

## **The Order 9941**

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More troublesome was that, as the battle continued, a low hum began to emanate from the depths of the bamboo forest, and a chilling pressure was gathering.

“We can’t delay! This restriction is draining the entire Peach Blossom Spring’s power; the longer it drags on, the stronger it becomes!”

The First Elder’s face was grim. “Use the Nether Spring Annihilation Array! Force a path through!”

“Yes!”

Ten black-robed figures swiftly changed positions, each taking out a jet-black array flag and planting it in the ground. Simultaneously, they bit their tongues, spitting out their blood essence onto the flags.

The First and Third Elders stood at the array’s core, pouring their immense magical power into the formation.

Boom!

The ten array flags blazed with dark light, spewing forth viscous, ink-like black water. This black water spread rapidly, withering vegetation, dissipating spiritual energy, and even causing the space itself to hiss and crackle.

This Nether Spring Annihilation Array was clearly an extremely vicious formation, releasing a life-corroding Nether Spring at the cost of the caster’s lifeblood and mana.

The Nether Spring clashed violently with the bamboo forest’s protective barrier, emitting a piercing hiss.

The emerald light and black water intertwined and dissolved, corroding vast swathes of bamboo forest into ashes.

However, the spread of the Nether Spring was slowing, indicating that the bamboo forest's protective barrier possessed a very high level of power, which the Nether Spring could not completely suppress.

A stalemate ensued.

Just then, Chen Ping moved.

He emerged from his hiding place like a ghost, his target not the Nether Spring Sect members, but... the array flags stuck in the ground!

“Chaos – Severed Flow.”

Chen Ping formed hand seals, and ten thin, hair-like gray threads shot from his fingertips, precisely wrapping around the energy nodes connecting the ten array flags to the ground.

These gray threads were condensed from the purest chaotic energy, possessing the property of dissolving all laws.

They silently sliced into the energy connection between the Annihilation Spring and the array flags, like the sharpest scalpel, making a gentle cut.

\*Pfft pfft pfft...\*

The ten array flags trembled simultaneously, the black light flowing across their surfaces suddenly dimming!

The energy supply maintaining the array was instantly severed!

“What?” The First Elder and the Third Elder turned their heads in shock, just in time to see Chen Ping retract the gray threads, coldly looking at them.

The array was broken, and the backlash was immediate!

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The ten black-robed men simultaneously coughed up blood, their auras weakening.

The Annihilation Spring, losing its support, was quickly suppressed and purified by the emerald light of the bamboo forest.

Worse still, the backlash from the formation disrupted their magical power, leaving them scrambling to defend against the renewed onslaught of the bamboo forest's restrictive attacks.

"You little beast! Who are you?!"

The Third Elder's eyes widened in fury. "You dare to ambush us!"

"Ambush?"

Chen Ping smiled faintly. "I merely borrowed your strength to break the restriction, and collected some interest. Now, it's time to send you on your way."

"Arrogant! Even without the formation, I could kill you like a chicken!"

The First Elder was enraged. His white bone staff transformed into a pale white streak, carrying overwhelming death energy, and pierced straight at Chen Ping's face!

This staff strike, seemingly simple, actually sealed off all of Chen Ping's escape routes. A single point of eerie light at the tip of the staff, condensed to its fullest extent, was enough to pierce through a high-grade defensive magic weapon!

At the same time, the Third Elder grinned maliciously and shook the skull bracelet. Greenish-yellow flames ignited in the eye sockets of the nine skulls, spewing out nine condensed green fire lines that shot towards Chen Ping from different angles, sealing off his escape route.

The combined attack of two second-grade Upper Immortals, fueled by rage, was awe-inspiring!

However, Chen Ping merely raised his right hand.

The faint chaotic vortex mark in his palm glowed slightly.

“Chaos – Void Return Vortex.”

A hazy gray vortex, three feet in diameter, appeared out of thin air before him, slowly rotating.

The center of the vortex was as deep as a black hole, its edges shimmering with four-colored light.

The bone staff and the nine green fire lines shot into the vortex without hindrance.

Then... they vanished.

There was no collision, no explosion; like a pebble thrown into a deep pool, it only created a barely perceptible ripple before falling silent.

“This...impossible!”

The First Elder and Third Elder’s pupils contracted to pinpoints, their faces showing terror for the first time.

Their full-force attack had been so easily neutralized?

“My turn.” Chen Ping took a step forward, his right hand clenching slightly.

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The hazy gray vortex suddenly reversed, its volume shrinking dramatically!

An indescribable, terrifying suction force erupted! Not only were the surrounding spiritual energy and light frantically sucked in.

Even the First Elder and Third Elder felt their magical power, life force, and even their souls uncontrollably draining away!

“What kind of evil magic is this?! Retreat!”

The First Elder was terrified, frantically channeling his magical power to try and break free, but the suction force seemed to act on the level of laws, something that mere brute force could not resist.

The Third Elder fared even worse. His cultivation was slightly weaker, and the skull bracelet in his hand couldn't withstand the force. The nine skulls shattered with a “crack,” and the evil spirits within them howled as they were sucked into the vortex, transforming into pure energy.

“No! My magic weapon!”

The Third Elder's heart ached terribly. This was his natal magic weapon, refined over hundreds of years!

“You're about to lose your life, and you're still thinking about your magic weapon?”

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord's sinister laughter rang out from behind them.

Unbeknownst to them, the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord had appeared behind the two like a ghost. His demonic claws swelled to the size of millstones, his nails like curved blades, carrying a space-tearing power as he viciously clawed at their backs!

With a strange suction force devouring them from the front and the Demon Lord's fatal blow from behind, the First Elder and the Third Elder were trapped in a desperate situation.

“Let's die together!”

A mad glint flashed in the Grand Elder's eyes. He stopped resisting the suction force and instead poured all his mana, blood essence, and even his soul into the bone staff. Then, he hurled the staff at Chen Ping!

The bone staff instantly expanded to a hundred feet in size after leaving his hand, engulfing him in a ghastly white flame, radiating destructive energy. He was about to self-destruct his natal magic weapon!

The self-destruction of a natal magic weapon nurtured for countless years by a second-grade Upper Immortal was powerful enough to severely injure or even kill someone of the same level!

"Be careful!" The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord's expression changed.

Chen Ping, however, remained calm. He simply uttered a single word towards the burning bone staff:

"Stop."

Buzz!

An invisible force field spread out from Chen Ping, and time seemed to slow down a thousandfold at that moment.

The blazing, expanding bone staff, the flying green flames, the ferocious Crimson Cloud Demon Lord lunging forward, even the desperate, crazed expressions on the faces of the First and Third Elders... everything slowed to a snail's pace.

Only Chen Ping's movements remained unaffected.

He extended his left index finger, a flicker of chaotic starlight at its tip, and gently touched a spot on the bone staff.

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That spot was precisely the weakest point in the bone staff's energy structure.

\*Crack.\*

A soft, crisp sound, exceptionally clear in the frozen time.

The deathly white flames on the hundred-foot-long bone staff abruptly extinguished, the expanding staff rapidly shrinking and dimming like a deflated balloon, finally falling to the ground with a “thud,” becoming a dull, ordinary bone staff, devoid of any spiritual energy.

The flow of time returned to normal.

The First Elder watched helplessly as his desperate attack was so easily countered, the last glimmer of light in his eyes completely extinguished.

A mouthful of black blood mixed with fragments of internal organs gushed out, their life force instantly weakening to its lowest point.

\*Pfft!\*

\*Pfft!\*

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord’s demonic claws pierced through the backs of the two men without resistance, emerging from their chests, each claw clutching a still faintly beating heart.

“Hah...hah...”

The First Elder and Third Elder looked down at the bloody holes in their chests, their eyes filled with resentment, despair, and disbelief. Finally, their spirits waned, and their bodies collapsed limply.

The remaining ten black-robed figures had already been completely wiped out by the bamboo forest’s protective barrier.

Chen Ping waved his hand, collecting everyone's storage magic items, the white bone staff, the broken skull bracelet, and other items.

His divine sense swept over them; the Nether Spring Sect, as expected of an old-established evil sect, possessed an astonishingly rich accumulation of resources.

Nearly a million high-grade immortal stones were found, along with mountains of rare materials, pills, and cultivation manuals, many of which contained insidious and bizarre techniques that even made Chen Ping frown.

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord, however, was more interested in the unorthodox resources that enhanced the soul and tempered the demonic body, and happily plundered them.

The two quickly cleaned up the battlefield and cremated the corpses.

As the bodies were cremated, the scene before Chen Ping and his companions changed abruptly.

The idyllic paradise was gone; it was as if they had entered the ruins of the world's edge.

As far as the eye could see, there were shattered, floating, massive landmasses, some still bearing the remnants of palaces and pavilions, telling tales of glory and destruction from a distant past.

Violent, multicolored energy turbulence raged and collided in the void like mad dragons, unleashing deafening roars.

Space was extremely unstable, sometimes twisting and folding, sometimes suddenly splitting open into a bottomless dark rift, devouring everything nearby.

"You're absolutely right, that paradise is a lie," the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord exclaimed in shock!

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“The path ahead is ours to walk!” Chen Ping frowned slightly, regretting his hasty action and the killing of the Nether Spring Sect members.

The most troublesome thing now was the omnipresent Void Gale.

It wasn't just ordinary wind; it was more like a terrifying force containing spatial cutting and law-eroding power.

The Gale was colorless and formless; only when you were close could you feel its chilling sharpness and deathly stillness.

Chen Ping witnessed a hundred-foot-long piece of hard black iron ore being swept away by a Gale, silently turning into the finest dust without a sound.

“Damn it, this wind is weird, it comes like that!”

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord cursed. He tried to condense a shield with his demonic energy to block it, but the shield was instantly eroded with countless holes, and his demonic energy was depleted at an alarming rate.

Chen Ping dared not be careless. He erected a protective shield of chaotic immortal power, the hazy airflow slightly deflecting and dissolving the oncoming gale, but this also consumed a great deal of energy.

The five elements and earth fire patterns on the back of his hand glowed faintly, seemingly actively absorbing the sparse five elements energy and remnants of earth fire from the surrounding chaotic energy to replenish himself.

The guiding talisman's halo pointed to a seemingly calm vortex center deeper within this desolate region.

There, the gale seemed slightly weaker, but the space was distorted even more severely; light was strangely deflected upon reaching it.

“The Eye of Return to Nothingness...it seems I must pass through that distorted area to reach it,” Chen Ping observed for a moment and judged.

“How do we get through? Force our way through?”

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord stared at the terrifying spatial power that distorted even light. “If only we hadn’t killed those two guys, perhaps they would have had a way.”

“It’s too late to say anything now. But given their strength, it’s unlikely they can get through anyway. That paradise we saw was actually an illusion. If we continue following, we’ll likely get lost too,” Chen Ping explained.

“Then what do we do now?” the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord asked.

Chen Ping pondered for a moment. “We can’t force our way through; that’s unwise. The power of that distorted space is very high-level. Rushing in might result in being torn apart or teleported to an unknown place.”

His gaze swept around, suddenly fixing on a dark purple boulder in the distance, its surface adorned with complex natural patterns, slowly drifting by.

Those patterns... seemed to contain a faint power stabilizing space.

“I’ve got an idea.”

Chen Ping’s eyes lit up. “See those space-stabilizing stones? They’re not high quality, but there are quite a few. We can use them.”

“How?”

“Set up an array!”

Chen Ping explained succinctly, "Using these space-stabilizing stones as a base, combine them with my Five Elements power to temporarily construct a simple teleportation and wind-avoidance array."

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"We don't aim to completely resist the distorting force, just to precisely launch us into the center of that vortex during the brief duration of the array's effect."

Although the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord wasn't an expert in arrays, he understood the principle and grinned, "You've got a lot of tricks up your sleeve, kid. Okay, I'll take care of moving the stones and clearing away the approaching turbulence and gales!"

They got right to work.

The two immediately sprang into action.

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord unleashed his demonic power, his massive demonic shadow weaving through the turbulent currents.

With his formidable demonic body and swift speed, he forcefully pulled pieces of space-fixing stones of varying sizes from afar, some requiring him to withstand several gusts of wind to obtain.

Chen Ping then rapidly inscribed temporary array patterns on these space-fixing stones.

Using his fingers as a brush and chaotic immortal power as ink, he imprinted runes containing the mysteries of the five elements' mutual generation and restraint, and spatial anchoring, onto the stones.

This process was extremely mentally taxing, as the surrounding environment was harsh and energy interference was intense. The slightest mistake could lead to failure or even an energy backlash.

Several times, powerful energy turbulence or hidden spatial rifts suddenly appeared and attacked, but the vigilant Crimson Cloud Demon Lord intercepted them in time or narrowly avoided them with Chen Ping.

On one occasion, a particularly well-hidden void rift grazed Chen Ping's back, tearing a gash in his protective aura and leaving a deep, bone-revealing wound on his back, wreathed with spatial erosion power, instantly staining his robes crimson with blood.

"Be careful!"

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord growled, crushing a swirling torrent of Yin Fire with a single claw.

Chen Ping grunted, four-colored light swirling around his wound as he forcefully expelled the spatial erosion, his flesh rapidly healing.

Without turning his head, he continued to focus intently on his inscription: "Time is running out. I can feel the fluctuations of the guiding talisman increasing. The entrance to the Eye of Return to Nothingness seems to have periodic periods of stability. We must complete this before the next period arrives!"

Finally, after nearly a day and several close calls, Chen Ping arranged the seventy-two rune-engraved space-stabilizing stones in a specific orientation in the void, forming a simple magic array about ten zhang in diameter.

Chen Ping stood at the array's eye, placing the guiding talisman at its core.

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord also stepped into the array.

"Activate!"

Chen Ping shouted, pressing his palms to the array's core. For the first time in actual combat, the four forces within his body—Chaotic Immortal Power, Five Elements Power, Earth Fire True Essence, and Golden Dragon Bloodline—attempted to coordinate their attacks. Although still somewhat sluggish, the immense power instantly surged into the array.

Buzz!

The seventy-two space-stabilizing stones simultaneously lit up, emitting a soft purple halo, connecting to form a semi-transparent light shield that enveloped the two.

The raging gales and turbulent energy currents outside the shield collided with it, creating ripples, but were temporarily isolated.

Sweat beaded on Chen Ping's forehead; maintaining this array against external pressure was extremely taxing.

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He dared not delay, activating the guiding talisman with all his might.

The guiding talisman shone brightly, its ancient runes projecting out a slender yet solid beam of light, pointing straight towards the center of the vortex in the distorted space.

At this moment, the distortion at the center of the vortex seemed to reach its limit, then suddenly contracted inward, forming a brief, stable, deep passage resembling an eye!

“Now! Go!”

Chen Ping detonated the last of the array's power, along with the guiding force of the talisman!

Boom!

The space-stabilizing stones shattered, and the array's protective barrier crumbled.

But a powerful, spatially-attribute force enveloped Chen Ping and the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord, transforming them into a stream of light.

Following the trajectory of the guiding talisman's light, it shot towards the deep eye at an incredible speed!

The instant he entered the eye, Chen Ping felt a powerful dizzying sensation and a sense of spatial compression, as if his body and soul were being stretched and crushed.

He gritted his teeth and persevered, his four powers protecting him. The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord also let out a low roar, his demonic body erupting with intense crimson light.

How long had passed? Perhaps only a moment, perhaps an eternity.

All the chaos, tearing, and roaring suddenly vanished.

The feeling of solid ground beneath his feet returned, fresh air filled his lungs, and the sounds of flowing water and birdsong filled his ears.

Chen Ping staggered a step, regaining his balance, and warily surveyed his surroundings.

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord also shook his head, his demonic eyes scanning sharply.

The scene before them both stunned.

This was indeed a paradise on earth.

The sky was a clear azure, with wisps of white clouds drifting by.

In the distance, verdant mountains rose in layers, shrouded in spiritual mist.

Nearby, fragrant grasses grew luxuriantly, and exotic flowers and herbs bloomed everywhere, exuding a refreshing fragrance.

A crystal-clear stream, faintly glowing with spiritual light, meandered through the meadow. Deer drank from its banks, and cranes danced gracefully.

The spiritual energy permeating the air was not of the type commonly found in the Twelfth Heaven; rather, it possessed a more ancient, profound, and seemingly untouched primal aura.

With each breath, one could feel a subtle resonance within their own body, especially with the chaotic immortal power and golden dragon bloodline within Chen Ping.

“Chen Ping, could this also be fake? An illusion?” The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord was now somewhat incredulous.

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Chen Ping glanced around, and the Illusory Origin Star within his primordial space shimmered.

After a moment, he shook his head: “This is the real thing...”

“Excellent!”

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord took a deep breath. “This Eye of Return to Nothingness truly holds a hidden world. However... it’s too quiet, unsettlingly so.”

Chen Ping shared the same sentiment.

While the scenery was beautiful, it felt lacking in genuine vitality. The spirit deer and cranes seemed somewhat vacant, their movements appearing to follow fixed patterns.

Moreover, he could keenly sense an extremely subtle yet immense field existing in this world, similar to an array or restriction, but more like the inherent laws of this world itself.

He took out the guiding talisman again.

This time, the guiding talisman no longer pointed in a specific direction, but instead glowed slightly, its runes flickering, as if resonating with something here.

“The cave should be deep within this paradise. Be careful; this place is definitely not simple.”

Chen Ping put away the guiding talisman, gripped the Dragon-Slaying Sword, and led the way along the stream deeper into the valley.

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord followed closely behind, his demonic senses highly focused, scanning for any potential danger.

At first, the path was calm and peaceful, except for the environment being too perfect to be real.

Chen Ping even cautiously collected some ancient-looking, spiritually rich herbs along the way.

When they passed through a dense bamboo forest with leaves as green as jade, Chen Ping and the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord stopped.

Just now, the people from the Nether Spring Sect had also been attacked in this very place.

However, that was an illusion, not the real Eye of Return to Nothingness.

Even so, upon reaching this point, both of them felt somewhat uneasy.

“Chen Ping, do you think we might also be attacked here?” the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord asked.

“It shouldn’t be. After all, this isn’t an illusion; this is the real Eye of the Ruins. If...”

Boom!

Before Chen Ping could finish speaking, the surrounding scenery abruptly changed!

The bamboo forest vanished, the green mountains and clear waters disappeared.

In its place was an endless starry sky, with cold, hard meteorite ground beneath his feet.

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Dead silence reigned all around, with only distant stars twinkling and nearby floating fragments of celestial bodies and dust.

“An illusion?”

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord was shocked. He swung his claw, the sharp wind shattering a small floating meteorite nearby, the sensation incredibly real.

“It’s not entirely an illusion,”

Chen Ping frowned. He felt his connection to the outside world greatly weakened, and the flow of power within his body sluggish. “It’s spatial displacement, or... domain suppression. We’ve been pulled into a special trial space.”

Chen Ping was certain this was a real space, not an illusion. After all, Chen Ping possessed the Origin of Illusion; if it were an illusion, he couldn’t have been completely unaware.

The sudden change in their surroundings could only be explained by one thing: they had been pulled into another dimension by some force.

Perhaps this dimension overlapped with the Eye of Return to Nothingness; to them, it appeared as if the Eye of Return to Nothingness’s space had collapsed, revealing yet another dimension.

As soon as Chen Ping finished speaking, starlight gathered in the starry sky ahead, coalescing into three blurry figures.

The figures gradually became clearer, revealing three figures dressed in simple hemp clothing, their hair tied up in high buns, their faces indistinct yet exuding a vast and ancient aura.

They held no weapons, simply standing there calmly, yet seemingly integrated with the entire starry sky, radiating a suffocating sense of oppression.

“A lingering image of an ancient Qi Refiner? Or a manifestation of a restriction?”

Chen Ping’s heart skipped a beat. While the energy intensity of these three figures didn’t seem to exceed the Celestial Immortal realm, the essence of their power and the way they wielded it revealed a terrifying, back-to-basics quality.

The figure in the middle slowly raised his hand, pointing at Chen Ping. A grand yet indifferent voice resounded directly in their minds.

“Future cultivators who wish to enter our cave must pass three trials. This is the first trial, testing your ‘control of power’ and ‘ability to adapt.’”

“Disperse our illusory images, or withstand the attack for the duration of an incense stick burning, and you will pass.”

Before the words were finished, the three figures moved simultaneously.

There were no dazzling magical lights, no earth-shattering sounds.

The figure on the left took a step forward, the meteorite beneath his feet silently turning to dust, and he charged straight at the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord like a cannonball.

He unleashed a punch. The fist wind was condensed to its extreme, compressing the air to form a visible white shockwave, causing the space to ripple slightly in its path.

The figure on the right, however, held his hands in a fist, starlight gathering around him, transforming into a shimmering whip. The tip of the whip trembled slightly, like a venomous snake flicking its tongue, locking onto Chen Ping. The trajectory was unpredictable and treacherous, containing a sense of spatial confinement.

The figure in the middle was the most peculiar; he didn't attack directly, but instead sat cross-legged, his hands forming a strange hand seal.

Instantly, Chen Ping and the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord simultaneously felt the gravity of the surrounding starry sky increase dozens of times!

Moreover, the direction of gravity was constantly changing, sometimes pulling downwards, sometimes dragging horizontally to the left, incredibly bizarre, greatly interfering with their balance and power.

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"What a strange method!" the Crimson Cloud Demon Lord roared, his demonic body expanding as he forcefully met the ancient punch that was coming at him.

Boom!

Fist and claw collided, producing a muffled, thunderous roar.

The Crimson Cloud Demon Lord was actually forced back three steps, the shockwave from the punch leaving several bloody gashes on his demonic arm.

"Hiss... That's incredible strength! And the power is terrifyingly concentrated!"

On the other side, Chen Ping swung his Dragon-Slaying Sword, its sword energy surging, attempting to sever the starlight whip.

However, the whip was unusually agile, as if it had a life of its own, coiling around him instead of meeting his attacks head-on. It constantly deflected and guided his force, leaving Chen Ping's swordplay feeling stifled and powerless.

At the same time, the unpredictable gravity caused him to stagger, his swordplay frequently veering off course.

"This can't go on!"

A fierce glint flashed in Chen Ping's eyes. He realized that the attack methods of these three illusory figures were vastly different from the current cultivators' methods of releasing and transforming energy.

They focused more on the concentration and application of the essence of power and the control of the environment.

"Since you're testing control, then try mine!"

Chen Ping took a deep breath, no longer pursuing the elegance and power of his swordplay, but instead focusing his mind on his inner self.

Within his dantian, the light of the primordial stars flowed. He attempted to mobilize the four initially fused forces, not simply by superimposing them, but by seeking their point of resonance.

He swung his sword again. A hazy, chaotic aura first surged forth from the blade, not expanding, but instead converging inwards, coiling around the sword's edge, emanating an obscure aura of "dissolving all laws."

Immediately afterward, the power of the five elements circulated, not transforming into five-colored sword energy, but evolving into subtle cycles of mutual generation and restraint among the five elements, attaching to the chaotic aura, increasing its stability and variability.

The true flames of earth fire burned along the sword's spine, providing a violent driving and purifying force.

A faint golden dragon shadow hovered at the hilt, bringing an indestructible sharpness and majestic majesty.

This sword strike appeared far less imposing than the previous hundred-foot-long sword energy, even seeming somewhat unremarkable.

But when he slashed at the starlight whip, a sudden change occurred!

The moment the chaotic energy flow touched the starlight whip, the whip, condensed from pure star power and powerful enough to crush magical artifacts, began to rapidly melt and disintegrate, like ice meeting spring sunshine!

The Five Elements Cycle invaded, disrupting its internal energy structure. The True Flame of Earth scorched, completely incinerating its remnants.

The dragon's shadow murmured softly, its sword pointing unimpeded at the throat of the right-hand shadow!

The shadow's blurred face seemed to flicker, its hand seals changing, its form dispersing like starlight, then reforming several feet away, but its aura noticeably dimmed.