

## Starlit Path 591

Chapter 591: This Person... Is He a Bandit?

Five Phoenix Continent.

Time flowed on, drop by drop.

In the blink of an eye, a century had passed in the mortal world.

Over these years, countless powerful cultivators crossed the vast sea, hoping to land on Lakeheart Island and pay respects to Young Master Lu. Every single one of them was blocked by Young Master Lu's three maidservants.

The reason was simple—and incredibly irritating.

“Young Master Lu is sleeping. Come back after he wakes up.”

Of course, their irritation was directed at the maidservants. Who would dare feel displeased with Young Master Lu himself? They were simply annoyed that these servants kept using such an obvious excuse to brush them off.

After all, what kind of existence was Young Master Lu? A supreme being whose cultivation reached the heavens, capable of fighting twenty immortal-rank gods and demons alone—one of the absolute pinnacles of the entire Five Phoenix Continent.

A being like that... sleeping?

If they had said “Young Master Lu is in seclusion” or “Young Master Lu is comprehending the Dao,” it would have sounded so much more believable.

But no one dared to voice their complaints. The three maidservants of White Jade Capital were domineering, and their cultivation was terrifyingly strong.

Force their way in?

That would be courting death.

The reputation of Young Master Lu’s pettiness had long spread across the world. Who would dare storm White Jade Capital?

Even ten lives wouldn’t be enough.

Meanwhile, the Fortune Tower continued to operate smoothly, nurturing and giving birth to generation after generation of powerhouses.

In a hundred years, many Profound Immortals had broken through to Golden Immortal realm after completing Fortune Tower missions.

Among the Twelve Witch Kings, one had successfully advanced.

Of course, the demon race also had new demon saints reaching the Golden Immortal level.

The existence of the Fortune Tower had made fortune tangible, turning what was once an intangible resource into something that could be actively accumulated—making breakthroughs significantly easier.

Zhu Long had officially begun her attempt to reach the ninth turn of Golden Immortal. If she succeeded, even without Young Master Lu, the Five Phoenix Continent would have someone capable of standing against immortal-rank gods and demons.

Dantai Xuan managed the Six Paths of Reincarnation and the Netherworld with meticulous order.

He had also carefully selected many geniuses from the Netherworld and sent them into the Fortune Tower for cultivation.

The entire Five Phoenix Continent was brimming with vitality, operating in perfect harmony, steadily undergoing its transformation into an immortal-martial world.

From time to time, someone would look up and catch sight of a phoenix spreading its wings across the sky—that was the immortal source of Five Phoenix's immortal-martial path.

Every appearance accelerated the evolution of the immortal-martial system, blessing the living beings of the continent with health, clarity of mind, and a sense of divine favor.

...

Above the vast sea, a lone boat drifted.

Emperor Tianling's expression was somewhat grave, his figure cloaked in black robes.

In these hundred years, he had finally raised the little princess's cultivation to the True Immortal realm. She had even begun to gain some fame within the Great Xuan Dynasty.

Originally, Emperor Tianling had hoped to push her to Profound Immortal level—at least then she would have the power to protect herself.

Unfortunately, although the pills, divine herbs, and other resources he obtained through Fortune Tower missions had cleansed and tempered her body, the little princess's innate talent was simply too limited.

Even with all that help, she couldn't cross the threshold into Profound Immortal.

Cultivation still required talent.

And the little princess's talent was, frankly, rather poor.

But Emperor Tianling could no longer wait. The sealed memories in his mind tormented him every single moment, filling him with dread.

As he broke through his own limits time and again within the Fortune Tower, his strength continued to rise.

Now, he felt as though he was brushing against the edge of that sealed memory.

Every time he tried to force it open, terrifying array runes would surge forth, threatening to tear his soul apart.

Even though he had reached the peak of the sixth turn of Golden Immortal, he still couldn't break the seal.

"This is Hao's seal..."

Emperor Tianling sighed. Ancient Emperor Hao was an Extreme Emperor-level existence, a master of formations. The Nine-Character Array Words were his signature work.

With a seal placed by Ancient Emperor Hao, even if Emperor Tianling reached the ninth turn of Golden Immortal, breaking it would be nearly impossible.

So he could wait no longer.

He bid farewell to the little princess, crossed the sea, and came in search of Lakeheart Island.

With his strength, he had faintly sensed the island's location through the mist.

"I request an audience with Young Master Lu. I have urgent business and require his assistance."

Emperor Tianling stood on the lone boat, black robes whipping in the wind, gazing at the island shrouded in immortal mist, and spoke.

Silence.

After a long pause, a faint, ethereal voice drifted across the sea.

“Young Master is resting. Return after he awakens.”

The cold, clear female voice floated out.

Emperor Tianling was momentarily stunned. So it really was that excuse. Rumors had spread throughout the world that Young Master Lu had been sleeping for decades and was refusing visitors. It seemed they were true.

Using “sleeping” as an excuse was just... too cliché.

Emperor Tianling slowly exhaled.

Feeling the seal in his mind throbbing as though it might explode at any moment, he knew he couldn't wait any longer.

“I truly have urgent matters and must see Young Master Lu.”

“Please inform him.”

But this time, his words fell into silence. No reply came.

Emperor Tianling's expression darkened.

He feared Young Master Lu, but that didn't mean he feared even Lu's maidservants.

Boom!

With a single step, he unleashed the full aura of a peak sixth-turn Golden Immortal!

The vast sea seemed to invert in that moment.

"I must see Young Master Lu. Forgive my offense."

To be honest, Emperor Tianling really didn't want to do this. No one knew better than him how petty Young Master Lu could be.

This act would surely offend Lu—but he had no choice.

In the entire Five Phoenix Continent, the only one whose formation attainments could possibly rival Ancient Emperor Hao's was Lu Ping'an.

“Insolence!”

Hum—

A figure in black robes appeared—Yi Yue, her expression icy.

“This is White Jade Capital. You will not act with impunity here.”

“Young Master is resting. Anyone who disturbs his rest will be suppressed!”

Yi Yue’s enchanting fox-like face was filled with cold killing intent.

Emperor Tianling’s aura continued to climb. In that moment, the entire Five Phoenix Continent sensed this terrifying power.

Everyone’s expression changed.

Figures shot through the sky, gazing toward the scene from afar.

They could clearly see Emperor Tianling attempting to force his way into White Jade Capital.

“Who is this person?”

“Is he insane? Daring to storm White Jade Capital?”

“Doesn’t he know what kind of temper Young Master Lu has?”

True Immortals and Profound Immortals clicked their tongues in disbelief.

Having failed their Fortune Tower missions and suffering soul injuries, they were in seclusion recovering—only to stumble upon such a spectacle!

In the ancient tomb.

Lu Changkong also sensed it, frowning deeply.

Bu Nanxing, on the other hand, was stunned. If he was the number one coward of the Five Phoenix Continent, then this guy trying to force his way into Lakeheart Island was undoubtedly the number one death-seeker.

You dare to storm Young Master Lu’s island?

Gu Mangran emerged from the Sea King Palace, transforming into a streak of light as he rushed over. He recognized Emperor Tianling—it was this very person who had once held back Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor, buying time for Young Master Lu.

“Sir, listen to my advice: life is precious. Do not force your way onto Lakeheart Island.”

Gu Mangran hurriedly tried to dissuade him.

Such a young, promising figure—why was he throwing his life away like this?

But Emperor Tianling had his own reasons.

He still had his pride. If not for the seal in his mind driving him to desperation, he would never have lowered himself to seek help from Lu Ping’an.

In fact, he had hesitated for a very long time before making this decision.

He simply couldn’t bear to part with the little princess. Otherwise, with his temperament, he would have long ago forced open the seal.

If he was going to die, he'd die cleanly.

Love and attachment had a way of softening even the hardest hearts—even the hearts of ancient emperors.

Boom!

Emperor Tianling ignored the advice.

He stubbornly pressed forward toward Lakeheart Island.

But just as his aura reached its absolute peak—

Ning Zhao, Yi Yue, and Ni Yu appeared together, floating above the island, coldly staring down at him.

The next moment.

Their wills connected.

A colossal projection of the Fortune Tower descended.

The Fortune Tower was a supreme innate spiritual treasure personally refined by Lu—its might was terrifying.

Even a peak sixth-turn Golden Immortal like Emperor Tianling was forcibly suppressed by it.

However, he was, after all, a half-step ninth-turn, half-step Extreme Emperor powerhouse.

He withstood the Fortune Tower's pressure. Given enough time, he would eventually break through and set foot on the island.

Suddenly.

A massive shadow blotted out the sky!

A deafening whale cry echoed. A pillar of water shot into the clouds, exploding into a torrential downpour.

Emperor Tianling froze.

The next moment, the colossal whale carrying the immortal island surfaced.

Its enormous tail swept out with terrifying force.

Slap!

Emperor Tianling, who had been resisting the Fortune Tower, was sent flying by a single tail swipe.

“A third-turn Golden Immortal whale?”

Emperor Tianling was utterly dumbfounded.

Lakeheart Island was actually being carried by such a beast? What kind of resources did Lu Ping'an have at his disposal?

The whale itself didn't really understand why it had become so strong. It had simply been carrying the island for so long, constantly bathed in fortune, that its strength had grown without it realizing.

Its original goal was to outlast the human on its back—but until that human died, it would naturally not allow anyone to harm him.

Emperor Tianling was only sent flying by the tail; with his sixth-turn Golden Immortal strength, he was unharmed.

Just shocked.

But one thing was certain: Young Master Lu really was indisposed and unable to see him.

A trace of disappointment flickered in Emperor Tianling's eyes.

The next moment, he stopped forcing his way in and sat cross-legged.

"I will wait here. When Young Master Lu awakens, please inform him that an old acquaintance is waiting outside the island."

"Very well."

From within the immortal island, after a long silence, Ning Zhao's cold voice drifted out.

The world returned to peace.

The onlookers—True Immortals and Profound Immortals—felt a pang of regret.

But they weren't too disappointed. After all, they had just witnessed the might of White Jade Capital: a third-turn Golden Immortal whale and three maidservants working together with a supreme treasure had actually repelled a peak sixth-turn Golden Immortal!

It only underscored how terrifying White Jade Capital truly was.

...

What happened on Lakeheart Island naturally escaped Lu's notice.

Right now, his mind was entirely focused on comprehending the Gold Origin mysteries.

He discovered that after activating the Indestructible Golden Body, he became like a bottomless pit, frantically devouring wave after wave of Gold Origin essence.

His understanding of the mysteries deepened with every passing moment. Now, even a casual strike from him probably carried devastating destructive power.

"This place is incredible..."

“Maybe after I go back, I should figure out a way to bring the cultivators of the Five Phoenix Continent here to comprehend as well.”

“Comprehending such mysteries might provide unexpected help for breaking through to the Great Luo Immortal realm.”

Lu pondered.

“That golden beast statue... does it have some connection to the Indestructible Golden Body? There’s an incredibly strong resonance between them.”

Lu was puzzled.

From the beginning of comprehension until now, he had endured eight waves of essence ripples. Each wave deepened his insight into the Gold Origin mysteries.

And each time, the Indestructible Golden Body felt as though it was being tempered and purified.

Lu had a feeling that his Indestructible Golden Body had reached absolute perfection. If he fused the Indestructible Fire Body now, it would definitely succeed without fail.

“The ninth wave is coming!”

Lu’s gaze sharpened.

He focused completely, preparing to meet the storm.

...

In the ancient starry void.

The giant beast statue seemed to truly come alive. Light burst from its eyes, as though it were genuinely sentient.

Even the Elemental Gods and the white figure felt a chill.

They restrained their auras, afraid of drawing the statue’s attention.

“The ninth wave of Gold Origin essence ripples...”

“Incredible... humanity is actually rising. To think such a genius would appear. If he obtains the inheritance of the Gold Origin Beast Ancestor, it might completely change humanity’s status in the ancient starry void.”

“Unfortunately, humanity is too weak. Even if this child obtains the inheritance, the gods and demons of the Elemental Realm—and the supreme Elemental Gods themselves—will never let him leave easily. Not even with Tonggu here.”

Whispers filled the air.

The silent starry void gradually grew noisy.

No one had expected such a dark horse to appear in this comprehension session.

Humanity had always been weak at comprehending the Gold Origin mysteries. No one had ever held high hopes—not even humanity itself.

Yet this time, the outcome defied all expectations.

“Across billions of years, only one being has ever withstood the ninth wave of Gold Origin essence ripples... and now, that record has been equaled!”

“Humanity has always excelled at creating miracles.”

“What’s most amusing is that the prized disciples of the Elemental Gods... have become mere foils for this human. Quite interesting.”

Amid the chatter.

The powerhouses on the top five stars radiated terrifying auras.

Each of them surpassed the immortal rank, capable of annihilating an ancient star with ease.

Their gazes fixed on the black-robed figure seated outside the top hundred.

Right now, they shared only one question.

“Who exactly is this human?”

Rumble!

The ninth wave of essence ripples surged forth.

It took the form of a real beast claw—as though the statue itself had come alive and struck out.

Under this claw, it felt as though the heavens and earth could be torn apart, everything annihilated.

No one believed the human could withstand it.

After all, the previous prodigy who reached the ninth wave had ultimately fallen to this very claw. But surviving long enough to experience it was already an immense gain.

If one could comprehend this claw and fuse it with the Gold Origin mysteries, crossing ranks in battle would become trivial.

The white figure felt strangely relaxed. Even if he failed, so what?

This time, humanity had finally held its head high.

What he cared about now was—who was this person?

As Tonggu, the supreme powerhouse of humanity's immortal-martial worlds, he had never even heard of such a prodigy.

Just when everyone thought the human would fail—

Boom!

A terrifying explosion rang out. The beastly roar became tangible.

Then...

Silence.

On the desolate star, the black-robed figure remained motionless, solid as a rock.

The sea of mysteries above his head had expanded to a diameter of sixty thousand miles during the ninth wave.

Perhaps because no one else was competing for the essence, this wave had actually produced an even more terrifying reverse growth!

Everyone was stunned.

Including the Elemental Gods.

“He withstood it?”

Tonggu’s face was filled with disbelief. Though they were both human... this level of excellence made even him uneasy.

The more outstanding the person, the less likely the Elemental Gods would let him leave.

While everyone’s thoughts churned, waiting for the unprecedented tenth wave—

It was as though a terrifying explosion had occurred, followed by an extreme compression and retraction.

From within the giant beast statue erupted an unimaginable suction force.

All the essence ripples in the heavens and earth returned to the statue at light speed.

The star on which Lu sat was rapidly pulled closer.

It came to rest right in front of the Gold Origin Beast Ancestor statue.

Under countless gazes, the black-robed human slowly stood up and raised a hand to touch the statue.

Lu himself was surprised. He had expected the tenth wave to be terrifying.

But it seemed... surprisingly easy.

Countless ripples washed over him, merging seamlessly. In an instant, he comprehended the profound power of the mysteries.

Gold Origin mysteries...

In that moment, Lu felt his Indestructible Golden Body become even stronger.

Boom!

The aura of the Indestructible Golden Body uncontrollably leaked from beneath the black robe.

Hm?

In the void.

The golden Elemental God suddenly frowned. That aura felt somewhat familiar.

“This aura... contains the energy signature of the gold-elemental god-demons we raised!”

But before he could think further—

Boundless golden light surged from the Beast Ancestor statue.

Lu’s black robe whipped wildly in the wind.

Vaguely, it seemed as though the Beast Ancestor statue was looking at him—with a trace of a smile.

“Congratulations to the host for completing comprehension of the Gold Origin mysteries. Reward obtained: one adorable mini Gold Origin Beast Ancestor statue.”

The instant all the essence energy was sucked back into the statue—

The world fell deathly silent.

Then the colossal Beast Ancestor statue—once larger than the nine heavens—began to shrink rapidly. In the blink of an eye, it reduced to the size of a small trophy.

Under the black robe, Lu froze.

A little trophy?

Was this some kind of affirmation of his talent?

Lu couldn't help but laugh wryly.

But since it was his reward, there was no reason not to take it.

He reached out, grabbed the mini Beast Ancestor statue, and let his wide sleeve fall to conceal it.

Holding the small statue, Lu's heart stirred.

He could feel the vast aura emanating from it, along with the constantly flowing Gold Origin mysteries...

His eyes lit up. An idea immediately formed.

Perhaps...

With this adorable little Beast Ancestor statue, he could recreate an environment for comprehending Gold Origin mysteries back in the Five Phoenix starry realm.

At the very least, comprehending these mysteries could greatly boost combat power—and might even allow someone to touch the threshold of the Great Luo Immortal realm!

Thinking of this, Lu was overjoyed.

This reward... worth every second!

Even the ferocious-looking mini statue suddenly seemed cute.

And the moment Lu put away the small statue...

Everyone was dumbfounded.

The sudden change, the sudden twist—caught them completely off guard. No one had anticipated this outcome.

“What... what just happened?”

“The Beast Ancestor statue shrank? Was it taken by that human?”

“Our place for comprehending Gold Origin mysteries... is gone?!”

“This person... is he a bandit?”

Countless powerhouses stared in shock.

But soon, their hearts began pounding wildly.

Why?

Because they smelled opportunity!

The Beast Ancestor statue was an incomparably precious treasure.

Though it had shrunk, it was now something that could actually be taken!

If they could seize it, it would be enough to become the supreme treasure of their entire race!

Now that the statue had seemingly exhausted its pressure and fallen into the hands of that human, wasn't this the perfect moment to snatch it?

In an instant, countless eyes turned predatory green.

In the void.

Even the Elemental Gods and Tonggu were stunned.

Even beings who had lived for endless ages had never imagined such a scenario.

After all, no one had ever withstood the ninth wave before.

“The Beast Ancestor statue... was taken?”

“Then this comprehension ground... is gone?”

“Look at what your humans have done!”

The Elemental Gods finally reacted. Their breathing grew ragged as cold fury filled their faces.

“Stop him! Take back the statue!”

The five Elemental Gods spoke in unison. Their thunderous voices echoed through every corner of the starry void.

An irresistible majesty spread out.

The next moment, their auras blazed like five suns, illuminating the entire ancient starry void.

The mere release of such terrifying power could reduce countless worlds to ashes.

Tonggu let out an angry snort.

He reached out with a massive hand, creating a pocket heaven that briefly blocked the eruption of the five Elemental Gods.

Bang bang bang!

The five prized disciples on the top five stars moved the instant their masters spoke.

They turned into streaks of light, charging toward Lu.

Their breathing was rapid, tinged with greed.

Failing the comprehension didn't matter. If they could seize the statue from that black-robed human, they would still be the ultimate victors!

In the sky.

Tonggu was ultimately unable to hold back five opponents at once.

After only a brief delay, the Elemental Gods broke past him.

Tonggu felt a wave of grief.

This was the tragedy of humanity. If they weren't strong enough, even the greatest treasures would only be taken away.

When one is weak, even breathing is wrong—let alone possessing a supreme treasure.

Lu naturally sensed the shift in atmosphere.

Five god-demons whose auras surpassed the immortal rank turned into five streaks of light, charging straight at him.

Even more terrifying was the black-hole-like pressure from the Elemental Gods, rapidly sealing the space around him. Even tearing space apart was now impossible.

Even Lu felt his heart race in that moment.

Suddenly, a system prompt appeared before his eyes.

“Congratulations to the host for completing comprehension. Would you like to return?”

Lu took a deep breath. No pretense, no posturing, no fearless defiance of authority.

Without the slightest hesitation, he immediately chose.

“Return. Return now. Hurry up and return.”

“I’ve shown off enough. Time to go!”

Chapter 592: The Request of Emperor Tianling

Return! Get me out of here—now!

Terrifying auras clashed and crisscrossed, flooding the entire starry void.

Though these were soul storms, the soul was the most vital part of any living being. Once annihilated, death was not far behind.

Lu’s soul was incredibly strong, but right now he was surrounded by the majority of the ancient starry void’s top powerhouses.

If they ganged up on him, even he would be in serious trouble.

So the moment the system gave him the option to return—

Lu chose without the slightest hesitation.

If he didn't leave now, he'd be an idiot.

Show off, then run. That was the rule.

Lu understood exactly what was happening.

The statue's importance was obvious. A treasure capable of aiding comprehension of the Gold Origin mysteries—how priceless was that?

The beings seated on those stars comprehending the mysteries were all top-tier existences: immortal-rank powerhouses, even some who surpassed that level.

That alone showed how valuable the statue truly was.

Now that Lu had taken it, how could the others not go insane?

How could they not try to do something to him?

He had enough self-awareness to know that if he lingered, he might never leave.

Still, even though his heart was racing, on the surface he maintained perfect calm and composure.

Beneath the black robe, his eyes shone with serene light.

The fierce winds formed by the soul storms whipped his robes wildly.

Boom!

Space tore open again and again, as though stars were being crushed by overwhelming force.

The first to arrive were the five prized disciples of the Elemental Gods.

Their strength far exceeded the immortal rank, sending a shiver down even Lu's spine.

“Return initiated.”

The system prompt appeared before him.

The instant Lu selected return, the system responded immediately.

Boom!

An invisible wave of energy surged around Lu’s body.

In that moment, the space sealed by the Elemental Gods began to fracture like shattered glass.

“This human... is trying to escape?!”

“Impossible! The Elemental Gods have completely locked down this space—how can he still leave?!”

“Who the hell is this human? Does humanity still have such a hidden powerhouse?”

Though everything happened in the blink of an eye,

the weakest beings present were already at the Great Emperor level. Their vision was sharp enough to see everything clearly.

This human was actually breaking through the Elemental Gods' spatial lockdown!

“Stay!!!”

One of the Elemental Gods roared in fury.

The sound was like it could annihilate an entire star domain.

Many felt their breath catch.

Yet it was like the rage of the powerless.

Lu's figure began to blur!

Boom boom boom!

The attacks of the Elemental Gods' disciples—and even the gods themselves—landed.

The area where Lu had stood exploded. Layers of space shattered, chaotic spatial currents raging wildly within.

But...

Every powerhouse present widened their eyes in disbelief.

Lu's body flickered. Every attack passed straight through him.

Beneath the black robe, his calm gaze swept across the crowd—as though memorizing every Elemental God and disciple who had attacked him, etching them deep into his memory.

Then, like a thread of light compressed to the extreme, with a soft chime—

He vanished.

The entire ancient starry void fell silent.

Deathly silent.

A slap in the face.

Brutal and straightforward.

The five Elemental Gods—rulers of the Elemental Realm, supremely powerful beings—had failed to stop this human.

For them, it was an utterly humiliating blow. Even they felt the sting.

But most importantly... the Beast Ancestor statue was gone!

That was the real disaster.

What kind of treasure was the Beast Ancestor statue?

It contained the primordial chaos mysteries of the ancient starry void—the very essence from which gods and demons were born.

And yet...

Such an ancient supreme treasure had been taken away right in front of the Elemental Gods.

And they couldn't even stop him.

After a long silence, the void began to boil like heated water.

The terrifying auras radiating from the five Elemental Gods filled the air with dread and coldness.

"Humans!"

The next moment, their gazes shifted toward Tonggu.

Tonggu was stunned as well.

The moment Lu safely escaped with the statue, he felt his scalp go numb.

This guy... was way too flashy!

What kind of background did he have?

The black robe already made him unreadable, but now, even under the combined assault of the Elemental Gods, he had broken through space and left.

That meant this human's mastery of spatial mysteries surpassed even the Elemental Gods!

To leave so effortlessly, his spatial attainments must have reached a terrifying level!

But Tonggu quickly snapped back to reality.

The instant Lu disappeared, he moved—sweeping his hand and enveloping the nine human prodigies, turning into a streak of light as he fled the area.

If he didn't leave now, he'd become the target of the Elemental Gods' rage.

And then he'd be in for a beating.

Of course, Tonggu was delighted.

Humanity had finally held its head high this time—at least they'd given these gods and demons a solid slap. He felt incredibly refreshed.

He could almost picture the dark, gloomy expressions on the Elemental Gods' true forms.

Boom!

Tonggu's strength was no joke. Even with nine prodigies in tow, he forced his way out. Even the Elemental Gods couldn't stop him if he was determined to leave.

Of course, if they had sealed the space around him from the beginning, he wouldn't have escaped.

Unfortunately, their main target was Lu—so Tonggu slipped away cleanly.

The ancient starry void fell quiet again.

After Tonggu left, one god-demons and star-race beings after another began to depart.

The Elemental Gods were furious. Lingering here risked becoming targets of their wrath.

The disciples of the Elemental Gods wore looks of deep shame.

Not only had they failed to obtain the inheritance, they hadn't even managed to stop the black-robed human. They'd been shown up, slapped in the face, and then watched him escape.

“Humanity only had nine comprehension slots. When Tonggu left, he took all nine human prodigies... which means this human wasn't brought by Tonggu...”

Powerful soul fluctuations turned into terrifying storms.

The Elemental Gods hovered above the now-empty spot where the statue had stood.

Their emotions churned.

How could such a massive Beast Ancestor statue just... disappear?

“Who exactly was that human? To break our spatial lockdown—could there be a starry saint behind him?”

“Could this be a scheme by a starry saint? Trying to steal all the Beast Ancestor statues?!”

“It seems we need to guard the remaining four statues much more carefully!”

“Also... that human’s aura carried traces of the elemental god-demons we raised...”

“That guy must have tampered with our bred elemental god-demons!”

The wills of the Elemental Gods surged. Their disciples didn’t dare breathe too loudly.

“Investigate!”

“Find out if any of our bred elemental god-demons have died recently. Whoever touched them must be connected to this human!”

The cold command echoed.

The five disciples bowed deeply, then turned into streaks of light and departed.

...

Tonggu, carrying the nine human prodigies, escaped far from the storm's center.

Only after reaching a safe distance did he stop and hover in the starry void.

"A Beast Ancestor statue was taken... which powerhouse from humanity did this?"

"The aura was completely unfamiliar. Could it be someone from a newly born immortal-martial world?"

"In the future, the gods and demons' encirclement of humanity will probably become even fiercer..."

Tonggu's eyes flickered. He wasn't sure whether this incident was a blessing or a curse for humanity.

But humanity had been oppressed by gods and demons in the ancient starry void for far too long.

Even without this event, an explosion was inevitable!

"Still... we need to find that black-robed human first."

After thinking for a moment, Tonggu raised his hand and began divining in the void.

...

Lakeheart Island.

Lu suddenly opened his eyes and slowly exhaled a breath of stale air.

His soul returned to his body. His form trembled lightly before he regained full control.

“The Elemental Gods... are terrifyingly strong.”

“Definitely beyond immortal rank—Great Luo Immortal level?”

Lu fell into thought.

But he faintly felt that even a Great Luo Immortal might not necessarily be a match for these Elemental Gods.

“This is going to be troublesome.”

“I accidentally provoked some really difficult enemies.”

Lu stretched lazily.

The spiritual energy blanket slipped off his body.

He smiled, feeling a trace of warmth in his heart.

“Hm... a whole century passed in the blink of an eye. I didn’t expect comprehending the Gold Origin mysteries would take so long.”

Lu was surprised.

With a thought, a golden Beast Ancestor statue appeared in his hand.

“One adorable little Beast Ancestor statue...”

Remembering the system’s description, Lu was speechless.

Where exactly was it adorable?

Still, seeing the originally colossal statue reduced to the size of a small trophy did make it strangely pleasing to the eye.

“System, what level of spiritual treasure is this statue?”

Lu asked curiously.

Soon, the system prompt appeared before him.

“This is simply one adorable little Beast Ancestor statue.”

Lu: “...”

So simple it could only be used as a decoration?

Lu had hoped it might have special functions—like killing enemies or suppressing foes.

Of course, he also knew the statue's aura of mysteries was incredible.

At least for cultivators of the Five Phoenix Continent, this statue could assist in comprehending mysteries. Once comprehended, it would greatly enhance the offensive power of divine abilities—and might even open the path to the Great Luo Immortal realm.

So Lu already had plans for this little Beast Ancestor statue.

“This Gold Origin Beast Ancestor statue corresponds to the Indestructible Golden Body... which means... there might be a Fire Origin Beast Ancestor statue for the Indestructible Fire Body?”

Lu's eyes lit up as the thought struck him.

By his reasoning, the Indestructible Body should have five attributes: metal, wood, water, fire, earth.

If the statues were truly connected to the Indestructible Body, then there should be five in total.

If he collected them all... could he summon something incredible?

He put the thought aside.

Lu first stored the statue away.

Because the moment he awoke, three streaks of light shot toward him at high speed.

“Young Master!”

Ning Zhao, Ni Yu, and Yi Yue floated over, delighted.

“Young Master, you’re finally awake!”

They looked at Lu with joy.

Lu nodded slightly.

During the century he had been asleep, it seemed Ning Zhao and the others had managed the Fortune Tower perfectly. No major issues had arisen.

Seeing Lu awake, they visibly relaxed.

Then they began reporting their work in an orderly manner.

After listening for a while, Lu waved his hand with a slight headache.

“Young Master, there was a mysterious powerhouse outside Lakeheart Island who wished to see you. But since you were sleeping, we refused him.”

“He even tried to force his way in... but we suppressed him with the power of the Fortune Tower.”

Ning Zhao said.

Lu raised an eyebrow. Force his way into Lakeheart Island?

His divine sense swept out like a blazing sun and quickly locked onto the black-robed figure seated outside the island.

“Emperor Tianling?”

Lu’s expression immediately turned strange.

Boom!

The next moment, Lu extended a hand.

...

Emperor Tianling had been sitting cross-legged on his lone boat, bobbing on the vast sea for dozens of days.

His expression was calm. Though anxious inside, he knew some things couldn't be rushed.

He had already caused such a commotion. Given Lu Ping'an's infamous temper, he should have acted long ago.

But since Lu hadn't, it meant the maidservants were telling the truth—he really was sleeping.

So Emperor Tianling could only wait.

Right now, he wasn't in a hurry.

Though the seal in his mind continued to compress, as long as he didn't force it open, there was no immediate danger to his life.

Suddenly.

A heart-pounding sense of danger surged in Emperor Tianling's chest.

He opened his eyes abruptly.

His black robes whipped wildly.

Boom!

His aura erupted like a rainbow piercing the sun, fortune surging into the sky.

An invisible pressure descended, making even breathing difficult.

“Lu Ping’an?!”

Emperor Tianling shouted.

Boom!

The vast sea churned, mountains and rivers darkened, and the heavens dimmed in an instant!

Emperor Tianling's face darkened as a massive hand appeared out of nowhere and slapped down!

The aura radiating from that hand was unmistakably Lu Ping'an's—Emperor Tianling recognized it immediately!

So Lu Ping'an had finally woken up!

And this aura had already alarmed the entire Five Phoenix Continent.

On the vast sea.

Gu Mangran shook his head with a sigh—partly for the mysterious powerhouse, partly in admiration.

The colossal hand radiated terrifying power, pressing down like an entire world.

Emperor Tianling suddenly felt like a lone boat in a storm.

Even with his peak sixth-turn Golden Immortal strength, he felt himself swaying, as though he might be destroyed at any moment!

“Forcing your way into Lakeheart Island comes at a price.”

A calm voice rang out.

Emperor Tianling resisted with difficulty, his face turning black.

That was ages ago! He’d already been slapped away by the whale’s tail—wasn’t that enough of a price?

Lu Ping’an really was as petty as ever. The moment he woke up, he came to mess with him!

Boom!

The hand slammed down!

Soon, a massive handprint cratered the vast sea.

Many sensed the disturbance here.

They clicked their tongues in awe.

That was a peak sixth-turn Golden Immortal powerhouse!

Completely powerless against Young Master Lu.

White Jade Capital... truly White Jade Capital.

Young Master Lu... still the same Young Master Lu.

...

Emperor Tianling was dragged by Lu onto Lakeheart Island.

He was drenched, looking quite disheveled. This time, he had truly experienced Lu Ping'an's pettiness firsthand.

Before, he had only known Lu's talent for messing with people's heads. Now he realized Lu's pettiness was even more terrifying.

Ning Zhao, Ni Yu, and Yi Yue stood quietly behind Lu.

Lu, dressed in snow-white robes, sat on the Thousand-Blade Chair, leaning against the railing and listening to the wind. He held a cup in his hand, the wine inside gently swaying.

The atmosphere remained silent for a long time.

"You want this Young Master to help you break the seal in your mind?"

Lu smiled lightly, finally breaking the silence.

He took a sip of wine and glanced at Emperor Tianling.

Emperor Tianling froze. Though disheveled, Lu hadn't truly harmed him—just taught him a lesson.

He stood up, eyes narrowing slightly. "You knew?"

“This Young Master knows everything.”

Lu’s lips curved as he toyed with the wine cup.

Emperor Tianling took a deep breath, then gave a wry smile.

Of course. With Lu Ping’an’s control over the Five Phoenix Continent, how could his presence possibly go unnoticed?

Though he had suspected it, hearing Lu say it still left him somewhat helpless.

He had thought he was hiding well.

Turns out everyone already knew.

“Then why didn’t you kill me?”

“We were enemies.”

Emperor Tianling said.

Lu waved his hand dismissively. “This Young Master isn’t bloodthirsty.”

“Besides, you acted during a crisis in the Five Phoenix Continent. You rendered a service. Naturally, this Young Master won’t kill you.”

Emperor Tianling felt a surge of emotion.

This was the difference between Lu Ping’an and the ancient emperors of the Nine Heavens.

Lu Ping’an might have a bad temper, be petty, and love messing with people’s heads...

But everything he did was for the Five Phoenix Continent.

The Nine Heavens... had long since gone rotten.

While the Five Phoenix Continent remained a place worth yearning for.

Sometimes, Emperor Tianling really felt the urge to stop digging, to let the secrets in his mind sink into oblivion forever.

To live peacefully in the Five Phoenix Continent, cultivate, and protect the little princess.

Now, the Heavenly Spirit Clan had already been relocated to the Five Phoenix Continent by Mi Jia. There was no longer any connection between Emperor Tianling and the Nine Heavens.

But he couldn't do it.

Simply put...

He wanted revenge.

His entire life had been one tragedy after another—schemed against, left sitting in a passage star for hundreds of thousands of years, only to return and be schemed against again, and finally hunted down by ancient emperors.

He was unwilling.

So he wanted revenge. He wanted to fight for his dignity. He wanted to shatter the plans of the Nine Heavens' ancient emperors—and shatter Hao's plans!

But with his own strength, he couldn't break the seal in his mind.

So he had come to Lu Ping'an.

Lu looked at Emperor Tianling and raised an eyebrow.

Just to fight for a breath of pride?

The atmosphere on the island grew somewhat grave.

The wind howled past.

Ning Zhao, Yi Yue, and Ni Yu stood behind Lu, slightly confused.

They couldn't understand a word of the conversation between Young Master and this man.

After a long silence,

Emperor Tianling removed his hood, revealing an ordinary yet profound face.

“I am Tianling. I beseech Young Master Lu to assist me in breaking the memory seal...”

Emperor Tianling bowed deeply.

Ning Zhao, Yi Yue, and Ni Yu were stunned. They finally realized who this person was!

“Emperor Tianling?”

“Wasn’t he dead? I never imagined he was reborn in the Five Phoenix Continent and recovered to such strength...”

“Didn’t Emperor Tianling have enmity with Young Master?”

The three exchanged glances, shock in their eyes.

This melon... was huge!

If the world knew Emperor Tianling was still alive, they’d be terrified. Back then, the greatest threat to the Five Phoenix Continent from the Nine Heavens had been this very man.

“A life lived only for joy, enmity, and revenge... this Young Master will help you.”

“But what price are you willing to pay?”

Lu’s lips curved as he drained his cup and spoke calmly.

Asking him to act always came with conditions.

Tianling froze, falling into thought as he considered what he could offer.

“The passage connecting the Five Phoenix Continent to the ancient starry void needs a guardian. If this matter is settled, you will become that guardian and watch over the passage for the Five Phoenix Continent...”

“No need for too long. Ten thousand years will do.”

Lu leaned against the railing and spoke lightly.

Tianling was stunned. He hadn’t expected such a condition.

To him, what kind of price was this?

Compared to guarding a passage in the Nine Heavens for hundreds of thousands of years, this was nothing.

The only hardship was being separated from the little princess for ten thousand years.

For a True Immortal powerhouse, ten thousand years wasn't much—but still, ten thousand years was a long time.

“As for your little sweetheart, whether you bring her along is up to you.”

“That's your private matter. This Young Master won't interfere too much.”

Lu seemed to know exactly what Tianling was hesitating over and spoke pointedly. Then he couldn't help but chuckle.

An ancient emperor of the Nine Heavens, falling for a mere mortal. Interesting.

Tianling froze, then his old face reddened slightly.

“Let’s begin. This Young Master has many things to attend to next...”

Lu said.

As his words fell, the atmosphere on the island grew grave.

“We will guard the law for Young Master.”

Ning Zhao, Yi Yue, and Ni Yu bowed, then transformed into streaks of white light and scattered to the four corners of the island, sitting cross-legged. Their souls intertwined.

Tianling had just reacted when—

A massive suction force pulled at his body, drawing him toward Lu.

His figure hovered before the pavilion.

Lu held the cup in one hand and slowly raised the other, pointing at the center of Tianling’s brow.

“I’ve long wanted to see what the ancient emperors of the Nine Heavens were doing deep in the rift that made you collapse mentally and choose to self-destruct...”

Lu smiled lightly.

Tianling’s pupils shrank.

His heart pounded violently.

Boom!

The next moment,

their consciousnesses appeared in the depths of memory.

Array runes interwove, forming a “Myriad Rune Cauldron” that suppressed the depths of Emperor Tianling’s memory.

Tianling’s expression was grave. The Myriad Rune Cauldron brought immense pressure to his soul. One misstep, and his soul might be crushed to ashes.

Lu's white robes fluttered.

With a thought, array runes formed a preaching platform.

Since he had shattered the Myriad Rune Cauldron once, he could do it again...

Boom!

The two forces collided.

An invisible clash of formations erupted in the depths of Tianling's soul.

Tianling felt a faint pain.

But the pain didn't last long.

Crack...

The Myriad Rune Cauldron formed by Ancient Emperor Hao's array words began to fracture. The pressure on Tianling's soul shattered instantly!

It was as though the massive stone blocking the gate of memory had been smashed open.

The gate of memory swung wide.

Vast waves of memory surged out.

Lu narrowed his eyes. Tianling tensed, staring at the memory images.

The images went from blurry to clear.

Revealing scenes from deep within the rift.

Scenes that made one's blood run cold.

Chapter 593: The Secret of Ancient Emperor Hao

Lu was genuinely curious about what lay beyond the rift.

This was one of the reasons he had willingly helped Emperor Tianling break the memory seal.

He really wanted to know.

What exactly had Tianling seen deep in the rift that drove him to choose self-destruction in despair?

Lu narrowed his eyes.

The void collapsed inch by inch. The scenes in the memory shifted from blurry to gradually clear.

It began with Tianling breaking free from the entanglement of the ancient emperors outside the void rift, then slowly moved deeper.

Lu saw a ceaseless flow of light and shadow.

Finally...

The scene deep within the void rift fully materialized before him.

Emperor Tianling's body trembled faintly.

As the images surged, every memory flooded back like a tidal wave, filling his mind.

The familiar scenes brought an inexplicable chill—a primal, uncontrollable shiver of dread from the depths of his soul.

Both Lu and Tianling’s pupils contracted sharply.

The image appeared.

In the boundless darkness of the void’s depths lay row upon row of coffins—bronze sarcophagi, each covered in thick dust.

Every coffin resembled a nutrient tank, each containing a heart that pulsed with terrifying energy. Each beat seemed capable of crushing space itself.

Countless hair-thin threads extended from the hearts, connecting to a figure floating above the coffins.

It was a withered, ancient form. Its skin resembled parched earth baked by the sun—cracked and fissured, as though the slightest movement would cause it to flake away entirely.

Like a body coated in dried mud.

Gaunt to the bone, long strands of hair hung down in disarray.

Each of those fine threads bulged slightly, as if energy was being pumped from the hearts in the coffins into the withered body.

At first glance, the scene wasn't particularly shocking or horrifying.

But the moment Tianling appeared, the figure seemed to sense him.

Crack.

The figure slowly raised its head.

Then, the cracked skin began to peel away, sloughing off in sheets.

Yet beneath the skin was no flesh and blood—only blinding white radiance.

And within that white light, countless anguished faces flickered in and out of existence...

This was what caused Lu and Tianling's pupils to shrink in shock.

Among those countless faces, Lu recognized Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor—who had once invaded the Five Phoenix Continent—and the Water Clan Ancient Emperor, whom he had effortlessly slain...

In other words, this single body had fused with many of the Nine Heavens' ancient emperors?!

"This light... is a Heavenly Dao clone?"

"No... that's Hao..."

Tianling's body trembled as he stared at the raised face.

He could never forget that visage.

"The Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao fused all the ancient emperors—including Hao—into one?"

Lu was stunned.

The thought struck him.

Or perhaps...

His eyes narrowed slightly.

“The Heavenly Dao is Hao, and Hao is the Heavenly Dao’s greatest incarnation... and through this, it devoured the other ancient emperors in order to break its shackles?”

“No wonder the Nine Heavens hasn’t produced an Emperor realm in so many years...”

Lu seemed to understand something. He drew a slow breath.

Tianling fell silent.

“Besides the lack of sufficient Emperor-level energy, there’s another reason: if anyone were to break through to Emperor realm, they would have to commune with the Heavenly Dao. And once they did... they might discover this secret.”

“To protect this secret, the Nine Heavens has deliberately prevented any Emperor realm from emerging for all these years.”

Even though this wasn't the first time Tianling had seen the scene, he still felt a violent tremor in his soul.

Lu sat calmly on the Thousand-Blade Chair, white robes fluttering.

"Why?"

"The purpose of the Heavenly Dao is to nurture more and more powerhouses within the world, thereby elevating the world itself."

"To grow stronger, the Heavenly Dao needs more powerhouses."

Lu murmured.

So this action of the Heavenly Dao was something he truly couldn't comprehend.

Ancient Emperor Hao was an incarnation of the Heavenly Dao...

"The Heavenly Dao treats the world as its chessboard, every living being as its pieces. Even ancient emperors, in the end, are merely devoured."

Tianling exhaled heavily.

His mental resilience had grown much stronger.

“In other words... deep in the rift, there is actually only one being—Ancient Emperor Hao, or rather, the Heavenly Dao incarnation.”

“All the ancient emperors in the passages were illusions—created to make us believe the Nine Heavens’ ancient emperors were all present in the rift! Or perhaps to give those ancient emperors’ consciousnesses the illusion that they were still alive?”

“In reality, every ancient emperor’s soul has been devoured and controlled by Ancient Emperor Hao.”

Lu pondered. The more he thought about it, the more chilling it became.

All those ancient emperors thought they were alive, but in truth, they had long been dead.

Tianling breathed heavily, his eyes faintly red.

“Why would the Heavenly Dao do this?”

Tianling closed his eyes. After a long moment, he slowly opened them again.

He couldn't understand.

But Lu had a faint understanding.

Perhaps this was the decision the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao made after realizing it could no longer ascend further.

To use the power of all living beings to break through its shackles.

To cultivate an existence that could surpass the Extreme Emperor realm, thereby allowing the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao to transform into an immortal source.

Unlike the Five Phoenix Heavenly Dao, the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao had no Young Master Lu. After being attacked by gods and demons, it had been severely wounded. It was no longer ascending—it was declining.

So it had made this ruthless choice.

“The power of all living beings originally belongs to the Heavenly Dao. To break through, the Heavenly Dao simply reclaims what it once dispersed... though the consequences would be unimaginable, if it succeeds, it can rewrite all of history.”

“But if it fails, the Nine Heavens will collapse entirely. That’s why Ancient Emperor Hao prepared the Void Heaven as a fallback...”

Lu said.

Tianling closed his eyes in pain.

“So everything... was just a game played by the Nine Heavens’ Heavenly Dao—or rather, ‘Hao.’ And as an ancient emperor with immense energy, I became one of their targets. That’s why they tried to devour me.”

“Unfortunately, I chose to self-destruct and ruined one corner of their chessboard.”

Tianling said.

Lu leaned back in the Thousand-Blade Chair and glanced at him.

The words stung a little.

“Whether you self-destructed or not wouldn’t have mattered much. Even if you did, the energy you released would still belong to the Nine Heavens. The Heavenly Dao would only need to spend some effort to reclaim it.”

“But unfortunately, your soul fragments were snatched away by me—er, I mean, your soul fragments escaped on their own, fled into the Five Phoenix Continent, and reincarnated... disrupting Hao’s plans.”

Tianling froze, looking at Lu in confusion, as though he had just heard something incredible.

Lu quickly changed his wording.

He had almost slipped up.

But this explanation suddenly brought clarity to Lu.

“So the Heavenly Dao incarnation is Extreme Emperor-level Hao... that explains why the Nine Heavens’ Heavenly Dao—once at the peak of high martial, half a step into immortal martial—was so weak back then.”

“The Heavenly Dao we saw was never the true Heavenly Dao. The true Heavenly Dao was quietly gathering power...”

Lu fell into thought.

While Lu and Tianling were deep in contemplation,

in the memory scene—

The Heavenly Dao incarnation, Ancient Emperor Hao, seemed to sense something.

Boom!

Faintly,

it looked toward Lu and Tianling from within Tianling's memory.

In those profound eyes, an entire starry sky seemed to be reflected.

“We’ve been discovered.”

Lu narrowed his gaze.

Tianling also looked up.

Crack...

The memory images began to fracture, then shattered like glass smashed by a hammer—twisting and exploding apart.

Whoosh!

The scenes rushed past at blinding speed.

Lu and Tianling opened their eyes simultaneously.

Tianling collapsed, falling onto the stone steps below the White Jade Capital pavilion, still dazed.

He remembered the scenes deep in the rift... but the impact on his mind was just as devastating the second time.

Though he had already endured it once.

“They’re dead... they were all dead...”

Tianling murmured.

Lu ignored Tianling, who was still sitting dazed on the ground.

He was also processing the images he had just seen.

The information they contained was far too massive.

“Those ancient emperors are dead, yet Ancient Emperor Hao created the illusion that they were still alive. In truth, those wills might even be the real ancient emperors’ wills... but that makes it even more horrifying.”

“A group of brains kept in nutrient tanks, all believing they’re still alive... unaware that if the connection is severed, they would wither instantly.”

Lu slowly exhaled.

The Nine Heavens’ Heavenly Dao—or rather, Ancient Emperor Hao—was truly ruthless.

Lu raised his head and looked toward the sky.

In his vision, he seemed to see the Five Phoenix Heavenly Dao immortal source soaring past.

The Heavenly Dao... is like a child.

Its growth environment determines its path.

Compared to the carefree, joyful Five Phoenix Heavenly Dao, the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao had it rough.

“But a Heavenly Dao that doesn't prioritize the lives of all beings... can it still be called the Dao of the living?”

Lu said.

His body transformed into a streak of white light and appeared below the pavilion.

Tianling finally snapped out of his shock, his face numb.

He had wanted revenge, but now... what was the point of revenge?

Everyone was dead.

Ancient Emperor Hao was merely an incarnation of the Heavenly Dao.

Was he supposed to take revenge on the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao?

Even if he had the power to destroy it, doing so would mean annihilating the countless lives of the Nine Heavens.

Could he bear to do it?

Tianling was lost.

When the truth he had chased for so long was laid bare before him, he found himself powerless to act.

"Perhaps... none of it was real?"

"Maybe it was just what Ancient Emperor Hao wanted you to see?"

Lu said.

“I’ve killed Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor and the Water Clan Ancient Emperor before. So to confirm whether it’s true or false, all we need to do is go to the rift and see if those two ancient emperors are still alive.”

“If they’ve truly been devoured by Hao, then even if they die, they will simply reform.”

Lu’s words caused Tianling’s eyes to flicker slightly.

“Then let’s go now!”

Tianling stood up immediately.

There was still a sliver of hope in his heart—perhaps what he saw was fake?

But soon, Tianling realized Lu had no intention of moving.

“You’re not going, Young Master Lu?”

Tianling asked in confusion.

Lu shook his head. “I have things to do. You can go alone. Don’t worry—this Young Master will support you from behind and assist you.”

“This Young Master’s assistance... is quite reliable.”

Lu smiled.

He truly had no interest in entering the Nine Heavens.

Compared to the affairs of the Nine Heavens, fusing the Indestructible Fire Body was far more important right now.

And dealing with the adorable little Gold Origin Beast Ancestor statue was even more urgent.

After all, he had taken the statue—and in doing so, had provoked the Elemental Gods and their disciples.

Though the ancient starry void was vast and boundless, with the strength of the Elemental Gods and their disciples—beings who surpassed immortal rank—Lu had no doubt they would eventually find the Five Phoenix Continent.

So he needed to use this time to grow stronger.

Tianling's eyes narrowed slightly.

He exhaled slowly.

He had been a bit greedy. With Lu's strength, if Lu accompanied him, his safety would be guaranteed.

But Lu had no obligation to go with him.

This was, after all, a matter of the Nine Heavens.

Lu no longer belonged to the Nine Heavens.

Strictly speaking, Tianling himself no longer belonged to the Nine Heavens either. He could simply ignore it.

But...

In his previous life, he had sat guarding the ancient starry void for hundreds of thousands of years.

In the end, he had been schemed against.

This had become an obsession buried deep in his soul, blocking his path forward. He simply wanted to fight for his dignity and clear his mind.

Of course, he also wanted to resolve the karma with the Nine Heavens.

“Thank you, Young Master Lu, for breaking the seal. I am endlessly grateful. Once I return from the Nine Heavens, I will fulfill my promise and guard the Five Phoenix passage for ten thousand years.”

Tianling said.

Lu nodded slightly.

...

Nine Heavens.

Void Rift.

“We’ve been discovered...”

“Tianling really isn’t dead.”

From deep within the rift, a low voice rose like a chant.

The many ancient emperors fell silent.

“Lu Ping’an actually revived Tianling... just to learn the secret of the rift and disrupt our plans?”

The voice carried surprise and astonishment.

Perhaps he hadn’t expected Lu Ping’an to revive an enemy.

“But so what if he knows?”

“The plan is already in its final stages. Even Lu Ping’an cannot stop it.”

“The Heavenly Dao has given everything for the living beings. Now, it is time for the living beings to give everything for the Heavenly Dao...”

“The original fallback was the Void Heaven. After countless years of sealed rules, it was the perfect place for the world to be cleansed and rise anew. Unfortunately, Lu Ping’an took advantage of it and created the Five Phoenix Continent...”

“But the Five Phoenix Continent has yet to produce an existence beyond Extreme Emperor...”

“It can serve as the new fallback.”

The faint voice drifted through the air.

Rumble!

The void rift tore wider and wider.

Finally,

when the rift reached its limit,

a figure of light stepped out from within—it was none other than the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao incarnation that had once entered the Five Phoenix Continent and nearly been devoured by the Five Phoenix Heavenly Dao in its origin universe.

Now, after being nourished in the rift, the incarnation had fully recovered.

The Heavenly Dao returned to the Nine Heavens.

Every world in the Nine Heavens seemed to receive a gentle blessing.

After the Heavenly Dao phantom stepped out of the rift,

one ancient emperor after another followed, their auras rising and falling as they emerged.

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor, Water Clan Ancient Emperor—every ancient emperor who had once vanished now stepped out of the rift.

Their forms appeared above every world in the Nine Heavens.

In every world, in every layer of the Nine Heavens, the people saw the manifest ancient emperors.

The living beings went wild with excitement.

The ancient emperors had returned!

A new era had begun.

With the ancient emperors and the Heavenly Dao returning together, the Nine Heavens—which had been severely weakened by the departure of the Heavenly Spirit Clan and the destruction of the Saint Clan—would soon return to its peak under the rule of the ancient emperors!

A golden age was coming!

In an instant, jubilation swept across the Nine Heavens.

...

After Tianling left,

Lu returned to the upper floor of the pavilion.

He fell into deep thought.

“Ancient Emperor Hao is the incarnation of the Nine Heavens’ Heavenly Dao. He devoured all the ancient emperors except Tianling. His plan... is likely to use the power of all living beings to break through the Extreme Emperor realm and reach the Great Luo Immortal level...”

Lu’s eyes flickered. Having created the current immortal-martial Five Phoenix Continent, he could somewhat guess Ancient Emperor Hao’s goal.

If Lu were to devour the power of every powerhouse in the Five Phoenix Continent, he too could pile his cultivation up to the Great Luo Immortal realm.

But...

Lu’s goal was different from Ancient Emperor Hao’s.

Lu sought to create a supreme fantasy world. To him, the world itself was the foundation.

He needed the world to grow strong as a whole—not just himself as an individual.

That kind of personal strength held no meaning for Lu.

This was the fundamental difference between Lu and Ancient Emperor Hao.

Lu shook his head, putting the matter aside.

He had no control over the current situation in the Nine Heavens.

Right now, he needed to deal with the gold beast statue.

“Place the gold beast statue in the Fortune Tower? Make it a cultivation project?”

Lu’s eyes gleamed.

He acted immediately.

With a thought, he appeared inside the Fortune Tower.

He took out the adorable trophy-sized little gold beast statue and prepared to integrate it into the tower.

However...

Before he could set it down, Lu's expression changed dramatically.

Because he could clearly feel that if he really placed the statue inside, the Fortune Tower would instantly explode.

Every powerhouse within the Fortune Tower would be erased in an instant!

Lu took a deep breath and picked the statue back up.

"This statue... where exactly is it adorable?"

Lu couldn't help but complain.

It seemed fusing the little statue with the Fortune Tower was impossible. He would need to create a dedicated secret realm for comprehension...

Lu rubbed his chin.

Ideas for a secret realm quickly formed in his mind.

As the cultivators of the Five Phoenix Continent grew stronger, Lu was starting to feel the strain. They were becoming harder and harder to fool.

Creating a secret realm that could fool everyone was no easy task.

But...

With the Six Paths of Immortality and this powerful, mysterious, adorable little Beast Ancestor statue, he should be able to craft a secret realm shrouded in mystery—similar to the Gold Origin mysteries comprehension ground in the ancient starry void.

If every cultivator in the Five Phoenix Continent could master the Gold Origin mysteries, it might bring about a massive leap in strength!

...

Meanwhile.

Emperor Tianling returned to the Cosmic King Mansion and spent some tender moments with the little princess.

Then he set off for the Nine Heavens.

Once this matter was settled, if he could return alive, he would truly belong to the Five Phoenix Continent.

He would have no more ties to the Nine Heavens.

The Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao... ruthless and heartless. It filled Tianling with dread.

Step by step.

Emperor Tianling arrived outside the Void Abyss.

Perhaps because of the passage, many Five Phoenix powerhouses were now stationed outside the abyss.

Tianling appeared silently.

With a flicker of his body, he stepped into the abyss. His flesh withstood the corrosive power of the abyss. With his peak sixth-turn Golden Immortal strength, crossing it was effortless.

Boom!

One step tore open the barrier between the abyss and the Nine Heavens.

The familiar aura filled Tianling with complex emotions.

He stepped forward.

Finally, Emperor Tianling returned to the Nine Heavens.

But...

The moment he returned, his expression froze.

He looked toward the worlds floating in the Nine Heavens.

Behind those worlds, he could clearly sense the radiant auras of Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor and the Water Clan Ancient Emperor.

The faint hope Tianling had clung to instantly sank into the abyss.

Ancient Emperor Hao and the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao's plan... had begun!

This world would soon be stained with blood.

Chapter 594: If the Heavenly Dao Dies, How Can the Living Survive?

Deep in the ancient starry void.

A sleek god-demon streaked through space at terrifying speed. Each leap traced a graceful arc, landing briefly on an ancient star before launching forward again, accelerating relentlessly.

It was like a nimble beast bounding through an ancient starry forest—agile, swift, unstoppable.

This was the very god-demon that had hidden in the void and overheard Lu's words.

He had to deliver this news to the Elemental Realm!

He needed to rally the mighty god-demons there to resolve this crisis.

Whether it was the Five Phoenix Continent or the Nine Heavens, both had to be dealt with.

Two human powerhouses—Ancient Emperor Hao and Lu Ping’an—had worked together to slaughter countless immortal-rank god-demons, along with a vast number of initial- and high-rank god-demons...

For the god-demon race, this was an unforgivable catastrophe.

In the ancient starry void, god-demons had always reigned supreme. Other races trembled before them.

Even humanity had been squeezed until it had almost no space left to survive.

Yet now, two humans had killed so many god-demons!

This was absolutely intolerable!

Boom!

Suddenly.

The god-demon landed on a star.

Even with his immortal-rank strength, he felt his heart pound violently—as though a dark cloud was rapidly approaching from afar, plunging the heavens and earth into pitch blackness.

He looked up.

Five figures were strolling through the starry void.

The auras radiating from them made this god-demon tremble uncontrollably.

“Mighty god-demons of the Elemental Realm!”

The immortal-rank god-demon’s eyes lit up.

Though all god-demons were born from chaos, there was still a vast divide between geniuses and ordinary ones.

Some genius god-demons were born at immortal rank—or even above it. With cultivation from powerful elders, they became the backbone of the race.

In comparison, ordinary immortal-ranks like him were insignificant.

They held some status in the Elemental Realm, but nothing remarkable.

The five powerful beings he had encountered were none other than the prized disciples of the Elemental Gods.

They had left the comprehension ground and received a mission from the Elemental Gate: investigate whether any gold-elemental god-demons had perished.

They hadn't expected to run into an ordinary, frantic immortal-rank god-demon.

The hierarchy among immortal-ranks was extremely strict.

As disciples of the Elemental Gods, their talent was extraordinary—they had already reached the level of great-path god-demons.

They even had the potential to step into the origin-chaos rank, rivaling humanity's quasi-saints...

So they naturally looked down on ordinary immortal-ranks.

They assumed this was just some wandering god-demon from the ancient starry void.

But the ordinary god-demon's eyes brightened.

Ignoring the oppressive pressure of their superior bloodline, he soared into the sky and waved frantically at the five disciples of the Elemental Gods.

The five paused and exchanged glances.

They actually stopped.

They wanted to hear what this god-demon had to say that was worth stopping them.

The bloodline pressure made the ordinary god-demon tremble.

But he could barely contain his excitement.

“Speak. Why have you stopped us?”

“If you can’t give a good reason, you know the consequences.”

The calm voice carried cold indifference and heavy pressure.

For a moment, the ordinary god-demon felt a surge of regret.

What if Lu Ping’an and Ancient Emperor Hao’s actions failed to catch the attention of these noble god-demons? Wouldn’t he be punished?

But he had already stopped them—he had no choice but to speak.

“A new immortal-martial world has been born in the ancient starry void. Its immortal source has formed and is slowly integrating... and already, twenty-two immortal-rank god-demons have perished in this newborn high-martial world!”

The ordinary god-demon hurriedly explained. He told the five noble god-demons how Ancient Emperor Hao had collaborated with them to trap and kill their kin.

“A newly born immortal-martial world?”

The five disciples exchanged glances.

“A human immortal-martial world?”

They asked again.

The ordinary god-demon nodded vigorously. Lu Ping’an was human. Ancient Emperor Hao was human too...

Both the Nine Heavens and the Five Phoenix Continent were human worlds.

“A new human immortal-martial world... Master instructed us to suppress humanity. Very well. Since we’ve encountered it, we’ll destroy its immortal source.”

“Qiang Huo, you go with him. The rest of us will continue searching. Once you’ve dealt with it, return to the Gold Elemental Realm and regroup with us.”

The other four disciples said.

“Understood.”

The burly god-demon wreathed in fiery red light nodded.

Then he grabbed the ordinary god-demon and tore through the void.

“Di Jin, the gold-elemental god-demons are mainly raised by your Gold Elemental Realm. Finding the human thief who stole the statue will depend on you.”

After the fiery god-demon left, the void fell silent again. The remaining four exchanged a few words, then departed in streaks of light.

...

On an ancient, dead star.

The white-robed figure, Tonggu, held a divination seal, performing calculations.

Suddenly, he sensed something and looked toward the direction of the Nine Heavens.

“That black-robed man must have a starry saint protecting him. I can’t divine anything—karma doesn’t touch him. But... I didn’t come up completely empty. This person once lingered on this nearly destroyed world.”

Tonggu murmured.

Then he beckoned.

Among the nine human prodigies he had brought along,

one was summoned.

It was the human prodigy he had placed among the top hundred stars.

“Chai Feng, come with me.”

“The rest of you, return and cultivate diligently. Also, strengthen your vigilance. The gods and demons may lash out in anger and launch an attack.”

Tonggu said.

The disciples bowed, then turned into streaks of light and departed.

Tonggu, taking Chai Feng with him, set off toward the Nine Heavens.

With his speed, it was like the stars themselves shifted—soon they would arrive.

...

White Jade Capital, Lakeheart Island.

The moment Tianling tore open the abyss and descended into the Nine Heavens,

Lu returned to the upper pavilion and took out the Spirit Pressure Chessboard.

Though he didn't care much about the Nine Heavens' affairs, he had given Tianling his word—and boasted about being the strongest support. If he did nothing, wouldn't he be slapping his own face?

So while contemplating how to construct a secret realm for the adorable little Beast Ancestor statue,

he also kept an eye on Tianling's situation.

The island was serene, suffused with immortal aura.

Purple bamboo groves rustled in the wind, playing a melody of immortal music. To ordinary mortals, even listening to it could cleanse the soul.

Ning Zhao, in flowing white robes, brought Lu a warmed cup of Heavenly Immortal Wine.

She poured the crystalline liquid into a flawless white jade cup. The wine shimmered, releasing a rich fragrance.

Afterward, she gracefully withdrew and sat cross-legged on the island, handling matters in the Fortune Tower.

There were simply too many cultivators training in the Fortune Tower.

From mighty sixth-turn Golden Immortals at the top,

to weak Heavenly Human cultivators at the bottom.

But no one could guarantee there wouldn't be accidents. During the century Lu slept, Ning Zhao and the others had dealt with countless crises.

Of course, there was also the matter of Empress Ni Spring and Autumn. Ning Zhao had wanted to tell Lu, but he had been so busy. Right after waking, he dealt with Tianling, and now he was remotely connected to the Nine Heavens' affairs.

So she didn't disturb him.

"Everything can wait until Young Master finishes his important matters."

Ning Zhao sighed softly.

...

Nine Heavens.

Tianling sensed wave after wave of ancient emperor auras blazing like suns. His expression darkened.

He looked up at the rift in the void.

Ancient Emperor Hao was the Heavenly Dao. The Heavenly Dao was Ancient Emperor Hao...

The revelation struck him hard. But the greatest shock was that all the Nine Heavens' ancient emperors were dead.

Completely dead.

In Tianling's eyes now, the rift emanated a bone-chilling cold—like the maw of a demonic world.

“These ancient emperors still don't know they're dead. They think they're carrying out some grand plan...”

Tianling sighed.

When he had self-destructed, he had hated these ancient emperors.

But now that he knew the truth, he still found them hateful... yet also pitiable.

Dead, yet unaware of their own death.

Tianling moved forward. He had to do something.

Of course, it was to resolve his karma and clear his mind.

And also to prevent this world—where he had once lived—becoming a river of blood.

What was Ancient Emperor Hao planning?

Having devoured all the ancient emperors, his next step was to absorb the energy of every world in the Nine Heavens...

This energy originally came from the Heavenly Dao, maintaining the balance and operation of the Nine Heavens.

Once reclaimed,

Ancient Emperor Hao's strength would skyrocket to terrifying levels.

But...

Worlds stripped of energy would become cannon fodder in the void. All living beings within them would face total annihilation.

Blood would flow through every corner of the Nine Heavens!

And the energy of cultivators would also be devoured, leading to rivers of blood.

So Ancient Emperor Hao had to be stopped!

By manifesting these ancient emperors, Ancient Emperor Hao was already beginning to absorb the Nine Heavens' energy.

The Nine Heavens was simply too vast—so each ancient emperor acted like a straw, collectively drawing it in.

And every ancient emperor... was actually Ancient Emperor Hao.

In the end, all of it would flow into Ancient Emperor Hao's body!

Boom!

Tianling descended upon a first-layer high-martial world in the First Heaven.

After the Heavenly Spirit Clan migrated, the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao had created another first-layer high-martial world.

Now, Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor occupied it.

"Stop this!"

Tianling's massive form manifested, blotting out the sky.

All living beings in this first-layer high-martial continent knelt in reverence.

Tianling's arrival snapped Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor back to awareness.

"Tianling... you're not dead."

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor narrowed his eyes.

"I'm not dead. You're the one who's dead... all of you are dead. Every last one. The current you is nothing but a puppet controlled by Hao!"

Tianling didn't mince words. He wanted to awaken these ancient emperors.

He believed that if they were truly alive, they would never accept the Heavenly Dao's actions.

In truth, the Nine Heavens no longer had any emperors—only the Heavenly Dao. Ancient Emperor Hao was merely its incarnation.

“What nonsense are you spouting?”

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor sneered. Terrifying blazing flames erupted around him, twisting the void.

“Since you're still alive, I'll capture you.”

Without another word, Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor attacked.

Tianling's expression remained calm. “Have you forgotten you already died once? When you were in the Five Phoenix Continent, Lu Ping'an killed you!”

“One punch—body exploded, soul annihilated!”

“You’re full of shit! Lu Ping’an may be strong, but he wouldn’t dare come to the Nine Heavens. How could he kill me? Why would I ever go to the Nine Heavens?”

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor sneered disdainfully, thinking Tianling was talking nonsense.

Tianling understood. Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor’s memories must have been sealed—or erased—by Ancient Emperor Hao, just like his own had been.

So he had forgotten he died once. Like a system reset.

A wave of tragic pity washed over Tianling.

But now wasn’t the time for sentiment.

Because Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor was already attacking. Terrifying flames instantly turned the void into a sea of fire.

The current Tianling was no longer the newly ascended Golden Immortal who had been beaten down.

Now a sixth-turn Golden Immortal at the peak—equivalent to the peak of Great Emperor, half a step into Extreme Emperor—he had gained many insights.

He had come here to clear his mind and break through to Extreme Emperor.

So Tianling fought back.

After several exchanges, he handled it with relative ease.

The clash between two emperor-level powerhouses instantly stunned every living being and powerhouse in the Nine Heavens.

What in the world was happening?

Some saint-realm powerhouses recognized that the one fighting Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor was the long-fallen Tianling.

Tianling had returned... for revenge?

In an instant, the atmosphere in the Nine Heavens grew strange.

Tianling paid little attention to the reactions of the weak.

He frowned, deep in thought.

“Young Master Lu... can you awaken Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor’s memories?”

Tianling asked.

He believed Lu could hear him.

“Yes—but you have to subdue him first.”

Lu’s somewhat lazy voice rang out, followed by the sound of a chess piece being placed.

Tianling’s gaze sharpened. Without hesitation, his combat power surged.

He unleashed his full strength. Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor was momentarily stunned.

Originally, Tianling should have been roughly equal to him. But now... Tianling was so strong!

Half a step into Extreme Emperor!

But Tianling also felt pressure. As he fought Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor, the other emperors in the Nine Heavens began converging.

The pressure on Tianling quickly grew heavy.

After all, he had not yet stepped into Extreme Emperor. He couldn't suppress multiple emperor-level powerhouses alone!

...

On Lakeheart Island.

Lu shook his head. Tianling still needed more tempering—he was too weak.

The next moment, Lu placed a piece on the chessboard.

Pop!

A chess piece fell. Tens of thousands of rays of white light blazed.

Of course, if he acted directly, Ancient Emperor Hao would surely notice...

But what did Lu have to fear?

...

Boom!

The void tore open.

A pillar of white Spirit Pressure light descended from the heavens.

It smashed into Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor, who was battling Tianling, causing him to stagger.

“Lu Ping’an?!”

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor roared.

This familiar tactic, this familiar way of messing with people's heads—only Lu Ping'an could do this!

Tianling and Lu Ping'an were working together?!

Taking advantage of the moment, Tianling closed in instantly. A palm struck out. The sea of flames was compressed, compressed again.

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor grunted. Then a powerful force drilled into his mind.

"Young Master Lu, thank you for the trouble."

Tianling said.

Lu paid no mind, casually placing another piece.

Crack!

The seal on Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor's memories shattered. In the next instant, long-buried memories flooded back like a reversed tide. Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor froze...

He remembered many things.

The scene of being obliterated by Lu Ping'an with a single punch. The moment he died fighting gods and demons...

Scene after scene. His face grew paler and paler.

"So... I died long ago?"

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor murmured.

Thump thump!

His heart beat violently.

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor clutched his chest.

A coffin. A heart embedded in it. Threads connecting with each beat...

Cold. Desolate. Dead.

The scene of the coffin flashed through his mind. In the next moment, his entire being nearly exploded.

The image filled him with bone-chilling horror.

...

In the void rift.

Ancient Emperor Hao, eyes closed, radiated white light.

He had finally begun his plan.

To avoid being devoured by gods and demons. To break free from this cage...

Ancient Emperor Hao had no choice.

When he finally awakened to the truth—that he was the primary incarnation of the Heavenly Dao—he had struggled to accept it.

But when he saw one Extreme Emperor after another fall at the hands of gods and demons,

sacrificing their lives to take down god-demons...

Ancient Emperor Hao understood. He had to make a choice.

He opened his eyes.

His gaze shifted, landing on the coffin containing Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor's heart.

The heart embedded in the coffin was beating violently, as though it would burst.

Ancient Emperor Hao froze.

Then his expression changed. His eyes reflected Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor's current state.

"It's finally come."

"Unfortunately... there's no other way."

“If the Nine Heavens’ Heavenly Dao is destroyed, the living beings of the world... will have no path to survive.”

“I only seek a future.”

“So, do not stand in my way.”

The faint voice echoed in the cold, desolate, lonely depths of the rift.

...

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor’s madness gradually subsided.

His eyes turned pure white.

“Tianling, why bother?”

“Your soul fragments were taken by Lu Ping’an. He revived you, gave you a second life. Why couldn’t you just live well in the Five Phoenix Continent? Why must you come back to obstruct me?”

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor's gaze blazed white. At this moment, he was Hao.

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor moved, blocking Tianling.

Tianling's expression shifted slightly.

"Continue the plan."

The calm voice came from Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor's mouth.

The next moment, the ancient emperors scattered, descending upon various worlds.

Rumble!

In that instant, the entire Nine Heavens seemed to become a massive furnace.

The protective power of low- and mid-martial worlds was stripped away.

The Dao essence of high-martial worlds was torn off, swirling like tornadoes into the bodies of each ancient emperor.

Countless saint-realm powerhouses and cultivators in the Nine Heavens sensed something was terribly wrong.

“Emperors! What are you doing?!”

“Why do this? Stripping the energy—we’ll all be annihilated in the void!”

“The emperors have returned to bring us a golden age! How has it become a great calamity? We refuse! We refuse!”

Miserable cries rang out.

But every ancient emperor remained cold and merciless. Their divine souls surged, stripping away the Nine Heavens’ energy.

And this was only the beginning...

...

On Lakeheart Island.

Lu's expression turned grave. The lazy demeanor vanished. He became fully alert.

He's really doing it?

This Ancient Emperor Hao... is ruthless enough!

He's sacrificing the entire Nine Heavens to break through his shackles and reach the Great Luo Immortal realm!

Insane!

Even Lu was shaken in that moment.

After all, how many living beings were there in the Nine Heavens?

Trillions upon trillions—sacrificed. What a terrifying sea of blood that would be!

Even Lu couldn't bear to imagine it.

...

The Nine Heavens was, after all, very close to the Five Phoenix Continent—separated only by the Void Abyss.

The commotion naturally alerted the many Golden Immortals of the Five Phoenix Continent.

Dantai Xuan, holding the Book of Life and Death, rose into the air. His black robes whipped in the wind as he gazed toward the Nine Heavens. His expression turned grave.

Lu Jiulian, Sima Qingshan, Bai Qingniao, and other Golden Immortals also sensed it.

They emerged from the Fortune Tower and stared at this scene of world-ending destruction.

This was true extinction—the annihilation of an entire high-martial golden age.

Mi Jia fell silent. He didn't know what to say.

The saint-realm experts of the Heavenly Spirit Clan, along with many former saint-realm experts of the Nine Heavens' Saint Clan, vaguely saw what was happening in the Nine Heavens. The atmosphere grew unbearably heavy.

...

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor's memories were resealed.

For Ancient Emperor Hao, resealing Fire Spirit's memories was far easier than resealing Tianling's.

Fire Spirit Ancient Emperor descended upon a world and began absorbing the energy the Heavenly Dao had once bestowed upon the Nine Heavens.

Bit by bit, the Nine Heavens' energy was stripped away.

And the auras and strength of these ancient emperors soared, soon breaking through their shackles.

Boom!

One Extreme Emperor after another was born.

This should have been a cause for universal celebration.

Yet the Nine Heavens was filled with wails and anguished howls.

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor's eyes were clear. She blocked Tianling, who wanted to act.

"I know what you want to say. I know I'm already dead."

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor sighed.

Tianling froze, staring at her in disbelief.

"You don't understand what the Nine Heavens is about to face... there's simply no other path."

"You don't understand the pressure Hao carries."

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor looked gently toward the void rift. But beneath that gentle gaze was endless sorrow.

“When the road ahead is completely blocked, what else can be done? Only by smashing through with fists until they bleed can a hole be made...”

“If the Heavenly Dao dies, how can the living have any path to survive?”

Boom boom boom!

Her voice was gentle, even tinged with grief.

But to Tianling, it rang like thunder.

He turned.

Behind him, the massive rift spanning the Nine Heavens tore wider.

Threads stretched out, pulling coffin after coffin.

An old, hunched figure slowly stepped out from the rift, calm and unhurried.

Chapter 595: If I Lose the Battle...

The hunched figure stepped out from the rift. White light gleamed from beneath his cracked skin.

He dragged coffin after coffin behind him. Each one bore a heart embedded in its surface—the hearts of ancient emperors. Every coffin represented one fallen emperor.

All eyes were drawn to him.

Tianling's body turned ice-cold as he stared at Ancient Emperor Hao emerging from the rift. It felt as though a natural disaster had descended—dark, frigid aura blanketed the entire Nine Heavens, as if everything was about to be annihilated.

Ancient Emperor Hao had actually stepped out of the void rift?

For hundreds of thousands of years, he had been hiding there alongside the other ancient emperors.

And now, this supreme being had finally appeared in the world.

A terrifying aura crisscrossed the void.

Each coffin seemed to carry a taboo.

Tianling was puzzled.

What exactly had Ancient Emperor Hao been doing all these hundreds of thousands of years...?

If he had decided from the beginning to reclaim all the Heavenly Dao's dispersed power in order to break through beyond Extreme Emperor, why wait until now?

He could have done it long ago—before Tianling ever discovered the truth.

No one would have been able to stop him.

But now that he had been discovered, he finally began the plan. Why?

Was it simply sentimentality?

Tianling truly couldn't understand.

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor gazed gently at Ancient Emperor Hao's withered, skeletal frame. Once, he had been peerlessly magnificent—even in his old age, he had carried a unique grace.

But now, he was hunched, decrepit, barely human...

Yet in the Water Clan Ancient Emperor's eyes, he remained radiant.

"Did you think reclaiming the Heavenly Dao's power would be so simple?"

"It requires a grand design—a meticulous formation that envelops the entire Nine Heavens, capable of stripping the energy from every world and every powerhouse."

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor said.

"And this formation, this grand scheme, took hundreds of thousands of years to prepare. Even that was barely enough..."

"Anyone else would have failed. Only Hao could succeed."

"Because he represents the Heavenly Dao..."

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor's voice burned with fervor—an obsession etched deep into her soul.

In Lu's words, she was a brain-dead fan.

Tianling's expression shifted slightly.

Boom boom boom!

Wails of despair filled the Nine Heavens.

As the ancient emperors absorbed the Heavenly Dao's scattered power, the worlds that had lost their maintenance and protection began to wither and collapse.

They turned to fine sand that slipped through fingers, impossible to grasp.

Mid- and high-martial worlds in the Nine Heavens fell from their golden age of cultivation into an era of decline in an instant.

Spiritual energy dried up. All energy was drained and fed back into the Heavenly Dao.

The auras of the ancient emperors surged into Extreme Emperor realm—and continued rising.

Boom!

Tianling exhaled slowly, his gaze trembling.

At this moment, Ancient Emperor Hao had truly begun his plan.

A plan laid out over hundreds of thousands of years.

The return of the ancient emperors brought not a golden age—but a great calamity.

A cleansing of the entire Nine Heavens.

A cleansing orchestrated by Ancient Emperor Hao—the Heavenly Dao itself.

Ancient Emperor Hao believed that if even the Heavenly Dao could not survive, the living beings of the Nine Heavens were doomed anyway.

Whether they withered away or were slaughtered by gods and demons, death was inevitable.

Since they were going to die either way, why not let the Heavenly Dao break through and forge a new era?

Boom!

Ancient Emperor Hao raised his head. His ancient, weary eyes gleamed beneath his disheveled hair.

His divine soul swept outward.

In that moment, it felt as though the entire Nine Heavens was enveloped by his will.

Ancient Emperor Hao was too strong.

His aura inspired dread, freezing the blood in one's veins.

Tianling didn't even have the courage to raise a fist against him.

"Just one more step... and I will surpass Extreme Emperor and enter a brand-new realm!"

Tianling drew in a sharp breath.

Even Lu Ping'an might not be his match now.

"Yes... just one step. But that step requires the power of the entire Nine Heavens to stack."

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor sighed.

In the void.

Ancient Emperor Hao slowly raised his hand.

One after another, the coffins embedded with ancient emperors' hearts floated upward, drifting toward the heads of the emperors who had absorbed vast power.

Soon, they hovered above each emperor.

The cultivation of the Nine Heavens' cultivators began to plummet rapidly.

Originally, saint-realm powerhouses could still wield grand techniques and protect the mortals of their worlds.

But as energy was drained dry,

even they felt their power slipping away.

Gradually, they could no longer sustain their strength and protect their people.

High-martial worlds shattered into mid-martial worlds. Mid-martial worlds withered into low-martial worlds...

In this moment, the Nine Heavens seemed to undergo a regression.

...

Origin Lake, Lakeheart Island.

Lu sat up straight, his expression grave.

Ancient Emperor Hao's determination filled him with horror.

Reclaiming all of the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao power was equivalent to forcing every world back to low-martial levels—a dimensional downgrade, an artificial descent into an era of dharma extinction!

Lu found it bizarre.

He had worked tirelessly to elevate the world's level.

Yet Ancient Emperor Hao had undone it all in a single moment.

Just so the Nine Heavens' Heavenly Dao could condense an immortal source and allow Hao to break into the Great Luo Immortal realm.

“It really is difficult.”

Lu could sense Ancient Emperor Hao's despair.

It was an invisible bottleneck.

Even now, with his perfected Indestructible Golden Body, Lu had yet to break through to Great Luo Immortal-level combat power.

Even with the system, he could feel the difficulty.

Let alone Ancient Emperor Hao.

Human cultivation differed from that of gods and demons.

God-demons cultivated talent. Some were born at emperor rank. The most monstrous were born at Extreme Emperor—or even beyond.

Many god-demons who surpassed Extreme Emperor were born that way—something humans could never match.

“But I still feel that Ancient Emperor Hao’s urgency in executing this plan must have another reason...”

“Is he trying to break through before the Five Phoenix Continent fully matures into an immortal-martial world, then forcibly occupy it?”

Lu narrowed his eyes.

Ancient Emperor Hao’s actions felt like he had torn off all pretense—no more waiting, no more subtlety. He was forcing it.

“But there might be another reason...”

“For example... the threat of gods and demons?”

Lu narrowed his eyes. On the chessboard, the scene shifted.

...

Why was Ancient Emperor Hao in such a hurry to execute his plan?

Originally, he should have had a buffer—gradually reclaiming power like slowly boiling a frog. Even if saint-realm cultivators noticed, he could easily suppress them.

But now, he ignored the buffer and forcibly reclaimed the Heavenly Dao’s power.

Why?

This was Lu’s question—and Tianling’s as well.

Tianling looked toward the Water Clan Ancient Emperor. Perhaps she knew the answer.

Her azure eyes shimmered with brilliant light. She smiled.

Raising her slender hand, she pointed toward the direction where the Nine Heavens connected to the ancient starry void.

“Because the enemy has arrived.”

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor said.

Her words struck Tianling like thunder. He turned sharply toward the void.

He saw nothing.

But his heart sank.

He had sat guarding that direction for hundreds of thousands of years. How could he not understand what the Water Clan Ancient Emperor was pointing to?

Tianling couldn't sense it because he was too weak.

But Lu was different.

With Lu's strength, he naturally detected a faint, concealed energy fluctuation—still very far away.

Yet even from that distance, the fluctuation had reached him.

That meant the other party's strength was... terrifying!

Very likely surpassing Extreme Emperor and immortal-rank god-demons!

"So it really is because of the gods and demons..."

Lu narrowed his eyes, realization dawning.

There was no chance for him to intervene now.

Ancient Emperor Hao's plan had begun...

There was no turning back.

...

In the ancient starry void.

A streak of fiery red light closed in rapidly. The next moment, it halted above an ancient star with the force of a cataclysm.

The star beneath him couldn't withstand the terrifying power and melted into slag.

Qiang Huo, the god-demon wreathed in crimson light, stood ten meters tall. His overwhelming aura radiated outward in waves, distorting the surrounding stars.

"Hm?"

He paused on the ruined star, frowning. Then he looked toward the Nine Heavens.

"The aura is gathering rapidly..."

“Is a human high-martial world attempting to break into immortal-martial?”

Qiang Huo narrowed his eyes. Cold light flickered beneath them.

Humanity was a major threat. For the ancient god-demons, suppressing humanity was the top priority.

The ordinary immortal-rank god-demon he was carrying trembled uncontrollably.

The bloodline pressure from this noble god-demon nearly suffocated him.

“Is that direction... the Nine Heavens?”

Qiang Huo asked.

The ordinary god-demon nodded frantically.

He feared that if he didn't, this noble god-demon would kill him.

“Good. You've done well.”

“It seems they sensed my aura and sped up their breakthrough... unfortunately, there’s no time left.”

Qiang Huo grinned. His sharp teeth gleamed coldly.

Boom!

He stomped down.

His body shot forward, shattering space as he hurtled toward the Nine Heavens.

...

Ancient Emperor Hao’s hair fluttered wildly.

His entire demeanor grew colder, more indifferent.

Boom!

The coffins hovering above the ancient emperors slowly opened.

A vast suction force surged from within them. One by one, the ancient emperors lay down inside the coffins that represented their identities.

Rumble!

As the Extreme Emperor-powered coffins settled,

a deafening explosion rang out.

With each violent beat of the hearts,

it felt as though the Nine Heavens itself was exploding.

Worlds shattered. Realms collapsed.

They watched in despair as the coffins hovered above their heads.

Boom!

Suddenly.

Energy waves erupted from the coffins.

Every living being exploded, turning into rivers of crimson blood...

A sea of blood surged. Countless vengeful souls and resentments roiled within!

Gurgle gurgle...

The Nine Heavens was dyed red with endless blood.

Tianling felt chilled to the bone.

The Nine Heavens... was finished!

A true great annihilation—everyone dead!

The Water Clan Ancient Emperor smiled.

Then her figure flickered. She stepped forward, walking straight into the sea of blood.

Her body began to melt.

She turned back, gazing gently at Ancient Emperor Hao.

“Hao, you must succeed.”

Her voice lingered.

The next moment...

Her body melted completely. Flesh sloughed off, bones floated, and she was swallowed by the sea of blood!

Boom!

Countless resentments and vengeful souls turned into a terrifying storm.

From the abyss beyond, Dantai Xuan's expression trembled as he witnessed this.

So much resentment—how much sin and karmic fire must this carry!

The threads in the coffins quivered.

Then energy flowed through them like pipelines, pouring into Ancient Emperor Hao's body.

His aura rose continuously, climbing higher and higher!

He seemed to become a black hole—a massive black hole, crushing and distorting everything around him.

Tianling's body trembled.

He floated amid the collapsing, ruined Nine Heavens.

This world that had flourished for countless ages... was extinguished in this moment.

Like a candle that burned through the night, snuffed out.

Tianling's emotions were complicated—anger? Rage?

He felt all of it.

But...

He couldn't find a way to vent it.

Though everything was Ancient Emperor Hao's plan, his chess game.

The purpose of that game was to save the Nine Heavens from inevitable destruction.

To break and rebuild. To be reborn.

Boom!

Suddenly.

The passage between the Nine Heavens and the ancient starry void exploded open.

Even Tianling could now sense the terrifying aura rapidly approaching.

An aura like a great furnace.

Even Ancient Emperor Hao, at this moment, seemed slightly inferior to it!

“So... the enemy has really arrived?!”

“So strong... unbeatable!”

Tianling’s expression changed dramatically.

No wonder Ancient Emperor Hao had gone all-in with this gamble.

Boom!

At the edge of the Nine Heavens' void, a massive gate stood.

Beyond the gate, just like the passage to the Five Phoenix Continent, lay an ancient starry expanse.

A ten-meter-tall crimson god-demon stepped forward slowly.

His overwhelming aura radiated outward.

From outside the passage, he gazed into the Nine Heavens.

At the surging sea of blood. At the countless resentful souls and vengeful spirits...

Qiang Huo's lips curled into an intrigued smile.

"Interesting... sacrificing an entire world for a chance to break into immortal-martial?"

"Ruthless."

Qiang Huo's gaze fell on the sea of blood, gleaming.

“This passage once buried countless god-demons—even half-step great-path god-demons. So they tried to break through once and failed...”

Qiang Huo inhaled deeply.

Then he tossed the ordinary immortal-rank god-demon aside.

“Is this the place?”

The ordinary god-demon gasped for breath. Ancient Emperor Hao’s aura filled him with terror.

“Yes! It’s here! He is Hao! The one who tricked and killed twenty-two immortal-rank god-demons!”

The ordinary god-demon shouted desperately.

Qiang Huo’s gaze shifted, landing on Ancient Emperor Hao, who was pulling the coffins.

Ancient Emperor Hao’s withered, hunched body trembled slightly.

Then he raised his head. His profound eyes calmly regarded the figure outside the passage.

“So you’re the one who killed twenty-two immortal-rank god-demons of my race?”

Qiang Huo asked.

Ancient Emperor Hao simply looked at him calmly.

After a long silence, he spoke in a hoarse, aged voice.

“Killed?”

“We fought together. We killed the enemy. Where is the ‘trickery’?”

“Lu Ping’an is powerful. They were simply outmatched.”

Ancient Emperor Hao said calmly.

Qiang Huo looked at him coldly from outside the passage, radiating terrifying pressure.

“Outmatched?”

Qiang Huo’s eyes gleamed as he analyzed something.

He raised his head. Chaos-like flames burned in his gaze.

His vision pierced through the Void Abyss that separated the Nine Heavens and the Five Phoenix Continent.

Dantai Xuan, Lu Jiulian, Sima Qingshan, Nie Changqing, and others felt an overwhelming pressure as his gaze swept over them.

So strong!

Even from such a distance, he could oppress them like this!

“A newly born immortal-martial world?”

Qiang Huo’s sharp teeth gleamed coldly.

“Infighting among humans? How rare...”

Qiang Huo sneered.

Then his gaze shifted to the ordinary immortal-rank god-demon.

The god-demon shivered.

He screamed shrilly: “Don’t believe him! Hao is despicable! I hid in the void with my divine ability and personally heard Lu Ping’an say he and Ancient Emperor Hao were close allies. They worked together to trick and kill us god-demons!”

“Lu Ping’an once mentioned needing god-demons as reserves, and Hao immediately tricked twenty-two immortal-rank god-demons and nearly a hundred initial- and high-rank god-demons!”

The shrill voice echoed like a desperate cry.

It reverberated through the Nine Heavens.

Qiang Huo’s gaze sharpened. The ordinary god-demon was screaming with his soul on the line—staking his life on the truth!

Under Qiang Huo's bloodline pressure, he didn't dare lie. He didn't have the courage.

Meanwhile, in the Nine Heavens.

Ancient Emperor Hao, who was in the midst of breaking through to the realm beyond Extreme Emperor, nearly spat blood.

Lu Ping'an, that bastard...

When had he ever been close allies with Lu Ping'an?!

Even at this critical moment, Ancient Emperor Hao nearly saw his plan of hundreds of thousands of years collapse from sheer rage.

But in truth, he had allied with those god-demons because he was confident he could deal with them.

Even without breaking through to surpass Extreme Emperor, he could handle a group of ordinary immortal-rank god-demons. That was his confidence.

But now... he hadn't expected this.

That such a powerful god-demon as Qiang Huo would appear.

The terrifying aura radiating from the other party filled Ancient Emperor Hao with dread.

“A god-demon beyond immortal rank...”

Ancient Emperor Hao felt bitter.

He understood now—Qiang Huo’s arrival was a consequence of when he had sent the Water Clan Ancient Emperor to ally with other god-demons to attack the Five Phoenix Continent.

All of this karma... traced back to him.

“A bit of self-inflicted retribution...”

Boom rumble!

But Ancient Emperor Hao did not give up easily.

His gaze sharpened. Everything on his body began to slough off.

The next moment, he transformed into a blazing white figure of light.

He began to chant. A vast, majestic sound of array words rolled forth.

“Lin... Bing... Dou...”

These were Ancient Emperor Hao’s Nine-Character Array Words!

As the words surged, a colossal array-pattern cauldron formed around the Nine Heavens!

The Myriad Rune Cauldron?!

Tianling, protected within the cauldron, was slightly stunned!

After millions of years of nourishment, Ancient Emperor Hao’s first imperial weapon—the Myriad Rune Cauldron—had reached a terrifying level!

Having done this,

Ancient Emperor Hao ignored Qiang Huo outside the passage. He closed his eyes and continued pushing toward the realm beyond Extreme Emperor!

The sea of blood surged. Countless resentments roiled.

Ancient Emperor Hao's aura climbed higher and higher!

"Courting death!"

Qiang Huo's eyes turned cold.

He clenched his fist. Flames gathered on his fist, forming a roaring beast head!

Vaguely, golden light shimmered.

That was the Gold Origin mysteries he had comprehended from the Beast Ancestor statue!

This punch contained the Gold Origin mysteries!

Dong!

The Myriad Rune Cauldron trembled violently. In an instant, countless cracks spread densely across its surface!

Tianling drew in a sharp breath.

Ancient Emperor Hao's body trembled, but he paid no mind. He continued absorbing the power fed back from the coffins.

On Lakeheart Island.

Lu frowned.

“Isn't this exactly one of the Elemental Gods' disciples who sat on the top five stars in the comprehension ground?”

Lu murmured.

He recognized the figure—because this one had attacked him!

Lu remembered that clearly!

“He actually tracked them here...”

Lu drew a deep breath.

Watching Ancient Emperor Hao withstand Qiang Huo’s assault, Lu’s gaze sharpened.

He swept his sleeve across the Spirit Pressure Chessboard.

He understood the principle of “lips die, teeth grow cold.”

If the Nine Heavens fell, Qiang Huo’s next target would be the Five Phoenix Continent...

But Lu also couldn’t be sure—if he helped Hao, and Hao broke through, would he then join forces with Qiang Huo against him?

This was a choice.

The next moment, Lu smiled.

A brilliant light gradually filled his eyes.

He rolled up his sleeve and picked up a chess piece.

His gaze blazed.

He placed the piece on the board.

Pop!

The piece landed. Instantly, a beam of Spirit Pressure tore through the void and descended from the heavens—straight toward Qiang Huo, who was smashing the Myriad Rune Cauldron to the brink of destruction.

“Ten billion times... Spirit Pressure!”

Boom!

Qiang Huo hadn't expected such a move. Struck by the Spirit Pressure, his pupils contracted. His movements froze.

Ancient Emperor Hao, protected within the Myriad Rune Cauldron, trembled slightly.

Lu Ping'an... was actually helping him?

In that moment, Ancient Emperor Hao felt an overwhelming bitterness.

But thanks to Lu's Spirit Pressure beam, the pressure on Ancient Emperor Hao eased.

Rumble rumble!

The sea of blood surged violently.

Then, under Tianling's incredulous gaze,

all the blood gathered. The sea of blood seemed to dry up. Countless blood compressed. Countless resentments and karmic sins compressed.

A twelve-petaled blood lotus of karma was born, carrying endless resentment.

Rip!

Ancient Emperor Hao moved.

The threads connecting him to the coffins snapped.

The aura stuck at the bottleneck tore through like paper. After hundreds of thousands of years of meticulous planning, his scheme succeeded.

He broke through.

Like teleportation, Ancient Emperor Hao plucked the basin-sized blood lotus and appeared beside Tianling.

“Tianling, take this blood lotus to the Five Phoenix Continent. If I lose the battle... beg Lu Ping’an to give all the vengeful souls within it a chance at reincarnation.”

“You should have enough face with Lu Ping’an for that, right?”

Tianling held the blood lotus, his expression stiffening.

Do you... perhaps overestimate my face with Lu Ping'an?

But Ancient Emperor Hao said nothing more.

With a flick of his finger.

Tianling, clutching the blood lotus, was sent flying backward.

The abyss tore open, pushing him out of the Nine Heavens.

Ancient Emperor Hao sighed.

He turned back. In the dried-up sea of blood, a set of withered bones stood quietly.

Ancient Emperor Hao lifted the bones—the remains of the Water Clan Ancient Emperor. He gently caressed them, then placed them into a coffin.

Then he glanced toward the direction of the Five Phoenix Continent.

“Thank you.”

With that, he turned around. Alone, he walked through the empty, dead-silent Nine Heavens like a king inspecting his ruined domain.

Toward the end of the Nine Heavens.

Toward the passage.

Qiang Huo had already broken through Lu’s ten-billion-fold Spirit Pressure. His expression was cold as he stared at Ancient Emperor Hao approaching step by step.

Ancient Emperor Hao’s gaze flickered. The passage—the place where the heroes of the Nine Heavens had once died defending.

Why had he broken his shackles? Why had he pushed the Nine Heavens to break through?

Wasn’t it all so they could survive the invasion of gods and demons?

In truth, he had forgotten nothing.

Now, a powerful god-demon had come.

He would carry the weight of the entire Nine Heavens and fight one final battle.

Chapter 596: A Battle at the Immortal-Martial Level

Tianling cradled the twelve-petaled blood-colored lotus. Countless vengeful souls churned within it, along with surging malice and resentment.

The resentment had a clear target—Ancient Emperor Hao. After all, he had sacrificed every living being in the Nine Heavens. It was impossible for them to feel no hatred toward him.

Even if his goal had been to save the Nine Heavens and resist the powerful god-demons.

To the living beings of the Nine Heavens, none of that mattered. They neither understood nor cared.

In the Five Phoenix Continent.

Dantai Xuan, Mi Jia, the Overlord, Lu Jiulian, and other Golden Immortals flew over at high speed.

Their divine souls flared outward, forming terrifying energy ripples that enveloped the malice and resentment within the twelve-petaled blood lotus, preventing it from leaking and harming the living beings of the Five Phoenix.

“Give it to me.”

Dantai Xuan frowned and took the lotus from Tianling’s hands.

Tianling didn’t refuse. After all, Dantai Xuan was the Netherworld Emperor—dealing with souls and resentment was his specialty.

“Once this is over, I’ll personally go with you to see Young Master Lu and beg him to grant these souls a chance at reincarnation.”

Dantai Xuan sighed.

In truth, if these souls entered the Netherworld, it would greatly benefit it.

Originally, he had harbored deep hostility toward Ancient Emperor Hao. After all, Hao’s goal had always been to invade the Five Phoenix Continent.

But now, seeing that solitary figure walking alone through a dead and silent world with his back to all living beings...

Dantai Xuan found himself unable to say anything harsh. His hostility faded somewhat.

They were all people bearing heavy burdens.

There was something pitiable about even the most hateful.

Everything Ancient Emperor Hao had done was for the Nine Heavens—for his beliefs, for his faith.

It was simply that the paths of the Five Phoenix and the Nine Heavens were incompatible.

The others fell silent as well. They frowned, gazing gravely toward the Nine Heavens.

The outcome of the battle between Ancient Emperor Hao and that god-demon would determine whether the Five Phoenix Continent would be affected.

Right now, the Five Phoenix and the Nine Heavens shared a “lips die, teeth grow cold” relationship.

That was why Young Master Lu had intervened earlier—helping Ancient Emperor Hao and blocking the god-demon for a brief moment.

That single moment had given Ancient Emperor Hao the time he needed to break through.

After hundreds of thousands of years of preparation and accumulation, Ancient Emperor Hao had finally succeeded.

It was an inevitable breakthrough.

If he hadn't broken through after all this, Ancient Emperor Hao... would probably have gone mad.

"Beyond Extreme Emperor... what realm is that?"

Everyone exchanged glances. They knew it was the Great Luo Immortal level, but... how strong was a Great Luo Immortal? None of them had ever seen one.

...

On Lakeheart Island.

Lu was somewhat stunned.

“He sacrificed every living being in the Nine Heavens... yet still left a sliver of hope.”

Leaning back in the Thousand-Blade Chair, Lu murmured.

Ancient Emperor Hao had indeed reclaimed all the Heavenly Dao’s power, achieving a breakthrough and stepping into the Great Luo Immortal realm.

This was the culmination of hundreds of thousands of years of planning—an inevitable success.

But Ancient Emperor Hao hadn’t annihilated the souls of the Nine Heavens’ living beings. Instead, he had condensed them into a twelve-petaled blood lotus within the sea of blood.

The lotus carried the hopes of every living being in the Nine Heavens.

“He left behind a seed for the Nine Heavens... hoping for reincarnation?”

Lu’s eyes flickered.

Clearly, Ancient Emperor Hao had left the seed in the hope that Lu would help the souls of the Nine Heavens reincarnate through the Netherworld.

Of course, this would require Lu's consent.

That was why Ancient Emperor Hao had entrusted the lotus to Tianling.

In Hao's view, since Lu was willing to help Tianling, perhaps Tianling's face carried some weight.

Ancient Emperor Hao hadn't come himself.

Because he couldn't be sure he would return alive.

The god-demon at the passage—Qiang Huo—was far too powerful. Stronger even than the god-demon that had once brought catastrophe to the Nine Heavens.

So Ancient Emperor Hao could only fight with everything he had.

Lu gazed calmly at the Spirit Pressure Chessboard.

In the scene, Ancient Emperor Hao walked step by step—alone and desolate—through a cold, dead world filled with the stench of blood.

His pace seemed slow, yet it was not. Soon he passed through layer after layer of the Nine Heavens and arrived at the passage.

He faced Qiang Huo, who was still seething with rage after being struck by Lu's Spirit Pressure beam.

Lu exhaled slowly.

He held a wine cup in his hand.

"Though Ancient Emperor Hao and I are enemies..."

"If our positions were reversed—if I were Hao in this moment... what would I do?"

"If the Five Phoenix Continent faced such a catastrophe and required the sacrifice of all living beings, could I make that choice?"

Lu asked himself.

He couldn't.

Ancient Emperor Hao, as an incarnation of the Heavenly Dao, was colder, more rational—even ruthless.

But Lu was different.

The Five Phoenix Continent held too many ties for him.

The Witch Clan, the Demon Clan... races he had personally created, like his own children.

And Lu Changkong, Zhu Long, and others—family, bonds.

Lu had poured too much of himself into the Five Phoenix Continent. He already felt completely integrated into it.

He belonged to the Five Phoenix.

If that moment ever came, perhaps... Lu would fight to the bitter end.

But to sacrifice all living beings? He still couldn't do it.

He wasn't ruthless enough. He lacked Ancient Emperor Hao's heartlessness.

Lu shook his head and set the thought aside. There was no comparison.

"That god-demon... is one of the Elemental Gods' prized disciples. His strength is formidable—likely at the Great Luo Immortal level..."

"Though not the Elemental God himself, the threat is no less."

Lu's eyes flickered.

If Ancient Emperor Hao truly couldn't defeat Qiang Huo,

then in the future, the Five Phoenix Continent would face cleansing by this terrifying god-demon.

Of course, Lu also had to guard against Ancient Emperor Hao joining forces with Qiang Huo.

After all, Hao had a history.

So though Ancient Emperor Hao's actions moved Lu, he still remained wary of him.

One must always guard against others—especially a powerhouse who had now surpassed Extreme Emperor and entered the Great Luo Immortal realm.

But the disciple of the Elemental God was also a major threat.

Lu narrowed his eyes.

Compared to Ancient Emperor Hao—who had suffered many losses at his hands—this newcomer, Qiang Huo, posed a greater danger.

After all, Lu had shown off in the comprehension ground, then fled—taking the adorable little statue with him.

The Elemental Gods were probably furious beyond measure.

So for now, Lu needed to keep a low profile.

The arrival of the Elemental God's disciple was unexpected, but their goal seemed to be revenge for the twenty-two immortal-rank god-demons Lu had tricked and killed earlier.

Not the adorable little Beast Ancestor statue.

While the enemy hadn't realized yet and hadn't spread the news—

Lu had to kill him!

For his own sake, and for the Five Phoenix Continent's sake.

Leaning back in the Thousand-Blade Chair, Lu finally made his decision.

Fuse the Indestructible Fire Body.

With his Indestructible Golden Body now perfected, he finally qualified to fuse the Indestructible Fire Body. If successful, Lu estimated that while his realm might not reach Great Luo Immortal, his combat power should... meet the mark.

Together with Ancient Emperor Hao, they might have a chance to kill this disciple of the Elemental God!

No sooner said than done. Lu sat upright in the pavilion. Sparks began flickering around his body, causing the air temperature to rise rapidly.

Fusing the Indestructible Fire Body was no easy task.

Lu had to proceed with extreme caution. He couldn't guarantee success—he had failed once before.

But as the fusion progressed,

a searing pain and burning heat surged through his body. Lu felt as though he had been thrown into a furnace, being tempered over and over.

...

In the Nine Heavens.

Ancient Emperor Hao walked step by step.

The entire Nine Heavens had turned into a dead, silent wasteland. Shattered continents floated everywhere. Without the Heavenly Dao's protection, they had been crushed by the void's power, reduced to rubble drifting in space.

A scene of utter ruin.

Ancient Emperor Hao walked on, blood and malice coiling around his body!

“I have broken through Extreme Emperor. Now... I am beyond Extreme Emperor—I am the Heavenly Emperor!”

Ancient Emperor Hao’s eyes blazed.

The sovereign of this heaven and earth!

Even if he was the only one left in this heaven and earth, he was still its Heavenly Emperor!

Boom!

With each step, his aura grew stronger.

He stared at Qiang Huo at the passage. Battle intent burned within him. After hundreds of thousands of years of planning, this was the moment—he would protect the Nine Heavens with his own power.

He had surpassed Extreme Emperor and shattered the Heavenly Dao’s barriers.

Though he had gained immense strength, he felt no joy.

And if he felt no joy, then he would vent it all on this god-demon!

A god-demon who had surpassed immortal rank and reached the great-path rank!

Let him... fight to the death!

“Come!”

Ancient Emperor Hao’s cold shout thundered, shaking the heavens and earth.

The Golden Immortals of the Five Phoenix Continent felt their expressions change.

Deafening!

Even from such a vast distance, they felt a heart-palpating terror from that overwhelming power.

“Great Luo Immortal level!”

“Ancient Emperor Hao calls this realm... Heavenly Emperor realm!”

“Beyond Extreme Emperor is Heavenly Emperor—the sovereign of heaven and earth!”

Everyone’s eyes flickered as they stared at Ancient Emperor Hao’s back. The passage was collapsing inch by inch, torn apart by terrifying force.

Around Qiang Huo, crimson flames coiled into a massive fire dragon that spiraled around him, burning and distorting the void.

“Sacrificing an entire world for power—ruthless. A true genius among humans.”

“But gods and demons are sworn enemies of humanity. Since you’re a genius... there’s no need for you to live.”

Qiang Huo sneered. Strange runes emerged on his crimson skin like tattoos.

His aura climbed higher and higher.

It was like two flames colliding in the void—one Ancient Emperor Hao, the other Qiang Huo.

And Ancient Emperor Hao's flame was slightly weaker.

It seemed it could be extinguished at any moment!

Ancient Emperor Hao had only just broken through. In combat power and foundation, he was still inferior.

Moreover...

This god-demon gave everyone a bone-chilling sense of despair—overwhelming, hopeless power.

The ordinary immortal-rank god-demon had already fled far away.

The shockwaves from Ancient Emperor Hao and Qiang Huo's battle could easily injure him gravely. He didn't dare linger near the center.

That would be suicide.

The ancient starry void was far more stable than the Nine Heavens.

Yet their battle was still terrifying. Explosive shockwaves shattered stars. Many stars were split by a single slash.

Many were melted by fire dragons.

The starry sky was torn into countless black spatial rifts, chaotic spatial currents spreading beneath them...

Crimson and eerie, yet dazzling like immortal light.

Flames fierce enough to incinerate all things in the void!

Boom!

With every clash, the two figures streaked through the void, unleashing heaven-shaking attacks!

The stray divine light could easily shred any immortal-rank god-demon!

They were like peerless immortals!

Beyond the Void Abyss.

The people of the Five Phoenix Continent felt their hearts sink.

Too strong!

So strong that none of them could muster the courage to join this battle.

“This... is a battle at the immortal-martial level...”

The Overlord spoke heavily.

No one could refute him.

The Five Phoenix Continent had entered the immortal-martial path and was gradually transforming.

But though it was immortal-martial, it had no Great Luo Immortal-level powerhouse. It couldn't truly represent immortal-martial.

Only a battle like this—between Ancient Emperor Hao and Qiang Huo—was truly immortal-martial level!

A single flash of attack could shatter stars!

The people of the Five Phoenix Continent felt an overwhelming weight.

“No matter who wins... it doesn’t seem like good news for the Five Phoenix.”

“Because the Five Phoenix has no combat power at this level...”

“If we all joined forces, could we defeat either of them?”

Everyone shook their heads.

This was immortal-martial combat power—the legendary Great Luo Immortal level.

“I wonder if Young Master Lu could defeat them?”

“Does Young Master Lu have combat power at the immortal-martial level?”

Many spoke with faint hope, but none could be sure.

...

Puff!

Blood sprayed from Ancient Emperor Hao's chest, forming a crimson river across the starry sky.

The searing heat evaporated his blood into black mist.

Qiang Huo sneered.

"You've only just proven yourself as Heavenly Emperor. You think you're worthy to fight me?"

"I'll kill you in ten moves!"

"You're not the first human Heavenly Emperor to die by my hand—nor will you be the last."

Qiang Huo's lips curled.

Boom!

He raised his hand.

A purple fire dragon coiled around him.

Within the purple flames, golden light shimmered—the Gold Origin mysteries.

Though he hadn't obtained the Beast Ancestor inheritance, he had sat on one of the top five stars and comprehended profound Gold Origin mysteries.

With the Gold Origin mysteries amplifying him, his attacks were multiplied many times over.

There was no way this newly ascended human Heavenly Emperor could withstand it!

The Gold Origin mysteries and fire dragon fused into a single punch—blasting forth.

The punch wove golden and crimson light, instantly draining all energy around it. Space collapsed. Rifts tore open, annihilating everything in their path.

It was as though a massive star was crashing down.

Like the wrath of the heavens!

Ancient Emperor Hao's robes whipped wildly. His skin cracked, releasing white light—the radiance of the Heavenly Dao.

As a Heavenly Dao incarnation who had proven himself, he now squeezed every last drop of the Heavenly Dao's power.

His blood-colored long blade shattered inch by inch, but the pale blade light seemed ready to cleave the starry sky apart.

It sliced through space itself.

One fist. One blade.

Two supreme forces collided!

Brilliant light illuminated the void. Every ancient star in the surroundings was obliterated.

A muffled groan echoed.

Then Ancient Emperor Hao's battered body flew backward, blood spraying like rivers.

He dropped to one knee in the starry void, gasping like a dragon.

His body was beginning to falter. The gap in combat power and foundation was too great.

He had no mysteries to amplify him.

In the end... he would still die.

Still not enough...

Even after breaking through Extreme Emperor and entering Heavenly Emperor realm.

He still couldn't resist the god-demons.

Ancient Emperor Hao felt deep unwillingness. He couldn't understand why a god-demon as powerful as Qiang Huo had appeared.

He hadn't been given enough time to grow.

Qiang Huo's burly frame blazed with flames.

He looked like a fire-elemental god-demon.

But he was far nobler—a prized disciple of the Elemental God, inheritor of their legacy.

So what if Ancient Emperor Hao had sacrificed an entire world to break through?

Qiang Huo had devoured entire human immortal-martial worlds before. When it came to ruthlessness, Ancient Emperor Hao couldn't compare.

"It's over."

Qiang Huo said calmly.

“Kill you, then flatten that newborn immortal-martial world...”

“A fresh human immortal-martial world... just thinking about it excites me. It must be a rare delicacy.”

Qiang Huo grinned, a hint of thrill in his voice.

This trip had turned out to be an unexpected bonus!

He stepped forward.

His powerful body shattered space as he charged toward Ancient Emperor Hao. This punch would surely annihilate him!

But.

Just as Qiang Huo surged forward—

A sound like a chess piece landing on a board echoed through the heavens and earth.

Suddenly.

Qiang Huo realized a colossal chessboard phantom had appeared, enveloping his body.

Hm?

Qiang Huo froze.

Ancient Emperor Hao was also stunned. Then his eyes flickered.

His divine soul surged wildly into the void.

“Lu Ping’an... you and I join forces?!”

“Kill him!”

Ancient Emperor Hao’s divine soul transmitted.

He stared into the void. He knew—Lu Ping’an had acted again.

Though he and Lu Ping'an were enemies—hostile to the core—and though he knew Lu's petty nature had long disliked him...

The Nine Heavens had reached this point. There was no retreat.

The Five Phoenix Continent might be the only hope for the reincarnation of the Nine Heavens' living beings.

Qiang Huo was too strong!

But Lu Ping'an hadn't entered Heavenly Emperor realm.

If the two of them joined forces, there might still be a chance!

Yet Lu's reply left Ancient Emperor Hao stunned.

"Join forces?"

Lu's faint laughter drifted over.

“No need.”

“This Young Master doesn’t like ganging up on others.”

Chapter 597: That Familiar Taste Is Back

Lu’s words were calm.

His face didn’t flush. His heart didn’t race.

But Ancient Emperor Hao froze, his emotions surging wildly.

You, Lu Ping’an, don’t like ganging up on others?

Back then, wasn’t it you who sent a horde of Five Phoenix Golden Immortals to surround Tianling with him?

Not only did you send people to gang up, but you also remotely applied all sorts of interference tactics that directly shattered Tianling’s mentality.

Ancient Emperor Hao even suspected that when Tianling saw the secret deep in the abyss rift, he hadn't originally intended to self-destruct—it was Lu Ping'an who messed with his head until he couldn't hold back and blew himself up.

So the true culprit behind Tianling's self-destruction... was you, Lu Ping'an!

And now you have the nerve to say you don't like ganging up on others?!

But the situation was urgent. Ancient Emperor Hao held his tongue.

Fine, no alliance then...

Couldn't he fight alone?

Of course, Ancient Emperor Hao was also curious: had Lu Ping'an's strength already reached the level where he could battle a great-path rank god-demon?

A great-path rank god-demon was equivalent to a human Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouse.

Though this was immortal-martial level combat power.

The Five Phoenix Continent had yet to complete its transformation into a full immortal-martial world. It shouldn't have produced a Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouse yet, right?

So Ancient Emperor Hao felt a trace of doubt toward Lu's confident words.

In the ancient starry void, the chessboard domain expanded.

It enveloped the great-path rank god-demon Qiang Huo.

Qiang Huo narrowed his eyes. His heart remained calm—no trace of panic. That was absolute confidence in his own strength.

With his power, even if two human Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouses appeared, so what?

He feared nothing. He wielded the power of fire origin and had comprehended Gold Origin mysteries. The combination of two elemental forces gave him absolute dominance in battle.

Qiang Huo gave a faint smile.

His gaze shifted toward the Five Phoenix Continent beyond the Nine Heavens.

Even if every Extreme Emperor from that newborn immortal-martial world attacked together, what did he have to fear?

Kill them all!

Slaughtering a newborn human immortal-martial world—if he reported this back to his master, it would surely delight him. Perhaps he'd even be rewarded with some supreme treasure!

The killing intent in Qiang Huo's eyes grew even denser.

Boom!

Suddenly.

White light exploded in the void, as though it had been blasted down from deep within the starry expanse.

It smashed brutally into Qiang Huo's body.

Qiang Huo's burly frame trembled slightly under the impact of the Spirit Pressure beam. His body even staggered for a moment.

“That move again, you slimy little crawler hiding in the shadows...”

An icy voice emerged from Qiang Huo’s mouth.

The attack didn’t hurt much, but it was incredibly infuriating.

The Spirit Pressure beam was oppressively heavy, forcing his movements to lag for a brief instant—though the lag was so short it could almost be ignored.

Still, it was a disadvantage.

Being at a disadvantage in the hands of a human was something Qiang Huo couldn’t tolerate!

Boom!

His body shook. Flames coiled around him, forcibly shattering the Spirit Pressure beam into countless specks of starlight that drifted away.

“Come out!”

The cold voice suppressed barely contained rage.

Ancient Emperor Hao watched as the once-composed Qiang Huo suddenly transformed into a furious lion. He sighed inwardly.

Indeed—even a great-path rank god-demon couldn't escape having his mentality shattered by Lu Ping'an.

“Crawler? You dare call this Young Master a crawler?”

A calm voice echoed through the void.

The void tore open. Silver-white spatial energy fluttered.

The next moment, a white-robed youth seated in a wheelchair slowly emerged from the rift.

His movements were unhurried, carrying a trace of elegance.

It really was Lu Ping'an...

When Ancient Emperor Hao saw Lu appear in person, a hint of gravity flickered in his eyes.

“Join forces?”

Qiang Huo sneered, completely unconcerned.

“No. I, Lu Ping’an, don’t like ganging up on others.”

Lu shook his head.

This made Qiang Huo even more disdainful. The human before him... was truly arrogant.

If these two didn’t join forces, he felt no pressure at all. Killing Ancient Emperor Hao would be effortless.

Likewise, dealing with Lu Ping’an wouldn’t be difficult either.

“Humans really are an arrogant bunch—eyes high, hands low.”

“Kill you, and this newborn immortal-martial world will surely be destroyed.”

“So you can die now.”

Qiang Huo said.

He was far too confident in his own strength.

Without hesitation, he launched his attack. With both fire origin and Gold Origin mysteries at his command, he was invincible.

Dong!

A punch blasted forward. The void exploded. Tearing rifts of energy obliterated one dead ancient star after another.

The explosive sounds continued endlessly. The rifts annihilated everything in their path.

This punch carried world-shaking power, aimed straight at Lu.

Blazing flames swept forth, distorting the void. Spatial turbulence seemed ready to swallow Lu in an instant.

And at this moment, Qiang Huo also sensed Lu's aura.

“Only at the peak of Extreme Emperor, yet you dare show yourself?”

Qiang Huo grew even more disdainful.

Ancient Emperor Hao at least warranted some seriousness—he was at Heavenly Emperor level.

But this Lu Ping'an? He sparked no interest at all.

Peak Extreme Emperor?

One punch would crush him.

Facing the punch that crossed millions of miles in an instant and closed in on his face.

The corner of Lu's mouth curved slightly.

He slapped his palm on the armrest. His body shot upright.

Clang clang clang...

The silver blades beneath him began to stack and separate, finally forming a pair of silver wings behind him.

Lu stood. The perfected Indestructible Golden Body instantly activated.

Powerful golden demonic energy surged outward, forming a protective layer around him!

With the perfected Indestructible Golden Body, Lu had some confidence.

Lu clenched his fist and punched forward.

Golden demonic energy roared. Lu's robes and hair turned golden. His entire body seemed forged from gold.

Two fists collided.

A world-shaking explosion erupted instantly, sweeping away stars.

Qiang Huo's body trembled slightly but remained rooted.

And Lu... also trembled slightly but stood firm.

The atmosphere suddenly fell silent. Both sides stared at each other, probing why neither had been moved.

Ancient Emperor Hao was stunned. He hadn't expected Lu to actually withstand that punch.

The clash of fist auras ended in a deadlock.

"Impossible... this great-path rank god-demon isn't a novice. His strength is formidable. How could Lu Ping'an block it head-on?"

Ancient Emperor Hao was puzzled.

His eyes glowed red. He had sacrificed the entire Nine Heavens to break his shackles—yet Lu Ping'an could clash head-on with a great-path rank god-demon?

Was Lu Ping'an hiding his strength all along, or had he broken through during this time?

"Interesting."

Qiang Huo was also slightly surprised. Then he turned into a streak of light and vanished from his spot.

Lu's appearance had ignited both battle intent and fury within him.

A human daring to clash physically with a god-demon?

And as a god-demon, he had actually suffered a disadvantage in a physical contest?

For god-demons, being evenly matched in a physical fight with a human was already a massive loss!

Boom!

Crimson flames intertwined. Qiang Huo became a blurry streak of fire and disappeared into the void.

When he reappeared, he was already beside Lu. A punch blasted out. The terrifying fist aura completely shattered the surrounding space into fragments.

But Lu's expression remained calm. Whenever he entered the Indestructible Body state, he became exceptionally serene.

He clenched his fist. Golden origin demonic energy surged within him.

He swung back instantly.

Dong!

Two fists met. The shockwaves from their clashing auras exploded outward.

Both bodies moved.

They turned into two streaks of light, weaving through the air. Though they moved at high speed, their exchange of blows never slowed.

Fists clashed and intertwined. Legs swept in afterimages, too fast to follow clearly.

The two flickered and teleported constantly through the ancient starry void.

It was utterly astonishing!

Ancient Emperor Hao stood still. His injuries were slowly recovering.

A Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouse had incredible self-healing abilities—especially since his body still contained all the power of the Nine Heavens.

He wanted to intervene.

But the battle between Lu and Qiang Huo was dazzling.

Hao could only watch, waiting for the right moment to strike.

...

In the Five Phoenix Continent.

Dantai Xuan, Mi Jia, Sima Qingshan, and the other Golden Immortals tensed the moment Lu appeared.

“Young Master Lu?”

“A battle of this level... Young Master Lu can actually intervene?”

“Young Master Lu... truly is Young Master Lu. Utterly unfathomable. We thought that was his limit before, but every time Young Master Lu appears, he shatters our understanding of boundaries.”

Everyone drew in sharp breaths, filled with awe.

Young Master Lu of White Jade Capital—the most mysterious man of all.

Even though they were already Golden Immortals standing at the peak of the Five Phoenix Continent, they still couldn't see through Lu.

“Actually... Young Master Lu probably didn't want to intervene. He has no goodwill toward Ancient Emperor Hao.”

“But to prevent a crisis from reaching the Five Phoenix Continent, he acted—to kill this god-demon.”

The Overlord spoke. He seemed to understand Young Master Lu's temperament.

Everything Young Master Lu did was for the Five Phoenix Continent!

“We really need to become stronger...”

Though they had trained extremely hard during this time.

They were still far behind—far behind their ever-growing enemies, and far behind Young Master Lu. Their progress was simply too slow.

They felt ashamed.

They had to work harder so Young Master Lu wouldn't have to worry.

...

In the ancient starry void.

A streak of white light flashed past.

Then it halted in the void, landing on a ruined ancient star.

“This level of battle fluctuation... it’s a clash between a Heavenly Emperor and a great-path rank god-demon!”

“I never expected that in such a remote corner, there would be a battle between a Heavenly Emperor and a great-path rank god-demon.”

The light dissipated, revealing two figures.

It was Tonggu, who had been divining, and the human prodigy Chai Feng.

The one who spoke was Chai Feng.

Chai Feng’s strength was formidable—he too possessed Heavenly Emperor-level power.

Tonggu’s expression was solemn.

“This is our oversight. I never imagined that in this remote corner of the ancient starry void, a newborn immortal-martial world would appear... along with two Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouses.”

“We must go assist them at once. We have to protect them.”

Tonggu said with emotion.

In the ancient starry void, humans had always been at a disadvantage against gods and demons. There were simply too few human powerhouses.

Unlike gods and demons, who were born powerful, humans needed to cultivate—but some humans could cultivate to terrifying heights that even gods and demons feared. That was why gods and demons suppressed humanity.

Now, discovering two Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouses was like finding two true gold nuggets on a beach. How could he not be overjoyed?

Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouses were top-tier combat power among humans!

Only an immortal-martial level world could nurture a Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouse!

The two exchanged a glance, then shot forward again.

...

Boom!

Lu grew more and more excited as the battle went on.

This fight was perfect practice for him.

Just moments ago, he had completed the fusion of the Indestructible Fire Body. Since his Indestructible Golden Body was already perfected, this time there was no failure.

Lu had succeeded.

After the fusion, Lu felt his power surge dramatically—as though he had broken through some invisible barrier.

It was like piercing through a membrane.

Even against a Great Luo Immortal-level powerhouse, Lu now had full confidence.

His guess had been correct.

The perfected Indestructible Golden Body had already brought him to the half-step Great Luo Immortal level.

Now, with the additional fusion of the Indestructible Fire Body, Lu had finally shattered the barrier.

And Qiang Huo was the perfect sparring partner.

Far more suitable than Ancient Emperor Hao.

Lu's Indestructible Body enhanced his physical strength—which was why he chose close combat.

In this physical exchange, he accelerated the fusion of fire and metal!

Dong!

No one knew how many punches they had exchanged.

The spectators' gazes had gone numb—they couldn't even follow how many times Lu and Qiang Huo had clashed fists.

Qiang Huo, however, grew more and more shocked.

This human... could actually match a god-demon in pure physical combat without falling behind.

This was extremely rare. God-demons were born from chaos—their bodies were indestructible, brimming with vast power.

They had absolute faith in their physical forms.

Yet today, that faith had been ruthlessly shattered by Lu.

Because Lu's physical strength... was actually on par with a god-demon's.

"A human prodigy!"

Qiang Huo instantly identified Lu's status.

In his view, only a human prodigy could match him physically in a five-five fight.

Compared to Ancient Emperor Hao, Lu Ping'an was far more troublesome.

Most importantly...

Lu Ping'an's original strength hadn't even reached Heavenly Emperor level!

The moment this thought arose, even Qiang Huo—wreathed in flames—felt a chill.

In other words, Lu Ping'an had treated him as a target for crossing realms to challenge.

This was humiliation!

Qiang Huo grew angrier the longer they fought.

He was always the one crossing realms to challenge others—never the one being challenged!

Fire dragons coiled through the starry void, distorting space and constantly shrinking Lu's range of movement.

"I've had enough fun!"

“I must kill you—slay a human prodigy, then flatten a newborn immortal-martial world. A great achievement!”

Qiang Huo sneered.

Though he was shocked by Lu’s physical strength.

He didn’t care.

Because his absolute power could completely crush Lu Ping’an!

Hum...

Crimson light surged. As a disciple of the Fire Elemental God, his fire origin power was his foundation—and he finally unleashed it.

With the amplification of fire origin power, his attacks grew stronger and stronger!

Fire origin power was inherently violent—perfect for offense!

Ancient Emperor Hao's expression changed. Compared to his own battle, Qiang Huo was finally getting serious.

The energy fluctuations made even Ancient Emperor Hao feel a chill.

"His killing move?"

Ancient Emperor Hao murmured.

The power of fire origin filled him with despair—a complete suppression of hard strength.

Now it was Lu Ping'an's turn to feel what it was like to have his hard strength shattered.

Rumble rumble!

World-ending might surged. Fire dragons gathered on Qiang Huo's fist. Fire origin power blazed to its limit, stacking, compressing, and sweeping outward!

It distorted space. The weight seemed ready to crush everything.

“Die!”

Qiang Huo’s eyes blazed. His burly body erupted with heaven-shaking power.

He smashed out a punch!

A massive fist shadow illuminated the heavens. Everywhere it passed, space was scorched into chaotic currents.

With fire origin power fully unleashed, the might of this punch had increased several times over!

“Unblockable!”

Ancient Emperor Hao sensed the terrifying power and drew in a deep breath.

“Lu Ping’an... let’s join forces.”

He spoke.

Only by joining forces could they have a sliver of hope!

But Lu remained calm.

“Fire origin power...”

The corner of Lu’s mouth curved slightly.

The next moment, his body shifted.

His golden robes and golden hair began to change—turning crimson in an instant.

And at this moment, Qiang Huo—who had just unleashed the punch—froze slightly.

He vaguely sensed a familiar aura on Lu... fire origin power?

But he didn’t care.

Perhaps his strength was slightly below some veteran great-path rank god-demons, but he was still a disciple of the Elemental God.

His fire origin power was his trump card—his greatest advantage!

And with the Gold Origin mysteries he hadn't yet unleashed, he was determined to kill this human prodigy today!

The punch crushed forward.

The void shattered inch by inch.

But to everyone's shock—and pale faces—

Lu didn't dodge. He seemed prepared to take the punch head-on.

It wasn't that Lu didn't want to dodge—he couldn't.

Qiang Huo had locked onto Lu's position with his divine soul. No matter where Lu fled, this attack would pursue him.

Rather than being chased down in embarrassment, better to face it calmly.

Boom!

Crimson light surged into the sky. The searing heat made Lu break into a slight sweat.

Fire origin power crashed into Lu madly, but converted through his newly fused Indestructible Fire Body, Lu gained massive resistance.

So he actually withstood this supremely confident strike from Qiang Huo!

Crimson demonic energy scattered around Lu's body.

After blocking the blow, Lu smiled.

His crimson hair fluttered. His expression remained calm.

"Sorry, but what you can do... I can do too."

Qiang Huo's expression froze.

This human prodigy... had also mastered fire origin power?!

Then the suppression of fire origin power was useless against Lu. Given Lu's ability to match him physically, blocking this punch wasn't difficult.

"You can do everything I can? Such arrogance..."

But Qiang Huo sneered.

He still had another trump card!

He had just comprehended... Gold Origin mysteries!

Qiang Huo's burly body erupted with world-shaking power. He roared.

Golden light surged into the sky like a sharp golden sword tearing through the dim starry void.

Gold Origin mysteries transformed into a sword—slashing straight toward Lu.

This was his strongest killing move!

The Gold Origin mysteries he had just comprehended!

Rumble rumble!

The killing move descended. The void collapsed.

Yet to everyone's astonishment, Lu showed none of the panic Qiang Huo had expected.

"Gold Origin mysteries..."

Suddenly, Lu's mind stirred.

Vaguely, the image of the adorable little Gold Origin Beast Ancestor statue flashed before his eyes.

The next moment.

The golden sword light slashing toward him—the Gold Origin mysteries flowing on it—melted away like ice and snow.

As though, in front of Lu, Gold Origin mysteries held no meaning.

Around Lu, there seemed to be an invisible domain that negated any Gold Origin mystery attacks...

This stunned Lu, who had been about to counter with his own Gold Origin mysteries.

The adorable little statue could automatically nullify this too?

After a brief moment of surprise, Lu maintained his calm demeanor. His Indestructible Fire Body shifted back to Indestructible Golden Body.

Then he raised his hand and slowly clenched it.

Boom!

The void trembled.

The golden sword was instantly crushed in Lu's grip!

Qiang Huo froze. Then his pupils shrank sharply. His eyes were filled with disbelief.

How was this possible?

A sword infused with Gold Origin mysteries...

Crushed by Lu with a casual grip through the void!

Not just Qiang Huo.

Ancient Emperor Hao and the Golden Immortals of the Five Phoenix Continent were all dumbfounded.

Lu's golden robes fluttered gently in the breeze.

"Sorry, but Gold Origin mysteries... I can do too."

"What you can do... I can do."

Lu said calmly.

Qiang Huo stared at Lu in disbelief.

His heart suffered a massive blow. He felt his mentality... on the verge of collapse.

Far away, Ancient Emperor Hao was speechless.

What kind of divine operation was this?

Did Lu Ping'an really not need to join forces? He could completely counter this great-path rank god-demon?

In the Five Phoenix Continent.

Tianling's expression was complicated as he watched this scene.

Here it comes...

That familiar taste is back.

Lu Ping'an, that bastard, was messing with someone's mentality again.

Meanwhile, Lu Jiulian, Dantai Xuan, Sima Qingshan, and the others slowly exhaled.

Young Master Lu truly was Young Master Lu...

As unfathomable as ever.

In the ancient starry void.

Qiang Huo clutched his chest. His mentality was on the verge of collapse. Staring at Lu in disbelief, he suddenly noticed—vaguely—that Lu's calm demeanor and figure... overlapped with the black-robed figure from before.

His eyes erupted with extreme sharpness and boundless excitement!

"Gold Origin mysteries... you can do them too?"

“You’re the black-robed man from the comprehension ground?!”

Lu froze.

Then the corner of his mouth twitched.

He’d been discovered. Time to get serious.

He took out the North Underworld Fishing Rod—specially designed for god-demons—and activated the God-Demon Hunter title, which suppressed god-demons. He slung the great killing weapon—the Five Phoenix Bow—over his shoulder.

Lu looked calmly at Qiang Huo.

“You know too much.”

Chapter 598: One Arrow, Even Quasi-Saints Can Be Slaughtered!

Lu’s words were calm, yet they caused the great-path rank god-demon Qiang Huo to freeze.

Not just him—Ancient Emperor Hao and the many Golden Immortals of the Five Phoenix Continent were also momentarily stunned.

“You know too much...”

Young Master Lu’s words sounded... off. Wasn’t this the kind of line villains usually said?

Everyone fell silent.

At this moment, Qiang Huo felt an inexplicable chill.

Though his mentality had been slightly shattered, when he realized Lu’s identity, his eyes lit up.

He hadn’t expected such an unexpected bonus. Lu’s actions in the comprehension ground had already drawn the attention of the Elemental Gods.

Especially taking the Beast Ancestor statue—that had enraged the Elemental Gods beyond measure.

What did the Beast Ancestor statue mean? As a great-path rank god-demon, how could he not understand?

A single Beast Ancestor statue was one of the supreme treasures of the ancient starry void—the most precious kind.

Even trading ten thousand immortal-rank god-demons' lives for it would be worth it!

Because the mysteries contained within the Beast Ancestor statue were the most crucial aid for immortal-rank—and even great-path rank—god-demons to break their shackles.

Even beings at the level of the Elemental Gods could gain immense insight from its secrets.

Its value was incalculable.

In the ancient starry void, four of the five Beast Ancestor statues were held by the Elemental Gods. The last one was in the hands of an extremely terrifying chaos creature.

Their extreme rarity only underscored their preciousness.

So when Qiang Huo learned that Lu was the black-robed figure, he became ecstatic.

He hadn't been certain at first—he had only been probing.

But he never expected Lu to not even bother denying it.

And then say “you know too much”...

Did this human prodigy actually intend to kill him?

Though Lu had mastered Gold Origin mysteries and fire origin power—and could do everything he could—his mentality had indeed taken a hit.

But he was still a great-path rank god-demon. Though only newly ascended, as a prized disciple of the Elemental God, he was still supremely confident.

If he wanted to leave, neither Lu nor Ancient Emperor Hao could stop him!

And Lu’s arrogant words made him laugh.

“So it really was you...”

Crimson flames burned around Qiang Huo.

His burly frame trembled—not from fear, but from excitement.

“Now I have even more reason to kill you...”

Qiang Huo grinned.

“Your value is too high. If I kill you, my master will be overjoyed. He might even reward me with supreme treasures, allowing my strength to rise further...”

Qiang Huo could barely contain his excitement.

He glanced sideways at the trembling immortal-rank god-demon who had guided him here.

“Go back now. Report this to the Elemental Realm. Tell them the black-robed man from the comprehension ground has been found.”

Qiang Huo said.

The immortal-rank god-demon froze. Then his face lit up with wild joy.

This was his chance!

If he seized this opportunity, he might soar to the heavens—even gain the right to live and cultivate in the Elemental Realm.

Without hesitation, he tore into the void and fled.

Lu smiled.

Spatial energy surged. The silver blades behind him stacked and swept forward. The explosive force propelled Lu's body, instantly intercepting the immortal-rank god-demon who had just hidden in the void.

The hidden immortal-rank god-demon was scared out of his wits.

Lu swung the North Underworld Fishing Rod. This rod had a special suppressive effect on god-demons—and was specifically designed for fishing elemental god-demons—so it was perfect for whipping them!

Earlier, Lu had wanted to test his newly fused breakthrough combat power, so he hadn't used the rod or activated the God-Demon Hunter title.

But now that his identity was exposed, Lu got serious.

“Hmph!”

Qiang Huo turned into a streak of fire and shifted like a flaming star, blocking in front of the swinging rod.

“Keep running. Get the message back—this is a great achievement. It’ll benefit you for life.”

Qiang Huo said.

His massive hand reached for the North Underworld Fishing Rod.

The hidden immortal-rank god-demon, hearing Qiang Huo’s words, became even more excited—like he’d been injected with chicken blood.

He shifted again, turning into a streak of light and fleeing at full speed.

He no longer cared about the swinging rod.

In his view... with Qiang Huo blocking it, the rod posed no threat.

Qiang Huo thought the same.

But...

When Lu saw Qiang Huo daring to grab the rod bare-handed, he couldn't help but admire the god-demon's courage.

As expected of a great-path rank god-demon—possessing courage that ordinary immortal-ranks could never match!

Qiang Huo's body was incredibly strong. As a great-path rank god-demon and prized disciple of the Elemental God, he had been tempered by countless chaos treasures.

He was a famous prodigy in the Elemental Realm.

So he was fearless. A god-demon's body was the ultimate treasure.

What was so hard about catching a fishing rod bare-handed?!

The rod looked plain and unremarkable as it whipped through the void, distorting space slightly.

But when Qiang Huo's palm was about to grab it—

An inexplicable sense of danger surged in his heart.

The scales on his arm contracted instinctively, as though sensing extreme cold.

Danger!

Qiang Huo stared at the rod. A deathly threat instantly enveloped him, giving him the illusion of severed limbs and freezing chill.

He couldn't take it head-on!

This rod... had a problem!

So Qiang Huo instinctively withdrew his hand and stopped blocking the rod.

But the moment he pulled back, Qiang Huo's pupils shrank. He realized something bad.

The North Underworld Fishing Rod arced through the air and struck the now-relaxed immortal-rank god-demon who had fled into the void.

A blood-curdling scream exploded through the ancient starry void!

The god-demon was torn in half. Blood flowed like a crimson river snaking through the stars.

Ancient Emperor Hao fell silent.

The Golden Immortals of the Five Phoenix Continent were speechless.

Qiang Huo froze.

His heart felt inexplicably stifled.

Even Lu was slightly stunned. “Thanks.”

Originally, Lu’s North Underworld Fishing Rod would have had some trouble killing this immortal-rank god-demon—after all, he could run.

But because Qiang Huo stepped in and then stepped back, the immortal-rank god-demon forgot to flee and was tragically whipped to death.

“You and Hao are both good people.”

Lu smiled.

Ancient Emperor Hao: “...”

Qiang Huo felt his suppressed rage finally erupt uncontrollably.

He stared at the North Underworld Fishing Rod. A familiar aura emanated from it—the blood of elemental god-demons!

“Gold elemental god-demon aura... it really is you!”

So Lu Ping’an had used this rod to fish elemental god-demons out of spatial turbulence?

Fishing god-demons?

Though elemental god-demons were merely livestock they raised to enhance their elemental origin power,

they were still god-demons.

Being fished by a human like this was an utter humiliation!

The blood-curdling screams continued.

The immortal-rank god-demon was crying tears of blood.

He had been hiding far away perfectly fine—yet now suffered this catastrophe—all because of Qiang Huo.

Qiang Huo said nothing.

The immortal-rank god-demon let out a tragic laugh.

Puff!

The rod yanked. The god-demon was torn apart. Flesh exploded in the starry void.

His divine soul and essence were shattered.

The fall of an immortal-rank god-demon added a bloody aura to the battle.

Qiang Huo also sensed Lu's extraordinariness.

That suppressive power against god-demons was incredibly unique!

"Who exactly are you..."

"Or rather—who stands behind you? Why do you have such suppressive power against god-demons?"

Qiang Huo stared at Lu.

The rod posed a threat to god-demons, and the oppressive aura Lu now released made Qiang Huo's heart sink. His momentum weakened slightly in front of Lu.

This was utterly inconceivable!

Lu smiled. He swung the North Underworld Fishing Rod again.

It instantly sealed the space around Qiang Huo.

Qiang Huo roared in fury. Fire origin power erupted. Gold Origin mysteries surged.

The two forces caused his aura to climb higher and higher.

He blasted out a punch. The collision with the North Underworld Fishing Rod produced a heaven-shaking explosion!

Boom!

Terrifying shockwaves tore open one spatial rift after another in the void.

But this clash made Qiang Huo's heart skip a beat!

A burning, tearing pain came from his fist. Shock filled his eyes.

His body... had been torn!

Drop after drop of blood dripped from his arm. His blood was extremely hot—as though a single drop could evaporate an entire ocean.

Lu gripped the rod and narrowed his eyes.

His current cultivation realm hadn't increased. Though his combat power had reached Great Luo Immortal level, his cultivation base was still insufficient.

The suppression from the God-Demon Hunter title couldn't fully manifest against a great-path rank god-demon like Qiang Huo.

But the North Underworld Fishing Rod still suppressed him.

This made Lu feel much more at ease.

Otherwise, it would be hard to deal with Qiang Huo—he'd have to rely on Ancient Emperor Hao for a gang-up...

And gang-ups... Lu really wasn't used to them.

Whoosh!

Lu's body streaked through the void. He swung the North Underworld Fishing Rod like a whip—dense, layered strikes crashing down like raging ocean waves, carrying terrifying impact.

Qiang Huo was furious, yet helpless.

His body was covered in dense whip marks.

Fortunately, it was him. An ordinary immortal-rank wouldn't have survived even one lash.

No wonder he could trick and kill twenty-two immortal-rank god-demons!

Qiang Huo drew a deep breath. He felt he couldn't continue this fight. A sense of powerlessness surged in his heart.

It wasn't that he couldn't win—in pure combat power, Lu was inferior.

But Lu's strange suppressive power and the North Underworld Fishing Rod's threat to god-demon bodies left him helpless.

Of course, more than that, he feared the potential of human prodigies. This was the first time he truly experienced it.

No wonder the Elemental Gods feared humans so much and constantly suppressed them.

Humans might lack the innate talent of god-demons, but their growth potential was terrifying!

Lu could use Gold Origin mysteries and fire origin power. Though his fire origin power was slightly weaker than Qiang Huo's,

everything Qiang Huo could do, Lu could do too. He had no killing move that could finish Lu.

So he had to leave.

If he left, he was confident he could escape.

He needed to retreat, regroup with Di Jin and the other four great-path rank god-demons, and fight together.

With five of them, they could easily suppress Lu Ping'an!

“He’s trying to escape!”

Ancient Emperor Hao noticed Qiang Huo’s movement and narrowed his eyes.

He hadn’t expected Lu to force a great-path rank god-demon to flee.

Lu Ping’an’s growth speed had exceeded his imagination.

He felt dazed. Back then, a half-step great-path rank god-demon had required the full might of the Nine Heavens.

Countless Extreme Emperors died before they finally killed that terrifying being.

The hope of the Nine Heavens advancing to immortal-martial had been extinguished because of it.

This time, with a great-path rank god-demon appearing, Ancient Emperor Hao had thought the Nine Heavens was doomed.

Even the Five Phoenix Continent would follow the same fate.

Yet Lu Ping'an had created another miracle.

This man... hid too deeply.

Seeing Qiang Huo try to flee, Lu wasn't surprised. If you can't win, you run—that's normal.

Just like how he had fled from the comprehension ground when he couldn't win.

Boom!

Qiang Huo's expression was cold.

His hands wove. Fire origin power poured out endlessly.

Since Gold Origin mysteries were useless against Lu, he could only rely on fire origin power to stall briefly.

Fire dragons coiled and intertwined, forming a terrifying net of flames that covered the starry sky—as though turning the entire area into a sea of fire!

Lu narrowed his eyes.

He activated the Indestructible Fire Body. Facing the sea of flames, he advanced instead of retreating.

He plunged straight in.

Boom!

Lu was instantly swallowed by the sea of fire.

Qiang Huo's face lit up with joy.

He stomped down. His body turned into a streak of crimson light and fled through the starry void—crossing millions of miles in an instant.

When he returned, it would be Lu Ping'an's death!

Perhaps he'd even report this back—his master, the Fire Elemental God, might personally take action!

By then, the humiliation he suffered today would be repaid a thousandfold—no, ten thousandfold—to Lu Ping'an!

The sea of fire was absorbed as though by a terrifying vortex.

Lu's Indestructible Fire Body devoured the fire origin power clean.

But Lu still frowned.

"This much fire origin power isn't enough to push the Indestructible Fire Body to perfection."

It seemed he had to keep Qiang Huo here.

As a great-path rank god-demon, his fire origin power should be no weaker than a fire elemental god-demon's.

With that thought, Lu looked toward Qiang Huo, who had already fled far away.

His mind stirred.

He raised his hand and slowly pressed forward.

Boom!

The Spirit Pressure Chessboard instantly spread out, covering a small region of the starry void in an instant.

Qiang Huo's body froze. He found himself trapped within the chessboard domain.

"Domain?"

Qiang Huo's pupils shrank.

"Break it!"

The next moment, fire origin power surged wildly. It transformed into a roaring fire dragon that slammed into the chessboard domain, trying to tear open a gap.

Lu placed several more pieces in succession.

Seven chess pieces fell like the Seven Stars formation.

Boom boom boom!

Seven ten-billion-fold Spirit Pressure beams smashed down relentlessly.

They struck Qiang Huo one after another. His aura faltered. His fire origin power became chaotic.

The seven Spirit Pressure beams caused Qiang Huo's movements and form to stiffen.

Though only for a single breath.

For Lu, who now possessed Great Luo Immortal-level combat power,

a single breath was enough time to do many things.

He took out the Five Phoenix Bow slung over his back.

Boom!

The Five Phoenix Bow struck the starry void with a muffled sound.

The next moment, the Five Phoenix Bow began to grow massive!

Lu's aura surged within him.

Gold Origin mysteries, fire origin power, innate purple qi, divine soul, compressed spiritual energy...

Five types of power poured into it frantically.

When he infused the Gold Origin mysteries,

the stored little Beast Ancestor statue trembled slightly. A stream of extremely pure mystery energy surged into the Five Phoenix Bow.

This surprised Lu slightly.

The five phoenix eyes at the front of the Five Phoenix Bow lit up.

From their mouths, five energies shot out, converging into a dazzling arrow dominated by golden light...

The instant the arrow took shape, everyone felt an icy killing intent!

It was the scent of destruction and death!

Ancient Emperor Hao felt a chill.

The Golden Immortals of the Five Phoenix Continent trembled with awe as they gazed at Lu.

“That’s the Five Phoenix Bow—the supreme killing weapon of the Five Phoenix!”

The void collapsed. The pure Gold Origin mysteries from the adorable little statue instantly dominated.

The five energies intertwined and compressed terrifying explosive power!

Among the five energies, Gold Origin mysteries were strongest, followed by innate purple qi, then fire origin power, Lu’s divine soul power, and finally spiritual energy.

Five violent forces stacked together. Within the arrow, a terrifying collision occurred—like an energy fusion.

Boom!

When the seventh Spirit Pressure beam smashed into Qiang Huo—

Qiang Huo roared in fury.

But soon, his body felt an icy chill.

It was the aura of death.

As though some terrifying existence had locked onto him!

This feeling was like being targeted by a peak great-path rank god-demon!

Who?!

He felt cold all over. He turned back.

He saw Lu drawing the massive bow. A five-colored arrow dominated by golden light was aimed at him.

An overwhelming sense of crisis came from that arrow...

If this arrow hit him.

He would die!

“A human... when did such a monster appear?!”

Qiang Huo roared inwardly.

Without hesitation, he tried to tear open the chessboard domain and escape.

But the Spirit Pressure beams made his body stiffen. It would take time to recover.

Qiang Huo was furious, shocked, enraged—his mentality shattered.

Why was there such a disgusting combat technique as Spirit Pressure beams?!

Whoosh!

Lu finally released the Five Phoenix Bow.

The next moment, the arrow spun at high speed and shot forward.

As it rotated, space twisted and tore. Spatial turbulence formed terrifying storms.

Around the arrow, endless blackness appeared—like a distorting black hole!

Originally, earth-shaking explosions rang out.

But in this moment, the entire starry void fell deathly silent—as though even sound was swallowed by the arrow's distortion!

The arrow seemed to fly slowly.

Yet it approached Qiang Huo bit by bit.

In this moment, a great-path rank god-demon's pupils shrank to the extreme in terror.

"No!"

"Don't come closer!"

This arrow filled Qiang Huo with dread!

Horror!

And... despair!

As a prized disciple of the Elemental God, his future was bright. He didn't want to die here like this.

But this arrow... he couldn't block it!

In the instant he broke free from the Spirit Pressure beams' restraint—

Qiang Huo realized he couldn't escape.

Because the arrow had already closed in!

Gold Origin mysteries surged. Fire origin power boiled. He even burned his bloodline power!

He tried to form the strongest shield to block this arrow!

The arrow arrived.

It drifted lightly, silently. The void shattered and twisted inch by inch. Countless black spatial currents surged.

A scene of utter devastation—grotesque and terrifying.

Boom!

Finally, sound returned—a heaven-shaking explosion.

A massive five-colored sphere spun like a top, expanding endlessly...

Ten thousand li. A hundred thousand li. A million li... ten million li, a hundred million li!

Everyone stared blankly at the scene, dumbfounded.

They knew the power of the Five Phoenix Bow.

After all, Lu had used it many times.

But this time, the power was shocking.

Even Lu himself was startled.

This power... far exceeded his expectations...

Why?

Lu sensed it—the pure Gold Origin mysteries from the adorable little statue?

The design concept of the Five Phoenix Bow was inspired by nuclear bombs from his previous life: compressing violent forces to the extreme, triggering explosive fusion and destruction through energy interactions.

This unexpected creation had now become Lu's most powerful killing move.

"This little statue... really is adorable."

Lu sighed.

He suddenly thought—there seemed to be five such Beast Ancestor statues...

If he could gather all five, suppressing five types of pure mystery energy within the Five Phoenix Bow... how terrifying would the power be?!

Lu's breathing quickened slightly.

"Perhaps... when the power of five adorable little statues combines, that one arrow could slaughter even quasi-saints!"

No...

Lu felt he could be bolder—remove the “perhaps.”

Rumble rumble!

The explosion continued for an unknown duration.

A colossal spherical void annihilated everything, like a massive black hole spinning.

Destruction, death, annihilation auras swept within.

Ancient Emperor Hao stared at the center of the terrifying explosion...

The blinding light made his eyes water.

Was Qiang Huo dead?

With an arrow like that, he must be dead without a corpse, right?

...

In the ancient starry void.

Tonggu and the human prodigy Chai Feng hovered.

Chai Feng's pupils shrank. He stared in disbelief at the distant terrifying explosion...

The aura of annihilation and destruction made his skin crawl.

Even Tonggu was slightly surprised.

"Incredible! To unleash killing power of this level! Humanity actually has such an outstanding cultivator!"

Tonggu was delighted.

"Let's go over. Next... it's my turn to clean up."

"After all, the one who died was a prized disciple of the Elemental God."

Tonggu shook his head, his face practically blooming with a smile.

An Elemental God had lost a prized disciple—he'd be furious. Tonggu was very satisfied. His mood was excellent.

Chai Feng could even feel Tonggu bouncing slightly as he flew—like an excited little girl.

...

When the annihilating energy finally dimmed.

Lu's gaze shifted to the center of the explosion.

Hm?

He raised an eyebrow.

He saw a cluster of vermilion flames.

That was extremely pure fire origin power!

Like flames burning in the starry void.

Qiang Huo... was indeed dead!

Under that arrow, not even bones remained—only this cluster of pure fire origin power!

At this moment, Lu's heart finally relaxed.

Not just him—Ancient Emperor Hao and the Golden Immortals of the Five Phoenix Continent who had been watching also breathed sighs of relief.

Qiang Huo—a great-path rank god-demon—was the greatest crisis the Five Phoenix Continent had faced so far.

Now that the crisis was over, how could they not feel relieved?

But suddenly, Lu's expression changed slightly.

Because...

A powerful fluctuation suddenly surged from that pure fire origin power!

Buzz buzz buzz...

An oppressive aura, as though it could dim the world, erupted with divine soul pressure.

It felt exactly like when Lu had once unleashed quasi-saint level sound!

“The will of the Elemental God?!”

Lu’s pupils shrank.

He hadn’t expected that Qiang Huo’s fire origin power would contain the will of the Elemental God?

It seemed Qiang Huo was indeed highly valued by the Elemental God—a true prized disciple.

The corner of Lu’s mouth twitched. This time... things were going to get troublesome!

In the comprehension ground, Lu had personally felt the power of the Elemental Gods!

“Who dares kill my beloved disciple?!!!”

Boom!

Terrifying aura, horrifying pressure surged from the pure flames!

A wave of mental energy swept out like a vortex storm, scanning the surroundings—locking onto and marking Lu, Ancient Emperor Hao, and the entire Five Phoenix Continent!

But...

Just as the wave was about to spread—

A white figure suddenly appeared, landing beside the flames.

A powerful aura erupted, forcibly shoving the Elemental God’s will and mental wave back into the pulsing flames.

Then the white figure grabbed the flames.

His face glowed with excitement.

“Hey~ Can you hear me? Old Fire, it’s me, Tonggu. Yes, I killed your disciple.”

“He passed away peacefully. Don’t worry, don’t grieve—take care.”

Chapter 599: This Girl’s Unexpected Aura

Tonggu’s sudden appearance caught the flame left from Qiang Huo’s annihilation in his grasp.

The terrifying pressure radiating from the flame was instantly crushed by overwhelming force.

The Five Phoenix Continent and everyone in it felt the oppressive weight vanish in an instant.

Lu raised an eyebrow, looking curiously at the newcomer.

This aura... he recognized it.

Wasn’t this the human powerhouse he’d seen in the comprehension ground?

The atmosphere grew slightly awkward.

Because Tonggu hadn't bothered to lower his voice.

So Lu, Ancient Emperor Hao, and all the Golden Immortals watching from the Five Phoenix Continent heard every word clearly.

Everyone was speechless.

This powerhouse's words... sounded oddly playful.

What was with that barely contained glee?

The flame remained silent for a long time, as though it had also heard Tonggu's message.

After extreme suppression and silence came explosion.

"Tonggu?"

“You’re courting death?!”

An icy voice rang from the other end of the flame.

It carried boundless rage.

Though there was a hint of doubt at first, it vanished quickly.

Because Tonggu did indeed have the strength to kill Qiang Huo.

Qiang Huo had only recently entered great-path rank, but as the prized disciple of the Fire Elemental God, he wielded fire origin power and had comprehended Gold Origin mysteries.

Even against a perfected human Heavenly Emperor, Qiang Huo shouldn’t have died.

Even if he couldn’t win, escape should have been possible.

Yet he died.

And his will flame hadn't even had time to self-destruct!

There was only one possibility: the one who killed Qiang Huo far surpassed him—only a quasi-saint level human could do this!

Most human quasi-saints were being watched by the Elemental Realm's god-demons and rarely dared leave their ancestral immortal-martial lands.

The only quasi-saint wandering the ancient starry void recently... was Tonggu!

So Qiang Huo's death was indeed very likely Tonggu's doing.

"Hey, hey? Old Fire, are you still listening?"

Tonggu held the flame and called out.

Far away, Chai Feng looked helpless.

He'd thought Tonggu meant some kind of grand cleanup when he said he'd handle the aftermath.

He never expected... this.

Chatting like old neighbors.

But the words... how did they sound so infuriating?

“Get lost!”

From the other end of the flame, the Fire Elemental God’s rage nearly exploded.

“Tonggu... are you declaring war on my Elemental Realm?!”

The Fire Elemental God’s killing intent was palpable.

Why hadn’t he acted in the comprehension ground—joined forces with the other four Elemental Gods to kill this damned Tonggu?

“War? Don’t joke. Killing one disciple of yours warrants this much fuss? Also, Old Fire, let me criticize you a bit. Your prized disciple—how come you didn’t give him any life-saving treasures? Not even a single innate spiritual treasure for protection? Tsk. You call him your most beloved disciple, yet deep down you must not care much, huh...”

“Next time, remember to give your disciples life-saving treasures—or at least supreme treasures. Otherwise, if they offend someone, they won’t even be able to run.”

“Lucky you met me, Tonggu—I’m good-tempered, one strike and done. If you met someone with a twisted hobby, the torture would’ve been miserable.”

“Alright, enough talk. I’ve got things to do. Let’s chat next time...”

“Same as always: don’t worry, don’t grieve—take care.”

Tonggu rattled off a string of words at the flame.

Even from countless light-years away, Lu could feel the Fire Elemental God’s rage about to erupt from the other end.

After finishing, Tonggu pursed his lips, squinted his eyes, and—before the flame could unleash another surge of powerful will—pinched it out with two fingers, even rubbing it slightly as though snuffing out the will within.

The dancing fire origin power lost all will fluctuation.

So... so cheap.

Lu drew a deep breath, looking at Tonggu's beaming, red-faced grin.

This old daoist's skill at messing with people's heads... was no weaker than his own, Lu Ping'an!

The thickness of this old daoist's face probably couldn't be pierced even by an arrow from the Five Phoenix Bow!

"I've met my match."

Lu felt a trace of gravity.

Qiang Huo's annihilation had created a massive energy field with a diameter of tens of millions of li centered on his place of death. Terrifying energy ripples still clashed and tore through it. In the short term, this energy wouldn't dissipate—it might linger for ten thousand, even a hundred thousand years.

These tearing energies were a mix of Gold Origin mysteries, fire origin power, and more. They would take a very long time to naturally fade.

The old daoist stood calmly within the energy field, completely unaffected.

Like a spring breeze, as though detached from the energy itself.

Soon, he floated out of the field and drifted toward Lu with Chai Feng, smiling all the way.

His gaze fell on Ancient Emperor Hao.

He paused slightly. The smile on his face faded a bit, replaced by a sigh.

In his eyes, the blood aura coiling around Ancient Emperor Hao and the terrifying resentment made the experienced old daoist instantly understand what had happened.

Clearly, he had sacrificed all life in an entire world to qualify for breaking through to Heavenly Emperor.

He'd seen this more than once.

When forced into desperation by gods and demons, what choice was there?

"I arrived too late."

Tonggu sighed.

Behind him, Chai Feng also fell silent.

For ordinary people, breaking through to Heavenly Emperor without resources or guidance was nearly impossible.

Ancient Emperor Hao looked calmly at Tonggu.

But there was caution in his eyes.

He sensed a familiar aura from Tonggu—similar to Lu Ping'an. This old daoist... also loved messing with people's heads.

So he had to be wary.

Tonggu didn't linger on Ancient Emperor Hao. He turned to Lu.

The moment he did, his face bloomed into a wide smile again.

“Haha, little friend—we meet again!”

The void rippled. White light flashed.

The old daoist appeared beside Lu as though teleporting. After tossing the fire origin flame to Lu—who accepted it without hesitation—he grabbed Lu’s hand and patted it enthusiastically.

He looked like long-lost brothers reuniting.

Lu was slightly dumbfounded.

Are we that close?

Lu discreetly pulled his hand back, maintaining his aloof demeanor.

The perfected Indestructible Golden Body radiated. Gold Origin mysteries were displayed to the extreme.

He didn’t rule out the possibility that this old daoist could be an enemy. After all, Lu had taken the adorable little Beast Ancestor statue—a supreme treasure. This old daoist might also be tempted?

“I am Tonggu, from the human ancestral land—Primordial Immortal Domain.”

Tonggu smiled warmly.

He kept sizing up Lu, growing more shocked the longer he looked.

Only at the peak of Extreme Emperor—yet capable of crossing ranks to kill a great-path rank god-demon. And this god-demon was one of the Elemental Gods’ prized disciples—a terrifyingly talented one even among god-demons.

It seemed he’d stumbled upon an absolute prodigy this time!

But thinking of Lu’s identity and performance in the comprehension ground, Tonggu wasn’t surprised.

After all, someone who could send Lu into the comprehension ground unnoticed must be a disciple of a starry saint.

A saint’s disciple crossing ranks in battle... was that surprising?

When he was young, hadn’t he done the same?

Nothing worth being shocked about.

The more he looked at Lu, the more satisfied Tonggu became—like seeing his younger self.

“Primordial Immortal Domain, the human ancestral land?”

Lu was puzzled.

“Is your master here, little friend? Send my regards—tell the senior to visit Primordial Immortal Domain when he has time~”

Tonggu smiled.

Lu was dumbfounded. His master?

Where did he have a master?

But Lu wasn't stupid. After a moment's thought, he understood why Tonggu was acting this way.

Clearly, the methods Lu displayed while taking the statue in the comprehension ground had led this Tonggu to mistakenly believe he had a powerful master.

Fine then—let the misunderstanding continue.

Lu's mind began to turn.

“No problem, no problem. My master often says Primordial Immortal Domain is full of powerhouses—he's admired it for a long time. Unfortunately, he's currently traveling the starry void. If there's a chance in the future, I'll definitely bring him to visit.”

Lu smiled and patted Tonggu's hand in return.

The two seemed to hit it off instantly, on the verge of becoming sworn brothers.

Ancient Emperor Hao's pupils shrank. He felt a wave of darkness.

This old daoist was so powerful—and allied with Lu Ping'an. If Lu wanted to deal with him now, escape would be nearly impossible.

On the other side, Chai Feng's eyes also narrowed.

Because Lu's performance and strength shocked him.

"Little brother, you killed a disciple of the Fire Elemental God. That old thing won't let it go. Though I crushed his will flame, the coordinates have already been sent back. With the Fire Elemental God's strength, he'll soon track them down."

Tonggu said.

Lu narrowed his eyes, feeling a jolt in his heart.

The Elemental God would come hunting?

"Does big brother have any solutions?" Lu smiled and asked. Though his heart was racing, his face showed nothing.

"If your master were here, it wouldn't be a problem. But since you said he's traveling the starry void, I actually have a method."

"Shift this entire explosive region into spatial turbulence using spatial mysteries. With the turbulence's flow, it'll drift chaotically to some corner of the starry void. The Fire Elemental God won't be able to track it."

Tonggu said.

Lu's eyes lit up. His expression remained unchanged, but he hesitated slightly: "That would be too much trouble for big brother. How about waiting for my master to return?"

"No trouble, no trouble..."

Tonggu waved his hand.

"A small matter."

The next moment, Tonggu flickered and appeared before the clashing energy field.

He raised his hand and formed a seal.

Vast purple qi surged from his body.

Purple qi roiled. Spatial mysteries wove into a massive silver-gray cutting domain that enveloped the energy field.

With a slice, he tore open the void and tossed the entire region into spatial turbulence, letting it drift away and gradually disappear.

Tonggu wiped his brow, completed the task, and floated back toward Lu with a beaming face.

Lu drew a deep breath. Tonggu's technique truly astonished him.

Spatial slicing...

The old daoist's mastery of spatial mysteries far surpassed Lu's.

After all, he was a quasi-saint.

Lu sighed in admiration.

But just as he was sighing—

He suddenly froze.

Because a system prompt had appeared before him.

“Encountered a human quasi-saint powerhouse. Challenge mission activated.”

“Challenge Mission: Establish a comprehension ground using the adorable little Beast Ancestor statue and arrange a competition between prodigies from the Primordial Immortal Domain and the Five Phoenix Continent. Upon victory, randomly obtain one of Tonggu’s divine abilities.”

Challenge mission?

Oh?

A wool-pulling mission?

Lu’s eyes instantly lit up. He hadn’t expected the system to issue such a task.

Establishing a comprehension ground with the little Beast Ancestor statue to study Gold Origin mysteries...

Lu had already planned to do this.

Now, with the mission, he felt even more excited.

Most importantly, the reward was one of Tonggu's divine abilities...

The technique Tonggu had just used to shift the energy field into spatial turbulence was truly dazzling.

So Lu became interested.

"Big brother, since we've met by chance, why not come sit in my Five Phoenix Continent?"

"Though the Five Phoenix is not as grand as Primordial Immortal Domain, it has just achieved immortal-martial status. If big brother could offer guidance, it would be greatly appreciated."

Lu suddenly became enthusiastic.

Tonggu froze. He instinctively sensed scheming.

But Lu's overflowing warmth made him dismiss the feeling.

What a good young man.

What an outstanding junior.

Moreover, he was very interested in this newly ascended immortal-martial world of the Five Phoenix.

To achieve immortal-martial status under the suppression of the Elemental Realm in the ancient starry void... this world was extraordinary.

Lu dispersed the Indestructible Golden Body. Silver blades stacked. White robes fluttered as he sat back in the Thousand-Blade Chair.

He nodded slightly toward Tonggu and drifted toward the Five Phoenix Continent.

Tonggu paused, narrowing his eyes.

“A secret art? No wonder he can cross ranks in battle... but this secret art has quite a backlash. He needs to suppress it usually.”

Then he dismissed the thought.

Which secret art didn't have backlash? Some were far worse.

With Chai Feng in tow, he followed Lu.

Ancient Emperor Hao didn't move. Lu ignored him.

Though Ancient Emperor Hao had sacrificed an entire world for the Nine Heavens' survival and bore immense karma,

Lu's relationship with him was bad—and it stayed bad.

He, Lu Ping'an, wasn't that forgiving.

Not killing Ancient Emperor Hao right now was already merciful.

Tonggu seemed to sense the tension between Lu and Ancient Emperor Hao. He raised an eyebrow but didn't dwell on it.

Ancient Emperor Hao was pitiable. Unless forced into desperation, who would bear such monstrous karma?

In short, sacrificing an entire world's life to reach Heavenly Emperor realm... basically severed his path to stary saint.

When the time came, he'd take Ancient Emperor Hao back to Primordial Immortal Domain...

Lu led Tonggu through the Nine Heavens toward the Five Phoenix Continent.

The dead silence of the Nine Heavens weighed heavily on Tonggu and Chai Feng. The fate of the Nine Heavens was the fate of most human worlds.

Oppressed by the god-demons of the ancient starry void.

Ancient Emperor Hao didn't enter the Five Phoenix.

He walked alone through the Nine Heavens.

Lost. Melancholy...

Finally, he landed on a desolate star. Beside him, a set of withered bones lay neatly arranged. Ancient Emperor Hao gently stroked them and sighed.

...

Boom!

Space exploded. Blazing flames distorted the void.

A crimson figure appeared in the endless spatial turbulence—like twisted light and heat.

All spatial turbulence seemed to freeze the moment this figure arrived.

It was a vermilion sphere of light—dazzling heat that obscured the figure within.

In the crimson blaze like a blazing sun, a pair of cold, ruthless eyes appeared.

The Fire Elemental God gazed at the clashing energy field before him.

Qiang Huo's aura had vanished within it, along with the ashes of the flame will that Tonggu had crushed.

This was precisely the field Tonggu had shifted into spatial turbulence—now drifting aimlessly.

“Tonggu...”

Killing intent surged in the Fire Elemental God’s eyes.

Soon, a dazzling golden figure appeared beside him.

With a casual wave, Gold Origin mysteries gathered...

“Such pure Gold Origin mystery power...”

“This is the power of the Beast Ancestor statue! No wonder Qiang Huo didn’t even have time to activate your flame will before dying...”

The Gold Elemental God said.

“So the one who killed Qiang Huo... wasn’t Tonggu?”

“Definitely not. Forget the pure Gold Origin mysteries—even if it was Tonggu, would he waste time chatting with you? He’d kill and run...”

The Gold Elemental God's words calmed the Fire Elemental God.

"So... the Gold Origin Beast Ancestor statue really was taken by a human?"

The Fire Elemental God said gravely.

"We originally held four Beast Ancestor statues. Now... one has been taken by humans. The last one remains with that terrifying chaos creature. With human talent, they'll soon use the Beast Ancestor statue to cultivate many Heavenly Emperor-level cultivators who comprehend mysteries!"

"At that point, the situation might turn against us."

"Enough. We'll discuss this after returning. For now, guard the remaining Beast Ancestor statues tightly... I have a feeling that damned thief is still eyeing the others!"

"As for Qiang Huo's death... humanity will pay in blood one day!"

...

"Young Master Lu!"

Beyond the Void Abyss.

When Lu returned chatting and laughing with Tonggu, the many Golden Immortals hovering in the Five Phoenix starry void bowed respectfully.

“This newly ascended immortal-martial world has quite a few emperor-realm cultivators...” Tonggu glanced around, slightly surprised.

Chai Feng behind him paid little attention.

Emperor-realm meant little to him. He was Heavenly Emperor level. In the Five Phoenix Continent, only Lu was worth his notice.

After all, Lu had killed Qiang Huo with a single arrow. Even he wasn't sure he could match that.

Lu smiled and nodded slightly.

Only now did Tonggu and Chai Feng begin to examine the entire Five Phoenix world.

Their divine souls spread out imperceptibly.

With Tonggu's vision, the moment his divine soul expanded, he sensed the Five Phoenix's extraordinariness.

His eyes sharpened.

"A starry world? Similar to the ancient starry void?"

"Incredible... an immortal-martial world formed through a starry structure?"

Tonggu's eyes gleamed.

Now he was even more certain—Lu must have a starry saint behind him!

Even Primordial Immortal Domain was formed as a continental immortal-martial world. A human quasi-saint had once tried to achieve immortal-martial through a starry structure, but the origin space collapsed, shattering a first-layer high-martial world and killing countless lives.

Yet now, he was witnessing an immortal-martial world formed through a starry structure!

Whoosh whoosh whoosh!

Suddenly, breaking sounds rang out.

Zhu Long, eyes closed, long lashes trembling slightly,

appeared before Lu like an autumn leaf.

Lu smiled and patted Zhu Long's head. Her aura had reached the peak of sixth-turn Golden Immortal—ready to break through to ninth-turn Golden Immortal, Extreme Emperor level, at any moment.

Lu's mind stirred. Since he'd encountered a quasi-saint, he might as well pull as much wool as possible.

“Zhu Long, this is a supreme powerhouse of the human race from the ancestral land, Primordial Immortal Domain—quasi-saint Tonggu.”

“If you have any cultivation questions, feel free to ask Senior Tonggu. He is a pillar of the human race—profoundly knowledgeable. He can definitely help you.”

Lu said.

“You too—ask away if you have cultivation questions.”

Lu's gaze shifted to Lu Jiulian, Dantai Xuan, and the others.

"Yes, Father!"

Zhu Long pursed her lips, eyes closed, and nodded firmly.

As her father's little cotton-padded jacket, Zhu Long understood the meaning behind Lu's words.

In other words... pull wool. Pull as much as possible!

Lu Jiulian and the others nodded. They respectfully glanced at Tonggu.

Lu smiled, very satisfied.

Tonggu laughed dumbly. Of course he understood Lu's intention.

But he didn't mind.

They were all humans. Offering guidance was only natural.

Tonggu smiled warmly, his face full of kindness. He appreciated talented human juniors.

But in this newborn immortal-martial world of the Five Phoenix, aside from Lu—who was clearly a starry saint's disciple—the others probably had average talent.

However...

When Tonggu's gaze fell on Zhu Long—

His warm, kindly smile froze.

His pupils shrank sharply.

He pursed his lips.

This girl's aura... so unexpected...

My heavens!

Chapter 600: Who Is Her Mother?

Tonggu stared at Zhu Long.

His eyes widened.

At first, he hadn't paid much attention when Lu introduced Zhu Long. Hearing her call Lu "Father," he assumed Lu wanted him to guide his daughter.

To build rapport with Lu—and perhaps pull the starry saint behind him to Primordial Immortal Domain—he hadn't refused. He figured it was a chance to do a favor.

But one look—and he was stunned.

The girl stood there, her aura not particularly strong—half-step Extreme Emperor level—but...

Tonggu felt an inexplicable chill. Vaguely, he sensed something familiar in her aura, as though he'd encountered it somewhere before.

That deep, stirring familiarity...

Tonggu narrowed his eyes.

His gaze shifted to Lu. He drew a deep breath, his expression turning serious.

“Who is her mother?”

After a long pause, those words finally escaped his lips.

The atmosphere grew awkward.

Lu was dumbfounded.

Zhu Long froze too.

This old daoist... so direct?

How would Lu know who Zhu Long's mother was...

The system... counts... right?

“Ahem...”

Realizing his question might have been a bit indelicate, Tonggu smiled and shook his head with a sigh.

“I merely sensed a familiar aura from this Zhu Long—one that originates deep in the ancient starry void. I once felt something similar...”

Tonggu said.

Then he looked deeply at Zhu Long.

That aura wasn't human. It seemed faintly connected to one of the terrifying chaos creatures in the starry void...

“Little brother, this girl... has limitless potential.”

“If not for your master's arrangement, I'd have wanted to take her back to the human ancestral land...”

With the aura Zhu Long carried, if guided personally by a saint,

she might one day become another quasi-saint for humanity!

Tonggu sighed in admiration.

Then he raised his hand, smiled, and a faint golden light shimmered on his fingertip.

He tapped it gently on Zhu Long's brow.

If his guess was correct, forming a good connection was only right.

Hum...

An invisible profound energy spread out. Zhu Long's hair fluttered. The bottleneck that had held her back shattered like broken glass, losing all restraint.

In an instant, she completed her comprehension and broke through to ninth-turn Golden Immortal.

In truth, Zhu Long's fortune accumulation had long been sufficient. What she lacked... was merely an opportunity, a breakthrough catalyst.

Seeing Tonggu help Zhu Long break through with a single tap, Dantai Xuan, the Overlord, and the others' eyes lit up.

No one lingered in the void. They headed toward the Five Phoenix Continent.

Tonggu seemed familiar with Zhu Long's aura.

Lu narrowed his eyes. When he created the Heavenly Dragon Seed through the system, Zhu Long was the most special. Even when he later tried to create another like her, he couldn't.

Even with the system, it was a one-time thing. Back then, Lu knew Zhu Long was unique.

Now it seemed... her origins were extraordinary.

But Lu remained calm—very Buddhist in mindset.

No matter how extraordinary her origins, she was still his precious little cotton-padded jacket.

The Five Phoenix Continent had grown even vaster. It was formed mainly of continental plates, surrounded by life-bearing stars. Powerful beings lived on those stars, along with many races from the Nine Heavens.

Though Tonggu and Chai Feng were experienced, this was their first time seeing an immortal-martial world structured this way.

Chai Feng was surprised, but Tonggu was even more astonished.

The construction of the Five Phoenix immortal-martial system gave him inspiration.

He looked at the entire Five Phoenix starry void like he'd found treasure, praising it endlessly.

Entering the Five Phoenix Continent, Lu led Tonggu and Chai Feng to Lakeheart Island.

After all, to pull wool, he had to show some enthusiasm.

Chatting and laughing with Tonggu, they entered the White Jade Capital pavilion.

Ning Zhao, Ni Yu, and Yi Yue were slightly surprised. It was the first time their Young Master had been this warm toward an outsider.

But they exchanged glances. The more enthusiastic Young Master was, the more suspicious it became.

This old daoist... had probably been targeted by Young Master.

Lakeheart Island had a relaxed atmosphere. Tonggu and Chai Feng were quite pleased.

Cultivators should have such immortal grace.

“Interesting... did you create this cultivation holy land, little brother?”

As a quasi-saint, Tonggu’s divine soul was incredibly strong. A casual sweep revealed the hidden “Fortune Tower” in the giant whale’s belly.

The Fortune Tower used god-demons as resources, harnessing their power to cultivate Five Phoenix cultivators.

This concept made Tonggu’s pores open wide—refreshing!

“Raising the might of humanity!”

Tonggu clicked his tongue in wonder, eyes shining. The more he looked at the Five Phoenix, the more he liked it.

To use the overlords of the ancient starry void—god-demons—as raw materials... what audacity, what genius design.

In Tonggu's eyes, the Fortune Tower was peak among innate spiritual treasures—nearly on par with innate supreme treasures!

Tonggu's quasi-saint aura was immense.

The Five Phoenix Golden Immortals flew over one after another, gathering around Lakeheart Island. Above the vast sea, Golden Immortals hovered.

Zhu Long had received Tonggu's guidance and instantly reached ninth-turn Golden Immortal.

Naturally, they hoped for guidance too—Young Master Lu had been hinting nonstop.

In the ancient tomb.

Lu Changkong hadn't finished cultivating the Immortal Mandala, but upon learning Lu had invited a major human figure from the ancient starry void, he stopped his seclusion.

He brought Bu Nanxing and left the tomb, heading to Lakeheart Island.

Lu Changkong's appearance surprised Lu slightly. Then his smile grew even brighter.

“This is my father.”

Lu introduced him to Tonggu.

Tonggu’s eyes lit up. To raise a prodigy like Lu, his father must be extraordinary.

“I am Lu Changkong. Greetings, senior.”

Lu Changkong smiled, neither humble nor arrogant.

He extended his hand to shake Tonggu’s.

Bu Nanxing, seeing this, hesitated to speak. After all...

Lu Changkong’s constitution was special. Now researching the Immortal Mandala, his poison body had become even more terrifying.

Tonggu also sensed something wrong. The moment he grasped Lu Changkong’s hand, it began turning green...

A patch of green spread like creeping grass from his fingertips.

“Oh my! What potent poison!”

Tonggu’s eyelids twitched. He pursed his lips.

He was a quasi-saint. Quasi-saint bodies were near energy-form—immortal and indestructible, with foundations of longevity.

Yet he’d been mildly poisoned.

“This special constitution... has something!”

Another talent!

Tonggu was surprised. He stared at Lu Changkong’s body, eyes narrowing.

Lu Changkong withdrew his hand, slightly embarrassed. In the excitement of the moment, he’d forgotten his poison body’s effect.

“Apologies, senior. My body carries deadly poison... I was so delighted to meet you that I forgot.”

Lu Changkong said apologetically.

He wiped his hand on his clothes, a bit sheepish.

Tonggu’s expression remained unchanged. He waved it off. The green on his palm vanished instantly.

Suppressed by his immense power.

“Just a minor poison—nothing serious, hahaha...”

Tonggu said calmly.

But inwardly, he was shocked. To him it was minor, but even a Heavenly Emperor-level powerhouse touching it would suffer agonizing torment.

“As expected of little brother Lu’s father—a tiger father begets no dog son.”

Tonggu laughed.

Then the three chatted more and more enthusiastically, talking freely.

Tonggu sat in Lakeheart Island, discussing the current state of the ancient starry void, the oppression humanity faced from god-demons.

“Humanity is weak—there’s no helping it. God-demons are born from chaos—known as the three thousand god-demons, though that’s just a figure of speech. Their true numbers are terrifying, and they’re stratified.”

“Ordinary innate god-demons are divided into initial-rank, high-rank, immortal-rank... Above immortal-rank are great-path rank god-demons. They comprehend mysteries and possess terrifying divine abilities—very strong. The Qiang Huo you killed with one arrow, little brother Lu, was a prodigy among great-path rank god-demons.”

“Above great-path rank are heaven-god rank god-demons—equivalent to human quasi-saints. The Elemental Gods of the Elemental Realm are among the best of heaven-god rank.”

“The ancient starry void is vast beyond imagination. Legend says it was created by a supreme being. After creating it, that being vanished. Since then, myriad races flourished, but god-demons dominate the starry void.”

“God-demons are born powerful, while humans are born weak. The earliest days were humanity’s hardest. But as we developed and gave birth to saint-level supreme beings, we finally gained some breathing room. Now, humanity can barely resist the tyranny of god-demons.”

Tonggu spoke calmly about the current state of the ancient starry void.

His words were unrestrained, spreading across Lakeheart Island and beyond, letting the Five Phoenix Golden Immortals hear clearly.

Their eyes gleamed.

They hadn’t realized the world beyond the Five Phoenix was so vast.

They’d thought the Nine Heavens was the pinnacle. Now it seemed not.

Of course, they’d already encountered innate god-demons and knew their power.

The Nine Heavens had fallen partly because of god-demons.

But they hadn’t expected the situation between humanity and god-demons to be this severe.

“God-demons suppress humanity’s growth by devouring the origin and Dao source of worlds humans create...”

“Any human world that qualifies to advance to immortal-martial faces powerful suppression...”

Tonggu sighed.

“Originally, Primordial Immortal Domain—the human ancestral land—should send powerhouses to help these starry worlds qualifying for immortal-martial ascension.”

“But the ancient starry void is too vast. Our ancestral land is sealed by god-demons. It’s hard to locate newborn immortal-martial worlds. Many worlds on the verge of ascension send powerhouses into the starry void seeking help, only to be killed by god-demons.”

“That’s what happened to the Nine Heavens. Back then, many Nine Heavens Extreme Emperors left through the passage into the starry void, but the ancient starry void is boundless. Most got lost and were hunted down by god-demons.”

“This time, if not for the commotion little brother Lu caused, I might have missed the Five Phoenix too.”

Tonggu’s words carried a heavy tone.

The human prodigy Chai Feng sat silently nearby.

Lu fell into thought. He now had a clear understanding of the ancient starry void's situation.

It matched his earlier guesses.

In the ancient starry void, god-demons dominated. Humanity was weak and suppressed. Other neutral races mostly followed the god-demons' lead.

So god-demons were truly powerful.

He'd felt it clearly in the comprehension ground.

"But little brother Lu need not worry..."

"Humanity isn't defenseless. With saints in residence, god-demons dare not wage open war against us."

"Besides, with a starry saint behind you, little brother, when I leave, I'll spread the word. The Elemental Gods won't dare touch you."

Tonggu smiled.

“Offending a saint over a newborn immortal-martial world... not worth it.”

Lu’s mouth twitched.

If only he really had a saint backing him.

Unfortunately, he was just bluffing.

But he said nothing. Silently, he resolved to strengthen the Five Phoenix quickly.

And accelerate the wool-pulling.

Lu’s mind stirred.

He recalled the quasi-saint voice from before—it had accelerated the Five Phoenix’s immortal-martial fusion. Now, with a living quasi-saint here,

Lu might stir up some ideas.

“Sigh, Senior Tonggu may not know—my master wanders the starry void and rarely involves himself with the Five Phoenix. Otherwise, with master here, the Five Phoenix would have become immortal-martial long ago.”

“Now, I’ve raised the Five Phoenix single-handedly.”

Lu spoke with a touch of melancholy.

Tonggu immediately became solemn. Chai Feng’s eyes filled with admiration.

Creating an immortal-martial world—what audacity!

“If little brother has any difficulties, feel free to ask this old dao. If I can help, I won’t hesitate.”

Tonggu narrowed his eyes.

“How could I trouble senior... actually, it’s nothing. The Five Phoenix has just achieved immortal-martial status—fusion isn’t complete. If senior has free time, perhaps you could preach the Dao and accelerate the Five Phoenix’s immortal-martial fusion.”

Lu smiled.

Tonggu froze, then laughed dumbly. Lu had dug this pit long ago, waiting for him to jump.

But Tonggu didn't refuse.

His divine soul spread, sweeping the entire Five Phoenix.

He indeed sensed the Five Phoenix's instability. A newborn immortal-martial world needed hundreds of thousands of years to stabilize and accumulate.

But with a quasi-saint's help to reinforce it, the time could be greatly reduced.

A rare immortal-martial world for humanity—one that could strengthen the race—how could Tonggu refuse?

After preparing himself,

he began preaching the Dao.

Lu quickly summoned all Five Phoenix cultivators. Centered on Lakeheart Island, above the vast sea, Five Phoenix cultivators sat cross-legged, eagerly awaiting.

Closest to Lakeheart Island were the Five Phoenix Golden Immortals.

Further out were Profound Immortals, True Immortals, Human Immortals...

Layer upon layer.

Tonggu smiled faintly. He was used to grand scenes and remained calm.

His body instantly grew to ten thousand zhang. Purple qi surged from him. His expression was serene.

As he slowly spoke, quasi-saint voice resounded.

He'd thought people would be shaken by quasi-saint voice.

But to his slight surprise, the Five Phoenix cultivators were calm—as though they'd already experienced quasi-saint voice baptism before.

This made Tonggu narrow his eyes in astonishment. It seemed he'd have to bring out some real skill.

Even Chai Feng sat cross-legged, listening attentively. Quasi-saint preaching benefited him greatly too.

On Lakeheart Island.

Lu arranged for Ning Zhao, Ni Yu, Yi Yue, and the others to attend as well.

But Lu himself didn't listen to the quasi-saint voice.

He had his own preparations.

His mind sank into the preaching platform.

The challenge mission's activation excited Lu. After all, randomly drawing one of Tonggu's divine abilities... how could he not be thrilled?

This was a quasi-saint, after all.

So Lu put serious thought into this comprehension ground setup.

“Should I follow the template of the original comprehension ground?”

Sitting cross-legged on the preaching platform, Lu frowned.

But after thinking, he dismissed the idea. He wouldn't copy the original. He had his own vision.

His hands formed seals, continuously casting array words.

Array words stacked, like lines of code.

Soon, after repeated simulations and reconstructions, a prototype of the comprehension ground took shape.

“A pyramid template—nine thousand nine hundred ninety-nine layers of stairs from the base to the top. At the peak, place the adorable little Beast Ancestor statue... the statue's power will transmit down the pyramid stairs. The higher one climbs... the more Gold Origin mysteries they comprehend.”

This was Lu's brand-new comprehension template.

And it was fair.

Everyone started from the bottom. The higher they climbed, the more Gold Origin mysteries they gained.

As for gathering the sea of mysteries, Lu kept that feature.

The visual spectacle was still necessary.

Not only was fairness ensured, but the spectacle remained.

After a few more simulations, Lu was very satisfied with this comprehension ground.

In the challenge mission, prodigies from Primordial Immortal Domain and Five Phoenix cultivators would compete. For victory, Five Phoenix cultivators had to win.

Originally, Lu could have built a comprehension ground favoring Five Phoenix cultivators.

But after thinking, he decided to keep it fair.

His mind withdrew from the preaching platform.

Unknowingly, ten days had passed.

Tonggu's preaching was nearing its end.

Lu's divine soul swept out. Joy appeared on his face—the Five Phoenix's immortal-martial fusion was nearly complete.

Not only that, Tonggu's preaching this time was as effective as the previous quasi-saint voice.

The Five Phoenix cultivators' cultivation had improved dramatically.

Among the Five Phoenix Golden Immortals, many had gained insights and could confidently break through to sixth-turn Golden Immortal.

Many Profound Immortals had sufficient comprehension—they only lacked fortune accumulation. Once they had enough, they could enter Golden Immortal realm.

And accumulating fortune was simple—complete missions in the Fortune Tower.

So for them, it was as good as already half-stepped into Golden Immortal.

This preaching was a bountiful harvest.

Moreover, the entire Five Phoenix starry void underwent transformation under Tonggu's Dao sound—some comprehended, some broke through...

Though Lu didn't check, he could already feel the skyrocketing spiritual energy reserves on the system panel!

His cultivation realm was nearing an upgrade!

What did Lu love most?

Naturally, the Five Phoenix people growing stronger—so his share of spiritual energy increased.

Sensing this massive change, Lu sighed. Tonggu really was a good person.

He almost felt bad pulling wool.

If only he could do this a few more times.

Of course, Lu only thought that. More sessions would diminish the effect and make Five Phoenix cultivators dependent—gains not worth the losses.

Lu sat in the Thousand-Blade Chair, leaning against the railing and listening to the wind.

A chessboard lay before him.

On the board, countless spiritual energies converged like a vortex, forming intersecting lines.

Vaguely, they shaped a pyramid.

This was the comprehension ground Lu had built on the preaching platform.

Hum...

Tonggu finally finished preaching.

The surging purple qi around him slowly receded. His massive illusory body gradually dissipated.

The vast sea grew calm.

Five Phoenix cultivators remained in meditation, savoring the profound mysteries Tonggu had shared.

Tonggu smiled with satisfaction. He had to admit—the Five Phoenix cultivators had excellent talent. He could feel the entire Five Phoenix growing firmer. The once-unstable immortal-martial foundation had finally stabilized.

He'd done a great deed.

Tonggu smiled contentedly.

He didn't disturb their meditation.

Stepping on auspicious clouds, he descended onto Lakeheart Island.

"Hm?"

Suddenly, Tonggu paused.

On the pavilion, Lu sat in white robes, smiling and nodding slightly.

“Thank you, senior.”

“Without senior’s golden words, who knows how long the Five Phoenix would have taken to complete its immortal-martial tempering?”

Lu smiled.

“My master foresaw senior’s arrival during his starry travels, so he already prepared a Gold Origin mysteries comprehension holy land...”

Lu said.

Tonggu froze. Then his eyes lit up like morning stars.

A comprehension ground for Gold Origin mysteries?

“Little brother Lu, is it built using the Beast Ancestor statue?”

Tonggu’s breathing quickened slightly.

He'd personally witnessed Lu taking the Beast Ancestor statue in the Elemental Realm's comprehension ground.

Back then, he'd been shocked—concluding a saint was behind it.

Now, this Gold Origin mysteries comprehension ground belonged to humanity!

For humanity, always at a disadvantage, this was tremendous fortune!

On the White Jade Capital pavilion.

Lu's white robes fluttered. He smiled faintly.

He picked up a chess piece from the box.

Rolling up his sleeve, he slowly placed it.

Pop!

Boom!

Between the Five Phoenix heavens and earth, a beam of light descended from the sky, tearing through the firmament and landing on an uninhabited life-bearing star just beginning to awaken outside the Five Phoenix Continent.

Tonggu's gaze sharpened.

He sensed a vast, terrifying aura being born on that star.

Whoosh!

Space compressed beneath Tonggu's feet.

In the blink of an eye, Tonggu appeared on that star.

"This is my master's arrangement—all for humanity."

"Oh, right—my master said this Gold Origin mysteries comprehension session can let prodigies from Primordial Immortal Domain compete with Five Phoenix cultivators to increase competitiveness."

Lu smiled.

Tonggu nodded repeatedly, thrilled. He hadn't even fully heard Lu's words.

His gaze shifted to the star. There, a golden pyramid rose from the ground, towering into the clouds—  
nine thousand nine hundred ninety-nine layers.

Tonggu was overjoyed.

His gaze moved upward, soon landing on the trophy-sized golden statue at the pyramid's peak.

It was exactly the Gold Origin Beast Ancestor statue that had once been in the Elemental Gods' hands!