

Chapter 91: Tit for Tat

It was only normal for someone of the Disciplinary Hall to come settle things since a disciple had broken the sect's rules.

However, if the person that had arrived was on good terms with Feng Haoyu, that meant something...

This person did not mean well!

Chen Yu's expression was solemn as his gaze swept through the messy crowd. Descending slowly, he surveyed the place and asked sternly, "Who is Su Zimo?"

Su Zimo was just done with attending to the spirit tiger's wound and the red gleam in his eyes had disappeared. Instead, it was replaced with a look of hidden uneasiness.

He wasn't worried about this disciple of the Disciplinary Hall, but something else.

When he heard Chen Yu's question, Su Zimo patted the spirit tiger's body to comfort it before standing up. Turning around, he replied calmly, "I am."

"I heard that you've only joined the sect for less than three months?"

"Yes."

"How dare you!"

Chen Yu suddenly bellowed out coldly.

Su Zimo remained silent.

Feng Haoyu's hands were behind his back with his lips slightly curled, looking on with a hint of mockery.

The moment Chen Yu arrived, Feng Haoyu knew that Su Zimo's reputation was over. He could not think of a way for Su Zimo to get out of this.

A ban from the year end face-off was probably the lightest of all punishments for breaking sect rules.

For worst case scenarios, Su Zimo could be locked in seclusion indefinitely, have his cultivation crippled or even kicked out of the sect!

Chen Yu smirked internally at Su Zimo's silence and declared, "Su Zimo, you've broken our sect rules by hurting your fellow sect mates. In the name of the Disciplinary Hall, I shall cripple you and kick you out of the sect!"

The moment he said that, everyone's expressions changed.

That punishment was way too severe!

Even disciples from Spirit Peak felt that it was a little too cruel as they looked at Su Zimo with pity.

Anyone who could join Ethereal Sect were all people who had exceptional endowments and mental fortitudes. Yet, he was going to have his cultivation crippled, turning him into a mere mortal. Not just that, he was even going to be kicked out of the sect. That was a blow that no one would be able to accept.

Leng Rou frowned and looked at Su Zimo instinctively.

To her surprise, the green robed man's expression had not changed in the slightest bit. His eyes were indifferent as though he hadn't heard what Chen Yu had said.

"Is he utterly dejected or scared silly?"

But Leng Rou wouldn't have imagined in her wildest imaginations that Su Zimo's current calmness was because there was no fear in his heart as he had already made up his mind.

No one will be able to take away his cultivation!

If Chen Yu dared lay a hand on him, he would dare to fight back or even kill!

And in the worst case scenario, even if his cultivation was crippled, he could continue with his demonic cultivation. He was not going to let things end so easily today!

Little fatty's expression was worried. After much conflicted thoughts, he could no longer hold it in as he said loudly, "Senior Brother Chen, I think that the punishment is a little too severe. Please show some mercy."

"That's right, Senior Brother Chen. Su Zimo has only joined the sect for less than three months. It's understandable."

"I agree. Similar things have happened in the past but I've never heard of anyone having their cultivations crippled or kicked out of the sect."

Many disciples of Weapon Peak chimed in to speak up for Su Zimo.

"Humph!"

Chen Yu harrumphed loudly and shouted, "All of you, shut up! Since you guys are not convinced, I'll explain to you why!"

"Ignoring sect rules and hurting fellow sect mates is something that's subjective. However, this incident nearly escalated to a full out bout between disciples of Weapon and Spirit Peak! That's unpardonable! If I was slightly later and disciples of both peaks end up fighting with severe injuries, who is going to bear the responsibility?"

The way Chen Yu put it made it seem as though the crime was truly heinous.

Suddenly, everyone went silent.

Right then, Su Zimo spoke.

“Based on what you said, I didn’t start the incident. Everyone saw that I wasn’t the one who started the provocation. Sun Tao was the one who made a move first. If we’re talking about who broke sect rules, he did it first.”

When he heard that, Feng Haoyu shook his head with a taunting look.

“Oh?”

Chen Yu was expressionless as he asked, “Sun Tao struck at you?”

“That’s right,” Su Zimo nodded.

“Bullshit!”

Chen Yu shouted, “Sun Tao clearly struck your spirit beast. The sect decreed that cultivators are not to strike at one another. However, there’s no rules stating that they’re not to strike at spirit beasts. So, Sun Tao’s actions do not equate to a violation of sect rules!”

At that moment, some people finally realized why Sun Tao chose to strike at Su Zimo’s spirit beast instead of him – it was premeditated. He just probably had not expected to be knocked out by a single slap of Su Zimo.

Calmly, Su Zimo replied, “Striking at my spirit beast is the same as striking at me. There’s no difference.”

“Fufu.”

Chen Yu scoffed coldly, “How dare you argue at a time like this. A spirit beast is nothing more than an animal. How dare you break our sect rules to injure fellow sect mates for an animal? That makes your doubly guilty!”

“To me, spirit beasts are no different from people. In fact, some people aren’t even comparable to spirit beasts. At least spirit beasts don’t create internal strife and plot against you.”

Su Zimo continued indifferently, “If spirit beasts are no different from animals to you, then some people aren’t even comparable to animals to me. If I whack those people, so be it then.”

When he heard that, Feng Haoyu’s expression turned stiff.

Those words pierced at his heart like needles.

Most people around could tell what Su Zimo meant by those words.

Little fatty and Xue Yi could not help but roar in agreement internally.

If it was them, they would not be able to rebut the same way in front of someone from the Disciplinary Hall!

“What a glib tongue you have.”

Chen Yu’s voice was ice cold as a killing intent rose within him.

They were surrounded by trial disciples of all five peaks. Su Zimo’s constant rebuttal caused him to look bad in front of everyone.

If he did not exert his authority right now, his image as a disciple of the Disciplinary Hall was going to suffer in the future.

“Su Zimo, don’t force me to kill you with my own hands!” Chen Yu narrowed his gaze, no longer hiding his killing intent.

Little fatty’s body shuddered as he tugged at Su Zimo’s sleeves, hinting for the latter to not say anything more and let matters get worse.

Everyone could tell that if Su Zimo continued, Chen Yu would definitely make a move to kill him right there!

Xue Yi looked at Su Zimo nervously, shaking his head fervently.

The tension was so high around the spirit arena that the atmosphere felt ice cold.

Everything that had happened was beyond everyone’s expectations, including Feng Haoyu.

No one expected Su Zimo to be this stubborn and unyielding!

Lowering his head, Su Zimo placed his palm on the storage bag and in the blink of an eye, a cold, gleaming saber appeared in his hands!

Psst!

Everyone gasped.

What Su Zimo did was simply way too dangerous – he was going to get himself killed!

Before that thought even dispersed from everyone’s minds, Su Zimo spoke indifferently, “If you dare lay a finger on me, I’ll kill you.”

That was tit for tat!

All 2,000 odd disciples of the five peaks broke into an uproar!

Chapter 92: Hidden Eyes

Above in the clouds, the hidden eyes had not left and was watching everything unfold beneath keenly.

When it heard Su Zimo’s declaration, an amused look appeared in those eyes.

“Brave lad indeed. Interesting.”

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At the spirit arena...

All the disciples were in shock. They were not even thinking about how a Level 6 Qi Refinement Warrior could go against a disciple of the Disciplinary Hall.

All of their thoughts were on how Su Zimo even had the courage to make such a declaration!

There were only two possibilities – he was either stupid or insane.

Everyone looked at Su Zimo as though they were looking at a dead man.

Initially, Chen Yu had only wanted to cripple Su Zimo's cultivation and kick him out of the sect.

But now, he could rightfully kill Su Zimo on the spot!

“Well, well, well!”

Chen Yu's anger turned into laughter as he nodded his head repeatedly, remarking coldly, “To think that trial disciples of Weapon Peak have fallen to such a state where they don't even know what's good for them. Since you want to die, I'll grant you your wish!”

Slapping his storage bag, a flying sword appeared in Chen Yu's palm.

Injecting spirit qi to it, the flying sword shone with a bright gleam as two bedazzling spirit lights appeared on the sword!

It was a middle-grade spirit weapon!

Su Zimo narrowed his gaze. Right as he was about to move, an authoritative voice boomed out from the skies.

“Stop!”

A shadow appeared and sped over with a frightening speed.

Soaring through the skies without the use of any items... it was a Perfected Golden Core!

Chen Yu turned his head slightly and frowned – he was not going to have the courage to strike in the presence of a Perfected Golden Core.

With a dark expression, Chen Yu glared at Su Zimo and suppressed his killing intent for now.

The person who had arrived as in his fifties. Arriving in lightning speed, his white robes fluttered loudly, exuding the aura of an immortal descending upon the world.

On the sleeves of the man's white robe was an emblem of a flying sword.

It was Spirit Peak's master, Wen Xuan!

Su Zimo had seen this person before at the top of the front peak when he joined Ethereal Peak.

“Greetings, master.”

The many disciples of Spirit Peak shouted out.

“Greetings, peak master.”

Disciples of the other four peaks bowed and greeted as well.

The appearance of Spirit Peak's master naturally meant that there would be no fight. Heaving a sigh of relief, little fatty, Xue Yi and the rest finally looked more relaxed.

Spirit Peak's master would be the one to decide how this matter should be resolved.

Su Zimo hesitated for a moment before keeping his Cold Moon Saber.

"Peak master, Su Zimo..."

"It's fine, I know everything."

Chen Yu spoke right away, wanting to explain everything to Wen Xuan but was interrupted by the latter's wave of his hand.

Standing tall in the air, Wen Xuan looked at Su Zimo silently. Even though he looked calm, no one could read his thoughts at all.

After a long time, he asked slowly, "Su Zimo, do you acknowledge your wrongdoings?"

Hearing that, little fatty, Xue Yi and the rest were delighted.

That meant that there was a high chance Wen Xuan wasn't going to punish Su Zimo as heavily as Chen Yu did.

Before the joy could disappear from the eyes of little fatty and the rest, Su Zimo's reply caused their expressions to freeze up.

A stir broke out amongst the crowd as well.

"I'm not in the wrong."

Su Zimo raised his head and looked at Wen Xuan, replying calmly.

If Su Zimo rebutting Chen Yu was understandable, his rebuttal of a peak master was definitely irrational.

But in truth, Su Zimo was never a rational man.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have stood his ground instead of kneeling back in Ping Yang Town against Perfected Cang Lang's oppression.

He would not have headed into Yan City's capital alone to kill the King of Yan despite knowing of the dangers.

He would not have proceeded resolutely despite knowing that there was a high chance he might die in the hands of Joyful Clan's Foundation Establishment Cultivators.

Right was right and wrong was wrong – Su Zimo was never going to bow down in the face of power!

Not too far away, the other four peak masters watched the situation develop.

There was no way they did not know about such a huge commotion where disciples of two peaks challenged one another.

When he heard Su Zimo's reply, Array Peak's master sighed gently. "Even though that lad's character is stubborn and somewhat unlikeable, it's really rare. I do admire him."

“That’s the type of guts and defiance that someone who cultivates should possess. The path of cultivation is one that defies the heavens to begin with.”

“Even though that’s true, that lad’s cultivation path will definitely be fraught with obstacles.”

Three peak masters discussed amongst themselves as the disheveled old man shook his head without saying anything.

It wasn’t appropriate for them to make an appearance since everything was happening on Spirit Peak.

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At the spirit arena...

After hearing Su Zimo’s reply, Wen Xuan went silent for a moment.

“Su Zimo, let me ask you a question.”

Wen Xuan spoke slowly, “Today, you injured Sun Tao because he injured your spirit beast. If he killed your spirit beast, what would you have done?”

As though it had realized something, the spirit tiger growled softly.

It had an intellect equal to that of a grown man and it could tell that if Su Zimo were to bow down in defeat now, he would be able to get off with a light punishment.

Its roar was to hold Su Zimo back.

Turning to look at the spirit tiger on the ground, Su Zimo suddenly smiled.

He already had an answer for that question.

Su Zimo was bent on revenge against Perfected Cang Lang for killing his steed, Zhui Feng. Why would things be different now that this spirit tiger was his spirit beast too?

“Of course I’ll kill him!”

“You’d kill your fellow sect mate for a spirit beast?”

“Yes!”

“Give me a reason.”

“Since the spirit beast chose to follow me, I naturally have to protect it properly too!”

Roar! Roar!

Ignoring its wound, the spirit tiger struggled to stand up and walked to Su Zimo’s side, growling in deep pain while rubbing its head against his arm.

The spirit tiger had never truly decided that it wanted to follow Su Zimo.

Besides, it could leave at any moment without the binding of a blood oath.

That was until this moment when it had made up its mind to never leave this person for the rest of its life.

Even if they had no blood oath, that would be the case.

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When the four peak masters heard the conversation, all of them frowned.

No matter how much of a ruckus Su Zimo caused in the past, they could overlook it because nothing had blown out of proportion.

But the fact that he expressed his willingness to kill a fellow sect mate over a spirit beast was a hard pill for them to swallow.

Right then, even the Perfected Golden Cores did not realize that in the depths of the clouds, a hidden pair of eyes was still watching everything silently.

When it heard Su Zimo's reply, the pair of eyes gave a look of slight surprise before turning into a ruminating admiration.

"Master, I think that not only is this man heartless, he's merciless towards our sect mates as well. We're bound to be faced with greater turmoil if he remains in the sect."

Finally, Feng Haoyu had spoken up.

The meaning of his words was clear – kick Su Zimo out of the sect!

Wen Xuan was silent.

Countless pairs of eyes watched him, awaiting his final decision.

Chapter 93: See You in the Spirit Arena!

Suddenly, Wen Xuan asked, "Su Zimo, as a heaven spirit root, your endowment completely qualifies you for Spirit Peak. But, do you know why you were asked to join Weapon Peak?"

"I don't know," Su Zimo replied.

Su Zimo was not the only one; the many disciples around had the same doubts.

It was especially so for little fatty and the others who had joined the sect at the same time. All of them had witnessed Su Zimo ascending the peak and passing through the Eight Distresses Formation.

It didn't make sense for someone like that to not join Spirit Peak.

"Your killing intent is too strong and you're too hotheaded. The reason why you were asked to join Weapon Peak and learn about weapon refinement was to train your mind and mow away your rashness. Once you're ready, you can naturally join Spirit Peak thereafter."

At that, everyone finally understood.

Shaking his head, Wen Xuan's eyes were filled with pity as he sighed. "But it's a pity that you're still the same despite three months of mowing."

Everyone could tell of the deep disappointment within Wen Xuan's tone.

Pausing for a moment, as though he had made a decision, Wen Xuan took a deep breath and declared, "Su Zimo, trial disciple of Weapon Peak! You have gone against sect rules today and despite nearly causing a huge disaster, you refuse to acknowledge your wrongdoings! As the peak master of Spirit Peak, I declare that you're forbidden to take a single step into Spirit Peak from now on!"

The 2,000 odd disciples from all five peaks went absolutely silent.

That punishment was way lighter than what Chen Yu proposed of crippling Su Zimo's cultivation and kicking him out of the sect.

However, for the trial disciples, a restriction to Spirit Peak merely implied that they wouldn't get to learn the dueling techniques between Qi Refinement Warriors – it wasn't a huge loss.

Little fatty, Xue Yi and the rest heaved a sigh of relief.

No matter what, being forbidden to enter Spirit Peak was way better than having one's cultivation crippled and kicked out of the sect.

Even though Feng Haoyu was expressionless, he was indignant within.

He had plotted immensely to create today's situation for the sake of getting Su Zimo kicked out of the sect. But, it was all in vain.

Even though that punishment seemed heavy, it would not prevent Su Zimo from taking part in the year end face-off. To Feng Haoyu, that wasn't good news at all.

Chen Yu's face dimmed as well.

If not for Wen Xuan's appearance, Su Zimo would have been a dead man to him!

He was a step too late.

"If I had known, I should have just killed him instead of wasting time talking! That bloody brat is so insolent. How dare he go against me!"

At the start, Chen Yu had only appeared as a favor for Feng Haoyu.

But now, it was personal.

All the disciples looked at Su Zimo, awaiting his response.

After a moment, Su Zimo chuckled and replied nonchalantly, "I'm willing to accept the punishment, but..."

Little fatty and the rest had just felt relieved when their hearts sank once more.

Su Zimo changed the topic and cast his gaze at Feng Haoyu, saying in a gradually intense tone, "This is not the end of today yet. Feng Haoyu, we both know the reason behind this challenge between disciples of both peaks. Since you want to fight, I'll grant your wish."

Feng Haoyu smirked coldly in disdain.

"Initially, I had only planned on taking part in the year end face-off for Weapon Peak. But now, I've changed my mind."

Su Zimo continued indifferently, "Listen up. For the year end face-off, not only would you fail to get top for Weapon Peak, you won't succeed for Elixir Peak as well."

Feng Haoyu had boasted previously that he wanted to be the top of Weapon, Elixir and Spirit Peak.

But Su Zimo's intent was clear – he was going to stop Feng Haoyu!

Only, the moment Su Zimo's declaration was said, a series of scoffs broke out from the crowd.

Even though refining weapons and elixirs both require spirit fire, both are completely different things. In the cultivation world, there has never been someone who was both a Weapon and Elixir Refinement Master.

Furthermore, the amount of time and energy a person had was limited. Spending a portion of it on refining of elixirs or weapons was already the limit, let alone mastering both or even being number one in time.

By now, there was only half a year left to the year end face-off.

This was definitely not enough time.

But of course, it was undeniable that Su Zimo had a Level 3 Spirit Fire. If he were to spend the rest of his next six months on refining elixirs and weapons, he would definitely be quite a threat to Feng Haoyu.

"That's not all."

Just as everyone was in deep thoughts, Su Zimo said something which caused a huge uproar!

"Peak master has forbidden me from stepping into Spirit Peak so naturally, I can't take part in the Spirit Peak face-off. But, once that is over, whether you're top in Spirit Peak or not, I'll issue you a challenge. See you... in the spirit arena!"

All the 2,000 odd disciples froze dumbfounded.

Su Zimo's final statement was beyond their imaginations.

The fact that he could cultivate a Level 3 Spirit Fire was something that everyone of the five peaks knew about. Therefore, it was still understandable for him to want to go against Feng Haoyu in terms of refining elixirs or weapons.

But now, he was declaring war against Feng Haoyu as a Level 6 Qi Refinement Warrior? That was insane!

If he was going to spend his next six months on weapon and elixir refinement, how was he going to have the time to raise his cultivation?

And even if Su Zimo could reach Perfected Qi Condensation, he was not well-versed in battles! Without a chance to step into Spirit Peak, how was he going to learn how to fight? How could he stand up against Feng Haoyu?

He was just setting himself up to be humiliated!

“Fufu...”

Right then, Feng Haoyu finally laughed as he nodded. “Amazing. Junior Brother Su truly has an extraordinary spirit and courage. Since that’s the case, I’ll definitely accept the challenge at that time. I hope that you’ll be able to give me a surprise.”

“Don’t worry.”

Su Zimo chuckled as well. “It’ll be a surprise for sure. I just don’t know if you can still laugh thereafter.”

“Ugh!”

The various disciples of Weapon Peak sighed grimly.

Deep in his thoughts, little fatty looked moody as well.

Disciples of Talisman, Array and Elixir Peak looked excited, awaiting the show at the end of the year.

However, disciples of Spirit Peak were just waiting to see Su Zimo make a fool out of himself.

Before long, today’s events would spread through Ethereal Peak and even inner sect disciples would get to know about it, piquing their interest to watch.

No matter what, with today’s incident, the year end face-off was now different from those in the past – everyone would be awaiting it!

Leng Rou’s gaze had been fixed on Su Zimo for a long time now.

Even though this man seemed refined, every single move, action and sentence he made sparked her curiosity.

Cold by nature, she was someone unconcerned about anything other than cultivation.

But now, even she was anticipating it internally.

She wanted to see what would happen to this green robed man at the year end face-off – was he going to shine brightly or would he turn into a laughing stock?

Chapter 94: Three Major Secret Skills

Summoning his flying sword, Su Zimo supported the spirit tiger on it carefully before hopping on himself. He nodded to Xue Yi and everyone else. “Fellow senior brothers, I’ll make a move first.”

“We’ll leave as well.”

The many disciples of Weapon Peak summoned their flying swords and sped off after Su Zimo, leaving Spirit Peak.

Little fatty hesitated for a moment before making up his mind and followed suit.

Before long, Su Zimo and the others disappeared from everyone's sights.

Disciples of the other three peaks gradually dispersed from Spirit Peak as well.

It was a momentary still to the current crisis. However, everyone knew that the year end face-off would definitely create a huge stir!

The eventual victor will be decided six months later.

At the same time, a gigantic pair of wings tore through the skies from the depths of the clouds, flying into Ethereal Palace.

If any disciples of the sect saw that, they would have recognized the owner of those wings as the Mystical Guardian Beast – that terrifying crane!

The crane's gigantic body landed into Ethereal Palace but with a spin, it turned into a ravishing middle aged lady, elegant with a head of red hair.

"Caw, caw!"

A cry came from a room as a smaller crane dashed over sadly upon sensing the aura of the redheaded beauty, flapping its wings furiously.

That crane was the one who had deterred Su Zimo and the others at the front peak of Ethereal Peak.

Shaking her head and smiling, the redheaded beauty looked at the little crane dotingly and asked, "Why? You're sad about being locked up?"

"Caw..."

The little crane seemed as though it wanted to explain something.

Looking at the pondering little crane, the redheaded beauty spoke gently after a while, "Child, I've been worrying about your future because I can't bear to see you being enslaved as someone else's spirit beast and losing your freedom. But I know that this day would come keeping you by my side since I can't protect you for the rest of your life."

The little crane did not know why its mother had suddenly turned so moody. Feeling fearful, it ran beside the redheaded beauty hastily.

Smiling, the redheaded beauty continued, "But, I seem to have found someone rather interesting recently. He's quite suitable to be your master and I'm sure that you won't suffer following him."

"Caw, caw!"

The little crane called out once more.

Rubbing the little crane's head, the redheaded beauty explained, "You can't follow me all the time. I'm old now and you've still got a long road ahead."

Instantly, the little crane was dejected.

After awhile, as though it could not repress its curiosity, the little crane asked inquiringly.

The redheaded beauty chuckled. "You know that man too. You've even fought him on the walls of the peak."

"Caw, caw! Caw, caw!!!"

Stunned for a moment, the little crane turned extremely agitated as it shrieked loudly, looking furious and disdainful.

"Fufu."

The redheaded beauty laughed. "Yes, he's a little weak now but you might not be a match for him. Besides, that man... hmm, he has some secrets in his body. It's hard to tell how his future will turn out."

"And of course, the most important thing is that you don't have to make a blood oath to follow him. You'll still retain your freedom."

The little crane called out a couple more times, seemingly still disagreeable to the suggestion.

The redheaded beauty nodded her head. "Of course, it's still your decision and I'll not force you. What I mean is that there's no harm for you to try getting along with him. If you like him, you can stay by his side. If you don't, you can just leave."

The little crane cried softly.

"Yes, of course I won't lock you up anymore as well. You can head out and play from now on as long as you don't get into trouble."

Rolling its eyes, the little crane lamented. "Hmph, hmph! I hate that man the most! He caused me to be locked up for so long and mummy even wants me to follow him? He'd wish! Now that I'm out, I'll definitely find a chance to get revenge!"

The redheaded beauty could naturally read the little crane's mind through its expressions.

However, she merely chuckled and did not expose him.

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In the skies not far away from Spirit Peak, four peak masters were present and Wen Xuan joined them now that he was done.

"Wen Xuan, my thanks. I owe you one," The disheveled old man cupped his fists.

There was initially no need for a peak master to appear personally to resolve today's incident – the Disciplinary Hall could have settled it.

However, worried that something might happen to Su Zimo, the disheveled old man requested for Wen Xuan to settle this personally.

Wen Xuan waved it off. "Let's not stand on courtesy between one another."

Pausing for a moment, he continued, "Actually, I did not intend to forbid Su Zimo from entering Spirit Peak. It's just that the lad was so arrogant to speak of such brazen words! In a fit of anger, I made that decision so that he could suffer some setbacks."

"No matter what, I'm still thankful for you stepping in."

The disheveled old man said, "Qi Refinement Warriors are all around the same, so it doesn't matter whether he learns anything. As long as he enters Foundation Establishment realm and gets promoted as an inner sect disciple, he can learn all the fighting techniques he wants at that time."

"It's just that, the challenge between him and Feng Haoyu at the end of the year..." Wen Xuan paused in his words.

The disheveled old man shook his head. "As you've said, if he loses, so be it. It'll be good for him to suffer some setbacks. At least, suffering in the sect is better than losing his life out there in the cultivation world."

Array Peak's master, Xuan Yi, suddenly said, "Actually, Su Zimo is not entirely to blame for today's incident."

"That Feng Haoyu is quite a scheming fella," The brown haired youth, Elixir Peak's master, remarked wistfully.

Wen Xuan frowned in displeasure and shook his head. "Feng Haoyu is merely competitive, but he isn't bad by nature."

The brown haired youth shrugged his shoulders. "Forget it, take it as though I've said nothing."

Xuan Yi hurriedly changed the topic as the five of them conversed idly for a while more before going their separate ways.

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Su Zimo had just arrived at his cave abode in Weapon Peak when little fatty caught up to him.

"Bro, hold on," Little fatty called out.

Turning around to see the descending little fatty, Su Zimo chuckled. "Thank you for speaking up for me quite a bit today."

"That's nothing," Little fatty waved it off casually.

As though he had just recalled something, Su Zimo apologized, "Because of me, you've offended quite a number of people today. I'm afraid things in Spirit Peak might be tougher for you in the future."

"Heh! Don't worry about it, bro! Even though I'm only Level 7 Qi Condensation right now, there's still six months more to the end of the year. I've got hope to reach Perfected Qi Condensation too. By then,

there won't be many people who can match me. If anyone's unhappy with me, they can meet me in the spirit arena!" Little fatty replied in a relaxed manner.

When he was done with that, he sighed. "Bro, that final challenge you issued to Feng Haoyu... was a little rash."

"Oh?" Su Zimo could tell that little fatty was hinting something.

Little fatty asked, "Bro, do you know of the three major secret skills of Ethereal Sect?"

"Nopes," Su Zimo shook his head.

Little fatty explained, "The reason why Ethereal Sect could become one of the five main clans of the Great Zhou Dynasty is because they have the legacy of these three major secret skills. Even if you're promoted to an inner sect disciple, you can't get to cultivate those skills. Only legacy disciples amongst the inner sect disciples have the possibility of learning them."

Chapter 95: Hidden Ailment

"Legacy disciples?"

Su Zimo frowned – this was the first time he had heard of that title.

Little fatty nodded his head. "Actually, every sect has legacy disciples. They are the prodigies that are highly valued and groomed by the sects. Some sects call them as core disciples."

Understanding, Su Zimo asked, "You mean to say that Feng Haoyu is a legacy disciple?"

"Not yet."

Little fatty replied, "But, he's almost certain to be one once he promotes to become an inner sect disciple. That's because he's already begun to cultivate one of the three major secret skills, Ethereal Sword. I heard it was because my master went to persuade the sect master personally."

When he heard that, Su Zimo's expression turned grim.

The fact that he had the rights to cultivate the three major secret skills before becoming a legacy disciple was enough to tell how much the sect valued him.

For the secret skill to be deemed as the support of one of the five main sects, it was definitely nothing to scoff at.

But of course, to Su Zimo, the factor that determined the victor wasn't on Feng Haoyu, but himself.

Outside the spirit arena of Spirit Peak, the moment he laid his hands on Sun Tao, he discovered that he had a hidden ailment within his body.

If he did not remove this hidden ailment, the fight against Feng Haoyu at the end of the year would not be favorable for him.

Little fatty went silent for a moment before chuckling. "But bro, since you made this choice, I'll still be on your side. It doesn't matter if you're forbidden from Spirit Peak. I'll spar with you from time to time during these six months to raise your fighting power and help you familiarize with duel techniques.

"Alright," Su Zimo nodded.

"It's just that we'll be a little tight on time. After all, you've got to raise your cultivation and learn about refining weapons and elixirs at the same time... no matter what, we'll just do what we can and hope for the best!"

After little fatty left, Su Zimo brought the spirit tiger with him back to the cave abode.

Sitting on his stone bed, Su Zimo's eyes no longer concealed his worries.

If this was before he had cultivated the Marrow Cleansing section, Su Zimo was absolutely confident that he would be able to take down Feng Haoyu with just the horrifying might of his physical body and melee strength.

But now, there were some logical yet unexpected changes in his body ever since he started cultivating the Marrow Cleansing section.

Marrow Cleansing implied the swapping of blood.

Even though the new blood was extremely strong, it contained obvious signs of its demonic nature!

Back on Spirit Peak, Su Zimo's killing intent rose upon seeing his spirit tiger get injured. Subconsciously, that activated his blood and veins and he felt his body showing signs of demonic conversion!

This was a feeling he had experienced back when he activated the Sanguine Ape Transformation.

Heaving a deep breath of air, Su Zimo channeled his blood, causing a tremendous aura to surge forth from his veins into every part of his body.

He could clearly feel his body expanding and strengthening!

The expansion was even more obvious than his flesh being filled and his tendons tightening!

This was a complete transformation!

His clothes were torn apart by his body, turning into shreds.

Even though he could not see his own appearance, Su Zimo knew that he definitely did not look like the refined scholar he was right now.

At the side, the spirit tiger glared uneasily.

It wasn't just because it felt foreign towards Su Zimo's appearance, the aura Su Zimo was emitting was chilling and horrifying!

Lowering his head, Su Zimo caught sight of his left hand's fingernails growing out, jade white and sharp as blades. Merely making contact with them gave off the sound of metal clashing!

With a single thought, those frightening nails retracted.

The spirit tiger was entirely stumped.

Su Zimo's palms were no different from its own palms where it could retract and release its claws at any time.

Green veins popped up and lined all over Su Zimo's arms, thick like pythons coiling around in a frightening manner.

How could this be the arm of a human?!

Using spirit qi, Su Zimo conjured a water mirror.

Through the shimmering light, he caught sight of a half human half demon appearance. With bloodshot eyes, it was like a mix of an ape and human.

His arm trembled and the water mirror disappeared.

His entire body was almost transformed save for his right hand that retained its appearance. Fair and tender with long nails, it looked like any other human's.

His right hand had always been somewhat strange.

Su Zimo had started realizing it back when it could create a Level 3 Spirit Fire.

However, he did not know the exact reason why.

Heaving a deep breath of air, Su Zimo's blood began to calm down as his demonic appearance faded too.

This was the consequences of demonic cultivation.

The effects were not so obvious in terms of Tendons Transformation, Body Tempering and Bones Strengthening.

However, now that he was swapping blood through Marrow Cleansing, Su Zimo was showing signs of truly turning to a demon!

This was not what he wanted.

No matter what, he was a human and did not wish to become a true demon.

He had yet to cultivate the Marrow Cleansing to an initial success yet. But once that was done, or if he had achieved phenomenal success, his blood may undergo endless changes and he may never be able to revert to his current appearance.

He could almost imagine the consequences of him failing to control himself earlier on at Spirit Peak and revealing his demonic state.

First, he might be killed on the spot.

Second, he might be forced into a blood oath to become someone's spirit beast.

If Su Zimo had revealed his demonic appearance, no one would take him as a human.

The only way demons could survive in the cultivation world was by becoming the spirit beasts of cultivators.

It was either that or he would have to leave the sect and live within mountains and forests from now on, mixing around with true spirit beasts while cutting off all ties with his family and kin.

That was something Su Zimo could not do.

Yet, he was not willing to give up on demonic cultivation as well.

“What should I do?”

He was lost.

Naturally, the greatest challenge to Su Zimo right now was the fight against Feng Haoyu at the end of the year.

Right now, he had no way of controlling his blood and if his blood churned while he engaged in melee combat, he was definitely going to reveal his demonic nature!

By then, many seniors of the sect in the audience would take him down before Feng Haoyu could.

If he wanted to win Feng Haoyu, he could only rely on immortality cultivation methods, making use of fighting techniques between Qi Refinement Warriors.

However, he was almost blank in that department since he had never practiced for it.

There were still six months till the end of the year face-off.

Raising his cultivation, refining elixirs and weapons while mastering sword wielding and fighting techniques between Qi Refinement Warriors...

Su Zimo made up his mind to pause on the Marrow Cleansing section.

It wasn't just because he did not have time. More than that, he did not dare to carry on.

At least, the only thing he could do was to stop his demonic cultivation before he found a way to stop his hidden ailment.

Retrieving the Weapon Tripod from his storage bag, Su Zimo began to work on the step of spirit gathering.

He had a hunch that he would be able to figure out the technique to spirit gathering soon. That was the most important step in weapon refinement!

Chapter 96: The Spirit Gathering Method That Will Change the World

Weapon Refinement Masters had spirit perception; a sense gained over a long period of time through countless weapon refinements and was extremely precious.

There was naturally no way Su Zimo could have attained it having only started on weapon refinement for less than three months.

However, he had a spirit perception as well.

His was a sharp sense towards danger – was it possible to use his spirit perception towards spirit gathering?

Gathering a scarlet Level 3 Spirit Fire in his right palm, Su Zimo warmed the tripod.

After a moment, he dug out a pure gold ore from his storage bag and placed it into the Weapon Tripod along with other materials and began smelting.

Under the high heat of a Level 3 Spirit Fire, the materials in the Weapon Tripod turned to liquid state extremely quickly and began to bubble.

Spirit Qi seeped out from the materials, swirling thickly within the Weapon Tripod.

The impurities within the materials were being purged as well as they condensed.

Before long, smelting was over.

Extinguishing his spirit fire, Su Zimo rested while waiting for the temperature inside the tripod to lower for forging.

A while later, he suddenly stood up and created a pair of spirit hands, reaching into the Weapon Tripod to create.

Before long, the shape of a flying sword appeared in the Weapon Tripod.

Fourth step, tempering.

The Level 3 Spirit Fire made its appearance once more, heating the flying sword to a scarlet state as Su Zimo hammered within.

He had spent more than three months familiarizing himself with the first four steps of weapon refinement. By now, he was so well-versed that every single step was fluid like water without any delays.

Within 15 minutes, the tempering was over.

He was at the most crucial step once again – spirit gathering.

Heaving out a breath of air, Su Zimo frowned.

He had failed countless times at this step and had destroyed many flying swords.

How could he solve this issue?

Spirit perception, danger, spirit gathering, failure, flying swords destroyed...

All of those terms and countless images flashed through his mind.

All of a sudden!

His eyes twinkled with a bright light.

He had just thought of an idea!

Su Zimo's heart palpitated uncontrollably as his eyes could not conceal his joy of excitement.

That idea could eliminate the problem of spirit gathering and in fact, he might even attain a 100% success rate through it!

Even Advanced Weapon Refinement Masters who could create superior-grade spirit weapons would not dare to claim a 100% success rate for creating inferior-grade spirit weapons.

They would only dare to claim they had a high probability of success.

Taking a deep breath of air, Su Zimo suddenly kept away the Weapon Tripod.

In theory, spirit gathering should be conducted within the Weapon Tripod.

The reason for that was because no one could guarantee the success rate of spirit gathering. If they failed, the flying sword would explode on the spot and the shards would cause huge damage all around.

The more spirit patterns gathered, the more destructive the impact of the explosion should the spirit gathering fail. In fact, it might even endanger the Weapon Refinement Master's life.

If it was done inside the Weapon Tripod, the shards of the broken flying sword would merely strike at the walls of the Weapon Tripod and the Weapon Refinement Master would not be injured.

Now that Su Zimo had removed the Weapon Tripod, he was exposing himself completely to the potential danger!

This was a way too dangerous move.

If any seniors of the sect saw this, they would definitely try to stop Su Zimo.

However, the gleam in Su Zimo's eyes was only getting more intense by the moment.

He was going to expose himself to as much danger as possible – that way, his spirit perception would unleash its full potential!

Su Zimo manipulated the thick spirit qi in the surroundings and channeled it towards the flying sword.

All of a sudden!

A sense of danger rang in his mind.

Instantly, he stopped his spirit pattern creation. The sword was unchanged and undamaged.

Su Zimo heaved out a sigh of relief.

If he had continued earlier, the flying sword would have exploded on the spot!

His spirit perception had informed him of the danger beforehand – the cicada senses autumn coming before the wind even starts to blow!

Adjusting himself, Su Zimo channeled the spirit qi towards the sword once more.

Another warning!

Stopping his motions, he continued to adjust without any hurry.

For the following period of time, Su Zimo continued to test the waters with spirit gathering, abandoning each time he sensed danger.

Time flew by and in the blink of an eye, an hour had passed.

Finally.

The spirit pattern on the sword was clear but Su Zimo had not sensed any danger.

The spirit pattern was being etched in!

“Buzz!”

With a slight quiver, the sword gave off a clean, ringing sound that reverberated through the cave abode.

Success!

A clear spirit pattern could be seen gathering on the sword, shimmering brightly.

Even though it was only an inferior-grade spirit weapon, he had created it personally.

A never before sense of pride rose in Su Zimo’s heart as he looked at the flying sword hovering not too far away.

Weapon Refinement Masters were in danger of exploding flying swords from failed spirit gatherings. However, with his spirit perception, Su Zimo could sense that danger beforehand.

That was akin to a premonition of a failed spirit gathering attempt so that he could abandon it and readjust for a new attempt.

This method of spirit gathering was something never seen before and it was difficult to replicate as well.

It was a spirit gathering method unique only to Su Zimo!

At that moment, Su Zimo did not know it yet. However, his act of removing the Weapon Tripod was something that would have a huge impact in the future of weapon refinement where countless Weapon Refinement Masters would attempt to imitate.

As the scarlet sword gathered its spirit pattern, the surrounding spirit qi was sufficient for a second pattern.

A bold thought crossed Su Zimo’s mind.

Since he could have a 100% success rate with this spirit gathering method, he could attempt for two spirit patterns to create a middle-grade flying sword!

Composing himself, Su Zimo continued to heat up the flying sword that was gleaming red.

Swoosh!

The spirit qi surged and gathered towards the sword.

“No!”

A warning rang out inside his mind as he stopped it right away.

It was another arduous cycle of failing and attempting.

In the blink of an eye, four hours had passed and he had not succeeded yet. Each attempt brought forth a warning to him.

By now, the spirit qi within Su Zimo was almost spent and he was worn out mentally as well.

He could no longer hold on.

“Seems like I thought too lightly of weapon refinement,” Su Zimo shook his head.

Right after he created the inferior-grade spirit weapon, he had a momentary hallucination that he would be able to craft a supreme-grade spirit weapon of his own before long.

Now, he knew that it was way too idealistic of a naive thought.

But no matter what, creating an inferior-grade spirit weapon was no longer an issue for Su Zimo!

Furthermore, he had even created a spirit gathering method that was unique to himself. If he made good use of it, the day would definitely come where he could create a supreme-grade spirit weapon.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Su Zimo dipped the scarlet flying sword into cold water for the final step, quenching.

Shing!

The moment the flying sword met with the cold water, white steam billowed out as the energy created through the mix of heat and coldness solidified the sword and spirit pattern!

Looking at the unusually sharp flying sword shimmering in his palm, Su Zimo let out a grin.

Chapter 97: Elixir Refinement Beginner

For the next few days, Su Zimo was in no rush to leave his cave abode. Instead, he chose to remain in seclusion to practice his self-invented spirit gathering method.

As he had expected, he was truly able to achieve a 100% success rate for spirit gathering after removing the Weapon Tripod.

The pity was that he could only create a single spirit pattern each time.

He had yet to succeed on a second spirit pattern.

Initially, Su Zimo thought that the materials used were the cause for it. However, he still could not create any results even after using the Pure Gold Crystal.

Puzzled, he decided to stop his efforts on weapon refinement for the time being.

His victory at the year end Weapon Peak face-off was assured with a 100% success rate of creating inferior-grade spirit weapons.

He had six months left and he still had to raise his cultivation, learn fighting techniques and elixir refinement.

Towards refining elixirs, Su Zimo had zero knowledge.

However, he had no intention of boasting about his current feats.

The fact that he was able to create an inferior-grade spirit weapon after just three months into weapon refinement was something that would shock the world.

Furthermore, Su Zimo's intention was to defeat Feng Haoyu completely during the year end face-off. If news of his feat was spread now, there was a chance that Feng Haoyu could avoid the challenge.

This day, Su Zimo headed out of his cave abode and flew towards Elixir Peak on his flying sword.

He intended to spend his time on learning the craft of refining elixirs.

Because the five peaks weren't really far apart, it did not take long before Su Zimo arrived on Elixir Peak.

Every afternoon, inner sect disciples that were Elixir Refinement Masters would head forth to explain more about the craft of refining elixirs and disciples of all five peaks were welcome to learn.

Elixir and Weapon Peak were similar in strength – both were the two weakest peaks in Ethereal Peak.

However, there were slightly more disciples in Elixir Peak than Weapon Peak.

The reason was simple – an Elixir Refinement Master could create elixirs for himself which was a huge booster for raising one's cultivation.

However, Weapon Refinement Masters could only create spirit weapons. Even though they boosted one's fighting strength, it was of no use to one's cultivation.

There were many cultivators who were talented in weapon refinement but failed to form a core. Because of that, they still died of old age with a lifespan of a hundred years.

Most importantly, refinement of elixirs was comparatively simpler than weapons because it did not require the step of spirit gathering.

Spirit gathering was something so difficult that through the history of time, there were no Weapon Refinement Masters who would dare proclaim a 100% success rate – Su Zimo was the only one.

Su Zimo's arrival at Elixir Peak attracted quite a bit of attention.

After the events of the spirit arena, there were now extremely few trial disciples of the five peaks who did not recognize him.

The feud between him and Feng Haoyu was something everyone knew about.

Of course, the disciples of Elixir Peak were unsurprised at Su Zimo's appearance on Elixir Peak too.

Afternoon.

An inner sect Elixir Refinement Master standing at the front of Elixir Peak's square gestured with their hands and the crowd gradually went silent.

“Fellow sect mates, there’s a few things to know before you start on elixir refinement.”

The inner sect Elixir Refinement Master said slowly, “There are nine grades of elixirs. Typically, a Grade 1 elixir is suitable for Qi Refinement Warriors. Grade 2, Foundation Establishment Cultivators. Grade 3, Perfected Golden Cores. If a Qi Refinement Warrior were to consume a Grade 3 elixir, not only would it not benefit them at all, they might even die on the spot!”

Su Zimo nodded in agreement.

The logic behind it was simple – it was the same as when he had devoured the Scarlet Flame Fruit. If one’s body was unable to endure the overwhelming energy, they would just rupture and die.

“Anyone who can create a Grade 1 elixir is an Elementary Elixir Refinement Master. Grade 2, Intermediate Elixir Refinement Master. Grade 3, Advanced Elixir Refinement Master. My name is Bo Xuezhen and I’m an Intermediate Elixir Refinement Master.”

The many disciples below looked at him in awe.

“Have you guys heard of the saying that every medicine contains 30% poison?”

Bo Xuezhen continued, “It is the same for elixirs in the cultivation world as well. However, the poison now refers to the impurities contained in the elixirs. The less the impurities, the better the quality of the elixir. If an elixir could contain at least 89% impurities, it would truly be a poisoned elixir for cultivators.”

The crowd chuckled.

“Senior Brother Bo, how do we differentiate between the qualities of elixirs?” A disciple from Array Peak who had just started on learning about elixirs as well asked.

Bo Xuezhen’s gaze paused momentarily on Su Zimo before chuckling. “I see that we have disciples from Weapon Peak around as well. Actually, the difference in quality for elixirs is the same as spirit weapons – both have obvious patterns. The only difference is that they are called spirit patterns in weapon refinement whereas for elixir refinement, they are called elixir patterns.”

“There are five different tiers of qualities for every grade of elixirs. The lowest quality would show a single line of elixir pattern. Of course, an Elixir Refinement Master would not have to gather the pattern personally. That is merely a representation of the amount of impurities within. An inferior-grade elixir would have a single elixir pattern with an impurity content of 40%”

“A middle-grade elixir would contain two elixir patterns at 30% impurity. Following that logic, a superior-grade has three patterns and supreme-grade has four. If one could create an elixir with five patterns, it would be 100% pure and that’s called a perfect elixir.”

The mention of that had Su Zimo’s heart skipping a beat.

If it was as Bo Xuezhen had mentioned and the same theory applied to spirit weapons since a supreme-grade spirit weapon had four spirit patterns...

Could there be an even stronger perfect spirit weapon with five spirit patterns gathered?

In theory, Su Zimo was right – perfect spirit weapons did exist.

The reason why no Weapon Refinement Masters in the sect had mentioned it was because spirit gathering was way too difficult. Notwithstanding five spirit patterns, one could even count with their fingers the number of Weapon Refinement Masters who could create supreme-grade spirit weapons in the whole Great Zhou Dynasty.

If one were to say that spirit perception was a sense gained through experience, one would have to require immense luck to gather five spirit patterns and create a perfect spirit weapon.

Luck, affinity, status, providence, environment, harmony, situation, mental state... a perfect blend of a myriad of factors were required for the possibility of creating a perfect spirit weapon.

And that was with the prerequisite that the Weapon Refinement Master himself was at the paragon of weapon refinement.

Bo Xuezhen's voice rang out once more, "There are six steps for elixir refinement as well. The first step is material selection which involves the choosing of spirit herbs and elixir recipes. Every elixir requires a different recipe. Within the sect, you can exchange for recipes using contribution points. Outside, you'll have to purchase them with spirit stones. Naturally, the rarer the recipe, the more expensive they will cost."

Even Grade 1 elixirs have different types and functions.

There's the Essence Nourishing Elixir which is used for stabilizing one's foundation and nourishing their essence and there's also Spirit Regeneration Elixir which is used for recovering spirit qi.

Something like the Spirit Gathering Elixir is the most commonly available elixir which can help cultivators gather spirit qi better. Those elixirs are easier to refine at the same time.

Of the Grade 1 Elixirs, the Foundation Establishment Elixir is the most difficult to refine requiring the most complex ingredients.

As the name implies, the Foundation Establishment Elixir can help Perfected Qi Refinement Warriors with breaking through the barrier to Foundation Establishment.

The gap in cultivation between Qi Condensation and Foundation Establishment was a huge one. If one had the help of a Foundation Establishment Elixir, things would be much easier.

Su Zimo listened intently. Even after Bo Xuezhen left, he sat on the spot for a long time, making sure he remembered everything he had learned thoroughly before standing up.

Arriving at the Elixir Chamber, he used his contribution points to exchange for an Elixir Furnace and a recipe for the Spirit Gathering Elixir before returning to his cave abode.

Chapter 98: Something Weird

Back in his cave abode, Su Zimo was in no hurry to start with elixir refinement. Instead, he continued pondering over everything he had learned today and took mental notes of his doubts.

Thereafter, he memorized the recipe of the Spirit Gathering Elixir by heart and just like that, an entire day had passed.

Night descended.

According to his previous plan, Su Zimo should be lying on the stone bed right now, cultivating The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness.

However, because he could no longer cultivate the Marrow Cleansing section, Su Zimo could only go to sleep while following the breathing and expiration technique of the first three sections, Body Tempering, Tendons Transformation and Bones Strengthening.

Thankfully, he had only just learned the Marrow Cleansing section and it was not a habit for him yet.

The second day, he got up bright and early and began on his Qi Condensation. Retrieving a spirit stone from his storage bag, he gripped it in his palm and started to raise his cultivation.

After Level 5 Qi Condensation, Su Zimo could sense a clear decline in his cultivation speed.

If he were to merely absorb spirit qi making use of the spirit stone, he would most likely only reach Level 8 Qi Condensation at best by the end of the year.

After all, he had to spend a huge chunk of his time on elixir refinement as well as fighting techniques too.

In the blink of an eye, it was already noon.

Su Zimo left his cave abode once more and headed to Elixir Peak on his flying sword.

To his surprise, the person explaining things today was Elixir Peak's master, a brown haired youth!

Compared to Bo Xuezheng, the brown haired youth's knowledge of elixir refinement was way deeper.

As he explained, the brown haired youth's gaze would linger from time to time towards Su Zimo for some reason.

After an hour of listening, Su Zimo felt his understanding of elixir refinement deepening with many of his previous doubts clarified.

After the talk, just as Su Zimo was about to leave, the brown haired youth called him back, beckoning with his hands.

Su Zimo went over hurriedly.

"How was it? Could you understand?" The brown haired youth asked, smiling with a warm attitude.

Even though Elixir Peak's master looked to be a youth, his tone was no different from that of an elderly person – one could tell that he had reverted to his youthful appearance.

"Yes, it's not bad," Su Zimo nodded his head.

"Do you have any doubts?"

Su Zimo pondered for a moment before asking, "I heard Senior Brother Bo mention previously that every medicine contains 30% poison. Except for perfect elixirs, every other elixir contains impurities. Would that affect the cultivation of cultivators who consume them?"

An approving look flickered through the brown haired youth's eyes as he nodded. "There is a reason why we set 40% impurities as the minimum value for inferior-grade elixirs in the world of elixir refinement. This is a conclusion made by seniors before us through history and experience. Therefore, any elixirs that have a grade, even inferior-grade, are harmless to cultivators."

With a slight pause, the brown haired youth continued, "However, seniors have mentioned the impact on one's cultivation should they consume too many elixirs such that the impurities become sediment in the body and are unable to be purged. Regarding that, there are many different theories to it in the cultivation world but no one has yet to discover the specific impacts that would be caused."

Su Zimo nodded.

The brown haired youth patted Su Zimo on the shoulders. "Go back and practice. Elixir refinement is much easier than weapon refinement and you'll get better with practice. With a Level 3 Spirit Fire as foundation, you can definitely do it. If you have any doubts in the future, feel free to come look for me at any time."

Suddenly, Su Zimo realized.

He might have been the reason why the brown haired youth was conducting the session today!

Touched, Su Zimo nodded his head.

The brown haired youth passed Su Zimo a storage bag. "There's quite a bit of spirit herbs in here. This should suffice your practice needs. Keep it."

Hesitating for a moment, Su Zimo took over the storage bag and bowed deeply.

...

Back to his cave abode.

Su Zimo retrieved his Elixir Furnace and prepared himself for his first elixir refinement.

Before him, four sets of ingredients were laid out neatly according to their types.

Su Zimo had already memorized the recipe as well.

The first step of choosing materials was completed.

Second step, extraction.

As the name implies, this step requires the use of spirit fire to purge away the impurities within the spirit herbs so as to extract its essence.

Unlike weapon refinement, the level of spirit fire did not determine the outcome of extraction for elixir refinement.

Spirit herbs had a high spirit content and was less rigid, requiring the continuous heating of a strong fire.

Most spirit herbs are fragile and the temperature they can endure is different too.

If the temperature was too high, the spirit herbs would turn into ashes and one would have to conduct a new extraction.

If it was too low, the desired outcome of extraction would not be met.

That was the reason why Elixir Refinement Masters had to practice continuously so that they understood the temperature requirements of different spirit herbs.

Heaving a deep breath of air, Su Zimo took up a spirit herb and started the extraction process.

“Swoosh!”

The moment his flames were ignited, the spirit herb turned into ashes.

Watching at the sides, the spirit tiger snickered in a mocking manner.

Su Zimo glared at the spirit tiger and regained his composure, taking up another stalk of spirit herb for a new attempt.

Failure! Again!

Another failure, another attempt...

Su Zimo's gaze was resolute and firm as he attempted repeatedly, adjusting the temperature time and again.

Finally, under the heat of the flames, the stalk of spirit herb turned into essence in powder form.

Placing the tuft of powder into a corner of the Elixir Furnace, Su Zimo continued with the extraction of another spirit herb.

It was another round of failures until he finally managed to place another tuft of powder into the Elixir Furnace, separate from the first tuft.

After a full four hours, Su Zimo's forehead was filled with sweat and his spirit qi was almost exhausted. Finally, he had managed to extract the essence of four stalks of spirit herbs, placing them in four corners of the Elixir Furnace.

Heaving a sigh of relief, he sat down in a lotus position and started recovering his spirit qi unhurriedly.

After awhile, Su Zimo got up and started with the third step of elixir refinement – synthesis.

This step required the mixing of the powdered essence in a specified ratio and order.

It was a relatively simple step since the ratio and order were documented in the recipe.

However, a single margin of error would affect the content of the produced elixir and in worst case scenarios, it would be a failed refinement.

After synthesis was the fourth step, secondary extraction.

This was the most critical extraction.

A failure in this step would result in a waste of all previous efforts.

The fusion of four difference spirit herb essences would result in a structural change such that high heat could be endured. This was the time where a furious flame was required.

This was also where the advantage of having a Level 3 Spirit Fire comes in.

Whether or not an elixir could be formed with a grade would depend on the amount of impurities that could be purged with this step.

The scarlet Level 3 Spirit Fire heated up the Elixir Furnace repeatedly, turning the powdered essence into liquid form.

The nine holes of the Elixir Furnace began to seep with white smoke as a fragrant medicinal smell wafted out.

If the level of spirit fire was too low for this step, black smoke might be emitted instead along with a pungent smell.

After a moment, the secondary extraction was completed.

Fifth step, formation.

This was a step that required absolute focus and the slightest bit of distraction could result in a failure of elixir formation!

Su Zimo took in a deep breath of air and composed himself before dividing the essence within the Elixir Furnace into nine portions. Fusing together, they gradually took shape and solidified towards a pill form.

Right then, something weird happened!

Chapter 99: Attack of the Stupid Bird

“Boom!”

An ear-piercing boom sounded out as the main entrance to the cave abode was slammed wide open. Instantly, both doors dropped to the ground heavily, creating a dust cloud.

One must not be disturbed during the process of pill formation. Caught unaware, Su Zimo was totally shocked as he saw the pills that were about to be formed explode on the spot!

His efforts had gone to waste!

Not only that, because Su Zimo was still stunned, his mouth was slightly agape and he ended up eating a mouthful of dust...

He was finally about to bear fruits for the elixir refinement he had spent an entire afternoon on only to see it go up in smoke.

Right then, Su Zimo even had thoughts of killing someone. Unable to control his blood in a fit of anger, he transformed to his demonic form.

“Caw, caw!”

At that moment, a familiar, mocking cry rang out in front of his cave abode.

Turning around, he caught sight of a crane standing at the entrance of his cave abode, flapping its wings excitedly and looking gleeful.

“Fu...”

Su Zimo was about to cuss when he realized his mouth was filled with dust and coughed furiously.

“Caw, caw!”

When it saw that, the crane was even more amused; if it could laugh, it would have done so long ago.

This was the crane that had fought against Su Zimo on the front peak when he was about to join the sect.

Su Zimo recognized it right away.

Of all times, this stupid bird chose to arrive at this critical juncture. Su Zimo was so pissed off that his curled fists were crackling and his eyes were bloodshot.

“Roar!”

The spirit tiger leaped up and roared towards little crane with widened eyes.

Glancing at the spirit tiger, little crane’s eyes were filled with disdain.

Initially, the spirit tiger was rather wary about making the first move against little crane that was a spirit demon.

However, that look of contempt triggered the spirit tiger instantly.

“I can’t take that lying down! I’ve got my pride!”

With a feral roar, it rushed up with fire flaring out of its eyes.

Bang!

The spirit tiger was sent rolling back even faster and more ferocious than it was when it had pounced ahead.

The moment it leapt ahead, little crane flapped its wings and knocked it back. Rolling a few times on the ground, the spirit tiger ate a mouthful of dust as well, looking wretched beyond anything else.

Flipping up, the spirit tiger spat out its mouthful of dust and hollered, ready to strike once more.

“Come back!”

Su Zimo called softly.

Without any hesitation, the spirit tiger retreated as though it was waiting for Su Zimo’s command from the get go.

At the end of the day, the spirit tiger was only a spirit beast and wasn't a match for that stupid bird.

"Alright, since you destroyed a batch of my elixirs today, let's use that to write off our feud. From now on, don't come look for me and I won't offend you too. How's that sound?"

Su Zimo decided to negotiate with the stupid bird since their feud wasn't deep to begin with.

If he did not resolve this issue, he was not going to have a peaceful life in the future as well.

Notwithstanding elixir refinement, Su Zimo wouldn't be able to handle it even if the stupid bird came every once in awhile during his cultivation.

"Caw, caw!"

Little crane raised its head in disdain.

Su Zimo frowned – the stupid bird did not seem as though it wanted to let things end here.

"On account that your elder is the Mystical Guardian Beast of the sect, I don't wish to hurt you. You should not continue to bother me," Su Zimo said slowly with a stern and blackened expression.

"Caw, caw! Caw, caw!!!"

Little crane continued to cry out with a taunting look.

Without saying anything more, Su Zimo patted his storage bag as a blood red bow appeared in his hands.

Arrow, load and strung bow like a full moon!

The entire process was fluid like water as though he had practiced it countless times.

"Swoosh!"

The sound of an arrow tearing through the air rang out as a black light streaked past little crane, missing it by an inch.

The speed of the arrow was so fast that little crane jumped in shock, totally caught unprepared.

Su Zimo declared coldly, "That arrow was just a warning shot. If you continue to bother me, I'll kill you with my next arrow!"

Naturally, there was no way Su Zimo would dare to kill that stupid bird unless he was tired of living – that was merely a threat.

Furthermore, this stupid bird was still in its infancy stage and was merely being playful; it did not deserve death just for that.

"Caw, caw!"

Upon hearing Su Zimo's declaration, little crane was enraged as it flapped its wings. Glaring at Su Zimo sharply, it wanted to engage him in a bout!

In a swift motion, Su Zimo dashed out of the cave abode.

This time round, little crane was prepared as it flew into the skies instantly. Circling around the skies, its talons shimmered dangerously looking as though it could swoop at any moment.

Su Zimo arched his bow once more.

“Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!”

He fired three arrows with all his might.

Little crane dodged everything in midair with nimble ease.

“Caw, caw!”

It cried out loudly, laughing at Su Zimo’s archery skills.

Su Zimo was starting to regret things now.

Had he known that this would be the case, he would have pierced the stupid bird’s wings with his first arrow while it was unguarded.

But now, things were awkward for him.

Even if he could use his flying sword, he would never be as agile in midair as a spirit crane with wings.

He wouldn’t be able to unleash his fighting prowess completely.

Furthermore, Su Zimo did not dare to engage the spirit crane in melee combat right now. If he lost control of his blood and showed signs of his demonic self, the consequences would be dire.

However, if he wanted to make use of his flying sword, he was only at Level 6 Qi Condensation. He might not be able to hurt the crane even if it stood still for him.

There was no way for him to fight!

After standing at the entrance for awhile, Su Zimo realized that there was nothing he could do to the stupid bird and decided to return to his cave abode.

The moment he sat down, little crane appeared before the cave abode and started yelping before he could even take a single breath.

“That stupid bird...”

In a fit of anger, Su Zimo rushed out once more.

Again, little crane flew away...

The moment Su Zimo returned to his cave abode, little crane returned. It refused to enter his cave abode and instead stood at the entrance taunting him while crying from time to time.

Suddenly, Su Zimo had a bad feeling.

If this stupid bird were to continue with this, notwithstanding elixir refinement and raising of his cultivation, even a good night’s rest would be a pipe dream.

True enough.

Su Zimo had just fixed the door to his cave abode when little crane broke it once more.

Little crane stood outside with Su Zimo remaining inside. The man, crane and a spirit tiger spent their day looking at one another without doing anything...

To that, little crane found extreme joy.

The man and the tiger suffered immensely.

For the next few days, little crane would visit Su Zimo's cave abode from time to time, crying loudly outside.

At times, the man and tiger would catch a breather once little crane left. But, the moment they tried to catch up on sleep, little crane would return...

Not only was Su Zimo unable to cultivate or refine elixirs, even sleeping was a tall task for him.

It has been a few days since the man and tiger have slept.

Both Su Zimo and the spirit tiger had lost quite a bit of weight.

The spirit tiger was on the brink of tears.

Previously, it was tormented by Su Zimo for some unknown reason in this cave abode, ordered to roar continuously.

Now, a stupid bird had appeared out of nowhere to torment them.

By now, the spirit tiger was suffering from mental trauma. It was even contemplating if it should leave Su Zimo for the time being so that it could escape to the forest for a good night's sleep.

Chapter 100: Delving Into Formations

This morning, Su Zimo sported two black eye circles, looking worn out and fatigued with bloodshot eyes – he was in the same state as the spirit tiger.

Under the torment of little crane, it was yet another sleepless night for the man and tiger pair.

Suddenly, Su Zimo spoke, "This can't go on. We've got to think of something."

The spirit tiger was listless and shrugged its head drowsily.

Counting on the spirit tiger to suppress little crane was way too unrealistic.

It had a normal bloodline and it was a long way before advancing to become a spirit demon.

Even if it could turn into a spirit demon, it had no way of flying and would only be led by the nose by little crane.

Su Zimo's current methods were not enough to suppress little crane as well.

Neither the man nor crane could injure the other but Su Zimo could not afford this waste of time.

He had considered asking seniors of the sect for help as well. However, given the crane's status, it wasn't a guarantee that he would receive any help.

Furthermore, Su Zimo had his ego as well.

Was he going to be defeated by a stupid bird?

After a long silence, he looked at the nearby spirit tiger and said sternly, "I'll go out for awhile. Don't follow me. As long as I'm not here, the stupid bird won't bother you."

The moment the spirit tiger heard that, it was invigorated and so touched that tears nearly streamed down its cheeks.

If Su Zimo had not left, the spirit tiger was prepared to head out to tide through this predicament as well.

Patting the spirit tiger on the head, Su Zimo left the cave abode and summoned his flying sword, speeding towards Array Peak.

After much thought, he concluded that only an array formation could suppress the stupid bird.

If he could set up a large array formation in front of his cave abode similar to the fog that was protecting the sect, he would be able to get rid of the stupid bird once and for all.

Su Zimo had zero knowledge about formations and he had to learn from scratch.

However, it was better than wasting his time in the cave abode accomplishing nothing at all.

Before long, he arrived at Array Peak.

It was early morning at that time and there weren't many disciples on Array Peak; most of them were cultivating in their cave abodes.

The Array Peak square would only be filled with more trial disciples come afternoon when it was time for inner sect Array Formation Masters to share their experience.

Similar to talismans and elixirs, formations are divided into nine grades.

Elementary Array Formation Masters are able to lay out and dispel most Grade 1 formations.

Grade 2 formations, Intermediate Array Formation Masters.

Grade 3 formations, Advanced Array Formation Masters.

There were many types of formations but generally, they could be divided into four types – killing, trapping, illusionary and buffing formations.

The Eight Distresses Formation was a type of illusionary formation whereas the fog formation protecting the sect was a combination of a trap on top of an illusionary formation.

In layman terms, the principle behind forming a formation was to make use of different obscure formation patterns while gathering spirit qi to activate various effects.

Unlike the other four peaks, Array Peak had a symbolic structure.

On the west of Array Peak was their spirit arena and beside it stood the Ten Formations Pagoda.

There were 10 floors to the pagoda containing a different formation on every level. Each time a cultivator entered, they would fall into a formation and they could only ascend to the 2nd floor if they managed to dispel it.

Following that logic, only cultivators who pass through the first five formations were qualified to be called Elementary Array Formation Masters.

Su Zimo's arrival did not cause much of a stir. However, many Array Peak disciples were surprised.

There were only six months left to the year end face-off. Everyone knew that Su Zimo had to work on elixir and weapon refinement alongside preparing for a duel against Feng Haoyu – there was no time at all.

Most disciples present at Array Peak thought that Su Zimo's appearance to listen in on formations was because the latter had chosen to give up on his duel against Feng Haoyu and scoffed it off.

However, none of them knew that Su Zimo was here because he had no choice.

He naturally hoped that he could spend all his effort on refinement of elixirs, raising his cultivation and working on fighting techniques. However, the appearance of that stupid bird had ruined all his plans.

From that day on, Su Zimo stayed in Array Peak temporarily.

Of course, there was no way Array Peak would provide Su Zimo with a cave abode. He spent his days in the Array Chamber, rarely appearing and delving into books to learn of the various formations.

Starting with the most elementary formations, he learned and dug further, exploring and researching.

There was naturally no way little crane would let Su Zimo off.

However, it was embarrassed to create a ruckus inside Array Chamber where Su Zimo was hiding. Instead, it merely gloated internally. "Hmph, you can't hide in there forever!"

Su Zimo spent the next period of time on Array Peak.

Not only had he memorized all the Grade 1 formations in Array Chamber, he was now researching on Grade 2 formations.

As little crane was a spirit demon level beast, Su Zimo had to rely on the power of Grade 2 formations to suppress it.

Grade 1 formations could kill, trap or bewitch spirit beasts.

However, spirit demons were way stronger and could break through Grade 1 formations with sheer brute force!

Su Zimo spent less than a month to memorize and comprehend Grade 1 formations.

The reason why he progressed so quickly was because he was putting all of his effort and time into formations.

In the cultivation world, there weren't many people who would be this extreme.

However, Su Zimo was forced to a corner by little crane and could only use every single moment he had on learning about formations.

Compared to Grade 1 formations, Grade 2 were much more complex.

Su Zimo spent more than two months before he memorized and understood most of the Grade 2 formations.

Three months. He had spent a whole three months in Array Peak.

It was undeniable that Su Zimo was a smart person with a talented endowment. That was something that Die Yue had discovered when he first cultivated The Mystic Classic of the Twelve Demon Kings of the Great Wilderness.

Coupled with the pressure from little crane, Su Zimo's wholehearted efforts into learning about formations were rewarded handsomely.

There were two floors in the Array Chamber and the 2nd floor was filled with Grade 2 formation manuals with almost nobody around.

Because Su Zimo had spent his later two months on the 2nd floor of Array Chamber, most Array Peak disciples thought that he had left long ago and gradually forgot about him.

This morning, Su Zimo came forth from the Array Chamber.

The sun was a little piercing to his eyes after such a long time.

Standing in front of the Array Chamber, Su Zimo recalled everything he had learnt for the past three months before heading towards the Ten Formations Pagoda.

No matter how much he understood and knew about formations, he had to give it a test.

The Ten Formations Pagoda was the perfect test to determine where Su Zimo was after three months of formation studies.

On the pagoda's left was Array Peak's spirit arena. On its right, a tall stele etched with dense lines of words was erected.

The upper portion displayed names, the middle portion displayed the number of floors cleared and the final portion displayed the time taken.

Su Zimo glanced at it casually.

Because it was in the morning, there were no other trial disciples near the Ten Formations Pagoda. There was only an elderly person who was sitting upright with a stoic expression on his face, looking hale and hearty with vigor.