

## Chapter 61: Spirit Testing Stage

Within three days, more than 500 people had gathered before the stone gate. Most of them were mortals who had not cultivated before and there were a couple dozens of Qi Refinement Warriors.

Once the three days had passed, the fog behind them turned murkier and impenetrable.

Even if anyone outside wanted to join Ethereal Peak, they could only wait for the next year by now.

Notwithstanding the 500 odd people waiting outside the stone gate, even the two children could not really conceal their fatigue after the three days as they stood there chatting idly.

“Senior brother, how many of these people do you think can get to join the sect?”

“Five at most.”

Through that vast forest, the sound of birds singing and running water was all around. As such, the discussion of the two children was almost like mosquito buzzing and no one could hear them.

Yet, within the crowd, a bow and saber carrying scholar frowned as a look of shock flashed through his eyes.

Cultivating The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness did not merely change one’s body. The Body Tempering aspect would heighten their sense of smell; the Tendons Transformation aspect their sense of vision and the Bones Strengthening aspect their hearing.

The changes were all encompassing.

Even though Su Zimo was of the Human race, his physical body and five senses were even sharper than those of Spirit Beasts!

Despite the soft voices of the two children, Su Zimo heard everything clear as day.

Only five out of the 500 of them could be accepted into the sect!

That was a ratio of 1:100! How could anyone imagine that?

Su Zimo had initially thought that he would be able to enter Ethereal Peak with ease with his borrowed Heaven spirit root. But now, it seemed like he couldn’t just rely on that!

The conditions for one to be able to join Ethereal Peak must be extremely stringent or there wouldn’t be so many people eliminated!

Just as Su Zimo was contemplating on what he should do, he heard the two children continue.

“Who do you think stands a greater chance, senior brother?”

“The couple that doesn’t really seem to fit in. Even though they’re only at Level 5 Qi Condensation, they look like they have an extraordinary aura. They’re decent. Oh, that little fatty too. He looks rather sharp so he should be fine. Junior brother, he’s even fatter than you! Hehe!”

Su Zimo swept his gaze at him.

Amongst the crowd, a man and woman stood by their own somewhere slightly further, not fitting in with the crowd.

Su Zimo was around the same age as the man who wore a purple robe with sharp brows and an edged chin. He looked haughty as his hands rested behind his back with eyes closed, standing still. It looked as though he was one with the environment.

The woman was wearing a flawless white blouse and looked beautiful like a fairy. Yet, her ravishing looks carried a cold expression where one could sense from a distance away.

Su Zimo had a feeling that the reason why the man did not want to fit in was out of disdain and the woman merely did not want to.

As for the little fatty...

To be exact, he was not little at all and looked to be around 16 years old. His neck and waist could not be made out and he merely resembled a water bucket that had two elephant legs as he rolled about the crowd without stopping.

His rotund face carried small beady eyes that fluttered about. In just three days, he was already one with the crowd.

"Senior brother, what about that bow and saber carrying scholar? Do you think he has a chance?" The fat child asked.

Su Zimo was curious when he heard the conversation being steered to him, intrigued to find out what the skinny child thought of him.

"That man... is a little strange. Even though he's a scholar, he's carrying a huge bow and saber. I suspect that there must be more to his weapons."

Right then, a gentle ray of sun shone through the greenery.

The sun had risen.

Arranging their attire, the two children stood on either side of the stone gate with a stern expression. The skinny child spoke, "Ethereal Peak's disciple acceptance consists of three stages. First is the Immortal Affinity Stage. There is a certain affinity required for one to attain immortality. I believe that all of you have that for being able to make it through the mist here."

"The second stage is the Spirit Testing Stage. Those with a superior-class spirit root, Earth spirit root or Heaven spirit root will be able to make it to the third stage once they pass through this gate."

"The third stage is called the Life and Death Stage. Those who the second stage can head up the stone steps behind me and you'll pass once you reach the peak. But let me remind you guys, this is an extremely treacherous peak. Any misstep and you'll fall to your death without a corpse. Please do be careful and not force yourselves."

At that thought, everyone felt their hearts skip a beat as they all looked unnerved.

The reason why they wanted to join Ethereal Peak was because they wanted to attain immortality. If they were to lose their lives joining the sect, how could they achieve immortality?

The tip of the peak was shrouded in clouds and could not be seen.

It was clear that the path would not be that easy to climb.

The dozens of Qi Refinement Warriors present smiled, looking confident.

All of them could tread the skies with their swords. Climbing the peak posed no challenge to them at all.

Amongst the group, one of the mortals was dissident as he yelled, "How is this fair? All of those Qi Refinement Warriors can easily fly their way to the peak but we have to climb it step by step!"

"Humph!"

One of the Qi Refinement Warriors harrumphed coldly and scoffed, "There's nothing such as fairness in this world. If you want to speak of fairness, come to me after you achieve Qi Condensation!"

"You...!" The mortal was speechless and indignant.

The two children of the Ethereal Sect were not annoyed in the slightest as the fat one chuckled.

"Everyone, you're overthinking it. The path is definitely fair for everyone. Even Qi Refinement Warriors will not, no, may not be able to reach the peak. If they're not careful, they'll end up losing their lives as well!"

As though he was about to let something slip, the fat child looked flustered for a moment as he changed his statement.

Most people merely thought that the fat child had said something wrong by accident.

At that reply, many of the mortals present heaved a sigh of relief.

However, the dozens of Qi Refinement Warriors looked terrible.

They had cultivated earnestly with some of them even at Level 9 Qi Condensation. If they were to die here just because they wanted to join a sect...

Su Zimo glanced sideways.

The purple robed haughty man still had his eyes closed as though he was indifferent to what the two children had said.

The white bloused woman maintained her cold expression with an unyielding gaze that seemed to be frozen.

The little fatty among the crowd was still laughing and looking nonchalant.

"Come, the first person," The skinny child raised his hand and indicated for the first person to enter the stone gate.

It was a Level 7 Qi Refinement Warrior.

The man was somewhat nervous as he paused before the stone gate. Bowing to the two children, he smiled and asked, "Fellow Daoists, can an ordinary spirit root work? Is there any leeway?"

The two children shook their heads.

Sighing, the man walked towards the stone gate.

The moment he reached the stone gate, a water barrier appeared across it with four shimmering lights.

Four elements – it was an ordinary spirit root!

The man tried his best to barge through the stone gate but he was blocked by the water barrier. In the blink of an eye, he was bounced back from it.

Failure!

The fat child looked apologetic as he nodded to the man before raising his voice to the crowd, "Next.

### **Chapter 62: Variant Spirit Root**

"Pseudo spirit root, fail!"

"Ordinary spirit root, fail"

"Superior-class spirit root, pass."

...

Everyone continued proceeding to the stone gate where more than half of them were rejected.

Only those with a superior-class and above spirit root could get to pass the Spirit Testing Stage.

In the blink of an eye, there were only a couple dozens of people left with the haughty man, the white bloused woman, the little fatty and Su Zimo.

There had yet to be a single Heaven spirit root amongst the tested yet.

There were tens of Earth spirit roots and the rest were all superior-class.

The two children could not hide their looks of disappointment as they placed their remaining hope in the last dozens of people.

Right then, the little fatty walked through the stone gate all smiles.

The moment he reached the stone gate, a roaring sound rang out, scaring everyone.

Bang! Boom! Boom!

The water barrier turned yellow right away before materializing slowly into a sturdy mud wall.

Earth element, Heaven spirit root!

Out of the 500 over applicants, there was finally a Heaven spirit root!

The two children nodded to the little fatty with a kind smile, their eyes sparkling.

As he crossed the stone gate with ease, he came to the two children with smiles and pulled their hands together like long lost friends. Casually, he started engaging the both of them in conversation.

Both of them were a little stunned and they nearly spilled everything about themselves within a few mere sentences.

At that sight, Su Zimo smirked internally – that little fatty looked to be amiable and cute from the outside, but her was sharper than any of them.

Before long, the skinny child was the first one to recover as he coughed gently and swung the little fatty's chubby hand away and said in a deep voice, "Fellow Daoist, please respect yourself and wait at the side instead of distracting us."

"Yes, yes. Self respect. I understand that I've got a huge self to respect," The little fatty giggled without looking awkward at all.

The skinny child rolled his eyes and got rid of the little fatty before yelling toward the stone gate, "Next!"

Someone tried and failed once more.

The number of people remaining was diminishing.

Finally, the haughty man opened his eyes as he turned to look at the white bloused woman not too far away. Giving a slight grin, he headed for the stone gate.

His actions attracted everyone's attention.

It was as though he was a born ruler where every single move he made would attract the gazes of the masses.

The little fatty stopped smiling and looked at the stone gate.

Frowning slightly, the white bloused woman raised her head and her eyes followed the haughty man coldly too.

The haughty man stopped himself before the stone gate where the water barrier showed no indication of color.

"Hehe."

After a temporary silence, giggles spread from the crowd.

"What's he putting a show on for when he doesn't even have a spirit root?"

"I know, right? And here I was thinking that he was someone incredible."

"Wait, something's not right. How did he become a Qi Refinement Warrior without a spirit root..."

The moment that sentence was spoken, everyone fell silent.

It was as though an invisible hand had gripped the covered the mouths of the mocking crowd as they watched with agape eyes.

The two children had a stern expression as well.

The little fatty was in deep thoughts. As though he had realized something, his chubby body shivered slightly as he could not contain his shock.

Oo! Oo!

Right then, a bizarre howling sound came out of the stone gate as the water barrier shimmered, looking like a breeze had just passed through it.

“Wind element, variant spirit root!”

The two children yelped.

When he heard that, Su Zimo’s heart skipped a beat too.

Of the five types of spirit roots, the Heaven spirit root was the best and rarest. However, there was a single spirit root that was even rarer than that – the variant spirit root, containing elements such as wind, thunder, ice, light and darkness et cetera.

One could say that a Heaven spirit root could only be found in one out of 10,000 men. Yet, a variant spirit root was tenfold rarer than that.

Naturally, a variant spirit root only had a single element as well and was a type of Heaven spirit root. However, that did not mean that it was stronger than the usual five elements; it was just extremely rare.

The haughty man smiled and crossed the stone gate with ease.

Excitedly, the skinny child whispered, “Junior brother, stand guard over here. I’ll go inform the peak master and be right back.”

“Yes, yes. Hurry on, senior brother,” The fat child replied hastily.

Right then, the white bloused woman outside the stone gate moved as well.

“Hold on, senior brother. We can wait till this one’s done too,” The fat Dao child called back the skinny one.

Nodding his head, the skinny child watched the white bloused woman keenly, seemingly even more nervous than her.

When she arrived before the stone gate, there was no color on the water barrier still.

This time round, no one dared to mock anymore.

“Could it be another variant spirit root?” The eyes of both children widened in disbelief.

Everyone else watched the stone gate with bated breath.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Suddenly, a layer of frost covered the water barrier before freezing it into ice!

“Ice element, variant spirit root!”

Everyone gasped.

“It’s been tens of years since a variant spirit root has appeared at Ethereal Peak! But now, there’s two in one go? No, I’ve got to hurry and report it to the peak master!”

The skinny child drew out a flying sword and sped towards the back of the peak, disappearing in the blink of an eye.

Everyone else watched the haughty man and the white bloused woman with looks of admiration and respect.

The little fatty smiled his way to the white bloused woman before pandering to her, “Miss, you’re so beautiful. I’ve never seen a woman as beautiful as you in my life. You’re even prettier than our village beauty, Sister Caifeng!”

It was as though thunder had struck everyone present as they rolled their eyes.

That little fatty really did dare to say anything with drivel such as his village beauty, Sister Caifeng and whatnot.

He wasn’t wrong in his words – the white bloused woman was indeed extremely beautiful. However, most people would not dare to spout such truths, let alone in front of her.

Yet, the strange thing was that everything seemed natural and sincere when they came out of the little fatty’s mouth without a single bit of awkwardness.

If any other women heard such an open and brazen compliment, they would definitely feel shy. However, the girl was unmoved as she glared at the little fatty coldly without saying anything.

The little fatty wasn’t dissuaded as he slipped away to the haughty man’s side before commenting in awe, “Sir, you have such a good figure. I’m really envious!”

“Get away!”

The haughty man’s lips pursed slightly as he spat out those two words.

“Ah, alright!”

The little fatty nodded his head keenly as he disregarded cleanliness and rolled away on the floor immediately!

Because his figure resembled a ball to begin with, his rolling motion indeed made him look less than human.

The white bloused woman’s lips twitched as her frostiness diminished slightly, watching with a trace of bemusement.

Spying her expression with his sharp eyes, the little fatty stumbled over to the white bloused woman's side with an intoxicated expression. His eyes seemed as though they were sparkling as he praised, "Wow, you really look so beautiful smiling!"

Instantly, the friendliness in the girl's eyes disappeared. However, she stretched out her delicate hand and patted on the little fatty's head, neither harshly nor gently.

Smiling with squinted eyes, the little fatty looked to be enjoying it.

"How could there be someone this shameless?!" Those were the words that passed through everyone's minds.

When the fat child looked at the remaining tens of people and saw nothing special about them, he waved his hand patiently and demanded, "Continue with the test. Hurry up."

Su Zimo tidied his clothes before heading up.

### **Chapter 63: E-Exploded?**

Su Zimo's actions did not attract anyone's attention.

Compared to the haughty man, white bloused woman and little fatty, he seemed simply way too ordinary apart from his slightly weird dressing.

The reason why Su Zimo waited for the end of the test wasn't because he wanted to pull a surprise on everyone.

It was because he had no spirit root to begin with. Even though Die Yue had planted the spirit root for him, he could not help but feel nervous as to whether things would turn out well.

Standing still before the stone gate, he watched the water barrier keenly.

Swoosh!

A red flash of light shimmered through the water barrier before burning into raging flames, exuding a scorching warmth.

Su Zimo was elated.

Fire element, heaven spirit root!

Apart from the haughty man and white bloused woman, everyone turned their sights to him.

Out of the 500 people, other than the two variant spirit roots, the little fatty was the only Earth element heaven spirit root. Now that Su Zimo was the second, he naturally attracted everyone's attention.

Furthermore, those with some knowledge on cultivation knew that a Fire spirit root was superior to an Earth spirit root.

On the one hand, the Fire element had the highest killing power amongst the five elements.

On the other hand, one who possessed the Fire element had the chance to become a Weapon or Elixir Refinement Master.

Those two paths required one to have a high mastery and understanding of the Fire element. As such, those with a Fire spirit root had an innate advantage.

Waiting with a hawk eye by the stone gate, the little fatty was hoping to make his acquaintance as well after Su Zimo passed through it.

“Eh?”

The fat Dao child was standing at the side idly as he let out a casual surprised remark. Smiling, he then nodded and said, “Not bad, not bad. Come on over, sir.”

After all, the fat child had his fill of surprises after the appearance of two consecutive variant spirit roots and hence the reason for his less than enthused response.

Right then, no one had noticed anything strange about Su Zimo just yet.

He stood before the stone gate motionlessly instead of crossing right away.

It wasn't that he did not want to – the stone gate was stopping him.

He could feel a strong resistance that was trying to keep him out of the gate!

In theory, the water barrier would only block out those without or those who possess a pseudo and ordinary spirit root. Yet, the scarlet water barrier was resisting Su Zimo who clearly possessed a heaven spirit root.

If not for the fact that he had an extremely strong physique, he would have been sent flying like the first Qi Refinement Warrior.

“How could this be?”

Su Zimo strategized as he fought against the resistance of the water barrier.

He knew his background clearer than anyone else.

He was someone without a spirit root to begin with.

It was only natural for the stone gate to resist him at that thought.

But, what was up with the clear indication of his Fire spirit root?

If he were to continue with this stalemate, notwithstanding the fat child of Ethereal Sect, even everyone else would realize that something was wrong and Su Zimo's efforts would have been wasted.

Indignant!

Su Zimo was indignant!

Why?

He had already come so far just to be stopped by a single stone gate!

With a darkened expression, he moved towards the water barrier and took a fierce step!

Su Zimo had already displayed the stance for the Plow Heaven Stride with his single step. Instantly, he gave off such a menacing aura that even the fat child at the stone gate jumped in shock.

“Mmm?”

As though he had sensed something, the haughty man opened his eyes and looked towards the stone gate.

Turning her head slightly, the white bloused woman frowned gently too.

Everyone found themselves witnessing the strangest scene ever.

Even though Su Zimo was almost entirely through the stone gate, the scarlet water barrier did not dissipate at all. Instead, it wrapped around him like an elastic veil that was trying its best to stop him.

It stunned everyone present.

What was going on?

Fire element, heaven spirit root. That’s right.

But, why would the stone gate try to prevent this man?

It was a wrestle between Su Zimo and the scarlet water barrier.

All of a sudden!

Squinting his eyes, Su Zimo’s body rang out with crackling sounds and his entire body seemed as though it had enlarged. With his tendons and bones cracking together, he gave a soft yell and strode out once more!

Swoosh!

The water barrier shattered and fell to the ground.

Having successfully passed the stone gate, Su Zimo’s expression relaxed as he heaved out a sigh of relief before walking to the fat child.

Right as he was about to speak, he saw a weird look in the fat child’s eye as the latter glared behind him intently.

Snap!

Suddenly, a boom sounded out from behind Su Zimo.

He turned around instinctively only to witness a fissure forming on the crossbeam of the mighty 30 foot stone gate!

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Before anyone realized what was going on, the fissure spread out swiftly and in the blink of an eye, filled the entire stone gate with dense, horrifying cracks!

Su Zimo's heart skipped a beat.

Bang! Boom! Boom!

Along with a huge crash, the stone gate crumbled right before everyone's eyes just like that, turning into a pile of rocks with dust clouds flying about.

What followed was a deathly silence.

Everyone's faces froze right away.

The haughty man scowled while a look of surprise filled the white bloused woman's face as her mouth gaped slightly, losing her previous demeanor.

The little fatty was so rattled that his eyeballs were almost popping out.

"E-E-Exploded?!"

The fat child was completely lost as his mind and eyes went blank.

It was already phenomenal enough for variant spirit roots to make their appearance in the test such that his senior brother had gone off to inform their peak master about it.

But, what was up with this scholar before him!

He had caused the entire stone gate to explode with a simple spirit root test...!

Unnerved, Su Zimo coughed gently before revealing a friendly smile to the fat child. "Fellow daoist, I suppose that stone gate must be really old, huh?"

"A-Ah! Yes!" The fat child replied automatically, "It's been a couple thousand years now."

"That must be it then."

Su Zimo nodded his head and continued solemnly, "It's only natural for problems to arise since the gate has been here for such a long time enduring the weather all round the year. How unfortunate that I had to come across its demise."

"Huh?" The fat child's jaw almost dropped to the ground.

Su Zimo patted the fat child on the shoulder and reminded sincerely, "This may not be a bad thing though. At least, it serves as a reminder for the sect to conduct constant maintenance to some of the older structures you guys have so that today's situation does not repeat itself. These issues have to be nipped in the bud before they are allowed to manifest."

The fat child was befuddled to begin with through the confusion. With Su Zimo's explanation, he was even more astounded and was almost convinced.

In reality, the stone gate was initially a gigantic spirit testing stone with its middle dug out by the cultivators of Ethereal Sect and placed here, turning into the stone gate they perceive today.

The spirit testing stone was a spirit item of the universe and was extremely perceptive to spirit roots – there was no way it would be destroyed through a lack of maintenance.

If no one had destroyed it, it could have lasted for even millions of years without any issues.

The little fatty was the first to react as his eyes flickered, glancing at Su Zimo while raising a thumbs up.

He knew that he was not at Su Zimo's level where the latter could spout nonsense with a straight face. As such, he could not help but feel impressed.

Su Zimo could not help but feel guilty.

Everything had gone beyond his expectations. Even though what he said was akin to duping kids, it was better than having his background exposed.

#### **Chapter 64: Life and Death Stage**

The fat child was thoroughly confused by Su Zimo as he froze for a long time without understanding what had happened, pointing at Su Zimo and stammering, "Y-Y-You! I-I-I...! I'll go let the peak master know about this too!"

Shrugging his head as though trying to clear his mind, the fat child patted his storage bag and summoned a flying sword before speeding to the back of the peak.

In the blink of an eye, both children guarding this place had disappeared.

Unnerved, the fat child had left in a hurry without saying anything else.

The little fatty seemed to be extremely interested in Su Zimo. With bright, shimmering eyes, he stumbled over and bowed. "Sir, how did you do it! Can you teach me?"

With an unchanging expression, Su Zimo shook his head. "That... has nothing to do with me."

Even though he said that, his heart whispered another tune.

There were only two reasons why the stone gate blocked him.

First, it was because he was a cultivator without a spirit root to begin with.

Second, even though it was also a heaven spirit root, the Fire spirit root that Die Yue gave him was different from normal ones.

Su Zimo could not tell which of the two reasons it was.

After the Spirit Testing Stage, there were only 80 out of the 500 left with more than 20 Qi Refinement Warriors.

Based on the order of events, the remaining 80 people should head up the peak through the path beyond the stone gate so that they could proceed with the third stage – Life and Death.

However, with the two children from Ethereal Sect gone, everyone was lost as to whether they should continue with the original plan or wait where they were.

Right then, the haughty man chuckled and started ascending the peak.

His actions caused everyone to waver.

The two children had mentioned earlier that the third stage was merely to head up the peak through the path. However, everyone knew that if they could be the first to reach the peak, their chances of being accepted would be much higher.

After the haughty man, the white bloused woman made her move too.

Exchanging glances, everyone else followed suit immediately.

The path was made from green stones and was neither rugged nor tough. Instead, the journey was picturesque with luscious greenery and the soothing melody of birds singing.

As they traversed through the clouds with the accompanying scenery, it was as though they were in paradise; everything felt relaxing unlike a treacherous Life and Death Stage.

Su Zimo was in no hurry as he hung around at the back of the pack.

He felt that since Ethereal Sect set this stage, it wouldn't be to give the first person who reached the peak an advantage.

It was way too cliché and wasn't a fair method given the number of people present. Finally, if it was that simple, it wouldn't be named Life and Death Stage.

After Su Zimo destroyed the entire stone gate for a mere test, the little fatty was now hanging around him instead of the haughty man and the white bloused woman, chatting non-stop the entire way.

Worried that he may let his background slip, Su Zimo was rather distracted as he only replied casually every now and then.

"Bro, everyone went through the spirit root testing so ordinarily. But your test was like a fart to Mother Nature!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it was loud and clear!"

"..."

"Bro, you seem like you have a dignified demeanor. I suppose you have quite the extraordinary background?"

"I've studied for a couple of years in the past."

"My, bro! That's like a rare gem in the crowd! You can both study and fight!"

"..."

Su Zimo finally understood the powers of the little fatty as he hurried ahead, wanting to bury himself into the crowd.

Right then, the people up ahead stopped in their tracks.

Su Zimo looked up and frowned.

That was the end of the mountain path! Everyone found themselves facing a steep peak that extended into the clouds boundlessly.

The true test had arrived!

The smooth mountain road was merely a warm up!

The many mortals present looked up at the peak solemnly.

For them, the only way they could reach the top was to climb by hand. However, the peak was simply way too steep that there was barely any edge for them to grab on to.

On both sides of the mountain road was a deep abyss where a single misstep would mean certain death!

Everyone could not help but recall the words of the children. This was a stage treacherous like no other. Any single mistake and they would find themselves dead without a corpse. Hence, they should be careful and not force themselves.

Many of the mortals could not hide their fear in their expression as they gave up internally.

There were some who were indignant about things and whispered in discussion.

“Ethereal Sect is way too much. They’re trying to get us killed just to join them.”

“Isn’t that right? It’s not as though our spirit root is lousy as well. If push comes to shove, we can just join some other sects. That would be better than dying here.”

“I don’t even know how high this peak is. What if we climb halfway up and run out of energy?”

Unlike the many mortals, the 20 odd Qi Refinement Warriors present looked relaxed.

While this mountain may seem insurmountable to mortals, all they had to do was ride their flying swords and rise endlessly.

One of the Qi Refinement Warriors pulled out a flying sword from his storage bag and with a single leap, he chuckled with a suave expression. “Alright, I’ll make a move first and await you guys at the peak.”

Right after, he soared into the skies and disappeared into the clouds in the blink of an eye.

Not willing to lose out, the other Qi Refinement Warriors took out their spirit weapons and followed suit.

Yet, the strange thing was that the haughty man did not move at all. Instead, he frowned and gazed into the clouds, contemplating about something.

It was the same for the white bloused woman as she stood there in deep thoughts.

Some of the mortals gathered their courage and began climbing the peak. Compared to the Qi Refinement Warriors, they were much slower and every single step was horrifying.

A single misstep and they would fall right into the abyss!

“Bro, aren’t you moving?” The little fatty looked at Su Zimo.

Right as he was about to reply, a shriek rang out from the clouds.

“Ah!”

Everyone’s hearts skipped a beat.

In the blink of an eye, a shadow fell from the clouds and glided through everyone’s vision into the dark abyss beneath!

At that sight, everyone’s expressions turned grim as chills ran down their spines.

The person who had fallen was the Qi Refinement Warrior who had moved first!

A Qi Refinement Warrior was dead just like that?

What had he encountered up there?

The clouds rumbled and shifted, emanating a chilling killing intent.

“Ah!”

It was yet another shriek.

A shadow fluttered by them and dunked into the depths of the abyss.

Gulp, gulp.

The place rang out with everyone’s gulping sounds.

In just a mere short while, two Qi Refinement Warriors had fallen to their deaths!

The two children were right. The third stage was fair for everyone such that even Qi Refinement Warriors may not be able to reach the peak.

The few mortals that had just started climbing up the peak found themselves getting cold feet as they watched everything unfold in utter horror.

There were already people who had started to climb down.

What kind of a joke was that? There was no need for them to take such a risk when even Qi Refinement Warriors have died.

Suddenly, the haughty man laughed and mumbled. “Life and Death Stage, Life and Death Stage. The peak represents life while the abyss represents death. Interesting! Challenging!”

## **Chapter 65: Crane Obstacle**

The way most of them looked at the haughty man had changed.

While everyone else was scared to death and wanted to back off, he was the only one who looked raring to go without a single bit of fear.

“Ah!”

“Ah...!”

Yet another chain of shrieks as the Qi Refinement Warriors who had moved ahead first fell from the clouds one after another, disappearing into the abyss on either side of the mountain path.

Finally, there were people who could take it no longer as they started backtracking.

The little fatty held his tongue and exclaimed, “Even a Level 9 Qi Refinement Warrior fell down. Just what did they encounter in the clouds?”

Su Zimo saw everything even clearer.

There were a total of 23 Qi Refinement Warriors who soared into the skies. In the blink of an eye, every single one of them had fallen!

That was a little horrifying.

Many mortals started climbing down the walls, looking terrified with trembling feet. Without even turning back, they dashed down the mountain path.

There were more than 80 people who had passed the second stage. Now, all the 23 Qi Refinement Warriors have already failed. Coupled with the mortals who had left, there were only 17 people left at the base of the peak.

All of the 17 were resolute warriors who did not show the slightest look of fear in their eyes even at the sight of all those Qi Refinement Warriors falling over.

Even the little fatty who was chattering the entire way merrily had gone silent, his beady eyes fluttering about as he was deep in thoughts.

Su Zimo had always felt something unusual about this stage as everything seemed suspicious.

However, he could not point out just what exactly was wrong.

At almost the same time, both the haughty man and white bloused woman summoned a flying sword and soared to the skies. However, their speed was clearly slower – it was clear that both of them were being wary about the situation as well.

“Bro, remember to be careful. I’ll scout the way for you first,” The little fatty was also a Qi Refinement Warrior as he retrieved a small shield from his storage bag. The shield expanded with the wind and carried his rotund body into the skies slowly.

The remaining 14 people inclusive of Su Zimo were mortals who had no spirit qi within them.

If they wanted to ascend the peak, they would have to climb the peak step by step physically.

Su Zimo hesitated no more as he approached the base of the peak. With a nimble leap, he hung onto the walls and started climbing up swiftly.

That shocked the remaining 13 people as they almost mistook him for a monkey instead of a human climbing the peak.

By now, Su Zimo had almost perfected his Tendons Transformation. He was nimble like a python and agile like an ape. Moving with ease, the peak posed no challenge to him at all.

Apes were natural born climbers.

If Su Zimo had given it his all, even Qi Refinement Warriors who could soar through the skies may not even be able to match his speed.

Previously at the Cang Lang Mountain Range, even when Elder Qian of Joyful Clan soared through the skies, Su Zimo's speed while climbing the towering old tree matched his!

Of course, Su Zimo had used his Sanguine Ape Transformation at that time and Elder Qian was only a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

Even without using all his strength, Su Zimo had left the 13 remaining mortals far behind his tail.

"Caw, caw!"

Right then, Su Zimo vaguely picked up on some birds crying out.

Even though he had lived a year in Cang Lang Mountain Range, he still could not understand the language of beasts. However, he could tell of how they felt through their sounds.

Those birds clearly sounded happy and mocking.

"Why are there spirit beasts here?"

He frowned as he continued climbing without slowing down at all.

"Bastard, how dare you!"

Before long, the voice of the haughty man hollered out above.

Su Zimo raised his head and gazed over, squinting his eyes.

Far beyond the clouds, a gigantic bird was extending its wings while cawing out with a raised head. Su Zimo could faintly make out the bird assaulting the haughty man, white bloused woman and little fatty in midair.

Every single gentle flap of its wings brought about a hurricane as all three of them swayed back and forth midair, looking as though they could fall anytime.

"A spirit demon?"

Su Zimo was stunned.

The bird exuded an aura that was the same as spirit demons.

It looked as though it had just become a spirit demon, equivalent to a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

Even then, its strength was enough to hold out against the three of them.

It was clear that the bird had not used its full strength. Instead, it was running circles around the three of them like a cat circling a rat, flapping its wings from time to time so that none of them could ascend further.

The haughty man had a Wind spirit root to begin with and thus was barely able to maintain his balance despite swaying in the wind.

The white bloused woman had a frozen expression. She was encased by a transparent ice barrier – it was clear that she had already used a talisman.

As for the little fatty, his shield was steady and spacious. He sprawled on it, gripping onto its edges tightly with sweat pouring down his puffy face, looking all nervous.

“So, this is the obstacle of the Life and Death Stage. One would be able to reach the peak if they could get through this bird.”

Now that he understood the reason, Su Zimo was prepared to continue climbing. Right then, the little fatty shrieked.

Perhaps because the bird saw that Su Zimo and the others were approaching as well, it seemed as though it no longer wanted to waste time as it flapped its wings furiously.

The little fatty was the first one to lose control as he fell from midair with his shield blown into oblivion.

“AHHHHHHH!”

His face was pale as a sheet as he flailed his arms, crying out loudly. When he caught sight of Su Zimo above him, he called, “Bro, run! There’s a fierce bird up there!”

The place where the little fatty fell was not too far away from Su Zimo.

Su Zimo had a decent impression of the little fatty and was not about to leave the latter in the lurch. With a swift motion, he strode horizontally across the wall and grabbed the little fatty from midair.

By then, the little fatty’s eyes were rolled over while he drooled all over, seemingly passed out of fear.

Su Zimo frowned.

He was already halfway through the climb. If he were to put the little fatty down, he would have to repeat an entire journey once more.

Even though the little fatty was heavy, he was nothing compared to the Cold Moon Saber and Sanguine Crystal Bow hanging on his waist.

At that thought, Su Zimo grabbed the little fatty with one arm while continuing to climb with another without slowing down at all.

It was only after he got closer that he managed to make things out clearly.

It was a crane that looked to be in its infancy stage, its eyes filled with merry excitement.

It was as though making the climbers fall was the most fun game it ever played.

Swooping down, the crane extended its claws and landed on the white bloused woman's talisman ice barrier.

Crack! Crack!

The barrier began cracking as the crane clawed at it with ease.

With a strong gust of wind, the woman then fell from her sword. Even though her gaze looked slightly dim, she did not make a single peep of disgruntlement as she disappeared into the abyss.

The haughty man followed soon after, holding out for not much longer under the attacks of the crane as he fell through the skies looking indignant.

"Caw, caw!"

Rearing its head, the crane looked extremely gleeful.

### **Chapter 66: An Ape**

When he saw the haughty man and white bloused woman falling into the abyss, Su Zimo was finally clear about one thing.

Those that fall into the abyss will definitely not die.

Since the two of them possessed a variant spirit root and the peak master of Ethereal Peak already knew about it, there was no way they would be allowed to die.

However, Su Zimo did not know what those who fell into the abyss would encounter.

Shifting horizontally, Su Zimo dodged from the crane's line of sight and continued speeding up the peak.

Even though he only had one hand, his feet were as nimble as his fingers after he removed his shoes. Digging themselves into the wall of the peak, he continued climbing steadily.

The crane had extremely sharp senses. With a swift flap, it appeared above Su Zimo's head and cried out, looking at him with a taunting expression as though mocking his little play of trying to dodge it.

The man and crane had finally met.

...

On a peak enshrouded with spirit qi elsewhere, two grace middle aged cultivators sat opposite to one another. They were both clad in white robes and one of them had a flying sword emblem engraved on his sleeve while the other had a hexagon emblem.

Both of them were sipping tea lazily.

Beside them stood a skinny child who was relating something excitedly.

"Hmms? Variant spirit root? Two of them?"

One of them placed his teacup down and turned around to ask, his expression slightly changed.

The skinny child nodded furiously.

The other cultivator asked, "What spirit roots were they?"

"One is wind and the other is ice."

At that, the two cultivators exchanged glances and smiled, apparently pleased.

"Wen Xuan, your peak's about to produce two more geniuses."

There were six peaks to Ethereal Peak where the highest amongst them was the true Ethereal Peak that was visible to the outside world.

Surrounding it were five other peaks – Spirit, Elixir, Talisman, Array and Weapon.

The cultivator known as Wen Xuan – the one with a flying sword emblem embossed – was the peak master of Spirit Peak.

The other person was Xuan Yi, peak master of Array Peak.

Naturally, anyone who could be a peak master was definitely a Perfected Golden Core.

Even though all the peaks had their specialties, Spirit Peak was the strongest amongst them with the most disciples. Because they valued cultivation realms the most highly, everything they learned and imparted were killing techniques.

If there were variant and heaven spirit roots, they would most likely be selected by Spirit Peak.

Wen Xuan smiled and stood up. "I'll go take a look and see how many tribulations of the Life and Death Stage those two can pass."

"Don't worry. Those with variant spirit roots are blessed by providence. They'll naturally be able to pass the tribulation of life and death," A teasing expression flickered by the eyes of Peak Master Xuan Yi as he joked, "Look how anxious you are. Where's your poise as a peak master?"

"Come, join me to take a look."

With a hearty laugh, Wen Xuan tugged at Xuan Yi's wrist and wanted to leave together.

Shaking his head, Xuan Yi ducked away and laughed. "I'm not going. Won't I be giving myself troubles by watching your Spirit Peak take all the good talents away?"

Right then, a chubby fat child ran over in a huff.

"P-Peak master! T-T-This is bad!"

"Mmm?"

Both peak masters exchanged glances, looking surprised.

"Why are you here too, junior brother?" The skinny child asked.

Sweating from head to toe, the fat child waved his lumpy hand and cried out, "Peak master, the spirit testing gate exploded!"

“Exploded?”

Xuan Yi and Wen Xuan looked at one another confused.

Wen Xuan asked, “Why would it explode? Someone destroyed it?”

“No.”

The fat child shook his head before nodding fervently. “Yes! Wait, no. No!”

Both peak masters were thoroughly confused.

“Just what in the world happened! Speak properly!” Wen Xuan hollered with a solemn expression.

The fat child could not help but recall the words of that scholar. Instinctively, he repeated, “It might be because the spirit testing gate had been enduring the rough weather for such a long time without proper maintenance, that’s why it broke apart...”

Bam!

Wen Xuan flicked the fat child on the head.

“Ow!”

Clutching his head, he pursed his lips sadly.

“What nonsense.”

Xuan Yi could not hide his smile as he chuckled. “Who taught you that? I’m sure you didn’t think up that on your own, right?”

“A scholar told me that,” The fat child replied, “But I think what he said makes sense too. And he was even kind enough to have me remind the sect to take care of our old structures so that...”

Bam!

Yet another flick.

Instantly, a big, swollen bump appeared on the forehead of the fat child.

He was almost bursting into tears as he asked with teary eyes, “Peak master, why are you hitting me?”

“You’re too silly, child. One day, you might even end up counting money for the man who sells you out,” Xuan Yi did not know to laugh or to cry.

Wen Xuan spoke sternly, “Tell me the entire series of events. Do not hide anything from me.”

“There was this scholar carrying a bow and saber. He came before the spirit testing gate and it displayed a Fire spirit root,” The fat child answered.

“Carry on.”

“But, the spirit testing gate did not allow him to enter. The scholar then continued barging through and the spirit testing gate exploded.”

Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi frowned and exchanged glances, still confused.

Wen Xuan asked right away, "Are you sure it was a Fire spirit root?"

"Yes!"

The fat child replied instantly, "Peak master, you've got to believe me! Even though I'm stupid, I can still tell that it's a Fire spirit root!"

"That's strange," Xuan Yi could not figure out what happened.

After a moment of silence, Xuan Yi spoke, "Wen Xuan, I'll accompany you to see just what is up with this scholar."

Without the use of any spirit weapons, the both of them soared through the skies and with a flip of their robes, carried the two children with them towards the front of the peak.

Before long, all four of them arrived at where the spirit testing gate was.

"It's indeed broken."

Xuan Yi stared at the lump of rocks beneath him where the spirit testing gate once stood and murmured silently.

Wen Xuan asked, "Where is that scholar?"

"Eh? He's gone," The fat child looked around.

Suddenly, Xuan Yi replied, "No, they're up the peak. The Eight Distresses Formation of the abyss has already been activated. Yes, those two with the variant spirit roots are there already."

Wen Xuan asked hurriedly, "How many tribulations have the two of them gone through?"

"They've already passed two, life and death. You can rest easy now, right?" Xuan Yi chuckled.

After pausing slightly, Xuan Yi shook his head. "Wait, the bow and saber carrying scholar isn't going through the Eight Distresses Formation. He might have left already out of fear."

Wen Xuan harrumphed gently. "This unknown lad appeared and destroyed our Ethereal Sect's spirit testing gate and left just like that? Brazen!"

"Caw, caw!"

Right then, the hurried calls of a crane rang out from beyond the clouds.

Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi looked up.

Far above, a figure was shifting nimbly around the walls of the peak without falling off. Even while dodging the attacks of the crane, the figure was still climbing to the peak rapidly!

Even with the eyesight of a Perfected Golden Core, they could not see clearly due to the distance between them and the tip of the peak.

"Xuan Yi, look! There's an ape!" Wen Xuan said as he pointed to a black shadow on the peak.

## Chapter 67: Full Effort Face Off

When he heard that, Xuan Yi laughed. “Fufu, what a sharp ape. Even he knows that we’re one of the five main sects of the Great Zhou Dynasty and that’s why he wants to be accepted as a disciple of this fortuitous sect.”

“Yes, that ape’s quite agile. I wonder how long it can last under the attacks of our lil crane.”

“Listen! Lil crane seems to be angry, haha!”

“Poor ape.”

“Come on, let’s go check it out.”

Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi were both smiling and relaxed as they soared towards the peak carrying a child each.

As they approached...

Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi found their smiles disappearing as they tore through the layers of mist. Instead, it looked as though they were witnessing something unbelievable.

After a momentary silence...

“Cough, that black shadow... doesn’t seem to be an ape?” Xuan Yi pointed to a black figure climbing to the peak as he coughed and asked hesitantly.

“Yes... it seems to be a human,” Wen Xuan smiled dryly, looking awkward.

Both of them could not help but feel their faces flushing after committing such an elementary mistake despite being peak masters.

But in truth, it was no wonder why they were mistaken.

From a distance where the black figure was murky, it was leaping left and right like an agile ape! Even though both of them were Perfected Golden Cores with an immense amount of knowledge, they would not have thought that the figure was a human!

As they got closer, their expressions changed once more.

“That... doesn’t seem to be a human.”

“Yes... There are two of them.”

After yet another momentary silence...

Wen Xuan could not help but grumble unhappily, “What the hell is wrong with that person. If he wants to climb the peak, so be it. Why is he even carrying a fatty with him!”

“Wait, that man’s carrying a bow and saber too. Haven’t I just heard of someone with that getup?” Xuan Yi remarked suddenly.

Right then, the fat child beside Wen Xuan pointed at the figure excitedly and yelled, "Peak master, that's him! That's the scholar!"

...

On the steep mountain peak.

Each time the crane flapped its wings, Su Zimo clung tightly onto the wall with his fingers and feet dug deeply into the rocks.

Against Su Zimo's fingers, those sturdy rocks seemed as soft as tofu.

For any mortal, they would have to find places they could step on if they wanted to climb the peak.

However, that was not the case for Su Zimo.

If not for the crane blocking his path, the peak he was climbing would be akin to flat ground for him.

As of now, all the mortals after Su Zimo had already fell due to the crane's flaps – he was the only one still climbing.

To be exact, there were two mortals left – he was carrying the little fatty too.

The crane's eyes shone with rage as it cried out. Soaring into the skies, it swooped down at Su Zimo with its sharp talons.

That was a vicious dive.

Su Zimo wanted to dodge but it was too late.

In the blink of an eye, he let go of his hand suddenly as he swayed dangerously in midair. He then reached out and dug himself into the wall once more!

Snap!

A large rock above Su Zimo's head was smashed into dust by the crane's sharp talons as everything sprayed down on his face. However, he was unaware of it.

When some of the rocks smashed on the little fatty's body, that rotund body trembled obviously.

Suddenly, Su Zimo realized something as he dangled the little fatty in midair and hollered, "Stop pretending or I'll toss you down!"

The little fatty's eyes burst wide open as he replied hurriedly, "Please don't scare me, bro! I know my mistakes now!"

"Do you still want to reach the peak?" Su Zimo asked quickly.

"Yes, of course!"

"Hold on to my back on your own. Don't blame me if you fall!"

"Yes, yes!"

The little fatty shifted quickly and wrapped his arms and legs around Su Zimo's neck and waist like an octopus.

That way, even though Su Zimo was still carrying an additional man, he had both hands to work with.

At the start, the crane's attacks weren't ferocious. It was clear that its aim was not to injure; it merely wanted to deter Su Zimo from climbing further.

After multiple failed attempts, the crane was frustrated. That was why if Su Zimo had not managed to dodge the previous attack, his brains might have been crushed by the crane's talons!

He did not dare to be careless against an enraged early-stage Foundation Establishment spirit demon. That was why he got the little fatty to a piggyback position so that he could have two hands to contend against the demon.

In all fairness...

Su Zimo was only at the third section of The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness and was not a match for the spirit demon yet, even if it was only at early-stage Foundation Establishment.

However, Su Zimo's goal was not to fight it out with the crane. Instead, he merely wanted to dodge it and reach the peak. With that, things were much simpler.

Swoosh!

The crane dove once more as Su Zimo's eyes shone brightly. Pushing his legs, he continued striding horizontally on the smooth walls of the peak as he dodged the attacks of the crane while climbing up swiftly.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Su Zimo's fingers and feet dug deep into the rocks. His speed was not inferior to when he was on the ground!

"Caw, caw!"

When the crane caught sight of that, it was even more enraged as it soared through the skies and burst off like a rocket, appearing behind Su Zimo and attacking relentlessly with its talons and beak.

Its long beak was even sharper than a flying sword such that every single poke sent a sharp, ringing sound reverberating through Su Zimo's ears.

As long as the beak pierced him, there would definitely be a bloody hole on his body.

The little fatty was so scared that he was shivering with his eyes closed tightly.

Su Zimo dodged repeatedly as his tendons cried out. With every single expansion and contraction, his blood would be filled as his large tendon convulsed intensely, pushing his body to its limits.

Using just his spirit perception, Su Zimo dodged the attack of the crane countless times as he continued climbing.

The cries of the crane were getting more hurried and in fact, there was even a hint of killing intent!

He was getting closer to the top of the peak.

At the same time, the crane's attacks were getting fiercer too!

...

As the two Dao children looked at everything unfold from the top of the peak, they were sweating from head to toe for the scholar as though they were the ones being attacked right at that moment.

The man and the crane contended against one another on the steep peak. Even though the man seemed unable to fight back, it was still extremely dangerous and intense.

Any bit slower and the scholar could very well be dead in the talons of the crane!

Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi had equally grim looks on their faces as they watched fixedly, prepared to save him if need be.

"To think that the scholar would still have strength left to be able to continue climbing while defending against our lil crane's attack," Xuan Yi's tone was somewhat amazed.

Wen Xuan commented solemnly, "If I'm not mistaken, the bow and saber on the scholar's waist are made from spiritual items. Even though those are pseudo spirit weapons, they weigh more than an entire ton together!"

Wen Xuan's remark had a clear meaning behind it – if Su Zimo had not been carrying the Sanguine Crystal Bow and Cold Moon Saber, he would have been even more agile and might have even reached the top of the peak by now!

Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi exchanged glances.

There was a common consensus as a thought flashed through their minds. "This scholar... is interesting."

### **Chapter 68: Ascending the Peak**

"How did this lad train his body? That level of nimbleness, harmony and stretchability is something that even a Spirit Beast can't match."

"His movements resemble an ape and python, yet there are many differences. He might have learnt them through observing wild beasts. Seems like this lad is rather talented."

"I wonder how many tribulations of the Eight Distresses Formation he can pass."

At that, both Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi froze with a startled expression.

Wen Xuan murmured softly, "The Eight Distresses Formation is set up within the abyss beneath. If this lad truly ascends the peak, wouldn't it be equivalent to him passing the Eight Distresses Formation?"

On the surface, Ethereal Sect's third Life and Death Stage was for the cultivators to ascend the peak. However, in reality, they had set an obstacle and it was intended for everyone to fall into the realm of the Eight Distresses Formation within the abyss.

That was the reason why the fat child had almost let slip at the beginning of things.

After all, no one would be able to ascend the peak.

Only those who manage to pass through life and death tribulations within the Eight Distresses Formation would be sent to the top of the peak where they would be able to join the sect.

If they failed the two tribulations, they would be teleported outside and would not be able to join the sect. At the same time, those cultivators would not know what had happened at all, merely feeling fortunate that they did not die.

The Eight Distresses Formation was a type of illusory formation that consisted of eight tribulations – life, age, illness, death, meeting with what they hate, parting with what they love, unattained love and all ills of the five skandhas of Buddhism.

There were two reasons why they had to beat around the bush by requesting the cultivators to climb the peak before knocking them down.

First, the steep peak would first deter the cowards and those who lack resolve.

Immortal cultivation was a heavenly defying act and was a path of extreme difficulty. If even those who had resolves of steel and bravery may not even reach the endpoint, there was no room for cowards at all.

Second, if everyone were mentally prepared that they would be faced with the Eight Distresses Formation, the illusory realm would not be able to bewitch them that easily Ethereal Sect would not be able to achieve their full aim.

In the cultivation world, be it illusory skills or formations, there would definitely be distinct loopholes to it. If the affected party were to be able to maintain their composure and alertness, they would be able to see through it and would not be bewitched by it.

However, by sending the masses up the peak before beating them down, no one would be prepared and as they were faced with death, they would definitely panic before they enter the Eight Distresses Formation of the abyss.

Right then, with everyone assuming that they were dead, they would then accept the illusory realm and go through the death tribulation.

Once they pass the death tribulation and endure through the life tribulation, they would be considered to have passed the third stage of Ethereal Sect's tests and would be able to join the sect.

Of course, there were eight tribulations to the Eight Distresses Formation and the more tribulations one could pass, the better.

This was not just a simple test; it was a rite of passage for the mind.

After all, everyone would have to endure the pain of the eight distresses in their lifetime and cultivators were no exception to it.

Yet, a problem had appeared.

If Su Zimo managed to ascend the peak, Ethereal Sect's third stage would have been set for nothing.

Wen Xuan lowered his voice further and said, "Let me attack and strike him down secretly. We can't go against the rules of the sect by accepting someone that hasn't gone through the third stage."

Xuan Yi shook his head and chuckled. "No matter. Right now, I'm honestly curious as to whether he can ascend the peak with just his own strength."

Pausing for a moment, Xuan Yi's eyes lit up as he remarked gruffly, "If the lad truly manages to ascend, I'll set an array formation for him myself to let him have a full taste of the Eight Distresses Formation!"

As the peak master of Array Peak, the Eight Distresses Formation was his masterpiece.

For a peak master to declare that he wanted to lay an array formation personally for an unknown scholar was something that had never occurred through the history of Ethereal Sect.

...

On the wall.

The man and the crane were still going at it.

Su Zimo was already sweating all over. His eyes remained bright as always, emanating an endless fight in them.

Initially, the little fatty kept his eyes shut and was extremely frightened. However, he was now fully excited, yelling from time to time from Su Zimo's back to taunt the crane.

"Caw, caw!"

Despite trying everything, the crane could not stop Su Zimo in his tracks at all. Coupled with the little fatty's mocking, it was even more furious and its attacks turned fiercer.

Su Zimo was pent up as well after being chased by the crane for such a long time.

Seeing that he was merely a step away from the top of the peak, Su Zimo took in a deep breath and circulated the Anaconda Eclipse's mind sutra before bellowing, "Damned bird, take this!"

Clang!

A sharp slicing sound rang through the place.

Su Zimo had retrieved the Cold Moon Saber on his waist and slashed upwards!

Swash!

A cold light shot through the air.

Stunned, the crane no longer dared to attack Su Zimo as it flapped and ran away.

It had not expected Su Zimo to make a move.

More than that, it had not expected that Su Zimo would DARE to make a move on it!

Within Ethereal Sect, no one dared to bully it. Notwithstanding the five peak masters, even Ethereal Sect's master would dote on it!

The job of pushing potential sect applicants into the Eight Distresses Formation was initially done by other cultivators of the sect.

However, the crane volunteered to do it thinking that it was interesting.

Indeed, it was rather fun at the start to see people being chased into the Eight Distresses Formation one by one.

Yet, the crane no longer found it fun after encountering this bow and saber carrying scholar.

A feather glided by slowly.

Even though the crane had managed to dodge the attack, the Cold Moon Saber still sliced away one of its feathers.

That sight caused the two peak masters watching above to freeze momentarily, almost striking out as they gripped their spirit weapons tightly.

"The gall of that lad to dare bully lil crane!"

"He's definitely going to have a hard time in the future if he gets accepted into the sect."

Both Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi looked at Su Zimo with a trace of pity.

Right then, Su Zimo did not know what was going on.

After that slash, he was overjoyed as he burst out laughing. "Damned bird, you're still too weak! Go back and train for a couple more years!"

With a reverse throw, Su Zimo stabbed the Cold Moon Saber into the wall of the peak and in one swift leap, jumped onto the blade with the tip of his toes. He then hopped up while conveniently pulling the Cold Moon Saber out of the wall with his feet.

The entire process was fluid as water without any pauses at all.

In the blink of an eye, he had arrived at the top of the peak!

Looking down at the crane that was still circling around in midair, Su Zimo waved and smiled.

"Goodbye!"

The crane was still in its infancy stage. In human years, it was nothing more than eight years old and that was when it was most playful. Even though it wasn't injured by that slash, it still felt upset about it.

Looking at Su Zimo's actions, the crane blinked a few times as though it was about to tear up before flying towards Ethereal Peak while crying non-stop.

"Caw, caw!"

“Caw, caw!”

The cries of the crane reverberated through Ethereal Peak, alarming many people.

“Eh? Didn’t lil crane go to the front peak to bully them? Why does it look as though it was the one that was bullied?” A brown haired youth seated within a palace on Elixir Peak asked curiously.

From a palace on Talisman Peak came a cold looking middle aged lady. Watching the crane fly through the air, she frowned slightly and muttered, “What’s wrong with lil crane? To think that someone of Ethereal Sect would dare bully it?”

A disheveled old man appeared on Weapon Peak as well. Slovenly dressed, he burst out in laughter. “How dare to see lil crane being on the losing end! Interesting, interesting!”

### **Chapter 69: Shocking Slash**

Su Zimo turned around and saw four people.

He had met the two children previously. Apart from them, there were two middle aged cultivators with exceptional auras, looking at him weirdly.

Su Zimo guessed that the two of them must be seniors of Ethereal Peak.

Placing little fatty down, Su Zimo noticed that there were eight gigantic flags around half as high as them being planted around each of them. The flags had mysterious patterns drawn on them as they flapped in the wind.

“What’s that?”

Su Zimo frowned. Without thinking more about it, he stabilized his breathing and arranged his attire before greeting the two middle aged cultivators. “Greetings, seniors. I’m Su Zimo of Yan Country. I’ve managed to ascend the peak by luck...”

“Activate!”

Before Su Zimo could even finish, he was interrupted by a loud holler.

The eight flags surrounding Su Zimo and little fatty illuminated brightly as the patterns shone with a bedazzling glow.

In the blink of an eye, Su Zimo felt an ominous sense of danger. The last thing he saw was one of the middle aged cultivators sweeping his robes from a distance away as an unblockable energy blasted at them!

The energy was tremendous and Su Zimo could not resist it at all.

He was swept off the peak and fell over, watching the top of the peak turn smaller by the second. His body was not his to control at all as fear started growing within him.

Bam!

Su Zimo fell into the abyss and his entire body was crushed.

Even though his physical body was clearly destroyed, Su Zimo was still entirely conscious. Endless waves of pain shot through him, biting at him tirelessly as his tendons tore and his flesh was shredded.

What was happening?

Su Zimo could not understand at all.

In fact, he did not have the time to think about it as he was tormented by the endless pain.

He had never understood the sort of pain that one would experience in the face of death.

An intense fear existed between the edge of life and death.

It was a fear that could cause one to breakdown.

For humans, it was almost instinct for them to fear death. If they could even shit their pants by having a sword pointed at their throat, how terrifying would it be to be faced with death itself?

At the top of the peak, Su Zimo and little fatty stood motionlessly with their eyes shut and bodies shivering – neither of them had fallen into the abyss.

The both of them were now within the illusion of the activated Eight Distresses Formation.

“This Eight Distresses Formation is even stronger than the one in the abyss since you’re the one who created it personally. Would the two of them be able to endure it?” Wen Xuan asked worriedly.

Xuan Yi replied, “Let’s wait and see. As long as they can get through one tribulation, they’ll be considered to have passed the test.”

Right then, three figures appeared on the top of the peak.

The three of them had passed the test of the Eight Distresses Formation from within the abyss. After crossing the life and death tribulations, they were teleported to the top of the peak.

All three of them looked pale as a sheet, sweating from head to toe as they sat where they were feebly, looking lost and dazed.

The two Dao children rushed up and fed all three of them an elixir each.

Once they consumed it, the three people looked more relaxed as their faces started to fill with life once more.

“The two fellas with the variant spirit roots are not bad. They’ve already passed through three tribulations,” Xuan Yi suddenly mentioned.

Wen Xuan sighed. “Of the eight distresses, life, death, illness and age are easier to get through. However, the later four tribulations are one tougher than the other. Even for myself who has already attained a core, I may not be able to get through all the tribulations.”

The moment he said that, one of the eight flags swayed gently before shooting into the skies with a blinding light.

Xuan Yi heaved out a sigh of relief and nodded. "Not bad. The lad has already crossed the tribulation of death."

A moment later, the haughty man and white bloused woman were sent to the top of the peak.

Wen Xuan looked at the both of them and smiled. "Well done, you guys have passed through four tribulations. Take a rest at the side."

Swoosh!

Yet another huge flag swayed before bursting into the skies.

"Hmms, that's fast? He's already endured through the distress of life?" Xuan Yi was surprised.

The distress of life was something that everyone had to go through but have forgotten.

Within the womb, a fetus would be coiled into a ball with its arms and feet unable to stretch and neither could it breathe. It was akin to being sealed in a tight cage and the pain of it was excruciating.

That was also the reason why babies would cry the moment they are born.

Before long, another streak of light broke through the clouds.

Right after, a fourth beam of light!

"This..."

Wen Xuan and Xuan Yi exchanged glances – both could read the shock in the other's eyes.

From Elixir Peak, a brown haired youth soared into the skies and looked at the lights from afar, frowning to himself. "That light's from a flag for the Eight Distresses Formation. There's actually someone who could have Xuan Yi create the formation personally?"

With a slight pause, he muttered to himself, "No, I've got to go check it out."

At the same time, a shadow streaked out towards the front peak from Talisman and Weapon Peak respectively.

Bam!

A fifth beam of light appeared!

Before long, a brown haired youth, cold faced middle aged lady and a disheveled old man appeared on the top of the peak as well.

All five peak masters were gathered!

Swoosh!

A huge flag wavered.

A sixth beam of light!

"He's already passed through six of the eight distresses! What a mental fortitude! Where is this lad from?" The brown haired youth asked with a deep voice.

“He’s from Yan Country. I don’t know anything other than that,” Wen Xuan shook his head.

The cold faced lady swept her gaze across Su Zimo’s body and frowned, asking, “Fire spirit root?”

“That... seemed to be the case. However, for some reason, the spirit testing gate refused to let him through. We can test him with a spirit stone again later,” Wen Xuan replied.

Right after he replied...

Bam!

The seventh beam of light shot through.

Su Zimo had passed through the seventh tribulation!

Little fatty was already sprawled on the ground bawling in tears after enduring through the tribulations of life and death – he had yet to pull himself out of the pain received from the tribulations of the eight distresses.

During the time, the two Dao children explained to everyone present about the entirety of the Life and Death Stage.

From the initial 500 odd applicants, there were only six remaining on the peak who had passed the third stage.

Other than the haughty man, white bloused woman and little fatty, the remaining three were mortals without spirit qi.

Everyone looked at Su Zimo with a complicated gaze.

They had just gone through the tribulations of the eight distresses personally and could still remember the excruciating pain they had gone through.

None of them could imagine the sort of torment it would be to endure through seven different distresses.

Xuan Yi spoke with a grim tone, “The eighth distress is of the five skandhas. That is akin to all of the previous seven distresses combined and isn’t something any human could endure. Let me dispel the formation lest the lad is hurt.”

He was just about to move when an eighth beam of light shone!

It was extremely bedazzling on the peak and illuminated half the skies above them.

At the same time, Su Zimo suddenly opened both eyes and with a burning killing intent, he reverse gripped his Cold Moon Saber and slashed forward!

It was a breathtaking slash!

That single slash was even brighter than the eighth beam that had covered the entire peak!

It was directed right at Xuan Yi with an intent so chilling that the air on the peak seemed to have frozen and gone stale!

All five peak masters were stunned right away.

After all, the slash happened way too suddenly.

Xuan Yi's expression was unchanged. Extending his finger, a light exuded from the tip of it as he tapped gently at the Cold Moon Saber.

Clang!

The Cold Moon Saber was sent flying.

Su Zimo's body jolted as he stumbled back a couple of steps and nearly slipped off the top of the peak.

When he saw the abyss beneath the layer of clouds below him, Su Zimo slowly woke up and realized that everything he had experienced was merely an illusion.

The gazes of the five peak masters looking at Su Zimo changed slowly...

### **Chapter 70: Joining Ethereal Peak**

The thing that truly shocked the five peak masters was not the fact that Su Zimo had endured through the eight distresses.

It was that slash of his.

As Perfected Golden Cores, all five of them could sense the sort of energy the slash carried along – its might had surpassed even the full strength of a Perfected Qi Refinement Warrior!

For a mere mortal to surpass the strength of a Perfected Qi Refinement Warrior with just a burst of his physical body, what sort of a phenomenon was that?

That was proof that this man's body was as tough as spirit beasts! In fact, he might even be able to match early-stage Foundation Establishment spirit demons!

Not just that, Su Zimo's slash carried a heavy killing intent!

This man must have killed quite a number of times to display a slash as such!

Yet, how could a mortal have killed so many times?

Furthermore, their shock came from the fact that Su Zimo had dared to strike at Xuan Yi with such resolute decisiveness!

One had to understand that Su Zimo was but a mere mortal.

However, Xuan Yi was a Perfected Golden Core, the peak master of Array Peak! To mere mortals, he was what they would define as immortals!

Yet, Su Zimo's slash had the intention of murdering an immortal!

"Why did you strike at me?" Xuan Yi's gaze was bright as he glared at Su Zimo and asked grimly.

By now, Su Zimo had realized that he had fallen into an illusion and everything he had experienced was merely his hallucinations.

Lowering his head, he replied, "I mistook you as the one who had struck at me to push me off the peak. Hence, the attack."

The five peak masters had expected that answer.

However, that answer was also troubling at the same time.

This was a man that couldn't be tamed. Be it whether the other party was an immortal or had anyone strong backing him, as long as this man was offended, he would kill the other party!

To them, Su Zimo was like a double edged sword. Resolute and sharp, not only could he kill, he could injure them as well.

It was hard to tell if it would be a fortune or disaster accepting someone like this into the sect.

However, Su Zimo had an extremely rare mental fortitude such that he was even able to endure through the tribulations of the eight distresses. It would be difficult for Ethereal Peak to give up on such a rare talent.

Furthermore, Su Zimo had already passed all three tests of the sect.

Exchanging glances, all five peak masters could not arrive at a decision.

Normally, Spirit Peak's master, Wen Xuan, would definitely be the first to accept someone as such. Yet, he was keeping silent at the moment.

Contemplating silently, Wen Xuan retrieved a spirit testing stone from his storage bag and handed it to Su Zimo. "Test your spirit root again."

Su Zimo gripped the spirit testing stone tightly.

It shone scarlet red and emanated heat.

All five peak masters nodded their heads in agreement.

Fire element, heaven spirit root. That's right.

Before that thought passed them, the spirit testing stone turned into ash and scattered from Su Zimo's fingertips.

Everyone was stunned.

What had just happened?

The fat child pointed at Su Zimo agitatedly. "Peak master, see! I didn't lie!"

Even though all five peak masters were Perfected Golden Cores, they had never seen anyone who could turn a spirit testing stone into ash for a mere test.

It was weird.

Suddenly, an authoritative voice boomed out in all five of their minds.

“This lad has too much killing intent and is too brash. Since he has a Fire spirit root, we can let him join the Weapon Peak to learn more about the craft of refining weapons. We can make other plans for him after we shave away some of his aggressiveness.”

That voice was from Ethereal Peak’s sect master. Other than the five peak masters, no one else knew what was going on.

The peak master of Weapon Peak was the disheveled old man.

He snickered at Su Zimo. “Come, follow me back to the Weapon Peak. From now on, you’ll be a trial disciple of Ethereal Peak. You’ll be under me.”

“Understood.”

Su Zimo nodded.

The haughty man, white bloused woman and little fatty were inducted into Spirit Peak naturally while the three remaining mortals were assigned to Elixir, Array and Talisman Peak.

Waving his oily robes, the disheveled old man collected Su Zimo and left the peak.

Before long, Su Zimo was brought to the Weapon Peak as the disheveled old man remarked, “I’m your master from now on. We don’t have so many rules here in Weapon Peak. You can just call me old man.”

“Xue Yi. Yes, you! Come here!”

The disheveled old man beckoned to a disciple passing by nearby.

The man named Xue Yi was frail and skinny. Running over, he nodded his head to the disheveled old man and greeted courteously, “Master.”

“Su Zimo here has just joined the sect and he’s your junior brother. Go get him one of our sect badges and items for trial disciples before choosing a cave abode.”

After giving his instructions, the disheveled old man waved his robes and left.

“I’ll be troubling you then, senior brother,” Su Zimo greeted with cupped fists.

Xue Yi smiled and waved it off. “It’s fine, don’t stand on courtesy.”

He brought Su Zimo before a majestic cockloft and introduced, “This is our Elixir Peak’s Spirit Weapon Chamber. If any of the trial disciples from the five peaks want a spirit weapon, they would have to come exchange for it using their contribution points. To exchange for spirit stones, elixirs and cultivation manuals, one would have to use contribution points too.”

“How do you get contribution points?” Su Zimo asked.

“There is a mission stele within the five peaks that will refresh with new missions every now and then. The greater the difficulty of the missions, the more contribution points they give.”

Xue Yi brought Su Zimo to the Spirit Weapon Chamber and greeted the elderly guard, “Senior, this is a new disciple of Weapon Peak and he’s here for a sect badge.”

“Oh, name?”

The elderly guard opened his sleepy eyes and asked feebly.

“Su Zimo.”

From his storage bag, the elderly guard retrieved a long jade badge where one side was etched with mysterious patterns and the other side was smooth and blank.

With his sharp nails, the elderly guard shot out a stream of spirit qi and wrote down in cursive letters – Su Zimo.

Tossing the badge out, the elderly guard went back to sleep.

Su Zimo took the badge over and examined it to find out that there was nothing extraordinary about it.

Xue Yi smiled. “Junior brother, don’t look down on this sect badge. Holding it gives you freedom in and out of the sect and even the mystifying fog barrier outside can’t affect you.”

Su Zimo nodded his head and kept it carefully.

Suddenly, Xue Yi slapped his own head as though he recalled something. He then turned and smiled to the elderly guard. “Senior, are you forgetting about something?”

Without even opening his eyes, the elderly guard tossed out a storage bag casually.

Receiving it, Xue Yi passed it to Su Zimo. “Junior brother, there’s a manual for the Spirit Peering Art and Qi Condensation along with 10 inferior-grade spirit stones. Do keep it well.”

Xue Yi knew that Su Zimo had not mastered Qi Condensation yet and hence opened the storage bag before placing one of the two manuals in the latter’s hands.

He summoned a flying sword and had Su Zimo hop on it. Arriving at the mid of the peak, he pointed to a row of cave abodes. “Weapon Peak does not have much disciples so many of our cave abodes are empty. Just pick whichever one you fancy, junior brother.”

Remembering that he had to cultivate his Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness, Su Zimo chose a secluded one at the corner as his home in Ethereal Peak.