

### **Chapter 281 - Heavenly Meridians Prodigy**

The female instructor rubbed her eyes. Was she dreaming?

However, the child with extremely delicate facial features but a neutral expression was clearly at the third layer.

The other instructors were alarmed too, walking over to take a look. They saw Xiao An and looked at her like she was a monster as well. They were filled with disbelief.

According to the rules of the academy, children that could not develop a feeling of qi within three months would be expelled. Even if they managed to sense it, they would still have to remain here for three months and learn some basics, forbidden to make contact with the outside world.

Xiao An had originally been rather reluctant to stand out too much, but the thought of not being able to see him for three months immediately made her worried. This was a form of yearning, and it was even more unbearable than being burnt by fire.

As a result, only one choice was available before her, which was to complete the Innate Method of Practising Qi and reach the third layer as a Qi Practitioner. To her, this was nothing difficult.

The female instructor screeched, "That's impossible! She must have been hiding her cultivation."

In the history of the academy, there were geniuses who had managed to complete the Innate Method of Practising Qi within three months, but just how long did it take her? Two hours?

The other instructors all nodded. This was the most logical explanation. After three months, the child with the highest cultivation would receive a precious reward. Since she was in possession of something as precious as a communication ring, possessing a spiritual artifact that could hide her aura would be nothing strange at all. The person behind her wanted to use this method to get his hands on the reward, but he must have never expected children to be so simple-minded.

The female instructor called out, "How despicable. I was wondering how she could fool my eyes when she kicked that kid. Little liars like this should be severely punished and immediately expelled from the academy."

The large hall became noisy. The restless children just happened to be at the end of their patience with meditation, so they all opened their curious eyes now that something so interesting was going on. They began discussing among themselves, and some of them even gathered over slowly.

Only Xiao An remained as quiet as before, but a rare sliver of worry appeared on her face now. She said, "I'm going," before making her way out of the hall.

"Where do you think you're running off to?" The female instructor extended her hand sternly, kicking up a swift breeze. She wanted to teach her a proper lesson.

Xiao An looked back and clenched her fist.

“Stop!” A plump old man made his way over in just a few steps and grabbed the female instructor’s hand.

The female instructor said, “Professor, she...”

“There’s no need to say anything. I’ve heard it all.”

The instructors of the academy were all composed of disciples who could not afford the school fees but wanted to remain in the academy. Their cultivations were not necessarily higher than the disciples of the various schools. For example, the female instructor had only just overcome the major obstacle of the sixth layer.

Professors were equivalent to high level instructors. Their cultivations were even higher. The plump old man was at the ninth layer, and he was responsible for all the education on this island, guiding these children who were new to cultivation.

The plump, old man was a kind person. When he saw how she was about to lay her hands so heavily on such a cute little girl, he objected very much inside. “Let’s leave this up to the leaders of the schools!” Afterwards, he said to Xiao An kindly, “Little girl, can you lend me your hand?”

Xiao An nodded. She loosened her fist and raised her hand.

The plump old man gripped her thin wrist with three fingers and injected some true qi. At first, he was in doubt, but soon, he was overcome by shock. “T- this...”

The female instructor said, “She’s just a little liar!”

The plump old man barked, “Shut up!”

The female instructor shivered in fright. Even the other instructors rarely treated her so harshly, so they were taken aback. They wondered what he had discovered.

The plump old man ignored their doubts. He removed the jade tablet from his waist and injected it with true qi.

Just as Liu Zhangqing argued with everyone else over which school Chu Tian should belong to, the jade tablet on his waist flashed. He picked it up and touched it gently with a finger. The plump old man’s rather hoarse voice rang out, “Leader, a child has already reached the third layer.”

Liu Zhangqing frowned. “You’re kidding with me.”

“I’m not.”

“They must have hidden their cultivation!” Liu Zhangqing gave it a moment of thought and came to the most logical conclusion. However, being able to reach the third layer at such a young age was still quite rare. They might have possessed ill intentions, but it was still a pity, so just a slight punishment would do.

Right as he was about to order the plump old man to bring the child over, he heard the old man say, “It’s not that either.”

Every single person seated there had sharp senses. They all stopped bickering and looked over at Liu Zhangqing.

Liu Zhangqing asked impatiently, "Then what's going on?"

"I think... she's a Heavenly Meridians prodigy." The old man gulped, as if even he was not convinced.

Liu Zhangqing was momentarily stunned. He wanted to cover up the jade tablet, but it was already too late. The eyes of the various leaders all lit up like the eyes of wolves.

All Liu Zhangqing could do was continue asking, "Are you sure?"

The ears of all the leaders pricked up. Not only were they excited and eager, but they were also rather doubtful too. All of them had heard about Heavenly Meridians prodigies before, but none of them had seen one. That was even rarer than the Pure Yang and Five Elements constitutions.

"All eight extraordinary meridians, twelve standard meridians, and various acupoints are open," the plump old man uttered a total of twelve words, completely summarising a Heavenly Meridians prodigy.

The slovenly daoist priest immediately snatched over the controls for the Watermirror disc. The image changed, depicting a tiny island. The island enlarged rapidly, flying into their faces. The image passed through the golden-yellow eaves and landed on the old man. His expression was both stern and solemn. The image immediately moved over to Xiao An beside him, and the daoist priest cried out, "It's her!"

As a result, no more doubts existed anymore. The Watermirror disc had depicted her just earlier. Back then, she truly did not possess any auras befitting of a Qi Practitioner. There were no concealing spiritual artifacts that could fool the eyes of a group of Foundation Establishment cultivators. Even if a spiritual artifact like that did exist, it was not something a third layer Qi Practitioner kid could control.

She really was a Heavenly Meridians prodigy!

Everyone's expressions changed. Heavenly Meridians prodigies were born with connected meridians, allowing their true qi to circulate without any obstructions at all. Cultivating to the tenth layer would be a piece of cake for them. Another way to put it would be that their constitutions were similar to tenth layer Qi Practitioners who had lost all of their true qi. All they needed to do was fill it up with true qi again.

Most cultivators in the world would be stuck as Qi Practitioners forever. Even those in possession of the Pure Yang constitution and the Five Elements constitution required great effort to break through the bottlenecks one by one, climbing up step by step. However, Heavenly Meridians prodigies did not share this issue. Instead, the issue they faced from the very beginning was how to reach Foundation Establishment.

The Pure Yang constitution was more suited to the schools of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Meanwhile, although the Five Elements constitution did cover a larger range, at least it was not enough to interest the school of Yin-yang. However, all sects, schools, and clans would be interested in a Heavenly Meridians prodigy. No matter how aloof these leaders were, they would still roll up their sleeves, ready to contend with one another. If they won, then they would be winning over a Foundation Establishment cultivator at the very least.

They finally understood why Qiu Haitang had offered her that promise. She was enough for any sect or clan to support with all the resources they possessed.

Liu Zhangqing said, "Bring her to Contention island immediately and have her yin, yang, and five elements tested!"

"Yes!"

"And, that woman, whatever she's called, she's not suitable for guiding children. Send her back to Contention island for her to reflect on her actions!"

This time, even Wang Pushi agreed with the decision. What kind of dirty woman are you supposed to be? Is a Heavenly Meridians prodigy someone you can wrongly accuse?

Suddenly, he thought of something and secretly cursed Liu Zhangqing for his craftiness. He has been so loud on purpose, clearly wanting to ingratiate himself with the kid. No, I need to get little Hua to talk to Li Qingshan about this. Whether he can be promoted to a Scarlet Wolf will depend on his behaviour this time.

"Sir, sir!" The female instructor's cries rang out from the jade tablet. Through the Watermirror disc, they could all see her face turn sheet white the moment she heard Liu Zhangqing's decision.

Only Xiao An remained unfazed, which disappointed Liu Zhangqing slightly. Suddenly, he raised his head and looked at Wang Pushi. Sparks seemed to fly. The leaders of the schools all look at one another with hostility.

Clang! Clang! Clang! There were three resonant sounds.

In the corner of the room, an old man brimming with a rustic aura struck the ground three times with his smoking pipe, shaking out the ash.

The old man's face that was riddled with gullies was a brownish-yellow, as if he himself had been smoked. He wore a short, white gown as he half-sat, half-crouched on the chair. He seemed like an old farmer who had tended to the land his entire life, which made him stand out very much. Suddenly, his eyes swiveled, and the light and wisdom that flickered through them gave away his true identity, the leader of the school of Agriculturalism.

He was the oldest here, so old that no one knew exactly how old he was. Everyone showed some respect to him, and even the slovenly daoist priest was no exception. No one knew his original name anymore either. All they knew was that his surname was Huang, and he called himself earth elder Huang.

"Everyone, please calm down. It's just a Heavenly Meridians prodigy. Look at how startled you've become, losing your composure as leaders of schools." As earth elder Huang said that, he added a tobacco leaf to his pipe. Firelight flickered in the darkness, and the smell of smoke wafted out.

When he saw Yu Zijian or Chu Tian, he did not say a single word. Affairs involving humans were never constant. They would constantly fluctuate. He seemed to have grown accustomed to it, so he no longer placed much emphasis on it.

"Have you seen one before, elder?" Liu Zhangqing asked politely.

“Over two centuries ago, I did see one.”

“What about now?”

All of the leaders listened closely. Even the coldest out of all of them, Han Anjun, could not help but listen attentively. Just what had the Heavenly Meridians prodigy attained after two hundred years? They must have reached much more than Foundation Establishment, but if they did, they would not be a figure without renown, yet they had never heard of someone like this before.

Earth elder Huang let out a puff of smoke. “Now, I’m sitting here, and he has already been buried for a century.” He did not go into any more detail. The death of a nameless figure was not worth any more detail than that, no matter how great of a genius he was in the past.

The leaders all came to a realisation. Good talent bore no semblance on how far someone could make it. In particular, Wang Pushi lamented about this a lot. Back then, there were so many Qi Practitioners with better talent than him that he could not even count them all even if he had ten hands, but in the end, only he had made it so far.

They all could not help but sigh that experience came with age, and people would only grow firmer with age.

The Watermirror disc was still locked onto Xiao An. They would still contend against one another for her, but they had settled down.

Finally, the last Qi Practitioner had been tested. The instructors let out a yawn, about to take the Qi Practitioners to lunch.

Suddenly, a shuttle pierced through the sky. The plump old man got off with Xiao An, while behind them was the sunken female instructor. She was very dissatisfied, and she utterly refused to accept this. She was basically staring daggers at Xiao An, tempted to slice her up. However, the child never took her seriously the entire time.

At this moment, she felt a sharp gaze sweep past her face. She raised her head and saw a frosty young man staring at her with a frown, which made her shiver inside for some reason.

### **Chapter 282 - Mutual Promotion**

Li Qingshan’s senses for murderous auras and hostility were as sharp as they came, so how could he not notice her? If it were directed at him, he might have not cared, but since it was towards Xiao An, that was enough for him to kill her.

The female instructor saw how Li Qingshan was also a sixth layer Qi Practitioner, so she glared back to hold her ground. However, Li Qingshan’s gaze had already shifted over to Xiao An.

What she failed to notice was Qian Rongzhi’s gaze, as gentle as water, from within the crowd. There was no killing intent or hostility in there at all. Even if the female instructor saw it, she would find it very gentle.

“Xiao An, why have you come here?” Li Qingshan asked. Suddenly, he was taken aback. Hmm? The third layer?

Xiao An looked at Li Qingshan and immediately revealed a dazzling smile, throwing herself into his arms.

“What’s wrong? It has only been a morning since you last saw me. How did you reach the third layer?” Li Qingshan rubbed her head. He vaguely understood that this was probably due to the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty.

Even the plump old man could not bother to explain things. He knew the leaders were all watching, so he urged, “Get tested for your elemental affinity.”

Li Qingshan smiled. “This is good too. We can cultivate together. Go get tested!”

Under everyone’s watch, Xiao An made her way towards the formation. Most of the Qi Practitioners were bewildered. Why did a kid appear at the end, and why did the professor personally bring her here? Did she possess some powerful background? Though, she sure was impressive to have reached the third layer at such a young age.

No one imagined that she had still been a regular person in the morning, or at least she seemed like one. Even if someone thought of that, they would immediately dismiss this absurd idea.

“Isn’t that the child who follows Li Qingshan around? Called Xiao An or something? Didn’t she take part in the test for children?” Han Qiongzhi asked in surprise.

Hua Chengzan frowned. What was going on with this kid? The third layer? Was she hiding her strength? Aside from that, there were no better explanations. Suddenly, he thought of something. Don’t tell me?

“Brother Tian, look at that child. She’s so pretty!”

“I think we’ve seen her somewhere.”

Chu Tian just happened to be walking away while surrounded by a crowd. He also looked back in confusion? More people to be tested? What a waste of time. The Academy of the Hundred Schools should increase their requirements. Otherwise, even nobodies could study alongside him.

Xiao An stood in the centre of the formation. Looking at the ancient formation carved deep into the rock, she found it to be extremely familiar.

This sense of familiarity was even more intense than what Li Qingshan had experienced, but it was so sudden too. It was like an unexpected rogue wave slamming into her, releasing the remnants of a few memories.

She could not help but close her eyes. At some point in her past, she had stood in a similar formation as a delighted cry rang out in the surroundings, “Success!”

What success?

The formation let out an undetectable hum and suddenly lit up. The surroundings fell quiet. Everyone was slightly taken aback before bursting out with laughter.

“Talent like that sure is rare!”

Chu Tian laughed the loudest. “Don’t tell me that’s the Five Elements constitution too?”

Around Xiao An in the five corners of the formation flickered a smear of golden light, a tender grass shoot, a translucent droplet of water, and a pale yellow flame. The location for earth was just empty. Only at a closer glance could the hovering speck of dust be seen.

In the air above the formation, the light and darkness were so weak that it was almost invisible.

“All low ding?” The instructor responsible for recording the talents frowned. No, it should have been even lower than low ding. She did not possess any talent for the five elements, yin, or yang. If Chu Tian was a supreme genius, then she was supremely useless.

The plump old man sighed. The female instructor mocked, “Is this the Heavenly Meridians prodigy that the school leaders valued? I think she’s just a piece of trash!”

Li Qingshan glanced at her indifferently. There was no longer any murderous aura. There was no need for him to behave so viciously towards a dead person. He was not interested in why she was so hostile to Xiao An either.

His Xiao An was someone that even brother ox had praised as a genius.

The various school leaders were disappointed. Originally, they wanted to confirm which school Xiao An would belong to from her elemental affinity, but all of it was so low. This meant that her connection with the spiritual qi of the world was so weak that it was almost non-existent.

Sigh. It would have been fine if she had even average talent for any single attribute. No, even if it was mediocre, it would be fine. However, this was basically akin to possessing no talent at all. She would be alright as a Qi Practitioner, but Foundation Establishment required connecting with the spiritual qi of the world.

Liu Zhangqing shook his head with a soft sigh. “Can you call this both a blessing and a curse?”

Behind her supreme talent hid a tremendous flaw. It was not impossible to make up for her lack of elemental affinity, but the required resources were so tremendous and precious that probably only large sects like the Sword Collection palace or the Umbral Yin sect, or large clans like the provincial lord’s estate, could bear the costs of and produce. However, if they poured all of these resources into any regular Qi Practitioner, they could still produce a genius, so why did they have to spend it on her? The heavens were playing a huge, evil joke on her!

The various school leaders looked at earth elder Huang again. They found his foresight to be rather admirable. Prodigies could not be determined from a single aspect alone.

The old man continued to smoke his pipe, neither disappointed nor surprised.

Only the One Thought master brought his palms together and lowered his head, acting like he was taking pity on her. His lips curled into a mysterious smile. It’s all the buddha’s arrangements!

“This can’t be right!” The man in coarse clothing with a long hat muttered with a frown. As the leader of the school of Yin-yang, Ma Buyi’s understanding of yin, yang, and the five elements completely surpassed the other school leaders. Born into the world, humans were created from yin, yang, and the five elements in the first place. Even regular people should not have been in possession of such poor talent.

“Child, you can come out from there now,” the plump old man said kindly.

Xiao An kept her eyes shut, without moving at all.

A woman’s cold voice rang out in her ears from the depths of her heart. “Do you understand the use of this formation now? Show me!”

She muttered with an almost indiscernible voice, “Yes, queen mother!”

“What did you say?” asked the plump old man.

Li Qingshan could sense there was something off about Xiao An. He took a few steps forward, wanting to pull Xiao An out.

The formation suddenly began to operate, shining with light.

The translucent droplet of water flew towards the tender grass shoot. The shoot began to grow, turning into a sapling in the blink of an eye. Just as the sapling thrived and budded, a spark landed on it, turning into a roaring fire.

The sapling was burnt to ashes, scattering as countless specks of dust, which were drawn over to the tiny speck of dust. They turned into a black piece of soil. Glimmers of golden light appeared in the soil, gaining a smear of gold.

Afterwards, the droplet of water appeared again, turning into a gurgling stream and wrapping around dead wood. It sprouted and grew once more.

The fire was unable to burn it all away. It sprouted once again in the spring wind.

At the same time, the two specks of light and darkness merged together above the formation, constantly revolving around one another. They would swell in size with each rotation, growing to the size of fists in the blink of an eye. The light and darkness were completely different, yet they also merged together without any repulsion. It looked like a diagram of yin and yang from all perspectives.

The instructor recording the affinities and talent was stunned. “All of the elements have reached high ding, no, bing!”

The Qi Practitioners in the surroundings had already become dumbfounded. Wasn’t this a testing formation? Since when could it be used like this?

“The five elements are promoting one another, and yin and yang are growing mutually. How is this possible?” Ma Buyi’s eyes widened as he leapt to his feet.

Liu Zhangqing frowned. “Fellow Ma, what is going on?”

“Do you know the full name of this formation?” Ma Buyi’s breathing became rather ragged.

The school leaders were all stumped. With their knowledge and experience, they even knew about a few rare, strange formations if they were asked, but they just happened to be at quite a loss regarding the name of this formation. Wasn’t this just the formation used to test elemental affinities?



The slovenly daoist priest asked, "Is it the Mutual Promotion and Regulation Formation of Yin, Yang, and the Five Elements?"

Ma Buyi said, "Exactly. Daoist brother, you truly are knowledgeable. Do you know what the true usage of this formation is?"

Even the slovenly daoist priest was rather stumped this time. Apart from testing affinities, what else was it for?

Ma Buyi said, "The cultivation methods of ancient cultivators have all been about practising yin, yang, and the five elements together. You all know that, right?"

The so-called supernatural powers in the ancient times was a power that merged together yin, yang, and the five elements. It allowed them to use any technique freely, with extraordinary power and infinite flexibility. However, the difficulty of cultivation and the requirement on the cultivator's talent was unimaginable to cultivators of the present day. Only a very small number of people could grasp it. If they used the standards of the ancient times as a requirement on present day cultivators, then it would be quite impressive if the academy was left with around a hundred or so people.

In order to fight their enemies, ancient cultivators gained inspiration from their enemies, the daemons and the otherfolk, constantly improving the path of cultivation. That was why the cultivation method of practising just a single element of true qi existed in the present day. Although it decreased the overall quality of cultivators, it multiplied the number of cultivators by hundreds or thousands of times, which allowed the establishment of human supremacy.

The various leaders nodded. This could be regarded as the basic history of the cultivation world. Suddenly, they seemed to understand something, and they looked into the Watermirror disc.

A startling transition occurred in the formation.

The tree had already been burnt to ashes over a dozen times by the fire, but under the nourishment of water and earth, it had become a lush forest. A river parted the thick soil, winding through the forest as specks of gold glimmered in the river water.

They were unable to spot Xiao An in there anymore. They would only be able to catch a glimpse of her when the flames rose up and burned down everything again. The yin and yang had vanished too. They merged with every spark and every part of the tree shade, pushing and pulling, fluctuating between yin and yang.

The five elements no longer stood alone. Instead, they had merged together, like a living world. It seemed like the birth of the universe as primitive creation unfolded.

"They're all yi," the note-taking instructor murmured. He no longer knew what to say. Although they were all yi, anyone could tell that this was even rarer than Chu Tian's complete jia. And, the yin, yang, and five elements were still growing. Reaching jia was just a matter of time.

"That's right. This formation was created for ancient cultivators to practise cultivation. Practising yin, yang, and the five elements together requires you to understand the changes and transformations within interpromotion and interregulation. It's both a method of cultivation and a very popular game

among ancient cultivators, a game forgotten by people,” Ma Buyi uttered by himself. His gaze made him seem like he was reminiscing, but also sighing, about the past.

### **Chapter 283 - Contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought**

Testing elemental affinity was just a secondary function of the formation, but to cultivators of the present day, this was the only function that they knew about. Many formation scrolls even simplified the formation’s original core, only leaving behind the function of testing elemental affinity.

However, the formation engraved into the rock on Contention island had several thousand years of history. It was a complete formation passed down since ancient times. Its size and complexity was nothing like the formation Li Qingshan originally believed it was, only able to test elements simultaneously.

Today, Xiao An unleashed its long-forgotten function.

Everyone was dumbfounded. Originally, they thought they had already seen a supreme prodigy, and they would not become shocked again.

But now, just what was a prodigy? Watching this sight that completely exceeded their imaginations and understanding unfold, they could not even develop any jealousy anymore.

Liu Zhangqing asked again, “Then what is her talent for yin, yang, and the five elements?”

Ma Buyi glanced at him. He could not be bothered with answering him. He continued to stare at the Watermirror disc as his gaze made him seem rather crazed.

Right from the very beginning, the child had not been using the formation’s low level function of testing elemental affinity. Instead, she had been conjuring the transition between yin, yang, and the five elements, which was why she needed to start with their weakest forms, which were the droplet of water and tiny grass shoot in other words. As for her talent, it would depend on how far she could go with this process.

Her talent would never be lower than the level she had conjured. As a matter of fact, it should have been much higher than that, which was why she could accomplish it so skillfully and easily. What she demonstrated right now was no longer talent, but capability, unmatched capability.

Ma Buyi took off his long hat and lowered his head to the ground. “Everyone. Today, I, Ma Buyi, have only a single request, which is for this child to join my school of Yin-yang. If you have any requests in the future, I will oblige to all of them.”

The various leaders were shocked. Among them, Ma Buyi was not as unruly as the slovenly daoist priest, but he was still known for how proud he was. He was like an ancient reclusive cultivator, standing proud and aloof from the world.

However, no one would offend him because of this, as he was skilled in the art of divination. Everyone had a moment when they required his abilities, but when did he ever request others with such humility?

Everyone in the world knew that the school of Yin-yang was proficient in divination, but Ma Buyi did not take pride in that. In the ancient times, even third-rate cultivators could divine the good and the bad. The school of Yin-yang was the remnants of ancient cultivators. Ancient cultivators focused on

omnipotence and being capable at everything, so divination was only one of the aspects they had to be proficient in.

However, when compared to the other schools that focused on a single aspect, they no longer seemed very proficient in those aspects anymore. In the end, only divination alone became the special art of the school of Yin-yang, which they became renowned for, and it was exactly because it required the powers of yin, yang, and the five elements as a foundation.

Whether it be Yu Zijian's Pure Yang constitution or Chu Tian's Five Elements constitution, neither of them were unable to interest him, as the school of Yin-yang required balance. From a certain perspective, the designation of genius in the ancient times differed tremendously from the present day.

However, if it was this child instead, then she would definitely be able to unleash the true glory of the ancient cultivation methods of the school of Yin-yang.

The various school leaders were silent. None of them could give up on this child so easily.

As the tree turned into a forest, and the stream turned into a river...

"They're all jia! Mid jia! High jia!" The instructor constantly changed his evaluation.

When he uttered the words high jia, there was a boom, and the scene on the formation exploded loudly, turning into seven different colours and returning back to the original yin, yang, and five elements.

Only Xiao An was left standing in the formation. Her expression was slightly lost. Everything that unfolded earlier felt like a dream.

Whether it was to her, or to the others.

The process she conjured had already reached the limits that the formation could endure, like how a rubik's cube would lose its function as a challenge or a game to a professional speedcuber.

Li Qingshan rushed over in a hurry. "Are you alright?"

The various leaders all looked at one another. Their gazes were not as simple as mere hostility anymore. Instead, there was utmost determination to win her over without any room for compromise.

"Namo Amitābha," the One Thought master, who had remained silent the entire time, suddenly chanted the buddha's name. His voice was like the morning bell, the thunderous roar of a lion. It was forcefully and resonant. "This child has a destiny with the buddha. Please do not compete with this lowly monk, everyone."

"I knew you'd say that, you damned bald ass," said the slovenly daoist priest.

The One Thought Master said urgently, "There really is destiny this time!" Just as everyone had been disappointed by Xiao An's talent for yin, yang, and the five elements earlier, only he had secretly celebrated. Finally, there was no need for him to contend with anybody.

He could see a clear, buddha's light from Xiao An that even the transitions and processes unfolding in the formation could not hide. Never had he seen such a clear root of wisdom and buddhist nature in the eyes of a child.

But this time, the arrangements of the buddha seemed to be quite unexpected.

Han Anjun said coldly, "So they were just the falsehoods of a buddhist monk earlier? I could see earlier that her kick to the little fatty was accurate, precise, and vicious, very much like the demeanour of my school of the Military's wind, forest, fire, and mountain."

TL: You may be somewhat familiar with the Japanese name of wind, forest, fire, and mountain—fūrinkazan. It's derived from Sun Tzu's Art of War, popularised by Takeda Shingen. It basically means "as swift as wind, as gentle as forest, as fierce as fire, as unshakable as mountain," which are concepts that should be applied to warfare.

"Women should be well-versed in the themes of romance, accompanied by poems and books. How can you let her become a nun and tend to statues of buddhas? Or a new recruit in the military, bleeding and sweating in the army? I think there is no school apart from my school of Confucianism that can handle someone with such great talent." Liu Zhangqing gave up on maintaining his gentle, modest, and courteous demeanour as he specifically targeted them.

With a bang, the slovenly daoist priest kicked over the long table before him. The alcohol jugs and cups scattered over the floor, making quite the ruckus.

"Whoever dares to contend for Xiao An against me better be ready to try what this great daoist is capable of first."

The One Thought master pulled his robes apart, revealing sturdy pectoral muscles that completely contrasted against his original appearance. He roared, "Hey! You ox nose, I've endured you for long enough now! Do you really think my school of Buddhism is actually incapable of dealing with you?"

"Heh, you bald ass. I've grown tired of you a long time ago. Let's settle this today!"

TL: Bald ass and ox nose go hand in hand as insults to buddhist monks and daoist priests respectively. I'd say this is something to keep in mind.

Bald ass originates from the fact that buddhist monks often lead a donkey around when travelling for alms and for developing good karma, and there are a lot of these monks that dirty the name of buddhists by stealing, tricking, or just forcefully begging for alms. As a result, when local people spotted these monks, they would call out, "Run! The bald-headed person leading an ass is coming!" Gradually, it turned into bald ass.

The origin of ox nose is a little more complicated. A major deity in Daoism, Laozi, was said to have left China after riding through Hanggu pass on a black ox. After he became a deity, the black ox became an immortal ox too, which later people joked that it was being led around by the nose by "Laozi". Laozi's mount in Daoism also happens to be the black ox he rode on. The reason why it's an insult is because although the ox became an immortal ox, it was still a mere animal, a beast.

The two of them pulled away from one another. The leaders of the minor schools could not help but stand up and chime in with their own thoughts at the same time, even though they knew it should have been impossible for them to contend against the major schools.

"With the mechanisms and puppets of the school of Mohism, she can rival millions alone..."

“Practising medicine to save people is the duty of the school of Medicine...”

“If she doesn’t learn music theory, it’s basically a pity that she’s born as a woman in the first place...”

Their original solemnity and respectfulness immediately descended into a noisy mess, no different from a vegetable market. The instructors awaiting orders outside were all stunned. If they began fighting inside, they would all end up as unwitting sacrifices.

“Writing novels is pretty good too!” From a corner, a middle-aged man said timidly. He sat in the corner the entire time, without emitting a peep of sound. Now, he finally could not help himself anymore.

The room suddenly fell silent. All of their gazes gathered on him. They were as stern as knives as murderous aura gathered like dark clouds.

The middle-aged man immediately broke out in a cold sweat. “I- I’m just saying...”

The arguments continued. The middle-aged man exhaled deeply. He was utterly dejected.

The One Thought master had already revealed the shredded upper half of his body, maintaining a fierce glare.

The slovenly daoist provoked loudly, “Bald ass, come at me! This great daoist will give you a handicap of three moves!”

“Hell of Ice!” Wang Pushi erupted.

The leaders all felt a frosty wind sweep over. It was grim and bleak, as mighty as hell itself.

The room immediately went from warm spring to the middle of winter. Even a layer of ice appeared. Everyone could not help but stop arguing and look at Wang Pushi.

“Everyone, please calm down. Do not lose your composure as the leaders of schools. Have you all forgotten what old brother Huang said earlier?”

From the beginning till the end, only the calm, old man remained silent, sitting there peacefully. It made them all slightly embarrassed.

“Old brother Huang, what do you think-” Wang Pushi paused. Unexpectedly, the earth elder Huang that sat there smoking his pipe was just an earthen figure. If he had not used the Hell of Ice, even he would have failed to notice that.

They all suddenly turned their heads and looked into the Watermirror disc.

Earth elder Huang currently stood before Xiao An with an amiable smile. He seemed to be chattering endlessly to her. He even fished out a handful of peanuts for her.

“That fucker! It’s the Earthen Substitute and Ground Contraction!” The slovenly daoist priest cursed aloud.

In the hands of earth elder Huang, these two earth elemented techniques could create wonders. None of the Foundation Establishment cultivators actually managed to sense anything. Sure enough, people grew craftier with age!

## Chapter 284 - Destiny with the Buddha

Xiao An walked out of the formation in confusion. The surroundings were hazy as the sounds seemed distant before gradually clearing up.

She could clearly see Li Qingshan's concerned face and clearly hear his worried voice. "Xiao An! Xiao An!" Gradually, she eased up again, and the remnants from the depths of her memories settled once more. She revealed a smile.

The surroundings had fallen dead silent. The female instructor was pale-white. She understood just how much trouble she was in this time. The child was much more complicated than she seemed.

With the limelight stolen away from him, Chu Tian said, "There's nothing impressive about that. If I wanted to, I could do that too."

The instructors responsible for guiding the Qi Practitioners returned to their senses. It seemed to be time for them to take everyone to go eat.

An old man with a face full of wrinkles appeared out of nowhere. He said gently, "You must be Xiao An!"

Li Qingshan shivered inside. He felt an aura as heavy as the ground itself from the old man. A Foundation Establishment cultivator!

The instructors bowed in a hurry. "Sir school leader, what brings you here?" They too had seen quite a few prodigies stand out during the elemental affinity test, but the various schools would only begin their contention over these prodigies once the tests were complete. Never had the leader of a school appeared at a time like this, let alone the fact that it was earth elder Huang, the most composed out of the leaders of the schools.

Earth elder Huang completely ignored the others. His eyes remained fixed on Xiao An. He bore the special, amiable smile that a senior would show to a junior, treating her with great warmth. He became more satisfied with her the more he looked at her.

"Come, try this. I planted it myself." He reached into his hundred treasures pouch and pulled out a great handful of peanuts, directly shoving them into Xiao An's hand.

Han Qiongzhi was stunned. Since when was this old man so generous? He was actually giving away the spiritual fruits he had tended to in his garden with great effort over several years.

Xiao An raised her head and glanced at Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan could also see the spiritual energy within the handful of peanuts. There were at least ten times more powerful than pills like Qi Gathering pills. The benefits offered by a Foundation Establishment cultivator would probably come with greater costs than what met the eye.

Hua Chengzan shook his head with a bitter smile instead. Earth elder Huang was known to be as patient and settled as the earth. Never had he seen the earth elder behave in such an urgent manner throughout his time in the academy. But clearly, this child was enough for earth elder Huang to behave like that.

He considered himself to be a prodigy, but in that moment, he could only acknowledge her superior talent. No wonder Haitang wanted her regardless of the cost.

Just, just what are the origins of this child?

“Senior, please tell me what you want my Xiao An to do! Please be straightforward!”

Only at this moment did earth elder Huang seemingly notice Li Qingshan. Under the radiance of a supreme prodigy, not only did others pale, but even their presence seemed to become non-existent.

“This is the leader of the school of Agriculture, earth elder Huang. Why don’t you greet him?”

“Greet my ass!” A voice erupted. The person was still extremely far away when they uttered the first word, but they had already arrived nearby by the last. The slovenly daoist priest roared at earth elder Huang, “Old brother Huang, where’s your composure as a school leader?”

“The entrance examination still hasn’t ended. This isn’t in accordance with the rule of the academy,” Liu Zhangqing said in a sunken manner. Clearly, he was unhappy with being played.

Earth elder Huang took a puff of smoke. “I already have a foot in the grave, so does respect mean anything to me at all? As for rules, they’re set by humans.” He looked back, and his face became amiable again. “Child, as long as you join my school of Agriculture, you can eat these kinds of fruit whenever you want. What do you think?”

“The school of Agriculture?” Liu Zhangqing snickered. He removed a twin fish jade tablet from his waist. It flickered with light, actually a supreme grade spiritual artifact. He said nothing, but the disdain on his face explained everything by itself. Move aside, you broke ass. Intellectuals aren’t so easy to just walk over.

Earth elder Huang snorted out of anger too, emitting a stream of smoke from his nostrils. However, his gaze towards Xiao An only became even more amiable and kind.

“The school of the Military is about certain success when attacking, certain victory when fighting, about wind, forest, mountain, and fire, about invincibility.” Han Anjun would produce a great quake with each step, making the ground shake. The bearing he gave off made him seem like an entire army.

“The path you must walk must be one of the ancient cultivators. Please listen as I explain the reason in detail...” Ma Yuyi said with great sincerity, but why would anyone let him explain in detail?

“Namo Amitābha. Child, you have destiny with the buddha. Really. Buddhism monks don’t tell falsehoods.”

.....

The slovenly daoist priest stamped his foot. “It’s all bullsh\*t!” But now, no matter how loudly he cursed, no one paid anymore attention to him.

In the blink of an eye, the various leaders of the schools appeared one by one. Perhaps cold, perhaps amiable, or perhaps violent, the various powerful auras clashed on the square with great intensity. Their only target was Xiao An.

The school leaders embroiled in a contest as they constantly increased the benefits they could offer, describing the better future they could grant to her. At that moment, just the supreme grade spiritual artifacts that Li Qingshan saw were several in number. He also heard quite a few glorious deeds and stories regarding the accomplished seniors of the various schools.

Unfortunately, this contest did not last for too long. It quickly devolved into a war of pulling the rug and digging up dirt.

“Tending to the statues of buddhas and passing her later years in solitude? Master, do you really plan on destroying her life?” Liu Zhangqing said tersely.

“Child, this sir Liu has over a dozen concubines, and he even visits brothels regularly.” The One Thought master spoke the slovenly daoist priest’s mind, launching this verbal trump card.

The corner of Liu Zhangqing’s eye twisted.

“The school of Confucianism is full of hypocrites!” “The school of Yin-yang is completely useless!” The school of Agriculture is full of bumpkins!” The school of Military warps human nature!” All of these abuses that they had kept repressed in their hearts erupted.

A while later, the eyes of the various school leaders all reddened from anger.

The One Thought master unfurled the monk robes he had just put on again, revealing the ripped upper half of his body.

Li Qingshan stood beside Xiao An, so he was also surrounded by them all. He felt uncomfortable. Were these the leaders of the various schools? Sure enough, they were each stronger than the last, but their demeanour was horrid. They were like a group of wretched hounds fighting for food.

Yet, it just so happened that he could not even rival any of these wretched hounds.

The Qi Practitioners that were relatively closer were all pressured by the aura. They all staggered backwards before directly collapsing on their bottoms.

Everyone was dumbfounded. Just what was going on?

Wu Gen said, “Brother Hua, what are we supposed to do?”

Hua Chengzan’s responsibility was to maintain order during the entrance examination, but all he could do was shake his head when confronted with this group of disorderly people. “Let them be!”

Xiao An glanced at Li Qingshan again.

“Li Qingshan! Do you still remember me?” A desolate coldness descended. Li Qingshan suddenly turned around. “Old- commander Wang!”

Wang Pushi stood with his arms crossed nearby. He did not partake in the contest. He walked over.

Li Qingshan’s impression was that this Scarlet Hawk commander did not seem to be on particularly good terms with him. He knew the reason for this extremely well too. Although knowing the reason was completely useless, he still raised his guard.



Wang Pushi patted his shoulder firmly and laughed aloud. "Impressive, kid! It has been so long since I last saw you, and you've already reached the sixth layer! I haven't misjudged you!"

Li Qingshan grinned. You haven't misjudged me? You'd better think about why again.

"This is enough for you to be promoted to Scarlet Wolf guard. As long as you cultivate a little in the school of Legalism, there's a great chance for you to become the future Scarlet Wolf commander too!"

"Thank you for your care and concern, commander Wang. I'll definitely work hard so that I don't let you down, commander!" If Li Qingshan still could not tell what he was hinting at, there was no point in him living for so long anymore.

Wang Pushi chuckled inside. This time, it's me, old Wang, who has gained the advantage.

The school leaders immediately responded. They looked at Li Qingshan together. Dammit, how did we forget about how the child was brought here by this kid? She'll definitely listen to an adult like him with how young she is!

The slovenly daoist priest tried to save the situation in a hurry. "You have to think about it clearly!"

The One Thought master said, "Exactly."

As the various gazes landed on him, Li Qingshan immediately felt the pressure multiply. He sighed gently and crouched down, asking Xiao An, "Are there any schools you want to go to?"

"I want to stick with you!" Xiao An ignored the gazes in the surroundings and said gently.

Wang Pushi smiled even wider. According to the rules, no one could forcefully interfere as long as this child had made her decision. Even if they wanted to interfere, they would have to ask him, Wang Pushi, first. Moreover, there was the Hawkwolf Guard behind him.

Li Qingshan smiled. "That'll be a little difficult. You know I can't handle those buddhist scriptures!" He stood up, brought his hands together, and bowed. "One Thought master, just as you have said, Xiao An has a destiny with the buddha. Please accept her into the school of Buddhism to cultivate!"

From a certain perspective, the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty was a buddhist ability. She constantly read the various buddhist scriptures and sutras to deepen her understanding of this ability. Now that this opportunity had presented itself, he obviously could not let her miss it. In her hands, even the Strength Talisman of the Guardian Kings would be unleashed with extraordinary power, so if she learnt even more greater buddhist techniques, just how powerful would they become?

And, during the contest earlier, the conditions that the One Thought master had offered were extremely impressive in order to express his sincerity. As her guardian, he had to choose a path most suitable for her.

The One Thought master was slightly surprised before ravishing in joy. Originally, he thought there was no chance for him to succeed. The school of Buddhism was one of the better major schools within the academy, but they were nowhere close to the schools of Confucianism and Legalism in terms of the number of disciples they possessed. Their numbers paled in comparison to their old rival, the school of Daoism, too.

After all, most people possessed various kinds of desires, with young people in particular. Just how many people were willing to follow the precepts, rendering all vanities void to comprehend the unsurpassable buddhist dharma? Not to mention that Xiao An was still a little girl, which made the chances of success even more meagre.

But never did he imagine that the tables would turn in the end, giving him what he wished for. He brought his hands together and bowed back at Li Qingshan. "Indeed, indeed. Sir, your wisdom truly blazes like a lantern. She does possess a destiny with the buddha. This is not a lie. Everything follows the buddha's arrangements."

Li Qingshan thought, If the buddha really knew about Xiao An's existence, he'd probably slay her in the very first instant. He saw how Xiao An frowned rather unhappily, so he comforted her and said, "Don't be like that. We'll both be in the academy. We'll have plenty of chances to see one another."

Xiao An would never object to him, and she also knew that he did this for her sake, so she nodded gently. "Alright."

The One Thought master smiled in relief. It was all over now. "Sirs, thank you for going easy on me!"

Wang Pushi's complexion immediately coldened, turning into a face without mercy. He shot a glare towards Li Qingshan sternly before leaving in a flash.

Li Qingshan understood that it would be rather difficult to be promoted now.

### **Chapter 285 - The Guardian King's Pearl**

The other school leaders were all disappointed. They either rode off on clouds or strode through the air. Just like how they had come, they vanished in the blink of an eye.

In the end, only Ma Buyi remained behind. He let out a deep sigh and said to Xiao An, "Since you've already chosen, there's nothing that I can say. However, the gates to the school of Yin-yang are open to you at all times! Contention is not all that exists among the hundred schools. They also exchange their thoughts with one another, accepting any and all. The One Thought master shouldn't mind this."

"Just like what the fellow has said, the hundred schools all have their own specialties, and they don't hoard it all to themselves like those sects in the wilderness. If you're interested, Xiao An, you are most welcomed to listen in on school leader Ma's teachings. You'll definitely benefit from it." The One Thought master recovered his usual, cultivated manner. Since Xiao An had joined the school of Buddhism, she would just be a knowledgeable disciple of the school of Buddhism even if she learned from the other schools; this was already set in stone. No one could change this anymore.

Ma Buyi nodded. He glanced at Xiao An once more reluctantly before riding away on the wind.

The One Thought master revealed a smile. The smile gradually grew wider before he suddenly laughed aloud. He said to Xiao An, "Child, come with me!"

Li Qingshan said, "There are still tests in the afternoon."

The One Thought master waved his hand. "There's no need to waste any time on them. An afternoon is enough for her to grasp the basics of the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual."

If there were other disciples of buddhism here, they would definitely develop jealousy, which would in turn affect their cultivation. The Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual was a secret method rarely ever passed to others. Not only did it require an extremely firm foundation in buddhism, but it would normally only be passed onto someone after they had undergone various tests. She was practising the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual right off the bat. It truly was quite the starting point.

"Buddhist monks tell no lies. I'll give this Guardian King's pearl to you as a gift to welcome you to the school of Buddhism. This can summon a guardian king to protect you. It complements the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual. It will bring great benefits to your cultivation."

The One Thought master took out a golden pearl from his hundred treasures pouch. As it glimmered with light, a glaring guardian king was vaguely visible. From how impressively it shone, it was a true supreme grade spiritual artifact. He erased his imprint casually and passed it to Xiao An.

Everyone was thrown into an uproar. Everyone knew what a supreme grade spiritual artifact was worth. When they saw how the school leaders competed against one another with supreme grade spiritual artifacts up for offer, they had already been extremely shocked. Now that the One Thought master had actually taken out a supreme grade spiritual artifact, they had no idea how to respond. They could not even develop any jealousy. Most Qi Practitioners would never obtain supreme grade spiritual artifacts in their entire lives.

Li Qingshan sighed with amazement too. Choosing to come to the Academy of the Hundred Schools truly was the correct decision. They had obtained a supreme grade spiritual artifact for free from just showing up. It had to be mentioned that right now, only the Cursive Sword Calligraphy in his possession barely counted as a supreme grade spiritual artifact. Although he could expect it to grow stronger in the future, it was probably not as effective as this Guardian King's pearl right now.

Xiao An accepted the Guardian King's pearl, and her mind shuddered. The set of white bones condensed from the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty that hovered within her flesh jolted slightly. She reacted mysteriously to this uncommon buddhist spiritual artifact.

The Guardian King's pearl flashed, and a six meter tall guardian king immediately appeared around her. Whether it be the crown on its head or the vajra in its hand, they were both extremely detailed. Its expression was filled with fury, and it seemed life-like, enough to frighten anyone.

Note: A vajra is a ritual weapon in Buddhism, which symbolises both indestructibility and unstoppable.

Li Qingshan thought, The power of supreme grade spiritual artifacts truly is startling.

The One Thought master was astounded too. Supreme grade spiritual artifacts needed to be refined before use. Never could anyone use it the moment it entered their hands, and it was all the more impossible with Xiao An's third layer cultivation.

And, while he did erase his imprint, it was not cleanly removed—a faint connection still remained. Xiao An needed to remove this completely if she wanted to use the Guardian King pearl as she wished.

But earlier, he clearly sensed that the residual imprint had immediately vanished the moment the Guardian King pearl entered Xiao An's hands; it was like a capable scholar meeting a wise lord, like a

beauty meaning a romantic, immediately discarding everything and throwing themselves into their embrace, casting aside their old master like an old shoe.

Xiao An stowed the Guardian King pearl away and bowed slightly, expressing her thanks.

The One Thought master smiled bitterly. Despite his cultivation, he actually felt worried that he would not be able to guide or control this child. He said, "Sir Li, if you're interested, you're welcome to cultivate in my school of Buddhism too." With the One Thought master's status, this was a gesture of great courtesy.

Li Qingshan smiled. "Thank you master, but in my life, I never cultivated goodness, relishing only murder and arson. If I join buddhism, I'll probably just disturb the peace of buddhism. I'd better find a different path!" His oath was to travel the world with fine alcohol in his hands and beauty in his arms. He was unable to learn buddhist methods of how to eliminate his desires and cleanse his heart, nor did he want to learn.

"In your life, you never cultivated goodness, relishing only murder and arson." The One Thought master frowned and repeated that before glancing at Li Qingshan deeply again. "This sounds extremely vulgar at first, but if you think about it closely, it also seems to be allegorical. You have a destiny with the buddha. You might not achieve instantaneous enlightenment today, but it may come to you in the days that lie ahead. Xiao An, let's go!"

Li Qingshan was secretly filled with admiration. Originally, this had been uttered by the Flowery Monk, Lu Zhishen, as he passed away in meditation. "In my life, I never cultivated goodness, relishing only murder and arson. Suddenly, my golden shackles have been opened; here, my jade locks have been pulled asunder. Alas! Hereby the river tide cometh, now I finally realise that I am what I am!"

Note: Lu Zhishen is a character from Water Margin, who became a buddhist monk throughout the story, but never actually bothered with any buddhist practises. He attains instantaneous enlightenment right before death.

He had replied with this absentmindedly, as if something was at work. As for whether destiny actually existed or not, that would be up to destiny!

Xiao An tugged Li Qingshan's sleeve, looking at him, reluctant to part with him. Originally, she wanted to cultivate with him, which was why she did all of that to come here, so why were they separating again?

Li Qingshan's heart softened. He crouched down and promised her. "Just go with the One Thought master and cultivate well. Once I'm done here, I'll come find you."

Only then did Xiao An nod, releasing his sleeve.

The One Thought master watched all of this unfold as he sighed inside. For those who studied buddhism, a rudimentary grasp was monkhood, renouncing all worldly ties and pursuits. Being so attached to a certain person was not good. However, there was no need for him to worry either. At the end of the day, she was still just a child. It would all be resolved once she grew a little older.

The young man was rather talented, but he lacked the strength to stand beside her. Before long, their cultivations, identities, and statuses would completely pull them apart into two different worlds; this

could not be changed by anyone's willpower. In the future, he would just be an acquaintance of hers at most.

The One Thought master said, "This monk bids farewell." He placed his hand on Xiao An's shoulder and took a step forward, disappearing promptly.

Li Qingshan turned around and returned to the crowd. They all looked at him in respect, and it was not because of who he was. Even idiots could tell that the child called Xiao An had a limitless future ahead of her. With how close he was to her, he achieved glory too.

Hua Chengzan had sunken into his thoughts too. She had made him take good care of Li Qingshan, but he had never imagined the child would be even more surprising. Foundation Establishment was just a matter of time for her, so he had to establish a good relationship with Xiao An. Probably even she had failed to see this!

He glanced at Yu Zijian nearby before glancing at Chu Tian in the crowd. These geniuses rarely ever appeared even across several generations, but this time, there were three of them, each more impressive than the last.

As it seemed, the Clear River prefecture's Academy of the Hundred Thoughts would be welcoming a period of great glory among the academies of the nine prefectures in the Ruyi commandery. He, a former prodigy, would dim in their brilliance. He could not help but feel very pressured.

Han Qiongzhi had the least self-control. She rushed over to Li Qingshan. "Just who is the child to you?"

Li Qingshan said proudly, "My only family!" Regardless of what other people were thinking, her glory was also his glory.

At this moment, the plump old man seemed to receive some order, and he arrived before the sheet-white female instructor who was at a loss as for what to do. He said sternly, "With your character, you are not suited to the job of an instructor. From this moment onwards, you are dismissed from the academy. Go back and pack your things!"

This order did not come from the One Thought master, but the leader of the school of Confucianism, Liu Zhangqing. The other leaders had no objections to this either. A supreme prodigy was about to rise up in the Academy of the Hundred Schools of the Clear River prefecture, so they could not allow her to develop any ill will towards the academy. As a result, the female instructor's punishment had to be severe.

The female instructor turned even paler. Originally, she wanted to find an opportunity to expel Xiao An from the academy, but never did she imagine it would end up with her dismissal instead. She screeched, "I re--"

The plump old man cut her off sternly. "This is for your sake!"

The female instructor trembled. She was bitter, not stupid. She understood what would await her. Even if she disregarded the consequences of disobeying the school leaders, just the child alone would become a great figure that she could not afford to offend if she was given a few years' time. By then, if she remembered this grievance of the past, just the slightest revenge would be a great calamity to her. The

best thing she could do right now was to quickly vanish from her view and hope that she would not remember her again.

She immediately stomped her foot before storming off. She thought, Just you wait! I will get revenge! However, even she felt like she did not have much of a chance. It was mainly to dismiss the fear in her heart.

Of course, no one knew that Xiao An basically had no concept on these principles of how people treated one another, unless it involved Li Qingshan. She did not feel any anger or hatred at all.

Afterwards, under the lead of the instructors, the group arrived before a building. A forest wrapped around it, making it extremely tranquil. They could smell a special fragrance from afar.

Li Qingshan raised his head and saw the three large words of “Hundred Flavours Restaurant.” He could not help but think about how he had once eaten in the Hundred Flavours restaurant below the Green Vine mountain. As it turned out, the origin of the place was here. That night, he had heard that the Town of Flowing Clouds would be opening again for the entrance examination. Where was it located?

Li Qingshan’s question was answered very quickly, as after a meal in the Hundred Flavours restaurant, the next stop was the Town of Flowing Clouds. It was more than enough for him to witness the close relationship between the Academy of the Hundred Schools and the town. At the very least, the school of Miscellany would not be missing this opportunity to make some spiritual stones.

The town was located in an empty spot on the south-western shore of the island. Although it was in a different place now, the structure was exactly the same as when it was below the Green Vine mountain.

The instructor clapped his hands in front of the gates to the town. “Everyone, you have some free time here now. Please consider which school you plan on enrolling in and make some preparations for the upcoming tests. Please do not leave the town.” Afterwards, he handed out pieces of colourful writing paper. “You all should know the rules. Everyone can only list five schools, and any more beyond that will be rendered null. In four hours, please regroup here.”

Li Qingshan received a piece of paper too. He discovered that the various information regarding elemental affinity was all recorded on there, and there were five blank spots.

## **Chapter 286 - The Five Schools Chosen**

The afternoon sunlight poured into the bookstore, illuminating the dust in the air.

Under the plaque of “Sea of Books” were a few long tables, covered in books. Sun Fubai had his head lowered as he sorted them. Suddenly, he felt his vision darken. A young man stood in front of the table. He had a robust figure, and while his bronze face was not handsome, he radiated with masculinity.

“Sir, what are you looking for?”

Li Qingshan glanced at Sun Fubai. Hope you are well. He lowered his head to check out the books and almost burst out laughing. The tables were covered with books like “Secrets of the Confucian Exam” or “Eight Methods to the Daoist Exam”. They were not pricey either, just a spiritual stone for one.

“I haven’t decided on the schools to enrol in yet. Do you have any recommendations, uncle?”

Sun Fubai immediately took out a book that gave a brief introduction to each school. Li Qingshan flipped through it slightly and paid a spiritual stone, but he put the book back down. "I'm not good with books. You don't have any guests right now, so why don't you give me some recommendations, uncle? I'll buy another five books according to my needs."

Li Qingshan placed great trust in Sun Fubai's experience and moral character. After arriving in the Town of Flowing Clouds, he had rushed right over here immediately, wanting to hear his recommendations.

Sun Fubai was surprised. There were not a lot of people like him. He passed the spiritual stone back to Li Qingshan and smiled. "If you want to buy them, then I'll explain them to you for free! Pass it over so that I can take a look!" After looking at the colourful piece of paper, he nodded. "Seventeen years old. Not bad, not bad. Do you have any schools that you'd like to join?"

Li Qingshan said, "I'm originally a Hawkwolf Guard, so the school of Legalism would be my first choice. I've also dabbled in some Body Practitioner techniques too, so the school of the Military seems like quite a good choice too. I have an old friend in the school of Mohism, so that's also within my considerations. As for the school of Confucianism and Daoism, they're both impressive major schools, so they seem to be five."

Sun Fubai shook his head with a smile. "The school of Mohism is good, but it doesn't suit you very much. If I'm not mistaken, you practise Gui Water true qi!"

Li Qingshan said, "Yes." And I even purchased the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi from you.

"Why don't I tell you which schools you're not suited for first?"

"Sure."

"I won't go into the school of Mohism. As for the school of Buddhism, I don't think you look like a person who wants to become a monk. The school of Confucianism prefers Profound Yang true qi, but of course, Gui Water true qi works too. Though, if you want to pass the school of Confucianism's examination, you'd need to be rather good with literature. At the very least, you need some foundation, or you'll struggle to pass even if you buy my Secrets of the Confucian Exam."

Li Qingshan shook his head. Ever since he reincarnated, he had barely read any books at all. He could still recite some poetry and lyrics from his past life, but he knew that was nowhere close to being rather good with literature. And, he had no interest in holding a position in the government either, so it seemed like he could only give up on the school of Confucianism.

"Although the school of Legalism is technically your original school, the core cultivation methods they practise require you to resonate with the realm of Hell, which regular people refer to as the netherworld. Normally, it's best if you practise Profound Yin and another type of true qi from the five elements. Your Profound Yang surpasses your Profound Yin, so it'll be difficult for you."

The realm of Hell! Only then did Li Qingshan learn that this aspect existed for the school of Legalism. The school of Legalism primarily dealt with punishment and torture, but there was no place more punishing and tortuous than hell. If it were not for Sun Fubai, he would have absolutely no inkling about the school of Legalism. So much for Hua Chengzan, not even warning him in advance.

Though, Hua Chengzan did not deserve the blame here. Li Qingshan was different from those weaker, second or third layer Qi Practitioners. He had already reached the sixth layer with the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi. There was no need for him to switch cultivation methods. If he reached Foundation Establishment and stepped through these gates to cultivation, would a suitable cultivation method really serve as an issue to him? In this aspect, Sun Fubai was instead not as knowledgeable as Hua Chengzan.

Li Qingshan thought, It's not like damned ol' Wang Pushi likes me anyway. If I join the school of Legalism, I'll have to put up with him every single day. That would be horrible. "Then I'm not going to enrol for the school of Legalism."

Sun Fubai said, "The school of Yin-yang requires a general balance between yin, yang, and the five elements, so you don't have a chance either. Let's see, just how many remain now?"

"The schools of Daoism, the Military, Miscellany, Names, Agriculture, Novels, Medicine, and Music." Li Qingshan felt his thoughts clear up. All he needed to do was drop another three schools now.

Sun Fubai said, "The schools of Daoism and the Military are both major schools, so you have to choose them. Gui Water true qi is suited for the schools of Names and Agriculture too, so that's four schools now. All you need to do is fill in the remaining spot with any of the minor schools. You have enough talent to freely choose among them anyway."

"Alright!" Li Qingshan immediately borrowed a brush and some ink from Sun Fubai, filling in the sheet of paper with the schools of Daoist, the Military, Names, and Agriculture. Only one blank was left. The remaining schools were all minor schools, so they could not rival these major schools when it came to both cultivation methods and resources. Often, they would be the final options for Qi Practitioners with the worst talent.

Li Qingshan did not hesitate much at all. He was about to fill it in with "Music". During times of loneliness in the past, the reed pipe would accompany him. He had grown rather attached to it.

And, when he saw the school leaders earlier, the leader of the school of Music was a beautiful madam in palace wear. Her beautiful voice that sounded like an oriole's song left a deep impression on him. If he joined that school, perhaps something immoral and condemned by society could unfold.

Of course, this was just the deep-rooted bad habits of men at work.

Sun Fubai stared at the "high jia" evaluation for Li Qingshan's water element. After faltering for quite a while, he finally blurted out, "Uhh, the Gui Water true qi is extremely suitable for the school of Novels."

"Really?" Li Qingshan was surprised, but soon afterwards, he filled in the blank with "Novels" with a flick of his brush. He brought it to the sun and took a look. "Done!" It was just a filler anyway, so it did not matter what he wrote.

Right now, it was time for Qi Practitioners to choose their schools. All they needed to do was to take part in the tests for their five schools, and it would be up to the schools to choose their Qi Practitioners. If they passed all the tests, then the choice would be up to the Qi Practitioner again. It basically guaranteed everyone to join a school, with nobody missing out. It was very different from how sects recruited disciples.



Li Qingshan took out five spiritual stones. "Uncle, please give me the books for the five schools!"

As if he was extremely embarrassed, he refused one of the spiritual stones. "The test for the school of the Military is actual combat, so you don't need a book."

Li Qingshan was extremely confident in his ability for actual combat. "Then four books! Heh, I wonder what the school of Novels tests. Don't tell me it's writing stories!" For some reason, he thought of the sh\*tty book Sun Fubai had given to him in the past again. If he wrote a story like that, he would probably be chased out of the exam venue!

Sun Fubai became even more uneasy. He shoved all the spiritual stones back into Li Qingshan's hands. "Sigh. Actually, with your talent, you don't need to make any preparations at all. As long as you show up, the school leaders will all accept you."

At the end of the day, the tests and examinations were just a formality. Whether someone passed was completely up to the school leader. With Li Qingshan's cultivation at the sixth layer as a seventeen year old and his "high jia for water" talent, he would be enough for many schools to fight over during other years.

Once someone's talent reached a certain point, such as Xiao An, they would even be directly taken away by the school leaders, without any regard for the rules. They would not have to undergo any tests at all. Strength was respected in the world of cultivation. There was no point in trying to reason around.

"Umm, okay then." Li Qingshan was perplexed. He was turning down business.

At this moment, Qi Practitioners walked over in groups of fives and threes.

Sun Fubai's gaze wavered. "I have customers now, so you should go!" Once Li Qingshan had left, he suddenly shook his head with a bitter smile. What's there to be uneasy about? It's not like he'd end up in such a miserable situation. I'm just doing the last bit that I can.

Li Qingshan strolled through the town alone before suddenly hearing a call for him.

"Oi! Qingshan! Over here!" Hua Chenglu waved at him from afar. Beside her was Yu Zijian and a few disciples of the Hua family.

Li Qingshan went up to greet them. Obviously, they asked each other which schools they had enrolled in too.

Hua Chenglu took out her piece of paper. The only school filled in there was "Legalism". The rest was left blank. She wanted to join the school of Legalism anyway. It was not like she would be rejected, so there was no need for her to waste time on additional tests.

"What did you enrol for?"

Li Qingshan took out his piece of paper too. Hua Chenglu frowned as soon as she saw it. Li Qingshan thought she was unamused over the fact that he did not enrol for the school of Legalism, but she pointed at the school of Novels. "Why'd you enrol here?"

Li Qingshan said, "It's just a filler."

Hua Chenglu said, "Whatever. It's not like it's possible for you to end up there. Hmm? You haven't enrolled for the school of Legalism!"

Li Qingshan gave a slight explanation. Hua Chenglu did not probe him any further either. She told him a few more things before parting with him.

Li Qingshan shook his head slightly. He really should not treat himself like a big deal. To Hua Chenglu, he was just an acquaintance she had seen a few times. In terms of familiarity, he probably even paled in comparison to the descendants of the Hua family.

Although he was unaccustomed to, or even detested, mingling with others, all people liked attention from others. However, after contemplating the secrets he hid, sure enough, less attention was better. Only by laying low could he fly high.

But there would be one day when he would make his name spread throughout the world.

.....

"That damned brat! So much for me picking him out from the mountains! He has shown me no respect at all! If the other school leaders weren't present, I would've killed him on the spot." Wang Pushi slammed the desk, jolting all the items on there.

Hua Chengzan knew that he was just venting his anger. He comforted him with a smile. "Old Wang, just calm down. Don't stoop to his level. The kid could use the One Thought master's Guardian King's pearl the moment she laid her hands on it, so maybe she actually does have a destiny with the buddha. It's not like we can insist against fate."

Wang Pushi continued to fume. "Want to be promoted to Scarlet Wolf? Want to join my school of Legalism? Don't even think about it!"

"Do you have to be like that? He still originates from our Hawkwolf Guard after all, and with his talent, the other schools definitely won't let him slip by if you don't want him. Combined with his relationship with the child..."

Under Hua Chengzan's gentle persuasions, Wang Pushi's anger subsided. "Fine. Once he joins the school of Legalism, I'll get him good."

In the blink of an eye, four hours had passed. Li Qingshan handed the piece of paper to the instructor, which was then passed onto the school leaders. Every single one of them possessed a copy.

Wang Pushi held Li Qingshan's paper as his face darkened. Everyone familiar with Wang Pushi would know that this was an expression of extreme anger. Who would have thought that Li Qingshan had not enrolled in the school of Legalism at all. All of his plans had fallen apart now, as if he was being mocked.

It was as if he could hear Li Qingshan say, No matter how powerful or how impressive you are, you're nothing to me. There's nothing you can do about me if I don't join your school of Legalism.

Hua Chengzan smiled bitterly. He was unable to pacify Wang Pushi anymore. If he didn't fill in the school of Legalism, then so be it. At least I can try to calm him down with how your elemental affinity doesn't match. But of all the schools to fill in, why the school of Novels? You could have filled in any other school, and I'd be able to speak up for you!

“He has gone too far!” Wang Pushi roared. It pierced the roof of the building and reached the sky, alarming a flock of birds in the forest.

### **Chapter 287 - Climbing the Mountain in Search of the Dao**

The birds flew over the great lake. The setting sun dyed the rippling waves of the Lake of Dragons and Snakes a reddish-yellow.

On Contention island, the tests had already begun despite the setting sun.

Qi Practitioners did not have to eat or sleep at fixed times like regular people. Going an entire night without sleep was nothing. The lunch at noon was akin to an additional benefit provided by the academy to them so that they could taste the delicious food on par with spiritual medicines for free.

Everyone boarded the ship once more, sailing to a small island in the east. The island was nowhere near as large as Contention island, but it was much larger than the other islands.

Within the rising, evening mist, a solemn daoist temple stood high on the mountain on the island. It did not give off an aura of peace and tranquility. Instead, it seemed to look down upon the various other schools.

It was rumored that most ancient cultivators were daoist priests, and they served as the origin for all techniques and cultivation methods. Most of the cultivation methods practised within the hundred schools originated from the school of Daoism.

In the present day, the school of Daoism was no longer the only option for all cultivators, but there was a saying, “Daoism stands to be the greatest among the hundred schools”. That only demonstrated how influential the school was.

The tests of the academy occurred consecutively, so all the Qi Practitioners would move about with each test. They could use this opportunity to familiarise themselves with the locations of the islands and the scenery they offered.

Regardless of the school they ended up with, they all had to visit these islands. The spirit of the academy was about the hundred schools resonating together and embracing all. Every single disciple of the academy could learn from other schools.

Of course, if they wanted to learn the very core teachings of a school, it would take them some effort and spiritual stones, but it was not impossible. It was unlike those cultivation sects, which would threaten them with death or permanently crippling their cultivation.

This was also the aspect that Li Qingshan admired the most. There was a reason why the Great Xia empire could keep all the cultivation sects in the world at bay with the Academy of the Hundred Schools.

The Qi Practitioners all disembarked and crossed through a forest along a small pathway, arriving before the mountain.

An instructor said, “Those who have enrolled for the school of Daoism, climb up the mountain with me. Those who haven’t, wait below the mountain. Don’t wander too far away.”

Li Qingshan discovered that the majority of the Qi Practitioners, almost a thousand of them, climbed up the mountain.

Not only was the school of Daoism a major school second to none, but it had no specific requirements on elemental affinities either. The school of Daoism was known to possess three thousand major paths and countless smaller paths. No matter who it was, they would always be able to find a path suitable for themselves.

As a result, almost everyone filled in “Daoism” within their five spots, even treating it as their main target. Li Qingshan was no different. His primary targets were either the school of Daoism or the school of the Military, but the school of Daoism did suit him more.

Everyone climbed up the mountain, and the moment they reached half way, mist rose up in the surroundings.

Li Qingshan sensed that everyone had vanished. Only he remained on the mountain path. He knew he had entered a formation.

“The test begins,” a voice boomed.

Li Qingshan gathered his mind and took a step forward. As soon as he took that step, his body immediately became several times heavier, while his true qi had been completely suppressed by the invisible formation too. It was not even possible to open his hundred treasures pouch, let alone use any techniques.

At that moment, all of the Qi Practitioners climbing the mountain had been reduced to regular people. The protective formation of the school of Daoism began to demonstrate its startling power.

Li Qingshan was unfazed. He took another step forward, and the wide, stone steps suddenly became a narrow, meandering footpath. The two sides were sheer cliffs that seemed bottomless. He could imagine that if he fell down, he would not actually die, but he would lose his right to join the school of Daoism.

At this exact moment, wild winds rose up without any fixed directions, blowing him around.

“Argh!”

There was a howl, and a Qi Practitioner fell down from the mountain path, spiralling off the cliff. Even though he knew he would be fine, he could not help but be utterly frightened. Just when he was about to hit the bottom, the surroundings suddenly twisted and changed. With another glance, he had returned to the bottom of the mountain. The group of Qi Practitioners waiting there all looked at him in disdain.

He called out, “I refuse to accept this! I was blown off by the wind. With my cultivation at the third layer, how can I possibly fend off the protective formation of the school of Daoism?”

“The more perturbed you are mentally, the stronger the winds and the narrower the path becomes. You can’t even control your fears when you knew it’s all an illusion, yet you still want to practise daoism? Piss off,” a voice boomed out. It was the slovenly daoist priest.

Hua Chenglu curled her lip. "You're clearly just useless. My elder brother said that if you can ease your nerves and control your mind, even regular people can make it to the end of the path. Sigh, I wonder if Zijian is fine."

The Qi Practitioner finally became defeated. He originated from a small clan. With his cultivation, he was regarded as a genius in the clan, and he was protected like a treasure. Never had he experienced any danger, so even his legs had almost given way from the fright earlier, which was why he slipped and fell.

However, this principle did not seem to apply to Li Qingshan very much at all.

His gaze was calm, and his steps were steady. Having gone through so many battles to the death already, the path failed to invoke any fear in him. However, the path just happened to grow narrower and narrower, and the wind blew harder and more chaotically.

He remained unfazed. His body would sway with the wind as he advanced at a steady pace. He admired the rare scenery to his two sides. He was as leisurely as a mountaineering tourist.

Towards the end, he was basically walking along a thin wall that stood tens of thousand meters tall, but it was still more than enough for him. He looked around as he thought, The school of Daoism's test really does have some difficulty about it.

The slovenly daoist priest saw this. He sneered. "Brat, let's see how long you last."

With a thought, large droplets of rain began to fall down from overhead. The path became slippery and even more difficult to walk on. Suddenly, there was a boom of thunder, so close that it was basically above his head. Regular people would probably trip from fright even if they were on flat ground.

The slovenly daoist priest snickered. He shifted his gaze onto someone else.

Sweat gathered on the tip of Yu Zijian's nose. She bore Hua Chenglu's reminder in mind as she stared straight at the path ahead, afraid to look to the sides.

Suddenly, a violent gust of wind bombarded her. She swayed with it, but because she was holding a sword, she was not particularly balanced. She was just about to fall off the cliff.

The slovenly daoist priest curled a finger, and a gentle breeze blew over from the other side, lifting her up softly. Only then did she stabilise herself.

"Master, that doesn't seem too appropriate!" A young daoist priest with small eyes watched on from the side the entire time. He could not help but say this after seeing how the slovenly daoist priest played favourites.

He wore a set of black clothes with a daoist hair ornament on his head. There was a silken belt around his waist and hanging from it was a tablet carved with the word "One". It was a representation of a primary disciple. His cultivation was at an impressive tenth layer.

The slovenly daoist priest's face reddened. He did not treat his dear disciple as rudely as the other school leaders. Instead, he explained, "Juechenzi, she's just a girl, so it's very normal for her to be afraid of heights. Who's born without fears anyway? The mind is something you can slowly harden. As for men, you need to be a little more vicious. The edge of a treasured sword comes from grinding and sharpening..."

“Master, the treasured sword is still there!” Juechenzi pointed.

The slovenly daoist priest looked over. Whether it was the wind, frost, or torrential downpour, none of it was able to make Li Qingshan’s gaze waver. His pace instead sped up, running wildly through the wind and rain.

He might not be particularly clever, and he might not possess any outstanding talent, but he did possess ambition and courage that almost no one could rival.

### **Chapter 288 - Thousand Days Drunk**

The slovenly daoist priest was surprised too. He appreciated people with great willpower very much, and his talent was rather impressive too. If this had happened in the past, he would definitely try to convince him to stay in the school of Daoism.

If Li Qingshan sent Xiao An to other schools, then so be it. But just why was it the school of Buddhism of all the schools? It would make the damned bald ass complacent. He had truly crossed the line this time.

Suddenly, he came up with an idea. With a wave of his arm, the windy, rainy weather vanished. The moonlight fell onto Li Qingshan. To his surprise, the path before him had recovered its original width, while his true qi was no longer suppressed either. The stars twinkled in the sky, and the daoist temple was nearby too.

He was afraid of becoming careless, so he slowed down. Arriving before the daoist temple, he saw a young daoist priest with small eyes waiting there. He nodded. “Congratulations, sir. You’re the first.”

Li Qingshan looked back. There were still two or three hundred Qi Practitioners left on the mountain path, advancing with difficulty. Some of them tottered around, while others teetered about. As long as they lost their balance, they would be sent to the bottom of the mountain immediately.

“Someone has emerged from the formation! It’s that Li Qingshan person!” A Qi Practitioner called out.

Hua Chenglu was perplexed. “How is it possible to break out of the formation midway?”

Qian Rongzhi sat in the thatched pavilion nearby as she watched on indifferently with a smile. This kid’s probably in trouble now.

Just like Hua Chenglu, she had only enrolled for the school of Legalism. She had already learnt about the various school leaders from Wu Gen and Fang Enshang in detail before the examination.

The leader of the school of Daoism was the strongest at late Foundation Establishment. He was close to condensing a Golden Core, and he was the most unruly out of all of them. He never liked the school of Buddhism. Even if the other school leaders were displeased with Li Qingshan’s choice, they probably would not act up, perhaps due to their identities, perhaps they cared about Xiao An, or perhaps they treasured talent. However, this old daoist priest was different. Once he was carried away, he was even bold enough to rain the other school leaders with curses.

Li Qingshan had broken out of the formation midway up. There must have been something going on behind the scenes for this anomaly to happen.

“I’m Li Qingshan. May I ask for your name, esteemed daoist?” Li Qingshan turned back again and clasped his hands. Although he was calm and composed, a tenth layer Qi Practitioner clearly was not someone he could just brush aside.

“This lowly priest is called Juechenzi. Please come with me!”

Juechenzi made his way towards the main hall with Li Qingshan. When they arrived in front of the hall, Juechenzi gave Li Qingshan a glance, wishing him good luck, before sending him in alone.

The large hall was empty. There was only a formation on the ground, shining dimly.

The slovenly daoist priest sat in front of a statue. The hair around his temples had already become grizzled, but he was brimming with energy and vigour. He said slowly, “Li Qingshan, do you recognise me?” His voice boomed like thunder, rolling and echoing through the hall.

“Obviously.” Out of the school leaders, the slovenly daoist priest was the person who gave Li Qingshan the most powerful and terrifying impression.

The slovenly daoist priest said, “And yet you still have the courage to come!”

Li Qingshan asked, “Why wouldn’t I?”

“In what way does my school of Daoism pale in comparison to the school of Buddhism? You better be clear with your explanation!”

Li Qingshan was stunned. He finally understood why it had been so difficult as he climbed up the mountain path just then. The slovenly daoist priest had clearly been working against him. He became angered by this too.

“What, you can’t answer me?”

Li Qingshan laid out his hands. “I never thought that a mighty leader of a school would be so petty. If you don’t want me to join your school of Daoism, I’ll get off the mountain immediately. There’s no need to say anything else.” He turned around to leave. If he remained in the school of Daoism, he would have to put up with his abuse constantly. Who could endure that? The school of Military was not a bad choice anyway, and if that did not work out, he still had the schools of Agriculture and Names.

Juechenzi stood outside the hall, gazing at the shining moon in the sky as he smiled and shook his head.

“Where do you think you’re going? Halt!” said the slovenly daoist priest.

Li Qingshan immediately felt his body seize up. He was immobilised. His right foot still hovered in the air, having failed to pull it back in time.

This was a curse!

The slovenly daoist priest said, “Are you saying that I’ve been unfair?”

Li Qingshan said nothing. His eyes churned with fury. He gathered all of his true qi, his sea of qi surged, and all of his muscles tightened. His right foot that had been frozen mid-air actually fell down bit by bit. With a boom, it landed on the ground, and he turned his head. “Yes!” His eyes shone brightly, like a wolf’s glare.

The slovenly daoist priest was surprised. He was not skilled in curses, and he had used the curse without much thought earlier, but it truly was unbelievable that Li Qingshan could forcefully break free with his cultivation at the sixth layer. This was no longer just due to his strength, but his extraordinary willpower too.

“Alright, I’ll give you a chance. Let’s gamble.”

Li Qingshan asked, “What are we gambling on?”

“Obviously what you are best at, drinking.” A jar of alcohol suddenly appeared in the slovenly daoist priest’s hand. He removed the sealing clay, and a streak of light shot out. The smell of alcohol permeated the entire hall.

“What are we gambling on?”

“If you can drink this jar of alcohol without falling drunk, I’ll let you join the school of Daoism, and I’ll forget about everything that happened in the past. If you fall drunk, then you’ll piss off, off of this mountain!”

“What if I refuse to gamble?”

“It’s fine if you don’t gamble. I’ll still treat you as passing this test, but don’t even think about joining my school of Daoism. I have plenty of ways to get you.”

Li Qingshan said, “Fine, let’s gamble.” With the toughness of his daemon body and how he could nullify the alcohol with his true qi, he refused to believe that he would fall drunk. And, the jar of spiritual alcohol was probably equivalent to a thousand Qi Gathering pills.

The slovenly daoist priest tossed the jar over and Li Qingshan caught it. He took a tasting sip and felt like he was drinking liquid fire, but it was extremely satisfying too. Afterwards, he tilted his head back and drank heartily, leaving not a single droplet behind. He tossed the jar on the ground. “How’s that?”

However, the slovenly daoist priest was laughing. He suddenly split into two, then four, then eight.

Li Qingshan immediately felt the world spin around him. He muttered, “Oh no!” He never thought the kickback from the alcohol would be so powerful. The entire hall twisted and changed.

“Fall!” The slovenly daoist priest stretched out the syllable.

With a thump, Li Qingshan collapsed on the ground, drunk. He began to snore.

The slovenly daoist priest walked over and kicked Li Qingshan. He smiled. “So much for being so crafty. You’ve drunk my Thousand Days Drunk.”

The slovenly daoist priest loved drinking, but with his cultivation, falling drunk was difficult. Under the idea that drinking without falling drunk could not be regarded as drinking, he went through multiple books and brewed this Thousand Days Drunk himself. Even he would fall drunk when he drank it, let alone a mere Qi Practitioner!

The slovenly daoist priest waved his hand again, and a daoist guardian in golden armour appeared, carrying Li Qingshan to the back of the hall.



Just as he was complacent, he suddenly thought of something. He uttered, "Crap!"

He checked the mountain path in a hurry. The person with the Five Elements constitution who he had been caring for the entire time, Chu Tian, had already fallen off the path. He could not help but feel regret. However, when he saw how Yu Zijian was still there, he finally relaxed. The Pure Yang constitution was even more important than the Five Elements constitution to him.

Yu Zijian no longer gripped the sword so firmly. Instead, she carried it on her back. The sight of her father teaching her movement techniques during her childhood appeared in her mind again. Don't be scared. Steady.

And when she raised her head, a powerful figure hovered before her. If Niu Juxia was here, he definitely would not be afraid! She had never seen him display an emotion like that, even when he turned around and returned to the place filled with daemons underground.

"I'm useless!"

"If you're useless, then why did I save you?"

"I want to stay here to help you out!"

"We'll see after you accomplish something with your divine abilities first!"

Her gaze gradually became determined. The person who had rescued her while risking his life was not useless. If she failed here, how was she supposed to help him out? How was she supposed to avenge him?

Her footsteps gradually sped up. She ignored the bottomless cliffs to the two sides and only stared ahead, chasing after that figure.

The slovenly daoist priest showed great appreciation for this. He said to Juechenzi, "Look, I was right, wasn't I? All she needed was a chance."

Juechenzi could only say, "Wise be master."

In the end, less than two hundred people made it to the top of the mountain. On the mountain path, the test would become harsher the closer they were to finishing, especially to those lacking in talent.

There was no need for them to complain about the unfair nature of the test. Since they lacked supreme talent, they had to possess supreme willpower, or how else were they supposed to contend with those prodigies.

As soon as everyone made it to the top, they saw the slovenly daoist priest. They all greeted the school leader.

The slovenly daoist priest got right to the chase. "You've all passed. I've already recorded your names down, so you're welcome to leave the mountain and partake in the tests of the other schools." Suddenly, he said to Yu Zijian in a pleasant and kind manner, "You must be Yu Zijian!"

Yu Zijian said in a hurry, "Yes!"

The slovenly daoist priest said, "You can stay behind."

Yu Zijian said, "But... I still have other tests..."

The slovenly daoist priest waved his hand. "There's no need to partake in them!" As long as she did not partake in any other tests, the only school Yu Zijian could join would be the school of Daoism.

Juechenzi whispered, "Master, that would be breaking the rules!"

The slovenly daoist priest growled, "Fuck those rules. That damn bald ass could directly intercept a person even before they went through any tests, so why can't I keep someone here?"

Juechenzi thought, You intercepted her too.

He saw how Yu Zijian hesitated, so the slovenly daoist priest said, "With your Pure Yang constitution, there's no place more suitable for you than the school of Daoism. Here is the only place where you can unleash the full potential of your talent. As for all the pills and medicines, I might refer to myself as a lowly priest, but I'm richer than those "lowly monks". I can see that you like swords, so I'll give you this Nine Yang sword as a welcoming gift!"

He drew out a shiny sword and tossed it before Yu Zijian. Surprisingly, it was also a supreme grade spiritual artifact.

Originally, it was impossible for disciples to be bestowed something like that the moment they joined the school no matter how talented they were. He only did this so that he would not lose out against the school of Buddhism.

Yu Zijian closed her eyes and sucked in a deep breath. She no longer hesitated anymore. Under everyone's envious gaze, she grabbed the sword hilt.

The slovenly daoist priest smiled in a satisfied manner. With this test, one of the three most dazzling geniuses had already fallen into his hands. As long as he guided her well, he refused to believe that she would end up any worse than the damn bald ass's disciple.

As a result, many Qi Practitioners expressed their willingness to stay behind. Apart from the Qi Practitioners that had only enrolled for the school of Daoism, the rest were shooed off the mountain by the slovenly daoist priest. If he really held them back here, he would probably just incur the wrath of the public.

The ship set sail once more. No one noticed Li Qingshan's absence. Even if they did, they would have just thought he had remained behind in the school of Daoism.

Li Qingshan had an absurd dream that night. He dreamt that he had returned to his past life and was a student again. He had overslept, missing an important exam.

"Wake up!" Juechenzi took out a pill and shoved it into Li Qingshan's mouth.

Li Qingshan let out an alcoholic breath and slowly woke up. The horizon shone dimly as morning birds sang.

Fuck, it's not a dream.

**Chapter 289 - The Cloudwisp Island**

Li Qingshan sprang up. “W- what’s the time right now?”

It was as if Juechenzi had been expecting him to ask this. “The tests for the other schools have all ended already.”

Li Qingshan fell back down again. He had been toyed around by this ox nose. The alcohol was far too strange. If this was the case, he could not remain in the academy any longer.

Juechenzi said, “You don’t have to worry too much. There’s still another school you can join.”

“Which one?”

Juechenzi pointed below his feet. “Here.”

Li Qingshan was slightly surprised. “But I’ve lost the gamble, and your master dislikes me too.”

Juechenzi smiled. “But you’ve still technically passed the test. My master has a fiery temper, but he also treasures talent. Do you know just how much the jar of Thousand Days Drunk you drank is worth? He doesn’t even have enough for himself most of the time. If he just wanted to screw you over, why would he take that out? As long as you plead to him properly so that he regains some self-respect, he’ll definitely accept you.”

Li Qingshan said, “Plead? How am I supposed to plead? Are you saying that only he has self-respect and I don’t?”

Juechenzi said, “What do you think?”

Li Qingshan sighed heavily. He stood up again. Self-respect was earned through strength, not by flapping gums. Just how could a Qi Practitioner be compared to a Foundation Establishment cultivator?

Juechenzi said, “Come with me! Master is giving sermons before the new disciples.”

With no other choice, all Li Qingshan could do was follow him.

Along the way, Juechenzi educated him. “No matter how master insults you, just endure it. The mountain path was for overcoming your fears, while now is for overcoming your pride. Only with tolerance can you achieve greatness.”

Li Qingshan remained silent. He arrived at the front. The slovenly daoist priest sat high up, while the new disciples sat in the hall. Yu Zijian sat the closest to him.

With Li Qingshan’s appearance, everyone cast their gazes over. The slovenly daoist priest continued his lecture, as if he was not there.

Li Qingshan went up and said reluctantly, “I’ve lost the gamble.”

The slovenly daoist priest said, “If you know you’ve lost, then why don’t you piss off?”

Li Qingshan suddenly raised his head, but he saw Juechenzi standing behind the slovenly daoist priest, mouthing a few words. “Endure it.” Li Qingshan clenched his fist.

The slovenly daoist priest sneered. “What, you refuse to accept your defeat?” As a result, he began to mock and curse Li Qingshan in front of everyone.

Everyone showed disdain for Li Qingshan. So much for showing off. There'll always be someone who'll get you.

Yu Zijian could not bear with it, so she said, "Master..."

Juechenzi looked over. "Zijian!" He understood his master's character. The more a person tried to calm him down, the more carried away he would become.

The slovenly daoist priest became more complacent as he cursed on. "You're just a piece of trash in my eyes. You managed to climb up the mountain out of sheer luck. Kneel down right now and prostrate three times, and I'll..."

"Shut up!" Li Qingshan roared, cutting off the slovenly daoist priest.

The hall fell completely silent. He was actually bold enough to speak to a school leader like this. Moreover, it was the strongest school leader, the leader of the school of Daoism, at that.

The slovenly daoist priest's expression changed. This kid still needed some more verbal thrashing so that he would understand just who was in charge of the school of Daoism.

Li Qingshan said loudly and clearly, "If I've lost, then I've lost. I, Li Qingshan, admit defeat. But why must you keep prattling on, you ox nose? Your words are like flatulence, foul to the senses. What's so impressive about the school of Daoism anyway? I'll just not join." With that, he turned around and left.

Juechenzi called out, "Sir, please be careful with what you say! Master!"

The slovenly daoist priest's expression darkened. "Let him piss off!"

Without any obstructions, Li Qingshan made his way to the bottom of the mountain in one breath. His anger eased up slightly. He leapt into the air and took off, flying into the Lake of Dragons and Snakes. For a moment, he was rather frustrated. He had no idea where to go.

If he was alone, then it would be easy. Perhaps he could go join a sect, or just go to another prefecture and join the Academy of the Hundred Schools there. The world was so large, so was finding a place to stay at really an issue? But now, Xiao An had already joined the school of Buddhism, so it was not like he could travel far away. Maybe he could go plead with the One Thought master and just become a monk. His destiny with the buddha sure had arrived quickly!

But with another thought, he knew that he would never plead with anyone. Even if he would, they might not necessarily accept him. Accepting him might actually offend the slovenly daoist priest through and through.

At this moment, he suddenly thought of something. Perhaps there was one test that was not over yet!

Last night on the ship, the instructor had given a rough explanation with regard to the order of the tests. The school of Daoism was the first stop, and the ship would travel in a clockwise direction, cruising to the various islands. They did not specially arrange the tests of the major schools to come first.

Back then, Li Qingshan could not help but ask, "Haven't you missed a school?"

"Which one?"

“The school of Novels.”

“You’ve enrolled for the school of Novels?” The instructor looked at him in disbelief, while the other Qi Practitioners looked at him with a similar expression.

“Yeah!”

The instructor pointed at the mental map in his hand. “Look, it’s here. It’s the final stop. You can go there by yourself when the time comes.”

Shouldn’t it be the fourth stop according to the clockwise order? And why do I have to go there by myself?

Li Qingshan did not think too much about these questions. He never took the school of Novels seriously anyway.

A while later, Li Qingshan set foot on this drearily peaceful little island. This was the Cloudwisp island that the school of Novels occupied.

An entire night had passed, but the test for the school of Novels, last on the list, might still be ongoing.

Though, he was wrong.

Li Qingshan followed the cobblestone path and crossed through a bamboo forest. He saw a simple courtyard. The courtyard was covered in fallen leaves, as if no one had swept it in a very long time. It did not seem like anyone lived there at all. He seemed to hear the moans of a woman.

He frowned, knocked on the door, and called out, “Is anyone here?”

A lazy voice rang out from the depths of the courtyard. “Who’s it?”

Li Qingshan said, “I’ve come for the test.”

With that, there was a swish, and a wild gust of wind kicked up the fallen leaves. A middle-aged man rushed out of the courtyard, arriving before Li Qingshan. He had a mustache on his face that was not exactly handsome. His clothes were ruffled, and he gave off a faint smell of cosmetics. There were several kiss marks on his face, and there was even a clear love bite on his neck. Combined with the moans from earlier, it was obvious what he was doing.

“It’s you?” Li Qingshan suddenly remembered how he had once met this person in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain three days ago.

“It’s you!” The middle-aged man remembered Li Qingshan as well. Various pieces of information drifted through his head. High jia for the water element. A seventeen year old sixth layer Qi Practitioner. A genius! A genius! He thought in an emotional manner, Senior brother, you really haven’t lied to me! You really haven’t lied to me!

“Are you the instructor of the school of Novels?” Looking at his age, he dismissed the possibility that he was a disciple. As for the possibility of him being the leader of the school, he had not even considered it. He had seen the various school leaders, and they all had a certain bearing about them. Even the slovenly daoist priest that utterly irritated him gave off the bearing of a school leader.

The middle-aged man tidied his clothes in a hurry and wiped away the kiss marks. He coughed gently and stood with his hands behind his back. "I am the leader of the school of Novels, Liu Chuanfeng!"

Li Qingshan was stunned. He wanted to turn around and leave immediately. No wonder no one enrolled for the school of Novels. But then he thought about how his priority right now was to find a place where he could stay, so he took the time to ask, "How are you going to test me?" Don't tell me it's essay writing.

Liu Chuanfeng scratched his head, as if he was even more confused than Li Qingshan.

He only seemed even more unreliable in Li Qingshan's eyes. Don't tell me the test has already ended?

Suddenly, Liu Chuanfeng's eyes lit up. He grabbed Li Qingshan by the shoulders. "You've passed! You've passed!"

"What?" It was true. Li Qingshan was wrong. It was not that the test of the school of Novels had not ended. Instead, it had never started to begin with.

What Liu Chuanfeng said next made Li Qingshan feel like he had been struck by lightning. "From now onwards, you're the primary disciple of my school of Novels!" As he said that, he took out a waist tablet with the word "One" from his hundred treasures pouch, hanging it on Li Qingshan's waist personally. He did not even try to ask which school Li Qingshan planned on choosing, wanting to accept him into the school just like this.

Li Qingshan sucked in a deep breath and asked softly, "Don't tell me I'm the only disciple of the school of Novels!" Surely that's not true! Surely not!

"Yep!"

It's true!

Li Qingshan removed the tablet from his waist expressionlessly before throwing it as hard as he could. With a swish, the tablet vanished into the bamboo forest. He turned around and immediately left.

Liu Chuanfeng roared out from behind, "Stop!"

Li Qingshan immediately raised his guard, but Liu Chuanfeng did not attack him. Instead, he took out an item from his hundred treasures pouch and tossed it before Li Qingshan.

"As long as you join my school of Novels, I'll give you my specially-made Cloudwisp brush."

Li Qingshan never imagined that there would be a moment where people would try to throw spiritual artifacts at him too. He was slightly interested. He lowered his head and took a look. A mid grade spiritual artifact. He completely gave up on hope now. Probably even a hundred of these could not be exchanged for a supreme grade spiritual artifact. Instead of calling it a bribe, it was more like an insult!

Li Qingshan did not say much. All he did was silently pull out ten mid grade spiritual artifacts from his hundred treasures pouch before stowing them away again. He clasped his hands and took his leave.

Liu Chuanfeng sobbed. "Sir, I'm pleading with you!"

Li Qingshan stopped, raised his head, and let out a long sigh. So be it. Being pleaded with was always better than pleading. Most importantly, this was a place where he could stay. It was so desolate here too, so it suited his cultivation instead!

He turned around and extended his hand.

“What?”

“The tablet!” Li Qingshan heard how primary disciples would receive a lot of special benefits within the academy. They could freely enter a few places that regular disciples were forbidden to set foot in. It would be convenient for Li Qingshan to study in the other schools in the future.

Liu Chuanfeng beamed with joy. He never imagined that Li Qingshan would actually agree. Suddenly, he waved his hand, and a tiny dog appeared out of nowhere. It let out a few barks and rushed into the depths of the bamboo forest. A while later, it returned with the tablet in its mouth.

Li Qingshan accepted it, and the dog vanished, as if it had never existed in the first place. He could not help but be taken aback. “What’s this?”

Liu Chuanfeng said complacently, “This is the secret art of my school of Novels. It stretches beyond the imagination of most.”

Li Qingshan clearly noticed that the kiss marks on Liu Wenchuan’s face had vanished before he knew it. Even the smell of cosmetics was gone too. Perhaps the school of Novels really did possess extraordinary abilities.

Liu Wenchuan brought Li Qingshan into the house. This was a suspended house made from wood and bamboo. The smell of ink permeated the gloomy room as the paper-covered short table was in a mess. The papers were filled with a few thickly-dotted characters.

Liu Chuanfeng swept aside these papers, revealing the table surface. He invited Li Qingshan to sit down as he demonstrated great hospitality by pouring him tea.

Li Qingshan picked up a piece of paper soon afterwards and asked, “Did you write these?”

Liu Chuanfeng said proudly, “Yes. You can call me the Master of Wind and Moon. That’s my pen name.”

So familiar, it sounds so familiar. I must have heard it somewhere before!

Li Qingshan came to a sudden realisation. Wasn’t the name of the author on the book that Sun Fubai had secretly shoved into his hands the Master of Wind and Moon?”

He understood everything now, why Sun Fubai’s expression was like that, and why no one enrolled for the school of Novels! He shot to his feet and kicked over the short table.

Fuck your novels!

## **Chapter 290 - Disciple of Novels**

Liu Chuanfeng stood up as he slammed the table. “Kid, I could see that you’re a man of talent, which is why I’ve been putting up with you. Don’t take it too far. You can insult me, but you can’t insult my novels.”

“You’re the exact person I’m insulting. Your novels are trash, trash!” Li Qingshan clenched his fist and cursed.

“You... you...” Liu Chuanfeng pointed at Li Qingshan, overcome with anger.

Outside, the wind blew over the clouds, and their shadows enveloped the place. The sunlight no longer reached the room. The bamboo building seemed rather gloomy.

Li Qingshan could feel a wondrous form of true qi rise up from Liu Chuanfeng. Only now did he finally give off the pressure of a tenth layer Qi Practitioner.

Come. Show me what your school of Novels is capable of.

“Li Qingshan, I will bind you in chains and a pillory and have a hundred beasts tear at you. It’s still not too late if you take back what you said.” Liu Chuanfeng’s true qi suddenly erupted, and the smell of ink grew heavier.

Li Qingshan said, “Your- novels- are- trash!”

“You unruly disciple!” Out of anger, Liu Chuanfeng clutched a brush in his hand and swung it hard.

With a jangle, a set of long chains flew out, wrapping around Li Qingshan firmly. With a clack, a wooden pillock locked around Li Qingshan’s neck.

“Calls of the Hundred Beasts!” Liu Chuanfeng said.

Tigers, bears, lions, wolves, snakes...

Various vicious beasts surged forward, letting out terrifying hisses and growls, lunging towards Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan frowned, not out of fear, but out of disappointment.

With a jolt, he spread his arms and broke out of the chains. He grabbed the wooden pillock and ripped them to pieces easily.

By now, the vicious beasts had arrived before him. With a thought, there was a clear thrum, and the Clear Stream sword flew up, turning into a stream of blue light with a series of swishes. After a few twists and turns in the room, all of the beasts were killed.

The chains and pillory were just regular chains and pillory, while the beasts were just regular beasts. They were enough against regular people, but against Qi Practitioners, especially a warrior who had gone through countless battles like him, he would be dreaming if he thought it would be effective.

Even if he just stood there and allowed the beasts to tear at him, were they supposed to penetrate his protective true qi or bite through his skin?

He held his fingers like a sword, pointing them at Liu Chuanfeng. “It’s not enough!” In the blink of an eye, the Clear Stream sword had arrived before Liu Chuanfeng.

Liu Chuanfeng said in a hurry, “Big-footed Monk, come out!”



Li Qingshan shivered, as this name had appeared in the book that Sun Fubai had given him. This was a character with extremely wondrous abilities. According to the descriptions of the book, it was not someone he could defeat.

They could actually summon characters from books. He understood what the school of Novels was capable of. Was he finally unleashing his true strength?

A large, fat monk with his chest exposed appeared out of nowhere. The most conspicuous part of him was his two large feet. He kicked the Clear Stream sword away with one foot as the other foot kicked towards Li Qingshan's chest.

The kick was so powerful that it could pierce rock. This was on a completely different level compared to the beasts.

Just as Li Qingshan tried to avoid the attack, his feet suddenly slowed down. The floor had turned into swamp before he knew it. This tiny swamp obviously could not keep him trapped. Instead, it stimulated his fighting spirit. Alright, I'll show you what's what. He made up his mind and threw a punch, striking the sole of the Big-footed Monk's foot.

The outcome was unexpected. With a great thump, the Big-footed Monk was sent flying back faster than it had arrived. It vanished in the air.

Liu Chuanfeng felt a chill on the back of his neck. The Clear Stream sword had shot over. He raised his protective true qi in a hurry.

But all of this was just Li Qingshan's distraction. With surging murderousness, he arrived before Liu Chuanfeng in a single step and swung his palm like a blade, forcefully destroying his protective true qi.

Liu Chuanfeng wailed, "Spare me, good sir!" He saw the knife hand strike stop right before him firmly.

Li Qingshan withdrew his hand and recalled the Clear Stream sword. He returned the short table he had kicked over to its original spot, sat down, and picked up the teapot, pouring himself a cup before pouring another one for Liu Chuanfeng.

The clouds passed over in the sky and sunlight flowed in once more, falling on the wisps of water vapour from the tea. All was peaceful.

Liu Chuanfeng was surprised. He also arrived by the short table and sat down. "You..."

Li Qingshan extended a hand. This world did not have a custom of shaking hands, so Liu Chuanfeng was left at a loss for a while before he understood what was going on. He grabbed his hand.

Li Qingshan shook his hand. "Let's get along in the future. There's just the two of us on the island, and there probably won't be anymore people arriving here in the future."

In the battle earlier, if Liu Chuanfeng had not used the powers of the school of Novels, only relying on his identity as a tenth layer Qi Practitioner and using some regular techniques, then it would have been very difficult for Li Qingshan to emerge victorious unless he used the Cursive Sword Calligraphy. Even with a powerful body and an opponent lacking all interest in fighting, it would be very difficult to overcome a difference of several layers.

He wanted to see the powers of the school of Novels, while Liu Chuanfeng also wanted to show off the powers of the school of Novels. The end result was not very optimistic at all. No, it directly destroyed Li Qingshan's last sliver of hope. He instead thought it through now. He was no longer angry at all.

It was not like he was lacking a cultivation method right now. The Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi was enough to last him until Foundation Establishment. By then, he would not be worried about being unable to find a better cultivation method anyway.

His priority in joining the academy was learning the various arts like alchemy, artifact forging, formations, and so on. He could learn them regardless of the school he belonged to. His identity as the primary disciple would provide quite a lot of convenience too. One aspect included coming to and leaving the academy freely, without requiring anyone's permission.

Who knew how many contests a person would have to go through in the other schools over an identity like this. They could never obtain it as easily as in the school of Novels. Being unfavoured, unable to enter the limelight, was not necessarily a bad thing. Cultivating in peace was all that mattered.

As Liu Chuanfeng sat before Li Qingshan, he basically behaved with utmost caution. The school of Novels had truly gained an impressive disciple this time. He saw how Li Qingshan had sunken into his thoughts, so he was afraid of interrupting him. A while later, he heard Li Qingshan sigh. He asked, "When do we start cultivating? You've seen the techniques of my school of Novels earlier. It truly has limitless potential..."

Li Qingshan listened quietly without interrupting him. The power of the school of Novels was extremely special. It could make the fake become real, create something from nothing, turn fiction into reality.

It was said that the school of Novels originated from when a cultivator went travelling in the ancient times. He heard about a monster that specially drained the vitality of children in the local region. All the children that had been caught by the monster would die from atrophy. It filled the entire city with fear, enough to make people pale from the slightest mention of the monster.

However, the cultivator had never heard of this monster before. After a close inspection, he discovered that it was not a monster running amok. Instead, it was a strange disease, and the reason for it was because all the wells in the city had been contaminated by a special spiritual stone vein. Children possessed weaker bodies, so they were unable to fight it off, but adults would be fine.

He purified the water source with his powers and healed the children, resolving everything. Afterwards, just when he was preparing to leave, he personally witnessed the monster, and it was exactly the same as the rumors.

A monster that never existed had actually appeared in the world, as people believed in its existence. The powerful belief gathered to form a power, but that was still not enough. It required some sort of... critical component.

He discovered that the spiritual stone vein that contaminated the water source formed a strange loop, like some kind of inscription or formation, providing this component. He began to think. Could his powers provide this component to?

This paved a brand new path of cultivation. In the very beginning, all it did was record the gossips and strange legends among the people, turning it into tales and rumours, which would then be passed on through word of mouth. After generations upon generations of inheritance and improvements, especially after the school of Mohism invented mechanisms for printing books, it finally became the school of Novels of the present day.

Repeat a lie enough and it would become the truth. They used ink and brushes to create tales, using themselves to provide this component. As a result, fantasy would spring alive in their hands. It could create anything and everything. In terms of being interesting, there were probably no schools that could rival the school of Novels.

However, Li Qingshan had already witnessed its battle applicability. Unfortunately, all it was was interesting. Being interesting was not enough to defeat opponents. Writing a novel that people actually believed to be real, with characters that they would cry and laugh along with, was probably even more difficult than managing a city. It was not like cultivators lacked money anyway when it came to running a city. All they needed to do was hire a few advisors skilled in administration and pour in a few million taels of silver, and the place would prosper by itself.

Li Qingshan had read several impressive novels in his past life, and he did not mind becoming a plagiarist, but he had almost no impression of them anymore after almost two decades. Compared to that, he would be much better off if he just stuck with his Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi!

Faced with Liu Chuanfeng's eager gaze, Li Qingshan shook his head and declined. "Thanks, but there's no need for that. Where's my room?"

Liu Chuanfeng was completely disappointed. He forced out a smile. "It's very big here, so anywhere you'd like."

Li Qingshan bowed slightly and left. He wandered through the courtyard and the building. He discovered that while it was not on par with the temple in the school of Daoism, it was not exactly small either.

The elevated bamboo and wood structure formed several winding corridors. As he walked through them, the clear sound of footsteps would echo around. The spring breeze would blow into his face, and the bamboo grove would sway. There was a slight chill in the air.

With his footsteps, he would gradually kick up ripples in the water below the bamboo building. The water gradually grew deeper too. When he arrived at the back of the courtyard and opened the bamboo door, a small, jade-green lake reflected the blue sky and verdant bamboo before him. It was a wonderful sight.

A bamboo rocking chair stood on the porch quietly. Li Qingshan sat down on it, and with a creak, it swayed gently, as if he could pass his entire life in a trance and wash away his carnal thoughts like this.

He sat there for a while before standing up. He smiled. He finally had a place of belonging now. He did not have to worry about his life being in danger, nor did he have to think about killing others here. He could cultivate slowly.

Now, it was time to go see Xiao An.

Arriving at the front room, Liu Chuanfeng was no longer there. A set of blue robes were folded neatly at the door, with a Cloudwisp brush on top.

Li Qingshan put on the clothes, stowed the brush away, and wore the tablet on his waist. He rode off on a cloud, flying towards Anāsraṃā? island of the school of Buddhism.

The full name of the island was Threefold Anāsraṃā? island, based off the threefold training and practises of buddhism—?īla, samādhī, and prajñā, or moral virtue and precepts, meditation, and wisdom and insight respectively. As mentioned in buddhist scriptures, “Gathering your mind results in moral virtue. From moral virtue arises mental training and stability, and from mental training and stability arises wisdom and insight. This is called the Threefold Anāsraṃā? disciplines.” The place was also known as Threefold Disciplines island, or Moral Virtue, Meditation, and Wisdom island.

Note: The island is basically named after the Threefold Training or Disciplines prevalent within buddhism, which involves following precepts, meditating, and gaining wisdom and insight. Anāsraṃā? in this context means that these three disciplines are karma-neutral practices—they don’t come at the cost of karma and merit, allowing for liberation from suffering in the end. Anāsraṃā? is the opposite of sāsrava, which does come at a cost of karma and merit, so while you can derive benefit in the present, sāsrava practises are likely to lead to negative consequences in the future.

Arriving above the island and looking over from afar, buddhist pagodas were scattered across the place, full of solemnity. He could vaguely hear the chanting of buddhist scriptures. It rivaled the school of Daoism’s Wuwei island in terms of scope. Xiao An was here.

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In the Sea of Books within the Town of Flowing Clouds, Liu Chuanfeng bowed all the way to the ground as soon as he entered through the door.

Sun Fubai’s heart sank. “Junior brother, what are you doing? Don’t tell me... the school of Novels has been abolished?”

The hundred schools in the academy were not fixed. There were some differences from prefecture to prefecture. Apart from the ten standard schools, there were many places that did not possess minor schools like the school of Music, the school of Medicine, and so on.

Note: The ten standard schools in this case consist of the schools of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Yin-yang, Legalism, Names, Mohism, Miscellany, Agriculture, and Novels. Normally, the school of Diplomacy would replace the school of Buddhism, but seeing how a school of Diplomacy was never mentioned, I assumed it was the school of Buddhism instead. If the school of Novels is removed from the list, it is also known as the nine streams of thought, or just the nine streams.

The academies also practised the survival of the fittest. It had been several years since the school of Novels had gained a disciple, so the various school leaders had already submitted a written statement together to the Academy of the Hundred Schools in the Ruyi commandery so that they could remove this stain in the academy of the Clear River prefecture.

If the school of Novels were not a part of the ten standard schools that the founding emperor had designated, the higher-ups would have accepted their request a long time ago. But even with that being

the case, they had issued an ultimatum. If the school leader, Liu Chuanfeng, was unable to reach Foundation Establishment or accept any new disciples, then they would abolish the school of Novels in the Clear River prefecture and take back Cloudwisp island so that another school could occupy the island.

Sun Fubai originated from the school of Novels. He was unwilling to see this happen, so having run out of choices, he would try whenever he saw a slightly talented Qi Practitioner. There was always a possibility, but he had actually given up on all hope too.

Liu Chuanfeng shook his head hurriedly. "Thank you, senior brother. Thank you, senior brother. Our school of Novels has gained a successor. There's no need to worry about it being abolished."

"Who is it?" Sun Fubai widened his eyes. Just who was so unlucky?

"Li Qingshan!" He might have had a bad temper and might have been unwilling to learn the secret arts of the school of Novels, but he was truly the primary disciple of the school of Novels.

Sun Fubai remained dazed for quite a while. His eyes reddened slightly too. His hard work had finally paid off.

"Junior brother!"

"Senior brother!"

"Boss, do you have any cultivation methods?" A while later, a Qi Practitioner walked in and just happened to see Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai holding hands and looking at one another with tearful eyes. He was actually left speechless, leaping up in fright and backing out of the store in a hurry.

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After Li Qingshan's departure, the slovenly daoist priest lectured the methods of daoism a little further in order to demonstrate his tolerance before dispersing everyone. He asked Juechenzi, "Where has that bastard gone?"

Juechenzi said, "Master, he seems to have... he seems to have..."

"What're you stuttering for? Spit it out? Has he gone to plead with that damned bald ass One Thought? Or has he gone to find Liu Zhangqing for a retest?"

Juechenzi said, "Neither. He has gone to Cloudwisp island."

The slovenly daoist priest said, "What? Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Juechenzi said, "I wanted to tell you earlier, but as soon as I mentioned Li Qingshan's name, you told me to shut up."

The slovenly daoist priest slapped his thigh. "My word! He might as well go find that damn bald ass and become a monk instead. Get him to piss over here. I'll accept him into my school of Daoism."

Juechenzi said, "It's already too late. School leader Liu handed in the register immediately. Li Qingshan has already become a disciple of the school of Novels, and he's the primary disciple."

The academy had its rules. No matter how they contended against one another during the entrance examination, once a disciple joined a school, that was it. No one could change that, or the academy would have been reduced to a mess a long time ago.

The slovenly daoist priest felt regret. Li Qingshan's inflexible will and staunchness suited his tastes very much. Others might have deemed him to be rude seeing how he openly cursed at a school leader, a Foundation Establishment cultivator, but he felt some admiration outside of his anger. When he was young, he was also renowned for his hubris and rudeness. Who knew how much suffering he had gone through because of his horrible temperament.

"Master, you should've just stuck to scolding him a little. What you said towards the end was just too insulting. It's no wonder that he couldn't put up with it any longer."

"Are you saying that your master is in the wrong?"

"Disciple dares not."

The slovenly daoist priest was utterly miffed. "Of all the normal choices he had, he just had to choose to go write novels. I'd like to see just what he turns into."