

I Am Loaded 51

Chapter 51: Inner Yard Opening

Clap clap clap!

A huge round of applause!

Everyone in the audience had stood up to pay their respects, and none were stingy with their applause, as they'd been completely captivated by the battle.

How should they describe this final...

It had started out strong and ended with a bang, with Xu Xiaoshou becoming the center of attention.

Everyone thought it was a little weird, but as they looked at this young man in the arena drenched in blood, they all felt that with him around, it was no surprise the match had ended with such a heated battle.

It was undeniable that this had been an extremely fantastic battle!

Xiao Qixiu waved and sent the medical staff to receive Mo Mo from Xu Xiaoshou's hands.

The remaining four staff members all awkwardly stared at Xu Xiaoshou.

"Do you need any treatment?"

The four familiar faces...

Xu Xiaoshou was amused. "It's okay!"

He took off his shirt and rubbed off the dead flesh that had been cooked by the lava, then passed it to them.

"Since you guys are here and I don't have anything nice for you guys, take this as a souvenir!"

"Cursed, Passive Points. +4."

The four staff members turned around and immediately left. This time, they didn't even bother to check out his condition.

He really was a monster. How had such horrifying lava not burned him? What a shame.

During the battle just now, these four people had been the least worried when they saw the lava appear. When they saw the audience start to feel nervous for Xu Xiaoshou, they'd all thought that the audience knew nothing about him. Then again, if they hadn't checked his body before, they probably would've thought him in danger too.

Xiao Qixiu signaled for the crowd to settle down and stop clapping, then smiled and said, "First, I would like to congratulate Xu Xiaoshou on winning the Wincloud Competition. To be honest, this was beyond my expectations!"

The spectators all smiled simultaneously, as they'd all thought the same thing.

Except for Xu Xiaoshou, who was inwardly cursing this middle-aged old man, his expression dark.

"So you thought I couldn't win the competition, huh?" he thought.

Xiao Qixiu didn't pay him any mind and added, "I noticed him in the group play-off because he was stirring up trouble. I noticed him once again in the subsequent matches, as he was making even bigger trouble. In the qualifying match..."

"Ha. Ha."

"I could no longer ignore him. This man almost p*ssed me off!"

The audience burst into laughter, but Xu Xiaoshou's expression darkened.

Revenge!

This middle-aged old man had finally seized an opportunity to tease him!

Xiao Qixiu went on. "However, Xu Xiaoshou is undeniably a black horse!"

"Everyone encounters a turning point in his or her life at some point, be it a setback or an opportunity. It all depends on your own effort to determine if you can overcome your own limitations."

He was taking such a roundabout way to praise him, and Xu Xiaoshou shyly scratched his head.

"Effort?" he thought.

"Well, it was okay."

"However, after your encouraging speech, I'll try harder to earn more Passive Points."

Xiao Qixiu wasn't aware that his words were being twisted by someone else. After he gave another round of appraise, he finally ended the post-game commentary.

"I hope that in the next cohort, there will still be people who can 'impress' me..."

"Now to the prize presentation!"

He activated the formation order, and a podium emerged in the arena. There were only ten spots.

The staff escorted the top ten contestants to the podium. Although the rest of the people who'd participated in the qualifying matches were also awarded, they couldn't enjoy being on the podium in this moment of glory.

Xu Xiaoshou glanced over and saw many of his subordinates...

Cough cough, familiar old friends!

Zhao Qingteng, Mu Zixi, Mo Mo...

The medical staff was indeed capable, as Mu Mu had regained consciousness and was able to move on her own.

Xu Xiaoshou chuckled as these people walked by him, and even waved enthusiastically to greet them. However, he was shocked when he glanced at his information bar.

Zhao Qingteng walked by in front of him and said emotionlessly, "Congratulations!"

"Cursed, Passive Points, +1."

Mu Zixi passed by, playing with her twin ponytails, and looked away, wrinkling her nose at him.

"Despised, Passive Points, +1."

Mo Mo walked over, not even looking at him.

"Ignored, Passive Points, +1."

Xu Xiaoshou: ???

"Hey!" he thought.

"All I did was stab you guys a few times and simply knock each of you out!

"Why are you people so narrow-minded?

"You guys really bear me a grudge, huh?"

Since everyone was being like this, Xu Xiaoshou didn't bother to wave his hand to greet anyone anymore.

Intolerant, shallow, and unbecoming!

The staff gave everyone another space ring, which Xu Xiaoshou really loved. This was his second ring.

"I'm not going to list out all the other prizes. Just take a look for yourself."

Xiao Qixiu turned to face the audience after saying this and raised his voice. "The top ten of the Windcloud Board each gets a chance to enter Spiritual Library Division to pick his or her spiritual skill."

"The top three will each be awarded an Innate Pill. If you don't need it, you can exchange it for other pills of equivalent value!"

The audience was amazed by the prizes, and they all looked envious.

The Spiritual Library division was one of the most important divisions in the entire Tiansang Spirit Palace. It contained countless spiritual skills, including the Acquired Stage, Innate Stage, and even Master Stage skills.

The Innate Pill was a Grade Eight pill that could increase the chances of evolving to the Innate Stage by thirty percent. This was the dream pill that was highly sought after by everyone!

Of course, the top three this year were a little unusual, as Xu Xiaoshou, the champion, was the only person who could use this...

The other two had already reached the Innate Stage!

Xiao Qixiu felt rather helpless too, as the quality of this cohort was higher than usual, and the Innate Pill, which was usually a popular prize, looked rather pathetic to them this year.

Of course, being able to exchange the Innate Pill for other pills of equivalent value was a pretty flexible option.

Xu Xiaoshou was pretty thrilled, as his cultivation level wasn't as high as those monsters.

These rewards were indeed timely for him. The Innate Pill would be useful to him, same for the opportunity to enter the Spiritual Library Division to pick a spiritual skill.

God knows that he had enrolled into the Spirit Palace for three years and only gotten a chance to enter there to get a White Cloud Sword Technique. Since then, he hadn't gotten a chance to enter there again.

Thinking of this, Xu Xiaoshou felt sad.

Just look at the other contestants. They all had huge reserves of spiritual skills to use. Look at Mo Mo. Her spiritual skill rank was probably higher than the Innate Stage!

A poor underdog like him could only rely on his self-invented skills, which were rankless.

Hmm?

But he had won at last.

"Heheh!" At this thought, Xu Xiaoshou chuckled, feeling good about himself.

The audience in turn felt conflicted as they watched the prize presentation ceremony being carried out in the arena.

At last, Xiao Qixiu smirked and said, "Very well. We've finally reached the last segment.

"The opening for Inner Yard!"

When he said this, people started to discuss enthusiastically.

"It's finally here! I've been waiting for this moment. I wonder how many will make it to the Inner Yard this year!"

"If I remember correctly, Su Qianqian was the only one who made it last year. I think the years before that saw few cohorts with people who made it."

"That's right. The benchmark for qualifying to enter the Inner Yard is too high, but the quality of the students there is really cream of the crop."

"Yeah, even with the thirty-three people in the Inner Yard, adding up the others wouldn't even surpass a hundred people..."

"Yup!"

Xiao Qixiu took out a paper from his pocket and read, "First Inner Yard Opening, Zhou Tianshen!"

Zhou Tianshen, who was sitting among the audience, stood up in disbelief and pointed at himself.

“Me?”

“You sure you aren’t mistaken?”

Chapter 52: Sunset

It was understandable that he didn’t believe it.

The guy had already been cut down by Xu Xiaoshou when there were thirty-two people left in the match, and thus had long since given up hope. As such, he couldn’t believe that he was actually able to join the Inner Yard.

The crowd cheered. Some were envious, some were jealous, but most were just curious.

Many were wondering if the bar had been lowered for this year, given the fact that someone ranked below 32 on the Windcloud Board was allowed to join.

Xiao Qixiu continued saying, “The second candidate to join the Inner Yard, Zhao Qingteng.”

Zhao Qingteng, who was usually cool and aloof, couldn’t help but smirk, his fingers tracing the guard of his Ice Stream Sword.

“Second ne...”

The audience clenched their fists, noting that the record had been broken.

“Third candidate to join the Inner Yard, Mu Zixi.”

“Fourth candidate to join the Inner Yard, Mo Mo.”

Xiao Qixiu read out two names in a row, causing quite a commotion in the audience.

Mu Zixi grabbed her pigtails. She looked very excited, so much so she even hopped once on the spot.

Mo Mo, on the other hand, remained cradling the bronze cauldron in her hand. She took a whiff of the incense within, her face deadpan.

“This is awesome!”

The audience was extremely excited, as if their names were the ones that had been called instead.

But someone voiced their doubts all of a sudden. “Hold on. It looks like only people at the Innate Stage were called...”

Everyone was stunned, finding that it was indeed the case.

Even Zhou Tianshen, who was outside the 32, was only able to join the Inner Yard due to having broken into Innate Stage in that battle with Xu Xiaoshou.

“In previous years, it seems like only people at the Innate Stage were allowed to join too.”

“If that’s the case, Xu Xiaoshou would definitely be able to join then, since he has Innate Level Physique...”

“Not quite,” someone interjected.

“Those with Innate Level Physiques have reached the end of the road. It would be very difficult for them to go further from there. Furthermore, his powers are only at level eight.”

Everyone started to feel tense then, as someone with Innate Level Physique making it to Master Stage was virtually unheard of.

The reason was simple—training was simply too difficult to achieve further success.

That was an unwritten law of sorts, which applied to more than just the Tiansang Spirit Palace; it was something that applied everywhere in the entire Shengshen Continent.

Everyone’s gaze fell on Xu Xiaoshou. None had expected the champion to be the one who’d caused the audience the most worry.

They wondered if an exception would be made for someone at Acquired Stage to join the Inner Yard.

They wondered if the number of candidates allowed to join the Inner Yard would go up to five, which was unprecedented.

Everyone started to feel very tense.

Xu Xiaoshou was rather intimidated by the looks he received all around, yet the next second, he felt nothing but glee.

Anticipated, Passive Points +2130.

He took a breath, like he felt nothing at all. But, despite having become the champion, he was nonetheless feeling rather tense.

Xiao Qixiu turned his gaze away from the paper, folded it, and put it away. His expression was cold as he said, “Four candidates. That will be all.”

Doubted, Passive Points +1869.

Doubted, Passive Points +1511.

Doubted, Passive Points +1042.

...

The Information Bar was flooded by such lines, and Xu Xiaoshou was stunned. “I’m not in?” he thought.

Even though he’d put on a nonchalant façade, he was still nonetheless the champion. Even if he hadn’t shown it outright, he’d nonetheless felt for sure deep down that he’d gotten it, yet this was the outcome.

That was all?

The others on the stage were equally as stunned. The smiles on the faces of the three who’d just been admitted instantly froze.

While they wouldn't openly admit it, they'd all been nonetheless impressed by Xu Xiaoshou, yet here was this baffling outcome.

???

The audience wasn't as reserved as the contestants. One after another, the spectators instantly went berserk.

"What? No more? Four candidates? Are you kidding me?"

"Xu Xiaoshou is the champion, man! He is funny, but you could not joke at such a time?"

"Oh the irony. The champion isn't admitted into the Inner Yard, and yet the one outside the thirty-two... hey, let me go! I'm gonna say what I'm gonna say!"

"Are you out of your mind? Zhou Tianshen is right behind you!"

"..."

Zhou Tianshen was furious. He immediately rose to his feet and said, "If this is how it's going to be, then I, Zhou Tianshen, would like to forfeit my candidacy into the Inner Yard."

He glared at Xiao Qixiu without a slight hint of fear in his eyes.

"Well said. Same goes for me."

"It's not like you're in."

"Oh, you shut up."

"..."

Xiao Qixiu's words had set the audience on fire. They were practically boiling with anger.

He didn't say anything to address their protests, and instead walked up to Xu Xiaoshou, looking at the kid without saying anything.

"The kid is still pretending that it doesn't matter eh?" he thought. "But..."

Xiao Qixiu was experienced enough to read all the hidden bitterness on the kid's face.

"The kid is still just eighteen, after all."

"Huff..." Xiao Qixiu sighed.

Xu Xiaoshou backed away, pinching his nose.

Xiao Qixiu was baffled.

"Oh, that little sh**!"

"The kid really does know how to put up a fight. And there I was feeling pity for him."

Xiao Qixiu stopped sighing and took a great big breath. He clapped Xu Xiaoshou on the shoulder and said, "You could still stay in the Outer Yard for another year, so as to make a breakthrough into Innate Stage as soon as possible."

Xu Xiaoshou was stunned.

He had almost forgotten that if he were unable to join the Inner Yard within three years, or stayed at the bottom of the Contest of Wind and Cloud, he would be kicked out of the palace.

"So, that's to say someone actually spoke on my behalf?" he thought.

"Was it this middle-aged guy who did so, or..."

"Elder Qiao?"

He took a look at the audience.

Elder Qiao was one of the few who had remained quietly seated in the audience seats. He simply nodded and said nothing.

Encouraged, Passive Points +1.

Xu Xiaoshou felt warm and fuzzy deep down.

He was undoubtedly feeling disappointed and dejected.

Yet, he didn't like being pitied, so he just had to do it when he saw the sympathetic look on Xiao Qixiu's face.

At the moment, however, he was truly touched.

Xu Xiaoshou sincerely voiced his gratitude. "Thank you."

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Xiao Qixiu shook his head and grinned. "You'd do enough by just sparing me your antics. Your thanks are too much for me."

He had no idea why this kid, despite being his junior, still managed to get on his nerves with all the antics he pulled.

Furthermore, he also seemed to have the subconscious tendency of lowering his status whenever he talked to Xu Xiaoshou.

"Yeah, that's probably how Old Qiao feels as well, I guess," Xu Xiaoshou thought. He pouted slightly and said nothing in return.

Xiao Qixiu then turned around and said loudly, "I hereby announce that the Contest of Wind and Cloud of this year is officially over!"

"Dismissed!"

Everyone in the audience was feeling vexed, but they couldn't do anything to protest the outcome.

They'd witnessed the birth of a dark horse and thought the ending would be utmost spectacular, yet the outcome had been unexpected.

The champion was unable to even get a place in the Inner Yard.

This would've been fine with them if Xu Xiaoshou were an ordinary champion, but he had defeated so many with Innate Elemental Powers, which meant he was anything but ordinary.

They wondered if his powers and potential were indeed not worth the Spirit Palace making a one-time exception.

"Good work! Xu Xiaoshou!"

Many didn't leave right away and came to encourage him instead. Before long, cheers were coming from all over the place.

"Xu Xiaoshou! You're the best! I'll love you forever!"

"Xu Xiaoshou! Hang in there!"

"..."

Encouraged, Passive Points +663.

Encouraged, Passive Points +414.

Encouraged, Passive Points +520.

"..."

Xu Xiaoshou was touched again seeing the waves of encouragement washing all over him.

This was especially so for the line: "Xu Xiaoshou! Hang in there!"

He vaguely remembered that that line had come about in the group matches, where he had pretended to be ganged up by over 40 people.

"Thank you," he whispered in gratitude.

The sun set, and the crowd eventually dispersed.

Xu Xiaoshou smiled as he responded to those who came up to him just to encourage him, whether he recognized them or not.

"Dejected?" Elder Qiao came up to him and asked.

"Yeah.

"Very much so."

Xu Xiaoshou looked at the sunset while Elder Qiao looked at him.

"This kid..." he thought.

Despite having said he was fine to so many people, he was sure being frank with him.

“That’s how it is with life,’ he said. “Ups and downs all the time.”

“Yeah.” Xu Xiaoshou tilted his head and seemed to recall something. “Ups and downs, but if you’re lucky...”

“You sure are one hell of an optimist.” Elder Qiao shook his head, then took out two bottles of pills for him before walking into the sunset.

“Good work.”

“Teach those unflinching old farts a lesson. Make them see that they were wrong.”

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Xu Xiaoshou was rather stunned, thinking that there was definitely a lot to swallow in those two lines.

He then looked down at the two bottles of pills in his hand.

A bottle of Spiritual Cultivation Pills.

Another bottle carrying Red Gold Pills.

Sunset, Elder Qiao, and pills again...

Xu Xiaoshou smiled faintly, finding the scene oddly familiar, yet something was missing.

He took out a Spiritual Cultivation Pill and took a whiff.

Hsss.

The sunset seemed to sway, so much so that even his shadow seemed to shudder.

Chapter 53: Spiritual Library Division

He slept soundly all the way until morning.

He slept so well that he’d swear it was the best sleep he’d gotten in his entire life so far.

There were no mosquitoes around, he didn’t need to worry about matches the next day, and there was no need to wake up to practice swordplay in the middle of the night just to ease all that tension.

As for that dull, dreadful ending from the day before, he had completely put it behind him after being dejected for a while.

Death was unable to completely do him in, so he thought nothing of that minor setback.

“It’s just the Inner Yard after all,” he thought. “And maybe I’m just not ready for it!

Urgent knocks were heard at his door again, waking him up. He went over to open the door.

“It’s you?”

The person before him was none other than a staff member from that waiting room who had delivered him the Red Gold Pills from Xiao Qixiu.

“Please be quick. Elder Xiao is waiting for you.” He deliberated for a moment. Then, afraid that Xu Xiaoshou would take his sweet time getting ready, he added, “You’re the only one who hasn’t shown up yet.”

Today was the day he would head inside the Spiritual Library Division to pick his spiritual technique. It was already noon, and was indeed getting late.

“Alright, lead the way.”

Xu Xiaoshou simply waved his hand and told the staff to lead the way, as he had nothing to pack anyway.

The staff member immediately rushed to get ahead of him.

“By the way, are there any special rules, written or otherwise, that I should know about before getting into the Spiritual Library Division?” Xu Xiaoshou took out a bottle of Red Gold Pills.

Again?

The staff member was startled, and immediately waved his hand in the negative.

“Nothing of that sort. Elder Xiao will personally explain the rules when he sees you all.” He pushed the Red Gold Pill bottle back, then drastically lowered his voice. “I’ve already broken the rules once, so I really can’t do this again.”

Xu Xiaoshou frowned. “Take it!”

The staff member looked like he was about to cry. “There really are no hidden rules, and even if I took this, I wouldn’t be able to tell you anything. I’ve never been to the Spiritual Library Division.”

“Oh, that so?” Xu Xiaoshou hesitated for a bit, realizing that he wouldn’t be able to fish anything out of the other man.

The last time he went there was about three years ago, and it actually wasn’t his soul that had been in control then, so he’d forgotten everything.

Furthermore, he was rather dumb back then, having picked the “White Cloud Sword Techniques,” which he was unable to master more than the first move of, even after practicing for three years.

He was determined to be smarter this time.

But then again, he had little confidence in his potential and figured that it wouldn’t quite matter what he picked anyway.

Sigh.

Xu Xiaoshou’s expression turned dull, and he had no intentions of taking that bottle of Red Gold Pills back.

The staff member took a deep breath, as if he were about to make some very, very important decision, and said, “I cannot take this!”

Xu Xiaoshou looked at the staff member, surprised that he wasn't actually backing down but was instead glaring at him with his teeth clenched.

Shing!

Xu Xiaoshou then drew his black sword out of his chest.

"Take it."

Sigh. The staff member then took the pills and shoved them into his sleeve.

"Lead the way."

"Very well."

The sun was hot, and the leader of the staff members looked up, trying to let the sun dry his tears.

"Oh, elder," he sighed inwardly.

"It's really not my fault. Xu Xiaoshou just insists on bribing me. Wuuuuuuuu.

"I'm sorry for breaking the rules again..."

Cursed, Passive Points +1.

Impressed, Passive Points +1.

Xu Xiaoshou was amused, wondering what could've possibly caused such ambivalence.

...

The Spiritual Library Division, Inner Yard.

The Inner Yard had a concentration of Spiritual Energy several times that of the Outer Yard, which enabled one to be invigorated as soon as one entered the place.

Every disciple who first joined the Tiansang Spirit Palace would get a chance to enter the Spiritual Library Division once. While this was mainly to let them select the techniques they would soon practice, having them experience the difference in Spiritual Energy concentration between the Inner and Outer Yards also served as a way to encourage them to be diligent in their training.

Furthermore, it was said that every Inner Yard disciple would get their own private compound, which had an array that, when opened, would increase said concentration by several times over.

Private compounds were hard to come by.

Not everyone was like Xu Xiaoshou, who'd managed to get himself a private compound when he was still training at the Outer Yard.

Some even had to sneak up others' doors just to train.

Xiao Qixiu brought eleven others with him, walking as he talked.

"Although you've all been here before, I'm about to reiterate the rules one more time."

“Each of you can select an Innate-level spiritual technique. Once you’re done, get to registration right away. Be careful not to cause a scene, and fighting inside is absolutely forbidden.”

He turned around and locked eyes with Xu Xiaoshou. “Got it?”

Exasperated, Xu Xiaoshou asked, “Why are you looking at me?”

“Heh.”

Xiao Qixiu’s expression seemed to say “you of all people should know why,” and he added, “I’m not going to be discreet about his. What I said was meant for you!”

Xu Xiaoshou was speechless.

Everyone else around laughed their lungs out.

Ridiculed, Passive Points +11.

Xu Xiaoshou immediately felt rather exhausted, and he shot a look at Xiao Qixiu that seemed to say, “I’m not talking to you.” Then, he walked to the tail end of the entourage.

He then found Zhou Tianshen in the entourage as well, and that piqued his interest.

He recalled Xiao Qixiu having said that only the top ten would get a chance to visit the Spiritual Library Division again, but he remembered having eliminated Zhou Tianshen when they were fighting for one of the top thirty-two places.

“Wait a minute,” he thought.

“Under-the-table deal then?”

Xu Xiaoshou went up and put an arm around Zhou Tianshen’s shoulders. “Why are you here too?”

The other man wanted to say something but decided not to.

Xu Xiaoshou then chuckled. His look seemed to say that he understood, and he dragged the man out of the entourage and whispered, “Just tell me, how did you manage to get here. I swear I won’t tell anyone.”

Zhou Tianshen tried to think up a way to go about this.

He had taken Xu Xiaoshou to be his friend after that battle, so he felt that he couldn’t do anything to provoke him.

However, by the look on Xu Xiaoshou’s face, he seemed to be urging him to speak the truth, so he had no choice but to be honest with him. “An opportunity given to me after making it into the Inner Yard.”

Xu Xiaoshou’s smile froze.

“Okay, sure!” he thought. “No problem. My own fault for putting salt in my own wound.”

“So umm... they all can pick two techniques each?”

“Yeah.” Zhou Tianshen nodded. “They can pick one now, and then they can come again to pick another after they master that one.”

“D*mn, that’s convoluted,” he thought.

Xu Xiaoshou took a deep breath and left.

“That middle-aged guy was right. I’m better off not talking at all.”

Disturbed, Passive Points +1.

He was stunned for a moment, then turned around to see the worried look on Zhou Tianshen’s face, as if he were worried that what he said had hurt him.

“This is one straightforward guy indeed,” Xu Xiaoshou chuckled inwardly.

...

“We’re here.”

A building that was three stories tall appeared before their eyes after they took a turn on the winding path.

The building looked plain and was sparsely decorated. There weren’t even any carvings to be found on its pillars. Other than the huge crimson pearl that seemed to be emanating heat on the roof, nothing about the building seemed to be out of the ordinary.

The plaque hanging above the door said “Spiritual Library Division” in black lettering.

The writing looked rustic and magnanimous.

It seemed to suggest that it was a good place for studying.

Xiao Qixiu took out a reddish-black Elder Token and placed it on the array printed at the door, which then opened it.

“Get in there. The first floor contains Acquired-level techniques, the second floor contains Innate-level ones, and no going to the third floor.

“You have six hours to pick your techniques. Don’t get too engrossed, and be mindful of the time allotted. Get to registration once you’re done.”

He then took a look at Xu Xiaoshou and said, “Remember what I said on our way here.”

Everyone was having a good laugh again. As the student who was specifically picked on by the “instructor,” Xu Xiaoshou had no choice but to walk inside with his head hung low.

Chapter 54: Zhou Tianshen Learns to Use His Head

The Spiritual Library Division was bigger on the inside than it looked on the outside.

Xu Xiaoshou scanned the place and found that there were hundreds of shelves around, with every shelf either having jade scrolls or ancient texts on them. There were easily over 1000 Acquired-level spiritual techniques to be found on that one floor alone.

“Tsk, tsk, this is something.”

He walked to the end along with the crowd and turned, reaching out his hand and touching the first technique.

That was a snippet of an ancient text that one could read, yet an array had been installed on it, causing the reader to only be able to read the name and introduction but not the content inside.

Xu Xiaoshou didn't dwell on this book. He glanced at it, then shook it a bit, but nothing happened.

He then shook even harder, and still nothing happened.

He put the book down and went for the second book.

The result was the same.

In contrast, the others in the crowd passed through the first floor and made their way to the stairs leading to the second floor.

Xiao Qixiu had made it very clear that the first floor contained Acquired-level techniques, which no one out of the group batted an eye at.

It wasn't every day they were allowed to come inside this place. Given that there were no restrictions on what they could read, they all naturally headed to the second floor.

Zhou Tianshen had thought to do the same as them initially, following the rest to the stairs, but when he saw that no one else was behind him when they turned a corner, he stopped instead.

“Where's Xu Xiaoshou gone to again? Is he still on the first floor picking techniques?”

Zhou Tianshen was puzzled. He figured that he should advise his friend if that were the case.

He peered around the corner and found Xu Xiaoshou doing something at a shelf near the entrance.

He took a closer look and missed a step on the stairs, causing him to almost roll down the steps.

“Sh**!” he thought.

“What's that guy doing?”

“Shaking ancient texts??”

Zhou Tianshen was completely baffled, thinking that Xu Xiaoshou was definitely very bold.

He'd completely forgotten what Elder Xiao had just said as soon as they'd gone inside. The way Xu Xiaoshou was shaking the books, it would only take moments for the caretakers to come and pick a fight with him.

Zhou Tianshen was exasperated. He headed back there and stopped Xu Xiaoshou from shaking the books again. “What the h*ll are you doing?”

“Looking for techniques.” The look on Xu Xiaoshou’s face seemed to suggest that he’d done nothing wrong.

“You call this looking for techniques?” Zhou Tianshen was so exasperated that his voice raised considerably. “What you’re doing here is ruining the books. You’ll be done for when the caretakers get here!”

“Quiet!”

Xu Xiaoshou then shushed him and said, “You know nothing, do you? The books are protected by arrays, so there’s no way they could be ruined. You on the other hand, why the h*ll are you being so loud? Looking to get your head chopped off?”

Zhou Tianshen shrunk back and added, “But that’s no reason for you to do what you did. Just in case, you know, the books do get ruined.”

“They won’t!”

Xu Xiaoshou waved his hand in dismissal, then stared at him instead. “What are you doing here anyway? Shouldn’t you be upstairs looking for Innate-level techniques?”

Zhou Tianshen was speechless.

“So you did know that the Innate level ones were up there, huh?” he thought. “Then why the h*ll are you shak...”

“Huh?”

“Hold on.”

He paused all of a sudden and started pondering.

“The guy knows that the good stuff is upstairs, so what is he doing here still?”

“Oh...”

“I see.”

He recalled the conversation he’d had with Xu Xiaoshou on their way here, and his face lit up with sudden understanding as he asked, “You have other ways, then?”

Xu Xiaoshou was dumbfounded.

“Other ways, yeah, right. I’m trying to find gold in the sands, dude!”

“Pfftt!” Zhou Tianshen pouted for a bit, then continued, “What gold could you find in the first floor, eh? The way I see it, you’re picking sesames in a pile of sh** instead.”

Xu Xiaoshou’s hand that was shaking the text stopped. He was kind of offended by Zhou Tianshen’s words.

“So what? You know how to go about it then?” he thought.

“Whatever. You’ve been here before. Might as well teach you something, then,” Xu Xiaoshou sighed, figuring that these people of foreign worlds were indeed hopeless. However, he figured that it would do no harm to remind a guy who’d been kind enough to come and remind him about some things.

He pulled Zhou Tianshen over and pressed the other man’s head low, saying, “Listen now. The real deal, the truly powerful techniques, will definitely not be put right in front of you.

“Only by selecting certain texts like me can you seek the lost treasures.”

Zhou Tianshen looked doubtful, and he retorted, “What? You think you can shake treasures out of these old books?”

“That’s hard to say...”

Xu Xiaoshou stretched himself a bit, a mysterious grin on his face. “You know, the likes of golden pages, ancient maps, pieces of broken scrolls and whatever. They’re often found wedged inside the common ones.”

“How do you know that?”

“Hehe, I’ve read enough books to tell.”

Zhou Tianshen saw how confident Xu Xiaoshou was and figured that he might not be lying, but then again...

He wondered if such ways that seemed to have come out of nowhere would actually work.

“Believe it or not. Have it your way.”

Xu Xiaoshou rolled his eyes, tired of explaining. Then he returned to shaking the ancient texts again.

Zhou Tianshen looked at Xu Xiaoshou, then shifted his gaze upwards as he thought about something. His gaze was so intense he could’ve seen through into the second floor.

He thought for a bit, then found himself reaching for a book on a shelf.

“We have six hours, so I’m going to search for three hours and then head upstairs if I don’t find anything.”

“Yeah, just like that.”

He nodded in the affirmative and looked at Xu Xiaoshou again. The other man almost looked like he were glowing.

While Xu Xiaoshou did look like a lunatic, most of those who were thought to have sense had all been taken out by him. Zhou Tianshen then figured that there was maybe something to what the former had said.

That was probably how he’d managed to become champion.

Zhou Tianshen’s eyes widened, as he felt he had seemingly discovered a piece of Xu Xiaoshou’s secret to success.

Swoop, swoop, swoop.

He started shaking the books one by one, finding nothing.

"I knew it!" he thought. "That the road to success would be anything but easy!"

Zhou Tianshen's eyes lit up.

Moving on!

Swoop, swoop, swoop.

Still nothing.

"Failed again, as expected..."

"Great. I guess this is what grandpa meant when he told me about the trials and tribulations one experiences on the road to success."

"Thinking could actually enable one to discover shortcuts to success. Now I know why grandpa kept telling me to think more."

A stout kid rubbed his hands and then kept searching the books on the first floor of the library, his eyes seemingly sparkling the whole time.

...

On the other side.

Xu Xiaoshou had already searched several shelves. His Sense told him that Zhou Tianshen was actually searching the places he'd already searched, and he almost fainted at the thought.

He walked up to Zhou Tianshen and said, "I've already searched the places you're looking through!"

"Hey, you might have overlooked something," Zhou Tianshen answered without looking up. His hands were busy shaking through all the books. No one could stop him from reaching success.

Xu Xiaoshou's expression turned glum. The other man actually made sense.

"But we don't have that much time!"

He pointed at the end of the first floor and said, "Search over there instead. We'll split up. Remember to share when you find something."

"Hmm..."

"Seems like a good idea." Zhou Tianshen stopped doing what he was doing and decided to do as told.

"Remember, the weirder the stuff you find, the better. If you happen to find a piece of blank paper, you're inches away from becoming a god."

"Blank paper?" Zhou Tianshen then looked like he had just realized something and clenched his fists. "I'll keep that in mind."

“And don’t just search the shelves. Look through the dusty corners, and there might be pieces stuffed under the legs of tables and chairs. If you find something, let me have a look first!”

“Man...” he thought.

“You want to cover that much, eh?”

Zhou Tianshen was stunned at the thought there might be legendary obscured pieces hidden somewhere.

That was the champion for you!

He gulped and came to believe all of a sudden that Xu Xiaoshou’s thought patterns would definitely lead him to fame and glory.

Xu Xiaoshou saw him walk away and returned to flipping everywhere he could flip, not missing even a single corner.

He figured that Zhou Tianshen might not find anything satisfactory, but he was different.

Knowing oneself was a precious trait. Xu Xiaoshou knew how rare his potential was from the fact that he’d only been able to master one move, even after practicing the White Cloud Sword Techniques for three years. As such, he knew that he had no hopes of being able to master any of the Innate-level techniques.

What he was looking for at the moment were techniques that were practical, yet had few requirements in terms of talent. As for level, he figured that it would be better if it was beneath the Acquired level.

As for those powerful techniques, he saw fit to just let the Passive System take care of them.

As for broken pieces...

He deemed it imperative to find any pieces of those. Although the chances of finding such pieces were low, every book he read had something of that sort.

Just in case, man!

He turned around to look at Zhou Tianshen. Truth be told, he actually had high hopes for the other man.

There was a saying about it, after all.

What was it again?

Luck favors the dumb?

He might just actually run into some rare techniques.

Chapter 55: Third Person on The Treasure Hunt

On the second floor of the Spiritual Library Division.

The place was different from the first floor, given that there were no shelves. There weren’t even ancient texts or jade scrolls. The only things around were white halos spaced far apart from each other.

Every single halo represented an Innate-level spiritual technique, and there were nearly one hundred of them to be found on the floor.

Mu Zixi, with a rather bored look on her face, played with her pigtails as she walked past one of the halos.

Unlike the others, she had set her sights on something and managed to find what she was looking for right away.

It wasn't every day that they got to enter the library, so she didn't want to just register her stuff and head out so quickly. Everyone was still inside. It would've been boring for her to stay outside all on her own, so she'd stayed inside the library.

She scanned her surroundings as she aimlessly walked around.

The halos were rather mystical. They would light up immediately once someone entered them, preventing another from getting inside.

Mu Zixi walked around and found something wasn't right. She counted the halos that were lit up.

"Eight?"

"Why are there only eight halos lit up when there are eleven of us here?" she thought.

"Where are the other three?"

"We aren't allowed to enter the third floor, so are there still people on the first floor, then?"

She frowned, finding this turn of events amusing, and ran all the way downstairs.

...

Swoop, swoop, swoop.

Swoop, swoop, swoop.

Rhythmic and minute shaking sounds were heard. Mu Zixi sneaked up on the source of the sounds.

"Zhou Tianshen?" she thought.

"What is he doing?"

Mu Zixi was puzzled.

She saw the stout kid pick up a book and shake it before returning it to its place and reaching for another one.

That wasn't all. Mu Zixi looked on, finding it scary when he suddenly stopped at a corner and pounced on a dusty box, his eyes lighting up as if he'd found some kind of treasure.

He then got up there, pushed the box away, and started fiddling with the dust.

He seemed to be having a good time.

Mu Zixi was completely baffled, and was feeling a little puzzled at this sight. Who would've thought the stout guy would actually enjoy games that were so childish?

But this was the Spiritual Library Division. He was here to play games instead of selecting spiritual techniques?

"Zhou Tianshen!"

"What are you doing?" she yelled at him, arms akimbo.

The stout guy, who was busy moving the boxes, was startled, but he breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that it was only Mu Zixi.

"Gosh, you scared me to death. I thought the caretakers were here..."

"Hmph, so you're telling me that you can just fool around as long as the caretakers aren't here?"

Zhou Tianshen was stunned when he heard this. Then, wiping the sweat from his brow, he said, "I'm not fooling around. I'm looking for techniques!"

Mu Zixi, amused, watched his blackened hand leave marks behind on his face and said, "Look at your messy face. Since when do people go about looking for techniques like this?"

"Yeah, that's what you think." Zhou Tianshen said, disgruntled. Then he pointed at Xu Xiaoshou. "Xu Xiaoshou's looking for techniques like this too, okay?"

Xu Xiaoshou?

Mu Zixi looked in the direction he was pointing and immediately spotted a lanky figure.

However, the sight that greeted them was completely different from what they'd expected.

Xu Xiaoshou, who was in his simple white garb, was leaning on a shelf, a book in his hands. He looked dazed, as if he were pondering some big question that was bothering him.

The bit of sunlight coming from the windows above shone on the young man's chiseled face, making the scene look like something out of a painting.

Zhou Tiansheng was completely baffled.

Mu Zixi got engrossed in the scene for a bit before recalling how Xu Xiaoshou had wiped at his neck, saying that it stank. She then quickly snapped back to reality.

She looked at Zhou Tianshen and snickered. "Well, the way you both look for spiritual techniques is definitely really similar."

Zhou Tianshen was all quiet as he looked at his blackened hand, then at Xu Xiaoshou's clean face, feeling that he'd been several cheated.

"I think I need to explain myself..."

"No need to explain anything. Better get your face washed instead."

"Oh? Don't you wanna know the secret to that guy becoming the champion?"

“I’m no... huh? What did you say? Come again?”

“Well, I’d better just get my face washed.”

“Wait, hold on. Come here for a bit.”

...

Xu Xiaoshou naturally wasn’t just acting cool in a sunny place because he’d sensed the two’s conversation and what they were doing.

He was actually engrossed by the broken piece he’d found.

“10 Sections of the Finger Sword?” Xu Xiaoshou mumbled.

He’d actually been able to find quite a number of such broken pieces after searching for two hours. However, all those techniques required certain special elemental traits, and it’d taken him just one look to tell that those weren’t for him.

All but the “10 Sections of the Finger Sword,” that is.

The technique’s level was unclear, and it didn’t require spiritual strength. All the technique required was sword will and arts of the finger. When fully mastered, one could easily slice a river open with a single attack.

It was as if the technique were tailor-made for him.

The experience of a transported one was actually d*mn useful!

The only thing that concerned him was if the sword finger technique would stack with Glow of Sharpness, yet it was also the part that got him thinking.

According to the introduction, it melded sword will with one’s fingers...

“Not with any sword-like item, like ‘All Things are Swords,’ but with one’s own fingers eh?” he thought.

This was just like the third way a swordsman could train in the way of the sword, then!

The mainstream way of combining a sword with spiritual techniques was one way.

Fighting with pure sword will that he created, which he’d had no idea would actually work, was the second way.

Yet this “10 Sections of Sword Finger”...

Combining sword will with one’s own body?

“I guess you can find all manner of weird stuff under the sun...” he thought.

He was completely shocked by this wild, unconventional way of thinking. Combining sword will and a sword-like item would produce Sword Telepathy. He wondered what combining sword will and one’s own body would produce.

“Hold on,” he thought.

“Sword will is something that gets produced from one’s own training in the first place. Does the “combining” concept even apply here?”

“But wait.

“It says here that it could be done.”

He was completely puzzled by what he was reading.

He decided that if he were unable to find anything else, then he would settle for “10 Sections of Sword Finger.”

Even if nothing else came out of his training with the technique, such a unique way of training would keep him occupied for a very long time.

“Heh, who was it who thought something this weird up? I guess I’ve met my match, and whoever invented this was a genius.”

He tried looking for the name of the creator. Unfortunately, it was a broken piece, and there was no mention of the creator.

He packed his stuff and looked at the time. There were still four hours left, which meant he had a lot of time left to explore.

So he went back to searching high and low.

...

Swoop, swoop, swoop.

Swoop, swoop, swoop.

Mu Zixi rather regretted having bought Zhou Tianshen’s mumbo-jumbo. She was holding two old books in her hands, and her favorite dress was all dirtied. She looked a mess.

“Zhou Tianshen!”

“There’s nothing at all!” She forcefully shoved a book back onto a shelf.

The bang startled him.

He stuck his head through a crack in the wall, then said with a disgruntled expression on his face, “Oh gosh, miss. Don’t you go scaring people like that! Becoming champion requires sacrifice, alright!”

Mu Zixi was actually fuming at the moment, yet she laughed out loud when she saw Zhou Tianshen’s face.

His face was all blackened, and given that there wasn’t enough light around, she was only able to see his white teeth.

Pfft!

“I think you really need to wash your face. Hahahaha!”

“Shh! Keep it down!” Zhou Tianshen shook the piece that he’d managed to find in the crack. It was indeed a page from somewhere. “See?”

“You found something?” Mu Zixi’s eyes glittered, and she immediately headed over to him.

Zhou Tianshen dusted off the page by blowing on it, causing both of them to cough.

“An old image?”

The image was of an old one-armed man lifting a saber while bending backwards, looking very twisted and weird on that tattered, old parchment.

Mu Zixi immediately pouted. She could tell from one glance that the technique would fit Zhou Tianshen just right, but would be of no use to her.

She was just about to grumble when she turned around and saw that dirtied man staring at that old image, seemingly in some sort of trance.

“You learned something?” She was stunned.

“Indeed.”

“What Xu Xiaoshou said was true, then? That the treasures are indeed on the first floor?”

“Yeah.”

Mu Zixi found her motivation for finding techniques there again, but then she quickly realized something, which caused her to freeze.

Zhou Tianshen was in a trance, Xu Xiaoshou wasn’t around, then...

“Who was speaking to me?” she thought.

She turned around in fright.

Chapter 56: A Stare from the Abyss

She turned around to see a wrinkled old face underneath a straw hat. On that shriveled face of his, which was doing its best to force a warm smile, there were two massive dark circles underneath his eyes.

But the distance between her face and his, which was less than an inch, was more than enough to scare her to death.

Mu Zixi was so frightened that she was unable to even make a sound. Her eyes rolled into the back of her head, and her body stiffened before she fell backward onto the ground like a log.

Thump.

The old man pulled his hat down and watched her fall to the ground, his face deadpan.

“Hmph, you’ve caused enough trouble, rascal. I bet you would’ve started digging at the walls next if I’d let you keep you doing this.”

He took the books from her hand, dusted them a bit, then put them back on the shelves.

He then kicked the girl, who was lying on the ground, to the side. He moved to get ready to take care of the next one, but then frowned all of a sudden.

He squatted down and lifted one of her hands.

“What the hell?” he muttered in shock.

“Such massive lifeforce...”

The old man was frightened, as he sensed that the lifeforce in her was so dense that it had almost concealed the presence of her wood elemental traits.

Furthermore, he also sensed that not only was the suppressed wood elemental powers not dying, but it was also gobbling up that lifeforce as best it could to strengthen itself. This was what shocked him the most.

“What kind of a physique is this?”

“Wood element capable of absorbing lifeforce to strengthen itself?”

His eyes glittered, as if he’d come across some rare treasure.

Yet, he turned his gaze to the shelf and then back again, obviously struggling inwardly.

However, the struggle only lasted for a brief moment before a determined look came back into his eyes.

“It’s a pity...” He sighed. “If you’d appeared before me earlier, I might have just picked you instead.”

After coming to this decision, the old man no longer hesitated, and he kicked the girl aside.

He lifted his head and squatted beside Zhou Tianshen. Then, he looked at the parchment, and his face twisted.

“He’s stunned?”

“How did something like this get out here?”

“Man, are these few fellows rats or something?”

The stout kid beside him seemed to move, and the old man put his face closer.

Zhou Tianshen finally snapped out of the trance he’d fallen under from reading the parchment. His eyes were filled with an excitement so intense that his hands, which were holding the image, couldn’t stop shaking.

“So, you’ve learned quite a bit, eh?” a hallowed voice seemed to say in his mind, and Zhou Tianshen nodded furiously.

“I’ve learned a lot indeed!”

“What Xu Xiaoshou said was true. So long as I keep practicing this blade technique, I’ll be able to get to Innate-level blade will in no time!”

“Mu Zi...”

His mind was completely occupied by that image, and he was about to wave to Mu Zixi, just to tell her to come to take a look, before he realized that he’d grabbed hold of something.

That thing was warm, soft, yet rough.

Zhou Tianshen turned around, a suspicious look on his face.

An old face!

An old face right before his very eyes!

He saw a pair of sunken, dark eyes peering at him through his fingers, making him feel as if the reaper himself were staring at him.

“Holy sh**!”

Zhou Tianshen’s eyes lost focus. The shout had barely left his lips before he passed out from this utterly frightening scene.

He stiffened, fell backward, knocked against the wall, then dropped to the ground with a thump.

“Tsk!”

The old man wiped his face and kicked the kid to a corner. “One more left!”

...

Swoop, swoop, swoop.

Swoop, swoop, swoop.

Xu Xiaoshou was doing two things at one time to be more efficient. He was shaking a book in one hand while holding a jade scroll in the other.

His movements slowed for a brief moment, yet he didn’t stop altogether.

The jabs from those other two in the Information Bar in his mind had been gone for a long time, yet another new information line popped up.

Being watched, Passive Point +1.

That information made his skin crawl, and a shiver immediately ran down his spine, causing him to almost whip his hand at whatever was watching him.

Yet, he held back the urge instead.

He then kept telling himself not to act on impulse. Turning around would definitely be the end of him.

“Who’s watching me?” he thought.

Xu Xiaoshou was utterly frightened, yet he continued doing what he was doing with his hands as he yelled deep down.

He noted that his Sense hadn't told him there was anyone around him.

"No, wait," he thought.

"What happened to the spiritual energy fluctuations from those two?"

"Why are they gone too?"

He tried hard to shift his focus to the two's last location, and then saw the both of them passed out on the ground.

"Sh**!"

"Someone got rid of them?"

"Is the caretaker here?"

Xu Xiaoshou's heart thumped furiously in his chest. If the person would just appear before him, he wouldn't feel so frightened.

But the other person was watching him, while he was unable to see them.

The fear of the unknown is the most torturous.

Xu Xiaoshou carefully blew on the book, then put it back again, pretending to mumble without a care in the world.

"Man, I wonder just how many years it's been since someone last cleaned this place. What's with all the dust? Can't help it. Just have to shake all that dust away."

He stretched backward without turning his head around. "I've done enough charity on the first floor. Time to look for my own spiritual technique on the second floor, then."

He rested his hand on the shelf, then moved his legs. That was when he realized he was no longer in control of his own body.

"Sh**!" he thought.

"Move, d*mn it!"

Xu Xiaoshou's expression turned glum all of a sudden, but he quickly adjusted himself and clapped at his legs.

"H*ll, legs got numbed from standing for so long. It's tiring work indeed.

"It sure is tough being a caretaker of this place and having to take care of so many books every day. I have to say, I'm impressed."

He was finally able to move his leg, and took a step up. Overjoyed, he rested his hand on the shelf, about to leave.

“Heh, you could actually detect my presence. Some progress right there,” a jeering voice came from behind him.

“D*mn.”

Xu Xiaoshou immediately covered his ears. “I’m getting so tired that I’m hearing things now...”

With his legs becoming mobile again, he immediately strode forward, yet he couldn’t shake the feeling of being choked by fate itself.

“Quit pretending already.

“Turn around, now!”

Xu Xiaoshou looked desolate, as he was forced to turn around. He then saw an old man in a straw hat with dark circles under his eyes.

“It’s you!”

His fear was immediately dispelled and replaced with shock instead.

“Isn’t that the old man who forced me to swallow that Infernal Fire Seed back then?” he thought to himself.

“What’s his name again...”

“Elder Sang!”

He immediately became furious as he recalled all the pain he’d experienced that day. He was so furious he almost completely forgot the old man’s status.

He’d sworn before that if he ever ran into that old man again, he would cut him into pieces. How could he forget him?

He took one step backward and pulled Hiding Pain from his chest, then pointed it at the old man.

“One’s gotta live hard and fast, no?” he thought.

Whatever was left of Elder Sang’s eyebrows raised when he saw that sword. He looked at the tip and traced the sword all the way back to Xu Xiaoshou without an ounce of emotion.

“Eh?”

He could only gasp before feeling as if he’d been thrown into an icy hell for a moment, and his body felt cold all of a sudden.

“My gosh!” he thought.

“What am I doing?”

“Why am I pointing a sword at the caretaker??

“Am I crazy or what? He got rid of those two without making a sound! Am I trying to get myself killed?”

He then slowly lifted the sword, twirling it about in the air for a moment before putting it back into the ring and flashing a beaming smile at the old man.

“Hehe, I’ve been looking at the technique for so long that I’ve found it kind of easy to pick up a thing or two from it. I just feel like I have to play with it for a bit with my sword...”

“Hehe, hehe...”

“Sword techniques?” Elder Sang took off his straw hat and took the book he’d just put back. “You mean this 12 Punches of the Great Barren Lands?”

Gulp. The smile on Xu Xiaoshou’s face immediately froze.

Chapter 57: Getting Played

“Why are you here, sir?”

Xu Xiaoshou tried his best to steady himself and explained, “I didn’t break any of the books or scrolls, and I didn’t mess up the boxes...”

“Relax. I’m not going to do anything to you.” Elder Sang flashed him an amicable smile. “What happened to those two was purely incidental. I’m here specifically for you.”

Xu Xiaoshou panicked even more. He’d rather this old man were here for his head than anything else.

What that old man did to him before had been excruciating.

He wondered how the old man would deal with him next.

“Let me have a look at the technique that you’ve picked.” Elder Sang reached out his hand.

Xu Xiaoshou took out the broken piece, wondering what the old man was up to.

“Ten Sections of the Finger Sword?”

Elder Sang frowned as soon as he took the piece. “You picked this thing despite it looking so broken already? You’d be lucky to even get one section out of all ten!”

He took the broken piece and flicked his hand, and an exquisite jade scroll appeared in his grasp.

Xu Xiaoshou was puzzled.

“What does this mean?” he thought. “What is that old fart up to now?”

“Give me back my broken piece!”

“Pretty, right?” Elder Sang snickered.

Xu Xiaoshou immediately got a bad feeling inside, but he couldn’t do anything but nod.

“Nice that you find it pretty. This is something I made specifically for you!” Elder Sang then stuffed the jade scroll into his hand, then gestured with his chin. “Take a look.”

“I don’t wanna take a look!” he thought.

“I want my broken piece back!”

“Pretty thing indeed.” Xu Xiaoshou grinned as he pressed the jade scroll to his head, then scanned it with his will.

“Infernal Heavens?”

His heart almost stopped right then and there at the familiar word.

Infernal?

He wasn't about to believe any claims about this thing if it had something to do with that Infernal Fire Seed he'd swallowed back then.

Xu Xiaoshou stopped pretending and handed the jade scroll back, saying, “Sir, you've overestimated me. I really have very little talent, so much so that I was only able to master one move of that White Cloud Sword Technique, even after practicing it for three years. I'm afraid that I wouldn't be able to master this.”

Elder Sang waved his hand dismissively.

“It's fine. Talent and potential are not requirements for learning this thing. So long as your physical body is strong enough to resist the burning might of the Infernal Fire Seed, you'll do fine.”

Xu Xiaoshou panicked. “The thing is I don't want to go through all that!” he thought.

“I have the Passive System, man! Why the h*ll would I want to do this to myself?”

“I could just slowly earn Passive Points. This thing here is no joke, man! One misstep and I could be reduced to dust!”

Elder Sang pushed the jade scroll back, grabbed his hand, then sensed for a bit.

“Hmm, you've internalized the Infernal Fire Seed well. You're already halfway there. I definitely have a good eye.”

Elder Sang then flipped his hand over, and that familiar scorching hot red seed appeared in his hand, which he immediately stuffed into Xu Xiaoshou's hand.

“Register this spiritual technique when you head out. Practice it well, and when you're done, come and look for me here again.”

“To h*ll with you!” he thought.

“I don't wanna see your face anymore!”

Xu Xiaoshou's heart almost seized as that terrifying pain and heat from the seed seemed to creep inside him again.

He then realized that he couldn't just roll with whatever life threw at him, that he needed to resist sometimes.

“Sir, I don't want to eat this thing...”

Shuu!

Elder Sang flicked his finger and shot another seed into Xu Xiaoshou's throat. Xu Xiaoshou swallowed it with a grunt.

"You can keep this one for later if you don't want to eat it now. Let's eat another one instead." The old man said amicably, squinting at him.

He then took out a jade bottle and carefully put the seed in Xu Xiaoshou's hand into it before shoving it back to him and saying, "No need to hurry. Just take your time."

Xu Xiaoshou staggered and fell to the ground, his face drained of color.

"That's not what I meant," he thought.

"I don't wanna eat any of these!"

He was entirely baffled. This trick had come so suddenly, making him think that the old man was entirely devoid of the air usually present in formidable seniors for having utterly relied on petty tricks.

He no longer dared to do anything rash with that seed in his stomach, and maneuvered his qi to quickly stabilize himself.

The heat in his body quickly rose, and his entire body became red hot again.

He leaned on a bookshelf as steam emanated from his body and that familiar, intense pain came again, almost making him go crazy.

Attacked, Passive Points +1.

Attacked, Passive Points +1.

"..."

He knew there'd be a massive rush of Passive Points, but he wasn't happy about it.

That was the price of pain!

No!

That was the price of being in h*ll!

If he started refining it, the pain would only get a lot more intense.

"Wasn't I here to pick my spiritual technique?" he thought. "How did this happen..."

He looked dazed, as he felt like his soul was leaving his body.

Elder Sang, regardless of this, put ten bottles of pills before Xu Xiaoshou, causing the latter's face to twitch.

"Red Gold Pills?" he thought.

"Ten bottles?"

“So, that’s what’s happening...”

He felt as if fate were toying with him.

“You’ll have a bright future ahead of you after you tough through this. Trust me.” The old man rummaged for a bit, then put down yet another bottle of pills.

“Work hard!

“And remember to come and find me again after you’ve mastered it.” After saying this, he disappeared from where he was standing.

Encouraged, Passive Points +1.

Xu Xiaoshou sat where he was, dazed, feeling as if life had lost all meaning.

“Why?” he thought.

“I fought so hard and became champion, yet I didn’t get to enter the Inner Yard?”

“I finally got a once in a blue moon chance to go into the Spiritual Library Division to pick a spiritual technique, and yet I got played instead?”

Xu Xiaoshou was unable to find an explanation for it. He felt like the world was out to mess him up.

“Forget it. Whatever...”

He registered his spiritual technique in a dazed state and left the place.

...

Back in the Inner Yard.

In some spiritual spot.

Bubble, bubble.

A wine flask, which was made of spiritual silver jade, burned nicely.

Lan Xinzi retracted the blue flames in her hand and opened the lid of the flask. The fragrance of wine went everywhere.

She took two cups, picked up the flask, and walked with steps as light as a feather to the side of a man training with his eyes closed.

“Master Zhang, this is the Murky Sage Brew that the head of the clan just sent here. How about trying it out for a bit?” she probed.

Zhang Xinxiong opened his eyes, coming out of his training state. He looked at the woman before him.

He had to admit that Lan Xinzi was an absolute beauty.

Her dress flowed like a goddess’s, and her shoulders were barely covered. She didn’t need much makeup to make flowers lose their radiance in her presence.

“Your dress fell down. Wear it right.” Zhang Xinxiong looked away.

“What do you mean? This is how it’s worn...” Lan Xinzi’s lips twitched all of a sudden, and she said slyly, “Well, I have two cups in my hands, and, as you can see, my hands are full, so how about you straighten it for me, then?”

Zhang Xinxiong took the cups away and gulped the contents down. “Straighten it yourself.”

Lan Xinzi only rolled her eyes at him, then went on to pour him more wine, saying in his ear, “News from the clan.”

“Speak properly.” Zhang Xinxiong tilted his head away and frowned. “What is it this time?”

“The thing about Wen Chong getting killed. Did you actually think you could hide it?”

Lan Xinzi stretched about lazily, putting up quite a show before the man, and continued.

“Your second mother would only need to whisper at your father’s ear. You see, more news here now.” She lightly blew on the wine in the cup while casting a glance at the man, looking alluring.

Zhang Xinxiong snickered. “What does the matter with the Wen family have to do with me?”

“That guy is your cousin!”

“Just a good-for-nothing piece of trash.”

“...”

Lan Xinzi was speechless for quite a while.

Chapter 58: Get me a Flask, and Kill Someone for Me

“If you don’t want to do it yourself, I could kill Xu Xiaoshou for you.” Lan Xinzi shrugged, causing her dress to slip even further down her shoulders.

“One of the thirty-three of the Inner Yard kill one of the Outer Yard disciples who just became the champion of the Contest of Wind and Cloud?” Zhang Xinxiong stared directly at her. “How would you do that?”

“Assassination.” Lan Xinzi raised her chin a little, and a sneering look appeared in her eyes. “You said it yourself. He’s but an Outer Yard disciple.”

“Heh, he’s but an Outer Yard disciple, eh?”

“Killing Xu Xiaoshou would indeed be simple, but do you really think you could fool the enforcer elder of the Spiritual Law Division so easily?”

“Kill him today, and you’d be executed tomorrow.” Zhang Xinxiong smirked.

“So you’re worried for me!” Lan Xinzi immediately flashed him a beaming smile.

"I just don't want to have myself cornered over someone like that." Zhang Xinxiong looked into the distance, a spirited look on his face. "The Tiansang Prefecture is nothing to me. Dongtianwang City is where the truly strong ones will fight in half a year."

Lan Xinzi stared at his chiseled features with yearning in her eyes. Zhang Xinxiong's mettle, which befitted a supreme overlord whom all submitted to, was what struck her the most.

She thought that it was quite a pity that he didn't fancy her at all.

Zhang Xinxiong turned around and looked at her instead, causing her to become flustered, then said in a serious tone, "Get someone to keep a close eye on Xu Xiaoshou. Remember, don't do anything rash."

"Sure," she said. "My Lord Master Zhang."

Lan Xinzi then snickered and asked, "More wine?"

"No. I need to head out."

"Where are you going?"

"None of your business."

Lan Xinzi's expression immediately changed, and she slammed the flask down on the table, shouting, "You're going to find that b**ch Rao Yinyin, aren't you?"

Zhang Xinxiong halted and slowly turned around. The look in his eyes made him look like he was about to eat someone. "Say that one more time."

Lan Xinzi backed away and fell on a chair.

Zhang Xinxiong's terrifying aura washed over her like a tsunami when he was angry. Despite being at Upper Spiritual Level just like Zhang Xinxiong, she still was unable to resist.

Yet, Lan Xinzi didn't just back off this time. She immediately stood up and shouted furiously, "You won't even be able to get inside her place. You've tried over and over. What's the point in doing it again?"

Zhang Xinxiong walked up to her with heavy steps. His expression was glum as he pushed her onto a chair and said slowly, "There are some things that are beyond you."

"You have good talents, and you're now part of the Inner Yard, so devote yourself to your training and forget about everything else."

"Know your place. You're but a servant of the Zhang family, a messenger..."

"And nothing more."

Lan Xinzi stared at Zhang Xinxiong with a blank look in her eyes until the man was no longer within sight. Then, her stiffened body immediately slumped over, and she felt that her back was drenched in a cold sweat.

She then laughed at herself, realizing that the gap between them in terms of level and status was something that could never be filled in that man's eyes.

That fact had remained the same, even after she became one of the thirty-three in the Inner Yard.

Crack!

She then shattered the flask made of spiritual silver jade by sweeping it to the floor, and the fragrance of Murky Sage Brew immediately filled the entire place.

She stared at the pieces on the ground with teary eyes.

The very next second, she siphoned spiritual source and dried her eyes.

“He Yuxing!”

At that moment, a man came in from outside the compound. He looked dashing, and wore a sword at his waist. He looked like he’d been waiting for a while.

“Why do you have to do this to yourself?” He Yuxing’s eyes, under those vibrant eyebrows of his, were filled with hurt and pity. He stepped on the wine and started picking up the pieces of the flask.

“Leave it be.” Lan Xinzi waved her hand, and blue flames sprouted from the ground, causing him to back away.

“The flask was his, and I broke it.”

“I know.”

“Get me one that looks just like it.”

“...”

“Will do.” He Yuxing snickered bitterly and turned to look at her, but she was gazing far into the distance.

Just as Zhang Xinxiong never saw her as anything more, she too never regarded He Yuxing as anything more.

He shook his head to dispel his messy thoughts.

“A flask. That’s all?”

“Of course not.”

Lan Xinzi straightened her dress and rose, heading for the door.

“Kill someone for me.”

“And that would be?”

“Xu Xiaoshou.”

...

Asschhuumm!

“Who’s talking about me?” Xu Xiaoshou thought.

He rubbed his nose.

If he had to name the prettiest girl he'd ever seen so far, it would probably be the woman in the red dress who went to the group matches with Su Qianqian that day. The woman had even shot him a seductive look when she left.

"She's probably the one thinking about me, eh..."

"I wonder what her name is..."

"Sigh. I guess being good-looking does come with the perk of being unforgettable."

Xu Xiaoshou shifted his focus. He had returned from the Spiritual Library Division and was currently spacing out on his bed.

That trip had been nothing short of mystical. He remembered the sympathetic look on Xiao Qixiu's face when he'd finished registering; the older man had been so sympathetic he'd even offered him words of encouragement when he left.

"Judging from Xiao Qixiu's attitude, that old man may actually be of a higher status. But Xiao Qixiu is already an enforcer elder, no? What could that old man be, then?"

"The dean?"

"No, that can't be right."

"The dean is someone named Ye Xiaotian..."

Xu Xiaoshou rolled around on the ground. He was unable to get on the bed, as he would reduce the bed to charred pieces if he were to lose control, and that would be utterly terrifying.

The temperature on the surface of his body had already burned the blanket and sheets to cinders.

"Whatever. No more thinking about that d*fkn old fart. Gets on my nerves every time I think about him..."

Due to all that had happened, he had to resign to his fate of becoming a guinea pig of some sort, as the old man seemed to be doing some kind of experiment with him.

Objectively speaking, there were pros and cons to it.

Xu Xiaoshou took out the jade scroll and pressed it to his forehead, extending his will to learn what was in it again.

"Infernal Heavens..."

That was an extremely special type of spiritual technique that didn't have a grade designation.

Yet, from his perspective, things that lacked a grade designation were probably the most formidable types of all.

In actual fact, this wasn't far from the truth. The prerequisite for picking up this skill was to have Innate-level Physique with the addition of a fire elemental treasure—the Infernal Fire Seed.

Training this skill was straightforward and simple. So long as one was able to withstand the might of the seed, one would gain the “Infernal Spiritual Source.”

He was very familiar with Spiritual Sources.

When one was at Spiritual Cultivation Level 10, absorbing ambient spiritual energy would enable one to cultivate Spiritual Strength at one’s energy reserve. After one had gotten to the Innate Stage, said Spiritual Strength would then become Spiritual Source and would amplify the might within by several times over.

That technique, which he was currently training in, would enable one to cultivate the unique Infernal Spiritual Source once one mastered it, regardless of one’s level. It was indeed something fearsome and supreme, yet that was also a testament to the difficulty of acquiring it.

Xu Xiaoshou bared his torso as he sat cross-legged on the floor with steam emanating from him all the time.

He had actually yet to get into the zone.

According to the introduction, the longer the Infernal Fire Seed stayed in one’s body, the more unstable it would become, which fitted his speculations.

This thing was indeed a time bomb!

He shot a glance at the red interface in his mind.

Passive Points: 48662.

According to his previous experience, internalizing that thing would require four to six hours, and getting through that stage would earn him a hefty sum in Passive Points.

“Alright. Time to eat it up.”

Xu Xiaoshou steeled himself. While the pain was still there, having been through the process and succeeded once, he deemed that nothing untoward would happen, so long as he was cautious.

He even began to look forward to his transformation after the session was successful.

The fire elemental Infernal Spiritual Source.

That would be akin to having mastered Innate Elemental Powers of fire, man!

Chapter 59: Fundamental Transformation of the Breathing Technique

Over ten bottles of Red Gold Pills were laid before him in a row on the floor. It was quite a splurge.

Xu Xiaoshou was ready, and yet he still hesitated nonetheless.

Through the use of Breathing Technique, he’d been able to shorten the refining time from about a month to four to six hours.

But at that time his Breathing Technique had been at level six.

After many trials and errors, he had basically figured out that every single passive skill would be fundamentally transformed after breaking into Innate Level.

He wondered if that would enable his Breathing Technique to break through Innate Level and become something he could manipulate.

For instance, he would like to be able to control the amount of scorching heat he took in with each breath.

Because if that were the case, it would apparently enable him to drastically reduce the pain and risk involved.

But what if the thing took a different turn, and instead of enabling him to control amounts, it enabled him to derive pleasure from it?

He shuddered at the thought, finding it terrifying.

He turned to look at the red interface. There were three technique bars with a total of six passive skills between them, and five were already at the Innate Level.

The only one left at the Acquired Level looked out of place.

He was somewhat OCD, so this bothered him somewhat.

“Whatever. You can’t stop eating because you might choke. I still need it so it can level itself up on its own in the future.”

Xu Xiaoshou gritted his teeth and exchanged his Passive Points for five Skill Points, then immediately dumped them all into Breathing Technique.

Breathing Technique (Acquired, level 7).

Breathing Technique (Acquired, level 8).

Breathing Technique (Acquired, level 9).

Breathing Technique (Acquired, level 10).

Breathing Technique (Innate, level 1).

The Information Bar quickly refreshed, and several messages went by. Xu Xiaoshou felt somewhat better, but the change wasn’t that noticeable.

He shuddered when the last message appeared.

He felt himself become a spirit-gathering array. Spiritual energy was absorbed, and the surface of his body became misty.

Pores all over his skin opened the very next instant, with every inch of his skin absorbing the spiritual mist around him.

The more drastic change took place in his nose. He caused two mini tornados to form just from taking a whiff.

That bit of spiritual energy that he absorbed in that one instant was able to compensate for a night's sleep altogether.

Xu Xiaoshou felt rather nauseous. His hands, which were splayed on his knees, clenched and his face twisted, as if he were trying to hold something in.

Hmm!

His body shuddered slightly.

Huff!

Xu Xiaoshou clenched his teeth.

Hah... HUUUHHH!

He struggled to the best of his ability, deeming it imperative that he hold it in.

He then leapt and threw a punch.

The resulting force of the spiritual energy immediately blew the door to his room open.

After exhaling hard, the pores all over his body closed, and he felt as if he'd just weathered a storm that could've killed him.

"Not bad. It's alright. Problem's manageable. Could continue training further in the future."

The rush that he felt was well over several times what he'd felt before. However, after practicing it a few times, he managed to develop a measure of resistance to it, making the situation manageable.

He then took out a Spirit Crystal.

He then hesitated and put the thing away, taking out a Spiritual Cultivation Pill instead.

"Let's get this over with. The harder I go, the sooner this could end."

He reached his hand out as far as it would go and pushed his head back as far as he could. Then, he took a light whiff.

Vooooom!

The pill immediately disappeared.

He was surprised.

He was hardly able to keep himself steady, as he was feeling dizzy, and thought that he'd taken it too far.

But he had no time to dwell on it. That terrifying spiritual energy went all the way into his energy reserve through his nose, and the rush spread all over his body.

Ohhh.

He was only able to keep a stoic face for a second before feeling like he'd melted into a puddle. His legs clamped inside, his wrists turned outside, and he slumped to the ground like mush.

Hmmmm...

He spasmed, and there was nothing he could do about it.

Xu Xiaoshou wiggled and flapped about on the ground like a dying fish, yet as soon as his body touched the ground, he became a lot more sensitive.

“Hickkk!” he thought.

“He-help me!”

...

After a while.

He finally returned to normal and looked at the bottle of pills on the ground, still reeling from the shock and terror.

He tested sniffing the pills and found that the rush had increased by three to four times from what it'd been back then. He stopped testing it further and thought that it would be more or less the same with the Red Gold Pills.

He came to realize something after all of this.

Grade 10 pills, like the Spiritual Cultivation Pill and Red Gold Pill, would bring him a higher rush, as the level of his Breathing Technique had increased, yet there was still a limit to it.

A pill could only hold so much spiritual energy in it. Being at level eight at the moment, he was no longer at a stage where sucking in a pill or two would bring about a breakthrough.

Yeah, that would require over a dozen instead.

However, that was beside the point. His progress at making breakthroughs was already deemed high enough, and he had no need to rush.

More importantly, he was already able to see the limits of pills at such grades.

Even if the pills were stronger, he still wouldn't be able to get more than five times out of them.

Xu Xiaoshou found this range tolerable.

But then again, he hadn't been able to stop himself from talking to ease the rush.

He deemed that it would serve as an important piece of information that could serve as a reference for when he went about absorbing other pills in the future.

Other than that, he'd also discovered that Breathing Technique at Innate Levels brought about a fundamental change: it enabled him to breathe not only through his nose but through his pores.

At the moment, every single pore on his body was breathing the spiritual energy around him.

That was something terrifying in itself, as his training rate would spike by more than ten times.

His speculation that he would be able to control the amount of whatever he could take in had been realized to a certain extent.

He could manipulate the pores all over his body by opening and closing them at will.

When he went all out with his training, he would even be able to form spiritual mist around his body. If he were to only breathe through his nose, his training rate would increase to a max of two to three times the usual.

“Very well.”

He looked at the six Innate-level passive skills in his mind and smiled with satisfaction.

If he were to treat them like spiritual techniques, it would make him a formidable fighter capable of six Innate-level spiritual techniques, and his growth from then on out would be practically limitless.

“Everything is set. Just one more thing.

“I have to get rid of this thing next.”

He saw the Infernal Fire Seed in his reserve. He’d had enough of its presence, as it prevented him from even sleeping in his own bed.

“I don’t give a d*mn that you’re a fire seed,” he thought. “H*ll, you could be a fire walnut for all I care. One way or another, I’m gonna bust you open!”

He took a Red Gold Pill and held his breath.

The next second, veins popped out of his forehead, and his neck got all tense.

As the pain built up, a faint red mist sprayed from the surface of his body. It was an air of bloodiness, but more importantly, it carried a charred smell with it.

That was his new way of using Breathing Technique—letting his body release all that gas in him.

A spark of joy flashed in his eye. By letting his body spread the work out instead of letting his nose do it all, his pain was drastically reduced.

It got to the point that he didn’t even need the Red Gold Pills. All that pain spread thin was easily repaired by Eternal Vitality right away.

Xu Xiaoshou clenched his teeth and said, “Get back here!”

He sucked in with all his might, taking in all that red mist that had just spread out. It was all suppressed by his new Breathing Technique, and all of it went straight to his energy reserve.

“Boy, that’s some efficiency indeed.”

“The rate is more than double!”

He remembered that when he’d taken the energy in again before, the scorching energy had burned his meridians for one microcosmic orbit. But at the moment, this process had surprisingly and completely been omitted.

“That’s Innate-level Breathing Technique for you. Perks far outweigh its shortcomings.”

Chapter 60: Infernal Heavenly Flames

The Infernal Fire Seed shrunk considerably.

And the spiritual power in his reserves noticeably increased.

Xu Xiaoshou stopped after he was done with the first round of refinement.

The process was far easier than he’d imagined it would be. All of the situations he’d been afraid of happening hadn’t appeared.

He was feeling rather disgruntled instead, and wondered if the seed had become weaker.

“No...” he thought.

“Something is off.”

He solemnly walked out his door, letting the night breeze blow through his clothes as he pressed a finger to his head and looked up at the sky with a rather lonesome expression on his face.

“It’s not that the Infernal Fire Seed has gotten weak. It’s just that...”

“I have become stronger!”

Whooooossh.

The cold breeze blew, and it looked like it was about to rain. It was then that he realized what “high and mighty,” yet alone, felt like.

He snapped back to reality after quite a while.

Given that the Infernal Fire Seed was no longer a threat to him, he went on to simply hasten his rate of internalization, changing his goal from internalizing the seed to earning Passive Points. But there was also something else.

He wanted to finish his training in “Infernal Heavens.”

It was undoubtedly a very powerful spiritual technique, and the no-brainer method of training was just what he was seeking.

A determined look came into his eyes again as he sat down cross-legged, resisting the pain as he sprayed red mist all around him again.

Absorb!

Spray again...

Absorb!

Spray...

...

Resilience came in handy at such times. It was something he'd long honed due to his illness back in his past life.

So long as it was something he saw to be a goal and there was hope, he would make sure that he succeeded one way or another, regardless of how painful the process would be.

As time passed, that seed in his body shrunk again, and the Passive Points in his mind continuously spiked.

Passive Points: 43220.

Passive Points: 53449.

Passive Points: 64122.

It was nighttime, and the last bit of scorching heat was absorbed into his energy reserves. Spiritual power raged within him, and seemed to fill him completely.

"I did it."

He opened his eyes, which looked ablaze with heat.

He sensed all that raging energy inside him, and that solid feeling of having become stronger was every bit on par with dumping Skill Points into techniques.

The Infernal Fire Seed above his energy reserve was completely gone, yet his progress with cultivating Infernal Spiritual Source was still at just 80 to 90 percent.

"That d*mned old fart. Don't tell me he even got that figured out!"

He then took out a bottle containing another fire seed.

His face twisted for a bit, as if he were a kid that still had homework left that needed to be done.

"D*mn it!"

He sat down again and quit thinking about rest altogether. He looked up at the sky and decided to get his hands on the Infernal Spiritual Source before the sun rose.

He swallowed his third seed and started refining it.

The night was quiet, and the breeze gentle. It was drizzling outside.

If Elder Sang were present, he probably would've been astonished at the frightening resilience demonstrated by Xu Xiaoshou.

While he had indeed given the kid the third Infernal Fire Seed, he never would've expected the kid to actually internalize two seeds in a single day.

It was more a matter of resilience, as only an insane masochist could've done this.

Poofff.

Red mist sprayed, and he got high yet again.

Attacked, Passive Points +1.

Attacked, Passive Points +1.

“...”

His body was scorched again and again, yet with pain came Passive Points.

Passive Points: 73322.

Passive Points: 81008.

“...”

Time passed. The misty spiritual strength in his energy reserve gradually became viscous, and the crimson colors gradually diluted into translucency as he neared the precipice.

He knew that when his misty spiritual strength finally condensed into a gel state, that would be the sign that he had acquired the Infernal Spiritual Source.

There were only bits of the seed left in him, and he breathed out in a frenzy, ignoring his pain altogether, and melded it with his energy reserve.

Boom!

His energy reserve rumbled, and his spiritual strength became completely condensed, turning into a crimson spiritual source that raged inside his energy reserve.

The resulting force was released, and he made his breakthrough.

He reached Spiritual Cultivation Level nine.

The spiritual source cooled, and the crimson color faded into pure white. Everything became completely silent again.

Huufff.

He breathed out, his expression one of excitement.

He did it!

The Infernal Spiritual Source was white, packing massive power and super high temperatures. It could be as still as a mountain yet rumble like thunder.

He then attempted to siphon the spiritual source in him. A sliver of it contained several times more heat energy than when it was conjured from mere spiritual power.

He wrapped it around the tip of his finger and prod at the ground. His attempt unexpectedly caused the stone ground underneath to melt before his finger even touched it.

“Man, this is dope!”

Xu Xiaoshou was excited. The force of his attack had very noticeably spiked.

He wondered what would happen if he added Strengthen and Sharpness to it.

Tsk, tsk.

He clicked his tongue under his breath. He wondered if he could be considered an absolute genius for having mastered Innate Elemental Power of fire, and acquiring the Infernal Spiritual Source of such fearsome force, while still at the Acquired Stage.

“Alright. Time to get to Infernal Heavenly Flames, then.”

According to the jade scroll, the Infernal Heavens was the next step to go after acquiring Infernal Heavenly Flames.

White spiritual source flowed and manifested at the center of his palm, and the temperature in his room spiked all of a sudden.

He manipulated the spiritual source with his will and did his best to compress it. He was able to sense fearsome energy being condensed at a single point on his palm.

He was sweating profusely. Not daring to let his guard down, he opened his Sense to the fullest and manipulated that bit of energy on his palm with utmost precision.

He knew that that bit of energy could explode violently if he wasn't careful with it, and he had no intention of dying.

He manipulated it with extreme precision, and made constant adjustments.

That bit of white on his palm became so condensed that it utterly disappeared before long.

Puk, puk.

He could very clearly hear sparks going off.

He took a look at his palm. Nothing could be seen, yet he was able to sense that there was a blob of extremely compressed raging energy there.

The Infernal Heavenly Flames had no color. It was completely transparent, with white sparks erupting from it once in a while. It was capable of burning everything.

That was how it was written in the jade scroll, and he wondered if any of that was just an exaggeration. He thought for a bit, then took out a piece of Spirit Crystal.

The thing was rock solid and had a high energy density. It would serve as a very useful item to experiment with.

He held the Spirit Crystal high above his right palm, which had that blob of invisible energy on it. Yet, he hadn't even released it yet before the crystal started to evaporate.

“The hell...”

He was so surprised that he let go of the crystal.

Fzzzz!

The crystal fell, and when it was still a few feet away from the palm of his hand, it was completely vaporized, and dense spiritual strength spread all over the place.

“Holy sh**!”

He was thoroughly frightened, finding the phenomenon utterly terrifying. The bit of flames in his hand was transparent and yet packed such terrifying heat. He wondered if there was anyone who could defend themselves against it.

He willed and absorbed that bit of flames on his palm back into his energy reserve along with all that spiritual energy that the Spirit Crystal had released.

Such was the way of his Breathing Technique. It took it all in without wasting even one bit.

Haahhh.

Xu Xiaoshou groaned comfortably as that bit of energy surged into his body and cured him of the exhaustion he'd felt from working the whole night.

He clenched his fists momentarily, finding everything to have worked smoothly. He was only one step away from completing that powerful spiritual technique of his.