

Starlit Path 441

Chapter 441: We Won—Time to Celebrate

The Void Heaven had transformed into a raging tidal surge tearing through a mighty river.

Countless waves churned and roared, forming a vast white ribbon that stretched across the horizon, thundering forward with unstoppable momentum.

Rules turned tidal!

Dense, blade-sharp laws of the heavens converged into a catastrophic flood, sweeping everything in its path.

To any living being that did not belong in the Void Heaven, this moment brought a soul-chilling sense of apocalyptic doom.

Compared to the earlier onslaught where rules fell like scattered knives, this tidal wave of laws was infinitely more terrifying. Even experts at the Body Integration and Tribulation Transcendence realms could previously weave through the Void Heaven under the suppression of those rules.

But now, the rules ignored all restraint.

It was as if the ancient emperor's weapon, the Supreme Furnace, had compressed them like a coiled spring—and the harder it had been pressed, the more ferocious the rebound.

Pfft! Pfft!

Agonized screams echoed through every corner of the Void Heaven.

Invaders from the upper realms had their bodies shredded by the terrifying tidal surge of rules.

Compared to the merciless erasure of the River of Time, the annihilation wrought by raw laws was far crueler. Flesh dissolved inch by inch, as though sliced by ten thousand blades. Divine souls were pierced by invisible spikes and violently torn apart.

Even mighty cultivators who had long transcended pain let out desperate, guttural wails that clawed at the soul.

Outside Pingyang Heaven.

The holy lords of the Blood Fiend Heaven, Yuan Magnet Heaven, and the various high-martial sacred grounds of Pingyang Heaven trembled uncontrollably.

What unfolded before them was nothing short of doomsday.

Life seemed utterly worthless.

One brilliant flower of existence after another withered and died.

The Void Heaven had become a slaughterhouse.

Its victims were the noble beings of the upper realms—though a few unfortunate cultivators from the lower three heavens were also painfully erased by the rules.

“Whoever said the Blood-Clothed One’s emergence was like a killing god reborn clearly never saw this Five Phoenixes Holy Lord... That kid’s the real butcher who kills without blinking!”

One shaking holy lord finally spoke.

Countless gazes converged on the black-haired youth hovering in the air, his hair wild, robes flapping, silver wings gleaming at his back.

The cold, ruthless youth—he was the true architect of this massacre.

No one had expected that although the blood-clothed Gu Mangran had indeed appeared, the greatest carnage was not his doing.

The Divine Son had lost an arm. Demonic qi gnawed relentlessly at the stump, his face drenched in blood, his body ice-cold.

He had nearly been obliterated.

If not for his special physique, Lu's first punch would have erased more than just an arm—it would have erased him completely.

Five Phoenixes Holy Lord...

Just how strong was he?!

Terror filled the Divine Son's eyes.

"Break!" he roared.

Terrifying energy exploded from his body as he tried to tear apart the "Suppressor" character formation.

"That damned Situ Gui!"

Fury and despair twisted his features.

If not for the formation that traitor Situ Gui had offered, Lu would never have had a way to block his teleportation.

Yet now, that very formation had become his prison!

Blood blurred his vision as he glared venomously at Situ Gui.

All he saw was Situ Gui's body crumbling inch by inch under the rules, screaming as he vanished into nothingness.

The Divine Son's heart lurched.

"No—I don't want to die!"

Panic finally overtook him.

The Void Heaven, graveyard of supreme beings throughout the ages, ignited an uncontrollable terror deep within his soul.

But he was no formation master.

He could not break the array.

Demon Lord Lu hovered calmly in the Void Heaven, his metallic wings beating gently.

Without the support of the three Immortal Constellation experts, the Supreme Furnace began to plummet.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Beneath the void, a massive rift seemed to tear open, hungry to swallow the imperial weapon whole.

Demonic qi swirling around him, Demon Lord Lu watched in silence.

His gaze lingered on the horrifying tear in the Void Heaven, a rare gravity surfacing in the depths of his eyes.

There might be something truly terrifying hidden beyond the Void Heaven.

The emaciated, blood-clothed general Gu Mangran hovered nearby, showing no interest in the ancient emperor's weapon.

Though it was a treasure of immeasurable value across all Nine Heavens, neither Lu nor Gu Mangran harbored the slightest desire to claim it.

Boom!

Just as the Supreme Furnace was about to vanish into the abyss—

A terrifying imperial aura suddenly erupted.

The furnace shot skyward.

The figure who had lost half his body to the rules coughed up blood, looking utterly wretched.

He summoned the imperial furnace and dove inside, letting it shield his ruined half.

Endless waves of rules crashed against the furnace walls like relentless tides on a mighty river.

A deep, resonant hum rang out.

“He survives even that? Can an imperial weapon really protect him?”

Lu frowned.

“He won’t die,” Gu Mangran replied, his magnetic voice carrying a hint of dry amusement despite his skeletal frame. “A proud Divine Son of his clan? Death doesn’t come that easily.”

“Old Qi died. Why shouldn’t he?”

Lu’s gaze was indifferent.

The next instant, his metallic wings shuddered.

His figure blurred into countless afterimages, thousands of Lus blooming in the void like deadly flowers.

He reappeared before the Divine Son cowering inside the imperial furnace.

“If the rules can’t kill you, then I’ll beat you to death myself.”

Demon Lord Lu’s voice was ice.

One punch thundered out.

Primordial spirit force, chaos force, and terrifying dao intent erupted simultaneously.

The fist smashed into the imperial furnace once more.

Dong!

A fearsome clash of dao and principle exploded outward.

The Phoenix Plume Swords disassembled into nine blades, spinning protectively before him.

Lu shifted hundreds of zhang sideways through the void.

Even a dormant imperial weapon would not tolerate such humiliation—it struck back.

And the Divine Son hiding inside suffered the worst.

The shockwave of intertwined dao and principle nearly pulverized his flesh.

He was reduced to a bloody pulp.

“Lu—Ping—an!”

The Divine Son howled his true name in rage and despair.

Lu’s expression remained cold.

Under the protection of the Phoenix Plume Swords, he crossed the distance again and again, hammering the ancient furnace with punch after punch.

Even as the backlash battered his own body, the Divine Son endured far worse.

Gu Mangran’s skeletal jaw dropped slightly.

This kid... ruthless.

Dong! Dong! Dong!

The Divine Son was a wreck, teetering on the edge of madness.

The imperial weapon that was supposed to be his ultimate lifeline had become a death knell.

Lu had turned his greatest protection into an instrument of torture.

Whoosh—

The tidal rules surged again and again, each wave more ferocious than the last, scouring the Void Heaven clean.

The screams gradually faded into absolute silence—the same silence that had reigned since the ancient wars.

Dong!

A resonant toll echoed.

A lone, defiant figure stood against the towering waves, a tiny silhouette smashing fist after fist against an unyielding cliff that pierced the heavens.

Inside the furnace, the Divine Son was losing consciousness.

From afar, Gu Mangran watched with a half-smile.

Finally, as Lu delivered yet another devastating blow—

The imperial weapon unleashed a terrifying burst of power, as though partially awakening—or as if a supreme expert from afar had roused it.

A blood-colored robe fluttered.

The skeletal, crimson figure of Gu Mangran appeared behind Lu in an instant.

With a casual flick of his finger, he sent a sleeve corner whipping downward like a thunderclap from a clear sky.

A blade of light descended from the heavens.

The erupting might of the imperial weapon was instantly suppressed.

“Keep hammering,” Gu Mangran said lazily, his magnetic voice carrying a domineering edge. “If you kill him, I’ll take the blame.”

Overbearing protection.

Demon Lord Lu glanced at the blood-clothed general hovering nearby.

The next moment, his silver wings fully disassembled, blades floating freely around him.

Black robes billowing, Lu raised a hand, turned his head slightly, and pointed at the imperial furnace.

Shrrriiek—

Countless silver blades shrieked through the void, clanging against the furnace in a storm of metal.

Though they left not a scratch on the weapon itself...

Every impact made the Divine Son's eyes roll back as he vomited thick gouts of blood.

Lu slowly closed his fist.

The hilt of the Phoenix Plume Sword fell into his grasp. The remaining eight blades stacked neatly atop it.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The reassembled sword pointed straight at the imperial furnace.

Then he swung.

The stroke was like splashing ink across rice paper—an enormous crescent of black-red flame erupted, curving like a phoenix feather in flight.

This slash carried everything: every drop of primordial spirit force, every wisp of chaos force, and the full might of his destructive dao intent.

Even three or five Immortal Constellation experts would have been torn apart by such a strike.

Clang!

The sword light streaked across the sky like a rainbow and crashed into the furnace.

A terrifying vibration rippled across its surface, spreading in faint, almost imperceptible waves.

The Divine Son inside was instantly reduced to a puddle of meat.

He... had suffered too much.

“Insolence!!”

A furious roar shook the heavens.

Beyond Pingyang Heaven, thunder rolled and an overwhelming aura forced countless beings to their knees.

A storm of divine sense surged forth.

Like a suicidal lone wolf, a terrifying figure charged straight into the Void Heaven.

“To repeatedly profane an imperial weapon—where is the dignity of an ancient emperor?!”

The words boomed like thunder.

A colossal palm woven entirely of immortal qi slammed down onto the barrier formed by the “Suppressor” character.

The barrier shattered; the formation vanished.

The palm continued downward, plunging into the Void Heaven.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The tidal rules boiled once more.

Countless strands of law wove together into a monstrous beast head that lunged and bit at the gigantic hand.

Lu frowned. The palm descending into the Void Heaven gave him a suffocating sense of invincible might.

A supreme expert!

Far beyond the Immortal Constellation realm!

Was this the one controlling the imperial weapon?

Yet faced with that palm, the blood-clothed Gu Mangran merely smiled—as if he had expected everything.

Terrifying power exploded from his emaciated frame.

With a flick of his blood-stained sleeve, he tore off a corner of fabric.

He pinched the scrap and flicked it outward.

The cloth spun wildly, unleashing a sky-blotting blade aura that filled the entire Void Heaven!

Rumble!

The blade qi roared like a dragon bursting from shallow waters, instantly dominating the heavens.

Pfft!

A single slash severed three fingers from the immortal-qi-woven hand.

The three fallen fingers were sucked into Gu Mangran's blood-red sleeve as though swallowed by a hidden universe.

Beyond Pingyang Heaven, a furious roar shook the void.

"Well done, Gu Mangran! Shame your strength is less than a tenth of what it once was!"

"All the divine medicines of the lower three heavens will be claimed by my Yun Clan—you'll never recover with them!"

"The day the ancient emperor's weapon emerges from the Void Heaven is the day I personally take your head!"

Gu Mangran sneered.

“Too scared to enter the Void Heaven and face me yourself, so you send a junior instead?”

“Spineless rats like you—I slaughter like chickens.”

Roar!

The massive arm surged with power, yet half of it was bitten off by the beast of rules.

The remaining half transformed back into a hand and seized the imperial furnace.

It could have dragged the furnace straight out of the Void Heaven.

But its owner caught sight of the demon-qi-shrouded Lu who had pounded the Divine Son into paste—and murderous intent flared.

Abandoning the furnace, the arm pointed straight at Lu.

Demon Lord Lu’s face was expressionless, cold as ice.

The Phoenix Plume Sword took the lead, silver blades forming a protective Bagua array before him.

Yet the terrifying attack never landed.

Because directly above Lu's head, a massive rift tore open the void.

Beyond Pingyang Heaven.

The Great Venerable of the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm trembled violently and fell to his knees, shaking like a sieve, as though remembering something unspeakably horrifying.

Inside the Void Heaven.

Even the skeletal Gu Mangran shuddered.

Lu looked up, eyes wide with shock as he stared at the rift.

Was this... the greatest secret of the Void Heaven?

Yet he could see nothing beyond the tear—only the gaping wound in space itself.

The arm that had been about to strike froze like a startled bird, then yanked back in terror.

It snatched the furnace, dragged it out of the Void Heaven, and fled as though its life depended on it—vanishing without a trace.

It was the behavior of something frightened to its core.

When Lu turned back, the rift had already healed completely, as if it had never existed.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The silver blades reassembled beneath him, forming the Thousand Bladed Chair.

Lu sat down slowly.

The raging demonic qi calmed. His black robes faded into pure white.

“What was that rift...?”

He narrowed his eyes.

The beast of rules dissolved, returning the Void Heaven to silence and hiding once more.

Every corpse, every trace of blood—everything had been scrubbed clean.

And it was that absolute cleanliness that sent chills down the spine.

Beyond Pingyang Heaven.

Countless figures stood frozen, speechless.

No one had imagined that a grand invasion from the upper realms would end like this.

The usually jovial Joyful Venerable wore only terror on his chubby face.

Staring at the white-clothed youth calmly hovering in the Void Heaven, uncontrollable fear surged through him.

Saint Lord Tuoba and Saint Lord Qingling felt their mouths turn dry.

During the earlier bloodbath, two seventh-grade sacred ground leaders like them hadn't even qualified to intervene.

Yet Lu had survived.

The Five Phoenixes stood unharmed.

“With the Five Phoenixes intact and Holy Lord Lu’s temperament... the lower three heavens are in for hell.”

Saint Lord Tuoba muttered.

Pingyang Heaven, bordering the Void Heaven, would suffer badly.

But the Blood Fiend Heaven and Yuan Magnet Heaven, who had led the grand army against the Five Phoenixes, would suffer far worse.

On the blood-colored battlefield.

The cultivators of the Five Phoenixes stared dazedly at the now-spotless Void Heaven. All the floating corpses had vanished; everything felt surreal.

Lu Jiulian was surrounded by blooming blue lotuses, his expression serene as he let out a long breath.

Zhu Long sat quietly atop the red dragon's back and closed her eyes once more.

Even they couldn't help but exhale in relief.

The war... was over.

The Five Phoenixes... had won!

The giant whale floated silently. Immortal islands rose and fell amid cascading origin qi waterfalls, thundering down in glorious torrents.

The white jade towers of the capital shimmered faintly in the mist.

A streak of red light and a streak of white light shot into the immortal island.

The white light dispersed.

The youth sat upon his chair, leaning against the railing, listening to the wind.

Yet to every person of the Five Phoenixes, that not-so-broad back had held up the entire sky for them!

The giant whale hovered above the blood-colored battlefield.

Everyone blinked—

And suddenly found Lu seated upon the Thousand Bladed Chair right before them, wheels rolling slowly over blood-soaked ground, facing the crowd.

His white robes were spotless.

His gaze swept gently across every single person of the Five Phoenixes.

He smiled.

“We won...”

“Time to celebrate.”

The soft words drifted through the air, ringing in every ear. On the blood-colored battlefield, the murderous wind stilled. It was as if sunlight had broken through thick clouds, spilling warm rays that melted the cold frost and snow.

Chapter 442: Honoring the Fallen, the Reckoning Begins

The blood-colored battlefield fell silent for a long, long time.

Then someone let out the first whoop of joy.

Like a spark hitting dry grass, cheers exploded, rolling across the plain in waves until the entire battlefield shook with triumphant roars.

Fame and titles mean nothing when one victory is built upon mountains of bones.

This hadn't been a war between nations, yet for the Five Phoenixes, it was bloodier, more desperate, more crucial than any war in history.

They fought for no glory, no profit—only survival.

Everyone knew the ancient tales: demonic invaders from beyond the heavens had once annihilated an entire era of the Five Phoenixes.

Now the same catastrophe had returned... and they had lived through it.

A new age, brimming with life and promise, was about to dawn.

Every face on the battlefield glowed with pride. Every pair of eyes burned with hope.

Figures streaked across the sky, converging on the youth seated calmly upon the Thousand Bladed Chair.

“Young Master!”

Ni Yu’s face was deathly pale, but her big eyes sparkled with exhilaration. Her golden body had shattered and reformed countless times—she looked miserable, but without the pills she had poured out like water, many here would have fallen long ago.

Zhu Long and Lu Jiulian drifted over. Lu Ping’an glanced at them and gave a slight nod of acknowledgment.

They had carried the heaviest burdens for the Five Phoenixes.

Nie Changqing, Jing Yue, Bai Qingniao, Du Longyang, Ni Chunqiu, Sima Qingshan—everyone gathered.

This war had forged them into one unbreakable family. Old grudges between the original Five Phoenixes cultivators and those from the Tian Yuan Domain had melted away completely.

Li Sansui, robes soaked in blood, pushed through the crowd with red-rimmed eyes and threw herself to her knees before Lu Ping'an.

“Young Master Lu...”

She clenched her fists and kowtowed hard enough to crack the ground.

“Please... save my Master!”

Her broken voice tore across the battlefield.

The jubilation died instantly.

Smiles vanished.

Watching the girl kneeling there, every heart grew heavy, throats tight with grief they couldn't voice.

Overlord let out a long sigh, grip tightening on his axe and shield as he remembered the kindly old man who had faced death with a smile.

Jiang Li removed his military cap, hair whipping in the wind.

All eyes turned to Lu Ping'an.

If anyone in this world could bring back Qi Liuja from death, it was him—and only him.

Lu Ping'an raised a hand.

Invisible force gently lifted Li Sansui to her feet.

"I'll do everything I can," he said quietly.

The crowd held its breath.

Boom!

Overwhelming primordial spirit pressure surged from him. In that instant, the world seemed to shift.

The youth sitting on his chair suddenly felt like an immovable sacred mountain towering ten thousand zhang high.

His fingers formed seals. Above his head, the sundial appeared.

The “Approach” character inscription on the sundial trembled violently.

The next moment, the River of Time poured forth, coiling around his fingertips.

Using the power of time, Lu Ping’an tried to pull Qi Liuji’s shattered existence back together.

The scene flickered like a stuttering lantern.

Under his terrifying primordial spirit, the entire battlefield fell deathly still.

High above on the White Jade Capital's towers, the blood-robed Gu Mangran watched, deep sorrow flickering in his hollow eyes.

He turned toward the ancient tomb.

Four skeletons still knelt there. For a moment, he could almost see smiles on their bony faces.

"Walk well, old friends," he murmured, blood robes fluttering lonely in the wind.

Everyone he once knew was gone.

Ancient Emperor "Hao" had vanished.

The Four Kings had fallen.

Now, in the boundless Void Heaven, he truly had no one left.

Below, Lu Ping'an was still trying to drag Qi Liuja back from oblivion with the River of Time.

Gu Mangran did not hold much hope.

If death were so easily reversed, the world would not be filled with so many regrets.

On the blood-colored battlefield, a cold wind suddenly rose.

A dim lantern seemed to burn in the gloom.

Soul fragments—tiny glittering shards—rose from the earth, drawn together by Lu Ping'an's immense power until they formed a hazy silhouette.

Qi Liuji's lingering remnant soul.

Lu Ping'an frowned.

He traced backward through time, yet met an impenetrable wall.

Somewhere in the darkness, unseen eyes watched him. Low, indistinct whispers brushed his ears.

It was a bone-chilling sensation—like thick fog swallowing the path ahead, nearly dragging him into the River of Time forever.

“This is the chaotic law of death after total collapse,” a warm, magnetic voice explained gently.

“In the primordial era, Great Emperors could still command death. Back then, a soul might have been retrieved.

But today, in the shattered Nine Heavens, the realm of death is broken. Once a being falls, their soul fragments scatter into the void—impossible to recover.”

Lu Ping’an’s brows knitted tighter. “Chaotic death laws...”

“Finish your affairs first,” Gu Mangran’s voice drifted down. “When you’re done, we’ll talk properly.”

Lu Ping’an inclined his head slightly.

With a flick of his finger, ripples spread like water.

On the battlefield, Qi Liuja’s remnant soul solidified.

Every gaze locked onto the translucent elder. Many hearts clenched in solemn respect.

“Old Qi’s Myriad Pattern Cauldron Array was a special manifestation of an ancient emperor’s weapon,” Lu Ping’an said. “Immensely powerful, but it burned his primordial spirit to nothing. This remnant soul is all that remains.”

Hope dimmed in countless eyes.

Far away, Kong Nanfei’s last flicker of wishful thinking died.

If even Qi Liujia could not return whole... how could he ever dream of asking Young Master Lu to resurrect the Master?

Then he laughed bitterly at himself.

Why bring the Master back anyway?

The old man would feel like a stranger in this new era.

Qi Liujia’s soul gradually grew clearer. He looked at Lu Ping’an and smiled with relief.

The Young Master lived. That meant the Five Phoenixes had won.

He had once urged caution and compromise for the sake of steady growth.

He had been wrong.

Young Master Lu had chosen a far harder, bloodier path—standing against the entire heavens.

Yet... maybe that was the only path worthy of the Five Phoenixes under his leadership.

Everything had unfolded just as Qi Liujia had quietly hoped.

The Five Phoenixes had survived the greatest crisis in their history.

This victory would propel them into a new era—an era ready to soar.

Relief and pride shone in the old man's translucent eyes.

Li Sansui's own eyes turned crimson the instant she saw him.

“Master!”

To her, this gentle, sometimes stern, sometimes indulgent elder was family—just like her siblings Li Sansi and Xie Yunling.

Lu Ping’an flicked his sleeve.

An invisible barrier enveloped master and disciple, granting them a final moment alone.

A heavy silence settled over the crowd.

Of the original hundred thousand Great Xuan iron cavalry, barely thirty or forty thousand remained. Facing the upper realms’ invasion, even that many Body Storage and Golden Core riders surviving was a miracle.

Lu Ping’an’s gaze flickered.

“Honor the fallen.”

His expression turned solemn.

This war had transformed him too.

Once he had watched the Five Phoenixes' growth like a distant puppeteer—ready, if they ever shattered, to simply walk away and begin again elsewhere.

But now he understood:

There was only one Five Phoenixes.

If it fell, it was gone forever.

If it truly vanished, his own heart would tear apart.

Unknowingly, he had already become part of this world.

Boom!

He raised a hand.

The earth shuddered like a carpet being shaken. Mountains and rivers seemed to shift.

One after another, heroic spirits soared from the blood-soaked ground.

The surviving Great Xuan cavalry froze.

These were their fallen brothers!

Hardened warriors removed their helmets with trembling hands, tears streaming as they saluted in silence.

Jiang Li's whole body shook. He clenched his fists, breathing ragged, staring at the ascending souls.

Boom!

From the heart of the Five Phoenixes, a towering city of darkness rose into the sky.

Ghostly yin qi roiled.

Yin officials lined the gates.

The gates swung open.

A figure stood smiling within, welcoming the cavalry with open arms.

The Nine Prisons Ghost City!

The King of the Underworld himself received them!

These men had lived as warriors; they would serve in death as honored spirit soldiers, continuing their glory in the realm of the dead!

From the White Jade Capital towers, Gu Mangran's sunken eyes narrowed.

He stared at the ghost city, then shifted his gaze to Lu Ping'an.

"Such audacity..."

"To rebuild the laws and order of death itself?!"

Then he laughed—excited, expectant.

“Now that’s guts! No wonder the Five Phoenixes is the only world to reach High Martial through the Void Heaven...”

...

The ceremony ended quickly.

The fallen cavalry were guided by Tantai Xuan into the Nine Prisons Secret Realm, becoming guardians of the ghost city and strengthening its power.

Boom!

On the blood-colored battlefield, Jiang Li leveled his silver spear, eyes blazing like lightning.

“The dead are gone, but we who remain will not wallow in grief—we will not yield!”

“Today’s blood debt will be paid in blood!”

“One day we will storm the Nine Heavens, march into the upper realms, and fight until our hearts are content—kill until the heavens tremble!”

His words rang like an oath carved into the sky.

He looked toward Lu Ping’an.

A ferocious wind suddenly whipped across the battlefield, kicking up blood-red sand.

Lu Ping’an sat motionless on the Thousand Bladed Chair, Jiang Li’s vow echoing in his ears.

After a long moment, he gave a single nod.

“Very well.”

BOOM!

With his approval, every surviving Great Xuan rider and every cultivator of the Five Phoenixes threw back their heads and roared, eyes bloodshot with fury.

Fire burned in their chests.

The Five Phoenixes were still weak—their flames only sparks for now.

But one day, those sparks would become a prairie blaze that set the entire Nine Heavens alight, making every world tremble at their name!

Qi Liujia finished speaking with Li Sansui.

The barrier dissolved.

Tears streaked her face, but beneath the sorrow burned unbreakable resolve and raging fire.

Qi Liujia's remnant soul could hold together no longer. It scattered like a cloud of fireflies suddenly released.

His coarse robes fluttered. Faint light shimmered around him as he swept his gaze across the Five Phoenixes—across the entire world.

He smiled.

In the distance, he seemed to see a fire phoenix rising from the land, wings spreading crimson across the heavens, soaring toward the Ninth Heaven.

Stroking his beard with a soft laugh, he stepped forward.

From his feet upward, he gently dispersed into motes of light...

...

The war was over.

The iron cavalry withdrew from the blood-colored battlefield and returned to the Five Phoenixes continent.

Within the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty, Human Emperor Tantai He personally led the common people to welcome them.

Seeing only thirty to forty thousand riders return from a hundred thousand, even the emperor's eyes reddened.

Cultivators dispersed to their homes.

People looked up and saw streaks of rainbow light shooting from the battlefield passage—some heading to Western Liang, some to the Eastern Ocean, some to Northern County...

The scattered experts of the Five Phoenixes were going back to seclude themselves and train harder than ever.

Victory today did not mean forgetting hatred.

Today the Five Phoenixes were drenched in blood—tomorrow they would pile corpses across the Nine Heavens!

To achieve that, every single cultivator had to grow stronger.

Fortunately, during the Heavenly Grand Competition, the Five Phoenixes had seized massive amounts of Dao reserves, triggering a world evolution.

Over the Eastern Ocean.

Vast seas rose and fell. The giant whale reappeared.

Origin qi floated like clouds.

On the Thousand Bladed Chair, Lu Ping'an held the Dao Derivation Mirror. Countless strands of great dao swirled within.

He glanced at it, expression unchanged.

Jing Yue stood quietly nearby.

Ni Yu hugged the little Yinglong, who didn't dare squirm an inch—he was terrified of being thrown back to Big Sister for “training.”

“You two, go cultivate,” Lu Ping'an said. “While the world is still evolving, break through as fast as you can.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

The two bowed and left. Little Yinglong burrowed deeper into Ni Yu's arms.

Once they vanished, Lu Ping'an's figure flickered and reappeared atop the White Jade Capital pavilion.

A blood-robed figure was already waiting, robes fluttering.

Lu Ping'an sat opposite him, set down the spirit pressure chessboard, and floated the white pieces to his guest.

Gu Mangran, skeletal as ever, chuckled softly, picked up a white stone, and placed it.

Lu Ping'an glanced at him, rolled up his sleeves, and dropped a black stone.

"Young Master Lu, allow this Gu to offer an apology," Gu Mangran said after a long silence, voice gentle.

Lu Ping'an said nothing.

"If not for me, the Five Phoenixes would never have suffered such a calamity."

Gu Mangran sighed.

He had wondered if it was worth it—waking from the ancient tomb, losing the Four Kings who had accompanied him through eternity, dragging the Five Phoenixes into war because of him.

But thinking of what still had to be done, resolve hardened in his sunken eyes.

“Ask whatever you wish. I will answer everything.”

He placed another stone.

Lu Ping’an wasted no time.

“Of the upper realms’ total power, what fraction was the army that attacked us?”

“If the upper realms’ strength is a thousand parts, that army wasn’t even one,” Gu Mangran replied.

Lu Ping’an had suspected as much. With the upper realms’ true might, they could have sent an army of actual mighty experts, not just Distraction-realm cannon fodder.

“They knew you were awakening. Why send only trash? What could a garbage Divine Son possibly do to kill you?”

Gu Mangran’s lips twitched at “garbage Divine Son.”

Thinking of how Lu Ping'an had pummeled the Yun Clan's proud heir into paste, he had to laugh.

Only you, Lu Ping'an, could say that out loud.

"You saw that terrifying rift... Something unspeakable lurks beyond it. Upper realm beings dare not set foot here. And the stronger you are, the faster the Void Heaven's rules kill you."

Lu Ping'an nodded slightly.

"What is your current strength?"

Gu Mangran smiled—he knew Lu Ping'an wanted the realms above Immortal Transformation.

"Above Immortal Transformation lies Immortal Constellation. Immortal Constellation experts refine the Five Qis... When the Five Qis are perfected, one may step toward Origin."

Very broad terms, but clearly vast realms lay beyond.

"With the divine medicines I've taken, their grade is too low. I've only recovered to Two Qis Immortal Constellation."

Lu Ping'an raised a brow.

"And at your peak?"

Gu Mangran paused, shook his head, and did not answer.

"The ones who came this time were the Yun Clan—one of the upper realm's ancient sacred clans. Any clan daring to call itself an ancient sacred clan has at least one Saint Ancestor. They are enormous. With the Five Phoenixes' current power, they could erase us with a flick."

"But you needn't worry yet. Until the ancient emperor's weapon emerges, the Void Heaven is the safest place for the Five Phoenixes."

"What you must do is raise the Five Phoenixes' strength—at least to a third-grade High Martial world. Only then will you have any hope of resisting the horrors to come."

Lu Ping'an frowned.

"The horrors to come... you mean when the Void Heaven's protection vanishes?"

Gu Mangran nodded. "No power lasts forever. It will disappear eventually. Prepare."

They continued talking as more and more stones filled the board.

Night fell.

When everything was said, Gu Mangran rose and left the White Jade Capital.

The blood color faded from his robes, turning pure white.

He vanished into the world, lonely as ever.

Only Lu Ping'an remained on the pavilion, thoughts swirling.

Lines of data danced in his eyes as his mind entered the origin space.

Gazing at the hundred-plus Dao reserve patterns etched into the origin, a complete plan for the Five Phoenixes' rise gradually formed.

He withdrew his consciousness.

Leaning back in the Thousand Bladed Chair, he watched the giant whale rise and fall on the waves.

The sea burned crimson beneath the setting sun. Clouds rolled like a fire phoenix spreading its wings.

Cold determination settled in his eyes.

The debt owed by the upper realms—he could not collect yet.

But the lower three heavens?

“Pingyang Heaven, Blood Fiend Heaven, Yuan Magnet Heaven...”

“I, Lu Ping’an, always treat others with sincerity. Yet you gathered a million-strong army to trample the Five Phoenixes—you drove a blade straight into my heart. Even if I have the best temper in the world, for the sake of every drop of blood spilled by my people... I cannot let this go.”

“It’s time...”

“For a reckoning.”

Chapter 443: To Apologize, At Least Look Like You Mean It

Reckoning would come—of that there was no doubt.

But Lu Ping'an was in no hurry.

On the origin lake, the morning sun broke through thick clouds, scattering golden rays across the spirit pressure chessboard.

Black and white pieces stood in stark contrast, forming a vast game that resembled a peerless painting—each stone a world unto itself, black for darkness, white for light.

“This Gu Mangran plays a decent game,” Lu Ping'an murmured with a faint smile, reclining in his silver Thousand-Bladed Chair.

He exhaled slowly, gazing at the newborn sun rising over the vast sea—fiery red, brimming with hope, beginning yet another cycle.

He stared, entranced.

With his current power, he could gaze directly at the blazing sun without fear.

The sun filled his eyes, stirring a strange sense of familiarity, as if it overlapped with the sun of his previous life.

In that instant, countless scenes flashed through his mind—towering skyscrapers, roaring cars, flickering neon lights... and then terrifying tongues of flame.

Everything blurred past in a heartbeat.

Lu Ping'an closed his eyes and tilted his head, fingers pressing against his temple.

It felt as though, in that single moment, his primordial spirit had torn through some terrifying barrier—like a dream returning him to a world he once knew.

But soon, he chuckled.

When he opened his eyes again, he was still on the familiar island at the center of the lake.

He had lived in this world far longer than in those memories.

He could no longer tell which life had been the dream.

Straightening, he leaned back in his chair.

Clink.

He poured himself a cup of wine. The liquid burned down his throat, stirring a flood of thoughts.

It had been a long time since he'd dwelled on such things. Now, savoring the taste, he found it oddly enjoyable.

What kind of world had that been?

Low Martial? Mid Martial?

Or... High Martial?

He smiled.

The recent invasion from the upper realms and the Heavenly Grand Competition had changed him. The man who once stood apart from the Five Phoenixes, watching everything with detached amusement, had finally admitted—this world was his.

And now, those old memories had resurfaced.

His thoughts surged like waves.

He cleared the spirit pressure chessboard.

Rolling up his sleeves, he drank and played—placing pieces with growing speed and focus.

Suddenly, his fingers froze.

Then—he burst out laughing.

He slapped his knee, laughing like a man who had just realized something profound.

“The Five Phoenixes are too weak?”

His laughter faded.

He narrowed his eyes.

Stroking his chin, he stared at the sun now high in the sky.

The Five Phoenixes were indeed weak. Compared to those upper-realm High Martial worlds with legacies spanning hundreds of thousands—even millions—of years, the gap was astronomical.

In third-grade and fourth-grade High Martial worlds, Immortal Constellation experts were commonplace. There were even beings beyond that—realms Lu Ping'an couldn't yet fathom.

Even with the time array, catching up would take ages.

And he had no idea when the Void Heaven's protection would vanish. What if the mysterious imperial weapon emerged tomorrow? The Void Heaven would become a battlefield for every High Martial world. The Five Phoenixes would be caught in the crossfire—erased without even a chance to speak.

So...

He needed a new approach.

At the very least, the Five Phoenixes needed the power to protect themselves in the short term—and the ability to stand against those top-tier worlds.

If nothing else... they needed something that could make even the strongest hesitate.

His eyes gleamed.

“Build a nuke?”

He shook his head.

A nuke’s power might be stopped by a single high-level expert.

But the idea sparked something.

What if he combined transcendent power with the concept of a nuke?

A transcendent nuke?

It was just a sudden, wild thought.

Too far-fetched for now.

Maybe start smaller—a transcendent cannon?

Once the idea formed, he could test it.

This was the kind of crazy inspiration that came from remembering his past life.

What kind of spark would fly from combining technology and the transcendent?

He was actually a little excited.

Technology gave mortals terrifying power.

If that power could be amplified through transcendent means... the results could be devastating.

It would give the Five Phoenixes immediate defensive strength—enough to deter enemies and buy time to grow.

The only worry: did third- or second-grade High Martial worlds already have something similar?

But then he remembered his conversation with the blood-clothed Gu Mangran.

The higher the grade of a High Martial world, the more it relied on individual power.

A Five Qis Immortal Constellation expert in a fourth-grade world was essentially a walking nuclear deterrent—one person capable of holding an entire faction in check.

Or a faction with an imperial weapon—same principle.

Actually, Lu Ping'an's idea wasn't far from the purpose of imperial weapons.

Gu Mangran had said that in the Nine Heavens, almost no faction dared to fully activate their imperial weapons.

They all feared triggering some unspeakable calamity.

Wasn't that exactly like nuclear deterrence?

The difference was that imperial weapons required top-tier experts to wield them.

Lu Ping'an wanted something that even weaker cultivators could use to unleash devastating power.

Mind stirring, he entered the preaching platform.

He would simulate and refine the concept there. The idea had potential, but execution would be difficult.

If the final weapon could only threaten Immortal Transformation experts, it would be useless to the Five Phoenixes.

He needed something truly terrifying.

...

Pingyang Heaven.

Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm.

Golden pagodas towered into the sky, bathed in radiant Buddha light. Ancient bells tolled as mighty Buddha Lords stepped onto lotus platforms and gathered from every corner of the realm.

The Joyful Venerable wore a face full of worry.

The Great Venerable sat solemnly upon the spirit platform. After sweeping his gaze over the assembled monks, he spoke.

“We underestimated the Five Phoenixes. Their Holy Lord, Lu Ping’an, wields Immortal Constellation-level combat power. He crushed the sacred clan’s Divine Son, punched an imperial weapon, and slaughtered Immortal Constellation experts...”

Even as he spoke with dignified composure, the Great Venerable’s cheek twitched slightly.

He never imagined that the High Martial world born from the Void Heaven had quietly grown so monstrous.

Even the sacred clan’s invasion had failed.

The Buddha Lords’ expressions turned ugly.

The Great Venerable continued, “Pingyang Heaven borders the Void Heaven. The sacred clan has retreated. The Five Phoenixes stand unscathed—and riding high on momentum. With Lu Ping’an’s vindictive nature, he will not let us off easily.”

“Blood Fiend Heaven and Yuan Magnet Heaven are far away—they would need spatial arrays to reach us. But the Five Phoenixes... they need no such thing to come here.”

Fear flickered across every monk's face.

How could they forget the battle in the Void Heaven?

Immortal Constellation experts had died like flies.

A world with even one Immortal Constellation expert was qualified to be fifth-grade High Martial.

So now, the Five Phoenixes had to be treated as a top-tier fifth-grade world—no, perhaps even higher.

After all, their Holy Lord had punched the Yun Clan's Divine Son into paste and battered an imperial weapon like a god of war.

No one in Pingyang Heaven could stand against him.

"I summoned you all to discuss how to quell Holy Lord Lu's wrath," the Great Venerable said. "If we do nothing, when he begins his reckoning... catastrophe will follow."

A Buddha Lord spoke up. "Great Venerable, we could request the sacred clan to station experts here."

The Joyful Venerable shook his head mournfully. "Protect us for a day, but can they protect us forever? And have you truly measured Lu Ping'an's strength? What if even their experts cannot stop him?"

"He crushed the Yun Clan's Divine Son with his fists. That's at least One Qi Immortal Constellation power. Do you think inviting such a being comes without cost?"

His words silenced the assembly.

The price would be enormous.

Their entire Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm might change hands.

But...

If they didn't invite such a powerhouse, they would still be crushed by that demon Lu Ping'an.

"Actually, there's no need to panic," another monk said, eyes gleaming. "Lu Ping'an dare not leave the Void Heaven for long. As the only High Martial world to emerge from it, he is tied to the Five Phoenixes' will. The moment he steps out, upper-realm supremes will hunt him down with heaven-shaking methods. A man who built a High Martial world in that forsaken land must be hiding countless secrets."

The Great Venerable nodded slightly.

The Joyful Venerable shook his head again. "Pingyang Heaven is too close to the Void Heaven. If Lu Ping'an slips in, slaughters everyone, and escapes before the upper realms react... what then? The Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm will still burn under his wrath."

He looked utterly miserable.

The crowd fell silent once more.

The Great Venerable turned to him. "Then what do you suggest, Joyful Venerable?"

The Joyful Venerable's chubby face twitched. He bowed deeply.

"This monk believes... we should proactively beg Holy Lord Lu for mercy. With the right attitude, everything can be discussed."

The square in front of the pagoda erupted in outrage.

Truth be told, they still looked down on the Five Phoenixes.

In their eyes, despite its growth, despite Lu Ping'an, Zhu Long, and Lu Jiulian who could fight Immortal Transformation experts, the Five Phoenixes were still upstarts—nouveau riche.

They couldn't shake their sense of superiority.

The Joyful Venerable smiled bitterly. "But that Holy Lord can kill Immortal Constellation experts. The Five Phoenixes are now comparable to a top-tier fifth-grade world. What exactly are you still feeling superior about?!"

Silence fell like a hammer.

After a long pause, the Great Venerable nodded.

"The Joyful Venerable speaks wisely. Then... let him represent all of Pingyang Heaven and bring gifts to the Void Heaven to express our sincerity."

The Joyful Venerable froze.

Wait—

He didn't want to go!

The Void Heaven was terrifying!

One wrong step and he was dead!

Had he just dug his own grave?!

...

After countless simulations in the preaching platform, Lu Ping'an emerged, rubbing his temples.

The concept was there, but turning it into reality would be hard.

"Fine... I'll drag Gongshu Yu into this later."

Creating a strategic weapon of devastating power in a short time was unrealistic anyway.

Boom!

A deafening explosion suddenly rocked the island.

No surprise—Ni Yu had blown up another cauldron.

Lu Ping'an glanced over.

Ni Yu's hair stood on end like a porcupine, her face pitch-black like a soot-covered cat. She wore a bitter expression as she prepared to catch the flying cauldron.

A deep, dark crater smoked nearby.

The explosion's power... had improved again.

The pit slowly healed under the nourishment of origin qi.

"This girl still needs to work on her alchemy," Lu Ping'an shook his head with a smile.

This kind of warm, everyday chaos was much better.

Killing and scheming really weren't his style.

Leaning against the railing, listening to the wind, playing Go and watching the clouds—how relaxing.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed.

He turned toward Ni Yu.

A flash of inspiration struck him.

“Little Ni.”

Ni Yu, limping from the blast, looked up in confusion, her soot-streaked face bewildered.

Was Young Master calling her?

“Blow up another cauldron for me.”

He leaned on the railing with a gentle smile.

“Huh?”

Ni Yu blinked, utterly lost.

She hadn't offended him recently, had she?

Why was his petty side acting up again?

Little Yinglong, floating on his back in the origin lake and kicking his legs lazily, giggled at the show.

Lu Ping'an glanced at him.

The dragon's laughter died instantly.

But just as Lu Ping'an grabbed the scruff of his neck—

Jing Yue returned gracefully.

“Young Master.”

“The Joyful Venerable from Pingyang Heaven’s Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm requests an audience.”

Lu Ping’an raised a brow. “I haven’t even gone to settle accounts yet, and they’re already coming to me?”

“Let him wait.”

Jing Yue bowed and turned to leave.

Lu Ping’an called her back.

“Did he say he brought gifts of apology?”

Jing Yue nodded.

“Fine. Let him onto the island.”

He casually tossed Little Yinglong to the soot-covered Ni Yu.

“Here.”

Jing Yue hid a smile behind her sleeve, bowed, and flew toward the sky.

“Wash your face. Don’t embarrass White Jade Capital.”

Ni Yu hurriedly used Little Yinglong like a towel, wiping all the pill ash onto the dragon’s now thoroughly miserable body.

Lu Ping’an sat properly in the pavilion, set out the spirit pressure chessboard, and poured a fresh cup of warm plum wine.

The heavens split open with radiant light. The vast sea parted in great waves.

The chubby, perpetually grinning Joyful Venerable followed Jing Yue nervously.

Jing Yue stepped onto the island.

The Joyful Venerable did not dare.

He stood atop the sea and immediately felt crushing pressure bearing down on him.

“H-Holy... Holy Lord Lu...”

He swallowed hard, forcing a wide, toothy smile.

“You’ve got some nerve showing your face.”

From the pavilion, Lu Ping’an didn’t even glance at him. He simply placed a piece on the board.

Clack.

The Joyful Venerable trembled, nearly in tears.

He didn’t want to be here!

He’d been set up!

“This monk has missed Holy Lord Lu dearly since last we met...”

“Speak like a human.”

The Joyful Venerable’s fat jiggled. He straightened his kasaya and bowed deeply.

“This monk comes on behalf of the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm and all of Pingyang Heaven to offer our humblest apologies.”

“We beg Holy Lord Lu’s magnanimity—grant Pingyang Heaven and our Buddha Realm a chance to redeem ourselves.”

He dropped to his knees and kowtowed hard.

If you’re going to apologize, at least look like you mean it.

“If you’re here to apologize, why isn’t your Great Venerable here himself?”

Lu Ping’an finally turned his head slightly.

Clack!

The piece in his hand fell.

BOOM!

A beam of spirit pressure descended like a heavenly pillar, slamming down onto the Joyful Venerable.

The sea caved into a massive crater, waves surging outward.

The Joyful Venerable knelt in the center, crushed so hard he could barely breathe.

Cold sweat poured down his face.

He opened his mouth—but the pressure choked his throat. Not a sound escaped.

Suddenly—

A grand, resonant voice boomed from beyond the Five Phoenixes' heavens.

“Holy Lord Lu, do not make things difficult for the Joyful Venerable. This venerable one has come personally to atone.”

The voice carried solemn dignity.

Outside the heavens, an old monk in plain robes stood quietly, wrapped in faint silver-gray light.

It was the Great Venerable of the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm.

The Joyful Venerable’s heart shook—the Great Venerable had actually come himself?

Lu Ping’an stared at the silver-gray glow.

“Spatial power?”

He murmured.

“Since you’re here, come down.”

Unhurried, he picked up another piece.

Clack.

A beam of light shot down from the depths of the Void Heaven.

BOOM!

It struck the old monk square in the back.

The Great Venerable staggered, vision blurring, and plummeted.

Every cultivator in the Five Phoenixes saw it—a dazzling white pillar piercing the sky.

KABOOM!

The sea exploded. The entire ocean seemed flipped upside down.

Countless cultivators looked over in shock.

Lu Ping'an watched calmly as the Great Venerable stood in the center of the inverted tsunami, palms pressed together, gazing up with neither humility nor arrogance.

"Amitabha. This monk has come to beg forgiveness."

Behind him, ten thousand rays of Buddha light bloomed, holding back the pillar of spirit pressure.

Lu Ping'an smiled.

A black piece and a white piece rested in his palm.

He weighed them, then tossed them lightly into the air.

Clack.

The white piece landed first.

BOOM!

A white rainbow beam crashed down from the heavens.

The Great Venerable's knees buckled. He could no longer maintain his calm—his legs bent as if to kneel.

“If you want to apologize...”

The black piece finally fell.

Clack.

An even thicker beam, carrying terrifying spirit pressure, smashed down.

The Great Venerable's back arched. His pupils contracted, losing focus.

The pressure was like the entire vault of heaven crushing him.

The sea detonated.

His body was compressed to its limit.

Thud.

His knees finally gave out.

He knelt heavily onto the seafloor.

The entire ocean trembled.

Chapter 444: How Magnificent—Ten Thousand Realms Come to Pay Tribute!

Tyrannical!

Utterly tyrannical!

From far away, the cultivators of the Five Phoenixes watched three consecutive pillars of light smash down, forcing the old monk who had stood tall like an ancient pine to kneel on the seafloor.

It looked as though the entire seabed might crack under the impact.

Everyone's tongues went dry, yet exhilaration surged through their chests.

Du Longyang, black robes fluttering, broken spear on his back, sat cross-legged in midair. Gazing into the distance, he inhaled deeply.

“Young Master Lu... still as domineering as ever.”

One-armed Ye Shoudao’s eyes flickered. “Same old temper.”

Ni Chunqiu’s eyes sparkled like stars. She could barely contain her excitement.

“That’s my Brother Lu! So domineering you can’t even hate him for it!”

Du Longyang and Ye Shoudao felt their hair stand on end. They glanced at the fangirl practically glowing beside them and pursed their lips.

This woman... was beyond saving.

Countless cultivators turned to watch.

The Joyful Venerable’s face was ashen.

He was now terrified—because the spirit pressure he had endured was nothing compared to what the Great Venerable had just suffered.

If Lu Ping'an had hit him that hard from the start, he would have been crushed into paste instantly.

Of course, he was also worried.

The Great Venerable was pride incarnate, the supreme Buddha Lord of an entire realm. When had he ever knelt to anyone?

Yet now, two casually tossed Go stones had forced him to his knees in the mud of the deep sea. The humiliation was unimaginable.

The Joyful Venerable feared the Great Venerable's pride would snap and he would lash out at Lu Ping'an in fury.

Waves towered like an inverted bowl, water forced aside in all directions.

At the bottom of the sea, the Great Venerable's knees sank into the silt.

Feeling countless gazes upon him, the muscles in his face twitched.

But after a long moment, he calmed.

He pressed his palms together, then extended them flat.

And solemnly kowtowed toward Lu Ping'an.

BOOM!

The impact shook mountains and seas; it felt as though the entire seafloor might shatter.

A realm's supreme lord had truly swallowed his pride and bowed his head.

The cultivators of the Five Phoenixes didn't find it strange at all. Plenty of people had kowtowed to Lu Ping'an—what was one more bald donkey?

But to the Joyful Venerable, this was earth-shattering.

Even Lu Ping'an, seated on his Thousand-Bladed Chair, raised an eyebrow.

This Great Venerable of the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm... was a ruthless man indeed.

“Holy Lord Lu, everything was the fault of our Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm. Your magnanimity is as towering as the mountains. On behalf of all realms of Pingyang Heaven, this monk offers due recompense for our past transgressions.”

His grand voice rolled across heaven and earth.

The cultivators of the Five Phoenixes watched calmly, but their blood boiled.

Lu Ping’an smiled.

He had no idea what the old monk was really thinking.

But since they had come to apologize, he couldn’t very well kill them outright.

He, Lu Ping’an, wasn’t that kind of villain.

He lifted a finger and flicked lightly.

The straight pillars of spirit pressure instantly dispersed. The crushing weight on both the Joyful Venerable and the Great Venerable vanished.

Mist once again shrouded the island at the lake's heart.

The terrifying oppression was gone.

Jing Yue, white dress fluttering, stepped across the sea and spoke coolly.

"Follow me onto the island."

"Thank you."

The Joyful Venerable gave his trademark honest grin.

The Great Venerable inclined his head slightly.

The two monks followed Jing Yue onto the island.

The island overflowed with dense spiritual energy and drifting origin qi.

Heaven-reaching chrysanthemums swayed, peach blossoms bloomed brilliantly, and bamboo groves rustled softly.

Amid the peach grove sat a white-robed youth in his chair, idly twirling a peach blossom between his fingers.

“Let’s be direct.”

“I was planning to settle accounts with every realm in the lower three heavens that once bullied the Five Phoenixes. Since you came on your own initiative, show me your sincerity.”

He never looked up, just continued playing with the blossom.

The Joyful Venerable’s face instantly lit up with a wide smile.

He produced a yellow cloth pouch—a spatial treasure.

“As expected of Holy Lord Lu, a man of great wisdom and generosity. These gifts are only proper.”

The pouch floated toward Lu Ping’an.

His primordial spirit swept inside and saw everything clearly with a single glance.

Ten low-grade earth-tier spiritual tools, one mid-grade earth-tier tool.

Nine types of fifth-grade pills, one bottle each, nine pills per bottle.

Plus a pile of Buddhist scriptures and texts.

Lu Ping'an withdrew his spirit, momentarily speechless.

Were they trying to send a beggar away?

This was their sincerity?

Gongshu Yu and Aru could forge mid- and low-grade earth-tier tools. Ni Yu could refine more fifth-grade pills in a single cauldron than this.

And Buddhist scriptures? What use were those?

In short, the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm's apology gifts were utterly worthless to him.

The smile on Lu Ping'an's face gradually faded.

He looked at the two monks.

Clang-clang-clang!

Sharp metallic rings filled the air as every silver blade of the Thousand-Bladed Chair shot out, transforming into thousands of hovering silver glints.

"Allow me to introduce you. Each of these blades is a mid-grade earth-tier spiritual tool—what you call a sacred-tier artifact."

"Little Ni."

From behind a large boulder, Ni Yu—who had been secretly watching with Little Yinglong on her head and a black cauldron on her back—jumped in fright and bolted out, standing ramrod straight, face red.

"Ni Yu present!"

“Have a midnight snack for the Great Venerable to see.”

Lu Ping’an’s fingers drummed rhythmically on the armrest.

Ni Yu flushed with embarrassment.

Young Master... so mean!

But her chubby little hand was already reaching into the pouch at her waist.

She pulled out a huge handful of sugar-coated pills—every single one fifth-grade!

She opened her mouth wide and stuffed in twenty or thirty at once, crunching loudly.

Little Yinglong perched on her head stared with round eyes, practically drooling.

While chewing, she mumbled unclearly, “Young Master! Want another round?”

Lu Ping’an’s drumming stopped.

The Joyful Venerable and Great Venerable wore extremely complicated expressions.

They had seen clearly—every pill Ni Yu shoved into her mouth was fourth- or fifth-grade.

“Holy Lord Lu... there’s no need to say more.”

The Great Venerable’s old face twitched.

He understood. Lu Ping’an thought their compensation was insultingly low.

Their maid ate fifth-grade pills like candy—one handful nearly equaled everything they had offered.

The message was clear: You have the nerve to bring this garbage?

The Great Venerable pressed his palms together.

“Amitabha. Those gifts were merely a token of our intent.”

He raised his hand. In his palm floated a replicated formation inscription.

Silver-gray light bloomed, causing space itself to crack inch by inch.

Strange ripples pulsed outward.

“I’m sure Holy Lord Lu recognizes this.”

“The ‘Travel’ character inscription from the Nine Secret Words of the Qi Liujia Sect?” Lu Ping’an frowned. “No—this one is fake.”

He controlled the genuine “Approach” inscription and saw through it instantly.

The Great Venerable gave a wry smile. “Indeed, it is a replica I created myself. Though inferior to the true ‘Travel’ inscription, it still allows one to glimpse some mysteries of space.”

“Let this serve as compensation.”

He flicked his finger.

The inscription floated toward Lu Ping'an.

"But Holy Lord Lu must be cautious when using it. The true master of the 'Travel' inscription—Sect Leader Qi's eldest disciple—has been taken in by a great sacred clan of the upper realms. Should you encounter the genuine inscription, this replica will instantly fail."

Lu Ping'an caught it and scanned it.

A simplified replica, but still extraordinarily valuable.

"Acceptable."

"But... not enough."

He stored the inscription in the preaching platform and spoke indifferently.

The two monks froze again.

Still not enough?!

A replicated “Travel” inscription was already priceless!

The Great Venerable took a deep breath, bowed slightly, and looked Lu Ping’an in the eye.

“Holy Lord Lu, name your price directly.”

“Pingyang Heaven is one of the Nine Heavens and home to many High Martial worlds. I remember every single one that once wronged the Five Phoenixes. My demands are modest: every offending world shall voluntarily offer one top-grade spirit stone vein and one hundred spiritual herbs—no low-grade trash.”

Lu Ping’an smiled brightly, fingers interlaced over his knees.

“Not too excessive, right?”

The Great Venerable was stunned.

The Joyful Venerable nearly choked.

Excessive? Not excessive my foot!

Top-grade spirit stone veins? High-grade spiritual herbs?

Knowing Lu Ping'an's temper, they would have to err on the side of the very best.

Spirit stone veins and spiritual herbs were the lifeblood of any High Martial world!

"N-not excessive at all," the Joyful Venerable forced a pained smile.

The Great Venerable pressed his palms together. "This monk accepts on behalf of all High Martial worlds in Pingyang Heaven."

"Excellent."

"Jing Yue, see the guests out."

With a flash of silver-gray light and a ripple of spatial fluctuation, the two monks vanished as though teleported.

The Great Venerable's body shook.

In the brief time they had spoken, Lu Ping'an had already mastered the replicated "Travel" inscription?!

Monster!

A true heaven-defying monster!

The Great Venerable and Joyful Venerable left the Five Phoenixes and soon disappeared.

...

On the White Jade Capital pavilion, Lu Ping'an raised his hand. The "Travel" inscription floated above his palm.

"A replica that touches the mysteries of space..."

"That old bald donkey gave me this as compensation—does he want me to personally go collect from Blood Fiend Heaven and Yuan Magnet Heaven?"

Lu Ping'an narrowed his eyes.

“A fake inscription?”

He chuckled.

“Sometimes... a fake can become real.”

Wrapping the inscription, he entered the preaching platform.

He sat cross-legged on the Eight Trigrams Array Platform. The eight trigrams runes drifted around him, radiating profound mysteries.

The stronger he grew, the more unfathomable these runes seemed—almost as if they held the secrets of the universe itself.

Of course, that was still far beyond him.

In truth, this Eight Trigrams Array Platform and its runes were his greatest trump card all along.

He had simply never used it.

The cost was too high. He had once tested moving the platform out of the preaching platform.

It was possible—but the price he would pay might be more than he could bear.

Seated atop the platform, his mind stirred.

The “Approach” inscription appeared in sundial form—his first true Nine Secret Word.

Another was the “Stabilize” inscription, stripped long ago from Zuo Xu, Qi Liuji’s disciple. He had never activated or studied it.

Now... it was time.

“The ‘Approach’ inscription holds the mysteries of time. ‘Travel’ holds space. What does ‘Stabilize’ hold?”

After a moment’s thought, he stopped guessing and let his mind surge.

The eight trigrams—Qian, Dui, Li, Zhen, Xun, Kan, Gen, Kun—orbited his body.

His white robes billowed as qi filled them.

“The ‘Stabilize’ inscription... seems to contain the profound truth of ‘stability,’ allowing different energies to coexist without exploding.”

His eyes lit up.

He hadn’t activated it yet, but he already understood its essence.

This was exactly what he had been searching for.

This inscription might be the key to creating a true superweapon.

If he could compress spiritual qi, origin qi, primordial spirit energy—energies that naturally repelled each other—and use the “Stabilize” inscription to hold them together...

Then, in battle, simply remove the stabilizing inscription.

The resulting collision of violent energies would unleash unimaginable destruction.

A transcendent nuclear weapon suddenly seemed very feasible.

Of course, it was still just an idea. Execution would be difficult.

Once everything was settled, he could drag Gongshu Yu into the research.

There was also the “Suppressor” inscription—a terrifying trapping array. He set it aside for now and turned his full attention to the newly acquired “Travel” inscription.

It was only a replica.

Yet using the runes on the Eight Trigrams Platform to deduce and refine it, he actually managed to complete it—its power now rivaled the genuine Nine Secret Words.

Lu Ping’an smiled, quite satisfied.

If he ever met the true holder of the “Travel” inscription, who could say which one was real?

...

The Great Venerable and Joyful Venerable returned to Pingyang Heaven.

Hovering in the Void Heaven, the Great Venerable looked back at the Five Phoenixes, a trace of emotion in his eyes.

“Like a great peng rising with the wind in a single day.”

The rise of the Five Phoenixes Continent could no longer be stopped.

But he quickly shook his head. It was still too early to say such things. Compared to the overwhelmingly powerful upper realms, the Five Phoenixes were still far too weak.

Though they had gained a small advantage against the Yun Clan by exploiting the Void Heaven’s restrictions, once those restrictions vanished, the Five Phoenixes would be flattened in an instant.

The upper realms could truly assemble armies of mighty experts.

Back in the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm, ancient bells tolled, their sound waves spreading across Pingyang Heaven.

A colossal Buddha projection appeared, radiating Immortal Transformation aura.

The Great Venerable announced Lu Ping'an's demands to every High Martial world in Pingyang Heaven.

Holy Lord projections gathered above their respective worlds, faces paling as they listened.

"This is outright robbery! Top-grade spirit stone veins are priceless!"

"They are the foundation for nurturing experts!"

"A ninth-grade High Martial world needs ten thousand years to produce just one!"

Many Holy Lords raged.

But none dared voice their anger.

The image of Lu Ping'an punching the upper-realm Divine Son into paste and hammering an imperial weapon until it roared with heavenly flames was still seared into their minds.

Even the Great Venerable had submitted and personally delivered gifts.

What right did they have to resist?

Thus, every offending world, hearts bleeding, prepared one top-grade spirit stone vein and a hundred high-grade spiritual herbs.

Envoys were dispatched into the Void Heaven, bearing treasures to the Five Phoenixes.

...

The great time array activated once more.

A massive sundial hung in the sky.

The River of Time swept around the borders of the Five Phoenixes like a dutiful guardian moat.

Within the continent, time accelerated.

Yet Lu Ping'an maintained only a 10:1 ratio.

His calculations showed this was the optimal speed. Any faster and the origin might collapse—growth at the expense of the foundation.

Great Xuan Calendar, Year 100, Spring.

Five years after the new emperor's ascension, the Five Phoenixes flourished. The common people lived in peace and prosperity.

Compared to the previous emperor Tantai Xuan, the new emperor Tantai He had his own vision for governance.

Tantai Xuan had strictly separated the cultivation world from mortal affairs, forbidding cultivators from meddling in politics and focusing on developing the mortal realm.

Tantai He, having witnessed the horrors of the upper-realm invasion, believed cultivating strength was paramount.

For the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty to last eternally, it could not rely solely on mortal nations—cultivator armies were essential.

Thus he poured resources into building cultivation legions, even facing remonstrance from many Confucian scholars.

But the first century came full circle.

On this day, the spiritual energy of the Five Phoenixes suddenly thickened.

Brilliant clouds blanketed the sky. Countless radiant beams shot upward.

Huge golden scriptures emerged, dazzling and majestic.

The Eastern Emperor Sutra had descended!

Immense fortune enveloped every corner of the Five Phoenixes.

Countless cultivators stared at the scriptures in the heavens, entranced.

Mysterious runes floated, shaking souls.

Many who had been stuck at bottlenecks broke through just by gazing upon them.

The first scripture, the Northern Emperor Sutra, had allowed cultivators to reach the Three Gods Realm. Over the past century, countless had entered the Yin Spirit and Yang Spirit realms thanks to it.

Now, with the Eastern Emperor Sutra's emergence, many felt enlightenment pour over them like sacred ghee. Bottlenecks crumbled. Some even comprehended Dao Intent.

It was a grand event.

Tantai He could faintly see the scriptures too. Overjoyed, he declared this day a national celebration.

Half a month after the Eastern Emperor Sutra vanished...

Beyond the Five Phoenixes, the River of Time parted.

One warship after another, spirit vessels gleaming, sailed proudly into the continent.

When Tantai He received word of the visitors, his entire body trembled.

He led his hundred officials to the summit of Mount Tai Ling, the peak that asked the heavens.

Warship after warship hovered above.

Envoys from every sacred ground of Pingyang Heaven stepped forth.

None dared show arrogance.

Even though the emperor before them was a mortal with no cultivation aura, they remained all smiles and courtesy.

Because they knew—the mysterious Holy Lord Lu of the Five Phoenixes was watching.

These were the envoys sent by Pingyang Heaven's many sacred grounds—to deliver tribute.

The envoys descended from their ships onto the peak and waved toward the vessels.

The next moment, they activated their spatial artifacts.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The sky blazed with blinding light.

One after another, dragon-like veins of top-grade spirit stones appeared, glittering brilliantly under the sun.

The sight was breathtaking.

Countless top-grade spirit stone veins densely filled the heavens.

Tantai He trembled from head to toe.

The officials of the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty stood with mouths agape.

“As requested by Holy Lord Lu, these top-grade spirit stone veins are our tribute of atonement.”

The Joyful Venerable smiled warmly.

Then, every mighty envoy who had stepped off the warships bowed deeply.

Each one represented a High Martial world of Pingyang Heaven.

Tantai He felt hot blood surging in his chest.

How magnificent were the Five Phoenixes—ten thousand realms coming to pay homage!

Chapter 445: The Human Emperor Hosts a Feast, Yi Yue Returns to the Island

The Five Phoenixes rise with the wind—ten thousand realms come to pay homage!

One after another, the mighty envoys from Pingyang Heaven bowed deeply. Top-grade spirit stone veins hovered in the sky like divine dragons, so numerous they blotted out the sun.

It was as if the entire vault of heaven had been replaced by a canopy forged of spirit stones.

Atop Mount Tai Ling.

Tantai He rose to his feet, fists clenched.

Though he was merely mortal, though he knew these experts from Pingyang Heaven feared only the legendary Young Master Lu, at this moment—as the Human Emperor of the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty of the Five Phoenixes—he felt genuine, heartfelt joy.

Compared to the time when they were besieged by armies from ten thousand realms and invaded by the upper worlds, the Five Phoenixes now were like a phoenix awakening, spreading its wings to reveal its might.

Everyone was growing—even the Human Emperor.

Every experience carved a mark upon their lives, and those marks were the footprints of their growth.

Tantai He's eyes blazed. Feeling the grandeur of "ten thousand realms paying homage," his conviction grew stronger: the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty needed to cultivate high-level cultivators.

Moreover, in his view, the dynasty's stability required cultivators as well.

Dragon qi could suppress many existences, but what if a cultivator appeared who could ignore dragon qi entirely?

The Tantai He who once adhered strictly to the principle that a Human Emperor must never cultivate to achieve longevity now felt a trace of envy for those who could soar through the skies and shatter mountains and seas.

Once, he had only wished to become a great Human Emperor like his father, Tantai Xuan.

But now, his mindset had changed.

The grand event of ten thousand realms coming to pay tribute shocked not only the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty but the entire cultivation world.

Figures streaked across the sky, hovering high above, gazing in awe at the countless spirit stone veins.

It was truly spectacular. So many veins pouring into the Five Phoenixes would surely trigger a terrifying leap in power!

For a time, every cultivator's heart surged with excitement.

Just as the excitement reached its peak—

A long rainbow flashed across the heavens.

The rainbow dispersed, revealing a figure in a flowing white dress: Jing Yue.

She had grown even more breathtaking—a cold, stunning beauty like an unapproachable glacier.

Only beside Young Master Lu did Jing Yue ever allow that glacier to melt into a smile.

The Joyful Venerable clasped his hands in greeting.

Every envoy from Pingyang Heaven followed suit.

Jing Yue represented White Jade Capital—and the terrifying Holy Lord Lu that everyone feared.

Atop Mount Tai Ling.

Human Emperor Tantai He's eyes flickered.

He bowed respectfully toward Jing Yue, and his hundred officials and countless soldiers followed.

When White Jade Capital appeared, the world bowed.

Such was the status of White Jade Capital.

Jing Yue inclined her head slightly.

She raised a delicate hand, and a black ring appeared in her palm.

Many recognized it—it was Holy Lord Lu’s personal ring.

She tossed it lightly into the air.

The ring seemed to crush the void itself. Terrifying pressure made everyone struggle to breathe.

Though the Holy Lord himself was absent, a mere ring he wore close to his body was enough to instill dread.

Rainbow light burst from the ring.

In an instant, all the spirit stone veins and spiritual herbs hovering in the sky vanished.

The peak of Mount Tai Ling suddenly felt empty again as sunlight poured down once more.

Yet everyone felt a strange sense of loss.

“By the Young Master’s command, White Jade Capital has taken the spirit stone veins and herbs,” Jing Yue said.

Her long lashes fluttered as she swept her gaze across the crowd. No one dared object.

Even the cultivators of the Five Phoenixes hovering in the sky harbored no greedy thoughts.

They knew that seizing even one vein would grant an explosive breakthrough.

But they did not dare.

To move against White Jade Capital... was to court death.

The legendary Holy Lord Lu was not known for his good temper.

After collecting the treasures, Jing Yue vanished into the heavens once more.

The envoys from Pingyang Heaven's many High Martial worlds stood awkwardly, their warships hovering, unsure whether to stay or leave.

Human Emperor Tantai He was the first to react, laughing heartily.

“You have all traveled far and worked hard. I, the Human Emperor of the Five Phoenixes, will take the liberty of hosting a feast for you in the imperial capital.”

His laughter rang out.

Atop the peak, the officials paled in horror.

“Your Majesty... no!”

“Your Majesty, please reconsider!”

The officials trembled and hurriedly spoke.

Tantai He ignored them.

A blunt old Confucian scholar stepped forward, eyes red.

“Your Majesty! This feast... cannot be held! It is too dangerous!”

Though aged, his voice was resolute.

High above, the experts from Pingyang Heaven exchanged strange looks, many with gleaming eyes.

The Joyful Venerable had no desire to attend—he only wanted to flee the Five Phoenixes, flee the Void Heaven, flee Lu Ping'an.

Otherwise, his life hung by a thread.

“Since the Human Emperor invites us, we shall stay a few days and feast with His Majesty.”

The experts from Pingyang Heaven exchanged glances.

They had no intention of causing trouble in the Five Phoenixes—White Jade Capital loomed over them.

But if they could learn more about the Five Phoenixes and bring back useful intelligence, their Holy Lords would be pleased.

The Joyful Venerable had no choice but to stay.

If everyone else remained and he left alone, it would be a slap in the Five Phoenixes' face.

If that somehow offended Holy Lord Lu's petty side, he would have nowhere to cry.

Word of the Human Emperor hosting a feast for Pingyang Heaven's many experts spread like wildfire.

The Great Xuan Divine Dynasty was on edge. Nearly all Xuanwu Guards were deployed to protect the imperial capital.

The Human Emperor was only mortal. Though protected by dragon qi, against so many experts, if they truly wished him harm, he would not survive.

Even Jiang Li emerged from seclusion.

He personally oversaw the banquet, his primordial spirit sweeping constantly to prevent any expert from trying to control the emperor.

The common people were naturally curious.

But the noble families of the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty paid even closer attention.

The warships docked outside the imperial capital.

Countless mortals stared in awe at the flying vessels radiating slaughter and grandeur.

Many cultivators coveted them too—each warship was a top-tier profound-tier artifact!

The feast began.

Surprisingly, it was peaceful. Cups clinked, and the atmosphere remained harmonious.

The experts feared White Jade Capital and dared not act out of line.

Human Emperor Tantai He sat at the head of the table. Though mortal, he faced the many experts without the slightest hint of inferiority.

Many from Pingyang Heaven looked at him with surprise.

The officials of the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty ate with pounding hearts, terrified something would happen to their emperor.

Fortunately, everything ended smoothly.

...

In the deep palace of the imperial capital.

Tantai He stood with hands behind his back, his robes slightly disheveled. Beside him, an old eunuch stood respectfully with head bowed.

A few strands of hair danced before Tantai He's forehead.

He watched the bronze warships rise from outside the capital and depart the Five Phoenixes, a self-mocking smile on his lips.

Scenes from the feast replayed in his mind. Though he was the Human Emperor, those experts had never truly respected him. To them, he was an ant they could crush at any moment.

If not for their fear of Young Master Lu, they would never have humored him.

"Eunuch Hong..."

Tantai He murmured.

“This old servant is here.”

The eunuch’s slightly shrill voice answered as he bowed.

“Tell me... if we continue following my father’s philosophy, can Great Xuan truly endure forever? Can the divine dynasty... truly last for all eternity?”

Tantai He did not move, eyes fixed on the departing warships.

The old eunuch trembled and dropped to his knees.

“Your Majesty... this old servant dares not speak ill of the previous emperor.”

“What is there to fear? We’re just chatting.”

Tantai He smiled helplessly at the kneeling eunuch.

He walked barefoot across the wooden floor of the palace.

Then he laughed softly.

“Cultivators... are still essential.”

“To secure the dynasty, powerful cultivators are indispensable. Father believed the people’s hearts alone could sustain Great Xuan forever, but... the hearts of the people change. How can something that changes grant eternity?”

Shaking his head, Tantai He walked along the corridor, hands behind his back.

His silhouette looked heavy.

Tantai He’s sense of crisis far exceeded Tantai Xuan’s.

Founding a divine dynasty was easy. Maintaining it... was hard.

Especially as the Five Phoenixes grew stronger and cultivators rose in power.

If the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty lacked sufficient strength to anchor it, one day it would fall.

Another dynasty would rise in its place.

Tantai He knew—he had to change something.

...

The news of the Human Emperor feasting Pingyang Heaven's experts soon faded.

To mortals, cultivators were too distant; they quickly forgot.

To cultivators, the event held little significance.

One feast could not mend relations.

Cultivators returned to their training.

With the emergence of both the Northern Emperor Sutra and Eastern Emperor Sutra, many studied the scriptures diligently. Countless new cultivation methods were derived from them, giving birth to numerous sects.

The cultivation world bloomed with a hundred flowers.

Furthermore, Lü Mudui, the Heavenly Mechanic Pavilion Master under White Jade Capital, announced that the Five Phoenixes had reaped immense rewards from the Heavenly Grand Competition—vast amounts of Dao reserves now etched into the world origin.

These reserves would eventually feed back to cultivators.

This was the best time to comprehend Dao Intent.

The news sent cultivators flocking to the Dao Stele in the Nine Prisons Secret Realm.

Over the years, many succeeded—fifth-sequence, sixth-sequence, even seventh- and eighth-sequence Dao Intents appeared.

The cultivators of the world were growing stronger.

The Northern Emperor Sutra detailed cultivation from Qi Condensation to the Three Gods Realm. The newly revealed Eastern Emperor Sutra continued from there, describing the Creation Venerable and Heavenly Person realms.

Unifying the primordial spirit formed the Origin Flower. Creation Venerables gathered the Golden Body Flower and Dao Intent Flower, then endured heavenly thunder to enter the Three Flowers Gather Atop realm.

The Five Phoenixes cultivators also learned the external realm divisions: Primordial Spirit Unity corresponded to Body Integration, Creation Venerable to Tribulation Transcendence, and Heavenly Person to Immortal Transformation.

Overall, the Five Phoenixes' system seemed stricter.

True Creation Venerables were still rare, though many half-step Creation Venerables existed—Overlord, Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, and others.

But Heavenly Persons were confirmed: the myth who walked out of the Great Xuan Academy, Lu Jiulian, was one.

And the terrifying witch of Buzhou Peak seemed to be another, though no one could say for certain.

As for White Jade Capital's Young Master Lu...

Both the cultivation and mortal worlds regarded him as having already stepped into the realm of immortals—a true land deity!

With clear realm divisions and concrete goals, the world burned with motivation to become Creation Venerables.

...

Jing Yue returned to the island at the lake's heart.

Gongshu Yu and Aru, master and disciple, were already waiting.

Lu Ping'an had emerged from seclusion.

His research on the formation inscriptions was temporarily complete.

Jing Yue returned the Mysterious Black Ring to Lu Ping'an and informed him of the Human Emperor's feast.

Lu Ping'an took the ring, swept his primordial spirit through the veins inside, and smiled.

"This new emperor is different from Tantai Xuan. He has his own ideas."

“No need to concern ourselves with such small matters. Let him manage the world as he sees fit.”

He crafted a spatial ring, separating the spiritual herbs from the spirit stone veins. The veins remained in the black ring; the herbs went into the new ring.

“Jing Yue, deliver these herbs to Father.”

He tossed the ring to her.

“Yes, Young Master.”

Though curious, Jing Yue asked nothing and vanished in a flash.

Her cultivation had advanced rapidly. On the island, she never neglected training and was now only one Dao Intent Flower away from Creation Venerable.

The ancient tomb floated above the vast sea, not far from the island.

Jing Yue arrived quickly.

She entered the city walls.

Within the tomb, the skeletal remains of the Four Kings still knelt.

Jing Yue sensed powerful auras—each at the half-step Creation Venerable level.

Sword light flashed.

Ximen Xianzhi appeared, sword case on his back, elegant as ever.

“Lady Jing, why have you come to the ancient tomb?”

He asked with a smile.

“The Young Master sent me to find the Lord.”

Jing Yue’s face was cold as frost.

Ximen Xianzhi smiled and led her deeper into the tomb.

Along the way, Luo Mingyue and Jiang Li, training atop the city walls, opened their eyes and nodded slightly to Jing Yue.

Suddenly, a shadow flickered.

Jing Yue's white dress flared. Transparent cicada-wing ice blades slashed out with terrifying sharpness.

Clang!

A pair of silver scissors blocked the strike.

Mo Liuqi emerged from the darkness, cloaked in black.

"It's you."

Jing Yue frowned.

"I'm not the one looking for you—she is."

Mo Liuqi pointed beside him.

Jing Yue's body trembled slightly.

From the shadows stepped a familiar figure.

It was Yi Yue, whom she hadn't seen in years.

Yi Yue now wore a black dress, a long whip of unknown material coiled around her waist. Her long lashes fluttered, emotions turbulent.

"Sister Jing..."

Yi Yue looked at Jing Yue, her foxy face filled with excitement.

"You're ready to come back?"

Jing Yue's icy expression softened.

Yi Yue nodded.

“I must return and beg the Young Master’s forgiveness...”

She had left White Jade Capital without permission. Lu Ping’an had never questioned her about it.

With his methods, finding her would have been easy.

Yet he had never dragged her back—he had let her walk her own path.

“Good. When I return, we’ll go together.”

Jing Yue did not refuse.

She could see the resolve in Yi Yue’s eyes.

Led by Ximen Xianzhi, Jing Yue entered the deepest palace of the tomb.

She found Lu Changkong laughing and chatting with the white-robed Gu Mangran.

“My Lord.”

Jing Yue bowed and handed over the spatial ring.

“Oh?”

Lu Changkong was surprised—his son still remembered his old man?

“Spiritual herbs? So many high-grade spiritual herbs...”

Lu Changkong’s eyes lit up the moment he scanned them.

“As expected of my son!”

He laughed heartily.

The skeletal Gu Mangran spoke, “Young Master Lu clearly knows Lord Lu’s ability to turn the rotten into the miraculous... He sent so many high-grade herbs to help perfect Lord Lu’s Myriad Poison Body.”

Lu Changkong shook his head. “The general is only half right. Fan’er sent these herbs primarily to have me cultivate divine medicines—to restore the general’s strength.”

Gu Mangran fell silent.

He had suspected as much—Lu Ping’an’s goal was divine medicine.

“In a little while, I planned to leave the Void Heaven and search the lower three heavens for divine medicines. I never expected Young Master Lu to have already prepared.”

Gu Mangran said.

Searching the lower three heavens would be dangerous—there were no Void Heaven restrictions there.

Supreme experts might dare to capture or kill him.

“I will do everything in my power.”

Lu Changkong declared.

But his gaze settled deeply on Gu Mangran, carrying an intensity that even someone like Gu Mangran felt pressured.

“If one day the general regains his strength, I hope the general will grant this old man one request.”

“What request?”

Gu Mangran’s magnetic voice asked.

“I haven’t decided yet. I’ll tell the general when the time comes.”

Lu Changkong shook his head.

Gu Mangran went quiet. Lu Changkong had already decided—he simply wasn’t saying.

“Very well.”

After a long pause, Gu Mangran agreed.

Lu Changkong smiled and turned, waving to the nearly invisible, utterly background Bu Nanxing.

“Little Bu, come! Be my assistant. You and I will cultivate another thousand or eight hundred divine medicines!”

Bu Nanxing’s face darkened.

Again?

Making divine medicines was insanely dangerous!

But under Lu Changkong’s kindly gaze, Bu Nanxing could not refuse.

Jing Yue took her leave.

She departed the ancient tomb.

Yi Yue bid farewell to Mo Liuqi and left with Jing Yue.

The two drifted gracefully back to the island at the lake’s heart.

Yi Yue gazed at the familiar sights—nothing on the island had changed at all.

“S-Sister Yi Yue?!”

Ni Yu, fresh from another cauldron explosion, face blackened like a calico cat, saw the black-dressed Yi Yue and her big eyes lit up with delight.

Yi Yue stared at the familiar little loli Ni Yu, momentarily dazed.

After so many years, Ni Yu still looked like a little girl.

But soon, Ni Yu froze mid-step.

The nostalgic smile on Yi Yue’s face solidified.

Because she saw, in the peach blossom grove...

The young master seated upon the Thousand-Bladed Chair, unchanged from years ago.

At this moment...

He idly twirled a peach blossom between his fingers, gazing faintly at her.

Chapter 446: Overlord vs. Tang Yimo—Who Is Stronger?

Leaning on the railing for half a day, speechless,

Yet the rustle of bamboo and the new moon are just as they were those years ago.

Gazing at that familiar figure in the peach grove, Yi Yue's heart trembled.

The Young Master had not changed at all.

Under Lu Ping'an's calm gaze from the grove, both Ni Yu and Yi Yue shivered slightly.

Jing Yue stood quietly to the side, saying nothing.

Yi Yue fell to her knees, long lashes trembling.

"Young Master..."

The wheelchair gently rolled over fallen peach blossoms, unhurriedly emerging from the grove.

Reclining in the Thousand-Bladed Chair, Lu Ping'an's expression remained neutral.

"You're back?"

After a long pause, he finally spoke.

Tears instantly welled in Yi Yue's eyes, swirling within.

She bit her red lip, said nothing, and only nodded heavily.

Lu Ping'an looked at her, strands of hair dancing in the breeze.

Yi Yue's talent had never been exceptional. To grow stronger, she had endured endless hardship and bitterness. Now, at last, she had carved her own path.

Yet her cultivation was still only at the ninth-step Yang Spirit realm.

She had not even condensed her primordial spirit.

A slight regret, perhaps she still carried some inner demon.

Lu Ping'an raised a hand and gently tapped her forehead.

Buzz...

A ripple of energy spread outward. Yi Yue felt as though her entire being was sublimating.

Her Yang Spirit consciousness suddenly touched the truths of heaven and earth and began to transform rapidly.

Like a chick breaking free from its shell, brimming with boundless vitality.

In that single instant, Yi Yue's primordial spirit fully condensed.

"Thank you, Young Master!"

Yi Yue prostrated herself, kowtowing deeply.

“No need. You were already one step away.”

Lu Ping’an waved it off.

“The rest of the path... you must walk yourself.”

Beside them, Ni Yu—face still blackened like a calico cat—grinned widely.

The Young Master hadn’t punished her. The tension in her heart melted away.

As expected, the Young Master was cold on the outside, warm on the inside.

Yi Yue had returned. The three maidservants who once served him together were reunited.

Even the icy Jing Yue let out a soft laugh.

Yi Yue raised her head, determination shining on her foxy face.

“Young Master... over these hundred years, I have gained some insights in my cultivation. In direct combat, I cannot compare to Sister Jing and the others, but...”

“I have walked a different path. I excel at hiding in darkness and striking fatally from the shadows...”

Lu Ping’an twirled the green peach blossom in his hand. “And?”

Yi Yue took a deep breath. Her body suddenly turned into a wisp of green smoke and vanished as though she had never existed.

Yet a faint voice drifted through the air.

“Yi Yue is willing to forever lurk in the darkness and guard the Young Master’s side.”

Lu Ping’an, seated on his Thousand-Bladed Chair, was momentarily speechless.

Jing Yue and Ni Yu were both stunned—what kind of move was this?

A gentle pulse of energy.

Yi Yue was forcibly shaken out of the darkness, looking bewildered.

“We’ll talk about that when you reach the Heavenly Person realm.”

Yi Yue’s eyes lit up. Did that mean... the Young Master agreed?

But soon, worry clouded her charming face.

Only a Heavenly Person could guard his side?

The Heavenly Person realm...

So far away...

Yi Yue’s return brightened the mood on the island considerably. Ni Yu chattered endlessly with her— they had always been the closest.

Atop the White Jade Capital pavilion.

Lu Ping’an summoned Gongshu Yu and Aru.

Gongshu Yu sat across the Go board. Aru stood nervously behind his master, head lowered, occasionally stealing glances at Lu.

This was the legendary Young Master Lu!

Gongshu Yu, however, remained calm and unruffled—an old monster who had lived through the era of the Hundred Schools of Philosophy.

He drank wine and played a few moves with Lu Ping'an.

Soon, though, his brows furrowed. The board had become too murky.

After a while, he gave up entirely.

Go was better left to Mo Beike and Kong Xiu, those two old fogeys.

“Young Master Lu, why have you summoned this old man?”

Gongshu Yu took a sip of wine and squinted.

Lu Ping'an smiled, leaning back in his chair.

“During the Heavenly Grand Competition, the Five Phoenixes were bullied by all sides. Armies from countless realms attacked us, and even the upper worlds sent forces to oppress us. In truth, the Five Phoenixes have always been like a lone leaf floating on stormy seas.”

Gongshu Yu's body stiffened slightly.

How could he not know that battle?

How could any citizen of the Five Phoenixes not know?

“Because of the Void Heaven's unique nature, as the only High Martial world to emerge from it, one day... the Five Phoenixes may face the enmity of the entire universe.”

Lu Ping'an sipped his plum wine, white robes fluttering.

Gongshu Yu suddenly felt immense pressure. Aru behind him trembled.

Facing the enmity of the entire universe?

Just imagining the Five Phoenixes besieged on all sides by powerful experts filled them with helplessness.

“I can protect the Five Phoenixes forever, but the Five Phoenixes must still learn to stand on their own.”

Lu Ping’an’s fingers tapped rhythmically on the armrest.

Gongshu Yu sat up straight.

Then Lu Ping’an slowly explained his vision.

Across the entire Five Phoenixes, perhaps only Gongshu Yu and his disciple could bring it to life.

“Create a spiritual tool with enough deterrent power?!”

“One that can intimidate top-tier experts—even sacred clans of the upper realms?”

Gongshu Yu’s mind reeled.

“Is the Young Master referring to the imperial weapon that once held open the Void Heaven?”

Lu Ping’an shook his head. “Imperial weapons are woven from profound dao and principle—they represent transcendence of power itself. Only ancient Great Emperors can forge them.”

“What we need is not that level of mystery. We don’t need interwoven dao and principle. We only need terrifying destructive force—enough to threaten or kill enemies.”

“For example... the explosive power generated when multiple conflicting energies collide.”

As he spoke, Lu Ping’an raised a hand and formed a peach blossom out of pure energy.

Primordial spirit energy, spiritual qi, origin qi, chaos force, vital blood force...

Each petal was made of a different energy.

As he compressed them...

The void around the blossom began to collapse.

Gongshu Yu felt his breath catch.

Aru's eyes nearly popped out.

Lu Ping'an quickly dispersed the blossom.

"That is the principle. Explore in this direction. First, create a vessel capable of containing terrifying amounts of energy. Then, a mechanism to release it. The longer these conflicting energies are compressed, the more devastating the explosion upon release."

Gongshu Yu fell deep into thought.

In recent years, his forging had hit a bottleneck.

He could already craft earth-tier spiritual tools—his greatest achievement being a single high-grade earth-tier tool, barely reaching that level.

He had thought his path of forging had reached its end.

That was why he had placed his hopes on Aru.

But now, just when one door closed, Lu Ping'an had opened a window!

"Imperial weapons require immensely powerful cultivators to wield..."

"What Young Master Lu describes requires almost no cultivation from the user—the demand is on the tool itself."

The wrinkles on Gongshu Yu's face twitched. His body shook with excitement.

"Is it possible?"

Lu Ping'an looked at him and smiled.

"It is!"

"Absolutely! The significance of such a tool to the Five Phoenixes is too great. This old man will stake his life on it—I will forge a vessel that can contain and unleash apocalyptic energy!"

Gongshu Yu stood, his short frame radiating immense determination.

He bowed deeply to Lu Ping'an.

“Then you two will stay on the island and research.”

Lu Ping'an said.

Gongshu Yu and Aru bowed.

Lu Ping'an was not stingy. He crafted another spatial ring, filled it with half the spirit stone veins, and handed it over—these were research funds.

The remaining veins he embedded across the Five Phoenixes continent, feeding them back to the people.

Weapons were necessary, but the Five Phoenixes' own strength was more important.

He looked up. The wind lifted his white robes.

He seemed to see the rotating stellar origin, crisscrossed with the Dao reserves etched upon it.

In recent years, more cultivators had comprehended unique Dao Intents at the Dao Stele.

The Five Phoenixes now had 120 Dao reserve inscriptions—reaching the seventh-grade evolutionary level.

But Lu Ping'an was far from satisfied.

The Dao Derivation Mirror appeared in his hand—a heavenly-tier spiritual tool from the upper realms, still containing vast Dao reserves.

Like fat meat dangling before him, he was tempted. If he merged them all into the Five Phoenixes, the entire world would experience a massive leap.

More Dao reserves meant more people could comprehend Dao Intent.

His own third-sequence destructive Dao Intent would soon reach second-sequence!

He already had a clear plan for how to use the mirror.

“The great war has just ended. The Five Phoenixes is evolving. Cultivators will enter a period of rapid growth... but steady progress is still too slow. They need stimulation.”

Leaning on the railing, Lu Ping'an fell into thought.

Suddenly, inspiration struck. He flicked his wrist, and fragrant wine poured from the gilded pot.

It was the Heavenly Immortal Brew rewarded by the system long ago.

Looking at the wine and thinking of his upcoming plan, the corner of his mouth curved upward.

...

As the Great Venerable of the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm had said—

Lu Ping'an did not rashly enter Blood Fiend Heaven or Yuan Magnet Heaven.

Those two realms were extremely dangerous—upper-realm experts could be lying in wait.

In the previous war, Blood Fiend Heaven and Yuan Magnet Heaven had assembled a million-strong army and sent countless experts into the Five Phoenixes.

With Lu Ping'an's temperament, he would never let them off easily.

He had actually given them a chance.

He had waited to see if their leaders would come to apologize like the Great Venerable.

They did not.

In Pingyang Heaven, many High Martial worlds watched the Five Phoenixes closely.

They noticed the Five Phoenixes had gone quiet. The mysterious Holy Lord Lu had not begun his reckoning.

Many Holy Lords grieved their losses, believing Holy Lord Lu was afraid—too scared to invade Blood Fiend Heaven and Yuan Magnet Heaven.

If they had known, they would never have followed the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm's orders and handed over so many spirit stone veins and herbs.

Now it was like throwing meat buns at a dog—gone forever.

Within the Little Thunder Sound Buddha Realm.

The Great Venerable sat atop the pagoda. The Joyful Venerable chanted sutras below.

Buddha light bathed the realm in peace.

The Great Venerable slowly opened his eyes, feeling the resentful thoughts from the other realms. He only smiled.

He gazed toward the Void Heaven, toward the Five Phoenixes.

There was no movement... but the Great Venerable could feel it—the calm before the storm.

He remembered entering the Five Phoenixes.

Two casually tossed Go stones had summoned pillars of spirit pressure that forced him to his knees.

If not for his powerful Buddha body, he would have been crushed flat.

At that moment, he was certain: Holy Lord Lu had surpassed Immortal Transformation and reached the Immortal Constellation realm!

Even in Blood Fiend Heaven and Yuan Magnet Heaven, only the few top fifth-grade worlds controlled by upper-realm sacred clans possessed Immortal Constellation experts.

“The reckoning is not forgotten... the time simply has not come.”

The Great Venerable murmured.

He pressed his palms together and closed his eyes once more.

With Lu Ping'an's personality, Blood Fiend Heaven and Yuan Magnet Heaven would soon be turned upside down!

...

Time passed, day by day.

Great Xuan Calendar, Year 105, Winter.

Human Emperor Tantai He issued a decree that shook the world: one hundred li outside the imperial capital, he established the “Marvels Bureau.” All graduates of the Great Xuan Academy and any willing cultivators across the land were to reside there, receiving official salaries according to court ranks.

The decree sent shockwaves through the court.

Many Confucian scholars knelt before the palace for three days and nights, begging the emperor to rescind it.

But Tantai He shut his doors for three days and saw no one.

The officials could see—this time, the emperor was resolute.

Some scholars fell ill from anger and resigned, leaving the capital.

In the past, Tantai He would have tried to retain them.

This time, for the sake of the Marvels Bureau, he remained behind closed doors.

The Marvels Bureau was eventually established, drawing cultivators from all over the world to the capital.

Their gathering caused unrest.

Yet Tantai He knew where to draw the line.

The purpose of the Marvels Bureau was to keep cultivators separate from mortals and prevent disruption of the court.

It was meant to serve as the dynasty's ultimate defensive force—much like the Xuanwu Guards founded by Tantai Xuan.

But the bureau was a mixed bag. He needed a powerful cultivator to anchor it.

Tantai He personally traveled to Southern Commandery and sought out Tang Yimo, who was in secluded training.

He asked Tang Yimo to oversee the Marvels Bureau.

Tang Yimo refused without ceremony.

Tantai He then went to Western Liang and found Overlord, who had secluded himself deep in the mountains with Luo Mingyue.

Protected by an army, Tantai He arrived and found Overlord seated on a barren rock, absorbing the essence of heaven and earth.

He explained his purpose.

Overlord finally opened his eyes. In that instant, terrifying pressure turned the entire ancient forest into a demonic hell.

“The Marvels Bureau...”

“As Human Emperor, govern the mortals well. Why establish a Marvels Bureau?”

“As long as you rule justly, who would dare invade the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty?”

Overlord said indifferently.

Tantai He’s body shook.

Overlord’s meaning was clear: as long as Tantai He was a good emperor, with the connections left by Tantai Xuan, no one in the world would dare disrespect the dynasty.

Because Overlord, Lu Julian, and others could crush any threat with ease.

Tantai He withdrew from the mountains.

He looked back.

He could still faintly see that towering figure seated atop the peak, comprehending the great dao of heaven and earth.

He clenched his fists.

In the end, Tantai He invited Xue Tao, the former Grand Commander of the Xuanwu Guards.

Xue Tao, who had watched Tantai He grow up, could not refuse.

He agreed to anchor the Marvels Bureau.

With ninth-step Yang Spirit power and unfathomable depth, though not on the level of Overlord or Tang Yimo, Xue Tao was like a stabilizing divine needle.

Great Xuan Calendar, Year 110—five years after the Marvels Bureau's founding.

The court officials who once feared the bureau would bring disaster were shocked to find these five years unusually peaceful. Not a single evil spirit dared cause trouble within the dynasty.

Tantai He was full of vigor. The Xuanwu Guards were his father's achievement; the Marvels Bureau was his.

That year, Xue Tao came to him.

Snow fell from the sky. In the warm palace hall, a brazier burned brightly.

Cultivators feared neither heat nor cold, but Tantai He was mortal.

Xue Tao, in loose robes, walked side by side with Tantai He through the pavilion.

“Your Majesty, this subject must leave.”

Xue Tao looked at Tantai He.

The little boy had grown into an emperor of his generation.

Tantai He froze.

“Uncle Xue, where are you going?”

Xue Tao stood with hands behind his back. He reached out; a snowflake landed on his palm and instantly evaporated.

Battle intent burned in his eyes.

“White Jade Capital has spread word across the world: Young Master Lu calls all Yang Spirit realm cultivators and above to enter a secret realm and compete for mysterious training slots. This subject has been stuck at Yang Spirit for decades. I cannot miss this chance.”

Xue Tao looked at Tantai He.

Tantai He fell silent.

A personal call from Young Master Lu—this matter was of utmost importance.

“Uncle Xue... will you return?”

Tantai He stared at him.

Xue Tao only smiled and said nothing.

He turned and floated out of the pavilion.

BOOM!

His loose robes exploded outward. In the next instant, the silver armor of the Xuanwu Guards covered his body—he was like a divine general descending from the heavens.

Laughing heartily, spear in hand, he vanished from the Great Xuan palace under Tantai He’s gaze.

...

The news that Young Master Lu had the Heavenly Mechanic Pavilion summon all Yang Spirit and above cultivators to compete for mysterious training slots in a secret realm sent the entire cultivation world into a frenzy.

One after another, cultivators shot into the sky, racing toward the Eastern Ocean.

Unless a world-shaking catastrophe occurred, Young Master Lu never interfered in worldly affairs.

Yet now, White Jade Capital's Young Master Lu had personally called for Yang Spirit and above cultivators.

How could the cultivation world not boil over?

Everyone was curious—what was the land-god-like Young Master planning?

Rumor said he had opened a secret realm for the strong to compete over training opportunities.

What kind of opportunity would make Young Master Lu announce it so grandly?

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Across the Five Phoenixes continent, terrifying auras soared into the heavens.

Western Liang—Overlord, seated on a barren rock, opened his eyes and laughed. Half-step Creation Venerable, he stood, axe and shield on his back.

He glanced back at the graceful figure in the bamboo house who smiled and nodded encouragingly.

The next instant, Overlord threw his head back and roared with laughter.

He tore through the void like a streak of black light, vanishing in a flash.

Southern Commandery—Tang Yimo opened his eyes, bones crackling. Arms wrapped in white cloth, he stepped into the courtyard, bid farewell to Tang Xiansheng, and left.

From blessed lands and ancient forests across the Five Phoenixes, legendary cultivators who had once dominated the continent reemerged.

Sima Qingshan, book box on his back, brought his disciple An Miaoyu to the Eastern Ocean.

Kong Nanfei, still slovenly after a century, traveled with Meng Haoran.

Bai Qingniao, now even more elegant and refined, raising nine phoenix chicks in her backyard, smiled at the news and headed to White Jade Capital with Chi Lian.

Du Longyang and Ye Shoudao streaked across the sky like twin bolts of light.

Prince Tianxu sat in his sedan chair, carried by four Yin Spirit disciples—his porters had been upgraded again.

Empress Ni Chunqiu could barely contain her excitement—she would finally see Brother Lu again!

The ancient tomb opened. Ximen Xianzhi emerged with his sword case, accompanied by Jiang Li, Luo Mingyue, and others.

Lu Jiulian brought his little tag-along Tang Guo and drifted toward the Eastern Ocean.

Zhao Zixu from Western Liang and many more.

That day, the entire Five Phoenixes celebrated. Though only Yang Spirit and above could compete, for a continent that had been quiet for so long, it was a festival.

Above the Eastern Ocean.

Misty rain and smoke swirled.

A giant whale loomed faintly in the haze.

Soon, White Jade Capital appeared above the island at the lake's heart.

On the vast sea, countless cultivators stood shoulder to shoulder, powerful auras intertwining.

Many hearts raced with excitement.

Only White Jade Capital could gather so many experts.

Lü Mudui of the Heavenly Mechanic Pavilion, white robes fluttering, beard dancing in the wind.

Mo Tianyu, belly exposed, leaned close.

“Old Lü, any guess what the Young Master's mysterious training slots are? What kind of training?”

Lü Mudui gripped his bamboo staff, shook his head, and chuckled. “How could this old man fathom the Young Master's intentions?”

Mo Tianyu pouted, suddenly bored.

“But... the Young Master did tell me to prepare paper and brush...”

Lü Mudui’s beard fluttered as he continued.

“For what?”

Mo Tianyu blinked.

Lü Mudui glanced at him and laughed.

“Overlord versus Tang Yimo—who is stronger?”

“City Lord Du versus Sect Leader Ye—who edges out the other?”

“Tang Divine Body versus Nie Sacred Body—who will reign supreme in the Five Phoenixes?”

“Do you know the answers?”

Mo Tianyu opened his mouth, but no words came.

Dense excitement shone in Lü Mudui's eyes.

"This time... we'll finally find out."

Chapter 447: Ruthless Lu—The Secret Realm of Time Reversal

What exactly was Young Master Lu planning?

Heavenly Mechanic Pigeons streaked across the world, spreading the message. The entire cultivation realm erupted in fervor.

Countless reclusive cultivators emerged from their hidden paradises and headed for the Eastern Ocean.

The sea was packed with cultivators.

After years of peace and prosperity, the Five Phoenixes had birthed countless new practitioners.

The giant whale broke through the dense fog, carrying the massive immortal island on its back.

Origin qi roared and cascaded down like waterfalls, creating earth-shaking noise.

All the cultivators fell silent, breathing rapidly as they stared at the island—the island of White Jade Capital.

Young Master Lu had appeared.

Atop the White Jade Capital pavilion, he leaned against the railing, calmly surveying every gathered cultivator.

His fingers tapped lightly on the armrest of his wheelchair.

Lu Ping'an smiled. The reason he had summoned the world's cultivators was simple.

As the saying goes: the best way to grow stronger is through battle.

Since that great war, the Five Phoenixes had known peace. Minor skirmishes between factions occurred, but true life-or-death battles were rare.

Steady cultivation could produce experts, but it was too slow.

Lu Ping'an had no idea when the mysterious imperial weapon in the Void Heaven would emerge. Once it did, the upper realms would never sit idly by.

When that happened, the Five Phoenixes—the only High Martial world born from the Void Heaven—would become the primary target.

They could be occupied, controlled, or even casually erased.

During this time, under the acceleration of the time array...

Ten years had passed in a flash.

Gongshu Yu and Aru had remained on the island, researching a weapon of terrifying destructive power.

Especially after Lu Ping'an provided the effects of the "Stabilize" inscription, Gongshu Yu's research had begun to show breakthroughs.

But beyond creating deterrent weapons, Lu Ping'an's main goal was still to strengthen the Five Phoenixes—to increase his own spiritual energy reserves and advance his Dao Intent.

Thus, within the preaching platform, he had spent time crafting a secret realm.

A secret realm of time reversal.

Using the “Approach” inscription and the power of time, he had extracted the invasion war from the upper realms and turned it into a secret realm.

Calling it a secret realm was one way to put it—in Lu Ping’an’s understanding, it was essentially an instance dungeon.

However, he had removed his own influence from that battle, ensuring his presence would not alter the course of events.

He wanted the world to experience true desperation and hopelessness.

Human potential is boundless. In dire adversity, people can achieve breakthroughs unimaginable in ordinary times.

As for the mysterious training slots...

Lu Ping’an planned to select a few individuals and send them to Blood Fiend Heaven and Yuan Magnet Heaven—to settle accounts on behalf of the Five Phoenixes.

As the Great Venerable had said:

It's not that there will be no reckoning... only that the time has not yet come.

Withdrawing his thoughts, Lu Ping'an looked out over the vast sea.

"Is everyone here?"

Seated on the Thousand-Bladed Chair, he scanned the crowd and asked.

Then he smiled lightly.

He raised a hand. A silver blade detached from the chair and floated above his palm, wrapped in powerful qi.

With a gentle flick of his finger...

The blade shot forth, plunging into the sea.

BOOM!

Waves surged dozens of zhang high.

Then the water suddenly drained away.

A massive mirror-like gate appeared—ten zhang tall, reflecting rainbow light, framed in ancient bronze.

“Those at Yang Spirit realm and above may enter this mirror. Beyond it lies the secret realm...”

Lu Ping’an said.

“Your performance inside will be scored.”

“The top sixteen scorers will receive the mysterious training slots.”

The moment he finished speaking, the crowd exploded.

Wasn’t this just making them compete against each other?

Many were stunned.

The cultivators of the Five Phoenixes had truly never had a proper ranking contest.

No one knew who was truly stronger.

Was this the moment it would finally be decided?

On the other side, Lü Mudui in flowing white robes spoke.

His hoarse, aged voice echoed over the sea.

“By the Young Master’s command, this old man has brought paper and brush. Based on the secret realm scores, I shall... create a ranking list.”

The moment he spoke, everyone’s breathing grew rapid once more.

Though these cultivators had long transcended worldly fame and fortune...

That was only relative to mortals.

They were still human—cultivators with human emotions and desires.

A ranking list meant glory.

How could they not be moved?

“Enter the mirror.”

Lu Ping’an’s voice drifted down from the pavilion.

BOOM!

As soon as he spoke...

The sea exploded. Thousands of cultivators surged forward like a tidal wave, streaking toward the towering mirror!

Yang Spirit experts laughed heartily, eyes blazing with fighting spirit and pride.

Like shooting stars, they stepped across the void and plunged into the ancient mirror.

The mirror's surface rippled like water, and their figures vanished one by one.

Overlord, axe and shield on his back, radiated battle intent.

His gaze swept across Tang Yimo, Jiang Li, and the others.

He threw his head back and roared with laughter, full of vigor.

“The top spot on this list belongs to me, Xiang Shaoyun!”

Overlord stepped forward, each footfall making the sea tremble.

“That remains to be seen.”

Tang Yimo tightened the white cloth around his fists and spoke calmly.

His bones cracked as he charged toward the mirror.

Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, and the others laughed heartily—such a chance to compete was rare and exhilarating!

Xue Tao, clad in silver armor, followed respectfully behind Jiang Li and entered the mirror.

The watching cultivators stared intently.

Many were below Yang Spirit, but they were just as eager.

Watching Yang Spirit experts and above enter the mirror secret realm, their hearts raced in sync.

“Young Master, Jing Yue has gone in.”

Jing Yue said.

With a flutter of her white dress, she headed for the mirror.

Yi Yue emerged from the shadows, bid Lu Ping’an farewell, and followed Jing Yue.

Ni Yu, excited, black cauldron on her back and Little Yinglong on her head, prepared to charge.

But the moment her short legs moved, an invisible hand of spiritual qi yanked her back.

“What are you rushing in for? Have you finished your new pill homework?”

...

Tang Yimo passed through the ancient mirror.

He felt an odd energy envelop his entire body.

Origin power... and the power of time!

Suddenly, he opened his eyes.

He found himself standing on the blood-colored battlefield.

A bleak wind blew, chilling his skin.

He was stunned, shocked, confused...

Then he felt an icy killing intent that made the hairs on his neck stand on end—along with a terribly familiar atmosphere!

He looked around and saw the furious Great Xuan iron cavalry, Jiang Li, and the others.

He looked up.

Beyond the Five Phoenixes, a massive round furnace hovered, radiating terrifying dao and principle.

The rules of the Void Heaven were completely suppressed by this furnace.

“This... this secret realm... it’s time reversal? We’re back in that war?!”

Tang Yimo’s entire body tensed!

The thunderous sound of iron hooves filled the air.

At the edge of the Void Heaven, powerful upper-realm cavalry wearing bronze masks charged forward, cold and merciless.

Tang Yimo's body began to tremble.

Not from fear—from excitement!

“Fight!”

Tang Yimo ripped off the white cloth binding his fists.

BOOM!

Ten thousand upper-realm foot soldiers charged, long halberds sweeping out with terrifying sharpness.

In the normal timeline, Young Master Lu would have appeared, the River of Time would have flowed, and the entire army would have been erased in an instant.

But this time...

Young Master Lu did not appear!

Tang Yimo understood what this secret realm was truly testing.

“What would have happened in that battle... without Young Master Lu?”

Tang Yimo stood still.

Then he took a deep breath.

Vital blood surged within him.

First meridian, second, third...

He opened meridians in rapid succession.

Demonic qi rose like black clouds as he charged into the ten thousand halberd-wielding soldiers!

Like a primordial beast!

One punch exploded outward.

Tang Yimo left afterimages as he tore into the enemy ranks.

Against these Distraction-realm soldiers from the upper realms—equipped with top-tier gear, disciplined like steel, and forged with iron will—Tang Yimo quickly felt the strain.

He could not erase them with a single thought like Young Master Lu.

He could not sacrifice himself like Qi Liuja, activating the Myriad Pattern Cauldron to annihilate ninety thousand troops.

All he could do was fight hand-to-hand, flesh against flesh!

Pfft!

He fought like a madman, blood boiling.

One Distraction-realm soldier after another exploded into bloody mist under his fists.

Each kill caused the number “1” to flash in the air.

BOOM!

When he killed his hundredth soldier, the upper-realm archers moved.

They drew their bows. Arrows blotted out the sky.

Tang Yimo’s pupils contracted. Immense pressure bore down.

He roared.

Breaking free from the infantry, he opened two more meridians—entering the Five Meridians realm!

He became a black blur, too fast to track, dodging through the rain of arrows.

He even stepped on the arrows themselves, advancing relentlessly!

Roar!

Tang Yimo burst through the arrow storm, body twisting mid-air. With a beast-like roar, he unleashed a punch shrouded in demonic qi that covered the heavens.

With unstoppable force, he smashed into the archers.

When he killed his hundredth archer...

The thunder of hooves shook the earth. The upper-realm cavalry charged!

An ocean of cavalry thundered forth. Though composed entirely of Distraction-realm cultivators, the pressure they exerted rivaled a Tribulation Transcendence expert!

Yet Tang Yimo did not dodge. Demonic qi soared skyward, forming armor around him.

Like a ferocious beast, he charged straight into the cavalry!

...

It wasn't just Tang Yimo.

Every expert who entered the mirror faced the same scene.

Without Young Master Lu's intervention, they faced the full onslaught of the upper-realm army.

Above the vast sea...

The wind suddenly died.

Though separated by the mirror, everyone seemed to feel the terrifying killing intent permeating heaven and earth.

Faint echoes of battle cries reached their ears.

What was happening behind the mirror?

What kind of secret realm was it?

Many itched with curiosity but could not enter.

The ancient tomb.

Atop the city walls.

The skeletal Gu Mangran sat cross-legged, his eyes reflecting the mirror.

Unlike the others, he could see through it.

He saw Tang Yimo drenched in blood.

He saw Jing Yue's white dress dyed crimson.

He saw Overlord remove his own head, becoming a god-demon that carved a path of destruction.

"This secret realm... actually reverses time and recreates that war..."

"War truly is the fastest way to grow stronger."

Gu Mangran couldn't help but admire Lu Ping'an.

Only someone who controlled the "Approach" inscription could do something like this within the River of Time.

Gu Mangran suddenly wanted to laugh.

If the upper realms knew their army had been turned into a training tool for Five Phoenixes cultivators, they would probably cough up blood in rage.

...

Lu Ping'an watched quietly.

He wanted to see how far these people could go in that terrible war without his influence.

To his surprise...

Their performances exceeded his expectations.

Scenes flickered within the mirror.

Sima Qingshan, face filled with grief, robes soaked in blood. Around him, the corpses of Five Phoenixes cultivators fell. He watched his disciple An Miaoyu cut in half by an enemy blade.

He could barely tell reality from the secret realm.

Without Young Master Lu, the Five Phoenixes truly couldn't hold!

The tragic scenes assaulted his mind.

He gripped his brush, using blood as ink, painting with desperate strokes.

This painting drained his very soul.

“Kill!”

When the scroll was complete...

The usually refined Sima Qingshan roared in fury!

BOOM!

Ten thousand foot soldiers were swallowed by his painting.

At the same moment, the bottleneck that had trapped him for so long shattered!

Creation Venerable—achieved!

Yet there was no joy on his face. Even knowing it was only the secret realm, his eyes burned with killing intent, pain, and sorrow.

His brush swept horizontally!

Ten thousand soldiers within the painting were gradually torn apart, reduced to bloody pulp.

...

Kong Nanfei sat high in the sky, radiating boundless righteous qi. His words thundered, forcing ten thousand soldiers to retreat.

Confucian robes stained with blood, he faced death without fear.

In that moment, he seemed to understand the mindset of the Master who once stood outside Dongyang City and repelled ten thousand troops with a single shout.

Kong Nanfei recited the Song of Righteousness.

Then he laughed heartily.

His mind cleared—a single thought propelled him into the Creation Venerable realm!

...

Within Bai Qingniao's mind, the Nine Phoenixes Scripture spun wildly.

The next instant, seas of fire rose and fell, turning the sky into a blazing inferno.

Little Phoenix One through Little Phoenix Nine—nine fire phoenixes soared.

Though not true phoenixes!

Their circling dance suppressed the upper realm's hundred-thousand-strong Distraction-realm army!

Bai Qingniao was dazed.

So... she was this strong.

BOOM!

An Immortal Transformation expert struck with thunderous might.

Little Phoenix Nine let out a mournful cry, feathers falling as it was smashed by a single palm.

Bai Qingniao's eyes instantly turned red.

Little Phoenix Nine was so cute—how could they do that?!

She felt the Nine Phoenixes Scripture spinning beyond her control. Brilliant flames erupted from her body.

The next moment...

Little Phoenix One through Eight all began to transform...

...

Lu Ping'an's fingers tapped lightly on the wheelchair armrest.

His eyes were calm, even cold and merciless.

He felt ruthless—for making these people relive such a war, forcing them to feel despair and helplessness once more.

But the results were undeniable.

In the face of absolute desperation, many displayed resilience that astonished even him.

Countless people made massive breakthroughs on the battlefield!

Comfort and ease corrode the will.

The Five Phoenixes could not yet afford comfort.

And Lu Ping'an was genuinely surprised.

In that original war, how many breakthroughs and heroic moments had his intervention suppressed?

They were capable of this much!

Suddenly...

Waves rose on the sea.

Ripples spread across the massive mirror.

A Yang Spirit expert stumbled out, eyes bloodshot.

He looked back. His score appeared on the mirror: 10 points.

His eyes red, he laughed maniacally.

“Hahaha! That bastard really died! Even if I had to self-detonate, I’d drag you down with me!”

The Yang Spirit expert laughed like a madman, completely abandoning dignity.

Lu Ping’an sent down strands of origin qi, calming his frenzied emotions.

Many onlookers exchanged confused glances.

But the murderous aura radiating from this expert made one thing clear—the secret realm behind the mirror was no ordinary place.

As the first Yang Spirit emerged...

More and more followed.

Without exception, every one of them was emotionally unstable—some threw their heads back and laughed, others knelt on the sea and sobbed through gritted teeth.

Lu Ping'an sent down origin qi to soothe them all. Only then did they gradually recover.

The spectators felt chills down their spines.

What exactly had they experienced...

To need such calming?

Their minds seemed on the verge of collapse!

Lü Mudui sighed deeply and began recording names and scores on profound yellow paper.

Ordinary Yang Spirit cultivators scored between 5 and 10 points.

A few exceptional ones exceeded 10, but not by much.

Finally, someone emerged.

Xue Tao in silver armor walked out in a daze.

He sat heavily on the ground, silent.

His score appeared: 101 points.

The highest so far. Gasps rang out—ninth-step Yang Spirit Xue Tao had taken the final step and achieved Body Integration!

Many wanted to congratulate him, but his icy gaze killed all desire to speak.

More and more Yang Spirit experts emerged.

Many had broken through to Body Integration within the realm.

Yet none showed joy at their breakthroughs.

Lü Mudui recorded solemnly.

Figures continued to walk out. Lu Ping'an flicked his fingers, sending down origin qi to stabilize their emotions.

Nie Shuang emerged—the renowned Sacred Physique of Nie was now well-known in the cultivation world.

Behind him came Tang Guo, Meng Haoran, Zhao Zixu, and others.

Then Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, and the rest.

Sima Qingshan, Kong Nanfei, and Bai Qingniao also appeared.

Many stared in shock.

Their scores were terrifying—completely crushing ordinary Yang Spirit cultivators.

When Tang Yimo, Overlord, Nie Changqing, and others stepped out...

The crowd erupted in uproar.

Overlord's aura had grown even more terrifying—he had broken through!

Shattering his shackles, he had stepped into the Creation Venerable realm!

But when Lu Jiulian emerged in fluttering blue lotus robes...

His score appeared on the mirror...

In that instant...

The entire sea fell deathly silent.

Chapter 448: No Regrets in This Life—Forging with My Very Soul!

Kill!

Kill until madness!

Every figure that emerged from the giant mirror radiated towering killing intent.

Many closed their eyes, minds unable to calm, emotions surging like stormy seas.

“Lu Jiulian: 123,600 points.”

The moment this score appeared...

The entire sea fell into absolute silence.

What kind of immortal score was this?!

Over 120,000 points?!

Ordinary Yang Spirit cultivators barely reached ten points. Even Overlord and Tang Yimo hovered around forty to fifty thousand.

Yet Lu Jiulian... over 120,000.

How could the gap be this huge?!

Even Overlord and Tang Yimo’s pupils contracted.

They had experienced the battles inside the mirror—they knew exactly how difficult it was to earn such a score.

The further the war progressed, the harder it became to rack up points.

Because... the enemies grew stronger in response!

Scoring wasn't easy.

After killing roughly a hundred infantry, the archers would act.

After a hundred archers fell, the cavalry would charge...

After a hundred cavalry died, the watching experts would strike...

The more enemies you killed, the stronger the next wave became.

Ordinary Distraction-realm soldiers were worth one point.

Body Integration experts were worth ten.

Tribulation Transcendence experts were worth a hundred.

Immortal Transformation experts... a thousand!

Even so, surpassing 100,000 points was nearly impossible.

Unless...

Lu Jiulian had slain something above Immortal Transformation!

Everyone fell silent.

Too strong!

Even Lü Mudui was stunned for a long while before recovering and recording the score with a click of his tongue.

Atop the White Jade Capital pavilion, Lu Ping'an rubbed his temples.

He had sent Lu Jiulian in to familiarize himself with combat and deepen his understanding of the Heavenly Person realm.

He never expected the man to produce such a monstrous performance.

Lu Ping'an had watched the entire thing.

In that war, Lu Jiulian had been a god of slaughter—killing anything in his path.

He nearly wiped out the entire 100,000-strong invasion force.

Tribulation experts fell to Tribulation experts, Immortal Transformation experts to Immortal Transformation experts...

And the most outrageous part? He did it without a single drop of blood staining his robes.

Like a blue lotus rising unsullied from the mud.

In the end, several Immortal Constellation experts attacked together.

Only then did Lu Jiulian bleed.

But the man was stubborn—he smiled faintly, turned, and self-detonated...

Taking one Immortal Constellation expert with him.

“I wonder if Zhu Long entered the mirror, could she surpass Lu Jiulian’s record?”

Lu Ping’an leaned back in his Thousand-Bladed Chair, pondering.

He hadn’t let Zhu Long enter, so he had no way of knowing.

“Girls shouldn’t be fighting and killing.”

He shook his head and stopped dwelling on it.

Everyone at Yang Spirit realm and above had now exited the mirror.

This experience of reliving the past war had pushed many to breakthroughs in the face of despair.

Nearly eighty percent of those stuck at ninth-step Yang Spirit had broken through under pressure, unifying their primordial spirits and achieving Body Integration!

Overlord, Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, and others had shattered the half-step Creation Venerable bottleneck and stepped into true Creation Venerable realm!

Even more surprising to Lu Ping'an—Sima Qingshan, Bai Qingniao, Kong Nanfei, and others had experienced explosive enlightenments and breakthroughs.

Overall, the secret realm's effect far exceeded his expectations.

The Five Phoenixes' collective strength had skyrocketed!

Even the former Tianyuan prodigies like Feng Yilou and Zhong Nan had unified their primordial spirits and become true experts.

From the pavilion, Lu Ping'an was extremely satisfied. He grew even more confident about the special training mission he was about to announce.

Above the vast sea...

The cultivators who had emerged sat cross-legged, powerful auras swirling around them.

Strands of origin qi descended from Lu Ping'an, stabilizing their emotions and helping them consolidate their new cultivation.

Many Yin Spirit cultivators watched with envy—they could not enter the mirror and thus missed this opportunity.

But more than regret, they felt excitement.

The Five Phoenixes... were growing stronger!

Stronger was always better!

Lü Mudui, pale from coughing too much blood, finally finished recording everyone's scores.

He ranked them accordingly.

White robes fluttering, he stroked his beard in satisfaction and wiped the blood from his lips with a white cloth.

Spitting blood? He was used to it by now.

This ranking was essentially a definitive hierarchy of the Five Phoenixes' top combat power.

It had to be done properly—no pig blood this time.

Shakily accepting a cup of tea from the beautiful woman beside him—tea infused with several radiant Heavenly Wolfberries and Blazing Dates he had begged from Lu Changkong—he took a sip. Color returned to his cheeks.

He turned excitedly toward Lu Ping'an atop the pavilion, wanting to ask if the list should be announced.

But just as Lu Ping'an was about to respond...

His expression suddenly changed.

At the same moment...

Every cultivator on the island felt a towering aura surge into the sky, as though a true phoenix was spreading its wings.

...

Gongshu Yu no longer knew how much time had passed.

His blood had gone from boiling to ice-cold, his entire being sinking into an indescribable state.

It felt as though his very soul had transcended.

“Master... please rest.”

Aru, bronze-skinned and muscular, spoke worriedly to Gongshu Yu, whose face was practically pressed against the forging furnace, one hand steadily wielding a small hammer for precise strikes.

“No need.”

“I can feel it... this spiritual tool is almost complete.”

Excitement shone in Gongshu Yu's eyes.

Aru sighed softly.

Ever since Young Master Lu had shared the concept of a weapon of apocalyptic destruction, Gongshu Yu had become possessed.

For ten straight years, he had not slept or rested—every ounce of his being poured into forging this weapon.

Even for a cultivator, ten years without sleep, mind constantly strained, was unbearable.

And Gongshu Yu was only at the Nascent Soul realm.

Aru couldn't understand his master's madness.

Yes, if successful, this weapon would be a cornerstone of the Five Phoenixes' defense.

But...

Gongshu Yu's obsession went far deeper.

Aru knew his master's past.

In ancient times, the Gongshu family of the Hundred Schools had been revered.

But with the advent of the cultivation era, practitioners relied solely on personal power. Even auxiliary tools were swords, spears, and axes.

Hidden weapons and mechanisms had been swept into the dustbin of history.

Gongshu Yu had once lamented to Aru:

What did the Gongshu family rely on?

Not forging weapons—that was a blacksmith's job.

The Gongshu family excelled at intricate mechanisms and divine hidden weapons!

That was how they had earned eternal fame!

Aru had only half-understood.

He was born in the cultivation era, when mechanisms and hidden weapons had already faded.

So he could not comprehend Gongshu Yu's obsession.

It was the burning desire to prove the Gongshu family once more.

Deep in Gongshu Yu's heart, embers had smoldered for centuries.

All it took was Lu Ping'an's single breath of wind to ignite them into a heaven-reaching blaze!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Gongshu Yu's focus was absolute.

The furnace burned with profound heavenly fire personally ignited by Young Master Lu—perfect for purifying impurities from ores.

Gongshu Yu harbored a breath he needed to release.

Staring into the flames, he seemed to return to his youth.

He had spent half his life crafting the hidden weapon “Storm of Pear Blossoms.”

It had been his proudest creation—shining brilliantly at the end of the Hundred Schools era.

He had nearly wounded Young Master Lu with it!

Though he ultimately failed, Young Master Lu’s praise had filled him with pride.

But as the Five Phoenixes advanced and the cultivation era fully dawned...

Powerful cultivators could block Storm of Pear Blossoms with their spiritual qi defenses alone.

He had tried improving it—coating the needles in poison.

It still worked against Golden Core and early Nascent Soul cultivators.

But against Infant Transformation and Three Gods realm? Useless.

Against Body Integration experts, the needles fell like ants crawling under primordial spirit perception.

Gongshu Yu had despaired. He tried countless modifications, all failures.

He accepted that outdated things were destined to be eliminated.

Storm of Pear Blossoms had gathered dust for decades.

Yet Lu Ping'an's words had reignited hope.

Hope for the resurgence of mechanical weapons!

"Integrate the way of hidden weapons into Young Master Lu's concept... it will surely burst forth with new life!"

Gongshu Yu's voice was hoarse, but his spirit burned brighter than ever!

“Aru, assist me!”

On the 99,999th hammer strike, a unique aura exploded from Gongshu Yu’s eyes!

Within the furnace, beneath the mold, a phoenix seemed ready to emerge from the flames.

“Yes!”

Since he couldn’t stop his master...

Aru could only give his all.

Spiritual qi surged from his body. Strange patterns appeared on his skin—his unique physique.

With a surge of divine sense, he controlled the molten metal, sending it soaring into the air.

Though aged, Gongshu Yu’s black hair danced as youthful vigor returned.

He gripped the massive hammer with both hands!

Spinning in place, he swung the mountain-heavy hammer!

Each swing seemed to shatter space itself!

BOOM!

BOOM! BOOM!

Every strike produced countless sparks, like volcanic eruptions.

Each swing drained his life force.

After just a few, Gongshu Yu felt as though he had aged countless years.

He coughed blood.

Yet his eyes grew brighter!

He felt as though he had returned to the days when he poured half his life into crafting Storm of Pear Blossoms.

He suddenly laughed wildly.

This weapon would restore the glory of the Gongshu family!

Gradually...

The mold transformed into the shape of a longbow.

But it was no ordinary longbow.

At its center were five phoenix heads!

As though reborn from endless flames!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Gongshu Yu was utterly exhausted, as if he had aged centuries in an instant.

Yet his heart grew more excited, more frenzied!

Of the Hundred Schools of old, who remained?

Kong Xiu had been dead a century. Mo Beike had gone into seclusion. Sword Saint Hua Dongliu no longer carried the spirit of “one sword to suppress the world”...

They were old.

Their era had vanished.

But were they truly willing to fade into history’s river?

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Suddenly, terrifying auras crisscrossed the air!

Even Aru, with his special physique, felt crushing pressure.

His flesh split open, blood pouring from countless wounds.

“Master!”

Aru’s pupils shrank in terror!

If this continued, unimaginable disaster would strike!

Five phoenix heads on a bow—what kind of weapon was his master forging?!

Pfft!

Aru coughed blood, drenched in crimson, utterly wretched.

Yet Gongshu Yu’s manic laughter echoed endlessly.

One hammer after another—each strike seemed to birth boundless vitality!

His black hair turned snow-white in an instant.

“Fuse the array!”

Gongshu Yu roared.

Aru gritted his teeth and slapped forward.

Two golden array blocks engraved with the “Stabilize” inscription shot forth.

Burned by the profound fire, they melted and fused into the bow.

The five phoenix heads grew increasingly lifelike, as though about to come alive. Every feather seemed to flutter in the wind, as if they were real phoenix feathers.

“Hahahaha!”

“It’s done!”

“Young Master Lu... this old man has not failed you!”

White-haired Gongshu Yu threw his head back and laughed.

Tears of joy streamed down his face.

“But... it still lacks one thing.”

“A treasure has spirit—it needs a fitting soul!”

Gongshu Yu’s eyes blazed like fire.

He raised a trembling hand and pointed at his own forehead.

Aru was horrified.

Covered in blood, carrying the bow that felt like the weight of heaven and earth, he screamed.

“Master, what are you doing?!”

Buzz...

The void trembled.

The next moment, Lu Ping'an appeared, seated in his Thousand-Bladed Chair.

Sensing the disturbance, he had rushed over.

He hadn't expected that in just ten years, Gongshu Yu had succeeded.

Though...

It was a bow.

Not quite what he had imagined.

"There's no need for this."

Lu Ping'an frowned.

But Gongshu Yu tore open his forehead with a finger.

His Nascent Soul leaped out.

“Young Master Lu... this is the proudest creation of my life.”

“If I cannot be fully satisfied, I would rather die than live!”

White-haired Gongshu Yu looked at Lu Ping’an with respect—and deep gratitude.

He was grateful Lu Ping’an had given him this chance.

“There’s no need. A treasure needs a spirit, but we can find another.”

Lu Ping’an said.

His primordial spirit surged, seizing control of Gongshu Yu’s Nascent Soul.

Aru exhaled in relief.

But the next moment—his heart nearly exploded!

“Do you not understand forging, Lu Ping’an?!”

“If you stop me again—I’ll self-detonate right now!”

Gongshu Yu roared, hair and beard bristling with fury.

Lu Ping’an was stunned.

This old man... was yelling at him?!

Aru nearly dropped the bow in terror.

Master, don’t lose your mind!

Lu Ping’an fell silent.

The white-haired, red-eyed Gongshu Yu radiated nothing but madness and resolve.

Lu Ping'an released his hold.

Buzz...

Gongshu Yu's Nascent Soul shot forth!

Like a moth to flame, it plunged into the golden bow shrouded in profound fire.

"Young Master Lu... forgive this old man's rudeness."

Just before entering...

Gongshu Yu's Nascent Soul cupped its hands toward Lu Ping'an.

Then, with a carefree laugh...

Full of the joy and freedom of walking the great dao, it crashed into the bow.

Buzz...

The Nascent Soul was instantly incinerated.

The moment it burned away, the five phoenix heads on the bow opened their eyes—brilliant light shining within.

As though five fire phoenixes were truly about to spread their wings and soar!

Gongshu Yu's physical body slumped to the ground as his life force drained away, merging completely into the bow.

Yet the white-haired old man showed no regret.

He stared at the bow and laughed like a child.

Aru trembled violently.

Forging with his very soul!

Was it worth it?!

At that moment, Aru's beliefs were shattered.

Lu Ping'an flicked his finger.

He locked away the last of Gongshu Yu's fading life force.

But with his Nascent Soul and soul fused and burned away, Gongshu Yu could never cultivate again—he was reduced to a mortal.

Thud!

The bow fell to the ground, shattering the stone tiles.

The profound fire vanished.

A golden bow, radiating ancient aura, lay quietly on the ground.

Shaped like a phoenix spreading its wings, yet with five phoenix heads at its center.

Each head's eyes gleamed with life.

An intimidating presence emanated from it.

“Heavenly-tier spiritual tool?”

“Yet... not quite.”

“Let this bow be called... the Five Phoenix Bow.”

Aru knelt, covered in blood, somewhat dazed. He didn't fully understand his master's realm, but the impact was overwhelming.

“Young Master... this old man... may I beg you to personally test the bow?”

Gongshu Yu sat on the ground, ancient and frail, his vitality and cultivation stripped away, now a mere mortal.

Yet his cloudy eyes held no regret—only a light brighter than the stars.

“Very well.”

Seated in his Thousand-Bladed Chair, Lu Ping’an heard the old man’s plea and agreed.

He reached out and grasped the Five Phoenix Bow.

Rumble!

The bow was as heavy as a mountain.

Lu Ping’an’s expression remained calm.

He gripped the bow and vanished.

In the Void Heaven.

Lu Ping’an appeared out of thin air, white robes fluttering, holding a golden bow. The five phoenix heads radiated powerful fluctuations.

Though the “Stabilize” inscription and concept had come from him...

To forge such a bow in just ten years spoke volumes of Gongshu Yu’s genius.

Though the old man had yelled at him, he was truly worthy of respect.

Lu Ping’an’s lips curved upward.

He slowly rose from the Thousand-Bladed Chair.

BOOM!

His white robes turned pitch black.

Demonic qi surged like a storm.

The Five Phoenix Bow floated before him, pulled by his aura.

He lifted one leg, knee pressing against the bow.

Leaning back...

He hooked the invisible string with two fingers.

Creak...

A sound like rolling thunder exploded outward.

Primordial spirit power, Dao Intent, chaos force.

All three were poured into the bow.

Three of the five phoenix heads blazed like stars!

Everyone in the Five Phoenixes seemed drawn to the blinding light.

The three energies erupted from the phoenix mouths, converging under the "Stabilize" inscription into a slowly rotating tri-colored arrow at the bow's center.

Black robes whipped in the wind.

Lu Ping'an's sharp eyes narrowed.

The arrowhead pointed toward Pingyang Heaven.

Of course.

He was just posing—feeling the power. He wouldn't actually shoot.

He could tell one arrow would cause serious problems.

Suddenly...

In Pingyang Heaven.

Atop the towering pagoda.

The Great Venerable, eyes closed while chanting sutras, felt his scalp explode. A wave of mortal danger surged through him.

The wooden fish before him shattered.

His eyes snapped open, bloodshot with shock, confusion, and fury.

Then all emotions merged into one desperate cry:

“No! Holy Lord Lu, NO!!!”

Chapter 450: By the Young Master’s Command, In the Name of Reckoning

The vast sea fell deathly silent.

Lu Fan’s voice wasn’t loud, nor was it some impassioned battle cry that set blood ablaze.

Yet those calm, almost casual words sent a torrent roaring through every Five Phoenixes cultivator’s heart.

Overbearing.

Who in the world didn't know Young Master Lu's temper?

Short-fused, petty, and vindictive—everyone knew it by heart.

So when he said something like that, it meant only one thing: if Blood Evil Heaven and Origin Magnet Heaven refused the gamble, Young Master Lu wouldn't just sit back and watch. He would strike like thunder.

Lu Fan straightened, leaning back in the Thousand Blade Chair, one hand resting lightly on the armrest. He looked utterly relaxed.

“This Young Master has always been merciful. They gathered a million troops to raze the Five Phoenixes, to slaughter every living soul, to humiliate me personally. Yet I repaid evil with kindness and gave them a chance. Otherwise—by the normal rules—anyone who dares bully the Five Phoenixes, anyone who dares bully me, would have rivers of blood to pay for it.”

He smiled faintly.

“So settling this grudge through the Heavenly Grand Competition format? That's me being generous.”

Many exchanged stunned glances.

Inside the Ancient Tomb.

Gu Mangran, skin and bones, twitched at the corner of his mouth.

He could hear every word, of course. Never in his wildest dreams had he imagined Lu Fan would choose this path.

It sounded noble enough, but in Gu Mangran's eyes, the truth was simple: Lu Fan had his eyes on the origin dao reserves of those high-martial worlds.

Still, a gleam soon flickered in his sunken eyes.

For the Five Phoenixes to evolve, they needed massive amounts of origin dao reserves. Waiting for a world to naturally produce them would take eons.

This bandit-like method was the fastest way to grow.

Immoral? Absolutely.

But Blood Evil Heaven and Origin Magnet Heaven had once led a million-strong army against the Five Phoenixes. The grudge was to the death.

So the Five Phoenixes doing the same? Perfectly justified.

Gu Mangran smiled.

He found himself... looking forward to it.

...

“Are you afraid?”

Lu Fan gazed at the sixteen still bathing in origin energy, healing the scars on their souls, and asked softly.

In truth, this was also their trial. Calling it a training mission was no exaggeration.

“I, Xiang Shaoyun, accept.”

The Overlord rose from the origin mist, wild hair whipping in the wind, sharp eyes blazing.

Reliving that hopeless war in the Giant Mirror had left a fire smoldering in his chest.

And the humiliations of the previous Heavenly Grand Competition—he remembered every single one.

It was time to pay them back.

Afraid?

He only wanted to kill until the heavens flipped.

Lu Fan nodded slightly.

“This Young Master already gave them a chance. The various realms of Pingyang Heaven personally came to apologize. I gave Blood Evil Heaven and Origin Magnet Heaven plenty of time too.”

“I was merciful to the end. Unfortunately, they didn’t cherish it.”

“So the reckoning begins.”

His voice was calm.

“Anyone who doesn’t want to go—step forward now.”

He swept his gaze across the top sixteen.

Every breath caught.

A breeze blew past.

No one moved.

Obviously, no one was backing down.

“I’ve been itching to go,” Tang Yimo said, cracking his neck as he stood.

“Consider this a warm-up for storming the Ninth Heaven,” the Overlord growled.

Sima Qingshan, Kong Nanfei, Nie Changqing—all rose.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Mighty auras and primordial spirits erupted, sweeping across the entire sea.

“Young Master Lu!”

Suddenly, from the crowd, Jiang Li stepped forward.

He had missed the rankings this time. Though he’d inherited the Soldier King legacy, his individual combat power wasn’t top-tier.

“Little Bluebird is still just a child. May I take her place?”

Worry creased his brow as he bowed toward Lu Fan.

Lu Fan’s gaze shifted to White Bluebird.

“No!”

“Uncle Jiang... I’m not a child anymore.”

White Bluebird shook her head firmly.

“Stop treating me like one.”

“I have to go to this war.”

Flames danced deep in her pupils.

Jiang Li fell silent.

“Very well...” Lu Fan said. “Then this Young Master awaits your triumphant return.”

With a flick of his finger—

Two ancient bronze warships, radiating primordial aura, appeared on the sea.

Mysterious runes crawled across their hulls, and on each prow soared a phoenix in flight.

These were Five Phoenixes warships—rebuilt and improved from the spoils of the upper-realm invasion fleet.

Now, they would carry the expedition.

...

The new training mission spread across the world via Sky Messenger Pigeons.

Nearly every cultivator learned of this insane task.

In the Heavenly Origin Domain, Martial Emperor City, Qian Female Palace, Absolute Blade Sect—every faction trembled with both worry and pride when they heard their ancestors would take part.

Worry, yes.

But also a burning sense of honor.

They knew exactly why these sixteen fought.

For the Five Phoenixes!

Ten years had passed since that war, yet the brutality, the oppression—every image remained vivid.

How could any Five Phoenixes cultivator forget that suffocating despair?

Human Emperor Tantai He couldn't sit still when he heard the news.

He gathered the army and set sail—to send off the warriors marching in the name of reckoning!

...

Lu Fan did not immediately dispatch them.

He gave them three days to say their goodbyes.

Southern Prefecture.

Tang Yimo stood outside the Tang Manor gardens.

His mother, a mortal with no cultivation, had long since passed despite life-extending pills.

Of his blood kin, only Tang Guo remained—and one other: Tang Xiansheng, whose heart knot had never truly unraveled.

“Young Master.”

A guard spotted him and bowed.

Tang Yimo nodded, straightened his black robes, and stepped inside.

Tang Xiansheng sat in his rocking chair, white-haired and frail as ever.

“I heard you’re representing the Five Phoenixes on this expedition...”

His voice was hoarse.

Tang Yimo walked to his side without stopping.

“Take care of yourself...”

Tang Xiansheng sighed.

“We father and son lived a hundred years together, yet the knot between us never untied...”

His cloudy eyes softened as he looked at Tang Yimo.

Tang Yimo said nothing.

“Come back alive.”

“Your father and Guo’er will be waiting in the Five Phoenixes.”

Tang Xiansheng rose shakily. His hunched frame barely reached Tang Yimo’s chest.

He smiled, stood on tiptoe, and patted his son’s head.

...

Western Liang.

The Overlord sat cross-legged on the Dongyan River, axe and shield on his back.

The mirage dragon churned beneath the surface.

His gaze wavered slightly.

Behind him stood Xu Chu, Zhao Zixu, and the others.

Xu Chu carried two spiked iron balls, eyes trembling.

This mission was perilous beyond words—challenging the top holy lands of two second-tier heavens.

Yet the honor of representing the Five Phoenixes in this reckoning filled his chest with pride.

“While I’m gone, protect Western Liang well. As for the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty, follow Mingsang’s orders. She reads the situation better than I do.”

The Overlord's voice was deep.

Xu Chu and the others bowed solemnly.

The Overlord exhaled, closed his eyes.

He remembered the war inside the Giant Mirror—the Five Phoenixes shattered, oceans of blood, mountains of corpses, utter silence.

That scene had carved itself into his soul.

He had to grow stronger.

He had to fight until the Five Phoenixes' name shook the heavens.

Inside the main tent.

Luo Mingyue finished speaking with Luo Mingsang and stepped out.

Luo Mingsang smiled calmly, hiding her fear.

She would not let her weakness show—not when sending both her beloved and her sister into battle.

“Don’t worry,” the Overlord said, walking beside her. “Young Master Lu promised—we’ll be fine.”

Long after, two beams of light shot skyward from the Dongyan River.

The Overlord and Luo Mingyue streaked toward the vast sea.

Luo Mingsang stood alone on the bank, staring until they vanished.

...

Three days.

Sixteen warriors said farewell to family, friends, and home.

This expedition was doomed to be perilous. They refused to leave regrets.

Lake Heart Isle, White Jade Capital Pavilion.

After bidding Nie Shuang goodbye, Nie Changqing ascended the tower.

Ning Zhao tossed a green plum into the warmer; wine steamed and filled the air with fragrance.

Lu Fan sat with eyes closed.

A gentle breeze stirred. All restlessness melted away.

Nie Changqing sat quietly in meditation.

Ning Zhao finished brewing and stood silently behind Lu Fan.

The two ancient warships floated beside the giant whale, waves crashing against their hulls like war drums.

When the yolk-sun rose over the horizon, scattering molten gold across the sea—

Black silhouettes appeared within the dawn light.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Figures tore across the sky, streaking toward the fleet.

“They’re here!”

Cultivators who had rushed over upon hearing the news stared intently.

The ancient warships rocked as if ready to split the ocean.

The Overlord landed first—heavy, domineering, murderous intent boiling in his eyes.

Whoosh!

Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, and the others followed.

“Young Master, we go too.”

Nie Changqing and Ning Zhao spoke together.

Lu Fan opened his eyes and smiled.

“Go.”

Nie Changqing strode out, dragon-slaying sword at his hip.

Ning Zhao floated after him, landing gracefully on deck.

Lu Jiulian arrived like a drifting lotus.

Tang Yimo shot forward like a dark arrow.

Soon, all sixteen stood aboard the bronze decks.

...

Artifact Refining Pavilion.

Master Gongshu Yu, ancient and frail, gazed gently at Aru carrying the great bow.

“Go.”

“Your master is fine. I’ll stay alive until you return.”

“I want to see the day you come home victorious.”

He smiled.

Tears gleamed in Aru’s eyes. He clenched his fists, stepped back, knelt, and kowtowed three times.

Then he rose, shouldered the Five Phoenix Bow, and marched away with heavy steps.

BOOM!

He crashed onto the warship like a meteor, the deck dipping into the sea.

“He is your substitute,” Lu Fan’s voice rang in everyone’s ears.

Aru stood at the stern, unmoving as a mountain.

Every gaze that fell on the bow sent a shiver through their hearts—an aura of utter terror.

Two warships, two teams.

One ship: Overlord, Tang Yimo, Ning Zhao for individual battles; Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, Ni Chunqiu, Luo Mingyue, Ximen Xianzhi for team battles—headed to Blood Evil Heaven.

The other: Lu Jiulian, Jing Yue, Li Sansui for individual; Nie Changqing, White Bluebird, Sima Qingshan, Kong Nanfei, Mo Liuqi for team—headed to Origin Magnet Heaven.

Aru and the Five Phoenix Bow stood with the Overlord's ship.

Terrifying auras wove together above the decks.

The warriors on both ships locked eyes and grinned.

The Thousand Blade Chair glided forward.

Lu Fan appeared at the shore, white robes fluttering.

Ni Yu stood behind him, carrying her black pot, Little Yinglong perched on her head, eyes red.

“Ready?”

His voice was soft.

From both warships, every warrior answered with their aura.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Mighty pillars of light shot into the sky, blasting waves across the sea.

Lu Fan’s eyes brightened. The corner of his mouth curled.

“Then... depart!”

Lines danced in his pupils.

The Spirit Pressure Chessboard materialized before him.

Hum...

Mysterious runes ignited across both warships. Silver-gray spatial light flared.

The profound meaning of Space—the “Travel” Array Word!

Bzzz...

Space tore open like a gaping maw before each prow.

BOOM!

The cultivators unleashed their auras, steering the warships into the voids.

From the horizon, a fleet of wooden ships sailed in.

Human Emperor Tantai He stood at the lead vessel's bow.

“Send off our warriors!”

His roar thundered.

“May you return victorious!”

“Fight!”

On every ship, armored soldiers stood ramrod straight, roaring as the bronze warships vanished into the rifts.

“Fight!”

Atop the Ancient Tomb.

Gu Mangran's tattered robes flapped in the wind.

His eyes flickered with emotion.

When the tomb first arrived in the Five Phoenixes, this world had been laughably weak.

Now, it dared march on Blood Evil Heaven and Origin Magnet Heaven.

He had watched the Five Phoenixes grow step by step.

As an ancient expert of the Void Heaven, seeing the only high-martial world here reclaim its former glory—his blood, dormant for countless ages, began to boil.

He truly wished to see the day the Five Phoenixes ruled the upper realms, standing proud above the Ninth Heaven.

...

Pingyang Heaven.

Inside the pagoda, the Grand Venerable meditating suddenly snapped his eyes open.

Not just him—every holy land master in Pingyang Heaven felt their primordial spirits tremble.

“The Five Phoenixes are moving...”

“Two warships—one heading to Blood Evil, one to Origin Magnet!”

“So the reckoning finally begins?”

Holy masters across Pingyang Heaven murmured, gazes fixed on the void.

Joyful Venerable sat beside the Grand Venerable.

“Two ancient warships... seventeen people in total...”

“Is Lu Ping’an seriously planning to settle accounts with just this? What gives him the confidence?”

“What exactly is he trying to do?!”

The Grand Venerable stared intently.

Joyful Venerable was equally baffled.

He knew Lu Ping'an well—vindictive to the bone. He would never send people to die for nothing.

There had to be something they couldn't see.

Hum...

The Grand Venerable waved a hand.

A golden alms bowl rose, projecting golden light.

The two warships, traveling via the "Travel" Array Word, appeared in the projection—now above Blood Evil Heaven and Origin Magnet Heaven.

The Grand Venerable saw the figures seated on the decks.

He saw the Overlord who had cleaved a Tribulation Transcender in half with one axe during the Heavenly Grand Competition.

He saw Tang Yimo, who had opened six meridians and nearly beaten a holy-land master to death.

“All elite geniuses of the Five Phoenixes... What is Lu Ping’an planning?”

“Is he sending them to their deaths?!”

He couldn’t understand.

Blood Evil Heaven and Origin Magnet Heaven were stronger overall than Pingyang Heaven.

They didn’t just have Level-6 high-martial worlds—some were Level-5!

Level-5 worlds might have Immortal Constellation experts sitting in them!

So...

He truly couldn’t fathom Lu Fan’s goal.

But he wasn’t in a hurry.

He would watch.

...

Blood Evil Heaven.

The terrifying spatial distortion faded.

An ancient warship hung in the boundless void.

The Overlord rose slowly and walked to the prow.

Black hair whipping, axe and shield on his back, he stared ahead.

“Blood Evil Heaven...”

“Xiang Shaoyun has arrived.”

BOOM!!!!

A horrifying aura erupted from the depths of Blood Evil Heaven.

“People from the Five Phoenixes... you really dared come!”

A nearby holy-land master appeared in the void, robes snapping, eyes strange and cold.

“Here to die?”

He laughed.

“By Young Master Lu’s command—we come to settle accounts with Blood Evil Heaven.”

The Overlord’s voice was calm.

He stepped forward onto the prow, body leaning, radiating crushing pressure.

“Insolence!”

“A measly Five Phoenixes dares speak of settling accounts?!”

The holy master roared.

The Overlord smirked.

Demonic energy exploded around him like a storm.

He leaped from the warship.

Black mist coiled, turning him into a towering demon.

One axe swung down.

Third-tier sequence dao intent roared. The strike could split mountains and seas.

The clash detonated shockwaves that tore the void.

Moments later—

The Overlord stood domineering in the emptiness, one hand holding the holy master's severed head.

The body had exploded into blood mist.

Even the primordial spirit was crushed beneath the Overlord's tyrannical will.

A holy-land master—slain on the spot.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Countless terrifying auras erupted from every corner of Blood Evil Heaven.

The ancient warship groaned under the pressure, as if it might shatter.

From every world, icy gazes locked on, crushing auras pressing down.

The Overlord returned to the deck.

Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, Ning Zhao, and the others stood behind him—unflinching.

Surrounded by enemies in the heart of Blood Evil Heaven, they were truly alone against the universe.

Yet not one trace of fear showed on their faces.

Because behind them stood someone.

The Five Phoenixes.

White Jade Capital Pavilion.

Lu Fan's white robes fluttered, lines dancing in his eyes.

He rolled up his sleeve, picked a chess piece from the box.

Watching the countless holy-land auras rising in Blood Evil Heaven, converging to crush the lone warship—

He smiled.

The piece fell.

Plop!

In Blood Evil Heaven—

A single chess piece tore through the void from nowhere.

It descended like divine judgment.

Pfft!

In that instant, every holy master who had unleashed their aura against the warship felt ultimate terror grip their hearts.

Their towering auras shattered like glass.

One after another, they coughed blood, faces pale with horror!

The Five Phoenixes' Lu Ping'an...

He had truly come to settle the score!