

Chapter 121: Foundation Establishment Elixir

After the Weapon Peak face-off, many disciples of the five peaks were still talking about it. A number of Weapon Peak disciples were even prepared to celebrate and it was extremely lively.

Su Zimo did not participate and returned to his cave abode straight.

Obtaining number one of Weapon Peak was entirely within his expectations.

The only unexpected gain was the powerful Mystic Gold Silk Armor in his storage bag.

By the time he returned to the cave abode, it was already past noon.

“I want to be in seclusion. Guard outside the entrance and not let anyone in.”

Su Zimo said to the spirit tiger before assuming a lotus position on the stone bed and retrieving spirit stones from his storage bag.

Tomorrow was Talisman Peak’s face-off and he had no intention of spectating. Instead, he wanted to focus on his cultivation and attain a breakthrough as quickly as possible.

Level 9 Qi Condensation was much tougher than Su Zimo had imagined.

But of course, the biggest reason for that was because he had wasted too much time on Array Peak in the past six months.

In the final two months, he had spent most of his time on practicing his sword wielding skills and the sword formation; he did not have much time to actually raise his cultivation realm.

There was a perfect-grade Spirit Gathering Elixir within his storage bag.

He was almost done absorbing more than two thousand inferior-grade spirit stones. If he still could not achieve a breakthrough to Level 9 Qi Condensation, he would consume that Spirit Gathering Elixir.

The next morning.

Xue Yi and other Weapon Peak disciples arrived at Su Zimo’s cave abode early in the morning to invite him along to spectate at Talisman Peak.

Even though it was less than five days, the five peaks face-off was the biggest event of the year in the sect. Almost none of the trial disciples would continue to cultivate immensely in these five days.

Even if they did not know anything about talismans, it was interesting to join the crowd too.

But of course, more importantly, the person known as the number one beauty of the five peaks, Leng Rou, would be taking part in this year’s Talisman Peak face-off. In fact, there was a high chance she could get number one of Talisman Peak.

Many disciples wanted to go and catch a glimpse of the beauty’s aura.

However, Xue Yi and the others were prevented from entering by the spirit tiger. They tried to explain things to the spirit tiger but to no avail and finally, they could only leave.

Before long, little fatty arrived too.

However, he had to leave as well against the snarling growls of the spirit tiger.

Su Zimo was completely oblivious to everything happening outside. He was immersed in cultivation till the third day of the five peaks face-off.

Third day, Elixir Peak face-off!

This was Su Zimo's second round of challenge against Feng Haoyu.

Everyone knew that Feng Haoyu had lost the first round on Weapon Peak's face-off. Today's challenge would definitely be more intense than ever!

Su Zimo pushed his door open and walked out of his cave abode.

Even after a day and night with the spirit stones in his storage bag emptied out, he was still at the peak of Level 8 Qi Condensation.

Su Zimo was in no hurry.

He still had time. After the Elixir Peak face-off, he would continue to cultivate and attempt for a breakthrough by consuming the Spirit Gathering Elixir!

Early in the morning, many disciples had gathered on Elixir Peak.

An endless stream of disciples arrived continuously in midair, their clothes fluttering gracefully in the skies.

The moment Su Zimo arrived on Elixir Peak, he was held back by little fatty.

"Bro, why didn't you come yesterday?"

"Who won first place?" Su Zimo avoided answering by asking another question.

"Of course it's Sister Leng Rou!"

Little fatty snickered. "That Li Liang from Talisman Peak is no match for Sister Leng Rou! He was completely crushed. It was so exciting. Bro, you didn't get to witness Sister Leng Rou creating talismans. That's what I call beautiful!"

"What nonsense is that?"

Just then, a fair hand appeared behind little fatty's head and rapped on it lightly.

Although the person who spoke sounded cold, it didn't seem like there was any ill intentions.

Su Zimo turned his glance and met with a pair of icy eyes.

A ravishing girl emitted an aura that prevented people from approaching her. Standing behind little fatty was Leng Rou, disciple of Spirit Peak.

Unexpectedly, Leng Rou actually nodded when she met with Su Zimo's eyes.

Slightly stunned, Su Zimo smiled and nodded in return.

Even though the both of them joined the sect at the same time, this was the first time he was having such an interaction with her.

Only, Su Zimo was slightly surprised. Given Leng Rou's personality, she would usually ignore even if people greeted her.

Now, even though she did not say anything, her action was still rather surprising.

Actually, after Su Zimo won first place in the Weapon Peak face-off, a number of disciples from the five peaks already had a changed impression of him.

Or rather, they wanted to befriend him.

No cultivator would not want to be friends with a Weapon Refinement Master.

Everyone witnessed little fatty obtaining an inferior-grade spirit weapon previously. Even though they said nothing, all of them were extremely envious.

"Come, let me introduce you!"

Little fatty's beady eyes revolved around Su Zimo and Leng Rou as he giggled. "This is number one of Talisman Peak, Sister Leng Rou. This is my bro, number one of Weapon Peak, Su Zimo."

Su Zimo and Leng Rou exchanged glances.

Leng Rou avoided his gaze and Su Zimo merely smiled with an indifferent expression.

Blinking, little fatty continued, "Don't just stand there! Both of you have your own strengths and you should hang out more in the future!"

When he mentioned 'hang out', little fatty winked at Su Zimo and sounded odd.

Su Zimo was alright about it. However, Leng Rou seemed to have thought of something as a blush appeared across her cheeks; compared to her snow-white skin, it was extremely obvious.

"More nonsense! You're asking for a beating!"

Leng Rou chided lightly and knocked little fatty on the head.

Little fatty merely continued giggling.

Right then, Su Zimo felt an intense enmity as he looked over instinctively.

Not far away, Feng Haoyu arrived on his flying sword with a group of Spirit Peak disciples.

Upon seeing that Su Zimo and Leng Rou were standing closely together, rage flashed through the eyes of many Spirit Peak disciples.

Even though Feng Haoyu's expression was cold and aloof as usual, his hands behind his back were curled into fists.

“Bro, other than Feng Haoyu, there’s a Elixir Peak disciple called Huo Xiuyuan who is also a strong competitor for you in this face-off. You must not underestimate him.”

Little fatty said, “He was the number one of Elixir Peak last year. He’s probably even stronger for this year’s face-off.”

Su Zimo nodded.

Compared to Weapon Peak, there were slightly more disciples taking part in the Elixir Peak face-off at around 200 odd.

All of them gathered in the Elixir Refinement Hall and waited patiently.

Refinement of elixirs was unlike that of weapons.

During the Weapon Peak face-off, the disciples could choose the type of weapon they wanted to refine.

However, for the Elixir Peak face-off, the peak master would decide on a specific elixir for the disciples to refine where they would be judged based on the final quality.

Therefore, many disciples would always try to guess which elixir would be refined during the face-off.

If they guessed it right and focused their practice on that specific elixir, their chances of winning the face-off would be much greater.

Before long, the five peak masters arrived.

When the time approached, the brown haired youth stood up and declared, “The elixir to be refined for this face-off is...”

At that, the brown haired youth paused for a moment as all disciples within the hall listened intently with bated breath.

The brown haired youth then continued slowly, “Is... the Foundation Establishment Elixir!”

The moment he said that, the crowd fell into an uproar.

The Foundation Establishment Elixir was one of the most difficult to refine among Grade 1 elixirs.

In the past, there was an instance of the Foundation Establishment Elixir being tested during a face-off as well. However, all participating disciples at that time failed to refine the pill and as such, it turned out to be the dramatic outcome of having no number one for that face-off.

After that, in order to prevent such a situation from happening again, there had been no more requests for Foundation Establishment Elixirs.

To think that this year’s Elixir Peak face-off would ask for the Foundation Establishment Elixir once more!

Chapter 122: Perfect Five Patterns

Many disciples in the hall frowned upon hearing Foundation Establishment Elixir.

Everyone had guessed wrongly.

Within the five peaks, few disciples would attempt to refine the Foundation Establishment Elixir.

It required more than ten types of ingredients and the refinement process was overly complex. Usually, only Intermediate Elixir Refinement Masters would have more confidence to try it.

Out of the 200 odd disciples, Su Zimo, Feng Haoyu and the previous year's number one, Huo Xiuyuan, were the only ones who were still calm.

During that period of time, some cultivators had already started placing plates of spirit herbs at the front of the hall.

The brown haired youth said in a deep voice, "Everyone's only allowed to take a single set, nothing more."

Only a single set of spirit herbs – that was another increase in difficulty!

Since the Foundation Establishment Elixir required more than ten types of spirit herbs, a mistake in extraction for any one of them would result in a wrong ratio for the recipe and a failure to refine the pills!

"Peak master, this is too difficult!"

"That's right! What if we were to make a mistake while extracting out of nervousness? Wouldn't that mean we won't have a chance anymore?"

Many disciples could not help but start to grumble.

The brown haired youth replied coldly, "The ingredients required for the Foundation Establishment Elixir are still considered common and our sect has them planted all around. But, do you know that some elixirs require spirit herbs that are extremely rare? For those, you only get one shot! If you fail your refinement, you can't blame anyone else but your own lack of skills!"

Everyone was silent.

Feng Haoyu laughed softly as he had already returned from choosing a stalk of each spirit herb, preparing himself for the Foundation Establishment Elixir.

The second to do so was Huo Xiuyuan.

Right after, the disciples headed forth and chose their spirit herbs.

Before long, many of them returned to their original positions and took out their Elixir Furnaces to make preparations.

"Let the Elixir Peak face-off commence!" The brown haired youth waved his hand.

Spirit fires lit up within the hall.

Su Zimo had never refined a Foundation Establishment Elixir yet.

However, he was no stranger to the spirit herbs used.

They were all ingredients used for other elixirs as well.

He was in no hurry as he picked up a stalk of spirit herb before him and closed his eyes to recall.

As he went through his memories, he recalled the temperature required for the spirit herb as well as every single detail of the extraction process.

He only had a single chance. If he were to fail the extraction, he would fail the Elixir Peak face-off – he had no room for errors!

“Ah!”

Right then, a disciple beside him yelped as he watched a pile of ashes on his palm with a vexed expression.

He had failed his first spirit herb’s extraction.

Because the temperature he used was too high, the spirit herb instantly turned into ashes.

Sighing, that disciple put away his Elixir Furnace and left the hall.

Right after, two other disciples failed their extractions and left silently.

A few people had been eliminated just on the first spirit herb’s extraction.

In truth, it wasn’t because those disciples were bad at elixir refinement. However, because there was only a single chance and this was during Elixir Peak’s face-off, it was only natural for them to feel pressured and make mistakes.

Before long, most of the disciples had completed the extraction of their first spirit herb as they placed the essence into the Elixir Furnace.

They had naturally started their first extraction with a spirit herb they were most familiar with and hence the success.

“What’s Su Zimo doing? Has he fallen asleep?”

“I think he has no clue what he’s doing and he’s just pretending that he does.”

Upon seeing that Su Zimo had not started on his extraction for a long time, some sarcastic voices could be heard from the crowd.

It was only until the other disciples had started on their second spirit herb’s extraction that Su Zimo opened his eyes. Igniting his spirit fire, he placed the spirit herb above it and started extracting.

Before long, his extraction produced a tuft of powder which he placed in the Elixir Furnace. Picking up his second stalk of spirit herb, he closed his eyes and recalled once more.

After a long time, he opened his eyes again and began extracting his second stalk of spirit herb.

More disciples were eliminated at the second spirit herb’s extraction.

Compared to Feng Haoyu and Huo Xiuyuan, Su Zimo’s speed was extremely slow. However, he made no mistakes at all as every single essence he produced gave off a refreshing medicinal scent.

As time passed by, more and more disciples were eliminated.

By the time Su Zimo was done with extraction of his spirit herbs, there were only around 80 of the 200 odd people left.

Third step of elixir refinement, synthesis.

The proportion of spirit herb essences required must be exact; the slightest mistake would result in a refinement failure.

This step was a test of the Elixir Refinement Master's attentiveness and conscientiousness.

After synthesis came the secondary extraction.

This time, the flame can be more intense.

This was the step where Su Zimo and Feng Haoyu's Level 3 Spirit Fire would be of great use.

What was worth mentioning was that Huo Xiuyuan had also managed to cultivate a Level 2 Spirit Fire which was extremely rare.

Feng Haoyu was the first to be done with the fourth step followed swiftly by Huo Xiuyuan.

Because he had spent too much time on the first extraction, Su Zimo was one of the slowest among the many disciples.

Fifth step, formation!

This step would reveal the quality of the elixir and it would be obvious who was better!

Initially, Feng Haoyu and Huo Xiuyuan would take note of Su Zimo's progress and situation from time to time. However, neither of them dared to be distracted on the step of formation.

It was absolutely silent outside of the hall as well.

Everyone held their breaths and watched intently at the two people condensing their elixirs.

Bang!

There was a crisp sound.

One of the disciples had failed his formation and the elixir exploded. Dejected, he left the Elixir Refinement Hall in indignance.

Right after, more crisp sounds echoed out of the hall.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Another couple of disciples failed their elixir formation and the number of people in the hall decreased.

"Form!"

One of the disciples cursed softly.

"Haha, I did it!"

That disciple burst out in laughter. Right as he was about to collect his elixir and check on its quality, black smoke puffed out of the holes in his Elixir Furnace, giving off a nasty stench.

The brown haired youth shook his head.

For a black smoke as such to be released, it meant that the Foundation Establishment Elixir was no different from a poisoned elixir.

“Form!”

Right then, Huo Xiuyuan hollered softly.

Immediately, a white smoke wafted out of the Elixir Furnace with a faint fragrance.

“Retrieve!”

A pill flew out of the Elixir Furnace and a clear pattern could be seen on it.

“It’s an inferior-grade Foundation Establishment Elixir!”

“Senior Brother Huo is amazing! He did it!”

Huo Xiuyuan heaved out a sigh of relief and looked towards Feng Haoyu subconsciously.

“Form!”

Right then, Feng Haoyu was also done with his elixir formation as a stronger fragrance was emitted from his side.

An elixir flew out and hovered in midair. Spinning around, there were two elixir patterns clearly etched on it!

A middle-grade elixir!

Huo Xiuyuan’s eyes dimmed as he let out a long sigh.

He believed that he was definitely not weaker than Feng Haoyu in terms of the first three steps.

However, for the fourth step, secondary extraction, his Level 2 Spirit Fire was no match for a Level 3 which was able to extract more thoroughly. That was the reason for the difference in quality of their pills.

Before long, the other disciples were done with their elixir formation as well.

Even though there were more than 20 others who had succeeded in elixir formation, their elixirs contained too many impurities and had no grade because of their poor qualities.

Right then, Su Zimo was completed with his elixir formation as well as a thick aroma spread across the place. The moment the disciples outside the hall caught a whiff of it, their bodies shuddered and they let out intoxicated expressions as the spirit qi in their bodies began to rumble!

If the fragrance alone possessed such an effect, what grade was the elixir created?

The brown haired youth's nose quivered as he sniffed carefully. Instantly, his expression changed as he bolted upright.

With disbelief in his eyes, he murmured softly, "Could it be..."

Swash!

An elixir flew out of the Elixir Furnace and hovered in midair – there were five patterns etched on it!

It was a perfect Foundation Establishment Elixir!

Chapter 123: Mysterious Danger

Looking at the Foundation Establishment Elixir that hovered in midair, it was pure silence both in and outside the hall.

Everyone held their breaths subconsciously as their eyes and minds were drawn in by that single elixir.

The five elixir patterns on the surface looked so profound and mystical. They were flawless, as though they were the most beautiful patterns in this world.

Five elixir patterns, a perfect Foundation Establishment Elixir!

Even Advanced Elixir Refinement Masters who could refine Grade 3 elixirs would not dare to guarantee that they could definitely produce a perfect Foundation Establishment Elixir.

Perfection meant that there were no flaws at all.

This proved that every step and every detail of an Elixir Refinement Master during the entire pill refinement process had reached perfection!

With such a Foundation Establishment Elixir, even Qi Refinement Warriors with a pseudo spirit root would have a chance to rise to Foundation Establishment realm!

At that moment, most of the disciples forgot about victory or defeat. They forgot that this was Elixir Peak's face-off as they were all smitten by the elixir.

That was the case until Su Zimo put away the Foundation Establishment Elixir. Thousands of disciples let out a long sigh at the loss of that spectacular sight.

That sigh contained many complicated emotions.

Disappointment, jealousy, envy and respect.

"No doubt! He won without any doubt!"

"I thought that Elixir Peak's face-off would be an even more intense challenge between Su Zimo and Feng Haoyu. To think that it would be this one-sided."

The five peak masters nodded in approval as their eyes could not conceal their admiration for Su Zimo.

Elixir Peak's number one! Number one of two peaks!

More importantly, this year's number one of Elixir and Weapon Peak was much stronger than previous years.

For so many years, there had never been a number one of the Weapon Peak face-off who could successfully produce an inferior-grade spirit weapon.

For so many years, there had never been a number one of the Elixir Peak face-off who could create a perfect elixir even for elixirs with easier recipes.

Compared to the other sects, Ethereal Peak was much weaker in terms of elixir and weapon refinement.

In the immortal meet of the Great Zhou Dynasty held once every ten years, Ethereal Sect has never had anyone leave their names on the rankings of elixir and weapon refinement for the sect competition.

But this time, the five peak masters saw hope through Su Zimo.

Perhaps, he might be able to leave his mark on the ranking list for elixir and weapon refinement during the sect competition. That would bring them immense prestige!

Elixir Peak's Huo Xiuyuan came before Su Zimo and laughed bitterly, cupping his fists. "Junior Brother Su, you're really amazing. I've truly lost against you."

"I was just lucky," Su Zimo smiled.

At that moment, everyone's gazes landed on Su Zimo.

A look of admiration flickered through Leng Rou's eyes as well.

On the other side, Feng Haoyu was surprisingly calm despite his defeat as he lowered his head in deep thoughts.

At the same time, Su Zimo felt a mysterious sense of danger!

It was extremely faint but when he sensed for it carefully, he could not discover anything.

Su Zimo frowned.

It was an ominous feeling.

Ever since he entered the sect, he had been very comfortable. Even if Feng Haoyu was hostile to him, it did not bring him such a sense of danger.

Discreetly, Su Zimo swept his gaze past the five peak masters and did not notice anything unusual.

Therefore, he turned sideways and glanced at the crowd outside the hall but to no avail.

The sense of danger earlier on seemed to be a hallucination.

Right then, the brown haired youth declared, "The outcome of the Elixir Peak's face-off is clear. I believe everyone has seen it. The victor is Su Zimo, disciple of Weapon Peak!"

Outside the hall, little fatty, Xue Yi and other Weapon Peak disciples cheered loudly.

Right then, every single Weapon Peak disciple beamed with pride.

The disheveled old man sat where he was laughing non-stop as well.

“Su Zimo, follow me to the Elixir Chamber to choose an elixir of your picking.”

Su Zimo nodded. Under the envious gaze of many disciples, he left the Elixir Refinement Hall and headed to the Elixir Chamber with the brown haired youth.

Even though the disciples outside the hall gradually dispersed, they were still discussing the outcome.

Losing two rounds in a row, Feng Haoyu left the Elixir Refinement Hall expressionlessly.

“Senior Brother Feng, there’s no need to take the outcome to heart. In any case, you can still teach that guy a lesson after the Spirit Peak face-off!”

A Spirit Peak disciple remarked consolingly.

Feng Haoyu smiled calmly. “Elixir and weapon refinement are merely supplementary skills at the end of the day. I hadn’t spent much effort on them to begin with. If I lost, so be it. That doesn’t matter to me.”

“You’re right, Senior Brother Feng.”

“That’s right. In the cultivation world, it doesn’t matter how amazing you are at elixir and weapon refinement. If you meet with danger, you will still die all the same. Only true strength is what matters.”

Many Spirit Peak disciples responded in unison.

After leaving Elixir Peak, Feng Haoyu suddenly said, “You guys can head back first. I’ll spend some time alone.”

Thinking that it was because Feng Haoyu was in a bad mood, the many disciples did not say anything else and left one after another.

Once everyone left, Feng Haoyu turned around slowly and glared towards the Elixir Chamber. His calm gaze suddenly changed, emitting a chilling aura!

...

On the other side, there were still some disciples lingering on Elixir Peak discussing things.

“Feng Haoyu had lost completely for both challenges.”

“That’s right. He boasted that he wanted to get number one of three peaks before the five peaks face-off. Now, I guess only Spirit Peak’s left for him.”

“I heard that Su Zimo had not intended to take part in the Elixir Peak face-off to begin with. Feng Haoyu was the one who provoked him into doing so.”

A disciple at the side shook his head. “In my opinion, this may not be a good thing for Su Zimo.”

“What do you mean?” Someone asked.

“That’s right. He’s number one for two peaks! The rewards aside, the honor itself is immense! Everyone will know of Su Zimo’s name in the sect from now on!”

That person scoffed coldly, "Don't forget, he still has a fight with Feng Haoyu after the five peaks face-off!"

Upon saying that, everyone suddenly realized.

Feng Haoyu was at Perfected Qi Condensation while Su Zimo was only at Level 8 – both of them were not on the same level!

That person continued, "Su Zimo's two consecutive victories must have already angered Feng Haoyu. In their final fight, Su Zimo is mostly going to be crippled or dead!"

As everyone was discussing, Su Zimo came forth from the Elixir Chamber.

This time, he had chosen a perfect Spirit Gathering Elixir.

Coupled with the existing perfect Spirit Gathering Elixir in his storage bag, he was confident that he would be able to reach Level 9 Qi Condensation within the next two days!

Just as Su Zimo was about to leave, the brown haired youth held him back and asked, "How confident are you for your last fight against Feng Haoyu?"

"Not confident," Su Zimo shook his head.

"I've got a suggestion," The brown haired youth said, "Now that you're number one of two peaks, there's no need for you to fight against Feng Haoyu. Even if you admit defeat, it's nothing much. After all, there's no long-lasting hatred within the same sect."

Su Zimo did not reply to the question and merely nodded. "Yes, I will consider it again."

"Alright, you can go back now," The brown haired youth nodded.

Chapter 124: Array Peak Face-off

Su Zimo had not left far from Elixir Peak on his flying sword when he caught sight of a person who seemed to have been waiting for him for a long time.

"Su Zimo, I didn't think much of you at first. But, I have to admit that the surprises you've given me weren't too small," Feng Haoyu said with a fake smile.

Su Zimo paused for a moment and ignored him, wanting to leave on his flying sword.

Feng Haoyu continued, "Oh yes, there's something I need to remind you about."

"Oh?" Su Zimo remarked softly without turning back.

"From now on, you'd better keep your distance from Leng Rou. Or else..." Even though Feng Haoyu did not continue, there was a chilling coldness in his tone.

Suddenly, Su Zimo laughed.

He and Leng Rou were merely acquaintances. However, Feng Haoyu's threatening tone disgusted him.

Su Zimo asked indifferently, "Or else, what?"

"Or else, you will die!"

Since there was no one else around them, Feng Haoyu had no qualms and did not conceal his killing intent.

With his back facing Feng Haoyu, Su Zimo's gaze narrowed.

He had indeed sensed Feng Haoyu's killing intent at that very instant!

Su Zimo's expression remained unchanged as he laughed. "Ethereal Peak forbids internal killing of disciples. You are no exception to that rule, Feng Haoyu."

"Fufu, it's fine."

Feng Haoyu replied coolly, "As long as you're in the sect, I'll play with you till you die!"

Su Zimo turned around slowly and looked at Feng Haoyu silently. He said expressionlessly, "Do you believe that I'll kill you right now?"

For some reason, Feng Haoyu felt a chill run down his spine as Su Zimo stared at him.

That feeling was as though he was being targeted by a ferocious ancient demon beast that could tear him apart at any moment!

Frowning, Feng Haoyu dispelled the weird sensation within him.

After all, Su Zimo was only at Level 8 Qi Condensation and was no threat to him.

When he saw that Feng Haoyu did not reply, Su Zimo turned around to leave and before long, he disappeared from the former's vision.

When Su Zimo returned to his cave abode, he stopped in his tracks. His eyes flickered as he pondered deeply.

He gradually noticed that something was amiss.

Previously, Feng Haoyu was indeed extremely hostile towards him.

However, after the Weapon and Elixir Peak face-offs, that hostility had gradually transformed into killing intent!

Even though it seemed normal, there was something ridiculous about it.

There was no deep hatred between fellow disciples. Even if there was competition, there was no need for Feng Haoyu to want to kill him.

Earlier, Feng Haoyu asked him to keep his distance from Leng Rou.

Right after that, he revealed his killing intent. Although it seemed logical, it felt like he was trying to hide something.

If neither Leng Rou nor the two face-offs were the reason for Feng Haoyu to want to kill him, what was?

Was Feng Haoyu hiding something?

Or perhaps, was he worrying too much? Was Feng Haoyu merely a narrow-minded person who was blunt?

Su Zimo shook his head.

He had a feeling that Feng Haoyu was not that simple.

After pondering for a while more without any clues, Su Zimo entered his cultivate and continued with his seclusion cultivation.

The Array Peak face-off was tomorrow.

The location of the face-off was at the Ten Formations Pagoda where the challenge would be on who could clear the most levels the fastest.

Su Zimo had no intention of taking part in it.

First, he did not have much time and he had to focus on raising his cultivation.

Second, even though clearing the Ten Formations Pagoda would not expend too much spirit qi, it would take a toll on his mental health and energy. It would take him more than two days to recover from it.

He had to do his best to prepare for the battle against Feng Haoyu two days later!

...

On the other side, Feng Haoyu had just returned to his cave abode when a hoarse voice suddenly sounded in his ears. It was hard to tell if it was a male or female.

“Feng Haoyu, you said too much to that lad!”

The voice sounded deep and sinister, making one’s hair stand on end.

Feng Haoyu spun around suddenly but there was no trace of anyone.

“You don’t have to doubt me. If I’m here to look for you, I naturally know of your identity. I’m just in time to remind you to be careful and not expose yourself. Also, don’t forget about your mission!”

The voice sounded once more erratically.

Feng Haoyu was finally relieved upon hearing that. Letting out a long breath of air, he laughed. “You’re worrying too much, senior. I intentionally requested for him to keep his distance from Leng Rou. That Su Zimo must definitely think that she is the reason for my killing intent.”

“Don’t underestimate anyone!”

“Understood,” Feng Haoyu nodded his head obediently.

“That Su Zimo is a hidden danger. We cannot keep him alive!”

Feng Haoyu lowered his head and replied in a low voice, “Don’t worry, senior. Leave it to me.”

“Senior, may I know who you are in Ethereal Peak?” After pausing for a moment, Feng Haoyu asked.

“That’s not for you to know now. If need be, I will tell you.”

“Yes.”

After a moment, that voice no longer sounded and Feng Haoyu knew that the other party had left.

Arranging his attire, he looked around before entering his cave abode.

...

Fourth day, Array Peak face-off.

Each year, there were not many disciples spectating Array Peak’s face-off.

After all, the challenge was to clear the Ten Formations Pagoda. Prior to this, there was already a record on the Ten Formations Stele and everyone already knew who the number one would be.

But it was different this year.

Just three months ago, a mysterious challenger had appeared and destroyed every single record in the Ten Formations Stele’s history.

“Cleared Level 10, 7 days 18 hours!”

That row of words was still at the first row of the Ten Formations Stele. It was eye-catching but its name was completely blank.

Out of curiosity, everyone wanted to know the identity of that mysterious challenger.

To many disciples, they felt that the reason why that person had kept his identity hidden was because he wanted to shock everyone during the Array Peak face-off.

As such, many trial disciples had already gathered on Array Peak early in the morning because they wanted to see his true identity.

The five peak masters had arrived early on as well. Seated in a row, they conversed idly.

“Xuan Yi, you’re still unwilling to tell us even now?” Wen Xuan laughed and asked.

The brown haired youth urged as well, “That’s right. Since we’re going to find out today, we’ll at least be prepared if you tell us beforehand!”

Xuan Yi’s gaze swept through the crowd but he did not see Su Zimo. After pondering for a while, he shook his head. “Forget it, you guys can see for yourself.”

Since Su Zimo did not choose to announce it, Xuan Yi had no intention to reveal it either.

Zhong Wen of Array Peak came before the Ten Formations Stele and looked at the first row of words with a complicated expression.

“Are you finally going to show yourself today?”

He murmured softly, “Let me see who you are so that I can accept my defeat thoroughly.”

Before long, the Array Peak face-off began.

Doves of disciples challenging the Ten Formations Pagoda entered it together.

Everyone outside was waiting for that one person to walk to the Ten Formations Stele and tap his sect badge.

As long as that person appeared, there would be no need to take part in the Array Peak face-off and he would also be the true number one of Array Peak!

At that moment, Su Zimo was in seclusion within his cave abode, attempting to reach Level 9 Qi Condensation...

Chapter 125: Number One of Spirit Peak

Time passed by gradually and in the blink of an eye, a day had passed.

The lights of the Ten Formations Pagoda's formation patterns shone repeatedly through the day.

The first row on the Ten Formations Stele still had a blank column where the name was supposed to be.

By the time the last person was sent out of the Ten Formations Pagoda, there were still no changes on the Ten Formations Stele.

Not to mention the many trial disciples gathered before Array Peak, even the four peak masters looked to be slightly disappointed.

"Just who is that person? Why is he not here?"

"Could that person truly think nothing of fame at all?"

The disciples were at the peak of their curiosity towards the mysterious challenger such that they were getting anxious about it.

Xuan Yi stood up and declared, "The face-off is over. The victor is Zhong Wen, disciple of Array Peak."

Sparse cheers rang out through the crowd.

Everyone knew that the reason why Zhong Wen could obtain the number one position was because the mysterious challenger had not appeared.

At that moment, Zhong Wen looked at the Ten Formations Stele and smiled bitterly too.

His title as number one of Array Peak this year was probably the least convincing.

The five peak masters were the first to leave.

In midair, Wen Xuan was still disgruntled and asked, "Xuan Yi, stop leaving us hanging. Just who is it?"

Xuan Yi smiled and did not reply. After pondering for a while, he asked, "After the five peaks face-off, where are you guys intending to set the location for the fight between Su Zimo and Feng Haoyu."

"The location doesn't matter since the outcome will not change," Wen Xuan replied indifferently.

Xuan Yi shook his head. "This match is the focus of everyone's attention. In fact, the hype might not even be less than the five peaks face-off itself. We had better take it more seriously."

"Su Zimo is forbidden from entering Spirit Peak so we can't use the spirit arena there. Since Su Zimo is a disciple of Weapon Peak, it wouldn't be appropriate to hold it there either. That leaves us with the spirit arenas of Talisman, Array and Elixir Peak," The brown haired youth said.

Xuan Yi suddenly said, "Let's hold it at Array Peak then."

"Alright," Wen Xuan nodded.

The other peak masters did not have any objections and so the matter was settled.

...

Each year, Spirit Peak's face-off was always placed on the last day. It was also the most valued event of the sect and all the cultivators.

Be it array formations, talismans, weapons or elixir refinement, their ultimate goal was to raise the fighting strength of a cultivator.

The cultivation world was a place where it was survival of the fittest and the strongest reigned supreme!

The degree of cruelty was even more brutal than the jungle mountains where fierce beasts were rampant. This was also the reason why Die Yue had Su Zimo survive in Cang Lang Mountain Range for a year.

Now, Su Zimo had barely just stepped foot into the cultivation world and had yet to truly explore it and experience the threats within.

Fifth day, Spirit Peak face-off.

Almost all disciples of the five peaks were present. Many inner sect disciples who were in seclusion and even some elders turned up as well.

The rules of the face-off were simple. Sect disciples would head up to draw lots for one on one fights. Finally, the eventual winner of the brackets is the number one of Spirit Peak!

Even though Feng Haoyu had lost consecutively in the Weapon and Elixir Peak face-offs, he was still the one who received the most cheers during the Spirit Peak face-off.

At the same time, all five peak masters thought the most highly of him too.

In the process of competing with his opponents, Feng Haoyu had indeed displayed the strength expected of him.

He won consecutively from the start to the end and no one posed much of a challenge to him.

Many disciples had heard that he was already cultivating one of the three major secret skills of the sect – Ethereal Sword – and wanted to catch a glimpse of its glory during Spirit Peak's face-off.

However, Feng Haoyu did not use it at all.

Other than Feng Haoyu, Leng Rou's performance was rather shocking too.

Even though she did not possess an inferior-grade spirit weapon, she had a firm foundation in sword wielding. Coupled with her talisman usage, she defeated many strong opponents of Spirit Peak.

Leng Rou's flying sword carried a chilling aura. If one was careless and made contact with the sword, they would be covered in a layer of frost, reducing their mobility.

Of course, little fatty was still the one who surprised everyone the most.

He was only at Level 9 Qi Condensation and did not have much of an advantage in sword kinesis.

However, with the help of the inferior-grade gigantic axe given to him by Su Zimo and his powerful body tempering technique, he had managed to close the gap and obtain victory against quite a number of Perfected Qi Refinement Warriors.

The final battle was still between Feng Haoyu and Leng Rou.

Even though Leng Rou deployed a myriad of different talismans, Feng Haoyu was still stronger in terms of sword kinesis.

With the aid of his wind spirit qi, Feng Haoyu's flying sword was more agile and graceful than anyone else. It was quite an eye-opener.

Before sunset, Spirit Peak's face-off was over.

As expected, Feng Haoyu was number one of Spirit Peak!

Leng Rou was number two.

Little fatty actually obtained third place.

The prize for the number one of Spirit Peak was also the most generous. Not only was Feng Haoyu awarded with many spirit stones and contribution points, he could also choose an elixir from the Elixir Chamber, an inferior-grade spirit weapon from the Spirit Weapon Chamber and a Grade 1 talisman from the Talisman Chamber.

"Hehe, seems like someone will be crushed by Senior Brother Feng tomorrow."

"That's right. Even people like Leng Rou and Senior Brother Li who are at Perfected Qi Condensation lost to Senior Brother Feng. There's no way Su Zimo is a match with his Level 8 Qi Condensation."

After the Spirit Peak face-off, no one had confidence in Su Zimo.

"That Feng Haoyu had managed to obtain the number one of Spirit Peak with much ease. He did not even use his full strength," The brown haired youth chuckled.

Wen Xuan could not contain his smugness as he nodded. "I'm never wrong in my judgment. If that wasn't the case, I wouldn't have pleaded with the sect master personally to let him learn our sect's secret skill in advance."

"To be fair, someone like Feng Haoyu with a wind spirit root is truly the best candidate to cultivate Ethereal Sword," The cold-faced lady nodded.

Wen Xuan laughed. "Before this battle, I already told Haoyu that if he were to win his fellow seniors and juniors using the secret skill, he would have lost even if he got number one since no one would be convinced of his victory."

"Not bad, Haoyu had not let me down."

The disheveled old man remained silent and looked slightly worried.

The stronger Feng Haoyu was, the worse Su Zimo was going to be defeated tomorrow.

As his beloved disciple, he could not bear to see Su Zimo suffer such a blow.

"Wen Xuan, give me some face. Why don't you tell Feng Haoyu to forget about the battle tomorrow?"
The disheveled old man suddenly said after much hesitation.

Given his status, the fact that he was saying something like that to plead for mercy for a disciple was extremely rare.

Xuan Yi, the brown haired youth and cold-faced lady remained silent.

It was inappropriate for them to interfere in something like this.

Wen Xuan remained silent for a moment before replying, "The arrow is already on the bow and has to be shot. I can't do anything about this matter."

"But..."

Right as the disheveled old man was about to continue, Wen Xuan frowned and cut him off, "Su Zimo won Haoyu twice in a row but Haoyu's not even allowed to win one? Your disciple is dear to you but mine isn't dear to me?"

With that, Wen Xuan turned to leave and left the four of them alone.

Slightly awkward, the disheveled old man sighed.

The brown haired youth coughed gently. "Don't blame him. Wen Xuan had poured too much effort into Feng Haoyu. Even though he did not say anything, he's definitely feeling upset about Feng Haoyu's two consecutive losses. It's only normal."

Xuan Yi patted the disheveled old man's shoulder and comforted him. "It's alright. It's good to let Su Zimo suffer some setbacks too. His future achievements might not be any weaker than Feng Haoyu's."

"The road ahead... is still long," Xuan Yi's eyes flickered mysteriously as he said that.

Chapter 126: Three Flying Swords

For the past two days, Su Zimo had not appeared at all. He was in seclusion attempting to reach Level 9 Qi Condensation.

On the night after Spirit Peak's face-off, Su Zimo consumed the second Spirit Gathering Elixir.

His body seemed to have transformed into a whirlpool as a steady stream of spirit qi flowed through his right hand into his body, wildly surging towards his dantian.

The spirit qi within Su Zimo's dantian expanded rapidly, vast as the seas.

After a long time, his body shuddered as his eyes jerked wide open. In the darkness, two rays of divine light shone and rapidly disappeared.

Level 9 Qi Condensation!

In less than a year after he joined the sect, Su Zimo had finally reached Level 9 Qi Condensation.

His cultivation speed was definitely not slow even in the entire cultivation world.

At the moment, Su Zimo carefully sensed the changes in his dantian with confused eyes.

Based on the Qi Condensation manual, the spirit qi within one's dantian would experience a change upon reaching Perfected Qi Condensation.

In other words, the dantian would form a vast sea of qi.

That was also the reason why it would take more time, resources and difficulty to attain a breakthrough from Level 9 to Perfected Qi Condensation.

But right now, Su Zimo's dantian had already formed a vast sea of qi despite having just attained Level 9 Qi Condensation.

This was completely different from what the Qi Condensation manual had described!

This also meant that in terms of spirit qi, Su Zimo's Level 9 Qi Condensation might not be weaker than Feng Haoyu's Perfected Qi Condensation!

Su Zimo smiled to himself. Suddenly, he was filled with anticipation and confidence towards tomorrow's battle.

...

The next morning.

When Su Zimo walked out of his cave abode, there were already many cultivators waiting for him to come out of seclusion.

Little fatty, Xue Yi and many other Weapon Peak disciples awaited him.

"Bro, you're finally out of seclusion! Eh? You're already at Level 9 Qi Condensation?" Little fatty's eyes lit up.

Su Zimo smiled and nodded.

"Was Feng Haoyu the number one of Spirit Peak?" Su Zimo asked.

Everyone nodded.

When they recalled Feng Haoyu's performance yesterday, everyone's expressions turned solemn. They looked at Su Zimo with a hint of worry in their eyes.

To everyone, even at Level 9 Qi Condensation, the gap between Su Zimo and Feng Haoyu was way too great.

Little fatty said in a low voice, "Feng Haoyu obtained number one yesterday without even using the sect's secret skill. Clearly, he did not use his full strength. Bro, you've got to be careful today."

"Oh, so powerful?" Su Zimo laughed.

Xue Yi smiled as well. "Junior Brother Su, don't be too stressed in this battle. Just give it all you've got. If you lose, let it be. You're already the number one of two peaks anyways."

"That's right. Even if Feng Haoyu wins you, so what? Weapon Peak disciples are not good at fighting to begin with so it's nothing embarrassing if he wins."

Su Zimo smiled and asked, "Where's the venue of today's battle?"

"Array Peak's spirit arena!" Little fatty replied.

"Array Peak?" Su Zimo muttered softly with a strange look flashing through his eyes.

Ever since he left Array Peak three months ago, he had not returned.

Sensing that Su Zimo's expression was odd, little fatty was worried and asked hurriedly, "What's wrong, bro? Is there anything wrong with Array Peak?"

"Nothing's wrong."

Su Zimo shook his head and did not explain. He waved his hand and said, "Let's go. Time to try out the skills of Spirit Peak's number one."

...

In just one day, Array Peak was once again filled with many disciples.

Other than the trial disciples of the five peaks, some of the inner sect disciples also rushed over to watch the bustle. Chen Yu of the Disciplinary Hall who had a grudge against Su Zimo was among them.

The five peak masters were all present.

Array Peak's spirit arena was right beside the Ten Formations Pagoda and was close to the Ten Formations Stele too.

Feng Haoyu arrived bright and early. He stood on the spirit arena with hands behind his back, looking proud and haughty.

Before long, Su Zimo and the others arrived on their flying swords and descended in front of the spirit arena.

Su Zimo's appearance instantly attracted countless stares.

“Fufu, I was wondering why he hasn’t appeared for the past two days. So, he’s been cultivating in seclusion and has actually reached Level 9 Qi Condensation.”

The tone of the disciple who spoke did not sound surprised. Instead, it was filled with obvious mockery.

“So what if he’s at Level 9 Qi Condensation? He’s still asking to be humiliated!”

“I’m betting that Su Zimo’s going to lose within three moves!”

“Forget it. If Senior Brother Feng goes all out, Su Zimo won’t be able to withstand even a single move.”

There was a flurry of discussion in the crowd.

Even though Su Zimo attained number one of Weapon and Elixir Peak, it did not mean that he was strong. No one thought highly of him for this battle.

Many of the Spirit Peak disciples were just waiting to see Su Zimo make a fool of himself.

Under countless scrutinizing gazes, Su Zimo entered the spirit arena.

Right from the beginning, Su Zimo’s expression was extremely calm. His eyes were peaceful and clear as if they were unmoved entirely.

“Hey, Su Zimo! If you kneel and beg for mercy now, Senior Brother Feng might let you off out of kindness!”

Among the crowd, Sun Tao shouted and caused a burst of laughter. He was the Spirit Peak disciple who was knocked out by Su Zimo with a single slap.

Su Zimo cast a sideways glance at Sun Tao indifferently and said, “Why? Do you think you haven’t embarrassed yourself enough last time?”

That incident had always been a disgrace for Sun Tao.

Now that Su Zimo was mentioning it in front of everyone, Sun Tao’s face turned green and red. He gritted his teeth and spoke coldly, “Su Zimo! I haven’t settled things with you for what happened back then! You ambushed me first but yet you dare to shamelessly flaunt it here?”

“Flaunt?”

Su Zimo laughed and shook his head. “What’s there to flaunt about beating someone like you?”

Anyone could tell of the casual and contemptuous tone in Su Zimo’s voice.

Instantly, Sun Tao’s eyes were bloodshot as he hollered, “Su Zimo, fight me fair and square if you’ve got the guts! I’ll let you witness what I can do!”

Right then, little fatty sneered, “You want to fight? Sure, I’ll fight you.”

Sun Tao immediately wilted.

During the Spirit Peak face-off, little fatty’s strength was obvious to all – Sun Tao was no match for him.

“Alright, that’s enough! Feng Haoyu, Su Zimo! You guys can begin.”

Right then, Wen Xuan shouted softly and suppressed the crowd.

In the spirit arena.

Feng Haoyu looked at Su Zimo disdainfully and scoffed, "Su Zimo, Junior Brother Sun is right. If you beg me now, I can consider sparing you. If we really fight, you can't blame me for not showing mercy since a sword has no eyes."

When he heard that, the disheveled old man frowned and could not help but declare, "When fellow disciples spar, one must not go overboard and threaten the other party's life!"

Feng Haoyu laughed. "Don't worry, peak master. I'm just going to teach Junior Brother Su a proper lesson about what it means to be a cultivator!"

Right as he said that, Feng Haoyu slapped his storage bag gently and summoned an inferior-grade flying sword.

Without revealing how he controlled it, the flying sword revolved around his body and danced in the air, revealing an extremely precise mastery of sword kinesis.

At the same time, Su Zimo summoned a flying sword from his storage bag.

Everyone focused their attention.

It was an inferior-grade flying sword as well!

"He must have gotten that as a reward from being Weapon Peak's number one."

"Yes, the number one can pick an inferior-grade spirit weapon of his choosing in the Spirit Weapon Chamber. This must have been his choice."

"Junior Brother Su is not behaving rationally. If I were him, I would have definitely chosen a defensive spirit weapon!"

Pointing at Su Zimo's flying sword, Feng Haoyu chuckled. "Do you really think you're qualified to fight me just because you have a single inferior-grade flying sword?"

"You're mistaken."

Su Zimo replied indifferently, "It's not just one."

Right as he said that, two more flying swords appeared in Su Zimo's palm!

Chapter 127: Fight

The crowd fell into an uproar upon seeing the three flying swords in Su Zimo's palm!

If those were ordinary flying swords, they would not have caused such a scene.

However, those were three inferior-grade flying swords!

Even if Su Zimo was rewarded with an inferior-grade spirit weapon for being number one of Weapon Peak, what was up with the other two flying swords?

Even for Spirit Peak disciples who were well known for their combat strength, most of them did not have inferior-grade spirit weapons. Su Zimo had just joined the sect for less than a year but he had three?

The many trial disciples below instantly turned green with envy.

“The peak master is way too biased. Why did he give Su Zimo three inferior-grade spirit weapons?”

“It might be because Su Zimo was number one for two peaks this year?”

“So what if he’s number one of two peaks? Our sect doesn’t have such a rule!”

“That’s right. Can’t they give us one instead? I’ve joined the sect for two years now but I haven’t even gotten a single inferior-grade spirit weapon.”

The disciples were not the only ones; even the five peak masters were stunned for a moment.

Xuan Yi’s heart skipped a beat as a strange glint flashed in his eyes. He thought to himself, ‘Could that lad have already mastered the Tripartite Sword Formation?’

He thought again, ‘But it’s impossible. How could he possibly have done so in such a short period of time?’

When he heard the discussions below, Wen Xuan frowned and looked sideways to the disheveled old man.

Sensing Wen Xuan’s gaze, the disheveled old man harrumphed lightly, “Don’t tell me you also think that I gave Su Zimo those three flying swords?”

The brown haired youth suddenly said, “The three flying swords are almost identical in terms of shape and size. They should have been made by the same Weapon Refinement Master. We shouldn’t have three almost identical flying swords in the Spirit Weapon Chamber.”

“In other words, does that mean Su Zimo refined those three flying swords himself?” The cold lady raised her eyebrows in surprise.

Xuan Yi nodded. “That should be the case.”

Using the vision of a Golden Core, they could naturally discern with a closer look that Su Zimo’s three flying swords were almost identical and couldn’t have been from the Spirit Weapon Chamber.

The brown haired youth smiled. “No wonder he was refining an inferior-grade gigantic axe for that little fatty of Spirit Peak during the Weapon Peak face-off. It was because he already had three flying swords.”

“I’ve got to acknowledge that he does have an extraordinary attainment in weapon refinement. To think that he could manage to refine three inferior-grade spirit weapons in less than a year. Seems like that unique spirit gathering method of his is rather useful.”

On the spirit arena.

When he saw Su Zimo's three flying swords, Feng Haoyu was stunned for a moment as well. However, the surprise in his eyes disappeared as quickly as it appeared. He then laughed mockingly. "Su Zimo, my dear Su Zimo. Do you really think you can win me just because you've got three flying swords?"

"You can try me."

Su Zimo replied nonchalantly.

Swash! Swash! Swash!

Three flying swords floated before Su Zimo, trembling slightly as they hummed incessantly.

"Well played!"

Feng Haoyu's eyes lit up as he hollered softly, "I'll show you what true strength is today!"

"Go!"

Standing motionlessly on the spot, Feng Haoyu waved and injected a stream of spirit qi into his flying sword.

The spirit pattern on his sword shone brightly.

Swoosh!

Turning into a stream of light, it burst towards Su Zimo's head with lightning speed!

Before the sword even arrived, its cold aura was already striking!

Su Zimo's heart skipped a beat.

In a sense, this match was his first battle making use of immortal techniques after he stepped foot into the cultivation world.

Feng Haoyu's sword was much faster and unpredictable than he had expected!

Su Zimo's expression was unchanged as he split two flying swords to receive the incoming sword. His third flying sword was then sent to attack Feng Haoyu!

"Hmm?"

Feng Haoyu narrowed his gaze.

He had not expected that Su Zimo would try to retaliate instead of using everything as defense!

"You must be courting death!"

Pointing his fingertips into the distance, he commanded, "Go!"

The flying sword which was initially speeding through the air shone brightly and accelerated. It broke through the defense of Su Zimo's two flying swords before arriving right in front of him in an instant.

In the blink of an eye, Su Zimo's defending flying swords became nothing but a decoration.

"Well played!"

Many disciples below could not help but exclaim upon seeing that.

If it was any other Qi Refinement Warrior, they would have been petrified at the sight of a chilling, bedazzling flying sword appearing right before their faces.

However, Su Zimo was not flustered in the slightest bit. Shifting his feet lightly, he sidestepped Feng Haoyu's attack barely.

Even though the flying sword brushed by Su Zimo, it did not injure him in the slightest bit!

When the five peak masters saw that, their eyes lit up as they nodded approvingly.

Feng Haoyu had not expected that Su Zimo would be able to dodge that attack.

At the same time, Su Zimo's third flying sword was already approaching Feng Haoyu.

Feng Haoyu controlled his flying sword while summoning a silver shield from his storage bag. Injecting spirit qi, it expanded and blocked right in front of him.

Clang!

The flying sword met with the shield and let out an ear-piercing sound.

That shield was the reward Feng Haoyu chose from the Spirit Weapon Chamber after getting number one of Spirit Peak.

Su Zimo's other two flying swords revolved around Feng Haoyu's flying sword. They clashed continuously, sending off a ferocious sword intent and sparks flew everywhere.

In an instant, Feng Haoyu's flying sword was restrained by Su Zimo's two flying swords and could not break through their offenses.

On the other hand, Su Zimo's third flying sword was attacking Feng Haoyu constantly.

Feng Haoyu could only defend passively.

All the disciples watching were dumbfounded at what was happening as they looked on with disbelief.

The battle was completely different from what they had imagined!

In their opinion, the difference in strength between the both of them were so great that it would take three rounds at most to determine the victor.

But, now that they were actually fighting, Feng Haoyu was on the losing end and could only defend passively.

Su Zimo who had three inferior-grade flying swords and a proficient mastery of sword kinesis had completely restricted Feng Haoyu's movements!

"This doesn't make sense."

"Su Zimo's only at Level 9 Qi Condensation. Even if he has two more flying swords, he shouldn't be able to take Senior Brother Feng head-on. Why does it feel as though they're both at a similar level of strength?"

The disciples below frowned in confusion.

Little fatty was the only one who had a rough idea of Su Zimo's background.

Back when the both of them sparred in the cave abode, Su Zimo was able to match his Level 8 Qi Condensation only being a Level 7.

With that logic, Su Zimo should be able to hold his ground against Feng Haoyu despite being a level down.

Upon seeing this, the five peak masters had different expressions.

The disheveled old man was invigorated and pleasantly surprised.

Spirit Peak's master, Wen Xuan, was frowning.

With his eyesight as a Golden Core, he could naturally tell that Su Zimo's mastery of sword kinesis was not weaker than most of Spirit Peak's disciples.

Coupled with the assistance of three inferior-grade flying swords, his strength was raised as well.

But of course, none of the five peak masters could understand how Su Zimo could stand his ground against Feng Haoyu's Perfected Qi Condensation.

The three flying swords clashed repeatedly around Su Zimo.

Feng Haoyu's flying sword was clearly more agile and graceful. However, it could not reach Su Zimo after being restrained by the latter's two flying swords.

On the contrary, Su Zimo's third flying sword was attacking Feng Haoyu consistently.

Feng Haoyu could only rely on the inferior-grade shield to block and was unable to retaliate. Instead, he looked rather pathetic.

The battle had fallen into a stalemate!

Chapter 128: Thunderfall Talisman

It had to be said that Su Zimo had indeed shocked everyone.

Based on the strength that he was displaying, he would have probably secured a top three position if he had taken part in Spirit Peak's face-off!

"Hmph, if Senior Brother Feng were to use his full strength, Su Zimo would be defeated instantly!"

"That's right. However, it's not embarrassing even if Su Zimo loses now since he managed to corner Senior Brother Feng as such."

The more the disciples below discussed, the more furious Feng Haoyu was in the spirit arena.

This exchange was completely out of his expectations.

Even though Su Zimo was only at Level 9 Qi Condensation, he was not getting the upper hand against their clashes!

This meant that if Su Zimo was at Perfected Qi Condensation, the latter might very well surpass him in terms of strength!

He must not let this carry on!

Waving the shield in his hands, Feng Haoyu struck away the incoming flying sword. Suddenly, he pulled out a talisman from his storage bag and injected spirit qi to it.

Whoosh!

A bedazzling light appeared on the talisman.

“Senior Brother Feng’s making use of talismans now!”

“That looks to be an offensive talisman that’s rather powerful. Let’s see how Su Zimo blocks this!”

Feng Haoyu threw the talisman in Su Zimo’s direction.

Suddenly, it exploded.

The scattered talisman fragments stirred the spirit qi in the air, instantly forming a blinding flash of lightning.

“Thunderfall talisman!”

The crowd exclaimed.

Thunder types of attacks were the strongest and most ferocious amongst spirit arts.

That talisman was naturally the most lethal among Grade 1 talismans!

That was also a reward that Feng Haoyu had obtained as the number one of Spirit Peak. Now that he had to use it, a pained look inevitably flashed by Feng Haoyu’s expression.

When he saw the Thunderfall Talisman summoned by Feng Haoyu, the disheveled old man’s expression changed as he glared at Wen Xuan. “That disciple of yours has quite a lot of treasures!”

“Talisman usage is also part of one’s strength. It’s normal,” Wen Xuan replied indifferently.

“He lost. Now that the Thunderfall Talisman’s out, the outcome has been decided.”

“Even if Senior Brother Feng was the one facing the Thunderfall Talisman, he would most likely have to use all his strength. Let’s see how Su Zimo can even block this, fufu.”

Right as the disciples were discussing, an explosion echoed out from the skies above the spirit arena.

Snap!

A bolt of thunder as thick as an arm struck down towards Su Zimo with a fast speed.

The moment Feng Haoyu had summoned the talisman, Su Zimo had already felt that something was wrong and hurriedly withdrew his three flying swords.

However, he was still extremely calm.

At the same time as the talisman exploded, Su Zimo waved his hands and the three flying swords suddenly shuttled through the air, leaving tears in the void. Finally, they joined head to tail in a triangle sword formation!

“Buzz!”

A bedazzling light shone through the air below the spot where lightning was flashing!

It was the light of formation patterns!

A light of formation patterns had actually appeared in the skies above the spirit arena!

“This is...”

“What’s going on? Why is there an array formation?”

“Did someone set up a formation beforehand?”

“Something isn’t right. That light of formation patterns seems to have been emanated from Su Zimo’s three flying swords.”

The crowd let out a cry of surprise. They were baffled as to what was happening in the spirit arena.

As for the five peak masters, they shuddered as their expressions changed drastically.

Even if Xuan Yi was mentally prepared, he could not help but feel excited upon seeing this scene with his own eyes. He exclaimed rapidly, “Good, good! Well done! Our sect finally has a successor for a Sword Formation Master!”

The disheveled old man burst out into laughter as well. “Good for you, Xuan Yi. So, you were secretly nurturing my disciple to be a Sword Formation Master too. Not bad, not bad at all!”

As a Golden Core, the disheveled old man naturally knew that there was no way Su Zimo could become a Sword Formation Master without Xuan Yi’s guidance.

Wen Xuan furrowed his brows in silence.

“Sword Formation Master?”

Most of the disciples below were unfamiliar with the term.

Array Peak disciples were the only ones that were shocked when they heard the term. Letting out astounded expressions, they could not help but gasp, “Su Zimo’s a Sword Formation Master?”

“So what if he’s a Sword Formation Master? What’s the big deal!” A Spirit Peak disciple sneered.

Before he could finish his sentence, the thunderbolt from the skies collided with the triangle sword array and a loud explosion was heard as electricity shot out in all directions.

Under the electric current in the atmosphere, Su Zimo’s legs separated slightly. His expression was cold as he controlled the sword formation with both hands while his hair spread behind him like a furious mane – he was akin to an immovable god!

“Huh? He’s actually fine?”

Many disciples were dumbfounded as their eyes nearly popped out.

Su Zimo had managed to block the power of the Thunderfall Talisman completely with his triangle sword array and was completely undamaged!

A disciple secretly exclaimed, “Is a Sword Formation Master that powerful?”

“What’s a sword formation?” Someone could not help but ask.

“If I’m not wrong, that’s our sect’s Tripartite Sword Formation!”

Array Peak’s Zhong Wen said in a low voice.

“Why tripartite?” Someone asked him.

Zhong Wen explained, “The tripartite refers to heaven, earth and man. With the three swords joined head to tail as a foundation, they form the Tripartite Sword Formation. The head is the tail and the tail is also the head. Every single corner of the sword formation has the sharpness of a sword and can both attack and defend!”

If one were to say that controlling three flying swords meant that Su Zimo’s strength was increased...

A sword formation made up of the three flying swords and made use of their combined strength was an exponential increase in strength!

The tides had turned entirely.

Everyone thought that Feng Haoyu would definitely win after summoning that Thunderfall Talisman. However, no one expected that Su Zimo would summon the Tripartite Sword Formation to guard against the thunderstrike entirely!

As Leng Rou watched below, she could not help but lament internally, ‘If I were to go against Junior Brother Su, I wouldn’t be able to break that defense of his sword formation either.’

In the spirit arena.

Feng Haoyu’s eyes flashed with surprise when he saw that Su Zimo was able to withstand the Thunderfall Talisman.

Right then, Su Zimo controlled the Tripartite Sword Formation with both hands. Pointing forward, he commanded softly, “Go!”

A triangular sword formation that carried a chilling aura tore through the voids and sped towards Feng Haoyu with a blinding light.

Instantly, Feng Haoyu retracted his flying sword and blocked himself from the Tripartite Sword Formation.

Clang!

When the flying sword met with the sword formation, there was a clashing sound of metals.

Feng Haoyu's flying sword was sent flying immediately. However, the Tripartite Sword Formation merely paused momentarily in midair before clashing heavily against Feng Haoyu's silver shield!

Bam!

With a loud bang, Feng Haoyu's entire body was shaken as he stumbled a couple of steps back. He felt a sweetness in his throat as blood oozed from the corner of his mouth.

He was injured!

Even in Spirit Peak's face-off, Feng Haoyu was not injured once against the many strong competitors of Spirit Peak.

Yet, against a Weapon Peak disciple that was a cultivation realm lower than his, Feng Haoyu was actually injured!

Su Zimo's eyes gleamed brightly as he controlled the Tripartite Sword Formation from afar. They hummed and quivered endlessly in the skies, sending forth a massive sword aura and could attack at any moment.

It was only at that moment when the crowd realized that the outcome of this match was unpredictable!

Su Zimo's strength was enough to pose a threat to Feng Haoyu!

Everyone had underestimated the strength of this Weapon Peak disciple!

"Hahahaha..."

Suddenly, Feng Haoyu laughed.

It was a deep laughter filled with anger.

"Su Zimo, do you really think that you can win me with this lousy sword formation?"

Taking a deep breath of air, Feng Haoyu said word by word, "Today, I'll let you experience the sect's secret skill and let you understand my true strength!"

Chapter 129: Hexagonal Sword Formation

Even though Su Zimo was still calm upon hearing that, the many disciples below were shocked and excited.

"Senior Brother Feng's finally about to use the sect's secret skill!"

"I heard that it's one of the three major secret skills, Ethereal Sword! Through the ethereal plains, the sword is nowhere to be seen!"

"Ethereal Sword is one of the strongest sword kinesis skills within our Great Zhou Dynasty. Finally, we'll get to see it today!"

Most of the people present were trial disciples of the five peaks who usually would not have a chance to catch a glimpse of the sect's secret skills. Right now, their eyes were all widened in anticipation.

The disheveled old man frowned. He looked at Wen Xuan and said in a deep voice, "Let's stop the battle here and consider it as a draw between both parties."

In all fairness, for Feng Haoyu to have to use the sect's secret skills against Su Zimo, he had already lost in the first place.

That was because most normal trial disciples would not have the rights to learn Ethereal Sword.

The disheveled old man's suggestion at this point was already a compromise on his end.

Wen Xuan pondered for a short moment before shaking his head. "At this point, how can we appease the masses if a victor is not decided?"

"Wen Xuan, is it because you're indignant that Feng Haoyu was unable to win this?" The disheveled old man was a little angry.

"Yes!"

Wen Xuan turned to the disheveled old man and replied, "The three of you have been teaching Su Zimo how to refine elixirs, weapons and imparting sword formations to him. I can let that slide. However, Feng Haoyu is a disciple of Spirit Peak! I can't let him lose in a battle! That is a concern of my peak's glory!"

"You...!" The disheveled old man hesitated.

Wen Xuan waved it off. "I'm never wrong in my judgment of people. Haoyu is the future hope of our sect. At the end of the day, the legacy of our sect is not about elixir or weapon refinement. True strength is what matters."

Right then in the spirit arena, Su Zimo said something that interrupted the argument between the disheveled old man and Wen Xuan.

"The sect's secret skill?"

Su Zimo laughed and shook his head. "Feng Haoyu, if that's your last resort, you will definitely lose this fight!"

Everyone was stunned!

No one could imagine that Su Zimo would say something like that in the face of the sect's secret skill!

Was he looking down on the sect's secret skill or Feng Haoyu?

What right did Su Zimo have?

"Hahaha!"

Feng Haoyu burst out in laughter. "Su Zimo, I think you don't know just how strong our sect's secret skill is to speak of that nonsense. Today, I'll teach you how to be a human!"

"Go!"

Feng Haoyu conjured a sword art as his fingertip emitted a trace of spiritual energy and injected it into the flying sword.

Quivering endlessly, the sword tore through the voids and a series of shadows appeared behind it in a bewitching manner. It was hard to tell between reality and illusion.

When he saw that, Wen Xuan nodded as his eyes flashed with admiration.

The brown haired youth commented with a grave look, "There are three levels to Ethereal Sword. To think that Feng Haoyu would have mastered Level 1, Shadows, this quickly."

"Haoyu has a wind spirit root to begin with and he's the most suited to cultivate Ethereal Sword. Otherwise, I wouldn't have let him learn the sect's secret skill while he's in Qi Condensation realm," Wen Xuan replied indifferently.

In the spirit arena.

Su Zimo retracted his three flying swords which hovered in front of him. Slapping his storage bag, another three flying swords appeared in the blink of an eye.

Furthermore, all three of them were inferior-grade spirit weapons as well!

Everyone was stunned.

Six inferior-grade flying swords!

That was something completely unimaginable for Qi Refinement Warriors.

"W-W-What's going on?"

"Holy f*ck! How is Su Zimo taking out inferior-grade spirit weapons three at a time? How is he obtaining them so cheaply?!"

Most of the cultivators watched with widened eyes as their jaws nearly dropped to the ground.

Many disciples were already envious over Su Zimo's previous summoning of three inferior-grade flying swords. Now that he summoned yet another three, most of them could not take it any longer.

Some of the trial disciples who had joined the sect for many years instantly felt that they had been wasting their time since they hadn't acquired even a single inferior-grade spirit weapon. Yet, Su Zimo had six after joining for less than a year!

At that moment, most of the disciples finally realized as well.

Those six identical flying swords could not have been from the sect's Spirit Weapon Chamber!

The only possibility was that Su Zimo had refined them himself!

"This is crazy. Had I known this would be the case, I would have gotten closer to Junior Brother Su! Perhaps I might even get an inferior-grade spirit weapon from him!"

"Why would I need to learn sword kinesis if I had six inferior-grade spirit weapons? I'll just toss them at any opponent I meet and smash them to death!"

“Don’t spout nonsense. Senior Brother Feng is in possession of our sect’s secret skill. That isn’t something that can be defended against by spirit weapons.”

The crowd was buzzing but the five peak masters remained silent.

The disheveled old man furrowed his brows even tighter.

Even though having six inferior-grade spirit weapons was amazing, they were not match against the sect’s secret skill.

Sensing the disheveled old man’s worries, the brown haired youth comforted, “No matter what, that lad is truly talented in weapon refinement still. As long as we nurture him well, he can still make waves through the sect competition.”

What the brown haired youth meant was that even if Su Zimo lost this match, it would not affect his status in the sect.

After all, everyone had their own specialties.

Su Zimo was talented in weapon and elixir refinement while Feng Haoyu was good in fighting – the both of them had different advantages.

However, no one realized that Xuan Yi who was standing beside the brown haired youth was incomparably nervous. He watched Su Zimo fixedly with a deep excitement in his eyes.

“Indeed, six flying swords alone won’t be enough to defend against the sect’s secret skill. But, it it was...”

In the spirit arena.

Feng Haoyu’s expression changed momentarily when he saw the six flying swords summoned by Su Zimo. However, that change disappeared almost instantly as he scoffed coldly, “Su Zimo, you’re way too naive! You really think that you can defend against my sword just because you have six inferior-grade flying swords?”

“Go!”

A cold glint flashed in Feng Haoyu’s eyes as he hollered. The sword tore through the voids with a chilling aura, letting out a soul-rattling explosion!

A series of shadows formed behind the sword, confusing any onlookers.

Su Zimo was calm as he waved his hands continuously, controlling the six flying swords in the air.

Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!

The six flying swords intertwined, leaving streams of sword qi.

The Tripartite Sword Formation was a triangular sword formation.

The Hexagonal Sword Formation was an evolution of that. By combining two Tripartite Sword Formations, it formed the Hexagonal Sword Formation!

It was a great enhancement be it in terms of offense or defense!

“What is this?”

“Eh? That hexagonal star formed by the sword formation looks familiar?”

“I think... that’s the emblem on Peak Master Xuan Yi’s sleeves!”

Everyone instinctively looked towards Xuan Yi.

By now, Xuan Yi had already stood up and was visibly emotional as he nodded. “Good, good! Well done! You have actually managed to master the Hexagonal Sword Formation!”

All other four peak masters let out looks of disbelief.

There was only a single Sword Formation Master within the sect – Xuan Yi.

As Golden Cores, they naturally knew how difficult it would be to become Sword Formation Masters.

The hexagonal emblem etched on Xuan Yi’s sleeves was a display of his pride.

And now, the Hexagonal Sword Formation has appeared once more. However, it came from the hands of a Qi Refinement Warrior – that shocked everyone!

Ethereal Peak, within Ethereal Palace.

Sect Master Ling Yun’s heart skipped a beat as he suddenly opened his eyes. A strange glint flashed in his eyes as he murmured, “The Hexagonal Sword Formation?”

Above the clouds in the skies of Array Peak, a gigantic pair of wings were faintly visible. A pair of eyes were also silently watching everything unfold in the spirit arena.

“Fufu, that lad. Not bad, not bad at all.”

Chapter 130: Defeat? Forced Foundation Establishment!

The six flying swords formed the hexagonal star sword formation and a bedazzling light of formation patterns blocked in front of Su Zimo.

Feng Haoyu’s attack was extremely swift as shadows were produced endlessly from his sword. It was difficult to distinguish where the sword was through vision anymore.

However, the advantage of a sword formation was reflected at this moment as well.

The sword formation formed by six flying swords was enough to block Su Zimo’s body entirely.

Feng Haoyu’s attack that came right for him would definitely hit the sword formation!

Clang!

True enough.

A crisp sound was produced when Feng Haoyu’s flying sword struck the sword formation.

Both sides exerted their strength!

“Break it!”

Feng Haoyu controlled the flying sword and injected spirit qi continuously. His eyes were wide with anger as his body trembled – he was using his full strength to break the Hexagonal Sword Formation’s defense.

Behind the sword formation, Su Zimo was calm as usual. He pushed his hands forward and twisted them.

The light of the formation pattern shone.

Instantly, the Hexagonal Sword Formation spun and sent Feng Haoyu’s sword flying in the blink of an eye.

“It’s impolite not to reciprocate. Feng Haoyu, have a taste of my sword formation’s power too. Let’s see if your secret skill can block this!”

Su Zimo stopped the Hexagonal Sword Formation from spinning and pointed forth with his finger.

In midair, the blinding light of the gigantic Hexagonal Sword Formation tore through the voids and smashed towards Feng Haoyu.

All disciples of the five peaks felt their hearts pounding as they watched with bated breath.

Everyone realized that this may very well be the move that reveals the outcome of the fight!

At that moment, the five peak masters were solemn as well.

The Hexagonal Sword Formation was considered as a Grade 2 formation. Even with the sect’s secret skill, Feng Haoyu was unable to face the might of the Hexagonal Sword Formation head-on.

From the point of view of the Golden Cores, Feng Haoyu had no chance of winning at all.

If Feng Haoyu were to give up on defense at that moment and continued to control his flying sword to unleash the sect’s secret skill to strike at Su Zimo, he might stand a shot at victory.

However, that would require a kind of fearlessness to cast life and death aside.

In a flash, Feng Haoyu’s expression changed.

Feng Haoyu subconsciously chose to defend himself against the terrifying might of the approaching Hexagonal Sword Formation.

“Go!”

Conjuring the Ethereal Sword art, Feng Haoyu injected all the spirit qi he had into his flying sword to defend against the incoming Hexagonal Sword Formation!

When he saw that, Wen Xuan sighed gently with a look of disappointment.

He was defeated!

If Feng Haoyu chose to fight head-on, this was a fight he was bound to lose!

Bam!

The flying sword smashed against the Hexagonal Sword Formation and it exploded with a loud boom. Sparks flew as a surge of heat spread out!

The sword formation trembled and almost dispersed. However, it soon stopped quivering and stabilized.

As for Feng Haoyu's sword, it was repelled entirely!

The Hexagonal Sword Formation paused for a slight moment before continuing to crush forward!

"Ah!"

Gasps could be heard from the crowd as they saw this.

Everyone realized that this elite who had won first place in yesterday's Spirit Peak face-off might very well be defeated!

Right then, Feng Haoyu reached inside his storage bag and swallowed a Qi Rejuvenation Elixir. Summoning his silver shield, he roared and pushed forward!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The Hexagonal Sword Formation spun and struck at the silver shield repeatedly.

With every single strike, Feng Haoyu would be knocked a step back and his face would turn frailer while his body trembled violently.

Bang!

The Hexagonal Sword Formation was finally dispersed.

At the same time, Feng Haoyu was also sent flying. He fell from the spirit arena and rolled a couple of times on the ground. Clothes filled with mud, he looked extremely wretched.

Wen Xuan closed his eyes.

The disheveled old man heaved out a long sigh of relief.

There was silence in the crowd.

After a while, little fatty waved his fists and let out a cheer.

Xue Yi and the others looked excited and could not suppress their excitement.

A Weapon Peak disciple had defeated the number one of Spirit Peak! This was something that had never happened in the thousands of years of history of the sect!

Furthermore, it was a defeat with a level difference!

Many Spirit Peak disciples were silent as they lowered their heads dejectedly. Looking at Feng Haoyu who was crawling up from the ground, their expressions were complex.

It wasn't because the number one of Spirit Peak this year wasn't strong enough.

On the contrary, the number one of Spirit Peak this year was much stronger than previous years because Feng Haoyu was already cultivating the sect's secret skill while being in Qi Condensation realm.

However, to their helplessness, Weapon Peak had produced an even more terrifying disciple!

A genius in both elixir and weapon refinement, he even became a Sword Formation Master and managed to release a Grade 2 sword formation, taking down Feng Haoyu in a single move.

It was said that Qi Refinement Warriors' fighting techniques were relatively simple. However, this fight was full of twists and turns with both parties revealing their trump cards – it was truly an eye opener for many disciples.

Su Zimo put away his flying swords and his expression showed a hint of exhaustion.

Even though a sword formation was strong, controlling six flying swords at the same time drained a lot of spirit qi. By now, the spirit qi within his body had dried up.

"Fufufu..."

Right then, a sinister laugh sounded from beneath the spirit arena, attracting countless gazes.

"I haven't lost yet!"

Feng Haoyu slowly stood up with blood still oozing from the corner of his mouth. His expression was deranged and his eyes were filled with madness.

Just as Su Zimo was about to leave the spirit arena, he heard that statement. He paused in his tracks and frowned, looking over.

Feng Haoyu retrieved a jade bottle from his storage bag and poured out a pill. Rearing his head, he swallowed it before declaring coldly, "Su Zimo, you will definitely lose today."

"What is that?"

"I think it's a Foundation Establishment Elixir!"

"Senior Brother Feng is trying to... forcefully reach Foundation Establishment!"

When he saw that, the disheveled old man stood up and said grimly, "Wen Xuan, aren't you going to stop him? The five peaks face-off is a spar between cultivators of the same realm. If Feng Haoyu were to reach a Foundation Establishment realm before fighting Su Zimo, what would that amount to?"

Wen Xuan closed his eyes and struggled inwardly, looking hesitant.

He knew that even if Feng Haoyu managed to defeat Su Zimo as a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, it wouldn't be a glorious victory.

However, Feng Haoyu might not ever recover from this blow of defeat if he lost this battle.

This was someone that he had chosen and even regarded as the future of the sect.

Wen Xuan couldn't bear it.

Xuan Yi also persuaded, "Let the battle end here. This is against the rules."

When he heard that, Wen Xuan opened his eyes suddenly and yelled, "What are rules? This is not a fight for the five peaks face-off, it's a personal feud between the both of them! Even if Haoyu becomes a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, that's his own strength!"

"Also, Xuan Yi! The Hexagonal Sword Formation is a Grade 2 formation! Who are you to talk about rules by imparting it to Su Zimo beforehand!"

Xuan Yi frowned and shook his head. "The reason why I imparted Su Zimo the Hexagonal Sword Formation was because he had the right to learn."

Actually, Xuan Yi's statement had already vaguely revealed who the challenger who cleared the Ten Formations Pagoda was.

However, in the heat of the moment, both Wen Xuan and the disheveled old man did not think too much of it and naturally could not comprehend the hidden meaning behind Xuan Yi's words.

Wen Xuan flicked his sleeves and said, "If not for the Hexagonal Sword Formation, Su Zimo would have been defeated by now. Since he was the one who broke the rules first, who's to stop Haoyu from fighting Su Zimo again after advancing to be a Foundation Establishment Cultivator?"

"Wen Xuan, are you crazy?!"

The disheveled old man could not help but scold, "What's there to fight if Feng Haoyu advances to become a Foundation Establishment Cultivator! Why don't you go and fight a Nascent Soul Perfected Lord then?!"

The disciples of the five peaks below were dumbfounded.

For the peak masters to argue over a fight between Qi Refinement Warriors... that was something that was even more exciting than the battle earlier.

"Alright, that's enough. All the disciples below are watching. Can you guys behave like the elders you are?" The cold lady frowned and persuaded.

Chapter 131: Not Even at Foundation Establishment!

Feng Haoyu was long already at Perfected Qi Condensation and could naturally advance to Foundation Establishment realm at any moment.

However, he had not expected that he would make a breakthrough during his fight against Su Zimo.

It seemed a little hasty.

If it was anyone else, they might fail in their advancement to Foundation Establishment. However, Feng Haoyu was different. In terms of endowment or spirit root, he was the creme of the crop.

Even though he was already injured, he had the confidence of reaching Foundation Establishment realm in one fell swoop after consuming the Qi Rejuvenation and Foundation Establishment Elixirs!

As the five peak masters argued, the medicinal essence of the Foundation Establishment Elixir coursed through Feng Haoyu's body and surged into his dantian.

Inside, his sea of qi rumbled and spewed continuously.

Through the power of the medicinal essence coupled with Feng Haoyu's control, the vast sea of qi began to coagulate to the middle!

The sea of qi was shrinking within his body.

However, the aura it emitted was even more terrifying.

The difference between Qi Condensation and Foundation Establishment was a huge leap.

In the path of cultivation, every crossing of a realm would bring about a significant change to one's strength.

This was the reason why things like defeating an opponent of different levels was mostly only possible within the same realm. When the difference is a realm apart, it was difficult to take down an opponent.

That was also the reason why cultivators would have a change in title after a breakthrough in realm.

Cultivators at Qi Condensation realm were called Qi Refinement Warriors.

As for Foundation Establishment cultivators, they were called Cultivator Warriors.

At the Golden Core realm, one could gain the title of a Perfected being!

From Qi Condensation to Foundation Establishment, the spirit qi in the dantian would undergo a change in quality. Instead of qi, it would be transformed to a liquid state.

With that, the strength one possessed would be purer, more solidified and powerful.

Using that as a basis, one could then learn and unleash the various types of power spirit arts in the cultivation world.

Right now, that transformation was happening within Feng Haoyu's body.

No matter how much the five peak masters argued, they were still rational towards this matter as none of them interrupted Feng Haoyu's breakthrough process.

After all, Feng Haoyu's cultivation path may very well be crippled if he were to fail his Foundation Establishment breakthrough.

That would imply the loss of a great genius.

Standing in the spirit arena, Su Zimo did not make a move as well while he watched everything unfold.

Everyone present was not fools. To be fair, if it was a life and death battle, Feng Haoyu would have already lost here.

Which opponent would give their enemies a chance to break through?

They would seize the opportunity and kill them on the spot!

However, to everyone's bewilderment, Su Zimo was still extremely calm as though he was looking at something completely unrelated to him.

An unknown period of time passed.

The vast sea of qi within Feng Haoyu's dantian disappeared, transforming into a drop of liquid. An even more terrifying aura spread out slowly, rippling through the crowd.

From its size, that drop of spirit liquid was small. However, in terms of power, it was many times larger than the sea of qi!

Feng Haoyu let out a long sigh. By the time he walked back into the spirit arena, he had gone through a complete transformation – his aura was incomparably sharp with a torrential fighting spirit!

Smiling, Feng Haoyu asked, "Su Zimo, you don't have much spirit qi left in you after controlling those six flying swords, right?"

Su Zimo did not reply and merely looked at Feng Haoyu silently.

On the other side, Wen Xuan and the disheveled old man were still arguing nonstop.

The fight between Su Zimo and Feng Haoyu had become a battle between the two peaks.

To Wen Xuan, it no longer mattered if the fight was unfair to Su Zimo. Feng Haoyu was a disciple of Spirit Peak and this year's number one to boot.

He must not lose!

What Wen Xuan did not realize was that his attitude provoked the injustice in Su Zimo's heart.

'Since you want to let Feng Haoyu win, very well. I'll have him lose!'

'Not just a loss. I'll have him suffer a complete defeat!'

Feng Haoyu waved his sleeves and his flying sword that had fallen nearby turned into a stream of light, returning to his side.

The mere act of summoning his flying sword left many disciples' hearts palpitating.

It was too fast!

Now that he was a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, Feng Haoyu's sword kinesis speed was more than twice as fast!

Coupled with the support of his wind attribute alongside the sect's secret skill, Ethereal Sword, which Qi Refinement Warrior could defend against Feng Haoyu's next attack?

Defending aside, they may not even be able to dodge it!

The disheveled old man laughed coldly. No longer arguing with Wen Xuan, he declared loudly, "Su Zimo, let's not fight anymore! Since he wants the victory to be in Spirit Peak's name, so be it! It doesn't matter. Everyone knows who won or lost!"

With that, the disheveled old man left his seat and walked towards the spirit arena while remarking, “What an eye-opener. A Foundation Establishment Cultivator actually has the cheek to fight against a Qi Refinement Warrior. Some people truly know no shame.”

Wen Xuan’s expression turned ugly.

If Su Zimo had admitted defeat, he wouldn’t have forced the fight to continue.

When Feng Haoyu heard the disheveled old man’s words, his cheeks burned with shame as well.

Suddenly, Su Zimo laughed and asked, “Master, it’s already embarrassing enough for Foundation Establishment Cultivators to pick a fight against Qi Refinement Warriors. But, wouldn’t it be even more embarrassing if they lose?”

“Hmm?”

The disheveled old man froze for a moment and paused in his tracks – he did not understand what Su Zimo meant.

Su Zimo clenched his fists. His eyes shone brightly as he declared loud and clear, “Feng Haoyu, let me tell you. Even at Foundation Establishment, you can’t beat me!”

“Such arrogant words. Prepare to die!”

A trace of ruthlessness flashed through Feng Haoyu’s eyes. Conjuring a sword art in both hands, he hollered as his flying sword suddenly burst forth, leaving shadows in its wake.

The sword qi was like ice that sent shivers down one’s spine!

“Ah!”

A wave of shock and astonishment could be heard from the crowd.

That strike was way too fast!

Everyone had merely felt a flash before their eyes and the flying sword had already pierced right in front of Su Zimo.

But the next moment, everyone’s exclamation stopped!

The disciples of the five peaks discovered in shock that out of nowhere, Su Zimo had disappeared from where he was too!

“Bang!”

Suddenly, a loud bang echoed from the spirit arena. A footprint appeared where Su Zimo was originally standing, shattering the surrounding stone slabs and leaving a spiderweb-like crack.

Everyone focused their attention.

In midair, a green shadow burst towards Feng Haoyu with lightning speed.

A crisp sound rang out as the flying sword crossed with that shadow.

If the sword had pierced Su Zimo, it would definitely flash with a bloody glow.

However, there were no traces of blood on the spirit arena.

He had dodged it?

Su Zimo had actually managed to dodge an attack of a Foundation Establishment Cultivator using the sect's secret skill!

But, what was that crisp sound earlier on?

The disciples of the five peaks below were unable to see clearly because the flying sword was too fast and Su Zimo's intercrossing with it merely lasted a split second.

However, the five peak masters saw everything clearly.

The moment Feng Haoyu struck with his sword, Su Zimo left his original position and charged towards the incoming sword!

Right as the sword was about to stab him, Su Zimo suddenly made an extremely strange dodge in midair and barely avoided the flying sword.

It was a mere centimeter gap!

As for the crisp sound, it was because the flying sword had struck Su Zimo's sect badge on his waist.

Chapter 132: It's Him, Number One of Four Peaks!

In the spirit arena.

No one could understand Feng Haoyu's feelings at the moment.

When he saw Su Zimo charging at him, Feng Haoyu felt that he was not facing a human, but a savage and brutal demon!

He could clearly see a red glint in the depths of Su Zimo's eyes.

Thick, dense veins also popped up on Su Zimo's face – it was a shocking and horrifying sight!

“Ah!”

Losing his composure, Feng Haoyu subconsciously summoned his silver shield to block in front of him.

When Su Zimo arrived before Feng Haoyu, he took a last step and landed with a loud thud, causing the entire spirit arena to shake!

Splash!

Su Zimo's blood rumbled and a shocking sound of waves could be heard by all the cultivators present.

Swoosh!

Su Zimo raised his arm in midair; the clothes on his arm were all tattered and torn into pieces.

What appeared before everyone was a muscular arm as thick as a python with green veins popping out and intertwining with the flesh. It was as though water was gushing forth with an explosive amount of power!

When his fist was thrown out, his flesh expanded once more and it looked like a gigantic stamp was falling to the ground with a shocking aura!

At that moment, everyone had an illusion.

Even though Feng Haoyu was a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, he was insignificant as an ant against Su Zimo's fist!

Bam!

The fist met with the silver shield and let out a deafening, earth-shattering explosion.

The disciples felt their hearts pounding alongside the explosion as they could not help but gulp.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

A strange sound rang out.

First, a gigantic crack appeared on the silver shield in Feng Haoyu's hands. It then slowly spread out and covered the entire shield.

Shattered!

An inferior-grade spirit weapon was shattered by Su Zimo with his bare hands!

The crowd was dead silent.

Everyone watched this horrifying scene with widened eyes and even forgot to breathe.

Falling far away from the spirit arena, Feng Haoyu rolled a couple of times on the ground and coughed out blood. Closing his eyes, his face was pale and it was unknown if he was alive or dead.

Things had ended just like that?

Everything had changed so quickly that it caught everyone off guard.

This was initially Feng Haoyu's victory after he had advanced to Foundation Establishment realm. However, the tides were suddenly turned as he was sent flying out of the spirit arena with just a punch from Su Zimo!

Everyone's first reaction was that Su Zimo had cultivated some extremely powerful body tempering technique.

However, why did that tempering technique seem like it was some demonic technique?

By now, the blood on Su Zimo's face had faded away gradually. However, all the cultivators had witnessed the scene just now.

In the spirit arena.

Su Zimo lowered his head and calmed his blood repeatedly.

Even though he had deliberately suppressed himself for that strike, the new blood cultivated from the Marrow Cleansing section had already been swapped into his marrows and it was difficult to distinguish or even control it properly.

Thankfully, Su Zimo did not let out any obvious signs of demonification.

Even then, that scene attracted the attention of the five peak masters.

At that moment, all five peak masters stood up with a solemn expression as they glared at Su Zimo with suspicion and scrutiny.

Suddenly, on the other end of the spirit arena, a bright bedazzling light burst forth and diverted everyone's attention.

The light came from the Ten Formations Stele.

Suddenly, a change happened on the first row of the Ten Formations Stele.

In place of the blank space, a name appeared – Su Zimo!

“Su Zimo, Cleared Level 10, 7 days 18 hours!”

That row of words caused an uproar.

“Su Zimo? Why is it Su Zimo?”

“T-This doesn't make any sense? Is something wrong with the Ten Formations Stele?”

“Su Zimo was the mysterious challenger?”

Disciples of the five peaks were so shocked that they couldn't speak properly.

Suddenly, a disciple yelled, “Guys, look! That's Su Zimo's sect badge!”

Everyone looked down.

At the feet of the Ten Formations Stele was an inferior-grade flying sword and a sect badge.

That flying sword belonged to Feng Haoyu.

As for the sect badge, it was Su Zimo's.

“I've got it!”

Someone suddenly shouted, “When Senior Brother Feng and Junior Brother Su exchanged blows earlier on, Senior Brother Feng's flying sword knocked Junior Brother Su's sect badge off and it struck the Ten Formations Stele by coincidence!”

At that, everyone finally understood.

But then, everyone was shocked by an even more unacceptable fact!

Su Zimo was the mysterious challenger.

That meant that he should have been the number one of Array Peak this year.

Since Spirit Peak's master had previously forbidden Su Zimo from entering Spirit Peak, he was unable to take part in the face-off.

However, Su Zimo had defeated the number one of Spirit Peak today.

That was akin to him being this year's number one of Spirit Peak!

Coupled with Elixir and Weapon Peaks, Su Zimo had achieved the unprecedented number one of four peaks!

The way everyone looked at Su Zimo gradually changed.

They could no longer use the term genius for someone like that.

He was a monster!

Little fatty was completely stumped.

He could not help but recall Su Zimo once mentioning casually in his cave abode that it was nothing to clear the formations.

Back then, he was displeased and even told Su Zimo earnestly to be humble and to keep a low profile...

"Bro, this is being way too humble!" Little fatty cried.

However, he knew that this was not Su Zimo's fault.

Su Zimo had mentioned that he was the mysterious challenger as well. However, little fatty was the one who did not believe him, thinking that it was a casual remark...

Zhong Wen of Array Peak chuckled bitterly and murmured to himself, "I've made countless guesses as to who you are. Yet, I would have never imagined that you were a disciple of another peak; someone who had joined the sect for less than a year to boot. Sigh."

A strange glint appeared in Leng Rou's eyes as she could not help but wonder internally, 'Given more time, would you take away my position as number one of Talisman Peak too?'

The many disciples aside, even the four peak masters were stunned.

Because Xuan Yi already knew about it, he was not taken aback.

However, the other four peak masters were filled with disbelief.

Wen Xuan looked towards Xuan Yi apologetically.

At first, he misunderstood that Xuan Yi had broken the sect rules by imparting the Hexagonal Sword Formation to Su Zimo without permission.

Now, Wen Xuan finally understood that Xuan Yi had done it because Su Zimo had earned the right to learn it!

Suddenly, Wen Xuan recalled something even more important. With a swift motion, he appeared beside Feng Haoyu and checked the latter before heaving a sigh of relief.

Feng Haoyu had merely fainted over and his life was not in danger.

Wen Xuan dug out an elixir from his storage bag and popped it into Feng Haoyu's mouth. He then raised his head and looked at Su Zimo in the spirit arena with burning eyes.

Right now, Su Zimo had already calmed his blood and returned to normal.

Even though the five peak masters said nothing, they required an explanation from Su Zimo.

Otherwise, even if he was the number one of four peaks and an unprecedented monstrous genius, they would absolutely not retain him!

Chapter 133: Thunderclap Valley

Regarding Su Zimo's matter, the five peak masters had a tacit understanding.

He had cultivated some sort of body tempering technique and it was an extremely terrifying one such that he had the power to defeat an early-stage Foundation Establishment Cultivator!

But of course, it could not be denied that Feng Haoyu's foundation was unstable since he had just advanced to Foundation Establishment realm. Furthermore, he was unprepared.

Even though Su Zimo had won this fight, all five peak masters felt that the outcome would be indeterminate if they were to fight again.

Firstly, it was worth suspecting the origins of this body tempering technique.

Something so terrifying could very likely be a secret of some sect out there, similar to Ethereal Sword.

If that was the case, they would have to think about Su Zimo's background and identity.

Could he be sent by other sects to hide in Ethereal Peak?

Did he have some ulterior motive for joining Ethereal Peak?

That was something intolerable for any sect. If they were to discover a spy, a light punishment would be to maim him of his cultivation or kick him out of the sect. Even a heavy punishment of killing him outright was considered to be normal.

Secondly, that body tempering technique did not seem as though it was from the orthodox path. Instead, it seemed like a demonic technique.

If that was the case and it was proven that Su Zimo was someone of the demonic path, all the more he shouldn't be kept! Despite admiring his talents, all five peak masters would have him killed on the spot!

Something as such was non-negotiable.

The path of immortals and demons was different to begin with and couldn't coexist.

There was no way they would let someone of the demonic path stay in the sect to plot against them!

They then recalled all the various abnormalities about Su Zimo since he had joined the sect. The explosion of the spirit testing gate; he ascended the peak against little crane's obstruction; he slashed at Xuan Yi after clearing the Eight Distresses Formation; he managed to cultivate a Level 3 Spirit Fire right after joining the sect...

"Su Zimo, do you have anything to say for yourself?" The cold lady asked frostily.

A look of pity flashed through Xuan Yi's eyes.

He had initially thought that Su Zimo could become the sect's second Sword Formation Master.

However, he would not permit it if that Sword Formation Master was someone on the demonic path!

Killing demons was the duty of orthodox cultivators. Since Ethereal Peak was one of the five main sects of the Great Zhou Dynasty, this was naturally something non-negotiable.

Furthermore, the talent displayed by Su Zimo was way too extraordinary.

If he was truly someone of the demonic path, he must not be kept alive!

He would definitely grow up to be a powerhouse of the demonic path and would turn into a great nemesis of all orthodox sects!

Su Zimo did not know how he should explain things.

However, through the gazes of the five peak masters, he understood that he could be met with a gigantic predicament he could not get through this.

A calamity of life and death!

"1..."

Right as Su Zimo was about to speak, a loud and clear sound of a crane could be heard from the clouds above the heavens.

Swoosh!

The winds howled as a gigantic pair of wings covered half the skies, shrouding them with a large shadow.

Everyone subconsciously looked up.

A humongous crane descended from the skies. Flapping its wings, sand was blown everywhere.

The clothes of many disciples fluttered in the wind. Some disciples even lost their footing against the strong wind and swayed.

The Mystical Guardian Beast had suddenly appeared!

No one had expected that a match between two Qi Refinement Warriors would trigger such an immense existence in the sect.

In the eyes of many disciples, the crane was the most mysterious existence in the sect. Rarely seen, it was said that the crane was even older than the sect itself.

However, one thing was certain – the strength and status of the crane surpassed even the five peak masters!

“Greetings, senior.”

Instantly, the five peak masters bowed respectfully at the arrival of the crane.

Hovering in midair, the crane did not move and swept its gaze across the crowd, finally fixing it on Su Zimo. Suddenly, it spoke in human language, “Weapon Peak disciple, Su Zimo, has resulted in Qi Deviation from his training! He shall be punished to an indefinite seclusion in Thunderclap Valley to reflect on himself!”

Everyone was stunned.

The five peak masters were equally stumped.

What surprised the five peak masters was that from the tone of the crane, it seemed as though it had no doubts about Su Zimo’s background and was merely punishing him to reflect on himself in Thunderclap Valley.

In other words, the crane was implying that Su Zimo had not cultivated demonic techniques. He had merely made a mistake in his path of cultivation, resulting in a Qi Deviation.

However, the contradiction was that if Su Zimo’s background and cultivation techniques were normal, there was no need to punish him at all, let alone send him to Thunderclap Valley to reflect on himself.

If there was nothing wrong, why should he reflect on himself?

If it was a mere Qi Deviation, all he had to do was to cultivate in seclusion within his cave abode with extra caution so that he could stabilize his foundation.

Upon hearing the words Thunderclap Valley, the five peak masters exchanged strange glances.

They simultaneously thought of someone.

Other disciples of the sect were no stranger to the Thunderclap Valley as well.

Thunderclap Valley was a place between Ethereal Peak and the back mountains. The strange topography formed a mysterious valley where reverberating thunderclaps could be heard rumbling through the year.

It wasn’t a large place and it was barren.

Every rainy day, it would even bring forth countless thunderbolts.

Due to the thin presence of spirit qi alongside the endless thunderclaps, it was impossible for one to cultivate within.

Being sent to Thunderclap Valley was a punishment akin to being kicked out of the sect.

Suddenly, little fatty recalled something and mumbled to himself, "It's over, it's over! I already told bro that he should release little crane. This is bad. This big crane must be making use of this opportunity to punish bro!"

Naturally, little fatty knew that little crane was trapped in front of Su Zimo's cave abode.

Some disciples also recalled that Su Zimo had once bullied little crane before he entered the sect. Now that the sect's guardian had descended personally, they could not help but relate both matters.

"Hehe! That Su Zimo sure is unlucky! He had just gotten first place of four peaks. Before he can do anything, he's already being thrown to Thunderclap Valley!" Some disciples in the crowd laughed.

"It should be fine. He'll still be equally powerful when he returns."

"Hmph, didn't you pay attention to the main point of senior crane?" That person continued, "Senior crane mentioned an indefinite amount of time for him to reflect on himself! That means that Su Zimo will not be able to leave without senior crane's permission!"

"It can't be that ruthless, right?" Another disciple jumped in fright.

That person shrugged and said, "Even if that's not the case, he won't be able to cultivate within! If it locks him for a good ten years, we'll all be Foundation Establishment Cultivators and inner sect disciples by the time he comes out. Even if he's the number one of four peaks, so what? He'll still be just a Level 9 Qi Refinement Warrior!"

Many disciples could not help but feel secretly alarmed when they heard that.

Su Zimo remained silent in the spirit arena.

In truth, he knew very well that the crane was not sending him to Thunderclap Valley as a punishment.

If it wanted to punish him, it could have done so long ago and without any reason in fact. Why wait till now?

Besides, Su Zimo had a vague feeling.

The crane was doing this to save him!

If it had not appeared, he would either be maimed of his cultivation, kicked out of the sect or killed on the spot!

However, there was something that puzzled Su Zimo as well.

If the crane merely wanted to save him, why send him to Thunderclap Valley?

Why was it doing this?

Chapter 134: Exposed

Even though the five peak masters were perplexed, none of them dared question a decision the Mystical Guardian Beast had descended personally to make.

The crane soared into the skies, causing strong winds to howl as it flapped its wings. No one saw what it did but Su Zimo's body was lifted off the ground uncontrollably and in the blink of an eye, they disappeared from everyone's sight.

After the crane left, the five peak masters exchanged glances and rushed to Ethereal Peak.

They had to inform the sect master about it given the strange circumstances of the incident.

Even after the five peak masters left, all the disciples remained where they were and started discussing.

"Senior crane is incredible. To think that it comprehends human language and can even speak it!"

"I heard that once demons reach a certain realm, they're able to speak like humans."

"That's not all. It's said that some powerful demons can even take on human form, looking entirely identical on the surface!"

For many disciples who had joined the sect for a couple of years now, this was their first time seeing the true appearance of the Mystical Guardian Beast and they were filled with curiosity.

"Sigh, Senior Brother Feng really suffered a huge blow this time. He had boasted that he wanted to obtain number one of three peaks. In the end, he only managed to get number one of Spirit Peak."

"Number one of Spirit Peak? But, he still lost to Junior Brother Su. It's not just Senior Brother Feng, I think this is a huge blow for the entire Spirit Peak."

"That's right. Back then, the peak master even forbade Junior Brother Su from stepping foot into Spirit Peak. Little did he expect that Junior Brother Su would take down his number one."

"Number one of four peaks. Who would have guessed that the mysterious challenger was Junior Brother Su? Sigh."

...

Ethereal Main Peak, Ethereal Palace.

The five peak masters arrived at the same time. Seated at the top of the palace, Sect Master Ling Yun looked as though he was resting with his eyes closed.

Wen Xuan cupped his fists. "Sect master, Su Zimo and Feng Haoyu fought on Array Peak's spirit arena today. In the end..."

"I know."

Before Wen Xuan could even finish, Sect Master Ling Yun interrupted him.

Ling Yun opened his eyes; they were like stars, deep and mysterious. He spoke in a low voice, "The crane has its plan regarding this matter."

"Sect master, Su Zimo's body tempering technique is not simple. Among the five major sects of the Great Zhou Dynasty, Southern Mountains Sect is the strongest in body tempering. Since Su Zimo is not cultivating in the demonic path, could he be cultivating a secret skill of Southern Mountains Sect?" The brown haired youth asked out of worry.

“I don’t know either.”

Sect Master Ling Yun shook his head.

“This...”

The five peak masters were speechless.

Wen Xuan frowned. “Sect master, senior crane is a demon at the end of the day. It...”

“Hmm?”

Ling Yun’s expression changed and his gaze suddenly turned extremely sharp. Narrowing his eyes, he asked, “Wen Xuan, what are you trying to imply?”

A suppressive aura surged forth from him as Wen Xuan’s face turned pale and he no longer dared to continue.

The tension within Ethereal Palace turned extremely oppressive and cold all of a sudden.

After a moment, Xuan Yi spoke, “Sect master, Wen Xuan meant no harm. It was just that Su Zimo’s behavior reminded us of that person back then. If Su Zimo is just like him, we’ll have to keep an eye on him from now on.”

“There’s no need to worry. Leave this matter to the crane.”

After pausing for a moment, Ling Yun continued, “Even though the crane is a demon, it conquered through the cultivation world with our Founder Master and established Ethereal Peak. You should not doubt it.”

“Moreover, do you think that Ethereal Peak can become one of the Great Zhou Dynasty’s five major sects if not for the crane guarding over us?”

When they heard that, the five peak masters shuddered.

They had long known that the crane held a special status in the sect.

However, humans and demons were completely different beings and had different goals as well. The concept of coexistence was one that wasn’t common.

However, the five of them had not expected that the crane actually held such importance for the sect!

“You can leave.”

Ling Yun waved his hand.

After the five peak masters left, Ling Yun’s face revealed a hint of exhaustion. Deep in his eyes, there was a trace of slight worry.

...

Enveloped by an invisible energy, Su Zimo was sent to a valley before long.

After stepping on the ground, Su Zimo looked over – he was surrounded by mountains and barren land.

Bang! Boom! Boom!

Bang! Boom! Boom!

The sound of muffled thunder reverberated in the valley deafeningly.

Su Zimo frowned.

The spirit qi in this valley was extremely thin. Coupled with the disruption of the thunder, it was almost impossible to cultivate.

If he stayed here, everyday would truly feel like an entire year.

After placing Su Zimo on the ground, the crane circled in mid-air and suddenly fell. By the time it landed on the ground, it had transformed into a beautiful woman. Her red hair was coiled up, looking graceful and noble.

Su Zimo was stunned on the spot.

The redheaded beauty before him was no different from a real human. If he had not known beforehand, Su Zimo would not have imagined that it was a crane before him!

With a single wave of her hand, the redheaded beauty formed a barrier around them that isolated the sound of thunder outside.

“Do you know why I brought you here?” She looked at Su Zimo with a gentle gaze.

“I don’t,” Su Zimo shook his head.

The redheaded beauty’s following words made Su Zimo pale in shock and panic.

“The demon technique that you’re cultivating is very powerful,” The redheaded beauty said shockingly.

Su Zimo’s expression changed and his heart thumped furiously. Instinctively, he lowered his head to try and conceal the shock in his eyes.

‘What did senior crane mean by that?’

‘Is it testing me or has it discovered something?’

Many thoughts ran through Su Zimo’s mind as he stood rooted on the spot.

“If I was testing you, your reaction would be all the answer I need.”

The redheaded beauty laughed. “Don’t worry. I naturally didn’t want to expose your secret since I brought you here.”

Su Zimo asked, “When did you discover it, senior?”

“Half a year ago, you knocked out a Spirit Peak disciple with a single push. Even though it was momentary, you let out the blood aura of a demon. While others may not notice it, a demon like me is naturally extremely familiar with that aura,” The redheaded beauty explained.

After pausing for a moment, she continued, "You are still human now, but with the passage of time, you will completely turn into a demon once your blood is completely swapped with the newly generated demon blood. By then, you will lose all traces of your humanity!"

Su Zimo remained silent.

This was something he had realized as well. Otherwise, he wouldn't have stopped cultivating the Marrow Cleansing section in the past half a year.

No matter what, Su Zimo was still human. Even if he cultivated The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness, he did not wish to transform into a demon.

As though she could read his mind, the redheaded beauty said once more, "Even if you stop cultivating that demon technique, your body is already infused with demon blood. If you aren't careful, you will be exposed! I'm sure I don't need to explain what would happen if you get exposed."

Su Zimo nodded.

If they knew that he was a demon, the sect would either kill him or force him into a blood oath to become someone's spirit beast.

Even if he escaped from the sect, Su Zimo would have a hard time advancing in the cultivation world.

All cultivators out there only deployed those two methods towards demons.

Chapter 135: He Was Here Too

"I can help you hide it this time round. But, what about the next time?"

The redheaded beauty's question suddenly gave rise to a doubt within Su Zimo.

He asked, "Senior, why do all cultivators possess such a deep hatred towards demons as though there's no room for negotiation?"

When she heard that, the redheaded beauty froze for a moment. Her eyes revealed a reminiscent look as she sighed. "The grudges between the two races have been going on for a long time. It can be traced back to the primordial era."

"Primordial era?"

That was the first time Su Zimo had heard that word and he could not help but look confused.

Primordial era... those words exuded a desolate and tragic aura, filled with the vicissitudes of time.

The redheaded beauty seemed to be filled with emotions as she murmured, "That was a magnificent era. Ancient in the past, many lives were born during that period and all races flourished with the humans among them. However, that era was a tragic period to the humans."

For some reason, Su Zimo felt his chest getting stuffy as though he was being suffocated by an invisible aura.

He could merely feel the pressure just by hearing the crane talk about that period of time.

It was hard to imagine how things would be like if he was born in that era faced with those circumstances.

Sensing Su Zimo's abnormality, the redheaded beauty came back to her senses and shook her head. "Let's not talk about it anymore. All you have to know is that after the primordial era, Tianhuang Mainland went through the ancient era before coming to this point of time. The feud between the two races had spanned through two eras and it is a hatred deeply ingrained in the blood of their descendants. It's impossible to resolve it."

Su Zimo nodded. With a thought, he asked, "Senior, did you bring me here because you have a method of removing the hidden ailment within my body?"

"I do have one, but I don't know if it will work."

The redheaded beauty continued, "A genius once appeared in the sect. His talent was similar to yours and he was regarded as the future hope of the sect. However, he eventually betrayed the sect and fell into the demonic path, never returning since."

"Was he also a fiend cultivator?" Su Zimo asked in surprise.

"No."

The redheaded beauty shook her head. "He had an eccentric personality and was extreme in his methods. After he showed signs of entering the demonic path, the sect realized it and locked him here in seclusion to reflect on himself. True enough, with the thunderclaps here, he managed to cleanse the demonic qi from his body."

Su Zimo asked, "What you mean to say is that I'm able to remove the demonic qi in blood through the help of thunder?"

The redheaded beauty nodded.

Pausing for a moment, she continued, "However, the demonic technique you're cultivating is extremely powerful. I don't know if this idea will work."

"But, how do I make use of the thunder? I don't understand at all," Su Zimo looked confused.

"I don't know about that either."

Su Zimo was speechless.

Could he cleanse the demonic qi in his body just by sitting here and listening to the rumbling thunder?

The redheaded beauty said once more, "Thunder is one of the most ferocious types of energy and is extremely useful in suppressing demons. Beasts are innately afraid of fire while demons are innately afraid of thunder. Of all the powers, thunder reigns supreme!"

Su Zimo roughly understood.

The crane meant that he might be able to get rid of the hidden ailment in his body with the help of the power of thunder.

It was only a direction she was providing for him to work on. As to how to resolve it, she did not know entirely either.

Right then, Su Zimo's heart stirred – he remembered something.

After the Weapon Peak face-off, he had obtained the Mystic Gold Silk Armor.

From the disheveled old man, he found out that the owner of the Mystic Gold Silk Armor was once a horrifyingly powerful being in the sect back then and was invincible across the Foundation Establishment and Golden Core realms!

However, the disheveled old man was unwilling to reveal more about that man as though he had some reservations.

Suddenly, Su Zimo asked, "Senior, the genius that you mentioned. Was he wearing a Mystic Gold Silk Armor back then which was a connate spirit weapon?"

"Hmm?"

A look of surprise flickered through the redheaded beauty's eyes as she asked, "You actually know about this?"

Bingo!

The powerful being mentioned by the disheveled old man was the same genius the crane was referring to!

"Senior, can you share with me about this person's past?"

Su Zimo suddenly felt a strong sense of curiosity towards this person.

"It's actually nothing much."

The redheaded beauty chuckled. "Ever since the sect set up the Eight Distresses Formation, you were the second person to endure through it. He was the first."

Su Zimo nodded – he had heard the disheveled old man mention this previously.

"Do you know how he managed to endure through it?" The redheaded beauty asked.

"I don't know."

"The Eight Distresses Formation is an illusion formation. In it, you will encounter countless people, many of whom will be your dearest kin. You will also experience life, death, illness... the eight distresses of life. And that person..."

At that point, the redheaded beauty paused for a moment before continuing, "He killed everyone he encountered within the illusion formation!"

"Ah!"

Su Zimo was shocked and could not help but exclaim.

Those who are trapped in the Eight Distresses Formation will not realize that they were in an illusion formation because everything they encounter would be too real.

However, that person killed everyone in the illusion formation – how terrifying was that?

“Could it be that he has already discovered that he was in an illusion formation?” Su Zimo asked.

“I’m not sure.”

The redheaded beauty shook her head. “However, he had not started on Qi Condensation at that time so he should not have realized it.”

“Forget it, these are all history of the sect. Just listen with a pinch of salt.”

The redheaded beauty said, “I vaguely guessed that you intend to cultivate both the immortality and demonic path in the future. However, that is a path no one had taken before and the future is unknown. The hidden ailment in your blood right now is only one of many. As you raise your cultivation realm, you will encounter even more trouble in the future, sigh.”

Su Zimo was also aware of this.

Right now, it was the wisest choice to stop cultivating The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness.

However, that cultivation technique held a special meaning to him.

It was this technique that had changed Su Zimo’s life. In fact, it even changed the fates of many people around him as well!

Most importantly, Die Yue had imparted it to him.

At the thought of Die Yue, Su Zimo could not help but compare her with the redheaded beauty before him.

Die Yue should be a demon as well.

Even though both of them could take on human form, Su Zimo did not know whose cultivation was higher.

“Senior, if a person is born without a spirit root, are you able to help them plant one?” Su Zimo took a different approach instead of asking directly.

After all, he did not know what cultivation realm Die Yue and senior crane before him was at.

“Plant spirit root?”

The redheaded beauty smiled. “It’s not just me, I don’t think anyone in the entire Tianhuang Mainland can do such a thing. Spirit root is something you are born with. If you don’t have it, you don’t have it. Being able to plant a spirit root into someone artificially is equivalent to changing that person’s fate against the heavens! Who in the world can change anyone’s fate?”

The redheaded beauty chuckled again. “Perhaps even Perfected Immortals can’t do that.”

Chapter 136: Void Thunder Manual

Su Zimo did not know what a Perfected Immortal was. However, he understood one thing – Die Yue was stronger than senior crane.

Much, much stronger!

He pondered for a while before asking again, “Senior, if I’m unable to cleanse the demonic qi within me using the thunder of this place, does that mean I’ll have to stay here forever?”

After all, she had only provided him with a direction – Su Zimo had to figure out how to get rid of that hidden ailment himself.

“One year. I’ll give you one year.”

The redheaded beauty said, “If you can’t do it within a year, we can only think of another way.”

Su Zimo nodded.

“Don’t be discouraged. That person back then did it and your endowment is not inferior to him. Perhaps you can do it too,” consoled the redheaded beauty before she left.

Losing the barrier around him, the rumbling thunder resounded within Su Zimo’s ears in a shocking manner once more

The area of the valley was not large. Looking around, Su Zimo could not find any place to stay. He then assumed a lotus position and listened to the rumbling of the thunder in the valley, trying his best to discover the secret within it.

Day after day passed.

Su Zimo sat within the Thunderclap Valley without his cultivation growing at all. The demonic qi within his blood was still there and did not show signs of subsiding.

During this period of time, the spirit tiger and little crane would sneak over to visit him and bring him food.

Normally, disciples were not allowed to visit someone who was locked in seclusion in Thunderclap Valley.

However, little crane’s status was special. Furthermore, the spirit tiger and it were not exactly considered as sect disciples.

Even though little crane was trapped by Su Zimo in a formation previously, it had gained quite a bit of benefits from the elixirs. In addition, seeing how pitiful Su Zimo was caused its attitude towards him to change entirely.

In the blink of an eye, a month passed.

Within Thunderclap Valley, Su Zimo opened his eyes and sighed gently.

He still had no clue.

If he were to carry on like this, he wouldn't be able to come up with anything even in 10 years, let alone a single year.

“Seems like that powerful being in the past is much stronger than I am.”

Su Zimo laughed in a self-deprecating manner.

At the thought of that person, Su Zimo took out the Mystic Gold Silk Armor from his storage bag.

Because there was no one else in Thunderclap Valley, he was not afraid of being seen. Standing up, he channeled the Power of Blood and instantly, his veins popped up as his flesh and body expanded.

Su Zimo could clearly sense the powerful energy cruising through his blood that seemed as though it could destroy the entire world!

It was also that same energy that allowed him to defeat Feng Haoyu who was in Foundation Establishment realm!

Heaving a deep breath of air, Su Zimo exerted strength in both hands and lifted the Mystic Gold Silk Armor, sizing it up and down.

Ever since he had obtained that damaged connate spirit weapon, this was the first time he was observing it so carefully.

The Mystic Gold Silk Armor was very thin and extremely soft to the touch. It was hard to imagine that an inner armor so thin could actually weigh 5 tons!

Just as Su Zimo was sizing up the Mystic Gold Silk Armor, two pages of paper dropped out from within and floated to the ground.

“Hmm?”

Su Zimo remarked softly as he glanced sideways. Putting down the Mystic Gold Silk Armor, he picked up the two pieces of paper.

Both pieces of paper looked a little old and exuded an ancient aura. One of the pages was tattered – it was obvious that someone tore away the bottom portion.

On the first page was a single sentence while the second page was scribbled with writings.

Su Zimo took a look at the first page.

“This is a technique I obtained in an ancient ruin, the Void Thunder Manual. Even though it's incomplete, it has the Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra along with a couple of some other thunder arts that are rather powerful. I will leave it here for any fated individuals.”

When Su Zimo saw that sentence, he understood.

If he was not wrong, the torn second page should be a record of this Void Thunder Manual!

These two pages of paper were left behind by that powerful being of the sect!

With a complicated expression on his face, Su Zimo felt a mix of emotions.

For all these years, the Mystic Gold Silk Armor had been kept in the Spirit Weapon Chamber and almost entirely covered in dust.

If not for someone like him who joined the sect after starting on the path of demonic cultivation, no one else would have laid their hands on this armor let alone discover its secret within.

Every single Qi Refinement Warrior who visited the Spirit Weapon Chamber would select a spirit weapon useful for themselves – who would choose the Mystic Gold Silk Armor?

No Qi Refinement Warriors would be able to make use of it.

Even for Golden Cores who had cultivated body tempering techniques, they wouldn't be interested in a broken connate spirit weapon as such given their strong bodies.

However, Su Zimo was able to refine his own inferior-grade spirit weapons and as such, he was not interested in anything else in the Spirit Weapon Chamber. That was the reason why he took such an odd equipment.

It was a complete coincidence left to chance.

The last two words of the sentence, fated individual, did seem rather appropriate at this moment.

Su Zimo smiled.

This powerful being indeed had a rather weird temperament.

Even though he betrayed the sect, he chose to leave this technique behind using such an indirect method.

In reality, Su Zimo had only just stepped foot into the cultivation world and the only technique he had learned was the Qi Condensation Manual. He hadn't even been in contact with any spirit arts so how could he possibly comprehend anything just through the sound of thunder?

It was the same for this powerful being of the sect back then as well.

If he did not have this Void Thunder Manual, he would not have been able to cleanse the demonic qi within him while he was trapped in Thunderclap Valley.

Just as Su Zimo was deep in thought, the first page in his palm crumbled into dust and dissipated into the air.

Too much time had passed and the piece of paper had already been corroded by time, turning to dust under the rumbling of the thunderbolts.

Logically speaking, the second piece of paper was even older. However, nothing happened to it at all.

Su Zimo rubbed the paper carefully and discovered that it was made with a unique material. Despite being rough, it was flexible. While so many years have passed, the writing on it was still clearly visible.

Looking at the bottom part of the paper which was torn, a thought suddenly struck Su Zimo as he exerted strength in both hands and pulled the paper.

It did not budge an inch at all!

Right now, Su Zimo was in a demonic state and his strength was enough to even break a pseudo spirit weapon apart.

However, the paper was completely intact!

‘Ancient ruin’

Suddenly, he recalled this point that the powerful being made in his message and fell into deep thought.

Through senior crane, Su Zimo knew that Tianhuang Mainland had been through two eras – primordial and ancient.

Since it was an ancient ruin, this Void Thunder Manual was very likely a technique left behind from the ancient era!

Su Zimo’s eyes lit up.

In the ancient era, the paper alone that contained this Void Thunder Manual was already extraordinary. If so, this technique must be incredible as well!

He started looking at the page of paper.

The first line of words – Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra!

When he saw those four words, Su Zimo nodded.

What he was cultivating right now was the Marrow Cleansing section of The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness. This page detailed another Marrow Cleansing sutra as well.

The combination of these two sutras could very likely resolve the hidden ailment within his body!

Suppressing the excitement in his heart, Su Zimo began cultivating the Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra in the midst of the rumbling thunder.

Chapter 137: Transformation

A few days later.

Within Thunderclap Valley, a green robed scholar sat on the ground. Every single breath he took gave off an odd series of sounds.

“Huff... hmm... boom!”

If someone were to stand beside the green robed scholar, they would be able to clearly hear the shocking sound of tigers and leopards through every single breath he took!

Amidst the sound of tigers and leopards, there was a rumbling thunder sound as well.

Treacherous and intense, the two completely different sounds shook at his bone marrow continuously, generating new blood!

That caused his blood to churn and flow rapidly!

Cultivating the Void Thunder Manual was easier than Su Zimo had imagined.

Be it the Marrow Cleansing section of The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness or the Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra of the Void Thunder Manual, the underlying concept was to make use of the sounds to vibrate the bone marrow such that the effect of cleansing and swapping new blood could be achieved.

With the foundation of the Marrow Cleansing section coupled with the torn page of the sutra, Su Zimo was able to comprehend the profoundness before long.

For anyone else, being in a strange place like Thunderclap Valley was something that would be extremely miserable.

However, it rendered a god-like assistance for someone like Su Zimo who was cultivating the Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra.

As time passed by, Su Zimo infused the Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra into the Marrow Cleansing section and created a unique breathing and expiration technique of his own – Tiger Leopard Thunder Sound!

He could clearly feel the demonic qi within his body being cleansed away by the sound of thunder.

However, the power within his blood was preserved perfectly.

Moreover, his Power of Blood turned even stronger and terrifying with the help of the Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra!

In just a month, Su Zimo had already achieved lesser mastery with the Marrow Cleansing section.

According to The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness, a lesser mastery of the Marrow Cleansing section enables the user to kill an early-stage Foundation Establishment Cultivator with ease. In fact, they can even stand against mid-stage Foundation Establishment Cultivators!

However, Su Zimo's circumstances were different.

Since the Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra enhanced his Power of Blood with an additional ferocious, thunderous power, he could even hold his own against late-stage Foundation Establishment Cultivators!

But of course, that was in terms of pure brute force.

Strength was only one of the factors in a fight between cultivators.

In the blink of an eye, Su Zimo had spent three months in Thunderclap Valley.

To his delight, most of the demonic qi within his blood had been cleansed in this period of time.

The new blood generated by cultivating the Tiger Leopard Thunder Sound would contain demonic qi. However, it would be cleansed away by the thunder sounds at the same time.

From now on, Su Zimo could not only continue to cultivate The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness, he could even activate his Power of Blood without any additional considerations.

This was going to be his greatest trump card!

From this day forth, Su Zimo wore the Mystic Gold Silk Armor under his green robes and underwent arduous cultivation in Thunderclap Valley bearing the heavy load.

Initially, he was not used to it.

Wearing the Mystic Gold Silk Armor was akin to carrying a mountain on his back. It was extremely difficult to move or dodge, much less cultivate the multiple killing techniques of The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness.

However, as time went by, his Power of Blood became stronger and Su Zimo gradually adapted to things. All of his motions soon looked identical to how he normally was.

Even if anyone saw him again, they would not notice that he was actually wearing an inner armor that weighed 5 tons!

An intense cultivation as such had clear effects on the tempering of his skin, flesh, tendons and bones.

His Body Tempering, Tendons Transformation, Bones Strengthening and Marrow Cleansing sections all made progress at the same time.

But of course, that was not the only surprise the ancient technique of the Void Thunder Manual brought for Su Zimo.

On the torn page, there were also a few other thunder arts.

Initially, Su Zimo paid no attention to them.

After all, thunder arts were a type of spirit art. Because he had not reached Foundation Establishment realm yet, his spirit qi had not transformed into spirit energy. As such, even if he learned them, he would not be able to unleash their potential.

However, after cultivating the Thunder Marrow Cleansing Sutra, Su Zimo realized that there was a Power of Thunder within his blood!

Hidden deep within his blood, that power did not belong to the scope of spirit energy. However, by making use of that Power of Thunder, Su Zimo was able to cultivate the thunder arts on the torn page as well as unleash them!

This meant that Su Zimo was not able to unleash spirit arts that only Foundation Establishment Cultivators could use even as a Qi Refinement Warrior.

Furthermore, they were thunder arts – the most powerful type of spirit arts!

Since he did not have a thunder spirit root, Su Zimo was not as sensitive towards lightning and it was difficult for him to cultivate in that direction as well.

However, since he was in Thunderclap Valley, Su Zimo received the first thunder in spring.

In the skies, a bolt of lightning flashed and coiled like a snake. It seemed to tear through the sky as it plummeted, bringing with it an aura of destruction.

In order to better understand the power of thunder, Su Zimo decided to try and draw lightning into his body.

This was an extremely dangerous act.

Each time, Su Zimo's body was charred black from the electricity. His skin was split open and his body was covered in wounds.

Even though he was wearing the Mystic Gold Silk Armor, he could not withstand it at all!

Fortunately, Su Zimo's healing powers were astonishing after cultivating The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness. He only needed a few days of rest to return to normal.

Within this valley, Su Zimo suffered unimaginable torture and pain.

He wanted to become stronger!

Strong enough to take revenge for Zhui Feng; strong enough to stand tall in front of Shen Mengqi once more; strong enough to pursue in Die Yue's footsteps!

Each time Su Zimo wanted to give him, he would recall what Die Yue told him.

"To become one of the greatest, you have to work on the foundation and be willing to take hardship and serve others!"

The path of cultivation was a heavenly defying act to begin with, not to mention cultivating the immortality and demonic path at the same time!

From the moment he started on this path, Su Zimo was destined to suffer more hardships and pains than others!

After cultivating the different thunder arts on that torn page, Su Zimo had memorized everything on that page in his mind.

At the very end of that torn page, there was mention of a unique thunder art – Thunderclap Kill

Most thunder arts were released by the unleashing of the power of thunder.

However, Thunderclap Kill purely made use of the power of the sound of thunder!

The power of sound!

The power of sound was something that was easily neglected, but it contained unimaginable power.

Making use of sound to shake the bones and rejuvenate the marrow was a manifestation of the power of sound.

At the end of the day, thunder arts required hand seals and activation of mental cultivation to release. However, the power of sound was an instantaneous power!

If used properly in battle, it would produce an unexpected effect.

It was a pity that someone had torn away the page and Su Zimo was unable to learn from the Thunderclap Kill section.

However, back in Cang Lang Mountain Range, Su Zimo had witnessed a powerful spirit demon kill a spirit beast on the spot by erupting forth an indomitable roar.

That memory was still fresh in Su Zimo's mind till this day and it gave him some inspiration.

Time flew and in the blink of an eye, Su Zimo had spent half a year in Thunderclap Valley.

To the sect disciples, they were certain that Su Zimo would definitely have a difficult time raising his cultivation since he was trapped in Thunderclap Valley.

However, no one knew that he had actually undergone a complete transformation here. Even though his cultivation did not rise, his fighting strength had risen by more than twice!

Chapter 138

: Spirit Mine

This day, a bright sound of a crane that even suppressed the thunderous sound of the valley echoed out.

After half a year, the crane had descended in Thunderclap Valley once more.

By the time it landed on the ground, it was already transformed into the redheaded beauty. Looking at Su Zimo, she remarked softly in surprise, "You've succeeded?"

Su Zimo nodded and bowed. "It's all thanks to you, senior."

Even though she was not the one who gave him the Void Thunder Manual, Su Zimo would not have been in this place if not for her help half a year ago, let alone resolve the hidden ailment in his blood through the sound of thunder.

"That's right."

The redheaded beauty praised, "Let's go. There's no point in staying here anymore."

With that, she swept her robes and left Thunderclap Valley, bringing Su Zimo with her.

The wind howled in their ears and in the blink of an eye, both of them arrived in the skies above Weapon Peak.

"Go on down. Try to raise your cultivation to Foundation Establishment as quickly as possible to become an inner sect disciple."

The redheaded beauty said, "Even though Ethereal Sword is no match for your sword formation, the real strength of Ethereal Sword does not lie in its power, but its unpredictability. First, Feng Haoyu did not manage to unleash the full power of Ethereal Sword and chose to fight you head-on. Second, he had only managed to cultivate Level 1 of Ethereal Sword, Shadows."

Su Zimo nodded.

For it to be one of the sect's three major secret skills and even the foundation of one of the five major sects, there was no way it would be an ordinary skill.

Pondering silently for a while, the redheaded beauty continued, "After becoming an inner sect disciple, you must not slack off. You have to raise your cultivation as quickly as possible and fight for a position as a legacy disciple so that you have the rights to learn our sect's secret skills. Other than Ethereal Sword, the other two secret skills are extremely important for you as well. In fact, one of them can even raise your melee combat strength by a fair bit!"

When he heard that, Su Zimo's eyes lit up.

Melee combat was his trump card.

The stronger his trump card was, the more powerful he would be and his journey through the cultivation world would be safer as well.

After a few more reminders, the crane turned to leave as Su Zimo descended slowly upon Weapon Peak.

Weapon Peak did not change much after half a year.

Around the Weapon Refinement Hall, Su Zimo caught sight of a few familiar faces.

"Eh, Junior Brother Su is back!"

Xue Yi looked at Su Zimo with a bright smile and greeted him while rushing over.

Some of the nearby Weapon Peak disciples looked towards Su Zimo as well.

After half a year, many of the Weapon Peak disciples had an improvement in their cultivation. Xue Yi was now at the peak of Perfected Qi Condensation and could advance to Foundation Establishment at any time.

Everyone knew that Su Zimo must have suffered quite a bit in the Thunderclap Valley. As such, they did ask him about it and merely chatted with him casually about the changes in the sect.

Feng Haoyu did not wallow in despair after his defeat half a year ago. Instead, he was even more focused in his cultivation and completely gave up on supplementary skills such as weapon and elixir refinement.

After becoming an inner sect disciple, he reached mid-stage Foundation Establishment in less than half a year. Within the inner sect, he was also well known and strong.

A month ago, right as he entered mid-stage Foundation Establishment, Feng Haoyu defeated a late-stage Foundation Establishment senior brother and rose to fame after that fight!

Even though he was only at mid-stage Foundation Establishment, there were rumors in the inner sect that apart from being a legacy disciple, he was already the number one of the inner sect!

It would not be long before Feng Haoyu became a true legacy disciple.

Even Leng Rou who also had a variant spirit root could not match up against his terrifying cultivation speed.

But of course, Leng Rou was now an inner sect disciple as well and as at the peak of early-stage Foundation Establishment.

After chatting a little more with Xue Yi and the rest, Su Zimo left and returned to his cave abode.

The spirit tiger and little crane were guarding the place. The moment they caught sight of Su Zimo returning, they were naturally elated.

The tiger and crane pondered for a moment – they were going to have more elixirs in the future...

The moment Su Zimo sat down, the sound of clothes fluttering could be heard from the skies outside.

Right after descending at the cave abode's entrance, heavy footsteps echoed out. Su Zimo smiled and knew who it was immediately. Waving his robes, the entrance door opened.

"Bro, I've missed you so much!"

Little fatty ran over and gave Su Zimo a passionate bear hug.

"Bro, you're really amazing. Nothing much happened to you despite spending half a year in Thunderclap Valley!" Little fatty laughed.

"You aren't bad either. You're already at early-stage Foundation Establishment."

It was easy to check on little fatty's cultivation using the Spirit Peering Art.

"Hehe."

Little fatty chuckled. He saw that Su Zimo was still at Level 9 Qi Condensation and had not made any progress for the past half year. Assuming that he would feel dejected over that fact, little fatty comforted Su Zimo, "Bro, don't be discouraged. Given your endowment, it's only a matter of time before you catch up to us."

Su Zimo laughed.

He had spent quite a lot of inferior-grade spirit stones to break through to Level 9 Qi Condensation. If he wanted to reach Perfected Qi Condensation, he would require even more spirit stones.

However, his storage bag was empty now.

Without sufficient spirit stones and perfect Spirit Gathering Elixirs, it was indeed not an easy task to catch up to little fatty and company.

Sensing that Su Zimo seemed to be troubled, little fatty thought for a moment and said suddenly, "Right, bro. Tomorrow, a few of us inner sect disciples are heading out for a sect mission. How about joining us to let off some steam?"

"Inner sect mission?"

Su Zimo shook his head. "I'm only a trial disciple. How am I qualified to take part in inner sect missions?"

Little fatty waved it off. "Don't worry. It's nothing much for you to tag along, bro. Furthermore..."

Pausing for a moment, little fatty continued mysteriously, "This mission is actually rather simple, bro. You can even get some spirit stones just by tagging along."

"Oh?" Su Zimo was a little moved.

Right now, he was exactly in need of spirit stones.

"What sort of a mission is it?" Su Zimo asked.

"A disciple out on training discovered a spirit mine outside of Linfeng City and he's currently mining it. Because this senior brother is alone, he's worried that itinerant cultivators might covet the spirit mine. So, he requested the sect to send some cultivators to assist him and collect the mined spirit stones back to the sect."

Little fatty winked. "I've asked around in the sect. For a mission as such, even if we were to secretly keep some of the mined spirit stones ourselves, the sect would not mind about it."

Su Zimo was deep in thought.

Thinking that Su Zimo was worried about his safety, little fatty laughed. "Bro, don't worry. It's just an inferior-grade spirit mine and the majority of it is inferior-grade spirit stones. Even if there are middle-grade spirit stones, they will be extremely limited. With a Foundation Establishment Cultivator leading the way, there won't be any danger at all!"

"Furthermore, Ethereal Sect is one of the five major sects of the Great Zhou Dynasty. No itinerant cultivator would have the guts to try and steal a spirit mine from us!"

"Once we arrive at Linfeng City of Qi Country, even the city lord will have to welcome us with good food and drinks! We'll stay there for a couple of days and once the mining is complete, we just have to take the spirit stones back to the sect."

"Alright," Su Zimo agreed to it.

Raising his brow, little fatty gave a strange smile and said, "Bro, we'll meet at the front peak tomorrow morning. There's even a surprise, hehe!"

Chapter 139: A Man's Name Grows Like a Tree's Shadow

The next morning.

From the main peak of Ethereal Sect, four Foundation Establishment Cultivators rode on their flying swords, speeding towards the front peak. There were three men and one woman.

Among the four, the woman was the most eye-catching. Her shirt was white as snow, untainted by any form of dust and her beauty was unparalleled with glistening complexion. The only thing was that she had an extremely cold gaze that seemed impenetrable to all life.

That woman was Leng Rou.

Of the three men, one of them was rotund. He wasn't tall but he had a chirpy face, smiling at anyone he saw in a kind manner – that was little fatty.

One of the other two men was Lu Yangrong, a mid-stage Foundation Establishment Cultivator.

Finally, there was Guan Jin. Even though he was at early-stage Foundation Establishment, he was well-versed in talismans and was already a Grade 2 Talisman Master.

Both of them were suitors of Leng Rou. Naturally, they were thick-skinned enough to head to Linfeng City on this trip with her, each hoping to win her heart against the other competitor.

“Sister Leng Rou, fellow senior brothers, I've also invited a friend along with us. I hope you guys don't mind,” Little fatty chuckled and said while they were on the way.

Little fatty's social relations within the sect was pretty good and he was quite familiar with everyone.

Upon hearing it, Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin merely frowned. Even though they were displeased, they did not say anything.

Since Leng Rou had a closer relationship with little fatty, she naturally did not object either.

Before long, the four of them arrived at the front peak of the sect.

At the front peak, a green robed man stood. Accompanied by a spirit tiger, he was handsome with delicate features and an indifferent expression.

Even though it was only sprawled there, the spirit tiger was almost as tall as the green robed scholar with its massive body. A ferocious glint would flicker from time to time from its half-opened eyes.

“Bro, here!”

When little fatty saw the green robed man, he rushed down and beckoned to the latter.

A look of disdain flickered through the eyes of Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin when they saw that the green robed man was only at Level 9 Qi Condensation. Naturally, there was no way they would lower their status by stooping to greet him.

Leng Rou's gaze swept across the place. When she caught sight of the green robed man, she was stunned for a moment and a strange glint flickered deeply within her eyes.

After not seeing him for half a year, the green robed man did not seem to have changed much. Even his cultivation was still at Level 9 Qi Condensation.

But, for some reason, Leng Rou felt that the man had turned even more mysterious.

If it was said that he shone with a bedazzling light half a year ago, right now, he was as deep and unfathomable as the ocean.

Leng Rou descended slowly and retracted her flying sword. She came before the green robed man and nodded.

Little fatty hid behind Leng Rou and winked at the green robed man lewdly. Even though he did not say anything, he mouthed silently, “Look, that's a surprise, right? Hehe!”

The green robed man smiled and nodded to Leng Rou. "Greetings, Senior Sister Leng."

In the five peaks, statuses were ranked according to the order of time one joined the sect.

However, all trial disciples would greet inner sect disciples as seniors.

When Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin saw this in midair, they were shocked and dumbfounded.

Leng Rou was known for being cold and aloof in the sect.

Neither of them had ever seen her greet a fellow disciple in the sect. Furthermore, this person was only a trial disciple?

Initially, Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin had no intention of descending. But now, they both had a tacit understanding and came to the ground at the same time.

"Who is this trial disciple?" Lu Yangrong placed emphasis on the words 'trial disciple' despite his seemingly casual question.

Little fatty introduced immediately, "This is Senior Brother Lu Yangrong and Senior Brother Guan Jin."

The green robed man smiled and waved. "Greetings, senior brothers. I am Su Zimo."

"Hmm?"

"Su Zimo!"

Suddenly, both their expressions changed and their pupils constricted.

The air around them suddenly became stale at the mention of Su Zimo's name.

A Man's Name Grows Like a Tree's Shadow.

While there were still inner sect disciples who had not seen Su Zimo in real life after the five peaks face-off, there was nobody who hadn't heard of that name.

It was unprecedented for anyone to be number one in four peaks!

A Qi Condensation Warrior who could defeat a Foundation Establishment Cultivator despite the gap in realm.

Moreover, that Foundation Establishment Cultivator was none other than the current limelight who was thought to be the number one of the inner sect!

After the fight half a year ago, many inner sect disciples gathered on Weapon Peak hoping to catch a glimpse of Su Zimo only to be disappointed.

After they heard that he was locked up in Thunderclap Valley for Qi Deviation, everyone merely laughed it off and stopped caring.

All of them knew that one's cultivation could not be raised in Thunderclap Valley.

Even if it was an unparalleled genius who was locked there indefinitely, it would spell the end of his path of cultivation.

“In just half a year, Su Zimo was released?”

Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin were both secretly shocked.

Given the talent that Su Zimo was displaying, it was only a matter of time before he caught up to them.

Lu Yangrong thought to himself, ‘No wonder Junior Sister Leng has such a different attitude towards this person. So, he is Su Zimo!’

‘Hmm... he doesn’t look like anything special. I heard that his body has been tempered to a strong degree, but why does he look just like a frail scholar?’ Guan Jin lamented internally as well, frowning as he sized up Su Zimo.

After a moment, Lu Yangrong suddenly said, “Junior Brother Su, I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Pausing for a moment, he changed the topic. “I heard that you were already at Level 9 Qi Condensation half a year ago. Why hasn’t your cultivation improved after such a long time?”

He was clearly pointing out the obvious and it was full of provocation.

“Eh?”

Guan Jin exclaimed with curiosity in his eyes. “Junior Brother Su, I heard that you entered Qi Deviation in your cultivation. Why were you so careless? Since you were just released from Thunderclap Valley, let me give you a word of advice as your senior. You should go back to cultivate in seclusion lest you make any more mistakes and affect your own future.”

Su Zimo was a smart man.

From the way they looked at Leng Rou, he could vaguely guess what they were thinking.

Towards their sarcastic questions, Su Zimo smiled and replied casually, “Thank you for the concern, senior brothers.”

Little fatty heaved a sigh of relief at Su Zimo’s reaction.

Initially, he was so nervous that his palms were sweating entirely.

Little fatty understood Su Zimo’s temperament and was afraid that the latter might fight with those two over that unpleasantness.

Back then, Su Zimo dared to point his saber at Chen Yu of the Disciplinary Hall; these two senior brothers did not have what it takes to hold down Su Zimo.

However, things were different to Su Zimo right now.

Back in Spirit Peak, Chen Yu was obviously biased towards Feng Haoyu and even wanted to maim him of his cultivation despite the spirit tiger being injured.

That was why Su Zimo was unable to tolerate it.

Even though these two senior brothers were also hostile towards him, it was just due to petty thoughts. Since it was nothing much, Su Zimo could naturally let it slide with just a smile.

He no longer looked at Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin, merely reaching out to fondle the spirit tiger on the head.

Instantly, Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin were furious – they were being ignored!

However, what the both of them did not know was that Su Zimo was actually comforting the spirit tiger. Otherwise, it would have lunged and attacked both of them given its wild nature!

Chapter 140: Mistaken Identity

“Caw, caw!”

Right then, a crane cried out from not far away.

“Roar!”

Growling softly, the spirit tiger looked at little crane that was flying over, as if greeting it.

Little crane had always been in Ethereal Peak and had never left the sect. This was a rare opportunity and it naturally wanted to tag along for some fun secretly.

However, Su Zimo did not dare to make the decision on his own and he had to ask senior crane for permission.

When little crane heard that, it became dejected immediately.

Its mother had always been extremely strict and had once said that it was not allowed to leave the sect until it was at Golden Core realm.

Initially, little crane did not bear much hope. However, the moment its mother heard that it was going with Su Zimo, she agreed to it right away!

Naturally, little crane was elated and quickly chased after them.

“Eh? Isn’t that the little crane in our sect? Why is it here?” Lu Yangrong remarked in soft surprise.

Guan Jin pondered and replied, “Perhaps it’s just passing by.”

Clearing his throat, Lu Yangrong swept his gaze across Su Zimo and the rest. He said in a deep voice, “It is said that the little crane’s background is not simple. It is the child of Ethereal Sect’s Mystical Guardian Beast.”

Guan Jin could tell that Lu Yangrong was boasting and could not help but scoff, “Which inner sect disciple doesn’t know about this?”

Raising his brow, a look of smugness flickered through Lu Yangrong’s eyes as he harrumphed softly, “I’ve been in contact with little crane before. Previously, I even fed it once. Given its intelligence, it might even remember me!”

In reality, Lu Yangrong was not the one who had taken the initiative to feed little crane.

Because Su Zimo spent half a year in Thunderclap Valley, little crane did not have any elixirs and it felt extremely uncomfortable. Coincidentally, it passed by Lu Yangrong who had just obtained a rather decent elixir and instantly, little crane robbed him...

Because of that, little crane was taught a lesson by its mother.

Guan Jin's expression darkened and he did not say anything.

Feeling that he had gained the upper hand, Lu Yangrong was in a good mood.

Right then, little crane arrived above their heads and chirped a couple of times before descending slowly.

The moment he saw that, Lu Yangrong repressed the excitement in his heart and no longer looked at Guan Jin. Turning slightly, he smiled to Lu Yangrong. "Junior Sister Leng, don't you think little crane is really intelligent? I've only fed it once and it remembered it dearly. Now, it even came looking for me specially, hehe."

Right after he said that, little crane descended before everyone."

Lu Yangrong let out a bright smile and greeted, "Little crane, my friend. It's been a long time."

Little crane tilted its head slightly and looked at Lu Yangrong as if it was trying to recall who this person smiling so disgustingly was.

It thought for a while but could not recall.

Ignoring that person, it walked towards Su Zimo and lowered its head. Rubbing gently against his arm with its sharp beak, it blinked and called out purringly.

Whether or not it could head out and play depended on whether Su Zimo wanted to bring it along.

Little crane was wheedling to Su Zimo.

That scene stunned everyone as their jaws almost dropped to the ground.

Anyone who had resided in Ethereal Peak for a couple of years would know about little crane. However, none of them had ever heard of it being this intimate with any cultivator of the sect at all!

What was with this change in attitude?

Wasn't it the child of the Mystical Guardian Beast?

Something wasn't right! It did look the same and there was only a single crane in the sect!

Guan Jin suddenly chuckled. "Oh my, this is bad. Who was the one shamelessly boasting that he had fed little crane before and that it recognized him? Pfft!"

Lu Yangrong was embarrassed and his face turned red. He wished he could dig a hole and hide in it.

"What's there to be smug about? Maybe it got the wrong person!"

Lu Yangrong rebutted and walked towards little crane. Smiling, he cupped his fists. "Little crane, my friend. It's me! Are you mistaken? A while ago, you even ate an elixir of mine, remember?"

Lu Yangrong was better off if he hadn't said that. The moment he elaborated, little crane recalled how it was punished by its mother for that incident.

"Caw, caw!"

Suddenly, it cried out twice. Its voice was sharp and piercing, and its gaze was murderous.

Caught off guard, Lu Yangrong stumbled a couple of steps back and shuddered in fear.

"Hahaha!"

When he saw Lu Yangrong being humiliated, Guan Jin could not help but burst out into laughter.

No inner sect disciple would know of Su Zimo's relationship with little crane.

Of the people present, only little fatty vaguely knew about it.

Su Zimo patted little crane on the head lightly and scolded jokingly, "Stupid bird, why are you so fierce!"

Their relationship had always been like this.

However, that scene made both Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin stare in shock.

Even though Lu Yangrong was an inner sect disciple at mid-stage Foundation Establishment, he had to greet little crane courteously as a friend. However, Su Zimo, could call it a stupid bird?

Not just that, that guy even hit little crane!

Yet, the strangest thing was that little crane was not angered. Instead, it was still rubbing against that guy's arm...

Little fatty looked at Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin before shaking his head and lamenting internally, 'If you guys knew that bro had little crane locked up for more than three months, you would be scared silly!'

"Did she agree?"

Su Zimo asked.

Little crane nodded hurriedly, its eyes filled with anticipation waiting for Su Zimo to agree.

Su Zimo replied, "Alright, let's go together then."

Pausing for a moment, Su Zimo felt that something was amiss again. He turned to look at Leng Rou and the rest, asking, "Senior Sister Leng and fellow senior brothers, will there be any problem if little crane comes along?"

"N-N-No problem!"

Lu Yangrong was completely stumped as he replied instinctively.

Leng Rou's lips curled slightly as she revealed a faint smile and nodded.

Putting aside the fact that little crane's strength was equivalent to a spirit demon at Foundation Establishment realm, who would dare to stop it from tagging along given its status?

“Since everyone’s here, let’s make a move and try to get to Linfeng City as early as possible.”

Little fatty coughed and rubbed his hands.

Leng Rou nodded.

Rolling his eyes, a plot came to mind as Lu Yangrong suddenly said, “You’re right, junior brother. We should get to Linfeng City as quickly as possible. However, Junior Brother Su’s cultivation is too low. How is he going to catch up with our speed on sword kinesis flight?”

“That’s right.”

Guan Jin nodded too. “Even though the trip isn’t dangerous, I think it’s better if Junior Brother Su doesn’t go. Our speed will be too slow with you tagging along.”

Lu Yangrong and Guan Jin were initially competing against one another in secret. However, both of them felt a sense of danger at the same time with Su Zimo’s appearance.

With a tacit understanding, both of them wished to knock Su Zimo out of the picture should an opportunity arise.

By that statement, they were implying that Su Zimo would be a burden to them.

However, that was something Su Zimo truly could not refute.

After all, he was only at Level 9 Qi Condensation. In terms of sword kinesis flight speed, he was far inferior to Foundation Establishment Cultivators.

But if he were to run on the ground, without even using his Power of Blood, Su Zimo would be even faster than the sword kinesis flight of Foundation Establishment Cultivators by making use of his Divine Steed Fleeting!

“It’s fine, it’s fine!”

Little fatty laughed. “I’ll catch up to you guys carrying bro with me.”

“Your speed is the slowest amongst us and you’re thinking of carrying someone else? Won’t you be even slower then?” Guan Jin frowned.

Lu Yangrong smiled. “How about this? Since I’m the strongest, let me carry Junior Brother Su.”

Right after he said that, Lu Yangrong even looked at Leng Rou intentionally.

Even though Lu Yangrong sounded like he was helping Su Zimo, there was a hint of boasting to his words.