

1101 Is Your Xuanxuan Faction Still Recruiting? 1

Xiao Qin's lips twitched.

This sudden encirclement... Was he going to have to challenge a group single-handedly, and was the group going to 'single-handedly' challenge him?

Individually, they were all weaker than him, but the overwhelming fighting will that was reflected in his eyes left him feeling as if he was a prey standing amidst a group of predators... Didn't they come from a weaker vassal state of Qingyuan Empire? Weren't they exhausted from their long journey?

Not only was there not the slightest hint of exhaustion from them, their eyes were even gleaming in excitement. It was almost as if they were waiting for him.

"I am at Saint 1-dan pinnacle. Is there any one of you who is at the same cultivation realm as me?" Xiao Qin asked.

Since he was going to test the strength of the Xuanxuan Faction, it would only be a fair assessment if he were to face someone who was of the same cultivation realm as him. Otherwise, facing a weaker opponent, even if he were to suppress his cultivation, he would still be able to easily subdue his opponent with his superior battle experience and eye of discernment. That would be no different from bullying his opponent.

And of course, if he were to play it fair, hopefully, the other party would be too embarrassed to order a lynching on him too...

"Saint 1-dan?" Ruohuan gongzi frowned.

Their Xuanxuan Faction mostly consisted of freshmen, and it had only been several months since the start of the school term. Despite the incredible speed of their cultivation, their

strongest member was still only at Perfect Harmonization realm. Thus, to find a member who had reached Saint realm was... Hmmm? It seemed like they did have a Saint 1-dan pinnacle member amongst them after all!

“Invite Senior Qiqi over!” Ruohuan gongzi turned around and issued an instruction to a nearby member.

The member swiftly sprinted away, and not too long later, Luo Qiqi appeared in the courtyard.

So far, other than the monstrous Zhang Xuan, this young lady was the strongest member of their faction.

“My apologies, but it seems like Senior Qiqi is the only one who has achieved a cultivation of Saint 1-dan pinnacle in our Xuanxuan Faction. Why don’t you... have a duel with her then?” Ruohuan gongzi said a little awkwardly.

Luo Qiqi was an individual who had received the individual guidance directly from Principal Zhang, so her cultivation and eye of discernment were far beyond that of the other members. It did seem like they were bullying the other party by having him face her.

“You want me to fight against a woman?” Xiao Qin frowned.

He was an unparalleled genius of the Combat Master Hall. Be it in terms of zhenqi, physical resilience, reaction speed, and the such, he was far superior to his other peers. To randomly find a woman to face him... Weren’t they looking down on him a little bit too much?

“What’s wrong with facing a woman?” Luo Qiqi frowned in displeasure. Raising her hands, she beckoned, “Make your move!”

“Since that’s the case, pardon me then!” Upon the other party’s insistence, Xiao Qin sighed lightly and did a gentlemanly bow. After which, he drove his zhenqi throughout his body, and an aura overflowing with strength surged from his body.

Hu!

Xiao Qin took a step forward, and his figure abruptly disappeared.

As a Thousand Men Commander of the Martial Arts Division, he specialized specifically in martial arts. It was just a single step forward, but there were at least seven to eight transformations contained in it. In an instant, multiple identical figures appeared all around him, making it impossible for one to determine which direction he was going to attack from.

Battle technique, Steps of Thousand Illusory Shadows!

Steps of Thousand Shadows was a battle technique which was created by a Primordial Spirit realm expert of the Combat Master Hall two thousand years ago. It could produce multiple illusory figures around one, making it impossible for one to determine one's location. This would, in turn, make the opponent vulnerable to one's attacks.

Even though his opponent was a woman, he still chose to go all out right from the start.

This was also one of the core teachings of the Combat Master Hall—Never underestimate any opponent that you are facing!

Huala!

As soon as the Steps of Thousand Illusory Shadows was executed, he raised his finger to serve as his sword and directed it against the opponent before him.

This was also a battle technique, known as the Rising Crouching Dragon. It was known for its swift and precise movements, reminiscent of a dragon swiftly subduing its prey, making it an extremely difficult move to guard against.

Even within the Combat Master Hall, there were hardly any peers who could equal him whenever he executed the two powerful battle techniques in unison.

“Not too bad!”

The young lady chuckled. Without resorting to any huge movements or battle techniques, she simply raised her hand and smacked downward.

It was a very simple palm strike!

Yet, for some reason, Xiao Qin felt as if his movement technique had been completely suppressed by the other party.

It was sensation similar to being cornered by a predator; no matter what he attempted to do, there was no way he could avoid that palm strike.

“What is that move?”

Xiao Qin’s eyes narrowed in shock, and cold sweat trickled down his back.

While the young lady’s moves seemed simple enough, it was exquisitely executed in a manner which sealed all of the transformations in his battle techniques. It seemed like no matter how he moved, there would only be a single conclusion—he would be sent flying by that palm strike!

“It seems like I can only clash with her forcefully...” As expected of a genius of the Combat Master Hall, Xiao Qin was able to derive the best solution to his current plight in an instant. Since he was unable to dodge the palm strike, he would only find himself defeated if he were to attempt all of his transformations desperately to escape. Thus, he gritted his teeth and raised his palm as well.

He might have lost in a battle of skill against the young lady, but he wouldn’t necessarily lose in a battle of strength.

While his defense wasn’t as formidable as that group of monsters from the Protector Division, his zhenqi and physical body resilience had still reached a fairly decent level. At the very least, he would be able to overpower most cultivators in a direct clash of power, let alone a female cultivator who was unlikely to specialize in strength.

Hu!

Just as he was about to thrust his palm forward to meet the other party’s, the young lady’s figure abruptly blurred before disappearing from his sight altogether.

“Shit...” Realizing that he had erred, cold sweat trickled down Xiao Qin’s body.

He had thought that the other party had intended to clash directly with him, so he had gathered all of his strength into his palm strike. Yet... it was actually a feint!

“AHHHHH!!” With a furious battle cry, Xiao Qin swiftly withdrew his attack and backed away.

Considering how he had been using his full strength, it was impressive that he was able to pull back his palm strike and retreat so quickly. However, it was a pity that he was still a step too slow. A powerful might suddenly pressed down from behind him, and even before it struck, he could already feel his organs being torn apart by the incredible might.

“I won’t be able to make it in time...” Knowing that it was too late for him to turn around and meet the other party’s attack, he quickly drove all of his zhenqi towards his back to ward off the force of the attack as much as he could.

At this point, he could only endure the strike and try to find a way to counterattack later on.

Gugu!

Anticipating a powerful strike landing on his back, he gritted his teeth and mentally resolved himself to withstand the strike. However, the powerful aura which had gathered behind him abruptly dissipated, and the pressure of the attack dissipated all of a sudden.

Bewildered, he anxiously turned around, only to see that the young lady had already retreated eight steps away. Standing calmly on the spot, as if not having moved at all, she calmly said, “You have lost.”

Pu!

Right after those words were spoken, Xiao Qin’s face suddenly turned ghastly pale, and a spurt of blood gushed from his mouth. Only in this instant did he realize that he had been completely sapped of his strength, and even remaining on his feet had become an incredibly arduous task for him.

It didn’t take him long to realize what was going on. Even though he had never directly clashed with the young lady throughout the fight, he had been forced to retract his zhenqi twice within a short duration of time, and the impact from doing so had caused immense damage to his body.

To be able to induce severe internal damage within him without even crossing blows... the young lady's comprehension of combat and battle techniques were truly fearsome!

At this point, Xiao Qin had no choice but to admit that he wasn't a match for the other party.

After recuperating for a moment, Xiao Qin stood up with a depressed look on his face and sighed deeply before conceding, "I have lost."

He had thought that the rumors concerning the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy were mostly exaggeration, but after facing the young lady, he realized that the notion he had couldn't be more wrong.

He couldn't even withstand the might of a random woman within the Xuanxuan Faction, so how incredible would their top-notch expert be?

"Actually, your zhenqi, physical body strength, agility, and reaction speed are all not bad. What that is truly limiting you is your battle techniques!" Seeing Xiao Qin's gloomy look, Luo Qiqi consoled.

"My battle techniques are limiting me?" Hearing those words, Xiao Qin's mouth twitched, suffering an even greater blow than before.

He was the greatest genius of the Combat Master Hall's Martial Arts division. Despite being only at Saint 1-dan, he had already grasped four Saint low-tier battle techniques!

It could be said that other than the Thousand Men Commanders whose cultivation were higher than him, there were no peers who possessed a deeper understanding of martial arts than him...

Despite such, the other party actually said that... his battle techniques were limiting him! This was a direct slap to his face!

"You don't believe me?" Luo Qiqi chuckled softly, not offended by Xiao Qin's response at all. "You can ask any

student here and have them evaluate your performance in the fight earlier!”

“Evaluate? They will evaluate me?” Shaking his head, Xiao Qin looked at the several thousand students around him.

Most of them were at Perfect Harmonization realm, and there were some who were still only at Consonant Spirit realm. He wouldn't even spare an additional glance at such cultivators on the streets, and yet, to have them evaluate his performance...

Were they able to see through the essence of his moves?

Were they able to understand how profound his moves were?

Evaluate his performance?

What a joke!

“You seem to doubt my words. Do you feel that they are unable to see through the flaws in your battle technique due to their limited cultivation?” Luo Qiqi shook his head. “It's not that I want to traumatize you, but with your current comprehension of battle technique, even if you were to suppress your cultivation and fight with any one of them here, you wouldn't survive past two blows!”

“Any one of them here?” Xiao Qin's complexion turned extremely awful. “I know that I have lost to you, but I have to ask you not to humiliate me like that!”

No matter what, he was still an expert of the Combat Master Hall. To claim that he would be unable to receive two blows from Perfect Harmonization realm cultivators... that was blatantly making a mockery out of him!

“Senior Luo Qiqi is right, your strength is indeed very lacking.”

“Even if you were to lower your cultivation and fight with me, you still wouldn't be a match!”

“We aren't deceiving you. Your comprehension of battle techniques is truly appalling...”

Seeing the indignant look on Xiao Qin's face, the crowd began remarking.

They were looking forward to the arrival of an expert who would allow them to go all out, but who knew that he would turn out to be so weak in the end. Honestly speaking, they couldn't help but feel deeply disappointed.

Since the Combat Master Hall was going to challenge them, why didn't they send a couple of stronger combat masters?

Given how appalling that fellow's comprehension of battle techniques was, it was as good as sending them a sandbag to pummel!

Hai!

Everyone in the room couldn't help but sigh deeply in lamentation.

"You all... Very well! I was afraid that it would be too much if I were to suppress my cultivation and challenge the rest of you, but since that's what you all think, let's do it then!" Hearing the sighs and seeing the disappointed looks around him, Xiao Qin was on the verge of exploding. Unable to take it any longer, he consumed a recovery pill to heal from his injuries before suppressing his cultivation with a roar. In the blink of an eye, his cultivation had fallen to Cosmos Bridge realm pinnacle.

"I have already suppressed my cultivation. Is there anyone who wishes to fight against me?" Xiao Qin scanned his surroundings and he declared coldly.

"Cosmos Bridge realm pinnacle? Many of us are at that cultivation realm here, so feel free to pick..." Seeing that the other party was still intent on challenging them, Ruohuan gongzi shook his head and replied.

"Alright!" Seeing how the leader of the Xuanxuan Faction was fearlessly asking him to have his pick, Xiao Qin couldn't help but feel as if his face had been slapped once again. Gritting his teeth in anger, he scanned the surroundings and selected an ordinary-looking young man. That person seemed to be in his early twenties, and with his fair complexion and slender physique, he had an appearance reminiscent of a weak scholar.

“You want to fight with me?” The person who was specifically pointed out widened his eyes in shock, as if he had just won the lottery.

“That’s right!” Xiao Qin flung his hands majestically.

“I can fight with you, but you are injured at the moment. I would be bullying you if I were to fight with you like that...” After hesitating for a moment, a hint of excitement flashed across the eyes of the young man as he spoke earnestly. “Why don’t I tie both of my hands up then? I’ll fight against you without my hands... It should be fairer this way!” In this context, transformations refer to the maneuvers he could utilize under the current circumstances. To put it in analogy to a car, a car that is moving forward could choose to continue moving forward, swerve right, swerve left, or stop. That would mean that it has four possible transformations.

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“Tie up both of your hands? Fairer?” Xiao Qin staggered, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

Are you suggesting that it would only be a fair fight against me after you tie up both of your hands?

Aren't you underestimating me too much!

I, a powerful Saint 1-dan pinnacle expert, am challenging you to a fight, and yet, you think that I would only be a match for you with both of your hands tied?

A sharp pain assaulted Xiao Qin's chest, leaving him feeling as if he would spurt blood at any moment.

“If you think that you will be able to withstand my attacks, do whatever you please!” Xiao Qin clenched his jaws so tightly that his teeth were on the verge of chipping, but he also knew that there was no point getting angry.

Thus, he took a deep breath to calm his state of mind before rushing forward.

The woman earlier was a Saint 1-dan expert just like him, and she was incredibly talented as well, so it was one thing for him to lose to her. He didn't believe that he would lose to a random individual whom he had picked from a group of several thousand people as well.

Huala!

With his fingers hooked like claws, his hands darted forward with a sharp gust of wind.

Battle technique, Thunderbolt Heart Ripping Claws!

While this technique hadn't reached Saint low-tier yet, it was well-known for its astounding prowess amongst Spirit pinnacle battle techniques. Upon reaching Major Accomplishment for this technique, one would be capable of

pulling off lightning-swift movements that could mess with the opponent's momentum, making it extremely difficult to deal with.

But of course, just the ability to mess with the opponent's momentum wouldn't justify the incredible infamy it had. What that had truly instilled fear in the hearts of the cultivators was how callous the technique was.

Everything that the claw latched itself onto would be torn off at lightning speed. If a cultivator were to put his guard down for a moment while facing this technique, his heart could very well be ripped out in the next moment.

It was due to how vicious the technique was that most master teachers would steer clear of it. However, these were the exact techniques that combat masters required to overwhelm their opponents in battle. The more vicious a technique was, the more likely that it would be effective in subduing or even killing their opponent. As a result, Xiao Qin had already reached an incredible level of mastery in the technique,

Huala!

Just as the Thunderbolt Heart Ripping Claws was about to land on its target, the scholarly young man suddenly took a quick step and dodged to the side. It was an extremely puzzling sight. The scholarly young man's movements were visibly far slower than Xiao Qin's, but for some reason, the scholarly young man was able to dodge his assault easily, as if having predicted the trajectory of his attack. On top of that, while the scholarly young man made the evasive maneuver, he lifted his leg and kicked it forcefully towards Xiao Qin's lower body as well.

Facing the attack, Xiao Qin's eyes narrowed.

He thought that the young man whom he had chosen out would only be average at best, but the movements made by the other party made him realize that he was sorely mistaken. The other party was far more terrifying than he had expected.

The Thunderbolt Heart Ripping Claws was extremely powerful, but the enhanced speed came at the expense of

stability in his lower body. On top of that, the other party's kick was accurately aimed at a location which he would definitely have to guard against but it was extremely awkward for him to do so.

“Thousand Leaf Threading Hands!” Knowing that he could be incapacitated if the kick were to land, Xiao Qin hurriedly opened up his claws and stroked the area in front of him gently.

It was a light movement reminiscent of a musician stroking its zither, but it was far more lethal than it looked.

The Thousand Leaf Treading Hands was a battle technique created by a demonic tunist. While its movements seemed completely harmless on the surface, in truth, every single finger harnessed a powerful surge of sword qi which could devastate any opponent easily.

The switch between the Thunderbolt Heart Ripping Claw to the Thousand Leaf Treading Hands was swift and seamless, devoid of the slightest lag in between, as if they were transformations of the same technique. This feat in itself showed that Xiao Qin's reputation as the genius of the Martial Arts Division wasn't just for show.

His mastery over his battle techniques had indeed reached an incredible level.

However, as incredible as his movements were, he was still outdone by his opponent. Seemingly having anticipated Xiao Qin's movements, the scholarly young man leaped into the sky and accurately kicked his fingers with the tip of his feet.

Kacha! Kacha!

As the immense force gathered in the scholarly young man's feet collided with Xiao Qin's fingers, the crisp sound of bone shattering echoed resoundingly in the air. Before Xiao Qin could recover from this blow, a black shadow abruptly covered his view. A leg was headed straight for his face.

Peng!

Xiao Qin was sent crashing into the ground, and blood spurted uncontrollably from his mouth.

He struggled back to his feet with disbelief in his eyes.

He realized that from the start to the end, the scholarly young man really hadn't used his hands at all. Yet, the other party was still able to defeat him so easily!

While he did lose to the Saint 1-dan pinnacle woman earlier on, he could rationalize his defeat as the woman being the most talented genius in the Xuanxuan Faction. But the scholarly young man was someone whom he had chosen at random, a mere Cosmos Bridge realm cultivator... and yet, he didn't even survive two attacks from the other party!

Could it be that there was truly a mistake in the battle techniques that he cultivated?

"There's no need to get depressed." the scholarly young man consoled. "Your fighting prowess is not too bad, it's just a pity that you met me! But well... I guess you could also count it as a blessing in disguise too, because I am one of the weaker members of the Xuanxuan Faction.

"Your moves are swift and powerful, and your ability to transit between different techniques is impressive. Your grasp of timing over battle techniques is rather commendable too. Despite all this, the reason why you are unable to achieve victory is because you place too much trust in your battle techniques and overlooked yourself!"

"Place too much trust in my battle techniques?" Unsure of what the scholarly young man was driving at, Xiao Qin frowned in incomprehension.

"That's right. The aim of a battle technique is to effectively draw out the strength within a cultivator so as to overwhelm the opponent. However, it is important to note that it is a means to a battle, not an end to a battle! As powerful as a battle technique may be, it can only play an auxiliary role in battle," the scholarly young man explained with a smile.

"The battle techniques that you have utilized in your fight against Senior Qiqi and me are indeed powerful. If it had been any other cultivator, there would be no doubt that they would

have fallen by now. However, in our eyes, your reliance on powerful battle techniques only became flaws for us to exploit.

“To give you an example, that claw art that you have used against me earlier boasted of incredible speed and astounding might. However, have you considered any countermeasure should your attacks fail to land on your opponent?”

At this point, the scholarly young man paused for a brief moment before continuing. “Even the strongest of battle techniques would be meaningless if you can’t land it on your opponent! The reason why I chose to dodge your claw art at the very last moment is because I could tell that you would be wide open in that very instant. In that instant, all of your strength would be centered on your upper body, leaving your lower body wide open!

“Thus, I aimed my kick at your lower thigh. No matter how fast you are able to drive your zhenqi, it would have been difficult for you to channel your zhenqi from your hands to your legs at a moment’s notice. You probably thought that this was a negligible flaw due to the incredible speed of your claw art, but under the careful manipulation of an expert, even the smallest of flaws could be exacerbated many times over. That being said, your response is truly commendable. Realizing that you would not be able to reinforce your defenses in time, you decisively chose to switch your method of offense.

“Your new offense consisted of a light stroking motion. Under its gentle exterior, I could sense sword qi gathering on your fingertips. If I’m not mistaken, it should be a type of battle technique as well. I have to admit that it’s quite a powerful move, but its attacks are very straightforward too. A sword might be sharp, but that’s only when you are standing before its blade. Just by leaping into the air, I was able to avoid your attack easily. Then, with a simple kick on your fingers, I was able to overcome your battle technique very easily and even inflict considerable damage.” The scholarly young man shook his head in pity.

As a whole, the strength of the fellow before him was still decent, but it was a pity that his movements were too rigid.

“Y-you...” Xiao Qin’s body trembled in shock, as if a streak of lightning had struck his body.

The other party’s analysis was spot-on. Those were indeed the flaws of his battle techniques... It was no wonder why he lost so tragically!

“All of you... were able to see through my flaws as well?”
Xiao Qin turned to the crowd around him and asked hoarsely.

“Considering how weak you are, it would have been difficult not to see through your flaws!”

“Your attacks are too straightforward, being able to see through the flaws in it is truly nothing much...”

“To tell you the truth, Hu Chun has only listed a small portion of the flaws in your battle techniques. It goes without saying that the more powerful a battle technique is, the greater damage it could deal, but... if one is unable to land his blows, what would be the use even if one were to wield the most powerful battle technique in the world?”

...

Hearing Xiao Qin’s question, a huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

“Unable to land his blows...” Xiao Qin muttered in a daze as he heard the comments around him.

Indeed.

Battle techniques were designed to allow a cultivator to amplify his strength so as to deal greater harm to his opponent. However, if one’s battle techniques couldn’t connect with one’s opponent... what would be the use?

No matter how many battle techniques one were to learn, it would only be for show!

“I have benefitted from your guidance...”

The realization of this fact came as an epiphany to Xiao Qin. He had a feeling as if the clouds that had been covering his eyes all along had finally been parted, revealing an entirely

new world to him. Thankful, he bowed deeply to the crowd before him.

For many years, he had been aiming to cultivate as many powerful battle techniques as he could, and he took pride in that as well. He mistakenly assumed that powerful battle techniques equaled greater fighting prowess.

Such a logic may hold true against ordinary cultivators, but when faced with a true expert, his overreliance on battle techniques would have been a fatal flaw!

As the saying goes, ‘the greater the breadth, the lower the depth’!

No matter how smooth his transitions between battle techniques were, they were still ultimately different battle techniques. There were bound to be several flaws in between that others could make use of.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. Actually, we also learned all of these from our principal as well. It’s only due to his guidance that we were able to attain the current eye of discernment and astute combat sense that we possess. Otherwise, as ordinary master teachers, there’s no way we could have been a match for you!” the scholarly young man replied.

“Your principal?”

“That’s right. Our principal is an incredible genius. Despite being younger than us, his understanding of combat far surpasses our understanding. He is the one who taught us that the precision of an attack is far more important than the strength harnessed in it. For example, in the fight earlier, if you had shifted your first attack to the left by three centimeters and taken an additional step forward, I would have been unable to counterattack at all.” the scholarly young man said.

“This...” Frowning, Xiao Qin simulated the scene in his mind, and his eyebrows suddenly shot up in astonishment.

He was right!

If he had done so, the scholarly young man wouldn’t have had any time to dodge his claws, let alone launch a counterattack

at his lower body!

“And for the second move, the concept of wielding sword qi on your hands with a gentle stroking motion is a good idea, but your movements are simply too rigid. If you were to complement it with the motions of Gentle Palm as well, you would have been able to cover your sides as well. Even if I had leaped into the sky and dodged your first attack, I would still have been in your attack range, thus forcing the match into a direct collision. If so, it would have been hard to tell who would emerge victorious...” the scholarly young man continued analyzing.

Xiao Qin’s body stiffened once more.

The main reason why his fingers were kicked so easily earlier was due to the sword qi on his fingers being unable to reach his opponent, thus leaving him wide open.

If he were to complement his stroking motion with the underlying concept of the Gentle Palm, the enhanced flexibility in his hand movements would have allowed him to cover a greater arc of attack before him. If so, he would have been able to fend against his opponent’s kick as well...

“Our principal had once told us that if it would be better to cast away all techniques if all one did was rely on them blindly. It’s your overreliance on battle techniques that resulted in your lack of flexibility in battle, thus placing you in a disadvantage against other cultivators...” the scholarly young man sighed.

With his fists tightly clenched, Xiao Qin finally absorbed everything that he had heard, and he exhaled a mouthful of turbid gas. With admiration in his eyes, he commended, “To be able to have such insights, your principal is truly an incredible genius...”

These combat insights were far more profound than those in the Combat Master Hall. Just by these in itself, it was apparent that the principal that they were speaking about was a terrifying genius.

“Of course, our principal is a genius like no other in the world! Not only so, he also has a magnanimous heart that is boundless like the ocean. As long as one is willing to learn from him, he would impart what he knows without any hesitation.” The scholarly young man smiled.

“He would impart what he knows without any hesitation to anyone who is willing to learn?”

“Indeed. But due to his limited time, he has no choice but to limit his efforts on the members of the Xuanxuan Faction for the time being. It is also for this reason that countless cultivators dream of joining our Xuanxuan Faction!” Ruohuan gongzi interjected at this point.

“T-this...”

With his fists tightly clenched, many emotions flashed across Xiao Qin’s face. A moment later, he spoke up meekly, “May I ask if... your Xuanxuan Faction is still recruiting?”

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“You are asking if we are still recruiting?”

Looks of bewilderment filled the faces in the area.

“That’s right!” Xiao Qin gritted his teeth in determination. “I wish to join the Xuanxuan Faction!”

“This...” Upon hearing those words, everyone’s eyes lit up. Ruohuan gongzi burst into laughter before replying, “That’s not a problem at all! If our principal were to learn than an outstanding expert like you wishes to join our ranks, he would definitely be delighted as well!”

“So... you are agreeing to it?” Xiao Qin asked nervously.

If there were only one or two strong individuals amongst them, he could still attribute it to their outstanding talent. However, when all several thousand members were that powerful, it could only mean that they had an outstanding teacher.

The primary goal of a combat master was to advance their fighting prowess. Only with greater strength would they be able to protect mankind from the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and other threats.

Considering that the Xuanxuan Faction was willing to impart its knowledge to anyone who was willing to learn, allowing him to attain power swiftly, why should he hesitate in joining its ranks?

“Of course, our Xuanxuan Faction welcomes all kinds of talent!” Ruohuan gongzi chuckled as he flicked his wrist and took out a book. “Here is a manual which contains the compilation of our understanding of the knowledge that our principal has imparted to us thus far. It isn’t complete, but it does cover many aspects of battle. You can take a look first, it might just prove to be of help to you in furthering your strength!”

“This...” Xiao Qin took the book, and upon taking a brief glance at it, his heart suddenly jolted in astonishment.

Even just by looking at the first page, he could tell by his eye of discernment and keen instinct for battle techniques that the content compiled within the book was an unparalleled manual of combat insights.

As long as he studied it diligently, he would definitely be able to bring his strength up another level.

While he was shocked by the content of the manual, he also couldn't help but feel a little moved.

It was just a moment ago that he requested to join the Xuanxuan Faction, but the other party still chose to hand him such a valuable book without the slightest bit of hesitation.

The deep trust that they showed in him left him with an indescribable feeling of warmth within.

“There is only one rule to our Xuanxuan Faction, and that is to obey Principal Zhang Xuan's commands and strive to assist him wherever possible. Other than that, there are no particular boundaries for our Xuanxuan Faction. We promote the sharing of knowledge amongst members without any concealment so that we can grow together as a whole.” Seeing through Xiao Qin's thoughts, Ruohuan gongzi explained.

From the very start, the Xuanxuan Faction was only a student faction, not an official organization. Furthermore, the primary aim why the organization was founded was to band the freshmen together so that they would be able to protect themselves from the tyranny of the seniors, so the management wasn't particularly strict.

Even though Zhang Xuan had become the principal and their primary aim had already ceased to exist, the culture of the free communication of knowledge and resources had still been preserved.

The more capable members would help to explain difficult concepts to weaker members, and those who were equal in strength would learn from one another and improve together... It was also under such a culture that even the average members

of the Xuanxuan Faction were able to advance their cultivation by so much within a short span of several months, such that even a Thousand Men Commander of the Combat Master Hall would be no match for them.

On the other hand, seeing that the Xuanxuan Faction had its ideology based upon the true essence of ‘teacherhood’, creating a culture of transparency of knowledge regardless of background, Xiao Qin couldn’t help but feel deeply impressed.

“I am Xiao Qin, a Thousand Men Commander of the Combat Master Hall. To tell you the truth, I have come here with the intention to assess whether the Xuanxuan Faction is qualified to have an exchange with the Combat Master Hall. However, after taking a look, the Xuanxuan Faction is indeed as amazing as the rumors put it out to be. And its leader, Principal Zhang Xuan, is truly the role model of all master teachers!”

At this point, Xiao Qin’s eyes lit up as he continued, “To be honest with you, there are still several hundred combat masters out there waiting for my news. If it’s not too much, I hope to bring them into the Xuanxuan Faction as well!”

He was rather familiar with most of the combat masters who had come to the manor today, and most of them were deeply interested in advancing their fighting prowess. Without a doubt, the Xuanxuan Faction was an ideal platform for them to achieve their goals. If they were to learn of this, they would surely join the Xuanxuan Faction without any hesitation.

“Several hundred combat masters will be joining the Xuanxuan Faction?”

The crowd couldn’t help but be stunned by the news.

“Does the Combat Master Hall permit you to join other organizations?” Ruohuan gongzi couldn’t help but ask.

No matter what, the Combat Master Hall could be considered as a military branch of the Master Teacher Pavilion. It didn’t seem likely for it to allow its members to join other organizations easily.

“The Combat Master Hall has no particular rules regarding that aspect. Furthermore, considering that the Xuanxuan

Faction is a student faction of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, it can be considered as an organization of the Master Teacher Pavilion as well. Thus, there should no problem in us joining the Xuanxuan Faction!” Xiao Qin replied with a smile.

The rules of the Combat Master Hall were mainly directed towards preventing combat masters from betraying mankind, but considering that the Xuanxuan Faction was an organization of master teachers, it was unlikely that it would cross the bottom line of the Combat Master Hall.

Besides, the Xuanxuan Faction was also a lax organization with few commitments. Even if the hall master were to learn of this matter, it was unlikely that he would say much about it either.

“Since that’s the case, feel free to invite your friends over then... This would also be a good opportunity for our members to learn from you all as well!” Seeing that it wasn’t a problem, Ruohuan gongzi nodded.

“Alright!” Xiao Qin quickly left the manor, and not too long later, he returned with two hundred men behind him.

Naturally, it was inevitable that there would be some battles in their first encounter with one another, but considering how even Xiao Qin wasn’t a match for the members of the Xuanxuan Faction, less had to be said about the other combat masters.

In less than two hours, the two hundred combat masters had nothing but admiration left for the members of the Xuanxuan Faction. They fought with one another for the opportunity to interact with the members of the Xuanxuan Faction at a deeper level.

The more that they crossed blows and traded insights with the members of the Xuanxuan Faction, the more astounded they were by the level of comprehension that their principal had regarding combat. At the same time, the admiration they felt toward their principal also inevitably deepened as well.

To impart such profound combat insights to the public without any reservations was almost unthinkable! Just what kind of person was their principal?

The combat masters who had just joined the Xuanxuan Faction couldn't help but be filled with curiosity towards him.

...

The Elder Conference Hall of the Combat Master Hall.

“I have taken a look at the report sent in by Zhuo Qingfeng and Feng Xun, and the fact that Principal Zhang Xuan was able to raise the fighting prowess of ordinary members to match combat masters shows that he's an extraordinary figure. We should pay close note to the students during the exchange, and if there are talented individuals amongst them, try to recruit them into our ranks so as to bolster the forces of our Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall!” an elder seated on the main seat of the conference table stroked his beard and said.

This was none other than the head of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall, as well as Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert, Xing Zhuoyuan.

While the notion of an exchange with the Master Teacher Academy of a vassal nation sounded ridiculous, it was a motion endorsed by a few Thousand Men Commanders of their Combat Master Hall. As such, Xing Zhuoyuan was also interested to see whether the little Master Teacher Academy was truly as powerful as everyone put it out to be.

If that was truly the case, he could try to bring in some of their talents into their branch so as to further strengthen themselves.

“Hall Master Xing is indeed wise, our thoughts have been too narrow!”

“With Hall Master Xing's sharp insight, our Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall would surely rise to greater heights!”

Upon hearing Xing Zhuoyuan's explanation, the various division heads and elders couldn't help but nod in commendation.

When they first heard that Xing Zhuoyuan had approved the exchange, they were astounded.

The Combat Master Hall had always been a symbol of strength for the master teachers, an unreachable target for them. Considering how the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy was just a cradle for master teachers in a vassal nation of Qingyuan Empire, it was beneath their Combat Master Hall to hold an exchange with them.

It was only at this moment did they finally comprehend the thoughts which Xing Zhuoyuan had put into this matter.

If one were to describe master teachers as the geniuses amongst the populace, the combat masters would be the geniuses amongst the geniuses. Even within a group of several thousand master teachers, there might not even be a single individual who would be qualified as a combat master.

It was due to the high standards of the Combat Master Hall that there were very few combat masters around. If what Zhuo Qingfeng and the others said were true, and the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy was truly filled with powerful individuals who could subdue cultivators beyond their current cultivation realm, it would indeed be a good opportunity for them to pull in some fresh blood.

“Right, Hall Master Xing. Even though the exchange has been set on three days from now, there are many combat masters who feel indignant at the notion of having to face the students of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy as equals, so they have secretly sneaked off to the accommodations of our guests intending to try out their skills...” At this moment, an elder suddenly recalled a certain matter and reported.

The head of the Martial Arts Division, Division Head Feng!

Just like the school system of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, the Combat Master Hall was also divided into multiple divisions. All in all, there were a total of ten divisions, namely the Weapon Division, Fist Division, Palm Division, Footwork Division, Martial Arts Division, Internal Breath Division, Guardian Division, Soul Division, as well as the most secretive Heart Division!

Each of these divisions represented a complete heritage, and it served to draw out the full potential of a combat master in a certain aspect.

For example, the Weapon Division could be divided into saber, sword, spear, and the various weapons. Those who were able to join its ranks were mostly combat masters who had grasped Weapon Intent.

On the other hand, the combat masters of the Palm Division specialized in palm arts and wielded incredible strength, and the combat masters of the Footwork Division specialized in movement techniques and possessed outstanding agility.

As for the Soul Division, combat masters would cultivate their souls and learn battle techniques effective against bringing down souls there.

As there was a limit to what an individual could learn, it was impossible for one to be capable in every single field. As such, the Combat Master hall divided the combat masters into the various divisions based on their proficiency. Through specialization, not only would they be stronger individually, they would also be able to better complement one another in group battles against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

“I have heard of that matter too. Don’t worry, just let them be. This will also be a good opportunity to see if the Xuanxuan Faction of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy is truly as capable as Zhuo Qingfeng and the others put them out to be!” Hall Master Xing replied with a chuckle.

Xiao Qin and the others had thought that they had managed to slip out without catching anyone’s notice, but considering how more than two hundred combat masters had suddenly vanished from the Combat Master Hall, it didn’t take long for the others to catch wind of what they were up to.

In fact, almost every single division head and elder on the conference room was aware of it. However, they chose to left the combat masters to their own devices.

“That’s what I thought too, so I allowed them to act as they please. I have already sent someone to scout the situation, so

we should receive some news very soon!” Division Head Feng nodded.

“Seems like all of us have the same intention in mind. We have also sent scouts of our own over, so we should be able to learn whether the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy is the real deal this time around... Good, it seems like the news is in!” Halfway through another division head’s words, he suddenly flicked his wrist, and a Communication Jade Token appeared in his hands.

With a smile still lingering on his lips, he lowered his head to take a look, and his face abruptly stiffened.

“What’s wrong? Did our combat masters lose in a duel against them?” Upon noticing the peculiar expression on the division head’s face, Hall Master Xing asked.

“News has come in on my side as well. Let me take a look...” Division Head Feng seemed to have felt something as well, and a Communication Jade Token materialized in his hands. Upon scanning the content, he suddenly froze on the spot as well, unable to speak a word.

“What’s going on? Say something!” Taking the reactions of the two division heads into sight, an elder couldn’t take it any longer, and he exclaimed in frustration. Thus, he walked forward and took the Communication Jade Token from Division Head Feng’s hand. However, after taking a look, he froze on the spot too.

It took a very long time before Hall Master Feng was able to exclaim with a tearful voice, “Hall Master Xing... it seems like before we could even recruit them into our ranks, our combat masters have already been taken in by the Xuanxuan Faction!”

1104 Even The Division Heads Have Jumped Ships

“Our combat masters have been taken in by the Xuanxuan Faction?”

“What do you mean?”

The crowd frowned. Even Hall Master Xing had a bewildered look on his face.

“The two hundred combat masters who went to challenge the students of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy have all joined the Xuanxuan Faction...” Division Head Feng uttered in a daze.

“They have all joined the Xuanxuan Faction?”

Everyone was dumbfounded for a moment before those words could finally be processed in their minds. A stabbing pain struck their chests, leaving them unable to catch their breath.

Hall Master Xing even nearly stumbled and fell out of his chair.

It was just a moment ago that he confidently claimed that the Combat Master Hall would be able to make use of this opportunity to bring in some new blood and bolster their forces. And yet, before they could even manage to poach the other party’s students, they ended up losing their men instead...

What the heck was this!

“Preposterous, this is preposterous! A bunch of combat masters actually joined a rural organization... Tell them to return back to the Combat Master Hall this instant, or else I shall have their names erased from the records!” one of the division heads stood up and bellowed furiously.

All along, the Combat Master Hall had always been the one selecting men from other organizations. Never once had

anyone managed to poach their men before.

“But would it be inappropriate for us to do so? Our Combat Master Hall has no rule that prevents our members from joining other organizations, and we don’t have the right to restrict them from learning the other occupations either...”
Another division head raised an objection.

While the Combat Master Hall was a little more rigid than the Master Teacher Pavilion, it wasn’t governed by too many rules either. Combat masters were still granted a considerable degree of freedom, so to threaten them seemed to be going a little overboard...

“There are no rules in the Combat Master Hall that hinders them from joining other organizations, but if all combat masters were to do so, what would become of our Combat Master Hall? If everyone were to fool around like that, who will stand up to protect mankind when disaster strikes? We need to sever the problem at the root before it gets out of hand!”

“Indeed! There mustn’t be a precedent for such a matter, or else, what would become of the pride and dignity of our Combat Master Hall?”

Two of the division heads harrumphed.

The crowd fell silent.

Those words did make some sense.

The Combat Master Hall had no explicit rule that prevented its members from joining other organizations, and all along, there had been no need for there to be such a rule, either. Most combat masters were highly devoted to their training, so very few of them had any time to join other organizations.

However, it was a different matter this time around. Two hundred combat masters were intending to join another organization together, and this could potentially pose a problem. If combat masters were to start segregating themselves by their affiliations, it would affect the camaraderie and morale of the Combat Master Hall.

As such, precedence mustn’t be allowed!

If their members were no longer united, how were they supposed to defend mankind from its threats?

There were simply too many empires that had fallen to factional rivalry, and as an organization that stood at the frontlines to protect mankind from threats, the Combat Master Hall couldn't afford to risk such a thing happening!

“Alright, I'll inform them right now...” Division Head Feng hesitated for a moment before nodding. He tapped his finger on the Communication Jade Token and sent a message over.

Weng!

A few moments later, new words emerged on Division Head Feng's Communication Jade Token, and after browsing through it swiftly, he staggered and nearly fell to the ground.

“What's wrong?”

Taking Division Head Feng's reaction into sight, the crowd couldn't help but ask anxiously.

The head of the Martial Arts Division had always been a composed individual, so why did he seem so edgy today?

Just what kind of news was it that would leave him so deeply jolted?

“My subordinate has just relayed the commands to Xiao Qin and the others... and the response he received was that if the Combat Master Hall were to force them to back out from the Xuanxuan Faction, they would rather renounce their identities as combat masters...” With twitching lips, Division Head Feng revealed the news he had just received.

“They would renounce their identities as combat masters?”

“How is that possible? They have just barely come into contact with the Xuanxuan Faction, and they are already so deeply loyal to them? Just what kind of charm does Zhang Xuan possess for them to act in such a manner?”

A huge commotion broke out within the room. The others didn't take the news any better than Division Head Feng.

Becoming a combat master was something which countless cultivators dreamed of every single day. It was an honor, as well as a calling... Those bunch of rascals had only come into contact with the Xuanxuan Faction once, and yet, they were already willing to go to the extent of renouncing their identities as combat masters just to join them?

“Just what kind of spell did that Zhang Xuan cast over them? This won’t do... I must teach those arrogant fellows a lesson!” an elder roared furiously as he stood up.

The head of the Fist Division, Chen Zhuqing!

He was the most hot-headed individual amongst the Ten Division Heads, so he was the first to lose his temper upon hearing that his subordinate had been beguiled and poached by a measly little organization from a vassal Tier-1 Empire.

“I’ll go with you!” Another elder stood up as well.

The head of the Footwork Division, Lu Wangqiu!

Lu Wangqiu was a good friend of Chen Zhuqing’s, and he knew about the latter’s fiery temper. Thus, he felt that it would be best for him to tag along so as to defuse the situation if required to.

Besides, even though he was much more rational than Chen Zhuqing, he shared the same thoughts as the latter, so he wanted to see what was going on too.

“If possible, try to avoid any conflicts. Zhang Xuan might only be the principal of a Tier-1 Master Teacher Academy, but he has close ties with Wu Shi and the others from the Master Teacher Pavilion. More importantly, he’s Zheng Yang’s teacher... It would suffice to teach him a lesson so that he understands that the Combat Master Hall isn’t to be trifled with, there’s no need to make this matter bigger than it is!” Hall Master Xing instructed.

As fellow master teachers, there was no need for them to fall out with one another. Such a thing wouldn’t benefit either of them.

Not to mention, Zhang Xuan was even the teacher of that incredible genius, Zheng Yang!

Zheng Yang was a rare genius that emerged only once every few millenniums, so there was a very good chance that he could clear the examination and become their Progeny of Combat. If that were to happen, as Zheng Yang's teacher, Zhang Xuan's standing would soar beyond measure as well. Thus, it was best to avoid offending him, or else it could turn out bad for them in the future.

While Zhuo Qingfeng and the others had reported Zhang Xuan to be an extraordinary genius as well, the information which the Combat Master Hall had regarding the latter's capability was severely limited as the latter rarely made a move. As such, they didn't think that Zhang Xuan would be more formidable than Zheng Yang.

Even though Zhang Xuan was Zheng Yang's teacher, it didn't necessarily mean that Zhang Xuan would be more talented than Zheng Yang. After all, the main job of a teacher lay in clarifying doubts and guiding the students towards the right path. It wasn't too rare to see students surpassing their teachers.

"Rest assured, Hall Master Xing."

"We know what we have to do!"

The two division heads replied before leaving the room.

Their departure left the room plunging into silence.

At this point, the group was still unable to overcome the fact that the infallible Combat Master Hall was actually outdone by a rural organization... This was something unthinkable to them.

"Actually, this isn't necessarily bad for us. Our Combat Master Hall has been in a lofty position for too long, so this might be a good opportunity to dispel the complacency amongst our members..." Noting the low morale in the room, Hall Master Xing consoled with a smile.

"Un."

The crowd nodded.

Indeed. The Combat Master Hall was too used to being in a higher position than others, and this matter could make their members understand that even the Combat Master Hall wasn't infallible.

“Division Head Chen is a little hot-headed, but with the rational Division Head Lu with him, nothing bad should occur... We should make sure to question those rascals thoroughly when they return so as to find out why they would rather renounce their identities as combat masters just so that they could join the Xuanxuan Faction!”

“There would be nothing for us to say if the combat masters have chosen to stay in the Xuanxuan Faction by its own merit, but if the Xuanxuan Faction has resorted to bribery and beguilement... Hmph, we will have to report it to the Master Teacher Pavilion and have them deal with those black sheeps!”

“To attempt to poach our members, that Zhang Xuan sure is brazen!”

...

The various division heads and elders harrumphed with wintry faces.

While the others were still discussing the matter, Division Head Feng took out his Communication Jade Token and said, “The both of them have already arrived at the manor, and they are currently in the midst of communicating with the members of the Xuanxuan Faction...”

Division Head Chen had sent a message over to report their progress.

“Tell Division Head Chen to bring those rascals over here right after he's done. I wish to question them personally to find out what happened!” Hall Master Xing said.

“Alright!” Division Head Feng nodded as he raised his Communication Jade Token to write on it. In that moment, a burst of light suddenly flashed from his Communication Jade Token, and a line of words surfaced on it.

Division Head Feng lowered his gaze to take a look at the newly-arrived message, and with just a look, his body

stiffened for the third time.

“You... What has happened this time around? It can't be that the other members still refuse to return even though two division heads have headed there personally to pick them up?” Hall Master Xing asked coldly as an air of hostility emanated from him.

For the Xuanxuan Faction to refuse to release their men even when they had already dispatched two of their division heads, weren't they looking down on them a little too much?

“That's not it...” Division Head Feng quickly shook his head. With utter disbelief and shock reflected in his eyes, he mumbled with quivering lips, “It seems like Division Head Chen and Division Head Lu... have joined the Xuanxuan Faction as well! They said that they won't be returning to the Combat Master Hall for the time being...”

Pu!

“What did you say?”

“The both of them... have joined Xuanxuan Faction as well?”

The crowd was frenzied by what they had just learned.

Those who went to the Xuanxuan Faction to challenge them ended up joining them, and those who went to retrieve their missing members also decided to jump ships... Just what kind of sorcery did the Xuanxuan Faction possess for those who headed there to be unwilling to return?

“Are you certain?” Hall Master Xing's body was trembling uncontrollably. Completely overwhelmed by the situation, he didn't even realize that he had tugged away a huge chunk of his beard.

He knew Division Head Chen and Division Head Lu very well. The both of them would never condone such matters, which was also why the both of them had volunteered themselves to head over there in the first place. So... how in the world did they end up joining the Xuanxuan Faction?

“This...”

The other elders and division heads glanced at one another at a loss.

“Everyone, follow me over to the manor. I want to see with my own eyes just what kind of sorcery that Zhang Xuan has cast over our combat masters!” After a moment of tense silence, Hall Master Xing rose to his feet and flung his sleeves furiously.

“Yes, Hall Master Xing!”

The others nodded in agreement.

To be honest, they were also perplexed as to why even the two division heads would choose to remain at the Xuanxuan Faction. Was the Xuanxuan Faction really that great?

Leaving the hall, it didn’t take long for them to be standing in the aerial space above the manor.

“Look, they are all below...”

Beneath their feet, they spotted Division Head Chen and Division Head Lu standing amidst a huge crowd.

“Who among them is Zhang Xuan?” one of the division heads asked.

“Zhuo Qingfeng has passed a painting of him to me, and it doesn’t seem like he’s amidst the crowd...” Hall Master Xing shook his head.

He had scanned the entire surroundings with his Spiritual Perception right after he arrived at the area, but there wasn’t anyone who fitted Zhang Xuan’s description.

The situation was a little bewildering to him. If Zhang Xuan wasn’t around, why did the combat masters choose to stay in the Xuanxuan Faction on their own accord?

“Don’t head down first. Let’s watch what they are up to before we decide on what to do...” Hall Master Xing raised his hand to stop the others from making a move before focusing his senses on perceiving what was happening below.

With his sharpened hearing, he could hear the voice of a male speaking below, “Little Chen, your fist art is actually not too

bad. The main reason why you aren't able to defeat me is because your mind is plagued by too many miscellaneous thoughts. Fist art requires one to converge their mind, spirit, and psyche into a single point before bursting forth. In your current state, there's no way you will be a match for me!"

"Little Chen?"

The others also heard those words, and they glanced at one another with twitching lips.

It was one thing for a seventeen-year-old fellow to be talking to Division Head Chen with a lecturing tone, but to call him Little Chen on top of that...

"It'll be easier for you to comprehend it through a demonstration. Alright, suppress your cultivation to Nascent Saint pinnacle for a moment, I'll give you an example of what a decent punch should be like!" the young man said.

"Alright!" Nodding, Division Head Chen suppressed his cultivation to Nascent Saint pinnacle. After which, he raised his fist, and an incredible aura burst forth from him.

"That is... Division Head Chen's strongest fist art, Ravaging Dragon In the Wild?"

"That young man is going to suffer badly!"

Seeing that Division Head Chen was going to use his famed move, the faces of the combat masters tensed.

Boom!

Two fists collided together, causing a powerful shockwave to ripple in the surroundings.

Sou!

In the next instant, Division Head Chen was sent flying.

"Cough cough. I failed to hold myself back yet again, pardon me..." the young man scratched his head helplessly.

"..." The crowd.

1105 Roughly Four Hours

Peng!

Division Head Chen crashed heavily into the wall, causing his body to be covered in dust and dirt. After a series of violent coughing, he got back to his feet and flew back. Even though his face had paled from the injury he had just suffered, there was an inconceivable excited gleam in his eyes.

As the head of the Fist Division, it went without saying that his specialty lay in fist arts. With the sheer prowess of his fist, he could easily crush opponents of higher cultivation realm than him.

Yet, despite the young age of the fellow before him, he found that the latter's comprehension of fist art had reached a level far beyond his imagination.

"How can I further improve my fist art?" Division Head Chen clasped his fist and asked earnestly.

'It is not the senior but the skilled that becomes the teacher'. He might have been the head of the Fist Division, and the other party might have been younger and possessed a lower cultivation than him, but it was indubitable that the other party was far beyond him in the field of fist arts. It was no shame for him to lower his head and ask for the other party's guidance.

"Your fist art looks decent on the surface, but it lacks an indomitable spirit behind it... If I'm not mistaken, you must have cultivated quite a lot of battle techniques, right?" the young man asked.

"That's right. Altogether, I have cultivated 42 fist arts..." Division Head Chen replied awkwardly.

In the past, whenever someone asked him how many fist arts he had learned, he would answer them with a proud look on his face. However, in this moment, he seemed to vaguely understand what the young man was driving at, and he couldn't help but feel a little embarrassed by it.

“When it comes to battle techniques, one’s strength is determined by the mastery of one’s technique, not the number of techniques one has learned. Learning too many battle techniques would just result in one’s mind, spirit, and psyche being divided. Ever since my teacher imparted to me my fist art, I have been spending the past year refining that one single move so as to ensure that I have grasped it perfectly. That’s also the reason why my fist is able to wield such might. You have learned a total of 42 fist arts, but how much time are you able to devote to each of them?” the young man asked.

“This... I spent roughly twenty years on each of them... I am nine hundred this year...” Division Head Chen scratched his head awkwardly.

“...” Realizing that he had misspoken, the young man’s face reddened, and he quickly changed the subject. “Time is not the only factor that matters in the cultivation of fist arts, devotion is very important as well. Alright, since you have joined our Xuanxuan Faction, I’ll impart to you a trick as to how you can align your mind, spirit, and psyche together in order to maximize the might of your fist!”

“Thank you!” Division Head Chen’s eyes lit up in agitation.

“That youth is actually offering pointers to Division Head Chen?”

“I can still hardly believe it at this point, but... that fist executed by the young man is truly too fearsome. I don’t think that we’ll be able to withstand it either!”

The division heads and elders in the air were shocked by what they had just seen.

Despite the young age of the person that was teaching Division Head Chen, they had to admit that his fist art was truly powerful. As martial arts fanatics themselves, they couldn’t help but feel interested in it.

“It should be out of his desire to learn that fist art that Division Head Chen decided to join the Xuanxuan Faction... But what about Division Head Lu?” After learning of the reason why

Division Head Chen had jumped ship, the crowd couldn't help but turn their gazes towards where Division Head Lu was at.

Standing in front of Division Head Lu was a young lady who seemed to be around sixteen or seventeen too. Despite her young age, she had a delicately-shaped face that was extremely beautiful.

The young lady seemed to be saying something to Division Head Lu. Focusing their senses at their conversation, the group could vaguely hear what was being said between the both of them.

“... Little Lu, your movement technique is not too bad, but it's excessively flamboyant. Flamboyant movement techniques can overwhelm the weak, making them err in panic. However, such a trick wouldn't work against experts. One will just appear as nothing more than a fool before their eyes!”

With her hand behind her back, the young lady spoke in a disappointed tone. “The main aim of a movement technique is to allow one to close in on an enemy swiftly so as to catch him off guard, thus creating an opportunity to subdue him. Squandering all of one's zhenqi solely on producing illusions will only effectively make one's attack weaker than it should be!

“Lower your cultivation to a realm higher than me, which is Saint 1-dan pinnacle. I'll show you what a movement technique should be like!” the young lady said with a deep sigh.

“Alright!” Division Head Lu nodded before suppressing his aura. In the blink of an eye, his cultivation had been lowered to Saint 1-dan pinnacle.

“Alright, let's begin!”

Right at the start of the battle, Division Head Lu's figure suddenly blurred, and five illusory clones appeared around him. Each of them felt lifelike, and they emanated the very same aura as one another, making it nigh impossible to figure out which was real and which was fake.

“That's Division Head Lu's Nine Shadows Step!”

“Upon mastering the Nine Shadows Step, one is capable of producing nine illusory clones simultaneously, making it an extremely fearsome technique to guard against. Even though Division Head Lu is only able to produce five of them due to his suppressed cultivation, it still wouldn’t be easy to deal with that technique!”

“So far, there have been very few people who have managed to overcome the might of the Nine Shadows Step...”

“Even I would have to retreat and reconsider my moves before dealing with that movement technique...”

...

Hall Master Xing and the others watched the situation with grim expressions on their faces.

Saint 1-dan was the minimum cultivation required to execute the Saint low-tier Nine Shadows Step. The movement technique was greatly feared even within the Combat Master Hall itself, such that in a battle at the same cultivation realm, there was none among them who were capable of overcoming it.

“Prepare yourself, I am going to make a move...” While the combat masters were still awed by the sight before them, the young lady suddenly spoke with a solemn voice.

Following which, a figure blurred before everyone’s eyes, and it seemed as if a shadow had darted forth. In the next instant, however, the shadow seemed to have returned back to where it was.

Padah!

A resounding echo sounded, and the five illusory clones dissipated. Division Head Lu’s body was scrunched together reminiscent of a shrimp, and yellowish bile was spewing in large mouthfuls from him.

Judging from the looks of it, it seemed like the young lady had struck his abdomen.

“She... made a move?” Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, everyone felt their throats running dry.

Even with their eye of discernment, they were unable to see the young lady's movements... Just how fast could she be?

They had never imagined that a day would come where the head of the Footwork Division would have his ultimate skill overcome by another movement technique...

Terrifying!

"Too fast... I am really no match for you. Young Miss, I beseech you to teach me..." After a long moment, Division Head Lu finally recovered from the blow. Struggling back to his feet, he looked at the young lady before him in admiration before claspng his fist earnestly.

When he first heard that the members of the Combat Master Hall would rather join the Xuanxuan Faction than return, he was extremely furious.

Thus, as soon as he arrived, together with Division Head Chen, they challenged a few of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy students and defeated them all. It was around that moment that Liu Yang, who was currently teaching Division Head Chen at the moment, and Young Miss Wang, who was standing before him at this very moment, came out.

The both of them suppressed their cultivation down to their levels, and yet, to their horror, they were unable to withstand even a single blow from them...

It was then that they realized how powerful the Xuanxuan Faction was, and they couldn't resist the urge of wanting to learn from them as well.

"The aim of a movement technique is fast, faster, and fastest. As long as one's speed is beyond a certain mark, the rest wouldn't be a problem anymore..." the young lady explained.

After listening to her lecture, Division Head Lu couldn't help but feel impressed.

The other party's explanation delved straight into the essence of movement techniques, leaving him feeling deeply enlightened. The various notions which had become walls that limited his fighting prowess seemed to have shattered after hearing her words.

To think that despite studying movement techniques for several centuries, his comprehension of movement techniques would turn out to be beneath that of a young lady. It was truly a huge embarrassment.

Sighing deeply, Division Head Lu was just about to speak when he suddenly heard Division Head Chen's exclamation not too far away.

"Hall Master Xing, you are here too! Come down, let's join the Xuanxuan Faction together..."

Astonished, Division Head Lu quickly raised his gaze, and only then did he notice Hall Master Xing and the other elders' and division heads' presence.

As the group had been standing quite a distance away, and they had also used their Primordial Spirits to conceal their aura, not even Division Head Lu had noticed their arrival.

"Indeed, come down here and join us. The members of the Xuanxuan Faction truly have an insightful and refreshing perspective towards combat. At the very least, it's far more profound than the knowledge that we impart within the Combat Master Hall! We should all join the Xuanxuan Faction and further our fighting prowess together!" Division Head Lu shouted with a bright smile.

"This..."

The lips of Hall Master Xing and the others twitched.

They were still planning to observe the situation a little longer and decide on a feasible course of action before heading down. Yet, those two fellows actually shouted for them like that, betraying their presence... It would be deeply impolite for them to remain hidden under such circumstances, so they could only all get down.

"I am the head of the Combat Master Hall's Weapon Division. May I know who is skilled in weaponry? I can suppress my cultivation and have a fight with you!" Since they were already discovered, there was no need for them to hesitate any longer. The head of the Weapon Division flicked his wrist, and

a spear appeared in his grasp. With a slight flick, a sound reminiscent of the call of a dragon echoed in the air.

Knowing that the entire Combat Master Hall might just end up joining the Xuanxuan Faction if they didn't do anything at this point, they were left with no choice but to fight for the sake of their pride and honor!

“Allow me...” the young man who was teaching Division Head Chen stepped forward.

Liu Yang!

While he specialized in fist arts, he did learn some spear arts from Zheng Yang for a period of time.

As for the other members of the Xuanxuan Faction, while they would suffice to deal with ordinary combat masters, they were still a little lacking to deal with the division heads.

The previous battle that they had with Division Head Chen and Division Head Lu had already proven the point. It was due to their successive losses that they ended up inviting them, the direct disciples of Principal Zhang, over.

“Very well!”

Seeing that the other party's cultivation was only at Half-Saint pinnacle, the head of the Weapon Division also suppressed his cultivation to the same level.

Hu la!

Once that was done, he flicked his wrist, and his spear burst forth with incredible momentum.

As expected of the head of the Weapon Division. Even before the spear could reach Liu Yang, the formidable wind pressure that it created as a result of its movement was already hard to withstand.

Even though the head of the Weapon Division had suppressed his cultivation to Half-Saint, the might that he wielded with a spear was still something which not even a Saint 1-dan expert would be able to withstand.

“Incredible...”

“Division Head Zhou’s Charge of the Roaring Dragon is indeed formidable. As expected of the battle technique which boasts the greatest fighting prowess within the Combat Master Hall! There’s probably no one in the same cultivation realm who could possibly face it head on!”

“I have fought against him once, and he had used that technique against me. Back then, I could only quickly beguile him with my soul art before quickly making my escape... In a straight encounter, there’s no way anyone would be able to withstand it!”

“The same goes for me as well. I could only flee from it for the time being and find a way to counterattack afterward...”

...

Hall Master Xing and the others nodded in approval.

As the pride and honor of the Combat Master Hall were at stake here, they couldn’t tolerate a loss here. Thus, it was relieving to see the head of the Weapon Division, Division Head Zhou, resorting to his strongest battle technique right from the start. Even if they were the ones facing that battle technique, they had no confidence to say that they would be able to escape intact from it.

Hu!

While they were still chatting with one another, the young man made a move.

The young man raised his spear and pushed it forward with incredible force. It wasn’t a particularly exquisite or sharp move, but it pierced through the air in an instant. As a result of its incredibly swift movement, it looked as if the spear had been lengthened in midair, and in the blink of an eye, it appeared right before Division Head Zhou.

Huala!

The might of Division Head Zhou’s Charge of the Roaring Dragon dissipated entirely, and the tip of Liu Yang’s spear stopped right before Division Head Zhou’s throat.

In a single move, Division Head Zhou had been defeated!

“Your spear art is much faster than mine. I have lost...” With a pale face, Division Head Zhou’s body froze.

Even though he was the head of the Weapon Division, that move which the young man had utilized previously had already far surpassed his current means. He realized that he was completely helpless before it.

“Your spear art is not too bad. I only defeated you by exploiting an opening in your spear art...” Liu Yang said with a smile.

“I have studied spearmanship for more than 842 years now, and I have always thought that I have already grasped the essence of the Way of Spear, and there is no peer who would be able to defeat me. Yet, who could have known that there was still a higher mountain...”

Shaking his head, Division Head Zhou looked at Liu Yang and asked, “May I know... how long have you been practicing spearmanship?”

“Roughly...” Liu Yang tried to calculate the duration which he had been learning spearmanship for. A moment later, he replied with a serious expression, “... Four hours!”

“...” Pavilion Head Zhou.

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Division Head Zhou cried.

As the head of the Weapon Division, he had dedicated his entire life to studying spearmanship—a whole eight hundred years! Even if the other party only had decades of experience with the spear, he still could have accepted the outcome. After all, everyone had a differing aptitude for spearmanship. There were simply some geniuses in the world who could easily achieve what others spent their entire lives pursuing within just several years.

However, what the young man before him truly specialized in was fist arts! As for spearmanship, the other party had only practiced it for four hours, and yet, he was still defeated that easily.

Seeing the twitching face of the old man before him, as if he was about to faint at any moment, Liu Yang couldn't help but feel a little guilty for traumatizing him. Thus, in hopes of lessening the blow, he quickly added, "This... Actually, I don't remember it clearly anymore. It could have been more than four hours."

Back then, in order to face the Dragon Gate Formation of the Combat Master Hall, he, Wang Ying, and Zheng Yang had imparted their skills to one another unreservedly so that they would have more options to choose from.

Due to the limited time they had, they could only quickly grasp as much as they could. Therefore, Liu Yang had allocated four hours to comprehending the essence of spearmanship.

No... Thinking back, it seemed like it should have been less than four hours... Was it three hours? Or perhaps two?

He had been too engrossed in his training back then, so he could not quite remember it anymore.

Liu Yang frowned.

“Alright...” Seeing how the young man before him was consoling him with a troubled expression on his face, Division Head Zhou could not help but feel deeply stifled in his chest. Blood seemed to well up at the back of his throat, just a little push away from spurting from his mouth.

Seeing that the head of the Weapon Division had been defeated, another elder stepped forward to challenge them. “I am the head of the Palm Division, Yan Qinghai. I would like to challenge you to a duel.”

“Palm Division?” Liu Yang frowned. With a nod, he stepped forward and said, “Alright, I’ll be your opponent then...”

Wang Ying stepped forward and interjected. “You just had a match, so you should take a rest for now. I’ll face him.”

Not expecting Wang Ying to vie with him, Liu Yang shook his head. “But Senior, he specializes in palm arts. My fist art is a more compatible match for him compared to your leg art, so it will be better for me to fight him instead!”

“I learned a palm art from Teacher recently, and I haven’t found an opponent to practice it with yet. I think this would be a good opportunity for me to give it a try,” Wang Ying admitted.

“Teacher also taught me that move too. I want to give it a try as well,” Liu Yang replied.

Wang Ying frowned in displeasure. “Well, you just had a match, so you must be exhausted by now. I think it would be good for you to take a rest first. It wouldn’t do for you to lose and soil our teacher’s reputation.”

Liu Yang harrumphed in response. “It’s not like you weren’t watching the previous round; it was no challenge at all! I didn’t even use a thousandth of my zhenqi; that kind of depletion can be recovered within just two breaths! I would have to face a thousand of such opponents to actually be exhausted.”

“...” Division Head Zhou.

“...” Division Head Yan.

“...” The crowd from the Combat Master Hall.

The heck!

Can't you all show some respect for your opponents?

We can hear every word you say over here, you know...

No matter what, we are still top-notch experts from the Combat Master Hall. Don't you think it's inappropriate for you to view us with such disdain?

At the very least, you should spare some consideration for our pride and honor.

“Fine fine, you are the senior, so your words count...” After a long argument, Wang Ying finally managed to suppress Liu Yang via her seniority and successfully snatched the right to face the head of the Palm Division, Yan Qinghai.

“Let's start!” With an excited look on her face, Wang Ying stepped up to Division Head Yan Qinghai and said, “I only learned my palm art recently, and I haven't had the chance to try it on anyone yet. I'm not too sure how it'll turn out, so I ask of you to go easy on me.”

Hearing the argument between Liu Yang and Wang Ying had left Division Head Yan Qinghai on the verge of erupting. Thus, upon hearing her say such humble words at this moment, he could not help but think that Wang Ying was making fun of him.

“It's too late for you to beg for mercy now!”

With a furious roar, he raised his palm and executed his strongest trump card without any hesitation.

Hong long long!

The palm strike harnessed such incredible force that loud explosions sounded from the compressed air, causing the surrounding temperature to rise to a fearsome level.

Saint low-tier battle technique, Palm of the Crimson Dragon!

The Palm of the Crimson Dragon was named after the legendary Crimson Dragons, which were known to live within searing lava. It harnessed the energy of pure yang, granting the palm strike the power to melt even steel.

It was due to this technique that Division Head Yan Qinghai had become one of the top experts in the Combat Master Hall.

Hu!

Facing Division Head Yan Qinghai's relentless assault, Wang Ying's first instinct was to dodge with her movement technique, as per her usual strategy. However, recalling her initial intention, she gritted her teeth and forced herself to remain rooted to the spot. Driving her zhenqi furiously, she executed the palm art that her teacher had imparted to her.

Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm!

According to her teacher's account, it seemed like her teacher had also learned the palm technique not too long ago, and he had not had a chance to use it in battle, either. Nevertheless, based on her understanding of the technique, it seemed like it wielded strength beyond measure.

The two palms collided.

Sou!

"Ahh..." With a cry of agony, Division Head Yan Qinghai's figure was sent retreating into the distance. He swiftly broke the seal on his cultivation and recovered his strength back to its peak, thus allowing him to steady his figure midair. Nevertheless, his face still paled from the previous impact.

"Did you really just learn this palm art? You have never used it in battle before?" Division Head Yan Qinghai asked with a look of disbelief.

"Indeed. On our way to Qingyuan City, my teacher said that he had recently learned a new palm art, so he imparted it to us and instructed us to practice it well. However, the cultivation of the palm art turned out to be more troublesome than I thought. The practitioner has to build up their emotions in order to draw out the true prowess of the technique, but that can be difficult to pull off in the midst of a battle. So, after

cultivating it for a while, I thought that it was rather meaningless, so I never really used it afterwards!” Wang Ying replied.

The greatest flaw in the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm lay in the necessity to build up one’s emotions in order to enter the ideal state of mind to draw forth the strength of the technique. However, despite Wang Ying’s strength, she was only a teenager, and limited by her experiences, she was unable to comprehend true sorrow. Thus, after cultivating it for a while, she felt that it was too troublesome and decided to shove it away altogether.

“Meaningless? You decided to seal away such a powerful palm art just like that?” Division Head Yan Qinghai widened his mouth in shock. There was an indescribably stifling sensation in his heart that left him feeling choked up within.

He had only traded one blow with the young lady before him, but with his eye of discernment, he could tell that the palm art she had executed was far stronger than every single battle technique he knew of!

Such a powerful technique, and yet, the young lady said that its cultivation was troublesome and meaningless.

Unable to hold it any longer, Division Head Yan Qinghai took in a deep breath and, with a reddened face, asked hesitantly, “Can you... impart this palm art to me?”

“Of course! Our teacher is a magnanimous person, and he would never hesitate to teach those who are willing to learn. If you truly wish to learn the palm art, I can impart it to you right now...”

Wang Ying had never learned such a troublesome battle technique ever since she started cultivating. Not only did it require her to align her mind, spirit, and psyche, she even had to build up her emotions and immerse herself within it during its execution. That was too troublesome!

In her view, such a troublesome technique probably wouldn’t be too powerful or practical in combat. Thus, there was no harm imparting it to the other party.

“Y-you are really... willing to impart it to me?” Division Head Yan Qinghai widened his eyes in shock. A moment later, he took in a deep breath, assumed a grave expression, and declared, “From now on, I am a member of the Xuanxuan Faction as well. Anyone who tries to advise me to leave here shall be my sworn enemy!”

“...” Hall Master Xing.

“...” The other division heads.

There was a long silence drifting in the air before another elder finally stepped forward.

“I am Division Head Lu of the Footwork Division. Is there anyone who is willing to face...”

However, before Division Head Lu could finish his words, Hall Master Xing stepped forward and said, “Enough. I see that our two friends over here are already exhausted from all the fighting they have done, so let’s call it a day.”

“Hall Master Xing...” There was a hint of anxiety in Division Head Lu’s words.

Aren’t we here to cause trouble?

How can we give up right now?

“Cough cough. Division Head Lu, let’s just call it a day. In any case, those from the Xuanxuan Faction will stay here for a couple of days, so we have more than sufficient time to exchange insights with them,” Hall Master Xing replied.

At this rate, he might very well find all of his division heads becoming members of the Xuanxuan Faction! How humiliating it would be for him if that happened!

After a long moment of silence, Division Head Lu could only sigh deeply and reluctantly give up on the idea. “Alright then...”

The battle techniques that the two youths had utilized were simply too astounding. Even he could not help but feel tempted to learn them as well. However, the look on Hall Master Xing’s face clearly showed that he would go into a frenzy if another division head jumped ship to the Xuanxuan

Faction. It seemed like he would just have to sneak back here later in the night.

After holding back the tempted division heads for the time being, Hall Master Xing turned to Liu Yang and Wang Ying and asked with a smile, "These two friends over here, may I know where Principal Zhang currently is?"

"Our teacher went out early in the morning, and he hasn't come back yet," Wang Ying replied.

"He hasn't come back yet?" Hall Master Xing nodded. "I see. Tell him that I'll be paying a visit soon to discuss the details of the exchange."

"Alright, I'll relay your words to him." Wang Ying nodded.

"Un. We'll be taking our leave now."

After saying those words, Hall Master Xing left the manor with the few remaining division heads and elders without any hesitation.

He rushed all the way back to the Combat Master Hall, and it did not take long for him to return to the Elder Conference Hall.

Everyone took their seat, and a queer silence permeated the air.

In this trip, not only had they failed to bring back their combat masters from the Xuanxuan Faction, they had even lost two more division heads. With this, only six were left of the initial Ten Division Heads. To make matters worse, there was an excited gleam within the eyes of several division heads, which hinted that they might defect very soon.

To think that his initial thought was to draw in fresh talents from the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy into the Combat Master Hall during the exchange. Yet, before he could draw in a single person, the other organization had already taken in so many of their men.

The more Hall Master Xing thought about the matter, the more stifled he felt.

After the silence lingered long enough, Hall Master Xing took a look at the faces before him and asked, “What are your views on the matter today?”

“This... The Xuanxuan Faction is indeed extraordinary in its own way. If I’m not mistaken, those two youths who faced Division Head Yan and Division Head Zhou should be Principal Zhang’s direct disciples. The battle techniques that they executed were truly impressive!”

“Indeed, indeed! This is my first time seeing someone overcoming Division Head Chen’s fist art with sheer force! That young man’s spear art is also very impressive as well, I never could have imagined that Division Head Zhou would be defeated in a single move!”

“To be honest, the palm art executed by the young lady is the most profound and powerful battle technique I have seen. That palm strike that she executed wasn’t just powerful, it gave me a feeling that I was sinking deep into the crevices of space, preventing me from dodging the attack...”

...

The several division heads and elders in the room discussed excitedly.

“Cough cough!” Hall Master Xing clutched his aching chest in despair.

He was asking them to offer suggestions to resolve the current quandary they were in, but... those faces filled with admiration and excitement... What the heck?

Was the heritage of their Combat Master Hall really beneath that of a mere Master Teacher Academy?

“Enough! This meeting is adjourned!” Knowing that the division heads and elders were still overwhelmed by the battle techniques they had witnessed at the Xuanxuan Faction, he realized that they were in no state to be discussing the matter, so he waved his hand and sighed deeply.

“Yes!”

The division heads and elders rose from their seats and bowed deeply to him before backing out of the room.

Soon, silence returned to the room. At this moment, only Hall Master Xing and an elder were left.

The elder was the head of the mysterious Heart Division of the Combat Master Hall, Liao Bujin.

“What is your view of the matter?” Hall Master Xing asked.

“Hall Master Xing, I don’t think that this is necessarily bad news for our Combat Master Hall!” Division Head Liao replied.

“You think that this matter could be beneficial for us?” Hall Master Xing frowned.

Why did he feel so skeptical at those words?

“Undeniably, the members of the Xuanxuan Faction possess a terrifying comprehension of combat. It is inevitable that our combat masters, who seek to advance their fighting prowess, have been seduced by their strength. However, as much as it is a threat, this is also a good opportunity for us as well. If we could absorb the Xuanxuan Faction into our Combat Master Hall, it will only be a matter of time before we are able to surpass the Combat Master Halls of other Conferred Empires!” Division Head Liao said.

“This... I also get the logic, but judging from the current circumstances surrounding the Xuanxuan Faction, will they be willing to join the Combat Master Hall?” Hall Master Xing shook his head dejectedly.

“Actually, that isn’t a difficult problem to resolve. From what I can see, they are deeply loyal to Principal Zhang. Thus, if we can convince Principal Zhang to join the Combat Master Hall, I don’t think that we will have any trouble absorbing the Xuanxuan Faction as well!” Division Head Liao said with a smile.

“This...” Hall Master Xing was stunned for a moment before slowly nodding.

What Division Head Liao said was indeed true. If they could convince Zhang Xuan to join the Combat Master Hall, they would be able to turn the threat of the Xuanxuan Faction into a blessing instead, and their forces would become stronger than ever!

But...

Bringing Principal Zhang into the Combat Master Hall did not seem like an easy feat!

“Hall Master Xing, with your current Half-Leaving Aperture realm cultivation, if you could just find a powerful spirit awakener to nourish your soul and make it even more wholesome, you might just be able to clear the Trial of Inner Demons of the Heart Division and obtain that secret art,” Division Head Liao said with a sharp glint in his eyes.

“By then, no one at the same cultivation realm will be a match for you! With that, you can challenge Principal Zhang to a duel with him joining the Combat Master Hall as the stake... If it works out, it will just be a matter of time before our Combat Master Hall rises to glory!”

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“The highest secret art of the Heart Division is a technique left behind by the founder of the Qingyuan Combat Master Hall. Of the many generations of hall masters, only five have succeeded in clearing the Trial of Inner Demons to acquire the technique.” Hall Master Xing frowned. “It won’t be easy...”

Division Head Liao was right. If he could master the greatest secret art of the Heart Division, he would be peerless in his class. No matter how powerful those from the Xuanxuan Faction were, they would still be no match for him.

The Heart Division was the most mysterious division of the Combat Master Hall. Instead of cultivating their body, soul, or battle techniques, their main focus lay in cultivating their heart and overcoming the fearsome Inner Demons within them. If one could clear the Trial of Inner Demons, they would be able to acquire the greatest secret art left behind by their founder, thus making one peerless in one’s class.

Of course, Hall Master Xing had considered taking the trial before, but each time, he had ended up shying away out of fear. The trial was simply too difficult, such that only the greatest of geniuses among the preceding hall masters had succeeded in clearing it.

“I know that it won’t be easy, but... we don’t have any other choice! Judging from the state of the remaining division heads, most of them will probably end up joining the Xuanxuan Faction as well. If that happens, we will become nothing more than an empty shell, and the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall will become a joke in everyone’s eyes!” Division Head Liao said bitterly.

He also knew that it would be nigh impossible to accomplish it, but they were already cornered. At this point, they did not have any other choice.

Hall Master Xing sighed deeply.

He knew that at this rate, it would only be a matter of time before their Combat Master Hall effectively became a subsidiary of the Xuanxuan Faction.

With his influence, he was still able to suppress the news for the time being. However, as the saying goes, paper cannot hope to contain fire.

It was only a matter of time before the news was leaked and became known to the public. For the great Combat Master Hall to become a subordinate organization of a student faction of a Tier-1 Empire... He would never be able to raise his head in public anymore!

The inept Hall Master Xing would become a laughingstock in all other Combat Master Halls!

More importantly, the Convention of Combat Masters among Conferred Empires was just around the corner... Nothing could be allowed to happen at this critical period!

“Hall Master Xing, we are already standing right at the cliff. We have no choice but to give it a try,” Division Head Liao persuaded.

Taking a deep breath, Hall Master Xing nodded grimly. “You’re right. No matter what, I’ll have to give it a try.”

The situation at the Combat Master Hall was not too optimistic. The Trial of Inner Demons was dangerous, but at the very least, it was not fatal. Currently, this was the best shot they had.

“Guild Leader Ruan and Vice Guild Leader Chen of the Spirit Awakener Guild are my friends, so I can bring you to them. As long as they assist us, your Primordial Spirit will be able to become more wholesome, and clearing the Trial of Inner Demons shouldn’t be too difficult!” Division Head Liao said.

“I’ll be troubling you then, Division Head Liao!” Hall Master Xing nodded in gratitude.

Although spirit awakener was only a supporting occupation, their expertise in the field of Primordial Spirits and souls were indeed valuable to cultivators. With their help, his Primordial Spirit could be made more wholesome, thus making his mind

more focused. With that, he would be less vulnerable to the beguilement of the Inner Demons.

There were also many Half-Leaving Aperture realm experts who would engage the help of spirit awakeners so that their minds would not be crushed by the excruciating pain of the lightning tempering their soul during the Leaving Aperture Ordeal.

Based on the statistics compiled by the Combat Master Hall, the probability of Half-Leaving Aperture realm cultivators clearing the Leaving Aperture Ordeal was only 10%, but with the help of a spirit awakeners, the probability could be raised to 30%!

It was for this reason that spirit awakeners were so highly sought after, the demand highly exceeding the supply.

In fact, despite not being classified as a unique occupation, the Spirit Awakener Guild's main headquarters held a prestigious standing in the Master Teacher Continent. The influence it wielded was on par with even the stronger Sage Clans.

After all, the stronger one became, the heavier one's Inner Demons would become. The ability of spirit awakeners in tempering the soul and making it more wholesome in itself made them an organization that most powers wanted to befriend.

It was said that there were at least six powerhouses in the continent who had declared that anyone who became an enemy of the Spirit Awakener Guild would have to face them as well. Not only so, there were also many experts in the Master Teacher Pavilion's main headquarters who had specially joined the Spirit Awakener Guild to learn spirit enchantment as well, thus furthering the Spirit Awakener Guild's sphere of influence.

It was for this reason that despite the relatively weak fighting prowess of the occupation, not even the Combat Master Hall dared offend them.

“Alright, let's go!” Division Head Liao nodded.

Having made up their minds, the duo stepped out of the Elder Conference Hall and flew straight for the Spirit Awakener Guild.

...

In the Spirit Awakener Guild, Zhang Xuan followed behind Guild Leader Ruan and the others with a sheepish look on his face, and soon, they arrived in a spacious room.

After taking their seats, Guild Leader Ruan turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, "May I know how I can address you?"

Zhang Xuan had not introduced himself to anyone in the Spirit Awakener Guild, so not even Vice Guild Leader Xu knew of his name.

"I am Zhang..." Zhang Xuan was just about to say his name when he paused for a brief moment. Then, with a refreshing smile, he continued, "Cough cough, I am Sun Qiang!"

Considering how he had caused so much trouble here, bringing the other party's guild building to life, it would be best if he did not reveal his name. Otherwise, if they were to raise their complaints with the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, how would he ever be able to raise his head before the students again?

"So, you're Sun gongzi!" Guild Leader Ruan pondered for a moment, but there was not a person she knew of in the Combat Master Hall who fit the criteria. Perplexed, she asked, "Sun gongzi, you aren't from our Qingyuan City, right?"

"That's right. I just arrived in Qingyuan City not too long ago," Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

"I see!" Guild Leader Ruan also nodded. "Back to the topic at hand, the reason we invited gongzi over is because we have something that we require your help on. You have enchanted our guild building and brought it to life. In light of that, we hope that... you can tame it and pass over its ownership to us, or else... you can just join our Spirit Awakener Guild and become one of us!"

"Join the Spirit Awakener Guild?" Zhang Xuan shook his head. "I am a master teacher, so I'm afraid that it would be

inappropriate for me to join other guilds. I'll help you tame the guild building instead. However... I am not too sure how I can go about doing it, so I'll need you to guide me along."

It was really an accident that he had enchanted the entire guild building!

How could he have known that the black pillar was part of the supporting structure of the building? It was at the same spot as where the examination puppets were on the previous floors, so he had thought that it was part of the examination as well.

Who would have thought that the entire guild building would come to life instead?

Hearing the young man turn down her invitation, Guild Leader Ruan could only shake her head in disappointment. "Actually, it isn't too difficult. Sun shi, you just have to draw out the awakened spirit of the guild building and have it contract with me!"

To be honest, the other party's ability to successfully enchant the entire guild building without going through proper training showed that he possessed unparalleled aptitude for spirit enchantment!

It was a real pity that the other party was a master teacher, not to mention, a male!

Otherwise, she would have surely recommended him to the main headquarters!

Even though the Spirit Awakener Guild had men, they were in the minority. The entire lineage, and that was including their founder as well, was dominated by females. No matter how talented a man was within their guild, it would be hard for him to enter the top echelon.

"I see." Zhang Xuan nodded. "That shouldn't be a problem at all."

Just as the other party had said earlier, the guild building possessed deep loyalty to him as he was the one who had awakened its spirit. As long as he commanded it so, its spirit should be willing to contract with Guild Leader Ruan.

“I’ll be troubling Sun shi then!” Guild Leader Ruan replied with a smile. “Let’s do it outside. The sealing of the contract requires both parties to face one another, so it would be impossible to do it in here.”

The sealing of the contract required the spirit of the guild building to offer a portion of its spirit to her, and their location was not suited for it, considering that they were currently in the ‘stomach’ of the guild building.

Thus, the four of them flew out of the room and gazed at the guild building face-to-face in midair.

Due to the movements of the guild building after it came to life, huge cracks had emerged on the tidy streets, and the civilians in the area had long evacuated as far as they could, leaving behind only a few dozen relatively powerful spectators in the vicinity.

Their gazes were centered on the guild building as well, seemingly intrigued by how such a huge building had suddenly come to life.

Noting that the three guild leader and vice guild leaders were standing behind him, Zhang Xuan said sheepishly, “Let me try communicating with its spirit.”

He turned his gaze toward the building, and using his means as a spirit awakener, he tried to establish contact with the spirit within it.

Huala!

Seemingly having heard Zhang Xuan’s calling, the building shook slightly as it raised its head once more.

Seeing that it was possible to communicate with the building, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He began discussing the matter of having it contract with Guild Leader Ruan.

While Zhang Xuan was in the midst of communicating with the building, hidden in an alley not too far away from the Spirit Awakener Guild, a white-haired elder was glaring at him with hateful eyes.

“That is the man who injured you?”

Standing beside that white-haired elder was another old man. The old man had a moustache shaped like the ‘八’ character, his eyes were slanted diagonally, and there was a crimson scar on his glabella that was eerily reminiscent of a closed eye.

“Yes, that’s him! You must kill him and have his corpse torn to shreds, or else I’ll never be able to quell the anger in my heart!” the white-haired elder spat with tightly gritted teeth.

He was the Earth Flitting Bandit of the Northern Meadows, Dao Kou!

He had been knocked out by Zhang Xuan’s punch previously, and after regaining consciousness, he had found himself unable to forgive that arrogant young man. Thus, he had gone to seek out the old man beside him and brought him over.

Naturally, the old man was the other member of the Twin Bandits, Sky Bearing Bandit Cang Xu!

Cang Xu was a Saint 4-dan Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert, and it was due to his overwhelming strength that the Twin Bandits enjoyed such great fame in the Northern Meadows.

“Don’t worry. No matter who he is, I will have his soul crushed for daring to hurt my brother!” Cang Xu harrumphed coldly. “However, based on what you said earlier, it seems like that person is a master teacher. His Saint 1-dan cultivation isn’t a threat at all, but the Master Teacher Pavilion will come after us if it is found that we have killed a master teacher!”

The Master Teacher Pavilion was not a power to be trifled with.

Even for just a 4-star master teacher, one could only report him to the Master Teacher Pavilion and have them deal with him. If one were found to have harmed a master teacher of their own accord, they would be severely punished for their actions!

Once the Master Teacher Pavilion made a move, there was no one in the continent who could get away unscathed, let alone the both of them!

Dao Kou harrumphed. “So what if he’s a master teacher? As long as you use your secret art, you should be able to get rid of him discreetly. The Master Teacher Pavilion will never be able to link his death to you!”

“You shouldn’t underestimate the prowess of the Master Teacher Pavilion. If they really try to investigate the matter, they will surely be able to uncover the truth. However... a mere Saint 1-dan small fry won’t be worthy of them putting much effort into the matter!” Cang Xu sneered.

As long as the Master Teacher Pavilion put its mind to it, it would be able to uncover the truth of even the most discreet of murders. However, the time, manpower, and resources that would have to be spent on it would be extremely great as well.

Even if it was through a surprise attack, the fact that the young man had been able to knock out Dao Kou in a single punch hinted that his standing in the Master Teacher Pavilion should not have been too low. But that still would not be sufficient to justify the Master Teacher Pavilion paying such a heavy price to investigate his death!

“As you know, I was only barely able to learn the secret art with the guidance of an elder. I cannot afford to be interrupted in the midst of the technique, or else I will suffer a severe rebound. I will need you to protect me later on while I try to snatch his soul,” Cang Xu said.

His secret art was, in fact, a soul art that he had found in an ancient domain. It was capable of killing another discreetly, making it extremely difficult to guard against.

It was through such means that they were able to dominate the Northern Meadows, with none daring to get on their bad side.

Dao Kou nodded. “Don’t worry, I’ll guard you!”

“Un.” Cang Xu nodded back. “The secret art only works when I am in within three hundred meters of the target. We will have to find a quiet spot a little closer to the Spirit Awakener Guild.”

1108 Pummeling the Guild

As fearsome as the secret art was, it had its limits, too. It was best to execute it within a distance of three hundred meters so as to ensure its effectiveness.

As Primordial Spirit realm experts, they were able to conceal their aura and hide their presence easily. In the blink of an eye, they had already made their way over to another alley not too far away from the Spirit Awakener Guild without catching anyone's attention.

After swiftly assessing the distance, Cang Xu noted that it was precisely three hundred meters, and he heaved a sigh of relief. He looked at Zhang Xuan in the sky with narrowed eyes as he said menacingly, "Let's do it here!"

"Alright!" Dao Kou nodded as he warily scanned the surroundings.

Cang Xu would be in a vulnerable state while he was executing the secret art. He would not be able to move, so someone had to protect him during that period.

As Cang Xu took a seat on the ground, he drove his zhenqi furiously. Blood suddenly began seeping from the crimson scar on his glabella, producing a hair-raising sight.

Tzzzzzz!

A sinister killing intent slowly drifted from his glabella. Something that was reminiscent of a Primordial Spirit floated above his head, and it slowly morphed into the shape of a mini altar.

The mini altar had a peculiar form unlike any other. If Zhang Xuan had witnessed this scene, he would have immediately recognized the altar as identical to the one that he had snatched from the Jadeleaf King, except for the fact that it was much smaller.

Upon seeing the appearance of the altar, Dao Kou heaved a sigh of relief.

As mystical as his brother's secret art sounded, it was rather simple in theory. It involved using the cultivator's Primordial Spirit as a medium to draw in the target's soul. Once this happened, the target, being deprived of their soul, would die unknowingly. It was troublesome to execute, but its value lay in how discreet it was. Even a 7-star pinnacle master teacher might not notice the attack even if it was happening right before his eyes!

Weng!

As Cang Xu drove his zhenqi, light shone from the altar, and a bizarre-looking figure emerged from it. The bizarre-looking figure made some peculiar movements similar to an awkward tribal dance to summon Zhang Xuan's soul.

Soft mutterings reminiscent of dream talk echoed in the air as a slight glow radiated from the altar. The slight glow, invisible to the eyes of others, slowly crept up and gathered around Zhang Xuan's body, shrouding him entirely in it.

Got him!

Sensing that the other party's soul was within his grasp, Cang Xu smiled in excitement. He quickly used his Primordial Spirit to drag Zhang Xuan's soul toward the altar.

How can it be so heavy?

A tug, and Cang Xu knew that something was amiss. For some reason, the other party's soul felt as heavy as a mountain. Despite his tug, it was not budging in the least!

In this moment, he felt like a cricket trying to fell a tree.

Cang Xu was perplexed. What is going on?

With his strength as a Primordial Spirit pinnacle cultivator, even if he assaulted an expert of the same cultivation realm as him, he would still be able to easily drag the other party's soul toward him. Yet, how could the soul of that Saint 1-dan young man possibly be so heavy?

I don't believe that I won't be able to pull him over.

Narrowing his eyes, Cang Xu harrumphed coldly within as he tugged with even greater force.

...

While Cang Xu was straining himself over there, Zhang Xuan was currently communicating with the spirit of the guild building.

“Be a good boy and seal the contract with that nice auntie over there...” Zhang Xuan communicated his thoughts over to the spirit of the guild building.

Hualala!

Upon hearing those words, the spirit of the guild building suddenly rippled anxiously, seemingly expressing its opposition to the notion.

It was the young man before it who had awoken its spirit, so naturally, it was only willing to submit to him. It was deeply reluctant to be contracted to another being other than him.

“Hmm?”

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to continue persuading the spirit of the guild building, he suddenly felt a light yank on his soul. The sensation... felt a little similar to being bitten by a mosquito or being tugged by a little child. He instinctively retaliated by pulling back on whatever was tugging on his soul, but before he could process what it was, the guild building before him suddenly leaped up furiously.

Puhe!

Due to the sheer size of the guild building, it was able to cover several hundred meters within a single leap. A resounding squish sounded beneath where it landed, and following shortly after was a shriek of agony similar to the sound of a pig being butchered.

“Brother!”

For some reason, Zhang Xuan found that shriek peculiarly familiar. Lowering his gaze, he saw Dao Kou, the man whom he had sent flying some time before, staring at the ground before him with a look of horror.

And in front of him, an old man was crushed into a meat patty under the sheer weight of the guild building.

While conducting the soul attack on Zhang Xuan, Cang Xu had been unable to move his body at all. Despite all the precautions he had prepared beforehand, he had never thought that the massive guild building would be able to move so energetically, and he ended up being crushed to death before he could even react.

No one would have thought that the Sky Bearing Bandit Cang Xu, who had the entire Northern Meadows trembling in fear at his name, would end up dying at the hands of a building.

“It really ended up trampling someone to death...” Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched as he watched his worst nightmare come to be.

Previously, he had been thinking that if the guild building ran amok, someone would eventually be hurt. To think that it actually happened...

Looking downward at the crying Dao Kou, he could not help but feel deeply apologetically.

It was just a moment ago that he had beaten the other party up, and now, the guild building that he had awoken ended up crushing the other party’s brother into a lump of meat. This fellow sure was unlucky!

Swiftly flying downward, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply and said, “My condolences. Rest assured, I’ll teach this guild building a lesson!”

“You bastard, I’ll kill you!”

However, for some reason, Dao Kou only seemed to become even more incensed upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s consolation. With eyes reddened in anger, he roared furiously and charged forward.

In his view, Zhang Xuan was the culprit who severely injured him and killed his brother, and his words appeared to be mocking him. Hatred clouded his mind, and he felt as if he would never be able to vent his anger unless he ripped the bastard in front of him into pieces.

Boom!

Before Dao Kou reached Zhang Xuan, an intense gust of wind tore through the area, and in the next moment, a massive figure suddenly came crashing down.

Paji!

Crushed under the guild, Dao Kou was flattened like a pancake, just like Cang Xu.

“You...” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up in fury.

Building, you are too much!

How can you blatantly murder others right before my eyes? Do you think I’m blind? Unforgivable!

Angered, Zhang Xuan flew up to face the guild building before raising his palm.

Hong long!

A massive palm print formed of zhenqi gathered before him before bursting forth toward the guild building.

In face of Zhang Xuan’s wrath, the guild building whimpered indignantly, not daring to move in the slightest.

...

Hu hu!

Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao were making their way over to the Spirit Awakener Guild.

While travelling, Division Head Liao had sent a message over to his acquaintances at the Spirit Awakener Guild through a Communication Jade Token.

After reading the message that had just appeared on his Communication Jade Token, Division Head Liao informed Hall Master Xing with a troubled frown, “Guild Leader Ruan is currently in the guild, but... it seems like she’s currently preoccupied with some matters at the moment. She might not be free to enchant your Primordial Spirit.”

It was a necessary formality for the head of the Combat Master Hall to send a notice before visiting the Spirit Awakener

Guild. Otherwise, if there was no one there to receive him, it would not look good on Hall Master Xing's part either.

"Preoccupied?" Hall Master Xing frowned. "Tell her that I'm willing to pay any price as long as she agrees to help me!"

The matter concerning the Xuanxuan Faction was extremely urgent. He had to resolve it as soon as possible, or he would be risking the utter disgrace of the Combat Master Hall. In order to prevent that, Hall Master Xing was willing to pay any price he needed to.

"Alright, I'll relay your words to her!" Division Head Liao swiped his finger on the Communication Jade Token, and a moment later, he frowned. "She says that... she really has urgent matters to attend to, and she won't be able help you today!"

"What about the other two vice guild heads?" Hall Master Xing asked.

"It seems like they are also with her," Division Guild Liao replied.

"With her? What in the world are they up to?" Hall Master Xing flung his sleeves. "Tell them that our Combat Master Hall is willing to settle any problem they are facing as long as they are willing to nourish my Primordial Spirit!"

"Alright, I'll try asking..." Knowing that this matter was of grave importance, Division Head Liao nodded and sent another message. A moment later, the Communication Jade Token in his palm glowed, and a line of words emerged.

Upon seeing what was written on it, Division Head Liao's body stiffened, and he nearly fell from the sky.

Hall Master Xing frowned. "What's wrong?"

"They said... They said..." the usually-composed Division Head Liao stuttered.

"They said that they are currently in the midst of watching someone pummel their guild!"

1109 Huge Trouble

Hall Master Xing was stunned. For a moment, he thought that he had misheard.

“What did you say? Pummel what?”

Division Head Liao took another look at the words on his Communication Jade Token, and he replied with an indescribable expression on his face, “Pummel their guild...”

“Guild? What guild?” Hall Master Xing widened his eyes in bewilderment. “Did Guild Leader Ruan offend some other guild?”

“That’s not it. They are watching someone pummel their own guild... It seems like someone has succeeded in enchanting the Spirit Awakener Guild’s building, and the building has come to life!” Division Head Liao explained.

“Someone enchanted the Spirit Awakener Guild’s building?” Hall Master Xing’s lower jaw nearly fell to the ground.

Even though he was not a spirit awakener, he also understood that the larger an object was, the harder it would be to enchant it. Considering how large the guild building was, it was bound to be far more difficult to enchant it compared to normal artifacts. For someone to actually successfully enchant it... just which incredible spirit awakener could it be?

“It seems to be the deed of a foreign spirit awakener who goes by the name of Sun Qiang,” said Division Head Liao.

“Sun Qiang?” Hall Master Xing frowned.

Not knowing much about the Spirit Awakener Guild, the name did not ring a bell to him.

A thought suddenly flashed through Hall Master Xing’s mind, and he spoke with an excited gleam in his eyes. “Right! If that Sun Qiang person is able to enchant even the entire guild building, he will surely be more than capable of nourishing and stabilizing my Primordial Spirit, right?”

“You’re right!” Division Head Liao nodded in agreement.

He knew full well that even with Guild Leader Ruan and the other vice guild leaders’ proficiency in spirit enchantment, they were still incapable of enchanting something as large as the guild building. Given that Sun Qiang was able to do it, it could only mean that his proficiency in spirit enchantment was far greater than theirs.

If they could acquire his assistance, perhaps Hall Master Xing would really be able to clear the Trial of Inner Demons and obtain the heritage, thus resolving the crisis they were in!

“Let’s head over to take a look!” Agitated, the duo hastened their footsteps.

It did not take too long for them to arrive at the Spirit Awakener Guild. There, they saw a young man wagging his finger furiously at the massive building while bellowing angrily.

Meanwhile, the guild building’s long neck was lowered miserably. From time to time, it would nick the young man’s robe, seemingly trying to appease him.

“This...”

Even though they had heard that someone had successfully enchanted the Spirit Awakener Guild’s building, it was still shocking to see it with their own eyes.

Such a huge building was moving its body ceaselessly, and the paint and dust on it were tearing off layer after layer, causing a cloak of dust to rise in the area. It was a truly fantastical sight.

More importantly... that massive figure was actually fawning over the young man, trying its best to express its goodwill toward him. Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao could not help but feel as if their perception of the world had just collapsed altogether.

“Guild Leader Ruan, Vice Guild Leader Chen, Vice Guild Leader Xu!” Stepping forward, Division Head Liao greeted the three ladies as he introduced his companion. “This is the head of the Combat Master Hall, Hall Master Xing!”

“It’s pleasure to meet you. I have long heard of your name...”

The three top brass of the Spirit Awakener Guild quickly greeted Hall Master Xing politely.

“Pardon me. As fellow residents of Qingyuan City, I should have come over long ago to greet you all.” After trading a few pleasantries, Hall Master Xing turned his gaze toward the young man before the guild building and remarked, “I don’t think that I have seen Spirit Awakener Sun Qiang around before...”

“He has just arrived at Qingyuan City not too long ago, and his proficiency in spirit enchantment is one that leaves even me deeply impressed. Hall Master Xing, if you truly hope to have your Primordial Spirit enchanted, it would be best for you to seek his assistance!” Guild Leader Ruan replied.

Honestly speaking, the cultivation of Hall Master Xing was a little too high for her spirit enchantment to work well on his Primordial Spirit.

“I’ll have to trouble Guild Leader Ruan to introduce me to him then.” Hall Master Xing quickly bowed.

“I also only just got to know him a while ago, so I’m afraid that there’s nothing I can do if he refuses to help,” Guild Leader Ruan said.

At this moment, Division Head Liao could not help but ask, “Guild Leader Ruan, if I may just ask, why is Spirit Awakener Sun Qiang beating up the guild building all of a sudden?”

This matter had left him deeply perplexed.

Since the other party had successfully enchanted the guild building, why was he pummeling it now?

“As the guild building has just been enchanted, it is still lacking in its judgmental ability. Earlier, it crushed two people to death, and that has caused Spirit Awakener Sun Qiang to fly into a rage!”

“It crushed two people to death?” Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao were taken aback.

“Un. It crushed the Twin Bandits of the Northern Meadow, Cang Xu and Dao Kou, to death earlier on...” Guild Leader Ruan swiftly filled Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao in on the matter.

“The Twin Bandits of the Northern Meadows have killed innumerable people in their time. Who would have thought that they would lose their lives here?” After hearing those words, the two combat masters were startled for a moment before shaking their heads at the capriciousness of the world.

The Twin Bandits of the Northern Meadows were notorious within the Qingyuan Conferred Empire. If not for the fact that they were often hidden amid the marshlands, they would have long been hunted down by others.

Previously, the Qingyuan Empire’s emperor had dispatched a force to have them eliminated, but the both of them still managed to get away. Eventually, they could only drop the matter.

Who knew that the both of them were brazen enough to step into Qingyuan City... and who would have thought that their lives would be ended beneath the feet of a mere building? Perhaps this was karma working its way around them.

While their minds were still dwelling on the matter, they suddenly heard the bellow of the young man ahead of them.

“Alright, stop acting pitifully here. Hurry up and seal the contract with Guild Leader Ruan!”

Zhang Xuan was truly angry.

As the saying goes, ‘an untrimmed tree grows bent; an undisciplined man turns crooked!’

It was indeed true that the spirit of the guild building had just awoken, so it might not have understood much of the world. However, if it were to go undisciplined, wouldn’t it go around killing others?

Zhang Xuan had always avoided causing trouble wherever he went, so why would a spirit he enchanted turn out to be so undependable?

How disappointing!

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was angry, the guild building dared not utter the slightest word of complaint. It indignantly stretched its slender neck toward Guild Leader Ruan.

Very soon, the contract was sealed.

“Thank you, Sun shi!” Having finally tamed the guild building, Guild Leader Ruan heaved a sigh of relief and clasped her fist toward the young man.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony...” Zhang Xuan waved his hand casually. “This fellow seems to have a bad temper, killing people on a whim. You have to keep a tight watch over it in the future!”

“The Twin Bandits of the Northern Meadows don’t have too good of a reputation. In a sense, they deserved their fate. Rest assured, our Spirit Awakener Guild will deal with the matter, so Sun shi need not worry about it,” Guild Leader Ruan said with a smile.

The abrupt deaths of two Primordial Spirit realm experts could cause pandemonium, but this might just work out to be a blessing in disguise for the Spirit Awakener Guild.

Even though most would not dare act against the Spirit Awakener Guild on the surface out of fear for its connections, its low fighting prowess paired with its wealth still made it an attractive target for most, and there were those who operated in the shadows against it. However, if others were to learn that its guild building had just stomped two powerful Primordial Spirit realm experts to death, many would be deterred from the idea of laying their hands on the guild.

Such a matter could only be beneficial to them.

Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, “No matter what, they did die as a result of my doings. Here are two hundred high-tier spirit stones. If an opportunity arises, please hand it over to their offspring or kin!”

Even though the Twin Bandits of the Northern Meadows had committed many evil deeds and deserved to die, it should not have been by his hands. After all, they had not done much to

him yet. Thus, he could not help but feel a little guilty about having killed them.

It had not been his intention to cause trouble.

All he wanted to do was to remain the pretty boy he was in the background, but trouble just had to keep knocking on his door.

Guild Leader Ruan hesitated for a moment, but seeing that Zhang Xuan had made up his mind, she eventually took the spirit stones from him and nodded. “This... Very well, we will handle this matter for you...”

At that moment, she could not help but feel a tinge of admiration for the young man.

He could have easily stood on the moral high ground and justified his actions through the immoral actions of the Twin Bandits, but he chose to acknowledge the portion of his sins in the matter as well. To stand up for what he did instead of making excuses, this was a true master teacher.

Putting everything aside, Kong shi had also caused a fair bit of trouble back then. However, it was how he resolved those problems that won him the admiration of all, thus allowing him to eventually become respected as the World’s Teacher.

“I’ll be troubling you then...” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. At this point, he suddenly remembered something and added, “I prefer to keep a low profile, so I don’t want too many people to learn of this news. Thus, I hope that Guild Leader Ruan can help me keep a lid on the matter.”

“Low profile?” Guild Leader Ruan’s face twitched uncontrollably.

You enchanted the guild building, bringing it to life, shortly after you arrived and even killed two Primordial Spirit realm experts afterward...

Is this your definition of low profile?

Surely there is not a single person who is more high profile than you!

However, since the other party had made such a request of her, Guild Leader Ruan still nodded and said, “Sun shi, rest

assured. We will warn those in the area to keep silent about this matter.”

It was also to their benefit for this matter to remain an enigma to the public. It might cause others to mistakenly assume that the Spirit Awakener Guild had a powerful expert in their midst, and this would further ensure their security.

“Sun shi, allow me to introduce you!” After chatting for a while longer, Guild Leader Ruan gestured Zhang Xuan over to two men standing not too far away. “These two men are the head of the Combat Master Hall, Xing Tianming, and the head of the Heart Division, Liao Bujin.”

“Head of the Combat Master Hall?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

One of the main reasons he came to the Qingyuan Conferred Empire was to lead the Xuanxuan Faction to an exchange with the Combat Master Hall. The date that they had agreed on was three days from now, so he had not really expected to see the other party there.

“That’s right. Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao, this is Spirit Awakener Sun Qiang. He is a master teacher as well,” Guild Leader Ruan said.

“Master teacher?” Hall Master Xing looked at Zhang Xuan with a frown. For some reason, he found the young man before him weirdly familiar. “May I know which Master Teacher Pavilion Sun shi is from?”

“I...” Zhang Xuan was just about to say that he was from Hongyuan Empire, but he quickly stopped himself before he could say those words.

If he were to reveal that he was from Hongyuan Empire, it would not take long for Hall Master Xing to connect the dots and uncover his true identity. If so, he would risk being exposed publicly that he had used a fake alias, and that would make the situation even more awkward.

“I have been wandering around with my teacher ever since I was young, so I haven’t joined any Master Teacher Pavilion branches yet. I only took my master teacher examination in a

Tier-1 Empire Master Teacher Pavilion...” Zhang Xuan quickly changed his words.

In the strictest sense, that could not be considered lying.

He had not joined any Master Teacher Pavilions, and he had indeed been wandering around the area.

“I see...” Hall Master Xing nodded.

There were indeed quite a few itinerant master teachers who chose not to join a Master Teacher Pavilion, so it wasn’t particularly shocking.

However, considering the fact that the other party had not joined a Master Teacher Pavilion and yet could still wield such capability at his age, surpassing even Guild Leader Ruan and the others in the field of spirit enchantment, his teacher was bound to be no ordinary figure!

After trading some pleasantries, Hall Master Xing finally popped the request with a look of anticipation. “I heard that Sun shi has a deep grasp over spirit enchantment, so I came here hoping for you to enchant my Primordial Spirit...”

“Me?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

In his studies, he did learn that spirit awakeners had the ability to nourish souls and Primordial Spirits, making them more wholesome. However, he had not thought that his first client would turn out to be... the head of the Combat Master Hall!

“Yes. I’ll be truly grateful if Sun shi accedes to my request,” Hall Master Xing quickly replied politely.

“That isn’t a problem. However... I have one artifact whose spirit is currently in a dormant state, and I need to wake it up first. If Hall Master Xing does not mind, may I ask you to wait for a moment while I treat it?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Considering how the head of the Combat Master Hall had come over and earnestly made this request of him, he had no reason to turn him down. Besides, with the Heaven’s Path Spirit Enchantment Art, reinforcing the other party’s Primordial Spirit was not a particularly difficult task for him.

However, the Golden Origin Cauldron took priority over that.

“This...” Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao frowned upon hearing those words, and they shot a glance at one another.

Based on what they had heard, waking a dormant spirit was a particularly difficult feat to pull off even for a spirit awakener. More importantly, it was highly depleting on the spirit awakener’s soul energy as well. It was very likely that the other party would not be able to conduct a spirit enchantment for many days after that, and their matter couldn’t afford to be delayed.

Hall Master Xing hesitated for a brief moment before asking, “Sun shi, may I speak with you privately?”

Hearing those words, Guild Leader Ruan knew that they needed some space to discuss private matters, so she clasped her fist with a smile. “I have just sealed the contract with the spirit of the guild building, so I still have to familiarize myself with it. I’ll be taking my leave first...”

Vice Guild Leader Chen and Vice Guild Leader Xu followed closely behind her.

Seeing that the head of the Combat Master Hall wanted to speak privately with him, Zhang Xuan waved his hand and created an isolation barrier around him before turning his gaze back to the other party. “May I know what matter it is that you wish to speak of?”

Hall Master Xing gritted his teeth and said, “To be honest with you, our Combat Master Hall has been facing some huge problems recently. To deal with the threat at hand, I need to temper my Primordial Spirit as soon as possible so that I can clear the Trial of Inner Demons and raise my fighting prowess... or else, the consequences will be unimaginable! Thus... I hope that Sun shi will enchant my Primordial Spirit first. For that, our Combat Master Hall is willing to fulfill any request that you have!”

“Huge problems?” Zhang Xuan was startled.

What kind of problem or enemy was the Combat Master Hall facing that left its head scrambling to raise his fighting

prowess?

It was unimaginable that there was an enemy that even the Combat Master Hall was unable to deal with. Just what kind of prodigious figure were they up against?

In that moment, Zhang Xuan could not help but feel a little apprehensive. It seemed like Qingyuan City was far more dangerous than he had thought!

1110 Truly Impressive!

The Combat Master Hall was the guild that boasted the greatest fighting power within the Qingyuan Empire. Not even the Master Teacher Pavilion could compare to it!

Yet, even a power as strong as the Combat Master Hall was being forced to tread carefully, and judging from Hall Master Xing's tone, it seemed like they had been backed into a corner, possibly at stake of being completely wiped out. Just the thought of it was sufficient to leave cold sweat dripping down his back!

However, giving some deeper thought to it, Zhang Xuan felt that he might have been giving the matter too much thought. After all, if a disaster were to truly strike, news should have already spread far and wide. At the very least, as the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, he should have been privy to the news as well. As the old adage goes, 'no news is good news'. Given that Hall Master Xing still had the time to drop by the Spirit Awakener Guild to have his Primordial Spirit enchanted, the problem did not seem to be too severe.

"Pardon me, but may I ask what kind of problem the Combat Master Hall is facing? Perhaps, I might be able to help," Zhang Xuan said.

Given how the Combat Master Hall had accepted his request for an exchange readily, it was only right for him to reciprocate the favor and help them when they were in need.

Hearing Zhang Xuan's question, Hall Master Xing's face reddened, and he quickly waved his hand. "Sun shi, thank you for your concern. However, it would be better for our Combat Master Hall to resolve this problem by ourselves. It will suffice if you can just help reinforce my Primordial Spirit so that I could successfully clear the Trial of Inner Demons..."

If others were to learn that the source of his trouble was a mere student faction from a Tier-1 Empire... he would never be able

to raise his head anymore!

He simply could not bring himself to speak of this matter to another soul outside of the Combat Master Hall!

“This... Alright then!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Since he had already mastered the art of spirit enchantment, he could treat the Golden Origin Cauldron any time he wanted. Considering that the head of the Combat Master Hall had gone so far as to plead with him, he could not bring himself to turn the other party down.

“Thank you, Sun shi!” Hearing the other party’s agreement, Hall Master Xing was delighted. “Shall we find a better place to do the spirit enchantment?”

Due to the intricacies in enchanting a Primordial Spirit, it had to be conducted in absolute silence so that the spirit awakener would not be disturbed in the process. Considering that the guild building was running around at the moment, even killing two men at that, it did not seem like a fitting location to conduct the spirit enchantment.

“This...” Zhang Xuan scratched his head.

It did seem like the guild building would take some time to quieten down. Furthermore, it was one thing for the spirit enchantment to fail, but if the guild building were to go on a rampage once more and stomp the head of the Combat Master Hall to death, he could see himself being apprehended and executed not too long later.

“Our Combat Master Hall’s Heart Division has a formation that isolates the space within from the external world. Why don’t we head there instead?” Division Head Liao suggested.

“Sounds good.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

In truth, he had also been planning to drop by the Combat Master Hall to take a look, and since the other party was inviting him over at this moment, there was no reason for him to turn them down. Also, it would be a good opportunity for him to assess the fighting prowess of the combat masters before mentally preparing the members of the Xuanxuan Faction for it.

Otherwise, he would be put in a spot if that bunch were to get into trouble here.

After bidding Guild Leader Ruan and the others farewell, Zhang Xuan followed Hall Master Xing back to the Combat Master Hall.

The Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall was located not too far away from his accommodation. It was a majestic building that exuded a powerful aura, deterring any troublemakers from committing any foolishness.

“It is even bigger than the Spirit Awakener Guild...” Zhang Xuan was astonished. He could not help but wonder. If I were to successfully enchant this building, it would surely be able to run faster than the Spirit Awakener Guild’s building...

“Sun shi, this is our Combat Master Hall! Our Combat Master Hall is divided into Ten Divisions...” Seeing that Zhang Xuan was looking around curiously, Division Head Liao began introducing the basic structure of the Combat Master Hall. “... and I am the head of the Heart Division!”

“The Ten Divisions of the Combat Master Hall...” Zhang Xuan made a mental note.

He had never really heard about it from anyone before. He would have to inform Ruohuan gongzi and the others of the matter so that they could take note of it during the exchange.

“Footwork Division, Weapon Division, Palm Division, Fist Division... I can roughly fathom what those divisions are focused on, but what does the Heart Division specialize in?” Zhang Xuan asked with intrigue.

It was not too difficult to guess what the other divisions did from their names, but what in the world was the Heart Division?

“Actually, the Heart Division is the most important, as well as the most fearsome division in the Combat Master Hall!” The one who responded to Zhang Xuan’s question was Hall Master Xing.

“Oh?” Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

“One of the core responsibilities of the Combat Master Hall is to fend off the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. However, the killing intent that Otherworldly Demons emanate is incredibly potent, and over time, it will slowly corrode one’s mind and soul. In order to withstand their killing intent, it is of the utmost importance that combat masters possess mental resilience far surpassing others. It is also for this reason that the Heart Division was founded”! Hall Master Xing explained.

“As the saying goes, it’s the brave who survive an encounter on a narrow bridge. There are many cases where a cultivator possessing more condensed zhenqi, a more resilient physical body, and stronger soul energy ends up losing to an opponent far weaker than them! In a battle, it’s not only strength and technique that counts. More often than not, it’s a clash of wills as well, and the one with the stronger will is often the one standing at the end!”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

He could relate with that point of view as well.

Taking himself for example, he had encountered plenty of opponents who were stronger than him in every aspect. However, be it the Scarletleaf King, Skyleaf King, or even Dao Kou, despite possessing the decisive advantage in a direct battle against him, they still ended up dying by his hand.

Ultimately, this could be boiled down to the differing intensity of their wills.

A cultivator lacking a strong will would find themselves being beguiled or outmaneuvered by their opponent, thus eventually suffering an untimely death.

That was not to say that cultivating one’s body and zhenqi weren’t important, but only with a state of mind that was proportionately powerful with one’s abilities would one be able to bring forth one’s full strength.

Looking at Wang Ying for example, despite cultivating the Heaven’s Path Movement Art, her lack of confidence still eventually resulted in her loss in the Teacher Evaluation back at Hongtian Academy.

That matter had taught Zhang Xuan that he had to pay close heed to the mental development of his disciples as well. Even though Wang Ying was still a little shy in front of strangers, she was at least much more decisive than before.

“The development of the mind is extremely important. The combat masters of the Heart Division have a far firmer will compared to those from the other divisions, allowing them to stand unwaveringly before the temptations of the world,” said Hall Master Xing.

Of the two hundred combat masters who had joined the Xuanxuan Faction, there was not a single one that was from the Heart Division. In fact, while the other division heads were easily drawn by the benefits that the Xuanxuan Faction offered, Division Head Liao was the only one who had been able to retain his composure; he calmly strategized a solution out of the quandary for him!

All of this was a result of his cultivation of his state of mind.

At this point, Hall Master Xing could not help but feel deeply regretful for neglecting to enforce the cultivation of the state of mind within the Combat Master Hall. If he had done that in the first place, the Combat Master Hall might not have been cornered by the Xuanxuan Faction in the first place.

“The Trial of Inner Demons can be divided into many different levels, and the strength of the inner demon in each level differs from one another as well. By clashing frequently with one’s inner demons, one can temper one’s will and reinforce one’s state of mind!” Hall Master Xing explained.

Zhang Xuan nodded.

His will had become significantly more resilient after facing an inner demon during the Saint Ascension Ordeal, inducing a significant rise in his Soul Depth. Were it not for the inner demon being too weak, the benefits that he would have received could have been much greater than that!

A thought suddenly came to Zhang Xuan’s mind, and his eyes lit up. “The Trial of Inner Demons sounds truly interesting. Could I give it a try as well to temper my will?”

“Of course! That’s not a problem at all!” Hall Master Xing replied with a smile.

“You have my gratitude!” Zhang Xuan thanked him with a smile in return.

As long as he could withstand the temptation of the inner demons, he could elevate his state of mind to greater heights. Since the Trial of Inner Demons had such a function as well, it would be a waste not to use it!

While they were chatting, the three of them walked into the Combat Master Hall.

Behind the majestic building front was a cluster of buildings. They were clearly segregated into ten areas, which probably corresponded to each of the Ten Divisions.

Division Head Liao led the way forward, and it did not take long for them to arrive in the Heart Division.

Before them stood a huge, pitch-black building with a bizarre design that was strikingly similar to a heart. From afar, it looked as if the heart was beating swiftly.

“This is the Heart Division,” Division Head Liao said as he led the way into the building.

As soon as Zhang Xuan stepped into the building, he immediately felt rich spiritual energy gushing at him. Not only so, a unique atmosphere seemed to linger in the air within the building, bringing tranquility to one’s heart.

“We have set up a formation that gathers spiritual energy and calms the minds of those within the building. Sun shi, why don’t you conduct the spirit enchantment for Hall Master Xing here?” Division Head Liao proposed as they arrived in one of the rooms in the Heart Division.

Zhang Xuan nodded.

The Heart Division was much quieter than the Spirit Awakener Guild, making its environment much more suitable for conducting a spirit enchantment. It would probably be much easier for him to wake the Golden Origin Cauldron’s spirit here too.

After finding a suitable area within the room, Zhang Xuan gestured to the spot before him and said, “Hall Master Xing, please take a seat.”

“Un.” Knowing that this would determine whether or not they would be able to resolve the crisis that the Combat Master Hall was facing, Hall Master Xing quickly nodded and took a seat.

“Calm your mind and focus your consciousness within your Primordial Spirit,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

“Alright.” Hall Master Xing closed his eyes and centered his consciousness around his Primordial Spirit. In a moment, he entered a trance, reminiscent of a meditating old monk.

Not bad! Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in commendation.

It was just a moment ago that the other party had still harbored emotions of anxiety and apprehension, but in the blink of an eye, he had reined in his emotions entirely and freed up his mind. His control over his state of mind and emotions was truly terrifying.

It seems like Wang Ying and the others still have a long way to go, Zhang Xuan remarked internally.

Having learned the Heaven’s Path battle techniques from him, Wang Ying and the others could be considered invincible existences within their power class. However, in terms of state of mind, they were nowhere on par with Hall Master Xing.

The ability to control one’s state of mind freely might not seem like much, but it could play a decisive role in battle.

In controlled circumstances such as an official tournament, Zhang Xuan was confident that Wang Ying and the others would be able to achieve victory easily. However, if it was a fight to the death, the veteran combat masters would be able to play on their weak minds and make them panic, and this would inadvertently result in openings in their movements.

This was inevitable. It was possible for Wang Ying and the others to advance their cultivation swiftly, but the same was clearly infeasible for their state of mind. Ultimately, they were still too young. In terms of mental resilience, there was no way

they could rival the much older and experienced combat masters.

Zhang Xuan made a mental note. I really have to pay more attention to the cultivation of their state of mind...

Those thoughts were swiftly tossed aside from his mind. He knew that this was not the time to be contemplating such matters. Raising his gaze to face Hall Master Xing, he focused his mind as he slowly placed his palm down on the ground.

Weng!

A circle of light shrouded Hall Master Xing.

Driving the Heaven's Path Spirit Enchantment Art, Zhang Xuan warped his consciousness into a thin thread before carefully delving into the other party's mind.

Enchanting an artifact was different from enchanting a Primordial Spirit. The former only required the spirit awakener to light up the flames of spirit within the artifact's consciousness, but as for the enchantment of a Primordial Spirit, the spirit awakener would have to extend his consciousness into the cultivator's mind and slowly search for the flaws and openings within it to repair.

As Zhang Xuan approached Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit, he could not help but widen his eyes in shock. He's even more fearsome than the Skyleaf King...

Regardless of whether it was the quality or the size, Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit had far surpassed that of the Skyleaf King!

Considering that Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit was already far stronger than that of the Leaving Aperture realm Skyleaf King despite only being at the Half-Leaving Aperture realm, it was difficult to imagine how terrifying his might would be once he became a full-fledged Leaving Aperture realm expert!

With such incredible strength, he should be able to withstand a third of my strength if he suppresses his cultivation to my level, Zhang Xuan thought in awe.

Truly impressive!

1111 What a Long Rif

Even though the Skyleaf King had only been at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, his Primordial Spirit had already undergone the tempering of the Leaving Aperture Ordeal, bringing the strength of his Primordial Spirit to a whole new level. However, Hall Master Xing was only at Half-Leaving Aperture realm, but his Primordial Spirit was already far stronger than that of the Skyleaf King. This was truly frightening.

Even so, provided that they were in the same cultivation realm, it was still impossible for Hall Master Xing to defeat him.

After all, he had cultivated the Saint Ascension Decipher and ascended to become a Celestial Saint. In his power class, there were none who could possibly be a match for him. The fact that Hall Master Xing was able to withstand a third of his strength was already an incredible feat in itself.

Let me see what kind of flaws there are in his Primordial Spirit... Activating his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan began assessing the sight before him.

The Primordial Spirit ahead of him had a transparent quality reminiscent of a perfect crystal.

Any other spirit awakener in his place would have been awed by the overwhelming might of the Primordial Spirit, but with the sharp gaze of Zhang Xuan's Eye of Insight, he was able to easily find innumerable flaws in the Primordial Spirit. There were many gaps that presented themselves in the form of depressions on the surface of the Primordial Spirit that would have prevented the flow of thought and power.

In a way, it was similar to glass; while it seemed flat and smooth to the human eye, one would find little bumps and depressions on it when placed under a microscope.

The Eye of Insight was capable of peering through the essence of items. Even though the other party's Primordial Spirit appeared transparent and perfect on the surface, ultimately, it was not formed from cultivating the Heaven's Path Divine Art. When magnified, Zhang Xuan was able to see all kinds of depressions and rifts on it.

After studying it for a moment, Zhang Xuan nodded. As long as I fill up those depressions, it will be difficult for inner demons to assault him.

Inner demons were formed from the deepest desires or the apprehension within one's heart. If one's Primordial Spirit was perfect, devoid of depressions and openings, it would be like a completely sealed egg, making it difficult for inner demons to breach one's defenses.

Zhang Xuan smiled as he reached his hand forward. Fortunately, the depressions aren't too big, so it won't be too difficult to resolve the issue.

With every single tap, a bundle of spirit would fill up the depressions within Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit. The glow that it radiated gradually became brighter and brighter, and eventually, it was nearly blinding.

Hmm? There's a long rift here. While traveling around Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit, Zhang Xuan suddenly caught sight of something that left a deep frown on his forehead.

At the back of Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit, there was a glaring rift that extended down the center, from one end to the other.

Even though it isn't too deep, it has severed many of the connections within the Primordial Spirit, preventing it from functioning normally. Zhang Xuan stroked his lower jaw and fell into deep thought.

It seemed like Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit had been severely injured at some point, or else it was impossible for there to be such a huge rift on his Primordial Spirit.

Zhang Xuan scratched his head as he contemplated. It's not too difficult to fill up the smaller depressions using the means

I have learned from the spirit awakener books. But, such a huge rift... How should I go about fixing it?

Judging by huge size of the rift, reminiscent of a valley in the Primordial Spirit, it was apparent that ordinary means would not work on it.

To make an analogy, a wall that had depressions could easily be plastered over to make it smooth once more, but if half of the wall collapsed altogether, the repair work would be far more complicated than that.

Suddenly, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement.

Wait... While ordinary methods will not work, if I use the method that I use for artifact enchantment within this rift, I might just be able to fill it up swiftly!

Ordinary methods were unlikely to work, but considering how his spirit enchantment could bring even the massive building of the Spirit Awakener Guild to life, it should not be too difficult for him to create a spirit within the crevice to fill it up.

There had been no records on anyone doing this before, but... didn't Kong shi just offer him some advice not too long ago?

He had to innovate and forge his own path!

Sticking along with the conventions would just limit his potential!

And this was the time for him to do so. If he were to succeed, Hall Master Xing would surely be able to clear the Trial of Inner Demons easily and resolve the problem plaguing the Combat Master Hall!

Kong shi is the World's Teacher; there can't be any mistake trusting him! Zhang Xuan nodded his head in satisfaction.

He swiftly assessed the feasibility of the matter based on his comprehension on spirit enchantment. There might be some side effects from doing so, but it won't affect his core.

One of the problems in this solution was that the spirit used to fill up the rift would have its own consciousness as well,

similar to that of the guild building. There was a chance that it would run amok.

This would be a huge problem for anyone else, but not for Zhang Xuan. All he had to do was eradicate that consciousness right after the spirit was born.

If it had been any other spirit awakener in his place, the other party would probably have been forced into a bitter fight against the spirit in order to erase it, and in the process of doing so, that might even have harmed Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit. However, as a soul oracle and a poison master, Zhang Xuan had many means that would allow him to effectively deal with spirits.

Alright, it's settled then...

Having conducted a simulation of the entire process in the head and confirming it to be feasible once more, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Drawing his consciousness back to his body, he turned to Division Head Liao and instructed, "Division Head Liao, I'll need you to guard us. By no means should anyone interrupt us during the course of the spirit enchantment!"

Division Head Liao nodded in response. "Rest assured!"

Nodding back, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath and closed his eyes once more. His will slipped into Hall Master Xing's mind along with the light, and in the blink of an eye, he was standing before the rift once more. With a grim expression, he stepped forward and tapped on the rift lightly.

Hu!

The darkness within the rift was slightly cleared by the emergence of a spark of light.

However, the spark was still too small to fill the entire rift. Zhang Xuan had to create another eight sparks before the light was able to cover the entire rift.

After that was finally done, he could not help but feel deeply exhausted.

Previously, in order to enchant the guild building of the Spirit Awakener Guild, he had produced thirty-two sparks, and over here, he had created another eight. All in all, he had already used the abilities of a spirit awakener more than forty times when the limit for the average spirit awakener was only three times.

With that, he had finally reached his limit.

I need to wipe away that newborn spirit.

Even though Zhang Xuan was exhausted, he knew that it was not the time to rest. Suppressing his exhaustion, he walked up to the rift.

He had to eradicate it as soon as possible, or else the clash of the two wills would cause Hall Master Xing great suffering.

Gathering his soul energy, a brilliant glow gathered on Zhang Xuan's palm. He was just about to make a move when...

Hong long!

The door to the room suddenly burst open. Following which, an anxious voice exclaimed, "Hall Master Xing, bad news..."

Shit... Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in alarm.

He had just been about to speak when the massive Primordial Spirit before him rose from its dormant state. It abruptly released a powerful aura that jolted Zhang Xuan's will out.

Hall Master Xing had awoken from his trance due to that shouting, and as a natural defensive mechanism of his body, Zhang Xuan's will was viewed as a foreign object and forcefully expelled from his mind.

If Zhang Xuan had been in his peak state, he would still have been able to withstand the simple instinctive reflex of Hall Master Xing's body easily. However, drained from all of the spirit enchantments he had done that day, he was feeling sluggish and weak all over, leaving him in no state to defend against Hall Master Xing's reflexive actions.

Returning back to his body, Zhang Xuan opened his eyes and saw an old man standing within the room with a frantic look. Division Head Liao was berating the old man with a deep

frown on his forehead, seemingly criticizing the other party for abruptly barging in forcefully.

Having regained consciousness, Hall Master Xing turned to the old man and asked, "Division Head Wei, what's the matter?"

"Hall Master Xing, Division Head Wu of the Footwork Division has also left the Combat Master Hall for the Xuan... that place!" Division Head Wei reported anxiously.

As there was an outsider around, he did not dare say the name 'Xuanxuan Faction'. Otherwise, if others learned that their combat masters had willingly defected to another organization, they would surely have become the joke of the town.

"He still went in the end," Hall Master Xing muttered with a livid expression.

He had thought that his division heads would at least still be able to hold themselves back, but who would have thought that they would succumb to the temptation in the end?

He felt so choked up that he could vomit blood.

Hall Master Xing was just about to speak when the person who had just enchanted his Primordial Spirit for him, Sun Shi, suddenly asked with a deeply worried look, "You... Are you still fine?"

"I'm fine. Right, I haven't thanked Sun Shi for enchanting my Primordial Spirit yet. I feel like my fighting prowess has been raised another notch, and my entire body is gushing with power!" Hall Master Xing replied with a smile.

As expected of a master spirit awakener, the other party's means were indeed formidable. Just a single session of enchantment, and he could already feel the strength of his Primordial Spirit rising by leaps and bounds.

He felt that it would not be a problem even if he were to challenge the Leaving Aperture Ordeal in his current state.

"I see... I'm glad to see that you are fine!" Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It seemed like he had worried excessively. Even though he had enchanted a spirit into the other party's Primordial Spirit in order to fill the rift, it only made up a very small portion of it. Under the suppression of Hall Master Xing's powerful Primordial Spirit, it was likely that it would be assimilated before it could do anything.

After thanking Sun shi, Hall Master Xing stood up with a resilient glint in his eyes. "Division Head Liao, prepare the formation. I'll be heading over right now!"

There were only Ten Division Heads in the Combat Master Hall, and five of them had already defected to the Xuanxuan Faction. Granted that it was not a true defection—they were only there to learn battle techniques for the time being—but still... if others were to learn of the matter, it would not reflect well on their Combat Master Hall! Their pride and honor were at risk of being shattered!

He had to resolve this problem at its root once and for all.

"Alright!" Knowing that the situation was urgent, Division Head Liao quickly rushed into action as well. He led the way to a huge hall before placing his palm on a mechanism. A burst of light shone, and a one-man passageway emerged before them.

"I'll be entering now," Hall Master Xing stated. He turned around to look at Zhang Xuan and said, "Sun shi, I'm afraid that I'll have to ask you to stay a while longer. If I fail the trial this time around, I might require your help once more..."

"Un." Zhang Xuan nodded.

After which, Hall Master Xing stepped in.

Watching him leave, Zhang Xuan finally felt exhaustion overcoming his body. Thus, he took a seat on the ground, closed his eyes, and began meditating so as to recuperate from his previous exertion.

He had to drive his soul energy using the Heaven's Path Spirit Enchantment Art ten times before his exhaustion finally alleviated. When he opened his eyes once more, he saw

Division Head Liao pacing around the entrance nervously, looking into the passageway from time to time.

“What’s wrong?” Zhang Xuan stood up and walked over.

“Hall Master Xing has been inside more than two hours now. I fear that something bad might have befallen him during the trial!” Division Head Liao replied with a worried frown.

“He isn’t out yet?” Zhang Xuan also frowned upon hearing those words.

He had been too busy recuperating previously, so he was not too aware of the passing of time. However, doing a swift calculation at the moment, it did seem like two hours had already passed.

This did not make sense. Regardless of whether Hall Master Xing passed or not, the results should have been out by now. It did not make sense for there to not be the slightest movements at all.

“Yes, he isn’t out yet,” Division Head Liao replied apprehensively. “No matter whether he has cleared the trial or not, he should have at least sent a message by now. However, there’s been no news from him at all.”

Right after those words were spoken, flurried footsteps suddenly sounded from the passageway. Following which, a figure came into sight.

“You are... Hall Master Xing? W-what happened to you?”

Upon seeing the appearance of the figure, Division Head Liao’s lips twitched as his body froze from astonishment.

At the same time, Zhang Xuan also caught sight of the figure, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

“What is that monster?”

1112 Hall Master Xing Has Been Eaten

It was a face covered in huge tumors, and at the very top of his head, there was even a crimson tower of meat stretching half a meter upwards. In this moment, Hall Master Xing looked like a moving cactus!

It was only due to his face retaining some semblance to his original appearance that they did not suspect him of being an inner demon who had escaped from the passageway... However, his appearance was truly eerie!

Didn't he just challenge Trial of Inner Demons?

Why did he look as if he had just been pummeled?

"Hall Master Xing!" Division Head Liao hurriedly rushed forward and cried, "Even if you couldn't clear the trial, you shouldn't have harmed yourself like this..."

The Trial of Inner Demons only served to assess one's mind, so it didn't pose any harm to the physical body. Yet, for Hall Master Xing to return in such a state... Was he so upset about failing the trial that he decided to harm himself?

"You..." Hall Master Xing nearly fainted from anger. He turned to Zhang Xuan, pointed at the tumors on his face furiously, and asked, "Sun shi, can you tell me what is going on over here?"

Not expecting to be dragged into the matter, Zhang Xuan was startled. "You are asking me? How would I know?"

"You really don't know?" Hall Master Xing asked with narrowed eyes as he turned around.

Upon seeing what was behind Hall Master Xing, Zhang Xuan nearly spurted blood.

A crimson flower bud was growing right on the other party's bottom.

A flower on the bottom and a cactus on the head... Zhang Xuan scratched his head in confusion for a moment when a thought suddenly came to him, and his lips twitched. Could it be that... I enchanted the spirit of a plant instead of an artifact into him earlier?

Naturally, different beings had fundamentally differing spirits.

Plant spirits could allow the medicinal herb it was harnessed within to mature swifter and healthier. However, if the spirit died, it was very likely that the entire medicinal herb would wither as well.

Such was the case for most saint herbs.

This was similar to the Bodhi Saint Tree. In the period of time that its spirit was asleep, it looked as if it was dead on the surface. This left Emperor Yu Shenqing in a panic, and he had searched far and wide for herbologists to treat it, nearly resulting in a calamity.

As such, dealing with spirits was also an extremely profound subject, such that it was worth others devoting their whole lives to studying.

That isn't right. I'm certain that I used the method to enchant artifacts on it. Zhang Xuan frowned.

No matter how he thought about it, he just could not understand how an artifact spirit could have possibly turned into a plant spirit.

While he was deep in thought, the bud on Hall Master Xing's bottom suddenly began blossoming, and an indescribably horrendous smell drifted from it. Shortly after, the cactus on his head also began blooming. In a moment, a bunch of flowers could be seen hanging on his head, making him look like a reindeer.

Its growth rate is clearly one of a plant spirit, so could I have really made a mistake? Wait, I've got it!

A thought suddenly struck Zhang Xuan at this moment. Even though I used the method to enchant artifacts on it, the rich vitality with Hall Master Xing's body resulted in the artifact spirit displaying properties similar to those of a plant spirit.

This is also why Hall Master Xing's body has transformed in such a bizarre manner as well.

Zhang Xuan had not made any mistakes in his enchantment, but due to the differences in the environment, it was inevitable that the artifact spirit would display unexpected properties from when it was in an artifact.

Most artifacts were non-living until they were enchanted, as shown by their pitch-black world within them. On the other hand, Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit was pulsating with life. It was an environment far more nourishing than any soil. As such, it was inevitable that the spirit that Zhang Xuan had enchanted into his Primordial Spirit had grown frenziedly.

Cough cough!

Upon making sense of what was going on, a bizarre look crept onto Zhang Xuan's face.

With the great strength wielded by Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit, he could still easily suppress the spirit within him, preventing it from running amok. However, shortly after having his Primordial Spirit enchanted, he had entered the Trial of Inner Demons, and his mind had come under attack. In his moment of weakness, the spirit had managed to make a comeback and grew frenziedly, thus resulting in the ridiculous circumstances at this moment.

But... what the heck was that plant?

While it resembled a cactus, it was not really one, and the flower on his bottom looked foreign as well.

Ah, it seemed like he had made a grave mistake trusting Kong shi's words!

It was due to the other party's advice that he had taken a leap of faith forward, in hopes of forging his path. Who could have known that barely after he took the first step, he already found himself dropping into a pit?

Kacha! Kacha!

Just as Zhang Xuan was in deep thought, the flowers of the cactus finally matured into fruits roughly the size of a jujube.

Round and crimson, it might sound weird to say this, but it looked deeply appetizing.

“What the heck are these?” Seeing that fruits were growing on him, Hall Master Xing was on the verge of tears. He looked at Zhang Xuan desperately, hoping that the latter could resolve his situation.

Even though he was not too sure what was going on, he had an inkling that it had something to do with the spirit enchantment.

Otherwise, given that he had never possessed the ability to flower in the past, why would his talent as a plant blossom all of a sudden?

“Cough cough. I’m not too sure what has happened either. Perhaps you ate something unclean a while ago. Let me take a look at your condition, and I’ll see what I can do about it.” Knowing that he might be pummeled to death if he were to admit that he was the culprit, Zhang Xuan spoke without the slightest redness on his face.

Honestly speaking, it was not his intention for the situation to end up in such a manner. Judging from the size of the rift on Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit, Zhang Xuan knew that it would be nigh impossible for the other party to clear the Trial of Inner Demons if he left it be.

On top of that, it was apparent that Hall Master Xing was in a rush to raise his fighting prowess to deal with some kind of threat, and it was for this reason that Zhang Xuan decided to take the risk after confirming that it was feasible, and it would not pose any threat to the other party’s life.

Furthermore, he did plan to deal with the spirit, but he just had to be disrupted at the very last moment, resulting in his efforts being rendered futile.

Still, it was indeed a stupefying sight to see the head of the Combat Master Hall, one of the strongest experts in Qingyuan Empire, walking around with a cactus head covered with delectable fruits and a bizarre flower on his bottom.

If he were to charge an entrance toll for this exhibit, he could probably earn a huge fortune out of this.

“I have eaten something unclean?” Hall Master Xing stared at Zhang Xuan with an unbelievable look on his face. However, knowing that it was meaningless to point fingers at this moment, he could only concede. “Sun shi, I beseech you to help me...”

“Very well!” Sitting on the ground, Zhang Xuan began exerting his spirit awakener prowess once more and entered Hall Master Xing’s mind.

He adeptly maneuvered his way over to the other party’s Primordial Spirit, and when he looked at where the rift had been, he could not help but freeze.

His efforts had not been futile; the rift had been completely filled up at this moment. However, this had led to another troubling matter—Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit had already fused completely with the enchanted spirit.

This... Zhang Xuan’s eyelids twitched uncontrollably. His Primordial Spirit is way too adaptable!

Typically speaking, the spirit that Zhang Xuan had enchanted should have been considered a foreign object, and the Primordial Spirit would have tried its best to expel it. Yet, within just two short hours, the spirit had actually succeeded in fusing perfectly with Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit.

Originally, all Zhang Xuan had to do was head to the rift and eliminate the consciousness within the spirit, thus putting it entirely under Hall Master Xing’s control. However, now that the spirit had already fused together with Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit, its consciousness had been intermixed together with Hall Master Xing’s, meaning that course of action was out of the question.

If he attempted to wipe out that consciousness, he would risk killing Hall Master Xing as well.

Most likely, the spirit must have hastened the fusion while his mind was preoccupied with the inner demons.

Had he known that such a situation would happen, he would have stopped Hall Master Xing from entering the Trial of Inner Demons at any cost. Now that the other party’s head had

turned into a cactus covered with fruits and his bottom was sprouting a flower... This was truly a disaster!

Zhang Xuan withdrew his consciousness from Hall Master Xing's mind as he frowned in distress.

It's fortunate that the enchanted spirit doesn't have any offensive ability. However, now that it's fused into his Primordial Spirit, it is no longer possible to resolve the issue externally. He will have to eliminate that spirit himself.

There were indeed some cultivators in the world who used certain secret arts to consume plant spirits in order to enhance their Primordial Spirit and souls. While Hall Master Xing did not cultivate any such secret arts, it seemed like the sheer strength of his Primordial Spirit had helped to facilitate a smooth fusion with the spirit. However, the first step of those secret arts was to eliminate the consciousness within the spirits, and in Hall Master Xing's case, the fusion had happened without him knowing, so he had ended up skipping the vital first step.

He did manage to perfect his Primordial Spirit in the end, but the existence of two consciousnesses within his Primordial Spirit had inevitably resulted in all kinds of bizarre problems cropping up.

For one, the spirit, through its instincts, was delightfully tapping into the huge reserves of vitality within Hall Master Xing's body to grow non-stop.

While Zhang Xuan was still deep in thought, the cactus on Hall Master Xing's head grew higher and higher, and the flower on his bottom grew more and more warped. From afar, he resembled a massive plant, rooted quietly to the spot.

Such a feeling was further accentuated as more and more jujube-like fruits sprouted from his head, making him seem like a bona fide fruit tree.

Noting that Zhang Xuan had withdrawn his consciousness from his mind, Hall Master Xing asked anxiously, "Sun shi, do you know any way to resolve this issue?"

“I have identified the root of your problem, but I still need some time to think the matter through,” Zhang Xuan said awkwardly.

What the heck was this?

The other party had earnestly made a request of him, but he had ended up causing such a huge mishap.

How embarrassing!

Hall Master Xing heaved a sigh of relief. “It’s good that you have identified the root of the problem.”

While there was still no solution at the moment, at the very least, with the root of the problem identified, there should still be hope for a cure.

Otherwise, if he had to spend his entire life in such a form, he would much rather have a knife plunged straight into his chest.

At that moment, ‘jiya!’, the door to the room opened. Division Head Wei walked in with large strides, and upon seeing the tree, he could not help but walk up to it and remark, “What a weird-looking tree!”

After saying those words, he reached out and plucked one of the fruits before biting down on it heartily. Then, he turned to Division Head Liao and Zhang Xuan, and asked, “Is Hall Master Xing not out yet? It has already been two hours!”

“...” Hall Master Xing.

“...” Division Head Liao.

“...” Zhang Xuan.

Grinding his teeth tightly together, Hall Master Xing replied menacingly, “I am over here...”

It was one thing for him to be treated as a tree, but to think that someone would actually eat his fruit.

“Hall Master Xing!” It was then that Division Head Wei noticed that Hall Master Xing’s face was on the tree. In that instant, the motion of his mouth came to a halt, and he widened his eyes in shock.

“Cough cough! Sun shi, you should quickly find a way to cure him. Otherwise, putting aside resolving our current crisis, he won’t even be able to face our fellow combat masters!”

Division Head Liao said anxiously.

“Un. The reason for Hall Master Xing’s current condition is due to a spirit fusing with his Primordial Spirit. At this stage, I’m afraid that it’s impossible to solve his situation externally anymore. He will have to cultivate a technique to eliminate the spirit within his Primordial Spirit. Nevertheless, rest assured that he will revert back to normal once the spirit is eliminated,” Zhang Xuan explained.

Hall Master Xing heaved a sigh of relief before asking, “Then, is Sun shi in possession of any techniques that are capable of eliminating a spirit?”

“That... I’m afraid not!” Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly.

The Spirit Awakener Guild did have techniques that allowed one to eliminate spirits externally, but the current predicament Hall Master Xing was in made it risky to adopt such a solution. And as for secret arts to eliminate a spirit internally... he did not have any such manuals in his possession.

Hall Master Xing staggered, and despair loomed in his eyes.

“Am I doomed to live in this state for the rest of my life?”

“Actually, I do have another solution that will revert you back to normal swiftly...” Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before continuing. “Firstly, I’ll sever the plant offshoots from your body to hinder their activity. After which, I’ll concoct some poison for you to swallow. The poison serves to temporarily lower the vitality within your body and deprive the plants of their nutrients. With some time, they should wither and die off. However, you mustn’t use your cultivation during this period of time, or else they will come right back to life!”

“You want me to consume poison?” Hall Master Xing gulped down a mouthful of saliva as his face paled. He could not help but tremble at that thought.

Just a spirit enchantment from you has already left me in such a state. If I consume the poison you concoct, what in the world will happen to me?

At the same time, he could not help but ask doubtfully, “For you to be able to concoct poison, could you be a... poison master?”

1113 What a Dark Color

The higher ranked a poison master was, the more feared they were by the populace.

And a poison master who could concoct poison that was effective even against a Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert... That was truly fearsome!

At the very least, he must be at 7-star pinnacle.

“That’s not it. I am a physician, and with my knowledge of medicinal herbs, I should be able to easily deduce a prescription for your condition!” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

Considering that the man standing before him was the head of the Combat Master Hall, there was no way he could admit that he was a poison master.

Hall Master Xing shook his head. “I’ll pass then...”

As much as physicians were knowledgeable about medicinal herbs, there was still a significant difference between the field of study for physicians and poison masters. In the concoction of poison, the slightest difference in the environment or combination of medicinal herbs could result in a huge difference in the resulting medicinal property. Just relying on fundamental knowledge of medicinal herbs would not suffice for one to deal with poison.

Otherwise, if every physician could be a poison master as well, the existence of a ‘poison master’ occupation would have been rendered meaningless.

Hall Master Xing was not willing to bet his life on that possibility.

“Are there no other ways beside these two options?” Division Head Liao asked with a frown.

One was unfeasible at the moment whereas the other one was too risky. He had thought that with a high-ranked spirit awakener to enchant the Primordial Spirit of Hall Master

Xing, the latter's fighting prowess should be able to be increased by leaps and bounds. Yet, who would have thought that the latter would end up being crippled instead?

What was with this?

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before saying, "Actually... I do have another solution. I just fear that... you will be reluctant to agree to it!"

"Tell us!"

"It's actually rather simple. Open up your Primordial Spirit and allow me to probe into it. I'll find the sentience of the spirit within your Primordial Spirit and kill it," Zhang Xuan replied.

The three combat masters glanced at one another and fell silent.

Opening up one's Primordial Spirit meant to lower every single line of defense one had. If the other party attempted to do anything to Hall Master Xing, he would be completely helpless to retaliate.

Hall Master Xing shook his head. "I apologize, but... I can't do that!"

Even if the person was the trusted Division Head Liao, he still would not be willing to lower all of his defenses, let alone an unreliable stranger!

"There's nothing else I can do then, unless..." Another thought came to Zhang Xuan's mind, but before he could speak of it, he swiftly shook his head.

"What?"

Zhang Xuan looked at Hall Master Xing hesitantly before eventually relenting. "I can try concocting some poison that is capable of wiping away the spirit in your Primordial Spirit. Of course, that is easier said than done, and I might require multiple attempts before I get it."

With his comprehension of poison, it was not entirely impossible for him to succeed in that. However, Hall Master Xing's situation was a little peculiar—a cactus growing fruits

on his head and a flower sprouting on his bottom—so it was a little difficult for him to ascertain the type of spirit so as to determine what would be effective. Thus, it might require several attempts before he got it right.

“That won’t do!” Hall Master Xing quickly refuted the idea with twitching lips.

A poison that would kill the spirit could very well end up killing him! If he were to let the other party experiment on him... wouldn’t it be more likely for him to die first?

“That’s all I’ve got. If none of that works with you, there’s nothing else I can do...” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Honestly speaking, he was not entirely at fault for this matter either. He had warned Division Head Liao to prevent anyone from entering, but Division Head Wei just had to barge into the room in the midst of the process, preventing him from eliminating the consciousness within the spirit.

It was a combination of mistakes that resulted in this huge farce.

Hall Master Xing fell silent.

He could tell that the other party was earnestly helping him, and it was no one’s intention for such a mishap to occur. However... those solutions were truly unacceptable for him.

“Sun shi, let me think over this matter for a while.” Hall Master Xing pondered for a moment before abruptly suggesting, “Right, didn’t you say that you would like to enter the Trial of Inner Demons to temper your will? Why don’t you give it a try now while I ponder over this matter?”

“Hmm?” Zhang Xuan blinked in surprise.

Wasn’t that quite a huge leap in thought?

They were just in the midst of discussing how they could save the other party, but the other party suddenly proposed that he try out the Trial of Inner Demons.

“Rest assured, the main goal of the Trial of Inner Demons is to temper one’s mind. If you find yourself reaching your limit, you can just admit defeat and leave. As long as you don’t push

yourself too far, it won't be dangerous!" Taking Zhang Xuan's silence as a sign of apprehension, Hall Master Xing consoled him with a smile.

However, the smile did not seem to have the slightest sincerity within it. Instead, it was so forced that the cactus on his head began shaking, and the fruits were on the verge of falling off.

Zhang Xuan assessed Hall Master Xing silently for a while before eventually nodding slowly. "I'll give it a try then."

While he had no idea what Hall Master Xing was up to, he did not think that the other party would harm him. At this moment, the other party needed some private space to ponder over the matter and make a decision for himself. Since that was the case, it was indeed a good opportunity for him to challenge the Trial of Inner Demons and temper his will. Perhaps, he might even find some inspiration within and come up with a better way to resolve Hall Master Xing's condition.

"Un. Division Head Liao, open up the Trial of Inner Demons once more!" Hall Master Xing instructed.

"This..." Division Head Liao frowned. A moment later, he slowly nodded. "Alright."

After saying those words, he walked up to the wall and placed his hand on it. A moment later, the passageway surfaced once more.

Directing a nod toward the crowd, Zhang Xuan walked into the passageway, and it did not take long for him to disappear from everyone's sight.

As soon as Zhang Xuan's figure disappeared, Division Head Liao immediately asked, "Hall Master Xing, Sun Shi isn't a member of our Combat Master Hall. Why did you let him enter the Trial of Inner Demons? You also know that the greatest heritage of our Heart Division is in there."

The Trial of Inner Demons was a forbidden land even to ordinary combat masters. It was only open to the hall masters and division heads. Contained within it was the greatest heritage of the Heart Division, and Hall Master Xing had actually allowed an outsider to enter. Why?

“Don’t worry, the heritage is only attainable upon clearing the entire Trial of Inner Demons. Even someone of my prowess is unable to clear it, let alone a Saint 1-dan cultivator like him,” Hall Master Xing replied grimly.

Division Head Liao pondered for a moment before nodding. “Yes, that’s true as well.”

He had been too caught up in the allowance of Sun Shi’s admittance into the Trial of Inner Demons, so he had not thought of this point.

Even among the generations of hall masters, only five of them had managed to attain the greatest heritage. Given so, it was nigh impossible for a mere spirit awakener to clear the trial.

“There’s no need to worry about the heritage for the time being. You also know our current circumstances; I have to resolve the problem I am plagued with as soon as possible in order to deal with that Xuanxuan Faction, as well as to participate in the Convention of Combat Masters. So... I am planning on allowing his will into my Primordial Spirit!” Hall Master Xing informed the other party grimly.

“You are going to allow him into your Primordial Spirit? Hall Master Xing, I urge you to reconsider!”

Division Heads Liao and Wei were startled, and they hurriedly tried to talk him out of the matter.

Opening one’s Primordial Spirit and allowing an outsider to enter was no joking matter. Placing one’s trust in the wrong person could very well spell death! As the head of the Combat Master Hall, the other party could not take such a risk!

“I have already made up my mind. I understand the dangers very well myself; that’s also why I had him enter the Trial of Inner Demons. If he harbors malicious thoughts in his mind, the inner demons that will be bred as a result will be proportionately greater, thus putting him in grave danger. By then, even if I do not make a move, he will be punished by his own evil intents, perhaps facing death even.

“On the other hand, if he has an upright and pure mind, inner demons will be unable to harm him. If it’s proven that he’s a

man of good character, I am willing to take the gamble and entrust my Primordial Spirit to him,” Hall Master Xing said.

“This...” The duo mused over what they had just heard.

Inner demons were a manifestation of the negative emotions within one’s heart. If that fellow harbored malicious thoughts toward Hall Master Xing, the inner demons would reflect his will, thus putting him through great suffering.

If the other party could traverse within the Trial of Inner Demons safely, it would show that the other party held compassion within his heart. If so, it might be worth taking the gamble for Hall Master Xing to entrust his Primordial Spirit to the other party.

Seeing that the duo was hesitating, Hall Master Xing placed his hands behind his back and said, “Risk is inevitable if one wants to achieve great things. In truth, I don’t blame Chen Zhuqing, Yan Qinghai, Lu Wangqiu, and the others for joining the Xuanxuan Faction. On the contrary, I envy them even.”

In that moment, he resembled a tenacious cactus in the midst of a desert.

“You envy them?” The two division heads were bewildered by those words.

The division heads’ mass defection to the Xuanxuan Faction was no different from snubbing the Combat Master Hall’s heritage, soiling its dignity and honor. If they were the hall master, they would have surely exploded at the division heads by now.

“Indeed. The Combat Master Hall is a branch of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and it serves as the military force of mankind. What does a military force require? It goes without saying—strength! As long as it augments our strength, allowing us to fend off the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and any threats that stand in our way, there are little qualms as to what we are limited to doing as long as we do not overstep our moral bounds. These are the words that our founder left us back then, as well as the motto that we, combat masters, all live by,” Hall Master Xing said.

Division Heads Liao and Wei nodded.

The very purpose for the existence of the combat masters was to protect mankind on the frontlines.

As long as it was not against the principles of the Master Teacher Pavilion, they were allowed to do anything in their pursuit for strength. After all, an excessively controlled environment would only stifle one's growth.

Those from the Xuanxuan Faction might be from a vassal nation, but their comprehension of combat had far surpassed their own, reaching an unfathomable level. If studying from the Xuanxuan Faction could grant them greater strength, why should one oppose it?

There was no shame in seeking knowledge from others, no matter how noble or how senior one was—that was an ideal that Kong shi himself had sought to propagate!

Asking for guidance from a cultivator who was weaker than one was not shameful; on the contrary, it highlighted one's humility and dedication to improving himself, thus giving others a good impression of them. The pros and cons were extremely clear here; the problem lay only in whether one was able to let go of one's pride or not.

“Despite being Primordial Spirit realm experts, they were willing to lower themselves and seek guidance from the Xuanxuan Faction. That displayed their strong thirst for knowledge and power, and that is a good thing! However, as the head of the Combat Master Hall, it is my responsibility to uphold the honor and dignity of the organization, so I have no choice but to stop them so as to not turn our branch into a laughingstock of the world.” Hall Master Xing sighed deeply.

“Un.” The duo nodded.

After explaining the matter, Hall Master Xing turned his attention back to the passageway and said, “Alright, let's see whether Sun shi harbors malicious thoughts or not. We should be seeing his fox tail soon if he intends to harm me...”

Nodding, Hall Master Liao placed his palm on the wall.

Huala!

The opaque wall transformed into transparent jade.

Noting the look of confusion of Division Head Wei's face, Division Head Liao explained, "This jade wall is able to detect the number of inner demons within. The more malicious thoughts one harbor, the darker the color of the jade wall will become. For one, due to our combat masters dedicating most of our time to furthering our combat skills, their state of mind tends to be much more innocent and purer, so most of them will face less than a dozen inner demons. Previously, when Hall Master Xing entered the Trial of Inner Demons, he only had three inner demons to deal with, so the wall was nearly transparent..."

"Most master teachers also face a dozen or so inner demons at most, and the wall will turn slightly translucent. Only those who harbor malicious thoughts will produce dozens of inner demons, resulting in the color of the jade wall turning darker!"

"If the wall remains translucent throughout while Sun Shi is within the passageway, it would mean that he is a righteous person, and we need not worry about him stabbing us in our back. Naturally, it would be relatively safe for Hall Master Xing to bare his Primordial Spirit to the other party..." At this point, a cold glint surfaced in Division Head Liao's eyes.

"However, if the wall turns dark, it would mean that he harbors malicious thoughts in mind. If so, we should end his life as soon as he emerges from the passageway!"

Hall Master Xing and Division Head Wei nodded in agreement. Just as they were about to respond, their faces suddenly warped in shock. Noting that something was wrong, Division Head Liao quickly turned around to look at the wall behind him.

The transparent jade wall had been gleaming brightly a moment ago, but in the blink of an eye, it was suddenly dyed pitch-black.

"The jade wall has turned black? How could this be? That would mean that there are more than a hundred inner demons inside..." "In ancient myths, foxes often transformed into

humans to play pranks. Thus, the term fox tail is used to indicate the catching hold of evidence of another's schemes.

1114 Cang Xu's Vengeance

He wasn't the only one who was astonished. Hall Master Xing and Division Head Wei had narrowed their eyes as well, and killing intent could be seen in the depths of their gazes.

Naturally, they had seen those whose minds could dye the wall dark, but this was the first time they had seen the wall being colored to a shade reminiscent of ink!

This was no longer at the level of harboring malicious thoughts. The other party was a huge threat that they had to get rid of by any means!

Who could have thought that despite Sun Qiang's seemingly harmless appearance and earnest attitude, his heart would be so sinister and terrifying?

"It's fortunate that you didn't agree to his demands and had him enter the Trial of Inner Demons first to ascertain his character... I dare not imagine what could have happened if you really agreed to him then!" Division Head Liao exclaimed in cold sweat.

Had Hall Master Xing really agreed to baring his Primordial Spirit to the other party, misfortune would have already befallen him!

"Division Head Liao and Division Head Wei, make preparations. We'll make a move as soon as that fellow leaves the Trial of Inner Demons. We mustn't allow him to get away alive..." Hall Master Xing said as a glint flickered in his eyes.

"Yes!" the two division heads responded resoundingly.

Shortly after Zhang Xuan stepped into the passageway, his surroundings changed so swiftly that it left him feeling as if he had stepped into another dimension.

Countless Night Illumination Pearls gleamed brightly above him, similar to the brilliant noon sun.

It was a sealed room. There was no path forward nor any exit. The walls were filled with all kinds of bizarre inscriptions.

Walking up to take a closer look, Zhang Xuan realized that the inscriptions were actually deformed demons, and there were more than a hundred of them around the room.

These demons were wearing all kinds of items—some were equipped with a golden pole in hand, some were carrying steel whips, and some had a necklace made of human bones. It was quite an eerie and inconceivable sight, and this gave rise to a hint of fear within one's mind.

Am I already in the Trial of Inner Demons? Zhang Xuan frowned.

At the very center of the room was a zafu, which was shrouded by a dense concentration of spiritual energy. It was probably a formation which could be activated.

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan walked up to the zafu and sat down on it.

Weng!

The moment he sat down, a certain mechanism in the room seemed to have been triggered. All of the demons inscribed on the wall suddenly emanated a brilliant glow, and it seemed as if they would tear out of the wall at any moment to tear him apart.

I see... The room establishes a link into the depths of the challenger's heart and produces inner demons accordingly... Sensing the energy harnessed within the ripples of light, Zhang Xuan swiftly came to a realization.

He had imagined the Trial of Inner Demons to be a location filled with formidable inner demons, something similar to what he encountered in the Saint Ascension Ordeal. However, from the looks of it, his initial assumption was off.

The true demons lurked in the depths of one's heart.

It seemed like sitting on the zafu had activated a formation which induced the birth of inner demons.

I wonder what my inner demons would be like... Zhang Xuan wondered.

Ever since he first started his journey, he had been cultivating the Heaven's Path Divine Art and his path had been relatively smooth-sailing. He had never experienced desperation in relentlessly pushing for a futile breakthrough, nor the despair of being unable to advance forward no matter how hard one worked, so he had never really encountered any inner demon in the midst of his cultivation before... With this opportunity, he wanted to see exactly how fearsome inner demons were, and whether his mind was sufficiently resilient to withstand their temptation.

Weng!

The formations swiftly whirred, and the spiritual energy in the surroundings spun into action. The surroundings blurred, and Zhang Xuan found himself plunged within a world of perfect darkness.

It was similar to the situation he had faced when he had encountered his Heart Ordeal previously. Just as Zhang Xuan was scanning his surroundings carefully, bizarre demons suddenly rushed in from the surroundings.

Their forms were similar to the inscriptions he had previously seen on the walls, and there must have been at least a few hundred of them around.

“So many? Why would I have so many inner demons?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

He was still thinking that he shouldn't have too many inner demons—after all, wasn't the cultivation technique that he practiced, Heaven's Path Divine Art, supposed to be perfect? Yet, who could have thought that he would end up having to face so many of them simultaneously... If they were to charge at him all at once, would he be reduced to dust?

“No, something is wrong. If they are truly my inner demons, how could I still be conscious at this point in time?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Having undergone the Heart Ordeal before, he knew that inner demons had the ability to place one's mind in a befuddled state, thus creating an opening for them to strike... It was perplexing how there were so many inner demons around him, but he was still perfectly conscious.

Just what was going on?

"You're indeed a smart fellow... Indeed, these inner demons aren't yours but mine..."

At this moment, a voice laced with hatred suddenly sounded. Zhang Xuan quickly raised his head and looked over, and he saw an elder with a crimson line in the middle of his glabella walking towards him.

"Who are you?" Zhang Xuan was stunned by the sudden appearance of an intruder.

With a look, he could tell that the other party was a human just like him. But... why would this foreign-looking elder suddenly appear within the Trial of Inner Demons as well?

"You are asking who am I?" the elder's face distorted in rage, and he looked as if smoke would pour out from the top of his head at any moment. "I am the person who was stomped to death by the house you have enchanted, Cang Xu!"

"You are Cang Xu? But... aren't you dead?" Zhang Xuan asked hesitantly.

Cang Xu had already been reduced to a lump of meat by the time he saw the other party, so it was inevitable that he wouldn't recognize the other party's face. Who would have thought that he would meet the other party here? But... why would a dead person suddenly appear here?

Furthermore, he seemed to have said that all of the inner demons in the area belonged to him. What was going on?

"I was in the midst of using my Primordial Spirit to lay claim to your soul when I was suddenly stomped to death by that building of yours... Due to the link forged between your soul and mine, I was able to conceal a sliver of my will within your body. If you hadn't come here, I would have been forced to lay dormant until the day I dissipated, but since you have

delivered this opportunity into my hands, I'll have you pay for your actions!" Cang Xu sneered frostily.

Crushed by the massive building of the Spirit Awakener Guild in the midst of executing his secret art, his Primordial Spirit dissipated on the spot. It was fortunate that with the strength of his secret art, he was able to slip a sliver of his will into Zhang Xuan's body and continue existing as an inner demon.

Unless Zhang Xuan were to be forced to face his inner demons during an ordeal or a trial, as an inner demon, he would have been forced to lie dormant, unable to do anything at all. Yet, by a stroke of luck, Zhang Xuan chose to enter the Trial of Inner Demons and activated the formation which triggered one's inner demons. How could he allow such a precious opportunity to slip past his fingers? Thus, he immediately got out and made his move.

As the villain who had tyrannized the Northern Meadows for many years, his hands were stained with the blood of innumerable innocent lives. As such, his presence and malicious thoughts swiftly triggered a reaction in the formation, causing several hundred inner demons to appear simultaneously.

"It seems like I have misunderstood the guild building..." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

At this moment, he suddenly recalled that mosquito bite on his soul back when he was in the midst of convincing the guild building to submit to Guild Leader Ruan and the others. He had shrugged it off back then, thinking that it might just be an imagination on his part. From the looks of it now, it was the working of the old fellow before him.

This would explain the abrupt movements from the guild building's part as well. It was due to its great desire to protect its owner that it had made a move, but he misunderstood the other party's intentions and thought that it was just acting willfully, and he even beat it up over the matter.

Thinking about it, he couldn't help but feel deeply ashamed.

“You tried to claim my soul? You are a soul oracle?” Zhang Xuan noticed a peculiar phrase in the other party’s words and asked.

The ability to claim another’s soul was a secret art of the soul oracles. Yet, the fellow before him was actually able to execute it... Could he really be a soul oracle?

“I am not a soul oracle, that’s a secret art which I have inherited from an old senior... Hmph, you need not try to sound me out, you will be a dead person very soon anyway!”

Roaring furiously, Cang Xu thrust his arm forward. In that instant, an altar appeared beneath him once more. A brilliant gleam of light surrounded Zhang Xuan as it tugged his soul towards the altar, seemingly attempting to consume it.

“This...”

The tug on Zhang Xuan’s soul was so weak that he could hardly feel anything. However, the altar that had formed beneath Cang Xu had left him startled.

Without a doubt, that was an altar of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

But... Cang Xu was clearly a human, so why would he have such a possession?

“You... betrayed mankind?” Zhang Xuan’s face turned cold.

It was inevitable that there would be some humans who would turn to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe to fulfill their desires. Even You Xu, the previous vice head of the Master Teacher Academy Physician School, had succumbed into his desires for a longer lifespan and chose to come under the command of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, let alone the others.

Cang Xu was definitely a human, but he was using an altar belonging to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe to execute a secret art which only Otherworldly Demons should have known of—what clearer signs of betrayal could there be other than this?

“Hehe, a smart fellow you indeed are. However, I’m afraid that you won’t live to tell the tale!” Sneering coldly, Cang Xu

tugged on the light with all of his might, wanting to drag Zhang Xuan's soul into the altar.

Yet, despite his efforts, Zhang Xuan remained firmly rooted to the spot as if a mountain. Even drawing on every last ounce of strength within him, the other party still didn't budge in the slightest.

"Why won't he budge?!" Cang Xu howled in desperation.

He had already claimed many souls with this secret art, and each time, he was able to pull the other party's soul into the altar with relative ease. Yet, why couldn't he move the fellow before him?

"Betraying mankind and learning such demonic arts to harm your own kind, you do deserve to die." Zhang Xuan uttered coldly.

He was still feeling bad that the guild building which he had enchanted had ended up crushing the other party to death, but from the looks of it, it seemed like it was a blessing in disguise after all.

Zhang Xuan was a peaceful person, but against those who had betrayed their own brethren, he wouldn't hesitate to make the killing blow.

For such a person, he had actually pummeled the innocent guild building... It seemed like he would have to apologize to the guild building after this matter was over.

"Move! Move! Why won't you move!"

While Zhang Xuan was deep in thought, Cang Xu was still tugging with all his might, to the point where veins had popped on his head and he was about to suffocate from breathlessness, but his efforts were not showing any results.

If only he still retained his strength as a Primordial Spirit, he would have long rushed over and killed the other party himself. He wouldn't have to go through so much trouble.

"Have you had enough yet?" Seeing how that fellow was still tugging at his soul relentlessly, Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure.

You just can't give it a rest, can't you?

Just because I left you to do as you please for a while, you thought that I was a person whom you can climb over easily?

“Die! You brat, die!” Cang Xu roared furiously.

“You said that you want my soul, right? Sure, I'll draw out my soul for you then.” Zhang Xuan said with a chilling smile.

Hu la!

A ten-meters large soul leaped out from Zhang Xuan's body and flew in the direction of where Cang Xu was tugging towards.

Paji!

The massive soul crushed down on Cang Xu's body, causing the weakened inner demon to be flattened into a pancake, just like how his physical body was crushed by the guild building back then.

At the same time, the altar also shattered to innumerable pieces under Zhang Xuan's bottom.

In the first place, the altar had been fueled by Cang Xu's soul. Given that Cang Xu retained barely a sliver of the strength he originally wielded, it was inevitable that the altar wouldn't be able to withstand the weight of Zhang Xuan's soul.

The crushed Cang Xu didn't dissipate immediately this time around. Instead, he muttered indignantly, “Why? Why wouldn't it work...”

His body and Primordial Spirit had been destroyed under the weight of the guild building, and it wasn't easy for him to slip a sliver of his will into his mortal enemy's body in the form of an inner demon. He thought that at the very least, he would be able to exact his vengeance.

Finally, an opportunity was presented right to him, but he ironically ended up suffering the same fate as he did previously...

Just what kind of monster have I got myself tangled with...

“It’s still too early for you to cry. Now that you’re an inner demon, you still have long days ahead of you...” Zhang Xuan uttered coldly.

An inner demon existed in a form similar to a soul. Unless Zhang Xuan were to execute his soul arts against it, it wouldn’t dissipate that easily.

However, it seemed like Zhang Xuan’s words had ended up sparking something within Cang Xu’s mind instead. A cold smile crept onto his lips, and he roared, “You’re right. I am an inner demon now, why should I fear you? Everyone, kill him together!”

He was the one who had produced all of the inner demons, and through his secret art, he was able to control all of the inner demons as well. As long as they were to make a move together, he would surely be able to kill that monster before him and exact his vengeance!

“Hm?”

Zhang Xuan frowned as he watched the inner demons slowly heading towards him. Even he would have difficulties dealing with several hundred inner demons simultaneously. However, at this moment, a voice sounded, “Master, that technique of using an altar as a medium to claim souls... it seems to be a secret art which I have created!” “Zafu refers to the round cushion that monks often sit on while meditating and conducting rituals.

1115 Taming the Inner Demons

The one who spoke was Vicious.

“You were the one who created the secret art?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“That’s right. The secret art serves to claim the souls and Primordial Spirits of other cultivators to nourish one’s soul.” Vicious replied.

“Nourish? Wait a moment... Do you mean that the person whom Cang Xu has submitted to is... another body part of yours?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That does appear to be the case.” Vicious replied.

In a battle against Kong shi many years ago, Vicious was killed, and his corpse was reduced into numerous pieces.

However, his cultivation had already achieved a level where he could revive just from a single droplet of blood. As long as he had sufficient time and the conditions were right, he could regain consciousness and come back to life. This was what had happened to his heart and phalange back then.

However, there was a drawback to that technique. Every single body part that regained consciousness viewed itself as the original Vicious, and it sought to devour the others so as to return back to its full strength.

Zhang Xuan had promised to help Vicious find back his other parts, but who would have thought that the person who Cang Xu had submitted to would be another one of his body parts!

“Master, if I can devour that body part which he has submitted to, my cultivation will surely rise by leaps and bounds...” Vicious said in agitation.

“Alright, I’ll conduct a Soul Search on him to gather some information.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

This Vicious had already submitted to him, so it would be beneficial to him if the other party were to raise his cultivation.

His interaction with Vicious had happened in the mind, and it only lasted for an instant. In this moment, the inner demons were still rushing toward him under Cang Xu's command.

The assault of inner demons differed from that of humans. Instead of executing techniques and exerting strength, they would attempt to infiltrate into one's mind through producing all kinds of illusions, gradually eroding one's mental resilience before overwhelming one's consciousness.

Weng!

The assault of the inner demons left Zhang Xuan suddenly feeling a little light-headed.

As Cang Xu was a Primordial Spirit pinnacle expert, his inner demons possessed power proportionate to his original cultivation realm. On top of that, there were simply too many of them. Even with mental resilience of Zhang Xuan's caliber, it was still difficult for him to withstand their simultaneous onslaught.

"Hold it for a moment!" Zhang Xuan roared.

He knew that he would be in a vulnerable position if the inner demons were to breach his mind. Thus, driving the Heaven's Path Soul Art to toughen his defenses, he bellowed, "You are Cang Xu's inner demons, so why are you going for me?"

These inner demons were all drawn out from Cang Xu's malicious thoughts, so why would they go for him instead?

"Why would we go for a disgusting brethren when there's a delicious soul right before us?"

"I know that you want to achieve higher realms in your cultivation and advance your ranking as a master teacher. As long as you listen to me, the goal will be just within reach!"

"Haven't you realized that there's a flaw in your state of mind? Trust me, and I'll supplement your deficiency!"

...

All kinds of lies were spouted from the mouths of the inner demons. Their words carried a beguiling quality to it which seemed to draw one into a trance, making one lose sight of oneself.

“Can’t you come up with something other than that?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Initially, he was still a little overwhelmed by the combined might of the inner demons. However, upon hearing those inner demons saying that there was a flaw in his cultivation technique and his state of mind, he immediately became more awake than ever.

The Heaven’s Path cultivation techniques were compiled by the Library of Heaven’s Path, and they were perfect in and of themselves... A flaw in them? You must be joking!

I am one who has cultivated the Heaven’s Path cultivation techniques, so for you to teach me... Who do you think you are?

Honestly, don’t you think that the quality of your beguilement is a little too low for inner demons?

“I don’t know where your inner demons came from, but are you really content with living your life in such a manner? Hiding in the corners of one’s heart, not daring to appear in the open... Do you really have no dreams of becoming stronger and making your mark on the world?” Zhang Xuan asked with an alluring tone.

“Ah?”

The inner demons halted what they were doing, and they glanced at one another in bewilderment.

They were in the midst of beguiling the other party, so how did it turn into a situation where the other party attempted to beguile them instead?

Shouldn’t the other party fall into a trance under their suggestions and begin doubting himself, causing his mental resilience to collapse and his mind to pass out, thus opening an opportunity for them to overwhelm him?

So how... How could he remain perfectly conscious, and from the looks of it, the other party seemed to be even stronger than them!

Furthermore... they found themselves a little moved by the other party's words!

“In order to cultivate one's soul, one must first stand against the Five Soul Declines. As lifeforms reminiscent of souls, the same applies to inner demons as well. I have a cultivation technique here which might help you if you were to cultivate it diligently.” Seeing that the inner demons were at a loss, Zhang Xuan pushed on.

In an instant, flowers began falling from the sky as the spiritual energy in the surroundings resonated in excitement. The inner demons felt as if as long as they were to cultivate according to his teachings, they would be able to surpass their limits and become stronger than ever.

“Inner demons are born by the evil within one's heart. If one's heart is pure, there would be no place for the existence of an inner demon. What a tragedy this is! The basis of your existence is actually centered around a cultivator's whims, and you don't even have control over your own fate... Don't you feel frustrated and helpless? But worry not! As long as you cultivate the technique that I impart to you, you will be able to grasp hold of your own fate and become the master of yourself!” Zhang Xuan continued on.

The inner demons, who were still hesitating a moment ago, clenched their fists tightly together in agitation, and their faces flushed crimson.

The prowess from the Impartation of Heaven's Will used alongside a demonic tune was simply too great, such that even the inner demons ended up succumbing to it.

“Don't fret, don't hesitate, trust yourself. You will definitely be able to do it. Why should you live such a bitter and difficult life? Heed my words, and gain the strength to dictate your lives!” Zhang Xuan said impassionately as he reached out a hand to them.

Huala!

The agitated inner demons immediately flew over to grasp Zhang Xuan's hand.

In that moment, Zhang Xuan swiftly flicked his wrist and took out a jade bottle. With a simple beckoning, he collected all of the inner demons into the jade bottle.

“Will they really be unable to escape from here?” Zhang Xuan asked as he grasped the shaking jade bottle tightly in worry.

Based on his prior experience, as long as he didn't fall for the inner demons' beguilement, the inner demons would dissipate on their own accord. However, Vicious told him that those fellows could be collected for his own use. This was also the reason why he went through so much effort, using the Impartation of Heaven's Will and his demonic tunes in order to convince them to submit to him.

“As long as you use the altar you have obtained from the Jadeleaf King to stopple the lid, they won't be able to flee. When you need to use them, just uncork the lid. Trust me, they might just prove to be a valuable asset in unexpected situations...” Vicious said.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

With a flick of his wrist, he took out the altar which the Jadeleaf King used previously, and with a light tap, a unique seal covered the entire altar. Following which, the massive altar began to shrink, until it was able to fit nicely on top of the jade bottle as a cork.

As soon as the altar fell on the cork, the bottle suddenly stopped moving altogether. It was as if the inner demons had been suppressed within.

Having reaching Saint realm, Zhang Xuan's zhenqi had obtained some new abilities. In the past, it would have been difficult for him to morph his body to be bigger or smaller than how it was, but this wasn't a problem anymore.

This was also the reason why the Byzantium Helios Beast was able to increase his size readily to ferry more people on top of him back then.

“Y-you...” Cang Xu stared at the sight before him in horror.

He thought that with so many inner demons assaulting the young man at once, it should be a walk in the park to take him down. Yet, who could have thought that in the blink of an eye, all of the inner demons would end up betraying him, submitting to the young man instead... Cang Xu’s body trembled in fear, and he felt so shocked that he felt as if his mind was going to snap.

Soul Search!

Soul Search was a convenient technique, but it had severe limitations as well. It was unlikely to work on those who were too much stronger than him and the mentally resilient.

Given the current state Cang Xu was in, Zhang Xuan knew that this was the ideal opportunity to strike. Thus, he swiftly grasped Cang Xu and utilized the soul art on him.

This soul art was highly damaging on the victim’s soul, but considering that Cang Xu had already defected to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and even attempted to kill him, there was no punishment that he was undeserving of.

Tzzzzzzzz!

In the blink of an eye, he had completed a Soul Search on Cang Xu.

As Cang Xu had already been severely weakened in the first place—only a mere sliver of his original soul remained—he was unable to withstand the tremendous pressure of the Soul Search and dissipated instantaneously, disappearing without a trace.

The Marshlands of the Northern Meadows City... After completing the Soul Search, Zhang Xuan managed to find the fellow who had imparted the secret art to Cang Xu.

At the very start, Cang Xu and Dao Kou were just two petty thieves. On one occasion, while fleeing from their enemies, they dived into the marshlands. Just as they thought that they were going to lose their lives, they stumbled upon a peculiar cavern and obtained the heritage contained within.

They had no idea who had left behind the heritage, but they had found themselves getting into a soul contract with the owner of the heritage, which forced them to tribute a soul into the altar once every few days.

And of all souls, the ones that were preferred were those of master teachers.

Over the years, countless master teachers had died by Cang Xu's hands. This was also the reason why he didn't hesitate for too long before deciding to make a move on Zhang Xuan, even when he had guessed that Zhang Xuan was likely to be no ordinary master teacher.

I'll have to look into it in the future... Zhang Xuan thought as he placed those thoughts aside for the moment.

Returning his soul back into his physical body, he opened his eyes once more. At this moment, there were no more inner demons before him, and the pitch-black world from before had vanished. He found himself sitting on a zafu in a room brilliantly-lit by Night Illumination Pearls.

It was as if what had happened to him previously was only a dream, and it had left him slightly dazed for a moment.

Lowering his gaze, he saw that there was indeed a jade bottle in his hands, and he muttered, "It seems like it wasn't a dream after all. I really managed to take down those inner demons..."

Zhang Xuan smiled.

He could feel the items that were sealed within the jade bottle, and that reaffirmed that everything that had happened was true.

Let me see if there are any changes in my state of mind...

Previously, when Zhang Xuan took down a single inner demon while undergoing the Heart Ordeal, his Soul Depth had surged from 21.1 to 23.1. This time, given that he had taken down several hundred inner demons, surely his Soul Depth would surge to an unbelievable level!

He quickly whipped out a Stone of Insight to test his Soul Depth, and upon taking a look, his mouth began twitching

wildly.

“How could this be?” Zhang Xuan muttered in shock

His Soul Depth was still the same as before, 23.1. There was no change whatsoever!

It was as if his previous encounter with the inner demons had done nothing to temper his mind!

“Master, those inner demons aren’t yours, so even if you were to successfully beguile them, it won’t temper your state of mind in any way... Given so, it’s normal for your Soul Depth to remain stagnant!” Knowing what was going through Zhang Xuan’s mind, Vicious explained telepathically.

“I see...” Zhang Xuan replied sorrowfully.

Why did other people have so many inner demons while he had none at all?

How could the world be so unfair? He should be given a chance to temper his state of mind as well!

Ah, being too strong had its own troubles as well!

Hong long!

While Zhang Xuan was lamenting his own plight, the wall in front of him suddenly parted, revealing a passageway forward. It seemed like him clearing the Trial of Inner Demons had triggered some kind of mechanism.

Putting away his woes, Zhang Xuan stood up and assessed the passageway warily. After confirming that it was safe, he slowly made his way into it.

The end of the passageway led to another sealed room, and there was a round and smooth crystal ball at the very center of the room.

Zhang Xuan placed his palm on it, and a brilliant gleam of light shot up, revealing a figure.

The figure was an old man with a snowy beard and hair. It was a little difficult to discern his age from his appearance.

“The fact that you are able to come here means that you have cleared the Trial of Inner Demons, and your state of mind has become flawless. With this, you are qualified to inherit my heritage...”

The elder stroked his beard with a smile before continuing on, “I am the founder of the Heart Division. The reason why I founded this division is to temper the hearts of the combat masters, and those who have managed to achieve that will be able to inherit the highest secret art of our Heart Division, Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra!”

“Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra?”

“That’s right. Upon reaching Major Accomplishment in this technique, one’s heart would be unblemished like a transparent glass, leaving one impervious to the temptations of the inner demons. At the same time, one’s Primordial Spirit would also become more wholesome, thus enhancing one’s strength!”

The elder smiled meaningfully at Zhang Xuan for a moment before continuing, “Only the greatest of geniuses who are able to withstand the Formation of Inner Demons are qualified to learn this technique. Since you are able to come here, this means that you have already met the minimum qualifications. How about it? Are you interested in learning the technique?”

“No.” Zhang Xuan replied without the slightest hesitation.

“...” The elder. It’s a little confusing here, but by nourishing one’s soul, it is not referring to Cang Xu’s soul but the person on the other side of the altar. Simply said, it’s like how the Jadeleaf King offered tributes to the Spirit God back then, just that it isn’t the Spirit God on the other end this time around. The stronger a cultivator is, the more powerful their inner demons are. The inner demons don’t possess the strength of a Primordial Spirit pinnacle cultivator, their strength is just proportionately greater than the inner demons of weaker cultivators.

1116 Altering the Sutra

Those who were qualified to challenge and overcome the Trial of Inner Demons, in terms of standing and strength, were all the upper echelons of the Combat Master Hall. There was only one motive for them to do so—to obtain the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra... He was only asking the other party whether he was interested out of politeness—naturally, there should only be one answer. Yet, who could have thought that... the other party would actually reply curtly with a ‘no’!

If you aren't interested, what the hell are you doing here?

Playing with me?

“This is the highest secret art of the Heart Division... Are you certain that you don't want to learn it?” the elder asked hesitantly.

“I'm not interested.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He had no inner demon at the moment, and that secret art, upon reaching Major Accomplishment, only served to reduce the number of inner demons. A secret art which performed poorer than him... Unless he was off his rockers, there was no way he should learn that technique!

“Then... why did you challenge the trial?” the elder was displeased.

“I thought that there are inner demons here to temper my state of mind, so I came here to train. Yet... who could have thought that the inner demons here are too weak, it's completely useless to me. I ended up getting excited over nothing... To tell you the truth, I am really disappointed!” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

If he had known that the formation was so weak, he wouldn't have come over and wasted his effort.

The only consolation for it was that he had managed to capture several hundred inner demons and uncover the location of

another one of Vicious's body parts, so the trip wasn't a complete waste.

"Too weak? Disappointed?" the elder's face flushed crimson, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

He managed to obtain the Formation of Inner Demons in an ancient domain a very long time ago, and he found that it was capable of drawing out the evil, sorrow, fear, and the various negative emotions within a human and amplify them, causing one to sink into a whirlpool of their own emotions.

Those who were able to overcome it would find their state of minds growing far more resilient than before. And for those who weren't able to overcome it, the formation was set up in a manner to halt before things truly get dangerous, so it wasn't dangerous at all.

As simple as the trial sounded, it was no easy feat to overcome one's inner demons. Of the generations of hall masters, only five had managed to clear the Trial of Inner Demons. Just through this in itself, one could see how difficult the matter of. And yet, that fellow actually said that it was too weak...

And furthermore, his face showed that he was full of disdain towards the matter...

Disdain your head! Are you really here to take the trial or to mock us?

"This Formation of Inner Demons is indeed nothing against true experts. However, your strength is only at Saint 1-dan, and it took you a very long time to clear the formation at that. From that, I think it can be seen that the formation isn't as easy as you put it out to be." the elder said with a displeased look on his face.

It had been around ten minutes from the moment that fellow triggered the formation to the point that he entered this room. As fast as it may be, the fact that he still needed ten minutes to overcome his inner demons meant that the trial wasn't as easy as he made it out to be.

So, why are you boasting over here? You aren't that great either!

“From the look on your face, it seems like you feel that I am talking big.” Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. “It’s not that I want to criticize you, but this formation of yours is truly unseemly and useless! If you don’t believe me, I can point out the errors in it for you right now. Even though the formation is capable of drawing out one’s inner demons, it requires one to walk to the center of the formation in order to do so. That’s as good as giving the cultivator a hint as to what is going to come, thus giving him an opportunity to mentally prepare himself. At the same time, the cultivator would also realize that the experiences afterward would all be false, and that would severely reduce the effectiveness of the formation. This is the very first problem with it!”

“This...” the elder mused over those words for a moment, but he couldn’t find anything to refute them.

That was indeed a flaw of the formation.

But while that was the case, once the inner demons came into play, the cultivator’s mind would immediately be sent into disarray. It would be hard for the cultivator to think rationally and remind himself that the experiences he was going through were false by then. Thus, in his view, that couldn’t be considered as a major flaw.

But even so, for the other party to notice it shortly after entering the Trial of Inner Demons... Could it be that the trial was truly too easy for him?

“Other than that, the inner demons produced by the formations are too simplistic. They only seek to lay doubts regarding one’s cultivation and battle techniques. What if the challenger has absolute confidence in his cultivation and battle techniques? If so, the trial would effectively be rendered meaningless... This is the second problem!” Zhang Xuan continued.

“You...” the body of the elder stiffened.

In the first place, the Formation of Inner Demons was not easy to set up, so it was normal for it to be flawed. But even so, finding them shouldn’t have been easy when one was in a

befuddled state under the work of the inner demons, so how could this fellow still have the attention to look out for flaws?

Was this for real?

“Besides that, the entire location reeks of a formation! The forms of the inner demons are too distasteful, who in the world would want to deal with those inner demons in their right mind? They would probably crack open their heads as soon as they get a chance to do so! Don’t you think that the effect would be far greater if the inner demons were to transform into someone they were familiar with? And this is the third problem of the formation!”

“... This is the fourth problem of the formation!”

“... This is the fifth problem of the formation!”

...

“... And this is the tenth problem of the formation! In the first place, this formation isn’t too large or powerful, so don’t you think that it’s unacceptable for there to be so many flaws in it?”

Placing his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan complained in dissatisfaction.

The formation was indeed capable of drawing out the inner demons within one, making it extremely hard to guard against it. However, the flaws were apparent as well.

To summarize it simply, it simply wasn’t immersive!

For the inner demons to appear in the form of demons, wasn’t this as good as telling others that ‘I am a demon, guard against me’?

As a customer, he found the experience too non-immersive and lacking.

A truly fearsome inner demon would be one which could warp into a being which evoked one’s remembrance or deepest regret, rendering one incapable or reluctant to tell the difference between the two... That would be truly fearsome then!

For one, if those inner demons had chosen to assume Luo Ruoxin's form instead of those ugly appearances they had, there was a very small chance that he might have just succumbed to it.

"T-this..." the elder's face paled.

In the first place, he was only a fragmented soul left behind a very long time ago. Suffering these consecutive shocks had left his existence wavering uncontrollably, and it looked as if he was only a step away from dissipation.

As the one who had set up the formation, it was natural that he was well aware of its flaws. He knew that all ten of the flaws pointed out by the other party had no mistakes whatsoever!

In other words, in the short span of time which the other party had cleared the formation, he had also managed to see through the very essence of it.

That would explain why he took ten minutes... It seemed like he spent most of the time analyzing the formation instead of dealing with the inner demons.

But still, to be able to uncover so much within such a short period of time... Wasn't his eye of discernment a little too formidable?

"Then... is there any way that I can resolve the issue?"

Knowing that he mustn't look down on the person standing before him, the elder asked carefully.

"It would be very difficult to resolve all of the flaws of the formation. However, I do know of one good way to raise its prowess by a little... As long as we stack an Illusory Formation on top of your Formation of Inner Demons, we would be able to hinder the challenger from noticing anything before the inner demons are triggered, and this would deprive them of the opportunity to prepare themselves. This should enhance the effectiveness of the formation significantly."

After saying those words, Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before drawing a picture identical to that in the previous room with his zhenqi.

Tapping on the picture, several hundred light points emerged within the picture of the room.

This was one of the abilities of a painter, Suspended Imagery!

“As long as we plant flags in these points, we should be able to build an Illusory Formation on top of the original formation and enhance its potency...” Zhang Xuan explained calmly.

His comprehension of formations had already reached 7-star pinnacle, putting him at a level comparable to 8-star primary formation masters. On top of that, his experiences at the Qiu Wu Palace had given a far deeper insight into formations as well. Thus, as complicated as compounding two formations together was, it wasn't an issue to him.

Besides, his aim was only to improve a small aspect of the Formation of Inner Demons, so the Illusory Formation didn't have to be too complicated.

“This...”

As the one who had set up the Formation of Inner Demons, the elder's comprehension of formations had also reached an incredibly profound level. With just a look, his body jolted, and disbelief crept into the depths of his eyes.

At first sight, the formation seemed haphazard, disobeying the conventions of formation building. It looked like something an amateur had randomly come up with. However, at closer examination, he realized that it was perfectly calculated to complement as many flaws in the Formation of Inner Demons as it could, enhancing the prowess of the latter immensely.

“I have benefited under your guidance...” the elder bowed deeply and respectfully.

His previous doubts had vanished without a trace, and in this moment, all he was left with was admiration for the latter.

As young as the person before him was, his comprehension of formations had already achieved a level far beyond what he had achieved in his lifetime. On top of that, he possessed an incredibly resilient mind which not even the Formation of Inner Demons could faze. Who could have thought that he

would encounter such an astounding genius after he had passed away?

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand calmly.

He was just feeling a little frustrated over how poorly the formation was designed, so he casually pointed it out. Since the other party accepted his views, there was no need for him to push his point insistently and embarrass the other party.

“This is the manual for the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra. Even if you are uninterested in it, I still have to abide by my own rules and hand it over to you...”

The elder tapped his finger lightly, and a shimmering bundle of light appeared. It gradually morphed into a manual.

Taking a glance at it, Zhang Xuan collected it into the Library of Heaven’s Path. Following which, he picked up the book to take a look while in truth, he was browsing through the content of the book in his mind. A moment later, with a deep frown etched on his face, he remarked, “This secret art has an extremely high requirement on one’s state of mind!”

The Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra demanded its cultivator to possess an extremely resilient mind, or else, not only would one fail to master it, it might even introduce inner demons into one’s mind, causing one’s cultivation to go berserk and decline drastically. In the worst case scenario, one might even lose his sense of self and go berserk.

There were simply too few people in the world who possessed sufficiently strong mental resilience to cultivate the secret art. It was no wonder why one had to clear the trial first before one could inherit the heritage! Otherwise, if those who were not sufficiently capable were to obtain it, it might end up ruining their future instead!

“That’s right.” the elder nodded regretfully.

“It would be hard to commonize a secret art that demands such a high mental resilience of the cultivator... Why don’t I take a look at it and alter it so that normal cultivators will be able to

practice it safely as well?” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before asking.

If it had been any other secret art, he would probably be helpless before it. However, it was a different case for this heart sutra.

The crux of the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra lay in cultivating one’s Primordial Spirit or soul to becoming wholesome. There was an uncanny resemblance between it and the method which spirit awakeners utilized to nourish Primordial Spirits and souls.

He had noticed it while he was browsing through the technique, so he fused it together with the spirit awakeners’ spirit enchantment techniques. Even though he failed to create a Heaven’s Path cultivation technique out of it, he did manage to overcome the requirement that demanded a high mental resilience from the cultivator.

In a sense, he had managed to resolve the greatest flaw of the technique.

“Alter it so that... normal cultivators will be able to practice it safely as well?”

Back then, he had endured much suffering in order to obtain this secret art. His goal was simple—he only wanted to raise the strength of the combat masters.

But after obtaining it, he realized that due to the sheer complexity of the technique, only those who possessed high mental resilience were able to cultivate it. This had been one of the greatest regrets in life.

If the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra could really be made commonplace, the overall strength of the Combat Master Hall could really be raised by leaps and bounds!

That would also mean a greater degree of safety for mankind as well.

“The greatest flaw in the cultivation technique lay in its cultivation process. Cultivators of the technique will have to face all kinds of temptations, and those who fail to overcome it will meet with disastrous outcomes. It is for this reason that

the threshold for the technique is extremely high. In truth, it's not too difficult to resolve the problem. While I was browsing through the manual earlier, I have already altered the portions concerning it accordingly. ” Zhang Xuan said.

“You altered it while you were browsing through it for the first time?”

When he heard that the other party would alter the technique and make it commonplace, he had imagined that the process would take decades or even centuries easily. Yet, it had only been half a minute since he had taken out the cultivation technique, and not only did the other party manage to finish browsing through it, he had even successfully altered it at that... The elder's body trembled in shock, unable to believe what he had just heard.

That had been his goal while he was alive as well, but despite devoting his entire life to it, he still didn't manage to succeed even when he was on his deathbed... Yet, within a period of time where it wouldn't suffice for anyone else to finish browsing through and internalize the manual, he had already finished altering the technique...

Even the great Kong shi couldn't have wielded such capability!

“That's right.” Zhang Xuan replied with an amiable smile. “Do you want a copy? I can write one down for you now!”

1117 Danger! Danger!

“I’ll be troubling you then.” The elder clasped his fist and bowed.

Even though the young man had shown capabilities that far exceeded common geniuses, he still found it hard to believe that the other party could alter the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra within such a short period of time.

He had to confirm it with his own eyes.

Having guessed the elder’s thoughts, Zhang Xuan waved his hand, and line after line of words formed out of zhenqi slowly appeared in the air.

It was the altered Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra!

“T-this...”

Upon taking a look, the elder’s body stiffened as incredulity crept into his gaze. “With this alteration, the temptations will still appear, but in a progressive manner instead. This will allow those with a weaker state of mind to cultivate the secret art and slowly advance their proficiency...”

He had studied the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra for many years, so he knew it inside out. The other party had not altered much of the sutra, but he had managed to change it from its very foundations.

The prowess upon reaching Major Accomplishment had not changed, but the starting point had been lowered instead.

In the past, even the head of the Combat Master Hall would have difficulties cultivating the technique, but now... even an ordinary Ten Men Commander could probably grasp it with ease.

Seeing the elder trembling in agitation, Zhang Xuan smiled.

Admittedly, the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra was a hard-to-come-by technique. While it was not of much use to him, he could still impart it to Wang Ying and Liu Yang. It should

complement the weaknesses in their state of mind, allowing them to reach even greater heights.

More than that, if all combat masters could cultivate the technique, the overall fighting prowess of the Combat Master Hall could be brought to greater heights.

The events in Qiu Wu Palace had given him deeper respect toward master teachers. This was also why he had accepted Hall Master Xing's request readily.

The elder bowed deeply. "Allow me to thank you on behalf of the entire Combat Master Hall!"

"You are being too polite. We are all master teachers, so it's only right for us to help one another!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

The elder had passed away many years ago, but he had chosen to leave behind his will to pass down his secret art, all in hopes that mankind could strive for greatness. His concern for the future of mankind was truly worthy of respect.

Zhang Xuan's response made the elder nod in approval. Curious, he asked, "Considering your incredible mental resilience, I guess that you must be the newly-elected head of the Heart Division?"

"I'm not..." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He was only dropping by the Combat Master Hall to help Hall Master Xing. He was not even a combat master, so how could he be a division head?

The elder was taken aback for a moment before realization struck him. "You aren't? Oh, I get it! Your strength must have been a factor limiting you from becoming a division head. After all, the minimum requirement is Primordial Spirit realm while you are only at Saint 1-dan pinnacle."

Naturally, there was a requirement on one's cultivation before one could be qualified to become a division head.

If they were to just go by the young man's mental resilience, he was definitely the best candidate to become the head of the Heart Division. However, it seemed like his cultivation had hindered him.

Upon ‘understanding’ what was going on, the elder said, “How about this then? As the founder of the Heart Division, I wield the ultimate control over the Heart Division. I’ll give this to you as compensation for resolving my greatest regret. This way, once your cultivation reaches the mark, you’ll automatically become the head of the Heart Division. Not even the hall master will be able to question the matter.”

“Thank you for your concern, but it’s fine...” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He was not even interested in becoming a combat master, let alone the head of some Heart Division. Just as he was in the midst of rejecting the other party, he suddenly felt the elder before him sending a thought into his mind. As the thought fused with his mind, he suddenly found himself with perfect knowledge of all the formations in the Heart Division. With this, he had effectively gained full control over all of them.

“Alright. With this, my job is done here. I will be entrusting the Heart Division to your hands.”

The transmission of thought had left the elder’s soul fading even more. Even so, there was a satisfied smile on his face.

The reason the elder had persisted for so long was due to his regret in being unable to find a successor whom he was truly satisfied with. Even though the cultivation of the young man before him was a little too low, his capability was truly not one to be underestimated. Under the other party’s leadership, he was confident that the Heart Division could be brought to greater heights. With this, he was finally able to put down the baggage in his heart.

“But I...” Seeing the elder’s look, Zhang Xuan was deeply conflicted.

While he was still in the midst of finding the words to explain his identity, the elder’s soul was visibly growing more and more transparent, and eventually, with a light ‘pop’, it vanished altogether.

“Jeez!” Seeing that it was already too late for him to say anything, Zhang Xuan shook his head helplessly.

Forget it. I'll just pass on the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra to Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao when I get out and let them deal with the matter. That should be more than enough.

He simply was not interested in becoming a combat master, so he could not possibly become the head of the Heart Division. At the very least, if he could pass on the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra to them, they would disseminate it. In a sense, he would be fulfilling the elder's final wishes as well.

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He took one last look around the room, and after confirming that there was really nothing around that he could temper his mind with, he began walking out with a disappointed look on his face.

However, barely after taking a few steps out of the passageway, he suddenly felt a chilling sensation pounding on his heart, and goosebumps rose all over his skin.

Hu!

Trusting his instincts, he immediately executed his Heaven's Path Divine Art, and his figure vanished from the spot. The next moment, the hands of a cactus struck the place where he had been standing, creating a huge depression in his place.

Hong long!

The cactus did not stop there just because he had missed. The following moment, Zhang Xuan felt the air crushing heavily down on him, threatening to flatten him into a sheet of paper.

Narrowing his eyes, Zhang Xuan unhesitatingly halted in his direction of advance and forcefully leaped into the air.

Paji!

Right after he left the ground, a brilliant ray of light blasted across the area that he had been about to pass by earlier, crushing everything in its path callously. If he had been a second late in responding, he might have lost his life.

Sou!

Before he had chance to catch his breath, the flash of a sword flew across the sky, headed for him.

It seemed as if the assaulter had already calculated the trajectory of his movements. Despite his swift reaction, he was still unable to free himself from the relentless offense of the assaulters.

If the previous two attacks were only to corner him, this attack was definitely a killing blow! The sword qi emanated by the sword covered every single path that he could escape to, leaving him no room to flee at all!

What is going on? Zhang Xuan's complexion turned incredibly awful.

He had never thought that he would be assaulted in the Combat Master Hall!

However, this was no time to be thinking about the matter. If he could not overcome the attack before him, all that would be left of him was a cold, lifeless corpse.

With a threat looming right before him, his mind whirred at great speed. In this moment, he seemed to have entered a unique state of mind. Under the assessment of the Eye of Insight, even the sword before him seemed to have slowed down.

Hu!

In this state of mind, Zhang Xuan found that he was completely composed and rational, and such a state allowed him to make the best decision before him. With a huge gust of wind, he compressed his body tightly together.

Geji geji!

In the blink of an eye, from his initial height of 1.8m, he was compressed into roughly the size of a watermelon.

Putting aside the fact that sword qi had sealed his surroundings, preventing him from dodging at all, even if he had managed to dodge the attack by some chance, there was no knowing if the other party still had some other countermeasures to corner him further. At this rate, it was only

a matter of time before he was killed! Since that was the case, he had to retaliate!

Shortly after he compressed his body into a bundle, he felt a cold burst of air flying straight above his head. The sword barely nicked his skin, causing a stinging sensation.

“Break!”

Reverting back to his original form, Zhang Xuan swiftly shot his finger forward.

Huala!

Innumerable bursts of sword qi shot forth from his fingers. They swiftly flew toward the barrier of sword qi ahead of him that had sealed his surroundings, and reminiscent of rain striking down on a banana tree, the clash between the two produced relentless ‘ding ding dang dang’ sounds.

From the previous few attacks, he could already tell that the other party’s strength was far greater than his, at least reaching the level of Primordial Spirit pinnacle. With his current strength, there was no way he could face them head-on. Since that was the case, he would just have to overwhelm them by quantity!

Relentless sword qi stormed forth from his finger and struck the barrier of sword qi. As powerful as the barrier was, it still swiftly thinned under the relentless attacks before eventually dissipating.

“What?”

This series of actions was completed in the blink of an eye. From the initial escape to retaliation, not even half a breath had passed. The one who had launched the attack clearly had not expected that he would be able to dodge the attack and even retaliate, breaking the barrier of sword qi, and he exclaimed in astonishment.

I have to flee now! Knowing that he was still in a dangerous position, Zhang Xuan leaped forward and dashed as fast as he could.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

A furious bellow sounded, and a massive palm print suddenly came falling down upon Zhang Xuan.

The palm print covered over a dozen square meters with him centered at the middle, thus effectively blocking his path of escape. With the speed that the palm print was heading toward him at, it was nigh impossible for him to escape in time.

His combat sense is too strong. Zhang Xuan's face turned grim.

He had thought that he could make use of the other party's lapse in concentration to flee, but the other party had recovered faster than expected. Furthermore, the other party was even able to come up with an attack that could corner him within the blink of an eye. The other party's combat sense was truly frightening!

Even Wu shi could hardly compare to that.

Zhang Xuan knew that he would be severely injured once he was struck by the palm strike, and in his weakened state, there would be no way for him to escape with his life anymore. Thus, he quickly hastened his footsteps and rushed off as fast as he could.

Huala!

In the blink of an eye, he reached the corner of the hall.

But at the same moment, the palm print had finally reached right above him.

“Break!”

Zhang Xuan tapped his finger upwards.

Weng!

Something seemed to whir into life in the room, and the massive palm print froze in midair, as if a fish frozen within a block of ice.

From the information imparted to him by the elder, he had gained a thorough understanding of the layout and formations within the Heart Division, allowing him to control them easily. From the very start, he knew that it would be hard for him to

escape, so his movements were also calculated to head toward the center of the formation so as to activate it.

If someone traced his path of movement from the moment he left the passageway of the trial, they would shockingly notice that it was actually a straight line right toward this point!

In other words, even while dodging those attacks, he was still able to instantaneously find a way to resolve it and continue advancing forward. Considering that he was up against an opponent far stronger than him, this was definitely an incredible feat.

With the formation active, Zhang Xuan was finally able to see the faces of his assailants, and a cold gaze immediately slipped into his eyes.

“Hall Master Xing, Division Head Liao, and Division Head Wei, what are you three trying to do?”

They were the three experts of the Combat Master Hall.

1118 Zhang Xuan Crushes the Trio

Zhang Xuan was extremely unhappy.

It was out of goodwill that he had come over to help nourish Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit so that the latter could deal with whatever trouble he was facing. It was one thing for them not to compensate him, but they even launched an attack against him on top of that.

If not for his swift reaction, he would have already been dead by now!

Was this how the Combat Master Hall treated their benefactor?

“Y-you...”

While Zhang Xuan was fuming, Hall Master Xing and the others widened their eyes in shock, unable to speak a single word.

Of the three of them, there was one who had reached Half-Leaving Aperture realm while the other two were at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle. With the three of them attacking in collaboration with one another, even a Saint 5-dan primary stage expert could easily have been taken down if caught off guard.

The young man was only at Saint 1-dan pinnacle, but he had still managed to escape from their encirclement unharmed. The combat sense and reflexes he had displayed had surpassed any one of them there!

And more importantly... he was actually able to control the formations in the Heart Division!

Wasn't only the head of the Heart Division able to control them?

“That should be our question instead! Speak, what is your motive for infiltrating our Combat Master Hall?” After

recovering from his shock, Division Head Liao harrumphed coldly. Flicking his wrist, he took out a token.

The token was the symbol of authority of the Heart Division, and it was also the key to controlling the formations within it.

Huala!

A flash of light burst from the token, and the frozen palm print abruptly shook free from its restraints. With a resounding explosion, it burst forth once more.

“Humph!” Sneering coldly, Division Head Liao was waiting for the palm print to fall upon Zhang Xuan when it suddenly switched direction and headed toward the three of them.

Hong long!

Astonished, the trio hurriedly retreated to dodge the palm strike. The palm print eventually struck the ground, creating a huge depression beneath it. At the same time, innumerable cracks crept across the ground within the room.

Amid an intense gale that burst forth from the palm strike, the fruits on Hall Master Xing’s head fell to the ground amid resounding ‘plops’.

“Division Head Liao, how in the world are you controlling your formation?”

Cloaked with a layer of dust, Division Head Wei roared furiously. At the same time, he gathered his zhenqi into his clenched fist and sent a powerful punch right toward Zhang Xuan.

The might of the palm burst forth, crushing down in Zhang Xuan’s direction.

“Humph!” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up as he stood his ground.

Hu!

Before the punch could connect, it made an abrupt U-turn and returned right back at Division Head Wei himself.

“What?” Shocked, Division Head Wei quickly thrust his palm forward to ward off the might of his punch.

Nevertheless, he was still forced to retreat eight steps, and a numbing sensation engulfed his arm. The impact had also jolted his zhenqi, causing him to sustain some internal injuries.

He had exerted his full might in the previous punch, and it seemed like the formation had further enhanced the strength of the punch before sending it back. With his last moment defense, he inevitably ended up suffering some injuries from the encounter.

Pale-faced, Division Head Wei roared furiously, “Liao Bujin, what the hell are you doing?”

With his eye of discernment, it was apparent that it was the Heart Division’s formation that caused his attack to turn against him. Given that Liao Bujin was the head of the Heart Division, it went without saying that he was the one who wielded absolute control over its formations. Yet... why was he helping the enemy instead?

“I have no idea! It is as if... he has obtained higher control rights over the formations than me...” Division Head Liao narrowed his eyes in horror.

The formations in the Heart Division were left behind by the founder of the Heart Division, and its control rights were determined by a strict hierarchy. In fact, the head of the Heart Division was not chosen by nomination, but by whether one was able to control the formations of the Heart Division or not.

Back then, it was because he had bested the other elders in terms of his control over the formations that he had been given the token, thus becoming the head of the Heart Division.

Under normal circumstances, with the token in hand, there should have been no one in the Combat Master Hall who could surpass him in terms of control over the formations, and this included the hall master. So, how could the young man be able to supersede his control so easily? This should have been impossible!

Seeing through the situation, Hall Master Xing turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “How did you manage to obtain

higher control rights over the Heart Division's formations than Division Head Liao?"

However, Zhang Xuan was in no mood to answer their questions at this point. With an incredibly dark face, he said in a chilly tone, "It's under your invitation that I came here to nourish your Primordial Spirit. While some mishap happened in the midst of it, it's due to Division Head Wei abruptly barging into the room despite my warnings beforehand. I'm sure it should be apparent that I bear no ill intentions. Yet, not only did you not reciprocate my favor, you even turned around and assaulted me. Why?"

Zhang Xuan's voice gradually grew colder and colder. As he spoke, he slowly walked step by step down from the sky.

With every step that he took, the pressure that Hall Master Xing and the others felt intensified by a notch. After several steps, they felt as if they were shouldering an entire mountain, causing their legs to tremble uncontrollably. Cold sweat trickled ceaselessly down their faces.

This immense pressure came from the formations of the Heart Division!

Given that the other party was in control of the formations, he could easily kill all of them as long as he willed it to happen!

"I asked why!" Zhang Xuan roared once more furiously.

Huala!

Unable to withstand it any longer, the trio collapsed to the ground. A stifling sensation choked them, and blood spurted from their mouths.

Zhang Xuan was truly furious this time around.

He had always acted by the principles that he deeply believed in. He did not think that he was a noble and selfless person, but at the very least, he had never done anything that went against his conscience. Even though a mishap did happen, it was a fact that he had helped to perfect Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit. And yet, these three combat masters had actually made an attempt on his life!

And it was an attempt that was completely devoid of mercy! If it was not for his swift reflexes, he would have been dead already!

He had been trying his best to find a way to resolve Hall Master Xing's condition, and yet, they actually attempted to kill him without rationalizing the situation!

"You are asking why even though you have tried to kill our hall master?" Division Head Liao spat indignantly as he tightened his grip around the token in his hand, wanting to wrestle back control over the formation. However, it was to no avail.

Before the other party, it was as if his token was a mere toy. Putting aside controlling the formation, he found that he was even unable to feel it at all. This was how absolute the other party's control over the formation was.

"Kill your hall master? If I really wanted to kill him, do you think that he would still be alive and kicking now?" Zhang Xuan sneered coldly as he flung his sleeves furiously.

Peng!

A powerful force struck Division Head Liao, and his body crashed heavily into the wall. He was completely helpless before the power of the Heart Division's formation.

In truth, even though Zhang Xuan's cultivation was only at Saint 1-dan, he still could have easily destroyed Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit earlier on. There was no need for him to go to such lengths to do it.

As such, when he heard Division Head Liao replying him with such a ridiculous reason, he could not hold back his temper any longer.

Seeing that his companion was wounded, Division Head Wei clenched his jaws furiously. "With more than a hundred inner demons in your heart, do you honestly expect us to believe that you wanted our hall master to bare his Primordial Spirit out of goodwill?"

Considering how the wall had turned so dark after the other party had entered the Trial of Inner Demons, it was apparent to

see that he harbored malicious intentions at heart. No matter how he tried to reason his actions, they were bound to be excuses!

“Inner demons?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had not really thought that the trio would attempt to kill him for such a reason.

“So that’s why you attacked me?” Zhang Xuan gazed down on them coldly. “Those inner demons aren’t mine. I was assaulted by the Sky Bearing Bandit Cang Xu back at the Spirit Awakener Guild, and a sliver of his soul ended up latching onto me. It was his soul that resulted in the congregation of inner demons.”

If it had been anyone else, he wouldn’t have bothered to waste his words. He would have just pummeled them straight to vent his anger and return some sense back into their heads.

However, he was in the Combat Master Hall, and as the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, his actions were representative of the entire organization. Given that the Xuanxuan Faction was going to have an exchange with the Combat Master Hall very soon, it could prove to be very troublesome later on if he beat up the hall master and two division heads.

The other party might even vent their anger on his students.

Considering that they were in Qingyuan City, the other party’s home turf, he had no choice but to hold himself back.

“Cang Xu?” Hall Master Xing and the others were stunned to hear that name.

He had heard how the fellow was stomped to death by the guild building.

If one had to compile a list of the ten most unforgivable criminals in Qingyuan Empire, that fellow would definitely have been on the list.

“Indeed. I have already killed that fellow and taken down all of the inner demons.” Zhang Xuan harrumphed coldly. “If I really have hundreds of inner demons, do you think that I

could walk out from the Trial of Inner Demons perfectly fine?”

“This...” The trio froze.

The other party was right. If those inner demons were indeed his, even with the safety measures in the formation, he would still have been driven to a state of near insanity by the simultaneous onslaught of the inner demons!

Considering how the other party was in a completely rational state, capable of making astute judgements in battle and analyzing the situation keenly... it did appear that he was unfazed by the inner demons.

Zhang Xuan gazed down on Hall Master Xing coldly.

“Besides, if I really intend you harm, do you think that I would have entered the Trial of Inner Demons just to cause problems for myself?”

“To deal with our hall master, it’s natural that you would have to gain our trust first. You could have known of the existence of the Trial of Inner Demons beforehand and made countermeasures against it, only for the countermeasures to fail halfway through the trial,” argued Division Head Liao.

If possible, they would not doubt their benefactor either. However, when they thought back about what had happened, everything seemed too coincidental to be true.

Just as they were about to find a powerful spirit awakener, he suddenly appeared in the Spirit Awakener Guild. It should have only been an ordinary spirit enchantment, but it ended up turning Hall Master Xing into a flowering cactus.

It was not to say that the points raised by the other party did not make sense, but there were still too many doubtful points for them to simply accept it as it was.

It was due to these doubts that they harbored that they were swiftly convinced that the other party was up to no good upon finding out that there were so many inner demons in the other party’s heart.

“Alright then. Let’s take a step back and not debate whether I would have to win your trust before dealing with your hall

master. With just my control over the Heart Division's formations, do you think that anyone will be able to stop me if I attempt to kill the three of you?" Placing his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan spoke with the utmost arrogance.

So what if they were combat masters?

With the many formations of the Heart Division under his control, he was the sole sovereign within this space!

If he wanted to make a move, he could have easily killed the trio without anyone being any the wiser.

Hearing those words, the trio fell silent.

That was indeed true.

Perhaps the other party might still have needed to resort to schemes beforehand, but with the formations of the Heart Division now under his absolute control, there was no need for him to waste his breath on them.

Seeing that the trio was unable to speak a word, Zhang Xuan continued. "Hall Master Xing, if I'm not mistaken, your Primordial Spirit suffered significant damage in the past, right?"

"That's right... Twenty-five years ago, I fought with an Otherworldly Demon King in the Subterranean Gallery and ended up being wounded by him," Hall Master Xing replied.

There were quite a few people within the Combat Master Hall who were aware of the wounds his Primordial Spirit had suffered. Back then, his injuries were so severe that he had nearly lost his life. He was unconscious for three whole years, and if not for the relentless effort of the old guild leader of the Physician Guild, he might have just passed away back then.

However, it was a pity that the old guild leader suddenly went missing after saving him, leaving him unable to repay the other party's favor.

That had become a huge regret of his.

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan began explaining with a softened tone. "The damage sustained by your Primordial Spirit has ended up leaving behind a huge rift in it. I used my spirit

enchantment to help cover up your rift, but Division Head Wei entered at that crucial moment, and your awakening Primordial Spirit ended up ejecting my consciousness from your mind. After which, while you were attacked by the inner demons, the enchanted spirit ended up fusing completely with your Primordial Spirit, thus resulting in that weird form of yours. It's indeed my fault for not explaining things to you earlier, but it was definitely not my intention to harm you."

"This..." Hall Master Xing's face paled.

He had felt his Primordial Spirit becoming much more wholesome than before, but as he had not done a thorough check, he didn't notice that the rift had been healed. Upon hearing Zhang Xuan's words, he hurriedly looked inwardly to check on his Primordial Spirit, and a moment later, his eyes widened in astonishment and delight.

"You treated... the rift in my Primordial Spirit?" Hall Master Xing asked hoarsely. He could hardly believe what had happened to him.

The huge rift in his Primordial Spirit had become a huge bottleneck for his cultivation. He had sought many formidable physicians due to that matter, but all was helpless before that issue.

Twenty years had passed, and he had already given up hope.

The reason he intended to challenge the Trial of Inner Demons was in hopes that perhaps that highest secret art could repair that wound of his. Although, to be honest, he did not harbor much hope for that either.

He had thought that his cultivation would be capped at this level for his entire life, and never had he thought that the spirit awakener before him would actually successfully repair his Primordial Spirit. How could he have made an attempt on the life of his great benefactor?

1119 Zhang Xuan Imparts a Technique

“I have misunderstood you. Please accept my sincerest apologies,” Hall Master Xing said as he bowed deeply.

Putting everything aside, if the other party truly intended to kill him, why would he have repaired his Primordial Spirit in the first place? There was no need for him to do so at all.

Furthermore, just as the other party had said, if the other party wanted to kill him, given his control over the formations, he would have just done it. There was no need for him to waste his breath.

To think that he, as the head of the Combat Master Hall, actually tried to kill a man who was earnestly doing his best to help him... A deep feeling of guilt and shame crushed down on his heart, choking him within.

Subconscious bias had influenced his train of thought, and the Trial of Inner Demons had further dulled his judgement. Otherwise, someone of his wits should have been able to figure all of that out.

“After all we have done, we dare not ask for Sun shi’s forgiveness. We only hope that you will give us an opportunity to compensate you. No matter what it is, we will definitely have it done without the slightest complaint!” Hall Master Xing implored.

They were at fault for this matter, and no matter what, they had to clear things up. Putting aside the fact that this matter would bring shame to the Combat Master Hall, they would not even be able to forgive themselves.

“I don’t need your compensation. However, if you are willing to trust me, I can resolve your problem right now,” Zhang Xuan replied.

He was still angry over the matter, but at the very least, the other party had not done what they did out of ill will against him. Rather than souring the relations with the Combat Master Hall just so that he could vent his emotions, it would be better if he could use this incident to forge a sense of camaraderie between them and the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy instead.

“Of course, I trust Sun Shi!” Hearing the other party not asking for compensation and even offering to resolve his problem for him, Hall Master Xing could not help but feel deeply grateful and ashamed at the same time.

This was the magnanimity of a true master teacher!

Compared to him, they seemed like hypocrites instead.

Zhang Xuan nodded. “Alright, I’ll need you to lower the defenses around your Primordial Spirit.”

“Very well!” Without any hesitation, Hall Master Xing sat down on the ground and bared his Primordial Spirit to the other party without any reservations.

Given that the other party controlled the formations of the Heart Division, there would have been nothing he could do even if the other party meant him harm. Since he was completely helpless, he might as well just completely let go. This way, he would at least be able to salvage the situation a little by displaying his trust in the other party.

Seeing that the other party was cooperating with him obediently, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It was indeed difficult to deal with a spirit once it had fused with the cultivator’s Primordial Spirit. Nevertheless, if he could slip his consciousness into the other party’s Primordial Spirit and specifically pinpoint the location of the target, it would not be too difficult to eliminate it.

Hu!

Thus, Zhang Xuan extended his consciousness into Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit and began his work. Not too long later, he heaved a sigh of relief.

“Sun shi, how is it?” Division Heads Liao and Wei asked anxiously.

“Take a look for yourself...” Zhang Xuan left them those words and sat down on the ground to recuperate.

The other party’s Primordial Spirit was simply too strong, such that he had to exert a lot of energy in order to maneuver his consciousness within it to find the spirit. Even though the process had only taken ten short minutes, it had ended up depleting his soul energy by almost 80%.

Boom!

A while later, a loud buzz suddenly sounded from Hall Master Xing’s body, and amid a brilliant glow, a Primordial Spirit suddenly gushed out of his body.

“Leaving Aperture realm...” Division Heads Liao and Wei widened their eyes in disbelief.

Just how long did it take for them to achieve a breakthrough?

Hu!

Returning his Primordial Spirit back to his body, Hall Master Xing opened his eyes once more. He jolted his body, and the cactus on his head and the flower on his bottom fell to the ground before withering to death.

Turning to the young man, he kneeled down in gratitude.

“Thank you, Sun shi!”

His Primordial Spirit had long reached a level far surpassing any other Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert. Were it not for his injury, he would have achieved a breakthrough many years ago. After his trauma was resolved with Zhang Xuan’s help, his flow of power finally became whole again, and with the incredible accumulation of power he had, he was able to achieve a breakthrough easily on the spot.

Of course, while he had managed to draw his Primordial Spirit out from his body, he had not undergone the lightning ordeal yet, so he could not be considered a full-fledged Leaving Aperture realm expert. Nevertheless, he was still many times stronger than before.

He could not help but feel incredibly blessed to have met with Sun shi.

Despite all of the misunderstandings between the both of them, the other party was willing to shrug off the matter magnanimously and treat him. In that moment, he was filled with nothing but admiration for the other party.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony!” Zhang Xuan swiftly helped the other party up.

At that moment, he suddenly recalled a certain matter, and he said, “Previously, after I cleared the Trial of Inner Demons, I met with the founder of the Heart Division!”

“Sun shi met with the founder?”

“But... Despite Cang Xu introducing so many inner demons into the trial, you were still able to successfully clear the trial?”

Everyone leaped in shock. This was especially so for the head of the Heart Division, Division Head Liao. His eyes were widened in disbelief.

Initially, considering that the other party’s cultivation was only at Saint 1-dan, he had thought that it was unlikely for him to clear the trial. Furthermore, the other party had said that Cang Xu’s Primordial Spirit had drawn in more than a hundred inner demons, and that only further convinced him so.

He had thought that the other party had only managed to get away unscathed by backing out of the formation through using some unknown method while his mind was rational the moment that the inner demons appeared. But who knew that the other party had managed to clear the trial!

He knew full well how difficult the Trial of Inner Demons was. Of the many generations of hall masters, only five had cleared the trial. Yet, a Saint 1-dan cultivator... had actually managed to clear it. This was too fearsome!

After a moment of shock, Division Head Liao asked, “Did the founder... impart the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra to Sun shi?”

“He did.” Zhang Xuan nodded before continuing. “Since all of you are around, let me impart the secret art to the rest of you. It should prove to be useful in helping you all temper your state of mind!”

“You want to impart it to us?” Hall Master Xing swiftly shook his head with a bitter smile. “I appreciate Sun Shi’s kind gesture, but there are fundamental requirements to cultivating that secret art. Until we are able to clear the Trial of Inner Demons with our own ability, we will only hurt ourselves by cultivating the secret art.”

They would have loved to cultivate the strongest technique of the Combat Master Hall as well, but it was a pity that they were not strong enough to overcome the temptations of the mind. Even with the secret art right before them, they would not dare touch it. Otherwise, it might just very well cost them their lives.

In the many millenniums of history behind the Combat Master Hall, there had been a handful of combat masters who did not believe in such matters and demanded to learn the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra from the hall master, and eventually, their cultivation all ended up going berserk.

It was for this reason that it was eventually firmly sealed behind the Trial of Inner Demons of the Heart Division, becoming one of the forbidden secret arts of the Combat Master Hall.

In truth, they could not help but feel deeply impressed by the young man before them. Despite his young age, he had already attained a state of mind far beyond theirs, and with his own prowess, he had managed to earn the right to cultivate the secret art. They hoped to do the same, too, but it was still impossible for them in their current state.

The dangers concerning the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra were in no way exaggerated. Once a cultivator started to cultivate the secret art and fell for its temptation, they would find themselves unable to stop cultivating, and it was a matter of time before disaster struck.

“The secret art did have such a flaw previously, but there’s no need to worry about it anymore. You can take a look at it first before deciding on whether you want to cultivate the technique or not!” Zhang Xuan chuckled as he raised his hand. A screen of zhenqi appeared before him, and a string of gleaming words materialized in midair.

“This...” Not expecting the other party to show the secret art to them without any reservations, Hall Master Xing and the others felt a little conflicted.

It might seem as if there was no harm just looking at it, but even they could not guarantee that they would not succumb to the temptation of the technique and cultivate it. But again, as combat masters, avid pursuers of strength, it was extremely difficult for them to turn their eyes away when they knew that a powerful secret art stood before them. Curiosity gnawed at their hearts.

“Forget it! It won’t hurt to take a look...” Eventually, the trio failed to withstand the allure of the secret art and began examining the secret art manual in the air.

Perplexed frowns gradually crept onto their faces.

Their eyes of discernment might not have been on par with the founder of the Heart Division, but they were still top-notch experts of the Combat Master Hall. With their deep experience and knowledge of all kinds of secret arts, it did not take them long to realize that the secret art was a little different from how it had been described to them. Astonishingly, the prerequisite mental resilience to begin cultivating the technique was not high at all. Putting aside them, even ordinary combat masters would be able to practice it without facing any serious danger.

“This...” The trio traded intrigued gazes with one another.

After a long moment of silence, Hall Master Xing asked hesitantly, “Sun shi, are you certain that this is the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra?”

“It is.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“But... that secret art can’t be cultivated by those who lack mental resilience...” Hall Master Xing muttered in confusion.

“That’s right. The secret art did have such an issue when I first obtained it.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “I thought that it was a huge flaw, so I casually changed some parts of it. Now, even ordinary cultivators should be able to practice it!”

“You casually changed some parts of it?”

“Sun shi... did you really... alter the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra?”

The three combat masters felt the back of their throats turning dry, and their bodies began shaking involuntarily.

The secret art had been around ever since the founding of the Heart Division. If it could be altered that easily, one of the countless geniuses in the long history of the Combat Master Hall would have long done so!

Sun shi had barely been in the Heart Division for twenty minutes... and within this period of time, not only did he deal with the hundred inner demons from Cang Xu, he even inherited the heritage and altered it on a whim.

You must be joking with us! You’ve got to be!

That is the greatest secret art of the Combat Master Hall!

Is it really possible to change it just like that?

“Indeed. The secret art had simply too many flaws, and more importantly, ordinary cultivators were not even able to cultivate it at that! A flawed technique that ordinary cultivators are unable to practice, is there a reason for such a technique to continue existing in the world?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “Honestly, I have no idea why the founder of the Heart Division left such a secret art behind!”

To regard a secret art that no one was able to cultivate as its unparalleled treasure, this Combat Master Hall sure was...

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “It’s pity that I wasn’t able to correct all of the flaws due to my ineptitude. I was only able to lower the prerequisites of the technique such that ordinary cultivators are able to practice it. It’s still rather lacking, but I’m afraid that you will have to just make do with it.”

He was still lacking books on the aspect of tempering one's mind, so he could only alter it this far for the time being.

Honestly speaking, he could not help but feel a little embarrassed for imparting a technique riddled with flaws to others.

The simplified Heaven's Path techniques that he would usually impart to others might have its flaws as well, but they numbered very few. However, as for this Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra... he had only altered one of the flaws, and there were still many more within it. If others were to learn that he was the one who had passed this technique over to the Combat Master Hall, he might just die of shame!

“Limits of your knowledge?”

“Make do with it?”

The trio staggered upon hearing those words, and they nearly collapsed to the floor.

Big brother, are you sure you aren't joking with us?

Generation after generation of our predecessors have failed to achieve what you did! If what you have done is considered ineptitude, shouldn't our predecessors have just banged their heads against the walls to repent for their uselessness?

And more importantly... it is such a profound cultivation technique, but why do you keep speaking of it with disdain, as if it is little more than trash?

Noticing the bizarre expressions on the faces of the trio, Zhang Xuan thought that they were worrying about the dangers of cultivating the newly-modified secret art, so he quickly clarified the matter. “Ah, are you afraid that I might have altered it incorrectly? Don't worry, your founder has taken a look at it personally and confirmed that it's fine. It's also for this reason that he passed down the top authority over the formations in the Heart Division to me.”

“The founder has taken a look at it as well?”

While the trio was shocked by the news, realization also struck them at the same time.

They had been wondering how the other party had suddenly gained control over the Heart Division's formations just after making a trip into the Trial of Inner Demons. It turned out that the founder had passed his control rights over!

Just that gesture in itself was sufficient to prove that there was no mistake in the other party's alteration. Otherwise, the founder could not have possibly gone to the extent of passing his authority over to a stranger.

To receive the recognition of the founder and gain authority over the Heart Division's formations... Wouldn't that mean that the time the other party had spent on altering the secret art was far less than twenty minutes?

To be able to alter their highest secret art so quickly... Could it be that Sun shi's greatest strength lay not in spirit enchantment but his comprehension of cultivation techniques?

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“Thank you, Sun shi!”

As shocked as they were, they knew that it wasn't the time to be pondering over this matter. They quickly turned their gazes back to the secret art and began memorizing it.

They understood full well the significance of the lowered prerequisites for the cultivation of the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra to the Combat Master Hall.

The other party could have hidden the fact that he had obtained the heritage from them, and no one would have been any wiser either. Using the secret art, he could have easily drawn in countless pursuers and form his own influence, thus bringing him immense power and vast riches... Alternatively, he could have also used the secret art as a leverage to make demands out of them... Considering that it was their highest secret art on the line, they would have no choice but to bow to anything that the other party demanded.

But the other party didn't choose to do so.

In fact, he even tossed it back to them as if it was nothing at all... This magnanimity was something they could never hope to match up to.

It was laughable how they had actually doubted the character of such a noble person...

Their faces reddened in shame, and they would dive into a hole to hide in if there was one beside them in this very instant.

All along, they had thought that given that everyone had their own greed and desires, true selflessness was impossible... However, the young man before them had overturned that belief!

Only a man like him could bear the title of a ‘teacher’ without any guilt.

“Sun shi, your impartation of the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra to our Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall makes you a half-teacher to all of us. From now onward, no matter what request you have of us, our Combat Master Hall will surely have it accomplish at all cost!”

After taking several more looks at the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra and confirming that it was suitable for everyone to cultivate, Hall Master Xing stepped forward and clasped his fist earnestly.

While this secret art was left behind by the founder of the Heart Division, the young man before him did make a huge alteration to the technique, so it could be said that he had a claim to it as well.

Since they were going to cultivate the other party’s technique, that would effectively make the other party their half-teacher.

No matter, the Qingyuan Conferred Empire truly owed the young man a huge debt this time around. This wasn’t a debt which could be repaid just by offering a little bit of help here and there.

“Hall Master Xing, there’s no need to stand on ceremony!” Not expecting the other party to take the matter so seriously, Zhang Xuan hurriedly waved his hands to indicate that it wasn’t a huge issue.

“That can’t do! Sun shi, you have truly done our Combat Master Hall a great favor this time around. With the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra you have imparted us, the overall fighting prowess of our Combat Master Hall would be raised immensely. With this, we would be able to deal with our current crisis easily!” Hall Master Xing replied earnestly.

There were two reasons why the members of the Combat Master Hall were so easily seduced by the Xuanxuan Faction. Firstly, the Xuanxuan Faction’s grasp of combat knowledge was indeed far superior to theirs—even Hall Master Xing had

to admit that. Secondly, it would be due to their lacking mental resilience against temptations.

However, with the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra being made commonplace, the overall prowess of the combat masters would be enhanced. With this, they might stand a chance in besting the Xuanxuan Faction in the exchange three days from now!

“Indeed. If one were to cultivate the secret art diligently, it’ll help them to maintain their clarity of mind, allowing them to withstand the beguilement of the inner demons. At the same time, the enhanced state of mind will also boost one’s comprehension of battle techniques and combat. It’ll indeed boost the prowess of the combat masters significantly.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

At this point, he suddenly recalled a matter and asked, “Right, I have some students who are severely lacking in their mental resilience. Will it be fine for me to impart the secret art to them as well?”

No matter what, the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra was still the highest secret art of the Combat Master Hall. He should still seek the other party’s permission before imparting it to Wang Ying and the others in the Xuanxuan Faction.

“Of course! Since the founder has imparted the technique to you, and you have also made significant improvements in it, you are free to do anything you want with it!” Hall Master Xing said with a smile.

It wasn’t a problem for the technique to be passed down to just a couple of students.

Division Heads Liao and Wei also nodded in agreement.

Such an act wouldn’t harm the interests of their Combat Master Hall, so there was no need for them to oppose it.

“Allow me to thank the Combat Master Hall on their behalf then.” Zhang Xuan bowed.

Wang Ying, Liu Yang, and the others from the Xuanxuan Faction were still too young. It was inevitable that they would be disadvantaged in terms of their state of mind against the

combat masters. However, if they could cultivate the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra, that flaw of theirs could be resolved. At the very least, they wouldn't panic in the midst of battle, and that would give the Xuanxuan Faction a better chance in the battle.

“Sun shi, you are too polite!”

The others quickly clasped their fists respectfully.

After chatting for a while longer, Zhang Xuan suddenly recalled a certain matter, and he asked, “Will it be inconvenient for me to ask what kind of trouble is the Combat Master Hall facing?”

This was the second time he was asking this question.

The other party agreeing to allow him to impart the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra to his students and the members of the Xuanxuan Faction was a huge favor to him. For this, he didn't mind helping the other party resolve their problem.

Also, he was also a little curious as to know what kind of problem the Combat Master Hall was facing that would leave even the formidable Hall Master Xing in such a panic.

“I thank Sun shi for your concern, but with this Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra, I am confident that we should be able to overcome the crisis easily.” Hall Master Xing replied with a smile.

The other party had already done them a huge favor by simplifying the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra to a level where each and every combat master would be able to cultivate it. If they still couldn't resolve the problem like that, their Combat Master Hall would have no face to continue existing in this world.

“Hall Master Xing...” Right after he had said those words, Division Head Liao suddenly turned to him and discreetly sent a telepathic message over. “Despite possessing only a cultivation of Saint 1-dan pinnacle, Sun shi was able to avoid our collaborative offense without incurring any injuries... His fighting prowess is truly terrifying! If we could have him to

teach our combat masters, the overall prowess of our Combat Master Hall would surely rise swiftly!”

“This...” Hall Master Xing was a little taken aback by the proposal.

He hadn't really thought about it, but the young man before him had achieved an astounding level in his comprehension of combat despite his Saint 1-dan pinnacle cultivation.

Even with his breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm, it was highly likely that he would be no match for the other party once he suppressed his cultivation to Saint 1-dan pinnacle too.

With his prowess, he was bound to be far stronger than those of the Xuanxuan Faction. If he could step forward to teach their combat masters... It could be foreseen that there would be a significant surge in the prowess of the Combat Master Hall!

By then, it wouldn't be a problem for them to defeat the Xuanxuan Faction and regain their honor.

“It's indeed a good idea, but... our Combat Master Hall is already deeply indebted to the other party. We can't let him do anything for us anymore...” Hall Master Xing replied with a frown.

Division Head Liao's idea was good, but they couldn't just keep accepting the goodwill of the other party without reciprocating.

Besides, for the Combat Master Hall to be unable to deal with an academy from a Tier-1 Empire, forced to the extent of engaging the help of a spirit awakener... How shameful it would be!

“You're right.” Understanding Hall Master Xing's point of view, Division Head Liao nodded and fell silent.

On the other hand, hearing Hall Master Xing's confident response, Zhang Xuan nodded, “That's good...”

He knew that it wouldn't be appropriate for him to probe any further at this point, or else it would as good as casting doubt over the capability of the Combat Master Hall. Thus, he

hesitated for a brief moment before continuing, “To tell you the truth, I do have something to ask of you.”

“Feel free to speak!” Hall Master Xing replied hurriedly.

“Is it possible for me to access all of the Saint 2-dan and above cultivation technique manuals in your Combat Master Hall? Recently, I have reached a bottleneck in my cultivation, and I need to accrue as much knowledge as possible in order to converge my cultivation together...” Zhang Xuan said.

It had been a month since he had reached Saint 1-dan pinnacle at the Qiu Wu Palace. His physical body, zhenqi, and soul cultivation had already reached their limits long ago, and it was about time for him to achieve a breakthrough.

To be honest, it was deeply embarrassing for him to be stuck at Saint 1-dan pinnacle for such a long period of time.

“Our Combat Master Hall do have cultivation technique manuals of Saint 2-dan and above, but I’m afraid that we don’t have too many of them.” Hall Master Xing was visibly surprised by Zhang Xuan’s request for a moment before nodding.

“There aren’t much of them?” Zhang Xuan asked with a deep frown.

Typically speaking, the Master Teacher Pavilion would have a huge collection of cultivation technique manuals numbering in millions so that master teachers could easily access whatever information they required. So, why would Hall Master Xing say that there wasn’t much of them?

“Unlike the Master Teacher Pavilion, where master teachers can access all cultivation techniques once their cultivation reaches the required level, combat masters have to overcome certain trials before they can claim any cultivation technique...” Seeing the incomprehension in Zhang Xuan’s eyes, Hall Master Xing explained.

In the Master Teacher Pavilion, as long as one’s master teacher rank and cultivation realm reached the required level, or if they were to accrue sufficient Contribution Points, they would be granted access to the cultivation techniques

correspondingly. However, the Combat Master Hall didn't obey by the same rules.

Combat masters were expected to wield fighting prowess at the apex of humanity, so they had to temper their strength to the very limits of their cultivation realm and prove it so through clearing a trial would they be able to obtain the cultivation technique manuals for the next realm.

Otherwise, if one failed to reinforce their cultivation sufficiently at a certain realm, their subsequent cultivation would become unstable. This meant that they would no longer be able to retain their strength of being at the apex of their cultivation realm, and it could also hinder them from reaching greater heights in their cultivation as well.

“As our Combat Master Hall is born for the sole purpose of combat, combat masters would cultivate the same cultivation technique as one another so as to make it more convenient for them to collaborate with one another in combat or amalgamate their zhenqi together to generate a force far beyond their individual limits... Thus, the quantity of cultivation technique manuals that we have here is much fewer than that in the Master Teacher Pavilion!” Hall Master Xing explained.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

The Combat Master Hall was effectively the army of the Master Teacher Pavilion, so naturally, their cultivation techniques would be geared towards maximizing their prowess, especially through teamwork. For this purpose, it was necessary for them to cultivate specific cultivation techniques so that they could better aid and complement one another in battle.

“Of course, even though our cultivation technique manuals number few, I can assure their guarantee. They should prove to be a great source of inspiration to you. Besides, even though I did say their quantity is limited, we still do have a few hundreds of them here to cater to those of differing constitutions!”

Hall Master Xing didn't know why Sun Shi would ask for quantity instead of quality, but since the other party had made

such a request, he was bound to have a rationale behind it. Naturally, he should first clarify things up so as to prevent a misunderstanding from occurring.

“Several hundred cultivation technique manuals will do as well. Where do I have to go to access them, and what kind of trials will I have to undergo?” Zhang Xuan asked.

To be honest, he was also a little curious to learn what kind of trials that combat masters undergo too.

He hadn't tested out his newfound strength as a Celestial Saint yet, this would be a good opportunity for him to assess where his strength stood against the rest of the Master Teacher Continent.

“The cultivation techniques are in the Inner Breath Division. It happens that I am the head of the Inner Breath Division, so allow me to bring you over!” Division Head Wei said with a smile.

“I'll be counting on you then!” Zhang Xuan nodded with a smile.

Since the other party didn't want him to interfere in their private affairs, he wasn't interested in becoming a busybody either. No matter what, since he had come to the Combat Master Hall, he should at least use this opportunity to raise his strength by at least a little.

“Sun shi, this way please...” Division Head Wei bade Hall Master Xing farewell before leading Zhang Xuan out.

Upon the departure of the duo, Division Head Liao turned to Hall Master Xing and asked in bewilderment, “Have you ever heard of anyone deriving inspiration by reading a huge variety of cultivation technique manuals? Wouldn't it just make it harder for one to discern the truth from the false, befuddling their train of thoughts further instead?”

“I have never heard of such a thing either, but one thing is for sure. Sun shi is a true genius! Most likely, only Zhang Xuan of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy could be a match for him...”

Halfway through his words, Hall Master Xing suddenly froze. “Wait a moment... Zhang Xuan has just arrived in Qingyuan City, and Sun Shi appeared shortly afterward. Furthermore, the both of them seem to be around the same age, and they are both top-notch geniuses...

“Division Head Liao, where is the painting of Zhang Xuan where Zhuo Qingfeng sent to us previously? Bring it over to me. Back then, I had only taken a glance at it and thought much of it. But this... I need to take another look to verify the matter!”

1121 Elder Qi

Zhuo Qingfeng did send a painting of Zhang Xuan to the Combat Master Hall along with his report back then. However, Hall Master Xing didn't think that he was someone whom he needed to take note of back then, so he didn't pay much heed to the matter. After taking a swift glance at it, he had left his subordinates to deal with it.

After all, a person of his position could not possibly be expected to deal with every miscellaneous matter that came his way. If that was really the case, he would have died from exhaustion by now!

However, thinking about how Sun Qiang and Zhang Xuan were of identical ages and were both geniuses, he could not help but pause for a moment.

Yes, the world was huge and had no lack of geniuses. However, those whose talents had reached such an astounding level were still hard-to-come-by. Surely it was too much of a coincidence for two to appear in Qingyuan City simultaneously, right?

"I'll go and take a look!" Nodding, Division Head Liao was about to head out when a frown abruptly surfaced on Hall Master Xing's forehead. Seemingly sensing something, he whipped out a Communication Jade Token.

Swiftly browsing through its content, Hall Master Xing's eyes lit up, and his eyes reddened in agitation.

"What happened?" Division Head Liao asked.

Hall Master Xing rarely allowed himself to show such intense emotions. Something major must have happened for him to react in such a manner!

"Elder Qi has returned!" Hall Master Xing said with clenched fists.

"Elder Qi? You mean the ex-head of the Physician Guild? Back then, he disappeared shortly after saving you, and I

thought that he might have already passed away...” Division Head Liao was surprised by the news, too.

More than two decades ago, Hall Master Xing had been severely wounded by an Otherworldly Demon, and that had caused massive damage to his Primordial Spirit, causing him to lose consciousness for three whole years. If not for Elder Qi, he might have been dead by now!

When he finally regained consciousness, he had intended to repay the favor to the other party, only to find that the other party had suddenly disappeared from the face of the world. He had tried searching for the old physician, but for twenty years, there had been no news whatsoever.

Just as he was on the verge of resigning himself to the fact that Elder Qi really might have passed away... the other party suddenly returned!

“I thought so, too, but it seems like we were mistaken. We’ll deal with the matter of the painting later on. For the time being, help me prepare some gifts. I want to pay a visit to him personally!” Hall Master Xing said in agitation.

At this point, there was nothing more important than the return of his benefactor!

The duo swiftly made some preparations before rushing out of the Combat Master Hall. Before long, they had arrived at the Physician Guild and successfully met with Elder Qi.

It seemed like twenty years had not made the old guild leader age in the slightest. If any, his aura seemed to have become even sharper than before.

“Congratulations to Elder Qi for successfully making a breakthrough to Half-Leaving Aperture realm!” Hall Master Xing clasped his fist in agitation.

In the past twenty years, it seemed like the old guild leader had advanced his cultivation considerably. This was a matter to celebrate.

“It seems like you have also made quite some advancement in your cultivation. Not bad, not bad!” Naturally, Elder Qi could

also see through Hall Master Xing's cultivation easily as well, and he nodded in approval.

"I am truly grateful to Elder Qi for saving my life back then." Hall Master Xing clasped his fist before asking, "Elder Qi, why did you suddenly depart from Qingyuan City back then?"

Upon hearing Hall Master Xing bringing up the matter, Elder Qi sighed deeply. "There's a long story behind this matter. I did not leave the city voluntarily. Instead, someone poisoned me and sent assailants to end my life. Cornered, I could only flee to a Tier-1 Empire and lie low, or else I would have been a dead man by now!"

"Poisoned? End your life?" Hall Master Xing's face turned livid, and killing intent burst forth from him.

Elder Qi was an upright and respected figure in Qingyuan City. During his time in the Physician Guild, he had saved countless lives, so who in the world would dare make a move against him? Furthermore, right under the nose of the Combat Master Hall at that!

"Elder Qi, do you know who poisoned you?" Hall Master Xing asked with a chilling gleam in his gaze.

"I have a good idea who it is, but... the implications behind this matter are too great, so I need to verify the matter first. The reason I informed you of my return is because I need to discuss this matter with you. At the same time, I hope to seek refuge with the Combat Master Hall for the time being while I reinforce my cultivation and decide on my next course of action!" Elder Qi replied grimly

"Seek refuge? At our Combat Master Hall?" Hall Master Xing's eyes narrowed.

Even though Elder Qi did not specify a name, just the very fact that he had to seek refuge in the Combat Master Hall had already severely narrowed the scope.

Despite the fact that Elder Qi was the ex-head of the Physician Guild, as well as Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert, for him to need to seek refuge in the Combat Master Hall... The

person who poisoned him was bound to be a person who wielded incredible power or influence.

“Very well. I will guarantee your safety!” Hall Master Xing nodded grimly.

The Combat Master Hall was symbolic of the greatest fighting prowess of the Qingyuan Conferred Empire. Putting aside the fact that he had already reached Leaving Aperture realm, even with his previous strength as a Half-Leaving Aperture realm, he could still easily deal with any ordinary Leaving Aperture realm cultivator!

More importantly, there were countless formations spread across the Ten Divisions of the Combat Master Hall. Anyone who dared barge in was simply courting death!

“I’ll be thanking Hall Master Xing in advance then. I did not think that the day would come when I would be able to return back to Qingyuan City either. If not for my benefactor saving my life, I probably would have been stuck in that Tier-1 Empire for the rest of my life.” Recalling his previous experiences, Elder Qi couldn’t help but sigh deeply.

Hall Master Xing was astounded by Elder Qi’s words. “For you to be unable to resolve the poison despite your deep mastery in the Way of Medicine... could the benefactor you spoke of possess greater medical skills than you?”

He knew full well how formidable Elder Qi’s medical skills were. Even if he was not the number one physician of the Qingyuan Empire, he was definitely not far from that!

For the benefactor he spoke of to resolve a poison that even Elder Qi was unable to resolve... wasn’t that benefactor a little too formidable?

“Compared to him, I’m nothing more like an ant before a divine dragon. I’m nowhere on par with him. Even though my benefactor’s cultivation realm is a little low, his medical skills have reached a level far beyond my imagination.” Upon speaking of his benefactor, admiration crept into Elder Qi’s eyes.

In the field of the Way of Medicine, he had never truly admired or respected anyone, but that young man who had saved his life... He viewed the other party with the utmost reverence!

Hearing that Elder Qi was full of praise for that man, Hall Master Xing couldn't help but ask, "May I know who he is?"

"He goes by the name of Sun Qiang, but I have no idea where he came from and where he is at the moment," Elder Qi said with a hint of lamentation in his voice. He turned to Hall Master Xing and continued. "You have wider connections than me. If there's a chance, help me look out for this man. If I manage to meet him again, I must make sure to express my gratitude to him formally!"

Halfway through Elder Qi's words, Hall Master Xing's eyes had widened to the brim. Perplexed, Elder Qi asked, "What's wrong?"

"A master teacher just came to our Combat Master Hall earlier today, and he goes by the name of Sun Qiang as well. And, if I recall correctly... he claimed to be a physician at one point in time too! C-could it be that... they are both the same person?" Hall Master Xing asked.

Previously, when Sun Qiang offered to use poison to resolve his trauma, the other party had said that he was a physician.

Could there really be such a huge coincidence? Were they really the same person?

"His name is Sun Qiang, too? What does he look like?" Elder Qi asked in agitation.

If Zhang Xuan were there, he surely would have been able to recognize Elder Qi as the Eccentric Old Man whom he had saved back at Jingyuan City.

Back then, after his poison was resolved, he had managed to return to the Primordial Spirit realm in an instant. Over the past two months, by reinforcing his cultivation further, he had managed to achieve another breakthrough, reaching Half-Leaving Aperture realm.

The most important factor that determined whether one was able to advance from Primordial Spirit to Half-Leaving Aperture realm was the resilience of their soul. The twenty years of suffering that Elder Qi had undergone had instead become the impetus to his rapid breakthrough once his condition was resolved.

“He looks like a young man in his early twenties...” Hall Master Xing rattled off a description.

“That isn’t right. The Sun Qiang I know of looks to be in his forties. However, there are many experts who are capable of altering their looks, so we can’t judge it just based on his appearance in itself. It would be better if I can meet the other party personally. Alright, bring me over to take a look!” Hearing that his benefactor could very well be in the Combat Master Hall, Elder Qi could not hold back his agitation any longer.

“Alright!” Hall Master Xing nodded, and he swiftly brought Elder Qi back to the Combat Master Hall.

...

“The trial in the Inner Breath Division is actually just a simple assessment of the challenger’s quantity of zhenqi. There is a powerful formation set up in the Trial of Inner Breath that can gauge the amount of zhenqi that one harnesses, and the greater the number is, the more zhenqi one wields. As long as you can achieve a score of ten or more, you will be qualified to enter the library to browse through the books you want!” Division Head Wei summarized the trial as they made their way over to the Inner Breath Division.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

While the both of them were speaking, they finally arrived at the Inner Breath Division.

It was a grand and splendid building, just like the Heart Division. There were huge crowds of combat masters walking in and out.

“Actually, with Sun shi’s strength, there is no need for you to take the trial at all. I can just bring you into the library

directly,” Division Head Wei stated with a smile.

Given how the young man before him was able to dodge a collaborative offense from the three of them despite possessing just a cultivation of Saint 1-dan pinnacle, there was no doubt that he would be able to overcome the Trial of Inner Breath with ease.

“To be honest with you, I have been cultivating diligently over the past month, but I haven’t had a chance to assess the current level of my strength yet. If it isn’t too much hassle, I would like to take the Trial of Inner Breath to see how much I am lacking compared to the combat masters,” Zhang Xuan replied.

Of course, Zhang Xuan had no doubt that he would be able to clear the Trial of Inner Breath with ease. However, this was a good opportunity not only to assess his own strength but that of the combat masters as well. With some understanding of the combat masters’ standard level of strength, he would be able to prepare the members of the Xuanxuan Faction accordingly for the exchange later on.

Otherwise, without the slightest understanding of the combat masters’ strength, they would be at a major disadvantage for the exchange.

On the way there, he had already sent information on the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra to Wang Ying and the others. He had simplified the secret art considerably, so even without him deciphering it for them, they would still be able to comprehend and cultivate it easily.

“Lacking?”

On the other hand, Division Head Wei shook his head after hearing Zhang Xuan’s words. The ones who were lacking were their combat masters instead!

Of course, he did not tell him that. Instead, he continued leading Zhang Xuan forward, and before long, they were already standing before a passageway.

Unlike the Trial of Inner Demons, where there was scarcely a person to be seen at the entrance, the entrance of Trial of Inner

Breaths was surrounded by combat masters.

There were quite a few of them whose cultivation had reached Saint 1-dan pinnacle as well, and they were intending to undergo the trial to gain access to their Saint 2-dan cultivation technique manuals.

Upon seeing that Division Head Wei had arrived, the crowd quickly opened up a path for him to walk through. At the same time, they could not help but direct perplexed gazes at Zhang Xuan.

For a Saint 1-dan fellow to be escorted here personally by their division head, just what was his identity?

Ignoring the perplexed gazes directed at him, Division Head Wei asked, “Who’s in there?”

The passageway into the Trial of Inner Breaths was currently closed—a sign that someone was currently challenging the trial inside.

“Reporting to Division Head Wei, Shi Hao is inside!” reported one of the combat masters amid the crowd.

“Shi Hao?” Division Head Wei’s eyes lit up. “That fellow is finally willing to challenge the trial and push for a breakthrough?”

Knowing that Zhang Xuan would be confused about what they were speaking of, he quickly explained, “Sun shi, Shi Hao has been the champion for an internal competition we hold annually in the Saint 1-dan tier for several consecutive years. Just by his strength alone, he has already surpassed the fighting prowess of ordinary Thousand Men Commanders. The zhenqi that he harnesses has also reached a frightening level, such that most Saint 2-dan combat masters would struggle to match him. He reached Saint 1-dan pinnacle twenty years ago, but in order to challenge his limits, he has been suppressing his cultivation all this while, reinforcing his cultivation again and again. However, if he has decided to drop by the Trial of Inner Breaths, he’s probably ready to push for a breakthrough to Saint 2-dan now!”

1122 Trial of Inner Breath

“He reached Saint 1-dan pinnacle twenty years ago?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

Those who were able to enter the Combat Master Hall were all the most talented of geniuses. For such an individual to suppress his cultivation for twenty whole years and not achieve a breakthrough, his cultivation must have been reinforced to an unbelievable level!

Hearing the sudden exclamation, a combat master turned to Zhang Xuan with a peculiar gaze and explained, “The reason Shi Hao held himself back from making a breakthrough is to break the existing record of the Trial of Inner Breaths!”

“The current record of the Trial of Inner Breath was 37 points, made by Combat Master Feng Moxiao three hundred years ago. Breaking his record won’t be easy at all!” Division Head Wei said with a frown.

For ordinary combat masters, they were considered to have achieved the apex of their cultivation realm just by achieving a score of ten points. Achieving a score of 37 meant that in terms of quantity of zhenqi, Combat Master Feng Moxiao had 3.7 times that of ordinary combat masters. That accomplishment in itself was inconceivable.

It was for this reason that the record had remained unbroken over the past three hundred years.

It was all for the sake of overcoming that record that Shi Hao had held himself back for twenty years, reinforcing his cultivation again and again, in hopes that he would be able to leave his name behind for future generations to look up to and admire.

Even though Division Head Wei had high expectations of Shi Hao, he still thought that it would be extremely difficult for the latter to break that record. The odds were not in Shi Hao’s favor.

“It might have been difficult in the past, but over the past half a year, he has been cultivating frenziedly, killing saint beasts, and gathering Saint-tier medicinal herbs to nourish his meridians and dantian,” replied with combat master grimly. “According to the rumors, it seems like he has even delved underground and bathed himself in lava for the sake of refining his zhenqi. Honestly speaking, even I can’t imagine how far his strength must have grown over the past half a year! At the very least, I don’t think that he will be too far away from matching up to Combat Master Feng Moxiao!”

If it had been half a year ago, no one would have believed that Shi Hao could clear the record. However, after seeing how far Shi Hao had gone to raise his abilities over the past half a year... he might just be able to break that record!

Division Head Wei was stunned for a moment before he shook his head. “That fellow sure is tenacious! I didn’t think that he would really cultivate that technique!”

“That technique?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

“Ah, I’m referring to a particularly profound cultivation technique of the Inner Breath Division known as the Art of Drawing Oceans. It’s said that once one masters that technique, the zhenqi within one’s body will become endless, as if drawing strength from the boundless ocean. This is also the technique that Combat Master Feng cultivated back when he made the record. It seems like that lad is really determined to leave his mark here this time around!” Division Head Wei said.

While the duo was speaking, the wall in front of the passageway suddenly lit up.

“Look, the trial is starting!”

Someone among the crowd shouted, and everyone quickly turned their gazes over.

Hula!

As the light lit up, a string of numbers suddenly materialized on the wall, and it began leaping up swiftly. It did not take long before it came to a halt—38!

“He really broke Combat Master Feng’s record...”

Upon seeing those words, everyone was stunned for an instant. Even Division Head Wei had frozen on the spot.

For an entire three hundred years, Combat Master Feng’s score had remained an unsurpassable record for those who came after him, and no one had thought it was possible to outdo him either. Who could have known that they would actually witness the birth of a legend today?

“He really didn’t disappoint me. It looks like the effort that I spent on him hasn’t gone to waste!” Division Head Wei laughed heartily.

He had seen potential in Shi Hao, and he had spent quite some time grooming him over the past few years. It seemed like he had really uncovered a gem this time around!

The door to the passageway slowly opened, and a young man walked out with a slightly pale face.

“Division Head Wei!” Shi Hao hurriedly clasped his fist and bowed upon seeing Division Head Wei. Even though it looked like he had overexerted himself back inside, his back was still upright like a spear.

“Un. You have done well!” Division Head Wei complimented.

“Thank you for guiding me over the past few years!” Shi Hao relied with an excited gleam in his eyes.

The breaking of the record had also given him a great injection of confidence. It was a reassurance to him that he was walking down the right path.

“A score of 38 means that Shi Hao has displayed a might 3.8 times of an ordinary combat master’s. Is it even possible to top that record?”

“I think that his record should remain safe up there for at least the next three hundred years!”

“To maintain a record for several hundred years... Impressive!”

...

An excited commotion broke out in the surroundings.

Watching a record being made before their eyes had left the others imagining themselves being in Shi Hao's place, and that had sparked their drive to cultivate as well.

"Sun shi, you should go in and have a try, too." Seeing that Shi Hao had broken the previous record right before Sun shi, Division Head Wei could not help but feel a little gleeful.

In response to Division Head Wei's words, Zhang Xuan nodded before heading in.

Seeing the young man beside Division Head Wei entering the Trial of Inner Breath, Shi Hao couldn't help but ask, "Division Head Wei, Sun shi is...?"

In the first place, it was perplexing for someone as esteemed as Division Head Wei to be escorting someone around. Furthermore, Shi Hao knew all of the Saint 1-dan pinnacle combat masters in Qingyuan Empire, but the young man's face didn't ring a bell.

Noticing Shi Hao's doubts, Division Head Wei explained, "Sun shi isn't a combat master but a spirit awakener. He has done our hall master a great favor, so make sure to treat him courteously. He said that he is interested in testing his strength, so I brought him here to give it a try.

"A spirit awakener wants to try out our Trial of Inner Breaths? What a joke!" Shi Hao sneered disdainfully.

He had thought that the other party would be some formidable expert, but who would have thought that he was a mere spirit awakener!

Spirit awakener was only a supporting occupation, and their fighting prowess was known to be rather unimpressive. For a spirit awakener to challenge the trial of their Combat Master Hall, wasn't that a joke in itself?

Not only did Shi Hao react in such a manner, the others also shook their heads as well.

Spirit awakeners were simply way too weak!

Sun shi might have helped their hall master in some way, but still, he was being too arrogant for thinking that he was worthy of challenging their trial as a spirit awakener!

Seeing that Shi Hao had blatantly ignored his reminder, Division Head Wei frowned in displeasure. However, seeing that Sun shi was not around, he decided to allow it to slide this once. “Don’t underestimate Sun shi. In terms of fighting prowess, he is likely to be above all of you here!”

He had seen Sun shi in action, and the other party’s reflexes and sense of timing were at a monstrous level. However, given that they had not truly crossed blows with one another previously, he could not tell for sure how much zhenqi Sun shi wielded. Thus, he could not really gauge how well the other party would fare in this trial.

Nevertheless, a person who possessed such frightening combat senses should not fare too badly in terms of zhenqi.

Shi Hao was initially astonished by Division Head Wei’s high appraisal of Sun shi. However, recalling the amazing feat that he had just achieved, he held his chest up high confidently and replied, “His fighting prowess may be above mine, but in terms of zhenqi quantity, there is no one who can possibly outdo me!”

As one of the greatest geniuses of the Inner Breath Division in the past three hundred years, it was natural that his confidence would not waver with just this much.

“The trial is beginning!”

Someone shouted once more, and everyone quickly turned their head. They were interested to see how the man who was so highly-regarded by their division head would fare in the trial.

Weng!

A burst of light emerged from the wall, but unlike the situation with Shi Hao previously, no number surfaced.

“There are no numbers at all? It can’t be that fellow didn’t even succeed in shattering the first stone wall?”

“One has to shatter the first wall in order to claim the ten points required to clear the examination. If one fails to shatter the wall, no results will be reflected.”

“I thought that he would wow all of us here like Shi Hao, but it seems like... he’s just a mere mortal after all!”

...

Seeing that there were no numbers surfacing on the wall in front of the passageway, everyone shook their head in disappointment. On the other hand, Division Head Wei could not help but feel a little bewildered.

Judging from how Sun shi had performed in the previous battle, it should not have been too difficult for him to earn ten points. So, how could there be no results whatsoever?

Had the test not started yet?

But that could not be! The burst of light was indicative that the test had already started, so how could there be no result?

Jiya!

Just as Division Head Wei was still pondering over the bewildering situation, the door to the passageway suddenly creaked. Someone was coming out.

It went without saying that the departure of the challenger meant that the trial had already ended.

If the challenger had met the fundamental requirement, a score would have already appeared by now. The fact that there was no score meant that, just as what the others had said, Sun shi had failed to break even the first wall.

Division Head Wei sighed. It seems that, despite Sun shi’s amazing reflexes, he’s still a little lacking in terms of his zhenqi.

Having strong fighting prowess only meant that one was able to utilize one’s strength efficiently and effectively, and that might not necessarily be directly correlated with one’s zhenqi quantity. And the Trial of Inner Breath only assessed one’s zhenqi quantity.

To put it simply, it was just like the difference between sprinting and running a marathon.

Even if an individual could utilize their strength effectively and sprint at a speed far beyond the others, that did not mean that they would necessarily be good at a marathon.

Sun Shi was probably the type of cultivator who had extremely powerful burst power, allowing him to overwhelm his enemy swiftly. However, if the battle was not concluded quickly, he might lack the endurance to follow through.

While Division Head Wei was contemplating over this matter, Zhang Xuan finally walked out of the room with a sheepish look on his face.

Division Head Wei thought that Zhang Xuan was feeling sheepish due to his poor results in the trial, so he quickly stepped forward to alleviate the awkwardness in the air. “Don’t worry about the results. Come, let me bring you to the library!”

“Those walls...” Zhang Xuan pointed into the Trial of Inner Breath and spoke hesitantly.

“Don’t worry, it’s fine. You aren’t a combat master, so you need not feel pressured by the matter!” Division Head Wei patted Zhang Xuan’s shoulder and smiled.

The other party was only a spirit awakener, not a combat master. Considering their differing fields of specialty, it would be unfair to hold him to the same standards.

“But...” Zhang Xuan was visibly a little distressed by the situation.

“It’s just a simple trial; it’s no big deal at all!” Division Head Wei added.

“No big deal at all?” A light flickered across Zhang Xuan’s eyes, and he turned to Division Head Wei and asked, “Ah, does the formation automatically repair itself?”

“Hmm? Yes, that’s right. The formation will automatically repair any damage to the walls inside, so there’s no need to worry about that!” Division Head Wei replied amiably.

“That’s good!” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief, and the conflicted expression on his face finally vanished, replaced with a smile. “Alright, let’s head to the library then!”

Division Head Wei nodded before leading the way.

The library of the Inner Breath Division was located relatively close to the trial. With a wave of his hand, a passageway opened in the formation surrounding the library, and the both of them proceeded in.

...

“I thought that he would be some formidable expert, but to think that he couldn’t even break the first wall...”

“Well, he’s just a spirit awakener. Do you honestly expect a spirit awakener to be able to clear the trials of our Combat Master Hall?”

“I figure that he’s probably a scion from some prestigious clan here for a tour. With strength like that, I could easily defeat three of him simultaneously, so how could he possibly be of any help to our hall master?”

After seeing the duo enter the library, a huge commotion immediately broke out among the combat masters.

They had to clear the trial before they could assess the library to pick out their cultivation technique. On the other hand, the spirit awakener did not even clear the trial, and yet, Division Head Wei still escorted him there. The clear disparity in their treatment left them a little dissatisfied.

“Alright, let’s not waste our breath on that fellow. He isn’t a combat master, so how can we hold him to our standards?” Interrupting the discussions of the crowd, Shi Hao turned to another combat master and said, “Speaking of which, Xiao Bo, didn’t you have a bet with me previously to see who will be able to leave our mark in the Trial of Inner Breath? I am done with the trial, so it should be your turn now. Let’s see if you can beat my record!”

With the gazes of the crowd on him, the face of the combat master named Xiao Bo reddened. “There’s no way that I will

be able to clear your record, but a score of 20 or so should still be a walk in the park!”

“You achieved a score of 21 previously, right? Alright, I won’t bully you then. As long as you can achieve a score exceeding 23, I’ll consider it your victory. Naturally, the stakes that we agreed on previously still count!” Shi Hao chuckled.

Xiao Bo pondered for a moment before nodding. “Alright then...”

Taking a deep breath, he pushed open the door and walked into the passageway. However, before his entire body could step through the door, he suddenly halted. As if having seen a ghost, his body trembled uncontrollably.

“H-h-h-how is this p-p-p-possible?” A high-pitched scream echoed from the passageway.

Everyone was bewildered by Xiao Bo’s sudden scream. Shi Hao rushed forward and asked, “What’s wrong?”

While speaking those words, he also peered through the ajar door. His eyes immediately narrowed, and his face paled. He could not help but retreat backward, and his body stiffened.

1123 A Score of 100

Seeing the two experts of the Combat Master Hall reacting in such a bewildering fashion, the crowd frowned. They quickly gathered around the door to take a look.

Jiya!

The door to the passageway was pushed open entirely, and the sight inside came into plain view.

“This...”

All of the combat masters instinctively drew in sharp gasps, and their eyes widened in horror.

After a long moment of silence, Xiao Bo gulped and spoke hoarsely. “Shi Hao, when you came out previously, are you certain that... the trial reverted back to normal?”

“Un. When I left, the trial had definitely reverted back to normal. It must be him. There’s no one else; it must be him!” Shi Hao replied in agitation.

Despite being labeled as a trial, the Trial of Inner Breath was actually rather simple. The challenger only had to stand at a specified location and exert their zhenqi to destroy the stone walls located several dozen meters away.

These stone walls were conjured by the formation, and they were particularly resistant to zhenqi. Without a sufficiently large reserve of zhenqi, it would be impossible to puncture a hole through it.

Under normal circumstances, a Ten Men Commander would have to use his full strength just to break the first wall.

The fact that Shi Hao had received 38 points meant that he had nearly broken through the fourth wall before his zhenqi was depleted.

Without a doubt, this achievement should have made him the number one Saint 1-dan pinnacle expert of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall since its founding.

But right before his eyes...

All ten stone walls had been shattered into fragments. The Trial of Inner Breath had been reduced to little more than a rubbish dump.

“Did he intentionally destroy our trial?” asked one of the combat masters.

The Trial of Inner Breath was one of the most important facilities of their Combat Master Hall. To reduce it to such a state, wasn't that a little too much?

“That isn't it.” Xiao Bo walked into the wrecked room and stopped right before the first stone wall. His eyes narrowed in disbelief as he explained, “The formation in the trial was created by an 8-star formation master sent by the headquarters. With his Saint 1-dan pinnacle cultivation, he wouldn't be able to cause damage even if he wanted to!”

Given that this was a location for a cultivator to test the amount of zhenqi they had, it was natural that it was built to be able to withstand a great deal of damage. Even with a combat master exerting their full might, it wouldn't even leave a scratch in the area. Given so, it was impossible to intentionally destroy it!

“Then how...” the combat master who had spoken earlier asked.

“This... was caused by a single palm strike!”

The one who spoke was Shi Hao this time around. There was a grim look in his narrowed eyes.

“A single palm strike?”

Everyone was perplexed by those words.

“In other words, he challenged the trial as anyone else would, but... due to the overwhelming zhenqi that he harnesses, the ten stone walls were destroyed in an instant. At the same time, the formation was unable to withstand the violent might he exerted, thus resulting in the ruination that we see!” Shi Hao explained.

“His strength... exceeded the tolerance of the formation?”

“He destroyed ten stone walls simultaneously?”

Everyone gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

This news was simply too shocking! It was at a level far beyond their imagination!

“Shi Hao is right. Look at those broken stone walls. I believe that you should notice something peculiar about them, too.”
Xiao Bo nodded as he pointed to the fragmented walls before him.

Everyone quickly rushed into the room to get a closer look, and before long, their eyes were widened in shock.

On the first wall face, there was a clean palm print smashed into it. As if a wrecking ball, the palm print had crushed through it with great ease.

Xiao Bo nodded. “This is just the first stone wall. Look at the others, and you should understand why Shi Hao said that.”

The others quickly turned their gazes over.

There were palm prints on the other nine faces as well, and they were identical in size. If one were to line them up, one would realize that they were connected by a straight line.

In other words... all ten of the stone walls were shattered simultaneously by just a single move!

Shi Hao could already be known as the greatest genius of the Inner Breath Division in the past several millenniums, and yet, he had only achieved a score of 38 points, not being able to break even the fourth wall before he ran out of zhenqi. And yet, that fellow actually broke through all ten walls in a single palm strike, and even the formation couldn't withstand his might.

How in the world did he do it?

“I just said a moment ago that no one will break Combat Master Shi's record for the next three hundred years...”

“I was also thinking the same as you, but who could have known that... in just two short minutes, someone would have already out done him? And as if to rub salt to his wounds, it

was done so overwhelmingly, fully displaying the vast contrast in their strength.”

Everyone’s body were shaking wildly.

They had just mocked the other party for being so arrogant to challenge their trial despite only being a spirit awakener, but who could have known that a single palm strike from the other party was more than sufficient to devastate their trial?

“How could a Saint 1-dan cultivator have so much zhenqi? In any case, there’s no way this can be true. Say, is it possible that he might have used some kind of formidable artifact?” asked one of the combat masters among the crowd.

As combat masters, they were geniuses among geniuses, but even clearing the Trial of Inner Breath posed a great difficulty for them. So how could the fellow achieve such an inconceivable feat?

“Artifact? You are really overthinking this one. Look over there!” Shi Hao shook his head and pointed in a certain direction.

Frowning, the combat master turned his gaze over, and what he saw left his body shivering in shock.

On the wall, a string of numbers could be clearly seen—100!

Since the result was reflected on the wall outside, it went without saying that it would be reflected within as well so that the challenger would know how well they had performed.

The formation had the ability to detect whether artifacts had been used or not, and once the presence of an artifact was detected, the results would automatically be voided.

“100...” The combat master felt the back of his throat running dry. “If he achieved a score, why isn’t it reflected outside?”

The other combat masters also turned their gazes over.

Indeed, if there was a score reflected within, why wasn’t it reflected on the wall outside? It did not make sense.

It was precisely because there was nothing outside that they had thought that the spirit awakener had failed the trial in the

first place!

“Most likely, the formation was destroyed before it could transmit the result to the wall outside,” Shi Hao said with a bitter smile.

“This...”

Taking another look at the devastated surroundings, the crowd came to a realization.

“Still, to be able to destroy all ten of the stone tablets with a single palm strike... just how much zhenqi does that Sun shi possess?”

Hearing that question, the combat masters couldn't help but fall silent.

...

Upon entering the library, Division Head Wei gestured to the shelves of books and said, “This is our library. Its scale is nowhere up to par to the Master Teacher Pavilion, but our cultivation techniques are all top-notch. There won't be any problem cultivating them!”

Most of the books in the Master Teacher Pavilion were created by many different generations of master teachers. As a result, there were many books that contradicted one another, making it difficult to determine the ‘truth’ from the ‘false’. If one were to read aimlessly, one would just serve to confuse themselves. It was for this reason that it was a huge taboo for a master teacher to randomly browse through books.

Without direction, the more one read, the more confused one would be. Eventually, it would erode one's state of mind and result in the birth of inner demons, thus causing one's cultivation to stagnate or even go berserk.

However, the libraries of the Combat Master Hall were different.

Most of the cultivation technique manuals on their shelves had been practiced by preceding combat masters, and they were proven to be practical time and time again. Otherwise, they would either be further refined or eliminated altogether. No

matter which book one picked off the shelves, it was bound to be a formidable cultivation technique that would allow one to advance one's cultivation swiftly!

Zhang Xuan nodded before heading forward to take a look. Soon, however, he could not help but feel a little disappointed.

Just as the other party had said, there were indeed not many cultivation technique manuals on the shelves. All in all, they only numbered several hundred.

But while they did not have many cultivation technique manuals, they did have a bunch of introductory manuals filled with the insights of the predecessors. There were around several hundred thousand of those altogether.

“Those shelves over there contain the insights of preceding combat masters. However, due to the unique constitution of each cultivator, the path that each individual takes is bound to differ from anyone else's. Thus, you should keep this in mind while browsing those books. If you simply read through them aimlessly, you might risk confusing yourself!” Division Head Wei explained.

“These books over here are the insights left behind by Hall Master Xing. If you must, it'd be better to study his. This way, if you have any questions, you could at least clarify them with him!”

Zhang Xuan nodded before turning his gaze back to the hundreds of cultivation technique manuals.

Those insights meant very little to him. What was more important were the cultivation techniques themselves.

Huala!

With a quick glance, he collected all of those books into the Library of Heaven's Path.

“Compile,” Zhang Xuan muttered softly.

In the blink of an eye, a brand-new book appeared. Placing his finger on it, the knowledge contained within it flowed into his mind.

Hmm? Not too bad, I managed to compile a complete cultivation technique from those books. Zhang Xuan frowned. However, there are still three flaws in it.

Even though there were several hundred books, due to their concise and profound content, Zhang Xuan was still able to successfully form a Saint 2-dan cultivation technique. However, there were three flaws with it.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. There are still too many flaws for me to cultivate it. Never mind, I should take in all of the other cultivation technique manuals first!

It was one thing for his battle technique to be flawed, but for his cultivation technique...

All along, he had only practiced the flawless Heaven's Path Divine Art. The only flawed cultivation technique that he had practiced was the Saint Ascension Decipher, but even so, he had made up for those flaws by using artifacts as catalysts. Thus, it was unacceptable for him to cultivate such a flawed Saint 2-dan cultivation technique!

It seemed like he would have to find some way to gather more Saint 2-dan cultivation techniques to remove those flaws.

Zhang Xuan turned his gaze to the insights, and after sweeping through them, he realized that they did little to remove the flaws in the Saint 2-dan cultivation technique. Thus, he decided not to collect them anymore.

Zhang Xuan turned to Division Head Wei and asked, "Are there any Saint 3-dan cultivation techniques here?"

"Saint 3-dan cultivation techniques? We do have some of them here. Follow me!"

Given how Division Head Wei was at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, it went without saying that the Combat Master Hall had Saint 3-dan and Saint 4-dan cultivation techniques.

Soon, they arrived at the area where the Saint 3-dan cultivation technique manuals were stored. Just as he had guessed earlier, there were even fewer of them around.

It took just an instant for him to collect all of them into his Library of Heaven's Path, and after taking a look at it, he could not help but feel even more disappointed.

He did not even manage to successfully compile a Saint 3-dan cultivation technique.

Under Division Head Wei's lead, he collected the Saint 4-dan cultivation techniques too, but he could not compile a cultivation technique either.

Seeing how the young man had been walking around the library without picking up any book at all, Division Head Wei couldn't help but ask, "Sun shi, may I ask exactly what kind of book you are looking for? Perhaps I may be able to assist you in searching for it."

"I'm not too sure either, but it doesn't seem like there's anything suitable for me here." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

After a moment of hesitation, he continued. "Right, do you have any other Saint 2-dan cultivation technique manuals? Their tier doesn't matter; I need as many of them as possible."

To him, the tier of the cultivation technique truly did not make much of a difference at all.

As long as the number was sufficient, he would be able to compile a Heaven's Path Divine Art.

Well, it was true that high-tier cultivation techniques had fewer flaws, so he needed less of them to compile a Heaven's Path Divine Art, but the problem with that was that they were rare and hard to obtain!

"I'm afraid that there are not any more in our Inner Breath Division. However, Division Head Feng of the Martial Arts Division might have some. He was originally from the Master Teacher Pavilion, and he has a huge collection of battle technique and cultivation technique manuals. In the Combat Master Hall, he's the one who is the most likely to fulfill your needs!" Division Head Wei replied.

"Oh? May I trouble you to take me to the Martial Arts Division to take a look then?" Zhang Xuan asked.

“That isn’t a problem!”

Smiling, Division Head Wei led Zhang Xuan out of the library.

However, upon reaching the entrance, his eyelids suddenly began twitching.

1124 Too Long, Too Long

A huge crowd of combat masters were standing right outside the library. Shi Hao and Xiao Bo from before were among them as well.

“What are you all up to?” The huge crowd gathered had eyes that were either reddened from agitation or anger. However, regardless of what it was, it was clear that they were up to something. Thus, Division Head Wei frowned in displeasure and said, “Sun Shi isn’t from the Combat Master Hall, so he need not obey our rules to enter the library.”

“Division Head Wei, we aren’t here for the matter!” Noting that Division Head Wei had misunderstood their intentions, Shi Hao quickly spoke up and explained, “There’s a matter that we hope for you look into!”

The happenings in the Trial of Inner Breath were simply too shocking that they feared that the other party would not believe them if they were to just speak of it. It was better to bring the other party over to have a look for himself.

Noticing the grim looks on their faces, Division Head Wei asked, “What happened?”

“Division Head Wei, this way please. You will understand once you see it!” Huang Bo said as he politely gestured the way forward.

“Alright then.” Seeing that they were not willing to speak of it, Division Head Wei thought that it might be a matter that was confidential to the Inner Breath Division. Thus, he turned to Zhang Xuan and said, “Pardon me, but I will have to trouble Sun Shi to wait here for a moment.”

“Don’t worry, it’s no problem at all.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

It was apparent that the other party had some private matters to attend to, so it was not convenient for him to tag along.

With an apologetic look, Division Head Wei quickly followed Xiao Bo out.

After he left, Zhang Xuan shook his head. Just as he was about to close his eyes and make use of this opportunity to look through the books that he had just collected, the combat master named Shi Hao suddenly walked up to him. “My name is Shi Hao, and I wish to have a spar with Sun shi.”

Considering how the other party had smashed through all ten of the stone walls in the Inner Breath Division, the sheer amount of zhenqi the other party possessed was bound to be countless times greater than his. He had never met a peer who exceeded him by so much before, and this had truly piqued his curiosity and fighting will.

At the same time, he also wanted to see if the other party had truly used his own strength to achieve such an astounding score in the Trial of Inner Breath.

“You want to have a spar with me?”

“That’s right!” Shi Hao clasped his fist. “I hope that Sun shi can agree to my request!”

Noting the earnest look in the other party’s eyes, Zhang Xuan relented. “Alright then!”

All along, other than Feng Xun, he had never crossed blows with any combat masters before. This would be a good opportunity for him to assess their strength too.

“Pardon me!”

Taking a deep breath, Shi Hao’s chest puffed up. At the same time, his aura surged immensely, and as if a dagger drawn from his sheath, a chilling air burst into the surroundings.

Hu la!

He sprinted forward swiftly with powerful footsteps. Even before he reached Zhang Xuan, he had already whipped up a strong gale in the surroundings, leaving one feeling as if a behemoth was standing before them.

Sheer power could crush all techniques.

The amount of zhenqi that ran through Shi Hao’s body was so great that he did not even need to resort to any battle

techniques when facing ordinary cultivators; all he had to do was to overwhelm them with the sheer amount of his zhenqi.

He was planning to do the same this time around too. His zhenqi gushed out as if water bursting out from a dam. Before such power, ordinary cultivators would find themselves completely bogged down by the intense concentration of zhenqi, leaving them incapable of retaliating or even escaping.

Art of Drawing Oceans: against the boundless mass of the ocean, it was impossible to withstand or avoid it!

“Not bad!” Feeling the other party’s strength, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

If he had not cultivated the Saint Ascension Decipher, the other party’s zhenqi would probably have been on par with his.

To gain the same quantity of zhenqi as him, who had practiced the Heaven’s Path Divine Art, through just an ordinary cultivation technique, the combat master named Shi Hao was indeed a formidable figure. It was no wonder he was able to break the existing record and claim first place for himself.

“Make your move!” While Zhang Xuan was still deep in thought. Shi Hao bellowed loudly as he raised his palm and struck at him.

It was not a particularly powerful battle technique, just the most basic Great Palm Strike.

But as simple as the technique was, the might it harnessed when complemented with Shi Hao’s overwhelming zhenqi was frightening. It felt as if the technique would rip a hole even in space itself. The surrounding air currents raged under the furious strength of his Great Palm Strike, and the rumbling of thunder echoed in the surroundings.

The frightening amount of zhenqi formed a huge flood that threatened to crush everything in its path.

Without dodging, Zhang Xuan simply smiled lightly as he shot a finger forward.

Huala!

The ferocious wave stopped right before his fingertip, unable to advance a single inch forward. As if a snake grabbed seven inches from its head, no matter how the wave raged, it found itself rendered completely helpless by the finger before it.

“Scram!”

Seeing how the other party had stopped his strongest attack with just a single finger, Shi Hao’s face flushed red. With a furious roar, he drove his strength to its very maximum, to the point where his meridians were beginning to tear from the immense pressure from the zhenqi racing through them.

Noting the veins bulging from Shi Hao’s head, Zhang Xuan shook his head. He bent his finger back slightly before flicking it forward forcefully.

Peng!

The massive wave vanished, and the rampaging zhenqi scattered into the surroundings. Deng deng deng deng! Shi Hao was forced to retreat eight steps, and his face turned scarlet from the impact.

Shi Hao swiftly took two breaths in order to calm his state, and to his astonishment, he realized that he had emerged from the short but deadly encounter with no injuries at all. In that instant, his face reddened in shame, and he quickly stepped forward and clasped his fist.

“Sun shi, thank you for going easy on me...”

He had attacked with his full strength; any ordinary cultivator would have suffered severe injuries in an instant. Yet, putting aside how the other party managed to subdue his attack with a single finger, he even controlled his strength so precisely that the damage he would suffer as a result of the collision of strength would be reduced to the bare minimum.

It was one thing to wield great power, but to be able to control it to such a precise extent as well... Terrifying!

“Your fighting prowess isn’t too bad,” Zhang Xuan complimented.

He did mean those words. In terms of quantity of zhenqi, the other party was just slightly beneath Wang Ying, Liu Yang, and his other direct disciples.

If he fought against the members of the Xuanxuan Faction, it was likely that the latter would not be a match for him.

It seemed like he would have to instruct those of the Xuanxuan Faction not to face this Combat Master Shi Hao in a direct clash of zhenqi, or else they would surely suffer tragic losses.

“Thank you!” Shi Hao thanked Zhang Xuan, but he couldn’t completely conceal the bitterness on his face.

He was the individual who boasted the greatest amount of zhenqi among all Saint 1-dan cultivators ever since the founding of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall, but yet, in the other party’s eyes, he could only qualify as ‘not bad’!

However, the other party did have the right to say so.

Shi Hao hesitated for a moment before saying, “I was unwilling to believe it at first, but it seems like you have really cleared the Trial of Inner Breath with your own strength. If it’s not too much, there’s one question I would like to ask you!”

“Feel free to speak!”

“To destroy all ten of the stone walls in a single palm... May I know how much zhenqi you expended in that single blow?” Shi Hao asked.

Even after depleting the very last bit of his zhenqi, he had only managed to shatter three walls. The fact that the other party had destroyed everything within a single palm strike meant that he did not use his full strength in the first place. The truth might very well frighten him, but even so, he still wanted to know how much strength the other party used to shatter the ten stone walls. He would then use that as a gauge and aim to surpass the other party in the future.

The few combat masters who had remained in the area to spectate the fight also quickly turned their gazes over. They were intrigued by this matter as well.

When Shi Hao emerged from the passageway, his face had been ghastly pale, and he had looked as if he would fall at any moment. It had taken him several pills and a long moment of recuperation before he had been able to heal up sufficiently to use the ultimate technique that he had just executed.

On the other hand, Sun shi had walked out of the passageway with a healthy red glow on his face, such that it almost seemed like he had just attended a feast instead of undergoing a trial. After that, he still had the strength to visit the library and browse through books. It would be understandable if he had not cleared the trial, but the problem was that he had done so with full marks! So, just how much zhenqi could he have?

“How much zhenqi did I expend?” Zhang Xuan did not really expect the other party to ask such a question. Scratching his head, he pondered for a moment before replying, “I wasn’t paying much attention to it, but I should have recovered fully by the time I entered the library. Thank you for your concern.”

Recovered fully by the time you entered the library? Thank you for my concern? Shi Hao choked on his saliva, and he nearly passed out on the spot.

Who the heck is worried about you? What I want to know is how powerful you are! But... you actually recovered by the time you entered the library?

Doesn’t that mean that the amount of zhenqi you expended in the Trial of Inner Breath is insignificant to you?

This realization left Shi Hao’s face paling, and he suddenly felt an excruciating ache in his heart.

For twenty years, he had held himself back from making a breakthrough, all for the sake of breaking a record and creating a legend for the future generations. He did manage to break the record, but it did not last for even two minutes before it was callously smashed by another person.

To make things worse, the other party did not even think that it was anything much!

He had thought that, at the very most, he would just have to work diligently for another twenty years to overcome the other

party. However, judging from the current situation... even two hundred years would not be sufficient for him to reach the other party's level!

The gap between them was simply too huge, too huge!

In an instant, Shi Hao felt so traumatized that he seemed to be withering on the spot.

Only he himself knew how much suffering he had gone through over the past twenty years for the single goal of breaking the record. Many times, he had thought of giving up and just achieving a breakthrough on the spot, but upon thinking of that single goal he had, he had gritted his teeth and persevered. However, the goal that he had striven for all this time turned out to be nothing in the other party's eyes.

The more he thought about it, the more he felt like spewing blood.

Shi Hao gritted his teeth and asked once more, "Then... May I know how long Sun Shi has been in Saint 1-dan to accumulate such astounding reserves of zhenqi?"

Even though the other party looked to be in his early twenties on the surface, there were several powerful clans who had secret arts that allowed them to conceal their age. Take him for example, he was already in his two hundreds this year, but in the eyes of others, he only appeared to be in his late thirties.

If the other party had spent more than twenty years at Saint 1-dan pinnacle, at the very least, he could console himself that the time he had spent was not in vain, and he could pick up some of his shattered fragments of confidence.

However, upon hearing Shi Hao's words, Zhang Xuan could not help but sigh deeply in lamentation. "It's a huge regret, but I have spent much longer than I thought I would in this realm!"

As he was unable to find the Saint 2-dan Heaven's Path Divine Art, he had ended up being stuck in Saint 1-dan for much longer than he would have liked. Just the thought of it left his face reddening in shame. This was like a dark stain on his record.

“You have spent much longer than you thought you would in this realm?” Shi Hao heaved a sigh of relief.

Given that the other party had also spent a long time in the realm in order to achieve such strength, it seemed like the talent he had did not pale too much in comparison to the other party after all.

“Indeed. I simply have not been able to find a suitable cultivation technique to achieve a breakthrough. That’s also why I paid a visit to your library in hopes that I might find some inspiration for me to overcome my bottleneck!” Zhang Xuan sighed once more and shook his head regretfully. “After all, I have already been in this realm for more than a month. If I don’t achieve a breakthrough soon, I won’t have any face to stand before my students anymore.”

“...” Shi Hao clutched his chest tightly.

“...” The other combat masters. This is a phrase originating from the wisdom of the older generations that it is the point where the weakness of the snakes lies.

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Shi Hao had spent a whole twenty years at Saint 1-dan pinnacle before being able to gather that much power. He had thought that the other party would have been in Saint 1-dan for decades at the very minimum since he was lamenting over the long period of time he had been in the realm, but who would have thought...

A month...

A month...

Long your head!

To reinforce your cultivation to such an extent within such a short period of time, and you still say that you've spent a long time in the realm... Will you die if you stop boasting?

Shi Hao felt the pain in his heart intensifying even further.

The others also had the same expressions on their faces. If only they were strong enough, they would have rushed forward to give him a good pummeling.

That fellow was truly asking for it!

To grumble about a month being too long, and even complaining that he would be unable to face his students...

With such speed, are you sure you are cultivating and not flying?

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan, who had only noticed the bitter expressions on the faces around him, shook his head helplessly.

That was truly his honest opinion; he was neither boasting nor showing off. Putting aside Zhao Ya, Yuan Tao, and the others, who were going to inherit powerful heritages, even Wang Ying had reached Nascent Saint pinnacle and was about to achieve a breakthrough anytime soon. On the other hand, his apothecary

student, Luo Qiqi, had already achieved strength on par with him, Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle, and if he did not achieve a breakthrough soon, the other party might very well surpass him.

It was not that he did not want to take his time, but with his students chasing right behind him, if he slacked off in the least, he would find himself lagging far behind them. Honestly speaking, he was also in a very difficult situation. Why wouldn't anyone just take him seriously when he said such words?

It truly was not easy to be a teacher!

Suppressing the urge to sink his fist into the other party's face, Shi Hao lowered his head and asked, "To be able to accumulate such an immense reserve of zhenqi within a single month, may I ask how Sun shi cultivates? If it is not too much to ask, we would like to learn from you as well!"

Realizing that this might be an opportunity for them, the others echoed Shi Hao's words and bowed deeply as well.

They had been stuck in the same cultivation realm for several years or even several decades for some. To them, cultivation was a lengthy and tiresome process, reminiscent of water droplets slowly grinding away on a rock. Yet, the young man before them had only cultivated for a month, and he had already amassed sufficient strength to destroy ten stone walls simultaneously. If they could learn his cultivation technique, their cultivation would surely soar rapidly as well.

"How do I cultivate?" Hearing the question, Zhang Xuan turned to look at the crowd before him and smiled. "Actually, it isn't anything complicated. A single word—conception! Take your Art of Drawing Ocean as an example. I heard that you hunted down saint beasts and gathered Saint-tier medicinal herbs in order to complement the innate flaws in your body. You even went to the extent of heading underground to temper your zhenqi through the heart of the lava. You did manage to advance your fighting prowess significantly through such methods, but there's a cap to how

far you can go by relying on external means. It will be harder for you to advance any further in such manner!

“The Art of Drawing Oceans empties out great oceans and converts them into devastating power for you to wield. In order to truly comprehend the conception behind the cultivation technique, you have to first understand the boundlessness of the ocean and comprehend its natural state. Once you manage to comprehend its conception, your body will naturally become as vast and boundless as the ocean, too!”

Zhang Xuan had seen the manual for the Art of Drawing Oceans in the library earlier, and after compiling it with the other manuals, he had gained a deep understanding to what the cultivation technique was at its very core.

“Conception?” Shi Hao hesitated for a moment before continuing on. “I once spent half a year on a remote island in the hope of comprehending the essence of the cultivation technique, but I didn’t make much of an improvement that way. That’s also why I chose to resort to external means instead.”

There were at least several thousand books explaining the Art of Drawing Oceans in the library, and a couple of them had spoken about conception. Drawing on those insights, Shi Hao had attempted to further his cultivation that way too, but his effort had turned out to be futile. As such, he had only been able to try other means. It was fortunate that hard work did not fail him, and his cultivation finally achieved a level far surpassing the others.

“Do you know why you weren’t able to succeed despite spending half a year on a remote island?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“This...” Shi Hao halted.

If he knew, he would have already corrected it long ago. He would not have ended up seeking alternative means.

“Your mind is too fixated on surpassing the record!” Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back and sighed deeply.

“Your fixation on the record had made you deeply

apprehensive, depriving you of even the courage to challenge the trial once. You have always told yourself that you would only challenge the trial once you have reached the very apex of Saint 1-dan, but where is that apex? Do you think that you are already at the apex? If you have truly reached the apex, why aren't you able to rival a single finger of mine?

“The vast ocean accepts every river that converges into it. To master the Art of Drawing Oceans, your state of mind must be vast as well. Struggle not, fight not, desire not, plead not, and only then will you be able to peer into the essence of the technique. But you are too fixated on whether you can surpass Combat Master Feng Moxiao's record or not. From the very start, your state of mind has been incredibly narrow. With such a mindset, you will never be able to comprehend the sheer vastness of the ocean no matter how long you remain on a remote island.” Zhang Xuan sighed.

When he sparred with Shi Hao, the Library of Heaven's Path had compiled a book on the other party. With a glance at it, he could tell that despite Shi Hao's strong foundation in the Art of Drawing Oceans, he had inadvertently gone down the wrong path.

“I...” Shi Hao's body stiffened. Closing his eyes, the twenty years of hard work he had devoted to furthering his cultivation flashed through his mind.

Some time later, he opened his eyes once more. Stepping forward, he knelt down and kowtowed. “I have benefited greatly from Sun shi's teachings. If you hadn't pointed out the path for me, I might have continued deviating from the true path and eventually limited my own accomplishments!”

After all of those memories played in his mind, he understood that he had erred.

Had it not been for the timely reminder from the young man before him, he would have continued treading down the same path. Perhaps, his cultivation would still rise swiftly, but eventually, he would find it harder and harder for him to reach higher realms, and the Primordial Spirit realm could very well have ended up becoming a pipe dream for him.

It was fortunate that someone had pulled him back from the cliff before that happened. It was still not too late for him to change.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony; we are just exchanging insights with one another.” Zhang Xuan hurriedly helped Shi Hao up.

Another combat master stepped forward and asked, “I have been stuck at Saint 1-dan pinnacle for five whole years. Five years ago, I failed to clear the Trial of Inner Breath, and five years later, I am still unable to overcome my limits. I hope that Sun Shi can offer me some pointers. Have I gone down the wrong path for my cultivation, or is my state of mind still too lacking?”

“Execute a battle technique.”

“Yes!”

The combat master began executing a forceful punching routine. His zhenqi flowed through his body with incredible momentum, creating resounding cracking sounds.

“That’s enough.” Zhang Xuan stopped the other party halfway through. “If I’m not mistaken, you cultivate the Combat Master Hall’s River Reversing Art, right? River Reversing and Drawing Oceans, these two cultivation techniques boast the greatest zhenqi quantity within the Inner Breath Division. Under normal circumstances, five years of accumulation should have allowed you to clear the examination easily, but you still remain limited by your bottleneck. This isn’t a problem with your talent. You are still cultivating based on the formula left behind by Combat Master Bai Mo two thousand years ago, aren’t you?”

“H-how did you know?” exclaimed the combat master in shock.

Combat Master Bai Mo was known for his astounding accomplishment in the River Reversing Art, so the combat master idolized him greatly. Thus, he had been cultivating based on the insights left behind by the other party.

However, he had kept the matter a secret from others, so how did the young man before him know about it?

“Combat Master Bai Mo was born with innate divine strength, and he specialized in water attribute cultivation techniques. Naturally, he was well suited to cultivate the River Reversing Art. On the other hand, you are of the earth attribute, and earth curbs water. Naturally, your improvement is significantly slower when you try to emulate Combat Master Bai Mo’s actions. You can try cultivating the Compact Gaia Formula left behind by Combat Master Hong Jiang instead. In less than a month, you should be able to achieve a breakthrough!” Zhang Xuan said.

“Earth attribute? Am I not of the water attribute?” The combat master was visibly surprised by Zhang Xuan’s words.

“You were born with the water attribute, but an earth attribute medicinal herb that you have consumed has resulted in earth becoming your dominant attribute instead,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

Even though one’s constitution was predominantly decided at birth, under the right circumstances and with the right artifacts, it was still possible for it to change.

Such was the case for the combat master before him.

He had been born with the water attribute, but a certain medicinal herb that he had consumed unknowingly had ended up sealing his original water attribute constitution. As a result, his rate of cultivation had ended up slowing significantly, resulting in his seeming loss in talent.

“This...” The combat master was taken aback. In an instant, a thought seemed to strike his mind as he recalled something, and his body jolted. He immediately bowed deeply and said, “Sun shi, thank you for your guidance. You have truly opened my eyes.”

In this moment, it was apparent to all of the combat masters that the young man before them wasn’t just powerful—his eye of discernment had also reached an unbelievable level.

“Sun shi, I also face some problems with my cultivation...”

Seeing that two combat masters had benefited greatly from the young man's guidance, the eyes of the other combat masters lit up, and they charged forward in excitement.

“Everyone, there's no need to get anxious. I know that all of you are interested in knowing how you can increase the amount of zhenqi in your body, so why don't I conduct a lecture to impart my insights on the matter instead? Hopefully, it will prove to be of some use to you.” Seeing that everyone had gathered around him, Zhang Xuan quickly calmed them down with a smile.

After everyone had settled down, he started his lecture. “In order to enhance the quantity of zhenqi in one's body, it is of paramount importance that one comprehends how a body contains zhenqi—the dantian! Only when the dantian is sufficiently large will one be able to store a greater amount of zhenqi...”

Zhang Xuan's voice was resounding, and small flowers began descending from the sky.

Combat masters were the strongest fighting force of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and they devoted their lives to protecting mankind from all threats. Naturally, Zhang Xuan would not turn them down.

After all, this was also part of his responsibility as a master teacher.

Even though they were going to be the opponents of the Xuanxuan Faction during the exchange, in a sense, it would also be beneficial to the Xuanxuan Faction if their opponents were strong. Perhaps, it might motivate the members of the Xuanxuan Faction to work harder than ever.

After comprehending the Heart of a Teacher, the concept of lineage had already become blurred in his mind. He was no longer as fixated on the idea of ‘my student’ and ‘the others’ anymore. As long as the other party was of good character and was willing to learn, he would not hesitate to teach them.

...

“You are saying that... this was caused by Sun shi?” Standing within the Trial of Inner Breath, Division Head Wei widened his eyes in disbelief.

“That’s right. It was still perfectly intact when Shi Hao left the area. It was only after Sun shi left that the area fell into such a state!” Xiao Bo quickly replied.

“To destroy all of the stone walls in a single palm strike and attain a score of 100... Just how much zhenqi does he have?” Division Head Wei’s breathing hastened in agitation.

All along, he had thought that even if Sun shi was powerful and had formidable burst power, there was no way the amount of zhenqi that he had would be able to match up to normal combat masters, let alone a genius of Shi Hao’s caliber. At that moment, he could not help but notice how naive his thoughts had been.

To devastate the trial with a single palm, the amount of zhenqi that Sun shi wielded had already reached an inconceivable level!

“I have no idea either, but with his strength, if we can convince him to join our ranks, our Combat Master Hall will be peerless among all of the Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls!” Xiao Bo said.

“You’re right.” Division Head Wei nodded.

Ever since the establishment of the Combat Master Hall, the highest record that anyone had achieved was 38 from Shi Hao. On the other hand, Sun shi, in a single palm strike, had managed to achieve a score of 100. At this rate, it was only a matter of time before he pierced a hole in the heavens!

Without a doubt, there was no combat master in any other Conferred Empire Combat Master Hall who could possibly possess such an astounding zhenqi reserve.

“Let’s go. We’ll invite him to join our Inner Breath Division!” The more Division Head Wei pondered over the matter, the more seduced he was by the idea. Thus, he immediately turned around and left.

“Division Head Wei, what do we about the trial then?” Xiao Bo asked anxiously.

He had been planning to take the Trial of Inner Breath right after Sun shi, only to find it devastated. Given that it had been utterly destroyed, the promotion system that had been put in place would fall apart!

“Don’t worry about it. After we deal with Sun shi’s matter, I will head to the Formation Master Guild and invite Guild Leader Han over to help us repair the trial’s formation. While the formation is at grade-8, it shouldn’t be too difficult for him to repair it once he studies the blueprint.” Division Head Wei smiled.

He might be unable to fix the formation in the Trial of Inner Breath, but he could always engage the help of the local Formation Master Guild.

With Guild Leader Han’s help, that should not be a problem at all.

“Alright, let’s head out!” After explaining the matter, Division Head Wei left the passageway and headed to where he had left Sun shi previously. At the same time, he was deeply contemplating which words he would use to convince the other party to join his Inner Breath Division.

But before he even arrived at his destination, he heard a calm voice echoing in the surroundings.

“... and that is the way to enhance the amount of zhenqi that you have!”

Raising his gaze, Division Head Wei saw the many combat masters of his Inner Breath Division bowing sincerely to Sun shi with reverence in their eyes.

Together, they exclaimed loudly, “Teacher, thank you for your guidance!”

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“Teacher...” Division Head Wei and Xiao Bo were startled.

They had only left for the Trial of Inner Breaths for a moment, so how in the world... did so many combat masters of the Inner Breath Division suddenly become Sun shi’s students?

Didn’t they acknowledge their teacher a little, no, way too fast?

Division Head Wei was utterly confused by the twist in the situation before him. He could not comprehend what was going on at all.

While combat masters were expected to obey the orders of their superiors, the relationship between division heads and the combat masters under them was similar to that of brothers. There was not a particularly strict hierarchy between them.

It was for this reason that Shi Hao and Xiao Bo had expressed themselves rather casually before Division Head Wei, not restraining themselves in the least.

For a teacher to suddenly pop out before those brothers all of a sudden...

He had been intending to bring Sun shi into the Inner Breath Division, but all of a sudden, the latter had become everyone’s teacher. What the heck was going on?

Just as he was wondering what kind of sorcery Sun shi had cast over them, the young man suddenly shook his head and said, “There’s really no need for this. Please rise. The path to cultivation is not one that should be walked in isolation. Only through trading insights and learning from one another will we be able to advance further. It’s sufficient for us to speak to one another as peers; there’s no need for you to address me as your teacher.”

It was just a simple lecture from him, so he did not think that they would suddenly acknowledge him as their teacher. This had left him in an awkward position.

“Sun shi’s teachings are direct, and they point directly toward the essence of cultivation. I have benefited greatly from your guidance. Given so, it’s only right for me to address you as my teacher. In fact, I am honored to have you as my teacher!” Shi Hao said.

As a renowned genius of the Combat Master Hall, it was inevitable that he was a prideful person.

Under normal circumstances, it would be hard to say whether even the hall master himself would be able to win his respect, and yet, he was showing such deep reverence for the man before him.

Not only did the other party enlighten him on the problems in his cultivation, more importantly, the guidance he had offered was truly full of wisdom, clearing the shadows veiling his eyes. As long as he absorbed all of the knowledge, he was certain that he would be able to advance his zhenqi capacity significantly to an unfathomable level.

Such valuable knowledge, and the other party had imparted it to him without any reservations.

Just this generosity in itself was sufficient to make him willingly address the other party as his teacher. This was how he felt deep in his heart as well.

“Indeed, Sun shi. We earnestly regard you as our teacher, so please don’t turn us down!”

“With the knowledge that you have imparted to us, we’ll surely be able to advance our cultivation swiftly. Clearing the examination will be a walk in the park!”

...

The others quickly nodded in agreement.

“This...” Division Head Wei was completely stunned.

It was a moment ago that he had wondered whether Sun shi had used some kind of underhanded method to force the

combat masters in the Inner Breath Division to become his students, but upon seeing this sight, it was apparent that it was an earnest gesture from the depths of combat masters' hearts.

He had only left for the Trial of Inner Breath for a moment... Just what in the world did Sun Shi lecture on that won him the respect of so many people within this short period of time?

"Alright then..." Seeing that the combat masters were determined, even though Zhang Xuan was a little troubled by the matter, he eventually relented and nodded in agreement.

Just as he had said, he only regarded it as an exchange, and it was with this notion in mind that he had conducted a lecture for them. It was never his intention to accept them as his students, so he could not help but feel a little lost when all of them suddenly addressed him as their teacher.

It seemed like being too outstanding was a trouble as well. No matter where he went, everyone just wanted to take him as their teacher. How problematic!

"Division Head Wei, you have returned. Alright, let's head to the Martial Arts Division then!" Just as Zhang Xuan was a little unsure of what he should do at the moment, he suddenly saw Division Head Wei walking over, so he quickly grasped this opportunity to free himself from this slightly awkward situation.

"Alright then..." Division Head Wei nodded blankly. Without saying too much, he began leading Zhang Xuan toward the Martial Arts Division.

The Martial Arts Division was not far from the Inner Breath Division. It was only a short walk before they arrived at their destination.

"Division Head Feng is a good friend of mine. We have known each other for more than three hundred years now. As long as I make a request on your behalf, he should allow you to browse through his collection," Division Head Wei said with a smile.

Division Head Feng used to be a renowned master teacher of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. He was skilled in all kinds of battle techniques, and his fighting prowess was

terrifying. Eventually, Hall Master Xing personally invited him over, offering him the position as the head of the Martial Arts Division so that he could help groom generation after generation of combat masters.

Division Head Wei had already been acquainted with him before the other party joined the Combat Master Hall, and their relationship had only gotten closer since then.

A combat master stepped forward and said, “Reporting to Division Head Wei, our division head went out a moment ago, and he hasn’t returned yet.”

“He hasn’t returned yet?” Division Head Wei frowned.

“I’m afraid so.” The combat master lowered his head apologetically.

“When he returns, tell him that there’s something I need his help on.” Since Division Head Feng was not around, there was nothing they could do. Thus, Division Head Wei could only shake his head in disappointment.

“I’ll relay your message to him, Division Head Wei,” the combat master replied with a smile. “Actually, if Division Head Wei is seeking to borrow our division head’s book collection, there’s no need to wait for our division head to return. Our division head has stored most of the battle technique and cultivation technique manuals he has collected in the Trial of Martial Arts. As long as one successfully clears the trial, one will be granted access to that collection for as long as one wants!”

“Trial of Martial Arts?” Division Head Wei asked.

He rarely had time to come over to the Martial Arts Division, so he was unsure of the various systems in place for it. On top of that, he did not recall the Martial Arts Division having a trial in the past.

“That’s right. In the Trial of Martial Arts, the challenger will first pick a battle technique from among several hundred, and as long as you are able to defeat the puppet left behind by our division head while using the battle technique, you will be

considered to have cleared the trial,” the combat master explained.

Division Head Wei nodded in realization.

In a sense, it was a system that was strikingly similar to their Inner Breath Division’s.

One should learn other battle techniques only after one had achieved a certain level of mastery in the battle technique one was currently practicing. After all, even if one were to learn a huge array of battle techniques, it would be completely meaningless if one could not use them effectively in battle.

“Sun shi...” Division Head Wei turned to seek Zhang Xuan’s opinion.

“I don’t mind giving the Trial of Martial Arts a try,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

Since he could access the books just by clearing the trial, there was no need for him to owe a favor to Division Head Wei over this minor matter.

“Alright, I’ll lead the both of you over then!” The combat master smiled before leading the way forward.

Not too long later, they arrived at a vast hall. Similar to the entrance of the Trial of Inner Breath, it was crowded with combat masters. Most of them had grim expressions on their faces.

“This is the Trial of Martial Arts. The wall over there lists the names of the many battle techniques for the trial. As long as one is able to achieve Major Accomplishment in any one of them, one will be qualified to challenge the puppet our division head left behind. After defeating the puppet, one will be able to enter the library and assess our division head’s collection of books. Sun shi, are there any familiar battle techniques on the list that you see? If there are any, tell me and I’ll register you for the trial!” the combat master said.

In the short talk they had while walking over, he learned that it was not Division Head Wei who wanted to browse through the books but the young man before him.

However, for the young man to be accompanied by a division head, he could not help but wonder what kind of identity the young man had.

“Let me take a look.” Zhang Xuan nodded as he turned his gaze to the wall.

There were all kinds of battle techniques listed on it —‘Thousand Leaves Palm’, ‘Fist of Red Thread’, ‘Asterism Finger’...

There was a huge variety, and making a swift count, there were actually more than two hundred techniques listed!

“There are so many of them?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

“It’s our division head’s hobby to collect such manuals. Listed up there are all of the common Saint-tier battle techniques in Qingyuan Empire. Is there a technique that Sun shi specializes in?” the combat master asked.

“This...” Zhang Xuan suddenly felt a little awkward. “This is the first time I have heard of these battle techniques. I haven’t practiced even one of them before.”

These battle techniques were unique to Combat Master Hall and the Qingyuan Empire, and considering that it hadn’t even been a day since Zhang Xuan arrived here, there was no way he could have heard of any of these battle techniques before, let alone practiced them!

The combat master was taken aback. “All of the easier Saint-tier battle techniques in the Qingyuan Empire are listed up there. As a Saint 1-dan pinnacle cultivator, Sun shi... has never practiced any of them before?”

Of the two hundred or so battle techniques, 180 of them were straightforward and easy to master. Yet, to actually not know a single one of them... just how weak was he?

“I have only cultivated one Saint-tier battle technique so far, but it isn’t among the two hundred techniques up there,” Zhang Xuan replied with an embarrassed smile.

Most of his stronger battle techniques had come from the Hongyuan Empire, but none of them had reached Saint-tier

yet. Only the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, which he had learned from the ancient domain, had reached Saint-tier, but even so, he thought that there were too many flaws in it, so he had not practiced it anymore afterwards.

“You have only learned one Saint-tier battle technique? And it isn’t within the list?” The combat master glanced at Zhang Xuan with an inconspicuous hint of disdain in his eyes.

He had thought that the other party was a genius from some powerful clan, but who would have thought that he was an inexperienced greenhorn instead?

In the Martial Arts Division, combat masters who hadn’t mastered at least three Saint-tier battle techniques would not even dare to walk with their heads up.

“That’s right,” Zhang Xuan replied. Following which, he pondered for a moment before adding, “Do you have any of the manuals for the battle techniques listed on the wall? I’ll quickly learn one before challenging the Trial of Martial Arts.”

He might not have learned any of the battle techniques listed on the wall, but it was not a problem at all. He could always just learn on the spot.

“You’ll quickly learn one before challenging the Trial of Martial Arts?” The combat master nearly burst into laughter.

If it was not for the fact that the young man had been brought there by Division Head Wei, he would have berated the other party at this very moment.

Saint-tier battle techniques might have been commonplace in the Martial Arts Division, but any single one of them could easily be considered a trump card in a battle in the Qingyuan Empire.

It was true that most of the listed battle techniques were straightforward, but it would still take at least several years of practice before one could achieve Major Accomplishment in any one of the techniques and challenge the puppet.

Even the more talented geniuses of their Martial Arts Division would require at least two years of practice before they dared enter the Trial of Martial Arts. Yet, this fellow sure spoke big

words. It sounded as if he would challenge the trial right after learning it on the spot.

Ignorance sure emboldened guts!

Pushing his displeasure back down, the combat master advised patiently, “I understand your desire to clear the Trial of Martial Arts, but mastering a battle technique isn’t as easy as you think it is. Regardless of the battle technique, it will require diligent practice over numerous years before one can even come close to reaching Major Accomplishment.”

“Thank you for your advice, I appreciate that. However, I think that it’s worth a try. If you have a manual of any of the listed battle techniques, I hope that you can lend it to me for a moment,” Zhang Xuan replied.

If he could compile the Saint-tier battle technique given by the other party with his current collection in the Library of Heaven’s Path to create a Heaven’s Path battle technique, he could still consider cultivating it. Otherwise, there was no way he would waste his effort on it.

“You... Alright then!”

The combat master was going to fly to a rage after seeing how obstinate Zhang Xuan was on the matter, but noting that Division Head Wei was by the side, he could only suppress his rage. Flicking his wrist, he took out a book.

“This is the manual for Grand Constellation Finger that I am currently practicing. It’s among the two hundred battle techniques on the wall, but I’ll have to warn you that it might be a little difficult for you. I had to spend seven years on it before I was able to reach Minor Accomplishment!” the combat master explained with a hint of pride on his face.

“You took seven years to reach Minor Accomplishment in the Grand Constellation Finger?” Division Head Wei suddenly thought of something, and his eyebrows shot up. “Wait a moment, are you the genius of the Martial Arts Division whom Division Head Feng often speaks about, Jiao Tan?”

When they were looking for Division Head Feng, he had been the only combat master who happened to be in the vicinity, so

they had approached him out of convenience to ask for the latter's whereabouts. As such, they were not aware of the other party's name.

However, upon hearing of the name of the battle technique and the duration the other party had taken to cultivate it to Minor Accomplishment, Division Head Wei suddenly recalled this matter.

The Grand Constellation Finger was definitely the most difficult to master out of the two hundred battle techniques listed on the wall, as well as the most powerful one. Even Division Head Feng had required 23 years before he could achieve Minor Accomplishment in the technique, but the other party had only taken seven years. His talent was truly frightening.

“Indeed, that's me!” Combat Master Jiao Tan nodded with an air of dignity around him.

1127 Eleven Breaths

“I see!”

Upon learning that the other party was the famed genius of the Martial Arts Division, a figure who stood toe-to-toe with Shi Hao, Division Head Wei nodded before turning to Zhang Xuan. “Sun shi, let me get another battle technique for you. Mastering the Grand Constellation Finger won’t be easy. Even among the two hundred battle techniques listed on the wall, it’s considered one of the harder ones.”

Considering that Division Head Feng was not a combat master and didn’t receive the systematic training that they underwent before, it was not surprising that he had taken two decades to achieve Minor Accomplishment in the technique. However, Jiao Tan was the most talented individual of the Martial Arts Division of the current generation, and yet, he had still taken seven years to reach Minor Accomplishment. It was no wonder the Grand Constellation Finger was famed as one of the hardest battle techniques to master in the Martial Arts Division!

Zhang Xuan shook his head as he casually took the manual of the Grand Constellation Finger from Jiao Tan’s hands and flipped through it. “There’s no need to go through so much trouble; I’ll just practice this one.”

To him, as long as he could compile a Heaven’s Path battle technique, it mattered not which of the two hundred battle techniques he practiced.

Knowing that he would draw hostility from the other party if he attempted to dissuade him too much, Division Head Wei conceded. “Alright then. If you wish to give up at any point in time, feel free to tell me. I’ll bring you another battle technique.”

Often, a cultivator had to try practicing the battle technique themselves before they would truly understand how difficult it was.

Once the other party stumbled on the technique, failing to even achieve Novice mastery quickly, he would finally understand how difficult the Grand Constellation Finger was.

Clearly, Jiao Tan also harbored the same thoughts in mind. He stared at the conceited young man before him intently, waiting to see the look of desperation on the other party's face once he realized that he could not comprehend the content of the manual.

However, his expectations did not come to be. Instead of desperation, he found himself looking at a face frowning in disgust.

“What do you mean by that?” Jiao Tan questioned in displeasure.

It was one thing for the other party to be unable to comprehend the manual, but what was with the look of disgust on his face? It was as if the other party thought that he was too good for their battle technique!

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before replying, “It's nothing!”

After which, he turned his attention back to the manual in his hands, and a moment later, he sighed deeply and said, “Forget it. I guess there's no choice!”

With a look of resignation reminiscent of one who was ready to face death, Zhang Xuan closed his eyes.

“You...” Seeing how the other party's expression grew even more exaggerated than before, Jiao Tan felt so wrathful that he could have blown up on the spot.

The Grand Constellation Finger might not be a top-notch battle technique, but it was at least one of the stronger techniques in the Martial Arts Division. Normal cultivators would find it profound and difficult to cultivate, but they would still be honored to learn it. Yet... this fellow had a look of complete repulsion on his face, as if a fly had entered his mouth. That was really a little too much!

Jiao Tan harrumphed coldly. “What's with your poor attitude? Even if you can't comprehend the intricacies of the Grand

Constellation Finger, surely you need not act in such a disrespectful manner...”

But before he could finish his words, a powerful aura carrying an air of antiquity and vastness suddenly burst forth from the young man before him. Following which, the young man suddenly raised his right hand and tapped at the space before him with his forefinger.

Tz la!

A burst of zhenqi tore across air, creating a deafening, piercing sound reminiscent of a piece of paper being torn into two. One could vaguely see stars rotating around the young man’s fingertip, as if he had the world in his hands.

The Grand Constellation Finger was a technique created by an elder of the Combat Master Hall more than ten thousand years ago. That elder had carefully observed the movements of celestial bodies, and emulating the positioning of the stars with his zhenqi, he had created this finger art.

This technique was feared not only for its powerful physical might. The finger art carried the vastness of the universe within it as well, and those facing it would feel as if they were traversing through boundless space, exerting great pressure on their souls. As such, it was extremely difficult to guard against this attack.

However, it was also for the same reason that it was extremely difficult for ordinary cultivators to comprehend. There were even some who had dedicated their entire lives to it, only to remain oblivious to the power of the stars on their deathbed.

Jiao Tan’s initial intention of offering the Grand Constellation Finger to Sun shi was because he could not stand the other party’s arrogance and wanted to teach him some humility. However, upon seeing the burst of zhenqi from the other party’s finger, his eyes narrowed, and his body trembled. “This is... Novice?”

He had thought that the other party was just putting on an act in order to spare himself from the embarrassment of being unable to comprehend the battle technique, and yet, just after

shutting his eyes for an instant, he had actually managed to achieve Novice mastery!

One must know that even Jiao Tan himself had taken an entire year to reach Novice mastery!

Tzzzzzzz!

While Jiao Tan was astonished beyond measure, the zhenqi gathering on the young man's finger was swiftly growing stronger and stronger, to the point where a deep rumbling sound could be heard from the sheer accumulation of power. In that instant, Jiao Tan felt as if the entire room had turned dark, and the stars around him threatened to fall upon him.

“This is... Initiate?” Jiao Tan gulped down a mouthful saliva as his face turned completely pale.

The biggest hurdle in the Grand Constellation Finger lay in the initial phase, where one had to comprehend the power of the stars in order to draw upon the might of the technique. Once one overcame this challenge, the subsequent cultivation of the technique would be a little easier and faster. But even so, it was not supposed to be so fast!

How long did the other party take?

Ten breaths?

Five breaths?

Or only two breaths?

A tap of his finger, and the other party was already at Initiate. Before he could even begin to process what was going on, the other party was already at Initiate...

Is this even humanly possible?

Jiao Tan's felt his throat turn dry. He quickly turned his gaze to ask Division Head Wei just what kind of background the young man came from to be able to grasp the Grand Constellation Finger so easily, only to see Division Head Wei staring at the young man with bulging eyes as well.

Clearly, Division Head Wei had not expected the young man to be able to advance from Novice to Initiate that quickly

either.

After all, this was something that defied common sense.

“Division Head Wei...” Fearing that he would interrupt the cultivating Sun shi, Jiao Tan opted to send a telepathic message over instead.

“Hmm?” Division Head Wei was jolted out of his shock.

“Has Sun shi... really not practiced the Grand Constellation Finger in the past?” Jiao Tan asked doubtfully.

Recalling the various incredible deeds the young man had achieved earlier, Division Head Wei contemplated for a moment before replying. “That should be the case. There’s no need for someone of his caliber to lie about something as minor as this!”

A collaboration between the hall master and two division heads, and Sun shi was still able to escape unscathed. Not only so, he even managed to find an opportunity to tap into the formation of the Heart Division to subdue them. And just earlier, he had destroyed all ten stone walls in the Trial of Inner Breath with a single palm strike.

Surely a person of such great capability would not need to lie just to inflate his ego. It was more likely that the Grand Constellation Finger was simply easy to him.

“If he has not practiced the Grand Constellation Finger before and really managed to reach Initiate within just a few breaths... won’t he catch up to my seven years of effort and reach Minor Accomplishment in just a single day?” Jiao Tan uttered with widened eyes as his lips quivered in horror.

“Surely not. There’s a huge rift between Initiate and Minor Accomplishment, so it shouldn’t be possible for anyone to do it so quickly... Ah?”

Halfway through his words, Division Head Wei abruptly exclaimed in shock.

At this point, the young man had straightened his arm, and a vortex reminiscent of a revolving stellar river appeared at his

fingertip. Just looking at that incredible mass of power rotating on the fingertip could easily leave one light-headed.

“Minor Accomplishment...”

The duo fearfully took two steps back.

It was just a moment ago that Division Head Wei had said that the other party would not reach Minor Accomplishment that day, but the next moment, he was forced to swallow his words.

Hu!

Upon achieving Minor Accomplishment, Zhang Xuan opened his eyes. He looked at the vortex of power gathered on his fingertip and sighed deeply before turning his gaze toward Jiao Tan.

“Does the Trial of Martial Arts only open to those who have achieved Major Accomplishment in their battle technique?”

Jiao Tan was not too sure why the other party was asking such a question, but he swiftly nodded in response. “That’s right...”

Only one who had achieved Major Accomplishment in any of the two hundred battle techniques would stand a chance in the Trial of Martial Arts. Over time, this had become the prerequisite to challenging the trial.

Jiao Tan was just about to explain this matter to the young man when the latter sighed deeply and said, “I see...”

Following which, the young man closed his eyes once more.

“What?” Jiao Tan’s cheeks twitched. “You aren’t thinking of... pushing for a breakthrough to Major Accomplishment right now, are you? The Grand Constellation Finger is highly demanding on zhenqi, and a forceful breakthrough without prior preparation could easily result in severe internal injuries.”

Once again, before Jiao Tan could finish his words, the young man raised his finger and tapped on the space before him once more.

Huala!

The air in the area was suddenly compressed tightly together. All of a sudden, Jiao Tan felt as if he was standing in the middle of the universe with innumerable stars around him. Each and every one of the stars was flying toward him with incredible momentum, threatening to crush his body into smithereens.

“Domain of Stars...” Jiao Tan’s body trembled intensely. “This is... the level of mastery exceeding Major Accomplishment, Consummation?”

The mastery of a battle technique could be divided into five levels: Novice, Initiate, Minor Accomplishment, Major Accomplishment, and Consummation.

It was just a moment ago that he had said that reaching Major Accomplishment would be nigh impossible, and the following moment, the other party managed to reach Consummation with such ease.

It seemed like from the moment he came into contact with the manual till he cultivated to Consummation, all in all... only a dozen or so seconds had passed!

And he, the most talented individual of the Martial Arts Division, had spent seven years only to reach Minor Accomplishment.

An overwhelming sense of defeat left him feeling as if he would explode on the spot.

There would be no damage if there was not any comparison.

Not knowing that his short moment of cultivation had scared Division Head Wei and Jiao Tan to the point that they were going to spew blood at any moment, Zhang Xuan opened his eyes.

Truthfully, if it was not for the collection of books within, he would never have lowered himself to cultivating the Grand Constellation Finger.

Even after compiling it with the finger arts in his Library of Heaven’s Path, there were still five flaws in it!

He had never thought that he would cultivate such a flawed battle technique in his life. It was for this reason that he had such a conflicted expression on his face.

It was simply too hard to swallow this finger art!

This must surely be the darkest stain in his history of cultivation!

However, it could not be helped. He had to clear the Trial of Martial Arts to find more Saint 2-dan cultivation techniques in order to achieve a breakthrough. Otherwise, who knew how much longer it would take him?

It was fortunate that none of these flaws demanded a catalyst for him to cultivate the battle technique, or else he would have been in deep trouble.

Shaking away the frustrations in his mind, Zhang Xuan said, "I'm done. Combat Master Jiao Tan, I will have to trouble you to register me for the Trial of Martial Arts."

Most of the flaws were regarding the tearing the cultivator's meridians upon the execution of the technique, putting the cultivator in excruciating pain. However, with Zhang Xuan's Heaven's Path zhenqi, he could heal those tears swiftly, so it did not pose a problem.

In any case, he only required it to clear the trial. At most, he would just avoid using it in the future.

"Y-yes!" Jiao Tan finally recovered from his shock. Cowering back slightly, he quickly left the area. Not too long later, he returned. "Sun shi, I have negotiated with the combat masters in charge and gotten you the next slot for the trial!"

A large crowd would challenge the Trial of Martial Arts each day, but the number that would eventually pass the trial was very low.

Considering that the young man had been brought over by Division Head Wei himself, and he had already achieved the level of Consummation for the Grand Constellation Finger, it was not anything much to let him go first for the trial.

“Thank you for your help.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist in gratitude before following Jiao Tan forward.

The door to the trial happened to open at this moment, and a young man walked out with a gloomy expression on his face. With just a look, it was obvious that he had failed the examination.

“Sun shi, this way.” Jiao Tan gestured into the opened doorway.

Zhang Xuan walked in, and in the blink of an eye, he had already disappeared from everyone’s sight.

“Jiao Tan, just what is that fellow’s background that you would intervene in his stead to give him priority in the queue?”

“I don’t know either...” Jiao Tan shook his head.

“You don’t know? Then, surely you do know what battle technique he is going to be challenging, right?” the combat master asked again.

Based on the reported battle technique, it was possible to deduce the other party’s background.

“He’s challenging the Grand Constellation Finger!” Jiao Tan said.

“Grand Constellation Finger? Isn’t that the battle technique you are cultivating at the moment?”

“I heard that that battle technique is incredibly difficult to master. Even someone as talented as you took seven years in order to reach Minor Accomplishment! For that fellow to dare challenge that battle technique, has he already achieved Major Accomplishment in it? But judging from his appearance, he doesn’t look old enough.”

The combat master from before frowned. “Given his young age, how long could he possibly have cultivated the technique?”

“Probably...” It was intended as a hypothetical question, but Jiao Tan happened to have the answer to it. With a bitter smile, he said, “Twelve breaths. Ah, no, it should be eleven breaths!”

1128 Division Head Feng's Misery

Hu!

As soon as Zhang Xuan stepped through the door, a puppet at the very end of the room stood up.

Its appearance looked no different from a real person. With its snowy hair and beard, it resembled a human in his sixties.

Most likely, it's constructed in the form of Division Head Feng, Zhang Xuan deduced.

Division Head Feng was probably a celestial designer as well, which was not surprising since he came from the Master Teacher Pavilion in the first place. Otherwise, it should have been impossible for him to craft such a lifelike puppet.

If Zhang Xuan had not known in advance, he would have really thought that the figure before him was a true human.

“The battle technique you have chosen is the Grand Constellation Finger. If you are able to withstand my attack with just the Grand Constellation Finger, you will have cleared the trial. Otherwise, you'll have to leave and try again next time,” the puppet said in an impassive tone.

“Alright.” Zhang Xuan nodded as he took a step forward.

Pitting the same battle technique against a puppet of the same cultivation realm, even if he did not use his Eye of Insight and Library of Heaven's Path, he was still absolutely confident that he would be the one to emerge victorious in the very end.

...

“Reporting to Hall Master Xing, it appears that Division Head Wei has taken Sun laoshi to the Martial Arts Division.”

Hall Master Xing and the others had led Elder Qi to the Inner Breath Division, but Zhang Xuan and Division Head Wei were

nowhere to be found. Thus, he had turned his sight toward Shi Hao, and he soon received his answer.

Hall Master Xing frowned. “What are they doing at the Martial Arts Division?”

“I’m not too sure either.” Shi Hao shook his head.

“Hold on a moment. Did you just address Sun shi as... Sun laoshi?” The sharp Division Head Liao swiftly noticed that there was something amiss with Shi Hao’s words.

Addressing Sun Qiang as Sun shi was a respectful way to refer to master teachers, but Sun laoshi meant something even deeper than that. It was a way to address one who had enlightened them greatly in their path.

“Yes, Sun laoshi has given us invaluable pointers in our cultivation; we are extremely grateful to him.” Shi Hao nodded.

“This...” Hall Master Xing and the others glanced at one another and frowned.

It was one thing for a spirit awakener to provide pointers to combat masters, but to win the respect of so many of them and have them acknowledge him as their teacher simultaneously... Just what in the world had happened?

Soon, upon clarifying the situation, the trio was dumbfounded.

Destroying the Trial of Inner Breath with a single palm strike and subduing Shi Hao with just a finger... Just how much zhenqi did Sun shi possess?

“Let’s head to the Martial Arts Division to take a look!” said Hall Master Xing, intrigued, before quickly making his way over to the Martial Arts Division.

Soon, he arrived at the entrance of the Trial of Martial Arts.

“You’re all here!” At this moment, Division Head Wei suddenly noticed the old man standing alongside Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao, and his eyes lit up as he quickly clasped his fist respectfully. “Elder Qi, you are fine?”

“Un.” Elder Qi nodded. “Where is Sun shi?”

“Ah, he just entered the trial,” Division Head Wei replied with a smile.

“Trial?” Hall Master Xing frowned.

“Sun shi is trying to find some Saint 2-dan cultivation technique manuals, but there aren’t any suited for him in the Inner Breath Division. Thus, we came over to look for Division Head Feng, but he happened to not be around. So, Sun shi decided to challenge the Trial of Martial Arts so as to gain access to Division Head Feng’s collection of books!” Division Head Wei swiftly summarized the happenings.

Recalling when they faced the young man earlier and the astounding sight they had witnessed at the Inner Breath Division, Hall Master Xing stroked his beard and remarked, “With his strength, clearing the trial shouldn’t be a problem!”

A genius of Sun shi’s caliber would not face any trouble clearing the Trial of Martial Arts. There was no need to worry about him.

Hall Master Xing continued after a brief pause. “Speaking of which, didn’t Division Head Feng return to the Martial Arts Division right after our conference? He usually spends his time cooped up within the Martial Arts Division, and there have been no reports saying that he has sneaked out like the others. It’s a little weird that he isn’t around here.”

Except for collecting new cultivation techniques and battle technique manuals, Division Head Feng’s greatest hobby was to isolate himself in his living quarters to study battle techniques. In fact, there were many times when Hall Master Xing had invited him to various formal occasions, only to be rejected for this reason. Considering how he did not defect to the Xuanxuan Faction like Division Head Zhou and Division Head Wu, it seemed a little bizarre for him not to be in the Martial Arts Division.

“I was also wondering the same thing,” Division Head Wei said.

He had been a little perplexed by the matter when he heard from Jiao Tan that Division Head Feng wasn't around. However, out of respect for Division Head Feng's privacy, he had chosen not to enquire too deeply.

"Old Feng actually willingly came out of his den? Why do I find that inconceivable? Wait a moment, could it be..." In the middle of his words, Division Head Liao suddenly recalled a matter and froze.

"What's wrong?"

Noting that Division Head Liao had thought of something, Hall Master Xing and the others quickly turned their attention to him.

"As you know, I have a close relationship with Old Feng. He regularly comes over to seek my help in clearing his inner demons. On one of these occasions, he told me that he has a bizarre habit." Division Head Liao spoke with twitching lips. "From time to time, he hides in the Trial of Martial Arts and pretends to be the puppet so as to assess his combat masters personally."

"Pretends to be the puppet?" Everyone was stunned.

They had not expected to hear such words.

"That's right. The Trial of Martial Arts is usually conducted by the puppet crafted by Old Feng, but facing multiple combat masters every single day, it inevitably accumulates damage and breaks down from time to time. In such cases, he suppresses his cultivation and acts as the puppet to battle with the challenging combat masters."

Gulping down a mouthful of saliva, Division Head Liao continued. "I only heard of this matter from him once though, so I took it as a joke. But... could it be true?"

A division head pretending to be a puppet in a trial was not a particularly shocking incident. Naturally, Division Head Feng would not tell such a secret to just anyone, so there were not many in the Combat Master Hall who knew of the matter. Or perhaps, Division Head Liao might even have been the only one aware of the issue.

For Division Head Feng to suddenly disappear despite there being no traces that he had left the Combat Master Hall... could he really be acting as a puppet in the Trial of Martial Arts at that very moment?

Hall Master Xing was stunned for a moment before asking anxiously, "What battle technique did Sun shi choose?"

Considering how dedicated Division Head Feng was toward the pursuit of battle techniques, there was no knowing if he would get serious with Sun shi! It would not be too much of a problem if Division Head Feng injured any of the combat masters—they would at least still be able to resolve it internally—but Sun shi was their esteemed guest!

"He chose the Grand Constellation Finger," Division Head Wei replied.

"That is indeed a powerful battle technique, but it's incredibly difficult to master as well. Sun shi actually managed to master such a powerful technique despite his age?" Hall Master Xing was stunned.

"He didn't know any of the battle techniques, so Jiao Tan offered him the manual of the Grand Constellation Finger, and... he learned it on the spot." Division Head Wei spoke hesitantly, unsure of how he should explain the matter to the others.

Before he could finish his words, Division Head Liao had already interjected in a panic. "He is going against Old Feng despite only learning the technique moments ago? You should have stopped him!"

"Old Feng is a lunatic, you know! If he learns that Sun shi is challenging the Trial of Martial Arts after just learning the fundamentals of the technique, he will think that the other party is disrespecting the solemnity of the trial and fly into a rage! You also know how seriously Old Feng takes the cultivation of battle techniques! This is really bad. Old Feng won't show any mercy once he is blinded by wrath. We have to rush in to stop him!"

At this point, Division Head Liao's eyes were widened in horror, and goosebumps rose all over his arms.

Division Head Feng, just like his surname[1], was a true lunatic. He took everything relating to battle techniques seriously, and he would never allow anyone to sully it in the least. Given that Sun shi had just learned the Grand Constellation Finger moments ago, his lack of mastery would surely show through in the trial in an instant.

Once Division Head Feng realized the matter, he would spare no punches in teaching Sun shi a lesson! And against a raging Primordial Spirit realm expert, no matter how powerful Sun shi was, there was no way he could last too long against him
Jiya!

Panicking, Division Head Liao and the others quickly rushed toward the door of the Trial of Martial Arts to save Sun shi, but at that moment, the door suddenly creaked opened. A young man calmly walked out from the door.

As he walked, he leisurely adjusted his robe to tidy himself up.

Hall Master Xing and the others ran up to the young man, but upon seeing that the latter was completely unharmed, they couldn't help but ask in intrigue, "Sun shi... are you fine?"

"Un, I'm fine," Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

"Have you... cleared the trial?" Division Head Wei asked.

"Un, it wasn't too difficult. However, I am really impressed by how exquisitely the puppet is crafted. To fully emulate the situation in a true fight, it is even able to spurt blood! If I hadn't known in advance, I might have just thought that it's a real human."

"Spurt blood?"

Upon hearing those words, the lips of the crowd began twitching wildly.

"I was also as surprised as you are back when I saw it! However, as exquisite as it is, there are still some glitches in it that requires fixing. After I defeated it in a direct clash at the same cultivation realm using the same battle technique, I

asked it if I have cleared the trial yet or not, but it did not reply to me. So, I could only continue the fight with it.

“As if that wasn’t bad enough, its cultivation even started rising halfway through! I was afraid that I might be no match for it at that rate, so I made a preemptive strike and knocked it out. That should still be considered as a pass, right?” Zhang Xuan asked slightly worriedly.

“You knocked it out?”

“Its cultivation started rising halfway through?”

If they were still uncertain whether or not Division Head Feng was acting as the puppet before, Zhang Xuan’s words had fully confirmed their doubts—the puppet had to be Division Head Feng!

The puppet in the Trial of Martial Arts was not weak, but its strength was fixed. There was no way its cultivation would suddenly rise in the midst of a battle! The only plausible explanation was that it was Division Head Feng in disguise!

“Let’s go in to take a look!” Hall Master Xing and the others quickly bypassed Zhang Xuan and rushed into the trial, and with just a glance at the situation inside, their faces began twitching uncontrollably.

A bloodied Division Head Feng was smashed into the wall, and his clothes had been torn to shreds by some kind of devastating might. His current situation was as unkempt as one could imagine.

“It’s indeed Old Feng...” Division Head Liao quickly rushed forward and placed his fingers on the other party’s pulse, confirming that the figure before him was indeed a living human.

He flicked his wrist and swiftly popped a recovery pill into Division Head Feng’s mouth. At the same time, he drove his zhenqi into the latter’s body to help the latter assimilate the energy within the pill.

Not too long later, the unconscious Division Head Feng finally came to.

“What are all of you doing here?” Division Head Feng asked with a confused look.

“Were you assessing a young man earlier before... being knocked out?” Hall Master Xing asked hesitantly.

“Yes... that does seem to be the case. The young man who came in to challenge the trial earlier has a profound comprehension of the Grand Constellation Finger. Given the same cultivation realm and battle technique, I was no match for him at all! Intrigued, I discreetly raised my cultivation to see how far I could push him... but who would have thought that the fellow would suddenly rush over at that instant and knock me out with a flick of his finger? Then... then... I can't recall anything anymore...” Division Head Feng's face reddened.

It was not easy for him to meet someone who had achieved such incredible mastery in the Grand Constellation Finger. As a martial arts fanatic, it was inevitable that he would be fascinated by the matter. Wanting to witness the might of the Grand Constellation Finger in its full glory, he had attempted to push the other party a little further. But who could have expected that he would be knocked out before he achieved anything at all?

How embarrassing!

“You are really...” Hearing those words, Hall Master Xing could not help but sigh in vexation.

For an esteemed division head of the Combat Master Hall to be pummeled into such a tragic state by a mere Saint 1-dan fellow... Hall Master Xing really had no idea what to make of the matter.

However, recalling how he and another two division heads had been completely subdued by Sun shi back in the Heart Division at all, he realized that he was not really in a position to admonish Division Head Feng either.

“Right, how did you know that I was in here? Also, who is that young man?” Division Head Feng asked curiously. “I don't

think I have seen him around in the Combat Master Hall before.”

While he did not know all of the combat masters in the Combat Master Hall, he could still recognize most of their faces. The face of the young man looked extremely foreign to him, so there was a good chance that he was not from their Combat Master Hall.

“He’s a spirit awakener whom Hall Master Xing invited over to help enchant his Primordial Spirit,” Division Head Liao explained.

“He’s a spirit awakener?” Division Head Feng was stunned. “But he was able to overpower me easily even when the both of us were at the same cultivation realm. You are telling me that a spirit awakener has managed to attain such a deep comprehension of the profound Grand Constellation Finger?”

One must know that he was the head of the Martial Arts Division! With his deep comprehension of battle techniques, he wielded fighting prowess far surpassing his peers.

With such strength, it was nigh impossible for any cultivator of a lower cultivation realm to match him even when he had suppressed his cultivation to the other party’s level. Yet, a spirit awakener had not only managed to subdue him but even easily knocked him out when he attempted to raise his cultivation.

“It’s the truth. Sun shi isn’t just a spirit awakener but a master teacher as well. It’s like this...” Seeing the look of disbelief on Division Head Feng’s face, Hall Master Xing could only explain the various happenings earlier.

“This...” Division Head Feng’s body stiffened in shock, not daring to believe what he had just heard. “Just eleven breaths after he looked through the manual of the Grand Constellation Finger, he has already attained a mastery in the technique that far surpasses what I have achieved in the past several hundred years?”

Seeing that Division Head Feng had his confidence utterly shattered, Hall Master Xing quickly stepped in to change the

topic. “It’s meaningless to judge true geniuses by our common sense. Come, I’ll introduce Sun shi to you.”

“Un.” Division Head Feng sighed deeply before nodding.

The very moment that the group stepped out of the trial room together, they saw innumerable combat masters kneeling and kowtowing on the ground. Their excited and admiration-filled gazes were directed toward a young man not too far away.

“Teacher, thank you for opening our eyes!”

[1] Old Feng’s ‘Feng’ (𠄎) has the same pronunciation as the character for insane in Chinese.

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“This...”

Seeing even the most talented genius of his Martial Arts Division bowing to the young man, Division Head Feng was completely bewildered.

What in the world happened?

Aren't the combat masters of our Combat Master Hall supposed to be prideful individuals who never bow to anyone?

The young man left the trial just moments earlier, and all of them had already acknowledged him as their teacher?

Unable to stand it any longer, Hall Master Xing walked up to Elder Qi and asked, “Elder Qi, this... what is going on?”

“Sun shi imparted some pointers on how one could more effectively utilize battle techniques... and it was deeply enlightening!” Elder Qi replied with a face flushed crimson from agitation, and his fingers were trembling non-stop. It was as if even he was tempted to acknowledge Sun shi as his teacher as well.

“Just some pointers on effectively utilizing battle techniques have left them in such a state?” Division Head Feng could hardly believe what he was hearing.

Their Martial Arts Division had a huge collection of insights from preceding combat masters on how one could maximize the effectiveness of their battle techniques in battle, but most of them were conflicting with one another. Each of them made sense in their own ways, thus making it impossible to tell the correct insights from the incorrect. For Sun shi to win the reverence of everyone here just by lecturing a bit on the subject... Wasn't that a little too exaggerated?

“You are only saying that because you didn't hear the content of his lecture. Forget it, it'll be difficult to explain it to you at

the moment. Just grab a combat master and ask him about the matter later on!”

Those who had not listened to the lecture would never comprehend how profound and novel that young man’s interpretation of the subject was. Ignoring the confused Division Head Feng, Elder Qi rushed up to Zhang Xuan and clasped his fist respectfully.

“Sun shi, we meet again. Thank you for saving my life back in the Jingyuan City!”

Even though Sun shi had altered his appearance, there was not much change to his voice. Just by hearing him speak, Elder Qi was certain that the young man before him was the middle-aged man who had saved him back then.

“It’s you! What are you doing here?” Zhang Xuan was surprised.

To his astonishment, the elder before him was the Eccentric Old Man whom he had met in Jingyuan City. Back then, the Eccentric Old Man had been plagued by a lethal poison, resulting in a languishing aura around him. However, in this moment, his face had a healthy red glow to it, and his aura felt more vigorous and livelier than ever. Had the other party not addressed him directly, he would not have believed that the person standing before him was actually the same old man he had met back then!

“It’s all thanks to Sun shi’s help. I was able to successfully make a full recovery after you cured my poison. Just a while ago, I successfully made a breakthrough, so I decided to return here to exact my vengeance!” Elder Qi replied.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Without a doubt, Elder Qi’s poison was the result of someone’s malicious deeds. Considering how long he had suffered under the torture of the poison, there was no way he would be willing to let the culprit get away scot-free, especially since he had managed to regain his strength!

“Don’t worry about it. I have already received your medicinal herbs as compensation, so we’re even now,” Zhang Xuan

replied with a smile. Then, he turned to Division Head Wei and said, “I have defeated the puppet earlier, so I should have cleared the trial, right? May I trouble you to lead me to the book collection?”

“Of course!” Division Head Wei’s lips twitched a little as he swiftly nodded.

Those who cleared the trial were able to access Division Head Feng’s collection of books. As this was the rule Division Head Feng had set himself, there was no one who would complain about that. There was no need to trouble Division Head Feng over this matter.

Besides, if the other combat masters were to learn of this matter, Division Head Feng would probably die of embarrassment.

Following behind Division Head Wei, Zhang Xuan soon entered a library.

On the other hand, upon noting Zhang Xuan’s departure, Hall Master Xing and the others hurriedly rushed up to Elder Qi and asked, “Elder Qi, is he... really the Sun Qiang you were talking about?”

The reason Elder Qi had hurried over so anxiously was to confirm whether the other party was the benefactor who had saved him previously.

“Un, he’s definitely my benefactor. It doesn’t seem like he’s the Zhang Xuan person whom you were talking about!” Elder Qi nodded.

Given that he was acquainted with Sun shi back at Jingyuan City, there did not seem to have been any need for the other party to disguise himself as another person back then. Going by this logic, it did not seem likely for the other party to be Principal Zhang.

“Thank goodness!” Hall Master Xing heaved a sigh of relief.

Noting the other party’s response, Elder Qi asked in bewilderment, “What’s wrong? Do you have a conflict with Principal Zhang? He’s well-respected in the Hongyuan

Empire, and there's hardly any discredit to his name. Did he offend the Combat Master Hall in some way?"

Zhang Xuan's name was resounding in the Hongyuan Empire, to the extent that his reputation surpassed even that of Emperor Yu Shenqing. Countless youths regarded him as their idol.

Putting aside the many incredible feats and merits he had accomplished, there was not a shred of dishonor to his name. Given so, it should be safe to assume that he was a person of noble stature. Why would Hall Master Xing fear such a person so?

"There are no conflicts between us. It's a long story." Hall Master Xing realized that he had acted inappropriately upon hearing Elder Qi's question, so he quickly waved his hand.

Division Head Liao sent a telepathic message to Hall Master Xing. "Hall Master Xing, since it's confirmed that Sun Shi isn't Zhang Xuan, and considering his incredible talent and outstanding comprehension of battle techniques, if we could have him represent our Combat Master Hall in the exchange with the Xuanxuan Faction..."

Hearing those words, Hall Master Xing's eyes lit up.

Indeed. After witnessing it with his own eyes, even he had no choice but to admit that the Xuanxuan Faction was a formidable foe. He had been confident of victory given that he had achieved a breakthrough and obtained the highest secret art, Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra, of the Combat Master Hall, but on second thought, there was still a huge gap between their combat skills. If the Combat Master Hall were to win by sheer strength and not skill, it would not reflect too well on them either.

However, Sun Shi was different.

In terms of combat skills, he could use a battle technique that he had learned moments ago to overwhelm Division Head Feng. In terms of state of mind, even the founder of the Heart Division had approved of him and willingly given him the highest control over the Heart Division's formations. In terms

of zhenqi, he could shatter ten stone walls in the Trial of Inner Breath simultaneously. In terms of real fighting prowess, he could escape from a collaborative offense from the three of them.

No matter how one looked at it, Sun shi was an expert among experts. There were none who could rival him in the same level!

If they could have him represent the Combat Master Hall in the exchange against the Xuanxuan Faction, the reputation of the Combat Master Hall would surely be boosted significantly. At the same time, it would also immensely increase their chances in bringing the Xuanxuan Faction under them.

“That’s a good idea!”

After another moment of deep contemplation, Hall Master Xing continued. “However... he’s ultimately not from our Combat Master Hall. If we have him fight on our behalf and others learn of it... will the reputation of our Combat Master Hall be sullied?”

“That won’t be a problem. We could have him represent our Combat Master Hall in the fight against Principal Zhang. If he wins, the Xuanxuan Faction will come under our Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall. Once that happens, not only will our reputation not take a dip, it will even soar to unprecedented heights,” Division Head Liao said.

“You’re right.” Hall Master Xing nodded.

That was indeed the case.

If they could have the bunch from the Xuanxuan Faction join the Combat Master Hall, their Qingyuan Empire’s branch would surely grow stronger and stronger. With time, they might even become a powerhouse within the Alliance.

Even if the Xuanxuan Faction had complaints then, they could deal with it internally. It would not affect their overall situation.

“But... what if he loses?” Hall Master Xing was still a little worried.

Sun Shi was indeed a formidable opponent, but Principal Zhang was not a pushover either!

No matter what, he was the man who single-handedly groomed their potential Progeny of Combat, Zheng Yang, and he was also the man behind the overwhelming strength of the Xuanxuan Faction!

There was no way such a person like that could possibly be weak!

“If we lose, there will be no way around it. At the very most, our entire Combat Master Hall will join the Xuanxuan Faction!” Division Head Liao said grimly.

“This...” Hall Master Xing fell silent upon hearing those words.

“We have no other option at this point. Once it becomes known that Division Head Zhou, Division Head Lu, and the others have already defected to the Xuanxuan Faction, it will surely cause a huge uproar. With time, more and more combat masters will turn to the Xuanxuan Faction!” Division Head Liao said bitterly.

It was not that he wanted to do this, but they were truly cornered at this point.

In terms of overall prowess, the Xuanxuan Faction was definitely no match for the Combat Master Hall. However, their comprehension of combat had reached an unfathomable level; it was inevitable that the strength-seeking combat masters would be drawn to them.

Of course, this was not necessarily a bad thing. If the combat masters could learn from the Xuanxuan Faction, their fighting prowess would be brought up to a whole new level.

The only issue at the moment was who wielded the dominant position. If the Combat Master Hall was forced to be subservient to a lesser organization, they would become a laughingstock.

Given that this matter concerned the future of the Combat Master Hall, Hall Master Xing had to tread carefully regarding this matter. He thought deeply for a moment before eventually

sighing in resignation. “You’re right, we can only do it this way now. I’ll talk to Sun shi about the matter later when he’s done browsing through the books.”

For the Combat Master Hall to be cornered by a lesser organization from a Tier-1 Empire, what a farcical situation they had found themselves in!

But that was indeed what was happening, so he had no choice but to face it.

It might seem absurd, but the Xuanxuan Faction could very well be the greatest crisis they had ever faced. The Xuanxuan Faction’s superior combat skills and philosophy of impartation without discrimination were a bad match for the Combat Master Hall. Putting aside the division heads, if not for the fact that the pride and honor of the Combat Master Hall lay on his shoulders, Hall Master Xing would have rushed over to learn from them as well.

At this point, he could only wish for the best.

...

This is the library of the Martial Arts Division? What an incredible collection of books!

Unaware of the thoughts of Hall Master Xing and the others, Zhang Xuan’s excited gaze was currently fixated on the innumerable shelves of books before him.

As expected of the Martial Arts Division, their collection was nothing short of impressive.

On top of the two hundred Saint-tier battle techniques listed for the Trial of Martial Arts, there were also tens of thousands of Spirit-tier battle techniques as well.

Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in excitement. With these battle techniques, I might just be able to perfect the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm into a Heaven’s Path battle technique.

What he was lacking the most at the moment was high-tier battle technique manuals. With so many of them, he would be

able to raise his comprehension of battle techniques up a notch, thus bringing his fighting prowess to another level.

Flaws!

Zhang Xuan swiftly laid his eyes on the first shelf and began collecting the books into his Library of Heaven's Path.

Hualala!

Books were appearing in the Library of Heaven's Path at an incredible speed.

Ten minutes later, Zhang Xuan had finally finished taking in all of the battle technique manuals.

There really is a substantial collection of Saint 2-dan cultivation techniques here!

After browsing through the battle techniques, Zhang Xuan turned his sight to the last few shelves and saw all kinds of zhenqi cultivation techniques. All in all, there were roughly several hundred of them.

There were also a couple of Saint 3-dan and Saint 4-dan cultivation technique manuals, but there were not too many of them, numbering only around four to five each.

Zhang Xuan swiftly glanced over them and collected them into the Library of Heaven's Path as well.

Compile!

In the blink of an eye, three books appeared before Zhang Xuan's eyes—Saint 2-dan, Saint 3-dan, and Saint 4-dan.

He swiftly flipped through them.

I have finally managed to form the Saint 2-dan Heaven's Path Divine Art!

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement as he heaved a sigh of relief.

Those hundreds of books had allowed him to perfect the Saint 2-dan cultivation technique. Unfortunately, there were still many flaws with the Saint 3-dan and Saint 4-dan cultivation techniques, so he could not cultivate them at the moment.

Nevertheless, he was satisfied.

I should just push for a breakthrough here, Zhang Xuan thought.

There was no one in the library, and it was extremely quiet. At the same time, he could not be bothered to find another place outside, so he headed to a corner and entered the Myriad Anthive Nest.

Considering his cultivation's strong foundation, his breakthrough would surely cause a commotion. How embarrassing it would be if he were to accidentally destroy the other party's library in the midst of doing so?

It would be safer for him to do it in the Myriad Anthive Nest.

In the Myriad Anthive Nest, he quickly found himself a quiet place before setting up a grade-7 Spirit Gathering Formation. Following which, he threw several thousand high-tier spirit stones in before sitting in the middle of it.

High-tier spirit stones were starting to become ineffective in his cultivation, so he needed a Spirit Gathering Formation to maximize their effects. Otherwise, if he were to just absorb them normally, it would be difficult for him to build up the momentum required for a breakthrough.

Once all preparations were ready, Zhang Xuan went through the Saint 2-dan Heaven's Path Divine Art in his mind once more before devouring the surrounding spiritual energy greedily and swiftly converting them into zhenqi.

Saint 2-dan Spiritual Perception realm. At this level, cultivators would open their Incipient Eye, allowing them to perceive their surroundings more vividly than any of their other senses through their Spiritual Perception. While a breakthrough to this realm would not raise a cultivator's basic strength by too much, the enhanced perception of one's surroundings would allow one to make more precise movements in battle, and often, that could be the difference between victory and defeat.

This should be enough... Time to open my Incipient Eye!

With his eyes closed, Zhang Xuan's consciousness slowly crept into his dantian before eventually stopping before his golden Origin Core, which sat at the center of his dantian.

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With a tense look, Zhang Xuan began to drive his zhenqi according to the Saint 2-dan Heaven's Path Divine Art.

A brilliant glow burst from his Origin Core, and it slowly began to revolve with increasing speed. An immense wave of spiritual energy gushed in from the surrounding formation, nourishing his Origin Core. In the blink of an eye, a vortex of spiritual energy reminiscent of a tornado had already formed above Zhang Xuan, producing a deafening whirring sound.

The process to opening one's Incipient Eye was extremely complicated, so Zhang Xuan dared not let his guard down. He controlled the immense amount of zhenqi flowing through his body with incredible precision, not leaving the slightest gap for error.

Hong long long!

As spiritual energy was gathering at a rate too fast, the Myriad Anthive Nest began to shake violently. The Ten Kings of the Cloud Mist Ridge looked over with astonished looks, unable to believe what they were seeing.

They had reached Spiritual Perception realm not too long ago, and from their experience, opening the Incipient Eye should not have caused such a huge ruckus. But why was it that such conventions did not apply to their master?

Not only so, they even felt a powerful pressure weighing down on them.

...

Being driven by the Heaven's Path Divine Art, the devoured spiritual energy was swiftly converted into the incomparably pure Heaven's Path zhenqi before being channeled toward the Origin Core.

Tzzzzzzzz!

Under the massive influx of zhenqi, the massive Origin Core slowly opened up, similar to a blossoming flower. A being reminiscent of an eyeball slowly emerged from within, and it looked as if it would open its eyes at any moment.

This was the crucial period, and Zhang Xuan knew it as well. Widening his pores as large as he could, he swiftly consumed all of the spiritual energy around him and gathered it all together, forming an incredible deluge similar to a rapid river.

“Open!” Zhang Xuan roared as a torrent of zhenqi surged toward his Origin Core.

In the breakthrough to Saint 2-dan, a cultivator had to channel his zhenqi toward his Origin Core to tear open the Incipient Eye. As long as the point that the zhenqi was channeled toward was correct, the Incipient Eye should open easily, thus unlocking the cultivator’s Spiritual Perception.

Huala!

The torrent forcefully struck against Zhang Xuan’s Origin Core, causing a brilliant light to burst from the latter as it revolved on the spot from the impact. However, it slowly came to a halt, and the seemingly opening Incipient Eye reverted back to its original shape, as if nothing had happened at all.

Why isn’t it working? Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had strictly followed the Saint 2-dan Heaven’s Path Divine Art for his breakthrough, and under normal circumstances, he should have opened his Incipient Eye easily. Yet, why was nothing happening at all?

Could there be a problem with his Heaven’s Path Divine Art?

That was impossible!

Zhang Xuan took another look at his cultivation technique and confirmed that there were no flaws in it. Just to double check, he examined every single sentence carefully, and there was not a single mistake in any one of them. Frowning, he thought, I should give it another try.

Hong long!

Spiritual energy gushed into Zhang Xuan's body once more, and after it was successfully converted into Heaven's Path zhenqi, it was channeled toward his Origin Core.

Bam!

After the powerful collision of the zhenqi, Zhang Xuan's Origin Core began spinning once more. However, just like before, it stopped not too long after and fell silent.

Zhang Xuan was bewildered. This...

His cultivation had always progressed smoothly all along, and not once had he failed in pushing for a breakthrough before. But this... He had already attempted it twice, but it still was not working!

That could not be right.

There was no flaw in his cultivation technique, and the amount of zhenqi that he had was sufficient as well.

Let me give it another try!

Frowning, Zhang Xuan attempted to push for another breakthrough.

...

Some time later, Zhang Xuan finally came to a halt. He was panting heavily at the moment, and there was a bitter smile on his face.

I finally get it. There's no mistake the cultivation technique, and I didn't comprehend it incorrectly either. It's that my Origin Core is too powerful, and the spiritual energy within high-tier spirit stones isn't pure enough to stimulate it. That's why I wasn't able to open my Incipient Eye!

After multiple tries, Zhang Xuan had finally managed to make sense of the situation.

It was not that there was a problem in his cultivation; his Origin Core was simply too powerful.

The Origin Core formed from the Saint Ascension Decipher was too stable, and it had been further refined in the Saint Ascension Ordeal, which created a layer of sacred energy

around it. To make a comparison, the sturdiness of his Origin Core was roughly at the level of a Saint intermediate-tier artifact. The purity of the spiritual energy within high-tier spirit stones was insufficient to break it open!

Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in distress as he halted the formation and stood up once more. I must find an even purer source of spiritual energy.

He had encountered such a problem before. As his cultivation rose, his requirement for spiritual energy steadily increased as well. There was a time when his cultivation could be advanced greatly with just low-tier spirit stones, but before long, he had found himself needing middle-tier spirit stones, then high-tier spirit stones... and now, even high-tier spirit stones were not sufficient.

This was not a problem of quantity but quality.

If the quality did not meet the minimum requirement, no amount of quantity could make up for it.

Previously, he had already felt high-tier spirit stones becoming less and less effective on his cultivation, and the quantity he needed for each breakthrough was increasing exponentially. Nevertheless, he had thought that it should still suffice for a few more realms... but it seemed like he had been too optimistic.

The Combat Master Hall must have purer spirit stones. Let me see if I can purchase some from them.

While Zhang Xuan was helpless before this matter, the Combat Master Hall might just be able to resolve the issue.

After all, the Combat Master Hall was an organization that the Master Teacher Pavilion heavily invested in so as to create powerful experts to protect mankind. As such, they never lacked resources. This was also why he had sent Zheng Yang to the Combat Master Hall headquarters to vie for the position of the Progeny of Combat.

If Zheng Yang successfully cleared the trial, through tapping into the vast resources and complete heritage of the Combat

Master Hall, he would likely be able to advance his cultivation at an astounding speed.

And more importantly, this was a good opportunity to temper his state of mind too.

Let me ask Hall Master Xing about the matter then, Zhang Xuan thought.

As long as he could obtain even purer spirit stones, he would be able to make a breakthrough to Spiritual Perception realm easily. However, such spirit stones were bound to be extremely valuable and rare. Nevertheless, he had no intention of taking them for free. As long as the Combat Master Hall was willing to sell them to him, he would surely pay a price that could satisfy them.

After leaving the Myriad Anthive Nest, Zhang Xuan swiftly left the library and entered the main hall of the Martial Arts Division, where Hall Master Xing happened to be waiting.

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up, and he quickly walked up to him. "Hall Master Xing, it's great that you are here. I happen to have a matter that I need to trouble you on."

"Hmm? Sun shi, feel free to state your request. There's no need to stand on ceremony with me. As long as it's something within my means, consider it done!" Hall Master Xing swiftly responded in delight.

He had just been wondering how he could convince Sun shi to help him with the matter of the Xuanxuan Faction when the latter suddenly said that he had a request.

After everything that Sun shi had done for their Combat Master Hall, mending his Primordial Spirit and gifting the altered Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra back to them, he wasn't in a good position to ask the latter for another favor. However, if Sun shi had a request to ask of them, that would make things easier for him.

"It's actually like this... I need a spirit stone that is even purer than a high-tier spirit stone for my cultivation, and I would like to enquire if your Combat Master Hall has any. If so, I am

willing to pay any price to purchase it!” Without beating around the bush, Zhang Xuan dived straight to the main point.

“This...” Hall Master Xing was slightly taken aback. “If you are seeking pinnacle spirit stones, that is a commodity that only those of Saint 6-dan and above are qualified to use, so I’m afraid that it will be nigh impossible to find even one of those in the Qingyuan Empire. You will have to head to a higher tier empire than that!”

“Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall doesn’t have any pinnacle spirit stones?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“Regretfully, that’s the case.” Hall Master Xing shook his head. At this moment, he suddenly recalled something and said, “Actually, if you don’t mind, we do have some concentrated high-tier spirit stones. The spiritual energy contained within them is indeed significantly purer than ordinary high-tier spirit stones, so perhaps they might just work for you?”

“Concentrated high-tier spirit stones?” Zhang Xuan was bewildered.

He had never heard of such a thing before.

“Un. High-tier spirit stones can be mined from ordinary spirit veins, but concentrated high-tier spirit stones are only found in the more potent spirit veins that produces pinnacle spirit stones. In terms of purity, they are nowhere near pinnacle spirit stones, but there is no doubt that they are still much purer than high-tier spirit stones. It’s for that reason that they are known as ‘concentrated high-tier spirit stones’,” Hall Master Xing explained.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Spirit veins could be divided into several levels, too. Some of the weaker spirit veins could only produce the inexpensive low-tier spirit stones, whereas those truly formidable ones could produce pinnacle spirit stones at their very core.

In those spirit veins that could produce pinnacle spirit stones, due to the incredible concentration of spiritual energy, even the outskirts of the spirit vein would produce spirit stones, and

their quality far exceeded that of ordinary high-tier spirit stones.

“May I know how many concentrated high-tier spirit stones the Combat Master Hall has? If possible, I would like to purchase some,” Zhang Xuan quickly replied.

Since concentrated high-tier spirit stones were purer than ordinary high-tier spirit stones, they just might prove useful in helping him achieve a breakthrough to Saint 2-dan realm.

“In truth, even our Combat Master Hall doesn’t have too many concentrated high-tier spirit stones. All in all, we only have ten of them. However, if Sun shi requires it, we can give five of them to you!” Hall Master Xing said.

“That would be imposing too much on you. How much do they cost? I’ll just buy them from you,” Zhang Xuan replied.

If he were to accept a favor from the other party, he would probably have to pay it back somehow in the future. Since he was not in any lack of money, there was no need for him to owe such a debt to others for the sake of saving money.

Hall Master Xing hesitated for a moment before speaking. “To be honest with you, there’s something that we need Sun shi’s help on. If you can help us with this matter, we will be more than glad to give the five concentrated high-tier spirit stones to you!”

“May I enquire what it is?” Zhang Xuan was bewildered.

The Combat Master Hall was one of the strongest organizations in Qingyuan Empire, and Hall Master Xing had even recently made a breakthrough to the Leaving Aperture realm. It was really a little unexpected to hear that they would require his help.

“It’s regarding the trouble that I mentioned to you not too long ago,” Hall Master Xing said with an unsettled look.

“Oh?” Zhang Xuan’s interest was piqued.

“It’s a little embarrassing, but that trouble is caused by a single cultivator. That cultivator’s cultivation isn’t too high, but he wields incredible fighting prowess. I fear that given the same

cultivation realm, there are none in our Combat Master Hall who are a match for him!” Hall Master Xing sighed deeply as he spoke with a vexed tone.

He had done a rough gauge, and even he would struggle to face Principal Zhang’s direct disciples given the same cultivation realm. It was likely that the teacher would be even stronger than that.

“If the cultivation of that cultivator who is causing you trouble is not too high, why don’t you just find someone to pummel him secretly? Surely it should suffice for you to scare him off? The Combat Master Hall isn’t as rule-bound as the Master Teacher Pavilion, so such should be fine, right?” Zhang Xuan asked.

The Combat Master Hall served a differing function as the Master Teacher Pavilion. The Master Teacher Pavilion served as the teachers of humanity, so naturally, they had to be role models for others, so it was inevitable that there would be many rules surrounding it. On the other hand, the Combat Master Hall served as the military of humanity, so it was not necessary for them to be as rule-bound as the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Besides, since the other party dared cause trouble despite his lack of strength, it should be well within the rights of the Combat Master Hall to retaliate. If he was the hall master, he would have had that cultivator pummeled into the ground first before talking the matter out.

Was there a need for them to be so vexed over the matter?

“Cough cough...” Hall Master Xing choked on his saliva.

“That cultivator happens to be a master teacher...”

“He’s a master teacher?” Zhang Xuan stroked his lower jaw and frowned. “There could be troublesome repercussions if such forceful methods were to be used against a master teacher. However, that should not be a problem either. Master teachers are bound by many rules, so you can use that against him. For one, you could challenge him on something that he is not proficient in and force him to back down. Alternatively, you could bring in the Master Teacher Pavilion to mediate in

the matter. If he still refuses to budge then, you could just capture him and have him sent to the Subterranean Gallery!”

Master teachers were protected by the Master Teacher Pavilion, so it would be difficult to deal with him directly. Nevertheless, given the considerably close ties between the Combat Master Hall and the Master Teacher Pavilion, it should be possible to deal with the other party through bureaucracy.

Since the other party was not too strong, he was likely just a 6-star master teacher. Even if he had powerful fighting prowess, his standing in the Master Teacher Pavilion was unlikely to be very high. Any higher ranked master teacher would be able to subdue him easily.

Zhang Xuan had been placed in such a situation several times himself, so he was rather familiar with it.

Surely, there was no need for Hall Master Xing to worry so much about this matter.

“If only it were that simple...” Hall Master Xing shook his head and sighed. “The other party is an upstanding and reputable master teacher, so we dare not go too far with him. That’s why we wish to invite Sun Shi to fight in our stead. His cultivation realm is at the same level as yours, and with your means, we believe that you should be able to defeat him with ease!”

“You want me to fight him in your stead?” Zhang Xuan smiled confidently. “That isn’t a problem at all! I have never lost in a fight against a peer before! Don’t worry, I’ll help you knock all of his teeth out! He’ll regret having messed with the Combat Master Hall.”

1131 Spiritual Perception Realm!

His current strength was nothing in Qingyuan Empire, but in terms of matching his peers, he had absolute confidence at victory.

Regardless of who it was, well, perhaps excluding that monster of a clone he had, as long as the other party was of the same cultivation realm as him, he was confident that he could have the other party crying for their daddies and mummies at the end of the duel.

To dare to cause trouble in the Combat Master Hall, he sure was brazen!

As long as I, Zhang Xuan, am around, regardless of which hole you have crawled out from or how formidable you might be, there won't be a shred of arrogance left once I am done with you!

“With Sun shi's promise, I am reassured...” Hearing those words, Hall Master Xing heaved a sigh of relief as a smile appeared on his lips.

Despite possessing only a cultivation of Saint 1-dan pinnacle, Sun shi was able to dodge the simultaneous attack from three of them. The great strength he possessed was undeniable. No matter how powerful Principal Zhang may be, he definitely wouldn't be walking out of a duel with him unscathed.

“However, Sun shi, you still have to be careful. That trouble I told you is said to be an invincible existence in his cultivation realm. Even though I haven't really witnessed his strength in person or not, the many rumors that surround him suggest that he isn't any weaker than you!” Hall Master Xing hesitated for a moment before saying.

He was deeply confident in Sun shi's strength, but the opponent wasn't easy either. It was best to proceed carefully.

“He isn’t any weaker than me?” Zhang Xuan was slightly taken aback for a moment before nodding.

It was surprising to hear that there was someone who was able to match him in the same cultivation realm, especially since he cultivated the Saint Ascension Decipher and successfully ascended to become a Celestial Saint. However, considering the immense size of the Master Teacher Continent, there might just be true geniuses who could match him.

His clone was one such example... Despite being of the same cultivation realm, he didn’t recall a single occasion where he could defeat his clone in battle. It was truly frustrating.

Considering how wary Hall Master Xing was regarding the matter, the other party’s strength was likely to be truly frightening. It seemed like he had met his match this time around.

“Indeed. I have never met the other party in person, but just the fighting prowess of his students is already plenty frightening. At the same cultivation realm, even I would struggle to match them. Thus, Sun shi, you mustn’t underestimate your opponent...”

“Even you would struggle to match the other party’s students?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

It was already incredible for the other party to be powerful, but who could have thought that the other party’s students would be so formidable as well. At this point, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but feel intrigued by the other party.

“Interesting. I’ll be looking forward to meeting him then...”
Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

If he could fight against such a talented master teacher, it might give him some inspiration as to how he could further his fighting prowess.

“Sun shi, we have appointed a duel with the other party earlier, and it would be held a few days from while. Meanwhile, why don’t you cultivate in our Combat Master Hall and further your fighting prowess? Each of our Ten Divisions has complete heritages, and they might prove to be of some use to

you in further developing your strength.” Hall Master Xing said.

Given how quickly the other party had managed to cultivate the Grand Constellation Finger, he should be able to master the other expertise of their Combat Master Hall swiftly too. With the future of the Combat Master Hall at stake, they couldn't afford to take any risk. As long as it was something that could boost their chances at victory, they would have to grasp tightly onto it.

“It would be a pleasure!” Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

He happened to be looking towards furthering his Heaven's Path Fist Art, Heaven's Path Palm Art, Heaven's Path Movement Art, and the such at the moment, and the high-tier battle techniques of the Combat Master Hall was indubitably an invaluable asset for that. This was a precious opportunity to learn, so naturally, he wouldn't turn it down.

“Here is a token which represents my authority. With this in hand, you will be able to challenge any trial and enter any library in the Combat Master Hall freely!” Seeing how the other party was still able to remain humble despite his astounding strength, Hall Master Xing nodded in approval.

After which, he flicked his wrist and tossed a token over.

Zhang Xuan casually caught it.

After which, Hall Master Xing flicked his wrist once more and took out a slender but long jade container before explaining, “Here are the five concentrated high-tier spirit stones, I'll pass them to Sun shi first as well. This battle is truly important to our Combat Master Hall, so I wish you luck in furthering your strength.”

“Thank you.” Not expecting to receive the spirit stones ahead of the battle, Zhang Xuan felt deeply grateful.

Since the other party trusted him so much, he had to return the favor and help the other party resolve their problem at its root. At the very least, he would pummel that troublemaker to the point where he would be unable to even manage his day-to-day functions!

The Combat Master Hall wasn't an organization that likes of his could trifle with!

...

Sitting quietly in an isolated chamber, Zhang Xuan quickly conditioned his current state to the peak before taking out the long jade container.

Right after giving Hall Master Xing his word, he quickly entered an isolated chamber to cultivate.

With the concentrated high-tier spirit stones in hand, it was about time for him to push for a breakthrough!

With a swift flick of his finger, the seal on the jade container vanished, and incredibly pure spiritual energy immediately began wafting from the container.

Placed within the container were five crystalline spirit stones. Transparent, Zhang Xuan could see the many streaks of pure spiritual energy flowing to and fro within it like little dragons. It felt as if they would burst out from the spirit stones at any moment and soar into the sky.

The spiritual energy within is indeed much purer than high-tier spirit stones... Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Through his observation, he could tell that the purity of the concentrated high-tier spirit stone was at least twice the level of ordinary high-tier spirit stones. With it, he would definitely be able to overcome the Saint 1-dan bottleneck with ease.

Alright, time to begin!

Whipping out a spirit stone and grasping in his hand, Zhang Xuan closed his eyes.

Boom!

Pure spiritual energy immediately began surging into his body, and they were swiftly converted into Heaven's Path zhenqi.

As ordinary high-tier spirit stones were simply not pure enough for the current him, he was only able to absorb an average of 10% of the spiritual energy within. On the other hand, using the concentrated high-tier spirit stones, he found

that he could absorb nearly 100% of the spiritual energy within. The conversion efficiency was truly at a wholly different level.

To put it in other words, the effects of a single concentrated high-tier spirit stone was far greater than even several thousands of high-tier spirit stones combined!

Hu la!

In the blink of an eye, the newly-converted zhenqi finally arrived before Zhang Xuan's Origin Core. With his previous experiences in attempting for a breakthrough, his movements were extremely smooth. With a thought, he had all of his zhenqi gushing towards his Origin Core like a furious torrent.

Geji! Geji!

Under the relentless striking of the torrent, the incredibly sturdy Origin Core finally began to open. However, barely after opening a slit, Zhang Xuan already felt that his zhenqi was running dry. If he were to stop at this juncture, it would render his previous efforts futile.

“Continue!”

At this crucial period, Zhang Xuan couldn't afford to stop. Without any hesitation, he picked up another concentrated high-tier spirit stone and began absorbing the energy within.

Hong long!

A long time later, the sturdy Origin Core finally broke open. An object reminiscent of an eye sat in its place, illuminating the surroundings.

Along with the opening of the Incipient Eye, Zhang Xuan felt his consciousness suddenly extending beyond himself, into the surroundings. In the blink of an eye, every nook and cranny within the chamber lay bare before his consciousness.

Minor details which he would only notice with just his Eye of Insight previously, they could all be vividly felt by him at this very moment. Those books in the distance, even if he didn't open them, he could still 'see' the content within each and every page.

This is Spiritual Perception? It is truly a powerful ability!
Zhang Xuan's face flushed in agitation.

Through the means of the soul oracle, he was also capable of scanning his surroundings with his soul energy. What was different about it and the Spiritual Perception was that the Spiritual Perception amplified what he could see by manyfold, as if someone had fitted a magnifier before his senses. Even the most minor of details could be perceived by him with astounding clarity.

It was no wonder why a breakthrough to Spiritual Perception realm would result in a huge leap in one's fighting prowess despite the minimal increase in zhenqi and strength. Just by opening one's Spiritual Perception in battle, a cultivator would be able to perceive every single move made by his opponent, allowing him to easily dodge, retaliate, or even predict the future moves that his opponent would make.

If I had the Spiritual Perception previously, I would have been able to flee from Hall Master Xing and the others with greater ease previously. It wouldn't have been such a close shave each time around... Zhang Xuan thought as he exhaled a mouthful of turbid gas.

While he did manage to successfully flee from the combined assault of Hall Master Xing and the others earlier one, it was by a hair's breadth every single time. This was due to a lack of his grasp over his surroundings. His attention had to be fixed on dealing with the assault he was currently facing, leaving him unable to effectively perceive the movements of the other two to guard against them. This had left him in a truly bad position.

With his Spiritual Perception, if he were to find himself in such a position once more, he would be able to make the better decisions in view of his overall circumstances, and his escape would surely have been far smoother.

Continue!

The breakthrough alleviated the deep pressure that Zhang Xuan was feeling within from his students swiftly closing up to him. Heaving a sigh of relief, he picked up another

concentrated high-tier spirit stone and began driving his zhenqi once more.

Spiritual Perception realm primary stage!

Spiritual Perception realm intermediate stage!

Spiritual Perception realm advanced stage!

Spiritual Perception realm pinnacle!

Within an hour, his cultivation had soared to Saint 2-dan pinnacle. However, at the same time, the five concentrated high-tier spirit stones had been completely depleted as well, reducing to mere white powder.

Let me see how far I can extend my Spiritual Perception for! With such a thought in mind, Zhang Xuan began concentrating on expanding his consciousness.

According to the records on books, depending on the cultivation technique one cultivated, the area where one's Spiritual Perception could cover would differ as well. A typical Spiritual Perception realm pinnacle expert would generally be able to expand his Spiritual Perception over a radius of 400 meters or so.

Those who were stronger could reach 500 to 600 meters, but there was nearly no one who could reach the 1000 meters mark.

Given that he had cultivated the Saint Ascension Decipher and Heaven's Path Divine Art, he was interested to see how he compared to other cultivators.

Hu la!

Extending his Spiritual Perception outward, it swiftly crept beyond the isolated chamber.

400, 500... Zhang Xuan counted mentally.

In the blink of an eye, it had already reached the 500 meters mark.

1000, 2000...

Zhang Xuan thought that 1000 meters should be where his limit lay, but he found that he could continue to push it forward with relative ease. Eventually, it was only at the 2500 meters mark where he found that he had reached his limit.

2500 meters, that's roughly six times more than that of ordinary cultivators... Zhang Xuan thought excitedly as he retracted his Spiritual Perception,

He knew that his Spiritual Perception was bound to be powerful due to the strength of his Heaven's Path Divine Art, but he hadn't expected that it would be such an extent.

One must know that the space that one's Spiritual Perception covered increased exponentially along with the increase in radius, so expanding one's Spiritual Perception was an increasingly difficult task. In terms of the space covered, Zhang Xuan was more than two hundred times more than an ordinary cultivator!

With such a wide Spiritual Perception, he could easily notice the movement of anyone in the vicinity, making it difficult for anyone to spring an assault on him in battle.

On top of that, it seems like the keenness at which I can perceive my surroundings is far above that of other cultivators too. Zhang Xuan noted as he exhaled deeply.

This matter was truly too astonishing. If he were to speak of it, who knew how many cultivators would be scared to death.

As per his usual practice, it would be best for him to maintain a low profile.

The Combat Master Hall is indeed worthy of its title as one of the strongest organizations in Qingyuan City!

With even just a swift scan, Zhang Xuan found that the Combat Master Hall was filled with innumerable powerful formations which could easily kill even Primordial Spirit realm experts upon contact.

It was fortunate that he had strictly instructed Ruohuan gongzi and the others to keep those of the Xuanxuan Faction in check. Otherwise, if they were to cause trouble here, the consequences could be dire.

With my breakthrough to Spiritual Perception realm, I should be able to match Primordial Spirit realm experts now.

While Zhang Xuan's strength hadn't risen with his breakthrough to Spiritual Perception realm, his fighting prowess did increase significantly. In the past, he could only subdue Primordial Spirit realm cultivators through springing sudden assaults, but with his newfound strength, even Primordial Spirit realm experts would struggle to bring him down in a fair battle.

But of course, he would still do well to steer clear from Leaving Aperture realm experts like Hall Master Xing.

Still, just cultivating a single realm has taken me five concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Without a doubt, the need for spirit stones in my cultivation will only continue to increase... I really have to find a way to earn money... Staring at the white powdery remains on the ground, Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in vexation.

Just when he thought that he had become a tycoon after slaying the Ten Kings of the Qingtian Lineage, a short moment of cultivation had put him back into his place as a poor bloke.

He really had to find a way to acquire more concentrated high-tier spirit stones, or else his cultivation would stagnate once more.

Forget it, I'll deal with it later. For the time being, I need to deal with the trouble Hall Master Xing spoke of first. Let me head to the Fist Division, Palm Division, and Footwork Division to see what they have... Given how generous Hall Master Xing had treated him, it was only right for him to reciprocate the favor.

This was how diplomacy usually worked, and as the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, the Combat Master Hall was an ally he would want to bring over.

Understanding this, Zhang Xuan walked out of the isolated chamber and headed to the Fist Division.

1132 Three Days Later

Hualala!

The crisp melody of tea flowing into a cup filled a tranquil room.

Hall Master Xing placed the teapot in his hand down before passing a fresh cup of tea over to Elder Qi.

Elder Qi took a sip of it, and his eyes immediately lit up. “Excellent tea! It’s no wonder it’s worth such a huge sum. Its quality is definitely worth the fortune spent on it!”

Hall Master Xing had specially bought these Cloudmist Flower tea leaves from the Hongyuan Empire. Back then, he had thought that it was a little pricey, and he had only intended to give it a try. However, upon tasting it, he realized that it was really worth its price.

“It sure is fine tea, isn’t it?” Hall Master Xing nodded in agreement as he sipped on his cup of tea.

Over the past three days of hard work, he had managed to further reinforce his cultivation, bringing his state of mind and Primordial Spirit to a whole new level.

At this rate, he would be ready to face the lightning ordeal by the time it fell.

Looking at the elder before him, Hall Master Xing asked, “Elder Qi, how has your cultivation been going recently?”

“The Combat Master Hall’s Spirit Gathering Formation is indeed formidable. Just by cultivating for a short three days, I managed to reinforce my Half-Leaving Aperture realm cultivation,” Elder Qi said with a stroke of his beard.

He had to admit that the training facilities within the Combat Master Hall were truly impressive. If it had been anywhere else, it would have taken at least several months before he fully reinforced his Half-Leaving Aperture realm cultivation. But here, he managed to do it within just three days!

Admittedly, it would be quite some time before he was ready to push for a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm, but with his body having adapted to his current level of cultivation, he would be able to draw forth incredible might at a wave of his hand.

“It’s only because Elder Qi has a strong foundation. Not just anyone is able to utilize the formation to its full potential as you did,” Hall Master Xing remarked.

Ultimately, the formation only played an auxiliary role in one’s cultivation. What was more important was the cultivator himself.

Elder Qi had braved through many threatening situations, and this had elevated his state of mind to a transcendental level, allowing him to advance his cultivation swiftly. In fact, Hall Master Xing suspected that the other party might even be able to clear the Trial of Inner Demons easily.

Choosing not to dwell too much on the topic, Elder Qi asked, “How has Sun shi been doing recently?”

He had been wanting to formally pay a visit to his benefactor to thank him, but in the past three days, he had found that the latter had been working even more diligently than him. In fact, there was hardly anyone who had caught a glimpse of him in the Combat Master Hall.

“You know, I really have to admit that Sun shi is a true genius!” Hearing that question, Hall Master Xing recalled the various reports he had heard over the past two days, and his eyes lit up in agitation.

“Genius?”

“Un. The first place Sun shi visited was the Fist Division. I presume that you should have heard of the Strength Assessing Fist Pillar there, right?” Hall Master Xing asked.

Elder Qi nodded.

The existence of the Strength Assessing Fist Pillar was no secret in the Qingyuan Empire. In fact, there were quite a few people who would visit the Fist Division in hopes of borrowing it to assess their current strength.

It was a Saint-tier artifact, and it could accurately gauge one's punching strength.

“The record for the Strength Assessing Fist Pillar for Saint 2-dan was left behind by Combat Master Wang Ce eight thousand years ago. Combat Master Wang Ce was born with incredible strength, and he went on to cultivate the Art of Drawing Oceans and the strongest defensive secret art of our Combat Master Hall, thus strengthening his zhenqi and physical body to an unbelievable level.

“Not only that, he is also an avid fist practitioner. Over the years, he refined his fist art to an unprecedented level. Yet, he only achieved a score of 18 in the trial. On the other hand, with just two hours of cultivation, Sun shi broke the record and attained a score of 88!”

Even as he spoke of those words, Hall Master Xing's eyes could not help but widen in disbelief as he imaged the situation in his head.

It was not without reason that achieving a record was considered a great honor. It could only be achieved by pushing one's body to the very limits, achieving a level that could be considered very close to the limit of a human. As such, breaking a record was never an easy feat. Those who did succeed in breaking a record would also only achieve a score slightly higher than the previous record.

Yet, that fellow actually managed to clear the record with a score several times the previous score.

This was truly unbelievable!

“You said that he attained a score of 88?” Elder Qi's lips twitched.

“Indeed. I was astonished by the score, too, so I went to look for him to ask him about the matter. But he said...” At this point, Hall Master Xing suddenly shook his head, and a look of utter defeat surfaced on his face.

“What did he say?”

“He said that... he attained a score of 88 because he felt that it was an auspicious number. His pockets have been running dry

recently, and he hoped that this auspicious omen could change his luck a little,” Hall Master Xing replied hoarsely.

“...” Elder Qi.

“And after he was done with the Fist Division, he went on ahead to the Palm Division.”

Hall Master Xing suddenly fell silent at this point. It took a long while before he was able to carry on.

“As you might know, the Combat Master Hall’s palm techniques can be divided into eighteen types, such as soft and gentle or hard and forceful. In order to assess one’s comprehension of a certain palm type, the Palm Division has a trial guarded by eighteen puppets. Usually, clearing even the first puppet is a difficult feat for most combat masters, and yet... after he entered, he immediately triggered all of the puppets into action, and with a palm each, he defeated all eighteen of the puppets. All in all, it didn’t even take him ten breaths!”

“He defeated all of the puppets with a palm each?” Elder Qi widened his eyes in shock.

“Indeed! More importantly, the palm type he used corresponded perfectly to each of the puppets. In other words, his palm art changed eighteen times within just a short ten breaths!” Hall Master Xing continued.

“How is that possible?” Elder Qi could not help but shudder upon hearing those words.

As the wrist was one of the most flexible parts of a human body, palm arts tended to be one of the more complicated and profound battle techniques. Using a gentle palm art and a forceful palm art drew on vastly different strengths, and an abrupt switch between the two could easily lead to severe injuries. Yet, to change to eighteen different types within just ten breaths... Was this really a feat that could be pulled off by a human?

Was the other party’s body forged of metal, making him impervious to the backlash from the abrupt switches?

If it had been Elder Qi himself doing it, he had no doubt that his meridians would have ruptured.

“The true shocker has yet to come. You should know of our Guardian Division, right?” Hall Master Xing asked.

“Of course I do,” Elder Qi replied with a nod. “The Guardian Division is known for its Divine Hammer, which is capable of analyzing the flaws of a cultivator’s body and tempering them through hammering, thus enhancing one’s defenses. Once all 1,296 acupoints have been tempered, even blades will struggle to slice through one’s skin. Through it, the Guardian Division has developed generations of formidable combat masters!”

If the Weapon Division was the strongest spear in the Combat Master Hall, the Guardian Division was definitely the sturdiest shield of it.

Those who could master its heritage would be nigh indestructible on the battlefield. Putting aside arrows, even Saint-tier weapons would hardly leave a mark on them. Just like the resilient cockroaches, they were a fearsome force regardless of where they went.

“Indeed. The Divine Hammer is a Saint intermediate-tier artifact, and it has exceptional capabilities in tempering the human body. However, its strikes produce excruciating pain that permeate deep into the bones, causing normal combat masters to be unable to even withstand a minute of its tempering. Even I am unable to last more than five minutes. But when Sun shi entered the Guardian Hall to allow his body to be tempered by the Divine Hammer...”

Hall Master Xing clutched his forehead and exclaimed incredulously, “... he actually fell asleep!”

“He fell asleep?” Elder Qi nearly spurted blood.

“He said that it was simply too comfortable, so he ended up dozing off. Honestly, if not for the fact that we were worried for his health and dragged him out, he might have just slept for several days straight in there!” Hall Master Xing said helplessly.

When he saw saliva flowing from the corners of Sun shi's face, he had nearly fainted from horror.

Such excruciating hammering, and the other party could actually think of it as a mere massage and relax from it... It was truly inconceivable.

“After he woke up, he headed to the Footwork Division. In the Trial of Footwork, there are total of 122 hidden mechanisms. As soon as one steps into the trial, one will trigger the mechanisms, resulting in a relentless wave of attacks. The further one proceeds into the trial, the more complicated the attacks become, and the harder it is to dodge them,” Hall Master Xing explained.

Elder Qi nodded in response.

The trials of the Combat Master Hall's Ten Divisions were deeply feared in the Qingyuan Empire, and this was especially so for the Trial of Footwork.

It assessed one's reflexes, speed, judgement, and many other aspects. If one was lacking in any of those, one would be struck before one knew it.

“Before entering the Trial of Footwork, I earnestly warned Sun shi about the difficulty of the trial for fear that he would be injured by it. Yet, who could have known that... he walked in and out of the entire trial, but he didn't even trigger a single one of the hidden mechanisms! Thus, I forcefully activated all of the hidden mechanisms as soon as he entered the second time around, filling the entire trial with weapons and threats. Yet again, he walked in and out, but he still didn't encounter a single thing.”

Hall Master Xing looked at the sky with a look of despair and sighed. “It was then that I realized that he was simply too fast. Such that even before the hidden mechanisms could do a single thing, he had already passed by all of them.”

“Even the hidden mechanisms didn't have time to react?”
Elder Qi's body trembled in disbelief.

The hidden mechanisms were controlled by a formation within the trial, and they would be triggered as soon as one entered

the vicinity of the trap. Yet, to move so fast that even the mechanisms did not have time to process his existence... Just how fast did he move?

At such speed, the other party was capable of killing him before he could even perceive the other party's existence!

“Indeed!”

The more Hall Master Xing spoke, the deeper the bitterness on his face became.

To be able to become the head of a regional Combat Master Hall, it went without saying that he was an incredible genius in his time too. With his talent, he thought that he could easily reach levels beyond his peers as long as he were to put in hard work.

But upon seeing Sun shi, he suddenly realized that his talent was really nothing at all...

Before the other party, he was like dirt before the brilliant sun.

Just by strolling around in each division for less than four hours each, he was able to accomplish achievements that were unmatched by any predecessors and probably by many future generations to come as well.

‘Genius’ was no longer sufficient to describe him. In fact, even ‘monstrous’ seemed to be a little inadequate.

On the other hand, after hearing Hall Master Xing's story, Elder Qi's mouth was wide open.

He had thought that even if Sun shi was able to make some advancement in his fighting prowess over the past three days, it would surely have been minimal. No one could have imagined that he would be able to cook up such a huge commotion!

It took a long time before Elder Qi was able to calm down his agitated mind, and taking a deep breath, he said, “It seems like you have really chosen the right person this time around. Sun shi shouldn't have any problem dealing with the huge trouble you spoke of.”

After the past few days of interaction with Hall Master Xing, he had learned what the ‘huge trouble’ was. For a student faction of a Tier-1 Empire’s Master Teacher Academy to be able to force their Combat Master Hall to such a desperate state, it had to be said that the rumored Principal Zhang did live up to his reputation.

Even though he had never met Principal Zhang in person, just by looking at the strength of the Xuanxuan Faction, he knew that it would be unwise to underestimate the other party’s strength.

“Indeed. I was still worried if Sun shi would be able to match Principal Zhang, but honestly, after seeing what Sun shi has accomplished so far, I am really unable to fathom an opponent who would be able to match him.” After venting out the shock he had accumulated over the past few days, Hall Master Xing finally felt as if a huge burden had been lifted from his heart, and a smile returned to his lips.

Having seen the Xuanxuan Faction’s strength with his own eyes, it was inevitable that he was apprehensive about going against an opponent like Principal Zhang. However, after witnessing the peerless strength that Sun shi had displayed, all worries had vanished from his mind.

If a 6-star master teacher like Principal Zhang could defeat even a monster of Sun shi’s caliber, the Combat Master Hall might as well be replaced with the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy.

“That’s good. I am also interested to see Sun shi using his strength to surpass the undefeatable legend of the Hongyuan Empire!” Elder Qi nodded with a smile.

Taking a glance at the sky outside, Hall Master Xing said as he stood up, “Looking at the time, the members of the Xuanxuan Faction should be arriving very soon. Let me invite Sun shi over.”

Today was the day that the Combat Master Hall would be holding an exchange with the Xuanxuan Faction, and the latter should have been on their way over at that moment.

The Xuanxuan Faction was a huge headache, but Hall Master Xing did not think that they would lose in the exchange. After all, there was far more to a battle than just combat skills.

“Let me head there with you,” Elder Qi said as he stood up as well, and they began making their way out.

Shortly after they left the room, Division Head Liao walked up to them.

Noting that Division Head Liao was alone, Hall Master Xing asked with a frown, “Where is Sun shi?”

“He said that it was still early, so... he went to the Soul Division first!” Division Head Liao replied.

“Soul Division?” Hall Master Xing froze for a brief moment before his face turned ghastly pale. “The Trial of Soul in the Soul Division is managed by the Saint 4-dan Chrysoprase Soul Beast. Our Combat Master Hall had to pay a heavy price to invite it over... This is bad!”

“Chrysoprase Soul Beast?” Elder Qi pondered for a moment. “That saint beast is indeed born with a powerful soul, allowing them to easily knock out anyone. Are you afraid that Sun shi will be knocked out ahead of the exchange?”

“That’s not it. I’m afraid that he will tame the Chrysoprase Soul Beast!” Hall Master Xing exclaimed anxiously.

“...” Elder Qi. The number eight in Chinese is pronounced as “ba”, which sounds similar to the word for prosperity, “fa”. As such, eight is considered to be an auspicious number.

1133 He Started I

If the Heart Division was the most mysterious division of the Combat Master Hall, the most bizarre division was probably the Soul Division.

In the Trial of Soul, a cultivator could temper their soul. However, a moment of carelessness could potentially place one in a disoriented state, temporarily robbing them of their ability to think rationally.

Zhang Xuan pushed open the door and entered the trial. As soon as he took a step in, he immediately heard a slight moaning sound by his ear, as if an aggrieved ghost was crying beside him. That crying seemed to capture the entirety of one's attention, causing one to forget one's initial purpose.

Zhang Xuan frowned as he halted his footsteps. It's a type of demonic tune.

He had encountered a situation similar to this back at the Qiu Wu Palace as well. When used in the correct circumstances, demonic tunes could prove to be extremely dangerous, rendering one incapable of discerning fiction from reality. However, against Zhang Xuan, a cultivator of the Heaven's Path Divine Art, its effects were minimal.

Driving his zhenqi around his body, the effects of the demonic tunes immediately vanished without a trace. Through playing closer attention to the moaning sound, he was able to determine the general direction it was coming from, so he began heading in that direction.

The Trial of Soul was significantly larger than the Trial of Inner Breath and Trial of Martial Arts, spanning a radius of roughly fifty meters. However, as it was completely dark, it was impossible to determine where one was heading. Even one's Spiritual Perception was inhibited by the formation within, leaving one unable to perceive too far ahead.

Slowly proceeding forward, Zhang Xuan advanced for around twenty meters before his body abruptly jolted slightly. An oppressive pressure had suddenly assaulted him, seemingly attempting to tear his soul apart.

A soul attack? Zhang Xuan was taken aback for a moment before coming to a realization. It seems like someone is controlling the trial.

If it had just been a simple trial, it was impossible for the formation to realize so swiftly that the demonic tune was not working and resort to a soul attack instead.

For most cultivators, such a soul attack would cause them such excruciating pain that they would not be able to move at all. However, for Zhang Xuan, such a soul attack was truly trivial.

Putting aside the fact that he was protected by his Heaven's Path zhenqi, just the sheer size and strength of his soul made that pressure completely ineffective on him.

The more Zhang Xuan advanced forward, the greater the pressure became. At this point, even a Saint 3-dan cultivator would have already succumbed to the immense pressure.

Taking another two steps forward, Zhang Xuan finally identified the source of the pressure, and he chuckled softly.

"It'd be rude if I didn't reciprocate the favor to you. Why don't you try mine?" Zhang Xuan's voice was not too loud, but it sounded clearly throughout the trial.

The following moment, an overwhelming surge of soul energy burst forth from his glabella.

Even though he did not have any soul cultivation techniques beyond Saint realm, the soul tempering that he had undergone during the Saint Ascension Ordeal had condensed his soul considerably, such that it had assumed a lucid crystalline form. With the enhanced strength of his soul, he was able to exert a pressure many times greater than before.

Hong long!

In an instant, it was as if the air had turned as viscous as mercury. An incredible pressure burst forth, directed toward

the source of the soul.

Bam! Kacha!

The loud thud reminiscent of something falling heavily to the ground, accompanied with the sound of many things shattering simultaneously, echoed resoundingly in the air. At the same time, the ground also tremored intensely.

It was true that the other party's soul was powerful, but it was still severely lacking compared to his.

“A soul attack? Who are you?”

The next moment, a furious voice boomed in the room. Following which, Zhang Xuan saw a massive saint beast walking out of the shadows.

That saint beast was probably the one who had attacked him earlier. Under the immense pressure exerted by Zhang Xuan's soul, it had probably lost its balance for a moment and fallen to the ground, shattering many things beneath it.

“You are... a Chrysoprase Soul Beast?” Upon taking a look, Zhang Xuan matched the distinctive traits of the saint beast before him with the books he had browsed through, and he could not help but frown.

The Chrysoprase Soul Beast was a rather peculiar saint beast. Unlike most saint beasts, which relied heavily on their superior physical bodies in combat, the Chrysoprase Soul Beast specialized in soul offense instead. Blessed with an innately powerful soul, it could easily produce hallucinations and leave its opponents in a disoriented state.

It was an extremely rare beast, and not even the Beast Tamer Guild had seen many of them in its entire history. It was rather unexpected to see this rare beast in the Combat Master Hall.

This knowledge swiftly flashed through Zhang Xuan's mind before he answered the other party's question. “I am a master teacher who is here to challenge this trial!”

“You are a master teacher?” the Chrysoprase Soul Beast snorted. Deep hostility flickered across its massive eyes as it

sneered, “How could a master teacher possibly be skilled in the means of the soul oracles? Speak, who are you?”

Zhang Xuan was stunned for a brief moment after hearing those words, but he swiftly recovered and replied with a smile. “Soul oracle? You must have misunderstood me somehow.”

The heritage of the soul oracles had vanished from the Master Teacher Continent several dozen millenniums ago. As such, not even master teachers would be able to identify it with certainty even if he utilized the means of a soul oracle before them. He had not really thought that the Chrysoprase Soul Beast would be able to recognize it with a single look.

It was not a crime to inherit the heritage of the soul oracles, but ultimately, just like poison arts, soul arts were viewed as unorthodox and depraved, and they were deeply feared throughout the Master Teacher Continent. In order to avoid trouble, it was best for Zhang Xuan not to admit to it.

Hearing Zhang Xuan denying the matter, the Chrysoprase Soul Beast scoffed coldly. “Don’t bother lying to me. I have seen soul oracles in action before, and I know their means very well.”

The next instant, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt overwhelming soul energy crushing heavily down on him, seemingly trying to smash him into smithereens.

“I was just born with a powerful soul; I am not a soul oracle,” Zhang Xuan replied with a frown.

The pressure that the other party weighed down on Zhang Xuan like an immense mountain, threatening to crush him into bits. Any cultivator who had yet to reach Primordial Spirit realm would surely have caved in to such pressure instantly. However, to Zhang Xuan, it was truly nothing at all.

Seeing that his soul attack was completely ineffective against the young man before it, the eyes of the Chrysoprase Soul Beast narrowed slightly, and it harrumphed coldly. “Soul oracles are capable of drawing of their souls out and surviving independently. The truth will be clear once I shatter your physical body!”

With a furious roar, it abruptly leaped forward, and a massive claw flew toward Zhang Xuan.

Si la!

The furious momentum of the claws produced a sharp, shrill sound, leaving one's hairs standing on end. It felt as if it would mercilessly rip anything before it in two.

“Hmm?”

Not expecting the other party to suddenly launch a lethal assault against him, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows knitted together in displeasure. His feet swiftly took a few steps backward with amazing agility, thus dodging the other party's assault perfectly.

Over the past three days, Zhang Xuan had made his way through the Ten Divisions of the Combat Master Hall and collected whatever books they had in them. With his newly collected books, he was able to compile several higher tier Heaven's Path battle techniques.

Regardless of whether it was the might of his fists, the strength of his palm, or the sturdiness of his defenses, they had been elevated to a whole new level.

If he was only a match against Primordial Spirit realm cultivators three days ago, the current him could be said to be invincible among Primordial Spirit realm cultivators.

Or to put it in simpler terms, any cultivator who had not reached Half-Leaving Aperture realm would not be a match for him.

And among all his battle techniques, the improvement in his movement technique was the greatest. After collecting all of the books in the Footwork Division, he had finally managed to perfect the 1-dan of the Unbound Voyager into a Heaven's Path battle technique, and he had immediately cultivated it on the spot.

It was through the Unbounded Voyager that he was able to move so fast that not even the hidden mechanisms had been able to perceive his presence.

“Where do you think you are going?”

Seeing that the young man had escaped from its claws, the Chrysoprase Soul Beast bellowed furiously as it raised its claws once more. A formation whirred into action, and in the blink of an eye, the Trial of Soul was completely sealed. There was no way to escape anymore.

Huala!

After sealing the surroundings, the Chrysoprase Soul Beast immediately launch another series of attacks against the young man before it.

On the other hand, after dodging several lethal attacks from the saint beast before him, Zhang Xuan’s patience finally wore thin, and he shook his head. “If a fight is what you want, a fight is what you’ll get.”

As his figure blurred, Zhang Xuan appeared by the side of the Chrysoprase Soul Beast in the blink of an eye before shooting a powerful fist toward the latter.

Peng!

Under the staggering might of Zhang Xuan’s fist, the Chrysoprase Soul Beast’s figure retreated swiftly before crashing heavily into the roof above. Its figure then plummeted heavily back to the ground, and a huge pool of fresh blood flowed out of its mouth.

So weak?

Zhang Xuan was startled by how easily he had managed to subdue the other party for a moment before he recalled the unique trait of the saint beast.

Chrysoprase Soul Beasts were blessed with powerful souls at birth, but their physical strength and resilience could only be considered average, possibly only at the level of an ordinary cultivator. There was no way it could withstand the might of his Heaven’s Path Fist Art.

As such, with just a single strike, it was already severely wounded.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. I accidentally used too much strength.

Even though the other party had tried to kill him, he was ultimately still the guardian of the Trial of Soul. It would be hard for him to explain this to the Combat Master Hall if it died after facing him. Furthermore, it was due to the other party's doubts that he was a soul oracle that it had made a move on him, and considering the association of the soul oracles with the Otherworldly Demons, its actions were not completely unjustified.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan slowly walked toward the Chrysoprase Soul Beast. I guess I'll have to try saving it then.

...

While making their way toward the Soul Division, Division Head Liao said with a casual wave of his hand, "Hall Master Xing, the situation can't be as exaggerated as you make it out to be. The Chrysoprase Soul Beast has a gentle personality; it's unlikely that it will get into a conflict with Sun shi."

The Chrysoprase Soul beast was the saint beast responsible for managing the Trial of Soul. While it would use demonic tunes and soul pressure to temper the challengers, it was actually a mild-mannered and meticulous individual. In the time that it had managed the Trial of Soul, there had never been a single mishap.

Furthermore, it was not like Sun shi had intentionally entered the Trial of Soul to wreak havoc. No matter how he looked at it, the chances of a conflict breaking out between the both of them was truly unlikely.

"I honestly hope for that to be the case, too. You also know how far I had to go in order to convince the Chrysoprase Soul Beast to become the guardian of the Trial of Soul. I can't allow anything to go wrong at this point," Hall Master Xing said with a bitter smile.

He also wished that nothing bad would happen, but Sun shi was simply too exceptional an individual. Every single time he challenged a trial, he would either break several records or

cause a huge ruckus. Given so, he could not help but worry that the latter would somehow end up fighting against the Chrysoprase Soul Beast.

The Combat Master Hall could not have either of them getting injured at this point in time!

The three of them swiftly arrived at the Soul Division and entered the Trial of Soul.

Pushing open the door, they stepped into the trial, and the very first thing they saw was a giant Chrysoprase Soul Beast lying on the ground with its tongue sticking out from its mouth. Blood was trickling down from the edge of its mouth, forming a crimson puddle on the ground.

“Sun shi, w-what happened here?”

Not expecting his worst fears to actually come true, Hall Master Xing’s cheeks twitched uncontrollably. At this point, he really felt like crying.

“Hmm?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan turned around and saw the trio. A sheepish look crept onto his face as he asked, “Why are you all here?”

“We were afraid that you might get into a conflict with the Chrysoprase Soul Beast.” Hall Master Xing swiftly tried to mediate the situation. “I know that it might have attacked you, but that is its responsibility as the guardian of the Trial of Soul. It isn’t trying to pick on you or anything.”

He had rushed there in hopes of preventing any conflict between the duo, but he had ended up being a step too late.

Furthermore, from the looks of it, it seemed like the Chrysoprase Soul Beast had been done in real bad. It did not seem like it would recover anytime soon.

“If only that were the case...” Seeing Hall Master Xing speaking up on behalf of the Chrysoprase Soul Beast, Zhang Xuan shook his head. He was just about to begin explaining what had happened previously when the eyes of the Chrysoprase Soul Beast suddenly opened wide.

It exclaimed anxiously, “Hall Master Xing, don’t listen to his words! He’s a sou—”

But before it could finish its words, a certain young man had already sunk his feet into its face.

Peng!

Its words were stifled back into its throat as its massive body flew several dozen meters away before crashing back onto the ground. The floor of the Combat Master Hall was constructed of an extremely resilient material, but the impact of the Chrysoprase Soul Beast’s fall still created a huge web of cracks on the ground.

Its teeth plopped all around the ground as its head twisted to the side. It had fainted.

“Sun shi!”

Not expecting the young man to kick the Chrysoprase Soul Beast flying right before their eyes, Hall Master Xing and the others were stupefied. Panicked, they quickly turned to the young man, only to see the latter looking back at them with a helpless shrug.

“If I were to say that it made the first move... would you believe me?”

“...” Hall Master Xing.

“...” Division Head Liao.

“...” Elder Qi.

1134 Who Is the Opponent Whom I Need to Defeat?

Hall Master Xing and the others felt as if they were on the brink of insanity.

We saw you kicking the Chrysoprase Soul Beast in its face with our own eyes; you nearly killed it with that blow. And yet, you are telling us that it made the first move?

Has anyone ever spouted such bullsh*t before?

Just how on earth did it offend you that you have to go so far against it?

Was there a need for a genius like you to get so serious against a beast?

Sighing deeply, Hall Master Xing explained, “Sun shi, if the Chrysoprase Soul Beast has offended you in any way, I beseech you to forgive it. The Combat Master Hall had to pay a hefty price before we managed to convince it to become the guardian of the Trial of Soul. If something happens to it, the operations of the Soul Division will be affected.”

“Hu...” As Zhang Xuan had expected, the other party really did not believe his words. Knowing that it would not make a difference no matter how much he argued, he shook his head and said, “I understand. I’ll help you treat it then.”

Seeing that Sun shi did not hold any hostility toward the Chrysoprase Soul Beast, Hall Master Xing heaved a sigh of relief. “It’s fine. Our Combat Master Hall has top-notch medicine to deal with injuries. I’ll just get my men to bring some over.”

“There’s no need to waste good medicine for this. Allow me to treat it instead,” Zhang Xuan said. “Don’t worry, I am a physician too. I won’t stoop so low as to harm my patient!”

“Ah, I nearly forgot that Sun shi is a formidable physician too!” Hall Master Xing came to a realization, and he burst into

a hearty laughter.

The man before him was a formidable physician who could treat a poison that even Elder Qi was helpless before. With him treating the Chrysoprase Soul Beast, it should not be long before the latter was nursed to full health.

“Indeed, Sun shi’s medicinal skills are nothing short of amazing. Considering that the Chrysoprase Soul Beast has only sustained physical wounds, it shouldn’t be a problem for him.” Elder Qi nodded. “It would be a pleasure to see Sun shi’s medicinal skill in action...”

But as he said those words, his smile abruptly froze as his words came to a halt. Right before his eyes, he saw the young man walking up to the Chrysoprase Soul Beast and kicking it forcefully once more!

Peng!

The Chrysoprase Soul Beast flew right into the sky once more.

“...” Elder Qi, Hall Master Xing, and Division Head Liao.

Didn’t you say that you are a physician and you wouldn’t stoop so low as to harm a patient?

Didn’t you say that you are going to treat it?

Is there a physician in a world who treats their patient like that?

The trio nearly burst into tears.

Unable to stand it any longer, Hall Master Xing dashed forward and grabbed the hand of the young man before him and asked with a deep frown, “Sun shi, just what on earth do you want?”

If not for the fact that the other party was a benefactor to him and the Combat Master Hall, he would have definitely sent the other party flying with a slap at this very moment.

Peng!

With his hand grabbed by Hall Master Xing, Zhang Xuan had no choice but to stop what he was doing. He turned around and faced Hall Master Xing with a peeved look on his face and

said, “Hall Master Xing, I am in the midst of my treatment. Move aside!”

“Ah?” Hall Master Xing was slightly taken aback by Zhang Xuan’s forceful words.

Before he could respond to those words, the Chrysoprase Soul Beast suddenly rose to its feet and walked up to Zhang Xuan before lowering its body subserviently. “Sun shi, Bro Sun, Grandpa Sun, won’t you kick me a few more times? As long as you give me a few more good kicks, I’ll even acknowledge you as my master!”

“...” Hall Master, Division Head Liao, and Elder Qi.

Hall Master Xing was afraid that the Chrysoprase Soul Beast would leave the Combat Master Hall out of rage from a conflict with Sun shi, and that was why he had rushed over as soon as possible to mediate between the both of them. Yet, who would have thought that the Chrysoprase Soul Beast would actually have an extraordinary interest in pain?

As long as he kicks you, you will even go as far to acknowledge him as your master?

The heck! When I recruited you over back then, you were so arrogant, as if you were the master of the world! Why are you so subservient now?

Are those who specialize in soul arts as perverted as you are?

Wait a moment, isn’t this an opportunity as well? If I can get it to acknowledge me as its master, I won’t need to worry about it leaving the Combat Master Hall anymore, right?

After pondering for a moment, Hall Master Xing walked up to the Chrysoprase Soul Beast and cleared his throat. “Ahem! Chrysoprase Soul Beast, why don’t you acknowledge me as your master instead? I’ll kick you whenever you desire it!”

“...” Chrysoprase Soul Beast.

“...” Zhang Xuan.

Ignoring the sudden eccentric words from Hall Master Xing, Zhang Xuan turned to the Chrysoprase Soul Beast and said, “By now, you should know that I am not a soul oracle, right?”

The Chrysoprase Soul Beast's lips twitched slightly as it quickly replied. "Erk... Of course you're not!"

If he were to say that the other party was a soul oracle once more, it might just be killed on the spot.

Hearing those words, Hall Master Xing turned to the duo and asked, "Soul oracle? What are the both of you talking about?"

"Due to my abnormally powerful soul, it thought that I was a soul oracle and made a move against me," Zhang Xuan explained.

"You suspected Sun shi of being a soul oracle?" Hall Master Xing turned to the Chrysoprase Soul Beast and shook his head. "You must be misunderstanding something here. Sun shi over here is a particularly formidable spirit awakener, and that's why his soul may appear to be abnormally powerful. In fact, he was the one who helped treat the huge rift in my Primordial Spirit!"

"He's a spirit awakener?" The Chrysoprase Soul Beast was stunned for a moment before awkwardness spread across its face.

Despite their differing field of specialties, spirit awakeners had a deep understanding of souls just like soul oracles. Otherwise, there was no way they would have been able to enchant weapons, nourish souls, and reinforce Primordial Spirits.

To think that he would actually suspect a spirit awakener of being a soul oracle and even make a move on the other party...

Seeing that the other party no longer doubted him, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. At this point, he could not help but recall a particularly intriguing piece of information he had heard from the other party, so he asked, "I remember that you said earlier that you have met a soul oracle, but didn't the soul oracles go extinct many years ago?"

For it to have witnessed the means of a soul oracle in person, could it be that there were other soul oracles who had survived the wrath of the master teachers?

“That’s what I thought too. But a few decades ago, back when I was still traveling around the world, I encountered a soul oracle. He possessed exceptionally powerful means that allowed him to devour the souls of others to nourish his own. With my own eyes, I saw the soul of a good friend of mine being consumed, and I was nearly devoured myself. It is only due to my powerful soul that I was able to withstand his soul art and escape. This is also why I got particularly agitated when I saw you utilizing means reminiscent of a soul art and acted recklessly. Please do pardon me for that,” the Chrysoprase Soul Beast said.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan frowned.

There was indeed a soul art that allowed one to devour the souls of others to nourish their own. However, that was an extremely depraved technique, so Zhang Xuan had opted not to learn it.

“Where did you encounter the soul oracle?” Zhang Xuan asked.

The Chrysoprase Soul Beast pondered for a brief moment before replying. “I encountered the soul oracle in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows.”

“The Marshlands of the Northern Meadows?” Zhang Xuan was startled.

Could it be related to Vicious?

Back then, when Cang Xu attempted to kill him back in the Trial of Inner Demons, he had used Soul Search on the other party and learned that Vicious had a body part hidden in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows. For the Chrysoprase Soul Beast to say that he had encountered a soul oracle there... it seemed too much of a coincidence for the both matters to not be related to one another.

“There are soul oracles in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows? Why have you never spoken of it before?” Hall Master Xing’s face darkened.

The duty of the combat masters was not only in fending off the Otherworldly Demons but to protect mankind as well.

If a soul oracle capable of consuming souls appeared, it was their responsibility to defeat them.

“I intended to do so, but it’s a pity that the Combat Master Hall has no one who stands a chance against him at all. If I had spoken of it, it would just have resulted in unneeded deaths of combat masters!” the Chrysoprase Soul Beast replied.

“This...” Hall Master Xing’s face reddened.

Clearly, the Chrysoprase Soul Beast lacked confidence in the Combat Master Hall’s strength.

“Hall Master Xing, there’s no need for you to feel embarrassed by this. The means of the soul oracles are extremely difficult to deal with. Putting aside unprepared combat masters, it would be difficult for you to deal with the soul oracle even if you headed there personally.” As the Chrysoprase Soul Beast spoke, hostility surfaced in its eyes. “In fact, I only chose to accept your invitation to the Soul Division back then in hopes of tempering your Combat Masters’ souls and my own so as to exact vengeance for my good friend one day!”

Seeing its state, Hall Master Xing nodded in realization.

It was no wonder the Chrysoprase Soul Beast had never spoken about any further remuneration over these years. It seemed like its main purpose at the Soul Division was to avenge the friend whom it had lost to the soul oracle back then.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before asking, “Can you explain the situation to me? If the other party is truly a soul oracle, I might be of some help!”

His soul cultivation had already hit a bottleneck due to lack of further soul cultivation techniques. Thus, it was about time for him to search for new ones, and this could very well be an opportunity for him. Besides, considering that this matter was likely related to Vicious, there was a need for him to head over there personally.

Hearing those words, the eyes of the Chrysoprase Soul Beast lit up. “Given that the strength of Sun Shi’s soul exceeds even

mine, it would be great if you could help us defeat that soul oracle!”

Over the years, it had assessed many combat masters, but not a single one had been able to satisfy its demand. On the other hand, even though the person before it was still young, his soul was exceptionally powerful, such that even it was not a match for his soul. If the other party could help it in dealing with the soul oracle, they might be able to subdue him!

“My friend was a Verdant Cloak Beast, and his cultivation had reached Primordial Spirit realm, just like me. We heard that the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows had Afloat Soul Flowers, which are rumored to be able to enhance one’s soul significantly upon consumption. Thus, we headed there together.

“However, before we could find the Afloat Soul Flowers, we met that soul oracle and ended up fighting him. He was unable to match the both of us, so he turned around and fled. However, in the middle of the night, he assaulted us in his soul form, and with a bellow, he extracted my friend’s soul from his body and captured it. I tried every single method at my disposal, but I was unable to retrieve my friend’s soul from his grasp. Eventually, I could only watch with my eyes as he devoured my friend’s soul whole.

“After that, he tried to capture my soul as well. However, fortunately, due to my powerful innate soul, I was able to withstand his soul art and flee. Otherwise, I would have lost my life there as well!”

Recalling the situation back then, the Chrysoprase Soul Beast could not help but feel a little frightened.

As a master of soul arts itself, it knew how frightening soul oracles were. Soul arts might have appeared to be relatively weaker in a direct battle, but due to their elusive nature, it was nearly impossible to guard against them. If a soul oracle put their mind to it, they could easily draw out the soul of another in the middle of their dreams.

“With just a bellow, he was able to draw out your friend’s soul?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

There was no record of such a formidable soul art from the heritage he had obtained from Mo Hunsheng.

The Chrysoprase Soul Beast nodded. “Indeed. Just by calling out the name of my friend, the soul oracle was able to extract his soul. No matter how my friend retaliated or how I tried to save him, it didn’t work at all.”

Recalling the various means he possessed as well, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement. “It’s indeed difficult to guard against the means of a soul oracle...”

Just as he was about to continue speaking, Division Head Wei suddenly rushed into the room.

“Hall Master Xing, they are here!”

“They are here?” Hall Master Xing nodded. “Sun shi, let’s discuss this matter later. The big trouble that I told you about previously is here.”

“Great. I have been wanting to meet the man who dared provoke the Combat Master Hall. Don’t worry, I will have his teeth knocked out for you!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Following behind Hall Master Xing, they swiftly left the Soul Division, and before long, they arrived before a vast square.

Before they could enter the square, an excited exclaim suddenly sounded.

“Teacher, we have been looking all around for you!”

Turning around, Zhang Xuan saw Wang Ying and Zheng Yang rushing up to him.

Behind them, the many members of the Xuanxuan Faction were lined up neatly. Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, they immediately clasped their fists and greeted him. “Principal Zhang!”

“Un, you came at a good time. It happens that I’m about to clash with an expert, so it’d be good for you to watch carefully!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had been thinking of asking Hall Master Xing to allow the members of the Xuanxuan Faction to spectate the battle as

well. After all, it would be a good learning opportunity for them. However, considering how gravely Hall Master Xing regarded the matter, it did not seem right for him to turn it into a spectacle for others.

But since the entire Xuanxuan Faction was already there, he was spared from the dilemma.

“You are going to clash with an expert? Who is it?” Wang Ying asked curiously.

“It’s with... Wait a moment, let me ask first.”

It was only at this moment that Zhang Xuan realized that he still did not know whom his opponent was. Thus, turning to face Hall Master Xing, he asked with a polite smile, “Hall Master Xing, may I know whom the big trouble is? Who is the opponent whom I need to defeat?”

1135 What? I Am the Big Trouble?

Till now, Hall Master Xing had always referred to that person as ‘big trouble’, and he had not said who the person was.

As such, Zhang Xuan had no idea who the other party was. All he knew was that the other party was an extremely skilled individual who possessed fighting prowess at the peak of his cultivation realm.

As one who had cultivated the Heaven’s Path Divine Art, he was confident that he would be able to subdue any opponent in the same cultivation realm easily, but he did not believe that he was truly invincible. After all, his clone was always around to remind him not to get complacent. Since his clone was able to attain strength far greater than him, surely there would be some amazingly talented cultivators in the world who might have been able to do the same.

As such, from the start to the end, he had never doubted that the ‘big trouble’ Hall Master Xing referred to could have been referring to him.

After all, he had never met with anyone from the Combat Master Hall in his identity as the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy ever since he arrived in Qingyuan Empire, so how could he possibly be the ‘big trouble’ the other party was talking about?

Furthermore, from the tone Hall Master Xing assumed, it was apparent that the Combat Master Hall was facing a great adversary, which further served to convince Zhang Xuan’s subconscious mind that it could not possibly be him.

After all, he was a humble individual who could not get any more low profile. Ever since he arrived in the Qingyuan Empire, all he did was pay a visit to the Spirit Awakener Guild, so it did not make sense for a Leaving Aperture realm expert like Hall Master Xing to be so worried about him.

...

After asking, Zhang Xuan waited patiently to hear from Hall Master Xing whom that formidable expert was, only to see the Leaving Aperture realm cultivator's mouth twitching non-stop. His body staggered weakly from side to side, and it seemed as if he would collapse to the ground at any moment.

At this point, the thought of killing himself even flashed across Hall Master Xing's mind.

After everything he had done to guard against the Xuanxuan Faction, it turned out that the other party's commander had already infiltrated their camp, converting nearly all of the combat masters into his students.

To think that he was so naive as to believe that he had managed to find himself an expert to defeat Principal Zhang and resolve the crisis the Combat Master Hall was currently facing...

They had even gone to the extent of allowing Sun shi to learn their heritages, only to find out that he was actually Zhang Xuan at this point in time.

Not only did he fail to resolve the crisis, he even turned it into a catastrophe.

A mouthful of blood welled up at the back of Hall Master Xing's throat, ready to spew forth at any moment. Hall Master Xing turned around to look at Elder Qi, only to see that the latter had a flabbergasted look on his face as well.

Back then, he had wanted to see Principal Zhang's painting, which Zhuo Qingfeng had sent in, and compare it with Sun shi to verify if they were the same person. However, Elder Qi had happened to arrive at that moment and confirmed that Sun shi was his benefactor. He had guaranteed that Sun shi could not possibly be Principal Zhang.

From the looks of it now, it seemed that Elder Qi had no idea what was going on either.

If you don't know, don't make blind guarantees! Look at the trouble you have landed us in!

If only he knew this would happen, he would not have taken Elder Qi's word for it.

It just so happened that Feng Xun, Jiang Yuan, and the others were cultivating in isolation at the moment, saying that they wanted to condition themselves so as to face the Xuanxuan Faction at full strength.

Everything had happened so coincidentally that it seemed as if the heavens had planned the doom of their Combat Master Hall themselves!

Clutching his chest, Hall Master Xing felt his breathing becoming more and more unstable.

He felt like he was a true fool. All of those schemes he had come up with to fend against the Xuanxuan Faction ended up as nothing more than a joke. If anything, it had only hastened the downfall of their Combat Master Hall.

Why did life have to be so difficult?

Unable to stand it any longer, Hall Master Xing asked, "You are... Principal Zhang? Then why did you call yourself Sun Qiang?"

Not expecting the other party to ask this question instead of revealing whom to beat up, Zhang Xuan was slightly taken aback. Sighing deeply, he spoke in a tone reminiscent of an expert attempting to conceal himself in the mortal world. "I don't like to cause trouble or stand out too much. After I enchanted the Spirit Awakener Guild, I didn't want to bring unneeded trouble to the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy as a result of that, so I decided to adopt another persona instead."

It was truly a trouble being too outstanding, he could not even conceal his true identity when he wanted to.

How frustrating!

"Pu!" Upon hearing those words and seeing how the other party was acting, blood spewed out of Hall Master Xing's mouth, and his breathing became even more unstable.

You said that you don't like to cause trouble or stand out?

Low profile?

Low profile your head!

Over the three days you have spent in our Combat Master Hall, the ruckus and commotion you have caused never halted at any single point in time. You even went to the extent of turning almost all of our combat masters into your students!

If not for the fact that you were too busy cultivating and challenging the trials, perhaps our Combat Master Hall might have become yours by now.

Every single time you challenged a trial, you just had to create a record that left others deep in despair... and you call that being low profile?

There is no one in the world who could be more high profile than you!

“Hall Master Xing, what’s wrong?” Seeing the Leaving Aperture realm expert before him abruptly spurting blood in the middle of a conversation, Zhang Xuan worriedly checked on him as he stepped forward, wanting to help Hall Master Xing.

“You...” Looking at the innocent look on the other party’s face, Hall Master Xing felt so angered that he could have erupted. However, he eventually forcefully suppressed it.

To be honest, he could not blame Principal Zhang for this either.

In the first place, he was the one who went to the Spirit Awakener Guild to engage the other party’s help. Besides, the other party had no obligation to report his true identity either, especially to a stranger like him.

And more importantly, the other party had agreed to help him get rid of the ‘huge trouble’ out of goodwill.

It was a pity that the heavens seemed to be playing a trick on them, resulting in such an awkward situation.

“It’s nothing; I’m just a little short on breath...” Hall Master Xing waved his hand and rejected Zhang Xuan’s help. Still

unwilling to accept the truth, he asked once more, “You really are Zhang Xuan?”

“That’s right. I apologize for concealing this matter from you, but it was not my intention to lie to you,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Alright then...” Hall Master Xing’s face turned reddened further, and his breathing grew even more erratic.

Noticing that there was something amiss with Hall Master Xing’s state, Zhang Xuan frowned. “Hall Master Xing, is there something wrong? You were still perfectly fine a moment ago... or could it be that big trouble has already made a move on you?”

To make a move right before his eyes without him noticing, it seemed like the ‘big trouble’ was far stronger than he had anticipated!

“Cough cough!” Unable to watch on the situation any longer, Division Head Liao stepped forward and said, “Principal Zhang, the big trouble that Hall Master Xing is referring to... is actually you!”

He feared that if this situation were to continue, their hall master might just die from sheer frustration.

“What?” Zhang Xuan was startled. “I am the big trouble?”

“That’s right!” Seeing how the other party was completely oblivious to the matter, Division Head Liao nodded helplessly.

“But when you first mentioned the trouble in the Spirit Awakener Guild, I had not even been to the Combat Master Hall, and I haven’t met any of you before either.” Zhang Xuan was completely bewildered by the situation.

“Hu... You will have to ask them for this matter!” Division Head Liao said as he pointed to Wang Ying and the others.

Frowning, Zhang Xuan turned to his two direct disciples and asked authoritatively, “What did you two do this time around to make the Combat Master Hall so angry?”

“We...” Wang Ying’s face reddened as she said, “Some of the combat masters in the Combat Master Hall didn’t abide by the rules and sneaked over to our accommodation to challenge us

ahead of the exchange. As such, they ended up being pummeled by our Xuanxuan Faction. After that... they insisted on joining us, so we welcomed them with open arms and taught them the battle techniques and combat skills that you have taught us.”

“That’s all? From the very start, the purpose of this exchange is to learn from one another, so... this shouldn’t be any problem at all...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

If the members of both organizations were just challenging and learning from one another, it should have been no big deal at all. Was there a need for Hall Master Xing and the others to label him as ‘big trouble’ and even display such deep fear for him?

“Cough cough. Actually, the combat masters that joined the Xuanxuan Faction aren’t just limited to ordinary members. It seems there are five division heads too. They were impressed by your teachings, so they joined the Xuanxuan Faction as well...” Seeing that his teacher was still a little bewildered by the situation, Liu Yang elaborated further on the matter.

“Even the division heads have joined our Xuanxuan Faction?” Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched.

He finally understood what was going on.

This was no longer a problem of whether they joined the Xuanxuan Faction or not, but that the dignity of the Combat Master Hall was at stake.

No wonder the Combat Master Hall regarded him as their top enemy! Who would have thought that within just three short days, this group of rascals would dare to do something so preposterous!

How infuriating!

“You all... Truly preposterous! It’s out of goodwill that the Combat Master Hall agreed to have an exchange with us, so how can you poach their members? Is this the right way to treat our friends? Regardless of whether we are master teachers or not, we must abide by our morals and conduct ourselves appropriately! Even if the division heads willingly

joined the Xuanxuan Faction, it's not right to bring them into the Xuanxuan Faction! Is this how I have taught you all this while? You are ruining the valiant reputation I have built up for myself! How am I to face our friends in the Combat Master Hall in the future..."

Zhang Xuan began to berate Wang Ying and the others from the Xuanxuan Faction furiously.

But before he could finish his words, the many combat masters behind Hall Master Xing finally arrived at the square.

Over the past few days, Zhang Xuan had been too busy cultivating and challenging trials, so they had not been able to consult him on the problems that they had. Thus, upon seeing him standing in the middle of the square, they could not hold themselves back any longer. The entire group rushed forward excitedly and kneeled onto the ground.

"Paying respects to Teacher!"

"..." Wang Ying.

"..." Liu Yang.

"..." Everyone from the Xuanxuan Faction.

1136 Envoys From the Spirit Awakener Guild Headquarters Arrive

Wang Ying, along with the others from the Xuanxuan Faction, came to a realization.

Turning their gazes to Zhang Xuan once more, admiration couldn't help but seep into their eyes.

As expected of their teacher (principal)!

They had to utilize every single means at their disposal before they were able to convince three hundred combat masters to join the Xuanxuan Guild. On the other hand, their teacher (principal) simply marched straight into the Combat Master Hall and took every single combat master as his student...

Truly, they had been too narrow-minded and timid. How could one capture a cub without entering a tiger's den?

On the other end, Zhang Xuan's face had turned completely green at this point.

He was in the midst of lecturing his students when this drama suddenly unfolded before his eyes... The words that he had been intending to speak ended up stifling in his mouth just like that, and he found his breathing becoming more and more unstable.

In this moment, he suddenly felt like he could empathize with Hall Master Xing.

"There's no need to stand on ceremony. Let me introduce you, this is the Xuanxuan Faction which I have founded. This is a good opportunity for all of us to trade insights and learn from one another." Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand.

"Yes!" The combat masters nodded.

“As for you all, this is also a good opportunity for you to learn from our friends at the Combat Master Hall. It’s true that you possess an advantage in terms of combat sense and fighting prowess, but in terms of battle techniques and state of mind, none of you are close to coming on par with them. You all still have much to work on!” Zhang Xuan instructed.

He had focused his effort on lecturing the Xuanxuan Faction on combat skills, so it was inevitable that those from the Combat Master Hall would be unable to match them.

However, in terms of the foundations and sheer strength, the Xuanxuan Faction would definitely be on the losing end.

Ultimately, the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy’s foundation simply paled too much in comparison to the massive Combat Master Hall. In terms of resources and heritage, there was no comparing the two.

“You are members of the Xuanxuan Faction? I heard that Xiao Qin and the others have already joined your ranks... Are you still recruiting?”

“If not for my division head keeping a close eye on all of us the past few days, we would have long gone over!”

“I heard that you all possess exceptional strength for your cultivation realm, and I have long wanted to try your hand. Anyone interested in a duel with me?”

...

It didn’t take long for the combat masters and the members of the Xuanxuan Faction to mingle together harmoniously.

The Combat Master Hall had tried to lock down the news concerning the defection of Xiao Qin, the five division heads, and a few hundred other combat masters, but this matter was simply too big to be concealed. They might be able to stop others from speaking about it in the open, but they couldn’t prevent gossiping in the shadows. By this time, most of the combat masters had heard bits and pieces of the matter, and they couldn’t help but be curious in the Xuanxuan Faction.

And at this moment, hearing that they were personally taught by the great Sun laoshi, their excitement was palpable.

Very soon, the members from both organizations began crossing hands.

Xiao Qin was the first representative to step forth from the Xuanxuan Faction, and he managed to utterly defeat a long-time rival of his in the Combat Master Hall.

Even those whom he was hardly a match for in the past couldn't even last three blows in his hands.

Despite not receiving Zhang Xuan's direct guidance, Wang Ying and the others still unreservedly imparted their knowledge to him. Through earnestly learning from their teachings, he had gained many new insights into combat, allowing his fighting prowess to advance by leaps and bounds.

Not to mention, he was a genius in combat himself. Three days wasn't long, but it was still sufficient for him to make substantial improvement. All in all, his fighting prowess had increased by at least twofold.

"We are willing to join the Xuanxuan Faction as well. We humbly ask of you to teach us as well!"

Seeing how swiftly their companions had improved under the tutelage of the Xuanxuan Faction, the other combat masters couldn't hold themselves back any longer.

"Hai! Who could have thought that the ten thousand years of legacy of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall would be destroyed in my hands..." Seeing the sight before him, Hall Master Xing knew that there was nothing he could do anymore. A look of defeat reminiscent of a failed examinee surfaced on his face, and an ache so sharp that it rendered him unable to breathe assaulted his heart.

As the hall master, it was a failure in itself for him to be unable to bring the Combat Master Hall to greater heights under his leadership, let alone the absorption of the Combat Master Hall into an organization from a Tier-1 Empire. He had prepared himself for the worst to come, but seeing it happen before his eyes was nevertheless heart wrenching.

"Hall Master Xing, there's no need for you to blame yourself. This matter is not a bad thing to our Combat Master Hall; on

the contrary, it could even be considered as a blessing!”

At this point, Feng Xun suddenly arrived on the square.

He had been in seclusion ever since he heard of the arrival of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy three days ago, intending to prepare himself to pull off a great comeback during the exchange. Yet, when he finally came out of his seclusion, this was the shocking sight that welcomed him. It was inevitable that he would feel slightly rattled within.

However, recalling the various incredible feats that Principal Zhang had pulled off previously, this matter didn't seem to be too surprising anymore. In fact, he felt a little relieved even.

He wasn't aware that Zhang Xuan had managed to become a Celestial Saint, but the various affairs that they had gone through together in the Qiu Wu Palace was still fresh on his mind. Without a doubt, there was no harm to maintaining such close ties with an organization headed by a master teacher as formidable as the other party. With this layer of relationship, their Combat Master Hall would surely develop swiftly, and it was just a matter of time before they overtook the other Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls!

“A blessing?” Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao turned their gazes over.

“Indeed. Think about it, the young man whom Zhuo Qingfeng had brought to the headquarters to participate in the Progeny of Combat Selection, Zheng Yang, is Principal Zhang's direct disciple!” Feng Xun nodded in agitation. “If Zheng Yang were to clear the Progeny of Combat Selection, that would effectively mean that he is the next head of our entire Combat Master Hall, a powerhouse even when taking the entire Master Teacher Continent into consideration! Not to mention, he... is also a member of the Xuanxuan Faction!”

“This...” Hall Master Xing and the others were taken aback.

They had been too focused on the fact that the Xuanxuan Faction was a Tier-1 Empire organization that they hadn't considered matters from this perspective yet.

“Taking a step back, even if he fails the Progeny of Combat Selection, an genius who is qualified to participate in the selection is bound to become an elder of the Combat Master Hall at the very least. With him around, even if our Qingyuan Empire Conferred Master Hall were to join the Xuanxuan Faction, who would dare mock us?” Feng Xun continued.

Hall Master Xing and the others fell into deep thoughts.

If one were to look at matters from that perspective, that was indeed the case.

Even though the Master Teacher Continent viewed seniority with grave important, what was more important was the heart to learn.

No matter how old or senior an individual was, as long as the other party was more skilled than him in a single aspect, it would be worthwhile to learn from the other party.

Not to mention, Kong shi had acknowledged many individuals weaker than him as his teacher and learned from them without a shred of conceit or arrogance too! Since even a man respected as the World’s Teacher could lower himself, why couldn’t others do the same?

A willingness to humble oneself to learn should be respected, not ridiculed. What would be truly ridiculous was for one to choose ignorance over knowledge for his own pride!

If Zheng Yang were to become the Progeny of Combat, he would inherit the greatest heritage of the Combat Master Hall, and it would only be a matter of time before he became their next hall master. Surely there was no shame in joining the organization which the head of the powerful Combat Master Hall was a member of!

And even if the other party didn’t become the hall master, an elder of the powerful Combat Master Hall was still a plenty incredible figure in the Master Teacher Continent. Similarly, it would still be a honor for them to be in the Xuanxuan Faction too.

“I understand.” Having thought things through, Hall Master Xing sighed deeply and nodded. With this, the knot in his

heart was finally untangled. Turning to Zhang Xuan once more, he couldn't help but feel deep respect.

For a man in his twenties to have all of the combat masters choose him over the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall, which had ten thousand years of legacy behind it, he was truly a fearsome figure!

"His background probably isn't simple either!" Hall Master Xing remarked.

"From what I know, Principal Zhang's teacher goes by the name of Yang Xuan, and his cultivation has reached an unfathomable level far beyond our imagination..." Feng Xun nodded in response.

"Yang Xuan?" Startled, Hall Master Xing widened his eyes slightly. "Could it be..."

"Hm? Has Hall Master Xing heard of Yang shi before?"

"I recall hearing such a figure from my teacher before... There's formidable master teacher whom others address as Yang shi in the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, and his cultivation has achieved an astounding level matched by very few in the long history of the Master Teacher Continent! However, I'm not too certain as to whether this Yang shi's name is Yang Xuan or not..." Hall Master Xing said.

"Hall Master Xing's teacher? Do you mean... 8-star Combat Master Tong Qianqiu, the man who goes by the nickname of Inferno Adamantine?" Division Head Liao asked.

Even though Hall Master Xing had never spoken about his heritage, after several centuries of friendship, Division Head Liao was still able to fathom a thing or two.

Inferno Adamantine Tong Qianqiu was a formidable combat master renowned even in the Empire Alliance. With his steel fists, he instilled deep fear into his opponents. Once, in a battle, he had single-handedly slain more than several dozen thousand Otherworldly Demons, thus striking his name out in the Master Teacher Continent.

"Un." Hall Master Xing nodded.

“If even Combat Master Tong has spoken such words, that Yang shi must be truly a formidable figure. If Yang shi truly is Principal Zhang’s teacher, that would explain the latter’s incredible capabilities. Under the tutelage of such a formidable master teacher, he was bound to achieve great things in the future!” Feng Xun said.

He had originally intended on challenging Zhang Xuan once more to cleanse his name, but in this moment, such thoughts had already vanished from his mind.

Since it was impossible for him to catch up with the other party no matter what he did, he might as well spare himself from the humiliation.

It wasn’t a bad thing to set high goals, but a human must understand his own limits. Being too fixated on something impossible would only narrow one’s scope.

...

While Hall Master Xing and the others were chatting, Zhang Xuan was busying himself with managing the exchange.

Facilitating the exchange between the two organizations was no easy task.

Under everyone’s request, Zhang Xuan conducted a lecture at the very end of the exchange. By the end of the lecture, it was already late at night, and the members from both organizations departed from the square excited and satisfied.

Deciding to stay overnight at the Combat Master Hall, Zhang Xuan beckoned Wang Ying and Liu Yang over and said, “Here are the fist art, palm art, movement art, defensive technique, and soul cultivation technique which I have organized over the past few days. Take a look through them and internalize them.”

Over the past three days, he hadn’t just been busy cultivating. He had also compiled a couple of battle techniques and cultivation techniques which even ordinary cultivators could practice. Since Wang Ying and Liu Yang were around, he could impart it to them first.

“Yes!” Wang Ying and Liu Yang nodded as they flipped open the book. It didn’t take them long to finish browsing through the book, and with a clap of their hands, the books were completely destroyed.

If these books were to be leaked out, they might draw unwanted attention onto themselves. Thus, it would suffice for them to retain a record of the technique in their minds and cultivate it silently.

“If you have any questions regarding the techniques, raise them now.” Seeing that they were done, Zhang Xuan turned to them and said.

Wang Ying and Liu Yang quickly barraged him with all of the doubts they had.

Two hours later, the duo finally gained a thorough understanding of the battle techniques and cultivation techniques.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan was just about to send them back to their accommodation when Sun Qiang abruptly rushed in at this moment.

“Young Master, Guild Leader Ruan of the Spirit Awakener Guild seeks an audience!”

“Guild Leader Ruan? Why would she be looking for me?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

It couldn’t be that the guild building acting disobediently again and had secretly sneaked off?

But that couldn’t be! They had already signed a soul contract, so such a thing should be impossible!

“Invite her in!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand.

Nodding, Sun Qiang left the room. Soon after, he returned with Guild Leader Ruan and a middle-aged lady.

The middle-aged lady that had come with Guild Leader Ruan looked to be in her late thirties. The clothes she wore was ordinary, but there was an air of grace and nobility around her that made none dare to underestimate her. Her disposition

granted her an incredible presence that left one feeling tensed and deeply pressed.

“What incredible strength... Her cultivation seems to have even exceeded that of Hall Master Xing’s!” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in alarm.

Even without the Eye of Insight, he could still easily discern the extraordinary strength wielded by the middle-aged lady before him. Despite having made a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm, Hall Master Xing was nowhere close to matching up to her.

In other words, even at the very least, she was a Leaving Aperture realm expert!

When had such a formidable figure appear in the Spirit Awakener Guild?

“Pleased to meet you once more, Sun shi... or perhaps I should say, Principal Zhang!” While Zhang Xuan was still assessing the middle-aged lady with a doubtful look, Guild Leader Ruan walked up to him and greeted.

To be honest, she still found it hard to accept that the talented spirit awakener whom she had met a few days ago would turn out to be the principal of a Tier-1 Empire Master Teacher Academy.

“Guild Leader Ruan, there’s no need to stand on ceremony. May I ask for the reason for your visit at this late hour?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“To be honest with you, I have reported the matter regarding the guild building to the headquarters, and the headquarters regards the matter with grave importance. Let me introduce you, this is Elder Wei from our headquarters!” Guild Leader Ruan said.

“Headquarters? You mean the Spirit Awakener Guild headquarters?”

1137 Zhang Xuan's True Aptitude

Noticing Zhang Xuan's confused look, Guild Leader Ruan explained, "Elder Wei happened to be in the vicinity of Qingyuan City, so she was dispatched here."

Just like most other guilds, the headquarters of the Spirit Awakener Guild were located far away from the Qingyuan Empire. Even Saint 5-dan aerial beasts would have to fly for many days before they reached Qingyuan City. It was only due to Elder Wei being in the vicinity that she was able to make it there within three days.

After explaining the situation to Zhang Xuan, Guild Leader Ruan turned to Elder Wei and said, "Elder Wei, this is the genius whom I told you about earlier, Principal Zhang. The talent he possesses in spirit enchantment is unlike any I have ever seen or heard of!"

"Un." Elder Wei nodded. Turning to Zhang Xuan, she said, "Guild Leader Ruan has already told me about you. Within just a few hours, from knowing nothing at all about spirit enchantment, you successfully enchanted the guild building just by browsing through books. Your aptitude for spirit enchantment is truly frightening!"

"You're too polite." Zhang Xuan quickly waved his hand before asking with a perplexed frown, "May I know the reason behind Elder Wei's visit?"

"Principal Zhang is indeed a candid person. I am not the type that likes to beat around the bush either, so I'll get straight to the point. Our Spirit Awakener Guild headquarters regard you extremely highly, and we wish to extend our invitation to you to train at our headquarters," Elder Wei said.

For a person of her cultivation realm, there was no need for her to dawdle with pleasantries.

“Train at your headquarters?” Zhang Xuan was slightly startled for a moment before shaking his head. “I believe that Guild Leader Ruan must have told you that I am a master teacher as well. For me, spirit awakener is more of a side occupation, so I don’t think I will be devoting too much to furthering my skills in it.”

If he did not manage to become a 9-star master teacher before he reached thirty, his life would be forfeited. Spirit awakener was a wonderful occupation, but he could not afford to allow his attention to wander at this moment.

Furthermore, while it was true that he could advance his cultivation swiftly by tapping into the resources in the Spirit Awakener Guild, there was a catch to it. If he received benefits from the Spirit Awakener Guild, he would have a responsibility to it as well. Give and take, this was how the world worked. The Spirit Awakener Guild would never allow him to shirk off his responsibilities to it after investing resources in him.

It was for this reason that Zhang Xuan had chosen to slowly advance with his own strength. He didn’t want to owe too big of a favor to anyone and end up slowing his advancement as a master teacher and a cultivator.

“You can resign from being a master teacher.” Elder Wei looked at Zhang Xuan intently. Her face was impassive, but the sharp glint in her eyes revealed the deep confidence that she had. “With the heritage and resources available at our headquarters, as long as someone of your aptitude works diligently, I am confident that you will one day gain control of the Spirit Awakener Mountain and become the Spirit Awakener Sovereign! At such a level, even 9-star master teachers will have to treat you with the utmost respect. Isn’t that much better than slowly fumbling your way up as a master teacher?”

As spirit awakening was a support-based occupation, it was inevitable that its fighting prowess was beneath that of the other guilds. However, if one could reach the very top, the potential it wielded was immense.

If the young man before her could gain control over their sacred lands and become the Spirit Awakener Sovereign, what was there to be feared of 9-star master teachers?

“I won’t resign as a master teacher,” Zhang Xuan replied resolutely. “That is the primary pursuit of my life. I am interested in learning spirit enchantment as well, but ultimately, it’s only a supporting occupation to me.”

He might have only chosen to become a master teacher out of convenience at the start, but at this point, it had become a lot more than that. Even without his Innate Fetal Poison, he would not have been willing to abandon his identity as a master teacher to become a spirit awakener.

Elder Wei frowned. “There’s no need to answer me so quickly; I’ll give you a few days to think your decision through. This is a rare opportunity for you to soar to the top. Such a chance won’t come again.”

If it had been anyone else in the young man’s stead, he would have surely leaped at her offer. After all, the Spirit Awakener Guild was still one of the more influential powers in the Master Teacher Continent.

It might not be up to par with behemoths like the Master Teacher Pavilion and the Combat Master Hall, but ordinary guilds couldn’t hope to compare to it.

Yet, to flatly reject the offer like that...

“I am thankful for your offer, but my mind is set. There’s no need for me to contemplate any further,” Zhang Xuan replied with a polite smile.

He could take spirit awakener as his supporting occupation, but there was no way he was going to abandon his main occupation for it.

However, it would be disrespectful to the Spirit Awakener Guild, and there was no way Elder Wei was going to accept that for an answer.

After all, that would effectively mean that they were devoting their resources to groom a master teacher for the Master Teacher Pavilion!

“Even though master teachers are the number one occupation of the continent, the resources to go around are severely limited, and rivalry over them is strife. Reaching 9-star is no easy feat at all. However, as long as you come to the Spirit Awakener Guild, all kinds of valuable resources will be at your disposal.

“Furthermore, our Spirit Awakener Guild is filled with all kinds of beauties. If you wish for it, you will be able to pick any of them. In fact, if you desire so, you can even enchant any building or weapon that takes your fancy and regard them as your closest mate. Why do you have to make things difficult for yourself?” Elder Wei asked with a frown.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “I have no interest in such shallow pursuits. Back then, the Glacier Plain Court also offered me similar terms, but I rejected them nonetheless.”

It seemed like the Glacier Plain Court and the Spirit Awakener Guild really had a low opinion of men. It was as if they thought that men were all lecherous individuals who were only interested in their lower body!

What a joke!

Hu Yaoyao, Zhao Feiwu, and the others were top-notch beauties, and it was not as if he was oblivious to the feelings they had for him. If he truly wanted it, he could have easily kept them by his side.

“Glacier Plain Court?” Elder Wei was taken aback.

There were many beauties in the Spirit Awakener Guild, but they were still far from matching the Glacier Plain Court.

Most female cultivators in the Glacier Plain Court practiced yin attribute cultivation techniques, which further accentuated their feminine charms.

It was for this reason that most powers in the Master Teacher Continent viewed marrying a disciple of the Glacier Plain Court as a huge honor.

Upon learning that the Glacier Plain Court had attempted to recruit the young man before her only to fail, Elder Wei

hesitated for a moment before flicking her wrist. A grayish stone appeared on her palm.

“This Spirit Gauging Stone over here is able to assess one’s aptitude as a spirit awakener. If your aptitude has reached the tenth level, I can help you apply for more favorable terms with the headquarters. Perhaps, it might even be possible for you to not resign as a master teacher!”

“Assess one’s aptitude as a spirit awakener?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Elder Wei hesitated for a moment before switching to zhenqi telepathy. “That’s right. To be honest with you, only one whose aptitude in spirit enchantment has reached the tenth level will stand a chance in successfully enchanting the Spirit Awakener Mountain. However, it’s a pity that it has been five thousand years since such an individual has emerged in our guild.”

This was a secret of their guild. Considering that it was her first time meeting with the other party, she should not have revealed such deep secrets. However, according to Guild Leader Ruan, the young man was likely to possess an aptitude of the tenth level. If that truly was the case, she would have to bring him back to the headquarters regardless of the cost.

Otherwise, the Spirit Awakener Guild would only continue down its declining spiral and eventually end up being absorbed into the other powers.

Even though the Spirit Awakener Guild had many allies to rely upon, they still needed to possess some strength of their own. Otherwise, if they were to grow too reliant on others, the others could use it as leverage against them and gradually control them.

“Spirit Awakener Mountain...”

“The Spirit Awakener Mountain is an artifact formed naturally by the forces of nature, and it is the greatest trump card of our guild. It’s rumored that the mountain is actually a rock mined from a world above ours. Once successfully enchanted, the spirit awakener will attain strength on par with 9-star master

teachers. With that, there will be nothing in the world that could stop them!” Elder Wei said with a hint of pride in her voice.

“It’s so formidable?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

To attain strength on par with 9-star master teachers just by successfully enchanting it... that was as good as soaring to the heavens in a single step!

On top of that, he would even be able to keep master teacher as his main occupation. It would be a lie if he said that he was not moved by this deal.

Not to mention, with the vast resources of the Spirit Awakener Guild, he would no longer have to worry about a lack of concentrated high-tier spirit stones and pinnacle spirit stones. Everything would be within his reach.

Furthermore, he would be able to access their cultivation technique manuals and compile the Heaven’s Path Divine Art all the way to Saint 9-dan. Even if he took his time and advanced only a single realm a day, he would still be able to reach the very top of the Master Teacher Continent within just a single week, becoming an existence on par with Kong shi!

“Alright!” Seeing that Zhang Xuan was hooked, Elder Wei nodded as she passed the Spirit Gauging Stone over.

“The test is very simple. Just grasp the stone lightly and silence your mind, and it’ll automatically assess your aptitude.”

Zhang Xuan replied with a nod as he took the stone.

Placing his hands around it tightly, he closed his eyes.

To be honest, he was also interested to find out what his aptitude in spirit enchantment was.

As long as he could reach the mark and the other party did not insist on him resigning as a master teacher... he would seriously consider heading to the Spirit Awakener Guild headquarters.

Weng!

In an instant, he entered the state of Heart of Tranquil Water. A brilliant light burst from the stone clasped in his hands.

“Alright, it’s done!”

A moment later, the light dissipated, and Zhang Xuan opened his palm.

Elder Wei and Guild Leader Ruan quickly rushed forward to take a look at the stone, and at a single glance, their eyebrows shot up in astonishment. They couldn’t help but rub their eyes in disbelief.

“What’s wrong?” Seeing the duo reacting in such an exaggerated manner, the bewildered Zhang Xuan lowered his gaze to look at the stone as well, and his mouth fell open.

“How is this possible?”

On the stone, there was a single number—3!

“3... Does this number mean that my aptitude has only reached the third level?” Zhang Xuan asked hurriedly.

A moment ago, Elder Wei had said that the highest level of aptitude was 10, and given that he possessed capabilities on par with 7-star pinnacle spirit awakeners, even if he wasn’t at the tenth level, he should at least be at seventh or eighth. For 3 to appear... what the heck?

“That’s right. It means that your aptitude has only reached the third level,” Elder Wei said with twitching lips.

After hearing the report, she had personally dropped by the Qingyuan Empire Spirit Awakener Guild to take a look at the guild building. Based on her deductions, the other party’s aptitude should, at the very minimum, be at the ninth level. Yet... third level?

Wasn’t that a little too low?

“What does this represent? Does it mean that... I’m very weak?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“This...” With a conflicted expression, Elder Wei had no idea how she should speak of this matter to the other party. She paused for a brief moment before pointing to the Spirit

Gauging Stone in her hand. “This stone possesses spirit of the fourth level.”

“...” Zhang Xuan.

“Why don’t I give it another try then?” Fearing that something might have gone wrong, Zhang Xuan tried it a few more times. However, the result still remained fixed at 3.

Seeing the number that kept appearing relentlessly on the Spirit Gauging Stone, Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in frustration.

He had thought that his talent in spirit enchantment would at least be decent, if not perfect, but to think that he was even worse than a stone.

How frustrating!

It seemed that the reason he was able to become a spirit awakener so easily, even successfully enchanting the entire guild building, wasn’t due to his ‘astounding’ aptitude in spirit enchantment. Rather, it only meant to say that the Heaven’s Path Spirit Enchantment Art was simply too formidable!

Elder Wei shook her head bitterly as she stood up. “I have imposed myself on Principal Zhang today. I’ll be taking my leave now.”

It might still have been a mistake the first time, but with the same result appearing so many times, she could no longer deceive herself.

Not only did Principal Zhang not possess exceptional talent in spirit enchantment, his aptitude was atrociously horrendous! It was most likely due to sheer luck that he had been able to successfully enchant the guild building.

She had thought that the Spirit Awakener Guild had finally found its savior, but from the looks of it... how could it be that simple?

If a genius with an aptitude of the tenth level could appear that easily, the seat of the guild leader of the Spirit Awakener Guild wouldn’t have been empty for the past five thousand years,

leaving them with no choice but to be subordinated to the other powers.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony,” Zhang Xuan replied awkwardly.

He had been bargaining with the other party a moment ago, but in the end, he was worse than a mere stone.

Just recalling what had happened left his face reddening in shame.

“I will have to ask of Principal Zhang to keep the matters concerning our guild a secret.” Sending a telepathic message over, Elder Wei beckoned to Guild Leader Ruan and said, “Let’s go.”

Right when the both of them were about to leave the manor, a crisp voice sounded.

“Teacher, can I give the Spirit Gauging Stone a try, too?”

1138 Departure

The person who had just spoken was Wang Ying.

When Elder Wei and the others entered the room earlier, she and Liu Yang had still been in the midst of cultivating. Since it didn't seem like anything confidential, they didn't excuse themselves.

However, when Elder Wei took out the stone, she had felt a tingling sensation in her heart. It was a feeling reminiscent of... intimacy? Thus, she could not stop herself from asking for a go.

Zhang Xuan turned to his student and asked, "You wish to give it a try?"

At this moment, Wang Ying's face was completely red, and her body was trembling slightly.

"Yes... Somehow, I feel a kind of attraction force between me and the stone..." Wang Ying nodded.

"Attraction force?" Noting the serious look on Wang Ying's face, Zhang Xuan turned to Elder Wei and said, "Elder Wei, I might need to trouble you for this."

"It's fine." Elder Wei nodded. With a flick of her finger, the Spirit Gauging Stone flew toward the young lady, landing accurately in the latter's hand.

Without saying anything, Wang Ying placed the stone between her palms before slowly closing her eyes.

Weng!

A blinding light burst from the stone. It took a while before it dissipated, and a string of numbers slowly floated into appearance.

"This..." Upon seeing the number on the stone, Elder Wei's body jolted. Even Zhang Xuan was dumbfounded.

"H-how can this be?"

Two digits sat quietly on top of the Spirit Gauging Stone—11!

“Didn’t you say that the tenth level is the highest level? Why does the result reflect 11?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“I-I have no idea!” Elder Wei was bewildered.

Based on what she knew, the tenth level was the highest level achievable. Only one who had reached this peak was qualified to enchant the Spirit Awakener Mountain and become the next Spirit Awakener Sovereign. For 11 to appear... what did this mean?

Suddenly, a thought came to Elder Wei’s mind, and she spoke with a quivering voice. “C-could it be... this is the level of aptitude of the founder?”

“The level of aptitude of the founder?” Zhang Xuan asked in incomprehension.

“According to the legends, the founder of our Spirit Awakener Guild, known to the world as the Fairy of Spirit Enchantment, possessed an aptitude above ten in spirit enchantment, reaching a level beyond our imaginations. It’s for this reason that she was able to turn an entire mountain into a powerful artifact and enchant it. Back in that era, even Kong shi was fearful of her. It should have been impossible for an individual as talented as our founder to appear once more, but to think that I would meet such an individual in my lifetime!” Elder Wei’s breathing hastened as her face flushed crimson.

She had originally hoped to find a genius of the tenth level to restore glory to the guild, but to think that she would actually find a genius of the eleventh level instead!

She could hardly imagine what this represented!

As long as they groomed her well, she could potentially become a figure as powerful as their founder!

“Young lady, do you wish to follow me back to the Spirit Awakener Guild?” Elder Wei asked anxiously.

She had definitely found a treasure this time around! If she could get the other party to return with her, the Spirit

Awakener Guild would reach greater heights in the near future, perhaps even ushering another era of greatness for them!

“I...” Wang Ying had not expected for her aptitude in spirit enchantment to be so great, either. Panicked, she could not help but turn to the young man. “Teacher, I’ll listen to your will...”

No matter how good her aptitude in spirit enchantment was, the will of her teacher was much more important.

“Principal Zhang!” Elder Wei glanced at Zhang Xuan anxiously.

“This...” Slightly hesitant, Zhang Xuan turned to Wang Ying and said, “Execute a punching routine for me.”

“Yes!” Nodding, Wang Ying swiftly executed an elegant but powerful set of punches.

Hu la!

Her punch tore through the air like a sharp spear, creating a sharp gust of wind.

This was a fist art that she had just learned from Zhang Xuan, but she had already achieved considerable mastery in it.

Hu!

A book appeared in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

Zhang Xuan placed his finger on it, and the information concerning Wang Ying flowed into his mind.

Swiftly looking through it, a frown emerged on his forehead.

There was nothing concerning Wang Ying’s talent as a spirit awakener inside at all. To be more exact, there was not anything that hinted at it either.

Is the Library of Heaven’s Path no longer accurate? Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

The Library of Heaven’s Path had reflected information on Zhao Ya’s Pure Yin Body the first time he met her, and the same went for Yuan Tao and Wei Ruyan as well.

So, why was Wang Ying's aptitude in spirit enchantment not reflected in her Library of Heaven's Path book?

Does the Library of Heaven's Path not reflect acquired constitutions? Back then, Lu Chong's Combat Soul Constitution wasn't reflected in it either, Zhang Xuan wondered.

Back then, the Library of Heaven's Path did not reflect the reason behind Lu Chong's massive soul. It was only through Mo Hunsheng that he learned of the Combat Soul Constitution and that Lu Chong was suited to learn soul arts.

Most likely, the situation was the same with Wang Ying as well. It might not have been an ability she was born with, and perhaps due to certain conditions of the Library of Heaven's Path, it wasn't reflected in it.

Wang Ying has a conscientious personality, and she is far more meticulous than any of my other students in deciphering the simplified Heaven's Path Divine Art that I impart to them. Perhaps it might be the work of her personality and the prowess of the Heaven's Path Divine Art at work that resulted in a change in her constitution, granting her such talents, Zhang Xuan deduced.

Fate is not something that is fixed. Not even the massive hands of the heavens are capable of grasping everything.

In truth, whether it was Lu Chong or Wang Ying, their talent could only be considered average among countless others in the Master Teacher Continent. However, despite the deficiencies that fate had given them, they had still ended up meeting Zhang Xuan and cultivated the powerful Heaven's Path Divine Art, thus changing their lives for good.

For better or for worse, destiny was a capricious power.

Perhaps, even the seemingly omnipotent Library of Heaven's Path was not infallible before the capricious nature of the world.

In teaching a student, it's important to assess their talents individually and cultivate their strengths. However, it is also important to assess their growth and make alterations

accordingly. There are some who might not show aptitude in a certain craft initially, but a sudden bout of enlightenment could bring about massive growth in their capabilities in the field. When such a situation happens, it wouldn't do to continue viewing them as a weaker student and teaching them as such...

A sudden enlightenment sprouted within Zhang Xuan's mind. He felt as if he was on the verge of coming onto something important, but when he tried to grasp it, it seemed to elude him.

He tried to delve deeper, to grab hold of it, but at that moment, Elder Wei's voice jolted him back to reality. "Principal Zhang!"

Raising his gaze, Zhang Xuan saw the middle-aged lady looking at him anxiously.

She really wanted to take Wang Ying away, but she could keenly sense the deep relationship between the teacher and student. If the latter was unwilling to go with her, it could create some feelings of aversion between Wang Ying and the Spirit Awakener Guild.

"Un." Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan knew that this wasn't the time for him to be thinking about other matters. Turning back to Wang Ying, he asked, "Are you willing to head to the Spirit Awakener Guild?"

In such situations, what was important was not his opinion but his student's. His role was only to help guide the latter along the road of life.

"I..." Wang Ying frowned in a dilemma.

"At the Spirit Awakener Guild, you will be entitled to a great pool of cultivation resources and a complete heritage. Naturally, you will also advance much quicker through the ranks. However, even if you choose to follow behind me, I am confident that I'll be able to bring you to the same height eventually!" Zhang Xuan looked at Wang Ying calmly with deep confidence in his eyes.

Heading to the Spirit Awakener Guild was a good opportunity, but even if Wang Ying did not wish to take the opportunity, Zhang Xuan was still confident that he could groom her into becoming one of the strongest experts on the Master Teacher Continent.

The ultimate decision lay in the hands of the young lady before him.

A deeply conflicted look surfaced on Wang Ying's little face. A moment later, she spoke up meekly. "Teacher, I... Just like Zhao Ya, Yuan Tao, and the others, I wish to share your troubles as well. I don't want to continue being a burden to you!"

If she opted to follow her teacher, she would surely reach incredible heights in the future. In fact, she did not think that the heritage of the Spirit Awakener Guild could compare with her teacher's lectures. But... as her cultivation grew, the resources she required to advance through each realm would increase exponentially. Even though her teacher had never uttered a word of complaint about the matter, she could not bring herself to keep dragging her teacher back. She wanted to become a person worthy of standing beside her teacher to assist him, and not baggage that was dragging him down all the time.

If she headed to the Spirit Awakener Guild and became the Spirit Awakener Sovereign, she could gain power swiftly. With her newfound strength, she would be able to help her teacher in his time of need.

She had not heard it from Zhao Ya herself, but she felt that it was with the same conviction that the latter had made the decision to join the Glacier Plain Court.

And the same went for Zheng Yang as well.

As the first student his teacher accepted, she could not bring herself to continue selfishly leeching off him.

On the other hand, upon hearing Wang Ying's words, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. "You are my student, how can you possibly be a burden to me?"

They had only been together for a short year, but the experiences that they had gone through together were unforgettable. The bond between them was one that would never be severed.

Wang Ying might have thought that she was a burden, but to him, she was family. How could a family member possibly be a burden?

Hearing Zhang Xuan's words, Wang Ying's eyes reddened. She was silent for a moment before resolution filled her eyes, and she declared, "I want to head to the Spirit Awakener Guild!"

Teacher, I know that you view me as your family, but it's the same for me as well!

This is an opportunity for me to grow and soar into the greater sky. In the past, you have sheltered me from the storm, and now, it should be my turn to protect you!

That's because... we are a family!

Zhang Xuan lowered his head and nodded silently.

A long moment later, he said, "Since you have made your decision, go on then!"

All parties must eventually come to an end. Even though he knew that it was just a matter of time before his students would leave his side, separation was still difficult for him each time.

Of his seven direct disciples, Zhao Ya had gone to the Glacier Plain Court, Lu Chong had headed to the Ancient Domain of Soul Oracles, Yuan Tao had returned to his clan, Wei Ruyan had left for the Poison Hall, and Zheng Yang had departed for the Combat Master Hall headquarters...

Five had already left his side.

And now, the sixth was leaving him, too.

Of course, Zhang Xuan was glad to see that they were grasping the opportunities before them. With these opportunities, he had no doubt that they would reach incredible heights.

Just that... the rational mind and the sentimental heart were two separate organs in the body. He knew that it was better for them, but such rationality did little to alleviate the sorrow of separation.

“Teacher, you must take care of yourself...” Kneeling on the ground, Wang Ying spoke hoarsely before making eight resounding kowtows.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded before placing a finger lightly on her forehead. A surge of Heaven’s Path zhenqi flowed into her body.

Placing his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan said, “If you meet with any danger in the future, just activate this surge of zhenqi, and I’ll know, no matter how far away I am. If anyone dares bully you, even if the other party is the strongest sect on the continent or even the Master Teacher Pavilion itself, I’ll definitely redress your grievances!”

His tone was impassive, but the conviction in his voice was clear for all to hear.

“Un.” Wang Ying nodded as she flashed a smile at Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan turned to Elder Wei and said, “Elder Wei, I’ll leave my student to you. I hope that you will treat her properly. If I ever learn that she has suffered the slightest grievance in the Spirit Awakener Guild headquarters, know that I’ll visit there personally and demand an explanation.”

To be threatened by a mere Saint 2-dan cultivator, it was natural that Elder Wei was unhappy. However, knowing that the other party was standing up for his own student, her heart still softened a little. “Don’t worry. Our Spirit Awakener Guild will surely protect her with everything that we have; we won’t allow her to suffer the slightest grievance, so you need not worry!”

For five thousand years, there had not been a single spirit awakener whose aptitude had reached the tenth level. It was not easy for one who possessed an aptitude of the eleventh

level to appear, so how could they allow anything to happen to her?

After all, the future of the Spirit Awakener Guild was at stake over here!

“That would be for the best.” Zhang Xuan could tell that there was not any falsehood in the other party’s words, and he nodded in satisfaction. Then, he turned around and waved his hand. “Since this matter is decided, it would be best for you to leave now!”

Unlike Zhao Ya’s decisiveness, Wang Ying had a soft heart. The longer they delay the matter, the more likely that Wang Ying would hesitate and change her mind.

“Teacher...”

How could Wang Ying not understand her teacher’s intention? Her body trembled, and tears trickled down her cheeks.

Elder Wei walked up to Wang Ying and said, “Let’s go.”

“Un.” Wang Ying wiped her tears and nodded.

Elder Wei then turned to Guild Leader Ruan and instructed, “It would be best for us to return to the headquarters as soon as possible, so we won’t be staying tonight.”

After finding such a genius, it would be safer to escort her back to the headquarters as soon as possible to prevent any mishaps from occurring.

Or else, if something really happened on the way, it would be too late for tears.

After which, she turned to look at Zhang Xuan one last time and said, “Principal Zhang, we’ll be taking our leave now.”

Hu!

Right after saying those words, Elder Wei drove her zhenqi and leaped into the sky together with Wang Ying. In the blink of an eye, the both of them had already disappeared over the horizon.

The very first student he had accepted ever since transcending over to this world, Wang Ying, had left.

A long time later, Zhang Xuan let out a deep sigh.

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“Principal Zhang, farewell!” Guild Leader Ruan also took her leave.

With this, aside from Zhang Xuan, only Sun Qiang and Liu Yang remained in the courtyard.

By the time Zhang Xuan turned around once more, Wang Ying and Elder Wei were already nowhere to be seen. With his hands behind his back, he looked into the deep night sky for a long time before saying, “Alright, let’s return back in.”

What that must go would eventually go.

To become true dragons, they couldn’t always remain by his side. How could they mature if they were always sheltered by him?

“Teacher...” Knowing that Zhang Xuan must be grieved over Wang Ying’s departure, Liu Yang stepped forward, wanting to say something. However, he suddenly felt someone grabbing his arm, holding him back.

“Let Young Master be alone for a while.” Sun Qiang said silently.

Liu Yang turned to look at Sun Qiang and saw the latter shaking his head. He hesitated for a brief moment before nodding and following the latter away.

Indeed. What his teacher needed at the moment were not words of comfort but tranquility.

To see one’s students leaving one’s side one after another was indeed not easy to bear.

After leaving the courtyard, Liu Yang looked at the dark night, and for some reason, the sky looked exceptionally gloomy

tonight. He turned to Sun Qiang and asked, “What can I do for teacher?”

“What you can do for him is to cultivate diligently. Don’t let Young Master’s efforts go to waste!” Sun Qiang pondered for a brief moment before replying.

Liu Yang contemplated those words for a moment before clenching his fists tightly together. “You’re right. Zhao Ya, Lu Chong, Yuan Tao, Wei Ruyan, Zheng Yang, and Wang Ying, they have all left. I am the only one remaining now. I must work hard and grow stronger so as to not let teacher down!”

Back in those days when all of them cultivated together, while he wasn’t the one who improved the fastest, he wasn’t the slowest either. Training wasn’t easy, but he was satisfied.

However, that feeling of satisfaction had long vanished, replaced by immense anxiety and stress.

Zhao Ya, Yuan Tao, Wei Ruyan, and Lu Chong had left to inherit heritages that were suited for their unique constitution. Once they fully awakened their unique constitutions, their cultivation would surely soar through the ranks.

On the other hand, Zheng Yang and Wang Ying had left for the Combat Master Hall and Spirit Awakener Guild respectively, where they would inherit complete heritages and receive top-notch cultivation resources. Without a doubt, they would grow stronger swiftly as well.

Of them all, he was the only one who had remained stationary on the spot.

If he were to lag behind the others, wouldn’t it mean that teacher was not on par with those other powers?

“No, this won’t do. I have to work harder than ever!” With a complicated look in his eyes, Liu Yang turned around and returned back to his room.

He couldn’t waste the slightest bit of time. He must work harder than ever on his cultivation so as to catch up with the others!

As fellow students, he didn't wish to be lagging far behind the others when they met once more. If so, he would truly become a baggage to his teacher.

“Hai...” Noting Liu Yang's response, Sun Qiang shook his head. “Forget it, I shall not compete with those cultivation maniacs. Let me take a walk through the streets and see if there is any delectable food around here...”

Stretching his back lazily, Sun Qiang began making his way out.

Ever since he arrived at Qingyuan City, he had been accompanying the lot from the Xuanxuan Faction, and he hadn't really gone anywhere yet. Since he had time now, it would be good for him to experience the nightlife in Qingyuan City for himself.

He didn't have much interest in cultivation. Otherwise, given that the Young Master had personally tutored him and provided with him with generous cultivation resources, he should have long surpassed Half-Saint by now.

...

Standing quietly on the spot, Zhang Xuan felt an unprecedented feeling of loneliness.

His students had all nearly left him, and Luo Ruoxin was no longer around either. He couldn't help but feel that it wouldn't be long before he was all alone once more.

It was as if he was slowly regressing back into those days of solitude when he first transcended over to this world.

Back then, he was under the constant threat of expulsion, and there was not a student under his name.

Everything was completely foreign to him, but there was not the slightest support or solace he could find from those around him.

“They might learn better and stronger cultivation techniques staying by my side, but... it's for the best that they have left! Staying by my side will only limit their growth as a person...”

A growth in cultivation was only a small aspect of life. In order to mature into adults, his students would have to venture into the larger world themselves and experience all kinds of things themselves.

As this thought surfaced in his mind, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt like he had grasped hold of that elusive thing he had been clawing at earlier.

“A teacher who truly loves his students would think ahead for them. Grooming a student isn’t like forging a weapon, where a forging technique and a blueprint would be sufficient to craft a good weapon. The students have their own life to live. They should experience the many aspects of life themselves, be it joy, anger, sorrow, or bitterness, and they should find their own goal and struggle for it too! If I were to just keep them by my side, all I can offer them is knowledge. They might be able to grow powerful this way as well, but I would be depriving them of an opportunity to temper themselves, and they would never be able to become true experts this way. The fact that they are leaving my side shows that they have already matured...”

Hong long!

His mind jolted, and a sound reminiscent of the rumbling of thunder echoed in his head. In the next moment, a unique aura abruptly descended from the sky and shrouded his figure.

The fourth acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher!

Tzzzzzzz!

That unique energy dived into his body, raising his Soul Depth swiftly.

At the same time, he fell into a trance, and his aura gradually grew deeper and steadier.

...

The Conference Hall of the Combat Master Hall.

“Hall Master Xing, here is the compilation of the combat knowledge we have learned from the Xuanxuan Faction over the past few days. According to them, they were all imparted

from Principal Zhang!” the head of the Footwork Division, Lu Wangqiu, took out a few thick books.

He had only left to the Xuanxuan Faction to study. It didn't mean that he was never coming back to the Combat Master Hall.

Hall Master Xing casually flipped open the first book and began browsing through it. Before long, his eyes lit up in excitement.

When he finally browsed through the books and mused over their content, he couldn't help but exclaim, “Principal Zhang is indeed a genius. His understanding of combat has reached an unfathomable level! As simple as these theories may seem, they are directed towards the very crux of cultivation. Through this knowledge, our combat masters will be able to easily find the flaws of any battle technique and overcome them easily!”

He had never known that combat could be interpreted in such a straightforward and refreshing manner. As expected of Yang shi's direct disciple, Principal Zhang was truly an incredible figure!

“Indeed. I was paying close heed when he conducted the lecture earlier during the exchange, and even though the knowledge he had imparted was simple, it was extremely enlightening. I felt that many new windows have opened up for my cultivation just by listening to his lecture!” the head of the Palm Division, Yan Qinghai, added.

The other division heads also nodded in agreement.

If they were still a little opposed to joining the Xuanxuan Faction before, after the exchange they had, such a feeling had vanished entirely. If anything, they would be delighted to join the Xuanxuan Faction at this point!

As long as they were to study diligently, they could foresee the overall prowess of the Combat Master Hall increasing by leaps and bounds.

“It seems like it's the correct decision for us to participate in the exchange...” Hall Master Xing nodded in agreement.

However, halfway through his words, he suddenly sensed something, and his eyes narrowed in astonishment.

Huala!

The other division heads seemed to have sensed the same thing that he did as well, and they hurriedly got to their feet.

“Let’s head over to take a look!”

Without any hesitation, Hall Master Xing dashed out. Not too long later, he arrived at a massive hall located a short distance away from the Conference Hall.

Placed within the hall were the tablets of the outstanding predecessors of the Combat Master Hall, as well as a sculpture of their founder.

Upon stepping into the hall, they saw the tablets and the sculpture of their founder trembling non-stop, as if they had witnessed something terrifying.

“What’s going on?” the head of the Footwork Division, Lu Wangqiu, asked in apprehension.

This was the first time he had seen such an occurrence in the eight hundred years of his life! Furthermore, there was no record of something of this sort happening in the long history of their Combat Master Hall!

Huala!

Just as Hall Master Xing and the other division heads were completely bewildered by the happenings before them, the tablets suddenly fell towards a certain direction. For some reason, their movement seemed to carry a hint of deference and respect.

At the same time, the sculpture of the founder also fell to the ground. It was as if it had finally encountered an existence worthy of its respect.

“T-this... Could it be...” Upon seeing these happenings, a thought suddenly came to Hall Master Xing’s mind, and his eyes narrowed in shock.

“What is it?”

The division heads quickly turned their gazes to him.

As combat masters devoted their time to furthering their combat skills, they weren't as knowledgeable as the master teachers. It was inevitable that they would be ignorant about the various legends and formalities of the Master Teacher Pavilion either.

“Trembling of Myriad Tokens, the Bow of Submission of the Predecessors. This... it is the sign of the birth of a Celestial Master Teacher!” Hall Master Xing said hoarsely, his voice quivering in disbelief.

“Celestial Master Teacher?”

Those words left the faces of the other division heads paling as well.

...

Lu Ran was a master teacher apprentice of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

He was in charge of cleaning and organizing the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall. It should have been his rest day today, but the other apprentice on duty had something urgent on, so he could only fill up for him.

I have already made an appointment with Luo Yan to meet her parents. Damn it, she'll surely hold a grudge against me for this! Lu Ran muttered in distress.

If not for this darned duty, he would have been able to make it for their appointment tonight, and if things go well, he might be able to finally bring the beauty he had been courting back home and officially terminate his long term of singlehood... But due to this darned duty, all of his plans had gone down the drain.

The more he thought about this matter, the more frustrated he felt.

It's only a bunch of lifeless tokens, is there a need to guard them day in day out? Pushing open the door to the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall, Lu Ran looked at the same barren sight before him and shook his head in frustration.

All that was in the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall was a bunch of old tokens and a sculpture of Kong shi.

He understood the need to respect one's ancestors, but those were all lifeless objects! It should suffice to clean them once in a while, surely there should be no need to appoint a guard to specially look over them?

Forget it, I just have to endure this for another half a year. Once I am promoted to an official master teacher, I won't have to do such dreary chores anymore! As an ordinary apprentice, it was inevitable that he would be appointed to carry out some menial labor for the Master Teacher Pavilion. However, once he became a true master teacher, his standing would become completely different from before.

It was true that a 1-star master teacher wasn't anything much in Qingyuan Empire, but a master teacher was still a master teacher. With this identity shielding him, he wouldn't have to live so humbly anymore, being at the beck and call of others.

Forget it, I should just have a good sleep here and apologize to Luo Yan tomorrow morning! Stretching his back lazily, Lu Ran headed to a corner of the Teacher Acknowledge Hall and placed a few cushions together before lying down on it.

Closing his eyes, he was on the verge of sleeping when he suddenly felt the entire hall trembling intensely.

“W-what? What is going on?” Nearly scared of his wits, Lu Ran immediately leaped to his feet in horror.

He was in the Master Teacher Pavilion, the most important ground in Qingyuan Empire! There were many formations erected around it, such that even if an earthquake or avalanche were to occur, the Master Teacher Pavilion would still be able to emerge from it completely intact. And yet... just what in the world could have happened for such intense tremors to occur?

Horrified, he scanned the room warily, only to see the many tokens leaping down from their stands.

“This...” Upon seeing this sight, Lu Ran's body shuddered in fear.

He had never encountered or heard of such a situation before!

Those tokens should have been lifeless objects! In the past, when he was cleaning those tokens, he had accidentally knocked down some of them, but it was not as if anything had happened to him...

Why would they suddenly come to life, jumping down from their stands?

Hualala!

Falling to the ground, they stood in a neat row, as if filing in on someone's command, and with a simultaneous action, they turned to look in a specific direction.

Completely chilled by that eerie sight, Lu Ran hid in the corner, covering his mouth tightly with his trembling hands. He was afraid that if he would be killed if he were to make a move at this moment.

Hong long!

Just as he was considering whether he should quietly sneak out of the room to report this matter to the pavilion master, he suddenly saw the unmoving sculpture of Kong shi coming to life as well. It turned around and looked in the same direction as the tokens.

Its eyes were deep and distant, reminiscent to that of a living person.

In that instant, Lu Ran even forgot how to breathe. Kong shi's sculpture slowly lowered its back and clasped its fist.

“Greetings, my comrade!”

1140 Zhang Xuan Visits a Courtesan House 1

Some time later, Zhang Xuan finally opened his eyes.

The acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher this time around lasted much longer than before. Under the tempering of the unique aura, his aura became much sharper, and his thoughts became clearer than ever.

Even though there was no tangible increase in his strength, the sharper clarity of his thoughts granted him better reflexes than before.

At the same time, his Eye of Insight had also become keener. With his sharper perception, his ability to disguise himself was also enhanced too. As long as he willed it so, not even an 8-star master teacher would be able to notice anything unusual about him.

On top of that, in the past, he was only able to discern flaws of individuals or objects which corresponded to a maximum to four cultivation stage higher than him, but now, he could see through the cultivation of those whose fighting prowess was on par with him.

To put it in more direct terms... he was able to see through the flaws and openings in the cultivation of Primordial Spirit pinnacle experts!

In the future, if he were to encounter such Saint 4-dan pinnacle experts, even without the Library of Heaven's Path, he would be able to analyze their flaws just with his Eye of Insight and subdue them with ease.

“The growth of my Eye of Insight is great, but what is truly significant is that my Soul Depth... has increased by 2.0 once more!” Zhang Xuan thought in excitement.

The changes in the Eye of Insight was great, but what that had left him the most excited was the explosive rise in his Soul

Depth.

This acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher had increased his Soul Depth by a whole 2.0!

After undergoing the Saint Ascension Ordeal, his Soul Depth had already been increased to 23.1, putting him on par with 7-star pinnacle master teachers. With this further increase by 2.0, it had reached a staggering 25.1, putting him on an equivalent level as 8-star high-tier master teachers!

With his enhanced Soul Depth, even 7-star pinnacle master teachers would succumb easily to his Impartation of Heaven's Will and willingly submit to him.

“As long as I know their cultivation technique, I should be able to faze even 8-star low-tier master teachers with my Impartation of Heaven's Will!” Zhang Xuan thought with clenched fists.

For the Impartation of Heaven's Will to work, the knowledge which one was lecturing must be aligned with the essence of the world. Those who were able to become an 8-star master teacher were all individuals with near transcendental state of minds. At their level, a lecture of fundamentals would do little to faze their mind. However, if Zhang Xuan could uncover their cultivation technique and correct it, beguiling them with his Impartation of Heaven's Will shouldn't be too difficult.

“Speaking of which, my Soul Depth has already long reached the mark required for me to become a 7-star master teacher. It should be about time for me to start preparing to take the 7-star master teacher examination...” Zhang Xuan thought as he exhaled deeply.

More often than not, the limiting factor to a master teacher was his Soul Depth. High Soul Depth enhanced one's rate of cultivation and learning, so once one's Soul Depth reached the mark, one's cultivation and supporting occupations would swiftly follow suit.

At the moment, the conflict between the Xuanxuan Faction and the Combat Master Hall seemed to be resolved. The

members from both organizations were getting along amicably with one another, so that was a burden off his mind.

With that, it was about time for him to focus on his own personal matters. It would be good to pay a visit to the Master Teacher Pavilion, meet some old friends, and obtain a 7-star master teacher emblem while he was at it.

For this 6-star master teacher examination, he had chosen to challenge Empire Building. It was the most difficult examination, but its benefits lay in that he would be automatically entitled to the 7-star master teacher emblem once he met the prerequisites for the promotion.

His Soul Depth and cultivation definitely met the mark for promotion, so what was lacking was his supporting occupations.

So far, the occupations which he had achieved a mastery of 7-star in were spirit awakener, demonic tunist, and poison master. His other occupations, such as apothecary, blacksmith, and the sort, were still at 6-star.

Of them, the spirit awakener was not considered as a unique occupation, and it wouldn't reflect well on his reputation if it was revealed that he practiced poison arts. Thus, he only had a single 7-star supporting occupation at the moment...

“In order to qualify as a 7-star master teacher, I'll require seven 7-star supporting occupations. Currently, other than appraiser and soul oracle, my other occupations are at 6-star pinnacle.”

In his long journey, Zhang Xuan had picked up a total of twelve supporting occupations, and they were namely: 7-star spirit awakener, 7-star demonic tunist, 7-star poison master, 6-star blacksmith, 6-star physician, 6-star painter, 6-star beast tamer, 6-star celestial designer, 6-star terpsichore, 6-star formation master, 5-star appraiser, and last but not least... soul oracle!

It went without saying that he couldn't use his spirit awakener, poison master, and soul oracle occupation, so he had only had the remaining nine to rely on.

“For formation master, I have already achieved the level of 7-star, and Guild Leader Han has already helped me apply for an emblem. If nothing goes wrong, I should be able to collect it very soon.”

Back at the Qiu Wu Palace, Zhang Xuan had managed advanced his mastery as a formation master straight to 7-star pinnacle. In view of that, Guild Leader Han, as the head of the Qingyuan Empire Formation Master Guild, had taken the initiative to apply for the 7-star emblem for him, so he didn't have to go through the trouble of taking the examination.

But even so, he only had two 7-star supporting occupations with that.

He still needed another five more.

“With my current identity, I should be able to access the libraries of the respective guilds directly. As long as I work fast, I should be able to be done with it in a single day...” Zhang Xuan thought.

To others, advancing their supporting occupations was a lengthy and tiresome process, requiring them to work diligently over a long period of time to brush their knowledge and skills up to par. However, to Zhang Xuan, it was truly nothing at all.

Even if he were to take his time, he should be able to accomplish it within two days easily.

“As the capital of a Tier-1 Empire, most major guilds can be found in Qingyuan City, such as the Apothecary Guild, Physician Guild, and the Beast Tamer Guild. However, I wonder if there is any Terpsichorean Guild, Celestial Designer Guild, and the others here as well...”

As Zhang Xuan had mainly spent his time training the Combat Master Hall over the past three days, he still hadn't gotten a clear grasp over the layout of Qingyuan City yet. As such, he had no idea what kind of guilds there were here and where they were located either. If he could uncover this information beforehand, he would be spared much time fumbling around the city looking for the occupation guilds.

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan walked out of his room and shouted, “Sun Qiang, Sun Qiang!”

Sun Qiang would always gather intelligence from the locals as soon as they arrived in a new city, so there was no one apter than him to ask.

“Teacher, Butler Sun headed out last night, and he isn’t back yet!” Hearing Zhang Xuan’s shouting, Liu Yang walked out and said.

After they parted the previous night, Sun Qiang left the Combat Master Hall, and even till morning, there was still no trace of the latter to be seen.

Zhang Xuan frowned, “Do you know where he went then?”

“I’m not too sure either. However, I have already entrusted some friends from the Combat Master Hall to help look into this matter.” Liu Yang quickly replied.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “Tell him to look for me as soon as he returns.”

This wasn’t the first time Sun Qiang had stayed out overnight, so Zhang Xuan was not particularly worried about him. In any case, the Combat Master Hall was already looking for him, so it shouldn’t be long before the other party returned.

“Noted!” Liu Yang nodded.

After which, Zhang Xuan began making his way over to Hall Master Xing’s residence.

Since Sun Qiang wasn’t around, he could only seek Hall Master Xing for help.

“You wish to brush up your supporting occupations and push for a promotion to 7-star master teacher?” Hearing the intent behind Zhang Xuan’s visit, Hall Master Xing replied with a smile.

“That’s right!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Elder Qi happens to be the old head of the Physician Guild, and given your deep mastery in the Way of Medicine, it shouldn’t be too difficult for him to apply for a 7-star

physician emblem, so there is no need for you to take the physician examination either.”

Hall Master Xing smiled. “Furthermore, the head of the Apothecary Guild, Wu Huayu, has heard news that you are currently residing in our Combat Master Hall. In a conversation we had recently, he indicated that he has helped you apply for a 7-star apothecary emblem, and he intends to pay you a visit and hand the emblem over to you personally some time soon.”

“Wu Huayu?” Zhang Xuan was startled.

That name was astonishingly familiar to him. It was the apothecary whom he challenged during the Pill Debate conducted via the Communication Jade Screen back when he was at the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy Apothecary School! Back then, he had given the latter several pointers in his pill forging, and in exchange, the latter had helped him apply for the Grand Intermittence Grass he needed to save Wei Ruyan...

All along, he had thought that the other party was a small fry in the Qingyuan Empire Apothecary Guild. Who could have thought that the other party would actually turn out be the head of the Apothecary Guild...

Later on, it seemed like the other party had come over to Hongyuan Empire personally to deliver the Grand Intermittence Grass, but Zhang Xuan happened to be out with Luo Ruoxin during that period of time, so they missed one another.

“Factoring in those two occupations, I would have four 7-star supporting occupations at the moment. I would just need three more in order to qualify as a 7-star master teacher!” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief and smiled.

It would have surely taken quite a bit of effort if he had to go through the various occupations one after another. Naturally, it would be for the best if he could save some time.

“As for the location of the respective guilds... Our Qingyuan City doesn’t have a Celestial Designer Guild, and the Beast

Tamer Guild is located in a mountain range roughly two hundred li away from the city. However, the Terpsichore Guild, Appraiser Guild, and Painter Guild are located in the city, so you could consider going for them instead.” Hall Master Xing explained.

“I see. I’ll head to the Terpsichore Guild first then.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Since the Beast Tamer Guild wasn’t in the city, it would be more efficient if he could clear all the examinations within the city before heading there.

“Alright, allow me to bring you over then...” Hall Master Xing nodded.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. There’s no need to trouble Hall Master Xing over a minor matter like this. You just have to tell me the location, and I’ll head there myself.” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

He was only taking the examination for a supporting occupation, it would be an overkill if he were to have the head of the Combat Master Hall accompany him there. That would raise too much of a commotion, and it went without saying that it was at odds with his intention of maintaining a low profile.

“That works too. However, the branch of the Terpsichore Guild in Qingyuan Empire... is located at a location which might be a little awkward for you to visit...” At this point, Hall Master Xing suddenly recalled a matter, and a peculiar expression appeared on his face.

“Awkward for me to visit?”

“Un. You have learned terpsichorean arts yourself too, so you should know that terpsichoreans utilize dance as an intermediary for their offense, and the location where dancers are the most sought after happens to be the... Spring Pavilion!” Hall Master Xing continued.

“Spring Pavilion?” Zhang Xuan was perplexed. “Is that the name of the Terpsichorean Guild branch in Qingyuan City?”

“It is... the name of a courtesan house!” Hall Master Xing replied awkwardly.

“A courtesan house?” Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched.

“Yes, but it isn’t the kind which you are thinking of. The courtesans there sell their craft, not their bodies. Nevertheless, it is still one of the most popular spots in the city with huge crowds walking in and out of its doors every day!” Hall Master Xing said.

Typically speaking, those who opted to learn terpsichorean arts were top-notch beauties with excellent figures. A dance from them could easily enchant them, leaving them craving for more.

But still, for an orthodox unique occupation to run a courtesan house... just the thought of it sounded deeply inconceivable.

“The founder of the Terpsichore Guild, Elder Gong Sun, had her entire family massacred by an enemy back when she was still at a young age. She spent many years of her life refining her craft as a dancer, and eventually, she managed to exact vengeance on her enemy. After that, under Kong shi’s guidance, she founded the terpsichore occupation. However, in acknowledgement of her past as a dance courtesan, most of the Terpsichore Guild branches are still established as courtesan houses.” Hall Master Xing explained.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

He had learned about the history of Elder Gong Sun through the books in the Master Teacher Academy, but as most of them were carefully selected by master teachers, the portion regarding Elder Gong Sun being a dance courtesan was probably intentionally left out due to it being viewed as dishonorable.

“Nevertheless, Kong shi didn’t look down on Elder Gong Sun despite her occupation. Instead, he said that there was no such thing as a lowly occupation; there were only lowly individuals in the world. As long as dance courtesans lived their life with dignity, they were individuals worthy of respect too. It is with

this philosophy in mind that terpsichore eventually managed to become a unique occupation as well.”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Kong shi was right.

Every single occupation had to be respected. Even the most ordinary occupation served a vital purpose in this world, so they shouldn't be disregarded and looked down upon.

As expected of Kong shi, his state of mind had indeed transcended mere forms.

“Where is the Spring Pavilion you spoke of located?” Tossing aside the prejudice in his mind, Zhang Xuan asked.

“It's located not too far away from the Combat Master Hall. After you leave here, turn left and head straight for roughly ten li, and you should see it.” Hall Master Xing said.

After getting the location of the other two guilds out of Hall Master Xing, Zhang Xuan finally clasped his fist and bade farewell, “Alright, I'll be heading over to take a look now. Farewell.”

After leaving the residence of Hall Master Xing, before Zhang Xuan could even step out of the Combat Master Hall, he saw a young lady hurriedly walking towards him.

“Zhang shi, are you heading out? Why don't you bring me along with you?”

1141 Zhang Xuan Visits a Courtesan House 2

The young lady was dressed in a light blue dress which shaped her elegant figure perfectly. A yellow silk belt was wrapped around her waist, accentuating the curves between her waist and her bottom. From afar, she looked like a bewitching succubus who would steal one's soul away at any time.

The person wasn't anyone else other than the head of the Bewitching Devil Faction, Hu Yaoyao.

The Bewitching Devil Faction was dissolved shortly after Zhang Xuan became the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, and Hu Yaoyao officially joined the Xuanxuan Faction right afterward, becoming one of the strongest cultivators in its ranks.

"You want to tag along with me? That's fine." Seeing that it was Hu Yaoyao, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Hu Yaoyao's main supporting occupation in the Master Teacher Academy was terpsichorean arts, and she was even the direct disciple of School Head Wei Ranxue. Since he was heading to the Terpsichore Guild, it would be good to bring her along as well.

"We want to go too!"

Shortly after Zhang Xuan accepted her request, another voice sounded not too far away. Turning his head over, he saw Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi standing not too far away, staring at him intently.

Looking at the curiosity in the eyes of the duo, Zhang Xuan shook his head and advised, "It would be best for the both of you to stay out of this matter. It isn't appropriate for the both of you to visit such a place!"

"It isn't appropriate? Why can Hu Yaoyao tag along with you but not us?" Yu Fei-er frowned in displeasure.

It was one thing if the other party refused to bring all of them with him, but he had agreed to bring Hu Yaoyao along! This blatant discrimination left her feeling deeply indignant within, and her explosive temper flared up in an instant.

Was Hu Yaoyao that important to him?

On the other hand, while Luo Qiqi didn't say a word, the unhappy gaze she shot him spoke the very same words too.

"I'm heading to the Spring Pavilion, which happens to be a courtesan house too! As ladies, it won't be appropriate for you two to tag along." Zhang Xuan explained.

"You are heading to a courtesan house?"

"With Hu Yaoyao at that?"

The duo exchanged gazes for a brief instant, and with uncanny harmony, they stretched their hands forward simultaneously to block Zhang Xuan's path. "No way, not over my dead body!"

"Stop fooling around, I'm heading there because I have important matters to attend to." Zhang Xuan frowned upon seeing their actions.

It was in view of their relatively mature characters that he treated the both of them well, patiently guiding them along whenever they faced any problem. Why were they suddenly throwing a tantrum at this moment?

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was starting to get a little annoyed by their actions, Yu Fei-er bit her lips and continued on, "Zhang shi, you are a master teacher, so how can you go to such a place? If you really... need to... I can help you.."

"Help me?" Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Help me? How do you intend to help me?

Can you give me a 7-star terpsichore emblem or a 7-star master teacher emblem?

To offer your help despite not knowing what is going on, aren't you worried that I might sell you out?

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan said, "I appreciate your good intentions, but I'm afraid that you aren't sufficient to help me

on this matter...”

“You say that I am insufficient? How am I insufficient? I am very sufficient, alright?” Yu Fei-er immediately lashed out as she stuck out her chest indignantly.

Is he scorning me for being not up to par with Hu Yaoyao?

This is too much. Isn't hers just a little bigger?

Mine is not too bad either, alright!

Besides... insufficient? How do you know that I would be insufficient?

Just as she was feeling deeply stifled within, the young man continued speaking.

“Spring Pavilion is the branch of the local Terpsichore Guild, and I intend to head there to take the 7-star terpsichore examination so as to rake up the required supporting occupations for a promotion to 7-star master teacher. Hu Yaoyao's main supporting occupation is terpsichore, so it would be beneficial for her to head there too. On the other hand, your main supporting occupation is formation master, so it might not be appropriate for you to tag along too.”

Zhang Xuan was speechless.

You don't even know the slightest thing about terpsichorean arts, and you still want to help me? This naivety is truly...

“Terpsichore Guild branch? 7-star terpsichore?” Yu Fei-er froze upon hearing those words, and in the next moment, her face flushed crimson.

Clearly, she was unaware of the matter too.

When she heard the words ‘courtesan house’, her thoughts immediately turned carnal... It was fortunate that the other party didn't seem to understand what she was driving at, or else she would be too embarrassed to meet anyone.

“Why would the branch of the Terpsichore Guild be a courtesan house?”

The one who had asked this time around was Hu Yaoyao. It seemed like despite being a terpsichore herself, she wasn't too

aware of its history either.

In truth, just like Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi, she honestly thought that Zhang Shi was going to bring her to that kind of place! She was still feeling conflicted as to how she should respond should the other party raise some kind of unreasonable demand there, whether she should turn him down or accept him... But to think that the courtesan house would actually be the branch of a Terpsichore Guild instead!

“The history of terpsichore can be traced back to dance courtesan. Furthermore, only by frequently performing for others will one be able to advance her terpsichorean art swiftly and bring forth greater prowess in battle. As such, most of the Terpsichore Guilds, other than the branches set up within the Master Teacher Academies, are courtesan houses...” Having understood what was going on, Luo Qiqi swiftly explained slightly awkwardly.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was slightly surprised to see that Luo Qiqi even knew of this matter, and he nodded in agreement.

With this, Yu Fei-er finally understood what was going on, but that only served to make her face redder than ever. Nevertheless, she still bucked up her courage and stared at Zhang Xuan intently, “I still want to tag along with you!”

“Teacher, I wish to follow you too!” Luo Qiqi added.

“... Alright then, you can follow me there if you really want to.” Seeing that he was unable to talk the duo out of the matter, Zhang Xuan eventually conceded.

In any case, it was not like he was going there to do something that couldn't be seen. He was only intending to take the terpsichore examination, so it mattered not whether he brought another person with him or not.

Soon, the group of four set forth from the Combat Master Hall, and after traveling roughly ten li, a massive building appeared before their eyes.

Even before coming close, they could already hear the excited voices within. There was a constant huge crowd walking to

and from the building, a truly bustling sight.

Almost the entirety of the crowd were young men, and judging from their extravagant dress up, they were likely to be from considerable backgrounds too.

“Too beautiful, she’s truly too beautiful!”

“Indeed! I would die just for an opportunity to share a night with a fairy like her!”

“Die? I would be willing to die ten times over for that!”

“Stop the talking and get moving. Fairy Zi Yan’s dance is about to begin...”

...

Such heated discussions could be heard all around the place. There was an excited gleam in the eyes of every single young man walking in or out of the building.

“It seems like terpsichore is a celebrated occupation in Qingyuan Empire!” Zhang Xuan noted.

He had been to many guilds over the past year, but it was truly rare to see one as lively as this.

“Who knows if it’s really the occupation that is celebrated...” Yu Fei-er harrumphed coldly.

“Alright, let’s head in!” With a smile, Zhang Xuan began making his way in as well.

Admittedly, the beauty of a dancing terpsichore was an allure hard for any young man to resist, but beyond that, the dance of terpsichores did help to temper one’s soul too. If it wasn’t for the latter, it was unlikely that so many cultivators would be so moved over just a few young ladies.

“This brother over here, are you... intending to enter the Spring Pavilion too?” Before Zhang Xuan could walk in, an astonished voice suddenly sounded. Turning around, he saw a young man staring at him with a flabbergasted look.

“What’s wrong?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

The other party had an appearance reminiscent of a man in his thirties, and shockingly, his cultivation was higher than Zhang Xuan's, reaching Saint 3-dan primary stage!

To possess such strength at such a young age, it was almost certain that the other party had a prominent background.

"It's nothing, it's just that I find it... weird..." Swiftly taking a glance at Hu Yaoyao and the others, the young man quickly shook his head.

To come to a courtesan house despite having three ravishing beauties by his side... he sure was adventurous!

And the most thing of all, those three ravishing beauties actually agreed to it, coming along with him even...

It wasn't too hard for Zhang Xuan to fathom what the other party was thinking, but he couldn't be bothered to explain himself. With the three ladies following behind him, he made his way over to the entrance.

A lanky attendant stood at the entrance, "Do you have any reservation?"

Zhang Xuan shook his head, "I have something important to do here. I'm not intending to..."

"Everyone that comes here says that he has something important to do. If you don't have a reservation, I'll have to ask you to turn around and leave. Our Spring Pavilion is already at max capacity, so even if you were to enter now, you won't be able to meet Fairy Zi Yan!" said the attendant impatiently.

The attendant didn't seem to care whom the other party was or what background he was from. From the looks of it, he must have encountered such situations often, and he knew very well that no one would dare to cause trouble right before the Terpsichore Guild too.

"We're not here to meet..." Slightly displeased by the self-assuming attitude of the attendant, Zhang Xuan was just about to clarify the matter when the young man whom he had spoken to earlier suddenly appeared by his side.

“This person over here is a buddy of mine. Why? Does my buddy need a reservation to enter the Spring Pavilion too?”

“I-I dare not to! I didn’t know that he’s Chu gongzi’s friend!” the attendant quickly lowered his head respectfully.

“That better the case!” Chu gongzi nodded before turning to Zhang Xuan. “This friend over here, I have a reservation at one of the suites inside. Why don’t you join me?”

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“It’s impossible to enter without a reservation. If you can’t even enter the Spring Pavilion, you won’t be able to accomplish whatever you intend to do here.” Chu gongzi reminded with a smile.

“... I’ll humbly accept your kind gesture then.”

Judging from the huge rejected crowd loitering around the entrance of the Spring Pavilion, it was apparent that it would be impossible to enter without making any prior reservation. It would be unseemly for him to make a huge ruckus just to step through those doors, so he decisively chose to take the other party up on his offer.

Having thought things through, Zhang Xuan nodded, “Thanks.”

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. With just a look, I can tell that you are one who pursues the same path as me. Naturally, it’s only right for us to help one another in times of need!” Chu gongzi blinked his eyes, gesturing with an ‘I understand’ look.

“I...” Seeing how Chu gongzi was acting, Zhang Xuan knew that the other party must be misunderstanding something here. He immediately tried to explain himself, but the other party simply shook off his words leisurely, “Don’t worry, I’m not so underhanded as go after the companions of a friend. Since I regard you as my friend, you can be certain that I’ll respect your women as well.”

Zhang Xuan placed his hand on his forehead.

What the heck was this?

Forget it.

At this point, it didn't feel like there was any point for him to explain anymore. The other party seemed to be so convinced of the matter that anything he said would probably be regarded as a mere excuse out of embarrassment.

Following behind Chu gongzi, it didn't take long for them to arrive at a suite on the second floor.

The room was spacious and clean. It was divided into several smaller rooms which would allow a large group to reside within this space comfortably. More importantly, its walls were made of glass panels, granting one a clear view of everything within the grand hall of the Spring Pavilion. With just a look, Zhang Xuan could tell that the cost of reserving this single room had to be absurdly high.

“Young Master!” As soon as Chu gongzi entered, several beautiful ladies immediately walked up to welcome him.

They paled in comparison to Hu Yaoyao and the others, but indubitably, they were still charming individuals in their own right.

“Un.” Chu gongzi nodded before turning to Zhang Xuan.

“They are all my lovers, I told them to come here and wait for me in advance. Well, you also know how watching the dance of a terpsichore can leave a raging flame burning within one's heart. If I don't find an avenue to vent my heat, I might just explode inside...”

“Vent your heat?”

“Indeed. The terpsichores of the Spring Pavilion only sell their craft and not their bodies. Oh, their graceful moves, those slim waists, and that elegant demeanor... Just one look is sufficient to draw out one's soul! Who in the world can bear to just watch and not do?” Chu gongzi shook his head. “Seeing how you have brought a few people of your own over as well, I can see that we are men treading on the same path...”

“Cough cough! Actually, I'm here for another matter.” Seeing how the other party was getting more and more ludicrous with

everything he said, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but interject.
“Actually, I'm here to take the terpsichore e...”

“Don't worry, we are all men. I understand, I understand. Who doesn't want to take a terpsichore home? Ah, how could I forget my manners? My name is Chu Xiang, may I know how I can address you?” With a smile, Chu gongzi introduced himself.

“I am Zhang Xuan.” Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

Previously, his attempts to conceal his name had ended up backfiring badly for him. With this trauma still vivid in his mind, he decided to just use his real name instead.

In any case, he wasn't here to watch some fairy perform anyway. All he wanted was to take the terpsichore examination.

“So it's Zhang gongzi! I have long heard of your name.” With a hearty laugh, Chu Xiang said. Even though he had said that he had long heard of Zhang Xuan, from the looks on his face, it seemed to be just pleasantries.

But that was to be expected. While Zhang Xuan's reputation resounded in the Hongyuan Empire, the same couldn't be said about the Qingyuan Empire. After all, there were many outstanding individuals here.

1142 I'm Willing To Offer a Dance To You!

“You’re being too polite.” Seeing that the other party didn’t know him, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It was for the best that the other party didn’t know him. Otherwise, if it were to be known that an honorable master teacher, as well as an esteemed guest of the Combat Master Hall, had visited a courtesan house, his reputation would be dragged through the mud!

“To be honest, Brother Zhang has chosen the right time to visit. Tonight, we have Fairy Ziyuan on the line, and Fairy Ziyuan is going to perform her newly learned terpsichorean art too. I can guarantee you that it’s going to be a feast for the eyes!” Chu gongzi said excitedly.

“Ziyuan? Ziyuan?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

“You haven’t heard of the both of them before?” Noting the confusion in Zhang Xuan’s voice, Chu gongzi was taken aback.

Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“To think that you actually wouldn’t have heard of them, Brother Zhang, you are really...” Chu gongzi couldn’t help but shake his head in disappointment.

When he saw the other party brought a few beautiful ladies with him to the courtesan house, he thought that the other party was a fellow comrade. Who could have thought that he hadn’t even heard of the two most famous terpsichores in the Spring Pavilion?

“Are they very famous?”

“Using the word ‘famous’ on them would be a gross underestimation of their reputation! There’s probably no one in the entire Qingyuan City who hasn’t heard of them! This is especially so for Fairy Ziyuan. A 7-star terpsichore, her dance

had bewitched countless audiences. Who knows how many men have emptied out their fortunes just to see her perform? However, it's a pity that she only performs once a month. For this very day, I had to book this suite a month ahead in advance!" Seeing that Zhang Xuan truly knew nothing at all, Chu Gongzi shook his head in disapproval.

"You had to book the suite a month ahead?" Zhang Xuan was speechless.

To go to such an extent just to watch a couple of dances, the other party sure was tenacious.

Chu Gongzi was just about to respond to Zhang Xuan's words when the sound of instruments suddenly echoed from the grand hall. He quickly waved his hands and headed towards the seat near the glass wall, "We'll talk later, the performance is about to start soon..."

Soon after, a figure landed daintily on the stage in the grand hall.

The figure was a young lady who seemed to be in her twenties. In contrast to the resplendent violet robe she wore, her feet were bare. However, when she flew across the air, her figure was truly reminiscent of a fairy.

If one were to evaluate her just based on her looks itself, she would be beneath Hu Yaoyao and the others. However, the aura she exuded was reminiscent of a heavenly fairy, one that could ascend into the sky at any moment. It was like fiction had spilled over into reality, making her existence one that was extremely hard to fathom.

Such a feeling was further enhanced by her clothes. Not only was it resplendent and gorgeous, it shaped out her figure perfectly, accentuating her natural grace. At the same time, it bared her skin at the perfect proportion. A little more revealed, and she might have appeared crass; a little less revealed, and she might have looked plain.

With such, it was inevitable that her appearance could capture every single gaze in the room as soon as she landed.

It was no wonder why Chu gongzi would be so moved by her. If not for the fact that Zhang Xuan's state of mind had already reached a near-transcendental level, he might be tempted to take a few more glances at her while sighing in pleasure.

"This is Fairy Ziyuan?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Of course not! This is Fairy Ziyuan, Fairy Ziyuan's junior!" Without turning his gaze from the stage, Chu gongzi replied indignantly.

Seeing how the other party wasn't even willing to tear his eyes away from the stage for a single instant, as if a little boy who had never seen a woman in his life, Zhang Xuan could only shake his head bitterly. Looking out of the glass wall, he took a swift glance of his surroundings. Be it the audiences in the suites beside him or amidst the grand hall below, their eyes were all fixed on the young lady on the stage as well. It was as the young lady had already stolen their souls from the moment she first arrived in the grand hall.

"A dance to steal the world... This is indeed a formidable occupation!" Seeing how everyone was reacting, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but remark in his head.

It was only due to the fact that his mastery in terpsichorean art was equivalent to a 7-star terpsichore and his powerful soul that the other party's dance couldn't faze him. But the same couldn't be said about the others. Their souls were more vulnerable, so it was inevitable that the dance would put them into a deep trance.

"Even though that Fairy Ziyuan is only a 6-star pinnacle terpsichore, her prowess in terpsichorean arts seems to be significantly more refined than Wei Ranxue..."

The head of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy Terpsichore School, as well as Hu Yaoyao's teacher, Wei Ranxue, was a 6-star pinnacle terpsichore too. Her beauty was on par with Fairy Ziyuan, but in terms of the allure of their dances, she didn't even come close to matching up with Fairy Ziyuan.

Every single gesture of the young lady on the stage was just so graceful that others would inadvertently fight their attention completely stolen by it. Clearly, the young lady's comprehension of terpsichorean arts had already achieved an incredible level.

“Esteemed as one the Ten Great Master Teachers, it is inevitable that Wei Ranxue's dance would be a little more rigid in consideration of her reputation. This resulted in the loss of the worldliness in her dance, and the lack of this quality resulted in a steep decline in the prowess of her dances...”

With just a look, Zhang Xuan was able to analyze the problem in Wei Ranxue's dance.

Those who hadn't gone through the vicissitudes of life wouldn't be able to devote feelings into their dance to evoke a certain quality, and as a result of that, their dance would be lacking in appeal.

This appeal was extremely important for bring forth the true prowess of a terpsichorean art in battle.

It was no wonder why the branches of the Terpsichorean Guild were established as courtesan houses. It was indeed beneficial for mastering this occupation.

Without a doubt, if Wei Ranxue were to battle with Fairy Ziyuan, the latter would emerge victorious.

Huala!

While Zhang Xuan was still deep in thoughts, the young lady suddenly twisted gracefully, and a set of beautiful dance moves flowed smoothly from her.

Her dance was silent and tranquil, reminiscent to the soothing atmosphere of a river gently knocking on a boulder amidst a lush, remote mountain. Those watching it instantaneously fell into a unique state of mind which placed their bodies and souls in a state of absolute relaxation.

“Watching such dances regularly will be beneficial to the growth of one's soul...” After taking a short look, Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

Even though the dance was riddled with so many flaws that he could hardly bring himself to watch it, its effects to place one in a calm state was still undeniable. By immersing themselves into such a state of mind often, one's soul would be nourished.

Perhaps, just like what he had guessed before, the crowd had come not for the allure of the dancers but the pleasurable sensation of one's soul growing...

With such thoughts in mind, he subconsciously turned his head towards Chu gongzi, only to see the latter's eyes glowing brightly as his saliva dripped all over his clothes.

"Ah?" Astonished, Zhang Xuan swiftly turned his eyes toward the other audience as well.

Just like Chu gongzi, they were completely absorbed into the dance too. Saliva was trickling down their cheeks, and there was an inexplicably lecherous expression on their faces.

From the looks of the faces, if not for fear of the prowess of the Terpsichore Guild, those men might have rushed forward and committed atrocities.

"It seems like... I have overthought the matter!" Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella as a bitter smile surfaced on his lips.

Hu!

Very soon, the dance came to an end, and Fairy Ziyuan bowed gracefully before taking her leave.

Following which, a middle-aged lady stepped out, and surveying the crowd, she said, "Tonight, our Spring Pavilion will be auctioning an [Exclusive Dance] from Fairy Ziyuan. If anyone is interested in it, feel free to make a bid. The starting bid is 50 high-tier spirit stones, and every raise must be of 10 high-tier spirit stones at the minimum!"

"Exclusive Dance?" Zhang Xuan asked in confusion.

At this moment, Chu gongzi had finally recovered from his trance, and he quickly wiped away the drool from his mouth as he explained, "It means that the fairy dance for you personally... Just imagine it in your head, watching the dance of a fairy at close proximity within a private room... how

could one not fall into a frenzy over it? It's precisely due to the popularity of Exclusive Dances that they are priced so steeply..."

Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

The execution of terpsichorean arts was extremely taxing on one's soul. Most terpsichores would only be able to dance at her full prowess once or twice per day due to the limitations of their souls. But, who could have thought that such an opportunity could actually be auctioned as a limited commodity too?

For the starting bid of a single dance to be 50 high-tier spirit stones... How fearsome!

Even the private lesson from a 6-star pinnacle master teacher wasn't worth as much!

"I'll offer 60!"

"70!"

"Hah, aren't you embarrassed to be only bidding 70? 100!"

...

A huge commotion broke out on the audience stand. In just a few moments, the price had already exceeded a hundred. Eventually, the opportunity was auctioned off at a final price of 150 high-tier spirit stones by a gentleman in one of the suites.

To be honest, Zhang Xuan was already doubting his existence at this very moment.

Back when he was still at Hongyuan Empire, he had to toil his body away just to earn a couple of high-tier spirit stones. And yet, the other party had managed to earn a whole 150 high-tier spirit stones just by executing a single dance.

Was this a sign from the heavens that it was high time for him to switch occupations?

With his profound comprehension of terpsichorean arts, his dances should at least be far more valuable than the young lady on the stage!

“Why didn’t you bid for Fairy Ziyuan’s Exclusive Dance?”
Zhang Xuan turned to Chu gongzi and asked curiously.

From the fact that the other party had booked this suite, it could be seen that on top of being a fan of terpsichorean arts, he was also an individual with no lack of money. Logically speaking, he should be interested in an opportunity at an Exclusive Dance with Fairy Ziyuan, so why didn’t he make a bid?”

“Naturally, I am saving up my money to purchase Fairy Ziyuan’s Exclusive Dance!” Chu gongzi replied proudly.

“Fairy Ziyuan?”

“Un, that’s right. Look, she’s coming out now!” Chu gongzi’s eyes lit up.

Zhang Xuan quickly turned his head over and saw a huge commotion rippling across the audience stand. Following which, another young lady gracefully flew down onto the stage as well.

This young lady was clearly much more beautiful than Ziyuan, and her figure was more alluring as well. Astonishingly, she was on par with even Hu Yaoyao!

More importantly, she carried an incredible air of worldliness, seemingly ready to plunge into the river of love with another at any moment.

“A 7-star pinnacle terpsichore... No wonder!” Zhang Xuan remarked internally. This explained why so many people were infatuated with her.

Hu hu!

While Zhang Xuan was still in thought, the young lady beneath began dancing. Her movements were graceful and exquisite, and it seemed to be playing on the souls of the spectators.

Once again, Zhang Xuan turned his head over to look at Chu gongzi, and as expected, the latter was drooling more than ever.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan quietly turned his attention back to the dance on the stage.

It must be said that Fairy Ziyān's comprehension of terpsichorean arts had reached an astonishing level. Every single movement of hers seemed to be aligned with the natural beauty of the world, causing even one's heart to beat in tempo with her dance.

“As long as she wills it so, she could easily cause the hearts of every single one here to come to a complete halt with her dance!” Zhang Xuan remarked meaningfully.

If her dance could even control the beating of one's heart, it would be no exaggeration to say that she wielded the life of every single being within this grand hall at this very moment. Truly, no occupations should be underestimated.

Hu!

Before long, the dance came to an end, and the auctioning of Fairy Ziyān's Exclusive Dance began.

“The starting bid of Fairy Ziyān's Exclusive Dance will be 500 high-tier spirit stones, and every increment must not be less than 100. Alright, let's begin the auction right now!” the middle-aged lady announced once more.

“I offer 600!”

“800!”

“1000!”

...

Fairy Ziyān's Exclusive Dance was indeed far more popular than Fairy Ziyuan's. In the blink of an eye, in the literal sense of the phrase, the price had already shot up to 1000 high-tier spirit stones.

“1000 high-tier spirit stones, just to watch a single dance?” Zhang Xuan shook his head bitterly.

If he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, he might have thought that the world had gone mad!

While he was still deep in thought over the matter, he suddenly heard the voice of Chu gongzi sounding beside him, “I offer... a concentrated high-tier spirit stone!”

“A concentrated high-tier spirit stone?” Zhang Xuan was startled for a moment before his eyes widened in shock.

One must know that even the Combat Master Hall only had 10 concentrated high-tier spirit stones! To offer a concentrated high-tier spirit stone just to watch a dance...

This darned prodigal!

“As long as I could obtain an Exclusive Dance from Fairy Ziyang, there’s no price too heavy for me to pay!” Noting Zhang Xuan’s shocked stare, Chu gongzi replied.

“There’s no price too heavy for you to pay?” Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched. At this moment, he suddenly recalled a matter, and his eyes lit up. Getting to his feet, he looked at Chu gongzi confidently and said, “Why don’t we do this then? Instead of watching her dance, why don’t you give that concentrated high-tier spirit stone to me, and I’ll dance for you instead!”

“...” Chu gongzi.

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Chu gongzi nearly collapsed onto the ground.

The reason why I wish to watch Fairy Ziyan's Exclusive Dance is because I want some private time with her... Who wants to watch a man like you dance?

I don't have such inclinations!

"Zhang shi, calm down!" Unable to watch it any longer, Hu Yaoyao rushed forward to hold Zhang Xuan back.

Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er also slapped their forehead helplessly.

They knew that Zhang shi had always been lacking in EQ, but who could have thought that it would be so dire?

Given how that Chu Xiang fellow was drooling all over his clothes earlier, do you think that it's really the terpsichorean art which he is appreciating?

For you to dance for him...

Honestly, he wouldn't watch it even if you were to pay him, and you still expect him to pay you a concentrated high-tier spirit stone over it? You are really thinking too much!

"Zhang gongzi, I think it would be better for you to dance for these beautiful ladies instead. I'm afraid that I don't have such an interest..." With a face flushed crimson, Chu gongzi finally caught a breather and replied.

"Is that so? What a pity. I have to say that you have missed a really good opportunity!" Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He hadn't offered to dance for the other party out of mere greed for the money. Instead, he had discreetly activated his Eye of Insight to assess the condition of the young man beside him.

Considering the value of a concentrated high-tier spirit stone within Qingyuan Empire, which clan could possibly give a concentrated high-tier spirit stone to a profligate son to

squander away? Furthermore, given the fact that he had achieved a cultivation of Saint 3-dan at such a young age, it was apparent that he wasn't an irrational individual who allowed lust to get the better of him.

It might sound ridiculous for a rational individual to pay such a hefty price just to watch a dance, but Chu gongzi's true goal was actually to resolve the flaws in his soul so as to advance his cultivation.

As long as the flaws in his soul remained, it would be nigh impossible for him to advance to Primordial Spirit realm.

It was precisely because Zhang Xuan had seen through it that he offered to dance for the other party.

Even though Fairy Ziyan was a 7-star terpsichore, in terms of her ability to heal souls, there was no way she could come close to matching up to Zhang Xuan.

If Chu gongzi had agreed to it, Zhang Xuan was confident that he would be able to nurse the other party's soul to perfection. However, it was a pity that the other party didn't treasure this opportunity.

"Opportunity? It's fine, I don't need it..." Chu gongzi quickly shook his head.

While the duo was chatting, the auction beneath concluded.

The value of a concentrated high-tier spirit stone was far above a thousand high-tier spirit stones, and not to mention, it was a commodity which was difficult to obtain in Qingyuan Empire even if one had the money for it. Inevitably, the slot went to Chu Xiang.

Shortly after the auction concluded, the room to the suite opened, and Fairy Ziyan, who had been dancing below earlier, slowly walked in.

At this point, she had already switched to another set of clothes. It was less revealing than the one she had performed in earlier, but it still complemented her well nevertheless. With her new set of clothes, the aura of worldliness around her had vanished without a trace, and instead, she resembled a noble from a prestigious clan instead.

At close proximity, one could see that her skin was exquisitely delicate, reminiscent of silk. On top of that, the graceful aura which she exuded made one unwilling to avert one's eyes after taking a look.

"Ziyan pays respect to Chu gongzi." Ziyan greeted with a smile.

"You're too polite..." Chu gongzi hurriedly got to his feet before introducing, "This is my friend, Zhang Xuan, Zhang gongzi!"

"Pleased to meet you, Zhang gongzi." Ziyan bowed slightly.

Zhang Xuan nodded before asking, "Since you are a terpsichore of the local Terpsichore Guild, may I ask where should I go and whom I should approach in order to take the 7-star terpsichore examination?"

Since Fairy Ziyan was standing right before him at this moment, it was natural that he should make use of this opportunity to ask the matter.

"The 7-star terpsichore examination?" Surprised by the abrupt question, Ziyan took a look around the room before her gaze finally fell on Hu Yaoyao. "Is this young lady here going to take the examination?"

"No, it's me." Zhang Xuan replied.

"You?" Fairy Ziyan was visibly startled for a moment.

There was no explicit rule that prevented a male from learning terpsichorean arts, but conventionally, it had been regarded as a female occupation. This was the very first time she saw a male asking to challenge the terpsichore examination.

"That's right." Zhang Xuan nodded.

Under his guidance, Hu Yaoyao's proficiency as a terpsichore had advanced to the level of 6-star pinnacle. Nevertheless, she still needed more practice before she was ready to be promoted to 7-star.

Knowing what Fairy Ziyan was thinking of, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out his 6-star terpsichore emblem.

That was the emblem which Wei Ranxue had applied for him previously.

Taking a closer look at the emblem and confirming its authenticity, Fairy Ziyān turned to Zhang Xuan apologetically and said, “You are really a 6-star terpsichore! I’ll bring you over right now then... Chu gongzi, pardon me, but I’ll have to ask you to wait for me here for a moment. I’ll be back after dealing with this matter to conduct an Exclusive Dance for you.”

“It’s fine.” Chu gongzi nodded. “Actually, since I’m free at the moment, is it fine if I follow you all over as well?”

To be honest, he was rather surprised to learn that Zhang Xuan was actually a terpsichore too.

The seductive moves of a dancing man... Just the thought of it left him feeling a little agitated within...

“This...” Fairy Ziyān turned to Zhang Xuan to seek his opinion.

Typically speaking, the examination would be conducted in a private location so as to ensure confidentiality and absolute silence for the examiner to showcase the full extent of his abilities. Since Zhang Xuan was the one going to take the examination, it would only be right for her to seek his opinion on the matter.

“It’s fine.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

In the first place, terpsichorean art was a performance art meant for others to spectate. It mattered not to him whether he performed before a crowd or not.

“Zhang gongzi, this way please!”

Knowing that the other party was here to challenge the 7-star examination, Fairy Ziyān’s attitude became significantly more amiable. She began leading the way forward.

Stepping out of the grand hall, they arrived in a spacious room.

A middle-aged lady walked up to them and frowned, “Ziyān, why did you bring others in here?”

“Teacher, Zhang Gongzi over here is a 6-star terpsichore. He intends to challenge the 7-star examination.” After saying those words, Fairy Ziyan passed Zhang Xuan’s 6-star terpsichore emblem over.

“Zhang Gongzi?” Lowering her head to look at the emblem, a look of astonishment surfaced on the middle-aged lady’s face. “You are Zhang Xuan, Zhang Shi? From Hongyuan Empire?” “Hm?” Zhang Xuan was perplexed to hear those words. “You know me?”

“I am Wei Ranqin. The head of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy Terpsichore School, Wei Ranxue, is my junior!” the middle-aged lady replied with a kind smile. “Not too long ago, she sent a message over and told me about your affairs. It’s truly incredible for a man as young as you to achieve the level of Unadorned Quintessence in your terpsichorean art.”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Wei Ranxue had never spoken about Wei Ranqin before, but given how the latter knew of his background, her words should be true as well.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony! Due to the considerations as a result of her identity as a master teacher, Junior Ranxue hasn’t been able to release her inner self through her dance, resulting in an awkward rigidity in her move. As a result, she has stagnated at 6-star pinnacle for a very long time. It’s thanks to your guidance that she’s able to take the final step forward and achieve the level of 7-star.” Guild Leader Wei Ranqin said with a smile.

“She specially sent a message over saying that you might visit our guild in recent days, and she entrusted me to relay her gratitude to you if I were to meet you. Since you are intending to take the 7-star terpsichore examination, allow me to make preparations for you now.” Guild Leader Wei Ranqin nodded.

“I’ll be troubling you then.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist in response..

“It’s no problem. It’s also a good thing for us if more geniuses to emerge from our Terpsichore Guild.” Wei Ranqin replied

with a smile. After which, she turned around and instructed, “Ziyan, accompany Zhang shi here for a moment while I make some preparations for the examination!”

“Yes!”

After Wei Ranqin left, Fairy Ziyan and Chu gongzi couldn’t help but reassess Zhang Xuan with a look of bewilderment on their faces.

To them, Guild Leader Wei was a nonchalant person who rarely showed her emotions. Power and prestige, these are things which didn’t seem to affect her in the least. This was the very first time that Fairy Ziyan had seen her teacher getting so excited.

“Brother Zhang, you are really... a terpsichore?” Chu gongzi still found it difficult to believe the matter.

“That’s right!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Aiya! How could I have been so dense...” Hearing Zhang Xuan acknowledge the matter, Chu gongzi slapped his forehead and exclaimed.

“What’s wrong?” Zhang Xuan was bewildered by Chu gongzi’s abrupt words.

“If I were to become a terpsichore too, I would have more opportunities to come into close range with other terpsichores too. If so, I’ll be able to watch as many dances as I want to without spending a single gold coin! More importantly... as the saying goes, those standing by the gazebo are the first to acquire the moon 1 . That must be the reason why Brother Zhang has three ravishing beauties following you. You are truly a winner in life, my idol!” Chu gongzi exclaimed with a look of deep regret on his face.

“How could I have been so foolish back then? If only I have insisted on learning terpsichorean arts back then, my life could have very well taken a wholly different trajectory!”

“...“Zhang Xuan was speechless.

Reluctant to bother himself with this fellow whose mind was filled with nothing but nonsense, Zhang Xuan turned to Fairy

Ziyan and asked, "Pardon me, but I would like to ask how the 7-star terpsichore examination is conducted."

"You don't know?" Fairy Ziyan was taken aback.

To challenge the 7-star terpsichore examination despite not knowing what it was, the other party sure was gutsy!

"To be honest, I don't really know..." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

"The 7-star terpsichore examination doesn't differ much from the 6-star examination, so you need not worry too much about it." Shaking her head, Fairy Ziyan replied.

"Cough cough, then... may I ask how the 6-star examination is conducted?" Zhang Xuan scratched his head.

He hadn't taken the 6-star terpsichore examination either. The emblem he had was specially applied by Wei Ranxue. As such, he had no idea how the examination went either.

Hearing those words, Fairy Ziyan couldn't help but frown in displeasure.

It is one thing for you to not know about the 7-star examination, but as a 6-star terpsichore, do you think that it makes sense for you not to know about the 6-star examination too? Aren't you clearly toying with me?

"To tell you the truth, I didn't take the 6-star terpsichore examination. My emblem was obtained by a special application from School Head Wei Ranxue, so I'm not very sure about the procedures for the 6-star examination either!" Seeing that the other party was mistaking his intentions, Zhang Xuan swiftly clarified.

"You obtained your emblem through a special application? How is that possible? How would others know how deep of an understanding you have in terpsichorean art without undergoing a formal examination? This is preposterous!" Fairy Ziyan flung her sleeves in displeasure.

Even if you wanted to boast, at least come up with something more believable!

While the Terpsichore Guild wasn't as strict and rigid as the Upper Nine Paths occupation, it was still a unique occupation. Every single examination needed to be invigilated by numerous elders of at least equal ranking, and only after receiving the approval of the majority would the individual be qualified to receive the emblem...

To be given the emblem without even undergoing the examination... You must be kidding me!

She had been considered as a once-in-a-century genius in terpsichorean arts, but even she had never encountered something as absurd as this!

"This..." Not expecting the other party to doubt him despite speaking of the truth, Zhang Xuan had no idea how he should explain himself. Sighing deeply, he could only give up on the matter and relent, "Forget it then. May I know where your guild's library is? I would like to browse through the books if possible."

Since the other party was unwilling to speak, he would just have to uncover the answer himself through the books.

Besides, he had only compiled the 6-star Heaven's Path Terpsichorean Art so far. While his prowess was already on par with 7-star terpsichore, he would still have to compile the 7-star Heaven's Path Terpsichorean Art before he could be considered as a full-fledged 7-star terpsichore.

"Teacher will be turning very soon, so just wait here for a moment longer..." Fairy Ziyang waved her hands impatiently. However, before she could finish her words, Guild Leader Wen Ranqin suddenly returned back to the room with a bright smile on her face.

"Congratulations, Zhang shi. Junior Ranxue has reported your mastery in terpsichorean arts to the headquarters previously, and it has cleared their reviews. Thus, when I tried applying for the 7-star terpsichore examination on your behalf previously, the headquarters replied that they would bestow you with the 7-star emblem directly, so you don't have to take the examination anymore!" Wei Ranqin said as she passed an emblem over.

“Thank you for that!” Taking the emblem, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

“It’s really possible to obtain the emblem without undergoing any examination?” Fairy Ziyang froze on the spot. In this saying, gazebo refers to an elegant sheltered structure constructed above a pond, and the moon refers to the reflection on the surface of the water. This saying means those who are closest in proximity to an individual or a place tend to be the ones to gain the most from a happening.

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It was just a moment ago that she said that it was ridiculous for one to obtain an emblem without any examination when her teacher delivered an emblem straight to the other party in the very next moment... If only there was a hole in the ground at this moment, she would burrow into it without any hesitation.

Too embarrassing! It was too embarrassing!

In the first place, it was rare for a male to learn terpsichorean arts, but not only was the young man before her a terpsichore, his emblems were even given straight to him by the Terpsichore Guild. Was this for real?

“Teacher, do the headquarters have a procedure to give out emblems straight? Why haven’t I heard of it?” Unable to stand it any longer, Fairy Ziyan asked.

“The headquarters grant special care to those who have made great contribution to the terpsichore occupation, and this includes certain privileges in the promotion of ranks as well. Previously, Zhang shi has altered the Dance of the Rippling Cloud Robe, granting it prowess on par with a grade-7 terpsichorean art. With such contribution, putting aside a mere 7-star emblem, as long as Zhang shi wills for it, he can easily qualify as an elder of our branch!” Wei Ranqin replied.

“Altered the Dance of the Rippling Cloud Robe? He’s the one who altered that terpsichorean art?” Fairy Ziyan’s body trembled as disbelief sank into her eyes.

She had long heard of that someone had managed to improve the Dance of the Rippling Cloud Robe, and she was astonished by the significant rise in its prowess when she cultivated the altered version.

Not only was it far stronger than before, the soul energy required for its execution was also reduced by at least two-thirds. With this, the technique had become far more practical in battle than before. At the very least, terpsichores wouldn’t

find themselves completely drained and powerless after executing this single technique.

It was in view of the astonishing prowess of the altered Dance of the Rippling Cloud Robe that nearly all 6-star terpsichores and above in their guild had cultivated this terpsichorean art. She had thought that the person behind the alteration would at least be an 8-star terpsichore at the very minimum. Who could have thought that the person would actually be a twenty-year-old young man?

More importantly, she had even mocked the other party just a moment ago...

“Un. Not only did Zhang shi alter the Dance of the Rippling Cloud Robe, he also has a unique insight into the essence of terpsichorean arts. Your Senior Aunt Ranxue has reported all of these in detail to the Terpsichore Guild, and it’s in view of those that the headquarter made a special exception and distributed the 7-star emblem to him straight.” Guild Leader Wei Ranqin explained.

Even though she had learned of the matter from her junior through the conversations that they had a while ago, she still couldn’t help but find the entire matter inconceivable, especially after seeing how young Zhang Xuan was in person.

It was one thing for him to have such a deep understanding of terpsichore despite his young age, but more than that, he had also shown outstanding accomplishments in the other occupations as well... Even she couldn’t help but feel deep admiration for the other party.

“This...” Fairy Ziyán’s face turned completely scarlet from embarrassment. Biting her lips, she stepped forward and bowed apologetically, “Zhang shi, I apologize for my previous rudeness. I hope that you can forgive my ignorance.”

“It’s fine, I won’t take it to heart, so you don’t have to worry about it.” Zhang Xuan waved his hands and smiled. “If you still feel bad about the matter, it’ll do as long as you help my brother over here resolve the issues with his soul during the Exclusive Dance with him later on.”

With his current state of mind, the views of others couldn't faze him anymore. Honestly, it didn't really matter to him whether Fairy Ziyan apologized or not.

"Thank you." Seeing that the other party didn't blame him for this matter, Fairy Ziyan bowed gratefully. After which, she turned her gaze towards Chu Gongzi to ask the latter what kind of flaws his soul had, only to see the latter staring at Zhang Xuan with an astonished look on his face.

"Y-you... You know about the injuries of my soul?"

He hadn't told anyone about the injuries of his soul for fear that his enemies would use it against him. As such, not even his father was aware of the matter. All along, he had been hiding it under the cover as a profligate individual, and yet, a person whom he had just met an hour ago pointed it out so easily, as if it was nothing at all...

"While your soul may seem compact, there are still some portions which aren't fusing well with the rest of your soul. If I'm not mistaken, it's probably the result from being assaulted by an enemy while you were in the midst of a breakthrough to the Embryonic Soul realm!" Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

With the increment in the prowess of his Eye of Insight, even if Zhang Xuan didn't use the Library of Heaven's Path, he could still easily see what was wrong with the latter.

The other party's soul had been damaged due to being assaulted by an enemy during a crucial stage in a breakthrough, but fortunately, the injuries he had sustained didn't seem to be too severe. Furthermore, it seemed like he had been visiting the Spring Pavilion regularly to nourish his soul through terpsichorean arts, and he was just a little short from making a complete recovery.

As long as Fairy Ziyan were to earnestly help him resolve his issue, he should be able to make a full recovery very soon after watching a few more terpsichorean arts.

Thus, while the process might be a little slower than, there was actually no need for Zhang Xuan to make a move.

Even though Chu gongzi had only buddied up to him thinking that he was a fellow ‘comrade’ treading down the same path, ultimately, it was still thanks to the other party that he was able to enter the Spring Pavilion and meet Guild Leader Wei Ranqin so easily.

Naturally, it would only be right for him to return the favor, especially since it was only a trivial matter.

“I...” Chu gongzi’s face turned scarlet. He couldn’t find any words to speak at this moment.

It was true that his injuries were caused from being assaulted by an enemy in the midst of his breakthrough to Embryonic Soul realm.

However, as this matter concerned a very huge secret, he dared not speak of it to another soul.

Yet, the young man before him was able to see through him so easily, even accurately determining the cause of his injury... The other party’s eye of discernment was truly, in every sense of the word, astounding!

He had thought that the other party was only a lecherous fellow, but who could have thought that he would actually be a hidden expert!

“Guild Leader Wei, is it fine if I browse through the 7-star terpsichore books in your library?” Having dealt with the matter over here, Zhang Xuan turned to Wei Ranqin and clasped his fist.

“As a 7-star terpsichore, you are definitely qualified to browse through our 7-star terpsichore books. This way please!” Wei Ranqin nodded before leading the way forward.

Following behind her, it didn’t take long for them to arrive in a vast room.

“All of the books of our Terpsichore Guild is in there. As long as you have the required emblem on hand, you will be able to enter and leave the premises freely.” Wei Ranqin said as she gestured forward.

“Un. I’ll be troubling Guild Leader Wei to take care of my three friends over here then. This young lady over here is Hu Yaoyao, and she’s the prodigious disciple of School Head Wei!” Zhang Xuan nodded as he gestured to the three ladies behind him.

“Junior Ranxue’s disciple?” Guild Leader Wei was surprised as she turned her gaze over to Hu Yaoyao.

“Yaoyao pays respect to Senior Aunt!” Hu Yaoyao quickly stepped forward and bowed politely.

“Un. Not bad, not bad...” With a look, Guild Leader Wei couldn’t help but nod in approval.

On top of their innate talent, terpsichores rely heavily on their external appearances as well.

The more beautiful a terpsichore was, the more likely she would be able to bring forth greater prowess from terpsichorean arts. Regardless of whether it was her figure or her appearance, it was apparent that Hu Yaoyao’s looks were far above that of Fairy Ziyao. As long as she had a good teacher to guide her along, she would be bound to achieve great things in the future.

Guild Leader Wei nodded in satisfaction. Seeing this, Zhang Xuan decided to speak no longer, and taking out his emblem, he entered the library.

The library was extremely vast. Countless books were stacked compactly in neatly-positioned shelves, which seemed to extend all the way to the horizon.

Without bothering himself with the 1-star to 6-star books, Zhang Xuan headed straight towards the section with 7-star terpsichore books and began scanning through them with his gaze.

Hualala!

Countless books materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

After undergoing the fourth acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher, while the Library of Heaven’s Path didn’t undergo any changes, Zhang Xuan’s ability to process things

did rise significantly. As such, the rate at which he could collect books was also raised considerably.

It took him less than an hour to collect all of the 7-star terpsichore books into the Library of Heaven's Path.

“Compile!” With a thought, Zhang Xuan gathered all of the books together and formed the 7-star Heaven's Path Terpsichorean Art.

Another hour later, he exhaled deeply, and a brilliant gleam shone from his eyes.

Having grasped the 7-star Heaven's Path Terpsichorean Art, his mastery as a terpsichore had risen to the level of a 7-star pinnacle terpsichore. Due to the overwhelming prowess of the Heaven's Path Terpsichorean Art, his skills could be said to be comparable to most 8-star primary terpsichores.

But of course, that was only in terms of knowledge and mastery. With his current Saint 2-dan pinnacle cultivation, if he were to meet a real 8-star terpsichore, he would do well to flee as fast as he could.

As long as his cultivation hadn't met the mark, he wouldn't be able to display the full prowess of his terpsichorean arts.

“Alright, another supporting occupation cleared. Two more left to go, and I'll be able to be promoted to 7-star master teacher!” Standing up and stretching his back, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

“Perhaps I should try the Appraiser Hall and the Painter Guild. The examinations of those two occupations are slightly simpler.” Zhang Xuan thought with a smile.

The Beast Tamer Guild was a considerable distance away, and considering that it was an Upper Nine Paths occupation, its examination was likely to be more rigid and rigorous, thus more time-consuming as well. Since that was the case, it would be better for him to drop by the Appraiser Hall and the Painter Guild to take a look.

Walking out of the library, Zhang Xuan saw that Guild Leader Wei and the others were still standing around the area. Thus, he walked up to them and said, “I have truly imposed on Guild

Leader Wei this time around. I still have matters to attend to, so I'm afraid that I'll have to take my leave first."

"Guild Leader Wei, we'll be taking our leave too." Seeing that Zhang Xuan was about to leave, Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er clasped their fists as well.

"Un." Guild Leader Wei nodded. "I'll keep Yaoyao here with me for the time being. There are some things which I would like to ask her."

Zhang Xuan took a look at Hu Yaoyao to seek her opinion on the matter, and only after seeing the latter nod did he reply, "Alright."

"Zhang shi, are we returning back to the Combat Master Hall?" Leaving the Terpsichore Guild, Yu Fei-er turned to Zhang Xuan and asked.

"I'm intending to drop by the Appraiser Hall. If you have things to attend to, feel free to leave." Zhang Xuan said.

"I-It's fine, I'll head there with you!" Yu Fei-er replied swiftly.

"Same here too..." Luo Qiqi nodded.

Seeing that the duo was determined to continue tagging along with him, Zhang Xuan decided to say no more. After determining the direction of the Appraiser Hall based on the description Hall Master Xing provided him, he was just about to head over when a young man dressed in black suddenly approached him.

"May I ask if you are Zhang Xuan, Zhang shi?" the young man clasped his fist and asked.

"I am." Zhang Xuan replied with a frown.

He hardly knew anyone in Qingyuan Empire, so why would anyone seek him?

"Our Old Master wants to meet you." the young man said.

"Your Old Master wants to meet me?" Zhang Xuan was perplexed. "Who is your Old Master?"

"You will know once you meet him." the young man replied nonchalantly.

“Pardon me, I’m not free.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand and turned the other party down.

He was currently busy at the moment, so why should he waste his time on someone who wasn’t even willing to report his own name?

“Hehe, our Old Master said that Zhang shi will dare not turn down his invitation.” A peculiar smile appeared on the young man’s face, seemingly suggesting that he might have already anticipated such an outcome.

“Oh? I dare not turn down his invitation?” Zhang Xuan scoffed in displeasure.

It was one thing for the other party to not report his name despite requesting to meet with him, but to utter such conceited words on top of that... It was apparent from this that the other party couldn’t possibly be an upright individual!

“Zhang shi, why don’t you take a look at this before making your decision?”

The young man flicked his wrist and passed an item over.

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan took a look at it.

It was the tattered fabric of a robe.

With just one look, Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes menacingly, “You kidnapped Sun Qiang?”

He was certain that the fabric had come from Sun Qiang’s clothes.

He hadn’t paid any heed to Sun Qiang’s disappearance, thinking that the latter was out feasting, drinking, and saving damsels in distress, enjoying his life to the fullest... He didn’t think that the latter would actually be captured by someone else!

More importantly, it was apparent that the other party knew who he was, but despite so, the other party still chose to resort to such a brazen and arrogant course of action.

“We are currently hosting Butler Sun in our manor as a guest. Our Old Master has entrusted me to bring Zhang shi over at all

cost, or else what that would be sent over next might not just be a simple piece of fabric anymore but..." Seeing that Zhang shi recognized the object, the young man smiled gleefully. However, before he could finish his words, a sharp pain assaulted his abdomen, causing his face to distort hideously.

Peng!

Zhang Xuan's powerful kick had left the young man's organs jolting under the powerful impact. If the slightest bit more force were to be exerted, the other party's organs might just end up being shattered on the spot.

Padah!

The young man flew several dozen meters across the street before skidding to a halt. Clutching his abdomen, his entire body was scrunched together like a shrimp from the excruciating pain.

1145 Landscaper

As a transcender, Zhang Xuan had grown up being inculcated by the positive values of his previous world. As such, he preferred to avoid confrontation, choosing to resolve all problem amiably wherever possible.

But... all dragons had scales 1 which couldn't be touched, and those who flout the rules would have to pay with their lives!

Sun Qiang had been with him ever since the time he was at Tianxuan Kingdom. Despite the other party's indolence when it came to cultivation, the other party had always dealt with all kinds of miscellaneous matters for him skillfully without a single word of complaint. If not for the other party, he would probably have been bogged down by all sorts of things, and there was no way he would have been able to devote his attention to cultivation and achieve so much within such a short period of time.

It could be said that Butler Sun was one of the most important people in his life, and he viewed him as a family member as well, just like Wang Ying, Zhao Ya, and the others.

Yet, the fellow before him actually dared to threaten him using Sun Qiang's life, so how could he possibly not fly into a rage?

"You dare to kick me?" Not expecting that the other party would dare to make a move on him even when they had a hostage in hand, the black-robed young man struggled weakly to his feet and glared at Zhang Xuan with eyes brimming with hostility.

"I want you to di—" Roaring furiously, the young man charged forward, but before he could finish his words, he suddenly felt his entire body tensing up. Someone had grabbed him by his neck and pulled him up.

Following which, a pair of frosty eyes appeared before him.

"If you want to die, I can fulfill your wish right now."

The frosty voice paired with the killing intent left the black-robed young man paling in fear. The words which he had wanted to speak stifled in his mouth, rendering him incapable of utter anything at all.

Having undergone life and death situations before, the black-robed young man could tell that the other party was deadly serious about this matter. If he were to dare speak another word of the matter, the other party would very well have him killed.

“Who is your Old Master, and where is Sun Qiang at the moment?” Zhang Xuan uttered frostily.

“I...” The black-robed young man shuddered upon hearing those words completely devoid of warmth. Fearing for his life, he quickly replied, “O-our Old Master is the First King of the Qingyuan Empire, King Zhongqing!”

“King Zhongqing?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “Why did he kidnap my butler?”

It had only been three days since he arrived at Qingyuan City, and his activities had been mainly centered around the Spirit Awakener Guild, Combat Master Hall, and Terpsichore Guild.

He had never been anywhere else other than those three places, so how in the world did he manage to offend the so-called First King of Qingyuan Empire?

If he hadn't offended the other party, he couldn't think of a reason why the other party would go to the extent of provoking a reputable master teacher like himself!

To kidnap his men without any warning was as good as challenging his dignity, and not to mention, the other party even sent a small fry over to threaten him... He must be really tired of living!

“I am just a servant, I really don't know anything else!” the black-robed man shuddered.

“Lead the way!” Seeing that the other party earnestly didn't know anything at all, Zhang Xuan dropped the young man on the ground and bellowed.

“Yes!” the black-robed man replied fearfully. He dared not pull his weight as he did previously anymore, and he quickly headed forward.

“Zhang shi, I have heard of King Zhongqing before. He’s not an easy figure to deal with, you must be absolutely careful around him!” While following behind the black-robed young man, Yu Fei-er warned with a deep frown.

Even though she wasn’t interested in politics, as a princess of Hongyuan Empire, she still knew a thing or two about Qingyuan Empire.

“Oh?” Seeing that Yu Fei-er knew about King Zhongqing, Zhang Xuan immediately turned his gaze to her.

“This First King of Qingyuan Empire used to be a humble peasant, but twenty years ago, the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe somehow managed to find a way to arrive at the Master Teacher Continent, and they planned to launch an invasion. The Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, Combat Master Hall, and royal family swiftly learned of the matter and dispatched their men to eradicate the Otherworldly Demons. It was an extremely bitter fight; the three powers suffered great losses, and the head of the Combat Master Hall, Hall Master Xing, even suffered grievous wounds in the fight and nearly lost his life.”

“Back then, the emperor of Qingyuan Empire, Chu Tianxing, personally led the forces of the Qingyuan royal family into the fight, but a sudden ambush by the Otherworldly Demons left him in a truly dangerous position. At that desperate situation, King Zhongqing suddenly appeared and massacred the Otherworldly Demons, saving Emperor Chu Tianxing from that seemingly hopeless situation. After that incident, he continued to accrue merit after merit, and within just a short twenty years, he managed to rise from a mere peasant into a conferred king. In the entire Qingyuan Empire, he’s definitely the number one figure of the external kings 2 !” Yu Fei-er explained.

“The Otherworldly Demonic Tribe attempted to invade Qingyuan Empire?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Thinking back, the wound on Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit was indeed left behind in a fight roughly twenty years back too. The was in line with the details of the story.

“Emperor Chu Tianxing is bound to be protected by countless experts, and he probably is a powerful cultivator himself too... If the Otherworldly Demons were able to corner him that far, just how powerful must King Zhongqing be to be able to break him out from that desperate situation?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Even Hall Master Xing had nearly succumbed to the Otherworldly Demons and lost his life, so how did a humble fellow manage to break Emperor Chu Tianxing out from the encirclement of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe?

“I'm not too sure about the details... Wait, I seem to recall my father discussing this matter with another person before. If I recall correctly, King Zhongqing used... poison!” Yu Fei-er exclaimed.

“Poison?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “Is King Zhongqing a poison master?”

If King Zhongqing was truly a poison master, then it might really be possible for him to pull such a matter off.

The reason why poison masters were so deeply feared was because of their ability to fend against multiple enemies simultaneously. As long as they were to play their cards right, they could easily eradicate a group of experts with their poison.

Just take the Ten Kings of the Qingtian Lineage for example; back then, he was only at Nascent Saint pinnacle, and any one of them could have easily killed him in a direct battle. Yet, nearly all of them ended up dying from the poison within his Heaven's Path zhenqi anyway.

“I'm not too sure whether he is a poison master or not, but there is one thing particularly sinister regarding him. It's uncommon for an individual outside of the royal family to be conferred a King, so naturally, there were many influential officials who opposed King Zhongqing. Yet, over the past twenty years, they had either disappeared or died... As such,

King Zhongqing currently wields immense influence in the royal court. Furthermore, due to his merit of having saved Emperor Chu Tianxing, he is well-favored, and there's no longer anyone who dares to confront him directly in Qingyuan Empire anymore!" Yu Fei-er said.

Zhang Xuan nodded as the frown on his forehead deepened.

Putting aside whether that fellow was truly a poison master or not, the fact still stood that he wasn't acquainted with the other party. It simply didn't make sense for the other party to kidnap Sun Qiang.

"Considering that he has gone to the extent of kidnapping Sun Qiang, it goes to say that he has absolutely no fear of my identity as a 6-star master teacher and the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. It would be best for you two to stay out of this matter. I'll deal with this alone." Zhang Xuan paused for a moment before saying.

Regardless of what the other party was up to, it was clear that the other party was aiming right for him. Since that was the case, there was no need for these two to bear this risk along with him.

"Zhang shi, you are my teacher. As your student, how can I flee and leave to face danger by yourself? I would be unworthy of being a master teacher if I were to do so!" Luo Qiqi stepped forward and spoke determinedly.

She was Zhang Xuan's apothecary and blacksmith student. While she wasn't his direct disciple, and they had never officially acknowledged their relationship, there were still the bonds between a teacher and student between them.

"I won't leave either! I'm willing to brave through any danger with you!" Yu Fei-er looked straight into Zhang Xuan's eyes and said.

"This..."

Seeing that the wills of the duo were unwavering, Zhang Xuan shook his head and whipped out two pills from his storage ring. "These pills are antidotes which I have personally forged, and they are capable of resolving most poisons. If you are

intent on tagging along, consume one first. This way, you shouldn't be in any danger even if King Zhongqing is really a poison master.”

The antidote which Zhang Xuan spoke of was just an ordinary pill, but it was infused with his Heaven's Path zhenqi.

“Un.” The duo knew that Zhang Xuan wouldn't allow them to follow him if they were to refuse, so they swallowed the pill without any hesitation.

“Alright, let's go!”

All this while, they had been conversing through zhenqi telepathy, so it didn't affect their movement. Following behind the black-robed young man, it didn't take long before a massive manor appeared before their eyes.

The manor was truly huge. While it couldn't be compared with behemoths like the Combat Master Hall, it was definitely one of the largest and grandest manor in Qingyuan City. The interior of the manor was filled with all kinds of formations, and even before coming close to it, one could feel the surrounding spiritual energy gravitating towards the manor. Without a doubt, the manor was definitely a top-notch land for cultivation.

Even ordinary men would find their lifespan lengthening by living in such an environment.

“This is the manor of our Old Master.” the black-robed man said before walking forward to discreetly whisper some things to the guard standing by the door. The guard glared at Zhang Xuan and the others for a moment before heading in.

Not too long later, the guard returned and gestured with a nod.

“This way please!” the black-robed man gestured forward politely. A vicious glint flickered swiftly across his eyes as he turned his head to lead the way into the manor.

Zhang Xuan noticed it, but he decided to feign ignorance. With Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi following behind him, he headed into the manor as well.

As expected of the manor of the First King of a Conferred Empire, it was far grander than the royal palace of Hongyuan Empire. Even its pavements were crafted out of valuable ores. Every single part of the manor screamed of extravagance.

“On top of powerful formations, it seems the entire manor has been specially designed by a landscaper.” Shortly after entering the manor, Luo Qiqi remarked.

“Landscaper?” This was the first time Zhang Xuan was hearing of this name.

“Un. Just like spirit awakener and herbologist, landscaper isn’t considered to be a unique occupation either. However, due to the unique capabilities that landscapers possess, they are still deeply welcomed by influential powers and clans as honorary guests.” Luo Qiqi said.

“Oh? Are there landscapers in Hongyuan Empire?” Zhang Xuan turned to look at Yu Fei-er curiously.

“I haven’t heard of such an occupation before...” Yu Fei-er shook her head.

“I learned of the existence of this occupation from an ancient record.” Luo Qiqi replied with a smile. “It’s said that landscapers are able to assess the geographical terrain, geomancy, and many other factors of the environment to design structures, be it residences, sects, formations, or mechanisms, and fuse them perfectly together, such that they complemented one another to exert the maximum strength possible. If a power were to have its base designed by a landscaper, its overall defenses could potentially be enhanced by severalfold!”

“But of course, it is an extremely rare occupation, and it doesn’t have a complete heritage either, so I can’t be too sure about the matter. It’s in view to the exquisite layout of the manor and the perfect harmony of the various structures and formations that I made such a deduction.”

“You’re right, the harmony of the various structures within this manor is indeed exquisite.” Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

As a 7-star pinnacle formation master and a possessor of the Eye of Insight, it went without saying that he would be able to easily notice what Luo Qiqi saw.

He had been to Hongyuan royal palace, and as numerous as the formations there were, they were all separate entities from one another. Each formation had to be manually triggered in order to come to life. On the other hand, the formations within King Zhongqing Manor were interconnected with one another, as well as the structures in the area. If they were to just trigger a single formation, they might find other formations coming to life as well, swiftly cornering them.

If the formations within Hongyuan empire were said to be mouse traps, effective only when in contact, the formations within King Zhongqing Manor were most definitely dominoes. Touch a single one of them, and it could cause a chain reaction with devastating outcomes.

What Luo Qiqi had said could very well be true, the manor had been worked on by landscapers.

Just as Zhang Xuan was still in the midst of contemplating over the matter, a bunch of footsteps suddenly sounded right in front of the black-robed young man. Following which, dozens of guards abruptly rushed out.

In the blink of an eye, they had the trio tightly encircled.

“Brat, you sure acted arrogantly a moment ago. Give him a good beating! Let him know that we from the King Zhongqing Manor are not to be trifled with!” the black-robed young man sneered savagely as he hid behind the crowd.

When he heard that he had to ‘invite’ the other party here, he thought that it would be an easy assignment. He had never thought that he would be nearly kicked to death. From that point onward, he was filled with nothing but utmost antagonism for the young man before him. Thus, back when he was still at the doorstep, he secretly informed the guard to prepare an ambush.

Huala!

Upon hearing those words, the guards began walking forward as they brandished the sharp weapons in their hands threateningly. Their movements seemed to be aligned with the surrounding formations, causing an overwhelming pressure to fall upon Zhang Xuan and the others. This is saying from a legend which depicts that dragons have an inverted scale on their neck which no one is to touch. Anyone who dares to touch it will be killed by the dragon. This saying means that everyone has their own bottom line, no matter how tolerant or forgiving they are. Anyone who dares cross that line will incur the ire of the individual King is a title usually granted to close relatives of the royal family, such as fellow brothers or sons of the current emperor. However, if one were to accrue sufficient merit, it's possible to be conferred as a King, and such Kings are called 'different surname Kings', or as I translated it, external Kings.

1146 King Zhongqing

“Teacher...” Luo Qiqi’s face warped in shock, and she hurriedly stood in front of Zhang Xuan to shield him.

Individually, these Half-Saint guards were no threat at all. However, when their prowess was enhanced by the surrounding formations and the perfect harmony crafted by a landscaper, the nature of the matter became completely different.

Even a Saint 3-dan expert would find it difficult to flee from their combined might!

“There’s no need to panic.” Seeing the anxious state the young lady was in, Zhang Xuan pulled her behind him before turning to the black-robed young man. His lips curled up as he asked, “You wish to teach me a lesson?”

“Considering that our Old Master has specially invited you over, I’ll allow you to keep your life for the time being. However, you won’t be getting away from here without suffering some pain!” the black-robed young man sneered.

The Old Master had said that if the other party refused to heed his words, he had his permission to teach the other party a lesson, there was no need to hold back just because the other party was a master teacher. It was for this reason that he dared to pull a thing such as this on Zhang Xuan.

“Pain?” Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed deeply. “I was considering whether I should let you off with just a kick, but it seems like you just won’t learn... It seems like there’s no need for me to hold back anymore then!”

Right after saying those words, Zhang Xuan snapped his fingers.

Pah!

A crisp sound echoed resoundingly through the manor. Initially, the black-robed young man thought that Zhang Xuan

was just feigning calm, but in the next moment, he suddenly felt excruciating pain assaulting every single part of his body.

Pu!

A mouthful of blood spewed from his mouth, and in an instant, his face flushed completely pale. He turned to face Zhang Xuan with a look of horror.

“Y-you... you poisoned me?”

The answer was already apparent at this point, but what was truly fearsome was that he couldn't even fathom when the other party had poisoned him!

With his body twitching from pain, the black-robed young man hurriedly whipped out two antidotes from his storage ring and swallowed it. However, the antidotes only seemed to have further worsened his pain. Cold sweat gushed down his head, and he felt as if he would simply cave in to the pain at any moment.

“Poison? When did you see me poison you? If I were to say, you probably just ate something unclean! However, worry not. I am a capable physician, so why don't you allow me to treat you instead?” Zhang Xuan waved his hand leisurely as he said.

Naturally, as a master teacher, he couldn't possibly admit to being a poison master.

“You...” Veins popped out on the temples of the black-robed young man as he clenched his jaws so forcefully that it seemed like his teeth would chip. He was tempted to make a move and end the life of the young man before him there and then, but eventually, he clenched his fists tightly and spat, “Let them pass!”

He had wanted to teach the other party a lesson, but at this point, the tides were no longer in his favor anymore. As indignant as he was, he could only let this matter go.

“Yes!”

The guards quickly split apart to open up a road for Zhang Xuan and the others to pass.

With a smile, Zhang Xuan stepped forward, and just as he was about to walk by the black-robed young man, he placed his mouth before the other party's ear and whispered in a silent tone that only the latter could hear. "The only way to alleviate my poison is to have your face slapped viciously. Otherwise, the pain will gradually intensify until it reaches a point where you can't bear it any longer and snap!"

The black-robed young man was startled for a moment before he regained himself and sneered, "The only way to alleviate the poison is to have my face slapped? Hah, do you take me for a fool? How can there be such a poison in the world?"

"You're right, I'm just fooling around with you. I'll be going ahead first, so have fun!" Not bothering to explain anything, Zhang Xuan left with the two ladies.

"You..."

The black-robed young man thought that Zhang Xuan would at least attempt to justify his words, but who could have thought that the latter would admit to lying to him so blatantly and shamelessly? This unexpected response left him stunned instead.

Just as he was at a loss of what to do, his body suddenly churned up once more, and he felt as if his organs were being gradually corroded by sulfur.

Pu!

Yet another mouthful of blood spewed from his mouth.

At this rate, I could really die! It felt as if his life force was gradually being sapped from his body, and this made him realize that he was at an imminent threat of death. Cold sweat immediately flowed down his back. Desperate, he turned to a nearby guard and ordered, "You, come over here. I want you to slap my face!"

"S-s-slap your face? Butler Qin, I dare not to!" The guard was horrified to hear such words, and he quickly lowered his head humbly and responded.

"Hurry up, do it!" The face of the black-robed man distorted hideously from the excruciating pain.

At this point, he had no other choice. He wasn't prepared to face death yet, so he could only heed whatever the other party told him, even though there was a good chance that it was a lie.

“This...”

No one had heard his conversation with Zhang Xuan, so everyone was taken aback by Butler Qin's abrupt request. No one here could have imagined that Butler Qin would actually have masochistic tendencies... Appalled and speechless, they stared at one another, not knowing what to do.

“Hurry up and do it, or else I'll have every single one of you killed!” Seeing that none of the guards were making a move, Butler Qin roared furiously.

“Yes!” A guard stepped forward, and gritting his teeth in resolution, he raised his hand and slapped Butler Qin's face forcefully.

Pah!

Butler Qin's face immediately swelled up.

“Hm?” While there was burning sensation on his face, the excruciating pain within his body seemed to have lessened considerably.

Could it be that the other party isn't lying? There's truly such a poison in the world? Butler Qin was thought in astonishment as he bellowed, “Continue hitting me, don't stop!”

“Yes!”

Fearing that Butler Qin would really claim their lives, the guard could only continue striking with all his might.

Pah pah pah pah!

With just a few slaps, Butler Qin's face had already swollen to a point where it bore no resemblance to how it was previously. However, it did seem like the poison within his body had alleviated significantly. The excruciating pain from before was no longer as unbearable anymore.

“It really is effectively!” Enduring the stinging pain on his cheeks, Butler Qin heaved a sigh of relief.

It was rather embarrassing to be slapped by others, especially before such a crowd, but his fear of death had surpassed all of his other emotions.

He had the guard slap him a few more dozen times, and after confirming that he was fine, he stood up once more. Hatred and hostility began welling up in the depths of his eyes once more.

“Damn that fellow, how dare he humiliate me with such a poison? I hereby vow that I’ll surely return this favor to him tenfold, or else I shall renounce my humanity!” Butler Qin clenched his jaws furiously.

As the loyal follower of the powerful King Zhongqing, the butler of the massive residence, when had he suffered such grievance before?

“Let it be clear that if I were to hear a single word about this matter anywhere else, I’ll have all of your tongues severed!” Butler Qin turned to the guard and harrumphed coldly.

“Y-yes, we won’t speak of this matter to another soul...” the guards quickly lowered their heads subserviently and replied.

“Un.” Harrumphing coldly, Butler Qin hurriedly walked down the path where Zhang Xuan had headed to previously.

...

“Zhang shi, that fellow won’t let this matter rest just like that. Are you really going to let him off like this?” Walking closely behind Zhang Xuan, Yu Fei-er couldn’t help but ask worriedly.

While Zhang Xuan may seem like a leisurely and easygoing person most of the time, he wasn’t the type to show mercy to those who had crossed him. Back then, she had crossed him too, and he forced her into becoming his maid through trickery. That matter had truly left her fuming mad for a very long time.

It was apparent with a look that the black-robed young man was a vicious character, and to such a person go after a

complete fallout... This truly wasn't Zhang Xuan's style.

“To dare to confront the principal of a Master Teacher Academy head-on, a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, there's no doubt that King Zhongqing must have prepared a foolproof plan. At this point, it might play to our advantage to spare that fellow, at least for now...” Zhang Xuan replied Yu Fei-er telepathically.

If it had been on any other occasion, even if he didn't kill that fellow, he would make sure to pummel him to the point where even limping was impossible. However, with Sun Qiang in the other party's hands, it was best for him to proceed carefully for the time being.

There was only one path that led to the main hall, so it didn't matter whether there was anyone bringing him along. Very soon, they arrived at their destination.

A hall that towered several dozen meters high had four thick and bulky pillars supporting its entrance. Each of these pillars was at least three meters big, and from afar, the grandeur was truly impressive.

“You must be Zhang shi. Our Old Master has been waiting inside for you for some time now...” A guard stepped forward and ushered Zhang Xuan in.

Nodding, the trio made their way into the hall.

The hall was exceptionally spacious, stretching for more than a thousand square meters large. The ceiling was embedded with Night Illumination Pearls of all sizes, bringing radiance to the insides of the hall.

Seated on the main seat in the room was a middle-aged man with tanned skin and eagle-like eyes. Even without coming close, one could already feel the aura of authority and bloodshed that he emanated. It was clear that he was a powerful man no stranger to slaughter.

Without a doubt, he was the famous King Zhongqing!

Not too far away from King Zhongqing sat an elder, who seemed to be in his sixties. The elder wasn't too tall, and he was a little hunched over even. However, his presence felt

similar to a silent, unmoving painting. If one didn't see him with one's physical eyes, one might not even have noticed him.

King Zhongqing is a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert, and the hunched over elder... seems to be even stronger than him! In the blink of an eye, Zhang Xuan managed to assess his current situation.

King Zhongqing's aura felt condensed and powerful, and it was imbued with overwhelming killing intent at that.

However, in terms of scariness, the hunched back elder was definitely an individual whom Zhang Xuan had to guard carefully against.

Even though he didn't use his Eye of Insight to assess the other party's strength yet, the fact that the other party was able to conceal his breath so perfectly indicated that his fighting prowess had already reached an incredible level. Most likely, the other party was even stronger than Wu Shi, even after the latter's breakthrough in the Qiu Wu Palace.

"You are Zhang Xuan, Zhang Shi?"

While he was assessing the other party, the other party was also assessing him. When the trio finally reached the center of the hall, King Zhongqing turned to look at him with a frown.

"That's right!" Zhang Xuan nodded as he walked up to a guest seat by the side and sat down.

Even though the other party wielded great authority in his hands, Zhang Xuan didn't pale in comparison either, so there was no need for him to fear.

It was one thing if the other party didn't provoke him, but if the other party didn't know what was better for him, he didn't mind flipping the entire Qingyuan City upside down!

To be honest, they should already be counting their blessing that he hadn't gone around causing trouble. To actually attempt to provoke him... they are truly courting death!

"Did I give you permission to sit?" King Zhongqing uttered with a cold, authoritative voice. His powerful presence swept across the room, commanding others to obey him.

“I am a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, as well as a principal of a Master Teacher Academy. In terms of standing, I am on par with any 7-star master teacher. Not even your emperor is worthy of dictating where and when I should sit, so who do you think you are?” Zhang Xuan raised his eyelid and glanced at King Zhongqing coldly.

Upon hearing those words, Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi’s face twitched as cold sweat filled their palms.

To act so brazenly despite being within the other party’s territory, even going to the extent of criticizing the other party... Wasn’t Zhang shi a little too gutsy?

However, master teachers also had their own dignity to uphold. If Zhang shi couldn’t even stand his own ground after what the other party had done, how could he stand before his students and lecture others?

“6-star pinnacle master teacher? Hmph, you still dare to say that you are a master teacher? Flouting the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion, colluding with the poison masters of the Poison Hall... Do you honestly think that no one will know of these, principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy?” King Zhongqing harrumphed coldly.

“Colluding with the poison masters?” Zhang Xuan glanced at King Zhongqing and sneered, “Watch your words, King Zhongqing. You should know the consequences of slandering a master teacher.”

Master teachers mustn’t be sullied.

Slandering a master teacher was an extremely grievous crime. Even if the other party was the First King of the Qingyuan Empire, he could still be beheaded on the spot over this matter.

“Slander? It seems like you simply won’t concede until you see your own coffin!” King Zhongqing said as he raised his hand.

Huala!

The sounds of rattling chain echoed in the room, and a plump figure was dragged into the room.

“Young Master!” Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, the plump figure immediately shouted. However, despite shouting with all of his might, his voice sounded feeble and powerless.

Sun Qiang.

Upon seeing the state that Sun Qiang was in, Zhang Xuan’s face turned livid.

There was not a single part of Sun Qiang which could be said to be in good shape. It was apparent that he had been severely tortured. There were even two Golden Soul Lock piercing through his chest, preventing him from exerting any strength at all.

“What do you mean by this?” Zhang Xuan turned to look at King Zhongqing with narrowed eyes.

1147 Tian Qing

He knew that the King Zhongqing wanted to deal with him, but he hadn't thought that the other party would be so vicious as to inflict such grievous torture on Sun Qiang.

As the saying goes, even when beating a dog must one look at its owner. To kidnap his subordinate without any prior notice and use such cruel means on the latter, it was clear that the other party was undermining him.

“What do I mean?” King Zhongqing asked in a mocking tone. “Bring Vice Hall Master Ming in here!”

Hualala!

As he said those words, two guards escorted a figure in.

Upon seeing the other party's appearance, Zhang Xuan's face turned livid.

He recognized that figure. He was the vice head of the Jingyuan City Poison Hall, Ming Zhen!

Back then, he willfully chose to side with his own student and attempted to kill Zhang Xuan. Unfortunately, Zhang Xuan's soul happened to be out at the moment, and eventually, the entire Poison Hall was reduced to waste as a result of his actions... But wasn't he killed by Hall Master Ruo Qingyuan back then?

Why was he still alive?

And from the looks of it, he wasn't even in the slightest injured... On the contrary, it seemed like he had even managed to advance his cultivation up a notch.

Could it be that something had happened to the Poison Hall?

Furthermore, despite Sun Qiang being bound by heavy chains, there was nothing on Ming Zhen at all. It was as if he was an honored guest of King Zhongqing!

Zhang Xuan's face turned livid.

“Paying respects to Your Highness!” Ming Zhen clasped his fist.

King Zhongqing nodded and said, “Speak of what you know!”

“I used to be the vice head of the Jingyuan Empire Poison Hall, located in the territory of Hongyuan Empire. Two months ago, Sun Qiang altered his appearance and dropped by our Poison Hall, claiming to be the successor of the Poison Hall’s founder. He displayed exceptional mastery in the Way of Poison that even I am unable to match up with...” Ming Zhen swiftly revealed everything that had happened at the Poison Hall.

“... After which, he entrusted the founder to Poison Hall Bai and Poison Master Hai. Initially, I was to be executed for my actions, but it’s fortunate that the one who was responsible for executing me was my student, and it was due to that that I was able to escape with my life...”

“The successor of the Poison Hall’s founder? If I hadn’t heard this with my own ears, I would truly dare not believe such a matter. Zhang shi, this Sun Qiang over here is your subordinate, and yet, he is also a formidable poison master as well. What do you have to say for yourself?” Sneering coldly, King Zhongqing gazed down at Zhang Xuan haughtily.

“You are accusing me of colluding with the poison masters over this?” Zhang Xuan was still wondering if the other party had managed to obtain some kind of evidence regarding the matter, but it turned out to be this much only. Shaking his head, he continued, “Putting aside the fact the fact that this Ming Zhen fellow over here has dubious backgrounds, just the fact that he’s a vice head of the Poison Hall should warrant him a death penalty. So, why is he standing right here, honored as a guest in your manor? Could it be that... King Zhongqing has colluded with the Poison Hall? Are you, in fact, a poison master, just like what others say of you?”

“Audacious!” King Zhongqing bellowed furiously.

“You are the one being audacious over here!” Zhang Xuan interjected with a roar. “There are plenty of people in the world who goes by the name of Sun Qiang, and yet, based on

this kind of indeterminate evidence, you kidnapped my butler and tortured him? If I were to capture a dog and confer it the name of King Zhongqing, can I say that you are a dog? If my butler is truly the successor of the Poison Hall's founder, you will have long been poisoned to death for treating him in such a manner!"

"You..." Not expecting the other party to be so crude in his words, King Zhongqing nearly spurted blood. With a face livid with rage, he harrumphed, "My men proceeded carefully and subdued your butler before he could even retaliate, so naturally, he wouldn't have a chance to strike at all. There is no doubt about Ming Zhen's identity, and he has voluntarily left the Poison Hall to side with us. In fact, he has led our men to eradicate the Jingyuan City Poison Hall, and his merits are more than sufficient to make up for his wrongdoings!"

"Eradicate the Jingyuan City Poison Hall?" "Gedeng", Zhang Xuan's heart skipped a beat.

As formidable as the Jingyuan City Poison Hall was, if there was an insider to lead the elite forces of the Qingyuan Empire in, it would indeed be difficult for the Poison Hall to stand its ground.

If the Poison Hall were to be destroyed, what would become of Elder Xu and the others?

He hadn't thought that so much would happen over a short frame of two months.

"Indeed! No matter how he was before, his accomplishments are more than sufficient to bring credibility to his words. Furthermore, we have corroborated his words with the confessions of the other poison masters of the Jingyuan City Poison Hall, so there is no doubt about the authenticity of this matter!"

Standing up, King Zhongqing flung his sleeves and harrumphed, "Despite being a master teacher, you actually kept such a reprehensible poison master by your side. This is a blatant infringement of the Master Teacher Pavilion's rules. For the safety of Qingyuan City, I am obliged to apprehend you."

“For the safety of Qingyuan City? I, Zhang Xuan, am an upright master teacher of the Master Teacher Pavilion. If there’s any problem with me, it should be the Master Teacher Pavilion to pass judgement. And you? Pardon me, but I don’t believe that you are in charge of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion!”

When a master teacher erred, only the Master Teacher Pavilion was qualified to judge them. A mere King of the Conferred Empire had no rights to take things in his own hands!

“I know that I’m not qualified to judge this matter, so I specially reported this matter to Vice Pavilion Master Tian Qing of the Master Teacher Pavilion to have him judge this matter!” Saying these words, King Zhongqing clasped his fist towards the hunched over elder seated beside him.

“Tian Qing?” Hearing that name, Zhang Xuan recalled a matter, and his eyes narrowed.

Huala!

But before he could say a word, the elder stood up, and it was only then did everyone notice the seven stars on the emblem pinned on his chest.

A 7-star master teacher!

“Vice pavilion master?” Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er were alarmed, and they quickly turned their gazes towards Zhang Xuan.

If the Master Teacher Pavilion wasn’t involved in this matter, Zhang Xuan might still be able to use his identity as a master teacher to avoid this matter. Yet, the other party actually brought a vice pavilion master of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion in. This would really complicate matters.

“He sure did come prepared.” Swiftly calming down, Zhang Xuan began reanalyzing the situation.

Previously, he had heard Wu shi briefly introduce the current circumstances within the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

The current pavilion master, Gou Tianze, was a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage expert. However, he had retired

from managing the affairs of the Master Teacher Pavilion since many years ago, and currently, Vice Pavilion Master Tian was the one who was in charge.

As such, despite being a vice pavilion master, Tian Qing wielded authority comparable to the pavilion master himself, making him one of the most powerful individuals in Qingyuan City.

Zhang Xuan had thought this would only be a small conflict; perhaps he might have accidentally crossed King Zhongqing somewhere and the latter wanted to embarrass him. He hadn't thought that the latter would actually bring Vice Pavilion Master Tian into the picture as well.

As the person in charge of the regional Master Teacher Pavilion, Vice Pavilion Master Tian had the right to liaise with the headquarters. If the other party were to judge that he had colluded with the Poison Hall, he would never be able to cleanse his reputation.

But of course, while the Jingyuan City Poison Hall had a poor reputation, it hadn't really caused too much harm. At the very most, being associated with it would only tarnish Zhang Xuan's reputation.

“Zhang shi, I have heard of your affairs, and I know that you are a person who possesses exceptional talent and capabilities.” Vice Pavilion Master Tian turned to Zhang Xuan and smiled. “King Zhongqing is in charge of the defenses of Qingyuan City. Given that he has uncovered evidence that suggests that Sun Qiang is a poison master, it's his responsibility to look into the matter, so I hope that you don't take this personally. The reason why he has invited you over to his manor instead of the Master Teacher Pavilion is in hopes of not blowing the matter up. After all, such a matter would soil the reputation of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, and this isn't something that any one of us would like to see.”

At this point, Vice Pavilion Master Tian glanced at Ming Zhen before continuing on, “I have personally investigated the background of Poison Master Ming Zhen and the words that he has spoken, and I believe that his words can be trusted.

However, worry not. Even though Sun Qiang is a poison master, the Master Teacher Pavilion will take into account the fact that you are unaware of the matter when passing judgement.”

“Even though Sun Qiang is a poison master?” Hearing how affirmative Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s words were, Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure, “Since Vice Pavilion Master Tian has seen this matter from the start to the end, surely you should be clearer than anyone else here whether Sun Qiang is a poison master or not, right?”

While a poison master may look like any other cultivator on the surface, their frequent consumption and concocting of poison would inevitably result in some internal changes in their body. In fact, there were some formidable poison masters who could even poison an entire city to death with just a droplet of their blood.

On the other hand, Sun Qiang cultivated the orthodox and upright simplified version of the Heaven’s Path Divine Art. His zhenqi was pure and attributeless, and that should be more than sufficient evidence to prove that he wasn’t a poison master.

Considering that Vice Pavilion Tian was a 7-star pinnacle master teacher, he should know better than anyone that Sun Qiang wasn’t a poison master. Yet, to be insisting that Sun Qiang was indeed a poison master here, it was obvious that he had chosen to side with King Zhongqing!

“Even though this Sun Qiang over here doesn’t have the prowess of a 6-star poison master, his very deed of escorting the founder of the Poison Hall back to the Poison Hall headquarters is a grievous mistake in itself! The founder of the Poison Hall is said to possess the Constitution of Disaster, and as long as she desires so, she could easily bring great catastrophe upon mankind. You might not understand because you haven’t seen the records regarding the war between mankind and the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe several dozen millenniums ago, but I had the privilege of looking through them in the Master Teacher Pavilion of the Empire Alliance. It was truly a huge tragedy that could hardly be described with

words. Countless master teachers and innocent souls had died of poison in the long war, and indubitably, the founder of the Poison Hall had a significant role to play in the matter!” Vice Pavilion Master Tian spoke righteously with the air of one who was worried for the future of the world.

Mankind had suffered great casualties in the fight against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, especially from the lethal poison they utilized. If not for the founder of the Poison Hall, there wouldn't have been a poison master occupation in the first place, and such a tragedy wouldn't have occurred.

It could be said that the founder was the very enemy of mankind herself!

“As a master teacher, you have a duty to mankind. And yet, you allowed your own subordinate to act willfully and escort the founder of the Poison Hall back to her place. You have truly let all of us down this time around. ” Vice Pavilion Master Tian sighed deeply. “However, if you were to confess to this matter, I'll implore the Master Teacher Pavilion to show leniency to you.”

“Vice Pavilion Master Tian, do you honestly believe the nonsense about the founder of the Poison Hall?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “If I recall correctly, the founder is a figure from the same era as Kong shi. Not even Kong shi could survive the trial of time, so do you think that it makes sense for the founder of the Poison Hall to still be alive at this point in time?”

“Naturally, I am skeptical of the matter as well. However, Ming Zhen has no reason to lie either. From what I know, even a Celestial Master Teacher has recently appeared in the world, so I don't think that the revival of the founder of the Poison Hall is something too absurd to believe.” Vice Pavilion Head Tian said.

“Celestial Master Teacher?” Zhang Xuan scoffed. “How can that be? If that is true, the matter would have long spread far and wide in the world. There's no way that I, as the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, would be oblivious to it!”

“It’s a deduction made based on the recent happenings in our Teacher Acknowledgement Hall. Currently, the news has been sealed for fear of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe learning of the matter, so only a handful of people in our Qingyuan branch knows of this matter.” Vice Pavilion Head Tian replied. “It might sound preposterous, but as a master teacher, we have a duty to the masses. It’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“So, Vice Pavilion Master Tian intends to...”

“Simple. For the grievous crimes that he has committed, Sun Qiang must be executed on the spot. On the other hand, Zhang shi, while you might not have played a direct role in the matter, your oversight in managing your subordinates have indirectly resulted in the happening of this tragedy. As such, you must be punished for your actions as well. You will be exiled to the Subterranean Gallery for three months in order to make up for your wrongdoings with merit.” Vice Pavilion Master Tian said.

“You want to execute Sun Qiang on the spot and exile me to the Subterranean Gallery?” Zhang Xuan felt as if he had heard a hilarious joke.

He abruptly stood up and patted his bottom before turning his gaze towards Vice Pavilion Master Tian, “What if...”

“... I refuse?”

1148 Wreaking Havoc In the King Manor

Even though three months in the Subterranean Gallery couldn't be considered to be a severe punishment, it couldn't be said to be a light one either.

The Subterranean Gallery was the intersection point between the Master Teacher Continent and the otherworldly battlefields. As such, it was constantly plagued with overwhelming killing intent. From time to time, Otherworldly Demons might even appear. Without a doubt, it was one of the most dangerous lands on the Master Teacher Continent, and most of those who ventured into its depths never return alive.

Only master teachers who had committed unpardonable crimes or wanted to make one last contribution to mankind would apply to enter those lands.

This was also the same with School Head Lu Feng back then.

Putting aside the fact that Sun Qiang wasn't a poison master, even if he was, he hadn't committed any harm to others, so how could he be said to have committed a grievous crime? Not even a master teacher had the right to claim the life of an innocent man! And since Sun Qiang hadn't erred, Zhang Xuan couldn't possibly be implicated into the matter as well!

For the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, a person who wields great authority in his hands, to judge a matter in such a manner... How ludicrous!

"Vice Pavilion Master Tian is already being magnanimous by showing you leniency for your actions, you really don't know what is best for you!" King Zhongqing roared furiously.

"You can have this kind of leniency for yourself!" Zhang Xuan couldn't be bothered with King Zhongqing any longer. Instead, he walked straight up to Sun Qiang.

Huala!

Seeing Zhang Xuan walking towards them, the two guards who were standing beside Sun Qiang swiftly drew their weapons warily.

However, barely after their swords left their sheath, they abruptly shattered into two with a crisp echo, and the tip of their swords flew into the distance. Right after that, the two guards were suddenly sent flying with a deep moan, crashing heavily onto a pillar right outside the hall before blacking out.

At this point, Zhang Xuan was already standing before Sun Qiang, and sighing deeply, he said, “You have suffered...”

In the next moment, the Golden Soul Lock on Sun Qiang suddenly flew out and fell onto the ground. Following that, Zhang Xuan flicked his finger towards Sun Qiang.

Tzzzzz!

The latter’s injuries began recovering at a pace visible to the eye.

As Sun Qiang’s cultivation was far lower than his, it didn’t take long for the Heaven’s Path zhenqi to heal his injuries.

“Audacious! Zhang Xuan, this is Qingyuan City, not your Hongyuan Empire! To disregard the earnest lecturing of a senior master teacher and act on your own accord, showing no regards for the law at all, a person like you isn’t worthy to be a master teacher. Men, take him down!” King Zhongqing roared.

Hualala!

Right after saying those words, a bunch of men suddenly barged into the hall.

“Young Master...”

Seeing that the Young Master was actually standing against the First King of Qingyuan Conferred Empire for him, Sun Qiang couldn’t help but feel a surge of warmth run through his heart.

Falling out with a vice head of a Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilion could possibly mean giving his future away, and yet, the Young Master still did so unhesitatingly just to

save a servant like him... To him, this was a debt of gratitude greater than the heaven itself.

Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er also swiftly moved over to Zhang Xuan and stood by his side as they warily scanned their surroundings.

Despite the sudden onslaught of guards, Zhang Xuan didn't pay them any heed. Instead, he turned straight towards King Zhongqing and uttered coldly, "You wish to capture me? King Zhongqing, it seems like you really don't fear death. Or perhaps, do you honestly think that I dare not kill you?"

"Kill me? You? Hahaha, it seems like becoming the principal of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy has really got to your head! A mere 6-star master teacher like you dare to speak of killing me... The fact that you disrespected Vice Pavilion Tian is more than sufficient to have you indicted on the grounds of insubordination. Today, I shall help the Master Teacher Pavilion purge its black sheep!" Sneering coldly, the aura shrouding King Zhongqing swiftly intensified, and it took a mere blink of an eye for it to reach its peak.

Under the immense power he was emanating, the surrounding air began to distort. This was the overwhelming might of a Saint 4-dan cultivator, a Primordial Spirit realm expert!

His strength had already surpassed the head of the Formation Master Guild, Guild Leader Han, reaching a level on par with Wu shi prior to entering the Qiu Wu Palace.

"King Zhongqing, no matter what, Zhang shi is still our master teacher. Even if he has erred, he can only be judged in our Master Teacher Pavilion. It'll do to just capture him, make sure to spare his life..." Seeing that King Zhongqing was going to make a move, Vice Pavilion Master Tian instructed.

"Rest assured, Vice Pavilion Master Tian. I won't go too far..." Sneering coldly, King Zhongqing thrust his palm forward, and in an instant, it felt as if ominous clouds had gathered within the hall, and a powerful might reminiscent of the relentless waves of the ocean began crashing down upon Zhang Xuan.

On top of that, perhaps due to cultivating some kind of secret art, the First King's zhenqi was not only condensed and powerful, it was also imbued with the scent of the battlefield, leaving one feeling as if one was standing amidst mountains of corpses and rivers of blood.

"That is... Scarlet Robe of Carnage?" Upon seeing the move, Luo Qiqi's eyebrows knitted together warily.

"Scarlet Robe of Carnage?"

"It's a technique that boasts of the strongest killing intent in Qingyuan Empire. Those who cultivate this technique must use fresh blood as a medium in order to advance their mastery in the technique. Once one starts practicing the technique, there's no turning back. The very sight of blood will trigger one's bloodlust, causing one to go into a manic. It's a truly sinister technique. Even the Art of Drawing Oceans will struggle to be a match for it!" Luo Qiqi explained grimly.

"However, due to the innately destructive nature of the technique, there was no master teacher or combat master who is willing to learn it... Who could have thought that a King of Qingyuan Empire would actually learn such a depraved technique! Teacher, you must be careful!"

"A mere small fry!"

In contrast to Luo Qiqi's anxiety, Zhang Xuan didn't show the slightest hint of panic. Instead, with a derisive smile, he flicked his finger.

Sou!

The Golden Soul Lock immediately flew towards King Zhongqing at a speed as swift as a streak of lightning, and in just an instant, it collided with the powerful palm strike that King Zhongqing executed an instant ago.

Astonishingly, the palm strike didn't even hinder the advancement of the Golden Soul Lock by even the slightest. It swiftly overwhelmed the palm thrust and arrived right before King Zhongqing

Peng!

The Golden Soul Lock struck King Zhongqing's chest squarely, and the latter's face immediately reddened from the impact before spurting a mouthful of blood.

Deng deng deng deng!

He swiftly retreated eight steps in order to ward off the impact before crashing into the exquisitely carved wooden chair behind him. The chair swiftly caved in to the pressure and exploded into countless smithereens.

King Zhongqing had to drive his zhenqi furiously and exert a relentless wave of might behind before he was able to finally steady his figure. At this point, he felt his blood within his body billowing furiously, and his face paled from frailty. He stared at the young man before him in disbelief, unable to accept what he had just experienced.

He was a Saint 4-dan Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert whereas the other party was only a Saint 2-dan Spiritual Perception realm pinnacle cultivator... There was a gap of two whole realms between them!

Logically speaking, this should be an unbreachable gap for any cultivator, no matter how skilled a fighter one was, and yet... the other party was actually able to neutralize his palm strike with such ease and even knock him back at that...

Too frightening!

King Zhongqing was not the only one astonished by the happenings, Vice Pavilion Master Tian was startled as well.

Zhang Xuan's fighting prowess had far surpassed his imagination. Such an outcome had never flashed across his mind, not even once.

“No wonder you dared to act so arrogantly, so you do have something up your sleeves. However... if this is all you got, I'll make sure you dearly regret your actions!” Gesturing to Vice Pavilion Master Tian that he didn't have to make a move, King Zhongqing roared furiously as he flicked his five fingers forth furiously. At the same time, he flicked his wrist forcefully, and his palm fell downward with a shape reminiscent of a lotus leaf.

“Three Autumn Palm!” Zhang Xuan recognized the battle technique.

Having browsed through all of the books in the Combat Master Hall’s Martial Arts Division and internalized them, he couldn’t be any more familiar with this battle technique.

Three Autumns of Osmanthus, Ten Li of Lotus Flower! 1

The might of this technique was comparable to the Grand Constellation Finger, and it was relatively famous for its difficulty within the Combat Master Hall. There were many combat masters who had to spend decades on it before managing to achieve some degree of mastery in it. Yet, King Zhongqing had actually managed to achieve a mastery of Major Accomplishment in it!

Such a formidable battle technique paired with the Scarlet Robe of Carnage made the hall feel as if it had turned into a marshland. Crimson bloodied lotuses bloomed one after another eerily, and it felt as if they would reap the soul and life of those who dared to approach them.

“This is indeed a powerful battle technique. Even Division Head Liao and the others would have to retreat temporarily before its immense might, but... it’s a pity that you picked the wrong opponent!” Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan took a step forward instead of retreating, stepping right upon one of the scarlet lotuses. He raised his finger and tapped forward.

Weng!

The brilliance of the stars shimmered on his fingertip, outshining even the radiance of the Night Illumination Pearls embedded on the roof.

A furious surge of zhenqi burst forth from his fingertip, tearing apart the Three Autumn Palm in an instant. In the next moment, blood spurted wildly from King Zhongqing’s mouth, and he was forced to retreat in a fluster yet again. A few steps later, his back crashed heavily onto the wall behind him.

Hualala!

Dust fell from the ceiling, cloaking his figure.

“You know of the flaws of the Three Autumn Palm?” King Zhongqing couldn’t believe his eyes.

Under normal circumstances, given that the Grand Constellation Finger and Three Autumn Palm were two battle techniques of equivalent might, even if they were to clash directly with one another, he shouldn’t have suffered such an utter defeat. But... somehow, Zhang Xuan seemed to have found the flaws in his technique and aimed his attack directly at it, causing his zhenqi to wither. As a result, his offense was subdued in an instant, causing him to sustain severe injuries.

Zhang Xuan couldn’t be bothered to explain anything to King Zhongqing at all. Placing his hands behind his back loftily, he calmly turned to Sun Qiang and said, “He has caused you great suffering, so how do you think we should deal with him?”

“Since he used the Golden Soul Lock to pierce my chest, it’s only right to return the favor to him!” Sun Qiang spat through gritted teeth.

“That’s simple!” Zhang Xuan smiled softly as he raised his palm once more.

Huala!

The Golden Soul Lock on the ground immediately flew into the air and slithered menacingly as if a vicious snake.

On the other hand, seeing that Zhang Xuan was actually discussing with a mere subordinate on how he should be dealt with, King Zhongqing felt deeply humiliated. His face turned crimson, and he bellowed furiously, “What are you all waiting for? Take him down!”

Huala!

Right after those words were spoken, the guards standing in the surroundings immediately charged forward with furious battle cries.

“Hmph!”

Couldn’t even be bothered to turn around, Zhang Xuan stomped his feet on the ground.

Huala!

A surge of zhenqi rippled from his feet, and in the blink of an eye, the formation shrouding the hall came to life, blocking all of the guards outside. No matter how hard they knocked against the formation, it simply wouldn't budge.

“Even you are nothing to me. Do you think that a bunch of small fries will be able to stop me?” Zhang Xuan glanced at King Zhongqing coldly.

Having mastered everything within the Combat Master Hall, Zhang Xuan's prowess could be considered to be invincible amongst Primordial Spirit realm. Even if King Zhongqing was an exceptional cultivator, his strength still meant nothing before him.

Huala!

Right after saying those words, the Golden Soul Lock rose up once more, seemingly ready to devour the figure before him whole.

“Vice Hall Master Tian, save me!” In face of the monstrous strength of the young man before him, the desperate King Zhongqing could only turn to the elder beside him for help.

“This is enough. Any more than this, and I will have to issue a master teacher arrest warrant on you...”

At this point, Vice Pavilion Master Tian could also see that King Zhongqing wasn't a match either. Shaking his head, he stepped forward and raised his palm, wanting to stop the Golden Soul Lock from making a move against King Zhongqing. However, in that instant, with a loud whiz, a massive cauldron abruptly fell from the sky.

Putong!

It fell straight on the head of Vice Pavilion Master Tian, causing the latter to collapse onto the ground, sprawled over in a ‘大’ shape.

“Master, where is the fellow whom you want me to pummel? Watch as I reduce that bastard to cinders for you!”

“...” Zhang Xuan.

“...” Vice Pavilion Master Tian Qing. This is the name of a poem.

1149 Pummeling The Vice Pavilion Master

The one who was speaking was the Golden Origin Cauldron!

Zhang Xuan had learned spirit enchantment previously at the Spirit Awakener Guild, and in the three days he spent in the Combat Master Hall, he found some spare time to wake the Golden Origin Cauldron up from its coma.

It might have been a difficult feat for any other spirit awakener, but as one who had cultivated the Heaven's Path Spirit Enchantment Art, as long as he were to be a bit more meticulous, it actually wasn't something too difficult to achieve.

Prior to heading to entering the Qiu Wu Palace, the Golden Origin Cauldron had already been at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle. While the onslaught of the lightning had caused its spirit to go dormant, it had also tempered it, allowing it to achieve a breakthrough swiftly after it awoke from its coma, achieving the same level of strength as Wu shi, Half-Leaving Aperture realm.

As long as Zhang Xuan could find fitting materials to reforge it, it was only a matter of time before it achieved a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm.

Given the Golden Origin Cauldron rise in power, as well as the advantage it wielded as a Saint intermediate-tier artifact, Vice Pavilion Master Tian was already smashed into the ground before he could even process what was going on. Truly, a pitiful state he was in.

“He's right below you... I only asked you to stop him, not to kill him...” Seeing how unreliable the Golden Origin Cauldron was, smashing Vice Pavilion Master Tian into the ground as soon as it appeared, Zhang Xuan slapped his forehead, speechless.

Can't you at least take a look before making a move?

Look at what you have done. Now that a vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion had been smacked into the ground, how should this matter be resolved?

"He's below me?" Taken aback, the Golden Origin Cauldron slowly shifted sideward before seeing a huge '大' character on the ground with a figure embedded in it.

"Ah... Master, I didn't do it on purpose..." the Golden Origin Cauldron said apologetically.

"You're courting death!"

Hong long!

Before the Golden Origin Cauldron could finish his words, Vice Pavilion Master Tian abruptly flew out from the depression of the ground, and powerful aura burst from his acupoints, rippling into the surroundings.

At this point, he felt so furious that he could explode on the spot.

For the person who commanded the entire Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion to be crushed beneath the bottom of a mere Saint-tier artifact, he felt so humiliated that he could just blow up.

"Zhang Xuan, it is insubordination for you to order your Saint-tier artifact to assault a 7-star master teacher. This is a blatant disregard for the dignity of the Way of Teacher, a complete lack of respect for your elders. A person like you isn't worthy of being a master teacher!" Roaring furiously, Vice Pavilion Master Tian thrust his palm towards Zhang Xuan.

It must be said that the might wielded by Vice Pavilion Master Tian was indeed fearsome.

Even King Zhongqing was nowhere on par with him. That single palm strike caused the surrounding air current to suddenly billow furiously, and it felt as if the entire hall would collapse under the pressure at any time soon.

"Your opponent is me!" Seeing that the other party was attempting to attack its owner, the Golden Origin Cauldron

roared in anger.

It wasn't easy for it to regain consciousness, and it had been wanting to find an opportunity to perform before its master. Yet, that fellow actually snubbed him and went straight for its owner. This was unforgivable!

Hu la!

The massive cauldron flung itself forcefully towards Vice Pavilion Master Tian.

Peng!

The incredible momentum of the charging cauldron succeeded in neutralizing Vice Pavilion Master's palm strike in an instant. However, at the same time, the impact of the collision also caused the Golden Origin Cauldron to skid back for several dozen meters before coming to a halt.

The both of them were actually equally matched!

As expected of a vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, he is indeed formidable! Zhang Xuan thought.

If he had to face Vice Pavilion Master Tian in a straightforward battle, there was a very good chance that it would end in his defeat.

While he was already invincible against all the Primordial Spirit realm cultivators, he was still a little lacking from being able to deal with Half-Leaving Aperture realm experts.

Knowing that it would take a long time before there was a conclusion for the battle between Vice Pavilion Master Tian and the Golden Origin Cauldron, Zhang Xuan decisively turned his attention away from them and turned his sights back to King Zhongqing, "It's your turn!"

"You... Vice Pavilion Master Tian is here! If you were to make a move against me here, there's no way he will let you off. You're courting death!" King Zhongqing roared furiously.

All along, he had thought that the figure he was going to deal with was just an insignificant figure from an insignificant land. As long as he were to pull his weight, the other party would surely be swiftly cave in, Who could have thought that the

other party was not only strong, he was even brazen enough to make a move against the Vice Pavilion Master Tian...

Formalities were extremely important to master teachers—after all, only one who conducted himself properly could be qualified to lecture others—and assaulting a higher ranked master teacher was a severe breach of the formalities.

If the Master Teacher Pavilion were to judge the other party for this matter, being stripped of his master teacher license could be said to be the least of his concerns. More than that, he could very well be executed on the spot to make an example for others to see!

And yet, to do so for a mere subordinate... Was that fellow insane?

“Whether I am courting death or not, it’s none of your business. However, for hurting my butler, you have to pay the price.” Zhang Xuan uttered coldly as he flicked his wrist.

Huala!

The Golden Soul Lock suddenly leaped up and pierced King Zhongqing.

Puhe!

It stabbed right into his chest.

The Golden Soul Lock had the ability to seal cultivation. As soon as it entered King Zhongqing’s body, the latter’s aura immediately began wilting. The excruciating pain of a foreign object piercing into his body left him spasming frenziedly, and for that moment, he thought that he would go insane from the pain.

“He’s powerless now, go and exact your vengeance.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand leisurely.

In his heart, Sun Qiang was as important as his direct disciples. The other party’s act of kidnapping Sun Qiang and deploying heavy torture on him had truly touched his bottom line, and it was already an act of mercy that he didn’t kill the other party on the spot.

“Yes!” Sun Qiang walked up to King Zhongqing, and gazing down on the latter, he sneered, “You had fun kidnapping me, didn’t you? You should have a taste of your own medicine...”

He flicked his wrist, whipped out a dagger, and swiped it right into King Zhongqing’s body.

Even though King Zhongqing was a Primordial Spirit realm expert, he hadn’t cultivated his body to a nigh indestructible level like Zhang Xuan, and his cultivation was also sealed by the Golden Soul Lock as well. As such, the dagger sunk right into King Zhongqing’s body, and blood began flowing out from his body.

“You!!!”

The immense pain caused King Zhongqing to howl in agony. However, before he could finish his words, he saw Sun Qiang whipping out a jar of salt from somewhere and spreading it generously on his wound.

“Bear with it, I’ll help you apply some medicine now...”

“...” King Zhongqing.

After applying a fair amount of salt on the wound, Sun Qiang picked up his dagger once more, brandished it to create another wound, and proceeded on to apply salt on it as well.

Zhang Xuan, having watched the happenings up to this point, couldn’t help but avert his gaze... It was simply too cruel!

However, he could tell that the Sun Qiang had been put through far more brutal torture than this while healing him up previously. In a sense, Sun Qiang’s rage and means weren’t unjustified.

On the other side, Vice Pavilion Master Tian and the Golden Origin Cauldron were still battling with one another, and both sides were equally matched. Thus, Zhang Xuan turned his sights to Ming Zhen instead.

The ex-vice head of the Poison Hall had attempted to escape as soon as he realized that the situation had gone awry, but the activated formation around the hall not only prevented those

outside from entering, it also prevented those within from leaving.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was staring at him intently, Ming Zhen backed away in horror.

“Come over!” Zhang Xuan roared.

With a flick of his wrist, Ming Zhen suddenly felt a powerful force pulling him right in front of Zhang Xuan before binding him tightly, preventing him from moving.

Zhang Xuan set up an isolation barrier with a wave of his hand to prevent Luo Qiqi and the others from hearing anything before asking coldly, “What happened to the Poison Hall? Where is Elder Xu You and the others?”

“Y-you, how do you know about Xu You?” Ming Zhen was astonished to hear that name coming out of Zhang Xuan’s mouth.

Back then, when Zhang Xuan headed to the Poison Hall, he had disguised him and assumed the identity of ‘Sun Qiang’. As such, Ming Zhen was unable to recognize the young man standing before him.

“Wait, it can’t be that... you are Sun Qiang?”

Ming Zhen was no fool either. It took only a moment for him to understand what was going on, and his eyes narrowed in horror.

“Not bad, I hope that you can remain this intelligent when you answer my questions.” Zhang Xuan’s lips curled up as he patted Ming Zhen’s shoulders, sending a surge of zhenqi into the other party’s body.

“AHHHHH!!!”

The zhenqi within Ming Zhen’s body warped into lethal poison, leaving cold sweat pouring down his convulsing body.

Not even Poison Master Hai and the others were able to endure the agony of the Heaven’s Path zhenqi, let alone him.

“You are... a master teacher... It’s already a grievous crime... for you to disregard Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s authority... If

you were to kill me... the Master Teacher Pavilion will conduct a thorough investigation of you..." Clenching his fists to bear the unbearable pain, Ming Zhen said.

Knowing that the man before him had a close relationship with Elder Xu You, he swiftly realized that the young man could possibly hold a grudge against him due to his actions which resulted in the annihilation of the Poison Hall. As such, he hurriedly said those words in hopes that he could convince the other party to stop.

"It seems like you aren't as intelligent as I thought. I only want to hear things I want to hear. Since you know that I'm the successor of the Poison Hall's founder, you should also know that I have the means to end your life discreetly without having anyone trace it back to me." Zhang Xuan replied impassively.

It might have been difficult for any other master teachers to kill an individual without having the Master Teacher Pavilion trace the case back to them, but Zhang Xuan was a poison master. He had many ways of killing a person without leaving behind any clues to him.

"I..." Hearing those bone-chilling words, Ming Zhen realized that the other party would really do so without any hesitation. Thus, he gritted his teeth and said, "Back then, after I fled from the Poison Hall, I headed straight here."

"You headed towards Qingyuan City? You are acquainted with King Zhongqing beforehand?" Zhang Xuan asked.

After fleeing from the Poison Hall, in order to ensure that no one would pursue him, he would surely head in a direction where he deemed that he would be safe. The fact that he chose to head here meant that it was likely that he had already known King Zhongqing beforehand, and he was certain that the latter could provide him cover.

"That's right, we have some business dealings with one another. I sold him quite a handful of lethal poison, and in exchange, he gave me many valuable cultivation resources..." Ming Zhen confessed.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan's face turned grim.

It seemed like Yu Fei-er's news was accurate. However, instead of being a poison master himself, King Zhongqing just had dealings with the Poison Hall.

Nevertheless, there were still some doubts about the matter.

"You said that he purchased lethal poison from you, but is he able to use it?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

Putting aside the concoction of poison, the usage of poison was also an incredibly profound art as well. Even if those who weren't poison masters were to obtain lethal poison, they would only be able to use it crudely, making it highly possible that they would be discovered.

This was the case with You Xu back then as well. Despite receiving lethal poison from the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, his ability to utilize poison was lacking, which prevented him from using it too often.

"I don't know about that... However, he has an exceptionally high demand for high-grade poisons. Most of the grade-7 poisons which I have applied by the headquarters ended up being sold to him." Ming Zhen dared not to hide anything from Zhang Xuan.

"I see." Zhang Xuan replied as he shot a doubtful gaze towards King Zhongqing.

That fellow was an honored King of Qingyuan Empire, and there didn't seem to be any incidents where the other party used the poison he had purchased to commit atrocities. As such, despite being a master teacher, he wasn't in a good position to interfere too much in this matter either.

Otherwise, it could very well cause some strife between Qingyuan Empire and the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Since King Zhongqing was the one to provoke him through Sun Qiang first, Zhang Xuan's actions could still be justified as self-defense. However, if he wanted to have King Zhongqing indicted for the purchase of poison, he would have to go through the royal court.

“What happened to Xu You and the others?” Zhang Xuan turned his attention back to Ming Zhen and asked.

“I spent my whole life toiling for the Poison Hall, only to be sentenced to a death penalty in the end. Indignant, I sought King Zhongqing, hoping to use his hand to return me justice. Yet, wanting to make use of this incident to win himself some merit, King Zhongqing ignored my opposition and captured everyone from the Poison Hall. Those who retaliated against him back then have all been killed...”

At this point, bitterness surfaced on Ming Zhen’s face. “As much as I hate Xu You and the others for putting me in such a plight, I still view myself as a member of the Poison Hall. It’s honestly not my wish to see this happen.”

Ming Zhen shook his head. What was done was done, nothing he said would change anything at this point in time.

“However, I can tell you that Elder Xu You isn’t dead yet!”

1150 Golden Origin

Cauldron vs. Vice Pavilion

Master Tian

“He isn’t dead yet?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. “Where is he then?”

Putting his trust in Zhang Xuan, Elder Xu had taken him to the Poison Hall. If the latter were to die as a result of that, he would surely feel deeply guilty.

“He was captured by King Zhongqing and is currently being held in the underground prison,” Ming Zhen said.

“Underground prison?”

“That’s all I know. It seems like King Zhongqing has spared them in order to have Elder Xu and the others concoct a more formidable poison for him, but I don’t know many details about the matter,” Ming Zhen explained.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Regardless of what King Zhongqing was up to, it was enough for him to know that Elder Xu and the others were still alive.

However, this was not the time to save them yet.

Otherwise, the others would surely use this as an excuse to attack him and pin some kind of crime on him.

After some questioning, Zhang Xuan confirmed that Elder Xu and the others were still fine at the moment, and he heaved a sigh of relief.

“You are currently afflicted with my poison, and only I have the cure for it. You are an intelligent man, so I believe I need not tell you what you should and shouldn’t say.”

“Y-yes!” Ming Zhen nodded hurriedly.

The young man before him was an individual who could even poison Hall Master Ruo's Darkgold Venom Beetle, and not even Poison Master Bai and Poison Master Hai from the headquarters dared oppose him. His mastery in the Way of Poison could be said to have reached an unfathomable level, a level that Ming Zhen would never be able to achieve.

Since that was the case, the only option left for him was to follow the other party's orders obediently.

His questions having been answered, Zhang Xuan released the isolation barrier around him with a wave of his hand.

Peng peng peng peng!

As soon as the barrier was released, a series of crashing sounds echoed in his ears.

Raising his gaze, he saw that Vice Pavilion Master Tian was still battling with the Golden Origin Cauldron.

With blazing flames burning within it, it was apparent that the Golden Origin Cauldron was using all its might to attack Vice Pavilion Master Tian. On the other hand, Vice Pavilion Master Tian also did not seem to be faring too well against the Golden Origin Cauldron's relentless attack. A trail of blood was flowing down the corner of his lips, signifying that he had already suffered considerable internal injuries.

As powerful as Vice Pavilion Master Tian was, the Golden Origin Cauldron was no pushover either. For the time being, it seemed like the fight would still go on for quite some time more before it reached a conclusion.

After noting that the Golden Origin Cauldron was not at a disadvantage against Vice Pavilion Master Tian, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze to King Zhongqing.

At this moment, King Zhongqing's body was completely covered in blood. There were at least fifty small holes on his body, sliced open by Sun Qiang. His breathing was extremely weak and erratic, and it felt like he might just pass away at any moment.

"You blind fool, how dare you torture me? You must not know whose butler I am," Sun Qiang bellowed as he brandished the

sharp dagger in his hand furiously, venting the grievances he had suffered before.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “Sun Qiang, calm down. Don’t accidentally kill him in the heat of the moment.”

“Don’t worry, Young Master!” Hearing the order, Sun Qiang nodded before whipping out a bottle of chili and spraying it over King Zhongqing’s wounds.

Seeing that King Zhongqing might really die if Sun Qiang was left to do as he pleased, he was just about to step forward to stop him when Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er suddenly walked over with deeply worried looks.

“Zhang shi, it won’t be easy to resolve this situation after blowing it up to this extent!” Yu Fei-er remarked worriedly.

Zhang Xuan had done it to save Sun Qiang, but still, the other party was still the First King of the Qingyuan Empire and the most authoritative vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion. To pummel them viciously, if news of the matter reached the Master Teacher Pavilion, this could become a huge issue.

At best, only his master teacher license would be revoked.

“It’s no problem. If it were any other master teacher, I would not dare do something like this. However, if it’s this Vice Pavilion Master Tian... then there won’t be a problem at all.” Zhang Xuan shook his head as he mentally calculated the time. After which, he whipped out a jade token and tapped on it lightly, sending a message out.

“There won’t be a problem at all?” The duo was unable to comprehend Zhang Xuan’s words.

Vice Pavilion Master Tian could be considered one of the most esteemed and authoritative individuals in the Qingyuan Empire, so how could there be no problem at all?

“There’s no doubt that King Zhongqing has colluded with the Poison Hall, but not only did this Vice Pavilion Master Tian fail to investigate the matter clearly, he even shifted the blame toward me. There is bound to be something more between them!” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Previously, he had indeed been a little hesitant to use forceful measures due to Vice Pavilion Master Tian's appearance. However, when the latter issued an unfair judgement, he recalled the various news he had heard before, and a realization dawned upon him.

"Even if Vice Pavilion Master Tian chose to side with King Zhongqing due to their prior relationship, the latter's claim isn't entirely unjustified, so it can't be considered collusion, can it?" Luo Qiqi frowned.

"Indeed. There isn't sufficient evidence to conclusively prove that Vice Pavilion Master Tian is colluding with King Zhongqing. There are a few things that you are unaware of, and it isn't convenient for me to talk about it for the time being. Don't worry, Wu shi will deal with the situation once he arrives," Zhang Xuan replied.

On the other hand, seeing how confident Zhang Xuan was about the matter, Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er heaved a sigh of relief.

"Young Master, I'm done teaching King Zhongqing a lesson."

At this moment, Sun Qiang was finally done scattering his chili powder, and he returned with a satisfied look on his face. The previous frustration and indignation he had suffered from the other party's torture had vanished without a trace.

Zhang Xuan swiftly turned around to look at King Zhongqing, only to see the latter breathing feebly, as if he would breathe his last breath at any moment.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan eventually stepped forward and retrieved a gourd of fine wine with a flick of his wrist. He tilted the other party's neck upwards and forced the gourd of wine into the other party's mouth.

The black-robed young man from before, Butler Qin, was roughly around the same cultivation realm as him, and Ming Zhen was only slightly stronger than him, so he could still afford to directly infuse his Heaven's Path zhenqi into their bodies without them noticing.

On the other hand, King Zhongqing was a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert. With the enhanced perception of his Primordial Spirit, it would not be too difficult for him to notice the presence of the Heaven's Path zhenqi.

The Heaven's Path zhenqi was one of his greatest secrets, so it was better to be safe than sorry.

Tzzzzzz!

The wine flowed down King Zhongqing's throat, and it did not take long for the wounds inflicted on the latter by Sun Qiang to vanish without a trace.

While Zhang Xuan's current cultivation was two realms lower than King Zhongqing, his Heaven's Path zhenqi was still sufficiently potent to heal the latter's wounds easily.

"Young Master..." Seeing Zhang Xuan heal King Zhongqing, Sun Qiang could not help but sigh in disappointment.

If only the Young Master had told him that they were going to heal the other party, he would have been far more vicious! He would have made many more decisive cuts and scattered more salt and pepper, and the vengeance would have felt far more fulfilling.

Noting Sun Qiang's response, Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, "He can't die now, and there mustn't be any wounds on him either. Otherwise... things might get troublesome."

As he spoke, he poured a few more mouthfuls of fine wine down the other party's throat. This time, however, he chose to hide the Heaven's Path zhenqi within the other party's body instead.

After he was done, he turned back to Sun Qiang. "What happened? How did you get captured by King Zhongqing's men?"

In truth, Zhang Xuan had been rather perplexed about this matter. In the first place, there should have been many people who went by the name 'Sun Qiang' in the world. If one were to shout the name on the street, many passers-by would surely turn their heads around and respond.

Yet, of all the possible people, King Zhongqing had chosen to capture him and even deeply believed that he was the one they were looking for.

“This...” Upon hearing those questions, Sun Qiang scratched his head in embarrassment.

Seeing Sun Qiang’s reaction, Zhang Xuan knew that there was more to the matter than there seemed. Frowning, he ordered grimly, “Speak!”

“Yesterday, I went out to search for good food to eat. I walked into a restaurant, and right after I took a seat, I heard a group just beside me talking discreetly, and I thought that I heard my name...”

As Sun Qiang spoke, his face grew redder and redder. “Young Master, you also know that I’m quite a nosey person. When I heard my name, I went up to them to ask them what they were talking about. They said that they were looking for a person going by the name of Sun Qiang who possesses astounding strength and unparalleled talent, an individual truly favored by the heavens. When I heard that, I naturally thought that the person they had described had an uncanny resemblance with me. Thus, I secretly told them that my name is Sun Qiang, and after that... after that... they knocked me out...”

“...” Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless before even hearing the entire explanation. To think that this would be the situation!

He had long known what type of person his butler was, but still, this was truly ridiculous!

Did he really have to leap at every opportunity to pose? Honestly, from whom did he learn this from?

Zhang Xuan shook his head helplessly. Jeez, he sure is a worrisome fellow. If only he was half as low profile as me...

No matter where he went, he would do his best to ensure that he kept a low profile. He would never boast or showcase his capabilities and accomplishments in public, and he would never cause trouble either. If there was a perfect example of a humble man, he would definitely be it.

And yet, his butler just had to go around boasting here and there. He could still afford to talk big in smaller places like Tianxuan Kingdom, but to actually do it in Qingyuan City, which was filled with countless experts... that was no different from courting death!

In a sense, Sun Qiang brought his plight upon himself. Hopefully, he would learn after this incident and not act as recklessly as before.

Knowing his own mistakes, Sun Qiang lowered his head apologetically. "Young Master, I dare not do so in the future..."

His young master always managed to pull off his posing, and motivated by the other party's successes, Sun Qiang had long wanted to give it a try himself. When he heard the others showering him with praises, he had thought that his time had come, so he had leaped at the opportunity. And yet, he had ended up being pummeled badly.

This sure was stifling!

"When we return, you will go into seclusion," Zhang Xuan ordered. "If you aren't able to reach Saint realm within three months, I'll have you scram."

"Yes..." Hearing that he had to reach Saint realm within three months, a bitter look surfaced on Sun Qiang's face.

Ignoring his conceited and boastful butler, Zhang Xuan turned his attention back to the battle above him.

"Young Master, that fellow is simply too powerful; I can't defeat him alone! Quick, give me some pointers!"

By this point, the Golden Origin Cauldron had fallen into a disadvantageous position. The tide of the battle was completely on Vice Pavilion Master Tian's side, and anxious, the cauldron quickly turned to Zhang Xuan for help.

Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, "In a battle, using just brute strength won't work. There's a mingmen located on the Jianhai acupoint on his waist, give it a try!"

“Alrighty!” Hearing those words, the Golden Origin Cauldron roared excitedly and charged furiously toward Vice Pavilion Master Tian.

“You...” Not expecting the young man below to be able to uncover his flaws so easily, Vice Pavilion Master Tian panicked. He swiftly retreated in fear.

Seeing that Vice Pavilion Master Tian was retreating, Zhang Xuan continued speaking swiftly.

“Due a constriction in his meridians, when he gathers zhenqi before his chest, there’s a moment when the might of his attack will diminish for roughly 0.3 seconds. That is a good opportunity to launch a counterattack against him.”

As soon as the battle began, Zhang Xuan had compiled a book on the other party in the Library of Heaven’s Path, and when he flipped it open, he found that it was filled with flaws. Of them, the greatest flaw lay in the other party’s Primordial Spirit.

In normal circumstances, a Half-Leaving Aperture realm cultivator should have an extraordinarily powerful Primordial Spirit, but the other party’s Primordial Spirit was filled with flaws. This peculiar situation had left Zhang Xuan slightly bewildered.

However, this was not the time to bother with the matter. What was more important was helping the Golden Origin Cauldron win the battle.

Hong long!

With Zhang Xuan’s pointers, Vice Pavilion Master Tian found the tide of the battle swiftly turning against him. In just a few breaths, he had already spurted several mouthfuls of blood, and his expression had turned livid.

At this rate, I’ll surely lose...

The flaws that the other party had pointed out so easily were all fatal weaknesses that could easily cost him his life! In normal circumstances, those flaws should not have been apparent to anyone else. Even true Leaving Aperture realm experts would have struggled to find them.

Yet, Zhang Xuan was able to list them one after another without any errors. This had truly left him deeply frenzied.

This won't do—I have to kill that fellow. Otherwise, the one who will die is me!

Clenching his jaws furiously, a hint of callousness flashed through his eyes. With a powerful step, Vice Pavilion Master Tian's body warped into a shadow, bypassing the Golden Origin Cauldron, heading straight for Zhang Xuan

At this moment, Zhang Xuan was in the midst of speaking to the Golden Origin Cauldron. He had not thought that the other party would go for him so abruptly. Before he could even react, the other party's attack was right before him.

“Teacher!”

“Zhang shi!”

“Young Master!”

Everyone's face warped in horror.

1151 What a Huge Pit!

Everyone anxiously rushed to Zhang Xuan's side.

The haughty young man who seemed to have the entire situation in his grasp a moment ago had already fainted, and a trail of blood was flowing down the edge of his lips. With just a look, it was apparent that he had suffered severe injuries.

“You bastards, I'll kill you!” Luo Qiqi and the others roared furiously as they glared at Vice Pavilion Master Tian menacingly, seemingly wanting to devour him whole.

Oblivious to their glares, Vice Pavilion Master Tian was completely dumbstruck by the situation. Everything had happened so smoothly that he could hardly believe his eyes.

He had confidence in his strength, but judging from how the young man had been able to easily subdue King Zhongqing, the young man should have been able to dodge his attack as well. Because of that, he had prepared many follow up moves for when his initial assault inevitably failed. Yet, who would have thought that the most troublesome individual would be subdued with a single strike?

And more importantly, even though it had happened for a very brief instant, he could have sworn that he saw the other party shifting his body slightly to complement his offense, seemingly fearing that he would miss the attack.

To think that an individual would willingly take his palm strike, this was truly...

His palm harnessed immense strength that could crush a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert with ease. Was that not as good as courting death?

Just as Vice Pavilion Master Tian was completely bewildered by the situation before him, a loud roar suddenly echoed through the hall. Turning around, he saw the Golden Soul Lock falling from King Zhongqing's body. The countless wounds on his body recovered at a visible rate, and within less

than two breaths, he had already returned to his peak state, as if the torture he had undergone previously was nothing more than a brief nightmare.

When did that fellow obtain such formidable saint medicine?

Vice Pavilion Master Tian was rather close with King Zhongqing, but he had never heard that the latter had a medicine that was capable of swiftly healing one's wounds. That was already comparable to the mystical means that Zhang Shi had used on Sun Qiang previously!

"I'll kill you!" Having recovered fully, King Zhongqing swiftly recalled the humiliation he had been put through just a moment ago.

With a furious battle cry, he immediately charged toward the unconscious Zhang Xuan. Along the way, he flicked his wrist and whipped out a sharp sword before brandishing it forcefully toward the latter.

In the previous battle, he had been subdued the whole time, depriving him of any opportunity to wield his weapon. Now that he knew how fearsome the enemy was, he knew that hesitation would be his downfall, so he decisively chose to execute his strongest offensive technique right from the very start.

Tzzzzzz!

A surge of sword qi burst across the room with a deafening sonic boom. Before this powerful sword art, even a Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert would have to back down temporarily.

"Don't you dare hurt him!" Luo Qiqi, Yu Fei-er, and Sun Qiang raised their weapons simultaneously to protect Zhang Xuan.

Peng! Peng! Peng!

With three deep thuds, Zhang Xuan's three allies were sent flying into the wall nearby. Their faces flushed crimson from the impact, and blood spewed wildly from their mouths.

The gap between them and a true Saint 4-dan expert was simply too huge. They did not stand a chance at all.

“Die!” After knocking the trio back, King Zhongqing continued slashing his blade toward Zhang Xuan, desiring to slice him in two.

“Hold it right there!”

At this moment, a furious bellow echoed. Following which, King Zhongqing felt a powerful surge of zhenqi morphing into a barrier right before Zhang Xuan, protecting the latter.

Despite the incredible might behind his sword, he found that he was unable to break that zhenqi barrier. Instead, the momentum he wielded in his offense seemed to backfire against him. The sword in his hand bounced back upon striking the barrier, flying back toward him.

Puhe!

Everything happened so fast that King Zhongqing could not even react. Before he knew it, his sword had already pierced his shoulder, and the powerful rebound sent him flying. He crashed into the wall, and the sword in his shoulder ended up lodged in the wall, leaving him hanging in midair like a scarecrow.

“Ahhh!”

The excruciating pain caused a roar of agony to escape from King Zhongqing’s mouth.

Considering that he wielded a sword in hand and he had more than enough time to build up the momentum in his offense to the peak, his attack could be said to have reached the level of Half-Leaving Aperture realm experts. On the other hand, the other party had set up the zhenqi barrier hastily to protect Zhang Xuan, and yet, the barrier was still strong enough to cause his attack to rebound against him. Just how powerful was the other party?

Huala!

Before King Zhongqing’s horrified gaze, two figures appeared before Zhang Xuan with anxious looks on their faces.

“Principal Zhang! Principal Zhang!”

The two figures were Elder Wu Rufeng from the Master Teacher Pavilion and Hall Master Xing Tianming from the Combat Master Hall!

After taking a closer look, they realized that Zhang Xuan had already lost consciousness due to how dire his injuries were. With a livid face, Hall Master Xing stood up and roared, “To attempt to murder a master teacher in public, Tian Qing, how dare you?”

Boom!

Enraged, Hall Master Xing flicked his arm furiously.

“I...” Vice Pavilion Master Tian was about to explain himself, but before he could say a word, he was knocked to the ground by a powerful slap, and huge spurts of blood spewed from his mouth.

He had not even been a match for Hall Master Xing when the latter was still at Half-Leaving Aperture realm, let alone when the latter had achieved a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm!

After knocking down Vice Pavilion Master Tian, Hall Master Xing roared, “Men, apprehend those two fellows!”

Hualala!

Upon hearing the command, Division Head Liao, Division Head Zhou, Division Head Chen, and Division Head Yan rushed out from the shadows, and in the blink of an eye, they had already sealed the cultivation of the duo and captured them.

Despite being at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle as well, the same cultivation realm as King Zhongqing, they were combat masters, the representation of the strongest fighting prowess in their cultivation realm. It would be a difficult fight against them even when the duo was in their peak state, let alone their current severely injured states.

“Principal Zhang...”

After apprehending the two culprits, Hall Master Xing took out a recovery pill and fed it to Zhang Xuan. Following which, he used his zhenqi to help the latter assimilate the medicinal energy within the pill, and only then did the Zhang Xuan slowly come to.

“You are finally here,” Zhang Xuan said faintly with a relieved smile. He weakly turned his gaze toward Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing before continuing. “There might be some kind of misunderstanding between us. I hope that you won’t hurt them... Pu!”

Before Zhang Xuan could finish his words, more blood spurted from his mouth.

“Principal Zhang!” Seeing that the other party was still speaking on the behalf of those two bastards, Wu shi and Hall Master Xing could not help but feel a little bitter for him.

It was those two bastards who had reduced him to his current state, and yet, he was still magnanimously asking for them to be spared! Where else could one find another individual as forgiving as that? He sure was kind to a fault!

On the other hand, King Zhongqing and Vice Pavilion Master Tian felt deeply frenzied as they watched the scene unfold before their eyes.

It was just a moment ago that Vice Pavilion Master Tian had been wondering why Zhang Xuan chose to take his attack face-on, and it turned out that... he was biding his time!

Now, the ones who were severely injured were the other party, and when Hall Master Xing and Wu shi appeared, King Zhongqing even nearly managed to claim Zhang Xuan’s life. How were they supposed to explain themselves in such a situation?

“Zhang Xuan was the one who made a move against us! He used that cauldron to...” Anxious, Vice Pavilion Master Tian turned around and pointed to where Ding Ding was previously, only to find that the cauldron that had arrogantly been threatening to reduce him to cinders a moment ago had vanished without a trace.

The other party had actually managed to stow the cauldron back into his storage ring within the short period of time!

“Shut your mouth!” Division Head Liao slapped Vice Pavilion Master Tian out of sheer anger, knocking the latter’s mouth out of place.

Principal Zhang had made such great contributions to their Combat Master Hall, and they had not even managed to show their gratitude to him yet when this fellow suddenly stepped in and reduced their benefactor to such a tragic state. If not for the other party’s identity as a master teacher, they would have surely killed him on the spot!

Unforgivable! This was truly something unforgivable!

Ignoring Vice Pavilion Master Tian, Wu shi turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Principal Zhang, can you tell us what happened?”

“Save them first...” Zhang Xuan weakly raised a finger and pointed toward Luo Qiqi and the others.

“Alright!” Hall Master Xing raised a hand, and a division head quickly fed the trio a recovery pill each.

Seeing that the three of them were fine, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He then weakly turned his attention back to Wu shi and said, “Wu shi, do you still remember the matter concerning the news of the ancient domain being leaked to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe?”

Back then, Old Principal Zhang Yinqiu had attempted to report the discovery of the ancient domain to the headquarters, only to have his intelligence covered up by a spy in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. After fleeing from the Qiu Wu Palace, the old principal had already explained the matter to them from the start to the end.

“Of course!” Wu shi nodded. “I have been looking into the matter since I returned, but I wasn’t able to find any conclusive proof.”

“I have been pursuing the matter as well, but in the midst of it... Sun Qiang was suddenly kidnapped by the men of Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing. They accused me

of colluding with the Poison Hall and claimed that I am unworthy of being a master teacher. They even said that they wanted to send me into the Subterranean Gallery to have me make up for my sins... Cough cough!” As Zhang Xuan spoke, he gradually grew more and more agitated before coughing once more.

“They accused you of colluding with the Poison Hall and wanted to send you into the Subterranean Gallery?” Hearing those words, Wu shi flung his sleeves wrathfully, and coldness surfaced in his eyes. “Preposterous! How dare they slander an upright master teacher?”

Others might have been oblivious to the matter, but he knew full well that the young man before him was not only a Celestial Master Teacher but also a Celestial Saint. In the entire history of the Master Teacher Continent, there was only one figure who had achieved the same—Kong shi.

To accuse a Celestial Master Teacher of colluding with the Poison Hall and attempt to send him to the Subterranean Gallery over it?

Unpardonable!

“I refused to acknowledge their accusations, so they decided to force a confession out of me instead. You should also know that I am completely powerless against Primordial Spirit realm cultivators. It’s fortunate that you came quickly, or else we might have lost our lives here,” Zhang Xuan said with a terrified yet relieved look on his face.

Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing glanced at one another, and they nearly blew up on the spot.

Completely powerless against Primordial Spirit realm cultivators?

You call this being powerless? We were nearly pummeled to death by you!

If there’s anyone who is powerless here, it should be us, alright!

The duo felt so indignant that they could have choked from the sheer frustration they felt. They wanted to refute the other

party's words, but the combat masters had already sealed their movements, not allowing them to speak even a single word.

On the other hand, Sun Qiang, Luo Qiqi, and Yu Fei-er also exchanged glances, and their mouths twitched uncontrollably from the shamelessness that Zhang Xuan was displaying.

This was even more so for Yu Fei-er. She was rendered completely speechless by the sight before her.

She had nearly lost her mind when she saw Zhang Xuan lying unconscious on the ground after being struck squarely by King Zhongqing, but to think that... he was just feigning weakness!

With Wu shi, Hall Master Xing, and many division heads witnessing Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing attempting to murder him, those two would never be able to cleanse their names.

Previously, they had been worried about how Zhang Xuan would resolve the situation after making a brazen move on the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Who would have thought that he had already prepared a pit for the duo to fall into!

For those who dare to provoke Zhang Xuan... they had best be prepared to fall to the lowest point of their life!

With such thoughts in mind, the trio could not help but direct looks of sympathy toward Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing.

On the other hand, Wu shi and Hall Master Xing nodded in agreement after hearing Zhang Xuan's words. "Indeed, I know your strength well. You aren't a match for Primordial Spirit realm cultivators."

Wu shi had spent a very long time together with Zhang Xuan in the Qiu Wu Palace, so he knew the latter's strength very well. It would have been difficult for him to even match a Saint 3-dan cultivator, so how could he be a match for Primordial Spirit realm cultivators?

As for Hall Master Xing, he had exchanged blows with Zhang Xuan back at the Heart Division. While he had been surprised by the incredible reflexes that the latter had displayed during

the battle, it had been apparent that the latter was still lacking the strength to stand against a Primordial Spirit cultivator head to head.

Not to mention, his opponents were the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion and a King who had forged his name on the battlefield.

Since Zhang Xuan was not a match for them, less had to be said about Luo Qiqi and the others.

“I was truly desperate, so I could only send a message to all of you...” After explaining the course of events, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief before lying on the ground, his breathing still faint from the severe injuries he had incurred.

With just a look, it was clear that he had suffered grievous wounds. Even with the supplement of recovery pills, it was unlikely that he would make a full recovery any time soon.

The more Wu shi thought about it, the more angered he felt. Turning to the duo, he harrumphed coldly. “On top of slandering a fellow master teacher, you even attempted to force a confession. Tian Qing and King Zhongqing, the both of you sure are brazen! I shall have this matter reported to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and have them judge it!”

Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing’s faces paled. The pit that they had leaped into... seemed to be a little too big in proportion.

Slander?

Force a confession? Report to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters?

Rather than a pit, it seemed like they had leaped into an abyss instead!

1152 An Irrefutable Argumen

“What do you have to say for yourself?” Wu shi bellowed coldly.

“Wuu wuuu...” Vice Pavilion Master Tian anxiously spoke.

“Release his seal!” Hall Master Xing instructed.

Division Head Liao nodded before striking the other party from the back.

Vice Pavilion Master Tian immediately felt the surge of zhenqi that had been suppressing his movements being released, and he heaved a sigh of relief. With reddened eyes, he cried, “He is lying! He’s the one to make a move on us first...”

“Enough!” Hearing those words, Hall Master Xing stood up and glared at them sharply. “The reason why I allowed you to speak is in view of the fact that you are a master teacher as well. I thought that you would at least repent on what you have done, and yet, all your mouth is capable of spouting is lies and more lies... Tell me, where has your dignity as a master teacher gone to? You said that he made a move on you? Even the strongest of the four of them only has a cultivation of Saint 2-dan, and you are in King Zhongqing’s manor at that. Do you honestly expect anyone to believe those words?”

Hall Master Xing was so angered that he could explode on the spot.

Do you take me as a fool? At least come up with a more believable lie!

The both of you are still well and kicking, and you still dared to claim that Principal Zhang made a move on you?

Even if Principal Zhang had such intentions in mind, is he even a match for the both of you?

“I...” Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s body staggered in despair.

But I am already telling the truth... Look at us, we are injured as well!

Vice Pavilion Master Tian felt deeply stifled within, but he knew that the other party had already claimed the upper hand in this debate, and the fact that the other party had witnessed King Zhongqing attempting to kill Zhang Xuan was truly disadvantageous to them. At this point, vehemently pushing their point forward would only incur the other party's repulse and disgust. Since that was the case, it would be better for them to direct the topic to something else for the time being.

“That person over there is known as Ming Zhen...”

Suppressing his indignation, Vice Hall Master Tian pointed to an elder standing by the side and said. “He is the vice head of a Poison Hall located in Hongyuan Empire. Not too long ago, he arrived at the manor to report Zhang shi's butler, Sun Qiang. He said that Sun Qiang is a particularly powerful poison master, and a while ago, he had arrived at their Poison Hall to arrange for the founder of the Poison Hall to be escorted to the headquarters. In view of the safety of Qingyuan Empire, King Zhongqing had no choice but to apprehend Zhang shi to interrogate him. Yet, who could have thought that he would attempt to forcefully take his butler away, thus resulting in this conflict...”

“The vice head of the Poison Hall?”

Wu shi and the others swiftly turned their gazes towards Min Zhen.

On the other hand, noticing so many master teachers and combat masters looking over towards him, Ming Zhen's face was scared pale.

“You are from the Poison Hall?” Wu shi asked grimly.

As a master teacher, he bore little goodwill to those from the Poison Hall.

“That's right.” Ming Zhen nodded as he flicked his wrist, taking out his poison master emblem and a token representing his identity as the vice head of the Poison Hall.

After taking a look and confirming that there was no mistake, Wu shi frowned, “You are here to report Sun Qiang?”

He wasn't too familiar with Sun Qiang, but since the latter was Principal Zhang's butler, how could he be a poison master?

But of course, there was still a need to clarify things before coming to a conclusion.

“This...” Ming Zhen's face distorted slightly, and after a long moment of hesitation, ‘putong!’, he kneeled to the ground. With reddened eyes, he exclaimed, “Wu shi, I beg of you to redress the grievances of our Poison Hall!”

“What happened?” Seeing the other party's abrupt actions, Wu shi's frown deepened.

“King Zhongqing captured all of our comrades from the Poison Hall and imprisoned them in his underground prison. He coerced me to accuse Zhang shi of that, or else he would kill my brothers... It's also out of desperation that I chose such a course of action! Wu shi, I implore you to return us justice!” Ming Zhen cried in grief.

“You... Nonsense! Utter nonsense!”

Those words left both Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing exploding on the spot.

That fellow was clearly one of their own, and they were still depending on him to serve as their eye-witness, and yet... how could he turn against them at this crucial moment?

You said that we coerced you?

You were the one who fled here after the Poison Hall exiled you!

Furthermore, you were the one who willingly revealed the location of the Poison Hall, and that was why King Zhongqing was able to dispatch his soldiers to eradicate them... How in the world did you suddenly become a victim over a blink of an eye, and what did you say? We used the lives of your brothers to threaten you?

You were the one who wanted to kill them in the first place! How could we use their lives to threaten you?

“Shut your mouths!” Wu shi flung his sleeves and bellowed furiously. After which, he turned his gaze back to the poison master and said, “You need not fear, continue speaking.”

“Yes! If Wu shi doubts my word, you can search King Zhongqing’s underground prison. My brothers from the Poison Hall is currently being imprisoned there. If you were to find any falsehood in my words, I’m willing to accept any punishment!” Ming Zhen cowered backward slightly, but the resolution in his eyes was apparent. It was as if he was deeply fearful, but for the sake of justice, he was willing to take a leap of faith and testify against the true masterminds.

His body was still plagued with the other party’s poison, so he knew what he should say and what he shouldn’t. Furthermore, at this point, it was apparent that King Zhongqing and Vice Pavilion Master Tian was no match against Zhang shi in terms of playing such trickery.

Clearly, this was the best opportunity for him to ‘leap out of the darkness and return to the light’.

“You...”

The words spoken and the subtle gestures that hinted at a mix of fear and courage from Ming Zhen left Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing so enraged that flames could erupt from their heads.

If Ming Zhen had chosen to side with them, they would have been able to turn the tables on the other party! Yet, who could have thought that the latter’s words would become the nail that sealed the lid of their coffin instead?

On the other hand, Luo Qiqi, Sun Qiang, and Yu Fei-er glanced at one another with their eyes widened and mouth agape in disbelief.

There was only a brief exchange between Zhang shi and that ex-vice head of the Poison Hall, and yet, he actually managed to convince the latter to side with them and speak completely different words from before... This was too formidable!

With this, no matter which perspective they looked at the situation for, they were in an absolutely advantageous position.

Even though Zhang Xuan was the one who had insulted a 7-star master teacher despite possessing only the identity of a 6-star master teacher, flouting the rules of formalities, at some point in time, the story had turned into the latter abusing his seniority to take advantage of Zhang Xuan, intentionally attempting to accuse him of something he hadn't done...

At this point in time, the duo would never be able to cleanse their reputation anymore.

“Head to the underground prison to take a look. Check if there are any poison masters there!” Ignoring the despairing duo, Wu Shi turned to a master teacher beside him and instructed.

In this rescue operation, the Combat Master Hall wasn't the only one that had dispatched their forces. The Master Teacher Pavilion had also brought many master teachers over as well.

When Wu Shi received Zhang Xuan's distress call on his Jade Communication Token, he immediately brought everyone that he could call upon in the Master Teacher Pavilion over, not daring to hesitate in the least.

“Yes!” The master teacher quickly turned around and left.

Not too long later, the master teacher returned and clasped his fist, “Reporting to Wu Shi and Hall Master Xing, in the underground prison of King Zhongqing Manor, there are indeed many captured poison masters, and every single one of them are severely injured...”

“As I expected!” Upon hearing that report, Wu Shi's face turned incredibly awful. He turned around to look at Vice Pavilion Master Tian and sneered, “To use the members of the Poison Hall to slander Principal Zhang; Vice Pavilion Master Tian, you can be assured that I'll report this matter in detail to the headquarters!”

Every single clue fitted together with pieces on the puzzle, forming a flawless story. At this point, there was no longer any need to listen to their explanation anymore.

With the advancement of his cultivation to Half-Leaving Aperture realm, as well as the merit he had accrued from exploring the Qiu Wu Palace, he was swiftly promoted to

become the other vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, putting him on equal standing as Vice Pavilion Master Tian. In terms of actual authority and influence, he was still beneath that of Vice Pavilion Master Tian, but considering that the latter had done something as immoral as this, he still held every right to investigate the matter.

“I...” Vice Pavilion Master Tian glared at Zhang Xuan hatefully, but at this point, he knew that there was nothing he could say that would change the situation anymore.

He thought that it would be easier for them to deal with the latter by pinning a crime on him—this way, the matter wouldn’t come back to bite them in the future—but who could have thought that the other party would actually use it against them?

It must be said that Zhang Xuan’s adaptability was truly formidable. In just a short moment that they had let their guards down, they ended up falling for his trap.

“I hope to have Pavilion Master Gou deal with this matter personally. If the results then are still the same as what you have concluded here, I would have nothing to say about reporting this matter to the headquarters.” Vice Pavilion Master Tian gritted his teeth and said.

He could tell that Wu Shi and Hall Master Xing had a deep relationship with Zhang Xuan. At this rate, there was no way he would be able to cleanse himself of his suspicions.

Just the very act of slandering and accusing another master teacher was more than sufficient for him to lose his current position. Perhaps, he might even be stripped of his master teacher license.

At this rate, he could only bank his hopes on Pavilion Master Gou. With his involvement, perhaps there might still be hopes for a reversal.

“You want to have Pavilion Master Gou to investigate this matter? Let me tell you this then. Your direct disciple has duped the intelligence regarding the existence of the ancient domain from the old principal of the Hongyuan Master

Teacher Academy, Zhang Yinqiu, two years back and relayed the intelligence to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, nearly causing a calamity to occur. I have already looked into this matter, confirmed it, and reported it to Pavilion Master Gou. And now, you are intentionally slandering and accusing Principal Zhang... Even if you were to bring him in, nothing will change!” Wu shi harrumphed coldly.

Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s face paled.

The reason why Old Principal Zhang Yinqiu and the others were hesitant to liaise with the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion after they were duped of their intelligence was because the person who had duped their intelligence had an exceptionally high standing!

And he was the direct disciple of Vice Pavilion Master Tian!

After Wu shi returned, he had been looking into the case carefully, and he found concrete evidence to formally charge Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s direct disciple of the matter.

It was also due to this matter that Zhang Xuan dared to make a move. In the first place, Vice Pavilion Master Tian was already under investigation, and yet, the other party still dared to make a move against him. Since that was the case, he didn’t mind pinning another accusation on him.

And besides, even though it was more of a gut feeling at this point, there were quite a handful of doubtful points about Vice Pavilion Master Tian himself back in the short interaction they had earlier as well...

“Men, bring Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing back to the Master Teacher Pavilion!” Wu shi instructed.

Typically speaking, the Master Teacher Pavilion wouldn’t deal with a local officials easily. After all, such actions could easily result in dissension between the royal family and the Master Teacher Pavilion. However, the King Zhongqing’s attempt to slander and accuse a master teacher of a crime had truly touch the bottom line of the Master Teacher Pavilion. This was an insult to the dignity of the number one occupation in the world, so he had to be dealt with.

Otherwise, if everyone were to regard master teachers as pushovers, how were they to maintain order in the world?

Master teachers mustn't be sullied, these weren't just mere words. Those who tried to climb over the head of the Master Teacher Pavilion would have to pay a corresponding price for their actions.

“Yes!”

The master teachers stepped forward and took the two men from the hands of Division Head Liao and the others before leaving the hall.

After the duo was brought away, Wu shi turned to Zhang Xuan and asked worriedly, “Principal Zhang, are you still alright?”

“I'm fine...” Zhang Xuan shook his head. With Luo Qiqi's support, he stood up and bowed apologetically, “Even though Vice Pavilion Master Tian was the first to make a move against me, it is a fact that I did retaliate against him, and that's against the formalities of the Way of Teacher. In order to make up for my mistakes, I have decided to crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion after I recover from my injuries. I hope that you can pardon me for this!”

“You want to crash our Master Teacher Pavilion?” Veins immediately popped up on Wu shi's forehead. “If you're worrying about that matter, there's really no need to. Your actions constitute as self-defense, so there's no one who would say a thing about that matter. I'll also report this matter to the headquarters, so that no one will be able to use this matter against you in the future...”

If a master teacher were to truly err, there was only one way he could cleanse his crimes—pavilion crashing.

Back then, in order to avenge Lu Chong, Zhang Xuan had single-handedly challenged Xuanyuan Empire, and in the midst of doing so, he had no choice but to fight against the head of the regional Master Teacher Pavilion as well. That was against the formalities of the Way of Teacher, and that was also why he had to crash the Master Teacher Pavilion afterwards in order to cleanse his name.

Pavilion crashing was the act of single-handedly challenging the trials set up by the Master Teacher Pavilion. It was equivalent to using the strength and wits of an individual to go against an entire Master Teacher Pavilion... and it was a nigh impossible to succeed.

For this reason, there were only a small handful of people who had succeeded in pavilion crashing in the entire history of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

However, while that rule may apply to others, when Wu shi recalled the identity and incredible means of the young man before him, he dared not agree to it.

Back in the Qiu Wu Palace, even he had willingly chosen to abide by the other party arrangement... Regardless from which aspect one was looking at, the young man before him was truly incredible. As formidable as the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion may be, Wu shi had no confidence whether it would be able to remain standing after the latter had made his round on it.

Furthermore, once the pavilion crashing succeeded, they would have to heed the other party's unconditionally, and that would be a true embarrassment to their Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

"Since Wu shi has said such words, I'm reassured..." Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. After which, he turned to Hall Master Xing and asked, "It's due to me that the members of the Poison Hall are implicated into this matter. May I trouble Hall Master Xing to take them back to the Combat Master Hall to take care of them for the time being?"

"You want me to take them back to the Combat Master Hall?" Hall Master Xing was taken aback.

"Indeed. While poison masters have a poor reputation, if we could bring them over to our side as allies, that would surely be a great boost to our fighting forces. Without a doubt, they would prove to be a sharp edge in dealing against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. Thus... if possible, I hope to have them join the Combat Master Hall and form a division of their own!" Zhang Xuan revealed his true intentions.

1153 Meeting Elder Xu Once More

While he was not the one who had orchestrated the incident, it was partly due to him that the Poison Hall had ended up in its current state. If they were handed over to the Master Teacher Pavilion, many self-righteous individuals would surely speak up against them, and it was hard to say what kind of fate would befall them in the future.

However, if they were to be taken to the Combat Master Hall instead, the situation would be entirely different.

Not only would the poison masters be able to resolve their current crisis, they would also be given a new identity that would allow them to walk in the open. Just based on these two benefits alone, the poison masters would not reject his proposal.

Additionally, if the Combat Master Hall could capitalize on the strength of the poison masters, their overall prowess would surely increase by leaps and bounds.

“That won’t do!” Hall Master Xing’s face twitched, and he hurriedly waved his hands to reject the suggestion.

“Why not?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

“As you know, poison masters are used to living carefree lives. I fear that it would be difficult for our Combat Master Hall to control them. Furthermore, as you know, the cultivation techniques that they practice are unorthodox and depraved; master teachers look down upon this.” Hall Master Xing shook his head. “No matter what, the Combat Master Hall is still a branch of the Master Teacher Pavilion.”

In order to raise their cultivation, poison masters reared poisonous bugs, consumed lethal poison, and even used their life force to cultivate Gu. Most of their means had already breached the moral code of the master teachers.

Combat masters were a type of master teacher, so if they were to accept the poison masters, how would their peers view them in the future?

Combat masters did strive to obtain greater strength, but the means by which they did so were important as well. They had principles to follow, so they could not simply go around accepting everyone.

“That’s simple. I’ll teach them a new cultivation technique that is orthodox and upright. On top of that, I’ll instruct them to heed Hall Master Xing’s words, so you need not worry about being unable to control them,” Zhang Xuan said.

It was indeed true that the horrific practices common in the cultivation of poison arts were unacceptable to the masses, but this was not a matter that was too difficult to resolve.

As long as he imparted his simplified Heaven’s Path Poison Art to them, not only would they be able to advance their cultivation swiftly, there would also be no need for them to resort to unorthodox means anymore!

“This...” Hall Master Xing contemplated over the issue.

It might have felt as if the young man before him was making light of the matter, but having seen the other party’s capability in person, he had absolute trust that the other party would be able to pull it off.

A person whose understanding of battle techniques was so deep that he could master a Saint low-tier battle technique to Consummation eleven breaths after first looking at the manual might really be able to alter poison cultivation techniques to make them orthodox.

If the person before him could resolve those two problems, accepting the poison masters into the Combat Master Hall was something that he could consider. After all, it was indeed the truth that the addition of poison masters to their ranks would bolster their forces considerably.

Putting everything aside, it was precisely due to the usage of poison that King Zhongqing had been able to rise to his current rank within a short twenty years.

At this point, Wu shi suddenly interjected. “While poison masters have a poor reputation, the fact that the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters have never ordered their elimination shows that there’s a purpose to the existence of the poison master occupation and that they are willing to give the Poison Hall a chance. If Principal Zhang really has a way to convince the poison masters to work for the welfare of mankind, I’ll report this matter to the headquarters and convince them of this matter. I believe that they would be glad to see this as well!”

Poison masters were the worst enemies to make, and at the same time, they were also the most reliable allies to have.

Their capability in group battles was nothing short of phenomenal. If they could assist in the fight against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, mankind would stand a far better chance.

While the Poison Hall headquarters were well-concealed, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters was bound to know where it was. Yet, over numerous millenniums, they still had not taken action against them as they did for the soul oracles. This was more than sufficient to show that they were not unpardonable.

Furthermore, these poison masters that were currently locked in the King Zhongqing Manor’s underground prison had grown up on the island just beside Jingyuan City, and they had rarely ventured out of the island. They might have been poison masters, but they had never harmed anyone.

Since they had never harmed anyone or committed any evil deeds, would it not be a little presumptuous of them to kill them just because of their occupation? If so, what would become of the values that master teachers preached?

“Alright!” Hearing Wu shi agree to the matter, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

While Hall Master Xing’s cultivation was higher than Wu shi’s, in terms of standing, the latter was still a notch higher. Since Wu shi had said such words, he must have had a feasible plan in mind to carry out the matter.

“Please wait here for a moment. I’ll head to the underground prison to talk with the poison masters and see if I’m be able to convince them. If it does not work out, we’ll just have to find some other way to deal with them,” Zhang Xuan said.

“This... But Principal Zhang, what about your wounds?” Wu shi asked worriedly.

“Don’t worry. With my constitution and your recovery pill, I’m fine now. It won’t impede me from talking with them.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand with a smile.

Recalling the various incredible means that the young man possessed, Wu shi knew that while the injuries the other party had sustained were considerable, they would not pose much of a problem for him. Thus, heaving a sigh of relief, he continued. “That’s a relief. However, poison masters are known to be rather scheming, so allow me to follow you to the underground prison. This way, I’ll be able to protect you if anything happens.”

“It’s fine. Given your current standing and identity, I fear that your presence will be pressurizing to them. It’ll do for me to face them alone.” Zhang Xuan turned down Wu shi’s goodwill.

If he wanted to convince Xu You and the others to obediently join the Combat Master Hall and obey their words, he would surely have to reveal his identity as Sun Qiang to them. Naturally, this mustn’t be done before Wu shi, or else the latter would learn about his identity as a poison master.

“This...” Wu shi hesitated for a brief moment before nodding. “Alright then, I won’t enter the underground prison with you. However, we will be waiting outside, and once we notice that something is amiss, we’ll immediately barge in and make a move!”

“I’ll be relying on the both of you then,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile, knowing that the duo was worried about him.

Led by the master teacher from before, it did not take long for the crowd to arrive at the entrance of the underground prison.

Wu shi and Hall Master Xing stood guard outside while Zhang Xuan entered the underground prison alone.

The prison was dimly-lit and eerie. There were all sorts of powerful formations set up here and there to prevent the escape of the imprisoned cultivators.

Shortly after walking in, ‘ge ge ge’, Zhang Xuan’s bones and muscles began rearranging themselves to assume the appearance of ‘Sun Qiang’.

“Elder Xu...” Very soon, Zhang Xuan found Elder Xu, and just as the master teacher had said, it seemed like he had been subjected to harsh torture. He was clearly much skinnier than he had been two months prior, and his aura felt withered as well.

With just a look, it was apparent that his wounds were not light.

There were roughly a hundred other poison masters captured in the underground prison. As for the other members of the Poison Hall... it was hard to say whether they were alive or dead.

“Founder!” Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Elder Xu and the others were stunned for a moment before agitation struck them.

The identity of the middle-aged man before them, Sun Qiang, had been verified by Poison Master Hai and Poison Master Bai of the headquarters. Thus, they had no doubts about his identity at all.

“I am not your founder, just a person who escorted her back then. It’ll do for you to just address me as Sun Qiang,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile. “You have truly suffered a lot. Here are some pills to heal your injuries. Quickly swallow them to regain some strength.”

He flicked his wrist and took out a couple of jade bottles before passing them around the poison masters.

He had plenty of pills from acquiring the storage rings of the Ten Kings of the Qingtian Lineage. As long as he infused some Heaven’s Path zhenqi into each of the pills, it would

grant them miraculous effects in recovering wounds and fatigue.

“Yes!” Without any hesitation, Elder Xu and the others took the pills and swallowed them.

As soon as the pill dissolved in their mouth, the Heaven’s Path zhenqi contained within them swiftly flowed through their bloodstream to the rest of their body, and their wounds began healing at a discernable rate.

“This...” Noticing the changes in their bodies, Xu You and the others were startled. They could hardly believe what was going on.

The effectiveness of these pills was far, far more potent than the recovery pills that they concocted. As expected of the individual who had escorted the founder! Without a doubt, the other party must have inherited the founder’s heritage!

After the poison masters had somewhat recuperated from their wounds, Zhang Xuan asked grimly, “What happened to the Jingyuan City Poison Hall?”

“The Poison Hall...” At this point, Xu You’s eyes reddened in deep indignation. His voice grew slightly hoarse, as if there was something stuck within it. “... has been destroyed. We are the only ones who remain. Everyone else has been... killed.”

As the ex-vice head of the Poison Hall, Ming Zhen knew all the secrets of the Poison Hall, and this included the flaws in their formations and defensive systems as well. Under his lead, King Zhongqing’s forces had been able to sneak into the Poison Hall successfully without alarming anyone, taking the Poison Hall off guard. As a result, the Poison Hall was completely wiped out in the tragedy.

“Killed? You are saying that King Zhongqing killed everyone in the Poison Hall?” Zhang Xuan’s face turned completely dark.

He had thought that it would at least have been a roughly equal fight, with both sides suffering some casualties. Yet, from the looks of it, the situation seemed far worse than he had imagined.

“That’s right... They attacked in the middle of the night. Caught off guard, we were swiftly encircled and subdued. That night, a river of blood flowed through the Poison Hall. Just like that, the ten thousand years of heritage of the Poison Hall was destroyed...” Elder Xu clenched his fists tightly, and his voice gradually grew more and more agitated. Eventually, it came to a point where he found himself unable to continue speaking anymore.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was at a loss for words. He had no idea how he should comfort Elder Xu’s pain.

He had been to the Poison Hall as well, and on top of poison masters, there were many ordinary civilians. These civilians did not possess the talent for cultivating poison arts, so they spent their lives idly on the island. Who knew that they were not spared either!

The fear of poison masters was not completely unfounded, but these poison masters had spent the entirety of their lives on a remote island, isolated from the rest of their world. They had never ventured beyond their island to harm anyone, but King Zhongqing had callously stepped in and ruined the relatively peaceful world that they had constructed for themselves!

Initially, Zhang Xuan had wondered if he had gone too far by scheming against King Zhongqing in such a manner, but from the looks of it now, he regretted not doing worse!

A person like him deserved to die a thousand times over!

After taking a deep breath, Elder Xu continued. “After King Zhongqing massacred the entire Poison Hall, he rounded up all the poison masters ranked 5-star and above, sealed our cultivation, and imprisoned us here. Every single day, he would use cruel torture techniques on us to have us mass concoct poison for him!”

When he spoke of King Zhongqing, flames of fury burned in his eyes. If he could, there was no doubt that he would have ripped the other party in two without any hesitation.

“Mass concoct poison?” Zhang Xuan knitted his eyebrows. “What kind of poison is he concocting?”

In the Qingyuan Empire, King Zhongqing was definitely a figure worthy of the phrase ‘beneath a single man, above the masses’. Putting aside the incredible cultivation he possessed, he also wielded unbounded authority as well. If a person who wielded that much power wanted to deal with his political rivals, there was no need for him to go through the trouble of mass concocting poison at all.

Or to put it in simpler terms, King Zhongqing was up to something huge.

“It’s the Scattering Breeze Powder!” Elder Xu replied.

“Grade-5 poison, Scattering Breeze Powder?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “Colorless and odorless, it is a poison that saps one of one’s strength upon inhalation, rendering one powerless for a short period of time. However, its ability to drift freely along with the breeze allows it to incapacitate a huge number of people simultaneously, though it is only effective on those beneath Saint realm. How much of it did King Zhongqing demand?”

All in all, the Scattering Breeze Powder could not be considered a lethal poison, but its ability to spread far and wide made it extremely difficult to guard against.

“Ten tons,” Elder Xu replied grimly.

“Ten tons?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

Just an ordinary jade bottle of Scattering Breeze Powder released into the air could knock out several hundred individuals. To produce ten tons of it... Was he planning to knock out an entire city?

What the heck did he need so much of it for?

Noticing Zhang Xuan’s worry, Xu You swiftly explained, “He’s the sworn enemy of our Poison Hall, so how could we possibly serve him? Thus, we refused to obey his orders.”

At the same time, realization suddenly struck him, and he looked at Zhang Xuan with a peculiar gaze. “Fou... Elder Sun Qiang, how did you know that we are here? You weren’t noticed by the guards when you came here, right?”

Even though Zhang Xuan's sudden arrival in the underground prison was perplexing to him, Elder Xu's trust in the other party remained unwavering, simply on the grounds that he was the man chosen by the founder.

As a poison master who had grown up in the Poison Hall, it was inevitable that he would have blind faith in the founder.

Nevertheless, he was still worried about the other party. Their deaths were nothing much, but if they were to implicate Elder Sun Qiang in this matter, they would have truly let the founder down!

"Don't worry, I have already subdued King Zhongqing, and he has been taken away by the Master Teacher Pavilion for interrogation. The reason I am here is to save you all!" Zhang Xuan replied.

"You have subdued King Zhongqing?"

"You are here to save us?"

The crowd stared at one another with shock gazes, not daring to believe what they had just heard.

They had thought that they were doomed to spend the rest of their lives rotting within this underground prison. Yet, never in their dreams had they thought that the elder who had delivered the founder back to them would come to save them, even exacting vengeance in their stead.

"Un. However, your current identities are a little awkward. It would be difficult for me to free you all given the present circumstances. Thus, I hope to give you all a new identity, but I'll need your consent for this matter," Zhang Xuan said.

"A new identity?" Elder Xu was perplexed by those words.

"What would that identity be?"

The other poison masters also turned their sights over.

"Combat masters!" Zhang Xuan replied concisely. This is a phrase often used in the context of ancient China. This term is usually used to refer to the authority and prestige that the Prime Minister of a country wields—beneath the emperor, but above everyone else in the country.

1154 Wu shi's Analysis

“Combat master?”

The many poison masters stared at one another, unable to process what they had just heard.

“That’s right. As long as you all become combat masters, you will be able to walk through the streets of Qingyuan City openly without fear, and you wouldn’t have to fear anyone confronting you or causing you any trouble just because you practice poison arts. And more importantly, you need not fear the Master Teacher Pavilion anymore!” Zhang Xuan said with a light chuckle.

“This...” Hearing those words, the faces of the poison masters reddened, and they clenched their fists in agitation.

As poison masters, they had lived in the shadows for far too long. For the longest time, their greatest wish had been to stand in the light as themselves without being snubbed or shunned by others... If Elder Sun Qiang could really make this come true for them, that would be as good as granting them a second life!

“But... we aren’t master teachers, are we truly qualified to become combat masters? Will the other combat masters really welcome us into their ranks? After all, we are poison masters...” Elder Xu asked apprehensively.

The other poison masters nodded in agreement as well, clearly harboring the same concerns.

The Combat Master Hall was a subsidiary of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and typically speaking, combat masters were talented individuals chosen amongst the master teachers. On the other hand, they were only a bunch of poison masters...

“It’s true that most combat masters are master teachers as well, but from time to time, the Combat Master Hall would also recruit talents of other fields into their ranks to widen their scope. While we poison masters have a bad reputation, our

fighting prowess with poison is exceptional too! The Combat Master Hall would surely welcome you into their ranks gladly! As long as you were to join the Combat Master Hall as one of their members, even if just as a reserve member, under their cover, no one would dare to say the slightest thing about you!” Zhang Xuan nodded with a smile.

The Combat Master Hall did have special rules when it came to recruiting top-notch talent, but those only applied to talents of around Zheng Yang’s caliber. To be honest, Elder Xu and the others were still quite lacking.

Nevertheless, even if they couldn’t become an official member of the Combat Master Hall, becoming a reserve member was still possible. It wouldn’t be too late for them to apply to become an official member once they achieve some merit.

“That would truly be for the best. However... would our cultivation technique and means be rejected by the master teachers? They might accept us at the start, but as time passes... would they start to repulse and shun us?” Elder Xu asked in concern.

“I understand your concerns, but don’t worry, the founder has already made preparations for this. Here are some cultivation technique manuals which the founder has prepared for you all. As long as you all were to cultivate accordingly to it, not only will the rate of advancement in your cultivation be faster than ever, you won’t have to resort to unorthodox means anymore too!” Zhang Xuan said as he flicked his wrist and passed a few manuals over.

Those manuals contained the simplified versions of the Heaven’s Path Poison Art.

Back then, he had written them down shortly after browsing through the books of the Poison Hall in hopes that he would be able to impart them to those of the Poison Hall.

Elder Xu and the others took the books doubtfully, but after flipping through a few pages, their faces swiftly flushed in agitation, and their breathing couldn’t help but hasten.

Every single one of them here had at least devoted a hundred years of their life into the study of poison, so their eye of discernment in the field of poison was superb. The poison cultivation technique manuals Elder Sun Qiang had passed to them weren't too thick, and the words on them numbered fewer than a typical manual as well. Yet, every single word written on them was deeply meaningful, directing them towards the very essence of poison art itself!

If they were to cultivate according to it, it could be foreseen that both their mastery of poison and cultivation would swiftly improve, granting them far greater prowess than before!

Even without achieving a breakthrough, their fighting prowess would soar by at least two or three times easily!

“Thank you, founder, for bestowing us with these cultivation techniques!” Agitated, the poison masters began kneeling on the floor and kowtowing deeply to Elder Sun Qiang.

With these cultivation techniques, they would no longer have to go through the trouble to search for all kinds of venomous worms and lethal poison, or even commit depraved acts against their conscience!

“It's out of the kindness of Hall Master Xing's heart that you all are allowed to join the Combat Master Hall, so I hope that you will heed his commands in the future. Don't let your emotions get the better of you when it comes to dealing with official matters, or else, even I won't be able to save you!” Zhang Xuan said with a stern expression on his face.

“Yes!”

The crowd nodded.

As formidable as poison masters were in group battles, they were still insufficient to go up against the powerful combat masters.

Not only did combat masters wield extraordinary fighting prowess, more importantly, they had also tempered their physical bodies in many ways, granting them considerably immunity to most forces of nature, and this included poison as well... If a poison master were to face a combat master of the

same cultivation realm, it was likely that the poison master would be killed even before he had a chance to utilize his poison.

Even if the poison master were to set up a trap in advance, it was also likely that the combat master would be able to push himself to slay the poison master before succumbing to the poison.

“Alright. After memorizing the content on the manuals, burn them. I’m sure that you understand the significance of these cultivation techniques, so I hope that they won’t be passed them down to anyone else without my permission.” Zhang Xuan instructed.

“Yes!” The crowd nodded.

Even though it was just a simplified version of the Heaven’s Path Poison Art, it was still an astounding power to behold.

...

While Zhang Xuan was still busy convincing the poison masters, Hall Master Xing and Wu shi were standing outside the underground prison.

“Wu shi, how do you intend to account the matter of the Combat Master Hall accepting the poison masters to the Master Teacher Pavilion?” Hall Master Xing asked with a frown.

He had never intended to accept the request, but since Wu shi had spoken up in the stead of the poison masters, he eventually relented.

While his fighting prowess far surpassed the other party, admittedly, his ability to assess situations was still lacking as compared to the latter. After all, their responsibilities differed significantly from one another.

As the head of the Combat Master Hall, his responsibility lay in training combat masters and preparing them for war whereas Wu shi, as the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, was in charge of maintaining the regional security and order.

And for that purpose, Wu shi had to be keen in assessing situations.

“Do you feel that Principal Zhang is bringing trouble to your Combat Master Hall?” Hearing Hall Master Xing’s question, Wu shi shook his head and turned to him.

“This...” Having his thoughts pointed out so directly, Hall Master Xing couldn’t help but shake his head awkwardly.

Those were indeed his thoughts.

Poison masters were known to be an individualistic and eccentric bunch, and it went without saying that it wouldn’t be easy to manage such a group. If they were to join the Combat Master Hall, wouldn’t it just erode the order he had established with great difficulty in the Combat Master Hall?

“It looks like you didn’t understand Principal Zhang’s true intentions! He’s doing this for the sake of the Combat Master Hall and mankind!” Wu shi shook his head and sighed deeply.

“He’s doing this for the sake of the Combat Master Hall and mankind?” A confused expression surfaced on Hall Master Xing’s face. Wu shi’s words were too deep for him to comprehend.

Those fellows were nothing but a huge trouble, so how could this be for the welfare of the Combat Master Hall?

“Hai, I knew that you wouldn’t understand.” A helpless smile flashed across Wu shi’s face as he looked meaningfully into the distance, reminiscent of a wise elder who had seen through the world. “Let me ask you this then. How do you intend to deal with those poison masters? Will you imprison them, or will you kill them?”

“This...” Hall Master Xing was caught off guard by the question. He had to take a moment to contemplate over the matter before he was able to respond, “Those poison masters haven’t erred or harmed anyone, so why do we have to imprison or kill them?”

The Master Teacher Pavilion aimed to lead mankind through virtue, not through tyranny. Naturally, they couldn’t just

punish an innocent bunch just because of their affiliation to the Poison Hall.

Not to mention, in the very first place, the poison masters were the victims of this incident as well! Given such, how could they possibly still harden their hearts to imprison or kill them? That would truly be going against their conscience!

“Indeed. We can’t imprison or kill them. But their Poison Hall branch has been exposed and destroyed, so they can’t return to it anymore. Are you certain that it would be safe to have so many powerful poison masters scattered throughout Qingyuan Empire?” Wu shi asked.

“This...” Hall Master Xing fell silent at those words.

It was easy to deal with the poison masters when they were gathered together as a group, but once they were to disperse and blend in with the countless civilians of Qingyuan Empire, it would be nigh impossible to find them anymore.

If those poison masters were to choose to harm others, their incredible mastery in poison would make it extremely difficult to trace the case to them. And even if they were to find the murderer later on, many lives would have already been lost then.

“If we could bring them into the Combat Master Hall, that would be effectively limiting their area of activity and preventing a catastrophe from happening. In essence, this is similar to a house arrest, but with a much better sounding name. Not only is it not detrimental to our reputation, it’ll also display the magnanimity of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Truly two birds with a stone!”

“This...” Hall Master Xing widened his eyes in astonishment, unable to speak a word.

Upon hearing the other party’s analysis, he realized that that was indeed the case.

If the poison masters were to join the Combat Master Hall, they would be bound by its rules as well. Naturally, they wouldn’t be able to maintain the carefree lifestyle that they had previously. That would effectively limit their area of

activity to Qingyuan City, thus preventing them from committing any harm out there.

“This is only the first aim behind Principal Zhang’s suggestion. As for the second, I can tell you with certainty that he’s doing it with the welfare of your Combat Master Hall in mind!” Wu shi said.

“You should still remember the fight against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe twenty years ago, right?”

“Of course!” Hall Master Xing replied gravely.

Back then, the Qingtian Lineage had dispatched all of their forces to encircle the Combat Master Hall, and a bitter fight ensued. The Combat Master Hall had suffered great casualties in that battle, and even Hall Master Xing himself had nearly lost his life.

If not for Elder Qi, he wouldn’t have been around anymore.

“Even though the Otherworldly Demons sprung a surprise attack, their forces were still insufficient to deal with the powerful forces of the Combat Master Hall. Yet, the Combat Master Hall still ended up being nearly forced into a corner... The reason for it should still be fresh in your mind.” Recalling the tragedy back then, Wu shi’s face turned grim as well.

The Otherworldly Demons had come prepared, but the defenses Combat Master Hall had never fallen lax. They were well-prepared to face the Otherworldly Demons, and under normal circumstances, even if the Otherworldly Demons had dispatched all of their elites into the assault, with the incredible might wielded by the combat masters, the battle should have still ended in an easy victory for the combat masters. There wasn’t even any need for the Master Teacher Pavilion and the Qingyuan Empire’s military to come into the picture...

And yet, despite the three powers making a move, the outcome was still a narrow and tragic victory!

It was due to that battle that Qingyuan Empire declined to become the weakest one of the Eight Great Conferred Empire.

Even twenty years weren't sufficient for it to recover from the impact back then.

"It's due to the Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder!" Hall Master Xing clenched his fists tightly together.

Back then, their combat masters were unknowingly afflicted with a potent poison known as the Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder, and the poison depleted their combat masters of their fighting prowess. This opened up a huge opening for the Otherworldly Demons to strike!

Even he wasn't spared from the effects of the Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder.

This matter had been a huge thorn in his heart, and even the passing of twenty years wasn't sufficient for him to let go of it.

"Indeed. That poison drifted with the wind, and odorless and colorless, it was inevitable that no one noticed a thing. Even I hadn't expected them to have such a hand either. It was thanks to the keen-eyed Vice Pavilion Master Tian noticing it that the losses of the Master Teacher Pavilion were minimized. Due to that matter, he gained great prestige in the Master Teacher Pavilion and soared through the ranks!" Wu shi nodded.

"It's probably due to the matter that Principal Zhang wishes to bring the poison masters into the Combat Master Hall. Firstly, with the sharp senses of the poison masters to poison, they would be able to uncover any poison used by the enemy ahead of time, thus preventing such tragedy from happening again. Secondly, the creation of a Poison Division could also serve to further temper the combat master's immunity to poison. This way, even if the Otherworldly Demons were to resort to the same means once more, the Combat Master Hall wouldn't be as helpless as it was back then..."

"This..." Hall Master Xing was taken aback.

Indeed.

With the inclusion of poison masters into their ranks, even if they were to encounter the same matter as they did twenty years ago, they wouldn't be as powerless as they were back then.

Hall Master Xing contemplated for a while, and the more he thought about it, the more convinced he was that there was no drawback from bringing the poison masters into the Combat Master Hall. Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, he turned to Wu shi, and it took him a brief moment of hesitation before he could bring himself to ask, “Did Principal Zhang... really see this far ahead?”

These were all factors that he had never considered before. Despite the other party’s severely injured state, he still managed to analyze so deeply into this matter... Was this for real?

“Principal Zhang’s wisdom is not something the likes of us can fathom. It also took me a long moment of contemplation after hearing his request before realization struck me!” Wu shi replied meaningfully.

Initially, he also didn’t think that the matter was really feasible either. However, when he tried to analyze deeper into the matter, he astonishingly realized that the potential benefits severely outweighed the drawbacks. This was truly a decision that only those of great wisdom would be able to come up with!

“This...”

Hall Master Xing ran through the situation in his head once more, and his admiration for Principal Zhang couldn’t help but deepen further. Impressed, he remarked, “Principal Zhang is truly a living sage!”

1155 I Like You

“Elder Sun, we have memorized the cultivation technique you have imparted to us!”

An hour later, Elder Xu clasped his fist and reported to Zhang Xuan.

“Destroy those books then.” Zhang Xuan replied with a wave of his hand.

Elder Xu and the others nodded, and with a powerful flick, the secret manuals disintegrated to ashes before scattering into the surroundings, as if they hadn't appeared in the first place.

“Elder Sun, where can we find you in the future? We wish to repay the favor to you!” Knowing that it was only a matter of time before the ‘envoy of the founder’ would have to leave, Elder Xu couldn't help but ask.

The other party had granted them a second life, and no words could possibly be sufficient to express the gratitude they felt towards him.

“Where to find me?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “There's no need for you to seek me. If I have any matter that I require your help for, I'll come and find you.”

“Then...” Elder Xu hesitated for a moment before asking. “May we have the honor of knowing Elder Sun's true identity? This way, if you have any instructions for us in the future, even if you aren't able to meet us in person, you can simply send a messenger to us, and we'll brave through even the flames of hell for you!”

“This...” Zhang Xuan was intending to refuse that request of theirs as well, but looking into the expectant eyes of the poison masters before him, he found himself hesitating for a brief moment before eventually relenting, “Alright then. Actually, my true identity is the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, Zhang Xuan... 's butler! However, I am a

very low profile person, so I hope that you can keep this matter a secret!”

“Principal Zhang’s butler?”

“I have heard of Principal Zhang. He’s famed to be a once-in-a-thousand-years prodigy, and despite his young age, he was unanimously nominated to become the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy!”

“So you’re Principal Zhang’s butler! Understood!”

“Senior Sun, rest assured. We will never speak a word of this matter to another soul...”

...

Upon learning of Zhang Xuan’s ‘true’ identity, the poison masters quickly nodded their heads excitedly.

“Alright, let’s leave the underground prison!” Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand.

Nodding, Elder Xu and the others began walking out of the door. After confirming that they had all left, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He reverted back to his original appearance before slowly heading out as well.

By the time he left the underground prison, the poison masters had already been brought back to the Combat Master Hall, leaving behind only Hall Master Xing, Wu shi, Luo Qiqi, and the others.

“Zhang shi...”

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was fine, the crowd heaved a sigh of relief before quickly gathering around him.

“I have already talked to those poison masters, and they will heed the commands of the Combat Master Hall in the future.” Zhang Xuan smiled.

“Un! Principal Zhang, thank you for your words of wisdom!” Hall Master Xing clasped his fist and thanked.

“Words of wisdom?” Seeing the delight and gratefulness on the other party’s face, Zhang Xuan was bewildered.

He had noticed Hall Master Xing's reluctance regarding the matter when he first proposed it, and he had been worried that the latter would abruptly change his mind halfway through. Yet, after returning from a short trip to the underground prison, the other party was suddenly thanking him for the matter?

Just what in the world had happened for the latter to change his mind so swiftly?!

"You're being too polite. This is part of my responsibility as a master teacher." Even though Zhang Xuan had no idea what was going through Hall Master Xing's head, humility had always been one of his dominant traits, so he quickly replied so.

On the other hand, seeing how humble Zhang Xuan was, not taking credit for his action at all, Hall Master Xing's respect for the other party deepened.

How in the world could there be such a selfless person in the world? Was he the living embodiment of altruism?

"Principal Zhang, may I know what you intend to do after this?" Wu shi asked.

"I intend to pay a visit to the Painter Guild and the Appraiser Hall to take the corresponding 7-star examinations so that I can be promoted to a 7-star master teacher." Zhang Xuan revealed his intentions without any reservation.

He was originally intending to head to the Appraiser Hall, but he was suddenly called here by King Zhongqing on the way... Thinking about it, he couldn't help but feel that it was a huge waste of time.

"Does Wu shi has any matter for me?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"To be honest, I was thinking that if Principal Zhang doesn't have any urgent matter at hand, it would be good if you could follow me to the Master Teacher Pavilion to discuss the results of my investigation..."

"The results of your investigation?"

"Un." Wu shi nodded. "According to what Zhang Yinqiu said, the master teacher who had duped him of the intelligence goes

by the name of Chen Zhe, who happens to be the direct disciple of Vice Pavilion Master Tian as well. I have already arrested Chen Zhe, and he's currently imprisoned in our Master Teacher Pavilion. If Principal Zhang is free now, I would like to invite you over to meet him."

"This..." Zhang Xuan was slightly hesitant.

In truth, he wasn't too interested in this matter.

Since even Vice Pavilion Master Tian himself had been imprisoned, it would do for the Master Teacher Pavilion to slowly interrogate the both of them. At this point, it didn't really matter whether he were to be involved in the matter or not.

Just as he was about to turn down Wu shi's request, the latter suddenly smiled, "Actually, there's no need for Zhang shi to rush into taking the painter and appraiser examination. To tell you the truth, there will be an Appraisal Convention later on, and if you are free, I can bring you there along with me. The head of the Appraiser Guild and Painter Guild should be attending as well, and if I were to introduce you to them there, it should make things more convenient for you on their side."

"Appraisal Convention? What is that?" Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

"From time to time, when new artifacts of unknown backgrounds are uncovered, a convention would be held over them so as to appraise the artifacts and see if they could be fixed. While it may appear to be an event for appraisers, over the years, it has gradually evolved into a high-class social event where most renowned and influential figures in Qingyuan City would attend." Wu shi replied.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding, "Alright then."

He had departed from the Combat Master hall early in the morning, and after the events at the Terpsichore Guild and King Zhongqing Manor, it was already in the late afternoon now, nearing evening. Rather than fumble his way into the guild and waste more time, it would be far more convenient

for him to first meet the heads of the Painter Guild and Appraiser Hall for the matter.

Hearing Zhang Xuan agree to the matter, Wu Shi smiled in delight, “Great! I’ll be leaving first to make some preparations then. I’ll see you at the Master Teacher Pavilion later on!”

After which, he turned around and left.

Shortly after, Hall Master Xing and the others bade their farewell as well, leaving only Zhang Xuan, Sun Qiang, Luo Qiqi, and Yu Fei-er around.

Zhang Xuan turned to the other three and said, “You all should return to our accommodation at the Combat Master Hall.”

“Yes!” Knowing that he had caused a huge trouble this time around, Sun Qiang quickly nodded obediently.

“Teacher, I have some doubts which I would like to ask you... May I know if it’s convenient for you?” Luo Qiqi bit her lips as she looked at Zhang Xuan nervously.

“Of course, feel free to ask anything.” Zhang Xuan replied with a kind smile.

Noting that Luo Qiqi had something private to ask, Sun Qiang and Yu Fei-er took their leave.

After confirming that there was no one around, Luo Qiqi set up an isolation barrier around them before asking, “Teacher, the affairs today have left some doubts in my mind, and I hope that you can answer them. I have been paying a close look to the earlier conflict... Vice Pavilion Master Tian and King Zhongqing have attempted to pin a crime on you using underhanded means, and I do agree that they should be punished for it... but is it really alright to frame them like that? Wouldn’t that be going too far? Isn’t it against the values preached in the Way of Teacher?”

She had known Zhang Xuan ever since the time she had spent in Huanyu Empire, and for the longest of time, she had viewed the latter to be a role model for her.

From saving her in Wu Yangzi’s underground chamber to risking himself to rescue Yu Fei-er to venturing into the

dangerous Cloudmist Ridge to tame all of the saint beasts...

All of these matters only served to build the noble and selfless image of the young man before her.

With time, his image within her grew bigger and bigger, and she even began to think that he was just like the World's Teacher, a true master teacher through and through...

Admittedly, he did resort to some schemes from time to time, but those were minor incidents, and they always concluded in a positive end.

But... everything she had witnessed today had overturned her view of him.

No matter what, Vice Pavilion Master Tian was a 7-star pinnacle master teacher, the vice head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion... To directly oppose a respected elder was already an infringement of the formalities and values that master teachers believed in and embraced.

As such, she found that her faith was starting to waver.

Instead of replying to Luo Qiqi's doubts directly, Zhang Xuan asked her a question, "What does being a master teacher mean to you?"

"Master teacher... As teachers, we serve to clear away doubts and bring mankind to a greater height of prosperity. As role models, we strive to conduct ourselves honorably, displaying desirable values for others to emulate..."

"Wrong! Your interpretation is all wrong!" Zhang Xuan shook his head.

"Wrong? These are the commandments that all master teachers must learn to recite. There's no master teacher who doesn't know about it..." Luo Qiqi frowned in incomprehension.

"It's true that master teachers serve as teachers and role models to mankind, but we shouldn't neglect the fact that they are humans as well!" Zhang Xuan replied.

"Humans?"

"Un. As long as we remain human, we will have our own emotions and thoughts. That's simply our nature. Kong shi

didn't create the Master Teacher Pavilion to churn out batch after batch of mindless puppets. Formalities and rules are there to guide, not to dictate. In situations where following rules and formalities go against one's conscience, it's fine to break free of it and do what one deems to be right." Zhang Xuan said.

"Master teachers should never aim to blindly follow existing conventions, that's what it means to stagnate and wither. Only when we open our mind and question freely will we be able to bring mankind to further heights, and that's what it means to be a master teacher!"

"This..." Luo Qiqi fell into deep thoughts.

"I have once met a cultivator whose father is a master teacher. From a very young age, he has deeply respected his father and heeded the latter's words obediently, devoting his entirety to cultivation. He had always regarded his father's words to be the absolute truth. However, his father has never managed to achieve a breakthrough before his death, and this matter had left a trauma in the cultivator's heart. Deep within, he felt that since his father was unable to achieve a breakthrough, there was no way he would be able to take the final step forward either... Under his father's looming shadow, even when he has accumulated sufficient zhenqi and knowledge to achieve a breakthrough, his attempts still ended in failure." Zhang Xuan said.

"That is what it means to have a fixed mindset! While we are master teachers, we are students in the long road of life as well. As students, we should expand our minds and doubt what we see and hear instead of blindly heeding the words of those who have come before us. Take the incident today for example, it's clear that Vice Pavilion Master Qing is at wrong, so why should I just take his words for it and accept his verdict?"

"He has a far higher standing than me, and I have no way to going against him directly. As a result, I can only resort to other means in order to stand up against him and protect myself."

“Then... what if a formidable master teacher were to use rules and conventions to force me to accept his point of view?” Luo Qiqi asked with a gleam in her eyes.

“Follow your heart!” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile. “No matter how formidable a master teacher is, can he be any more formidable than Kong shi? In fact, even if Kong shi were to order you to kill a man, claiming that it’s for the welfare of mankind, does that mean that you really should do it? Ultimately, you shouldn’t allow others to dictate your actions. Look into your conscience, and determine what is right and wrong for yourself! As long as you disagree with the other party’s words, you are always entitled to the right to reject his point of view! In the first place, if the other party is using rules and conventions to force you into submission, disregarding your own personal thoughts, he’s already breaking the very foundations that make a master teacher. Since that’s the case, there’s no need to uphold formalities with the other party either!”

“This...” The light in Luo Qiqi’s eyes grew brighter and brighter, as if realization had dawned upon her.

“Alright. In the end, those tricks are just means to protect oneself. I can’t say that they are honorable, but sometimes, there is little choice but to resort to them. As long as you don’t go overboard with them or utilize them to cause harm to the innocent, they aren’t fundamentally at odds with the teachings of the Master Teacher Pavilion. There’s no need for you to think too much into it.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

It was clear that the other party had cornered herself this time around.

Master teachers shouldn’t be inflexible individuals who only knew how to abide by the rules. Different circumstances called for the application of a different set of standards, and master teachers should know how to flexibly adapt to the situation whenever it was required.

Luo Qiqi was a talented individual, but she was simply lacking in the adaptability that Hu Yaoyao and the others possessed.

“I understand!” Upon hearing the explanation, Luo Qiqi’s eyes lit up. She raised her gaze to look right into Zhang Xuan’s eyes and said, “Since teacher has already said so, I think that I should follow my heart as well. Teacher...”

“... I like you!”

“...” Zhang Xuan.

1156 Zhang Jiuxiao

The sight before Zhang Xuan turned dark, and he nearly fell to the ground.

He thought that the other party was truly conflicted and lost, and yet, who could have thought that the other party was actually preparing a trap for him to jump into!

All along, he had always been the one to scheme against others, and never had he thought that he would actually be outwitted by a young lass...

To drop a bunch of philosophical questions first in order to lead him to tell her to follow her heart so that she would be justified to say what she wanted to say afterward...

Zhang Xuan cleared his throat and replied, "I like you too. I like everyone from the Xuanxuan Faction as well. If I didn't like you, why would I accept you as my apothecary student?"

To be confessed by his own student... How embarrassing!

"Teacher, you know what I mean. The type of like that I am referring to isn't that." Luo Qiqi stared at Zhang Xuan intently with her large eyes as she spoke.

"You should return to the Combat Master Hall first. I still have matters to attend to." Right after saying those words, without giving Luo Qiqi an opportunity to respond, Zhang Xuan turned around anxiously and flew in the direction of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

"Hahaha!" Watching the sight, Luo Qiqi couldn't help but burst into laughter.

Her teacher had always been a composed person. This was the first time she was seeing him in such a fluster.

"You were the one who told me to follow my heart. I might address you as my teacher, but we have never undergone an official acknowledgement ceremony... As long as I'm not

your direct disciple, this isn't a problem at all!" Luo Qiqi muttered as her lips curled into a ravishing smile.

In the Master Teacher Continent, it wasn't appropriate for a student to harbor such thoughts about her teacher, so for a very long time, she had been suppressing her true desires. However, after her teacher's 'counselling', the dilemma that she had been facing finally cleared up, and a beautiful smile surfaced on her lips.

She might have addressed Zhang Xuan as her teacher, but since they hadn't gone through an acknowledgement ceremony, the teacher-student relationship between them had yet to be officialized.

Since that was the case, it wasn't against the rules for her to court the other party!

...

"Phew! That was a close shave!" After flying for some distance, Zhang Xuan came to a halt and wiped away his cold sweat.

While his actions may seem unprincipled time to time, he would never dream of laying his hands on his students. This was his moral boundary as a teacher and a belief he held firmly onto.

Are kids nowadays all that brave? Zhang Xuan shook his head.

It took many, many days of hesitation before he could build up the courage needed to confess to Luo Ruoxin, and that young lass actually just directly said that she liked him to his face...

My gosh, it was fortunate that he had fled quickly. Otherwise, wouldn't he die of embarrassment if she were to say anything more than that?

The world sure is becoming more and more open... Zhang Xuan looked at the sky and remarked deeply.

He had always conducted himself properly so as to not get into any messy relationship with the ladies. Yet, who could have thought that he would still end up being placed in such an awkward situation?

Just the thought of it left his head hurting.

How was he to face Luo Qiqi in the future?

“Forget it, I won’t think about it anymore. I should head to the Master Teacher Pavilion first!”

Driving his Soul Depth, Zhang Xuan calmed his mind down before continuing on his way to the Master Teacher Pavilion. At that moment, however, he suddenly noticed a beautiful figure swiftly rushing towards him.

“Zhang shi!”

“Yu Fei-er? Didn’t you return back to the Combat Master Hall?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

At this point, Yu Fei-er had already switched into a crimson dress which embraced her body tightly, fully displaying her alluring figure.

It must be said that this fiery-tempered princess truly had a beautiful physique. It might pale in comparison to Hu Yaoyao, but her perfectly-shaped hips which extended down to her slender legs was truly an eye to behold. At the same time, perhaps it was due to her intentionally concealing it in the past, but under the tight embrace of her dress, her chest looked far more voluptuous than before.

At this moment, her appearance was one that would leave the gazes of others lingering upon her.

“Zhang shi, there’s a matter which I need to talk to you about.” Yu Fei-er said with bit lips.

“Cough cough, I still have matters to attend to, so I’ll talk to you some other time. Farewell!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand hastily as he prepared to take his leave.

“This won’t do! Since you are willing to listen to Qiqi’s words, why won’t you listen to mine as well?” Yu Fei-er harrumphed unhappily as she swiftly grabbed Zhang Xuan’s arm.

“This...” Cold sweat burst from Zhang Xuan’s head.

No matter how low his emotional quotient may be, the very fact that the other party had specially changed her dress up and return for him was more than sufficient clue for him to figure out what the other party was going to say.

“I’m only going to say one thing to you. I’m willing to follow you wherever you go in the future, even if it’s to the end of the world...” Yu Fei-er said.

She was one with a fiery temper, and she usually dealt with matters decisively as well. Nevertheless, it took all of her courage in order to say those words.

“I see.” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan was pondered for a moment before replying, “Very well, acknowledge me as your teacher then! As long as you become my student, I’ll bring you wherever I go. Otherwise, you would only be able to follow me as my maid.”

“You...” Yu Fei-er glared at Zhang Xuan furiously.

“Ah? Is that a no? I guess we’ll just have to forget about this matter then. Alright, I still have things to attend to at the moment, so I’ll be taking my leave first...”

Hu!

Once again, without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan pushed his Heaven’s Path Movement Art to its very limits and disappeared on the spot.

“Hmph!”

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan left, Yu Fei-er’s tightly-clenched fists finally opened up once more. With a smirk, she muttered, “I would like to see who will you choose, Qiqi or me!”

...

What the heck is this... Fleeing to a remote alley, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Just one awkward situation was intolerable to him, and they just had to come in pairs... It was truly too pressurizing to face the confessions of other simultaneously...

If not for the recent rise in his Soul Depth, he might have just collapsed under the immense mental stress and lose his mind.

“It won’t do to drag this matter out for too long. I have to find Ruoxin soon and show them that I already have a girlfriend so that they would give up on me!” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Being too outstanding also came with its troubles too!

How vexing!

He really had to proclaim his attached status soon, or else, if everyone were to come confessing to him one after another, even a person of his Soul Depth wouldn’t be able to take it.

Just fending off the two of them took everything that he got. If more were to come, he wouldn’t have to cultivate anymore.

The next time I meet any ladies, I must accept them as my disciple in advance so that they wouldn’t have any opportunity to harbor such thoughts... Zhang Xuan thought as he stroked his lower jaws.

Making his way forward as he contemplated over this matter, he soon arrived at the Master Teacher Pavilion.

The Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion was even grander than the Combat Master Hall. The majestic and towering building seemed to signify the dignity and standing of the number one occupation on the Master Teacher Pavilion. Even from a distance, Zhang Xuan could see many master teachers walking to and fro the building, and countless cultivators had gathered in the area in hopes of finding a suitable teacher to guide them along.

Zhang Xuan walked into a remote alley and swiftly switched into his master teacher robe and pinned on his master teacher emblem before making his way into the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Upon seeing the six brilliant stars gleaming on his chest, there was no one who dared to stop his passageway. Every single person that he walked by bowed to him respectfully.

While 6-star master teachers might seem nothing much to the topmost echelon of Qingyuan Empire, they were still

formidable existences to the eyes of the common populace. Not to mention, a 6-star master teacher as young as Zhang Xuan, given sufficient time, was bound to become a 7-star master teacher as long as he didn't die prematurely.

“Zhang shi, can I have your autograph? I don't have any paper on hand, so why don't you sign it on my inner wear instead...”

“Hey, don't cut my queue, I was the one who came first! Zhang shi, just sign over here...”

“Scram to one side, Zhang shi is mine!”

...

Shortly after walking through the doors of the Master Teacher Pavilion, Zhang Xuan suddenly saw a huge group of girls rushing in his direction.

“I...” Zhang Xuan's face warped in astonishment.

There were plenty of idol-chasing crazed fans in his previous world as well, but this was the first time he had seen someone asking to have an autograph signed on her inner wear in public!

“Everyone, I understand your agitation, but... I am an upright person, and I am already attached too. Pardon me, but I won't be able to fulfill your wishes. Besides, as a master teacher, I hope that you will focus on my inner beauty instead of just my appearances...” Zhang Xuan waved his hand and said, but before he could finish his words, the group of ladies had already rushed by his side, heading out of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Lunatic!” One of the ladies in the group stopped for a brief moment turn to examine Zhang Xuan from head to toe before harrumphing in disdain. After which, she turned her flabby face back forward, and shaking her millstone-sized bottom, she charged forward along with the crowd while shouting, “Zhang shi, wait for me!”

In the direction where she was charging towards, Zhang Xuan soon spotted a white-robed young man standing not too far away with seven stars gleaming on his chest. The white-robed young man looked at the crowd apologetically and said,

“Pardon me, but I still have important matters to attend to at the moment. I’ll sign autographs for you all later on...”

“But we want it now!”

The group of ladies exclaimed resoundingly.

“Alright, alright...”

Despite the demanding attitude of his fans, the white-robed young man waved his hand patiently to calm them down. After which, he gracefully flicked his hand in the air for a few moments, and a floating name appeared.

“Suspended Imagery? He is a... 7-star painter?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

A painting could be divided into various grades—Reality Depiction, Spiritual Canvas, Infused Intentions, Breathtaking Verisimilitude, Spirit Creation, Spirit Wisdom...

Those who were able to produce works at the level of Spirit Wisdom were already worthy of becoming 6-star painter.

Up to 6-star, painters would require a paper as a medium for them to express their creative conceptions. However, upon reaching 7-star, they would be capable of producing their work in mid-air, painting their picture and words without anything to serve as a medium.

And the fact that the young man was capable of writing in mid-air showed that he had already comprehended the seventh level of painting—Suspended Imagery!

Zhang Jiuxiao...

Zhang Xuan read the name that the white-robed young man written, and his lips suddenly began twitching.

It turned out that the young man had the same surname as him, so naturally, others addressed him as Zhang shi as well...How embarrassing!

Indeed, there were plenty of people in the world who went by the surname of ‘Zhang’ as well. He wasn’t the only ‘Zhang shi’ in the world.

Just that... his name went by a single character of ‘Xuan’, which meaning could be interpreted as only levitating a few inches off the ground. On the other hand, the other party’s name is ‘Jiuxiao’, reminiscent of a roc soaring in the Nine Heavens... The conception behind their names was simply far too different!

While Zhang Xuan was lamenting over how shallow his name was, he examined the two words, ‘Zhang Jiuxiao’, closely. Those two words carried a unique beauty and aura around them that seemed to draw one into a trance, rendering their minds incapable of anything but to appreciate the immensely beautiful words before them.

This was an ability that only 7-star painters could wield.

“Alright, I’ll just leave a single autograph here, you can decide its allocation amongst yourselves. I still have some urgent matters to attend to, so I’ll be taking my leave first...” After writing his name, Zhang Jiuxiao smiled at the crowd before turning around and leaving elegantly.

“He’s simply too dashing!”

The ladies who had demanded the autograph a moment ago couldn’t help but fall into a daze upon seeing his smile.

“As expected of Zhang shi. Every time he comes to the Master Teacher Pavilion, there would always be a huge group of girls waiting for him, Compared to him, it’s like we don’t even exist at all!”

“Well, he’s the number one genius of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, a one-in-five-hundred-year prodigy. Furthermore, given how cultured and refined he is, how can we compete with him?”

“Indeed, he’s far beyond our league...”

A few master teachers lamented bitterly as they walked by the area.

“The number one genius of Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion?” Zhang Xuan muttered beneath his breath after hearing their words.

Indeed, to be able to become a 7-star master teacher at such a young age and achieve such outstanding accomplishments as a painter, it was little wonder why so many ladies would go in a frenzy over him.

“Indeed, there are many talented prodigies in this world. I am not too bad myself, but I mustn’t get complacent over it.” Zhang Xuan warned himself.

While he might have been able to advance his cultivation swiftly, he mustn’t get conceited over the matter. Given how large the Master Teacher Continent was, there were bound to be outstanding geniuses who could match him somewhere.

While Zhang Xuan was deep in thought, the lady with the millstone bottom from before walking over once more and glanced at him disdainfully, “What are you looking at? Have you never seen a beauty in your life?”

“...” Zhang Xuan. Zhang Xuan’s ‘Xuan’ has the meaning of hanging in midair, often just a few feet off the ground. On the other hand, Zhang Jiuxiao’s ‘Jiu Xiao’ means Nine Heavens, which is clearly far more refined and artistic than Zhang Xuan’s name.

1157 News on Luo Ruoxin

He had met plenty of beautiful women before, and he had just been confessed to by two of them a moment ago. But he had never met one with a millstone-like bottom before. To put it in slightly harsher terms, she could have served as a road roller.

Forget it!

However, Zhang Xuan did not pay too much attention to the matter. There was not any need to be angered by something as trivial as that, so he simply asked around for Wu shi's whereabouts before heading over.

Not too long later, his eyes suddenly lit up, and he quickly walked forward.

“Mu shi!”

The person whom he had spotted was no other than Mu Yuan!

After leaving Qiu Wu Palace, the other party had returned straight back to Qingyuan Empire. He had promised the other party to meet him when he came over to Qingyuan City, but who would have thought that they would bump into one another so coincidentally here?

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Mu shi quickly clasped his fist and greeted with a smile, “Senior Uncle!”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “You have achieved a breakthrough to Saint 4-dan?”

For a very long time, Mu shi's cultivation had been confined at Saint 3-dan due to the presence of metal attribute energy suppressing his strength, preventing him from achieving a breakthrough. Thus, he had remained as a 7-star high-tier master teacher for a very long time. Yet, in just a short month of absence, he had successfully made a breakthrough to the Primordial Spirit realm.

“Indeed. It's all thanks to Yang shi's guidance that I was able to take the final step forward,” Mu shi replied with deep

gratitude.

His encounter with Yang shi back in Hongyuan City might have been short, but it had been truly life-changing. If not for the latter's guidance, he might very well have remained stagnant at Saint 3-dan for his entire life, unable to advance any further.

After trading a few pleasantries, Mu shi asked, "May I know if Yang shi has come over to Qingyuan City as well? If possible, I would like to pay him a visit and thank him personally!"

It was his benefactor who had allowed him to walk out of the shadow of the past and neutralize the metal attribute energy within his body, thus allowing him to achieve a breakthrough. He had been wanting to thank the other party for a very long time, but it was unfortunate that the other party's whereabouts were truly elusive. Ever since that parting back then, he had not been able to gather any news on the other party.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. "My teacher's whereabouts are a mystery to me as well. Usually, he is the one who finds me whenever there is a need to..."

In essence, Yang Xuan's identity was just a background that Zhang Xuan had forged to instill fear and deference in the hearts of others. Otherwise, it was highly likely that the swift advancement of his cultivation would have roused the greed of others, and perhaps, some might even have attempted to kidnap him in the hope of uncovering his secret. However, with an unfathomable expert like Yang Xuan backing him from the shadows, the others would have to weigh whether it was worth offending an 8-star master teacher over Zhang Xuan's secret or not.

After all, putting aside the overwhelming strength that an 8-star master teacher possessed, more importantly, the Master Teacher Pavilion would surely be backing him as well.

Those who dared to offend an 8-star master teacher would risk being completely annihilated by the number one occupation on the Master Teacher Continent.

The very eradication of the entire soul oracle occupation should be sufficient to highlight the overwhelming might that the Master Teacher Pavilion wielded.

Since Zhang Xuan was relying on Yang Xuan as his trump card, naturally, it would be best to keep the other party as elusive as possible. The more times that ‘Yang Xuan’ appeared, the higher the chances that Zhang Xuan would make a mistake and give himself away.

“I was still planning to meet Yang shi once before my departure to thank him for his help...” Mu shi shook his head bitterly. “I guess it can’t be helped!”

“Departure? Where is Mu shi going?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

Mu shi was a master teacher of the Qingyuan Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, where else could he possibly want to head to?

“After neutralizing of the metal attribute energy within my body and achieving a breakthrough in my cultivation, the words that Yang shi said to me that night have been lingering my mind. Thus, I made up my mind to return to the Mu Clan! I’m willing to accept any punishment that they issue to me, so long as they will accept me as one of their own once more!” Mu shi spoke with resolution.

Zhang Xuan was slightly dazed for a moment before nodding in realization.

Mu shi was actually from one of the Sage Clans, the Mu Clan. However, in his earlier years, he had unintentionally leaked the secrets of his clan to a lady whom he fancied, causing him to be exiled, thus landing him in his current plight.

“A fallen leaf should return to its roots. After so many days of wandering, I think that it’s about time for me to return to my home. Even if I cannot receive their forgiveness and eventually lose my life there, at the very least, it will be better than spending my life aimlessly out here,” Mu shi said deeply.

Zhang Xuan fell silent.

He did not have a family, so he could not really relate to those emotions. However, he could clearly sense Mu shi's resolution from the latter's eyes. It seemed like even if the Mu Clan sentenced Mu shi to death, the latter would still accept the verdict willingly.

Mu shi continued with a bitter look on his face. "I don't wish to remain an escapee for life."

"Escapee?"

"That's right. No matter what, the blood of the Mu Clan flows through my veins. There's no way I can truly sever my relations with them, so I think it's about time for me to face it. And to be honest, even though I didn't think much of it then when I first left the Mu Clan, the long years have given me more than sufficient time to reflect on the matter, and I regret my decision then. I really regret it..." Mu shi shook his head and sighed soulfully.

Looking at Mu shi's weathered face, Zhang Xuan found himself unable to find the correct words to console the latter.

It took a long while before the silence between the two was broken. Mu shi turned to Zhang Xuan and said, "Senior Uncle, I know that you like Luo shi, but I think that there are still some words that I should say to you."

He had witnessed the relationship between Zhang Xuan and Luo Ruoxin, and he had a clear idea of what was going on.

"Please speak," Zhang Xuan replied politely.

"To be honest with you, I am not too sure about Luo shi's exact identity either, but based on what I have observed thus far, there's a very high chance that she's related with a Sage Clan, the Luo Clan. If she truly is the young princess of the Luo Clan, unless Yang shi specially speaks on your behalf, it will be extremely difficult for you to wed her," Mu shi said.

"You aren't too sure about Ruoxin's exact identity either?" Zhang Xuan was taken aback by those words.

Based on what he knew, Mu shi was the one who had brought Luo shi to the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. Thus, he had always assumed that Mu shi would know a lot about the

latter. He had not expected to hear such words from Mu shi's mouth.

"It has been too many years since I left the Mu Clan and took root in Qingyuan City, so I am no longer in touch with the happenings there. However, judging from how Luo shi has been able to acquire strength that far surpasses mine despite her young age, there is little doubt that she's the famed genius of the Luo Clan. Not only does she wield the strongest artifact of the Luo Clan, she also boasts the purest bloodline. There's no way the Luo Clan will allow a person like her to marry an outsider!" Mu shi shook his head grimly.

"I understand that." Zhang Xuan lowered his gaze as he nodded slowly.

Guild Leader Han and Wu shi had told him about the matter previously as well.

He knew that it would be difficult for him to get together with Luo shi, but he had no intentions of backing down from the challenge.

As a Celestial Master Teacher and a Celestial Saint, he was confident that he would be able to become a man worthy of Luo shi!

If the heavens were to stand in his way, he would just have to crush the heavens!

Mu shi gazed at Zhang Xuan deeply for a short moment before nodding. "Alright then. Since you know about it, I won't say too much about it either. However, don't blame me for being too naggy. I just want to offer you one last word of advice: don't allow her to make a decision that she will regret in the future."

"Regret?" Zhang Xuan's heart jolted.

Those words had truly struck the depths of his heart. In truth, he had been considering simply snatching Luo Ruoxin away if the Luo Clan adamantly opposed their relationship. In any case, he was confident that it was just a matter of time before he gained sufficient strength to do so. However, after hearing Mu shi's advice, he could not help but rethink the matter. Yes,

he might be able to get together with Luo Ruoxin using such a forceful method, but did he really want to leave her with such a deep regret for life?

As the young princess of the Luo Clan, she had probably grown up amid the loving care of her family and clan members. Without a doubt, she had deep feelings for her clan. Even if she were to choose him over her family in the end, there was no doubt that her decision would leave her with lingering regrets and a great deal of pain.

Clenching his fists tightly, Zhang Xuan said, “Don’t worry, I’ll make her family acknowledge me. I won’t put her in a tough spot.”

There was only one way for him to not put Luo Ruoxin in a difficult position, and that was to have the Luo Clan acknowledge their relationship!

It would be an uphill battle, but for Luo Ruoxin’s sake, this was the only path that he could choose.

Seeing that the young man had made up his choice, Mu shi nodded. “I see... I wish you luck then!”

“Right, Mu shi, Ruoxin said that she had to leave because she had matters to attend to. Do you have any idea where she might have gone? Also, do you know where the Luo Clan is located?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Luo Ruoxin had left hurriedly the previous time, and she did not say where she was headed to or where he could find her. However, since Mu shi was from a Sage Clan himself, he might know a thing or two.

Mu shi contemplated for a moment before replying. “The Luo Clan is based in the City of Sages, Qufu. However, I think that it’s more likely that she has headed to the ‘Sanctum of Sages’ instead of the Luo Clan!”

“Sanctum of Sages?”

“Gathered in the Sanctum of Sages are either the offspring of Sage Clans or the most talented prodigies of the entire Master Teacher Continent.” Mu shi pondered for a moment before continuing. “Based on what I have heard, the young princess

of the Sage Clan is a student of the Sanctum of Sages. However, it seems like she escaped from there a while back due to some kind of issue, and her whereabouts became unknown afterwards.”

“She’s a student of the Sanctum of Sages?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

He had no idea what Luo Ruoxin’s true strength was, but the fact that she had been able to easily bind the Leaving Aperture realm Skyleaf King was more than sufficient to prove that her strength had far surpassed his imaginations.

And yet, who would have thought that even an expert with strength like hers was only a student?

Wasn’t the Sanctum of Sages a little too scary?

“Un. The Sanctum of Sages serves to cultivate the offspring of Sage Clans and young geniuses into top-notch experts of the Master Teacher Continent. Generations of the head of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and the various influential Sage Clans have all emerged from the Sanctum of Sages. Senior Uncle, if you wish to have the Luo Clan acknowledge the relationship between you and Luo shi, it would be best for you to enroll into the Sanctum of Sages as well and make your name there. This way, no one will dare take you lightly despite your humble background!” Mu shi continued.

Zhang Xuan nodded upon hearing those words.

Even though it was known to most that he had a ‘Yang shi’ backing him, he himself knew better than anyone else that it was just a huge lie.

If he wanted to marry Luo Ruoxin openly, there was no way he could rely on Yang shi.

He could still use Yang shi to deal with smaller conflicts; the other party would not know better anyway. However, before the top master teachers in the continent, there was little doubt that his petty disguise would be unraveled in an instant. Against them, he would not even know how he died.

Given so, the Sanctum of Sages was indeed his best bet. No matter what, he had to give it a try.

Of course, most importantly of all, if he could enroll in the Sanctum of Sages, there was a good chance that he would be able to meet Luo Ruoxin sooner.

It was difficult for a new couple to spend even a day away from one another, let alone a month.

“May I know how I can enroll in the Sanctum of Sages?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“The semester for the Sanctum of Sages starts at around... the middle of the ninth month, and it usually recruits a new batch of students before that. Based on what I know, the Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilions have a slot each to nominate a candidate to enroll in the Sanctum of Sages, and as long as the candidate clears a test, they will be brought into the Sanctum of Sages!” Mu shi replied.

“The middle of the ninth month... Isn’t that less than two months away?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up in alarm.

“Indeed, it’s less than two months away. To be more exact, it’s a month and seventeen days!” Mu shi replied.

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned. “Then, may I know what the prerequisites are for obtaining the nomination slot?”

Since the Sanctum of Sages only accepted top-notch geniuses from all over the Master Teacher Continent, there was bound to be some fundamental prerequisite for enrollment.

“One has to be a 7-star high-tier master teacher at the very minimum and possess a cultivation at the Embryonic Soul realm!” Mu shi replied.

“7-star high-tier...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He was currently just a step away from reaching the Embryonic Soul realm. As long as he could gather sufficient concentrated high-tier spirit stones and Saint 3-dan cultivation technique manuals to compile the corresponding Heaven’s Path Divine Art, he would be able to achieve a breakthrough easily.

That would not be too much of a problem.

“However...” Mu shi hesitated for a moment before continuing. “The nomination slot for our Master Teacher Pavilion this year has already been allocated. It was a decision made by Pavilion Master Gou personally, so I fear that it might be difficult for you to obtain it!”

“It has already been allocated? Who is it?” Not expecting the slot to be taken, Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

At this moment, a figure suddenly emerged in his mind, and he could not help but exclaim, “Could the person you are talking about be... Zhang Jiuxiao?”

Mu shi nodded. “That’s right, it’s him. If I’m not mistaken, he should be an offspring from the Zhang Clan, another one of the Sage Clans.”

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“Zhang Clan?” Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

Back then, Wu shi and Guild Leader Han had told him that the little princess of the Luo Clan was betrothed to a powerful Sage Clan, and the said Sage Clan was none other than the Zhang Clan.

As such, he could not help but feel deeply uncomfortable upon hearing that name.

He might have been able to remain calm before any other matter, but just for this single matter, he could not maintain his composure.

If he could, he would not have pummeled Feng Xun so viciously after hearing that the latter had confessed to Luo Ruoxin.

Mu shi nodded. “This is still a conjecture on my part at the moment, but I do believe it to be so.”

“Wait, that doesn’t sound right.” Zhang Xuan frowned as he recalled what Mu shi had said earlier. “Since the Sanctum of Sages serves to cultivate the offspring of Sage Clans, surely Zhang Jiuxiao should be able to enroll into it directly. Is there any need for him to come to the Qingyuan Empire to vie for this single slot?”

“The Sanctum of Sages is indeed much more lenient toward the Sage Clans. While the Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilions only acquire a nomination slot each year, each Sage Clan obtains at least ten slots each year at the very minimum. For behemoths like the Zhang Clan, they acquire at least thirty slots each year,” Mu shi explained.

“However, for a clan as large as the Zhang Clan, thirty slots are only sufficient for them to send in the inner clan members with purer bloodlines. As for the clan members from the side

families, whose bloodlines are thinner, they basically stand no chance whatsoever. As such, they scatter themselves among the Conferred Empire to vie for the other nomination slots in order to enroll into the Sanctum of Sages. Once they get in, they are entitled to the best cultivation resources and the most outstanding heritages. To the side families of powerful clans, this is an ideal opportunity for them to change their fate, so no one is willing to allow this opportunity slip through their fingers.”

“With them around, doesn’t that mean that the local prodigies of the Conferred Empires don’t stand a chance at all?” Zhang Xuan asked in displeasure.

There was only a single nomination slot in each Conferred Empire, and if the side families of the Sage Clans sent their members over, wouldn’t the local prodigies stand no chance at all?

“Survival of the fittest, this is something that can’t be helped. If there is a prodigy in the Conferred Empire who can surpass the member of the side family, the prodigy will naturally obtain the slot. Otherwise, the nomination slot can only be given to the member of the side family.” Mu shi shook his head.

Even the offspring from the Sage Clans were not above the rules. They dared not openly snatch slots from the Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilions, but they were still allowed to compete for it fairly.

If their skills surpassed those of the local master teachers of the Conferred Empire, the slot would only be allocated to them.

The Sanctum of Sages only accepted the strongest experts on the continent. If one was inferior to their competitors, it would only mean that they were not qualified to join the Sanctum of Sages. The rules were that simple, direct, and harsh.

“You’re right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

This was just like the Combat Master Selection. As the students of his Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy had the

strongest fighting prowess, it was natural that they would all be picked. The other three Master Teacher Academies had outstanding students as well, and many of them would have stood a chance had they not been put against the candidates of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy.

It was unfortunate for them, but they only had their own bad luck to blame.

That was how harsh the world of cultivation was.

Nevertheless, the presence of the Master Teacher Pavilion still brought around some degree of meritocracy. Even if an individual had a humble background, as long as he had sufficient talent and were willing to work hard, he would be able to make a name for himself too. Take Zhang Xuan for example, despite being a mere orphan from the Tianxuan Kingdom, he had still been able to slowly scale up the ladder and eventually become the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy.

“While Zhang Jiuxiao is only from a side family of the Zhang Clan, the talent that he possesses is undeniable. Despite being only twenty-seven this year, he has already reached the astounding height of a 7-star high-tier master teacher, a Saint 3-dan pinnacle expert. His fighting prowess and capabilities are unmatched by any master teacher in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Academy, so naturally, the nomination slot went to him,” Mu shi said.

“To tell you the truth, the side families of Sage Clans don’t possess a particularly high standing, and the resources that they are entitled to are severely limited as well. For one as young as him to have achieved such accomplishments, on top of possessing considerable talent, he must have put in quite a bit of hard work as well.”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. He could relate deeply to that.

Indeed. Talent without diligence was futile. Even a prodigy would achieve little in their life if they refused to devote themselves to their work.

Again, taking Zhang Xuan for example, it had taken him an entire year of blood, sweat, and tears before he was able to earn his current accomplishments. The difficulties he had faced over the year were truly hard to describe using words.

Zhang Xuan turned to Mu shi and asked, "I'll definitely have to head to the Sanctum of Sages, but how can I obtain the slot?"

Now that he knew that Luo Ruoxin was likely to be at the Sanctum of Sages, he definitely had to head there as well. Regardless of the means, he was determined to obtain the nomination slot.

"You only have one chance. In twenty days, the Sanctum of Sages will send an envoy over to escort the nominated candidate over. If you can successfully become a 7-star master teacher, obtain a cultivation of Saint 3-dan pinnacle, and defeat Zhang Jiuxiao in every aspect before then, naturally, the qualifications will go to you. The timing is extremely rushed, but I fear that there is no other way," Mu shi said.

"Twenty days?" Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding decisively. "Alright."

If it was just two to three days, he would need to rush a bit. However, twenty days was more than sufficient for him.

"Alright?" Mu shi looked at Zhang Xuan doubtfully. "If I recall correctly, your cultivation is still only at Saint 1-dan pinnacle. You are still two whole realms away from reaching Saint 3-dan pinnacle..."

"Oh, I accidentally made a breakthrough to Saint 2-dan pinnacle last night," Zhang Xuan replied with a smile as he leaked out a little bit of his cultivation.

Due to the unique nature of the Heaven's Path Divine Art, as long as he did not intentionally display his cultivation, not even Mu shi would be able to discern his current cultivation realm.

"Accidentally? You made a breakthrough to Saint 2-dan... pinnacle?" Mu shi's lips twitched wildly. He felt something stifling in his chest, and it took him a long while before he

managed to sooth it. Sighing deeply, he remarked, “Senior Uncle sure is a talented individual.”

Back when they were still in Qiu Wu Palace, the other party had only been at Saint 1-dan pinnacle. Yet, over the span of a single month, he had managed to advance a whole cultivation realm. The rate of advancement of his cultivation was truly unheard of in history!

“However, I fear that just this much might not be enough. There is a huge gap between the Spiritual Perception realm and the Embryonic Soul realm, and even if you do achieve a breakthrough within the next twenty days, it’ll take at least several years before you will be able to fuse your soul into your Origin Soul perfectly!”

Mu shi was not too optimistic about Zhang Xuan’s chances.

Beyond Saint realm, progressing past every single realm was like venturing into a whole new world. Even the most talented of prodigies would require several years before they were able to fully grasp a cultivation realm and advance to the next level. To be honest, attempting a breakthrough within a short twenty days... was nothing more than a pipe dream.

“And more importantly, Zhang Jiuxiao isn’t an ordinary Saint 3-dan pinnacle cultivator. He has built up a powerful foundation, allowing him to match cultivators far stronger than he is. Ordinary Saint 4-dan cultivators are no match for him, and even I would only stand a fifty percent chance against him after my breakthrough,” Mu shi explained with a frown.

As an ex-inner clan member of the Mu Clan, he had cultivated top-notch cultivation techniques and battle techniques, granting him strength far surpassing that of ordinary master teachers. Yet, despite his recent breakthrough to Saint 4-dan, the other party was still able to match him equally with his Saint 3-dan pinnacle cultivation. Just this in itself was sufficient to show how fearsome an existence Zhang Jiuxiao was.

“You stand a fifty percent chance against him?” Zhang Xuan asked contemplatively. A moment later, he added, “Mu shi, do you mind testing my strength?”

“Test your strength? Sure!”

Knowing Zhang Xuan’s intentions, Mu shi took him to the training grounds within the Master Teacher Pavilion, and crossing his hands before his chest, he said, “Feel free to make a move. I have not reinforced my cultivation after my breakthrough yet, so ultimately, I am still a Primordial Spirit realm expert. It would be good for you to experience the true might of a Primordial Spirit realm expert so that you are mentally prepared. Don’t worry, I won’t use my full strength...”

Hu!

Before Mu shi could finish his words, a figure suddenly appeared before him, and before he could even process what was going on, he saw a fist abruptly flying for his chest.

“Hmm?”

Not expecting Zhang Xuan to be able to move so swiftly, Mu shi’s eyebrows shot up. He swiftly tapped into the entirety of his strength, wanting to fend off the other party’s punch. However, just as he was preparing his retaliation, he suddenly felt an overwhelming soul pressure assaulting him from the surroundings, preventing him from moving.

Peng!

The punch struck Mu shi’s chest squarely, and he was knocked straight out of the training grounds before crashing heavily into the wall. Huge mouthfuls of blood spewed wildly from his mouth.

Following which, a young man’s apologetic voice sounded in his ears. “I’m truly sorry! Mu shi, are you still fine? I already tried holding myself back earlier, using just a fifth of my strength, but I didn’t think that you wouldn’t be able to receive it...”

“Pu!” Mu shi’s face paled, and another huge mouthful of blood spurted from his lips. He nearly fainted on the spot after hearing those words.

For a brief moment, he had thought that he was facing a Saint 4-dan pinnacle expert instead of a Saint 2-dan cultivator.

Against such strength, even five of him would not be an opponent for the other party.

Zhang Xuan quickly helped Mu shi up apologetically while asking with a doubtful look on his face, “Does that Master Teacher Zhang Jiuxiao only possess this much strength?”

“Cough cough!” Mu shi’s face reddened, and he coughed out yet another mouthful of blood.

While the Mu Clan did not specialize in combat, no matter what, he still used to be one of the inner clan members who inherited the heritage of the main family. His fighting prowess should have been far stronger than his peers... and yet, he was actually subdued in a single punch by a master teacher whose cultivation was far lower than his.

Just the thought of it left him deeply stifled within.

It took a long while before Mu shi was able to calm himself down. With a face reddened in embarrassment, he said awkwardly, “Actually, Zhang Jiuxiao’s prowess is slightly above mine. Nevertheless, with fighting prowess like yours, even if you don’t achieve a breakthrough, you should be able to defeat him easily!”

If Zhang Xuan was already this powerful with a cultivation of Saint 2-dan, once he broke through to Saint 3-dan, Zhang Jiuxiao would probably stand no chance against him at all.

“Other than the requirement on my cultivation, what other prerequisites are there to enter the Sanctum of Sages? If possible, I would like to ask Mu shi to train along with me so that I can get a clear grasp of the standards...”

Mu shi’s face warped in horror upon hearing those words, and he quickly shook his head. “I’m not free!”

Just a simple test of cultivation had nearly cost him his life. If that were to continue, he feared that the confidence that he had barely picked up would be shattered once more.

“What you have to do now is be promoted to a 7-star master teacher as soon as possible. That is the fundamental prerequisite for joining the Sanctum of Sages. If you do not

meet this prerequisite, it'll be futile even if your fighting prowess exceeds that of Zhang Jiuxiao's!" Mu shi said.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response to those words.

This happened to coincide with his current goal. At the moment, he was just lacking two more supporting occupations before he was qualified to be promoted to a 7-star master teacher.

"Alright, I have already said all that I should say. I need to be on my way now, so farewell!" After saying those words, Mu shi turned around and left hurriedly.

He was afraid that if he remained any longer, he would be traumatized once more.

"Ah..." Not expecting Mu shi to leave so decisively, Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment.

Sighing deeply, he walked out of the training grounds and headed in the direction of Wu shi's residence, as pointed out by a master teacher from before.

Before Zhang Xuan could get far, he heard a series of ear-piercing shrieks in his ear.

"Zhang shi, you can do it!"

"Zhang shi, we believe in you! You will definitely be able to set a new record..."

Looking past the huge crowd, he saw a long stone bridge.

A man was standing right on top of the bridge with sweat flowing profusely down his face. It seemed like he was under immense pressure.

The man was none other than the offspring of the Zhang Clan, Zhang Jiuxiao!

What is he doing? Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

At this moment, a master teacher amid the crowd suddenly exclaimed loudly, "Zhang Jiuxiao is challenging the Heart Tempering Bridge?"

1159 You Can Do It!

“Heart Tempering Bridge?” Confused, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over and saw that the one who had just spoken was a 6-star master teacher like him.

The other party seemed to be in his forties, and there was an aged look of a veteran on his face.

“Zhang Shi’s talent has allowed him to advance his cultivation swiftly, but that, in exchange, has made his mental fortitude his greatest weakness. As such, Pavilion Master Gou has sent him out to temper his mind well. He has returned from his journey just a while ago, and it seems like he’s attempting to give it a try to see if he is able to break his previous record.” the 6-star master teacher explained.

To be able to raise his cultivation realm to Saint 3-dan pinnacle and advance his master teacher rank to 7-star before hitting his thirties, Zhang Jiuxiao was indeed a formidable genius. On top of that, as he was from the Sage Zhang Clan, there was also nothing to pick about his background either. The only thing that was lacking about him was his mental fortitude.

This was also the reason why he had been working on it over the past month, hoping to achieve a breakthrough in it soon.

“Ahem, I am asking about the Heart Tempering Bridge, not Zhang Jiuxiao...” Zhang Xuan cleared his throat.

All he wanted to know was what the Heart Tempering Bridge was used for.

It didn’t matter to him how powerful or weak Zhang Jiuxiao was. In his view, it was just the difference between one punch or two punch anyway, there was truly no need for him to go to the extent of analyzing his opponent’s strength.

“The Heart Tempering Bridge is a unique artifact that assesses one’s mental fortitude. Those who attempt to walk through it will be placed under immense pressure, and cultivators with

weaker minds would find themselves succumbing to the pressure very soon. All in all, there are ten levels for the entire bridge, and even a typical 7-star pinnacle master teacher would find it hard to reach the end. Previously, Zhang shi has only managed to reach the fourth level. This time, he is intending to see if he will be able to surpass his previous record.” The 6-star master teacher shot a perplexed glance at Zhang Xuan, but he still chose to explain it anyway.

There were no master teachers in Qingyuan Empire who were unaware of the existence of the Heart Tempering Bridge. For the other party to disregard the number one genius of their Master Teacher Pavilion and focus on a mere bridge instead... this had truly rendered him speechless.

“Fourth level?”

“Don’t underestimate the Heart Tempering Bridge. The previous record of the Heart Tempering Bridge for cultivators beneath thirty is left behind by Ye shi two thousand years ago, but even he had only managed to reach the fourth level. The fact that Zhang shi is able to reach the fourth level is already a formidable feat in itself... However, Pavilion Master Gou has high hopes for him. He feels like reaching the fourth level isn’t enough, so he tasked Zhang shi to work harder on his mental fortitude.” the 6-star master teacher replied.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“You aren’t surprised by his achievement?” Seeing how nonchalantly the young man was acting, the 6-star master teacher couldn’t help but feel a little stifled within.

When he first heard about Zhang shi’s accomplishments back then, he had been so shocked that he fell into a very long moment of daze before he could finally regain himself. Yet, the fellow before him simply replied with a nonchalant ‘I see’, as if the achievement was nothing at all.

Did the other party not get what was going on, or was he feigning composure?

“Surprised? Why should I be surprised? Didn’t you say that there are ten levels? He has only reached the fourth the

previous time, so even if he did make some improvement over the past month, at the very most, he would only at the fifth or sixth now. That's still a long way to go before reaching the end." Zhang Xuan scratched his head in confusion.

Honestly speaking, he had never really cultivated his mental fortitude as well, so he couldn't relate to the difficulty and torture in tempering it.

What fourth level and fifth level, he had completely no notion of that at all. Since that was the case, what did he have to be surprised over?

"You..." Hearing those seemingly ignorant words, the 6-star master teacher staggered and nearly spurted blood. He quickly explained, "The fact that 7-star pinnacle master teachers would find it hard to reach the other end of the bridge means to say that it's a trial which even Saint 4-dan pinnacle experts are unable to clear. Just think about it, Primordial Spirit realm experts, despite the superior prowess of their Primordial Spirits granting them mental fortitude far surpassing that of ordinary cultivators, are still unable to reach the tenth level... Given so, the fact that Zhang Shi, a Saint 3-dan cultivator, was able to reach the fourth level is already a frightening feat in itself!"

"Ah." Zhang Xuan replied indifferently. "So it's a formidable feat. Then... how should I react to this matter? Should I be shocked, or should I scream like the others over there?"

"Forget it..." Seeing that the other party was still unable to comprehend the significance of the feat, the 6-star master teacher shook his head helplessly and gave up.

At this point, he was really starting to doubt whether the young man before him had robbed the master teacher robe and emblem from elsewhere to put it on... To think that there would be a master teacher in Qingyuan City who wouldn't even know about the Heart Tempering Bridge, as well as the significance of a young man below thirty reaching the fourth level on it...

Just how lacking must his general knowledge be?

“Look, look! Zhang Shi is about to overcome the fourth level!”

“Wah, you’re right! Impressive, I feel like my admiration for him is shooting up swiftly!”

“As expected of my idol! Wuu wuu, I am so agitated at this moment that my tears are about to stain my pants wet!”

All of a sudden, the piercing shrieks abruptly crescendoed.

Zhang Xuan and the 6-star master teacher quickly halted their conversation and turned their gazes back towards the Heart Tempering Bridge.

There, Zhang Jiuxiao’s figure could be seen gradually nearing the center of the bridge. Despite the tremendous pressure that the latter was clearly under—his body was shaking, and his robe was completely drenched in sweat—he did successfully hold on up to the point.

Is that the demarcation of levels? Seeing how exhausted Zhang Jiuxiao was, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but take a closer look at the bridge. There, he saw various red lines scattered across the bridge, and Zhang Jiuxiao had passed the fourth and was slowly making his way over to the fifth.

“As expected of the number one genius of our Master Teacher Pavilion! Despite only spending a month in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, his mental fortitude has already grown by such a great extent. At this rate, it might really be possible for him to reach the fifth level today!” the 6-star master teacher remarked in agitation.

“Marshlands of the Northern Meadows?” Hearing that phrase, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but frown.

It hadn’t been long since he had arrived at Qingyuan City, but this must be his third or fourth time hearing of that location.

Vicious’s body parts could very well be there, and it seemed like a soul oracle had settled there as well... Why would the number one genius of the Master Teacher Pavilion head to such a dangerous location to temper his mental fortitude?

“That’s right. According to the rumors, there is a place known as the Ghost Cavern in the Marshlands of the Northern

Meadows that raises one's mental fortitude immensely. It is extremely famous even in the surrounding empires, and there are many master teachers who would head to the Northern Meadows each year to seek it, hoping of training their mind. The fact that Zhang Shi dared to challenge the Heart Tempering Bridge after spending less than a month there, even improving his record by an entire level, means that it's very likely that he might have found the Ghost Cavern!" the 6-star master teacher explained in excitement.

"Ghost Cavern? What's in there?" Zhang Xuan's curiosity was piqued.

The conventional methods that others use to temper their mental fortitude were the usage of inner demons, illusions, pain, and sourcing for inspiration for enlightenment... So what did the Ghost Cavern rely on to allow one's mental fortitude to increase swiftly, attracting so many master teachers to see it?

"I have never been there before, so I'm not too sure either. However, I heard that there's a body of springwater there that deeply resembles the shape of an eye. Staring into it would allow one to peer into the deepest desires in their hearts, and the longer one stares into it for, the more desires would spring up. As long as one kills off the desires that are reflected in the springwater, their minds would grow more wholesome and resilient..." the 6-star master teacher pondered for a brief moment before responding.

"A body of springwater that can reflect one's deepest desires?" Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

"Indeed. I was also as shocked as you when I first heard of the matter, and I didn't believe it either. However, there are simply too many rumors that lend credibility to the case, so eventually, I could only accept it to be true. Also, another thing that is perplexing about the Ghost Cavern is that it doesn't seem to be fixed to one location. Instead, it moves around, and only the truly fortunate master teachers are able to find it. There were more than twenty master teachers who have headed to the Northern Meadows along with Zhang Shi this time around, but Zhang Shi was the only one who enjoyed a tremendous increase in his mental fortitude... It seems like the

others simply just aren't as lucky..." the 6-star master teacher said.

"I see." Zhang Xuan nodded.

From the sounds of it, it seemed like the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows was truly a mysterious place. If he had some time after being promoted to a 7-star master teacher, he would really have to head over there to take a look himself.

While Zhang Xuan was deep in thoughts, excited shrieks continued resounding from the surroundings, and there was a single one which was particularly piercing.

"Look! Zhang shi has already reached the fifth level!"

Turning around, Zhang Xuan noted that the source of the sound had come from the millstone-bottom lady whom he had encountered just a few moments ago. The latter was staring at the Heart Tempering Bridge with gleaming eyes, and if she could, Zhang Xuan had no doubt that she would pounce on Zhang Jiuxiao at this very moment to bear his babies.

After which, he turned his gaze back to the bridge and saw that Zhang Jiuxiao had already passed the fifth red line. However, it seemed like he had reached his limit as well. His body was trembling so intensely that he could hardly move anymore, and it seemed like he would collapse at any moment.

"This is probably his limit..." Zhang Xuan noted.

Seeing that the show was over, Zhang Xuan was just about to leave the area when he suddenly heard a deeply displeased voice echoing from the other end of the bridge, "Send off our guest!"

Following which, the doors to a residence at the other end of the bridge suddenly creaked open, and two armored individuals walked out with awkward looks on their faces.

"It's Wu shi!" Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

He could tell in an instant that the displeased voice belonged to Wu shi. It seemed like he was in the residence on the other side of the bridge.

"I should head over to find him."

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan began walking towards the stone bridge without any hesitation, wanting to cross to the other side.

...

“Argh... Persevere, persevere! I must persevere on!”

On the bridge, Zhang Jiuxiao’s sweat flowed profusely down his head. At this point, the vision before him had already blurred, and the only thing that was pushing him on was the tenacity in his mind.

But no matter how hard he tried to push himself, he was already completely sapped. This was the limit of his mental fortitude, and it was impossible for him to push any further.

Eventually, he could only give in, “Forget it, I’ll just stop here today...”

Giving up, Zhang Jiuxiao turned around, only to see a young man with a 6-star master teacher emblem pinned on his chest walking over leisurely. From the faint aura that the latter emanated, he could vaguely discern that the latter was a Saint 2-dan pinnacle cultivator.

The young man walked up to him nonchalantly, nodded in approval, and pulled his arm down in an encouraging gesture, “You can do it!”

After which, he proceeded on to cross the bridge leisurely.

It was a trial which left his mind feeling as if it would succumb at any moment, and yet, the other party was able to clear it so easily as if it was a mere stroll down the streets...

“He cleared the tenth level so easily?”

The stupefied Zhang Jiuxiao stared at the sight before him with twitching lips.

He wasn’t the only one who was flabbergasted by this inconceivable situation. The surroundings had suddenly grown so silent that one could literally hear a pin drop.

The 6-star master teacher who had been speaking to Zhang Xuan earlier had an expression on his face which suggested

that he had seen a ghost.

The millstone-bottom lady had also halted her fervent cheer dance. In this instant, her mouth was widened even larger than her bottom...

1160 Bail

After leaving the Heart Tempering Bridge, Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment. “Damn, I thought that it would at least be kind of challenging...”

He had expected a challenge from the Heart Tempering Bridge, but when he walked across it, he had realized that... it was truly nothing at all. He did not feel the slightest resistance. It did not even jolt his soul in the slightest.

All he wanted to do was temper his mental fortitude and try raising his Soul Depth, but this simple wish just would not come true for him. When he went to the Trial of Inner Demons, his inner demons refused to appear. When he walked over the Heart Tempering Bridge, he did not feel the slightest thing... Why did life have to be so difficult!

Shaking his head in pity, Zhang Xuan walked toward the room where Wu shi’s voice originated from previously and knocked on the door.

Walking in, he saw Wu shi seated in the middle with a livid expression. He did not seem to be in a good mood at that moment.

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan asked, “What’s wrong?”

When he parted with Wu shi earlier, the latter had still had a smile on his face. It had not even been an hour since then, so why would his mood suddenly sour so quickly?

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s question, Wu shi rubbed his glabella and said, “The two men earlier came on the orders of Emperor Chu Tianxing to demand King Zhongqing’s release, so I chased them out.”

“The emperor wants to have King Zhongqing released?”

Zhang Xuan frowned. “Does he not understand the crime of slandering a master teacher?”

While Zhang Xuan might not have been a master teacher of the Qingyuan Empire, and his rank had not reached 7-star, he

was still the principal of a Master Teacher Academy, and there were a hundred thousand master teachers standing behind him! Considering that the other party had been caught slandering him, wasn't Emperor Chu Tianxing taking him too lightly by demanding King Zhongqing's release without even investigating the matter?

If such a thing were to be approved, what would become of the Master Teacher Pavilion's dignity.

"I sent my men to explain the matter to Emperor Chu Tianxing right after capturing King Zhongqing," Wu shi said grimly.

No matter what, King Zhongqing was the First King of the Qingyuan Empire. Considering that the Master Teacher Pavilion had sent out all its forces to apprehend the latter, it might sour the relations between the Master Teacher Pavilion and the royal family if he did not deal with this matter properly.

"You have already explained this matter, but Emperor Chu Tianxing still sent his men over to demand King Zhongqing's release? Isn't he being far too brazen?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

King Zhongqing's act of finding the ex-vice head of the Poison Hall to frame him was a truly major crime, and yet, Emperor Chu Tianxing, despite knowing that such actions would offend the Master Teacher Pavilion, still demanded King Zhongqing's release. Just what in the world was going through the minds of the nobles of the Qingyuan Empire?

Did they not understand that even if it was the royal family of a Conferred Empire, once they lost the protection of the local Master Teacher Pavilion, they would spiral into a cycle of endless decline and soon face destruction?

Wu shi shook his head and sighed deeply. "I'm not too sure either, but I think that he might have been emboldened by Vice Pavilion Master Tian..."

For the authoritative vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion to work together with a King to accuse a master teacher without investigating the matter properly was truly a huge

oversight. The future of a master teacher could very well have been ruined due to it.

The only reason Zhang Xuan was fine was because they had rushed over in time. Otherwise, held captive by the duo, he would have been no different from a prey on the chopping board. As long as the duo pulled some tricks, he could very well have found himself pinned with an accusation that he would never be able to cleanse himself of.

Such matters happened far too frequently.

It was simply too easy to slander and accuse another of a crime, especially when two of the most authoritative individuals in the Qingyuan Empire were working with one another.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. He was just about to reveal his deduction when someone suddenly knocked on the door outside. Following which, a master teacher walked in and reported, “Teacher, Emperor Chu Tianxing of the Qingyuan Empire seeks an audience!”

“He has already arrived? Invite him in!” Frowning, Wu shi waved his hand.

He had chased away the envoys of Emperor Chu Tianxing just a few minutes earlier, but then the latter suddenly arrived personally. From the looks of it, it seemed like he had already been waiting outside for the results.

The master teacher backed out of the room, and not too long later, a middle-aged man dressed in a yellow robe walked in with widened strides.

Just like Wu shi, the middle-aged man’s cultivation had reached Half-Leaving Aperture realm as well. His eyes carried an authoritative air reminiscent of a majestic tiger. With just a look, it was apparent that his unique aura had been cultivated by the many years he had spent in a lofty position.

“Wu shi!” As soon as the middle-aged man walked into the room, he quickly clasped his fist politely.

Although he was the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire, his standing still paled in comparison to Wu shi, a vice head of the

Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Un. Take a seat.” Wu shi gestured as he assessed the middle-aged man before him nonchalantly. “If Your Majesty is here to request King Zhongqing’s release, I’ll have to ask you not to waste your breath. Framing a master teacher is a grievous crime that our Master Teacher Pavilion is unable to pardon. I have already reported the matter to the headquarters, so if you continue insisting on this matter, I fear that the entire Qingyuan Empire might be implicated in this issue. Thus, I have to ask you to think twice before speaking.”

Wu shi’s words were not particularly sharp, but they were devoid of warmth. His tone had made it perfectly clear that there was no room for negotiation.

Instead of proceeding on to take a seat, Emperor Chu clasped his fist and spoke in an earnest tone. “It truly pains me to see King Zhongqing committing such foolishness, but Wu shi... you also know that I would have been killed long ago if not for him. Thus, regardless of how big a crime he has committed, I am willing to compensate the Master Teacher Pavilion for it. Thus, I beseech the Master Teacher Pavilion to give him and me an opportunity to apologize to Zhang shi personally and plead for his pardon...”

“Apologize? If apologies truly work, what would the world need our Master Teacher Pavilion for?” Wu shi waved his hands impatiently. “Send our guest out!”

“Yes!” The master teacher who had led Emperor Chu Tianxing in nodded before walking up to the latter. “Your Majesty, this way please!”

“This...” The expression on Chu Tianxing’s face turned awkward upon hearing those words. He had prepared a long script to convince the other party of the matter, but it seemed like the other party was not intending to give him an opportunity to speak at all. Thus, sighing deeply, he turned around to leave the room. However, before he could step out of the room, a voice suddenly sounded.

“Wu shi, hold it for a moment. Didn’t he say that he intends to compensate the Master Teacher Pavilion for the matter? I’m

interested to hear how much he's willing to offer to save King Zhongqing!"

Emperor Chu Tianxing turned around and saw a young man in his twenties, dressed in the robe of a 6-star master teacher, seated not too far away from Wu shi.

The young man was none other than Zhang Xuan.

"Principal Zhang..." Not expecting Zhang Xuan to suddenly interject at this moment, Wu shi turned to look at the other party in bewilderment. A moment later, he closed his eyes and nodded before turning his gaze back to Emperor Chu Tianxing. "Since Zhang shi has already spoken on your behalf, I'll listen to your words."

"Zhang shi?"

Emperor Chu Tianxing swiftly understood what was going on. He quickly walked up to Zhang Xuan and bowed slightly. "King Zhongqing has truly erred in attempting to slander Zhang shi. As long as Zhang shi is willing to let bygones be bygones, I'm willing to build a new accommodation to house the students from the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy and unconditionally provide enough cultivation resources for a hundred years. On top of that, from this day forth, any student from Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy who drops by Qingyuan City will be able to receive a cultivation technique manual and a few small gifts as a token of our sincerity. We won't allow anyone of them to leave Qingyuan City empty-handed!"

Knowing that the other party was the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, Emperor Chu Tianxing chose to center his offer around the academy instead.

As expected of the man who had the entire Qingyuan Empire in his grasp, he knew how to make an offer that was irresistible to the other party.

Naturally, as a principal of a Master Teacher Academy, Zhang Xuan's priority would be the welfare of his student, and to be honest, the terms that he had offered were truly generous.

With the backing of a Conferred Empire, it was only a matter of time before Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy became the top of the Four Great Master Teacher Academies.

“That’s not enough,” Zhang Xuan said nonchalantly.

“This...” Chu Tianxing was visibly taken aback by Zhang Xuan’s refusal. However, he swiftly recovered and said, “Zhang shi, if you have any requests, feel free to raise them. As long as it’s within the means of our royal family, we will accomplish it without the slightest frown!”

Zhang Xuan glanced at Emperor Chu Tianxing and said, “Simple. Add in another hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones to your previous terms, and you can take back King Zhongqing right now.”

He was currently severely lacking in cultivation resources. It was far more practical for him to receive concentrated high-tier spirit stones from the other party than to hold a King in custody.

In any case, he could easily get rid of King Zhongqing whenever he wanted to, so it did not matter whether the latter remained imprisoned or not.

“A hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones?” Emperor Chu Tianxing widened his eyes in astonishment before a bitter smile surfaced on his lips. “Zhang shi, you must be joking. Even if we sold everything in our Imperial Treasury, we still would not be able to fork out that sum...”

In the first place, concentrated high-tier spirit stones were a severely lacking commodity in Qingyuan City. Even the Combat Master Hall, an organization that the Master Teacher Pavilion had devoted a large portion of its resources to, only had ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones in their reserves. No matter how wealthy the Qingyuan royal family was, there was no way it would be able to fork out ten times the sum in a single breath.

“Very well then, I shall give you a discount. Fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones, and King Zhongqing will be yours to take away. This is my final offer, and if you can’t fulfill that

condition, I'll have to ask you to leave." Zhang Xuan waved his hand.

He also knew that the other party would be unable to afford 100 concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Nevertheless, he had chosen to ask for it so that he would have some room to bargain.

"This..." Chu Tianxing's lips twitched.

Fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones still was not a sum that the Qingyuan royal family could afford.

Emperor Chu Tianxing contemplated for a long while before responding. "Zhang shi, to be honest with you, even with the ten-millennium reign of our Qingyuan royal family, we only have seventeen concentrated high-tier spirit stones at the moment... We did have quite a handful of it in the past, but most of them were bestowed to the princes and meritorious subjects. Is it possible for me to give all seventeen to you and make up for the rest with valuable medicinal herbs and ores?"

There was no way he would be able to fork out fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones, but as long as the other party was willing, he would still be able to find substitutes for the rest.

"Alright then. Here are the ores and medicinal herbs I require, and as long as you are able to gather all of them, I can let King Zhongqing go with just seventeen concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Also, I require as many Saint 3-dan and Saint 4-dan cultivation technique manuals as possible. Make a copy of every single book in your library and pass them to me," Zhang Xuan said as he whipped out a brush and paper and swiftly penned down a list.

He was intending on making use of this opportunity to upgrade the Golden Origin Cauldron and Glacier Rain Sword. He already had the main materials, but he was still lacking a few supporting materials. If he were to search for them himself, who knew how long it would take before he was able to gather the required materials? It would be best if he could enlist Emperor Chu Tianxing's help for this matter.

“Very well.” Emperor Chu Tianxing took the list and browsed through it. While there were some materials that seemed to be a relatively rare, with the prowess of an entire Conferred Empire, he should be able to gather all of them promptly. Thus, he accepted the request heartily.

After which, he flicked his wrist and passed a jade container over.

“Here are the seventeen concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Zhang shi, please take a look.”

Zhang Xuan swiftly swept through the contents in the jade container and verified that the other party was not lying. Nodding, he stowed the jade container into his storage ring.

“Zhang shi and Wu shi, please give me a moment while I deal with the rest.”

After saying those words, Emperor Chu Tianxing turned around and issued some instructions to his attendant.

As expected of the emperor of a Conferred Empire, his connections were truly astounding. In just two mere hours, the ores and medicinal herbs that Zhang Xuan had requested had been successfully gathered.

Even the books that Zhang Xuan had requested earlier were all stacked up neatly before him.

For those that they could not copy in time, the originals were brought over instead. All in all, there were roughly several hundred thousand books for Saint 3-dan and above ten thousand books for Saint 4-dan.

Zhang Xuan placed those items into his storage ring before nodding in satisfaction. “Alright, you may take King Zhongqing away now.”

“Thank you, Zhang shi.” Emperor Chu Tianxing quickly turned to Wu shi, and upon seeing the latter nod in agreement as well, he heaved a sigh of relief. After which, he followed a master teacher down to the underground prison, to where King Zhongqing was locked up.

As soon as Emperor Chu Tianxing left, Wu shi immediately turned a perplexed look to Zhang Xuan, uncomprehending of what the latter was up to. “Principal Zhang...”

1161 Chen Zhe's Death

“Do you feel that I shouldn't have released King Zhongqing?” Taking Wu shi's expression into sight, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly.

“Emperor Chu Tianxing's offer might be alluring, but I don't think that it's a good idea to accede to his request.” Wu shi nodded. “Master teachers mustn't be sullied. This isn't a matter about compensation but pride. If a precedent were to be set, it might send out a wrong message about the Master Teacher Pavilion's stand, and others might begin to emulate King Zhongqing's actions...”

After the affairs that they had gone through together in the Qiu Wu Palace, he had come to know the young man before him as an extremely wise and discerning individual. As such, while he didn't agree with the latter's decision, he didn't interject during the discussion earlier on because he knew that the latter would surely have his considerations for making his decision. However, with Emperor Chu Tianxing's departure, he couldn't hold back his intrigue any longer.

“I'll explain the matter to you, but before that, I would like to ask Wu shi a single question... Will you speak of the matter concerning Celestial Master teacher to any other master teachers in your Master Teacher Pavilion?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Upon hearing those words, Wu shi's face immediately turned grim. He quickly set up an isolation barrier around him before assessing his surroundings to confirm that there was no one around. Only then did he respond with a soft voice, “Principal Zhang, you must be absolutely careful when you speak of this matter! To respond to your question, due to the huge implications regarding the matter concerning Celestial Master Teacher, there's an absolute need to maintain a silence restraint on the matter. If word were to be leaked to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, it could result in a disastrous outcome.

Therefore, even if it's to the headquarters, I would choose to maintain my silence.”

He knew that the young man before him was a Celestial Master Teacher.

However, this matter mustn't be spoken of lightly to others. If news were to fall into the wrong hands, it might cause the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe to send its forces frenziedly after the other party. Putting aside the devastating destruction that would occur as a result of that, more importantly, it might result in the premature downfall of the master teacher before him.

If that were to happen, he would become a sinner of history.

“I share the same thoughts as you. However... Vice Pavilion Master Tian revealed the existence of a Celestial Master Teacher right before me.”

Back when Vice Pavilion Master Tian was interrogating him at King Zhongqing Manor, the other party had once said these words: “From what I know, even a Celestial Master Teacher has recently appeared in the world, so I don't think that the revival of the founder of the Poison Hall is something too absurd to believe...”

Back then, he had already realized that something was amiss.

There was no master teacher who didn't understand the significance of those three words. It was the first time that Vice Pavilion Master Tian was meeting him, and yet, the other party actually revealed such an important news to him... This was a clear breach of the silence restraint.

That was also the main reason why he didn't hesitate in dealing with Vice Pavilion Master Tian.

“You are saying that Vice Pavilion Master Tian knows that... you are Celestial Master Teacher?” Wu shi's face darkened.

“From the looks of it, that doesn't seem to be the case. If anything, he seems to be trying to sound me out instead.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Judging from the other party's tone, it didn't seem like the other party knew of the matter yet. However, the fact that the other party raised the term 'Celestial Master Teacher' before him showed that the other party harbored some doubts regarding his identity. However, given how calmly he was able to respond to the other party, not showing the slightest bit of fluster, he should have been able to dispel the doubts in the other party's mind.

"That's a relief. However, Principal Zhang, you must be careful. Next time, no matter where you head to, you must make sure to bring either me or Hall Master Xing with you for your own safety!" Wu shi advised gravely.

As long as the news hadn't leaked, Principal Zhang would only be seen as an incredible prodigy in the eyes of others. An uncommon existence, yes, but there were still a handful of others just like him in the world as well.

However, if others were to learn that he was a Celestial Master Teacher... that would truly be a catastrophe.

"For the time being, there's no need to resort to such measures yet. Such extreme actions would be as good as confirming the suspicions of others." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

If he were to utilize all of the means he had in his hands, he was confident that he would be able to fare much better than with the protection of the duo. On the other hand, if the duo were going to be tagging around him, it wouldn't be convenient for him to utilize those means, and it would place him in a more dangerous position than before.

"This..." Wu shi hesitated.

Indeed. If he and Hall Master Xing were to follow the other party day in and day out, even those who hadn't doubted the matter previously would start getting suspicious. That would be as good as giving themselves away!

"There's something wrong with Pavilion Master Tian, and King Zhongqing has colluded with the Poison Hall to concoct huge quantities of poison—I have a feeling that those two matters are related. Also, there is something amiss about

Emperor Chu Tianxing paying a visit to you personally and paying such a heavy price just to bail King Zhongqing... I don't believe that he would go so far just to repay the latter for saving his life!" Zhang Xuan analyzed grimly.

Hearing those words, Wu shi suddenly widened his eyes in realization.

The royal palace was a cold-blooded place where blood brothers would murder one another for authority. For the most esteemed man in there, the emperor, to risk offending the Master Teacher Pavilion and pay such a heavy price just to save a mere official... that was indeed something worth looking deeper into.

"Since we know that there's something wrong with them, instead of stifling ourselves over here to figure out what they are up to, why don't we just release them temporarily and have them untie the dead knot for us before deciding on our next move?"

They might have captured King Zhongqing, but their clue effectively ended right there. However, if they were to let King Zhongqing go, it might just lead them to something unexpected.

"You're right, that's indeed a good solution..." Coming to a realization, Wu shi nodded his head in admiration.

As expected of Principal Zhang! While he was still engrossed by the situation before him, the other party had already thought many steps ahead!

At the current moment, their investigation had already hit a bottleneck. There was no more clue for them to look into, and even if they were to interrogate King Zhongqing and the others, there was no way the other party would reveal their plan to them. However... if they were to release their grasp and allow the other party to do as they pleased, it was likely that the other party would attempt something and give themselves away in the midst of doing so.

"Un. Alright, I'll leave the rest to you. There's still some time before night time, and if it's convenient, I would like to pay a

visit to the Master Teacher Pavilion's library to take a look.”

It would suffice to have Wu shi deal with the investigation, it made no difference whether he participated in it or not.

For the time being, his priority was to compile the Saint 3-dan Heaven's Path Divine Art and raise his cultivation up to the required level, so that he could surpass that Zhang Jiuxiao and successfully claim the nomination slot to enter the Sanctum of Sages.

“Alright, I'll bring you over then!” Knowing that Principal Zhang liked to read books, Wu shi stood up with a smile to lead the way. At that moment, however, anxious knocking suddenly sounded on the door.

“Come in!” Wu shi said with a frown.

The master teacher who had just left a moment ago rushed into the room with a panicked look.

“What's wrong?” Wu shi asked.

For a 6-star master teacher to lose his bearings, there was no doubt that something huge must have happened.

“Teacher, bad news! Chen Zhe... he has died!” the master teacher gulped down a mouthful of saliva and said.

“Chen Zhe has died?” Wu shi narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

Chen Zhe was the master teacher who had duped Zhang Yinqiu of the details concerning the ancient domain back then and leaked it to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. He was the key to uncovering the other traitors within the Master Teacher Pavilion, and he had been locked in the most secure prison in the Master Teacher Pavilion, such that even his cultivation had been sealed. So, how could he suddenly pass away all of a sudden?

“I'm not too sure about the reason behind his death either. When I checked on him earlier in the morning, he was still perfectly fine. However, when I took another look at him while releasing King Zhongqing earlier, I realized that he has

already breathed his last...” the master teacher exclaimed anxiously.

Chen Zhe was Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s direct disciple, a 7-star low-tier master teacher. His abrupt death was no joking matter.

“Let’s head over to take a look!” Wu shi said grimly. He turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Principal Zhang, will you follow me to take a look as well?”

The eyes of the young man before him was far more discerning than his own. The other party could very well notice something that he had missed out.

“Alright.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He also found the matter perplexing as well.

In the Master Teacher Pavilion’s prison, putting aside killing any prisoner, even suicide should have been impossible, so how did Chen Zhe possibly lose his life there? This was truly eerie.

Following behind the 6-star master teacher, it didn’t take long for them to arrive at a cold chamber. In there, they saw a middle-aged man lying motionlessly on the ground, his body frigid cold. He had already breathed his last.

Instead of walking over to assess the corpse, Zhang Xuan first examined the surroundings instead.

An airtight formation had been set up around the room, preventing one’s Spiritual Perception from reaching in. As such, it was impossible to send any information in or out. It would be impossible for those within the chamber to communicate with those outside it.

After which, Zhang Xuan walked up to the corpse and activated his Eye of Insight.

“He doesn’t have any physical wounds, but his soul has already dissipated entirely.” Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed in astonishment.

The cause of the other party’s death was no other than the dissipation of his soul!

“His soul has dissipated entirely?” Taken aback, Wu shi quickly placed his hand on the other party’s corpse to extend his consciousness into the other party’s body. A moment later, his face turned livid.

Clearly, he had come to the same conclusion as well.

“Could it be the same soul nabbing technique as before?” Frowning, a thought came into Zhang Xuan’s mind.

Previously, Cang Xu of the Twin Bandits of the Northern Meadows had attempted to use a soul nabbing technique to kill him, but the Spirit Awakener Guild’s building had crushed him to death at that very moment, thus resulting in his failure.

He had analyzed the soul nabbing technique carefully after gaining possession of the other party’s memory via Soul Search, and it bore striking resemblance to the means of the soul oracles. It aimed to draw a cultivator’s soul out of his body and confine it, thus rendering him completely powerless to one’s whims...

Once the technique were to succeed, the body, left without a soul, would slowly wither away and die.

Could Chen Zhe have been killed using such a method?

“Could it be that Vicious has imparted this technique to someone else other than Cang Xu?” Zhang Xuan contemplated doubtfully.

However, even if that was the case, why would the practitioner of the technique want to go through the trouble of killing Chen Zhe? Or could it be that Chen Zhe had something to do with Vicious and the soul oracle as well?

“Let’s bring his corpse over to Division Head Qiu of the Combat Master Hall and have him help us analyze the situation.” After examining the corpse for a while longer, Wu shi was still unable to make sense of the situation, so he stood up and said.

“Alright!” the 6-star master teacher replied.

Division Head Qiu was the head of the Soul Division, and he possessed deep knowledge in the study of souls. While Wu shi

might not be able to determine anything from the corpse, perhaps Division Head Qiu might be able to see something that they couldn't in it.

"There's no need for that." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

The soul within the corpse had already vanished, so there was no point in finding Division Head Qiu anymore.

"Principal Zhang..." Wu Shi looked at Zhang Xuan anxiously and said. "Chen Zhe's death effectively means that we have lost our evidence to deal with Vice Pavilion Master Tian. Even though Vice Pavilion Master Tian has made a move on you, the evidence we have at the moment isn't sufficient to indict him for attempting to frame you. In other words, we don't have any reason to imprison him any longer!"

No matter what, Vice Pavilion Master Tian was a 7-star pinnacle master teacher, the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Previously, it was due to his direct disciple leaking critical intelligence to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe that he was implicated and imprisoned for the matter. However, with Chen Zhe's death, there was no longer anyone who could possibly point Vice Pavilion Master Tian to be the culprit of the matter, so naturally... they would have no reason why keep the other party imprisoned any longer.

As for the crime of slandering and accusing Zhang Xuan, he could dump it all onto King Zhongqing, and the remaining could be overlooked just on his prestigious identity in itself!

"Since we no longer have any right to imprison him, just let him go then." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

If not for the fact that he had discovered that there was a fatal flaw in Vice Pavilion Master Tian's Primordial Spirit through his Library of Heaven's Path, which would hinder him from effectively executing any soul art, he would have truly doubted if Vice Pavilion Master Tian had killed his own student.

"Let him go?" Wu Shi was taken aback. "But Principal Zhang, the humiliation that you have suffered because of him..."

"There's no need to be bothered about that matter. In view of Vice Pavilion Master Tian's standing, it won't do us any good

to keep him imprisoned for an extended period of time, especially when we don't have sufficient evidence on hand. Furthermore, it hasn't been long since you have been promoted to a vice pavilion master yourself, so you can't afford to forcefully make a move against Vice Pavilion Master Tian yet." Zhang Xuan shook his head and said.

At the current moment, it was imperative for them that Wu shi remained in power. Otherwise, they would be powerless to stand against Vice Pavilion Master Tian.

"Alright then." Seeing that there was some sense in what Zhang Xuan said, Wu shi could only reluctantly nod in agreement. "Then... what should we do next?"

"What do you think that we should do?" Zhang Xuan returned the question with a smile.

"I think that we should announce Chen Zhe's crimes publicly and turn everyone against Vice Pavilion Master Tian. This would put Vice Pavilion Master Tian in a disadvantageous position, and we would be in a better position to make a move against him." Wu shi contemplated for a moment before saying.

The news regarding Chen Zhe's betrayal was currently known by only a very small group. If they could pin a crime on Chen Zhe at this moment, Vice Pavilion Master Tian, as Chen Zhe's teacher, would be placed in a precarious position as well.

Otherwise, Vice Pavilion Master Tian would truly be getting away scot-free from the entire matter.

"Wrong! That course of action won't work!" Zhang Xuan shook his head.

"It won't work? What should we do then?" Wu shi was taken aback.

"Simple. We should have Chen Zhe buried with the grandest of master teacher ceremonies. On top of that, we will compensate his family and accord them with the highest compliments. We shall dub him as a true master teacher, the role model whom everyone should learn from!" Zhang Xuan replied with a mysterious smile.

“Ah? What kind of solution is that?” Wu shi was stunned by Zhang Xuan’s unexpected suggestion.

1162 The Poisoned King

Zhongqing

Chen Zhe was the person who revealed the intelligence from Zhang Yinqiu to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, causing the latter to nearly be unable to return from the Qiu Wu Palace. A person like him should be deeply condemned by the Master Teacher Pavilion, and yet, Principal Zhang was proposing to offer the highest of compliments to him?

This was too bizarre!

On the other hand, seeing that Wu shi didn't comprehend what he was driving at, Zhang Xuan shook his head and explained, "At this point, Chen Zhe's crimes are only known to a handful within the Master Teacher Pavilion. This is actually disadvantageous to us. In order to officially indict Chen Zhe of a crime and justify his arrest, we'll need to convince the entire Master Teacher Pavilion of our case, and that would require more evidence than just Old Principal Zhang Yinqiu's testimony. However, that is one thing that we are lacking at the moment. If we were to disregard that and forcefully pin an accusation on Chen Zhe, it will appear as if we are trying to conceal our depraved actions instead. On top of that, the fact that Chen Zhe has even passed away in the Master Teacher Pavilion plays against us as well. Think about it, we have captured Chen Zhe, but Chen Zhe ended up dying in captivity. What do you think the others would think about the matter?"

"This..." Wu shi fell silent.

It was normal for others to sympathize with the weak, but whether the weak was truly weak or not was often one thing that couldn't be clearly seen on the surface.

If they were to really attempt to pin a crime on Chen Zhe, as long as someone were to work behind their backs and fabricate a story to accuse Wu shi of abusing his authority to deal with Chen Zhe, the common populace would be unable to discern

which point of view was true. In such situations, the tendency was for them to naturally sympathize with the victim, Chen Zhe.

By then, the tables would be turned. Their advantageous situation would turn into a deeply disadvantageous one in an instant.

“On the other hand, if we were to declare that he has died and bestow his family with huge riches for the matter, the other party might think that news has been leaked and panic. By then... the other party might very well do something that would give themselves away. As long as we can lure the other party out, the rest would be simple. As for Chen Zhe, it wouldn't be too late to indict him of his crime then.” Zhang Xuan said.

“I see...” Wu shi came to a realization.

That was indeed the best plan they had at the moment.

Not only would it resolve the adverse effects brought about by Chen Zhe's death, it could also potentially bait the other party out. Truly two birds in a stone.

“I'll have it done now!” Nodding, Wu shi quickly turned to the 6-star master teacher beside him to issue instructions.

“What else should we do?” After making arrangements, Wu shi asked once more.

“For the time being, this should be enough. Tonight, we'll still be attending the Appraisal Convention that you spoke about... Don't worry, we have already placed the bait dangling before them. Now, we just have to wait to hook something up.” Zhang Xuan smiled.

Wu shi nodded before falling silent.

After leaving Chen Zhe's cell, Zhang Xuan headed straight for the Master Teacher Pavilion's library.

With Wu shi's identity token in his hand, he was qualified to access the Saint 3-dan and Saint 4-dan cultivation techniques in there. In less than two hours, he had already collected everything into his Library of Heaven's Path.

After that was done, he took out the books which Emperor Chu Tianxing had given him and collected them into his Library of Heaven's Path too.

Compile!

The Library of Heaven's Path jolted, and two new books materialized before Zhang Xuan's eyes.

They were the Saint 3-dan and Saint 4-dan Heaven's Path Divine Art.

Swiftly browsing through them, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement.

“They have both reached the level of Heaven's Path, I can cultivate them straight now!”

This seemed to be the first time he had collected the Heaven's Path Divine Art for two realms in advance. With these two, he would be able to make a breakthrough on the spot to Saint 4-dan Primordial Spirit realm!

“However, the sky seems to be getting dark. I should first head over to the Appraisal Convention with Wu shi before cultivating...”

Zhang Xuan glanced out of the windows and saw that the sun had already set. The Appraisal Convention that Wu shi had mentioned previously should be starting any time soon, so he couldn't afford to spend any time on cultivation for the time being. Thus, he stretched his back lazily and walked out of the library.

In any case, everything would be simple once he had the required cultivation techniques. At most, it would only take him two hours or so, or at the very worst, four hours... Either way, he could have it done very quickly.

Besides, there was no such thing as a cultivation bottleneck to him. Once he cultivated, the technique would surely reach the mastery of Consummation.

Thus, for the time being, it was more imperative for him to bring all of his supporting occupations to 7-star and become a 7-star master teacher first.

“Principal Zhang, let’s set forth!” Wu shi said with a smile upon seeing Zhang Xuan walking towards him.

After which, the duo headed out together.

...

While Zhang Xuan and Wu shi were heading to the Appraisal Convention, in a vast hall in the royal palace...

“Damn it, damn it!”

King Zhongqing paced around the room as he clenched his teeth tightly in fury. Hatred burned within his eyes like raging inferno, as if they would burn down everything in its sight.

“Enough! You sure have gotten brazen to attempt to make a move against a 6-star master teacher without making ample preparations!” Chu Tianxing harrumphed coldly.

“Your Majesty, I...” King Zhongqing quickly clasped his fist to explain himself.

“Forget it, you don’t have to explain anything to me. Just learn from this lesson and make sure that you never commit it in the future. Know that it took me a heavy price to bail you out!” Chu Tianxing waved his hand impatiently.

“I apologize for my inept.” King Zhongqing lowered his head and said.

“Alright, that’s enough of that. For the next few days, you should remain in my royal palace to cultivate and reflect on where you have gone wrong. During this timing, you can’t afford to have anyone finding any more handle on you, or else no one will be able to save you!” Chu Tianxing instructed.

“Yes!” King Zhongqing nodded. “Don’t worry, there shouldn’t be any more problems. The main issue at hand lies with that Zhang Xuan, he really isn’t an easy fellow to deal with. Furthermore, his cultivation is much higher than we have previously anticipated...” As King Zhongqing spoke about Zhang Xuan, he couldn’t help but grit his teeth furiously. However, as soon as he said those words, his face suddenly paled, and his body began shaking uncontrollably.

“This is bad...” King Zhongqing narrowed his eyes as goosebumps rose all over his body.

“What’s wrong?” Chu Tianxing frowned.

“I-I have been poisoned! Pu!” King Zhongqing’s body began convulsing non-stop, and large mouthfuls of blood spurted from his mouth. He felt as if all of his organs were about to shatter anytime soon.

“Poisoned? How did you get poisoned?” Chu Tianxing’s eyes widened in alarm.

King Zhongqing had been beside him for the last few minutes, so how could he be suddenly poisoned without any warning?

“I have no idea either!”

The immense pain rendered King Zhongqing incapable of standing on his feet, and he rolled around the ground wildly, hoping that it would alleviate his pain somehow. Cold sweat trickled down his entire body, and no matter how he contemplated over the matter, he simply couldn’t recall when he was afflicted with the poison.

“Did you eat or drink anything today?” Chu Tianxing asked anxiously.

For even King Zhongqing, a Saint 4-dan pinnacle expert, to be unable to tolerate it, the poison was truly fearsome.

An individual who had such a potent poison in his possession and could poison King Zhongqing without the latter noticing had to be a 7-star pinnacle poison master at the very least!

But if such a figure had appeared by King Zhongqing’s side, he would have known it. Why did he have no impression of it whatsoever?

“Today...” King Zhongqing began recalling everything that had happened earlier, “That Zhang Xuan has fed me several gourds of fine wine, and that Sun Qiang has sprinkled salt and pepper over my body...”

There couldn’t be anything wrong with the food in his King Zhongqing Manor, and he hadn’t touched the food in the

Master Teacher Pavilion either. The only thing left was Zhang Xuan's wine and Sun Qiang's condiments.

"Sprinkled salt and pepper over your body?" Chu Tianxing was stunned.

What the heck was that?

However, he knew that this wasn't the time to be asking about that. With a deep frown, he remarked, "From the looks of it, the culprit seems to be that Zhang Xuan... Just that, what kind of poison is this? Men, summon Royal Physician Sun over!"

"Yes!" A guard quickly bowed and rushed out of the room.

Not too long later, an elder entered the hall.

"Your Majesty!"

"Un. Royal Physician Sun, King Zhongqing has been poisoned, and I would like you to analyze what kind of poison it is and treat him..." Chu Tianxing instructed.

Royal Physician Sun was a 7-star pinnacle physician specially employed by the royal court, and his comprehension of the Way of Medicine had already reached a profound level. If anyone could treat King Zhongqing, it had to be him!

"Your Majesty, rest assured, As long as the poison isn't beyond grade-7, I'm confident that I'll be able to resolve it easily!" Royal Physician Sun smiled, revealing a row of perfectly yellow teeth.

With a flick of his finger, he swiftly weaved his zhenqi into thin threads, which swiftly wrapped itself around King Zhongqing in the shape of a sphere.

This was his exclusive diagnosis and treatment method—
Sonar Diagnosis Cocoon.

By linking his zhenqi threads to the vitals and acupoints of the patient, he would be able to take a closer examination on the patient's condition through the vibrations through the zhenqi threads, and thus, making an accurate diagnosis of the patient's condition.

“Hm? There’s something really weird about the poison...”
Royal Physician Sun analyzed King Zhongqing’s condition for a moment, and a deep frown surfaced on his forehead.

“Weird?” Chu Tianxing’s face darkened. “Can he be treated?”

“Your Majesty, rest assured. Even though the poison is elusive and nearly indiscernible, I should be able to figure what is going on by sending my zhenqi threads into King Zhongqing’s body through the Zhenqi Thread Diagnosis Method, and from that, resolve the poison!” Physician Sun said confidently.

“Hurry up then!” Seeing King Zhongqing’s face turn ghastly pale, as if he would succumb to the poison at any moment, Chu Tianxing urged.

“Yes!” Royal Physician Sun nodded. Taking a deep breath, he flicked his fingers forward.

Tzzzzzzz!

A surge of zhenqi shot from his fingers into King Zhongqing’s glabella, and it swiftly dived its way into the latter’s meridians.

The Zhenqi Thread Diagnosis Method involved sending zhenqi threads into the body of the patient to examine the latter’s inner condition to determine the source of the injury or illness, thus allowing the physician to treat the issue at its root.

Since the Sonar Diagnosis Cocoon wasn’t sufficient to determine the lethal poison which King Zhongqing was suffering from, he could only resort to this method.

Hu!

Before long, his zhenqi had already made its way around the King Zhongqing’s body, but there was still no lethal poison to be seen. Perplexed, Royal Physician Sun retracted his zhenqi and contemplated with a deep frown.

He had checked every nook and cranny within King Zhongqing’s body, but there was not a trace of any poison to be seen. Yet, the other party’s internal organs were corroding, clearly the doing of a lethal poison. These contradicting situations had left him deeply bewildered.

“How is it?” Chu Tianxing asked anxiously.

“There’s something really bizarre about the poison. I need some time to think of a solution...”

Halfway through his words, Royal Physician Sun’s face suddenly turned ghastly pale. His body abruptly fell heavily onto the ground before convulsing wildly. Huge mouthfuls of blood spurted wildly from his mouth, rendering his face a shade paler each time. “Damn it, I was poisoned as well...”

As he said those words, his body convulsed a few more times before he passed out altogether.

“This...” Chu Tianxing was astonished.

It was just a moment ago that the other party declared confidently that he would be able to resolve the poison, and yet, before he could even determine what kind of poison it was, he had already passed out...

The other party was already the most formidable physician in the royal palace, but he still ended up succumbing to the poison.

Against a lethal poison which could affect even a 7-star pinnacle physician unknowingly, what could they possibly do?

“Your Majesty... I have a handful of poison masters imprisoned in my manor... Bring one of them over...” King Zhongqing uttered weakly.

“Hold on, I’ll send my men to bring them over!” Chu Tianxing said before turning to his men to issue some commands.

Under the orders of the emperor, the guards swiftly made their way over to the King Zhongqing Manor, and not too long later, they returned with a black-robed young man.

He was no other than Butler Qin!

“Old Master, the poison masters in the residence has been released by Zhang Xuan!”

“Released?” Pu!”

At this point, King Zhongqing was already withered internally and externally. At this moment, he didn’t even have the

strength to move around anymore, as if an old man languishing on his deathbed.

“There are no poison masters left, and the physicians aren’t capable of treating it either... I’ll go look for Zhang shi personally! To think that a master teacher would actually resort to such underhanded tricks...” Chu Tianxing roared lividly.

He had to pay such a heavy price in order to bail King Zhongqing out. If the latter were to die of poison shortly after, wouldn’t his Qingyuan royal family become a laughingstock of the populace?

“Zhang shi? Poison?” Upon hearing those words, Butler Qin swiftly turned to Chu Tianxing and asked with his head lowered, “Your Majesty, was our Old Master poisoned by Zhang Xuan?”

“It must be him! No one else had a chance to strike other than him!” Chu Tianxing harrumphed in anger.

“If he’s the one behind the poison...”

Butler Qin paused for a brief moment as confidence emerged on his face, “I know how to alleviate the poison!”

1163 Butler Qin's Unique Poison Neutralization Technique

“You know?” Chu Tianxing and King Zhongqing looked at Butler Qin in bewilderment.

It was a poison that even the 7-star pinnacle Royal Physician Sun was helpless before, even passing out after being afflicted with the poison himself, so how could a butler who didn't know the slightest thing about poison possibly know how to alleviate it?

“To be honest, I was also afflicted with the poison a while back, but I managed to keep it under control using a certain method,” Butler Qin replied.

Hearing that his subordinate had been poisoned by Zhang Xuan as well but managed to overcome the poison, King Zhongqing immediately exclaimed, “Is that true? What are you waiting for then? Hurry up and treat me!”

“Yes, Old Master! The treatment might be a little painful, so I ask you to bear with it,” Butler Qin said grimly as he stepped forward.

“I have been through innumerable life and death situations. What kind of pain have I not suffered before? Rest assured and do it!” King Zhongqing replied proudly.

Back in his time, he had charged into many a battlefield and survived against the odds. No matter how painful a poison neutralization process was, how could it compare to the experiences he had been through on the battlefield?

“As long as you are able to cure my poison, I'll immediately promote you to the official head butler of my manor, granting you authority to mobilize anyone within the manor...” Before King Zhongqing could finish his words, he suddenly saw a

palm enlarging swiftly before him, covering his entire sight in an instant.

Pah!

The slap struck King Zhongqing's face squarely, and the stinging pain threatened to tear his cheeks into two.

"You..." Not expecting his subordinate to slap him instead of treating him, King Zhongqing felt so furious that he was on the brink of insanity. However, before he could even finish his words, another slap had already flown right for his face.

Pah! Pah! Pah! Pah!

A series of consecutive slaps left King Zhongqing's face swelling up as if a crimson bun.

Butler Qin had exerted his full strength in those slaps, such that he was already panting from exhaustion. He carefully raised his gaze and looked at King Zhongqing. "Old Master, are you feeling better now?"

"Better your head! You bastard, I'm going to kill you!" With his eyes reddening in rage, King Zhongqing stood up with a belligerent air around him.

To think that he, the First King of the Qingyuan Empire, would actually be pummeled by his own subordinate, not to mention, in front of Emperor Chu Tianxing at that. And as if that was not enough, the other party even had the cheek to ask him if he was feeling better after.

Better your head!

That is as good as a rapist asking his victim if it felt good!

I'm going to beat you into the ground, you bastard!

King Zhongqing was so furious that it also seemed as if smoke was pouring out of his head.

"You still aren't feeling better yet? Old Master, worry not! I still have another trick up my sleeve..." On the other hand, Butler Qin didn't expect the slaps to not work, so he hurriedly tried to appease the other party first.

“You still have another trick up your sleeve?” King Zhongqing was taken aback for a moment upon hearing those words. Before he could even process what was going on, he saw Butler Qin taking off his shoes, and in the next moment, a leg emanating an exceptional scent flew right toward his face.

Peng!

The impact of the kick left King Zhongqing’s face distorted into the shape of a fried dough twist before he flipped around two and a half times in the air and collapsed heavily onto the ground.

Butler Qin had experimented on himself when he found the effectiveness of the slaps a little lacking, and he had to admit that the kick did have miraculous effects against the poison. In an instant, the pain vanished from his body like a receding tide.

He had been planning on treasuring this secret art as his family heirloom, vowing to only pass it down to those of his lineage. However, since the Old Master required it, he had no choice but to take it out.

“I’ll kill you...” Seeing the teeth that had dropped to the ground and the amazing stench that filled his nostrils, King Zhongqing nearly went insane on the spot.

He had ordered his subordinate to treat his poison, but not only did the latter do nothing of that sort, the latter even dared to slap and kick him. Unforgivable!

Standing up furiously, he glared at his subordinate with a piercing glare, ready to tear the fellow before him into two.

But before he could make a move, Chu Tianxing suddenly spoke. “King Zhongqing, your poison... has been cured?”

“Poison?”

Those abrupt words jolted King Zhongqing out of his rampage. All of a sudden, he realized that the pain from the lethal poison had really receded after the slaps and kick.

Overwhelmed by astonishment, the rage from a moment ago completely vanished from his mind. He quickly asked Butler

Qin in bewilderment, “This... What is going on?”

Butler Qin clasped his fist and explained the matter. “Old Master, earlier today, when you asked me to invite Zhang Xuan over to the manor, we had a small verbal conflict, and he discreetly planted a poison in me. I had a physician look at the poison, and the latter said that not only is the poison indiscernible, it will even corrode one’s inner organs, putting one in unbearable agony. However, he did inform me of a way to alleviate the poison, and that is to hit one’s face. The more vicious the strike is, the more effective it will be against the poison. That’s also why I brazenly made a move against you, and I beg for your pardon!”

“The poison is alleviated through slapping? There’s actually such a poison in the world?” King Zhongqing and Chu Tianxing glanced at one another in disbelief.

They had never encountered or heard of such a bizarre poison in the world.

“That’s right!” Butler Qin replied affirmatively.

“To actually concoct such a poison, that Zhang Xuan sure is a depraved individual...” King Zhongqing’s lips twitched furiously as he cursed, but halfway through his words, his body suddenly jolted. He felt that excruciating pain from before slowly returning to his body.

“This is bad; it’s acting up once more. Quick, hit me again!” Recalling that unbearable pain, King Zhongqing could not help but tremble in fear. He never wanted to experience such a sensation ever again.

He quickly pulled Butler Qin over as he stuck his face out to the other party and exclaimed in desire, “Harder!”

...

“To think that it could work this way as well...”

Shortly after walking out of the Master Teacher Pavilion, Zhang Xuan suddenly chuckled beneath his breath.

Wu shi turned around and asked, “Is there something wrong?”

“It’s nothing,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly with a smile.

When he had been curing King Zhongqing's wounds earlier in the latter's manor, he had secretly slipped a sliver of his will into the other party's body. It was concealed within his Heaven's Path zhenqi, making it difficult for even a Primordial Spirit realm expert to notice it.

He had made it such that in fixed intervals or whenever the other party insulted him, the Heaven's Path zhenqi would turn into lethal poison and ravage the other party's body. It was precisely because he had left such a hand that he did not hesitate to have King Zhongqing released.

In any case, King Zhongqing's life and death hinged on a single thought of his, so it mattered not whether the other party was imprisoned or not.

Initially, he had only chosen to spare Butler Qin in case he might require a pawn to use in the near future, but who would have thought that the latter would actually end up believing in his 'Face Slapping Treatment Method'?

That actually worked to his advantage for the time being, so he decided to go along with it. After all, even though he had set King Zhongqing free for the moment, he was still more than willing to see the other party suffer, especially after seeing with his own eyes what the other party had done to Sun Qiang and the Poison Hall.

Under the control of the sliver of will he had slipped into the other party's body, he was able to create the impression that slapping one's face would be able to alleviate the corrosion of the poison. Of course, the slapping would not actually cure the poison—in truth, the Heaven's Path zhenqi was just switched back from its poisonous state temporarily...

The poison would recede under vicious slapping and act up if the slapping were to halt for some time. He could probably entertain himself for quite a few days with that.

However, it was another question whether King Zhongqing would be able to last that long or not.

After communicating with the will that he had hidden within the other party's body for a moment, Zhang Xuan decided to

put aside the matter and follow behind Wu shi. Not too long later, they arrived at a massive trading hall.

Zhang Xuan took a look at the surroundings, and after confirming his location, he could not help but ask in bewilderment, “Isn’t this where the Appraiser Hall is located?”

Based on the directions from Hall Master Xing, the location they were currently at should have been the Appraiser Hall, so why was a huge trading hall standing before them instead?

“You should also know about how intricately linked the Appraiser Hall is with trade. Many businesses rise in the vicinity of its establishment, so it was inevitable that it eventually developed into a trading hall,” Wu shi explained with a smile.

“That’s true.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Appraisers were capable of determining the authenticity of artifacts, and in the Master Teacher Continent, authenticity had always been a problem for both buyers and sellers alike. Receiving an appraiser’s certificate on a good was equivalent to having a guarantee on the quality of the good, and naturally, sellers would be able to sell it at a higher price. At the same time, knowing that the authenticity of the good had been verified by an expert, buyers could also purchase it with their mind at ease.

Thus, it was inevitable that businesses would gradually sprout in the vicinity of the Appraiser Guild, and as time passed, a trading hall would be constructed around it, thus becoming the center of commerce within the city.

“Actually, there is something that has been on my mind for quite some time already. If I’m not mistaken, the Appraisal Convention that you spoke of should be an event to verify the authenticity of precious artifacts. However, if that’s the case, why would the head of the Painter Guild attend the convention as well?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Since the main focus of the event was appraising, it was peculiar that those of another occupation would be there as well.

“As you know, appraisers deal with artifacts of all sorts. Tonight, one of the artifacts that will be appraised is a painting left behind by the Sorrowless Old Man,” Wu shi explained.

“Sorrowless Old Man?”

“He’s the most famous painter in the history of the Qingyuan Empire. An extremely talented individual, he was an 8-star painter before he reached three hundred years old.

Unfortunately, on the third day after his three hundredth birthday, he vanished without a trace. As for where he went, no one knows for sure. However, there are rumors that he was killed by his enemies,” Wu shi explained.

“Three hundred years old? Isn’t that age considered young for Saint realm cultivators? Why would others address him as the Sorrowless Old Man?” Zhang Xuan asked in confusion.

Even Hall Master Xing and Wu shi were at least five hundred years old. In comparison, three hundred years could really be considered young among Saint realm cultivators, so that title seemed to be a little inappropriate.

“It is said that in the earlier years of the Sorrowless Old Man, his talents in cultivation and painting were unexceptional. Even as he approached 180, he was still nowhere near to reaching Saint realm. However, his talents suddenly blossomed one day. Within a short ten years, his mastery in painting surged all the way to 7-star, and he managed to advance his cultivation to Saint realm as well. Nevertheless, due to his late breakthrough, he still retained his old appearance despite his lengthened lifespan, and it was because of his old appearance that others addressed him as the Sorrowless Old Man,” Wu shi explained.

“I see...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The average lifespan of a Transcendent Mortal was around two hundred, and typically speaking, a 180 years old Transcendent Mortal cultivator stood no chance of achieving a breakthrough at all. To suddenly be enlightened in the Way of Painting and successfully advance to Sainthood at his age, it must be said that the Sorrowless Old Man was indeed a legend.

While chatting, the duo entered the trading hall.

The trading hall was far larger than Zhang Xuan had expected. There were all sorts of artifacts on display, and a huge crowd was walking back and forth between the vendors, seeking the items they required.

Curious, Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight and scanned through the array of items on display. A while later, he could not help but shake his head in disappointment.

There were a couple of items that could be considered a treasure to Transcendent Mortal cultivators, but to him, they were completely useless.

“Most of the items on the first floor of the trading hall are miscellaneous goods that have not yet been appraised, so they are relatively inexpensive. Most of those on this floor loiter with the hopes of stumbling on a treasure. It would be best if they could hit the jackpot, but even if they do not, they won’t make a big loss either,” Wu shi said.

“It’s from the second floor onwards that the artifacts have been appraised. While their prices are slightly pricier, there’s at least a guarantee on the authenticity of the goods. Does Principal Zhang want to take a look around the trading hall first?”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “There’s no need for that.”

What he lacked the most at that moment was concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Other than that, there was not any particular artifact that he required.

As for medicinal herbs, ores, and the sort, he had already gotten what he needed from Emperor Chu Tianxing, so there was no need for him to go to the trouble of purchasing them.

Since there was nothing he required, there was no need for him to browse through the items in the trading hall either.

“Since that’s the case, let’s head straight for the fifth floor then. The Appraisal Convention is being held there.” Nodding with a smile, Wu shi led the way forward.

Walking through the crowd, it did not take long for them to arrive on the fifth floor.

Instead of stores, there was a vast hall on the fifth floor.

Before Zhang Xuan could enter the hall, he suddenly spotted two men walking over, and upon seeing one of their faces, he could not help but halt for an instant.

The person was none other than the young man whom he had encouraged earlier in the day—the offspring of the Zhang Clan, Zhang Jiuxiao!

1164 Evocative Vividness

Dressed in a light green robe, Zhang Jiuxiao had a look deeply reminiscent of a scholar. Pinned on his chest was not the emblem of a master teacher but that of an appraiser, and the seven stars gleaming on the emblem signified the outstanding skills he had in the field.

The one that came along with him was an elder who appeared to be in his sixties. The aura that he emanated revealed his Saint 4-dan cultivation, and there was a 7-star appraiser emblem on his chest as well.

That fellow... is an appraiser as well? Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Having witnessed Zhang Jiuxiao conducting calligraphy in the air, he knew that the latter possessed exceptional proficiency in painting. He had not expected the latter to be a 7-star appraiser as well.

As expected of the number one genius of the Qingyuan Empire, he was indeed no simple figure.

Upon seeing the elder, Wu shi quickly walked up to him and greeted with a smile, "Guild Leader Mu, it has been long since we last met!"

"Wu Rufeng, were you not going to pay me a visit if I didn't send you the invitation to the Appraisal Convention? Have you long forgotten about the many years of friendship between us?" The elder patted Wu shi's shoulders and berated him jokingly.

"Of course not! I was already planning to pay you a visit but then you sent me the invitation," Wu shi replied with a smile.

Hearing the conversation between the two, Zhang Xuan noted internally, This elder seems to be the head of the Appraiser Hall.

Considering the 7-star appraiser emblem and how Wu shi addressed the other party, it was not too difficult to figure out

the other party's identity.

While he was assessing the guild leader before him, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt a gaze falling on him. Raising his head, he saw Zhang Jiuxiao staring at him with a slight hint of enmity in his eyes.

To be honest, the hostility the other party emanated was so vague that it would have been nearly indiscernible for anyone else, but with his Soul Depth of 25.1, which was comparable to an 8-star master teacher, it was still rather easy for him to perceive it.

He is hostile toward me? Why? I don't think I have offended him before. Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

The both of them had only met once back on the Heart Tempering Bridge, and he had even cheered the other party on with a 'You can do it!' It was one thing for the other party not to reciprocate his goodwill, but to carry enmity against him on top of that... what the heck was the other party up to?

Just as Zhang Xuan was lamenting how difficult it was to be a good person nowadays, the young man walked up to him and clasped his fist. "I am Zhang Jiuxiao, how may I address you?"

"I am Zhang Xuan."

"Zhang Xuan? Are you the newly appointed principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy? I have heard much of your talent!" Upon hearing the name, Zhang Jiuxiao came to a realization. "It's no wonder you possess such exceptional mental fortitude, being able to cross the Heart Tempering Bridge with ease. It's indeed impossible to govern an entire academy without an exceptional state of mind."

He had been wondering whom the 6-star master teacher who had broken his record was, and upon learning of the other party's identity, he felt as if the burden in his heart had been lifted.

He had heard bits and pieces of Zhang Xuan's affairs, and the latter was indeed worthy of being considered a prodigy among geniuses.

However, the other party was still only a 6-star master teacher, no matter how talented he was. Against him, a true 7-star master teacher, the other party was clearly still far from a match.

“It’s due to the appreciation of the teachers and students in the academy that I accepted the position of the principal in the first place. To be honest with you, I am intending to resign soon,” Zhang Xuan replied humbly.

Since the old principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, Zhang Yinqiu, had returned, he had been wanting to step down, just that the others had been unwilling to accept his resignation.

“Resign? Well, I guess that’s to be expected. Despite your talent, your young age still limits your experience. It wouldn’t reflect too well on the academy to have a master teacher as young as you as its principal.” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded in agreement.

Not expecting his words of humility to be taken for real, Zhang Xuan shook his head with a helpless smile.

It was the norm in such social settings to keep up pleasantries. More than manners, it was a sign of politeness and respect for the other party. He could tell that Zhang Jiuxiao was trying to put him down, and while he would not go to the extent of getting into a squabble with the other party over something as inconsequential as this, he was not interested in putting up with it either. Thus, he chose to take his leave instead.

However, before he could do so, the other party continued speaking. “Since Wu shi has brought you to this Appraisal Convention, it must mean that he has a high opinion of you. Is Zhang shi an appraiser as well?”

Out of politeness, Zhang Xuan replied, “Yes, I have learned a little bit of appraising in my spare time.”

“May I know what your current rank in it is?” Zhang Jiuxiao asked curiously.

“I am currently a 5-star appraiser,” replied Zhang Xuan nonchalantly.

The previous Appraiser Hall that he had been to was in Honghai City of the Myriad Kingdom Alliance. Over there, the highest emblem he could receive was only 5-star, so he had been stuck with it until now.

“5-star? I see. Given your current age, it’s actually not too bad. At the very least, it does show that you have some talent in the field. As long as you work diligently on it, it might be possible for you to overtake me in the future!” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded.

“To tell you the truth, 5-star appraisers are actually unqualified to attend the Appraisal Convention, but it seems like Wu shi has specially brought you here to expand your horizons.”

“Seems so,” Zhang Xuan replied casually.

“Un.” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded before continuing. “The Appraisal Convention this time around is far grander than the previous few. The Appraiser Hall has invited many leading figures in their own occupation this time around, so it’s very likely that a few valuable treasures might appear later on. Since it’s fate that we have met, and the both of us have the same surname, ‘Zhang’, why don’t you follow behind me later on, and I’ll show you around? If there’s anything you don’t recognize or know of, you can ask me. We are all master teachers, and as your senior in the field of appraising, it’s only right for me to offer you a few pointers here. Hopefully, my words will be of some help to you in pushing for a breakthrough to 6-star.”

“I’ll be counting on you then,” Zhang Xuan replied.

It did not seem like the other party had any bad intentions in mind, so Zhang Xuan did not think that there was any need to create unnecessary acrimony between them.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. While I am a master teacher as well, I have devoted quite a bit of my time to studying appraising, and I do have a some reputation of my own in the Qingyuan Empire Appraisal Hall as well,” Zhang Jiuxiao replied calmly, but the slight hint of pride in his tone was unconcealable.

He had been feeling rather traumatized by the other party after the affairs at the Heart Tempering Bridge, so he could not help but feel exceptionally refreshed after returning the favor.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He was just about to speak when Wu shi and Guild Leader Mu suddenly both turned their sights over, and the latter spoke with a smile on his face. “I was too busy speaking earlier that I forgot to introduce him to you both. As all of you are master teachers, I believe that I need not specially introduce him. Zhang Jiuxiao over here has studied appraising under me for three years, and within this short period of time, he has already achieved 7-star proficiency in the occupation. His talent in this field is truly fearsome, an outstanding youth indeed.”

Wu shi nodded upon hearing those words before saying, “Guild Leader Mu, this young man over here is my friend, Zhang Xuan. Don’t underestimate him just because of his young age; he’s truly an exceptional genius. He was previously intending to look for you to take the appraiser examination, but since we coincidentally met one another here, I thought that it would be good to introduce him to you.”

“Your friend? I thought that he is your junior?” Guild Leader Mu was taken aback.

Wu shi was almost eight hundred this year, so he had automatically assumed that the twenty-year-old lad whom he had brought with him to the Appraisal Convention would be a new student that he had accepted recently or a close junior. Who would have thought that the other party was his friend instead?

The fact that Wu shi chose to address the young man as his peer showed how high an evaluation he had of the other party’s capability.

“Principal Zhang is a man of great talent. It’s already a great honor for me to have him as my friend, so how could he possibly be my junior?” Wu shi quickly waved his hand to deny the claim.

The young man before him was a Celestial Master Teacher and a Celestial Saint. To be honest, he already felt as if he was being a little conceited to address the other party as his friend, so he nearly died of a heart attack when Guild Leader Mu asked if the other party was his student.

“Oh?” Noting that his old friend was not say those words out of humility, Guild Leader Mu could not help but take another good look at Zhang Xuan, and the casual attitude he took before slowly turned into graveness. “A friend of Wu shi is a friend of mine too. Principal Zhang, feel free to look for me if you ever require any help concerning appraising.”

Having known Wu shi for many years, Guild Leader Mu knew that the other party was an austere man who viewed formalities with grave importance. The fact that he was willing to address a person as young as Principal Zhang with such deep respect showed that the latter was no ordinary figure.

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and replied, “Guild Leader Mu, you are being too polite!”

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony with me. Wu shi and I have been close friends for many years!” Guild Leader Mu said with a smile. He turned to Zhang Jiuxiao and said, “Jiuxiao, I know that the both of you are around the same age, but since Principal Zhang is a friend of mine, you will have to address him as Senior Uncle. Alright, hurry up and greet him.”

Zhang Jiuxiao nearly vomited blood. He reluctantly voiced those two words from his mouth. “Senior... Uncle...”

It was just a moment ago that he had said that he would show the other party around the Appraisal Convention to teach the other party a thing or two. His face turned so red that it looked as if he would burst into flames at any moment.

“Un.” Guild Leader Mu nodded. “Wu shi and Brother Zhang, it seems like most of the guests have arrived. Allow me to bring you two to your seats.”

“Alright.” Wu shi nodded.

Thus, the group began making their way into the hall.

The hall spanned roughly thirty meters from one end to the other, and there was a long rectangular table stationed at the very center. Both ends of the tables were already surrounded with all kinds of finely-dressed gentlemen and ladies, and most of them seemed to be roughly around the age of Guild Leader Mu.

Zhang Xuan spotted two familiar figures amid the crowd— Guild Leader Ruan of the Spirit Awakener Guild and Guild Leader Wei of the Terpsichore Guild.

Guild Leader Mu first brought Wu shi and Zhang Xuan to their seats before heading to the principal seat of the rectangular table and gestured to them. “Alright, please take a seat. “

“Un.” Zhang Xuan and Wu shi sat down side by side.

Zhang Jiuxiao also walked up to one of the seats as well, but Guild Leader Mu frowned at that moment and said, “Jiuxiao, you shall stand behind me.”

“Yes!” Zhang Jiuxiao’s face twitched slightly, but he quickly nodded and took his place behind Guild Leader Mu.

He was initially thinking that with his standing as a 7-star appraiser, he would at least be able to vie back some dignity from the other party, but who would have thought that before he could really do anything, he would already be suppressed to the point where he could hardly raise his head before the other party?

After settling everyone into their seats, Guild Leader Mu looked at the person sitting on the other end and said, “Since everyone is here, my friend over there, can you take out your artifact now?”

That person was wearing a copper mask, making it impossible to distinguish his facial features. Nevertheless, from his skin, one could roughly tell that his external appearance should be one of a middle-aged man in his late forties.

“Everyone present here is a reputable figure of Qingyuan City, and I see that even Vice Pavilion Master Wu is here today, so naturally, I have no qualms regarding your credibility.

However, I think that there is still a need for me to put the ugly words at the forefront and make my stand clear. I only wish for my artifact to be appraised so as to decipher the secret hidden within it. Regardless of what is discovered in the process, I wish to make it very clear that I have no intentions of selling my artifact to anyone else. However, be assured that I will handsomely reward those who help me in deciphering it,” the copper-masked figure said.

His voice was slightly scratchy, a sign indicating that he had intentionally altered his voice so that no one would be able to recognize him.

“Rest assured, the friends that I have invited to the Appraisal Convention this time around are trustworthy individuals!” Guild Leader Mu nodded.

The copper-masked figure nodded. “Un, I trust Guild Leader Mu’s judgement.”

He flicked his wrist, and a scroll appeared in his hands. He unfurled it carefully, and a beautiful scene opened up before everyone’s eyes. A lush mountain peak filled with the cries of birds and beasts alike was paired with a tranquil flowing river; it was a calming sight.

The crowd found themselves unable to distinguish whether the sight before them was true or not. It was as if a mountain was truly erected not too far from where they were, and they could even vaguely feel a warm, humid breeze on their faces.

“This is... Evocative Vividness, the work of an 8-star painter!”

Upon seeing the painting, an elder rose to his feet in agitation. His eyes reddened, and his body trembled uncontrollably. Putting together the fact that he was wearing the robe of a painter and the seven gleaming stars on his painter emblem, it was likely that he was the head of the Painter Guild whom Wu shi had spoken of previously.

“Evocative Vividness?” Zhang Xuan asked in confusion.

“Evocative Vividness is the ability of an 8-star painter. Those who have achieved this realm are able to produce paintings that are extremely lifelike, making it extremely difficult to

discern it from reality. A painting that has achieved such a level is capable of absorbing spiritual energy in order to sustain the spirit within and even cultivate. With sufficient time, it might even be able to leap out of the painting and exist as an independent lifeform!” Wu shi explained with a suppressed voice.

“So formidable?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

He discreetly activated his Eye of Insight in order to assess the painting before his eyes closely.

1165 The Proud Zhang

Jiuxiao

Without taking a closer look at the painting, it would appear as if one was watching the scenery through one's windows, a little distant but nevertheless clear. Through the Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan was able to perceive the details of the painting with greater clarity, and to his shock, he found that he was able to even perceive the veins of every single leaf in the painting.

It's almost as if it's real! Zhang Xuan was astonished.

Even to him, the painting was extremely lifelike. That was truly fearsome. If one were to hang it on a wall, those who passed by it would never think that it was a painting. Instead, they would view it as a real window.

Zhang Xuan examined the painting from the top to the bottom, and a deep frown surfaced on his forehead. But... it doesn't seem like there's any seal on this painting?

The copper-masked figure had said earlier that there was a seal on the painting, but even with the Eye of Insight was activated, he was still unable to see what was amiss about the painting.

It seems like my cultivation is still too low. I am still able to see through paintings of the seventh level with my current skills, but paintings of the eighth level are still a little beyond me! Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Even though his Eye of Insight had been upgraded after undergoing the fourth acknowledgement of the Celestial Master Teacher, it was a pity that his cultivation was still simply too low, being at only Saint 2-dan.

A painting of the eighth level was produced with the might of a Leaving Aperture realm expert. As such, even with the Eye of Insight, it was not surprising that Zhang Xuan could not see through anything at all.

“Is there a seal on the painting?”

“Such a lifelike painting, it is apparent that it is infused with the essence of Evocative Vividness. If there’s truly a seal on it... what could it possibly be sealing?”

“I have no idea either. However, since the other party was willing to bring out such a valuable painting to have it appraised in public, he must have noticed something peculiar about it!”

...

Zhang Xuan was not able to notice what was wrong with the painting, and the others in the room also had confused frowns on their foreheads. With hushed voices, they discussed the matter among themselves, unable to figure out what was wrong.

At this moment, the perplexed Guild Leader Mu stood up and asked, “May I take a closer look?”

“Feel free!” the copper-masked figure said nonchalantly.

“Thank you.”

Guild Leader Mu walked up to the painting before whipping out a magnifying crystal ball. After which, he began examining the painting bit by bit carefully.

As he was the most capable appraiser in the room, the others waited with bated breaths for his conclusion, fearing that they would interrupt his work.

A moment later...

Guild Leader Mu turned a doubtful gaze toward the copper-masked figure and asked, “Friend, can you tell us where exactly the seal is located or what form it takes? This way, we can be spared from making blind guesses here and there and focus our attention on deciphering it instead.”

Upon hearing those words, the copper-masked figure replied with a hint of disappointment in his voice, “Guild Leader Mu isn’t able to tell?”

If the other party could not even discern the seal, how could he possibly be able to decipher it?

“Allow me to take a look!”

The head of the Painter Guild also stood up and walked toward the painting in order to assess it more closely.

The method by which a painter examined a painting was very different from that of an appraiser. Instead of taking out a crystal ball to scan the details of the painting, the head of the Painter Guild took out a brush instead and began drawing in midair.

Noting the look of confusion in Zhang Xuan’s eyes, Wu shi explained telepathically, “He’s trying to comprehend the intentions of the painter through retracing his painting process.”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

In a sense, this was similar to backtracking.

By backtracking on the painting process, one would be able to better analyze the focus of the painter when they was working on it, and through so, one could deduce their intentions and discern the location of the seal, assuming that it existed in the first place.

As the head of the Painter Guild analyzed the painting process, the frown on his forehead seemed to gradually tighten. A while later, he turned around to explain his findings. “The painting flows fluidly, and there is not a single inconsistency to be found in the painting. To put it simply, the painting was completed in a single seating and is wholesome. A seal on a painting would have introduced some incongruous factors to it, affecting its overall impression, but that isn’t the case with this painting over here.”

Hearing the evaluation of the head of the Painter Guild, the copper-masked figure flung his hands furiously and harrumphed in displeasure. “If there was no seal on the painting, do you think that I would go through so much effort to invite all of you here? Do you think that I am doing this just because I have too much time on my hands?”

He had thought that with all of the top figures of Qingyuan City gathered together, they should be able to discern the

anomaly in the painting in a single look. However, from the looks of it, it seemed like he had overestimated their capabilities.

It seemed like an eighth level painting had truly exceeded the caliber of the Qingyuan Empire.

“Allow me.” Wu shi stood up and walked over.

Not too long later, he shook his head and returned to his seat.

With his eye of discernment, he could tell that there was something extraordinary with the painting, but he could not discern where the supposed seal was at all.

Very soon, everyone within the room had already taken a look at the painting, but they shook their heads helplessly.

Seeing that the crowd was gradually becoming impatient, Guild Leader Mu waved his hand and said, “Alright, friend, we won’t get anywhere at this rate. We might be unable to tell where the seal is, but with the wisdom of the masses, we should still be able to offer some useful input on the matter and possibly unravel the seal that you speak of. You should just tell us where the seal is.”

From the looks of it, it seemed like the seal was very exquisitely hidden, and it would require careful examination over long periods of time in order to discern where it was. Instead of wasting their time on this, it would be more efficient for the other party to just reveal where it was so that they could begin working on deciphering the seal.

“Alright then.” Seeing that no one was able to discern where the seal was located, the hint of disappointment in the eyes of the copper-masked figure deepened. Perhaps it was because he had no better solution than this, he sighed deeply and nodded before pointing to the clouds at the bottom of the mountain.

“The seal is hidden amid the clouds! If I’m not mistaken, there’s a painting that lies beneath the clouds, and there is some kind of secret concealed within it. However, I am unable to figure out how the clouds can be removed from the painting,” the copper-masked figure said.

“The clouds?”

The crowd swiftly turned their gazes back to the painting.

The painting depicted a mountain range with towering peaks that shot beyond the clouds. The middle portion of the mountains were mostly concealed amid bundles of drifting, wispy clouds. They had thought that it was just a detail of the painting, but it was actually the seal?

Intrigued, Zhang Xuan also examined the clouds with his Eye of Insight, but he was unable to discern anything peculiar about them.

After examining the painting for a moment, the head of the Painter Guild couldn't help but ask, "How can you be certain that the clouds are the seal?"

The crowd also swiftly turned their gazes over.

Shaking his head, the copper-masked figure instructed, "Bring me a torch."

An appraiser standing by the entrance of the hall backed out of the room, and a moment later, he returned with a torch.

The copper-masked figure took the torch and lightly placed it against the painting. Under the searing flames of the torch, the mountain range was dyed in an orange glow, and the lush greenery was swiftly reduced to ashes. Only the clouds remained as they were.

"This..."

The head of the Painter Guild narrowed his eyes in astonishment. "For only the clouds to remain unaffected by the flames of the torch... that means that the clouds were not part of the original painting. Judging from the effect, I deduce that there was an interval of at least thirty years between the completion of the painting and the addition of the clouds. How could I have failed to notice it?"

Under normal circumstances, if the painting was truly wholesome, any change to the painting should have affected its entirety. Yet, for only the clouds to remain unaffected by the flames of the torch, it meant that the clouds had been added a significant period after the completion of the rest of

the painting. If that was the case, it was understandable why the copper-masked figure would view it to be a seal.

“The brush strokes for the painting of the clouds must have been slightly more forceful in order to allow it to blend in better with the rest of the painting, thus making it harder to notice. However, considering how wholesome the painting remained even after the addition of the clouds, it stands to reason that they were added in by the original painter himself,” Guild Leader Mu interjected.

The crowd nodded.

Only the original painter could possibly add clouds into the painting without introducing any incongruous factors into the painting.

“But... even if we know that the clouds are the seal, there is no way we can ‘remove’ them.”

The crowd fell silent once more.

Even if they knew that the clouds were added after the completion of the painting and that they were likely a seal, they had no way of separating the two. After all, the clouds had already fused with the rest of the painting.

Seeing that the crowd was still helpless after he revealed the position of the seal, the copper-masked figure shook his head. “It seems like I have overestimated the Qingyuan Empire...”

Sighing, he was just about to put away the painting when someone suddenly spoke up.

“Can you allow me to take a look at it?”

The copper-masked figure raised his gaze and saw a young man walking toward him.

The young man was none other than Zhang Xuan.

He was also a little intrigued by the painting, and since the others were unable to discern anything peculiar about it, he wanted to take a closer look to see what was going on.

However, before Zhang Xuan could reach the painting, another voice sounded behind him. “You are only a 5-star

appraiser, what can you possibly see from the painting? Allow me to do it instead!”

After which, Zhang Jiuxiao stood up and walked proudly toward the painting.

He brushed his finger lightly across the painting and pondered for a moment before saying, “I have seen such eighth level painting before, and I also know how the seal works.”

Seeing how confident Zhang Jiuxiao was, the copper-masked figure clasped his fist and earnestly requested, “You know how the seal works? If that’s truly the case, I humbly request you to remove the seal on the painting. I’m willing to reward you generously for this favor!”

“This seal is known as the Sealing Cloud Pin. It utilizes a unique method to conceal the layer beneath it without harming the foundation of the painting. If I’m not mistaken, the seal has been imbued with an individual spirit, or else the clouds would have surely fused together with the rest of the painting with sufficient time!” Zhang Jiuxiao analyzed confidently.

“Sealing Cloud Pin?”

The copper-masked figure and the crowd turned to look at Zhang Jiuxiao in bewilderment. They had never heard of such a skill before.

Zhang Jiuxiao placed his hands behind his back and spoke proudly. “I once witnessed a person undoing this seal back in my clan, so I know how it can be deciphered.”

“Your clan?”

“You don’t know? The number one genius of Qingyuan City is actually an offspring of a Sage Clan, the Zhang Clan!”

“An offspring of the Zhang Clan?”

“That explains a lot! With a background like his, even if he’s just from the side family, he’s bound to have seen things that we can hardly imagine ourselves.”

...

Hearing that Zhang Jiuxiao had a way to decipher the painting, an excited commotion broke out amid the crowd, and many looks of admiration were centered on him.

Upon hearing that the other party was from the Zhang Clan, the copper-masked figure froze for a brief moment before clasping his fist to ask, “So, how should the Sealing Cloud Pin that you spoke of be deciphered?”

“Simple. In order to resolve the seal, we have to find an individual who specializes in soul arts. Using his soul as a medium, we will draw out the spirit harnessed within the clouds.”

“An individual who specializes in soul arts?” the copper-masked figure asked doubtfully.

“Indeed. Once the spirit harnessed within the seal is drawn out, we’ll be able to remove the seal easily,” Zhang Jiuxiao said.

The copper-masked figure hesitated for a brief moment before asking, “May I know how skilled the individual must be in soul arts?”

“That individual must have fine control over their soul, and their soul must not be too strong. Otherwise, that might cause severe damage to the painting, turning the eighth level painting into a piece of scrap paper. More importantly, that individual must know where the spirit is concealed, so he must have a deep understanding of painting.”

“This...” The copper-masked figure was stunned. “Where in the world can we find a person like that?”

It was easy to find individuals to satisfy a single one of the conditions, but to find one that satisfied all three conditions... Was there even such a person in Qingyuan City?

Zhang Jiuxiao chuckled. “There’s no need to look any further.”

Standing upright, he emanated a lofty but valiant air, reminiscent of a true hero. “I happen to fit the criteria!” “For those that are confused as to what this means, it means that the clouds are not ‘bumped up’ on the painting. When you paint over a painting, the added portion tends to be bumped up as

the paint has thickness itself. It doesn't work this way in reality, but it's basically saying that the painter was more forcefully in painting the clouds to push down the bump, thus putting them on equal level with the rest of the painting.

1166 Durians

“You?”

The eyes of the copper-masked figure lit up, and he unwittingly clenched his fists tightly by his side.

The crowd was also astonished to hear those words.

“That’s right!” Zhang Jiuxiao said confidently as he tilted his head upward. At this moment, he felt as if he had really soared into the Nine Heavens.

He couldn’t even begin to describe how deeply indignant he felt when he saw that Zhang Xuan was granted a seat when he, the number one genius of Qingyuan Empire, had to remain standing before others. Now that he finally had a chance to stand up and shine, he could hardly hold back his excitement.

“Zhang shi, I beseech you to help me remove the seal from the painting!” the copper-masked figure clasped his fist and said.

At this moment, he had put down the haughty attitude that he had maintained even before Wu shi and the others.

“Rest assured!” Zhang Jiuxiao said confidently as he made his way over to the painting. He whipped his brush before pausing for a brief moment. After which, he suddenly turned his head around and said, “Zhang shi, I might have to trouble you to help me grind some ink for me.”

Zhang Xuan turned to glance at his sides to see whom Zhang Jiuxiao was talking to, but the latter’s intent gaze on him seemed to suggest that he was the chosen one. Taken aback, he asked in bewilderment, “You are talking to me?”

“Indeed. I will have to focus my attention on resolving the seal, so I require your help for this matter. For something as important as this, surely you wouldn’t turn down my request, right?” Zhang Jiuxiao said with a faint smirk on his lips.

Back at the Heart Tempering Bridge, the other party had outdone him so utterly that he couldn’t even keep his head up

in public anymore. Not to mention, just a moment ago, he was forced into calling the other party ‘Senior Uncle’.

This was a rare chance for him to strike back, so naturally, he was going to make full use of it. He was going to show the other party that a genius like him wouldn’t be outmatched by just anyone.

“Very well then.”

Zhang Xuan could easily see through Zhang Jiuxiao’s intentions, but he still chose to agree to the matter with a nonchalant shrug.

In the first place, it wasn’t any big deal to be grinding some ink for the other party. Besides, he was interested in the 8-star painting as well, and he was curious to see if Zhang Jiuxiao would really be able to break the seal or not.

Thus, he walked up to Zhang Jiuxiao, whipped out an inkstone from his storage ring, and began grinding some ink carefully.

“Un.” Seeing the young man before him working obediently without daring to utter a single word of complaint, Zhang Jiuxiao felt indescribable exhilaration rushing through his veins.

Taking a momentary breather to calm himself down, he dabbed his brush into the ink before tapping it lightly on the painting.

Weng!

Contrary to expectations, the ink on the brush didn’t blot the painting. Instead, it floated in midair, covering the white clouds in the painting.

Suspended Imagery!

Under Zhang Jiuxiao’s skillful movements, it took only a few instants for another layer of clouds identical to those on the painting to appear above it. After that was done, he scrutinized the clouds carefully, probably attempting to identify the location of the spirit infused amongst the clouds. Then, with a casual wave of his hand, he retracted the ink back into the inkstone before focusing his soul energy into the painting.

“Hm? His soul energy is exceptionally pure. He must have cultivated some kind of secret art relating to the soul...” Zhang Xuan noted.

While the other party’s soul was nothing compared to him, it still stood out among other cultivators. Based on Zhang Xuan’s analysis, it was likely due to the cultivation of some sort of secret art from the Zhang Clan.

For a clan with as powerful as the Zhang Clan, even its side family was not something that ordinary clans could hope to match. Be it the things that one could see there, or the secret arts that they had in their possession, they were truly nothing short of extraordinary.

With such thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan discreetly stretched his hand towards the painting and touched it lightly.

Weng!

A book immediately materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

Zhang Xuan was just about to take a look at it when he suddenly noticed Zhang Jiuxiao’s face turning ghastly pale, and cold sweat was pouring down his face.

“What’s wrong?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

At this point, the crowd also seemed to have noticed that something had gone wrong.

They could sense that Zhang Jiuxiao’s current state wasn’t simply due to exhaustion.

Peng!

Before the crowd could even ask about the matter, a tinge of red abruptly appeared on Zhang Jiuxiao’s pale face, and in the next moment, he suddenly staggered back eight steps before spewing a mouthful of blood.

Worried, Guild Leader Mu immediately rushed up to him.

“I’m fine. I just didn’t expect the spirit in the painting to retaliate so violently...” Zhang Jiuxiao shook his head, but

halfway through his words, he suddenly realized that the room was bizarrely quiet.

He raised his head and saw Guild Leader Mu staring at him with a look of horror. Perplexed, he asked, “Teacher, what’s wrong?”

Even if he had failed in undoing the seal, surely the other party didn’t have to look at him with such an expression, right?

“Y-your head... There are durians growing out of your head!” Guild Leader Mu exclaimed in shock.

“Durians?” Zhang Jiuxiao was taken aback by those abrupt words.

“There is a tail on your bottom as well!” Another elder amidst the crowd exclaimed.

“Ah?”

Zhang Jiuxiao quickly turned around to look at his bottom, and the sight he saw left his eyes narrowing into slits, and he nearly blacked out on the spot.

There was a crimson tail extending from his bottom, and it was extremely furry, reminiscent of green foxtail. At the same time, through his Spiritual Perception, he also noticed the large spiky lumps that bore a striking resemblance to durians were emerging from his head one after another, and it didn’t take long for them to fill his entire head. To make things worse, they were showing signs of flowering...

“What’s going on?” Zhang Jiuxiao’s face paled in disbelief as he subconsciously took several steps back.

At this point, he was already on the verge of insanity.

All he had done was to attempt to break the seal on the painting, so why would such an issue suddenly happen to him?

“From the looks of it, it seems like a plant spirit has taken root within your Primordial Spirit. Fortunately, it seems to be an ordinary plant spirit, or else the growth of the plants would be much faster than this...” Seeing through the root of the problem, Guild Leader Ruan spoke up and explained.

As a 7-star pinnacle spirit awakener, she had heard of such a situation before. However, it was still rather shocking to see it in person.

“Plant spirit? What’s going on?” Zhang Jiuxiao asked anxiously.

The situation was really driving him insane.

All he had wanted to do was to resolve the seal and bring some dignity back to himself, and yet, before he could achieve anything, such a thing ended up happening to him instead. Durians were actually growing out of his head, and there were already four of them now!

“It is probably the retaliation of the spirit in the painting. You tried to get rid of it, so it got even with you.” Zhang Xuan shook his head in sympathy.

He had seen this situation of Hall Master Xing before as well. He had tried to mend the rift in the other party’s Primordial Spirit through spirit enchanting it, but he failed to destroy the spirit in time... As a result, he ended up bearing fruits on his head and blooming flowers on his bottom.

For such a situation to occur with Zhang Jiuxiao at this moment, there was no doubt that it had something to do with the spirit within the painting. Most likely, the latter had attempted to get rid of the spirit, only to get done in himself instead.

“What do I do?” Zhang Jiuxiao’s face paled in despair.

He was the number one genius of Qingyuan Empire, the idol of countless young women. How could he possibly walk around with durians on his head? He would become the laughingstock of the town!

“It’s very simple, you just have to get rid of the spirit that has taken root within you.” Zhang Xuan explained in composure.

He had panicked a little when he saw it happen to Hall Master Xing the previous time around, but the past experience had truly tempered his mind well. At this point, he no longer felt anything towards the matter anymore.

“Get rid of the spirit? How can I get rid of it?” Zhang Jiuxiao looked at Zhang Xuan anxiously, as if a desperate man clutching onto his final straw of hope.

“Simple. Bare open your soul to me, and I’ll help you check for the spirit and destroy it.” Zhang Xuan said.

Even someone as powerful as Hall Master Xing was unable to deal with the plant spirit by himself, let alone Zhang Jiuxiao. This was already the most effective and easiest way to get rid of the spirit.

“You want me to bare open my soul to you? That won’t do...” Zhang Jiuxiao swiftly shook his head.

As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he had many secrets concealed within him, especially within his soul. Given such, how could he possibly bare his soul to a random stranger?

One must know that baring one’s soul was effectively no different from standing completely nude before another.

There was no way he could do that!

“That won’t do? I guess that can’t be helped then. Let me take a look at what the spirit within the painting is first, and I’ll see if I can concoct some kind of medicine that could isolate and kill the spirit within you.” Zhang Xuan said.

It was a little more troublesome, but as long as he could figure out what kind of spirit it was, he was confident that he would be able to concoct a corresponding poison to deal with it.

Back then, he had raised it as one of the potential solutions to Hall Master Xing as well, but it was a pity that the latter didn’t agree to it.

“Alright. You should go on and take a look at the painting then!” Zhang Jiuxiao heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing that he didn’t have to bare his soul before urging the other party forward.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded nonchalantly before turning his gaze towards the painting. His eyes were fixated on the painting, but his mind had already slipped into the Library of Heaven’s Path to take a look at the newly compiled book.

After taking a quick look, a frown emerged on his forehead.

“Did you notice anything?” Noticing Zhang Xuan’s expression, Wu shi asked in intrigue.

Instead of answering Wu shi’s question, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze towards the copper-masked figure and asked, “Where did you obtain this painting from?”

“I have only invited all of you over to decipher the seal for me. I don’t think that I’m obliged to tell you the background of the painting.” the copper-masked figure replied curtly.

“You’re right, you are indeed not obliged to tell me the background of the painting.” Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back and replied.

“The Marshlands of the Northern Meadows is an extremely humid place. An 8-star painting it might be, but having spent two thousand years in a place like that, it is already permeated with an air of dampness. It’s not apparent from a distance away, but it’s quite easily discernible at close proximity.”

“You...” Even with his face concealed, the shock of the copper-masked figure was palpable.

To be able to deduce the history of the painting just through the slightly damp aura around the painting, wasn’t the other party’s eye of discernment a little too formidable?

Before the copper-masked figure could recover from his state, Zhang Xuan had already continued, “The Marshlands of the Northern Meadows is a treacherous land, but many cultivators still flock there in hopes of stumbling upon treasure. It’s not too surprising that you were able to find the work of the Sorrowless Old Man there. There’s one thing that I have to concede that you are right about. It’s indeed suspicious that the Sorrowless Old Man would suddenly conceal what he has drawn within the mountains thirty years after he has created the work... Judging from that in itself, it must have been quite a huge secret.”

The eyelids of the copper-masked figure twitched slightly as he narrowed his eyes, “It doesn’t seem like we are getting

anywhere at this rate. If none of you are able to decipher the seal, I'll be taking my painting away with me then."

"Who says that none of us are able to decipher the seal?"
Zhang Xuan spoke up.

"Since you don't want me to speak about the origin of the painting, I can't be bothered to waste my breath on it either. I'll talk about the painting itself then. The canvas for the painting is specially created by fusing the skin of the Emeraldhorn Fish and White Reindeer together, and the ink used is a compound between the Sapphire Stone and Goldensource Water. It's due to the usage of these precious materials that there isn't the slightest wear and tear on it despite spending two thousand years under damp condition. On the contrary, the artwork is getting more and more lifelike and touching as the years go by."

"Judging from the changes in the ink color, it seems like it has been three years since you unearthed the painting from the ground, and it should have been 2142 years since the painting is created. Judging by the timing, I stand to believe that it's the work of the Sorrowless Old Man back when he's around 270 years old. When he eventually added the clouds on the painting, he was already close to three hundred. In other words, the addition of the clouds could very well be the last thing he did before he went missing. As for whether he was killed or kidnapped, there is no way to say for sure now."

"This..."

Everyone was astonished by the analysis.

By the side, Guild Leader Mu couldn't help but widen his eyes in shock.

Even he was unable to determine the history of the painting despite examining it for a long time earlier, and yet, the young man was actually able to detail the history of the painting with just a short glance. Wasn't his appraising capability a little too fearsome?

On the other hand, the durian-head Zhang Jiuxiao's body also staggered upon hearing those words. At this point, he really

felt like bursting into tears.

Didn't the other party say that he was a 5-star appraiser?

On normal days, he wouldn't even spare a second glance to other 5-star appraisers, and yet, why did it feel that the other party was even more formidable than a 7-star appraiser like him?

“The Sorrowless Old Man had already reached Leaving Aperture realm prior to his disappearance. With his outstanding painting skills, his painting was still able to reach the level of Evoking Vividness even with the addition of those clouds, making it extremely exceptionally difficult the decipher the seal he has put up...”

1167 The Ink Slab Won't Grind Itself

“Assuming that you are right, what does determining the material of the canvas and the age of the painting have to do with deciphering the seal?” the copper-masked figure interjected Zhang Xuan.

“There’s indeed no direct relation between them, but such analysis allows us to deduce the reason why Sorrowless Old Man has decided to leave behind a seal on the painting, as well as to determine possible flaws and deficiencies in the seal.” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

“To claim that you are able to determine the flaws and deficiencies within a painting through just the age of the painting itself, aren’t you being a little too conceited over there?” Zhang Jiuxiao tilted his head upward and harrumphed. Due to him speaking too forcefully, the durians on his head shook violently, seemingly ready to fall to the ground at any moment.

Even though the crowd had remained silent, the looks on their faces showed that they agreed with Zhang Jiuxiao’s point of view. Being able to accurately determine the age of painting did prove that one was an outstanding appraiser, but that piece of knowledge had nothing to do with the seal at all.

“Don’t impose your ignorance upon others.” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly. He took a sweeping glance across the room before eventually halting his gaze upon a certain figure. “If I’m not mistaken, you are the head of the Painter Guild, right?”

“Indeed. My name is Meng Chong.” Guild Leader Meng stood up and clasped his fist politely.

“Guild Leader Meng, pardon for troubling you, but may I ask what kind of painting style was in trend in the Qingyuan

Empire Painter Guild two thousand years ago? What kind of brush stroke was preferred then?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“This...” Guild Leader Meng contemplated for a moment before replying, “Two thousand years ago, the painting style that was popular within Qingyuan Empire was the [Anchored Painting Style]! This style consists of determining the specific size and outline of the objects within the painting before slowly painting them over a layer after a layer. Usually, one would first spread a layer of ink over the entire paper before slowly painting it on a layer after a layer. Every single layer must be done with utmost preciseness, and the margin of allowed errors is minimal. It is an extremely intensive process, but it allows for the creation of extremely vivid and wholesome paintings!”

Just like anything else, painting styles would also gradually change over the years. Each era had their unique mark which differed greatly from the other.

It was based on such differences that allowed appraisers to be able to identify the era which a certain artifact was produced.

The Anchored Painting Style was in trend two thousand years ago, and many painters had chosen to adopt that style in their painting. Of them, the most notable figure was definitely the Sorrowless Old Man.

It was for this reason that everyone immediately guessed that it was the work of the Sorrowless Old Man when they first saw the painting.

“Indeed, it’s the Anchored Painting Style.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “While the Anchored Painting Style allows for extremely vivid and wholesome paintings, there is a huge downside to it as well. The ink used in the painting must be equal throughout so that the painting remains flat as the sides of a knife. Otherwise, the painter would be mocked for his lack of skill...”

At this point, Zhang Xuan gestured to the painting, “However, this painting is of the equal thickness throughout, be it the sky, greenery, mountains, or clouds.”

Everyone swiftly extended their Spiritual Perception towards the painting in order to perceive it with greater clarity, and a moment later, they nodded in agreement.

That was indeed the case.

If the other party hadn't spoken about it, they might not have noticed this anomaly.

“So what if the painting is of equal thickness?” the copper-masked figure harrumphed impatiently. “What I need is for the seal to be deciphered, not an analysis of the painting!”

“Calm down and listen to my words first. They contain the crux to deciphering the seal in the painting.” Zhang Xuan turned to the copper-masked figure to appease him before continuing on, “Like what I have said earlier, the Sorrowless Old Man had worked on the painting on two separate occasions, and there was an interval of thirty years for those two occasions. In other words, the painting was already complete the first time that he had worked on it. Based on the standards of the Anchored Painting Style, the painting must have already been flat then... Thirty years later, in order to conceal some kind of secret, the Sorrowless Old Man intentionally added white clouds onto the mountains. Since he was painting over his work then, there should have been a difference in the thickness of the painting between the clouds and the remaining portions.”

Hearing those words, the crowd turned their attention back to the clouds once more, and a moment ago, bewilderment seeped into their eyes.

“The painting is of equal thickness throughout even for the portions with the clouds...”

“How could this be?”

Such voices could be heard throughout the hall.

As spoken by the voices in the hall, the clouds were of equal thickness with the rest of the painting. Just looking at the painting by itself, there was nothing that suggested the painting had been worked on twice.

“I believe everyone should be able to tell that the painting is of equal thickness throughout. What this means is that he had shaved off a layer of the painting prior to adding on the clouds!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“This...”

The crowd widened their eyes in disbelief.

“To shave off the original work and add something different to it? Is this even feasible in practice?” The head of the Painter Guild, Meng Chong, expressed his skepticism towards the matter.

As a 7-star pinnacle painter, he fully understood the difficulty in pulling such a thing off in practice.

Since the Sorrowless Old Man was working with ink, as most painters did, the matter wasn't as simple as simply painting over the previous layer. Ink that had seeped into the canvas from painting the previous layers would affect the new layer that had been painted over, causing unpredictable distortions in the painting over time. Yet, the painting before him showed no distortions of that sort... Theoretically, by careful calculation and fine control of one's brush stroke, it might be possible to pull something as complicated as that off, but anyone with the slightest understanding of painting would understand that it was nigh impossible to carry out in practice!

“You're right, but what if he were to use Suspended Imagery on the painting instead?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Suspended Imagery? But that would make it a separate entity from the painting!” Guild Leader Meng Chong replied.

Suspended Imagery referred to the capability of painting in midair. However, if the clouds were to be painted using suspended imagery, it wouldn't fuse in with the rest of the painting. In other words, if one were to just move the canvas, the two would separate from one another. However, it was clear from the painting itself that the clouds had fused in with the rest of the painting.

“That would indeed be an issue, but just like what Zhang Jiuxiao had said, a spirit had been infused into the painting. If

I were to just make an analogy, if the previous painting and the clouds are two different sheets of paper, the spirit would be the binding factor between them, allowing them to fuse without interfering with one another!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“I see!”

The crowd came to a realization.

They were still a little confused previously when Zhang Jiuxiao said that there was a spirit within the painting, but after listening to the explanation, they finally understood what was going on.

‘But after all you have said, haven’t you come to the same conclusion as me?’ Zhang Jiuxiao harrumphed.

He was still wondering what kind of astounding theories the fellow would come up with, but after going one big round, the other party still ended up stumbling on the same conclusion as him.

“That isn’t really the case.” Zhang Xuan said. “You have accurately identified the presence of a spirit within the painting, but do you know the reason behind it and how it can be dispelled?”

“I...” Zhang Jiuxiao’s face turned crimson upon hearing those words.

The only reason why he knew that there was a spirit within the painting was because he had once witnessed an elder deciphering something similar back in his clan... As for the reason why a spirit was infused into the painting and how one could resolve the issue, he was honestly not too sure.

If he had truly understood the issue, he wouldn’t have ended up sprouting durians on his head either.

“Since there is a spirit binding the two, it is nigh impossible to separate them. If one were to do it forcefully, it might even result in the destruction of both paintings. To make an analogy, that is equivalent to attempting to tear apart two pieces of paper which have been bound together with glue for several thousand years. Even one were to succeed in pulling them apart, would the remains of the painting still be discernible?”

Turning his attention away from the conceited Zhang Jiuxiao, Zhang Xuan continued his analysis.

“This...” Hearing those words, the face of the copper-masked figure twitched slightly before falling silent.

His purpose of undoing the seal was to find out what was hidden beneath the clouds. As such, it would be pointless to him if the layer beneath were to be destroyed as well in the midst of separating the painting from the clouds.

After a moment of silence, the copper-masked figure turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Zhang shi, is there a way to separate the clouds while ensuring that the painting remains intact?”

Since the young man was able to make sense out of the situation, perhaps... he might just be able to accomplish what others had failed at.

“Since I walked up here and said so much, naturally, I am confident in resolving the issue.” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

“Oh? I beseech you to enlighten me...”

The eyes of the copper-masked figure lit up upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, and he quickly clasped his fist earnestly.

“It’s actually rather simple.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“If the Sorrowless Old Man had used any other binding factor in order to fix the clouds to the painting, it would have been truly difficult to separate the two. However, since he had chosen to use a spirit instead, it actually plays to our advantage. The spirit infused into the painting is similar to a plant spirit, it would only develop or act in very specific manners. In this case, it would be to bind the two parts of the painting together. In essence, it wouldn’t be wrong to say that the spirit possesses no sentience. I believe that Guild Leader Ruan should be aware of it as well.”

“Un.” Guild Leader Ruan nodded.

Most plants possessed spirit, which controlled their intake of nutrients to facilitate their growth. However, unlike the animal spirits, they didn’t have a sense of self, which disallowed them

from roaming around freely and averting disasters on their own accord.

“It was due to the lack of sentience that the spirit was able to sustain the monotonous work of binding the two paintings together for two thousand years. Thus, if I were to grant the spirit sentience, do you think that it’ll still be able to carry out its job as well?” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

“This...”

“If the spirit is granted sentience, it’ll view the clouds above the painting as a tumor plaguing the painting, rendering it extremely uncomfortable. It would surely struggle to get rid of the clouds above it!”

“That seems to be the case, but... granting sentience to the spirit wouldn’t be an easy task, would it?”

“It doesn’t seem like it would be easy to pull that off...”

...

With a direction pointed out for them, the eyes of the crowd lit up. However, at the same time, they had also come to a bottleneck as well.

Enchanting spirit into a weapon was easy, but granting sentience into a spirit which had laid dormant for more than two thousand years was clearly something not as simple.

“It’s indeed something not too easy to carry out in practice, but I happen to be able to do it.” Zhang Xuan smiled.

“Zhang shi, I implore you to help me. If you are able to do so, I’ll surely reward you handsomely for this!”

The copper-masked figure bowed deeply to Zhang Xuan.

Previously, he had thought that the crowd of Qingyuan Empire was inept, being unable to even discern the presence of the seal of the painting. However, after hearing Zhang Xuan’s analysis, he couldn’t help but find himself in awe of the other party.

To be able to find the root of the problem within such a short period of time and deduce a feasible solution to it, his wisdom

and eye of discernment were indeed extraordinary!

“Rest assured, I’ll help you on this matter. However, I still need to make some preparations beforehand in order to ensure that the painting wouldn’t be damaged in the process.” Zhang Xuan said.

“Of course, of course!” The copper-masked figure nodded. “May I know what Zhang shi requires? If there’s anything that requires my help, I’ll try my best to satisfy your needs.”

Speaking was always easier than doing. If it was so easy to decipher the seal, he wouldn’t have been helpless before the painting despite having obtained it for so many years.

“I don’t need anything for the time being.” Zhang Xuan replied with a shake of his head.

He paused for a brief moment before flicking his wrist and taking out a brush. After which, he explained, “It would be difficult to enchant the painting as it is. In order to do so, I would have to either destroy the conception of the painting or carve an opening in it so as that I can extend my consciousness into it. However, doing so would inevitably cause some damage to the painting, so I would like to seek your pardon regarding this issue.”

“Don’t worry, feel free to do anything that you deem necessary.”

What he truly valued was the secret hidden beneath the seal. In his view, no matter how valuable the painting was, it couldn’t be more important than what lay beneath.

“That would be great.” Heaving a sigh of relief. Zhang Xuan was just about to dab the brush in his hand into some ink when he suddenly halted for a brief moment. Then, he turned around to look at Zhang Jiuxiao and bellowed.

“What are you waiting for? The ink slab won’t grind itself!”

1168 Kong shi's Silhouette

“You...” Hearing that bellow, Zhang Jiuxiao's body staggered, and he nearly vomited blood.

It was just a moment ago that he had asked the other party to grind some ink for him, and in the blink of an eye, the favor had been returned to him. This face slap had come way too quickly!

Overwhelmed with agitation, a durian from his head plopped to the ground. Zhang Jiuxiao was just about to give Zhang Xuan a tongue-lashing when the other party's voice sounded once more.

“I will have to focus my attention on resolving the seal, so I require your help with this. For something as important as this, surely you won't turn down my request, right?”

Zhang Jiuxiao's face immediately turned black. All the words that he had intended to say choked up in his chest, rendering him completely speechless.

It seemed like... those were the words he had said to the other party before.

He had just stood majestically before the crowd, as if a hero paving the way forward, but now... with their identities switched all of a sudden, he suddenly felt a stinging pain on his face.

Karma really comes around... As frustrated as Zhang Jiuxiao was, he knew that the other party was getting back at him for what he had done earlier. Even though he was extremely furious, he still obediently stepped forward and began grinding some ink.

Seeing that, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

To be honest, he was not one to bear grudges.

That was because he never had to remember one.

He could sense the other party's hostility toward him, and since that was the case, there was no need for him to act like a good man any longer...

Not to mention, a person from the Zhang Clan was planning to take Luo Ruoxin as his bride.

One must know that even Feng Xun had nearly died from his hands just by confessing to Luo Ruoxin!

While he had no idea where the Zhang Clan was and did not yet have the strength to get them for that matter, that did not stop him from obtaining a small down payment first.

After Zhang Jiuxiao was done grinding the ink, Zhang Xuan was just about to begin painting to destroy the conception of the painting so that he could extend his consciousness in when a thought suddenly came to him.

He turned to Guild Leader Meng Chong and asked, "Guild Leader Meng, do you have any 7-star painting books on you? I need as many of them as possible. I intend to quickly browse through them in order to analyze where I should enchant the spirit to minimize the damage to the painting."

"You want to browse through painting books right now?" Not expecting the young man to request books from him at this crucial moment, Guild Leader Meng was taken aback for a moment before shaking his head. "I don't have many books on me at the moment. However, if you really need them, the Painter Guild just happens to be located in the vicinity. I can fetch some for you right now."

"I'll be troubling you then." Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and bowed.

"There's no need to stand on ceremony," Guild Leader Meng Chong replied before walking out of the room. Not too long later, he returned to the hall, and with a flick of his wrist, a huge pile of books appeared before him. All in all, there seemed to be several dozen thousand of them.

As the head of the Painter Guild, he had the right to take the books in the Painter Guild out at his whim. He had not been

too sure which books Zhang Xuan required, so to be safe, he had taken most of the books and brought them over.

Zhang Xuan walked up to the pile of books and swiftly swept over them with his gaze. After which, he picked up one of them and casually flipped through it as he delved his consciousness into the Library of Heaven's Path.

7-star Heaven's Path Paint Art! Zhang Xuan smiled in satisfaction before flipping through the book in his hand.

It was based on the astounding prowess of the 6-star Heaven's Path Paint Art that Zhang Xuan was able to pull off Suspended Imagery. In truth, he had never gathered the required books to learn the 7-star Heaven's Path Paint Art before.

A short hour later, he had managed to fully comprehend the essence of the 7-star Heaven's Path Paint Art.

Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan finally placed down the book in his hands.

At this moment, his comprehension of painting had already reached the level of 7-star pinnacle, which was comparable to most 8-star primary painters.

"Zhang shi, can we start now?" the copper-masked figure asked anxiously.

The young man before him had picked up an unimpressive-looking book among the huge pile and dazed off for a whole hour. This period of time had felt like an eternity to him, and it was more than enough to turn his anticipation into anxiety.

"I'm done."

Nodding confidently, Zhang Xuan took in a deep breath before making his way toward the painting. Activating his Eye of Insight once more, he took another good look at the painting before him.

If the painting had been a complete enigma to him a moment ago, with the flaws he had seen in the Library of Heaven's Path and his enhanced understanding of painting at the moment, he was already able to see roughly what was going

on with the painting, and many aspects that had bewildered him previously had become clear.

“I’m going to start now.”

Without wasting any words, Zhang Xuan dabbed his brush lightly into the inkstone, soaking it with ink. After which, he positioned his brush carefully before moving it majestically.

Hu hu hu hu!

In the blink of an eye, a painting appeared right before everyone’s eyes, floating peacefully in midair.

“What profound Suspended Imagery this is!” Guild Leader Meng remarked with a mix of astonishment and awe.

The unskilled revel in the commotion while the experts assess the mastery.[1]

Zhang Jiuxiao had pulled off Suspended Imagery previously as well, but he had only brought out the bare basics of its capability. On the other hand, the young man before him had managed to infuse a beautiful conception on top of the Suspended Imagery, a clear indication that he had achieved incredible mastery in the Way of Painting.

“Profound?” Guild Leader Mu was surprised to hear that Guild Leader Meng had such a high opinion of Zhang Xuan. He could not help but ask in curiosity, “How does he compare to you then?”

“To tell you the truth, even I wouldn’t be a match for him. Every single stroke of his Suspended Imagery further enhances the artistic conception that he’s trying to build, allowing him to create a painting so vivid that it feels as if it will leap out at any moment. He has already accomplished a level of mastery very close to that of an 8-star painter!” Guild Leader Meng said with a look of helplessness.

As reluctant as he was to admit it, the fact was that the other party’s proficiency in painting was far higher than his.

It was no wonder he was able to see through the crux of the painting in a single glance. In the Qingyuan Empire, there was probably no one who could compete with him.

“This...” Upon seeing this sight, Zhang Jiuxiao’s eyelids began twitching alongside his lips.

He felt as if the world had collapsed on him, and he was very close to suffering from a mental breakdown.

He could not help but recall how he had said that he would offer Zhang Xuan some pointers earlier. At this point, it could not have been any clearer that the other party had already achieved a level far beyond him in both appraising and painting!

To say such big words before a true expert... If it was possible for anyone to die of embarrassment, he was probably going to join the list of victims very soon.

Hu hu hu!

Before everyone’s astonished gazes, Zhang Xuan finally placed his brush down. A door stood right before his eyes.

“A door?”

“Why did he draw a door?”

“The view that we are receiving of the 8-star painting is actually similar to looking at the scenery beyond a window. While the mountain range in the painting may seem to be in close proximity to us, it’s actually another massive world within the painting itself. If one attempted to traverse through the painting with one’s consciousness, it would take an eternity to arrive at one’s destination. As such, it is imperative to first open up a door leading to one’s destination within the painting prior to extending one’s consciousness in.”

...

With Guild Leader Meng’s explanation, everyone’s initial astonishment swiftly turned into nods of realization.

The group that had gathered for the Appraisal Convention tonight consisted of the top figures of Qingyuan City. While most of them were not painters themselves, they still had a certain degree of understanding of the field.

The painting left behind by the Sorrowless Old Man had achieved the level of Evoking Vividness, and the striking

verisimilitude of the painting had left everyone with the misconception that the mountain range in the painting was very close to them. In order to enchant the spirit infused within the painting, it was imperative for one to come into proximity with it first, so a passageway needed to be constructed beforehand.

Hu!

After putting his brush down, Zhang Xuan placed his hand on the door that he had just painted and pushed it forcefully.

Huala!

The door swiftly imprinted itself onto the painting.

Hong long!

In an instant, the mountain range seemed to suddenly magnify right before everyone's eyes, and the freshly painted door seemed to open a passageway into it.

After doing this, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He turned to Wu shi and said, "Wu shi, I'll be going in now. I'll have to trouble you to protect me."

As unlikely as it was for anyone to assault him on this occasion, Zhang Xuan still felt that it was better to be safe than sorry.

"Alright."

Wu shi stepped forward and took a position by Zhang Xuan's side.

Reassured, Zhang Xuan finally took a seat on a ground before extending a sliver of his consciousness toward the door.

Upon entering the door, he immediately felt a damp air gushing right at his face. Paying no heed to it, he swiftly traversed forward, and before long, he arrived at the midpoint of the mountain.

White clouds covered the mountain peak, making it impossible to see anything beneath it. He extended his consciousness further into the clouds, and in an instant, his surroundings suddenly turned completely dark.

He knew that this was a result of the lack of sentience of the spirit infused within the painting. Thus, he began to enchant the space.

Hu!

He lit up twenty sparks consecutively before adeptly fusing them together. At this point, the space was nearly fully lit up, just a breath short from triggering the spirit's sentience.

Even so, the light still illuminated the scenery beneath the clouds, and the entire mountain appeared before Zhang Xuan's eyes clearly.

It was a lush mountain forest, not much different from the other parts of the painting. However, at the very center of the mountain, beneath the bright rays of the sun, a vague figure could be seen. Despite his faint silhouette, he emanated an aura that commanded the veneration of others.

This... Upon seeing the figure, Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed in astonishment.

He had seen the figure before.

Kong shi!

At this very moment, Kong shi was standing quietly on the mountain, exuding a peaceful and harmonious air. But at the same time, his figure felt a little indistinct, as if his presence was just a mere illusion that would vanish at a touch.

This is... a sight that the Sorrowless Old Man saw? Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly in agitation.

It went without saying that the Kong shi amid the mountain forest was only part of the painting, but... the Sorrowless Old Man had accurately captured the distinct aura that Kong shi commanded, and that was not something that one could simply conceptualize from mere thoughts.

In other words...

It was very likely that the Sorrowless Old Man had seen this sight himself, and it was such a striking sight that he could not resist painting it.

Wu shi said that the Sorrowless Old Man was an untalented individual in his earlier years. It was due to a sudden enlightenment in his 180s that his cultivation and mastery in painting abruptly soared. Is it possible that this was the result from seeing Kong shi's silhouette?

Wu shi had once told him about the history of the Sorrowless Old Man, and his history truly felt like something that had leaped right out from a fantasy novel.

For such a massive change to occur to him all of a sudden, there was no doubt that he had stumbled upon a life-changing encounter.

Perhaps... it might have been the sight of Kong shi that had granted him sudden enlightenment, allowing him to advance his cultivation and understanding of painting swiftly. Out of gratitude, he had decided to dedicate this painting to Kong shi.

However, anything that is related to Kong shi has great implications. He knew that trouble would come knocking on his door should others learn that he had stumbled upon Kong shi's silhouette. Or perhaps, trouble might have already been at his doorstep, so he decisively chose to conceal the secret beneath a layer of clouds. Nevertheless, it still did not stop tragedy from befalling him, Zhang Xuan deduced.

Having undergone four Celestial Master Teacher acknowledgements, it did not take long for him to connect the dots and make sense of the situation.

It was a mystery why Kong shi's silhouette had abruptly appeared in the mountain, but without a doubt, it was bound to be something huge. After all, Kong shi was the World's Teacher. All that was associated with him was anything but ordinary.

If news leaked to those with malicious intentions, it could very well spell a calamity.

As an 8-star painter, a Leaving Aperture realm expert, it was impossible for the Sorrowless Old Man to not know this fact.

But ultimately, this was still a masterpiece beneath his brush, and he could not bring himself to destroy it. He had hesitated

for thirty years before he eventually decided to seal away a portion of the painting. However, that did not stop death from creeping upon him.

If Kong shi's silhouette has appeared in this land, it is very likely that there is a hidden ancient domain similar to the Qiu Wu Palace located in this area. Let me take a closer look.

Having thought things through, Zhang Xuan quickly made his way toward Kong shi's silhouette.

[1] This is a phrase in Chinese that describes a simple general fact, an adage. It is saying that in a situation involving onlookers, let's say a dance performance, the crowd is mainly just joining in with the commotion whereas the experts are the ones who are truly looking closely to discern the skills involved in the performance.

1169 Bathing Beauties

The Sorrowless Old Man seemed to have had a clear view of the situation, and that was reflected in his painting as well. Despite being in the world of a painting, the area where Kong shi's silhouette was located was depicted in elaborate detail.

Very soon, Zhang Xuan arrived at the destination.

Before him stood a massive rift with white rocks scattered around the area.

The rocks seemed to be made of a rare material that he had never seen before.

Zhang Xuan was just about to enter the rift to see what was within when Kong shi's silhouette suddenly wavered, and with a light whoosh, he vanished without a trace.

Damn it... Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

He had thought that Kong shi's silhouette would at least be able to last a little longer, but it seemed like he had misjudged the situation.

Logically speaking, the silhouette should have been able to sustain itself for a much longer period of time, but the earlier forceful insertion of a door into the painting had destroyed its artistic conception, resulting in the erosion of its Evoking Vividness quality.

Forget it, at least I know about this rift. Now, I just have to figure out where this mountain is located!

Once he found out where the mountain was, he would just have to find the rift and venture into it to take a look himself.

There should not be many similar mountain ranges in the world, so it would not be too difficult to find it.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to fully enchant the spirit and leave the area, a thought suddenly came to his mind. Thinking about it, the copper-masked figure seems to be a little too fixated on destroying the seal. No matter what, this is still an

eighth level painting. It is bizarre that he is going to the extent of destroying an eighth level painting just to pursue something as elusive as this. I wonder, is it possible that he knows that Kong shi's silhouette is beneath the clouds?

In the first place, the copper-masked figure's desire to conceal his identity was a little suspicious in itself. On top of that, he would go to the extent of destroying such a valuable historical work just to find out what lay beneath the seal...

Wasn't he afraid that he would destroy a treasure just to obtain something insignificant in return?

Did he already know for certain that what lay beneath the clouds was something significant?

Regardless, if he sees that Kong shi's silhouette has vanished after the seal is released, he will surely be suspicious about the matter. Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

He could not tell how powerful the copper-masked figure was at the moment, but considering how he dared to act arrogantly before Guild Leader Mu and the others, it was very likely that he was a powerful expert.

If the other party were to learn that he had accidentally caused Kong shi's silhouette to dissipate, would the other party exact vengeance on him for the matter?

Considering that this is a matter related to Kong shi, it's best for as few people to know about it as possible...

It was best to take caution with anything relating to Kong shi, or else, he could very well end up in the same plight as the Sorrowless Old Man.

Since that's the case, perhaps I should make some alterations myself... Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before creating a brush with his consciousness. He leaped into the air and began to paint.

At this point, he had no choice but to do this in order to avoid trouble.

It did not take too long for him to finish his painting, and he heaved a sigh of relief. He sealed the painting that he had just

created where Kong shi had appeared earlier before returning to the clouds to finish the enchantment process.

Hong long!

As soon as he lit up the final spark, his surroundings began to tremble intensely. Knowing that he had succeeded in enchanting the spirit, he swiftly retracted his consciousness out of the painting through the door and back into his body.

Hu!

Exhaling a mouthful of turbid air, Zhang Xuan opened his eyes once more.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had come to, the copper-masked figure quickly rushed forward and asked anxiously, “How is it?”

With a pale face and a feeble voice, Zhang Xuan replied, “It was difficult, but I managed to successfully pull it off. However, I seem to have overexerted myself in the midst of doing so. If there were a hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones before me at this moment, I would be able to recover a little...”

“A hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones?” The mouth of the copper-masked figure twitched upon hearing those words. “I don’t have that, but if you have truly helped me unseal the painting, I’ll surely compensate you fairly!”

Even the Qingyuan Empire royal family only had a couple of concentrated high-tier spirit stones in their hands, so how did this fellow manage to ask for a hundred of them so unabashedly?

On the other hand, hearing that the copper-masked figure did not have any concentrated high-tier spirit stones with him, Zhang Xuan sighed in disappointment. Shaking his head, he walked up to the painting and tapped it lightly.

“Wake up.”

Hu!

Shortly after those words were spoken, the painting suddenly moved. It arched itself backward, as if a person stretching after

waking from a long slumber.

“This... He actually managed to enchant the entire painting?”

The mouths of the crowd twitched upon seeing this sight.

After stretching its back, the painting seemed to slowly scan its surroundings warily before abruptly dashing out.

“Humph, where do you think you are going?” With a harrumph, the copper-masked figure raised his hand, and the surrounding space was immediately sealed.

Half-Leaving Aperture realm!

Zhang Xuan was able to tell the other party's cultivation as soon as the other party made a move. The other party was a Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert!

It was no wonder the other party dared to snub the many guild leaders and powerful figures gathered within the hall.

Upon realizing that its escape route had been sealed, the painting could only return indignantly.

“Allow me to negotiate with it,” Zhang Xuan said.

He walked toward the painting and stretched a finger toward it.

As the person who had enchanted the painting's spirit, there was a special intimacy between them. As such, the painting did not avoid Zhang Xuan's finger.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan relayed a thought to it.

Weng!

Upon understanding Zhang Xuan's intentions, the painting suddenly shook itself, and the clouds shrouding the mountain range abruptly shuddered, as if a tornado was forming within them. The clouds gradually thinned, revealing patches of the world that lay beneath.

“It's working!” Upon seeing this sight, the eyes of the copper-masked figure and the crowd in the hall lit up in excitement.

This was the first time that they had seen such a seal, and to witness it being deciphered right before their eyes, even the

calmest of them all could not suppress their agitation any longer.

Geji! Geji!

As the painting continued shaking itself vigorously, the white clouds on it shuddered more and more vigorously. Before long, unable to withstand the intense shaking, it finally flew off the canvas and fell with a loud splat onto the ground.

Seeing that the seal had finally been removed, everyone quickly focused their gazes on the painting, curious to see what lay beneath.

Even Wu shi could not help but pay close attention to the painting at this moment. He wanted to see what it was that would leave the copper-masked figure so desperate to decipher the painting.

However, what lay beneath the clouds consisted only of lush greenery and glistening lakes. As beautiful as they were, there was nothing particularly noteworthy about them as compared to the rest of the painting.

“Wait a moment... What’s that?”

Someone amid the crowd suddenly shouted at this moment, and everyone quickly turned their gazes over once more.

By a rift near the center of the mountain, surrounded by countless bizarrely-shaped stones, a natural hot spring could be seen. Several beautiful silhouettes were currently soaking in it delightfully.

Too far away, those beautiful silhouettes were extremely blurred. Nevertheless, with but a glance, it was apparent that they were extraordinary beauties.

“This...”

The crowd had been wondering what kind of wondrous artifact or astounding secret would be hidden so securely beneath the clouds. Who would have thought it was a group of beautiful ladies bathing? They could not help but freeze on the spot.

It was too unexpected!

“I get it! The Sorrowless Old Man must have stumbled upon a group of bathing ladies while he was venturing through the mountain range, and in a moment of inspiration, he swiftly painted the scenery before him. However, he soon realized that it was extremely disrespectful of him to peek on others while they were bathing, and ashamed by that encounter, he decided to seal away a portion of his painting!”

“I was wondering why the Sorrowless Old Man would go through so much trouble to put a seal on it and ruin the artistic conception of his masterpiece. So, this is the true reason behind it!”

“Hahaha, to be able to paint those bathing beauties with such amazing semblance, the Sorrowless Old Man is indeed a passionate individual!”

...

At this point, the crowd could not help but burst into laughter.

They had thought that there was bound to be some kind of earth-shattering secret hidden within the painting, considering the effort that the Sorrowless Old Man had put into sealing it away, but surprisingly, what he was trying to conceal was just a dark history.

“This... Impossible! This can't be!” the copper-masked figure exclaimed in disbelief.

He had put in so much effort to acquire and decipher the painting, and yet... it turned out to be just a group of ladies bathing? The vast difference between reality and his expectations left him feeling as if his mind would descend into insanity at any moment.

“There must be another seal within the painting, right? There's no doubt about it—there must be one!”

The agitated copper-masked figure hurriedly rushed up to the painting and extended the consciousness of his powerful Primordial Spirit into the painting, wanting to see what had happened.

Hu!

Feeling the immense pressure from the elder before him, the painting leaped in shock. He quickly hid himself behind Zhang Xuan fearfully.

“Tell me! Is there still a seal within the painting!” The eyes of the copper-masked figure turned crimson, and a powerful soul reverberation rippled from his Primordial Spirit.

“Enough! Look at how frightened Little Painting over here is!” Zhang Xuan bellowed as he gently consoled the eighth level painting. After which, he turned back to the crowd and said, “Just as everyone has seen, the secret lying beneath the seal is a group of bathing beauties. It seems like the Sorrowless Old Man was peeking on others bathing, and unable to find a way to vent his emotions, he decided to pick up his brush instead. While it may seem a little dishonorable, it is perfectly normal for all humans to feel inherently attracted to beautiful individuals. It’s actually no big deal at all, so you need not get so agitated.”

Noting the other party’s attitude, it was clear that he knew what actually lay beneath the painting.

Facing such a situation, he could not help but heave a sigh of relief for his wise decision back then.

If he had not added in the hot spring of beautiful ladies to fill the void, he might have very well given himself away!

“Pardon me, I was too reckless.” Hearing those words, the copper-masked figure took a deep breath and swiftly calmed himself down. After which, he clasped his fist and bowed. “Ever since I discovered the presence of the seal, I have been wanting to find out what lay beneath it. Even though the result turned out to be a disappointment for me, I’m still grateful to you all for helping me resolve this lingering regret.”

Right after saying those words, he flicked his wrist, and a pile of high-tier spirit stones appeared right before him.

Even from a rough estimation, there had to be at least a dozen thousand within the pile.

“These spirit stones are a token of appreciation for your help. Please, feel free to take them.”

After saying those words, the copper-masked figure turned to Zhang Xuan. “Zhang shi, I am full of admiration for the astounding mastery you have achieved in the Way of Painting despite your young age. Here is a book left behind by the Sorrowless Old Man, named the ‘Ten Deciphers of Painting’. Detailed within it are the various painting techniques that he is the most skilled in. I hope that this will prove useful to you.”

After saying those words, he swiftly grasped forward and retrieved the painting before clapping his fist. “I’ll be taking my leave now. Farewell!”

Then, without further ado, he stood up and rushed out. In the blink of an eye, he had already vanished from everyone’s sight.

From the looks of it, it seemed like he feared that others would go after him for the treasure that he possessed, so there was not the slightest hesitation in his movements at all.

“...” Looking at the book in his hands, Zhang Xuan could not help but fall speechless.

The other party had mentioned earlier that he would be handsomely rewarded if he were to decipher the seal, but this...

What the heck was this?

He could not help but feel a little choked up within.

“Is that really... the Ten Deciphers of Painting? Zhang shi, it might be a little presumptuous for me to ask this of you, but will you sell the book to our Painter Guild?”

In contrast to Zhang Xuan’s speechless expression, by his side, Guild Leader Meng’s gleaming eyes were completely fixated on the inconspicuous book that Zhang Xuan held in his hands.

The Sorrowless Old Man was the most formidable painter from the Qingyuan Empire. While he had only lived for a short three hundred years, he had made great contributions to the Painter Guild, bringing it an era of prosperity.

Of the heritage that he had left behind to the Painter Guild, there was one that stood out—the Ten Deciphers of Painting. It

was a painting manual that he had begun working on in his later years. However, he had gone missing before he could finish the book, and mysteriously, the book had vanished from the surface of the world as well. The Painter Guild had devoted great resources into finding it, but there was not the slightest clue to be found.

Who could have predicted that it would be in the hands of the copper-masked figure, and he would even give it to Zhang shi for free!

“You wish to buy the book?” Zhang Xuan glanced at the book in his hand and instantaneously recorded its contents into the Library of Heaven’s Path. After which, he tossed it over generously and said, “Since you want it, I’ll give it to you.”

“I-is this really alright?” stammered Guild Leader Meng as he caught the book with his trembling hands. “Zhang shi, allow me to thank you on behalf of the entire Painter Guild! You are truly generous to give away a book that is easily worth fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones just like that! I am impressed.”

“What did you say? Fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones?” Zhang Xuan felt as if the world was spinning around him.

“Indeed!” Guild Leader Meng replied.

“Pardon me, but I won’t be giving you the Ten Deciphers of Painting anymore.” Zhang Xuan quickly snatched back the book from Guild Leader Meng’s hands.

“Pay up.”

“...” Meng Chong.

“...” The crowd

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In the end, Guild Leader Meng did not pay the fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones. After all, there was no way he could fork out that much money. After promising to bring Zhang Xuan around the Painter Guild, he quickly snatched the book back and hid it in his storage ring.

Zhang Xuan could not help but lament how the noble values of the past were gradually eroding with time.

“Zhang shi, we didn’t contribute much to the unsealing of the painting, so we won’t be accepting any of the high-tier spirit stones here,” Guild Leader Mu said as he passed over a storage ring filled with the high-tier spirit stones that the copper-masked figure had left behind.

He had gathered everyone here today in hopes of combining the wits of the masses to decipher the secret of the painting, but they had ended up contributed nothing at all. The case ended up being resolved by the sole efforts of the young man before him. While the high-tier spirit stones were the compensation that the copper-masked figure had offered to all of them, they were too embarrassed to accept any.

“Alright then.”

Zhang Xuan initially refused it, but seeing that the crowd was unwilling to accept the high-tier spirit stones, he could only reluctantly take it.

Actually, these spirit stones were not of much value to him. However, considering that he could possibly exchange them for concentrated high-tier spirit stones in the future, he chose to take them.

At this point, Guild Leader Mu suddenly stepped forward and remarked, “Zhang shi’s capability in appraising is truly exceptional. If I’m not mistaken, you are an appraiser, right?”

Considering how the other party had been able to sharply determine the year in which the painting had been created and

deduce the solution to deciphering the seal through analyzing its creation method, there was no doubt that he was a skilled appraiser as well.

Zhang Xuan nodded. “That’s right. I’m a 5-star appraiser at the moment. Actually, I was intending to pay the Appraiser Hall a visit to take the 7-star examination, but I haven’t yet found the time to do so.”

“With eyes as sharp as yours, there’s no need to for you to take the examination. I’ll apply for a 7-star appraiser emblem on your behalf straight afterward,” Guild Leader Mu replied with a smile.

At this point, he could see why even a prestigious figure like Wu shi would regard the other party as his brother.

With the other party’s capability, it was clear that he would clear the examination perfectly, so there was no need to waste their time on such formalities.

Guild Leader Meng also hurriedly stepped forward and said, “I’ll apply for a 7-star painter emblem on your behalf as well.”

Judging just from the Suspended Imagery that the other party had performed earlier, it was apparent that the other party’s proficiency in painting was far above his. Even 7-star pinnacle painters would struggle to be a match for him! Naturally, he was more than qualified to be promoted straight to 7-star.

“Thank you!” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It seemed like his trip here was not wasted. Not only did he manage to bring his painting up to the level of 7-star pinnacle, he had even managed to obtain two 7-star emblems simultaneously.

With this, he had finally gathered the supporting occupations required for his promotion to 7-star master teacher. Once all the emblems arrived, he would be qualified to apply for the nomination slot to the Sanctum of Sages!

“Guild Leader Mu, may I know where the library of the Appraiser Hall is located?” Zhang Xuan asked with a polite smile. “If it’s possible, I would like to take a look at your books.”

Since he had already come to the Appraiser Hall, it would be good to take this opportunity to collect all their books into the Library of Heaven's Path as well.

"Of course, of course." Guild Leader Mu nodded. "That isn't a problem at all!"

He was just about to lead the way forward when a conflicted voice sounded. "Teacher, Zhang Shi... May I trouble the both of you to help resolve this thing first?"

It was only upon hearing the voice that the duo suddenly recalled that there was still a certain figure whose head was blooming durians.

Over the past hour, Zhang Jiuxiao had flourished well. Another nine durians, along with a dense congregation of lush leaves, had sprouted on his head, and the tail behind him had grown longer and more bulky, reminiscent of a valiant tiger...

"Give me a moment." Zhang Xuan pondered briefly before whipping out a brush and penning down a prescription. He passed the prescription over and said, "Concoct the medicine according to the way I have stated and consume it—it should be able to destroy the spirit within your body. The process will be a little painful, but you must endure it."

Since the other party was unwilling to bare his soul open to him, Zhang Xuan could only resort to poison in order to deal with the spirit.

It was fortunate that he had gotten a close glimpse of the spirit earlier when he entered the painting, so he knew what kind of poison had to be concocted in order to kill it.

The poison that Zhang Xuan had prescribed was a relatively simple one, such that even ordinary cultivators would be able to concoct it. However, it was extremely damaging to the body, dealing excruciating pain to those who consumed it. Whether Zhang Jiuxiao would be able to endure the pain or not would be dependent on him.

If Zhang Jiuxiao felt that the poison was too dangerous, he could always choose to keep his head of durians. In any case, that would only affect his appearance; it would not make too

much of a difference to his physical functions. In fact, his transformation into a plant might even enhance certain functions of his...

Considering the fact that the other party was from the clan of his love rival, there was really no reason for Zhang Xuan to do this for the other party. It was already a great mercy that he had offered this much help in the first place.

“Thank you...” Zhang Jiuxiao took the prescription with a conflicted expression on his face. Nevertheless, he still bowed in gratitude.

After dealing with this matter, Zhang Xuan and Wu Shi bade everyone else farewell before following Guild Leader Mu to the library of the Appraiser Hall.

Appraisers were valued for their knowledge. In order to be a good appraiser, one had to have some understanding of everything, be it knowledge on other occupations, history, geography... Investigating the background of an artifact was the foundation to determining the authenticity of a certain artifact. As such, there were several dozen million books within the library of the Appraiser Hall.

Walking between the shelves, it took Zhang Xuan four whole hours before he managed to collect everything. By the time he was done, it was already late at night.

He swiftly compiled the 6-star and 7-star Heaven's Path Appraising Art and internalized them.

Before long, his understanding of appraising had reached the level of 7-star pinnacle. Even without the Library of Heaven's Path or the Eye of Insight, he was able to easily discern most artifacts of Saint intermediate-tier and below without any errors.

Returning from the Library of Heaven's Path, he began reflecting on what had happened earlier.

This was the first time he had come to an Appraisal Convention, and it had truly have been a fruitful trip. Not only had he managed to advance his knowledge to the level of a 7-star appraiser and painter and obtain the 7-star emblems of

those two occupations, more importantly, he had learned that Kong shi's silhouette had once appeared on the peak of a mountain. If there was a chance in the future, he should really investigate this matter.

Perhaps, he might be able to uncover something special.

“Zhang shi!”

As soon as Zhang Xuan walked out of the library, he saw Guild Leader Mu walking toward him.

Even though it was the middle of the night, it seemed like the other party had not gone to rest yet.

There was a young man following behind Guild Leader Mu with a slightly conflicted look on his face—Zhang Jiuxiao.

The durian head and tail that had been on Zhang Jiuxiao's body a few hours ago had vanished without a trace, but in place of that, his face and body were slightly swollen. Most likely, that was the aftereffect of consuming the poison. The swelling looked a little glaring, but it would swiftly fade after some rest.

After trading some pleasantries, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and took his leave.

A starry night sky welcomed him as he stood outside the Appraiser Hall. It felt as if someone had used a needle to pierce through the night sky, leaving behind innumerable holes for light to pass through.

The bustling streets from a moment ago had become a little cold, with nary a person in sight. Stretching his back lazily, Zhang Xuan began making his way toward the Combat Master Hall.

But before he could get very far, goosebumps suddenly rose all over his body.

He could clearly sense that someone was following him, but regardless of whether he used his Spiritual Perception or his eyes, he was unable to find the other party.

Hu!

Sensing that the person following him was a dangerous individual, possessing strength far beyond him, he swiftly executed the Heaven's Path Movement Art and dashed forward. In a single breath, he flitted over a distance of ten kilometers. But despite that, he was still unable to shake off the feeling of being 'eyed'.

Anxious, he turned around and saw a black-robed man standing not too far away.

For the other party to be able to catch up even though he had pushed his Heaven's Path Movement Art to its very limit—not to mention the fact that the other party was able to prevent even his Spiritual Perception from noticing the other party—there was no doubt that the black-robed man standing before him was a true expert!

This was the very first time Zhang Xuan had encountered this situation, and it left cold sweat drenching his back.

Nevertheless, he did not panic. He began assessing the figure before him carefully.

It was not possible to see the face beneath the other party's black robe, but his very presence seemed to meld into the essence of the world itself, leaving him with an impression that the other party would vanish at any moment.

Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight to get a closer look of the other party, but he was unable to discern the other party's cultivation at all.

In other words, the other party wielded strength beyond the Leaving Aperture realm Hall Master Xing... or perhaps, beyond the Leaving Aperture realm even!

When did such an expert appear in Qingyuan City?

“There's no need for you to be so wary around me. If I wanted to kill you, you would have long been killed.”

It was an extremely deep and resounding voice.

As nervous as Zhang Xuan was, he knew that there was no way he would be able to escape if the other party wanted to

kill him. Thus, he clasped his fist politely and replied, “Elder, you were waiting for me?”

It was shortly after leaving the Appraiser Hall that he had sensed that the other party was following him, which meant that the other party had probably been waiting for him.

But instead of answering his question, the black-robed man placed his hands behind his back and said, “To be able to sense me so swiftly even though I only leaked out a hint of an aura, it seems like you are quite a talented individual.

“I have been following you since sunset, and I saw how you managed to decipher the seal on the painting. Despite your young age, you have quite a keen pair of eyes. Not bad.”

“You have been here since sunset?” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in alarm.

He had been paying close attention to his surroundings all this while due to the happenings with King Zhongqing earlier in the day, and yet, despite his enhanced wariness, he had still been oblivious to the fact that the other party had been following him.

This was too frightening!

“If I may ask, I would like to inquire why elder has been following me all night.”

At the same time, Zhang Xuan secretly activated his Library of Heaven’s Path, but no book was compiled.

Until the other party executed a battle technique, he would be unable to discern the other party’s background.

“It’s nothing much, I just want to know if you have the qualification and capability for what you seek.” The black-robed man harrumphed as he finally raised his head, revealing the appearance of an old man in his sixties.

It was a foreign face. Zhang Xuan was certain that he had never seen the other party before.

Peng!

In the next moment, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt a choking sensation in his chest, as if some kind of force had struck him. At the same time, the space before him suddenly compressed together, as if someone was forcefully denting it, trapping him in place.

As if a caged beast, no matter how he struggled, he was unable to free himself.

“This...” Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed further and further.

The fact that the Library of Heaven’s Path had not compiled a book meant that the other party had not executed a battle technique. And yet, the other party was still able to wield such strength, rendering him completely helpless...

Just how strong could the other party be?

Saint 5-dan pinnacle?

6-dan?

Or was it 7-dan?

In any case, the other party was a figure whom he could not stand a chance against at this moment.

Despite knowing the deep danger he was in, Zhang Xuan knew that the more threatening a situation was, the more he should not panic. Thus, driving his Soul Depth, he began speaking with a unique aura in his voice. “Elder, if you are only seeking me to display your strength, there’s really no need for you to do so. I am a mere Saint 2-dan cultivator. I won’t understand it no matter what you show me.”

The gap between him and the other party was simply too great. The only thing he had that could possibly match the other party was his exceptional Soul Depth. If he could leave the other party in a short trance, he might be able to buy sufficient time to flee from this situation.

However, seeing through Zhang Xuan as if he was transparent, the black-robed elder chuckled softly. “Your Soul Depth is not too bad, but you’re still a little lacking to be using Impartation of Heaven’s Will on me.”

Those words immediately sent chills down Zhang Xuan's spine. With an earnest smile on his face, he swiftly waved his hand and said, "Elder, how could I dare do something as rude as that? It is a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding!"

To be able to see through his Impartation of Heaven's Will, it seemed like the other party's Soul Depth was beyond his as well!

It was fortunate that he had not recklessly forced his way through. Otherwise, the other party's retaliation could very well have cost him his life.

"You do have some wits, but it's meaningless against me," the black-robed elder replied indifferently.

"How could I dare flaunt my little wits before you? Elder, your ability to track me without catching my notice and seal my movements so easily must mean that your Soul Depth has reached a level far beyond my imagination. If I may request, could you display a battle technique for me?"

At this point, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. "I have come from a humble place, and I have never met a person as strong as you. I truly respect experts like you, and if you could just accede to this request of mine, my life would be truly fulfilled!"

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The black-robed elder harrumphed coldly. “Humph, you do have quite a glib tongue. Do you take me as one of those naive, young ladies who fall for your words easily?”

“Naive, young ladies? Falling for my words?” Zhang Xuan hurriedly waved his hands earnestly, denying the accusation. At the same time, an inconspicuous frown surfaced on his head.

He could vaguely feel that the black-robed elder was referring to something with his words, but he had always conducted himself properly, never getting involved with any women. What could the other party possibly be getting at?

If others were to hear that, they might just think that he was a playboy!

“I will just get straight to the point with you.”

With his hands behind his back, the elder slowly closed in on Zhang Xuan.

In that instant, Zhang Xuan felt as if a massive mountain was slowly making its way toward him, and the immense pressure that he felt seemed to sap the air from his lungs.

This pressure weighed on both his mind and his body, rendering him completely powerless. It was apparent that the other party wanted him to know the gap between them and force him to submit.

“Humph!” With narrowed eyes, Zhang Xuan drove his Heaven’s Path zhenqi, and the pressure on him alleviated significantly.

As powerful as the other party was, there was no presence more imposing than the heavens.

“Hmm? Interesting!” Seeing that the other party was able to endure his pressure so easily, an interested gleam surfaced in the eyes of the black-robed elder.

“To be able to endure my pressure so easily, you must have some kind of formidable artifact on you. It seems like you have quite a doting teacher there.”

“I am my teacher’s only direct disciple, so he does treat me quite well,” Zhang Xuan replied.

The other party was too fearsome. With his current strength, he stood no chance at all. Even escape seemed unlikely at this point. Thus, he could only place his hopes in his teacher, ‘Yang Xuan’, to deter the other party from doing anything overboard.

The black-robed elder looked at him and asked, “May I know whom your teacher is?”

Zhang Xuan nodded. “My teacher goes by the name of Yang Xuan.”

Upon hearing the name, the black-robed elder’s eyes narrowed menacingly, and he harrumphed coldly. “Yang Xuan? Young man, I still have a rather favorable impression of you. Don’t lose it by lying!”

Suddenly, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt as if he was standing above a sinkhole and an unknown power would consume him at any moment.

Gritting his teeth to withstand the devastating might crushing him, Zhang Xuan asked, “Lying? Elder, why would you say such words?”

“I have met Yang shi once, and he has already long retired from worldly affairs. As far as I know, he has never accepted any students, and yet, you say that you are his student? Are you honestly expecting me to believe such words?” the black-robed elder said with a threatening edge in his voice.

“You have met... Yang Xuan?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up in alarm, and for a moment, he found himself in a daze.

‘Yang Xuan’ was a name that he came up with spontaneously back then. In other words, it was a fictional character that he had fabricated... and yet, the black-robed elder was saying that he had met Yang Xuan?

It couldn't be that there was really a master teacher going by the name of Yang Xuan in the world who coincidentally wielded unfathomable strength as well, could there?

That would be too much of a coincidence!

“Alright, I have no interest in whose student you are. I am here only to offer you a warning. It's good to dream big, but a human should know his own place and limits. If you attempt to pursue things that are unreachable to you, not only will you bring pain upon yourself, you will also hurt those around you as well. By then... things will not be resolved with just mere words. And I cannot promise that those whom you associate with will remain unharmed in the process as well.”

“Know my place and limits? Pursue things that are unreachable?” Zhang Xuan was confused as to what the other party was saying. Just as he was about to ask about it, his eyes suddenly widened in astonishment. “You are... from the Luo Clan?”

The threat, coupled with the previous words about naive, young ladies...

Could the other party be Luo Ruoxin's family?

Only a clan as powerful as the Luo Clan would be in command of experts who could subdue him without using any battle technique at all.

The pieces of the puzzle seemed to fit together perfectly.

While he and Luo Ruoxin had never told anyone that they had gotten together, it was not surprising that a family as powerful as the Luo Clan would be able to uncover that.

“Quite a keen mind you have there.” The black-robed elder harrumphed, not denying the matter. With a lofty look on his face, he gazed down at Zhang Xuan as if looking at a mere ant and said, “By this point, you should be aware that she's the little princess of our Luo Clan. She carries heavy responsibility on her shoulders. I advise you not to have any thoughts toward her. Someone like you will never be good enough for the Luo Clan!”

“Someone like me will never be good enough?” Zhang Xuan subconsciously clenched his fists tightly together.

“Indeed. The Luo Clan is one of the top three Sage Clans on the Master Teacher Continent, and there is no one who doesn’t know that our little princess wields immense power. As long as she wills it so, anyone whom she favors will be able to rise to the top of the world. You might have some wits, and your talent isn’t too bad either, but if you think that you are qualified to get together with our little princess, I suggest that you take a closer look at yourself. A toad lusting over the flesh of a swan will never end well!” the black-robed elder sneered in disdain.

Who were they?

One of the behemoths of the Sage Clans, a top-notch power on the Master Teacher Continent!

On the other hand, the other party was just a bumpkin from a remote place. Even if he possessed exceptional talent, he was still nowhere near to matching up to the peak.

In the first place, they were existences from two wholly different worlds.

“Who are you to judge my worth?” The other party’s words left a surge of fury rising in his chest. He could not accept the other party saying that he was not good enough for Luo Ruoxin, and he raised his head proudly and bellowed, “So what if you are from a Sage Clan? A higher starting point doesn’t give you the right to look down on others.

“A day will come when even Sage Clans like yours won’t catch my eyes!”

So what if the other party was from a Sage Clan?

So what if the other party wielded strength far greater than him at the moment?

As a Celestial Master Teacher, he would eventually reach heights that no one had seen before.

Perhaps, in a few decades time, the supposed Sage Clans would be little more than mere ants before him.

“Many conceited fools have uttered such words in the past as well, but the Luo Clan’s position still remains unshakeable in this world.” The elder harrumphed with a cold glint in his eyes. “I have met countless talents in the world, and there are plenty whose talents you don’t even come close to matching. Yet, there was not a single one of them who managed to shake the Luo Clan.

“So, I advise you not to bring trouble upon yourself. I hate to pull my weight before my juniors or to incur the dislike of our little princess, but if you still don’t back down, it’s my responsibility to give you a good reason to do so.”

Hong long!

As soon as those words were spoken, the stars up above suddenly seemed to plummet from the sky. Unimaginable might crushed down on Zhang Xuan, threatening to smash him into pieces.

Under the overwhelming strength of the power, Zhang Xuan found himself unable to breathe. As if an ant standing before a giant, he felt utterly vulnerable.

“Swear on your identity as a master teacher that you won’t see her, and I’ll spare you,” the black-robed man uttered coldly.

Zhang Xuan felt as if someone was grabbing his neck tightly, and the feeling of death encroaching on him felt more vivid than ever. He struggled with all his might, but he was unable to struggle free.

Damn it! This won’t do... At this rate, I might really die!

The other party’s strength was omnipresent around him; there was nowhere he could escape to. It was as if a guillotine was hanging above him, ready to claim his life at any moment.

While the other party had not shown any killing intent yet, he hated the feeling of having his life in the hands of another. It felt as if his entire existence was banking on the whims of another, and he abhorred such a feeling of helplessness.

His fingernails sank deep into his flesh, causing a stream of blood to drip down his hands. For the first time, he vividly felt

the need for power in this world. Without power, there was truly nothing at all.

Dignity!

Love!

Master teacher rank!

All of that was meaningless if one did not have absolute power to protect them!

Ever since his transcension to this world, things had always gone favorably for Zhang Xuan. While the situation might have gotten a little dangerous from time to time, he had always been able to overcome any adversity with his wits. This was the very first time he had felt completely helpless and powerless.

He could not help but realize that if the person before him harbored malevolent intentions, no amount of words would get him out of this situation.

For the first time, he desperately craved greater strength. Only with greater strength would he be able to embrace and protect those whom he held dear.

Zhang Xuan anxiously sent a message to Vicious discreetly. "Vicious, what is the strength of that fellow? Are you able to deal with him?"

With his current strength, he stood no chance against the black-robed elder. His only hope lay in the person who had once stood at the very pinnacle of the Master Teacher Continent.

"Master, his cultivation has probably reached Saint 7-dan. I have yet to recover my true strength, so I fear that I won't be a match for him," Vicious replied with a hint of anxiety in his voice as well.

If his master was killed, he would dissipate on the spot as well. This was the effect of the Soul Contract between them.

If he wished to survive, he would have to do his best to ensure the safety of his master.

“I have to find a way to make him execute a battle technique. Only with some information on him will I be able to find a way out of this situation,” Zhang Xuan replied, unsurprised by Vicious’ response.

Saint 7-dan, that was a level that had nearly reached the peak of the Master Teacher Continent. With such strength, even the entire Qingyuan Empire would be helpless before him!

Vicious was currently only a mere heart and a finger, so it was natural that he would not stand a chance against an expert of the other party’s caliber.

“I should be able to force him into executing a battle technique, but I fear that my killing intent might be a little too strong. He could easily discern that I’m an Otherworldly Demon, and that might get you into greater trouble,” Vicious replied.

Zhang Xuan gritted his teeth and replied, “I’ll give you the permission to devour Kong shi’s writing, so do it!”

Back on the Saint Ascension Platform, he had received Kong shi’s personal handwriting. Schemed by Lu Feng back at the Master Teacher Academy, a third of it had been consumed for his clone to act as Yang shi. To deal with Vicious’ finger, another one-third of it had been consumed. Thus, only a third of the original text remained in the booklet.

This was the last time he could use this card.

It was a heavy price to pay, but after consuming Kong shi’s writing, not only would Vicious’ aura become much stronger, he would also be able to morph his aura into that of a true master teacher, and that was what Zhang Xuan required to resolve the precarious situation he was in.

“Alright!” Vicious replied.

Kong shi’s writing, which he had kept in his storage ring, gradually faded line after line, and at the same time, Zhang Xuan felt a powerful aura surging within him.

Boom!

The following moment, an aura reminiscent of a rampaging dragon burst into the surroundings, dissipating the power that had gathered in the area in an instant.

At the same time, Zhang Xuan felt the invisible shackles around him vanish without a trace, as if a fish onshore who had managed to make its way back into the water.

“Hmm?”

On the other hand, not expecting the young man before him to suddenly release an aura so powerful that even he was unable to withstand it, the black-robed elder’s body stiffened.

Not daring to get careless before such a powerful force, he swiftly executed a defensive technique to ward off the aura.

Barely after he successfully protected himself from the burst of aura, the young man before him suddenly raised his head to gaze straight at him. Deep within his eyes, ripples reminiscent of a torrential river could be seen.

At the same time, a deep and ancient voice sounded. It was spoken in time with the movement of the young man’s voice, but eerily, the voice sounded as if it had come from the heavens.

“When have I grown so weak that even a mere Saint 7-dan brat dares to threaten my student?”

“Who do you think you are?”

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Boom!

The powerful aura that had burst forth from Zhang Xuan's body left the black-robed elder feeling as if the heavens and earth had shattered, and the sun and moon had fallen. In that instant, he thought that he had witnessed the end of the world.

Under the suppression of the overwhelming aura, the black-robed elder's body froze in fear as his mind whirred to a stop.

In just the blink of an eye, it was as if a deity had descended from the heavens. The inviolable aura that the other party emanated had dispelled any thought of retaliation in his mind. Not only so, he felt as if his knees would cave in at any moment, as if his body instinctively wanted to worship the figure before him.

It took a while before the black-robed elder could speak once more. With quivering lips, he asked weakly, "You are... Yang shi? No, that's not right. A will that Yang shi has left behind?"

For the aura of the young man before him to surge so abruptly, there was only a single possibility. In order to protect his own student, Yang shi had specially left a sliver of his will in the latter's body. Only in the face of absolute crisis would he show himself.

"If I didn't appear, were you going to kill my student?"

There was no difference in the external appearance of the young man, but it was as if another person had taken control of the body. Be it his disposition or his voice, it was completely different from before.

This was especially so for his gaze. Cold, impassive, and unfathomable, as if a lofty deity from the heavens. Before this powerful figure, the black-robed elder dared not move in the slightest.

He feared that the slightest movement could instantly bring death upon himself.

Even though he was a Saint 7-dan cultivator, he knew that before those who stood at the very pinnacle of the Master Teacher Continent, his strength was not even worth a mention.

Even the hostile intent from an expert of that caliber was too much for him to bear, let alone facing one in a proper battle!

Despite his trembling body, the black-robed elder asked with a hint of doubt in his voice, “Are you really... Yang shi?”

He had once had the honor of meeting Yang shi, and the latter’s voice did not sound like that. On top of that, his aura felt a little different as well. It did not seem likely that they were the same person.

“Luo Chengxin, are you doubting me?”

The young man took a step forward.

Huala!

In an instant, the aura intensified, and the surrounding air crackled furiously. It was as if even the world was unable to withstand the overwhelming strength emanated by the young man before him.

“I dare not!”

The face of the black-robed elder paled, and he quickly clasped his fist and lowered his head respectfully. At this point, he did not even dare to breathe loudly.

He had only felt such overwhelming pressure from the old ancestor. Who could have thought that the other party wielded such immense strength as well?

And more importantly, he was certain that he had never said his name throughout the entire encounter, not even once! Yet, the other party was still able to identify him correctly. This meant that the other party knew who he was!

To call himself Yang Xuan on top of that... could he really be that legendary figure?

But... he had only met that legendary figure once, and before that figure, he was even less than an ant. It was only because of the old ancestor that he had been able to meet that figure,

and he did not even dare to report his name for fear that he would sully the other party's ears.

So how could the other party possibly know his name?

“You dare not? It doesn't seem that way to me.”

Completely different to the humble young man from a moment ago, the person that stood before him at this moment carried an air of disdain for all lifeforms, as if a being who had transcended the world.

“The Luo Clan's bloodline is powerful, and the ‘Art of the Dimension Silencer’ is a masterpiece. Despite your fortune of being born in the Luo Clan, you still managed to make a wreck of yourself. You have reversed the Yin-Yang of your San Jiao Yin Meridians and introduced filth into your zhenqi, resulting in your inability to concentrate your strength. Not only that, your Seven Acupoints of Primordial Chaos are plagued with turbidity, and three of them are even reversed.

“During your breakthrough to the Primordial Spirit realm, the shortcut you attempted to take ended up damaging your foundation, resulting in the corruption of your internal state. Yet, instead of devoting your time to resolving these problems, you chose to head down here to take advantage of my student. Is it because you think that you are too powerful?”

At this point, a faint, disdainful smile surfaced on the lips of the young man. “Shall I play with you?”

Shivers immediately ran down Luo Chengxin's spine as he quickly lowered his head in abject fear.

The terms that the other party had used, the San Jiao Yin Meridians and the Seven Acupoints of Primordial Chaos, would seem like utter nonsense to any other cultivator, but they left him shaking non-stop, as if he had heard something terrifying.

Those were the unique terms used only in their Luo Clan's Art of the Dimension Silencer!

The Luo Clan's bloodline granted the offspring of the Luo Clan with exceptional talent in spatial manipulation. In fact, its

ultimate treasure, the Dimension Silencer, was a powerful artifact that could bring about the complete freezing of space.

It was due to this reason that the Art of the Dimension Silencer was completely different from other cultivation techniques, tailored solely to those with the Luo Clan's bloodline. San Jiao, Seven Acupoints... these were terms that only the core members of the Luo Clan would know of.

Yet, the young man before him spoke of them so easily as if they were nothing at all, accurately identifying the flaws in his cultivation even! This had left his entire body turning freezing cold, and sweat trickled down his back endlessly.

If he had been doubtful whether the other party was Yang shi or not a moment ago, at this moment, he dared not harbor such thoughts.

Regardless of whether the other party was truly Yang shi or not, the other party was definitely of the same caliber as their old ancestor. Otherwise, it was impossible for the other party to see through the problems in his cultivation with a single look.

As one of the inner clan members of the Luo Clan, he had been guided by top-notch master teachers from birth, but limited by his talent, it was inevitable that he erred in his cultivation from time to time. As these errors accumulated, even though it did not hinder him from exerting his strength, it had capped his cultivation. At this point, it was already nigh impossible for him to achieve a breakthrough to higher realms.

This was not uncommon among those of the Sage Clans. After all, no matter how formidable a teacher one had, it was impossible for a teacher to constantly overlook one's cultivation, not to mention that even advanced master teachers were not infallible either.

Besides, if a cultivator could really avoid erring in one's cultivation, wouldn't he be able to advance through the cultivation ranks easily without facing any bottlenecks? That was clearly daydreaming!

But... while it was true that he had errors in his cultivation, it would be difficult for most master teachers to discern it. To be able to see through him with a just a glance, that was clearly the prowess that only 9-star master teachers wielded!

“I-I-I dare not to!” Luo Chengxin’s body trembled uncontrollably upon that realization.

“Humph, if I had not left a sliver of my will in the body of my student, I might have just lost a student today!”

The young man gazed down at Luo Chengxin coldly in his eyes, as if contemplating whether he should have the latter killed for his insolence.

“I... I didn’t intend to make a move on Zhang shi!” Luo Chengxin gulped down a mouthful of saliva as he hurriedly explained, “I watched our little princess grow up, and no matter how reckless I am, I would not dare hurt the person she loves, or else she would hate me for life! No matter what, the relationship between her and Zhang shi is impossible, and I fear that she will be hurt if the both of them get any further involved with one another. That’s why I chose to seek Zhang shi to convince him to step away from the matter.”

“Humph! Are you saying that my student is unworthy of the Luo Clan?” the young man said once more, his tone laced with threat this time around.

“That’s not what I mean...” Luo Chengxin shuddered in fear as he hurriedly explained, “Yang shi, you should know the current circumstances surrounding our Luo Clan as well. The matrimony between our little princess and the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan cannot be changed. At this rate, the both of them will only be hurt in the end. If that is going to be the case, it will be better for us to end it at this point in time to reduce the heartbreak!”

The young man narrowed his eyes. “Their matrimony cannot be changed? Is that due to your Luo Clan or the Zhang Clan? If it’s the latter, I’ll find their old ancestor and talk to him about the matter!”

Luo Chengxin quickly shook his head. “The betrothal between the two was decided twenty years ago. The little princess is also a victim in this matter!”

“Decided twenty years ago?” The young man frowned. “Tell me about it.”

“I believe that Yang shi should have heard about the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan as well. Even before his birth, he was said to possess the purest bloodline in the Zhang Clan. Twenty years ago, during the birth of that young prodigy, scarlet clouds covered the entire sky, and a sacred ray of light descended from the heavens. Even Kong shi’s tablet rose into the air, as if acknowledging the arrival of his peer.

“On that very day, the old ancestor of the Zhang Clan sought the old ancestor of our clan, and the both of them agreed on this betrothal,” Luo Chengxin said. “The marriage ceremony was scheduled for the third month of next year, and this matter can no longer be changed by anyone!”

“Third month of next year?” The face of the young man darkened, and with a frosty voice, he uttered, “Does a mere marriage ceremony really require an auspicious day to be chosen twenty years prior?”

“It’s not really a matter of it being auspicious or not.” Luo Chengxin shook his head with a bitter smile. “Rather, it seems like there’s something huge tied to it. Our old ancestor has already declared this decision to be final, and no one dares go against his orders...”

“Due to this matter, our little princess has caused a huge ruckus in our clan for quite a while, but as this matter was a promise between the old ancestors of both clans, she was unable to change anything. Eventually, she snuck out of the clan and sealed her cultivation such that no one would be able to find her. I was only able to find her recently, and by the time I did, I realized that she was already deeply in love with Zhang shi. That’s why I decided to talk Zhang shi into backing down!”

“Something huge is tied to their marriage? What is it?”

“I am not qualified to know of the inner secrets of our clan. I only happened to overhear bits and pieces of it, so I don’t know much about it either. However, it should be something very important. After all, as one of the top three Sage Clans, there’s no need for our Luo Clan to bow down to the Zhang Clan,” Luo Chengxin replied.

“Since it’s an engagement decided on at birth, is there a reason why the little princess of your Luo Clan is unwilling to marry the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan?” the young man asked.

Considering that it was a marriage decided at birth and that both clans were of equal standing, it was likely that the little princess of the Luo Clan and the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan had grown up side-by-side, so the relationship between them should not have been too bad. For the little princess to go to the extent of escaping from her clan in order to escape the betrothal, was she not afraid of falling out with her family?

Or was there something about the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan that was so repulsive to her that she would go to such lengths just to avoid marrying him?

Hearing those words, Luo Chengxin could not help but glance at the young man before him with a peculiar look. It felt weird for a figure as powerful as Yang Shi to be so interested in the gossip of their clan.

Naturally, he did not dare say those words aloud, and he quickly replied the other party’s question. “It’s just a guess on my part, but I think that our little princess might have rebelled because she’s unwilling to marry a person she has never met before. The young prodigy of the Zhang Clan is a rather mysterious figure. He has been in seclusion ever since his birth, and unlike most offspring of the Sage Clans, he has not attended the Sanctum of Sages either. Not a single person of our Luo Clan has seen him before, and this includes our old ancestor as well. Based on what I have heard, it seems like he is busy undergoing some kind of unique inheritance at the moment.”

“No one has seen him before?” The young man could not help but frown upon hearing those words.

To set an engagement without bringing out the person in question... the Zhang Clan sure was bizarre.

“Indeed. There are many rumors floating around about that young prodigy. Some say that he doesn’t possess the talents that he is rumored to possess. Some say that he has failed in awakening his talent, and out of embarrassment, the Zhang Clan chose to hide him from the world.”

Luo Chengxin sighed. “There are even some who say that he vanished from the world shortly after his birth, and the Zhang Clan has been trying to find him ever since then. In any case, there does not seem to be anyone aside from those of the Zhang Clan who have seen that young prodigy before.”

Thinking about it, the little princess sure was a pitiful person.

To have to shoulder the fate of the entire clan at such a young age, even forced to marry a person she had never seen before, it was no wonder she would feel so repulsed and rebel.

The young man harrumphed coldly. “The Zhang Clan sure knows how to put on airs. To make a betrothal between the two clans and yet hide their own offspring, I have gotten a glimpse into their shamelessness today.

“And that young prodigy as well... I really should teach them a lesson about etiquette!” San Jiao, also translated as Triple Burner, is a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) term, referring to the parts of the human body that govern the passageway of fluid and heat. ‘Advanced master teachers’ refers to master teachers from 7-star to 9-star. It’s a term used in the earlier parts of the novel.

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Luo Chengxin had spoken of the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan as a being who wielded unfathomable power in the world, but as the person who possessed the Library of Heaven's Path, Zhang Xuan was confident that he would be able to crush the other party with sufficient time and make him doubt his own existence.

For no reason other than the fact that he had caused Luo Ruoxin so much grievance over the past few years!

Anyone who dares to touch my woman will have to suffer my wrath!

Noting the killing intent in Yang shi's eyes, Luo Chengxin shuddered once more. With a wary tone, he said, "Yang shi, since Zhang shi is your student, I shall not impose on you any longer. I'll take my leave..."

If only that he had known that Yang shi had left his will within the young man's body, he would have never dared to come over and warn the latter...

"Go." The young man waved his hand.

"Thank you, Yang shi..." Luo Chengxin quickly turned around to flee. But barely after taking a few steps, he suddenly halted and hesitated for a moment before fearfully turning around. Mustering all the courage he had, he said, "Yang shi, pardon me for saying this, but I hope that you will talk Zhang shi into letting her go. Our little princess has suffered too much while growing up, and I really hope that she won't be hurt by this matter."

Those words left Zhang Xuan with a deep frown on his face. But knowing that the other party was really thinking for Luo Ruoxin, he shook his head and said, "I'll think about it. You may leave now."

“Thank you, Yang shi.” Heaving a sigh of relief, Luo Chengxin quickly left the area.

Watching as the other party disappeared into the distance, Zhang Xuan finally heaved a sigh of relief himself. That earth-shattering aura vanished in an instant, and as if a deflated balloon, he felt so weakened that it was difficult to even lift his own arm.

That was a close shave. I was nearly unable to hold on anymore! Zhang Xuan patted his chest in relief.

Even though Vicious was able to exert an incredibly powerful aura after consuming Kong shi’s writing, the fact was that he could not maintain the state for too long.

It was fortunate that his Soul Depth was only slightly beneath the other party’s, allowing him to avoid giving himself away.

It was also fortunate that he had dashed out of the city to a remote location earlier, or else with the abrupt emanation of such a powerful aura, it would have surely drawn the attention of the experts within the city.

Alright, I should hurry up and leave. If that fellow finds that something is amiss and returns, I won’t be able to deal with him again, Zhang Xuan thought as he quickly rushed back to the Combat Master Hall.

Not too long later, he finally returned to his accommodation. The tension in his mind finally snapped, and a weariness similar to a soldier who had just fought a war consumed him, lulling him into a deep sleep. However, he forced himself to remain awake so as to ponder over the information he had just received.

Even though he had managed to beguile the other party through his means, he knew that luck had a factor to play in it as well. Putting on a disguise before experts of the other party’s caliber was no different from dancing above a bed of knives; a single wrong move could very well have cast him into oblivion.

Had it not been for his superior mental resilience, he would have long been seen through.

Taking a seat on the ground, Zhang Xuan meditated for roughly two hours before the exhaustion finally receded from his body.

I need to possess the strength to stand against the Zhang Clan by the third month of next year!

Recalling the conversation that he'd had with Luo Chengxin earlier, Zhang Xuan could not help feeling greatly pressured.

Judging from the other party's tone, it seemed like the marriage was not just to create a bridge between the both clans; it also involved an extremely important matter as well, thus fixing it in stone. Not even the beloved little princess of the Luo Clan, Luo Ruoxin, had a say in the matter!

As talented as Zhang Xuan was, it was too dangerous for him to reveal the fact that he was a Celestial Master Teacher to others. After all, he could not tell for sure what the Luo Clan and Zhang Clan's attitude toward a Celestial Master Teacher would be, so until he had sufficient power to back up his identity, it was best to keep it under wraps.

Thus, he was not intending to play the card unless it really became necessary.

So, if he really wanted to marry Luo Ruoxin openly, he would have to swiftly raise his cultivation and his standing!

By the third month of next year, he needed to possess sufficient strength to stand toe-to-toe with the Zhang Clan!

Only then would the Luo Clan take him seriously and consider their relationship.

Otherwise, there was no way they would offend the Zhang Clan and choose a 'supposed' genius over a prodigy whose very birth had caused Kong shi's tablet to levitate in the air.

There is still another eight months or so. I am currently only at Saint 2-dan pinnacle. If I wish to gain enough power to negotiate with the Luo Clan and the Zhang Clan, I must at least cultivate to the same level as Luo Chengxin... Saint 7-dan, Zhang Xuan thought as immense pressure weighed down on him.

Even though he had taken less than a year to advance from the bare bottom to Saint 2-dan, he knew that it would be harder and harder for him to advance higher from this point onward!

Not only would it be harder for him to find the necessary cultivation technique manuals, more importantly, there was a lack on cultivation resources as well!

In the past, a couple of low-tier spirit stones were enough for him to advance several realms at once, but now... he was not even certain how long concentrated high-tier spirit stones would suffice for him before he would require pinnacle spirit stones!

And more importantly, advancing one's cultivation in Saint realm required one to cultivate one's soul and mind as well. Sufficient spiritual energy was only the minimum requirement to achieving a breakthrough at this point. Without accomplishing the required state of mind, it was impossible to achieve a breakthrough.

Tempering one's state of mind had to be done over a long period of time; it was not something that could be accomplished within a short period of time.

As such, even though it was only five realms, he knew that it would be extremely difficult for him to cover the gap within just eight months. Even he did not have absolute confidence in being able to pull it off! Thus, all he could do was work himself down to the bone and make every single second he had count.

"I must hurry up and cultivate... Ruoxin, wait for me. I won't let you suffer any grievances," Zhang Xuan muttered with unwavering resolution.

After his conversation with Luo Chengxin, it was not hard for him to imagine how difficult it had been for Luo Ruoxin to accept his confession back then.

Since the other party had chosen him over everything else, as a man, he could not possibly let her down.

No matter what, he was determined to have her marry him openly. He did not want her to suffer the fate that Mu Shi had

suffered over the past few centuries.

If the Zhang Clan stood in his way, he would just have to trample them!

With this newfound determination in his mind, he felt his mind suddenly clearing up. His soul seemed to have undergone some kind of change, and his soul energy became even purer than before.

Time to cultivate... At the very least, I should try to aim for Saint 4-dan before daybreak!

Sitting on the floor once more, Zhang Xuan began browsing through the Saint 3-dan and Saint 4-dan Heaven's Path Divine Arts, which he had compiled previously.

He had already successfully compiled them back at the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion earlier, but in a rush to attend the Appraisal Convention, he did not have time to look through them.

After internalizing the content of both manuals, he flicked his wrist and whipped out the 17 concentrated high-tier spirit stones that he had obtained from Chu Tianxing.

At his current level, even high-tier spirit stones were no longer effective on him anymore.

Calming his mind, he drove the zhenqi in his body before turning his consciousness toward his Origin Core.

Saint 3-dan Embryonic Soul realm was also known as the Origin Soul realm, and it served to fuse one's Origin Core with one's soul to create an embryonic Primordial Spirit.

The hardest aspect in this breakthrough was to shatter one's Origin Core and facilitate its fusion with one's soul in order to create the embryo.

There were many cultivators who were unable to overcome in this challenge, resulting in the stagnation of their cultivation.

Having cultivated the Heaven's Path Divine Art, even though bottlenecks were pretty much nonexistent in his cultivation, it proved to be a problem for him at this point. As his Origin Core had been tempered to the level of perfection, it was

incomparably resilient. It would take a lot more effort for him to shatter his Origin Core compared to other cultivators.

Soul!

With a thought, Zhang Xuan channeled his soul toward his Origin Core.

There were two steps to achieving a breakthrough to the Embryonic Soul realm.

Firstly, the cultivator had to fuse their soul together with their Origin Core. Secondly, the cultivator had to shatter the fused Origin Core and facilitate its development into an embryo.

According to the description in the Heaven's Path Divine Art, I just have to open a small door in the Origin Core to fuse my soul together with my Origin Core.

Going through the content of the Saint 3-dan Heaven's Path Divine Art, Zhang Xuan focused his attention on his Origin Core and created a small passageway in it.

After which, his soul swiftly dived into the passageway to enter his Origin Core.

Kacha!

But barely after diving in, its movements suddenly came to an abrupt halt.

This is bad... My soul is stuck!

Zhang Xuan's soul was simply too big. After undergoing the Saint Ascension Ordeal, it had returned to its original size of ten meters. While his Origin Core was much stronger than that of other cultivators, it was still too small to house his soul!

He had never thought that he would face such a problem in his cultivation.

While it was possible for one to morph the size of one's soul, there was a limit to doing so. This was just like how an elephant would never fit into a walnut no matter how it squeezed itself together.

After struggling for a very long to no avail, Zhang Xuan could only retract his trapped soul with a conflicted look on his face.

He already had the required concentrated high-tier spirit stones, and his Heaven's Path Divine Art had also been perfected, but... his soul had turned out to be too big to enter his Origin Core! If that was the case, he would not even be able to complete the first step of his breakthrough.

At this rate, would he be unable to even achieve a breakthrough to Saint 3-dan?

What should I do...

Zhang Xuan gave it a few more tries, but each time, his soul ended up being stuck without fail. There was even one instance when he was nearly unable to pull out his trapped soul. At this point, he felt like he was going to burst into tears.

It had not been easy for him to gather so much drive to cultivate, and he had put his mind to achieving a double breakthrough to the Primordial Spirit realm... but he had already encountered a bump at the very first step of his cultivation.

There's no error in the Heaven's Path Divine Art, but due to me cultivating my soul, it's not suitable for my current state... Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella.

In the previous realms, the cultivation of his zhenqi and soul were separate, so he had not faced such a problem to date.

But the Embryonic Soul realm required the fusion of the both of them.

Typically speaking, zhenqi cultivation and soul cultivation were considered two different branches. Both paths would lead to the peak, so there was little point in pursuing both paths simultaneously.

Furthermore, the flaws in the cultivation techniques of the soul oracles made it impossible for one to cultivate both simultaneously.

By perfecting the cultivation techniques of the soul oracles, Zhang Xuan had managed to achieve the impossible, developing his physical body and soul simultaneously. There had not been many problems in the earlier stages, but it was proving to be a problem for him at this moment.

What should I do now?

Retracting his consciousness from his dantian, Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in frustration.

This was the first time he had encountered such a situation.

In the past, he had been able to advance easily just by compiling the knowledge of the predecessors through the Library of Heaven's Path... but treading on a path that none had walked on before... there was no one he could see for help.

It's no wonder Kong shi said that I have to pave my way forward myself if I wish to achieve greater heights. Blindly following the wisdom of the predecessors might bring me to greater heights in the short term, but it'll only narrow my future path, possibly bringing me to a dead end even. Perhaps, he might have even predicted the problems I would face in my cultivation!

Back in the Qiu Wu Palace, Kong shi had warned him that he should not just follow the teachings of the predecessors but seek his own individual path instead.

He had kept the other party's teachings in mind, but it was only at this point that he truly understood what it meant.

Walking my own path... how can I do so?

In the face of such a situation, with no one whom he could learn from, he could not help but feel completely lost. With a deep frown on his forehead, he fell into deep contemplation.

Walking one's own path was easier said than done. That was equivalent to venturing into uncharted territories, an extremely dangerous feat.

After a long moment of contemplation but still coming up with nothing at all, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

Should I head to the Qiu Wu Palace to take another look? Perhaps, I might be able to find something that Kong shi left behind that will bring me some inspiration...

Flicking his wrist, a sphere appeared in his palm. Unique patterns reminiscent of a map were carved on top of it.

Back then, he had kept the entirety of the Qiu Wu Palace in the sphere through fusing the map together with it, allowing him to bring it around anywhere he went.

Let me go in to take a look!

As the master of the sphere, he could easily open a passageway into it. With a thought, he vanished from the spot.

1174 Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel

Hu!

In the next moment, he was already standing before the tablet erected right outside the Qiu Wu Palace.

The tablet was a gigantic high-tier spirit stone in itself, and it had left him deeply moved back then that he had even considered stealing it. But now... high-tier spirit stones were already completely useless to him, so it no longer held as great of an allure to him anymore.

These words... they have actually reached the level of Evoking Vividness! Zhang Xuan exclaimed as he looked at the three large words, 'Qiu Wu Palace'.

Back then, his proficiency in painting wasn't too high, so he wasn't able to accurately discern its level. However, looking at it once more now, he was very certain that those three words had reached the eighth level.

As mere words, the feelings that evoked from them were unable to match up to an entire painting, but nevertheless, if one were to stare at it for too long, they might find themselves sinking uncontrollably into a trance.

Hm? Those words... Why does it seem like there is something strange about them?

After a short look, just as Zhang Xuan was about to take his leave, he suddenly exclaimed with a frown.

He didn't think that there was anything peculiar about those three words initially, but after staring at them for some time, he suddenly felt his zhenqi jolting within his body. To his shock, his zhenqi had suddenly begun flowing on its own accord.

It's the circulation pathway for the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm! Feeling his zhenqi flowing under the effects of

the three words, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but fall in a dazed state.

He recognized the circulation pathway which his zhenqi was moving at to be the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, which he had learned in Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's trial back then. But why would he have such a reaction just by looking at those three words?

Let me give it a try... Allowing his zhenqi to move freely, Zhang Xuan raised his palm and lightly thrust it towards the tablet

After resolving all of the flaws of the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, raising it to the level of a Heaven's Path technique, he had gained the ability to manipulate the strength of battle technique freely at his will. Even though he had struck the tablet squarely, the latter didn't sustain the slightest damage at all.

Weng!

As soon as his palm struck the tablet, those three words suddenly emanated a blinding glow. With a stagger, Zhang Xuan vanished from the spot.

When he opened his eyes once more, he found that he had entered another space. The space wasn't too large, and the area was filled with all kinds of inscriptions.

"Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel?" Zhang Xuan read the line of words right before him, and his eyes narrowed in astonishment.

When those inscriptions were placed together, they formed a unique secret art known as the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel.

Just by reading its content, Zhang Xuan could tell that it was an incredibly profound technique, far exceeding any other secret art he had learned thus far.

Could this be... the heritage of the Qiu Wu Palace? A thought suddenly struck Zhang Xuan's mind, and he couldn't help but gasp.

Back then, after being traumatized by him, Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's will ended up vanishing before it could reveal where the heritage was located.

Zhang Xuan had thought that the heritage was a gone case after that matter, but who could have thought that it would actually be hidden within a tablet at the entrance?

All who had entered the Qiu Wu Palace had headed straight for its deepest regions in hopes of acquiring the greatest treasure within it. What an irony it was for the most valuable heritage to actually be located in the most conspicuous and open place instead!

However, it seemed like the key to entering this place was to execute the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm. Without knowing the battle technique, even if one were to stand before the tablet and notice its peculiarity, one would still be unable to enter it and obtain the heritage.

“The Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel views the space of heavens and earth as two separate entities, and it seeks to manipulate the two through calculations made through the Number of Grand Transformation...”

While those inscriptions looked foreign to Zhang Xuan, for some reason, he was still able to fathom the meaning behind them.

“Similar to the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, this secret art is also divided into 5 dans. Those who have mastered the fifth dan will be qualified to stand at the very peak of the world, possessing strength not beneath mine...”

Taking the inscriptions into sight, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement.

Initially, due to his possession of the Library of Heaven's Path, he wasn't particularly concerned about obtaining Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's heritage. However, after looking through the inscriptions, he was glad that he had stumbled upon the heritage eventually. The Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel was truly a powerful technique. If he were to cultivate it well,

he would be able to gain a strong grasp over the spatial laws, allowing him to manipulate space skillfully.

With that, his fighting prowess could easily be enhanced manifold.

If I could just cultivate the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel to 2-dan pinnacle, I would at least be able to escape from Luo Chengxin even if I were to encounter him once more... Zhang Xuan thought in agitation.

So far, Luo Chengxin was the strongest expert he had encountered, a true Saint 7-dan expert. Even if he were to use all of his means, he still wouldn't stand a chance against the other party, and even fleeing was out of the question... But with the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, everything would be different.

Even if he were to just master the secret art to 2-dan, he would still be able to struggle free of the other party's spatial seal and make his escape!

However, it seemed like the secret art had an exceptionally high requirement on one's zhenqi capacity as well. From the looks of it, it seemed like it would be impossible to cultivate it to 2-dan without possessing the cultivation of Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle.

After scanning all of the inscriptions and successfully collecting them into the Library of Heaven's Path, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Let me see if I can compile it into the level of Heaven's Path!

Over the past few days, he had collected an astounding number of battle technique and secret art manuals. Perhaps, if he were to compile the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel with them, he might just be able to perfect the secret art.

Compile!

A book materialized before Zhang Xuan's eyes.

Flipping open the book, the knowledge contained within the manual flowed into his mind.

I have managed to perfect the 1-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, but I'm still a far way off from perfecting the 2-dan...

While he had only managed to perfect the 1-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, the results were well within his expectations. Overall, he was still satisfied with the outcome.

While the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel formed an entire whole, it was subdivided into multiple dans with increasing levels of profoundness.

So far, the most powerful battle technique he had collected so far was only at Saint intermediate-tier. As powerful as Qingyuan Empire was, the battle technique manuals that it had was still insufficient for him to perfect the entire Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel.

In fact, it was already a huge blessing that he was able to perfect the 1-dan of the secret art here.

Let me try cultivating the secret art...

Zhang Xuan swiftly internalized the 1-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel before backing out of the space within the tablet. He swiftly searched for a quiet location in the Qiu Wu Palace before whipping out his concentrated high-tier spirit stones to cultivate the secret art.

The Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel was a technique that granted one the ability to manipulate space, so in the strictest sense, it couldn't be considered as a cultivation technique or battle technique.

If one were to fully master the secret art, one would be able to manipulate space and traverse through it freely. In fact, it was possible to cover a distance of over a hundred million li within a single day through it.

All in all, the secret art could be divided into five realms, which were namely Compress, Traverse, Control, Creation, and Destruction.

One who masters the 1-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel would be able to compress space, allowing one to cover a distance of a hundred meters in a single step... If used

well in battle, it could allow one to catch one's opponents off guard and launch a surprise assault or escape from a cornered situation!

Going through the cultivation technique in his mind, Zhang Xuan drove his zhenqi, and before long, he entered a unique trance. In this state, his comprehension of spatial laws swiftly deepened.

A long time later, he opened his eyes once more and stood up. Then, he took a single step forward.

Hula!

His figure suddenly vanished on the spot and appeared at a distance of a hundred meters ahead.

I succeeded? Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Cultivating the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel wouldn't raise his cultivation, but it would deepen his understanding over the spatial laws. If paired with his Unbounded Treader, he would be able to flit from place to place like a specter!

With my current speed and grasp of spatial laws, I should be able to match even Vice Pavilion Master Tian in a battle...

With Zhang Xuan's current fighting prowess, he could already be considered an invincible existence amongst Primordial Spirit cultivators. Even so, it was still difficult for him to go up against Half-Leaving Aperture realm experts like Vice Pavilion Master Tian.

However, after learning the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel and gaining a deeper understanding of space, Half-Leaving Aperture realm experts no longer posed as great of a threat to him anymore. With his enhanced understanding of space, even if the other party were to use his Primordial Spirit to suppress him, he would still be able to easily struggle free. On top of that, as long as he were to play his cards well, he could abruptly appear before his enemy and deal out a lethal blow before the latter could process what was going on.

More importantly, after learning the 1-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, I am already able to set up some basic Spatial Formation. While the Spatial Formations I can create is

still severely limited on many aspects, it has the ability to isolate individuals within it from the rest of the world, as well as to... compress matter! Zhang Xuan chuckled in delight.

It was due to his soul being too big that he was unable to fuse it into his Origin Core, but with the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, as long as he could find a way to set up a Spatial Formation to compress his soul, his soul should be able to enter the passageway of his Origin Core and successfully fuse the two together.

However, Zhang Xuan's delight didn't last for too long. Looking at the powdery remains of the concentrated high-tier spirit stones on the ground, he couldn't help but rub his glabella and lament, As powerful as the secret art is, the depletion of zhenqi... is really a little unacceptable...

Just to cultivate the 1-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, he ended up using up the 17 concentrated high-tier spirit stones which he obtained with great difficulty.

Without a doubt, the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel was an invaluable secret art, allowing one to comprehend the essence of space... However, the depletion that resulted from its cultivation was equally fearsome as well.

Initially, he had been thinking that with the concentrated high-tier spirit stones he had at the moment, it should suffice for him to reach Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle at the minimum, but before he ended up expending all of them before he could even start. How stifling!

I really must find a way to earn more money... Zhang Xuan thought as he stood up and left the Qiu Wu Palace.

In any case, at least he had managed to resolve the problem regarding his soul being unable to enter his Origin Core. All he had to do now was to find a way to earn more concentrated high-tier spirit stones!

Ahhh, the days without money sure sure was difficult to endure!

But where can I earn more concentrated high-tier spirit stones? Returning back to his room, Zhang Xuan lowered his head and

pondered instead of anxiously heading out.

Even if he wanted to earn concentrated high-tier spirit stones, he had to have a concrete direction first. Considering that the Qingyuan royal family only had 17 and the Combat Master Hall could only afford to take out 10... Where else in Qingyuan City could he possibly find more concentrated high-tier spirit stones?

I should go and ask Hall Master Xing! Knowing that it would be futile for him to wrack his brain over it since he didn't have much of an understanding of Qingyuan City in the first place, Zhang Xuan stood up and began heading over to Hall Master Xing's residence.

By this point, the sun had already risen at the horizon. The brilliant rays of the sun pierced through the coldness of the night, bringing warmth to the world.

It didn't take long for Zhang Xuan to find Hall Master Xing.

At this point, the latter had already mastered the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra. Over the past few days, his Primordial Spirit had become even purer, and his aura felt denser than before.

At this rate, it shouldn't be long before Hall Master Xing was ready to face the Leaving Aperture Ordeal and push for a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm primary stage.

"Hall Master Xing, how are Elder Xu and the others? I hope that they aren't causing you any problem."

Yesterday, Elder Xu and the others were brought away from those of the Combat Master Hall, and given that a day has passed since then, they should have been settled down by now.

"They aren't causing any trouble, but... something weird did happen. Yesterday, Butler Sun happened to pass by their quarters, and shortly after, all of them suddenly chose to join the Xuanxuan Faction as well..." Hall Master Xing said with a perplexed look

The poison masters were far more compliant than he expected them to be, but if he had to point out something weird about

them, it would be their excessive respect towards Zhang Xuan's butler.

Sun Qiang's strength was unremarkable, but for some reason, the poison masters from the Poison Hall would bow respectfully to him whenever they met the latter.

As such, that butler extended an invitation to the poison masters to join the Xuanxuan Faction as well, and naturally, that bunch accepted the offer and became members of the Xuanxuan Faction as well.

But of course, that wasn't at odds with them being members of the Combat Master Hall, so it wasn't really a big problem.

"I see... Anyway, I'm glad that they aren't causing any trouble. They have been through a lot, so I hope that you can treat them kindly. They do possess expertise in a field that the Combat Master Hall is lacking in, so it would be good to have the other combat masters to interact with them, allowing them to learn from one another." Zhang Xuan nodded.

"That is my intention as well... Right, Principal Zhang, the other Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls will be coming over for a friendly spar a few days later, so if you have some time, I would like to invite you to conduct a few lectures for our combat masters." Hall Master Xing said.

"The other Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls will be coming over for a friendly spar?"

"That's right. They should be arriving in three days' time." Hall Master Xing nodded. Number of Grand Transformation is a Chinese term relating to the transformations of numbers. For those interested, it's the number 50 or 55.

1175 All at Once

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up, and he hurriedly asked, "How many Combat Master Halls will there be? Will they be... bringing many concentrated high-tier spirit stones with them?"

He was currently about to go insane from a lack of money. If the Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls that were coming over for the friendly spar were wealthy, he could try to think of a way to earn some from them.

As soon as the words 'concentrated high-tier spirit stones' came out of Zhang Xuan's words, Hall Master Xing could immediately guess what the other party was thinking about, and a helpless smile surfaced on his lips. "There are three Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls coming over. They are of the same tier as our branch, so it's unlikely that they will have many concentrated high-tier spirit stones on them!"

"Same tier?"

"Indeed. There is a total of eight Conferred Empires under the Empire Alliance. Four of them belong in the upper tier whereas the remaining four, which includes our Qingyuan Conferred Empire, belong to the lower tier. The ones that are coming over for the friendly spar this time around belong to the latter group. The friendly spar is actually a selection exercise for us to select twenty candidates out of the four Combat Master Halls for the opportunity to train in the Qianchong Conferred Empire," Hall Master Xing explained.

"In previous years, our Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall has only been able to acquire two slots at maximum, putting us at the lowest rank among the four Combat Master Halls. But this time around, seeing that our combat masters have made massive improvements after training with the Xuanxuan Faction, I hope to try to vie for a few more slots."

"Train at the Qianchong Conferred Empire? Is there some kind of blessed land for cultivation there?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Back then, he had headed to the Huanyu Empire in order to access the Cleansing Lake, which was said to be beneficial to soul cultivation. Could it be that the Qianchong Empire had something similar to that as well?

“Speaking of blessed lands, there is indeed one of them there. The Qianchong Empire has a sword pool, which harnesses boundless sword intent and sword art. If a cultivator tempers themselves in the sword pool, it will surely enhance their fighting prowess by leaps and bounds. As such, this slot is very important to our Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall. On top of that, the headquarters also reward the Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls according to the number of slots they obtain. The more slots a certain Combat Master Hall obtains, the more resources it will be entitled to!” Hall Master Xing said.

“Resources?” That single word triggered Zhang Xuan’s interest, and his eyes immediately lit up.

“Indeed. In the previous friendly spar, the Chongyuan Conferred Empire obtained the most slot, and the headquarters rewarded them with a hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones,” Hall Master Xing replied.

“You said... a hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones?” Zhang Xuan’s hands began trembling in excitement.

If he were to obtain so many concentrated high-tier spirit stones, it would definitely be more than sufficient for him to push for a breakthrough straight to the Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle!

“That’s right.” Hall Master Xing nodded. “To be honest with you, while it’s called a friendly spar, in essence, it could be regarded as a military display for the Combat Master Halls as well. Each Combat Master Hall will send out the strongest expert for each cultivation level and pit them against one another, and to the side that obtains the most victories, the headquarters will not hesitate to award them more resources. In a sense, it serves to motivate the subordinate Combat Master Halls and combat masters to work more diligently than ever.”

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

If one were to view the Combat Master Hall as an army, this friendly spar would be similar to a tournament among the different units.

In times of peace, competition could pressure the Combat Master Halls and their combat masters into pushing themselves to greater heights. Otherwise, without any concrete aims and goals for them to strive for, the morale and discipline of the combat masters could gradually slacken.

“If Principal Zhang can help offer some pointers to our combat masters and help them clinch the top position, I am willing to share half of the awarded concentrated high-tier spirit stones with you. That’s already the most that I can give you within the limits of my authority, so I am really unable to share any more with you...” Hall Master Xing said.

The young man before him did not just possess superior fighting prowess, granting him nigh invincible might among his peers, his comprehension of combat and battle techniques had also achieved an unfathomable level.

While he rarely offered any guidance to others, his pointers were always spot-on, leaving one deeply enlightened by his teachings. If they could really engage his help, the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall could very well surpass its previous results and reach a new peak.

It was with this in mind that Hall Master Xing had offered Zhang Xuan such generous terms upon seeing the latter.

“Deal!”

Before Hall Master Xing could finish his words, the young man before him had already interjected decisively.

Was there any need to hesitate over the matter?

What he was lacking at this very moment was concentrated high-tier spirit stones! Putting aside half of the total reward pool, even if Hall Master Xing had offered him just one-third of it, he would still have accepted the request without any hesitation.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had agreed to the request, Hall Master Xing heaved a sigh of relief. “It’s settled then! If nothing goes wrong, the men from the other three Combat Master Halls should be arriving within three days. Principal Zhang, I’ll leave the training of the combat masters completely in your hands, so feel free to do whatever you want. Don’t worry, I’ll order them to abide by your commands unconditionally!”

“You said earlier that the friendly spar is a fight among the strongest cultivator of each cultivation realm. May I know what the specific cultivation levels for the friendly spars are, and have the candidates been chosen yet?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“All in all, there are twenty candidates, and the cultivation levels range from Chrysalis realm primary stage to Spiritual Perception realm pinnacle—all in all, twenty cultivation stages. We have already chosen the candidates,” Hall Master Xing replied.

Chrysalis realm, Half-Saint, Nascent Saint, Void Pursuit realm, and Spiritual Perception realm, and each realm consisted of primary stage, intermediate stage, advanced stage, and pinnacle. This added up to twenty cultivation stages.

Each Combat Master Hall would dispatch their strongest expert for each of the cultivation stages for the friendly spar, and the ultimate winner in that class would be entitled to the nomination slot.

“Where are they? Bring me over to meet them.” Since Hall Master Xing had already chosen the candidates, the remaining part was rather simple. He would just have to find what each individual was skilled in and offer the other party pointers in that aspect so as to maximize the other party’s fighting prowess.

“They are currently in the training hall.” Hall Master Xing smiled as he quickly led the way over.

The training hall was located in the vicinity of the Martial Arts Division, and it was a place where combat masters sparred with one another in their free time. The hall was extremely spacious. There were four dueling platforms erected at the very center with a spectator stand at the outer perimeter. At the

same time, there were also seclusion chambers for combat masters to rest in between battles as well.

Even before entering the training hall, the sound of swift air currents could be heard in the air. It seemed like there were quite a few people sparring within the training hall. Excited cheers and anxious shouts could be heard here and there, creating a lively atmosphere.

Walking into the training hall, Zhang Xuan swiftly saw two combat masters clashing with one another on one of the dueling platforms. Elegant moves sprung forth from both parties one after another as their immense strength collided again and again, drawing in fixated gazes on them.

Surrounding the dueling platform was around a dozen combat masters. Whenever they saw a formidable move being executed, they would cheer in excitement.

Zhang Xuan took a swift look through the group, and to his astonishment, he found two familiar faces—Shi Hao from the Inner Breath Division and Jiao Tan from the Martial Arts Division.

These two were top-notch geniuses from the Combat Master Hall, so it was not too surprising that the both of them had made it onto the list of candidates to participate in the friendly spar.

“Hall Master Xing, Zhang shi!”

Upon seeing the two figures walking over from the entrance, the crowd quickly halted what they were doing and clasped their fists respectfully.

Hall Master Xing stepped forward and said, “There’s no need to stand on ceremony. I believe that all of you should be familiar with Principal Zhang, so I shall not waste any time introducing him to you all again.”

The crowd nodded.

In the past few days that Zhang Xuan had spent in the Combat Master Hall, he had paid a visit to all the divisions and caused a huge ruckus in each of them. They would have to have been living under a rock to have not heard of him.

A person who consecutively broke the records of every single trial in the Combat Master Hall, and by an inconceivably large margin at that, at this point, they were filled with nothing but admiration and awe for the other party.

“Our Combat Master Hall has high expectations for the friendly spar with the other Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls that will be coming here in three days’ time. In view of that, we have specially invited Principal Zhang over here to conduct special training for all of you. I expect all of you to cooperate fully with him, got that?”

“Yes, Hall Master Xing!”

Upon hearing that Zhang Xuan was going to train them, the eyes of the combat masters immediately lit up in excitement.

They had witnessed the astounding might of the Xuanxuan Faction with their very own eyes.

To be taught by the person who had transformed an ordinary Master Teacher Academy filled with ordinary master teachers into a power whose fighting prowess exceeded combat masters of the same cultivation... They could not help but shudder in excitement as they imagined how their fighting prowess would soar within the next three days!

“Principal Zhang, why don’t you come up here and say a few words as well?” Hall Master Xing invited with a smile.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. Without wasting any time on pleasantries, he flicked his wrist and whipped out some rope before saying, “Hall Master Xing, please tie my hands up.”

“Ah?” Hall Master Xing was stunned.

“Please tie my hands up.”

Hall Master Xing had no idea what Zhang Xuan was up to, but the latter must have had his own reasons for making such a request. Thus, without any further hesitation, he pulled Zhang Xuan’s hands behind his back and tied them firmly together.

Struggling a little, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction when he confirmed that he was unable to break out of his binds. Then, he leaped onto the stage and said, “Suppress all of your

cultivation to Chrysalis realm primary stage and... come at me together!”

After saying those words, Zhang Xuan swiftly suppressed his Saint 2-dan pinnacle cultivation down to Chrysalis realm primary stage before standing patiently at a corner of the dueling platform.

“You want all of us to attack you together?”

“Zhang shi, you intend to fight all of us with your hands bound?”

“Is this for real?”

“Zhang shi, I admire your strength, but to think that you will be able to fight against all of us with your hands bound... I have to say that you are really taking us too lightly!”

...

Seeing Zhang Xuan’s actions, the faces of the combat masters flushed crimson, and they could not help but narrow their eyes slightly in anger.

No matter what, they were the geniuses specially picked out by the Combat Master Hall to participate in the friendly spar, the strongest combat masters in their power class.

It was true that Zhang Xuan possessed strength far surpassing theirs, and one-on-one, they would stand no match at all. However, to challenge all twenty of them with his hands bound... Was he not mocking them?

“Why? You dare not accept my challenge?”

Despite Zhang Xuan’s provocations, none of the twenty candidates dared step forward. Thus, Zhang Xuan glanced at them leisurely and continued. “Since that’s the case, I’ll leave behind two footprints here. If anyone of you can make me take a single step away from here, I’ll consider it my loss!”

As he spoke, he stepped lightly on the ground, and two footprints appeared on the sturdy ground of the dueling platform.

“What pure zhenqi...”

The crowd widened their eyes at that sight.

Given that the dueling platforms would have to endure the might of the cultivators fighting above it, they had been constructed with the most resilient of materials. On top of that, there were also several seals cast over them, such that even Saint realm experts would struggle to make a mark on them. Yet, despite lowering his cultivation to Chrysalis realm primary stage, the other party had left such a clear imprint on the dueling platform just by stepping lightly on it.

Only a cultivator with unbelievably pure zhenqi could possibly concentrate their strength to their feet to such an extent!

“The purity of Zhang shi’s zhenqi is indeed incredible. However, to defeat all of us while neither using your hands nor moving your feet... even for an expert of your caliber, that should be an impossible task!”

After a short moment, a combat master suddenly harrumphed before leaping onto the stage. “Why don’t I test it out first? If you are able to defeat me even like that, we will go against you all at once!”

The combat master was none other than Shi Hao!

He was the young man who had suppressed his cultivation for twenty whole years to achieve a new record for the Trial of Inner Breath, only to be outdone by Zhang Xuan a few moments later. After that traumatizing experience, he had managed to achieve a breakthrough, and he was currently a Saint 2-dan intermediate stage expert.

Hearing Shi Hao’s suggestion, the remaining combat masters nodded in agreement.

As fellow peers, they were aware of the immense strength that Shi Hao wielded, and they trusted deeply in his capabilities. Through watching the battle between him and Zhang Xuan, they would be able to discern the fighting prowess of the latter with his hands bound and feet in place.

Geji! Geji!

After stepping onto the stage, Shi Hao wasted no time with words and swiftly suppressed his cultivation to Chrysalis

realm primary stage, just like Zhang Xuan.

“Zhang shi, please guide me!” Shi Hao said with narrowed eyes.

Raising his hand, he sent a powerful burst of zhenqi toward Zhang Xuan before charging forward.

Even before Shi Hao’s figure reached Zhang Xuan, the burst of zhenqi he had sent prior had already arrived.

Shi Hao knew of the strength that Zhang Xuan possessed, so he did not hesitate to devote his full strength to the burst of zhenqi. Under the immense might of the burst of zhenqi, even the sturdy ground of the dueling platform could not help but tremble uncontrollably.

1176 Infinitesimal Maneuver

“Not bad!”

Seeing how Shi Hao was no longer relying on brute force as he had done previously after the past few days of training, Zhang Xuan nodded in approval. Facing the other party's assault, he stood his ground firmly and tilted his body slightly.

Huala!

Shi Hao's palm strike flowed right past Zhang Xuan's shoulders, missing by just a hair's breadth.

This evasion was truly beautifully carried out. A split second earlier, and the other party might still be able to alter the trajectory of his strike to launch a different attack; a split second later, and he would have been injured by the other party's strike.

“This is... Infinitesimal Maneuver?”

Beneath the dueling platform, Hall Master Xing narrowed his eyes in shock.

“Hall Master Xing, what is Infinitesimal Maneuver?” an uncomprehending combat master asked doubtfully.

“Infinitesimal Maneuver is the act of precisely calculating the might, timing, and trajectory of an opponent's offense and making the corresponding maneuvers to neutralize the offense. Through doing so, one is able to dodge any attack with ease and even prepare a counterattack in advance, allowing one to turn the tables in an instant,” Hall Master Xing explained.

The fundamental principle behind Infinitesimal Maneuver involved dodging attacks at the very last moment so that the opponent would not have chance to alter their offense, and at a close proximity, one would be in a good position to launch a counterattack and turn the tables.

The theory behind Infinitesimal Maneuver was simple, but it was too difficult to carry it out in practice. Not only did one

need to have an exceptional eye of discernment and sharp reflexes, more importantly, one's state of mind needed to have reached a certain mark as well.

Ultimately, humans were living beings, not puppets that would blindly follow orders. Inevitably, a cultivator would feel nervous and uncertain when a sword was right before them, and there would be an instinctive desire to protect themselves and distance themselves from the sword.

“Even among Leaving Aperture realm experts, I only know of a very small handful who have reached such a realm, and even I have not reached this level yet. I honestly didn't expect Principal Zhang to have achieved this level,” Hall Master Xing remarked in awe.

“Leaving Aperture realm?”

The crowd was astonished. No wonder Zhang Xuan was so formidable, shattering all the records in the Combat Master Hall! His talent in martial arts had indeed far exceeded theirs.

While the crowd was still shocked by the matter, Zhang Xuan, who had just dodged Shi Hao's palm, began to launch his counterattack. At this point, Zhang Xuan was already close to Shi Hao as a result of latter's palm strike, and with a slight jerk of his shoulder, he lightly struck the other party's chest.

Hu!

Before Shi Hao could even react, his figure had already retreated into the distance before crashing onto the ground.

Shi Hao swiftly got up, and with a pale face, he clasped his fist and bowed. “I have lost...”

He knew that the other party had gone easy on him, or else things would not have ended so easily. If the other party had willed it so, he could have died from that shoulder jerk itself.

Zhang Xuan turned to the remaining combat masters and said, “Come at me all at once.”

Huala!

This time, the remaining combat masters leaped onto the dueling platform without any hesitation.

A young man amid the combat masters bellowed, “Let’s surround him and use our fastest battle techniques to overwhelm him. I don’t believe that he will be able to dodge every single one of our attacks!”

He was none other than Jiao Tan.

As the genius of the Martial Arts Division, he had a deep understanding of combat. With just a look, he was able to instantaneously identify what Zhang Xuan’s flaws would be with his hands tied.

The remaining nineteen combat masters swiftly took their positions around Zhang Xuan, and when a loud “Move!” was shouted by Jiao Tan, all of them executed their fastest battle techniques simultaneously.

Sou sou sou sou sou!

The loud whirring of wind sounded on the dueling platform. In that instant, it was as if countless arrows were raining down from the sky, covering Zhang Xuan entirely.

“Let’s see how he will deal with such a situation,” Hall Master Xing muttered as he stared at the situation on the dueling platform intently, not daring to blink.

Every member of the Combat Master Hall had learned all sorts of collaborative formations, which allowed them to collaborate with one another under any circumstances, regardless of how many people they had, thus synergizing their offense together and exerting a fighting prowess far beyond what they could achieve individually.

Despite having suppressed their cultivation to Chrysalis realm primary stage, the simultaneous offense of the nineteen combat masters was truly fearsome. Even a Nascent Saint would have been crushed into a lump of meat in the face of their combined might.

Intrigued to see how the talented Zhang Xuan would neutralize this situation, Hall Master Xing drove his strength as a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator, and everything on the stage seemed to slow down for him. He could perceive even the

slightest of gestures made by anyone on top of the dueling platform with perfect clarity.

Fist, finger, palm, head, leg... All sorts of attacks from the nineteen combat masters simultaneously fell upon Zhang Xuan. They were all the most talented geniuses of the Combat Master Hall, and under the incredible might of their collaboration, even the surrounding air seemed to have been thrown into a state of disarray, producing a series of sonic booms in the air.

Seeing the storm-like offense carried out by the nineteen combat masters, Hall Master Xing unwittingly imaged himself in Zhang Xuan's position, and his body shuddered slightly in apprehension.

Even with his current fighting prowess, he knew that he would not stand a chance against that barrage of attacks if he suppressed his cultivation as well.

Looking intently to see how Zhang Xuan would deal with such a situation, he saw the latter standing still on the spot instead, not moving in the least. It was as if he had not even realized the precarious situation he was in!

This attack could deal significant damage to him even if he didn't suppress his cultivation, but he still isn't planning to avoid it? Hall Master Xing was appalled.

However, in the next instant, his eyes suddenly narrowed in astonishment.

He realized that the other party was not standing still on the spot at all. On the contrary, the other party was moving so quickly and slightly that it was imperceptible to the naked eye. Even with his Spiritual Perception, he was only able to make out bits and pieces of it.

Hualala!

Due to Zhang Xuan's slight movements, the attacks of the combat masters ended up falling empty. Astonishingly, despite the encirclement that they had put up, they were not able to land even a single blow on the unmoving Zhang Xuan!

"This... This..." Hall Master Xing felt his throat running dry.

Back when he, Division Head Liao, and Division Head Wei had assaulted the other party at the Trial of Inner Demons, he clearly had not been that formidable. How could he suddenly have grown so much more powerful within three short days?

In this instant, it seemed as if the young man had absolute control over the space around him. Regardless of whether the attack had come from the front or the back, he could perceive it with absolute precision and move accordingly.

“Alright, it should be my turn now.”

At this moment, a nonchalant voice suddenly sounded from the dueling platform.

That voice carried a quality that seemed as if it had come from the primordial era, reverberating deeply in his mind, leaving him feeling light-headed.

Sh*t, this is a demonic tune! Hall Master Xing widened his eyes in alarm.

He was just about to warn the combat masters on the dueling platform when he saw that the eyes of the nineteen on the stage were glazed. It was already too late; they had fallen in a trance.

Huala!

Following that, instead of making use of this opportunity to launch an assault, Zhang Xuan swept a nonchalant gaze over the combat masters.

His movements were poised and dignified, reminiscent of an emperor assessing his soldiers authoritatively or a strict teacher staring down on students who had skipped class.

This seemingly simple gesture effected endless fear and deference within the hearts of the combat masters.

Putong!

One of the combat masters who had a lower Soul Depth could not take it any longer and caved in to Zhang Xuan's gaze. He knelt down onto the floor and pleaded for forgiveness. “I was wrong, please forgive me. I will not dare to do it again.”

While the other combat masters did not cave in directly, their bodies were wobbling on the spot, an indication that their minds were swiftly approaching their limits.

“There’s no need to continue the battle any longer. You have all lost.” Hall Master Xing quickly leaped onto the dueling platform to halt the duel. After which, he subconsciously turned his gaze toward Zhang Xuan once more to assess the young man.

Facing the assault of nineteen men with his feet planted on the ground and hands tied behind his back, he was still able to fend off the storm-like barrage of attacks easily. Not only so, with just a single sentence, he had incapacitated all of them, and with a gaze, he had forced all of them into submission.

This was too fearsome!

“Yes!”

It was only after hearing Hall Master Xing’s bellow that everyone finally recovered from their trance. At this point, their robes were already completely drenched with sweat. Facing Zhang Xuan once more, they subconsciously took a step back out of fear.

They did not even realize when they had fallen into a trance... If the other party had borne ill intentions toward them, they would have been corpses by now!

Paying no heed to the shocked combat masters, Hall Master Xing walked up to Zhang Xuan and asked in bewilderment, “Principal Zhang, you should have utilized the means of a terpsichore earlier, right?”

The other party’s words had been imbued with the ability of a demonic tunist, that he could be certain of, but that sweeping gaze at the very end... he was not too sure, but it deeply resembled the ability of terpsichores.

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Terpsichores... are able to command such a powerful presence as well?” Hall Master Xing frowned in incomprehension.

In his mind, terpsichores were scantily-dressed ladies who beguiled others through their dances, but Principal Zhang's gestures were reminiscent of a regal emperor, and his eyes carried authority that none would dare defy. Were terpsichores capable of doing this as well?

“The abilities of a terpsichore are not just centered around charm. If that was all there was to the occupation, Kong shi would not have allowed this occupation to be classified as a unique occupation in the first place. Those who have reached the peak of terpsichorean arts are capable of influencing others with just a simple gaze or gesture, granting them unthinkable fighting prowess in battle,” Zhang Xuan said calmly as he undid the ropes behind him with a slight jerk of his hands.

If terpsichores had to rely on their physical features and alluring dances to charm and attack other cultivators, they would have been unworthy of being one of the unique occupations.

As the saying went, ‘the greatest sound is silence, and the greatest form is formless.’”

If the heritage of terpsichores had truly been that shallow, there was no way it would have been able to withstand the trial of time.

“I am enlightened,” Hall Master Xing replied with his face slightly reddened in embarrassment.

To be honest, as a combat master, he had always looked down on the terpsichore occupation. He had thought that they were a shallow occupation that used their physical traits to charm others, but the situation had clearly shown him that there was no such thing as an occupation being unworthy of respect; there were only people who were unworthy of respect.

Turning his attention away from Hall Master Xing, Zhang Xuan turned to the candidates once more and said, “Despite coming at me together, none of you managed to touch me. Is there anyone who disagrees with the results and would like to give it another go?”

“We dare not...”

“We are completely in awe of you!”

“Zhang shi, we beseech you to teach us well!”

...

The crowd looked at Zhang Xuan with impassioned, fiery eyes.

If they had only been impressed by Zhang Xuan’s talent previously, after that battle, they had no choice but to acknowledge that they were inferior to the young man in every respect.

It was almost as if they lived in two different worlds.

To be able to learn from a person like that was indubitably something extremely fortunate.

“Un.” Seeing that the attitudes of the crowd had changed, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

The reason he had chosen to have his hands and feet bound to fight with those combat masters was not to show off but to shake their confidence and win their trust instead.

This would be extremely important if he wanted to induce a metamorphosis in them within just three days.

“Since no one else wants to spar with me, I’ll begin the training then. I’ll allocate each of you a task to accomplish, and you must complete it within three days. If you fail... don’t blame me for not going easy on you!”

The crowd nodded. “Yes!”

“Un. You are different from my Xuanxuan Faction. Most members of my Xuanxuan Faction are beginners in combat when I first encountered them, so I could imprint my interpretation of combat on them easily. On the other hand, you guys have plenty of combat experience, and you have already forged your own interpretation of combat. It’s inevitable that there might be some collisions between my interpretation and yours, so lecturing you will likely have minimal effects on your improvement. Thus, I can only resort to another method.”

At this point, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist to take out a few pieces of paper before swiftly drafting up twenty different training regimes.

“Alright, I have specially designed these training regimes for your individual conditions, and I want you to follow them strictly!”

The combat masters took the training regimes from Zhang Xuan and swiftly browsed through it. A moment later, their eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets from shock.

1177 Eccentric Training Regimes

In the Elder Hall of the Combat Master Hall...

“Hall Master Xing has gone to find Principal Zhang?”
Division Head Wei frowned.

Division Head Liao nodded. “Indeed. If I’m not mistaken, Principal Zhang should have started training our combat masters by now.”

“With Principal Zhang’s help, I am reassured. Even average master teachers in the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy have become experts on par with us, combat masters, after just a few sessions of tutelage; his capabilities are truly nothing short of being phenomenal!”

“My thoughts exactly! It might just be three short days, but with his help, the fighting prowess of our twenty candidates would surely advance by leaps and bounds. Perhaps, we might really be able to bring about a miracle this time around,”
Division Head Liao remarked.

Having interacted with the Xuanxuan Faction previously, he had a clear understanding of how frighteningly effective Zhang Xuan’s teachings could be. In just a few short months, not only was the fighting prowess of the Xuanxuan Faction enhanced significantly, their comprehension of combat had also achieved a level comparable or perhaps even exceeding theirs!

“Shall we secretly take a look at how the training is going?”
Division Head Wei proposed out of curiosity.

“Secretly take a look?”

“Un. To be honest, I’m interested to see how Principal Zhang intends to train that lot. If we could learn a thing or two from him, we could emulate his methods and groom generation

after generation of powerful combat masters!” Division Head Wei stroked his beard with an excited gleam in his eyes.

“Your words do makes sense... Alright, let’s head over there together!” Moved by the idea as well, Division Head Liao stood up.

The training regimes that Zhang Xuan had prepared for the combat masters were not confidential, and as a division head of the Combat Master Hall, it was not a big deal for them to ‘watch over’ the training of the combat masters anyway.

Thus, the duo hurriedly made their way over to the training hall.

“Hmm? Why is the door open?”

The first thing that they noticed upon arriving in the vicinity of the training hall was that its massive doors were wide open. Typically speaking, when a training session was in place, the doors should have been tightly shut.

Glancing at one another in confusion, the duo walked into the training hall, only to find that there was not a single silhouette to be found in the vast room. It was as if the twenty candidates had vanished into thin air.

“Where are they?”

The two division heads looked at one another in bewilderment.

They had been informed earlier that the special training would be conducted in the training hall, so they had expected to see a lecture when they walked in. But this... did they change the location at the last moment or something?

The duo scanned every nook and cranny of the training hall, but none of the twenty candidates were in sight. A moment later, Division Head Wei raised his finger toward one of the isolated chambers and said, “Why don’t we ask the cleaner over there? He might know a thing or two.”

Following Division Head Wei’s finger, Division Head Liao saw a cleaner dressed in dirty clothes scrubbing a toilet bowl within the isolated chamber earnestly.

“This friend over here, did you happen to see a group of combat masters training...”

Before Division Head Wei could finish his words, the cleaner scrubbing the toilet bowl suddenly turned around, and upon getting a clear look of the other party's face, his lips suddenly began twitching

He was one of the candidates who would be representing their Combat Master Hall in the friendly spar, Shi Hao!

Through the exceptionally vast capacity and dense zhenqi that Shi Hao possessed, he had become a famous figure throughout the Combat Master Hall. For such a figure to be scrubbing toilet bowls... and not to mention, the friendly spar was only three days away. He should have been cultivating at that moment!

Upon seeing the duo, Shi Hao quickly clasped his fist respectfully. “Division Head Wei, Division Head Liao!”

“W-what are you doing here? Where are the rest? Didn't Hall Master Xing invite Principal Zhang to lecture you all?” Unable to hold back his shock, he shot straight to the question at hand.

“This is the training regime that Zhang shi has set for me. He has ordered me to clean every single toilet bowl in the Combat Master Hall within three days,” Shi Hao replied.

“Clean all of the toilet bowls in the Combat Master Hall within three days?” The two division heads widened their eyes in shock.

All in all, there were more than ten thousand people in the Combat Master Hall, and the visitors from the Xuanxuan Faction added another ten thousand to the number. In order to house twenty thousand men simultaneously, it was a given that there were many public facilities. Even by the lower estimates, there had to be at least a thousand toilet bowls throughout the Combat master Hall!

Was it even possible to scrub so many toilet bowls within three days? Taking a step back, even if it could be done, what about the friendly spar? Did Shi Hao not need to cultivate?

“That’s right. Furthermore, he has strictly ordered that I can only use this tool in the cleaning,” Shi Hao said as he raised the item in his hand.

The sight of that item left the eyelids of the two division heads twitching wildly.

Astonishingly, what was in the other party’s hand was not a scrubbing brush or anything of that sort but a feather duster!

The softness of a feather duster made it suited for cleaning dust, but to clear off the grime and filth that was firmly attached to the toilet bowl... Could it be done?

“Pardon me, division heads, but I don’t have much time to spare. I have to finish scrubbing all of the toilet bowls within three days, or else a pitiful fate will be awaiting me. I have to get to work now!”

After saying those words, Shi Hao decisively turned away from the two and continued scrubbing the toilet bowl before him diligently.

“Ah... Alright then, we won’t trouble you any longer. That... Do you know where the other combat masters are?” Division Head Wei asked.

Without raising his head, Shi Hao replied, “Jiao Tan is busy smacking flies buzzing around the bathroom outside, and Qin Xiao is trying to catch birds. As for the rest, I’m not too sure. However, they should be within the vicinity, so you can try looking for them.”

“Smacking flies? Catching birds?”

The bodies of the two division heads swayed from side to side as the vision before them abruptly darkened.

Shouldn’t they have been listening to a lecture at this very moment?

Weren’t the combat masters supposed to be attending a crash course to raise their fighting prowess as much as possible over the next three days?

But... scrubbing toilet bowls, smacking flies, and catching birds... It was as if the world had gone bonkers!

Perplexed, the duo walked out of the training hall with confusion clearly written on their faces. They were intending to search for the fly-smacking Jiao Tan and bird-catching Qin Xiao when they saw a young man following behind a female combat master with a bright smile on his face.

“Big sister, don’t leave. Why don’t we explore the intricacies of the human body together...”

Pah!

“Hey! If you are unwilling, just say so. There’s no need to resort to violence! That big brother over there, are you interested in exploring the intricacies of the human body together?”

“Scram!”

“Roger that!”

Upon seeing this sight, Division Head Wei subconsciously turned his gaze to Division Head Liao, and just as he had expected, the latter’s lips were twitching wildly, and his face was so reddened that it seemed as if he would burst into tears at any moment.

“If I’m not mistaken, that young man over there is your student, Lu Jianling, right?”

“That’s indeed my student. He has always been a rather shy and introverted person, so why... would he be chasing after ladies and uttering such brazen words? Not to mention, why in the world is he chasing after men as well?” Division Head Liao covered his face from the utter shame as he instinctively walked away in a different direction.

He was afraid that his student would actually run up to him and invite him to explore the intricacies of the human body together. His old heart would not have been able to take that blow!

On the other hand, Division Head Wei looked at the sight a little longer and gulped down a mouthful of saliva before catching up with Division Head Liao.

The duo continued walking forward, and before long, they saw a young man standing before a tree, driving his zhenqi furiously. He seemed to be undergoing some kind of intense training.

“This should be Dong Rui from the Guardian Division. He has managed to temper his physical body to an astonishing degree, such that swords and sabers will struggle to leave a scratch on his body,” Division Head Wei remarked with a nod.

It was gladdening to see someone normal among the insanity.

Otherwise, if they were to continue seeing more madness before them, they feared that they would suffer a mental breakdown soon.

“Un.” Division Head Liao heaved a sigh of relief.

He was just about to continue speaking when Dong Rui suddenly finished conditioning himself. He began scrambling up the tree with his four limbs, and upon reaching the very top, he... let go?

Paji!

He fell head first into the ground, reminiscent of a carrot planted in the earth.

Putong!

Dong Rui had to struggle a fair bit before he was able to pluck himself out. He applied some medicine on himself before walking up to the tree once more, conditioning his body, and repeating the cycle.

Paji!

Once again, he fell head first to the ground, and this time, blood sprayed out of his head.

“...”

The two division heads felt as if they were going insane.

What were they doing instead of training?

These combat masters were geniuses who they had specially picked out to participate in the friendly spar, and the Combat

Master Hall had high expectations of them. Everyone was waiting for them to bring glory back to the Combat Master Hall, and yet, all of them had suddenly gone insane at this crucial moment!

Proceeding forward, they encountered more and more bewildering sights. One was sprawled within a bathing vat, acting like a corpse. One had buried himself in the ground, not moving in the least...

It did not take long for them to find all twenty geniuses, but it was like all of them had become psychopaths, carrying out actions that no sane human would ever do again and again.

Instead of the arrival of a miracle that they had anticipated, it seemed like a cataclysm had struck their Combat Master Hall instead!

“Hall Master Xing, what is going on?”

Unable to take it any longer, the two division heads headed straight to Hall Master Xing’s residence, only to see the latter staring blankly into the sky.

Hall Master Xing turned around to look at them with a deeply helpless look. “I... have no idea either.”

It was then that the duo realized that the head of the usually dashing Hall Master Xing was completely ruffled like a bird’s nest. There were dark bags beneath his eyes, as if he had not slept for a few days straight.

“Principal Zhang is the one who made the call, and he requested that I not interfere in the training regime. I also have no idea what he’s up to either!”

At this moment, Hall Master Xing was truly on the verge of a mental breakdown.

He had thought that Zhang Xuan would put their combat masters through some special intensive training, but the moment that he saw the papers listing the training regimes, he had nearly lost his mind.

Special it was indeed... but this was way too freaking special!

Are you sure that this can still be considered training? Are you secretly plotting the downfall of our Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall instead?

“You don’t know either? Then... are we going to just let him fool around like that?” Division Head Wei exclaimed.

“I tried talking to him about the matter too, but he said that... if we don’t trust him, we should have just trained the candidates ourselves. I also hesitated for very long before deciding to leave it be,” Hall Master Xing replied with a bitter smile.

In his many years as the head of the Combat Master Hall, this was the first time that he had seen something as mystifying as this.

But since he had asked for Zhang Xuan’s help, it was only right for him to trust the other party.

“But...”

The two division heads wanted to protest, but they had no idea where they should start.

A long time later, Division Head Wei finally found the words to speak. “Is Principal Zhang... really training our combat masters?”

“I have no idea either... but my thought is that since it’s unlikely that three days of training by us will make any substantial difference in the results of the friendly spar. Therefore, we might as well just allow him to do as he pleases. Perhaps... who knows? There might really just be a miracle!” While Hall Master Xing said those words, his shaking head was more than enough to show his skepticism.

Their Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall had been in a weak position for a very long time. While they would be dispatching their greatest geniuses to participate in the friendly spar, it was still questionable whether or not they would be able to obtain even two slots.

Since that was the case, they might as well place their bets on Zhang Xuan and pray for a miracle. Considering the

unthinkable feats that the latter had pulled off in the past, it was not out of the question!

“It seems like this is our only option at the moment...”

Division Head Wei took a look around, but Zhang Xuan was not in sight, so he asked, “Oh right, where is Principal Zhang?”

“He just obtained his 7-star physician and appraiser emblem, and he said that he would be paying a visit to the Master Teacher Pavilion to apply for his promotion to 7-star master teacher,” Hall Master Xing replied.

“Promotion to 7-star master teacher?”

The duo was slightly taken aback by those words.

We invited you to train our combat masters, and yet, after turning all of them into lunatics, you even ran off to the Master Teacher Pavilion by yourself!

Isn't this a little too much?

The two division heads looked up into the sky as well, and a very long time later, a deep sigh escaped from their mouths.

...

Just as Hall Master Xing had said, Zhang Xuan was currently in the Master Teacher Pavilion.

To him, training the combat masters was just a minor issue. What was more important for him was to be promoted to 7-star master teacher.

He needed that promotion in order to vie for the nomination slot to the Sanctum of Sages and find Luo Ruoxin. This was the only chance he had. Otherwise, once Luo Ruoxin was married in the third month of the next year, everything would be over.

Walking through the vast hall of the Master Teacher Pavilion, Zhang Xuan headed straight for Wu Shi's residence.

Due to him having cleared the Empire Building, he could apply for his promotion to 7-star master teacher directly without undergoing the examination. It would be troublesome

to explain that matter to the others, so he decided to find Wu shi immediately and have the latter clear it for him.

Before Zhang Xuan could enter Wu shi's residence, he heard the voice of an old man from within the room.

“Wu shi, if it wasn't for Vice Pavilion Master Tian noticing the trap laid by the Otherworldly Demons, our Master Teacher Pavilion might not exist. Yet, you had him captured over the trivial matter of slandering a 6-star master teacher? Don't you think that you are making a mountain out of a molehill?”

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“Pavilion Master Gou, Hall Master Xing of the Combat Master Hall and I witnessed this matter with our own eyes. There is concrete evidence to prove it!” Wu shi anxiously exclaimed.

“You said that there is concrete evidence to prove this matter?” The old man spoke once more. “As a master teacher, you should know better than to blindly trust your eyes! You have to carefully investigate the issue in order to discern fact from fiction, not to mention, this matter involves a vice pavilion master! If we go by your judgement and rule that our vice pavilion master attempted to frame a 6-star master teacher, what will become of the reputation of our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion?”

“This...” Wu shi’s voice grew slightly hesitant.

In order for the local Master Teacher Pavilion to maintain order in the region, reputation was of utmost importance. If it was made known that a vice pavilion master had tried to oppress a lower-ranked master teacher, the credibility of the entire Master Teacher Pavilion would be doubted, and they would become the laughingstock of the world!

Wu shi paused for a moment before responding. “Pavilion Master Gou, I understand that our reputation is important, but even more so is fairness! As master teachers, we should conduct ourselves properly and remain neutral. If we side with our own master teachers for the sake of our reputation, how can we be qualified to pass judgement upon others?”

It was true that the reputation of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion would be sullied if Vice Pavilion Master Tian was convicted for the current accusations. However, if it was discovered that their Master Teacher Pavilion had willfully sided with their own men, it would cast doubt over the

leadership of the master teachers over the Master Teacher Continent!

“Fairness? Are you trying to tell me that your words are the very embodiment of fairness? What I heard is that Vice Pavilion Master Tian has been wronged instead!” The old man harrumphed coldly. “Tian Qing, recount the matters that happened yesterday to me once more!”

“Yes!” Vice Pavilion Master Tian said from within the room. “It’s like this. King Zhongqing is in charge of the defenses of the city, and after capturing the vice head of the Hongyuan Empire Poison Hall, he managed to acquire critical intelligence regarding the Poison Hall and successfully led an expedition to eradicate it.

“On top of that, he also learned that there was a particularly formidable poison master known as Sun Qiang hiding within the city, and there was a very good chance that the latter’s existence could place mankind in danger. After investigating the matter, he found that Sun Qiang happened to be Zhang Xuan’s butler!

“Given that a master teacher was involved in the matter, he knew that he could not act recklessly, so he came to seek my assistance in the matter. Thus, I invited Zhang Xuan over to King Zhongqing’s manor in my name, but not only did Zhang Xuan refuse to cooperate with the investigation, he even forcefully freed Sun Qiang and made a move against the both of us...”

“Made a move against the both of you?” Wu shi’s eyes shot up in displeasure. “Vice Pavilion Master Tian, don’t you think that your words are ludicrous? Principal Zhang is a Saint 2-dan pinnacle cultivator whereas you are a Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert. Are you trying to tell us that Principal Zhang is so foolish as to pick a fight against someone more than two cultivation realms stronger than him?”

He could not tell anyone about Zhang Xuan’s identity as a Celestial Master Teacher, but that did not mean that he would not fight against anyone who dared to frame him!

“The one who has attacked me wasn’t Zhang Xuan himself but a cauldron in his possession. The cauldron is a Saint intermediate-tier artifact, and it wields strength comparable to mine,” Vice Pavilion Master Tian replied.

“That only discredits your story further. Despite being a master teacher, you aren’t able to match a mere Saint intermediate-tier cauldron?”

As powerful as a Saint intermediate-tier artifact was, without a person to drive it, it was unable to bring out its full prowess. For someone as powerful a Vice Pavilion Master Tian to be unable to match a mere Saint intermediate-tier artifact... wasn’t this a joke in itself?

“Fine.” Vice Pavilion Master Tian harrumphed coldly. “Since you insist that I have attempted to frame Zhang Xuan, let me ask you this... do I have any reason to pick on him?”

“This...” Wu shi are stumped.

“I am the vice head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, as well as a 7-star master teacher. In terms of standing, he’s nowhere near me. Do you think that it makes any sense for me to put my career as a master teacher on the line just to deal with a mere principal of a Master Teacher Academy whom I have no connections whatsoever with?” Vice Pavilion Master Tian argued.

This was exactly what had confounded Wu shi as well.

He could not understand why Vice Pavilion Master Tian would make a move against Zhang Xuan either.

A person who was seemingly superior to Zhang Xuan every way, at least on the surface... He should not have any reason to deal with Zhang Xuan!

This was the missing piece of the puzzle that he had been struggling to find all along!

“Wu Rufeng, what do you have to say?” Pavilion Master Gou said coldly.

“While I have no idea why Vice Pavilion Master Tian would deal with Principal Zhang, it’s a fact that King Zhongqing and

Vice Pavilion Master Tian were making a move on him when we arrived on the scene. If we were just a second slower, Principal Zhang would have been a dead man by now! Countless master teachers and combat masters witnessed that with their own eyes, so if Pavilion Master Gou doubts my words, I can bring them over to testify before you!

“Furthermore, the vice head of the Poison Hall whom Vice Pavilion Master Tian spoke about has already confessed that King Zhongqing and Vice Pavilion Master Tian forced him into complying with them to frame Principal Zhang!”

“Is the vice head of the Poison Hall you spoke about Ming Zhen?” Pavilion Master Gou asked.

“That’s right!”

Pavilion Master Gou harrumphed coldly. “He died last night!”

“He’s dead? But he’s in the prison cell of the Master Teacher Pavilion... How could he have died?” Wu shi could not believe his ears.

“How am I supposed to know that? You were the one who captured him, and now you are telling me you do not know why he died in the Master Teacher Pavilion. Don’t you think that you should be the one explaining the matter to me?” Pavilion Master Gou replied in a frosty tone.

“Pavilion Master Gou, are you... doubting me?” Wu shi’s eyes widened in disbelief.

“It’s not that I want to doubt you, but think about what has happened. Do you think that it’s possible for me to not doubt you? You claimed that Chen Zhe has betrayed the Master Teacher Pavilion and requested for permission to capture and investigate him, and I granted you permission for that. Yet, he passed away in your custody! Given how secure the Master Teacher Pavilion is, there is no one who could have gotten to him other than you! If you had not used torture on him to force a confession, how could he have died?”

“Furthermore, I have also investigated the affairs of that Zhang Xuan, and you seem to have gone through a life-and-death situation with him. Considering the deep ties between the both

of you, I cannot help but suspect that you are intentionally siding with him in order to protect him, perhaps even making a false testimony in his favor!” Pavilion Master Gou harrumphed.

“It hasn’t been long since you have been promoted to a vice pavilion master, so I understand that you might be eager to prove yourself to replace Vice Pavilion Master Tian. But no matter what you do, you need evidence! Look at the mess you have caused, and you still expect me to believe you?”

Seeing that Pavilion Master Gou was doubting him, Wu shi anxiously explained himself. “I swear on my name as a master teacher that I have been perfectly impartial in this matter, and I have no interest in usurping Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s position...”

“Enough! I do not wish to talk about this matter anymore. I don’t care how the both of you fight with one another, but you had better not do anything that will harm the reputation of our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion!” Pavilion Master Gou interjected coldly.

“It has been five hundred years since I became the pavilion master, and while I have not accomplished anything outstanding my time, I have not erred in my leadership either. It’s already nearing my retirement date, and I hope to leave the Master Teacher Pavilion in peace. I do not want to retire as a laughingstock of the town, so I do not want to see anything happen till then. You hear me?”

Not expecting Pavilion Master Gou to suddenly pin such a severe accusation on him, Wu shi panicked. “Pavilion Master Gou, I am really not doing this for power! While I have braved through a life-and-death situation with Principal Zhang, I would not dream of willfully siding with him over something as important as this...”

“Enough! I have already said that I do not want to interfere in the matters between the both of you! You can do whatever you like, just do not make our Master Teacher Pavilion appear to be a joke before others!”

“But...” Indignant, Wu shi gritted his teeth, but seeing that Pavilion Master Gou was unwilling to listen to his words, he could only clench his fists and reluctantly reply. “Fine, I understand.”

“Un, that had better be the case. Alright, send a man to bring Zhang Xuan over here right now to clear things up. If he’s willing to listen, I can still consider giving him the benefit of the doubt. Otherwise, just on the grounds of insubordination alone, I will have him condemned for his entire life...” Pavilion Master Gou instructed.

However, before he could finish his words, a voice suddenly sounded. “There’s no need to send anyone. I’m already here.”

Following which, a young man walked in.

Zhang Xuan.

He had only gone there to take the 7-star master teacher examination, but who would have thought that he would hear those words instead? He could almost feel his blood boiling from the rage within him.

Initially, he had thought that Pavilion Master Gou had only been blinded by the words of Vice Pavilion Master Tian, but as he listened on, he had realized that the other party was just an incompetent superior who did not want the pot to be stirred so that he could retire in peace.

Horrified by Zhang Xuan’s sudden arrival, Wu shi exclaimed in shock, “Principal Zhang!”

From the earlier conversation, he could tell that Pavilion Master Gou was deeply displeased with Zhang Xuan. This was truly a bad moment for the fellow to appear... If Pavilion Master Gou were to pass a judgement on the fellow in a rage, the fellow could very well be doomed!

At the same time, a cruel glint flashed across Vice Pavilion Master Tian Qing’s eyes as he hurriedly stepped forward and said, “Pavilion Master Gou, this young man over here is the person who framed me, the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, Zhang Xuan!”

“You are Zhang Xuan?” Pavilion Master Gou narrowed his eyes threateningly. “How dare a mere 6-star master teacher like you eavesdrop in our conversation? You audacious brat!”

“Audacious? I don’t think I am as audacious as you are!” Zhang Xuan replied with a voice that was freezing like a winter’s night.

“What did you say?” Pavilion Master Gou smacked the table out of rage as a powerful aura burst forth menacingly from him.

As the head of the regional Master Teacher Pavilion, his standing was unmatched by anyone in the Qingyuan Empire. Yet, a pesky principal of a small Master Teacher Academy had actually dared to speak to him in such a manner. This was a complete lack of respect for his elders, a blatant breach of the formalities among master teachers!

“Don’t you have a clear idea as to what I just said?” Facing the other party’s wrath, Zhang Xuan did not show a hint of worry or anxiety. With eyes filled with nothing but apathy, he said, “After so many years, you should know Wu shi’s temperament better than anyone else. Vice Pavilion Master Tian has aided King Zhongqing in a scheme against me and my butler, and yet, instead of investigating the matter, you chose to side with Vice Pavilion Master Tian blindly in order to protect yourself, even coming over here to berate and put down Wu shi. Are you really that blind, or has water gotten into your head? How in the world can the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion be so unfortunate as to get a pavilion master as incompetent and useless as you?”

“Principal Zhang!” Not expecting the good-tempered Zhang Xuan to actually criticize Pavilion Master Gou openly, Wu shi was nearly scared of his wits.

From the very start, Pavilion Master Gou already had a bad impression of the other party. After saying these words, there was no longer room for reconciliation.

“You impertinent scoundrel, how dare a mere 6-star master teacher like you insult our pavilion master? Pavilion Master Gou, I shall have him apprehended for breaching the

formalities of master teachers right now and cripple his cultivation!” Vice Pavilion Master roared furiously as he charged forward to nab Zhang Xuan.

“Qing Tian, you dare!” Wu shi bellowed furiously as he quickly stepped forward to protect Zhang Xuan.

“There’s no need for that!” Zhang Xuan replied coldly as he waved his hand lightly.

Peng!

Before Vice Pavilion Master Tian could process what was going on, he was already smacked into the wall.

Following which, Zhang Xuan slowly advanced step by step, and with a gaze as sharp as daggers, he spoke with a voice that resounded clearly throughout the entire Qingyuan City.

“I have walked here step by step from Tianxuan Kingdom, and no one has ever dared to frame me for anything before!

“I, Zhang Xuan, as a 6-star master teacher and the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, hereby request permission from the headquarters to crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion!

“Today, one of us shall fall!”

1179 It Seems He Is Called Zhang Xuan

In the Appraiser Hall...

“How is it? My medicine is quite effective, right?”

In the lounge, Elder Qi spoke to the young man before him with a smile.

Looking into the mirror and seeing that his dashing appearance had finally been restored, the young man heaved a sigh of relief and clasped his fist. “Elder Qi, thank you for your help. If not for your assistance, who knows how long it would have taken for me to recover!”

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. It’s my responsibility as a physician to help those in need,” Elder Qi replied kindly.

“Jiuxiao, you really mustn’t act recklessly in the future. Don’t push yourself to do what is beyond your capability. Being embarrassed is just a small matter, but it would truly be a huge disaster if you were to lose your identity as an appraiser over it,” Guild Leader Mu advised worriedly.

It went without saying that the young man was Zhang Jiuxiao.

The previous night, while the poison that Zhang Xuan had prescribed him was effective in eliminating the spirit that had taken root within him, it had caused his face to swell, leaving him unable to meet anyone. Thus, he could only stay overnight in the Appraiser Hall.

That morning, the swelling had still shown no signs of subsiding, so he could only invite the old guild leader of the Physician Guild, Elder Qi, over to treat him.

While Elder Qi’s enemy wielded great influence, considering that it was in the middle of the day and the Master Teacher Pavilion was in the vicinity, his enemy would surely not be so brazen as to assault him at that moment.

“I understand.” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded in response.

He had stepped out in the hope of winning the respect of others by deciphering the seal on the painting, only to end up leaving himself in a pitiful state.

When he had looked into the mirror and seen how his dashing face had been warped hideously... just recalling the matter was enough to send tears to his eyes. It was fortunate that he had been in the Appraiser Hall, so none of his fans had been able to see the state that he was in. Otherwise, he would have been too embarrassed to walk on the streets of Qingyuan City ever again.

Of course, more important was the rule surrounding appraisers that only allowed them to make three appraisal errors in their entire career. While the affair yesterday had not really been considered an appraisal, it had happened before many eyes, and once others learned of the matter, it would become a stain on his records.

It’s all because of that Zhang Xuan... He clearly knew how to decipher the seal, but he chose not to speak just so to embarrass me... Recalling that seemingly innocent yet revolting smile of that fellow, rage swiftly surged through Zhang Jiuxiao’s veins.

That fellow had already embarrassed him once on the Heart Tempering Bridge, and he had been banking on that matter to vie back some dignity. Yet, who would have expected that he would be beaten further down into the ground?

He must have done it intentional, no doubt about it!

As innocent and honest as that fellow looked on the surface, his instincts told him that the other party had done it intentionally to humiliate him in public!

As stifled as Zhang Jiuxiao was, as a 7-star master teacher, he was still able to conceal his emotions perfectly, so neither Elder Qi nor Guild Leader Mu noticed his inner thoughts.

“Elder Qi, can you tell me what poison my face is afflicted with?” Zhang Jiuxiao asked.

“It’s a particularly potent poison, possibly reaching the level of grade-7. If it was not for the fact that I have been studying poison for the past few years, I might not have been able to treat you,” Elder Qi replied with a frown.

It was not for no reason that he had chosen to flee to Jingyuan City after he had been poisoned by his enemy. He had heard that a Poison Hall was located there, so he had decided to try his luck.

In the twenty years he had spent there, while he had failed to cure his poison, he had managed pick up several means concerning poisons through interacting with a few local poison masters, which had allowed him to suppress the poison within him considerably.

Thanks to that, he had been able to survive long enough to meet Zhang Xuan.

His experiences had granted him a deep insight into poison. As long as a poison was not particularly potent, he would be able to resolve it with ease.

Hearing those words, Zhang Jiuxiao could not help but mutter aloud in astonishment, “The prescription that Zhang shi gave me was actually a poison? Could it be that Zhang shi is a poison master?”

The Poison Hall maintained a strict confidentiality over their poison formulas, so for Zhang Xuan to prescribe one to him so easily... Could it be that he was a poison master?

Hearing a familiar name, Elder Qi could not help but ask, “May I know who the Zhang shi you mentioned is?”

“Ah, Jiuxiao must be referring to the 6-star master teacher from the Hongyuan Empire who has recently arrived in our city, Zhang Xuan,” Guild Leader Mu replied.

“Zhang Xuan? You all know him too? He’s my benefactor! He’s truly an incredible figure, isn’t he? Not only does he wield phenomenal capabilities in the Way of Medicine, which far exceed my own, more importantly, he holds compassion in his heart. There’s no way a person like him could be a poison master,” Elder Qi replied.

“Benefactor? His capabilities in the Way of Medicine far exceed yours?” Zhang Jiuxiao was dumbstruck by those words.

That fellow has a Soul Depth higher than me? Fine, I’ll accept it.

That fellow’s capability as an appraiser is higher than mine? Fine, I’ll accept that, too.

But for his capability in the Way of Medicine to be more formidable than mine as well... Just who is the 7-star master teacher here?

Ever since meeting that fellow, it seems like I have been leaping from one nightmare straight into another!

Zhang Jiuxiao heaved a sigh of relief. “It’s fortunate that my master teacher rank is higher than his, or else I would really be utterly outmatched by him...”

But before he could finish his words, a voice reminiscent of the rumbling of thunder suddenly boomed in the air.

“I, Zhang Xuan, as a 6-star master teacher and the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, hereby request permission from the headquarters to crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion! Today, one of us shall fall!”

Hearing the news, Zhang Jiuxiao nearly collapsed to the ground. “What? He’s intending to crash the Master Teacher Pavilion?”

Pavilion crashing was the act of challenging an entire Master Teacher Pavilion single-handedly.

Whether one had a conflict with a superior master teacher or had committed a sin, as long as one had not betrayed humanity, one would be able to absolve oneself of blame through successfully crashing the Master Teacher Pavilion.

To put it in simpler terms, once a master teacher had successfully crashed a Master Teacher Pavilion that they had a conflict with, the headquarters would no longer pursue the matter.

It was just a moment ago that Zhang Jiuxiao had consoled himself with the fact that he still had his master teacher rank to fall back on against Zhang Xuan, but then the latter suddenly challenged the entire Master Teacher Pavilion.

Was this for real?

Rushing out of the room, Zhang Jiuxiao saw a master teacher emblem flying straight into the sky before floating silently.

Deep within the Master Teacher Pavilion, from the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall, a pure and ancient aura surged into the sky and shrouded the emblem. Two words slowly morphed into appearance. ‘Permission granted!’

“The headquarters... actually agreed to his request? A 6-star master teacher is going to challenge a 7-star Master Teacher Pavilion branch? Is this for real? This is going to make history!”

“If Zhang Shi successfully carries out the pavilion crashing, the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion will lose all shred of its dignity and honor, and Pavilion Master Gou will become a laughingstock of all master teachers...”

Guild Leader Mu and Elder Qi were dumbfounded by the happenings before them.

“Teacher, Elder Qi, as a master teacher of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, I have a responsibility to guard its honor as well, so I’ll be taking my leave. Farewell!” Zhang Jiuxiao clasped his fist before hurriedly flying back to the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Pavilion crashing was as good as causing trouble on the home turf of the regional master teachers. As one of the master teacher of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he had to rush back to protect it!

“Zhang Xuan, no matter how talented you are, if you wish to bring down the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, you will have to get past me first,” Zhang Jiuxiao muttered menacingly with narrowed eyes.

It was about time for him to return the favor for the two face slaps that he had suffered from the other party!

...

In the Qingyuan Empire royal palace...

A pig-faced middle-aged man was lying on a bed, panting heavily.

King Zhongqing.

After being viciously pummeled for an entire night, while he had managed to suppress the poison within his body for the time being, he had nearly been crippled in the process. If not for his superior physical resilience and the abundant supply of pills, he might have long died from the relentless beating.

In order to satisfy his needs, more than twenty guards had already had their turn with him, and every single one of their hands had swollen up and was trembling from frailty.

Butler Qin walked to King Zhongqing and politely enquired, "Old Master, how are you feeling at the moment?"

"I'm still fine for the moment... Right, remember to get rid of those guards who pummeled me. No one can learn of my condition, got it?" King Zhongqing harrumphed callously.

"Don't worry, Old Master. I have already made arrangements for that," Butler Qin respectfully replied.

"Good." Struggling to sit up, King Zhongqing began meditating to recuperate from his injuries. It took a while before the pain from the beating he had sustained finally alleviated. Turning his head toward Butler Qin once more, he asked, "Is there any news from Vice Pavilion Master Tian?"

"I have already informed Pavilion Master Gou of the situation surrounding Vice Pavilion Master Tian as you have instructed me to..." At this point, Butler Qin could not help but hesitate for a moment before continuing. "Old Master, will Pavilion Master Gou really save Vice Pavilion Master Tian? The crime of framing another master teacher is a serious matter. Will it really be worthwhile for him to protect Vice Pavilion Master Tian?"

"Don't worry, I know that old man very well. He'll definitely save Vice Pavilion Master Tian!" King Zhongqing sneered

coldly. “As long as Vice Pavilion Master Tian remains in power, no one will be able to touch me. Humph, I will make sure Wu Rufeng and Zhang Xuan pay the price for their actions!”

“I see...” Butler Qin heaved a sigh of relief. He pondered for a brief moment before asking once more, “Old Master, what is Zhang Xuan’s background? How can a 6-star master teacher manage to corner you and Vice Pavilion Master Tian to such an extent?”

“Regardless of where he is from, there’s no way he will be able to escape with his life after offending Vice Pavilion Master Tian.” King Zhongqing waved his hand leisurely. “You do not have to worry about this matter anymore; he will be a goner soon enough. Most likely, either today or tomorrow, he will be apprehended by the Master Teacher Pavilion and die an untimely death in the cells.”

However, before he could finish his words, a resounding voice echoed deafeningly in the air, shaking the entire royal palace.

“I, Zhang Xuan, as a 6-star master teacher and the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, hereby request permission from the headquarters to crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion! Today, one of us shall fall!”

King Zhongqing was taken aback for a brief moment before hearty laughter boomed from his mouth. He was laughing so intensely that tears were beginning to form in his eyes. “A 6-star master teacher like him actually dares to crash the Master Teacher Pavilion? Hahaha, this must be the most hilarious joke that I have heard my entire life! He’s bringing about his own doom! Given the prowess of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, not even an 8-star low-tier master teacher would dare challenge it. For a 6-star master teacher to dream of crashing it, he sure likes to dream big!”

There was no master teacher who was unaware of the difficulty in pavilion crashing. It was a nigh impossible feat to accomplish, and throughout the long history of the Master Teacher Continent, only a small handful of top-notch prodigies had ever succeeded in accomplishing it!

Yet, that fellow was so conceited as to think that he could succeed in it. It seemed like they had been worrying over that fellow for nothing!

Just as King Zhongqing was laughing heartily, Emperor Chu Tianxing suddenly walked into the room with widened strides.

“Your Majesty!” Overwhelmed with excitement, King Zhongqing immediately reported, “That Zhang Xuan has foolishly decided to crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. With this, his days are already numbered!”

“I have heard the declaration, too. That will be one less worry for us.” Emperor Chu Tianxing nodded, but there was still a hint of worry in his eyes.

As the emperor of a country, he always considered the worst-case scenario so that he would not be caught off guard by any abrupt changes in the situation. As unlikely as it was, he could not shake off the sliver of doubt nudging his mind. Thus, he could not help himself from asking, “Is there anyone who has succeeded in crashing the Master Teacher Pavilion before?”

“This... I’m not too sure either. However, we can call Bai shi over to ask him,” King Zhongqing replied.

While the Master Teacher Pavilion did not interfere in the affairs of the empire that they were stationed in, the royal family would usually recruit some unaffiliated master teachers to bolster their ranks.

Master teachers had a choice to decide whether they wanted to join the regional Master Teacher Pavilion or not. If they joined, they would be granted several privileges, but in exchange, they would have a responsibility to the Master Teacher Pavilion as well. On the other hand, they could also choose to remain unaffiliated.

The Bai shi whom King Zhongqing spoke of was one of the unaffiliated master teachers, and he was currently serving as the Imperial Master Teacher of the Qingyuan Empire.

Emperor Chu Tianxing nodded before sending a subordinate to invite Bai shi over. Not too long later, an elder walked into the room.

“Bai shi, have you heard of any master teachers who have successfully crashed a Master Teacher Pavilion?”

“Hold on a moment, Your Majesty. I’ll have my friend look into the matter,” Bai shi replied.

Unaffiliated with the regional Master Teacher Pavilion, he was unable to access its resources as he liked. Thus, he could only ask his friend to do it in his stead.

Weng!

Not too long later, the jade token in his palm lit up. Bai shi swiftly took a look at it before clasp his fist. “Your Majesty, there are indeed cases where a Master Teacher Pavilion has been successfully crashed before. There are three such men in history who have succeeded in pulling off this feat.”

“Three men?” Hearing that such a small handful of people had succeeded in the past, both King Zhongqing and Emperor Chu Tianxing heaved a sigh of relief in unison.

It had been several dozen millenniums since the Master Teacher Pavilion first came into existence. Countless geniuses must have come and gone throughout the many years of its existence, and despite that, only three had ever successfully crashed a Master Teacher Pavilion. This was more than sufficient to show the difficulty of the task.

Just by this fact alone, it was impossible for Zhang Xuan to successfully crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

Out of curiosity, King Zhongqing asked, “Who are those three men? Do you have their names?”

“I do. The first goes by the name of Luo Yuntian, and the second is Yuan Xi. They are both the old ancestors of Sage Clans, the Luo Clan and Yuan Clan respectively...”

“What about the third person?”

Looking at the name written on the jade token, Bai shi was visibly taken aback for a moment before he stuttered in astonishment, “I-it seems he is called...”

“... Zhang Xuan!”

1180 Zhang Xuan vs. Zhang Jiuxiao

‘Gedeng!’

Both King Zhongqing and Emperor Chu Tianxing’s hearts skipped a beat.

“Zhang Xuan? Which Zhang Xuan?”

“Zhang Xuan from Xuanyuan Conferred Kingdom.” Reading on, Bai shi’s lips began quivering in fear. “After which... he became appointed as the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy!”

Considering how the previous declaration had resounded throughout Qingyuan City, they would have to have been deaf to not hear it. He had thought that the Zhang Xuan person, whoever he was, was courting his own death, and yet... to think that the other party had a history of successfully crashing a Master Teacher Pavilion!

He had thought that it was an ignorant novice, but it turned out to be an experienced veteran instead!

“The Master Teacher Pavilion in the Xuanyuan Conferred Kingdom should be a 3-star branch at the very most, so it’s not too surprising that he was able to successfully crash it. Do you think that... he’ll be able to crash our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion as well?” King Zhongqing asked hesitantly.

“I can’t say for sure. However, since he has a previous experience in pavilion crashing, I believe that he should understand how difficult the matter is. Since he dares to challenge the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, it is likely that he is confident that he will be able to successfully crash it,” Bai shi replied with an apprehensive frown.

Overwhelmed with anxiety, King Zhongqing howled in desperation, “There’s no way he can succeed. He mustn’t

succeed!”

Bai shi shook his head and sighed deeply. “I don’t know whether he’ll succeed or not, but regardless of the results... the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion can be said to be a goner already...”

Injustice was rife in the world, even within the Master Teacher Pavilion. Despite the rules put in place by the Master Teacher Pavilion, it was unable to avoid it altogether. Throughout history, many geniuses had fallen not at the hands of powerful enemies but from the schemes of their peers.

The death of every single genius master teacher was a huge loss to the Master Teacher Pavilion, and it was in view of this that the Master Teacher Pavilion had implemented the system of pavilion crashing to serve as an avenue for these geniuses to redress their grievances.

Regardless of whether Zhang Xuan succeeded or failed, the very fact that the headquarters had agreed to his request meant that the headquarters held Zhang Xuan in high regard, and as a consequence of that, the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion would be effectively plastered with a label of incompetence and mistreating rising prodigies. The headquarters would summon Pavilion Master Gou for further investigation, and no matter how the investigation turned out, the latter’s reputation would be ruined.

“There’s no way he can succeed, there’s just no way... Puu!” King Zhongqing roared with clenched jaws when he suddenly felt a pain in his chest, and fresh blood burst through his lips.

He quickly turned to Bai shi and pleaded, “Quick, beat me. Beat me up with all your might! I need it! I need it right now...”

“...” Bai shi.

“...” Emperor Chu Tianxing.

...

In the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion...

Seeing the two words in the sky, Wu shi felt his vision darken.

He did think that Pavilion Master Gou had displayed a lack of fairness in this matter, but still... no matter what, this was where he had grown up and spent several centuries in. He already considered this place his home, and he could not bear to see someone wrecking it.

However, he knew that it was already too late to say anything. Given the present circumstances, Zhang Xuan had no choice but to choose this course of action.

Zhang Xuan was only a 6-star master teacher whereas Pavilion Master Gou was a 7-star master teacher, as well as the head of the regional Master Teacher Pavilion. If the latter really attempted to indict him for some crime, the only way Zhang Xuan could have possibly salvaged himself was through crashing the entire Master Teacher Pavilion.

Wu shi stood in a daze for a long while, and all the frustrations and helplessness he felt within him eventually materialized in the form of a deep sigh.

On the other hand, Pavilion Master Gou was so angered by the course of events that his entire body was trembling in rage.

Having served five hundred years as the head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, he was already nearing his retirement age. He had thought that he could spend the end of his career in peace and retire with a perfect record, but who would have thought that he would actually end up stepping on a huge landmine at the final juncture?

He knew that regardless of the outcome of the pavilion crashing, the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion's reputation was doomed to be sullied.

“You! Do you know what it means to crash a Master Teacher Pavilion?” Suppressing the exploding rage within him, Pavilion Master Gou glared at the young man before him with gritted teeth.

If looks could kill, the world would have withered there and then.

“You are asking me that question? Humph!”

As if there was lightning within his eyes, Zhang Xuan glared at Pavilion Master Gou with a frightening gaze as he spoke.

“For mankind, I, Zhang Xuan, descended alone into the Subterranean Gallery to mend the seal leading to the otherworldly battlefield!

“For mankind, I hunted down the Ten Kings of the Qingtian Lineage one after another, averting a potential crisis!

“For mankind, I have groomed the students of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy and granted them strength comparable to the combat masters!

“I have devoted my life to protecting mankind, putting myself in precarious situations time and time again, and I have never regretted my actions! And yet, the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion dares to humiliate me like this... I only hope that the headquarters give me an opportunity to redress my grievances! Since you are incompetent and useless, choosing to cover up for those who have sinned just to avoid stepping into muddied waters, I'll just have to use my own methods to resolve this matter!

“As for whether you are embarrassed by this matter or not... why should I care about that?”

“You!” Choked by Zhang Xuan's words, Pavilion Master Gou spurted a mouthful of blood.

He had thought that the figure whom he was dealing with was a mere 6-star master teacher, and a few words of criticisms would surely have made the latter bow obediently before him. Never in his dreams had he expected the other party to be such a fearless troublemaker!

“Pavilion Master Gou... I hate to say this, but you have really done wrong this time around.” Wu shi closed his eyes and shook his head.

While others might have been unaware of it, he knew that the young man before him was a Celestial Master Teacher and a Celestial Saint, a figure whose standing was on par with Kong shi's!

Putting aside the head of a branch, even the head of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters would dare not humiliate the other party in such a manner!

Humiliating a figure like that was no different from undermining the authority of the heavens! If the other party were to take such an insult lying down, how could he possibly stand dignified before the masses ever again?

Hearing the words spoken by Wu shi, Pavilion Master Gou's face warped in fury, and he spat furiously through gritted teeth, "You said that I have done wrong? Humph, do you think that it'll be that easy to crash our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion? Sound the bells!"

Since things had already reached that point... there was no way that he would let the other party get away so easily!

Dong dong dong dong!

Shortly after his bellow, four resounding chimes echoed from the depths of the Master Teacher Pavilion, indicating the arrival of a pavilion crashing challenger.

Hong long long!

In just fifteen minutes, all of the 6-star and 7-star master teachers had returned to the Master Teacher Pavilion with grim expressions on their faces, as if soldiers preparing to march onto the battlefield.

"There are two steps to pavilion crashing. Firstly, the challenger must defeat all the master teachers in the Master Teacher Pavilion. Secondly, the challenger must successfully clear the Master Teacher Tower! Currently, all of the 6-star and 7-star master teachers in our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion are present here. If you wish to crash our pavilion, you will have to first trample past on their dignity!"

At which point, Pavilion Master Gou slowly swept over the gathered master teachers with his gaze before bellowing authoritatively, "Master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, someone has come to challenge our dignity. What shall we do?"

"Annihilate him!"

“Make him learn that our Master Teacher Pavilion is not a place for him to fool around!”

“How dare a 6-star master teacher act so brazenly as to challenge our Master Teacher Pavilion? See how I eradicate him with a flick of my hand!”

...

Upon understanding what was going on, the master teachers howled furiously.

Seeing that morale was high among the master teachers, Pavilion Master Gou nodded in satisfaction. “Good! Let’s begin then!”

There were dozens of thousands of 6-star master teachers in the Qingyuan Master Teacher Academy, and their might was no joking matter when combined together. No matter how talented or powerful Zhang Xuan was, their forces were more than enough to grind him down eventually!

“Who will go first?”

“Allow me! As a member of the Master Teacher Pavilion, I wish to strike down the brazen fool who dares challenge us!”

Shortly after those words were spoken, a loud whiz sounded from the air as a young man descended from the sky.

Zhang Jiuxiao!

He had just rushed over from the Appraiser Hall.

“Good!” Pavilion Master Gou nodded.

Zhang Jiuxiao was the offspring of a Sage Clan, the Zhang Clan. Even though he was just part of the side family, his talent was unrivalled by any other in the Qingyuan Empire. On top of that, as a 7-star master teacher, he had many means up his sleeves. Without a doubt, it would be a piece of cake for him to deal with Zhang Xuan!

Pavilion Master Gou secretly sent a telepathic message to Zhang Jiuxiao. “There’s no need to show him mercy. Let him learn the heavy price he must pay for daring to crash our Master Teacher Pavilion!”

“Pavilion Master Gou, rest assured. I know what to do!” With a frown, the aura surrounding Zhang Jiuxiao grew stronger and stronger as he turned to look at the young man not too far away with narrowed eyes.

From the moment he met the fellow the day before, the fellow had embarrassed him time and time again. Since that was the case, he would resolve this humiliation once and for all with a fight!

“A duel between master teachers can come in many forms—a challenge of Soul Depth, a fight in supporting occupations, a direct showdown, a lecture... Since you are the challenger, I have the right to choose the type of challenge,” Zhang Jiuxiao said as he walked confidently toward Zhang Xuan before eventually stopping five meters in front of the latter.

As the offspring of the Zhang Clan, he had been able to take many shortcuts in his cultivation, resulting in his state of mind being less tempered than others. However, he was confident that his capabilities in all other aspects were top-notch, and he would not lose to anyone!

Since that fellow had dared challenge the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he would make that fellow learned that he was not to be trifled with.

In no mood to entertain Zhang Jiuxiao, Zhang Xuan waved his hands impatiently. “Speak!”

“I choose a showdown, a duel to pit our strength against one another!” Zhang Jiuxiao sneered coldly.

A duel was the most direct and easiest way for him to establish his superiority. As a member of the Zhang Clan, he had cultivated many powerful battle techniques, so defeating a fellow whose cultivation was beneath his was truly no big deal.

“Jiuxiao, you mustn’t!”

On the other hand, hearing that Zhang Jiuxiao was proposing to have a direct fight instead, Pavilion Master Gou immediately recalled how Zhang Xuan had sent Vice Pavilion

Master Tian flying with a flick of his hand, so he quickly sent a telepathic message over anxiously.

Since even a Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert like Vice Pavilion Master Tian was no match for Zhang Xuan, how could Zhang Jiuxiao possibly stand a chance?

Zhang Jiuxiao shrugged the other party's worries away with a chuckle. "Pavilion Master Gou, rest assured! No matter what, I am an offspring of the Zhang Clan. While my cultivation is only at Saint 3-dan Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle, my fighting prowess has already far exceeded that level. To be honest with you, I have never revealed my true strength before."

As there was no peer who was a match for him, there had never been any need for him to use his full strength before. For the first time, he planned on displaying his true strength in public to teach Zhang Xuan a lesson!

Hong long!

His acupoints burst open simultaneously, and an overwhelming aura abruptly burst forth from him.

In the blink of an eye, his cultivation had already exceeded the boundary of Saint 3-dan pinnacle, reaching Saint 4-dan.

"Primordial Spirit realm? When did Zhang Jiuxiao achieve a breakthrough?"

"It seems like he has been concealing his true strength all along..."

"To reach the Primordial Spirit realm beneath thirty, he is truly fearsome..."

"He isn't the most formidable genius of our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion for no reason! There's no way that 6-star master teacher can possibly be a match for him!"

...

Seeing Zhang Jiuxiao's cultivation surge to Saint 4-dan in an instant, everyone was taken aback for a moment before admiration and respect seeped into the depths of their eyes.

“Zhang shi is so dashing. I knew that no one would be able to match him!”

At some point in time, the millstone-bottom lady had arrived in the hall, and hiding behind a pillar, she peeked on Zhang Jiuxiao coyly with stars twinkling in her eyes.

She knew that her idol was no ordinary person, but she had not expected him to be so extraordinary. Just by the momentum itself, he had already overwhelmed his opponent many times over. Watching this sight, her massive heart could not help but thump in excitement.

Hu!

Zhang Jiuxiao’s aura eventually stabilized at Primordial Spirit realm primary stage. He clenched his fists tightly as he leisurely stretched his neck, causing crisp ‘Geji! Geji!’ sounds to echo in the room. After which, he turned to look at the young man before him with eyes filled with disdain. “Let’s begin.”

“Are you certain you are ready?” Zhang Xuan asked indifferently.

“Indeed. If you wish to use a weapon, feel free to do so. I’ll catch anything that you send at me with my bare hands and show you the unbreachable gap between a mortal like you and a true prodigy!” Zhang Jiuxiao harrumphed coldly as he channeled his zhenqi toward his hands, creating a golden shimmer around them.

“Weapon?” A derisive smile emerged on Zhang Xuan’s lips as he said impatiently, “I don’t have time to waste on you. Since you are ready, I’ll start now.”

He was extremely busy.

Crashing the pavilion meant that one had to face all the master teachers associated with the Master Teacher Pavilion and overcome the many wills left behind by the preceding master teachers in the Master Teacher Tower. He had no additional time to waste on this fellow.

“I don’t have time to waste on you either, so I’ll end you in an instant!”

Seeing how Zhang Xuan was taking him lightly, the final string of sanity within Zhang Jiuxiao's mind finally snapped, and with a furious roar, he dashed forward.

“You want to end me? Try it then!” Without even bothering to dodge Zhang Jiuxiao's attack, Zhang Xuan raised his head, and a voice reminiscent of the crisp chime of a bell boomed.

“Kneel down!”

Boom!

It was as if thunder had rumbled within the room. In an instant, the momentum that Zhang Jiuxiao had built up for his offense vanished without a trace, and before anyone could process what was going on, the other party abruptly plummeted from the sky and crashed to the ground.

With his kneecaps firmly fixed onto the ground, Zhang Jiuxiao knelt before Zhang Xuan with indignation and frenzy written on his face.

1181 You Think I Dare Not Pummel You?

“What?”

“This... How is this possible?”

Everyone’s face warped in shock.

The millstone-bottom lady even fell to the ground in utter disbelief.

The idol whom she had revered for so long... was actually unable to even withstand a bellow from the other party, kneeling down without the slightest bit of resistance. What in the world was going on?

In an instant, the faith that she had carried for so long abruptly shattered.

“No, this can’t be...”

While the crowd was staring at the situation with mouths agape, veins were popping up on Zhang Jiuxiao’s forehead as frenzy overtook his mind.

He was a genius!

A peerless genius in the Qingyuan Empire!

How could he be subdued in a single shout? How could he kneel before another man so embarrassingly?

“You bastard, I’ll slaughter you!” Roaring furiously, Zhang Jiuxiao pushed his hand against the ground forcefully and flew into the air. After which, he charged forward furiously once more.

He had come here to prove himself, not to be humiliated once more!

Seeing how the other party was still doggedly coming after him, Zhang Xuan bellowed once more. “Scram!”

Padah!

Zhang Jiuxiao plummeted from the sky, and this time, his body scrambled on the ground and fled away hurriedly.

“Jiuxiao, be careful! Your state of mind is your core weakness, and that is why he’s using demonic tunes against you! As long as you shut off your hearing organs, you should be able to cope with his offense easily!” Pavilion Master Gou anxiously sent a telepathic message over.

While others were still wondering why Zhang Jiuxiao was listening to Zhang Xuan so obediently, Pavilion Master Gou had already fully comprehended the situation. Zhang Jiuxiao’s greatest weakness was his state of mind, which resulted in him being powerless before the other party’s demonic tunes.

It could be said that Zhang Xuan had already identified Zhang Jiuxiao’s weaknesses, and he was playing on them to his advantage.

Hearing those words, Zhang Jiuxiao swiftly awakened from his frenzied state, and gritting his teeth, he forcefully shut off his sense of hearing. As expected, the effects of the demonic tune dulled significantly, allowing him to wrestle back control over his body.

Then, with a swift leap, he dashed straight toward Zhang Xuan to launch an assault.

On the other hand, seeing that Zhang Jiuxiao was determined to court his death, Zhang Xuan impatiently flicked his finger.

Peng!

“Ahhh!” A scream of agony echoed loudly in the air before Zhang Jiuxiao was smacked away like a pesky fly. He crashed right into the wall of the building before dangling weakly up there.

Zhang Jiuxiao was no weakling, but he was still far from a match for him.

After sending Zhang Jiuxiao flying, Zhang Xuan turned his attention back to the remaining master teachers, and placing

his hands behind his back, he said, “To save some time, why don’t all of you come at me together?”

“He wants to challenge all of us simultaneously?”

“Is he insane? He’s only at Saint 2-dan pinnacle; even a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator wouldn’t be able to withstand our combined offense!”

...

Hearing his words, everyone nearly lost their mind for an instant.

Everyone who had gathered within the room was a 6-star master teacher at minimum, and there were more than ten thousand of them there. Even the weakest of them was at Half-Saint realm, and their combined might was sufficient to tear apart the heavens and earth. Putting aside a mere Spiritual Perception realm pinnacle cultivator, even a Leaving Aperture realm expert like Hall Master Xing would not have stood a chance against them!

“None of you are going to make a move? Fine, allow me to go first then!”

Too lazy to waste his breath any more, Zhang Xuan walked up to the crowd, and his voice began echoing resoundingly in the minds of everyone gathered in the room.

“The key to cultivation lies in devotion, and the crux of the devotion to one’s path lies in earnestness. Only with an earnest heart can one accomplish...”

Zhang Xuan began lecturing.

“What is he up to?”

“He seems to be lecturing about the essence of cultivation!”

“Huh? Isn’t he going to fight us? Why is he conducting a lecture all of a sudden?”

...

The crowd had thought that the other party was about to dash right into their midst and fight them with all his might. Yet, contrary to their expectations, not only did he not make a

move, he even began imparting an interpretation of cultivation to them, leaving every single one of them dumbfounded.

Just as they were perplexed, Pavilion Master Gou's anxiously shouted, "Everyone, be careful! He's using the Impartation of Heaven's Will. He's planning on making all of you submit to him!"

To be honest, Pavilion Master Gou was truly feeling deeply frightened at this point.

Even a genius as talented as Zhang Jiuxiao, dubbed as the number one prodigy of the Qingyuan Empire, had ended up falling from a mere bellow from Zhang Xuan. From just this, it could be seen that Zhang Xuan's Soul Depth was comparable to his own, if not above it!

Such formidable Soul Depth paired with the Impartation of Heaven's Will... in a group battle, there was no weapon more devastating than this!

Even poison masters were not as fearsome as that!

Against a poison master, the most one could lose was one's life. However, against a master teacher's Impartation of Heaven's Will, one would lose control of oneself and become the other party's student!

"Impartation of Heaven's Will? That does seem to be the case... I want to struggle against him, but... what he is saying is really true!"

"If I cultivate according to his words, my cultivation will surely be greatly enhanced within a short period of time!"

"I really couldn't have imagined that there is such an exquisite zhenqi circulation method in the world. This is too scary, too scary!"

...

Hearing Pavilion Master Gou's bellow, the crowd immediately attempted to struggle free of Zhang Xuan's Impartation of Heaven's Will, but their minds and bodies just would not listen to them. Instinctively, they desired to learn, and the other

party's teachings were simply too valuable for them to miss out on.

"The rest of you, feel free to make a move on him. I'll listen to his words a bit first... Wait a moment! Don't do it now. Let him finish this part before making a move!"

"If any of you dare to touch him, I'll pummel you into the ground. This portion happens to be regarding the flaw of my cultivation. If I can resolve this problem, I will surely be able to make a breakthrough to become a 7-star high-tier master teacher!"

...

Such words could be heard amid the crowd. In the blink of an eye, the tense atmosphere had abruptly calmed down, turning into a leisurely academic exchange.

"..."

Watching the inconceivable sight before him, Pavilion Master Gou felt crazed. He did not even notice it when he plucked out several strands of his beard.

My brothers, wake up! He's crashing our Master Teacher Pavilion; this isn't the time to be learning from him!

"Pavilion Master Gou, at this rate, all of the master teachers of our Qingyuan Empire master Teacher Pavilion are going to become his students!" Vice Pavilion Master Tian exclaimed with a pale face.

He had just barely recovered from the other party's previous blow when he saw such a sight before him, and he was nearly shocked speechless.

"I know, but there's no way to break his Impartation of Heaven's Will unless he makes a mistake in his teachings!" Pavilion Master Gou's face reddened in anxiety.

The Impartation of Heaven's Will was a resonance induced by the alignment of one's teachings with the essence of the world. If there was the slightest error in one's teachings, the resonance would immediately be dispelled, and the crowd

would recover from the trance they were in and regain their rationality.

“Are we to wait helplessly for him to make an error? Will he even make an error? Since he dares use the Impartation of Heaven’s Will, he must have done his homework in advance,” Vice Pavilion Master Tian said anxiously.

“But what else can we do?”

“Simple! We should just have Zhang Jiuxiao assault him from behind. In any case, they were supposed to be dueling with one another, and besides, he was the one who asked everyone to go at him a moment ago. Thus, this cannot be considered an unfair move! As long as we pull it off, we’ll be able to break his Impartation of Heaven’s Will, and by then... it will be impossible for him to successfully crash the pavilion,” Vice Pavilion Master Tian sneered coldly.

Pavilion Master Gou hesitated for a brief moment before nodding. “Very well!”

If he, as the head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, were to break the other party’s Impartation of Heaven’s Will forcefully, he would surely be despised and mocked for his actions. However, it was different for Zhang Jiuxiao.

In the first place, he was supposed to be in a duel with Zhang Xuan, and as fellow peers, he did not have to pay as much attention to his standing compared to Pavilion Master Gou. Thus, it would not be a big deal if he made a move.

Having made up his mind, Pavilion Master Gou quickly sent a telepathic message to Zhang Jiuxiao.

As Zhang Jiuxiao had shut off his hearing organs, he was not as affected by the effects of the Impartation of Heaven’s Will as the others. As soon as he heard Pavilion Master Gou’s orders, a cold glint flashed through his eyes, and he nodded. “I’ll do it right now!”

The single flick that had sent him flying had left him utterly humiliated. No matter what, he had to get one back on Zhang Xuan!

Huala!

Flicking his wrist, two long sword swords and four sabers appeared before his eyes, each of them commanding a powerful presence.

Two Saint intermediate-tier and four Saint low-tier artifacts!

Even Pavilion Master Gou only had a single Saint intermediate-tier artifact in his possession, and yet, Zhang Jiuxiao was able to whip out two of them in a single breath along with four other Saint low-tier artifacts. His fortune was truly astounding!

“Go!” Zhang Jiuxiao waved his hand furiously as he commanded his weapons.

Huala!

The six weapons flew straight toward the lecturing Zhang Xuan!

Zhang Jiuxiao was not intending to kill Zhang Xuan but to interrupt his Impartation of Heaven’s Path.

A typical Saint intermediate-tier weapon wielded strength comparable to a Primordial Spirit realm expert whereas a typical Saint low-tier weapon wielded strength comparable to a Spiritual Perception realm cultivator. Against the simultaneous assault of all six weapons, even Vice Pavilion Master Tian would be pressured to deal with them.

This was the true strength that Zhang Jiuxiao wielded!

The origin of his confidence also lay in these six weapons. With them, there was no way any of his peers would be able to match him!

Not expecting Zhang Jiuxiao to be so despicable as to assault Zhang Xuan at this moment, Wu shi shouted in a panic, “Zhang shi, be careful!”

Considering that Zhang Xuan was in the midst of crashing the pavilion, Wu shi was not allowed to make a move to help the other party, or else that would be flouting the rules.

Hu la!

The six weapons flew forth in an arc, heading right for Zhang Xuan's back. However, the latter continued lecturing the crowd, as if he was oblivious to the movements of the weapons.

“... channeling the inner breath into the internal organs, like the spirit of a weapon enforcing its body. Other than tempering its body, a weapon can grow stronger through tempering its spirit as well. Even among Saint intermediate-tier artifacts, there are some that wield strength comparable to a Primordial Spirit realm expert, and others are on par with Leaving Aperture realm cultivators. This difference is not a result of the usage of inferior materials in its crafting or lack of tempering, but the weakness of the weapon's spirit!

“A weak spirit can easily be eradicated by its master, thus placing it in a deeply vulnerable position...” Zhang Xuan's voice sounded as spiritual energy began gathering in the area, forming beautiful, miniature flowers that slowly drift to the ground.

The weapons that were previously heading toward Zhang Xuan suddenly halted upon hearing those words.

Seeing the weapons that had been charging full momentum a moment ago abruptly coming to a halt, Zhang Jiuxiao panicked. Driving his zhenqi furiously, he loudly bellowed, “Kill him!”

Those weapons had already acknowledged him as their master, so there was no reason for them to disobey him. Yet, to abruptly halt in the midst of their assault, floating in midair silently... were his weapons listening to Zhang Xuan's lecture as well?

Wasn't the Impartation of Heaven's Will supposed to only be effective on cultivators?

When did the Impartation of Heaven's Will become effective on weapons as well?

Zhang Jiuxiao was completely dazed in this moment.

“Heart of a Teacher, Enlightenment Devoid of Discrimination,” Pavilion Master Gou muttered in disbelief.

His body began trembling uncontrollably.

A normal master teacher could cause a cultivator's zhenqi to circulate in accordance to the content of their lecture through their Impartation of Heaven's Will, thus convincing the cultivator to become their student.

But to make even weapons listen obediently to his Impartation of Heaven's Will, it could only mean that Zhang Xuan had already comprehended the Heart of a Teacher!

Those who had comprehended that ability could affect not only cultivators with their Impartation of Heaven's Will, even ordinary humans, animals, or even weapons would be influenced as well.

Seeing that none of his weapons were moving, the desperate Zhang Jiuxiao furiously bellowed, "Attack him! I said, attack him..."

Hu!

But before he could finish speaking, the Saint intermediate-tier sword that had flown forth previously suddenly retreated toward him.

Huala!

A burst of sword qi suddenly struck Zhang Jiuxiao, plastering him back onto the wall.

"Shut up, can't you just let me listen to this lesson properly? To be prattling on over there so noisily, don't you realize that you are being an annoyance? You think I dare not pummel you?" One of Zhang Jiuxiao's swords harrumphed coldly before turning its attention back to Zhang Xuan.

It floated silently in the air, reminiscent of an obedient little student before its teacher. From time to time, it would even tilt itself forward slightly, as if indicating that it had understood the content of the lecture...

1182 The Legendary Palm Art That Descends from the Heavens

Zhang Jiuxiao burst into tears.

For real.

As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he had seen plenty of formidable geniuses in his time, and he knew how fearsome they could be. Knowing that there was a natural gap between him and them, even if he was utterly crushed by their hands, he would at least still be able to accept it and swiftly recover from the mental trauma. But... to be pummeled and told to shut up by his own sword...

How was he supposed to accept something like that? His heart felt so pained that he could hardly breathe!

Was that still his weapon?

It was just a mere lecture; did it really have to betray him over something like that?

Compelled by his confusion, Zhang Jiuxiao released the seal on his hearing to hear what kind of amazing knowledge Zhang Xuan was lecturing about to make his sword willingly betray him. In just a few moments after releasing his hearing, his zhenqi had already begun moving according to the formula that the other party was explaining.

Zhang Jiuxiao was astounded by what he was hearing. This... What a formidable cultivation technique! It's on par with the top-notch techniques of the Zhang Clan! Is it really fine for him to impart such a formidable technique so easily?

As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he had seen much more than ordinary cultivators, so it was inevitable that he would have a sharp eye for cultivation techniques and the sort.

He could tell that there was no fluff in the other party's lecture at all. Every single word was directed toward the crux of cultivation, words of wisdom in the truest sense. Just by assimilating the content of the lecture, he would be able to cultivate much easier and smoother than before. From that alone, it was already superior to most cultivation techniques out there.

As Zhang Jiuxiao's eyes started to glaze, he quickly bit his lips to regain his rationality. This won't do. I mustn't continue listening to his lecture, or else I will be indebted to him and become his student...

While his state of mind was nothing compared to Zhang Xuan's, it was still far superior to that of ordinary 7-star master teachers. On top of that, he was a significant distance away from Zhang Xuan as well. Thus, despite the formidable might of the Impartation of Heaven's Will, he was still able to force himself to retain consciousness.

Forcefully suppressing his desire to continue listening to the other party's lecture, he struggled out of the wall with some difficulty while contemplating on how he could ruin the other party's lecture.

Zhang Jiuxiao found that he was unable to stand up by himself after struggling for a while, and coincidentally, a lady with a millstone bottom suddenly walked over at this moment. Thus, he strenuously stretched his hand toward to the lady and said, "Come over here and help me for a moment..."

He knew that the other party was his loyal fan, infatuated with him to a crazed degree. Putting aside helping him up, the other party could remain excited for days just by catching a single look of him.

Pah!

But instead of being helped up, Zhang Jiuxiao found his face welcoming the millstone bottom instead.

Sou!

Crushed by the millstone bottom, he was sent flying into the wall once more, and huge mouthfuls of blood spewed wildly

from his mouth.

“Shut up. If I see you interrupting Zhang shi’s lecture again, I’ll pummel you whenever I see you on the streets!” The lady with the millstone bottom harrumphed coldly before walking away.

“...” Zhang Jiuxiao.

First, the betrayal of his weapon, and now, the betrayal of his most loyal fan. Just what kind of magic did Zhang Xuan cast to be able to capture their hearts so utterly?

Traumatized by the happenings, his mental fortitude collapsed in that instant. Unable to suppress himself any longer, his zhenqi began moving according to the formula described by Zhang Xuan.

At the same time, his wounded strength and aura also began recovering swiftly.

The more he cultivated, the more intricate he felt the matter was, and the more glazed his eyes became.

After an unknown period of time, Zhang Xuan waved his hand and said, “Alright, I’ll be stopping the lecture here today. If you have any doubts, feel free to approach me after class to clarify them.”

“Yes, Teacher!”

The ten thousand or so master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion bowed down one after another, submitting willingly to the young man before them.

Even though the young man had not lectured them for too long, there was no doubt that they had benefited greatly from his lesson. Through his teachings, their cultivation would surely soar in the near future.

Even Zhang Jiuxiao had bowed down together with the crowd without any hesitation.

“It’s over...” Seeing how the crowd was reacting, Pavilion Master Gou’s face collapsed. In an instant, he looked as if he had aged several centuries.

He had thought that with the ten thousand master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, they would at least be able to obstruct the other party. Yet, in just a single lecture, they had ended up becoming his students.

If only he had known that Zhang Xuan was so formidable, he would have never been so foolish as to speak up for Tian Qing!

“It’s your turn.”

Just as Pavilion Master Gou was feeling suffocated within, the young man’s voice sounded. Raising his gaze, he saw the other party staring right at Vice Pavilion Master Tian and him.

The first phase of pavilion crashing was to defeat all of the master teachers in the Master Teacher Pavilion, and currently, all of the other master teachers had become the other party’s students, leaving only Wu shi, Vice Pavilion Master Tian, and Pavilion Master Gou.

Considering that Wu shi had a close relationship with the other party, there was no way he would make a move. Thus, he and Vice Pavilion Master Tian were the only ones who remained.

Tossing aside all of the miscellaneous thoughts in his mind, Pavilion Master Gou exhaled deeply before stepping forward. “Since everything has developed to this point, I’ll be your opponent then!”

As he had already been humiliated, the embarrassment from having to make a move against a junior could not impede him any longer.

No matter what, he was a Leaving Aperture realm expert. While he had yet to undergo the Leaving Aperture Ordeal, his strength still far exceeded that of Vice Pavilion Master Tian and Wu shi.

As he made his way over toward Zhang Xuan, Pavilion Master Gou noticed that Vice Pavilion Master Tian seemed to be intending to join the battle as well, so he quickly shook his hand and harrumphed. “Tian Qing, you wait by the side and don’t make a move. Even if our Master Teacher Pavilion is crashed today, we mustn’t abandon our dignity!”

It was already embarrassing for a 7-star master teacher like him to make a move against a 6-star master teacher. If they had to go to the extent of ganging up on the latter on top of that, they would not be able to face anyone anymore.

“Yes!” A cold glint flashed across Tian Qing’s eyes as he stepped backward and lowered his head silently.

When Pavilion Master Gou was standing only ten meters away from Zhang Xuan, Wu shi secretly sent a telepathic message over to the latter. “Principal Zhang, even though Pavilion Master Gou hasn’t undergone the Leaving Aperture Ordeal yet, he still wields power far exceeding mine. You must be careful when facing him!”

He had taken into account everything that had happened over the past few days, and as unwilling he was to see Zhang Xuan crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he knew that the latter was justified in doing so. Furthermore, considering the latter’s identity, nothing could be allowed to happen to him!

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The Leaving Aperture realm could be further divided into Quasi Leaving Aperture realm and True Leaving Aperture realm. Basically, Quasi Leaving Aperture referred to those who had already gained the ability to draw their Primordial Spirit out of their bodies but had yet to undergo the lightning ordeal.

Without undergoing the lightning ordeal, no matter how powerful one’s Primordial Spirit was, its strength would still be limited. It was like how Zhang Xuan could have never wielded such astounding power at just Saint 2-dan if he had not undergone the Saint Ascension Ordeal back then.

Hall Master Xing and Pavilion Master Gou were both at Quasi Leaving Aperture realm. As powerful as they were, there was still a gap between them and True Leaving Aperture realm primary stage experts.

Nevertheless, their strength was still plenty fearsome. They were already capable of adeptly controlling their environment

and wielding it to their advantage, making it difficult for any opponent whose cultivation was beneath them to match them.

“Make your move!” Facing the strongest opponent that he had encountered other than Luo Chengxin, a hint of graveness surfaced in Zhang Xuan’s eyes.

Hula!

Without wasting his breath on words, Pavilion Master Gou raised his hand and thrust it forward forcefully.

His palm strike did not seem to be particularly powerful, but through the mystical capabilities of his Primordial Spirit, the space surrounding his palm strike became extremely viscous, making it difficult to dodge his attack.

Leaving Aperture realm cultivators are capable of controlling space to some degree, allowing them to hinder the movements of their enemies. If I had not learned Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, I would have been bound by that before I could do anything, Zhang Xuan remarked internally as he felt the changes in his surroundings.

As expected of the strongest fighting power within the Qingyuan Empire! Even without undergoing the lightning ordeal, their strength was still not something that a Saint 2-dan cultivator like Zhang Xuan could withstand.

Retreat! Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan stepped forcefully against the ground and leaped backward.

As long as Pavilion Master Gou had not reached True Leaving Aperture realm, the space that he could control would be severely limited. If Zhang Xuan could get out of the other party’s range, the other party’s technique would not be able to faze him.

“Do you think that you will be able to escape?” Sneering coldly, Pavilion Master Gou raised his hand and closed it forcefully. In the following moment, it felt as if the space within the room had abruptly caved in, and the momentum of Zhang Xuan’s retreat was immediately stalled.

Battle Technique: Dominion of the Roaring Tiger!

Even though it was only an ordinary Saint low-tier battle technique, the strength that it displayed was comparable to a Saint intermediate-tier battle technique in Pavilion Master Gou's hands.

Tzzzzzzz!

A thin sheet of zhenqi revolved relentlessly in the surroundings, causing the air to become even more viscous than before.

Dragged back by that thin sheet of zhenqi, Zhang Xuan's speed plummeted once more.

With his strength, he should have been able to cover tens of meters within a single breath. Yet, under the effects of Pavilion Master Gou's multiple means, he could not even retreat half a meter within the same period of time.

"As expected of the head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion..." Zhang Xuan remarked as he decisively halted his retreat. The following instant, his body blurred slightly before abruptly vanishing from the spot.

"What?" Seeing the other party vanish right before him, Pavilion Master Gou narrowed his eyes in astonishment. Before he could react, a figure suddenly materialized in front of him, and a palm flew forcefully toward his chest.

Zhang Xuan had decisively abandoned his retreat, choosing to use the momentum of the Dominion of the Roaring Tiger to charge toward him instead!

However, this was nothing to worry about. After all, the gap between them was simply so huge that it could not be bridged by tactics alone.

"Not a bad maneuver at all! If it had been anyone else, it just might have worked. However, it's a pity that you are going up against a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator!" Sneering coldly, a brilliant ray of light burst from Pavilion Master Gou's glabella before a Primordial Spirit drifted out into the air.

The next moment, Zhang Xuan felt as if his entire body had been bound. Even though his palm was just half a meter away from the other party, it was as if there was a world standing in

between that half a meter. No matter how he pushed forward, his palm just would not advance any further.

Is this the strength of a Leaving Aperture realm expert? Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly together.

Even though he had learned the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, granting him some control over space, it was still insufficient for him to go head to head against an opponent as powerful as Pavilion Master Gou.

It looks like this is my limit! Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

Upon gaining a rough gauge of how powerful he was at the moment, he decided to get serious. In an instant, all the acupoints throughout his body burst open, and an overwhelming surge of zhenqi burst forth. The zhenqi swiftly morphed into thousands of palms superimposed upon one another before falling upon Pavilion Master Gou.

“Thousand Hands Rulai Palm? How can this technique be so powerful?”

“It seems like he has made some alterations to it, or else it couldn’t possibly wield such power...”

Recognizing the move that Zhang Xuan was executing, the master teachers in the area were stunned.

The Thousand Hands Rulai Palm was a Saint intermediate-tier battle technique. While it allowed one to strike hundreds of palms consecutively, each individual palm strike was not that powerful due to the dispersion of energy. Against a stronger opponent, it would only be effective as a distraction.

However, this limitation did not seem to apply to Zhang Xuan at all. Every single palm within his thousands of palms was filled with devastating might that threatened to smash apart everything within its way. Even a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert would have been smashed into minced meat before it!

“Just how much zhenqi must he have to execute so many palms simultaneously?” a master teacher within the crowd exclaimed in shock.

Those words left the master teachers widening their eyes in shock as they swiftly made calculations in their minds. The unbelievable conclusion that they arrived at caused them to gulp a mouthful of saliva down their hoarse throats.

Indeed. To be able to execute thousands of palms with each palm strike wielding such devastating might... even if they were to learn this battle technique as well, there was no way that they would have enough zhenqi to successfully execute it.

Even if they sapped every last droplet of zhenqi from their bodies, they would not even be able to execute a quarter of the battle technique.

Siila!

Under the relentless waves of devastating palm strikes, the seals that Pavilion Master Gou had cast over the surrounding space were swiftly torn into shreds.

Following which, with a powerful leap, Zhang Xuan rose high into the air before abruptly turning 180-degrees and diving downward, quickly accelerating. At the same time, he pulled his palm backward and thrust it forward powerfully.

Boom!

An immense palm print formed in front of Zhang Xuan's hand.

“T-this! Could it be...”

Upon seeing this sight, Zhang Jiuxiao face paled in shock as he turned to a nearby master teacher and asked anxiously, “Do you remember the legendary palm art that descends from the heavens?”

“I don't,” replied the master teacher curtly.

“...” Zhang Jiuxiao. This is a reference of Kung Fu Hustle, where in the final scene, the main character leaps high into the air before diving vertically downward to execute a move of the Buddha's Palm. The video link is over here for those who are interested. I couldn't find a higher quality version of the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrL0bYsF_0E&t=138s

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“You haven’t heard of Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm? Back then, unable to pay his final respects to his deceased mother due to compelling circumstances, Ancient Sage Qiu Wu created this technique out of deep sorrow. Due to the concept behind the technique, the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm is one of the few physical battle techniques that is able to faze a cultivator’s soul! Legend has it that one of its moves consists of a palm art descending from the heavens,” Zhang Jiuxiao quickly explained as he stared at the sight before him with the utmost shock.

As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, while the lacking purity of his bloodline made him unqualified to access the best cultivation resources within the clan, the experiences and relics that he had come into contact with in the Zhang Clan still granted him knowledge and an eye of discernment far superior to the master teachers of the Qingyuan Conferred Empire.

As one of the closest followers of Kong shi, Ancient Sage Qiu Wu was indubitably a legendary figure of the Master Teacher Pavilion. While the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm was not the strongest battle technique that he had created, the unique properties of the technique still made it rather well-known.

Hu hu!

While Zhang Jiuxiao was explaining the palm art to the other master teacher, more and more power was gathering in front of Zhang Xuan’s palm, stirring up a mini tornado in the surroundings. Everyone could not help but retreat before the powerful air currents.

A tree desires the calm, but the wind batters relentlessly; a child seeks to repay, but his parents wait not!

“Hmm?”

Seemingly recognizing the move as well, Pavilion Master Gou's body trembled in astonishment.

The person whom he respected the most happened to be Ancient Sage Qiu Wu, so naturally, he knew about the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm as well. His mind was almost blown when he saw Zhang Xuan executing the move!

He had searched for Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's heritage for so many years, but to no avail. Who would have thought that the young man before him would be able to execute the battle techniques of his idol so easily, so smoothly, and so powerfully!

Huala!

In his moment of astonishment, the palm strike finally fell upon him.

Zhang Xuan possessed the Eye of Insight, and he had already achieved the level of Infinitesimal Maneuver as well. As such, he was able to grasp the flow of battle with perfect precision. It took a mere glance for him to notice the huge fluctuations in Pavilion Master Gou's emotions, and he instinctively knew that this was the ideal opportunity for him to strike.

Under the immense force of the palm strike, Pavilion Master Gou's Primordial Spirit was forcefully struck back into his body before he retreated eight steps back. His face reddened from the impact, and a mouthful of blood burst from his lips.

That single palm strike had dealt considerable internal injuries to him.

"The Leaving Aperture realm Pavilion Master Gou... was actually injured by Zhang shi?"

"But there is a three-realm difference between the two of them!"

"To be able to bridge this gap and match Pavilion Master Gou squarely, Zhang shi is too formidable!"

The other master teachers did not recognize the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, but upon seeing Pavilion Master

Gou getting injured from Zhang Xuan's assault, their bodies could not help but stiffen in disbelief.

To them, Pavilion Master Gou was not only the most powerful expert of the Master Teacher Pavilion but a symbol of its invincibility as well. He was the sturdy pillar whom they could fall back on in times of crisis. Yet, in less than three blows, Zhang Xuan had already managed to push him back and deal considerable internal injuries to him. This was an immense shock to all of them.

"It's fortunate that we listened earnestly to his lecture instead of challenging him, or else... we might have been lying on the floor at this very moment!"

"Indeed. Thank god for Zhang Shi's magnanimity..."

Wiping the cold sweat off their foreheads, the master teachers patted their wildly beating chest in relief.

Earlier, when they had submitted to Zhang Xuan's Impartation of Heaven's Will without putting up a fight, they had felt that they had let the Master Teacher Pavilion down. However, the sight before them had dispelled the deep guilt within them.

Against such strength, even if they had really challenged Zhang Xuan, there was no doubt that they would have been defeated as well! Their involvement would not have made the slightest difference to the ultimate outcome.

"Your move..." Frantically steadying his body, Pavilion Master Gou swiftly suppressed his internal injuries before turning to Zhang Xuan with an anxious look. He opened his mouth, wanting to ask the young man before him about the technique that he had just executed, but before he could finish his words, the young man had already charged up to him to continue his assault.

This time, the young man's palm strike was much more powerful than before. While it was not augmented by the momentum of his descent, the might that it wielded did not pale in comparison at all.

Humph, I'll take a look for myself to see if that is the real Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm or not! Knowing that it

would be fatal if he allowed himself to be distracted in battle, Pavilion Master Gou swiftly put aside all of his miscellaneous thoughts and turned his attention back to the battle.

Previously, he had been relying on the abilities unique to Leaving Aperture realm cultivators to deal with Zhang Xuan, but this time, he wanted to rely on his own zhenqi and body and fight a proper battle with the other party.

Placing his palms together before his chest, ripples of shockwaves began spreading out one after another from the meeting of his hands, inducing a deafening sonic boom.

Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, Myriad Waves Layered Clouds!

Legend had it that a master teacher had created this battle technique when inspiration struck him while studying the flow of water within a river. Ripples of shockwaves would burst forth relentlessly like the river that flowed tirelessly, overwhelming the surroundings through its multiple layers just like the clouds concealed the sky.

Pavilion Master Gou had devoted countless years of his life to refining this technique of his, and he had long achieved a high level of mastery in it. The Myriad Waves Layered Clouds easily halted the advancement of Zhang Xuan's Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, keeping it firmly at bay.

However, Zhang Xuan did not back down just because of that. Instead, while continuing to exert force on his right hand, he raised his left hand and gathered the Power of the Stars on his fingertip before shooting a blinding ray of light forward.

“The Grand Constellation Finger?”

“A palm art in one hand, a finger art in the other?”

The crowd was stunned by what they were seeing. Even Zhang Jiuxiao was shocked speechless by the sight, not daring to believe his eyes.

A palm art and a finger art were two entirely different battle techniques, and the zhenqi circulation pathways required for executing the techniques were completely different from one another as well. It was possible to execute the palm art first

before executing the finger art, or vice-versa, but... to execute them simultaneously on a hand each... that was a nigh impossible feat!

Putting aside them, not even Pavilion Master Gou would have been able to accomplish such a feat!

Wuuuuuuuuuu!

The Grand Constellation Finger swiftly tore a small hole in Pavilion Master Gou's Myriad Waves Layered Clouds, causing the might of the latter's battle technique to disperse swiftly like flowing water, thus undoing the defense that the other party had built up.

Kacha!

The Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm swiftly tore through Pavilion Master Gou's weakened defense with overwhelming might, forcing the latter to retreat in a fluster.

Incredible!

Not expecting that he would still be outdone despite having exerted his full strength, Pavilion Master Gou assessed the young man before him grimly. Swapping his palm with a fist, he charged forward once more.

Boom boom boom!

Both sides moved with incredible agility. Within less than a minute, they had already exchanged more than a hundred blows.

Watching the battle, one of the master teachers could not help but mutter to himself in absolute shock. "Pavilion Master Gou was known as an unparalleled genius in his earlier days, and he has mastered countless powerful battle techniques. In that series of exchanges previously, he must have used at least ten different battle techniques. Considering his background, it's understandable how he is able to pull that off, but... if my eyes are not playing tricks on me, Zhang Shi seems to have used more than eighty battle techniques in the same period of time."

Pavilion Master Gou was already nearing nine hundred, so it was not surprising for him to have learned and mastered many

battle techniques. But Zhang Xuan was only twenty years old! To execute so many formidable battle techniques with ease, it was apparent that he had a deep understanding of every single one of them...

How could that be possible?

“I have been counting, and he has used a total of 87 battle techniques so far,” another master teacher added.

Those words swiftly caught the attention of others, and they widened their eyes in disbelief.

As combat masters, they knew how difficult it was to master every single battle technique. Yet, every single battle technique that the young man had executed was at a mastery of Major Accomplishment at the very minimum...

Inconceivable!

“It seems like it’s about time for the title of the number one genius of Qingyuan City to change hands!”

The crowd could not help but agree with that statement.

In the past, they had viewed Zhang Jiuxiao as a hurdle that they would never be able to overcome, but after seeing the young man before them, they realized that a true prodigy was actually an existence who was far beyond the comprehension of mortals like them.

Contrary to everyone’s shock, Wu shi frowned in incomprehension at the sight before him instead. “Something is wrong...”

Another master teacher stepped forward to ask, “Wu shi, what’s wrong?”

Wu shi contemplated for a moment, trying to put his finger on the feeling of incongruence that he felt. “Principal Zhang specializes in identifying the flaws of others and capitalizing on them to subdue his opponents, but he has not done so in this battle. Instead, he began displaying an array of battle techniques. It almost as if he’s intentionally prolonging the battle to temper himself!”

While the other master teachers might not have been familiar with Zhang Xuan's abilities, he could not have been any clearer about them, especially after what they had gone through together in the Qiu Wu Palace.

The fellow had a remarkable eye that allowed him to accurately discern the flaws within the battle techniques or cultivation techniques of any cultivator, and he had always relied on this ability to catch his opponent off guard and subdue them in a single move.

But despite utilizing so many powerful battle techniques, that fellow did not center his attacks on Pavilion Master Gou's flaws. From this, it could be deduced that he was not intending to defeat the latter immediately. If so, there could only be one possibility... he was trying to temper his strength through battle!

"Tempering himself?" The master teacher could not believe what he was hearing.

If it was on any other occasion that someone had told him that a Spiritual Perception realm cultivator was battling a Leaving Aperture realm expert but was thinking of ways to temper himself through the battle instead of achieving victory, he would have surely thought that the other party was fool or a lunatic. However... with what was happening right before his eyes, no matter how inconceivable the matter was, he knew that it was the undeniable truth!

To actually be thinking of tempering himself while fighting against an expert three cultivation realms stronger than he was... just how confident was the other party in his fighting prowess?

Boom boom boom!

After trading three more blows, Pavilion Master Gou was suddenly forced back, giving Zhang Xuan a moment to catch his breath.

Just as Wu Shi had guessed, he was intending to use Pavilion Master Gou to temper his mastery of the battle techniques.

It was not easy for him to find a worthy opponent who could take him at his full might. Furthermore, he had just learned many new battle techniques from the Combat Master Hall, so he wanted to test them out and heighten his mastery in them as well.

As expected of a Leaving Aperture realm expert, I'm indeed no match for him at the moment. Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed.

Even though his fighting prowess had risen after grasping the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, it would still be too difficult for him to match a Leaving Aperture realm expert until he achieved a breakthrough to the Embryonic Soul realm. Otherwise, just by the overwhelming gap in their fundamental capabilities and strength, it was nigh impossible for him to emerge victorious.

Nevertheless, while it would be difficult for him to achieve victory in a proper duel, there were actually many other ways he could subdue the other party.

Raising his palm and crushing it downward to halt the other party's advancement, Zhang Xuan snapped his fingers.

Sou sou sou sou!

More than a hundred flags suddenly materialized from Zhang Xuan's storage ring, and they swiftly took their positions around Pavilion Master Gou.

As soon as that was done, Zhang Xuan stomped on the ground lightly, and the formation instantaneously came to life.

He had achieved a proficiency comparable to 7-star formation masters in the field of formations back at the Qiu Wu Palace. Although it would be difficult to him to fight against Pavilion Master Gou with just his own strength, with the help of a formation, his chances of victory would be enhanced significantly.

Hula!

A mist swiftly shrouded the entire area, concealing Pavilion Master Gou within as well.

Zhang Xuan had set up two 7-star intermediate stage formations, and while they were not too powerful, it would still take Pavilion Master Gou more than ten breaths to undo them.

That period of time was more than enough for Zhang Xuan to subdue Pavilion Master Gou.

As the formation whirred into operation, the crowd found their vision completely blocked by the mist.

Kacha!

After fifteen minutes, the formation finally dissipated, and with a wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan returned all of the formation flags to his storage ring.

Seeing that the battle had ended so quickly, the crowd quickly turned their gazes toward Pavilion Master Gou, only to freeze the next moment.

The dashing Pavilion Master Gou from a moment ago had his head planted in the ground. His entire body was covered with blood and wounds, such that there was not a single spot of unblemished skin on his body.

It was apparent that he had come under a frenzied torrent of attacks within the short period of time, and it was doubtful whether even his closest kin would be able to recognize him given the current state he was in.

Huala!

Pavilion Master Gou plucked his head out from the earth. He did not seem to feel disappointed or humiliated by his loss. On the contrary, his eyes were filled with excitement and anticipation as he asked, “Zhang shi, may I ask if the technique you displayed earlier is Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm?”

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded, admitting to the matter.

“May I know... if it’s possible for you...” Pavilion Master Gou hesitated. Gritting his teeth in determination, he continued. “... to impart the battle technique to me?”

“Why? You are interested in learning the technique?”

“That’s right!”

“Then I won’t teach you.”

“...“In this analogy, tree refers to the perspective of an individual whereas the wind refers to time. Basically, it means that time stops for no one, and often, when one finally puts one’s mind to repaying one’s parents, they are already nearing their end or have already passed away. It’s a phrase that laments the regrets of a child, and this is the concept behind the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm.

1184 Pavilion Master Gou Admits Defeat

While a teacher should enlighten others without discrimination, Pavilion Master Gou had truly crossed Zhang Xuan's bottom line. For his own selfishness, he had chosen to disregard the truth and selfishly sided with Vice Pavilion Master Tian. The stronger a person like that was, the greater a threat to humanity they were.

Thus, how could he possibly impart Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Art to the other party?

Zhang Xuan was a kind and generous person, but that did not mean that he was undiscerning and naive.

He had a clear gauge of who he should accept as his student and who he should never accept as his student.

"Pardon me, I was getting ahead of myself..." Pavilion Master Gou's face sank in disappointment.

It was just a moment ago that he had forced the other party into crashing their Master Teacher Pavilion, so why would the other party be willing to impart his battle technique to him now?

He should be glad that the other party had not killed him on the spot!

"I have lost..." Pavilion Master Gou closed his eyes momentarily and shook his head. A moment later, he opened his eyes and announced, "Zhang shi has successfully cleared the first phase of the pavilion crashing!"

The first phase was to defeat all of the master teachers of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and given that Zhang Xuan had managed to get all ten thousand master teachers to submit to him and defeat the strongest Pavilion Master Gou, he had already cleared it.

“Hold it for a moment. I haven’t fought with Vice Pavilion Master Tian yet, and I don’t think it’s right that we skip straight past him!” Zhang Xuan interjected.

“Even I am not a match for you, let alone Tian Qing. Thus, there’s no longer any meaning in you fighting him,” Pavilion Master Gou said.

However, Zhang Xuan did not seem to be convinced by that explanation. He was just about to argue when Tian Qing clasped his fist and said, “I am not an opponent for you either. I admit my defeat!”

A hint of disappointment surfaced in Zhang Xuan’s eyes.

To be honest, he was still seething with rage with Vice Pavilion Master Tian. If only the other party had agreed to have a duel with him, he would surely have pummeled the other party deep into the ground, never to see the light of the day again!

But since Vice Pavilion Master Tian had admitted his defeat, there was no excuse he could use anymore.

After all, the act of pavilion crashing was bound by rules, and the entire process was supervised by the headquarters. It would not be good for him to intentionally kill another master teacher here.

“The Master Teacher Tower is over there. Follow me.”

The Master Teacher Tower housed the wills of the strongest master teacher of each generation. Some of them had reached the level of 8-star low-tier, and there were those who had achieved accomplishments even higher than that. Naturally, it would not be an easy feat to overcome them.

As such, the first phase of pavilion crashing was actually considered a mere warm up.

The true test lay ahead.

This was the challenge that had halted the footsteps of countless geniuses in history.

Following behind Pavilion Master Gou, it did not take long for Zhang Xuan to see a seven-story tower looming over him.

Knowing that a great trial lay ahead, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath and gathered his concentration before making his way in.

As soon as Zhang Xuan's silhouette disappeared amid the darkness of the tower, a master teacher could not help but ask apprehensively, "Will Zhang shi... succeed?"

"It'll be very difficult. While our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion isn't ranked at the forefront of the Eight Conferred Empires, it has still produced four 8-star master teachers in history. Of them, He shi even managed to reach 8-star high-tier in his lifetime. With the extensive knowledge he possesses and the incredible power he wields, the will he has left behind in the Master Teacher Tower won't be that easy to overcome," another master teacher within the crowd replied.

The first master teacher nodded in agreement. "Indeed. 8-star master teachers are existences that are considered near the peak of the Master Teacher Continent. Be it their knowledge, state of mind, or comprehension of cultivation, it would be difficult for ordinary master teachers to match them."

"Jeez, I hope that Zhang shi will be able to clear the examination. If he succeeds, as his students, we will be able to share his glory as well!"

"I am also fervently praying for his success. It has been a long time since anyone has crashed a pavilion. If he succeeds, think about the fame that it will bring us! In the future, I'll be able to brag to my friends that my teacher is a successful pavilion crasher!"

The two master teachers spoke with looks of anticipation on their faces.

Pu!

Hearing the words of the duo, the severely wounded Pavilion Master Gou suddenly felt his injuries acting up once more, and fresh blood spurted wildly from his mouth. It took quite a while before he managed to calm himself down once more.

Master teachers of other Master Teacher Pavilions would lay down their lives to guard the honor and pride of their pavilion,

so why were his master teachers wishing for Zhang Xuan's victory instead?

Do you even realize that this is your Master Teacher Pavilion too? Once he succeeds in crashing the pavilion, you will be humiliated, too! Glory your head!

Noticing the look on Pavilion Master Gou's face, Wu Shi could immediately tell what the other party was thinking about, and he shook his head. "Those who conduct themselves morally will find help coming their way, while those who lack principles will find themselves isolated from the others. Pavilion Master Gou, regardless of whether Principal Zhang is able to clear the Master Teacher Tower or not, you have already lost the hearts of your men. Even if the headquarters do not pursue this matter, it is likely that no master teacher within the Master Teacher Pavilion will willingly follow your orders anymore."

While Vice Pavilion Master Tian's act of framing Zhang Xuan had been carried out discreetly, considering how the matter had blown up to such a degree, there was no way the truth could be hidden any further.

A person who stood bravely against an entire Master Teacher Pavilion in order to redress his grievances, as compared to a pavilion master who chose to overlook the evil of others just to save his own skin and retire peacefully... it was apparent with a single look whom the crowd would choose to side with.

Due to this matter, Pavilion Master Gou would be despised by all master teachers in the world, never to make a comeback.

"I..." Realizing the same, Pavilion Master Gou's face turned ashen in despair.

In truth, he had also realized that his days of glory were over from the moment the other party declared that he would crash the Master Teacher Pavilion.

But... he had not expected that those master teachers whom he had fought alongside with previously would abandon him so utterly either.

His eyes colored with desolation, Pavilion Master Gou gazed into the sky with a complicated look. “Have I... really done wrong?”

The initial hopes and dreams in bettering the world when he first became the regional pavilion master had eroded over the long five hundred years. Unknowingly, his priority had shifted into desperately protecting the authority and prestige that he held instead. Perhaps karma had truly come around to bite him.

With a suffocating sensation within his chest, he turned to Wu shi and asked, “What is the background of Zhang shi?”

“He’s the most diligent and talented individual I have ever seen in the world,” Wu shi replied with a brilliant gleam in his eyes.

A person who insisted on reading and bettering himself no matter what kind of circumstances he was in... Just Zhang Xuan’s attitude toward studying was one that he should really strive to learn from.

Perhaps, it was due to how studious Zhang Xuan was that he was able to achieve what he had at such a young age, possessing strength far beyond his.

...

Zhang Xuan slowly advanced after entering the huge doors of the Master Teacher Tower.

Having challenged the Master Teacher Tower once back at Xuanyuan Kingdom, he knew the rules concerning it.

The wills of the outstanding predecessors of the Master Teacher Pavilion were deposited here, and every single one of them wielded superior strength. It was nigh impossible to defeat them in a normal duel, and due to that, the test would tend to concern the fundamental abilities of master teachers instead, such as lecturing, discerning flaws, offering pointers on battle techniques, and so on.

As such, what was tested in this second phase was not one’s strength but how accomplished a master teacher one was.

Hu!

After proceeding for some time, an illusory figure suddenly appeared before Zhang Xuan. He was the guardian of the very first test, an 8-star low-tier master teacher who had risen from the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion 13,000 years ago, Zhao Zhen.

Seeing that the person who was crashing the pavilion was only a twenty-year-old, Master Teacher Zhao Zhen frowned. “To crash a Master Teacher Pavilion at such a young age, what kind of grievances have you suffered?”

“The incumbent pavilion master has sided with evildoers to sully my reputation just to preserve a clean record and protect his own position...” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and began explaining the matter.

“There’s actually such a matter? The Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion really is getting worse generation after generation! It is high time to do some internal reorganization!” Zhao Zhen harrumphed furiously before turning his sights back to Zhang Xuan once more.

“I know that you have suffered greatly from this matter, but as one of the guardians of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, I cannot let you pass me so easily. Otherwise, if everyone attempted to crash the Master Teacher Pavilion whenever something happened, the authority of the Master Teacher Pavilion will be undermined. I hope that you can understand that.”

“I understand.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Seeing how earnest the young man was, Zhao Zhen nodded in approval.

“My test will be on discerning flaws in my battle technique. I will execute a battle technique, and as long as you can find a single flaw in it, you will have cleared my test.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan’s face brightened up.

“Alright!”

On the other hand, seeing that the young man had loosened up instead after hearing the content of his test, as if it was already

a done deal, Zhao Zhen frowned. “Don’t think that it will be easy to find a flaw in my battle technique. I won’t be going easy on you just because of your plight. I will be using my most prided battle technique, one that I have refined again and again in my lifetime in order to perfect it. While I cannot say that it’s flawless, most 7-star pinnacle master teachers would need numerous months before they could find a single flaw!”

“I understand. Pardon me, but I am in a hurry, so can we get it over and done with quickly?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“You...” Displeased, Master Teacher Zhao Zhen flung his sleeves furiously.

As an 8-star low-tier master teacher, a test from him could not possibly be as easy as it sounded. Yet, that young man was taking him lightly, even saying that he wanted to get it over and done with as if everything was already in his grasp. Was he really that confident in clearing his test, or was he just another conceited fool?

“The battle technique that I will be using is known as the Autumn Breeze Intertwining Silk Hands. It’s a technique that I came up with while observing the falling leaves being raked up by the autumn wind, only to be entangled in a spider’s web. I’ll first execute it once for you.”

Master Teacher Zhao Zhen raised his hands and drew out fine zhenqi threads from the tips of his fingers. With elegant movements, he skillfully weaved it into a spider’s web that entrapped everything within it. If someone was within the spider’s web’s area, they would surely find themselves getting helplessly entangled if they tried to escape from the area.

“I have never executed this battle technique before anyone, so you need not try to find any shortcuts around this test. Also, do not even think that you will be able to pull the wool over my eyes; it won’t work. My technique consists of ten moves, and each of them is stronger than the last. The one that I have just executed is only the first move, Entwining Threads of Golden Silk. After I am done executing all ten moves, I will give you four hours to contemplate over the matter. If you are able to find a single flaw in my technique, you pass. Otherwise, I will

have to regretfully inform you that your pavilion crashing has come to an end,” Master Teacher Zhao Zhen said as he executed the technique.

Typically speaking, he would grant those crashing the pavilion two days to analyze the intricacies in his battle techniques. However, the young man before him had spoken arrogantly, so he had chosen to narrow the timeframe to four hours instead so as to hammer down the other party’s arrogance.

When the other party finally came to realize his own arrogance upon failing to come up with anything after four hours, he would loosen the time restriction.

Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, “There’s no need to execute all ten moves or wait four hours; I can list your flaws now.”

It was only in the spur of the moment from Pavilion Master Gou’s humiliation that he had chosen to engage in pavilion crashing. His priority was still to be promoted to 7-star master teacher and find ways to earn more concentrated high-tier spirit stones to raise his cultivation. He did not have any time to waste here.

“You will list my flaws now?” Zhao Zhen was taken aback.

He had only used a single move, but the young man was ready to list his flaws? What utter nonsense!

“Your Autumn Breeze Intertwining Silk Hands does not look bad on the surface, wielding strength that would easily put it in the forefront of Saint intermediate-tier battle techniques. Upon mastering the technique, the zhenqi threads can be skillfully utilized in many ways to restrict an opponent’s movements, making it an extremely difficult technique to deal with.

However, it’s unfortunate that it is riddled with quite a number of flaws. I did a rough count earlier, and it seems like there is a total of 37 flaws!” Zhang Xuan said.

“37 flaws?” Zhao Zhen’s face darkened in rage.

I have only used the first move of my battle technique, and it’s already questionable in itself whether you are able to find a

single flaw from it or not. Yet, you are telling me that you have already found 37?

In an instant, the last traces of goodwill that Zhao Zhen felt toward the young man before him vanished.

“Indeed.” Oblivious to Zhao Zhen’s thoughts regarding him, Zhang Xuan thought that the other party was just skeptical about there being so many flaws in his technique, so he swiftly explained, “The creation of a battle technique must involve trial through practical battles as well to test its effectiveness and might. Considering that you have never imparted the battle technique to anyone else or tested it out in battle, I must say that it’s already impressive that there are only 37 flaws in your battle technique.”

“You!” Hearing those words, Zhao Zhen nearly exploded on the spot. With a livid face, he uttered coldly, “Since that’s the case, why don’t you tell me where the 37 flaws are? If you can’t, don’t blame me for getting nasty with you!”

1185 Pavilion Crashing, Success!

“Are you feeling indignant because I said that there are 37 flaws in your battle technique? Fine, I’ll list them for you!”

Seeing how the other party was refusing to learn humbly despite erring so much, Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure. In the tone of an elder educating his juniors, he said, “First and foremost, I’ll start with the greatest flaw of your Autumn Breeze Intertwining Silk Hands.

“You mentioned that you created it while observing the leaves being raked up by the autumn breeze, but I cannot see the desolation of autumn from your battle technique at all! All I can see is the intertwining nature of the zhenqi threads; there is completely no conception in it at all! Intent without strength is a pipe dream, and strength without intent is simply wasted energy! If it was just a Spirit-tier battle technique, it would not pose much of a problem at all. However, for a Saint realm expert to utilize a battle technique devoid of conception, there’s no doubt that it’ll place him at a severe disadvantage against his peers!”

“This...” Zhao Zhen was stunned.

It was not impossible to create a Saint-tier battle technique devoid of conception, but conception could augment the might of a battle technique significantly and make it easier to grasp the technique.

In a sense, it could indeed be considered a flaw.

Back then, when he created the technique, he had just successfully cleared his 8-star master teacher examination. With his heart filled with delight from his success, he was not in the correct state of mind to comprehend the desolation of autumn. As a result, while he did succeed in creating a powerful Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, he failed to infuse the correct conception into it.

“As for the second flaw, as useful as your Entwining Threads of Golden Silk is in limiting the movements of an opponent, it’s only effective against ordinary cultivators. True experts will be able to swiftly notice the openings in the technique. Look, if I just concentrate my zhenqi at this point...”

As he spoke, Zhang Xuan raised his hand and drew fine zhenqi threads from his fingers. In a moment, he had already weaved the web that Zhao Zhen had created earlier.

“You...” Zhao Zhen widened his eyes in shock.

He had never executed this technique in public before, so there was no way the young man could have learned it from anywhere else. Since that was the case... didn’t it mean that the young man had learned the technique from him just by observing it once?

But how could that be? Not even the most formidable of prodigies that he knew of could grasp a battle technique that swiftly!

A moment later, Zhao Zhen suddenly noticed a slight discrepancy in Zhang Xuan’s actions, and he exclaimed in delight, “Wait a moment, your Entwining Threads of Golden Silk is slightly different from mine!”

He was the man who had single-handedly created the Autumn Breeze Intertwining Silk Hands. As similar as the young man’s Entwining Threads of Golden Silk was to his, the subtle differences in their movements were still unable to escape his eyes.

“Oh. The original version is too trashy, so I quickly altered it a little.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand as he replied leisurely.

“Don’t interrupt me, let me finish my words first.”

“Too trashy? Quickly altered it a little?” Zhao Zhen’s body trembled in shock upon hearing those words. He turned his sight toward the ‘altered version’ that the young man was executing to examine it closely, and it seemed like... the other party’s version was much stronger than his.

Hu la!

While he was still caught up in the shock from seeing the battle technique that he had perfected with much difficulty being improved by another so easily, he saw the young man raising his other palm and striking a certain point within the web.

Huala!

In an instant, as if having its crux destroyed, the zhenqi web swiftly shriveled, and the surge of zhenqi abruptly reversed as if an alarmed beast.

“The crux of your Entwining Threads of Golden Silk lies in the constriction of the zhenqi threads upon contact with the opponent so as to trap the latter. I’m not saying that it doesn’t work, but its flaw is apparent as well. Once this mingmen is noticed by the opponent, the latter just has to tap on it lightly in order to cause the flow of zhenqi to reverse, resulting in a backlash!”

Those words left Zhao Zhen’s eyes narrowing in shock.

He was indeed aware of this flaw in his Autumn Breeze Intertwining Silk Hands, but one had to be at least an 8-star high-tier master teacher before they were able to notice it, and against such experts, victory was already impossible in the first place! Thus, he had not really paid much attention to it.

“Moving on, for your second move, Threading the Heavens, a silver thread infused with one’s will is skillfully maneuvered to control the environment, allowing one to corner the opponent. However, the problem is that the silver thread can be easily severed. Once the opponent notices the presence of the silver thread and severs it, it will inflict significant damage to one’s soul...” Zhang Xuan continued.

“Hold it for a moment!” Zhao Zhen’s eyes widened upon hearing those words. “I haven’t executed my second technique yet, right? So, how could you know its name and its flaws...”

“I told you not to interrupt me! Given how simple your battle technique is, anyone would easily have deduced the rest as long as they are no fool...” Zhang Xuan waved his hand impatiently.

“As for your third move, Cry of the Autumn Cicada, I understand that you wanted to incorporate a sonic attack into the Autumn Breeze Intertwining Silk Hands in order to grant it more variability and transformations, but this happens to be the most flawed move in your battle technique as well! Out of the 37 flaws, it takes up a whole 8 of them, and they are namely...”

Zhang Xuan proceeded to explain every single flaw in elaborate detail, clearly pointing out the fundamental principle behind each move and how it could be easily deciphered. Just by hearing this much, Zhao Zhen could tell that there were no longer any secrets in his battle technique. At this point, it was as if the other party was the creator of the Autumn Breeze Intertwining Silk Hands and not him!

His lips twitched as he felt his body growing more and more illusory, threatening to dissipate at any moment.

Had it not been for his superior mental fortitude as an 8-star master teacher, he might have gone mad there and then.

To be able to deduce the other nine moves just by seeing the first one, even accurately naming them... why did it feel as if he was dreaming?

At this point, the young man's lecturing voice suddenly sounded once more, jolting him out of his dazed state.

“Alright, these are the flaws that I have noticed so far. Have you understood them? Do you know where you have erred now?”

“Yes, I know my errors now. I won't do it in the future...”

Zhao Zhen replied instinctively, but halfway through his words, he suddenly paused before redness spread across his face.

The other party had placed himself in the role of a teacher, and somehow, he had been dragged along with the flow and subconsciously placed himself in the role of a student.

He was an old ancestor from 13,000 years ago, an elder countless generations more senior than the young man before him! For this to happen...

“Cough cough!” Unable to take it any longer, Zhao Zhen quickly waved his hand and ushered Zhang Xuan to move on. “Alright, alright! You have already cleared the test, so you should proceed to the next floor.”

“Cleared the test? Is that the problem now? It seems like you still have not realized what the problem is. As a master teacher who has ventured beyond the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, do you know how many people look up to you as their role model? And yet, is this the attitude you have toward learning?” Zhang Xuan berated furiously. “You are really the worst student I have seen in my years of teaching! You should learn some humility!”

“...” Zhao Zhen was crazed.

I am the invigilator over here! How in the world did I turn into your student?”

Pop!

Frenzied, Zhao Zhen finally reached the limits of his tolerance, and his will wavered before vanishing from the spot.

Seeing the other party’s will vanishing out of embarrassment, a glint flashed across Zhang Xuan’s eyes.

You knew why I am crashing this Master Teacher Pavilion, and yet, you still chose to hold me back. If I didn’t choke you with my words, who else should I choke?

Since I am here to crash the pavilion, I might as well go all the way with it.

...

Outside the Master Teacher Pavilion...

Seeing the light on the Master Teacher Tower, Wu shi remarked, “The second floor has lit up. It seems like Principal Zhang has encountered Elder Zhao!

“Elder Zhao has a deep comprehension of battle techniques, achieving a level unmatched by any other in our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. Even if Principal Zhang is able to clear his test, it’ll probably take quite a while...”

Wu shi had lived in the Qingyuan Empire all his life, so he was familiar with the various tests in the Master Teacher Tower as well.

Hu!

Just as Wu shi was analyzing the situation, the light on the second floor abruptly extinguished.

The moment a challenger stepped into one of the tests, the corresponding floor would light up. When the test was cleared, the light would automatically be extinguished.

“This... He cleared the test?” Wu shi was taken aback.

He had thought that Zhang Xuan would take some time before he was able to clear Elder Zhao’s test, but who could have known that... he would actually be so fast!

To clear a test within just three minutes... when did 8-star master teachers become so easy to deal with?

“Hmm? The second floor has lit up again?” someone within the crowd exclaimed in shock.

Raising his gaze to take another look at the Master Teacher Tower, Wu shi was stunned.

The light of the second floor, which had just been extinguished a moment ago, suddenly lit up again.

For the light to suddenly return... did it mean that Zhang Xuan did not actually clear the test? But if that was the case, why would it be extinguished in the first place?

Just as everyone was bewildered by the bizarre happenings, Pavilion Master Gou suddenly spoke. “Wait a moment, the color is different! That color should belong to... Elder Han of the third floor!”

Taking a closer look, Wu shi realized that there was indeed something amiss.

The color that had lit up previously was yellowish-orange whereas the one that had just lit up was milky-white.

“That should have been the color to represent Elder Han’s test. Elder Han is a master teacher who left the Qingyuan Empire

Master Teacher Pavilion 8,000 years ago, and even though he's an 8-star low-tier master teacher as well, he possesses capabilities surpassing those of Elder Zhao. That is why he has been tasked with the responsibility of guarding the third floor. So, why would he suddenly appear on the second floor?" Pavilion Master Gou's voice was tinged with confusion.

Wu shi and the rest of the gathered crowd frowned in bewilderment as well.

"Under normal circumstances, the light will only be extinguished when the test has been cleared, and the challenger will move on to the next floor. The location of the tests shouldn't change..." Pavilion Master Gou analyzed. However, halfway through his words, his body suddenly stiffened as his mouth opened wide, and his eyes bulged in disbelief. "Or does this mean that... the will of Elder Zhao has dissipated?"

"Dissipated?"

"That's right. According to what I know, if the will of the predecessor guarding a certain floor of the Master Teacher Tower dissipates, the other predecessors guarding the floors above will automatically slide down to take his place," Pavilion Master Gou said hoarsely. "But it should just be a simple test, so why would Elder Zhao's will dissipate?"

Considering that there was no fight involved in the tests of the Master Teacher Tower, there should have been no way that the wills of the predecessors would dissipate all of a sudden.

What could possibly be happening within?

Just as the crowd was bewildered by the absurd situation, the milky-white glow suddenly flickered before vanishing altogether. After which, a light blue glow lit up on the second floor.

"Elder Han's will has dissipated as well?" Pavilion Master Gou was dumbstruck. In the next moment, everything suddenly struck him simultaneously like a bomb exploding in his mind, and he abruptly leaped up in a panic. "This is a disaster! Quick, we need to stop Zhang shi from carrying on!"

Our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion only has this many experts in its history! If all of their wills dissipate, our Master Teacher Pavilion will really be a goner!”

On top of serving as the final line of defense against pavilion crashing, the wills of the predecessors also served to clarify the doubts of the master teachers. With the extensive knowledge they possessed, they could be considered the greatest asset of their Master Teacher Pavilion! If they disappeared as well, the days of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion would truly be over!

“It’s impossible to stop him at this point. The headquarters have given Principal Zhang the permission to crash the pavilion, and we would be flouting the rules if we intervened!” Wu shi panicked upon realizing the severe implications of the situation as well, but due to the rules set in place, there was nothing they could do.

“Can’t we just admit our defeat?” Pavilion Master Gou was so flustered that it seemed as if he would burst into tears at any moment.

“That might work.” Wu shi pondered for a moment before swiftly nodding. “As long as our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion officially acknowledges that he has successfully crashed the pavilion, there will be no need for him to challenge the Master Teacher Tower anymore. If so, we will be allowed to head in and stop him.”

Hearing those words, Pavilion Master Gou whipped out his Pavilion Master Token, bit his finger, and dripped a droplet of blood on it.

Weng!

A brilliant burst of light rose into the sky.

Hong long!

An overwhelming aura descended from the sky, placing immense pressure on those standing beneath.

Following which, a grand voice echoed in the air. “The Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion officially surrenders to Master Teacher Zhang Xuan, and I seek

permission to end the pavilion crashing... Ah, there's no need for it anymore. He has already finished his pavilion crashing..."

At that moment, 'jiya!', the doors to the Master Teacher Tower suddenly opened. Zhang Xuan emerged with a look of bewilderment on his face.

"What is wrong with your Master Teacher Tower? Why are all of the predecessors cramping up the second floor?"

1186 7-star Master Teacher!

Hearing Zhang Xuan's question, Pavilion Master Gou spurted a mouthful of blood. He felt so stifled that he could have gone insane on the spot.

With this, his dream of retiring peacefully had been utterly shattered. He was probably the very first pavilion master in history to have the wills of all the predecessors dissipate under his leadership!

After a long moment of silence, Pavilion Master Gou finally suppressed the indignation in his heart and bowed deeply. "Zhang shi, since you have successfully crashed the pavilion, you can raise any request. As long as it isn't at odds with our fundamental values as master teachers, our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Empire will surely heed your orders!"

To be honest, Pavilion Master Gou really felt that he was unlucky. There had only been three successful pavilion crashes in the long history of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and never had he dreamed that he would be the fourth.

"Vice Pavilion Master Tian has colluded with King Zhongqing to frame me, and on top of that, he has intentionally leaked the secrets of the Master Teacher Pavilion to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, causing the death of countless master teachers. His sins are unpardonable, so I want the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion to apprehend him and have this matter thoroughly investigated this instant!" Zhang Xuan ordered authoritatively.

"Yes!" Pavilion Master Gou nodded. Turning around, he was just about to speak when he noticed something and frowned. "Where is Vice Pavilion Master Tian?"

Vice Pavilion Master Tian had been standing next to him just a moment ago, so how did the latter vanish all of a sudden?

A master teacher quickly rushed forward. "Reporting to Pavilion Master Gou, Vice Pavilion Master Tian has left

temporarily to deal with some urgent matters.”

“Shit!” Pavilion Master Gou’s eyes narrowed in dread. “Comb through Qingyuan City and find him right now!”

Huala!

The ten thousand master teachers swiftly dispersed throughout Qingyuan City. Not too long later, they returned with livid expressions on their faces. “Pavilion Master Gou, it appears that Vice Pavilion Master Tian is no longer in the capital. We aren’t able to find any trace of him...”

Hearing those words, Pavilion Master Gou’s face turned completely pale.

He had been so shocked by Zhang Xuan’s pavilion crashing that he had not paid much notice to the fellow beside him. He had not expected the latter to escape while his attention was elsewhere!

It seemed like the Vice Pavilion Master Tian knew that Zhang Xuan would have him apprehended as soon as the latter succeeded in crashing the pavilion, so he dared not stay any longer.

“The very purpose of my pavilion crashing was out of indignation of being framed by Vice Pavilion Master Tian; you should know that very well. You should have known that he would escape as soon as I succeed in my pavilion crashing, and yet, you did not make any preparations in advance. Tell me, how in the world did a fool like you manage to become the pavilion master?” Zhang Xuan’s face turned incomparably ugly as well.

The conflict between him and the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion originated from Vice Pavilion Master Tian. Regardless of whether Zhang Xuan succeeded in the pavilion crashing or not, it was almost certain that the headquarters would investigate this matter, and the latter would be punished for his actions.

Despite this, Pavilion Master Gou did not dispatch any men to keep a close eye on Vice Pavilion Master Tian, even allowing the latter to come and go as he pleased. As such, Vice Pavilion

Tian would have to have been an imbecile to not make use of the opportunity to escape!

If a 7-star master teacher were to determinedly conceal all traces of himself and go into hiding, it would be nigh impossible to find him.

“I...” Pavilion Master Gou’s face turned completely red.

He had intended to make such an order, but he had not expected Zhang Xuan to successfully crash the pavilion, and to succeed so swiftly at that!

Clenching his fists tightly, Pavilion Master Gou turned to the crowd and declared imposingly, “In my name as the head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, I hereby issue an arrest warrant for Tian Qing! Alive or dead, capture him and bring him to me!”

“Yes!”

The master teachers swiftly scattered.

An arrest warrant from the Master Teacher Pavilion could be said to be the most powerful warrant throughout the entire Master Teacher Continent. Once released, all the empires and kingdoms within the Qingyuan Conferred Empire would receive the message, and any cultivator who encountered the wanted individual would be handsomely rewarded for notifying the regional Master Teacher Pavilion.

It could be said that with this arrest warrant, unless the wanted were to forever conceal their strength and lie low, it would only be a matter of time before they were found.

After making arrangements for Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s capture, Pavilion Master Gou took out his emblem and declared, “I, Gou Tianze, have let down the Master Teacher Pavilion. Thus, I shall officially resign from my position in the Master Teacher Pavilion and await the headquarters’ verdict. Until a new pavilion master is nominated, the affairs of the Master Teacher Pavilion will be handled by Wu shi!”

Along with that declaration, the energy he had a moment ago seemed to suddenly vanish without a trace. In an instant, he looked as if he had aged several centuries.

He had been the head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion for five hundred years, and he had not erred within that period. He really did not expect that he would end up retiring in such a manner.

On the other hand, knowing that there was no point in saying anything further, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. Even with all the measures taken to arrest Vice Pavilion Master Tian, it would not be easy to find him once more. Thus, choosing to put the matter aside for the moment, he turned to Wu shi and said, “Wu shi, here are my 7-star supporting occupation emblems. I meet the prerequisites, so I would like to apply for my promotion to 7-star master teacher!”

After saying those words, he passed the 7-star supporting occupation emblems over.

After taking a look, Wu shi nodded and said, “Principal Zhang, give me a moment. I’ll report your situation to the headquarters, so it might take a while.”

“There’s no need to hurry. Meanwhile, is it fine if I take a look around the Master Teacher Pavilion’s library?” Zhang Xuan replied.

Even though he had cleared the Empire Building examination, there were still some necessary administrative procedures that had to be completed before he could be awarded with the 7-star emblem. With Wu shi dealing with those for him, they would not pose much of a problem. Rather than waiting there for the processing to be done, his time would be better spent browsing through books.

While he was already qualified to become a 7-star master teacher, he had not browsed through the 7-star master teacher books yet. This would be a good opportunity to do so.

“Here is my identity token. With this, you should be able to freely access any book within the Master Teacher Pavilion,” Wu shi replied.

Considering how Zhang Xuan had managed to crash the entire Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, defeating all the master teachers within it, there was no doubt that he was

already on par with a 7-star master teacher. Thus, it could not be considered a breach of rules to allow the other party to access the 7-star books using his token while the other party's promotion application was being processed.

“Un.” After accepting the token, Zhang Xuan had a master teacher swiftly lead him to the library.

The Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion's library did not just contain books concerning the master teacher occupation; there was also a sizeable collection on each of the other occupations as well, such as painter, appraiser, and the like.

Master teachers prided themselves on being knowledgeable, so it was only natural that they would house a huge array of books in their library. It took almost an entire day before Zhang Xuan managed to collect all the books into the Library of Heaven's Path.

He started by browsing through the master teacher books before moving on to the spirit awakener, demonic tunist, apothecary, physician, painter, beast tamer, terpsichore, formation master, appraiser, celestial designer, and the others.

Naturally, the collection of books on the other occupations within the library of the Master Teacher Pavilion could not be compared to the collections in the libraries of the occupations' guilds, but to Zhang Xuan, it did not matter how profound or deep each book was. As long as the quantity was enough, the quality did not matter at all.

It was not until three days later that Zhang Xuan successfully assimilated the knowledge of these books with their corresponding 7-star Heaven's Path manuals.

As soon as Zhang Xuan walked out from the library, Wu shi stepped forward and passed an object to him. “Principal Zhang, here is your 7-star master teacher emblem.”

Taking a look at it, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

After all the trouble he had gone through, he was finally a 7-star master teacher.

It was only a year ago that he had been a teacher who was on the verge of being fired, and he had not even heard of the master teacher occupation at that point. Yet, in the blink of an eye, he was already a 7-star master teacher, one of the top figures of the Master Teacher Continent.

Time really flies!

“Principal Zhang, there’s still no trace of Tian Qing anywhere. However, I have already reported this matter to the headquarters, and the headquarters have decided to dispatch an envoy to track him down as well. If nothing goes wrong, the envoy should be arriving in half a month’s time,” Wu shi informed Zhang Xuan.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Tian Qing would have surely escaped as warily as he could so as to prevent anyone from tracking him down, so unless a unique artifact was used, it would be nigh impossible to find him.

“What about King Zhongqing? Have you captured him yet?”

“He’s currently imprisoned within the cell of the Master Teacher Pavilion. However, he still refuses to speak.” Wu shi shook his head.

“It’s fine, just keep him imprisoned for the time being. How is the matter of awarding Chen Zhe with accolades coming along?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Zhang Xuan had advised Wu shi to offer the highest compliments to Chen Zhe instead of punishing the latter so as to lure their enemies into action. But before Wu shi could do so, Zhang Xuan had ended up crashing the pavilion. Three days had passed since then, so Wu shi should have gotten it done by now.

“Just as you instructed, I conducted a ceremony to award accolades to Chen Zhe earlier this morning, complimenting him for the great contribution he has made to mankind. I also made sure to make his accomplishments as detailed as possible.” Wu shi quickly nodded.

Hearing that Wu shi had done it, Zhang Xuan smiled in satisfaction. “That’s good. Alright, gather a few of the stronger master teachers and follow me. It’s about time for us to apprehend Tian Qing!”

“Apprehend Tian Qing? How?” Wu shi was stunned.

“Simple. We’ll lie in ambush at Chen Zhe’s residence. If nothing goes wrong, the residence should find itself welcoming an uninvited guest tonight,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Chen Zhe’s residence? Does Principal Zhang mean to say that Chen Zhe wields some secret concerning Tian Qing?” Wu shi pondered for a moment before swiftly comprehending the situation.

Chen Zhe was Tian Qing’s student, which made the latter suspicious too. On top of that, Chen Zhe’s abrupt death in his cell in the midst of the investigation was extremely curious as well. At this point, Wu shi was nearly certain that the both of them had been conspiring with one another!

“I’m not too sure either. This is an idea that came to my mind over the past two days. If Chen Zhe did not hold any critical information, there should have been no reason for the other side to go to the trouble of silencing him. While your act of awarding him accolades publicly will reek of a trap, my gut feeling tells me that the other side will not dare take the risk,” Zhang Xuan analyzed.

“I understand the rationale behind your plan, but... given that Tian Qing is already in a precarious position himself, is there a need for him to stake his life just to guard a secret?” Wu shi asked with a frown.

If Tian Qing was indicted with the current crimes he was accused of, there was a very good chance that he would be executed by the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters. Since he was already a goner either way, it should not matter whether the list of crimes to his name increased or not. Thus, even if Chen Zhe possessed any secrets, it did not seem likely that Tian Qing would risk exposing himself just to retrieve the ‘secret’.

“That depends on how important the secret is,” Zhang Xuan said.

“The reason Chen Zhe was exposed was because he had duped Zhang Yinqiu and the others of the news concerning the ancient domain and leaked it to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. So... if the secret that he holds concerns some confidential intelligence of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, Tian Qing might just take the risk.”

“This...” Wu shi’s body stiffened upon hearing those words. “Principal Zhang, could you have discovered something regarding that?”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “It’s still speculation at the current moment.”

Over the past two days, on top of going through the books that he had collected, he had been pondering over his encounters over the past seven days in Qingyuan City as well.

After some thought, he could not help but feel that something was amiss.

It was a little difficult to believe that Tian Qing was unaware of his student’s affiliation with the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

Furthermore, as the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, it was honestly suspicious how Tian Qing took no action after learning from Wu shi that his student had leaked vital intelligence to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. Considering how severe the matter was, shouldn’t Tian Qing have been in a rush to explain himself so as to absolve himself of blame? Or perhaps... did he know that he did not have to do so?

“Alright, I’ll gather my men right now!” Wu shi could tell that Zhang Xuan seemed to have noticed something crucial, so he quickly left the room.

A few moments later, he returned with five master teachers beside him.

Four of them were elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and the last one was a familiar face—Zhang Jiuxiao!

As powerless as Zhang Jiuxiao appeared to be compared to Zhang Xuan, defeated without even managing to land a blow on the latter, his true strength was still formidable. If he were to use all the means at his disposal, especially his two Saint intermediate-tier swords and four Saint low-tier sabers, there was a good chance that he would be able to overwhelm even Wu shi.

“For the time being, just sit around and rest. We’ll set off at night time,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

“Yes!” the crowd replied.

After witnessing the pavilion crashing, they were all filled with admiration for the young man before them. At this moment, Zhang Xuan’s prestige within the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion could be said to have exceeded even that of Wu shi!

1187 Arres

In a compartment of a tavern by the suburbs of Qingyuan City, a few men were gathered around a table. However, their eyes kept drifting off toward a nearby residence from time to time.

Wu shi sent a telepathic message to Zhang Xuan. “Principal Zhang, that’s where Chen Zhe lives...”

As soon as night fell, they had immediately headed over here. Through the prior, discreet arrangements of the Master Teacher Pavilion, they did not catch anyone’s attention.

“Un.”

Zhang Xuan extended his Spiritual Perception toward the residence to perceive its interior.

While the Spiritual Perception of others was only able to cover a radius of 400 meters, and that was including even the Half-Leaving Aperture realm Wu shi, Zhang Xuan’s Spiritual Perception was able to cover a radius of 2,500 meters. He would be able to perceive the slightest movement within the residence from where they sat, so there was no need for them to hide within Chen Zhe’s residence at all.

“Chen Zhe’s residence sure is extravagant and sturdy!” Zhang Xuan could not help but exclaim after taking a swift look at it.

As humble as Chen Zhe might have seemed in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he was still a 7-star low-tier master teacher, as well as the direct disciple of a vice pavilion master. Just by those two identities, he could definitely be considered one of the more eminent figures in Qingyuan City.

As if to reflect that, his residence was filled with all kinds of formations, and nearly all of them had reached grade 7. In terms of renovation, his residence was not on par with the affluent King Zhongqing’s manor yet, but it was still far beyond that of an ordinary clan.

A gazebo on the fifth step, a towering building on the tenth. The corridors meandered like long ribbons, and the roofs were

beautifully sculpted.

It was hard to tell what Wu shi did, but the residence did not seem to have been too affected by Chen Zhe's death. On the contrary, it was extremely tranquil and peaceful.

"Principal Zhang, do we have to make any preparations in advance?" Wu shi pondered for a brief moment before continuing. "From what I know Tian Qing seems to have a Saint intermediate-tier artifact in his possession. In terms of its individual strength, it is beyond that of the Golden Origin Cauldron, and it complements his cultivation, allowing him to display exceptional fighting prowess!"

"It's fine." Zhang Xuan shook his head. "Making too many preparations in advance could play against us instead. It would be bad if the other party notices that something is amiss and flees."

Naturally, it would have been much safer if they were to fill Chen Zhe's residence with their own formations and men. However, the commotion in doing so might instead deter Tian Qing from biting the bait.

"But..." Wu shi was still a little worried.

"There's no need to worry. As powerful as Tian Qing may be, as long as his fighting prowess is beneath that of Pavilion Master Gou, we should not face too many problems dealing with him. Besides, as long as we can hold him for a moment, we can always call for reinforcements from the Combat Master Hall," Zhang Xuan said.

He had fought Tian Qing in the past, and the latter was not a match for him at all. Even if the latter had a powerful Saint intermediate-tier artifact in his possession, Zhang Xuan was still confident that they would at least be able to protect themselves. On the off chance that they found themselves outmatched, as long as they could hold on for a short moment, the Combat Master Hall would be able to dispatch their elites to reinforce them.

Even if Tian Qing was a true Leaving Aperture realm expert, he was confident that they would be able to subdue him with

relative ease.

Wu shi pondered for a moment before nodding. “That’s true.”

Knowing that they would be facing a great battle soon, the other master teachers focused their attention on conditioning their state so that they would be able to fight at their full strength later on.

A long time later, when the moon was just beginning to set in the west, Zhang Xuan suddenly stood up and said, “He’s here.”

Wu shi and the others widened their eyes in alarm.

They quickly activated their Spiritual Perception to take a look, only to find nothing at all.

“He’s already in the residence.” Noticing the looks of confusion on the faces of the master teachers, Zhang Xuan quickly explained, “He came from underground!”

“Underground?”

Everyone looked at Zhang Xuan with an incredulous look.

While Spiritual Perception was able to pass through obstacles, it would severely limit its range. Thus, it was difficult to perceive items that were beneath the ground. And yet... Zhang Xuan was still able to discern the intruder so easily?

“He’s advancing very warily, choosing to sneak into the opposite residence before using some kind of secret art to dive underground. His movements are subtle, but there’s no doubt that he’s there. Alright, let’s go over to apprehend him,” Zhang Xuan said.

Back in the Jingyuan City Poison Hall, he had encountered the Earthleaf King, who had the uncanny ability to dive into the ground.

In view of that, Zhang Xuan had chosen to extend his Spiritual Perception to cover the underground as well, and it was a relief that he had done so.

“Alright!”

The crowd swiftly got to their feet before flying out through the windows, heading for the residence right before them. They landed at the center of the residence, where Zhang Xuan carefully directed the master teachers into their positions. After that was done, he flicked his wrist and swiftly placed a few formation flags into the ground.

Weng!

Zhang Xuan stomped on the ground and bellowed, “Come out!”

Peng!

The ground began shaking intensely, and before long, as figure was forcefully plucked out from the ground.

The figure was dressed in black from head to toe, allowing him to blend in perfectly with the darkness of the night. However, with their exceptional eyesight as Primordial Spirit realm experts, the other master teachers could still easily make out his appearance to determine his identity.

“Tian Qing, it’s indeed you!” Wu shi’s face turned livid. “You won’t be getting away today!”

Wu shi’s hand clawed forward, and a powerful might burst forth, threatening to tear Tian Qing into shreds.

On the other hand, Tian Qing did not expect that there would be someone lying in ambush for him. His eyes narrowed in apprehension as he quickly raised his arms to defend himself from Wu shi’s offense.

Wu shi’s claws gouged deep into the flesh of his hand, but thanks to his timely reaction, Tian Qing managed to protect his vitals.

After fending off Wu shi’s attack, Tian Qing swiftly turned around and flitted away, hoping to escape from the area.

“Escape? Do you think that you will be able to escape?”

With a light chuckle, Zhang Jiuxiao raised his finger, and a powerful sword suddenly descended from the sky.

It was the Saint intermediate-tier sword that he had in his possession.

After listening to Zhang Xuan's lecture, while the sword still had not made a breakthrough to Half-Leaving Aperture realm yet, its strength had still grown considerably. Complemented with Zhang Jiuxiao's incredible cultivation, powerful surges of sword qi burst forth from the sword, covering a distance of several dozen meters in the blink of an eye to strike Tian Qing.

Seeing this, Tian Qing's face darkened. Without any hesitation, he flicked his wrist and drew a sword as well to deal with Zhang Jiuxiao's offense.

After several clashes, Zhang Jiuxiao was forced to retreat in a fluster.

As powerful as he was, Tian Qing was still an entire cultivation realm stronger than him. On top of that, their weapons were both at Saint intermediate-tier. Given so, it was inevitable that he would be in a disadvantageous position against the other party.

After pushing back Zhang Jiuxiao, Tian Qing leaped into the sky, but the next moment, he felt a ferocious might tearing through the space around him, heading right for him.

It was the offense from the other elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

They were all Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle experts as well, and knowing how powerful the person before them was, they dared not hold back. Whipping out their weapons, they used their strongest techniques without any hesitation. Innumerable bursts of sword qi appeared before Tian Qing, forming a massive wall in his path.

If the latter continued any further, he would surely be torn to shreds.

With an awful complexion on his face, Tian Qing knew that it would be dangerous if he pushed on any further. Flicking his wrist, he sent a powerful strike toward the wall of sword qi and made use of the momentum from the rebound to descend back to the ground. Barely after he managed to steady his

figure once more, Wu Shi and Zhang Jiuxiao launched their second assault on him.

Zhang Xuan had prepared a battle plan to ensure that they would be able to successfully apprehend Tian Qing. As the two most powerful experts of the group, Wu Shi and Zhang Jiuxiao would be in charge of the offense whereas the remaining four were responsible for preventing Tian Qing from escaping.

Watching as Tian Qing was slowly ground down under the simultaneous assault of the master teachers, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. Seeing that he did not have to join the battle, he activated his Eye of Insight and began assessing the surroundings instead.

Since Tian Qing was willing to the risk going to Chen Zhe's residence, it could only mean that there was a secret hidden there that Tian Qing perceived to be even more important than his own life.

Scanning the surroundings carefully, Zhang Xuan suddenly frowned.

He walked up to the trees in the middle of the courtyard.

They were Saint-tier Lingering Fragrance Trees, known for the Lingering Fragrance Fruits that they produced.

Despite being considered a Saint-tier medicinal herb, the Lingering Fragrance Tree was completely ineffective in raising one's cultivation. It was only valued as a perfume—one who consumed it would retain its fragrance within their body for an entire year. To put it in other terms, it was a commodity that only ladies would want.

Yet, there were actually seven of such trees in Chen Zhe's courtyard. Even before coming close, Zhang Xuan could already smell the sweet, intoxicating fragrance that they emanated.

Even he had to admit that the fragrance was indeed very pleasant. If a lady carried such a scent on her, she would surely be able to charm any men.

However, what Zhang Xuan was interested in was not the trees themselves but the area a zhang beneath the trees.

A grade-7 Aura Sealing Formation... Using Saint-tier medicinal herbs in place of formation flags in order to conceal the presence of the formation, not bad! Zhang Xuan nodded.

In the eyes of an outsider, those might have seemed like perfectly normal trees. However, as a 7-star pinnacle formation master, Zhang Xuan could easily tell that the positions of those trees formed a unique formation.

In principle, it was similar to the Aura Sealing Formation that he had set up previously in Hongyuan Empire to conceal the Byzantium Helios Beast's presence, but through tapping into the strength of the Saint-tier Lingered Fragrance Trees, the formation was raised to the tier of grade-7 pinnacle. On top of that, it was also intentionally concealed by the other formations, so if one did not examine it closely, it would have been difficult to notice its existence.

Even Zhang Xuan had only managed to deduce it himself by analyzing the flow of the spiritual energy in the area.

A 7-star low-tier master teacher setting up a grade-7 pinnacle Aura Sealing Formation in his residence? Let me see what kind of secret he is hiding beneath!

Zhang Xuan walked forward and stomped forcefully on the ground.

Huala!

The ground immediately parted, revealing a stone door.

Zhang Xuan placed his hand on the stone door and forcefully erased the inscriptions on it before walking in.

Beyond the stone door was a flight of stairs made from a mysterious material that descended into the deep darkness. For some reason, it was impossible to see too far ahead even with the radiance of the Night Illumination Pearls, as if something was absorbing the light.

Zhang Xuan had to activate his Eye of Insight before everything became a little clearer.

It's Starluster Stone... Zhang Xuan frowned.

After going through the books in the Appraiser Hall and the Master Teacher Pavilion, he had gained some understanding of the rare minerals on the Master Teacher Continent.

The Starluster Stone was a peculiar mineral that had the ability to absorb light, making an area incredibly dark.

Of course, through using a unique method, one could release the light absorbed within the stone, making it incomparably bright, as if a star in the sky.

It was for this reason that the rock was named 'Starluster'.

However, the Starluster Stone within the passageway seemed to have been altered in a certain manner that allowed it to only absorb light but not release it.

Nevertheless, this did not pose too much trouble for Zhang Xuan. Navigating his way forward with his Eye of Insight, he slowly made his way down.

After walking for around seventy to eighty meters, he finally reached the bottom of the stairs. Raising his gaze, he could not help but be taken aback by what he saw.

It was a vast underground chamber.

At the very center of the chamber was a huge pool of lava that emitted frightening heat. Fortunately, it was sealed by a massive formation.

This... A grade-8 formation?

Seeing how the formation was constructed out of unique materials, its grade was surely not beneath those within the Qiu Wu Palace. Clearly, it had already reached grade-8.

It was one thing for there to be a grade-7 pinnacle Aura Sealing Formation in the courtyard of a 7-star low-tier master teacher, but to think that there would be an underground chamber with a grade-8 formation beneath his residence at that...

Something was definitely amiss.

Let me see what the formation is channeling power toward.

Through his discerning eye, Zhang Xuan could tell that the purpose of the grade-8 formation was to channel the immense energy contained within the lava to power something.

Tracing the flow of power in the formation, Zhang Xuan soon narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

“T-this...“1 zhang = 3.33 meters

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Before Zhang Xuan's eyes was a massive altar powered by the formation. It was floating silently in the air, and perhaps because it was not activated, it appeared to meld into the deep darkness. There was an ancient quality to the altar that felt as if it had traversed across the ages.

This altar... it's very similar to the one that I obtained from the Scarletleaf King. Could it be an altar of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe? Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

The altar was identical to the one he had obtained from the Scarletleaf King previously, just significantly larger. With a single glance, it was apparent that the altar belonged to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe as well.

Studying it with his Eye of Insight, he saw countless inscriptions carved on the altar. These inscriptions were extremely peculiar, being neither in the language of the humans nor the language of the beasts.

Nevertheless, these words were extremely familiar to Zhang Xuan. With just a single glance, he had already recognized them.

These words are in the language that Ancient Sage Qiu Wu used to leave behind his heritage!

The maps that Ancient Sage Qiu Wu had left behind were in the same language as the words carved on the altar. When these words were structured together in a certain manner, they would be imbued with a peculiar power over space.

It seems to be some kind of teleportation formation, serving to teleport Otherworldly Demons over here! Zhang Xuan pondered with a deep frown.

The presence of this very formation was the most direct evidence to show that Chen Zhe had betrayed mankind for the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

Considering the scale of the altar, and the sheer amount of energy it was powered with from the grade-8 formation below, it was extremely likely that it had played an integral role in the invasion of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe twenty years ago!

Otherwise, considering that the Subterranean Galleries had been tightly sealed, how could so many Otherworldly Demons have suddenly emerged?

From the looks of it, it seems like Tian Qing has betrayed mankind as well...

While Chen Zhe was a 7-star low-tier master teacher in the Master Teacher Pavilion, it was impossible for him to construct such a powerful formation by himself while concealing the matter from his teacher, Tian Qing.

The only possibility was that... Tian Qing was in on the matter as well.

In other words, Vice Pavilion Master Tian, the most authoritative 7-star pinnacle master teacher of the Master Teacher Pavilion, had been a spy of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe all along!

Putting it together with the deductions he had made before, Zhang Xuan came to a realization. And here I was wondering why, despite how honest and humble I have been, the other party still came straight for me. Everything makes sense now...

It had only been a week since he had arrived at Qingyuan City, and he had not caused any trouble within this period, unlike back when he was at the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. And yet, someone had still found such a crude reason to attack him, claiming that his butler was the 'founder' of the Poison Hall just on the basis that they shared the same name.

This matter had left him rather confused for quite some time, but looking at it once more, it could have been vengeance for the Skyleaf King and the others.

After all, the Ten Kings of the Qingtian Lineage had ended up dying in his hands. Even if not for vengeance, it was

understandable why the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe would attempt to get rid of him.

The Qingtian Lineage, Tian Qing, King Zhongqing... I should have known earlier! Zhang Xuan shook his head.

The Qingtian Lineage had nearly been wiped out by him—nine of them were killed while the last one was tamed.

He should have suspected this from the moment that he learned that King Zhongqing and Tian Qing wanted to deal with him, especially given the fact that Tian Qing was the teacher of Chen Zhe.

However, due to their identities, he had only thought that they were negligent in their responsibilities back then.

Tian Qing and King Zhongqing... They were probably both from the Qingtian Lineage, right?

Furthermore, looking back on their records, both of them seemed to have come to power after achieving significant contributions in the war against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe twenty years ago.

Forget it. For the time being, my priority should be to destroy this altar. Once I crush it, it'll be impossible for them to send any more men over.

As this matter had great implications, while Zhang Xuan was confident in his deduction, he knew that he needed to obtain concrete proof before doing anything. Thus, he decided to put the matter aside for now.

Flicking his wrist, he took out the Glacier Rain Sword.

Huala!

Driving his zhenqi, he shot a barrage of sword qi toward the altar.

In the three days he had spent in the Combat Master Hall, he had managed to bring his Heaven's Path Sword Art to greater heights. If he could raise his Glacier Rain Sword to Saint intermediate-tier too, even without the use of a formation, he would be able to subdue Pavilion Master Gou easily with his sword.

“Break!”

However, as Zhang Xuan’s sword qi was just about to strike the altar, he suddenly felt a compelling power wrapping around him, rendering him light-headed.

Following which, an immense might suddenly tugged at his soul, attempting to forcefully drag it out of his body.

This... Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

With a powerful force tugging at his soul, he could not continue his attack anymore, and his body staggered weakly on the spot.

The tugging sensation on his soul was extremely familiar. He had experienced it once in the past.

Cang Xu had used such a technique against him.

However, due to Cang Xu’s lacking strength relative to his soul, the technique was not able to faze him at all. However, the might that was pulling at his soul this time around was extremely powerful. If Zhang Xuan let his attention waver for a moment, his soul could very well be nabbed away.

Zhang Xuan swiftly drove his Heaven’s Path zhenqi to ward off the force tugging at his soul, and only then did he manage to steady himself. Turning his gaze to the altar once more, he soon understood something.

So, this is how they carried out the killings.

Without a doubt, Tian Qing or the Otherworldly Demons must have made use of the grade-8 formation to amplify the prowess of their soul art to bypass the defenses of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Given that it had nearly taken even his soul away, surely it would have been much easier to deal with Chen Zhe and the others.

While I was trying to lure them out, they were trying to do the same. No wonder everything went so smoothly!

Knowing that there was someone hiding in the area, using the altar to nab his soul and kill him, Zhang Xuan narrowed his

eyes sharply.

As socially inept as he was, it did not mean that he was lacking in intelligence. On the contrary, as his Soul Depth increased, his ability to analyze and decipher situations was getting stronger and stronger.

He had told Wu Shi to compliment Chen Zhe publicly in order to lure Tian Qing out, and Tian Qing did arrive in the end. However, he still ended up being assaulted... It seemed like the other party was no fool either!

Perhaps, from the very start, the other party's goal was not to retrieve the altar but to kill him!

He had set up this ploy in order to bait Tian Qing, but from the looks of it now, it was apparent that the other party had already seen through his ploy. They had chosen to go along with his ploy, sending Tian Qing over and forsaking him like a pawn so as to lure him out and hunt him down.

A thought suddenly came to Zhang Xuan's mind. Could this be related to Vicious?

"Master, there's no doubt that the soul art is one of my secret arts, but judging from the lack of mastery in the technique, I am certain that it isn't another one of my body parts executing it. Otherwise, as powerful as you are, it's unlikely that you would have been able to survive it!" Vicious informed Zhang Xuan telepathically.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

As powerful as his Heaven's Path Soul Art was, it was a pity that he was still too weak at the moment. If the enemy he was facing was truly Vicious, the latter would surely have been able to nab his soul easily.

But if it isn't another one of the body parts... who else could it be? Zhang Xuan frowned.

In this moment, another bout of dizziness struck his head, and a might even greater than before began tugging at his soul.

It seemed like the other party was giving it a second try after the first failure.

Perhaps I should just go along with the other party to take a look.

Instead of racking his head to figure out whom the culprit working against him was, it would be much easier for him just to let the other party take his soul and see the other party's face for himself.

After some discussion with Vicious to learn more about the various aspects of the soul art, Zhang Xuan walked up to the altar and wrote some things on it with his brush. Only after that did he release his grip on his soul, allowing the force to take away his soul.

Hu!

His soul flew out from his glabella.

My soul is currently a little too big. If I go over in such a form, it might cause the other party to put up his guard instead. It would be better if I can compress it slightly for the time being.

Zhang Xuan's soul was nearly ten meters tall, and if he were to appear in such a form before the other party, he would surely expose his proficiency in soul arts. Thus, with a tap of his finger, he began driving the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel.

In the blink of an eye, his ten-meters large soul became compressed into the size of his physical body.

Hu!

Under the powerful suction force from the altar, Zhang Xuan's soul was swiftly dragged into it.

Weng!

With a brilliant shimmer from the altar, Zhang Xuan's soul disappeared from sight.

...

While Zhang Xuan was exploring the underground cavern beneath Chen Zhe's residence, Tian Qing had been under the relentless assault of the master teachers, and he was swiftly approaching his limits.

His body was covered in wounds and fresh blood, and a mixture of desperation and despair could be seen in his eyes.

As powerful as he was, he was still unable to cope with the collaborative offense from six powerful experts.

“Tian Qing, give up. If you struggle anymore, we’ll just have to kill you!” Wu shi harrumphed coldly.

Previously, Pavilion Master Gou had already issued a warrant to apprehend Tian Qing dead or alive!

If the latter still refused to submit, they did not mind dragging his corpse back to the Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Kill me? Try it then! I’ll make sure to bring all of you down with me!” Knowing that it was impossible to escape, Tian Qing roared ferociously.

All of a sudden, an immense power surged within Tian Qing’s body, and his body began glowing with a fearsome shade of red.

Narrowing his eyes in horror, Wu shi bellowed anxiously, “This is bad, he’s going to blow himself up! Quick, seal the surroundings!”

The power that a Half-Leaving Aperture realm harnessed within his body was no joke. It could easily reduce everything within a radius of a thousand meters into cinders.

Chen Zhe deserved to die, but his family members and the civilians that lived in the area were innocent. As master teachers, it was their responsibility to protect them.

“Yes!”

The crowd swiftly created a barrier around Tian Qing with their zhenqi to contain the might of his explosion.

There was no doubt that their barrier would be insufficient to neutralize Tian Qing’s explosion, and they could very well incur severe injuries or even die from the shockwave of the explosion. However, if their efforts could at least save the lives of some, they did not think that their sacrifice would be wasted.

Just as the crowd had resolved themselves to a bitter end, a voice suddenly sounded from above them. “There’s no need to go through so much trouble. Let me do it instead!”

Raising their heads, they saw a massive cauldron falling from the sky.

Padah! In the blink of an eye, the exploding Tian Qing was suddenly crushed toward the ground.

On the off chance that Tian Qing managed to turn the tables, Zhang Xuan had left the Golden Origin Cauldron outside for the safety of the others.

And upon seeing that the master teachers were in a bad position, that fellow immediately rushed forward to deal with the situation.

Huala!

After pressing Tian Qing back onto the ground, the massive body of the Golden Origin Cauldron suddenly twisted as its cauldron cap opened, and it swallowed Tian Qing without any hesitation.

Boom!

Shortly after it swallowed Tian Qing, a deafening explosion suddenly sounded within the cauldron. Following which, the cap opened once more, and a puff of white smoke rose from it, as if a burp of contentment.

Putong!

A tattered body was coughed out of the cauldron.

“How revolting! It sure is hard to swallow this...” The Golden Origin Cauldron shook intensely, as if retching in disgust. However, it soon recalled that it did not have anything to vomit out, so it could only let the matter go.

As powerful as Tian Qing’s explosion was, it was still insufficient to blow a Saint intermediate-tier artifact, especially one like the Golden Origin Cauldron, into pieces.

On the other hand, the eyebrows of the master teachers shot up.

Wu shi had gone through many life-threatening situations with the Golden Origin Cauldron, and he knew how powerful the latter was. It was just that he had not expected the latter to become so formidable after its reawakening.

To swallow Tian Qing and survive the impact of his explosion... At this rate, it seemed like it was only a matter of time before the Golden Origin Cauldron reached the Leaving Aperture realm.

Zhang Jiuxiao walked up to the corpse and muttered with a complicated expression, "He's dead..."

"Dead?" Wu shi walked up to take a look.

He examined the corpse and swiftly confirmed that it was Tian Qing, no doubt about it. However, he still could hardly believe his eyes.

Considering how tenacious Tian Qing had been all this while, he found his easy death a little hard to swallow.

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“Bring his corpse back to the Master Teacher Pavilion!”

Nevertheless, since Tian Qing was already dead, there was no use pursuing this matter anymore. Everything was finally over.

Sighing deeply, Wu shi waved his hands.

Tian Qing was a person who had wielded great power. Even though he had only been a vice pavilion master, the authority he had wielded in the Qingtian Empire Master Teacher Pavilion was effectively equal to the pavilion master. It had been a matter of time before the other party was due to become an official 8-star master teacher or even higher. No one had thought that the other party would end up dying here.

Life sure was unpredictable.

No matter who one offended, one should never offend Zhang Xuan. It seemed like his previous decision was correct.

Two of the elders walked forward to collect Tian Qing’s corpse. It was at this moment that Wu shi finally scanned the surroundings once more and asked, “Where is Zhang shi?”

As the fight a moment ago had been too intense, he had not noticed Zhang Xuan’s disappearance.

“Master went into the passageway over there,” replied the Golden Origin Cauldron swiftly.

“Passageway?”

It was only then that Wu shi noticed the stone gate in the courtyard.

Wu shi walked up to the stone gate, and after examining it for a moment, he remarked, “This is... an Aura Sealing Formation? It seems like the stone gate was concealed by the formation before—that’s why we didn’t notice it.”

The formation had the ability to seal all auras, which had previously prevented them from perceiving the presence of the stone gate. However, the formation became undone with the rising of the stone gate, and if they still could not notice it now, they would be unworthy of being 7-star master teachers.

“Let’s head in to take a look!” Wu shi said as he made his way into the passageway.

Zhang Jiuxiao and the others followed Wu shi in, but before they could venture too far in, they heard a vexed voice. “Help me in...”

Everyone turned around and saw that the Golden Origin Cauldron had followed them in as well. However, too big, it was stuck at the entrance of the passageway. Its three thick legs just would not fit into the passageway no matter how it tried to squeeze in.

While the Golden Origin Cauldron could enlarge itself easily, it was not as easy for it to compress itself.

The others had to break open the entrance before the stuck Golden Origin Cauldron could squeeze its way into the passageway.

Satisfied, the Golden Origin Cauldron followed the crowd happily down the stairs.

Not too long later, they arrived at the underground chamber.

They swiftly saw the lava and the altar, along with Zhang Xuan, who was seated on the ground, unmoving.

“Zhang shi!”

The crowd swiftly gathered around Zhang Xuan.

Noticing that Zhang Xuan was not responding, Wu shi placed his hand on the young man, and his face suddenly paled in disbelief. “He isn’t breathing, and there is no heartbeat either. He is dead? How is this possible?”

How could Zhang Xuan die within the short period of time that they were fighting against Tian Qing?

He was a Celestial Master Teacher and a Celestial Saint! How could he die in somewhere as humble as this?

Just as the crowd was completely bewildered by the situation before them, the Golden Origin Cauldron's furious voice suddenly sounded. "What do you mean by my master is dead? My master is obviously cultivating some kind of formidable cultivation technique, so stop bothering him and scam to the side!"

Back at the Qiu Wu Palace, the Golden Origin Cauldron had once dived into the lava with Zhang Xuan, and the latter had been in such a state as well. Thus, it was not too surprised by the situation before it.

"Cultivation technique?"

"What kind of cultivation technique could possibly stop one's breathing and halt one's heartbeat?"

The master teachers frowned, not believing the Golden Origin Cauldron's words in the slightest.

As knowledgeable master teachers, they had never heard of a single cultivation technique that would place one in a state reminiscent of a corpse!

Zhang Jiuxiao shook his head, too. "How could there possibly be such a cultivation technique in the world?"

He felt that the Golden Origin Cauldron was only saying those words because it was unwilling to face the reality of its master's death.

As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he had seen plenty of mysterious and bewildering occurrences in the world, but a cultivation technique that halted one's breathing and heartbeat and even caused the stiffening of one's body... There was no way there could possibly be a cultivation technique like that!

Those were clearly signs of death!

Zhang Jiuxiao's words won the approval of the other master teachers in the area as well.

The Golden Origin Cauldron harrumphed coldly. "Believe whatever you want!"

If it had a face, it would surely have been showing a look of disdain toward those master teachers.

To think that these 7-star master teachers cannot even match up to a cauldron like me in terms of knowledge, what a bunch of countryside bumpkins!

Zhang Jiuxiao shook his head and said, “We’ll know the truth once I use my zhenqi to check the internal state of his body!”

Right after saying those words, Zhang Jiuxiao immediately stretched his hand forward and placed it on Zhang Xuan’s body.

There were clear differences between the internal state of a living human and a corpse. For one, if Zhang Xuan was truly cultivating, the zhenqi in his body would surely still be active. His meridians would also be supple, and his internal organs would be filled with vitality.

All of this could easily be checked by pumping a surge of zhenqi into the other party’s body.

As soon as Zhang Jiuxiao placed his palm on Zhang Xuan’s body, he suddenly felt a furious might bursting toward him. In that instant, he felt as if he had been eyed by a ravenous beast, and goosebumps swiftly rose all over his body.

Instinctively, he immediately backed away, but it was already too late. A palm harnessing incomparable strength darted toward his dashing face.

His face distorted hideously as his body whizzed back with astounding momentum.

Bam! Pu!

Crashing heavily into the wall of the underground cavern, Zhang Jiuxiao’s face turned as white as a sheet of paper, and crimson blood spurted from his mouth.

The impact of that palm thrust had been so powerful that a depression of his shape had formed on the wall of the cavern, holding him firmly in place.

Tears streamed down Zhang Jiuxiao’s face as he cried, “I just wanted to check if you are dead or not out of worry... Did you

really have to get so angry and use so much force?”

As the victim, it went without saying that he knew whom the palm had come from. It was none other than the ‘dead’ Zhang Xuan!

It is not as if I was trying to harm you!

Did you have to attack me so mercilessly?

In an instant, an unprecedented feeling of weariness consumed Zhang Jiuxiao.

It seemed like ever since he became acquainted with Zhang Xuan, he had never lived a single day in peace.

Struggling out of the wall, he turned to look at Zhang Xuan once more, only to see that the culprit who had cruelly harmed him a moment ago was still sitting on the same spot with his eyes closed. There was not the slightest bit of guilt on his face at all, as if the assault that had happened earlier was none of his business.

Seeing this sight, the Golden Origin Cauldron shook its body triumphantly as it gloated in a tone that was practically dripping with ‘you reap what you sow’. “I told you that my master is in the midst of practicing some kind of unique cultivation technique, but you just wouldn’t listen...”

“He really is cultivating...”

The lips of Wu shi and the others twitched in disbelief.

They had seen plenty of cultivators who had eccentric cultivation techniques, but this was the first time they had seen something like this.

Was there really a cultivation technique like this in the world?

A moment later, Wu shi recovered from his shock and instructed, “Since Principal Zhang is cultivating, let’s sit here and guard him. Elder Gu, you should return to the Master Teacher Pavilion first and bring some reinforcement here to seal the area. Also, make sure to report this matter to the headquarters.”

“Yes!” An elder nodded before leaving the underground chamber.

...

The world around him spun and distorted. When Zhang Xuan finally came to once more, he was already standing within a tattered hut.

The same altar that he had encountered in the underground chamber was still beneath his feet. It seemed like he had been transported to the other end of the altar.

He tried to explore the area, only to find that there was a peculiar suction force from the altar holding him firmly in place, preventing him from moving. It would be difficult for him to break free of it quickly.

“Zhang shi, we meet again.”

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to scan the area, he suddenly heard a faint voice before him. Raising his head to take a look, he saw a copper-masked figure staring at him with his hands behind his back.

“It’s you?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

The other party was the person who had brought the grade-8 painting of the Sorrowless Old Man to Appraisal Convention to have the seal on it deciphered!

The copper-masked figure did not reply to that question. Instead, he stared at Zhang Xuan coldly for a very long moment before asking, “You altered the content of the painting, didn’t you?”

“Altered?” Zhang Xuan’s heart skipped a beat, but he did not let it show on the surface. With an indignant frown on his face, he harrumphed furiously. “How can that be? Putting aside the fact that I do not have the ability to do so, as a master teacher, I would never do something as unethical as that! That would be as good as trampling on the efforts of others, and only the most despicable of scum would commit such atrocities!”

“How can that be?” The copper-masked figure narrowed his eyes as he repeated Zhang Xuan’s words mockingly. “There

are some discrepancies in the painting beneath the seal, and there's also a visible difference in the conception of the painting. Only your consciousness entered the painting throughout the entire Appraisal Convention, so who else could it be other than you?"

Back at the Appraisal Convention, when he saw that what lay beneath the painting was not what he had expected but a group of ladies bathing, he could hardly believe his eyes. In that instant, he felt that he had wasted many years of his life pursuing the secret of the painting.

However, when he returned to his residence and studied the painting carefully, it did not take too long for him to notice that something was amiss.

In the first place, the fact that he had been able to notice the presence of a seal concealed within the painting meant that his comprehension of painting was at least on par with Guild Leader Meng of the Painter Guild.

Through his careful examination, he noticed that while the artistic style of the bathing beautiful ladies was a close imitation of the Sorrowless Old Man's Anchored Painting Style, there were still some discrepancies between the two.

The Sorrowless Old Man had gone to the extent of shaving off a layer of his painting to ensure that the surface remained smooth when he added in the seal. This clearly showed that he had a deep obsession for ensuring the perfection his painting, and he would never allow any flaws to plague his work.

While the unsealed painting looked wholesome in the surface, upon closer examination, it was still apparent that the portion concerning the bathing beautiful ladies was leveled slightly higher than the rest of the painting. Furthermore, the colors were slightly more vibrant than the rest of the painting. From these two discrepancies, it was not too difficult to deduce that the bathing beautiful ladies had been added onto the painting recently.

Corroborating that with the happenings prior to the unsealing of the painting, given that Zhang Xuan was the only one who

had entered the painting, it was not too difficult to deduce that he was the culprit.

“I must say that you have really misunderstood me. While the bathing beautiful ladies only took up a small portion of the painting, I’m sure that you are able to tell how exquisitely detailed it is. My consciousness only entered the painting for a brief instant, and given that I had to devote most of my time to analyzing the seal, how could I possibly have the time to paint such an exquisite addition to the painting? That is clearly an impossible feat! Not even the Sorrowless Old Man would have been able to pull it off within the limited period of time I had!” Zhang Xuan explained himself earnestly, as if fearing that the other party would not believe him.

“This...” The copper-masked figure frowned.

This was also the issue that had confounded him while he was analyzing the matter.

All in all, the other party had only been in the painting for less than three minutes, and within this period of time, it was nigh impossible to make an addition that fused nearly perfectly into another completed painting. Even 8-star painters would not be capable of pulling off such a feat!

But there was no one else could have pulled it off other than the young man before him!

Noticing the copper-masked figure’s hesitation, Zhang Xuan quickly added, “Putting aside the fact that I did not have time to pull it off, I’m also not the only one whose consciousness entered the painting that day.”

“You aren’t the only one?”

“Indeed. Have you forgotten it already? Zhang Jiuxiao’s consciousness entered the painting as well, only to be attacked by the spirit and sprout durians on his head,” Zhang Xuan said.

Hearing those words, the face of the copper-masked figure darkened. “You’re right... Zhang Jiuxiao’s consciousness entered the painting as well!”

“He’s from the Zhang Clan, and surely I need not say much about the capabilities of those from a Sage Clan. Furthermore,

the Zhang Clan is particularly known for snatching items by force. Putting aside a painting, they would even snatch a living human without any hesitation! Do you remember how he said that he knew a way to decipher the seal? Perhaps, he might have used some kind of artifact to alter the contents of the painting before faking his failure so that you wouldn't suspect him!" Zhang Xuan harrumphed indignantly.

"The Zhang Clan..." The lips of the copper-masked figure twitched slightly as fear crept into his eyes.

...

Ah choo!

Shortly after applying some medicine and feeling the swelling on his face alleviating slightly, Zhang Jiuxiao suddenly sneezed.

Is someone thinking about me?

After being traumatized time and time again, it was reassuring for him to know that he was at least still on someone's mind!

1190 The Demands of the Copper-Masked Figure

After recovering from his shock, the copper-masked figure quickly shook his head and said, “No, that doesn’t make sense! If the Zhang Clan intended to make a move on me, there would be no need for them to do it so discreetly. They would have just crushed me openly!”

The Zhang Clan was known to be the Number One Clan of the Master Teacher Continent, possessing many experts. If they had known about the secret behind the painting, they would have just found him and killed him directly. There was no need for them to go about it in such a roundabout manner.

It was true that the Master Teacher Pavilion did ensure some degree of order and equality in the world, but rules were meaningless before absolute strength.

And the Zhang Clan wielded such absolute strength to overlook the rules.

“I don’t know how else I can prove it to you, but what I saw in the painting back then was indeed the bathing beauties!” Seeing that the other party did not trust him, Zhang Xuan anxiously urged, “If you don’t believe me, feel free to ask around. I am known in town for my honesty and humility...”

“Enough!” Knowing that it would only be a waste of mind to argue who the culprit was, the copper-masked figure harrumphed coldly. “There is no point arguing over this now. The reason I have brought you here today is to have you restore the painting. If you get it done, I can consider letting you off!”

Even though someone had added new content on top of the painting, it should still be possible to restore what was beneath at the hands of a sufficiently skilled painter.

This was especially so given that the bathing beautiful ladies had been added recently, and there was a clear contrast between it and the rest of the painting.

Given that the young man before him had been able to decipher the seal on the painting easily, achieving what neither him nor Guild Leader Meng were able to accomplish, there was no doubt that his mastery in painting had already reached the pinnacle of Qingyuan Empire, perhaps even comparable to the Sorrowless Old Man's. If the young man were to work on the painting, there was a good chance that they would be able to restore the original painting.

However, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. "It's not that I don't want to help you, but even I am unable to do it..."

"You can't do it?" The copper-masked figure suddenly sneered coldly as killing intent lit up within his eyes. "It seems that you still haven't understood the situation you are in. You are currently just a mere soul. If your pitiful brain is unable to process what that means, let me phrase it out clearly for you. You. Are. Already. A. Dead. Man!"

"Dead?" Horror surfaced in Zhang Xuan's eyes. As if he was unable to believe what he had just heard, he exclaimed with widened eyes, "I am dead?"

He quickly lowered his head, only to see his translucent body. In that instant, his vision darkened, and he fainted from shock.

"..." Seeing the other party's actions, the copper-masked figure clawed at his hair in frenzy.

Given that he had used a secret art to nab away the other party's soul, anyone who did not have a screw loose should have noticed what was going on!

To put on such an elaborate act and even faint on the spot... Brother, do you think that I don't know that souls can't faint?

Under normal circumstances, given that the young man's soul had been bound in place and his physical body was already dead, shouldn't the young have been eager to heed his commands?

To put on such an act... What the heck was going on?

Suppressing his urge to rush forward and tear the young man before him apart, the copper-masked figure clenched his jaws and spat coldly, “Stop your act. Without my permission, you won’t even be able to commit suicide, let alone faint!”

“Ah? I can’t faint here?” Zhang Xuan sat back up regretfully before shaking his hand leisurely. “Forget it, I won’t faint for the time being then. However, I was really not lying to you when I said that I am unable to restore the painting to its original state.”

Hidden within the painting was Kong shi’s silhouette. Considering the implications of the matter, there was no way he would restore the painting to its original state.

On the other hand, seeing the other party shrug away his fainting act without the slightest bit of embarrassment, the copper-masked figure felt so furious that he could have exploded from rage at any moment. It took him a few large breaths before he managed to suppress his rage. Narrowing his eyes, he spoke in a callous tone. “Don’t think that I have no way of dealing with you just because you are a soul. Since I was able to drag you here, naturally, I know of ways to put you through suffering that would make you wish that you were dead!”

“Since I am already dead, why don’t you just have me killed once and for all?” Zhang Xuan replied leisurely, paying no heed to the copper-masked figure’s threats at all.

“You...” The copper-masked figure’s breathing hastened from anger, and his chest fluctuated intensely. “Since you don’t know what is good for you, I’ll just have to use Soul Search on you then. For your arrogance, I shall make sure that your soul dissipates for good!”

Huala!

Right after saying those words, he grabbed forward, and a powerful might suddenly burst forward.

Seeing the movements of the copper-masked figure, a glint flashed across Zhang Xuan’s eyes. “That’s... a soul oracle technique!”

The main reason he had allowed himself to be captured by the copper-masked figure was to see who the other party was and what the other party was up to. He did not think that the other party would actually be able to utilize the means of a soul oracle...

Tzzzzzz!

As shocked as Zhang Xuan was, he did not resist the copper-masked figure's offense. Instead, he allowed the latter to enter his mind easily.

This was because he could tell with a glance that it was not Soul Search but Soul Read.

Soul Search was an extremely violent technique. It allowed one to learn what was in the mind of another, but in the process of doing so, it would destroy the other's soul as well, resulting in death. On the other hand, Soul Read was much less powerful than Soul Search, but it would not harm the soul.

It seemed like the copper-masked figure still hoped that Zhang Xuan would be able to restore the painting for him, so he dared not kill him straight.

"Let me see what you know!" Harrumphing coldly, the copper-masked figure delved his consciousness into Zhang Xuan's mind, and very soon, he found what he wanted to know.

A frown emerged on the forehead of the copper-masked figure as he muttered in disbelief. "You really don't know the secret behind the seal..."

Through his Soul Read, he could tell that the other party really knew nothing about the content beneath the seal. In other words, he was not the perpetrator who painted on the bathing beautiful ladies on the painting.

Furthermore, in his search, he had found that despite the other party's brazen personality, he was really an upright and talented master teacher.

"It looks like I have really gotten it wrong this time around..." After seeing all that, the copper-masked figure retracted his consciousness from Zhang Xuan's mind.

He had been extremely certain that it was the young man who had altered the painting before, but the evidence before him had smashed the theory to pieces. However... since he had already captured the young man, he should at least get the young man to restore the painting for him. Otherwise, his effort over the years would have really been in vain.

He really is a soul oracle, and from the looks of it, it seems like he has a close relationship with Tian Qing and the others.

While the copper-masked figure was reading Zhang Xuan's mind, Zhang Xuan was also secretly reading the other party.

His understanding of soul arts was much higher than the copper-masked figure's, so it was not too difficult for him to bypass the other party's mental defense.

Nevertheless, for fear of alarming the other party, he only probed at the surface of the other party's mind, so he only received some basic information.

Based on the results he had received, the copper-masked figure had a very close relationship with King Zhongqing and Tian Qing. That was how he had managed to convince Tian Qing to snoop into Chen Zhe's residence despite knowing the dangers to lure their group here while he hid at the altar, preparing to nab Zhang Xuan's soul when the opportunity was ripe.

"I was initially intending to conduct a Soul Search, but out of mercy, I'll give you one last chance. Right now, you have two options before you." Knowing that the young man before him really knew nothing at all, the copper-masked figure harrumphed in disdain. "The first option, restore the painting for me, and not only will I spare your soul, I'll also bring you back to life, granting you greater power than you possess at the moment!

"The second option, succumb to my Soul Search and vanish from the face of this world! Your mastery in painting is indeed praiseworthy, but there are plenty of painters in the world who are more skilled than you. Even without you, it's only a matter of time before I manage to restore the contents of the painting!"

“You’ll bring me back to life?” Zhang Xuan asked in bewilderment.

“That’s right!” The copper-masked figure waved his hand, and a body appeared before his eyes. “This is known as a Soulless Metal Humanoid. As long as you accomplish what I ask of you, I’ll allow your soul to reside in it, and through it, you will be able to continue living and existing as an ordinary human!”

“Soulless Metal Humanoid...”

Zhang Xuan was surprised. He could tell that the other party’s Soulless Metal Humanoid was of a far higher grade than what he had seen before, most probably crafted with the body of a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert. Not only so, the craftsmanship was also particularly exquisite, making it reminiscent of a real human.

If a soul were to be deposited into it, the average 7-star master teacher would not even notice that it was an artificial body.

Seeing Zhang Xuan’s astonished expression, the copper-masked figure smirked gleefully. “Even if you don’t have much of an understanding of the soul oracle occupation, as a master teacher, you should have at least heard of the Soulless Metal Humanoids, right? With it, not only will your current fighting prowess be enhanced, more importantly, I will also grant you a different identity and place you in a position of great power!”

“Place me in a position of great power? Could it be that... both Tian Qing and King Zhongqing are Soulless Metal Humanoids?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed in shock.

To be able to become the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, there was no doubt that ‘Master Teacher Tian Qing’ really did exist. There was no way the Master Teacher Pavilion would make the huge error of allowing a Soulless Metal Humanoid to become a vice pavilion master. However, it was possible that the real Tian Qing had been killed at some point in time, and his body had been forged into a Soulless Metal Humanoid.

Through using a soul to drive Tian Qing's Soulless Metal Humanoid, the enemy would be able to impersonate him, assuming the powerful role as the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Furthermore, there would be no one who would check on his identity as he was already verified to be a human.

That might have been the case for King Zhongqing as well.

If that was truly the case, this would really be frightening.

Just thinking about how the fake Tian Qing had been able to fool the eyes of the others for so many years, only exposing himself in order to kill Zhang Xuan... How many more undercover spies did the enemy have?

It was no wonder the Master Teacher Pavilion had destroyed the soul oracles without any hesitation! If the soul oracles had truly attempted to plot their vengeance, just this ability of theirs would throw the Master Teacher Pavilion into huge chaos!

Just imagine being put in a state where one could not recognize who was a friend and who was an enemy, being forced to doubt everyone.

"King Zhongqing isn't a Soulless Metal Humanoid. It isn't as easy to forge one as you think!" The copper-masked figure refuted Zhang Xuan's words.

"He isn't?"

The copper-masked figure harrumphed disdainfully. "He's just a loyal dog!"

"Then... what about Tian Qing?" Zhang Xuan asked on.

"Tian Qing?" At this point, the copper-masked figure sneered coldly before turning toward Zhang Xuan. "Do you wish to see my face?"

Zhang Xuan's heart skipped a beat upon hearing those words. Keeping his calm, he said, "I do. Given the current situation, it's really hard for me to trust you. As you have said, I'm already dead. I have nothing else to lose, and there's no need for me to go all out to help the person who killed me!"

He had been curious about the true identity of the copper-masked figure for a very long time, but the latter had never used a battle technique before him. The previous Soul Search had not registered as a battle technique to the Library of Heaven's Path, so he was not able to compile a book on the other party through that.

As such, he still had no idea whom the copper-masked figure truly was.

It would be best if he could convince the copper-masked figure to take off his mask.

“Humph! Tough words for a person in my grasp. You might be dead already, but your soul is still in my grasp. As long as I wish to, I can put you through suffering beyond your imagination!” the copper-masked figure sneered as he slowly took the mask off his face.

At this point, the young man before him was already no threat. Firmly bound to the altar, he could claim the young man's life any time he wanted to, so he did not fear the latter's retaliation.

Thus, it was not a big deal for him to show the other party his appearance.

Zhang Xuan stared intently at the face of the copper-masked figure as the mask was slowly pried open. A look of disbelief gradually crept onto his face.

“How could it be you?”

1191 I Am the Qingtian Emperor!

The person before him was none other than Tian Qing!

But wasn't the other party fighting with Wu Shi and the others?

More importantly, the first time he met the copper-masked figure, Tian Qing had definitely been confined within the Master Teacher Pavilion's prison. No matter how powerful Tian Qing was, there was no way he could escape from his cell without alarming the Master Teacher Pavilion, so... how could he possibly be the copper-masked figure?

Zhang Xuan could not believe his eyes.

Everything had already exceeded his expectations.

"Indeed. Tian Qing and I are the same person!" Tian Qing nodded.

The young man before him had been putting on a fearless and nonchalant exterior ever since he had been dragged here, so he was delighted to see the shocked expression on the other party's face.

"No, that's not right... You aren't Tian Qing but the Qingtian Emperor, right?" Frowning, Zhang Xuan revealed his deduction.

He had been thinking over the issue over the past few days, and he was confident that the Qingtian Emperor had a part to play in his framing. Else, there was truly no reason for King Zhongqing and Tian Qing to go to such lengths to frame him.

Just that, there were still some details that he had yet to make sense of.

"You are an intelligent person. However, you should know that there are some things in the world that you should never meddle with." Hearing Zhang Xuan's words, the Qingtian Emperor's voice suddenly grew deep and sinister. A burst of

killing intent suddenly swept through the surroundings, leaving one feeling as if one had been suddenly plunged into hell.

The killing intent was even purer than the Skyleaf King's. Those who possessed weaker mental fortitude could have very well fainted as soon as they came into contact with this overwhelming aura.

“Since you have already figured out who I am, there's no need for me to put on an act anymore then. I am sure you should know about the irreconcilable conflict between the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and the darned humans. Submit to me, and I can grant you a life of wealth and power. Otherwise, I will have no choice but to end your life!” Tian Qing did not deny Zhang Xuan's accusations. Instead, he gazed down upon Zhang Xuan as if he was looking at a mere corpse.

Since everything had already been revealed, there was no need to beat around the bush any longer.

“If you are both the Qingtian Emperor and Tian Qing... then who is the person fighting outside with Wu shi and the others? You... as an Otherworldly Demon, no matter how good you are at disguising, surely the headquarters would have looked into your background when you became the vice pavilion master, so how could you possibly have passed their checks?” Zhang Xuan uttered in disbelief.

No matter how he thought about the matter, it just did not make sense.

It might be possible for the Qingtian Emperor to act as an ordinary master teacher—the headquarters could not possibly check the background of every single master teacher spread across the Master Teacher Continent after all—but he wielded great power over the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. It was extremely difficult to believe that the headquarters would make such a severe oversight!

If the Master Teacher Pavilion was really so incompetent as to remain unaware when the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe had

already seeped into their ranks, it would have been destroyed long ago.

With a cold sneer, hostility welled up in the Qingtian Emperor's eyes as he harrumphed menacingly. "Tian Qing was the incarnation of my will. I slowly forged his identity as a master teacher step by step over a long 800 years, but who would have thought that you would ruin the preparations that I made? Do you know how much I want to kill you right now?"

In order to build up 'Tian Qing', he had paid an extremely heavy price, sacrificing the lives of many of his tribesmen.

If not for the damned young man before him, Tian Qing would still have been the vice head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, wielding great power.

In a short few days, 800 years of his effort had gone down the drain. How could he possibly take something like that lightly?

However, it was fortunate that it was not all in vain. Over the years, he had managed to gather plenty of crucial intelligence, allowing him to obtain the various items that he required.

At this point, he was just one last step away from success.

If not for that, he would have surely killed the young man before him without any hesitation instead of wasting so many words on him.

"Incarnation of your will?" Zhang Xuan was taken aback from a moment before swiftly coming to a realization.

In his previous battle against Tian Qing, he had found that there was a fatal flaw in the other party's Primordial Spirit, which made it highly unlikely for the other party to ever reach the Leaving Aperture realm in his lifetime. Back then, he had thought that the other party might have just erred in his cultivation somewhere along the way, but it turned out that... the error was actually fundamental!

As the incarnation of a mere will, it went without saying that the soul was bound to be incomplete. It was already a miracle that Tian Qing could cultivate to the Primordial Spirit realm with an incomplete soul; any further than that was nigh impossible.

Perhaps due to Tian Qing being an incarnation, the Library of Heaven's Path considered him a separate existence from the Qingtian Emperor, resulting in its inability to draw the links between the two.

From the start to the end, Zhang Xuan had never considered such a possibility before because of the sheer impossibility in it.

A will was effectively a fragment of a soul, so it was fundamentally of the yin attribute. It was fatal for a newborn baby to be plagued with yin energy, and the chances of survival were practically null.

Furthermore, such an incarnation was against the laws of nature, an act that the heavens would not condone. Thus, even if the baby survived by some chance, one would have to pay a heavy price in order to prevent the baby from dying.

As such, even if the occupation that boasted the greatest understanding of souls, the soul oracles, were to attempt to reincarnate a will, it was likely that there would not even be a single successful case out of ten thousand attempts.

Otherwise, Mo Hunsheng would not have been so desperate to fuse together with the Nine Hearts Lotus to gain a new body for himself.

On top of that, a will would automatically go into a dormant state upon reincarnation. There were those who were unable to unlock the memories of their previous life until the moment of their death, thus achieving nothing significant in their lifetime. Such a symptom was known as the Void of Reincarnation.

To make matters worse, the attempt to reincarnate one's will was also highly damaging to one's soul. This effectively limited each person to a single attempt in their lifetime.

As such, only those who had been cornered would resort to will reincarnation, hoping that the infinitesimal possibility of success would come their way.

To think that the Qingtian Emperor not only succeeded, but his incarnation grew to become a 7-star pinnacle master teacher, governing the Master Teacher Pavilion of a Conferred

Empire? While the Qingtian Emperor must have assisted in some ways, it was still a particularly formidable feat.

The Qingtian Emperor harrumphed coldly. “That’s right. I advise you not to test my patience. Since I have already revealed my identity to you, you should know that unless you submit to me and seal a soul contract with me, there’s no way that you are getting out of this. I’ll put you through endless torture and...”

The reason he fearlessly revealed his identity before the young man was because he did not fear the latter leaking the secret. Everything was within his control.

If the young man attempted anything, it would only take a single thought for him to kill the lad.

“Fine, I’ll submit!” Zhang Xuan interrupted the Qingtian Emperor’s words.

“Ah?” The Qingtian Emperor was taken aback.

Having lived among the humans for many years, he knew how firmly master teachers held onto their beliefs and faith.

Considering how arrogant the young man before him was, going to the extent of even crashing the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion upon being accused of siding with the enemy, he had thought that it would be a long fight to get the latter to submit to him. Who knew that the latter would agree to it so heartily?

What happened to the unwavering will that master teachers should have?

The Qingtian Emperor eyed Zhang Xuan suspiciously for a moment before harrumphing coldly. “Words are empty. Offer your soul!”

As skeptical as he was about the young man’s intentions, he knew that once the latter offered his soul to him, there was no way the latter would be able to betray him anymore.

“Of course, of course!” Zhang Xuan nodded. “But before that, I would like to confirm one thing first. Will you really give me a suitable Soulless Metal Humanoid so that I can continue living as I did?”

The Qingtian Emperor waved his hand derisively. “You don’t have to worry about that!”

In the end, it seemed like the young man was just another spineless coward who would abandon his beliefs and faith for his own life.

But again, the threat of death was indeed scary, especially to cultivators who boasted long lives. The older one became, the more vivid one’s fear of death and losing everything they had would become, and not even master teachers were spared from this rule. That was also how You Xu had ended up succumbing to the Otherworldly Demons back then.

“Then...” Zhang Xuan hesitated for a brief moment before mustering his courage to ask, “Can you tell me the method of entering a Soulless Metal Humanoid and let me give it a try first? I want to confirm that there’s indeed a way for me to continue living before I submit to you!”

“This...” the Qingtian Emperor frowned. Somehow, he felt like Zhang Xuan was up to something. However, looking at the young man’s innocent face, he suddenly recalled the memories he had seen in young man’s head earlier, and since it was impossible for the young man to turn the tables against him, he eventually relented with a nod. “Alright then. The method to entering the Soulless Golden Humanoid is very simple...”

The Qingtian Emperor swiftly explained the method to enter and control the Soulless Metal Humanoid.

“Alright, I got it.” Seeing that the other party’s explanation was essentially similar to what he had learned from Mo Hunsheng, Zhang Xuan nodded.

In truth, he had already compiled a Heaven’s Path manual regarding controlling a Soulless Metal Humanoid, and he had even practiced it before. In fact, this was the very method that he had used to place his severed soul into the Nine Hearts Lotus to make his clone.

After which, Zhang Xuan pretended to struggle but to no avail. With a helpless tone, he said, “Set me free for a moment. I

want to try entering the Soulless Metal Humanoid.”

“Don’t try to pull anything. I am the one who forged the Soulless Metal Humanoid, so it goes without saying that I have a way to destroy it as well. Don’t naively think that you will be able to go against me just because you have gained a body!” the Qingtian Emperor warned callously.

Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed deeply. “As a Saint 2-dan cultivator, I won’t be able to tap into the full strength of the Soulless Metal Humanoid no matter how powerful it is. I won’t be a match for you even if I do try to pull something.”

Hearing those words, the Qingtian Emperor hesitated for a moment before eventually nodding.

It seemed like he was really being too jumpy, worrying over the most insignificant of issues.

The other party was right. As a Saint 2-dan cultivator, the other party could not possibly tap into the full strength of the Saint 4-dan Soulless Metal Humanoid. Since that was the case, what did he have to fear?

Thus, with a light flick of his hand, the altar gleamed brilliantly. Following which, Zhang Xuan felt the bindings holding him in place loosening, allowing his soul to move freely.

“Let me give it a try!” Zhang Xuan said as he made his way over to the Soulless Metal Humanoid.

A moment later, the Soulless Metal Humanoid opened its eyes.

Zhang Xuan tried moving in it a little, and it felt no different from controlling a puppet. He could not help but shake his head in disappointment.

It seemed like a Saint 4-dan Soulless Metal Humanoid was still ultimately a mere puppet.

A real human had senses that allowed him to receive information from his surroundings, but a puppet did not. While it was possible for a soul to survive by housing itself within a puppet, it was effectively no different from driving a corpse.

It was no wonder few would choose to learn soul arts despite the great longevity of soul oracles.

There was more to life than to just continue existing. If a cultivator had to live amid the darkness for their entire life, deprived of everything that made them feel alive, perhaps death would have been a better option.

Watching as the young man entered the Soulless Metal Humanoid, the Qingtian Emperor heaved a sigh of relief.

He had attempted to use his words to distract the young man from it, but the fact was that as the creator of the Soulless Metal Humanoid, he wielded absolute control over it. In other words, it was just another cage to encase the young man's soul. If he willed it so, he could kill the other party whenever he wanted to.

Nevertheless, to be absolutely safe, he still wanted to bind the young man with a soul contract. Thus, he turned to the other party and said, "Now that you have tested the Soulless Metal Humanoid for yourself, it's about time for you to offer your soul!"

"Alright." Zhang Xuan nodded. Maneuvering the Soulless Metal Humanoid to the altar, he said, "I'll be offering my soul to you through this altar then!"

After saying those words, a will slowly rose from the glabella of the Soulless Metal Humanoid.

"Un." Not expecting the young man to be so active about this issue, the Qingtian Emperor nodded in approval. He also walked up to the altar and drew his soul out of his body.

As he cultivated the soul cultivation techniques from the soul oracles, his soul harnessed incomparably frigid yin energy, leaving others not daring to approach.

The foundation of a soul oracle lay in their soul, so it would be better to bind the young man's soul to his soul instead of his body.

"Start the ritual!" the Qingtian Emperor declared loudly.

He had thought that it would take more effort to deal with this young man, but it seemed like the other party was still too young and inexperienced.

Once the soul contract was sealed, he would be able to peer into the other party's thoughts. By then, the other party would dare not to formulate the slightest thought of rebellion.

“Alright!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He maneuvered his Soulless Metal Humanoid to walk around the altar before abruptly slapping its palm on the altar.

Weng!

The inscriptions suddenly lit up, and a powerful suction force drew in the soul of the Qingtian Emperor, wanting to devour it whole.

Horrified by the changes, the Qingtian Emperor exclaimed, “H-how do you know the method to triggering the altar?”

1192 A Knife to Me, a Knife to You!

The altar had been specially crafted by a method known only to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, and it required the Zhenqi of Slaughter to activate. More importantly, it concerned a secret of the soul oracles, so how could a master teacher possibly be able to activate it?

The Qingtian Emperor felt as if he was going insane.

Others might not have known how fearsome the altar was, but he did.

Once it was activated, it could draw even the Primordial Spirit of a Leaving Aperture realm expert into it easily!

Tzzzzzzzz!

Before the Qingtian Emperor could even give any further thought to the situation he was in, he suddenly felt the suction force growing stronger and stronger. Despite his resistance, his soul was slowly dragged by the suction force, seemingly about to be taken over to the other side at any moment.

“You are courting death!” Frightened and alarmed, the Qingtian Emperor bellowed furiously. At this point, he was fully aware that he had fallen for the young man’s schemes.

He swiftly extended his soul energy toward the will floating in the air, wanting to grab and destroy it.

However, the will seemed to be completely unaffected by the suction of the altar. It leisurely made its way back into the Soulless Golden Body.

Not expecting the other party to escape from his grasp, the Qingtian Emperor’s rage crescendoed. “Humph, I am the creator of the Soulless Metal Humanoid. It takes nothing more than a mere thought for me to claim your life!”

With a furious roar, the Qingtian Emperor swiftly sealed the pores of the Soulless Metal Humanoid, preventing the young man's soul from escaping it. After which, he sent the energy harnessed within the metal humanoid into chaos, putting it on the verge of explosion.

As the creator of the Soulless Metal Humanoid, he was able to have it explode at his whim.

This was the exact same method that Zhang Xuan had used to subdue the Jadeleaf King back then.

“There's no need for you to go through so much trouble,” said Zhang Xuan nonchalantly. Following which, with a resounding ‘puhe!’, the Soulless Metal Humanoid was abruptly ripped in two down the middle.

A massive ten-meter-tall soul appeared from within the body.

It should have been impossible for any soul to escape once the pores of the Soulless Metal Humanoid were sealed. However, by abruptly enlarging his soul by undoing the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, Zhang Xuan managed to tear the metal humanoid in two.

Seeing Zhang Xuan decisively tearing the Soulless Metal Humanoid in two, the Qingtian Emperor widened his eyes in astonishment. “T-this is your soul? H-how is it so big?”

As a soul oracle, he understood the significance of the size of a soul, and the one before him was actually ten meters large! Just how much soul energy could that ten-meters large soul possibly contain?

“This is impossible! No, wait a moment! You are... a soul oracle?” Realization suddenly struck the Qingtian Emperor as his mouth widened in shock.

Only a soul oracle could possibly possess such an enormous soul, but... wasn't the other party a master teacher? How could a master teacher possibly be a soul oracle?

The Qingtian Emperor felt as if his mind was going to blow from the insanity unfolding before his eyes.

It had been countless years since the heritage of the soul oracles had disappeared from the face of the world. He had needed to pay a heavy price before he managed to lay his hands on a couple of soul arts, but... who would have thought a master teacher as talented as the other party would actually be a full-fledged soul oracle? This was truly a shocker!

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to do anything much.” Watching as the Qingtian Emperor went into a frenzy from the situation, Zhang Xuan consoled him insincerely as he slowly made his way over to the other party’s immobile body. With a thought, his soul swiftly shrunk back to the size of a human before diving into the glabella of the immobile body.

“W-what are you trying to do?”

This sight immediately sent the Qingtian Emperor into a panic. That was his body! If the other party were to possess his body, his soul would have nowhere else to go!

“What am I doing? Like I told you, I am not doing anything much. Didn’t you teach me how to utilize a Soulless Metal Humanoid earlier? I’m just trying to see if it will work on your body since the Soulless Metal Humanoid you gave me earlier has exploded.”

As Zhang Xuan spoke, his soul successfully entered the Qingtian Emperor’s body. A moment later, the eyes of the immobile body opened, and it began stretching its neck lazily.

“Hmm, not bad. Feels much better than the Soulless Metal Humanoid!” The ‘Qingtian Emperor’ smiled in delight before casually waving his hand at the soul on the altar.

Boom!

Killing intent burst into the surroundings as immense might poured forth like the relentless rapid tides of a river.

Feeling the strength harnessed within the body, Zhang Xuan could not help but remark, “How powerful!”

Even though he had roughly twenty Otherworldly Demon puppets in his storage ring, they came nowhere close to competing with the one he was currently possessing. To make

an analogy, if the strength of the Otherworldly Demon puppets was only a little pond, the body he was currently possessing would be an endless sea!

“You...” The Qingtian Emperor felt as if he would explode from rage.

He was an Emperor of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, but not only did he fall for the ploys of a mere human, more importantly, the latter even used his own body to attack his soul!

Be it his body or his soul, he could not afford to have either of them injured!

“Damn it!” Knowing that he would die if he did not protect himself, the Qingtian Emperor swiftly gathered his soul energy together and formed a devastating force that clashed with Zhang Xuan’s slap.

Boom!

The collision ended with the physical body that Zhang Xuan controlled consecutively retreating eight steps.

He’s a True Leaving Aperture realm expert! Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

He had thought that the Qingtian Emperor would be at Quasi Leaving Aperture realm as well, the same as Hall Master Xing and Pavilion Master Gou, but who knew that he would be a True Leaving Aperture realm expert, one who had undergone the lightning ordeal!

The souls of soul oracles were of the yin attribute, making it more difficult for them to clear the lightning ordeal compared to ordinary Primordial Spirits. The fact that the Qingtian Emperor had been able to succeed went to show that he possessed exceptional talent in cultivation.

“Come out of my body!” Ignoring Zhang Xuan’s shock, the Qingtian Emperor’s soul rushed forward and launched another wave of attacks. In an instant, Zhang Xuan felt the air freezing around him, making it difficult for him to move.

This was a method similar to what he had faced from Pavilion Master Gou during the pavilion crashing a few days earlier, but its might was several times stronger.

If Pavilion Master Gou had been able to draw forth such strength as well, he would have admitted defeat on the spot, thus resulting in the failure of his pavilion crashing.

After his body was bound in place, Zhang Xuan quickly felt a powerful suction force tugging at his soul, attempting to forcefully pull his soul out from the body.

“Calm down, calm down. I’ll come out, alright?” Knowing that the Qingtian Emperor would not rest until his soul was out of the other party’s body, Zhang Xuan shook his head. He quickly raised his fist and struck his own chest forcefully.

Peng!

Zhang Xuan was knocked back from the sheer impact of that strike, and a mouthful of crimson blood spewed from his mouth. That single strike had nearly killed the body on the spot.

“You!” the Qingtian Emperor roared furiously.

Can you get any more shameless than that?

That’s my body!

Peng!

Flustered, the Qingtian Emperor watched helplessly as the other party sank another palm into his body.

Pu!

More fresh blood spurted into the air.

“Stop it, stop it!” Tightly bound by the altar, the Qingtian Emperor’s soul was unable to break free and protect his body at all. Completely powerless, he could only shout again and again.

At this rate, his body might really be utterly destroyed from the young man’s self-harming. Even if he survived the ordeal, his cultivation would surely suffer a sharp decline!

“You stop first, and then I’ll stop.” Ignoring the Qingtian Emperor’s bellows, Zhang Xuan continued striking his body relentlessly.

“Fine, fine, I’ll stop!” With a look dyed with hatred, the Qingtian Emperor gritted his teeth as he reluctantly retracted his hand.

He had no choice but to stop, or else the young man might just destroy his body for good. If so, it would be meaningless even if he managed to force the other party out of his body.

Boom!

However, right after he retracted his control over the surrounding space, freeing the young man to move as he pleased, the Qingtian Emperor suddenly saw a palm enlarging swiftly before him.

It seemed like the other party had no intention of stopping even when he did...

“You @# ¥ %...” the Qingtian Emperor cursed frenziedly.

When had he, the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage, ever suffered such grievances?

There was no way out of this situation at all! The other party would kill his body if he made a move, but if he did not make a move, the other party would continue attacking his soul. He was doomed no matter what he did!

“Stop! I’m telling you to stop!” the Qingtian Emperor howled furiously as he gathered his soul energy once more to fend off the young man’s offense.

However, before the palm strike could reach him, the young man abruptly changed the trajectory of the palm strike to hit himself instead.

Pu pu pu!

The strike was far more vicious this time around. Fresh blood spurted wildly all over the place, a sign that the organs of the body might have sustained irreparable damage.

Panicked, the Qingtian Emperor quickly withdrew his strength to appease the young man, only to see the other party sending yet another palm strike toward him.

“...”

Unable to retaliate, the Qingtian Emperor felt his soul gradually growing weaker and weaker.

To think that he, a Leaving Aperture realm expert and one of the very few soul oracles existing in the world, would be cornered by a Saint 2-dan brat to this extent! He really felt his sanity being challenged!

How can there be such a shameless person in the world?

Aren't you a master teacher?

Shouldn't master teachers be righteous and honest?

How could you possess my body and hold it hostage as you attack my soul?

This is unfair! Really, really unfair! How am I supposed to fight against that?

I can't let this continue! At this rate, either my soul will dissipate, or my body will be crippled! the Qingtian Emperor thought grimly.

Admittedly, the young man's underhanded measures were truly effective. By holding his body hostage, there was no way he would dare make a move against the young man, thus allowing the young man to freely attack his soul.

The Qingtian Emperor racked his mind for a solution to get him out of the quandary he was in, but nothing came to mind. Eventually, as his soul gradually sustained more and more damage, he lost the strength to withstand the suction force from the altar, and 'hu!', he disappeared into the altar.

Watching as the other party was absorbed into the other side of the altar, Zhang Xuan's eyes suddenly widened in alarm. Sh*t!

He suddenly realized that he had made a mistake.

He had used the suction force of the altar to limit the Qingtian Emperor's movements, but he had neglected the fact that his

physical body was still lying on the other side. If the Qingtian Emperor made a move against his body in the meantime, he would be in deep trouble.

I must quickly make my way over as well!

Knowing that there was no time to lose, Zhang Xuan quickly drew his soul out of the Qingtian Emperor's body and stowed the body into a storage ring.

He had come over in his soul form, so he did not have his storage ring with him. As such, he used the Qingtian Emperor's one instead.

Without wasting any time, he quickly hid the storage ring at a secret location before swiftly traveling through the altar as well.

Hula!

With a brilliant flash of light, Zhang Xuan vanished as well.

...

Hu!

The Qingtian Emperor's soul appeared in the underground chamber.

“What's that?”

“Is that... a soul oracle?”

As the Qingtian Emperor's soul harnessed overwhelming yin energy, it was swiftly noticed by Wu shi and the others as soon as it traveled over, and they swiftly rose to their feet in alarm.

Why are there so many master teachers here?

Out of worry, Wu shi had called for around thirty master teachers from the Master Teacher Pavilion to guard Zhang Xuan while he was cultivating and explore the underground chamber for clues, but who knew that the Qingtian Emperor would suddenly appear at this moment?

If they capture me, I will be doomed! Goosebumps rose all over the Qingtian Emperor's body.

In his injured state, there was no way he could match so many master teachers simultaneously. Even as a Leaving Aperture realm expert, he could very well lose his life.

Just as the Qingtian Emperor was scanning his surroundings to formulate a countermeasure, he suddenly caught sight of Zhang Xuan's unmoving body, and a sharp glint surfaced in his eyes. Wait a moment, isn't that his body? Hahaha, wonderful! Since you possessed my body, I shall take yours as well!

'Sou!', he swiftly flitted his way over.

Since you were the one who started it, don't blame me for this!

Let's see who will have the last laugh!

1193 Are You Looking for Me?

“Is that soul oracle trying to possess Zhang shi?”

“Quick, stop him!”

Sensing the soul oracle swiftly making its way toward Zhang Xuan, Wu shi and the others narrowed their eyes in astonishment. They swiftly moved to intercept the soul oracle.

Even though the Qingtian Emperor’s soul had been tempered by the Leaving Aperture Ordeal, the cold yin aura that shrouded it was still very apparent. It was easily discernible through one’s Spiritual Perception.

Hualala!

Many surges of energy burst forth toward the Qingtian Emperor, wanting to strike him down.

“Humph!”

Under the barrage of attacks, even the Qingtian Emperor was unable to get off completely unscathed. Nevertheless, his eyes still narrowed in tenacity and callousness.

The reason he had been completely helpless before Zhang Xuan previously was because the latter had possessed his body, so he had not dared execute his strongest moves for fear that he would injure his own body. On the other hand, while the master teachers before him were not too powerful, they were still insufficient to stop him.

“Seal!” the Qingtian Emperor bellowed as he raised his finger.

Huala!

A ripple swept through the surroundings, and all of a sudden, it was as if the air in the underground chamber had been frozen by some compelling might. In the blink of an eye, it was as if everyone was standing in a marshland, severely limiting their movements and attacks.

“He’s a True Leaving Aperture realm expert!” Zhang Jiuxiao exclaimed anxiously.

One who wielded enough strength to seal all of their attacks simultaneously... there was no doubt about it; the soul oracle had already undergone the lightning ordeal and successfully reached True Leaving Aperture realm!

Against an expert of the other party’s caliber, their numerical advantage did not mean much.

Wu shi also swiftly came to the same conclusion. Knowing that the soul oracle before them was not a weak foe, he quickly bellowed, “Soaring Dragon Formation!”

The Soaring Dragon Formation was a formation that every master teacher in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion would practice in case of emergency situations.

Huala!

A moment after Wu shi issued the command, the disciplined master teachers had already formed the formation. The combined strength of over twenty master teachers quickly overwhelmed the seal that the Qingtian Emperor had cast over the surroundings, causing the seal to shatter as if a glacier breaking into ice shards.

A Leaving Aperture realm cultivator still was not qualified to come into contact with spatial laws yet. As such, the seal that they set up was not, in the truest sense, a sealing of space but a forceful impediment measure set up through their overwhelming strength. If there was another might that had exceeded the strength of the seal they had put up, the seal would shatter in an instant.

On the other hand, the Qingtian Emperor did not expect the master teachers to react so swiftly to his attack and break his seal in an instant. Not daring to hesitate in the least, he used the temporary lapse in the master teacher’s defenses as they were dealing with the seal to dash right toward Zhang Xuan before diving into the latter’s glabella.

“HAHAHA!”

Having successfully entered Zhang Xuan's body, an inexplicable feeling of joy spread across the Qingtian Emperor's entirety, and he could not help but burst into hearty laughter.

Trying to kill me?

Now that I am in that bastard's body, let's see what you can do about me!

"Principal Zhang!" Watching as the soul oracles successfully bypass their defenses and possess Zhang Xuan, the eyes of Wu shi and the others reddened in panic.

Even with their limited understanding of soul oracles, they knew that once a soul successfully possessed another individual's body, the individual's soul would be utterly destroyed!

They had specially been deployed there in order to protect Zhang shi while the latter was cultivating, and yet, such a matter had still occurred right in front of their eyes!

Huala!

Their initial fluster swiftly turned into rage as they surrounded Zhang Xuan's body with sharp killing intent in their eyes.

"What? You want to make a move against me? Come on then! If you aren't scared of killing this talented master teacher of yours, give it your best shot..." The Qingtian Emperor howled maniacally as he watched the angry faces around him in joy. However, before he could finish his words, his eyes suddenly narrowed in disbelief, as if something inconceivable had just happened. "Ah? W-what is this? N-no, this can't be! NOOOOOO!"

Putong! Amid the crescendoing scream of agony, Zhang Xuan's body suddenly collapsed to the ground, convulsing endlessly.

"Ah?" Wu shi and the others were already prepared to make their move to avenge Zhang Xuan when such a sight suddenly appeared before their eyes. They could not help but glance at one another in confusion, not knowing what they should make of the situation before them.

Why would the person who was arrogantly boasting before their faces a moment ago suddenly be reduced to such a state?

“P-please! F-forgive me. I won’t possess your body anymore. Let me leave... Let me leave!” A desperate scream echoed as the Qingtian Emperor’s soul frenziedly tried to break out of Zhang Xuan’s body, only to realize that his pores had been completely sealed. There was no way for him to escape.

“Please, I’m begging you! Don’t kill me! I won’t do anything anymore, I promise you! So, please... Nooo!”

Tzzzzzz

The screaming grew louder and louder, as if reflecting the Qingtian Emperor’s deep fear of what he was seeing.

A while later, the voice finally began to soften, and it gradually quietened into silence.

Hu!

A flicker of light burst from the altar, and Zhang Xuan finally returned to the underground chamber as well.

Knowing the immense strength that the Qingtian Emperor wielded, he immediately rushed back as soon as he could. He had only managed to keep the latter in check by holding the latter’s body as hostage, but if the latter were to go on a rampage in Qingyuan City, it could very well spell a calamity!

Thus, as soon as he appeared, he immediately scanned the surroundings to find the Qingtian Emperor, only to see a room full of master teachers instead.

“Another one? Get him!” someone amid the crowd exclaimed.

Before Zhang Xuan could even process what was going on, a barrage of attacks suddenly fell upon him.

Having cultivated the Heaven’s Path Soul Art, Zhang Xuan’s soul was devoid of the usual yin attribute that soul oracles had. As such, it was not easily discernible to cultivators; only when a cultivator had their Spiritual Perception on would they stand a chance of perceiving the presence of Zhang Xuan’s soul.

However, activating one's Spiritual Perception was extremely exhausting for a cultivator, so they could not afford to have it activated for extended periods of time. It was due to this that Zhang Xuan had been able to slip past most cultivators in his soul form easily.

But as luck would have it, the Qingtian Emperor's sudden appearance had alarmed the surrounding master teachers, compelling them to activate their Spiritual Perception. On top of that, the flash of light from the altar had also caught their attention, allowing them to instantaneously notice Zhang Xuan's presence.

Pilipala!

The seemingly comprehensive barrage of attacks heading toward him caused goosebumps to rise all over Zhang Xuan in alarm.

What the heck is going on?

I was only gone for a short moment; why are there so many master teachers in the area all of a sudden?

And why are they attacking me so furiously at that?

Have they... gone mad?

And where is the Qingtian Emperor?

To make things worse, there was no way Zhang Xuan could explain the situation. Otherwise, he would expose his identity as a soul oracle, and that would surely raise quite a huge storm within the Master Teacher Pavilion, bringing him endless trouble in the future.

Self-righteous individuals would impeach him for learning the depraved arts of the soul oracles whereas greedy individuals would possibly seek him out in the hope of obtaining the heritage of the soul oracles from him.

It would be foolish to raise another problem just to solve one.

Feeling so indignant within that he could have vomited blood, Zhang Xuan swiftly compressed his soul together through his Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, allowing him to avoid the barrage of attacks by a hair's breadth.

After which, making use of the brief opening in the crowd's attacks, he immediately dashed toward his body as fast as he could.

“Another one that's trying to harm Zhang Shi? You're courting death!”

“Kill that bastard!”

Everyone's eyes reddened in rage upon seeing the 'enemy's' movements.

Their previous mistake had allowed the soul before to possess Zhang Shi's body, nearly costing Zhang Shi his life. There was no way they were going to allow themselves to make the same mistake again!

Hualala!

Drawing all their strength, they immediately sent another frenzied barrage of attacks toward Zhang Xuan, preventing him from moving a single step further.

“...” Zhang Xuan would have torn all his hair out at that moment if he could.

Instead of dealing with the Qingtian Emperor, why was this group of master teachers so obsessed with stopping him?

“Ding Ding, come over here!” Zhang Xuan immediately called for the Golden Origin Cauldron through the telepathic connection from their soul contract.

“Master!” Hearing Zhang Xuan's voice, the Golden Origin Cauldron immediately leaped up.

“Quick, bring my body over to the altar!” Zhang Xuan instructed.

Before the endless barrage of attacks in his path, there was no way Zhang Xuan could afford to forcefully push through. As such, he could only engage the Golden Origin Cauldron's assistance.

“Very well!” Nodding, the Golden Origin Cauldron immediately leaped up toward Zhang Xuan's body with a resounding ‘hu!’.

“Everyone, make way...” the Golden Origin Cauldron shouted as it rammed its way forward.

It slammed into Zhang Xuan’s body forcefully, sending it flying straight toward the altar.

Pilipala!

The crisp sound of bone cracking.

“...” Zhang Xuan slapped his forehead.

Can’t you treat my body more carefully?

He knew that the Golden Origin Cauldron was not a reliable individual, and this matter only served to further his belief...

As stifled as he felt, he knew that this was not the moment to be concerned about this matter. Watching as his body flew in his direction, his soul swiftly dived into his body.

As soon as he regained control over his body, he immediately drove his zhenqi to heal his injuries before opening his eyes once more.

Standing before the group of master teachers, he asked, “The Qingtian Emperor should have come by earlier. Did any of you see him...”

But before Zhang Xuan could finish his words, he suddenly noticed that the atmosphere was not right. Somehow, he felt as if everyone’s killing intent was directed toward him.

Thus, he narrowed his eyes and asked, “What are you all trying to do?”

“Who are you? Even if you possess Principal Zhang’s body, do you think that we will allow you to get out of here alive?” Wu shi bellowed furiously.

Through their Spiritual Perception, they had personally witnessed the soul that had just arrived earlier diving into Zhang Xuan’s body, possessing it. That sight had nearly made them erupt on the spot.

It was one thing for them to fail to stop the earlier soul from possessing Zhang Xuan’s body, but for the second soul to succeed as well...

Do you honestly think that our Master Teacher Pavilion is full of pushovers? Do you think that Zhang Shi's body is your playground?

Seeing that the crowd was only showing such a response out of worry for him, Zhang Xuan shook his head and patiently explained, "I am Zhang Xuan. I've just awoken from my earlier cultivation..."

"Do you think that we'll believe your words?" Wu Shi roared angrily.

The rage of the other master teachers did not alleviate at all either. If anything, the hostility in their eyes seemed to have further deepened.

You opened your eyes right after the soul entered Zhang Shi's body, and you still dare to claim that you are Zhang Shi... Do you really take us for fools?

"You don't believe me?" Zhang Xuan frowned. "Wu Shi, the attack you used on me earlier was the seventh move of the Six Harmony Swords. Your execution has eight flaws in total, namely inept swordsmanship, lack of control in your breathing, unrefined execution of strength, incomplete conception in the technique..."

Knowing that there was no way he could explain his way out of this, Zhang Xuan decided to resort to another method to convince them of his identity instead.

Flaw identification was a capability that master teachers were the most adept at. Naturally, it was also the best way for him to verify his identity.

"This..." Hearing how the young man sharply pointed out all the flaws in his technique with ease, Wu Shi could not help but widen his eyes in astonishment.

"Last but not least, your soul has sustained some degree of damage from the demonic tunes back at the Qiu Wu Palace, and it has not recovered since then. As such, it has affected your execution of techniques to some degree. May I know if what I have said is correct?"

Wu shi was stunned for a moment before hurriedly nodding.
“Y-you’re right...”

“Then... am I Zhang Xuan?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

“Y-yes, you are...” Wu shi quickly nodded affirmatively.

To be able to point out all his flaws while being aware of the happenings back at the Qiu Wu Palace, who else could the young man before him be if not Zhang Xuan?

After seeing that he had successfully convinced the crowd of his identity, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. Then, with a confused frown, he asked, “What happened earlier? Why are all of you attacking me?”

Knowing that there could very well be master teachers on the other side, he had made sure to proceed very carefully. And yet, he still ended up being exposed in an instant and even nearly lost his life as a result of it. Furthermore, even if he was an unidentified intruder in their eyes, their rage seemed to be a little too excessive. Without a doubt, something must have happened before he arrived.

“It’s like this...” Wu shi quickly filled Zhang Xuan in on the earlier happenings.

“You are saying that... a soul dived into my body, and shortly after, he began screaming in agony?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan could not help but shake his head.

Was that Qingtian Emperor a fool? His body was filled with Heaven’s Path zhenqi, the very nemesis of soul oracles. And yet, he brazenly dared to possess his body... That was no different from leaping into a pool of toxins for him!

He had been feeling a little vexed about the Qingtian Emperor’s escape earlier, but who would have thought that the latter would be so dumb as to end his own life?

Or maybe, he felt too indignant from seeing me possessing his body, and blinded by rage, he wanted to possess mine to return the favor... Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella.

Who would have thought that the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage, a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator, would meet his

end in such an unintelligent manner? Judging by Wu shi's account, the Qingtian Emperor should have been reduced to ash from being burned by his Heaven's Path zhenqi, thus dissipating from the face of the world.

Zhang Xuan waved his hand and said, "Don't worry, I'm fine. I was cultivating a unique cultivation technique earlier, which temporarily deprived me of my awareness of my surroundings. If I'm not mistaken, those two soul oracles should have died from the passive ability of one of the secret arts I cultivate."

"I see, that's a relief."

Hearing that the matter concerned Zhang Xuan's secret art, the crowd decided not to ask any further.

On the other hand, Wu shi knew very well what was going on.

Zhang Xuan was a Celestial Master Teacher, and how could the body of a Celestial Master Teacher be taken away by a soul oracle so easily?

"Thank you for protecting me earlier." Knowing that the crowd was doing it all for him, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and thanked them.

The crowd quickly clasped their fists back and replied, "There's no need to stand on ceremony, Zhang shi."

After trading some pleasantries, Zhang Xuan took his leave before curiously assessing the internal state of his body.

Even if the Qingtian Emperor had been killed by the Heaven's Path zhenqi, there should still have been some traces of the other party within his body.

At this moment, a bone-chilling voice suddenly sounded in his mind, as if a specter.

"Hehe, are you looking for me?"

1194 An Eye

“Who is it?” Zhang Xuan suddenly felt all his hair stand on end.

For the other party to get into his mind without his noticing it... Who could it be?

He quickly turned his attention to the area where the voice came from, and a pitch-black tunnel appeared before him. It seemed to extend on and on, leading into a dark abyss.

The bone-chilling voice spoke once more. “Come over!”

Following which, Zhang Xuan felt his consciousness falter, and by the time he came to, he was already standing right before the tunnel.

To think that he would be completely helpless before the other party’s strength!

“Who in the world are you?” Zhang Xuan asked with an awful complexion as he swiftly scanned his surroundings. It did not take him long to realize that there was a massive eye right before him.

The gaze of the massive eye was deeply unnerving. It seemed to peer right into the depths of one’s mind, intensifying whatever dark thoughts one had.

“No wonder you were able to land my subordinate in such a pitiful state...” A cold sneer echoed from the massive eye. “A Celestial Master Teacher, huh? It has been many years since Kong shi, so it’s probably about time for another one to appear.”

“You can tell?” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in alarm as he felt tension clutch his heart.

Even a Saint 7-dan expert like Luo Chengxin was unable to see through his identity, and yet, the fellow before him was able to tell with just a single glance. Just how powerful could the other party be?

The eye harrumphed coldly. “If I could not even tell this much, the years I spent fighting against Kong shi would have really been wasted!”

“Years spent fighting against Kong shi? You are... Vicious?” Zhang Xuan asked with a deep frown.

Previously, the Vicious that he was sealed within his Book of Heaven’s Path had already told him that the secret art to nabbing souls had been created by him, and it was highly likely that there was another body part of Vicious in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows. But who would have thought that the other party would appear here!

In the form of a massive eye at that!

“You have heard of my name?” the eye asked curiously. “Well, that is to be expected. I managed to trap Kong shi within Chen-Cai, nearly killing him. Even if you master teachers wish to preserve Kong shi’s honor, there will inevitably be some records of me!”

“Trap Kong shi?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

Due to the tremendous damage he had suffered prior to his death, the memory of the Vicious that he had sealed within his Book of Heaven’s Path was fragmented. As a result, that Vicious had remembered very few details concerning Kong shi.

On the other hand, the Vicious before him seemed to know much more.

While he did not have as deep respect for Kong shi as compared to the other master teachers, he had always known the latter to be an invincible existence on the Master Teacher Continent. Yet, for Vicious to have successfully trapped Kong shi in Chen-Cai and nearly killed the latter... just how powerful could Vicious have been at his peak?

“Hmm? It seems like you are unaware of that. Well, it does not matter anyway. If I devour a Celestial Master Teacher, I should be able to recover a significant portion of my strength. With that, I will be able to struggle free of my restraints and become

a free man once more!” A sharp glint emerged in the massive eye as Vicious’ voice sounded with a tinge of excitement in it.

“For that, you will have no choice but to die!”

Hu!

Right after those words were spoken, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt an incomparably powerful suction force pulling him in from the depths of the tunnel, forcefully dragging his soul in.

Sh*t... This is the soul nabbing secret art? Zhang Xuan’s face immediately turned incredibly awful.

He had nearly succumbed to the soul nabbing secret art when it was executed by the Qingtian Emperor, and now that it was being executed by Vicious himself, the creator of the technique, how could he possibly stand a chance?

Watching as his soul was being dragged toward the tunnel, goosebumps rose all over Zhang Xuan’s arms.

As expected of the individual who had once fought toe-to-toe with Kong shi! Even if Vicious retained no more than a small fragment of the strength he possessed earlier, it was still not something that he could withstand.

There was simply too huge a difference between them!

At this rate, it’s just a matter of time before I get swallowed whole!

Even though he had no idea what was at the end of the tunnel, his instincts told him that he would be doomed if he was pulled over to the other side.

Thus, clenching his jaws, he drove his soul energy to the maximum and firmly persevered on. At the same time, he discreetly established a telepathic connection with the Book of Heaven’s Path and asked Vicious about the current situation.

“If I’m not mistaken, that should be my head and my eye,” Vicious quickly replied.

“Do you have any idea how I can deal with this?” Zhang Xuan asked anxiously

“As powerful as the soul nabbing secret art is, its effectiveness is limited across vast distances. In such circumstances, a medium may be required. For example, the Qingtian Emperor only managed to faze you through amplifying the prowess of the secret art through the altar.

“Well, back when I was at my peak, I was able to kill any Saint 2-dan cultivator easily as long as they were within a million li from me, but given the current state that I am in... there’s a high chance that the other party is using some kind of medium as well. As long as you destroy the medium, the soul nabbing secret art should be undone!” Vicious quickly explained.

Back when he was at his peak, as long as he had a droplet of the other party’s blood to trace the other party down, he would have been able to easily kill a Saint 2-dan expert even from a million li away. However, with his body parts scattered around the continent, he was currently nothing more than a shadow of his former self. Even if the other Vicious had recovered to a greater degree than him, it still should not have been possible for the other party to cast the soul nabbing secret art over a great distance.

The only possibility was that the other Vicious, just like the previous Qingtian Emperor, was using something nearby as a medium for his technique!

A medium? Wait a moment... Hearing those words, a thought streaked across Zhang Xuan’s mind. The Qingtian Emperor’s soul!

Considering that it was just a moment ago that the Qingtian Emperor’s soul had entered his body before the other Vicious’ abrupt emergence, it was very likely that the medium was the Qingtian Emperor’s soul!

It seems like that fellow still has a breath left in him. Humph, let me see where you are hiding! With a direction in mind, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. While pushing his soul energy to his limit to fend off the suction force, he extended his Spiritual Perception throughout his entire body to find the hiding Qingtian Emperor.

Found you!

It took just a moment for Zhang Xuan to notice a fragmented soul hiding in a corner of his mind.

When uncontrolled, the Heaven's Path zhenqi could circulate through his entire body, but it could not reach his mind. It seemed like the sharp-witted Qingtian Emperor had swiftly noticed this and dived for his mind, thus surviving the ordeal.

Humph! Zhang Xuan swiftly drew his Heaven's Path zhenqi toward his mind to destroy the remnants of the Qingtian Emperor's soul.

“Ahhh!”

Amidst the Qingtian Emperor's cry of agony, Zhang Xuan felt the suction force growing weaker and weaker. At the same time, the massive eye also began to fade from existence along with the tunnel.

“You noticed it? Well, it matters not. You might have survived this time around, but I'll eventually get you...” With a menacing bellow, the massive eye vanished with a resounding ‘hu!’

Zhang Xuan's surroundings abruptly morphed, and in the next moment, he found that he was still standing in the underground chamber, as if nothing had happened at all. However, the cold sweat that he was drenched in reminded him of how close he had come to death.

In just an instant, the other Vicious had successfully put him in a trance and nearly devoured him whole.

That was a close one! Even though he was finally out of danger, Zhang Xuan found that his heart just would not calm down.

It was too scary!

Had he not reacted swiftly, his soul could have been dragged over to the other side!

He might have managed to outwit the Qingtian Emperor, but it would not have been easy for him to do the same to Vicious.

“Master, pardon me for not making a move then. I could not do anything in that situation, or else I would have exposed my existence. Once that fellow knows of my presence, he’ll surely pursue you with even more extreme methods, and that would have just placed you in greater danger!” Vicious explained from the Book of Heaven’s Path.

“I understand.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The other party was right.

While the Book of Heaven’s Path had limited his Vicious’ activity, the divine aura that shrouded it had concealed his presence as well, preventing the other Vicious from perceiving his existence. However, if his Vicious were to make a move, the other Vicious would surely sense his existence.

Every single independent Vicious was trying to seek and devour the other Viciouses so as to regain his strength. While their side was trying to hunt down the other Viciouses, there was no doubt that the other Viciouses had the same intentions in mind as well.

They were currently still unprepared to deal with the other Vicious, so it would be unwise for them expose themselves.

Furthermore, once the other Vicious learned of the existence of his Vicious, the other Vicious would surely raise his guard, making their chances of overwhelming him very slim.

At the very least, with his Vicious hidden in the shadows, he would have another effective card to play against the other Vicious. This would put them in a more advantageous position.

“How strong is the other party? Are you a match for him?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Vicious hesitated for a moment before replying. “I can’t clearly gauge his current strength, but from the looks of it... he’s is at the Leaving Aperture realm at the very minimum! I am no match for him in my current state. However, if I could devour the Qingtian Emperor’s soul, I should be able to reach Leaving Aperture realm as well!”

“Devour the Qingtian Emperor’s soul?” Zhang Xuan contemplated for a moment before nodding in approval.

Even though the Qingtian Emperor was an Otherworldly Demon, he had inherited the heritage of the soul oracles, and his cultivation had even reached the True Leaving Aperture realm. If Vicious were to consume the Qingtian Emperor’s soul, it would surely benefit him greatly.

“Thank you!” Vicious replied in gratitude.

Zhang Xuan paused for a moment before adding, “Wait a moment first, I wish to interrogate him first. I’ll pass him over to you once I’m done.”

Trapped by the Heaven’s Path zhenqi and grinded down from the earlier clash, the Qingtian Emperor no longer posed any threat to him.

There were still some doubts in his mind that he wanted to clarify with the Qingtian Emperor.

“Principal Zhang...”

While it seemed to have been a lengthy encounter, in truth, only ten seconds had passed since the appearance of the black tunnel. Raising his head, he saw Wu shi looking at him with a worried look.

“I’m fine. Wu shi, I need you to follow me somewhere. Oh right, get your men to move the altar to the Master Teacher Pavilion and hand it over to the envoy from the headquarters once he arrives. That would serve as evidence of the activities of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe here,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Noted!” Wu shi quickly issued some instructions before following Zhang Xuan out of the underground chamber.

Returning to Chen Zhe’s residence, Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight and began scanning the area once more. It did not take long before he identified a direction and swiftly began heading in it.

Chen Zhe’s residence was located in the suburbs of Qingyuan City. As such, it did not take long for Zhang Xuan and Wu shi to travel beyond the city walls and into the depths of the

mountain forest. Soon, a tattered, wooden hut appeared before their eyes.

Finally arriving at the destination, Zhang Xuan remarked in astonishment, “Here it is... I never thought that the two would be so far away from one another!”

He had thought that the two altars should be in proximity with one another, but who would have thought that there would be a distance of several dozen kilometers between the two? To be able to drag his soul across such distance, Vicious’ secret art was truly fearsome!

Entering the wooden hut, Zhang Xuan swiftly retrieved the storage ring that he had hidden earlier.

“This...”

On the other hand, a look of disbelief surfaced on Wu shi’s face when he noticed that there was an identical altar in the wooden hut as well.

“Take a look at who this is...” Zhang Xuan drove his Heaven’s Path zhenqi to destroy the Soul Imprint of the storage ring before flicking his wrist. A corpse materialized before him.

“Isn’t this... Vice Pavilion Master Tian? Didn’t he explode earlier?” Wu shi was taken aback.

Tian Qing had exploded right before his eyes, and he had sent the other party’s body back to the Master Teacher Pavilion for investigation. How could there be another corpse here?

Furthermore, this body was completely intact, and it commanded an even stronger aura than Vice Pavilion Master Tian’s!

“This is his disguise,” Zhang Xuan said as he flicked his hand over the Qingtian Emperor’s body.

Huala!

The corpse suddenly grew much bulkier, and its height abruptly increased to more than two meters. While there was no significant difference in its facial features, a fearsome killing intent abruptly burst forth from him.

“He’s an Otherworldly Demon?” Wu shi’s eyes narrowed in shock.

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “Not only is he an Otherworldly Demon, he’s the Qingtian Emperor!”

“The Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage?” Wu shi could not believe what he was hearing.

How could Vice Pavilion Master Tian have been an Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage?

If that was true, how could he have failed to notice it despite having known the other party for several centuries?

“It’s like this...” Zhang Xuan swiftly filled Wu shi in on the story.

“This...” Wu shi’s lips quivered in horror.

To think that the Qingtian Emperor would have successfully incarnated his soul and even risen to the position of the vice head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion without their notice! This was truly a horrifying oversight on their part!

If this was the case for Qing Tian, how many other master teachers in their Master Teacher Pavilion were Otherworldly Demons in disguise? One li = 0.5km

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“You should understand why I asked you to come here with me alone. This matter must not leak out at any cost, or else it could stir a panic among the populace!”

Seeing that Wu shi had understood the severity of the issue, Zhang Xuan instructed, “Nevertheless, it’s still of paramount importance that we uncover the traitors of mankind, or else they could bring catastrophe upon us. Thus, you must conduct the investigation privately and destroy whatever lingering influence the Qingtian Emperor has in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion once and for all!”

“I understand!” Wu shi nodded.

He knew that Zhang Xuan was right. If they could not purge the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion of its spies, it would only be a matter of time before the spies did them in.

“I’ll leave this corpse to you. When the envoy from the headquarters arrives, use it as evidence and report the matter to him,” Zhang Xuan said.

It was true that the body of the Qingtian Emperor wielded incredible strength, but it was not as agile and nimble as being in his own body. As such, he did not think that there was a need for him to retain the Qingtian Emperor’s body for his own use.

More importantly, a vice pavilion master was even involved in the matter. In view of that, it would not be convenient for him to use the body in public. As such, it was best to leave the matter to Wu shi.

“Thank you.” Wu shi clasped his fist in gratitude before stowing the corpse into his storage ring.

To be honest, if not for the young man before him, he never would have believed that the meritorious Vice Pavilion Master

Tian was the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage!

“Alright, you should return back to the Master Teacher Pavilion to deal with the matter. I also want to take a rest,” Zhang Xuan said.

Hearing those words, Wu shi bade his farewell before leaving.

After Wu shi left, Zhang Xuan swiftly stowed the altar before him into his storage ring. Following which, he took out the Qingtian Emperor’s storage ring and extended his consciousness into it.

As the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage, the Qingtian Emperor would have plenty of treasures in his possession.

Hu!

A painting materialized in Zhang Xuan’s hands. It was the grade-8 painting that he had appraised a while back.

Placing the painting aside, he continued looking on.

A moment later, he delightfully took out a few jade boxes from the storage ring.

Slowly opening them, a concentrated surge of spiritual energy suddenly gushed into Zhang Xuan’s face, leaving him feeling refreshed.

Concentrated high-tier spirit stones!

Six jade boxes with five concentrated high-tier spirit stones each... That means there’s a total of thirty of them here! Zhang Xuan thought in agitation.

He had only managed to obtain 18 concentrated high-tier spirit stones from the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire, and yet, who could have thought that the Qingtian Emperor would actually have thirty of them in his possession.

The Qingtian Lineage sure was wealthy!

With this thirty, I should be able to advance to the Embryonic Soul realm easily! Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Strength was the foundation he had to build up before he could pursue anything.

Only with sufficient strength would he be able to vie for the slot to the Sanctum of Sages, rise through the ranks, and gain the ability to negotiate on equal terms with the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan.

Time was truly not on his side. He only had until the third month of next year.

He did not want to see his lover getting married to a ‘so-called’ talent of the Zhang Clan whom she had not even met before!

After obtaining the concentrated high-tier spirit stones, Zhang Xuan decided to leap straight into the Myriad Anthive Nest.

It was quieter within the nest, and he did not have to worry about being interrupted by anyone in there.

Crossing his legs, he placed the thirty concentrated high-tier spirit stones in front of him before muttering, “Time to start!”

Concentrating his focus on his soul, he moved his soul toward his Origin Core once more, and this time, he managed to successfully infuse his soul into the Origin Core without any problems.

At the same time, he swiftly devoured the spiritual energy contained within the concentrated high-tier spirit stones and channeled it through his meridians toward his Origin Core.

In order to reach the Embryonic Soul realm, he would have to fuse his soul and Origin Core together and morph it into the shape of an embryo. He had already compiled the cultivation technique required for the morphing process, and all that he had been lacking was spirit stones.

Driven with immense power, the massive congregation of spiritual energy crashed toward the Origin Core with astounding momentum.

Boom!

As the rate at which Zhang Xuan absorbed spiritual energy increased, a vortex of spiritual energy quickly formed around him. Under the massive impact from the crashing spiritual energy, a gap finally opened in his Origin Core.

A small hand slowly crept through the small gap in his Origin Core.

Knowing that this was the crucial period, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up as he channeled all the spiritual energy he had absorbed toward his Origin Core at maximum speed. "Break!"

Sila!

The Origin Core finally broke open, and a small infant slowly climbed out from it.

This is... an Embryonic Soul?

Seeing his Embryonic Soul, Zhang Xuan's lips could not help but twitch uncontrollably.

It was true that his Embryonic Soul did resemble a baby, similar to that of other cultivators, but... his Embryonic Soul was ten meters tall!

Imagine a ten-meter-tall baby... This was truly frightening!

An ominous feeling suddenly arose in Zhang Xuan's heart. This... Just how much spiritual energy will I require to develop it into a Primordial Spirit...

If his Embryonic Soul was this much bigger than that of the other cultivators, did it not mean that the spiritual energy he would require to achieve a breakthrough would surely be much greater than others? Other cultivators might only require a single concentrated high-tier spirit stone to cultivate through the entire Embryonic Soul realm or even achieve a breakthrough to the Primordial Spirit realm.

But with the size of his Embryonic Soul, he really could not begin to imagine how many concentrated high-tier spirit stones he would require.

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan continued absorbing the spiritual energy within the concentrated high-tier spirit stones to raise his cultivation.

Some time later, when the final concentrated high-tier spirit stone broke, Zhang Xuan slowly opened his eyes and shook his head helplessly.

Embryonic Soul realm intermediate stage...

He had thought that thirty concentrated high-tier spirit stone should suffice for him to reach Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle, but who would have thought that they were completely depleted by the time he reached Embryonic Soul realm intermediate stage?

Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in frustration. At this rate, I'll require at least fifty more concentrated high-tier spirit stone before I can reach Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle...

Even finding a single concentrated high-tier spirit stone felt like finding a needle in a haystack. Where in the world was he supposed to find the fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stone required for him to reach Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle?

In the first place, it was doubtful that he could find so many concentrated high-tier spirit stones even if he flipped Qingyuan City upside down!

Sighing deeply once more, Zhang Xuan consoled himself. At the very least, despite the fearsome rate of depletion of spirit stones, my fighting prowess did rise proportionately to the consumption.

While it did pain his heart to see thirty concentrated high-tier spirit stones vanishing so swiftly, admittedly, he was still rather satisfied with the rise in his fighting prowess.

Previously, he would have struggled to be a match for Pavilion Master Gou, relying heavily on his superior combat skills and adept use of formations to achieve victory. However, with his newfound strength, he would be able to match even the Leaving Aperture realm Qingtian Emperor!

In other words, despite possessing only a cultivation of Embryonic Soul realm intermediate stage, he was already on par with a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator!

With such strength, it could be said that he had finally reached the peak of the Qingyuan Empire!

When he first arrived at Qingyuan City, he was only a Saint 1-dan pinnacle rookie, only able to match Saint 3-dan cultivators. Even Primordial Spirit realm cultivators would

have been able to do him in easily. But now, even Hall Master Xing was not a match for him.

Ah, time sure flies...

Just thinking of it evoked some reminiscence within him.

This should be the eighth day since I arrived in Qingyuan City, Zhang Xuan remarked internally as a slight tinge of redness slowly crept across his face.

Eight whole days, and yet, he had only advanced less than two realms. Zhang Xuan could not help but feel deeply ashamed of himself. It seemed like he really needed to work harder from now on.

Forget it. I should check on that fellow now.

Tossing aside his stifled feelings, Zhang Xuan tapped the area before him, and a soul appeared before his eyes.

At this moment, the Qingtian Emperor had already been ground down by the Heaven's Path zhenqi, retaining only half of his original strength. Severely wounded, he seemed to be spiritless and lethargic, reminiscent of a person on his deathbed.

Nevertheless, upon catching sight of Zhang Xuan, flames of hostility began burning in his eyes.

“You son of a bitch, I’ll kill you!” Roaring furiously, the Qingtian Emperor charged forward to tear the young man before him apart. However, before he could even deal any damage, a single finger abruptly appeared before his eyes.

Padah!

The next moment, the Qingtian Emperor found himself firmly pressed down on the floor, unable to move at all no matter how hard he struggled.

“Y-y-you... How can you be so strong?” The Qingtian Emperor narrowed his eyes in disbelief.

It was just a while ago that the other party had been no match for him at all. How could the other party have become so much stronger in the blink of an eye?

To be able to render him powerless with a single finger... just what kind of cultivation realm had he reached?

Since he could not be bothered to waste his breath with the other party, Zhang Xuan got straight to business. “As an Otherworldly Demon, how did you manage to cross over to the Master Teacher Continent? How did you become acquainted with Vicious and inherit the heritage of the soul oracles? How many spies of yours are there in the Master Teacher Pavilion? Speak! I’ll just say this once; I have plenty of time to play with you. Confess, and I’ll consider giving you a painless death. Otherwise, I’ll become your worst nightmare...”

The reason he did not let Vicious swallow the Qingtian Emperor directly was because he wanted to find out these things from the other party’s mouth.

“Hahaha!” Raising his head proudly, the Qingtian Emperor obstinately declared, “Do you think that I’ll submit to human scum like you? Dream on! I am the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage, death brings no fear to me...”

However, before he could finish his words, a kick suddenly fell on his head, smashing it into the ground.

Following which, he heard the voice of the young man once more. “Vicious, as long as I retain his soul energy for your consumption, it won’t matter if I kill his consciousness, right?”

“Very well, I won’t stand on ceremony then.”

Right after saying those words, the other party’s palm rose up, and a surge of burning Heaven’s Path zhenqi gathered in his grasp.

The palm gradually lowered toward the Qingtian Emperor, leaving him with a burning sensation that was intensifying by the moment.

The Qingtian Emperor tried to struggle free but to no avail. When the palm finally fell on his soul, a wretched scream escaped from his lips. “You... AHFFF!”

He had been planning to grit his teeth and bear the torture until the very end, but in the very next moment, he saw the other

party flicking his finger and pulling a thin thread from his soul.

The eyes of the Qingtian Emperor immediately widened in horror. “Soul Search!”

As a soul oracle, there was no way he would be unaware of the technique that Zhang Xuan was executing. Known to be one of the most violent techniques of the soul oracles, it would put the victim through excruciating pain and deal irreparable damage. Even if his soul did not dissipate at the end of the process, the chances were that he would have become mentally retarded.

For a person as proud and lofty as the Qingtian Emperor, the thought of living life mentally retarded was unacceptable to him, and it filled him with tremendous fear.

“I’ll speak, I’ll speak!” the Qingtian Emperor immediately exclaimed.

“I already gave you a chance earlier. It’s too late now.” Unwilling to waste his breath on the other party, Zhang Xuan forcefully tugged on the string and pulled it out.

Toward his enemies, he was not so patient and kind as to offer them second chances. It was only out of consideration of Vicious’ needs that he had spared the Qingtian Emperor for so long. However, since Vicious did not require the latter’s mind to be intact, there was no need for him to hesitate any longer.

At this point, he could tell that the other party’s mental fortitude had already fallen, so he would be able to acquire whatever he needed through the Soul Search.

Tzzzzzzz!

After drawing out the other party’s memory, Zhang Xuan began studying it carefully.

Two hours later, Zhang Xuan exhaled deeply before rubbing his glabella.

Through his Soul Search, he had already gained a thorough understanding of the ins and outs of the incident.

Around two thousand years ago, this Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage had unwittingly established a connection to Vicious' consciousness in the midst of a ritual.

Making use of that opportunity, Vicious had used a secret art that tapped into the energy from the tributes to teleport the Qingtian Emperor over and imparted the cultivation techniques of the soul oracles to him.

In order to infiltrate the higher ranks of the Master Teacher Pavilion, he had bid his time while kidnapping young infants who showed some talent for cultivation, intending to reincarnate his will within them.

This secret art was extremely complicated, and it would deal severe damage to one's soul as well.

Even tapping into Vicious' deep comprehension of souls, he could only afford to use the technique once every ten years. It had taken 120 attempts before he managed to succeed with Tian Qing.

As for why the Qingtian Emperor would go through so much trouble to infiltrate the higher ranks of the Master Teacher Pavilion personally, the reason was detailed in his memory as well.

"It's for Kong shi's 'Celestial Amulet of Legacy'!" Zhang Xuan muttered with a grim expression.

1196 The Friendly Spar Between the Combat Master Halls Begins!

Before Kong shi disappeared, he left behind six Celestial Amulets of Legacy. One was known to be with the Master Teacher Pavilion whereas the other five had disappeared from the face of the world.

Legend had it that the gathering of all six Celestial Amulets of Legacy would herald the opening of the Temple of Confucius, and those who entered it would be able to obtain his ultimate treasure... the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn!

It was for this reason that many people had been seeking the Celestial Amulets of Legacy over the past several dozen millenniums, but it was a pity that they were nowhere to be found.

Or perhaps, they might have already been found, just that no one dared proclaim their ownership of them.

After all, this was linked to Kong shi's ultimate treasure. Even master teachers would lose their rationality before it.

It was through the mouth of Vicious that the Qingtian Emperor had learned of the news concerning the Celestial Amulets of Legacy, and in a bid to lay his hands on it, he had set up elaborate plans.

Through his Soul Search, Zhang Xuan realized that there was a reason that the Qingtian Emperor was so determined to find the Qiu Wu Palace. "Based on the Qingtian Emperor's memories, there should be a key to finding a Celestial Amulet of Legacy within the Qiu Wu Palace, but... it doesn't seem like anything is there at all."

Rather, he had made the decision to seek out the Qiu Wu Palace only after tracing down the clues he had. On top of

learning that there was a key to the Celestial Amulet of Legacy, he had also discovered that there was a sliver of Kong shi's will that lingered in there as well.

If things had gone well, he might even have been able to uncover the precise location of the Temple of Confucius while obtaining the Celestial Amulet of Legacy.

The Temple of Confucius was a heritage that Kong shi had left behind for the later generations. It was hidden within the void, and there was no one in the world who knew where it was located.

It seems like the intelligence that the Qingtian Emperor has obtained is untrue... Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He had looked through the Qiu Wu Palace twice, but there was nothing reminiscent of a key in there! In fact, there was not a single thing in there that pointed to the Celestial Amulets of Legacy at all.

Well, how could the elusive Celestial Amulets of Legacy be obtained so easily?

Other than the Qiu Wu Palace, the Qingtian Emperor had also learned that a painter had chanced upon a Celestial Amulet of Legacy, and he had detailed it with a painting of Kong shi's silhouette.

After hearing the rumors, the Qingtian Emperor had swiftly captured the painter to interrogate him, but to no avail.

Three years ago, he had unintentionally found the heritage that the painter had left behind, and within the heritage was a certain grade-8 painting. He had suspected that the painting might have been the one mentioned in those rumors, and as luck would have it, he discovered a seal on it. That had further supported his deduction. Unfortunately, he had been unable to find a way to decipher the seal.

After many failures, he had eventually decided to turn to the head of the Qingyuan Empire Appraiser Hall, Guild Leader Mu, for help.

And the rest was as how Zhang Xuan remembered it.

Zhang Xuan frowned. Does that mean that the place that I saw in the painting was the location where the Celestial Amulet of Legacy is located?

While the clue concerning the Qiu Wu Palace had led to a dead end, it was a fact that he had seen Kong shi's silhouette within the grade-8 painting, so there should have been no mistake about it.

Zhang Xuan made up his mind. I really must investigate where the mountain range is after I return and find it...

On top of uncovering that, Zhang Xuan also managed to obtain a list of traitors from the Master Teacher Pavilion as well.

There were more a hundred of them, and they were scattered throughout the Qingyuan Empire.

The Otherworldly Demonic Tribe was blessed with long lifespans, far exceeding the thousand years that a human Saint realm cultivator would have. Thus, it had not been too difficult for them to plant a few spies here and there.

Not all master teachers were strong-willed enough to withstand the sweet whisperings of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, so some of them had eventually succumbed and become their puppets.

Zhang Xuan swiftly jotted down a copy of their names before sending them over to Wu shi through his Communication Jade Token. After that was done, he heaved a long sigh of relief.

With this, they would be able to root out the Qingtian Emperor's influence in the Qingyuan Empire once and for all.

"Vicious, I'll leave him to you."

After uncovering all that he wanted to know, Zhang Xuan waved his hand and passed the soul of the Qingtian Emperor over to Vicious.

In the two thousand years that the Qingtian Emperor had spent living among the humans, he had stained his hands with the blood of countless master teachers. To be honest, Zhang Xuan thought that the other party was getting off too lightly.

“Thank you, Master!” Vicious replied excitedly.

Getting to his feet, Zhang Xuan stretched his back lazily as he began pondering over a new plan to obtain more concentrated high-tier spirit stone. However, in that moment, he suddenly recalled a certain matter, and his lips began twitching wildly.

I forgot that I promised Hall Master Xing to train his combat masters. Earlier, he said that the combat masters from the other three Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls would be arriving in three days...

He had headed right for the Master Teacher Pavilion for his promotion to 7-star master teacher right after preparing the training regimes for the combat masters. After getting caught up in an entire string of matters, four days had passed in a flash.

In other words, the combat masters from the other three Conferred Empire Combat Master Halls should have arrived by now, and the friendly spar might have already begun!

I should rush back to take a look!

Swiftly leaving the Myriad Anthive Nest, Zhang Xuan realized that the sun was hanging high in the sky. It was already the noon of the fourth day.

Back then, Hall Master Xing had told him that if he trained the combat masters well and led them to victory in the friendly spar, he would split half of the reward from the Combat Master Hall headquarters with him. This was a precious source of concentrated high-tier spirit stones for him! No matter what, he needed to witness the exchange with his own eyes.

At this point, he could only pray that those fellows had obediently followed his training regime. Otherwise, if they lost... that would be fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones!

Just the thought of it was sufficient to make his heart bleed in pain!

Hu!

Anxious, he rushed all the way toward the Combat Master Hall.

...

In the training hall of the Combat Master Hall...

Countless combat masters were gathered in the area, their eyes fixated on the dueling platforms in the middle.

At the very forefront of the spectator stand, ahead of the crowd gathered in the area, sat four elders. One of them was Hall Master Xing.

“Hall Master Xing, I heard rumors that your combat masters have joined that... what is it called again? Xuanxuan Faction? According to what I have heard, it seems to be an organization from a Tier-1 Empire, right?”

Before the friendly spar had even begun, the other three elders had already turned sharp gazes toward Hall Master Xing as they questioned him with deep frowns on their faces.

The Combat Master Hall represented the highest fighting prowess in the Master Teacher Continent, and yet, the combat masters of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall had actually lowered themselves to joining a master teacher organization of a Tier-1 Empire... This was truly inconceivable!

It was true that the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall was the weakest of them all, but surely they did not have to lower themselves to such an extent!

To band themselves together with a group of ordinary master teachers... they were practically tossing aside the dignity of the combat masters!

“Yes, that’s right,” Hall Master Xing replied.

The ten thousand men of the Xuanxuan Faction were currently living in the Combat Master Hall. There was no way he could possibly conceal the matter from them at this point.

An elder with a goatee harrumphed coldly as he glared at Hall Master Xing sharply. “I don’t want to interfere in the affairs of your Combat Master Hall either, but are you serious? To actually have your combat masters join a Tier-1 Empire organization, just what is going through your mind? Does the

dignity and honor of the Combat Master Hall mean nothing to you?”

That was the head of the Chongyuan Empire Combat Master Hall, Zhao Yi.

“It’s not what you all think it is. I concede that the Xuanxuan Faction is a student faction from a Tier-1 Empire, but their comprehension of combat is superior even to us combat masters. As Kong shi once said, learn from the capable, regardless of their standing...” Hall Master Xing explained, but he was interjected halfway through his words.

Another elder harrumphed. “Enough! We are not interested in hearing whatever explanation you have. I hope that you can at least get a single slot for the Sword Lagoon of the Qianchong Empire so that you don’t embarrass yourselves any further.”

The head of the Haohai Empire Combat Master Hall, Liu Qinshan.

The third elder shook his head. “Allow me to give you a word of advice. The Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall might be the weakest of the Conferred Empires now, but don’t test the patience of the headquarters. They could very well call for your closure. When that happens, I don’t know how you intend to face your predecessors!”

The head of the Qianyun Empire Combat Master Hall, Wei Qianshu!

Of the Eight Great Conferred Empires, the weakest four were namely Chongyuan, Qianyun, Haohai, and Qingyuan.

Qingyuan used to be ranked third, but the assault from the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe twenty years ago had been a crushing blow to it, and it had not been able to recover from the devastating damage since then. As such, be it their national power, regional Master Teacher Pavilion, or Combat Master Hall, unfortunately, they could only be placed in very last place.

Seeing that the three hall masters were clearly looking down on him, Hall Master Xing frowned in displeasure. “Thank you for your kind advice, but even if our Qingyuan Empire

Combat Master Hall has not recovered from the damage we suffered twenty years ago, we are still making a swift recovery. You won't be let down in the friendly spar later on..."

Halfway through his words, cheers suddenly erupted behind him. The candidates that would be participating in the friendly spar were making their way into the training hall.

"Haha, indeed. I am not let down at all!" Zhao Yi burst into laughter upon seeing the candidates from Qingyuan.

"Hall Master Xing, has your Combat Master Hall run short of funds? So, this is what the elites of your Combat Master Hall look like, huh?" Wei Qianshu frowned in disapproval.

"Run short of funds?" Uncomprehending of what they were saying, Hall Master Xing turned his gaze over to his combat masters, and his eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets.

He saw that Shi Hao was still dressed in the clothes he had worn while cleaning the toilet bowls, and he was still equipped with a feather duster in hand. Jiao Tan was still holding onto his fly swatter; Xiao Qin was carrying a bird cage in his hand; Dong Rui had large bumps all over his head...

It was as if they were pitiful beggars picked off the street!

Caught off guard by the happenings, Hall Master Xing swiftly turned his head toward Division Head Liao. "Division Head Liao, what is going on?"

"Hall Master Xing, Principal Zhang's training regime was simply too much for them to finish within three days! They all carried out their training until the very last moment before rushing over in a hurry," Division Head Liao quickly explained.

Zhang Xuan's training regime was truly harsh; it was clearly impossible to finish it within three days! Division Head Liao could not tell whether the candidates were possessed or brainwashed, but despite the impossible mission that they had been tasked with, the candidates had carried out their training diligently without a single word of complaint. It was only

when the friendly spar was about to begin that they had reluctantly halted their training to rush over.

Hearing that explanation, a bitter look surfaced on Hall Master Xing's face.

Had he known that this would happen, he never would have entrusted the training of the candidates to Zhang Xuan. With this, their Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall would surely become the laughingstock of the other Conferred Empire Combat Master Hall for many years to come.

Cleaning the toilet bowl, swatting flies, capturing birds, leaping off trees... Just what was Zhang Xuan up to? Was he really trustworthy?

While Hall Master Xing was still staring at the situation before him with a desolate look in his eyes, a shout suddenly sounded from the dueling platform. "I am Ling Xuan from the Chongyuan Empire Combat Master Hall. My cultivation is at Saint 2-dan intermediate stage. Are there any friends from the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall who would like to spar with me?"

A combat master had already leaped onto one of the dueling platforms, and he was staring at Qingyuan's candidates intently.

Hall Master Xing clenched his fists tightly. "To challenge us right from the start... they are intending to suppress our morale."

There was a proper order to how the friendly spar should have been conducted, and yet, that Combat Master Ling Xuan had leaped up onto the dueling platform to challenge Qingyuan's candidates. That was clearly an intentional act to destroy their confidence right from the start.

Furthermore, as the host of the friendly spar, it would make them appear weak if they turned down the challenge.

"I'll face you!" Jiao Tan leaped onto the dueling platform.

Jiao Tan was a genius from the Martial Arts Division, and his cultivation had long reached Saint 2-dan intermediate stage. He was the candidate that the Qingyuan Empire Combat

Master Hall had chosen for the friendly spar for this cultivation stage.

“You?” Seeing the other party’s work clothes and the fly swatter in his hands, Ling Xuan could not help but burst into laughter. “Very well then, make your move! Let me see the formidable strength of the Qingyuan Empire combat masters!”

Huala!

Right after saying those words, he channeled his zhenqi toward his palm, and a deafening rumble reminiscent of thunder echoed from his hands.

“That is Chongyuan Empire’s famous Bolt Lightning Palm!”

“It’s said that the palm art is as swift as a bolt of lightning, making it nigh impossible for cultivators of the same tier to withstand it!”

“According to what I know, it’s extremely difficult to cultivate as well. Countless geniuses have found themselves completely clueless before it. However, judging from the resounding thunder from Ling Xuan’s palm... most likely, he has already reached Major Accomplishment in the battle technique!”

“Major Accomplishment? That should be Consummation! Ling Xuan is said to be the most talented individual of Chongyuan Empire Combat Master Hall’s Martial Arts Division, and despite having yet to reach his thirties, he has already broken several records and successfully cultivated 34 battle techniques to date!”

“He’s so formidable?”

Such discussions could be heard throughout the crowd.

However, seemingly oblivious to the words of the crowd, Jiao Tan calmly walked up to Ling Xuan with the same fly swatter in his hand.

1197 Pah Pah Pah!

“That bamboo fly swatter is delicate and powerless, and yet, he intends to use it to deal with Ling Xuan’s Bolt Lightning Palm?”

“Is there something wrong with that fellow’s head?”

“Jiao Tan is the number one genius of the Martial Arts Division, and his comprehension of battle techniques has reached an incredible height as well. In normal circumstances, even if he is no match for Ling Xuan, he would at least be able to put up a spectacular fight. But to walk up with a fly swatter in hand... is he out of his mind?”

Seeing how Jiao Tan was acting, everyone was dumbfounded. Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao felt so crazed that they wanted to tear out all their hair on the spot.

They had placed so much hope in Jiao Tan, and yet, after a few days of undergoing Zhang Xuan’s training regime, he was suddenly off his rockers!

It would have been tolerable if Jiao Tan had chosen to wield an ordinary sword, a chair, or even a brick! A fly swatter was flexible and fragile, making it unsuitable to exert strength through it. To face Ling Xuan with such a weapon was practically committing suicide!

Thinking that Jiao Tan was making light of him, Ling Xuan’s face reddened in fury. “Are you sure you want to face me with that?”

Even though it was just a friendly spar, it was still a formal event. It should have been a solemn and dignified occasion, and yet, the other party was actually insulting him by facing him with a fly swatter. That was blatant humiliation toward him!

Jiao Tan nodded earnestly. “Un. If you think that you are disadvantaged, you can wield a weapon if you want. There’s no need to hold back!”

“You...” Jiao Tan’s words caused a mini explosion in Ling Xuan’s mind, and he clenched his jaws so tightly together that his teeth nearly chipped. Waving his hands furiously, he harrumphed. “There’s no need for that! I’ll use my palms to teach you a lesson and make your Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall understand the gap between us! No matter how hard you work, you will never be able to catch up to us!”

Huala!

Right after saying those words, with a thunderous roar, his palm shot forth with a speed as swift as a streak of lightning. In the blink of an eye, his lightning-like aura permeated the entire dueling platform. It felt as if the slightest wrong move would bring a crushing blow, seemingly forcing Jiao Tan into a cornered situation.

“I’ll look forward to it then,” Jiao Tan replied leisurely before raising the fly swatter in his hand. With a swift motion, he struck the lightning before his eyes.

“You’re seeking death!” Seeing that the other party obstinately wanted to face him with a fly swatter, Ling Xuan gritted his teeth furiously as his palm flew toward Jiao Tan.

He was going to use his full strength to inflict a crushing defeat upon the other party so as to let the other party understand what a true expert was!

Hall Master Zhao Yi shook his head and said, “There’s no need to watch any further. The victor has already been decided.”

“Indeed. An aura suffused with lightning, a palm overflowing with strength. Even though Ling Xuan is only a Saint 2-dan cultivator, his might is more than sufficient to overwhelm any Saint 3-dan cultivator. Even a Half-Saint weapon could be crushed into pieces before his Bolt Lightning Palm! There is no way that fellow will be able to match Ling Xuan with just a bamboo fly swatter!” Hall Master Liu Qinshan sighed.

“From the looks of it, it seems like the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall won’t be able to obtain a single slot...” Hall Master Wei Qianshu sneered coldly. However, before he

could finish his words, a ‘pah!’ suddenly echoed resoundingly throughout the training hall.

“Hmm?”

Taken aback, the three hall masters quickly turned their gazes back to the dueling platform, only to see that before Ling Xuan’s Bolt Lightning Palm could reach Jiao Tan, a fly swatter had struck his face squarely, leaving a dense congregation of red lines in its wake.

“Ahhh, I’ll kill you!” Ling Xuan had clearly not expected the other party’s fly swatter to move so swiftly as to slap him right before everyone else. Seething with rage, he dashed forward and thrust another palm forward.

Pah!

But again, before his palm could connect, another crisp echo sounded throughout the entire training hall. Once more, the fly swatter had struck his face.

“I...” At this moment, Ling Xuan really felt as if his mind would blow up.

With a swift step, his silhouette flickered, and five illusory figures appeared on the dueling platform, making it difficult for one to discern which was true and which was false.

As a combat master, he had been through plenty of battles. Even though he felt humiliated by the two consecutive slaps, he knew better than to allow his emotions to dictate his actions. While his opponent was dressed in a bizarre get up, it was apparent at this point that he possessed superior fighting prowess. Thus, he immediately executed his strongest movement technique.

Artful Steps of Seven Specter!

It was a Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, and if perfectly executed, it could generate seven lifelike illusions of one to confound one’s opponent.

While its power was beneath that of the Bolt Lightning Palm, its reputation far exceeded the latter. Ever since he successfully mastered the technique, there had been none who

had been able to break his Artful Steps of Seven Specter through skill.

“Five illusions! He has already refined his Artful Steps of Seven Specter to an incredible level, such that even I can’t accurately discern his true figure within the illusions...” Hall Master Zhao Yi remarked while stroking his beard.

But once again, before he could finish his words, ‘pah!’.

And once again, the fly swatter struck Ling Xuan’s face squarely.

“Ahhh!” Flying into a frenzy, Ling Xuan hastened his footsteps, making his movements even more indiscernible to the eye.

Pah! Pah! Pah!

But even so, three consecutive strikes still landed accurately on Ling Xuan’s face. It was as if Jiao Tan could see right through the illusions!

Seeing how his comrade was being slapped time and time again without laying a single finger on his opponent’s body, a combat master from Chongyuan Empire could not hold himself back any longer and shouted, “Ling Xuan, since he is using a weapon, use your sword too!”

“Alright!” Knowing that the fellow before him was a tough nut to crack, Ling Xuan flicked his wrist and whipped out a Saint low-tier sword. Flicking the sword furiously, a relentless barrage of sword qi burst forth, instantly covering the entire dueling platform.

“Freezing Rain Sword Intent... That’s the unique Sword Intent that Ling Xuan comprehended while standing under the winter rain when he was 23. No one has ever succeeded in dodging it before...” Hall Master Zhao Yi commented proudly, but once again, before he could finish his words, Jiao Tan, who was surrounded by the barrage of sword qi, raised his fly swatter nonchalantly and...

Pah! Pah! Pah!

Yet another three consecutive slaps. At this point, Ling Xuan's face was already swollen red from all the slapping.

Huala!

Furious, Ling Xuan drove his sword forward and sent sword arts of all kinds toward Jiao Tan.

However, Jiao Tan easily avoided all of Ling Xuan's attacks as if a butterfly flitting through a field of flowers. And more importantly, his fly swatter never stopped moving throughout.

Pah! Pah! Pah! Pah!

It was a steady and rhythmic melody, sounding surprisingly like an orchestra.

“This...”

The three hall masters widened their eyes in disbelief, unable to believe what they were seeing. Even Hall Master Xing, Division Head Liao, and the others could not process what exactly was going on.

They had witnessed Zhang Xuan's training regime with their own eyes, and they had nearly been convinced that it was a prank. And yet... how could Jiao Tan undergo such a huge change, as if a caterpillar metamorphosed into a butterfly?

“Incredible, I never thought that fly swatters would make such powerful weapon!”

“That's only because of Jiao Tan's exceptional control. I saw him hunting down flies inside the toilet, and he could even accurately strike a fly's front legs without hurting the rest of its body!”

“What? Is that true? Given how small and nimble flies are, is it really possible to do it to such an extent?”

“If that's really true, the precision of his control is truly frightening!”

A couple of Qingyuan combat masters discussed as they watched the duel.

Hearing the conversation among the combat masters, Division Head Liao smacked his thigh and exclaimed in realization,

“Ah, I get it now!”

Division Head Wei turned his head and asked, “What did you get?”

“Jiao Tan is a genius of our Martial Arts Division,” Division Head Liao explained, “but due to the huge variety of battle techniques he has cultivated, he isn’t focused in any of them, and this has prevented him from drawing out his full fighting prowess...”

“It might seem nonsensical for Principal Zhang to have instructed him to hunt down flies, but there’s actually a deeper meaning behind it! Every single fly moves in a unique trajectory, and in order to strike it accurately, one has to closely observe its movements and predict it in advance.

“More importantly, this training served to enhance his focus and rid his recklessness. With greater focus, he is now able to immerse himself into the battle technique he is executing and bring forth its maximum strength.”

“This...” Division Head Wei fell into deep thought.

That did seem to make sense.

As a genius of the Martial Arts School, Jiao Tan was an extremely proud individual. He would surely find hunting down flies to be a deeply demeaning and unengaging task. However, if he could overcome this part of himself, his state of mind could be elevated to greater heights, and this would be beneficial in his execution of battle techniques as well.

It was due to his incredible focus that no matter how Ling Xuan altered his movements, he was unable to escape Jiao Tan’s swatter. Since he was even able to accurately strike a fly’s legs, there was no reason he could not evade and strike something as big as a human!

Pah pah pah pah!

The sound gradually crescendoed.

“Stop! I admit defeat!”

It did not take long before Ling Xuan had used all of his battle techniques, and yet, he did not even manage to nick the other

party's body. Realizing that it was impossible for him to win, he could only surrender miserably.

At this moment, his face resembled nothing like a human's. It was swollen so badly that it resembled a doughnut.

“Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall's Jiao Tan is the victor!” Since Ling Xuan had already admitted defeat, the referee could only award the victory to Jiao Tan.

Huala!

A well-built young man leaped onto the stage.

“I am Bai Xun from the Qianyun Empire Combat Master Hall. My cultivation is at Saint 2-dan primary stage, and I would like to challenge the experts of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall as well!”

“My cultivation is at Saint 2-dan primary stage as well. I'll be your opponent,” Shi Hao said as he walked onto the stage.

“Bai Xun is the genius of Qianyun Empire Combat Master Hall's Fist Division. His steel fists are known to be invincible among his peers. I don't think that cleaner stands much of a chance against him.”

“Cough cough, he's not a cleaner. He's actually the genius of our Inner Breath Division, Shi Hao!”

...

As the duo walked up the stage, the combat masters of both Combat Master Halls could not help but clench their fists nervously.

“Hall Master Xing, how is the strength of this combat master of yours?” Hall Master Liu Qinshan asked curiously.

Just a moment ago, everyone had thought that the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall had already given up on themselves, but the overwhelming prowess that Jiao Tan had displayed had really opened their eyes. At this point, it would have been truly foolish of them to continue underestimating the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall.

“I... I don't know either!” Hall Master Xing shook his head.

Principal Zhang's training regime was simply too bizarre! Even someone as experienced in combat as him could not comprehend the rationale behind it at all!

To instruct the proud genius of the Inner Breath Hall to clean the toilet bowls throughout the Inner Breath Division... If things went wrong, Shi Hao's fighting prowess might even decline instead!

"It's impossible for that lad to beat Bai Xun!" the head of the Qianyun Empire Combat Master Hall, Wei Qianshu, remarked proudly. "I have absolute confidence in him! He's my direct disciple, and there has never been anyone who could match him in the field of fist arts. There's just no way your combat master will be able to win against him!"

Hu hu!

While the hall masters were chatting, the battle on the dueling platform had already begun.

With the opportunity to train in the Sword Lagoon of the Qianchong Empire on the line, Bai Xun had no intention of holding back at all.

From the very start, he threw out a fist with his full strength harnessed in it.

Just as the fist was about to strike Shi Hao, the latter suddenly raised his hand and scraped the other party's face forcefully, reminiscent of how he had scraped the toilet bowls with his feather duster throughout the Combat Master Hall over the past three days.

"You!" Seeing this, flames of fury lit up in Bai Xun's eyes.

With a furious roar, he sent another powerful fist forward.

The fist wielded astounding might that caused a deafening sonic boom. However, before it could reach Shi Hao, the latter raised his hand once more and swiped Shi Hao's face forcefully, digging out a huge lump of dirt while doing it.

"You... How long has it been since you last washed your face?" Shi Hao disdainfully wiped his hand on his shirt.

"..." Bai Xun.

With a livid expression, Bai Xun swiftly stepped back and equipped his knuckleduster before charging forward once more. “You bastard, I’ll kill you!”

The combat masters of the Fist Division relied on knuckledusters to draw forth greater strength from their fist arts.

On the other hand, seeing that his opponent had drawn his weapon, Shi Hao also unhesitatingly flicked his wrist, and a feather duster appeared in his hand.

“Glacier Smashing Fist!” With a furious bellow, a brilliant light flashed from the knuckleduster, and Bai Xun thrust his fist forward furiously, seemingly intending to utterly destroy the figure before him.

But just as the fist was shooting forward, still a distance away from connecting, Bai Xun suddenly saw something flying toward him with a speed reminiscent of a streak of lightning. Before he could process what was going on, a feather duster had already been stuffed into his mouth before swishing around.

In an instant, a harmony of indescribable flavors filled his mouth.

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“Shi Hao possesses an incredible zhenqi capacity, so relying on his strength, he prefers to overwhelm his opponent with his sheer might. While it allows him to defeat weaker opponents easily, it puts him at a critical advantage against opponents who are equal or stronger than him. His careless use of zhenqi would only cause him to run out of strength first, so it was not a particularly wise fighting style,” Division Head Liao remarked hoarsely as he watched the duel unblinkingly.

“A feather duster is fragile, and an excessive use of strength could easily cause it to break. By instructing Shi Hao to clean toilet bowls with that, he was trying to temper Shi Hao’s use of strength, granting him a finer control over his zhenqi. Over the past three days, he has scrubbed tens of thousands of toilet bowls diligently, and his effort has not gone to waste. It’s clear that his use of zhenqi has become more refined, and his execution of strength is also more controlled. It’s these two factors that allowed him to achieve victory easily!”

“As for Xiao Qin, he has an impatient personality. As such, the training regime he was put under, capturing birds, served to temper his patience. Furthermore, the agility of birds makes them difficult to deal with, so the training further refined his dexterity too...”

“Lu Jianling has a cowardly personality, so by having him confess to everyone he meets, teasing men even, he was able to embolden his guts and temper his state of mind. Don’t think that confidence is of little importance just because of how vague it sounds; it can actually allow a person to make decisions more decisively, granting him a significant boost in his fighting prowess...”

“Even though Dong Rui is a genius from the Guardian Division, the defenses of his head were slightly lacking. Through a continuous cycle of falling from a tree, the

defensive ability of his head could be tempered. At the same time, this also served to build his courage. If he could willingly embrace pain, he would be able to charge fearlessly into hordes of enemies and display his true prowess... The crux of the Guardian Division lies in their invincible physical prowess. If they cower in face of the enemy, there would be no way they could bring out their full strength..."

"As for Chen Xiaoxu..."

With each passing battle, the excited gleam in Division Head Liao's eyes grew brighter and brighter.

In just a few moments, ten matches had already passed. Everyone had thought that the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall would perform below average this time around, but who knew that every single one of them would successfully clinch victory, not losing even a single round!

It was only in this moment that it dawned on them how fearsome Zhang Xuan's training regime was.

"He managed to see through the flaws of all twenty candidates with a look and tailor a training regime suited to their needs! Scrubbing toilet bowls, swatting flies, capturing birds... All of those may seem simple, but there was a deeper meaning to each of those actions, allowing the candidates to grasp a more profound interpretation of combat!"

Hall Master Xing's eyes grew brighter and brighter as he began to understand the rationale behind Zhang Xuan's training regime.

He had been utterly dumbfounded when he first saw the training regime, and he had thought that Zhang Xuan was just fooling around. However, after seeing the performance of Qingyuan's candidates, he realized that the other party's training regime was truly spot-on!

Combat masters were constantly tempering their skills every single day, and while their diligence allowed them to sharpen their combat prowess to levels far exceeding that of ordinary master teachers, it had also led to a rigidity in their combat

senses and even reflexes. Clearly, it was infeasible to overthrow what they had learned within just three short days.

As such, Zhang Xuan had made them carry out activities that ordinary humans would do so as to loosen their state of mind, making it easier for them their mind and body to absorb new things. Through having them repeat the actions again and again, the training they carried out was eventually integrated into part of their instincts as well.

It was just like how Shi Hao used his hands to scrub the other party's face viciously. In truth, he was not doing it intentionally. Rather, it was a habit he had unintentionally cultivated from three days of relentlessly scrubbing toilet bowls.

"I really should have more confidence in Principal Zhang and them..." Hall Master Xing shook his head with a bitter smile.

He had been deeply worried that their candidates would stand no chance against the geniuses from the other Combat Master Halls after undergoing such a nonsensical training regime, but it seemed like Zhang Xuan had the situation tightly in his grasp all along!

It was no wonder he was even relaxed enough to head off to the Master Teacher Pavilion, staying out for the entire three days. From the looks of it now, it was apparent that he had absolute confidence in the training regimes he had assigned to the candidates!

The minds of the true experts were truly different from ordinary folk like them!

In an instant, Zhang Xuan's position in Hall Master Xing's heart had been elevated to a greater height.

While Hall Master Xing was reveling in the overwhelming prowess his candidates were showing, the other three hall masters, whose chins had been tilted up in disdain earlier, were panicking over the unexpected situation.

They never could have imagined that that bunch of unkempt, beggar-like combat masters would actually wield such tremendous strength!

The combat masters whom they had gone through much effort to find and groom had actually turned out to be no match for them at all! It was an utter annihilation!

What the heck was this?

Unable to take it any longer, Hall Master Zhao Yi turned to Hall Master Xing and asked, “Hall Master Xing, what is going on with your combat masters?”

Long years of competition between both Combat Master Halls had granted both sides a clear grasp over the strength of the other. Even if the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall had made massive improvements over the past few years, it still did not make sense that all of their candidates would actually lose! Something was clearly off!

But regardless of what it was, there was one thing that was certain—the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall was no longer the weakling it had once been.

“To be honest, three days ago, the fighting prowess of my candidates was still beneath that of the geniuses from your Combat Master Halls. It was due to special last-minute training that they managed to metamorphose into the experts that you see now!” Hall Master Xing revealed the truth.

“Special training? They managed to attain such strength just by undergoing special last-minute training?”

“How in the world can that possibly be true?”

“Three days wouldn’t even be sufficient to master the simplest Saint-tier battle technique!”

...

The three hall masters found Hall Master Xing’s words inconceivable.

Other cultivators often used decades as a unit of measurement of how long they have trained! Three days... What the hell could one possibly do in three days? It would probably pass in a flash before one could even fully digest the principles behind a Saint intermediate-tier battle technique!

“I understand your skepticism. I also thought that it was impossible as well, but the leader of the Xuanxuan Faction that I told you about earlier specially designed training regimes tailored to resolve their individual flaws. It was thanks to those that they were able to improve at such an astounding pace!” Hall Master Xing replied with a hint of pride in his voice.

“The leader of the Xuanxuan Faction?”

The three hall masters glanced at one another in bewilderment.

“Indeed!” Hall Master Xing nodded. “He might be from a Tier-1 Empire, but his comprehension of combat and battle techniques has already reached a realm that I can hardly fathom. It’s due to that reason that I allowed our combat masters join to the Xuanxuan Faction. Through their expertise, I hope to bring the strength of our Combat Master Hall to greater heights!”

“A master teacher from a Tier-1 Empire was able to grant your candidates the strength to achieve a complete victory in our friendly spar through just three days of teaching?”

Despite Hall Master Xing’s explanation, the other hall masters still found the matter a little doubtful.

Huala!

At that moment, a commotion suddenly broke out on the dueling platform, and countless agitated shouts echoed from the spectator’s stand.

Raising their heads, the hall masters saw that the victor of the final match had been decided. All sixty candidates from their three Combat Master Halls had been defeated.

In other words, the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall had managed to win all twenty slots to the Qianchong Empire’s Sword Lagoon for themselves!

“This...”

The eyelids of the three hall masters twitched wildly. They really could not accept such an outcome.

They had thought that they would be able to claim roughly six slots each at the very least, but who could have imagined that

the friendly spar would end with them obtaining none at all!

It was truly a complete defeat for them!

However, knowing that the results were already decided, the three hall masters could only sigh deeply and reluctantly accept it.

A moment later, Hall Master Wei Qianshu asked, “Where is the leader of the Xuanxuan Faction? Can you bring us to meet him? I would like to meet the man whom you are full of praise for!”

“He isn’t in the Combat Master Hall at the moment,” Hall Master Xing replied.

According to the news he had heard, Zhang Xuan had gone off to the Master Teacher Pavilion to take his 7-star master teacher examination, so it would not be appropriate for him to interrupt the young man at this moment.

“He isn’t in the Combat Master Hall? Since that’s the case, can you take us to the Xuanxuan Faction to take a look?” Hall Master Zhao Yi asked. “I am interested to see just what kind of capability that Tier-1 Empire organization holds that you would even go to the extent of seeking their assistance!”

“This...” Hall Master Xing hesitated for a moment, but recalling how the other three hall masters had treated him prior to the duel, he eventually relented. “Alright then.”

It was no big deal to take them to the Xuanxuan Faction to take a look.

Besides, based on what he recalled, the members of the Xuanxuan Faction were also very welcoming toward combat masters. After all, they were the perfect cannon fodder for them to test their skills on.

Thus, Hall Master Xing stood up and led the other three hall masters toward the accommodation of the Xuanxuan Faction. Not too long later, he saw a young lady walking in his direction.

Hall Master Xing clasped his fist and said, “Lady Qiqi, greetings. Allow me to introduce to you. These three are the

heads of the Chongyuan, Qianyun, and Haohai Empire Combat Master Halls respectively. They are interested in having an exchange with the Xuanxuan Faction, so may I know if now is a convenient time?”

He recognized the young lady before him. She was the strongest expert of the Xuanxuan Faction, Luo Qiqi.

In just a few days of absence, the young lady seemed to have made some advancement in her cultivation, rising from Saint 1-dan pinnacle to Saint 2-dan primary stage.

“An exchange?” Luo Qiqi glanced at the trio beside Hall Master Xing and smiled. “Sure! Suppress your cultivation to my level and come at me all at once!”

“This...”

Hearing the other party asking them to come at her all at once, Hall Master Zhao Yi frowned in displeasure. “Young lady, we are the heads of our regional Combat Master Hall, Leaving Aperture realm experts. Do you think that you will be able to match us just because we have suppressed out cultivation?”

Hall Master Wei Qianshu shook his head in disapproval. “Without a doubt, you are a talented individual to be able to attain such strength at your age. However, that is no reason for you to act with such conceit!”

“When we were your age, we were able to match ten cultivators of the same cultivation realm easily. Even though we have already grown old, I believe that we still have more than enough in us to subdue a young lass like you!” Hall Master Liu Qinshan frowned.

“Give it a try then,” Luo Qiqi replied with a leisure smile.

“Since Hall Master Xing was full of praise for the Xuanxuan Faction, allow me to experience your incredible strength for myself!” Seeing how lightly the young lady was taking them, Hall Master Zhao Yi shook his head. He took a step forward while suppressing his cultivation to Saint 2-dan primary stage.

The other two also suppressed their cultivation as well.

Hu!

With a powerful step, Hall Master Zhao Yi appeared before Luo Qiqi in an instant. As if a massive dragon had risen from the ocean, his presence suddenly felt extremely heavy and powerful, compelling others to bow before him.

Even though he had already suppressed his cultivation, he was still a Leaving Aperture realm expert. The overwhelming strength of his Primordial Spirit was able to collapse the mental resilience of any Saint 2-dan cultivator easily, rendering the other party completely helpless.

“Heh!” As if unfazed by the pressure from Hall Master Zhao Yi, Luo Qiqi also made her move. She raised her palm and thrust it forward forcefully, and astonishingly, it dispelled the might of Hall Master Zhao Yi’s assault in an instant.

Hall Master Zhao Yi could not help but narrow his eyes in shock.

In a clash between fellow experts, one move was all it took to gauge the other party’s strength.

From that move, he realized that the young lady, when at the same cultivation realm, was actually even stronger than him!

That explained why she was able to act so haughtily despite learning of their identities.

“Humph!” Hall Master Zhao Yi’s expression turned grim, and the previous disdain in his eyes disappeared without a trace.

He executed a movement technique and darted forward with astounding speed, wanting to catch the young lady off guard and nab her. However, before he could reach her, her figure suddenly appeared before Hall Masters Wei Qianshu and Liu Qinshan, and she thrust her palms at the both of them simultaneously.

Just as she had said earlier, she would deal with the three of them at once.

Boom boom!

Under the young lady’s powerful assault, the other two hall masters had no choice but to join the fray as well. Thus, the battle became three against one.

Pipa! Pipa! Pipa!

Ten breaths later, Hall Master Zhao Yi's face had already reddened from exhaustion. There were two clear palm prints on his chest, but only his clothes were ripped. The attacks did not deal any considerable external or internal injuries to him. Clearly, the young lady had gone easy on him.

Twenty breaths later, Hall Masters Wei Qianshu and Liu Qinshan were forced to retreat several steps in a fluster. A stifling sensation choked up their chests, rendering them unable to speak.

The trio clasped their fists simultaneously and bowed. "We have lost..."

Despite collaborating with one another, they were still unable to defeat the young lady before them. They never would have believed such a thing to be possible in the past, but with it happening right before their eyes, there was no way they could deny it anymore.

Furthermore, it was apparent that the young lady had gone easy on them. Otherwise, every one of them would have been severely wounded.

As stifled as Hall Master Zhao Yi felt from his defeat, he had to concede that the strength wielded by the young lady was truly extraordinary. Out of curiosity, he could not help but ask, "May I know how I should address you?"

The least he could do was to find out the name of the person who had defeated him.

On the other hand, the young lady placed her hands behind her back and tilted her chin upward. A faint smile surfaced on her lips, and in an instant, it felt as if a field of flowers had blossomed.

"Xuanxuan Faction, Luo Qiqi!"

1199 Decree of the Progeny of Comba

“Luo Qiqi?”

The trio etched the name into the depths of their hearts.

As the heads of their regional Combat Master Halls, they were existences who were looked up to by countless combat masters, revered for the overwhelming strength they wielded. Even within the Leaving Aperture realm, there was nearly no one who was a match for them. Yet, they were not a match for the young lady at all. This went to show the young lady’s astounding prowess!

“May I know if Lady Qiqi is interested in joining our Chongyuan Empire Combat Master Hall?” Hall Master Zhao Yi stepped forward and clasped his fist.

“I am not interested,” Luo Qiqi replied curtly.

If she was truly interested in joining the Combat Master Hall, she would have long taken the examination for it. There was no need for her to have dragged it out till now. And to be honest, she was only interested in staying by her teacher’s side at the moment. If only she could, she would willingly stay with him until the end of time...

“This...” Hearing the other party’s unhesitating rejection, Hall Master Zhao Yi knew that it would be impossible for him to convince the young lady otherwise, so he could only give up with a bitter smile.

Just as he was about to continue speaking, a resounding horn reminiscent of the roar of thunder reverberated deafeningly throughout the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall. It was so loud that it felt as if it would tear through even the heavens.

The sound was coming from the very heart of the Combat Master Hall, the Great Combat Master Atrium!

“It’s the Combat Master Assembly Decree!”

The eyes of the four hall masters widened in astonishment.

The Combat Master Hall was in charge of maintaining the security of the region, and for that purpose, they devoted most of their time to training and cultivating. However, once the horn was blown, all combat masters that heard the sound had to assemble immediately. Even the slightest delay would not be tolerated!

“Let’s head over!”

Knowing that this was not the time to speak, they hurriedly rushed over to the Great Combat Master Atrium.

The fact that the horn had been blown meant that something major had occurred.

In the blink of an eye, they arrived at the concourse right before the Great Combat Master Atrium. At this moment, all the combat masters in the Qingyuan Empire had assembled in the area. With grim expressions, they stood upright in neat rows, as if soldiers awaiting their commands.

Hula!

Right after the four hall masters landed at the very forefront of the crowd, a powerful energy suddenly rippled in the Great Combat Master Atrium, forming a massive screen in midair.

“It’s news from the headquarters!”

Upon seeing this, Hall Master Xing and the others heaved a sigh of relief.

They had been worrying that there had been an invasion and that they would have to march onto the battlefield. Fortunately, that did not seem to be the case.

If it was a war, the headquarters would have sent a command straight into their minds and had them set forth as soon as possible. They would not have gone to the trouble of producing this massive screen.

Boom!

While the four hall masters were trying to deduce what was going on, the voice of an elder suddenly sounded from the

massive screen, echoing in the hearts of every single combat master present.

“The candidate that the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall nominated, Zheng Yang, has successfully cleared the Dragon Gate Formation, and I hereby declare him the Progeny of Combat of our Combat Master Hall!

Hula!

Following which, a silhouette gradually surfaced on the massive screen. It was a young man holding a spear in his hand. He commanded a sharp aura that felt as if it would pierce through the heavens.

The current Zheng Yang looked much keener than before. Under Zhang Xuan’s tutelage, he had already been extremely formidable, but having never experienced the cruelty and the bloodshed from life-and-death battles, it was inevitable that he would appear a little immature. However, at this moment, the presence that he commanded was formidable, and it exerted immense pressure on those before him.

It felt as if the sharp blade of a dagger was pressed on their skin, threatening to part their skin and flesh.

“Progeny of Combat?”

Hall Masters Zhao Yi, Wei Qianshu, and Lin Qinshan narrowed their eyes in astonishment, and their bodies froze on the spot.

It had been three hundred years since the passing of the previous Progeny of Combat of the Combat Master Hall. They were well aware of the significance behind this declaration.

They had thought that the Qingyuan Empire was just a declining empire that would soon fall out of its ranks and that its Combat Master Hall had fallen into a spiral of frailty. Yet, who would have thought that a combat master from their ranks would actually succeed in clearing the Dragon Gate Formation and become the next Progeny of Combat?

Putting the rest aside, just the ‘gratitude of nomination’ was more than enough for them to rise to unprecedented heights.

That realization left the trio with a hoarseness at the back of their throats, and they found themselves unable to speak a single word.

They had still been lamenting their bad luck from being unable to claim a single slot from the friendly spar, but after witnessing the sight before them, they realized that it had not been bad luck at all. From the very start, the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall wielded strength far exceeding theirs!

At the same time, Hall Master Xing could not help but narrow his eyes either.

In truth, when he sent Zheng Yang over to the Combat Master Hall headquarters, he did not bear much hope for success. But contrary to his expectations, the young man really managed to pull it off!

Progeny of Combat... That was the man who would become the next head of the entire Combat Master Hall, the future Combat God of the Master Teacher Continent!

And that man had actually come from their branch!

Weng!

While he was still overwhelmed by emotions from that realization, the sight on the screen suddenly changed as Zheng Yang swept his spear toward a massive dragon ahead of him.

“This is... challenging the Dragon Gate Formation?” Hall Master Xing remarked.

In order to become the Progeny of Combat, one had to first clear the Dragon Gate Formation.

The Dragon Gate Formation was divided into three stages: Dragon’s Tail, Dragon’s Back, and Dragon’s Head. In every single stage, the challenger would have to face three challengers with consecutively ascending cultivation stage, ranging from an equivalent cultivation to eight cultivation stages higher!

Furthermore, the fighting prowess of the three cultivators was further enhanced by the Dragon Gate Formation, making it extremely difficult to defeat them.

It was for this reason that no one had cleared the Dragon Gate Formation in the past three hundred years.

“The headquarters are playing the recording of the Progeny of Combat clearing the Dragon Gate Formation to all combat masters in order to muster their morale through the strength of the new Progeny of Combat, as well as to show them that the trial was carried out fairly!”

The sight was recorded using the Record Crystal in the headquarters, and naturally, it was played to the combat masters for a reason.

The intent was clear as well.

It was to force all the combat masters to acknowledge the strength of the Progeny of Combat, thus building up authority and respect for him. This was a necessary procedure for the Progeny of Combat to lead the Combat Master Hall in the future.

Hu la!

While Hall Master Xing was pondering over the matter, he saw Zheng Yang making his way over to the Dragon’s Tail.

His spear shot forth with a speed so swift that it was nearly indiscernible, flying forth as if a streak of lightning.

“Too strong...” Even though it was only a video, Hall Master Xing still could not help but shudder upon seeing the speed of the spear.

If he were to face the Progeny of Combat at the same cultivation realm, there was no doubt that the spear would have pierced through his throat before he could even respond.

But before this despairing strength, the combat masters in the Dragon’s Tail actually manage to react to the spear. They swiftly moved to meet Zheng Yang’s spear with their own, and a powerful shockwave burst into the surroundings.

Despite having his assault foiled, Zheng Yang did not show the slightest hint of apprehension. He took a leisure step forward, and despite his light movement, for some reason, his body still moved at an exceptional speed. In the blink of an

eye, he was already standing before one of the combat masters.

Peng!

With a quick flick of his spear, he sent the combat master flying out of the field. After which, he continued executing his spear art relentlessly toward the two remaining combat masters, overpowering them swiftly. In just three moves, the both of them were subdued as well. With this, the Dragon's Tail had fallen.

“What swift spearmanship...”

The combat masters in the concourse could not help but tighten their fists in agitation.

At the same time, the eyes of the combat masters from the Martial Arts Division lit up as they watched the fight.

All in all, Zheng Yang had used five moves to deal with the Dragon's Tail. Even though it appeared that he had only used the most straightforward movements, a pierce and a sweep, they had been infused with the very essence of spearmanship, making it extremely difficult to guard against them.

Even if they were to devote their entire lives to the spearmanship, they could not see themselves pulling off the same spear that Zheng Yang had used.

However, this was not the end of the Dragon Gate Formation yet. The Dragon's Tail could only be said to be the starter, and there was still the Dragon's Back and Dragon's Head to go.

The trio on the Dragon's Back had a cultivation of three, four, and five cultivation stages higher than Zheng Yang.

Similarly, it did not take too long for Zheng Yang to subdue them. He met with slight difficulties in the midst of doing so, but it did not pose too much of a problem.

“He has used 17 moves in total!” Hall Master Xing exclaimed in shock.

After clearing the Dragon's Back, Zheng Yang moved on to the Dragon's Head.

The three cultivators in the Dragon's Head were of six, seven, and eight cultivation stages stronger than him. The moment they made a move, a powerful gale blew furiously in the surroundings as overwhelming auras crushed down in the area.

It was as if a true dragon had surfaced in the area, causing ominous clouds to gather in the sky, as if the entire world was cowering in fear before its might.

On the other hand, Zheng Yang seemed like a withered leaf floating on the surface of a raging ocean. It seemed as if he would be submerged under the furious might of the three cultivators, but somehow, he still managed to remain firmly afloat.

Peng! Peng! Peng!

Sometime later, the clouds finally scattered, and Zheng Yang's figure surfaced once more. He was panting heavily, and beads of sweat trickled relentlessly down his forehead.

He was severely wounded; there were many bloodied gouges all over his body. However, his three opponents were lying unconscious on the floor, leaving him the only one standing on the field. Without a doubt, he had successfully cleared the Dragon's Head trial as well!

“Now, for the final Dragon's Pearl...”

Unlike the simplified Dragon Gate Formation, the complete Dragon Gate Formation in the Combat Master Hall headquarters contained a Dragon's Pearl as well, and it was also known to be the most difficult phase of the entire trial.

Over the past three hundred years, there had been around ten cultivators who were able to clear the simplified Dragon's Gate Formation, but not a single one of them had managed to clear the Dragon's Pearl.

Standing on the spot, Zheng Yang took in a few deep breaths to recuperate slightly from his wounds before proceeding forward. Blood was still trickling down from his wounds, leaving a crimson trail behind him.

Despite so, his footsteps were firm and steady. It was as if there was some kind of faith that granted him the courage to

march on fearlessly, not cowering even in the face of death.

Boom boom boom!

Soon, a cultivator stood before him—the guardian of the Dragon’s Pearl.

Without any hesitation, the duo began clashing with one another.

The guardian of the Dragon’s Pearl was an incredibly powerful cultivator. Every blow of his harnessed immense strength that seemed to warp even space itself, and halfway into the battle, Zheng Yang’s spear even broke in a direct clash against the guardian.

Nevertheless, Zheng Yang did not give up. Fist art, movement art, leg art... He utilized every kind of technique at his disposal, executing profound moves one after another. Eventually, through utilizing his body as a spear, he successfully breached the cultivator’s defense and achieved victory.

“388 blows... It really isn’t easy to become the Progeny of Combat!” Hall Master Xing remarked.

Even though Zheng Yang had managed to defeat the Dragon’s Pearl in the end, he had also come to the very limits of his body. At this point, there was not a single unwounded patch of skin on his body, and his body was trembling weakly.

However, he still remained firmly standing.

Completely astounded by the sight before them, all the combat masters fell silent. They had a feeling that they would never be able to erase this sight from their minds.

To be honest, if they had been in Zheng Yang’s place, they would have already given up at the Dragon’s Back. This had nothing to do with their strength but their willpower.

It was as if Zheng Yang carried an unwavering faith within him. No matter how many gorges one pierced through him, he still firmly stood his ground, determined to defeat his opponent.

This undying spirit was what set them apart from him.

“I, Zheng Yang, was only an ordinary spear practitioner from the humble Tianxuan Kingdom!”

The recording cut off from the Dragon Gate Formation, and when Zheng Yang appeared once more, he was already cleaned up, and his wounds had recovered as well.

“It’s the blessing of the heavens that I met my teacher. Not only did he impart the strongest spearmanship to me, he also taught me important values, correcting me patiently whenever I stray off from the path. It’s thanks to his guidance that I was able to become the person I am today.

“In cultivation, the aim is not only to cultivate one’s strength, but more importantly, to cultivate one’s character. The Way of the Spear is but a means to that. The reason I was able to become the Progeny of Combat isn’t due to strength but the principles, values, and aims that I hold onto dearly! I hope that all of you will come to comprehend this someday...

“Last but not least, I shall make my first decree as the Progeny of Combat!”

The crowd in the Combat Master Hall swiftly got to their knees and clasped their fists. “We will humbly listen to the decree of the Progeny of Combat!”

In the absence of the hall master, the Progeny of Combat Decree was effectively the Hall Master Decree, an order that all combat masters had to comply to unconditionally.

“I am deeply indebted to my teacher. Without him, there would be no me. Thus, I hereby order everyone in the Combat Master Hall, regardless of strength or position, to honor and respect him as a teacher!”

“Yes!” A resounding response sounded from the crowd.

The teacher of the Progeny of Combat was effectively the teacher of the entire Combat Master Hall.

Anyone who dared disrespect him would be disrespecting the entire Combat Master Hall as well.

“My teacher has always been humble, so no one is to speak of his identity outside of the Combat Master Hall. Anyone who

dares leak any detail about him shall be executed on the spot! Understood?" Zheng Yang commanded authoritatively.

"Yes!" the crowd replied thunderingly.

"Very well. Etch the name of my teacher into your minds lest you cross him..."

"My teacher is Zhang Xuan!"

1200 Spirit Reinforcing Pill

“Zhang Xuan?” Hall Master Zhao Yi repeated the name under his breath.

Considering how much respect the Progeny of Combat had for his teacher, he would have to make sure to treat the other party respectfully in the future.

At this moment, he suddenly caught sight of a young man flying over from afar and landing in the middle of the concourse. Placing his hands behind him, the young man looked at the Progeny of Combat on the screen with complex emotions in his eyes.

“Hall Master Xing, is that person a combat master from your Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall?” Hall Master Zhao Yi narrowed his eyes in rage. “It’s one thing for him to arrive so late despite the sounding of the Combat Master Assembly Decree, but how dare he not kneel to receive the decree of the Progeny of Combat? Is this the kind of discipline a combat master should have?”

It was just a moment ago that the Progeny of Combat had made his decree, so it was only right for all combat masters to kneel and humbly receive his decree. And yet, that young man arrogantly dared to remain standing in the middle of the concourse! This was truly unacceptable!

“Ah, he isn’t a combat master from our Combat Master Hall. He’s the person whom I told you about, the head of the Xuanxuan Faction, the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, Zhang... Hall Master Zhao, where are you going?” Hall Master Xing explained with his sight still fixated on the Progeny of Combat on the screen. When he finally turned about to look at Hall Master Zhao, he realized that the latter had already stood up and was walking toward Zhang Xuan with a hostile glint in his eyes.

“I don’t care whether you are the head of the Xuanxuan Faction or whoever you are, but our Combat Master Hall is

currently holding a solemn ceremony now. Please leave this instant, or else don't blame me for getting nasty with you!"

The decree of the Progeny of Combat was a confidential secret among the Combat Master Hall. Since the young man was not from the Combat Master Hall, he should have known better than to land in the middle of the concourse. Or... could it be that he was trying to eavesdrop on the confidential secrets of the Combat Master Hall?"

"You want to get nasty with me?" Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure.

He had rushed over to see how the friendly spar had gone, only to see the image of Zheng Yang before the Great Combat Master Atrium while he was making his way over. Thus, he could not help but land in the concourse to take a closer look.

Looking at how his student had matured, and he could not help but feel a little nostalgic inside.

But at that moment, this old man suddenly came over to threaten him.

"That's right, don't think..." Hall Master Zhao Yi bellowed furiously, but before he could finish his words, a finger suddenly appeared before his eyes.

Sou!

Hall Master Zhao Yi's eyes widened in astonishment, but it was already too late for him to respond. It appeared to be a normal flick, but due to the immense force harnessed within the flick, his body swiftly retreated into the distance before colliding with the wall of the atrium, producing a resounding explosion.

Zhang Xuan was in no mood to deal with anyone. This was a precious moment for him and his student, and he did not want to be interrupted by anyone.

Since the old man was the one who had provoked him in the first place, he had no qualms about flicking the old man away.

After sending the old man flying, Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back once more as he continued looking at

the screen before him.

Watching how Zheng Yang had become the Progeny of Combat had left him many emotions within.

He had accompanied Zheng Yang on every part of his journey since Tianxuan Kingdom, watching how an ordinary spear fanatic who had just had his heart broken slowly worked diligently day in and day out, gradually refining his spear art to a level far surpassing his peers, eventually becoming the Progeny of Combat.

So many things had changed in less than a year. Time sure was a powerful force.

A teacher can only do so much for their student. The true reason for your success lies in your own diligence and perseverance! Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

While the simplified Heaven's Path Spear Art was an unparalleled battle technique in the world, it would be for naught if the practitioner himself did not work diligently on it.

Just take Sun Qiang for example... Forget it, let's not talk about something that depressing on this happy occasion.

Zheng Yang could not be considered the most talented among his direct disciples, but without a doubt, he was the most valiant and hot-blooded of them all.

It was his deep love and perseverance for the spear that had led him to where he was today.

Even the most capable of teachers could only play an auxiliary role in the lives of their students.

Zheng Yang had managed to pave his own way forward, and Zhang Xuan was happy for him.

“How dare you...”

Climbing out of the rubble, Hall Master Zhao Yi gritted his teeth in fury.

He had thought that the brazen young man would leave sheepishly after hearing his criticism, but who knew that the latter would actually be so arrogant as to beat him up?

To make a move against a hall master in a Combat Master Hall... Unpardonable!

Seething with rage, Hall Master Zhao Yi was just about to rush up to the young man once more to teach him a lesson when he suddenly saw Hall Master Xing rushing toward him.

“Hall Master Xing, that leader of the Xuanxuan Faction actually dared to brazenly assault me before the Progeny of Combat! He might be your guest, but such actions cannot be tolerated in the Combat Master Hall! Otherwise, what will become of the discipline of the combat masters?” Hall Master Zhao Yi spat angrily through gritted teeth.

The reason his candidates had failed to acquire a single slot to the Sword Lagoon of the Qianchong Empire was due to that fellow, and he had even been humiliated by a young lady of the Xuanxuan Faction just a moment ago. While he had chosen to accept those matters, it was still inevitable that they would breed some frustration and resentment within him toward the leader of the Xuanxuan Faction.

This incident only served to spark those negative emotions within him. Completely clouded by rage, the only thing that was on his mind at that moment was to teach that young man a lesson!

“Listen to me, he isn’t just an ordinary guest...” Hall Master Xing hurriedly advised.

“I know that your Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall is indebted to him, but he dared to disrespect the Progeny of Combat and undermine the Combat Master Hall! If I don’t teach him a lesson, how am I to face my combat masters?” Hall Master Zhao Yi harrumphed coldly as he marched forward furiously.

“Fine, do whatever you like!” Seeing how Hall Master Zhao Yi refused to hear his words, Hall Master Xing frowned in displeasure. He flung his sleeves impatiently and said, “Right, I forgot you tell you. The name of the leader of the Xuanxuan Faction is... Zhang Xuan!”

“Zhang Xuan?” That name caused Hall Master Zhao Yi to halt in his footsteps. An ominous feeling in his heart left him shuddering in fear as he asked meekly, “The teacher of the Progeny of Combat?”

“Who else?” Hall Master Xing replied curtly before returning to his position to kneel down.

If you desire death that much, go ahead!

I won't stop you!

“He... really is the teacher of the Progeny of Combat?” Hall Master Zhao Yi suddenly found the world spinning around him as he struggled to process what he had just heard.

It was no wonder the candidates of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall would grow so much stronger after three days of guidance! If the teacher of the Progeny of Combat was behind the matter, that would explain a lot!

Hu!

Hall Master Zhao Yi stood petrified on the spot, not knowing what he should do.

At this moment, the silhouette of the Progeny of Combat gradually faded after issuing his decree.

The surrounding combat masters stood up and turned toward Zhang Xuan before bowing respectfully.

“All of them know...” Hall Master Zhao Yi's eyes swam around the place from frenzy.

He was really in deep trouble this time around.

The Progeny of Combat had just instructed everyone to treat his teacher with the utmost respect, and yet, right after hearing the decree, he had insolently told the young man to leave the Combat Master Hall.

His face gradually turned redder and redder as he racked his brain to figure out a way to get the young man to pardon him for his rudeness.

At that moment, Hall Masters Wei Qianshu and Liu Qinshan suddenly walked up to Zhang Xuan and clasped their fists

respectfully.

“Paying respects to Zhang shi. Our Combat Master Hall is interested in having an exchange with the Xuanxuan Faction. May I know if Zhang shi will be so magnanimous as to grant us the opportunity to learn from the Xuanxuan Faction?”

“I have long heard of the fame of the Xuanxuan Faction, and it would truly be an honor to have an exchange with you...”

Hearing those words, Hall Master Zhao Yi’s lips twitched in frenzy.

Those two fellows were too shameless!

It was just a moment ago that they had been filled with disdain with the so-called Xuanxuan Faction. Yet, as soon as they learned that the leader of the Xuanxuan Faction was the teacher of the Progeny of Combat, their attitudes had immediately taken a 180-degree turn. Where was their dignity?

“You can discuss the issue with Hall Master Xing.” Seeing that a huge crowd was swiftly gathering around him, Zhang Xuan shook his head before taking his leave.

Still overwhelmed by his emotions from seeing how Zheng Yang had become the Progeny of Combat, Zhang Xuan was in no mood to deal with such miscellaneous affairs. In any case, there were others to handle the matter in his stead, so there was no need for him to deal with them personally.

Thus, he returned to his residence.

Not too long later, Hall Master Xing knocked on his door.

“Principal Zhang, thanks to your training, our candidates manage to obtain all twenty slots to Qianchong Empire’s Sword Lagoon. As promised, I’ll share half of the awarded concentrated high-tier spirit stones with you. However, it will probably take some time before the reward arrives.”

“Roughly, how long will it take?”

Hall Master Xing pondered for a moment before replying.

“The headquarters have a unique delivery method, but even so, it will still take at least ten days.”

“Ten days?” Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed helplessly.

He had thought that he would be able to acquire the concentrated high-tier spirit stones swiftly and quickly advance his cultivation to Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle, but from the looks of it, it seemed like he would still have to wait a while longer.

Why did cultivation have to be so difficult?

Looking back, he really missed the days when he could advance an entire realm within a single night.

“Principal Zhang, do you still require a lot of concentrated high-tier spirit stones?” Hall Master Xing asked after noticing Zhang Xuan’s frustrated expression.

“Yes. Do you know of a way to acquire them?”

“I don’t have any way to acquire more concentrated high-tier spirit stones, but if you are intending to use them for your cultivation, perhaps you could try the grade-7 Spirit Reinforcing Pill instead,” Hall Master Xing suggested. “The Spirit Reinforcing Pill harnesses concentrated medicinal energy that can advance even the cultivation of a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator significantly.”

“Spirit Reinforcing Pill?” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment.

There was some information regarding Spirit Reinforcing Pills within the books in the Master Teacher Pavilion. It was a grade-7 pill that had an effect similar to concentrated high-tier spirit stones. However, he had never seen the pill in person before, and he did not have the pill formula for it either.

“I happen to have a Spirit Reinforcing Pill with me at the moment. Principal Zhang, why don’t you give it a try? If it is effective, you can acquire more from Guild Leader Wu. He should have quite a few in his possession.” Hall Master Xing flicked his wrist and passed a jade bottle to Zhang Xuan.

“Thank you.”

Zhang Xuan took the jade bottle and uncapped it. Floating within the bottle was a crimson pill, and he could vaguely feel the concentrated spirit energy that was sealed within it.

Taking the pill out of the bottle, he popped it into his mouth.

The pill swiftly dissolved into a huge accumulation of warm, concentrated spiritual energy, which swiftly flowed through his meridians before eventually gathering in his dantian.

“It’s effective!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

Too accustomed to cultivating with spirit stones, he had not really thought of seeking other substitutes for spiritual energy. However, the fact was that there were plenty of items that could replace the use of spirit stones!

For example, the Earth Vein Spirit Essence that he had acquired from the Cloudmist Ridge back then was a superior substitute for middle-tier spirit stones.

Naturally, there were also some pills that could replace spirit stones as well.

Even though the spiritual energy within the Spirit Reinforcing Pill was less concentrated than that of concentrated high-tier spirit stones, it was still useful to him at the moment.

If he could just acquire enough of them, he would be able to push for a breakthrough to Embryonic Spirit realm pinnacle!

Seeing how the young man swallowed the pill directly without bothering to sit down and cultivate, Hall Master Xing widened his eyes in astonishment. “Principal Zhang... don’t you have to cultivate to assimilate the energy within the pill into your body?”

Even he would have to take some time to assimilate the energy within a Spirit Reinforcing Pill, and yet, the Saint realm 3-dan young man before him had actually swallowed it so recklessly. Was he not scared of absorbing in too much spiritual energy in one go and exploding?

“Hmm? I have already assimilated the energy within the pill,” Zhang Xuan replied with a hint of confusion in his voice.

It was only one small pill; he had assimilated the energy within it a moment after consuming the pill. Why would he have to specially cultivate for it?

“You have already assimilated it?” Hall Master Xing’s lips twitched in frenzy. At this moment, he finally understood how the young man before him had been able to advance his cultivation so swiftly.

Putting everything aside, just the rate of his assimilation was already incomparable to any ordinary cultivator.

“Are there more of such pills in the Apothecary Guild?” Zhang Xuan asked.

If he wanted to achieve a breakthrough using the Spirit Reinforcing Pill, he would require a massive amount of them, a hundred at the very minimum. Just that, would the Apothecary Guild have that many pills for him?

“I’m not too sure either. You will have to ask Guild Leader Wu for that,” Hall Master Xing replied.

Guild Leader Wu Huayu was the individual who had invigilated Zhang Xuan’s Pill Debate examination back when he was still at the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. Zhang Xuan’s exceptional results then had led him to deliver the Grand Intermittence Grass to the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy personally. Unfortunately, Zhang Xuan happened to be away back then.

“Okay. I’ll head to the Apothecary Guild now then,” Zhang Xuan replied.

Luo Ruoxin would be marrying the genius of the Zhang Clan on the third month of the following year. He could not afford to waste any time.

Bidding Hall Master Xing farewell, Zhang Xuan walked out of his accommodation, only to see Luo Qiqi walking toward him.

“Teacher...”

Upon seeing Luo Qiqi, Zhang Xuan felt a slight headache.

As an attached man, he felt a little awkward about being confessed to by his student.

Nevertheless, knowing that he could not possibly continue hiding from the other party, he sighed inwardly as he walked up to Luo Qiqi.

“Teacher, can you... accompany me for a day?”

Noticing that Zhang Xuan’s expression had turned a little awful, Luo Qiqi’s face sank slightly, but she continued staring at him with expectant eyes.

“Just one day!”