

1201 Your Teacher Shall Redress Your Grievances for You!

“What’s wrong?” Noticing that the young lady’s eyes were slightly reddened, as if she had just cried a moment ago, Zhang Xuan frowned.

While Luo Qiqi’s confession had made the relationship between the two of them slightly awkward, he would not hesitate to strike down anyone who dared bully his student!

“It’s nothing much...” Luo Qiqi’s eyes seemed to dim for a moment before she raised her head once more and replied with a smile. “I just want to spend some time with you, Teacher.”

“Ah... Alright then!” Seeing that Luo Qiqi had something weighing on her mind, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before eventually nodding.

It was inevitable for those too outstanding to be fancied by others. As long as he maintained an appropriate distance between the two of them, there was no issue with them spending some time together.

As long as he conducted himself correctly and made his intentions clear, it would only be a matter of time before the other party dispelled her thoughts. On the other hand, if he continued avoiding her, it would only cause her mind to wander, and that could prove to be dangerous.

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s consent, Luo Qiqi’s face lit up in delight. “Then... shall we find a quiet place? It’s a little noisy over here!”

Be it the Combat Master Hall or the Xuanxuan Faction, they were filled with familiar faces. It was indeed a little inconvenient.

Thus, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Thus, the duo took flight, and before long, they landed at the top of a mountain right outside Qingyuan City.

Sitting on a boulder near the cliff, Luo Qiqi gazed intently at the bustling Qingyuan City, seemingly pondering over something.

A mountainous breeze tussled her hair, pulling some strands over her impeccable face. Yet, this slight imperfection seemed to be perfect in its own way as well.

Admittedly, the young lady was indeed very beautiful, and her beauty was not just limited to her exterior. She had a calming disposition that placed those around her at ease as well, making it very comfortable to be around her.

Facing young lady's queer silence, Zhang Xuan asked with a frown, "Is there something on your mind? As long as it's within my means, I'll try my best to help you."

There was no doubt that the young lady had some worries on her mind, but there was nothing he could do about it if the latter refused to speak.

"It's nothing much. It's just that I suddenly remembered some things from my childhood." Luo Qiqi smiled as she quietly gazed down at Qingyuan City. "When I was younger, I liked to spend my time idly sitting on the rooftop and watching the sunrise and sunset, as well as the birds that fluttered their wings freely in the sky. Somehow, that brought me great joy as a child.

"There was one time when I found myself deeply desiring an artifact. I really wanted it a lot, so I pestered my father to get it for me. In the face of my relentless pleas, my father eventually caved in. However, he said that he would only give it to me after I mastered a cultivation technique, so I frantically cultivated, regardless of day or night. A year later, I finally succeeded! My father did not renege on our promise either, and he gave the artifact to me.

"I can still remember how happy I was the day I received the artifact. It was something that I had acquired through my hard work. I brought it around with me everyday, hugging it to

sleep even. But on one occasion, while I was fighting with another, it broke. I was truly heartbroken, and I wept for three whole days. My father found an identical one to comfort me, and it was really the same no matter how one looked at it. But for some reason, I no longer wanted it.”

With her knees hugged to her chest and her chin resting atop them, Luo Qiqi tilted her head over and asked, “Teacher, do you know why?”

Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“It was because it is no longer the same one that I liked... Even if it appears identical, it wasn’t!” Luo Qiqi replied.

Not knowing how to respond to it, Zhang Xuan was quiet for a long moment before replying with a nod.

This should have been a common experience for many. When an object that one liked a lot was destroyed, even if an identical one was bought to replace it, the anticipation for it would no longer be there.

Sentiment was not something that could be transferred just because two objects appeared or were identical.

“Eventually, I slowly came to understand that just because I liked something doesn’t mean that I’ll be able to possess it forever. Just like that shattered artifact, no matter what I do, I’ll never be able to get it back to how it was anymore.”

At this point, Luo Qiqi turned to look at Zhang Xuan once more. It seemed like she had many words at the back of her throat, but she was unable to voice them.

Noticing that there was something amiss with the young lady’s state, Zhang Xuan said, “What’s wrong? Did someone bully you? If the other party is at fault, I’ll exact vengeance for you!”

“Pfft!” Luo Qiqi suddenly burst into laughter. She looked at Zhang Xuan playfully as she asked, “Will you really exact vengeance for me?”

“Of course,” Zhang Xuan replied with a light smile.

“You are the one who bullied me. Do it, exact vengeance for me,” Luo Qiqi said earnestly.

“...” Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

A moment of carelessness, and he had fallen into the young lady’s trap once more.

Back then, she had claimed that she had some doubts in mind and needed answers, but in the midst of clarifying her doubts, he had ended up being confessed to. It seemed like it was the same this time around as well. A pitiful front, but if he were to earnestly respond to it, he would fall into a pit as well.

Just as Zhang Xuan was at a loss, the young lady suddenly stared at him intently and said, “Teacher, you haven’t given me a proper response yet. You should also know that my feelings for you... are more than just those between a teacher and a student!”

“Is this how you should talk to your teacher?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “If that’s all you want to say, I’ll be leaving now!”

After saying those words, Zhang Xuan stood up.

“I’m joking, I’m joking... Don’t get mad!” Luo Qiqi quickly appeased Zhang Xuan while secretly sticking her tongue out.

“It’s not funny. Please do not make that kind of joke again.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand.

“Alright. Teacher...” Luo Qiqi paused for a moment before asking, “Will you teach me pill forging one more time?”

“Sure.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “What kind of pill do you want to forge?”

There were many different pill formulae in the world, and each of them had a unique forging method.

“The pill that I want to forge is the grade-7 Spirit Reinforcing Pill,” Luo Qiqi replied.

“Spirit Reinforcing Pill?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

It was just a moment ago that he had told Hall Master Xing that he needed some Spirit Reinforcing Pills, and he had been intending to find them at the Apothecary Guild. Who could

have known that Luo Qiqi would suddenly ask to learn to forge the pill at this moment?

“That’s right,” Luo Qiqi replied with an innocent blink of her eyes.

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before asking, “Do you have the required pill formula and medicinal herbs?”

This would be a good opportunity for him to refine the forging method for the Spirit Reinforcing Pill. With this, he would be spared from a lot of trouble when he headed to the Apothecary Guild.

“I have already prepared them!” Luo Qiqi answered with a smile before flicking her wrist to take out a jade token.

Zhang Xuan took the jade token and scanned it with his consciousness. The content imprinted within the jade token was swiftly transferred into his mind.

It was indeed the pill formula for the Spirit Reinforcing Pill.

With Zhang Xuan’s knowledge as a 7-star pinnacle apothecary, it did not take him too long to deduce the most ideal method to forge the pill.

“Here are the medicinal herbs.” Luo Qiqi flicked her wrist once more, and a huge pile of medicinal herbs appeared before her eyes.

Taking a swift look at the medicinal herbs, Zhang Xuan was stunned. “Where did you find these medicinal herbs?”

The medicinal herbs that the young lady had taken out each had a maturity of a least several thousand years! One must know that such medicinal herbs were worth an astronomical sum!

An ordinary Spirit Reinforcing Pill only required medicinal herbs that were fifty years mature. If one were to use these several-thousand-year-old medicinal herbs to forge the Spirit Reinforcing Pill, the produced pills would at least be several dozen times more potent!

“As you know, I like to study and explore. I happened to discover an ancient domain a while back, and these medicinal

herbs came from there!” Luo Qiqi explained.

“You really are quite lucky,” Zhang Xuan remarked.

Given how meticulous Luo Qiqi was, even being able to trace the underground chamber where Wu Yangzi had been imprisoned through a forged weapon, it was not surprising that she had discovered other ancient domains as well.

“Teacher, are these medicinal herbs sufficient to forge the Origin Reinforcing Pill?” Luo Qiqi asked.

“Definitely! Not only sufficient, the Spirit Reinforcing Pill will also be of exceptional quality!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“However, these medicinal herbs are valuable, so you have to be careful not to make an error during the forging. A cauldron explosion with these herbs would be a huge pity!”

With such valuable medicinal herbs, as long as the forging process was perfect as well, there was a good chance that they would be able to up the grade of the Spirit Reinforcing Pill!

“Un.” Luo Qiqi nodded.

“Since the medicinal herbs used are of a significantly higher maturity, I’ll have to make some changes to the forging method. Give me a moment,” Zhang Xuan said.

Naturally, the forging method had to be changed when the potency of the medicinal herbs used was different. Zhang Xuan swiftly went through his forging method once more to tailor it to the current conditions before flicking his wrist to summon the Golden Origin Cauldron.

While the Golden Origin Cauldron was a weapon cauldron, it could also be used as a pill cauldron as long as several conversion formations were cast over it.

“Let’s use the Golden Origin Cauldron for the forging; it should lower the chances of a cauldron explosion!”

“Alright!” Luo Qiqi replied.

Once everything was ready, Zhang Xuan whipped out a brush and penned down the revised pill formula before passing it over to the young lady.

It did not take long for the young lady to memorize the pill formula, and soon, the pill forging began.

With Zhang Xuan guiding by the side, the pill forging proceeded smoothly. Soon, the lid of the cauldron was opened, and a burst of spiritual energy burst up to the heavens.

Sou!

Five pills flew out of the cauldron, intending to escape.

“Quasi grade-8 pills!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. He waved his hand, and the Golden Origin Cauldron swiftly leaped up to capture the fleeing pills. After which, Zhang Xuan carefully placed them into jade bottle that he had prepared beforehand.

The Spirit Reinforcing Pill was intended to be a grade-7 pill, but due to the superior maturity of the medicinal herbs used in the forging, they had actually managed to forge five quasi grade-8 pills! While they were not true grade-8 pills yet, their potency could not be compared to a Spirit Reinforcing Pill.

“Since you were able to forge such Spirit Reinforcing Pills, I believe that you should have mastered the forging technique for it as well.” Zhang Xuan passed the jade bottle to the young lady with a smile.

On top of being quasi grade-8, those pills were Inscribed Pills as well! Beautiful patterns flowed over the pills, granting them an exceptional beauty.

The quality of a pill could be divided into four tiers: Formation, Satiation, Perfection, and Inscribed Pill.

The fact that Luo Qiqi was able to produce an Inscribed Pill showed that she already commanded a perfect understanding for the forging process of the specific pill.

As long as she digested what she had learned from this experience, her comprehension of pill forging would shoot up significantly.

“It’s due to your guidance that I was able to successfully forge the Spirit Reinforcing Pills. Thus, I would like to gift these pills to you!” Luo Qiqi pushed the jade bottle back to Zhang Xuan.

“I can’t accept these Spirit Reinforcing Pills from you.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

The medicinal herbs had come from the young lady, and the pill had been forged by her as well. Even though he had guided her from the side, this was not a good enough reason for him to accept these incredibly valuable pills from her.

“Then... How about this? I’ll keep one for myself and gift the remaining four to you. If you still feel that it’s too much to accept, you can compensate me with spirit stones!” Seeing through Zhang Xuan’s thoughts, Luo Qiqi took a pill out of the jade bottle before pushing the rest back to him.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan eventually nodded. “This... Alright then.”

It just so happened that he needed some Spirit Reinforcing Pill, and the effectiveness of these quasi grade-8 pills was equivalent to several dozen ordinary ones. With four of these, he would have no trouble achieving a breakthrough to Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle!

Taking out a storage ring, Zhang Xuan placed the ten thousand high-tier spirit stones that he had obtained from the Appraiser Hall into it before passing it over.

Luo Qiqi carefully took the storage ring from Zhang Xuan before raising her head to look at Zhang Xuan once more. “Teacher, you said earlier that you would exact vengeance for me if anyone bullies me. Did you mean it?”

Not expecting Luo Qiqi to suddenly ask such a question, Zhang Xuan was taken aback. A moment later, he nodded. “Yes.

“If anyone dares bully you, your teacher shall redress your grievances for you!”

1202 Saint 3-dan Pinnacle

No matter what, Luo Qiqi was still his student. If someone bullied her, he could not possibly sit idly.

This was just like how he would stand up for Lu Chong and the others.

“Thank you...” Seeing the unwavering look in the man’s eyes, Luo Qiqi could not help but recall the sight of the latter standing up against the Otherworldly Demon puppets back in the underground chamber, and a faint smile crept onto her lips.

It had been half a year since she had come to know this man, and she knew what kind of person he was.

For his student, he would stand against an entire kingdom unhesitatingly. For his butler, he was a man who would oppose the First King and a vice pavilion master of a Conferred Empire. Domineering, but very protective of those whom he cared for. Just by this alone, she had no doubt that he would rush to her rescue if something happened to her.

And this was why she loved him.

Earnest, gutsy, responsible, and decisive!

To those whom he cared for, he would treat them earnestly, not showing the slightest hint of hypocrisy.

“Teacher, I’m happy to hear such words from you. Alright, I’ll be heading back first!” Luo Qiqi patted the dust off her hand as she flashed Zhang Xuan a smile. “I won’t impose on you any longer.”

Zhang Xuan waved his hand. “Go on.”

Even though he had not voiced it explicitly, his actions should have clearly shown his rejection for her feelings.

After the affairs today, she should understand that he viewed her as another one of his precious students, and her affection toward him would never bear fruit. Hopefully, she would cast aside those thoughts and find one who was truly suited for her.

Luo Qiqi turned around before muttering softly, “Farewell... Teacher.”

After which, she leaped into the air, and before long, she vanished from sight.

At Luo Qiqi’s departure, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

He had only spent two hours with the other party, but he felt as if he had fought a war.

It seemed like he would really have to hold himself back in the future and maintain a lower profile, or else it would be troublesome if too many ladies were to fall in love with him.

Sometimes, being too outstanding was a sorrow.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan was just about to find a place to cultivate with his newly-acquired Spirit Reinforcing Pills when he suddenly saw a figure heading over. It was none other than Yu Fei-er!

“Zhang shi, aren’t you being a little biased? You should have told me that you were teaching Qiqi pill forging! I want to learn it, too!” Yu Fei-er harrumphed as soon as she landed on the cliff, apparently displeased by the private time he had spent with Luo Qiqi.

The both of them had confessed, and yet, Zhang Xuan had still chosen to spend some private with Luo Qiqi. She could not help but feel a little jealous at that.

“I was only teaching her pill forging. Nothing of what you are thinking happened...” Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in frustration. Knowing that it would be better to be straightforward with someone of Yu Fei-er personality, he decided to get straight to the point. “To be honest with you, I already have someone that I like!”

“Really? Who is it? Is it Qiqi?” Yu Fei-er asked in alarm.

“It’s not her but... the little princess of the Luo Clan!” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Luo Clan? As in the Sage clan?” Yu Fei-er did not believe what she was hearing. “The Luo Clan is a lofty existence in

the Master Teacher Continent, so how could you be acquainted with their little princess?”

The Sage Clans were existences that stood at the very peak of the Master Teacher Continent, the very embodiment of absolute power! In comparison to the Luo Clan, her Hongyuan royal family was truly nothing at all.

Considering that Zhang Xuan originated from the humble Tianxuan Kingdom, how could he possibly be acquainted with someone as noble as the little princess from the Luo Clan, let alone fall in love with her?

“You can choose not to believe my words if you want to. As for how I came to know her... I can only say that it was the workings of destiny. Furthermore, I can tell you that the feelings that we have for one another are mutual!” At this point, Zhang Xuan could not help but think of Luo Ruoxin, and his lips unknowingly curled up into a smile.

It was a misunderstanding that had brought them together the first time they met. He had thought that she was being pursued by spirit beasts back then, and he had forcefully pulled her down into a river, only to faint in the end. Thinking about it, the misunderstanding seemed almost like the miraculous working of fate. If that had not happened, would they still be together today?

In any case, since he already had someone he loved, he did not want to get too deeply involved with other ladies anymore. Yu Fei-er was a headstrong and resolute person, so he felt that he should nip her feelings in the bud.

“I don’t believe you. You are lying...” Yu Fei-er’s face paled.

All along, she had thought that Zhang Xuan had no girlfriend and that she, Luo Qiqi, and Hu Yaoyao all stood a chance as long as they worked diligently. However, it seemed like they were already too late.

“You are a wonderful lady, but what I am saying is the truth.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“But I...” Too agitated, Yu Fei-er’s breathing hastened, rendering her unable to continue. Gritting her teeth, she turned

around. After a moment of silence, she spat, one word after a word, “Zhang shi, I have imposed on you today. I’ll be leaving now...”

Then, not even waiting for Zhang Xuan’s response, she leaped into the sky and took flight, disappearing into the horizon in a few moments.

Even though she did not say anything, her voice was tinged with sorrow and shock.

She could not believe that Zhang Xuan was taken, and she could not accept it either.

“Jeez.” Seeing that he had unintentionally hurt two ladies in just a few moments, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed.

If possible, he did not want to have done that either.

But he simply did not harbor any romantic feelings toward them. If he had allowed their feelings for him to develop, it would only have caused them greater pain in the future.

Only for Luo Ruoxin did his heart beat.

Having experienced two lifetimes in two different worlds, he had already seen many things, allowing him to remain unfazed and composed before most matters. Yet, before Luo Ruoxin, he acted like a young man. Out of jealousy, he had ended up beating Feng Xun up and intentionally traumatizing Zhang Jiuxiao. Despite his rational personality, he found himself with an irrational hate for the Zhang Clan as well.

Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er were beautiful and outstanding ladies, but neither of them were able to generate such feelings within him.

He knew very well that all he felt for them was the care and concern that a teacher would have for his students.

Since that was the case, rather than get needlessly entangled with them, it would be better to dash whatever hope they had before they descended deeper into the abyss. After all, the greater the expectation, the greater the disappointment.

He was certain that this was the best course of action.

“Forget it, I shouldn’t think too much into it now. I should raise my cultivation to Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle first!” Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan tossed aside the other thoughts he had in his mind and sat cross-legged on the ground.

The area was exceptionally quiet, and there was not a person in sight. It was the ideal environment for him to cultivate in.

He quickly conditioned the internal state of his body and his breath, and when his physical condition finally peaked roughly two hours later, he took out a Spirit Reinforcing Pill and swallowed it.

The Spirit Reinforcing Pills that Luo Qiqi had forged were made using extremely mature medicinal herbs. Those medicinal herbs harnessed rich medicinal energy, and the pills were perfectly forged on top of that, reaching the tier of Inscribed Pill. As such, every single one of the four pills harnessed several dozen times more spiritual energy than the one he had obtained from Hall Master Xing.

As the pill dissolved in his mouth, he immediately felt a blazing surge of energy coursing through his meridians before eventually gathering around his Origin Soul.

Upon reaching Saint 3-dan intermediate stage, his Origin Soul had adopted a form reminiscent of an eight-year-old child. Its every move seemed to be tinged with incredible might that could shatter the world.

Calming his mind, Zhang Xuan focused his consciousness on the internal state of his body as he began to drive his zhenqi according to the Saint 3-dan Heaven’s Path Divine Art.

Whenever he felt that he was running low on spiritual energy, he would unhesitatingly swallow a Spirit Reinforcing Pill.

As he absorbed more and more spiritual energy from the Spirit Reinforcing Pills, his cultivation and strength swiftly rose.

Embryonic Soul realm intermediate stage!

Embryonic Soul realm advanced stage!

Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle!

An hour later...

His Origin Soul had already adopted the form of a sixteen to seventeen-year-old young man, sharing an identical appearance with him, just slightly younger.

Its size remained the same as back when it was just an infant—ten meters tall. It did not become any taller during its development.

“Finally!” Zhang Xuan exclaimed after a deep exhalation.

He had really gone through a lot of trouble just to raise his cultivation to this level. Fortunately, diligence did not fail him. After overcoming all the difficulties in his path, he had finally managed to reach Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle!

However, the four Spirit Reinforcing Pills that Luo Qiqi had given him also ended up being depleted as well, and he had become poor once more.

Assessing his internal condition again, he felt that the flow of zhenqi in his body was far smoother than ever, and his strength had already risen by leaps and bounds as compared to before.

He stretched out his hands and lightly closed his fist together.

Peng!

A sonic boom sounded, and the next moment, the boulder beneath him suddenly burst into dust.

It was fortunate that he had flown up in advance, or else he would have been cloaked in dust.

This is the might wielded by an Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle expert? Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly together in excitement. Incredible!

Even though it was hard for him to determine his current strength until he exchanged blows with a true expert, he was confident that if he were to meet the Qingtian Emperor once more, he would be able to crush the latter into meat paste with a single punch.

Huala!

Rising to his feet, he reined in his aura, and the pressure he exerted finally vanished. In the eyes of other cultivators, he

would only appear as an ordinary Saint 3-dan pinnacle.

Even though he had raised his cultivation significantly, he still had every intention of maintaining a low profile. If he could avoid standing in the spotlight, he would try his best to do so to avoid unnecessary trouble.

At my current cultivation realm, ordinary Spirit Reinforcing Pills won't be of much use to me anymore. There's no longer any point in me heading to the Apothecary Guild.

Zhang Xuan's original intention had been to pay a visit to the Apothecary Guild to purchase some Spirit Reinforcing Pill to advance his cultivation. However, along with the rise in his cultivation, it would seem that the concentration of the spiritual energy within ordinary Spirit Reinforcing Pill was no longer sufficient for his cultivation.

As such, it would be futile no matter how many of them he acquired. He would only be wasting his money.

Forget it, I should just return to the Combat Master Hall. Those three hall masters should still be around, so I can assess my new strength on them, Zhang Xuan thought with a chuckle as he began making his way back to the Combat Master Hall.

However, just as he was about to make his way back, he suddenly froze for a moment. Flicking his wrist, he took out a jade token.

Wu shi had sent him a message. After taking a look at it, his face immediately turned grim.

Pavilion Master Gou... is dead?

1203 Crisis at the Master Teacher Pavilion

In the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, straw mats lay side by side on the ground, and eight corpses were neatly placed on top.

The corpses were each dressed in a master teacher robe, and the seven gleaming stars on their chests indicated their identities.

Zhang Xuan was extremely familiar with the elder in the center. It was due to the injustice that the elder had brought upon him that he had gone to the extent of crashing the Master Teacher Pavilion, even directly exchanging blows with him in the midst of doing so. He had thought that the elder would be severely judged by the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, but who would have thought that he would die before then?

Zhang Xuan turned to Wu shi and asked grimly, “What happened?”

“It happened earlier in the day... Based on the list of names you gave me, I quickly moved to apprehend those related master teachers and apprehend them. However... just as I was interrogating the eighth suspect, my subordinate suddenly reported to me that eight master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion had passed away!” Wu shi replied lividly.

He had interrogated the apprehended suspects discreetly so as to not alarm the enemy, but it seemed like the enemy had somehow learned of the matter and decided to kill eight 7-star master teachers to warn them against probing any further into the matter.

And the victims included even the old Pavilion Master Gou!

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

It was a blatant threat targeted toward them.

“Furthermore,” Wu shi continued, “they all died in the same manner as Chen Zhe and the others. When we found them, their souls had already dissipated, leaving behind an empty body.”

Zhang Xuan fell silent.

He had also noticed the same as soon as he stepped into the room. Despite their bodies being perfectly intact, the eight master teachers did not have a hint of life within them. Only the soul nabbing secret art could result in such a deeply unnerving death.

It's Vicious! Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly together.

Only Vicious had the strength to nab even Pavilion Master Gou's soul.

Just that... from what he knew, Vicious should have been in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows. Furthermore, from what he had learned in the Qingtian Emperor's memories, it appeared that Vicious had been sealed by something, preventing him from leaving the region. Considering the long distance between Qingyuan City and the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, how could he possibly carry out such a feat?

Zhang Xuan turned around and asked, “Where were they found?”

“They were found in their accommodation. Their family members thought that they were resting, so they did not disturb them initially. However, when they attempted to call for them but received no response, they approached them, only to realize that they had stopped breathing,” Wu shi replied before turning to look at Zhang Xuan. “Does this matter have something to do with the Qingtian Emperor? But... isn't the Qingtian Emperor already dead?”

As a soul oracle, the Qingtian Emperor was skilled in soul arts, and he had killed Chen Zhe and the others using one of his secret arts. Zhang Xuan had already informed him of this matter, thus unraveling the cause of the mysterious deaths that had occurred in the Master Teacher Pavilion a while back.

But since it was affirmed that the Qingtian Emperor was already dead, who else could possibly wield the ability to pull off the same feat?

The deaths of these eight 7-star master teachers were simply so abrupt and mysterious that it had shocked everyone in the Master Teacher Pavilion, sending them into a fluster.

It was the norm for humans to fear those that they were unable to comprehend, and even master teachers were no exception to the rule.

Pavilion Master Gou had been viewed as the strongest individual in Qingyuan City, but if even he could be killed silently without putting up a fight, it did not seem like anyone would stand a chance against the murderer. The realization of this notion left the necks of the master teachers feeling cold.

“The Qingtian Emperor is dead, but the person behind him is still alive and kicking,” Zhang Xuan replied with a vexed look.

“The person behind him?” Wu shi was perplexed by those words.

As the matter concerning Vicious’ existence was simply too huge, Zhang Xuan had decided not to tell anyone about it. As such, not even Wu shi was aware of the matter.

“Yes. Even if the Qingtian Emperor was the Emperor of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, it is worth contemplating how he managed to learn the heritage of the soul oracle oracles when they had already disappeared many years ago. As such, I believe that there’s a mastermind behind this matter who imparted the heritage of the soul oracles to the Qingtian Emperor. If my deduction is correct, he’s probably the one who had caused this as well,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“A mastermind who imparted the heritage of the soul oracles to the Qingtian Emperor?” Wu shi narrowed his eyes in alarm as he said, “How powerful do you think the mastermind is? If he’s beyond the means of a Conferred Empire, I’ll immediately report this matter to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and have them dispatch some men to assist us!”

The Master Teacher Pavilion had its own system. Typically speaking, while subordinate Master Teacher Pavilions would report major affairs to the Master Teacher Pavilion above them, they were still expected to resolve matters in the region by themselves.

Firstly, the headquarters also had their own region to care for, and they did not have the spare energy and time to be cleaning up after the subordinate Master Teacher Pavilions. Secondly, it would also serve as a platform to temper the master teachers in the branch.

If the headquarters had to attend to every single problem that the subordinate Master Teacher Pavilions were facing, it probably would not have been long before the advanced master teachers worked themselves to death.

However, if the problem exceeded the scope of the subordinate Master Teacher Pavilion, that was a different matter. If such a problem was left uncared for, it could possibly lead to a great massacre. In such cases, the subordinate Master Teacher Pavilion would be justified in calling for the aid of a higher ranked master teacher from the headquarters.

“How long will it take for the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters to dispatch an envoy?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

Wu shi swiftly did a rough calculation before replying. “If I recall correctly, the Master Teacher Pavilion closest to us that has at least one half 8-star master teacher is the Qianchong Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. If the headquarters dispatched a half 8-star master teacher from them, judging from the distance, it would take at least ten days. However, if we require an 8-star master teacher, we would have to call for an envoy directly from the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, and if that’s the case, it will take twenty days at the minimum!”

“Ten days, twenty days? We don’t have that much time to spare.” Zhang Xuan pinched his glabella grimly. “By the time the envoy arrives, our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion could have very well been massacred!”

“What do we do then?” Wu shi asked anxiously.

Indeed, they could not afford to wait ten to twenty days. The enemy possessed an ability to kill their men silently, and in a single night, he had already managed to take out eight 7-star master teachers. If the enemy continued their massacre at the current rate, it would not be long before all of the 7-star master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion were killed!

“I’m not too sure how powerful the mastermind behind the Qingtian Emperor is, but I believe that his strength shouldn’t exceed the Leaving Aperture realm. Otherwise, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters would have definitely kept a lookout for their movements,” Zhang Xuan analyzed.

While the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters left the regional Master Teacher Pavilion to their own devices, they would still conduct a thorough scan throughout the world using a special technique from time to time. If they found any existences that exceeded the tier of the regional Master Teacher Pavilion, they would eliminate it immediately if they viewed it to be a threat, or else, they would maintain a close watch over its movements.

The highest fighting power in Conferred Empires was the Leaving Aperture realm. Considering how Vicious’ eye was able to remain in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows without alerting the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, it was likely that he had not exceeded that level.

“But even if he has not exceeded Leaving Aperture realm, there is a huge difference in the prowess of a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator for each increment in the cultivation stage. As long as the mastermind wields strength exceeding Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, we will have no way of dealing with him!” Wu shi frowned.

In Leaving Aperture realm, a cultivator would be able to draw their Primordial Spirit out of their body and directly manipulate the energy in their surroundings to aid them in battle. Every increment in the cultivation stage would call forth a lightning ordeal, and as long as the cultivator survived

it, it would temper their Primordial Spirit and significantly enhance their control over their surroundings. Due to that, there was a vast difference in the fighting prowess of Leaving Aperture realm cultivators of differing cultivation stages.

For example, even though it might appear that there was only a small cultivation stage difference between Leaving Aperture realm primary stage and Leaving Aperture realm intermediate, a dozen Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivators might not have even been a match for a single Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage cultivator!

As such, even if the mastermind was still within the Leaving Aperture realm, if their cultivation had already reached Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, there was no person or any power in Qingyuan Empire that would be able to stand against the mastermind.

“I understand that as well, but I don’t have a clear gauge on the mastermind’s exact power at the moment. Alright, let’s put this matter aside for now. There are more important matters for us to attend to.” Zhang Xuan turned his gaze toward the corpses on the ground and said, “Aren’t you curious about how the mastermind managed to kill these eight 7-star master teachers discreetly?”

“How?”

“That night, when I was assaulted by the Qingtian Emperor, I happened to learn of the secret behind their soul nabbing secret art. They utilize a medium to infiltrate the consciousness of a cultivator and take their soul away. This medium could be anything, such as an altar or even a soul fragment. So, one aspect that we should explore is what medium the mastermind used to kill these eight men. Did you find anything during your investigation of the case?” Zhang Xuan asked.

In close proximity, Vicious could nab the soul of anyone easily. However, over tens of thousands of li, he would have to rely on a medium to channel his soul energy.

Like the altar that he had found beneath Chen Zhe’s residence a while back!

However, the altar should have been taken away by Wu shi and sealed. So... how did Vicious manage to kill these eight master teachers?

Wu shi was taken aback for a moment before replying.

“This... I haven’t been paying much notice to this matter...”

“Try to look into it. It could very well lead us to some clues,” Zhang Xuan instructed before falling silent. Activating his Eye of Insight, he began examining the corpses before him carefully.

Pavilion Master Gou had a horrified expression on his face, as if he had encountered something he dared not believe before his death.

After a moment of examination, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed.

The physical state of Pavilion Master Gou was identical to that of Chen Zhe back then. Even through his Eye of Insight, he did not notice anything peculiar.

At this moment, Zhang Xuan suddenly recalled a crucial figure in this matter, and he hurriedly asked, “Wait, where is King Zhongqing? Where is he imprisoned?”

“I dispatched my men to have him arrested once more, and he was locked in the prison of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Last night, Emperor Chu Tianxing came to pay me a visit, presumably over the matter concerning King Zhongqing, but I turned him down,” Wu shi replied.

“Emperor Chu Tianxing came to pay you a visit?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

King Zhongqing was only a mere subordinate of the Qingyuan royal family. It was not as if he was Emperor Chu Tianxing’s son or anything, so why was Emperor Chu Tianxing so desperate to protect him, coming over whenever something happened, willing to pay a hefty price for his release even?

“That’s right. However, I did not allow the two of them to meet. Furthermore, we have a legitimate reason to have King Zhongqing imprisoned this time around, so I don’t think that

Emperor Chu Tianxing will be able to do anything about the matter for the time being,” Wu shi replied.

“I see... However, there’s really something amiss about Emperor Chu Tianxing. I think we have to look into him,” Zhang Xuan said grimly.

Based on the Qingtian Emperor’s memory, Zhang Xuan was able to confirm that King Zhongqing had indeed defected to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. Considering how close Emperor Chu Tianxing was to King Zhongqing, it was a little hard to believe that there would be nothing wrong with him as well.

“Should I have him captured and interrogated?” Wu shi also had the same suspicions, but due to Emperor Chu Tianxing’s position, he had been a little hesitant to make a move.

“We shouldn’t rush into this matter. It would surely cause a huge uproar if we made a move against Emperor Chu Tianxing, so we have to amply prepare. What’s more urgent right now is finding the medium that the mastermind is using to conduct the killings. After that, we should focus our efforts on getting rid of the mastermind.”

Zhang Xuan contemplated in silence for a moment before sharing his analysis. “Only when the mastermind is dead will everyone be safe.”

“That’s true.” Wu shi nodded.

Zhang Xuan was right. In a sense, an emperor could be said to be the very heart of an empire. Thus, if anything happened to the emperor, it could easily induce pandemonium among the populace of the empire.

And the pandemonium was only one small aspect of the matter. If the Master Teacher Pavilion failed to deal with the problem properly, they could risk losing their credibility!

Considering how the Master Teacher Pavilion was in charge of maintaining order within the region, if they wished to deal with the royal family, they would need to have concrete, irrefutable evidence. Otherwise, what would the other empires make of the matter?

Wouldn't they feel that their sovereignty was threatened by the presence of the Master Teacher Pavilion as well?

As such, no matter how confident they were of their speculations, it was far from enough.

Wu shi nodded. "I'll have my men look into the matter this instant."

"Aside from that, I might also need you to organize a group of men for an expedition to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows."

"An expedition to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows?"
Wu shi frowned.

"That's right. I suspect that the mastermind is hiding there,"
Zhang Xuan explained.

"I see. Alright, I'll pick out the elites of the Master Teacher Pavilion and liaise with the Combat Master Hall to dispatch some of their experts as well!" Wu shi said.

"Alright then, I'll be taking my leave first to make some preparations myself," Zhang Xuan replied. "Farewell."

There were two things he had to do before heading to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows. Firstly, he needed to try to raise the strength of the Golden Origin Cauldron another level, preferably to the Leaving Aperture realm. Secondly, he would have to urge Vicious to quickly devour the Qingtian Emperor's soul and clear his Leaving Aperture realm ordeal!

Only with these would he have sufficient cards to deal with the other Vicious. Otherwise, considering his current cultivation, he would not stand a chance if he headed over there recklessly. If things went wrong, he might even end up as the other party's nourishment.

1204 The Blacksmith Guild

Knowing that it would be a bitter fight against the Vicious in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, Zhang Xuan did not dare hesitate. After leaving the Master Teacher Pavilion, he headed straight to the Blacksmith Guild.

Logically speaking, Vicious had already lain low for many years, so he should not have taken such brazen actions at this juncture, especially given the fact that he would risk bringing the wrath of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters on him. However, it seemed like the death of the Qingtian Emperor and the emergence of a Celestial Master Teacher had really heaped a great amount of pressure on him, forcing him to show his hand.

Without a doubt, the first person that the other Vicious would go for once he was freed of his bindings would be him, Zhang Xuan.

Thus, he would be better off taking the initiative and making the first move instead of waiting for the enemy to arrive at his doorstep. Not only would it be safer for him, more importantly, it would also limit the casualties among the master teachers.

The Golden Origin Cauldron is currently at Half-Leaving Aperture realm. If I fuse the Black Goldcrystal Ore into the Golden Origin Cauldron, I should be able to raise its tier significantly. Even if I'm unable to bring it up to the level of a Saint high-tier artifact, I should have no trouble raising its cultivation to the Leaving Aperture realm! Zhang Xuan hypothesized as he made his way forward.

He had obtained the Black Goldcrystal Ore from the treasure Wu Yangzi had left behind in his old residence. After splitting a portion of it with Luo Qiqi, he still had a slice of it left. It was just that he had been too busy recently, and he had not found the required materials to perfectly fuse it into the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Since he had already decided to set off to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, he would really have to equip himself well in advance.

The Blacksmith Guild was roughly ten li away from the Master Teacher Pavilion, so it did not take too long for him to arrive at his destination.

Zhang Xuan had not challenged the 7-star blacksmith examination ever since clearing the 6-star examination back at the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, so he was still a 6-star blacksmith. He took out his 6-star blacksmith emblem and pinned it on his chest before walking in.

The Qingyuan Empire Blacksmith Guild was extremely crowded, just like the other guilds in the city. Every day, countless cultivators would pay the guild a visit to browse through their array of weapons to select one that was handy for them.

Only Saint low-tier weapons were on display in the public section. If a cultivator wanted a Saint intermediate-tier weapon, they would have to fork out a hefty sum and make a personal request to a 7-star blacksmith personally, provided that the 7-star blacksmith was able to successfully smith one.

“Zhang shi? Is it really you?” Just as Zhang Xuan was about to ask at the receptionist where the head of the Blacksmith Guild was, he suddenly heard an exclamation amid the crowd. Turning around, he saw Chu Xiang, whom he had met at the Terpsichore Guild a while back, waving at his hands excitedly.

“Chu gongzi!” Zhang Xuan greeted with a smile.

It was thanks to the other party that he had been able to enter the Spring Pavilion back then and successfully obtain his 7-star terpsichore emblem.

“Zhang shi, it’s really a delight to meet you here. I have been wanting to thank you for your help back then. It’s due to your words that I have managed to recover fully from the wounds on my soul.” Chu Xiang bowed deeply as he spoke.

Back at the Terpsichore Guild, it was due to Zhang shi’s words that Fairy Zi Yan did her best for him during the Exclusive

Dance, thus allowing him to recover fully from his wounds.

“It’s not a big issue; there’s no need to stand on ceremony.”
Zhang Xuan quickly helped Chu Xiang up.

He had just offered a word on behalf of Chu Xiang, so it was really nothing much. Just that, he could not help but feel his heart bleed whenever he thought about the concentrated high-tier spirit stone the other party had spent on the Exclusive Dance. If Chu Xiang had allowed him to dance for him instead, he would have surely recovered way faster!

“I heard about Zhang shi’s crashing of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and I honestly have nothing left but reverence for you!” Chu Xiang looked at Zhang Xuan with eyes twinkling with admiration.

“It’s really nothing much. I only crashed it on a whim...”
Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He had simply caused too great of a commotion during his pavilion crashing. For one, his declaration had resounded throughout the whole of Qingyuan City, so it would only have taken a little bit of investigating for Chu Xiang to make the link between him and the pavilion crashing.

“You only crashed it on a whim?” Chu Xiang rolled his eyes.

The Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion has stood proudly on the Master Teacher Continent for many years without any issue, and yet, you ended up crashing it just days after your arrival, leaving Pavilion Master Gou with no choice but to step down. If this was done on a whim, wouldn’t the entire Master Teacher Pavilion be completely eradicated as long as you made plans beforehand?

A thought suddenly came to Chu Xiang’s mind, and he looked at Zhang Xuan doubtfully. “It can’t be that Zhang shi has an issue with the Blacksmith Guild, so you have come here to crash it today as well?”

Based on what he had found, it seemed like Zhang shi had not allowed Qingyuan City to have a single day of peace ever since his arrival. First was the enchantment of the Spirit Awakener Guild’s building, and after that, he crashed the

Master Teacher Pavilion. For him to suddenly pay a visit to the Blacksmith Guild... it could not be that he was up to something, could it?

“Cough cough!”

Not expecting Chu Xiang to have such a horrendous impression of someone as honorable and upright as him, Zhang Xuan choked. With a slightly awkward tone, he asked, “How could someone as humble as me possibly do something of that sort? You are really thinking too much...”

“Humble?” Chu Xiang’s lips twitched wildly. He had seen plenty of humble people in his lifetime, but this was the first time he was seeing someone that ‘humble’.

“Since you aren’t here to crash the Blacksmith Guild, you must be here to watch Master Lin Jie’s smithing then?”

“Master Lin Jie?”

“Yes. Master Lin Jie is a half 8-star blacksmith from the Qianchong Empire. He happened to be passing by the area, so Guild Leader Qin specially invited him over to conduct a public lecture for the 7-star blacksmiths of Qingyuan City. I was honored to have received an invitation letter for this occasion as well!” Chu Xiang explained.

“You are a 7-star blacksmith?” Considering how the young man before him was a regular at the Spring Pavilion, Zhang Xuan had automatically assumed that he was a profligate scion. Who would have thought that he was actually a 7-star blacksmith?

“Of course! I might seem nothing much, but my talent in smithing is unquestionable!” Chu Xiang boasted gleefully.

“Zhang shi, if you face any problems in smithing, feel free to ask me. Given our relationship, I’ll do my best to answer any queries that you have!”

“Thank you, I will definitely find you if I have any questions in mind.” Knowing that the other party was saying those words out of goodwill, Zhang Xuan replied with a kind smile. “Right, I happen to have something that I need your help on at

the moment. Can you bring me to meet the head of the Blacksmith Guild?”

“You want to meet Guild Leader Qin? No problem, leave it to me,” Chu Xiang replied confidently as he led the way forward. “Follow me!”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

With someone to bring him around, he would be spared from much trouble.

From Chu Xiang’s introduction, Zhang Xuan came to learn that the name of the head of the Blacksmith Guild was Qin Chong, and he was a 7-star pinnacle blacksmith.

It did not take long for them to arrive at the Guild Leader Office. After reporting their presence, the duo made their way in.

“Guild Leader Chong, this young man over here is 7-star Master Teacher Zhang Xuan, the individual who successfully crashed the Master Teacher Pavilion a few days back!” Chu Xiang introduced.

“I see. It’s an honor to meet you, Zhang shi.” Guild Leader Qin quickly got to his feet and bowed.

A master teacher who could successfully crash a Master Teacher Pavilion was indubitably an extremely talented individual who was bound for great things in the future. Even as the head of the Qingyuan Empire Blacksmith Guild, he knew that the other party was not someone whom he could underestimate.

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and responded, “Guild Leader Qin, you are too polite.”

Swiftly getting into their seats, they traded a few pleasantries to get acquainted with one another before Guild Leader Qin asked with a worried expression on his face, “Zhang shi, may I know the reason behind your arrival? Our Blacksmith Guild has been abiding by the law all this while, and I have maintained a tight watch over every single one of the subordinates, so...”

Knowing that Guild Leader Qin was thinking about, Chu Xiang slapped his hand on his forehead before clarifying, “Guild Leader Qin, Zhang Shi isn’t here to crash the Blacksmith Guild!”

“Ah, that’s a relief.” Guild Leader Qin heaved a long sigh of relief, and the tension that had been on his face ever since Zhang Xuan was introduced to him finally alleviated.

On the other hand, hearing the conversation between the duo, Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

All he had done was crash the Master Teacher Pavilion! Did they really think that he was a God of Destruction, destroying everything in his path wherever he went? He was really a humble person, a really, really humble person! Why wouldn’t anyone believe him?

“To be honest with you, I really do have a few things that I’ll have to trouble Guild Leader Qin with.” Knowing that it would be futile even if he explained himself, Zhang Xuan shook his head helplessly and got straight to business. “I have a Saint intermediate-tier artifact that I would like to fuse some Black Goldcrystal Ore into. May I know if you have any time to help me in the forging process?”

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s request, Guild Leader Qin was visibly taken aback for a moment before asking, “May I ask what kind of weapon your Saint intermediate-tier artifact is? Does it have any spirit? Also, what’s its current cultivation realm?”

“It’s a Half-Leaving Aperture realm weapon cauldron, and it does have a spirit,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“This…” A frown emerged on Guild Leader Qin’s face.

“Zhang Shi, I’ll be frank with you here. If your weapon cauldron was only at Primordial Spirit realm primary stage, I might still have been able to help you reforge it and fuse it with your Black Goldcrystal Ore, but Half-Leaving Aperture realm… I haven’t even reached that level of cultivation realm yet, so I fear that your request is beyond my ability!”

“If that’s what you are worrying about, there’s really no need to. I’ll be giving you some guidance from the side during the

forging process, and as long as you follow my instructions strictly, there won't be any problems," Zhang Xuan replied.

No matter what, he was determined to overlook the Golden Origin Cauldron's forging personally. Otherwise, no matter who did the job, he would not be able to put his mind at ease.

"You will be giving guidance?" Guild Leader Qin was taken aback. "Zhang shi is a blacksmith?"

"Un. I studied it for a while in the past. I am currently a 6-star blacksmith," Zhang Xuan replied.

He had collected all the books concerning smithing in the Master Teacher Pavilion and read the compiled 7-star Heaven's Path Smith Art too, thus raising his understanding on smithing to 7-star pinnacle, which was comparable to most 8-star primary blacksmiths.

However, it was just that he never had time to practice forging before, so with his current proficiency, he could only make metal blocks at the very most. Fearing that he would end up misshaping the Golden Origin Cauldron, he had sought Guild Leader Qin's help instead.

"6-star blacksmith?" Guild Leader Qin and Chu Xiang exchanged a glance as frowns emerged on their faces.

There was a huge gap between a 6-star blacksmith and a 7-star blacksmith. For a 6-star blacksmith to actually speak of guiding a 7-star blacksmith like Guild Leader Qin...

Was this a joke?

Noticing the peculiar gaze in the duo's eyes, Zhang Xuan realized what was going through their minds, and he swiftly clarified, "Actually, my proficiency in smithing has already reached 7-star. It's just that I have been too busy recently, so I haven't been able to find time to take the examination."

"I see!" Guild Leader Qin nodded in comprehension. "Since that's the case, allow me to invite Zhang shi to follow me to our Forging Hall. Only the earth flames there will be able to produce sufficient heat to melt a Saint intermediate-tier artifact and the Black Goldcrystal Ore."

“Sure!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Most Blacksmith Guilds tapped into the earth flames underground for their smithing.

There were differing tiers to earth flames as well, and the Black Goldcrystal Ore was known to be exceptionally difficult to process while the Golden Origin Cauldron had reached Half-Leaving Aperture realm and had been tempered by lightning, so ordinary earth flames would not do the job.

The trio swiftly arrived at the Forging Hall, only to meet with a huge crowd. Astonishingly, every single one of them had seven stars on the emblem pinned conspicuously on their chests. They were all 7-star blacksmiths!

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had thought that the Forging Hall would be empty. If that were the case, he would have been able to go all out in the reforging of the Golden Origin Cauldron. But with just a swift glance, he could see at least several hundred 7-star blacksmiths in the room.

Noticing Zhang Xuan’s unhappiness, Guild Leader Qin quickly explained, “Zhang shi, pardon me. Only the flames of the Forging Hall are sufficient to process the Black Goldcrystal Ore, and it just so happens that Master Lin Jie will be conducting a lecture on smithing for us today. If Zhang shi is willing to wait, why don’t you listen to Master Lin’s lecture first? He’s a half 8-star blacksmith, so his understanding of smithing is bound to have reached an unfathomable level. Through his teachings, your grasp of smithing could improve by leaps and bounds.”

“I fear that I don’t have that much time to spare,” Zhang Xuan replied with a frown.

Vicious could make another move at any moment, so he had to quickly raise the prowess of the Golden Origin Cauldron so that he would be prepared to face him. Thus, he really had no time to spare on a lecture.

Right after Zhang Xuan said those words, a displeased voice suddenly sounded from the center of the room.

“Do you mean to say that listening to my lecture is a waste of your time?”

1205 Master Lin Jie

Turning around, Zhang Xuan saw an elder with a flowing white beard walking over. There was an air of valiance surrounding him, and astonishingly, his cultivation was indiscernible on first glance.

“Master Lin Jie!” Guild Leader Qin hurriedly clasped his fist and greeted the elder whereas Chu Xiang lowered his head respectfully.

Be it in terms of cultivation or comprehension of smithing, they came nowhere close to matching up to the half 8-star blacksmith before them.

“Master Lin Jie, allow me to introduce you. He is a 7-star pinnacle master teacher, Zhang shi!” Fearing that the duo would end up fighting one another, Guild Leader Qin hurriedly introduced the two of them.

Considering how Zhang Xuan had successfully crashed the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, even defeating Pavilion Master Gou in the midst of doing so, there was definitely nothing wrong with addressing him as a 7-star pinnacle master teacher.

“7-star pinnacle master teacher?” Master Lin Jie was taken aback for a moment. “For one as young as you to wield such power, I see that you do have the right to act conceited.” Initially, Master Lin Jie had thought that it was some arrogant individual trying to humiliate him publicly, but since the young man was a 7-star pinnacle master teacher, it was unlikely that he would lower himself to something as crass as that.

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and requested, “Pardon me, but I have some urgent issues concerning the Master Teacher Pavilion that cannot be delayed. May I ask you to lend me the Forging Hall for a while so that I can upgrade my artifact?”

Considering that Master Lin Jie had specially been invited there by Guild Leader Qin to conduct a lecture, it was indeed a little disrespectful for him to suddenly barge in and request to use the earth flames.

“Upgrade your artifact? Is Zhang shi a blacksmith as well?” Master Lin Jie asked curiously.

“I have learned it for a while and happened to obtain a 6-star emblem,” Zhang Xuan replied.

Master Lin Jie nodded in response. “May I know what kind of artifact Zhang shi hopes to upgrade?”

While the Qingyuan Empire Blacksmith Guild was not as grand as the Qianchong Empire’s, there were at least six to seven hundred private chambers where one could access earth flames.

Just what kind of artifact was the young man dealing with that he would absolutely need to use the Forging Hall?

If the other party was a 7-star pinnacle blacksmith, he would not have bothered to ask that question. Just that... the young man’s proficiency in smithing seemed to be a little low, and the earth flames in the Forging Hall were exceptionally wild. The slightest lapse in control would not only result in the failure of the tempering—the artifact could possibly be destroyed as well.

“It’s this one.” Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and the Golden Origin Cauldron appeared in the room.

“Master, are you intending to reforge me? Hahaha, am I going to be upgraded once more?” Scanning its surroundings, the Golden Origin Cauldron found that there were many blacksmiths around him. He swiftly realized that he was standing in the middle of a Blacksmith Guild, and he could not help but tremble in excitement.

“A Half-Leaving Aperture realm Saint intermediate-tier artifact?” Master Lin Jie had thought that it would only be a Half-Saint artifact or that sort, but to think that it would be a Saint intermediate-tier artifact! Master Lin Jie’s eyebrows shot

up in disbelief as he asked hesitantly, “Zhang shi, are you certain that this is the artifact that you wish to upgrade?”

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“This...” Attributing it to the young man’s inexperience, Master Lin Jie could not help but advise him. “To forge a Saint intermediate-tier artifact, on top of wielding sufficient strength, more importantly, one must possess a deep understanding of smithing so as to ensure that the forging and upgrading do not damage the spirit within the artifact. Otherwise, not only will the artifact not be upgraded, its tier might even decline sharply instead!”

Even a half 8-star blacksmith like him only had a twenty percent chance of successfully upgrading a Saint intermediate artifact like that, so for a 6-star blacksmith to do so...

He was certain that the Saint intermediate-tier artifact would be ruined during the upgrade! It was truly not worth the risk.

Before Zhang Xuan could even speak, the Golden Origin Cauldron had already harrumphed in discontent. “Old man, what do you mean by those words? My master was able to raise my tier from Saint low-tier to Saint intermediate-tier just by giving pointers to an apprentice blacksmith, so do you think that he needs you to lecture him?”

Ever since its creation, its current master was the only one that it had felt so much respect and awe for, and yet, that old man actually dared to doubt its master’s capability!

Count yourself lucky that I didn’t charge forward to crush your puny head with my butt!

“By giving pointers to an apprentice blacksmith?” The crowd was taken aback by the Golden Origin Cauldron’s words.

One must know that an apprentice blacksmith was an individual who had yet to successfully smith a Mortal low-tier weapon, and such a person was able to upgrade a Saint low-tier artifact to Saint intermediate-tier just by receiving some pointers from the young man before them?

Zhang Xuan slapped the Golden Origin Cauldron’s lid and berated, “No one will think of you as a mute if you don’t

“speak!”

The only reason Song Zhen had been able to successfully raise the tier of the Golden Origin Cauldron was because he was actually highly talented in smithing himself, and he had devoted many years of his life to diligently refining his forging techniques on top of that. This had granted him a deep understanding of most common types of forging techniques. Furthermore, he also wielded a cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 9-dan, which was on par with a 6-star blacksmith.

These were the factors that had led to the eventual success in the upgrade, and this success could not possibly be replicated with any other apprentice blacksmiths.

It was just a work of coincidence; there was nothing in it to brag about.

“I...” The Golden Origin Cauldron shook its body indignantly. “But what I am saying is the truth. You did manage to get an apprentice blacksmith to successfully raise my tier just by offering him some pointers...”

Seeing that the Golden Origin Cauldron was still arguing with him, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up. “Shut up and wait by the side.”

“Alright...” Seeing that its master was really angry, the Golden Origin Cauldron meekly retreated to the side.

Zhang Xuan turned to the crowd and said in embarrassment, “That fellow has been a lofty position for too long, so he rarely thinks before he speaks. As such, his words tend to be a little impolite and disrespectful. Allow me to apologize on his behalf.”

It was insolent for an artifact to suddenly interject in the midst of its master’s conversation.

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it,” Master Lin Jie replied with a wave of his hand. With intrigue in his eyes, he asked, “Previously, your artifact has said that you gave pointers to an apprentice blacksmith, allowing him to successfully upgrade the Golden Origin Cauldron. May I know if that’s true?”

“It’s actually nothing much; it’s truly not worth speaking about!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand.

He was only there to upgrade the Golden Origin Cauldron. It had never been his intention to create a ruckus, so there was no point speaking of past affairs.

“Pardon me, it seems like I was a little reckless...” Master Lin Jie thought that Zhang Xuan was reluctant to speak of the matter because there was some secret tied into it, so he chose not to probe any further.

“Alright, if you don’t mind, I’ll start upgrading my artifact now.” Seeing that he did not cause any sort of misunderstanding, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He paused for a brief moment before turning to Chu Xiang. “Chu gongzi, I might need to trouble you later on.”

“Zhang shi, feel free to make any request of me. As long as it’s within my means, I’ll accomplish it to the best of my abilities!” Chu Xiang replied with a smile.

Putting aside that they were acquaintances, just the fact that the young man before him had successfully crashed the Master Teacher Pavilion, making him the bona fide number one master teacher of the Qingyuan Empire, made him a person who was worth befriending.

“It’s like this. I really dote on my Golden Origin Cauldron a lot, and I fear that I’ll hesitate during a critical step of the upgrade. Thus, I would like to invite you to upgrade it on my behalf!” Zhang Xuan said.

“Dote?” Hearing those words, the Golden Origin Cauldron racked his mind, but he could not think of a single instance where his master had doted on him.

In fact, it seemed like his master had even just slapped him just a moment ago...

“This...” Hearing that Zhang Xuan wanted him to upgrade his artifact, a bitter smile surfaced on Chu Xiang’s face as he hurriedly waved his hand. “Zhang shi, it’s not that I don’t want to help you, but my cultivation hasn’t even reached Primordial Spirit realm yet. Even though I am a 7-star blacksmith, it’s still

far beyond my current abilities to upgrade a Half-Leaving Aperture realm artifact...”

Even a 7-star pinnacle blacksmith like Guild Leader Qin was not confident in handling artifacts of such a tier, so how could a newly promoted 7-star blacksmith like him possibly stand a chance?

The other party was really thinking too highly of him.

“There’s no need to be nervous. I’ll guide you from the side. As long as you follow my instructions strictly, you will be fine,” Zhang Xuan said.

However, Chu Xiang was still conflicted. “Zhang shi, I really don’t think that I’m up to the task. Your artifact is truly valuable, and it’ll be a disaster if I make a mistake in the smithing process.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll be using the Impartation of Heaven’s Will on you later on, so you need not worry about making a mistake. If something really crops up, I won’t blame you for that,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Ah...” Since the other party had already said this, it seemed like he did not have any reason to turn the offer down anymore. Thus, after a moment of hesitation, Chu Xiang eventually nodded in agreement.

“Alright, let’s begin then!”

Zhang Xuan turned to the Golden Origin Cauldron and frowned. “What are you waiting for? Hurry up and go over to the earth flames!”

The Golden Origin Cauldron pouted in indignation, but it still hurriedly flew over to the earth flames.

“This is called doting?” Black lines streaked across Master Lin Jie and Guild Leader Qin’s faces.

It was just a moment ago that the other party had said that he feared that he would hesitate in the upgrading process because his heart might suddenly soften for his artifact, just like how to doctor would find it hard to be decisive when conducting a surgery on their kin. But those harsh words...

Do you know what doting means?

Walking up to the formation to draw up the earth flames, Zhang Xuan gestured to Chu Xiang.

The latter swiftly understood Zhang Xuan's intention and walked forward.

“Zhang shi, this is the token to draw out the earth flames...” Guild Leader Qin flicked his wrist and proffered a token.

Due to safety considerations, the formation to draw the earth flames could only be activated with a certain token.

However, before he could pass it to the other party, the young man had already begun speaking.

“Take three steps to the left, two steps forward. No, take one small step back, and shuffle a little to the right. Good. Drive your zhenqi and channel it into your right leg before stomping down...”

The voice carried a unique melody to it that seemed to place one in a trance. Without any hesitation, Chu Xiang followed Zhang Xuan's orders strictly and stomped hard on the ground.

Whoosh!

In an instant, the formation for drawing the earth flames suddenly whirred into action, and a powerful surge of flames burst up, shrouding the Golden Origin Cauldron.

“This...” Guild Leader Qin narrowed his eyes in disbelief. “To activate the earth flames without using the token... how is that possible?”

The temperature of the earth flames was exceptionally high, such that even Saint 4-dan cultivators could easily be reduced to cinder in a moment of carelessness.

As such, the formation was firmly sealed to prevent any flames from leaking out when it was not in use, and without the required token, it was impossible to remove the seal and trigger the formation. Yet, with Zhang Xuan's guidance, Chu Xiang had actually managed to pull it off with ease.

Despite witnessing it with his own eyes, he still found it hard to believe!

“Only one who possesses a deep understanding of formations is capable of pulling this off! Most likely, Zhang shi has achieved exceptional proficiency in the field of formations as well!” Master Lin Jie remarked in approval.

To be able to see through the structure of the earth flame formation with a glance and successfully activate it, the young man’s comprehension of formations could be said to be top-notch even among the formation masters in their Qianchong Empire!

“As expected of Zhang shi...” Guild Leader Qin nodded.

Master Lin Jie shook his head. “I’m more interested in his smithing ability. In the first place, upgrading a Saint intermediate-tier artifact is already an incredibly difficult task. To make matters worse, he is even using another person as a proxy to smith in his stead. Even if he uses the Impartation of Heaven’s Will, considering that he has never worked with his partner before, the difficulty is bound to be countless times greater. Honestly speaking, I am not too optimistic about the outcome.”

It was one thing if Zhang Xuan and his partner had worked with one another on numerous occasions, allowing them to work synergistically with one another.

There were indeed such cases in the real world as well, where a more knowledgeable blacksmith would offer pointers to a more skilled blacksmith in order to create a weapon more powerful than what they could create individually.

But that would take years of cooperation in order for both parties to understand each other’s strength, zhenqi purity, forging techniques, smithing tendencies, and so on.

And that clearly was not the case between Zhang Xuan and his partner!

To work on a Saint intermediate-tier on their very first partnership, when they knew next to nothing about one another...

As a half 8-star blacksmith, his experience told him that such a thing was impossible to pull off. If it was truly possible, he would have spent his years smithing in vain!

As a 7-star pinnacle master teacher, Zhang Xuan should have been aware of this matter as well. Yet, to go on with it despite understanding the risks... was he banking on the occurrence of a miracle, or was the Saint intermediate-tier artifact disposable to him?

At this point, Master Lin Jie could not help but shoot a look of sympathy at the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Doting?

More like murder!

1206 Chu Xiang Smiths

Seeing how Chu Xiang had scared himself silly from activating the earth flames, Zhang Xuan frowned. He quickly spoke to jolt the other party out of his daze, “Alright! Prepare yourself, we will be starting soon!”

“Yes!” Chu Xiang replied.

To be able to reach Saint 3-dan and achieve the proficiency of a 7-star blacksmith at such a young age, while Chu Xiang might have appeared like a profligate scion on the surface, he was definitely not as simple as he seemed.

Taking a deep breath, it did not take him long to calm his mind.

Seeing how jittery Chu Xiang was, the Golden Origin Cauldron laughed heartily and consoled, “Lad, rest assured. It’s not that I want to brag, but as long as you follow the instruction of my master word for word, Grandpa Ding will be completely fine. Perhaps, I might even be upgraded by a tier!”

It appeared that it was not worried in the least.

On the other hand, upon hearing those words, Master Lin Jie and Guild Leader Qin could not help but share a look, and they could see the worry in each other’s eyes.

Are you really that gutsy, or is there something wrong with your head? If something goes wrong in the upgrading process, dropping a tier will be the least of your worries. More importantly, your spirit might even be completely destroyed as a result!

Are you sure that you don’t need to worry about this at all?

“Yes, sir!” Chu Xiang replied tensely before turning to Zhang Xuan. “Zhang shi, may I have the ore that I have to fuse into the Golden Origin Cauldron?”

“Here you go!” Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and an ore flew into Chu Xiang’s grasp.

“This...” Seeing the ore that was being passed over, Master Lin Jie’s eyes narrowed in astonishment. “Isn’t that the Black Goldcrystal Ore?”

The Black Goldcrystal Ore was an incredibly valuable and rare ore. Just fusing a pinch of it into the weapon could potentially raise the prowess of the smithed weapon significantly! It was highly sought-after, even among the top Conferred Empire blacksmiths. Who would have thought that the young man actually had such a thing in his possession?

A moment later, Master Lin Jie frowned as he analyzed the situation. “But it will be difficult to fuse that with the cauldron...”

As rare as Black Goldcrystal Ore was, as a half 8-star blacksmith, he still had various channels that he could acquire some from. What truly stumped most blacksmiths was not the rarity of the ore but the sheer difficulty in processing it. Even with the earth flames in the Forging Hall, it would still be extremely difficult to melt the Black Goldcrystal Ore.

If the Black Goldcrystal Ore was not fully melted, it would be impossible to fuse it with the Golden Origin Cauldron perfectly.

“If only we were in the Qianchong Empire Blacksmith Guild... the earth flames there would have no problem melting the Black Goldcrystal Ore, although it would take a great deal of effort. However, here...” Master Lin Jie shook his head pessimistically.

The earth flames in the Forging Hall boasted the highest temperature in the Qingyuan Empire, but they were still lacking compared to the earth flames in the Qianchong Empire Blacksmith Guild. It really would not be easy to melt the Black Goldcrystal Ore here.

Staring curiously to see what Zhang Xuan would do in this situation, Master Lin Jie suddenly heard the young man issuing an instruction, and right afterwards, the Golden Origin Cauldron opened its lid and swallowed the ore.

“This...” While the crowd blinked blankly at the sight, Master Lin Jie slapped his thigh with an excited gleam in his eyes.

“How did I not think of that! The cauldron that is to be upgraded is a weapon cauldron itself! While the temperature of the earth flames is limited, the superior heat conductivity of the weapon cauldron can channel the heat through it, thus raising the temperature another notch! With this, there should be no problem melting the Black Goldcrystal Ore! Just that...”

“Just what?”

“While the Black Goldcrystal Ore can be melted through this method, the problem is that he will be unable to view the current state of the Black Goldcrystal Ore to determine whether it has fully melted or not,” Master Lin Jie replied.

“Due to the firm exterior of the weapon cauldron and the intense flames, it will be impossible to extend his Spiritual Perception into the cauldron as well. If the Black Goldcrystal Ore is retrieved too early, it will not have melted properly. If retrieved too late, its properties could very well have been destroyed by the heat. Either way, it will adversely affect the result of the upgrading.”

Considering how the intense flames harnessed within the cauldron were able to melt even the Black Goldcrystal Ore, if one were to extend one’s Spiritual Perception into it, one’s consciousness would surely be seared by the heat!

If one could not view what was going on in the cauldron, it would be impossible to accurately discern when the Black Goldcrystal Ore needed to be retrieved to move on to the next step.

The Black Goldcrystal Ore was a particularly sensitive ore. Exposing it to high heat for a second or two too long could potentially lead to the failure of the smithing.

Guild Leader Qin also swiftly understood the implications of the decided course of action. “Indeed. Not only so, the cauldron will also have to be constantly placed in the intense heat of the earth flames. If the timing is not right, not only will the Black Goldcrystal Ore be ruined, there is also a good chance that the internal structure of the Golden Origin

Cauldron from the previous smithing will also become undone, resulting in a sharp decline in its tier.”

In the first place, the Golden Origin Cauldron was made of an alloy consisting of different metals. It truly was not easy to establish a balance among all of the metals and stabilize it at Saint intermediate-tier. However, if it were exposed to intense heat for a prolonged period, the balance could very well be shattered.

In other words, while melting the Black Goldcrystal Ore within the Golden Origin Cauldron did resolve the problem of lacking heat, it produced several other problems, thus raising the difficulty of the forging process another level.

While the duo was still worrying over the forging, the young man’s voice suddenly sounded once more. “Take two steps forward and fuse your zhenqi into the earth flames at a northeast trajectory. After which, use the Three Leaves Forging Technique to pry open the cauldron lid.”

The voice carried the unique melody of the Impartation of Heaven’s Will, compelling Chu Xiang to obey it without any hesitation.

As such, he immediately followed the orders faithfully, taking two steps forward and flicking his finger.

Huala!

The cauldron lid was pried open, and a viscous, golden liquid flew out from the Golden Origin Cauldron.

“The Black Goldcrystal Ore has melted? Furthermore, from the looks of it, it seems like it has just melted. The error in timing is definitely less than a tenth of a breath! This...” Guild Leader Qin narrowed his eyes in disbelief.

To be able to grasp the timing perfectly despite being unable to peer into the situation within the Golden Origin Cauldron... How in the world did the young man manage to pull it off?

Master Lin Jie pondered over the earlier situation and swiftly made a deduction. “It’s because of the commands he issued!

“He instructed his partner to take two steps forward and fuse his zhenqi at a northeast trajectory; that step served to swiftly intensify the heat within the cauldron. After which, he instructed his partner to utilize the Three Leaves Forging Technique.

“As you know, the Three Leaves Forging Technique is an extremely forceful method that consists of incredibly swift and precise movements of one’s fingers, allowing one to compress the flames together, thus focusing all the heat at a single point, resulting in a sharp rise in the temperature. It’s through this method that he was able to melt the Black Goldcrystal Ore instantaneously and retrieve it timely from the cauldron.

“But pulling this off would require extremely precise calculations... Just how fast does his mind run? Fearsome!”

He could not help but clench his fists tightly in agitation.

It appeared to just be a simple command, but there was actually a profound logic behind it that required deep understanding of the earth flame formation, the temperature of the earth flames, the melting point of the Black Goldcrystal Ore, the attribute of Chu Xiang’s zhenqi, and many other factors! Only with such precise calculations would one be able to pull it off without accidentally destroying the Black Goldcrystal Ore.

Even a half 8-star blacksmith like Master Lin Jie would be unable to accomplish something like that!

The other party’s mental calculation ability was truly fearsome!

“Side shift three cun to the left before lifting your hammer to strike the opening of the Golden Origin Cauldron. Use the Descending Willow Leaves Forging Technique and strike a total of 148 times at a rate of once every three breaths, no more, no less. After which...” Zhang Xuan continued issuing instructions.

Soon, a rhythmic ‘ding ding dang dang’ began resounding in the Forging Hall.

“Marvelous! Truly marvelous!” Master Lin Jie suddenly exclaimed in delirium.

“Master Lin Jie?” Guild Leader Qin could not understand the other party’s abrupt, fevered outburst.

“As a 7-star pinnacle blacksmith, it’s perfectly normal for you to be unable to see through the exquisiteness of their forging,” Master Lin Jie explained with visible excitement in his tone.

“The Descending Willow Leaves Forging Technique is a perfectly ordinary forging technique, essentially consisting of slow but steady strikes.

“What is truly exquisite is how aptly it is used in this situation! Having just been exposed to intense heat, the cauldron is already starting to melt. If a fast and forceful forging technique were to be used in this situation, it could cause the internal structure of the cauldron to break apart. While it would not affect the formation of the cauldron, the small cracks here and there would adversely affect the durability of the cauldron, causing its tier to decline.

“On the other hand, through using the Descending Willow Leaves Forging Technique, not only will such a problem be avoided, it will even further temper the current structure of the cauldron, making it more compact and firmer than before, thus enhancing its quality!”

The instructions issued by the young man were truly exquisite. Every single word he spoke seemed to directly point to the very essence of smithing, turning even the most ordinary movements into a profound art. Despite utilizing only the most basic forging techniques, he was still able to facilitate the fusion of the cauldron with the Black Goldcrystal Ore perfectly.

Ding ding dang dang!

By the time Chu Xiang performed his 148th strike on the Golden Origin Cauldron, he happened to return to the starting point. After which, under Zhang Xuan’s instructions, he flicked the hammer into the air and began striking the bottom of the cauldron.

“Why is he striking the bottom of the cauldron instead of the cauldron body?” Guild Leader Qin asked in confusion.

Under normal circumstances, it would be best to hammer an artifact in sequence to further its stability, which in this case, would be from the top to the bottom. As such, it was perplexing why Zhang Xuan would instruct Chu Xiang to strike the bottom of the cauldron right after hammering the top. Logically speaking, he should have the body of the cauldron hammered first before moving to the bottom!

“This...” Master Lin Jie frowned in bewilderment as well, unable to make sense of the situation either.

Weng weng weng!

In the midst of his confusion, the cauldron before him suddenly emitted a deep rumble, reminiscent of an ocean’s waves.

“Could it be...” Master Lin Jie’s eyes suddenly widened in realization. “I finally get it!”

Guild Leader Qin hurriedly turned his gaze to Master Lin Jie.

“This is the Tidal Forging Technique! It was created by an 8-star blacksmith after listening to the sound of the waves. By striking the bottom of the cauldron in a specific manner right after hammering the top, a unique resonance is produced within the cauldron via the strikes, allowing the Black Goldcrystal Ore to better fuse into the body of the cauldron without hammering it directly, thus reducing the potential damage the hammering could cause to its structure.

“More importantly, the wave-like jolts from the hammering temper the spirit within the cauldron as well, enhancing it further. Formidable! Truly formidable! How did he manage to think of something like this?”

The more Master Lin Jie spoke, the more astounded he was. At this point, he could not help but feel a little light within.

The Tidal Forging Technique was an obsolete forging technique, applicable only in very few circumstances. As such, he had never really used it before despite having heard of it.

Yet, who would have thought that he would actually see it being perfectly applied here?

There were many forging techniques in the world, some more profound than the others. However, just because one forging technique was more profound than another did not necessarily mean that it would be better. What was more important was to use the forging technique more apt for the situation!

For example, not only would the Tidal Forging Technique preserve the integrity of the Golden Origin Cauldron's internal structure to the greatest degree, it would also temper its spirit.

There were simply too many people in the world, and this was including blacksmiths as well, who thought that the stronger the physical structure of a weapon was, the stronger the weapon would be. They attempt to fuse all kinds of superior ores into their weapon, only to neglect the enhancement of its spirit. As a result, they would end up with a weak weapon spirit trying to drag a body far stronger than it along, and naturally, this was detrimental to the overall prowess of the weapon.

The usage of the Tidal Forging Technique at this crucial juncture solved this issue perfectly.

This was truly killing two birds with one stone!

Witnessing what he had previously thought to be impossible, he could not help but feel a little dreamy inside. "To be able to think this far ahead while issuing instructions to another... Just how deep an understanding does he have of smithing?"

His years of experience in smithing told him that Zhang Xuan and his partner were doomed to fail, but from the current looks of the situation... it seemed like they would really succeed!

Just from this alone, it could be seen that the young man's comprehension of smithing was much, much deeper than his!

In fact, they were not even on the same level!

He continued watching the forging process, and his shock only served to deepen at every turn.

Every instruction made by Zhang Xuan was profound and precise, such that he could not find the slightest flaw or error in it. On top of that, he astonishingly realized that the young man had really taken everything into consideration, factoring in his partner's strength, zhenqi attribute, level of mastery in smithing, and so on.

He had still been able to comprehend what the young man was doing at the start, but as the forging process went on, he swiftly found that there were many aspects that were beyond his understanding.

Perhaps he might have been able to make sense out of it if he were to ponder deeply over the process, but the young man was issuing instructions one after another at a rapid pace, using a myriad of forging techniques within just a few moments, granting him no time to think at all.

After some time, a resounding echo suddenly sounded, and under Zhang Xuan's instructions, Chu Xiang rapidly retreated several steps.

Hong long!

Following which, an overwhelming aura burst into the air, and the sky abruptly darkened.

“It's the Leaving Aperture Ordeal...”

Everyone stared at the sight before them with mouths agape. 1 cun is 3.33cm.

1207 Leaving Aperture Ordeal

Saint 5-dan Leaving Aperture realm was the level where a cultivator's Primordial Spirit gained the ability to leave its physical body and survive for a prolonged period of time independently, but in order to do so, the cultivator had to undergo the Leaving Aperture Ordeal first.

While artifacts were able to reach the Leaving Aperture realm as well, their spirits were unable to make the metamorphosis into Primordial Spirits. As a result, unlike normal cultivators, they were unable to leave the confines of their body. Nevertheless, they would still gain the ability to grow hands and legs, granting them greater ease and flexibility of movements.

The Golden Origin Cauldron had already been at Half-Leaving Aperture realm prior to the upgrading, and after having the Black Goldcrystal Ore fused into it, it successfully overcame its previous bottleneck and drew in the Leaving Aperture Ordeal.

Dark clouds swiftly gathered in the area, causing the darkness to spread. A powerful gale raged, tearing apart the roof of the Forging Hall, exposing the room to the world.

This was the first time that most blacksmiths in the room had witnessed an artifact's Leaving Aperture Ordeal, and they stared at the sight before them intently as their bodies trembled in excitement.

Kacha!

A deafening peal of thunder rumbled as countless blue streaks of lightning tangled with one another within the dark clouds.

“Why would the cauldron draw in the Leaving Aperture Ordeal despite having yet to be tempered? Does Zhang shi not intend to temper it?” Guild Leader Qin asked in confusion.

There were three main steps to smithing and upgrading a weapon. First, the fusing of the ores to form a suitable alloy. Second, the forging of the alloy into the correct form. Third, the tempering of the formed artifact to enhance its durability and flexibility!

Most blacksmiths would be able to grasp the first two steps with sufficient practice. What was truly difficult to master was the third one.

Whether an artifact would be able to achieve true perfection depended on how well the blacksmith was able to conduct the tempering.

There were many techniques used in the forging process that he was not able to understand, so he had thought that the tempering stage would be an eye-opener for him as well, allowing him to catch a glimpse into the prowess of a true genius blacksmith. Yet, before the tempering could be carried out, the Leaving Aperture Ordeal had already fallen!

“It’s not that he doesn’t intend to temper his cauldron; he is going to temper it now,” Master Lin Jie replied hoarsely, his quivering tone reflecting his disbelief at the situation.

“He’s intending to temper it now? Wait a moment, Master Lin Jie, you don’t mean that... Zhang shi intends to use the Leaving Aperture Ordeal to temper his cauldron?” Guild Leader Qin froze upon hearing those words, and his eyes bulged in disbelief.

Master Lin Jie nodded. “That seems to be the case. He’s probably intending to use the lightning to temper his cauldron to perfection.”

“But the devastating might of the Leaving Aperture Ordeal is one that could incapacitate even True Leaving Aperture realm experts! To temper an artifact that rose to Leaving Aperture realm just a moment ago with the Leaving Aperture Ordeal is utter madness!” Guild Leader Qin exclaimed in shock.

At this moment, he really felt that Zhang Xuan had gone insane.

In the Leaving Aperture Ordeal, one would have to undergo a lightning tribulation, which was the nemesis of souls and spirits alike! Even True Leaving Aperture realm experts would cower from it, not daring to take it head on.

Even though the deceased Pavilion Master Gou had long reached the Leaving Aperture realm, he still had not dared to undergo the Leaving Aperture Ordeal due to his old age, fearing that his soul would dissipate.

While everyone was eager to avoid the Leaving Aperture Ordeal, that fellow was actually intending to use the lightning to temper his artifact!

Wasn't he being too gutsy?

That was truly playing with fire! The slightest mistake could very well render all the effort he had put into upgrading his artifact futile. More importantly, if the Golden Origin Cauldron failed to withstand the lightning ordeal, it could very well explode on the spot!

That would be equivalent to the explosion of a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator! The entire Blacksmith Guild and everything in its vicinity would be utterly obliterated!

“Elders, begin evacuating everyone from the area!” Guild Leader Qin could not afford to take this risk, so he quickly issued commands.

Even if the Blacksmith Guild was destroyed, as long as their men remained, they would at least still be able to rebuild it.

But the problem was that all of the 7-star blacksmiths in Qingyuan City were currently gathered in this room to listen to Master Lin Jie's lecture. If all of them were killed due to this, the Qingyuan Empire Blacksmith Guild would really become a thing of the past.

“Yes!”

“Everyone, hurry up and flee!”

“Quick, contact the Master Teacher Pavilion and have them dispatch some personnel here! If something goes wrong, it could end in a disaster!”

The other blacksmiths also swiftly came to realize the grave danger they were in, and their faces turned ghastly pale. They hurriedly rushed out of the Blacksmith Guild and dashed into the distance.

Soon, only Zhang Xuan, Chu Xiang, Master Lin Jie, and Guild Leader Qin were left in the room.

In this moment, Chu Xiang's face was pale in fright as well, and his body would not stop trembling. He quickly turned his gaze toward Zhang Xuan, only to see the latter standing with his hands behind his back, looking at the sparks of lightning in the sky calmly. Not only was there not the slightest hint of fear to be seen on his face, there was even a tangible vibe of excitement around him.

“Zhang shi...” Chu Xiang gulped as he called out to Zhang Xuan in apprehension, perhaps wanting to seek comfort from the other party's words in this unnerving situation.

Seeing through Chu Xiang's worries, Zhang Xuan replied with a light chuckle. “There's no need to worry. Just a mere Leaving Aperture Ordeal, the Golden Origin Cauldron will be able to survive it with ease!”

Normal tempering would be able to further the effects of the Black Goldcrystal Ore on the Golden Origin Cauldron as well, but the results would not be as pronounced as tempering through lightning. By tapping into the lightning energy in the Leaving Aperture Ordeal, not only would it perfect the fusion between the Black Goldcrystal Ore and the Golden Origin Cauldron, more importantly, it would grant the latter the Power of Lightning as well.

The Power of Lightning would put the Golden Origin Cauldron at a decisive advantage when facing other Leaving Aperture realm experts!

Kacha!

While the others were still in a state of shock, the first streak of lightning descended from the heavens.

It struck the Golden Origin Cauldron squarely, but surprisingly, the latter managed to absorb it easily without any

problems. Its exterior became even more lustrous, and its structure seemed to have become more compact and firmer.

“This...” Master Lin Jie was astonished by how easily the Golden Origin Cauldron managed to withstand the lightning strike. “Given that the cauldron is a Saint intermediate-tier artifact, and the Black Goldcrystal Ore has been fused into it, it’s understandable how its body is able to withstand the first lightning strike easily. But how could its spirit remain completely unharmed?”

Possessing the yin attribute, spirits and souls were innately weak against lightning!

Once the lightning was absorbed into the artifact, the spirit would naturally be devastated by the Power of Lightning as well, possibly even resulting in its dissipation.

Yet, the spirit of the cauldron was completely unfazed by the lightning. In fact, it was even shaking its body gleefully in the air, as if provoking the lightning in the heavens to give it its best shot...

Just what the heck was going on?

Seeing how frenzied Master Lin Jie was from being unable to comprehend the situation before him, Zhang Xuan shook his head and explained, “The spirit of the Golden Origin Cauldron has been tempered by lightning once in the past, thus granting it some degree of immunity to lightning. While the lightning tribulation in the Leaving Aperture Ordeal isn’t weak, it is no longer sufficient to cause significant damage to the Golden Origin Cauldron.”

Back in their expedition in the Qiu Wu Palace, the Golden Origin Cauldron had exposed itself to concentrated streaks of lightning in order to shield the rest of the expedition team from harm. Eventually, its spirit had ended up falling into a dormant state from the immense damage it had sustained. While it had nearly lost its life from the encounter, surviving the ordeal had made its spirit more resilient than ever.

Even though there had not been anyone managing the grade-8 lightning formation then, its might was still something that a

Leaving Aperture Ordeal could not compare to.

It was due to that experience that Zhang Xuan dared use lightning to temper the Golden Origin Cauldron.

“It has been tempered by lightning in the past?” Master Lin Jie nodded in realization. Everything made sense if that was the case, but soon, worry surfaced in his eyes. “The Leaving Aperture Ordeal is divided into primary stage, intermediate stage, advanced stage, and pinnacle. May I know what realm the Golden Origin Cauldron is at currently?”

When Leaving Aperture realm cultivators achieved a breakthrough to primary stage, they would undergo their first lightning ordeal, which consisted of a single streak of lightning. Even though it was only a single streak, its might was not to be underestimated. Nevertheless, if a cultivator successfully withstood it, their Primordial Spirit would become significantly more resilient once it had recovered from the injuries it had sustained.

Fortunately, it would take an ordinary cultivator several decades or even a century in order to cultivate from Leaving Aperture realm primary stage to intermediate stage, giving them sufficient time to recover from the damage caused by the lightning ordeal. With that, it would become much easier for it to survive the lightning ordeal during their breakthrough to intermediate stage.

However, this was different for artifacts.

Artifacts could be upgraded several cultivation stages at once. If the Golden Origin Cauldron was upgraded to Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle in a single go, it would have to undergo the primary stage, intermediate stage, advanced stage, and pinnacle lightning ordeals consecutively without any time to recover in between the ordeals!

In the face of four consecutive lightning ordeals, no matter how powerful the spirit was, its defenses would gradually be worn thin before eventually dissipating.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before replying. “Chu Xiang’s forging technique is still slightly lacking, so he

inevitably made a few minor errors in the forging process. As such, the Golden Origin Cauldron was unable to achieve a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle. So, it should currently be at advanced stage.”

While the Black Goldcrystal Ore had the incredible effect of raising an artifact’s tier, the materials that the Golden Origin Cauldron was made of were simply too weak, thus limiting how much it could be upgraded. Furthermore, Chu Xiang’s proficiency in his forging techniques were also slightly lacking as well, so even though there was no error in Zhang Xuan’s guidance, it had still met its bottleneck at Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage.

Nevertheless, the Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage Golden Origin Cauldron was not to be underestimated.

At Saint 5-dan, the advancement of every single cultivation stage became incredibly difficult, with bottlenecks at every turn.

With the Golden Origin Cauldron’s current cultivation and the Power of Lightning it would wield after its tempering, ordinary Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivators would not be a match for it. Putting aside the Qingyuan Empire, the Golden Origin Cauldron would probably go unmatched even in the Qianchong Empire!

Master Lin Jie’s lips twitched upon hearing those words, and a worried frown emerged on his face. “Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage? Doesn’t that mean that it’ll have to undergo three consecutive lightning ordeals? That will be dangerous!”

Since the Golden Origin Cauldron had reached Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage in a breath, it would have to undergo the primary stage, intermediate stage, and advanced stage lightning ordeal consecutively. Each one would be more fearsome than the last, and to clear all three of them was nigh impossible!

“I know.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “However, I believe that my Golden Origin Cauldron will be able to succeed!”

How could one see the rainbow without weathering the storm?

The Golden Origin Cauldron might have appeared immature and unreliable at times, but it was still a spirit that had lived for innumerable years, nourished by the spirit of countless master teachers.

Since it had survived the field of lightning back at the Qiu Wu Palace, Zhang Xuan believed that it would surely be able to withstand the Leaving Aperture Ordeal as well.

Boom!

While they were still chatting with one another, the second streak of lightning fell.

The energy harnessed within this lightning bolt was more destructive than the previous one, and even the air seemed to char from the overwhelming energy it possessed.

Kacha!

When the lightning bolt struck the Golden Origin Cauldron, the latter shuddered slightly. Under the devastating might of the lightning streak, it was unable to keep itself in the air any longer, and it fell heavily onto the ground, leaving a massive depression in its wake.

Even though it was a tough fight, the Golden Origin Cauldron eventually managed to withstand it.

Hong long long!

As soon as the second streak of lightning came to an end, the third streak fell before anyone could respond.

The deep-blue third streak of lightning had a width reminiscent of a large water vat, and it ripped through the air with incredible momentum to strike the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Seeing the astounding might of the lightning, the composure of Zhang Xuan's face finally cracked, revealing a hint of anxiety. "Sh*t! The lightning ordeal is stronger than I thought; the Golden Origin Cauldron might not be able to withstand it!"

As much as he trusted the Golden Origin Cauldron, the third streak of lightning was simply too powerful. If the cauldron

took it head on, there was really a good chance that its spirit would dissipate on the spot.

“Golden Origin Cauldron, swallow the earth flames and use them to neutralize the might of the lightning!” Zhang Xuan immediately commanded as he flicked his wrist and whipped out a bunch of formation flags.

Sou sou sou sou!

The formation flags fell into the surroundings of the Golden Origin Cauldron, forming an even more powerful formation to tap into the earth flames underground.

Since the lightning was too powerful for the Golden Origin Cauldron to withstand by itself, they would just have to find another power to offset its might!

And the strongest power that they could tap at this moment were the earth flames!

Xiong xiong!

Due to the powerful pull of the formation, raging earth flames were forcefully dragged from beneath the earth, generating a violet inferno in the area.

The Golden Origin Cauldron also knew that it was a do-or-die situation. Struggling out of the depression it was in, it opened its lid and swiftly absorbed the purple inferno into it.

Huala!

The flames circulated within the Golden Origin Cauldron’s body before bursting forth in the form of a fiery dragon.

The fiery dragon soared into the sky, clashing straight on with the third streak of lightning.

Boom!

A powerful shockwave rippled into the surroundings, shaking the heavens and earth alike. In the blink of an eye, the entire Blacksmith Guild was torn down as if it was a mere sheet of paper.

“My guild!” Guild Leader Qin widened his eyes in horror.

Didn't you say that you weren't here to crash my Blacksmith Guild? I gave you permission to upgrade your weapon, and yet, you still ended up destroying my building. How do you expect me to face my predecessors now! Just a reminder, the Qianchong Empire is the strongest Conferred Empire whereas the Qingyuan Empire is ranked last. The Qianchong Empire also contains the Sword Lagoon, which the candidates of the Combat Master Halls were vying for a while back.

1208 Yu Fei-er's Resolve And Pride

Hu!

When the third streak of lightning finally dissipated, the ominous clouds in the sky finally scattered, as if they had finally accomplished their mission. The Golden Origin Cauldron also heaved a sigh of relief before slumping weakly to the ground, as if a lump of mud.

Having reached the Leaving Aperture realm, it was finally able to make basic movements like a human, such as walking and picking up items.

Zhang Xuan walked up to the Golden Origin Cauldron and placed his hand on it. A moment later, he heaved a sigh of relief.

While the latter was completely drained after withstanding three consecutive streaks of lightning, fortunately, its spirit remained mostly unharmed. As long as it rested well, it would be able to recover within three months.

Of course, if Zhang Xuan were to treat it personally, its recovery period could be significantly reduced.

“You should return to the Myriad Anthive Nest for now and recuperate under the Bodhi Saint Tree,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

The Saint Bodhi Tree that he had planted in the Myriad Anthive Nest was exceptionally effective in nourishing souls and spirits. Since most of the damage that the Golden Origin Cauldron had sustained was to its spirit, it would do it some good to cultivate there.

“Yes, Master!” Knowing its own condition, the Golden Origin Cauldron decisively entered the Myriad Anthive Nest without any hesitation.

After the Golden Origin Cauldron left, Zhang Xuan turned around to face Chu Xiang. “Chu gongzi, thank you for helping me upgrade my artifact. As a token of my gratitude, I’ll give you these ores...”

Back then, Zhang Xuan had obtained quite a handful of ores from Emperor Chu Tianxing. While he had used some of them to upgrade the Golden Origin Cauldron, there was still a substantial portion of them remaining. Since Chu Xiang had helped him, the least he could do was give those to him to thank him.

“Zhang shi, there’s no need for that. Instead, I should be the one thanking you. This experience has truly given me a deeper insight into smithing!” Chu Xiang quickly waved his hand to turn Zhang Xuan down.

The very experience of upgrading the Golden Origin Cauldron was worth more than any ores or reward. As long as he digested everything that he had done today, his proficiency in smithing would surely improve by leaps and bounds.

“Alright then.” Seeing that Chu Xiang was reluctant to accept the ores, Zhang Xuan did not insist on it either.

Considering how the other party was able to fork out a concentrated high-tier spirit stone for an Exclusive Dance back at the Spring Pavilion, there was no doubt that he came from a privileged family. Thus, it was very likely that those ores did not mean much to him.

After settling the matter with Chu Xiang, Zhang Xuan turned his attention to Guild Leader Qin. “Guild Leader Qin, regarding this... I’m really apologetic that I reduced the Blacksmith Guild to this state...”

He had not expected such a mishap to happen during the upgrade of the Golden Origin Cauldron either. It was out of goodwill that the other party had allowed him to upgrade his weapon at the Forging Hall, but he had ended up reducing the other party’s guild to rubble. No matter what, he had to take responsibility for the damage he had caused.

It was truly fortunate that no one had been injured in the incident, otherwise there was no way he would have been able to compensate for that.

“To make up for your losses, I’ll have the Master Teacher Pavilion restore the Blacksmith Guild to its original state,” Zhang Xuan said awkwardly.

“I’ll be counting on Zhang shi then.” Guild Leader Qin heaved a sigh of relief.

If the Master Teacher Pavilion was willing to help, it probably would not even take a day for the Blacksmith Guild to be restored to its former glory, or even better than that. This outcome was at least still acceptable to him.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. He swiftly sent a message to Wu shi to inform him of the matter and have him dispatch some men over to help him clean up the mess. Last but not least, he turned his gaze onto Master Lin Jie and said, “I am truly apologetic for having interrupted your lecture. I’ll be taking my leave now, so feel free to continue.”

“...” Master Lin Jie’s eyelids twitched.

All the blacksmiths have already been evacuated from the place, so who am I to lecture?

Furthermore, how am I supposed to lecture them after they have witnessed your exquisite use of smithing? Even if they did not say anything out of politeness, I would still be too embarrassed to lecture them with my half-assed knowledge!

If only I knew this would happen, I never would have agreed to come to the Qingyuan Empire Blacksmith Guild to conduct a lecture. Since there is such a formidable expert at the Master Teacher Pavilion, why in the world did they still bother to invite me?

Just the thought of it left Master Lin Jie deeply stifled within.

After bidding farewell to the crowd at the Blacksmith Guild, Zhang Xuan did not return to the Master Teacher Pavilion. Instead, he flew out of Qingyuan City and headed to the wooden hut where the Qingtian Emperor had dragged his soul to previously.

The area was extremely quiet and isolated, making it appropriate to deal with the problem concerning Vicious there.

Hu!

Flicking his wrist, the Book of Heaven's Path appeared before Zhang Xuan's eyes. Taking in a deep breath, Zhang Xuan stretched his hand forward and grabbed it.

Huala!

The heart and finger sealed within a page in the book slowly materialized.

Due to Zhang Xuan's lack of strength, he had kept Vicious sealed within the Book of Heaven's Path all along, not daring to let him out.

However, he had no choice but to let Vicious out this time around in order to allow the latter to undergo the Leaving Aperture Ordeal and successfully advance to the Leaving Aperture realm. In any case, Vicious had already submitted part of his soul to him, so he did not have to worry about a betrayal.

Tzzzzzzz!

As soon as Vicious escaped from the confines of the Book of Heaven's Path, the heart and the finger immediately released extremely concentrated Zhenqi of Slaughter. In an instant, it felt as if someone had filled the entire wooden hut with water, making the surroundings incredibly suffocating.

Seeing how Vicious was still in the mood to show off, Zhang Xuan harrumphed coldly. "Alright, hurry up and devour the Qingtian Emperor's soul and raise your strength. Otherwise, if the other Vicious in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows notices your presence, he'll surely come after you like a mad dog!"

"Alright!" Vicious answered meekly before swiftly absorbing the Qingtian Emperor's soul.

Suppressed within the Book of Heaven's Path, the rate at which he could absorb the Qingtian Emperor's soul was severely limited as well. However, with his release, he was

finally able to utilize his strength to its maximum, and it did not take long for him to fully devour the soul.

Boom!

Gradually, dark, ominous clouds began gathering in the sky.

Vicious had successfully invoked his Leaving Aperture Ordeal as well.

Unlike the Golden Origin Cauldron, even though Vicious had lost his memory, he was still an old monster who had lived for countless years. As fearsome as the Leaving Aperture Ordeal was, he was able to clear it as if it was a mere walk in the park.

Just like the Golden Origin Cauldron though, he also underwent three consecutive lightning strikes, and his cultivation rose all the way to Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage before gradually sliding to a halt.

The Qingtian Emperor was ultimately only a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage soul oracle. Even though his soul harnessed an incredible amount of energy in it, it was only sufficient for Vicious to reach Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage.

Seeing that Vicious had succeeded, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. “Good, rest up well. I’ll be bringing you to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows in two days, so make sure that you are in your peak condition to deal with the other Vicious by then.”

Now that he had two Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage experts protecting him, he was in a much safer position than before. On top of that, he also possessed substantial strength himself after achieving a breakthrough to Saint 3-dan Embryonic Soul realm. As long as the Vicious in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows was not beyond the Leaving Aperture realm, he would be able to deal with the other party without much trouble.

“Alright, time to return to the Combat Master Hall.” Sending Vicious back into the Book of Heaven’s Path, Zhang Xuan flew to the Combat Master Hall.

All in all, his trip out had only taken around eight hours in total, but his fighting prowess and trump cards had increased significantly.

Currently, the combat masters from the other three Combat Master Halls were in an intensive exchange with the Xuanxuan Faction, and they were currently negotiating for a long-term alliance.

Zhang Xuan decided not to interfere in the matter, allowing the others to sort it out among themselves. Just as he was about to find Hall Master Xing to discuss the matter about heading to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, he suddenly saw Yu Fei-er flying over.

“Zhang shi, Qiqi has left Qingyuan City!”

“She has left?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback. “Where did she go?”

It was just earlier in the afternoon that she had asked him to accompany her for an entire day, and he had even spent two hours guiding her on pill forging. Why would she suddenly leave?

“I’m not too sure either!” Yu Fei-er shook her head.

“Did she say anything?” Zhang Xuan asked. Even if he had rejected Luo Qiqi, the latter was not the sort to leave without saying farewell. Could something have happened to her?

“She said that she had some matters at home to attend to, so she needed to leave for the time being,” Yu Fei-er replied.

“Some matters at home to attend to?”

“Un. I saw the introduction letter she submitted when applying to the Master Teacher Academy. She was introduced by the Baiyuan royal family, so I figure that she’s the princess of the Baiyuan Empire. I heard a few days earlier that there has been some unrest in the Baiyuan Empire, and several members of the royal family have been injured. Perhaps she has left to resolve the issue!” Yu Fei-er said.

“Baiyuan Empire...” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding.

He seemed to have recalled someone saying that Luo Qiqi was the princess of some empire back when he first met her.

Baiyuan Empire was a Tier-1 Empire too. While it was significantly stronger than the Hongyuan Empire, it still paled greatly in comparison to the Qingyuan Empire.

Noticing Zhang Xuan's worry, Yu Fei-er said, "The Baiyuan Empire is just a Tier-1 Empire, so their strongest power should be at Saint 1-dan pinnacle. Considering that Qiqi is a Saint 2-dan cultivator, she shouldn't have any problem suppressing the unrest there."

"Un." Zhang Xuan nodded.

With Luo Qiqi's recent rise in cultivation, it would be easy for her to deal with the unrest in her homeland.

Just that, the recent consecutive departures of his students did leave him feeling slightly down within.

Yu Fei-er hesitated for a moment before speaking. "Zhang shi. To be honest with you, I intend to return to the Hongyuan Empire soon, too."

"You are leaving, too?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Yes. I have thought about many things over the past few hours, and I have come to a realization. You are a dragon who will eventually ascend to great heights; not even the Qingyuan Empire nor even the Empire Alliance will be big enough for you to fully spread your wings. Only a person like the little princess from the Luo Clan will be worthy of being by your side," Yu Fei-er said with downcast eyes.

"I am only an insignificant princess from a Tier-1 Empire, so it's indeed about time for me to stop my delusions. Rather than pursuing an impossible goal, I might as well focus my attention on my cultivation. Perhaps one day, I can reach a height where I could make you spare a glance at me too..."

She had always been a decisive person, and since she had made her decision, she would not hesitate in carrying it out.

Over the half a year she had been with Zhang Xuan, deep inside her heart, she had already realized that it was just a

matter of time before he became someone completely out of her reach.

Watching as the distance between them grew bigger and bigger, she felt more and more anxious and apprehensive. It was not too long ago that he had been weaker than her, but before she could truly grasp it, he had already become a person far nobler and stronger than her.

Rather than chasing behind him anxiously and allowing panic to gradually consume her, perhaps it would be much better if she took her leave and calmed down first.

“This...” Not expecting Yu Fei-er to come to a decision so quickly, Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding. “I understand. Take care of yourself.”

Even with his state of mind, he was still unable to fully comprehend and resolve the dilemma of love. From his feelings for Luo Ruoxin, he could tell how difficult it was for a person to give up one that they liked. In fact, it was due to his reluctance to lose Luo Ruoxin that he was so motivated to push himself to his limits.

Yet, within just a few hours, Yu Fei-er had been able to sort out her feelings and sever whatever sentiments she had for him. From this perspective, she was indeed a courageous individual.

Most likely, she would become a very capable monarch, possibly achieving accomplishments far exceeding those of her father, Yu Shenqing.

“Zhang shi, farewell.” With a light smile, Yu Fei-er turned around and left.

Just like her arrival, she left without any hesitation as well.

It seemed like she could see through Zhang Xuan’s determination as well. She knew that Zhang Xuan’s heart was only big enough to house the little princess of the Luo Clan, and her persistence would only become a nuisance to him. Since that was the case, perhaps leaving was the best decision. At the very least, she would be able to leave behind a good impression in his mind.

Leaving the Combat Master Hall, Yu Fei-er turned around to gaze at the majestic building behind her as she clenched her fists tightly in agitation. Qiqi probably has the same thoughts in mind as me. Dealing with the affairs back home is one matter, but she probably doesn't know how she can face Zhang shi after her rejection either. Nevertheless, I should still hasten my footsteps so as to not lag behind her.

She and Luo Qiqi were both extremely prideful people. It had not been easy for them to find someone whom they loved, but the both of them had ended up being rejected together. It was inevitable that they would find this hard to swallow.

If we just followed behind you and accepted your guidance and generosity, even if we eventually caught up with you, we would not be able to harbor any intentions toward you anymore.

Indeed, we might be unworthy of you now, but we'll continue working hard! Eventually, with our own strength, we will climb to a height where we will be qualified to stand beside you!

This shall be my resolve, as well as my pride!

1209 Heading to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows

Zhang Xuan could see through Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er's thoughts, but as he already had someone that he loved, he did not want to get involved with anyone else. While it was inevitable that they would be depressed for a period of time, this was at least better than prolonging their pain.

Often, hesitation and indecisiveness were what hurt others the most in a relationship.

After watching Yu Fei-er depart, Zhang Xuan stood quietly for a moment to calm down his vexed mind before heading to look for Hall Master Xing.

What was more important at the moment was to resolve the issue with Vicious. Otherwise, if they let that fellow be, it was only a matter of time before a calamity befell the Qingyuan Empire. Many master teachers would lose their lives, and even Zhang Xuan would be placed in a deeply precarious position.

After all, as a Celestial Master Teacher, his significance was simply too great to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. Even if Vicious was trapped at the moment and could not make a move himself, as long as he leaked the news, Zhang Xuan's good days would be over, and he would be forced into an endless game of hide-and-seek.

Upon hearing the story from Zhang Xuan, Hall Master Xing replied with a resolute gaze, "Our Combat Master Hall is a part of the Master Teacher Pavilion, so there's no way we can stay out of this! Zhang shi, I'll head to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows with you!"

Given that an Otherworldly Demon actually dared make a move against the Master Teacher Pavilion, as the head of the

Combat Master Hall, it was his responsibility to step up and vanquish that Otherworldly Demon!

“Alright. It’ll suffice to bring two of your strongest subordinates along. It’ll be best for our expedition team to not be too big, or else we will catch the enemy’s attention easily. If the enemy notices our presence and guards against us, it’ll make our mission more difficult than ever,” Zhang Xuan said.

As an existence who had rivaled Kong shi in the past, Vicious was an opponent who they could not afford to underestimate. They might still stand a chance against him if they caught him off guard, but it would be a different story if he anticipated their arrival and made preparations to deal with them.

Even if Vicious had fallen from his former glory, the knowledge and experience he had accumulated over countless years were still far beyond theirs. The slightest carelessness against such an opponent could very well cost them their lives.

“I understand.” Knowing how grave the matter was, Hall Master Xing nodded before taking his leave to make preparations.

Not too long later, Hall Master Xing appeared once more with Division Head Liao of the Heart Division and Division Head Wei of the Inner Breath Division behind him.

“They are the ones who started to cultivate the Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra the earliest, so their mental resilience could be considered the strongest within the Combat Master Hall at the moment. If the other party is truly a soul oracle who specializes in soul arts, they will be the best candidates to bring with us for the expedition!” Hall Master Xing said.

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Soul oracles were skilled in confounding the soul, producing illusions and the sort to incapacitate one. Those with stronger mental resilience would be in a significantly safer position.

As the head of the Heart Division, there was no doubt about Division Head Liao’s mental resilience. On the other hand, Division Head Wei was one of the first few to have learned the revised Vitreous Heart Tempering Sutra that Zhang Xuan had

given to the Combat Master Hall, and his mental resilience had been reinforced significantly. Furthermore, the fighting prowess of the duo was second only to Hall Master Xing, so they were indeed the ideal candidates to fight against Vicious.

Zhang Xuan looked at them grimly. “This expedition to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows will be very dangerous. Our opponent possesses means far beyond our imagination, and there’s a good chance that you might not return alive. Even so, are you still willing to follow us there?”

Division Head Wei and Division Head Liao replied without any hesitation.

“Principal Zhang, we know that.”

“The purpose behind the creation of the Combat Master Hall is to deal with potential threats that humanity may face on the frontlines. As long as we are able to protect our brethren, death is nothing to fear!”

Seeing the resolve that the both of them had, Zhang Xuan nodded in approval. “Well said! Alright, let’s head to the Master Teacher Pavilion to liaise with Wu shi.”

Thus, the four of them began making their way over to the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Upon arriving at the Master Teacher Pavilion, Zhang Xuan saw that Wu shi had also prepared four personnel to follow them to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows. Three of them were 7-star pinnacle master teachers, old elders who had been in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion since a very long time ago, so their loyalty was indubitable. The last one was surprisingly a familiar face—Zhang Jiuxiao.

“Jiuxiao has been to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows before, and he entered the Ghost Cavern as well. I believe that the hiding place of the mastermind behind the Qingtian Emperor is likely related to that mysterious place, so I think that it would be good to have him lead the way for us,” Wu shi said.

“This...” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding.

There was not much about Vicious in the Qingtian Emperor's memory, and it had not been too detailed either. It was not due to the lacking ability of his Soul Search but because Vicious was a highly capable soul oracle as well, and he had erased the Qingtian Emperor's memory about him in advance in case a mishap happened.

As such, the information that Zhang Xuan had of Vicious was not complete.

Since Zhang Jiuxiao had been to the Ghost Cavern before, it would be for the best if he could lead them there.

Zhang Jiuxiao turned to look at Zhang Xuan and said with determination, "Zhang shi, I know that we had some conflicts in the past, but this matter concerns the future of mankind. As fellow master teachers, I hope that we can put our differences aside and work together on this matter."

Bewildered by Zhang Jiuxiao's words, Zhang Xuan replied in a daze, "My thoughts exactly..."

Due the affairs concerning Luo Ruoxin, he had inevitably become a little prejudiced against the Zhang Clan, thinking that it was a snobbish and domineering clan that paid no heed to the feelings of others. However, seeing how Zhang Jiuxiao was willing to put aside their personal grudges during a crucial moment like this, his opinion of the Zhang Clan could not help but change slightly for the better.

Just as Zhang Xuan was still harboring such thoughts in his mind, the eyebrows of the young man before him shot up as he continued. "You might appear to be an insurmountable wall before me at the moment, but it'll only be a matter of time before I surpass you. I'll have you know that I, Zhang Jiuxiao, am a true genius!"

"Surpass me?" Once again, Zhang Xuan did not expect Zhang Jiuxiao to have such thoughts in mind. He shook his head helplessly and said, "Whatever pleases you..."

Surpass him?

Perhaps there might really be geniuses in the world who were capable of pulling it off, but without a doubt, the young man

before him was not one of such people.

Be it in terms of state of mind, fighting prowess, supporting occupations... Forget it, he could probably list on till the end of time. As a human, it was still good to have dreams, no matter how implausible they were.

“Since everyone is here, let’s set off!”

After confirming the personnel for their expedition, Wu shi found the strongest aerial saint beast in the Master Teacher Pavilion and had everyone step aboard it. Before long, they were already on their way to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows.

The Marshlands of the Northern Meadows was slightly north of the Northern Meadows City, roughly several million li away from Qingyuan City. Even though the aerial saint beast they were riding on had already reached Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, it would still take around six days before they arrived at their destination.

Seated in the wooden hut at the back of the saint beast, Zhang Xuan took out a few pills and passed them around. “Here are some pills that I have forged specially for this expedition. When we arrive at the marshlands, make sure to swallow one. It’ll grant you immunity to whatever poison we will encounter there, and it will help to prevent any soul oracles from possessing your body.”

All in all, including him, there were nine people in the expedition to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows. Even though their fighting prowess was ranked at the very top of Qingyuan City, considering that it was Vicious that they were going to be dealing with, it would not hurt to be prepared.

“Yes!”

The crowd took the pills and carefully placed them into their storage rings. The old adage always holds true—better safe than sorry.

“The collaborative formation used by the Combat Master Hall isn’t too bad, flexible in terms of numbers, executable with any number of combat masters. However, it’s a pity that it has

quite a few flaws in it. Thus, I improved it a little earlier, and I have jotted down the formula in this book. Look through it quickly and learn it well.” Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist once more to take out a book before passing it over.

Most combat masters and master teachers that were associated with a Combat Master Hall or Master Teacher Pavilion would practice a collaborative formation of some kind. To the eyes of ordinary cultivators, their collaborative formation was already plenty formidable, but to Zhang Xuan, it was filled with so many horrendous flaws that he could barely bring himself to look at it without cringing. Thus, he made use of the time on the aerial saint beast to quickly improve on it.

“You improved our Combat Master Hall’s collaborative formation?” Hall Master Xing and Division Head Liao turned to Zhang Xuan with widened eyes.

They quickly took the book from Zhang Xuan to browse through it, and it did not take long for their eyes to redden in excitement and their breathing to hasten in agitation.

The collaborative formation of their Combat Master Hall had been refined by many predecessors, and it had long reached a bottleneck where it would be hard for any change to generate a net improvement in it. Yet, after seeing the improved formation that Zhang Xuan had written down, they realized that they had only been seeing the tip of the iceberg all along!

They swiftly browsed through the collaborative formation and memorized it.

After which, Zhang Jiuxiao also took a look at the improved collaborative formation, and his face gradually turned paler and paler. Eventually, all the emotions bubbling within him were released with a helpless shake of his head.

It seemed like there was no way he could match up to the young man before him in the field of formations. He would just have to find another field to compete against the young man in.

Stroking his chest to alleviate the suffocating sensation there, Zhang Jiuxiao consoled himself. Even the most formidable

genius will have his flaws. There's no such thing a perfect man in the world, so he's bound to have a weakness, too. With sufficient time, I'll eventually find it!

Just as he was about to begin learning the collaborative formation too, Zhang Xuan suddenly turned to him and asked, "Brother Zhang, you are from the Zhang Clan, right? I happen to have a question to ask of you."

"Zhang shi, feel free to speak."

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before asking, "I have heard rumors that there's an unparalleled prodigy in your Zhang Clan who possesses an exceptionally pure bloodline, may I know if that's true?"

As the saying goes, 'Know thy self, know thy enemy. A thousand battles, a thousand victories!'

Since Zhang Jiuxiao was from the Zhang Clan, this was a good opportunity for him to listen into the affairs of the rumored genius of the Zhang Clan so that he could make some preparations in advance to deal with him.

"I am from a side family in the Zhang Clan, so I am not qualified to interfere or learn of the affairs concerning the main family. However, I have heard of the little prodigy you spoke about as well. If I'm not mistaken, he should be twenty this year. The talent that he wields is so great that it is truly not an exaggeration to call it 'unparalleled'!"

Zhang Jiuxiao hesitated for a moment before adding, "But those are only things I have heard. I have never met the little prodigy before either."

The astounding phenomena that had happened along with the birth of the Zhang Clan's young master had caused a huge ruckus, making his existence common knowledge among those of the upper tier of the Master Teacher Continent. As such, it was not a big deal for him to speak of it to Zhang Xuan.

"You have never met the little prodigy before either?" Zhang Xuan asked with a perplexed frown.

“Indeed. To be honest, members of the side family like me don’t get many opportunities to interact with the members of the main family,” Zhang Jiuxiao said as he sighed deeply.

“I heard that the little prodigy of your Zhang Clan is engaged to the little princess of the Luo Clan. May I know if that matter is true too?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“That... I’m afraid that I don’t know much about the matter! The main family doesn’t allow members of the side family like me to probe too much into their affairs, and we aren’t allowed to speak of the matters in the clan lightly either.” Seemingly a little fearful of the Zhang Clan, Zhang Jiuxiao was visibly reluctant to linger too much on this topic.

“I see. Then, of the disciples of the main family you have seen, how does their talent compare to yours?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“How does their talent compare to me? I am just a mere ant before them. Even if I devote my entire life to cultivation, there’s still no way I’ll be able to catch up with them.” A bitter smile emerged on Zhang Jiuxiao face as he said these words.

He raised his gaze to look at Zhang Xuan before continuing. “Putting everything aside, Zhang shi, while it is highly possible that there’s no cultivator in the history of the Qingyuan Empire who possessed as much talent as you, compared to the disciples of the main family, I fear that you are still severely lacking!”

“I am still severely lacking?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up in disbelief.

As a practitioner of the Heaven’s Path Divine Art, while he dared not say that his rate of cultivation was fast, surely there should have been very few people in the world who would be able to match him. Were there truly people in the world whose talent surpassed even the might of the Heaven’s Path Divine Art?

“That’s right. Zhang shi, it’s not that I want to traumatize you, but the more formidable inner disciples are able to easily reach the Primordial Spirit realm without cultivating just by awakening their bloodline. With that high of a starting point, it

is truly a breeze for them to reach the Leaving Aperture realm or even higher! Against those monsters, there's no way ordinary cultivators like us stand a chance!" Zhang Jiuxiao said with a bitter smile.

The difference in talent from individual to individual sure was something frustrating and exasperating.

Taking the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe for example, every single one of them wielded the strength of a Transcendent Mortal from birth, and it was for this reason that mankind was at an inherently disadvantageous position against them.

Most inner disciples of Sage Clans were able to advance to heights that most ordinary cultivators dared not dream of just on the basis of their pure bloodline. Against such monsters, ordinary cultivators like them had no choice but to admit defeat.

"Awakening their bloodline? Does the improvement induced by the awakening of their bloodline depend on the purity of their bloodline?"

"That's right. In a sense, I guess you can say that this is similar to the case with saint beasts. The closer their bloodline to Ancient Beasts is, the greater the increment in their cultivation will be as a result of awakening their bloodline. It is on this foundation that the Sage Clans were able to remain the top powers on the Master Teacher Continent despite the passing of several dozen millenniums!" Zhang Jiuxiao replied.

"Does that mean your bloodline isn't pure?"

"To be honest with you, I can only be considered the side family of the side family, so there is no way the purity of my bloodline can be compared with that of the main family," Zhang Jiuxiao said awkwardly.

"If bloodline is that important, is there any way to purify one's bloodline or increase the tier of one's bloodline?" Zhang Xuan asked.

1210 Ji Tianxiong

“Purify one’s bloodline or increase the tier of one’s bloodline? How can there be something as convenient as that in the world?” Zhang Jiuxiao shook his head. “The purity of the bloodline of a Sage Clan offspring is determined at birth. In fact, there are many inner disciples who had the purity of their bloodlines verified even before their birth. Similar to unique constitutions, this is something innate. There are no external forces that can possibly change one’s constitution and bloodline easily.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan fell into deep thoughts.

As he had never come into the contact with the Sage Clans before, he wasn’t aware of many of their affairs. However, he did have two students with unique constitutions and one with a unique bloodline.

Zhao Ya and Wei Ruyan possessed the Pure Yin Body and the Innate Poison Body and Poison Soul Constitution respectively, and Yuan Tao possessed the Emperor’s Bloodline. These weren’t things which one could cultivate postnatally.

Just like how a tadpole could never evolve into a divine dragon no matter how hard it trained, there were simply some things in the world that couldn’t be achieved through hard work.

Otherwise, he would have long given Zheng Yang, Liu Yang, and the others with unique constitutions as well so as to enhance their rate of growth.

“I see. It seems like I have been taking this matter too lightly.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

With the experience of cleansing the bloodline of spirit beasts to stimulate their growth, he thought that the Sage Clans might have some kind of means similar to that as well. However, it seemed like there was no way there could be something that convenient in the world.

“While the bloodline from Sage Clans enables one to cultivate swiftly in the initial phase, allowing one to easily reach heights that most ordinary cultivators would never be able to reach, it comes with some flaws as well. For one, the bloodline will also limit one’s future potential, making it difficult for one to exceed the accomplishments of our ancestor! This is also the reason why most Sage Clans have focused on preserving their strength instead of pushing their way forward. It’s simply too difficult to reach greater heights due to the limitations of the bloodline...” Zhang Jiuxiao continued.

There were always two sides to everything.

Inheriting the bloodline of past Sages would allow one to cultivate swiftly in the earlier stages, as if propelled by a rocket. However, as the individual had heavily relied on the inheritance of their ancestor to climb to their current height, it would also be extremely difficult for them to forge their own path forward beyond their ancestor.

After asking for a while longer, Zhang Jiuxiao said everything that he was able to say. As for information that was confidential, his lips remained firmly sealed, refusing to speak a single word about it.

Knowing that this was the rule within the Zhang Clan, Zhang Xuan also chose not to probe any further either and put Zhang Jiuxiao in a spot.

While the other party had left out the most important information, Zhang Xuan still managed to gather quite a few critical intelligence. For one, it seemed like there was indeed an engagement between the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan, and just like what Mu shi had told him back then, the little prodigy of the Zhang Clan was a very mysterious and elusive figure. Nearly everyone had heard of his name, but somehow, it was as if not a single person had caught a glimpse of his shadow.

Nevertheless, based on Zhang Jiuxiao’s deductions, while that little prodigy was only twenty this year, it was highly likely that his cultivation had already reached Saint 7-dan!

While Zhang Jiuxiao hadn’t met the little prodigy, he did meet the other inner disciples of the Zhang Clan before. One of

them possessed an incredibly pure bloodline, and he was already at Saint 7-dan before he reached 30.

Considering how even he could reach such height, the little prodigy would surely be even more incredible than that!

“Saint 7-dan...” Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but feel deeply pressured.

The elder of the Luo Clan who had confronted him a few days back, Luo Chengxin, was at this cultivation realm as well.

Even without using any battle technique, the other party was able to render him completely powerless with just a mere thought, leaving him unable to retaliate at all. The difference in their strength was as if the gap between the heavens and earth.

“Beyond Primordial Spirit realm, the increment in every cultivation stage will be extraordinarily difficult. If I want to marry Luo Ruoxin openly, I’ll really have to try harder than that!” Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly.

Beyond Saint 4-dan, the advancement of every single cultivation stage demanded incredibly pure spiritual energy and superior talent. If he wanted to receive the Luo Clan’s approval, the least he could do was to attain strength that matched the Zhang Clan’s little prodigy.

If he couldn’t even defeat his ‘love rival’, how could he vie Luo Ruoxin from the other party’s hands?

“I really have to start cultivating now...”

Feeling deeply pressured, Zhang Xuan spent the next few days either cultivating or digesting the information in the books he had collected within his Library of Heaven’s Path.

His efforts weren’t wasted. Not only did he manage to further reinforce his cultivation, his comprehension of battle technique had also reached a new peak. He had spent the majority of his time studying the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel left behind by Ancient Sage Qiu Wu, and it had granted him a greater grasp over the laws of space. While he was only at Embryonic Soul realm, he was already able to

execute the Spatial Seal which only Leaving Aperture realm cultivators were capable of pulling off!

Once executed, he would be able to leave everyone within a five-meter radius around him feeling as if they were treading through a marsh, significantly reducing their strength and speed. Within this area, he was confident that he would be able to subdue even Hall Master Xing with a single finger, let alone Wu Shi and the others.

“However, this is mainly due to the superior strength of my Origin Soul and zhenqi. Ultimately, my grasp over the laws of space is still a little too weak. However, I’m still some distance away from fully compiling the 2-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel.” Knowing that he still had much room for improvement, Zhang Xuan didn’t get conceited at his newfound strength.

The Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel could be divided into 5 dans. Even though he had managed to reach 1-dan pinnacle, he was still a distance away from reaching 2-dan.

Time passed in a flash for cultivators. Six days later, the aerial saint beast finally came to a halt above a massive city.

“Zhang Shi, this is the Northern Meadows City, also known as the Ji City. It is one of the more prosperous and powerful cities within Qingyuan Empire!” Wu Shi introduced.

Gazing downward, Zhang Xuan saw a massive city vaguely visible beyond the clouds. It was extremely large, making it impossible to overlook the entire city in a single sight. What was different about this city was the amazing number of high-rise buildings that they had, which reminded Zhang Xuan a little about the world he had been in previously.

Just from a swift glance, it could be seen that it was indeed quite a prosperous city. Even if it was nowhere on par with Qingyuan City, it was far grander than Hongyuan City and the others.

“The Marshlands of the Northern Meadows is an incredibly dangerous territory to venture into. Its sky is filled with exceptionally powerful turbulent air currents, making it

impossible to enter it by flight. On the other hand, the ground was filled with all kinds of threats, ready to prey on the unknowing. As such, we need to find a guide familiar with the local terrain to bring us around. Otherwise, there's a good chance that we'll lose our life even before we manage to find the Ghost Cavern." Wu shi said.

"I understand." Zhang Xuan nodded.

Through reading books concerning the area, he had also gained some understanding of the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows as well.

Just like what Wu shi said, it was an extremely treacherous terrain. Even Primordial Spirit realm experts had to venture through it on foot, or else they would risk being torn to shreds by the turbulent air currents.

Without a guide to lead the way, they could very well fall into the traps that hunters had set up in the area, come under the encirclement of the regional saint beasts, or even step into a pit filled with lethal worms!

Considering the superior fighting prowess of their expedition team, these naturally didn't pose much of a threat to them. However, it would still impede their advancement, and the longer they spent roaming in the marshlands, the more likely that Vicious would notice their presence.

"The head of the Northern Meadows City Master Teacher Pavilion, Ji Tianxiong, is my good friend. He's a trustworthy person, and I have just sent a message to him a while back. He should be arriving very soon. I intend to have him bring us through the marshlands so as to spare us some trouble." Wu shi said.

"Ji Tianxiong? I have heard of him a well. He has spent a period of time in our Combat Master Hall, and his fighting prowess is really not bad!" Division Head Liao couldn't help but interject at this moment.

"Indeed! His Freezing Zhenqi spared with his Glacier Finger is capable of turning water into ice in an instant, and this capability is exceptionally useful and practical on marsh

terrains. With him leading the way, we should be able to overcome any danger easily!” Wu shi nodded, clearly deeply confident in his close friend.

While they were speaking, the crowd suddenly saw an elder flying in their direction.

Taking a close examination at the elder, Zhang Xuan noted that the other party had the appearance of one in his fifties, and he had a pair of incredibly sharp eyes that were filled with spirit and vigorous. At first impression, he seemed like an exceptionally keen individual.

His cultivation realm was at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, and he exuded an aura reminiscent of a snowy mountain. It was very apparent that he cultivated an ice-type cultivation technique.

Wu shi quickly welcomed the elder before ushering him into the wooden hut, “Everyone, this is the head of the Northern Meadows City Master Teacher Pavilion, Ji Tianxiong, Ji shi! Ji shi, this young man over here is Zhang Xuan, Zhang shi, and this is Hall Master Xing of the Combat Master Hall...”

He swiftly introduced everyone to one another.

Upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s name, Ji shi immediately bowed respectfully and said, “Ji Tianxiong pays respect to Zhang shi!”

Even though a distance of several million li sat between Qingyuan City and the Northern Meadows City, he had still heard news of Zhang Xuan’s pavilion crashing.

For an individual to successfully overcome an entire Master Teacher Pavilion, just this feat in itself made him a person worthy of respect.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony.” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile. “I believe Wu shi should have told you the reason behind our visit here.”

“Yes, Wu shi has already told me everything.” Ji shi nodded.

“That’s good. We intend to enter the depths of the marshlands to find the so-called Ghost Cavern, so we’ll require Ji shi’s

help in leading the way forward.” Zhang Xuan said.

“Regarding that... the Ghost Cavern is actually a peculiar existence in the marshlands. It has no fixed location. There are some who follow the directions given by those who have found it in the past, only to see that it was no longer there. I can only fathom the rough area it would be, but as for whether we’ll able to find it or not... I’m afraid that I can’t guarantee that!” Ji shi said.

While the Ghost Cavern was indeed in the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, it seemed like it wasn’t fixed to a location. Luck played a heavy role in determining whether one would be able to find it or not.

“I understand. You just have to bring us to the vicinity of where it usually appears. Zhang Jiuxiao, Zhang shi, over here has entered the Ghost Cavern once, so he might be able to find some clues to track it down.” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

“Alright!” Ji shi agreed.

The Ghost Cavern was a place which could temper one’s mental resilience. Every year, there would be many master teachers who would drop by the marshlands to try their luck. Some of them did succeed, but there were also those who vanished without a trace as well.

The previous time Zhang Jiuxiao had been in the marshlands, he had a guide to bring him around as well. The marshlands were rather similar to a desert, changing greatly with time. Even if one had visited the marshlands in the past, it would still be wiser to hire a guide to bring one around, or else one could very well end up losing his way.

“You have already flown for many days now, do you want to take a brief rest at our Master Teacher Pavilion first?” Ji shi offered.

“There’s no need for that. We’ll head over right now, or else more master teachers could possibly lose their lives!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand to turn down the other party’s kind gesture.

An additional day delayed for them meant an additional day for Vicious to strike. Considering that the lives of master teachers were on the line, they couldn't afford the luxury of time. In any case, as cultivators, they could recover their fatigue through cultivation, so they weren't in dire need for rest either.

"Very well, let's set off now then!" Ji shi nodded in agreement.

He swiftly pointed out a direction for the aerial saint beast, and it began making its way over to the marshlands.

The marshlands were located further up north of the Northern Meadows City. After roughly two hours of flight, the group was welcomed with the sight of a pitch black marshlands that seemed to stretch endlessly into the horizon, creating an illusion that it was connected with the sky.

"Let's alight here. The air currents ahead will be turbulent, and there are many dangerous fields in the sky as well. It would be a disaster if we were to accidentally drop into one of them, so there's no choice but to proceed ahead on foot." Ji shi explained as he instructed the aerial saint beast to land on the ground.

The danger of the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows lay not only on the ground but in the air as well. There were many peculiar fields in the air that one could potentially collide with when traveling above ground. The slightest carelessness could cause one to be devoured by it, placing one in great peril.

After alighting from the back of the aerial saint beasts, the group swiftly assessed the pitch-black marshlands right before them.

To be exact, the marshlands wasn't completely pitch-black. It was actually filled with scarlet flowers that rose above the marsh, reminiscent of lotus.

"The locals call those flowers Man-eating Lotuses. Don't underestimate them just because of their beautiful exterior, they are actually extremely dangerous plants. Most Transcendent Mortal cultivators would be unable to escape

from their clutches once caught!” Ji shi explained as he threw a stone toward a nearby lotus.

Huala!

As soon as the rock came into contact with the lotus, the latter immediately wrapped itself around the rock, reducing it to dust in an instant, as if some kind of unique power had devoured it.

“This...” Zhang Xuan’s eyelids shot up in astonishment.

If he hadn’t seen it with his own eyes, he would never believe that there would be such a plant in the world.

1211 Hall Master Xing's Leaving Aperture Ordeal

The Man-eating Lotus had devoured the energy swiftly, precisely, and accurately. Just like what Ji shi had said, it was indeed unlikely for ordinary Transcendent Mortal cultivators to be able to escape from their clutches.

“Other than the Man-eating Lotuses, there are also some unique poisonous worms that live within the marsh. Once bitten, one’s body will immediately be numbed, making it impossible for one to exert any strength. Unable to move, one will only continue to sink deeper and deeper into the marshlands, until one is reduced to white bones. There was even a year where a hundred thousand cultivators and master teachers had died here. As such, this area has been labeled as a forbidden zone for cultivators.” As Ji shi spoke, he took out a slice of cooked meat from his storage ring and tossed it into the marsh.

Initially, the cooked meat floated on top of the marsh. A moment later, a couple of black beetles suddenly dived out of the marsh and bit the meat. In the blink of an eye, the meat was reduced to a puddle of acid, as if it had been corroded by a very potent acid.

Upon seeing this sight, the faces of the group turned extremely awful.

They had heard rumors about how treacherous the marshlands was, but they hadn’t thought that it would actually be so fearsome. Even as Primordial Spirit realm cultivators, they still couldn’t help but feel their bodies turning cold in apprehension.

“However, there’s no need to worry. As treacherous as the marshlands are, there is a way to pass through it safely. There are some plots of land that float above the marsh, and they form something similar to a suspension bridge. As long as we

are able to find these plots of land, we will be able to pass through the marshlands without much trouble!” Ji shi said with a smile.

After saying those words, he leaped ten meters forward and stepped on solid ground on the marshlands. “Everyone, follow me closely. Make sure not to step wrongly or lag behind!”

Following which, he continued to leap forward. In just a dozen steps, he had already covered a distance of several hundred meters.

Zhang Xuan examined the area where Ji shi had landed carefully, and while it was nearly indiscernible, there was indeed a slight difference in the color as compared to the rest of the marsh. It was slightly tinged green, and while there were no plants growing in the area, it gave a feeling of fertility, different from the desolate aura that the rest of the marsh was emanating.

“It doesn’t seem likely for these plots of land to have been formed naturally. Most likely, they have been artificially constructed...”

Zhang Xuan had no reason how the marshland came to be, but its formation should have resulted in the ground in the area to sink as a whole. For there plots of land where one could stand on to surface from the marsh, the chances were that they were man-made.

“Let’s move on!”

Deciding not to think too deep into the matter, the group had the aerial saint beast to wait for them on the spot while they leaped onto the plots of land as well, following closely behind Ji shi.

As Saint realm experts, their memory far surpassed ordinary humans. Even though they had only briefly seen Ji shi’s movements, they were still able to memorize his movements clearly and emulate them without any problem.

“Ji shi, I heard that there are some native saint beasts that live within the marsh. I am curious to know how do they survive in such an environment?”

Considering how poor the environment was, it was truly difficult to comprehend how any saint beasts could possibly grow in the marsh.

“Nearer to the center of the marsh, there will be some ‘islands’, the largest of them being roughly several kilometers in diameter, which would produce unique saint herbs and ores due to the unique environment of the marsh. As such, there are quite a few saint beasts who would claim those territories for their own in order to dominate those resources. Often, there are some cultivators who unwittingly enter those areas, only to end up killed.”

At which, Ji shi suddenly gestured forward and said, “Speak of the devil. There’s one of those right in front of us!”

The crowd turned over, and as expected, they saw a significantly larger plot of land right in front of them. Lush with greenery, it resembled a remote island in the midst of an ocean. It was filled with all kinds of plants, and from time to time, they would even see some birds flying in the area.

Proceeding forward, they finally arrived on the island after a ten-minute journey.

The island was roughly five hundred meters in radius, and there was a small hill in the middle of it. It floated above the marsh as if an upside-down tortoise shell.

“We should hurry forward. It’ll be best if we could reach the center of the marsh before night time. The marsh gets even more frightening at night!” Seeing that the crowd’s attention was wandering around the island, Ji shi urged anxiously.

“Un.” Taking a glance at the gradually falling sun, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement. “Let’s proceed forward.”

While there was still some time before sunset, the marshlands were simply too huge, and they couldn’t fly in the area either. Even if they were to rush at full speed ahead, it would probably take them two to four hours before reaching the middle of the marsh, so they couldn’t afford to waste any time.

With Ji shi’s deep understanding of the marsh, the group managed to avoid most of the pitfalls along the way. They

managed to successfully circumvent the territories of the saint beasts, as well as some of the more treacherous terrain in the marsh, thus saving much time. Four hours later, they were finally nearing the center of the marshlands.

On the way forward, they encountered quite a few cultivators, but the latter chose to take a detour around them.

While the group didn't don on their master teacher robe in order to conceal their identities, the incredible fighting prowess of the group was more than sufficient to strike fear in the hearts of others. Unlike in the city, where the presence of the Master Teacher Pavilion would make others think twice before carrying out any malicious acts, those in the marshlands had no qualms with killing other cultivators to steal their items. In fact, such actions were commonplace here.

Furthermore, if the corpses were to be disposed into the marshlands, it would be difficult for the regional Master Teacher Pavilion to investigate the matter and make an accurate judgement. As such, it was considered as a lawless zone, and in such an area, it went without saying that strength reigned supreme.

After proceeding forward another hour, just when the sun was starting to disappear at the western horizon, Ji shi lifted his finger and pointed, "The island just ahead of us is the very center of the entire marshlands. Based on most of the rumors, the Ghost Cavern tend to appear there the most often, so it'll be good to start out search there before gradually spreading out. Other than that, I don't really have a better idea in mind."

Following his finger, the crowd saw a massive island of roughly eight kilometers in diameter. The land was extremely lush, filled with greenery of all sorts, and there was a towering mountain in the middle of the island. Looking at it from afar, it seemed like a small city.

"Let's head over!"

Before long, the crowd stepped onto the island.

The first thing that they noticed about the island was the astonishingly high concentration of spiritual energy in the

area. It felt refreshing and energizing to be in an environment so rich in spiritual energy.

“No wonder why saint beasts would want to live here! Indeed, if one were to cultivate here, one could probably achieve twice as much with the same amount of effort!” Zhang Xuan noted.

It seemed like the island was a natural blessed land for cultivation. Those who cultivate for the long-term here would be able to easily surpass those who lived outside.

As the saying goes, opportunities go hand in hand with risk. Despite knowing the dangers lurking within the marsh, the saint beasts still determinedly chose to reside in the area in hopes that they would be able to attain greater strength.

“Alright, we’ll be resting here tonight. It’ll be best for us to only start our search for the Ghost Cavern tomorrow morning as venomous worms and the sort will emerge from the marsh at night. Being too hasty in the moment will only slow us down!”

As Ji shi spoke, he flicked his wrist and took out a gourd of high-tier saint beast urine before pouring them in the surroundings. This served as a deterrent to venomous worms and the sort from coming around them.

Having seen many things on their journey here, the remaining members of the group had also seen how terrifying the marsh was with their own eyes. Not saying anything much, they took out the rations they had prepared beforehand and began eating.

Fine wine accompanied with roasted meat, it could be said to be a considerably bountiful dinner.

After eating, Zhang Xuan didn’t go to rest. Instead, he crossed his legs and continued to cultivate.

He drove his Heaven’s Path zhenqi through his body to temper his Embryonic Soul again and again, trying to push for a metamorphosis as soon as possible.

While Zhang Xuan was at the Combat Master Hall, he had collected all of the books in the Guardian Division to form another Heaven’s Path Golden Body, and its effects weren’t too bad. Even if his physical body wasn’t on par with the

Golden Origin Cauldron yet, it definitely didn't pale too much from the latter.

“Hm?”

After cultivating for some time, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt a surge of energy pulsating not too far away. Turning his head over, he saw Hall Master Xing's face abruptly reddening, as if he was unable to suppress the energy rampaging within his body.

“What's wrong?” Alarmed, Zhang Xuan quickly walked over and asked.

The others were also jolted awake from their cultivation, and they quickly walked over to check on Hall Master Xing out of worry.

“Principal Zhang, I think that my Leaving Aperture Ordeal might be coming very soon...” Hall Master Xing replied with a pale face.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan frowned.

After he had repaired the large rift in Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit, the latter swiftly made a breakthrough from Half-Leaving Aperture realm to Quasi Leaving Aperture realm. Under normal circumstances, he should be able to determine when he wanted to summon the Leaving Aperture Ordeal whenever he wanted, so why would it suddenly trigger at this moment?

“What happened?” Knowing that there was something doubtful about the situation, Zhang Xuan asked.

“I'm not too sure either. I was cultivating for a while earlier when I suddenly felt energy overflowing from my Primordial Spirit, attempting to overcome my bottleneck. I tried suppressing it, but I couldn't hold it in...”

At this moment, Hall Master Xing's zhenqi suddenly burst out from his pores, and soon after, ominous clouds began gathering above everyone's head. The lightning ordeal was about to fall.

“Don’t worry, it’s just the Leaving Aperture Ordeal. With your strength, you’ll surely be able to overcome it easily!” Gesturing for everyone else to evacuate from the area where the lightning ordeal would fall, Zhang Xuan encouraged with a smile.

As the head of the Combat Master Hall, Hall Master Xing’s physical resilience far exceeded that of ordinary cultivators. It was only because Qingyuan City had been in turmoil for the past few days that he chose to keep putting off his Leaving Aperture Ordeal, especially given the fact that it would take some time for him to recover from the overwhelming damage sustained from the lightning ordeal. Otherwise, he shouldn’t have any trouble clearing the lightning ordeal.

Boom!

While Zhang Xuan was speaking, a streak of lightning suddenly fell from the sky.

Hu la!

Hall Master Xing drew out his Primordial Spirit and dove it straight toward the lightning.

Tzzzzzz!

As soon as his Primordial Spirit collided with the lightning, it immediately began shrinking as if cotton in the face of fire. A deep roar resounded deafeningly in the air, reflecting the immense pain that Hall Master Xing was going through.

“What?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up in alarm.

“The Leaving Aperture Ordeal is incredibly dangerous, shouldn’t he keep his Primordial Spirit within his body so as to share the burden of the lightning ordeal with it? Why did he draw his Primordial Spirit out to meet it face on? That’s too reckless, too dangerous!” Wu shi exclaimed in horror.

The lightning of the Leaving Aperture Ordeal could temper one’s Primordial Spirit, but the devastating might of it was not one which any Primordial Spirit could withstand by itself. As such, most cultivators would choose to use their physical body to ward off most of the lightning, absorbing only a small portion of it into their Primordial Spirit... And yet, Hall

Master Xing actually sent his Primordial Spirit straight into the lightning. That was practically no different from suicide!

“No, something is wrong. It doesn’t seem like he’s doing it voluntarily...” Activating his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

“He isn’t doing it voluntarily? You mean that... he’s under control?”

The crowd couldn’t really comprehend what Zhang Xuan meant.

“It seems like a soul oracle has made a move on him. Knowing that he’s on a verge of a breakthrough, the soul oracle forcefully manipulated his Primordial Spirit while he was cultivating to draw down the lightning ordeal before dragging his Primordial Spirit out, wanting to use the Power of Lightning to eradicate first. Or perhaps, he intends to make use of this incident to wear us down while attempting to save him...” Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed in fury.

“Soul oracle? Does that mean that we have been noticed?” Wu Shi’s face darkened.

They had swapped out of their master teacher robe and rushed here without any worry in order to get to the mastermind behind the Qingtian Emperor before the other party could get to them.

Yet, who could have known that the other party would still be the one to make the pre-emptive blow?

“That seems to be the case.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Turning his gaze back to the sky, he saw Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit gradually growing smaller and smaller under the devastating might of the lightning, seemingly about to dissipate at anytime soon.

As powerful as Hall Master Xing was, given that Primordial Spirits were innately weak against the Power of Lightning, and he wasn’t fully prepared to face the Leaving Aperture Ordeal when it descended, the odds were extremely against his favor.

“At this rate, Hall Master Xing really might just die!” Division Head Wei and Division Head Liao watched the situation in anxiety, not knowing what they could do.

Hall Master Xing was not only their leader but an old friend whom they had known for several centuries now. They couldn't bear to watch their old friend being burned to crisp with their own eyes!

“Principal Zhang, do you have a way to save him?”

The duo hurriedly turned to Zhang Xuan desperately, hoping that he would have a way to resolve the situation.

If there was anyone here who could possibly save Hall Master Xing, it could only be the young man before them.

“Rest assured, I'll surely save him!”

Even if the duo didn't say anything, Zhang Xuan would still save Hall Master Xing. With a sharp glint in his eyes, he examined the lightning ordeal before him closely with his Eye of Insight.

1212 The Emergence of the Ghost Cavern

Through his Eye of Insight, he could see the Power of Lightning swiftly grinding down Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit, swiftly pushing it toward dissipation. At this rate, Hall Master Xing didn't have much time left.

"There are many cultivators who have reached Quasi Leaving Aperture realm, but out of fear for the Power of Lightning, they dare not to summon their Leaving Aperture Ordeal down. Pavilion Master Gou is one such person. Going by this logic, it should be impossible for the Leaving Aperture Ordeal to fall on its own accord. It's likely that someone has interfered with Hall Master Xing's Primordial Spirit, thus giving rise to the current situation!" Zhang Xuan analyzed with a tight knit between his brows.

"There's no way to forcefully stop a lightning ordeal once it has started. Any attempt to interfere with the Leaving Aperture Ordeal will only make it grow stronger, thus putting the cultivator facing it in greater peril..." Ji shi remarked as he shook his head helplessly.

As a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert, he had read many books regarding the Leaving Aperture Ordeal, so he knew quite a bit about it as well.

This was the trial that the world put those who attempted to vie power from it through, and those who dared to cheat in the trial would have to face a greater lashback from the heavens.

"Indeed, this is really a dilemma." Zhang Xuan nodded grimly.

What was truly fearsome about the lightning ordeal was that no one would be able to interfere with it started, or else it would only grow stronger and stronger before eventually reaching an uncontrollable level. Take his Saint Ascension Ordeal for example, despite seeing how much danger he was in, Luo Ruoxin still held herself back from interfering,

knowing that any attempt to do so would only put him in greater danger.

Otherwise, Zhang Xuan would at least have dozens of methods to eradicate the lightning ordeal.

“If we don’t do anything soon, Hall Master Xing really will lose his life!” Division Head Liao urged anxiously.

“I know!” Zhang Xuan replied impatiently as he muttered ‘flaws’ in his mind, and a book materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

He swiftly flipped it open to take a look.

A moment later, he turned to Wu shi and said, “You are the only one who can save Hall Master Xing now.”

“Me?” Wu shi was taken aback.

“Is there anyone who has any Spirit Reinforcing Pill here?” Paying no heed to Wu shi’s bewilderment, Zhang Xuan turned to the crowd and asked.

“I have one here!” Division Head Liao rushed up and passed a jade bottle into Zhang Xuan’s hand.

Zhang Xuan immediately took out the pill from the bottle before placing it into Wu shi’s hands, “Swallow it.”

Wu shi looked at the pill in his hand hesitantly.

The Spirit Reinforcing Piill was a grade-7 pill that harnessed an immense amount of spiritual energy. Even as a Half-Leaving Aperture realm cultivator, if he were to consume it recklessly, there was good chance that he would be unable to control the massive accumulation of energy within his body and explode on the spot.

“I don’t have any time to explain. Just believe me and do it!” Zhang Xuan’s face darkened further upon seeing Wu shi’s hesitation.

“Yes!” Knowing that the young man before him wielded capabilities exceeding that of ordinary humans, Wu shi dared not to utter any nonsense. He quickly placed the pill into his mouth and swallowed it.

A moment later, he felt a furious surge of energy rampaging angrily within his body, threatening to burst his meridians apart.

“There are a few flaws in your cultivation technique. Once you correct them, you will be able to achieve a breakthrough on the spot...” Zhang Xuan’s voice began sounding melodiously in the air.

Before Wu shi could even process what was going on, he realized that the zhenqi in his body had already begun to move in accordance with the words spoken by the young man before him.

“This is... Impartation of Heaven’s Will? Is Zhang shi intending to resolve my flaws and have me achieve a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm on the spot?” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

Instructing him to swallow the Spirit Reinforcing Pill and resolving the flaws concerning his Primordial Spirit... No matter how slow he was, he would have to be a fool to still not understand what was going on.

Within moments, the zhenqi in his body had already fused together with the spiritual energy in the Spirit Reinforcing Pill, swiftly accumulating more and more.

Boom!

In less than three minutes, he broke through the bottleneck of his body, and Primordial Spirit which shared the same appearance as him emerged from his glabella.

“Go over!” Zhang Xuan instructed as he gave Wu shi’s Primordial Spirit a push on the back.

Before Wu shi could even process what had just happened, his Primordial Spirit was already fast on its way toward the Hall Master Xing’s lightning ordeal.

“This...” Watching as the fearsome streak of lightning swiftly enlarged before his eyes, Wu shi nearly fainted on the spot.

He had only achieved a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm, and he hadn’t even had time to reinforce his cultivation

when he was suddenly forcefully pushed toward the lightning ordeal... Could it be that Zhang shi thought that it would be a pity for Hall Master Xing to depart alone, so he wanted to send him down as a companion for Hall Master Xing to walk the final journey with him?

“Quick, push Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit back into his body!” Seeing that Wu shi was still dazing off in midair, Zhang Xuan bellowed anxiously.

“Push his Primordial Spirit back?” Wu shi was stunned for a moment before realizing that even though he had stepped into the area of the lightning ordeal, he wasn’t affected by the Power of Lightning.

Heaving a sigh of relief, he hurriedly grabbed forward to push Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit down.

Huala!

Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit flew straight back into his body.

Hu!

Nourished by his body, Hall Master Xing’s Primordial Spirit finally stabilized from its previous injured condition. As powerful as the lightning ordeal was, it wasn’t sufficient to faze Hall Master Xing’s incredibly resilient body in the short run.

“This... What’s going on? Isn’t interfering with the Lightning Ordeal of another a huge taboo? How could they still be fine?”

Taking the scene into sight, the crowd was utterly dumbstruck by what they were seeing.

Under normal circumstances, the Leaving Aperture Ordeal would have surely intensified as soon as one stepped into the perimeter of the lightning ordeal. So, how could nothing happen when Wu shi’s Primordial Spirit headed over to save Hall Master Xing?

“Who says that they are fine? Speak of the devil, here it comes...” Zhang Xuan shook his head grimly.

Hurriedly turning their gazes over, the crowd saw the swiftly dissipating ominous clouds in the air suddenly gathering together once more.

“Wu shi has barely reached Quasi Leaving Aperture realm, and as one who has to face a lightning ordeal himself, the lightning ordeal of others is unable to faze him. It’s through making use of this loophole that he was able to save Hall Master Xing successfully. However, this maneuver on his part brought him to the lightning ordeal’s notice, so his Leaving Aperture Ordeal would be falling very soon as well.” Zhang Xuan explained.

“He has to face a Leaving Aperture Ordeal too?”

The crowd nearly fainted on the spot.

What is the point of this then?!

To put another in danger in the midst of saving one, aren’t we returning back to the square one in the end?

“Wu shi, what are you waiting for? Hurry up and return to your body!” Oblivious to the shock of those around him, Zhang Xuan bellowed.

“Yes!”

Realizing that he had been noticed by the lightning ordeal as well, Wu shi’s body trembled in fear. He quickly turned around and retreated back into his body.

“Zhang shi, what should I do next?” Wu shi asked Zhang Xuan with his face pale in fright.

“These lightning clouds have gathered together in a rush after abruptly sensing your aura, so it wouldn’t be too strong. Furthermore, most of the Power of Lightning has already been absorbed by Hall Master Xing, so as long as you don’t face the lightning ordeal with your Primordial Spirit straight, you should be able to withstand it.” Zhang Xuan said.

Even though Wu shi had only just made a breakthrough, considering how his body had just been nourished by the Spirit Reinforcing Pill, and the flaws in his Primordial Spirit had just

been resolved, he should still be able to withstand the weakened lightning ordeal.

“Most of the Power of Lightning has been absorbed by Hall Master Xing? That’s good...” Hearing that, Wu shi heaved a sigh of relief.

Unfortunately, his relief didn’t last for too long.

A moment later, a flash of lightning descended on Wu shi.

Huala!

Every single strand of hair on Wu shi’s head immediately leaped up from the static lightning, as if alarmed by the might of the lightning. The astounding might of the lightning bolt nearly caused his Primordial Spirit to dissipate on the spot.

“... You call this ‘wouldn’t be too strong’? Why do I feel like it has gotten much stronger than before?” Wu shi roared in frenzy.

You told me that most of the Power of Lightning has already been absorbed by Hall Master Xing! How could the lightning bolt still be so powerful then?

In the midst of his frenzy, Wu shi heard the voice of a certain young man sounding sheepish not too far away, “Oh. My mistake. Calculation error... It seems like your involvement in Hall Master Xing’s Leaving Aperture Ordeal has caused your own Leaving Aperture Ordeal to intensify instead. However, there’s still no need for you to panic. Un, no need to panic at all. I have complete trust in your strength. You can do it! Fighting!”

“...” Wu shi.

To think that the young man before him would be such an unreliable person! Damn it!

How can you make me take such risk before confirming the matter? This is too much!

While Wu shi was filled with grudges against Zhang Xuan, the Power of Lightning swiftly accumulated in his body, leaving him with no spare attention to think about anything else

anymore. He quickly concentrated his mind into dealing with the Power of Lightning coursing through his body.

Huala!

But despite his efforts, the might of the lightning coursing through his body was simply too destructive. In just a moment, his Primordial Spirit had already been ravaged to the point of near dissipation.

At the same time, countless charred marks appeared throughout his body, and blood wouldn't stop flowing down the edges of his lips. It felt as if he would cave in at any moment and die.

"It's over..." Wu shi's face turned livid with despair.

He had just achieved a breakthrough, and he hadn't even reinforced his cultivation yet. There was no way he could face a powered up Leaving Aperture Ordeal in his current state.

Tzzzzzzzz!

Just when he thought that it was the end, he suddenly felt a surge of zhenqi hidden in the depths of his body suddenly surging forth, repairing his injuries at a visible rate.

This surge of zhenqi seemed to carry the authority of the heavens, and it was incredibly pure as well. It could even repair the damages on his Primordial Spirit with ease!

"This... Did Zhang shi leave this surge of zhenqi within my body?" Wu shi widened his eyes in astonishment.

He had verified with his own eyes Zhang Xuan's identity as a Celestial Master Teacher. Considering the mystical effects of the zhenqi, there was little doubt that it was the latter who left it in his body.

This would explain why the young man would instruct him to save Hall Master Xing without any hesitation. It seemed like he had prepared a hand in case something awry were to occur!

Hu!

In the blink of an eye, his Primordial Spirit and physical body had already recovered back to its peak. However, the Power of

Lightning coursing through his body was far from dying down yet.

Injury, recovery, injury, recovery...

It was just a short ten minutes, but Wu shi felt as if he had been to and fro the gates of hell several times within this short span of time.

Nevertheless, he had finally successfully cleared the Leaving Aperture Ordeal!

Opening his eyes once more, he saw that Hall Master Xing's lightning ordeal had also passed, and the ominous clouds had scattered, revealing a clear night sky once more.

Even though Hall Master Xing had started the Leaving Aperture realm on a shaky note, he was ultimately still the head of the Combat Master Hall, possessing capabilities far surpassing ordinary cultivators. While he had nearly died on several occasion, he managed to successfully withstand it with gritted teeth.

"Principal Zhang, thank you." Wu shi quickly walked up to Zhang Xuan and clasped his fist.

If not for the zhenqi the young man had left in his body, he would have indubitably succumbed to the lightning ordeal and lost his life.

While the process was extraordinarily excruciating, he still managed to leap two cultivation stages within a very short period of time, jumping from Half-Leaving Aperture realm to Leaving Aperture realm primary stage. In such a sense, the pain that he had been put through was worthwhile.

At this moment, however, he suddenly heard Zhang shi's telepathic voice sounding by his ears, "Don't speak anymore and feign a state of severe injury!"

Wu shi had no idea why Zhang Xuan would abruptly make such an instruction, but he knew that the latter would have his own reason for doing so. Thus, his body suddenly wobbled weakly before collapsing powerlessly to the ground, as if he had been sapped of all of his strength.

“Wu shi!” Alarmed, Zhang Jiuxiao rushed over.

With Zhang Jiuxiao’s support, Wu shi was barely able to get back onto his feet. Just as Wu shi was about to ask what Zhang Xuan was up to, the latter suddenly shouted loudly into the surroundings.

“It seems you have already known that we would come. Since that’s the case, why don’t you show yourself straight? I know that you want to kill me, and you know that I want to kill you as well. There’s no point wasting time playing hide-and-seek, don’t you think so?”

“Hide-and-seek? What’s that? More importantly, who is Principal talking to?” Wu shi was taken aback.

Wu shi wasn’t the only one who was surprised by Zhang Xuan’s abrupt actions. The remaining members of the group were perplexed as well.

They had swiftly scouted the island and scanned the area with their Spiritual Perception earlier and confirmed that there was no one in the area other than them. If there was truly someone in the area, there was no way that person could have managed to bypass the detection of their Spiritual Perception.

While the uncomprehending crowd was just about to ask about the matter, an eerie voice suddenly echoed in the air, “Hehehehe, as expected of Zhang shi. Formidable indeed, noticing my presence right after I played a small trick...”

Following which, another island slowly surfaced from the depths of the marsh.

“T-that... That is the Ghost Cavern!” Zhang Jiuxiao exclaimed with clenched fists.

1213 Encountering Inner Demons Once More

“This is...” Wu shi quickly turned to the island.

Despite being the vice head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, this was the first time he had seen the rumored Ghost Cavern.

It was a small island, roughly three kilometers in diameter. At the very center was a lake shaped like an eye, and it was impossible to see how deep it was just by looking at its surface. Bizarrely-shaped stones were scattered throughout the island.

Even though the island had surfaced from the marsh, it was as if some kind of mysterious power was shrouding it, preventing the slightest hint of mud from being visible on the ground. On the contrary, there was low-lying lush greenery to be seen all around.

The eerie voice sounded once more. “If you wish to kill me, come over! I’ll be hiding somewhere within. You can slowly take your time to find me; I’m in no hurry at all...”

Following which, a layer of mist seemed to suddenly drift into existence around the island, gradually shrouding it from view. It was as if the island would sink back into the marsh very soon.

“Let’s head over,” Zhang Xuan said as he began to make his way over.

However, before he could get to the other island, Division Head Liao abruptly stepped in his path to halt him. “We can’t go! It’s obvious that the enemy has come prepared. We were nearly done in even before we could enter the Ghost Cavern. If we really enter the Ghost Cavern, there will surely be plenty of traps that will come our way!”

Even someone of Hall Master Xing's strength had nearly been eradicated by the lightning ordeal due to the other party's schemes. If they stepped onto the island, there was no doubt that they would face countless traps, and chances were that one of the traps would claim their lives.

Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, "He already knows that we are going after him. If we don't head enter the Ghost Cavern now, he will only have more time to prepare, and that will put us in greater danger in the future!"

From the looks of it, it was apparent that Vicious had anticipated their arrival and made preparations beforehand. As such, there was no point delaying the matter any longer; it would not make a difference either way. In fact, the more time they wasted, the more time Vicious would have to kill more master teachers.

Since that was the case, it would be simpler if they barged in and got it over with.

Otherwise, once the Ghost Cavern descended into the marsh once more, they would not be able to do anything about Vicious anymore.

"But..."

Zhang Xuan was still shaking his head as he interjected, "If we do not enter the Ghost Cavern now, the enemy will just continue his attack. Rather than allow more innocent lives to be lost, we might as well head in to see what he's up to. Besides, if he really wanted to make a move against us, at least half of our group would have been dead by now!"

The enemy they were facing was Vicious, the legendary expert who had clashed directly with Kong shi back then!

Furthermore, it was apparent that the memory of the Vicious in the Ghost Cavern had recovered to a greater degree compared to the Vicious in his Book of Heaven's Path. Even though Zhang Xuan was able to withstand the other Vicious' soul arts, it was hard to say the same about the three Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle elders from the Master Teacher Pavilion.

In fact, it was also doubtful whether Division Head Wei and Division Head Liao would be able to withstand Vicious' soul arts or not.

Vicious inviting them into his lair instead of assaulting them head-on meant that he had some schemes in mind, and as risky as it might have been, this could have been their only opportunity to find out what Vicious was up to and bring him down!

Seeing Zhang Xuan insisting on the matter, Division Head Liao was a little conflicted. At this moment, he suddenly felt something hard in his hands. It was a wine gourd. At the same time, he heard a telepathic voice in his ears. "Give Hall Master Xing this wine."

"You want Hall Master Xing to drink wine?" Division Head Liao was taken aback.

Hall Master Xing had just been through the lightning ordeal, and there was not the slightest patch of un-charred skin on his body. In such circumstances, he should be fed with pills in order to hasten his recovery, and yet... wine?

Division Head Liao stared at the wine in his hands in a dilemma. At that moment, the feeble Wu shi suddenly walked over and bellowed deeply, "Hurry up and go!"

"Yes!" Hearing Wu shi agree with Zhang Xuan, Division Head Liao swiftly got to action. He pried open Hall Master Xing's mouth and poured the fine wine in.

A moment later, Hall Master Xing finally opened his eyes. Even though spirit had finally returned to his eyes, his movements were still dull with lethargy, similar to Wu shi.

"Since Principal Zhang has already said so, let's head in together. We have come as a group, so we should advance as one too," Hall Master Xing said.

With Division Head Wei's support, he struggled to his feet before wobbling his way over to Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan shot him a faint smile before leaping over to the other island, and the others quickly followed suit.

The little island was deathly silent, to the point where they could vaguely hear a deafening ring in their ears. It was as if there was some kind of formation that isolated them from the rest of the world. Wu shi and the others quickly scanned their surroundings as grimness seeped into their eyes.

“It seems like... a grade-8 formation!”

Even though the island was completely sealed, they found that they were unable to tell exactly what was wrong with it.

Without a doubt, the formation cast over the island was one that was on par with those they had encountered back at the Qiu Wu Palace.

A Grade-8 formation... Even though two members of their groups had just achieved a breakthrough to the Leaving Aperture realm, they were still far from matching a formation of that caliber.

Zhang Xuan nodded as well.

While he did not think that it would be easy for Vicious to kill them, given that they were already standing in the other party's territory, it would be unwise for them to let their guard down.

Vicious was an existence who had trapped even Kong shi back in his prime, so the means he had up his sleeve were bound to be frightening.

Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight and began assessing the island silently.

There was indeed a formation cast around the island, but it was not one intended for offense. Instead, its purpose was to float and conceal the island.

It seems like this land didn't float out of the marsh after all! Instead, it operates like a boat. Using the power of the formation, it floats above the marsh and roams around the area freely, appearing only before others when it wants to, Zhang Xuan thought.

Vicious needs to devour master teachers in order to regain his strength, so he intentionally spread the news regarding the abilities of the Ghost Cavern to draw cultivators and master teachers into the marshlands. Considering the treacherous

terrain of the marshlands, the high death toll in the region has not drawn the suspicion of others, and all he had to do was let off a few cultivators from time to time in order to further the legend...

Slowly, a complete picture formed in Zhang Xuan's mind.

Previously, he had heard that the Ghost Cavern could temper one's mental resilience, and countless master teachers and cultivators came to the marshlands in the hope of a chance encounter with it. However, from the looks of it, it seemed like most of those who managed to find the Ghost Cavern end up becoming Vicious' nourishment.

On the other hand, the few successful cases who had their mental resilience significantly boosted would become living advertisements for the Ghost Cavern, drawing in a steady supply of cultivators and master teachers for him.

Birds die for food; humans die for wealth. Greed was an innate nature for all living beings, and master teachers were no exception to the rule.

As expected of an old monster who has lived for countless years, his means are far more formidable than that finger...

The finger Vicious that Zhang Xuan had subdued in the Cloudmist Ridge had subordinated the spirit beasts and saint beasts in the area to provide him with the nourishment required for his recovery. While he had managed to devour a substantial number of master teachers over the years, the numbers could not begin to compare with this one.

Let me see what is within the lake that has driven so many master teachers into a frenzy to find it... Zhang Xuan shook his head as he began making his way over to the lake.

"Zhang shi, be careful!" Seeing Zhang Xuan walk toward the lake, Zhang Jiuxiao hurried over to advise him. "The lake reflects a person's inner desires and magnifies them. It'll be difficult to escape from it once you are caught!"

He had cultivated here for a month, so he was extremely familiar with the nature of the lake.

It reflected one's inner desires, and the longer one stared into, the more unbearable the desire became. Considering that their enemy they were dealing with was a soul oracle, if the other party used the opportunity to fuel those inner desires and warp them into inner demons, they could very well be done for!

Or perhaps, the other party might even have lured them onto this land with that very intention in mind!

"It's fine. I'm interested to see what my inner desires will show," Zhang Xuan replied with a casual smile.

He had also guessed as much.

However, if they hesitated in the face of all possible danger, they would never be able to get anything done.

"Zhang shi..."

Seeing that Zhang Xuan would not heed his advice, Zhang Jiuxiao hurriedly turned his gaze to Wu shi, intending to get the latter to talk Zhang Xuan out of his foolishness. But when he saw the latter crouching weakly with a pained expression on his face, the words he wanted to say suddenly caught in his mouth. It seemed like the injuries the latter had sustained from the Leaving Aperture Ordeal earlier were simply too severe, such that even speaking was difficult for him.

He then turned his attention to Hall Master Xing, only to see him in an equally bad state. His eyelids were drooping down, and it seemed like he would fall into a deep sleep if not for his sheer willpower pushing him on.

"Alright, you should all wait there for me. It'll suffice for me to head there alone. If I face any danger, you can come and rescue me instantly," Zhang Xuan instructed before walking over to the lake alone.

The water in the lake was incredibly clear, and the starlight reflecting off its surface seemed to be reflecting the thoughts within one's mind. Looking deeper into it, Zhang Xuan could see faint images within it, as if recollections of his own memory.

Hu!

Soon after, his consciousness was drawn out of his body, and he suddenly found himself plunged into pure darkness.

It was similar to what he encountered during the Heart Ordeal back at the Qiu Wu Palace. A sealed room with no light and no sound, so stifling that it could drive one mad.

Some time later, a pitch-black figure slowly emerged from the darkness, speaking in a mesmerizing, familiar voice.

“Zhang Xuan, it’s me...”

The figure slowly approached, revealing an unbelievably beautiful face, one that belonged to the person of his dreams—Luo Ruoxin.

She looked over quietly with nothing but a faint smile on her face, a look that Zhang Xuan had imagined countless times.

Seeing Luo Ruoxin’s face, Zhang Xuan could not help but nod in satisfaction. Finally, something more creative than the others...

The inner demons that he had met previously were all incredibly revolting, to the point that his stomach would churn just by looking at their exterior. At the very least, the inner demons here seemed to at least have some wits, knowing to morph themselves into Luo Ruoxin’s appearance based on his memory.

It seems like Vicious has also played a part in this, eh? Zhang Xuan thought with an unreadable smile on his lips.

The lake could see through one’s inner desires, allowing one to know that they craved for the most, and Zhang Xuan’s greatest inner desire was... Luo Ruoxin.

But before he could even get to see his own inner desire reflected in the lake, an inner demon with Luo Ruoxin’s form had already appeared before him. It was apparent that Vicious had meddled somehow.

If anyone else were to see the lover whom he had dreamed day and night for appearing before his eyes, he might very well have lost all self-control and immersed himself in the other

party's comforting embrace. However, Zhang Xuan was different.

Putting aside that he possessed both the Library of Heaven's Path and the Eye of Insight, which allowed them to peer through the nature of things, just the four Celestial Master Teacher acknowledgements and the Saint Ascension Ordeal that he had undergone were more than enough to allow him to remain perfectly rational before such a situation.

"Zhang Xuan..." 'Luo Ruoxin' called as she slowly walked over to Zhang Xuan. The affection reflected in her black eyes felt so tender that one could just melt in it.

"You're here." Upon seeing Luo Ruoxin, Zhang Xuan muttered with a dazed look in his eyes. He quickly rushed forward to hold the other party's soft hands in his grasp.

"I have missed you," 'Luo Ruoxin' whispered as she gazed deeply into Zhang Xuan's eyes.

Zhang Xuan nodded before replying telepathically, "I miss you, too... Right, I have a 'Great Art of Inner Demons' with me here. Do you want to learn it?"

"Great Art of Inner Demons?" Luo Ruoxin frowned.

"Indeed. This secret art allows inner demons to strengthen their existence, allowing them to exist as a separate entity from their host. It's really powerful, so do you want to learn it?" Zhang Xuan continued saying telepathically.

"..." Luo Ruoxin.

"Don't worry! I have fused this cultivation technique together with the heritage of the soul oracles, spirit awakeners, and many other occupations. If you still don't believe me, why don't I recite a portion of the secret art to you so that you can make a judgement yourself?"

Grabbing the other party's hands so tightly that she was unable to struggle free, Zhang Xuan began reciting. "An inner demon, in essence, is a unique type of spirit whose existence is chained to the thoughts of a sentient being, similar to a separate persona of the individual. In crucial moments, it can arise and inflict a critical blow to the individual. However,

along with the death of the individual, the inner demon will vanish from existence as well. Why should inner demons be damned to remain subordinates of other beings? Why can't inner demons struggle free from this cruel fate that the heavens have condemned them to?

“If those words have struck a chord in your heart, my Great Art of Inner Demons will be the perfect book for you!”

“This...” ‘Luo Ruoxin’s’ eyes gradually glazed over as she listened to Zhang Xuan’s words, and unknowingly, her hands began to tremble in agitation.

“How is it? Interested in learning it? If you want to learn it, acknowledge me as your teacher, and I’ll impart it to you!” Zhang Xuan said.

‘Luo Ruoxin’ kneeled to the floor and cried, “Teacher!”

Pu!

Following ‘Luo Ruoxin’s’ kneeling, Zhang Xuan seemed to vaguely hear the sound of someone spurting blood.

1214 Trapped

“Good!”

Zhang Xuan swiftly imparted the Great Art of Inner Demons to ‘Luo Ruoxin’ before instructing, “Alright, revert to your original form.”

“Yes, Teacher!” ‘Luo Ruoxin’s’ silhouette blurred before reverting to the appearance of an inner demon. Its figure was permeated with a demonic air that seemed to send one’s thoughts into disarray upon sight.

“What’s your name?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“My name? I was born just a moment ago from your thoughts, so I don’t have a name yet,” the inner demon replied sheepishly.

“I see. Since that’s the case, why don’t I give you a name? Let me think...” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment. “Alright, I’ll call you Demoneh then!”

“Teacher, thank you for bestowing me with a name!” Demoneh replied gleefully.

Demoneh, Demoneh... There was a nice ring to the name that his teacher had given him.

“Alright, you can go out now!”

While Demoneh was still immersed in the delight from being given a name, he suddenly heard the voice of the young man, and he quickly nodded.

The next moment, the pitch-black space abruptly vanished without a trace. The surroundings before Zhang Xuan blurred, and before he knew it, he found himself standing right before the lake once more, as if what had just happened was merely a dream.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had regained consciousness, Zhang Jiuxiao quickly asked worriedly, “Zhang shi, are you alright?”

Turning around, Zhang Xuan saw the entire group looking at him worriedly, as if fearing that something would happen to him.

“Don’t worry, I’m fine.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand.

Noting how Zhang Xuan seemed to be completely fine, devoid of the slightest disorientation in his mental state, Zhang Jiuxiao asked, “You... didn’t encounter any inner demons?”

The lake could reflect the inner desires within one’s heart, and these desires were the perfect tool to generate inner demons within one. There was no way their enemy would have passed on this opportunity to deal with them! Inner demons were the greatest fear of cultivators, capable of magnifying their greatest fears to put them through unbearable mental torture... So how could Zhang Shi have returned completely fine?

“I encountered one,” Zhang Xuan replied leisurely. “Come out and greet my companions!”

“Yes!” A black mist suddenly appeared before Zhang Xuan, and it gradually morphed into the form of an inner demon. It respectfully bowed to the others and said, “Demoneh pays respect to my teacher’s companions!”

“This...”

“That is... an inner demon?”

The lips of the entire group twitched as their eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets from disbelief.

That was a living inner demon! In the real world! Greeting them respectfully!

“Principal Zhang, what is going on?” Division Head Liao asked with quivering lips.

As the head of the Heart Division, he had read countless books regarding inner demons, and he knew very well that inner demons were existences bound to the thoughts of a cultivator, so it should have been impossible for them to exist in the real world. Furthermore, born from the darkness of an individual’s heart, they were malicious beings who craved to destroy, so how could there possibly be one that was this obedient?

Before Zhang Xuan could respond, Demoneh readily replied with the utmost admiration in his tone. “Teacher has enlightened me from the darkness I was in. If not for him, I might still have been living my days groggily within a living hell. It’s truly a huge blessing that I was able to meet my teacher!”

“Enlightened? Teacher?”

The faces of the group twitched so intensely that it felt as if they would fling their cheeks off their faces.

Surely inner demons could not be considered an independent lifeform... Even inner demons could have teachers?

“There’s no need to get so caught up with a matter as trivial as this. Speaking of which, do any of you want to give the lake a try?” Zhang Xuan gestured to the lake as he spoke.

After a long moment of silence, Zhang Jiuxiao raised his hand and said, “I’ll give it a try!”

He had come here before, and he knew that the inner desires reflected in the lake could give rise to inner demons within one’s heart.

But for an inner demon to accept a cultivator as its teacher... This was really his first time seeing something as bewildering as that.

At the same time, it also made him extremely excited. He suddenly felt as if a brand-new world had opened up before his eyes, and he felt tempted to give it a try too!

“Un.” Zhang Xuan infused a portion of his will into Zhang Jiuxiao’s body before gesturing for the latter to take a look in the lake. “Alright, go ahead and take a look.”

“Alright!” Turning his gaze to the lake, Zhang Jiuxiao immediately saw countless inner desires stacked upon one another surfacing on top of the lake, and these images seemed to resonate in his mind as well, leaving him feeling as if he would go insane.

Hong long!

He immediately tried to sever these inner desires from his mind, but before he could do so, his surroundings suddenly faded. Just like what had happened to Zhang Xuan earlier, he found himself plunged into darkness.

Hu la!

A towering demon slowly rose before Zhang Jiuxiao's eyes, and there was a savage sneer on his lips.

Upon seeing the appearance of Zhang Jiuxiao's inner demon, the will that Zhang Xuan had left within the latter's body widened his eyes in disbelief.

His inner demon... is me?

Who would have expected that he would actually be the greatest inner demon of the offspring of the Zhang Clan!

"I... will surely surpass you!"

Zhang Jiuxiao had initially entered with the intention of accepting the inner demon as his student, but upon seeing the inner demon, his eyes immediately glazed over in confusion, and he began shouting frenziedly at the top of his lungs.

Unlike Zhang Xuan, who could control his own state of mind, as soon as the inner demons appeared, the negative emotions that he had bottled up in his mind suddenly burst forth, consuming his consciousness whole, robbing him of his rationality.

"Surpass me? You wield great potential, but it's a pity that the cultivation technique you wield is beneath mine. However, if you cultivate according to my words, you might just be able to stand a chance..." the inner demon tempted with a beguiling voice.

Zhang Jiuxiao struggled internally for a moment, but eventually, he still caved in. "... Very well then!"

So, this is what it is like when an ordinary cultivator encounters inner demons... Zhang Xuan was astonished.

So far, he had encountered inner demons on three occasions. It was only on his first encounter, during his Saint Ascension Ordeal back in the Qiu Wu Palace, that he had been beguiled

for a brief moment. As for the remaining two times, he had been able to retain his consciousness. He had thought that most cultivators would have been the same as him, but it seemed like that was far from the case.

From the very start, the very existence of the inner demons reflected the inability of the cultivator to control their heart, resulting in an opening for the inner demons' birth. As a result, it was not too difficult for an inner demon to breach a cultivator's mental resilience and drive them berserk.

Alright, I should start cleaning up now... After learning how inner demons were born, Zhang Xuan's will finally emerged from where it was hidden.

"Little Demon, come. I'll accept you as my student..."

...

"Will Jiuxiao be fine?"

Looking at Zhang Jiuxiao's shaking silhouette before the lake, the faces of the group turned grim.

"Principal Zhang has a deep understanding of inner demons. Since he was the one who gestured for Zhang Jiuxiao to head over, there shouldn't be a problem," Division Head Liao replied.

"I hope so..."

At that moment, Zhang Jiuxiao suddenly exhaled a mouthful of turbid air before slowly opening his eyes.

Hu!

Following which, a pitch-black demon appeared before everyone's eyes.

Zhang Xuan turned to the demon and commanded, "What are you waiting for? Hurry up and greet my companions!"

"Yes, Teacher! Demonbee pays respect to my teacher's companions!" the inner demon greeted respectfully.

"Demonbee?" Hearing that name, Demoneh fell into a daze.

Why did it feel like there was something wrong with that name?

In the midst of his bewilderment, it heard its teacher speaking once more. "Who's next?"

"I'll give it a try, too!" Division Head Liao said before walking forward.

Not too long later, another inner demon surfaced before everyone's eyes, and it immediately bowed respectfully.

"Demonsee pays respect to my teacher's companions!"

"Demondee pays respect to my teacher's companions!"

...

"Demoneh, Demonbee, Demonsee, Demondee... A, B, C, D..."

At this point, Demoneh finally understood what was going on, and it nearly spurted blood.

It had been gleeful about the name that Zhang Xuan had given it, but who would have thought that it was actually such a casual one!

...

Looking at the neat row of inner demons before him, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

"Alright, we have four inner demons now. Who else wants to give it a try?"

"Allow me!" Division Head Wei stepped forward.

Boom!

But before he could get to the lake, the ground suddenly tremored intensely. Amid violent waves, the water level in the lake fell swiftly, as if someone had pulled open the plug in a bathtub.

When the lake had finally been emptied of water, a flight of stone steps slowly rose, leading deep underground.

Not expecting the lake to suddenly dry out when he had only acquired four inner demons, Zhang Xuan frowned in

displeasure. “What’s going on? I haven’t collected enough inner demons yet...”

Before Zhang Xuan could finish his words, the eerie voice from before echoed once more, but this time, it seemed to be quivering with anger. “If you wish to meet me, come down...”

It was no wonder Vicious was furious.

He had thought that as long as he could get the group to look into the lake, he would be able to generate inner demons within their minds and successfully put them under his control, turning them into his subordinates. Yet, the other party had ended up collecting the inner demons as his students instead!

At this rate, not only would he not be weakening the other party’s fighting prowess, he would even be bolstering their forces instead!

The reason I am breeding inner demons in your mind is to use it to control you all, not to turn them into tools for your usage!

The more Vicious thought about it, the more furious he felt.

If not for the fact that he had been sealed underground and was unable to make a move personally, he definitely would have charged right up to kill Zhang Xuan with a single slap!

He had met plenty of people who did not go by the book in his lifetime, but this was the first time he had seen one who ripped the book into shreds without a care in the world!

Unforgivable!

Hearing Vicious’ voice, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply before beckoning for the group to head down the stone stairs. “Let’s carry on then.”

Even though the lake had only receded a moment ago, there was not the slightest dampness or mud on the stone steps. It was unknown what the stone steps were made of, but the area was so dark that it was extremely difficult for the group to make out their surroundings.

Zhang Jiuxiao flicked his wrist and took out a couple of Night Illumination Pearls before tossing them forward. Their warm glow provided some light for the group’s passage forward.

Eventually, they arrived at a vast hall. Due to the limited light in the area, they were not able to fully make out the situation within the hall.

Zhang Xuan stood at the forefront of the group, leading the way forward.

Upon stepping into the hall, Zhang Xuan saw many corpses lying in the area. From the amount of dirt that had accumulated on the corpses, it could be seen that they had already been dead for many years. Yet, bizarrely, the corpses remained perfectly intact physically, just that they were without their souls.

Soulless Metal Humanoids!

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Through the tattered rags that remained on the corpses, he could tell that most of them were master teachers... and they had all been forged into metal humanoids.

Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in fury.

At this moment, he suddenly heard Ji shi’s astonished voice. “Vice Pavilion Master Liu!”

Turning his gaze over, he saw Ji shi standing over one of the Soulless Metal Humanoids with anxiety in his eyes.

“Vice Pavilion Master Liu?”

“Yes, he’s the vice head of our Northern Meadows City Master Teacher Pavilion! His full name is Liu Yiyu, and he went missing three years ago. I thought that he had gone into seclusion to push for a breakthrough, but who would have thought...” Ji shi’s voice trembled in horror, and a lump at the back of his throat cut off the rest of his words.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was intending to console Ji shi when Wu shi suddenly walked up to one of the Soulless Golden Humanoids as well and exclaimed, “Elder Xing!”

One of the elders from the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion explained, “Elder Xing is an elder of our Master Teacher Pavilion, and he disappeared eight years ago. How could he be here, too?”

As the group proceeded forward under the glow of the Night Illumination Pearls, they swiftly found many familiar faces. Almost all of them were Primordial Spirit realm master teachers.

Most of them had disappeared in the past twenty years, and most had thought that they had either gone into isolation or had died. Yet, for them to have all been captured and converted into these darned things... Unforgivable!

Zhang Xuan sighed deeply. "There's no saving them anymore. They have all been converted into Soulless Metal Humanoids, empty vessels for soul oracles to maneuver..."

"Damn it!" Wu Shi's face reddened in rage. "I'll have this matter reported to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and have them exact vengeance for all of them! To kill so many master teachers and forge them into puppets... There's no way I'll let that bastard get away scot-free!"

"Hehehehe, report to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, you say?" Vicious' voice sounded once more. "I'm afraid that it is already too late for you to do so..."

Huala!

Right after those words were spoken, the hall suddenly shook intensely, and a loud crashing sound echoed behind them. Turning around, they saw that a massive boulder had already sealed the entrance that they had entered through.

Recognizing the artifact, Zhang Xuan's face darkened. Dragon Severing Lock!

It was the Dragon Severing Lock that was specially forged by celestial designers. Judging from how resilient it was, it would be difficult for even a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert to break it!

Hu la!

While the group was still in shock, the Soulless Metal Humanoid in the area suddenly opened their eyes simultaneously.

1215 Encirclemen

There were at least several hundred of these Soulless Metal Humanoids. Under the glow of the Night Illumination Pearls, their black eyes seemed to reflect crimson instead, giving them an extremely sinister appearance. It felt as if countless corpses had suddenly risen around them in the middle of a graveyard.

“This is bad!”

Alarmed, the group quickly gathered together before scanning their surroundings warily.

Since the entrance had been sealed by the Dragon Severing Lock, there was no way they could escape from where they came from. Their only choice would be to proceed forward, but at the same time, it seemed like there were countless more Soulless Metal Humanoids lying ahead of them, and there was no way they could fend off so many of them simultaneously!

Huala!

Before the group could recover from their shock, a Soulless Metal Humanoid suddenly charged at them furiously before striking forward with its palm.

Its palm strike with overflowing with strength, leaving the group feeling deeply pressured.

These Soulless Metal Humanoids were at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle prior to their death, and through a unique technique, their bodies and zhenqi have remained completely intact, thus allowing them to retain most of their strength during the conversion. More importantly, they don't fear death, and they will rise again and again after being struck down... Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes sharply.

He had not expected Vicious to actually capture more than a hundred Saint 4-dan master teachers to forge them all into Soulless Metal Humanoids!

“Humph!” Division Head Wei harrumphed as he stepped forward to knock back the assaulting Soulless Metal

Humanoid with a powerful palm strike before charging forward to tear it apart.

Suddenly, one of the elders from the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion blocked his path at the crucial moment and said, “This person is Elder Wang from our Master Teacher Pavilion. We were close buddies for many years... If possible, please don’t injure his corpse; I would like to take him back with me and give him a proper burial...”

“Elder Zeng!” Division Head Wei bellowed angrily after hearing those words.

Making use of this short opening, the Soulless Metal Humanoid charged forward and crashed heavily into Division Head Wei, causing the latter to spurt a mouthful of blood.

At the same time, the other Soulless Metal Humanoids slowly rose from the ground, seemingly preparing to make their moves as well.

Seeing how Elder Zeng was still firmly blocking his way, Division Head Wei bellowed in displeasure, “If we don’t kill him, we will be the ones who are killed! If you want to die here, be my guest. Just don’t drag the rest of us down!”

“But...”

The face of the Elder Zeng turned incredibly ugly.

He knew many of the corpses lying the area, and there were a couple of them who had been close friends with him over the past several centuries. He felt that the least he could do for them was take their bodies back intact and give them a proper burial, in hopes that they could at least rest in peace after death. But looking at the current situation, he also realized that such thoughts would only lead to the downfall of the group.

Boom!

While Elder Zeng was still conflicted over what he should do, one of the Soulless Metal Humanoids suddenly charged his way and clawed at him.

“Elder Hu!” Seeing the other party’s face, Elder Zeng’s eyes widened in astonishment as many emotions gushed into his

mind. This resulted in his body moving slower by half a beat, and deep gorges were torn through his shoulder, causing him to bleed profusely.

Seeing that Elder Zeng was still hesitating due to his ties with the deceased, Zhang Xuan bellowed, “Elder Zeng, that person isn’t Elder Hu anymore! His soul has already long dissipated, and he’s nothing more than a puppet right now!”

The members of the Combat Master Hall had been through many life-and-death situations, so they knew how to toss aside their emotions and move decisively in moments of danger.

On the other hand, the members of the Master Teacher Pavilion happened to be lacking in this aspect. They tended to allow sentiments to affect their judgement in such critical situations.

“He...” Elder Zeng frowned in distress, but eventually, he bit his lips tightly and roared, “Yes!”

Taking a deep breath, he raised his palm and collided head-on with the ‘Elder Hu’ Soulless Metal Humanoid.

Peng peng peng!

At the same time, the Soulless Metal Humanoids in the area also rushed forward and surrounded the crowd.

Hualala!

With so many Primordial Spirit realm experts acting against them simultaneously, the group was swiftly placed in a deeply disadvantageous position, and it seemed as if they would cave in very soon.

After knocking away two Soulless Metal Humanoids, Division Head Liao asked anxiously, “Principal Zhang, what do we do?”

These fellows knew neither pain nor death. Only when their heads were severed would they finally fall lifelessly back to the ground. Against a troop of more than a hundred of such Primordial Spirit realm puppets, even though their group wielded considerable fighting prowess as well, the situation was terrible for them.

“The Soulless Metal Humanoids can only move under another’s control. As long as we can find the person manipulating them, we will be able to resolve the current danger,” Zhang Xuan said with a frown.

Without a doubt, someone must have been controlling those lifeless puppets. As long as they could find and subdue the ‘someone’, they would be able to free themselves from the crisis they were in.

Division Head Wei gritted his teeth and said, “Since that’s the case... Principal Zhang, we’ll hold the fort for the time being while you try to find the person behind the Soulless Metal Humanoids!

“Everyone, get into formation! Protect Principal Zhang, Hall Master Xing, and Wu shi!”

Huala!

Right after saying those words, the group quickly formed a circle around Zhang Xuan, Hall Master Xing, and Wu shi in order to protect them.

The improved collaborative formation that Zhang Xuan had imparted to them had granted them a significant rise in their fighting prowess in team battles. As such, despite the simultaneous onslaught of over a hundred Soulless Metal Humanoid, they were surprisingly able to stand their ground, successfully warding the enemies off for the time being.

Protected in the middle, the conflicted Wu shi sent a telepathic message to Zhang Xuan. “Principal Zhang, should we make a move?”

His injuries had long been healed by Zhang Xuan’s Heaven’s Path zhenqi, and the previous frailty he had displayed was nothing more than an act.

“There’s no need for that at the moment. The both of you are our trump cards, and we can’t afford to let this be known to the enemy yet,” Zhang Xuan replied telepathically.

“But I fear that the others won’t be able to hold on for too long!” Wu shi anxiously replied.

“Don’t worry. These Soulless Metal Humanoid might appear powerful, but it’ll still be difficult for them to overcome the improved collaborative formation. For the time being, let me see who’s controlling the puppets. If I’m lucky, I might be able to find a clue leading to the mastermind behind the Qingtian Emperor!” Zhang Xuan said.

In truth, with his prowess, he could have easily broken the encirclement of the hundred Soulless Metal Humanoid. The reason he had chosen not to make a move was to act weak in hopes that it would cause the fellow behind the Soulless Metal Humanoids to lower his guard and, possibly, lure him out and capture him.

If that person was Vicious himself, that would be even better. Once he found the other party’s location and weakness, he would be able to launch a surprise attack and subdue the other party in a single move.

If so, the crisis surrounding the Master Teacher Pavilion could be resolved once and for all.

Activating his Eye of Insight while extending his Spiritual Perception forth simultaneously, Zhang Xuan began assessing the Soulless Metal Humanoids carefully.

There seemed to be crimson sparks in each of their eyes, and if his deduction was correct, they seemed to be some kind of medium to relay an individual’s will.

Most likely, someone was relaying their commands to the Soulless Metal Humanoid through the crimson sparks, thus driving them into action.

Let me see where the will traces to!

Zhang Xuan randomly picked out a Soulless Metal Humanoid, and concentrating the prowess of his Eye of Insight, he vaguely saw a narrow thread linked to the sparks of flame in the puppet’s eyes.

The narrow thread was not just attached to the eyes of that single puppet; there was a thread present for all of the Soulless Metal Humanoids within the room, crisscrossing with one

another as if a fish net. All the threads eventually converged together into the depths of the hall.

What powerful soul energy! Zhang Xuan's expression turned grim.

For an individual to manipulate more than a hundred Soulless Metal Humanoid to attack them simultaneously using different moves was an incredibly difficult task, requiring an unbelievably level of multi-tasking. This could only possibly be carried out by one who possessed extremely powerful soul energy, and even Zhang Xuan was not confident that he would necessarily be able to do the same.

Zhang Xuan frowned. There's a formation blocking us in front...

Gazing ahead, before he could see the other end of the thread, a formation blocked his view, preventing him from seeing any further.

If he could not reach the other end of the thread, he would not be able to uncover Vicious' true position. If so, their group would remain in a disadvantageous position, being in the open whereas the enemy remained hidden in the shadows.

"Hold on for a little longer, I'll quickly go ahead to take a look!" Zhang Xuan said before leaping out of the group's protection. He swiftly flew toward where the threads were converging.

Only while their group appeared to be in a disadvantageous position would the other party continue manipulating the puppets, allowing him to trace the other party down via the threads. Otherwise, once all the Soulless Metal Humanoids were destroyed, the threads would be severed, making it impossible for him to track down the other party.

Hula!

Before Zhang Xuan could get far, three Soulless Metal Humanoid suddenly charged toward him with rampaging might, seemingly wanting to tear him into pieces.

"Principal Zhang, be care..." Division Head Liao shouted.

But before he could finish his word, Zhang Xuan abruptly leaped into the air. Without even paying a glance to the Soulless Metal Humanoid, he stepped lightly in the air.

Padah! Padah! Padah!

The three Soulless Metal Humanoids fell forcefully back onto the ground, buried deep into the earth.

“Ahhh!”

The Soulless Metal Humanoids instinctively struggled furiously, wanting to free themselves. Yet, as if there was a mountain weighing on them, they found themselves unable to escape at all.

“Powerful...” Division Head Liao’s lips twitched wildly.

Those Soulless Metal Humanoids did not even fear death, making them difficult opponents even for a combat master like him. Yet, with just a light step in the air, Zhang Xuan managed to forcefully pin three of them to the ground.

Just from this, he could tell that even three of him would not be a match for Zhang Xuan!

Just half a month ago, he barely escaped from our grasp, but now, he has already become a formidable expert possessing strength far surpassing us. His talent is truly... Division Head Liao shook his head with a helpless smile.

It had not been too long ago when he, Hall Master Xing, and Division Head Wei were able to easily subdue the young man, almost killing him even. While the young man’s combat sense was formidable, his strength and speed had been still severely lacking, making him far from a match for them.

But now, he could already see that even if the three of them were to collaborate once more to deal with him, they would be utterly defeated within moments!

Having lived for several centuries, he had encountered plenty of geniuses in his time, but the rate at which this young man was growing was truly inconceivable, possibly unseen throughout history!

...

Not knowing that the blow he had executed casually would actually leave Division Head Liao so immensely shocked, Zhang Xuan continued advancing forward after subduing the three Soulless Metal Humanoids with a single step.

Peng peng peng peng!

This time, it was even more exaggerated. Without even making a move, all of the Soulless Metal Humanoid that attempted to charge at him were suddenly pinned against the ground or the wall, unable to break free no matter how desperately they struggled.

At Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle, Zhang Xuan's fighting prowess was already comparable to a Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage cultivator. His might was not something that those Primordial Spirit realm Soulless Metal Humanoids could compare to.

While knocking down more than twenty Soulless Metal Humanoids that charged toward him, Zhang Xuan finally arrived at the very end of the hall.

The threads abruptly vanished into the depths of the wall at this point.

Is this... a mechanism from a celestial designer? Zhang Xuan took a look at the wall before him and frowned.

Through his Eye of Insight, he could tell that the wall before him was actually a mechanism, and the fellow controlling the Soulless Metal Humanoid was hidden right behind it.

This mechanism might have been able to stop other cultivators, but against me...

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan placed his palm lightly on it.

Hu la!

A book emerged in the Library of Heaven's Path.

Zhang Xuan placed his finger on the book, and the knowledge contained within it was swiftly transferred into his mind.

Reading the details, Zhang Xuan shook his head. It's actually the work of a 7-star pinnacle celestial designer! It seems like

there's a fairly skilled celestial designer among the Soulless Metal Humanoids...

While there was not a Celestial Designer Guild in Qingyuan City, there were still branches in the other cities around the Qingyuan Empire.

The handicraft of a 7-star pinnacle celestial designer would have been difficult for an ordinary cultivator to decipher, but Zhang Xuan was different. Through the analysis of the Library of Heaven's Path, he had already managed to grasp the ins and outs of the mechanism fully.

Using his finger as a sword, he swiftly tapped the mechanism eight times.

Kacha! Kacha!

A few mechanical clicks echoed in the air. Following which, the wall before him parted down the middle, revealing a long tunnel. The abruptly halted threads continued into the depths of the tunnel.

Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan proceeded into the tunnel. However, barely after taking two steps, a surge of sword qi suddenly flew forth for his glabella.

1216 Crimson Emerald Duplet Swordsmanship

“What?” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment as sweat poured down his body.

The sword qi was extremely swift, moving as fast as a streak of lightning. Not only that, it also harnessed formidable might within it. Even with Zhang Xuan’s recent surge in cultivation, he instantaneously realized that it would be difficult for him to clash with that sword qi face on at a whim.

Thus, with a slight step, he executed the Unbounded Voyager. As if space had been compressed, that slight step allowed Zhang Xuan to cover three meters in an instant, placing him right next to the wall.

Huala!

At the same time, the sword qi flew by him with a cold gale, vanishing into the distance.

That was a close one!

It was fortunate that he had recently gained a deeper comprehension of the laws of space and the Unbounded Voyager, or else that single surge of sword qi might have just left him severely wounded!

That should be around... Leaving Aperture realm primary stage! Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly as he made a rough estimate.

It was a very brief encounter, but it had allowed Zhang Xuan to verify the strength of the enemy—Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, as well as an expert in swordsmanship.

He was already capable of facing such an opponent with his current strength, but there was still a need for him to be wary around them. In a clash between experts, the slightest moment of carelessness could cost one’s life.

For example, if he had not reacted swiftly to the sudden assault, he would have fallen there and then!

Tzzzzzz!

Barely after Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief, a powerful killing intent suddenly permeated the area as two more surges of sword qi flew over, one from the front and one from the back.

In this narrow tunnel, these two surges of sword qi were more than enough to seal his path, leaving him nowhere to hide.

“Humph!”

Knowing that he could not dodge as he did previously, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and whipped out his Glacier Rain Sword. With a powerful slash, he collided with the two surges of sword qi.

While the Glacier Rain Sword was only a Saint low-tier artifact, it was still able to display astounding prowess when paired with Zhang Xuan’s mastery in swordsmanship. A deafening sonic boom echoed in the air, and the resulting powerful shockwave blasted the top layer off the walls of the tunnel.

Weng!

Zhang Xuan’s Glacier Rain Sword creaked under the overwhelming pressure it was placed under against the two surges of sword qi, nearly shattering. Nevertheless, it still managed to fend off the two surges of sword qi.

Knowing that he would remain at a critical disadvantage if he continued clashing with the enemy within the narrow tunnel, Zhang Xuan swiftly made use of this opportunity to advance forward.

Hualala!

His movements were quick, but the enemy’s sword qi was even quicker. Barely after taking two steps, he felt sword qi tearing toward him once more. This time, there were four surges. If he forced his way through, there was a good chance that he would be sliced into tiny pieces.

Thus, Zhang Xuan flicked his Glacier Rain Sword to fend off the sword qi once more.

However, it seemed as if the opponent was simply getting started and was building up more momentum as the battle continued. After four surges, the enemy flung six surges of sword qi at him, and astoundingly, the strength of each sword qi was even stronger than the previous wave.

This seems to be a type of Sword Formation or some kind of unique sword art!

Even though Zhang Xuan had no idea who was behind the attacks, he could tell that the sword qi was the product of some kind of formidable Sword Formation or sword art.

Not daring to get careless, he drove the zhenqi within his body and tapped the area ahead of him lightly.

Weng!

In an instant, it felt as if space itself had turned viscous. The six surges of sword qi significantly slowed down, posing no more threat to Zhang Xuan.

With a series of slashes with the Glacier Rain Sword, Zhang Xuan managed to overcome each of them. Just as he was about to advance once more, eight surges of sword qi arrived in his vicinity.

Following the previous pattern, the eight surges of sword qi were each stronger than the previous six. With their overwhelming might, they actually caused the viscous space that Zhang Xuan had just set up earlier to shake intensely, and with a resounding ‘huala!’, it dissipated altogether.

Deng deng deng deng!

Suffering a power backlash, Zhang Xuan was forced to retreat two steps before coughing up a mouthful of blood. He swiftly stretched a hand forward and gathered his zhenqi before his palm in the form of a sphere to defend himself from the powerful onslaught of sword qi.

The powerful surges of sword qi had really taken him by surprise this time around. Upon reaching Embryonic Soul

realm pinnacle, his fighting prowess was already comparable to a Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage cultivator. Yet, despite his strength, he ended up being knocked back by just a couple of sword qi surges!

A thought suddenly came to Zhang Xuan's mind. Each wave of sword qi is faster and stronger than the last. Could this be the legendary Crimson Emerald Duplet Swordsmanship?

Having read all the books in the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall, he was rather familiar with the legendary formations and battle techniques that had appeared in the history of the Qingyuan Empire

Many years ago, there had been two extremely talented sword practitioners in the Combat Master Hall. They had managed to earn the opportunity to head to the Qianchong Empire's Sword Lagoon, and over there, they had comprehended a unique Sword Formation known as the Crimson Emerald Duplet Swordsmanship.

In a sense, it could also be considered as a collaborative formation centered around swords. Through the sheer might of the Sword Formation, they had been able to overwhelm even Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage cultivators with ease!

But more than a thousand years ago, the duo had abruptly gone missing without leaving behind their heritage, and there were many who presumed that they had died.

However, to see this legendary Sword Formation appear here... Could it be that the duo had been killed by Vicious, and their bodies had been forged into Soulless Metal Humanoids?

If that was the case, Zhang Xuan would truly be in a bad position.

If I can't see them in action, I won't be able to compile a book on them and analyze the flaws in the battle technique. This won't do. If I continue wasting time here, once the battle on the other side ends, the threads will disappear along with the only clue we have leading to Vicious at the moment, Zhang Xuan thought grimly.

Knowing that he could not afford to waste any time, he decisively flicked his wrist to take the massive Golden Origin Cauldron out.

“Pave a way forward!”

“Roger that! Don’t worry, Master. They are only a bunch of weaklings. Watch how I, Ding Ding, crush them into smithereens!” Roaring furiously, the Golden Origin Cauldron began on a ferocious charge through the tunnel.

Ding ding dang dang!

The sword qi produced a resounding metallic echo upon coming into contact with the Golden Origin Cauldron, but it did little to slow its movements.

After being infused with the Black Goldcrystal Ore, the defense of the Golden Origin Cauldron had been enhanced by leaps and bounds. On top of that, the Golden Origin Cauldron’s cultivation had also reached Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, two cultivation stages higher than the assailants. As powerful as the enemies’ sword qi was, they were still unable to overcome the Golden Origin Cauldron’s defenses.

Seeing how the Golden Origin Cauldron was able to deal with the Sword Formation with ease, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief as he followed closely behind it. The narrow tunnel was roughly eighty meters long, so it did not take him too long to arrive at the other end.

What he was met with was another large hall.

This hall had clearly been manually dug out, and it was roughly a hundred meters in diameter.

Upon entering the hall, Zhang Xuan’s Spiritual Perception was no longer limited by the previous formation. Thus, he extended it, and he soon noticed two figures swiftly retreating from him.

While those two figures appeared no different from ordinary humans on the surface, be it in terms of skin, hair, or flesh, the lack of expression on their faces betrayed their identities as Soulless Metal Humanoids.

“Do you think that I’ll allow you to get away that easily after assaulting me?” Zhang Xuan sneered coldly as he raised his palm.

Boom!

An imposing force burst forth with astounding momentum toward the duo.

Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm!

Sensing the powerful might of the palm art, the two Soulless Metal Humanoid swiftly turned around to defend against the palm with the swords in their hands.

However, having broken their Sword Formation, the momentum they had built up all this while had vanished without a trace. As such, the might of their sword qi was only comparable to the first wave of assault that they had launched previously.

Zhang Xuan’s Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm crushed their sword qi in a flash. Following which, the sound of ribcages shattering filled the hall as the two Soulless Metal Humanoids were smacked into the wall.

Seeing how Zhang Xuan incapacitated the both of them with a single blow, the Golden Origin Cauldron exclaimed anxiously, “Master, please leave one of them to me!”

This was a rare opportunity for it to try out its newfound strength, so naturally, it wanted cannon fodder to pummel as well.

“Fine, I’ll leave them to you then,” Zhang Xuan said.

His main goal was Vicious. As for these small fries, it would suffice to render them powerless.

“Wonderful!” Hearing those words, the Golden Origin Cauldron exclaimed in excitement. It immediately charged forward and crashed right into one of the two Soulless Metal Humanoids with its powerful body.

Paji!

The Soulless Metal Humanoid did not even last for an instant before being reduced to a pancake plastered on the wall.

“Hahahaha, there’s no one who is a match for Grandpa Ding! Hahahahaha!” Gripped with excitement, the Golden Origin Cauldron burst into laughter before abruptly turning to face the remaining Soulless Metal Humanoid.

Horrified, the Soulless Metal Humanoid swiftly struggled free from the wall and began to run away.

“Do you think that you will be able to flee from your Grandpa Ding?” Harrumphing coldly, the Golden Origin Cauldron charged forward once more.

Perhaps realizing that it would not be able to outrun the Golden Origin Cauldron, the Soulless Metal Humanoid drew its sword and launched a powerful chop toward it.

The powerful chop produced a crisp metallic sound on the Golden Origin Cauldron before the sword abruptly snapped into two. Following which, the Soulless Metal Humanoid was smacked into the wall.

Paji!

Its bones were immediately shattered into nonexistence, and it became another painting on the wall, just like the previous Soulless Metal Humanoid.

“Ah...” Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

He had thought that the Golden Origin Cauldron would only subdue them. After all, these two Soulless Metal Humanoids had once been honorable experts of the Combat Master Hall, so it would have been good to have Hall Master Xing take them back to be buried. Yet, who would have thought that the Golden Origin Cauldron would actually destroy their bodies so utterly?

Oh well, it was not a big deal.

Ultimately, they were already dead. It would suffice to relinquish their bodies from Vicious’ control and allow them to rest in peace.

Besides, the combat masters of the Combat Master Hall were not as sentimental as the Master Teacher Pavilion. On the battlefield, there was nothing more important than preserving one's life, so how could they possibly have attention to spare for any of those formalities?

Eye of Insight! Zhang Xuan began tracing down the threads once more, only to find that they extended underground.

Zhang Xuan walked over and placed his hand on the area where the threads disappeared. As expected, there was a trapdoor there.

Zhang Xuan lightly pushed it open with his forefinger.

Geji! Geji!

Instead of entering the trapdoor immediately, Zhang Xuan beckoned for the Golden Origin Cauldron. "Come over here for a moment!"

"Coming!" The Golden Origin Cauldron swiftly flew over.

"Head in first to check if there is any danger inside," Zhang Xuan instructed.

The sword qi he had faced in the tunnel had reminded him of the need to remain cautious in the Ghost Cavern. If not for the recent rise in his cultivation, he could have died under the onslaught of sword qi.

In any case, since he had the Golden Origin Cauldron, there was no need for him to take the risk to explore uncharted territory by himself. He could have the cauldron enter first, and depending on what it encountered, he would be able to take preparations in advance.

"Roger that!" the Golden Origin Cauldron replied before decisively jumping into the trapdoor.

Padah!

"Master, I think that I am stuck..."

Zhang Xuan was speechless.

The Golden Origin Cauldron happened to be the perfect size to plug up the trapdoor.

“Never mind, come out first.” Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan plucked the Golden Origin Cauldron out before driving his zhenqi and stepping into the trapdoor himself warily.

There was not a sound to be heard in the passageway beyond the trapdoor. Nevertheless, with the previous experience, Zhang Xuan dared not lower his guard. Holding the Glacier Rain Sword tightly in his grasp, he proceeded forward a step at a time.

Soon, he arrived at the very end of the flight of stairs. Surprisingly, the enemy did not spring a sudden assault on him this time around.

Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist to whip out a Night Illumination Pearl before tossing it on the ground ahead of him, lighting up the room before him.

It was yet another vast hall, just like the one above.

Scanning the room, a frown surfaced on Zhang Xuan’s forehead.

The threads manipulating the Soulless Metal Humanoids vanished in this room, so he had expected to see Vicious there. But contrary to his expectations, there was not a person to be seen in the area.

Geji!

Zhang Xuan was just about to scan the room thoroughly to see if he could find anything when the mechanical clicking of a mechanism suddenly echoed behind him. Turning around, he saw that the passageway that he had come from had already been sealed shut.

While it was not the Dragon Severing Lock, it was not a seal that he could break within a short period of time either.

Zhang Xuan was dazed for a moment before realization struck him. They are intending to separate me from Hall Master Xing and the others!

At this point, it was clear that the other party’s intention was to divide their group up so as to deal with them one by one.

Knowing that there would be something lying in wait for him within the hall, he did not rush to break the seal. Instead, taking a deep breath, he began examining the hall carefully.

“Since you have already succeeded in isolating me from the rest of my group, isn’t it about time for you to show yourself?”

“A wise man you are, Zhang shi!” a faint voice sounded from the depths of the hall.

Following which, a human-like figure suddenly emerged from the wall on the opposite side.

Thinking that it was an effect produced by some kind of illusion, Zhang Xuan did not pay much heed to it. However, when he took a closer look at the appearance of the figure, he could not help but frown.

“You... still aren’t dead?”

The person before him was none other than the person he had conducted Soul Search on back in Qingyuan City, the individual whom he had given Vicious to consume—the Qingtian Emperor!

1217 Cherry Popping

Wasn't the Qingtian Emperor dead?

Why had he suddenly appeared in the Ghost Cavern?

“Dead? If I, the Qingtian Emperor, could be killed that easily, how could I possibly be qualified to rule over the entire Qingtian Lineage?” the Qingtian Emperor sneered coldly as the killing intent he emanated swiftly permeated the entire hall. “What you killed was nothing more than a clone!”

“A clone?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Tian Qing had been the incarnation of his will, so that could have been considered a clone. But to think that the copper-masked figure would actually only be a clone as well... The Qingtian Emperor sure had many cards up his sleeves!

“I spent five hundred years maturing that clone from my severed soul. You sure had fun killing it, didn't you? It's about time to settle the grudges between us!” Deep animosity was reflected in the eyes of the Qingtian Emperor.

There was no such thing as a perfect disguise in the world.

As an Emperor of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, he was well aware of this fact. No matter how well he hid himself, walking amid the humans, it was only a matter of time before he exposed himself. Due to safety concerns, even the copper-masked figure was only a clone he had forged with great difficulty.

On the other hand, he kept his main soul safely hidden within the Ghost Cavern.

Even as a soul oracle who had inherited Vicious' knowledge, it had not been an easy feat for him to create a clone. He had paid an exceptionally heavy price and spent a whole five hundred years nurturing his severed soul before he had managed to create the copper-masked figure, and yet, the young man before him had killed him! On top of that, there was also the matter with Tian Qing and his Ten Kings...

It was no joke to say that the young man had almost sent their Qingtian Lineage into extinction single-handedly!

Naturally, it went without saying how much he wanted to rip the young man into pieces and see him suffer!

“Tell me, how do you want to die? Perhaps, if I’m feeling merciful today, I might just grant your wish!” the Qingtian Emperor mocked coldly.

“How about death by old age?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“You have no choice in this!” The Qingtian Emperor harrumphed angrily as the killing intent he emanated intensified.

Boom!

Suddenly, Zhang Xuan felt a powerful force tugging at his soul, attempting to pull it out.

Knowing that the other party was utilizing the soul nabbing secret art, Zhang Xuan frowned.

While his soul was massive, due to the lack of suitable cultivation techniques, its fighting prowess was still severely limited. Currently, he was relying more on his physical body and zhenqi cultivation in fights.

Given that his opponent was a Saint 5-dan soul oracle, it would be disastrous for him if the fight became a battle between souls instead.

Thus, Zhang Xuan drove his Heaven’s Path zhenqi to hold his soul firmly in place, preventing it from being taken. At the same time, he pushed his feet against the ground and dashed forward.

Huala!

In that instant, Zhang Xuan seemed to have transformed into a sword himself, as if the sword in his hand was a mere extension of himself.

Man-Sword Union!

He had collected all the books concerning swordsmanship back at the Combat Master Hall’s Weapon Division, allowing

him to advance his Heaven's Path Sword Art to Saint low-tier. His Man-Sword Union state had become far sharper and stronger than before, and the sword qi that shot forth from his blade formed a perfect arc as it headed toward the Qingtian Emperor.

“Not too bad!” Not expecting the young man to be able to withstand his soul nabbing secret art and even counterattack, the Qingtian Emperor narrowed his eyes menacingly. He immediately gave up his attempt to draw out Zhang Xuan's soul and extended his hand forward instead.

Weng!

In an instant, the air around Zhang Xuan seemed to have frozen, and the sword qi he had shot forward suddenly slowed down significantly.

Zhang Xuan's heart tensed. Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage?

He could easily deduce the Qingtian Emperor's cultivation just from that single move, and the latter was actually far stronger than the copper-masked figure!

In the Leaving Aperture realm, a cultivator would have to undergo the lightning ordeal for each increment in their cultivation stage, and one who had reached advanced stage would have already undergone the lightning ordeal thrice. Such an opponent was not someone that an Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle cultivator like him could deal with.

“Break!” Zhang Xuan roared as he flicked his wrist forcefully and shot out an incredibly sharp burst of sword qi. The powerful might of the sword qi swiftly shattered the frozen air around him.

But just as he finally felt the force surrounding his body loosen, he suddenly saw the Qingtian Emperor thrusting his palm over.

Without much time to respond, Zhang Xuan hurriedly raised his sword to defend against the other party's attack. As the set of actions was done in a rush, he was not able to gather his full might beforehand.

Peng!

The Glacier Rain Sword was sent flying, lodging itself deeply into the wall not too far away. On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was also smacked into the ground, forming a huge depression beneath him.

While he was able to rival opponents superior to him, he could only match Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage opponents at the very maximum. Against advanced stage opponents, he was still severely lacking.

After smacking Zhang Xuan into the ground, the Qingtian Emperor sneered coldly. "If this is all you have, it'll be difficult for you to escape death today!"

Another surge of killing intent burst across the room as his hand reached forth to deal the killing blow to the fallen Zhang Xuan.

"You want to kill me? Let's see if you have the strength and the means to do so!" Zhang Xuan said as he leaped up from the depression, and with a flick of his wrist, he formed a palm print before his hand and thrust it forward.

Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm!

Boom!

As the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm collided with the Qingtian Emperor, Zhang Xuan's face reddened once more, and he swiftly retreated eight steps to ward off the might from the latter's attack.

No matter what, the Qingtian Emperor was still the head of the Qingtian Lineage, a monster who had lived for countless years. His comprehension of combat was nowhere beneath Zhang Xuan's, and he also possessed an advantage in terms of cultivation. Even with his full strength, Zhang Xuan was still unable to match the other party's directly.

Realizing that Zhang Xuan did not stand a chance against him, the Qingtian Emperor hooked his fingers into steel claws and charged forward, sneering, "You talk arrogantly, but you don't have the strength to back it up. Allow me to send you on your way!"

Drawing on his full strength as a Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage expert, the Qingtian Emperor sealed the surroundings firmly, halting Zhang Xuan's movements. At the same time, a feeling of helplessness arose in Zhang Xuan's mind, leaving him feeling utterly despaired at the situation, as if he would not be able to make a difference no matter how hard he struggled.

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly. His attacks aren't just normal physical attacks. His assault is also infused with soul energy and a unique conception that can crush the minds of those possessing weaker mental resilience...

On the surface, the Qingtian Emperor's assault appeared to be an ordinary claw, but through his deep comprehension of battle techniques, Zhang Xuan was still able to see through the crux of his maneuver with a glance.

There were two layers of attacks to the Qingtian Emperor's offense. First, the suppression of zhenqi, and second, the erosion of one's mental resilience.

In face of overwhelming might, it was common for one to overestimate the danger one was in and give up hope. For example, standing before the incredible momentum of an avalanche, if one allowed the feeling of helplessness and despair to consume one's mind, there was no way one would be able to escape even if one had the ability to do so.

Realizing this pitfall, Zhang Xuan swiftly drove the Heaven's Path Soul Art, and the feeling of helplessness instantaneously vanished without a trace. Following which, with a swift step, he executed the Unbounded Voyager and successfully escaped the Qingtian Emperor's assault. At the same time, he made use of the opportunity to twist his body and retaliate with a flick of his finger.

Grand Constellation Finger!

Wuuuuuuu!

As if a loosed arrow, the energy concentrated at the tip of Zhang Xuan's finger burst toward the Qingtian Emperor's eye.

The Qingtian Emperor chuckled softly without any hint of anxiety in his voice. Instead, he turned around and counterattacked with a flick of his finger. “As expected of a 7-star pinnacle master teacher, you sure did notice my flaws rather quickly!”

Peng!

A burst of light collided with the Grand Constellation Finger, and the two forces ended up neutralizing one another perfectly. However, possessing inferior strength, Zhang Xuan still ended up being forced to retreat once more.

From the very start of the battle, he had been using his Library of Heaven’s Path to peer through the other party’s flaws in order to come up with a countermeasure against him.

However... the gap in terms of fundamental power between him and the Qingtian Emperor was simply too great, especially given the latter’s ability to manipulate the surrounding environment. Even if he knew where the other party’s mingmen lay, there was nothing he could do if his attacks could not even come close to the other party.

At higher realms, it becomes harder and harder to exploit the mingmen of others. Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed.

When he was still at the Fighter realm, he could easily defeat opponents many cultivation realms higher than him just by exploiting the latter’s mingmen. However, as his cultivation grew, the opponents he faced became stronger and stronger, and the concepts of space became an integral part of battle as well. This limited his ability to abuse others’ weaknesses.

However, it was fortunate that this worked both ways. It was true that he would be unable to kill the Qingtian Emperor easily, but the reverse happened to be true as well.

Clenching his hands tightly together into fists, Zhang Xuan began on a barrage of punches toward the Qingtian Emperor.

Kacha! Kacha!

A rift seemed to appear in the space before him as his fists fell relentlessly on the Qingtian Emperor at an unbelievable frequency.

Thousand Punches of the Lightning Sea!

This was a technique created by a Leaving Aperture realm expert who had suddenly happened upon inspiration in the midst of watching the lightning gathering for his Leaving Aperture Ordeal. It was considered one of the stronger battle techniques in the Qingyuan Empire, and its power was further enhanced in Zhang Xuan's hands.

Before he even fully brought out the full strength of the battle technique, the hall was filled with lightning.

While the might of the Thousand Punches of the Lightning Sea could not be compared with the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, it was harnessed with the Power of Lightning, which made it extremely effective.

It was not exactly true to say that the more profound and powerful a battle technique was, the more effective it would be in battle. To truly maximize one's fighting prowess, the key lay in the effective use of battle techniques according to the situation instead.

It was for this reason that experts would strive to create more battle techniques so that they would have a greater number of cards to play in battle.

“Hmm?”

Not expecting a mere Saint 3-dan Embryonic Soul realm cultivator to be able to withstand his assaults and even launch a counterattack, the Qingtian Emperor's face turned livid. He subconsciously took two steps back before spreading his hands open to claw at the barrage of punches around him.

Huala!

The lightning in the area suddenly dissipated into nothingness, as if some kind of mysterious might had burst them.

“I am a Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage cultivator, a person who has been through three lightning ordeals! Even the lightning from the heavens is unable to kill me, did you really naively believe that this lightning attribute battle technique of yours would be able to faze me?” The Qingtian Emperor harrumphed coldly.

A powerful surge of aura burst from the Qingtian Emperor, and for a moment, his presence suddenly seemed to tower, as if an infallible giant who could not be felled no matter what kind of means one used against him.

“I know that just lightning itself won’t be sufficient to deal with you... but what if I paired that with my Glacier Rain Sword?” Zhang Xuan replied with a smirk.

The Qingtian Emperor frowned. “Your Glacier Rain Sword?”

He distinctively recalled that he had knocked away the young man’s sword at the very start of the battle.

It should be lodged in the wall...

With this thought in mind, he subconsciously turned his gaze toward where he remembered the Glacier Rain Sword to be, and the next moment, his eyes narrowed in shock.

“Where’s the sword!”

To his astonishment, the sword had already vanished from sight. At some point in time, the young man had actually managed to retrieve the sword behind his back!

“Why don’t you try looking behind you?” Zhang Xuan advised kindly as he gestured to the Qingtian Emperor’s back.

The Qingtian Emperor’s eyes widened as he quickly turned around fearfully. However, there was nothing behind him at all.

“Damn, I fell for his trap!”

Realizing that he had been tricked, without even bothering to turn around to look at Zhang Xuan, he immediately leaped to the side in hopes to dodging any attack that could soon be landing on him. However, it was already too late. A dull pain pervaded his chest, and glancing downward, he realized that a palm had landed squarely on his body.

Under the impact of the palm, his face paled, and he retreated multiple steps.

As the young man had to move swiftly in order to launch this surprise assault, the palm strike did not wield too much

strength, so he actually was not too severely injured by it. However, the very fact that he had been had by such a crude trick left him feeling deeply frenzied within.

He was the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage, an old monster who had lived for countless years, as well as a Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage expert. And yet, he had actually been injured by such a ridiculous maneuver conducted by a mere Embryonic Soul realm lad... Unforgivable!

“I’ll kill you!” Roaring furiously, the Qingtian Emperor drove the Slaughter of Zhenqi in his body furiously as he prepared his strongest move.

At that moment, however, the young man’s voice sounded once more. “Below you!”

“Humph, once bitten, twice shy! Do you think that I’ll fall for your crude ploys twice?”

Seeing that the young man was still taking him for a fool, the Qingtian Emperor clenched his jaws furiously in anger. But before he could make his move, he suddenly heard a ‘wuuu’ sound beneath him, and his eyebrows shot up in alarm. Lowering his head, he saw the Glacier Rain Sword, which should have been lodged in the wall, surging straight up toward him.

“Do you honestly think that a mere Saint low-tier sword will be able to kill me? Brat, you are really underestimating me far too much...” the Qingtian Emperor sneered coldly as he directed the energy he had just gathered toward the sword. If his attack landed, the sword would surely shatter into innumerable pieces.

But before he could exert his strength, a huge shadow suddenly loomed over him, and it was growing larger at an unbelievable pace.

Glancing upward, he saw a massive cauldron plummeting straight for his head.

Horrified, he instinctively redirected his strength upward to fend against the cauldron.

Boom!

Even though he was a Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage expert, he astonishingly realized that the falling cauldron was no weaker than him. The momentum with which the cauldron fell was simply so great that it ended up pushing his body downward.

Puhe!

The sword stabbed right into the opening of his alimentary canal.

Red blood trickled down his thigh, as if signifying the blossoming of a new flower.

A moment later, a piercing scream of agony resounded in the air.

1218 Art of Cloning

“Tsk tsk!” Zhang Xuan clicked his tongue as he covered his eyes with his hands.

It was so gruesome that he could not even bring himself to look at it.

It was true that the Glacier Rain Sword had followed him for many years, but now that it had been sullied by the other party in such a horrendous manner, how was he supposed to bring himself to use it in the future?

Just thinking about the stench on it was enough to make him cringe.

His poor Glacier Rain Sword... Hopefully that poor sword will be able to walk out of its mental trauma from this incident one day!

While Zhang Xuan was pitying his weapon, the Qingtian Emperor felt as if he was going mad.

He was an Emperor of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, an incredibly noble and authoritative existence. In the first place, it was already humiliating that someone like him would have to personally deal with an Embryonic Soul realm brat, but to think that the brat would even pop his cherry at that!

To make things worse, the cauldron above him was still shaking its massive bottom right above his face, as if trying to find a more comfortable position on his face to rest. An indescribable feeling of humiliation consumed his mind, pushing him toward the abyss of madness.

“All of you must die!” Roaring furiously, the Qingtian Emperor drove his Zhenqi of Slaughter at full strength.

Sou!

The sword that was lodged up his bottom was sent flying, and the massive cauldron was knocked off his face as well.

“Master, he’s really powerful!” Seeing how the other party was actually able to knock it off and singe its bottom red, the Golden Origin Cauldron eyed the Qingtian Emperor warily.

“He’s indeed powerful,” Zhang Xuan remarked grimly.

He had already known that it would be hard for him to deal with the Qingtian Emperor with his current strength. The Golden Origin Cauldron was at Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage as well, and while it possessed sufficient strength to fend off the Qingtian Emperor, it was not strong enough to kill the latter. Additionally, he did not want to expose Vicious’ existence yet.

As such, he had slowly made preparations to lure the Qingtian Emperor into his trap so as to launch a decisive two-pronged attack against the latter.

He had thought that it would at least be able to incapacitate the Qingtian Emperor even if it was not sufficient to kill the latter, but who would have thought that the latter would actually be able to force the Glacier Rain Sword out with his zhenqi!

As expected of the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage, even his cherry was made of steel. Admirable indeed.

Huala!

At this moment, the Qingtian Emperor suddenly roared furiously, and all of a sudden, his body began growing bigger and bigger, as if he had eaten some kind of growth stimulant. In the blink of an eye, he had already grown to three-meters tall.

Seeing the sight before him, Zhang Xuan blinked his eyes in a daze.

What was the point of growing so big?

With too large a physique, one’s flexibility and agility would face a steep decline. Furthermore, there would also be a larger surface area for an enemy to strike. Thus, no cultivator would enlarge their size in battle unless there was a compelling reason to do so.

No matter how he looked at it, it seemed as if the Qingtian Emperor was only putting himself in a disadvantageous situation.

“Ah?”

While Zhang Xuan was still confused by what the Qingtian Emperor was up to, the latter suddenly used his right hand to grab his left hand and pulled forcefully.

Si la!

To Zhang Xuan’s horror, the Qingtian Emperor split in two!

This... Is he committing suicide because he is unable to face the humiliation of being deflowered? Zhang Xuan widened his eyes.

Zhang Xuan was not the only one bewildered by the current situation. The Golden Origin Cauldron was also flabbergasted.

At the same time, the Glacier Rain Sword stopped its retching as it stared at the Qingtian Emperor as if it had seen a ghost.

If anyone should commit suicide, the sword should have been the first one to do so!

Sullied by the other party, it felt dirty from head to toe. Just the thought of what had happened earlier was enough to send its stomach, if it had one, churning in disgust.

But did it cry?

Did it cause a fuss?

No!

A person should live strong in this world—don’t seek the end so easily!

Ahem, this applied to weapons as well, of course.

Even when it was put through such agony, it still gritted its teeth and bore with it, believing that there would be a brighter future ahead. But as the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage, why was the Qingtian Emperor so weak-minded?

To actually tear himself apart over something like this... He sure was vicious to himself! Was this some kind of custom

among the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe?

While the human and the two artifacts were staring at the sight dumbstruck, Vicious' voice suddenly sounded in Zhang Xuan's head. "Master, he's not bleeding! I think he has used some kind of secret art, so be careful!"

"Secret art?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

"Un. My memory is still in tatters, so I can't really remember clearly at this point, but from the looks of it... it seems like resemble a secret art exclusive to the Emperors of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe!" Vicious said.

"By bearing with the overwhelming pain from tearing oneself into two, that secret art allows one to divide oneself into two! Once it is successfully executed, it will effectively double one's fighting prowess! However, there is a limited duration to how long the secret art can be sustained for, and once that duration is over, one's cultivation will fall steeply. Most likely, the Qingtian Emperor realized that he couldn't kill you, so he decided to go all out by using this secret art!"

"Divide oneself into two? There's actually such a convenient secret art in the world?" Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in disbelief.

Just one Qingtian Emperor had nearly cornered him. Once the other party successfully cloned himself, wouldn't he be in deep trouble?

More importantly, the fighting prowess commanded by two Qingtian Emperors was not as easy as one plus one. Both Qingtian Emperors would share the same thoughts, allowing them to collaborate with perfect synergy. Without a doubt, they would be a far more difficult opponent to deal with than the Crimson Emerald Duplet Swordsmanship.

"Golden Origin Cauldron and Glacier Rain Sword, hurry up and stop that fellow!" Zhang Xuan roared as he dashed forward without any hesitation.

If he faced two Qingtian Emperors there simultaneously, he really might lose his life! He had to stop the division of the Qingtian Emperor at all costs!

Huala!

Before Zhang Xuan could arrive, his saber qi was already fast on its way toward the two halves of the Qingtian Emperor.

Using his palm as a saber, he intended to sever the latter's head before he could do anything.

At the same time, the Golden Origin Cauldron and the Glacier Rain Sword had also rushed up to the Qingtian Emperor to launch their most powerful attacks.

But before any of the attacks could reach, the two halves of the Qingtian Emperor suddenly squirmed uncontrollably, and in the blink of an eye, each of the two halves grew their other half, forming two complete, identical individuals.

Peng!

One of the Qingtian Emperors stopped Zhang Xuan saber qi with ease while the other one charged forward to smack him away, flinging him forcefully toward the wall. Zhang Xuan's face reddened, and fresh blood spewed from his mouth.

Peng peng peng!

Zhang Xuan quickly drove his Heaven's Path zhenqi to alleviate his injuries. When he raised his head once more, he saw that the Golden Origin Cauldron and the Glacier Rain Sword had been sent flying as well. One created a massive depression in the ground whereas the other one ended up being deeply lodged in the wall once more.

As expected, the combined fighting prowess of the two Qingtian Emperors was indeed fearsome. Even though the Golden Origin Cauldron was a Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage expert as well, it still ended up being subdued in a single move.

“To have forced me to use this move, you can rest in peace now!”

The simultaneous speaking of the two identical Qingtian Emperors had a bizarrely unnerving feeling to it. The two Qingtian Emperors glared at Zhang Xuan coldly, dying to tear the young man into pieces.

They had guarded their cherry fervently for so many years, and yet, the young man had actually popped it so casually. Just this alone was sufficient to make them lose their rationality.

“You... Which one is the clone, and which one is the main body?” Zhang Xuan asked warily as he prepared himself to dodge the attacks from the Qingtian Emperors.

Even though it might have appeared to be an equal split, considering that one of them would disappear after some time, there was bound to be a main body and a clone among them.

“I’ll tell you by your grave!” the two Qingtian Emperors roared as they charged forward.

Huala!

In an instant, it felt as if the air in the hall had been replaced with killing intent, making every move that Zhang Xuan wanted to make incredibly difficult.

“Block him!” Zhang Xuan roared at the Golden Origin Cauldron as he waved his hand to destroy the Spatial Seal hindering his movements.

Upon hearing his instruction, the Golden Origin Cauldron charged toward the Qingtian Emperors furiously, roaring, “You popped-cherry brats! I’ll relinquish my name as Ding Ding if I don’t kill you today!”

Hearing the Golden Origin Cauldron’s taunting, fury immediately blazed like an inferno in the eyes of the two Qingtian Emperors. “You’re courting your death!”

That was their greatest injury at the moment, and yet, that damned cauldron actually dared speak of it so easily! There was no way they would let the other party get away with that!

Thus, one of the Qingtian Emperors turned around to deal with the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Boom boom boom!

Before long, the duo began clashing with one another.

Seeing that the Golden Origin Cauldron had managed to lure one of the Qingtian Emperors away, Zhang Xuan heaved a

sigh of relief. He swiftly flicked his wrist and drew a spear as he prepared to face the other Qingtian Emperor.

Just like the Glacier Rain Sword, the spear was a Saint low-tier spear as well. However, just like the other weapons in the Qiu Wu Palace, it did not have a spirit.

Huala!

With a swiftly thrust of his hand, the spear pierced forward with frightening momentum.

Tzzzzzzz!

A piercing shrill echoed loudly from the friction between the spear and the surrounding air.

Even though Zhang Xuan rarely practiced his spear arts, the fact that Zheng Yang's spearmanship had originated from him was something that should not be neglected. His Heaven's Path Spear Art was nowhere weaker than his swordsmanship.

Gu gu gu!

In the face of Zhang Xuan's spear, the Qingtian Emperor showed no signs of dodging at all. Instead, he narrowed his eyes and clashed with the incoming spear with a flick of his black fingernail.

Judging from how resilient and sharp the Qingtian Emperor's fingernail was, it seemed to be some kind of powerful artifact as well.

Upon making contact, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt immense strength surging from the tip of his spear toward his arms, and he swiftly retreated several steps.

Had it been anyone else, the multiple clashes with the Qingtian Emperor surely would have left injuries piling up on them, rendering them weaker and weaker. However, as one who possessed the Heaven's Path zhenqi, Zhang Xuan was able to heal any injuries at an astounding speed. Even if he sustained an injury, it would not remain for long. As such, at least for the time being, he was still able to maintain his fighting prowess at its peak.

However, the Golden Origin Cauldron and the Glacier Rain Sword were different. Even with their collaboration, they still were not a match for the powerful Qingtian Emperor without Zhang Xuan's pointers.

The situation really did not look good at all. Putting aside the question whether Zhang Xuan had sufficient zhenqi to drag the battle out or not, once the Golden Origin Cauldron and Glacier Rain Sword were defeated, he would be forced to face the two Qingtian Emperors simultaneously, and there was no way he would stand a chance in that situation.

This secret art is really troublesome to deal with! Zhang Xuan thought grimly as he took a few steps back to heal up his injuries.

"Since you have already forced me to use my Art of Cloning, there's no way I can allow you to walk out of here alive!" The Qingtian Emperor gritted his teeth and roared as he charged toward Zhang Xuan once more.

With a flick of his fingers, he sent five surges of sword qi toward Zhang Xuan, intending to rip him into pieces.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan swiftly activated the Unbounded Voyager to flee several dozen meters back.

Hu hu!

But barely after Zhang Xuan escaped from the area, the Qingtian Emperor arrived before him once more to launch his second wave of assault.

To his surprise, the divided Qingtian Emperor was actually able to move at speed that was in no way inferior to his!

Zhang Xuan repeated the same cycle eight more times, even abruptly changing his directions from time to time to shake off the Qingtian Emperor, but his efforts were to no avail. This left cold sweat trickling down his back.

All of a sudden, another Qingtian Emperor appeared right in front of him.

To Zhang Xuan's astonishment, the Golden Origin Cauldron's massive feet were already twitching on the ground

uncontrollably, seemingly pummeled badly by the other Qingtian Emperor. From the looks of it, it did not seem like it would be able to battle for some time.

On the other hand, the Glacier Rain Sword was stabbed deeply into the ground, not moving at all.

“You... As an Emperor of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, don't you think that it's embarrassing for the two of you to gang up on me? This is unfair!” Zhang Xuan spat through gritted teeth as he slowly backed away

“Unfair? Hahahaha!” The two Qingtian Emperors burst into laughter simultaneously. With a cold voice, they sneered, “Feel free to clone yourself too, no one is stopping you!”

“But... I don't know such a secret art!” Zhang Xuan protested.

The two Qingtian Emperors scoffed coldly. “Is that supposed to be any of my business? You only have your own ignorance and powerless to blame!”

After saying those words, the duo exerted their strength simultaneously, and once again, the space around Zhang Xuan seemed to have frozen. As if an insect stuck in a spider's web, he found himself unable to move.

He had to exert his full strength before he was able to struggle free of the Spatial Seal and escape. However, before he could get far, the two Qingtian Emperors had caught up with him.

Peng!

A powerful blow struck Zhang Xuan from behind, sending him crashing forcefully into the wall.

Pu!

Swiftly pushing himself out from the wall, Zhang Xuan turned around to face the Qingtian Emperors warily, as if preparing himself to deal with whatever other attacks they went at him with. However, at this point, his body was already shaking uncontrollably from the severe wounds that he had sustained, and it seemed as if he already had a single foot in the grave.

“At most, we'll just die together!” Despaired, Zhang Xuan bellowed furiously as he gathered his zhenqi furiously, as if

intending to explode himself.

“Trying to explode yourself? Do you think we’ll give you an opportunity to do so?”

The two Qingtian Emperors immediately rushed forward to stop Zhang Xuan, but before they could make a move, they felt an instantaneous, splitting pain in their heads before their heads exploded simultaneously.

Peng!

Flashy and glamorous, just like the fireworks.

As the crimson rain died down, two fists finally appeared behind the necks of the Qingtian Emperors.

“You...” As if unable to believe that their heads had been destroyed, the souls of the Qingtian Emperors swiftly turned around to see the culprit behind the assault. It was none other than... Zhang Xuan!

Following which, they saw the ‘exploding’ Zhang Xuan coming up to them with disdain in his eyes.

“What is there to boast about a mere clone? You make it sound as if it’s a big deal. These days, no one dares leave home without a clone or two with them!”

1219 The Qingtian Emperor Bursts into Tears

It was already hard enough to deal with a single Qingtian Emperor, and dealing with two of them simultaneously was nearly impossible. As such, Zhang Xuan had slowly made the necessary preparations. First, he had his clone conceal himself in the hall before retreating again and again so as to make the Qingtian Emperors lower their guard, as well as to lure them where he wanted them.

The final explosion served as a distraction for the duo, buying sufficient time for his clone to launch an assault.

It sounded simple on the surface, but it was actually much more complex than it sounded. In order to put up a convincing act to fool the Qingtian Emperors, he had needed to carefully decide which techniques he should use, how far he should escape, where he should stop, and from which angle his clone launch should launch his assault to not be noticed.

It was only due to such careful calculation that the plan worked out in the end.

At the same time, it was also fortunate that his clone had been cultivating hard in recent days, granting it strength far greater than the main body, allowing it to destroy the bodies of the two Qingtian Emperors with ease.

Otherwise, with just him and the Golden Origin Cauldron, the chances of victory would have been extremely slim.

“Damn it!”

The corpses of the Qingtian Emperors fell to the ground with a loud ‘plop’. Following which, with a furious roar, two souls oracles rose from the two bodies.

The Primordial Spirits of the Qingtian Emperors!

Astonishingly, the division was not just limited to the Qingtian Emperor’s body—even his Primordial Spirit had split in two

as well!

Boom!

As soon as the two Primordial Spirits appeared, the surrounding air suddenly seemed to have grown even more viscous, as if one was standing in quicksand. Putting aside making a move, just remaining upright would have been a struggle for any ordinary cultivator!

As soul oracles, the Primordial Spirits of the Qingtian Emperors were far stronger than their bodies, allowing them to exert strength far greater than before.

Hu!

All of a sudden, the two Primordial Spirits suddenly began fusing back together.

It appeared that the Qingtian Emperor's Art of Cloning had become unstable with the destruction of both of the bodies, making it difficult for the Primordial Spirits to maintain their divided form.

The fusion was completed in an instant.

Seeing how his advantage had been lost, the Qingtian Emperor's face turned incredibly livid. With a wrathful bellow, he charged toward Zhang Xuan once more. "You bastard, how dare you destroy my body? I'll make you pay the price for your actions!"

He had thought that he would have been able to kill Zhang Xuan with ease once he activated his trump card, the Art of Cloning. Yet, not only did he fail to kill that brat, his physical body had even ended up being destroyed in the process. At this moment, the sheer frustration and rage in his mind were enough to make him erupt.

If he had only been angry at Zhang Xuan for undoing his many years of efforts and preparations before, at this very moment, there was nothing else in his mind but the overwhelming loathing he had for Zhang Xuan.

Before the other party's threat, Zhang Xuan simply chuckled leisurely. "Is that the only line you know? You have already

said it quite a few times, but aren't I still alive and kicking over here? Cut the crap.”

Not even bothering to avoid the Qingtian Emperor's attack, he thrust his palm forward instead.

Tzzzzzzzz!

As soon as the Qingtian Emperor's Primordial Spirit came into contact with Zhang Xuan's palm, a sizzling reminiscent of metal coming into contact with sulfur filled the hall. In the blink of an eye, a massive hole had been corroded open in the center the Qingtian Emperor's Primordial Spirit.

“Ahhh!” The Qingtian Emperor cried in agony as he hurriedly retracted his hand. At the same time, he stared at Zhang Xuan with a disbelieving look. “Y-you...”

Even back when he was in his physical body, he had still managed to overpower Zhang Xuan easily, but he had unfortunately been done in by the young man's schemes in the end. Given that, he should have been able to deal with the young man even more easily now that he was in his Primordial Spirit form. Yet... why would it turn out like that? Why did his Primordial Spirit end up being corroded instead?

“If you were just an ordinary Primordial Spirit, I might not have been able to deal with you so easily. But since you are a soul oracle, I happen to have a hundred ways to end your life...” Paying no heed to the other party's shock, Zhang Xuan smirked haughtily as he swiftly shrouded the entire hall with his Heaven's Path zhenqi, not intending to give the Qingtian Emperor any opportunity to escape at all.

Typically speaking, with his current strength, he should not have been a match for the Primordial Spirit of a Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage cultivator. However, the Qingtian Emperor just happened to be a soul oracle, resulting in the yin energy in his Primordial Spirit being far more concentrated compared to ordinary Primordial Spirits... and the Heaven's Path zhenqi happened to be the very nemesis of that!

Just as a metal hammer would eventually be corroded into nothing no matter how hard it pounded on sulfur, as powerful the Qingtian Emperor might have been, there was no way he stood a chance against the Heaven's Path zhenqi!

"Damn you..." The Qingtian Emperor glared at Zhang Xuan coldly.

At this moment, he finally realized how far he had screwed up. With his superior strength, he had wielded the decisive advantage at the very start of the battle, but with the scheming of the young man, his advantage had gradually been lost throughout the course of the battle, and now, he was in the weaker position.

Glancing at the zhenqi shrouding the entire hall, his face turned ghastly pale.

At this point, while he could not understand the reason behind it, he had already come to realize that the zhenqi in the area had the ability to corrode his Primordial Spirit. If he attempted to charge out of the encirclement, he would only wear himself thin and worsen his position.

"Even if I die here, I'll bring you down with me!" Gritting his teeth furiously, the Qingtian Emperor roared furiously as he focused his soul energy together and charged at Zhang Xuan once more.

At this point, it was already a do or die situation. If he could kill the young man before his Primordial Spirit corroded into nothing, he might still stand a chance at survival.

Even if he did die in the end, he would never be able to rest in peace if he did not bring the young man down with him!

Boom!

Exerting his full strength once more, the Qingtian Emperor cast another Spatial Seal around Zhang Xuan, restricting the latter's movements.

"You sure are a resilient insect. I guess the Emperors of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe aren't just for show after all," Zhang Xuan remarked coldly as he released a powerful burst of zhenqi, breaking the Spatial Seal around him. After which,

he swiftly raised his palm to face the Qingtian Emperor's assault.

Tzzzzzzzzzz!

That palm strike infused with the Heaven's Path zhenqi swiftly clashed with the Qingtian Emperor's Primordial Spirit, producing yet another series of sizzling sound.

"Ahhh!" With a cry of agony, the Qingtian Emperor's Primordial Spirit shrunk significantly.

"Damn it! Damn it, damn it!" Gritting his teeth tightly, the Qingtian Emperor cursed furiously.

The greatest trump card of a Leaving Aperture realm expert was their control over the environment, allowing them to limit the movements of their enemies. Yet, for some reason, the young man was able to break his Spatial Seal easily as if it was nothing at all.

With a swift motion, the Qingtian Emperor distanced himself away from Zhang Xuan. After which, he gathered his energy on his fingertip before blasting it toward Zhang Xuan.

He was thinking that as long as he could distance himself from the young man, it would be more difficult for the young man's zhenqi to get to him.

Weng!

The burst of energy from the Qingtian Emperor was incredibly concentrated, and it traveled so quickly that its motion was hardly discernible with the eye.

Peng!

As expected, Zhang Xuan failed to withstand the burst of energy, and it struck him squarely in his chest, sending him flying into the distance.

Using the same method, the Qingtian Emperor also sent Zhang Xuan's clone flying as well.

Without his Heaven's Path zhenqi to suppress the Qingtian Emperor's strength, there was no way Zhang Xuan would be

able to face the Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage soul oracle head on.

Seeing how the Qingtian Emperor was able to come up with a countermeasure against him so quickly, Zhang Xuan's face turned grim. As expected of an old monster who has lived for countless years, he sure does react swiftly!

While using his Heaven's Path zhenqi to heal his injuries, he swiftly reanalyzed his current situation.

The further he spread out his Heaven's Path zhenqi, the less concentrated it would be. While it was true that he would be able to defeat the Qingtian Emperor if he just bombard the entire hall with his Heaven's Path zhenqi, the problem with that was that the consumption of zhenqi would be insane as well. He might very well deplete his entire zhenqi reserves for that.

Considering how he had not even met Vicious yet, depleting his zhenqi reserves at this point would likely be an unwise move.

What should I do? Zhang Xuan thought with a frown.

However, the Qingtian Emperor did not intend to grant him any time to think. With a furious roar, he sent another burst of energy toward him.

Wuuuuuuuu!

The sheer accumulation of power burst through the air, seemingly wanting to tear a hole through the world.

Having anticipated the move, Zhang Xuan easily dodged the attack with a swift side step. Just when he was about to counterattack, a thought suddenly came to his mind. A smile slowly crept up his lips, and he flicked his wrist.

Bam!

An altar fell onto the ground.

Zhang Xuan placed his palm on it lightly.

Hu la!

The inscriptions atop the altar swiftly lit up, and a powerful suction force began pulling the Primordial Spirit of the Qingtian Emperor in.

Feeling the powerful suction force pulling him in, the Qingtian Emperor widened his eyes in astonishment. What? Isn't that the altar that I set up in Qingyuan City?

That was the altar that his clone had set up in Qingyuan City to kill master teachers and nab their souls. Who would have thought that the other party would actually bring it with him and even use it against him?

Supposedly, that altar could only be activated with the Slaughter of Zhenqi unique to Otherworldly Demons. Furthermore, the formation for it was extremely complicated. Even he would require much preparation in order to activate the altar once, and the energy consumption was massive. So how in the world did that fellow do it so easily?

Noticing something, the eyebrows of the Qingtian Emperor shot up in astonishment. Wait a moment, he's using his own zhenqi to activate the altar?

The other party was actually using his own zhenqi to fuel the altar! Just how much zhenqi did he possess to squander it like that?

The Qingtian Emperor was convinced that Zhang Xuan would not be able to maintain the activation of the altar for too long, but as time passed, he found the suction power from the altar growing stronger and stronger. Eventually, he was unable to hold on anymore, and his Primordial Spirit was swiftly dragged all the way to the top of the altar.

The altar was crafted using a unique method from Vicious. Those whose soul or Primordial Spirit was still grounded by a physical body might have been able to withstand the suction force of the altar, but with only his Primordial Spirit remaining at the moment, the Qingtian Emperor stood no chance at all.

The Qingtian Emperor struggled furiously as he was helplessly dragged toward the altar, but it was to no avail. At this point,

he suddenly saw two Zhang Xuans charging up to him before launching a furious barrage of attacks on him.

Elbow, palm strike, punch, kick... Every single possible attack that could be launched by a human rained down on him relentlessly.

“Damn it!” With a cry of anger, the Qingtian Emperor roared furiously as he released an overwhelming burst of energy with his full might.

That burst of energy had sapped his zhenqi and soul energy significantly, but it did free him from the suction of the altar. As soon as he broke free, he immediately stretched his claws toward Zhang Xuan to snap his neck.

But before his hands could reach, the two Zhang Xuans had already retreated a hundred meters away.

Naturally, the next course of action that the Qingtian Emperor would do was destroy the altar beneath him, but to his horror, the young man had already stowed the altar into his storage ring.

The Qingtian Emperor’s face immediately turned livid. He swiftly gathered his energy on his fingertips once more and launched a barrage of attack on the two Zhang Xuans, only to see them whipping out the altar once more to activate it.

Huala!

He was swiftly dragged over, and the two Zhang Xuans charged over to pummel him.

“You bastard! I swear that I’ll rip you into pieces!” Feeling so furious that he could have exploded on the spot, the Qingtian Emperor tapped into the reserves of his strength and successfully broke free of the altar once more.

However, again, he found that the two fellows had already fled to somewhere even further away to activate the altar.

Padah!

He was pulled over once more, and yet another barrage of attacks fell on him.

The cycle continued a few more times, and the Qingtian Emperor's Primordial Spirit grew smaller and smaller.

Feeling that he would dissipate at any moment, the Qingtian Emperor finally burst into tears.

How can there be someone that shameless in the world?

He had seen plenty of capable and powerful master teachers in his time, but this was the first time he was seeing someone as shameless as that!

1220 Listen to Me

The Golden Origin Cauldron, which had been smashed into the ground previously by the Qingtian Emperor, finally came to and struggled to its feet. Upon seeing the sight above, it could not help but shudder in fear.

“Master... sure is vicious!”

It had thought that after fusing with the Black Goldcrystal Ore and undergoing three lightning ordeals to reach Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, it could finally be considered an expert among experts. Yet, who would have thought that it was still a level beneath its master?

For someone as keen, resourceful, and powerful as the Qingtian Emperor to be reduced to such a state, it really felt like a dream.

The Golden Origin Cauldron made a mental note that no matter what it did in the future, it should never cross its master regardless of the situation.

The cauldron did not even dare imagine what kind of plight it would be put into if it did so.

“Enough!” After a series of pummeling, Zhang Xuan finally waved his hand.

Upon hearing those words, his clone had a look of disappointment on his face.

Spending day after day trapped within the Myriad Anthive Nest, it was not easy for it to have an opportunity to come out and pummel someone. It had not even had its fair share of fun yet when everything suddenly came to a halt.

At this moment, the Qingtian Emperor’s Primordial Spirit was already as weak as it could get, and it seemed as if it would dissipate at any moment.

It had sustained significant damage from the Art of Cloning, and the relentless pummeling from the two Zhang Xuans had

really done nothing to help. Not only had his Primordial Spirit grown incredibly weak, his mind was also on the verge of snapping as well.

“I will... kill... you.”

Despite his frailty, the eyes of the Qingtian Emperor were still burning with hatred.

“Yes, yes, I know, I know. There’s no need to get anxious now. I’ll just do a quick Soul Search on you, so bear with it. It’ll be over before you know it!” Zhang Xuan consoled as he tapped his finger on the glabella of the Qingtian Emperor’s Primordial Spirit.

“No!” Seeing that Zhang Xuan was going to use Soul Search against him, the eyes of the Qingtian Emperor widened in fright. He immediately struggled, wanting to escape, but the suction power of the altar was simply too strong. His Primordial Spirit just would not move an inch no matter what he did.

The struggling of the Qingtian Emperor was interfering with his Soul Search, so Zhang Xuan turned to his clone and instructed, “Clone, come over and help me hold him in place. I’ll conduct a Soul Search on him to get the intelligence we need first.”

“Sure thing!” Excited, Zhang Xuan’s clone immediately hopped over to the Qingtian Emperor and sent a forceful kick to the latter’s head.

Paji!

In an instant, the Emperor of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe was reduced to a ‘大’ shape on the altar. With an indignant look in his eyes, he continued struggling with all his might, but things simply would not go as he wished.

“Still being disobedient here, eh?” Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan’s clone raised his hand and yelled, “Sword!”

Hu la!

The Glacier Rain Sword immediately flew into his grasp. “If you dare move once more, I’ll pierce my sword right through

your throat!”

The Qingtian Emperor immediately froze on the spot, not daring to move at all.

“That’s more like it. Good boy!” Nodding in satisfaction, Zhang Xuan’s clone turned to Zhang Xuan and said, “Alright, it’s done. You can conduct a Soul Search on him now!”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan placed his finger onto the Qingtian Emperor’s glabella before sending a sliver of his consciousness in.

Just as he was about to examine the latter’s memories carefully to see where Vicious was, the entire hall suddenly began shaking. Following which, an eerie voice boomed.

“Who would have thought that a Celestial Master Teacher would actually be skilled in the arts of the soul oracles too? If I spread this news, do you think that the humans will continue accepting you as one of their own, or will they send their strongest experts to assassinate you?”

Following that, a cold laughter echoed in the air. The voice seemed to sound right within Zhang Xuan’s ears, making it impossible for him to discern the source of it.

“You are finally showing yourself, huh?”

Halting his Soul Search, Zhang Xuan swiftly shoved the altar and Qingtian Emperor’s Primordial Spirit into his storage ring before standing back up.

He had known that Vicious was definitely in the area, and the Soul Search was actually just a ploy to lure the latter out.

“Despite being only at Saint 3-dan pinnacle, you were able to defeat the Saint 5-dan advanced stage Qingtian Emperor. I must say, as expected of a Celestial Master Teacher. Just like Kong shi back then, you do have a unique insight into cultivation and combat that far surpasses other geniuses,” Vicious remarked meaningfully. “However... you are still too young. In your current state, it’s simply too easy for me to kill you!”

Right after saying those words, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt the world spin around him. A powerful might tugged at his soul forcefully, nearly dragging it out of his body.

“This...” Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

It was the same feeling that he had felt from the massive eye he had encountered back when he was in Chen Zhe’s residence. It felt as if he had lost control of his soul, and the slightest mistake in his control would result in his soul being devoured whole.

Driving his Heaven’s Path zhenqi furiously, Zhang Xuan struggled desperately against the powerful suction force. However, the other party was simply too powerful. In the blink of an eye, it felt as if a black hole had materialized right before him, as if it would not rest until it devoured him whole.

Hu la!

Eventually, Zhang Xuan’s soul was dragged out of his body and pulled over to the altar.

“T-this... What a huge soul you have!” Vicious was visibly stunned by what he saw.

Skilled in the arts of the soul oracles, the strength of his soul was extraordinary as well. Yet, who would have thought that the young man before him would have one that was even bigger than his! This had already surpassed a level that he could comprehend!

However, the shock only lasted for a moment. Swiftly regaining his composure, a pair of eyes suddenly appeared from the other end of the black hole, staring at Zhang Xuan silently.

“You should know that I have the ability to kill you easily.”

“I don’t deny that,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

“Good. I like dealing with candid people,” Vicious replied.

“Since that’s the case, you should also know that the reason I have spared you for so long is because you still have some value to me!”

“You want me to free you?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It’s indeed easier to speak with the intelligent! As long as you free me, I’ll spare you this once!” Vicious said.

“You will spare me? Do you mean that you will allow me to exist as a Soulless Metal Humanoid or your puppet as soon as you are freed from your restraints?” Zhang Xuan scoffed.

“You don’t have any other options,” Vicious replied frankly, not denying the matter.

“Since I’ll face death regardless of whether I help you or not, tell me, why should I free you?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Vicious harrumphed coldly. “You don’t have any choice in this matter. If you want to see all of the master teachers and combat masters who have accompanied you here dying before your eyes... feel free to turn me down!”

Following which, the black hole suddenly stirred, and a screen appeared.

It was Hall Master Xing and the others.

At this moment, they were still surrounded by countless Soulless Metal Humanoids. Those guarding the outer perimeter—Division Head Wei, Division Head Liao, and the others—had already sustained considerably injuries, and they seemed to be drained as well.

They had been chosen to participate in this expedition for the superior strength they possessed compared to their peers, but against so many puppets who felt neither pain nor exhaustion, it was inevitable that they were eventually worn down.

Hu!

At this moment, a mechanism suddenly whirred into action within the room, and a figure slowly walked out, heading toward Hall Master Xing and the others.

The figure was a Soulless Metal Humanoid as well, but it wielded strength far greater than the others in the room. Astonishingly, it was a Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage puppet! Powerful zhenqi burst from its acupoints, seemingly flaunting the superior strength that it wielded.

“Your comrades already have their hands full dealing with the other Soulless Metal Humanoids. If I make a move as well, how many of them do you think will remain alive at the end of this?” The pair of eyes continued staring intently at Zhang Xuan, as if peering right into his thoughts, as it sneered coldly. “You don’t have much time left to make your decision.”

Following which, the Soulless Metal Humanoid on the screen dashed right into Hall Master Xing’s group.

“Everyone, stand your ground...” Alarmed, Division Head Wei bellowed anxiously.

However, before he could finish his words, the Soulless Metal Humanoid had already sunk its palm into his chest.

Peng!

Division Head Wei was immediately sent flying into the wall, coughing up huge mouthfuls of blood.

His abrupt absence resulted in an opening in the formation. Before the others could move to close the opening, that fellow charged toward the second strongest of the group, Division Head Liao, to incapacitate him.

Kacha!

Under normal circumstances, even against a Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage expert, as long as Division Head Liao exerted his full strength, he would at least have been able to withstand a few blows and buy some time. However, after the long battle with the Soulless Metal Humanoids, his zhenqi and stamina were already reaching their limits. As a result, he ended up caving in within a single blow, collapsing weakly to the ground.

In the blink of an eye, two members of their group had been incapacitated.

“You bastard! I’ll kill you!” Seeing that two of his companions had been severely wounded, Zhang Jiuxiao roared furiously. Whipping out the two Saint intermediate-tier sabers he had, he began launching a barrage of attacks toward the Soulless Metal Humanoid.

However, seemingly expecting Zhang Jiuxiao's move, the Soulless Metal Humanoid raised its hand and tapped his finger forward.

Weng! The swords suddenly froze in midair.

With a flushed face, Zhang Jiuxiao struggled with all his might, but he found that he was not able to move at all. It was as if someone had glued him to the floor.

In the end, he was only a Primordial Spirit realm primary stage cultivator. As powerful as he might have been, the gap between him and a Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage cultivator was simply too great.

After being pinned on the spot, the Soulless Metal Humanoid sneered coldly as it walked forward and struck Zhang Jiuxiao with its palm.

Padah!

Zhang Jiuxiao was immediately sent flying. However, while he was flying in midair, a brilliant light suddenly shimmered from his chest, and his retreating figure abruptly came to a halt. It seemed like some kind of protective amulet or the sort had been activated.

As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he still had a few protective artifacts on hand in case he met with danger.

“Interesting... However, if you think that the amulet will be able to stop me, I'll have to say that you are being hopelessly optimistic!” Vicious scoffed.

Under his control, the Soulless Metal Humanoid bent its knees before abruptly leaping up. Then, with a series of fluid motions reminiscent of a musician playing a zither, a barrage of attacks was launched toward Zhang Jiuxiao.

Weng weng weng weng!

The activated protective amulet shielded Zhang Jiuxiao well, shielding him from harm. However, as the barrage of attacks continued, the radiance of the protective barrier gradually grew dimmer and dimmer.

No matter how powerful a protective barrier was, it was limited by the energy it harnessed. It might have been able to withstand a powerful blow or two, but too many times, it would eventually reach its limit.

Peng!

The protective barrier finally shattered, and just like the others, Zhang Jiuxiao was struck forcefully into the wall, sustaining severe injuries in the process.

After subduing the three stronger members of the group, the rest was simple. It did not take long for the three elders whom Wu shi brought over to be incapacitated as well. Other than the severely wounded Wu shi and Hall Master Xing, it could be said that their entire group had been wiped out.

With a cold smile on its lips, the Soulless Metal Humanoid slowly walked over to Hall Master Xing with its palm raised, seemingly ready to kill the other party at any moment.

Knowing that the two severely wounded individuals wouldn't be able to withstand the might of his Soulless Metal Humanoid's attacks, Vicious glanced at Zhang Xuan provocatively. "How about it? Submit to me, and I can spare your comrades. As a Celestial Master Teacher, surely you won't watch your comrades die one by one before your eyes, right?"

The principles of the master teachers were not just mere guidelines. Rather, it was a faith that they embraced, and their state of mind was built upon this faith, giving them the strength to stand resiliently in the face of fear and despair.

However, if a master teacher abandoned their principles and watched idly as their comrades die before their eyes, it could potentially lead to a collapse of their faith and their state of mind, making it difficult for them to make any advancement in their cultivation in the future.

"Watch my comrades die before my eyes?" Hearing Vicious' words, Zhang Xuan abruptly burst into laughter. "Of course I won't!"

“You...” Bewildered by Zhang Xuan’s bizarre outburst, Vicious was just about to speak when the scene within the screen abruptly changed. The ‘severely-wounded’ Wu shi and Hall Master Xing abruptly leaped up from their positions to attack simultaneously.

Peng!

Their attack was extremely abrupt, and the Soulless Metal Humanoid was simply too close. As a result, before the Soulless Metal Humanoid could react, a massive hole was plunged through its chest, causing its ribcage to shatter entirely.

Vicious was completely taken aback by the course of events. At that moment, Zhang Xuan suddenly spoke.

“How about it? Submit to me, and I can consider sparing your Soulless Metal Humanoid! As a person who once successfully trapped Kong shi, surely you won’t watch your comrades die one by one before your eyes, right?”

“...” Vicious.

1221 Brain and Eyes

It had been hard for them to hold themselves back as they watched their comrades being sent flying by the Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage Soulless Metal Humanoid one after another. However, they knew that the other party wielded strength far greater than them, and they would only have a chance at victory if they bided their time and waited for a suitable opportunity to strike.

Fortunately, their efforts had paid off, and they had succeeded in incapacitating the latter.

Hulala!

Hall Master Xing and Wu shi got to their feet simultaneously and began clearing up all the Soulless Metal Humanoids in the area.

Having undergone the lightning ordeal, the two of them were already True Leaving Aperture realm experts. On the other hand, these Soulless Metal Humanoids were only at the Primordial Spirit realm, so there was no way they could possibly stand a chance against the duo.

After clearing up the Soulless Metal Humanoids, Wu shi hurriedly rushed up Zhang Jiuxiao, Division Head Wei, and the others, and taking out a gourd of fine wine, he gave everyone of them a mouthful of it.

In a few breaths, the wounded crowd had fully recovered from their injuries, and they rose to their feet.

“Hall Master Xing, Wu shi... What’s going on? You...”

The crowd could hardly believe what they were seeing.

The two of them had clearly suffered grievous wounds from their Leaving Aperture Ordeal, making them too frail to even stand properly, so... how in the world did they suddenly recover from their injuries?

“Principal Zhang had us pretend to be injured in order to relax the enemies and make them lower their guard. He told us only to make a move at the crucial moment,” Hall Master Xing explained.

It was true that the Leaving Aperture Ordeal had nearly cost him his life, and even though he had successfully cleared it in the end, he had sustained severe injuries.

Under normal circumstances, without months of recuperation, it would have been hard for him to return to his peak. However, the gourd of wine that Zhang Xuan had fed them was simply too potent. Not only did their physical wounds recover, more importantly, even their wounded Primordial Spirits had been nursed back to full health!

Wu shi also nodded in agreement.

He did not drink the wine, but Zhang Xuan had infused his zhenqi straight into his body. As a result, he had already recovered from the injuries as soon as he sustained them.

“Principal Zhang headed over there earlier. Let’s go over to take a look as well!”

Having just overcome a near-death experience, everyone was filled with many complex emotions within. Nevertheless, knowing that there was an enemy that they needed to overcome ahead, they decided to head on without wasting any time.

After seeing all of that, Vicious’ expression turned livid.

He had planned to trigger Hall Master Xing’s lightning ordeal in order to make them lose their strongest fighter, but who would have thought that his efforts would end up bolstering the other party’s forces instead?

“You knew that I would dispatch some men to deal with them?” Vicious looked at Zhang Xuan with killing intent in his eyes.

“I didn’t, but as the old adage goes—better safe than sorry,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

He could not have expected that Vicious would attempt to hold Wu shi and the others hostage in order to threaten him, but there was no doubt that Vicious would have attempted to harm them. Regardless of how he planned to go about doing so, it was always best to prepare some cards in advance. That way, they would not be utterly helpless in face of an unexpected situation.

This was especially so given that they were dealing with an old monster with countless years of experience. They might not have won in a direct battle of wits, but the least they could do was win in terms of preparation.

Seeing the fearless look on Zhang Xuan's face, Vicious lashed out furiously. "Very well. Do you really think that I dare not kill you?"

"Of course you want to kill me, but... are you able of doing it in your current state?" Zhang Xuan chuckled softly as he shot a sideward glance at Vicious. "If you are really able to do it, you would have done it long ago. You wouldn't be wasting words with me here."

Prior to meeting the eyes, he had encountered and fought with two other body parts of Vicious.

The first Vicious he had met was the heart. Without any hesitation, the latter had attempted to kill him. It was truly fortunate that he had possessed a golden page, allowing him to seal Vicious and force the heart to submit to him.

The second Vicious he had met was the finger. Similarly, the finger also made a move on him without wasting any breath. Considering that they had come from the same origin, it was likely that they would have the same personality. So, how could the first two Viciouses be so ferocious whereas this one would be so kind as to negotiate terms with him?

Clearly, the other party was all talk. While the other party kept the matter of killing him by his mouth, the fact was that it was probably easier said than done.

Otherwise, he would have long made his move.

Alternatively, it could also have meant that Vicious was intending to use his hand to be freed from his restraints. With that in mind, Vicious had been forced to play along with him, coming up with this entire show to force him to submit.

But regardless of which reason it was, Zhang Xuan had nothing to fear.

“You...” Vicious was taken aback.

“Alright, let’s not waste any more time here. I’ll be leaving now then.” Since he could not be bothered to deal with Vicious any longer, Zhang Xuan drove his Heaven’s Path Soul Art.

The area around him blurred, and he suddenly found that he was still standing on the spot. Everything that he had just encountered seemed to have been nothing more than a figment of his imagination.

Seeing that everything was just as he had deduced, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Previously, back at Chen Zhe’s residence, Vicious had made a move on him. From that, it could be seen that Vicious did intend to kill him. Yet, upon arriving at the Ghost Cavern, Vicious had gone to the effort of separating them, triggering Hall Master Xing’s Leaving Aperture Ordeal, and putting on this entire act. This had left him rather doubtful.

If Vicious was truly as powerful as he made out to be, surely it would not have mattered how powerful Hall Master Xing was. Interfering with Hall Master Xing’s Lightning Aperture Ordeal would truly have been a redundant step.

Furthermore, he had also pummeled the Qingtian Emperor to the point that the latter was on the verge of passing away, and yet, Vicious still did not appear.

Putting all that together, Zhang Xuan had roughly come to a conclusion. However, with many things at stake, he had not dared to act recklessly. Thus, he had sought to verify his conjecture.

After which, when his soul was dragged away by Vicious, he surprisingly found that Vicious did not make a move on him

directly. Instead, the latter began negotiating with him, even trying to take Wu shi and the others hostage to force him to submit. This very action affirmed all the conjectures that he had come up with previously.

Vicious really was not as powerful as he had thought. Perhaps, he might even have been weaker than the Qingtian Emperor!

Otherwise, there was no reason for him to keep hiding, controlling the Soulless Metal Humanoid from behind to kill the others.

Without a doubt, this was an attempt to portray himself as an expert, winning the battle by forcing him into submission.

If it had been anyone else, they might have fallen for his ploy. However, Vicious never would have thought that pretending to be an expert... happened to be his field of specialty!

He was one who was able to scare away a real Saint 7-dan expert by acting as Yang shi, so how could he possibly allow others to beguile him with the same tactics?

With a quick step, Zhang Xuan headed to the wall where the Qingtian Emperor had emerged from, and he placed his hand on it.

A moment later, a slight smile surfaced on his lips. Using his finger as a sword, he tapped on the wall seven times.

Kacha!

The whirring of a mechanism echoed loudly, and a passageway leading further down appeared.

It was completely dark within, and just like before, Zhang Xuan found that his Spiritual Perception was unable to penetrate too far ahead.

Zhang Xuan turned around and instructed, "Clone, you take the lead."

His clone was made of the Nine Hearts Lotus, so even if he was ground into meat paste or sliced in two, he would still be able to regenerate to his original form. On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was clearly incapable of pulling that off himself.

Even if Vicious' fighting prowess was not as fearsome as what he had imagined, it would still be wise to proceed carefully. After all, he was a person who had succeeded in winning the Qingtian Emperor's loyalty, so the chances were that he had more tricks up his sleeves.

"Follow behind me closely. Don't worry, I'll cover you. When it comes down to it, I'll just act as if I'm the main body, and you can assume the role of the clone!" Zhang Xuan's clone shot Zhang Xuan a disdainful look before raising his head haughtily and venturing into the passageway.

To think that the main body would not only be weak, he would even be so spineless! It really was a wonder how he had managed to come this far!

Ignoring his narcissistic clone, Zhang Xuan stowed the Golden Origin Cauldron and the Glacier Rain Sword back into his storage ring before closely following his clone into the passageway.

Zhang Xuan's clone harrumphed in displeasure as he walked through the passageway. "Let me tell you, as the main body, you should be daring and decisive. If you keep acting so cowardly, not even daring to walk through a mere passageway yourself, as your clone, I'll be deeply embarrassed!"

"Well, it's always good to be careful."

The more he heard his clone speak, the more awkward Zhang Xuan felt.

He really was the most pathetic main body in the world. To think that the clone that he had forged would end up being a bigger poser than he was. There were really no words he could find to describe the feeling in his heart.

"What's there to be careful about? If you're sufficiently strong, there's no need to hesitate before anything!" Zhang Xuan's clone refuted coldly.

However, halfway through his words, a powerful force suddenly charged at him.

Padah!

Before he realized what was happening, his head was already smacked flat like a biscuit.

“What the hell! Who in the world assaulted me?” Roaring furiously, Zhang Xuan’s clone immediately charged in the direction that the attack had come from, only to realize that he had arrived at the end of the flight of stairs.

Appearing before him was yet another vast hall.

Huala!

Several figures suddenly rushed out from the corners of the hall to block their path. Without a doubt, one of them was the culprit behind the flattened head of Zhang Xuan’s clone.

At this moment, Zhang Xuan stroked his chest in relief. If he had not gotten his clone to help lead the way forward, he might have died there and then. Suppressing his shock, he began examining the figures before him closely.

There were four figures in total, and they were roughly around his height. However, they were neither Otherworldly Demons nor Soulless Metal Humanoids.

“These are... celestial designer puppets?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

Upon careful observation, he realized that those figures were actually exquisitely-crafted celestial designer puppets.

The puppets created by celestial designers were vastly different from those crafted by Wu Yangzi using the Otherworldly Demon bodies. These puppets were crafted solely out of spare parts, and the powerful engine behind them granted them incredible fighting prowess.

From how they had flattened Zhang Xuan’s clone head with a single strike, their fighting prowess was probably on par with Zhang Xuan—Saint 3-dan realm intermediate stage at the very least.

“Damn it!” Zhang Xuan’s clone was so furious that he could have exploded on the spot.

He had been acting like expert before the main body and mocking him, but the next moment, his head had ended up

being smashed in. If he could convert his frustration and rage into energy, it could have destroyed the entire world. With a furious bellow, his head popped back up, reverting to its original form, before rushing forward to tear apart the puppet that dared to lay its hands on him previously.

Peng peng peng peng!

In an instant, Zhang Xuan's clone had already traded dozens of blows with one of the puppets, and the powerful shockwave from their collision caused sonic booms to sound in the air. Countless scars were left on the floor and walls, and broken gravel was swept furiously into the air, creating a sight of devastation. Nevertheless, neither of them was willing to back down.

“Strong...” Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up in alarm.

Astonishingly, despite its lower cultivation realm, the strength that the puppet displayed was almost on par with the Qingtian Emperor!

To make things worse, there were even three more standing by the side.

If they collaborated with one another, even with his clone and the Golden Origin Cauldron, Zhang Xuan still would not stand a chance.

“How about it? Did you really think that I won't be able to kill you?” Vicious' voice sounded once more.

“Through these puppets, you mean?” Zhang Xuan replied coldly.

“As long as it's effective, does it matter what I use?” Vicious sneered in response.

“So, you are admitting that you are no match for me with your current strength?” Zhang Xuan scoffed.

To first send the Qingtian Emperor after him before bringing out these puppets, it seemed like Vicious was really in a weakened state at the moment.

“Master, I can confirm it now. He's my brain and my eyes!” the Vicious within the Book of Heaven's Path informed Zhang

Xuan.

“Your brain and your eyes?”

“Un. The brain is where the memory is stored, so that explains why that fellow was able to retain a greater degree of my memories and recall the matter of trapping Kong shi,” the Vicious in the Book of Heaven’s Path analyzed.

“The fighting prowess that my brain and my eyes wield is severely limited. Other than casting some basic soul arts, they are effectively useless in battle. As such, they have no choice but to rely on beguiling others to work for them. This is probably why they are resorting to such schemes instead of dealing with you directly!”

“I see!” Hearing Vicious’ analysis, Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Back then, when he encountered Vicious’ finger, the latter had attacked him without any hesitation. On the other hand, this Vicious seemed to be relying on external forces—such as other Otherworldly Demons, Soulless Metal Humanoids, or puppets—to deal with him. This further supported Vicious’ conjecture.

“Even so, Master, you still must remain careful! While my brain is lacking in fighting prowess, it’s still where most of my memories are kept. It won’t be easy to kill and possess it!” the Vicious in the Book of Heaven’s Path remarked worriedly.

Even though he had undergone the lightning ordeal and successfully advanced to Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, he still had no confidence that he would be able to deal with the many means that the other Vicious possessed.

The head was bound to retain most of the memories of the former Vicious, granting it a deep understanding of all kinds of techniques. This would allow it to effectively neutralize most offenses and possession attempts. On this aspect, the Vicious in the Book of Heaven’s Path, being just a heart and a finger, was at a critical disadvantage.

“More importantly, the brain is the center of a body, possessing innate authority that grants it near-absolute control

over the rest of the body. I fear that... if I get too close to him, I might just unknowingly fall under his control!” the Vicious in the Book of Heaven’s Path revealed worriedly.

Putting aside just him, even if the rest of Vicious’ body parts were there, they still would have had to obey the commands of the brain. If they rushed at the other Vicious recklessly, not only would he be unable to devour the other Vicious, he might even end up as the other Vicious’ puppet!

1222 Teacher Loves You!

Zhang Xuan frowned.

The brain was the command center of a body. Even if Vicious' body was divided into many parts at the moment, the authority that the brain had over the other body parts still remained. In other words, even if the Vicious in the Book of Heaven's Path was stronger than the other Vicious, it would still have no choice but to submit to it.

Furthermore, while the fighting prowess that the brain wielded was severely limited, the sheer amount of knowledge it retained granted it many other means, which made it a frightening opponent to go against.

For one, it was due to the means that the other Vicious possessed that allowed him to make the Qingtian Emperor his subordinate, control so many Soulless Metal Humanoids and puppets simultaneously, and cast soul arts with superior proficiency that could nab even Zhang Xuan's soul.

Fortunately, while Zhang Xuan had been powerless against the other Vicious' soul nabbing secret art previously, the advancement of his cultivation to Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle had granted him the strength to withstand the technique, making it impossible for the other party to kill him with the soul nabbing secret art anymore. Nevertheless, that did not mean to say that the other Vicious did not have any other means that he could use against him.

After all, how could an old monster who had rivaled Kong shi in his peak possibly only know the soul nabbing secret art?

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before asking the Vicious in the Book of Heaven's Path, "Let me confirm again, you won't be able to defeat him in a direct encounter?"

"That's right. Even if he's weaker than me, I don't think that I'll be able to disobey the commands of the brain blatantly. In a direct encounter, he'll be able to control me easily. The only

time I will stand a chance against him is when he's unconscious. As long as I can erase his consciousness and replace it with mine while he's out, I'll be able to possess him," Vicious replied.

"Unconscious?" A helpless smile surfaced on Zhang Xuan's lips.

How could that be possible?

The other party's soul was so strong that it could even drag his massive soul into a black hole; how could he possibly knock a soul that powerful unconscious?

That was an impossible mission!

Hu!

Since the two of them had conversed directly with their souls, even though it seemed like they had chatted for some time, in truth, only half a breath had passed so far.

Back in the hall, making use of the opportunity while Zhang Xuan's clone was preoccupied, the other three puppets swiftly dashed forward to encircle Zhang Xuan. One of them raised its fist and flung it forcefully toward him.

"Golden Origin Cauldron!" Knowing that there was no way he could defend against three puppets with his current strength, Zhang Xuan bellowed loudly, and the Golden Origin Cauldron immediately appeared before him.

It swiftly charged forward with its bottom facing a puppet.

Peng!

The fist collided with the Golden Origin Cauldron's bottom, and with a deep chime, the puppet was forced to retreat several steps back.

The reason the Golden Origin Cauldron had not been a match for the Qingtian Emperor was due to the superior combat skills that the latter possessed. With his opponent being a puppet that was only capable of relying on its brute strength this time around, the Golden Origin Cauldron's outstanding defense granted it a huge advantage in the battle.

Nevertheless, the puppet was not weak. The both of them fought on equal grounds with one another, but it seemed like the Golden Origin Cauldron currently held the upper hand.

However, before Zhang Xuan could ease up, the remaining two puppets charged at him.

Hualala!

Overwhelming auras gushed out from the two puppets, creating a powerful gale in the area. It felt as if a devastating storm was brewing within the hall, preparing to bring a catastrophe upon those present.

In face of such strength, Zhang Xuan's face paled. He swiftly pointed forward and exclaimed, "That person over there is the real Zhang Xuan, so go for him! I mean, just look at how powerful he is..."

"..." Zhang Xuan's clone.

However, the two puppets seemed to remain unconvinced. They continued charging toward Zhang Xuan furiously, launching attack after attack.

Dodging their attacks in a fluster, Zhang Xuan exclaimed desperately, "I am really just the clone! Have you ever seen a clone more powerful than the main body before?"

Thinking that there was some logic in those words, one of the puppets hesitated for a moment before heading over toward Zhang Xuan's clone, collaborating with the previous puppet to launch a barrage of devastating attacks. It did not take long before the head of the Zhang Xuan's clone was flattened once more.

Zhang Xuan's clone was truly on the verge of tears. The main bodies of the other clones were powerful and selfless, diving unhesitatingly into danger to uphold their beliefs. On the other hand, his main body...

Heavens, just what kind of crime did he commit in his previous life to be born to such a main body?

But thinking back again, it seemed like he had done the same thing to the main body back at the Qiu Wu Palace, so he did

not have any right to complain.

With a weary heart, Zhang Xuan's clone could only swallow his frustrations and try his best to deal with the two puppets. Nevertheless, it did not take long for several dents to appear all over his body.

It was fortunate that he was forged out of the Nine Hearts Lotus, or else he would have really lost his life there and then!

Just as Zhang Xuan's clone was about to explode from frustration, the main body suddenly sent a telepathic message to him. "Clone, try to stall those two puppets for the time being. I'll come and help you as soon as I get rid of this one!"

"... Fine!" Hearing that his main body was not intentionally abandoning him, the stifling sensation that Zhang Xuan's clone felt in his chest finally alleviated slightly.

Boom boom boom!

Despite abandoning his defense altogether and devoting his full strength to offense, Zhang Xuan's clone only barely managed to rival the two clones.

"Interesting..." The voice of the other Vicious echoed eerily in the hall. "But regardless of which of you is the main body and the clone, none of you will get out of here today!"

He had not expected Zhang Xuan's clone to wield such strength, fighting on equal terms with two puppets. With a cold harrumph, he was just about to continue speaking when he suddenly froze. "Y-you... What are you doing? Kill him!"

Sensing the anxiety in the other Vicious' voice, Zhang Xuan's clone was bewildered. He quickly forced back the two puppets with two powerful punches before hurriedly turning a glance to his main body. And then... dumbfounded.

At some point in time, the puppet that had been chasing after his main body mercilessly, seeming as if it would not rest until it butchered the latter, was suddenly kneeling before his main body with a look of reverence on its face.

On the other hand, his main body seemed to be saying something that caused the puppet to tremble uncontrollably in

excitement.

“The heck...” Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, Zhang Xuan’s clone widened its eyes in shock.

It had fought so desperately that its head had even been flattened multiple times throughout the course of the battle, and it did not even manage to scratch his enemy. Yet, his main body had made the puppet willingly kneel down to him just by uttering a few words. They originated from the same soul, so how could there be such a huge gap between them?

Overwhelmed by frenzy, Zhang Xuan’s clone focused its hearing to find out just what words of sorcery the main body was saying, only to hear some unexpected words. “... Go! Remember, your teacher loves you!”

Right after those words were spoken, the puppet that had been chasing his main body around suddenly rushed straight for him.

“I...” Horrified, Zhang Xuan’s clone immediately began to run away, only to see the puppet charging past him to clash with one of the puppets it had been dealing with.

Peng peng peng peng!

The two puppets were equally matched, and it did not seem any one of them would emerge victorious anytime soon.

The mouth of Zhang Xuan’s clone twitched upon seeing that sight. Taking a deep breath, it was just about to deal with the other remaining puppet when the main body suddenly appeared before it. With a melodious tone, the main body began speaking. “Born as a puppet, doomed to obey the commands of others for life. What a tragic fate it is, don’t you think? Come, listen to me...”

It did not take long before that puppet knelt earnestly before his main body as well.

“Go!”

With a shout from the main body, the puppet immediately charged for the puppet that was currently clashing with the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Ignoring his shocked clone, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. “Phew, it’s done!”

Having comprehended the Heart of a Teacher, the effectiveness of his Impartation of Heaven’s Will had expanded from just humans to beasts and artifacts as well. In fact, he had even managed to get Zhang Jiuxiao’s weapons to acknowledge him as their teacher before. Considering that these puppets had their own spirits as well, naturally, it was also possible for him to win them over with his Impartation of Heaven’s Will.

“This move of yours sure is convenient! With this, you will be able to get any puppet to submit to you without even lifting a finger,” Zhang Xuan’s clone remarked in awe.

Zhang Xuan turned to his clone and said, “Are you interested in it? If you want to learn it, I can teach you.”

“...” The face of Zhang Xuan’s clone reddened in exasperation. “We are both the same person, is there really a need for you to pose before me? It’s just Impartation of Heaven’s Will, who doesn’t know how to do that?”

After saying those words, Zhang Xuan’s clone charged up to one of the ‘unconverted’ puppets and reached out, as if a holy priest offering a hand to salvation. “Born as a puppet, doomed to obey the commands of others for life. What a tragic fate it is, don’t you think? Come, listen to me...”

Peng!

His head was flattened with a forceful punch.

“I...” Zhang Xuan’s clone was crazed.

The same person saying the same words—the puppets had kneeled right after hearing them from his main body, but when he spoke them, he ended up being pummeled instead.

Are you all bullying me because I’m a clone? This is discrimination!

Seeing his clone’s state, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed deeply. “Jeez...”

Ultimately, his clone had also come from his soul as well. However, when would his clone learn to be as humble and low-profile as he was?

To be thinking of how he could pose before others every single day, did he really have nothing better to do?

Forget it, I should try to find Vicious first!

Ignoring the puppets and his clone, Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight and began scanning the hall.

However, other than the four puppets, there did not seem to be anything of note within the hall.

There must be some kind of mechanism in here... Recalling how there were mechanisms in the previous halls he had been through, Zhang Xuan was just about to search for the one within the hall more thoroughly when Vicious' furious voice suddenly erupted.

“Using your Heart of a Teacher and the Impartation of Heaven's Will to beguile my puppets... you really have a sharp tongue, just like Kong shi! However, given how many times I have clashed with Kong shi before, do you think that I would be completely unprepared for this?”

“What?” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

He quickly turned around, only to see that the two puppets he had just beguiled earlier abruptly shuddering intensely before their heads burst with a resounding explosion.

Putong!

Their headless bodies fell limply onto the ground.

“You left another trick within them?” Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

As expected of Vicious, he was indeed prepared for all kinds of situation. Anticipating the possible betrayal of his subordinates, he had left a trick in them so that he could kill them whenever he wanted.

“Do you think that I would have been able to survive so long without at least this much brainpower?” Vicious sneered

coldly.

Considering that his enemy was Kong shi, if he did not even have this much wariness in him, he would have been killed by the Master Teacher Pavilion many times over.

In the face of such a situation, Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly.

Killing the puppets that he had just beguiled did not just cost him two powerful soldiers, more importantly, it also served as a warning against those who intended to betray Vicious.

As powerful as the Heart of a Teacher paired with the Impartation of Heaven's Will was, it was not exactly brainwashing. It served to win others over by merit, not through force.

The spirits of the puppets had seen how their companions were killed right before their eyes, which caused their wills to instinctively reject Zhang Xuan's teachings out of fear of death. Given so, it would be nigh impossible for Zhang Xuan to win them over.

Boom!

At this moment, the two remaining puppets suddenly charged at Zhang Xuan even more frenziedly than before.

The deaths of their companions had left them feeling as if there was an invisible noose around their necks, and they realized that they could very well be killed by Vicious if they failed to kill the young man before their eyes.

Against the frenzied assault of the duo, even Zhang Xuan's clone and the Golden Origin Cauldron ended up being forced back.

The other Vicious chuckled gleefully. "Let's see how well you will cope this time around!"

"Cope? There's no need for that at all!" Zhang Xuan replied casually.

"No need for that?"

“Indeed. There’s really no need to go through so much trouble just to deal with those puppets.” Shrugging leisurely, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and Demoneh and Demonbee appeared before his eyes.

He had moved these inner demons into the Myriad Anthive Nest prior to entering the Ghost Cavern.

“Go, possess those two puppets!”

“Yes, Teacher!”

Demoneh and Demonbee morphed into two clouds of black mist and flew over to shroud the puppets.

Hu!

The intangible nature of inner demons made it impossible for physical might to faze them, and soul-wise, considering how even cultivators would easily succumb to their onslaught, how could mere puppets possibly withstand their assault? In the blink of an eye, they had already dived into the glabellae of the puppets.

Gudong! Gudong!

As soon as the inner demons entered the puppets’ bodies, the two puppets staggered weakly for a moment before collapsing to the ground.

“You... Inner demons?” Vicious was crazed.

He was the one who had conjured those inner demons back then! Who would have thought that the other party would actually use those inner demons against him at this crucial moment?

“Indeed. While these inner demons are unable to destroy the spirits of the puppets and gain control of their bodies, they are still more than capable of incapacitating them for a short period of time, rendering them powerless!” Zhang Xuan chuckled softly.

Inner demons could confuse an individual’s mind, robbing them of their fighting ability. Even though Demoneh and Demonbee were unable to effectively gain control of the puppets, they were still able to keep them busy for some time.

“Excellent. Excellent! I concede that you are indeed a formidable opponent, but while you might be able to stop two of my puppets, will you be able to stop this many of them simultaneously?” With his voice trembling with rage, Vicious roared angrily.

Following which, a mechanism suddenly whirred into action, and a door opened. Following which, more than a hundred puppets dashed into the hall simultaneously.

The face of Zhang Xuan’s clone paled as it widened its eyes in disbelief. “There are so many of them?”

On the other hand, the Golden Origin Cauldron cowered backward in fear. If he could have cowered beneath his lid, he definitely would have done so at this very moment.

“Hahaha! Hahahaha!” Vicious’ manic laughter echoed resoundingly in the hall. “I have more than a hundred puppets here. Do you have enough inner demons to incapacitate every last one of them?”

But Vicious’ glee did not last long.

The young man shook his head and replied calmly, “You are in luck. I happen to have enough.”

1223 Celestial Designer Lock

Hu la!

Right after Zhang Xuan said those words, a dark mist abruptly burst forth from him. In the blink of an eye, a massive group of inner demons had rushed into the surroundings.

There was more than a hundred of them.

Back then, in the Combat Master Hall's Heart Division, Cang Xu's fragmented soul hidden within his body had resulted in the generation of a huge army of inner demons in the Trial of Inner Demons, and Cang Xu had attempted to use them to kill him. Eventually, he had managed to tame those inner demons, and he had kept them inside a jade bottle ever since then.

Tzzzzzzzz!

The hundred or so inner demons immediately rushed for the puppets.

"This is mine, don't you dare snatch it from me!"

"Hey, I was the one who saw it first..."

"I am Demonsee, and he's Demondee. We're inner demons who were personally named by our teacher! Nameless small fries like the rest of you should know your own place and go to the back of the queue!"

Upon seeing the huge army of puppets before them, the inner demons immediately charged forward to claim a body for themselves. Before the hundred puppets could even cause a shred of damage, every single one of them was already lying powerlessly on the ground.

"Y-you..." Vicious nearly lost his mind.

Only he knew how much time, effort, and precious materials he had spent on forging each and every one of those puppets. Those puppets were to become the invincible army that he would command upon his return, and he had been confident that they would easily kill the young man before him.

Yet, who could have known that the young man had prepared a hand for this as well!

To actually have more than a hundred inner demons in your possession... Does your family actually deal in inner demons?

“You bastards, get up and kill him!” Vicious bellowed wrathfully.

But plagued by inner demons, the eyes of the puppets were glazed. They remained motionless on the ground, as if lifeless corpses.

Reverting back to its usual, imposing presence, the Golden Origin Cauldron stepped forward and spoke confidently.

“Master, let me smash all of them to smithereens! Otherwise, once the puppets struggle free of their inner demons, they will surely pose a threat to us once more!”

At the same time, it glared down on the puppets on the ground, seemingly wanting to suffocate each and every one of them with its massive bottom.

“Smash them to smithereens?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“While they are only puppets, they do have their own consciousness. It would truly be a huge pity to kill all of them.”

Just like the Golden Origin Cauldron, these puppets had spirits of their own. It would have been cruel to massacre over a hundred of them just like that.

“But...” the Golden Origin Cauldron frowned.

Even if they were to spare the puppets, it was not as if the puppets would spare them once they struggled free of the inner demons. Faced with more than a hundred Leaving Aperture realm puppets, it would only take moments for them to be pummeled to death!

“Jeez, I guess I have no choice then!” Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan waved his hand grandly with a deeply reluctant look on his face.

Huala!

All of the puppets lying on the ground were packed into his storage ring.

Those puppets were currently in a state of confusion, so they could not resist being pulled into the storage ring at all. Furthermore, as artifacts, they would not suffocate to death in the storage ring either.

“...” the Golden Origin Cauldron.

“...” Vicious was so choked up that he could not speak a word at all, and he even nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

Those puppets are mine! Mine!

This is robbery! How can you steal my possession right before my eyes?

You planned for this right from the start, right? Right?

Vicious was livid with rage, but there was nothing he could do in the situation.

All his puppets had been incapacitated, so he no longer had any subordinates who could possibly stop Zhang Xuan.

Ignoring the speechless Golden Origin Cauldron and clone, as if not feeling the slightest guilt for his actions, Zhang Xuan remarked leisurely, “I’ll have to preach to them later on and have them renounce evil for good. It seems like I have unwittingly made another huge contribution to the Master Teacher Pavilion!”

With a few steps, he walked over to the door where the puppets had emerged from and walked in.

Once again, there was another flight of stairs leading downward. Just like before, he had his clone lead the way.

This time, they did not encounter any danger on the way. Before long, they reached the end of the passageway.

“This is... a labyrinth?” the Golden Origin Cauldron asked.

This time, instead of a vast hall, they were met with countless smaller rooms densely packed together. There were many possible paths to take, just like in a labyrinth.

More importantly, when Zhang Xuan scanned the area with his Spiritual Perception, he realized that it was not able to reach the end of the labyrinth. It was as if the entire labyrinth stretched across the whole island!

“This... What is this supposed to be used for?” Zhang Xuan’s clone was bewildered.

In fact, even Zhang Xuan himself was taken aback.

He scanned the room with his Eye of Insight, and he realized that each of the small rooms was forged out of a unique material, making the walls particularly resilient. He could hardly imagine how much it would have cost to build such a gigantic labyrinth.

To make a comparison, the cost of crafting these rooms was at least a hundred times the price required to forge all the puppets he had encountered earlier.

“Are these residences for those puppets?” the Golden Origin Cauldron asked after a moment of contemplation.

“Residences? Would a hundred puppets require this many residences?”

Scanning the area with his Spiritual Perception, Zhang Xuan could perceive at least ten thousand rooms. Putting aside the question of if the puppets would require a room for themselves, surely there was no need to construct so many of them!

Unable to make sense of the bizarre labyrinth, Zhang Xuan shook his head as he began heading down one of the paths.

“Let’s not bother with that for the time being. Make sure to keep your guard up; don’t give Vicious an opportunity to assault you...”

If it had been anyone else, they would have swiftly lost their way due to the identical rooms everywhere. However, through his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan was able to vaguely perceive an extremely thin strand of thread in the air. After walking for around ten minutes, passing by countless rooms in the meantime, they finally arrived before an open stone door,

which revealed another passageway that led further downward.

Since they had already come this far, the two men and one cauldron walked into the passageway without any hesitation, heading downward once more.

As soon as they reached the end of the passageway, they immediately felt a concentrated burst of killing intent gushing their way, threatening to tear their consciousness into shreds.

Having practiced the simplified Heaven's Path Soul Art, Zhang Xuan's clone was still able to withstand the overwhelming killing intent. However, the Golden Origin Cauldron shook feebly in the face of the fearsome killing intent, unable to stand against it.

Despite having reached Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, it was ultimately still a mere spirit and not a soul. Inevitably, its ability to withstand the powerful killing intent of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe was lacking.

"You should return for now." Zhang Xuan swiftly stowed the Golden Origin Cauldron back into his storage ring before assessing the room before him together with his clone.

It was a spacious underground chamber. There was a square box hanging in the middle of the chamber, propped up by four thick chains embedded in the wall at the four corners. Zhang Xuan could not tell what kind of material the box was made of, but there was an eerie cold glint reflected off its black exterior.

The powerful burst of killing intent had originated from the box.

"Vicious... is inside?" Zhang Xuan's clone muttered softly.

"Very possibly so," Zhang Xuan replied with a grim frown.

The sheer concentration of the killing intent in that previous burst showed that the purity of the bloodline of whatever was sealed within the box had already exceeded that of the Qingtian Emperor. In the Ghost Cavern, the only one who could possibly possess a purer bloodline than the Qingtian Emperor was Vicious.

Beneath the black box was an altar that bore a striking resemblance to the one he had used to deal with the Qingtian Emperor earlier, just that it was slightly bigger. There were bizarre inscriptions all over it, and for some reason, there seemed to be an air of desolation shrouding those inscriptions. It felt as if one would be torn in two just by approaching it.

Zhang Xuan's clone picked up a stone and tossed it at the altar.

Tz la!

Countless sword qi burst forth from the altar, slicing the stone into powdery remains.

"This..." Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up.

The altar in his possession was used to nab souls whereas the altar right before him seemed to have a Slaughter Formation inscribed into it.

Even if it was him, he had no doubt that he would be reduced into minced meat if he was caught amid the sword qi.

In other words, anyone who tried to approach the black box would be instantaneously killed by the endless sword qi.

"You are here, aren't you?" Unable to see through the box nor the altar through his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan began scanning the surroundings as he called out.

"Humph! Even if you managed to find your way here, it makes no difference at all. As long as you are unable to open the box, your mission is doomed to end in a failure!" Vicious' eerie voice echoed within the chamber.

"You are in the box?" Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

"Indeed. Even if you know it now, what can you do about it?" Vicious mocked.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan fell into deep contemplation.

Back at Chen Zhe's residence, when the other Vicious had nabbed his soul, he had muttered to himself, saying that as long as he devoured Zhang Xuan, a Celestial Master Teacher,

he would be able to escape from his restraints. From the looks of it now, he had been referring to this box back then.

If he opened it and the other Vicious escaped... Considering how even the Vicious in the Book of Heaven's Path would not be able to make a move, Zhang Xuan was not too confident.

But... if he did not let Vicious out, there would be no way he would be able to kill the latter through the black box.

Let me see what it is!

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan slowly walked toward the black box.

The closer he came to the black box, the more powerful the killing intent became. If it had been Wu shi and the others, or perhaps even an 8-star master teacher, their minds could have very well succumbed by now.

However, Zhang Xuan was different. Driving his Heaven's Path zhenqi, he was able to easily dispel the pressure arising from the killing intent. Before long, he was already standing at the perimeter just outside of the altar's area of attack.

He did not dare proceed any further, but from this distance, he was already able to get a good look at the black box through his Eye of Insight.

The black box was roughly fifty centimeters in length, and there was not the slightest opening in the box, as if it was just a lump of metal.

"What is it?" Zhang Xuan's clone also walked over.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before saying, "If I'm not mistaken, it seems to be... the Celestial Designer Lock!"

"Celestial Designer Lock?" Zhang Xuan's clone asked in confusion.

He had been in the storage ring over the past few days, and Zhang Xuan had not had any time to share his newly-learned knowledge with him yet. As such, his current knowledge was far beneath Zhang Xuan's.

"The Celestial Designer Lock is a unique artifact known to be the most unyielding lock that a celestial designer can create.

It's often used to seal away highly dangerous objects, and once the lock is in place, not even the creator of the Celestial Designer Lock will be able to open it! If one forces it open, the content of the box will be utterly destroyed!" Zhang Xuan said.

"It's different from Celestial Designer Mechanical Container in the sense that the Celestial Designer Mechanical Container can be opened whereas the Celestial Designer Lock is intended for permanent sealing!"

Zhang Xuan had once encountered a Celestial Designer Mechanical Container, and while it had been difficult to open, those who managed to find the key would still be able to open it. On the other hand, the Celestial Designer Lock was like a dead knot. What was sealed within was doomed to never see the light of the day again.

If one forcefully pried it open, what was sealed within the box would be destroyed as well.

"Since that's the case, isn't it obvious what we should do? As long as we attempt to pry open the black box forcefully and trigger the self-destruction of the Celestial Designer Lock, we will be able to kill Vicious, right?" Zhang Xuan's clone said.

It was not as if they were here to save Vicious. If they could kill him, that would be for the best.

"This..." Zhang Xuan shook his head. "I fear that things might not be as simple as that!"

Stroking his lower jaw, he began circling around the altar, deep in thought.

If it was as easy as his clone made it out to be, there was no way Vicious would have allowed them to come this far so easily!

While they might have been unable to get close to the Celestial Designer Lock, if they were to knock the box with their zhenqi, they should be able to trigger its self-destruction without coming under the attack of the altar.

But it was precisely how easy and convenient everything was that left Zhang Xuan deeply apprehensive inside.

Could an expert of Vicious' caliber really be done in that easily?

“Clone, let's take a look around the area and see if we can find anything!” Zhang Xuan said as he swiftly imparted what he had learned recently to his clone.

After which, he began walking around the perimeter of the altar's area of attack to check for any anomalies.

The underground chamber was massive, and its walls were reinforced with the same unique material as the one used to construct the rooms in the labyrinth above.

Frowning, Zhang Xuan placed his finger lightly on the wall.

Hu!

A book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path.

Upon taking a look, Zhang Xuan frowned.

“This...”

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After reading through the content of the book, Zhang Xuan exhaled deeply.

He pondered for a moment before heading to a corner of the room to sit down cross-legged.

Some time later, his clone came over and asked in bewilderment, “What are you doing?”

Zhang Xuan turned around and replied with a pale face, “Whenever I have a question that I can’t find an answer to, I like to sit in a corner of the room to mull over the secrets of the universe and the meaning of life.”

“Mull over the secrets of the universe? Meaning of life?” Zhang Xuan’s clone was bewildered.

When did the main body gain such an ability?

Why was he unaware of it?

Even though he had no idea what the main body was up to, he felt that the main body had a reason for doing what he was doing. Thus, he decided not to interfere in the latter’s business. “I’ll just take a look around. Feel free to continue what you are doing.”

Leaving those words behind, he turned around and left.

Around two hours later, Zhang Xuan exhaled deeply before getting to his feet once more.

At this moment, his eyes were reddened, and he seemed to be drained of energy. His feet wobbled unstably on the ground, and he nearly fell over.

Upon seeing this sight, his clone quickly rushed forward to support him.

“I’m fine.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand as he quickly drove his Heaven’s Path zhenqi three circulations around his body—the weakness and exhaustion he felt were finally alleviated.

Noting that Zhang Xuan had recovered from his weakened state, his clone quickly sent him a telepathic message. “I have just checked the entire area, and other than the black box and the altar, there are not any mechanisms in the area at all. If my deduction is correct, I think we are already at the bottommost layer of the island.”

In the two hours that Zhang Xuan had spent contemplating the meaning of life, he had already gone over every nook and cranny of the underground chamber.

With the impartation from the main body, his comprehension of formations and mechanisms had already reached the level of 7-star pinnacle. Given that, if he still could not find anything amiss after a thorough check, the chances were that there were no mechanisms in the room.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“What do we do now?” Zhang Xuan’s clone frowned. “Should we just destroy the Celestial Designer Lock and hope that it will kill Vicious?”

Zhang Xuan’s clone had a feeling that his main body knew something, just that the latter was unwilling to speak of it.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “That won’t do. There might be other conditions to activating the attack of the altar other than distance. If we make a rash move, we will risk triggering the altar. If so, we might very well end up as nourishment for Vicious!”

“Then...”

“It’ll be safer for us to destroy the altar first. Once we destroy the altar, we will be able to do whatever we want with the box,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Sounds reasonable.” Zhang Xuan’s clone nodded.

Thus, the both of them walked closer to the altar to take a closer look at it.

The inscriptions on the altar were even more intricate than those on the altar in his storage ring. There was no way for

Zhang Xuan to accurately discern the effects of the formation inscribed onto it.

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out a spiritless Saint low-tier sword he had obtained from the Qiu Wu Palace and tossed it over.

Sou sou sou sou!

In the blink of an eye, the Saint low-tier sword was torn into pieces by the onslaught of sword qi from the altar.

Seeing the sight, the mouth of Zhang Xuan's clone twitched.

His physical body was capable of regenerating back to its original form even when it was being sliced into pieces, but his soul still was not strong enough yet. Judging by the might of the sword qi, his soul could very well dissipate if it was subjected to such an assault.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan closed his eyes shortly after the altar came into action. A moment later, he opened his eyes once more and retrieved a bunch of formation flags from his storage ring.

“What are you planning to do with these formation flags?” Zhang Xuan's clone asked in bewilderment.

Shouldn't they have been thinking of a way to break the altar?

Why would he suddenly whip out a couple of formation flags?

“The formation inscribed onto the altar is extremely profound, at least reaching the level of grade-8. A forceful attempt to break the formation could cause it to blow up instead, which would be extremely dangerous. Thus, I intend to deal with the formation by setting another one up myself!” Zhang Xuan explained.

“Deal with the formation by setting another one up yourself?” Zhang Xuan's clone pondered for a moment before nodding in realization.

In essence, what Zhang Xuan intended to do was to use a new formation to interfere with the functions of the altar's formation and destroy its internal structure.

As simple as it sounded theoretically, it was no easy feat to pull off.

In the first place, it was already difficult to construct a formation on top of another one, and a mistake in doing so could potentially result in severe backlash from the existing formation. On top of that, in order to successfully neutralize the altar's formation, Zhang Xuan had to construct a formation that possessed might on par with it. The difficulty in doing so was truly unimaginable.

However, Zhang Xuan's clone knew that his main body would only make a move when the latter was confident of success, so he decided not to say too much about the matter. Instead, he took a few steps back and returned back into the passageway, ready to flee if a mishap occurred.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath before leaping into the air. Then, he suddenly flicked his wrist.

Wuwuwuwuwu!

More than a hundred formation flags shot out from his palm, falling accurately into their respective positions.

Boom!

The next moment, the massive formation began whirring into action.

"It's a Starlight Convergence Formation..." Zhang Xuan's clone recognized the activated formation in an instant.

It was neither a Slaughter Formation nor an Illusory Formation but... a Spirit Gathering Formation!

A half grade-8 formation, it tapped into the lingering Power of Stars in the world in order to gather spiritual energy.

To use such a formation to break the altar...

"It's indeed a good idea."

While Zhang Xuan's clone snubbed the main body for being so much weaker than him, he had to admit that he was really impressed by the latter at this moment.

The formation inscribed on the altar was extremely powerful, possibly even a grade-8 formation, and given the current strength of the main body, it would be difficult for him to set up a formation sufficiently powerful to interfere with and destroy it. However, a Spirit Gathering Formation would be a different story.

On the surface, overlapping a Spirit Gathering Formation on top of the already powerful grade-8 formation may seem like a foolish act, but... everything in the world had a tolerance limit.

Even grade-8 formations were no exception to the rule.

It was unknown where the altar received the required spiritual energy to drive the formation from, but the energy that it received was already plenty, and there was no need to supplement it anymore. Thus, if a Spirit Gathering Formation was set up on top of it, it would not be long before the spiritual energy gathered in the altar's formation exceeded its limit.

While Zhang Xuan's clone was still analyzing the situation, Zhang Xuan whipped out ten thousand high-tier spirit stones and placed them into the formation in order to speed up the rate at which the Starlight Convergence Formation was gathering spiritual energy.

Hong long long!

The massive influx of energy swiftly formed a gigantic energy whirlpool, causing the underground chamber to shake intensely.

Under the control of the Starlight Convergence Formation, the massive whirlpool of spiritual energy swiftly dived into the altar.

The altar emanated a brilliant glow, and a moment later, it began to inflate swiftly like a balloon.

Boom!

The altar had finally reached its limit, and a deafening explosion resounded in the underground chamber.

"We have succeeded!" The eyes of Zhang Xuan's clone lit up.

He had thought that even with the prowess of the Starlight Convergence Formation, it would still have taken at least a month in order to destroy the formation. However, the main body's act of tossing ten thousand spirit stones into the formation had hastened the process by innumerable times.

In less than an incense's time, the altar had already exploded.

Upon the altar's destruction, Zhang Xuan swiftly packed all of his formation flags back into the storage ring.

Barely after he did so, the killing intent in the underground chamber suddenly intensified, and a frenzied laughter sounded. "Hahaha! Zhang Xuan, it seems like I really made the right choice in luring you here! I really have to thank you for freeing me from my restraints! I, Vicious, have finally returned to the world!"

As those words were spoken, Zhang Xuan and his clone suddenly realized that their bodies had been frozen by some kind of power, and an incomparably powerful might weighed down on them, threatening to crush their bodies.

Coming to realize what had just happened, the face of Zhang Xuan's clone turned ghastly pale. Sh*t, he wasn't trapped in the Celestial Designer Lock but... the altar?

As they had sensed that the killing intent originated from the Celestial Designer Lock, they had instinctively assumed that Vicious was inside there. They had thought that the destruction of the altar would allow them to deal with Vicious... but it turned out that they were sorely mistaken! The true seal that was restraining Vicious was actually the altar itself!

"Quick, escape!" Seemingly having just realized what had just happened as well, Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed in astonishment. With an anxious bellow, he swiftly executed a powerful palm strike.

Si la!

The powerful might of the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm swiftly tore apart the frozen space trapping him. Zhang Xuan stretched his hand forward to return his clone into his storage ring before executing the Unbounded Voyager. His

silhouette blurred, and in the blink of an eye, he was already at the other end of the passageway.

Rushing all the way up, it took only ten breaths for him to return to where Hall Master Xing and the others were.

They had been attempting to find another exit to the Ghost Cavern so as to secure an escape route, but their efforts had been futile.

“Principal Zhang!” Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, the group heaved a sigh of relief.

“Follow me! We need to escape from here as fast as possible!” Zhang Xuan urged.

Vicious had been freed from his restraints, and he was not someone whom they could deal with at the moment. The only thing they could do right now was to get away as fast as they could.

“But the Dragon Severing Lock is still blocking the entrance... How are we to leave the Ghost Cavern?” Wu shi asked.

With the entrance sealed and no alternative exits in sight, they had nowhere to escape to!

“Don’t worry about that and follow me!” Paying no heed to the doubts that the others harbored, Zhang Xuan continued charging forward.

The remaining members of the group were perplexed, but they chose to follow him. Passing through a long passageway, they finally arrived before the Dragon Severing Lock once more. It was still firmly blocking the entrance, sealing their escape route.

“What should we do?” Wu shi asked anxiously.

Hall Master Xing gritted his teeth and said, “Since it has already come down to this, why don’t we combine the strength of all nine of us together through a collaborative formation to attack the Dragon Severing Lock? We might just be able to force our way out.”

“It seems like there’s no other choice...” Wu shi nodded.

However, halfway through his words, he realized that Zhang Xuan had already walked up to the Dragon Severing Lock, and stroking the massive rock gently, the latter said, “Open up. We need to leave.”

Jiya!

Before everyone’s shocked gaze, the Dragon Severing Lock, which even a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert might not have been able to destroy, suddenly began nudging aside.

“This...”

Everyone widened their eyes in shock at the unbelievable sight before them.

It was an established fact that unless one possessed strength greater than the forged Dragon Severing Lock, there would be no way to pass through a path that it sealed. Yet, the young man before him had actually managed to get the Dragon Severing Lock to nudge aside just by touching it gently and saying a few words to it.

This was too exaggerated!

“Let’s hurry up and leave!” Zhang Xuan urged as he took the lead forward.

On the other hand, the others also know that this was not the time to be dozing off, so they quickly caught up to Zhang Xuan and escaped from the little island.

Hong long long!

The shaking of the little island swiftly intensified, and by the time the group finally leaped back to where they had been prior to entering the Ghost Cavern, amid a furious flinging of mud, the little island actually began rising into the air.

Everyone’s eyes widened in shock.

Geji! Geji!

The little island rose higher and higher, and it did not take long before it was fully freed from the marsh. Following which, the little island did a 180-degrees turn, and as the mud shrouding

it swiftly fell back into the marsh, its true face finally unfolded.

Amidst the crowd, Division Head Liao's body trembled as he spoke the words that were in everyone's mind. "Is that... a head?"

Shockingly, the little island was shaped similar to a head. The lake that they had encountered prior to entering the Ghost Cavern was actually one of the two eyes of the head!

A glint flashed across the massive eyes as a powerful voice boomed. "Hahaha! I, Vicious, have finally returned! Tell me, how do you want to die?"

Vicious of the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows was finally back! Roughly 15 minutes.

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“How can this be...”

Feeling the immense pressure emanated by the massive head, the group froze in place.

They could feel that the massive head was not just for show. The strength that it wielded was boundless as well, and even though it had not made a move yet, the indomitable aura that it emanated had already sealed the surrounding space, making escape nigh impossible.

“This... Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle?” Wu shi gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

He could vividly sense the other party’s strength—Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle! There was no way they could stand against an expert of this caliber!

Zhang Xuan nodded grimly in response.

At Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, Vicious was far stronger than the Qingtian Emperor, and this was without taking into account the powerful means that he possessed.

“What do we do?”

The group swiftly fell into a state of panic.

If the enemy was only at Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, they could still have given it a try, but Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle... there was no way to win no matter how hard they struggled!

“To be able to think of using another formation to break the altar, Zhang Xuan, I have to admit that you are indeed a clever person. But it seems like clever people like you have a tendency to fall prey to their own wits. It’s thanks to your help that I managed to escape from my restraints! Won’t you tell me how you are feeling at the moment? You have been

desperately trying to kill me all along, only to end up freeing me with your own hands. Regretful? Guilt-ridden?”

The floating face in the sky eyed Zhang Xuan with a playful look in his eyes.

He had sealed the surrounding space, so there was no way that the group of humans before him would be able to escape. At this point, victory was already his!

“I do feel quite regretful, but since the situation has already played out this way, there’s no point crying over spilt milk. However, I’m just curious to know the origin of the altar. How did you manage to get trapped in it?” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

This was the only thing that he just could not comprehend at this point.

It was obvious that the altar was an artifact of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, so how did Vicious end up being trapped in it?

“Since you are about to be devoured by me, I’ll accede to your request, since it’s the last one you are going to be making anyway!” the face in the sky sneered coldly. “That altar was the doing of that Qingtian bastard!”

“The Qingtian Emperor?” Zhang Xuan frowned in astonishment. “But... isn’t he your student? Didn’t you impart the heritage of the soul oracles to him?”

Why would the Qingtian Emperor seal his own teacher into an altar?

“Humph! Two thousand years ago, when I summoned that Qingtian bastard over, I was only a pair of tattered eyes and a sliver of will...” Vicious harrumphed coldly.

“I taught him the heritage of the soul oracles for one simple reason—I wanted to make use of his strength to find my other body parts so as to return to my peak!”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had also deduced this much.

How could a person who was given the nickname ‘Vicious’ possibly be so kind as to accept a student and pass on the lost heritage of the soul oracles for free?

It went without saying that he had his own motives.

“That fellow wasn’t too bad too. He regarded me as his teacher, and he even captured many celestial designers and blacksmiths and gathered countless precious ores to forge this head for me!” Vicious said.

“Forge?” Zhang Xuan suddenly remembered the countless rooms he had seen earlier.

If the entire little island was Vicious’ head, those rooms should have been the internal structure of his brain.

To forge such a massive head, not only would an immense amount of materials be required, more importantly, the manpower needed would truly be massive as well. It seemed like in the past two thousand years, on top of master teachers, many celestial designers and blacksmiths had lost their lives, too.

Just that, due to Vicious’ means in concealing the ‘little island’ and the innate treacherous nature of the marshland, no one had suspected that those deaths were part of someone’s scheme.

“From the very start, that Qingtian bastard was extremely respectful toward me, carrying out whatever orders I had for him without any hesitation. As such, I never doubted his loyalty, but... he actually dared scheme against me!”

Overflowing rage could be heard within Vicious’ voice. “At some point in time, he brought the altar over under the pretext of helping me regain my strength, but in truth, he was using it with the head he had the celestial designers forge to have me sealed! By the time I realized it, I was already imprisoned here.”

“Imprisoned?”

“That’s right! However, that Qingtian bastard’s intention was not just to imprison me. From the very start, he had intended to use the soul arts he had learned from me to steal my memories and replace me!” At this point, Vicious sneered in

disdain, as if mocking a mere ant for having such ridiculous thoughts.

Even though the Qingtian Emperor had been Vicious' subordinate, he had still been a proud and lofty Emperor of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, an existence that was born superior to others! Even if the other party was the powerful Vicious, there was no way he would willingly submit to him.

Not to mention, the current Vicious was nothing but a mere shell of his former self.

“Steal your memories and replace you?” Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed in pity. “As a legendary expert who rivaled Kong shi back in your prime, you actually fell for the ploy of a mere Qingtian Emperor?”

Even if Vicious had fallen from grace, he should still have retained countless protective measures and trump cards.

Yet, to still be outplayed by the Qingtian Emperor despite that... this was truly inconceivable.

“Humph! Even though I did not doubt his loyalty, I did guard against him from the start to the end. But two thousand years ago, I had only just awoken from my slumber, and my cultivation was not even at Saint realm then. I needed his strength and the resources he provided, so I had no choice but to go along with him.”

At this point, a cruel glint flashed across Vicious' eyes as he said, “But as you have said, how could I possibly be outdone by that Qingtian bastard so easily? I secretly left a sliver of my will in his mind so that if he attempted to act against me, I would be able to crush his soul instantly!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan's lips twitched.

They sure were a good pair of teacher and student. Beneath the seemingly calm waters, they were actually stabbing daggers into the backs of one another. Both adept at playing the game of treachery!

“After the forging of the head, in order to revive myself and gain some fighting prowess, I would have to extend my consciousness to cover the entire little island. However, if I

were to do so, I would temporarily lose my consciousness... and he made use of this opening to used the altar to seal me!”

Recalling the matter, Vicious' rage flared. “Just as he was about to kill me, the will I had left inside his head triggered. He did not want to die, so naturally, he had no choice but to heed my orders. However, it seemed like he had prepared a hand to ensure that I would not be able to kill him, so I did not dare make a move either. As such, we could only maintain the stalemate between us.”

“This...” Wu shi and Hall Master Xing glanced at one another.

The word ‘teacher’ had a very deep significance to those in the Master Teacher Continent, including ordinary cultivators.

If a student was found to have betrayed their own teacher, they would be killed without any hesitation.

Heaven, Earth, Kin, Teacher, Sovereign!

The position of a teacher was even above that of one's country, just beneath that of one's parents!

Given the culture of the Master Teacher Continent, it was very rare to see a student scheming against their own teacher.

However, with this pair of Otherworldly Demons, the teacher was thinking about how he could make use of his own student everyday whereas the student was thinking about how he could replace his teacher every day.

How eccentric!

Noting the incomprehension among the others, Zhang Xuan explained, “The Otherworldly Demonic Tribe pledges their loyalty to the Spirit God. The word ‘teacher’ has no significance to them at all.”

He had encountered quite a few Otherworldly Demons on his journey and even eliminated the Qingtian Lineage from its Kings up to its Emperor. Due to his frequent encounters with them, he had come to learn a bit about their culture and beliefs.

There was only a single existence they were truly loyal to, and that was the Spirit God. Only the words from the Spirit God

would they unconditionally obey. On the other hand, the term ‘teacher’ really meant nothing to them at all.

Putting aside scheming against their own teacher, there was not any social stigma even toward the killing of one’s teacher among them. They did not consider it a reprehensible act.

It was for this reason that the Qingtian Emperor and Vicious had no qualms about clashing with one another in the shadows over the past two thousand years.

In fact, Zhang Xuan suspected that the reason the Vicious in Wu Yangzi’s underground chamber had been able to regain consciousness could very well have been the doing of the Qingtian Emperor in order to keep his teacher in check.

Zhang Xuan raised his head and asked, “To make someone like you hesitate to make a move, what is the Qingtian Emperor’s hand?”

One must know that the Qingtian Emperor intended Vicious harm, and considering that Vicious was in a good position to exact vengeance, there was no need for him to hesitate.

“It’s regarding the news concerning a Celestial Amulet of Legacy,” Vicious said.

Perhaps the years of isolation and solitude had really left him deeply stifled. Facing the group of master teachers who would very soon become his prey, he revealed everything without any worry.

“Celestial Amulet of Legacy?” Zhang Xuan had searched the Qingtian Emperor’s memory, and he had learned of this matter as well. As such, he was not too surprised by the revelation.

On the other hand, however, the eyes of Wu shi and the others narrowed in astonishment,

Ignoring the shock of the others, Vicious harrumphed before continuing. “It was a puppet loyal to that Qingtian bastard who uncovered this piece of intelligence. As a master teacher, you should also know how valuable a Celestial Amulet of Legacy is.”

The crowd nodded in agreement.

The Celestial Amulets of Legacy were artifacts that Kong shi had personally left behind, and they concerned the supreme artifact that Kong shi had forged himself, the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn. As such, the value of a Celestial Amulet of Legacy was so great that it would leave even the 9-star master teachers of the Master Teacher Pavilion going into a frenzy over it.

An excited gleam surfaced in Vicious eyes. “If I could obtain a Celestial Amulet of Legacy, I would be able to free myself from this hellish state I am in, quickly find my remaining body parts, and return to my peak! Perhaps, I might even be able to steal the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn and surpass Kong shi!”

Ordinary Otherworldly Demons might not have known what they should do with a Celestial Amulet of Legacy even if they did obtain one, but as one who had fought with Kong shi for many times, Vicious knew very where to use one and how to best use one.

“Due to my current condition, I am unable to leave the marshlands. Thus, I could only rely on him to obtain a Celestial Amulet of Legacy. As such, I had no choice but to spare his wretched life! Furthermore, he also knew where a few of my body parts are, and if he had destroyed them before I got to them, my recovery would have been severely impeded!” Vicious continued.

“No wonder...” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

The allure of a Celestial Amulet of Legacy was simply too great, and after a long period of hibernation, Vicious would surely want to regain his strength as soon as possible. As such, it was understandable why he would choose to spare the Qingtian Emperor despite the latter’s betrayal.

Noticing a peculiar aspect in Vicious’ story, Zhang Xuan tried to sound him out. “You said that the intelligence was procured by a puppet loyal to the Qingtian Emperor? Considering that this is a piece of news that even Tian Qing is unaware of... it seems like the Qingtian Emperor trusts that puppet quite a bit!”

Tian Qing was a sliver of the Qingtian Emperor's will, so he could not be considered a puppet.

As for King Zhongqing, he could only be considered a lackey at most, so the 'puppet' that Vicious spoke about probably did not refer to him either. If that was the case, could it be that there was another close aide of the Qingtian Emperor hiding within the Qingyuan Empire?

But again, assuming that that was true, why didn't he discover anything about that in the Qingtian Emperor's memories?

"There's no need to try sound me out. That fellow has already pledged his loyalty to me," Vicious sneered coldly.

Then, seemingly losing interest in speaking any further, a cold glint flashed across Vicious' eyes as a surge of killing intent burst from him. "Alright, story time is over. You should be happy that you have managed to learn so many confidential secrets. Now, it's about time for me to send you on your way!"

Boom!

A compelling pressure suddenly descended from the heavens, causing a suffocating sensation to crush their chests. Everyone's breathing hastened.

1226 Liu Yang's Crisis 1

“Principal Zhang, we’ll help you stall him. Meanwhile, you try to get away.”

Wu shi and Hall Master Xing stepped forward as they frenziedly drove their zhenqi to ward off the pressure on them, protecting the other members of the group.

Whatever the existence before them was, he was simply too powerful. There was no way they would be able to escape unscathed from his clutches. However, if they went all out, perhaps, they just might be able to buy sufficient time for Zhang Xuan to escape.

Zhang Xuan’s incredible talents would surely play a critical role in furthering the strength of mankind in the future, and a person like him could not be allowed to die just like that. Thus, saving him would be their final contribution to mankind!

“Get away? If we had tried before that little island floated all the way up, we might still have been to get away, but now...” Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. “Did you really think that he’s explaining everything to us just to vent his emotions?”

“This...” Not understanding what Zhang Xuan was getting at, the crowd fell silent.

Indeed. It was perplexing why Vicious would actually reveal all of these valuable secrets to them, such that they even forgot about the predicament they were in for a moment. Thinking about it once more, his actions felt more like... buying time.

“Given that his will has only just escaped from its restraints, it required some time in order to gain absolute control over such a massive island. Thus, he decided to use this information to divert our attention. If I’m not mistaken, he should have already gained full control over the head by now. Even if we start running now, considering how big the marshlands are,

there's no way we will get away in time. Furthermore, given the treacherous terrain we are in, our haste might just land us in deeper danger," Zhang Xuan replied.

Wu shi and Hall Master Xing had only just advanced their cultivation to Leaving Aperture realm primary stage whereas Vicious was at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle. Even if they put their lives on the line to stall Vicious, how long could they possibly stall him for? Not to mention, given Vicious' superior cultivation realm, he would surely catch up soon after.

Most likely, he would be caught before he could even escape ten li away!

"But Zhang shi, if you knew what the other party was up to beforehand, why didn't you flee earlier?" Ji shi[1] couldn't help but ask.

Since you saw through the other party's motive, you should have escaped when you had the time to do so! Why did you still remain here to play along with his games and ask him questions? Now that the other party has gained full control over the little island and returned to his peak state, we are all doomed!

Instead of responding to Ji shi's question, Zhang Xuan walked forward and gazed at the massive face before him.

"There's no way we can escape at this point, and we don't have the strength to rival you either... I hope that you can just answer this final question of mine. Who is the puppet that you were referring to?"

"Hahaha! To still be concerned about this matter despite the situation you are in, your mental resilience sure is incredible, perhaps even on par with Kong shi back then! I'm starting to think that it would be a pity to kill a genius like you just like that." Vicious shook his head as he gazed down at Zhang Xuan with a look of pity.

"I'll offer you one last chance then. As long as you pledge your loyalty and offer your soul up to me, not only will I tell you who the puppet is, I'll even spare your life. When I finally obtain a Celestial Amulet of Legacy, I'll take you along with

me to find the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn and even aid you in becoming the next World's Teacher!"

"You want me to pledge loyalty to you?" Zhang Xuan's lips curled up in disdain. "I have lived as a master teacher, and I'll die as one too! There's no way I'll side with an Otherworldly Demon like you. However, even if you don't tell me who that puppet is, I already have a good idea who he is!"

"Oh?" Vicious looked down at Zhang Xuan with a playful look in his eyes, as if daring the latter to give him a guess.

"It's the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire, Chu Tianxing, right?" Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

"Oh?" Vicious' eyes narrowed.

"Tian Qing was the vice head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and yet, while he hasn't uncovered any information about the Celestial Amulet of Legacy yet, the puppet you spoke of did. From that, it can be seen that the puppet possesses an exceptionally high standing in the Qingyuan Empire. There's no way Wu Shi or Hall Master Xing could be your ally, and Pavilion Master Gou has been killed as well... Thus, that only leaves us with Chu Tianxing!" Zhang Xuan revealed his deduction.

It was not too difficult to guess this.

A person who could uncover news about an elusive Celestial Amulet of Legacy had to have a powerful intelligence network in the Qingyuan Empire, one that was even wider than the one Tian Qing controlled. As powerful as the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion's intelligence network was, there was still a single power in the Qingyuan Empire whose intelligence network surpassed it—the Qingyuan royal family.

And the one who could tap into the intelligence network of the royal family was naturally the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire, Chu Tianxing!

Furthermore, Chu Tianxing's actions had truly been very suspicious.

King Zhongqing had been captured time and time again, and yet, Chu Tianxing was willing to pay a heavy price each time

to bail him out. Furthermore, now that he thought about it, on the night that the souls of eight master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion were nabbed, Chu Tianxing had visited the Master Teacher Pavilion under the pretext of paying a visit to King Zhongqing.

He had not been able to connect the dots earlier, but upon hearing Vicious mention a puppet, everything swiftly came together to form a clear picture.

“To be able to see through everything with just a few clues, as expected of a Celestial Master Teacher! You are keener than I expected,” Vicious sneered coldly, not intending to deny the matter.

There was no reason for him to deny it at this point. In any case, the people before them were pretty much dead men anyway.

“Celestial Master Teacher?”

“Zhang shi... is a Celestial Master Teacher?”

Hall Master Xing, Ji shi, and the others were astonished.

Of the crowd, the only one who was aware of Zhang Xuan’s true identity was Wu shi. Due to safety concerns, Wu shi had not even revealed the matter to Hall Master Xing.

Thus, upon hearing the words of the Otherworldly Demon before them, all of them widened their eyes in shock, unable to believe their ears.

In the long history of the Master Teacher Continent, there had only been a single Celestial Master Teacher, and that was Kong shi. And yet, the young man before them was actually a Celestial Master Teacher as well?

“You didn’t even tell your comrades about the matter? Hahaha, you sure are a wary individual! That’s right! He’s a Celestial Master Teacher, a person whose existence is acknowledged by the heavens themselves! As long as premature death doesn’t come to him, it’s only a matter of time before he becomes the next World’s Teacher!”

Vicious burst into a hearty laughter before abruptly coming to a halt. A cold glint surfaced in his eyes as he continued.

“However, it seems like that will never come to be. I have fought with Kong shi on many occasions, and I am very familiar with all his means. You may have a thousand ideas in your mind, but let me tell you that you are just wasting your effort! How about it? Submit to me, and you can continue living in this world. Otherwise, not only will you die, even your kin and friends will have to suffer due to your obstinacy!

“I’ll be honest with you here. The very moment you arrived in these marshlands, I instructed Chu Tianxing to capture your student. Chances are that your student is already being held captive at this moment,” Vicious sneered.

“You had Chu Tianxing capture my student?” Zhang Xuan’s gaze turned incredibly cold.

He could not have imagined that Vicious would actually stoop down to such lowly and underhanded means against him.

“Indeed!”

“Do you honestly expect me to believe your words? My student is currently cultivating in the Combat Master Hall, where he’s protected by countless combat masters. Even if Chu Tianxing attempts to make a move against him, can he possibly breach the defenses of the Combat Master Hall?” Zhang Xuan harrumphed coldly.

Currently, he only had a single direct disciple in the Qingyuan Empire, Liu Yang!

Before he left, he instructed Liu Yang to focus his effort on cultivating in the Combat Master Hall. Even though Chu Tianxing wielded great power and influence in the Qingyuan Empire, surely he would not dare barge into the Combat Master Hall and cause a ruckus!

“Of course, I concede that there’s no way Chu Tianxing will be able to breach the defenses of the Combat Master Hall... but what if he invites your student out?” Vicious said with twisted smile.

“Invites?” An ominous feeling surfaced in the back of Zhang Xuan’s mind as he clenched his fists tightly.

Zhang Xuan had suspected Chu Tianxing of betraying mankind prior to leaving Qingyuan City, but due to the lack of evidence, he had decided against publicizing the matter for the time being. Instead, he had Wu shi dispatch a few master teachers to keep a tight watch over the latter.

If Chu Tianxing invited his student to the royal palace as a guest in his capacity as the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire, there would really be no reason for Liu Yang to turn down the invitation.

And once Liu Yang left the secure Combat Master Hall to enter the royal palace...

To make matters worse, Wu shi and Hall Master Xing were currently by his side, so there was no one left in Qingyuan City who wielded sufficient authority and strength to oppose Chu Tianxing head on!

Seeing that he had finally broken Zhang Xuan’s calm demeanor, Vicious sneered coldly, “Since you were coming over, wouldn’t it have been disrespectful of me if I did not give you my warmest welcome? Humph, if I did not have at least this much in me, how could I have possibly fought on equal grounds against Kong shi back then?”

“I’ll give you some time to think it over, but know that there is a limit to my patience. Submit to me, and I’ll spare you and your student. I will even impart the complete heritage of the soul oracles to you on top of that and support you in becoming the next World’s Teacher! Otherwise, I’m afraid that you will just have to watch helplessly here as your student suffers a tragic death!”

“You...” Zhang Xuan glared at Vicious in rage.

This was the first time that someone dared to threaten him like that.

...

In Qingyuan City’s Combat Master Hall...

On the third day after the departure of the group to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, the Combat Master Hall ushered in an esteemed guest—the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire, Chu Tianxing.

“Division Head Zhou, I’ll really have to trouble you for this matter. King Zhongqing is still being locked in the Master Teacher Pavilion, and honestly speaking, he really didn’t commit any heinous crimes that warrant such extreme treatment! The biggest mistake he really made was provoking Zhang shi. I don’t want to put you on the spot either, so I just hope that you can bring me to him so that we can attempt to reconcile!” Chu Tianxing said with a vexed look on his face.

He had come to the Combat Master Hall with several guards, who were currently standing behind him, in order to meet with the head of the Weapon Division, Division Head Zhou.

In Hall Master Xing, Division Head Liao, and Division Head Wei’s absence, the responsibility of managing the affairs of the Combat Master Hall ended up falling on his shoulders.

“Pardon me, Your Majesty, but your arrival is truly untimely. Zhang shi has recently gone into seclusion, so I’m afraid that you will have to return another day.” Division Head Zhou shook his head as he turned down Chu Tianxing’s request with an apologetic look.

Hall Master Xing had instructed that this expedition was a confidential operation, so if anyone sought them in this period of time, he had to turn them down with an appropriate excuse.

As powerful as the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall was, it would still be beneficial for it to maintain amiable relations with the regional royal family. As such, it would not be good for it to turn away Chu Tianxing curtly.

“Zhang shi is in the midst of a seclusion? I see...” A look of disappointment surfaced on Chu Tianxing’s face. “If I recall correctly, Zhang shi has a direct disciple named Liu Yang, right? If it isn’t too much trouble, may I meet him instead? I heard that he’s seventeen this year, and I happen to have a daughter who is around his age. I think that it would be good for youngsters like them to get acquainted with one another.”

“This...” Division Head Zhou was put on the spot.

He had already turned down Chu Tianxing’s request to meet Zhang Xuan, so if he hindered the latter from meeting Zhang Xuan’s student as well, it would seem as if he was intentionally making things hard for Chu Tianxing.

Division Head Zhou pondered for a moment before replying. “Pardon me, but I’m afraid that I can’t make a decision on Liu Yang’s behalf. Allow me to send my man over to ask him first. If he’s preoccupied at the moment, I fear that there’s nothing I can do!”

“I’ll be troubling you then, Division Head Zhou,” Chu Tianxing replied with a smile. “As you know, I came here with the intention of mending relations with Zhang shi. If you could have your men put in a few good words for me, I’ll extend my deepest gratitude to you once the matter is done!”

“Un.” Division Head Zhou nodded before beckoning a combat master over to issue a few instructions.

The combat master hurriedly rushed over to Liu Yang’s residence, but before he could even get close, he could already hear loud ‘Peng! Peng! Peng! Peng!’ sounds echoing from within.

Knocking on the door and entering, he soon saw a seventeen-year-old young man brandishing his spear powerfully. Perhaps due to his long hours of training, his entire body was drenched with sweat, and his face had turned a little pale even.

“Young Master Liu, you...” The combat master couldn’t help but kindly advise, “I think you should take a rest first! It won’t do to push yourself too far, or else you might injure yourself! It’ll be disastrous if you damage your foundation in the midst of your training.”

Their Progeny of Combat had decreed that all combat masters must respect Zhang Xuan as their own teacher, and Liu Yang was Zhang Xuan’s direct disciple. However, Liu Yang was neither a master teacher nor a combat master, so eventually, they chose to simply respectfully address him as Young Master Liu or Liu gongzi.

Every single combat master was carefully sieved from countless master teachers, so there was no such thing as a subpar cultivator within the Combat Master Hall. While the combat master who had just entered Liu Yang's residence was just an ordinary member of the Combat Master Hall, he could still easily discern that Liu Yang had overexerted himself in the midst of his training.

It was good for a cultivator to be diligent in their training, but if they were to go overboard and exceed the tolerance limit of their body, they could very well damage the foundation of their cultivation, and such damage was incredibly difficult to repair!

More importantly, excessive desire for swift success could easily result in a disturbance in one's state of mind, especially when the results did not meet up to one's expectations. An impaired state of mind could easily breed inner demons, and it could potentially cause one's cultivation to go berserk as well.

"I know that, too, but time waits for no one!" Liu Yang stopped his training and wiped away his sweat.

His teacher had a total of seven direct disciples.

Zhao Ya, Lu Chong, Yuan Tao, Wei Ruyan, Zheng Yang, Wang Ying... The six of them had already managed to find their own path, and they were bound to ascend to great heights in the near future.

He was the only direct disciple who remained with their teacher, and he had the responsibility to uphold his teacher's reputation. But with the current growth of his cultivation, he would soon be lagging far behind the others... and this had left him feeling greatly pressured.

Watching Zheng Yang become the Progeny of Combat and commanding the combat masters authoritatively had only served to fuel his anxiety further, to the point that he felt as if he would collapse under it.

He was desperate to grow stronger. He wanted to prove that he was not weaker than anyone else!

With nowhere to vent that feeling of anxiety, the only thing he could do was cultivate desperately, gritting his teeth to persevere on even when his body was groaning in pain.

Liu Yang turned to the combat master and asked, “You were looking for me?”

“If there’s nothing, I’ll be continuing on with my cultivation now.”

[1] For those who might have forgotten, Ji shi is Ji Tianxiong, the head of the Northern Meadows City Master Teacher Pavilion.

1227 Liu Yang's Crisis 2

“It’s like this. The emperor of the Qingyuan Empire, Chu Tianxing, wishes to reconcile with Zhang shi, so he has specially paid a visit to the Combat Master Hall in hopes of making amends. However, Zhang shi happens to be in seclusion at the moment, so it is not convenient for him to meet him. Thus, he hopes to meet you instead,” the combat master said.

“He wants to meet me? Tell him that I’m not free!” Liu Yang waved his hand impatiently.

What he was lacking the most at the moment was time, and he did not want to waste a single second of it.

“Young Master Liu, you cannot simply spend every single second of your life cultivating. You need to relax and wind down from time to time. Even though His Majesty did have a disagreement with Zhang shi in the past, he seems to be earnestly seeking reconciliation this time around. Why don’t you meet him and foster some goodwill with him? No matter what, he’s still the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire. If his attempts at reconciliation fall through, he could possibly resort to underhanded tricks to deal with Zhang shi, and that would only cause Zhang shi more trouble!” the combat master advised.

“This... Alright then!” After a moment of hesitation, Liu Yang eventually nodded.

While the other six of his peers were busy bringing glory to his teacher’s name, he was the only one who was still leeching off their teacher, using his teacher’s cultivation resources.

If he added to his teacher’s trouble on top of that, what rights would he have to continue remaining as Zhang Xuan’s student?

Thus, he quickly washed up and switched into a fresh set of clothes before following that combat master to the main hall.

Upon seeing Liu Yang, Chu Tianxing quickly walked over to welcome him with a bright smile, completely devoid of the airs of an emperor. “You must be Brother Liu, I have long heard of your name! To be qualified to become Zhang shi’s direct disciple, you must be a man of great talent!”

Slightly taken aback by Chu Tianxing’s abrupt intimacy, Liu Yang awkwardly replied, “Your Majesty, you’re flattering me...”

“Not at all, not at all! There isn’t any point beating around the bush before someone as smart as you, so I’ll get straight to the point. As you know, I had a conflict with Zhang shi previously over King Zhongqing, so I earnestly wish to make amends and heal the rift between us.”

At this point, Chu Tianxing raised his hand, and a guard standing behind him walked over and passed a jade container to him.

“This is a gift that I have specially prepared for Zhang shi as a token of my sincerity. I hope that you won’t turn down my goodwill!”

Glancing at the jade container in his hand, Liu Yang frowned. He slowly pried it open, and a gush of concentrated spiritual energy immediately burst forth from the container.

Concentrated high-tier spirit stones, five of them!

Liu Yang widened his eyes in astonishment. “This...”

He knew that his teacher urgently required concentrated high-tier spirit stones, so if he could help his teacher secure these five concentrated high-tier spirit stones, he would be doing his teacher a great favor!

Noticing Liu Yang’s expression, Chu Tianxing’s smile brightened. “Brother Liu, aside from the gift for Zhang shi, I have also prepared a present for you, too.”

He raised his hand once more, and another guard swiftly walked forward and grandly presented another jade container. “I know that Brother Liu possesses exceptional talent in fist arts, so I specially paid a visit to the Blacksmith Guild to have

them forge a pair of knuckledusters for you! It's a Saint low-tier weapon, and I believe it should be fitting for you."

As Chu Tianxing spoke, the guard opened the jade container.

Jiya!

A powerful aura emanated from the jade container. Lowering his gaze, Liu Yang saw a pair of beautifully-crafted knuckledusters. A brilliant gleam was reflected off them, and one could feel the powerful aura of a Saint low-tier weapon.

"This..." Liu Yang's voice went hoarse, and his body could not help but stiffen in astonishment.

To be honest, he had wanted a pair of knuckledusters for some time in order to augment his fist arts. However, his teacher had been too busy recently, and he could not bring himself to trouble his teacher at such a moment. As such, he could not hold back his agitation upon seeing Chu Tianxing's gift.

Liu Yang hesitated for a brief moment before replying, "I appreciate your goodwill, but I can't accept these valuable gifts from you."

"Brother Liu, there's no need to hold yourself back. It's my fortune to be acquainted with you, and I hope that these gifts can serve as a token of our friendship for the many years to come. So, I hope that you won't turn down my goodwill!" Chu Tianxing urged with an earnest smile.

"I see... Since that's the case, I'll humbly accept your gifts. I'll also relay your goodwill to my teacher." Liu Yang took the knuckledusters from the jade container and put them on.

They happened to fit him perfectly. The more he looked at them, the more he found himself liking them.

As these knuckledusters had just been forged, they did not have any spirit in them yet. As such, he could use them immediately without having to win the acknowledgement of a weapon spirit.

"There's no need to stand on ceremony," Chu Tianxing replied graciously. "Right, that reminds me. There is going to be a family banquet in the royal palace tonight. My younger

daughters have long heard of your name, and they have been pestering me for an opportunity to meet you. If it isn't too much trouble, I would like to invite you to join us in the banquet!"

"This..." A hesitant frown emerged on Liu Yang's forehead. "Since it's a family banquet, it wouldn't be good for an outsider like me to join in the commotion..."

"It's fine, it's fine! It isn't easy for two people to meet in this massive world, and I have already long considered you my brother, so there's no need to be so formal with me! Actually, I intended to invite Zhang Shi over as well, but it's a pity that Zhang Shi is currently in seclusion. Brother Liu, it'll truly be an honor for our Qingyuan royal family if you would join our family banquet!" Chu Tianxing said.

"I thank you for your high opinion, but I need to cultivate," Liu Yang replied.

"Brother Liu, I know that you are a diligent individual, and I admire your perseverance as well. However, you need to take a rest from time to time and recharge yourself! Also, I actually do have a small request to make of Brother Liu during the banquet. My sons have been getting rather lazy recently, and that has been a huge headache for me. So, I hope that you can teach them a lesson and make them understand that there's a world far greater than the one that they see, and that they shouldn't get complacent with what they have!"

"This..." Liu Yang was conflicted for a moment before eventually nodding. "Alright then."

No matter what, the other party did give him a new pair of knuckledusters, so it was only right for him to return the favor. Furthermore, this was an opportunity for him to further his teacher's reputation. With these thoughts in mind, his hesitation in accepting Chu Tianxing's invitation was alleviated.

All six of his departed seniors and juniors were all outstanding individuals, bound for great heights in the future. Living under their shadows, he had been under extreme pressure in recent days. He strongly craved for a chance to prove himself as well,

and this family banquet was the perfect opportunity for him to do so.

Seeing that Liu Yang had made up his mind, Division Head Zhou decided not to say anything else. In any case, he did not think that any harm would come to Liu Yang under Chu Tianxing's care.

Before long, the duo was already well on their way to the royal palace.

By the time they arrived at the royal palace, the family banquet had already started. Countless princes and princesses walked in and out the area, chatting harmoniously with one another.

As expected of the princesses of a Conferred Empire, they were all outstanding beauties. Sitting among them, Liu Yang could not help but feel his heart beating in nervousness.

While their beauty was nowhere on par with Zhao Ya, Wang Ying, and the others, it was still inevitable that a seventeen-year-old young man like him would find it hard to keep his cool before their charming smiles and alluring gestures.

At this moment, a young man walked over and greeted him. "Liu gongzi..."

"You are..." Liu Yang frowned.

From the other party's dress-up, he could tell that the young man was a prince as well. However, his standing within the royal family did not seem to be particularly high, especially considering how Chu Tianxing neglected to introduce him.

"I am Chu Xiang, the 77th Prince of the Qingyuan Empire," the young man replied with a bitter smile. "I have met Zhang shi on two separate occasions, so we can be considered acquaintances of one another."

If Zhang Xuan was there, he would have recognized the other party as none other than the young man he had met at the entrance of the Terpsichore Guild and Blacksmith Guild, Chu gongzi!

Who knew that he was actually a prince of the Qingyuan Empire?

However, this also explained how he could afford to pay a concentrated high-tier spirit stone for an Exclusive Dance from Fairy Zi Yan.

“A friend of my teacher? Pardon my rudeness. It’s a pleasure to meet you!” Liu Yang quickly got to his feet and clasped his fist.

“There’s no need to be so polite,” Chu Xiang replied with a smile.

The duo chatted for a while. In between their conversation, a few princesses dropped by and offered him a drink. Drunk on the atmosphere, Liu Yang delightfully accepted their toast and drunk a fair bit. Before long, he found his eyelids getting heavier and heavier, and with a clumsy stagger, he collapsed to the ground.

Chu Xiang hurriedly rushed up to check on Liu Yang, but at this moment, Chu Tianxing suddenly appeared. With a sharp glint in his eyes, he bellowed, “Men, lock him in the underground prison and make sure to seal off all news about this matter!”

“Yes!”

A couple of guards quickly stepped forward to bind the unconscious Liu Yang before dragging him away.

Astonished by the sudden turn of events, Chu Xiang asked, “Father, what is going on?”

“This is none of your business!” Chu Tianxing waved his hand impatiently.

“But... he’s Zhang shi’s student! Zhang shi is a genius who has succeeded in crashing our Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, and to apprehend his student like this...” Chu Xiang exclaimed anxiously, only to be interjected halfway through his words.

“Enough! Who do you think you are as to lecture me? If you dare speak another word of this matter, don’t blame me for

being heartless!”

Paying no heed to Chu Xiang’s advice, Chu Tianxing walked away with a livid look on his face.

As the 77th Prince who had come from one of the many concubines in the royal palace, Chu Xiang’s standing was not high.

In order to gain his father’s favor, he had worked diligently, successfully became a 7-star blacksmith, and advanced his cultivation to Embryonic Soul realm despite his young age... He had thought that he could win the respect of others through his hard work, but who knew that he would only end up being poisoned by others as well, resulting in the impairment of his soul?

It was then that he realized that there was no such thing as kinship within the royal family. There were only relationships of convenience.

Thus, he fell into degeneracy, frequenting brothels to comfort himself in the intimate embrace of women. It might have appeared as if he had given up on himself, but it was actually all a ruse.

If he had not put up a useless front, the other princes who were vying for power would have viewed him as a threat and gotten rid of him.

Furthermore, he had realized that his father was not oblivious to the viciousness of his fellow brothers, choosing only to turn a blind eye to them. This had caused the final shred of expectations he had from kinship to freeze over like a winter’s river.

He had thought that his acquaintance with Zhang Xuan might be able to change his father’s low opinion of him, but who would have thought that his father would actually capture the latter’s direct disciple!

Having met Zhang Xuan twice, Chu Xiang knew how protective the young man was of those around him. If something really happened to Liu Yang, that young man could very well turn the entire Qingyuan City into a living hell!

This won't do! I must inform Zhang Shi of this matter this instant... If there is any misunderstanding between Father and him, they should hash it out before things get out of control... Chu Xiang clenched his fists tightly and made up his mind.

He had witnessed the incredible prowess that Zhang Xuan possessed with his own eyes, and he instinctively knew that the latter was the type of person that one should never make an enemy of.

He had no idea why his father had chosen to capture Liu Yang, but from the looks of it, it seemed like there was nothing he could say that would change his father's mind. Since that was the case, he could only deal with this matter from Zhang Xuan's side, and hopefully, it still would not be too late to resolve the conflict between them peacefully.

Thus, Chu Xiang discreetly took his leave from the banquet and returned to his accommodation.

He swiftly changed his clothes before sneaking out of the royal palace to rush to the Combat Master Hall.

A combat master stood in Chu Xiang's way and asked, "Who are you looking for?"

"I am Zhang Shi's acquaintance, and I have some urgent matters for him!" Chu Xiang replied anxiously as he passed a name scroll over.

"You are Zhang Shi's acquaintance? Give me a moment." Noting the anxious look on Chu Xiang's face and hearing that this was a matter relating to Zhang Xuan, the combat master did not dare to waste any time. He quickly took the name scroll and headed in.

Not too long later, the combat master returned with a fatty behind him.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Chu Gongzi. I am Sun Qiang, Zhang Shi's butler. May I know the reason behind your visit?" Sun Qiang greeted with a warm smile.

Noting that the person who had come out was not Zhang Xuan, Chu Xiang panicked. "Pardon me, Butler Sun, but I

really do have an urgent matter that I need to report to Zhang shi about, so I must trouble you to inform him of my visit...”

“Chu gongzi, our young master is currently in seclusion, so I fear that it’ll be inconvenient to interrupt him at this crucial juncture,” Sun Qiang replied with a conflicted frown. “If you really do have an urgent matter for our young master, you can feel free to inform me. I’ll have it relayed to our young master as soon as he’s out of his seclusion!”

“This...” Hearing Sun Qiang’s words, Chu Xiang hesitated for a moment. From the looks of it, it seemed like he would not be able to meet Zhang Xuan immediately, so he swiftly set up an isolation barrier and said, “To be honest with you, Zhang shi’s direct disciple, Liu Yang, has been captured by my father...”

“Young Master Liu Yang has been captured?”

Sun Qiang was taken aback for a moment before his eyes slowly narrowed menacingly.

1228 Castrate That Emperor

1

Others might not have been aware of the sentiments that Zhang Xuan had for his students, but having followed him since Tianxuan Kingdom, Sun Qiang could not have understood any clearer.

For Lu Chong, he single-handedly faced an entire Conferred Kingdom. For Zhao Ya and Wang Ying, he was willing to threaten the powers that had taken them away. For Wei Ruyan, he was willing to put himself in danger.

It could be said that for his students, there was nothing that he would not do!

If something really happened to Liu Yang, he could already foresee Zhang Xuan charging straight into the Qingyuan royal palace and wreaking havoc, not resting until he turned the entire place upside down!

“What should I do?” Sun Qiang frowned in anxiety.

Although it was said that Zhang Xuan was in seclusion, Sun Qiang knew that he had gone somewhere very far away, and it would be difficult for him to return any time soon.

If Sun Qiang allowed anything to happen to Liu Yang during this period, there was no way Zhang Xuan would ever forgive him!

After asking for the details of the matter, Sun Qiang clasped his fist and bade farewell. “Chu gongzi, thank you for your notice. I am deeply grateful to you for your tip. I’ll report this matter to our Young Master this instant!”

After which, he turned around and left.

Not too long later, he arrived at Division Head Zhou’s residence.

“... That is the entire matter.” Sun Qiang swiftly filled Division Head Zhou on the happenings before requesting, “Division Head Zhou, I hope that you can dispatch some men to follow me to the royal palace to save Young Master Liu Yang!”

“You want to march to the royal palace to save Liu gongzi?” Division Head Zhou frowned. “This is no light matter. This is a matter that concerns the relationship among the Combat Master Hall, Master Teacher Pavilion, and the regional monarchy. While I can dispatch some combat masters to demand for Liu gongzi’s release, such an action could easily escalate the conflict! It’ll be safer if we report this matter to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and have them mediate for us!”

“Report it to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters?” A deep frown emerged between Sun Qiang’s brows.

At this point, they did not even know what condition Liu Yang was in. A single day delayed meant an additional day of danger for the latter! If they were to settle this matter through bureaucracy, who could guarantee that Liu Yang would still be alive by the time any concrete action was taken?

At this point, Sun Qiang could not help but recall the torture he had been put through by King Zhongqing, and an involuntary shudder ran through his body.

“Combat masters are effectively the soldiers of the Master Teacher Pavilion, so there’s a strict regimentation that we have to follow. In order to mobilize our men, we will need a decree from the hall master himself! I apologize, but there is really nothing I can do about this matter. However, there should be no cause for worry. No matter what, Liu gongzi is Zhang shi’s student, so Chu Tianxing should not go too far,” Division Head Zhou consoled.

It was not that he did not want to help Sun Qiang, but the potential consequences that could arise from dispatching combat masters to confront the regional monarchy were simply too great. A division head like him was not qualified to bear the responsibility of the outcome.

If Hall Master Xing had been around, he might have been qualified to make such a call. However, as luck would have it, Hall Master Xing was not around either. If matters were to go awry, putting aside his position as a division head, he might even be stripped of his identity as a combat master!

The Combat Master Hall wielded immense power, so it was of paramount importance that the utmost caution was taken in its mobilization.

Otherwise, the Combat Master Hall would only be viewed as a threat by the regional power, and this would cause the leadership of the Master Teacher Pavilion to be questioned.

Seeing that Division Head Zhou was reluctant to make a move, Sun Qiang's face turned livid. "Since you aren't willing to save Young Master Liu Yang, I'll think of a way myself!"

Leaving those words behind, Sun Qiang flung his sleeves furiously and left.

After leaving Division Head Zhou's residence, he headed straight to the accommodation that the Combat Master Hall had prepared for the poison masters.

"Benefactor!" Upon seeing Sun Qiang, Elder Xu and the others from the Poison Hall hurriedly greeted him with grateful smiles on their faces.

If not for the middle-aged man before them, they could have been tortured to death in King Zhongqing's hands. They also would not have been able to become upstanding combat masters, able to walk in the light without being shunned by others either.

The other party had not only given them a second life, he had also changed their fate as well.

"Un. Actually, I have a matter that I require your help with." Without any hesitation, Sun Qiang dove straight to the topic at hand.

With his current strength, there was no way he could barge into the royal palace single-handedly and save Liu Yang. Thus, he had to gather all the power he could tap into.

For some inconceivable reason, these poison masters were extremely respectful to him, even going to the extent of pledging their loyalty to him again and again. As such, they were the first group that he thought of seeking help from.

“Benefactor, feel free to speak! As long as it’s within our means, we’ll have it accomplished regardless of the cost!” the poison masters replied resoundingly without the slightest hint of hesitation in their voices.

After cultivating the poison art that their founder had left for them, their cultivation had really improved by leaps and bounds. This was especially so for Elder Xu, who had recently made a breakthrough to Saint 3-dan.

The improvement in his cultivation was one thing, but more importantly, his comprehension and grasp over poison had also reached greater heights.

As long as he had a sufficiently potent poison in hand, he would be able to kill even a Primordial Spirit realm expert easily!

“There’s no need to agree to my request so quickly. You can make your decision after listening to their story.” Sun Qiang was slightly surprised by the poison masters’ unhesitating response to his request, but knowing the dangers in this mission, he did not want to force them into it.

“It’s like this. Young Master Liu Yang has been captured by the emperor of Qingyuan Empire, so I would like to seek your help in saving him!” Sun Qiang swiftly went through everything that he had heard from Chu Xiang.

“You want us to break into the Qingyuan royal palace to save Liu gongzi?”

“That dog of an emperor! I knew that he is a snake just by seeing how adamantly he protected King Zhongqing!”

“To dare make a move against Liu gongzi, that bastard is clearly disrespecting our great benefactor! Tell us, how do you want us to do it?”

“Shall we have the entire Qingyuan royal palace poisoned to death? I think they at least deserve this much for their

insolence!”

Sun Qiang’s words induced an impassioned uproar amid the crowd from the Poison Hall.

There was not a single word of refusal from them.

Any matter concerning to their benefactor was more important than their own lives. Besides, they were not master teachers either, so rules and the sort meant very little to them.

“Good!” Seeing the poison masters agreeing heartily to his request, Sun Qiang could not help but feel deeply touched inside.

Ever since his first meeting with these poison masters, they had already treated him with the utmost respect. And now, they were even willing to brave such grave danger just to complete the task he had asked of them.

This was probably what they call personal charisma!

They were not even that respectful to someone as formidable as the Young Master, but they regarded him as if he was their savior. It seemed like his splendor and valiance had not gone unnoticed in the eyes of the world after all!

“Let’s quickly discuss a strategy before making our move!” Seeing the authority that he wielded amid the poison masters, Sun Qiang puffed his chest up and waved his hand grandly.

Even though they had many poison masters on their side, one must not forget that they were going up against the royal family of a Conferred Empire!

It would be a gross mistake if they thought that they could achieve victory just by charging over recklessly. If they did so, they could very well be subdued before they even got to Liu Yang.

Thus, there was a need to strategize in advance.

“Back then, when King Zhongqing purged our Poison Hall, he did it in the middle of the night, when everyone was resting...” Elder Xu narrowed his eyes menacingly.

Even though he had already decided to submit to the Combat Master Hall, that did not mean that he could forgive the Qingyuan Empire royal family for destroying his home and purging his kin and friends. While King Zhongqing was the one who had supervised the operation, there was no way that Chu Tianxing, as the emperor of Qingyuan Empire, would have been oblivious to it. In order to mobilize the troops required to destroy their Poison Hall, King Zhongqing had definitely received Chu Tianxing's approval.

As such, the poison masters were also filled with hostility against Chu Tianxing as well.

In consideration of the effort their benefactor had put into giving them a fresh start, they had been planning to put their grudges aside and live their lives in peace. However, seeing how even the bastard emperor dared to make a move against their benefactor, they could not hold themselves back anymore.

A poison master stepped forward and said, "Back then, King Zhongqing gave us a lot of medicinal herbs to concoct the Scattering Breeze Powder. Making a rough calculation, we have enough to concoct ten whole tons of it!

"We refused to comply by King Zhongqing's orders to concoct the Scattering Breeze Powder back then, but we still kept his medicinal herbs in our storage rings. In the past few days, we have been studying the new poison cultivation technique diligently, and we tried our hand at concocting the Scattering Breeze Powder as well. The results were not too bad—we have managed to concoct a fair bit of it, and it all reached Supreme grade! If you intend to break Liu Gongzi out of the royal palace, I think that we can use it."

"Scattering Breeze Powder? Supreme grade?" Sun Qiang was confused.

He knew nothing about poison at all, so naturally, that name did not ring a bell with him.

However, as their 'benefactor', how could he possibly appear ignorant before the poison masters?

Thus, he asked with a frown. “How much of it do you have?”

The security of a Conferred Empire royal palace was bound to be extremely tight. In order for their operation to be successful, they would need to have a massive amount of poison on hand.

“Benefactor, you don’t have to worry about the quantity. We have almost 500 jin ready,” the poison master replied with a chuckle.

After learning the poison cultivation technique their founder had left for them, they had been wanting to find a way to put their newfound understanding of poison to the test. However, due to the lack of other medicinal herbs available, they could only concoct the Scattering Breeze Powder. As a result, they had ended up concocting a large quantity of it.

“500 jin?” Sun Qiang’s lips twitched in astonishment.

Even if he did not have much of an understanding of poison, he could still roughly fathom the significance of 500 jin of poison. On average, just a few grams of poison was sufficient to kill a large group of experts, so 500 jin of it... He shuddered just imagining the sheer devastation it could bring.

“The Scattering Breeze Powder is colorless and odorless, and it drifts along with the wind. As long as we scatter it throughout the royal palace in the middle of the night, we should be able to knock out the guards and successfully rescue Liu gongzi!” Elder Xu said.

“Good, it’s settled then! We’ll move later tonight.” Sun Qiang had never been one to fear anything. Since everything was ready, there was no reason to hesitate anymore.

After refining various details of their plans and confirming once more that there were no major issues, they swiftly returned to their rooms to condition themselves for the imminent operation.

Very soon, it was the Zi hour.

Under Sun Qiang’s lead, the poison masters left the Combat Master Hall quietly.

As the poison masters had already been taken into the Combat Master Hall, and they were moving under the lead of Zhang Xuan's butler, the sentries of the Combat Master Hall did not think much of their departure.

Flitting through the night, they soon arrived at the side of the royal palace where the wind was blowing from.

The group did encounter a few patrolling guards and sentries of the royal palace along the way, but they were all swiftly knocked out by the poison masters before they could manage to do anything.

Elder Xu took a swift look around the area before confirming the ideal location. "Alright, let's release the poison here. The wind isn't strong tonight, but as long as we release the poison from a high enough altitude, we should be able to cover the entire royal palace."

Their goal was to deal with the Qingyuan royal family, and they had no intention of harming innocent civilians in the midst of their operation. Thus, they had to choose the location where they would release the poison from carefully as well.

"Un."

The other poison masters also nodded in agreement as they swiftly took their positions in the air.

Hu la!

They scattered poison powder from their hands, and it dispersed into the night sky.

The Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder drifted along with the night wind as it slowly descended upon the oblivious royal palace.

While the royal palace was guarded by many formations, those were only activated in the face of an enemy assault. Not even the royal family of a Conferred Empire could afford to keep their defensive formations constantly activated.

Not to mention, the Scattering Breeze Powder could also seep through one's pores, making it nigh impossible to guard against.

It was precisely due to the nature of this poison that the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe managed to catch the Master Teacher Pavilion and Combat Master Hall by surprise back then and lay claim to innumerable lives.

A poison that could incapacitate even the wary Combat Master Hall, how could the sleeping royal palace possibly be able to withstand it?

As the poison powder scattered further and further, the group gradually saw the guards of the royal palace losing consciousness and collapsing to the ground one after another.

The Scattering Breeze Powder only robbed a cultivator of their fighting prowess temporarily, it would not cause any significant damage to them. While the Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder boasted a greater potency, it would only increase its effective duration by several hours.

Roughly fifteen minutes later, Elder Xu roughly scanned the area with his Spiritual Perception before nodding. “They have all passed out. It’s time to strike. Let’s go get that dog of an emperor now!”

“That’s right. Let’s capture and castrate that dog of an emperor first!” Sun Qiang uttered viciously as he gazed coldly upon the royal palace. 500 jin is roughly 250kg. Zi hour refers to 2300 ~ 0100.

1229 Castrate That Emperor

2

Inside the royal palace...

Seated behind a table, Chu Tianxing gazed down on a kneeling black-robed man and asked impassively, "How is it? Has that fellow submitted yet?"

The black-robed man clasped his fist and reported, "Your Majesty, even though that brat is young, he has quite the backbone. Our brothers have attempted to use all kinds of torture to pry open his mouth, but as if a mute, he simply won't talk!"

"Backbone? Hah! I have seen plenty of people with backbone in my lifetime, but before me, whatever backbone they have will be shattered into smithereens!" Chu Tianxing sneered coldly.

"That's true... but Your Majesty, what do you want us to get out of him?" the black-robed man asked doubtfully.

Chu Tianxing had only asked them to torture the young man to get him to talk, but he had not said exactly what he wanted to get out of the young man. Faced with such a bizarre order, he was not too sure how he should proceed.

"You don't have to worry about it at the moment. You just have to torture him until whatever spirit he has in him is broken so that he submits unconditionally to me. As for the rest, I'll deal with it personally!" Chu Tianxing waved his hand casually.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" The black-robed man nodded before taking his leave.

As soon as the black-robed man departed from the hall, a vicious glint surfaced in Chu Tianxing's eyes.

As long as he could get wear down Liu Yang's spirit, he would be able to use the soul art that Vicious had imparted to him to

take the young man's soul hostage. By then, he would be able to do whatever he wanted!

Rising from his throne, he began making his way out of the hall as well. However, soon after walking out of the entrance, he saw the black-robed man whom he had just spoken to a moment ago lying on the ground motionless, seemingly having passed out.

“Hmm?” Chu Tianxing's eyes widened in alarm as he began driving his zhenqi furiously.

He was a Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert, and the strength he wielded was no joke. ‘Hula hula!’

Massive surges of zhenqi were pumped through his meridians, ready to bring death upon anyone who dared make a move against him.

To be able to knock out his subordinate at the entrance of the main hall without alarming him, there was no doubt that the one who had made a move was a true expert!

He warily scanned his surroundings as he walked over to his subordinate, intending to check on the wounds on the latter so that he would be able to verify the identity of the assailant through that. At this moment, however, a feeling of weakness abruptly consumed him, causing his body to stagger weakly. His eyes narrowed in alarm as he exclaimed, “This is... Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder!”

This sensation was very familiar to him. It was the poison that the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe had used for their invasion twenty years ago.

Those who came into contact with the poison would immediately be consumed with a feeling of weakness, and even Half-Leaving Aperture realm experts were not spared from it.

This poison was the reason for his capture back then. He could still remember the excruciating torture that the Qingtian Emperor had put him through, and eventually, he had been left with no choice but to offer his soul to the latter and become the latter's puppet.

Fortunately, I still have the antidote with me, Chu Tianxing thought as he flicked his wrist to whip out a jade bottle. Suppressing the intense dizziness in his head, he popped out a pill and swiftly ate it.

He was not like the combat masters, who could still move and battle on their sheer willpower even in the face of abnormal conditions. It was true that he was at Half-Leaving Aperture realm, but that was actually the result of consuming countless precious medicinal herbs. In terms of true fighting prowess, he might not have been on par with an average Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle cultivator, let alone combat masters.

The pill swiftly dissolved in his mouth before entering his bloodstream to course through his veins. He thought that he would swiftly recover his fighting prowess, but after waiting for some time, the feeling of weakness still did not subside. On the contrary, it seemed to be growing more and more powerful.

It was as if he had consumed a fake antidote.

What's going on? Chu Tianxing's face darkened.

He had received the antidote from the Qingtian Emperor himself. It should have made him impervious to the effects of the Scattering Breeze Powder, so why would he still feel so powerless even after consuming it?

Perplexed, Chu Tianxing was just about to pop out a few more pills to consume when he suddenly heard a cold voice behind him.

“Don't bother. The Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder was concocted using the poison cultivation technique we have learned from the founder. Its potency is at least five times stronger than the original, so the antidote you have won't work at all.”

Hearing those words, Chu Tianxing quickly turned his head around, only to see a bunch of bizarre-dressed individuals walking over.

Elder Xu knew that this operation would have great implications, so he had all the poison masters switch into their

normal clothing so as to indicate that they had conducted this operation in their capacity as individuals and not combat masters.

Their Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder was concocted using the unique poison cultivation technique that their founder had imparted to them, which had enhanced its potency manifold. This had rendered ordinary antidotes ineffective against it.

If it was not for this, would they have dared to barge into the royal palace?

“You scoundrels, do you know who you are standing before? How dare you assault me, the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire? Just on the ground of this crime itself, I can have you—as well as all of your kin, friends, and everyone related to you—executed...” Chu Tianxing bellowed furiously.

But before he could finish his words, another furious voice had already interjected. “Execute us? Try it then!”

Following which, Chu Tianxing suddenly saw a massive meatball charging in his direction.

Peng!

A fist struck his eye squarely, sending him flying headfirst into a pillar. The impact from the collision caused blood to bleed profusely down his face.

“You...” Struggling weakly to his feet, Chu Tianxing shot a hostile glare at the fatty who had just made a move against him, only to pale upon recognizing the latter. “You are... Zhang shi’s butler, Sun Qiang?”

It was due to abducting this fellow that King Zhongqing had nearly been killed. Chu Tianxing had conducted an investigation into Sun Qiang as well, allowing him to recognize the latter with just a look.

“That’s right! It’s me, your Grandpa Sun!” Sun Qiang sneered coldly before turning to the elder beside him. “Elder Xu, do you have a dagger?”

“Here you go!” Elder Xu obediently took out a dagger and passed it over to Sun Qiang as he asked doubtfully,

“Benefactor, what are you planning to do with it?”

“This dog actually dared to capture Liu Yang... I’m going to castrate him to get even with him!” Sun Qiang spat through gritted teeth.

“Castrate?”

The faces of Elder Xu and the others twitched.

Everyone in the royal palace had only been knocked out temporarily—the Supreme Scattering Breeze Powder would not harm their cultivation or life at all. This was also their primary intention in hopes of minimizing the repercussions from the operation. This way, even if the Master Teacher Pavilion investigated the matter, they might at least still be able to justify their actions...

As long as things did not get out of hand, Zhang shi would be able to clean up their mess once he returned.

But if they castrated the emperor... that would really be a huge matter.

That would be equivalent to attempting to assassinate on the emperor, and once news spread, not even Zhang shi would be able to cover them!

Glaring at Chu Tianxing coldly, Sun Qing harrumphed. “Help me hold him tightly. If I don’t make this dog pay the price for his actions, my surname won’t be Sun!”

Ever since he had begun following the old master, he had never suffered such grievances before!

First, King Zhongqing captured him for no reason, and now, Chu Tianxing even held Liu Yang hostage...

The heck, did you really think that you can climb over our heads so easily?

If I don’t teach you a lesson, won’t everyone think that they can bully us?

“Yes!” A few poison masters rushed forward to hold down Chu Tianxing’s limbs.

Seeing that Sun Qiang was serious about the matter, Chu Tianxing's face turned ghastly pale, and he began screaming at the top of his lungs. "What are you doing? I am the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire! You won't get away scot-free for doing this to me! You will pay with your lives! The Master Teacher Pavilion will never allow such an incident to pass..."

He was the emperor of a Conferred Empire, the man who dictated the fates of countless lives. There was no way he could withstand the humiliation of being castrated by another!

"Master Teacher Pavilion? Humph! If the Master Teacher Pavilion was really interested in interfering in this matter, they would have long rid the world of a poisonous tumor like you!" Sun Qiang harrumphed coldly. "Take off his pants!"

Heeding Sun Qiang's command, a poison master quickly rushed forward to pull down Chu Tianxing's pants. However, Elder Xu suddenly walked over at this moment and said, "Benefactor, let's not dirty our hands with his filthy blood. That would be a great discredit to you!"

Hearing Elder Xu pleading on his behalf, Chu Tianxing heaved a sigh of relief.

"It's indeed a little disgusting..." Sun Qiang nodded as his movements came to a halt. "What do you suggest we do then?"

It was only in the heat of the moment that he wanted to castrate Chu Tianxing. Elder Xu's words had brought rationality back to him, and he swiftly realized the possible implications of the matter. As such, he could only reluctantly drop the idea.

"How about this instead?" Elder Xu hesitated for a moment before flicking out a jade bottle. He took out a pill from it and passed it Chu Tianxing. "Eat it!"

"Eat it?" Staring at the pill in his hand, Chu Tianxing hesitated.

However, the other poison masters were not as good-tempered as Elder Xu as to allow Chu Tianxing to take his time. They

held Chu Tianxing's hand firmly and forced the pill into his mouth.

Sun Qiang turned to Elder Xu and asked, "What is it?"

"Benefactor, it's a kind of poison. Its consumption will cause it to drop off by itself without having the need for you to castrate him personally. Furthermore, the poison alters his genes to make it a permanent condition. In other words, even if he consumes the Grand Intermittence Pill, he will still be unable to regrow it. Not only is this method cleaner, it also resolves the problem once and for all! Two birds with one stone, don't you agree?" Elder Xu said.

"Drop off by itself?" Chu Tianxing nearly blacked out upon hearing those words.

He was just thanking the heavens a moment ago for having mercy on him when he was suddenly fed with such a vicious pill.

Choked up with frustration, his face flushed crimson, and he spurted a mouthful of blood.

Amid the uncontrollable shivering of his body, he felt an abrupt coldness in his lower body, as if something had really dropped off.

"My..." Unable to take the trauma, Chu Tianxing's eyes rolled up, and he passed out on the spot.

"Wow... the poison sure is potent!" Watching as Chu Tianxing's pants were dyed crimson by the fresh blood flowing from his crotch area, Sun Qiang could not help but direct a look of admiration toward Elder Xu.

No wonder poison masters were so deeply feared on the Master Teacher Continent! Their means were truly fearsome, a living nightmare for all cultivators!

Sun Qiang waved his hand impassively and instructed, "Wake him up and get Liu Yang's location out of him!"

"Yes!"

Two poison masters stepped forward to deal with Chu Tianxing, and it did not take too long for them to uncover Liu

Yang's location from his mouth.

The means of the poison masters were simply too frightening. The myriad of effects that their poisons had could have the most steadfast of minds crumbling in just a few moments, let alone a spoiled emperor.

The group swiftly rushed over to the place where Chu Tianxing had pointed out, only to be find a feeble Liu Yang. He had been severely tortured to the point that it seemed like he was about to breathe his last.

“Young Master Liu Yang!”

Sun Qiang quickly rushed forward to feed him a few recovery pills that Zhang Xuan had given him previously.

Perhaps his previous capture had given Zhang Xuan a shock, but for fear that Sun Qiang and the others would find themselves faced with life-threatening situations in the future, he had decided to leave them with a few pills for in times of need.

Even after consuming the pills, it took some time before Liu Yang regained his consciousness. When he saw the arrested Chu Tianxing held firmly by the poison masters, a burst of rage swiftly ignited within him, blazing into an inferno in an instant.

He had truly thought that the other party had invited him out of goodwill, wanting to reconcile the differences he had with his teacher. Yet, from the start to the end, that fellow had been planning to hold him hostage to threaten his teacher! Unforgivable!

Never in his life had he felt so enraged by anyone's action.

“You bastard, I'll kill you!” Roaring furiously, Liu Yang sent a kick straight toward Chu Tianxing.

Peng!

Chu Tianxing crashed forcefully into the wall, and the powerful impact had him coughing out huge mouthfuls of blood.

“These are the knuckledusters you have given me. Allow me to return them to you right now!”

Putting on the knuckledusters, Liu Yang charged up to Chu Tianxing and smashed his fist into the latter.

Peng!

Chu Tianxing’s chest immediately sunk in. His ribcage had been shattered.

Liu Yang raised his fist once more and send another blow toward Chu Tianxing, and at that moment, Elder Xu’s eyes suddenly narrowed in horror.

“This is bad. H-h-he... is dead!”

“Dead?” Taken aback, Liu Yang quickly took a closer look, only to see that a horrified look had been permanently plastered onto Chu Tianxing’s face. Unknowingly, the latter had breathed his last.

“Things have really gone in the worst direction...”

Gazing at the dead emperor before their eyes, everyone’s face paled. Even Sun Qiang could not help but stiffen at that sight.

1230 Flee

No matter how much of a dastard Chu Tianxing was, he was still the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire. They could teach him a lesson, they could place him in a state of living hell, but if they killed him, that would be a huge matter.

“This is really bad...” Elder Xu was horrified by the situation as well.

As much as he wanted to exact vengeance for his dead comrades, he knew that the death of an emperor would surely draw the intervention of the Master Teacher Pavilion. None of them would be able to escape unscathed.

Even if he was guilty of a crime, he should be put through an official trial of the Master Teacher Pavilion before being sentenced. To kill an emperor of a Conferred Empire so abruptly was no different from challenging the self-determinism of the country.

“I’ll take responsibility for what I have done. I am the one who killed him, so I’ll bear the burden for doing so alone!” Liu Yang clenched his fists tightly as he spoke.

“How do you want to take responsibility for it?” Sun Qiang snapped. “You aren’t just an individual now! You represent the Young Master as well!”

“I...” Liu Yang fell silent.

Indeed, even if he claimed that he was solely responsible for this matter, his teacher would still be inevitably implicated in this matter.

From the moment he became his teacher’s direct disciple, his fate had become intricately linked with his teacher’s, not to be severed by anything.

“What do I do then?” Liu Yang asked in panic.

No matter how high his cultivation was, he was still only a seventeen-year-old child. He might have persevered through

the pain and bore of cultivation, but he had no idea what he should do in a situation like this.

“I don’t know either!” Sun Qiang pinched his glabella in frustration.

If only the Old Master was there, he would be able to use his strength and standing to resolve this issue easily. In fact, even if it was the Young Master, given his sharp wits and incredible means, he might be able to salvage the situation, too.

But none of them were around at the moment... and in the face of such a hopeless situation, he had no idea what he could do either.

There was no way they could suppress the news regarding the death of an emperor of a Conferred Empire.

Unable to find a solution, Sun Qiang eventually sighed deeply and said, “Let’s return to the Combat Master Hall first and find a way to contact the Young Master!”

“It seems like there’s no other choice at this point,” Elder Xu said.

Elder Xu and the others knew that the Young Master of their benefactor was a 7-star master teacher who had successfully crashed the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. At this point, they could only bank on that young man.

Thus, the group quickly departed from the royal palace and returned to the Combat Master Hall.

Shortly after they left, in a corner of the royal palace, a figure struggled for a while in an attempt to rise to his feet, but the overwhelming weakness he felt prevented him from making any large movements.

“This is really a huge matter. I must report this to the Master Teacher Pavilion as soon as possible!” After recuperating for roughly six hours, the figure finally felt the effects of the poison dulling. He quickly rose to his feet and left the royal palace.

It was already daybreak by the time he returned to the Master Teacher Pavilion. At this point, he had already changed his

clothes. He was actually a 7-star master teacher!

This was the man whom, under Zhang Xuan's advice, Wu shi had dispatched to follow Chu Tianxing to keep a close eye on the latter's movements!

He had concealed himself in the depths of the royal palace to find evidence of Chu Tianxing's wrongdoings, but who would have thought that he would end up witnessing Liu Yang's assassination of the emperor! To make things worse, he had not been able to move at all due to the poison, so he had been unable to stop them!

"Elder An, you are finally here! Song shi arrived early in the morning, and he's currently fuming..." As soon as the 7-star master teacher walked into the Master Teacher Pavilion, another master teacher quickly rushed up to report the matter to him.

"Song shi?" Elder An frowned.

"He's the quasi 8-star master teacher from the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion dispatched by the headquarters when Pavilion Master Gou reported the matter concerning Zhang shi's pavilion crashing back then," the master teacher explained.

"Quasi 8-star master teacher?" Elder An narrowed his eyes in shock.

There were two tiers in between 7-star master teacher and 8-star master teacher, namely half 8-star and quasi 8-star.

Those whose cultivation had reached True Leaving Aperture realm would be qualified to attain the title of half 8-star master teacher, but only those who had reached Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle could be called a quasi 8-star master teacher!

Since Song shi was a quasi 8-star master teacher, there was no doubt that his cultivation had already reached Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, just a step away from Saint 6-dan.

Saint 6-dan was known as the Grand Dominion realm. At this cultivation realm, a cultivator would be able to create their own Dominion, wielding absolute control over everything

within its area. In other words, they were undefeatable within their own Dominion!

The master teacher nodded. “That’s right!”

He came at a timely moment. I should just report the matter to him and allow him to decide how it should be dealt with, Elder An thought with a nod.

The death of the monarch of the Qingyuan Empire was already a matter that had exceeded his jurisdiction. At times like this, it would be best for him to just report the matter and allow a senior master teacher to decide on a course of action.

Following behind the master teacher, it did not take long for Elder An to arrive at the main hall of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Before he could even enter the room, he could already hear a displeased voice sounding from within.

“Pavilion Master Gou, Vice Pavilion Master Tian, and so many 7-star master teachers have been killed, but instead of finding the murderer, all of you are idling around here instead! Have you all forgotten your responsibilities as master teachers, or have the years of loftiness made you all indolent fools? You lot are really reprehensible! It’s really about time to reorganize your Qingyuan branch! Where’s Wu Rufeng? Didn’t Pavilion Master Gou put him temporarily in-charge? Where is he?”

Upon walking into the room, Elder An saw an elder pacing around the room, reprimanding a group of elders from the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

That elder was probably Song shi.

On the other hand, the group of elders had their heads lowered humbly, not even daring to breathe loudly.

The other party had arrived as an envoy dispatched from the headquarters, and he was a quasi 8-star master teacher at that. Who would dare talk back to him?

Furthermore, his rage was justified. The Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion had ten thousand years of history behind it, but their pavilion master and vice pavilion master had ended up dying abruptly along with seven other 7-star master teachers. On top of that, a twenty-year-old young man

even managed to crash their pavilion. This was truly a great discredit to the reputation of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Vice Pavilion Master Wu is currently in seclusion,” one of the elders replied.

“In seclusion? After such a huge mishap has occurred, as the person in-charge of this Master Teacher Pavilion, he has the gall to go into seclusion?” Upon hearing those words, Song shi nearly erupted on the spot.

To actually be able to go into seclusion when the branch was facing a huge crisis... was the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion filled with nothing but dimwits?

“Bring him to me right now! Also, get that Zhang Xuan who crashed this Master Teacher Pavilion here as well!” Song shi flung his sleeves furiously and harrumphed.

“You want us... to bring Zhang shi over too?”

“Everything that has happened in your branch recently seems to be related to him. I want to see just what kind of formidable figure he is to be able to make a Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilion such a mess!” Song shi harrumphed coldly.

He had specially investigated the matter before coming over, and the conflict seemed to have originated from King Zhongqing capturing a butler named Sun Qiang. After which, the conflict had escalated further and further, eventually resulting in a pavilion crashing.

To cause such a huge ruckus within just a couple of days after entering Qingyuan City, he really wanted to see just what kind of incredible figure that Zhang Xuan was.

“Yes...” An elder nodded before quickly leaving the room.

At this point, Elder An stepped forward and reported, “Song shi, I am Elder An Rufang. I have a matter that I would like to report to you!”

“I have heard of you. You are one of the more senior elders of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. Feel free to speak!” Song shi nodded.

“It’s like this... Last night, the emperor of the Qingyuan Empire, Chu Tianxing, had one of Zhang shi’s direct disciples, Liu Yang, imprisoned. Later in the night, his butler, Sun Qiang, led a group of remnants from the Poison Hall to the royal palace and poisoned all the guards there in order to save Liu Yang. In the midst of doing so, they even had Chu Tianxing... killed!” Elder An swiftly went through everything that he had witnessed.

“You said that they had Chu Tianxing killed? Chu Tianxing is dead?” Song shi widened his eyes in shock.

“That’s right!” Elder An nodded grimly.

“Who’s the one who made the killing move?” Song shi asked anxiously.

“It’s Zhang shi’s direct disciple, Liu Yang. He killed Chu Tianxing with a single punch!” Elder An said.

“This... How could he kill the emperor of a Conferred Empire so easily? He’s really taking our Master Teacher Pavilion too lightly!” Song shi roared with a livid face.

The Master Teacher Pavilion was in charge of maintaining order within the region so as to ensure peace for the populace.

While that Zhang Xuan was admittedly an incredible genius, the Qingyuan Empire did not seem to have had a single day of peace ever since his arrival. In fact, his student even ended up killing the emperor. How was the Master Teacher Pavilion supposed to account for all of this to the populace?

This was truly unforgivable!

“Bring Zhang Xuan and that direct disciple of his to me this very instant!” Song shi spat through gritted teeth.

“Yes!” Hearing Song shi’s instructions, a group of elders immediately left the main hall.

Not too long later, they returned with a fatty behind them.

The fatty clasped his fist and introduced himself with an attitude that was neither too humble nor arrogant. “Paying respects to Song shi. I am Zhang shi’s butler, Sun Qiang.”

“You are Sun Qiang?” Song shi narrowed his eyes as he assessed the person before him.

To be honest, rather than to pinpoint Zhang Xuan as the root of the entire string of trouble that had happened in Qingyuan City, it would be more accurately to say that it had all started with the fatty before him.

“That’s right. Our Young Master happens to be out of Qingyuan City at the moment,” Sun Qiang said.

“He isn’t in Qingyuan City?” Song shi’s complexion turned even more awful.

“Young Master and Wu shi have left to apprehend the culprit behind Pavilion Master Gou’s death. In order to prevent the culprit from learning of their movements beforehand, they instructed us to maintain the act before others that they have gone into seclusion!” Sun Qiang explained.

He knew that the Young Master was not truly in seclusion, and considering that the elder standing before him was a master teacher dispatched from the headquarters, he knew that it would be best for him to report the truth.

“They have left to apprehend the culprit?” Hearing those words, Song shi’s expression finally alleviated. He then continued asking, “Where’s Liu Yang then?”

It was understandable that Zhang shi was not around, but what about the culprit who had killed Emperor Chu Tianxing, Liu Yang?

Why didn’t he come here along with Zhang Xuan’s butler?

“He...” Sun Qiang hesitated for a moment before continuing. “He has left Qingyuan City. I don’t know where he is at the moment.”

“You don’t know where he is at the moment? What do you mean by that?” As Song shi spoke, a powerful aura suddenly burst forth from him, causing the crowd to shudder involuntarily under the pressure he was emanating.

Song shi glared at the fatty before him intently, seemingly daring him to utter the slightest word of falsehood before him.

Sun Qiang was alarmed by the sudden outburst of power as well, but recalling that he was Yang shi's butler, he forcefully composed himself and replied, "Reporting to Song shi, after accidentally killing Emperor Chu Tianxing, Liu Yang felt extremely guilty at his actions, so he left Qingyuan City overnight discreetly. I honestly have no idea where he has headed off to."

What he was saying was the truth.

After returning to the Combat Master Hall, Sun Qiang had quickly consoled Liu Yang to calm him down before anxiously attempting to contact the Young Master. However, despite a night of trying, he was still unable to establish communications with Zhang Xuan. By the time he realized it, Liu Yang was no longer in the Combat Master Hall.

He had left only a letter in his bedroom.

"He left Qingyuan City overnight? Hah, more like trying to flee from his crimes!" Song shi's eyes narrowed menacingly as he instructed, "Comb through the entire city and have that murderer apprehended... dead or alive!"

"Yes!"

A group of master teachers quickly left to carry out his orders.

"On the other hand, as a mere butler, you disregarded the laws of the country and brought your men into the royal palace to poison the guards. You are as guilty as Liu Yang! Men, throw Sun Qiang into the prison! I'll judge him along with Liu Yang once the latter is captured!" Song shi bellowed.

A group of master teachers swiftly stepped forward to grab hold of Sun Qiang.

"You want to judge me and Young Master Liu Yang?"

Not expecting Song shi to make such a decision, Sun Qiang's eyebrows shot up in displeasure. "How dare you! Do you know who our Old Master is?"

1231 Rise and Shine!

“Like I would care who your Old Master is! In the face of the law, all beings are equal. Take this fellow away!” Song shi waved his hand impatiently, not giving Sun Qiang an opportunity to speak at all.

Indignant, Sun Qiang wanted to argue, but a sudden surge of power had his cultivation completely sealed, preventing him from speaking a word. Following which, two master teachers stepped forward to have him taken away.

“Wuuuuu!” Sun Qiang was so angry that he could have exploded, but he was still completely helpless before the situation.

He was the butler of the great Yang shi, so how could a mere quasi 8-star master teacher treat him in such a manner? This was insubordination!

“Have those poison masters captured too. Make sure to keep a tight watch over them so that they don’t escape!” Paying no heed to the furious fatty, Song shi continuing issuing a series of instructions.

Very soon, with the entire Master Teacher Pavilion mobilized, it did not take long for Elder Xu and the others to be apprehended and imprisoned.

However, despite combing through the entire Qingyuan City, Liu Yang was nowhere to be seen. It was as if he had suddenly vanished from the world; there was not even the slightest trace of him to be found.

...

Several hours earlier, back at the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, Zhang Xuan was staring at the massive face right before him calmly.

“Well, I have to admit that it’s a brilliant idea to have Chu Tianxing invite Liu Yang to the royal palace to hold him hostage so as to threaten me. Just that, I am really curious as to

know why someone as esteemed as Chu Tianxing would end up pledging loyalty to you?”

In truth, Zhang Xuan was not the only one who was intrigued by this matter. The other master teachers and combat masters were also puzzled by Chu Tianxing’s betrayal.

As an emperor of a Conferred Empire, Chu Tianxing was an individual who wielded great authority in his hands. However, the entire basis of his power was built upon humans, so it was deeply counterintuitive for him to betray humanity to side with the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

One must know that if the Master Teacher Pavilion uncovered his betrayal, he would be killed on the spot. There would be no mercy whatsoever.

“You want to know why?” Hearing those words, Vicious sneered coldly. “You will have to ask your own Master Teacher Pavilion for that!”

Zhang Xuan frowned but did not say anything.

Vicious harrumphed. “As the monarch of a Conferred Empire, he should have wielded supreme power within his country. No one should have dared disrespect him or question his words. But with the existence of your Master Teacher Pavilion, what has become of his authority as the emperor?”

“Thanks to your Master Teacher Pavilion, he has to always consider how the Master Teacher Pavilion would view a matter before making a decision. No matter what he did, he would never be able to break free from your control, doomed to remain subservient to you lot for life. How could a man as prideful and lofty as him possibly accept this?”

“Through controlling this opening in his heart, it was not too difficult for me to place him under my control.”

“This...” Hearing that, Zhang Xuan fell silent.

In truth, Vicious’ words had some truth in them.

To the common populace, the presence of the Master Teacher Pavilion brought about some degree of equality and order, allowing them to live their lives in peace. It was also a

platform where they could have their grievances redressed, allowing standing up against the powerful nobles of the country whom they would have been powerless against otherwise.

On the other hand, to those who wielded great power, especially for those who donned the crown, the existence of the Master Teacher Pavilion was a major threat to their authority. No matter what they wanted to do, they had to take how the Master Teacher Pavilion would react into consideration, or else a swift sword might fall upon their heads. Naturally, how could they be pleased something like that?

To have to remain subservient to another despite sitting upon the almighty throne... It was inevitable that dissatisfactions would pile up and eventually reach a point where it was no longer repressible.

At this point, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed.

Chu Tianxing only saw how his power had been curbed, but he failed to see how the Qingyuan Empire could have very well been annexed by other empires or destroyed by the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe if not for the Master Teacher Pavilion's protection.

Without a strong foundation, how could an empire possibly survive the test of time?

Despite the various restrictions that the Master Teacher Pavilion would impose on the regional monarchy, there was no doubt that its presence played a crucial role in making the country strong!

Nevertheless, even though Vicious had put it simply, Zhang Xuan knew that the truth was bound to be more complicated than that. Most likely, Chu Tianxing must have gone through some kind of traumatic event that resulted in him steering off the path, eventually causing inner demons to breed within him. Unable to overcome his inner demons, he had no choice but to become the puppet of the Qingtian Emperor and Vicious, heading down a path of no return.

Not wishing to waste his breath any longer, Vicious uttered coldly, "Alright, I have already come to the limit of my patience. I don't want to waste any more time on you. Hurry up and give me your answer, or else I'll ensure that you, your students, and your kin will suffer tragic deaths!"

At the same time, a powerful force suddenly rippled forth from Vicious, leaving Zhang Xuan's group swaying on their feet. It was a threat from Vicious to remind them how powerless they were before him.

"You know, I do care for my students a lot. However, if you think that you can make me betray mankind and submit to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe just by holding them hostage, you are really taking me too lightly!" Zhang Xuan shook his head as his voice resounded clearly amid the powerful wind.

"As their teacher, I have to conduct myself properly so that I can become a good role model to them. If I surrender to you easily, what kind of message would I be sending to my other students? How could I be qualified to preach to them about principles and values if so? I know that I can't keep them under my wing and protect them forever, so I have worked hard to teach them everything that they might need... and if they are still to be unable to discern the situation themselves and end up being done in, I can only say that it isn't meant to be."

As much as Zhang Xuan did not want to see anything happen to his students, as a teacher, he knew that he could not possibly protect them for life. More importantly, he understood the respect and admiration that his students had for him, and he was not oblivious to the immense influence that he had on them.

For this very reason, he would not bend his principles and values even for their sake, or else he would be sending the wrong message to them, possibly leading them down the wrong path.

Often, the consequences of a decision were ambiguous. It was easy to look back retrospectively to say what could have been

better done, but it was not as easy when one was put into the same position, looking upon an uncertain future.

Nevertheless, there were still some things that one should do and one should never do.

Principles and values were what set humans apart from beasts, so those were things one should never compromise!

This was what Zhang Xuan deeply believed in, and he felt that it was something that all master teachers should persist in as well.

“Is that your answer? Very well. Since you have made up your mind, you can die now!”

Looking at the resolve in the young man’s eyes, Vicious knew that there was nothing he could say or do that would sway the other party. Thus, he decided not to waste his breath anymore.

Boom!

An overwhelming might rippled forth from Vicious, crashing down upon the group like a tsunami. Standing at the very front of the group, Wu shi and Hall Master Xing hurriedly drove their zhenqi furiously to reinforce the barrier they had put up to protect the others. However, under the immense pressure, it did not take long for their faces to redden, and fresh blood spurted from their mouths.

The disparity in strength was simply too great! They did not stand a chance at all.

Gritting his teeth furiously to persist even a second longer, Wu shi bellowed desperately, “Principal Zhang, hurry up and leave!”

“There’s no need for that.” A soft chuckle escaped from Zhang Xuan’s mouth. “I know that he’s biding his time, but who’s to say that I’m not doing the same?”

Raising his head, he gazed at the massive face before him and asked, “Do you think that you have won?”

“What do you mean?” Realizing that the young man’s eyes was calm, devoid of worry or fear, Vicious’ eyebrows shot up. An ominous feeling sprouted within him.

He quickly looked back at everything that had happened, but there did not seem to any time when the young man could possibly have turned the tables on him.

“What do I mean? Isn’t the meaning obvious? Just as you were stalling time to gain control over the little island, I was also playing along with you to buy some time as well,” Zhang Xuan replied with composure.

Were it not to stall for time, even if he had many questions in his mind, he would not have bothered to talk so much at this critical moment!

“You were buying time, too? Don’t bother putting on a front before me; it’s meaningless. We both know that there’s nothing else you can do in this situation!” Vicious replied coldly.

The Qingtian Emperor had engaged countless celestial designers and blacksmiths and devoted countless precious resources in order to forge this head. While taking control of it had only granted him a cultivation realm of Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, in terms of true fighting prowess, he could match even an average Grand Dominion realm expert easily!

Of the cultivators before him, the two strongest ones were only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage. On the other hand, while Zhang Xuan possessed strength far beyond his current cultivation realm, he was only barely able to match the Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage Qingtian Emperor even when he utilized all the means in his possession.

The disparity in strength was not something that could be breached in a moment no matter how much time Zhang Xuan bought!

The only fate possible for them was death!

“Why would I bother putting up a front before you at this moment? Alright, since it has come to this, it’s time for me to show my hand as well. Haven’t you rested long enough now? It’s time to do your work!” Zhang Xuan’s voice echoed in the surroundings with a unique melody to it.

Surprised by Zhang Xuan’s words, Hall Master Xing and the others quickly looked around them, but beneath the starry

night sky, there was not a figure to be seen.

“I was wondering what kind of formidable ally you could have prepared on your side. It seems like it’s just a mere front after all!” Vicious sneered coldly.

Previously, that fellow had used this method once against the Qingtian Emperor, resulting in the impaling of the latter’s bottom. If that fellow thought that the same trick could work twice, he was dreaming!

If the other party really had an ally hidden in the shadows, he would have gotten them to appear long ago. There was no reason to have waited so long!

“I have had enough of your farce. Let’s end it once and for all!” Harrumphed coldly, a compelling might far stronger than the previous ones rippled from Vicious, swiftly crushing its way down upon the group.

However, before the might could reach them, the massive head in the air suddenly staggered.

Following which, as if the little island had gone out of control, it began trembling non-stop.

“What is going on? How can I possibly lose control over this head?” Vicious widened his eyes in horror. He shot his glance down upon Zhang Xuan and screeched, “You! It can only be you! Speak, what did you do to my head?”

“It’s nothing much, really. All I did was to enchant the little island!” Zhang Xuan replied with a casual smile.

Back when he was at the bottommost level of the little island, he had used the Library of Heaven’s Path to check on the surrounding walls.

Perhaps it was because he was at the very center of the little island, but he astonishingly found out that the entire island was actually a massive man-made structure, forming a gigantic entity by itself.

Upon realizing that, he swiftly recalled what he had seen upon stepping on the Ghost Cavern and mentally traced the path he

had walked. Once a full picture was formed in his mind, he immediately realized what was going on.

Thus, he spent two hours in the underground cavern secretly enchanting the entire little island.

His movements were very discreet, and Vicious' will was still trapped in the altar back then. As such, the latter had failed to realize what he was doing.

After which, he released Vicious and allowed the latter to take control of the little island.

From the start to the end, Zhang Xuan knew that Vicious was intentionally stalling for time, but he was more than happy to grant the latter all the time he wanted. After all, the more deeply fused Vicious was with the little island, the more intricately attached he would be with the dormant spirit that he had enchanted into it.

Before Vicious knew it, there would already be two consciousness within him. Just like the situations with Hall Master Xing and Zhang Jiuxiao back then, he would be forced into a tough battle for supremacy with the spirit.

“Enchant? You are telling me that you enchanted my entire head?” Vicious shrieked in disbelief.

He was aware of the spirit awakener occupation, but even 9-star spirit awakeners were only capable of enchanting spirits into stronger and larger artifacts. Furthermore, each enchantment would exhaust them greatly, and they would have a long downtime after each enchantment session.

On the other hand, the head that was forged for him was roughly six li in diameter. How many times would one have to enchant the head in order to produce enough sparks to bestow it with a spirit?

Was it even humanly possible?

“It seems like the Qingtian Emperor has neglected to tell you about how I managed to enchant the building of the Spirit Awakener Guild,” Zhang Xuan scoffed.

Due to the previous incident, he had been afraid that Vicious might have noticed his plan in advance and guarded against the spirit. However, from the looks of it, it seemed like the latter was oblivious to it as well!

While the Qingtian Emperor and Vicious appeared to be close allies on the surface, they had been trading blows with one another beneath calm waters. Information asymmetry could often prove to be a powerful weapon in crucial circumstances, so there was no way the Qingtian Emperor would have told Vicious everything he knew!

This worked to Zhang Xuan's advantage. Completely unguarded against his abnormal capability in spirit enchantment, Vicious could not have anticipated such a move.

Otherwise, Zhang Xuan would not have succeeded so easily.

“Humph, so what if you have managed to enchant my head? It makes no difference to the situation at all! I'll still be able to kill all of you easily!” Roaring furiously, Vicious forcefully wrestled control over the head from the spirit and maneuvered the head to kill the young man before him.

However, the young man simply shook his head with a derisive smile before uttering softly, “Rise and shine, spirits!”

Boom!

Right after those words were spoken, it was as if spring had sprung upon the face-shaped little island. In literally the blink of an eye, countless plants sprouted out.

Cactus, green foxtail, and flowers of all shapes and sizes... All of them sprouted on every inch of land on the little island, filling it densely.

“Ahhh!”

Under the forceful intervention from the spirit, Vicious' consciousness began descending into chaos. As if two personas struggling for supremacy, he began to lose control over his own strength.

“This...”

Watching the inconceivable drama unfold before their eyes, Wu Shi, Hall Master Xing, and the others could not help but gulp in fear.

All along, spirit awakeners had been a synonym for 'weakness', playing nothing more than an auxiliary role to other cultivators. Who would have thought that their aptitude could actually be used in such a way?

Under normal circumstances, it would have been impossible for them to defeat this Otherworldly Demon. Yet, just by enchanting a spirit into the other party's head, Zhang Xuan had actually managed to send the other party into a state of disorientation, effectively incapacitating the other party.

While struggling with the spirit within him, Vicious roared furiously, "Do you think that a mere spirit you have enchanted into my head will be able to defeat me? Dream on! Once I get rid of this spirit, it'll be your doomsday next!"

Zhang Xuan's capability in spirit enchantment was unnatural, but Vicious' proficiency in soul arts was no joke either. At the very most, the spirit would only prevent Vicious from controlling the island and place his consciousness into a state of disorientation temporarily. With just some time, there was no doubt that Vicious would be able to eradicate the spirit.

"I have no doubt that you have the ability to kill the spirit I have enchanted into your head. However..." Zhang Xuan shook his head before continuing. "It will be too late then."

Hu!

A book materialized in Zhang Xuan's palm. Vaguely, one could see a finger and a heart imprinted on it. Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm. 3km Information asymmetry refers to situations where information is not fully shared/known by those involved in the matter. One common example would be in a murder case, where each eye-witness knows some important details of the full story that others might not know of. In such a case, the detective has to gather all of their stories in order to deduce the full story and pinpoint the murderer.

1232 Possession!

It was the Book of Heaven's Path, where he had sealed Vicious within!

Vicious had once told him that the other Vicious was his brain and his eyes, and the innate authority the brain possessed allowed it to exert dominance over the other body parts. As such, it would have been impossible for him to possess the other party under normal circumstances.

The only way he could successfully possess the other Vicious was when the other party's consciousness in a state of confusion, rendering the other party unable to counterattack to his possession!

Considering how the other Vicious was a soul oracle who possessed the intact memories of the original Vicious, it could be said that it would be nigh impossible to place his consciousness into a state of confusion. However, upon learning that the little island was an artifact that the other Vicious was intending to use to house its will, the rest was easy.

As long as he enchanted the little island in advance and put on a convincing act to have the other Vicious willingly fuse his consciousness into it... A single head with two consciousness clashing for supremacy, that was more than enough to disorientate the other Vicious' consciousness!

Admittedly, with the strength that the other Vicious wielded, it would not take too long for him to devour the spirit, but... how could Zhang Xuan give him the opportunity to do so?

With an upward wave of his hand, the book in his palm gradually opened. The heart and finger sealed within the book surged into the sky.

Boom!

A powerful killing intent burst forth from the heart and the finger, shrouding the entire island in an instant.

“Y-you... You actually have my other body parts! How could I have failed to sense them?”

Panic and disbelief could be heard in the voice of the other Vicious. At this point, he could not maintain his composure any longer.

Under normal circumstances, as soon as the body parts came into his vicinity, he should have been able to notice them in an instant due to the connection among them... so how could those two body parts come so close to him without him noticing?

Sense them? Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Vicious' heart and finger were sealed using his Book of Heaven's Path. Concealed by the heavens themselves, if Vicious could still sense their presence, wouldn't that mean that he had already surpassed the heavens?

How could that possibly be?

Hu!

Paying no heed to Vicious' shock, the consciousness within the heart and the finger flew out and dived into the massive head.

Hualala!

The head in the air was no longer able to maintain its steady flight, and it seemed as if it would plummet from the sky at any moment.

Zhang Xuan turned around and told the group behind him, “Let's vacate the area first. It's likely that their battle will cause devastating destruction.”

The battle between the two Vicious for dominance was bound to be one that was extremely perilous. Even if they remained in the area, there was nothing they could do. In fact, they might even be placed in danger from the shockwaves of their clash. Since that was the case, they might as well leave the area for the time being and wait somewhere further away.

“Alright!” Wu shi and the others nodded.

Even though they still had not been able to make sense of the situation, considering that the pressure that had been weighing down on them previously had vanished, they were out of danger for the time being.

The group hurriedly dashed away from the area, and after ten minutes of travel, they finally stopped at an area roughly two hundred li away from the Ghost Cavern.

At this moment, the little island appeared to be nothing more than a small bean in everyone's eyes. Nevertheless, from the uncontrollable shaking of the little island, they could imagine the intense battle that was ongoing there.

Unable to hold himself back any longer, Wu shi turned around and asked, "Principal Zhang, what is happening?"

Why would the book that Zhang Xuan had taken out contain the will of an Otherworldly Demon?

What did that Otherworldly Demon have to do with the Qingtian Emperor's teacher?

Everything felt like a perfect enigma to them, leaving them completely befuddled.

"The teacher of Qingtian Emperor is the fragmented will of a powerful Otherworldly Demon who fought on equal grounds with Kong shi many years ago. He had already reached the level where he could revive even through just a single droplet of blood, and his death has resulted in many portions of his body being scattered around the world. I happened to find a few of his body parts and forced him to submit to me..."

Zhang Xuan briefly explained the situation.

"An Otherworldly Demon who fought on equal grounds with Kong shi?"

"Doesn't that mean that he's an existence who has survived through the ages?"

"He's able to revive just from a single droplet of blood?"

...

The master teachers stared at one another as they felt their throats turning hoarse.

Despite having encountered plenty of mystical affairs themselves, they dared not believe what Zhang Xuan was saying. It was simply too inconceivable!

An old monster who had survived from the ancient times had actually ended up being tamed by Zhang Xuan?

The group felt as if their minds were going to blow up.

“I’ll have to ask all of you not to speak of the matters that have happened here to anyone else,” Zhang Xuan requested.

No matter what, Vicious was still of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. It would adversely affect his reputation and credibility as a master teacher if it was made known that he had an Otherworldly Demon under his command.

“Rest assured!” Wu shi and the others hurriedly nodded in agreement.

To be honest, even if they wanted to speak of the matters that had happened that day, it was doubtful if others would be willing to believe their story.

Battling with an expert who had rivaled Kong shi many years ago, as well as that three-kilometer large head...

No matter how one looked at it, it seemed to be something that had come straight out from a fantasy novel, a figment of one’s imagination.

At this point, Zhang Jiuxiao suddenly asked hesitantly, “Zhang shi, are you really... a Celestial Master Teacher?”

The others quickly turned their attention back to Zhang Xuan.

They did not have any time to ask about the matter previously because their hands had been full dealing with the Otherworldly Demon. However, now that they were finally out of danger for the time being, they could not hold back their intrigue any longer.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan knew that there was not any point hiding it from them any longer. Without saying a word, he stepped forward.

Hong long long!

A unique aura emanated from his body.

The faces of Zhang Jiuxiao and the others immediately paled.

The aura was not particularly powerful, but there was a compelling pressure to it that rendered them powerless before it. It was as if they were standing before an existence far superior to them, and an urge to bow down to the other party and acknowledge him as their teacher welled up in them.

“You really are...”

The crowd clenched their fists with widened eyes.

There was no doubt about it.

This was a sensation that should only have been felt from Kong shi. It was a pressure that weighed on their soul directly, compelling them into submission. There was no way such an aura could possibly be feigned!

“I never would have thought that I would live to see a Celestial Master Teacher with my own eyes.”

“I actually went through so much together with a Celestial Master Teacher.”

Other than Wu shi, the other combat masters and master teachers trembled uncontrollably from the sheer agitation they felt.

They had grown up listening to the legends of the only known Celestial Master Teacher in the world, Kong shi, and they had never thought that they would ever meet a real Celestial Master Teacher in their lifetime. Yet, unknowingly, they actually ended up venturing into a legendary expedition with one, braving through danger together.

“No wonder your Impartation of Heaven’s Will could win the hearts of several ten thousand master teachers all at once, making them willingly address you as their teacher,” one of the Master Teacher Pavilion elders remarked.

He had been wondering how Zhang Xuan wielded such astounding capability as to make so many master teachers submit to him simultaneously, willingly addressing him as their teacher.

However, if the other party was a Celestial Master Teacher like Kong shi, everything would make sense!

Putting aside making several ten thousand master teachers submit to him, he would not even be surprised if the other party made every single being in the world acknowledge him as their teacher!

After all, the previous Celestial Master Teacher eventually grew up to become an existence known as the World's Teacher!

On the other hand, Zhang Jiuxiao felt a stifling sensation in his chest as he lamented internally, How am I supposed to defeat a rival like that?

All along, he had viewed Zhang Xuan as a hurdle that he would have to overcome, and he had deeply believed that with his talents, he would be able to do it as long as he worked diligently. However, from the looks of it now, it seemed like it was only wishful thinking on his part!

It was no wonder he suffered such a tragic defeat!

Considering that his opponent was a Celestial Master Teacher, his defeat was inevitable. In that sense, his loss could not be considered an embarrassment.

If Zhang shi is really a Celestial Master Teacher, it's likely that his talent surpasses even that of the young prodigy of our Zhang Clan. But the young prodigy has the full support of the Zhang Clan behind him, having free access to top-notch cultivation resources from a very young age. I really wonder what will happen if the two of them clash with one another... Zhang Jiuxiao could not help but wonder.

He had never met the young prodigy who boasted the purest bloodline of the Zhang Clan in many years, but he had heard many rumors about the latter's superior talent and strength. He could not help but wonder how the latter would compare to the Celestial Master Teacher standing before him.

Would the young prodigy end up being traumatized to the point where he did not even want to live anymore?

It would be interesting to watch them clash with one another one day... Zhang Jiuxiao pondered.

Paying no heed to everyone's shock, Zhang Xuan looked at them grimly and said, "I also hope that you won't speak a word about the matter concerning me being a Celestial Master Teacher."

The encounters in the Qingyuan Empire had taught him not to take the safety of the Master Teacher Pavilion for granted. There was a good chance that there were more Otherworldly Demons hiding in their midst, and if the news regarding him being a Celestial Master Teacher reached their ears, he might find himself being plunged into grave danger.

Currently, he only possessed fighting prowess on par with a Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage cultivator. Before the true top-notch experts on the Master Teacher Continent, his strength was not even worth a mention.

Before he acquired absolute strength that would allow him to stand indomitable in the world, it would be best for him to maintain a low profile.

"Principal Zhang, don't worry. We understand the graveness of the matter, so please rest assured that we'll keep our mouths sealed!" Hall Master Xing replied.

"I swear on my name as a master teacher that if I speak a word of this matter, may vicious retribution fall upon me!" one of the Master Teacher Pavilion elders swore.

With him taking the lead, the others also swiftly followed suit as well.

"I have troubled all of you." Zhang Xuan waved his hand before turning his gaze back to the fight in the distance.

With the world cloaked in darkness, it would be difficult for even Saint realm cultivators to spectate a sight from two hundred li away. However, with his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan was able to perceive everything with clarity.

The wills of both Vicious were tangled with one another, fighting desperately to devour the other.

While the Vicious he had tamed was far weaker than the other Vicious, the assistance of the enchanted spirit and the other Vicious being spread too thin across the massive head had impaired the other Vicious' fighting prowess. As a result, both sides turned out to be equally matched for the time being.

It seems like I need not worry... Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief upon seeing the sight.

The Vicious he had tamed possessed the heart, the origin of power. As such, the longer the battle dragged on for, the more advantageous his position would be. On the other hand, while the head possessed the ability to control power, its ability to supply power was significantly weaker.

Even though they were equal for the time being, the other Vicious would gradually grow weaker and weaker before eventually being consumed once and for all.

As Zhang Xuan had expected, an hour later, the battle finally began to die down.

The movements of the face-shaped little island were gradually slowing to a halt, too.

"Wait here for a moment. I'll head over to take a look!" Zhang Xuan said before heading forward.

"Zhang shi, I'll go with you! This way, I'll at least be able to cover you if anything happens," Wu shi quickly offered.

"There's no need for that. You'll only be a burden if you tag along." Zhang Xuan waved his hand casually before flying away swiftly

"..." Wu shi.

...

"Master, as you have commanded, I have successfully eradicated him!"

Upon arriving before the face-shaped little island, a voice sounded in Zhang Xuan's mind. It was the Vicious whom he had tamed.

"Good, good!" Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

Vicious continued speaking. “But while I have managed to eradicate his consciousness, I have suffered significant damage in the midst of doing so. I fear that I will need to hibernate for a period of time to recuperate...”

Previously, just by devouring the finger, he had needed to go into a lengthy sleep. Considering how the opponent this time around was far stronger than him, it was not too surprising that Vicious had to rest again.

“I understand... However, given your current size, how am I supposed to take you away?” Zhang Xuan asked as he gestured toward the massive little island before him.

Spanning a length of three kilometers from one end to the other, there was no way Zhang Xuan could fit it into his storage ring or the Myriad Anthive Nest!

“Master, don’t worry. I can continue hiding inside the Book of Heaven’s Path...” Right after saying those words, the island suddenly blurred from sight before materializing within the Book of Heaven’s Path.

“This...” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

The Book of Heaven’s Path actually had such an ability? Why didn’t he know about it?

Hu!

The Book of Heaven’s Path fell back into Zhang Xuan’s hands, and he flipped it open casually. In it, he saw a head, a heart, and a finger floating quietly within, reminiscent of a 3D painting. 100km

1233 Returning to Qingyuan City

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

To think that the Book of Heaven's Path would be able to store such a huge island. As expected of a product of the Library of Heaven's Path, there was really no questioning its quality!

Putting the Book of Heaven's Path back, Zhang Xuan returned to where Wu shi and the others were.

Even though the trip to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows had been fraught with dangers, the returns had also been rather substantial. Putting aside the massive power up that Vicious would receive upon his reawakening, just the hundred or so Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage puppets that he had acquired would become a powerful fighting force for him.

If he released all of them at once, even a Saint 6-dan primary stage expert would be pummeled into the ground.

More importantly, unlike the other Otherworldly Demon puppets that he had acquired previously, these puppets were the purely engineered works by celestial designers, so they did not carry the slightest aura of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe on them. As such, there were no issues with using them in public!

"Principal Zhang, where is that island?" Wu shi and the others turned to look at Zhang Xuan curiously.

"Due to the great implications in this matter, I'm afraid that I can't tell you anything..." Zhang Xuan shook his head apologetically.

At this point, he did not feel like blatantly lying to Wu shi and the others, but it was not safe to speak of the existence of the Library of Heaven's Path to others. Thus, he decided to sidestep the topic instead.

“Alright then, we understand,” the crowd replied understandingly.

Even though they were curious, they knew that Zhang Xuan, as a Celestial Master Teacher, was bound to have secrets of his own that would not be convenient for him to reveal to others. Thus, they reined in their curiosity and held themselves back.

As the group headed out of the marshlands, Wu shi asked, “Principal Zhang, should we report this matter to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters?”

By now, the sun had already begun rising. It was truly a terrifying night filled with twists at every turn, but it was fortunate that they had survived it in the end.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “It would be best not to.”

Since this matter concerned Vicious, the headquarters was bound to investigate the issue thoroughly. If they were to uncover the Book of Heaven’s Path in the midst of doing so, it would cause Zhang Xuan a great deal of trouble.

“This...” Wu shi hesitated for a moment before adding, “But if we don’t report this matter to the headquarters, there’s no way we can account for Pavilion Master Gou and Tian Qing’s death.”

Considering the number of casualties in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion as a result of this issue, there was no way they could simply wrap up the investigation in such a slipshod manner. The headquarters would surely send men over to question them on the incident or even conduct an investigation themselves, and that could lead to more trouble then.

“Is that so?” Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in frustration.

If it was up to him, he would have preferred for this matter to pass quietly. Otherwise, his plan of maintaining a low profile would be shattered.

Knowing Zhang Xuan’s considerations, Wu shi advised, “If we take the initiative to report to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, we’ll be in a better position to decide the information to be passed on to them.”

As young as Zhang Xuan was, he had a very dependable and humble personality. He was able to see through the splendor and glory of being a Celestial Master Teacher to understand the responsibility and risks that he carried before making the rational decision to conceal his identity and maintain a low profile. To be able to avoid getting complacent despite being in such a glorious position, he was truly a role model for all master teachers!

Naturally, stirring a ruckus over this issue was not something that a person as humble as him would wish to see happening!

However, this matter was simply too big, such that it was impossible for them to simply put it aside and disregard it anymore. If they were to take the initiative to report it, they could at least choose what information to filter out before sending it to the headquarters, and naturally, this would be to their advantage.

“Alright then.” After a moment of thought, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and two corpses appeared before him. “This is the corpse of the Qingtian Emperor. When you report the matter to the headquarters, just pin the blame for the entire incident on him.”

“The corpse of the Qingtian Emperor?” Wu shi was bewildered by Zhang Xuan’s words.

Wasn’t the Qingtian Emperor already dead? Why would another one pop out all of a sudden?

Noticing the look of confusion on Wu shi’s face, Zhang Xuan swiftly explained the situation, but that only seemed to deepen the astonishment on Wu shi’s face.

As expected of an Otherworldly Demon Emperor who had lived for countless years! To actually have multiple clones under his command, it was really as if he was an indestructible cockroach!

Honestly, just thinking about the opponent they had clashed with would leave Wu shi’s back drenched in fear. It was truly fortunate that they had Zhang Xuan with them, or else they might have died on the first encounter!

“I’ll report the matter concerning the Qingtian Emperor and the Ten Kings of the Qingtian Lineage to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and have them make a judgement on the matter!” Upon learning the full story, Wu shi could also roughly guess what the young man’s bottom line was.

For some reason, it seemed like he was reluctant to have others learn of the matter concerning the little island turning into head, as well as the mastermind behind the Qingtian Emperor.

While he was curious about the matter, he eventually decided against probing any further in.

“Un.” Seeing that Wu shi had understood his intention, Zhang Xuan nodded.

The important thing was to not have anyone learn of Vicious’ involvement in this affair.

Other than that, everything else would be fine.

It was really fortunate that the Qingtian Emperor had been involved in this matter as well, so they could use him as a cover to explain everything what had happened in the Qingyuan Empire.

“I think it would be better to stop by our Northern Meadows City and report this matter at our Master Teacher Pavilion. We can apply for a holographic communication with the headquarters there and ensure that the appropriate information reaches them!” Ji shi suddenly interjected at this moment.

“That would be great!” Wu shi’s eyes lit up as he turned around to seek Zhang Xuan’s opinion on the matter.

Through the holographic communication, they would be able to present the corpse of the Qingtian Emperor to them as well. Considering how huge the incident was, their report had to have ample evidence to back up their claims.

“Hmm...” Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before replying. “Wu shi, you should follow Ji shi to the Northern Meadows City Master Teacher Pavilion to explain the matter to the headquarters then. I still have some matters to attend to, so I’ll be returning to Qingyuan City first.”

Even though Zhang Xuan had put on a composed front when Vicious claimed that he had Liu Yang held hostage, the fact was that he was actually deeply apprehensive and unnerved within. He had long wanted to return to Qingyuan City to check on Liu Yang.

While Liu Yang had no particularly outstanding talent, he was still a student who had followed him from the days when he was still in Tianxuan Kingdom. A step at a time, they had come this far together. The year they had spent together had already forged an inseparable bond between the two of them.

Knowing what Zhang Xuan was worried over, Wu shi nodded. “Principal Zhang, I understand. Go ahead!”

It was roughly noon when they finally got out of the marshlands. Getting onto the aerial saint beast, they first flew over to the Northern Meadows City, where Wu shi and the others alighted, before returning back to Qingyuan City.

As soon as he was alone, Zhang Xuan quickly dived into the Myriad Anthive Nest without any hesitation.

Shortly after his entry, he heard a furious bellow within the Myriad Anthive Nest. “You bastard, I’ll kill you!”

Peng peng peng peng!

Following which, the sound of punches and kicks echoed in the air. Walking over to the origin of the sound, Zhang Xuan saw his clone viciously pummeling the Primordial Spirit of the Qingtian Emperor, not giving the latter an opportunity to recover at all.

At this moment, the Qingtian Emperor’s Primordial Spirit was so faint that it seemed as if it would dissipate at any moment. However, his face remained as ferocious as ever, reflecting his strong desire to rip the duo before him into shreds.

“Alright, stop your ruckus. Hold still and allow me to conduct a Soul Search!” Zhang Xuan uttered coldly as he drew out his soul and placed his palm on the Qingtian Emperor’s head.

Tzzzzzz!

Before the Qingtian Emperor's horrified gaze, Zhang Xuan sent a sliver of his will into the other party's consciousness.

Two hours later, Zhang Xuan returned his soul to his body. Rubbing his glabella, he exhaled a mouthful of turbid air.

At this moment, the Qingtian Emperor's consciousness had been completely shattered, leaving a mindless Primordial Spirit behind.

"Vicious has already gone into hibernation, so I'll leave this Primordial Spirit for you to assimilate," Zhang Xuan told his clone.

Vicious' consciousness had already gone into a deep sleep before they could even get out of the marshlands, leaving Zhang Xuan with a pile of unanswered questions.

Since that was the case, it would be better to leave the Qingtian Emperor's Primordial Spirit to his clone. It would be able to raise the latter's fighting prowess significantly.

"Roger that!" Zhang Xuan's clone replied happily as he dragged the mindless Primordial Spirit back into a room. Not too long later, a scream of agony sounded in the air.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan began to organize the memories that he had just obtained through his Soul Search.

Regarding the matters concerning Vicious, it was mostly just as Vicious had described earlier.

The reason the Qingtian Emperor had obediently heeded Vicious' orders was to bide his time until the day he obtained the latter's full heritage and could take over the latter's body. On the other hand, the reason Vicious took in the Qingtian Emperor as his disciple was to make use of the latter's strength to find his remaining body parts and make a full recovery.

Despite working with one another, both had their own private intentions in mind.

Through his Soul Search, Zhang Xuan was able to acquire the soul cultivation techniques that Vicious had imparted to the Qingtian Emperor. However...

It seems like Vicious has only imparted the Saint 1-dan to Saint 5-dan soul cultivation techniques to him.

Zhang Xuan studied the soul cultivation techniques for a while before sighing deeply. I guess it isn't that easy for a soul oracle to convert their soul into a Primordial Spirit.

A Primordial Spirit was basically an evolution of the Embryonic Soul, an existence made up of zhenqi and soul energy. It was also for this reason that it could exist outside the body, and it harnessed the strength to tap into zhenqi independently of the body as well.

On the other hand, the souls of soul oracles were purely made of soul energy. Through utilizing unique soul cultivation techniques to enhance and temper their soul energy, a soul oracle was able to exert overwhelming might.

As ordinary Primordial Spirits contained zhenqi, they had a more upright and orthodox air to them. On the other hand, due to the yin nature of soul energy, the souls of soul oracles emanated a cold and eerie aura, and they feared both sunlight and lightning.

Fundamentally, Primordial Spirits and the souls of soul oracles were two completely different entities.

As a result, it was extremely difficult for soul oracles to convert their souls into Primordial Spirit.

On top of that, the overwhelming yin nature of their souls also made the Leaving Aperture Ordeal an extremely high hurdle for them to overcome.

As a result, despite the overwhelming benefits that soul oracles had earlier on, most of them ended up capping at Quasi Leaving Aperture realm, unable to advance any further.

Out of ten thousand soul oracles, there might not even be one of them who would be able to clear the Leaving Aperture Ordeal.

In a sense, the Qingtian Emperor could be considered an incredible genius for successfully cultivating up to Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage.

However, as I have cultivated the Heaven's Path Soul Art right from the start, my soul doesn't have any attribute. So, I shouldn't face a bottleneck from that.

Aside from that, Zhang Xuan's soul had also been tempered by the Saint Ascension Ordeal as well. As such, even though he was only at the Embryonic Soul realm, his soul already possessed resilience far superior to the Primordial Spirits of ordinary cultivators.

The issue that most soul oracles would encounter was not a problem to him at all.

After compiling the soul cultivation techniques that Vicious has left behind together with the terpsichore, spirit awakener, and demonic tunist books, I have managed to compile the Saint 1-dan to 4-dan Heaven's Path Soul Arts successfully. I can cultivate the first two realms with high-tier spirit stones, but as for the remaining two, it seems like I will have to gather more concentrated high-tier spirit stones before working on them, Zhang Xuan thought.

Thinking back, roughly ten days had passed since the friendly spar with the other Combat Master Halls. The rewards from the Combat Master Hall headquarters should have arrived by now, so the problem concerning the lack of concentrated high-tier spirit stones was not an issue for the time being.

Thus, putting the matter aside for the moment, Zhang Xuan flicked his hand and released the puppets he had confiscated from Vicious back in the Ghost Cavern inside the Myriad Anthive Nest.

He had the inner demons leave them one by one before using his Impartation of Heaven's Will to tame them. In less than three days, those fellows had already become his loyal subordinates.

Leaving the Myriad Anthive Nest, Zhang Xuan realized that he was still a distance away from Qingyuan City. Thus, he began going through the Qingtian Emperor's storage ring to see if he could find any treasures in it.

To his disappointment, while there were quite some treasures in the storage ring, there were no concentrated high-tier spirit stones to be found.

From the looks like it, it seemed like the Qingtian Emperor had most likely used any concentrated high-tier spirit stones he managed to acquire himself.

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan decided to use the remaining time he had before arriving at Qingyuan City to browse through his books and cultivate.

...

While Zhang Xuan was rushing back to Qingyuan City, Wu shi and the others entered the Northern Meadows City Master Teacher Pavilion, and after a series of formalities, Ji Tianxiong placed his palm lightly upon a screen. A powerful aura slowly rippled from the screen as the silhouette of an elder gradually came into appearance.

The head of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, 8-star Master Teacher He Xuan!

“What has happened that would require you to establish a holographic communication with me?”

1234 Public Execution

“Reporting to Hall Master He, I am the vice head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, Wu Rufeng!” Wu shi quickly stepped forward to introduce himself.

“I know of you.” Pavilion Master He nodded in response.

Even though the Qingyuan Empire was the weakest among the Eight Conferred Empires subordinate to the Empire Alliance, it was considered an individual entity. As the head of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, it was his responsibility to have some understanding of the Master Teacher Pavilions directly subordinated to them.

“It’s like this... We have uncovered the truth behind the deaths of Pavilion Master Gou and Vice Pavilion Master Tian, and we have established this holographic communication in order to report the matter to you,” Wu shi said.

“Oh? You have already uncovered the truth? Tell me about it!” Hearing those words, Pavilion Master He’s expression became grim.

The death of the head of a Master Teacher Pavilion was a huge deal, so he had been keeping a close eye on the matter. However, despite dispatching Song shi, there still had not been any response yet.

Ordinary Communication Jade Tokens were only effective within a range of around a million li. Any further than that would require a large Communication Formation.

Song shi had not activated a Communication Formation ever since arriving in Qingyuan City, so Pavilion Master He had no way of checking the progress of the investigation either.

“In truth, Vice Pavilion Master Tian was the incarnation of the will of the Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage...” Wu shi swiftly told the story that he had prepared with beforehand.

There was not much deviation from the truth, just that the aspects concerning the Qingtian Emperor’s teacher had been

intentionally left out.

“An Otherworldly Demon Emperor has been hiding on the Master Teacher Continent for nearly two thousand years, even successfully inserting a spy into the Master Teacher Pavilion, and no one noticed a thing?” Pavilion Master He was clearly unable to believe what he had just heard.

If this matter was leaked to the populace, the repercussions would be even greater than the deaths of ten Pavilion Master Gous.

This was a huge breach in the responsibility of the Master Teacher Pavilion!

“That’s right. It’s fortunate that we have managed to eradicate him under Zhang shi’s leadership,” Wu shi said as he flicked his wrist, and two corpses fell to the ground. “These are the corpses of the Qingtian Emperor and his clone!”

Pavilion Master He quickly examined the corpses through the holographic image, and a grim expression set upon his face. “That is indeed the corpse of an Otherworldly Demon Emperor. Otherwise, there’s no way he would be able to create such a powerful clone of himself.”

As the head of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, he had a deep understanding of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, and he knew that only those with the pure bloodline of an Otherworldly Demon Emperor would be able to execute such a cloning technique.

This was sufficient evidence to confirm the Qingtian Emperor’s identity.

“Not only so,” Wu shi continued, “Zhang shi has also managed to slay the Ten Kings of the Qingtian Lineage single-handedly...”

“To eradicate an entire Otherworldly Demonic Tribe lineage single-handedly... Even though the Qingtian Emperor harnesses the weakest bloodline among the Otherworldly Demon Emperors, it’s still quite a formidable feat!” Pavilion Master He nodded in approval.

“It’s no wonder he was able to successfully crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. His talent and eye of discernment are indeed exceptional, perhaps even on par with some of the Sage Clan offspring! Where is Zhang shi at the moment?”

“The emperor of the Qingyuan Empire is a puppet of the Qingtian Emperor, and in order to blackmail Zhang shi, he took one of Zhang shi’s direct disciples hostage. Thus, Zhang shi is currently rushing back to rescue his student,” Wu shi explained.

“I see. That’s a pity...” Hearing that Zhang shi was not around, Pavilion Master He sighed. “To destroy the entire Qingtian Lineage and foil their schemes to infiltrate mankind, sparing countless master teachers and innocent civilians from a tragic fate, Zhang shi has really done mankind a huge merit this time around! In view of his contribution, I hereby grant him the position of honorary elder in our Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion!”

“Yes!” Wu shi clenched his fists in agitation as he nodded.

While the position of honorary elder in the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion might appear to be an empty title, this position was actually associated with immense prestige and honor.

Under normal circumstances, only real 8-star master teachers were qualified to assume the role of an elder in the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, and yet, Zhang shi was actually bestowed with it despite being a 7-star master teacher.

Putting aside himself, even the head of the Qianchong Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilion would have to address Zhang Xuan respectfully now.

“I’ll have my men prepare the documents for the bestowment as soon as possible. By the time you all return to the Qingyuan Empire, activate the Communication Wall, and it should be ready,” Pavilion Master He said with a smile.

“Thank you, Pavilion Master He.” Wu shi quickly clasped his fist and bowed.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. Zhang shi’s accomplishments in killing the Otherworldly Demons and foiling their plans are a huge merit. In comparison to his deeds, the position of an honorary elder is really nothing at all.

“Wu Rufeng, you have also played a huge part in helping Zhang shi accomplish his mission, so I shall officially appoint you as the head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion right now. At the same time, I shall grant you an opportunity to come to the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion for an exchange!”

“This... Thank you!” Wu shi could not help trembling in excitement.

To him, becoming the head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion was not a big deal. What was more important was the exchange at the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion.

This exchange consisted of receiving the personal guidance of a real 8-star master teacher, and this would surely be deeply beneficial to his cultivation and eye of discernment. This was an opportunity that countless would die to have!

The reason Pavilion Master Gou was unwilling to tolerate any problems prior to his retirement was in hopes that a clean record in his term of service would grant him such an opportunity as well.

However, it was a pity that in his desire to maintain a clean record, he had neglected his responsibilities as a pavilion master. Thus, there was no way the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion would grant such a precious opportunity to him.

After dealing with Wu shi, Pavilion Master He turned to Hall Master Xing and the others and said, “As for the others, you have all bravely ventured into the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows despite the overwhelming risks in order to eliminate the Qingtian Emperor. All of you have done mankind a huge merit as well, so rest assured that I’ll have this matter reported to the Empire Alliance Combat Master Hall and have them reward you all handsomely!”

“Thank you, Pavilion Master He!” Hall Master Xing and the others quickly clasped their fists and bowed.

“Alright! Send the corpse of the Qingtian Emperor over here as soon as possible. If we can examine his corpse carefully, we might be able to develop some countermeasures to deal with the Otherworldly Demon Emperors, and that’ll bolster our fighting force significantly,” Pavilion Master He said with a wave of his hand.

The Otherworldly Demon Emperors would never venture out of the otherworldly battlefield easily in consideration of the perils they would face on the Master Teacher Continent. On top of that, every single one of them wielded many life preservation means, making it highly difficult to kill any one of them. Even the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion did not have many corpses of Otherworldly Demon Emperors that they could examine.

“Yes, Pavilion Master He!” Wu shi nodded before making arrangements with Ji shi to have the corpse delivered to the Empire Alliance. After which, with a respectful bow, he bade Pavilion Master He farewell.

“Alright, since we are done with our report, it’s about time for us to return to Qingyuan City!”

Wu shi and the others borrowed a saint beast from the Northern Meadows City Master Teacher Pavilion before swiftly making their way back to Qingyuan City.

...

After nearly six whole days of flight, the majestic infrastructure of the Qingyuan City was finally within view.

On the way back, Zhang Xuan had received two messages from Sun Qiang.

Firstly, they had headed to the royal palace to save Liu Yang. While they had managed to rescue Liu Yang, the latter had accidentally killed Chu Tianxing in a moment of rage.

Secondly, Liu Yang had abruptly left Qingyuan City, and there was no one who knew where he was.

Judging from the timing, it seems like Chu Tianxing was killed around the time that the will of the other Vicious dissipated. Chu Tianxing was bound to the other Vicious by a soul contract, so the death of the other Vicious' will would have resulted in his death too... Zhang Xuan swiftly deduced as soon as he received the messages.

In a show of loyalty toward Vicious, Chu Tianxing had offered his soul toward the other Vicious to establish a soul contract between them. A soul contract bound the life of the contractor to the contractee, such that the death of the contractee would result in the death of the contractor. Naturally, when the other Vicious died, Chu Tianxing lost his life as well.

Thus, even though it was only a conjecture on Zhang Xuan's part, he had a feeling that Liu Yan did not actually kill Chu Tianxing. Rather, it was a coincidence that Chu Tianxing's soul dissipated at that moment, resulting in the death of his physical body.

After all, even though Chu Tianxing was incapacitated at that moment, he was still a Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert. It did not make sense for Liu Yang to be able to kill him with a single punch.

If that was the case, Liu Yang and the others could only be convicted of unlawfully barging into the royal palace to cause trouble. With Zhang Xuan's influence from the successful pavilion crashing, he should be able to resolve the issue with ease.

Just that... why isn't Sun Qiang replying to my messages? Zhang Xuan frowned in worry.

Even though the matter was not a big deal according to what he had seen so far, the problem was that Sun Qiang had not replied a single time to him despite sending eight messages over the days. This left him worried that a mishap might have occurred.

Furthermore, Liu Yang's disappearance had also left him feeling a little unnerved within. Many days had already passed, so had they found him yet?

With a mind filled with doubts, Zhang Xuan finally arrived in the aerial space above Qingyuan City. He maneuvered the aerial saint beast to land at the accommodation that the Combat Master Hall had prepared for him.

“Principal Zhang, you have finally returned!”

As soon as Zhang Xuan landed, he saw Ruohuan gongzi running over with a mix of anxiety and relief on his face.

Noticing the peculiarity in Ruohuan gongzi’s expression, Zhang Xuan asked with a frown, “What’s wrong?”

“Something bad has happened!” Ruohuan gongzi exclaimed. “Liu Yang’s act of killing Emperor Chu Tianxing has caused an uproar throughout the Qingyuan Empire! In order to appease the crowd, a master teacher named Song shi has ordered the public execution of Butler Sun and the other poison masters who participated in the raiding of the royal palace that day at noon!”

“A public execution of Sun Qiang and the poison masters?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed in astonishment as his expression turned livid.

He quickly glanced at the sky and noted that the sun was nearly directly overhead. It was nearing noon!

In other words, Sun Qiang and the others could be executed at any moment!

“Yes! The entire Xuanxuan Faction has headed over to the square, intending to raid the execution platform. The only reason I stayed was to inform you of the matter as soon as you returned!” Ruohuan gongzi said anxiously.

“Raid the execution platform?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

Those fellows sure were gutsy.

The members of the Xuanxuan Faction did wield fighting prowess far surpassing that of their cultivation realm, but the problem was that their cultivation was still too low. Most of them were not even at Half-Saint yet, so how were they intending to stop the execution?

They would be captured by the soldiers guarding the execution platform before they could start anything!

“Bring me to the square right now!” Zhang Xuan bellowed authoritatively.

There was no time to be lost. If those fearless fellows really started something, it would be difficult to resolve this matter peacefully anymore.

Thus, Zhang Xuan grabbed Ruohuan gongzi and swiftly made his way for the royal palace.

While making his way over, he quickly had Ruohuan gongzi fill him in on the details.

“Who is that Song shi master teacher you spoke of earlier? How does he have the authority to order Sun Qiang’s execution?”

Pretty much all of the master teachers in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion were his students, and owing to their gratitude for his enlightenment, they would not execute Sun Qiang and the others recklessly without conducting a proper investigation of Chu Tianxing’s death.

“Based on what we have gathered thus far, Song shi is a quasi 8-star master teacher from the Qianchong Empire. As he’s an envoy dispatched by the headquarters, the other master teachers have no choice but to heed his orders,” Ruohuan gongzi explained.

“He’s from the Qianchong Empire?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right. After Chu Tianxing’s death, the officials, nobles, and even soldiers of the royal court have been crowding outside the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, demanding justice for Chu Tianxing. Unable to withstand the pressure from the populace any longer, Song shi eventually made this judgement,” Ruohuan gongzi said.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Indeed. For the emperor of a Conferred Empire to be killed so easily, if the Master Teacher Pavilion was unable to give a

proper explanation for the matter, wouldn't everyone start fearing for their own lives?

"Where's Liu Yang?" Zhang Xuan asked grimly.

"After that raid on the royal palace, Liu Yang suddenly vanished. Song shi had all the master teachers comb Qingyuan City and its vicinity, but they were still unable to find him. We have no idea where he went. In fact, we believe that the reason Song shi intends to execute Butler Sun and the other poison masters is to force Liu Yang to appear. If they apprehend the culprit behind Chu Tianxing's death, they will at least be able to explain the matter to the Qingyuan Empire and restore some of the Master Teacher Pavilion's credibility," Ruohuan gongzi explained.

"Un." Zhang Xuan nodded.

Chu Tianxing's death in the heavily fortified royal palace had most probably scared the nobles and the officials of the Qingyuan Empire, as this meant that Sun Qiang and the other poison masters could effectively bypass any defense and kill anyone they wanted, and there was nearly nothing they could do to prevent it.

If they did not offer them a proper explanation, there was no way the other officials and nobles would let this matter rest. In fact, they might even start swaying public opinion against the Master Teacher Pavilion, and with the influence that they wielded, that could have proved troublesome.

"I can understand the difficult position that the Master Teacher Pavilion is in, but if they think that I will allow them to kill Sun Qiang and the others... over my dead body!" Zhang Xuan uttered coldly. An honorary elder would basically be an elder in name but possesses no particular authority. The Qianchong Empire is the number one Conferred Empire under the Empire Alliance, the place where the Sword Lagoon is located.

1235 Raiding the Execution Platform

In the square outside the royal palace, a huge crowd had gathered, numbering at least in the hundred thousands. There was a towering platform at the very middle of the square, where Sun Qiang, Elder Xu, and the others were firmly held in a kneeling position. Their cultivation was sealed, preventing them from struggling free and escaping.

Looking at the group atop the platform, Song Chao asked anxiously, "What should we do?"

The members of the Xuanxuan Faction had arrived early in the morning, but the guards protecting the execution platform were all Saint realm experts. In fact, there were even Primordial Spirit realm elders from the Master Teacher Pavilion stationed in the area as well.

Against such fighting power, putting aside saving Sun Qiang and the others, they would be subdued before they could even get close to the execution platform!

"I don't know! For Butler Sun, Principal Zhang didn't even hesitate to cause an uproar in the King Zhongqing Manor! Given how highly Principal Zhang regards Butler Sun, if the latter is killed, I really can't imagine what kind of destruction Principal Zhang will bring upon Qingyuan City," Song Chao said with a deeply worried frown.

He had become acquainted with Zhang Xuan back in the Myriad Kingdoms Alliance, and he knew how protective the latter was of those around him.

No matter what, Sun Qiang was Zhang Xuan's butler, and if he was killed just like that, Zhang Xuan would surely raise a storm!

Perhaps, the entire Qingyuan City might even be wiped off the map!

“Is there any word from the Combat Master Hall? They have received Principal Zhang’s enlightenment, so they can be considered half students to him. But why is it that none of them are here at this crucial moment?” a member of the Xuanxuan Faction remarked furiously.

They had been training with the combat masters over the past few days, and they had imparted many of their combat tricks and secret arts to them without any reservation. Yet, in their time of need, none of the combat masters were willing to help them raid the execution platform. Naturally, some members of the Xuanxuan Faction was deeply unhappy at this matter.

“We can’t blame them for this either. I heard that a few of the division heads have visited the Master Teacher Pavilion to demand for Sun Qiang’s release, only to end up being imprisoned by Song shi. On top of that, Song shi has even made an official order demanding that all combat masters remain within the Combat Master Hall, or else they will be punished for defying military orders...” Song Chao shook his head and sighed deeply.

Combat masters were considered the military of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and for them, there was nothing higher than a military order.

Considering that this was an order coming from a quasi 8-star master teacher from the Qianchong Empire, not to mention that he was an envoy dispatched by the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, no matter how indignant the combat masters were, they had no choice but to obey Song shi’s orders.

The sole responsibility of a soldier was to obey the orders of his superior, and this was the same for combat masters.

“Without the aid of the combat masters, it’ll be nigh impossible for us to save Butler Sun and the others!” The member of the Xuanxuan Faction who had spoken earlier hesitated for a moment before closing his eyes in despair.

With their cultivation realm, there was no way they could breach the defenses around the execution platform. It was truly a hopeless situation.

“I know that, too. Raiding an execution platform is a severe crime. Regardless of whether we succeed or not, there’s a good chance that we’ll be stripped of our master teacher licenses, and perhaps, we might even be executed on the spot to serve as a warning to the others. It will be unreasonable of us to demand others to put their future on the line for our sake. We only have ourselves to count on,” Song shi said grimly.

Even if their raid ended in a failure, just their act of attempting to undermine the orders of a quasi 8-star master teacher was enough to warrant them the death penalty. The members of the Xuanxuan Faction who had dared come to the square had come prepared to die.

How could they expect the combat masters to risk their lives to save someone whom they hardly knew? They had no moral obligation to do so at all.

At this point, a voice suddenly sounded behind the members of the Xuanxuan Faction.

“Who says that you only have yourselves to count on? Do you not consider us your brothers?”

Alarmed, the members of the Xuanxuan Faction hurriedly turned around, and they saw familiar faces appearing before their eyes.

Xiao Qin, Shi Hao, Jiao Tan, Lu Jianling, Dong Rui...

They were all combat masters of the Combat Master Hall. All in all, there were several thousand of them!

“You... How did you all get here? Wasn’t there a strict order against any combat master leaving the Combat Master Hall?” Song Chao asked worriedly.

“We did receive the orders, but those orders only apply to combat masters... From this moment on, we are no longer combat masters!” Shi Hao explained with a smile.

“All of you are no longer combat masters?” Song Chao widened his eyes in shock.

At this point, he suddenly realized that none of the combat masters gathered there were dressed in their combat master

robe.

“You... are relinquishing your identities as combat masters? B-but...” Song Chao clenched his fists tightly apprehensively. However, despite his worry about the combat masters, he could not help but feel a surge of warmth flowing into his heart.

In the days that he had spent with the combat masters, he had come to learn how much their identity meant to them. It was their pride, their honor, and their calling.

But to save Sun Qiang, they were willing to throw aside what they had worked for over many years.

In a moment, the eyes of the members of the Xuanxuan Faction turned red.

“As combat masters, we can’t blatantly go against the orders of a superior. Otherwise, what would become of the credibility of the Combat Master Hall? We cannot allow the name of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall to be sullied because of us! So, we had no choice but to abandon our identities...” Shi Hao shook his head grimly.

Jiao Tan also sighed deeply.

“Is this really worth going so far?” Song Chao asked hoarsely.

“Zhang shi isn’t just your principal—he’s our teacher as well! Without him, we would not have been able to attain the current strength we possess. We never would have known that combat and battle techniques could be interpreted in such a manner as well. We were just mere strangers to him, and yet, he taught and guided all of us without any reservation. We are all deeply indebted to him,” Qin Xiao said. “So, how can we simply watch idly in his time of need?”

“Indeed! Zhang shi is the most magnanimous person I have ever seen! To have met and learned from him is a true blessing from the heavens. Now that something has happened to his butler, there’s no way we can stay out of this!”

“You don’t have to talk us out of this.” Shi Hao patted Song Chao’s shoulder. “Unless you don’t view us as your brothers?”

Taking a deep breath, Song Chao suppressed the overwhelming emotions he felt and replied, “Of course not!”

Indeed. Those who conducted themselves upright and properly were bound to find many people willing to stand up for them in times of need, let alone someone of Zhang Shi’s character!

He could still remember the day when Zhang Xuan duped him of his spirit stones, and he had been so furious that he even wanted to kill the latter. But as he gradually spent more time with the latter, he came to realize that there was a lot more to him. Zhang Xuan might have his flaws, but he knew right from wrong, and he persisted in the principles that he believed in regardless of how dire the situation was.

Unknowingly, he actually found himself becoming Zhang Xuan’s loyal subordinate, willing to heed his orders and lay down his life for him.

This was not just a question of personal charisma anymore. What was more important was his magnanimity and his outlook! For the sake of what he perceived to be the greater good, he was willing to put aside his personal interests and impart profound battle techniques to others unreservedly.

Only a true teacher would have so many willing to stand up on his behalf and bleed for him!

“Since you regard us as your brothers, don’t turn down our help. Alright, have you all thought about how you intend to raid the execution platform?” Shi Hao asked. “We’ll back you up accordingly.”

“Un, we have come up with a plan.” Knowing that this was no time to chat, Song Chao swiftly got down to business. “Later on, before the execution, there will be a reading of crimes first. I intend to make a move at that moment. We’ll be trying to breach the defenses of the execution platform through the ‘Grand Formation of Myriad Stars’. We’ll be facing Primordial Spirit realm experts later on, but with our sheer numbers, we might just be able to overwhelm them for a moment and buy sufficient time to free Butler Sun and the others!”

“Grand Formation of Myriad Stars... Indeed, that is the best collaborative formation to use in this situation!” Shi Hao nodded in agreement.

The Grand Formation of Myriad Stars was a formation often used by the military of empires. It served to combine the strength of an entire army together to launch a powerful assault toward a single target.

The members of the Xuanxuan Faction were not too powerful individually—most of them were about Transcendent Mortal 7-dan to 8-dan—but when the might of over ten thousand men was combined through the massive formation, they might just be able to put together enough strength to subdue even a Primordial Spirit realm expert!

“But... have you thought about how you will bring Butler Sun and the others out of Qingyuan City after rescuing them?” Shi Hao asked. “If there’s no feasible escape route, they will only be captured again shortly after. That will render the rescue operation meaningless.”

“This...” Song Chao and the others fell silent.

They knew that with the chances of success were extremely slim with their current strength, and they had already prepared themselves to lose their lives in the raid. As a result, they had not really thought too deeply about the follow-up after rescuing Sun Qiang and the others.

However, now that the combat masters were backing them as well, there was a chance that they might just pull it off successfully. As such, they had to start thinking about a follow up to the rescue operation, or else Sun Qiang and the others would just be recaptured soon after.

“Do you have an idea in mind?” Song Chao asked Shi Hao.

“As a matter of fact, I do. My plan is rather simple. Instead of raiding the execution platform, we should find a way to hold Song Shi hostage!” Shi Hao said.

“Hold Song Shi hostage?” Song Chao widened his eyes in disbelief.

“Indeed. Song shi is the key to everything that has happened. As long as we subdue him and have him take back his orders to execute Butler Sun and the others, we will be able to have Butler Sun and the others released. After that, we just have to hold him for a sufficient period of time for Butler Sun and the others to get out of Qingyuan City.”

Song Chao and the others contemplated for a moment before slowly nodding in agreement. “That does sound like a feasible idea...”

It was solely based on Song shi’s command that Sun Qiang and the others were being executed. In other words, as long as Song shi took back his orders, Sun Qiang and the others should be able to leave Qingyuan City safely.

“How do you intend to carry your plan out? We’ll follow you!” Seeing that Shi Hao had a better plan in mind, Song Chao and the others quickly turned their attention to Shi Hao.

“It’s quite simple. Just move on my command later,” Shi Hao said.

However, before he could reveal his plan, a resounding voice suddenly echoed from the execution platform, instantaneously silencing the voices of the hundred thousand men in the square.

An elder floating above the execution platform gazed at the crowd beneath before speaking in an authoritative voice. “I am quasi 8-star Master Teacher Song Xuan!”

Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, Song shi!

“Sun Qiang, along with his conspirators from the Poison Hall, raided the royal palace overnight, knocking out all of the guards with their poison before murdering Emperor Chu Tianxing. For the heinous crimes they have committed, I hereby decree that they are to be publicly executed!”

“He’s Song shi?”

Previously, they had not really thought much about the other party. However, upon feeling the unbelievably powerful aura that the other party emanated, Shi Hao and the others could not help but begin hesitating.

A Leaving Aperture pinnacle expert could not be defeated by numbers alone.

Song shi scanned the surroundings, and unable to find the missing Liu Yang amid the crowd, a disdainful smile crept onto his lips as he harrumphed coldly. “It’s noon. Carry out the execution!”

Huala!

As those words were spoken, a huge execution blade rose into the air, preparing to fall upon the necks of Sun Qiang, Elder Xu, and the other poison masters.

Seeing that it would be too late if they did not make a move right now, Shi Hao bellowed, “Now!”

Boom!

Right after those words were spoken, countless surges of zhenqi gathered together to form a massive dragon, and it charged with incredible momentum toward Song shi in the air.

This massive dragon had the strength of over ten thousand members of the Xuanxuan Faction and several thousand combat masters. While their cultivation was not too high individually, they still posed a frightening force when their strengths were put together.

The massive dragon seemed to tear right through space, appearing before Song shi in an instant.

“You brazen scoundrels...” Not expecting someone to actually raid the execution platform and even make a move on him, Song shi’s eyes immediately narrowed in fury.

He raised his hand and pressed it forcefully downward.

Huala!

The sheer might of his palm strike froze the massive dragon in mid-air!

As a Leaving Aperture realm expert, an existence just a step away from the Grand Dominion realm, Song shi was no longer an opponent who could be defeated just by combining the strength of the masses.

“How dare you scoundrels raid the execution platform and assault a quasi 8-star master teacher? I’ll deal with you all personally after executing this bunch here. Execute them!”

After fending off the massive dragon, Song shi sneered coldly as he raised his other hand.

Weng!

Countless execution blades immediately fell for the necks of Sun Qiang and the others.

But... at the very last moment, the execution blades suddenly froze in midair.

Following which, an ice-cold voice swept through the surroundings like a tornado, resounding loudly in everyone’s ears.

“You want to execute my men? Let me ask you, how many heads do you have?”

Following which, a figure suddenly appeared in the middle of the square, gazing down on the execution platform as if a deity who had descended from the heavens.

1236 I'll Choke You With My Words

A tall and slender figure stood imposingly in the air. An ordinary face he had, but in his eyes was a brilliance reminiscent of the stars.

There was nothing exceptionally powerful about his presence, and there were plenty of people possessing a cultivation stronger than him. Yet, there was a suffocating pressure coming from him, leaving the crowd feeling as if they were facing the might of the heavens instead.

To oppose him would be no different from opposing the very world they lived in, and there was only one fate that could come out of such foolishness.

“Zhang shi...”

“Principal Zhang is here!”

“Finally!”

Song Chao and the others clenched their fists tightly in agitation, and their eyes reddened.

The pressure they had been under for the past few days was simply so great that it felt as if they would be crushed beneath it.

It was truly fortunate that their principal had arrived at this timely moment.

With his arrival, the members of the Xuanxuan Faction and the combat masters seemed to have finally found their backbone and their direction.

“You are Zhang Xuan?” Song shi glanced at Zhang Xuan with a displeased frown. “You’re finally here. That will at least spare me the trouble of finding you.

“As a master teacher, you failed to keep your student in check, allowing him to act as he pleased and ruin the order that the

Master Teacher Pavilion has established with difficulty in this world. Surely you should understand how heavy a crime it is even if I don't explain it to you, right?

“In light of your previous contributions and the fact that you were not around in Qingyuan City when the incident happened, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. As long as you can harden your heart to punish these men personally so as to affirm your values, I'll plead for leniency to the Master Teacher Pavilion on your behalf.”

Song shi's initial intention of executing Sun Qiang and the others was to lure out Liu Yang, but who would have thought that he would draw out Zhang Xuan instead? Nevertheless, this still worked.

To raise but not teach is the fault of a father, and to teach but lack sternness is the blunder of a teacher![1]

Even though it was Liu Yang who had killed Chu Tianxing, Zhang Xuan's failure to instill the correct values in his direct disciple despite imparting cultivation techniques and battle techniques to him could also be said to be the root of the problem. As such, he also had to take responsibility for this matter.

Typically speaking, while Zhang Xuan would have to be punished for the matter, it would not be too severe. However, considering that the person Liu Yang had killed was the emperor of a Conferred Empire, the Master Teacher Pavilion had no choice but to be harsher in the matter. In the worst-case scenario, Zhang Xuan might even be stripped of his 7-star master teacher license!

However, this was not something that Song shi wanted to see. No matter what, just Zhang Xuan's feat of successfully crashing the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion was more than sufficient to show that he was an outstanding talent, a person who would become a firm pillar of the Master Teacher Pavilion in the days to come. As long as the young man was willing to reflect on his mistake and right his wrong, severing the relationship between him and his troublemaking

butler and the poison masters, there was still some ground for reconciliation.

“You want me to kill Sun Qiang and the others to affirm my values? What lofty words you speak!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed coldly.

“Are you intending to raid the execution platform like the rest of them?” Hearing the hostility in the young man’s tone, Song shi’s face darkened. “Have you forgotten that you are a master teacher? As a 7-star master teacher, you are a role model for the rest of the world. Someone like you has no right to act willfully! In view of your talents and past contributions, I’ll give you just one last opportunity. Please don’t waste this precious chance that I have placed in your hands.”

“You can keep that chance for yourself!” Seeing how Song shi was acting as if having him kill Sun Qiang was a great mercy, Zhang Xuan could not even be bothered to waste his breath anymore.

In the next moment, a torrential aura surged forth from Zhang Xuan, piercing right through the clouds.

“Do you think that you can climb over my head just because I have been considerate of you?” Song shi bellowed wrathfully as he raised his hand.

The other party was just a 7-star master teacher who happened to have a bit of talent. He had already gone so far to help the other party, and yet, the other party simply had shrugged his goodwill away as if it was nothing at all. Arrogant! Truly arrogant!

With a face livid with rage, Zhang Xuan slowly walked over to the towering execution platform a step at a time.

“Considerate? There’s no need for it! I, Zhang Xuan, have never required the consideration of others!”

At this moment, he was incredibly angry.

Not long ago, Pavilion Master Gou, Tian Qing, and seven other 7-star master teachers had passed away, and as a quasi 8-star master teacher, Song shi should have investigated that matter right away!

Yet, he had neglected so many more important issues and chosen to clutch at this matter relentlessly instead. On top of that, there were also plenty of suspicious aspects to the issue even if Song shi did not have any prior knowledge beforehand, such as Chu Tianxing's abrupt kidnapping of Liu Yang, and Wu shi instructing an elder to keep a tight watch on Chu Tianxing.

A more meticulous person would have investigated deeper and waited for Wu shi to return in order to get the full story before passing judgement. Granted, there was pressure from the officials and nobles, but as a quasi 8-star master teacher, Song shi should have been able to suppress their movements for quite some time.

Just why in the world did the headquarters send such an incompetent fellow?

“Audacious! Zhang Xuan, don't think that you can act as you please just because you successfully crashed the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion! I, Song Xuan, am a quasi 8-star master teacher, an envoy dispatched here by the headquarters to deal with the mess here. As a 7-star master teacher of a subordinate Master Teacher Pavilion, how dare you speak and behave so disrespectfully before me? Have you forgotten the formalities that you should follow as a master teacher?” Song shi bellowed angrily.

He had heard about Zhang Xuan crashing the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, and even he had no choice but to admit that the young man was an exceptional genius. This was also why, despite being an austere and inflexible person himself, he had still chosen to make a special exception on this matter to grant leniency to the young man.

It was one thing for the young man to not appreciate his goodwill, but to actually forgo all formalities and treat him with utter disrespect was intolerable!

“Formalities? I am in no mood for those at the moment. All I know is that those men on the execution platform do not deserve to die!” Zhang Xuan uttered coldly as he continued advancing toward the execution platform.

“It’s not your place to decide if they deserve to die. Just the fact that they have assassinated the emperor of a Conferred Empire and induced panic and chaos within the country is more than enough to have them beheaded numerous times over! As a master teacher, you should be well aware of this!” Harrumphing coldly, Song shi flicked his palm, and the execution blades floating above Sun Qiang and the poison masters’ heads rose up once more, and just as they were about to decapitate the helpless bunch beneath them...

Peng! Peng! Peng! Peng!

The hundred or so execution blades shattered into dust before scattering into the surroundings.

“Preposterous! I finally know why the peaceful Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion suddenly found problems cropping up one after another following your arrival! Indeed, a mere droplet of poison ruins an entire pot of porridge. Zhang Xuan, do the laws of the Master Teacher Pavilion mean nothing to you? Just because you have a little bit of talent doesn’t mean...” Song shi was so angered that he could have exploded on the spot.

The young man was clearly there to raid the execution platform as well!

“Shut your mouth.”

Despite the clear sky overhead, the deep rumbling of thunder reverberated deafeningly in the air. Standing less than ten meters away from Song shi, Zhang Xuan glared at the latter with deadly sharp eyes, carrying a disposition and might that compelled one to defer to him.

“You...” Hearing the young man tell him to shut his mouth, Song shi’s body trembled from the sheer rage running through his veins. He was just about to give the young man a tongue-lashing when the latter’s deafening voice sounded in the air.

“You want to talk to me about the rules? About the formalities? Very well, let’s do just that. While I, Zhang Xuan, was investigating the murders in the Master Teacher Pavilion

and foiling the schemes of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, what were you doing?

“While I was venturing deep into the treacherous Marshlands of the Northern Meadows to hunt down the Qingtian Emperor so as to prevent him from claiming any more innocent lives, what were you doing?”

“While I was imparting my knowledge to the master teachers and combat masters so as to reduce potential casualties in the fight against the Otherworldly Demons, what were you doing?”

“As a quasi 8-star master teacher, instead of properly investigating the truth behind the deaths of the master teachers, you took what you saw for granted and turned a blind eye to everything else, choosing the easiest way out of this matter for yourself. So, tell me, what right do you have to judge me and my men?”

Boom!

Zhang Xuan’s voice echoed clearly throughout all of Qingyuan City along with the deep rumbling of thunder, as if even the heavens were resonating with his rage.

The righteous aura that Zhang Xuan emanated added a majestic authority to his words, allowing no one to refute him.

“You...” Choked speechless, Song shi’s face reddened in frustration, and it looked as if he would blow up at any moment.

However, Zhang Xuan was not intending to just stop there, and he interrupted Song shi forcefully.

“Chu Tianxing chose to side with the Otherworldly Demons, why aren’t you investigating that?”

“Tian Qing was a clone of an Otherworldly Demon Emperor, why aren’t you investigating that?”

“Pavilion Master Gou neglected his responsibilities and left the affairs of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion fully in Tian Qing’s hands, resulting in the Master Teacher Pavilion’s decline day after day, why aren’t the investigating that?”

“Shall I point the answer out for you? It’s because you don’t give a damn at all! You allowed yourself to remain ignorant, willfully turning a blind eye to all of those important issues and choosing to devote your effort to cornering my butler and a bunch of poison masters instead. Song Xuan, I just want to ask you—is this how you intend to use the authority that the Master Teacher Pavilion has granted you?”

“Is this how you conduct yourself as a quasi 8-star master teacher?”

“I…” Song shi immediately wanted to refute Zhang Xuan’s argument, but the latter was not intending to give him a chance to speak.

“The reason Kong shi established the Master Teacher Pavilion was to bring knowledge and clarity to mankind, thus bringing us to greater heights. He became an embodiment of his beliefs and dedicated his life to teaching others, and that was why he was eventually respected by countless as the World’s Teacher!

“The meaning behind the existence of the Master Teacher Pavilion is to emulate Kong shi’s greatness and bring wisdom to the minds of mankind. As a quasi 8-star master teacher, why don’t you tell me how my direct disciple, Liu Yang, a cultivator who hasn’t even reached Saint realm, manage to kill a Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert like Chu Tianxing?”

“If Chu Tianxing could really be killed so easily by my direct disciple, is there any significance behind the existence of the Qingyuan Empire?”

“Don’t bother justifying it by saying that the poison masters have used poison. I have already looked into the matter myself, and it’s confirmed that they have only used the Scattering Breeze Powder.

“Twenty years ago, the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe used the Scattering Breeze Powder to assault the Qingyuan Empire, nearly resulting in its destruction. Putting aside the fact that Chu Tianxing was a puppet of the Qingtian Emperor and could very well have an antidote prepared for himself, after the failure twenty years ago, do you think that the royal family would not have taken any precautions against it?”

“If they did not take any precautions, does that not mean that they have a screw loose in their heads, or... have they chosen to betray mankind to side with the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe? If the royal family is really that negligent, do they really have what it takes to protect their people from external threats?” Zhang Xuan’s voice grew more and more forbidding.

“This...”

Unknowingly, Song Shi’s rage had turned into bewilderment and horror, and he began trembling uncontrollably at Zhang Xuan’s words.

On the other hand, flinging his sleeves furiously, Zhang Xuan pressed on. “Chu Tianxing’s death was riddled with discrepancies, but you failed to conduct a thorough investigation of the matter to uncover the truth. This is incompetence!

“You allowed yourself to be swayed by the words of the nobles and officials, choosing to heed their will instead of making a fair judgement. This is foolishness!

“As a quasi 8-star master teacher, you ignored the direct threat that the Master Teacher Pavilion was under, and your negligence could have potentially resulted in the deaths of many more master teachers. This is getting your priorities wrong!

“You had the division heads and combat masters of the Combat Master Hall imprisoned on a whim, using your identity as an envoy of the headquarters in order to suppress their dissension, effectively undermining the command structure that the Master Teacher Pavilion has put in place. This is an abuse of power!

“Incompetence, foolishness, getting your priorities wrong, and abuse of power...” Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back, and his eyebrows shot up. “Song Xuan, how could you possibly have the cheek to call yourself a quasi 8-star master teacher?”

“I... Pu!” Song Shi’s face was completely scarlet, and blood spurted from his mouth. His body wavered intensely for a

moment, and he nearly fell to the ground.

“This...”

“He actually made Song shi spurt blood through mere words?”

Song Chao and the others gulped down a mouthful of saliva as they glanced at one another with pale faces.

In order to conduct a successful raid of the execution platform, they had undergone much discussion and refined their plan time and time again. Yet, when it came to the time for them to make a move, they had helplessly realized that they were no match for Song shi at all. If they had really gone against the latter, there was no doubt that they would all have been wiped out.

They had thought that they were doomed when the massive dragon they had created by putting all of their strength together was subdued so easily, but who knew that Zhang Xuan would suddenly appear at this moment? And without making a single move, he actually managed to make Song shi spurt blood with just his words!

“Young Master’s mouth technique is really formidable!” the bound Sun Qiang muttered as he stared at the sight before him.

“Mouth technique? Cough cough!” That peculiar term left Elder Xu choking on his saliva. “Benefactor, what should we do now?”

“Don’t worry. Didn’t I tell you earlier? Our Young Master will surely make a move to save us. Even if he does not, there’s still our Old Master. They won’t watch as a mishap befalls me, so there’s no need to worry at all,” Sun Qiang replied calmly with a yawn.

Over the couple of days that he had been imprisoned, not only had he remained completely uninjured, it even seemed like... he had grown even plumper than before.

It was as if he was exhausted from cultivating, so he took a short vacation over at the prison of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Our benefactor sure is fearless...” Hearing Sun Qiang’s words and actions, Elder Xu was speechless. At the same time, he couldn’t help but wonder—why did it seem like the benefactor before him was different from the one he had met before?

The benefactor he knew was valiant, decisive, and incredibly wise. He could remain composed even in the most threatening situation to find the most suitable manner to maneuver his way out of danger. On the other hand, the person before him...

While being locked in the Master Teacher Pavilion, he had eaten portions intended for five people and slept his time away. No matter how he looked at it, the two of them seemed to be completely different people.

Still, there was no doubt that their benefactor was a one-of-a-kind individual.

Despite being indicted in the Master Teacher Pavilion, possibly losing his life at any moment, he was still able to keep his cool, continuing to carry out his usual routine fearlessly. There were not many people in the world who had such nerves of steel. At the very least, Elder Xu knew that he did not.

Perhaps this was why the founder had chosen their benefactor in the first place!

[1] This is a quote from the famous Three Character Classic, which is commonly used by children for elementary education. It basically reflects the values of Confucianism, which in this case, the belief that a parent and a teacher should be responsible in granting a child a good upbringing, instilling in him the correct values in life, resorting to severity to bring them back to the right path if required. This is a belief that is still commonly shared by many Chinese families nowadays.

1237 Sever It!

“You sure do have a sharp tongue!”

After spurning a mouthful of blood, Song shi finally managed to collect his thoughts. “There’s still a need for further investigation to determine whether what you have said is true or not, but it’s a fact that Sun Qiang and the group from the Poison Hall snuck into the Qingyuan royal palace, knocked out all of the guards, and assassinated Emperor Chu Tianxing.

“There is clear evidence of their crimes, so there’s no refuting this matter. If we do not punish them to make an example, how can we maintain order in the rest of the world? The authority of the Master Teacher Pavilion will be undermined! If everyone acted in the same manner as them, it would be pandemonium!”

It was not that Song shi really wanted Sun Qiang and the others to die, but it was impossible to appease the hearts of the populace without doing so.

If they were to allow the culprits who had assassinated the emperor of a country to get away so easily, wouldn’t the entire Master Teacher Continent swiftly fall into chaos?

Song shi gazed at the master teachers on the execution platform and ordered with a majestic wave of his hands, “Continue the sentence!”

Despite what Zhang Xuan had said, there was solid proof of Sun Qiang and the other poison masters’ wrongdoings. Regardless of whether they had really killed Emperor Chu Tianxing or not, they had certainly participated in and contributed to the assassination. Since that was the case, it was only right for them to be punished!

“Very well. Since you refuse to listen to reason...” Seeing that Song shi still wanted to execute Sun Qiang and the others, Zhang Xuan waved his hands majestically. “Take him down!”

“Humph! You think that the bunch of brats you have down there will be able to faze me?” Song Xuan laughed in fury and disdainfully gazed down on Song Chao and the others below.

While they had managed to gather quite a number of allies to raid the execution platform, it was a pity that their individual prowess was too weak. Even if they were to gather a hundred thousand Transcendent Mortal 8-dan brats, they would not be able to faze him in the slightest!

Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm was also known as the Realm of Invincibility. Once a cultivator activated their Dominion, numbers would no longer be sufficient to faze them.

While Song shi was still at Saint 5-dan pinnacle, he was only a step away from making a breakthrough. If this bunch of small fries could actually faze him, the time he had spent cultivating would have really been vain!

“It seems like you really don’t know how fearsome a quasi 8-star master teacher is!” Sneering coldly, Song shi raised his hand.

An intangible will rippled outward swiftly from Song shi, shrouding Song Chao and the others within it in an instant.

This will weighed down on the group from the Xuanxuan Faction and the Combat Master Hall like a massive mountain. Every single one of them froze on the spot. Putting aside launching an attack, even moving was difficult for them.

“Your strength is indeed formidable...” Seeing that Song shi had only suppressed Song Chao and the others, not intending them any harm, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief as he shot an impassive gaze toward the other party. “But... who told you that I was commanding them?”

“You weren’t commanding them?” Song shi was taken aback. “Then...”

Before he could finish his words, he suddenly sensed a searing dragon made of zhenqi surging upward.

“You...” Song shi hurriedly turned around, and his eyes narrowed in horror.

The ones who had made a move were not those who had come to raid the execution platform. They were... the master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, those who were directly under his command!

In this moment, all of them were channeling their strength together to assault him!

“Break!” Knowing that this was not the moment to be dazed, Song shi gritted his teeth tightly as he gathered his strength to face the searing dragon.

The strength of a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert was incomparably powerful. The palm strike that Song shi launched seemed to carry the weight of the sky in it. But as powerful as his battle technique was, it came nowhere close to comparing to the massive zhenqi dragon below.

Kacha! Kacha!

Song shi’s palm strike was swiftly overpowered by the massive dragon, and he ended up being struck in the chest, causing his ribcage to crack. At the same time, the momentum of the dragon’s charge also knocked him high into the sky.

“You might be a quasi 8-star master teacher, but all of the master teachers in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion are my students!” Glancing at the look of disbelief on the face of the swiftly retreating Song shi, Zhang Xuan shook his head. “You couldn’t have been more foolish to use my own students to deal with me.”

Back when he had crashed the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he had lectured all of the 6-star and 7-star master teachers present in the area, and out of gratitude for his teachings, they had ended up acknowledging him as their teacher. At the same time, the fact that he had successfully crashed the pavilion also meant that the master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion had to unconditionally obey his orders.

After knocking Song shi flying, Zhang Xuan swiftly flitted over to the execution platform and waved his hand.

Huala!

The chains binding Sun Qiang and the poison masters immediately shattered.

Facing the group before him, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply. “You all have suffered...”

While the Master Teacher Pavilion could not resort to vicious torture on their captives, the group must have been under a great deal of mental pressure knowing that they would be executed soon.

Sun Qiang rushed up to Zhang Xuan as soon as he was freed, and he cried with reddened eyes, “Young Master, you must redress my grievances!”

Watching as their benefactor made the transition from extreme composure to extreme indignation in just an instant, Elder Xu’s lips twitched wildly.

As expected of their benefactor... he had even mastered the art of changing his face swiftly!

“Un. You should liaise with Song Chao and the others first. There are still some matters that I have to settle here!” While saying those words, Zhang Xuan could not help but notice that Sun Qiang had grown fatter, and a disapproving frown appeared on his face. However, knowing that this was not the time to talk about such a matter, he quickly waved them away.

He might have saved Sun Qiang and the others for the time being, but this matter was not settled yet. The ordinary civilians were still unaware of the truth, and if the incomplete version of events they knew were to spread far and wide, not only would it affect his reputation, it would also bring him great trouble as well.

More importantly, he had made a move on a quasi 8-star master teacher, an envoy dispatched by the headquarters. If he did not resolve this matter properly, he would be charged with insubordinate, and that could lead to dire consequences.

“Yes, Young Master!” Trusting that his Young Master would resolve the matter promptly, Sun Qiang nodded before leaping off the execution platform along with the others.

“You scoundrel! If I don’t teach you the consequences of disrespecting a senior master teacher, I shall abandon my surname!”

Boom!

Right after Zhang Xuan was done making arrangements, a furious bellow suddenly sounded below. The next moment, Song shi flew back up with a savage look on his face.

To think that he, a quasi 8-star master teacher from the Qianchong Empire, despite coming down to the weaker Qingyuan Empire, would actually end up being smacked flying! The irrepressible anger that he felt left him on the verge of exploding!

If he did not get the other party back for this matter, his reputation would be completely ruined, and he would no longer be able to face anyone else!

As master teachers, reputation was extremely important as well. Without a good reputation, what would become of their dignity, and who would be willing to heed their teachings?

Driving his zhenqi furiously, Song shi forcefully suppressed the injuries in his chest as he flipped upside down and dived downward toward Zhang Xuan, making use of the momentum of his descent to augment his palm strike.

“A palm strike from the heavens?” a master teacher asked with narrowed eyes. He was the same master teacher whom Zhang Jiuxiao had spoken to back when Zhang Xuan executed a similar technique against Pavilion Master Gou during the pavilion crashing.

To this day, he could still remember the astounding prowess harnessed within that palm strike, as well as the feeling of helplessness that rose in his heart as he witnessed its overwhelming might.

“Palm strike from the heavens? What I see is a cauldron from the heavens instead...” another master teacher beside him uttered with a pale face.

“Cauldron?” The first master teacher was taken aback by the abrupt remark. He quickly glanced above Song shi, and his

mouth began twitching uncontrollably.

A cauldron had appeared right above that quasi 8-star master teacher at some point, and it was currently descending at a speed far swifter than Song shi was descending.

Peng!

Before Song shi's palm strike could reach Zhang Xuan, the massive cauldron had crashed into the area between his two thighs.

“Ahhh!”

A scream of agony echoed loudly in the air as Song shi's figure crashed heavily into the execution platform as if a cannonball, creating a huge depression in the ground. Following which, his figure swiftly cramped up together as if a shrimp as he trembled uncontrollably with a ghastly pale face.

If it was not for Song shi's superior cultivation, that single blow would have knocked him out on the spot.

“...”

The mouths of the other master teachers twitched wildly upon seeing this sight.

Just watching the sight was enough to induce a tight cringe on their faces and an involuntary shudder through their bodies. They could not even bring themselves to imagine how Song shi was feeling at that moment.

Offend anyone but that cauldron... It was simply too vicious!

“You... I'll kill you!” Struggling weakly to his feet, a furious killing intent was ignited in Song shi's eyes. He glared at the Golden Origin Cauldron with sharp daggers in his eyes.

Zhang Xuan was a genius who had successfully crashed the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, so he dared not kill him. On the other hand, for a mere artifact to dare treat him in such a manner... there was no way he would let it get away scot-free!

Hu!

But right after Song shi spoke those words, he suddenly noticed that the massive bottom of the Golden Origin Cauldron was falling toward him once more.

The cauldron had only landed the attack the previous time because he had been caught off guard. However, prepared this time around, how could he allow the Golden Origin Cauldron to strike him once more? He lifted his finger and tapped in the air.

The air above him suddenly became incredibly viscous, causing the Golden Origin Cauldron's speed of descent to slow sharply before eventually freezing in space.

Despite his injuries, Song shi was still a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle master teacher. While his strength could not compete with the other Vicious, he was still far stronger than the Qingtian Emperor.

The Golden Origin Cauldron was only at Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, and it had not learned any kind of battle technique before. As such, it was only capable of carrying out simple charges, which made it easy for any opponent stronger than it to subdue it.

“Die!” After freezing the Golden Origin Cauldron in midair, Song shi flicked his wrist and whipped out a sword.

With a graceful arc, he pulled his sword down upon the Golden Origin Cauldron.

As expected of a quasi 8-star master teacher from the Qianchong Empire, even his sword was a Saint intermediate-tier artifact that was nowhere weaker than the Golden Origin Cauldron.

“Master, save me...” Knowing that it would be fatally injured if it was struck by the sword, the Golden Origin Cauldron cried in fright.

But all of a sudden, the Golden Origin Cauldron suddenly heard an incomparably calm voice within its mind.

“Even though he's already very close to reaching the Grand Dominion realm, he has not made the breakthrough yet, so there are many gaps in his assault that can be exploited. Shift

slightly to the left and open your cauldron lid. Following which, sink downward and dive into the execution platform. Attack him when the distance between the both of you has been reduced to three meters. There is an opening in the Bimen acupoint in front of his chest, so conduct your attack in such a manner...”

Those words were communicated via zhenqi telepathy, so it took only a tenth of a breath for the Golden Origin Cauldron to receive the entire message. At this moment, the sword qi executed from Song shi's sword was already right before it.

Knowing that there was no time to be wasted, the Golden Origin Cauldron swiftly obeyed what its master told him and shifted slightly left.

Weng!

The sword struck its lid, and a reverberating boom reminiscent of a gong echoed throughout the area.

While feeling a sharp pain on its spirit, the Golden Origin Cauldron hurriedly opened its lid and sunk its body into the ground.

Boom!

A sound reminiscent of the rumbling of thunder boomed toward Song Xuan, causing his vision to blur for a moment.

It was not a demonic tune, but the abrupt, deafening noise did produce an effect reminiscent of a powerful demonic tune for an instant.

Kacha!

As soon as that was done, the Golden Origin Cauldron dove straight into the execution platform, leaving a massive hole in its wake.

The execution platform was basically an elevated platform supported by pillars below, so there was empty space right beneath the execution platform. As soon as the Golden Origin Cauldron dove into the execution platform, the viscosity in the air that was limiting its movement previously vanished all of a sudden. With a swift movement, it arrived at the area that

Zhang Xuan had mentioned earlier and dived back upward, aiming for the opening in Song shi's Bimen acupoint.

"You..." Song shi's face warped in horror. He quickly raised both of his hands to dodge the attack.

Even though he did not have much time to react, his swift reaction allowed him to defend against the charging cauldron, albeit with some difficulty. Unfortunately, he did not notice a stubby leg of the cauldron furiously kicking upward with frightening momentum behind it.

Kacha!

A crisp sound reminiscent of shattering eggs echoed in the air.

"Ahhh!" Song shi kneeled onto the floor, and this time, his body was scrunched up in an even more extreme angle than before.

"I... will kill you..."

Even speaking was a difficulty for Song shi with the excruciating pain and the intense trembling of his body.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan turned to the Golden Origin Cauldron and lectured furiously, "Look at what you have done! Where are your manners? Can't you at least control your strength properly?"

After which, he turned to look at Song shi apologetically and said, "My apologies, Song shi. I have really spoiled my cauldron too much; it does not even know how to respect its elders anymore. Don't worry, I'll definitely give it a harsh tongue-lashing when I return. As for your injuries..."

At this point, he lowered his head to look at the pitifully trembling Song shi and sighed deeply. Shaking his head, he took out a dagger and passed it over.

"Why don't you just sever it?"

1238 Are You Still Suckling Milk?

Pu!

Song shi spurted a mouthful of blood after hearing Zhang Xuan's words before fainting from sheer rage and indignation.

As a quasi 8-star master teacher coming to the weaker Qingyuan Empire, he should have been in a position of absolute prestige and authority with none daring to oppose him...

But things didn't seem to go as he anticipated. Firstly, all the master teachers that should have been under his command ended up turning against him. As if that was not enough, a cauldron even crippled him. What further intensified his wrath was that Zhang Xuan was even putting on a look of innocence, as if he had nothing to do with it at all.

You might have given pointers to your cauldron very discreetly, but as a quasi 8-star master teacher, did you really think that I wouldn't be able to notice it?

In secret, you gave pointers to your artifact to teach it how to cripple me, but publicly, you put on an innocent front, as if everything that happened had nothing to do with you...

Can you get any more shameless than that?

Furthermore... sever?

Sever your head!

Crippled as it may be, it still beats having nothing at all!

Seeing that Song shi had really fainted, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sheathed his dagger. He placed his finger on the latter's renzhong to help him regain consciousness. After which, he turned to the Golden Origin Cauldron and bellowed furiously, "What are you standing around there for? Come over and apologize!"

“Yes, Master!” The Golden Origin Cauldron walked over awkwardly with its stubby legs, reminiscent of the movements of a duck. Standing before Song shi, it apologized earnestly. “Song shi, I shouldn’t have kicked your crotch. To make up for the damage you have incurred... why don’t I allow you to kick me twice?”

After saying those words, the Golden Origin Cauldron spread open its legs, as if inviting Song shi over.

Pu!

Song shi spurted yet another mouthful of blood.

The heck! Is you kicking my crotch the same thing as me kicking your crotch? Do you even have anything there for me to kick?

Besides, I am a quasi 8-star master teacher! If I need someone else to spread his legs for me to kick him back... what would become of my honor?

Song shi struggled free out of Zhang Xuan’s support as he bellowed, “Zhang Xuan, you forcefully freed the prisoners on death row, disrespected your senior, and ordered your artifact to make a move against me. It’s clear that you have no eyes for the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion at all! Have no doubt that I’ll have this matter reported to the headquarters!”

“You will report this matter to the headquarters?”

“That’s right!” Song shi roared with gritted teeth.

“Very well. Golden Origin Cauldron, I’ll leave our Song shi over here in your care. Make sure to give him plenty of love...” Zhang Xuan waved his hand nonchalantly.

“Sure thing!” Excited, the Golden Origin Cauldron lifted its short and stubby legs, and it looked as if it would shoot up toward a certain location once more.

“You!” Alarmed, Song shi hurriedly staggered backward weakly. He swiftly drove his zhenqi, thinking that he would at least make Zhang Xuan pay the price for his actions even if he died there. However, at that moment, the sharp call of a saint beast suddenly echoed across the sky.

A moment later, something reminiscent of an inferno appeared by the horizon.

“It’s the Saint 6-dan saint beast, Inferno Cloud Phoenix!” Song shi narrowed his eyes in astonishment. Following which, a thought came to his mind, and he began trembling in agitation. “It’s... the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion’s Yao shi, Yao Mantian!”

“Yao Mantian?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Activating his Eye of Insight, he began examining the inferno closely.

There indeed a figure standing on the back of the Inferno Cloud Phoenix. It was a lady who appeared to be in her forties. Dressed in plain clothes, her external appearance could not be said to be beautiful. However, the graceful disposition that she commanded set her apart from the crowd, giving the impression that she was a noble goddess from the heavens.

Pinned on her chest was a master teacher emblem, and the eight stars on it gleamed conspicuously beneath the brilliant rays of the sun.

8-star master teacher?

To think that the other party was a real 8-star master teacher!

In other words, at the very least, she was a Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm expert!

Amid shocked gazes, the Inferno Cloud Phoenix halted right above the execution platform. Following which, Yao shi slowly took walked down from the back of the aerial saint beast.

Before she reached the platform, a graceful voice filled the area. “I am 8-star low-tier Master Teacher Yao Mantian from the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion. I have come under the orders of the headquarters to investigate the death of Pavilion Master Gou. May I know if Vice Pavilion Master Wu of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion is here at the moment?”

“Investigate the death of Pavilion Master Gou?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback for a moment before coming to a realization.

Back when Zhang Xuan crashed the pavilion and Tian Qing escaped, Pavilion Master Gou had applied for the help of the headquarters in order to track the latter down, so the headquarters had sent Song shi over. After which, Pavilion Master Gou died along with seven other 7-star master teachers, and in view of the massive threat that the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion was in at that moment, Wu shi also sent another application for help.

The second matter was too huge for Song shi, whom they had dispatched previously from the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion to deal with Tian Qing, so the headquarters had decided to send an 8-star master teacher over as well.

Due to the lag in between the two matters, Song shi and Yao shi had not been informed that the other would be going to the Qingyuan Empire as well.

“Qianchong Empire 7-star Master Teacher Song Xuan pays respect to Yao shi!” Song shi stepped forward and greeted.

Quasi 8-star master teacher was an informal title created by the master teachers themselves in view of the vast disparity in strength inherent among the 7-star master teachers. This title was never officially recognized by the Master Teacher Pavilion, so in front of a higher ranking master teacher, Song shi did not dare to address himself as a quasi 8-star master teacher for fear that he might appear impudent.

“Un. I remember meeting you once when I visited the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion to conduct a lecture a few years back.” Yao Mantian nodded before a hint of intrigue crept into her voice. “What are you doing here? Also, your injuries...”

With her eye of discernment, she could immediately tell that Song shi’s crotch had been injured.

For a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert to be injured in such a location, could he have been facing a formidable opponent prior to her arrival?

“Reporting to Yao shi, I came here at the orders of the headquarters to investigate the matter concerning Zhang shi’s pavilion crashing and the disappearance of Vice Pavilion Master Tian.

“However, when I arrived, I learned that Emperor Chu Tianxing had been assassinated. I was unable to find the murderer, but I did manage to uncover his accomplices. By the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion, those criminals should be publicly executed to serve as a strict warning to others against doing the same.

“Yet, who could have known that Zhang shi over here would disregard the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion and willfully rescue those criminals, even going to the extent of disrespecting and assaulting me?” Song shi swiftly explained the matter to Yao shi.

“Yao shi, I ask of you to redress my grievances!”

“You are saying that Zhang shi rescued the criminals and injured you?” Yao Mantian frowned as she turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Are you Zhang Xuan? Is what Song shi said true?”

“It’s true that I did free those men who were to be executed, and it was indeed my artifact, the Golden Origin Cauldron, that injured him.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and answered the question, not denying the matter.

With so many people beneath the execution platform witnessing the incident, there was no way he could deny the matter. Since that was the case, he might as well admit to it candidly.

“Song shi has come to Qingyuan Empire as an envoy of the headquarters, so his words represent the very will of the headquarters. Yet, to disregard his judgement, raid the execution platform, and even injure him... Do you understand how heavy a crime that is?” Yao Mantian asked imposingly.

Given how huge an affair a pavilion crashing was, she had also heard of Zhang Xuan.

For a person as young as him to successfully crash an entire Master Teacher Pavilion, the talent that he wielded was truly inconceivable.

As long as he did not die prematurely, he was bound to achieve great things in the future. Since that was the case, why would he suddenly do something so reckless and foolish at this moment, giving up the bright future ahead of him?

“Reporting to Yao shi, there’s more to the story than Song shi reported. As a 7-star master teacher, I am aware of the implications of my actions, but I had no choice but to resort to such actions. I did not wish to see the Master Teacher Pavilion being mocked over a foolish course of action!” Zhang Xuan bowed deeply.

“Foolish course of action?” Yao Mantian asked doubtfully.

“Yes.” Zhang Xuan nodded before he began explaining. “Vice Pavilion Master Tian was a spy of the Otherworldly Demon. He was an incarnation of the will of the Qingtian Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage, which means that his roots can be traced back to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. He was colluding with King Zhongqing and Emperor Chu Tianxing, and they sought to bring disorder and chaos upon mankind...” Zhang Xuan swiftly explained the matter concerning Tian Qing and the Qingtian Lineage to Yao shi.

Of course, he made sure to neglect the portion concerning Vicious.

“This...” By the time Yao shi had heard the full story, her eyes were already widened in shock. Staring at Zhang Xuan intently, she asked grimly, “This is a huge matter. Do you have any evidence?”

This matter concerned the vice head of a Master Teacher Pavilion and the emperor of a Conferred Empire. If they were to fail to deal with this matter promptly, the reputation of the Master Teacher Pavilion could possibly be sent into the gutters, and its credibility would take a huge blow.

“Wu shi and the others should have already reported the incident to the headquarters. If Yao shi doubts my word, you

can try to establish contact with the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion to ask about the matter. They should have the corpse of the Qingtian Emperor there as evidence,” Zhang Xuan said.

It was true that the Qingtian Emperor and Tian Qing were already dead, but their bodies remained. As difficult as it might be, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters should still have its ways to find out whether Tian Qing was truly the incarnation of the Qingtian Emperor or not.

This matter could easily be verified by the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, and knowing this, it was not likely for Zhang Xuan to make up such an easily exposable lie. Thus, Yao Mantian nodded. “I’ll contact the headquarters later to look into the matter.

“However, even if there was something wrong with Chu Tianxing, Zhang shi, you should also know that there is a set of formal procedures to deal with the matter. The matter should have been reported to the headquarters, and the headquarters would then have placed Chu Tianxing on a trial before sentencing him. The actions of your butler and the poison masters of barging into the royal palace, poisoning all of the guards, and killing Chu Tianxing are inappropriate and unacceptable.

“Since Chu Tianxing was a traitor of humanity, I understand why you might think that it’s unjustified for Song shi to sentence them to death. However, you must also consider the huge implications that would arise from the assassination of the emperor of a Conferred Empire.

“In order to calm the hearts of the people, this is a course of action that Song shi has no choice but to take for the sake of the greater good. On the other hand, your act of barging into the execution platform and ordering your artifact to injure him is impudent and unacceptable!”

The goal of the Master Teacher Pavilion was to maintain the order of mankind and lead them to greater heights.

The very act that Sun Qiang and the poison masters had done, poisoning the entire royal palace and killing the emperor, was

against the rules, even if Chu Tianxing really was a traitor of mankind.

There were proper avenues to deal with such matters, and it was important for others to utilize these avenues. Otherwise, if self-justified individuals started taking matters into their own hands, it would not have been long before society devolved into chaos.

This was similar to how the law worked in the world where Zhang Xuan had come from. No matter how much a person hated a certain murderer, they could only leave it to the law to judge and punish the murderer instead of taking matters into their own hands, or else they could be charged for the same crime.

This was the same situation that Sun Qiang and the other poison masters were facing.

No matter what, even if Chu Tianxing was a traitor of mankind, he was still the emperor of a Conferred Empire. His abrupt assassination was bound to cause unrest among the populace, and that was why it was even more important to go through the formal procedures and put him through a trial. However, what was done was done, so Song shi could only find a way to appease the populace for the time being, even if the method utilized was disheartening.

Since Song shi's actions were justified, Zhang Xuan's act of forcefully barging into the execution platform and pummeling Song shi were unjustified, and the crime of insubordination was truly not light.

Hearing that Yao shi was speaking on his behalf, Song shi quickly jumped forward to further fuel the flames. "Yao shi, Zhang shi has grown complacent due to the talent he possesses. Not only is he disrespectful to his seniors, he also has no regard for the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion! Such a person must be punished severely, or else we will be setting a bad example for others..."

For his manhood to be crippled like that, there was no way he could take this matter lying down!

But before he could finish his words, Zhang Xuan roared, “Shut up!”

“You...” Song shi nearly exploded on the spot.

“Yao shi didn’t give you permission to speak, do you think that it is appropriate for you to be prattling off over there? To casually interject in the words of an 8-star master teacher, are these the formalities you have been speaking about all along?” Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back as he spoke deeply.

“I...” Song shi’s face paled.

Considering that Yao shi was currently judging the case, it was indeed disrespectful of him to abruptly interject without permission.

Seeing that Song shi had fallen silent, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and reported, “There’s more to this matter than what Yao shi has reported. Song shi mentioned earlier that Sun Qiang was conspiring with the poison masters of the Poison Hall to assault the royal palace, but the truth is that Elder Xu and the others are no longer poison masters of the Poison Hall. They have already become combat masters of the Combat Master Hall!”

“Combat masters?”

“Indeed. It’s true that Elder Xu and the others used to be poison masters, but their kindness has touched the hearts of the combat masters, so the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall took them in. This matter has already been reported to the Combat Master Hall headquarters, and the newly-inaugurated Progeny of Combat has given his consent to this matter. If you harbor any doubts to my words, you can investigate the issue!” Zhang Xuan reported righteously.

The matter of Elder Xu and the others joining the Combat Master Hall had already been reported up to the headquarters, and it had received their approval.

Thus, they were effectively no longer poison masters but combat masters of the Combat Master Hall, albeit not full-fledged ones yet.

“Oh?” Yao shi glanced at Song shi and asked, “Song shi, are you aware of this matter?”

“I-I am aware that they have joined the Combat Master Hall, but...” Song shi face reddened as he anxiously replied, “A leopard doesn’t change its spots! The fact that they are still concocting poison secretly is more than sufficient evidence to prove that!”

He had heard that the poison masters had been accepted into the Combat Master Hall, but he did not think much about it back then.

“A leopard doesn’t change its spots? To think that a day would come where I would hear such words coming out of the mouth of a master teacher!” Zhang Xuan flung his sleeves furiously. “Song shi, you used to suckle milk in the past as an infant. If I apply your own logic, can I say that you are still suckling milk even at your age?” “Renzhong is a traditional Chinese medicine term, referring to the curved area in between one’s nose and above one’s lips.

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“Audacious!” Song shi roared furiously.

“As master teachers, we seek to enlighten and guide others with our words and actions. On top of imparting knowledge to others, we aim to instill the correct values into them so that they will eventually become upstanding members of our society! If, as you have said, a person’s nature cannot be changed, what would be the point in the existence of master teachers? Can I take it that you are refuting Kong shi’s teachings and the purpose of the Master Teacher Pavilion?” Zhang Xuan bellowed authoritatively.

“I... That’s not what I mean!” Song shi quickly denied it.

To refute Kong shi’s teachings and the purpose of the Master Teacher Pavilion... Even if he inflated his guts tenfold, he would not dare do something like that!

“Then, can I take it that you are refuting the decisions made by the Progeny of Combat and the Combat Master Hall headquarters?” Zhang Xuan continued cornering Song shi with his words.

“T-that’s not what I mean either!” Song shi quickly waved his hand.

While the Combat Master Hall was a subsidiary of the Master Teacher Pavilion, the Progeny of Combat was still not a person whom a small figure like him could refute.

“If that is not what you mean, what else do you mean then? In a world of drunkards, you are the only sober one?” Zhang Xuan mocked.

“You...” Choked to the point that his face had turned scarlet, Song shi knew that he would only fall deeper and deeper into the ditch if he allowed Zhang Xuan to continue questioning him. Thus, he turned to Yao shi and clasped his fist. “Yao shi, we are all aware of the rituals that the depraved poison masters practice. Putting aside the vile nature of their cultivation

techniques, they use human blood and even human lives to breed their gu... Such is the unspeakable brutality that they carry out!

“I have no idea why those poison masters were accepted into the Combat Master Hall, but in my opinion, it might just be another form of imprisonment so as to prevent them from doing any more evil in the world, rather than an acknowledgement of their noble personality.”

“You said that the nature of their cultivation techniques is vile?” Zhang Xuan suddenly interjected with lifted eyebrows. “As a master teacher, you should be well aware of how important it is to verify your facts before speaking. I find it hard to comprehend how you can utter such blatant nonsense before an 8-star master teacher. Do you understand the consequences of lying to a higher ranked master teacher?”

“What kind of rubbish are you talking about?” Song shi roared back.

“Rubbish?” Zhang Xuan stared at Song shi disdainfully for a moment before shaking his head. He turned his gaze to Elder Xu and the others below the execution platform and said, “Elder Xu and the other esteemed poison masters! Pardon me, but I would like to ask you to drive your cultivation technique to show Song shi if your cultivation technique is really of vile nature as he claims!”

“Yes!” Nodding, Elder Xu and the others swiftly drove their zhenqi, and their auras swiftly permeated the surroundings.

Their auras were upright and orthodox. Not only were they devoid of the eerie and bone-chilling sensation that most unorthodox cultivation techniques emanated, they even felt warming and soothing, reminiscent of an embrace.

“This...” Song shi was flabbergasted.

As a quasi 8-star master teacher, he had met plenty of poison masters in his time. Due to their long-term contact with lethal poison, each of them had a deeply unnerving aura to them.

Yet, the poison masters before him did not have such a feeling to their aura; it was even warm and comfortable.

Paying no heed to Song shi's shock, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and asked, "Yao shi, may I ask if the cultivation techniques they practice are vile in nature?"

Hearing those words, Yao shi shook her head and replied, "Their zhenqi is pure and orthodox. I don't see anything vile in their cultivation technique."

Turning his gaze back to Song shi, Zhang Xuan continued. "This should be enough evidence for you to prove that they have already turned for the better, right? They are already members of the Combat Master Hall, but you keep insisting that they are poison masters of the Poison Hall, claiming that they are depraved and practice vile arts. Since that's the case, I would like to ask what the meaning of 'depraved' and 'vile' is in your view. Is it something that you conceptualize in your mind?"

"I..." Song shi's body trembled. He could not find an argument to refute Zhang Xuan's words.

He did not participate in the arrest of Elder Xu and the others, and they did not make any attempt to break out during their captivity either. As such, he was oblivious to the warm and soothing aura of the poison masters, and he could not have imagined that poison masters practiced such an orthodox and upright cultivation technique either.

It took a very long time before Song shi was able to speak once more. "Even if their cultivation techniques are orthodox, it's still a fact that they knocked out everyone in the royal palace! There is nothing you can say that can possibly refute that!"

"Since that's the case, why don't I go through the case with you in details so that you can finally give up struggling?"

Waving his hand grandly, Zhang Xuan turned to the 8-star master teacher and said, "Yao shi, allow me to recount the ins and outs of the matter to you. I hope that you and the rest of the crowd can help me judge this matter!"

"Feel free to speak." Yao shi nodded.

“The truth is like this. The Qingtian Emperor of the Qingtian Lineage did not just possess superior cultivation, he was also a formidable soul oracle! He possessed a particularly sinister secret art that allowed him to nab the souls of anyone for his own use. To put it in more direct terms, as long as your cultivation was beneath his and you are within a set area of him, he would be able to draw your soul out of your body and imprison it, and he would be able to use it to nourish himself afterward!”

“Nab the souls of others? Nourish himself?”

“That’s right!” Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and an altar fell to the ground. “This is the medium he used to carry out his soul nabbing, and there’s a formation inscribed on it. Yao shi, please take a look!”

It was the altar that he had used to corner the real Qingtian Emperor back then.

“These inscriptions...” After examining the altar carefully, Yao shi’s expression turned grave. “I have never seen such an altar before, but I am aware of the existence of a soul art that allows one to nourish oneself with the souls of others. This is also one the contributing factors that eventually led to the Master Teacher Pavilion’s eradication of the Soul Oracle Guild back then!”

While Yao shi had never seen the altar before, with her eye of discernment as an 8-star master teacher, she could still vaguely tell that the altar seemed to be powerful against souls. If one activated it using a certain method, there was a good chance that it could be used to drag a cultivator’s soul out of their body, thus effectively conducting the ‘soul nabbing’.

“Indeed! And to be honest with you, this ability isn’t just limited to the Qingtian Emperor. As the Qingtian Emperor’s lackey, Chu Tianxing also knew this ability from him!” Zhang Xuan revealed.

“You are saying that Chu Tianxing was a soul oracle as well?” Yao shi frowned.

“That’s right!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Do you have any evidence to prove that?” Yao shi asked.

Pledging loyalty to the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and practicing soul arts imparted from them, this was a huge crime to pin on Chu Tianxing. Even though Chu Tianxing was already dead, he was still not a person who could be slandered without concrete evidence.

“I have a way to prove that. Elder Bai, please bring the corpses of Chen Zhe, Pavilion Master Gou, and the other 7-star master teachers!” Zhang Xuan instructed.

“Yes!”

An elder of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion at the bottom of the execution platform replied affirmatively before turning around and walking away.

This elder had participated in the operation at Chen Zhe’s residence to nab Tian Qing as well, so they were both acquainted with one another.

Not too long later, Elder Bai returned. With a flick of his wrist, a row of corpses appeared on the ground.

Due to the sinister nature of their deaths, the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion had used a unique method to preserve their bodies so as to facilitate future investigation. On top of that, the bodies of Saint realm cultivators did not decompose easily either. As such, those corpses remained extremely fresh, as if they had just died not too long ago.

Zhang Xuan beckoned Yao shi over and said, “Yao shi, please take a look and see if you can find something common among all of them.”

Yao shi walked over and began examining the corpses intently. Gradually, a frown appeared on her face.

These corpses were perfectly unharmed, be it their exterior or their internal state. However, their souls had disappeared without a trace.

“They have died as a result of the disappearance or dissipation of their souls,” Yao shi concluded after taking a look at all of the corpses.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “They are all victims of the soul nabbing secret art. Furthermore, according to my investigation, I have found one common point among the death of all these 7-star master teachers—they came into contact with Chu Tianxing prior to their deaths. We should be able to verify this through conducting a formal investigation in the Master Teacher Pavilion.”

Chu Tianxing had entered the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion multiple times in order to visit King Zhongqing, and on the night before the deaths of master teachers, Chu Tianxing had paid the Master Teacher Pavilion once again. During his visit, he had come into contact with all of the master teachers who had died. Back then, Zhang Xuan had not made the connection, but after learning from the other Vicious that Chu Tianxing had pledged loyalty to him, it had not been too difficult to deduce the full story.

No matter how formidable the other Vicious was, without a suitable medium, it was impossible for him to kill an individual in Qingyuan City from the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows. The reason he had been able to do so was likely because Chu Tianxing had left or fed them something.

“I can testify that the night before the killings, Chu Tianxing did drop by our Master Teacher Pavilion to pay a visit to King Zhongqing. During his visit, he brought many gourds of fine wine to share with us!”

“I can testify to that as well!”

Right after Zhang Xuan said those words, several master teachers beneath the execution platform swiftly shouted over.

Chu Tianxing had been exceptionally friendly that day, so the encounter with him had left quite the impression on the master teachers.

Seeing that there were so many master teachers standing up to testify on Zhang Xuan’s behalf, Yao shi knew that this matter was likely true. She turned to Zhang Xuan doubtfully and asked, “You are saying that... Chu Tianxing used a secret art to kill all of those master teachers?”

“Even if he was not directly responsible for the killings, there’s no doubt that he played an integral role in them,” Zhang Xuan replied affirmatively.

“Wu shi and I deduced that there was something wrong with Chu Tianxing, but due to several considerations, we dared not move recklessly. Most importantly, if we dealt with Chu Tianxing, the mastermind behind him, the Qingtian Emperor, would surely have fled for fear that he had been exposed. While the Qingtian Emperor remained alive, the threat that he posed to the Qingyuan Empire would never have come to an end.

“As such, under the cover of going into seclusion, we secretly gathered a group of experts to head to the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows to deal with the Qingtian Emperor. The journey was fraught with dangers, but with some luck, we managed to accomplish the mission we set out for. I have spoken of this matter previously, so I’ll just skip the details.”

Yao shi nodded in response.

“Even though we left discreetly, Chu Tianxing, as the emperor of Qingyuan Empire, still noticed an anomaly. Perhaps realizing that he had been exposed, he became desperate and decided to make one last stand!”

“One last stand?”

“Indeed. According to my deductions, there’s a very good chance that Chu Tianxing was planning to use his soul nabbing secret art to gather as many the human souls in Qingyuan City as he could to nourish himself and raise his cultivation. Of course, it would have been impossible for him to kill so many experts at once, but if he limited his targets to those beneath Saint realm, it wouldn’t have been much trouble to gather tens of millions of souls with sufficient preparation. If he succeeded, the entire Qingyuan City would have become a living hell!” Zhang Xuan spoke with a fearful edge to his voice, as if he still could not believe that Chu Tianxing would actually resort to such depraved actions.

“Zhang shi, you are saying that... Chu Tianxing was intending to kill every single cultivator beneath Saint realm in Qingyuan

City?”

“W-what? How is that possible? That is madness!”

Zhang Xuan had spoken loud enough that the large crowd gathered beneath the execution platform could hear him clearly, and they could hardly believe what they had just heard.

The severity of the matter had far surpassed their imagination!

“Even if I do not speak of them, I’m certain everyone here is aware of the consequences of betraying mankind. Once exposed, that individual will become the enemy of everyone on the continent, living a life worse than death. Considering that, he would have no qualms resorting to extreme actions so long as he had sufficient power to survive!” Zhang Xuan harrumphed coldly.

“This...”

The crowd fell silent.

In face of death, even the most rational of people could possibly lose themselves. Even the most docile of dogs could bite when forced into a corner, let alone a man as ambitious and prideful as Chu Tianxing.

“It’s with such worries in mind that I specially instructed Sun Qiang, Liu Yang, Elder Xu, and the others that if Chu Tianxing took any suspicious actions, even under the risk of being misunderstood by the populace, they were to get rid of Chu Tianxing as soon as possible. This is the responsibility and burden that we, as master teachers, have to bear!

“It’s due to those commands that Liu Yang infiltrated the royal palace and pretended to be captured while Sun Qiang, Elder Xu, and the other poison masters knocked out all of the guards with their poison. While their actions may have appeared reckless, it was the best they could do in the spur of the moment. It reduced the casualties to the minimum while sparing Qingyuan City from a bloodbath.

“As such, I think that not only should Sun Qiang and the others not be punished, they should even be praised for saving countless lives! Yet, without attempting to investigate and

make sense of the matter, Song shi recklessly sentenced all of them to death. So, how could I possibly watch them be killed? I know that there are rules to the Master Teacher Pavilion, but surely there are times when exceptions have to be made!”

The more Zhang Xuan spoke, the more vehement his voice became.

“Ah...” Hearing those words, Elder Xu and the others stared at one another blankly.

Sacrificing ourselves to save the people... When did our actions suddenly become so noble?

Everything Zhang shi has spoken of, why is it that...

... this is the first we are hearing of it?

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With poison in their hands, they knocked out the tens of thousands of people in the royal palace, rendering them powerless. While it was to save Liu Yang, and Chu Tianxing also deserved it... the problem was that the news was simply too shocking!

If those men had set forth with the intention not to save but to kill, who would have been able to stand against them?

If news spread, there would be unease among the populace. Everyone would start fearing for their lives. The emperors of the other Conferred Empires would also live in fear and apprehension, afraid that those men would come after them one day as well.

This was also why Song Xuan had sentenced them to death without much hesitation, and even Yao Mantian did not think that there was a mistake in Song Xuan's call.

With his Soul Depth of 25.1, Zhang Xuan was able to see through their thoughts and considerations, and he knew that without a suitable reason, there was no way he could free Sun Qiang and the other poison masters from their execution.

Thus, he first gave Elder Xu and the others a formal identity before pinning a heinous crime on Chu Tianxing's head.

This way, he would be able to claim that the actions of Sun Qiang and the other poison masters were not reckless but a planned operation by the Combat Master Hall and Master Teacher Pavilion to save the populace of Qingyuan City.

This way, even if the other Conferred Empires learned of this matter, they would at least view those men as under the control of the Combat Master Hall and Master Teacher Pavilion, so they would not have to worry about a bunch of madmen coming after their lives.

In other words, it was to alleviate the fears of the officials, nobles, and populace so that they would be able to accept this

justified assassination. As long as the populace was appeased, Yao shi and the Master Teacher Pavilion would have no qualms with sparing Sun Qiang and the others.

Elder Xu was only taken aback for a moment before realizing all of this. He turned to look at Zhang Xuan once more with deep admiration in his eyes.

To be able to grasp the thoughts of Song shi, Yao shi, the Master Teacher Pavilion, and the populace and find the most suitable reason to appease all of them simultaneously... that was no easy feat at all!

Zhang Xuan's ability to think on his spot was truly frightening!

Elder Xu alternated his glances at Zhang Xuan and Sun Qiang, and he could not help but mutter beneath his breath, "Why do I feel like that man is our true benefactor instead?"

The benefactor who had saved them had also displayed an exceptional ability to remain composed and think on the spot, coming up with the most rational solution to deal with the problem at hand. This was completely different from that fatty whom they had been locked up with for the past few days!

That fatty Sun Qiang seemed to know nothing but how to eat and sleep. There was really nothing praiseworthy about him at all!

Perplexed, Elder Xu was just about to test Sun Qiang when that fat 'benefactor' he was thinking about suddenly stepped forward.

"Yao shi, I am Sun Qiang, one of the men who was to be executed under Song shi's orders!"

Sun Qiang placed his hands behind his back and lifted his head proudly. With a voice that sounded loudly across the entire square, he spoke.

"I was reluctant to speak too much of this matter for fear that it would cause unease and pandemonium in Qingyuan City, but since our Young Master has already said so much, I'll admit to it. The reason Young Master Liu Yang and I set out to kill Chu Tianxing was due to our uncovering of his depraved ploy to

nab the souls of the cultivators in Qingyuan City and nourish himself! I know that we are weak and insignificant, but if our insignificant lives could be traded for the lives of the entire city, we would still do it without any hesitation!”

After saying those words, Sun Qiang walked up to the crowd with a straightened back, assuming the look of an unsung hero who, despite being misunderstood by many, would still stand up valiantly for the sake of mankind.

“I see...”

“They were all willing to sacrifice themselves to save us... It’s laughable how we actually thought of them as rebels!”

“I never would have thought that Chu Tianxing would actually kill all of us to nourish himself. This is unforgivable!”

“If not for this matter, I never would have known how noble Sun Qiang and those poison masters—ah no, it should be combat masters—are so noble. We have really wronged them.”

...

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s explanation and witnessing Sun Qiang’s selflessness, choosing to sacrifice himself rather than let the entire city fall into chaos, the crowd could not help but feel deeply moved.

The master teachers of the Master Teacher Pavilion also revealed faces of embarrassment.

Despite being master teachers themselves, they really came nowhere close to those noble men standing before them.

“This...” Elder Xu’s lips twitched uncontrollably.

Setting out to kill Chu Tianxing was due to our uncovering of his depraved ploy?

His death was clearly an accident, alright? More important... you even whipped out a knife, wanting to castrate the other party...

Rather than the other party, you are the one who looks more like a villain!

More importantly... in the time of your captivity, you were either eating or sleeping. I have never seen the valiance and selflessness you spoke of in the time I have spent with you...

Then again... this does seem to resemble our benefactor's way of doing things!

Elder Xu rubbed his glabella in frustration, unable to discern the truth.

He had suspected that Zhang Xuan was their true benefactor, but after hearing Sun Qiang's words, which sounded like they could have come from their benefactor as well, he was confused once again.

On the other hand, upon seeing Sun Qiang rush out and behave in such a manner, Zhang Xuan could not help but shake his head. That fellow only knows how to pose!

Zhang Xuan sighed. If only he was half as humble as I am...

No matter what he did, he always strove to avoid trouble and the spotlight wherever possible. On the other hand, his butler seemed to crave to stand under every single spotlight he could find.

Really, from whom did he learn that bad habit from!

However, Sun Qiang's interjection there was also good in a way.

As long as they could generate sufficient buzz over this issue, the conflict would be resolved by itself. Even if Yao Shi found several anomalies with the story, in face of the will of the populace, she would have no choice but to agree to it as well.

Most importantly of all, the betrayal of the emperor of a Conferred Empire was a huge blow to the Master Teacher Pavilion's credibility. If they went along with Zhang Xuan's story, that would make it appear that the Master Teacher Pavilion had been on top of things from the start to the end, making preparations in advance to deal with Chu Tianxing. This way, not only would the reputation of the Master Teacher Pavilion not be impaired, it would even be brought to greater heights!

Under such circumstances, as long as one was no fool, it was clear whom one should stand with.

As expected, Yao shi soon nodded and exclaimed gravely, “I didn’t think that Chu Tianxing would be such a depraved individual! Since the truth has been unraveled, I will report this matter to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and have them reward you handsomely for your contribution to mankind, as well as to make up for the injustice you have suffered!”

“Yao shi!” Hearing Yao shi’s judgement, Song shi’s face paled. “I think that there’s still some suspicious details concerning the story that requires further investigation...”

If Yao shi made such a ruling, it would effectively mean that he had dealt with this matter incompetently, ordering for the execution of meritorious subjects. Just that crime was sufficient to signal his doom!

“Enough!” Yao shi flung her sleeves lividly. “Don’t you think that you have embarrassed yourself enough today? As a quasi 8-star master teacher, instead of investigating the matter properly, you recklessly passed judgement upon others, nearly resulting in the deaths of meritorious subjects. The Master Teacher Pavilion trusted you enough to grant you great authority and power, but you have really been a huge disappointment on this occasion!”

“I...” Song shi’s body shook in despair.

Yao shi waved her hand impassively. “There’s no need to say anymore! I’ll report this matter as it is to the headquarters, so return to the Qianchong Empire and await for the verdict from the headquarters!”

Song shi’s face turned ghastly pale as he staggered backward weakly. Then, he suddenly halted. Slowly, he raised his head to glare at Zhang Xuan with the utmost hostility, “You! It’s all your fault!”

If not for that young man, things would not have developed in such a manner.

If he had settled this matter properly, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters would surely have rewarded him handsomely for his efforts. With the reward, he would have been able to take the final step forward in his cultivation and overcome his bottleneck, successfully making a breakthrough to Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm.

But it was a pity that it was all impossible now!

More importantly, all of this had happened in public, and his manhood had been crippled as well.

No words could begin to describe the sheer hatred he felt for Zhang Xuan at this moment.

Flicking his wrist, he took out his master teacher emblem and dripped a droplet of blood on it.

“Zhang Xuan, you ordered the master teachers to make a move on me and humiliated me. On top of that, you even had your cauldron to cripple me. I, Song Xuan, as a 7-star master teacher, hereby request the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters allow me to challenge Zhang Xuan to a Master Teacher Confrontation! Zhang Xuan, do you dare accept my challenge?”

Following which, a brilliant light burst forth from the emblem, surging toward the sky.

“Song Xuan, how dare you!” Not expecting Song Shi to make this move at such a moment, Yao Shi’s face turned livid.

Whenever there was an irreconcilable conflict between two master teachers, they could choose to resolve it through a Master Teacher Confrontation. In order to initiate a Master Teacher Confrontation, a master teacher would first have to express their intention to the headquarters first, and the headquarters would gauge whether it was appropriate to allow both parties to face one another.

This was the most effective way for two master teachers to resolve the conflict between them. Once both sides accepted the Master Teacher Confrontation, not even an 8-star master teacher like Yao Shi would be able to intervene in the matter anymore.

“Why would I not dare to? I agree,” Zhang Xuan replied impassively.

He had forcefully snatched Sun Qiang and the poison masters back from Song Shi's hands, cornered him verbally to the point that he puked blood, and even crippled his manhood. All of this was done before a huge crowd at that. He would have been surprised if Song Shi could take all that lying.

“Zhang Shi!” Yao Shi anxiously tried to talk Zhang Xuan out of it, but it was too late. Zhang Xuan's agreement had already reached the headquarters.

Boom!

On the Master Teacher Tower not too far away, a surge of light burst forth, forming two massive words in the sky. ‘Permission granted!’

While Song Xuan was a quasi 8-star master teacher, he was still officially classified as a 7-star master teacher. On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was an outstanding genius who had successfully crashed the Master Teacher Pavilion. Thus, the headquarters deemed it appropriate to have the both of them faced one another.

“It's good that you have agreed!” Seeing Zhang Xuan agree to the Master Teacher Confrontation without any hesitation, Song Xuan was slightly taken aback. Gritting his teeth, he said, “Since I was the one who proposed the Master Teacher Confrontation, I'll allow you to choose the type of duel!”

Since he was the one who had proposed the Master Teacher Confrontation, it would only be fair to have the other party decide on the type of duel.

“I can decide the type of duel? Very well then.” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before replying, “I choose Impartation of Heaven's Will!”

Zhang Xuan's Soul Depth had already reached the level comparable to an 8-star master teacher, and he also possessed an innate advantage as a Celestial Master Teacher. Putting aside a quasi 8-star master teacher like Song Shi, it was

doubtful whether even real 8-star master teachers would be able to withstand his Impartation of Heaven's Will or not!

Since the other party was the one proposing the Master Teacher Confrontation, there was no need for him hesitate. Just crush the other party and get it over and done with.

"Impartation of Heaven's Will?" Song shi's eyebrows shot up.

He had heard news about how Zhang Xuan had managed to make all the master teachers of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion willingly acknowledge him as their teacher in the midst of his pavilion crashing. Just from that alone, it could be seen that the other party's Soul Depth was certainly not beneath his.

If it was a duel of Impartation of Heaven's Will, there was really a good chance that he would be utterly crushed.

Even so, Song shi did not think that victory was completely impossible. After all, he was a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator who had been through four lightning tribulations whereas the other party was just an Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle cultivator. As long as he set the rules of the duel properly, he would still have a considerable chance at victory.

"Alright then, I'll agree to it. However, I get to decide on the rules of the duel!"

There were many ways to conduct a duel of Impartation of Heaven's Will. For the sake of fairness, it would be more reasonable for one side to decide on the type of duel and the other to decide on the rules of the duel.

"Of course." Zhang Xuan waved his hand nonchalantly.

Regardless of what the rules of the duel were, as long as the type of duel was Impartation of Heaven's Will, he had nothing to fear.

"Good!" Song Xuan replied.

After which, he turned to Yao shi and clasped his fist. "Yao shi, may I borrow your Brush of Heavenly Impartation?"

"Brush of Heavenly Impartation?"

Yao shi was taken aback for a moment before her face darkened. “It can’t be that you intend to challenge the most difficult duel of the Impartation of Heaven’s Will... Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy?”

1241 Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy

“That’s right!” Song shi said with a cold glint in his eyes.

“Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback for a moment before slowly nodding.

There were some details about the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy in the books of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, so he did have some understanding of it.

Impartation of Heaven’s Will was an ability that could be triggered through one’s Soul Depth when one’s words were aligned with the essence of the world. It served to place the students into a trance, allowing them to better absorb the knowledge that was being imparted. At the same time, it would also generate certain phenomena in the surroundings, such as drawing in spiritual energy, to further support the learning of the students.

The more profound and aligned the content was to the essence of the world, the more effective the Impartation of Heaven’s Will would be.

Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy was similar to Impartation of Heaven’s Will in terms of the principles behind them, but the former was achieved through using an artifact known as the Brush of Heavenly Impartation as a medium.

The Brush of Heavenly Impartation was not a Saint-tier artifact. Rather, it was a unique artifact that was infused with the will of master teachers, and it was capable of discerning the authenticity of the words spoken by other master teachers. If the words spoken were aligned with the essence of the world and offered a fresh perspective on the topic, the Brush of Heavenly Impartation would automatically move to pen down the essence of those words in the form of characters.

The observation of those characters penned down could generate an effect reminiscent of the Impartation of Heaven's Will to the individual, thus hastening the latter's cultivation significantly.

Of course, the characters penned down by the Brush of Heavenly Impartation would not exist eternally. After one observation, the characters would disappear.

There were two reasons the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy was considered the most difficult challenge of Impartation of Heaven's Will.

Firstly, the Brush of Heavenly Impartation was infused with the ideas and understanding of innumerable master teachers, so it had already seen its fair share of ordinary Impartations of Heaven's Will. In order to prompt it into action, the content lectured had to be innovative compared to the other master teachers.

Secondly, it was extremely taxing on one's Soul Depth, even more exhausting than conducting an entire lecture. On average, the writing of a single character could expend 1.0 Soul Depth of a master teacher.

It was for these two reasons that it had left countless master teachers defeated. There were many 7-star pinnacle master teachers who were unable to invoke the movement of the Brush of Heavenly Impartation even after a long lecture, and even for quasi 8-star master teachers, the most characters anyone had evoked from the Brush of Heavenly Will in a single sitting was ten. Nearly no one had been able to break that record.

“The Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy is extremely damaging to one's Soul Depth. Are you sure you want to choose this for the duel?” Yao shi asked with a darkened complexion.

To make the Brush of Heavenly Impartation write was extremely taxing on one's Soul Depth. If a master teacher accidentally pushed themselves too far, it could lead to their state of mind collapsing altogether, and their many years of

cultivation would be ruined. As such, this duel would not only be difficult but dangerous as well.

“I am sure!” Song shi replied firmly.

“You...” Yao shi frowned at Song shi for a moment before turning her gaze to Zhang Xuan. “Zhang shi, what’s your view on this matter? If you don’t wish to proceed with the duel, you can always turn it down.”

As she said those words to Zhang Xuan, she also secretly sent him a telepathic message.

“Song Xuan has specially studied Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy, and he has achieved the outstanding record of having the Brush of Heavenly Impartation pen down eight characters. You have never used the Brush of Heavenly Impartation, so it’ll be extremely difficult for you to defeat him. Why don’t you just turn down his proposal and choose another type of duel?”

Without prior experience with the Brush of Heavenly Impartation, it was difficult to ascertain what kind of content excited it, making it nigh impossible for it to move. So far, there had nearly been no master teachers who had managed to get the Brush of Heavenly Impartation to move on their first attempt.

The reason Song shi had proposed this challenge was because he possessed a Brush of Heavenly Impartation, and he had even achieved an outstanding record of eight characters.

Given that ten characters were the very limits of a quasi 8-star master teacher, his record of eight characters would put him among the top in the field even in the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

Indubitably, Song Xuan had an overwhelming advantage in this challenge, making this duel unfair for Zhang Xuan.

“It’s fine, let’s just go along with his rules.” Knowing that Yao shi was advising him out of goodwill, Zhang Xuan directed a nod along with a smile toward her to express his gratitude.

It was just Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy. While he had never come into contact with it before, he did

not think that it would be too difficult.

“Alright then.” Seeing how nonchalantly Zhang Xuan accepted the duel, Yao shi could not help but shake her head. With a flick of her wrist, a floating golden brush appeared before everyone’s eyes.

It was roughly a chi[1] long, and there was no ink on its tip. When scanning it with one’s Spiritual Perception, one could feel an aura unique to master teachers from it, inducing a slight pressure on one.

With a tap, the brush quietly took its place between the duo. After which, Yao shi looked at the duo and said, “This is the Brush of Heavenly Impartation. Who will be going first?”

“Since Song shi was the one who proposed the rules of the duel, let’s allow him to go first,” Zhang Xuan said humbly.

While he had read the records concerning Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy, he had never tried it himself before, so he was not too certain of the rules concerning it. By allowing the other party to go first, he would have a chance to examine how the Brush of Heavenly Impartation should be used.

“Very well!” Song shi nodded.

He took two steps toward the brush, and his lips began moving.

There was no sound to be heard—he was communicating with the brush via zhenqi telepathy.

Fearing that Zhang Xuan would not understand, Yao shi secretly informed him via zhenqi telepathy. “Through using zhenqi telepathy, the effects of the Impartation of Heaven’s Will are more directed, and that makes it easier to move the Brush of Heavenly Impartation.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded.

Indeed, there was a vast difference between lecturing an individual and lecturing a group of people.

Naturally, one-to-one guidance from a teacher would be more nurturing and effective as compared to a one-to-many

guidance.

Through using zhenqi telepathy, the effects of the Impartation of Heaven's Will would be more directed, thus reducing unnecessary wastage of energy.

Proceeding with his impartation, Song shi's lips never stopped once, and it did not take long before sweat droplets began appearing on his forehead.

However, the brush before him remained completely motionless, as if it had been fixed in place.

Using his Spiritual Perception to assess the situation, Zhang Xuan could clearly sense that Song shi's Soul Depth was rapidly falling with time.

Hu!

After some time, the silent brush finally began moving. With swift strokes, a massive character soon appeared in the sky.

Suspended Imagery!

The character written by the Brush of Heavenly Impartation was not of a language Zhang Xuan was familiar with; it was not the language of a human, Otherworldly Demon, or the Beast Tribe. It was a character he had never ever seen before. But while he could not recognize the character, he found that he was vaguely able to understand the meaning and conception behind it.

If a normal cultivator studied the character, their zhenqi might have been driven to cultivate according to the method depicted within it.

“By scanning the character with your Spiritual Perception, you will be able to learn the ideas infused within the character. However, the character will disappear after a single scan,” Yao shi explained to Zhang Xuan.

Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy could be considered a form of Impartation of Heaven's Will, being able to drive a cultivator's zhenqi through the profound knowledge harnessed within the written characters. As long as a cultivator scanned the characters with their Spiritual Perception, they

would find their body cultivating the technique uncontrollably. However, the characters produced through Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy could only be used once. No matter how profound or mystical the cultivation technique infused within the character was, it could only be viewed by one person.

In a sense, it could be said that the characters were storable Impartation of Heaven's Will that master teachers could gift to those whom they viewed to be fated with them.

Due to the precious knowledge harnessed within these characters, they were extremely high in demand and valuable. However, due to the difficulty in Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy, it was one of those commodities that could not be bought with just money.

With the appearance of the first character, the droplets of sweat on Song shi's head grew more and more numerous. The second character swiftly followed after the first, and then the third and fourth...

As the number of characters increased, Song shi's face grew paler and paler. It seemed like he had expended too much of his Soul Depth, and it was already about to be sapped dry.

Quasi 8-star master teachers had a Soul Depth of 23 and above, but they could not afford to expend all of it in a single breath or else it could lead to the breakdown of their state of mind, and that could potentially introduce countless inner demons in their minds.

Typically speaking, a quasi 8-star master teacher would be in a dangerous position once their Soul Depth fell beneath 15.

Activating his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan observed Song shi intently. As the number of characters written increased, the latter's body trembled with greater and greater intensity, and his Primordial Spirit was starting to show signs of breaking down.

It was fortunate that his Primordial Spirit had been tempered by four lightning tribulations, or else it would have already succumbed.

“Six, seven, eight... Eight characters! That is his record so far...”

By the tenth minute, there were already eight characters floating silently in the sky, emanating a brilliant glow.

Eight words were Song shi’s record so far, as well as his limit. His body trembled non-stop, and it looked as if he would collapse to the ground at any moment. His face was also as pale as a sheet of paper, and there was not the slightest trace of color to be seen.

However, it appeared that Song shi still had no intention of stopping as he continued communicating with the Brush of Heavenly Impartation through his zhenqi telepathy.

Seeing this, Zhang Xuan said with a frown, “If you continue pushing yourself, you will inflict irreparable harm to your body.”

Be it in cultivation or Impartation of Heaven’s Will, a cultivator should always take note of their own limits and strive not to overexert themselves. Otherwise, the overwhelming burden they had forced upon their body could very well cause it permanent impairment.

As a 7-star pinnacle physician, he could tell that Song shi had already reached his limits. Perhaps he would be able to achieve unprecedented results if he forced himself on, but he would also be inflicting permanent damage on his body and possibly his state of mind.

It could cause his soul depth to stagnate permanently, and as a master teacher, that would mean that Song shi would be doomed to remain a quasi 8-star master teacher for life, unable to ascend to greater heights.

Hu! Hu! Hu!

Despite his poor condition, Song shi still gritted his teeth and forced himself on. All of a sudden, a spurt of blood escaped from his mouth, and in just a mere instant, it seemed like he had grown much older.

Huala!

The brush in the air moved once more and wrote the ninth character.

Peng!

That single character seemed to have stolen every single last bit of strength Song shi had. He fell weakly to the ground and fainted.

“Jeez, is there any point going this far?” Seeing how Song shi had pushed himself to his limits for the sake of achieving victory, Zhang Xuan could not help but shake his head in disapproval.

To throw away whatever future he had just to get even with him... that fellow sure was tenacious.

Sighing deeply, he walked up to Song shi and placed his finger on the latter’s acupoints before sending a surge of zhenqi in. A moment later, Song shi slowly opened his eyes.

“You...” Gritting his teeth furiously, Song shi struggled to his feet, and with a livid face, he spat, “It’s too late to show your goodwill. It won’t change a thing...”

Zhang Xuan shrugged. “Whatever pleases you.”

He had only saved the other party out of his obligation as a master teacher. Whether the other party appreciated his favor or not, it did not matter to him.

After regaining consciousness, Song shi quickly took out a pill and ate it, and only then did his complexion finally improve slightly. Following that, he turned to Yao shi and said, “Yao shi, I have completed my Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy. I hope that you can bear witness to my results!”

“You have written a total of nine characters. While it has not broken the highest record of ten characters among quasi 8-star master teachers, you have indeed performed exceptionally,” Yao shi replied with a nod.

The result of nine characters was nothing much among 8-star master teachers, but indubitably, it was an exceptional result among quasi 8-star master teachers. Even the head of the

Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion was unlikely to be able to rival this feat.

“Thank you for your compliment, Yao shi.” Seeing that Yao shi had acknowledged his results, Song shi glanced at Zhang Xuan with narrowed eyes. “Zhang shi, it’s your turn now.”

“Very well.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had seen how the other party had carried out the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy previously, and that had given him a good idea of how he should go about doing it as well.

He walked up to the floating Brush of Heavenly Impartation, and with his hands behind his back, he began lecturing it telepathically. His mouth opened and closed swiftly, making it hard to discern what he was talking about.

The brush was still fidgeting slightly in the air earlier, but upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, it suddenly froze completely, as if someone had nailed it in place.

“It has been nearly an hour now, so why is there no movement from the brush yet?”

“It can’t be that Zhang shi cannot get a single character out of the Brush of Heavenly Impartation, right?”

“If that’s really the case, it would really be terrible...”

After waiting for nearly an hour, the brush remained completely motionless in the air. At this point, the crowd had begun looking at one another, a little apprehensive at the current situation.

Within the same period, Song shi had made the Brush of Heavenly Impartation write down seven to eight words.

Why would there be no movement when it came to Zhang shi?

Could this mean that... he had failed?

[1] One chi is approximately 0.33cm.

1242 Why Are You Playing Dead?

“Zhang shi has never tried the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy before, so it’s inevitable that he’s unfamiliar with the nature of the Brush of Heavenly Impartation. No matter how high his Soul Depth is, it’ll still be hard to bridge this disparity in experience between them.”

“It’s precisely in view of this that Song shi intentionally challenged Zhang shi to this duel. It seems like Zhang shi’s undefeated record is about to come to an end!”

“Indeed, there are no ordinary quasi 8-star master teachers out there. He must have seen through Zhang shi’s flaws, so he intentionally proposed such rules to the duel.”

...

After waiting a while longer, the brush remained completely motionless. The crowd beneath the stage was already beginning to feel a little unnerved.

Even though Heavenly Impartation of Mentor Calligraphy was considered another offshoot of Impartation of Heaven’s Will, its difficulty was far greater than the latter. There were many talented master teachers who possessed high Soul Depth and exceptional insight in cultivation but failed to cause the Brush of Heavenly Impartation to move on their first attempt as well, and this could have been the situation that Zhang Xuan was facing.

“Benefactor, Zhang shi...” Elder Xu looked at Sun Qiang worriedly.

It was to save them that the Young Master of their benefactor ended up being challenged by Song shi. If the young man came to any harm as a result of this matter, they would never be able to rest in peace.

“Don’t worry, our Young Master has never lost in this kind of challenge before!” Sun Qiang waved his hand nonchalantly.

It had been nearly a year since he had met the Young Master, and they had seen innumerable conflicts and battles within this period of time. In comparison, this matter could not have seemed any more trivial, so how could the Young Master possibly lose?

In this moment, the confident Sun Qiang suddenly saw the Young Master on the execution platform stretching his back lazily, seemingly a little exhausted, before taking a few steps back.

“Alright, I’m done.”

After which, Zhang Xuan stopped speaking and stood patiently by the side.

Upon seeing this sight, the flabs on Sun Qiang’s cheeks began to twitch wildly.

The brush had not even moved, and yet, the Young Master actually said that he was done. Wasn’t the Young Master supposed be invincible?

Could it be that he was unable to push on anymore, so he intended to admit defeat?

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan’s actions, Yao shi’s face also warped in astonishment. “Zhang shi, there’s no time limit to the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy. The victor is determined by the number of characters written.”

“I know.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand. “Given how much I have said, it should suffice for me to win.”

“Win?” That word made Yao shi’s eyes roll up, and she nearly choked on her own saliva.

From the moment you started speaking, the Brush of Heavenly Impartation has not even moved a single inch, as if it was sleeping its way through your lecture. Did you really think that you could win with this?

Song shi was also stunned for a moment before sneering coldly. “You want to defeat me without having a single

character written?”

Given how the young man could get all of the higher ranking master teachers in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion to acknowledge him as their teacher, as well as his feat of successfully crashing the Master Teacher Pavilion, there was little doubt that the other party's Soul Depth was at least on par with his. As such, he had been worrying that the young man might just make a miracle here and break his current record. However, from the looks of it now... it seemed like he had been worrying in vain!

If only he had known how weak his opponent was, he would not have forced himself to write the ninth character!

What a waste!

Song shi stepped forward and clasped his fist. “Yao shi, the results should be clear at this point. You were the one who brought the Brush of Heavenly Impartation here, so there's no way I could have cheated in the duel. I beseech you to declare the victor of the duel.”

“This...” Yao shi hesitated.

The Master Teacher Confrontation was only conducted when there was a conflict between two master teachers. The victorious individual would be able to do anything to the losing party without incurring any punishment, and this included murder!

However, Zhang Xuan had just killed the Qingtian Emperor and saved the countless civilians from Qingyuan City. The contribution he had made to mankind was truly great, so if Song shi dealt with him too harshly, it would be hard for her to explain this to the headquarters.

“May I know what kind of punishment Song shi intends to issue Zhang shi upon your victory? Putting aside the fact that he's a genius who has succeeded in pavilion crashing, more importantly, he also just made a huge contribution to mankind.” Instead of announcing the results, Yao shi hesitated for a moment before turning to Song shi to remind him of who his opponent was.

Song shi harrumphed coldly. “Yao shi, rest assured. I won’t kill him. However, he has undermined my dignity and sullied my reputation, and for that, I cannot let him off easily! Firstly, I shall cripple him and make him just like me. After that, I will crush the spirit of the cauldron that injured me. Last but not least, I want him to publicly apologize to me!”

“You want to make him like you?” Yao shi’s lips began twitching uncontrollably.

While she did not witness the sight with her own eyes, she could still tell the current state Song shi was in. By saying that he wanted to make Zhang Xuan like him, wasn’t the other party effectively saying that he wanted to castrate Zhang Xuan?

But...

Even though Song shi’s intention to castrate Zhang Xuan was a little gruesome, it was still possible for Zhang Xuan to fully recover through the Grand Intermittence Pill. The process would be humiliating and excruciating, but at the very least, it would not cause any physical impairment to the young man.

As for destroying the spirit of the cauldron and making a public apology, those were at least acceptable conditions.

“Very well!” After a moment of thought, Yao shi turned to Zhang Xuan and said, “Zhang shi, there is no one in the world who can avoid loss their entire life, so you don’t have to take this matter to heart. As long as you live to see another day, there will still be a chance for you to turn the tables...”

After saying those words, Yao shi sighed deeply before turning to the crowd. With a resounding voice, she declared, “Alright, I’m going to announce the results of the duel...”

But before Yao shi could finish her words, Zhang Xuan suddenly raised his hand and said, “Yao shi, the duel is still ongoing. Why are you announcing the results now?”

“The duel is still ongoing? The Brush of Heavenly Impartation has not written out a single character under your Impartation of Heaven’s Will, so I believe the results should already be

clear for everyone to see! Stop stalling for time!” Song shi sneered coldly.

With so many people present to testify for him, not to mention the fact that Yao shi was presiding over the duel herself, it was impossible Zhang Xuan to refute the results.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “Isn’t there no time limit to the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy? The Brush of Heavenly Impartation might not be moving at the moment, but that doesn’t mean that it won’t move later on.”

“Later on? Are you joking with me? You should know very well that if the Brush of Heavenly Impartation did not move during your lecture, there’s no way that it will move after it. Despite being a 7-star master teacher, are you so gutless as to be unwilling to acknowledge your own defeat?” Song shi mocked.

Seeing that Song shi was unwilling to believe his words, Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment. Just as he was about to explain himself, Yao shi suddenly sighed and interjected, “Zhang shi, the fact that the Brush of Heavenly Impartation hasn’t moved yet is enough to show that you have already lost.”

“Lost?” Hearing those words from Yao shi, the look of disappointment in Zhang Xuan’s eyes deepened. “Yao shi, you are unable to discern it as well?”

“Discern what?” Yao shi frowned.

“Since none of you can tell, I guess I have no choice...” With a look of helplessness, Zhang Xuan turned to the unmoving brush in the air and bellowed, “Why are you still playing dead over there? Hurry up and write!”

I have already given you sufficient time to ponder over the lecture; it’s about time you stop playing dead and get to work!

Not expecting Zhang Xuan to roar at the Brush of Heavenly Impartation like that, everyone was stunned. Yao shi even nearly collapsed to the ground from shock.

“The Brush of Heavenly Impartation has been nourished by the wills of countless master teachers, so it carries the

authority of the Way of Teacher. Bellowing at it like that will only make it even more reluctant to write...”

The Brush of Heavenly Impartation was an extremely proud artifact, such that not even Pavilion Master He of their Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion would dare use such a harsh tone toward it. Yet, this fellow actually insulted it straight to its face.

That was as good as completely offending the brush! Putting aside having it write anything for him, it would already be a blessing if it did not scribble on his face as vengeance!

Grabbing her forehead out of frustration from the foolish action from the young man, Yao shi suddenly heard a commotion beneath the execution platform. Countless piercing screams echoed in the air, as if something inconceivable had just happened.

“What’s wrong?” Frowning, Yao shi raised her head to look at the Brush of Heavenly Impartation once more, and what she saw left her frozen on the spot.

The unmoving Brush of Heavenly Impartation suddenly began shaking intensely as its golden exterior faded into paleness, and a warm glow emanated from within.

Following that, the spiritual energy in an area of two hundred li swiftly converged toward the brush, sapping the entire area dry within just a few moments.

Geji! Geji!

Under the nourishment of the spiritual energy, the Brush of Heavenly Impartation seemed to be undergoing an evolution, and a crisp sound reminiscent of a being breaking out of its cocoon echoed in the air.

“T-this is...” Clenching her fists in agitation, a hint of disbelief surfaced on Yao shi’s elegant face. “The Brush of Heavenly Impartation... is making a breakthrough?”

While the Brush of Heavenly Impartation was not a Saint-tier artifact, there were still differing grades to it. This was similar to how brushes could be of different qualities.

Without a doubt, a Brush of Heavenly Impartation nourished by a 9-star master teacher would be vastly different to one nourished by an 8-star master teacher.

The Brush of Heavenly Impartation that Yao shi owned could be said to be average. It would not have much trouble penning down the quintessence of the teachings of an 8-star low-tier master teacher, but anything more profound than that would prove to be a challenge for it.

Typically speaking, for a Brush of Heavenly Impartation to make a breakthrough, it had to be nourished by the aura of a higher ranked master teacher, so... why would it suddenly achieve a breakthrough after listening to a single lecture from Zhang Xuan?

Not to mention, the huge commotion that was happening at the moment was abnormal as well. Without a doubt, this was no ordinary breakthrough.

Kacha! Kacha!

While everyone was still in a state of shock, the motionless brush finally began to move.

An entire line of words appeared before the crowd in the blink of an eye.

“One, two, three... eighty-seven... It’s moving too fast for me to count properly!” shouted someone amid the crowd.

“Look! It’s writing so fast that smoke is rising from its brush tip,” another person shouted.

“Smoke?” With a look of horror, Song shi quickly turned his gaze to the sky and saw that due to the astounding speed that the Brush of Heavenly Impartation was writing at, a long stream of smoke was rising behind it.

Back when he was conducting the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy, the Brush of Heavenly Impartation wrote every single stroke slowly, as if there was something restraining it. Yet, when it came to Zhang shi, characters seemed to flow out like a flood.

Did there really have to be such a huge disparity between the two of them?

Unlike the flabbergasted crowd, Yao shi gulped as she uttered with a quivering voice, “This is... the Beacon of Heavenly Impartation!”

“Beacon of Heavenly Impartation?” Song shi frowned.

Despite being a quasi 8-star master teacher, he had never heard such a term before.

Yao shi clenched her fists tightly in agitation as she explained, “The Brush of Heavenly Impartation takes every word that it pens down solemnly, rarely making a move unless it hears something that inspires it. However, if it encounters a particularly profound Impartation of Heaven’s Will, it will rush to pen whatever it heard down, leaving behind a trail of smoke in its wake. We named this phenomenon ‘Beacon of Heavenly Impartation’. When in this state, the Brush of Heavenly Impartation will jot down the profoundness of the lecture down word for word.”

“Word for word? This... How can that be possible?” Song shi could hardly believe what he was hearing. “No matter how concise a lecture is, there’s bound to be conjunctions and connectors, and even though those words improve the flow of the lecture, they don’t add value to the content, so the Brush of Heavenly Impartation never jots them down.”

Even the most formidable of teachers could not possibly conduct a lecture where every single word was significant. It was inevitable that some unmeaningful words would be mixed into the lecture.

This was also why the Brush of Heavenly Impartation would only selectively pick out the crux of the Impartation of Heaven’s Will to record.

“It’s indeed true that there are bound to be many meaningless words in an ordinary lecture, but... have you forgotten about that?” Yao shi replied in a shaky tone.

“That?” Song shi was stunned for a moment when a thought streaked across his mind. His body immediately stiffened as if

a wooden stick as he asked weakly, “Is Yao shi referring to the ability that only 9-star master teachers possess... Words of Wisdom?”

“Indeed. Only Words of Wisdom can induce the Beacon of Heavenly Impartation,” Yao shi replied.

Unable to believe what he was hearing, Song shi exclaimed, “B-but... he’s only a 7-star master teacher!”

He turned his gaze back to the brush in the air and saw the latter writing faster and faster. At this rate, it was already moving so swiftly that afterimages could be seen in its wake. At the same time, the lines of words ferociously swallowed the gathered spiritual energy, seemingly ready to break into the world themselves.

“This is too exaggerated! It can’t stop at all!”

Feeling as if he had just received ten thousand points of damage, Song shi nearly burst into tears.

1243 The Noble Zhang shi!

Despite being fellow 7-star master teachers, why was there such a huge gap between the two of them?

He had used all his might to squeeze out a few characters from the Brush of Heavenly Impartation, and yet, when it came to the other party, the brush leaped from place to place swiftly as if a leopard, visibly getting more and more excited as it wrote, to the point where it could not even stop itself anymore...

Was this really the ability that only 9-star master teachers were capable of, Words of Wisdom?

Rumor had it that every single sentence and every word of a 9-star master teacher carried profound wisdom behind it. Putting aside listening to an entire lecture, even a few words from them could benefit one greatly.

Even though the young man before him was a talented individual, no matter what, he was still only a 7-star master teacher. So, how could he possibly possess the ability of a 9-star master teacher?

But if that wasn't the case, there was no way to explain the Brush of Heavenly Impartation's sudden breakthrough and outburst!

"Let's see what he has lectured on..." Unable to believe his eyes, Song shi immediately began examining the characters written in the air.

With just a single look, his body could not help but begin trembling.

It would be impossible to comprehend the deepest significance harnessed within the lecture without scanning the characters with his Spiritual Perception, but nevertheless, as a quasi 8-star master teacher, he could still roughly fathom the meaning of those written characters.

He could feel that those characters harnessed knowledge that was directed toward the very essence of cultivation itself, and

with just a glance, he already found himself gradually growing more and more absorbed in them.

No, I mustn't look... Otherwise, I might really just become his student!

Biting his tongue to bring back his rationality, Song shi quickly closed his eyes.

If he cultivated according to the method imparted by Zhang Xuan, that would mean that he had accepted the other party's guidance, and that would effectively make the young man a half a teacher to him.

He was there to challenge Zhang Xuan to a Master Teacher Confrontation to right his reputation and regain his dignity, not to acknowledge a teacher!

But... considering how profound this cultivation technique is, if I study it carefully, there's a good chance that it could become my impetus for a breakthrough to the Grand Dominion realm.

Gritting his teeth tightly, the angel and the devil within Song shi's heart began clashing with one another.

He did not want to become Zhang Xuan's student, but this was a truly valuable opportunity for him to achieve a breakthrough. Such an opportunity was hard to come by, and he had a feeling that he would regret it for life if he allowed this chance to slip through his fingers!

Deeply conflicted, Song shi fell into an internal struggle.

"There are around... one thousand, two thousand, three thousand... Forget it, it's too much trouble to count. In any case, there are more than nine words here. Brush, you don't have to write anymore."

Not only was the crowd astonished by the sight before them, even Zhang Xuan was dumbfounded. It had taken a while before he finally recovered. Knowing that he had already won the duel, he turned to Yao shi and said, "Yao shi, this duel should be my victory, right?"

Hearing Zhang Xuan's words, Yao shi's eyebrows shot up.

Despite spurting blood and passing out, Song shi only managed to squeeze out nine words. On the other hand, in the blink of an eye, you have already written three thousand words... Ah, no, it has written another two thousand words while I was speaking. Five thousand words...

If this isn't sufficient to be considered a victory, what else can be considered a victory?

Yao shi hurriedly nodded. "Of course, you are the victor!"

"Thanks." Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan raised his head and saw that the Brush of Heavenly Impartation was still writing. At this point, there were already more than eight thousand words in the sky.

"I said that it's enough—didn't you hear me?" Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure.

What the heck is this!

Since I told you to stop, you should stop obediently. To keep writing and writing, are you boasting about how fast you are able to write?

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had lost his temper, Yao shi quickly explained with a bitter smile, "Zhang shi, under the effects of your Words of Wisdom, the Brush of Heavenly Impartation will have to pen down the content of your entire lecture before it is able to rest."

It was not that the brush did not want to stop, but it could not!

Words of Wisdom was a truly formidable ability. While it was a skill that only 9-star master teachers were capable of, it was not something that all 9-star master teachers were able to pull off.

"Is that so? I guess there's no helping it then." Scratching his head awkwardly, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply before waiting patiently.

Some time later, the brush in the air finally came to a halt. Completely exhausted by the sheer amount of work it had done, its brush tip was split haggardly, and it looked as if it had done enough work for its entire lifetime.

“You are finally done...” Zhang Xuan sighed in exasperation.

But right after he spoke those words, the brush struggled up into the air and wrote down a line of characters. They were the words that he had just spoken.

“You... Are you doing this on purpose?” Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

The brush continued writing—Are you doing this on purpose?

“...” Zhang Xuan was on the verge of clawing his hair away.

“Yao shi, look! It’s copying me!”

Brush moved again—Yao shi, look! It’s copying me!

“This... It might be because Zhang shi said too much earlier, such that it has developed a habit of penning down your every word. As a result, even when you aren’t executing the Impartation of Heaven’s Will, it still moves to record your words,” Yao shi explained with a twitching mouth.

This was also the first time she had seen a situation like this, so she was not too sure.

“If that’s the case, I think it would be good for you to put your Brush of Heavenly Impartation away now. Otherwise, I fear that it might end up scribbling all over Qingyuan City,” Zhang Xuan remarked as he looked at the lines of ten thousand words in the air.

Currently, those words had already covered around a half of the massive square. If the Brush of Heavenly Impartation was allowed to continue, it would not be long before the entire sky over Qingyuan City was dyed black!

“You’re right!” Seeing how the words that Zhang Xuan had just said were being written down, Yao shi shook her head helplessly. She immediately stepped forward to stow the Brush of Heavenly Impartation back into her storage ring, but the latter suddenly jolted wildly before abruptly plummeting from the sky and falling weakly to the ground.

“This is...” Anxious, Yao shi immediately rushed over to take a look. Upon closer examination, her face darkened. “It has fainted from exhaustion!”

While the Brush of Heavenly Impartation was neither a Saint-tier artifact nor a Spirit-tier artifact, in order to be able to discern the Impartation of Heaven's Will spoken by a master teacher, it had to possess some degree of sentience. The abrupt overload of profound information from Zhang Xuan, along with the physical exhaustion from writing so many words, had sapped its energy dry, resulting in it collapsing.

“Fainted from exhaustion?”

“Such a thing is possible, too?”

Hearing Yao shi's words, a huge commotion broke out beneath the stage. All the master teachers had looks of shock on their faces, as if they had seen a ghost.

Usually, it was the master teachers who fainted during the Brush of Heavenly Impartation out of exhaustion from the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy, and yet... Zhang Xuan actually managed to make the Brush of Heavenly Impartation faint from exhaustion instead.

Was this really happening before them?

They could not help but pinch themselves to check if they had imagined everything that had happened before them.

Pu!

In this moment, a spurt of blood showered the sky. Unable to suppress his injuries any longer, Song shi fainted as well.

He had gone to the extent of expending every last bit of his Soul Depth in order to break his previous record, and yet, with just a seemingly leisurely lecture, Zhang Xuan actually managed to break his record by more than a thousandfold!

More importantly, he even made the Brush of Heavenly Impartation faint out of exhaustion?

Could such an existence still be called a human?

Not even real 9-star master teachers would be as outrageous as him!

“Zhang shi, how do you intend to deal with these characters?” Yao shi swiftly packed the Brush of Heavenly Impartation

back into her storage ring before turning her gaze to Zhang Xuan.

Given that those characters had been written from Zhang Xuan's Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy, naturally, he possessed ownership over them.

"This..." Zhang Xuan looked at the huge accumulation of characters in the sky, and he could not help but feel his head hurt.

Those words were so densely packed together that it caused a huge shadow to loom over the square. They would be an eyesore if he left them there.

Noticing the conflicted look on Zhang Xuan's face, Yao shi stepped forward and clasped her fist. "From how you were able to induce the Beacon of Heavenly Impartation, causing the Brush of Heavenly Impartation to continue writing non-stop, there's no doubt that the knowledge harnessed within those words is deeply aligned with the essence of the world. If Zhang shi doesn't mind, I'm willing to use two Saint intermediate-tier artifacts to purchase the characters from you."

As an 8-star master teacher, she knew that those characters in the sky were incredibly valuable. It was no exaggeration to say that they were worth an entire city or even more!

"You wish to purchase them?" Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Those characters could actually be sold?

"That's right." Yao shi nodded. "Through a unique method, it's possible to store those characters within a book and study them whenever one wants to."

Despite existing in a tangible form, those characters could be said to be no different from a physical embodiment of the Impartation of Heaven's Will. As long as a cultivator scanned those words with his Spiritual Perception, they would be able to interpret the knowledge harnessed within it and benefit greatly from it.

Despite being an 8-star master teacher herself, Yao shi could sense that the knowledge harnessed within those characters

could help her rise to greater heights.

As such, putting aside two Saint intermediate-tier artifacts, she would not hesitate to up the stakes if needed to!

“Yao shi is offering to buy those characters with two Saint intermediate-tier artifacts?”

“Doesn’t that mean that those characters are literally words of gold?”

Taking the discussion between the two in, the master teachers beneath the execution platform were utterly stunned.

Saint intermediate-tier artifacts were incredibly valuable. There were no more than a couple of them within the entire Qingyuan Empire.

Converted to high-tier spirit stones, they would be worth several ten thousand!

To actually offer that much money in exchange for those characters... Granted that it was Zhang shi’s lecture, but it was still a really huge sum to pay for them!

“Two Saint intermediate-tier artifact?” Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before eventually shaking his head, rejecting Yao shi’s offer.

He usually relied on his strength and wits in order to defeat others. In comparison, his weapons seemed to play a smaller role. Not to mention, he already had the Golden Origin Cauldron, so any more Saint intermediate-tier artifacts would be unnecessary.

Seeing Zhang Xuan reject her offer, Yao shi quickly replied, “Zhang shi, I am willing to negotiate the price with you if you find my offer inadequate. If two Saint intermediate-tier artifacts aren’t enough... what do you think of three?”

“It’s not about your offer.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He swept through the crowd with his gaze before speaking with a resounding voice. “Chu Tianxing has committed many reprehensible deeds in his time, and he deserves the fate that befell him. Even though those deeds were orchestrated by the

Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, there's no doubt that our Master Teacher Pavilion was somewhat responsible for this matter.

“Despite serving as the guardians of mankind, we allowed the Otherworldly Demons to infiltrate our ranks and cause harm to our brethren. It's fortunate that we managed to stop Chu Tianxing in time before he could conduct his depraved ritual, but it's still a fact that our lapse in duty endangered countless innocent lives in Qingyuan City.

“As such, in order to make up for our mistake, I would like to donate this Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy to Qingyuan City as a show of repentance from our Master Teacher Pavilion. We will right where we have erred and reflect on where we have failed!”

“This...”

“He's actually giving such valuable characters to us?”

“That is worth three Saint intermediate-tier artifact! To gift it to us just like that...”

Hearing Zhang Xuan's decision, the eyes of the civilians of Qingyuan City reddened.

To view money as if it was nothing more than dirt, giving them the characters that were easily worth three Saint intermediate-tier artifacts without much hesitation... He was a true master teacher!

“Actually, the matter concerning Vice Pavilion Master Tian and Chu Tianxing has already left me a little doubtful about the competency of the Master Teacher Pavilion. However, after hearing Zhang shi's words, my trust in the Master Teacher Pavilion has been restored!”

“Indeed. Without their protection, there's no way we could have lived in peace for so many years. Perhaps, we might even have fallen under the treacherous schemes of Chu Tianxing and lost our lives.”

...

While the crowd of Qingyuan City had not said anything, the problems that had surfaced one after another in recent days

had really left them a little disappointed in the competency of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

After all, the betrayal of a vice pavilion master and an emperor of a Conferred Empire was no laughing matter. Yet, the Master Teacher Pavilion had been oblivious to something as huge as this for such a long period of time. Inevitably, they had started to question the Master Teacher Pavilion's leadership internally.

However, the display of magnanimity from Zhang Xuan reassured them that the Master Teacher Pavilion was still devoted to its responsibilities and duties, and this had helped to restore public faith in them.

Hearing the words from the crowd and the agitation on their faces, Yao shi clasped her fist toward Zhang Xuan and bowed. "Zhang shi's magnanimity is truly worthy of praise. I was being too narrow-minded."

She had been thinking of how she should dispel the various adverse consequences of the matter and re-establish the prestige and authority of the Master Teacher Pavilion among the populace. However, from the looks of it now, it seemed like there was no need for her to do so anymore.

As long as Zhang Xuan was around, the unrest among the populace of Qingyuan City would be settled easily.

In just two short hours, the young man had already effectively become the number one figure of Qingyuan City, wielding authority incomparable by anyone else there.

With just a few simple moves, he had already managed to reduce the adverse effects from this incident to the bare minimum. It seemed like the young man did not just possess superior talent. More importantly, his outlook toward matters was also far broader and deeper than others. Compared to him, she really had much to learn.

"Alright, I shall announce the results of the Master Teacher Confrontation now. For the duel of Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy between Song shi and Zhang shi, Zhang shi is the victor!" Yao shi declared loudly, her voice sounding across the entire capital.

“Wonderful!”

“Great!”

“I knew that Zhang shi would win!”

Loud cheers broke out throughout the capital.

Not expecting Zhang Xuan to receive the admiration of so many people within such a short period of time, the awoken Song shi’s face paled. “You all...”

After announcing the results, Yao shi turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Zhang shi, since you have achieved victory... may I know how you intend to deal with Song shi?”

1244 Zhang shi Is Conducting a Lecture!

Upon hearing Yao shi's questions, the crowd also swiftly sent curious gazes over.

They had heard Song shi's earlier words as well. Not only did he want to cripple Zhang Xuan's manhood, he even wanted to kill the Golden Origin Cauldron and have Zhang Xuan issue a public apology to him.

Considering that the tables had turned, they could not help but want to know how Zhang Xuan would deal with this situation.

Given how callous Song shi had been previously, any punishment that Zhang Xuan enforced on him would not be considered overboard.

At the same time, Song shi also tightened his fists as he nervously awaited Zhang Xuan's verdict.

The losing party of the Master Teacher Confrontation had to comply with whatever request the victor demanded. This was the rule established by the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Zhang Xuan waved his hand and said, "Song shi attempted to kill Sun Qiang, Elder Xu, and the other meritorious subjects, but that was due to the compelling situation forcing him to do so. While I disagree with his actions, I can understand his rationale for doing so. Other than that, I do not have a personal grudge with him either... and if we look to the heart of the issue, my artifact was indeed at fault for going too far and injuring him. Thus, I won't enforce any punishment on him."

In a sense, the assault from the Golden Origin Cauldron was already a sufficient for punishment against Song shi. At this point, he was not interested in pursuing the matter any further. That would only make him appear narrow-minded and unforgiving.

"As expected of Zhang shi, magnanimous and gracious!"

“Indeed! They are both master teachers from the Master Teacher Pavilion, so why is there such a huge disparity in their characters?”

“Huge disparity? More like they aren’t even on the same level!”

“From today onward, Zhang shi will be my idol! Anyone who wants to get to him must go through me!”

“Hey, Zhang shi doesn’t belong to you alone! He’s my idol too.”

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, a wave of admiration rippled through the crowd.

Even Yao shi could not help but nod in approval.

It was no wonder Zhang Xuan was able to rise to such heights at his young age. Putting aside his talent, what was more important was his heart.

“Despite Zhang shi’s magnanimity, there’s no doubt that Song shi has failed to carry out his mission as an envoy from the headquarters properly. He passed judgement upon Sun Qiang and the other poison masters without investigating the issue properly, nearly inflicting grievous injustice upon meritorious subjects,” Yao shi said. “No matter what, he still has to take responsibility for his actions. I’ll report this matter to the headquarters and have them make a judgement.”

Zhang Xuan sparing Song shi of his punishment was only a result of his victory from the Master Teacher Confrontation. Putting that aside, there was still no doubt that Song shi had committed a huge oversight in the handling of this incident, so he still had to be punished for his lapse in responsibility.

This was the rule of the Master Teacher Pavilion, so it had to be upheld.

“Thank you, Zhang shi. Thank you, Yao shi.” Hearing the judgement, Song shi heaved a sigh of relief. He could not help but glance at Zhang Xuan with complex emotions in his eyes.

Previously, when the young man crippled him with his artifact, he had been so angry that he could have murdered the other

party. But now... seeing how the young man's every action was dedicated to fulfilling his responsibility as a master teacher, not forgetting his role regardless of the situation, he could not help but feel deep respect for the other party.

Perhaps, that was how a real master teacher should act.

“There's no need to stand on ceremony.” Seeing that the matter was finally resolved, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief on the inside.

Raising his gaze toward the sky once more, he raised his finger toward the many characters and tapped lightly.

Hong long!

The first character abruptly burst apart, and concentrated spiritual energy diffused into the surroundings, shrouding the entire Qingyuan City.

In the blink of an eye, every lifeform in Qingyuan City heard a word resounding in the depths of their souls. A single word it might have been, but the rich intent infused into it left them falling into a trance.

Pah pah pah pah!

The characters popped one after another, and more and more words sounded.

“In the Way of Cultivation, the body as the world, and the spirit as Yin-Yang...”

Hearing those words, Yao shi and Song shi could not help but fall into a daze.

From the moment they saw those characters, they knew that the knowledge they harnessed would be anything but ordinary. However, it was only when they heard it with their own ears that they realized just how profound it truly was.

Compared to the content in those characters, the cultivation techniques that they cultivated were truly inefficient and slow, as if a crawling snail. Hardly worth a mention!

Suppressing her urge to cultivation, Yao shi's eyes widened in bewilderment. “Zhang shi is converting the characters of the

Heavenly Impartation of Mentor's Calligraphy back to Impartation of Heaven's Will!"

Taking a look at the square beneath her feet, all of the cultivators in her sight had already sat down cross-legged on the ground, driving their zhenqi according to the method depicted through those words.

Pilipala!

Not too long later, as if an endless firecracker had been lit, the crisp echoes symbolizing breakthroughs in cultivation sounded amid the crowd.

This is...

It was understandable that a cultivation technique as profound as the one lectured by Zhang Xuan would cause the cultivators to swiftly achieve breakthroughs... but beyond the crowd, a group of wild chickens, flying birds, and many other animals were also swiftly growing stronger, and they were beginning to make breakthroughs as well.

Am I really not dreaming?

Astonished, Yao shi extended her Spiritual Perception to scan the area, and she swiftly saw countless donkeys, horses, geese, chicks... and as if they had all started cultivating as well, their auras swiftly surged along with Zhang Xuan's words.

It isn't just those flying birds, even the domesticated animals are achieving breakthroughs as well!

Shocked beyond words, she was just about to retract her Spiritual Perception when another sight she saw nearly caused her knees to cave in from sheer astonishment.

Hmm? Weren't those metal pipes bent earlier? Why did they suddenly straighten themselves?

The bent metal pipes just a little in front of the execution platform had, at some point in time, become incredibly straight, as if valiant soldiers standing at attention, exuding a heroic aura.

To actually be able to talk a metal pipe into becoming erect...

Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, Yao shi took another glance at Zhang Xuan, and she felt as if she was going insane.

This had already far exceeded the ability of a normal Impartation of Heaven's Will!

It's Heart of a Teacher, Yao shi thought as her eyes lit up in excitement.

Only those who possessed the Heart of a Teacher would wield such capabilities!

Who would have thought that the young man before her had actually comprehended this at such a young age?

It was no wonder he would unreservedly gift those valuable characters to the crowd and consider the welfare of the Master Teacher Pavilion and mankind in everything he did.

A thought emerged in Yao shi's mind.

If I could accept such a formidable genius as my student...

There was no denying Zhang Xuan's outstanding talent, but his potential was limited by his environment. The Qingyuan Empire, ranked last among the Conferred Empires, was simply too backward, and it was not big enough for him to fully spread his wings.

If she could accept him as her student, bring him to the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, and accord him the best resources there, he would be able to avoid many detours in his cultivation and improve swiftly.

When he finally displayed his brilliance, as his teacher, her reputation would also spread far and wide.

I should ask him later.

Glancing at the slowly disappearing characters in the sky and the countless cultivators achieving a breakthrough around her, Yao shi suppressed her urge for the moment and waited patiently for the Impartation of Heaven's Will to come to an end.

...

At the same time, in a smithy located at the suburbs of Qingyuan City...

In a compact room, an old metalsmith was forging a metal ingot beneath his hammer.

An elder walked up to the old metalsmith and smiled. “Old Zhou, I am still lacking eighteen metal pots. You must complete them for me by today!”

The old metalsmith was neither a blacksmith nor a celestial designer—he was just an ordinary metalsmith who forged basic necessities for a living.

“There’s no need to rush me, don’t you have any confidence in me? I’ll surely finish your order by today!” the metalsmith replied with a smile.

Like magic, just with a few strikes from the hammer in his hands, the metal ingot swiftly assumed the shape of a pot.

” I have known you for several decades now—of course I have confidence in you!” the elder said.

With several decades of fellowship, they had long become close friends with one another.

The pots, spoons, and other necessities forged by the old metalsmith were exceptionally exquisite and elegant. Whenever he placed the products of the old metalsmith on display, they would be swiftly sold out. Even the nobles of the country had placed orders for the old metalsmith’s works with him, offering to pay a premium on them. It was for this reason that he would always frequent the smithy of the old metalsmith and acquire his goods.

The metalsmith gestured to the chair by the side as he said, “Yes, wait there for me. I should be done soon, so let’s have a cup of tea together later on...”

However, something happened at this moment that caused the metalsmith’s hammer to freeze in place.

Ding ding dang dang!

The various pots and bowls he had hung on the walls suddenly began moving by themselves despite the absence of wind.

They delightfully leaped to the ground before marching out of the smithy in a neat line.

“This...” Unable to believe his eyes, the old metalsmith rubbed his eyes.

Those pots and bowls were just ordinary goods, possessing no spirit at all. Why would they suddenly flee by themselves?

Watching as a bunch of spoons make their way out of the room, the elder who had been speaking to the old metalsmith a moment ago was also dumbstruck. He quickly rushed up to the metalsmith and asked, “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know either...” The metalsmith stared at the fantastical sight before him in a daze.

Slowly, his dazed expression twisted into one of horror.

Those were the goods that he had hammered with great effort! If they ran away, wouldn’t his effort all have been in vain?

Thus, he swiftly dashed to the door to block the marching of the various metalworks, but at that moment, he suddenly felt a sharp ache in his palm, which caused his clenched hand to open. The metal hammer he was holding made use of this opportunity to leap to the ground and dash out of the room.

“Don’t run!”

That hammer had been with him for several decades now, and he depended on it for a living. The old metalsmith immediately gave chase, but the following moment, the metal door to the smithy abruptly smashed into his head, knocking him back.

Before he could even process what was going on, the entire house began shaking intensely before furiously running after the metal hammer.

“Even my house is running away?” The metalsmith was crazed.

It was one thing for his pots and bowls to run away, but for his house to escape as well... Where was he going to live from now on? Where was he going to smith his goods in the future?

Panicked, the old metalsmith turned to his old friend and pleaded, “Old Liang, don’t you have an aerial spirit beast? Help me check what’s going on! I can’t lose my wares and house just like that!”

“Alright!” The elder who had been speaking to him earlier nodded.

With a loud whistle, an aerial spirit beast immediately flew to the ground. The elder stepped on the back of the aerial spirit beast and flew into the distance.

Not long later, the elder returned with a pale face, as if he had just seen something supernatural happening before him.

“What’s wrong, Old Liang? Is this the work of some kind of burglar?” the old metalsmith asked anxiously.

He had heard rumors about formidable burglars being able to steal items even from a distance away.

Could one of these burglars have cast some kind of sorcery over his possessions, causing them to run out of his control and flee?

“It’s not the doing of a burglar but...”

The elder swallowed a mouthful of saliva, but his voice still sounded extremely hoarse.

“... Zhang shi is conducting a lecture!“I would just like to point out that Chinese words do have connectors and conjunctions, but it’s possible for sentences to still flow logically without meaningless connectors and conjunctions too. On the other hand, it’s impossible to do so in English, so the ‘Words of Wisdom’ effect where every single word has some kind of significance is pretty much impossible to bring out here.

1245 Honorary Elder

“Zhang shi is conducting a lecture?”

The old metalsmith was taken aback. Pricking up his ears and listening intently, there was indeed a faint voice to be heard a distance away.

As it was too far away, the voice sounded indistinct. Nevertheless, just by catching traces of it, he could already feel the zhenqi in his body leaping into action, moving along with the other party’s words.

“Is this... Impartation of Heaven’s Will?” the metalsmith asked hoarsely as his eyes lit up in agitation.

Even though he was only an ordinary metalsmith, he had still heard much about the master teachers. It was indeed troublesome that his pots and bowls had run away, but this was also a rare opportunity for him. There was a vast difference in the price of an ordinary pot and one that had been infused with a spirit.

With his exquisite craftsmanship, he could sell his pots for a thousand gold coins easily. However, if his pots were infused with spirit, he would have to think twice about selling them even if the buyer were to offer him a middle-tier spirit stone!

Of course... before considering any of that, he had to capture his escaped pots and metalware back first!

Hu!

Not too long later, the old metalsmith finally managed to catch up to his pots and bowls, and his hammer was finally back in his hands as well. This time though, he could feel a bloodline connection with his hammer, and it felt as if the hammer had no weight at all.

With this, I won’t need to rest in between my forging anymore. I can finish the eighteen pots required well before afternoon! As long as I have this hammer in hand, I’ll be able to lead a far

better life than before, the old metalsmith thought as he clenched his fists in agitation.

Gazing in the direction that the voice had come from, the old metalsmith kneeled onto the floor with reddened eyes.

“Thank you, Zhang shi.”

...

The same sight was happening throughout every street and alley of Qingyuan City.

Zhang Xuan’s Impartation of Heaven’s Will was not only able to raise one’s cultivation, it was also highly effective toward one’s proficiency in an occupation. There were some apothecaries who found themselves successfully forging pills that they had failed countless times before after listening to Zhang Xuan’s lecture. There were also saint beasts who were unable to reproduce due to their strong bloodlines suddenly finding themselves carrying twins in their wombs after listening to the lecture.

...

Padah!

When the final character above the square dissipated, the cultivators in the square gradually roused from the trance they were in, and an ardent heat could be seen in their eyes.

Ordinary Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy was only sufficient for the cultivation of an individual, but Zhang Xuan’s had been actually able to release a resounding voice, reminiscent of an Impartation of Heaven’s Will. Within just a short period of time, they had found themselves benefiting greatly from his teachings.

Everything felt so mystical that they could not help but feel a little dreamy within.

“Teacher!”

One by one, they kneeled onto the ground and kowtowed in agitation.

Having benefited from the Zhang Xuan's guidance, he could be considered half a teacher to them.

From that day onward, nearly all of the master teachers and cultivators in Qingyuan City would be Zhang Xuan's students, granting him unparalleled authority and prestige in the city.

Seeing the gazes of admiration around him, Yao shi remarked in awe, "To make countless submit to him through just words... this is a true master teacher!"

Despite being an 8-star master teacher, she knew that she was incapable of doing the same.

The talent that the young man before her possessed far surpassed her imagination. Perhaps, he might even be on par with the offspring of the Sage Clans!

Furthermore, despite having so many people acknowledging him as their teacher simultaneously, he showed no signs of excitement or complacency at all. Just by his state of mind alone, there was no doubt that he would eventually achieve great things in the future!

I must accept him as my student! Yao shi clenched her fists tightly in determination.

As talented as Zhang Xuan was, he still was not an 8-star master teacher yet, so she stood a chance in becoming the young man's teacher.

As long as she groomed him well, it would not be long before she became one of the most respected figures in the Master Teacher Continent!

With such thoughts in mind, Yao shi could no longer hold herself back anymore. Turning to Zhang Xuan, she asked, "Zhang shi, are you are interested in cultivating in the Empire Alliance?"

"Empire Alliance?"

"That's right. The cultivation techniques and resources they have there are incomparable to those of the Qingyuan Empire. As long as you agree to become my student, I can take you there and vie for the best resources for you. With my guidance,

I guarantee that you will become a real 8-star master teacher within the next fifty years!” Yao shi nodded.

“Fifty years?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan shook his head. “No thank you.”

If he needed fifty years to advance to an 8-star master teacher, he would already be lying in the dirt with tall grass above his grave.

To others, to be able to become an 8-star master teacher before seventy was already a formidable achievement, but to him, that was a speed even slower than a snail’s crawl. It could not generate the slightest enthusiasm in him.

Despite Zhang Xuan’s rejection, Yao shi did not show the slightest hint of anger. Instead, she began patiently explaining, “Zhang shi, this is really a good opportunity. The Empire Alliance is filled with many different factions, and without someone to bring you around, you will face many obstacles there.”

“Factions?”

“The Empire Alliance is basically a power consisting of multiple organizations, namely the Eight Conferred Empires and several smaller Sage Clans. Due to the independent nature of these organizations, there are often conflicts of interest, resulting in the rise of several different factions in the Master Teacher Pavilion. Without any understanding of the various factions, it’s very easy for one to get on the wrong side of the more powerful factions, which would make it hard for one to survive there,” Yao shi replied with a nod.

“I am not taking advantage of you by accepting you as my disciple. By coming under my protection, you will be able to better maneuver your way around the politics there and receive the recognition from the various powers. Otherwise, no matter how talented you are, it will be difficult for you to rise through the ranks. After all, given how big the Empire Alliance is, one thing that they don’t lack is talented individuals!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had read books concerning the Empire Alliance, so he had some understanding of how it operated.

Just as Yao shi said, the Eight Conferred Empires were only a portion of the Empire Alliance.

Some of the weaker Sage Clans and sects were under them as well.

As a power consisting of multiple individual organizations, it was inevitable that multiple factions would rise in the Empire Alliance so that these organizations would be able to protect their interests.

“There’s no need to give me a response right now. You can give it some thought,” Yao shi said.

“Regarding that, I’m curious, why do the headquarters allow the master teachers of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion to engage in factional rivalry?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

In the previous places he had been to, the master teachers from the same Master Teacher Pavilion would typically get along harmoniously with one another. While there was some rivalry and conflict, it was mostly between individuals rather than factions. So, why would the headquarters turn a blind eye to such chaos in the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion?

“When Kong shi first established the Master Teacher Pavilion, he once said that in order for mankind to grow swiftly, their true nature mustn’t be restrained. There should always be some degree of competition and conflict internally, or else peace will slowly result in stagnation and decline,” Yao shi explained.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

This was similar to the rules of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy.

Unless in the face of affairs that threatened the welfare of mankind, the management of the academy would usually stay out of the rivalry among students.

Only with competition would there be a sense of urgency for improvement.

If each independent power felt that their interest would be assured by a higher power, while it was true that this would allow the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion to become united in the short-term, in the long-run, these independent powers could grow complacent and lazy.

It was also for this reason that the regional Master Teacher Pavilion was entrusted with the full responsibility of dealing with whatever conflicts they faced on their land. Unless the problem surpassed their capability, the direct headquarters would not interfere in the matter.

As long as the factional rivalry did not get out of hand, maintaining such a state in the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion was not necessarily a bad decision.

It was through such a system that talents rose one after another in the Master Teacher Pavilion, and despite dozens of millenniums passing, its position as the number one occupation still remained unwavering.

This was survival of the fittest. Only through a cycle of continuous selection would the most capable master teachers be left within the organization.

“I really dislike dealing with such factional rivalries...” Zhang Xuan pinched his glabella in frustration.

It was simply too tiring to engage in politics against others.

“I understand your point of view, but there’s no way to avoid it. Unless you become an elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, you will eventually be dragged into the factional rivalry as well!” Yao shi replied with a sigh.

“Elder?”

“Un. The elders of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion have a vote in deciding major affairs, and just for that, every single organization lobbies them. It could be said that they possess a transcendental position in the Empire Alliance, and no one dares offend them!” Yao shi explained.

“How can one become an elder then?” Zhang Xuan was a little moved by that idea.

By becoming an elder, he would be spared from the politics that he hated, and he would also be able to enjoy cultivation resources as a result of that position. Two birds with one stone!

“You want to become an elder?” Yao shi was rendered speechless.

That fellow sure knew how to dream.

Even she, an 8-star low-tier master teacher, was not qualified to become an elder. Yet, a 7-star master teacher like him was actually already thinking about it...

Aren't you being too ambitious?

Suppressing her displeasure at the young man's conceit, Yao shi explained patiently, “In order to become an elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, you first have to become an 8-star master teacher, and your cultivation has to reach Saint 7-dan. More importantly, you must receive Pavilion Master He's recognition and approval. Without any of that, it's impossible to become an elder!”

At this point, Yao shi sighed deeply before continuing. “My teacher is an 8-star high-tier master teacher, and he has been applying for the seat of an elder for thirty years now. Despite that, he still has not been approved!”

If only her teacher was an elder, she would have been in one of those blessed lands for cultivation at this moment instead of being dispatched here to the remote Qingyuan Empire to deal with this trouble.

Since even her teacher was not qualified to be an elder, how could the young man before her possibly stand a chance? Even if he possessed astounding talent, he was still only a 7-star master teacher!

One must know that the number of talented master teachers increased exponentially going up the ranks. Zhang Xuan might have been an incredible genius, but which of the current 8-star master teachers were not astounding talents back in their time?

Besides, one had to get past Pavilion Master He in order to become an elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion. If it was that easy to earn Pavilion Master He's approval, there would not only have been twelve elders in the entire Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion over the course of the past few centuries.

"I see... It's indeed not easy to become an elder." Hearing that even Yao shi's teacher, an 8-star high-tier master teacher and Saint 7-dan expert, had not succeeded in becoming an elder yet, Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly, realizing that he might have been a little too impudent.

"Indeed..." Yao shi shook her head and sighed deeply once more. "As such, it's impossible to avoid the factional rivalry in the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion. Since that's the case, the only way to protect yourself is by choosing a side to stand with and coming under the faction's protection. Even though my teacher is not an elder, he's still possesses one of the managerial roles there. If you become my student, you will automatically become a member of our faction, and you can be assured that my teacher and I will do our best to protect you..."

While Yao shi was busy analyzing the situation for Zhang Xuan in order to convince him to become her student, a furious gale suddenly sounded in the air. Following which, a massive aerial saint beast came to a halt above the execution platform.

Several figures leaped down from the aerial saint beast.

"Wu shi, Hall Master Xing..." Zhang Xuan greeted the familiar faces with a smile.

Wu shi and the others had taken a short stop at the Northern Meadows City Master Teacher Pavilion in order to report the incident concerning the Qingtian Emperor to the headquarters before rushing back, thus causing them to return to Qingyuan City a few hours later than Zhang Xuan.

After trading some pleasantries, Wu shi said with a smile, "Zhang shi, I have already reported the matter in detail to the

Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, and Pavilion Master He has also prepared a reward for you!”

Following that, he abruptly raised the token in his hand, and a pillar of light rose from the nearby Master Teacher Pavilion.

Boom!

As if some kind of formation had been activated, a powerful aura began diffusing into the surroundings, shrouding the area.

Realizing that a decree from the headquarters had arrived, all the master teachers and combat masters hurriedly turned their gazes over grimly.

A powerful voice echoed in the surroundings.

“Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion’s Zhang Xuan has foiled the schemes of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and annihilated the Qingtian Emperor and his Ten Kings. For the immense contribution he has made to mankind, I hereby declare him an honorary elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion...”

1246 Ji Ruochen

Hong long!

Right after those words were spoken, a peculiar power began shrouding Zhang Xuan, and it gradually converged to form a unique token in his hands.

On the front was an emblem representing the Empire Alliance, and on the back were the words ‘Honorary Elder’. The token was golden in color, and it carried an aura of authority.

“Honorary elder? I became an elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion?” Zhang Xuan was stupefied.

It was just a moment ago that Yao shi had been filling him in on how difficult it was to become an elder, advising him to drop the hopeless idea. But in the blink of an eye, he was suddenly bestowed with this identity?

Too easy!

Zhang Xuan subconsciously shot a glance toward Yao shi, only to see the latter’s face completely red as her body trembled uncontrollably. It seemed like she was already on the verge of tears.

Well, it was no wonder she would react in such a manner.

Her teacher had spent so many years applying for the position of an elder time and time again, only to fail each time around. Yet, he, a 7-star master teacher who had never even been to the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, had actually become its elder so easily.

Not to mention, he had even received the title right after Yao shi explained how difficult it was to obtain it!

“Thank you!” Knowing that this was probably the result of Wu shi and the others passing on the credit of the expedition to him, Zhang Xuan quickly turned around to thank them.

Other than bestowing Zhang Xuan with the position as an honorary elder, Pavilion Master He also announced Wu shi’s

promotion as the new head of the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Yao shi and Pavilion Master Wu, I’ll be counting on you to deal with the affairs here.”

As the two clasped their fists, Pavilion Master He’s voice gradually faded into silence.

With this, the problem that Sun Qiang and the others had caused had been resolved, so there was no longer any need for Zhang Xuan to remain there. As for dealing with the post-crisis clean up concerning the Qingyuan Empire and the Master Teacher Pavilion, Wu shi and Yao shi were clearly more competent than him in that area, so his interference in those matters would only be excessive.

Thus, Zhang Xuan bade farewell and prepared to take his leave.

At that moment, however, Wu shi suddenly stopped him and asked, “Zhang shi, wait a moment. Chu Tianxing’s death has resulted in a power gap in the Qingyuan Empire. Who do you think will be a suitable candidate to become the next emperor?”

The Qingyuan Empire could not go on without an emperor. Since Chu Tianxing was dead, they had to ascertain a successor as soon as possible, or else it would not be long before internal strife broke out for the throne.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before replying. “This... Chu Tianxing has a son named Chu Xiang. I know him personally, and he does have the qualities suited for the crown. I think it’s worth considering him.”

Sun Qiang had revealed Chu Xiang’s identity to him in the message that he had left for him in the Jade Communication Token.

While that young man was indeed a little lustful, he was no profligate scion. Putting aside his superior talent in cultivation, the young man did have a keen eye for assessing the big picture, and in the interactions with him, Zhang Xuan had realized that he harbored compassion for the populace. From

those two aspects, he would make a much better emperor than Chu Tianxing.

“I understand. I’ll take a look at Chu Xiang,” Wu shi replied.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded before leaping down from the execution platform. He walked up to Sun Qiang and asked, “Where is Liu Yang’s letter? Let me take a look at it!”

Shortly after Chu Tianxing’s death, Liu Yang had gone missing, leaving behind only a letter. Considering how Song shi had mobilized the entire Master Teacher Pavilion to comb Qingyuan City and its surroundings, only to find no trace of him at all, there was a good chance that he had already left Qingyuan City.

Sun Qiang had expressed that he was unaware of the details concerning Liu Yang’s departure as well, and the only clue that was left behind was the letter.

Since the crisis was already over, it was time for him to deal with Liu Yang’s issue.

“As the letter was addressed to Young Master, I didn’t dare open it,” Sun Qiang explained as he passed it over to Zhang Xuan.

Taking the letter, Zhang Xuan tore open the envelope, and lines of words immediately appeared before him.

“Teacher, I’m sorry for my abrupt departure. I have really caused you much trouble this time by killing Chu Tianxing, but that’s only partly why I have chosen to take my leave. I know that with you will be able to absolve me from blame, but I really do not wish to remain a burden by your side. You have already done too much for me...”

The words were neat with distinctive strokes, and they carried an air of resolve to them.

Soon, Zhang Xuan finished reading through the letter, and he shook his head silently.

In truth, he was able to understand the reason behind Liu Yang’s abrupt departure.

Liu Yang was one of the first few students he had accepted, and in that sense, he could be considered the senior of Zheng Yang, Lu Chong, Yuan Tao, and the others. But now, Zheng Yang had become the Progeny of Combat, Lu Chong had headed to the Ancient Domain of the Soul Oracles to inherit the heritage of the soul oracles, and Yuan Tao had returned to the Yuan Clan. It was clear that all of them were destined for greatness!

On the other hand, of Zhang Xuan's three female students, one had gone to the Glacier Plain Court, one had taken root in the Poison Hall, and one had joined the Spirit Awakener Guild.

In contrast, he appeared to be the only unaccomplished one, still silently following behind their teacher's back.

The pressure he had been under was unimaginable.

It was one thing for him to expend their teacher's cultivation resources, but he even fell for the enemy's ploy and was held hostage by them in order to threaten his teacher.

The immense guilt that he felt nearly had suffocated him!

He knew how much his teacher cared for them, and that only served to deepen the pressure on him. He realized that the only way he could stop being a burden to his teacher was to leave. This way, no one would be able to hold him hostage to threaten his teacher, and his teacher would not be put in a spot because of him.

Thus, he hardened his resolve and departed without any hesitation.

"Jeez..." Zhang Xuan sighed deeply. "You are my precious student; I would never think of you as a burden."

Even though Liu Yang could not be said to be particularly outstanding of the seven direct disciples, he was still a student who had been with Zhang Xuan since Tianxuan Kingdom, and step by step, they had come this far together.

Zhang Xuan had long viewed the young man as his own child, so how could he possibly view the latter as a burden?

“Young Master, what should we do about Young Master Liu Yang?”

At this point, Sun Qiang had also finished reading the letter, and he could not help but ask.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “There’s no need to look for him. Given his capability, it’ll be impossible to track him down. We can only wait for him to think things through and find me of his own accord.”

As his direct disciple, what Zhang Xuan had imparted to Liu Yang were not just cultivation and battle techniques but practical skills such as disguising and anti-tracking. If Liu Yang really wanted to hide himself, unless it was Zhang Xuan himself, not even a 7-star master teacher would be able to identify him!

“I have really neglected his state of mind and sentiments...” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

Zheng Yang becoming the Progeny of Combat must have been a huge blow to Liu Yang.

His peer had already become someone who could bring pride and honor to their teacher whereas he was still living off their teacher. It was inevitable that he would feel dispirited.

However, Zhang Xuan had simply had too much on his hands then to pay any heed to Liu Yang’s state of mind, or else, he never would have allowed such a thing to happen.

“In grooming a student, a teacher mustn’t just focus on developing their cultivation and capabilities.” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply once more.

For the past year, he had been too focused on developing the capabilities of his students that he had neglected their feelings.

His students did not just view one another as seniors and juniors, they also thought of the others as rivals whom they compared themselves with.

However, it was already too late to do anything about it. He could only wait for Liu Yang to walk out of this matter by himself now.

...

In the sky far away from Qingyuan City, a beautiful figure was seated on the back of an aerial saint beast with her eyes tightly closed. A surge of pure zhenqi flowed through her veins, resulting in a peculiar deep melody.

Kacha!

Some time later, as if successfully breaking some kind of bottleneck, the young lady slowly opened her eyes.

“I have finally made a breakthrough...”

She had been cultivating diligently during this period of time, and her efforts had finally paid off. Even though she was still some distance away from reaching Saint realm, it was no longer a distant target for her.

“Zhang shi, just you wait! I’ll look for you once more I catch up to you,” the young lady declared with a determined gleam in her eyes.

She really fancied the talented master teacher who dared treat her as his maid for a period of time, but she knew that blindly following behind the other party would only bring her greater and greater despair.

Since that was the case, she would just have to focus all her effort into her cultivation, and hopefully, she would be able to get him to spare her an additional glance.

She had thought over many matters in the ten days that she had spent on top of the aerial saint beast, and she had come to understand a lot.

Leaving did not mean that she was giving up or admitting defeat. Rather, it was to build the foundation for a sweeter reunion.

Hopefully, when I meet you once more, I will have the courage and strength to speak on equal grounds with you.

Qiu!

While the young lady’s eyes were still wandering over the place, the piercing call of a beast sounded in her ears.

Following which, she felt the aerial saint beast beneath her trembling non-stop, as if it had encountered an overwhelmingly powerful existence.

She quickly raised her head and saw an emerald-colored saint beast slowly flying over from the horizon.

Roughly ten meters in length, the saint beast before her was indescribably beautiful. It had nine tails that fluttered elegantly behind it, and its movements seemed to manipulate space itself, allowing it to soar freely in the sky.

“That is the... Saint 9-dan Nine-tailed Empyrean Phoenix?” the young lady gasped in disbelief.

While it was only a short stay in Qingyuan City, she had not spent her time idling away. Through visiting the various guilds and reading the books they had on their shelves, she had managed to deepen her understanding in most of her supporting occupations, including beast tamer!

Based on what she knew, the saint beast that was appearing before her was likely one of the rarest saint beasts in the Master Teacher Continent... the Nine-tailed Empyrean Phoenix!

It would already be a blessing of a lifetime if an ordinary cultivator was able to catch a glimpse of it, so it felt too much of a coincidence for her to encounter it there in the middle of the vast, endless sky.

As the young lady stiffened her body warily, a figure suddenly emerged on the back of the Empyrean Phoenix.

Her face was covered with a veil, making it impossible to discern her appearance or age. However, from the veiled lady's slender and elegant figure, the young lady could tell that the other party was likely a ravishing beauty.

Just from the fact that the other party was standing upon the Saint 9-dan Nine-tailed Empyrean Phoenix, there was no doubt that the veiled lady was a formidable expert, an existence who stood at the very peak of the Master Teacher Continent.

Not daring to hesitate in the least, the young lady immediately got to her feet and bowed respectfully.

There was no way she could afford to offend such a powerful expert!

Hu!

The Nine-tailed Empyrean Phoenix stopped at a distance not too far away from the young lady's aerial saint beast.

With a pair of eyes that twinkled like the brilliant stars in the sky, the veiled lady looked at the young lady and said, "You are Yu Fei-er."

It was a crisp voice reminiscent of the jingle of bells. Rather than a question, it seemed like she was making a statement instead.

Nevertheless, the young lady still hurriedly nodded in response. "Yes!"

She was indeed Yu Fei-er.

"My teacher wishes to accept you as her disciple." Despite her crisp voice, the veiled lady's tone was one of nonchalance.

"This..." Yu Fei-er's body stiffened. She could not believe what she had just heard.

Considering how the veiled lady was riding a Saint 9-dan Nine-tailed Empyrean Phoenix, she was bound to be an incredible expert herself. So, just how powerful of a person would the teacher she spoke about be?

"May I know who your esteemed teacher is?" Yu Fei-er asked meekly.

"My teacher is a 9-star master teacher of the Master Teacher Pavilion main headquarters, Elder Ji Ruochen!" the veiled lady replied calmly.

"9-star master teacher? An elder of the Master Teacher Pavilion main headquarters?" Yu Fei-er's breathing hastened. In this moment, she found her head insufficient to process the astounding news she had just heard. "But I am just an ordinary person from a Tier-1 Empire, and I have never met Ji shi

before. Why would... Ji shi want to accept me as her disciple?"

Everything had happened so abruptly and quickly that she dared not believe that something as good as this could possibly happen to her.

"You will have to ask my teacher personally. My job is just to bring you to my teacher," the veiled lady replied impassively. "So, what's your decision? If you are willing to become the disciple of my teacher, I'll take you with me. Otherwise, I'll convey your refusal to my teacher."

"I-I'm willing... I'm willing!" Yu Fei-er quickly woke up from her daze and nodded vehemently.

If she could become the disciple of a 9-star master teacher, her cultivation would surely grow by leaps and bounds. Perhaps, she might even be able to catch up with Zhang Xuan!

Without a doubt, this was much better than fumbling her way forward.

This was a rare opportunity that countless dreamt of. She would have to have been a fool to let it slip through her fingers!

"Very well, follow me then!"

The veiled lady waved her hand, and Yu Fei-er suddenly found the world blurring before her. Before she could understand what was going on, she realized that she was already standing on the back of the Nine-tailed Empyrean Phoenix.

Boom!

While she was still dazed, the Empyrean Phoenix beneath her roared furiously before abruptly disappearing. As if teleportation, several thousand kilometers disappeared behind them in an instant.

"How fast!" Seeing how fast the world was passing by her, Yu Fei-er's face reddened in astonishment.

Glancing back in the direction of Qingyuan City, she tightened her fists in agitation and made a vow. Zhang shi, I'll definitely

stand proudly before you once more and have you make your choice again!

1247 The Guide Arrives

“Zhang shi, here is the gift that the headquarters have given us for the friendly spar with the other Combat Master Halls.”

Zhang Xuan brought Sun Qiang and the others back to their accommodation in the Combat Master Hall, and not too long after they returned, Hall Master Xing came over.

There had recently been a friendly spar between the four lower-ranked Combat Master Hall in order to choose twenty combat masters to train at the Qianchong Empire’s Sword Lagoon. Thanks to the training regime that Zhang Xuan had specially created for their candidates, the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall had managed to acquire all twenty of the slots, and the Combat Master Hall headquarters had specially relayed their compliments to them.

Just a few days ago, the rewards for their spectacular performance this time around had arrived through a special delivery channel.

“The reward this time around is 120 concentrated high-tier spirit stones, 20 more than we initially expected. However, even as the hall master, I can only freely allocate half of them, so I can only give you 60.”

Hall Master Xing flicked his wrist and passed several jade containers over.

“60 concentrated high-tier spirit stone? That is good enough!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. “It seems like the effort I put into training those lads wasn’t in vain!”

“The effort you put into training those lads?” Hall Master Xing’s eyebrows began twitching, and he nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

You ran off to crash the Master Teacher Pavilion right after coming up with the training regime, and you didn’t even return to watch the friendly spar.

If even that can be called effort, what can’t be?

“Thanks!” Zhang Xuan was perplexed by Hall Master Xing’s twitching eyebrows, but he decided not to pay any heed to it. He opened the jade containers, and upon feeling the dense spiritual energy flowing out of them, he nodded in satisfaction.

With so many concentrated high-tier spirit stones, he would be able to advance his cultivation considerably!

While it was his obligation as a master teacher to raise the fighting prowess of the combat masters, it still did not hurt for him to earn some benefits in the midst of doing so.

“This is what we agreed on previously, so there’s no need to stand on ceremony. Alright, if there’s nothing else, I won’t hold you any longer.”

Knowing that Zhang Xuan would surely have to cultivate after obtaining the concentrated high-tier spirit stones, Hall Master Xing bade farewell before taking his leave.

As soon as he left, Zhang Xuan unhesitatingly entered the Myriad Anthive Nest.

He had already compiled the Saint 4-dan Heaven’s Path Divine Art, and all he had been lacking was ample concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Since he had finally obtained what he had been waiting for all this while, it was a given that he should quickly raise his cultivation.

After all, it had already been more than ten days since he had been stuck at Saint 3-dan pinnacle. It was about time for him to make a breakthrough.

In this world of cultivation, strength was the foundation to almost everything. Without sufficient strength, one would be too vulnerable.

If he did not obtain strength soon enough, his girlfriend could very well be going into the embrace of another man.

Zhang Xuan swiftly conditioned his state to the peak, and once everything was in place, he took a seat and flicked his finger. A concentrated high-tier spirit stone flew out from the jade container.

Under the effects of the formation, incredibly pure spiritual energy gushed out from the spirit stone and gathered around Zhang Xuan, flowing into his body via his acupoints.

“This isn’t enough...” Knowing that he would require far more spiritual energy than an ordinary cultivator to achieve a breakthrough, he continued to draw more spirit stones out from the jade containers.

Sou sou sou sou!

The remaining 59 concentrated high-tier spirit stones flew out one after another, and they took position in a unique formation around Zhang Xuan.

Hong long long!

The Spirit Gathering Formation drew out the spiritual energy from six of the concentrated high-tier spirit stones, and in the blink of an eye, the spiritual energy around Zhang Xuan felt as viscous as water.

If any other ordinary cultivator had been in his place instead, they would have found their breathing becoming erratic. Not only would they be unable to cultivate under such circumstances, it might even pose a threat to them.

The difference in the concentration of spiritual energy in the surroundings and a cultivator’s body would result in the spiritual energy relentlessly gushing into his body, and if the cultivator could not assimilate the spiritual energy fast enough, the energy could end up wrecking their body, resulting in an unfortunate death.

However, such a situation would never occur to Zhang Xuan.

Having cultivated the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body, his body was already comparable to a Saint intermediate-tier artifact. On top of that, he had also cultivated his soul through the Heaven’s Path Soul Art, making it far more resilient than the soul of any ordinary cultivator. As a result, it was nigh impossible that a situation would occur where his body was unable to withstand a massive influx of spiritual energy.

The spiritual energy grew more and more concentrated, and when it finally reached a certain density, Zhang Xuan opened

his mouth wide and began absorbing it furiously.

Boom!

The concentrated spiritual energy surged into Zhang Xuan's body through his acupoints and into his body before swiftly gathering in his dantian.

In his dantian, the ten-meter-tall Origin Soul waved its hand excitedly upon seeing the influx of spiritual energy, and it swallowed it delightfully in huge mouthfuls. Slowly, it began to metamorphose.

The key to achieving Saint 4-dan Primordial Spirit realm was to relentlessly feed one's Origin Soul with energy in order to nourish it, granting it sufficient energy to evolve into a Primordial Spirit.

With ample spiritual energy and the Saint 4-dan Heaven's Path Divine Art, Zhang Xuan's Origin Soul grew at a visible pace, and the aura it exuded was swiftly becoming stronger.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

But along with the metamorphosis of the Origin Soul, the concentrated high-tier spirit stones lying all around were also beginning to shatter with crisp echoes as the spiritual energy within them was sapped dry.

The rate at which the concentrated high-tier spirit stones are being consumed is really frightening... Zhang Xuan's eyebrows twitched wildly.

He had thought that 60 concentrated high-tier spirit stones would be sufficient for him to cultivate from Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle. However, from the looks of it... he had once again underestimated the frightening consumption rate of cultivating the Heaven's Path Divine Art.

The further he cultivated the Heaven's Path Divine Art, the greater the requirement for the purity and quantity of spiritual energy he would need. At this point, even the purity of concentrated high-tier spirit stones seemed to be slightly lacking.

Zhang Xuan sighed. Of the four necessary elements to cultivation—wealth, peers, method, and environment—wealth is indeed ranked at the very top. Without sufficient resources, no amount of talent can allow one to climb to the top!

He had been thinking that he would try to achieve a breakthrough to Saint 7-dan as soon as possible so that he would be on equal footing with the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan. But he now realized that the road ahead was truly arduous.

Putting everything else aside, just the lack of spirit stones could already leave him with a splitting headache.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

Finally, when 32 concentrated high-tier spirit stones had been expended, he struck the bottleneck of Embryonic Soul realm pinnacle.

Hong long!

His aura abruptly transformed, granting him a more imposing presence.

Saint 4-dan Primordial Spirit realm reached!

Upon the breakthrough in his cultivation, Zhang Xuan instantaneously felt his thoughts become clearer and faster. At the same time, his physical body and soul had also undergone massive changes, becoming far more resilient and powerful than before.

On top of that, his reflexes had also grown significantly.

In the past, when he clashed with Leaving Aperture realm experts, while he had been able to match them with his sheer strength and speed, his slightly slower reflexes had placed him at a critical disadvantage. He had needed to depend on his Eye of Insight in order to predict the opponent's move in advance in order to stand against them on equal footing. Otherwise, he might not have even been a match for the copper-masked clone of the Qingtian Emperor.

But with his current enhanced reflexes, he would be able to easily carry out maneuvers faster than the copper-masked

clone's reflexes, allowing him to subdue the latter in a single blow.

“Continue!”

Seeing that he still had some spirit stones remaining, Zhang Xuan calmed his state of mind before closing his eyes to continue cultivating.

An hour and a half later, all the remaining 28 concentrated high-tier spirit stones had shattered in powdery dust, and his cultivation had also advanced to Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage.

He raised his hand and grasped the area before him lightly. In an instant, the surrounding air turned viscous, making it tangible to one's touch.

“Incredible...”

Feeling that his grasp over space had advanced another notch, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up. With my current strength, even if I encountered the real Qingtian Emperor again, I would be able to subdue him easily even without the assistance of my clone!

From the Embryonic Soul realm to Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, he had only achieved a breakthrough of three cultivation stages, but his fighting prowess had risen by twofold at the very minimum!

With his enhanced strength and grasp over space, even in the Qingtian Emperor's cloned form, without relying on his clone or any ploys, he would be able to overpower the latter with brute force.

In other words, the current Zhang Xuan already wielded strength comparable to Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage experts, or perhaps, he might even stand a chance against ordinary Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle experts.

In the Leaving Aperture realm, every single advancement in one's cultivation stage would bring a lightning tribulation, and the tempering from the lightning tribulation resulted in a vast difference in strength between each cultivation stage.

If it were to be known that Zhang Xuan was able to match a Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage cultivator before he had even made a breakthrough to the Leaving Aperture realm, it would surely scare many to death.

Of course, considering that he cultivated the Heaven's Path Divine Art and Heaven's Path battle techniques, as well as the advantage from the Eye of Insight and Library of Heaven's Path, he would really be useless if he could not do this much.

It's a pity that I only received 60 concentrated high-tier spirit stones from Hall Master Xing. If I had obtained all 120, I might have been able to make a breakthrough to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle directly. Zhang Xuan shook his head.

If only he could have raised his cultivation to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, he was confident that he would have been able to down just about any Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert.

Even without the Golden Origin Cauldron, he would be able to defeat cultivators of Song Shi's caliber with ease.

Zhang Xuan sighed deeply. I guess it can't be helped. No matter what, Hall Master Xing is the head of the Combat Master Hall. He will surely have to leave some concentrated high-tier spirit stones for himself to groom his own combat masters, so I can't possibly take all of them from him.

To be honest, Hall Master Xing was already being generous by giving him half of the rewards given to them by the Combat Master Hall headquarters. He would only be greedy if he attempted to acquire any more from them.

After taking a while to adapt to his newfound strength, Zhang Xuan left the Myriad Anthive Nest.

As soon as Zhang Xuan walked out of the room, Sun Qiang walked up to him. "Young Master, Pavilion Master Wu has requested that you drop by the Master Teacher Pavilion for a moment after you are done cultivating!"

"Wu Shi wants me to drop by the Master Teacher Pavilion?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

It had not been long since he returned. Why would Wu shi suddenly ask him to drop by the Master Teacher Pavilion?

Sun Qiang pondered for a moment before replying. “Un. Pavilion Master Wu said that the guide to the Sanctum of Sages has just arrived, so he wishes to invite you over to participate in the Selection of Sages.”

“The guide has arrived?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

Previously, Mu shi had told him that it was very likely that Luo Ruoxin was at the Sanctum of Sages, and if he wanted to find her, he would have to enroll into the Sanctum of Sages himself.

However, as the highest academy of the Master Teacher Continent, it was not a place that just anyone could enter. The slots for it were severely limited.

When Zhang Xuan had asked about it back then, the response he had received was that the guide would be arriving around twenty days later. Taking a look at the time, it was around twenty days since he had parted from Mu shi, and it was indeed about time for the guide to arrive.

“I’ll head over to take a look...” Since it was a matter concerning Luo Ruoxin, there was no need for Zhang Xuan to hesitate at all. He quickly made his way over to the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Not too long later, he arrived at his destination.

“Zhang shi!”

Now that Zhang Xuan was the teacher of all master teachers, there was no one who did not recognize him. As soon as he entered the Master Teacher Pavilion, all the master teachers who saw him immediately clasped their fists and bowed.

“He is Zhang shi?”

“How dashing!”

“I am his loyal fan! Do you think that he’ll allow me to bear his babies?”

“Scram to the side! You are a man; how do you intend to give birth?”

...

A commotion swiftly broke out in the surroundings.

After the incident with the Heavenly Impartation of Mentor’s Calligraphy, Zhang Xuan had already taken over Zhang Jiuxiao’s position as the idol of all young men in the Qingyuan Empire.

Thus, upon his appearance, all the young men who were currently studying in the Master Teacher Pavilion could not help but fall into a state of agitation, unable to control themselves.

Seeing the crazed crowd around him, a feeling of deep helplessness rose within Zhang Xuan. This is really not the type of life I want! Why do things never go the way I want them to?

All he sought was a humble life, cultivating peacefully, advancing his cultivation peacefully, and remaining the inconspicuous handsome lad he was.

It really was not his wish to have so many people idolize him frenziedly!

Scanning the surroundings, Zhang Xuan saw the millstone-bottom lady who had been deeply infatuated with Zhang Jiuxiao back then standing amid the crowd as well. Upon noticing his gaze, the latter began shrieking in excitement, and from the looks of it, it seemed like she might even dash straight forward to knock him onto the ground.

Alarmed, he hastened his footsteps.

Zhang Xuan sighed deeply. Forget it, it’s about time for me to leave Qingyuan City anyway...

He had been in Qingyuan City for roughly twenty days now, quite a long time indeed. It was about time for him to move on.

No matter what, I must clinch the slot for the Sanctum of Sages! Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly in agitation. This

is actually a Taoism concept in real life. At the primary stage of enlightenment, it's inevitable that one would have to devote his time to cultivating himself, so it's necessary that he has the wealth to sustain himself. In other words, those who don't have money won't be able to cultivate themselves. Following that is peers, those who don't interact with others will only remain as a frog in a well. Method, those who are already heading in the wrong direction from the start will never achieve enlightenment, no matter how much time and effort they devote to it. Environment, different land have different fengshui.

1248 The Two Listening-In Students

Led by a master teacher, Zhang Xuan soon arrived at a majestic hall.

Within the hall were Wu shi, Yao shi, and the others. On the guest seat was a silk-robed middle-aged man, and two young men stood behind him.

Taking a quick peek over, Zhang Xuan found that the aura of the middle-aged man was deeply concealed within his body, like lightning shrouded by ominous storm clouds, rendering him incapable of gauging the latter's strength.

On the other hand, the young men had powerful Primordial Spirits lying dormant within their bodies, ready to bring forth devastating damage at any moment—Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage cultivators.

Judging from their physiques, Zhang Xuan gauged them to be beneath thirty this year. To wield such strength at their young age, they were indeed nothing short of the word 'frightening'. They would not pale even in comparison to the highly-talented Zhang Jiuxiao.

"Zhang shi!" Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Wu shi immediately stood up and introduced with a smile, "Seated over here is the guide to the Sanctum of Sages, Zhao Xingmo! Zhao shi, this is Zhang Xuan, whom I spoke much about earlier. He possesses unparalleled talent not only in our Qingyuan Empire but possibly across all eight Conferred Empires!"

"Un." Zhao Xingmo took a look at Zhang Xuan before giving a slight nonchalant nod.

It was as if he had heard so many of such introductions that they could not faze him anymore.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan began swiftly scanning the room.

Other than the few of them, Zhang Jiuxiao and ten or so of the more outstanding young geniuses from the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion were also in the room.

A moment later, when two more men finally arrived, Zhao Xingmo said with an impatient frown, “Since everyone is already gathered here, let’s begin!”

Nodding, Pavilion Master Wu took a sweeping gaze at the surroundings before announcing, “Master teachers, I believe that all of you should know of Zhao shi, so I won’t waste your time introducing him to you once more. For the Selection of Sages this time around, the guide shall be conducting the test himself. Without further ado, let us invite him to announce the rules for the test, as well as what you will have to prepare.”

The crowd quickly turned their gazes over to Zhao Xingmo.

“There’s no need for any preparation. First and foremost, I shall announce the requirements for the selection. Those who fail to meet the requirement need not waste any more of their time here,” Zhao Xingmo announced impassively.

“I’ll assume those who are gathered here should have some understanding of the Sanctum of Sages. There are several strict requirements for one to enroll into the Sanctum of Sages—one must become a 7-star master teacher and achieve a cultivation of Saint 3-dan Embryonic Soul realm before thirty. I can see that most of you here have already met the requirements, but... in my view, it would be best for one to have as high a cultivation as possible. So far, only two of you have reached Saint 4-dan. Therefore, other than those two, the rest of you can leave right now.”

“This...”

“That’s all to the selection?”

“Isn’t this taking the Selection of Sages a little too lightly?”

Not expecting Zhao Xingmo to reduce the number of candidates to two just on the basis of their cultivation, everyone could not help but look at one another in astonishment.

“The Sanctum of Sages isn’t like the Master Teacher Academies that you know of. It won’t accept any master teacher just because they have met the prerequisites. You all should know that it’s the highest academy in the Master Teacher Continent, and it’s a place to nurture future Sages. Those whose strength pales in comparison to their peers really shouldn’t be wasting their time,” Zhao Xingmo uttered coldly.

“I don’t have that much time to waste with the rest of you!”

“Ah...”

Pavilion Master Wu did not think that Zhao Xingmo would actually be so direct. However, considering that the futures of a dozen young, talented master teachers of his Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion were at stake, he interjected. “Zhao shi, isn’t it a little too reckless to choose the candidates solely on the grounds of their cultivation? Why don’t you take another look at them? Even if their cultivation is lacking, they might be able to make up for it through other aspects.”

“There’s no need for that. To be honest with you, I am only in charge of the preliminary selections. There will be another round of selections when we arrive at the Qianchong Empire and a final examination when we enter the City of Sages. Those whose cultivation has yet to reach Primordial Spirit realm won’t even be able to clear the selections at Qianchong Empire, so it would only be a waste of time to bring them along!” Zhao Xingmo waved his hands casually.

“I see...” Since Zhao Xingmo had already said such words, there was nothing else Pavilion Master Wu could do. Shaking his head helplessly, he turned to the dozen or so eliminated master teachers and said, “There’s no need to be too disheartened by this setback. As long as you set your mind to it, you will be able to advance to great heights no matter where you are. The Sanctum of Sages isn’t the only place for you to spread your wings and soar.”

“Alright then...” Knowing that there was nothing they could do about the situation either, the dozen young geniuses could only shake their heads and leave.

In truth, they also knew that it was unlikely that they would have been chosen. Their cultivation and talent weren't too weak either, but compared to Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao, they knew that they were still sorely lacking.

With those two competing for the slot in the Qingyuan Empire as well, there was no way that they would be picked.

Soon, Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao were the only candidates left in the room. Zhao Xingmo turned his gaze over and said, "Only the elites of mankind are allowed into the Sanctum of Sages, and these are the people who will eventually lead mankind to greater heights. But in order to have others submit to you, the most important thing one must possess is strength. As such, for this preliminary selection, I shall be taking strength to be the main assessment criterion."

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded.

He could relate deeply to that sentiment. Schemes and disguises could bring others over to one's side in the short-term, but what would compel others submit to one was overwhelming strength.

Take the current Zhang Xuan for example. Possessing unsurpassed might in the Qingyuan Empire, he no longer had to fear anyone or anything there. If he wished to, he would be able to exert his dominance over the populace, and no one would be able to oppose him.

As for disguises, they would ultimately be exposed in a matter of time, so they were not a reliable measure.

It was for this reason that most powerhouses relied not on schemes but the might of their fists to establish their dominance.

Unwilling to submit? He would just have to crush the dissenters until they finally gave in!

The same went for the Master Teacher Pavilion as well. Of course, its values and impartiality did allow it to win the heart of the others, but without sufficient strength at its foundation, it would only have been a matter of time before their leadership was questioned and overthrown.

There were two occupations in history who had challenged the Master Teacher Pavilion's leadership—the soul oracles and the poison masters.

The soul oracles had been completely eradicated, such that their heritage had been completely terminated, and there was barely any trace of them to be found in the current times. As for the poison masters, they had been exiled to the darkest corners of the world, not daring to show their faces in public.

Unquestionably, strength played a crucial role in building one's authority.

Similarly, the reason Sage Clans were so widely feared by others was not because of their ties to disciples of Kong shi but because they had a strong foundation and overwhelming might that left others with no choice but to take them seriously.

Only the strong were qualified to show compassion to others. Without sufficient strength, all words spoken were nothing but empty.

Zhang Jiuxiao also nodded in agreement.

Even though he was only from the side family, if his cultivation had already reached Saint 6-dan or Saint 7-dan, he would have been highly regarded by his clan. He would not have fallen into this position, where he needed to go through so much trouble to vie for a slot to the Sanctum of Sages in a mere Conferred Empire.

Seeing that the duo understood his intention, Zhao Xingmo gestured to the two young men behind him and said, “These two are listening-in students of the Sanctum of Sages. Even though they are not outstanding cultivators, their individual strength is still not too bad. On top of that, they are also able to complement one another through a collaborative formation. If one of you is able to withstand three moves against their collaboration, I'll take it as a pass!”

Huala!

As Zhao Xingmo said those words, the two young men stepped forward and exerted their auras. In an instant, the

entire hall suddenly seemed to have turned freezing cold, leaving those present feeling deeply pressured.

“They aren’t too bad...”

Just from their disposition alone, Zhang Xuan could tell that even though those two only possessed a cultivation of Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, they wielded fighting prowess that could match any ordinary Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert. If the two of them were to collaborate perfectly with one another, it was likely that they would be able to match even a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage expert!

In other words, even Pavilion Master Wu could be placed in a dangerous position when faced against them!

And yet... they were only listening-in students of the Sanctum of Sages?

If that was the case, just how powerful were the real students of the Sanctum of Sages?

After making introductions, Zhao Xingmo looked at the two examinees and asked, “Who wants to go first?”

Zhang Jiuxiao took a look at the duo before him, and after evaluating them, he shook his head with a bitter smile and sent a telepathic message to Zhang Xuan. “Zhang shi, I didn’t know that you were intending to head to the Sanctum of Sages as well. Since that’s the case, I think I’ll just forfeit here.”

“Forfeit?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

He did not expect a person as proud as Zhang Jiuxiao to admit defeat so easily.

“Indeed. Rather than embarrass myself, I think it would be better if I just forfeit right here,” Zhang Jiuxiao said helplessly.

Since he had traveled down to Qingyuan City from his home to vie for the only slot here, there was no doubt that he harbored great hopes for the Sanctum of Sages. He had thought that he would be able to succeed this time around, but who knew that Zhang Xuan would suddenly appear at this

moment? Regardless from which aspect he was looking at, he had no confidence that he would be able to match Zhang Shi.

Previously, he had thought that given his talent, he might still be able to put up a fight. However, after finding out that Zhang Xuan was a Celestial Master Teacher, he dared not harbor such thoughts anymore.

Figures like Zhang Xuan were destined to make their mark in history. There was no way someone like him could possibly stand against Zhang Xuan.

Furthermore, he had just made a swift calculation, and he realized that with his current strength, it was very unlikely that he would be able to survive three moves against the duo.

“This...” Seeing through Zhang Jiuxiao’s thoughts, Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before turning to Zhao Xingmo. “Zhao Shi, you said earlier that anyone who is able to survive three moves against their collaboration will clear the test, correct?”

“That’s right,” Zhao Xingmo replied affirmatively.

“Then, if both of us withstand three moves, would this mean that we will both be receive the slots for the Sanctum of Sages?”

“Both of you?” Zhao Xingmo shot a glance at Zhang Xuan before replying nonchalantly, “From the looks of it, it seems more likely that both of you will fail the test.”

“That’s not necessarily so,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

He had harbored some prejudice toward the Zhang Clan due to the issue between Luo Ruoxin and that young prodigy of the Zhang Clan, but after spending some time with Zhang Jiuxiao, he realized that the latter was just a little too proud. Other than that, Zhang Jiuxiao was not as bad as he had initially thought.

Zhang Jiuxiao had left his home to reside in Qingyuan City for several years, all in the hope of attaining the Qingyuan Empire’s slot to the Sanctum of Sages. If Zhang Xuan had not cut in abruptly, it was likely that he would have been the one to have obtained the slot. If the two of them could head to the Sanctum of Sages together, that would really be for the best!

“If both of you can survive three moves from those two, I’ll consider the matter. However, just a word of advice—don’t overestimate yourself.” Seeing the confident smile on Zhang Xuan’s face, Zhao Xingmo warned, “Since I set the test in such a manner, you should also know that it won’t be easy to survive three moves from those two!”

He earnestly did not believe that the master teachers from a humble Conferred Empire would be able to survive three moves from these two listening-in students from the Sanctum of Sages.

“It’ll suffice as long as you are willing to consider the matter. Alright then, I guess we will have to try our best to survive those three moves,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“It’s good to see that you are confident. Let’s hope that it isn’t arrogance,” Zhao Xingmo replied with a frown. “Alright, who is going first?”

“Allow me!” Zhang Xuan stepped forward.

He released his aura as well—Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage. In contrast to the two young men before him, the might that he released seemed insignificant.

“Those are big words. Let’s see what kind of strength you possess!”

The young men sneered coldly as they flitted forward, flanking Zhang Xuan on both sides.

They had positioned themselves perfectly to seal all plausible escape routes that anyone trapped in between them could possibly take, leaving him feeling as if he was locked within a cage.

“To exert psychological pressure ahead of the battle to make their opponent panic, not bad...” Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

As expected of experts from the Sanctum of Sages, they really paid careful attention to every single aspect of battle in order to ascertain their victory. Through their psychological pressure, those who possessed a weaker state of mind would

be more prone to falling into a state of panic, especially if they found themselves cornered in the midst of the battle.

Once a seed of doubt was planted in their minds, it could possibly change the tides of the battle entirely.

“Your battle plan isn’t too bad, but to compete with me in a battle of wills, the both of you are still lacking.”

Raising his chin, Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back and stepped forward. Listening-in means that they are allowed to listen to lectures, but they wouldn’t receive the guidance from any teacher or resources from the academy.

1249 I Shall Assess Him Personally!

The opponents were attempting to heap pressure on him, aiming to launch the decisive blow when he finally exposed an opening in his defenses. Such a move might have worked against Zhang Jiuxiao, but against him? A piece of cake!

Putting aside the fact that his Soul Depth had already achieved a level equivalent to 8-star high-tier master teachers, even if it was beneath the other party's, there was no way such simple tricks would work on him.

Hong long!

That single step forward may appear to be nothing much, but to those young men, they felt as if a towering mountain was crushing down on them, placing them in a fluster.

Following which, the pressure that they had exerted on Zhang Xuan was immediately returned to them, causing their minds to spin wildly.

“Terpsichorean art?” Zhao Xingmo’s eyebrows shot up.

Even though Zhang Xuan’s hands remained firmly behind his back, Zhao Xingmo had sensed a soul offense belonging to that of a terpsichore for a split instant. Not only did it wipe away the pressure from the wills of the two young men cleanly, it even struck terror into their hearts.

To be able to see through the psychological attack and even return the favor in an instant, causing the two listening-in students of the Sanctum of Sages to suffer a setback... that fellow was not bad.

“Begin,” Zhao Xingmo declared impassively.

Boom!

To an outsider, it would not seem as if there was anything peculiar to his voice. However, to the two young men, it

sounded just like a bolt of lightning, jolting them awake from their daze.

“Damn it!” Realizing that they had fallen from Zhang Xuan’s counterattack, their faces reddened in fury as their eyes narrowed menacingly.

They had come here to teach the young man a lesson, but before they could accomplish anything, they had ended up falling for the young man’s counterattack and lost themselves. The intense frustration they felt from this failure left them with a blazing inferno raging inside their bodies.

Huala!

Driving their zhenqi furiously, they sealed the space around Zhang Xuan. After which, the two of them dashed forward simultaneously, and two palms struck down on Zhang Xuan simultaneously, one from the front and one from the back.

Their assault was perfectly coordinated with one another, such that even if their opponent succeeded in avoiding one of the attacks, they would never be able to avoid the other. Even a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage expert would have found it hard to escape from their collaborative offense.

However, it was a pity that even though Zhang Xuan was no Leaving Aperture realm expert, he wielded fighting prowess comparable to a Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage cultivator, far beyond the likes of them.

A glint flashed across his eyes as he began moving his lips.

“It seems like both of you are attacking the wrong target...”

His words carried a unique melody reminiscent of the whisperings of a lover, causing the faces of the duo to redden upon hearing it.

In an instant, the palms that were heading for Zhang Xuan’s body abruptly changed their trajectory to strike the other instead.

Peng! Peng!

Two deep moans sounded, and the two young men were sent flying.

They had intended to assault Zhang Xuan together, but somehow... it turned into a battle between themselves instead!

“Demonic tune?” Zhao Xingmo was startled for a moment before his eyebrows shot up. “Is he trying to warn me?”

Previously, when the two listening-in students had fallen for Zhang Xuan’s terpsichorean art, he used his voice to jolt them back from their trance. While he had done it very discreetly, it seemed like the other party had still noticed it, and he was using the same method to turn them against one another.

The provocation behind his intention was clear.

Demonic tunes? I know some, too!

It was a clear warning toward him against interfering with the duel.

“What an interesting fellow!”

This realization did not anger Zhao Xingmo. Instead, it only served to deepen his interest in Zhang Xuan.

Those who were qualified to enroll into the Sanctum of Sages were either the offspring of the Sage Clans or unparalleled geniuses of the Master Teacher Continent. In either case, they were destined to become the leaders of humanity, taking charge of a region to guard mankind from other threats. If they dared not speak up in the face of injustice, it would really be doubtful if they had the necessary qualities to become one of the powerhouses of the Master Teacher Continent.

In a sense, Zhao Xingmo’s previous action was an intentional attempt to goad a response from Zhang Xuan. He wanted to see how the young man who had been so highly complimented by Pavilion Master Wu would react.

But who would have thought that the young man would actually return the favor straight to him, not allowing anyone to wrong him at all?

With such a mentality, if he could set his mind to furthering the prosperity of mankind, he would surely become a valuable asset to the world.

“However, those who are able to become the listening-in students of the Sanctum of Sages don’t make easy opponents either. Given that he has already revealed his cards as a terpsichore and demonic tunist, it’ll be hard for him to survive the remaining two blows,” Zhao Xingmo analyzed with a smile.

Just to become a listening-in student of the Sanctum of Sages, one would still have to clear several rigorous examinations. If Zhang Xuan thought that he would be able to defeat those two young men just by relying on his prowess in demonic tunes and terpsichorean arts, he would really be looking down on his opponents.

As expected, even while they were retreating, they had already shaken themselves out from their trance, and killing intent flickered within their eyes.

They had gone there to invigilate the candidates, not to be toyed around with!

Yet, they had actually been humiliated time and time again by a mere fellow from the remote countryside. This had left them feeling deeply embarrassed.

“Fortify your soul—he specializes in soul attacks!” bellowed the young man on the left.

At the same time, he thrust his palm slightly behind him and successfully halted his retreating figure. Following which, he clenched his fists together, and the space before him froze.

Despite being only at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, he was actually able to execute Spatial Seal, a technique that only Leaving Aperture realm cultivators should have been able to wield!

“Rest assured!”

The young man on the right had also noticed this much by now, and he furiously drove his zhenqi and clenched his fist.

The Spatial Seals cast by the two of them immediately compounded upon one another, causing the entire area to feel like an invisible marshland. Any attempt to move was met

with overwhelming resistance, making it an arduous task to even take a single step forward or backward.

“Impressive.” Zhang Xuan nodded slightly in approval.

Under normal circumstances, if two cultivators were to attempt to overlap their Spatial Seals, it was likely that their Spatial Seals would conflict with one another and cause destructive interference instead of constructive interference. As a result, the Spatial Seal would be weakened instead of fortified.

It was for this reason that Leaving Aperture realm experts did not fare that well in group fights.

But astoundingly, the two young men were actually able to harmonize their Spatial Seals together with one another perfectly. This was a sight to behold, even for Zhang Xuan.

As expected of students from the Sanctum of Sages, their grasp over their techniques was indeed far superior to ordinary cultivators!

While there was no doubt that the compounded Spatial Seals was powerful, and no ordinary Primordial Spirit realm cultivator would ever be able to escape from it, to Zhang Xuan, breaking out of the compounded Spatial Seals was really a walk in the park. He took two steps forward and tapped on the area in front of him.

Si la!

As if an invisible balloon had been popped, air currents began leaking out furiously into the surroundings.

Peng! Peng!

The two young men had not thought that Zhang Xuan would be able to overcome their Spatial Seals so easily, and they suffered an energy backlash as a result of it. The both of them simultaneously took two steps back as their faces turned ghastly pale.

“It has been two moves... It should be about time for me to make a move now!” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

As long as he could withstand three moves from them, it would be considered his victory. He had allowed the two young men to attack him as they pleased for the previous two moves, so the least he could do was return the favor for the last move!

“Come!”

The eyebrows of the duo shot up. They swiftly got into a unique formation, and an indomitable aura began drifting between them. In their current form, even a Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage expert would have to fall back temporarily against them.

At this point, they had also realized that the young man before them was no ordinary cultivator, and they dared not let their guards down anymore.

Despite facing such an overwhelming aura, Zhang Xuan calmly clasped his fist and said, “Allow me to apologize in advance for any injuries that you might sustain later on.”

“Injuries?”

“You are courting death!”

The two young men nearly exploded on the spot! The other party had not even made his move, but he was already apologizing to them. He was clearly looking down on them!

Why don't you brag after you have achieved victory?

Fueled by their rage, all their strength poured out unreservedly, whipping up deadly air currents that threatened to tear the entire hall down.

A shockwave rippled into the surroundings, leaving a searing sensation on the skin of those standing in the area.

“They are really strong...” Zhang Jiuxiao's face paled.

In this moment, he finally realized why Zhao Xingmo was so confident that they would not be able to withstand three moves from the two young men. Putting everything else aside, just the sheer might of this move would be able to tear apart every single secret art he had learned in the past!

Worried for Zhang Xuan, he quickly turned his gaze over, only to see the latter calmly standing his ground, not bothering to dodge at all. Without using any battle techniques or complicated maneuvers, he simply raised his hand and struck at them as an ordinary human would strike down a fly.

“Let’s end this.”

Padah! Padah!

As these leisurely-sounded words echoed in the air, the furious outburst of zhenqi around the two young men abruptly vanished, as if it had never appeared before at all. In the next moment, the two men were knocked flying as if ping pong balls.

Hu!

They were smacked right into the wall, and buckets of blood spewed from their mouths.

Despite gathering all their might together, those two listening-in students of the Sanctum of Sages could not even withstand a single slap from Zhang Xuan!

After knocking the duo flying, Zhang Xuan calmly raised his gaze to look at Zhao Xingmo. The perfect nonchalance on his face made it seem as if he had only done something insignificant, unworthy of mention.

“Does this mean that I have passed?”

Zhao Xingmo was also startled for a moment before nodding slowly. “You have overcome their collaboration with a single strike, and it’s clear that you haven’t even used your full strength. You have passed!”

At the same time, Zhao Xingmo could not help but feel a little perplexed.

In the first two moves, it was apparent that Zhang Xuan had gone easy on them. Or else, given that the two young men had their guards down, he would have been able to knock them out easily given his proficiency in terpsichorean arts and demonic arts. Since that was the case... why did he suddenly go overboard in the last move?

It might have seemed like a trivial detail, but Zhao Xingmo felt like there might have been more to it.

Could it have been that even Zhang Xuan was pressured before the combined might of the duo, so he did not want to take any risks?

Zhang Xuan turned around and said, “Thank you! Jiuxiao, it’s your turn. You should be able to survive three moves from them.”

“My turn? Now?” Zhang Jiuxiao was taken aback.

The two young men were currently still pressed into the wall, severely wounded. Surely it would not be good for him to attack them at that moment.

“Un. There are two of them, and there are two of us here. Thus, even though I have just fought with them, surely it will be fair for you to face them right after,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

“Ah, I see! Alright!” Hearing those words, Zhang Jiuxiao immediately understood Zhang Xuan intentions.

The latter was trying to help him clear the Selection of Sages! He had intentionally executed a heavy blow for the final move so as to injure them and grant him an advantage in the battle!

This way, he would stand a chance at surviving three moves from them.

It might have been a little despicable, but considering that a slot for the Sanctum of Sages was at stake, he swiftly vanquished all of the hesitation in his mind and stepped forward. Claspng his fist at the duo pressed against the wall, he said, “I’ll be in your care.”

“You two... Damn it!”

Hearing the conversation between the two and seeing that Zhang Jiuxiao shamelessly stepped forward to challenge them in their injured state, the two young men felt so indignant that they could have exploded on the spot.

How can there be such shameless people in the world?

We are already injured to this state, and even standing up would be difficult for us. How can we possibly fight you like that?

“Zhao shi has said that as long as we can withstand three moves from the two of you, he will consider adding another slot to our Qingyuan Empire. If the two of you think that you aren’t up to the fight, I suggest that you surrender,” Zhang Xuan said.

“You want us to surrender and let you win so easily? Dream on!”

“Even if we have to put our lives on the line, we will make sure that you don’t survive three moves from us!”

Gritting their teeth, the two young men forced themselves out of the wall and began preparing themselves for a second round.

“Enough! Stand down, both of you!” Zhao Xingmo waved his hand.

“But Zhao shi...” The young men panicked.

They knew that they had failed their responsibilities this time around. They were supposed to invigilate all qualified candidates, but they ended up being nearly incapacitated after the first battle. Zhao shi must have been really mad at them at the moment.

“Don’t worry, this isn’t your fault. This was all part of Zhang shi’s plan.” Zhao Xingmo waved his hand to allay the worries of the two young men before standing up himself.

“I’ll assess Zhang Jiuxiao personally!”

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“You will assess me personally?” Zhang Jiuxiao’s face paled, and he nearly collapsed to the ground.

He understood Zhang Xuan’s intentions. He had injured those two young men and rendered them incapable of battle so that he would be able to take advantage of their weakness and obtain an easy pass for the Selection of Sages. But who would have thought that Zhao Xingmo would actually disregard his own standing as a senior and declare that he would conduct the test personally!

Given how formidable those two listening-in students were, the guide was bound to be even more so. Against such an opponent, how could Zhang Jiuxiao possibly stand a chance?

Hearing Zhao Xingmo’s words, Zhang Xuan frowned. “As a guide to the Sancutum of Sages, isn’t it inappropriate for you to make a move against your juniors?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll suppress my cultivation down to your level, Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage,” Zhao Xingmo replied calmly.

“This...” Hearing that, Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before asking, “As long as Jiuxiao is able to withstand three moves from you, it’ll be considered a pass, right?”

“That’s correct!” Zhao Xingmo nodded.

Following which, the energy within his body began flurrying, and in the blink of an eye, his cultivation had already been suppressed to Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, the same as the two challengers.

Zhang Xuan fell quiet.

To be honest, even if Zhao Xingmo suppressed his cultivation, he still possessed an absolute advantage in terms of his experience and eye of discernment. It would be extremely

difficult for Zhang Jiuxiao to withstand three moves from him. Or to be more precise, it was impossible.

“Zhang shi, I appreciate your goodwill, but it’s fine. If I am unable to clear the test, it can only mean that my cultivation hasn’t met the mark yet, and I’m not fated with the Sanctum of Sages.” Zhang Jiuxiao stepped forward and smiled.

To be honest, he was rather touched to see Zhang Xuan speaking on his behalf. However, since things had come to this point, there was nothing else that could be done.

At the very most, it would just be a loss. It was not like it would be the end of the world. As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he could at least take a defeat.

Hong long!

Zhang Jiuxiao began furiously exerting the zhenqi within his body. While his aura paled in comparison to the collaboration between those two listening in students, it carried an unwavering and fearless intention behind it.

“Good.” Zhao Xingmo nodded.

Considering the overwhelming disparity between the both of them, Zhang Jiuxiao could be said to be rather courageous to still be willing to step forward and face him.

Of course, courage was not enough for one to become a student of the Sanctum of Sages. More importantly, one had to possess sufficient strength!

Without strength, everything else would be for naught.

Just as Zhang Jiuxiao’s entire body tensed up, ready to face whatever Zhao Xingmo threw at him, Zhang Xuan suddenly spoke once more. “Wait a moment!”

“What’s wrong this time?” Zhao Xingmo frowned in impatience.

This lad sure was a ton of trouble.

You have already cleared the test yourself; do you really value whatever friendship you have with Zhang Jiuxiao so much that you are determined to have him clear the test with you?

Other master teachers would know to back down in such situations, especially since the matter does not concern their own interests. Do you really know what kind of figure you are attempting to haggle with?

“I understand that Zhao shi is in a rush, but surely it would be fine to spare us twenty minutes?”

“Hmm?” Zhao Xingmo was not sure what Zhang Xuan was getting at.

“It’s like this. I have gained some insights from the previous battle with those two young men over there, and I would like to share them with Jiuxiao.” Zhang Xuan raised his gaze to stare intently at Zhao Xingmo. “Zhao shi, as the guide, you should at least have some time to spare for us to trade some insights, right?”

“... Fine.” Zhao Xingmo frowned in displeasure, clearly unhappy with this proposition. Nevertheless, he eventually nodded in agreement.

Twenty minutes would not make a difference to the outcome of the test.

If it was that easy to raise a person’s fighting prowess, everyone would have been an expert by then.

“Thank you, Zhao shi. Jiuxiao, come over for a moment!” Zhang Xuan gestured with a smile.

Knowing that Zhang Xuan was doing all of this for him, Zhang Jiuxiao unhesitatingly headed over. Just as he was about to speak, he suddenly caught sight of something that left his eyes widening in shock.

A massive cauldron was plummeting from the sky, headed straight toward Zhao Xingmo’s head!

Seeing this sight, Zhang Jiuxiao nearly fainted from fright.

Who was Zhao Xingmo?

A guide of the Sanctum of Sages, a Saint 6-dan expert at the very least! Even if Zhao Xingmo had suppressed his cultivation to Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, such a crude assault would never work on him!

Just as Zhang Jiuxiao was about to scream out loud, he suddenly saw Zhang Xuan's figure blurring before him. With a powerful leap off, Zhang Xuan dashed straight toward Zhao Xingmo, and in that moment, it seemed like his figure had warped into a sword itself, seemingly wanting to tear the latter into pieces.

"It's over..." Zhang Jiuxiao felt that if there was an end to the world, this would likely be it. His body trembled uncontrollably, and he nearly burst into tears.

Even if I can't clear the test, you really don't have to kill the guide for me! If you succeed, you will become a fugitive of the Master Teacher Pavilion, condemned to an entire life of escape!

This sight did not just challenge the limits of Zhang Jiuxiao's rationality, even Pavilion Master Wu and Yao Shi felt as if they were going insane.

To make a move against Zhao Xingmo... Too reckless!

If the other party got mad, putting aside the fact that Zhang Xuan would not be doing Zhang Jiuxiao any favors, he might even be stripped of his own slot.

But everything had happened so fast that even they were unable to intervene in time.

"Humph!" Noticing Zhang Xuan's assault, Zhao Xingmo's eyebrows shot up. Driving his zhenqi, he raised his finger and stabbed it forward like a sword.

Even though his cultivation was still suppressed at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, this simple maneuver amply displayed his superior eye of discernment, experience, and combat sense.

The finger stab was directed straight toward the blind spot of Zhang Xuan's offense. Not only would it be able to keep Zhang Xuan at bay, it would also allow him to fend off the cauldron above him at the same time. Two birds with a stone!

To be able to make such sharp instantaneous judgement from the unprepared state he was in, there was no doubt that his

combat experience was superior even in comparison to Zhang Xuan.

Hula!

However, before the finger stab could strike Zhang Xuan, the young man suddenly flitted to the side before raising his palm, thrusting it toward the cauldron above to neutralize the force behind its descent, and catching it with a single hand.

His movements were actually not an assault against Zhao Xingmo but a maneuver to rescue!

Zhang Xuan swiftly shoved the Golden Origin Cauldron into his storage ring before apologizing awkwardly to Zhao Xingmo. “My apologies, Zhao shi. I have really spoiled my cauldron. It never thinks before acting, and I never thought that it would suddenly make a move against you either. I was alarmed when I saw it earlier, and that’s why I leaped forward to save you. I hope that I didn’t scare you!”

“You say that you were saving me?” Zhao Xingmo nearly choked on his saliva.

To use your body as a sword and charge toward me with such frightening momentum, as if preparing to launch a lethal strike at any moment... Are you sure that you were trying to rescue me?

That’s clearly attempted murder!

If I hadn’t reacted fast enough, I would have been split in half by now!

Not to mention, that vicious cauldron even wanted to smash my head. Do you really think that I will drop the matter with a simple ‘I didn’t know that it would do that’?

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist apologetically. “Indeed. I am the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, and this cauldron is the Saint Guardian Artifact of the academy. As such, it’s constantly keeping a lookout for my safety and protecting me. It sensed the overwhelming strength that Zhao shi was emanating, so it thought that you were planning to harm me. That’s why it would recklessly make a move against

you. Zhao shi, I hope that you will be as magnanimous as to let this matter go...”

“Alright, alright! Hurry up and impart your insight. I’ll give you ten minutes!” Even though Zhao Xingmo still felt deeply indignant, he eventually decided to drop the issue.

The other party had been pushing all of the blame to his artifact right from the start, and he could not stoop down to the level of venting his anger on a mere artifact.

If the guide to the Sanctum of Sages were to pummel its owner out of fury toward an artifact... His peers would use that as a reason to mock him for many years to come!

Not to mention, the cauldron was the Guardian Saint Artifact of a Master Teacher Academy, so it was bound to have contributed plenty to mankind. Even if he was an advanced master teacher, there would still be repercussions if he killed such an artifact that easily.

Nodding in relief, Zhang Xuan returned to Zhang Jiuxiao’s side, and his face immediately turned grim as he sent a telepathic message over. “Even though Zhao shi has suppressed his cultivation, given your current strength, it’ll be impossible for you to emerge victorious. However, it shouldn’t be too difficult for you to withstand a few moves from him. I’ll teach you three maneuvers right now, and as long as you learn them seriously, no matter what kind of move Zhao shi throws at you, you will be able to neutralize it by repeating them again and again... Got it?”

“Yes!” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded.

Considering that the young man before him was a Celestial Master Teacher, and taking into account everything that the other party had done for him, Zhang Jiuxiao no longer harbored any doubt toward him.

“I’ll describe those movements to you in detail, so try to simulate them in your head. Don’t execute them, or else he will be prepared for them,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

These three maneuvers were directed toward Zhao Xingmo’s flaws, and their aim was just to catch him off guard. If he

noticed their intentions in advance, given his strength and eye of discernment, these maneuvers would surely be rendered useless.

Understanding this as well, Zhang Jiuxiao listened earnestly as he pictured those movements in his mind. It did not take long before he grasped the zhenqi circulation method and the trajectory of each attack.

As for the remaining time, he continued driving his zhenqi as he simulated those three moves in his mind in order to execute them perfectly when he faced Zhao Xingmo later on.

These three moves were actually rather simple, much simpler than any battle techniques in fact. A couple of minutes was more than enough for him to hone them to perfection.

Seeing that Zhao Xingmo's complexion was still rather awful, Pavilion Master Wu stepped forward to alleviate the situation. "Zhao shi, please don't take the matter to heart. Zhang shi's cauldron is indeed a little reckless. Just earlier this morning, an envoy from Qianchong Empire, Song shi, was turned into a eunuch by it."

He had no idea why Zhang Xuan would attempt to assault Zhao shi, only to stop at the crucial moment, but considering the relationship between them, he felt obliged to cover for the young man.

"Someone has been turned into a eunuch?" Zhao Xingmo was unaware of the various affairs that had happened earlier in the morning, and he frowned upon hearing Pavilion Master Wu's words.

"Indeed..." Pavilion Master Wu proceeded to fill Zhao Xingmo in on the various matters that had happened earlier.

Even though he had not been on the scene personally, he was still able to picture the situation through Pavilion Master Wu's descriptions.

"That cauldron sure is reckless!" After hearing the full story, Zhao Xingmo could not help but shake his head.

For an artifact to cripple the manhood of a quasi 8-star master teacher, even the word 'brazen' would be an understatement!

Of course, that was even more so for Zhang Xuan. To dare talk back to a quasi 8-star master teacher and even walk away from the conflict unscathed... yet it was the other party that had ended up being punished.

Just as Zhao Xingmo wanted to inquire deeper into Zhang Xuan's history, the person in question suddenly spoke up from the side. "Zhao shi, we are done trading insights. You can start the test now."

Turning his gaze over, he saw that Zhang Jiuxiao was already standing at the center of the hall, his body conditioned to its peak, ready to face any opponent before him.

Zhao Xingmo made a rough calculation of the time, but it seemed like five minutes had not even passed. Slightly perplexed, he stepped forward and said, "Very well, let me see just what kind of insight he has shared with you!"

To haggle with him just to stall for a mere five minutes... what kind of valuable insight did Zhang Xuan impart to Zhang Jiuxiao within this short period of time?

"Zhao shi, please pardon me if my moves offend you later on!" Zhang Jiuxiao clasped his fist and spoke apologetically.

"Offend me? Worry not! Feel free to use whatever you have against me. As long as you can withstand three moves from me, I'll consider allocating you another slot!" Zhao Xingmo replied calmly.

"Thank you. I'll be making my move then."

Hu la!

Before finishing his words, Zhang Jiuxiao had already leaped off the ground to dash furiously forward. His right leg shot up, traveling along a trajectory that would land perfectly in between Zhao Xingmo's thighs.

"You..." Not expecting that fellow to actually aim for Little Zhao right from the start, Zhao shi's face turned livid.

It was just a moment ago that he had heard about how Song shi's manhood had been crippled by a cauldron, and then Zhang Jiuxiao suddenly came at him with this move.

Don't tell me that the supposed insight that Zhang Xuan imparted to you was to strike me there?

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Zhao Xingmo was fuming inside. However, as angry as he was, there was no way he could take that kick head on. Thus, he quickly sidestepped to avoid it.

It was not that he was afraid that he would be crippled as well, but that he couldn't afford to lose his face as a result of this!

Huala!

As soon as Zhao Xingmo fled to the side, Zhang Jiuxiao's fingers immediately shot for his armpit. It turned out that the attack toward his crotch was only a feint—the other party's real goal was this!

“To deduce the movement technique I would use in reaction to your kick and assault my armpit, where a mingmen of the movement technique is located...” Zhao Xingmo narrowed his eyes in disbelief.

The other party's finger was accurately aimed at the point where the greatest mingmen of his movement technique was located! If he were to be struck, his entire body would be numbed, resulting in a complete loss in his fighting prowess!

It was too much of a coincidence to think that the other party had found his mingmen by sheer luck in the middle of a battle. Rather, it seemed more likely that the other party had predicted this right from the start.

Zhao Xingmo realized that he was already dragged into Zhang Jiuxiao's pace from the very first strike... The young man's combat sense was really a little way too strong!

“Such a cunning fellow. He has been waging a psychological war against me right from the start...”

As a Saint 6-dan master teacher, it didn't take long for Zhao Xingmo to see through the crux of the matter.

Pavilion Master Wu casually mentioning that Song Shi had his manhood crippled had left a subconscious notion in his mind, so when Zhang Jiuxiao angled his attack between his crotch, he didn't doubt that it would possibly be a feint in that instant.

To think that he had already lost in the psychological warfare prior to the battle...

Impressive.

"If it were to be any other ordinary Primordial Spirit realm cultivator, they would have been forced into a corner with this blow. Without at least ten moves, it would be impossible to turn the tables around. However, it's unfortunate that your opponent is me!"

Zhao Xingmo twisted his body to avoid Zhang Jiuxiao's finger jab. At the same time, he raised his hand and jabbed his finger toward the latter as well.

Finger against finger, Zhao Xingmo was intending to use his superior strength and comprehension of battle technique to forcefully overpower Zhang Jiuxiao, and through doing so, he would be able to regain to turn the tides of the battle back to his side.

Even though their cultivation were both at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, it was apparent that the might of Zhao Xingmo's finger jab was far stronger than Zhang Jiuxiao's. Even before the finger arrived, the air was already groaning under the immense pressure, and vaguely, the sound of a storm could be heard.

In face of the might of Zhao Xingmo's finger jab, Zhang Jiuxiao was visibly flustered. Knowing that he couldn't face such an attack face on, he hurriedly retracted his finger. But perhaps because he was too anxious, his body ended up tilting to the side, placing his head in the trajectory of Zhao Xingmo's finger jab.

Seeing this, Zhao Xingmo frowned.

With his strength, if his finger jab were to land, Zhang Jiuxiao's head would explode on the spot. In other words, Zhang Jiuxiao would die!

In the first place, as a Saint 6-dan expert, his choice of intervening in a duel between juniors was already one that many would frown upon. If he were to kill Zhang Jiuxiao on top of that... without a doubt, he would be stripped of his position as a guide to the Sanctum of Sages.

“Hmph!”

Thus, Zhao Xingmo pulled back his might, and the sudden withdrawal of zhenqi left a groan escaping from his mouth, and his face reddened from the backlash.

If he hadn't suppressed his cultivation, this bit of backlash would have been nothing at all. However, with his current cultivation of Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, and given the fact that he had devoted his full strength into the finger jab on top of that, the sudden withdrawal of his attack inevitably left him with some injuries.

Huala!

But even though Zhao Xingmo had withdrawn his finger in order to avoid killing Zhang Jiuxiao, the latter, seemingly having expected Zhao Xingmo to react in such a way, abruptly charged forward to knock Zhao Xingmo's chest with his shoulder.

With a deep frown between his brows, Zhao Xingmo swiftly struck his palm forward to ward off Zhang Jiuxiao's charge.

That palm strike moved at an astonishing speed, such that it would land on Zhang Jiuxiao before his charge could strike Zhao Xingmo.

“My apologies...”

Zhao Xingmo was still guessing that Zhang Jiuxiao might retreat for the time being before launching another wave of attack when he suddenly heard a faint voice sounding in the air. Following which, he suddenly felt a piercing jab beneath his armpit. Unknowingly, Zhang Jiuxiao's fingers had already landed on his mingmen.

Huala!

Zhao Xingmo felt his strength receding swiftly from him as if a tide, and in an instant, numbness and powerlessness permeated his entire body.

“You...”

Hu!

After landing his finger jab, Zhang Jiuxiao didn't continue his assault. Instead, he hurriedly leaped back before clasping his fist apologetically, “Zhao shi, thank you for sparing me earlier...”

“Hmph!” Driving his zhenqi, Zhao Xingmo was able to swiftly recover from his numbed state. However, the loss had left him so frustrated that he couldn't speak a word.

If Zhang Jiuxiao were to continue his assault after his mingmen was struck, he would surely have been pummeled badly... And just thinking about the matter was enough to leave him stifled within.

“If Zhao shi intended to kill me, I would have died by the second blow. I apologize for using such a despicable trick against you...” Noticing Zhao Xingmo's displeasure, Zhang Jiuxiao lowered his head further and continued apologizing.

In truth, in the second move, if Zhao Xingmo hadn't retracted his finger for fear of endangering his life, he would have never been able to close in on him. It was only due to Zhao Xingmo's forceful withdrawal of his finger jab that gave him an opportunity to strike.

It could be said that he had played on the other party's compassion to achieve victory.

“Forget it. A victory is a victory, I have no excuses for my loss!” Zhao Xingmo waved his hand impassively. “I'll allocate Qingyuan Empire with two slots, but note that this is only the preliminary selections. I hope that you will be able to retain your slot during the secondary selections, or else your effort would have gone to vain!”

While Zhang Jiuxiao did resort to underhanded tricks to achieve victory, he did mention beforehand that all tricks were

allowed. Furthermore, Zhang Jiuxiao had not just withstood three moves from him, he had subdued him even...

Just from that in itself, it was undeniable that this battle was Zhang Jiuxiao's victory.

Since that was the case, it wasn't a big deal for him to give out another slot... However, whether they would be able to secure this slot would depend on their performance at Qianchong Empire later on.

"Is this the insight you have imparted to him?" Zhao Xingmo glanced at Zhang Xuan and asked.

Judging from Zhang Jiuxiao's reflexes, it was unlikely that he would be able to come up with such a plan in the middle of the battle. Since that was the case, this matter would have to be linked back to Zhang Xuan, especially considering the bizarre five minutes break he had called for earlier.

"Un. They are three maneuvers that I casually came up with earlier." Knowing that there was no point hiding this from Zhao Xingmo, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and replied truthfully.

"Casually?" Zhao Xingmo scoffed. "A maneuver you came up with casually is able to predict that I would use the [Steps of Stalling Leaves], which mingmen was located beneath my armpit. Not to mention, you were even able to take into account the fact that I wouldn't kill Zhang Jiuxiao, and after retracting my finger jab, I would have to take half a step back in order to ward off the momentum from the withdrawing energy, so you had Zhang Jiuxiao to dash forward to strike my mingmen in this temporary opening... Do you expect me to believe that?"

There was no such thing as a coincidence in battle.

Of the three moves that Zhang Jiuxiao had used earlier, the first one was psychological warfare, the second one had him putting his life on the line as a gamble, and the third one was a result of a careful calculation... Only one who had a thorough understanding of Zhao Xingmo's habits in battle would be able to design such a battle plan to deal with him...

Considering how every single step of the plan took advantage of his weaknesses, there was no way it could be something that was ‘casually came up with’.

“I guess I was lucky then.” Zhang Xuan replied.

In truth, the reason why he had the Golden Origin Cauldron assault Zhao Xingmo earlier was to force him to execute a battle technique, thus allowing him to compile a book on him in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

With a compiled book, he would be able to gain a thorough understanding of Zhao Xingmo’s strongest moves and flaws, thus making it easy for him to tailor a set of maneuvers to corner him.

However, considering that the secret of the Library of Heaven’s Path was at stake here, he could only feign ignorance in this matter.

“Lucky?” Seeing that Zhang Xuan was unwilling to speak any further on this matter, Zhao Xingmo decided not to ask any further either. Shaking his head, he took a look at Zhang Xuan and said, “Just a casual pointer from you can allow Zhang Jiuxiao to defeat me within three moves... If I were to suppress my cultivation once more, would you be willing to face me in a battle?”

“You want to have a duel with me?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“That’s right.” Zhao Xingmo nodded.

To be honest, he was really getting more and more interested in the young man before him.

To subdue two listening in students of the Sanctum of Sages easily within three blows... To grant Zhang Jiuxiao the strength to defeat him with just a casual pointer...

If the young man before him were to utilize his full strength, just how powerful would he be?

“Ah... That might not be a good idea. I’m afraid that there might be a fatality!” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“Don’t worry. I’ll immediately release my seal as soon as I feel that you are in danger. You will be safe.” Seeing that Zhang Xuan was slightly apprehensive at the idea of having a duel with him, Zhao Xingmo consoled.

When two cultivators of equal strength fought with one another, it was indeed very easy for a fatality to occur as they would be unable to control their strength precisely in battle. However, Zhao Xingmo was a Saint 6-dan cultivator, so if they were to find themselves in the middle of a perilous situation during their duel, he would at least still be able to release his seal and take control over the situation.

“I’m not referring to myself... I’m afraid that you will be unable to withstand my attacks...” Seeing that the other party had misunderstood his words, Zhang Xuan explained awkwardly.

“You...” Zhao Xingmo nearly exploded on the spot.

It is one thing for you to remain unfrightened and fearless in a battle against a guide of the Sanctum of Sages, but to actually worry that you would hurt me... Ludicrous!

“You don’t need to worry about hurting me. Given my cultivation realm, it’ll be difficult for you to inflict any damage on me!” Zhao Xingmo replied coldly with a livid face.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was still a little hesitant.

“Feel free to make a move! I know that you possess exceptional strength, and your talent is superior to your peers too. However, all of these are nothing in the eyes of the true experts of the Sanctum of Sages!” Zhao Xingmo placed his hands behind his back as he spoke in an air unique to experts.

The Sanctum of Sages was the highest academy in the Master Teacher Continent. Even the powerful Sage Clans would send their offspring there in order to study. From that in itself, it was apparent just how formidable the personnel there were.

Do you really think that a countryside bumpkin like you would really be able to defeat me?

The only reason why he fell from Zhang Jiuxiao’s tricks was out of a moment of carelessness! Now that he was fully

prepared, there was no way he would allow himself to be defeated that easily anymore!

“Since that’s the case... I’ll give it a try then.” Seeing how confident Zhao Xingmo was, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in excitement.

To be honest, as he had just achieved a breakthrough, he had been wanting to find someone to test out his newfound strength. The reason why he initially turned down Zhao Xingmo was because he was afraid that he might accidentally hurt the latter, considering that he still lacked precise control over his strength especially since he hadn’t really tried it out in battle yet. But since Zhao Xingmo was so confident about this matter, there was no longer any reason for him to turn down this precious opportunity.

“Let’s begin then!” Taking a deep breath, Zhao Xingmo grasped his hands tightly together, and strength began flowing through his entire body.

In his view, even though Zhang Xuan’s talent was not too bad, he was simply too arrogant. This would be a good opportunity for him to strike down the young man’s conceit and have him understand that there was a world far larger than the one that he could see.

“Alright, I’ll be making a move then...” Zhang Xuan warned in advance.

“Hmph.” Sneering coldly, Zhao Xingmo paid no heed to Zhang Xuan’s words and dashed forward furiously. However, before he could make a move, he suddenly saw a palm print falling straight for him.

In that instant, it felt as if the entire world was caving in on him.

Pu!

Zhao Xingmo felt as if his entire body had been frozen in place, rendering him unable to move at all. Before he could even begin to breathe, he was already struck squarely in the chest, causing his body to retreat swiftly into the distance. At

the same time, a wild spurt of fresh blood colored the air crimson.

Boom boom boom boom!

Zhao Xingmo immediately drove his zhenqi, wanting to ward off the momentum from his retreat. However, in the next moment, his eyes narrowed. Countless palm prints abruptly appeared before his eyes.

The other party's follow up attack wasn't just a single palm strike but thousands of them!

Boom!

His back crashed heavily into the walls of the hall, causing a deep depression behind him.

Hu la!

Unable to withstand the impact anymore, he swiftly unsealed his cultivation, and only then did he barely manage to fend off the attack. Just as he was heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan's forlorn voice suddenly sounded ahead of him.

"I thought that he was really that formidable, but he was sent flying before I could even use a fifth of my strength... In the end, he was nothing more than a braggart..."

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Pu!

A suffocating sensation assaulted Zhao Xingmo's chest, and he spurted blood once more.

Even though his standing as a guide was nothing in the Sanctum of Sages, in his many years of invigilating the candidates, there had never been any genius who had been able to defeat him in the same cultivation realm.

But this time, not only had he been defeated, he was even being looked down upon.

The immense frustration that he felt left him on the verge of explosion.

“Hold it in, hold it in...” Zhao Xingmo took a few deep breaths to suppress that feeling of frustration in his chest before pushing himself out of the wall.

As indignant as Zhao Xingmo felt from his loss, it would only be more embarrassing if he vehemently denied it. He would at least be able to retain some of his dignity if he accepted it graciously.

At this point, he suddenly recalled the surnames of the duo, and a thought came to him.

Looking at the young man before him, he said, “You are indeed an impressive individual. In the same cultivation realm, even I am no match for you. Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao, are the both of you from the Zhang Clan, the Sage Clan?”

If they were both geniuses from the Zhang Clan, it would make sense why he was not a match for them when fighting in the same cultivation realm.

While the Sanctum of Sages had plenty of experts who could deal with such offspring of Sage Clans, a mere guide like him

was not one of them.

“Jiuxiao is from the Sage Zhang Clan, but I am not...” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “I am an orphan, born in the remote Tianxuan Kingdom.”

He had never really given this matter much thought before, but thinking about it once more, there was something quite suspicious about it.

Logically speaking, it should not have been anything much for him to be born in the remote Tianxuan Kingdom, but the fact that he was plagued with the Innate Fetal Poison was a huge anomaly in itself.

According to the Sage Yuan Clan, Tianxuan Kingdom was one of those ancient lands where descendants of Sage Clans could recover and awaken their bloodlines. For this reason, many Sage Clans had chosen to leave their offspring in such places, only taking them into the clan once their bloodline achieved a certain mark.

Could it be that... he was also a member of the Sage Zhang Clan, just that he was one of those children who had been left in an ancient land to awaken his bloodline?

If that was the case, it would explain why a humble nobody in Tianxuan Kingdom would be plagued with such a fearsome poison.

His current comprehension of poison had already reached the level of 7-star, but he still had no clue how the Innate Fetal Poison could be resolved. He had even attempted to use Wei Ruyan's Innate Poison Body to curb it at one point, but its effectiveness was limited.

From this, it was apparent that the Innate Poison Body was one of the most formidable poison, even when placed among grade-9 poisons!

In other words, the person who had planted the poison on him was at least a 9-star poison master... and possibly one of the strongest ones at that!

It was unthinkable for an expert of that caliber to travel to the small Tianxuan Kingdom just to deal with a nobody like him.

Could it really be that the person whom he had possessed was also a member of the Sage Zhang Clan, just like Zhang Jiuxiao?

It's no wonder I always felt like pummeling Zhang Jiuxiao whenever I met him... this might be a resonance in our bloodline!

Zhang Xuan stroked his lower jaw in deep contemplation.

I really should find an opportunity to look into this matter.

Knowing that this was not the time to be thinking such miscellaneous thoughts, Zhang Xuan decided to put the matter aside for the moment.

"I thought that you were from the Sage Zhang Clan too." Zhao Xingmo looked at Zhang Xuan in intrigue before falling silent.

Since Zhang Xuan had already said that he was not from the Zhang Clan, there was no point pressing on. It would only make things awkward. Thus, Zhao Xingmo changed the topic and said, "Alright, since the both of you have cleared the primary selection, I'll bring you to the Qianchong Empire for the secondary selection. The other chosen candidates should already be gathering there, so we must make haste."

"Qianchong Empire?"

"Yes. We will be heading there right now. You have two hours to prepare, make whatever arrangements you need to and bid farewell to others. Once the two hours are up, we'll set off right away," Zhao Xingmo said.

The reason he had been in a rush earlier was because the semester for the Sanctum of Sages was about to start, so the secondary selection in the Qianchong Empire had to be conducted soon. However, the Qingyuan Empire happened to be located the furthest away from the Qianchong Empire, so there was a need for them to make haste.

"Two hours?" Not expecting that they would be in such a rush, Zhang Xuan was taken aback. He pondered for a brief moment before turning to Zhao Xingmo with a grim expression.

"Right, Zhao shi. There's a matter that I would like to consult

you on, and this matter is very important to me. Thus, I hope that you can give a precise answer to me.”

“As long as it’s something I am aware of and the information isn’t confidential, I’ll answer your question,” Zhao Xingmo replied.

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly and said, “I would like to ask if Luo Ruo... I mean the little princess of the Luo Clan is currently in the Sanctum of Sages.”

Initially, Zhang Xuan had intended to ask using Luo Ruoxin’s name, but after some thought, he realized that there was a good chance that Luo Ruoxin might not be her real name. After all, as the little princess of the Luo Clan, there were bound to be many who would want to claim her life or hold her hostage against the Luo Clan, so it would not have been surprising if she adopted a pseudonym with that in mind.

If Luo Ruoxin was not in the Sanctum of Sages, it would be meaningless for him to head there.

If that was the case, he would be better off heading straight to the Empire Alliance to raise his cultivation. After all, he already had the position of an honorary elder in that Master Teacher Pavilion, so it would be much more convenient for him to access precious cultivation resources there.

“The little princess of the Luo Clan?” Zhao Xingmo frowned upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s question. “Why are you asking for her whereabouts?”

“This matter is very important to me. Zhao shi, I hope that you can answer my question.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and bowed respectfully.

“Alright then!” Seeing that Zhang Xuan was serious about this matter, Zhao Xingmo briefly hesitated before shaking his head in resignation. “The little princess of the Luo Clan was indeed studying in the Sanctum of Sages, and with her outstanding talent, she managed to enter the Inner Sanctum. However... a while back, for some unknown reason, she suddenly disappeared, and no one has seen her since then. But when I was coming here, I heard rumors that the Luo Clan had

managed to locate her, and they were intending on sending her back. Of course, I could not verify the authenticity of the rumors, so I can't say for sure if she is truly returning to the Sanctum of Sages."

"She really is from the Sanctum of Sages?" Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It seemed like Mu Shi's guess was indeed correct.

Since that was the case, he would have to head to the Sanctum of Sages. This was the only clue he had to find Luo Ruoxin at the moment, and even if Luo Ruoxin was not there, he might still be able to find some clues to her whereabouts.

If he could find Luo Ruoxin, he would be able to discuss with her how they should deal with her marriage with the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan on the third month next year.

"You are acquainted with the little princess of the Luo Clan?" Zhao Xingmo was taken aback. "According to what I know, the little princess has a cold personality..."

"I guess we can be considered to be acquainted with one another." Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

The other party would probably die of fright if he were to say that she was his girlfriend. Low profile, low profile!

Even though Zhang Xuan had attempted to conceal his emotions, Zhao Xingmo could still see traces of affection in the young man's eyes. He fell silent for a moment before advising, "There's an engagement between the Luo Clan and Zhang Clan. Given that you aren't from the Zhang Clan, I advise you not to disturb the little princess. Otherwise, I fear that you might find yourself in deep trouble.

"The little princess of the Luo Clan doesn't just boast a high cultivation, she's also known for her peerless beauty. There are none in the Sanctum of Sages that come close to matching her grace. For this reason, she has countless admirers among the younger generation. However, due to her ties with the Zhang Clan, all those who dare approach her have been viciously taught a lesson."

Zhao Xingmo's words were roundabout, but Zhang Xuan could still roughly understand the intentions behind them.

He had seen Luo Ruoxin's true appearance through his Eye of Insight, and it was no exaggeration to say that even Yu Fei-er, Luo Qiqi, Hu Yaoyao, and the others did not come close to comparing to her. Given so, it was inevitable that she would have countless admirers.

It seemed like the Zhang Clan was quite domineering, teaching all of those who harbored any thoughts toward her a lesson. Well, that worked to his favor too.

"Thank you for your advice." Still immersed in his relief from learning that Luo Ruoxin was likely in the Sanctum of Sages, Zhang Xuan did not pay much heed to Zhao Xingmo's advice.

Instead, he began to plot his next move. Firstly, he should find a way to obtain Zhang Jiuxiao's blood. If he could induce a resonance with the latter's blood, that would mean that he was a member of the Zhang Clan as well. If so, he could infiltrate into their ranks and secretly get rid of that unparalleled young prodigy that everyone had been talking so much about!

If he was not... well, that might work out even better. He could do as he please without having to consider the Zhang Clan's position. Anyone who dared stand between him and Luo Ruoxin would be crippled!

Of course, either way, he would have to possess sufficient strength first before he could do anything.

"Return here in two hours sharp. We'll be setting off together!" After saying all that should be said, Zhao Xingmo waved his hand, dismissing the two of them.

Thus, Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao clasped their fists before taking their leave.

Zhang Xuan headed straight to the Combat Master Hall and took Sun Qiang with him. After which, he bade farewell to Hall Master Xing and the members of the Xuanxuan Faction.

Before he came to Qingyuan City, he had still had the accompaniment of Wang Ying and Liu Yang. But now, only he and Sun Qiang were left. After spending so much time with

one another, the departure of his direct disciples had really left him with an empty feeling inside.

Following behind Zhang Xuan, Sun Qiang suddenly recalled a matter and said, “Young Master, there was a messenger from Hu Yaoyao earlier. She wished to relay the news that she has been recommended to cultivate at the Terpsichore Guild main headquarters due to her outstanding talent, and she will be leaving Qingyuan City in half a month’s time.”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

It was not for no reason that Hu Yaoyao had been called a bewitching devil. She had a sensual figure and disposition that seemed to draw others to her helplessly. It was as if the terpsichore occupation had been created just for her. In view of that, it was not too surprising that the Terpsichore Guild main headquarters had taken her away.

“Also, when Young Master was at the Master Teacher Pavilion, Chu Gongzi also dropped by earlier to relay his gratitude to you. He’s currently the regent of the Qingyuan Empire, and they are still deciding on the inauguration date. With the Master Teacher Pavilion and Combat Master Hall working in unison to push this through, there shouldn’t be any problems with the inauguration,” Sun Qiang said.

It was due to Zhang Xuan’s recommendation that Pavilion Master Wu, Hall Master Xing, and the others nominated him to be the next emperor of the Qingyuan Empire. With two True Leaving Aperture realm experts backing him, the other rivaling factions would not dare to make any reckless moves.

“As for the members of the Xuanxuan Faction, it seems like they are planning to remain at the Combat Master Hall for the time being to raise their cultivation as fast as possible, so they won’t be returning to the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy for the time being.”

As the cultivation of the members of the Xuanxuan Faction was still too low, they would only become a burden when heading to a higher tier empire. Nevertheless, they sought to become a source of strength for Zhang Xuan, so they decided

to remain in Qingyuan City for the time being and focus on their cultivation.

Zhang Xuan could roughly fathom their thoughts. Since they had already made their decision, he would not interfere in their choices. Nodding slightly, he turned to Sun Qiang and said, "Let's go."

Returning to the Master Teacher Pavilion once more, Zhang Xuan saw that Zhao Xingmo, Zhang Jiuxiao, and the two listening in students were already prepared to depart from Qingyuan City.

The aerial saint beast that Zhao shi had prepared was at Saint 6-dan pinnacle, and the small house it carried on its back was extremely spacious. Even if they took more people along, there would not be any problem at all.

After bidding Pavilion Master Wu farewell, Zhang Xuan leaped on the back of the aerial saint beast, and its massive wings began flapping powerfully. Before long, they were already well on their way toward the Qianchong Empire.

"The Qianchong Empire is the strongest country among the Eight Conferred Empires, and the head of its regional Master Teacher Pavilion is a Half-Grand Dominion realm expert. He's a real quasi 8-star master teacher, wielding strength far greater than Song shi!"

While the group was sitting around in the small house on the aerial saint beast, Zhang Jiuxiao began introducing the various aspects of Qianchong Empire to Zhang Xuan.

Naturally, in order to maximize his chances of entering the Sanctum of Sages, he had done his research on the Eight Conferred Empires before he chose the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

"Half-Grand Dominion realm?" Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up.

The gap between each cultivation stage became more and more significant the higher one's cultivation was. Similarly, there was also a huge disparity between a Leaving Aperture

realm pinnacle cultivator and a Half-Grand Dominion realm cultivator.

It seemed like it was not without reason that the Qianchong Empire was the leading power of the Eight Conferred Empires. Under the lead of such a powerful pavilion master, it was inevitable that its national power would be strong as well.

“There will be a secondary selection in the Qianchong Empire, so I’ll offer you some guidance on your cultivation over the next few days. Try to advance your cultivation as much as possible during this period of time, or else it might be difficult for you to clear the secondary selection,” Zhang Xuan instructed sternly.

Even on a Grand Dominion realm aerial saint beast, the journey from the Qingyuan Empire to the Qianchong Empire would still take roughly six to seven days. This period of time should be enough for Zhang Jiuxiao to make several breakthroughs in his cultivation.

Otherwise, the slot that he had obtained with great difficulty would really go to waste.

“Un. Thank you, Zhang shi!” Zhang Jiuxiao quickly nodded.

With Zhang Xuan’s eye of discernment and capability, if Zhang Jiuxiao could obtain his personal guidance, his cultivation would surely be able to advance by leaps and bounds over the next few days.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand calmly. At this point, he suddenly recalled the matter that had been on his mind all this while, and he turned to Zhang Jiuxiao and said, “Jiuxiao, give me a droplet of your blood essence. I want to examine it closely to see if there’s any way I can raise the purity of your bloodline.”

“A droplet of my blood essence? Sure!” Without any hesitation, Zhang Jiuxiao flicked his forefinger, and a droplet of blood shot straight into Zhang Xuan’s palm. *Chu gongzi* refers to *Chu Xiang*, who is the man whom Zhang Xuan met at the Spring Pavilion Terpsichore Guild and the Blacksmith Guild. When *Wu shi* asked Zhang Xuan to recommend a

suitable candidate to be the emperor, Zhang Xuan recommended him.

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Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up upon seeing the blood essence.

He quickly wrapped it within a layer of his zhenqi before he turned to Zhang Jiuxiao and said, "I'll take some time to examine it. For the time being, you should cultivate using the method that I imparted to you earlier."

After which, he turned around and returned to his room.

With a grasp of his hand, he created an isolation barrier around him and leaped into the Myriad Anthive Nest.

It would be best for him to be in an environment with absolute silence while studying Zhang Jiuxiao's blood essence. It would also be much safer as well.

After finding a place to sit down, Zhang Xuan had the droplet of blood essence float in front of him. With a tap of his finger, a droplet of blood essence was squeezed out of his fingertip, and he pushed it toward Zhang Jiuxiao's blood essence.

After careful examination, Zhang Xuan could only shake his head helplessly.

There doesn't seem to be any resonance between the two droplets of blood essence. It seems like I'm not from the Sage Zhang Clan after all.

If the bloodline of the Zhang Clan was truly running through his veins, there would at least have been even the slightest reaction between his and Zhang Jiuxiao's blood essence, but even with his Eye of Insight, there was nothing of the sort. In other words, the body that he had transcended into had nothing to do with the Sage Zhang Clan.

It seemed like he had really been thinking too much into it! How could there be such a coincidence in the world?

But if I am not a member of the Zhang Clan, which freaking poison master was so bored as to travel all the way to

Tianxuan Kingdom just to plant the Innate Fetal Poison into me?

That person had to be really sick in the mind! That person had better not let Zhang Xuan catch him!

In any case, whether he was from the Zhang Clan or not would not really affect his plans.

If he was from the Zhang Clan, he would just have to hold back a little on that young prodigy, but since it was already confirmed that he was not... Well, he could not be blamed for being merciless!

After confirming that he was not an offspring of the Zhang Clan, Zhang Xuan began looking into whether he could refine unique bloodlines.

It seems like it is really difficult to refine a person's bloodline.

It did not take long before Zhang Xuan arrived at a conclusion—refining a person's bloodline was a feat so difficult that it was nigh impossible.

That was to be expected. If it was that easy to raise a person's bloodline, every offspring of the Sage Clans would have been an inner member.

Before leaving the Myriad Anthive Nest, Zhang Xuan suddenly recalled how much his cultivation had risen in recent days, so he confidently sought his clone for a battle.

As usual, he ended up being viciously pummeled into the ground, nearly losing his life.

Against others, there were none of the same cultivation realm who could possibly rival him. Yet, no matter how hard he tried, he was still a long distance away from matching up to his clone.

Ahhh, so stifling!

After leaving the Myriad Anthive Nest, Zhang Xuan continued offering pointers toward Zhang Jiuxiao's cultivation.

As expected of a genius from the Zhang Clan. Despite the low purity of Zhang Jiuxiao's bloodline, the talent that he

possessed was truly spectacular. His ability to learn was almost like a sponge; not even the most talented member in the Xuanxuan Faction could come close to him!

In just six short days, it was as if he had undergone a metamorphosis. While his cultivation remained at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, his fighting prowess had risen to a level where even the two listening-in students were no longer necessarily a match for him.

Thinking about the guidance that Zhang Xuan had offered over the past six days, Zhao Xingmo was filled with nothing but shock. His pointers are really spot-on, especially on the details. Even I wouldn't have noticed those aspects if he hadn't pointed them out explicitly...

Zhang Jiuxiao had quite a handful of inconspicuous but nasty flaws that even he had failed to discern, but Zhang Xuan was able to uncover them keenly without the slightest error in his analysis. Such an eye of discernment was nothing short of fearsome!

Just with his eye of discernment and state of mind, it was no wonder he could successfully crash the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion! Zhao Xingmo had no doubt that even in the Sanctum of Sages, Zhang Xuan would be able to rise through the ranks and glow brighter than everyone else.

On the seventh day, a massive city came into sight.

“We have finally arrived at the Qianchong Empire!”

Standing by the window, Zhao Xingmo said, “Judging from the timing, the candidates chosen from the other empires should have arrived as well. Let's head straight to the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.”

On the journey there, Zhang Xuan had learned that Zhao Xingmo was responsible for the primary selection phase of the Eight Conferred Empires. He had been to the other empires, and the Qingyuan Empire was the final stop for him.

Those who had cleared the primary selections should have made their way over themselves, and judging from the current time, they should have all arrived. So, as soon as the

candidates from the Qingyuan Empire arrived, they would be ready to start the secondary selection.

“May I know how many people have cleared the primary selection, and how many slots are there for the secondary selections?”

“The Qianchong Empire has three slots, and the other three stronger Conferred Empires have two slots each. The remaining four, including Qingyuan, only have a slot each. All in all, the Eight Conferred Empires should have thirteen slots in total. Other than that, there are also the Ten Tier-3 Sage Clans, and each of them have two slots. Thus, all in all, there should be 33 people, and only 20 will remain after the secondary selection,” Zhao Xingmo said.

“That’s still good.” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

20 out of 33, it would be fine as long as they were not in the bottom half of the candidates.

That should not be too difficult.

Seeing how Zhang Xuan’s expression had relaxed after hearing the rules, Zhao Xingmo warned, “Don’t let your guard down just because the proportion of candidates that are cleared for the secondary selection is high. Those who are able to obtain the candidacy to Sanctum of Sages are all top-notch geniuses in their regions, experts among experts. It won’t be easy to rise above the rest of them.”

No matter what, the Qingyuan Empire was the weakest among the Conferred Empires. Even as top-notch geniuses from the Qingyuan Empire, there could still be plenty of geniuses outside of the Qingyuan Empire who were stronger than them.

“I acknowledge that there’s no Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage cultivators who could possibly be your match—after all, even I lost to you. However, the requirement to entering the Sanctum of Sages is that the candidates must be a master teacher below thirty years old... There are some formidable geniuses who have already reached Leaving Aperture realm. In other words, you won’t just be facing Primordial Spirit realm experts!”

“Leaving Aperture realm?”

“That’s right. One genius of the Qianchong Empire has already reached Leaving Aperture realm. Even though he hasn’t undergone the lightning tribulation yet, his fighting prowess is still not one to be underestimated. There are also quite a few from the Tier-3 Sage Clans who have reached that level as well. If you let your guard down before them, you could be done in before you know it.” Zhao Xingmo nodded.

He was only saying this much because he had really high expectations for the young man before him.

As powerful as the young man was, the problem was that he was not just faced with opponents of the same cultivation realm. Furthermore, the opponents would not be suppressing their cultivation to his level before fighting with him either...

Thus, it would be no easy feat to get into the top twenty among the 33 people.

“I see... Thank you for your warning. I’ll just have to deal with whatever comes my way then,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

Instead of leaving him on edge, Zhao Xingmo’s words had left Zhang Xuan feeling slightly excited instead.

While his cultivation was only at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, his fighting prowess was already on par with Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage cultivators. Previously, out of fear that he would accidentally hurt Zhao Xingmo, he had only used a fifth of his full strength. If the other candidates were really as powerful as Zhao Xingmo had said they were, he should be able to have some fun in the secondary selection!

Seeing Zhang Xuan’s expression, Zhao Xingmo knew that his warning had effectively fallen on deaf ears. Shaking his head, he decided to nag no more.

At this point, the aerial saint beast beneath them suddenly began diving down, heading toward the middle of the majestic city beneath them.

Not too long later, the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion came into sight.

They landed on the square just in front of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and barely a moment after they had landed, a few old men immediately stepped forward to welcome them.

“Zhao shi!”

The person leading the group was an elder who appeared to be in his sixties. There was no beard or moustache on his pale face, and his eyebrows were arched like crescents. Despite being dressed in a simple green robe, he carried an imposing disposition with him.

Activating his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan discreetly assessed the elder, and he realized that the latter’s cultivation had actually reached Half-Grand Dominion realm!

The other old men following behind him were not weak either. Just like Song Xuan, they were all Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle experts.

As expected of the number one Conferred Empire. Just this group of men could easily bring about a complete change in the leadership of the Qingyuan Empire by themselves.

Zhao Xingmo nodded impassively to the other party’s warm greeting before introducing the duo standing behind him.

“Pavilion Master Yue, these two young men are the candidates chosen from the Qingyuan Empire—Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao.”

After which, Zhao Xingmo turned around and said, “This elder over here is the head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, Yue Yiquan.”

“Paying respects to Pavilion Master Yue!” Hearing that the elder before them was the head of the regional Master Teacher Pavilion, Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao swiftly clasped their fists and bowed respectfully.

“Zhao shi, this way please.” Pavilion Master Yue shot the both of them a glance, but he did not bother responding to their greetings. He turned his attention back to Zhao Xingmo and began leading the way forward.

“If I remember correctly, Song Xuan seems to be his uncle. Most probably, the reason he was dispatched to the Qingyuan Empire was to have him accrue some contribution so that he could be promoted to the position of vice pavilion master, but...” Zhang Jiuxiao sent a telepathic message over to Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan swiftly understood what Zhang Jiuxiao was saying.

That explained why Pavilion Master Yue would even bypass the most basic of formalities with them. So, it was because the other party harbored enmity toward him.

As an envoy dispatched by the Empire Alliance Master Teacher, Song shi should have conducted a thorough investigation of the matter before passing judgement, even if he had to withstand immense pressure from the populace for that. Thus, his very act of sentencing Sun Qiang, Elder Xu, and the others to the death penalty rashly was a flawed judgement in itself. As such, there was no doubt that he had to be punished for his lapse in responsibility.

And with Song shi’s punishment, not only would Song shi be no longer qualified to rise to the position of the vice pavilion master, even Pavilion Master Yue’s reputation would take a blow as well, considering that he was the one who had chosen to send Song shi over. Given so, it was inevitable that Pavilion Master Yue would harbor some enmity toward Zhang Xuan.

“Let’s go!” Zhang Xuan said.

There was nothing he could do about the other party’s enmity toward him, and he couldn’t be bothered with it either.

The Qianchong Empire was just a temporary stop before he headed to the Sanctum of Sages. He wouldn’t be staying there for too long, so the other party’s attitude toward him meant nothing at all.

At most, he would avoid encounters with Pavilion Master Yue as much as possible.

Perhaps because the Master Teacher Pavilion had been cleared in advance, there weren’t too many people along the corridors,

except for those master teachers who had specially come to welcome them.

Even the weakest of those master teachers were at 7-star pinnacle, and forming two rows by the side, there were at least several hundred of them.

They sure have a steady foundation, Zhang Xuan thought as he passed in between the two rows of master teachers.

These master teachers possessed a cultivation of Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle at the very minimum. Experts of this caliber were truly limited in the Qianchong Empire, but here, they were as numerous like the grass along the road. It was as if one would see them at every turn. Truly, as expected of the number one Conferred Empire.

“The reason behind the Qianchong Empire’s overwhelming strength is due to their proximity to a spirit mine. They are rich in spirit stones, and they have the Master Teacher Pavilion’s support as well. It was based on these two factors that they were able to grow so prosperous over the years!” Noticing Zhang Xuan’s astonishment, Zhang Jiuxiao sent a telepathic message over to explain.

“Spirit mine?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Un.” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded. “According to the rumors, there’s a concentrated high-tier spirit stone mine in the Qianchong Empire. It’s for this reason that they were able to attract countless experts to work for them, and this formed a virtuous cycle that furthered their development. As such, their national strength grew stronger and stronger.”

Of the four necessary elements to cultivation—wealth, peers, method, and environment—wealth was indeed ranked at the very top.

With sufficient money, a person would be able to attract talents to work for him, and once there were sufficient experts, cultivating a new generation of experts wouldn’t be too difficult either. Through this cycle, a country would be able to grow stronger and stronger.

If an empire was utterly poor, lacking in precious cultivation resources, which expert would be willing to waste their time there? Naturally, it would be impossible to establish a high-tier Master Teacher Pavilion either.

“You said that... there is a concentrated high-tier spirit mine here?” Zhang Xuan’s breathing hastened in agitation.

“That’s right. Most of the concentrated high-tier spirit stones in circulation in the other empires all originate from here!” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded.

“If I wish to earn concentrated high-tier spirit stones here, where should I go?” Zhang Xuan asked anxiously.

He happened to require as many concentrated high-tier spirit stones as possible to raise his cultivation. Since there was a spirit mine here, there should be plenty of concentrated high-tier spirit stone in circulation as well. If he could just lay his hands on some of them, he would be able to push his cultivation forward!

“I am not too sure about that either, but... according to rumors, there seem to be a black market in the Qianchong Empire, and concentrated high-tier spirit stones are often traded there in high quantities. If you really do require concentrated high-tier spirit stones, it should be worth checking that out.”

After which, Zhang Jiuxiao pondered for a moment later before continuing. “However, this is second-hand information, so do take it with a pinch of salt.”

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“I’ll take a look at it later on.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Even though Zhang Jiuxiao’s fighting prowess was subpar and his talent was not really worth a mention, he still had a redeemed trait—reliability. Since the other party was telling him this news, most likely, there should be some level of credibility to it.

Besides, regardless of whether the Qianchong Empire had spirit mines or not, as the number one Conferred Empire with many Leaving Aperture realm experts under its command, it was bound to have a rich supply of concentrated high-tier spirit stones. As long as he could find a channel to exchange or earn them, he should be able to raise his cultivation to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle there.

With such thoughts in mind, the crowd arrived at a vast hall, and everyone swiftly took their seats. Pavilion Master Yue waved his hand with a hearty laugh and said, “Invite the outstanding talents who have cleared the primary selection in!”

A master teacher backed out of the room, and not too long later, a group of young men and women walked into the hall.

Dressed in master teacher robes, there were seven conspicuous stars weaved onto the emblems pinned on their chests.

Zhang Xuan quickly scanned through the arriving crowd.

Just as Zhao Xingmo had said, the cultivation of those who had cleared the primary selection was not too bad. The weakest ones were like him and Zhang Jiuxiao, Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, whereas the strongest ones were at Quasi Leaving Aperture realm.

To be able to advance their cultivation to this level before they even reached thirty, there were indeed plenty of geniuses in this world who possessed talent that did not pale too much in comparison to his.

“Zhao shi, the candidates have come here in a rush after clearing the primary selection, and I reckon they are weary after the long journey they have taken here. Thus, I specially prepared a banquet to welcome you, as well as to allow a day of rest for all the candidates. Will it be fine if we conduct the secondary selection tomorrow?” Pavilion Master Yue inquired with a smile.

Zhao Xingmo pondered for a moment before nodding. “It’s fine.”

Even though they were pushed for time, half a day’s delay would not do much harm.

This would be a good opportunity for the young geniuses who had come for the secondary selection to let loose before facing the cruel challenges that lay ahead of them.

Upon receiving Zhao Xingmo’s agreement, Pavilion Master Mo raised his hand and instructed, “Men, serve the wine and dishes!”

Following which, a group of apprentice master teachers walked out and served plates of delicacies before the crowd.

It seemed like Pavilion Master Yue had roughly estimated when Zhao Xingmo would be arriving and made preparations in advance.

As if to reflect their economic power as the number one Conferred Empire, the served dishes were the nourishing meat of saint beasts cooked along with various precious medicinal herbs. Judging from the cooking method, it seemed to have been prepared by a high ranked gourmet as well.

Not only was the meat fresh and succulent, the spirit infused within was also incredibly rich. Just a bite of it would leave one’s zhenqi pulsating in excitement.

Such food was extremely beneficial to the cultivation of one’s Primordial Spirit.

“This entire table should be worth at least several thousand high-tier spirit stones!” Zhang Jiuxiao remarked.

“So expensive?” Zhang Xuan was startled by the extravagance of the meal.

Back then, he had to go through so much trouble just to earn a thousand high-tier spirit stone. But now, just a single meal already cost way more than that. Income disparity sure was frightening!

“Just look at this Golden Tiger Beast Liver. On top of the Saint 1-dan Golden Tiger Beast, it’s also complemented with four saint herbs, Riverbreath Grass, Pipa Stem, Desolate Flower, and Five-flavored Beef Leaf! These four have a maturity of roughly fifty years, and every single one of them is individually worth a hundred high-tier spirit stones. Taking all of these ingredients into account, and factoring in the exceptional skills of the gourmet that has prepared this dish, one could say that even a thousand high-tier spirit stone would be a low cost for this dish!” Zhang Jiuxiao analyzed.

Hearing Zhang Jiuxiao’s analysis, Zhang Xuan took a look at the dish himself and realized that his analysis was spot-on. Thus, he could not help but ask, “You... have studied food before?”

Gourmet was a Lower Nine Paths occupation, and it was not even qualified to be considered as a supporting occupation. For this reason, there were nearly no master teachers who would learn it. Despite this, Zhang Jiuxiao knew a surprisingly great deal about food.

“Well, I do love eating good food, so I spent my free time studying it. The Zhang Clan has employed a gourmet to take care of their meals, and back then, whenever I was free, I would tag along and learn from him, so... I guess I do have some understanding of it,” Zhang Jiuxiao explained.

To most master teachers, gourmet was viewed as a trivial field of study. However, if one could complement the ingredients well, the tonic broth a gourmet broiled could possibly harness medicinal effects on par with pills.

In fact, the reason Zhang Jiuxiao was able to advance his cultivation and capabilities so far despite being only twenty-seven this year and a mere member of the side family could be

partly credited to his effective coordination of ingredients in his meals.

“Incredible,” Zhang Xuan complimented.

Zhang Xuan did know a thing or two about gourmet as well, but that was mostly limited to appraising. He had not collected many books about that occupation, so he could not be said to be too proficient in it.

While the duo was talking to one another, Pavilion Master Yue suddenly laughed heartily in the center of the room. “How can delicacies go without fine wine?”

Flicking his wrist, he took out a gourd of wine.

“This is the Tianchen Brew specially brewed by Old Man Tianchen. I believe I need not explain how valuable it is to you. I happened to obtain a gourd of it a while back, and I stored it away for a whole three hundred years to allow it to mature beautifully. Since Zhao shi is here today, I think it would be a good time to take it out and savor it. Is there anyone here who wishes to give it a try?” Chuckling softly, Pavilion Master Yue uncorked the lid and gently poured out a cup.

The transparent wine in the cup emanated a strong fragrance that swiftly permeated the entire hall. Just a single whiff was sufficient to whet one’s appetite for it.

“Fine wine!” Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

The wine fragrance could be clearly smelled even from a distance away. From that, it could be seen that the purity and taste of the Tianchen Brew were bound to be far superior to the other wines he had drunk in the past.

Zhang Jiuxiao’s eyes gleamed in agitation as his breathing hastened. “Old Man Tianchen is a famous Wine Sage in the Empire Alliance. The wine that he brews is able to intoxicate even Saint 7-dan experts! Tianchen Brew is known to be the finest wine he has ever made, and the quantity of it is severely limited, making it an extremely precious commodity. Countless people would willingly sell their fortunes just to

acquire a single cup of it, only to leave in disappointment. And yet, Pavilion Master Yue is actually offering it to us?”

“Is this wine very famous?”

Seeing that Zhang Xuan did not understand the value of the wine before him, Zhang Jiuxiao exclaimed in agitation. “Of course it is! It’s a priceless commodity! Even ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones wouldn’t be able to buy you a single cup of it!”

“Ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones... just to buy a cup of wine?” Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched.

Even the entire Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall only had ten of such concentrated high-tier spirit stones in its inventory, and to spend this sum of money just to buy a single cup of this wine...

How insane must one be to do something like that?

“It’s true! Even though concentrated high-tier spirit stones are rare, there are still channels through which one can obtain them. However, the Tianchen Brew of Old Man Tianchen is not something that one can buy with just money. It takes a great deal of luck as well! Without sufficient luck, one might not even get to see it,” Zhang Jiuxiao explained in agitation.

Seeing how excited Zhang Jiuxiao had become before the Tianchen Brew, Zhang Xuan could only smile helplessly.

To be honest, he really did not desire such fine wine. On the contrary, he even thought that drinking was a waste of time. Thus, unless he was really bored, he would never drink.

But judging from Zhang Jiuxiao’s response, it seemed that if he could really purchase a cup of Tianchen Brew with ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones, he would fork out that sum without any hesitation. Seeing this, Zhang Xuan could not help but shake his head.

Was this wine so delicious as to make so many people willingly fork a huge fortune just for an opportunity to try it?

Seeing how Zhang Xuan had no interest in the Tianchen Brew at all, Zhang Jiuxiao sighed deeply and said, “I understand that

Zhang shi might not think much of the Tianchen Brew because you are neither a drinker nor a gourmet. However, if you just look at their reactions, you should be able to roughly understand how valuable the Tianchen Brew is.”

“Their reactions?”

Zhang Xuan raised his head, and only then did he notice the heated atmosphere in the hall. Everyone was staring at the cup of Tianchen Brew in Pavilion Master Yue’s hand with reddened eyes, and it felt as if they would even rush forward to snatch it if not for the disparity in strength between them.

After a short moment of commotion, a young man spoke up. “Pavilion Master Yue, there are so many of us here but only a cup of fine wine. So, it wouldn’t be too good to bestow it upon anyone here. Since that’s the case, why don’t we hold a competition, and the victor will be entitled to the cup of wine!”

“Yun shi is right. The fine wine brewed by Old Man Tianchen should only be awarded to those who are worthy of it. Otherwise, it would only be wasting it.”

“Regardless of what competition it is, I shall be the one who drink that cup of wine!”

“Stop bragging. It’s still not clear who will get the wine.”

...

The words of the first young man swiftly received the approval of the crowd.

Considering how valuable the Tianchen Brew was, it was impossible for everyone to be given a cup of it. Since that was the case, the one who would be drinking the wine would have to display some kind of capability that others would have no choice but to submit to!

“Quiet down.” Hearing the discussion among the crowd, Pavilion Master Yue took a sweeping gaze at the crowd and smiled. “All of your words are indeed true. There’s only a cup of wine here, so naturally, it should only be awarded to the one who possesses the greatest capability. However, there’s no need for a competition. I have already made up my mind on

who here is the most deserving of this cup of wine. In my opinion, he's the strongest and most capable among all of you."

"Oh?"

"Strongest? Pavilion Master Yue, may we know whom the person you are referring to is?"

"To have Pavilion Master Yue offer such high praise for him, I sure am curious to see just who that person is!"

...

Pavilion Maser Yue's words caused the crowd to immediately begin scanning the faces in the hall in hopes to finding whom the mysterious person complimented by him was.

They were all the top geniuses and experts in their own regions, so how could they possibly permit others to claim the title of the strongest without putting up a fight for it?

"This person's reputation is not too striking, but throughout his journey here from an Unranked Kingdom, he has crashed two pavilions in total, and both of them were successful. Furthermore, he brought about a change in the dynasty of the Qingyuan Empire and had almost all the master teachers there acknowledge him as their teacher. It has not been long since his name emerged on the Master Teacher Continent, but his every deed is nothing short of impressive. I have nothing but respect for that person," Pavilion Master Yue said.

"Two successful pavilion crashes?"

"Brought about a change in the dynasty of the Qingyuan Empire?"

"Journey here from an Unranked Kingdom?"

Everyone was taken aback for a moment before hurriedly turning their gazes toward Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao.

These two were the last to arrive, so there was no doubt that they were the candidates from the Qingyuan Empire.

"Indeed. He's no other than Zhang Xuan!" Pavilion Master Yue declared as he gestured at Zhang Xuan grandly.

This fellow sure has a bunch of boring tricks up his sleeves... Zhang Xuan clicked his tongue in disdain.

Pavilion Master Yue first took out the fine wine to evoke everyone's agitation before announcing that he would gift the cup of wine to him.

On the surface, it might seem like a compliment, an attempt to raise his standing among the candidates. But in truth, Pavilion Master Yue was 'helping' him draw hostility from the rest of the candidates, compelling them to spurn him.

To make him the enemy of the crowd with just a cup of wine, that fellow sure had mastered politics.

"Zhang shi, you might be unaware of it, but Song Xuan is actually my wife's younger brother. His recklessness back in the Qingyuan Empire nearly caused a huge disaster, and we really owe you one for correcting him. Also, your flawless resolution of the crisis has prevented a potential uprising in the Qingyuan Empire and instilled confidence back into the Master Teacher Pavilion. This is something that I could have never done. Thus, allow me to propose a toast to you with this cup of wine!"

With a chuckle, Pavilion Master Yue tapped on the table, and the wine on the table immediately floated into the air.

On the other hand, after hearing Pavilion Master Yue's words, Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes menacingly.

To first acknowledge his relationship with Song shi before expressing his respect toward Zhang Xuan... To onlookers, it seemed that there was nothing wrong with his words. However, that was basically invalidating any possible accusation that he was intentionally putting Zhang Xuan in a spot due to his conflict with Song shi.

To be able to make things difficult for Zhang Xuan while staying perfectly clean by the sidelines...

As expected of the head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he sure knew how to play games.

Really, there was nothing more frightening than a despicable master teacher!

1255 How Can Zhang shi Be That Weak?

If Zhang Xuan rejected the cup of wine, it would make him appear weak, and he would be made a laughingstock as a result of that. However, if he accepted the cup of wine, there would surely be plenty of people who would stand up in opposition to it.

Just thinking about the matter was enough to leave him with a splitting headache.

As Zhang Xuan was contemplating on how he should resolve this crisis, Pavilion Master Yue suddenly smiled slightly. With a tap of his finger, the floating wine cup before him immediately flew toward Zhang Xuan.

It seemed like the other party had no intention of allowing him turn down his ‘goodwill’.

“Zhang shi, this is just a token of my sincerity. I hope that you can accept it!”

Huala!

The wine cup arrived before Zhang Xuan.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to catch it, a powerful pressure hidden amid the cup suddenly crushed down on Zhang Xuan, threatening to tear his body apart.

In the face of the pressure, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

The movement of the wine cup was not too fast, making the gesture appear amiable on the surface. But in truth, Pavilion Master Yue had tampered with the wine cup so as to humiliate Zhang Xuan publicly.

If Zhang Xuan failed to catch the wine cup and allowed the fine wine within to spill, it would make it seem as if he had a complete lack of respect for Pavilion Master Yue, not even reciprocating the latter’s goodwill. Once that happened, the

crowd in the area, already displeased and indignant by how Pavilion Master Yue had chosen to bestow the wine upon Zhang Xuan, would surely make use of this opportunity to defame and put him down.

Through this, on top of getting back at Zhang Xuan for the affairs with Song Shi, Pavilion Master Yue would also be able to portray himself as a magnanimous and gracious man, further winning the respect of others. Truly two birds with one stone! Formidable!

“I’ll be graciously thanking Pavilion Master Yue for this cup of wine then!”

If it had been anyone else, this abrupt trick would surely have caught them off guard, causing them to embarrass themselves. However, Zhang Xuan was different. Through his Eye of Insight, he was able to sharply identify the flow of zhenqi around the cup.

Without any exaggerated movement, he lightly lifted his chopstick and tapped the wine cup ahead of him.

The movement of the chopstick was not too fast, but it carried the aura of an indomitable spear. In the blink of an eye, it struck the wine cup.

Po!

A hole was struck into the bundle of zhenqi shrouding the cup.

The zhenqi immediately dissipated into the surroundings like a deflated balloon. At the same time, without the support of the zhenqi, the wine cup began falling to the ground.

With a swift movement, the wine cup was caught in between the chopsticks.

“Hmm?”

The set of actions from Zhang Xuan flowed fluidly, as if he was simply calmly catching Pavilion Master Yue’s wine with his chopsticks. To an outsider, there was nothing incongruous about Zhang Xuan’s actions at all, but Pavilion Master Yue’s face froze for an instant.

The energy he had shrouded around the wine cup was something that even Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle cultivators would have been unable to withstand. Yet, the young man was actually able to neutralize his zhenqi so easily. From this, it could be seen that the other party's grasp over his strength had already reached an astonishing level.

Based on the intelligence he had received, Zhang Xuan's strength was mainly built upon a Saint intermediate-tier cauldron that he possessed.

There was nothing in the intelligence that he had received that said that Zhang Xuan possessed such powerful strength himself!

Naturally, Zhao Xingmo would not speak of his humiliating defeat against Zhang Xuan to another, and the others present in the room back then—Pavilion Master Wu, Yao shi, Zhang Jiuxiao, and the others—out of respect for the guide of the Sanctum of Sages, would never gossip about such a matter.

As a result, even with the superior intelligence network that Pavilion Master Yue commanded as the head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, there was no way he could have been aware of the surge in Zhang Xuan's cultivation and his near invincible fighting prowess in his cultivation realm.

Most of the information he had was obtained from Song shi's account.

And Song shi, having suffered a huge setback in Zhang Xuan's hands, would naturally put him out to be as vile as possible, accusing the other party of using his artifact to launch a surprise assault on him. As for the rest, he was a little too ashamed to speak of it. As a result, there was a lapse in the information regarding Zhang Xuan.

Nevertheless, despite his shock, Pavilion Master Yue did not allow it to show on his face. Instead, he covered it with a chuckle. "Zhang shi, cheers!"

After which, he raised his wine cup and gulped the wine down in a single mouthful.

Zhang Xuan replied with a polite smile and raised his wine cup as well. However, before he could drink it, the young man known as Yun shi abruptly stood up and yelled, “Hold it for a moment!”

Everyone immediately turned their gazes over.

“Yun shi, what’s wrong?” Pavilion Master Yue asked in bewilderment.

“Pavilion Master Yue, everyone has agreed earlier that the cup of wine should go to the one who is most qualified to drink it. I know that you have said earlier that Zhang shi is the strongest among us, but I can’t help but feel a little indignant about that. Thus, if it isn’t too much to ask, I would like to challenge him to a battle.” Yun shi clasped his fist toward Pavilion Master Yue before directing a provocative gaze toward Zhang Xuan.

There was no one in this room who would willingly miss the opportunity to savor the Tianchen Brew from Old Man Tianchen. For this opportunity to go to an unknown figure from the Qingyuan Empire... Putting aside him, there was no one in this room who did not feel indignant about that!

“Indeed. I think that we should still hold a competition to decide the allocation of the wine!”

“We are all aware of the circumstances surrounding the Qingyuan Empire. If I’m not mistaken, Zhang shi over here is currently at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, the same cultivation realm as one of my students! I really don’t think that he’s qualified to enjoy this cup of wine from Pavilion Master Yue!”

“Zhang shi, surely you won’t turn down our request to spar, will you? In any case, we will all be participating in the secondary selections tomorrow, so why don’t you give us a show of your strength first?”

...

All the candidates spoke up one after another, and they did not neglect to send looks of hostility toward Zhang Xuan while they were at it.

It seems like I have really underestimated the prowess of this cup of wine...

Looking at how vehemently the crowd was speaking up against him, Zhang Xuan could not help but sigh.

Despite Zhang Jiuxiao's previous explanation, he had been hoping that the others would not go so far for a mere cup of wine, and he would have been spared this unnecessary trouble. However, it seemed like the allure of the wine was truly irresistible to them.

Pavilion Master Yue contemplated for a moment before nodding. "I have already bestowed the wine upon Zhang shi, so I'll leave him to decide its allocation. However, I don't wish to see any acrimony arising out of this matter, understood?"

He had already ignited the spark, and all that was left was to sit back and watch the show.

"We understand, Pavilion Master Yue." Hearing those words, Yun shi's eyes lit up. Those words could be taken as a silent consent to his proposal. Thus, with a cold sneer, Yun shi turned to Zhang Xuan and said, "Zhang shi, do you dare duel me? If I were to win, the wine shall be mine to savor!"

Swirling the wine in the cup, Zhang Xuan asked leisurely, "Oh? Then what if you lose?"

"Lose?" Yun shi's lips crept up in derision. "Don't worry, I won't lose."

"I don't think your words can dictate whether you will win or not. Even if I'm on the weaker side, I still do have a chance at victory. Earning nothing when I win, losing a cup of fine wine when I lose—don't you think that the bet you are proposing is too convenient?" Zhang Xuan pointed out to Yun shi nonchalantly.

Yun shi was silent for a moment before harrumphing coldly. "What do you propose then?"

The cup of wine was bestowed upon the young man by Pavilion Master Yue. From such a perspective, the bet was indeed a little unfair to the other party.

“Simple. Both you and I know the value of this Tianchen Brew—a cup of it is worth at least ten concentrated high-tier spirit stone. However, I’ll give you a discount. As long as you take out five concentrated high-tier spirit stones, I’ll have the duel with you. If I lose, you can take the wine away with you. Otherwise, the spirit stones will be mine to take!” Zhang Xuan said.

That Yue Yiquan had intentionally come up with this show to embarrass him, but who was to say that this was not an opportunity for him? With just a bit of manipulation, he could make use of this opportunity to scrape this bunch of geniuses clean!

It was unlikely that they would be able to take out ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones, but five... Considering their standing as the top-notch geniuses in their regions, they might have that many.

“Five concentrated high-tier spirit stones?” Upon hearing the bet, Yun shi frowned in hesitation.

He had not expected the bet to get so big.

“If you do not dare to stake the spirit stones, I’m afraid that this wine will be mine to savor...”

Unwilling to waste his breath, Zhang Xuan began raising the wine cup, seemingly ready to gulp it down in a single mouthful.

“Wait a moment!” someone bellowed at that moment, and another of the master teachers stood up. “Yun shi, if you don’t have the guts to challenge him to a duel, I’ll be taking your place. That wine shall be mine to take!”

After saying those words, the master teacher flicked his wrist, and a jade container appeared before everyone’s eyes. He pried it open lightly, revealing five radiant spirit stones within.

“Here are five concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Feel free to check if you want to!” The master teacher flicked his hand, and the spirit stones flew toward Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan caught those spirit stones and examined them closely. A moment later, he nodded. “These are indeed

concentrated high-tier spirit stones.”

Before this huge crowd, the master teacher was not worried that Zhang Xuan would steal those spirit stones. He calmly walked into the center of the hall and said, “Good! The preliminary selection was a test of fighting prowess, so why don’t we compete on that as well? Do you dare to accept my challenge?”

The hall was rather spacious. While 33 outstanding talents were seated around the room, there was still substantial empty ground in the center to carry out duels and the sort.

“You want to have a duel with me?” Zhang Xuan unconfidently looked at the master teacher before him, and after a moment of hesitation, he asked, “May I know what your cultivation is at the moment?”

Seeing the fearful look on Zhang Xuan’s face, the master teacher could not help but sneer coldly. “I am at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle... If you really are that afraid, I can suppress my cultivation to Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage for the duel!”

To already be losing out in terms of aura prior to the battle... Even before conducting the duel, it was apparent who the winner would be.

“That would be for the best!” Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan placed the cup down before getting to his feet. He slowly walked over to the empty space in the middle of the hall.

The master teacher introduced himself as Zhang Xuan walked over. “I am Liu Chongxin from Beiye Empire!”

The next moment, Liu Chongxin’s eyebrows shot up, and he began suppressing his cultivation. In the blink of an eye, his cultivation had fallen to Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, just like Zhang Xuan.

“Qingyuan Empire, Zhang Xuan!” Zhang Xuan nodded hesitantly before clasp his fist. “Please have mercy on me later on.”

“Hehe, I will.” Seeing how the other party had suddenly turned so cowardly after challenging him arrogantly a moment ago, a contemptuous smirk emerged on Liu Chongxin’s lips. With a flick of his hand, his palm began turning red. “Let’s begin!”

After saying those words, he began dashing toward Zhang Xuan with imposing momentum.

“Liu shi’s movements may seem reckless on the surface, but these actions are actually carefully calculated. From the very first move, he is already using his Metalcore Palm!”

“Those who have cleared Zhao shi’s selection had to withstand three moves from those two listening-in students from the Sanctum of Sages. Given so, how could he be at all ordinary? Liu shi’s reckless exterior is just a performance to provoke his opponent into making a careless move. In truth, he’s in perfect control of the situation!”

...

The cultivators who were familiar with Liu Chongxin began discussing discreetly.

Those who were able to surpass countless other master teachers and clear the preliminary selections were all extraordinary geniuses. Even though Zhang Xuan might have appeared weak on the surface, Liu Chongxin still knew better than to underestimate his opponent.

Huala!

As soon as the palm fell, the surrounding air immediately began to redden, as if a coal that had lit up under intense heat.

The Metalcore Palm was the ultimate technique of the Beiye Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. A Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, the might it harnessed was comparable to even the Grand Constellation Finger.

“Interesting!” Zhang Xuan seemed to have gotten into the fight as well. He raised his palm as well to meet the other party’s assault.

The palm art he was using was also a Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, Cloud Crane Palm!

Despite its grand sounding name, the palm was centered around flexibility. Clearly, this was a sign that Zhang Xuan was unwilling to face Liu Chongxin's Metalcore Palm directly, intending to use other means to bypass it.

“Do you think that I'll allow you to deflect my palm that easily? Dream on!” Sneering coldly, Liu Chongxin intensified the pressure from his palm.

All of a sudden, it was as if the surrounding space had collapsed toward Zhang Xuan, leaving only a single path for the Cloud Crane Palm to travel through, effectively preventing the Cloud Crane Palm from exploiting its flexibility to maneuver around the Metalcore Palm.

He was trying to force a direct confrontation between them through his superior might!

Peng!

As soon as the two palms collided with one another, Zhang Xuan's face immediately paled, and he retreated several steps backward. At the same time, his arm bent slightly as well under the impact. Fearing that his opponent would notice his weakness, he hurriedly hid it beneath the sleeves of his robe.

“And here I was still wondering how formidable you were. With just this bit of strength, you were still dreaming of drinking the Tianchen Brew?” Seeing that his assault was effective, Liu Chongxin burst into a heart laughter.

“This...” On the other hand, Zhang Jiuxiao stared blankly at the unexpected sight before him.

Slowly, realization dawned upon him, and sympathy seeped into his eyes. “Zhang shi... can't possibly be that weak. I guess it's time to start praying for Liu shi over there...”

Every time Zhang Xuan behaved like that, someone would be in for a round of misfortune. He had undergone that many times himself, so he could be considered a veteran.

1256 My Weapon Is A Little Heavy!

Zhang Jiuxiao wasn't the only one who thought that. Zhao Xingmo and the other two listening in students were also speechless by the sight before them as well.

They had experienced with their own bodies how pervertedly powerful that fellow was. There was probably not a person in the world who could win against him in a battle of equal cultivation realm. Liu Chongxin might be talented, but compared to that abnormal fellow, he was still lacking far too much

Yet, despite the overwhelming disparity between the both of them, Zhang Xuan was pummeled to the point where his body was trembling non-stop, unable to retaliate at all... Even if they were beaten to death at this very instant, they still wouldn't believe the sight they were witnessing at this moment was true.

“It's a pity that Liu Chongxin beat me to it... If only I knew he was that weak, I would have gone up myself!”

“How could I miss this precious opportunity to savor the Tianchen Brew just like that...”

In contrast to Zhang Jiuxiao and Zhao Xingmo's reactions, the other young geniuses revealed regretful looks on their faces upon seeing this sight.

Previously, Pavilion Master Yue had said that Zhang Xuan had successfully crashed two Master Teacher Pavilions, and in his view, he was the strongest of them all... These words had instilled some fear and hesitation into them. After all, five concentrated high-tier spirit stone was no small sum at all...

They were still thinking that Zhang Xuan might really be an expert amongst experts, but who could have thought that he would actually be so weak!

Huala!

At the center of the hall, Liu Chongxin roared furiously and launched yet another charge toward Zhang Xuan.

In the blink of an eye, it felt as if eight hands had sprouted from his body, inducing a furious gale in the surroundings.

Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, Eight-armed Ape Form!

Powerful and swift, this battle technique swept across the hall like a raging storm, making it incredibly difficult to guard against.

From the looks of it, it seemed like Liu Chongxin had ‘seen through’ Zhang Xuan’s true strength, and he intended to end it swiftly so as to not waste any time.

“You...” On the other hand, seeing Liu Chongxin abruptly exerting such a powerful might, Zhang Xuan’s face paled in fright. He subconsciously huddled his body together.

Since he was unable to dodge the move, he would just have to forcefully attempt to endure it with his back.

This was one of the moves which a cultivator would not use unless they were really in a helpless and desperate position as it would only likely put them deeper into a spot.

“Such a person... is actually being called a genius?” Pavilion Master Yue sneered coldly.

Song Shi had sent word over saying that he had suffered a major setback in the hands of someone named Zhang Xuan, such that his manhood was even crippled. Pavilion Master Yue had still been wondering what kind of amazing expert Zhang Xuan would be, and he was intending to put the young man down into his place here. Who would have thought that... the young man would actually be so weak!

It seemed like there was no need for him to make any moves. Just Liu Chongxin would be enough to give the young man a beating of his life.

Shaking his head, Pavilion Master Yue picked up a slice of fish, and he was just about to savor it when the huddled Zhang

Xuan, seemingly in a state of complete panic, suddenly slipped and fell forward.

“AHHHHH!”

This forward fall had pushed him right toward Liu Chongxin—a completely suicidal move!

But... for some reason, despite how suicidal Zhang Xuan's move appeared to be, Liu Chongxin's face warped in horror upon seeing that sight. He immediately attempted to retreat, but it was already too late. With astounding momentum, Zhang Xuan's head crashed heavily onto his chest, and Liu Chongxin's body stiffened on the spot. A mouthful of fresh blood spewed all over the air.

In the next moment, Liu Chongxin fell heavily onto the ground, knocked out.

“Ah...”

As if not daring to believe that he would actually be able to knock out Liu Chongxin just by a mere slip, Zhang Xuan stood up and stared at the knocked out young man in a daze, muttering dreamily beneath his breath, “I... won?”

“This...”

While Zhang Xuan was in a state of confusion, the surrounding crowd had already widened their eyes in astonishment.

“Liu Chongxin's Eight-armed Ape Form wields incomparable might, making those who stand before it fearful to face it straight on. I would have never thought that it was all an act to conceal a mingmen at his chest! Zhang shi's panicked fall happened to avoid the Eight-armed Ape Form's assault and exploit the flaw... Just what kind of ridiculous luck is that?”

“His luck might be not bad, but that won't be enough to make him deserving of the Tianchen Brew! If he wishes to savor that wine, he would do well to show some strength!”

...

Soon, the crowd recovered from their state of shock, and disdain and contempt slipped back into their eyes.

They hadn't expected the young man to win through a lucky maneuver like that, but that was all there was to it. Mere luck.

"I have won! These concentrated high-tier spirit stones are mine then!" Finally recovering from his dazed state, Zhang Xuan exclaimed in excitement as he kept the spirit stones on the table into his storage ring. Then, he lifted the cup of wine once more and declared proudly, "Fellow master teachers, I believe that all of you should have witnessed my superior strength. So, I won't stand on ceremony before you all anymore and savor this cup of wine!"

"Bore witness to his superior strength?"

"How can there be such a shameless person in the world?"

"It's as if the person who had shrieked earlier wasn't him at all! It was clearly a lucky victory, so where did he find the courage to talk big before us?"

"I can't stand it anymore! I'll have to have a showdown with him!"

Not a surprise, Zhang Xuan's words swiftly piqued a furious uproar from the crowd. All of their faces flushed crimson from rage and indignant, reminiscent of volcanoes on the verge of eruption.

Pah! The earlier Yun shi smacked his table furiously and stood up once more.

"Liu Chongxin might have lost, but I haven't lost yet. Here is five concentrated high-tier spirit stones. They will be yours if I were to lose, but if I win, that Tianchen Brew will be mine to take!" With a powerful leap, Yun shi landed in the middle of the room before staring down on Zhang Xuan imposingly.

Had he known that the fellow was so weak, he would have surely dashed forward earlier. He wouldn't have waited till now.

"You still want to compete with me?" Zhang Xuan shook his head vehemently as a visible hint of fear surfaced in his eyes. "I don't think that would be appropriate. I just had a battle, and I have exerted myself greatly..."

“Exerted yourself greatly?” Hearing the nonsense the young man before him was speaking, Yun shi spat through gritted teeth.

If anyone has exerted himself in the earlier battle, it is clearly Liu Chongxin! You barely used any of your zhenqi in that earlier battle, knocking him with a headbutt by sheer chance. How can you say that you have exerted yourself greatly like that?

“That’s right. I don’t think I am in any state to face you in a duel, so... why don’t we just forget about it!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand as he lifted the Tianchen Brew once more and brought it over to his lips.

“Wait a moment! Why don’t we do this instead? I’ll give you some time to rest, and... here is ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones! If I lose, they will be for your taking. Otherwise, you will have to give the Tianchen Brew to me!”

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was intending to back out, Yun shi quickly flicked his wrist, and two jade containers appeared in his hands. With a flick, they landed on the table not too far away. While doing so, Yun shi didn’t forget his taunting, “Why? Are you scared now? Surely the man that Pavilion Master Yue is full of compliments for wouldn’t be a coward, right?”

“This...” Zhang Xuan lowered his head in hesitation.

It was hard to tell whether it was the spirit stones or the words that had left him conflicted, but after a moment of silence, he took in a deep breath, as if making a grave decision, and raised his head resolutely once more.

“Very well, I shall have a fight with you. However, I have a condition. You must suppress your cultivation to my level as well!”

“There’s no problem with that. However, unlike Liu shi, I’ll be using a weapon.” Hearing Zhang Xuan’s consent, a smile crept up on Yun shi’s lips.

He flicked his wrist, and a meteor hammer appeared in his hands.

Saint intermediate-tier weapon, Gilded Violet Meteor Hammer!

“You want to use a weapon?” Zhang Xuan frowned in distress for a moment before asking once more. “Are you sure?”

“Of course!” Yun shi replied.

“Very well then.” Zhang Xuan walked to the middle of the hall and assessed Yun shi once more. “Is that meteor hammer the weapon you are going to use?”

“That’s right!” Yun shi replied proudly.

It was out of sheer coincidence that he obtained this weapon, but rarely were there anyone who was a match for him when he had this meteor hammer in his hands. While it was clear that the young man before him had only defeated Liu Chongxin out of sheer luck, considering that he had placed ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones on the line, he didn’t dare to take any risk. Thus, he decided to go all out.

With this weapon in his hands, he would be able to subdue even Quasi Leaving Aperture realm experts easily, let alone a mere Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage cultivator!

“I also have a weapon, but... just a warning beforehand, it’s a little heavy. Please do pardon me if I fail to control its strength in the midst of battle.” With a conflicted look on his face, Zhang Xuan told Liu Chongxin.

“Your weapon is a little heavy? You are pitting the weight of your weapon against mine? Hahahahaha! Rest assured, use whatever weapon you want! It won’t be fun if your weapon isn’t heavy enough!” Hearing those words, Yun shi burst into hearty laughter.

Is there something wrong with this fellow’s head?

I am using a meteor hammer! You want to compete with me on the heaviness of our weapons?

Regardless of whether he was faced against a sword, a saber, or a spear, a hammer from me would never fail to force any opponent into defense!

Yet, to compete with me in terms of heaviness...

In the many fights I have been through, I have never seen a single weapon that is even heavier than mine!

“Since that’s the case, let’s begin then...” With an apprehensive look, Zhang Xuan reluctantly nodded.

“Show your weapon and allow me to have a look!” Yun shi laughed heartily as he raised his meteor hammer in a battle position.

Despite the lack of wind, the chain in between the two hammers rattled loudly, as if provoking the young man who dared stand before it.

“But I have already shown you my weapon...”

Contrary to his expectations, the young man before him simply shrugged his shoulder nonchalantly before the imposing presence of his meteor hammers, uttering some incomprehensible words.

Yun shi couldn’t help but be taken aback.

The young man’s hands were completely empty, and there was not a single thing on him that came close to resembling a weapon. Yet, he was saying that he had already shown him his weapon?

“Your head!”

In his moment of bewilderment, a master teacher by the side abruptly shouted in alarm.

“My head?” Perplexed, Yun shi raised his head, and his eyes immediately narrowed in astonishment.

Unbeknownst to him, a massive cauldron was already floating right above him at some point. Upon meeting gazes with Yun shi, ‘hu!’, the massive cauldron began descending on him with astounding momentum.

“The hell!” Exclaiming in horror, Yun shi tried to leap to the side to avoid the falling cauldron, only to realize that the sheer might of the cauldron had already caused the surrounding space to collapse inward.

Padah!

With a deafening explosion, a huge hole was punctured into the ground. All Yun shi saw was a dark shadow covering the entire world before being crushed into the ground. His two legs were exposed at the end of the cauldron, and its uncontrollable convulsing suggested that Yun shi had already been incapacitated.

“I told you that my weapon is really heavy!” Shaking his head helplessly, Zhang Xuan headed to the table and carefully kept the ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones there. Then, with a wave of his hand, he kept the Golden Origin Cauldron back to his storage ring, revealing a ‘大’-shaped Yun shi in the middle.

With a perfectly nonchalant voice, Zhang Xuan informed the other party, “You have lost.”

Pu!

This further blow caused Yun shi to spurt a mouthful of blood.

“T-this... This is cheating!”

“He’s from Qingyuan Empire, so how could he have such a formidable cauldron?”

“That cauldron must at least be at Leaving Aperture realm...”

“To win on sheer luck the first round and rely solely on his cauldron for the second, can that fellow get any more shameless than that?”

...

There was a brief moment of silence before a heated commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

Given the current circumstances, it was implied that a duel between the both of them should be a clash in their fighting prowess. Even if weapons were used, they should only play a supporting role... Yet, that fellow actually sent a Leaving Aperture realm artifact over to thrash his opponent!

That was way too unconventional!

However... Yun shi was the one who proposed fighting using weapons, and prior to the duel, Zhang Xuan had also told him that his weapon would be a little heavy...

Considering that Yun shi had been warned beforehand but still heartily agreed to it, Zhang Xuan couldn't exactly be said to be at a fault over here either!

Just that, while it was not clearly stated, it was obvious to everyone here that it was a duel to pit their fighting prowess against one another, not their artifacts...

“Two consecutive rounds of victory should be enough to prove my strength to all of you. If none of you have any objections, I'll assume that all of you agree that I am deserving of the title of the strongest amongst all of you. Naturally, I won't hold back on this cup of wine too!” After keeping Yun shi's spirit stones safely into his storage ring, Zhang Xuan announced smugly as he picked up the wine cup and swirled it. In an instant, the wine's fragrance diffused into the surroundings.

“Prove your strength to all of us?” Seeing how gleeful Zhang Xuan was, the faces of the remaining candidates reddened in indignation.

It is mere luck the first time round, and a complete reliance on your artifact the second time...

How can you call yourself the strongest amongst us all like that...

The title of the strongest should be forged with one's strength, not through relying on external tools!

“Zhang shi, I still have doubts about your strength. Do you dare to have a duel with me?”

Another master teacher stood up and walked to the center of the hall. Just the aura that he emanated left the surrounding air feeling as if it had turned viscous.

A Half-Leaving Aperture realm expert!

It seemed like the stronger experts amongst the group couldn't watch on anymore, and they had decided to make a move themselves. Meteor hammer is a Chinese weapon consisting of two weights hooked together with a chain.

1257 Sick From Spinning

“Zhang shi, that person is the Third Young Master of Sage Xue Clan, Xue Ning!” Upon catching a closer glimpse of the person who had just stepped forward, Zhang Jiuxiao hurriedly sent a telepathic message over to Zhang Xuan.

“Xue Clan?”

“Un. Even though they are a Tier-3 Sage Clan, their prowess is still one that shouldn’t be underestimated. In terms of influence and power, they are on equal footing with Qianchong Empire!” Zhang Jiuxiao continued.

Even the weakest of the Sage Clans would have a long heritage behind them, as well as a set of cultivation techniques suited for their bloodlines. Ordinary empires wouldn’t come close to comparing to them.

Even though this Third Young Master of the Xue Clan was only at Half-Leaving Aperture realm, his true fighting prowess could very well be on par with an average True Leaving Aperture realm expert!

“Thanks for your reminder.” Zhang Xuan replied Zhang Jiuxiao telepathically before lifting his gaze to look at Xue Ning. “You are interested in drinking the Tianchen Brew too?”

“At this point, it isn’t just for the Tianchen Brew anymore.” Xue Ning harrumphed proudly.

It might just be a cup of wine, but due to Pavilion Master Yue’s proclamation of bestowing it upon the strongest of them all, the nature of this matter had changed altogether. It was now a matter of their dignity and honor as well!

It would be one thing if Zhang Xuan was truly outstanding, but the two victories he had achieved were either by chance or through unacceptable means. Not to mention, that fellow’s cultivation was only at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage only...

If even that fellow was qualified to drink this cup of wine, which was to be bestowed to the ‘strongest’, what would this mean of the rest of them?

“What do you want then?” Zhang Xuan asked warily.

“The same as before. I’ll take out ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones to have a duel with you over the Tianchen Brew.” Xue Ning said.

“This...” Zhang Xuan paused for a brief moment. “I have just undergone two battles, and my zhenqi is nearly depleted at this point... Why don’t we do this instead? If you are willing to take out fifteen concentrated high-tier spirit stones, I’ll accept your duel!”

“Your zhenqi is nearly depleted?” Xue Ning’s eyelids twitched.

All you have done earlier was to toss a cauldron out to crush your opponent... Please explain to me how you have managed to deplete your zhenqi doing that!

“Fine! I’ll take out fifteen concentrated high-tier spirit stones then!” Xue Ning could tell that the other party had a way with his words, and arguing with him would be pointless. Thus, he waved his hands majestically and accepted the deal.

Judging from the strength and reaction speed which Zhang Xuan had displayed earlier on, it shouldn’t be too difficult for him to achieve victory.

Besides, there were close business ties between the Xue Clan and Qianchong Empire, so fifteen concentrated high-tier spirit stones were still a sum they could afford to lose.

“Very well!” Zhang Xuan nodded. “Will you be using any weapons?”

“I won’t be using any weapons, so you shouldn’t use your cauldron either. Let’s have a fair duel using our own strength!” Xue Ning quickly replied.

As confident as he was in his strength, he could tell that he stood no chance against the young man’s cauldron at all. If

they were going to compete with one another, the first thing he should do was to stop the other party from using his cauldron.

“This...” Hearing that they were not to use any weapon, Zhang Xuan seemed to have become a little apprehensive.

“Those who wish to enter the Sanctum of Sages should possess individual fighting prowess worthy of doing so. Relying on external tools is just a temporary measure; it might help you right now, but it won’t help you for life. Why? Are you afraid of having to fight a battle yourself?” Noting Zhang Xuan’s hesitance, Xue Ning mocked coldly.

“If that’s the case, I advise you to put down the Tianchen Brew and step down. Someone as cowardly as you isn’t worthy of drinking it!”

“Very well then. I guess it would only be fair for me to not use a weapon if you aren’t using one...” Seemingly cornered by Xue Ning’s words, Zhang Xuan gritted his teeth forcefully in indignance before finally relenting.

“Let’s start then!” Xue Ning flicked his wrist and placed three jade containers filled with concentrated high-tier spirit stones on a table.

At the same time, Zhang Xuan also casually placed the cup of wine back on the table before walking back to the center of the hall.

“Hmph!” Without the slightest interest in wasting any more time on words, Xue Ning immediately stepped off from the spot, and his figure suddenly turned illusory as he dashed toward Zhang Xuan.

Despite having suppressed his cultivation to Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, his speed was still as fast as lightning, making it highly difficult for one to accurately discern his figure.

With tremendous speed, Xue Ning’s five fingers swiftly appeared before Zhang Xuan.

“At the very least, he’s considerably stronger than that Liu Chongxin and Yun Shi!” Zhang Xuan thought as he took a step back before meeting the other party’s strike with a finger.

Grand Constellation Finger!

Upon catching sight of Zhang Xuan's move, Xue Ning forcefully changed his move. From a powerful palm strike, his fingers suddenly began moving adeptly as if he was playing a zither.

Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, Coy Pipa Finger Strokes!

Pipa! Pipa!

A series of resounding taps echoed as Xue Ning's adroit five fingers clashed together with the Grand Constellation Finger, inducing a series of sonic booms. Under the relentless assault of Xue Ning's fingers, Zhang Xuan's face paled, and he was forced to retreat again and again.

"Heh!" Xue Ning smirked upon seeing that his attack was effective.

He knew that this was a perfect opportunity to continue his assault, so he swiftly moved his fingers to draw out long strings of zhenqi to seal the area, preventing Zhang Xuan from getting away.

On the other hand, seeing how formidable Xue Ning was, a hint of fear seemed to appear in Zhang Xuan's eyes. Flustered, he moved his hands and legs simultaneously at an extremely swift speed, forming a protective barrier around him.

Even though this set of action seemed to have been done in a state of panic, it did manage to help him effectively fend off Xue Ning's continued assault.

"Oh? It seems like he isn't totally useless after all..." Seeing that his attack had been warded off, Xue Ning's eyebrows shot up in surprise.

In the first round, it appeared that the other party had obtained victory by sheer luck. In the second round, the other party had relied completely on his artifact, not moving a single finger in the battle at all... As a result, in Xue Ning's eyes, Zhang Xuan was nothing more than a fake, a person who had earned his reputation through trickery and luck. However, this

momentary encounter had made him realize that the other party's weakness could very well be feigned.

In any case, one thing was for sure. The other party was definitely not as weak as he appeared to be.

Nevertheless... an opponent who could only defend himself was still nowhere on par with him!

Clenching his fingers into a fist, he gathered his full strength and launched a decisive blow toward Zhang Xuan.

Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, Contention of a Hundred Vessels!

In terms of sheer might, this battle technique was above even that of Liu Chongxin's Eight-armed Ape Form.

Wasn't the other party's defense as resilient as a tortoise's shell?

Fine then, he would just have to forcefully break it apart!

Pah pah pah pah pah!

Overwhelming might paired with incomparably swift movements, in the blink of an eye, Xue Ning had already released more than a hundred punches. However, despite the immense might of his assault, he found that the young man's defense was even more formidable. Even after so many strikes, he found that he still was nowhere close to breaking apart the young man's tortoise shell!

"That fellow sure is scheming!"

"Despite being considerably strong himself, he intentionally feigned weakness in order to get us to challenge him and earn our spirit stones!"

"However, no matter how tough his defense is, it won't be sufficient to bring him victory. He might have withstood the barrage of punches from Third Young Master Xue, but he's bound to take significant damage in the midst of doing so..."

...

At this point, it had become apparent to the others in the room that Zhang Xuan wasn't as easy as they had initially thought

him out to be too.

As elites amongst the master teachers, they might have been tricked the first two times Zhang Xuan feigned weakness, but if they still couldn't tell this much by the third time, they would really be unworthy of their titles as geniuses.

But while they realized that Zhang Xuan wasn't as weak as they had initially thought, they didn't think that he would be too strong either. Otherwise, he wouldn't have allowed himself to force into a state where he could only sustain his defense, unable to counterattack at all.

As the old adage preached, 'a sustained defense is bound to lead to defeat'. At this rate, it was just a matter of time before Zhang Xuan caved in.

"Third Young Master Xue's zhenqi capacity is really no joke. For him, a hundred punches is nothing but a warm up... Let's see how long that lad can keep up his defenses for!"

"I had a battle with Third Young Master Xue once, and the weight of his punches will only grow stronger throughout the course of the battle. While that lad over there isn't too bad himself, it is nigh impossible for him to win against Third Young Master Xue!"

Amidst the crowd, two of the young geniuses remarked.

At Quasi Leaving Aperture realm, these two young geniuses were the few stronger ones amidst the crowd, so naturally, their words held more weight and credibility.

Xue Ning's strength might be nothing compared to them, but amidst the 33 candidates participating in the secondary selection, he could definitely be considered as one of the stronger ones.

Given his strength, it was hard to believe that a Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage nobody from Qingyuan Empire would be able to defeat him.

The battle proceeded on for some time, and another Quasi Leaving Aperture realm cultivator remarked, "Xue Ning's punches are growing faster and faster!"

On the field, Xue Ning was utilizing a particularly bizarre movement technique which made his movements seemed reminiscent of an intangible specter. At one moment, he would be at Zhang Xuan's left, and in the next moment, he would suddenly appear at the right. While flitting around Zhang Xuan, his punches never stopped, causing a rampaging shockwave to diffuse into the surroundings and raise a powerful gale.

Xue Ning's movements were so fast that just looking at it was giddy.

"He's actually still able to defend against that?"

This offense continued for quite a while, but despite seeming as if a weak candle flame in the midst of a raging storm, about to be extinguished at any moment, Zhang Xuan still managed to withstand every wave of attack each time, not exposing the slightest opening for Xue Ning's punches to slip through.

"Even if he's able to defend against that, he's bound to reach his limits very soon!" Frowning, one of the Quasi Leaving Aperture realm young genius who spoke up earlier remarked once more.

Even as a Quasi Leaving Aperture realm cultivator, under Xue Ning's rampaging barrage of attacks, he could only afford to maintain a defensive position for some time before his defense collapsed. The typical strategy against such relentless attacks was to bide one's time until an ideal opportunity emerged to slip an attack in and turn the tables around. Yet, Zhang Xuan had already maintained his defensive position for a very long time now, and even more shockingly, he actually managed to perfectly ward off every single attack... Was he really a tortoise?!

But even if Zhang Xuan specialized in defense, this wasn't a feasible plan in the long run.

Xue Ning's punches didn't just consist of mere brute strength—they were also infused with a hidden might. As the hidden might began accumulating, it would slowly wear down Zhang Xuan's body from the inside. Even someone of his cultivation

wouldn't be able to withstand something like that, let alone Zhang Xuan!

“Zhang shi, I concede that I have really underestimated you. I haven't thought that you would be able to survive so long under my offense. However, it's about time to put an end to this farce!”

Contrary to what the two Quasi Leaving Aperture realm young geniuses had thought, Xue Ning's attacks were completely ineffective against Zhang Xuan, and he had realized this fact as well.

His failure to bring down the other party despite his sustained assault had caused him to start feeling a little panicked, so he decided to use his ultimate move.

With a furious roar, the strength in his body began surging swiftly.

Xue Ning had intended to reserve this move as his trump card in the secondary selections, but at this point, he couldn't care that much anymore.

Hong long!

As his aura surged, Xue Ning's movements grew faster as well. Vaguely, seven to eight silhouettes of him seemed to appear all around Zhang Xuan. Following which, a thin golden line forged of zhenqi was pulled in a circle before tightening around the tortoise-shelled Zhang Xuan, slowly creeping its way into the shell an inch at a time.

“This is... the Xue Clan's Golden Silk Thread!” The face of one of the Quasi Leaving Aperture realm young genius warped in astonishment. “He actually managed to grasp this technique?”

“Golden Silk Thread?” the second Quasi Leaving Aperture realm young genius asked in confusion.

“That's right! The Xue Clan's Golden Silk Thread is similar a guillotine created by capitalizing on the superior speed of their movement techniques. If utilized well, it would be able to even sever a Saint intermediate-tier artifact into two!” The first young genius tightened his fists in agitation.

“This battle technique is really powerful. If Zhang shi persists on his defense, he could very well find the Golden Silk Thread wrapped tightly around him. Once that happens, even if he doesn’t die, he could very well find himself crippled for life!”

“It’s that formidable?” The second young genius gulped down a mouthful of saliva as he anxiously turned his gaze back to the battle. One look, and he suddenly froze in disbelief. “W-what... is Zhang shi trying to do?”

“Hm?” Turning his gaze over as well, the first young genius also froze on the spot as well.

In this moment, the young man trapped in the middle of the Golden Silk Thread suddenly staggered on the spot, as if intoxicated on alcohol. He did a series of extremely bizarre actions, a little reminiscent of an avant-garde dance, and a little reminiscent of a physical expression of his panic and helplessness as well.

Hu la!

As those movements were being conducted, Xue Ning’s movements suddenly grew faster and faster, to the point which it seemed as if he was going to lose control of himself.

And... he really did.

From the sheer centripetal force of his circular movement around Zhang Xuan, he ended up flinging himself headfirst into a pillar of the hall. Following which, his face suddenly flushed green, and he bent over and vomited...

After vomiting, his legs suddenly twitched, and putong!

He fainted.

“This...”

Not expecting the imposing Xue Ning to suddenly vomit and pass out, the second young genius stared at the sight with bulging eyes as he muttered in disbelief, “Could it be that he ended up moving in circles too fast and too much that he ended up getting... nauseated?” “The concept of hidden might is rather similar to Naruto’s Hyuuga Clan’s attacks. Basically, a punch can be mainly divided into two types, one that deals

superficial damage and one that deals internal damage, and hidden might refers to the portion of the strength that seeps into one's body to deal internal damage. For those who aren't too familiar with what centripetal force is, to put it in a very simplified term, it's similar to the feeling which you feel like you will be flung away when a car makes an abrupt turn or when you are playing the teacup ride in an amusement park. In this case, Xue Ning moved too fast that he really got flung away.

1258 Please Guide Me Along

It was true that an ordinary human would find themselves dizzy after spinning around too much, resulting in nausea and vomiting.

And Xue Ning did spin quite a few times in order to execute his Golden Silk Thread, and quite quickly at that. Could it have been that he had been unable to withstand the resulting sensation, just like ordinary humans?

“Of course not!” the first Quasi Leaving Aperture realm young genius exclaimed. “If I’m not mistaken, Zhang shi should have utilized a terpsichorean art, and in his moment of carelessness, Third Young Master Xue fell for it.”

In the first place, it was already ridiculous to think that someone whose cultivation had reached Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle would actually be vulnerable to giddiness from spinning too much. Even if not for that, Xue Ning surely would have undergone plenty of intensive training to cope with whatever side effects the battle technique would bring him. Otherwise, if he started vomiting before his attack could land, that would literally be suicide!

“Terpsichorean art? Speaking of which, the movements he carried out earlier were indeed a little peculiar. But Zhang shi isn’t dressed in any elegant clothes, and there were no exaggerated movements. Were those awkward movements really enough to put Third Young Master Xue into a trance?” The second young genius was still a little skeptical at that notion.

Xue Ning might not have been the strongest in their group, but he was definitely ranked in the upper half. His willpower and state of mind should have been flawless, so before a man who was neither dressed in beautiful clothes nor carrying out elegant and pleasing moves... why would he fall into a trance?

Didn’t terpsichores bewitch others through their beauty and grace?

Or did this mean that Xue Ning... was interested in men?

“True terpsichores are able to draw others in with even the simplest of gestures. In normal circumstances, it would indeed be difficult to faze Third Young Master Xue using such means. However, Third Young Master Xue’s failure to break through the tortoise-like defense after an extended period of time left him deeply anxious, resulting in an opening in his state of mind. It was by exploiting this opening that Zhang shi managed to get him in a single move!” the first young genius explained.

Even though the two of them were Quasi Leaving Aperture realm cultivators, he was more well-versed in the topic of terpsichores compared to the other.

“To wear down Third Young Master Xue’s strength and patience through putting up an impeccable defense, biding his time for the perfect timing to down him in a single move. It is no wonder Pavilion Master Yue said that Zhang shi is the strongest among us. There’s indeed more to him than meets the eye!” The second young genius turned his gaze toward Zhang Xuan, who was delightfully stowing the concentrated high-tier spirit stones into his storage ring, and his face turned grim.

Just like the others, he had thought that the young man had only won against Liu Chongxin and Yun shi through sheer luck. However, after seeing this sight, it suddenly dawned on him—how could a person who had cleared Zhao Xingmo’s preliminary selection possibly be ordinary?

“He really piques my interest. Brother Sun, let me challenge him first. You can have him if I fail,” the second young genius said.

As drawn to the Tianchen Brew as they were, they were not so desperate as to have to drink it at all cost. However, the various peculiarities that Zhang Xuan had shown had left them rather intrigued. In this moment, he was like an enigma that they desired to look into.

“Our fighting prowess is roughly equal. If you can’t defeat him, there’s no point in me going up there and embarrassing

myself.” The first young genius shook his head. Nevertheless, he still offered some pointers. “During the battle with him, remember to propose a fight without weapons. Also, make sure to firm your state of mind. Don’t grant him any openings to use his terpsichorean arts!”

“Un!” The second young genius nodded.

Following which, he stood up and clasped his fist. “Zhang shi, I am Ma Minghai from the Qianchong Empire. Please guide me along!”

Zhang Xuan was still feeling deeply thankful to Pavilion Master Yue for granting him this precious opportunity to earn so many concentrated high-tier spirit stones when he suddenly heard a voice. Turning to the young man who had just stood up, he asked, “You want to challenge me, too?”

“That’s right!” Ma Minghai smiled. “Will you accept my challenge?”

“I won’t,” Zhang Xuan replied as he sat back down on his seat.

“...” Ma Minghai nearly fell to the ground after hearing those words.

That is not how the script was supposed to go!

Even if you don’t want to accept my challenge, do you have to be so smug about it?

A little choked up within, Ma Minghai gritted his teeth and offered, “I’m willing to offer fifteen concentrated spirit stones as my stake for the battle!”

“I have exerted myself too much earlier. I’m too exhausted to fight anymore.”

“Twenty! I can’t offer you any more th..” Ma Minghai clenched his fists tightly. However, before he could finish his words, the young man had suddenly materialized back in the middle of the hall. He flung his sleeves grandly, assuming the disposition of an unworldly expert.

“You should have said so earlier! I have already recovered from my exertion, so let’s start now!”

“...” Ma Minghai was so stifled that he nearly failed to catch his breath.

Shameless people, he had seen plenty of them in his life, but the young man before him was really in a whole different class!

Just to up the stakes, he would use the same blatant lie again and again... Incurrable!

At that moment, Ma Minghai suddenly heard a voice in his ears. “Don’t be affected by him. He’s intentionally provoking you to affect your state of mind!”

It was from the earlier ‘Brother Sun’.

“Un.” A glint flashed across Ma Minghai’s eyes, and he nodded in agreement.

If not for Brother Sun’s reminder, he might have lost sight of himself there. It seemed like the clash between them had already begun, even before the battle itself.

Taking a deep breath, Ma Minghai calmed his state of mind back to its unperturbed state before flicking his wrist to take out twenty concentrated high-tier spirit stones. With one quick movement, the jade containers storing the spirit stones flew straight toward Zhang Xuan’s table. After which, he leaped to the center of the hall and raised his hand politely.

“I’ll be in your care.”

“I’ll be in your care, too.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Boom!

Without wasting any time on words, Ma Minghai swiftly suppressed his cultivation to Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, and with a resounding burst of zhenqi flowing through his meridians, he dashed forward.

Unlike the previous few opponents whom Zhang Xuan had faced, Ma Minghai’s movements were simple and concise. There was no elegance or complexity in his moves, only ferocity and brutish violence. Yet, it was such an offense that was extraordinarily difficult to cope with. A single lapse in attention could very well result in severe injuries.

“Not bad!” Zhang Xuan complimented.

As expected of a genius from the Qianchong Empire, this Ma Minghai was not a person to be underestimated.

In the previous few battles, Zhang Xuan had not used his full strength at all. Nevertheless, it seemed like his opponent had still noticed that something was amiss, so he had given up all attempts at testing him out, using his strongest moves from the start so as to gain control of the flow of the battle.

Under his relentless suppression, it would leave very few gaps for Zhang Xuan to attempt anything.

Nevertheless, in face of the ferocious offense, Zhang Xuan calmly drove his zhenqi and flicked his palm. In an instant, it felt as if a river had appeared between the two of them.

Zhang Xuan had not used Spatial Seal, utilizing just his zhenqi.

Even though it was less than a tenth of his true strength, the palm strike still harnessed strength that no ordinary Primordial Spirit realm cultivator would have been able to withstand.

“This...” The awoken Liu Chongxin saw the sight before him, and he gulped fearfully.

Previously, he had thought that Zhang Xuan had only defeated him by sheer luck, and he had been filled with indignation at his defeat. But after seeing this, he realized that if the young man were to get serious on him, just this move would be more than enough to defeat him!

“Good move!” Exclaiming in excitement, Ma Minghai focused his Sword Intent into his forefinger and sliced it downward.

Si la!

A burst of sword qi surged forward, and the river forged of zhenqi was instantaneously sliced in two.

“What formidable Sword Intent!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in excitement.

He had faced quite a few experts himself, but he had never encountered anyone with such pure Sword Intent! That was nearly on par with a fifth of his!

Really, experts from the Qianchong Empire were indeed extraordinary.

With such thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan grabbed the sword qi in between his forefinger and middle finger, and with a flick, he sent it back at Ma Minghai.

“What the... He actually managed to catch such a powerful burst of sword qi?” Brother Sun widened his eyes in incredulity.

Granted that Ma Minghai’s sword qi was already considerably worn down from slicing the river of zhenqi, its might and speed were still not at a level where it could be caught. Impeccable timing, superior strength, and a profound grasp of swordsmanship—all of these had to be met before a feat like this could become remotely possible!

Brother Sun knew that there was no way he could achieve a feat like that.

Could it be that Zhang Xuan was actually a wolf cloaked in sheep skin? Appearing weak and tame before them, an unparalleled expert was actually hidden beneath that exterior!

“Incredible! Why don’t you try catching this one too?”

Despite having his sword qi caught, Ma Minghai did not show the slightest apprehension or fear. Instead, his eyes glowed in excitement, as if a new world had appeared before him.

With a bellow, a powerful surge of Sword Intent burst forth from Ma Minghai. It swiftly morphed into countless swords around him, filling the area so densely that a large area was shrouded by an ominous shadow.

Forged from sword qi, these swords could be considered mere masses of energy, but if they were to land, they would easily cut through one’s flesh just like sharp blades, inflicting grievous injuries upon their victim.

“That’s Sea of a Thousand Blades!”

“To be able to form so many swords with just his Sword Intent, Ma Shi is really a frightening person!”

“I can’t even imagine standing against all of those swords simultaneously...”

...

The faces of the young geniuses in the hall swiftly turned grim.

Due to the presence of the Sword Lagoon in the Qianchong Empire, most of their experts had a profound mastery of swordsmanship.

The Sword Lagoon had many swordsmanship heritages, and the Sea of a Thousand Blades was one of the strongest sword arts there. It was impossible for any cultivator to defend themselves from the simultaneous assault of so many blades!

Just like the rest of the crowd, Zhang Xuan was also a little startled by the emergence of countless swords around Ma Minghai.

To be able to form so many surges of sword qi around him in the blink of an eye, Ma Minghai was indubitably a powerful adversary. While the other party was still a long distance away from matching up to him, against Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, Liu Yang... Fine, at least Sun Qiang would not have been a match for him in a battle at the same cultivation realm!

Standing before the imposing array of swords, a slight smile crept onto Zhang Xuan’s lips. Instead of attempting any evasive maneuvers, he opened his mouth and inhaled deeply.

Huala!

The countless swords immediately converged together into Zhang Xuan’s mouth.

Geji! Geji!

Before anyone could process what was going on, the imposing array of swords was swallowed into Zhang Xuan’s stomach.

“This...”

The faces of the surrounding crowd paled.

While others would be desperately trying to escape from the onslaught of sword qi, that fellow actually opened his mouth and swallowed it.

However, that was not the end of the shock yet.

“Here, I’ll return them to you!”

The countless surges of sword qi that Zhang Xuan had swallowed earlier were melded into a short sword inside his abdomen, and with a resounding roar, the short sword burst forth toward Ma Minghai.

Along the trajectory of its movement, the short sword swiftly grew longer, reaching a length of a zhang before it stopped growing. Even before reaching its target, the incomparably sharp aura that it emanated already left a sharp pain in the eyes of onlookers.

“Ahhh...” Not expecting such a move from Zhang Xuan, Ma Minghai’s face paled.

Understanding the deep peril that he was in, he unhesitatingly released the seal of his cultivation, and his aura quickly rose.

Peng!

Nevertheless, he was still forced to retreat a dozen steps to ward off the momentum from Zhang Xuan’s assault.

Only with the full might of his Quasi Leaving Aperture realm cultivation did he barely manage to withstand that attack, and even so, he still felt an aching pain gushing through his body. At the same time, the lingering shockwave from the collision had caused his robe to be shredded, leaving behind a tattered rag that barely covered his body.

“You are indeed very powerful...”

Taking a deep breath, Ma Minghai was just about to suppress his cultivation once more to release his most powerful move when he suddenly heard a voice sounding from above.

“Enough. You aren’t a match for Zhang shi.”

Turning around, Ma Minghai saw Pavilion Master Yue gesturing for him to back down with a wave of his hand.

“Yes!” As indignant as Ma Minghai felt, he knew that Pavilion Master Yue was right. Just the previous release of the seal on his cultivation was already enough to signify his defeat.

“I believe that Zhang shi should have proved his superior strength to everyone here, so let’s end the duels right here.” Pavilion Master Yue waved his hand.

At that moment, he was feeling stifled inside.

He had intended to use the hands of others to teach that brat a lesson, but not only did his plan fail tragically, it even became an opportunity for that brat to establish his dominance.

“End the duels right here? Are you really thinking that you will be able to get away scot-free after attempting to bully me? How could there be something that convenient in the world?” Zhang Xuan raised his eyelids to glance at Pavilion Master Yue, and his voice grew louder as he spoke.

“I, Qingyuan Empire’s Zhang Xuan, request to challenge the head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, Yue Yiquan. Please guide me along!” “One zhang = ~3.33m

1259 Give Him Plenty Of I

“He’s challenging Pavilion Master Yue to a duel?”

“But Pavilion Master Yue is a Half-Grand Dominion realm expert!”

Everyone froze, unable to believe what they had just heard.

Yue Yiquan was not only the head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he was also a Half-Grand Dominion realm expert. To challenge him to a duel... had Zhang Xuan gone mad, or was he really that arrogant?

“You are challenging me?” Caught off guard by those words, Pavilion Master Yue was visibly startled for a moment before his eyes gradually narrowed into thin slits.

“That’s right!” Zhang Xuan replied with a cold smirk. “Surely you wouldn’t shy away from a challenge from a junior, would you?”

From the very start, that fellow had been trying to make things difficult for him at every turn, and this had left Zhang Xuan deeply displeased.

The reason why he feigned weakness at the very start was to draw others to challenge him so that he could earn his fair share of concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Now that his strength was finally exposed, there should be no one so foolish to challenge him anymore.

Since that was the case, it was about time for him to settle some personal grudges.

You wanted to play politics with me?

Alright then. Let’s see if you have the strength to back up your actions!

“Audacious!” An elder standing behind Pavilion Master Yue stood up and roared. “Zhang Xuan, mind your own standing! You are a mere 7-star master teacher from a Tier-1 Empire

whereas Pavilion Master Yue is a quasi 8-star master teacher. Do you think that you are qualified to challenge him?”

“You are questioning my qualifications?” Zhang Xuan scoffed coldly as he flicked his wrist, and a token floated in the air.

“Tell me, am I still unqualified now?”

“That token! You are... an honorary elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion?”

“H-how can that be?”

The revelation of the token left everyone in the room horrified, unable to believe what they were seeing.

They understood very well just how powerful the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion was. Even the most normal of managers there would be a top-notch expert at the very least, wielding unquestionable authority in his grasp. As for an honorary elder... that was a position so high that they couldn't even begin to fathom it!

Not only was the crowd astounded by this, Pavilion Master Yue's body had stiffened in horror as well.

Very clearly, Song Shi hadn't informed him of this!

If he had known this in advance, even if one were to inflate his guts tenfold, he still wouldn't dare to provoke an elder from the Empire Alliance!

“Y-y-yes, you are qualified!” The face of the elder who had spoken earlier turned ghastly pale, and he fearfully replied with quivering lips.

With his eye of discernment, he could tell that the token was real. In other words, despite the young man's lacking cultivation and low master teacher rank, he was indeed a bona fide elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion.

A figure whom they could only look up to, not daring to offend in the slightest.

“Good!” Retracting his emblem, Zhang Xuan looked at Pavilion Master Yue coldly and said, “Pavilion Master Yue, are you going to turn down my challenge? You used a cup of Tianchen Brew to turn everyone against me, all just to exact

vengeance for your wife's brother. Really, watching you play out your own act is truly cringeworthy. We are all master teachers here, do you think that your little ploys would really go unnoticed? Are you going to coward out after you have provoked me, an elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion?"

"This..."

"Exact vengeance? Does anyone know what's going on?"

"I arrived earlier, so I heard some news. It appears that there are some problems in the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, so Pavilion Master Yue sent his wife's brother to deal with the matter. However, the latter failed to resolve the issue properly, abusing his authority even, so he ended up being crippled, and he's currently awaiting punishment from the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion as well..."

"There's such a matter? That explains why there's something weird about Pavilion Master Yue's behavior today..."

Hearing up to this point, there was no one else in the room who didn't know what was going on. They turned to look at Pavilion Master Yue once more, but this time, the nature of their gazes was very different.

They had thought that Pavilion Master Yue was an impartial and magnanimous person, and his personal charisma had also won them over for a while. However, from the looks of it now, it seemed like he was nothing more than a hypocrite...

To manipulate them to deal with Zhang Xuan, doing in his enemy without soiling his hand, Pavilion Master Yue sure knew how to play politics.

"Since it's a request from Elder Zhang, there's no reason for me to turn you down!" Noticing the hostile looks from the surroundings, Pavilion Master Yue clenched his fists tightly.

At this point, he knew that he couldn't back out of this matter anymore. Those in this room wouldn't allow him to retreat with his hands clean.

Huala!

Pavilion Master Yue got to his feet and walked forward before stopping at the center of the hall. With a soft chuckle, he said, “Elder Zhang, you are an honorary elder of the Empire Alliance, a person of extraordinary standing. It’s an honor to have a duel with you, as well as a great learning experience. Considering that you are my senior, surely I don’t have to suppress my cultivation, right?”

“Don’t have to suppress his cultivation?”

“Pavilion Master Yue means to... fight against Zhang shi with his Half-Grand Dominion realm cultivation?”

“But Zhang shi is only at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage! Even if he were to use his cauldron as well, it’s questionable whether he would be able to rival a Leaving Aperture realm expert or not, let alone a Half-Grand Dominion realm! Isn’t Pavilion Master Yue clearly taking advantage of him?”

“This is really too much. I was still doubting the authenticity of Zhang shi’s words earlier, but from the looks of it now, it’s clear that Pavilion Master Yue is indeed intentionally trying to trip him over!”

...

A huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

At the same time, Zhang Xuan also narrowed his eyes menacingly.

Indeed, those who were advanced in age tended to be more cunning.

In his years of experience as the head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, it seemed like Pavilion Master Yue had become rather adept at playing within the rules.

He first intentionally addressed Zhang Xuan as Elder Zhang so as to lower his standing, making Zhang Xuan appear as if he was in a superior position...

If it was a senior who had proposed the duel, the junior accepting the duel wouldn’t have to lower his cultivation.

Such was the convention in the Master Teacher Pavilion, especially considering that there were nearly no circumstances where a senior master teacher would be weaker than a junior master teacher.

And this was exactly the convention which Pavilion Master Yue was building his argument upon. Such conventions had already become something similar to unspoken rules, so from an ‘official’ stance, Pavilion Master Yue would be safe as long as he were to insist on it. Despite the condemnation from the crowd, there was really nothing Zhang Xuan could do to force Pavilion Master Yue to lower his cultivation.

So, in just a single move, Zhang Xuan had been cornered instead.

It seemed like Pavilion Master Yue had also realized that he wouldn’t be a match for Zhang Xuan even with his cultivation suppressed, that was why he disregarded his reputation to propose something like this.

“Sure. You don’t have to suppress your cultivation.” Zhang Xuan nodded slightly.

You want to thrash me with your full power?

Sure, let’s see if you have enough teeth for me to knock out!

From the point where I started my journey here from Tianxuan Kingdom, those who had attempted to do me in had all either suffered tragic fates or ended up becoming my students!

“I’ll be thanking Elder Zhang for your kind guidance then!” Pavilion Master Yue chuckled politely, but the sharp glint that flickered across his eyes showed a very different story.

As he stretched his body slightly, a domineering aura burst forth from his body, reminiscent of a massive dragon soaring into the clouds.

At Half-Grand Dominion realm, Pavilion Master Yue’s cultivation had already surpassed that of the other Vicious. With just a grasp of his hand, the surrounding space suddenly seemed to freeze on the spot, preventing anyone from making a move.

Hu la!

After driving his aura to its strongest, Pavilion Master Yue flicked his wrist and whipped out a sword.

He drove his zhenqi into the sword, and a resounding metallic call echoed from it. With just one look, it was apparent that the sword was of superior tier, Saint intermediate-tier at the very minimum.

A weapon of such caliber, paired with Pavilion Master Yue's cultivation and profound grasp of swordsmanship... There was no doubt that he was one of the strongest enemies that Zhang Xuan had encountered so far!

“Pavilion Master Yue has even taken out his sword?”

“He's clearly trying to quell Zhang shi!”

“Well, given that Pavilion Master Yue was exposed and challenged in public, it's a given that he would want to vie his dignity back!”

“It seems like Zhang shi is in a really dangerous position then...”

The crowd frowned upon seeing this sight.

Pavilion Master Yue was already a difficult adversary even without a sword, and now that he was equipped with one... it seemed unlikely for anyone beneath Grand Dominion realm to be able to match him.

“Since you took our your weapon, can I take that to mean that you wish to have a clash of weapons with me?” Zhang Xuan asked calmly.

Pavilion Master Yue nodded, “My specialty happens to be swordsmanship, so naturally, I hope to receive Elder Zhang's pointers in that aspect.”

“Since you have wielded a weapon, I won't hold back either then.” Zhang Xuan stated nonchalantly.

“Elder Zhang, feel free.” Pavilion Master Yue replied with an impeccably polite smile.

He had seen Zhang Xuan's cauldron, and with his eye of discernment, he had gauged its fighting prowess to be roughly on par with Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage cultivators. Naturally, to a Half-Grand Dominion realm expert like him, that cauldron wouldn't pose any threat at all.

"Very well then." Zhang Xuan nodded slowly.

Then, he flicked his wrist.

Huala!

More than a hundred puppets suddenly appeared in the middle of the hall.

These were the puppets forged he had obtained from Vicious back at the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows.

As these puppets were forged from the hands of celestial designers, they didn't carry the aura of Otherworldly Demons. As such, there was no problem with Zhang Xuan using them in public.

"These are my weapons." Zhang Xuan replied calmly. "You guys, Pavilion Master Yue over there seeks your guidance. Make sure to give him plenty of it!"

"Yes!"

These puppets had all submitted to Zhang Xuan, so upon hearing his order, they immediately roared furiously before charging at Pavilion Master Yue.

While their cultivations were only at Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage to advanced stage, lower than the Half-Grand Dominion realm Pavilion Master Yue, the issue lay in that there were more than a hundred of them! Watching as the hundred puppets charge toward him, Pavilion Master Yue suddenly felt as if someone had opened the gates of hell and let the demons loose on him.

"You..." Pavilion Master Yue could have never dreamed that Zhang Xuan would have so many powerful puppets in his possession, and his face immediately warped in horror.

He immediately flicked his sword to fend off the first incoming puppet, but in the next moment, two fists were

already on their way to striking his back.

Before he could even turn around, more punches and kicks were already on their way to him from all different direction. To make things worse, they were all accurately aimed for his blind spots. It was as if those puppets knew the openings in his swordsmanship in advance, and they were exploiting them intentionally.

“It’s a collaborative formation from the Combat Master Hall... and it seems like someone is guiding them too!” Pavilion Master Yue’s body stiffened at the realization.

If these puppets were to attack randomly, with his Half-Grand Dominion realm cultivation, even though it was still likely to end in his loss, at least his defeat wouldn’t have been too tragic. However, that was clearly not the situation now. Somehow, it seemed like Zhang Xuan knew where all of his openings were, and he was getting the puppets to attack him while cooperative with one another impeccably through using one of the most profound collaborative formation of the Combat Master Hall...

Things were really dangerous for him then!

And as expected, after trading a few blows, the puppets still remained completely unhurt whereas he was already covered with wounds.

Peng peng peng peng!

As the battle went on, the number of blows that Pavilion Master Yue received increased swiftly. From time to time, there would even be a kick landing squarely on his face. By ten minutes, his eyes were already swollen to the point where he had to squint to barely see what was before him.

As powerful as he was, there was no way he could withstand the simultaneous assault of more than a hundred Leaving Aperture realm combat master level fighting prowess puppets!

“If only I knew this would happen, I would have never proposed using weapons...” In this moment, Pavilion Master Yue really wanted to cry.

It was just a moment ago which he deeply believed that as long as he didn't suppress his cultivation, he would be able to destroy Zhang Xuan easily... Who in the world was to know that that fellow would have so many puppets in his possession!

Puppets were indeed considered to be weapons as well, so from that perspective, what Zhang Xuan did couldn't be considered to be against the rules...

But what that had left him even more frustrated was how leisurely he had told the young man to 'feel free' previously!

The young man sure had taken his words at face value!

"This..."

On the other hand, the rest of the crowd gulped down a mouthful of saliva as they watched the sight before them fearfully.

It was really fortunate that they didn't propose to have a duel using weapons after the precedence with the cauldron, or else even if all of them were to go at him simultaneously, their forces would still be utterly devastated!

"Zhao shi, please! Save Pavilion Master Yue!" Seeing how pitiful Pavilion Master Yue was being pummeled, the elder who had spoken earlier quickly turned to Zhao Xingmo and pleaded desperately.

Zhao Xingmo shot a nonchalant glance at Pavilion Master Yue as he casually picked up a piece of fatty meat and placed it into his mouth. After chewing and swallowing the piece of meat slowly, he calmly replied, "Pavilion Master Yue has agreed to the duel, and he was the one to set the rules too. I don't think that there's anything I can do to help him."

After witnessing everything with my own eyes, why should I bother helping someone like Yue Yiquan?

If a student from the Sanctum of Sages couldn't even stand up for himself after being bullied, he would be better off living a humble life as an ordinary master teacher!

Besides...

That fellow didn't even hesitate to beat me up either! Why should I sacrifice myself to save you?

“Pavilion Master Yue...” Seeing that Zhao Xingmo was reluctant to make a move, the elder could only panic helplessly by the side.

By this moment, Pavilion Master Yue was already lying feebly on the ground. His face was filled with footprints, and blood spouted out from his mouth as his body convulsed uncontrollably...

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After ten minutes of pummeling, it had already come to a point where it seemed like Pavilion Master Yue would lose his life if the puppets continued hitting him. Thus, Zhang Xuan could only reluctantly order his puppets to stop.

After stowing his puppets away, Zhang Xuan placed his finger on Pavilion Master Yue's renzhong to wake him. Then, looking at the latter earnestly, he asked, "Pavilion Master Yue, you have used a weapon in the battle, so I used mine as well. It was a fair duel, so you should have no disagreements with the conclusion, right?"

"A fair duel?" Blood spouted from Pavilion Master Yue's mouth once more.

To send more than a hundred puppets to pummel the individual me, can that still be considered as a fair duel?

"If Pavilion Master Yue has any objections with the conclusion, I don't mind having a match with you right now without using any weapons," Zhang Xuan replied. "I fought four battles earlier without any rest whereas you have only fought one. Such will be advantageous to you, but considering that you are my junior, I'll make an exception just this once."

Pu!

Pavilion Master Yue spouted blood once more.

You weren't even injured in the four matches you fought whereas I am clearly on the verge of death, unable to move at all... How the heck am I supposed to battle with you?

"Pavilion Master Yue, can I take your silence as consent? Since that's the case, I guess I'll just have to reluctantly accompany you for a duel then!"

Seeing how the other party was focused on spouting blood, neglecting to answer his question, Zhang Xuan began walking

over to Pavilion Master Yue with clenched fists, ready to sink it into the latter's flesh at any moment.

"I admit defeat! I admit defeat!" Pavilion Master Yue exclaimed.

At this point, there was nothing else he could do. He was clearly unfit for battle in his current state, so if the duel continued, he could very well lose his life.

For a Half-Grand Dominion expert like him to be forced to admit defeat to a mere Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage lad... The more he thought about it, the more stifled he felt.

It's all that bastard Song Xuan's fault! Pavilion Master Yue thought with gritted teeth.

Had Song Xuan not misreported the information, he would not have been pummeled so badly. It felt as if Song Xuan wanted to pull him down with him!

"It's good that you have admitted defeat." Placing his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan straightened his body. "As the head of the Master Teacher Pavilion, instead of thinking about how you can bring greater prosperity to mankind, you waste your time obsessing over your personal interest and making paltry gains.

"If I wasn't strong enough, not only would I have humiliated myself here, I might even have been severely injured as well. I'll report this to the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion, and I'll leave them to judge this matter."

Pavilion Master Yue had exploited his position in order to settle his personal grudges. In the first place, the punishment that Song Xuan had received was justified, and yet, due to his personal ties, Pavilion Master Yue still attempted to exact vengeance on him. Just the lack of magnanimity he had displayed this far was already enough to show that he was not worthy of being the head of a Master Teacher Pavilion.

"I..." Pavilion Master Yue's face paled.

Zhang Xuan was an honorary elder of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion. These words were more than enough

to end his career as the head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Alright, feel free to continue. I’m going to rest now.”

After everything that had happened, Zhang Xuan knew that it would only be uncomfortable for everyone if he remained in the hall. Thus, he turned around and left.

The moment he walked out of the door, two apprentice master teachers immediately rushed up to lead him to his accommodation.

Regardless of whether Zhang Xuan had a conflict with Pavilion Master Yue or not, he was still a guest of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. Even if only due to formalities, they would still have to prepare a proper accommodation for them.

Zhang Jiuxiao, Sun Qiang, and the others quickly followed along as well.

Their accommodation was a residence. Zhang Xuan took one of the rooms and closed the door before entering the Myriad Anthive Nest.

While there were some unpleasant events that had happened at the banquet earlier, he did earn fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones, so it was not too bad. With this many spirit stones, he could attempt to break the bottleneck of Primordial Spirit realm and reach Half-Leaving Aperture realm.

Once he reached that cultivation realm, he would be able to deal with Pavilion Master Yue even without his puppets.

Sitting on the ground, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out all the concentrated high-tier spirit stones that he had obtained earlier.

After making some preparations, he began absorbing the pure spiritual energy through his acupoints and converted it into Heaven’s Path zhenqi.

Hong long!

Some time later, he successfully achieved a breakthrough—
Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage!

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

Soon after, just as Zhang Xuan had reinforced his cultivation and was attempting a breakthrough to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, he found that the fifty concentrated high-tier spirit stones had been completely expended, reduced to mere dust.

Zhang Xuan could not help but shake his head. The effectiveness of concentrated high-tier spirit stones is falling along with the advancement in my cultivation.

Back when he achieved a breakthrough to Primordial Spirit realm, he had already noticed that the effectiveness of concentrated high-tier spirit stones was starting to dip. Nevertheless, he had thought that fifty of them should at least suffice for him to reach Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle. However, in the end, it was only enough for him to raise his cultivation by one stage.

It seemed like he would have to find some way to acquire higher tier spirit stones if he wished to achieve breakthroughs swiftly!

I should go out and take a look around!

Seeing that there was no way he could cultivate on, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply as he left the Myriad Anthive Nest and walked out of his room.

“Young Master...” Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Sun Qiang and Zhang Jiuxiao immediately walked over and greeted him.

“Jiuxiao, are you familiar with Qianchong City? I need someone to take me around. I want to check if there’s any place where I can exchange for or earn concentrated high-tier spirit stones,” Zhang Xuan said.

“I came to Qianchong City three years ago, so I am quite familiar with the city. Is Zhang shi in urgent need of spirit stones?” Zhang Jiuxiao asked, slightly perplexed by Zhang Xuan’s question.

Did the other party not just earn fifty pieces at the banquet? Was it insufficient for his use?

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded, not explaining anything much.

If he told the other party that he needed more spirit stones because he had already expended those that he had earned during the banquet, there was a chance that the other party might have been shocked to death. In any case, it was a risk not worth taking.

“How many do you need?” Zhang Jiuxiao asked.

“As many as possible.” Zhang Xuan roughly estimated. “It would be best if there’s around three hundred or so!”

Based on his current consumption of spirit stones, in order to reach Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, he would require at least a hundred more. Furthermore, his soul cultivation was only at Saint 2-dan, and to raise it to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle as well would require roughly another two hundred.

“Three hundred?” Zhang Jiuxiao’s lips twitched. “You need so many of them? It won’t be easy to find that many even in Qianchong City...”

While Qianchong City did have a spirit mine that produced concentrated high-tier spirit stone, it was far from becoming a common commodity in the city. Only the strongest of powers in Qianchong City would have the connections and wealth to obtain that many concentrated high-tier spirit stones.

Zhang Jiuxiao pondered for a moment. “Currently, I only know of three places that will have that many concentrated high-tier spirit stones. First, the Master Teacher Pavilion, which is here. Second, the Qianchong royal family. Third, the black market that I told you about earlier!”

“How could I have forgotten the Master Teacher Pavilion!” Zhang Xuan was taken aback for a moment before he slapped his forehead.

Indeed! Considering how even those individual master teachers were able to take out ten to twenty of them easily, it should not have been too difficult for the Master Teacher Pavilion to take out three hundred of them.

“Hmm... Should I go look for Pavilion Master Yue and have him take out those spirit stones?” Zhang Xuan stroked his chin as he pondered. A moment later, he shook his head. “Better

not. I have just beaten him up, and it would be bad for my reputation if I continued pummeling him.”

If he extorted spirit stones out of Pavilion Master Yue right after pummeling him to a state of half-death, it would have seemed as if he was taking advantage of the weak, and it would have reflected badly on him.

No matter what, he still had his image and standing to uphold. If he extorted spirit stones from Pavilion Master Yue like that, he would have been no different from a street thug!

“The Master Teacher Pavilion is out for the moment then. As for the Qianchong royal family... I don’t have any ties with them, so that’s probably unfeasible, too.”

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xuan said, “Where is the black market you spoke of? If I don’t have anything to exchange for concentrated high-tier spirit stones, is there any way I can earn some there?”

“The black market is just outside of Qianchong City,” Zhang Jiuxiao replied. “The fastest way you can earn concentrated high-tier spirit stone if you have nothing to trade for them would probably be... gambling!”

“Gambling?”

“Un, gambling with your life.” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded. “The black market has something known as the Ring of Death. A victory in the Ring of Death will earn one a high-tier spirit stone, two consecutive victories two high-tier spirit stones, three consecutive victories three high-tier spirit stone, so on and so forth. But of course, that is only spare change—the big money lies in what comes later on. By winning ten consecutive matches, one will have earned the title of ‘Conqueror of Ten’, and that grants one the opportunity to clash with the other Conquerors of Ten. There will be many people putting their bets on those matches, and if one plays it right, it’s possible to strike a windfall!

“But to be honest, those who were able to become Conquerors of Ten are all nigh invincible existences in their own class. There’s no doubt that great wealth lies there, but the slightest

misstep could spell one's death. Every year, countless experts are brutally killed in the ring!"

"I see." Zhang Xuan nodded as his eyes grew brighter and brighter.

He was confident that he would not lose to anyone in the same cultivation realm, so if he became a Conqueror of Ten and clashed with the others, wouldn't he be able to learn lots of money swiftly?

Seeing through Zhang Xuan's thoughts, Zhang Jiuxiao advised, "Zhang shi, you are indeed extremely powerful in your power class, but... I think it would still be best for you to steer clear of the Ring of Death."

Intrigued, Zhang Xuan asked, "Why?"

Zhang Jiuxiao should have been fully aware of his strength, and yet, to still ask him to steer clear of the Ring of Death... could it mean that he had encountered cultivators who were even stronger than him in the Ring of Death?

"Other than the usage of excessively powerful artifacts, the Ring of Death has basically no rules whatsoever. Usage of poison, hidden weapons, trickery... Such means are all fair game. Putting everything aside, it's unlikely for even the powerful combat masters to last till the tenth round!"

At this point, a bitter smile crept on Zhang Jiuxiao's face before he said, "I also visited the Ring of Death out of curiosity back then, but in the fifth match, I was defeated."

In view of their standing, there were many means that a master teacher wouldn't be able to use in a battle. On the other hand, the fighters in the Ring of Death were those who underwent life-and-death battles every single day. They had no qualms resorting to whatever means they could think of, as long as it would aid them in slaying the opponent before them.

"You were defeated by the fifth match?"

"That's right. The ten victories required to become the Conqueror of Ten must not only be consecutive but continuous as well. In other words, you have to remain on the stage and fight ten opponents without any rest in between. While the

opponent chosen for each match is selected by random, they typically grow stronger and stronger.

“Furthermore, each of them have different specialties—some are adept in physical assault, some are more skilled in soul arts, and some are masters of mystical arts, making it extremely difficult to guard against them. The reason I was defeated is due to exhaustion piling up, and the fellow in the fifth match took advantage of that well,” Zhang Jiuxiao explained.

“Take me over to take a look,” Zhang Xuan said.

To be plunged into a life-and-death battle one after another was indubitably a great challenge on one’s mind and body.

But to Zhang Xuan, it was really nothing at all.

“Does Zhang Shi really want to go?” Seeing how the other party was still insisting on it after all he had said, Zhang Jiuxiao shook his head and sighed. “If you find yourself in danger, it would be best for you to admit defeat quickly.”

“Don’t worry!” Zhang Xuan said confidently.

If he could earn spirit stones just by fighting matches one after another, just as Zhang Jiuxiao said, he should be able to easily earn enough to shut down the entire black market!

Just the thought of it left his heart trembling in excitement! *Renzhong* is a traditional Chinese medicine term that refers to the curved area between one’s nose and mouth. In English, it is called the philtrum.

1261 Trading for Spirit Stones

The underground market was located beneath a manor in the suburbs of Qianchong City. Before heading over, Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao had changed into leisurely clothes, assuming the roles of young scions heading out to play.

“It’s said that the person who founded the black market in Qianchong City is an ill-fated scholar. The injustice he has faced from the bureaucratic system has made him harden his heart to the world, and he decided to forsake academics for martial arts. In order to vent the frustrations within him, he created the black market.

“In there, there’s nothing that one cannot buy or do as long as one has sufficient money. Of course... the prices there are exorbitant as well. In fact, it could be said to be the greatest money sink in the Qianchong Empire!”

While advancing forward, Zhang Jiuxiao briefly introduced the black market to Zhang Xuan.

“Considering the scale of the black market, isn’t it weird that the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion and the royal family have left them to their own devices?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Since even an outsider like Zhang Jiuxiao knew about this place, there was no doubt that the royal family and the regional Master Teacher Pavilion were aware of its existence as well. Thus, shouldn’t they have moved to strike down the black market instead of allowing it to develop freely, especially considering that they were gambling with the lives of others?

“The Master Teacher Pavilion and royal family do keep a lookout for the black market just in case it gets out of hand, but otherwise, they usually leave it be for stability considerations.”

“Stability considerations?” Zhang Xuan asked in incomprehension.

Even though they had not arrived at the black market yet, based on what Zhang Jiuxiao had said so far, it seemed like the black market was effectively a lawless area, devoid of any security or rules. How could an existence like that in Qianchong City possibly contribute to its stability?

“The larger a city is, the more cultivators it has. There’s always a lack of cultivation resources, so it’s inevitable that cultivators will clash with one another to vie for them. As this is a fundamental problem, there’s no way that the royal family or the Master Teacher Pavilion can stop them altogether,” Zhang Jiuxiao explained.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

In this world where strength reigned supreme, there was no doubt that raising one’s cultivation realm was extremely important. However, given that the resources in the world were limited, there was bound to be conflict and strife over them.

No matter how powerful the Master Teacher Pavilion was, it could not possibly prevent such matters altogether. If it implemented forceful measures to put a halt to such conflicts, it might face serious backlash from the stifled cultivators.

“An underground black market might be unseemly, but it’s a possible channel where cultivators can acquire what they need as long as they have enough money. And to earn sufficient money, they have to cultivate harder and battle. With such a channel, there is a lesser need for cultivators to engage in dishonorable actions such as stealing to obtain what they need. While there are quite a few casualties from the Ring of Death, there’s no doubt that the security of Qianchong City as a whole has improved,” Zhang Jiuxiao said.

Where there was light, there were bound to be shadows as well.

There were misfits even within the Master Teacher Pavilion, let alone the other cultivators. Without an avenue to vent their

darker desires or acquire their resources, there was no knowing what extreme actions cultivators might resort to within the city.

As the saying went, ‘A lake too clear will sustain no fish; a man too severe will find no companion.’

The existence of a black market was unlawful and should have been frowned on, but if it could reduce crime rates in the city, there would be a meaning to its existence as well.

Take his previous life for example, there was a certain occupation that was banned in several countries. But despite the authorities knowing where the people of that occupation operated, they still allowed its existence. It was not that they could not shut it down, but the occupation served its own role in society. It satisfied the needs of others, and through doing so, it reduced crime rates in that aspect.

If they really eradicated it altogether, that would potentially pose a challenge to the security of the society.

Such was the same for the Qianchong Empire’s black market as well.

It was unlawful on the surface, but its existence could prevent societal problems from arising in the city. In view of that, the royal family eventually chose to look the other way when it came to their operations.

As for the Master Teacher Pavilion, as long as there was no grievous injustice being dealt and the matter would not harm mankind in general, it usually would not interfere. After all, its manpower was limited.

Thinking back, it was likely that Hongyuan City, Qingyuan City, and the other capitals should also have had such a place. It was just that Zhang Xuan had been too preoccupied with other matters, and he had never stayed too long in each city either.

Just as Zhang Xuan was in the midst of his thoughts, Zhang Jiuxiao said, “Alright, we have arrived!”

Raising his head, Zhang Xuan saw a massive manor right before him.

Before they could walk into the manor, two middle-aged men stood in their path and demanded, “Token!”

Surprisingly, they were both Primordial Spirit realm experts, and they emanated a powerful killing aura. With just a look, it was clear that they were veterans who had killed many enemies in battle.

Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and passed an object over.

A middle-aged man took the object and examined it closely before passing two black cloths over, gesturing for them to cover their eyes.

Following Zhang Jiuxiao’s lead, Zhang Xuan wrapped the black cloth around his eyes, and he realized that not only did it hinder his sight, even his Spiritual Perception was impeded, preventing him from clearly perceiving his surroundings.

Under the lead of the two middle-aged men, they walked for roughly ten minutes before the cloth around their eyes was finally loosened.

A massive mall came into sight. There was a huge crowd milling about, and they extended all the way to the horizon. Even though they were underground, the brilliant glow of the Night Illumination Pearls had the entire area brightly lit as if it was day.

“This...” Blinking in wonder, Zhang Xuan began scanning his surroundings.

He had been to plenty of trading halls, markets, and malls, and even though the scale of the mall before him was not too big, the items that were on display were truly astounding.

Walking past the various vendors, Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed in astonishment. “Is that the Black Goldcrystal Ore? It’s actually on sale here?”

The Black Goldcrystal Ore was a treasure that Wu Yangzi had left behind in his heritage. It was known to be extremely rare, such that it could not even be found anywhere in Qingyuan City. Yet, in this black market, it was actually placed on public display!

Despite seeing all of this with his own eyes, Zhang Xuan still found it difficult to accept.

Noticing Zhang Xuan's expression, Zhang Jiuxiao chuckled softly. "Even though the Black Goldcrystal Ore is rare, it isn't completely unobtainable. It isn't that surprising for it to be on sale here."

He had also been like that the first time he entered the black market, hardly daring to believe the treasures that were being sold so casually around him. However, after seeing more of it, he had gradually grown used to it.

"Cultivation technique manuals, Saint intermediate-tier artifacts, intelligence... As expected of a black market, they really have everything here!" Zhang Xuan remarked in awe as they walked along the street.

It was really as if everything was on sale there, regardless of whether the item was lawful or unlawful.

Upon seeing a store that sold cultivation technique manuals, Zhang Xuan stopped and asked, "Are there are Half-Leaving Aperture realm and Leaving Aperture realm cultivation techniques here?"

"We do. Depending of the tier of the cultivation technique manual, we will charge different prices!" the elder watching the store replied lazily.

The black market also had its own guards to maintain security. As such, the vendors did not fear that their good would be snatched.

"Oh? How much do they cost?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Gesturing to the board beside him, the elder replied nonchalantly, "Take a look at it yourself."

Saint intermediate-tier cultivation techniques and battle techniques cost roughly ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones at the minimum. Naturally, those of lower tiers were slightly cheaper.

The price of a single book was still acceptable for Zhang Xuan, but if he had to buy the thousands of books required for

him to successfully compile a Heaven's Path Divine Art, that would really be a huge expenditure.

“How many Half-Leaving Aperture realm and Leaving Aperture realm cultivation technique manuals do you have?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“I have a total of 327 for Half-Leaving Aperture realm and 52 for Leaving Aperture realm. They are all on the shelves there. They have been sealed, so don't bother using your Spiritual Perception to scan them. If there's a book you are interested in, fork out the money and I'll copy down a new one for you. Don't worry, the cultivation techniques we have here are all complete and detailed. We even have the Crouching Dragon Art, which the Qianchong royal family practices, and the Supersonic Severing Swordsmanship that Pavilion Master Yue practices. The prices are very fair as well,” the elder said with a proud wave of his hand.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan looked at the bookshelves before him. There were quite a few books on them, but they had been sealed with some kind of special formation, making it impossible to view their content through Spiritual Perception.

However... When had Zhang Xuan needed to rely on Spiritual Perception to read a book?

Sweeping across them with his eyes, he muttered in his mind, Flaws!

Huala!

The shelves of books immediately materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path.

These books were indeed high quality, but it was a pity that they were lacking in quantity, so he was still unable to compile a complete Heaven's Path Divine Art.

There's really the royal family's Crouching Dragon Art and Pavilion Master Yue's swordsmanship... Isn't this black market a little too powerful? Zhang Xuan exclaimed internally after swiftly browsing through the books in the Library of Heaven's Path.

On his journey here from Tianxuan Kingdom, the cultivation techniques practiced by the royal families had all been confidential secrets. Outsiders would never be allowed to even come close to them, let alone lay their hands on them. Yet, for them to actually appear in a black market like this, placed on public display for sale... this was really frightening in another way.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was scanning through the books, the elder asked casually, "Which one do you wish to buy? I'll have it copied for you."

"There's no need for it..." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Since he had already collected those books into the Library of Heaven's Path, there was no need for him to waste precious concentrated high-tier spirit stones on them, not to mention that he did not have the money to afford any at the moment anyway.

On the other hand, seeing that Zhang Xuan would not be buying anything, the elder turned his head away coldly, not wanting to waste any effort on him anymore.

There were plenty of people who would ask him for the prices of his cultivation technique manuals just to put on a show despite not having the money to afford them. He was already used to it.

After leaving the book vendor, Zhang Xuan continued proceeding ahead. There were really all kinds of valuable treasures on sales, and even grade-7 pinnacle pills could be found here and there.

Zhang Jiuxiao pointed to the area ahead of him and said, "Zhang shi, the shop up ahead is the place where one can trade items for concentrated high-tier spirit stones. If you have some spare high-tier spirit stones or other miscellaneous artifacts, you can have them exchanged for concentrated high-tier spirit stones. However, the prices will be pushed down, so you might not get a good exchange rate."

Turning his gaze over, Zhang Xuan saw a store with a long and narrow reception. There were two attendants on wait

there, and there were hardly any customers to be seen.

Walking up, Zhang Xuan took a look at the exchange rate listed on the wall, and his mouth began twitching uncontrollably.

It sure was a huge scam.

Under normal circumstances, the exchange rate for high-tier spirit stones to concentrated high-tier spirit stones was 1,000:1. However, the store actually tripled it, turning it into 3,000:1.

In other words, he had to exchange three thousand high-tier spirit stones for a single concentrated high-tier spirit stone!

Most cultivators would pretty much have to bankrupt themselves just to trade for a single concentrated high-tier spirit stone here.

At the same time, the average price for Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle Saint intermediate-tier artifacts would be around ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones, but over here, it was only worth three. Even Leaving Aperture realm Saint intermediate-tier artifacts were only worth six.

Well, Ding Ding is still rather valuable, worth about roughly thirty concentrated high-tier spirit stones... Zhang Xuan stroked his chin as he swiftly calculated the price of the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Even though plundering the Ten Great Kings and Qingtian Emperor and the sales of the Cloudmist Flower had earned him a fair sum, all in all, that only added up to roughly sixty thousand high-tier spirit stones. In order to raise his soul cultivation, he had expended quite a number of them, so he only had roughly forty thousand of them left at the moment.

In other words, he could only trade for ten concentrated high-tier spirit stones in this store!

That did not even come close to the value of his Ding Ding!

Zhang Xuan pondered hard for a moment before eventually shaking his head. Forget it, that fellow has been rather loyal to me, so I can't really sell it.

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan walked up to the attendant.

“I want to trade for concentrated high-tier spirit stones.”

“How many do you need?” the attendant asked nonchalantly.

“How many can I trade all of this for?”

Hong long!

With a loud boom, a huge bunch of high-tier spirit stones, weapons, medicinal herbs, ores, and the like fell to the ground, raising a cloud of dust in the area.

“So many items?”

The attendant rose to his feet in astonishment. This is a saying usually used as a philosophy toward governance. Basically, what it means that a rule too authoritative could result in a backlash from the populace. If you were to impose all kinds of lofty ideals and strict rules upon the populace, even if out of goodwill, it's unlikely that the common populace will be able to accept it. Sometimes, it might be good to leave some grayness between the black and white, as well as to leave some space for others to breathe.

1262 Annal of Bedstead

Disquisition

This attendant was extremely young, appearing to be only in his early thirties. His cultivation was only at Half-Saint as well. He did not think much when Zhang Xuan first approached him, but upon seeing the countless items on the ground, his eyes widened in agitation.

Due to the exorbitant prices in the black market, unless in cases of emergency, rarely would there be anyone who was willing to exchange for concentrated high-tier spirit stones there. As a result, he had rarely received any customers. Thus, it was completely inconceivable for him to see Zhang Xuan pulling out so many items at once.

It took a moment before the attendant shook himself out of his daze, and he anxiously turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Gongzi, do you want to trade in all of these for concentrated high-tier spirit stones?”

“Un!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had taken most of these items from the Qingtian Lineage and the Qingyuan royal family. In the past, they could still have been considered valuable resources to him, but after his cultivation reached Primordial Spirit realm, they were no longer useful to him.

Rather than taking up space, he was better off trading them for something that could be used to raise his cultivation further.

“A-alright! I’ll have the appraiser come over right now...” Knowing that an invaluable customer was standing before him, the attendant dared not show the slightest disrespect to Zhang Xuan. He quickly rushed into the store, and before long, he returned with an elder behind him.

After swiftly assessing the items, the elder turned to Zhang Xuan and said, “All in all, your items can be traded for 113

concentrated high-tier spirit stones. Here's the receipt, please take a look..."

However, Zhang Xuan waved his hand and said, "There's no need for that. Bring me the spirit stones."

He had tabulated the total cost earlier as well, and his calculations were roughly in line with the final price the elder had mentioned.

The elder nodded. "Very well. Bring me the spirit stones!"

The attendant quickly rushed back into the store before returning with a storage ring in hand.

Taking the storage ring, Zhang Xuan quickly took a look inside. 113 concentrated high-tier spirit stones, no more no less.

"Zhang gongzi, by trading a hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stone at our store, you have already automatically become an esteemed guest of our market. It happens that we have an auction tonight that is only opened to esteemed guests, so I would like to extend an invitation over to you as well." Smiling, the elder passed over a token that represented Zhang Xuan's identity as an esteemed guest of the market.

To trade in so many concentrated high-tier spirit stones at once, Zhang Xuan could already be considered a huge customer of the black market, qualifying him to become an esteemed guest.

"Auction?" Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before shaking his head. "For the time being, I'm not really interested in attending any auctions."

What he was lacking the most at the moment was spirit stones. Everything aside from that was not of much use.

"Gongzi, please don't reject my offer so quickly. Perhaps, you might change your mind after hearing my introduction of the auction tonight!" the elder replied with a confident smile.

"Oh?"

"In the auction tonight, there will be two Leaving Aperture realm Saint intermediate-tier artifacts and a quasi grade-8 pill

that can fully restore the strength of a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator within three seconds, making it a miracle pill for clearing one's Leaving Aperture Ordeal!" the elder said proudly.

The Leaving Aperture Ordeal was a battle against the power of the heavens. Just the slightest weakness in the midst of the ordeal could spell the utter annihilation of one's body and soul.

In view of the risks, many cultivators would spend huge sums of money to purchase quasi grade-8 pills that would allow them to swiftly regain their strength. This would ensure that their strength would not be depleted in the midst of facing the lightning tribulation, thus enhancing their chances of clearing it.

Of course, such pills were extremely expensive as well. The average cultivator would never be able to afford their exorbitant prices.

"It's fine..." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

After cultivating the Saint Ascension Decipher, Zhang Xuan's zhenqi capacity could be said to be nearly boundless compared to ordinary cultivators. As such, the effects of those quasi grade-8 pills on him were truly insignificant. As for Saint-tier artifacts, he already had the Golden Origin Cauldron and his army of puppets. Why should he waste his money on purchasing others?

With a light chuckle, the elder said, "If gongzi is uninterested in those, there's one thing that you might be interested in."

"Oh?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Annal of Bedstead Disquisition!" the elder said.

"Annal of Bedstead Disquisition?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

"When Sage Luo passed by this area, the head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion back then, Pavilion Master Yan, specially visited him to pay respects to him.

"Seeing that Sage Luo was resting, he stood perfectly still on the spot for three days straight, resulting in a huge heap of

snow covering his entire body. In view of his sincerity, Sage Luo began lecturing Pavilion Master Yan while seated on his bedstead.

“According to historical records, the sight then was truly phenomenal. Countless celestial flowers descended from the sky, and golden lotuses bloomed from the ground. Origin Energy surged into the surroundings, and even the heavens seemed to rattle from his teachings.

“Pavilion Master Yan recorded the teachings that Sage Luo imparted to him back then in a book and passed it down to the later generations, and that book is known as the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition!” the elder explained.

“Sage Luo?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“Un. The old ancestor of Sage Luo Clan, Luo Tianyun!” the elder replied with a nod. “According to the rumors, there are some secrets concerning the Luo Clan’s cultivation technique hidden within the annal, and if one studies it diligently, it will advance one’s understanding of space significantly.

“However, the annal went missing at some point in time, and for many years, no one was able to find it. It was only recently that someone coincidentally discovered it, and passing through many hands, it eventually found its way into our market.”

Hearing the explanation, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

In truth, he had no interest in the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition. However, hearing that it had some ties with the Luo Clan, he could not help but feel a little moved.

If he could uncover the secrets of the Luo Clan’s cultivation technique through the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition, this might very well add to his bargaining power against the Luo Clan when he sought Luo Ruoxin in the future.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before asking, “May I know roughly how much the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition is likely to be sold at?”

If he could get a rough estimate of the price of the artifact, he would at least have a rough target as to how much concentrated high-tier spirit stones he would have to earn.

Even though he had just exchanged for more than a hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones, there was no doubt that this sum would be far from sufficient for him to buy something as valuable as the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition.

“While the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition was not written by Sage Luo himself, it does contain the essence of his teachings. Even if only a tenth of the original conception is harnessed in the text, there’s no doubt that it’s an unparalleled treasure to Primordial Spirit realm and Leaving Aperture realm cultivators. As such, even I can’t say for sure how much it’ll be sold for.

“However, the starting bid is five hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones, so I reckon the auctioning price will be a thousand at the very minimum. Gongzi, if you wish to purchase the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition, you should quickly gather your concentrated high-tier spirit stones,” the elder advised.

Due to Zhang Xuan’s earlier action of whipping out countless valuables, the elder was already convinced that the young man was a wealthy scion. If that was the case, it would not have been too difficult for him to fork out a few hundred or even a few thousand concentrated high-tier spirit stones.

“Alright!” Zhang Xuan nodded. “Help me reserve a seat. I’ll make some preparations first. I’ll rush back later when the auction starts.”

Seeing that there was some time until night fell, Zhang Xuan decided to head to the Ring of Death first to see if he could rake in a thousand concentrated high-tier spirit stones.

“Alright.” The elder nodded as he began making preparations.

“Alright, let’s go!” After dealing with the matter at hand, Zhang Xuan beckoned Zhang Jiuxiao over and had the latter take him over to the dueling ring.

The dueling ring was located at the very center of the black market. The personnel of the Ring of Death first checked their cultivation and handed them a token that represented their tier before letting them in.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan's cultivation had already reached Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage, Zhang Jiuxiao was rendered speechless.

The rate at which this fellow's cultivation rose honestly left him feeling deeply crazed within.

The first time that they met, he was only at Spiritual Perception realm. Yet, in just a few days, he had become a Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage cultivator, just like him. And two hours ago, when he was fighting against the other young geniuses during the banquet, he was certain the other party's cultivation had still been at intermediate stage too, but within this short period of time, Zhang Xuan had actually managed to make a breakthrough.

All along, he had prided himself as a genius, but seeing the rate at which the other party was growing, Zhang Jiuxiao suddenly realized that he was just an ordinary mortal after all.

They were not even on the same level of existence.

Seeing the traumatized look on Zhang Jiuxiao's face, Zhang Xuan explained, "I managed to reinforce my cultivation sufficiently, so I was able to achieve a breakthrough just a moment ago..."

"You managed to reinforce your cultivation sufficiently..."

Those words only furthered Zhang Jiuxiao's trauma.

Others take at least months to fully reinforce their cultivation at Primordial Spirit realm, but this fellow took a day or two.

Really, there was no comparing with him.

Forget it. There's bound to be a disparity between the both of us. After all, he's a Celestial Master Teacher, Zhang Jiuxiao consoled himself.

If Zhang Xuan could not achieve the extraordinary, how could he receive the acknowledgement of the heavens?

While Zhang Jiuxiao was still deep in thought, a middle-aged manager of the Ring of Death walked over and asked, "Which of the two of you is going into the ring later?"

"I'll be going on the ring," Zhang Xuan replied.

“I’ll first fill you in on the rules and requirements on the ring. In order to join the ring, you must first pay two concentrated high-tier spirit stones as a participation fee. During the match, the weapons, hidden weapons, and similar equipment that you are intending to use must be supplied by us. You must not use your own personal items. This is to ensure fairness on the ring,” the middle-aged manager explained.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The rules were also roughly as he guessed as much. Otherwise, if a participant were to bring an extraordinarily powerful weapon on the ring, they would be able to easily dominate the entire ring. There would be minimal suspense and entertainment for the audience, and the purpose of the Ring of Death would also be rendered meaningless.

“Also, after you win five rounds, we will start opening bets for your matches. As there are stakes involved, unless you are incapacitated or crippled, any attempts to surrender will be considered invalid by the Ring of Death. This is extremely important, so do prepare yourself for it,” the middle-aged manager said.

“Incapacitated or crippled?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Zhang Jiuxiao had not told him about this previously.

“Yes. Every victory and loss will have great implications once we open bets. If a challenger who is capable of achieving victory intentionally admits defeat, it would be a crushing blow to the credibility of our Ring of Death. For this reason, we strike down very hard on challengers who lose on purpose,” the middle-aged manager explained.

“I understand.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had some reservations regarding that rule, but he knew that it was necessary for the functioning of the Ring of Death. It was precisely the excitement from the suspense of the matches that had cultivators betting their wealth frenziedly. If it was found that the results in the Ring of Death were manipulated, the ring would swiftly become boring and meaningless to others.

As a result, the earnings of the Ring of Death would dip as well.

“That’s all I have for you. If you still wish to continue, I’ll have you registered right now. Otherwise, the both of you can proceed on to the spectator stand,” the middle-aged manager said.

“I want to participate in the Ring of Death,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly as he took out two concentrated high-tier spirit stones to pay the registration fee. After which, he passed his entire storage ring to Zhang Jiuxiao.

“I’ll need you to bet for me later on. Just go all in on my victory each time around.”

“Very well!” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded.

The reason Zhang Xuan had gone there was to win spirit stones, and it went without saying the fastest way to win more spirit stones was to gamble their wealth!

Soon, Zhang Jiuxiao was led to the spectator stand whereas Zhang Xuan was taken to the backstage to prepare.

Boom!

While passing by the spectator stand, Zhang Xuan took a look into the ring and saw that there were two people battling inside. Their furious clash of zhenqi induced a deafening reverberation in the air, and watching the adrenaline-filled sight, the crowd screamed in excitement.

“Tear him apart! Tear him apart!”

Such exclamations could be heard among the crowd.

Looking into one of the rings through the door, Zhang Xuan saw a middle-aged man dressed in metal armor letting loose a raging roar as he raised his opponent into the air.

The middle-aged man had a towering physique, standing at two meters tall. In comparison, the opponent he was holding appeared to be a helpless, small chick instead.

Si la!

With a fiery bellow, the middle-aged man forcefully tore his opponent in half, and fresh blood poured all over him, dyeing him crimson.

This sight left Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shooting up as he clenched his fists tightly.

He had undergone many battles, but this was the first time he had witnessed such a brutal and meaningless murder, as if a human's life was nothing more than a toy.

When he strolled through the area earlier and browsed through the array of items they had on sale, he had felt that the black market did not seem any different from other mall. However, after seeing this sight, he realized that all he had seen before was just the very surface of the black market. It was not without a reason that the black market was labeled as a lawless zone. In here, a human's life had no intrinsic value at all.

Without superior strength in the Ring of Death, one was bound to be ripped into shreds in the ring.

It was no wonder Zhang Jiuxiao retreated after five rounds. Even for a master teacher, such callousness was hard to swallow.

1263 Hong Yang

“How is it? It’s still not too late for you to back out!” Seeing that Zhang Xuan’s face had changed, the middle-aged manager scoffed.

In his time at the Ring of Death, he had met plenty of young scions who put on airs and bragged about their strength. However, when they finally witnessed the brutality on the Ring of Death firsthand, their bodies would freeze in fear.

“There’s no need for that.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

What he was shocked at was how lightly a human had taken the life of another, not the bloodshed that had occurred.

In terms of fearsomeness, they wouldn’t even come close to competing with the bloodthirsty Otherworldly Demonic Tribe!

Harnessing a killing intent that would leave any ordinary cultivator scrambling away in fear, these Otherworldly Demons would unhesitatingly feast on the blood and flesh of any man! But from the first time he encountered them, Zhang Xuan was already able to take them into committing suicide, so how could a battle between two humans possibly frighten him?

“Not bad, you do have some guts. Go in!” The middle-aged manager was surprised by how swiftly Zhang Xuan had managed to calm himself down, and a hint of approval emerged in his eyes.

Heading down the stairs, Zhang Xuan soon arrived in a room. There were all kinds of weapons in the room, and they were all of Saint low-tier. Perhaps to allow any cultivator to wield them easily, none of them contained any spirit.

“You can freely pick any weapon you would like to use in the ring later. There are no limits how many you can take, so feel free to take anything you want. However, should any of these weapons be spoiled in battle, you are to compensate us accordingly. Also, at the end of your duels, you have to put the

weapons you have taken back in its place prior to leaving.” the middle-aged manager said while gesturing to the weapons.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. He swiftly scanned the surroundings before making his way over to a saber rack.

There were more than a hundred sabers in here, be it short sabers, long sabers, nine-ringed sabers, single-handed saber, ghost-head saber... The variety of weapons that were available here was truly astounding.

Zhang Xuan lightly brushed through the weapons with his finger before casually picking one that seemed to be slightly heavier. He flicked it a few times, seemingly testing out its handiness, before shaking his head and putting it back down. He repeated the same process for a few other weapons before eventually sighing deeply.

“Forget it, I won’t use any weapons!” Zhang Xuan told the middle-aged manager.

“You aren’t going to use any weapons?” the middle-aged manager was taken aback.

After witnessing the brutality in the ring, most of those who had registered to fight in the ring would be eager to take as many weapons as they could with them. After all, it might just happen to play a crucial role in helping them out of a critical situation. On the other hand, this fellow actually chose not to take anything with him at all... Was he really that confident in his skills?

“If one’s strength is lacking, no weapon can save him.” Zhang Xuan replied impassively.

“Alright then.” Deciding not to say anything more, the middle-aged manager pushed another door open and walked in. Zhang Xuan swiftly followed suit, and within the room, he saw dozens of cultivators sitting cross-legged on the ground, conditioning themselves in preparation for the battle to come.

Every single one of them carried the stench of blood on them. Clearly, they carried numerous human lives on them.

“Wait here for the time being. We’ll call you when it’s your turn!” the middle-aged manager instructed before leaving the

area.

Left to be, Zhang Xuan began scanning his surroundings.

He noted that while the dozens of cultivators in the room appeared to be cultivating, they had retained a sliver of their awareness out to observe their surroundings constantly, guarding warily against one another. If anyone were to dare approach them carelessly, they might abruptly burst forward to launch a preemptive strike out of self-defense.

A moment after Zhang Xuan found a place to sit, an indifferent voice sounded beside him, “A newcomer to the ring before?”

Turning around, Zhang Xuan saw that the person speaking to him was a young man who appeared to be in his early thirties. There was a crimson saber cut on his face, and blood was still trickling out of it. It was likely to have been inflicted on him not too long ago, such that he hadn’t had the time to recover from it yet.

Considering how cold the cultivators in this room were, Zhang Xuan was rather surprised that someone would take the initiative to strike up a conversation with him.

“You can tell?”

“Those who have experienced the ring would have eyes reminiscent of ravenous wolves, ferocious and vicious. There is no way one can survive the savagery that happens up there otherwise. In comparison, you are nothing more than a little tame sheep. How can I not be able to tell?” the scar-faced young man scoffed.

Strength did play a deterministic role in the Ring of Death, but ‘viciousness’ was also another crucial factor as well!

Not just vicious to one’s opponent, but vicious to oneself as well.

Those who were willing to sacrifice their own bodies to launch a decisive blow would stand a far better chance at subduing their opponent as compared to those who expected to walk out of the ring completely unharmed. The young man before him had an air of innocence around him, reminiscent to that of a

scion who had never weathered through the harshness of the world before.

“Little tame sheep?” Zhang Xuan was visibly a little amused by the scar-faced young man’s metaphor.

So far, he had been treated as a God of Destruction no matter where he went, leaving behind demolished buildings and traumatized minds in his wake. Yet, in the young man’s eyes, he was just a little tame sheep?

Perhaps he was really a little too good-tempered.

“Of course! Those who have never stepped onto the ring and undergone the initiation ritual of bloodshed are nothing more than tame sheep! Let me tell you, I have already won six consecutive victories so far! It’s just a pity that the seventh opponent is too strong, and I depleted too much of my zhenqi. Otherwise, there’s a good chance that I could have very well become a Conqueror of Ten by now!” the scar-faced young man declared proudly.

“Incredible.” Zhang Xuan offered an earnest compliment.

Even a genius like Zhang Jiuxiao didn’t even get to the six matches. The fact that the young man could win six consecutive matches already bore testimony to his strength and state of mind.

Jiya!

While they were chatting, the door ahead suddenly opened. A powerful killing intent poured into the room, exerting immense pressure on the cultivators within.

“It’s him?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

A figure had appeared by the door, and it was no other than the metal-armored middle-aged man who had ripped a person to two on the ring earlier.

This middle-aged man had a towering stature, similar to a metal tower. The thick metal armor that he wore was completely dyed in crimson, and fresh blood was still trickling down the edges of his armor. Such an appearance made him

reminiscent of a savage Asura on the battlefield, wedging fear deep into the hearts of others.

“That’s the strongest existence in the black market at the moment, Hong Yang!” Seeing that Zhang Xuan didn’t recognize the person by the doorway, the scar-faced young man sent a telepathic message over to him to introduce him. “He’s also known as the Conqueror of Hundred!”

“Conqueror of Hundred?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback. “He has won a hundred matches consecutively?”

“It’s not that. Rather, he has won ten Conquerors of Ten consecutively! The fellows who challenged him had all been ripped into two, as dead as they could get!” the scar-faced young man replied as a hint of fear flickered across his eyes.

He was full of admiration for the strength Hong Yang wielded before him, but the brutal means that the latter used had left him deeply fearful as well.

And very apparently, such a feeling resonated not just within him but the others in the room as well.

Hong Yang slowly walked over to the corner and glared down coldly at the two young men cultivating there, bellowing, “Scram!”

Without any hesitation, those two young men hurriedly got up and scrambled away.

Huala!

Even when seated, Hong Yang’s figure still conspicuously towered over the others. He took out a pill and swallowed it, and his aura began to billow.

On the other hand, the crowd heaved a sigh of relief with uncanny harmony. Those who were in proximity to Hong Yang slowly shifted backward, creating a huge vacuum around him.

“Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage...” Through the aura Hong Yang was emanating, Zhang Xuan was able to clearly perceive his cultivation.

Just like him, Hong Yang was a Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage cultivator.

However, the killing intent that he emanated was truly overwhelming. Even a cultivator of the same realm would experience great mental pressure facing him, even prior to the battle itself.

Activating the Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan was just about to take a clearer view to the strength of the young man before him when Hong Yang suddenly raised his gaze and looked over.

“What powerful instincts...” Zhang Xuan was slightly startled.

As expected of an existence who had consecutively defeated ten Conquerors of Ten, his awareness of his surroundings was truly fearsome.

It was just an inconspicuous glance, but the other party still sensed the nature of his gaze clearly and even ascertained the direction where it was coming from accurately. With such powerful instincts, it would be nigh impossible to spring a surprise assault on him.

“It seems like life-and-death situations do help to temper a person greatly. Even though Hong Yang’s cultivation is at Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage, it seems like he would be a match for even a Half-Leaving Aperture realm master teacher... In fact, if he was locked together with a combat master of equal cultivation realm, it was very likely that he would be the one to survive at the very end!” Zhang Xuan noted.

How powerful one was didn’t rely solely on one’s strength. How one reacted in face of pressure and danger was of utmost importance as well.

Even though a cow possessed strength far superior to a wolf, if the both of them were to be placed in the same room, the cow was likely to be the one to fall at the very end.

And Hong Yang was this very wolf. Or perhaps, it might be more accurate to call him a ravenous tiger instead. Anyone

who dared to come close to him would be ripped apart by his sharp fangs.

“Newcomer, scram to the side. Don’t you know this is my seat?” While Zhang Xuan was busy assessing Hong Yang, a cold voice suddenly sounded above him.

Raising his gaze, he saw that one of the two young men chased away by Hong Yang earlier standing before him.

“Is your name inscribed anywhere here?” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly, not intending to make a move at all.

To scramble fearfully in face of Hong Yang yet stomp right up to him just because he appeared to be a newcomer... A typical bully, huh?

“Oh? The newcomers seem to be getting quite cocky nowadays, huh?”

“Qian Xu, it seems like you don’t have much of a presence anymore!”

Seeing how Zhang Xuan refused to move, retorting back even, the cultivating crowd slowly opened their eyes to watch the commotion before them in interest.

“You say that my name isn’t inscribed here? Hehe, since you wish it so, why don’t I have it inscribed for you right now!”

The young man named Qian Xu didn’t expect that a newcomer to dare affront him like that, and his eyes narrowed menacingly. A dagger abruptly appeared in his palm, and he swiftly swiped it right toward Zhang Xuan’s forehead.

His movements were fast and devoid of any hesitation. It was as if the person he was attacking wasn’t a human but a mere tree branch.

If that dagger were to be plunged into Zhang Xuan’s head, there was no doubt that it would cause instantaneous death.

“You want to claim my life over a trivial matter like this?” Zhang Xuan scoffed coldly.

It was one thing if there was an irreconcilable grudge between both of them, but to attempt to take his life just because he

wouldn't give up his seat... It seemed like the young man really thought nothing about a human's life!

Even in this world, where strength reigned mighty, such actions were truly abhorrent.

Displeased, Zhang Xuan raised his finger and fend off the other party's dagger.

Ding!

His finger struck the blade of the dagger, and with a metallic ring, the Saint low-tier artifact abruptly broke into two.

“Oh? It seems like our young newcomer over here has the strength to back up his words! No wonder you dare speak so conceitedly before me!” Seeing that his weapon was broken with a single flick, Qian Xu slightly startled for a moment. However, in the next moment, he licked his lips as an excited gleam flickered across his eyes.

He had thought that the other party was just an amateur whom he could crush easily, but it seemed like it wasn't as easy as it seemed. Nevertheless, as a veteran of the Ring of Death, Qian Xu still had confidence in his capabilities.

Tzzzzzzzzzz!

Several more daggers abruptly emerged in Qian Xu's hand, and with a swift flick of his wrist, they came flying toward Zhang Xuan from the top, middle, and bottom.

The top dagger was aimed for the right eye, the middle dagger was aimed for the heart, and the bottom dagger was aimed at Zhang Xuan's thigh.

Abrupt and swift, it would be difficult for even a genius like Zhang Jiuxiao to fend against such an attack in the nick of a moment.

“You have quite a hand, don't you?” Zhang Xuan remarked impassively.

As expected of one who had been through multiple life-and-death battles, his killing skills had indeed been refined to an exceptional level. The trajectory of the daggers was aimed in a

manner such that avoiding one of them would result in the other two plunging right into one's body.

However...

Such an attack was of limited effectiveness against Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan swept his hand in a half arc before him, and all of a sudden, the three daggers were already caught between his fingers. Despite the intense trembling of the daggers, they weren't able to struggle free from his grasp.

"Newcomer, you have successfully piqued my interest!" Seeing that his second attack was resolved by the other party so easily, killing intent surfaced in the depths of Qian Xu's eyes. Just as he was about to make his next move, a voice suddenly sounded in the room.

"Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage, Zhang Xuan! You will be faced against an opponent of the same cultivation realm, Meng Fuxing!"

"It's my turn." Paying no heed to Qian Xu, Zhang Xuan stood up and began making his way over to the ring.

"You think that I will allow you to walk out just like that after provoking me? Just how easy do you take me to be?"

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was leaving, Qian Xu flicked his wrist once more, and amidst a freezing burst of air, two daggers shot forth for the back of Zhang Xuan's heart. Just to highlight, the ages wrote as descriptions in the story are based on appearance instead of true age. Depending on when you advance your cultivation, you could be much older than you appear to be. For example, a person who has reached Saint realm by 20 years old would only appear to be in his thirties when he's roughly 120 years old.

1264 In the Ring 1

“It’s Qian Xu’s Three Arts of Assassination!”

“There should at least a hundred people who die from those three moves of his every year...”

“That can’t be helped. His daggers are fast and vicious, making them extremely hard to guard against. Opponents of the same cultivation realm barely stand a chance against him!”

“That newcomer is a goner!”

...

The crowd remarked calmly as they watched the two daggers whizzing for Zhang Xuan.

While it was true that Qian Xu’s strength was nothing compared to the Conqueror of Hundred, Hong Yang, he was still a famous figure in the underground black market.

He was renowned for the seemingly endless daggers he had on him, as well as his vicious Three Arts of Assassination. With just his superior mastery over those two things, he had been able to claim countless lives over the years.

Yet, that arrogant newcomer dared to provoke him head-on, inciting Qian Xu to use his strongest moves. With this, the guillotine had already been raised upon that newcomer’s head.

With such thoughts in mind, the eyes of the crowd swiftly turned to the newcomer. Even as the two daggers were swiftly approaching him, the newcomer did not turn around at all, as if he was unaware of the threat right behind him.

Watching the sight, the scar-faced young man immediately spoke up anxiously, wanting to remind the newcomer. However, before he could say a word, the vision before him suddenly blurred.

He could not say for sure what exactly happened—it might have just been a figment of his imagination—but it seemed like the newcomer’s foot had shot up to strike the daggers.

Wu!

In the next instant, the daggers abruptly turned around and flew back at a speed much faster from before.

Pu he!

“What?” Astonished, before Qian Xu could even react, the daggers had already plunged into his wrists.

Hu!

The sheer momentum of the daggers sent Qian Xu flying all the way back until his wrists were firmly pinned onto the wall by the daggers, forming a cross. Qian Xu struggled with all his might, but he found that the daggers were simply too firmly lodged into the wall, such that he could not free himself.

“What in the world...”

“With just a slight kick, not only did he neutralize Qian Xu’s daggers, he even returned it to Qian Xu and pinned him against the wall? Just how powerful can that newcomer be?”

“That newcomer is really no ordinary figure? Will the black market find itself another Conqueror of Ten soon?”

“It’s still too early to say, but with just that hand, that newcomer should have no trouble winning seven to eight matches!”

...

Watching as Qian Xu howled in agony on the wall, the crowd felt their hair standing on end.

Although that brief encounter was not sufficient for them to analyze how powerful the newcomer was, the fact that he was able to subdue Qian Xu so easily was more than enough to say that he was not an opponent to be underestimated.

Perhaps, he could very well be crowned the next Conqueror of Ten.

“Interesting.”

By the corner, Hong Yang took a glance at the departing back of the newcomer before closing his eyes once more.

The counterattack that the newcomer had launched earlier might have seemed impressive, but to him, it was truly nothing at all.

Even if he could not subdue Qian Xu with a single punch, all he would have to do was smash another one in.

...

The ring was not too big, and its perimeter had been secured by a unique formation, forming something similar to a cage. Once a challenger entered the ring, he would not be able to escape until the end of the battle.

“Sign this Life-and-Death Contract first.”

Before Zhang Xuan could step into the ring, a member of the Ring of Death’s staff standing in front of the ring passed a parchment over to him.

Zhang Xuan lowered his head to swiftly browse through the contract before sealing it with a droplet of his blood. Following which, as if some kind of seal around him had been released, he heard thunderous cheers from the surrounding crowd.

Raising his head, he saw that the spectator stand was fully filled with roughly five to six hundred people. There were people from all walks of life, be it male or female, old or young. Every single one of them had eyes that were crimson from the irrepressible excitement within them.

It seems like the thrill of watching a life-and-death battle really does appeal to many. Above that, from spectating this kind of duel, they can also gain some insights into battle as well, Zhang Xuan thought.

In life-and-death battles, cultivators would be pushed to their very limits, forcing them to show their strongest hands for survival. Such intense battles could be beneficial in providing inspiration to other cultivators as to how they could further refine their fighting prowess.

Perhaps, this might even have been the biggest reason the black market was able to grow to such a massive scale.

By the time Zhang Xuan stepped onto the stage, a young man was already standing on the opposite side with his hands wrapped around his chest. Nonchalance and loftiness could be seen in his eyes, as if this battle was nothing more than a show for him.

The young man seemed to be the opponent for this round, Meng Fuxing.

“Alright, let’s not waste our time dawdling over here and end it quickly.” Taking a rough calculation of the current time, Zhang Xuan noted that he did not have much time before the auction started. Unwilling to waste even a second, he stretched his back lazily before clasp his fist. “Pardon me.”

Hu!

In the blink of an eye, Zhang Xuan’s figure suddenly materialized right before the young man, and his arm darted forward to strike the latter.

The strength behind this move was not too strong, but the young man felt as if a massive net was closing in on him, preventing him from escaping at all.

Not expecting Zhang Xuan to make a move against him so abruptly, the young man widened his eyes in shock. “You... I am not...”

He immediately attempted to sidestep to dodge the attack, but to his horror, he found himself unable to move properly, as if he was standing in marshland.

Pah!

Zhang Xuan’s palm connected with the young man’s face, and a crisp echo resounded throughout the ring. Before the young man could speak, he had already collapsed on the ground, knocked out.

He had thought it through prior to entering the ring. Since he could not intentionally let his opponent off, he would just have to knock the other party out.

A knock out could also be considered incapacitated, so naturally, the match would have to be judged as his victory.

After knocking out the young man, Zhang Xuan waited for a long moment, but no one declared the results of the duel. Perplexed, he placed his hands behind his back and asked, “I should have won for the first match, right?”

Still silence.

Confused, Zhang Xuan took a look at his surroundings. To his bewilderment, the crowd from before had fallen completely silent, and their excited expressions had been replaced with flabbergasted ones instead.

Zhang Jiuxiao was also amid the crowd, and his palm was slapped onto his face. He kept trying to shout something, but due to the various impeding formations between them, Zhang Xuan was unable to hear a word at all.

“What’s wrong?” Seeing that the crowd was reacting in a manner contrary to what he had expected, Zhang Xuan was bewildered. Just as he was about to speak, the formation to the ring suddenly opened up, and another young man walked in. Upon seeing the fainted person on the ground, he widened his eyes in astonishment.

“Are you my second opponent?”

In order to become the Conqueror of Ten, one had to defeat ten opponents consecutively. In Zhang Xuan’s view, the young man who had just entered was likely his second opponent.

“I am Meng Fuxing!”

“You are Meng Fuxing? Then, this guy is...” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in shock.

If the young man before him was the opponent he was supposed to fight against, who was the person he had just knocked out?

“The referee!” Meng Fuxing’s lips twitched.

“There’s actually a referee for the ring?” Zhang Xuan’s eyelids twitched.

“Have you ever seen an official duel without a referee?” Meng Fuxing retorted.

“...” Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

What the heck!

Typically speaking, referees should be standing beneath the ring and not in it. As a result, when Zhang Xuan saw the other ‘Meng Fuxing’ standing on the stage—the fact that the other party had a fierce-looking face did little to help as well—he had thought that the other party was his opponent!

To knock out the referee before even meeting his opponent, this was really...

Finally understanding what Zhang Jiuxiao was screaming outside, Zhang Xuan sheepishly asked, “Will I be... disqualified?”

He had thought that he was being smart by claiming the first move, but his ‘smart move’ only ended up knocking out the referee. It would really be terrible if his right to fight in the Ring of Death was revoked as a result of this!

Recovering from his initial astonishment, Meng Fuxing replied indifferently, “Unlikely. There aren’t any rules here. Let’s not waste time and begin.”

In the first place, the black market was intended to be a lawless land. In other rings, knocking out the referee would have been a huge penalty, but in the Ring of Death, it was not that big a deal.

Hula!

Meng Fuxing charged straight toward Zhang Xuan.

While he was in the midst of his movements, his hands were already moving swiftly, creating afterimages reminiscent of a blooming lotus.

Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, Thousand Buddha Lotus Hands!

There was no doubt that Meng Fuxing possessed noteworthy strength. Even if he was still slightly lacking compared to the previous Qian Xu, there were few cultivators of the same cultivation realm who would be a match for him. As soon as he made his move, he had already made sure to seal the

surrounding space with his zhenqi, forcing Zhang Xuan to meet him head-on.

“Not too bad,” Zhang Xuan remarked as he raised his palm to meet the other party’s assault.

Huala!

It was the exact same move he had used against the referee earlier. It carried an imposing momentum that seemed as if it would not rest until it smacked every last drop of brainy remains out of one’s ears.

This strike was not a battle technique or any profound move, just the simplest slap.

But for some reason, it seemed like harness some mysterious might that left those facing it feeling as if they would be unable to avoid it.

Pah!

The two palms collided, and Meng Fuxing’s face swiftly flushed pale. He retreated several steps back before his legs caved in, causing him to fall to the ground. The next moment, his eyes suddenly rolled up. He had fainted.

“Strong!”

“What move is that?”

“I reckon that’s some kind of palm art. But still, to be able to knock Meng Fuxing out in a single strike, that fellow there should at least be able to achieve five consecutive victories!”

“That’s not necessarily so. The stronger a move is, the more it depletes one’s zhenqi. The ring isn’t just about absolute fighting prowess but endurance as well. If he tires himself too much in the earlier rounds, he will risk running out of juice quickly.”

...

Such discussions broke out in the spectator stand.

Even though Zhang Xuan had been a little reckless, knocking out the referee as soon as he got onto the stage, there was no denying that he did possess true strength.

However, in the Ring of Death, strength was not enough for one to get far. Stamina was of the utmost importance as well.

Many challengers would step into the Ring of Death to acquire the title of Conqueror of Ten each year, but those who had succeeded were truly numbered.

“I am Tan Shiyou. Are you my opponent?”

After knocking out Meng Fuxing, it did not take long before another young man came onto the stage.

This young man going by the name of Tan Shiyou was slightly stronger than Meng Fuxing, but he was still far from a match for Zhang Xuan. A single blow to the face, and he was floored as well.

The same went for the next three opponents as well. A hint of exhaustion was starting to show through Zhang Xuan’s posture. Sweat was dripping down his forehead, and his hands were beginning to tremble non-stop as well.

Right after he defeated the fifth person, Zhang Xuan heard a loud voice. “You have just cleared the fifth round. Do you want to carry on?”

A casual challenger would usually stop at the fifth match as the matches beyond would have stakes involved. As an inevitable result of that, the later matches would be much more demanding than before, and until one side was crippled or incapacitated, the match would not stop.

“I’ll continue,” Zhang Xuan replied.

His main goal at the Ring of Death was to obtain as many concentrated high-tier spirit stones as possible, but what he had earned so far could only be considered peanuts. Naturally, how could he back down, especially since the true money lay ahead of him!

“Very well. Your opponent for your sixth match is Kui Qing. Just like you, he also has five victories under his belt as of the moment,” the voice informed Zhang Xuan.

As the first five matches did not involve any wagers, the pairings would be mainly between newcomers. It was from the

sixth match on that the true veterans started appearing.

The pairings would be made in a manner that placed opponents with an equal number of consecutive victories against one another—those with six victories would be faced against those with six victories, those with seven victories would be faced against those with seven victories, and so on.

As a result of this system, Zhang Xuan's next opponent was someone who had achieved five consecutive victories as well.

Hu!

A young man slowly walked up the ring under Zhang Xuan's gaze.

Different from the previous opponents he had faced, this young man exuded a faint killing aura, signifying that he was a dangerous figure.

"I have watched your matches. So far, you have subdued all your opponents with a single strike. Not too bad at all," Kui Qing said with a hair-raising smile as his sharp eyes assessed Zhang Xuan from head to toe keenly. "However, that strike of yours should consume quite of bit of your zhenqi, right? I sure would like to see how many more times you can use it!"

Hula!

With a flick of his wrist, a spear appeared in Kui Qing's hands, and without any warning whatsoever, he drove it swiftly toward Zhang Xuan.

That cunning old rat! He actually launched an assault on me while he was talking...

It took only an instant before the spear was already right before Zhang Xuan.

"You want to play spearmanship with me?" A glint flashed across Zhang Xuan's eyes as he looked unblinkingly at the spear whizzing toward him.

"You should know that I'm the true ancestor of spearmanship!"

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Right after saying those words, Zhang Xuan tapped his finger forward leisurely.

Zhang Xuan's finger was positioned straight in the face of the furious pierce of Kui Qing's spear, and it seemed as if the spear would pierce right through his finger at any moment. Yet, for some reason, before the spear could even reach the finger, it suddenly lowered its trajectory slightly, as if Kui Qing was intentionally going easy on Zhang Xuan.

Hula!

With a simple downward grasp, Zhang Xuan grabbed Kui Qing's spear and flicked it slightly.

A powerful might shot right through the spear and struck Kui Qing.

Deng deng deng deng!

Kui Qing's face reddened, and he was forced to retreat several steps in a fluster.

"You were able to see through my move?" The disbelief in Kui Qing's eyes couldn't be concealed.

There was no way Kui Qing would have gone easy on Zhang Xuan in the midst of a duel. What had happened earlier was that the change in the trajectory of his pierce earlier was actually an intended change in his battle technique to catch his opponent off guard, but somehow, Zhang Xuan seemed to have anticipated it in advance and positioned his finger right there, creating the illusion that it was his finger that had caused the change in trajectory.

"I told you, I am the ancestor of spearmanship. You are still much too inexperienced to be shaking your spear before me!"

Zhang Xuan dashed forward once more and raised his palm to strike Kui Qing's face.

Huala!

A powerful might burst forth.

Alarmed, Kui Qing retreated in a panic.

He thought that five consecutive matches should have exhausted most of Zhang Xuan's zhenqi, preventing him from using that move anymore. He thought that with his spear in hand, he should be able to achieve victory easily. But he never thought that the other party would be able to see through his spearmanship so easily and utilize that move against him once more.

Realizing that he wouldn't be able to escape from the slap, he immediately attempted to raise his spear to counterattack, but it was already too late. A palm struck his face, and the spear in his hand flew away.

Padah!

Kui Qing crashed onto the ground and blacked out.

“Seventh match, Zhang Xuan VS Guan Yongfeng!”

Following which, a familiar face walked onto the ring. It was no other than the scar-faced young man who had treated him as a tame sheep earlier.

“And I thought you were a tame sheep. It turns out that you are a wolf instead...” the scar-faced young man, Guan Yongfeng, said with a shake of his head.

When Zhang Xuan first entered the room, he had an innocent and dazed look on his face, reminiscent of a naive newcomer. Such people usually ended up suffering a great deal on the ring. Yet, who could have thought that he would be so strong that even Qian Xu wouldn't be a match for him!

“I know that you are strong, but there's no way I'll be going down without a fight. Come!”

Hula!

Drawing a saber, Guan Yongfeng drove his zhenqi furiously and slashed down on Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan had a rather good impression of Guan Yongfeng, so he didn't go too hard on the latter. After two blows, he

knocked the latter out with a light blow.

On the other hand, on the spectator stand, Zhang Jiuxiao had also been diligently staking the concentrated high-tier spirit stones which Zhang Xuan had handed him previously into the matches.

As Zhang Xuan was a newcomer, despite his outstanding results in the earlier matches, the crowd still wasn't too confident in Zhang Xuan's strength. Thus, in the sixth match, most of the crowd had placed their stakes on Kui Qing. On the other hand, Zhang Jiuxiao successfully doubled the initial 111 concentrated high-tier spirit stones he had into 222.

After the match with Kui Qing, the crowd gained a clearer glimpse into Zhang Xuan's strength, so the payout wasn't that high anymore. Nevertheless, by staking everything into Zhang Xuan once more, Zhang Jiuxiao managed to increase their total asset to 300 concentrated high-tier spirit stones.

"It really is lucrative!" Zhang Jiuxiao exclaimed as he looked at the huge pile of spirit stones before him.

Despite being an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he was only from a side family, so his allowance every month was rather meagre. Concentrated high-tier spirit stones were extremely beneficial to his cultivation as well, but even when using all of his means, he could only earn one to two of them each month. Yet, in just a short twenty minutes, he had actually just earned nearly two hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones! This sure was frightening!

"Let's do it!" Knowing Zhang Xuan's intention, Zhang Jiuxiao didn't hesitate to stake all 300 concentrated high-tier spirit stones on Zhang Xuan's victory once more.

The opponent for the eighth match was a young man in his thirties. He had a pair of arms that were innately thick as if tree trunks. On the other hand, fighting seven consecutive battles seemed to have exhausted Zhang Xuan greatly, and he looked as if he was about to be sapped dry. In view of that, the payout for Zhang Xuan's victory increased this time around.

After trading thirty blows or so, Zhang Xuan achieved a narrow victory.

And the spirit stones in Zhang Jiuxiao's hand leaped from 300 to 720 in an instant!

Zhang Xuan had been able to subdue his opponents in a single strike in the previous matches, but in the eighth match, he actually took more than thirty blows. To the crowd of spectators, this was a visible sign that the newcomer was swiftly approaching his limit!

“He really knows how to act...” Shaking his head with a smile on his lips, Zhang Jiuxiao's eyes glowed in excitement.

In order to draw more people to bet against his victory so as to raise his payout, it was necessary for Zhang Xuan to feign weakness. Otherwise, if he were to crush all of his opponents in a single move, there would be no suspense at all. Knowing that they would surely lose the bet, who would be willing to bet against him?

It was true that those who gambled in the Ring of Death were mostly scions from notable clans with powerful finances, but that didn't mean that they were fools who would squander their money away blindly. They were all biding their time to place the decisive bet which would maximize their profits.

So naturally, Zhang Xuan would have to provide those scions an impetus to make their move. By giving out clear hints that he was getting weaker with every match, those scions would surely be tempted to go all in.

After all, who would be willing to stake their bets on a newcomer who appeared to be already wobbling on his feet? Obviously, the stakes would start gravitating to his opponent!

The opponent for the ninth match was a middle-aged man.

The previous time the middle-aged man had challenged the Ring of Death, he had won eight consecutive matches before falling on the ninth.

But the reason why he lost wasn't due to his lack of strength. According to the rumors, it seemed like he had drunk too much the day before, resulting in him being unable to exert his

strength properly... As a result, in his matches in the Ring of Death the next day, his entire body was swaying weakly, and it seemed as if he would collapse at any moment...

The fact that he could still achieve eight victories under such a condition was a clear sign of his strength.

It seemed like he had learned his lesson this time around and kept himself in check. His body was overflowing with energy, and from the very first move, it seemed like he already had the entire battle in his grasp. This had induced a wave of cheerings from the spectator stand.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan appeared to be weak on his feet, and it seemed like he was only hanging on his sheer willpower at the moment.

With such a clear contrast between the two opponents, Zhang Xuan's payout nearly broke through the roof.

However, despite the powerful assaults the middle-aged man sent at Zhang Xuan over and over again, the latter kept bouncing back as if an indestructible cockroach. The latter obviously looked as if he would collapse on the ground with the slightest breeze, and yet, that final bit of energy he had left in him seemed to never extinguish, allowing him to withstand the relentless waves of attack.

Just like that, the battle stretched on to over a hundred moves.

At some point in time, the incredibly exhausted Zhang Xuan somehow managed to bump into the back of the middle-aged man's head and knocked the latter out, thus achieving a somewhat miraculous and unbelievable victory.

And with this, the number of concentrated high-tier spirit stones Zhang Jiuxiao had increased to an astounding 1800!

"To be able to achieve victory like that, that newcomer sure is lucky. If he could just win another match, we would find ourselves with a new Conqueror of Ten!"

"That's true, but it seems like the newcomer has expended himself too much the previous round. In his current state, there's no way he can win the tenth!"

“I thought that way in the eighth round too, but he still managed to grit the teeth and win the ninth round through his sheer willpower. I think that lad has some kind of unfathomable power laying dormant in him. As unlikely as it may be, I actually think that newcomer will really be crowned as the next Conqueror of Ten!”

“You think so too? Alright, I’ll bet on his victory then...”

...

Very soon, the tenth match began. Despite Zhang Xuan’s appearance of weakness, the incredible endurance he had displayed in the previous match still won the hearts of some, and quite of a portion of the crowd actually chose to bet on him against the odds. As a result, the payout dipped significantly.

Zhang Jiuxiao placed all 1800 concentrated high-tier spirit stones in, as usual, but it only increased to 2200 this time around.

On the field, however... Naturally, Zhang Xuan had a ‘tougher’ fight than ever. He traded more than three hundred blows with his opponent, maintaining the same ‘I look like I’m going to fall but I just won’t fall’ appearance throughout the match...

In the end, the way which he managed to achieve victory nearly had the eyeballs of the crowd bulging out of their eyes. The tenth opponent actually moved too fast in the midst of his assault and crashed into the formation barrier, knocking himself out...

To come this far, one had to brave through nine life-and-death matches, and those who managed to do so were all indubitably outstanding warriors.

Yet, for an expert of such caliber to actually knock himself out... Zhang Jiuxiao really couldn’t bear himself to look on any longer...

Brother, can you be any faker than that?

Do you take the audience to be fools?

However, it was already the tenth match, and the results for the fight to become the Conqueror of Ten were already out.

“Congratulations to Zhang Xuan for becoming our new Conqueror of Ten! You have a choice to continue your battle now or take a brief rest first. Either way, it won’t impede you from fighting for the title of the Conqueror of Hundred. I suggest that you take a rest first so that you can face your opponent in your peak condition...” the voice sounded.

Upon successfully becoming a Conqueror of Ten, one would be allowed to take a rest first before continuing one’s battle for higher grounds.

Considering how tired the young man already was—he looked as if he could very well faint at any moment—it would be best for him to take a rest first before continuing on his battle.

“I’ll continue on...” Despite hearing the voice’s advice, Zhang Xuan raised his eyes wearily and shook his head slowly.

Rest? You must be joking! I am not even close to being done yet!

Since I have already made the journey here, how could I leave without making a big killing?

In any case, everything was a fair game in the black market, so he didn’t feel particularly guilty about this.

“Are you certain you want to continue? I don’t think that you are in any condition to fight another match...” the voice continued.

Every single Conqueror of Ten was a money tree for the Ring of Death. It would be a huge waste for the Ring of Death if the young man were to die on the ring right after his conferment as a Conqueror of Ten.

“I think that... I can still... persevere on a little!” Zhang Xuan said weakly.

“Alright then... In order to become a Conqueror of Hundred, you must defeat ten Conquerors of Ten successively. Your first opponent will be...”

Before the voice could finish speaking, a nonchalant voice suddenly boomed across the entire ring.

“I’ll fight with him. As long as he can defeat me, he can become the new Conqueror of Hundred!”

Following which, the clanging of metal sounded clearly in everyone’s eyes. Following which, the crowd saw a towering figure slowly walking over to the ring.

“It’s Hong Yang...”

“Hong Yang is going to fight the newcomer personally, and he even promised the latter the position of Conqueror of Hundred?”

“All along, it has always been others challenging Hong Yang, so why would he suddenly challenge this newcomer? As the strongest existence in the Ring of Death, there’s no one who could possibly defeat him... If that newcomer were to really fight against Hong Yang, he would surely be crushed!”

“Of course, that goes without saying! But as long as that newcomer doesn’t have something wrong with his head, he should know better than to accept the duel!”

...

When the crowd saw the figure walking over to the ring, there was a brief moment of silence before a huge uproar broke out.

The person who had spoken was no other than the man who could leave Qian Xu shivering in fear with just a single word, the Conqueror of Hundred, Hong Yang!

At this moment, the fatigue of battle that was plaguing Hong Yang previously had already vanished without a trace. Instead, his eyes were dyed crimson, as if he had already eyed a new prey.

“How is it? Will you accept my challenge?” Hong Yang gazed at Zhang Xuan coldly.

“This...” Zhang Xuan hesitated.

“You aren’t too bad at acting, but I have faced and destroyed countless experts in my time. That act of yours isn’t going to

fool me! To still have the strength to be holding back even after defeating ten opponents... Boy, you have caught my attention!" Hong Yang spoke impassively.

"..." Zhang Xuan's face turned green, and a whole string of vulgarities nearly spilled from his mouth.

He was still thinking that he could earn a hefty sum from Zhang Jiuxiao's bets during the battles with the Conquerors of Ten, but this fellow actually exposed him publicly!

"Acting? That fellow was acting?"

"Is that so? It doesn't really seem like an act to be though..."

"Think about it! He was already on the verge of collapsing by the end of the seventh match, but he still managed to survive till the ten. Don't you think that's very suspicious?"

"That bastard! I staked all my money on his loss!"

...

Hearing Hong Yang's words, the crowd was so angry that they nearly morphed into demons on the spot. This was especially those who were fooled by Zhang Xuan's act earlier and betted on his loss.

"Even if you wish to find a reason to challenge me, surely you need not frame me like that? After battling ten people, there's no cultivator who can avoid becoming severely weakened!"

With a voice devoid of strength, the pale-faced Zhang Xuan raised his head and exclaimed, "Putting everything aside, do you think that you can defeat ten people and still have the strength to put on an act?"

"I can!" Hong Yang replied impassively.

"..." Zhang Xuan.

1266 My Heart Really Can't Take It Anymore!

The faces of those who were previously defeated by Zhang Xuan turned red.

While their strength couldn't be compared with Conquerors of Ten, they were still figures who had braved through many battles, and their fighting prowess were superior to ordinary cultivators... Yet, the other party was still able to defeat them consecutively and yet still have the energy to put on an act... Where were they supposed to put their pride and dignity now?

But thinking about it, there were indeed such people in this world. For one, Hong Yang definitely had the strength to defeat all ten of them twice each without getting exhausted at all.

Could the person whom they had fought with earlier possess such strength as well?

Everyone turned their gazes over to Zhang Xuan, wanting to see if what Hong Yang had said was true. But what they found themselves faced with were a pair of hollow eyes, a weakly trembling body, and a face which suggested that the young man was going to lose consciousness at any moment soon.

"I don't have such strength..." Zhang Xuan shook his head weakly. "I can hardly remain standing at the moment, how am I to fight with you?"

He was currently in the Ring of Death of the black market, where schemes and deception were a huge taboo. If he were to admit that he had been putting on an act previously, he could very well bring great trouble upon himself.

"You don't have a say in this matter. I, Hong Yang, will fight anyone I want. No one can sway my decision!" Hong Yang declared with compelling authority as he took a step forward.

Boom!

A powerful surge of zhenqi suddenly permeated the entire ring, exerting immense pressure on Zhang Xuan. It carried a threatening intent behind it, as if saying that regardless of whether Zhang Xuan liked it or not, this was a battle he wouldn't be able to escape from.

“You're too much!” Zhang Xuan stiffened his neck in indignation.

“I'm too much?” Hong Yang mocked before shaking his head. “Make your move. I suggest that you go all out, or else there's no way you will be stepping out of this ring alive!”

After which, Hong Yang raised his hand, and a bundle of zhenqi began gathering furiously above his palm.

“Given how bent Hong Yang is on fighting against that newcomer, a battle should be inevitable. Who do you think will win?”

“Do you even need to ask? It's obvious it's Hong Yang! I shall stake everything on him!”

“I'm also going to bet on Hong Yang as well. His battle style is exceptionally brutal, and he would even rip a living person into shreds callously... Even if that newcomer was putting on an act before, he still won't be able to avoid the fate of being torn in two!”

“More like torn in four!”

“Well, no matter how many pieces he is torn into, there's no doubt that the newcomer is dead meat...”

...

Upon hearing Hong Yang's words, the faces of the spectators flushed crimson in excitement.

“Time to place my bet...” Amidst the crowd, Zhang Jiuxiao also had his fists clenched tightly in agitation as well.

In the earlier few rounds, the highest payout had only been a little more than 1:2, but owing to Hong Yang's fearsome reputation, the payout should be able to rise to whole new heights this round.

Zhang Jiuxiao walked over to the betting table, and as he had expected, the payout for Zhang Xuan's victory had already increased beyond 1:10!

In other words, nearly every single person here had bet on Hong Yang's victory! No one thought that Zhang Xuan would be able to emerge victorious in the duel!

"We have really struck it rich this time!" With hands trembling uncontrollably in excitement and delight, Zhang Jiuxiao passed a storage ring over. "I'll bet 1800 concentrated high-tier spirit stones on Zhang Xuan's victory!"

"You are going to bet on Zhang Xuan?" the staff in charge of managing the bets asked in disbelief. Shaking his head, he quickly processed Zhang Jiuxiao's bet.

If no one were to bet on Zhang Xuan, how would their black market earn money?

Without a doubt, that fellow was bound to lose his 1800 concentrated high-tier spirit stones...

While the spectators were excitedly making their bets, on the ring, Hong Yang looked at the young man before him and said, "Make your move!"

"Why don't we just forget it? I won't be a match for you anyway..." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

"Like I said, you don't have a say in this matter!" Seeing that the young man was still rejecting him, Hong Yang couldn't be bothered to waste his words anymore.

Hula!

With a cold sneer, Hong Yang charged forward with astounding momentum. In just an instant, he was already right before Zhang Xuan.

His stature was truly towering. Standing next to him, Zhang Xuan appeared to be nothing more than a child.

Without any hesitation, Hong Yang smashed his fist down toward Zhang Xuan, and a ferocious gale whipped up in the surroundings. A slight rumbling sound reminiscent of thunder could be heard in the air, hinting at the immense might that

was packed behind that punch. From the looks of it, if that punch were to land, there was no doubt that Zhang Xuan would be reduced into meat paste.

On the other hand, seeing how Hong Yang didn't even hesitate before making his move, Zhang Xuan felt deeply exasperated.

As expected of one who had undergone multiple life-and-death battles, Hong Yang's instincts were truly keen.

Zhang Xuan was confident in his disguise, and the fact that the crowd was only slightly doubtful of his strength even after he had won round after round bore testimony to how lifelike his disguise was. Yet, Hong Yang was still able to see right through him, remaining firmly convinced that he was putting on a disguise no matter how he protested.

Without a doubt, Hong Yang was a formidable figure.

“Forget it...”

Feeling the immense might crushing down on him, Zhang Xuan knew that there was no avoiding this battle anymore. Sighing deeply, he took a step to the side.

Huala!

It was just a small step, but it allowed Zhang Xuan to narrowly avoid the other party's downward punch.

“Hmph!”

Hong Yang redirected the lingering strength behind his smashing punch into a sideward hook, adamantly tracing Zhang Xuan's figure with his offense.

“What a swift transformation!” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

Had it been any other opponent, his Infinitesimal Maneuver method of dodging would have surely caused the other party's attack to fall empty. Yet, Hong Yang's reflexes and flexibility were so powerful that he could actually change his movements at a whim fluidly, as if he had planned it right from the start! Even Hall Master Xing might not be capable of pulling off something like that!

“He can almost catch up with a third of me... Incredible!”
Surprised, Zhang Xuan did a rough mental calculation.

It was already extremely formidable for a challenger of an underground ring to be able to match a third of his reflexes and speed.

Knowing that it would be hard for him to avoid Hong Yang’s sideward hook, Zhang Xuan exhaled deeply and pushed his chest inward, making himself as thin as the width of a fist.

This was a unique battle technique that was used to avoid close-quarter attacks.

Even an ordinary human would be able to push their chest in significantly by exhaling deeply, let alone a cultivator.

By withdrawing his zhenqi into his dantian and using the surrounding air to compress his chest, it was possible for a cultivator to reduce his size significantly.

In a battle between experts, even the smallest difference in the distance could cause a vast difference in the outcome. Through using this move, Zhang Xuan successfully dodged Hong Yang’s sideward hook.

However, Hong Yang’s offense didn’t stop just there. He immediately changed his punch into a palm to strike down on Zhang Xuan.

In the first place, his hand was already extremely close to Zhang Xuan’s chest. If Zhang Xuan were to be struck by that palm strike, his heart could very well be pierced through, resulting in instantaneous death.

Just as everyone thought that there was no way Zhang Xuan could possibly dodge this move, perhaps it was out of resignation or exhaustion, Zhang Xuan’s caved in chest abruptly bounced back up.

As if an inflated ball, it coincidentally collided with Hong Yang’s approaching palm and successfully deflected it aside.

Following which, Zhang Xuan stepped forward and raised his hand, preparing to strike Hong Yang’s face.

It was the same move he had used to subdue his previous opponents!

“Hm?” Not expecting that Zhang Xuan would be able to launch a counterattack despite his relentless assault, Hong Yang’s eyes narrowed his eyes in surprise.

Even though his earlier assault may appear to be simple on the exterior, it was actually his famed Triple Chain Assault. This was the technique he had used to down countless tough opponents, and even Conquerors of Ten hadn’t been able to survive the second strike of his Triple Chain Assault.

Yet, not only did the young man successfully dodge all three maneuvers, he even managed to launch a counterattack! Just like what he had guessed before, the young man was indeed no ordinary opponent.

In this moment, Hong Yang couldn’t help but feel deeply excited within.

He swiftly raised his other hand, wanting to fend off the young man’s slap. But contrary to his expectations, the young man right before him shot him a peculiar smile instead.

All of a sudden, Hong Yang felt a bout of dizziness assaulting his head, and his body staggered backward weakly.

“Crap, it’s a terpsichorean art...” Hong Yang’s widened his eyes in astonishment.

That other party’s smile was actually one of the famed techniques of terpsichores—Hundred Flowers Bloom!

It was said that the person who had created this technique was an incredible beauty amongst the terpsichores more than ten thousand years ago. Just a returning smile of hers could send one’s heart throbbing uncontrollably, and in that instant, it would be as if the rest of the world had turned colorless!

Those who had fallen for the technique would find themselves consumed in a trance, thus losing their fighting prowess.

But... wasn’t this a technique which only women could use?

How could a man like Zhang Xuan use it as well, and to look so moving on top of that...

Feeling that his mind was swiftly descending into confusion, Hong Yang hurriedly bit his tongue to restore some rationality back into his head. However, it was already too late. Zhang Xuan's slap was already right before his eyes.

For some reason, those five fingers felt like towering mountains to Hong Yang. He felt that he would never be able to avoid the slap no matter how he struggled.

Pah!

A resounding 'pah!' echoed on the ring, and a palm was clearly imprinted on Hong Yang's swollen face.

"You..." Feeling the stinging pain on his face, Hong Yang felt so frenzied that he could lose his mind at this very instant.

He was the Conqueror of Hundred of the underground black market, but he ended up being slapped in the ring so easily... This was a huge humiliation to him!

"I'll rip you into shreds!" Roaring furiously, Hong Yang was just about to make his move when the young man abruptly retreated eight steps backward.

As if he had depleted all of his strength, the young man's body trembled uncontrollably, and it looked as if he would collapse onto the ground at any moment. "I told you that I have already come to the limit of my body, and I won't be able to fight with you anymore. Let's just forget it. I really am not a match for you..."

"You..." Hong Yang felt as if his mind was about to explode.

Right after literally giving me a tight slap in my face, you want to call the duel off and retreat unscathed? How can there be something that convenient in the world?

Furthermore, you aren't a match for me? If you still aren't a match for me after nearly crippling me, if you were really a match for me, wouldn't I be killed in an instant?

Boom!

Unable to hold back his rage, Hong Yang dashed forward furiously for Zhang Xuan.

This time, he decided to go all out. He adeptly weaved his zhenqi with his fingers, crafting a massive cage around them.

“Hong Yang is getting serious!”

“Once he gets serious, there’s bound to be a cold corpse lying in his wake...”

“It was just a lucky slap earlier. That fellow can’t possibly be so lucky the next time around too...”

A commotion broke out on the spectator stand.

Earlier, when Hong Yang was slapped by the newcomer, everyone was stunned for an instant, causing the spectator stand to fall deathly silent. However, seeing that Hong Yang had flown into a rage, excited cheerings began resounding once more.

Hula!

A might which seemed to harness sufficient strength to sway even the heavens themselves gathered in Hong Yang’s palm as he callously thrust it toward Zhang Xuan.

As a person who had been crowned as the Conqueror of Hundred in the Ring of Death, his fighting prowess was truly not one to be underestimated.

Facing the other party’s attack, Zhang Xuan took a step back before twisting his body, nimbly dodging Hong Yang’s powerful palm strike. After which, he raised his palm once more.

It was the exact same movement as before. He was preparing to send another slap toward Hong Yang’s face!

“You want to use the same move against me twice? Dream on!” Seeing that it was the same old move, Hong Yang was suddenly reminded of the previous insult he had suffered. He bellowed furiously as he sent another palm strike to meet the young man’s slap.

But just as their palms were about to collide with one another, the young man before him suddenly sent him another bewitching smile.

This smile was even more radiant than the one before.

In an instant, Hong Yang felt the sight before him blurring as another bout of dizziness assaulted his head. The palm strike he had pushed forward in order to fend off Zhang Xuan's slap also came to an abrupt halt, freezing in midair.

Padah!

Another burst of fiery pain stung Hong Yang's face as his body revolved twice on the spot from the sheer might behind the slap.

"AHHHHHHHHHHH!" Awakening from his trance, Hong Yang clutched his hair in fury.

With a furious roar, he was just about to dash forward to return the favor to the young man when the latter's helpless voice suddenly sounded once more, "Like I said, my body has really reached its limit. I am in no state to fight with you... Why won't you just listen to my words? I honestly don't want to fight with you... I really am no match for you!"

"Your body has reached its limit? You are no match for me?" Hong Yang touched the two swollen palm prints on his cheeks, and his head nearly exploded.

You call this reaching your limit?

Doesn't that mean that if you haven't reached your limit, I would have already been killed by you?

Can you just stop humblebragging? My heart really can't take it anymore!

1267 A Shocking Be

In a vast room in the underground black market...

An elder anxiously barged into the room, exclaiming, “Boss, bad news!”

“What’s wrong?”

Seated at the very center of the room, a middle-aged man was leisurely sipping on his tea when he heard the exclamation and frowned.

This middle-aged man was a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert, as well as the person who rules over the entire black market! Very few people knew of his true name, so most would only deferentially refer to him as the Boss.

Invaluable treasures could be found at every turn in the black market, but very few dared to snatch those treasures for their own. A huge reason for this was out of fear and deference for the Boss and his vicious means.

“Earlier, a challenger known as Zhang Xuan arrived in the Ring of Death, and he won ten rounds consecutively, winning himself the title of the Conqueror of Ten...” the elder reported.

“Is this anything to make a fuss about? Winning ten rounds consecutively isn’t anything much, is it?” the Boss replied leisurely as he lifted the teapot and poured himself another cup of tea.

It wasn’t easy to rise to the position of Conqueror of Ten, but every single year, there would still be seven to eight who would be crowned as one. In view of that, it really wasn’t anything much to make a fuss over.

“That would be nothing much, but just as he was about to challenge the other Conquerors of Ten for the position of Conqueror of Hundred, Hong Yang suddenly stepped into the ring!” the elder continued.

“Oh?” the Boss smiled in interest. “Given Hong Yang’s strength, there is none in his cultivation realm who would be a match for him. Anyone who faces him is likely to end in death. Since that’s the case, just make preparations to dispose of the corpse then. You have done this for a few years now, so is there any need to trouble me for something as trivial as this?”

“B-but Boss... I initially thought that there would be no problems as well, but after both parties traded two blows... Hong Yang ended up being slapped twice whereas Zhang Xuan... is still completely unscathed!” the elder swiftly explained the situation he had seen earlier, and the disbelief in his tone showed that he still hadn’t been able to come to terms with the matter yet.

“Hong Yang was slapped? Are you saying that Hong Yang isn’t a match for Zhang Xuan?” the Boss was taken aback.

“I’m afraid that’s likely to be the case!” the elder nodded.

“Hong Yang is our money tree, and he has been known for his indomitable strength. While he has a resounding reputation himself, there hasn’t been any good opponent to pit against him to create some fanfare for the Ring of Death... This works fine too. With this defeat, he should be able to grow further. We can plan for his comeback and earn substantial profits from it. Keep a close look on the situation, and make sure that his life isn’t threatened...” the Boss placed his teacup back on the table and said contemptively.

Hong Yang was formidable, not infallible. Anything could happen on the ring, and it was precisely this trait of the Ring of Death that allowed it to draw a steady stream of customers. As long as Hong Yang didn’t die, his defeat wouldn’t be a problem.

“I understand. However, there’s another problem... Zhang Xuan came to the ring together with a companion, and the latter has been betting all in on him every single round! Over the past ten matches, he has already won more than 1600 concentrated high-tier spirit stones from us! When Hong Yang came on the stage, I thought that Zhang Xuan would surely be

defeated in the duel, so I altered the payout to be very low on Hong Yang's side and very high on Zhang Xuan's side, wanting to lure that companion of his to go all in once more to recoup our losses... I didn't think that Zhang Xuan would actually outmatch Hong Yang!" An awkward look surfaced on the elder's face.

"Very high? How high is that?" The Boss was startled.

"If Hong Yang were to lose, even the overall profits of the black market which we have accumulated over many years won't be enough to compensate the other party..."

"What did you say?" Hearing those words, the cup in the Boss' hand fell to the ground and shattered into innumerable fragments.

Just how high of a payout did that fellow set for Zhang Xuan?!

"Bring me over to take a look. I want to see the situation with my own eyes..."

Unable to remain still any longer, the Boss stood up and began making his way over to the ring.

In the Ring of Death, the death of an individual or two wouldn't mean anything at all. However, if they were to bankrupt themselves over a bet, how were they supposed to continue operating their business?

Such a thing must be prevented at all cost!

...

"You bastard, I'll tear you apart!"

On the ring, after being slapped two consecutive times, Hong Yang's eyes had already reddened in utter rage.

Prior to challenging Zhang Xuan, he had already known the young man was no weakling. However, he hadn't thought that the young man would actually be so powerful!

It had been nearly ten years since he first fought in the Ring of Death, and never had he suffered such humiliation before!

More importantly, even after managing to land two clean blows on him, that fellow was still adamantly continuing with

his act, making it look as if he would collapse at any moment...

Act your head! If anyone is going to collapse here, it should be me!

But even though Hong Yang was livid with rage, he knew better than to let his anger blind his rationality.

“I have to steady my Primordial Spirit!”

With this thought in mind, he sealed all of his acupoints and steadied his state of mind so that the young man couldn't sway him anymore.

The reason why the young man had managed to land two slaps on him was because of his terpsichorean art. As long as he were to avert his eyes and attention away from it, he would be able to avoid being falling into a trance!

Hong long!

After putting up his mental guard, Hong Yang charged forward once more. This time, he was planning to get into close quarters to launch a barrage of attacks.

His towering stature had granted him with strength superior to that of his peers, and he knew that the best way for him to capitalize on this strength was through close-quarter combat. The young man was swift and nimble, but in close-quarter combat, one would often be limited by their reaction speed, thus making it night impossible to dodge every single attack.

This would be his best shot at exacting vengeance!

Hu la!

Charging forward, his arms and legs flew forth one after another with astounding speed, reminiscent of a relentless storm battering down on the world. In comparison, Zhang Xuan seemed like a fragile raft, completely helpless in its face.

“Not bad!” Zhang Xuan muttered beneath his breath.

In this moment, Zhang Xuan's body was still limp in weakness, and it felt as if he would be swallowed by that storm of attacks. But for some bizarre reason, despite his

sluggish movement, Hong Yang's barrage of attack still missed him one after another, as if Hong Yang was intentionally letting him off.

"He's able to predict my attacks?" Hong Yang widened his eyes in disbelief.

Despite the young man's slow and sluggish movements, it was apparent to him that the young man had seen right through every single one of his attack trajectory, dodging all of his attacks in advance. The young man's movements may seem unseemly, but there was not a single wasted movement at all!

Just as Hong Yang was thinking of another plan to subdue the young man before him, the latter abruptly raised his palm once more, clearly preparing to imprint another palm on his face.

"Again? I have already steadied my Primordial Spirit. Your terpsichorean arts won't work on me anymore!" Hong Yang sneered confidently.

However, in the next moment, he heard a voice sounding in his ear, "Don't bother dodging. It's futile..."

It sounded like the whisperings of a lover, causing a jolt of electricity to course through his body. In an instant, the tension in his muscles loosened, causing his body to fall limp.

"Shit, it's demonic tune this time around!"

It took only a tenth of a second for Hong Yang to realize the anomaly in his body, and he immediately bit his tongue to jolt himself out of his abnormal state. But by the time he was about to protect himself, the young man's palm had already appeared by his face once more.

Pah!

A crisp and resounding echo it was!

Hong Yang's eyes reddened once more as he twisted a round on the spot. At the same time, half of his face swelled up as well.

"Please, believe me! My body is really reaching its limit. I can't fight against you anymore... I can't defeat you!" the young man's helpless voice sounded yet again.

“ARGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

Overwhelmed with frenzy, Hong Yang charged forward furiously once more, but yet another palm struck his face.

And Zhang Xuan didn't forget to continue his humblebragging either, “I am really exhausted, let me go. I want to rest, don't come anymore...”

Hong Yang charged over once more.

Pah! Pah! Pah!

“No, this is really my limit. Oh, I'm going to pass out...”

It was as if the young man's hand was infused with some kind of sorcery. Each and every time, it would strike Hong Yang's face accurately. Despite trying out a dozen different movement techniques, the young man's palm would still land on his face with inconceivable precision. More importantly, after each slap, the young man would act as if he was going to fall without fail, as if he was the victim over here...

If you can't hold on anymore, just faint then!

You say that you can't hold on any longer each time, but you still manage to slap me without fail each time I charge forward...

Can you be any more shameless than that?

Hong Yang really felt that his sanity was being severely challenged over here.

He wasn't the only one who felt that. Every single person on the spectator stand was also completely dumbfounded. Their minds were too crazed over the happenings on the field that they even forgot how to react with their bodies.

They knew Hong Yang's strength very well—Conqueror of Hundred, unmatched in his power class...

They thought that it should be easy for him to teach an arrogant newcomer a lesson... But who could have thought that such would happen instead...

Each time Hong Yang charged over, he would be smacked back in place by a slap. Then, the young man would wobble

on the spot, as if he would collapse at any moment.

And the cycle would just repeat and repeat...

With each slap, the indomitable Hong Yang in their hearts would erode by a bit, to the point that nothing was left at all.

What that was even more shocking was that the fellow that was on the verge of fainting was actually still completely intact! Throughout the course of the battle, he hadn't sustained the slightest injury at all!

“Did I really just fight with that monster?”

The faces of the scar-faced young man and the others were completely pale. At the same time, Qian Xu's head also cowered back with every slap that had been dealt. At this rate, it seemed like it would be long before his head was buried into his neck.

That was Hong Yang, the invincible gladiator of the Ring of Death! To be smacked around so easily as if a little chick, just how powerful could that newcomer be?

This was too exaggerated!

And he, Qian Xu, actually provoked such a figure... It was fortunate that the other party didn't hold a grudge against him over that matter, or else he would have already turned into a lifeless corpse.

“Stop hitting me, I really am not a match for you... Stop it!”

The crisp slaps and helpless exclamations continued sounding on the ring.

Putong!

At some point in time, Hong Yang finally came to the limit of his strength and collapsed to the ground, knocked out.

Even up to the moment that he lost consciousness, his heart was filled with indignance.

In his many years on the Ring of Death, this was the first time he had been pummeled so indignantly and humiliatingly.

Before his vision turned dark, he took one last look at his opponent and saw the young man was still swaying on the spot, no different from before.

It seemed as if he would fall at any time, but somehow, he just kept standing on...

“The newcomer... defeated Hong Yang?”

“I lost the bet again?”

“That was the money I took from my wife’s secret stash!”

Because it was Hong Yang fighting, there were many who had placed huge bets on Hong Yang’s victory. Thus, when they saw Hong Yang collapsing on the ground, knocked out, their faces turned completely livid. There were even a few who burst into tears.

After losing several rounds, they thought that they would be able to recoup some of their losses through Hong Yang. Yet, who could have thought that this match would only further their losses, plunging them deeper into the abyss.

If only they had known this in advance, they would have bet their everything on Zhang Xuan... But speaking of which, just where did this inconspicuous little lad pop up from him?

To be able to defeat even the Conqueror of Hundred with such ease...

“This duel... Zhang Xuan is the victor!”

After waiting for ten seconds, Hong Yang still remained completely motionless. So, the voice from before declared loudly, but the disbelief in his voice was still clear for all to hear.

“We’re riiiiichhhhhh! We have really struck it rich this time!”

At odds with the depressing atmosphere drifting along the spectator stand, upon hearing the news of Zhang Xuan’s victory, Zhang Jiuxiao leaped up in excitement and cried out.

The payout for this match was a little more than 1:10, which meant to say that as long as Zhang Xuan won, the 1800

concentrated high-tier spirit stone would bring him a return of nearly 20,000!

Even as the offspring of the Zhang Clan, he had never seen that many concentrated high-tier spirit stone before!

Completely broke when they first entered the black market, in less than two hours, their wealth had actually leaped up to nearly 20,000...

Zhang shi was really a walking spirit mine! Furthermore, he was the type that could produce countless spirit stones without using an excavator!

With so many of it, it should be enough to fulfill Zhang shi's needs!

With this thought in mind, Zhang Jiuxiao walked over to the betting counter and passed over the document in his hand over. "I have come here to collect my payout. If I'm not mistaken, you owe me a total of 19,800 concentrated high-tier spirit stones!"

"19800?"

Before the person in charge could speak, a cold harrumph suddenly sounded. Following which, a middle-aged man walked over and spoke authoritatively, "We suspect that you have been cheating in the Ring of Death, so the bet that you have made in this match will be annulled!"

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“Annulled?” Zhang Jiuxiao was taken aback for an instant before his eyebrows shot up, “What do you mean by that?”

“Exactly as it sounds.” the middle-aged man harrumphed. “Whatever gambling we conduct in our Ring of Death is built upon the idea of fairness, but you collaborated with one of the challengers of the ring, one feigning weakness on the ring to influence the payout and the other to make the bets... This is considered a cheating behavior, and it is a violation of our rules. Not only will your winnings be confiscated, you are also to compensate the Ring of Death for your disruptive behavior!”

“Compensate?” Zhang Jiuxiao’s face turned livid.

“You are hereby under arrest under the charges of disrupting the black market’s order and fraud. Men, capture that fellow!” the middle-aged man commanded with a grand wave of his hand.

Huala!

In the blink of an eye, a dozen guards dressed in tight-fitting armor, each possessing a cultivation of Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, dashed forward and surrounded Zhang Jiuxiao tightly.

“You all...” Not expecting that the black market would refuse to acknowledge its loss, attempting to capture him even, Zhang Jiuxiao was seething with rage. With a raise of his hands, a Saint intermediate-tier sword materialized before him, ready to make a move at his command.

While he had the strength to challenge opponents stronger than him, there were simply too many people before him at the moment. Furthermore, from the start to the end, the middle-aged man hadn’t been concealing Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivation. Even if he were to utilize all of the means

at his disposal, he would be no match for the middle-aged man.

“To think that the black market would resort to forcing others to submit after losing in a gamble... Is this how you all usually act?”

But before anyone could make a move, an impassive voice sounded in the air. Following which, the young man who had just defeated Hong Yang on the ring suddenly appeared on the spectator stand as well, and his displeasure was clearly carved onto his face.

He was intending to use the money he had won to attend the auction and buy down the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition, but who knew that not only would the black market refuse to pay up, they even had Zhang Jiuxiao surrounded. Unable to watch on anymore, Zhang Xuan flew over from the ring.

“The both of you collaborated with one another to conduct fraud in the Ring of Death, and that’s a clear violation of our rules. If we don’t punish you to make a warning to the others, how can our Ring of Death continue to operate if everyone were to do the same?” the middle-aged man flung his sleeves furiously.

The middle-aged man was the Boss of the black market.

20,000 concentrated high-tier spirit stones—the entire fortune of their black market was only worth about this much! If they were to really pay this sum to those two, their black market might really have to shut down for good!

“You want to talk rules with me? Sure, let’s talk just that then!”

Even the Master Teacher Pavilion, an organization which was heavily dictated by rules, could hardly do anything to him, and yet, the head of a black market actually wanted to talk to him about rules... This was almost the same as flaunting your wealth before a bank!

“Regarding the matches in the Ring of Death, there are no rules preventing anyone from placing any bet. Zhang Jiuxiao is my friend, and he has confidence in my strength, so

naturally, he would be inclined to bet on me. Surely there's no problem with that, right?" Zhang Xuan reasoned.

"There's no problem about that, but..." the Boss nodded.

There were no rules preventing the kin or friends of a challenger from betting on him; on the contrary, it was common practice. It was in view of the wealth that they could earn that the challengers were willing to go all out in their own fights. Wealth and honor upon victory, poverty and humiliation upon loss—it was the stakes at play here that they were willing to stake even their own life here.

As such, this couldn't be considered to be a violation of the rules.

"Since there's no problem, and you were the one who set the payout under the premise that you would be willing to pay up no matter how much you lost. Given so, what rights do you have to say that we have violated the rules?" Zhang Xuan interjected the Boss' words.

"You were clearly able to achieve a victory easily, but you maliciously feigned weakness on the ring. Such a behavior can be considered as fraud..."

"Fraud? By fraud, do you refer to using trickery and deception to achieve victory? Putting aside the fact that there are no rules to the ring, you can ask everyone here what has happened. In the duel against Hong Yang, I kept telling him that I am no match for him, and that we should stop the duel there and then, but he simply wouldn't listen, insisting adamantly that I should have a fight with him. It's out of no choice that I had to counterattack... Given that the duel is forced upon me in the first place, are you sure that my behavior can be considered to be fraud?"

Zhang Xuan turned to the Boss and continued, "If I really want to achieve victory that much, I could have just accepted his duel straight. There's no need for me to turn him down again and again!"

"This..." the eyebrows of the Boss shot up.

He had also been watching the match earlier as well.

Indeed, the young man kept telling Hong Yang that he didn't want to fight anymore, but the latter just kept charging at him relentlessly... From such an aspect, if anyone was guilty of cheating, it should be Hong Yang.

However, with a huge sum of nearly 20,000 at stake here, he couldn't afford to back down. Knowing that it was impossible for him to win in a proper debate, he flung his sleeves furiously and bellowed, "Don't bother playing word games with me over here. I am the Boss of the black market, and my words are the law! Men, take these two troublemakers down!"

"You are just going to use force since you are unable to reason against us? Very well, I would like to see who dares to touch a strand of hair of ours!" Zhang Xuan bellowed as he swept a cold gaze across his surroundings.

"Go!"

One of the guards bellowed before taking the lead, charging at Zhang Xuan.

Even if the fellow before them was strong enough to defeat Hong Yang easily, they had the numerical advantage. On top of that, they were all Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle experts as well. They were confident that they would be able to take him down easily.

The guard brandished his sword furiously, and the cold glint of a sword qi swiftly fell toward Zhang Xuan.

Considering the lawlessness of the black market, those who were qualified to become guards to ensure order and security had to wield extraordinary strength as well. As the sword qi flew over, the air was groaned under the immense strain from its pressure, as if testifying to the humongous strength behind it.

Facing the powerful sword brandish, Zhang Xuan didn't bother to dodge at all. Instead, he lifted his finger casually and tapped on the space before him.

Padah!

The sword qi shattered, and the burst of zhenqi continued gushing forward to the guard. 'Pah!', the latter suddenly felt a

violent pressure striking his dantian.

Following which, his dantian abruptly shattered into countless pieces.

Feeling that his zhenqi was gushing out of his body like a leaking balloon, the guard widened his eyes in horror, “Y-you... you crippled my cultivation?”

The breaking of one’s dantian was equivalent to destroying a person’s cultivation. This meant that the countless years of hard work that an individual had put into advancing his cultivation had gone to utter waste.

Couldn’t be bothered to respond to the guard’s question, Zhang Xuan continued to move. A series of exploding sounds echoed in the air over the next few breaths, and the dozen of guards that were surrounding Zhang Jiuxiao suddenly collapsed to the ground as well.

Feeling as power gradually seeped away from their bodies, a fear so powerful that it left them hardly able to breathe consumed the guards.

These guards had made use to the authority that had been granted to them to oppress the weak and make benefits for themselves. Even killing them outright wouldn’t be considered as going overboard. In a sense, crippling their dantian could already be considered as a mercy from Zhang Xuan to them.

But of course, considering all of the evil deeds they had done before through exploiting their strength, this mercy might not be one that they would appreciate...

On the other hand, seeing that a mere Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage cultivator actually crippled his subordinates right before him, the eyes of the Boss reddened in fury. Unable to hold himself back anymore, he thrust his palm forward with overwhelming might.

Facing the Boss’ palm strike, Zhang Xuan had no intentions of dodging either. On the contrary, he took a step forward to receive the other party’s palm.

He hadn’t found a worthy sparring partner ever since he advanced to Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage. Since this

middle-aged man was flinging himself at him, he didn't mind using the other party as a moving punching bag!

Boom!

As their palms clashed against one another, a resounding explosion swiftly swept across the entire Ring of Death. Under the shockwave that diffused from the collision of palms, the entire area immediately began collapsing.

Most of the spectators had chosen to linger in the area to watch the drama, but in face of the powerful shockwave, they immediately fled in fright. Even Zhang Jiuxiao also had to retreat several dozen meters away before he felt that he was finally a safe distance away.

“How can this be... How can you be so powerful?” the Boss widened his eyes in astonishment and fright.

He thought that even if Zhang Xuan possessed strength far beyond his cultivation realm, the latter should still be a long distance away from matching up to him. After all, it was nearly unheard of for a Primordial Spirit realm cultivator to match a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator, let alone a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert like him! Yet, in a direct clash of palms, they were actually on equal footing!

For the other party to wield raw strength on par with him...

Even seeing it with his own eyes, he still found it hard to believe.

“Who in the world are you?” the Boss questioned warily.

There was no way a person who wielded such overwhelming power could possibly be from a humble background.

“I am Zhang Xuan. You can etch that name into your head!” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly as he flicked his palm and sent the second wave of attack toward the Boss.

His palm strike appeared to be flimsy on the surface, but for some peculiar reason, it exuded an indomitable aura that was at odds with its exterior.

The Boss was still intending to say something, but facing such an attack, he knew that he couldn't afford to waste any time on

words. He quickly gathered his strength into his fist and launched a counterattack.

However, before his fist could meet with Zhang Xuan's palm, the latter's figure suddenly flickered before abruptly materializing right before him. Before he could react, the palm had already landed lightly on his body.

Peng!

With a furious spurt of blood, the Boss was sent flying all the way back, dragging a long gorge in the ground in his wake.

Back when Zhang Xuan was at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage, he was already roughly a match for Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle experts, let alone now. The Boss might be a powerful cultivator, but he didn't stand a chance at all.

After trading two blows, Zhang Xuan also realized that the Boss was hardly a challenge at all, so he began losing his interest too.

Couldn't be bothered to make a move himself anymore, he waved his hand and commanded, "Go, cripple him for me!"

Hu la!

From a room connected to the ring below, more than a hundred different types of sabers flew forth, headed right toward the Boss.

These sabers might just be Saint low-tier artifacts, but there were simply too many of them. With all of them launching an offense simultaneously, it didn't take long before the entire area was flooded with saber qi.

Upon seeing this sight, the Boss widened his eyes in shock. Before he could even put up his defenses, several saber qi had already cut into his body, leaving him bloodied all over.

"These sabers..."

Seeing the familiar sabers, the eyelids of the middle-aged manager who had led Zhang Xuan into the Ring of Death earlier began twitching uncontrollably.

These sabers were no other than the weapons they were providing to the challengers of the ring! But these weapons shouldn't have any spirit at all! Why would they listen to that young man's command and attack the Boss?

"That lad must have enchanted them..." The middle-aged manager clenched his fists in realization.

Very clearly, Zhang Xuan must have enchanted those weapons. This would also explain why they were so loyal to him, attacking the Boss without any hesitation on his command.

But he had personally followed that young man into the Weapon Room, and the young man had only spent a few minutes testing out several weapons before leaving empty-handed... To actually successfully enchant all of these weapons within that short period of time... Just how in the world did he do it?!

Aside from the middle-aged manager, Zhang Jiuxiao's lips were also twitching from the sight before him.

He had known about Zhang Xuan's unparalleled proficiency in spirit enchantment, but he had never thought that the latter would be so vicious as to tame all of these weapons!

Looking at it now, it seemed like Zhang Xuan had known from the start that the black market would never allow them to walk away with the sum they had won from the Ring of Death from the very start, so he had made preparations against it in advance.

Wuuuuuuuuu!

It seemed like the hundred Saint low-tier sabers had been through some kind of special training. Every single attack of theirs was accurately aimed at the blind spot or mingmen of the Boss. Under this furious onslaught of deadly saber qi, it didn't take long for the imposing Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert to be bleeding all over. Countless cuts were inflicted throughout his body, and from the looks of it, it seemed like he wasn't too far away from death anymore.

“Stop... I’m willing to compensate you...” Knowing that he might really die at this rate, the Boss finally exclaimed anxiously.

Even though he felt incredibly frustrated, he knew that there was nothing he could do but to surrender.

If the other party really wanted to claim his life, he could have been dead by now.

“Compensate?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

With a wave of his hand, the hundred sabers immediately flew back and neatly took their positions behind Zhang Xuan’s back, forming something reminiscent to the feathers of a peacock.

“Yes, I’m willing to compensate you...” Struggling to his feet, the Boss took out a storage ring and passed it over, “Here are 19,800 concentrated high-tier spirit stones...”

This was the profit which the black market had accumulated over countless years. If he were to give it away just like that, the black market would soon find itself facing severe financial troubles.

But at this point, he had no other choice either.

Taking the storage ring, Zhang Xuan swiftly swept its contents before nodding.

There was no mistake with the quantity. It seemed like the other party wasn’t playing tricks with him.

“Alright, what are you going to compensate us? These 19,800 concentrated high-tier spirit stones are what we have earned fairly through the gambling earlier, but you have made a move against me and my friend. How do you intend to resolve this matter?” Keeping the spirit stones safely into his own storage ring, Zhang Xuan turned his sight back to the Boss and asked.

“You still want me to compensate you?” the Boss’ face turned pale in horror.

You have nearly taken everything that I have, and you still want to squeeze me dry?

“Isn’t that a given? Or do you expect to be so magnanimous as to forget what you have just done?” Zhang Xuan sneered.

“How... do you want me to compensate you?” the Boss asked through gritted teeth.

“I heard that your black market has just obtained a certain book, Annal of Bedstead Disquisition?” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before asking.

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The Boss hesitated for a moment before slowly nodding, “Fine. I’ll get my men to bring it over to you now.”

As valuable as the Annal of the Bedstead Disquisition was, it was just another artifact to him. If he were to weigh it against his life, it was obvious that his life was way more valuable. With a guillotine right above him at this moment, it was obvious what he should choose.

After making a few instructions, it didn’t take long for an elder to arrive at the scene with a considerably large jade container in hand.

The elder opened the jade container, revealing an ancient book within. The yellowish pages were evidence to the long history behind the book, but it was still generally well-preserved. The words on the pages were also pulsating with spiritual energy.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan took a closer look, and after confirming that it was the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition, he finally nodded before keeping it into his storage ring.

Turning to Zhang Jiuxiao, he said, “Let’s go!”

Then, with a powerful leap, he began flying away from the scene.

Zhang Jiuxiao and the hundred sabers behind him quickly followed suit.

Staring in the direction where they disappeared at, hatred began flooding into the eyes of the Boss.

“Boss, are we going to let them off just like that?” an elder walked forward and asked.

It had been more than ten thousand years since their black market had been established, and they had never suffered such a huge setback!

“Let them off? How can I, Ji Lingfeng, allow others to take my items so easily?” The Boss narrowed his eyes as he

clenched his fists tightly together.

What he had lost this time around weren't just spirit stones but his pride as well. If they were to take this lying down, how could the black market uphold its prestige and authority in Qianchong City?

"Then... What should we do?"

The young man was strong enough to even overpower their Boss, so even if they wanted to exact vengeance, what could they possibly do?

"Fetch me my [Sword of Faint Whispers]!" The Boss flung his sleeves furiously.

"Sword of Faint Whispers? Boss, you can't be thinking of..." The elder narrowed his eyes in disbelief as something surfaced in his mind.

"That's right! I'm going to head there and have him make a move in my stead!" A cold glint flashed across the Boss' eyes as he gritted his teeth in fury.

"Yes!"

The elder hurriedly rushed off, and not too long later, he returned with a sword in hand.

At first sight, there was nothing that set the sword apart from the others. However, with just a slight flick of it, an incomparably chilling sword qi would shroud its blade, leaving one feeling as if one had been plunged into the midst of a winter's night. On top of that, one could also vaguely hear some soft mutterings in one's ears, as if the sword was whispering to one.

This was the Sword of Faint Whispers, a top-notch Saint intermediate-tier artifact, possessing a might comparable to a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert!

Without a doubt, it was one of the strongest weapons in Qianchong Empire!

"Look into the background of that Zhang Xuan!"

With the sword in hand, the Boss' disposition immediately changed. In an instant, he appeared to be many times stronger than before.

“Yes!”

The elder quickly backed away to arrange some men to look into Zhang Xuan's background. On the other hand, the Boss consumed several recovery pills and sat down on the spot to recuperate.

Not too long later, the elder returned with a jade token in hand, “This is the information we have gathered on Zhang Xuan so far. He's from Qingyuan Empire, and he has once succeeded in a pavilion crashing. He has also cleared the preliminary selections of the Sanctum of Sages, and he's in Qianchong Empire for the secondary selections...”

The black market was also known for its outstanding intelligence network as well, so it didn't take long for them to uncover Zhang Xuan's background.

“So he's a talented master teacher, eh? No wonder he dares to cause trouble here...” the Boss stood up and uttered menacingly.

After a moment of recuperation, even though his wounds were still severe, he was at least out of danger for the time being.

“You, stay here and keep the situation in check. I'll head out for a moment.” Flinging his sleeves, the Boss began walking away with the Sword of Faint Whispers in his hand.

After leaving the black market, the Boss flew for quite some time before he reached the boundary of a land completely shrouded in mist.

“You have come...” From the midst of the mist, a faint voice sounded.

“Yes, I want you to kill someone for me!” the Boss spat coldly.

“Price.”

“I'll give you the Sword of Faint Whispers in exchange!” With a flick of his wrist, the sword in the Boss' hand slowly floated up.

“Are you certain?” A trace of agitation could be heard in the voice from the mist.

“I’m certain!” the Boss replied in resolution. “I know that you are camping here for the legend, but you should also be aware that it’s impossible to accomplish it without the Sword of Faint Whispers!”

After a moment of silence, the voice in the midst asked, “Who?”

“His name is Zhang Xuan, a master teacher. He has cleared the preliminary selections of the Sanctum of Sages. Here is his information!” With a flick of his wrist, the Boss threw the jade token he had received from the elder earlier into the mist.

“A master teacher who has successfully crashed the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion? It seems like he’s quite a prodigy.” the voice in the mist sounded a little hesitant.

A master teacher who had successfully crashed a Master Teacher Pavilion would surely be highly-regarded by the headquarters. If it were to be known that he had killed such a prodigy, the rage of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters would be one he wouldn’t be able to withstand.

“Cut the nonsense and tell me whether you are willing to accept the deal or not!” the Boss asked impatiently.

“I don’t have much time left. If I still can’t open that place, I reckon that three years will be my limit... Killing a prodigy in exchange for an opportunity for a breakthrough doesn’t sound that bad. However, this matter must be carefully planned so as to ensure that no one finds out about it...” the voice in the mist spoke slowly.

“I know that that much too!” the Boss replied coldly.

Regardless of whether he was the one who had done it personally, the crime of plotting the death of a prodigy of the Master Teacher Pavilion was grave. The Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters had to make a firm stand on the matter so as to deter others from doing the same and ensure the safety of their younger talents. Even if he had the entire black market

behind him, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters still wouldn't hesitate to smash him into the ground.

The might of the number one occupation on the Master Teacher Continent was not to be underestimated!

Any power would have to think twice before laying its hand on the young talents of the Master Teacher Pavilion!

This was similar to the disciples of powerful sects as well.

Even if you were to know that they were weak and carried invaluable artifacts with them, would you still dare to make a move on them?

“Alright, I have received your request, so you can leave now. I'll think over the matter and give you an answer three days later.” the voice in the mist hesitated for a moment before replying.

“There's no need for that, I'll wait here for your response. I want to see you kill him with my own eyes. I'll give the Sword of Faint Whispers to you as soon as he dies!”

There was a moment of silence before the voice in the mist spoke once more, “Very well. Come in then.”

“Un.” Holding the sword tightly in his hand, the Boss walked into the mist, and it didn't take long before his silhouette vanished altogether.

...

“I never thought the underground black market isn't located beneath the manor we saw before but in the middle of a mountain range...”

After leaving the black market, Zhang Xuan swiftly kept the sabers following behind him. Gazing downward, he realized that he wasn't underground, or even anywhere near the manor they had stopped at before they were blindfolded and brought into the black market at that. Instead, the black market was actually located in the belly of a mountain.

The manor was just a method of deception to hide the black market away from prying eyes.

It was no wonder why one would have to be blindfolded before entering the black market. Considering the nature of the black market, it also wasn't surprising why they would go to the extent of making such precautions as well.

Even if the black market had some value of existence to Qianchong Empire, there was no saying when the Master Teacher Pavilion would decide to stop tolerating them and launch a crusade against them. It would be unwise to entrust their safety to the whims of others.

“You have really done me a great favor this time around. Here are a thousand concentrated high-tier spirit stones, take it as a token of appreciation from me.” Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took a pile of concentrated high-tier spirit stones out.

Zhang Jiuxiao was astonished, “How can I take so many spirit stones from you...”

A thousand concentrated high-tier spirit stones—this was a fortune which he couldn't even fathom possessing!

“Take it. You will need it to raise your cultivation as quickly as possible so that you can pass the secondary selection!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand.

Had it not been for Zhang Jiuxiao informing him about the existence of the black market and making the bets in his stead, he wouldn't have been able to earn such a huge sum either.

He had provided the brawns whereas Zhang Jiuxiao had provided the means. In that sense, Zhang Jiuxiao deserved every single one of these concentrated high-tier spirit stones.

“Then... I'll be thanking you for this generous gift then, Zhang shi!” Knowing what Zhang Xuan had said was the truth—it would be a waste if he were to fail at this point after all the trouble they had gone through for him to clear the preliminary selection—Zhang Jiuxiao accepted the concentrated high-tier spirit stones heartily and kept them into his storage ring.

Somehow, being with the young man before him had instilled him with an endless drive for cultivation, and he found himself motivated to work harder than ever to reach greater heights.

Perhaps this was the reason why others would naturally gravitate to him.

He had been filled with envy and grudges for the other party in the past, but in this instant, he found that, at some point in time, those emotions had already disappeared without a trace...

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony!” Unaware of the thoughts in Zhang Jiuxiao’s mind, Zhang Xuan casually waved his hand.

...

By the time they returned to their residence in the Master Teacher Pavilion, the sun had already set.

Zhang Xuan entered the Myriad Anthive Nest once more and took out the concentrated high-tier spirit stones he had just obtained.

He first conditioned his state to its peak before attempting for a breakthrough. Not too long later, he overcame his bottleneck and finally reached the long-awaited Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle.

“Alright, time for me to cultivate my soul!”

With plenty of concentrated high-tier spirit stones at hand, Zhang Xuan began cultivating his Heaven’s Path Soul Art as well.

Four hours later, his soul cultivation had reached Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle as well.

“With this, my strength should be on par with Half-Grand Dominion realm experts...” Feeling the zhenqi rushing through his body, as well as his enhanced strength and grasp over the spatial laws, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

Back when he was at Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage, ordinary Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivators were already no match for him. Now that he had achieved a breakthrough in his zhenqi cultivation and soul cultivation, his fighting prowess had been enhanced by at least twofold at the minimum.

It could be said that with his current strength, even if he didn't use the puppets he had obtained from the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, he would still be able to overpower Pavilion Master Yue with ease.

“But after my cultivation reached Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, it seems like concentrated high-tier spirit stones have become completely ineffective on me as well...”

While it was gladdening to see that he had managed to make significant advancements in his fighting prowess and cultivation, the ineffectiveness of the concentrated high-tier spirit stones meant that he would have to start looking for more advanced cultivation resources too.

In the past, just a single concentrated high-tier spirit stone would suffice for him to make multiple breakthroughs, but now, even a hundred of them would barely make a difference in his cultivation.

Even with the ten thousand or so concentrated high-tier spirit stones in hand, it would still be nigh difficult for him to push for a breakthrough to Half-Leaving Aperture realm.

His Heaven's Path zhenqi simply had too high a demand for the purity of spiritual energy he absorbed for his cultivation, and he had also anticipated that this would happen as well. Nevertheless, he still couldn't help but feel a little stifled by the situation.

It wasn't easy for him to earn so many concentrated high-tier spirit stones at once, but in just a few moments, they had already become completely useless to him...

It seemed that if he wanted to make progress in his cultivation, he must continue fighting on and forge his path forward.

“Clone, this is the cultivation technique for the Heaven's Path Soul Art. Hurry up and cultivate.” Zhang Xuan said as he sent the content of the Heaven's Path Soul Art to his clone telepathically and tossed a pile of concentrated high-tier spirit stones over.

At this moment, his clone had already finished consuming the Qingtian Emperor's soul, and his fighting prowess had also

risen to an incredible level as well.

“Alright.” Without wasting any time, Zhang Xuan’s clone began on his cultivation.

As they had originated from the same soul, their rates of cultivation were nearly the same. In a few hours, his clone had already finished cultivating the Heaven’s Path Soul Art. Through assimilating the energy of the Qingtian Emperor’s soul on top of that, he managed to surpass Zhang Xuan in terms of soul cultivation, reaching Quasi Leaving Aperture realm.

As long as he overcame the lightning tribulation, he would be able to become a True Leaving Aperture realm expert!

“How strong are you at the moment?” Seeing that his clone had managed to a significant advancement in his cultivation, Zhang Xuan couldn’t resist asking.

“I can squash Half-Grand Dominion realm ants with a grasp of my hand, and as for Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivators... I reckon I should be able to put up a fight.” Zhang Xuan’s clone replied with his head raised haughtily.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan’s cheeks twitched.

Even though it was only a small cultivation stage of difference between Half-Grand Dominion realm and Grand Dominion realm, there was a vast gap in their fighting prowess.

At Grand Dominion realm, otherwise known as the Indomitable realm, cultivators would gain the ability to create their Dominion. They would be the absolute dictator within the area of their Dominion. Regardless of how many people were gathered in the area, as long as none wielded strength on par with them, they would be as good as invincible!

For his clone to wield strength on par with Grand Dominion realm primary stage experts... Just on this itself, it was clear that his clone was already many times stronger than him!

Such strength paired with that fellow’s monstrous regenerative ability... Was there still anyone in Qianchong Empire who would be a match for him?

Hai, after cultivating for so long, it turned out that he was still unable to keep up with his clone...

How embarrassing!

“It seems like I am still cultivating too slowly...” Zhang Xuan remarked with his face lowered in shame.

1270 Dominion

He might still have been able to derive some feeling of superiority when comparing himself with others, but against his clone, he had been wrecked time and time again to the point where it had nearly become a trauma in his heart.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan tried to ignore the feeling of helplessness within him and took out a jade container. Opening it lightly, an ancient book came into sight.

Annal of Bedstead Disquisition!

By scanning it with his eyes, an equivalent book appeared in the Library of Heaven's Path.

After swiftly looking through the content in the book, Zhang Xuan thought, It is indeed related to the cultivation technique of the Luo Clan. However, it isn't a cultivation technique itself but a compilation of insights!

Recorded in the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition was Pavilion Master Yan's interpretation of Sage Luo's lecture. It did not contain a cultivation technique but a new interpretation toward cultivation.

To make an analogy, it would be like learning a studying method. As long as a cultivator were to fully grasp those insights, their speed of cultivation should increase significantly.

Just that... the Heaven's Path Divine Art was already no different from the best studying method in the world. While the insights to cultivation recorded in the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition were not too bad, superior to most interpretations of cultivation out there, it was completely useless to him.

After studying the book for a moment longer, Zhang Xuan eventually shook his head. I was still expecting something out of it due to how valuable it is. What a pity!

He had thought that by learning the key to the Luo Clan's cultivation technique, he would be able to better deal with

them when the time came. But thinking about it now, how could the cultivation technique of a Sage Clan possibly be obtained that easily?

If, by any chance, someone leaked the Luo Clan's cultivation technique, with their massive influence, they would have surely swiftly found it and destroyed it utterly. There was no way they would allow their cultivation technique to be auctioned in a small black market in the Qianchong Empire.

While the Luo Clan's insight into cultivation is not too bad, it seems like it's still a far stretch from matching Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel.

From the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition, it was apparent that the Luo Clan specialized in the study of spatial laws. However, in terms of depth of comprehension, Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's understanding of space was clearly a more direct interpretation of the world compared to the Luo Clan's.

But looking at it now, there seemed to be striking similarities between the two of them... as if they originated from the same source.

A thought suddenly emerged in Zhang Xuan's mind.

Right. If I compile this together with the 2-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, will I be able to perfect it?

There were five dans to the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, and so far, he had only cultivated the first dan of the technique. The reason he had not continued was because there were simply too many flaws from the second dan onward, and his cultivation had not met the mark either.

But since his cultivation had already reached Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, he could try cultivating the 2-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel if he could perfect it.

So, Zhang Xuan took out the 2-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel and placed it together with the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition.

Compile!

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up, and he hurriedly flipped it open.

It really worked...

There was a total of five dans to the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, namely Compress, Traverse, Control, Creation, and Destruction.

He had already fully mastered Compress, and by using it in unison with the Unbounded Voyager, he had gained the ability to carry out near-instantaneous movement within a radius of hundred meters, as if teleportating.

It was also his superior grasp over spatial laws that granted him the strength to rival Half-Grand Dominion realm experts.

If he could master the 2-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, he would be able to increase his fighting prowess another a notch.

Excited, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist to place all his concentrated high-tier spirit stones before him in a pile before immersing himself into the cultivation of the Traverse realm.

Some time later...

Zhang Xuan finally stood up, and his aura began to rise steadily.

After a long moment of hard work, even though he had not mastered the 2-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel 'Traverse' yet, his understanding of space did advance by leaps and bounds.

With his previous strength, he had only been on par with Half-Grand Dominion realm experts. However, with his current strength, he might even be able to rival true Grand Dominion realm primary stage experts!

Release!

Willing it with his mind, a sphere of faint light with a radius of one meter immediately appeared around Zhang Xuan, and he could feel the absolute control he wielded within this space.

Feeling the effects of the light sphere, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement. Even though this isn't a Dominion, it has similar effects to one.

This light sphere was created by using his soul energy to warp the surrounding Laws of Space. He had absolute control over anything that was within this light sphere, and unless there was another individual who could wrestle the control over this space from him, he would practically be invincible.

Let me test out my strength!

With a flick of his wrist, the Golden Origin Cauldron appeared before Zhang Xuan.

“Attack me with your full might!”

“Alright!” Even though the Golden Origin Cauldron was unsure what Zhang Xuan was up to, it still agreed to the request. It leaped powerfully into the sky before descending heavily upon Zhang Xuan.

Possessing a fighting prowess on par with Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage cultivators, the speed at which the Golden Origin Cauldron was capable of moving at had already exceeded the speed of sound. Nevertheless, when it came within a meter of Zhang Xuan, its speed abruptly decreased.

“Freeze,” Zhang Xuan muttered softly.

In the instant that the Golden Origin Cauldron was just about to touch Zhang Xuan, it came to a completely halt. No matter how it struggled, its body would not budge at all.

As long as I will it, I will even be able to destroy the spirit of the Golden Origin Cauldron easily.

Feeling the power that he wielded over the Golden Origin Cauldron, Zhang Xuan was astonished.

It was no wonder everyone said that the difference between each cultivation realm from Leaving Aperture realm onward was an unbreachable rift. From the looks of it now, it seemed like those words were not hearsay.

He had thought that the prowess that Grand Dominion realm cultivators wielded had been exaggerated—as long as there was sufficiently large group of cultivators surrounding a Grand Dominion realm cultivator, it should have been a matter of time before he eventually slipped up and erred.

But having first-hand experience with the prowess of a Dominion, he realized that he had been too naive!

Within the sphere of a Dominion, there was no such thing as chance. Unless one could destroy the Dominion with a greater power or interrupt the activation of the Dominion, the chances of success were practically null.

However, the maintenance of a Dominion is really taxing on one's zhenqi and Primordial Spirit.

After releasing the Golden Origin Cauldron, Zhang Xuan released the light sphere around him, and a feeling of extreme fatigue swiftly consumed him.

Even though this Dominion-like light sphere was extremely powerful, granting him the strength to fight toe-to-toe with a Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator, the rate at which his zhenqi and soul energy depleted was truly frightening.

Despite having cultivated the Saint Ascension Decipher, not to mention that he was a Celestial Saint as well, just maintaining the light sphere for ten seconds had left him feeling sapped and exhausted.

I should only activate this technique in times of emergency.

As powerful as the light sphere was, if he depleted all his energy from using it, he would be placed in a vulnerable position for quite a period of time. Thus, unless in times of emergency, it was best for him to avoid using it.

Zhang Xuan rested for a moment to recover his depleted zhenqi. At this moment, a thought suddenly came to his mind, and he clenched his fists in agitation. Wait a moment... Since I have comprehended a Dominion-like ability, does this mean that I will be able to crush my clone easily?

All along, he had been put down by his clone, and the shame and embarrassment had weighed down on him for far too long. Since he had managed to comprehend Dominion ahead of his clone, it was about time for him to return the favor!

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan did not hesitate to leap into action. He immediately called his clone over.

Without wasting any words, an earth-shaking, mountain-crushing battle began.

Frightened, the Golden Origin Cauldron swiftly retreated to a corner and trembled fearfully.

Three breaths later, Zhang Xuan had been imprinted with clear panda eyes. Five breaths later, huge spurts of blood from Zhang Xuan dyed the sky crimson. Ten breaths later, an unmoving human was lying on the ground.

“Nice try, better luck next time...” Clapping to rid the dirt off his hands, Zhang Xuan’s clone turned around smugly and walked away.

Feeling utterly stifled inside, Zhang Xuan could only drive his Heaven’s Path zhenqi to heal up.

He had thought that after comprehending Dominion, he would be able to utterly thrash his clone, but who knew that the other party would actually still be able to forcefully move even under the effects of his Dominion!

In the end, he had still been pummeled.

That monster! Just how in the world did he cultivate?

Driving his zhenqi two circulations around his body, Zhang Xuan managed to recover from his injuries. He looked at his clone helplessly for a moment before decisively leaving the Anthive Nest.

Oh well... I guess I’ll just have to come back and exact vengeance the next time I make a major breakthrough in my cultivation!

Returning to his room, Zhang Xuan walked out and noted that the sun had already risen. Breathing in the morning air, he felt extraordinarily refreshed.

After a night of cultivation, even though it was a pity that he still was not a match for his clone, he did manage to advance his fighting prowess considerably.

A moment after walking out of the residence, he suddenly saw Zhang Jiuxiao rushing over with unconcealable glee on his

face. “Zhang shi, I have managed to achieve a breakthrough to Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage! Hahaha!”

Even though he knew it was likely that he would be outdone very soon, he still could not help but to take pride in the fact that he had managed to catch up with Zhang Xuan for the time being.

To be able to catch up to a Celestial Master Teacher... This was something he could brag to his offspring about in the future!

“Congratulations!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Thank you. Since my cultivation is on par with Zhang shi now, I think that I should be able to clear the secondary selection...”

Halfway through his words, Zhang Jiuxiao’s words suddenly clogged up in his throat. His face twitched a little as his eyes widened in disbelief. “Zhang shi... you are at... Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle?”

“Un. I managed to sufficiently accumulate my cultivation, so I was able to push for a breakthrough,” Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

“You managed to sufficiently accumulate your cultivation?” Zhang Jiuxiao nearly burst into tears.

Accumulate your head!

It was just yesterday that you made a breakthrough, and yet, over the course of a night, you made another breakthrough. What can you possibly accumulate in a single day?

Even genius cultivators would at least take several months to advance a single cultivation stage after reaching Primordial Spirit realm, and yet, you only took a single night. Can you be any more terrifying than that?

Zhang Jiuxiao’s eyes reddened in frenzy as he felt a pail of cold water washing away the little bit of confidence that he had just barely built up.

When other cultivators achieved swift breakthroughs, their strength would be volatile, resulting in a reduction in their

fighting prowess. Yet, despite advancing so swiftly, that fellow was actually still be able to exert unbelievable strength.

Really, Zhang Jiuxiao felt that he should stop trying to compare with the young man before him, or else he might just die of trauma some day.

On the other hand, seeing how dejected Zhang Jiuxiao was, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt the exasperation and frustration that he had just felt from being pummeled by his clone vanishing without a trace. Satisfied with the outcome, he nodded in approval.

Indeed. While he might have been far from a match for his clone, he was still stronger than the common populace.

Knowing that he would only get more and more depressed talking about cultivation, Zhang Jiuxiao quickly changed the topic. “Zhang shi, Zhao shi asked us to gather at the main hall. The secondary selection is about to begin.”

Nodding in response, Zhang Xuan quickly followed Zhang Jiuxiao over to the main hall.

In the main hall, the thirty or so master teachers he had seen the previous day had already arrived. They were standing neatly in two rows with solemn looks on their faces.

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, they swiftly greeted him before falling silent.

Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao took their positions at the end of the two rows, and quick sweeping over the room with their gazes, they noted that Zhao Xingmo and Pavilion Master Yue were standing in the middle.

Pavilion Master Yue’s body was still a little swollen, and there were various patches of bruising all around. It was apparent that he had yet to recover from the beating that he had received from the puppets the previous day.

The higher one’s cultivation, the lower the effectiveness of a pill. Given his cultivation realm, if he wanted to recover from his wounds quickly, he would have to consume a grade-8 pill at the very minimum. However, even as the head of the

Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, a grade-8 pill was not a commodity that could easily be acquired.

“Since everyone has arrived, let’s not waste any time and begin the secondary selection.”

Stepping forward, Zhang Xingmo shot a sweeping gaze across all of the candidates before saying, “In the selections of the Sanctum of Sages, we aim to assess the strength, intelligence, ability to assess the big picture, and many other key capabilities of the candidates. In the preliminary selection, we have assessed you on your strength. As long as you wield sufficient strength, you will be able to clear the selection easily. However, the secondary selection won’t be as simple as that.

“Now, I shall begin explaining the rules for the secondary selection!”

Everyone’s ears perked up, and their eyes narrowed, not wanting to miss any words or gestures that he spoke or made.

This would determine whether they would be able to enter the Sanctum of Sages or not, so they had to obtain every scrap of information they could get about the secondary selection.

“As complicated as I have made it sound, there is only a single rule to the secondary selection. That is to use every means possible to eliminate your opponent!”

With a solemn look, Zhao Xingmo raised his hand and declared grandly, “The challenge for the secondary selection shall be... a caged battle royale!”

1271 Caged Battle Royale

“Caged battle royale?”

Hearing the theme of the secondary selection, the candidates widened their eyes in astonishment.

They had heard of caged battle royale before, and they understood the significance behind it as well.

In ancient times, when the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe was still the dominant power in the Master Teacher Continent, they would often conduct caged battle royales to entertain themselves.

To put it in simple terms, caged battle royale consisted of placing a group of men in the same cage and leaving them to fight it out amongst themselves. The last one standing would be spared, and the rest would become sacrifices for his survival. It was an extremely brutal event, testing of a human’s true nature.

For their own survival, there were those who would even lay their hands on their kin or even their own children... Such practice had been considered to be vile by mankind, spurned by the Master Teacher Pavilion, so why would the Sanctum of Sages use it in their secondary selections?

“Don’t worry, the caged battle royale won’t be a slaughter but an elimination match!” Noticing that everyone’s expression was growing unnatural, Zhao Xingmo waved his hand and explained, “We’ll be placing you in an isolated island, and within three days, you must find and eliminate thirteen amongst you in order to clear the examination. Of course, the method of elimination will not be killing the individual but breaking his allocated jade token. If we were to find that you have willfully killed any one of the candidates, your candidacy will be stripped immediately!”

“Breaking allocated jade tokens?”

“This will be difficult...”

Grave expressions appeared on the faces around.

They were all top-notch geniuses, and while there was some disparity in their strength, each of them wielded exceptional life preservation and escape means. If it was just a normal battle royale, they would still be able to eliminate other candidates through springing surprise assaults and swiftly incapacitating their enemy. However, if they had to break the jade token without endangering the other party's life, the difficulty would be hiked up significantly!

“Of course, you aren't the only ones on the isolated island too. There will be saint beasts, traps prepared in advance, and treacherous terrains... While trying to eliminate others, you will have to try your best to protect yourself as well!”

A glint flashed across Zhao Xingmo's eyes before he continued, “Just a warning in advance, if you think that you can just hide at one corner and wait for others to be eliminated, let me make this clear right now. You will be forcefully eliminated by me as well. The Sanctum of Sages needs no cowards and escapees! Also, if you all were to fail to eliminate thirteen people within three days, everyone shall lose their candidacy!”

“This...”

“In other words, we have to eliminate others or else we won't be able to get into the Sanctum of Sages even if we were to last till the end?”

“This is too difficult!”

“Well, if it's that easy to enroll into the number one academy of the Master Teacher Continent, it would surely be overflowing with freshmen each year!”

...

After a moment of commotion, everyone fell silent.

While the rules of the caged battle royale may seem simple, it was actually far more demanding than being literally placed into a cage.

It wasn't just a simple battle royale anymore. It was demanding on one's overall capabilities, be it planning, analyzing the situation, tracking, danger sensing, and much more.

As expected of the selection of the Sanctum of Sages, its difficulty was indeed at a different level.

“These are your jade tokens, they represent each of your identities. You can choose to carry it with you, hide it, or anything else. The only condition is that the jade token must remain on the island. As long as your jade token isn't shattered, that would mean that you aren't eliminated yet!” Zhao Xingmo said as he flicked his wrist, and more than thirty jade tokens flew toward the crowd.

“The jade tokens can be hidden as well?”

“In other words... even if we were to successfully capture others, as long as we can't find the other party's jade token, there's nothing we can do at all?”

“As long as we can't find the jade token, there's nothing we can do to eliminate a candidate... But how in the world are we supposed to find a jade token that can be hidden anywhere on an isolated island?”

...

The crowd was stunned once more. They could hardly believe what they were hearing.

If the rules enforced that the jade token must remain on one's body, after defeating an opponent, they would at least be able to search the other party's body and destroy his jade token. On the other hand, if the hiding of jade tokens were to be permitted as well, even if they were to successfully track down and subdue an opponent, there would be nothing they could do to eliminate him if he didn't have his jade token on him!

In the first place, eliminating an opponent through jade tokens had already hiked up the difficulty considerably. Now that the hiding of jade tokens was allowed as well, the difficulty would be increased to at least tenfold of before.

This is also a test of one's state of mind! In contrast to the shocked faces around him, a gleam flashed across Zhang Xuan's eyes.

Perhaps it was because he wasn't as pressured to enter the Sanctum of Sages as compared to the others, from a bystander's point of view, he was able to see through the crux of the rules in an instant.

Zhao Xingmo had intentionally said that they could hide the jade token, but to be honest, where else could be safer than with keeping it with oneself?

To hide one's jade token was as good as leaving one's fate to luck, gambling on whether the others would be able to find his jade token or not. If a person couldn't even trust himself enough to guard his jade token himself, it was likely that he was lacking in certain necessary traits that a leader of mankind should have.

Most likely, such an action would result in a huge penalty of some kind.

But of course, he wouldn't go so far as to remind the others of this matter. Stretching his hand forward, he grabbed the jade token flying toward him lightly.

It was a specially forged black jade. Carved on the back of the jade token was his name whereas the front was inscribed with a peculiar kind of pattern. The pattern seemed to grant the jade token a communication function that would allow Zhao Xingmo to determine whether a candidate had been eliminated or not.

“Zhao shi, if someone were to utilize artifacts beyond our prowess in the secondary selection, wouldn't we stand no chance at all?” a genius from Qianchong Empire, Ma Minghai, asked.

Hearing those words, everyone's sights swiftly turned to Zhang Xuan.

Yesterday, that fellow threw out more than a hundred puppets and pummeled the Half-Grand Dominion realm Pavilion

Master Yue with ease. If those puppets were to be used against them, they wouldn't stand a chance at all.

“In the caged battle royale, out of concerns over fairness, no candidate is to use any weapon or artifact to execute any actions that would directly or indirectly lead to the elimination of a candidate. Anyone who flouts this rule will be eliminated without exception!” Zhao Xingmo declared.

“That's good...”

The crowd heaved a sigh of relief.

As long as weapons and artifacts weren't allowed, even if Zhang Xuan possessed superior fighting prowess, there was no need to fear him!

While they might not have been able to defeat him face-to-face, but they would at least still be able to use their life preservation methods to flee from him.

“Is there any other questions?”

“Zhao shi, may I enquire where the isolated island will be? Roughly how big would it be? Also, regarding the traps and saint beasts you spoke of, how strong would they be?” a master teacher asked.

“These are secrets. You will have figure those out yourself after arriving at the location. Alright, if there are no other questions, we shall set off right now. Oh right, you aren't allowed to utilize remote communication artifacts to communicate with one another either. Anyone caught doing so will be eliminated as well!”

Zhao Xingmo warned strictly, “Don't even dream of cheating or attempting to exploit loopholes in the rules. Since I dare to set these rules, I have my own way of keeping a lookout and enforcing them.”

“Yes!”

The candidates nodded.

Seeing that everyone had understood the rules, Zhao Xingmo decided to say no more. He turned to Pavilion Master Yue and said, “Pavilion Master Yue, send them off.”

“Un.” Pavilion Master Yue nodded before raising his hand.

In the next moment, over thirty aerial saint beasts descended to the ground. There was a cultivator on each of them, and they passed a blindfold over to the candidates, gesturing for them to put them on before leading them to the back of the saint beast.

This blindfold was similar to the one Zhang Xuan had worn prior to being led to the black market. Once put on, not only was one’s sight impeded, even one’s Spiritual Perception would be severely limited as well. Under the lead of the cultivators, the candidates soon heard a resounding call before the saint beasts soared into the sky.

After flying for some time, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt his feet stepping on solid ground once more. Tearing away his blindfold, he soon realized that he was standing in the midst of a dense forest. His surroundings were completely silent, and there was not a single person to be seen.

It seemed like the purpose of covering their eyes wasn’t just to keep the location where they were heading to a mystery, more importantly, it was also to prevent them from finding their comrades easily and teaming up.

As such, each person would have to depend on himself for most part of the selection.

Zhang Jiuxiao did make substantial advancement in his cultivation, reaching Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage. On top of that, after my guidance along the way, his combat skills have also visibly improved as well... As long as he doesn’t encounter Ma Minghai and the others, he should still be able to cope.

Admittedly, Zhang Jiuxiao’s fighting prowess was still far lacking as compared to Zhang Xuan, but no matter what, he was still an offspring from a powerful clan, and he had received Zhang Xuan’s guidance as well... As long as he didn’t meet with enemies that were too powerful, he should be able to deal with them with relative ease. At the very least, escaping shouldn’t be a problem.

Deciding not to think too much into it, Zhang Xuan leaped onto a nearby tree branch to assess his surroundings, only to find that the forest extended far into the horizon. Rather than a remote island, he seemed to be in the depths of a mountain range instead.

Is this really an isolated island? This is really way too big... Zhang Xuan thought in astonishment.

To be unable to see the other end even with his current strength, just how big could the island be?

A thousand li? Two thousand li? Or six thousand li?

To find the other thirty or so candidates on an island this big and eliminate them within three days... the selection really wasn't as easy as he thought.

It seemed like knowing how to track the other candidates was also one of the aspects of assessment.

But considering the size of the island, how can Zhao shi keep a tight watch over what's happening everywhere to enforce his rules? Leaping back to the ground, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but wonder.

Despite having cultivated the Heaven's Path Divine Art, his Spiritual Perception was still limited to a radius of roughly 2500 meters. Ordinary cultivators would only be at around 400 meters or so. Given how large the island was, even if Zhao Xingmo was a Grand Dominion realm expert, it was really hard to believe that he would be able to keep a tight watch over everything that was happening on the island at every moment.

Forget it, there's no point thinking about that now. What's the most important at the moment is to find other candidates and eliminate them... Unable to figure out the matter, Zhang Xuan decided not to think too much into it as well.

With his recent breakthroughs, even without a weapon in hand, he would still be able to rival Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivators. With such fighting prowess, he would be able to eliminate any candidate he encountered

without any problem. The ones who should be shivering in fear were his opponents instead.

Zhang Xuan walked along the mountain range for a while, but he soon realized that roaming around aimlessly in such a manner was likely to end in futility. The chances were that he wouldn't be able to find a single person even if he were to walk like this for an entire day. Thus, he flicked his wrist and took out a compass.

As a formation master, a compass was a necessary tool. Even though Zhang Xuan had never really used it before—he had never found the need to do so—he still stored a few of them in his storage ring, and they were of decent quality as well.

The spiritual energy is more concentrated in that direction... It seems like the center of the island should be in that direction. I should head over to take a look! After determining a direction, Zhang Xuan began flitting forward on the ground.

He didn't choose to fly for several reasons. Firstly, the area was filled with saint beasts, so he might end up becoming a target if he were to rise to the air. Secondly, he would also attract the attention of the other candidates. Even if he had no fear with his current strength, he still had no intention of being too high profile.

Roar!

After advancing some distance away, a furious howl suddenly sounded. Following which, Zhang Xuan saw a massive Tigerbone Beast charging in his direction.

Just like him, the Tigerbone Beast was at Primordial Spirit realm as well. Even before its approach, one could already feel the authoritative pressure that it commanded weighing down on one's soul, as if it would crush one with ease.

Its body is pretty valuable... Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

The saint beasts should already be thankful that he wasn't seeking any trouble with them, but this fellow actually still dared to charge over. Since that was the case, he had no intention of holding back either. He raised his palm and crushed it downward.

Paji!

The body of the Tigerbone Beast abruptly froze, as if someone had sealed it in place. Fear and horror crept into its massive eyes.

“You only have your own recklessness to blame...” Zhang Xuan muttered impassively as he bent his finger backward, preparing to flick the Tigerbone Beast to death and extract its valuable body parts.

In that moment, the sky suddenly trembled, and a deafening voice sounded.

“Zhang Jiuxiao’s jade token has been shattered. The first candidate has been eliminated. Remaining candidates: 32!”

What? Zhang Jiuxiao has been eliminated?

Startled, a look of disbelief slowly crept onto Zhang Xuan’s face. 500km, 1000km, 3000km

1272 Sword Lagoon

While Zhang Jiuxiao's strength was far from on par with his, among the candidates, he could definitely be considered to be above average. On top of that, with the various means he wielded, Zhang Xuan figured that it should not have been too difficult for him to last till the very end. Yet, to be eliminated barely ten minutes after arriving on the island...

Just who was the one who had made the move?

Not to mention, to succeed so quickly...

I should check out where he was eliminated. Perhaps, I will be able to find some clues...

Tapping his finger, a droplet of blood appeared before Zhang Xuan's eyes.

It was the blood essence that Zhang Jiuxiao had given him previously for him to test his bloodline.

Zhang Xuan formed several hand seals on the blood droplet, and the next moment, the compass in his hand began spinning before eventually pointing in a certain direction.

While remote communication artifacts were not allowed on the isolated island, there was no explicit rule preventing him from using blood essence to track the whereabouts of another candidate.

The fact that Zhang Jiuxiao had been eliminated shortly after arriving on the island was rather bewildering. He felt that there was something more to the matter, so the matter needed to be investigated immediately.

After having a way pointed out, Zhang Xuan swiftly flitted forward.

Seeing the man who was just about to kill it leaving, the Tigerbone Beast heaved a quick sigh of relief. It leaped into the depths of the forest and concealed itself, not daring to prowl arrogantly and pounce on others anymore.

After flitting for several minutes, covering a distance of almost two hundred li, Zhang Xuan suddenly came to a halt.

Zhang Xuan frowned. Why does it feel like I have been moving in circles?

No matter how big the island was, after traveling for so long, the terrain around him should have at least changed.

Yet, for some reason, the sight before him looked extremely familiar, as if the road he had been flitting on was a round track.

Taking a few steps forward, the truth soon dawned upon Zhang Xuan.

It's a formation...

To his astonishment, there was a massive formation on the island. As the sheer area that it covered was too big, even Zhang Xuan had not noticed its presence at first.

To actually be able to avert my detection and trap me... at the very least, this formation must be of grade-8!

Currently, Zhang Xuan's comprehension of formations had already reached 7-star pinnacle. Due to the exceptional prowess of the Heaven's Path Formation Art, he would be able to easily set up some of the easier grade-8 primary formations.

With his proficiency, he should have been able to notice any formation beneath grade-8 with a single glance. Yet, to be able to trap him for such a long period of time before he became aware of its presence... without a doubt, the formation cast over the island had to be grade-8.

Eye of Insight!

Regardless of the grade, as long as it was a formation, he would not have any problems with it. Lines of insight flickered in his eyes as he began assessing his surroundings.

Very soon, he found narrow threads of spiritual energy drifting in the area.

This should be... quasi grade-8 formation, Riverbank Beguilement Formation! Furthermore, it seems to cover a

distance of at least several thousand li! To have such a massive formation set up over this area... just where could this place be?

The Riverbank Beguilement Formation was known for its scalability, and it would usually be used to conceal manors or even entire cities, such as the Jingyuan Empire Poison Hall back then.

For there to be such a formation here, not to mention, covering several thousand li at that...

Just why would there be something like that here?

Without several hundred years of effort, it would be impossible to set up a formation of this size. Even Zhang Xuan would require at least a month of hard work for it.

He had initially thought that it was only an ordinary island, but at this point, it was clear that there was something much more to it.

However, without much understanding of the Qianchong Empire's history and heritage, it would be difficult for Zhang Xuan to figure anything out. Shaking his head, he decided to put this matter aside for the moment.

Now that I know that it's a formation, the rest will be easy.

The Riverbank Beguilement Formation would confuse one's sense of direction, leading one to unwittingly return to the same place over and over again. However, since Zhang Xuan knew of the existence of the formation, he would not allow himself to be beguiled anymore. He swiftly scanned his surroundings and determined a direction. Then, he moved forward twenty li before side stepping roughly fourteen to fifteen li. After which, he changed direction another dozen times before he finally took a step forward.

Huala!

In that instant, it was as if he had leaped out of some seal. His surroundings were still the same lush forest, but the nature of the spiritual energy around him had changed. It had become a little heavier, carrying a hint of authority and killing intent to them.

“Sword qi!” Zhang Xuan’s gaze turned grim.

He was very familiar with this aura. It was induced by lingering sword qi in an area.

Tracing the origin of the aura, Zhang Xuan swiftly saw that an area of trees collapsed on the ground not too far away. Judging from the clean severing between the tree trunk and the tree stump, it was likely to have been done all in a single sword slash. At the center of the clearing, there were several droplets of fresh blood imprinted on a boulder, and the fact that they had yet to dry up indicated that the battle had occurred recently.

Zhang Xuan frowned. It’s Zhang Jiuxiao’s blood...

He had examined Zhang Jiuxiao’s blood before, allowing him to recognize it at a single glance. Given that his blood was splattered there, and there were marks of battle in the area, was that where he had been eliminated by others?

Just that...

Wasn’t the usage of weapons and artifacts disallowed?

What was with the sword qi and the clean cuts on the trees in the area?

Furthermore, it would be tough for even Zhang Xuan to sever so many trees within a single sword slash, so when did such a formidable figure appear among the candidates?

Eye of Insight!

Lines of insight emerged in Zhang Xuan’s eyes once more as he swiftly scanned his surroundings.

Considering that it had not been long since Zhang Jiuxiao was eliminated, the culprit should not have gotten far yet. He should still be able to track down the culprit by the tracks they had left behind.

As he had expected, it did not take long for another surge of sword qi to appear not too far away, directed into the distance.

Upon seeing that, Zhang Xuan immediately dashed over in that direction.

However, barely after taking two steps, he heard a voice in his ear once more. “Chi Yurui’s jade token has been shattered. The second candidate has been eliminated. Remaining candidates: 31!”

He has been eliminated, too?

Zhang Xuan had some recollection of that fellow. A Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle expert from the Qianyun Empire, Chi Yurui possessed decent fighting prowess and superior. Who would have thought that barely ten minutes after Zhang Jiuxiao had been eliminated, Chi Yurui would actually be knocked out as well? This was really too fast!

Proceeding further, another plot of land filled with cleanly severed trees appeared before Zhang Xuan’s eyes. This time, the sword qi lingering the area was even more devastating. Just by standing there, one would feel as if the air was slicing into one’s skin.

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan was just about to continue moving forward to investigate the scene when he suddenly felt something. He immediately took a powerful step backward, and in an instant, he was already a hundred meters away.

Huala!

The sharp sword qi abruptly burst forth from where he had been standing. It flew all the way into the heavens, slicing the air in its path.

Weng!

Highly alert, Zhang Xuan saw a sword surging up from the ground. There was a slight aura of disappointment around it, as if unhappy that its surprise assault had failed.

Zhang Xuan was taken aback. It’s a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle sword? Why would it be here?

Upon sensing the assault, his first instinct was that a master teacher had been camping in wait underground, waiting for him to approach to launch a decisive attack. Yet, he never could have imagined that the one springing the assault was actually a Saint intermediate-tier sword!

Just like the Golden Origin Cauldron, the sword also possessed a spirit. Most likely, it had sensed that someone was tracking it, so it had decided to hide itself and launch a preemptive strike.

It was fortunate that Zhang Xuan possessed keen instincts toward danger, allowing him to notice that something was amiss in an instant. Otherwise, if that burst of sword qi had landed on him, even if he had not been injured by it, it would have left him in an unkempt state.

“Humph!” With a displeased look on his face, Zhang Xuan raised his hand, and a burst of force shot toward the sword.

Hu!

Sensing that the young man before it was going to fight back, the sword unhesitatingly dived back down, intending to return to the safety of the underground world.

“Trying to flee after attempting to assault me? How can I allow you to get off that easily?” Zhang Xuan sneered.

The next moment, the air in the surroundings suddenly became incredibly viscous. As if it had fallen into a pool of mercury, the horrified sword found itself unable to move at all.

“Come over here!”

A powerful suction force tugged at the sword. The sword attempted to struggle against the suction force, but severely overpowered, it succumbed after an instant and rapidly flew toward Zhang Xuan.

Catching hold of the sword, Zhang Xuan swiftly tapped the sword at various points.

Weng!

With a light buzz, the agitated sword turned gentle in a matter of seconds.

Zhang Xuan had successfully tamed the sword!

“Were you the one who assaulted Zhang Jiuxiao and Chu Yurui?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It wasn’t not me; the Dawn Rain Sword did it!” the sword replied resoundingly.

“Dawn Rain Sword? What’s your name?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback to hear that there was another sword in the area.

Could it be that... other than this sword, there were other Saint intermediate-tier swords in the area as well?

“I am known as the Dusk Cloud Sword!” the sword replied.

“Dawn Rain, Dusk Cloud...” Just from the names, Zhang Xuan could tell that they were likely a pair of treasured swords. Frowning deeply, he asked, “Why are you both here? What is this place?”

Not only was there a powerful formation shrouding the entire island, there were even Saint intermediate-tier swords lying in wait, prepared to assault anyone who crossed them.

“We have been here since a very long time ago. We are currently at the perimeter of the Sword Lagoon of the Qianchong Empire!” the Dusk Cloud Sword replied.

“Sword Lagoon?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

Back then, Hall Master Xing had tasked him to train the candidates of the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall in preparation for a friendly spar with three other Combat Master Halls, and the prize for the winners in each cultivation tier seemed to be an opportunity to cultivate at the Qianchong Empire Sword Lagoon.

Who would have thought that the location for the secondary selection would turn out to be here?

“Yes. The Sword Lagoon is filled with swords and the Sword Intent left by countless experts. The truth is that your companions and you carry something that really attracts us a lot, so we can’t help but want to attack you all to obtain that item,” the Dusk Cloud Sword explained.

“Something that attracts you a lot?” A thought suddenly came to Zhang Xuan’s mind. He flicked his wrist and took out the jade token. “Are you referring to this?”

“That’s right, it’s that item! That item contains a surge of Sword Intent that is highly beneficial to the growth of our spirit once devoured!” the Dusk Cloud Sword exclaimed excitedly.

“Sword Intent?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan extended his Spiritual Perception into the jade token.

Just as the Dusk Cloud Sword had said, even though it was extremely faint, the jade token harnessed a Grand Dominion realm expert’s comprehension of swordsmanship, and this lingering trace of Sword Intent posed an irresistible allure to sword spirits.

“I see...” Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

On the surface, Zhao Xingmo seemed to be pitting the candidates against one another, but in truth, the secondary selection was more complex than that. On top of guarding against their opponents, the candidates also had to defend against the relentless assault of the swords.

This was probably the penalty for those who resorted to hiding their token instead of protecting it with their own strength.

Zhang Jiuxiao had probably encountered the Dawn Rain Sword, and in a moment of carelessness, he had his jade token destroyed, resulting in his elimination.

Coming to realize what was going on, Zhang Xuan continued his question. “Where’s the Sword Lagoon located? How many swords of your tier are there here?”

Having acknowledged Zhang Xuan as its master, the Dusk Cloud Sword told him everything that it knew. “The Sword Lagoon is roughly two hundred li away from here, and there should probably be at least a hundred other swords like me there!”

“A hundred other swords like you... as in Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle swords?” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in shock.

Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle swords were Saint intermediate-tier artifacts. Even throughout the entire Qianchong Empire, there would not be too many weapons of

such a tier. Yet, for there to be a hundred of them there... If he could tame them all, his fighting prowess would soar immensely.

“The Qianchong Empire Sword Lagoon was left behind by the old Sword Maestro many years ago. This place contains his heritage and countless Sword Formations. Every year, countless sword practitioners visit this place, searching for an impetus to further their craft, but so far, no one has succeeded in claiming his heritage.

“This place is filled with all kinds of sword qi. If one stays here for a prolonged period of time, the influx of different Sword Intent and sword arts could result in a clash of one’s conception of swordsmanship, and for a sword practitioner, that is extremely dangerous. Furthermore, considering how there are people from all walks of life here, it’s inevitable that there will be conflicts time to time. As a result, there are many sword practitioners who have ended up losing their lives here.”

At this point, the voice of the Dusk Cloud Sword sank.

“That is also how the master of the Dawn Rain Sword and me died here.”
200 li = 100km

1273 Heaven's Path Sword

Ar

Swords were just a type of weapon, but with many generations of cultivators immersing their entire lives to furthering the Way of Sword over the course of many years, it had already developed into a complex art with countless paths. Naturally, the method of cultivation for each path also differed vastly from one another.

It was precisely for this reason that heritage was extremely important.

There were simply too many different Sword Intent and sword arts within the Sword Lagoon that if one were to attempt to use them as an inspiration to further one's mastery in swordsmanship, putting aside the fact that the divergence in the fundamental principles of each path of swordsmanship would make it very unlikely for one to succeed, the odds were that one's cultivation would go berserk instead.

It was also for this reason why the Master Teacher Pavilion chose to limit the cultivators' access to cultivation technique manuals.

Reading just one or two different cultivation technique manuals was still fine, but if exposed to too many cultivation techniques, a cultivator's interpretation of cultivation would be muddled, preventing him from distinguishing which methods of cultivation were feasible for him and which weren't. Once in such a state, the cultivator would be extremely prone to making a wrong step in his cultivation, thus making it highly likely for his cultivation to go berserk.

This was also the reason why master teachers had to be selective with what they read.

The same principles applied to the Sword Lagoon as well. Those who came here to cultivate might be tempted by the powerful sword arts and Sword Intent all around them, but if

they were to cultivate what they saw without careful selection, it could very well lead to the erosion of the foundation of the swordsmanship path they had built so far. In the long-term, not only would it be detrimental to one's growth, they might even lose their lives as well.

“Bring me over to take a look!” Understanding all of these, Zhang Xuan said.

“Yes!” the Dusk Cloud Sword began leading the way forward.

A journey of two hundred li was nothing to a Primordial Spirit realm cultivator. In just a few moments, they had already arrived at their destination.

Towering before them were a massive stone wall with the character ‘劍’ (Sword) inscribed on it. Written with majestic and powerful strokes, it felt as if the character would transform into a burst of sword qi and tear them apart at any moment.

“What powerful Sword Intent!” Zhang Xuan remarked in astonishment.

He couldn't clearly discern what level of calligraphy the character before him was at, but just by looking at it from afar, it gave him the impression of an unparalleled expert wielding a sword slashing at him furiously. It felt like no matter how he moved, he wouldn't be able to escape from that slash, as if the attack had been locked upon his soul.

“This is left behind by the Old Sword Maestro?” Zhang Xuan asked in astonishment.

“That's right!” the Dusk Cloud Sword replied.

“The Old Sword Maestro must have achieved an astounding level of mastery in the Way of Sword in his lifetime!” Zhang Xuan exclaimed in awe.

In his past year of cultivation, he had assimilated quite a number of books relating to sword art, and he had successfully advanced his comprehension of swordsmanship to a considerably high level as well.

All along, he thought that even if his comprehension of swordsmanship hadn't reached the peak yet, he still wouldn't

lose out to anyone. But through this inscribed character, he could tell that the level of mastery in swordsmanship that the Old Sword Maestro had achieved was far higher than his.

The Old Sword Maestro had ground the very essence of the Way of Sword into his bones, such that even his body had been forged into a sword as well... Otherwise, it was impossible for a casual calligraphy to harness such astoundingly refined Sword Intent, leaving him feeling a sense of helplessness before it.

“These are the cultivators who have journeyed here in hopes of comprehending the secrets of the Old Sword Maestro’s swordsmanship.” the Dusk Cloud Sword as it gestured in a certain direction.

Turning his gaze over, Zhang Xuan realized that there was a huge crowd of several hundred cultivators gathered beneath the stone wall. Every single one of them was staring intently at the ‘剑 (Sword)’ character as they emulated its strokes with their fingers. There was an unnaturally focused or even frenzied look in their eyes, almost as if they had gone mad.

“What you said is all wrong. My move has to be correct. Look!” a voice sounded.

From the direction where the voice sounded, a middle-aged man flicked his wrist in a beautiful arc, and a surge of sword qi burst forward. It slashed everything within several hundred meters of its path before gradually dissipating.

“This is Upper Sword Heart?” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

Proficiency in swordsmanship could mainly be divided into two stages—Sword Intent and Sword Heart.

Most sword practitioners should be able to comprehend Sword Intent upon reaching Transcendent Mortal. Those who were slightly more talented might be able to comprehend Sword Heart, inducing the phenomenon ‘Call of the Myriad Swords, Roar of the Dragon’.

Sword Heart, as the name suggested, referred to wielding one’s heart like a sword, drawing out the true prowess of the

Way of Sword through their will. Every single strike made by a sword practitioner who had achieved Sword Heart would be a sword art in itself. This state was also otherwise termed as Man-Sword Union... Only those who harbored spirit and heart in their sword would be able to reach this realm.

Sword Heart could be further divided into three tiers, namely Lower Sword Heart, Middle Sword Heart, and Upper Sword Heart.

For Saint cultivators, even just achieving Middle Sword Heart would already make them top-notch experts. Yet, the middle-aged man had actually comprehended Upper Sword Heart...

One must know that so far, Zhang Xuan had only comprehended Upper Sword Heart as well. In other words, in terms of proficiency in the Way of Sword, the middle-aged man was nowhere weaker than Zhang Xuan!

“That’s not right. That crux of the move lies in overwhelming one’s enemy, so the focus of it should be in the relentless barrage of sword qi. Your focusing all of your strength within a surge of sword qi is clearly erroneous. Look at mine...”

In his moment of shock, an old man beside the middle-aged man shook his head in stern disapproval before he whipped out a sword and flicked it.

In the blink of an eye, a cold and forbidding aura permeated an area of several dozen meters around the old man, and a storm of sword qi filled the surroundings. It felt like anyone who dared step into the area, no matter how powerful, would be trapped for life.

“He has comprehended Upper Sword Heart as well?” Zhang Xuan was startled once more.

It was already frightening to see that a cultivator had comprehended Upper Sword Heart, but to think that the old man would also be another such person as well. In fact, it seemed like the old man had a deeper and more profound understanding of the Way of Sword than the middle-aged man before.

“Wrong! The both of you are utterly wrong! It should be like this...”

A third man joined in the commotion, and he executed a powerful sword art which utilized sword qi like thin threads that weaved around the surroundings, forming something reminiscent to a mist.

Similarly, this third man has also comprehended Upper Sword Heart.

Completely dumbstruck, Zhang Xuan turned to look at the rest of the crowd. Every single one of them seemed to harness a cold and sharp aura within their bodies, as if they were the very embodiment of swords themselves.

“These several hundred men... have all comprehended Upper Sword Heart?” Zhang Xuan gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

In his long journey, he had never seen a single cultivator whose swordsmanship was on par or superior to his. Yet, in the blink of an eye, he found himself faced with several hundred of such cultivators. Really, as expected of the famed Sword Lagoon! It sure was a fearsome place.

“They are the itinerant cultivator, master teachers, and combat masters from the various different empires or even the Empire Alliance. Some of them have already spent more than nine hundred years here... And with nine hundred years of accumulation, the least they should do is to achieve Upper Sword Heart.” the Dusk Cloud Sword replied.

“Nine hundred years?” Zhang Xuan was startled for a moment before slowly nodding.

It was already nearing a year since he had come over to this world, but in terms of the duration he had dedicated to learning swordsmanship, the total time probably wouldn't even add up to a single day yet!

There were plenty of experts in the Eight Conferred Empires, and with nine hundred years of hard work behind them, it wasn't too surprising that there would be so many individuals who commanded the same level of mastery in swordsmanship as him.

After all, it was not like he was some kind of unparalleled genius. Putting all aside, he couldn't even defeat his own clone!

“Wait. You mean that these men spent nine hundred years sitting in front of the stone wall, contemplating over swordsmanship?”

“This single character is already enough for them to study it for their entire life. As sword fanatics, they couldn't resist the allure of the intrigue contained in the character, and this only made them determined to decipher the secrets behind it. As a result, most of them end up never leaving the Sword Lagoon...”

“Hai!” Zhang Xuan sighed.

He suddenly remembered a book he had read in his previous life. In the story, there was an island that contained unparalleled secret manuals. Each year's Laba Festival, there would be a huge number of martial artists venturing to the island, only to never return... The situation was somewhat similar to what he was seeing at the moment.

There was no one restricting their movement, but obsessed with furthering their swordsmanship, they failed to realize that their entire life was flying past their eyes!

“Utter nonsense! It's apparent that my interpretation is correct!”

“Your direction has been wrong from the very start, so how could your interpretation possibly be right? My interpretation is the one that's correct!”

“All of you are wrong! Since none of you are willing to admit it, why don't we settle it with a fight?”

Huala!

After a long round of argument, none of the trio was willing to concede to the other. Eventually, they drew their swords on one another and began on an intense fight.

“Actually, they have already gone berserk...” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

No matter how profound the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character was, the fact that these people were no longer able to control themselves anymore, even clashing with one another over something as minor as that, meant that their rationality had already been eroded. They had already lost sense of self, and that was no different from going berserk.

Amidst Zhang Xuan’s lamentation, the battle among the trio had finally concluded. Two of them were severely injured in the encounter, and the final victor walked out of the battle with a confused look on his eyes. He couldn’t help but doubt if his comprehension of swordsmanship was wrong, or else how could the other two be almost as powerful as him.

The many years of devotion to nothing but swordsmanship had already eroded their rational judgement. Under such circumstances, no words could possibly sway them anymore. Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan tore his gaze away from them to assess the massive character on the stone wall once more.

Inscribed using sword qi, the character harnessed the conception of the carver. Each stroke of the character was imbued a powerful yet unique aura, seemingly the manifestation of a sword art. The aura of these individual strokes harmonized with one another to grant an imposing yet unfathomable meaning to the formed character.

“It’s no wonder why these people would abandon their all and devote all of their life to deciphering the character...” With just a look, Zhang Xuan could already feel a slight jolt in his mind urging him to cultivate according to the character.

Shaking his head, he slowly closed his eyes.

It was not that his mind wasn’t resilient enough to withstand the allure of the profound sword arts contained within the character, but... the sword arts contained within the character were simply riddled with too many flaws. It was hard for him to even continue looking at it straight in the eye!

“What are these?” Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan tossed aside the miscellaneous thoughts in his mind and opened his eyes once more. In the next moment, he noticed that there were countless scribblings in the perimeter of the stone wall.

“These are the Sword Intent and sword arts that countless generations of sword practitioners have comprehended from the character. If you find yourself unable to grasp the meaning of ‘劍 (Sword)’ on the wall, you can use them as references!” the Dusk Cloud Sword said.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Taking a brief sweep, it seemed like there were at least a thousand of such insights scribbled all over the place.

“This does resemble the Saint Ascension Platform!” Zhang Xuan noted.

The road up to the Saint Ascension Platform was filled with insights as well. Every single individual felt that they were the person chosen by the heavens to comprehend the true meaning of Kong shi’s writing, but in truth... their interpretation was riddled with flaws, a manifestation of their ignorance!

These insights scribbled around the stone wall were likely to be the same as well.

“Flaws!”

Sweeping his gaze across the area, many books swiftly materialized one after another in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

These insights could be considered to be sword art manuals as well, allowing Zhang Xuan to collect them with a sweep of his eyes.

After collecting all of the insights, Zhang Xuan gathered the thousand of books together and muttered, “Compile!”

They swiftly merged together into a single book.

Casually flipping it open, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

“It’s a Heaven’s Path Sword Art!”

He had done this set of actions on a whim, not really expecting to gain any gains out of it. Yet, who could have thought that the compilation of insights from the many generations of sword practitioners would actually form a perfect Heaven’s Path Sword Art!

Zhang Xuan swiftly went through the compiled Heaven's Path Sword Art in his mind.

It must be said that the heritage which the Old Sword Maestro had left behind was truly profound. If he were to cultivate the compiled Heaven's Path Sword Art, his comprehension of the Way of Sword could be brought to another level.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to close his eyes to cultivate, he suddenly felt the surrounding spiritual energy surging forward, gathering to an area just ahead of him. It didn't take long for the massive influx of spiritual energy to create something reminiscent of a whirlpool.

Quickly turning his gaze over, he saw that the crowd cultivating before the stone wall had also turned their heads over toward the commotion as well.

"Master..." Just as Zhang Xuan was about to head over to check what was going on, he suddenly saw the Dusk Cloud Sword trembling non-stop, as if it couldn't control its body anymore.

"What's wrong?" Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

"Master, someone has grasped a higher realm in the Way of Sword... As a sword spirit, I can't help but be compelled to submit to him!"

"Grasped a higher realm of the Way of Sword?"

Taken aback, Zhang Xuan quickly scanned the area in front, and there, he saw a young man seated cross-legged on the ground. An incredibly sharp sword qi burst forth from his body, as if heralding the arrival of an unparalleled sword into the world.

"Is that Ma Minghai?" Upon taking a closer look at the young man, Zhang Xuan frowned.

It was no other than the genius of the Qianchong Empire who had challenged him over the Tianchen Brew back in the Master Teacher Pavilion, Ma Minghai!

"Why would he be here?" Zhang Xuan frowned.(100km)

1274 The Strong Can Do as They Please

While the other candidates were busy avoiding being eliminated or eliminating others, this fellow actually sat right in front of the stone wall to cultivate. Furthermore, from the looks of it, it seemed like he had already been there for quite a while. Such a bizarre decision left Zhang Xuan slightly bewildered.

Soon, Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

He's a genius from the Qianchong Empire, and he specializes in swordsmanship. I had to capture the Dusk Cloud Sword in order to find out where this is, but there's a good chance that he realized that we are in the Sword Lagoon as soon as he opened his eyes!

As a sword practitioner of the Qianchong Empire, it was likely that Ma Minghai had been there before. Given so, it would not have been too surprising for him to know his way around the area.

Hong long long!

At this moment, boundless Sword Intent and sword qi suddenly converged on Ma Minghai, and in an instant, his aura surged swiftly.

Weng!

Unable to control it any longer, the Dusk Cloud Sword lowered itself onto the ground, trembling non-stop. It could feel the absolute authority that the wielder of that powerful aura had over it, and it dared not oppose him.

Looking at the sky filled with sword qi, as well as the sword in his hand that was submitting to the young man before him, the elder was overwhelmed with agitation. "That's... Sword Quintessence! It has been a whole seven hundred years! I never thought that I would see such a sight once more!"

“No, it isn’t Sword Quintessence,” an elder beside him refuted. “Those who have truly achieved the level of Sword Quintessence would be able to induce the Servility of the Myriad Swords, but that young man has only received the deference of the swords. If I’m not mistaken, that should be... Half-Quintessence!”

“Indeed, it’s Half-Quintessence! Most cultivators are only aware that swordsmanship can be divided into Sword Intent and Sword Heart, oblivious to the fact that there’s Sword Quintessence above them. Upon mastering this realm, as long as the strength of a sword is beneath one, the sword will obey one’s commands unconditionally.”

“The young man is only able to get the swords to submit to him, but he hasn’t reached the level of having them obey his commands unconditionally. Given so, he should only be at Half-Quintessence!”

“Even if it’s just Half-Quintessence, isn’t that the breakthrough that we have all been working hard for?”

“Indeed!”

“Seven hundred years ago, when Sword of Faint Whispers, Ji Lingzhen, achieved a breakthrough to this realm, I happened to be around and witnessed the miraculous event with my own eyes. Who could have known that I would have the luck to encounter another Half-Quintessence breakthrough just before my life comes to an end?”

“Ji Lingzhen... If I recall correctly, he has not left the Sword Lagoon ever since he made the breakthrough to Half-Quintessence, right?”

“He has not. He chose to venture deeper into the Sword Lagoon in hopes of obtaining the Old Sword Maestro’s heritage. It’s just a pity that he hasn’t succeeded yet. I wonder if he’s still alive after all these years.”

Such discussions could be heard amid the crowd.

Half-Quintessence? Hearing the words of the crowd, Zhang Xuan nodded slowly.

With a slight stroke of his hand, the crouching Dusk Cloud Sword suddenly felt the pressure crushing his soul vanish without a trace, and it quickly struggled back into the air. Its slight shivering every now and then seemed to indicate its deep fear and apprehension over what had just happened.

A Sword Quintessence expert wielded a natural dominance over all sword spirits, forcing all sword spirits to bow before them. For Ma Minghai to achieve this level at such a young age, his aptitude for swordsmanship was truly astounding. It was no wonder he had been chosen as a candidate to enter the Sanctum of Sages.

Compared to Ma Minghai, Zhang Jiuxiao was truly lacking.

Hu hu!

After absorbing all of the sword qi into his body, Ma Minghai eyes gradually opened.

Huala!

His eyes were extremely sharp, and it felt as if one could be sliced in two under his gaze.

Even though his cultivation was still only at Quasi Leaving Aperture realm, yet to undergo the lightning tribulation, his zhenqi felt much more condensed than before. It seemed like even if the lightning tribulation fell upon him at that very moment, he would have been able to slice it in two with a flick of his blade.

Ma Minghai slowly stood up and stretched his stiff muscles with a delighted look on his face. At this moment, he suddenly caught sight of a familiar figure standing not too far away, and his eyes narrowed. “Zhang Xuan?”

A day ago, he had exchanged blows with the other party. He had executed one of his trump cards, Sea of a Thousand Blades, which the other party had simply swallowed in a single mouthful, even returning to him right after. Without a doubt, the other party was the strongest rival he had ever come across.

Back then, he had even resolved himself to use his ultimate technique to defeat the other party, but due to Pavilion Master

Yue's intervention, he had been left with no choice but to drop the matter.

After which, the other party had challenged Pavilion Master Yue with his puppets. While the other party did manage to achieve victory in the end, it was only through the vast number of puppets he had in his possession. That did not represent the other party's true strength.

If he were to pair his Quasi Leaving Aperture realm cultivation together with his newfound strength as a Half-Quintessence expert, putting aside defeating Zhang Xuan, even killing him should not pose much of a problem at all!

Thus, a sharp glint flashed through Ma Minghai's eyes as he stepped forward. "You have really come at an untimely moment. You just had to appear here right after I achieved my breakthrough. It seems like even the heavens are asking me to eliminate you..."

Hu!

With a swift maneuver, he stepped up to Zhang Xuan and said, "Zhang shi, we meet again."

"Yeah, we meet again," Zhang Xuan replied casually.

"While I am in awe of your strength, it's a pity that we are in a selection match at the moment. The slots to the Sanctum of Sages are on the line, so... will you take out the jade token yourself, or do you need me to make a move?"

Gazing at Zhang Xuan coldly, Ma Minghai spoke in a domineering voice that allowed for no opposition. "Take it out yourself, and you can at least spare yourself some pain. Otherwise... even if I'm not allowed to kill you, I have plenty of ways to temporarily incapacitate. And if you get killed by saint beasts while you are immobilized, I'm afraid that you will only have your own bad luck to blame then!"

"Are you threatening me?" Zhang Xuan looked at Ma Minghai with narrowed eyes.

"Threat? This isn't a threat. I'm just stating a fact. It's just the natural order of the world. The weak have to bow to the strong!" Ma Minghai sneered coldly.

Staring at Ma Minghai intently, Zhang Xuan asked, “Do you mean to say that the strong can do as they please?”

“Indeed, the strong can do as they please!” Ma Minghai replied with a smirk.

He had felt deeply humiliated by the crushing defeat he had suffered against Zhang Xuan. It would have been one thing if it had been a close match with one another, but the vast disparity in strength between them was truly completely unacceptable to him. This had left frustration and anger boiling within him.

Furthermore, shortly after that, the young man dared insult Pavilion Master Yue. As a member of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he could not swallow seeing an outsider treating their pavilion head with such disrespect.

It was not easy for him to turn the tables around, so naturally, he wanted to make use of this chance to get even with the other party for those two matters!

“Very well then.” Seeing how confident Ma Minghai was, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. “Since you have already said so much... pardon me then!”

After saying those words, Zhang Xuan channeled his zhenqi into his palm and thrust it toward Ma Minghai.

Seeing how the young man had chosen to struggle against him instead of surrendering, Ma Minghai scoffed in disdain. “Do you think that you stand a chance against me in your current state?”

With a flick of his finger, he sent a surge of sword qi toward Zhang Xuan.

His comprehension of swordsmanship had already reached Half-Quintessence. Even without just using a sword, he could easily defeat an opponent of the same power level as him with the sword qi in his body.

Let alone a mere Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage cultivator...

Hmm?

At this moment, Ma Minghai suddenly noticed something.

When he fought with the other party the previous day, the other party had still been at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage. However, at this moment, why did it seem like his cultivation had risen to... Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle?

Did he advance two cultivation stages in a single day?

It makes no difference whether he's at intermediate stage or pinnacle. Against the current me, the only fate that lies in wait for him is death!

Ma Minghai shrugged the matter off casually as he watched the burst of sword qi he had shot previously dashing toward Zhang Xuan.

While Ma Minghai was still confident that his sword qi would be able to tear through the other party's palm strike with ease, the two finally collided with one another. However, contrary to his expectations, his sword qi actually dissipated instantaneously, as if a blob of tofu crashing into a wall of steel.

Caught off guard by the abrupt turn of events, Ma Minghai narrowed his eyes in shock.

As someone whose mastery of swordsmanship was at Half-Quintessence, he knew full well how much strength was packed into that burst of sword qi. Even the companion he had been very close with, 'Brother Sun', would not dare clash directly with it. Yet, the young man before him had been able to easily dissipate his sword qi with just a simple palm strike. Just how could this be?

But this was not the end of Ma Minghai's bewilderment yet. The remaining might of the palm strike continued charging forth toward him with astounding momentum, appearing before him in the blink of an eye.

Peng!

An overwhelming pressure assaulted Ma Minghai, causing his face to pale. He immediately tried to put up his defense to defend against the palm strike, to no avail. He crashed heavily

into a massive boulder, and a stifled feeling in his chest made him cough out a mouthful of blood.

“How could this be? How can you be so powerful?” Ma Minghai widened his eyes in disbelief.

He felt that the main reason he had lost to Zhang Xuan earlier was because he had to suppress his cultivation. Now that his cultivation was not suppressed, and he had even comprehended Half-Quintessence, it would really be an eye-opener if he was defeated!

“It must be a coincidence—it must be! There’s no way you can possibly be that powerful! There’s just no way...”

Rising to his feet, Ma Minghai drew out a half moon in front of his chest before shooting it forth.

“Sword qi in the area, heed my command!”

Upon his shouting, the sword qi drifting aimlessly in the region swiftly converged together to form a massive sword of roughly ten meters long in front of Ma Minghai’s chest.

Having comprehended Half-Quintessence, even if he was unable to earn the absolute obedience of swords, it was still well within his means to control sword qi in the air.

The Sword Lagoon was filled with sword practitioners, resulting in a massive congregation of sword qi in the area. In other words, the area was almost like a haven for those who had comprehended Half-Quintessence!

In his current state, Ma Minghai would be able to slay even True Leaving Aperture realm cultivators easily!

“This is the strength of those who have comprehended swordsmanship to Half-Quintessence?”

“How fearsome...”

“To be able to control sword qi, he’s practically invincible in the Sword Lagoon!”

“Indeed. That fellow facing him is doomed.”

The crowd in the area analyzed the situation grimly.

As sword practitioners themselves, they understood how fearsome a cultivator who had comprehended Half-Quintessence was. Wielding the strength to manipulate and release a barrage of sword qi at will, they were unmatched in their power class.

The young man facing Ma Minghai was only a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, so how could he possibly withstand Ma Minghai's strength?

Huala!

Before everyone's apprehensive gaze, the massive sword forged solely out of sword qi began flying toward Zhang Xuan with incredible momentum.

Its was even faster than the speed of sound, and it appeared right before Zhang Xuan in just the blink of an eye.

If that technique landed, no matter how sturdy a body one had, one would instantly be sliced in two and die on the spot.

"The attack you have launched through gathering the surrounding sword qi is indeed formidable, but it's a pity that the sword qi is not yours!"

In the face of that devastating attack, there was not the slightest hint of anxiety or fear to be seen on Zhang Xuan's face. On the contrary, disappointment was written all over his face instead.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan casually tapped his finger forward, and a powerful ray of light burst right through the sword, dissipating it instantaneously.

"Go," Zhang Xuan muttered as he flicked his finger lightly.

Peng!

Ma Minghai flew back once more. His back crashed heavily into the stone wall, creating a massive depression in it.

To make matters worse, when he tried to struggle out of the stone wall, for some reason, he found that his body simply would not budge, and this left him deeply terrified.

“Y-you...” With a ghastly pale face, Ma Minghai stared at the young man before him with horrified eyes.

He had thought that as long as he fought with his full strength, he would be able to subdue the young man easily. But it turned out that he had been too naive. Even with his heightened strength, that monster of a young man was actually able to subdue him with just a single finger!

Even when he had borrowed the strength from the massive congregation of sword qi in the surroundings, he had found that he was still completely helpless before that young man.

With a look of utter disbelief, he watched as the young man gracefully walked up to him with a frighteningly radiant smile on his face.

“While I am in awe of your strength, it’s a pity that we are in a selection match at the moment. The slots to the Sanctum of Sages are on the line, so... will you take out the jade token yourself, or do you need me to make a move?”

Hearing those words, Ma Minghai’s face immediately turned red.

Those were the very words that he had told the young man earlier, and the latter was returning all of them to him!

“You want to take my jade token? Unless you plan on killing me, dream on!” Ma Minghai spat with gritted teeth.

The destruction of his jade token would mean that he lost the slot to enter the Sanctum of Sages. This was his greatest opportunity to rise to the top of the Master Teacher Continent, and he could not let all of the hard work he had put into it go to waste!

“Kill you? There’s no need to go through that much trouble.” Gazing down on Ma Minghai, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly as he snapped his finger.

Peng!

It was as if a massive mountain had suddenly fallen upon Ma Minghai, crushing him deeper and deeper into the stone wall.

This immense pressure seemed to squeeze whatever oxygen he had out of his lungs, threatening to choke him to death.

“Wait... a moment...” The fear in Ma Minghai’s eyes intensified. He anxiously spoke up to plead for mercy, but he found that even spitting out a word was a great strain on him in his current state.

“My apologies, I don’t have a habit of giving my opponents the chance to counterattack,” Zhang Xuan replied with a bright smile. “Besides, there is one thing that you spoke of that I can deeply relate to...”

“The strong can indeed do as they please!”

1275 Chaotic Palace

Beguilement Formation

Geji! Geji!

Ma Minghai's bones creaked under the immense pressure, threatening to shatter at any moment. His body also swiftly approached its limit as redness consumed his skin.

If the other party hadn't made a move on him, Zhang Xuan wouldn't have bothered to make a move either. However, since the other party had chosen to provoke him, he saw no need to go easy on the other party either.

"Let go of me... I'll give you my jade token!" Sensing that he wouldn't be able to survive long in this state, Ma Minghai gathered all of his strength in order to yell out those words.

"Very well." Zhang Xuan retracted his hands and placed them behind his back.

Padah!

Finally released from the stone wall, Ma Minghai had to take several deep breaths before he was able to calm himself down.

A hint of savagery flashed across his eyes and he discreetly whipped out two swords. With a powerful fling of his hands, he threw them right toward Zhang Xuan.

Astonishingly, these two swords were at Saint intermediate-tier as well. Further enhanced by his Half-Quintessence Sword Intent, they surged forward at an astounding speed.

According to the rules of the secondary selection, the candidates were forbidden from using their artifacts against one another in the secondary selection. Ma Minghai knew the rules, but he also understood very well that he wouldn't be a match for Zhang Xuan without using his sword, and he was already at the brink of being eliminated as well. Given so, he could only take a gamble and pray that Zhao Xingmo wouldn't find out about the matter.

Si la!

The two powerful blades tore across the air, and before one could even see them, they were already right before Zhang Xuan.

Just as Ma Minghai thought that he would be able to slay that fellow, the latter's exasperated voice suddenly sounded in the air.

"Hai, it seems like I really am too good-natured. Had it been anyone else, you would have already been killed several times over for what you have done!"

Hong long!

Before Ma Minghai could process what had just happened, his body was suddenly flung backward, crashing heavily back into the stone wall. Under the overwhelming impact of the collision, his bones finally gave in and shattered. At the same time, the severe internal injuries he had sustained caused fresh blood to spurt out of his mouth.

"If you won't hold to the end of your promise, I guess I'll just have to take your jade token myself!" Following which, Ma Minghai suddenly felt a tearing pain on his finger.

His storage ring had been forcefully taken away, and it flew straight into Zhang Xuan's palm.

"You..." Ma Minghai's face reddened in anxiety.

However, it was already too late for him to do or say anything. With a tap of his finger, Zhang Xuan took out the jade token from the storage ring and flicked it lightly.

Kacha!

The jade token shattered into powdery remains.

"It seems like Qianchong Empire does value you quite a bit, there's plenty of treasures in your storage ring. Good. I'll be taking them as your compensation then..."

Zhang Xuan had intended to let Ma Minghai off with just crushing his jade token, but since the other party was so shameless as to attempt a surprise assault after being defeated,

he was no longer willing to let the other party off without making him pay some price for his actions.

Pu!

On the other hand, watching as Zhang Xuan placed his storage ring into his pocket, another mouthful of fresh blood spurted from Ma Minghai's mouth.

He had to go through a lot of effort in order to procure all those valuable resources in his storage ring, and to have them snatched away just like that...

In his moment of despair, Ma Minghai heard the other party continuing on, "These swords of yours seem to be Saint intermediate-tier artifacts as well. Not bad, not bad. I'll be taking them as interest payment!"

"I have nurtured my swords with my blood essence over a long period of time, so the spirits within them are completely loyal to me. Even if you take them, there's no way you will be able to make them submit to you..." Seeing that his swords were about to be taken away, Ma Minghai spat through gritted teeth.

He had spent a hefty sum to nurture those two swords of his, so he was certain of their loyalty toward him. As long as he was alive, there was no way they would betray him...

But before Ma Minghai could finish his words, he suddenly saw Zhang Xuan tapping his swords at various points, and all of a sudden, his swords joyfully rushed forward to the latter and bowed respectfully.

Pu!

Another spurt of blood escaped from Ma Minghai's mouth, and the despair on his face deepened.

He thought that with his newfound strength, he should be able to overwhelm Zhang Xuan easily and exact his vengeance. Yet, who could have thought that the opponent he had pitted himself against would actually be a monster in disguise!

"Alright, I'm done."

After taking Ma Minghai's items, Zhang Xuan couldn't be bothered to waste his time on the other party anymore. Thus, he released his grip on the other party, and the other party fell from the stone wall.

Hong long!

Shortly after Ma Minghai was released, a voice sounded across the entire island, "Ma Minghai's jade token has been shattered. The second candidate has been eliminated. Remaining candidates: 30!"

Huala!

Not long after those words were spoken, an aerial saint beast descended from the sky to fetch Ma Minghai before flying off into the distance.

Zhang Jiuxiao should have been taken away as well then... Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

That explained why he wasn't able to find Zhang Jiuxiao despite following the latter's track. It seemed like he had already been brought out of the island.

I understand how Zhao Xingmo is able to sense the elimination of a candidate through the dissipation of the Sword Intent within the jade token, but... how does he manage to locate individual candidates, sending an aerial saint beast over to fetch them so swiftly? Could Zhao Xingmo really have the ability to perceive everything that has happened on the island? Zhang Xuan frowned in incomprehension.

Based on his estimates, the island had to be at least two to three thousand li in diameter, and it would be impossible for anyone to cover this entire area with their Spiritual Perception. Since that was the case, how could Zhao Xingmo possibly keep track of everything that was happening here at all times?

He must be using some kind of artifact or medium to uphold an intelligence network over the entire island... Zhang Xuan analyzed.

With this thought in mind, he activated the Eye of Insight and focused his sight on the aerial saint beast which had just flown away.

This look unveiled the mystery behind Zhao Xingmo's seeming omniscience over the island.

“o think that it would just be Myriad Ants... Zhang Xuan couldn't help but burst into laughter.

Perhaps the simpler the truth was, the easier it was to be blindsided by it.

After all the time he had spent wondering what kind of means Zhao Xingmo could have used to watch over the entire island, it turned out to just be Myriad Ants!

Due to the small stature of Myriad Ants, they were able to conceal themselves easily amidst trees and bushes, making it nigh impossible for even keen-eyed master teachers to notice their presence. Zhang Xuan had used the exact same method to scout the Cloudmist Ridge back then too.

He really didn't think that Zhao Xingmo would use such a method to look over the secondary selection.

Since he was using Myriad Ants as his scout, there should also be a Myriad Anthive Queen under the other party's command too.

“Anthive Queen, is there any way you can drive away the Myriad Ants observing me?” Zhang Xuan communicated with the Myriad Anthive Queen telepathically.

He understood that Zhao Xingmo had to keep a tight watch over the entire field as the invigilator, but he still felt a little uncomfortable at the thought of being constantly spied on.

“While these Myriad Ants aren't my children, I still do have the ability to drive them away. However, I only fear that Zhao shi would notice an anomaly if I were to drive them away...” the Myriad Anthive Queen replied.

“That's true...” Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in frustration.

Zhao Xingmo had to maintain his watch over the secondary selection so as to keep up to date with the circumstances of each and every candidate. If Zhang Xuan's 'presence' were to suddenly disappear from his sight, there was a good chance

that Zhao Xingmo might personally head over to check on the situation.

“Alternatively, I think that I might be able to tame some of the Myriad Ants and have them obey my commands...” After a moment of silence, the Myriad Anthive Queen proposed.

“You are able to tame the Myriad Ants? That would be perfect!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

Naturally, it would be better to tame the Myriad Ants than to chase them away. This way, he would be able to control the information that the Myriad Ants were reporting to Zhao Xingmo about, thus allowing him to fake his position without incurring the latter’s suspicion.

“I’ll leave that to you then.” Zhang Xuan said as he released the Myriad Anthive Queen in the area with a flick of his hand. After which, he turned his attention back to the stone wall before him.

Having witnessed how easily Ma Minghai was defeated, the sword practitioners gathered around the stone wall had all retreated a distance away from Zhang Xuan, fearing that they would accidentally offend him.

Zhang Xuan couldn’t be bothered to waste his time on them either. Just as he was about to return back to cultivating his Heaven’s Path Sword Art, the Dusk Cloud Sword suddenly flew over and said, “Master... Since you are that powerful, do you want to try challenging the Sword Lagoon? I think that there is a good chance you might be able to acquire the heritage!”

“Challenge the Sword Lagoon? Aren’t we at the Sword Lagoon at the moment?” Zhang Xuan asked in bewilderment.

Considering the sheer amount of sword qi and Sword Intent that were drifting in the area, where else could currently be at if not the Sword Lagoon?

“We are currently only at the outer perimeters of the Sword Lagoon. The true Sword lagoon lies behind the stone wall... The heritage of the Old Sword Maestro lies within there as well!” the Dusk Cloud Sword said.

“Oh?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up. “Are the hundred Saint intermediate-tier swords you have mentioned earlier located beyond the stone wall as well?”

“That’s right!” the Dusk Cloud Sword replied.

“Bring me over to take a look!”

Having a compiled Heaven’s Path Sword Art sitting in the Library of Heaven’s Path, the heritage of the Old Sword Maestro held little attraction to Zhang Xuan. However, if he could acquire a hundred Saint intermediate-tier swords out of this, that would really be a huge gain.

Even a hundred Saint low-tier sabers were sufficient to crush the Boss of the underground black market. If he could acquire a hundred Saint intermediate-tier swords, he would be able to destroy Pavilion Master Yue easily with them even without resorting to his puppets!

In fact... he might even be able to rival Zhao Xingmo in a battle!

The Dusk Cloud Sword delightfully led Zhang Xuan around the massive stone wall, and very soon, they arrived at the boundary of a land shrouded with mist.

The mist seemed to have been the result of some kind of formidable formation, completely blocking the sight of whatever that lay ahead.

Realizing that he didn’t recognize the formation, Zhang Xuan frowned.

Flaws!

Hu la!

A book materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

As the formation was currently in operation, the Library of Heaven’s Path was able to compile a book on it.

Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation, a grade-8 formation? Reading the content on the book, Zhang Xuan was startled.

It was no wonder why no one had obtained the heritage this far. It was actually guarded by a grade-8 formation!

A grade-8 formation could only be set up or deciphered by a Grand Dominion realm expert, and there was no one in Qianchong Empire who possessed the strength to do so.

In no hurry to step into the formation, Zhang Xuan turned to the Dusk Cloud Sword and asked, “Have you entered the Sword Lagoon before?”

“I haven’t entered it before, but I heard that the Old Sword Maestro’s personal sword and heritage lie in there!” the Dusk Cloud Sword replied.

“The Old Sword Maestro’s personal sword?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

“Un. According to the rumors I have heard, the Old Sword Maestro’s personal sword is a Saint high-tier artifact, and even the emperor of Qianchong Empire is dying to lay his hands on it. However, it’s a pity that no one has been able to bypass the formation, let alone find the sword!” the Dusk Cloud Sword said.

“A Saint high-tier artifact?” Zhang Xuan tightened his fist in agitation.

Even at the very minimum, a Saint high-tier artifact would possess strength equivalent to a Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm cultivator!

There was actually such a formidable weapon in the Sword Lagoon?

“That’s right. To be honest with you, most of the sword qi lingering in the area was emanated by the Old Sword Maestro’s personal sword. While those sword practitioners are attempting to decipher it in order to raise their mastery of swordsmanship, more than that, they wanted to acquire the Old Sword Maestro’s heritage and obtain his personal sword through it!” the Dusk Cloud Sword explained.

It had been on this island for quite a long while now, so he was well aware of the affairs that happened here.

“Since there’s such a weapon here, I really should take a good look in the Sword Lagoon then!” Zhang Xuan thought in excitement.

Unless in large quantities, otherwise even Saint intermediate-tier artifacts weren't of much use to him anymore. However, this was different for Saint high-tier artifacts.

With a Saint high-tier sword in hand, he was confident of defeating Zhao Xingmo even!

With such a weapon at hand, he would be in a far better position to challenge the Zhang Clan for Luo Ruoxin's hand in marriage.

"You should wait outside for the time being!" Zhang Xuan instructed.

"Yes!" the Dusk Cloud Sword nodded before standing completely still on the spot.

After which, Zhang Xuan unhesitatingly turned around and ventured into the mist.

The flaws of the formation was recorded in its corresponding book compiled in the Library of Heaven's Path, so this grade-8 formation no longer posed any secret to him. After advancing ahead for some time, the area before Zhang Xuan abruptly opened up. The mist had vanished, revealing a stream and a wooden hut instead.

Oh? To think that there would a piece of tranquil land in the middle of the Sword Lagoon! Surprised, Zhang Xuan slowly made his way over to the wooden hut.

Just as he was about to open the door to the wooden hut, his body suddenly stiffened. With a swift maneuver, his silhouette vanished on the spot, appearing at a distance of a hundred meters away.

Huala!

A burst of sword qi sliced through the area where he was previously standing on, leaving behind a dark gorge in its wake.

1276 Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill

This burst of sword qi was extremely powerful; Ma Minghai's attacks appeared to be nothing in comparison.

Alarmed, Zhang Xuan assessed the situation before him warily.

Even with his strength, if not for his sharp instincts prompting him to avoid in advance, he could have been sliced in two by that burst of sword qi.

Just who in the world was in the wooden hut?

Jiya!

The door opened, and a figure slowly walked out.

Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up. The Boss of the underground black market?

It was none other than the person whom he had a hundred Saint low-tier sabers pummel back in the Ring of Death!

But why would he appear here?

The other party had mostly recovered from the wounds he had suffered back in the encounter with Zhang Xuan, but from the glaring scars that crawled all over his body like innumerable centipedes, one could still fathom the tragic plight he had once been in.

The Boss of the black market, Ji Lingfeng, glared at Zhang Xuan with deep hatred in his eyes. "Zhang Xuan, you have manipulated my rules, humiliated me, and snatched my wealth. For that, I shall personally execute you today!"

While the black market was known to be a lawless zone, the truth was that it was only subjected to a different set of laws, set solely by the Boss of the black market. Regardless of whether one was a master teacher or a combat master, one would have to obey the new set of rules in there. Yet, this

fellow actually disregarded the rules in place and raised a huge commotion, severely injuring him even!

If he let the other party go, how could he re-establish his dominance and authority in the black market in the future?

“You knew that I would be here for the secondary selection, so you lay in wait for me?” Zhang Xuan asked with narrowed eyes.

The only ones who should have known that the secondary selection would be held in the Sword Lagoon were only Zhao Xingmo and Pavilion Master Yue. For the other party to be lying in wait for him here, could it have been that the other party already knew of his whereabouts in advance?

Even with the vast intelligence network of the black market, it should have been impossible for them to uncover the location of the secondary selection on such short notice. So, for the other party to have been hiding within the formation all this while, waiting to launch an assault on him, that could only mean one thing.

“I’ll tell you after you go to hell!” Ji Lingfeng bellowed furiously as he flung his sword furiously, sending another burst of sword qi toward Zhang Xuan.

His sword was only three chi long, but it emanated bone-chilling coldness. Even before the sharp burst of sword qi could arrive, an eerie sound reminiscent of the resentful mutterings of the departed echoed in the air, placing those who heard it in a distraught state.

Feeling a sudden bout of dizziness striking his head, Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed. A demonic tune!

All along, he had been using this trick against others. He did not expect others to use it against him, and in a moment of carelessness, he was placed into an unnatural state of mind.

Even so, with his Soul Depth of 25.1, a level comparable to 8-star high-tier master teachers, he was able to shake out of his unnatural state in just an instant. However, as soon as his unnatural state was dispelled, the sword qi was already right before his face. The sharp gale that rose from the movement

left a slightly piercing sensation on his skin, leaving him feeling as if a blade was slowly sinking into his body.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan immediately flitted away from the spot, appearing a hundred meters away in an instant.

Unbounded Voyager!

After learning the second dan of Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, his comprehension of the Unbounded Voyager had deepened, allowing him to move at greater speed. By driving his strength to its limit, he was capable of making near-instantaneous movements in desperate situations.

At this point, Zhang Xuan realized that his back was completely drenched with sweat.

It was fortunate that he had reacted with time, or else that attack would have gouged out a huge hole in his chest.

“Do you think that I will allow you to flee that easily?”
Sneering coldly, Ji Lingfeng sent another burst of sword qi toward Zhang Xuan.

The sword qi spanned over two hundred meters, covering the entire area.

“That sword... Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

It was no wonder the other party still dared to provoke him despite having suffered a tragic defeat. It turned out that he had a top-notch Saint intermediate-tier sword that wielded strength comparable to a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert.

An attack from a sword of that caliber was far more fearsome than that of the Golden Origin Cauldron!

Wielding such a sword, Ji Lingfeng would be able to rival even Pavilion Master Yue in a match.

Despite seeing through the other party's strength, Zhang Xuan did not panic. Instead, he shook his head. “If you had drawn

that sword in the battle against me yesterday, I might have been put in a spot, but now...”

The only reason it seemed like the situation was disadvantageous to him previously was because he had been caught off guard. Once he had managed to grasp the situation, with his strength, an opponent such as Ji Lingfeng was simply too lacking!

With a flick of his wrist, Zhang Xuan raised his palm, and a massive palm print materialized before him. “Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm!”

Boom!

As soon as the sword qi collided with the palm print, it felt as if several tons of gunpowder had exploded simultaneously, and an intense shockwave blasted into the surroundings.

It was fortunate that the area was protected by a grade-8 formation, or else the stone wall would have been torn down by the sheer might of the shockwave itself.

Deng deng deng deng!

Retreating consecutively, Ji Lingfeng felt his blood flow running erratic, and his eyes turned crimson.

Just a single night, and that fellow had already grown much more powerful than before!

If he allowed the other party to continue growing at this pace, it would not be long before he was completely outmatched!

“I told you that you would die by my hands tonight, and I’ll do everything to ensure it,” Ji Lingfeng spat menacingly as he took out a pill and swallowed it.

In an instant, his aura began surging furiously.

Before long, he managed to overcome his bottleneck, reaching Half-Grand Dominion realm.

“That’s... a grade-8 Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill?” Zhang Xuan’s face turned grim.

The Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill was something reminiscent of a stimulant. After consumption, it had the effect

of allowing a cultivator to temporarily surpass their limits. However, once the effect was over, not only would the cultivator suffer a steep decline in their cultivation, their body could suffer permanent damage as well.

To go this far just to kill him... the Boss of the black market sure was a tenacious fellow!

But again, there was no more backing out for the Boss. Just the crime of assaulting a 7-star master teacher was sufficient to bring the wrath of the Master Teacher Pavilion upon him. If the Boss allowed him to escape alive, there was no doubt that his days would be numbered!

Thus, no matter the cost, since he had already made a move, he would have to see the deed through to the end.

“Strike not when at the bank of the river but when in the midst of crossing it!”

With a cold harrumph, Zhang Xuan waved his hand, and more than a hundred puppets appeared before him.

Since the Boss of the black market had already made a move to kill him, he was not so magnanimous as to grant the other party the luxury of time to achieve his breakthrough before making a move.

It would take some time for the other party to assimilate the medicinal properties of the pill, so this was the ideal moment to knock him down!

In any case, the Myriad Anthive Queen had already gained full control over all the Myriad Ants within the grade-8 formation, so Zhao Xingmo and the others would not be able to notice a thing. Thus, there was no need for him to hesitate at all.

Huala!

More than a hundred puppets immediately charged straight for Ji Lingfeng.

When their might was combined together, they could destroy even a Half-Grand Dominion realm expert like Pavilion Master Yue easily. While the Boss was no weakling, there was no way he would be able to withstand their onslaught.

“Did you think that I wouldn’t be guarded against those toys of yours?” Sneering coldly, Ji Lingfeng flicked his finger and tossed a formation plate into the air.

While spinning in the air, a burst of mist suddenly diffused from the formation plate, shrouding the puppets within it.

Zhang Xuan was taken aback for a moment before his eyes slowly lit up. This is a... quasi 8-star formation plate? It seems like that fellow does have quite a few good items on him.

As expected of the Boss of the black market, the wealth he had accumulated over the years was truly nothing to scoff at!

Putting aside how valuable the Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill was, just the quasi grade-8 formation plate was bound to be worth a huge sum, at least a thousand concentrated high-tier spirit stones!

The activation of a formation plate of this tier could trap even an expert of Pavilion Master Yue’s caliber for a short period of time. That explained why the other party was so confident as to swallow the pill right in front of his eyes!

In the first place, the spirits within puppets were significantly weaker compared to humans’ spirits, thus making it harder for them to perceive their surroundings once their senses were hindered by the formation. With this single move, the other party had effectively incapacitated all his puppets!

Admittedly, the method used was not too bad. If it had been any other 7-star pinnacle formation master, he would have been completely helpless before this situation. However, to Zhang Xuan, such a thing could not even be called a problem!

Muttering ‘flaws’ in his mind, the Library of Heaven’s Path jolted, and a book materialized in it. Flipping it open, the flaws regarding the formation plate appeared in Zhang Xuan’s head.

“Go!” Zhang Xuan commanded with a raise of his hand.

Hu la!

The next moment, more than a hundred sabers charged into the mist, and amid sounds of ‘ding ding dang dang’, as if slicing

through certain structures, the mist swiftly receded before dissipating altogether.

Formation broken!

“Return!” With a flick of his finger, a saber swiftly brought the formation plate over to Zhang Xuan’s hands, and with a few taps on it, Zhang Xuan managed to make it his.

Hong long!

As swift as Zhang Xuan had moved, he was still inevitably delayed for several breaths. Within this period of time, Ji Lingfeng had already successfully assimilated the Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill into his body, and his cultivation had stabilized as well.

At this point, Ji Lingfeng’s aura had grown frighteningly fearsome, as if he had become a feral beast that would tear his claws through others.

It seems like this Boss of the black market has fought quite a few ring matches himself, Zhang Xuan thought warily.

From the killing intent that Ji Lingfeng was exuding, it could be seen that he had participated in quite a few life-and-death matches in his time as well, killing many of his opponents.

Otherwise, there was no way he could have emanated such an overwhelming aura of savagery.

It was no wonder the other party dared make a move on him despite knowing his identity. It seemed like the blood he had on his hands had already dulled his deference for life and the Master Teacher Pavilion.

“To be able to decipher even a quasi grade-8 formation so swiftly, you are indeed a formidable opponent. However, no matter what kind of tricks you have up your sleeves, there’s no way you will be getting out of here alive!” Ji Lingfeng gritted his teeth furiously.

Letting loose a feral wary cry, he raised his sword and hacked it down furiously, releasing an overwhelming burst of sword qi amid powerful winds.

Si la!

Ji Lingfeng's strength as a Half-Grand Dominion realm cultivator complemented with a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle sword was no joke. It felt as if it would tear through space and forcefully crush one into innumerable pieces.

Just this single move was sufficient to show that Ji Lingfeng's current strength was already far beyond that of Pavilion Master Yue!

Even though Pavilion Master Yue was the head of a Master Teacher Pavilion, due to his lofty position, he was lacking in battle experience. There was no way he could compare to the Boss of the black market, who had undergone multiple life-and-death battles and killed innumerable master teachers!

Without such battle experience, it was inevitable that Pavilion Master Yue's moves would be lacking in decisive sharpness and valiance, and those two factors had lowered his fighting prowess significantly.

This will be difficult.

A grim expression finally appeared on Zhang Xuan's face.

"You won't be useful against an opponent of this caliber... Return!" With a wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan collected the puppets and sabers back into his storage ring.

These puppets were only at Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage and advanced stage. There was no way they would be able to stand against an opponent like Ji Lingfeng. They would only be crippled if they were kept on the field.

The same went for the sabers.

"Release!" After storing the clones and sabers, Zhang Xuan tapped the area before him, and a light sphere with a radius of roughly one meter covered him.

2-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, Traverse!

Sensing the danger that he was in, Zhang Xuan had decided to use his strongest move! Three chi is roughly equal to one meter. It's saying that metaphors an army crossing a river. It means don't attack the army before or after they have crossed the river, but when they are in the midst of crossing it for

strategic reasons. In this case, it means to take advantage of the time which Ji Lingfeng needs to achieve a breakthrough to bring him down.

1277 Poison Needles

As soon as his Dominion appeared, Zhang Xuan felt as if a sturdy armor had been formed around him, and the sense of security he felt made him heave a sigh of relief.

In the next moment, the sword qi fell into the range of Zhang Xuan's Dominion.

Tzzzzzz!

A sizzling sound reminiscent of searing metal coming into contact with ice was produced. Despite being impeded by Zhang Xuan's Dominion, the sword qi was actually still able to edge forward bit by bit.

It seems like my Dominion doesn't necessarily grant me invincibility. If the strength of my opponent were to exceed my limits, the effects of my Dominion will be on my opponent would be discounted... Zhang Xuan noted grimly.

He had tested his Dominion on the Golden Origin Cauldron shortly after comprehending Dominion, and he had successfully halted the Golden Origin Cauldron's movement instantaneously. But thinking back, the reason why he had been able to do so might have been because the Golden Origin Cauldron's cultivation was only at Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, and it didn't specialize in offense either.

On the other hand, Ji Lingfeng had consumed an Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill, and he was wielding a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle sword as well. In the face of such overwhelming strength, it was inevitable that the effects of Zhang Xuan's Dominion would be limited.

Nevertheless, while his sword qi might be strong enough to move in my Dominion, an attack of this level won't be able to faze me at all.

While Zhang Xuan's Dominion failed to halt Ji Lingfeng's sword qi entirely, it did manage to slow and weaken it to the point where the sword qi could no longer harm him.

With a cold harrumph, Zhang Xuan flicked his palm.

Huala!

The slowly advancing sword qi immediately dissipated on the spot.

As powerful as the other party's sword qi was, most of its energy was expended while trying to overcome the might of his Dominion, such that the threat it posed was already minimal by the time it arrived before its target.

“You have already made your move. It should be my turn now!” While saying these words, Zhang Xuan flitted forward.

Hu la!

In an instant, Zhang Xuan traversed over a hundred meters and appeared behind Ji Lingfeng's back. Clenching his fist tightly, he dealt a powerful punch forward.

A torrential might that could reverse even the flow of a river burst forth for Ji Lingfeng's heart.

At Zhang Xuan's current strength, even without utilizing the 2-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, his strength was already on par to a Half-Grand Dominion realm expert.

Pairing such strength with the Heaven's Path Fist Art, even Pavilion Master Yue would be hard-pressed to receive this attack!

My attack didn't work?

Ji Lingfeng had devoted his full strength to the previous attack, and he hadn't thought that a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle cultivator like Zhang Xuan would actually be able to withstand his sword qi, let alone launch a counterattack shortly after that. In an instant, his face turned livid in grimness.

Nevertheless, while he was taken off guard by the situation, his movements didn't stop at all. With a swift reversal of his blade, he turned his sword around and pierced it through the opening beneath his armpits.

What swift reaction speed! Zhang Xuan was astonished.

He thought that the sudden surge of strength would make Ji Lingfeng prone to carelessness. After all, the most fatal mistakes usually occur when one was certain of victory, so he was planning to catch Ji Lingfeng off guard by launching an attack right after his offense.

Yet, to his surprise, Ji Lingfeng was actually able to react to his attack with nearly no delay time at all.

As expected of a warrior who had fought on the Ring of Death! Through undergoing multiple life-and-death situations, one would become more adaptable to unexpected situations, allowing one to see opportunity amidst the threat of danger.

Take the current situation for example. Instead of going on the defensive, Ji Lingfeng had chosen to launch a counterattack instead. He angled his sword in a trajectory such that if Zhang Xuan's fist were to proceed any further, Zhang Xuan would first find a hole punctured into him by the sword.

“Excellent! Let's see who will be able to last till the very end then!” Seeing Ji Lingfeng's swift and sharp reflexes, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement. In this crucial moment, he suddenly felt a surge of adrenaline rushing through his veins.

All along, his opponents were either way stronger than him, or they would be defeated in a single move after having their flaws exploited. As a result, he couldn't really say that he had gone through a real life-and-death battle before.

Thus, when he saw how the other party was actually able to match him in battle, he couldn't help but feel his heart leap in exhilaration.

Against Ji Lingfeng's counterattack, Zhang Xuan decisively morphed his fist into a palm while twisting his body to advance forward.

The sword should have pierced Zhang Xuan if he were to proceed any further, but this maneuver allowed him to move parallel to the sword, thus bypassing the sword with ease.

Peng!

With his sharp instincts, Ji Lingfeng also swiftly noticed that something was amiss. He quickly dashed forward to retreat,

but it was already too late. Zhang Xuan's fingertips struck the back of Ji Lingfeng's body squarely, pumping a powerful might through his body that shattered many of his meridians simultaneously, and a spurt of blood escaped from his mouth.

Nevertheless, Ji Lingfeng's forward dash wasn't completely meaningless. It had allowed him to ward off a significant portion of the might behind Zhang Xuan's strike, thus minimizing his injuries. At the same time, he had also managed to create some distance between the latter and him. Making use of this opportunity, he quickly turned around to launch a decisive counterattack.

In the next moment, however, the scene that came into his sight made his hair stand on end.

He realized that no matter how fast he moved, Zhang Xuan was actually able to move faster than him! The young man was like a bug firmly plastered to his back! No matter how he twisted and turned, he simply couldn't shake the young man away!

His movement technique is really a drat to deal with... Left with no choice, Ji Lingfeng could only swing his sword frenziedly and form a protective barrier around him, choosing to go on the defensive for the time being to bide his time for the next opportunity to strike.

Just as what Zhang Xuan had guessed, he had once stood on the Ring of Death of the black market using another persona, and with his superior strength, he managed to rise to the position of Conqueror of Hundred at one point in time! It would be foolish for anyone to underestimate his fighting prowess!

Even an average combat master of the same cultivation realm was no match for him!

Yet, despite possessing cultivation significantly lower than his—not to mention the fact that he had even consumed the Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill for this—he found that he was still unable to claim the upper hand in the battle...

How in the world could a monster like that young man before him exist in the world?

“I admit, you are indeed a far stronger opponent than I have thought you out to be. It won’t be easy for me to kill you using ordinary means...” Ji Lingfeng uttered coldly as a callous glint flashed across his eyes.

In the next moment, he propelled his sword behind with his zhenqi and drove it straight toward the young man behind him.

Then, making use of the time that the young man was preoccupied with his sword, he turned around and flicked his left hand powerfully.

Sou sou sou sou!

Several hundred sharp needles flew forth like a raging storm.

Storm Needles!

In order to remain the undefeated champion of the Ring of Death, on top of being strong and vicious, one must possess countless different means up one’s sleeves as well.

The Storm Needles happened to be his strongest trump card. Every single one of those narrow needles was forged of a unique material, allowing it to pierce through the skin of a Half-Grand Dominion realm expert. On top of that, it was also laced with lethal poison that would swiftly kill any cultivator afflicted with it.

Uncountable was the number of experts who had fallen right to this move.

Huala!

Despite having used his hidden weapons, Ji Lingfeng didn’t get careless. He swiftly rushed forward first in order to free himself from the young man’s relentless pursuit before turning around to assess the situation before deciding on his next course of action. But when he turned around once more, the sight that unfolded before him made him narrow his eyes in shock.

The young man had successfully halted all of the needles through a sphere of light around him, allowing him to collect

all of the needles into his hands. However, perhaps out of curiosity over the needles, he picked them up and began fiddling with them.

Slowly, Ji Lingfeng's shock turned into overwhelming agitation, and he exclaimed excitedly, "Hahaha, I never thought that you will actually court your own death!"

He had specially found a 7-star pinnacle poison master to concoct the poison he had laced on the needles. Even if the needle didn't pierce his opponent's skin, the poison would be able to kill his opponent just by coming into physical contact with him!

Usually, there would be no cultivator who would dare to pick up the hidden weapon of another carelessly, but that fellow actually picked up his needles directly with his own hands... Was he tired of living?

But instead of seeing the young man's face slowly caving in to despair, the latter simply glanced over and shook his head in disappointment.

"The poison you have used on the needles is too weak. You have probably been scammed. You might be able to scare others with it, but there's no way such an inferior poison is going to kill anyone!"

Right after saying those words, Zhang Xuan intentionally pinched the tip of the needle, as if trying to prove his point.

"You are able to discern the poison on the needles?" Ji Lingfeng narrowed his eyes.

The lethal poison concocted by the 7-star poison master was colorless and odorless, making it impossible for any ordinary cultivator to perceive it. Yet, to be able to see through the poison just by holding it up... how did he manage to do it?

"If I can't even discern such an obvious poison, I would have already died countless times over!" Zhang Xuan scoffed coldly. Then, with a sudden flick of his wrist, he shot the needles back at Ji Lingfeng.

Wuwuwu!

These needles were further enhanced by Zhang Xuan's zhenqi, allowing them to move at a speed that seemed to be as fast as lightning. In just the blink of an eye, the needles were already right before Ji Lingfeng.

Knowing that the needles were laced with poison, Ji Lingfeng didn't dare allow any of the needles to land on him. Thus, with a powerful swing, he spun the sword before him in a continuous circular motion to deflect the needles.

Ding ding dang dang!

As the Boss of a black market in Qianchong Empire, Ji Lingfeng possessed considerable talent in swordsmanship as well. His mastery over the sword had at least reached the level of Upper Sword Heart. Under his tight guard, all of the needles were easily deflected to the ground.

"If you think that you can injure me using my hidden weapons, dream on..." After knocking away the storm of needles, Ji Lingfeng sneered coldly.

But before he could finish his words, the vision before him abruptly blurred. Without any warning, Zhang Xuan materialized right before him and raised his hand up, preparing to send a slap over.

To his astonishment, it seemed like in the span of time that he was dealing with the hidden weapons, the young man had already closed in the distance between them once more.

"You..." Livid, Ji Lingfeng quickly raised his sword, intending to counterattack. Unfortunately, it was already too late.

Pah!

A fiery pain consumed Ji Lingfeng's face, and he was sent flying away. A sweet sensation welled up in his throat before a spurt of fresh blood spilled from his mouth along with several teeth.

The young man had used his full strength in that slap. Had it not been for the Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill that he had eaten earlier, his head might have exploded from that move.

Even so, he still felt intense vertigo assaulting his head, leaving him feeling deeply disoriented for a moment.

“Damn you!” Ji Lingfeng’s body trembled uncontrollably under the impact, and he roared in frenzy.

He had lived for several centuries now, and yet, he actually suffered two consecutive setbacks in the hands of the same person. The overwhelming feeling of shame left him so angry that he could explode on the spot.

“You bastard, I will rip you into pieces!” Roaring angrily, the zhenqi in his body billowed as he prepared to charge forward. But before he could make a move, a derisive smile had already emerged on the lips of the young man in front of him.

“I advise you not to move recklessly. And also, it would be wise for you to avoid driving your zhenqi as well... Otherwise, you will only be hastening your own death!”

“What do you mean?” Seeing the fearless smile on the young man’s face, Ji Lingfeng narrowed his eyes warily.

“I don’t mean anything much... Just that when I struck you earlier, I inserted two needles into your cheeks.” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

“Needles?” Ji Lingfeng’s body froze. It was only in this moment that he realized that there were indeed two additional needles on his cheeks. Due to the powerful might of the slap he had suffered earlier, he hadn’t sensed the presence of the needles at all.

“The antidote...” Swiftly withdrawing the needles, he hurriedly retrieved a pill from his storage ring and swallowed it.

He had witnessed the formidable potency of the poison with his eyes—even a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert had died within three seconds of being afflicted with the poison! While his cultivation was currently at Half-Grand Dominion realm after consuming the Insane Demon Breakthrough Pill, he still wouldn’t last more than ten seconds before a poison as lethal as that!

“Consuming the antidote can spare you from death, but if my eyes fail me not, the side effects of the antidote will induce numbness in your body in the short run. You aren’t even a match for me in your peak condition, so how do you expect to defeat me in your current state?” Zhang Xuan chuckled softly as he slowly made his way forward toward Ji Lingfeng.

He raised his palm slowly and thrust it down lightly.

Kacha!

A tremendous pressure fell on Ji Lingfeng and shattered all of the bones in his body in an instant, rendering him completely helpless on the ground.

The young man was right. Since he wasn’t a match for the other party in his peak condition, how could he possibly defeat the other party in his current state?

“What other trump cards do you have? Take them all out at once! If this is all you got, don’t you think that it’s laughable for you to attempt to take my life?” Crushing Ji Lingfeng firmly to the ground, Zhang Xuan glanced down at him impassively.

The both of them had crossed blows with one another back at the black market, so Ji Lingfeng should know that he had over a hundred puppets and sabers in his possession. To be safe, the latter should have assumed that he would have other means in his hands as well.

Yet, Ji Lingfeng still dared to attempt an assassination on him, even declaring proudly that he would claim his life... If this was all Ji Lingfeng had, a pill and a sword, he was really being a little too conceited over here!

“Oh? You are indeed a smart person... But smart people tend to die premature deaths!” Spurting another mouthful of blood, savagery returned to Ji Lingfeng’s face.

Gathering whatever strength he had left, he flicked his wrist, and the sword in his hand flew into the stream not too far away.

“I have already given you the sword, so it’s about time for you to fulfill the end of your bargain...”

The stream began billowing furiously before a massive column of water rushed into the sky, as if heralding the arrival of an unparalleled existence. Following which, an old man slowly walked out of the water column, headed toward Zhang Xuan.

He naturally commanded a grand and imposing appearance, reminiscent of a deity.

“It’s no wonder why Ji Lingfeng wants to kill you. You are indeed extraordinary.” the old man chuckled. Then, his eyes abruptly turned cold, “It’s really a pity to see someone as talented as you going down prematurely, but I guess it can’t be helped...”

Huala!

With a flick of his finger, a sharp surge of sword qi whizzed toward Zhang Xuan.

1278 Ji Lingzhen

This surge of sword qi descended from the sky with a might almost comparable to a comet. The surrounding space froze as soon as the sword qi appeared, making it nigh impossible to avoid the attack.

“Grand Dominion realm primary stage?” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

Who could have thought that the old man hiding in the stream would actually be a real Grand Dominion realm expert, stronger than even Pavilion Master Yue himself!

More importantly...

“His comprehension of swordsmanship is also on par with Ma Minghai, reaching Half-Quintessence!”

To possess superior cultivation and exceptional mastery of swordsmanship...

Even normal Grand Dominion realm primary stage experts would find it hard to rival him!

Si la!

In the midst of Zhang Xuan’s shock, the sword qi had already appeared before him, colliding with the one-meter Dominion he had constructed around him.

Kacha!

The sword qi sliced right through his Dominion like butter, opening a small gap that allowed it to advance forward unhindered.

“Halt!” Zhang Xuan swiftly concentrated the strength of his Dominion to hinder the sword qi as much as it could. At the same time, he also thrust his palm forward in order to fend it off.

Peng!

Despite the defenses Zhang Xuan had put up, the tremendous might of the sword qi was still too much for him to bear. His face paled, and he was sent flying straight into a massive tree behind him.

To think that even when using his full might together with his barrier, he would still be unable to withstand the other party's attack!

"It's no wonder why Ji Lingfeng is unable to defeat you. You actually managed to grasp the primary form of Dominion... To be able to achieve this despite being only at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, your talent is really beyond my imagination!" On the other hand, seeing that his slash had only injured Zhang Xuan, the old man in the stream remarked wintry.

The coldness in his eyes deepened as he continued, "All the more reason to kill you!"

A genius of this caliber was bound to come from a powerful lineage. Since they had already made a move, they would have to ensure that the other party was killed through and through, or else this matter would come back to haunt them in the future.

They couldn't afford to take such a risk!

"Who are you?" Struggling to his feet, Zhang Xuan spat through gritted teeth.

"Since you are already bound for death, I'll at least fulfill satisfy this little curiosity of yours. I am the Sword of Faint Warble, Ji Lingzhen, and the Boss of the black market is my younger brother, Sword of Faint Whispers, Ji Lingfeng!" the old man, Ji Lingzhen, said.

"Ji Lingzhen?" Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before shaking his head.

He had been in Qianchong empire for a day now, and toward those two names, he only had four words to say... Never heard of it!

"Now that your curiosity is satisfied, it's about time for me to send you off on your trip down!" Ji Lingzhen spoke coldly.

Unwilling to waste his breath anymore, he flicked out another sword qi with his finger.

This attack was even more fearsome than the one before.

As soon as the burst of sword qi was released, the entire formation began shaking, as if even the grade-8 Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation wasn't resilient enough to withstand the might of the sword qi!

If he could wield such strength without a sword in hand, how powerful would he be armed? With a face livid with graveness, Zhang Xuan knew that he mustn't take Ji Lingzhen's attack face on.

Thus, he flicked his wrist, and a formation plate appeared in his hand.

It was the very same formation plate which Ji Lingfeng had thrown out previously, but Zhang Xuan had managed to take it for his own!

Hong long!

Instead of using it to trap Ji Lingzhen, Zhang Xuan used the formation to shroud himself instead, and his silhouette swiftly disappeared in the mist produced by the formation.

A Beguilement Formation could be used to trap others, but it could also prevent the enemy from finding one in the short-term.

But of course, such a course of actions had its own setbacks too.

Firstly, it would be much easier for the enemy to break the formation from the outside. Secondly, placing oneself in the midst of a Beguilement Formation was as good as trapping oneself in a cage! Even if the cage was shrouded with a cloth, a relentless barrage of attacks from the outside would still eventually wear down and destroy whatever that was on the inside.

“Interesting. Let me see how long you can hide for!”

Chuckling softly, Ji Lingzhen took a step forward and sent another burst of sword qi over.

It sliced an opening through the mist easily, reminiscent of a sword cutting through mud. Astonishingly, instead of caving back in to fill up the opening, the mist actually remained firmly parted, as if there was some kind of force preventing them from converging in once more.

With just one look, it was obvious that the formation plate had been ruined.

Regardless of whether a formation was constructed using formation flags or a formation plate, there were two ways to overcome it. First, understanding the principles behind it and finding its flaws or Life Gate. Second, using brute force to destroy it.

Ji Lingzhen's formation plate was only at quasi grade-8. It could still trap Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle or Half-Grand Dominion realm cultivators, but against a true Grand Dominion realm expert, let alone one who had comprehended Half-Quintessence, it was inevitable that its resilience would be lacking.

A slash to overcome all means!

As long as one's strength had reached a certain mark, regardless of what kind of ridiculous abilities others were to throw at one, a single slash would be able to put them right back in place!

And the current Ji Lingzhen wielded such strength.

Zhang Xuan had many means up his sleeves, but against Ji Lingzhen, they were all sorely lacking.

After slicing the mist into two, Ji Lingzhen waved his hand slightly.

Kacha! The mist dissipated without a trace, and a severed formation plate fell to the ground.

Without the formation to conceal him, Zhang Xuan's silhouette appeared once more.

In just a few breaths, the young man had changed into a fresh set of clothes. More than that, his aura seemed to have become loftier, and his eyes carried disdain from everything in the

world. If one had to describe his attitude, it would be that of the indomitable conqueror of the world, peerless and unmatched by any other.

If not for the identical face and soul, Ji Lingzhen would have really thought that the young man had swapped positions with someone else.

“No matter what means you use, there’s no way you will be able to bridge the vast difference in strength between the both of us. Even if you change your clothes and disposition, it won’t make a difference at all. It’s all futile!” Sneering coldly, Ji Lingzhen flicked another sword qi at Zhang Xuan once more.

Si la!

The air was split apart once more, and a chilling glint whizzed swiftly across the air.

He can’t even deal with such trash? He sure is regressing with time... Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment.

With a swift step, his figure suddenly blurred.

Wu!

In the blink of an eye, he suddenly appeared in mid-air and threw a fist forward.

Huala!

“Do you really think that you stand a chance against me?” Seeing how the young man who had struggled to withstand even a single burst of sword qi from him was attempting a counterattack, Ji Lingzhen scoffed in disdain.

A cold glint flashed across his eyes, and he flicked another burst of sword qi forward.

That burst of sword qi clashed directly with Zhang Xuan’s fist, and a powerful shockwave rippled from the collision, causing the entire formation to tremble non-stop.

The collision lasted for just an instant before the sword qi shattered into countless fragments and scattered the surroundings, leaving sharp gorges all over the ground.

“What?” Astonished by the outcome of the collision, Ji Lingzhen widened his eyes in astonishment, and he unwittingly took a few steps back.

Earlier, even when using a technique similar to a Dominion, the young man was still unable to fend against his sword qi. Yet, just by changing his clothes, it was as if the young man had turned into a completely different person! To actually catch his sword qi with a brute punch...

Furthermore, he shockingly realized that... the other party's fist seemed to be even more resilient than his sword qi?

“I don't believe it. There's just no way a person's cultivation could grow that quickly. He must have used some kind of method, some kind of method!” Shaking away his astonishment, Ji Lingzhen flicked his finger with greater force than before, sending forth a sword qi far stronger than before.

Halfway in its movement, the sword qi abruptly divided into countless surges of sword qi that filled up the entire sky. These surges of sword qi seemed to harmonize with one another, releasing the metallic call of a sword, resembling waves in a sea.

Sea of a Thousand Blades!

This was one of the most powerful techniques of the Sword Lagoon, and clearly, Ma Minghai wasn't the only one who had managed to comprehend this move.

Si la!

The sea of sword qi swiftly gushed toward Zhang Xuan, and a black streak seemed to vaguely appear along the path where it passed by, as if even space was unable to withstand its stupendous might.

“A mere child's play!” Zhang Xuan sneered coldly as he took a single step forward.

He raised his palm high in the sky and pressed it down powerfully.

It was the same palm strike which was used against Ji Lingfeng earlier, but its might was far stronger than before.

Even when faced against the sea of sword qi, it was like a swat smacking away a fly, an unquestionable suppression.

Right after resolving the sea of sword qi, Zhang Xuan immediately flitted forward, appearing before Ji Lingzhen in the blink of an eye. Without any hesitation, he shot a fist toward the latter's abdomen.

Peng!

Caught off guard, Ji Lingzhen didn't even manage to put up his defenses when a colossal might sunk into him. His lungs suffocated in that instant, and 'sou!', he was sent flying diagonally the ground.

He tumbled along the ground many times, creating hole after hole in his wake.

"How can this be? This is impossible!" In this moment, the severely wounded Ji Lingzhen had nothing but disbelief left inside his head.

It wasn't too long ago that he wielded the absolute advantage in the battle, so how could the other party suddenly overpower him by so much in just a few moments?

He wasn't just any ordinary Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator, he was a genius who had comprehended Half-Quintessence! There was not a single person in Qianchong Empire who came close to being a match for him! Yet, someone as strong as him wasn't able to receive a single punch from that young man...

Was that young man really just a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle cultivator?

Very quickly, Ji Lingzhen's disbelief turned into rage. He had been an indomitable existence to those around him for a good part of his life, and he couldn't accept being defeated by a mere young lad so easily.

"Screw this!"

Suppressing his injuries, he pushed himself out of the pit he was in forcefully. In this moment, the elegance and grace he

had when he first appeared had already turned into unkempt and fury.

“Screw this? The only one who is going to be screwed here is you!” Zhang Xuan replied coldly as his figure blurred once more.

This time, the attack that Ji Lingzhen found himself faced against wasn't a punch nor a palm strike but a kick.

“You...”

This kick wasn't a battle technique, and there was nothing notable about it skills-wise either. However, the might it wielded was staggering, to the point where it felt as if no human could stand against it. For a moment there, Ji Lingzhen felt as if the heavens were collapsing down on him!

“Damn it! Damn it!” Ji Lingzhen cursed furiously as he quickly drove his zhenqi furiously, sending out as many sword qi as he could.

In an instant, a sphere constructed out of sword qi surrounded him.

Battle technique, Great River of Swords!

This was a defensive technique that served to create a spherical river of sword qi around one, neutralizing any external attacks that were to land on it. In terms of defensive ability, it could be said to be even stronger than a Dominion!

Kacha!

As soon as the kick landed on the sphere, a resounding ‘jiya!’ echoed deafeningly in the surroundings, seemingly threatening to burst the spherical river of sword qi.

With a livid face, Ji Lingzhen gritted his teeth and infused even more sword qi into the defensive technique, attempting to sustain it.

“Hmph!” Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up as he intensified the strength exerted by his leg.

Boom!

Under the swiftly growing might of the kick, the sphere eventually came to its limit and burst.

Pu!

Ji Lingzhen spurted a mouthful of fresh blood as he flew out once more, crashing forcefully to the ground.

“You actually think that you could kill me with skills like yours? You sure know how to dream!” Zhang Xuan slowly walked over on mid-air before stopping right above Ji Lingzhen. With his hands behind his back, he gazed sternly down on the latter, reminiscent of a peerless God of War.

“I...” At this point, Ji Lingzhen’s mental defenses had already collapsed. Frightened by the imposing disposition of the young man before him, he couldn’t help but crawl backward in fear.

The young man was simply too strong!

Without using Dominion or any powerful battle technique, just by sheer brute strength, the young man was able to overcome all of his means. To make things worse, the young man’s body was also unbelievably resilient. Despite clashing multiple times with his sword qi, there wasn’t the slightest scratch to be seen on his skin at all!

At this rate, he might really just die!

“Just what kind of existence is this fellow?” Ji Lingzhen couldn’t help but feel a shred of regret.

Had he known that the young man would be so powerful, he would have never agreed to help Ji Lingzhen and place himself in this mess.

He thought that the other party was just an insignificant shrimp whom he could crush to death at a wave of his hand, but in the midst of his battle, he realized what he was faced against was an inviolable dragon instead!

“This won’t do. I’ll really die like this! Since that’s the case, I can only give it a try then...” Ji Lingzhen gritted his teeth and toughened his resolve.

He swiftly rushed toward the stream before slitting his wrist with a flick of his finger. Fresh blood began spurting out

wildly.

Tzzzzzzzzzz!

As more and more fresh blood flowed out of his body, Ji Lingzhen's face shriveled more and more, and his black hair swiftly turned snowy white. It felt as if his vitality was flowing away along with his blood, causing his rapid aging.

With a feeble but indignant voice, he exclaimed, "Over the years, I have offered countless blades to you... Now, I have even tributed the Sword of Faint Whispers, Sword of Faint Warble, and even my own fresh blood to you... Isn't it about time for you to appear? Or are you just going to lie dormant here for your entire life?"

Hong long long!

The earth began shaking uncontrollably, and the water in the stream raged furiously. The Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation shrouding this area also began to shake intensely as a result of this furious surge of power, seemingly on the verge of collapsing altogether!

"What's that?" Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

1279 Movements From All Fronts

The sight before him was simply too scary.

Even ‘he’ had to rely on the Library of Heaven’s Path to overcome the Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation, and yet, just the power surging from the stream was enough to leave the formation on the verge of collapsing. Most likely, whatever that was hidden beneath the stream had already exceeded his ability to deal with.

Si la!

In Zhang Xuan’s moment of shock, a powerful Sword Intent suddenly burst into the sky, tearing right through the Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation and soaring up into the sky, reminiscent of pillar of blinding light that connected the heavens with the earth.

Huaji! Huaji!

Along with the appearance of the ray of light, Zhang Xuan felt the Sword Intent within him being completely suppressed, preventing him from utilizing it at all.

Following which, the earth began shaking intensely, and a scarlet stone platform slowly rose from a crack in the stream. There was a sword plunged into the stone platform.

Even from afar, one could already feel an unbelievably sharp sword qi harnessed within the sword, and it felt as if it was threatening to slice them into thin shreds.

“That is... a Saint high-tier artifact?” Zhang Xuan’s face warped in astonishment as he clenched his fists tightly.

A powerful aura which could burst a hole even through the Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation, along with that indomitable Sword Intent—there could only be one possibility...

The weapon before him had far surpassed the level of ordinary Saint intermediate-tier artifacts, reaching the level of Saint high-tier!

Only a weapon of that caliber could wield the strength to overwhelm even a grade-8 formation and instill a feeling of helplessness in him.

“That must be the personal sword of the Old Sword Maestro!” While Zhang Xuan still pondering over the matter, another identical ‘Zhang Xuan’ appeared with a grim look on his face.

Naturally, the one who had subdued Ji Lingzhen with ease earlier was the clone, and the one who had just appeared was the real Zhang Xuan.

Previously, when the real Zhang Xuan realized that he wouldn’t be a match for Ji Lingzhen, he swiftly concealed himself within the mist and made use of the opportunity to swap places with his clone.

And his clone really didn’t let him down, crushing Ji Lingzhen with ease... Just that, he didn’t think that Ji Lingzhen would still have another card up his sleeves!

Considering how the sword was lying in the middle of the Sword Lagoon, the chances were that it was the personal sword which the Old Sword Maestro had left behind.

Could it be that Ji Lingzhen had successfully tamed the sword?

If that was the case, they would really be in a dire position.

“Like I have told you, only when you have truly comprehended Sword Quintessence will you be qualified to make me submit to you and obtain that old man’s heritage... Why are you waking me at this moment? Do my words sound like a joke to you?” A crisp voice reminiscent of a bell sounded from the sword.

There was a special quality to the voice that allowed it to echo even within one’s soul.

Saint high-tier artifacts had the ability to slay Primordial Spirit and erode one’s mental fortitude. If one were to get careless

around them, one's state of mind could very well be shaken by them.

“Elder, the reason why I pleaded for you to appear is to request your help in dealing with my enemy... I hope that you can help me kill that, that...” Ji Lingzhen turned around to point at Zhang Xuan, but the sight that he saw left his face freezing in shock instead.

He was sure that there was only one ‘Zhang Xuan’ earlier, so how did he split into two all of a sudden?

“Kill?”

The sword embedded in the stone platform also swiftly understood what was going on, and in the next moment, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt a wave of Sword Intent locking in place and assessing him from head to toe. He tried resisting it, but he found that he was unable to move at all. Realizing that he was completely helpless against that sword, cold sweat began dripping down his back.

“Y-yes!” It took a while before Ji Lingzhen recovered from his shock, and he hurriedly nodded in response.

“The items you have tributed to me over the years did help me regain consciousness. In view of your efforts, I’ll grant you this favor and kill a person for you. However, you are still lacking in your mastery of swordsmanship for me to submit to you. We’ll only talk about that after you have comprehended Sword Quintessence.”

After saying those words, the sword on the stone platform trembled slightly, and a powerful wave of Sword Intent abruptly caved in on the two Zhang Xuans. It felt like as long as the sword were to will it, the both of them would be killed easily.

“Thank you, elder!” Seeing that the sword was willing to stand up on his behalf, Ji Lingzhen heaved a huge sigh of relief. He directed a savage look at the two young men, and the deep hatred in his eyes was apparent.

If not for those two fellows, he could have used the tributing of the Sword of Faint Whispers and Sword of Faint Warble to

win the goodwill of the sword, and with that, he might just be able to convince the latter to hand him the heritage.

But now... he could only expend the goodwill with the sword for a favor to kill that bastard. Just like this, this ideal opportunity for a breakthrough was blown!

Just as Ji Lingzhen thought that the sword was going to make a move, the sword's doubtful voice suddenly sounded, "Which one of those two do you want me to kill?"

"Which one of those two?" Ji Lingzhen frowned upon hearing that question.

In truth, he was also deeply perplexed over this matter. Shouldn't there be only one of Master Teacher Zhang Xuan? Why would there suddenly be two of them? Could they be twins? But even twins wouldn't have such identical appearances, dispositions, and even souls!

"I am the real one, he's the fake!"

"I am the real one, he's the fake!"

The two Zhang Xuans simultaneously pointed to one another, glaring at the other indignantly.

"This..."

Seeing how even the movements of those two fellows were identical, as if a mirror, Ji Lingzhen fell into a daze.

...

While such a farce was occurring within the formation, a huge commotion had broken out amidst the crowd outside.

All of the sword practitioners had halted their cultivation to look at the burst of Sword Intent in the air, and their bodies trembled uncontrollably in agitation.

"That must be from the Old Sword Maestro's personal sword! Does it mean that... the heritage is about to surface?"

"I have waited so many years just for this day! Let's go over to take a look!"

“I must snatch over the heritage no matter who obtains it, otherwise my centuries of hard work would have gone to vain...”

“I shall slay anyone who stands in my way of obtaining the heritage!”

Everyone’s eyes had reddened upon seeing this sight. Some were out of agitation, some were out of envy, some were out of greed, and some were out of all three.

Many of them had camped here for several centuries now, and it was not without reason why they would devote such a huge portion of their lifespan in the Sword Lagoon. Of course, a part of the reason was to advance their comprehension of swordsmanship, but more than that, they were biding their time for the day that the heritage of the Old Sword Maestro rose from the dirt!

Otherwise, even if they could refine their mastery of swordsmanship in the Sword Lagoon, they would have never wasted several centuries of their life here...

The Old Sword Maestro had stood at the very peak of Qianchong Empire. Countless opponents had challenged him, and some were even experts from the Empire Alliance, but he remained undefeated until his death. If they could obtain his heritage, they would be able to overcome their current bottleneck and reach far greater heights!

“It must be the young man who has just entered. Let’s head over to take a look!”

Someone amidst the crowd exclaimed, and the crowd hurriedly rushed toward the area behind the stone wall.

Previously, a young man had easily defeated Ma Minghai, who had comprehended the Half-Quintessence, and barely ten minutes after he walked into the formation, a huge pillar of Sword Intent suddenly rose from within. For such a situation to occur, it could only mean that the young man had managed to free the Old Sword Maestro’s personal sword from its seal!

The emergence of the Old Sword Maestro’s heritage was an opportunity of a lifetime. The young man might have

displayed astounding might earlier, but just this much wouldn't deter them from fighting over the heritage.

Very soon, they arrived before the formation.

The structure of the Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation had already been destroyed by the burst of Sword Intent from the sword earlier, putting it in a precarious situation, on the verge of shattering at any moment.

It might have been difficult for them to overcome the formation in the past, but in its current state, it wouldn't be able to hinder their passageway anymore.

"Everyone, let's calm down and discuss a plan first. We have all witnessed that fellow's strength, and it's apparent that he's no ordinary cultivator. One on one, none of us will be an opponent for him. Thus, I propose that we collaborate with one another to subdue him first!" an old man halted the crowd and said.

"He's right. We'll only stand a chance against that fellow if we were to unite with one another!" a voice of agreement swiftly sounded from the crowd.

"But how do we determine the allocation of the heritage after that?" asked another member of the crowd.

"We have known each other for quite some time now, so we have some understanding of what each of us is capable of. So, I say that we collaborate with one another to obtain the heritage first, and after that, we can study the heritage together!" the old man suggested.

"Sounds good to me!"

Voices of consent swiftly rippled through the crowd.

The Old Sword Maestro's heritage was bound to be incredibly profound. If they were sufficiently talented to figure it by themselves, they wouldn't have ended up sitting before the stone wall for centuries yet still be unable to take the final step forward.

Besides, they also knew that if any one of them were to attempt to claim the heritage for himself, that person would

never make it out of here alive. Assuming that that person really did manage to escape from their encirclement, his friends and family would also swiftly meet with the vengeance of those gathered here.

“Good. Let’s proceed ahead then!”

Having successfully come to a consensus, the crowd began marching into the formation.

...

At the same time, on the island, many young men were standing opposite to one another with wary looks in their eyes.

“Sun Gan, we can be considered as old acquaintances with one another, so you should know that even if you are able to snatch away my jade token, you will end up sustaining severe injuries yourself as well. By then, you would be easily eliminated by other candidates too. Since that’s the case, why don’t we team up to eliminate the others instead?” one of the young men proposed.

Standing opposite to the young man was the person whom Ma Minghai recognized as ‘Brother Sun’. Brother Sun contemplated for a moment before replying with an amiable smile, “Brother Hu is right. If we were to clash with one another, the victor will surely be severely wounded at the end of the battle. It’s simply not worthwhile. In any case, we only have to eliminate 10 more candidates, so it would be wiser for us to team up and eliminate other candidates. There’s really no need to fight this tough battle.”

“Very well. Let’s make a Master Teacher Vow then. We shall work with one another to eliminate others, and we are not to turn on one another until the end of the secondary selection.” Brother Hu said.

A Master Teacher Vow was more of an informal promise, and it wasn’t binding. Nevertheless, in view of their standing, it was unlikely that they would stoop so low as to renege on their words.

“Very well...” Brother Sun nodded, but halfway through his words, there was suddenly an abrupt disturbance in the

spiritual energy in the surroundings.

Following which, a pillar of Sword Intent burst into the sky.

“A treasure has surfaced...”

The eyes of the young men gathered in the area narrowed their eyes.

They were all top-notch geniuses in their own regions, and every single one of them was deeply knowledgeable. The Sword Intent was powerful, but it carried no hostility at all. As such, it was unlikely to be emanated by a cultivator. Since that was the case, it was likely to be the occurrence of a phenomenon as a result of the emergence of a treasure.

“I heard that Qianchong Empire has a Sword Lagoon, and hidden within it is an exceptionally powerful Saint artifact. There was once an expert who attempted to venture into the depths of the Sword Lagoon to uncover the secret behind it, only to be chased away by the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion under the pretext that this was a heritage left behind for the populace of Qianchong Empire, so it should only be acquired by them... All along, I thought that it was only a legend, but this... Could the island we are on really be the Sword Lagoon?” Brother Hu exclaimed with fists tightly clenched in agitation.

All of them had heard of Qianchong Empire’s Sword Lagoon, but they didn’t think that the secondary selection would actually be held there. More importantly, the powerful Sword Intent that was radiating from that blinding pillar of light was a clear sign that the treasure that had surfaced possessed extraordinary strength!

Whether the legend was true or not, as long as they could obtain that treasure, their strength would surely increase by leaps and bounds. With a superior Saint-tier artifact in hand, they would be able to make a name for themselves even in a place as competitive as the Sanctum of Sages!

“Let’s head over to take a look!” With irrepressible excitement on his face, Brother Hu proposed.

“Let’s not hurry into making a move first. Considering the scale of the phenomenon, everyone on the island should have noticed the emergence of the treasure by now. Given so, there’s bound to be a tough fight over it. Since that’s the case, why don’t we make an agreement to team up first? Otherwise... with our strength, we won’t have much of an advantage over others, especially against that Zhang Xuan!” Brother Sun quickly halted the crowd and said.

“Zhang Xuan? The rules of the secondary selection prohibit the usage of puppets and weapons. That lad is just powerful for his own cultivation realm. As long as we don’t suppress our cultivation, we’ll surely be able to thrash him with ease!” Brother Hu replied casually, clearly not thinking of Zhang Xuan as a threat.

There was an unbreachable gap between the strength of Primordial Spirit realm cultivators and Leaving Aperture realm cultivators—this was common knowledge known to all cultivators. As long as he fought with his full strength, he should be able to subdue Zhang Xuan easily!

“The rule which Zhao shi has set is that artifacts are not to be used in any manner that contributes to the elimination of a candidate. If he were to just use his puppets to keep us at bay, preventing up from getting to the treasure, that wouldn’t be against the rules!” Brother Sun replied.

“This...” Brother Hu was taken aback.

Thinking about it once more, Zhao Xingmo did say that artifacts weren’t allowed in the elimination of other candidates... As long as Zhang Xuan didn’t attempt to break their jade tokens with his puppets, whatever actions he made with his puppets wouldn’t be considered as an infringement of the rules.

“What do you suggest then?” Brother Hu hesitated for a moment before asking.

With just the strength of the few of them, they wouldn’t be a match for those puppets even if they were to team up with one another.

“Simple... As soon as we meet Zhang Xuan, we should just charge forward and subdue him before he can release his puppets. With our combined strength, we should stand a pretty good chance at success!” Brother Sun said as a glint flashed across his eyes.

1280 Five Minutes

“Charge forward and subdue him?” Brother Hu and the other young men fell into deep contemplation.

“With our strength, as long as we collaborate with one another, it shouldn’t be too difficult for us to seal his cultivation before he can release his artifacts! Once we succeed, we won’t have to worry about him anymore. By then, we can just fight it out amongst ourselves to determine the allocation of the treasure. What do you say about that?” Brother Sun analyzed the situation for the crowd.

“Zhang Xuan will indeed be a huge trouble to deal with if we don’t strike him down promptly. As long as he remains in the race, there’s no way any one of us will be able to acquire the treasure. I approve of your idea!” Brother Hu nodded.

The others also quickly expressed their agreement to the temporary collaboration as well.

“Alright. Since we are all agreeable to the matter, let’s make a Master Teacher Vow. Anyone who violates our agreement shall have his reputation torn to shreds!” Brother Sun said.

“Very well!” The others nodded in agreement.

Very soon, everyone made their vows, and the group began making their way in the direction where the treasure had appeared.

As powerful as the massive formation cast over the island was, as top-notch geniuses, it didn’t take long for the group to overcome it and make their way over the stone wall.

Circumventing the stone wall, they soon found themselves standing at the boundary of a land shrouded in mist.

There, they found that all of the remaining twenty or so candidates were gathered in the area as well.

“Shall we make an agreement? Let’s first obtain the treasure before fighting it out amongst us?” Brother Sun swiftly raised

his previous suggestion to the larger crowd.

“Very well!”

The crowd knew that a temporary teamwork with the others would boost their chances of acquiring the treasure, so they swiftly agreed to Brother Sun’s idea.

...

“Regardless of which one is real and which one is fake, just kill the both of them to be safe!” Lying on the ground, Ji Lingfeng exclaimed anxiously.

“Indeed, elder. Please kill both of them for me...” Ji Lingzhen clasped his fist to the sword and requested.

Dealing with one Zhang Xuan had nearly cost him his life. Now that another had popped up, he wouldn’t stand a chance at all without the help of the sword.

“Kill the both of them? Well, I guess that I can help you. However, don’t you think that you should show some sincerity in exchange? For example, another sword of the same caliber of the Sword of Faint Warble...”

“This...” Ji Lingzhen’s face twitched.

Finding an ordinary Saint intermediate-tier artifact in Qianchong Empire was no difficult feat, but those of the Sword of Faint Warble’s caliber only numbered a few, and they were extremely difficult to find and obtain.

Otherwise, he wouldn’t have put himself at risk and agree to help Ji Lingfeng over his sword.

“Elder, you also know that swords of that caliber are extremely hard to find. If you could just give me some time, I promise you that I’ll find one for you. However, that young man over there must be killed as soon as possible, or else there’ll be great trouble...” Ji Lingzhen hesitated for a brief moment before replying anxiously.

But before he could finish his words, the young man not too far away had already interjected with a voice filled with disdain, “In the end, you are just unwilling to offer my sword to the elder!”

Following that, one of the Zhang Xuans stepped forward, and with deep indignation reflected in his eyes, he cried, “Elder, do you know why the both of them are so determined to kill me? That’s because they have stolen a top-notch Saint intermediate-tier sword which has been passed down through my clan over many generations from me! It’s out of fear that I would alert the elders in my clan of the matter that he lured me here, intending to silence me!”

“You are saying that we stole your sword?”

“Who in the world stole your sword? You are the one who stole my spirit stones and the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition from me, you bastard!”

Not expecting those two Zhang Xuans to interject at this crucial moment, Ji Lingzhen and Ji Lingfeng were stunned for a moment before they lashed out furiously.

Can you get any more shameless than that?

When have we stolen your sword? Don’t you dare hurl false accusations at us!

On the other hand, after hearing the words from the two Zhang Xuan, the sword on the stone platform shook its blade and sealed Ji Lingzhen and Ji Lingfeng’s mouths with its sword qi. After which, it asked, “Lad, you said that Ji Lingzhen stole your sword? What tier is it?”

“Elder, my sword is at Half-Grand Dominion realm. Even though it hasn’t reached Saint high-tier yet, it isn’t too far from that... An elder in my clan has bestowed it to me in case I encounter any danger in my journey, and he has reminded me time and time again not to lose it!” One of the Zhang Xuans replied anxiously.

“A Half-Grand Dominion realm sword?” The sword in the platform harrumphed coldly, and a burst of Sword Intent suddenly emanated from it, as if reflecting the overwhelming rage it was in.

“Elder, don’t listen to his nonsense! I have never taken his sword! Besides, he’s just an ordinary cultivator, so how could

he possibly have such a powerful sword in his possession?” Ji Lingzhen desperately explained.

The spirits within weapons tended to be innocent and candid in nature.

For some reason, the personal sword of the Old Sword Maestro had an interest in collecting other high-tier swords. Thus, Ji Lingzhen brought the Sword of Faint Whisper and Sword of Faint Warble over, hoping to win the sword’s goodwill through offering them.

He thought that after several centuries of companionship, they would already be considered as friends with one another. Yet, the sword actually chose to trust the words of that young man over his!

“Who are you saying is an ordinary cultivator? I am a genius of a Sage Clan, the Zhang Clan at that! Elder, if you don’t believe my words, you can check my blood...” As he said those words, Zhang Xuan flicked a droplet of blood toward the sword lodged in the stone platform.

“Offspring of Sage Clans possess the strength of old Sages in their bloodline. Through using a unique method, it’s possible to draw out the Sage Aura in it...” the sword on the stone platform mumbled as it shook its blade.

Wuuuuuuuu!

Numerous surges of sword qi landed on the droplet of blood, and a slight, divine aura rippled out from it.

“It’s very thin, to the point that it’s almost negligible, but without a doubt, you do possess the bloodline of a Sage Clan...” the sword said.

“This...” Ji Lingzhen body stiffened.

In the information which Ji Lingfeng had provided him, Zhang Xuan should have just been an insignificant figure from Qingyuan Empire. When in the world did he become an offspring of a Sage Clan, not to mention, the powerful Zhang Clan at that?

If he had known that Zhang Xuan was related to the Zhang Clan, he would have never dared to make a move on him!

“Elder, please don’t listen to the nonsense that fellow is uttering! One must possess a very high comprehension over swordsmanship before one can possibly earn the recognition of a Half-Grand Dominion realm sword. However, that fellow is a saber practitioner. Even if he knows a little of swordsmanship as well, there’s no way his minor understanding in the Way of Sword would be sufficient for him to tame such a sword...” Seeing that the sword was beginning to waver, Ji Lingfeng quickly spoke up.

Since neither Ji Lingzhen nor he was a match for Zhang Xuan, they only had the personal sword of the Old Sword Maestro to fall back on. Their fates were dependent on the decision made by the sword. If the sword were to be beguiled by Zhang Xuan, they would be the ones who would die here today!

Recalling their encounter with Zhang Xuan so far, he had shown superior proficiency in saber art, fist art, palm art, and movement art, but as for sword art... it didn’t seem like he knew much about it.

Swords were light and agile whereas sabers were heavy and powerful. While both weapons may appear similar, they were very different in nature. Those who were proficient in the saber were not necessarily proficient in the sword too!

As long as they were to bite relentlessly on this point, they should be able to convince the sword that it was impossible for Zhang Xuan to have a Half-Grand Dominion realm sword in his possession, and that Zhang Xuan had been lying all this while!

As expected, as soon as it heard those words from Ji Lingfeng, the sword on the stone platform immediately spoke with a displeased voice, “Lad, you specialize in saber art?”

For many years, sabers and swords had been in a rivaling relationship, both vying for supremacy. Naturally, the sword would be displeased to hear that Zhang Xuan specialized in the saber instead.

“Elder, please don’t listen to the lies he is spouting! I am a sword practitioner, so the weapon I specialize in is naturally the sword! My comprehension of swordsmanship has already reached the level of Upper Sword Heart, so how can I possibly be a saber practitioner?” Zhang Xuan exclaimed indignantly as he tapped his finger forward.

Tz la!

A surge of sword qi flew across the air, causing a cold, sharp glint to reflect onto the surroundings.

From the pure Sword Intent, it could be deduced that Zhang Xuan had long reached the level of Upper Sword Heart, just a step away from Half-Quintessence.

“You...”

Arriving at the same conclusion as well, Ji Lingzhen and Ji Lingfeng were stunned.

It was just a moment ago they had seen that fellow controlling over a hundred Saint low-tier sabers to deal with Ji Lingfeng’s formation plate, so they assumed that he specialized in the saber... Yet, how in the world did his field of specialty turn into the sword all of a sudden?

Furthermore, they realized that his Sword Intent was so pure that even theirs paled in comparison to it!

“A pure and firm Sword Intent! Those who don’t carry true passion toward swordsmanship will never be able to comprehend such a realm!” the sword on the stone platform complimented earnestly.

“H-how can this be...”

Ji Lingzhen and Ji Lingfeng’s bodies stiffened.

It was apparent from the sword’s tone that it was full of approval for Zhang Xuan... If so, things were really bad for them. It would be nigh impossible for them to convince the sword to kill the young man.

“In order to become closer with the Old Sword Maestro’s personal sword, I spent the last five hundred years offering treasures and artifacts to it. The wealth I have spent on it can

easily number up to several ten thousand concentrated high-tier spirit stones... On top of that, my comprehension of swordsmanship has reached Half-Quintessence as well. Yet, after so many years, not once have I ever received its recognition... How could that fellow receive the sword's compliment despite only being at Upper Sword Heart?" Ji Lingzhen couldn't accept the situation.

Taming a high-tier sword was somewhat similar to taming a beast. Continuous and steady effort was required for the high-tier sword to accept one.

In order to get close the Old Sword Maestro's personal sword, he had gone to great lengths, but never once did he receive the other party's compliment. On the other hand, Zhang Xuan had only spoken a few words, but the sword was already full for compliments for him... When did the sword become so understanding?

If the sword had been so understanding from the start, he wouldn't have failed to make any progress despite centuries of effort!

"Wait a moment... That fellow is using demonic tunes and Impartation of Heaven's Will!" Ji Lingfeng hurriedly sent a telepathic message over to Ji Lingzhen.

He could tell that there was a unique quality to the other party's voice that seemed to put one in a trance. If not for that, the sword would have never believed Zhang Xuan so easily!

"That bastard!" Ji Lingzhen also swiftly realized the same after Ji Lingfeng had pointed it out, and his gaze swiftly turned cold.

"Elder, please don't fall for his deception..." Ji Lingzhen anxiously stepped forward and persuaded.

However, Zhang Xuan swiftly shot him a piercing glance and bellowed, "Silence!"

After which, he turned his sight back to the sword and explained, "Elder, the main reason why those two men want to kill me is because... I have fully grasped the conception behind the Old Sword Maestro's '剑' (Sword) character, and

my comprehension of swordsmanship is also about to reach Sword Quintessence. They feared that I would overtake them, that's why they have been wanting to suppress me for a long time now..."

"You have fully grasped the '劍 (Sword)' character?" the sword on the stone platform trembled intensely upon hearing those words, and it hurriedly asked on.

"Of course!" Zhang Xuan nodded proudly. "All in all, the character harnesses a total of 107 sword arts. On the surface, the sword arts appear to be individual of one another, and some of them were conflicting even, but... this is also where the wisdom of the Old Sword Maestro lies. He has managed to combine all 107 sword arts together to create a new sword art. Elder, may I know if my analysis is right?"

The sword on the platform shook in agitation as it gestured on, "Continue!"

"While the sword art doesn't manifest itself in the '劍 (Sword)' character, I am still able to deduce a part of it. Most likely, it would have a grand air so as to allow it to harness and control any sword art within it... If I'm not mistaken, the final sword art that the Old Sword Maestro has formed out of the 107 sword arts should be a type of Sword Formation, and in order to activate it, we would need your strength, elder!" Zhang Xuan said.

The scriblings on the stone tablet outside contained the knowledge of experts over many generations. While their interpretation was erroneous on a whole, there were bits and pieces of truth in each of them, and through the Library of Heaven's Path, he was able to derive out the most accurate cultivation method to the sword arts.

After which, with his deep understanding of swordsmanship, it wasn't too hard for him to deduce a little ahead!

"You're right..." the sword on the stone tablet replied as it assessed the young man before it once more. The more it looked at the young man, the more satisfying he became to it.

To be able to deduce this much from just the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character itself, the young man’s talent was really frighteningly high.

If Ji Lingzhen could comprehend so much back then, it might have already submitted to him and became his weapon.

“You said that you were about to reach Sword Quintessence... May I know how long will it take? Ten years? Fifty years? Or a hundred years?” the sword asked in agitation.

The young man already managed to achieve a complete grasp of the character which the Old Sword Maestro had left behind. As long as he achieved Sword Quintessence, he would be able to meet the requirements for the Old Sword Maestro’s heritage.

“I don’t need that much time...”

At which, Zhang Xuan closed his eyes before continuing, “Just give me a moment... Five minutes would do!” The formation refers to the huge formation that causes one to walk in loops. Zhang Xuan faced it while he was attempting to find Zhang Jiuxiao.

1281 Sword Quintessence

“Five minutes?” The sword on the stone platform froze.

Sword Quintessence was the highest level of comprehension toward swordsmanship, so naturally, it was no easy feat to achieve that realm. Without several centuries of experience and accumulation, it was nigh impossible to make the breakthrough.

Even the Old Sword Maestro, famed to be one of the greatest geniuses in swordsmanship in his era, had to work ceaselessly for more than a hundred years before he managed to achieve that realm!

On the other hand, the young man before him appeared to only be in his early twenties, and yet, he actually claimed that he would be able to achieve a breakthrough within five minutes...

How could that be possible?

“Elder, that is clearly nonsense! He’s obviously trying to stall for time. If we don’t kill him right now, there’s no saying that he would do within those five minutes!” Seeing that the situation was developing in a direction beyond his control, Ji Lingzhen exclaimed anxiously.

I didn’t summon you out to chat with the enemy... As a weapon, can you at least show some professionalism?

“Shut up!” the sword bellowed furiously.

Weng!

Before Ji Lingzhen could even react, a powerful surge of sword qi was already darting his way. Horrified, he quickly channeled his zhenqi to defend himself.

Peng!

However, the sword qi still overcame his defense and struck his chest squarely. His face reddened, and a spurt of fresh blood escaped from his mouth. At the same time, a glaring horizontal cut appeared across his chest.

All along, while Ji Lingzhen knew the sword to be a Saint high-tier artifact, he had no idea what its exact tier was. However, when he felt the sword qi emanated by the sword, he immediately realized that the true strength wielded by the sword was far beyond his imagination.

Just a simple sword qi was enough to render him completely helpless. If the sword were to attempt to claim his life, there would have been nothing he could have done about it!

“Try uttering another word, and I’ll kill you this instant!” the sword harrumphed coldly.

It was also no wonder why it would be angry.

Prior to the Old Sword Maestro’s death, he had sealed the sword here as an inheritance for his successor. There were two conditions that the successor had to meet in order to unseal it.

Firstly, he must fully comprehend the conceptualization behind the ‘劍’ (Sword) character outside. Secondly, his comprehension of swordsmanship must achieve the level of Sword Quintessence.

Only when these two factors were met would the sword finally be freed from the stone platform. Over the years, many geniuses had found its way to it, but it was a pity that none of them had been able to meet the two conditions simultaneously.

Ji Lingzhen could be said to be the one who had come the closest to unsealing it in the past several thousand years, but it was a pity that despite several centuries of hard work, he was still unable to take the final step to achieving Sword Quintessence...

If Zhang Xuan was really able to achieve Sword Quintessence, he would be able to free it from its restraints. Naturally, how could it allow others to interfere with this hard-to-come-by opportunity?

“Elder...” Not expecting that several centuries of companionship would actually mean nothing as compared to a couple of words uttered by Zhang Xuan, Ji Lingzhen trembled in fury. Clenching his fists tightly, he exclaimed, “That fellow over there has used the Impartation of Heaven’s Will and

demonic tunes in order to sway you. It's clear that he's up to no good!"

"Sway me?"

"That's right, elder. There's no sword practitioner who doesn't know how difficult it is to achieve Sword Quintessence. Even the Old Sword Maestro had to take many years of hard work before managing to achieve that realm!" Ji Lingzhen spoke with a worried tone.

"He's only at Upper Sword Heart, not even reaching the level of Half-Quintessence. How could he possibly achieve a breakthrough to Sword Quintessence within just mere minutes? That's obviously an attempt to stall for time. He's probably intending on using some kind of lowly method to tame you..."

"This..." Hearing those words, the sword hesitated.

There was some sense to what Ji Lingzhen had said. If it was that easy to achieve Sword Quintessence, it wouldn't have been known as the threshold to the pinnacle of swordsmanship!

Back in those years, countless sword experts of the Empire Alliance had come to challenge the Old Sword Maestro, and there was no lack of 8-star master teachers amongst them. However, all of them ended up being defeated by his superior comprehension of swordsmanship.

From this, it could be seen how difficult it was to achieve the level of Sword Quintessence.

From such a perspective, it was indeed doubtful whether a young man in the early twenties would be able to achieve this breakthrough or not.

"That fellow is a despicable and scheming fellow. Without a doubt, he's up to his underhanded tricks once more. Elder, I suggest that you kill him right this instant just to be safe..." Noticing that the sword was starting to sway in his favor, Ji Lingzhen immediately pressed on with an anxious tone.

But halfway through his words, his body suddenly stiffened instinctively. Following which, an unbelievably grand and

pure Sword Intent burst into the sky.

Hong long!

It was as if huge waves had been raised in the Sword Lagoon. In the blink of an eye, countless sword qi began gathering toward them, forming a frightening hurricane around them.

“This is...”

Ji Lingzhen clearly felt the Sword Intent within his body being suppressed entirely, preventing him from even moving a single step. An ominous premonition loomed over his mind, and his face paled. He slowly turned his stiffened neck over in the direction where the Sword Intent was coming from.

The young man who was just talking a moment earlier came into his sight. His eyes were still completely shut, but in this moment, it felt as if he had transformed into a sharp blade which could challenge even the deities even.

Weng weng weng weng!

Countless blades flew in from outside the formation, and they swiftly took a kneeling stance before the young man, as if paying respects to their new emperor.

“Servility of the Myriad Swords... This is Sword Quintessence?” Ji Lingzhen widened his eyes in fright before slowly shaking his head in disbelief.

It was just a moment after he said that it was impossible for the young man to achieve a breakthrough to Sword Quintessence and he was just stalling for time when such a situation occurred. At this moment, he couldn't help but feel as if the world had directed its full malicious intentions toward him.

Seven hundred years ago, he reached Half-Quintessence. Ever since then, he had been trying to further his mastery of swordsmanship to take the final step forward, and for this, he had resorted to all sorts of means and studied all kinds of books. Yet, no matter what he tried, he was still unable to grasp the realm above Half-Quintessence. On the other hand, the young man had only closed his eyes for a few minutes, and he had already reached the level that was beyond his reach...

The stark contrast between both of their plights left him on a mental breakdown.

Had it not been for his firm mind, the final string of rationality in his mind might have just snap there and then, leaving him falling endlessly down the abyss of lunacy.

He has really comprehended Sword Quintessence? This is really bad...

On the other hand, Ji Lingfeng's eyes were narrowed in horror.

He thought that as long as they were to engage the help of the Old Sword Maestro's personal sword, they should be able to get rid of Zhang Xuan without any trouble. In fact, that was one of the contributing factors why they chose to make their move here, so that they would at least have a trump card to fall back on if things went awry. Yet, who could have thought that the both of them would end up hooking up together, and Zhang Xuan even managed to achieve a breakthrough to Sword Quintessence...

At this rate, the sword might even acknowledge Zhang Xuan as its master!

To put it in concise terms, they were in deep shit.

Run! Realizing this, Ji Lingfeng suppressed the pain that was resonating throughout his body with every move and fled as fast as he could out of the mist.

Even though he had only managed to get through the Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation thanks to Ji Lingzhen's directions back then, he had memorized the passageway from the previous experience. Furthermore, the formation had been mostly destroyed by the burst of Sword Intent from the awakening of the sword, thus making it easier from him to escape from the area.

Hualala!

Barely after taking two steps out, before he could even get far, he suddenly felt a chill running through his body. Before he could do anything, he suddenly felt the upper half of his body tumbling forward uncontrollably.

Turning his head over, he saw Ji Lingzhen retracting his finger coldly, and the nonchalant look on the latter's face was as if saying the deed he had just committed was nothing worthy of note.

He watched as Ji Lingzhen turned around to the stone platform and clasped his fist respectfully, saying, "Elder, I only made a move on Zhang shi under the deception of my foolish younger brother. As you know, it has been many years since I left the Sword Lagoon, so I was unaware of the happenings outside..."

"You..."

Padah!

Ji Lingfeng's upper body fell onto the ground, and blood spurted wildly from the severed halves of his body. Even up to the moment of his death, his eyes were widened in disbelief, as if not daring to believe that his elder brother would actually kill him with his own hands.

Used to seeing bloodshed, the sword didn't flinch at the slightest by the gore before its eyes. Instead, it bellowed coldly in response to Ji Lingzhen's words, "Silence! Don't interrupt that lad's breakthrough!"

"Yes!" Ji Lingzhen hurriedly fell silent and stood obediently on the spot.

Since even a newcomer like Ji Lingfeng was able to see through the attitude of the sword, how could Ji Lingzhen, who had accompanied the sword for hundreds of years, possibly be oblivious to it?

The requirement to taming the sword was to comprehend Sword Quintessence. Since Zhang Xuan had successfully reached Sword Quintessence, and he had also displayed a thorough understanding of the conceptualization behind the character the Old Sword Maestro had left behind, it was only a matter of time before he successfully tamed the sword.

Once that were to happen, Ji Lingzhen would be a goner. Thus, he decisively chose to slay Ji Lingfeng and pin all the blame on the latter.

In the face of life and death, so long as he could survive, he wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice the life of his kin!

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan paid no heed to the mess that was happening at the moment. Under the protection of his clone, he immersed himself in the profound knowledge contained in the new Heaven's Path Sword Art which he had compiled earlier.

This sword art could be said to have contained the wisdom of the strongest sword practitioners in not just the Conferred Empires but even the Empire Alliance as well! As Zhang Xuan's comprehension of swordsmanship deepened, his Primordial Spirit also began morphing in the shape of a sword, and he felt like he could call forth devastating might with just a wave of his hand.

When his Primordial Spirit finally completed the metamorphosis into a sword form, he found that he seemed to command a natural authority over swords that were weaker than him. With just mere thoughts, he was able to drive them into action.

But of course, this was just the most elementary form of control. If he wished to wield absolute control over the sword, he would still have to gain the acknowledgement of the sword and tame it.

Nevertheless, this was already an extremely frightening ability

This effectively meant that no sword practitioner of the same cultivation realm as him could rival him anymore!

“With the deepening of my comprehension toward swords, I can now infuse Sword Intent even to the simplest of movements. Also, when I'm wielding a sword, the fighting prowess I can exert is around twofold as compared to when I'm fighting with fist art or palm art!” Assessing the Sword Intent flowing within his body, Zhang Xuan began to make a primary gauge of his current strength.

As expected of Sword Quintessence, it's indeed formidable... Now that I have achieved this level of strength, I wonder if I'll

be able to defeat my clone... A thought suddenly came into Zhang Xuan's mind.

However, he soon shook his head, Forget it, I don't have masochistic tendencies!

He and his clone might have originated from the same soul, but through the superior capabilities of the Nine Hearts Lotus, his clone wielded a fighting prowess far beyond his. Every time Zhang Xuan thought that he had made substantial improvement and wanted to exact vengeance for his previous humiliation, he would find that his clone had grown even stronger...

It should probably be the same this time around.

Both their souls were connected, allowing them to share everything telepathically. As soon as their minds connected with one another, his clone would also be able to grasp Sword Quintessence as well. Given so, whatever advantage he had over his clone would be undone as well.

If he were to really dare make a move, there was little doubt that the one who would be lying miserably on the ground afterward would be him.

With this lingering thought in mind, Zhang Xuan slowly opened his eyes.

The first thing that came into his sight was a hundred or so Saint intermediate-tier swords bowing right in front of him, every single of them trembling in fear.

I see. So that's the reason why the Dusk Cloud Sword was so fearful of Ma Minghai back then... Zhang Xuan thought.

He found that he had the strength to easily wipe away the spirit of any of the swords with just a thought. Given so, how could the sword spirits not know fear?

"Zhang shi, congratulations on your breakthrough! Please pardon me for my previous disrespect. It's due to the deception of the despicable Ji Lingfeng that I made an erroneous judgement. I beg for your forgiveness!" Following which, Zhang Xuan swiftly heard an exclamation,

Turning over, he saw Ji Lingzhen kneeling on the ground not too far away. Even though the latter was trying to keep himself composed, the slight trembling of his body still betrayed his innate fear.

Ji Lingzhen was already no match for Zhang Xuan previously, and the situation had only just worsened. The sword on the stone tablet was clearly biased against him, and the young man had already had more than a hundred Saint intermediate-tier swords under his command at the moment as well. If the young man really wanted to kill him, all it would take would be a mere thought.

“You are asking for my forgiveness?” Zhang Xuan scoffed.

Conducting a swift scan of his surroundings, he suddenly noticed that Ji Lingfeng had already been killed. Then, he traded glances with his clone, and through a telepathic interaction, he swiftly understood what was going on, and a deep frown emerged on his forehead.

To be willing to kill even his own brother, Ji Lingzhen was really the worst of scums. Morals and principles clearly meant nothing to him at all.

Thus, Zhang Xuan communicated telepathically with his clone for a moment before turning his gaze back to the stone platform.

“Zhang shi!” the sword exclaimed in agitation.

It had been sealed here ever since the death of the Old Sword Maestro, and it had been nearly ten thousand years since then. Even though it had spent most of its time in hibernation, it still direly craved for freedom. If there was a chance for it to leave this damned place, it would grasp it without any hesitation.

“Zhang shi, I have the heritage of the Old Sword Maestro on me. You have to pull me out from the stone platform for it to show...” the sword informed Zhang Xuan telepathically.

“Pull you out?” Zhang Xuan asked before coming to a realization.

He hadn't really thought of it in such a manner previously due to the astounding power displayed by the sword, but the words

that the sword had just spoken made him realize that the reason why the sword hadn't moved all this while was because there was some kind of seal trapping it in the stone platform.

For even something as strong as the sword to be unable to free itself, the seal was bound to be exceptionally powerful.

Thus, Zhang Xuan couldn't help asking, "If even you are unable to struggle free of the seal, how can I possibly be able to free you?"

1282 I Won't Be Learning Them Anymore

“This stone platform was left behind by the Old Sword Maestro as well, and only sword practitioners who have comprehended Sword Quintessence would be able to break the seal and pull me out! However, I’m not too sure about how it can be done either...” the sword replied awkwardly.

The Old Sword Maestro had passed away shortly after sealing it in the stone platform, and it had spent most of its time hibernating since then. All it knew was that in order to be freed from the stone platform, it would need to find a sword practitioner who had comprehended Sword Quintessence and the conceptualization of the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character. As for how that sword practitioner could draw it out from the stone platform... Embarrassingly, it didn’t know a thing at all.

“You aren’t too sure how it can be done either?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help heaving a deep sigh.

“Alright, let me give it a try then.”

The sword was a Saint high-tier artifact. It would be of great use to him, so he wouldn’t turn down an opportunity to obtain it.

With a swift movement, Zhang Xuan appeared before the stone platform. He grabbed the sword and exerted all of his force.

However, it was as if the sword was nailed into the stone platform, not budging in the least.

Frowning, Zhang Xuan began examining the stone platform closely.

“It’s an artifact created by a celestial designer! No wonder...”

With Zhang Xuan’s current strength, he could pluck up even an entire mountain if he wanted to. Yet, for him to be

completely helpless before a seemingly ordinary stone platform...

So, he decided to take a closer look, and he swiftly found that the entire stone platform was a celestial designer mechanism. Unless one were to use a special method to resolve both the seal and the celestial designer mechanism simultaneously, or else it would be impossible to release the sword.

“The sword said earlier that only those who had achieved Sword Quintessence would be able to draw it from the stone platform. Perhaps I need to utilize my Sword Intent while drawing the sword out for it to work...”

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan tightened his hands on the handle of the sword before closing his eyes. He quickly morphed his comprehension of Sword Quintessence into a surge of Sword Intent and slowly drove it through his body.

Hong long!

It was as if something had been activated. With a resounding buzz, a peculiar power abruptly burst forth from the stone platform. Following which, a powerful wave of Sword Intent rippled into the surroundings before swiftly forming a barrier around the area.

The first thing Zhang Xuan noticed was that his Spiritual Perception had been isolated by the barrier of Sword Intent, preventing him from sensing anything beyond the barrier. The converse was likely to be true as well—those outside were unlikely to be able to sense what was going on within the barrier too.

Frowning in uncertainty, Zhang Xuan was just about to release his grip of the sword to assess his current situation when he suddenly saw a few lingering Sword Intent in the area slowly gathering before his eyes, gradually forming the silhouette of an old man.

The old man had a slightly emaciated figure, but his very presence felt like an incredibly sharp sword which would slice through anything standing before it.

“Old Sword Maestro?” Zhang Xuan called out warily.

Even though the old man was an existence formed solely of just Sword Intent, Zhang Xuan could sense that the other party retained memories of his past. Even just as a congregation of Sword Intent, the other party still wielded might far beyond his means.

“I am Jian Zhen, the man whom others know as the Old Sword Maestro! Since you were able to awaken the will I have left behind, you must have successfully comprehended Sword Quintessence. With this, you are qualified to inherit my heritage...” the old man placed his hands behind his back and said.

One could vaguely see Sword Intent rippling within his black eyes, as if granting him the keenness to discern everything in the world.

“Kneel down and pay respects to me as your teacher, and I’ll impart you the Three Swords of Lingxu and the method to undoing the seal on the stone platform!”

“Pay respects to you as my teacher?” An inconspicuous frown emerged on Zhang Xuan’s forehead.

“To inherit my heritage and my wisdom, naturally, you have to acknowledge me as your teacher!” the Old Sword Maestro replied with a tone of unquestionable authority.

“My Three Swords of Lingxu—Sea Severing Sword, Ocean Cataclysm Sword, and Heaven Desecration Sword—are top-notch battle techniques. Even the experts of the Empire Alliance would kill for the opportunity to learn them! If my days hadn’t been numbered, I wouldn’t have left my heritage here for any outsider take it for their own!”

Typically speaking, when an expert wanted to pass down his heritage, he would first assess his student’s nature, talent, and many other aspects before deciding on whether to impart to the latter his heritage. After all, there was no expert who wouldn’t want to find an outstanding successor to further his legacy. However, by the time the Old Sword Maestro arrived in the Sword Lagoon, he was already on the verge of death, so he wasn’t in the physical state to set too many trials. Thus, he

could only leave behind the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character and the stone platform to assess his successor.

Nevertheless, even if he couldn’t make a wholesome assessment of his successor, he was determined to have his successor acknowledge him as his teacher before imparting to the latter his heritage.

It might appear to be an empty title on the surface, but to those of the Master Teacher Continent, the solemnity of their lineage was something they wouldn’t compromise on.

“Since you have spent a long time to decipher the words I have left behind, I believe that you must have been moved by my heritage for some time now. Considering how you are able to comprehend Sword Quintessence at your young age, I believe that you should be able to accomplish great things in the future. After you acknowledge me as your teacher, not only will I teach you the Three Swords of Lingxu, I’ll also impart to you the essence of my comprehension of swordsmanship. As long as you train diligently, you should have no trouble becoming a top-notch swordmaster in the Empire Alliance within three hundred years!” the Old Sword Maestro said proudly.

He had absolute trust in his own swordsmanship.

Since the young man went through all of the trouble to come here and study the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character he had left behind, it would mean that the young man was interested in obtaining his heritage.

Naturally, as the senior and teacher here, he should put on an authoritative air deserving of his standing.

Otherwise, how could he win the trust and respect of his successor?

“Three hundred years just to become the top-notch swordmaster in the Empire Alliance? That’s too long, I can’t afford to wait till then!” With a conflicted look on his face, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He had to become a 9-star master teacher before thirty in order to get rid of his Innate Fetal Poison before it blew up on him.

More importantly, he needed to wield strength on par with an 8-star pinnacle master teacher by the third month of the next year so that he could have the strength to free Luo Ruoxin from her engagement with the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan.

Three hundred years just to reach the peak in the Empire Alliance... That was simply too slow.

“You can’t afford to wait till then? What do you mean?” the Old Sword Maestro narrowed his eyes in agitation.

It wasn’t easy for him to find a suitable successor, and there was no way he was going to let this opportunity to pass down his heritage go. As a show of power, he released a powerful burst of Sword Intent into the surroundings, causing the air to moan from the pressure.

“Are you afraid that my sword art is too profound, and you are afraid that you won’t be able to succeed? If that’s the case, you don’t have to worry so! The fact that you are able to comprehend the conceptualization behind my ‘劍 (Sword)’ character shows that you aren’t lacking in intelligence. I know that the Three Swords of Lingxu might be profound, but as long as you study it diligently, there’s still at least 30% chance that you might succeed... But of course, the shorter the duration you take to comprehend the conceptualization behind my ‘劍 (Sword)’ character, the higher your chances of success!”

The reason why the Old Sword Maestro had left behind the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character was simple. He wanted to test the intelligence of his successor.

Without sufficient intelligence, even if he imparted to his successor the complete Three Swords of Lingxu, the latter would still be unable to grasp it.

Due to the lack of time, he was unable to construct the required mechanism to impose a time limit on the duration of comprehending the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character. However...

“Judging from your young age, it shouldn’t have been too long since you started comprehended my ‘劍 (Sword)’ character,

right?” the Old Sword Maestro asked. “I figure that it shouldn’t have been ten years yet. If so, your chances of success would be at least 60%!”

“This...” Zhang Xuan scratched his head and he tried his hardest to remember how long he took. “I think I took around... a minute?”

He had barely glanced at the words on the stone wall before taking in the insights left behind by the predecessors. In total, he probably only took just six seconds or so...

Of course, it would be too shocking if he said that he had taken only six seconds, so he intentionally multiplied it by ten times to cushion the blow.

“A-a minute?” the Old Sword Maestro was taken aback. The Sword Intent he had diffused in the area also began trembling in resonance to his emotions, and it felt as if they would dissipate at any moment soon. “You said that you only took a minute to see through the conceptualization of the character I have left behind?”

“Indeed. It was just a single character, but it consists of 107 different Sword Intents and sword arts. If I’m not mistaken, the heritage should be a Sword Formation. That is the most convenient method to combine all of those differing Sword Intents and sword arts together.” Zhang Xuan chuckled softly. “It actually isn’t that difficult to deduce this much.”

“You... in just a minute, you were able to see through how many sword arts there were in that character?” Unable to recover from his shock, the Old Sword Maestro exclaimed in disbelief.

A moment later, a thought came to his mind, and a deep frown containing a hint of displeasure furrowed itself in between his brows. “Lad, it seems like you have learned how to lie despite your young age... You said that you were able to see through the conceptualization behind the character I have left behind within a minute, so why don’t I give you a test then? If you are really able to figure it out, I’ll believe your words!”

He had concealed the Sword Intents and sword arts deeply within the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character, such that even swordmasters of the same tier as him would be stunned upon coming into character with the character for the first time, unable to make sense of what it was. Yet, the young man actually said that he was able to figure it out within a minute... Most likely, he was either lying or he had simply made use of the wisdom of predecessors to figure it out.

“You wish to test me? Very well.” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly.

“I’ll execute a sword art right now, and you’ll try to see how many Sword Intents and sword arts are infused into it.”

After those words were spoken, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt a killing intent surging toward him.

An ocean of sword qi materialized before his eyes, as if he had been dragged into a wholly different world. Be it the constantly changing currents or the fleeting clouds, there was not a single glance within the world where one was unable to find any sword qi.

“How about it? Are you able to tell how many sword arts are in my move?” After doing all that, the Old Sword Maestro turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan.

“This...” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “I can’t tell.”

“Such an obvious question, and you can’t tell anything at all. How do you expect me to believe your words then?” the Old Sword Maestro frowned in disapproval.

The Sword Intents and sword arts infused in the previous move he had executed were more apparent than those in the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character he had left behind. Through this, the other party’s claim that he had comprehended the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character was pretty much overthrown.

Facing the Old Sword Maestro’s doubt, Zhang Xuan didn’t panic in the slightest. Instead, he chuckled softly and said, “I wasn’t able to tell how many Sword Intents and sword arts are in that move, but I did manage to discern seventeen flaws in it!”

The reason why he was able to decipher the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character was due to the compilation of the insights from countless preceding experts. Otherwise, if he were to do it himself, he would have taken several months at the very least... Given how fast the Old Sword Maestro’s previous move came and go, even if he had comprehended Sword Quintessence, he was still unable to count the number of Sword Intents and sword arts in just a glance.

Besides... why should he go through the trouble of counting the number of Sword Intents and sword arts?

It would suffice for him to know the flaws.

“You found seventeen flaws in my move? Nonsense!” the Old Sword Maestro’s face turned livid with rage.

Paying no heed to the Old Sword Maestro’s wrath, Zhang Xuan began on a monologue, “The first flaw, even though the sword art you have executed is grand and imposing, it’s needlessly intricate. If I’m not mistaken, it’s designed as such so as to be utilized as a technique to trap others. However, considering the immense might that is devoted to the technique, to use it as a technique to trap and not kill is a huge waste of energy. In other words, the focus of the technique is wrong!”

“The second flaw, while infusing a Sword Intent targeted toward damaging Primordial Spirits would enhance the might of the sword art significantly, it also makes it more demanding on the user’s soul energy and state of mind. Should the sword practitioner be unable to meet the basic requirement of the sword art, its execution could very well result in a backlash, which could make one vulnerable for a period of time, thus creating an opening for one’s opponent to exploit...”

“The third flaw...”

“The fourth flaw...”

...

“The seventeenth flaw, the sword art is powerful but its might is unnecessarily scattered. If the might were to be devoted in a single move, it would have allowed the sword practitioner to

overpower and slay his opponent in an instant. Yet, you had to divide the might among more than a dozen of transformations in the sword art, making it excessively complicated and even weakening it in the midst of doing so...”

Shaking his head in disappointment, Zhang Xuan raised his head to look at the Old Sword Maestro, “May I know there’s anything you disagree with regarding my analysis?”

“Y-you...”

Initially, the Old Sword Maestro didn’t think of anything much when the young man first spoke. However, the more he listened to the young man’s words, the paler his face became. Eventually, by the time the young man listed the seventeenth flaw, his body was already trembling wildly.

As a swordmaster, he was still vaguely aware of the various problems there was in his sword arts... For the other party to be able to discern them with just a look, and even analyze them at a deeper level than him at that...

Just how in the world did he do it?

Gradually, the Old Sword Maestro’s astonishment transformed into overwhelming joy, “With such intelligence and eye of discernment, you’ll surely be able to master the Three Swords of Lingxu swiftly!”

His eyes glowed in excitement, and just as he was about to urge the young man into acknowledging him as his teacher once more so that he would be able to pass his heritage down, the young man suddenly sighed.

“For even a casual sword art you have executed to be plagued with flaws, your Three Swords of Lingxu is bound to be nothing much too... Forget it, you can leave your sword arts for yourself. I won’t be learning them anymore!”

“Ah?”

The Old Sword Maestro froze on the spot.

1283 Three Swords of Lingxu

Countless people wanted to learn the Old Sword Maestro's Three Swords of Lingxu. To be honest, the reason he had been severely injured back then was also due to his enemies wanting to acquire his sword art manual.

Here he was, offering the Three Swords of Lingxu to the young man, but the young man actually rejected him with such a look of disdain on his face.

The overwhelming frustration he felt left his chest feeling a little stifled.

“While I'm not interested in your sword art, your sword is indeed of some use to me.” Zhang Xuan turned to the Old Sword Maestro and asked, “If it's not too much, can I take it away with me?”

As powerful as the Old Sword Maestro had made the Three Swords of Lingxu out to be, through the Sword Intent the other party had emanated earlier, Zhang Xuan could tell that there were still many flaws in the other party's comprehension of swordsmanship.

Instead of learning swordsmanship from the other party, he would be better off collecting ordinary Saint-tier sword arts and compiling them into the Heaven's Path Sword Art.

He would be able to improve faster that way, his foundations would be stronger, and most importantly of all, he would not have to become the Old Sword Maestro's student!

To be honest, he had become so used to being a teacher himself that he found it a little awkward to become the student of another individual, even if just in title.

Seeing that the young man was still reluctant to learn his sword art, the Old Sword Maestro said with a frown, “I have sealed the Lingxu Sword in the stone platform using a technique from the Three Swords of Lingxu. If you don't learn

my sword art to a certain level of mastery, it'll be impossible for you to draw out the Lingxu Sword.”

He had sealed the Lingxu Sword in the stone platform using the Three Swords of Lingxu. Only those who had mastered the technique to a certain level would be able to free the Lingxu Sword and take it away. Naturally, the purpose for doing so was to ensure that his heritage was properly passed down.

Those who did not inherit his heritage would never be able to take the Lingxu Sword away.

After explaining that, the Old Sword Maestro was just about to begin round two of convincing Zhang Xuan to acknowledge him as his teacher when the young man suddenly bent down and touched the ground casually. Then, he kicked the four corners of the stone platform once.

Kacha!

The crisp whirring of mechanisms filled the air.

Zhang Xuan gave the stone platform one powerful stomp.

Hu!

The Lingxu Sword leaped out of the stone platform and fell into Zhang Xuan's hand.

“You... You are actually able to undo the seal and mechanism I have put in place?” The Old Sword Maestro's figure flickered in astonishment. Had he not suppressed his emotions in the last moment, he might have dissipated on the spot!

It was just a moment ago that he had told the other party that he had to learn the Three Swords of Lingxu before he could extract the sword when something like this happened.

Are you here to tear down my show?

More importantly... he had put a lot of effort into crafting the stone platform and the seal so as to ensure that nothing would go wrong, such that it would be impossible for even him to forcefully extract the sword without going through the proper means. Yet, that fellow actually succeeded in retrieving the sword with just a few casual kicks.

In that moment, the Old Sword Maestro felt like he was just a dancing clown before the young man. All of the preparations he had made were nothing more than a joke to him!

“The seal and the stone platform you have prepared are not too bad, but it’s pity that they have fatal flaws in them...” Paying no heed to the other party’s current state, Zhang Xuan chuckled as he lowered his head to assess the sword in his hand.

The Lingxu Sword had a black blade, so there was no sharp glint typical of a sword to it. At the same time, there was no sword qi that could be felt from it either. On the surface, it appeared to be no different from any ordinary sword out there.

It was only when Zhang Xuan held it in his hand that he realized what a frightening weapon it was.

He found that there was absolutely no impediment when he drove his zhenqi through it. Even with a casual swing, he would be able to bring forth power far beyond his imagination.

His cultivation was still too lacking for him to be able to bring out the full prowess of the sword, but even if he could just wield a tenth of it, he would still be able to slay a Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator easily!

This was how frightening the Lingxu Sword was!

Weng!

Just as Zhang Xuan was feeling the overwhelming strength of the Lingxu Sword, the latter suddenly began trembling intensely, seemingly trying to free itself from Zhang Xuan’s grasp.

“Hmm?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“It’s due to the nourishment of my Sword Intent over many years that the Lingxu Sword managed to become this strong. Without learning the Three Swords of Lingxu and my sword cultivation technique, it’ll be impossible for you to tame the Lingxu Sword. You should understand that a sword that can’t be tamed is unusable in battle...” the Old Sword Maestro explained proudly.

He had forged and nourished the Lingxu Sword personally, and his will was infused into it. How could others possibly tame the Lingxu Sword so easily?

But before the Old Sword Maestro could finish his explanation, the young man had already bellowed furiously, “Stop thrashing around!”

Following which, he tapped the Lingxu Sword on several points with his fingers.

Kacha! Kacha!

A series of crisp echoes rang in the air, and it did not take long for the Lingxu Sword to tremble in astonishment. It hurriedly halted its shaking and kneeled respectfully on the ground.

“Paying respects to Master!”

“Un.” With a wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan stowed the Lingxu Sword into his storage ring. Then, he turned his sight back to the Old Sword Maestro and asked doubtfully, “What did you say earlier? I wasn’t really paying attention!”

Zhang Xuan had been so busy trying to examine the strength of the Lingxu Sword that he did not hear what the Old Sword Maestro was saying.

“I-it’s nothing much...” The Old Sword Maestro’s mouth twitched uncontrollably, and the body he had formed out of Sword Intent began to dissipate.

Even though his death had left the Lingxu Sword free to take any master, he knew his sword very well. He had forged the Lingxu Sword personally, and he knew that it was an incomparably arrogant individual. Yet, to submit to the young man in the blink of an eye... this was a blow that he could not take.

“Alright. If there’s nothing else, I’ll be taking my leave first!” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist before turning around.

“This... You haven’t even learned the Three Swords of Lingxu yet; how can you leave like that?” the Old Sword Maestro exclaimed in agitation. “The area is shrouded by the Sword Intent I have infused into the stone platform previously. Unless

you learn my Three Swords of Lingxu, forcefully barging through will make you severely inju...”

Before the Old Sword Maestro could finish the word ‘injured’, the young man had already placed his finger casually on the barrier of Sword Intent, and with a light ‘hu la!’, the entire barrier of Sword Intent vanished without a trace.

“Cough cough!” The Old Sword Maestro’s face turned completely crimson. At this point, he could not bother keeping up the impression of an expert anymore. A pleading look surfaced in his eyes as he spoke. “Why don’t you reconsider the matter? My Three Swords of Lingxu is really, really formidable...”

“I know, but I truly can’t become your student!” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

The Old Sword Maestro hesitated for a moment shaking his head in resignation. “It’s fine if you don’t become my student. All I ask is that you pass down my heritage down to the later generations.”

He had thought that as long as he could accept a talented student, he would be able to bring honor and glory to his heritage. But... the young man before him was simply too outstanding! Considering how even he could not see the depths of the young man before him, it was clear that it would be nigh impossible for him to get the young man to acknowledge him as his teacher. At this point, all he could hope was for the young man to impart his heritage to a suitable person and pass down his lineage.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before turning around. “I can help you find a suitable successor to the lineage of your swordsmanship. Where’s your sword art?”

“It’s over here.” A light flickered through the Old Sword Maestro’s eyes, and a surge of Sword Intent flew straight for Zhang Xuan. Zhang Xuan did not dodge, and in an instant, he saw countless surges of sword qi flashing across his eyes. They swiftly formed a sword art manual.

Just as the Old Sword Maestro had said earlier, there were only three moves to this battle technique. However, every single move wielded might that could not be underestimated.

In fact, even the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, which Zhang Xuan had learned earlier, paled in comparison to it.

Most likely, this is a Saint high-tier battle technique... Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up.

The Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm was a technique that Ancient Sage Qiu Wu had come up with in his earlier years, and limited by his knowledge and experiences, it only met the mark of a Saint intermediate-tier battle technique. On the other hand, the Three Swords of Lingxu clearly wielded far superior might, reaching the level of Saint high-tier.

It was no wonder the Old Sword Maestro was so confident in his heritage. There was indeed a basis for his confidence.

A moment later, Zhang Xuan sighed grudgingly. But... why are there so many flaws in it? How am I supposed to learn it like that?

Sea Severing Sword, Ocean Cataclysm Sword, and Heaven Desecration Sword—each of these techniques harnessed strength and speed far greater than the last. However, the number of flaws they possessed were also so numerous that they left him completely speechless. Putting everything aside, even the most basic Sea Severing Sword had a total of 336 flaws.

Just by looking at it, Zhang Xuan had already lost his interest in learning the sword art.

“More importantly, these sword arts require the complementation of 108 swords in order to execute...”

Typically speaking, it would be impossible for a battle technique to have so many flaws, or else there was no way one could practice it without one's cultivation going berserk. The main reason the Three Swords of Lingxu had so many flaws was because the sword arts did not consist of the movement of a single sword. Rather, it was a Sword Formation, requiring a total of 108 swords in order to execute!

With each of the 108 swords moving individually, it was inevitable that there would be many more flaws in the sword art compared to other battle techniques.

Seeing the look of disgust on the face of the young man after receiving his heritage, to the point where it almost seemed like he would just vomit, the Old Sword Maestro sighed deeply and said, “This is the Three Swords of Lingxu, which I devoted my entire life into creating. If you don’t wish to learn it, I hope that you will at least find a successor for it. Please don’t let my lineage end here!”

“Don’t worry. Even though the sword arts in your Three Sword of Lingxu are plagued with flaws—just the depletion of zhenqi is a nightmare in itself—the might they harness is still considerable. I’ll try to find a way to make some improvements in them before passing them on to a suitable successor in your stead.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist sincerely.

In truth, he was only irked by the high number of flaws in the sword arts, and just the thought of the number of high-tier sword art manuals that he had to gather in order to perfect the Three Swords of Lingxu was enough to leave him feeling deeply fatigued. On the whole, he still thought that the Three Swords of Lingxu was a decent technique, wielding considerable strength.

“Ah...” Stifled by the young man’s words, the Old Sword Maestro’s figure flickered once more. “I’ll be counting on you then...”

After saying those words, ‘pah!’, he dissipated on the spot.

All he wanted to do was to pass down his heritage... but never in his dreams did he expect to meet such a fellow. In the end, he even dissipated from sheer indignation and rage before he could even pass down his comprehension of swordsmanship.

“Jeez!” Seeing the figure of the Old Sword Maestro disappearing before him, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply. “Since I have learned your sword arts and taken your sword, I’ll see your wish to the end and bring honor and glory to your swordsmanship!”

The fact that the Old Sword Maestro had gone to the trouble of setting up these trials despite the severely wounded state he was in back then was more than enough to show his determination to pass his heritage down. He did not want the sword arts he had created with much difficulty to disappear from the world just like that. He hoped to pass them down to the later generations and have them shine in their hands.

Since that was the case, Zhang Xuan would help him pass down the Three Swords of Lingxu to the right successor after he had improved it so that his name could be sung through history.

This stone platform is a treasure as well. I should take it with me!

The fact that the stone platform was able to trap the Lingxu Sword showed that it was made from decent materials. So, Zhang Xuan threw it into his storage ring with a flick of his hand.

If he could not find a use for the stone platform for the time being, using it as a sheath did not sound too bad. At this point, Zhang Xuan could not help but remember that, in his previous life, sword experts in novels were able to defeat their opponents with just their sword sheath. In the future, while his sword was still sheathed in the stone platform, he could lift the ten-meter-long stone platform to smash his opponent, too. The thought of it left him tingling a little in excitement.

After the stone platform was removed, the flow of the stream reverted to normal. Zhang Xuan stretched his back lazily before slowly making his way out. Barely after taking a few steps, he saw Ji Lingzhen lying on the ground, his breathing halted.

“I only told you to teach him a lesson, why did you kill him?” Zhang Xuan turned to his clone and frowned.

“I wasn’t the one who did it. It was them!” The clone gestured to the area behind Ji Lingzhen.

Turning his gaze over, Zhang Xuan first noted that the mist that had been shrouding the area was dissipating along with

the gradual collapse of the Chaotic Palace Beguilement Formation. Next, he saw several hundred people lying unconscious all around the area.

They were the sword practitioners who had been studying the ‘金’ (Sword)’ character in front of the stone wall earlier.

Zhang Xuan swiftly assessed their conditions and confirmed that they were just unconscious, not dead, and he heaved a sigh of relief. Soon, a hint of doubt arose in his mind.

Shouldn’t they have been busy studying the ‘金’ (Sword)’ character outside?

Why would they have fainted there?

“The rising pillar of Sword Intent earlier made it known to everyone on the island that a treasure has surfaced, so they rushed over here in hope of claiming the treasure. So, I told them that Ji Lingzhen had managed to obtain the treasure, and they immediately rushed forward and lynched him to death. However, they were not able to find anything on him, so they turned their sights to me instead. So, I could only knock all of them out!” Zhang Xuan’s clone replied with a casual shrug.

His clone wielded the strength to defeat even the Grand Dominion realm primary stage Ji Lingzhen easily. Even though the cultivators gathered in the area were not weak, they were still far from matching up to him.

“I see. It’s good that they aren’t dead, or else things could get troublesome.” Hearing his clone’s explanation, Zhang Xuan knew that he would also have made the same call if he were in the same position.

Men blinded by greed are irrational. Force works better than words on them.

Zhang Xuan quickly put his clone back into the Myriad Anthive Nest before making his way out of the mist. Soon, he heard numerous footsteps outside, and shortly after, Brother Sun and the other candidates of the secondary selection appeared in his sights.

1284 Taming of the Swords

“It’s really you!” Upon seeing Zhang Xuan stepping out from the mist, a cold glint flashed through Brother Sun’s eyes.

When they saw the pillar of Sword Intent emerging earlier, they had swiftly realized that a treasure had emerged in the world. Anyone who obtained it would surely be able to rise through the ranks and make a name for themselves even in the Sanctum of Sages!

Even though they were master teachers, they were still humans with desires. This was a rare opportunity for them as well. They could not allow it slip through their fingers just like that. No matter what, they had to at least give it a try.

They could not allow Zhang Xuan to hog it just like that!

The master teachers swiftly moved to surround Zhang Xuan tightly, and their representative, Brother Sun, said with a cold voice, “Hand over the treasure and share it with all of us, and we’ll consider sparing you this once. Otherwise, don’t even dream of getting away today.”

“Treasure?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“You need not feign ignorance before us. All of us know that we are at the Sword Lagoon, and the previous pillar of Sword Intent is a clear sign that the heritage of the Old Sword Maestro has surfaced. Quickly hand it over, and we can spare you this once. Otherwise... this matter won’t just end with you losing your slot!” another master teacher bellowed coldly.

As long as the young man did not use his artifacts, there was nothing of him to fear!

Even if he did use his artifacts, considering how many of them were here, they would still be able to incapacitate him swiftly.

“That’s right! Zhang shi, you should know the position you are in very well!”

“There’s no denying that you possess incredible strength, and you possess powerful artifacts as well. However... are you certain that you will be able to withstand our combined strength?”

...

The other master teachers looked at Zhang Xuan coldly.

After that fellow embarrassed all of them the previous day, they had already had a huge bone to pick with him. Now that the heritage of the Old Sword Maestro was at stake as well, they did not hesitate to show their hostility toward him.

“Are you all going to disregard your standing as master teachers and snatch my possession?” Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure.

Due to the standing and identity that master teachers had on the Master Teacher Continent, they would usually conduct themselves honorably and respectably. When it came to the allocation of a treasure, they would compete with one another fairly through duels. However, those men gathered there clearly had no intention of playing it fair. They were outright forcing him to hand over the heritage to them.

“Snatch? It’s only natural for a treasure to go to those deserving of it! If you wish to keep it for yourself, you should first consider if you have the capability to do so!” Brother Sun waved his hands impassively. “Alright, let’s not waste our breath anymore. Attack him! Don’t give him any opportunity to release his puppets!”

“That’s right!”

Huala!

The next moment, the master teachers surrounding Zhang Xuan charged forward simultaneously.

All of them knew that Zhang Xuan had an army of puppets in his possession, and once released, things would become troublesome for them. For this reason, they did not hesitate to gang up on him. In an instant, zhenqi abruptly flooded the entire Sword Lagoon, causing the air to turn a little suffocating from the viscosity of the energy.

To be able to clear Zhao Xingmo's preliminary selections, there was no doubt that they were all outstanding geniuses possessing talent and strength on par with Zhang Jiuxiao. Even though this was the first time they were collaborating with one another, they were still able to draw out strength far beyond a normal cultivator's imagination.

Gathered together, their strength was like a river gushing forward relentlessly, threatening to tear down everything in its path.

Given the momentum of their offense, it was likely that even a Half-Grand Dominion like Pavilion Master Yue would have been hard-pressed to withstand their attack.

"Not too bad!" Seeing how those master teachers were able to draw out so much strength from their teamwork, Zhang Xuan nodded leisurely. Then, he drove his Sword Quintessence.

In the blink of an eye, his presence seemed to have turned into a sharp sword, and a burst of Sword Intent rose into the clouds. At the same time, he emanated a dangerous aura that threatened to tear anything in its path into shreds.

In the face of Zhang Xuan's aura, the master teachers revealed looks of astonishment and fear, but they did not allow their emotions to impede their offense at all.

Wuuuuuuuu!

With the summoning of Zhang Xuan's Sword Intent, countless gales rose throughout the Sword Lagoon, and innumerable swords began flying in his direction.

"Since you were the ones to make the first move, don't blame me if you get hurt."

Hu!

With a cold harrumph, Zhang Xuan's figure abruptly vanished from the spot. Through the Unbounded Voyager, he flitted at a speed as fast as a specter.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan charged right into the river of energy created by the master teachers, and as if a sharp blade, he sliced their

attack in two. After which, more than twenty individual surges of sword qi abruptly burst forth from his body, aimed at each of the master teachers.

Had it been before, the combined prowess of the crowd might have been able to stop him. However, after he had comprehended Sword Quintessence, his sword qi had grown far sharper and more condensed than before. While Brother Sun and the others were not weaker, they were insufficient to put up a fight against him.

Tzzzzzzzz!

In just ten breaths, all of the master teachers were wounded by the sword qi.

However, their injuries were not too severe. Zhang Xuan's goal was just to punish them; he did not intend to claim their lives.

But the master teachers did not seem to have any ideas of backing down. On the contrary, seeing how their collaborative offense had been neutralized so easily, and the young man had even managed to launch a successful counterattack, their eyes reddened further with greed.

“That fellow has been hiding his strength all along. With his current prowess, even Pavilion Master Yue would be no match for him.”

“Isn't he from the Qingyuan Empire? How can he be so powerful? Have you all realized it yet? He was only at Primordial Spirit realm intermediate stage yesterday, but at this very moment, he is at the pinnacle stage!”

“Not only so, it seems like he has managed to comprehend Sword Quintessence as well.”

“There's no doubt about it. This must be the result of inheriting the Old Sword Maestro's heritage. Otherwise, there's no way he could grow so much within this short period of time.”

...

They had fought with Zhang Xuan the previous day as well, and while he had not been weak, it was certain that he had not been so strong!

For his cultivation to rise by two small cultivation stages within a single day... there was no way this had nothing to do with the Sword Lagoon! After all, there was no cultivator who could possibly advance his cultivation so quickly!

“To be able to raise an individual’s strength by such a degree within a short period of time, the heritage of the Sword Lagoon is truly no joke.” Clenching his jaws tightly, Brother Sun bellowed, “Everyone, we must unite! If we don’t stand together on the same front, not only will we be unable to obtain the treasure and the heritage, there’s a good chance that we might all lose our lives here!”

“Yes!” the crowd echoed in response.

Just a day ago, the young man could only achieve victory when their cultivation was lowered, but today, he had already gained the strength to rival all of them simultaneously. If they could obtain the heritage of the Old Sword Maestro for themselves, they would be bound for greatness!

“Move!”

With a furious roar, the geniuses immediately charged up together.

Even though their teamwork had been decent previously, all of them had held back quite a bit. After all, after they defeated Zhang Xuan, there was a chance that they would have to fight it out among themselves for the allocation of the heritage. However, after witnessing Zhang Xuan’s strength with their own eyes, they realized that they would not even get to come close to the heritage if they continued holding back at this point.

With their wills united by a common foe, their combined strength soared to new heights.

Innumerable surges of zhenqi began gathering together to form a huge cluster of power that covered a radius of over several hundred meters. Under the immense influx of power, the air

became as viscous as mud. Putting aside a cultivator, even weapons would find it hard to proceed in the face of such atmosphere.

Kacha! Kacha!

Immense pressure weighed down on Zhang Xuan, who stood at the very center of this hurricane of energy. The overwhelming power tugged and pulled at his body, as if attempting to tear him into shreds.

“Humph!” Facing the offense of the master teachers, Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes frostily.

He had shown them mercy, but they had simply taken his magnanimity as a sign of weakness and carried on their offense. With this, he felt that his tolerance had come to a limit.

There was indeed no end to a human’s greed.

From their attitudes, it could be seen that even if he imparted the Three Swords of Lingxu to them, they would still think that he was holding something back.

Since that was the case, it was time to take forceful measure and have them know the meaning of fear.

Without wasting any words, Zhang Xuan pushed his foot against the ground and dashed into the crowd of master teachers.

For some reason, the viscous space created by the full might of all of the master teachers present seemed to be completely ineffective on him. He flitted through the area as if a phantom, and with every grasp, he would accurately catch a master teacher, acquire his jade token, and send him flying with a light push.

Just like that, the master teachers fell one after another.

While the collaborative offense of the master teachers was powerful, through his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan was still able to find many flaws here and there, allowing him to overcome it with ease.

Peng peng peng peng peng!

It was almost as if Zhang Xuan was a tiger diving into a crowd of goats. As many master teachers as there might have been, there were none who lasted more than a breath before him.

“My jade token!”

“He took away mine as well!”

“He isn’t just knocking us down; he’s taking away our jade tokens too! Be careful!”

It did not take long for all of the master teachers to be collapsed on the ground, and every single one of them were moaning in pain.

Since Zhang Xuan had been able to guess that a part of the test was to have confidence in one’s strength and keep one’s jade token with one, the other master teachers had also come to realize the same as soon as they calmed down, and they had chosen to bring it along with them as well. Yet, who would have thought this would end up presenting a chance for Zhang Xuan to acquire all their jade tokens at once?

Despite collaborating with one another, they were actually unable to withstand a single move from the other party at all. How in the world did this freak cultivate to gain such monstrous capabilities?

In this moment, Brother Sun and the others were still in a state of disbelief, unable to believe what had just happened.

“Since you all tried to eliminate me, it’s only right for me to do the same to you. This isn’t a breach of the rules, right?”

Paying no heed to the state of shock the master teachers were in, Zhang Xuan flicked his hand, and the twenty jade tokens floated right in front of him.

“You dare!”

The crowd immediately panicked.

Those jade tokens represented their chances to enter the Sanctum of Sages. If they were to be destroyed, it would mean that they had failed the secondary selections, and they would be unqualified to enter the Sanctum of Sages anymore.

Their initial thought had been that as long as they collaborated with one another, they should be able to eliminate Zhang Xuan with ease. Yet, instead of overpowering the young man, they had ended up placing themselves in a precarious situation.

“Is there any reason I shouldn’t do it?” Zhang Xuan scoffed coldly as he closed his grip.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

The crisp echo of the jade tokens shattering sounded simultaneously, and in an instant, all twenty jade tokens were reduced to powdery remains.

Seeing the sight, the master teachers were completely frozen for a moment.

“Ahhh!”

Gradually, the master teachers returned to their senses. Some let loose despaired howls, some collapsed to the ground in utter shock, and some glared at Zhang Xuan in hostility, as if swearing to exact vengeance.

“This is catastrophic. If all of us have been eliminated simultaneously, doesn’t that mean that... that bastard is the only one who has cleared the secondary selection?” Brother Sun muttered in disbelief.

There was a total of 33 candidates participating in the secondary selection, and the selection should have come to an end as soon as thirteen candidates were eliminated. However, if all of them were eliminated simultaneously... would that make Zhang Xuan the only one who had cleared the selection?

If that was really the case, they might really lose their minds!

Furthermore, how was Zhao Xingmo supposed to explain this matter to the Sanctum of Sages? For there to be only a single candidate from the Empire Alliance...

Wuuuu!

Just as complete chaos had descended upon the situation, a series of whistling sounds suddenly echoed from afar. Soon after, more than a hundred Saint intermediate-tier swords flew over, surrounding Zhang Xuan tightly.

“These... are the superior swords that have chosen to remain in the Sword Lagoon?” one of the master teachers exclaimed with narrowed eyes.

Each year, the Sword Lagoon would draw countless sword practitioners in. When these sword practitioners died in the Sword Lagoon, their swords were likely to choose to rest in Sword Lagoon due to the Sword Intent lingering in the area.

Due to this, there were also sword practitioners who would visit the Sword Lagoon in the hope that they might be able to take away some formidable swords to enhance their fighting prowess.

“These swords are able to grow by devouring the Sword Intent lingering in the area, so they tend to abhor outsiders who interrupt their peace in the Sword Lagoon. For this reason, they assault cultivators from time to time. Haha! It seems like Zhang Xuan is in deep trouble this time around!”

Coming to realize what was going on, the master teachers burst into gleeful laughter.

So what if you have eliminated all of us?

Now that you are surrounded by so many Saint intermediate-tier swords, no matter how powerful you are, there's no way you will escape from here alive!

“Kill him! Let's all go down together...” Brother Sun roared frenziedly.

But before he could finish his words, the swords abruptly fell to the ground respectfully.

“Paying respects to Master!” the hundred or so swords declared simultaneously, their deafening voices shaking even the clouds.

“Master?”

“These swords have all recognized Zhang Xuan as their master?”

The master teachers were completely flabbergasted and crazed by the sight before them.

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“You are acknowledging me as your master?”

Not only were the crowd flabbergasted, Zhang Xuan was startled as well. It took a long while before he was able to make sense out of what was going on.

It seemed like the Sword Intent released by the Lingxu Sword had benefited these swords greatly, so all of them ended up submitting to it.

And now that the Lingxu Sword had acknowledged Zhang Xuan as its new master, these swords also unhesitatingly chose to do the same as well.

Adding Lingxu Sword into the group, and I would have a total of 108 swords, thus meeting the weapon requirement for the Three Swords of Lingxu. Could this be the reason why the Lingxu Sword agreed to help Ji Lingzhen make a move on me over the Sword of Faint Whisper and Sword of Faint Warble? Zhang Xuan wondered.

There was a total of 107 Saint intermediate-tier weapons in the area, and adding the Lingxu Sword in the equation, he would have the number required to execute the sword arts in the Three Swords of Lingxu.

Did this mean that the Old Sword Maestro hasn't been able to gather the swords required for the Sword Formations after he created the Three Swords of Lingxu? Was that the reason why his enemy was able to severely wound him, forcing him to escape to the Sword Lagoon? Another thought appeared in Zhang Xuan's mind.

One of the greatest difficulties in executing the Three Swords of Lingxu was gathering the swords required to set up the Sword Formations. Could it be because the Old Sword Maestro wasn't able to gather the required number of swords that resulted in his eventual defeat?

Otherwise, given the overwhelming strength that the Old Sword Maestro wielded, as well as the tremendous might he could bring forth via his Three Swords of Lingxu, it should have been extremely difficult for anyone to defeat him.

However, Zhang Xuan also knew that there was no point thinking about these matters anymore. There was no way he could affirm his deductions at this point. With a swift flick of his hand, he kept all of the swords into his storage ring.

After he kept those swords, the resounding call of a crane suddenly echoed in the air. Soon after, a majestic crane could be seen gliding over from the horizon.

Zhao Xingmo and Pavilion Master Yue were standing on the back of the crane, gazing down at the defeated candidates on the ground.

Zhang Xuan had used the Myriad Anthive Queen to control the surrounding Myriad Ants, preventing Zhao Xingmo and Pavilion Master Yue from noticing anything. Nevertheless, as time passed, they still eventually realized that something was amiss, so they began making their way over. When they felt all of the jade tokens except for Zhang Xuan's had shattered, they nearly fell off the back of the crane.

The secondary selection was set to be three days long, but in less than half a day, all of the candidates except for one had been eliminated... This was too that exaggerated!

The crane slowly landed on the ground, and after making sense out of what was going on, Zhao Xingmo turned to Zhang Xuan with tearful eyes.

He knew that the young man was a troublemaker, but surely the latter didn't have to do this during the secondary selection! This was too much!

For a candidate to single-handedly eliminate all of the others, how was he supposed to report this matter to the Sanctum of Sages?

After all the trouble he had gone through searching for candidates, he couldn't possibly just bring a single person back to the Sanctum of Sages with him, right?

Putting aside whether the Sanctum of Sages would be willing to accept such an outcome or not, there would surely be a huge uproar from the Eight Conferred Empires and the various tier-3 Sage Clans!

“Zhao shi, the law doesn’t punish the masses. If everyone has failed the secondary selection, that could be a sign saying that there’s a major loophole in the secondary selection. Since that’s the case, why don’t we balance out the rules and conduct another round of selection? It would be fairer for the candidates this way.” Pavilion Master Yue shot a glance at Zhang Xuan before quickly clasped his fist toward Zhao Xingmo.

“Indeed, I agree that there’s a need for a new round of selection too...”

“I think that it’s only rational to do so as well...”

Seeing that there was hope for them, Brother Sun and the others quickly spoke up in agreement to Pavilion Master Yue’s words as well.

If there wasn’t a new round of selection, they would all be eliminated right here. Naturally, they knew where they should stand

“This...” Zhao Xingmo hesitated.

He couldn’t just take a single person back to the Sanctum of Sages with him, but... the rules were the rules. If he were to alter it at his convenience, that would be compromising the integrity of the selections.

If that was the case, every single candidate who failed the selection would just demand to retake the selection once more, thus rendering the significance of the selection pointless.

“I’ll report this matter to the Sanctum of Sages and have the elders make a judgement on this matter.” Zhao Xingmo pondered for a moment before replying.

The situation had already exceeded his authority. It would be best for him to report it upward and have them make a judgement instead.

“Yes!” Since Zhao Xingmo had already said so, they weren’t in a position to say anything more.

“Zhang shi, since you have received the heritage contained in our Sword Lagoon, I hope that you can return it to our Qianchong Empire. I’ll thank you in the stead of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion and its countless master teachers...” Pavilion Master Yue turned to Zhang Xuan and said.

Previously, while the other master teachers were explaining the reason behind their elimination, they had also spoken about the emergence of the Old Sword Maestro’s heritage as well.

“Return?” Zhang Xuan turned to Pavilion Master Yue with a look that suggested that a fool was talking to him. “The Sword Lagoon has been in Qianchong Empire for at least ten thousand years now, but not a single person has been able to acquire it. This only goes to show that none of you are deserving of the heritage. Since I have the luck and capability to acquire it, why should I hand it over to you?”

“Zhang shi, you can’t put it like that. The Sword Lagoon is a heritage that is passed down from generation to generation in our Qianchong Empire, and it serves to motivate countless master teachers to work harder and charge forward bravely. It has already come to be a spiritual pillar of Qianchong Empire, as well as an identity that civilians of Qianchong relate with. Since you aren’t from Qianchong Empire, it’s only natural for you to return the heritage to us. If you were to take it away with you, you would be robbing an entire Conferred Empire of its spiritual pillar and identity.” Pavilion Master Yue replied.

His words weren’t heavy, and there was a smile on his face as well. However, there was a clear resolve in his words which showed that he wouldn’t bow down on this matter.

His intentions were clear—the heritage in the Sword Lagoon belongs to Qianchong Empire. Since you aren’t from our country, don’t you dream of taking it away!

If you don’t return it, should any chaos happen to Qianchong Empire, it’ll all be your fault... Let’s see how you’ll account

the matter to the headquarters if that were to happen!

Pavilion Master Yue's voice might be gentle, but the steely threat behind it was impossible not to notice.

Seeing through the hidden meaning behind Pavilion Master Yue's words, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly and said, "Since you claimed that it's a spiritual pillar and identity of your Qianchong Empire, why hasn't anyone obtained it over the past ten thousand years? To leave a heritage lying in the dust, preventing it from bringing prosperity to generations to come, isn't your Master Teacher Pavilion a little too incompetent?"

"Ah..." Pavilion Master Yue's lips twitched upon hearing those words, and his face turned crimson.

"Trying to extort the heritage out of another because you aren't able to obtain it yourself, is this how the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion operates? It seems like I really should report this matter to the headquarters and have them look into the prevalent culture here!" Zhang Xuan continued.

"This... Zhang shi, I'm just worried that your reputation will be affected if you were to keep the heritage with you, I don't bear any ill will toward you..." Knowing that he wasn't on the side of reason, Pavilion Master Yue could only concede.

"You're worried my reputation will be affected? Pavilion Master Yue, I must say that you are worrying unnecessarily. However, there happens to be something which I would like to report to the headquarters which I think you might want to worry about." Zhang Xuan replied coldly.

"May I know what's the matter?" An ominous premonition came to Pavilion Master Yue, and his eyebrows began twitching slightly in worry.

"Zhao shi is the one who chose the location of the secondary selection, and even as candidates, we aren't aware of the location beforehand. Yet, not too long after entering the Sword Lagoon, I was met with an ambush. I suspect that someone on the inside has intentionally leaked news concerning the secondary selection to my enemy in order to harm me.

Therefore, I hope to have the Empire Alliance investigate this matter and redress my grievances!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand imposingly.

It would be too much to shrug off Ji Lingzhen and Ji Lingfeng’s presence in the Sword Lagoon as a coincidence. It was more likely that they had known that he would be there for the secondary selection.

It was just yesterday that he had beaten up Pavilion Master Yue, so the latter had the motive to backstab him. On top of that, it was likely that Zhao Xingmo had approached Pavilion Master Yue to obtain his assistance in helping to coordinate the miscellaneous matters concerning the secondary selection so as to ensure that it would proceed smoothly. Thus, it was likely that he knew of the location of the secondary selection in advance as well...

So, other than Pavilion Master Yue, Zhang Xuan couldn’t think of anyone else who would and could do such a thing.

A hint of deep horror was reflected in the depths of Pavilion Master Yue’s eyes, but he knew better than to allow it to show on his face. With a tone reminiscent to a senior kindly advising a junior, he said calmly, “Zhang shi, since you have gotten off unscathed and obtained the heritage even, this matter can be considered as a blessing in disguise. Let’s not blow things up or else it might reflect badly on the Master Teacher Pavilion. Why don’t you leave it to our Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion to deal with this matter instead? I promise you that I’ll root out the culprit and...”

“I’ll hand the heritage of the Old Sword Maestro to the headquarters and report the happenings over the past two days to them. As for what they will do about the matter, that would be none of my business.” Zhang Xuan interjected coldly, speaking with a decisive voice.

Had it not been for the many trump cards he had hidden up his sleeves, he could have surely been killed by Ji Lingfeng. For the head of a Master Teacher Pavilion to collude with outsiders to harm an elder of the Empire Alliance Master

Teacher Pavilion, just this crime itself was enough to drag Pavilion Master Yue down to his doom.

As for the specifics of how Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion would deal with this matter, Zhang Xuan wasn't interested to know.

"I..." Pavilion Master Yue was at a loss for words.

Thinking about the fate that would befall him, his face turned ghastly pale, and his body collapsed weakly to the ground.

He was indeed the one who had leaked the news concerning Zhang Xuan's whereabouts to Ji Lingfeng. If no one were to investigate this matter, he might still be able to get away scot-free. However, if the headquarters were to be dragged into this matter as well, there was no way he would be getting off with what he had done.

After all, that would be equivalent to harming his own brethren, and the Master Teacher Pavilion would never tolerate such actions!

"Zhang shi, what happened?" Noticing that something was amiss from the conversation between the two, Zhao Xingmo couldn't help but ask.

"Zhao shi, this is what I have faced after entering the Sword Lagoon. You can take a look." With a flick of his wrist, Zhang Xuan passed a jade token over.

Looking through the content in the jade token, Zhao Xingmo's complexion swiftly turned livid.

He was the one who had set the rules and details of the secondary selection, and this included the location as well. He had made great deal preparations to ensure that news wouldn't be leaked out in advance, and yet, Zhang Xuan still ended up being ambushed...

"Yue Yiquan! How dare you do such a thing beneath my eyelids? Very well! I'll have this matter reported to the headquarters in the name of the Sanctum of Sages. You better have a good reason prepared for that by then!" Zhao Xingmo bellowed coldly before flinging his sleeves coldly.

“Zhao shi...” Pavilion Master Yue’s face was ashened.

The Sanctum of Sages was the highest master teacher training institution beneath the Master Teacher Pavilion, and its standing was higher than even that of the Empire Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion. If Zhao Xingmo were to report this matter in his capacity as a guide from the Sanctum of Sages, the highest headquarter would surely keep a close lookout for the matter as well.

In other words, there was really no way out for him anymore.

At the very start, all he had intended was to exact vengeance for his wife’s brother and have that insignificant figure from Qingyuan Empire learn that a quasi 8-star master teacher wasn’t someone he could afford to humiliate... Yet, while trying to do the other party in, he ended up drawing flames upon himself instead.

His future, standing, and reputation... All of these were going right down the gutter. From the respected head of the Qianchong Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, he would soon become a scorned criminal.

If only he knew that this would happen to him, he would have never gone up against Zhang Xuan...

In this moment, Pavilion Master Yue felt deep regret for his actions.

“Let’s go!” Couldn’t be bothered about Pavilion Master Yue, Zhang Xuan swiftly got onto Zhao Xingmo’s crane and began flying back to Qianchong City.

Soon, they arrived back at the Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Zhang shi, I’m sorry that I have let you down...” Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Zhang Jiuxiao immediately walked forward and apologized in dejection.

Zhang Xuan had spent much time and effort on him in order to help him to enter the Sanctum of Sages, but he ended up being the first one to be eliminated in the secondary selection. While he felt dispirited from his failure, he felt even more apologetic for letting Zhang Xuan down.

“How were we eliminated shortly after the selection began?” Zhang Xuan asked in intrigue.

“I...” Zhang Jiuxiao’s face turned crimson. “I was assaulted by a sword...”

It turned out that shortly after landing on the Sword Lagoon, Zhang Jiuxiao found himself assaulted by a top-notch Saint intermediate-tier sword.

As the sword wielded strength far beyond his capability, it didn’t take long for his jade token to be shattered.

“That’s most probably Ji Lingfeng’s Sword of Faint Whispers...” After asking about the appearance of the sword, Zhang Xuan replied with a shake of his head.

Since Ji Lingfeng had gone to the extent of laying an ambush for him in the Sword Lagoon, he was bound to have dug his background as well. Perhaps it was out of worry that Zhang Jiuxiao would foil things up, in view of the relationship between the both of them, Ji Lingfeng chose to eliminate him right from the start.

“I have really let down the expectations you have for me this time around...” Zhang Jiuxiao lowered his head in shame. He really didn’t know how he should face the young man before him.

In this moment, Zhao Xingmo’s voice suddenly sounded.

“Due to the unexpected event occurring in the secondary selection, the results will be voided. Everyone will be following me to the Sanctum of Sages to participate in the final selection!”

“The results will be voided?” Zhang Jiuxiao was taken aback. “Zhang shi, what’s going on? Wait a moment, shouldn’t the secondary selection last for three whole days? Why did you all return so early?”

As he was taken out of the Sword Lagoon right after he was eliminated, he was unaware of the happenings afterward.

“The remaining candidates ganged up on me, attempting to eliminate me, and I accidentally... eliminated all of them...”

Zhang Xuan replied.

“You accidentally eliminated everyone else?” Zhang Jiuxiao was stunned.

1286 Ruoxin, Here I Come!

Amidst a furious gale, an aerial saint beast soared swiftly through the sky, leaving behind white streak in its trail.

In the room on the back of the aerial saint beast, Zhang Xuan looked at the young man sitting before him and nodded in satisfaction.

Due to the results of the secondary selection being voided, it was decided that all of the candidates would head to the Sanctum of Sages together to undergo the final selection.

While the other candidates would shoot Zhang Xuan looks of hostility from time to time, they didn't conduct any acts of aggression toward him during the trip.

Along the way, Zhang Xuan imparted the Three Swords of Lingxu and his comprehension of swordsmanship to Zhang Jiuxiao.

And as expected of a genius from the Zhang Clan, Zhang Jiuxiao's ability to absorb new knowledge was not too bad. In just half a month, he managed to raise his comprehension of swordsmanship up to the level of Half-Quintessence. While it was still a long way off from comparing to up to Zhang Xuan, his mastery of swordsmanship could be said to be unmatched against the other sword practitioners amongst the candidates.

Not only so, he also managed to advance his cultivation to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle. With his current strength and superior comprehension of swordsmanship, he would be a match for even Brother Sun and Ma Minghai.

From someone who was barely able to clear the selections of the Sanctum of Sages, Zhang Jiuxiao had grown to become one of the strongest candidates in the running.

Upon reaching a certain bottleneck, one's fighting prowess would begin to stagnate, improving at a rate much slower than before. To make an analogy, this was just like how it was relatively easier to improve one's timing in a 100 meters sprint

from 13.0 seconds to 12.0 seconds. However, to improve it from, let's say, 10.3 seconds to 10.2 seconds, was no easy feat at all. This was because one was already nearing his physical limits and talent, so it would take a lot of effort and time in order to make any visible improvement, if possible at all.

This was the situation which Zhang Jiuxiao was facing. Even though he possessed considerable talent and a unique cultivation technique, he was already nearing his bottleneck. Under such circumstances, it would usually take significant time and effort for him to just raise his fighting prowess by a visible level. And yet, within half a month, he actually managed to achieve such a huge breakthrough. If this were to be known to others, it would definitely shock many speechless.

This could almost be said to be a feat which only 9-star master teachers were capable of!

“Finally, I have reached the Unbounded Voyager 2-dan!”

While offering guidance to Zhang Jiuxiao, Zhang Xuan hadn't been slacking off on his training either. In half a month, he fused the movement techniques he had learned together with the Unbounded Voyager and perfected the Unbounded Voyager 2-dan to the level of Heaven's Path. Naturally, he didn't waste any time learning it too.

It was a pity that he was currently on the back of an aerial saint beast and it wasn't convenient for him to try out the technique, so he wasn't sure how the effects were.

On top of that, he had also fully reinforced his Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle cultivation as well. The Primordial Spirit in his body was pulsating with power, ready to make the breakthrough to Half-Leaving Aperture realm at any moment.

However, Zhang Xuan's greatest breakthrough still lay in his swordsmanship.

After comprehending Sword Quintessence and learning the Three Swords of Lingxu, his understanding of swordsmanship had advanced by leaps and bounds. Putting aside the Lingxu Sword, even if he only had the Glacier Rain Sword in hand, he

would still be able to bring forth strength far beyond imagination.

In the past, he would only be barely a match for a Grand Dominion realm primary stage even if he were to utilize all of his means. But now, as long as he had a sword in hand, he would be able to crush any Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator with ease.

The most important thing I have to do right now is to gather more sword art manual and perfect the Three Swords of Lingxu. If I could perfect them into Heaven's Path battle techniques too, I would be able to bring my fighting prowess to greater heights once more! Zhang Xuan thought as he got to his feet.

There was no doubt that the Three Swords of Lingxu wielded tremendous might, but it was unfortunately plagued with far too many flaws. For a perfectionist like Zhang Xuan, it was simply much too bitter of a pill to swallow.

Fortunately, considering that the Sanctum of Sages was the highest master teacher training institution on the continent, there should be plenty of sword art manuals there for him to perfect the Three Swords of Lingxu.

While Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jiuxiao were cultivating diligently, Ma Minghai, Brother Sun, and the other candidates weren't idling around either. In fact, perhaps due to the setbacks they had suffered during the secondary selection, they were more tenacious than ever in their training.

While they failed to make a significant breakthrough in their fighting prowess, the experience did temper their state of mind, making them far more resilient than before.

An uncarved jade will never become a treasure. As top geniuses from their own region, they have been accustomed to being at the top. The experience of being outdone by another will be beneficial to their future growth... Taking this scene into sight, Zhao Xingmo nodded in approval.

The candidates who had cleared his preliminary selections were all the greatest of geniuses, so it was inevitable that there

would be some complacency in them. The indignance at their defeat against Zhang Xuan would drive out the complacency within them, pushing them to work harder than ever in hopes that they would be able to return the humiliation in the future.

While Zhao Xingmo was looking at the candidates contemplatively, a master teacher suddenly stepped forward and asked, “Zhao shi, what will the format of the final selection in the Sanctum of Sages be? Would it be another battle?”

The one who had asked the question was Brother Sun.

Upon hearing those words, the other candidates also halted their cultivation and turned their heads over in curiosity.

They were about to reach the Sanctum of Sages very soon, so they were rather curious about how the final selection would be like. After all, it was the final hurdle standing between them and the Sanctum of Sages.

“The final selection will be far more difficult than the preliminary selection and secondary selection. It won’t be just a battle...” At this point, Zhao Xingmo hesitated for a moment, seemingly trying to find a term for it, before replying, “To be more exact, it would be like an overall evaluation!”

“Overall evaluation?”

The crowd was intrigued.

“The Sanctum of Sages is the highest master teacher training institution on the Master Teacher Continent, and those who wish to enter it must display qualities far surpassing an ordinary man, be it in terms of strength, wisdom, adaptability, magnanimity, courage, and such. The final selection serves to conduct an overall evaluation of all of these qualities to determine whether a candidate is qualified to become a student of the Sanctum of Sages. Naturally, its difficulty will also be far greater than the previous two rounds of selections!”

At this point, Zhao Xingmo paused for another moment before continuing on, “Based on past experiences, there is a great chance that the final selection would be... challenging the Mountain Gate!”

“Challenging the Mountain Gate?”

“That’s right. The Mountain Gate is an examination ground which the Master Teacher Pavilion has spent a great deal of effort to set up. It serves to assess a cultivator’s state of mind and strength by putting him through a series of tests, each with a pre-allocated amount of time. The shorter the duration one takes each test, the higher one’s score will be... And those who are unable to clear the tests within the preallocated period of time would be eliminated!” Zhao Xingmo explained grimly.

This was the standard selection trial used to assess candidates seeking to join the Sanctum of Sages, so revealing it in advance wasn’t an infringement of the rules.

Zhao Xingmo gestured to the two young men who had assisted him in conducting the preliminary selections and said, “The two of them have also challenged the Mountain Gate in the past, but they failed to clear it. Nevertheless, as they had achieved decent results in it, they were offered the opportunity to become listening in students in the Sanctum of Sages.”

“Doesn’t that mean that they are geniuses who have cleared the preliminary and secondary selections as well?”

The crowd was astonished.

Only those who had cleared the preliminary and secondary selections would be qualified to take the final selection... Even though all of them were allowed to take the final selection this time around, it was due to the Sanctum of Sages granting them a special exception. Otherwise, thirteen of them wouldn’t be standing here at this very moment.

“You’re right. They did manage to clear the preliminary and secondary selections, but they failed to clear the Mountain Gate, so they were eliminated in the final selection.” Zhao Xingmo nodded.

“Zhao shi, based on your previous experience as a guide, how many of us do you think will be able to clear the Mountain Gate?” Ma Minghai couldn’t help but ask.

“Your talents and strength are decent, but in the final selection, you will be pitted against top-notch geniuses from the most

powerful clans and organizations all over the Master Teacher Continent. Based on my previous experience, if you are lucky, ten of you might be able to clear the Mountain Gate. Otherwise, there would only be one or two of you, or perhaps, even none at all!” Zhao Xingmo replied.

The challenge of the Mountain Gate wasn't just a selection exercise amongst the thirty of them. There would also be other candidates from the Empire Alliance, Sage Clans, and major powers all over the continent. The geniuses from those powers had access to superior cultivation resources, especially top-notch cultivation techniques and battle techniques, and some even possessed unique bloodlines...

While individual prowess was important in clearing the final selection, luck also played a crucial role as well. As talented as the thirty or so of them were, the vast difference in their background would make it rather hard for them to match up to the other candidates from the Empire Alliance, Sage Clans, and other major powers. If they were lucky, they might still be able to vie ten slots or so over. Otherwise, they might find themselves without even a single slot at the end of the final selection.

Such a situation did happen in history before.

“Jiuxiao, you are from the Zhang Clan too, so you should know quite a bit about the final selection too, right?” Seeing the looks of disbelief from the candidates around him, Zhao Xingmo turned to Zhang Jiuxiao and asked.

“Yes. From what I heard, the competition there is extremely rife. Even for the Zhang Clan, there are years where over half of the candidates they have sent would fail the final selection...” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded.

Even though he was from a side family in the Zhang Clan, he was still rather informed about the situation concerning the Sanctum of Sages, as well as the difficulty of the final selection.

The Zhang Clan had no lack of offspring, and there were plenty who were stronger and more talented than him. Yet, every year, many of them would challenge the Mountain Gate

and fail tragically. From this, it could be seen how difficult the trial was.

“There’s a genius from the same side family as me named Zhang Yunqi. He was twenty-eight last year, and he has already cleared his first lightning tribulation, successfully making the breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm primary stage. In our group, he can already be considered to be a nigh invincible existence, and yet, he still failed the final selection...” Zhang Jiuxiao explained.

“Even a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator had failed the final selection?”

The crowd was stunned.

Currently, even the strongest of them all was only at Quasi Leaving Aperture realm. If even a True Leaving Aperture realm expert had failed the final selection, didn’t that practically mean that none of them stood a chance at all?

“Indeed. However, the final selection isn’t based solely on one’s cultivation realm. Zhang Yunqi’s younger brother was only at Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage, but he managed to clear the final selection in the end... To be honest, I can’t really tell what the criteria to clear the Mountain Gate is!” Zhang Jiuxiao said with a bitter smile.

Plenty of geniuses from the Zhang Clan would challenge the Mountain Gate each year, but there was no specific pattern to be observed by those who managed to clear it. Sometimes, a clan member with high cultivation realm could challenge the Mountain Gate for multiple years, only to fail each time. Sometimes, a clan member whom others didn’t bear much hope for would clear the Mountain Gate with flying colors at the first attempt.

“There are many variations to the tests of the Mountain Gate. Even those who were participating in the same final selection could find themselves facing different trials. As such, there’s no way to train or prepare for it in advance. One can only enter with a flexible mind and adapt to the circumstances.” Zhao Xingmo explained.

“This...”

The crowd fell silent.

They had asked about the format of the final selection in hopes that they would be able to make preparations for it so as to boost their chances of clearing it. However, after hearing the details, they realized that things were far more complicated than they had thought it out to be.

However, that was to be expected. If it was that easy to enter the highest master teacher training institution, wouldn't it be flooding with students by now?

“My advice is for you all not to get too worried about the matter. After entering the Mountain Gate, just complete the tests to the best of your abilities. Even if you can't clear the final selection, you will still have plenty of opportunities as long as you can make it as a listening in student. As a listening in student, you will have the opportunity to take the final examination again in subsequent years!” Noticing the apprehension and nervousness on the faces all around, Zhao Xingmo advised with a smile.

While the Sanctum of Sages was very strict in the selection of its students, it did offer other avenues for candidates who were reluctant to give up. As long as one's results in the final selection weren't too bad, one could always opt to become a listening in student and challenge the Mountain Gate in subsequent years.

But of course, as one who was challenging the Mountain Gate for the second time, they would be judged far stricter than other candidates. Nevertheless, in order to raise the spirits of the crowd, Zhao Xingmo chose to bottle that up in his heart. Otherwise, their nervousness could very well affect their performance in the final selection.

“I see. That's a relief to hear...” Hearing that there would still be a chance for them even if they were to fail the final selection, the crowd heaved a sigh of relief.

“Alright, we should be arriving at the Sanctum of Sages very soon, so make some preparations. If nothing goes wrong, the

final selection should be held within the next three days!”

After chatting for a while more, Zhao Xingmo suddenly pointed to the area ahead and announced.

Everyone hurriedly looked forward, and soon, a massive city came into sight. Located in the middle of a mountain range, it seemed to be shrouded by a massive Spirit Gathering Formation, drawing the spiritual energy in a radius of several hundred thousand li into the area. Even before landing in the area, the rich spiritual energy in the air had already left them feeling deeply refreshed.

“That’s the Sanctum of Sages?” Abruptly getting to his feet, Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly in agitation.

“Ruoxin, here I come!”

1287 Ancient Sage Bo Shang

The very reason why he came to the Sanctum of Sages was to seek Luo Ruoxin and free her from the engagement with the Zhang Clan so that he could be with her...

He had put in so much effort to come this far, and he was currently just a step away from meeting her, so how could he not be agitated?

Rest assured, I'll marry you openly. I'll never put you in a spot and make you choose between me and your family. Zhang Xuan vowed as he calmed down his agitated heart.

This engagement concerned two of the strongest clans on the Master Teacher Continent, so his mission was bound to be fraught with difficulties. But, so what?

Anyone who dared to stand in his way, even if the other party boasted the strongest power on the Master Teacher Continent, he would simply crush whatever opposition they had down like a domino!

Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan gazed at the world beneath him.

A cluster of towering buildings rose from the ground, reminiscent of a crouching behemoth prowling in the mountain range. Its sheer grandeur bestowed it with a natural air of majesty and authority.

The person who founded the academy must have possessed a comprehension of formation on par with 9-star formation master... Zhang Xuan noted in wonderment.

The entire academy was built along the mountain range, and every single bit of it was exquisitely constructed, placing it in perfect alignment with its surroundings. Looking at it from above, it felt as if one was looking at a beautiful artwork.

From this, it could be seen that the founder of academy, on top of being a 9-star formation master, was likely to be a highly-skilled landscaper as well.

“The founder of the Sanctum of Sages is Ancient Sage Bo Shang. He has followed Kong shi and learned from him as one of his direct disciples!” Noticing Zhang Xuan’s astonishment, Zhao Xingmo remarked.

“Kong shi’s direct disciple?” Zhang Xuan was startled.

Despite the prestige of the Sanctum of Sages, he had thought that it was just an organization created by a 9-star master teacher or one of the normal students under Kong shi. He hadn’t even considered the possibility that it was founded by Kong shi’s direct disciple!

“Indeed. Otherwise, how could the Sage Clans possibly be willing to send their inner clan members to the Sanctum of Sages to study?” Zhao Xingmo replied with a hint of pride in his voice.

“Ah, that’s true.” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

In truth, this was also something he had been wondering about all along. Clans as powerful as the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan were bound to at least have some 9-star master teachers in their ranks, as well as experts of most major occupation. Given so, was there really a need for them to send their offspring to the Sanctum of Sages to study? After all, they should have the resources required to groom their own offspring!

However, if the Sanctum of Sages was founded by one of Kong shi’s direct disciples, that would change the nature of things.

Just on that fact in itself, there was bound to be something extraordinary about the Sanctum of Sages.

“Ancient Sage Bo Shang is neither the most famous nor the most powerful of Kong shi’s direct disciples, but he possesses an extraordinary ability in imparting knowledge and ideology to others. It has been several ten thousand years since the Sanctum of Sages was founded, and despite the trial of time, Kong shi’s ideology is still perfectly passed down from generation to generation. Students there are able to feel the very spirit of the World’s Teacher, as well as his deep desire to

bring mankind to greater heights! Learning in such an environment could open up one's mind, allowing one to view the society and the entire world from a higher perspective from before, thus giving them an insight into how they could better use their strength to bring about greater prosperity for mankind. This is something that no clan or blessed land is able to do!" Zhao Xingmo continued on.

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Naturally, there was no doubting Kong shi's selfless spirit for mankind.

Just the very fact that Ancient Sage Bo Shang was passing from Kong shi's knowledge and ideology in full from one generation to the next was more than enough to reinforce the Sanctum of Sages' position as the number one training institution in the world.

It was no wonder why all powers over the world wanted to send their offspring in. Just the inheritance of Kong shi's spirit represented a prestige that no other blessed land could possibly bring.

"I have heard of the affairs of Ancient Sage Qiu Wu before, and just out of curiosity, may I know that compared with Ancient Sage Bo Shang, who is stronger?" Zhang Xuan couldn't help but ask.

"Well... Ancient Sage Qiu Wu is Kong shi's servant whereas Ancient Sage Bo Shang is his direct disciple. But of course, this is a matter from ancient times, and it involves Ancient Sages at that, so it wouldn't be our place to speak too much about it." Zhao Xingmo replied with a smile.

"I see..." Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

While Zhao Xingmo didn't point it out explicitly, the meaning behind his words was clear. Ancient Sage Bo Shang was stronger than Ancient Sage Qiu Wu!

To make a comparison, it was just like how Sun Qiang and Zheng Yang were like to Zhang Xuan, albeit Sun Qiang might not exactly be a good comparison.

While Sun Qiang did receive Zhang Xuan's guidance from time to time, his fighting prowess was still nowhere in comparison to Zheng Yang and the others.

“Of Kong shi's 72 direct disciples, the ten strongest are referred to as the ‘Ten Apostles’, and Ancient Sage Bo Shang is one of them. He's one of the few possessors of the Eye of Insight, which grants him strength unmatched by most.” Zhao Xingmo said.

As a member of the Sanctum of Sages, he revered the founder of the academy deeply, and he was also well-versed in the latter's background as well.

“Eye of Insight?”

“Un. Ancient Sage Bo Shang is the second master teacher after Kong shi to comprehend Eye of Insight, and he even created a set of optic arts for it. It was said that back in the war against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, a look from him would kill even an ordinary Otherworldly Demon Emperor instantaneously! However, it was a pity that despite having being passed down over the years, no one has been able to master the optic arts he has created...” Zhao Xingmo shook his head in lamentation.

“Optic arts? Kill even an ordinary Otherworldly Demon Emperor instantaneously?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

He possessed the Eye of Insight, and he knew what it was capable for. So far, he had only known it to wield the ability to peer through the facade to look into the essence of things, identifying the intrinsic flaws in them... To be able to kill others with just a look, this was something he had never imagined to be possible before.

If that was really the case, wouldn't the Eye of Insight be a really frightening ability?

“Indeed. But of course, the set of optic arts isn't easy to master. Those who are able to master it to that extent would have already inherited Ancient Sage Bo Shang's heritage, and they would be immediately conferred the position of the head of the Sanctum of Sages! Just to give you a sense of what that

represents, the standing of the head of the Sanctum of Sages on the Master Teacher Continent would only be higher than that of the heads of the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan.” Zhao Xingmo remarked.

“Becoming the head of the Sanctum of Sages?” Seeing through the hidden meaning behind those words, Zhang Xuan frowned. “Is there no sanctum head for the Sanctum of Sages at the moment?”

As the number one training institute of the Master Teacher Continent, it served to groom generations and generations of geniuses. There were many elders and clan heads of the Sage Clans that used to be students from the Sanctum of Sages... So, how could the Sanctum of Sages have no sanctum head at all?

“One of the requirements to becoming the head of the Sanctum of Sages is to possess the Eye of Insight and master the optic art which Ancient Sage Bo Shang has left behind. It has been three hundred years since such an expert has appeared in the Sanctum of Sages, so the affairs are currently managed by a deputy head.” Zhao Xingmo explained.

These matters couldn't be considered as secrets. Those who were members of the Sanctum of Sages were aware of such matters, so there were no qualms about speaking of them to Zhang Xuan.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Most powers with long history had their own set of heritage. If one was unable to inherit the heritage, one would be unable to receive the acknowledgement of the predecessors. This would, in turn, make it nigh impossible for them to earn the recognition from the crowd and have them submit to one.

This was especially so for an organization as prestigious as the Sanctum of Sages. These requirements were viewed with grave importance, and there was no way of working around them.

Taking a step back, if someone were to really attempt to circumvent the requirements and proclaim himself as the head

of the Sanctum of Sages... Putting aside the headquarters of the Master Teacher Pavilion, even the students of the Sanctum of Sages themselves would rise up in opposition to it!

And for the sanctum head to not even be recognized by his own students... Putting aside the question of legitimacy, was there anything more disgraceful than that?

“Alright, we have arrived at our destination. Let’s head down.”

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to ask on, Zhao Xingmo suddenly declared loudly. Glancing downward, he noted that the aerial saint beast had already stopped right above an empty square, and it was beginning to descend slowly.

Zhang Xuan knew that this wasn’t a good timing for him to ask on, so he decided to hold his questions off for later.

Hula!

Soon, the aerial saint beast landed on the ground, and the group swiftly leaped off its back.

The square was filled with many men and all sorts of saint beasts. It seemed like they had rushed here from all over the Master Teacher Continent to participate in the final selection as well.

Even with a swift glance, it could be seen that every single one of them possessed exceptional strength.

“Zhao shi, are we going against these men in the final selection?” Ma Minghai asked with quivering lips.

While they weren’t the weakest bunch in the square, there were plenty who were stronger than them. The powerful auras that they exerted were more than enough to tell Ma Minghai and the others that they stood no chance against them in a proper duel.

Back when they were still in their own homeland, they had always thought that they were top geniuses on the Master Teacher Continent. Even if there were people in the world who were more talented than them, the disparity between them was unlikely to be too great. However, after seeing the crowd that

had gathered in the area, they swiftly realized that their thoughts were too naive.

“Most of them are inner clan members of the Sage Clans. On top of the superior purity of their bloodlines, they were also given the best guidance from young, so it’s only natural that they would be that strong. In any case, like I have told you earlier, strength is only one of the criteria being assessed in the Mountain Gate. As long as you were to perform to the best of your abilities in every test, you should stand a decent chance. So, there’s no need to be too worried...” Noting the air of anxiety shrouding the group, Zhao Xingmo consoled.

The inner members of Sage Clans were able to grow swiftly in the earlier stages of their cultivation through awakening their bloodline. Furthermore, they were also had access to the best cultivation resources and the best guidance from a very young age, so it was a given that they would be stronger than the other candidates.

With that huge of a difference in the starting line, it was inevitable that there would be some distance between them at this point. This was an innate factor, so there was nothing they could do to help that. Nevertheless, as long as the group continued working hard, they might just be able to catch up with them.

“We understand. Thank you, Zhao shi.”

Even though the group understood this much too, they still couldn’t help their nervousness.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was secretly scanning his surroundings with his Eye of Insight.

As expected of the offspring of Sage Clans, they are indeed powerful.”

Not only were there Leaving Aperture realm cultivators who had undergone the lightning tribulation amongst the crowd, there were even some who had reached Half-Grand Dominion realm! To possess such strength when they weren’t even in their thirties yet, their talents could be said to be almost on par with him!

As powerful as Zhang Xuan's fighting prowess was at the moment, his true cultivation was still only at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle at the moment, a long distance away from reaching Half-Grand Dominion realm.

"Hm? There seems to be quite a few who aren't master teachers amongst them..." someone within the group suddenly remarked.

Zhang Xuan had also noticed the same as well.

There were quite a few young men in the square who weren't wearing master teacher robes, and they didn't carry the disposition that master teachers would usually have either.

"The Sanctum of Sages serves not only to groom master teachers but those of the other occupations as well, such as blacksmith and apothecary. As such, those from the other occupations would come to challenge the Mountain Gate each year too." Zhao Xingmo replied with a smile.

The Sanctum of Sages was the highest training institute on the Master Teacher Continent, but it didn't seek to just cultivate master teachers. It also had heritages for the other occupations as well.

In fact, the number of non-master teachers amongst the candidates, as a whole, was far higher than the number of master teachers.

"So that's the case..." Everyone nodded.

All of the candidates from the Eight Conferred Empires only numbered thirty in total. If the secondary selection had gone as planned, there would only be twenty of them left.

But on the square, there were more than ten thousand young men, and this disproportionate number of candidates was deeply bewildering to them. However, if the scope of the candidates wasn't just limited to master teachers, that would make perfect sense.

Even though the occupations in the world were divided into Upper Nine Paths, Middle Nine Paths, and Lower Nine Paths, that didn't mean that there were only 27 occupations in total. It

was only a conventional terminology used to rank the occupations.

There were at least a thousand occupations out there in the world, and which occupation wouldn't have a couple of geniuses each year? Given so, it was within expectations that there would be so many candidates taking the final selection.

“Let me see how the strength of the geniuses from the other occupations are like...” Upon understanding all of these, Zhang Xuan began assessing those of the other occupations.

A moment later, he shook his head.

While there were plenty of experts amongst those of the other occupations too, on the whole, they were still rather lacking as compared to master teachers.

After all, master teacher wasn't the number one occupation in the world for nothing.

“Hm?” Just as Zhang Xuan was about to retract his gaze, he suddenly caught sight of a certain group which made his eyes light up in agitation. “Are those people... from the Glacier Plain Court?” “The landscaper occupation has appeared in King Zhongqing's arc. It's an occupation which serves to design and position structures and ornaments in a way that places them in harmony together with the surroundings, thus maximizing its defensive ability. They differ from formation masters in the sense that formation masters create formations but landscapers take these formations into account along with the surrounding environment and determine the best positioning to enhance defense.

1288 Zhang Qian

Standing nearby were a few young ladies. They were dressed in white robes, identical to those of the Glacier Plain Court back when he was at the Myriad Kingdom Alliance branch.

Zhang Xuan had not received any news about Zhao Ya since she left, and he had been wanting to know how she was faring since then. Since he happened to meet the members from the Glacier Plain Court, it was a good opportunity to ask about her condition.

Considering that they had been selected to participate in the final selection of the Sanctum of Sages, the group over there would likely possess considerable standing in the Glacier Plain Court. Thus, there was a good chance that they were aware of how Zhao Ya was doing.

“Zhao shi, I’ll head over there to take a look,” Zhang Xuan informed Zhao Xingmo before making his way over.

“Over there?” Zhao Xingmo took a glance over and remarked, “Those ladies over there are from the Glacier Plain Court. It’ll be best not to get on their bad side.”

“Oh?” Zhang Xuan was surprised by the warning. “Are the members of the Glacier Plain Court known to be unreasonable?”

Zhao Xingmo shook his head and replied, “That’s not it. Most of the members of the Glacier Plain Court are beautiful ladies, so their group tends to be extremely popular in the Sanctum of Sages. In fact, most take pride in marrying one of their members, so there are plenty of people who attempt to chat them up on a daily basis. I fear that you might get snubbed if you approach them abruptly.”

The young man before him was very talented, and his eye of discernment was incredible as well. However, who would have thought that he was actually so lecherous!

On their first meeting, the young man had already asked him about the details of the number one beauty of the Sanctum of Sages, the Luo Clan's little princess. And now, as soon as he spotted the beautiful members of the Glacier Plain Court, he was drawn in and wanted to approach them.

Do you know that the Sanctum of Sages isn't like the Qingyuan Empire? Even if you possess incredible talent, you can't just react in such a manner every time you see a beauty. At this rate, it's just a matter of time before you get beaten up by someone!

"Ah... I just intend to ask them something. I'm not intending to chat them up."

How could Zhang Xuan be unaware of what Zhao Xingmo was thinking after hearing those words and seeing the expression on the latter's face? Black lines immediately streaked across Zhang Xuan face.

He had always conducted himself honestly and righteously, rarely overstepping his boundaries unless truly necessary. Yet, for the other party to treat him like a pervert... that was a great insult to his character!

"No matter what, you have to make sure to tread carefully. There are no weaklings in the Sanctum of Sages. Try to be as low profile as you can, and don't ever get into a conflict with anyone!" Zhao Xingmo advised.

First, the young man forcefully got him to allocate two slots to the Qingyuan Empire during the preliminary selection through his scheming. Next, the young man made a mess out of the secondary selection, forcing him to have to bring everyone over.

And now, barely after they had arrived, he was already trying to approach the group from the Glacier Plain Court.

Can't you just give it a rest for a while? Will you die if you stop causing trouble for a moment?

"Don't worry," Zhang Xuan reassured with a smile, "I've always been one to keep a low profile. I won't get into any trouble, so rest easy!"

This time, he was only heading over to ask some questions. Surely, nothing bad could happen from asking a few questions, right?

“That would be for the best. I’m only your guide, so I won’t be able to help you with anything that happens from here onward. So, allow me to give you a few words of advice. The Glacier Plain Court possesses great power and influence in the Master Teacher Continent, and they used to be on par with the Zhang Clan and Luo Clan in the past. Even though they might have been declining in recent years due to the absence of a court chief, their prowess is still not to be underestimated,” Zhao Xingmo warned with a stern frown.

He was only in charge of selecting the candidates and taking them over to the Sanctum of Sages. Anything beyond that was out of his jurisdiction, and it was not his place to interfere either.

Nevertheless, they had still spent some time together, and he had a rather favorable impression of Zhang Xuan. So, he still hoped that the latter would not get into trouble in the Sanctum of Sages.

Especially not with a power as strong as the Glacier Plain Court.

Knowing that the other party was saying those words out of goodwill, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and replied, “I understand!”

“Un.” Zhao Xingmo nodded before falling silent.

After which, Zhang Xuan made his way over to the members of the Glacier Plain Court and asked with a smile, “May I ask if you all are from the Glacier Plain Court?”

“We are.”

The young ladies turned around and responded, but their faces were devoid of any emotion. Complete indifference, as if trying to distance themselves from the young man before them.

As those of the Glacier Plain Court cultivated yin attribute cultivation techniques, their personalities tended to be a little

cold.

“I am a cultivator from the Qingyuan Empire, and I hope to enquire about a certain matter,” Zhang Xuan said earnestly.

“Don’t you think that your pick-up line is a little too old-fashioned?” one of the young ladies sneered coldly, the disdain in her eyes clear for all to see.

The Glacier Plain Court was one of the top powers in the Master Teacher Continent, and they were ravishing beauties possessing exceptional talent. As a result, there were many who tried to chat them up every single day, and over time, they had seen all kinds of means that others would use. The one that the young man before them was using, trying to enquire about a certain matter—it had been many years since anyone had tried using that on them! It was a pick-up line that had expired a very long time ago!

A complete lack of creativity. Zero marks for effort!

Seeing that he had been misunderstood, Zhang Xuan shook his head with a bitter smile as he quickly explained, “You are really misunderstanding my intentions. I have an acquaintance who entered the Glacier Plain Court recently, and I haven’t been able to gather any news on her. I happened to spot your group here, so I was wondering if I could perhaps enquire about her affairs from you!”

“An acquaintance? You aren’t going to say that your acquaintance is one of us, are you?” The disdain on the young lady’s face deepened.

She had heard so many of such pick-up lines that she could recite most of them from memory.

In the short time that they had spent in the square so far, there had already been five groups of men who had approached them, wanting to get close with them.

‘Young miss, you look familiar. I think we might have met in our previous life.’

‘Aren’t you tired? Because you have been running through my mind all day long.’

She had simply heard too many of such pick-up lines; any more of them could very well cause her ears to grow warts!

“Of course not. The person I wish to ask about is a young lass called Zhao Ya. She should have been brought into the Glacier Plain Court by one of your elders that goes by the name of Liu Xuan,” Zhang Xuan said.

The young lady menacingly narrowed her eyes as she snapped furiously. “Audacious! Is the name of our young court chief something that you are worthy of uttering?”

“Young court chief?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“Stop putting on an act!” An imposing aura burst forth from the young lady as she glared at Zhang Xuan threateningly, as if daring him to continue spouting nonsense. “Leave right now, and I can let this matter slide. Otherwise, don’t blame me for getting nasty!”

As soon as she released her strength, her cultivation immediately showed. Despite her young age, the young lady was actually at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle! Even among the impressive geniuses that had gathered there, she could be considered as an expert.

“Calm down, I just want to ask you...” Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan continued to explain the matter, but the young lady seemed to have reached the limit of her patience. She raised her hand and struck out at Zhang Xuan.

Her palm was imbued with a frosty energy that induced a spine-chilling sensation within one, as if threatening to freeze everything in the surroundings.

“This...”

Zhang Xuan did not think that his serious question would actually end up provoking the other party into making a move against him. Sighing helplessly, he raised his finger in preparation to counterattack, but before he could do so, a figure suddenly appeared before him, and the energy built up abruptly dissipated.

Zhao Xingmo.

“This friend from the Glacier Plain Court, I am a guide from the Sanctum of Sages, Zhao Xingmo. This young man over here is a candidate under me, and if he has offended you in any way, I ask for your pardon...”

It was just a moment ago that the young man had promised him that he would not get himself into trouble, but the young man had ended up provoking the other party into making a move after just a few words. Unable to watch on any longer, he had ended up charging in to mediate in the fight.

“Since Zhao shi has spoken on his behalf, I’ll overlook the matter this once.” Seeing that a guide had stepped in to mediate the matter, the young lady glanced at Zhang Xuan coldly before flinging her sleeves and turning away.

“Thank you.” Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhao Xingmo turned to Zhang Xuan with a frown and said, “Let’s return.”

“I really have something I would like to ask her...”

All Zhang Xuan wanted to know was whether Zhao Ya was faring well or not, but not only was the young lady unwilling to say anything, she even tried to make a move on him. Was there something wrong with her head?

“You said that you wouldn’t provoke them, but as soon as you spoke, you actually called their young court chief a young lass. Aren’t you clearly taunting them?” Zhao Xingmo berated with a deep frown.

Worried about Zhang Xuan, he had been keeping an eye on the situation, and he had heard the conversation between the two of them from the start to the end.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Zhao Ya was his student, so there was no problem with him calling her ‘young lass’. However, he had failed to consider the fact that Zhao Ya was also their young court chief at the moment. From their perspective, his method of addressing her was indeed rather disrespectful.

No matter what, the Glacier Plain Court was still one of the strongest powers on the Master Teacher Continent. The standing of their young court chief could be said to be on par

with a 9-star master teacher, and yet, a young lad like him actually addressed her in such a manner. It was no wonder the young lady had gotten angry.

In a sense, this was like directly addressing the emperor by his name and even calling him a young lad.

“Alright, let’s go back... I’ve heard of the affairs of the Glacier Plain Court’s young court chief too. She possesses the Pure Yin Body, and the Glacier Plain Court only brought her back several months ago. I know she is rumored to possess beauty on par with the little princess of the Luo Clan, but still...” As Zhao Xingmo spoke, he looked at the young man before him and shook his head.

This young fellow was not just a pervert—he was practically blinded by his lust!

He looked into the affairs of the Luo Clan’s little princess before coming to the Sanctum of Sages, and now that he had encountered the members of the Glacier Plain Court, he actually rushed straight forward to enquire about their young court chief.

Are you going to do that to every beautiful lady you come by?

While both of them might be young, they are figures who could rattle the entire Master Teacher Continent with just a stomp of their feet. Just how gutsy are you to actually dare to think of making a move on them?

“Zhao Ya is my... There’s a close relationship between the both of us. I honestly only wish to ask you for some news on her...” Unwilling to give up, Zhang Xuan could only change his words.

Previously, when he had addressed Zhao Ya as a young lass, the young lady had nearly exploded. If he said that she was his student, wouldn’t the young lady overturn the heavens?

Upon hearing those words, the young lady’s eyes immediately widened with rage. Unable to hold her burning fury in anymore, she stepped forward and bellowed furiously.

“Close relationship between the both of you? What kind of nonsense are you spouting? The young court chief of our

Glacier Plain Court is sacred and virtuous—how dare you insult her in such a manner? Zhao shi, pardon me, but I'll have to ask of you to step away. No matter what, I must teach this insolent fellow to watch his mouth!”

“This...” Zhao Xingmo was frenzied.

Previously, that fellow claimed that he was acquainted with the Luo Clan's little princess, and now, he actually claimed that there was a close relationship between him and the young court chief of the Glacier Plain Court.

Just who do you think you are?

The young prodigy from the Zhang Clan?

Do you really think that everyone in the world ought to know of you?

“There must be some kind of misunderstanding...” As crazed as Zhao Xingmo felt on the inside, he still tried to maintain a composed exterior as he attempted to mediate in the conflict.

From his point of view, given Zhang Xuan's capabilities, he would clear the final selection without a problem. It would really be a huge pity if he was injured prior to the final selection.

The young lady harrumphed. “There's no misunderstanding over here. While our Glacier Plain Court has been lying low in recent years, that's not to say that we will tolerate others defaming us in such a manner! How can I simply watch as that bastard insults our young court chief like that? If I don't teach him a lesson, what will become of the authority and prestige of our Glacier Plain Court?”

She took two steps toward Zhang Xuan and eyed him intimidatingly, saying, “Since you dared to speak of our young court chief in such a manner, surely you won't shy away from a fight, will you?”

“You wish to challenge me to a fight?” Seeing how the young lady had even gone to the extent of challenging him to a fight, Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, “If I defeat you, will you tell me the current circumstances of Zhao Ya?”

Seeing how the young man was still persistently addressing their young court chief by her name, the young lady's face turned livid. "You are really courting death..."

But before the young lady could make a move, a leisurely voice suddenly sounded in the air. "This fairy over there, it's not worth it getting angry over an arrogant brat like him. Leave him to me. It would be a huge pity if you dirtied your hands over someone like him!"

Following which, a white-robed young man holding a fan in his hand slowly walked over.

With an elegant flick of his wrist, he folded his fan and chuckled. There was a refined air shrouding him, making him appear gentlemanly.

"The Zhang Clan's Zhang Qian greets the fairies of the Glacier Plain Court. It's a delight to meet you all!"

1289 I'm In A Rush For Time

“Glacier Plain Court’s Chen Leyao pays respects to Zhang gongzi!” Withdrawing her palm, the young lady clasped her fist and returned the greetings

“Zhang Clan?” Zhang Xuan turned to the young man who had just appeared and assessed him carefully.

Zhang Qian appeared to be in his mid-twenties, and his cultivation felt deep like the unfathomable ocean. Just like the Glacier Plain Court’s Chen Leyao, he had reached Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle as well.

It was no wonder why Zhang Jiuxiao could only be considered as one from the side family in the Zhang Clan. Even after receiving his guidance, Zhang Jiuxiao still paled far in comparison to Zhang Qian.

“So you’re Fairy Leyao! I have long heard rumors of your affairs. A palm to subdue seven swords, a breath to freeze three thousand li... The Seven Bandits of Shunyan City has been going wreaking havoc all around, and if not for your help, they might have really brought forth a huge catastrophe!” Zhang Qian chuckled refinedly.

“Zhang gongzi, you’re flattering me!” Chen Leyao’s eyebrows shot up, but her tone remained nonchalant, showing no particular emotion to Zhang Qian’s words.

In order to enter the Sanctum of Sages and resolve the trauma in her cultivation, she had worked herself down to her bone, spending most of her time cultivating. As a result, the only notable affair concerning her was about how she had single-handedly brought down the vicious Seven Bandits of Shunyan City, thus saving many lives from dying in their hands. It wasn’t a particularly huge affair, but the fact that Zhang Qian was aware of it showed that he had been keeping a lookout for her affairs.

“I have always been in awe of Fairy Leyao’s strength and talents.” Zhang Qian complimented once more. “I have heard the conversation between the two of you, and that young man over there has been really disrespectful to you that I couldn’t even stand watching it anymore. Why don’t I teach him a lesson in your stead, so that you don’t have to dirty your hands for someone like him?”

“... I’ll be leaving the matter to you then, Zhang gongzi.” Chen Leyao could tell that Zhang Qian was intentionally fawning on her, and after a moment of pause, she eventually nodded. “It’ll do to just teach him a lesson. There’s no need to go too far.”

It wasn’t like there was some kind of irreconcilable grudge between the both of them, so there was no need to blow things out of proportions. She was only unhappy at how the young man had addressed the name of their young court chief so casually and it would suffice to just teach the young man a lesson so that he would never dare do it again.

“Fairy Leyao sure is kind. Don’t worry, I won’t go too far!”

Huala! Zhang Qian opened the foldable fan in his hand, and as he turned his gaze toward Zhang Xuan, the smile on his face vanished, replaced with frostiness in his eyes. With a disposition which suggested that he had everything in grasp, he said, “This friend over here, I’ll give you two options. You can choose to apologize and compensate for the mistake you have done. I won’t ask for too much, just two Saint intermediate-tier artifacts will do. Otherwise, I’ll make a move and force you to apologize and compensate. Once that happens, don’t expect to be able to get off with just compensating two Saint intermediate-tier artifacts!”

“Apologize? Compensate?” Zhang Xuan nearly burst into laughter.

Couldn’t be bothered with that self-assuming fellow, he turned his gaze back to Chen Leyao and said, “Young lady, I didn’t know that she has become your young court chief, so if there’s anything I have said that has offended you, allow me to apologize to you right here. I am acquainted with your young

court chief quite a while back, so I just would like to know how she's faring in the Glacier Plain Court."

Considering how Zhao Ya's current standing in the Glacier Plain Court, it was understandable why Chen Leyao would get mad at how he addressed Zhao Ya directly by her name.

While Zhang Xuan did find Chen Leyao's words and actions rather offending and reckless, he didn't come to pick a fight. In any case, an apology cost nothing at all, and if he could find out how his student was faring by apologizing, he would gladly do it.

Before Chen Leyao could say anything, Zhang Qian's face had already darkened in fury. "Brat, I am talking to you right here. Are you deaf?"

As one of the geniuses of the esteemed Zhang Clan, he was respected no matter where he went to. No one would dare to snub him even in the slightest. Yet, this brat actually ignored him altogether... This was something that the prideful him couldn't accept.

"I'm enquiring something from the young ladies of the Glacier Plain Court, and I don't think this has anything to do with you, right? Do the members of your Zhang Clan have the habit of drifting to wherever there are ladies and rudely interject in the business of others?" Zhang Xuan glanced at Zhang Qian with cold eyes filled with contempt and disdain as he flung his sleeves. "You really should go for therapy to cure that bad habit of yours!"

Trying to use me as a stepping stone to impress the girls?

Young man from the Zhang Clan, you should already be thankful that I haven't knocked on your doorstep yet. For you to actually be getting on your high horses in front of me, do you really think that your Zhang Clan is untouchable in the Master Teacher Continent?

"What did you say?" Zhang Qian narrowed his eyes menacingly as veins popped on his temples.

Even though his bloodline was purer than Zhang Jiuxiao's, his standing on the Zhang Clan was actually not too high. If he

could establish good relations with those from the Glacier Plain Court, he would be able to become more highly-regarded in the Zhang Clan, which would, in turn, open up more opportunities for him, allowing him to soar through the ranks.

It was for this reason that he unhesitatingly stepped forward to help Chen Leyao when he saw that she had gotten into an argument with another.

He thought that by bringing out the Zhang Clan's name, he would be able to scare the other party into submission. Yet, he never thought that the young man would actually have such a fearless attitude toward the Zhang Clan!

“Unless you are deaf, you should have heard what I have said perfectly clear. Stop sticking your nose into where it doesn't belong and scram to the side, or else I'll have to no choice but to teach you a lesson...” Zhang Xuan ordered coldly with a wave of his hand.

The other party should be thankful that he had a good temperament. If it had been anyone else in his place, he would have surely beaten the other party up by now!

“It's over...” On the other hand, Zhao Xingmo, who had been watching the entire scene from the start to the end, nearly fainted on the spot.

The young man had just said that he was extremely low profile and would avoid trouble, but in just a few moments, he had already successfully turned the disciples of the Glacier Plain Court and an offspring of the Zhang Clan against him...

If this is what you mean by low profile, are you going to tear down the entire Sanctum of Sages once you go high profile?

“You're courting death!” Unable to take Zhang Xuan's taunting, Zhang Qian roared furiously before charging forward.

In an instant, the surrounding air seemed to have become viscous. An incredibly powerful energy converged in on Zhang Xuan, shrouding him within it.

As expected of a genius from the Zhang Clan, despite being at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle as well, his fighting prowess

was nearly on par with the other Vicious he had encountered at the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows.

It was not to say that Vicious was weak, but after several dozen of millenniums to death and having barely awoken from the seal the Qingtian Emperor had cast upon him then, the strength that the other Vicious could exert was really severely limited then. Furthermore, the other Vicious consisted of only the head and the eyes, which meant that his fighting prowess would be severely limited as well.

Nevertheless, despite such factors, Vicious was still an existence which could rival Kong shi back then, so it could be said to be rather amazing for Zhang Qian to be able to wield strength on par with him.

“Hmph!” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes coldly.

As powerful as Zhang Qian might be, there was no way Zhang Xuan would lose against him with the current strength he wielded. Just as he was about to make a move as well, a burst of sword qi suddenly flew toward Zhang Qian.

Hong long!

Noticing the burst of sword qi, Zhang Qian released a powerful ripple of zhenqi in retaliation, and the sword qi dissipated in an instant. Not too far away, a groan echoed inconspicuously, but that faint sound couldn't escape from the notice of those present here. It seemed like in the earlier encounter, the person who had made a move against Zhang Qian had been injured instead.

“Zhang Jiuxiao, you actually dare to raise your hand against me?” Zhang Qian roared furiously.

When he turned his head over, he saw Zhang Jiuxiao rushing forward to stand in front of Zhang Xuan. His slightly pale face hinted that he was the one who had clashed with Zhang Qian earlier and sustained some injuries from it.

No matter what, he was only at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, an entire cultivation realm weaker than the Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle Zhang Qian.

“Zhang Qian, we are here all here to participate in the final selection of the Sanctum of Sages. There’s no need to make things so tense among us...” Suppressing the suffocated sensation crushing his chest, Zhang Jiuxiao clasped his fist and said.

Zhang Xuan was his benefactor, so even though he knew that he was no match for Zhang Qian at all, he couldn’t bring himself to simply look away from the matter.

“You said that there’s no need to make things so tense among us? That might be true a moment ago, but I do see a need for it now!” With a warped look on his face, Zhang Qian roared furiously. “I’ll deal with you once we return to the Zhang Clan. Now, don’t get in my way and scram!”

“If you want to make a move here, you’ll have to start with me!” Zhang Jiuxiao replied adamantly, refusing to back down.

“Jiuxiao, it’s fine. I’ll deal with him myself.” Zhang Xuan placed a hand on Zhang Jiuxiao’s shoulder to indicate that it was fine before stepping forward.

He understood Zhang Jiuxiao’s intentions, but he didn’t think that there was a need for that.

In truth, Zhang Jiuxiao wasn’t trying to play the hero here. He knew that there was a huge disparity in strength between Zhang Qian and him, and he knew that he would only be tragically defeated if a fight were to occur. However, he still chose to intervene in the conflict because that would be the only way to minimize the implications of the matter.

As the number one Sage Clan on the Master Teacher Continent, the Zhang Clan wielded frightening power in its hands. While it wouldn’t stoop so low as to mobilize its influence to interfere in the matters of the younger generation, it was still inevitable that there would be plenty of people in the Sanctum of Sages who were eager to butter up to Zhang Qian and the other offspring of the Zhang Clan. It was for this reason that very few people dared to cross Zhang Qian and the other offspring of the Zhang Clan, or else they could find every step they took in the Sanctum of Sages fraught with difficulties.

If Zhang Jiuxiao were to take the blame for this matter, in view that he was an offspring of the Zhang Clan as well, he would just suffer a bit of punishment and that would be the end of things.

However, what Zhang Jiuxiao didn't know was that Zhang Xuan didn't fear the Zhang Clan at all. As long as he wanted to marry Luo Ruoxin, it was only a matter of time before he became an enemy of the Zhang Clan.

Besides, he didn't fear the suppression of the Zhang Clan either. With the Library of Heaven's Path, would he have to fear anyone attempting to stifle his growth?

Since Zhang Qian was the one to start the conflict, there was no reason for him to defer meekly to the other party!

With these thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze back to Zhang Qian and spoke with casual contempt, "Alright, hurry up and make your move. I'm in a rush for time, so I don't have too much time to waste on you!"

"You..." Seeing how lightly Zhang Xuan was taking him, Zhang Qian roared furiously and charged forward once more, sending a palm strike toward the other party.

The offense this time around was much stronger than before. The immense might behind the palm strike brought forth the slight rumbling of thunder, as if it was tearing open a vacuum in space.

"Powerful..."

"Zhang Qian might not be the strongest candidate dispatched from the Zhang Clan to participate in the final selection this time around, but his strength is still one that shouldn't be underestimated!"

"Even I would have some trouble taking on that palm strike face-on. It would better to dodge it before making another move, but it doesn't seem like Zhang Qian would allow that lad to do so..."

"That haughty fellow is in for some suffering!"

“Even if he wanted to chat those young ladies up, he should have found a better reason than that. Now that he has offended both the Glacier Plain Court and the Zhang Clan, even if he clears the final selection by some chance, he probably won’t be able to survive in the Sanctum of Sages for too long...”

...

The surrounding crowd also swiftly turned their attention over to the commotion that was going on as well. There was a myriad of expressions on their faces, shocked, curious, intrigued, and much more. However, if one thing was clear, none of them thought well of the young man.

There was no one who dared to step forward to mediate in the conflict either, especially since the Zhang Clan was involved in the matter as well. There was no way they would risk getting flames on themselves just to help a stranger.

“This...” Chen Leyao also didn’t expect things to blow out of proportions, and a slight frown emerged between her brows.

She thought that the young man was just a little thoughtless in his words, but at this point, conceited would be a more appropriate adjective to describe him!

She had long heard of Zhang Qian’s name, even before arriving in the Sanctum of Sages.

Despite only being twenty-six this year, Zhang Qian had already reached Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle. On top of that, his aptitude toward battle techniques was astounding as well. Not only so, he also boasted vast battle experience, such that even Chen Leyao herself would be hard-pressed to subdue him. For a mere Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle lad to dare taunt him... Wasn’t that lad just asking to be killed?

Hong long!

Before everyone’s astonished gazes, the sheer force of Zhang Qian’s palm tore a deep gorge right through the square.

“That’s the Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, Soul Shattering Palm!”

“That strike doesn’t just wield overwhelming physical might, it also boasts a powerful offensive power toward souls as well! If that strike were to land on one squarely, it would jolt one’s soul and instantaneously knock one out, putting one at the mercy of another!”

“Even among Saint intermediate-tier battle techniques, it can be considered as one of the strongest!”

...

A huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd once more.

But at this very moment, a slightly disappointed voice sounded from the young man standing right in front of that powerful palm strike, “This is your move? Well, I guess it’s not too bad considering that it’s coming from you, but I really don’t have any interest in playing with you right now, so pardon me then...”

Right after saying those words, the young man took a step forward and thrust his palm forward casually.

Kacha!

There was no astounding strength or overwhelming aura from that palm strike, but for some inexplicable reason, the majestic Soul Shattering Palm actually dissipated upon clashing with it.

Following right after, with a resounding ‘pa dah!’, Zhang Qian found himself crushed forcefully onto the ground like a toad, as if there was a mountain weighing down on him. He struggled wildly, but his body simply wouldn’t budge at all. Frenzy and rage were written all over his face.

“This...”

“He subdued Zhang Qian in a single move?”

Everyone widened their eyes in frenzy.

“H-how is this possible?” Chen Leyao widened her eyes in disbelief.

“Settled.” Without sparing a glance for Zhang Qian, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze back to Chen Leyao and said, “Young

lady, you haven't answered my question yet. How is your young court chief faring in the Glacier Plain Court?"

1290 Chen Leyao's Attitude

“Y-you...” Chen Leyao was at a loss for words.

She viewed her strength to be roughly on the same level as Zhang Qian, so Zhang Qian's defeat meant that she wouldn't have been able to withstand even a second blow from the young man as well!

If they were to really get into a battle, she would only be humiliated!

Wasn't he just a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle cultivator?

How could he be so formidable?

Cold sweat trickled down Chen Leyao's back. It was fortunate that Zhang Qian had stood in earlier, or else the one who would be crushed on the ground like a toad would have been her... If that were to really happen to her, she would never be able to hold her head high before others anymore!

“Just who in the world are you?” With tightly clenched fists, Chen Leyao asked.

It shouldn't be possible for someone who wielded such strength to be a nobody. So, how could she have never heard of the young man before?

More importantly, judging from the young man's overwhelming strength and how he was able to qualify for the final selection in the Sanctum of Sages, he should have a powerful background. Since that was the case, it was irrational to think that someone of the young man's caliber to stoop down to provoke them.

Building on that argument, could that mean that he was really acquainted with their young court chief? Or perhaps, was he... one of their young court chief's pursuers?

“I am a 7-star master teacher from Qingyuan Empire, so I doubt that you would have heard of my name. Don't worry, I

don't mean you any ill-will. I'm just asking out of concern.” Zhang Xuan replied.

As famous as Zhang Xuan might be in Qingyuan Empire and Hongyuan Empire, it was unlikely that his reputation would travel so far for even those of the Sanctum of Sages to have heard of him.

“Qingyuan Empire?” Chen Leyao pondered for a moment before shaking her head.

There was indeed no notable figure she knew of that originated from Qingyuan Empire.

Due to a war two decades ago, the Qingyuan Empire had become the weakest of the Eight Conferred Empires. Who could have thought that such a talented master teacher would emerge from their ranks at this point in time?

“Are you... really acquainted with our young court chief?” Chen Leyao asked hesitantly.

According to what she knew, their young court chief seemed to have come from Qingyuan Empire as well. Could the both of them really be acquainted with one another?

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded affirmatively.

Zhao Ya was one of his direct disciples, and together, they had forged their way out of Tianxuan Kingdom to the greater world out there. Their relationship couldn't be just covered with the word 'acquainted'.

“I have been a bit worried about how she has been doing ever since your Elder Liu Xuan took her to the Glacier Plain Court, so I thought that I would ask you since you are from the Glacier Plain Court as well. I really don't intend anything aside of that.” Zhang Xuan explained earnestly.

“I see. If that's the case, I guess it would be fine to speak of her affairs to you...” Chen Leyao looked at Zhang Xuan's earnest eyes for a moment before nodding slowly. “To tell you the truth, I don't know much about our young court chief either. I know that she's extremely diligent in her cultivation, and her cultivation has been growing swiftly as well... While it hasn't been long since she arrived in the Glacier Plain Court,

her strength already far surpasses ours, reaching a level unfathomable to us. As for the details, I'm afraid that I am not too clear about them myself either..."

Speaking up to this point, Chen Leyao's face couldn't help but redden.

While she did possess considerable talent as well, which made her a relatively famous figure in the Glacier Plain Court, she was still a long distance away from matching up to the young court chief.

As the young court chief had devoted all of her time to her cultivation, she hadn't been able to find an opportunity to interact with the other party over the past half a year since the other party's arrival. In fact, if not for the couple of times she had seen the young court chief from afar, she would have doubted if there was truly such a figure in their Glacier Plain Court at all. As a result of that, she knew next to nothing about the other party.

Zhao Ya's strength far surpasses theirs? Zhang Xuan was startled for a moment before nodding slowly.

As one who possessed the Pure Yin Body, her cultivation would surge forward once she awakened her unique constitution. On top of that, there was no doubt that the Glacier Plain Court would devote all of their resources into grooming her as well, so it was indeed not difficult for her to surpass Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle in half a year.

It seems like I really have to work harder... Zhang Xuan thought with a bitter smile.

It would really be embarrassing if he turned out to be the weakest amongst his students the next time they met.

"Thank you for your information. Pardon me for having imposed on you. Farewell." Seeing that Chen Leyao really didn't know much about Zhao Ya, Zhang Xuan decided to take his leave.

In any case, the fact that Zhao Ya had been recognized as the young court chief by the members of the Glacier Plain Court, and that her cultivation had risen beyond Leaving Aperture

realm showed that the Glacier Plain Court hadn't been mistreating her. Since that was the case, he would be able to rest his heart easy.

His students would have their own lives to live too, he couldn't possibly keep an eye on them all the way. He would just have to be content with knowing that they were doing well.

With a wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan released the weight on Zhang Qian. Then, with a polite bow, he returned back to where he was standing.

"There's no need to stand on ceremony..." Seeing Zhang Xuan leaving without saying anything else, not even sparing her an additional glance, Chen Leyao's face reddened in embarrassment.

Previously, she thought that the other party was intentionally saying those words to chat her up, or perhaps, to build a relationship with the Glacier Plain Court. However, from the looks of it now... that was clearly not the case!

The young man had really only approached her just to ask a question.

If she had known it in advance, she wouldn't have been so self-assuming and implicate Zhang Qian in the matter...

As this thought came to her mind, she quickly turned her head over to look at the released Zhang Qian. The latter struggled to his feet with rage and mania written on his face.

"Damn it!" Zhang Qian spat indignantly.

He thought that this was an opportunity for him to perform before the beauties and get close with them, only to find himself crushed to the floor in a single move. The great humiliation he had gone through left him feeling so frustrated that he could go mad on the spot.

However, that encounter had also made him realize that the young man was someone whom the current him was no match for. As furious as he may be, he knew that he would only be embarrassing himself further if he were to rush up to the young man and confront him.

“Are you fine?” While Zhang Qian was at the peak of his rage, he suddenly saw Chen Leyao looking over with a concerned look.

“I... I’m fine!” With a reddened face, Zhang Qian quickly tried to regain his poise.

He attempted to flick open the foldable fan in his hand to block his face, only to find that half of the fan had been destroyed in the previous clash. Even though their battle was ended in a single blow, the shockwave that was released as a result of the blow was not one which ordinary fans could withstand. As a result, it ended up being reduced to an unseemly state.

“It’s good that you’re fine. Zhang shi, thank you for making a stand for me earlier. However, it seems like the friend from before means no ill-will, so I hope that you won’t take this matter to heart.” Chen Leyao said.

It was while trying to stand up for her that Zhang Qian ended up landing himself in such a state. Even though he ended up contributing nothing at all, she was still rather grateful to him for offering his help.

This entire incident had originated from her misunderstanding, and she felt deeply ashamed by her rashness as well. Thus, she felt that it was necessary for her to mediate between the both of them, and hopefully, they might be able to put aside their differences.

“No ill-will? Just on the very fact that he had belittled our Zhang Clan, there’s no way I’ll be able to make peace with him!” Hearing that Chen Leyao was even speaking on that young man’s behalf now, Zhang Qian’s rage intensified.

“Fairy Leyao, you need not say anything more. This thing has nothing to do with you anymore. That brat has insulted our Zhang Clan and even made a move on me. I’ll have to return this favor to him, or else what dignity would I have in the Sanctum of Sages?”

As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he was utterly crushed right before the faces of so many geniuses before they could

even take the final selection. Without a doubt, this incident would be one of the darkest spots in his records. If he couldn't get even with the other party, he would be mocked for this matter for many years to come!

"This..." Chen Leyao had no idea what she could say at this point.

Indeed. With how far things had come, it was no longer just a personal conflict between her and that young man anymore.

"Zhang Yu, I want you to look into the background of that brat and find out why Zhang Jiuxiao is helping him!" While Zhang Qian might be arrogant, he wasn't a reckless individual. After a moment of thought, he turned to the side and instructed.

On the other hand, the young man known as Zhang Yu before him nodded in response before disappearing amidst the crowd.

Inner clan members like him tended to have some personal attendants, who would be in charge of taking care of their daily necessities and attending to miscellaneous matters.

Not too long later, Zhang Yu returned. He clasped his fist and reported, "Young Master, I have managed to dig up some things on that fellow. He's a master teacher from Qingyuan Empire, serving as the principal of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. He has once succeeded in crashing the Qingyuan Empire, which goes to say that he possesses talent and strength far beyond ordinary master teachers!"

Most of the affairs surrounding Zhang Xuan were recorded in the Master Teacher Pavilion, so it was actually not too difficult for those who knew where to look to acquire information on him.

"Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy? Not even worth a mention!" Zhang Qian scoffed derisively before a frown emerged between his brows. "However, the fact that he succeeded in crashing the Qingyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion does make him quite a troublesome figure to deal with!"

In his view, being a principal of a Master Teacher Academy in somewhere as small as Hongyuan Empire was no different

from being the chief of some a remote village, an insignificant figure. However, if the young man had successfully crashed a Master Teacher Pavilion before... things wouldn't be that simple anymore.

There were certain restrictions imposed on pavilion crashing. For one, a master teacher's rank must not exceed that of the tier of the Master Teacher Pavilion he was crashing, and he must be a local in the region as well.

It was due to these two restrictions that only a small number of people had succeeded in pavilion crashing over the past several dozen millenniums. The very fact that the young man had successfully crashed a Master Teacher Pavilion was enough to show that he wielded extraordinary talent.

“But no matter how formidable he might be, he's still nothing more than a countryside bumpkin. Young Master, if you had used the power of your bloodline earlier, there was no way he would have been a match for you!” Zhang Yu said.

What that made Sage Clans extremely frightening wasn't their talent but their bloodline.

“Indeed, it won't be too difficult for me to defeat him if I were to tap into my bloodline. However, using that ability will drain me greatly, and I won't be able to recover in the short-run either. Given that the final selection is coming up, I can't afford to deplete myself at this point in time...” Zhang Qian shook his head.

It was not that he didn't want to use the power of his bloodline but he dared not to.

The power of his bloodline would exhaust his strength by far too much, such that even if he managed to teach that young man a lesson, his performance in the final selection would be impeded as a result... If so, he would be severely punished when he returned to the Zhang Clan.

The Zhang Clan also valued the slots for the Sanctum of Sages greatly as well.

“What do we do then?” Zhang Yu asked.

“There’s no need to worry.” Zhang Qian harrumphed as he narrowed his eyes menacingly. “Let him immerse himself in his glee for a couple of days. Once I get into the Elite Division of the Sanctum of Sages, he would be nothing more than a helpless bug in my grasp!”

“That’s true...” Zhang Yu nodded in realization.

Naturally, students of differing degree of talent and strength had to be groomed under different environment and conditions. For this reason, the students of the Sanctum of Sages were allocated to one of the two divisions based on the results of the final selection, namely the Elite Division and the Ordinary Division.

The Elite Division was where most geniuses were gathered. They were groomed to be future Sages, and they stood a far better chance at entering the Inner Sanctum in the future.

Comparatively, the conditions for those in the Ordinary Division were considerably poorer.

Zhang Qian’s goal wasn’t just to clear the final selection; he wanted to get into the Elite Division as well, becoming one of the top existences amongst the students!

“With the greater degree of authority I would wield as a member of the Elite Division, I would be able to make his life in the Sanctum of Sages a living hell! After I have my fun with him, I shall have him expelled from the Sanctum of Sages so as to carve it deep in his mind that the Zhang Clan isn’t an existence whom he can offend!” Zhang Qian sneered as his eyes turned completely cold.

At this moment, he suddenly recalled something, and he turned his head over, “Right, what’s that fellow called?”

After all that had been said and done, Zhang Qian suddenly realized that he didn’t even know what the young man was called.

“He goes by the surname of Zhang as well, but he isn’t from our Zhang Clan. His name is Zhang Xuan!” Zhang Yu replied.

“Zhang Xuan? You said that the young man earlier is called Zhang Xuan?” Before Zhang Qian could even speak, Chen

Leyao had already abruptly interjected in with an anxious look on her face.

“Yes, his name is Zhang Xuan. He’s just a lowly figure who walked out of Tianxuan Kingdom, and he still has the cheek to adopt the same surname as us...” Zhang Yu harrumphed coldly.

However, before he could finish his words, Zhang Yu’s body suddenly stiffened. A surge of chilling energy had abruptly gripped his body.

Following which, a palm suddenly flew for his face.

Pah!

With a resounding echo, Zhang Yu was sent flying out before crashing heavily into the ground. His shattered teeth scattered all over the floor, and blood spurted out of his mouth endlessly.

Seeing this, Zhang Qian stepped forward and asked with a livid expression, “Fairy Leyao, what do you mean by this?”

The person who had just made a move earlier was Chen Leyao, but why would she suddenly turn on them all of a sudden?

“Zhang Qian, you better keep the mouth of your subordinate in check. And you as well, if I were to find out that you have been disrespectful to Zhang Xuan, Zhang shi... Let it be known that our Glacier Plain Court won’t sit idly!”

Placing her hands coldly behind her back, Chen Leyao spoke with unquestionable conviction.

1291 Zhao Xingmo's Mental Breakdown

“You are going to fall out with me over that Zhang Xuan?”
Zhang Qian could hardly believe what he had just heard.

He did all of this in order to win the goodwill of Chen Leyao and the Glacier Plain Court, but why did it seem like his efforts were backfiring on him?

Weren't you so angry at him that you even wanted to make a move on him earlier? Why are you protecting him now?

“Zhang Qian, the previous slap was just a warning. I hope that you will know what's best for yourself!” Chen Leyao waved her hands casually.

“You... Why? I want to know why!” Overwhelmed with rage, Zhang Qian bellowed in agitation.

He really couldn't understand how the woman before him could be so fickle in her attitude.

“You don't need to know why. Just know that if you dare to cause any trouble to Zhang shi, you will be making an enemy out of me as well!” Chen Leyao replied with a steely and determined tone.

From her voice, there was no doubt that her words weren't just a mere threat. She wouldn't hesitate to make a move if Zhang Qian really dared to do anything to Zhang Xuan!

“You...” Zhang Qian clenched his fists tightly as his body trembled from anger. He wanted to lash out at the woman before him, and it took the final shreds of his rationality to prevent him from doing so.

Putting aside the fact that Chen Leyao was nowhere weaker than him, he couldn't afford to offend the Glacier Plain Court at this point in time.

“Very well...” Zhang Qian stared at Chen Leyao for a moment longer before suppressing his rage forcefully. Flinging his sleeves, he carried Zhang Yu up and walked away.

He had come all the way here to fawn on Chen Leyao, only to have his subordinate pummeled by the latter instead... The more he thought about it, the more furious he felt.

“Zhang Xuan, it’s all your fault... If I don’t make you pay the price for that, my surname shall not be Zhang!” Unable to vent his frustrations of Chen Leyao, Zhang Qian turned all of his hostility toward Zhang Xuan instead.

If not for that brat, how could he possibly suffer such humiliation? His relationship with those from the Glacier Plain Court wouldn’t have turned awry either.

As this thought flashed across his mind, he turned around to glance in Chen Leyao’s direction, only to see the latter looking at Zhang Xuan with a complicated look in her eyes.

“Damn it!” Seeing this, Zhang Qian’s anger flared up once more.

But amidst this anger, some doubts emerged in his mind as well.

Chen Leyao was an aloof person who wouldn’t even bother to keep up conventional politeness before others. Why would she suddenly regard that fellow so highly?

Was she charmed by him?

...

“Senior Leyao, Zhang Qian is an exceptional individual, be it in terms of background or talent. Is it really wise to fall out with him like that?” another young lady from the Glacier Plain Court walked up to Chen Leyao and asked.

She had gone off for a moment earlier, so she didn’t hear the earlier conversation. All she saw was Senior Leyao making a move on Zhang Qian’s subordinate, and this act left her deeply perplexed.

Regardless of which aspect one was looking from, Zhang Qian was an outstanding master teacher. It would be best to befriend

such a person rather than to make an enemy out of him, so why would Senior Leyao suddenly fall out with one another?

“Do you know who the young man here with us earlier was?” Chen Leyao asked.

The young lady pondered for a moment before shaking her head, “I have no idea.”

“He’s Zhang Xuan, Zhang shi!” Chen Leyao replied with a grim expression.

“Zhang Xuan... Zhang Xuan?! Senior Leyao, you can’t be saying that... he’s the man who resolved the problems in our cultivation techniques, our benefactor?” the young lady’s body froze on the spot.

“That’s him! If I’m not mistaken, he’s our young court chief’s teacher as well...” Chen Leyao continued.

“H-how is that possible?” The young lady widened her eyes in disbelief.

Their Glacier Plain Court’s Yin Formula and Yang Formula were powerful but fundamentally flawed, which resulted in the premature deaths of the cultivators practicing them. Even those who had reached Saint realm would survive no more than three hundred years, paling far in comparison to the average thousand years lifespan most ordinary Saint realm cultivators would have.

Like flowers, the young ladies of the Glacier Plain Court blossomed for just a short moment before withering in desolation.

Chen Leyao and the others thought that they were bound to walk down the same road as well, but a gift from the heavens descended upon them... Eight months ago, when Elder Liu Xuan brought their current young court chief back, she also handed over a revised copy of their Yin Formula and Yang Formula over to the Glacier Plain Court.

The revised version had resolved the various side effects that cultivating the Yin Formula and the Yang Formula would cause, allowing their lifespan to revert back to the length of an ordinary cultivator!

Even though news concerning the origin of the revised cultivation technique had been suppressed by the upper echelons, Chen Leyao, as one of the core members of the Glacier Plain Court, still managed to learn a thing or two about it.

From what she had heard, it was the teacher of their young court chief who created the revised version, a master teacher named ‘Zhang Xuan’...

All along, Chen Leyao had envisioned the benefactor to be an old man, at least an 8-star master teacher at minimum. Yet, who could have thought that he would be so young, roughly the same age as them!

“By revising the cultivation technique, he has bestowed upon us a new life...” Realizing this as well, the young lady’s face flushed crimson in agitation.

“Indeed. Given how indebted we are to him, it’s really unforgivable that I have attempted to make a move on him... Should we head over to pay our respects to him, as well as to apologize for my earlier mistake?” Chen Leyao asked awkwardly.

“Sounds good.” The young lady nodded. She quickly gathered the rest of the members of the Glacier Plain Court who weren’t around previously and explained the situation to them as well, and they revealed looks of shock as well.

Their gazes couldn’t help but drift in Zhang Xuan’s direction.

...

“How can you be so reckless?” Looking at Zhang Xuan, Zhao Xingmo couldn’t help but berate furiously.

The other party was a genius of the Zhang Clan! To knock him into the ground with a single slap, humiliating him in such a manner... That was equivalent to thoroughly offending the Zhang Clan! How was he going to survive in the Sanctum of Sages after this matter?

“I only intended to ask a few questions, but Zhang Qian just had to stick his leg into the matter for no reason.” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly.

As powerful as the Zhang Clan was, they couldn't possibly do whatever they want in the Sanctum of Sages. One had to play by the rules here!

And as long as it was they were playing within the rules, there was really nothing for Zhang Xuan to fear!

If forced to a corner, Zhang Xuan didn't mind going all out to bring down whatever influence the Zhang Clan had in the Sanctum of Sages!

“The only reason why you are able to remain calm is because you don't understand the extent of the influence that the Zhang Clan wields in the Sanctum of Sages. If you were to know, there's no way you would be thinking the same anymore...”

Seeing that Zhang Xuan didn't care at all, Zhao Xingmo shook his head and said, “Why don't I put it this way for you? The Sanctum of Sages is an academy that towers above the Sage Clans, but as the number one clan, the numbers of slots that the Zhang Clan receives each year is really substantial, and most of their dispatched candidates are able to successfully clear the final selection as well. Their clan members could be found in every single grade, and they dominate most of the important roles in the academy as well... Offending one of them would be equivalent to offending all of them. Once that happens, no matter what you attempt to do in the Sanctum of Sages, you will find yourself impeded at every step.”

Sometimes, it was more frightening and troublesome to offend a ruffian than an official. At least officials would still be bound by rules and self-decency, but ruffians would stoop to anything to make your life a living hell.

“Even if they have the numbers, they wouldn't dare to mess around in the Sanctum of Sages.” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly.

“Even if they don't mess around, just following the rules will be enough to leave you with a headache. Putting everything aside, if all of them were to challenge you one by one, do you think that you'll still have time to cultivate?” Zhao Xingmo asked.

“That would really be troublesome...” Zhang Xuan scratched his head.

Indeed.

Even if Zhang Xuan was able to defeat all of those challengers, their pestering would still be more than enough to annoy him to no end. That would indeed be difficult to deal with.

“Furthermore, you didn’t just offend the Zhang Clan just now, you offended the Glacier Plain Court as well. Even if the influence of the Glacier Plain Court in the Sanctum of Sages pales in comparison to the Zhang Clan, it’s still not to be underestimated. Furthermore, due to the nature of their group, their rallying power is no joke either! Just a call, and countless helpers would come their way. As long as they were to openly express their hostility, there would be plenty of geniuses who would be willing to teach you a lesson in their stead!” Zhao Xingmo continued on.

It was one thing that the members of the Glacier Plain Court were all ladies, but they were top-notch beauties at that. It was for this reason that most people were fixated on the idea of marrying a lady from the Glacier Plain Court.

As such, the Glacier Plain Court also became one of the powers which no one dared to offend. The endless stream of trouble that could ensue from crossing them would really be able to give anyone a headache.

Zhang Xuan sure knew how to pick his enemies! He had warned the young man so many times against it, but he still ran over to provoke them...

Can’t you just quietly wait here for the final selection to start? How good would that be?

What were the words you have said earlier? Low profile?

Are you sure that this can be considered as low profile?

If that was low profile, there would be no one high profile in the world!

“Listen to my advice and apologize to those from the Glacier Plain Court. I think there’s still some room for reconciliation with them. Otherwise, if the two of them combine their forces to deal with you, even ten lives wouldn’t be enough for them to take!” Zhao Xingmo pondered for a moment before advising.

While he was only in charge of bringing them here, he had a good opinion of Zhang Xuan. He didn’t hope for the latter to suffer over a moment of folly just after he had entered the Sanctum of Sages.

“This...”

Just as Zhang Xuan scratched his head, not knowing how to respond to those words, Zhang Jiuxiao’s anxious voice suddenly sounded by the side, “The members of the Glacier Plain Court are making their way over to us...”

“Ah?”

Zhao Xingmo and Zhang Xuan quickly turned their gazes over, and indeed, Chen Leyao and the other young ladies from the Glacier Plain Court were walking in their direction.

They might still have been able to pray that the young ladies from the Glacier Plain Court were just walking coincidentally in their direction, but those impassioned gazes fixated on Zhang Xuan had completely ruled out that possibility.

“They must be here to thrash it out with you, Zhang shi. I fear that they might have already come to some sort of agreement with Zhang Qian. This is really bad...” Zhao Xingmo frowned in worry.

Too anxious to drag Zhang Xuan away, he didn’t see Chen Leyao making a move on Zhang Yu earlier. So, when the entire group from the Glacier Plain Court marched imposingly in their direction, he immediately thought that they were here to cause them trouble.

“Zhang shi, you should first apologize to them before they say anything later on... At the very least, try to appease them before they do anything!” Zhao Xingmo anxiously sent a telepathic message over to Zhang Xuan.

“Apologize to them?” Zhang Xuan felt deeply conflicted at this moment. “How should I go around doing it?”

Apologizing wasn't a big deal to him, but he knew that he hadn't done wrong this time around, so he really couldn't bring himself to admit that it was his fault!

“How to go around doing it?”

Not expecting Zhang Xuan to have such a low emotional quotient, Zhao Xingmo nearly tore his hair out in exasperation. “Alright, I'll guide you step by step. Just repeat after me word for word, alright?”

“As soon as they come, say these words, ‘Fairy Leyao, please forgive me for my bluntness earlier. I'll apologize to you sincerely here, so I hope that you can overlook my faux pas...’”

“... Alright then.” Knowing that Zhao Xingmo was doing this for his good, Zhang Xuan eventually decided to go along with his plan after a moment of hesitation.

By the time he memorized those words from Zhao Xingmo, the young ladies of the Glacier Plain Court were already standing before him. Thus, he cleared his throat and began on his monologue, “Fairy Leyao...”

But before he could finish his words, the young lady before him had already bowed deeply and said, “Zhang shi, please forgive me for my bluntness earlier. I'll apologize to you sincerely here, so I hope that you can overlook my faux pas...”

“Ah?” Hearing oddly familiar words coming from Chen Leyao's mouth, Zhang Xuan was stunned.

“Cough cough!” Zhao Xingmo also widened his eyes in shock, and he nearly collapsed to the ground.

Wasn't the other party here to cause trouble?

Why did they suddenly start apologizing instead?

More importantly, to be saying the exact same words which he had just taught Zhang Xuan...

“This is a specialty from our Glacier Plain Court, Wintry Spirit Essence. It has exceptional effects for those who are at Leaving Aperture realm. If you don’t find it too shabby, please do accept my gift. It’s a compensation for my earlier rudeness...”

Before the both of them could recover from their shock, Chen Leyao had already whipped out a jade bottle and passed it over.

“Wintry Spirit Essence? B-but that’s one of the most valuable resources in the Glacier Plain Court! Even a single bottle would cost a thousand concentrated high-tier spirit stones...”
Zhao Xingmo widened his eyes in shock, and he nearly choked on his own saliva.

Wintry Spirit Essence was a rare commodity even in the Glacier Plain Court, and it was barely sufficient for their internal consumption. As such, it was nearly impossible to find it in the open market. Yet, Chen Leyao was actually intending to give it to Zhang Xuan just like that...

Just what in the world was going on?

Weren’t they marching here angrily to pick a bone with Zhang Xuan?

Why were they moving around carefully instead, apologizing and even passing over a gift as well?

Unable to make sense of the perplexing situation before him, Zhao Xingmo felt a little light-headed.

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“Wintry Spirit Essence?” Zhang Xuan did not expect the other party to offer him a gift after apologizing. He froze for a moment before taking a glance at the jade bottle.

The jade bottle was not too big, but there was a freezing air emanating from it, threatening to freeze someone into an ice cube at any moment. At the same time, spiritual energy even more concentrated than concentrated high-tier spirit stones could be felt pulsating within the jade bottle.

Even though Zhang Xuan had never heard of the item before, he could tell at first glance that it was something extraordinarily valuable. With just the spiritual energy contained inside, he would have no trouble pushing for a breakthrough to Half-Leaving Aperture realm. In fact, even reaching Leaving Aperture realm with it did not seem impossible.

“That’s right. Zhang shi, please do accept it. It’s a token of my goodwill,” Chen Leyao urged anxiously.

Since she had cultivated the cultivation technique that Zhang Xuan had altered, that made the young man a half-teacher to her. On top of that, the young man was the teacher of their young court chief.

Had she not thought that the young man was trying to chat her up and attempted to make a move, Zhang Qian would not have been drawn in, and the whole string of trouble would not have happened.

No matter what, she had to make it up to the other party.

“This...” Zhang Xuan blinked blankly.

Previously, Zhao Xingmo had spoken of the matter with extreme graveness, urging him to admit his fault and apologize, making it seem as if the young ladies from the Glacier Plain Court were terrifying monsters. But from how he saw it, they seemed rather easy to approach, and they were

very cordial. It was completely unlike what Zhao Xingmo had said earlier!

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was still hesitating, Chen Leyao thought that he was still angry, and she urged him anxiously. “Zhang shi, we won’t be able to rest well if you refuse to accept our gift...”

“This... Alright then. Since it’s a token of your goodwill, I won’t hold back!”

Judging from the other party’s attitude, it felt that she would never let him go if he refused her gift, so he could only helplessly reach out to take the jade bottle.

Relief visibly flashed across Chen Leyao’s face for a moment. “Thank you for your understanding, Zhang shi.”

Since the young man was willing to accept her gift, she saw this as a sign that he was willing to put aside their differences and forgive her.

“You’re too polite.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist in response. Then, with a slightly perplexed tone, he asked, “I was rather impolite to you earlier as well, so why would... you all apologize to me instead?”

He could not make sense of the situation.

It was just a moment ago that the other party had been so furious that she had wanted to make a move on him, but a few minutes later, she suddenly approached him to give him a gift.

Even for a change of mind, that was way too fast!

“This...” Chen Leyao and the others glanced at one another, and bitter smiles surfaced on their lips.

“It’s because...”

Just as she was about to begin explaining, the ruckus in the surroundings abruptly vanished, to the point where one could even hear a pin drop. Following which, three figures flew over from the distance and stopped in the air above the square, emanating powerful auras.

All three of them were old men. Zhang Xuan found himself unable to gauge how powerful they were, but the powerful auras that they emanated left one feeling as if they could tear a person apart with just a glare.

Beneath his sleeves, Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly. They possess even greater power than Luo Chengxin.

Luo Chengxin was a Saint 7-dan expert, so did that mean that those three in the sky were at Saint 8-dan?

With such strength, they could already be ranked at the top of the Master Teacher Continent!

Zhao Xingmo sent a telepathic message to Zhang Xuan to explain the situation. “They are the elders of the Sanctum of Sages, and they are in charge of invigilating the final selection.”

“I see...” Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

As expected of the Sanctum of Sages! The strength of their elders was really at a wholly different level!

“Candidates!” The old man standing at the very front spoke. “The three of us will be overseeing the selection this time around. I am 8-star Master Teacher Liu Haoyu, and you can address me as Elder Liu. The esteemed gentleman on my left is Elder Han Zhu, and the one on my right is Elder Lin Qing.”

His voice was not particularly loud, but it resounded clearly in everyone’s ears. It felt like even if one were cover one’s ears, the voice would still resonate right within one’s mind, preventing one from shutting it off altogether.

Demonic tunist... and a particularly high-ranked one at that! Zhang Xuan noted with a grim expression.

As a demonic tunist himself, he was able to tell that there was something amiss with the other party’s voice. He had already comprehended the level of ‘the greatest sound is silence, and the greatest form is formless’.

For even the simplest words to wield such strength... If the elder tapped into the power of his Primordial Spirit as well,

most probably, every single person standing in the square would be put into a trance immediately.

A Saint 8-dan master teacher was indeed frightening. Even a casual gesture from them could wield so much power.

“I believe the guides should have informed you all of the entrance examination to our Sanctum of Sages—challenging the Mountain Gate,” Elder Liu said as he grabbed at the space in front of him.

Huala!

A massive gate abruptly warped into appearance before the crowd. A brilliant light shimmered within the gate, making it impossible for one to tell what was on the other side.

“Could this be... a Teleportation Formation for living beings?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Legend had it that 8-star formation masters were capable of not just transmitting holograms and words but even lifeforms.

The gate before his eyes caused significant disturbances in space, and it felt as if stepping in would bring him into a whole new world. Chances were that it was the legendary Teleportation Formation that he had heard so much about.

“It’s indeed a Teleportation Formation.” Zhao Xingmo confirmed Zhang Xuan’s supposition. “The Mountain Gate examination won’t be held within the Sanctum of Sages but a unique folded space. A Teleportation Formation is required in order to enter the area.”

“Folded space?” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding.

Based on what he had heard about the Mountain Gate so far, it sounded far more complex than the Caged Battle Royale. Considering how there were over ten thousand candidates participating in the final selection simultaneously and each candidate would face a test unique to them, space was bound to be a huge problem. However, if the test were to be conducted in a folded space, everything would make sense.

He had a folded space himself too, the Qiu Wu Palace. As such, he was rather familiar with it.

“In the Mountain Gate examination, the difficulty will be altered based on your individual capability. Each person will be faced with tests vastly different from others’, so there’s no point taking the experiences of preceding candidates as reference,” Elder Liu advised, gazing down upon the crowd. “You just have to try your best and deal with whatever comes before you to the best of your ability.

“As for the tabulation of the results, there’s no need for you to worry about that. The Sanctum of Sages has a unique artifact known as the Jade Tablet of Trials, and it will make a fair evaluation of your performance in the tests based on established criteria. The higher you are scored, the more likely you will pass the examination.

“This year, the Sanctum of Sages will be taking in five hundred students. So, we will only be taking in those who score within the top five hundred.”

“The Sanctum of Sages is only accepting five hundred students this year?”

“But there are at least ten thousand people here! Five hundred... Isn’t that one in twenty?”

“It really won’t be easy!”

...

Hearing how competitive the final selection would be, unease and trepidation could be seen on most of the faces among the crowd.

At the same time, Zhang Xuan could not help frowning as well.

Those who were currently standing in the square were all the top geniuses gathered throughout the Master Teacher Continent, experts among experts. To finish in the top five percent of them all was truly no easy task.

It was no wonder Zhao Xingmo had said that it was possible for not even a single one of them to make the cut. Considering

the harsh requirements, it was indeed not easy to succeed.

Even Zhang Xuan did not have absolute confidence in the final selection.

In a sense, this was a testimony to the strength of the Sanctum of Sages.

If every single batch of candidates of the Sanctum of Sages had to go through this harsh selection, just how powerful would those who managed to stay till the end be?

“Zhao shi, what is the Jade Token of Trials?” one of the master teachers asked Zhao Xingmo with a perplexed look on his face.

“In the Mountain Gate examination, each individual will be faced with different tests. For example, if a Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage cultivator and a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle cultivator encounter a Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle saint beast and defeat it, naturally, the Primordial Spirit realm advanced stage cultivator will be awarded with more points. The Jade Token of Trials is a unique artifact that serves to tabulate these deeds into a score before compiling them into a scoreboard. The higher one’s score is, the better one’s final result will be!” Zhao Xingmo explained.

“I see...” Everyone nodded in realization.

“Then... other than defeating saint beasts, what else in the tests will add to our score?” another master teacher asked.

Since the Jade Tablet of Trials worked by converting accomplishments into a corresponding score, it stood to reason that there was an established system for its calculation. As stated previously, there were many different tests, so not all of them would be concerning saint beasts. Surely, there should be other ways of earning points too.

“So far, some of the known possible tests are defeating saint beasts, breaking through a formation, sensing danger in advance, and lecturing a crowd. As long as you perform well in these tests, you will be able to earn some points. Other than that, skillful utilization of one’s capability in some unique occupations will also earn one bonus points, such as in spirit

enchantment, terpsichorean arts, and painting. As long as you display proficiency exceeding that of the other candidates, those could be considered as accomplishments as well, and the Jade Tablet of Trials will take them into account,” Zhao Xingmo explained.

“In other words, as long as you possess a skill that others don’t have and perform it in the tests, they will be noted down by the Jade Tablet of Trials and added to your final score, thus helping you stand out from the other candidates!”

Hearing those words, the crowd could not help but clench their fists tightly in agitation.

As easy and fair as the test might have seemed, it was actually far more difficult than it sounded.

If one was competing with just a couple of people, one was bound to have a skill that stood out from the others. However, amid a crowd of over ten thousand geniuses, any seemingly outstanding capability would only appear ordinary in comparison.

Someone might be good at painting, but there was bound to be another one amid the group who was better at it than that person. The same went for the other occupations.

As the saying went, ‘there is always a mountain higher than the one before you’. It was definitely no easy feat to reach the peak.

“The capabilities one can display aren’t just limited to hard skills. Outstanding management and leadership skills can also add to one’s score, but of course, those might be harder to display. The aim of the Sanctum of Sages is to further the wisdom of mankind, thus bringing mankind to reach greater heights. Naturally, the benchmark for enrollment is much higher than other academies.”

Seeing the tensed look on the faces of the group, Zhao Xingmo chuckled softly to alleviate the atmosphere.

“However, there’s no need to worry. Just as I have said before, as long as you work hard and perform to the best of your

abilities, your brilliance will definitely catch the attention of the Sanctum of Sages!”

“Yes!” The group nodded before falling into deep contemplation to figure out what their outstanding traits were.

Zhang Xuan also stroked his lower jaw and pondered. A while later, he could not help but shake his head—he did not seem to have any outstanding traits at all!

Lecturing, formation deciphering, terpsichorean arts, painting... While he was rather proficient in all of those, those could not be considered his specialty!

For example, his painting—while he had achieved a level of proficiency comparable to ordinary 8-star primary painters, the geniuses of the Painter Guild that were participating in the final selection were bound to be able to outdo him.

The same went for pill forging, smithing, and the like.

His mastery of those supporting occupations could be considered outstanding among master teachers, but to those who truly devoted their lives to those arts, it was inevitable that he would still be lacking.

Well, if I really have to choose a specialty... that would probably be disguising! Zhang Xuan thought.

His supporting occupations were all so-so, roughly around the same level. There were none that particularly stood out.

If he really had to list a strength that he was proud of, that would be ‘acting like an expert’!

After all, his disguise as ‘Yang Xuan’ had been able to fool even Luo Chengxin. So far, he had never made any major slip-ups in his disguise before, and that should be more than enough to show his incredible aptitude in the art!

Just that... will acting like an expert really add to my score? Zhang Xuan’s face collapsed.

It was hard to imagine any formal academy that would take into account one’s ability to act as an expert as one of its entrance criteria!

It seemed like his strongest capability would not be able to help him here.

Forget it. If it comes down to it, I'll just execute a couple of my less outstanding techniques. As long as I utilize enough of them, I should be able to acquire a decent score, Zhang Xuan thought.

No matter what, he was determined to enter the Sanctum of Sages. This was the road leading him to Luo Ruoxin, and he could not let the journey end just here.

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“In the Mountain Gate examination, you are only allowed to rely on your own talents and capabilities. No external artifacts, weapons, or the sort are allowed. If we were to find you have cheated, your results in that test will be voided. Other than that, the killing of other candidates is prohibited as well. Such an act will result in a direct termination of your candidacy!” Elder Liu announced solemnly.

“Yes!”

The crowd in the square quickly nodded in response.

The main point of an examination lay in fair competition. If one were to rely on artifacts and the sort in the final selection, that would undermine the purpose of it.

If everyone were to rely on their artifacts to clear the examination, the Sanctum of Sages wouldn't be an institution for the talented but the wealthy.

“Prior to passing through the gate, remember to leave your Soul Imprint on the gate so that the Jade Tablet of Trials can process your names and backgrounds. This is so as to facilitate the tabulation of the results of your performance in the examination.” Elder Liu continued.

Nodding, the crowd quickly used their secret arts to leave behind their Soul Imprint on the gates.

“Alright, let's set off now. The duration for the Mountain Gate examination will be three days, and may the odds be in your favor!” Elder Liu waved his hand grandly.

“Yes!”

With a resounding response, the excited crowd began passing through the gates.

“Since it's the Teleportation Formation, it's unlikely that we'll end up in the same location. So, you can only rely on yourself for the entrance examination...” Watching as the crowd surged

through the gates, and it was going to be their turn soon, Zhang Xuan turned to Zhang Jiuxiao and said.

“Zhang shi, rest assured. I’ll do my best in the entrance examination!” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded.

In the past, he wouldn’t have been confident of emerging in the top 5% amidst this large group of geniuses. However, the times were different now.

In the time that they were traveling to the Sanctum of Sages, he had been learning diligently from Zhang Xuan, and this had boosted his fighting prowess significantly. His comprehension of combat had also soared by leaps and bounds, making him no longer the man he used to be. More importantly, he even comprehended Half-Quintessence in swordsmanship, which would make him nigh invincible amidst his peers. With these, his chances at getting into the top five hundred were higher than ever!

“Be careful inside.” Seeing that Zhang Jiuxiao was confident, Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

Chen Leyao and the others also turned to Zhang Xuan and said, “Zhang shi, let’s meet in the Sanctum of Sages.”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

After which, the group from the Glacier Plain Court swiftly made their way through the gates.

In their view, considering how the young man was able to easily defeat Zhang Qian, it should be a walk in the park for him to clear the final selection. Now, it was just a matter of whether he would be able to qualify for the Elite Division or not.

“You all can go now!” A moment later, Zhao Xingmo finally gestured the group to advance ahead, and the thirty or so candidates from the Eight Conferred Empires began making their way over for the gates.

Zhang Xuan was at the very back of the group, and he watched those ahead of him disappear in the shimmering light within the gates one after another before it was finally his turn. Upon contact with the gates, he immediately felt the space around

him warping abruptly, and with a flash, he vanished from the spot.

Meanwhile, watching as Zhang Xuan vanished from the spot, Zhang Qian narrowed his eyes and spat with gritted teeth, “Zhang Xuan, just you wait. Once I get into the Elite Division, I’ll make your life a living hell!”

After saying those words, he stepped into the gate as well and disappeared.

Not too long later, the ten thousand or so geniuses on the square had all entered the gates, leaving only the guides who had brought them here behind.

“Alright, let’s all head to the Hall of Results.”

Following behind the other guides, Zhao Xingmo flew across the Sanctum of Sages and before long, he was standing before a towering hall.

Standing imposingly in the center of the hall was a grayish-emerald jade tablet, and it emanated an air of ancient history.

With just a look, there was little doubt that this jade tablet had been in the Sanctum of Sages for many years.

A warm glow rippled across the surface of the jade tablet, bringing slight illumination to the surroundings. Stopping right before the jade tablet, all of the guides directed their gazes to it directly, hoping to find some familiar names on it.

“Guides, the examination has barely started. There’s no rush.” Seeing the anxious looks on the guides, Elder Liu couldn’t help but chuckle.

There were three days to the examination, so it was too early to conclude anything at the current phase. The true fight over the placing would only happen at least two days later.

“Un.”

The guides nodded as they sat onto the ground as well to rest. At this moment, a nearby stone pillar positioned just beside the jade tablet lit up, and several names emerged on the jade tablet.

“The examination has barely started, but there are already candidates who have scored some points?”

Astonished, the guides quickly took a closer look to see who those candidates were.

“Feng Ziyi, 127!”

Zhang Yu, 121!”

“Jiang Xuecun, 116!”

“Yuan Haiqing, 109!”

“Bai Qingxuan, 103!”

...

“All above a hundred points? They have already scored so much even though the examination has barely started a while ago...”

Seeing the names and their respective scores on the jade tablet, a huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

It was truly frightening to see the candidates scoring more than a hundred points when the examination had just started a few minutes ago. More importantly, it wasn't just an individual or two who had achieved that feat, but five of them!

Such a thing had never happened in previous years before!

“One would gain 1 point from defeating a saint beast of one cultivation stage higher, 5 points from defeating a saint beast of two cultivation stages higher, and 25 points for three cultivation stages higher... Yet, a hundred points in just a few minutes? Just how in the world did they accomplish this?”

Zhao Xingmo felt his throat turning hoarse. He could hardly believe what was happening at all.

Under normal circumstances, one's results would only reflect on the jade tablet once it exceeded 10 points, and it would be a gradual increase beyond that. For their score to reflect more than a hundred points from the very start, and for five candidates at that...

“The highest scorer at the moment is Feng Ziyi. Where’s he from?” one of the guides amidst the crowd asked curiously.

“He’s from the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters. It’s said that he’s the direct disciple of one of the elders, and his cultivation has already reached Grand Dominion realm intermediate stage. Without a doubt, he was definitely one of the stronger, if not the strongest, candidate!” a black-robed master teacher who knew about the details explained.

“A direct disciple of an elder from the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters?” Zhao Xingmo’s breathing hastened.

In order to become an elder of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, one had to be a 9-star master teacher at the very minimum! As a student of such a powerful expert, it was no wonder why Feng Ziyi would be able to achieve such incredible results right from the start.

“In second place is Zhang Yu, a genius from the Sage Clan, Zhang Clan. It’s said that the purity of his bloodline has already reached Earth-tier!”

“Earth-tier?” Zhao Xingmo widened his eyes in shock.

The bloodline of Sage Clan’s offspring could be divided into four tiers depending on their purity, namely Tier-2, Tier-1, Earth-tier, and the highest Sky-tier!

The basic requirement to become an inner clan member was to possess Tier-2 bloodline, and some of the more formidable ones would possess Tier-1 bloodline. As for those whose bloodline had reached Earth-tier, most of them would be from the main family, and even at worst, they would be the offspring of the elders.

“Indeed. Ever since the founding of the Sanctum of Sages, the Zhang Clan had a total of 37 Earth-tier bloodline offspring. Even the weakest of them eventually reached Saint 8-dan pinnacle... Considering that Zhang Yu possesses the same Earth-tier bloodline as well, he’s bound to reach incredible heights in the future as well!” the black-robed master teacher said.

“Saint 8-dan?” Zhao Xingmo found himself at a loss for words.

Wielding such strength, one could already be considered to be standing at the top of the continent. With just a stomp of his feet, he would be able to bring around the downfall of a power like Qianchong Empire easily!

“Right! Earlier, I encountered another offspring of the Zhang Clan named Zhang Qian. May I know what the purity of his bloodline is?” Zhao Xingmo couldn’t help asking.

“Zhang Qian only possesses an ordinary Tier-2 bloodline. Amongst the thirty candidates the Zhang Clan has sent in this time around, he’s ranked amidst the last, not even worth a mention!” the black-robed master teacher replied.

“Not even worth a mention?” Hearing those words, Zhao Xingmo’s face turned as dark as charcoal.

Zhang Qian was a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle expert, and yet, he was still ranked in the bottom few of the Zhang Clan’s candidates? If that was the case, just how formidable would those who were ranked ahead of him be?

This was really too terrifying!

The Zhang Clan had its fair share of spectacular candidates in the previous years’ final selection, but never had the line-up of their candidates been so formidable before!

“Jiang Xuecun... Is she from the Sage Clan, Jiang Clan?” Zhao Xingmo continued asking.

Of the many Sage Clans on the Master Teacher Continent, the three strongest were namely the Zhang Clan, Jiang Clan, and Luo Clan respectively.

Considering how Jiang Xuecun managed to get onto the rankboard within such a short period of time, achieving a score that was just beneath Zhang Yu, it was hard to imagine that she could be from any other clan other than the illustrious Jiang Clan.

“Un, I have met Jiang Xuecun myself once before. As you know, the Jiang Clan specializes in soul offense, but even

amidst their ranks, the soul energy which Jiang Xuecun is born with can be considered immense. In terms of fighting prowess, she could very well be on par with even Feng Ziyi!” the black-robed master teacher said.

“As for Yuan Haiqing, he’s one of the geniuses of the Sage Clan, Yuan Clan. While the Yuan Clan is slightly weaker than the Zhang, Jiang, and Luo at the moment, unable to squeeze into the top three, I heard that they have managed to find a successor who possesses Sky-tier bloodline half a year ago. If the rumors are really true, there’s no saying that the Yuan Clan might just be able to join their ranks in the near future!”

“Sky-tier bloodline?” Zhao Xingmo was astonished.

Sky-tier bloodline was the strongest bloodline that any offspring of the Sage Clans could possess. As long as those who possessed such bloodline was given time to mature, it was just a matter of time before he became a renowned figure in the Master Teacher Continent.

For one, the current heads of the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan possessed Sky-tier bloodlines as well.

“It doesn’t seem to be just a rumor. Over the past few days, several of the stronger powers and clans have expressed their goodwill toward the Yuan Clan, wanting to befriend them. It seems like the rise of the Yuan Clan is inevitable...” the black-robed master teacher replied.

“So, these candidates all have notable backgrounds... Then, what about Bai Qingxuan? What’s his background?” Digesting the news which he had just heard, Zhao Xingmo asked in interest.

Since the four in front had such spectacular results, Bai Qingxuan, whose name was placed just beneath theirs in the fifth place, shouldn’t be any ordinary figure either!

“Bai Qingxuan is from the Blazing Inferno Court.” the black-robed master teacher said.

“Blazing Inferno Court? You mean the powerful organization whose reputation rivals that of the Glacier Plain Court?”

While the Glacier Plain Court had the Yin-Yang Lake, and their core cultivation techniques were the Yang Formula and Yin Formula, most of their members still cultivated the Yin Formula. On top of that, nearly all of their members, from the court chief down to the elders and the ordinary members, were all female.

The Blazing Inferno Court was the direct opposite. Most of them were men, and they practiced cultivation techniques that were rich in yang attribute, such as the Inferno Art and such.

It was said that the two powers were created by the same founder, but due to certain disagreements and intense rivalry between members who cultivated yang cultivation techniques and yin cultivation techniques, they were eventually divided into two powers.

Roughly two decades ago, the two powers attempted to bridge their differences and reunite as one through a political marriage. However, in the last moment, the to-be court chief ended up fleeing at the very last moment, disappearing from the face of the world.

Eventually, the two powers fell out with one another once more, and they parted on an unhappy note.

“That’s right.” The black-robed master teacher nodded. “While the reputation of the Blazing Inferno Court isn’t too resounding, and they have very few branches over the world, on the whole, they still wield overwhelming strength which would be foolish to overlook. If not for that, the Glacier Plain Court wouldn’t agree to a political marriage with them either!”

“Indeed.” Zhao Xingmo nodded in agreement.

For a political marriage to work, both powers should be of equal standing. Otherwise, it would be nigh impossible for them to coexist peacefully.

Weng!

While the both of them were chatting, the stone pillars lit up once more, and new names emerged on the jade tablet.

“The top five hundred candidates have emerged...”

Zhao Xingmo immediately turned his gaze toward the jade tablet, and as expected, it was filled with all kinds of names.

The height of the jade tablet was just sufficient to reflect five hundred names in total, and perhaps it was for the very same reason, only five hundred students would be accepted into the Sanctum of Sages in each entrance examination.

“Come, take a look and see if the talents you have brought here are on the rankboard or not.” the black-robed master teacher said with a smile.

Nodding, Zhao Xingmo swiftly scanned the jade tablet from head to toe, and very soon, a tight knit emerged between his brows.

Despite the huge number of names, he realized that there was not a single one that was familiar to him.

Under normal circumstances, Zhang Xuan should be able to get into the top five hundred easily. So, why is his name nowhere to be found? Zhao Xingmo thought worriedly.

Is none of the candidates I have brought here going to clear the final selection?

1294 A Royal Harem of 3000

The entire world shook intensely before Zhang Xuan's eyes. As Teleportation Formations worked by warping spatial laws, he knew that if he could decipher the structure of the Teleportation Formation, it would help him greatly in further comprehending the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel. Thus, as soon as he entered the Teleportation Formation, he immediately activated his Eye of Insight, hoping to get a rough understanding of how it worked.

A myriad of colors shimmered in the surroundings, creating a beautiful artwork. Many lines seemed to stream past him, creating a feeling as if he was flying at an extremely fast speed.

It's a little similar to the deciphers of the Saint Ascension Decipher... Zhang Xuan thought.

Under the discerning gaze of his Eye of Insight, he actually found that the Teleportation Formation had a structure that was deeply reminiscent of the Saint Ascension Decipher. On the fundamental level, it contained of lines, ranging from one to nine of them, tightly knitted to form a unit, creating what one would perceive as length, breadth, and height, or in other words, space.

Hu!

An abrupt jolt left Zhang Xuan staggering, and the gleaming lights before him vanished. When he finally scanned his surroundings once more, he realized that he was already standing in the midst of a relatively small mountain valley.

Dense trees filled the area, and a small stream trickled down from the heights of a mountain. It knocked on the various rocks that stood in its path, creating a crisp yet tranquil melody.

Taking a look at his sides, Zhang Xuan found that he was completely surrounded by lush trees. It was a little similar to

the sight he saw when he first took off his blindfold in the Sword Lagoon. However, the swiftly rising altitude of the land around him, as well as the mountain on the horizon, were clear indications that he was in the midst of a valley.

I should start with hunting down saint beasts to earn some points first. Knowing that time was precious in the examination, Zhang Xuan didn't hesitate to flit up the valley.

He wasn't too sure how the score calculation for other aspects worked, but at the very least, it was definite that he would earn points from hunting down saint beasts. Since that was the case, it would be best for him to hunt down as many of them as possible first just to be safe.

This kind of reminded him of the entrance examination of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy as well. Back then, he tamed over several hundred spirit beasts and obtained a score far exceeding that of other candidates.

But again, in terms of beast taming and dealing with saint beasts... while he did have confidence in his skills, it was hard to fathom what those geniuses from the Beast Tamer Guild were capable of. After all, they had devoted their life to studying beast taming, so they were bound to be good at what they did. It would be hard for him to compete against them, especially since he had barely spent a few days learning beast taming in total.

Flitting swiftly ahead, many plants flashed across Zhang Xuan's peripheral vision.

Perhaps it was due to the superior concentration of spiritual energy in the area, there was a large variety of plants in the area. Even Zhang Xuan found that he couldn't name most of them.

On the journey to the Sanctum of Sages, other than cultivating, Zhang Xuan had spent most of his time studying in the Library of Heaven's Path, and he had managed to go through most of the books he had collected.

In terms of scope of knowledge, it was possible that even 9-star master teachers were no match against him. From such a

perspective, it was indeed peculiar that there were actually so many plants that he was unable to name. Perhaps, it might be because most of them were native to the folded space, so they weren't recorded in any books.

Hm? Something is not right...

As Zhang Xuan continued examining the area around him as he flitted forward, a realization suddenly dawned on him, and a deep crease appeared on his forehead.

Judging from the area of his Spiritual Perception and his length of the flight, even if saint beasts were really rare in the folded space, he should have at least encountered a couple of ordinary lifeforms by now. But up to this point, other than plants, there was nothing around him at all. This was really baffling.

Could I have been teleported into some kind of formation? Zhang Xuan immediately halted his flight and examined his surroundings closely with his Eye of Insight.

It took a moment of concentration, but he eventually noticed that something was indeed amiss.

It's an Illusory Formation. Zhang Xuan noted.

He quickly advanced toward a certain point and stomped his feet lightly.

Weng!

The huge congregation of plants all around him withered immediately. The melodious sound of flowing water knocking on rocks continued sounding in his ears, but the world before Zhang Xuan changed greatly.

He found that he was no longer in a mountain valley but before a straw house located in the midst of a lush mountain. There was a feeling of serenity drifting in the air, soothing one's tense nerves.

However, knowing that he was still in the midst of the Mountain Gate examination, Zhang Xuan didn't allow such an atmosphere to affect him. Keeping his guard up, he swiftly

assessed his surroundings before walking warily toward the straw cottage.

Tz la, tz la!

Before he could reach the straw cottage, a slightly screechy, metallic sound suddenly echoed in the air. Circumventing the straw cottage, he saw an old man squatting by a stream, grinding a certain object in his hand relentlessly.

Taking a closer look, Zhang Xuan realized that it was a thick and long metal bar.

Perhaps under the relentless effort of the old man, the top portion of the bar had been ground thin, and the tip was as fine as a needle.

Whittling a metal bar into a needle? Taken aback by the sight before him, Zhang Xuan asked with a slight hint of bewilderment in his voice.

He wouldn't be surprised if he were to meet with an assault from a pack of saint beasts, trapped within a formidable formation, encountering an army of soldiers, or anything else. But to see someone whittling a metal bar into a needle in the Mountain Gate examination... what was this supposed to mean?

"Do you know what I'm doing?" At this moment, a faint but clear voice sounded in the air.

The old man seemed to have noticed Zhang Xuan's presence, and without stopping his action, he asked with a questioning edge in his tone.

"Are you whittling a needle?" Zhang Xuan replied.

"Oh?" The old man seemed to be a little surprised by how Zhang Xuan was able to get it at the first try. "You can tell that I'm whittling a needle?"

Considering how thick and long the metal bar was, most cultivators would probably guess that he was attempting to whittle out some kind of weapon. That would be the logical answer, after all.

“You are trying to use this as an analogy to tell me that as long as one has perseverance and is willing to put in hard work, there’s nothing in the world that’s too difficult to accomplish. As the saying goes, ‘With diligence and perseverance, a metal bar can be whittled down to a needle.’” Zhang Xuan replied.

“This...” The old man blinked his eyes.

He was born with unimpressive talents, and in his earlier years, he thought that he would never be able to catch up with the others. But one day, while he was out, he saw his teacher grinding down a metal bar bit by bit. When he asked what his teacher was doing, the latter said that he was trying to whittle out an embroidery needle and quoted those exact same words.

It was as if a ray of light had parted the darkness he had been in, showing him a clear path forward. It was with that very mindset that he charged forward fearlessly, eventually reaching his current height.

The reason why he was enacting the same action was in hope that the later generations could gain the same enlightenment that he did... But this fellow actually saw through his motive with a single look, causing all of those words of wisdom that he had scripted before to clutter up in his chest, suffocating him.

“Whittling a metal bar down to a needle...” Suppressing the stifling sensation in his heart, the old man was just about to speak when he saw the young man before him shake his head, sighing deeply, “The intentions behind the saying may be good, but in my view, it’s simply wasted effort!”

“Why would you say so?” Frowning, the old man looked at Zhang Xuan and asked.

These were the very same words which had inspired him back then. Why would they be wasted effort?

“Simple. If I’m not mistaken, you are not a real person but a Soul Imprint. The metal bar which you are whittling down is Starspirit Metal, which is even more valuable than Black Goldcrystal Ores due to the incredible resilience it boasts. On the other hand, the chisel you are using to grind it down is

made of ordinary Risegreen Rock, which can be easily picked right off the streets... Due to the overwhelming difference in the tier of the tool you are using and the metal bar you are trying to whittle down, what you are doing is really not any different from using a cotton swab to grind down a metal bar. Given so, do you think that you will succeed?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Through his Eye of Insight, he could tell that the old man wasn't a real person but a Soul Imprint.

The metal bar in his hand was the extremely rare Starspirit Metal, boasting incomparable hardness. It would be difficult for even an 8-star blacksmith to melt it down. Yet, to use an ordinary stone chisel to whittle it down to a needle... Surely this was a joke?

"Even if perseverance and diligence don't fail those who embrace them, at this rate, whatever returns you will receive from your efforts will only be minimal... Furthermore, as a Soul Imprint, your time is severely limited as well. If my memory fails me not, Soul Imprints can only survive for a limited time in the external world." Zhang Xuan continued.

He had met quite a few Soul Imprints so far, and he had some understanding of how they worked as well. In a dormant state, they would still be able to survive for a long period of time. However, once they gain consciousness, they wouldn't be able to sustain themselves for too long.

Ancient Sage Qiu Wu and the Old Sword Maestro were such examples. Despite the incredible strength they wielded while they were still alive, the Soul Imprint that they left behind still didn't last for too long before dissipating.

"This..." Hearing Zhang Xuan's logical analysis, the old man sighed helplessly before putting down the metal bar in his hand. "You really are a sharp-witted and discerning person. I didn't think that you would be able to see through so much within such a short period of time."

While part of the reason why the old man was whittling the metal bar here was to motivate the later generations, more than that, it also served as an assessment to them as well.

For the young man to see through his motive with a single look and even tell that he was just a Soul Imprint, the young man was truly a keen person.

In response to the praise, Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, "It really isn't too difficult to see through this much."

Even though he wasn't an academic in his previous life, he had at least heard of the story of whittling a metal bar down to a needle. Perhaps to those who had never heard of the story before, this could be a huge source of inspiration and enlightenment, but as someone who could recite the story even from the back, it couldn't even leave the slightest ripple in his mind.

"Actually, if you really wish to whittle the Starspirit Metal down to a needle, there's a way to go around doing it. The Risegreen Rock chisel won't be sufficient, but with some Black Goldcrystal Ore and Woodvine Essence, it can definitely be done!" Zhang Xuan suddenly said with a smile.

"Oh? You're saying that a combination of Black Goldcrystal Ore and Woodvine Essence would allow me to whittle this bar of Starspirit Metal down to a needle?" the old man asked in interest.

"That's right!" Zhang Xuan replied confidently. "The process isn't too complicated either. The Woodvine Essence possesses corrosive property, and through complementing it with several other medicinal herbs, it can be used to wear down the Starspirit Metal. In fact, as long as we calculate the size and quality of the metal bar in your hand precisely, with sufficient medicinal essence, we will be able to corrode the entire bar down to the size of a needle within minutes. There would be no need to whittle it down at all!"

"You are saying that it can be done within minutes?"

"It happens that I do have the required ingredients with me at the moment. Why don't you give it a try?" Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out a pile of medicinal herbs.

These medicinal herbs had come from the storage ring which he had retrieved from Ji Lingfeng back at the Sword Lagoon.

Even though those medicinal herbs were valuable, as the Boss of the Qianchong Empire Black Market, Ji Lingfeng still had a substantial number of them with him.

Zhang Xuan quickly mixed the various medicinal herbs together to concoct a unique medicinal essence.

Retrieving a piece of Black Goldcrystal Ore, Zhang Xuan poured the medicinal essence on it equally throughout. Then, he took the metal bar from the old man's hands and placed it on top of the Black Goldcrystal Ore.

Tzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

A white stream of smoke rose into the air, and the Starspirit Metal swiftly contracted. Just like what Zhang Xuan had said, it really became a thin needle within a few minutes' time.

The medicinal essence and Black Goldcrystal Ore also happened to be depleted at this moment, as if everything had been precisely calculated prior to the act.

With a flick of his finger, Zhang Xuan casually tossed the needle over to the old man. "Here, I have already done it for you, so you don't have to waste your time whittling the metal bar anymore. Honestly speaking, don't you find it tiring? Not only is it tough, more importantly, you aren't making much progress either..."

"..."

The old man's lips twitched.

It was only an analogy he used to test the candidates! And yet... the young man before him really turned his metal bar down into a needle...

More importantly, that lecturing tone that he took after that was as if he was a senior speaking words of wisdom to a junior...

Do you know who I am to be talking to me like this?

Shaking his head, the old man swiftly shook away the frustrations in his mind and said, "With just a look at the metal bar, you were able to precisely calculate the quantity of medicinal essence you would require to corrode it down to the

size of a needle... It seems like your Eye of Insight has already reached the realm of 'Infinitesimal Keeness'!"

"You know that I possess the Eye of Insight?" Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

After the fourth acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher, he had already gained the ability to conceal his Eye of Insight completely. As long as he willed it so, not even an 8-star pinnacle master teacher would be able to notice his Eye of Insight.

Yet, the old man was actually able to see it with a single look... Just how powerful could he be at his peak?

Could he possibly... be a 9-star master teacher? A thought came to Zhang Xuan's mind, and he couldn't help but tighten his fists in agitation.

So far, the most formidable master teacher he had seen was Elder Liu, who had briefed them on the rules of the Mountain Gate examination earlier. He hadn't met a real 9-star master teacher before, and he didn't even know the name of any single one of them either.

If the old man before him was really a 9-star master teacher, it was indeed possible for him to tell that he possessed the Eye of Insight. This is based off Chinese saying, "With diligence and perseverance, even a metal bar can be chiseled down to a needle." There are many variations to the story, but it's basically just a person encountering another person attempting to wear down a metal bar to a needle and being touched by the effort and perseverance they had put into it.

1295 Do You Want To Be the Sanctum Head?

“Your possession of Eye of Insight has resulted in a distortion in the Teleportation Formation, that’s why you were sent here!” Seeing the look of confusion in Zhang Xuan’s eyes, the old man explained.

The Teleportation Formation of the Sanctum of Sages would teleport every candidate to different locations depending on their field of specialty. The young man had activated his Eye of Insight as soon as he entered the Teleportation Formation, so naturally, he was sent here.

The Illusory Formation was the first trial, and it served to assess his proficiency in the usage of his ability. Only if he was able to overcome the Illusory Formation would he be qualified to meet the old man.

Zhang Xuan swiftly realized this as well.

A person who was able to create something as formidable as a Teleportation Formation was bound to be able to sense his Eye of Insight as well, not to mention, he was using it openly within the Teleportation Formation earlier too.

“You said earlier that my Eye of Insight has reached the level of Infinitesimal Keeness... what does that mean?” Zhang Xuan asked.

He had never told anyone about his possession of the Eye of Insight before, and there was nothing detailed regarding the Eye of Insight in the books either. As such, he had no idea that it could be divided into differing realms too.

“Eye of Insight is an extremely rare ability that only a very small portion of extraordinarily talented 6-star master teachers are able to awaken. In the entire history of the Master Teacher Continent, there are not many of people who managed to awaken the Eye of Insight. Depending on how proficient one

is at using the Eye of Insight, there is a vast difference in its prowess too. As such, it is classified into different realms as well.”

The old man stroked his beard as he continued on, “The first realm is Discerning Facade. It allows one to see through all disguises, allowing one to see an object right at its core.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded.

Ever since he comprehended the Eye of Insight, he had realized that he could use it to see through any facade with ease.

It was through using it that he was able to catch a glimpse of Luo Ruoxin’s true appearance too.

“The second realm is what I have told you earlier, Infinitesimal Keeness. At this realm, you are able to see through the weight, size, material, and the various other details of an object with absolute precision. At the same time, you are also able to see through the strengths and flaws of cultivation techniques, battle techniques, and all sorts of maneuvers as well.” the old man said.

Nodding, Zhang Xuan asked, “I see. Is there a third realm as well?”

Even without using the Library of Heaven’s Path, the current him was indeed able to assess the details of an object with absolute precision using just the Eye of Insight. This would mean that he had achieved the realm of Infinitesimal Keeness at the very minimum.

Just that... if he recalled correctly, he already possessed this ability when he first obtained the Eye of Insight. So, to call it the second realm felt a little weird to him,

“The third realm is known as Origin Tracing, and it allows one to peer into the origin of a matter and determine its crux. Upon reaching this realm, one would be able to peer into the very fundamentals of artifacts and battle techniques and even uncover disappeared traces. For example, no matter how well a person covered his tracks up well, he’s bound to leave some traces of his presence behind. Thus, those whose Eye of

Insight have reached the realm of Origin Tracing will be able to see these traces and track that person down.” the old man said.

“Ah...” Zhang Xuan blinked his eyes blankly.

Was this really the third realm of the Eye of Insight?

If that was really the case, wasn't it weird that he possessed this ability right after he had awakened his Eye of insight too?

“Upon reaching this realm, those of the same cultivation realm would be unable to hide any secrets from one anymore. With just a sweep glance, one would be able to tell if an individual is lying or holding back some critical information. More importantly, one would be able to accurately assess the potential of a cultivation technique as well. Those who have achieved the realm, other than those who have died prematurely, have all gone on and become 9-star master teachers!” the old man said.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan fell into deep contemplation.

He could roughly understand what the old man was driving at. The reason why he was able to improve so swiftly without facing any bottlenecks was mainly due to the Heaven's Path Divine Art. Considering the Eye of Insight's ability to determine the potential of cultivation techniques, those who possessed it would be able to choose the most suitable cultivation techniques for themselves and advance through the ranks with ease too.

“Then... is there a fourth realm?” Zhang Xuan asked.

He had already accomplished the first three realms, so could there still be any level above that?

If that was the case, it would be good if he could advance the mastery of the Eye of Insight too. It could potentially becoming a powerful trump card in battle.

“Of course! Upon reaching the third realm, one would be able to start practicing optic arts. Through creating formations with the lines of insight, it's possible for one to exert a prowess far surpassing that of battle techniques through the Eye of Insight!

According to my teacher's impartation, the fourth realm is called Demon Vanquisher. Once mastered, one will be able to tear apart even the space of where one lays one's eyes upon. In terms of prowess, it's even comparable to Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's famed Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel!" the old man said proudly.

"Even on par with Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel?" Zhang Xuan might be unaware of other battle techniques, but he had definitely heard of the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel.

Having cultivated the technique himself, he knew how profound it was. If one could master it up to 5-dan, one would be able to wield full grasp over space and travel freely within it. Even without using Teleportation Formations, one would be able to cover long distances instantaneously with a spatial leap.

So far, it was the most formidable battle technique he had ever seen, even more profound than Kong shi's Saint Ascension Decipher even. If he could perfect all of its flaws and master it to its highest level, even with his current cultivation of Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, he would still be able to slaughter Saint realm 7-dan experts with ease.

Back then, Ancient Sage Qiu Wu had used this very technique to seal the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe for several dozen millenniums, preventing them from entering the Master Teacher Continent and granting mankind this period of peace.

So, for the optic art to be on par with such a battle technique, wasn't it a little too powerful?

"Optic art... Elder, may I know whom your teacher is?" Zhang Xuan couldn't help asking.

He had heard that Kong shi's direct disciple, Ancient Sage Bo Shang, possessed the Eye of Insight, and he had created a set of optic arts to complement it. With just a look from his eyes, thousands of Otherworldly Demons would be reduced to ashes.

Considering how the old man before him was speaking about optic arts, could there be some kind of link between the both of them?

“My teacher is one of Kong shi’s Ten Apostles, Ancient Sage Bo Shang! My teacher left right after creating the Sanctum of Sages, so I’m officially the first sanctum head. The rules regarding the Mountain Gate were also created by me.” Seeing that Zhang Xuan had finally come to a realization, the old man chuckled softly.

“The first sanctum head?” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in shock.

He thought that the old man was just a random soul drifting around the Mountain Gate, but to think that he was the very first sanctum head!

“I heard that in order to become the head of the Sanctum of Sages, one must possess the Eye of Insight... Since that’s the case, elder, does it mean that you possess the same gift as well?” Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but ask.

“Indeed, I possess the Eye of Insight as well. At my peak, I have cultivated it up to the fourth realm, Demon Vanquisher. In fact, the rule stating that only those who possess the Eye of Insight would be able to become the sanctum head was also created by me. The intention behind it is simple. Just like how my teacher hopes to pass down Kong shi’s ideology through the the Sanctum of Sages, I also hope to pass my teacher’s heritage down to later generations so that they would honor his name for years to come!” the old man nodded.

“For this reason, every student who wish to enrol into the Sanctum of Sages must participate in the Mountain Gate examination, and those who possess the Eye of Insight will be teleported here to undergo my test!”

Zhang Xuan finally understood what exactly was going on.

It was no wonder why there was no one in the area at all. It seemed like his test was in a completely different area from all of the other candidates.

Learning that the old man before him was the first sanctum head, Zhang Xuan dared not to pull his weight either. Claspng his fist respectfully, he asked, “Elder, may I know what your name is?”

In terms of standing, the old man could be considered as Kong shi’s grandstudent, a truly formidable figure in history. On top of that, he was also the person who had helped build up the Sanctum of Sages, bringing it to the position of honor and glory that it currently sat on... Without a doubt, he was a person worthy of respect.

“It has been too long since my passing, so my name is not worth a mention. However, the people of this generation address me as Sage Kui!” the old man said.

“Junior Zhang Xuan pays respect to Sage Kui.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and bowed slightly.

The old sages had contributed greatly to mankind in their own ways, so he had always harbored great respect toward them.

“Un.” Sage Kui nodded. “Since you were able to see through my Illusory Formation and overcome it, that would mean that your Eye of Insight has achieved the level of Discerning Facade. After which, you were able to accurately gauge the weight of the metal bar and concoct a corresponding amount of medicinal essence to melt it. That would mean that you have achieved the level of Infinitesimal Keeness as well... However, in order to become a candidate for the position of the sanctum head, you have to achieve the third realm, Origin Tracing, at the very minimum!”

“Candidate for the position of the sanctum head?” Zhang Xuan blinked his eyes in a daze.

He had come here in order to qualify as a student of the Sanctum of Sages, why did it suddenly become a test for him to become the sanctum head instead?

“That’s right. Due to the rule of sanctum heads having to possess the Eye of Insight, there has been many times in history when the Sanctum of Sages went without a sanctum head for a long period of time. Including me, there have only

been nine generations of sanctum heads so far. Since you possess the gift required, you have met the basic qualification to be considered as a candidate for the position of the sanctum head as well... Right, I forgot to ask you yet. Are you interested in becoming the tenth sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages?" Sage Kui asked.

"Of course!" Zhang Xuan nodded hurriedly.

If he were to become the sanctum head, be it in terms of standing or position, he would become worthy of Luo Ruoxin. If he were to ask for Luo Ruoxin's hand in marriage with this position, the Luo Clan would really have to think the matter through.

"That is great. However, I have to inform you first that possessing the Eye of Insight is just one of the requirements to becoming the sanctum head. You also need to undergo trials to ensure that you have the strength, state of mind, and wisdom required for the position." Sage Kui said.

"Yes!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had known for a long time that there were very few master teachers who managed to comprehend the Eye of Insight, but he never thought that they would really number so few.

Considering how there were only nine sanctum heads in total, and an average Saint realm cultivator was able to live for a thousand years... That would mean that most of the time, the Sanctum of Sages was without a sanctum head!

It was no wonder why he would be teleported here as soon as he stepped into the formation. Considering how difficult it was to come by a master teacher possessing the Eye of Insight, it was natural to rope him in as soon as possible to groom him as the next sanctum head!

"May I know what the trials would be?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Like I've said before, in order to become a candidate in line for the position of the sanctum head, your Eye of Insight must reach the third realm. Now, I'll have to assess whether you have met that prerequisite before moving on to the next test!" Sage Kui replied.

“The third realm of Eye of Insight, Origin Tracing, allows one to peer into the origin of a matter and determine its crux. I have an artifact with me right here, and I’ll give you an incense’s time to accurately determine its nature. If you can do so, it would mean that you have cleared the test.”

“Very well.” Zhang Xuan nodded confidently.

Discerning artifacts had always been his strength, and ever since the time he had spent at Tianxuan Kingdom, he had never failed before.

“Good!” Noting Zhang Xuan’s confidence, Sage Kui nodded.

Then, with a flick of his wrist, a ceramic vat suddenly appeared before him.

“All you have to do is to tell me what’s stored in the ceramic vat.”

“What’s stored in the ceramic vase?” Zhang Xuan repeated with a frown.

The ceramic vase appeared to be perfectly ordinary on the surface, and there was indeed nothing special about its material too. However, there were unique paper seals plastered on its cap, preventing one’s Spiritual Perception from viewing what was within.

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight and attempted to peer into the vase.

As soon as his Eye of Insight was activated, the vase before him seemed to come to life. It emanated an astounding aura reminiscent of a sun, mercilessly blinding those who were attempting to peer into it. With this, it was impossible to see what was hidden within!

“How am I supposed to tell what’s inside like this?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Under the blinding light, his eyes felt like they were going to bleed anytime soon. There was no way to see through that!

In fact, everything had been overwhelmed by that light, making it impossible to even discern any traces to make a deduction on what was inside the vat.

At this point, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a brief moment before muttering in his mind.

“Flaws!”

1296 Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld

Hu!

A book appeared in the Library of Heaven's Path.

With a simple flip, the information within the book flowed into Zhang Xuan's head.

“Golden Script Seal, an artifact created by the first head of the Sanctum of Sages, Sage Kui. It possesses the ability to seal the transient and eternalize it. There is a total of seven flaws. No.1, it can only seal non-living objects as living beings would suffocate under the effects of the seal. No.2, its defenses are extremely weak. Sword qi would be able to destroy it...”

“Ah...” Zhang Xuan clutched his forehead speechlessly.

What he wanted to know was the information concerning the vat and, more importantly, what was inside it. Yet, for information on the seal to appear instead... what a headache!

But thinking deeper into it, it was natural that the Library of Heaven's Path would react in such a manner.

The vat was a non-living object, so it required physical contact in order to compile a book on it. However, it happened that the seals were currently in its active state, so its flaws were reflected instead.

This was truly a dilemma. Considering that this was a test on his Eye of Insight, he could not just step forward to touch the vat.

Zhang Xuan contemplated deeply for a moment before a thought suddenly struck him. While I can't see anything through the Eye of Insight, it should be possible to deduce what's within it through the flaws of the seal.

He had already assessed the entire vat all over with his Eye of Insight, but perhaps due to the long age of the vat or the jarring radiance blinding his sight, he was really unable to find any clues as to what could be stored in the vat.

However, through the seals, it should still be possible for him to make an intelligent guess as to what was within the vat.

Based on the first flaw, the seal could only be used to seal non-living objects. This meant that what was within was not a lifeform. Even if it was, it would have to be dead by now.

As for the second flaw, it stated that the seal had weak defenses and one could easily destroy it with sword qi. Since that was the case, it was safe to assume that what was within the vat was not too valuable. Otherwise, considering the ordinary material of the vat and the fact that the seal could be easily destroyed, it would be a little too negligent to store it within the vat.

And the third flaw...

Zhang Xuan's mind whirred into action as he swiftly narrowed the scope of his deduction.

A moment later, he could not help but shake his head.

Even if he were to narrow down the possible choices through the flaws of the seal, there were still way too many items that could have been in the vat!

There was no way to come to a conclusive deduction just through this.

If I can't even deduce it despite knowing the flaws, how did the previous candidates possessing the Eye of Insight manage to clear this test? Zhang Xuan frowned in bewilderment.

Since he was able to see the invisible trails of others to locate their whereabouts, it meant that he had already reached the third realm of the Eye of Insight. However, despite having achieved this realm, he was still unable to tell what was within the vat. Since that was the case, shouldn't the others who were at the same realm in terms of Eye of Insight have been unable to discern what was within the vat too?

But if they were unable to discern what was in the vat, how did they clear the test?

While Zhang Xuan was still stressed out over the matter, he suddenly heard Sage Kui's voice. "Times up. How is it? Were you able to find what's stored within?"

"Elder, I was only able to deduce that the vat is likely to be used to store some kind of fluid. As for what it is and what it does, I'm afraid that I can't tell at all..."

Zhang Xuan had thought that with his prowess, he would be able to clear the test with ease. Yet, who would have thought that he ended up suffering such a huge setback instead? His face could not help but redden in embarrassment.

On the other hand, Sage Kui's eyes widened for a brief moment before swiftly reverting back to normal. With a composed tone, he asked, "Is there any underlying basis behind your deduction?"

"This Golden Inscription Seal can only be used to seal fluids," Zhang Xuan replied.

"You are able to comprehend the Golden Inscription Seal?" This time, Sage Kui was no longer able to conceal his astonishment.

"I'm afraid that I am unable to comprehend it. I was only able to deduce that from deciphering the aura that it emanates," Zhang Xuan said.

"Un, you are right. What's stored within the vat is indeed a type of fluid. Also, putting aside those who have achieved the third realm in the Eye of Insight, even those who have reached the fourth realm would be unable to tell what's inside the vat!" Sage Kui revealed with a satisfied look on his face.

"In truth, this test serves to assess not one's eye of discernment but one's character and nature. The Eye of Insight can always be cultivated, so it doesn't matter whether you have reached the third realm or not. However, character and nature are two aspects that are very hard to change. The Sanctum of Sages houses Kong shi's ideology and my teacher's heritage, so I don't wish to pass it down to those with malicious intentions!

“The reason I said earlier that only those whose Eye of Insight has reached the third realm are qualified to become a candidate in line for the position of sanctum head and have you observe this vat was to assess your reaction.

“If one is unable to determine what’s inside the vat, so be it. To lie out of anxiety to clear a test only shows that one’s character is questionable.”

At which, Sage Kui chuckled. “Congratulations, you have cleared the test. It’s admirable that someone as young as you is willing to admit failure graciously. It seems like you are a person of good character. Not bad, not bad!”

“Thank you,” Zhang Xuan said with a reddened face.

It turned out that it was a test after all. Indeed, if one was unable to discern anything, there was no reason one could not just admit to it.

Even so, the other party’s words about him being of good character were indeed true. Otherwise, why would he have been unanimously chosen to become the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy?

Just with that remark alone, Zhang Xuan immediately felt a burst of goodwill toward Sage Kui.

For some inexplicable reason, everyone else seemed to tightly hold onto the belief that he was an existence who brought destruction wherever he went, and they tried to maintain a distance from him. Only the old man before him was able to see through his good character with a single glance. As expected of a grandstudent of Kong shi, his eye of discernment was indeed outstanding.

“Since you have cleared my test, here is your reward. It’s the Sanctum Head Token of the Sanctum of Sages!”

With a flick of his wrist, Sage Kui passed a token over to Zhang Xuan. “The token is real, but it has been sealed by some inscriptions, so you won’t be able to use it for the time being. As a result, you won’t be able to issue commands through it, and you won’t enjoy the authority and privileges that come along with it. In other words, despite having the

Sanctum Head Token in your hand, you'll still be an ordinary student in the Sanctum of Sages.”

Nodding, Zhang Xuan caught the Sanctum Head Token.

Taking a look at it, the token was not big. It was filled with inscriptions, which sealed the aura of the token tightly within.

To the eye of an outsider, it would appear to be nothing more than an ordinary token. However, just by grasping it, one would be able to feeling the raging power harnessed within it. It felt as if there was some immense energy stored within the token that would cause even the sky to dull before its powers.

This token is probably a really high-tier artifact.

Even without checking on it with his Library of Heaven's Path, Zhang Xuan could tell that the token was no ordinary tool. In terms of tier, it was definitely superior to the Lingxu Sword of the Old Sword Maestro.

“I didn't seal the token to intentionally make things difficult for you. You should be well aware of the standing of the Sanctum of Sages in the Master Teacher Continent. In order to become the sanctum head, it's imperative that you wield strength proportionate to your position. Otherwise, how will others be willing to follow you? Even if your position is legitimate, you still won't be able to gain the respect of others.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded slowly.

While the Master Teacher Pavilion did establish a certain degree of order via rules to the Master Teacher Continent, the fact was that strength still reigned mighty.

The reason the Zhang Clan wielded such great authority, which even the Master Teacher Pavilion would falter before, was due to their overwhelming strength. Even if Zhang Xuan rose to the position of the sanctum head right now, if he did not possess strength worthy of the position, no one would be willing to follow him.

On the contrary, it might even bring danger upon him.

Considering how he was only at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, there was a good chance that this would only make him a laughingstock.

“I’m glad that you understand that. Alright, I have set three seals in total upon the Sanctum Head Token. The first seal will be broken when you become an 8-star master teacher. The second seal will be broken when your cultivation reaches Saint 8-dan. Last but not least, the third seal will be broken when your cultivation of the Eye of Insight reaches the fourth realm, Demon Vanquisher.”

Sage Kui looked at Zhang Xuan with eyes filled with anticipation as he continued. “Judging from your appearance, you should only be your early twenties at the moment. Given how you are able to wield such strength at your current age, there’s no doubt that you possess outstanding talent. While these three goals will be hard to achieve, as long as you work diligently, you should be able to accomplish it within a hundred years. At just 120 years old, you will be one of the youngest to become the head of the Sanctum of Sages!”

“A hundred years?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan could not help but shake his head.

While the three conditions that Sage Kui had imposed for him were indeed difficult, if he could only accomplish them within a hundred years, he would already be buried under a huge pile of grass thanks to the Innate Fetal Poison.

Not to mention, if he wanted to stop Luo Ruoxin from marrying that hateful fellow from the Zhang Clan, he would have to wield sufficient strength to stand before both the Luo Clan and the Zhang Clan by the third month of the next year.

He was not going to survive that long at that pace.

“I’ll just repeat it one last time. Until you fulfill those three conditions, you won’t be able to release the seal on the Sanctum Head Token, and you won’t be able to tap into the power harnessed in it. As such, I hope that you can disguise yourself as an ordinary student and study diligently in the Sanctum of Sages, slowly taking a step at a time to the peak.

This is the best way for you to win the respect of others, as well as my test to you,” Sage Kui advised.

“I understand.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Two words: low profile.

By walking every step of the way by himself, he would be able to gain a true understanding of the Sanctum of Sages. This way, when he finally became the sanctum head, he would be able to take control of matters with ease instead of falling into a panic.

“Good. Alright, this is the optic art that my teacher has created, Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld. Only those who possess the Eye of Insight will be able to practice it. As the saying goes, once one cultivates it to the highest level, one will be able to peer right into the ninth netherworld. Even the heavens will be unable to conceal one’s eyes.

“I’ll impart the technique to you right now, and you have three days to practice it. As for how much you manage to learn, that will be dependent on your own talent. If you can’t comprehend it your entire life, you won’t be able to reach the fourth realm of the Eye of Insight. In other words, even with the Sanctum Head Token in hand, you won’t be able to become the real sanctum head.”

Sage Kui waved his hand forward.

Huala!

A huge number of words along with a massive formation map appeared in the space before Sage Kui.

Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld?

Swiftly glancing through the content, Zhang Xuan felt his heart jolting in astonishment.

As expected of an ultimate technique on par with the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, it was indeed formidable.

Just as Sage Kui had said, the optic technique was built upon the foundation of the Eye of Insight, so only those who possessed the gift would be able to practice and utilize it. Basically, the underlying idea behind it was to make use of the

lines of insight within the Eye of Insight to form formations. The more lines of insight one had, the more capable one would be in seeing through the essence of objects, and the greater prowess the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld would wield.

This optic art consists of three realms. The first realm is Gaze of Deities and Demons. With just one look, one would be able to crush the mental state of a cultivator, rendering them incapable of fighting against one! Zhang Xuan noted as he looked at the first realm.

There were some formidable cultivators who carried a unique disposition of their own. With just a glare, they would be able to instill deep fear into others.

This was especially so for emperors. With a glare and a roar, those who had never experienced life-and-death situations would find themselves being put under deep pressure.

Basically, the first realm, Gaze of Deities and Demons, served to maximize such an ability to its very limits via the Eye of Insight. With just one look, one's enemies would feel as if they were standing before deities and demons alike, crushing their spirit entirely, rendering them incapable of retaliating at all.

Once one's spirit had been crushed, no matter how powerful one was, there would be no chance at victory at all.

To be able to induce others to flee with just one look...

As expected of the technique left behind by the founder, it was indeed formidable!

If he could master it, his fighting prowess would surely grow by at least twofold.

With such thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan continued looking on. But before long, a deep frown appeared on his forehead.

“Hmm? That's not right. It seems like... there's something wrong with the optic art!”

1297 Are You Suffering From Achromatopsia?

Out of habit, Zhang Xuan collected the manual of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld into the Library of Heaven's Path before browsing through it. So, what he was reading wasn't the text in the sky but the compiled book in the Library of Heaven's Path.

The introduction still sounded fine, but when he began processing the formula to practicing the optic art, he swiftly realized that something was amiss with the technique.

“What's wrong?” Sage Kui asked.

The optic art was created by his teacher, and it was incomparably profound. There was no genius possessing the Eye of Insight who wouldn't be mesmerized by it. Yet, the young man actually frowned and said that there was a problem. What did he mean by this?

“This...” Zhang Xuan turned over to look at Sage Kui. “Elder, I would like to ask if there's anyone amidst the preceding sanctum heads who have suffered from blindness?”

“Blindness?” Not comprehending the reason behind Zhang Xuan's words, Sage Kui frowned. “I am only in charge of guiding and assessing the potential candidates for the position of sanctum head, so I don't really know much about their affairs.”

He had died several dozen millenniums ago, and in order to allow his fragmented soul to survive as long as possible, he would only regain consciousness if a genius perceived to possess the Eye of Insight were to enter the examination grounds. Considering the limited time that he remained conscious, it was difficult for him to find out much about the affairs of the other sanctum heads.

“Then... Pardon me for asking this insolent question, but was Ancient Sage Bo Shang’s eyes fine?” Seeing that he was unaware of the matter, Zhang Xuan rephrased his question once more.

“My teacher has departed from the world shortly after founding the Sanctum of Sages... and his eyes were indeed blind then.” Sage Kui paused for a brief moment before adding, “However, with appropriate treatment, I think that his condition should be reversible...”

“Reversible?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan unwittingly shook his head as a bitter smile emerged on his lips. “I’m afraid that it’ll be extremely difficult to do so, if not impossible altogether.”

“Why?” Slightly surprised by Zhang Xuan’s affirmative response, Sage Kui asked.

There were many books containing details about Ancient Sage Bo Shang’s affairs in the Sanctum of Sages, but most of them were centered around the nobler and more positive aspects of him. Furthermore, it was only known in a very small, closed circle that he had lost his sight back then, so the news didn’t spread too far. So, how did the young man learn of the matter?

Not to mention, to speak so affirmatively that it was nearly impossible to recover from his blindness...

“The reason lies in the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld!” Zhang Xuan sighed.

“The optic art serves to tap into one’s potential through the Eye of Insight to unleash devastating might. In terms of prowess, it is indeed an incredible battle technique. However, the side effect is that each time the formation map was activated, it would inflict tremendous, irreparable damage to the eye. As time goes by, one would inevitably lose one’s sense of sight!”

In fact, the very first flaw regarding the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld in the Library of Heaven’s Path was the permanent loss of sight.

Regardless of whether one was an ordinary mortal or a cultivator, there was bound to be a limit to one's potential. The ability of the optic art in tapping into this potential in the form of formation maps was indeed formidable, capable of bringing forth great destruction in an instant. However, the damage that it would inflict on the caster was immense and irreversible too.

This was especially so since a human's potential couldn't be restored with any pills or means.

To make an analogy, this was just like how, in Zhang Xuan's previous life, a significant portion of talented athletes tended to have short lives. This was because they had sapped the potential of their bodies dry when they were younger. On top of that, the injuries they had sustained throughout the course of their career also remained as traumas, placing a great strain on their bodies. As a result, very few of them were able to enjoy the lifespan of an ordinary human.

What the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld drained was the optic nerves. It was possible to treat and change the eyes, but if one's optic nerves were to wither and die, there would be very little that one could do.

In other words, the optic art was fatally flawed.

To Saint realm cultivators, who possessed extraordinary senses and Spiritual Perception, it might seem like the loss of sight might not impede their fighting prowess significantly. However, the same couldn't be said about those who possessed the Eye of Insight.

In the first place, even without practicing optic arts, the Eye of Insight was already a very powerful gift in itself. The very ability to discern details more keenly than anyone else could play a deterministic role in the outcome of a battle. The loss of sight would mean the loss of this gift, which would result in a sharp decline in one's fighting prowess. On top of that, one might also suffer a huge setback in their state of mind as well, and that would prevent them from reaching greater heights in the future.

Hearing the young man's helpless sigh, Sage Kui frowned in displeasure, "I have practiced the Divine Eyes of the Ninth

Netherworld for several hundred years now, but I haven't noticed any damage to my eyes. This is an optic art left behind my teacher, so I'll have to ask of you not to spread false rumors about it!"

It was not that Sage Kui was reluctant to believe Zhang Xuan's words, but he had also cultivated the optic art for many years, but his eyes were still completely fine. He didn't experience any discomfort or pain as a result from using the technique, and his eyesight hadn't been impaired either.

Given so, wasn't the other party's worries a little unfounded?

Besides, who was his teacher?

Ancient Sage Bo Shang, one of the Kong shi's direct disciples, honored as one of the Ten Apostles! The Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld was a technique which Ancient Sage Bo Shang had devoted his entire life to developing, so how could there be such a fatal flaw to it?

This was a ridiculous notion in itself!

Even if there was a flaw in it, it shouldn't be something which a mere Primordial Spirit realm cultivator like the young man would be able to see through!

Knowing that Sage Kui would react in such a way, Zhang Xuan didn't lose his composure. Instead, he looked at the latter and said calmly, "Why don't I put it like that then? Elder, you mentioned that you have cultivated the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld for several hundred years now, but if I'm not mistaken, you weren't able to reach the third realm, right?"

"... Yes." Sage Kui nodded.

Due to his lack of talent, despite his hard work, he was still unable to catch up with his teacher's footsteps even up to his teacher's death. Putting aside the third realm, he wasn't even able to reach the peak of the second realm.

"If I'm not mistaken, when you first left this fragment of your soul here, you have just used the inferno to reforge your eyes and the frigid ice to temper them, allowing you to barely reach the second realm of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld. At your current level, you are already able to see through the

darkness with absolute keenness, as if it's a brightly lit room. However, in a real battle, you still aren't able to use the true prowess of the second realm, Asura's Wrath, right?" Raising his eyelids, Zhang Xuan said.

The first realm of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld was Gaze of Deities and Demons, and the second realm was Asura's Wrath. Once one had mastered the second realm, with just a glance, one would be able to bring scorching inferno to the lands, as if hell had descended upon the world.

The first realm was mainly focused on mental offense whereas the second realm was a pure physical offense.

Those whose strength hadn't met a certain mark would stand no chance before Asura's Wrath at all, turning into cinders in an instant. Even those who possessed strength greater than the caster would find themselves placed in a very difficult position, unable to exert their strength freely as they wanted to.

Most importantly of all, the optic art could be cast at will. There would be no movements or anything else to warn one of the offense beforehand. Everything within the reach of the eye were possible targets, making it nigh impossible to guard against it.

It was for this reason that the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld was so famous, and the generations of sanctum heads were also deeply respected throughout the continent, possessing a standing higher than even that of the heads of the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan.

However, as powerful as the technique was, it was extremely troublesome to cultivate it. Firstly, one had to reforge one's eyes with the inferno and use frigid ice to temper them. After which, one still had to go through many gruesome trials, and the slightest mistake in any of them could result in the cultivation of the Eye of Insight to fall through.

Even though Sage Kui hadn't executed any optic art so far, through Zhang Xuan's understanding of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld, he was still able to roughly deduce the latter's proficiency.

“How... did you know?” Sage Kui was astonished.

The other party’s words were completely spot-on. When he first left behind a fragment of his soul in the Mountain Gate, he had barely managed to cultivate the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld up to the second realm, still a very far way off from reaching the third realm.

“Even though you are just a sliver of will at the moment, I can still see slight flames burning in your eyes. As weak as they appear, they seem to wield the potency to torch everything down to cinders. From that, it isn’t too difficult to deduce that you have reached the second realm, Asura’s Wrath.” Zhang Xuan said as he leisurely strolled around the other party.

Since he had collected the manual of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld into the Library of Heaven’s Path, it took only a moment for him to assimilate all of the knowledge concerning it. With his current understanding of the optic art, it wasn’t too difficult for him to deduce this much.

“Are you saying that... you have already finished reading through the second realm of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld?” Hearing those words, Sage Kui’s body trembled in astonishment, and his eyes widened in shock.

It was just a moment ago that he had shown the manual of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld to the young man, but in just a few breaths’ time, the young man was actually able to accurately list out the various distinctive traits of the second realm... Could it be that he had really managed to memorize all of it?

One must know that the manual of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld consisted of over several hundred thousand words! Just browsing through it would take some time, let alone assimilating the knowledge. Back then, he had studied it day and night without rest after obtaining the manual, but it still took him two days before he managed to primarily grasp the optic art.

He even received his teacher’s compliment for that...

And yet, the young man actually managed to memorize it all within just a few breaths? How could that be possible?

“It isn’t too difficult to memorize the entire optic art. What’s more important is interpreting and cultivating the technique.” Zhang Xuan shook his head. He didn’t reveal the slightest joy at having astounded the other party; on the contrary, he shook his head in pity as he continued on, “Correct me if I’m wrong, but while cultivating the second realm, Asura’s Wrath, you should have seen red dots in your eyes from time to time. Also, there would be a slight itch in your eyes from time to time, and upon facing the wind, your eyes would tear up uncontrollably too. Worst of all, after casting Asura’s Wrath, you would find yourself in a state of temporary blindness for roughly three breaths...

“May I know if there’s any mistake in what I have said so far?”

“You...” Sage Kui couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

He had indeed faced these conditions while he was cultivating the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Underworld, but back then, he thought that it was just a side effect from reforging his eyes with the inferno, so he didn’t think too much into it. Could there really be something wrong with the optic art?

By the time he reached the second realm of the optic art, his teacher had already departed from the world, so there was no one whom he could consult these issues with. As a result, he could only fumble his way forward, hoping that he would be able to find the right path.

It was also true that he would suffer temporary blindness after casting Asura’s Wrath, but he thought that it was a natural effect as a result of the excessive exertion of his strength in the casting of the optic art. Could it really be as the young man had said... there was really a problem in the optic art?

“Asura’s Wrath uses the eyes as a medium to channel a raging inferno upon one’s enemies. Upon reaching Major Accomplishment, the flames would be able to cleanse all impurities and torch everything down into cinders. Without a doubt, it’s a technique that wields astounding might, but it’s

highly exhausting on one's mind as well. Continued usage of the skill would cause the nerves that governed sight to age prematurely, thus significantly reducing the lifespan of one's sight. This is just like how the core of a formation plate would be depleted each time it's used. Once it reaches its limit, not even the most formidable of formation masters would be able to fix it."

Zhang Xuan shook his head in pity as he continued, "Even though you have barely reached the second realm by the time you left this sliver of will, the side effects have already started to show. For one, the immense strain on your eyes has resulted in the enlarging of blood vessels in your eyes, resulting in them appearing slightly red. Also, if I'm not mistaken, you should suffer from frequent insomnia too."

"You know that... I have insomnia?" Sage Kui was flabbergasted.

For a cultivator as strong as Sage Kui, he could use cultivation to replace his need for sleep. Nevertheless, an occasional sleep now and then would still be a relaxing experience for both his body and mind.

In fact, most cultivators would still opt to rest from time to time.

Back then, when his teacher just departed from the world, he had to govern the entire Sanctum of Sages by himself, so he didn't have time to get much rest. Even when he tried, he wasn't able to fall asleep either. He had attributed the matter to his tense nerves, but could it really be related to the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld?

Now that he thought about it... he seemed to recall that his teacher suffered from constant insomnia as well, and that had left him feeling lethargic frequently.

"Considering the damage the cultivation of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld has caused to your nerves, it's inevitable that you would suffer from insomnia. Furthermore, as you deepen your mastery in it, your mind would start to wear down, resulting in frequent memory loss. More importantly... your sensitivity toward colors would also start

to dull, and eventually, the many colors of the natural world would appear to be nothing more than black and white to you...”

At this moment, Zhang Xuan paused for a moment before sighing deeply in sympathy. “In other words, total color blindness!”

“If I’m not mistaken, you should be suffering from such symptoms too!”

1298 Sage Kui's Dilemma

Due to the inferno burning within one's eyes, those who practiced the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld would find their sensitivity toward colors fading as time passed, and eventually, the entire world would appear to be nothing but black and white to them.

Due to the nature of the injury, it was an irreversible symptom. There was no way to recover from it.

This was not listed in the flaws in the Library of Heaven's Path, but through Zhang Xuan's deep understanding of the Way of Medicine and cultivation, he could still deduce this much from working backward.

"Color blindness? What's that?" Sage Kui was stunned by the foreign term.

He had never heard that terminology from anyone's mouth before.

"You don't know what it is?" Zhang Xuan was startled for a moment before realization struck him.

Due to the difference in worlds, it was indeed possible that the notion of color blindness was not as prevalent or common in this world.

So, Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment to decide how he should explain the concept. "Color blindness refers to a lack of sensitivity of one's eyes in perceiving different colors. Take my clothes for example, what's the color that you see?"

"Gray," Sage Kui replied.

"It's light-blue, not gray," Zhang Xuan stated with a shake of his head.

"Light-blue?" Sage Kui frowned.

Is this supposed to be what light-blue looks like? Why doesn't it seem to be the case?

“Let me ask you a different question instead. How many colors are there in a rainbow?”

While saying those words, Zhang Xuan waved his hand and created a rainbow bridge of seven colors in the sky.

“I can discern a couple of colors from it, but... there doesn't seem to be seven colors in the rainbow you have created. Furthermore, most of the colors are of similar tones, so I can't really say for sure either...” Staring at the rainbow intently, Sage Kui felt a ripple of shock striking his mind.

He had seen plenty of rainbows when he was younger, and he could accurately distinguish seven colors from them. But now, he could only identify three colors in total, and the difference between the three was very vague. Could he really have been suffering from color blindness, just as the other party had said?

Was this really the side effect from practicing the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld that his teacher had left behind?

For so many years, he had harbored absolute faith toward the optic art that his teacher had created. However, under the persuasive and logical analysis of the young man before him, he could not help but begin doubting.

“Then... is there a way to resolve the problem?” Sage Kui asked.

“So far, I only managed to analyze the flaws in the optic art. I haven't really found a way to resolve them yet...” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

The Library of Heaven's Path would only reflect the flaws of techniques, and Zhang Xuan had not come into contact with any optic art manuals before, so he could not compile anything with the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld to perfect it.

“However, since we have identified the problem, it will only be a matter of time before a solution is found!”

As long as Zhang Xuan could find sufficient optic art manuals to perfect the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld, those problems would be resolved as well.

Back then, there had also been many faults with Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, and cultivation of the technique could have caused one to go blind, too. Nevertheless, through compiling it with many other cultivation techniques, he had resolved that problem.

"Let's hope so..." Sage Kui nodded. "So, will you still be cultivating the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld?"

Sage Kui knew how powerful the Eye of Insight was as well, and it would indeed be a pity to go blind as a result of cultivating an optic art.

"I think I'll hold off cultivating the technique for the time being. I'll try to resolve the current problems before cultivating it," Zhang Xuan replied.

Despite its flaws, the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld was still an extremely formidable battle technique. He would have to find some way to access optic art manuals so as to compile them together with it and perfect it.

In any case, there was no rush for the time being. What he was lacking in the most at the moment was not battle techniques but his cultivation.

If his cultivation was too low, no matter how many formidable battle techniques he had, he would still be unable to faze the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan.

"Un, that would be good, too. For the next three days, you should try to gain a complete understanding of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld. If there's anything that you are unable to comprehend, feel free to ask me. You won't have any more opportunities to clarify your doubts once you leave this land in three days!" Sage Kui nodded.

"Thank you, elder!" Zhang Xuan replied before sitting on the ground.

While he appeared to be staring at the words in the air, his consciousness was immersed within his mind as he tried to fully grasp everything concerning the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld.

There are more than thirty flaws to the optic art all in all, and every single one of them poses great damage to the body.

After a moment of studying the optic art, Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella helplessly.

It was not that he did not want to cultivate the technique, but there were simply too many flaws in it! How could a perfectionist like him possibly swallow something like this?

If he forced himself to cultivate it, he might very well die from repulsion before anything else.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had paused on the spot for some time now, Sage Kui asked with a kind smile, “How is it? Is there anything concerning the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld that confuses you? I can address your doubts here!”

Knowing that Sage Kui was asking out of goodwill, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before shaking his head. “There are quite a few aspects of the optic art that confuse me, but it’s fine. I don’t think that you’ll be able to address them either.”

It was not that he was underestimating Sage Kui, but it was likely that even Ancient Sage Bo Shang himself would have been unable to address his doubts! Otherwise, there was no way he would have ended up blinding himself.

“You are saying that I won’t be able to address your doubts?” Sage Kui frowned in displeasure. “I’ve spent several centuries cultivating the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld, even reaching the second realm of it. As long as it’s a problem regarding its cultivation, I’ll surely be able to answer it!”

He knew that the young man before him possessed an exceptional eye of discernment, being able to notice such a major flaw in the optic art with just one look. Nevertheless, he had still cultivated the technique for many years now, and not to mention, he was also a powerful cultivator. He was confident that with his deep understanding of the battle technique, he would be able to address any questions that the young man could come up with.

“You’ll surely be able to answer it?” Seeing the confident look on Sage Kui’s face, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over and

smiled lightly. “Very well, I do have a few questions that I would love to have some answers to. I would be very grateful if you can answer them. Firstly, in the Gaze of Deities and Demons, what is the exact form that the demons and deities should assume? If it’s just based on personal conceptualization, won’t the effectiveness of the optic art be compromised?”

“This...” Sage Kui was startled by the abrupt question.

In this world, there was no one who had seen a true deity or demon before, so naturally, they were beings that were extremely hard for any human to truly imagine.

In fact, whenever Sage Kui cast the technique, he would instinctively attempt to imagine bloodshed and carnage, intending to use killing aura as a substitution for the conceptualization of deities and demons to instill fear in the hearts of others.

Just as Sage Kui was about to reveal his method, the young man before him had already spoken up once more. “If what we are going to image is just plain slaughter, once the killing intent corrodes one’s eyes and consciousness, how would one be different from the Otherworldly Demons? Furthermore, what demons and deities stand for should be supremacy, not slaughter. If we use slaughter to replace the concept of supremacy, wouldn’t that be an inaccurate interpretation of the technique?”

Hearing those words, Sage Kui’s face turned pale.

Indeed. As a result of his frequent conceptualization of bloodshed and carnage, there was a period of time when he found himself unable to control the killing intent within him anymore, and he ran all the way down to the Subterranean Gallery to slaughter Otherworldly Demons to vent his emotions.

In a sense, using the concept of slaughter to substitute the demons and deities would turn the technique into a depraved art, which was at odds with the standing and beliefs of a master teacher.

“My second question!” Seeing that Sage Kui was unable to answer his first question, Zhang Xuan decisively decided to move on.

“The Gaze of Deities and Demons utilizes one’s eyes as a medium to attack another’s soul. However, for the attack to reach its target, one must first absorb a hint of the target’s soul energy in order to lock the attack onto the other party’s Primordial Spirit. However, if the target is aware of this aspect of the technique, they could use it as an opportunity to overwhelm one with their soul energy, putting one in a perilous position. Taking a step back, even if the target isn’t aware of this opening, if the target’s Primordial Spirit is far stronger than one’s own, a forceful attack would inflict significant damage upon one!”

Sage Kui fell silent, unable to speak a single word at all.

This was another flaw of the Gaze of Deities and Demons, and even his teacher, Ancient Sage Bo Shang, had been unable to resolve it.

But while this was indeed a potential opening, considering the fast pace of a battle, there would be very few people who would be able to notice it and use it against them.

As such, it could not be considered a major flaw.

Just that... since the other party had pointed it out, it would not feel right to say that it was a negligible flaw.

“My third question. In order to cultivate Asura’s Wrath, one must use the inferno to reforge one’s eyes and the frigid ice to temper them. Through the intersection of hot and cold, one will be able to form a balance of duality within one’s eyes, which is aligned with the nature of the world as well.

However... while two contrasting powers in one’s eyes can enhance the strength of the formation maps and strengthen the lines of insight, it will also suppress the strength of one’s soul as well, reminiscent of a seal. This will inadvertently result in the weakening of one’s Primordial Spirit...”

“My fourth question...”

Zhang Xuan posed all his questions one after another.

With each question asked, Sage Kui's face turned paler by a shade. By the time the tenth question was asked, his silhouette had already turned faint, and it seemed as if he would vanish at any moment.

At this point, he was no longer shocked but horrified.

While the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld was created by his teacher, it was inevitable that it would have its own flaws as well. Nevertheless, under normal circumstances, these flaws were not too apparent, so they would not cause much of a problem in its execution.

Yet, with just a single glance, the young man was able to see through all of these flaws, reciting them one after another precisely. If the young man had been an enemy, with just this knowledge, the young man would have been able to overcome his optic art easily and blind him with a single move!

The realization of this made Sage Kui break out in cold sweat.

He had thought that after learning the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld, there would be hardly anyone in the world who would be a match for him. In any battle, as long as he utilized the optic art, he would be guaranteed victory.

But after hearing the young man's words, he realized that the only reason he had remained undefeated for so long was because he had never encountered a true expert. If he had encountered an enemy of the young man's caliber back then, it was questionable whether he would still have his eyes with him at this moment.

As the saying goes, 'the most proficient of swimmers can drown in water'. Complacency would eventually bite back at one.

He was able to discern so many flaws with just a look... and I actually tried to offer him guidance...

Sage Kui's body stiffened. He felt so stifled that he could not even speak a word.

It was just a moment ago that he had declared confidently that he would offer the young man guidance, but as soon as the

young man starting stating his questions, he found that he could not even answer a single one of them.

The searing sensation on his face left him feeling like burying himself in a hole.

“This is my thirteenth question... Never mind, I’ll just stop here today. Elder, have you thought of the answers of any of them?”

There was a momentary silence before the young man spoke with a comforting voice. “There’s no need to rush into it; you can slowly take your time to ponder over them. In any case, we still have two days more here. For the time being, I’ll take a rest first and sleep for a while. Feel free to wake me up when you’re done, and I’ll continue asking the other questions I have in mind.”

“Cough cough!” Sage Kui’s lips twitched wildly as his silhouette faltered.

This was supposed to be a session to clarify doubts, but why did it seem like the young man was assessing him instead?

More importantly... he knew that there was no way he could come up with a fitting answer to those questions!

Putting aside him, even his teacher would have been unable to do so! If his teacher was really able to answer these questions, he would have improved the Divine Eye of the Ninth Netherworld already.

Given so, there was no way he would be able to answer those questions even if he were to ponder over them for two years, let alone two days!

The reason he had left behind a sliver of his will was to assess the later generations, but now, he found himself being stumped before them instead.

Just where in the world did this monster come from?

After contemplating for some time and deciding that there was no way he would be able to answer any of the questions, Sage Kui could only turn his gaze back to the young man helplessly. However, what he saw was the young man deeply asleep on

the ground instead. Saliva was dripping down from his opened mouth, and there was a sweet smile on his face, as if he was having a good dream.

This... Are you the first-generation sanctum head, or am I?

Sage Kui's vision immediately turned dark. The sheer frustration that he felt left his very existence faltering non-stop, as if he would dissipate at any moment.

1299 End of the Examination

Over the past several ten thousand years, he had assessed eight candidates possessing the Eye of Insight, and every single one of them expressed deep reverence toward him, not daring to show the slightest disrespect.

Their wonderment and awe only served to deepen when they saw the manual of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld. Every single one of them swore to cultivate strictly to the manual, and some even feared that their lack of talent would taint such a brilliant optic art.

Yet, this fellow actually managed to stump him after a swift look at the manual, and as if that wasn't enough... he actually went to sleep right before him!

You are obviously biting tightly onto the fact that I won't be able to answer your questions!

Deeply stifled, Sage Kui shook his head before sitting helplessly onto the ground. Staring at the optic art manual before him, he eventually began to reanalyze it once more.

Even though he felt a little unhappy about the young man's casual attitude before him, he knew that the young man's words rang true. Just the fact that the young man could pose those questions to him meant that the young man's comprehension of the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld had already reached a level on par with his.

If a cultivator were to find flaws in the technique he practiced, it went without saying that he would have to find ways to resolve them.

Otherwise, if he were to harbor doubts about the capability of the battle technique he practiced, how could he possibly charge valiantly toward the top?

...

Some time later, Zhang Xuan stretched his back lazily and opened his eyes.

Ever since he arrived at Qianchong Empire, he had been constantly preoccupied with various matters. Even on the way to the Sanctum of Sages, he was completely absorbed into studying, raising his cultivation, and guiding Zhang Jiuxiao along. As a result, a great deal of mental fatigue had been building up in him for some time now.

Perhaps in view of the fact that they were currently in the Mountain Gate examination, and Sage Kui was looking after him, Zhang Xuan instinctively realized that there wouldn't be any problem regarding his safety here. As such, he was able to release whatever wariness he had toward his surroundings and slept rather sweetly.

“It has been almost three days?” Standing up and stretching his back lazily, Zhang Xuan did a rough calculation of the time he had been out, and he couldn't help but leap in shock.

He thought that he would only sleep for a day at most, but who could have thought that he would end up being knocked out for three days straight. Just the thought of it left him deeply embarrassed.

Perhaps it was the great stress he had been under recently, he hadn't been able to get a good rest. As such, when his tension finally loosened, his mind took this opportunity to rest as much as it could without any concern about time.

“Has Sage Kui resolved the problems which I have posed to him yet?” Zhang Xuan suddenly recalled what happened prior to his sleep, and he turned his gaze toward Sage Kui.

To his shock, he found that the old man's body had already turned significantly less corporeal, as if he would dissipate at any moment. On top of that, his eyes were crimson, and there was an indescribably aged look on his face. It was as if he had depleted all of his vitality, spirit, and energy in the past three days.

“What's wrong with you?” Zhang Xuan was horrified by the sight before him.

Before he went to his sleep, Sage Kui was still doing perfectly fine. Why would he suddenly change so much after a short

span of three days?

“You are finally awake...” Turning his gaze to Zhang Xuan, Sage Kui’s face unwittingly reddened in embarrassment. With a distressed and helpless look in his eyes, he said, “I have pondered over the questions you have asked for three days... and I really can’t find an answer to them!”

He thought that he should at least resolve one of the questions posed within the next three days so as to preserve his honor, but... it seemed like he had overestimated himself.

The deeper he pondered over those questions, the less confidence he found that he had in the optic art. At this point, he was already severely doubting if the way he had chosen was wrong right from the very start.

Zhang Xuan was still wondering what kind of earth-shattering incident had occurred while he was in his sleep when he heard those words. Heaving a sigh of relief, he consoled, “It’s fine that you can’t find an answer to them, there’s no need to take it to heart! It’ll do as long as you keep a lookout for these problems when you practice the technique in the future...”

“...” Sage Kui felt even more stifled inside.

Why did it feel like he was the student here?

“The duration of the examination is three days, so is it about time for me to leave now?” Zhang Xuan swiftly glanced at his surroundings and noted that he was still in the folded space.

Then, a thought suddenly struck him, and he looked at Sage Kui in alarm, “What about my points?”

While the other candidates were busy trying to get as many points as they could, he actually slept through all three days! Was he going to fail the examination because of that?

“... Wait a moment, I’ll get you some points now.” Sage Kui replied awkwardly.

He had been too busy pondering over the young man’s question that he forgot about this matter...

It would really be the greatest joke of the world If the future sanctum head couldn’t even qualify as a student in the

Sanctum of Sages!

For the past eight sanctum head candidates, while the candidates were busy studying and comprehending the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld, he would gradually add their points so as to ensure that no one would be able to notice that something was amiss with their results. However, the overwhelming trauma he had suffered this time around had caused him to completely forget about this matter.

He quickly tapped his finger, and a moment later, he said, "Alright. You should have enough points to enter the Elite Division now!"

"Thank you." Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

At this point, he had also roughly realized what was going on here. While the previous sanctum head candidates wouldn't sleep through the three days like he did, they would still be preoccupied with studying the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld, so they wouldn't have any time to head out to earn points either.

Most likely, they were only able to become official students of the Sanctum of Sages due to Sage Kui tampering with their points.

Considering how the latter was the creator of the Mountain Gate examination, it wouldn't pose any difficulty for him to add points to a candidate!

"Good luck and work hard. Try to break the seals on the Sanctum Head Token as soon as possible so that you can become the next official head of the Sanctum of Sages. I'll be entrusting the responsibility of passing down Kong shi's ideology and my teacher's heritage to the later generations into your hands then!" Despite Sage Kui's solemn voice, the expectant gleam in his eyes showed that he thought highly of the young man before him.

There was something really different about the young man as compared to the other sanctum head candidates he had

assessed. Perhaps, he might just be able to walk out a path different from the rest of them.

As difficult as the task was, he had a feeling that the young man might just be able to resolve the flaws in the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld and perfect his teacher's heritage.

"Rest assured." Zhang Xuan replied.

The position of the sanctum head meant a lot to him as an individual as well. It would prove to become an important chip for vying for Luo Ruoxin's hand in marriage, and it would also grant him the resources he would need to push for a breakthrough to 9-star master teacher before reaching his thirties.

No matter what, he was determined to obtain it.

"Un." Sage Kui nodded in satisfaction before waving his hand.

In the next moment, Zhang Xuan abruptly felt a jolt in his body, and the surroundings before him warped into nothing more than a myriad of colors.

Hu la!

With another jolt, he suddenly found a large gate towering before him. He instinctively took a step forward, and before he knew it, he was already standing in the midst of the square before.

"I have returned?" Blinking his eyes in confusion, Zhang Xuan scanned his surroundings.

At this point, the students who had fought to enter the examination grounds three days ago seemed to have mostly returned. There were vastly different expressions on their faces; some were lit up in delight, some were dim with dejection.

The results were only reflected on the Jade Tablet of Trials, so they were still unaware of whether they were qualified as candidates in the Sanctum of Sages or not. Nevertheless, they were able to make a gauge based on their performance, so most of them already had a rough idea of their own results.

Zhang Xuan swiftly searched the surroundings for the group he had entered the Mountain Gate with. Coincidentally, in this moment, the gate behind him suddenly lit up once more, and a figure walked out—Zhang Jiuxiao.

“How did you fare for the examination?”

“I’m not too sure either, but I think I shouldn’t have a problem with clearing the examination!” Zhang Jiuxiao said with a hint of excitement in his eyes.

“Oh? What’s your test?”

To be able to remain confident despite the strong competition, just what could Zhang Jiuxiao’s test be?

“Swordsmanship! I have already achieved the level of Half-Quintessence, and I have also grasped the basics of the Three Swords of Lingxu too. While it’s still a little lacking at the moment, I think that there shouldn’t be too many candidates who would be able to match my level of proficiency.” Zhang Jiuxiao replied confidently.

On their journey from Qianchong Empire to the Sanctum of Sages, Zhang Xuan had imparted him the essence of swordsmanship, inducing a massive leap in his comprehension of the sword, and he successfully made a breakthrough to Half-Quintessence.

Together with his grasp over the Three Swords of Lingxu, even Ma Minghai, who was famed for superior mastery in swordsmanship, wouldn’t be a match for him. Given so, it was indeed not too difficult for him to stand out from the other candidates in the field of swordsmanship.

“That’s good.” Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

He had spent quite a lot of effort guiding Zhang Jiuxiao along in hopes that he would be able to clear the examination, and he had seen how hard Zhang Jiuxiao had worked during this period of time as well. It was truly heartening to see that his efforts had paid off.

“My results should be enough for me to become a student at the Sanctum of Sages, but it doesn’t seem too likely that I’ll be able to get into the Elite Division.” Zhang Jiuxiao continued.

“Elite Division?”

This was the second time Zhang Xuan was hearing this term. He couldn't help but direct a perplexed gaze toward Zhang Jiuxiao.

“The Elite Division is the class which only the most talented students of each intake would be able to enter, and all in all, there are only fifty slots for it!” Zhang Jiuxiao explained as a gleam of anticipation flickered across his eyes.

“Only fifty?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

With an intake of fifty, it would mean that only the top 10% of the candidates who had cleared the entrance examination would be able to enter the Elite Division.

Considering how strict the selection was, it could be seen how outstanding those who were able to get into the Elite Division were.

“Indeed. Most of those who were able to get into the Elite Division eventually went on to take up leadership roles in their own affiliated organizations. If I could get into the Elite Division too, there's a good chance that my standing in the Zhang Clan would rise beyond Zhang Qian!” Zhang Jiuxiao said in agitation.

“Isn't the offspring of Sage Clans ranked by the purity of their bloodlines?” Zhang Xuan asked in wonder.

“To a large degree, yes. However, it isn't the only criterion that is assessed. There are some geniuses from the side family who, despite the lacking purity in their bloodlines, achieved spectacular accomplishments as well, and they were highly-regarded in the Zhang Clan too!” Zhang Jiuxiao explained.

“There's nothing more to say about the standing of the Sanctum of Sages in the Master Teacher Continent. Putting aside how much the students in the Elite Division would accomplish in the future, just the connections that they could build there were already sufficient to reinforce their standing in the world!”

“That's true.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Those who were able to enter the Elite Division were mostly highly-regarded geniuses from top-notch powers. Even if they failed to become the heads of their affiliated organization in the future, even at the very worst, they would still at least be able to qualify as elders!

And being in the same class as those figures would allow one to forge connections with them, thus establishing a powerful network of contacts.

In contrast, the Ordinary Division was comparatively weaker.

“Right, Zhang shi, how many points do you think that you have received? Were you able to calculate it? Do you think that you’ll be able to get into the Elite Division?” Zhang Jiuxiao asked curiously.

He had spent a considerable amount of time with the young man so far, and if the young man were to use his full strength in the examination, there was really a good chance that he might be able to get into the Elite Division.

But again, it was hard to say for sure.

The most outstanding young geniuses of the Master Teacher Continent were all gathered on this square, and to emerge above them all was no easy feat at all.

“This...” A bitter smile surfaced on Zhang Xuan’s lips as he shook his head. “To be honest, I’m not too sure either.”

Even though Sage Kui said that he had given him sufficient points to enter the Elite Division, he still wasn’t too sure how many points he had obtained.

“You aren’t too sure?” Guessing that Zhang Xuan might be reluctant to reveal his results, Zhang Jiuxiao decided not to press the issue any further. With a chuckle, he said, “It’s fine. Our scores are being tabulated at the moment, so we should know the results of the examination very soon!”

If nothing went wrong, they should be able to find out whether they had managed to make it into the Sanctum of Sages by today.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The duo swiftly found Ma Minghai and the others and made their way over.

Judging from the composure on Ma Minghai and Brother Sun's face, it seemed like they should have performed not too bad. As for the others, their complexion looked a little awful, and their fidgety body posture reflected their anxiety and worry, so it was apparent that they didn't have too much confidence in their performance.

It was no wonder why they would feel this way. They might be the cream of the crop in their respective clans or empires, but against the many experts from the various occupations, Sage Clans, and Empire Alliance, their halo as geniuses inevitably dimmed in comparison.

"I wonder how many of them will be able to get into the Sanctum of Sages..." Zhang Xuan wondered as he glanced at the worried faces before him.

The competition to reach the top was never easy, let alone in somewhere like the Sanctum of Sages. To make a metaphor, it was like thousands of cavalry charging to get across a narrow plank of wood to get to the other side.

Inevitably, some might find themselves being crushed by the hordes behind or pushed down the cliff, thus being eliminated from the race.

Just taking himself as an example, if not for how outstanding he was, he would have never been able to rise up through the ranks from Tianxuan Kingdom, reaching where he was at the moment.

...

Before long, all of the candidates had finally stepped out from the gates, and the rankboard reflecting the scores of the top five hundred candidates on the Jade Token of Trials was refreshed for the very last time.

Many nervous guides stood before the grayish-emerald tablet with their eyes fixated on it.

1300 Elite Division

Weng!

With a brilliant shimmer of light, the names, ranks, and scores on the Jade Tablet of Trials were refreshed one last time. All in all, there were five hundred lines of information on the screen, no more no less.

Upon seeing the results, a huge commotion broke out amid the crowd.

“The results this time around have really broken the records!”

“I wouldn’t say that they have broken records, but it’s definitely the best performance we have seen in the entrance examination for the past thirty years.”

“The top ranker, Feng Ziyi, actually managed to obtain a score exceeding 70,000 points. Even the little princess of the Luo Clan didn’t manage to obtain such a score back then!”

“That’s only because the little princess didn’t use her full strength. If she really went all out, putting aside 70,000, even 700,000 is not completely out of the question!”

“As the one who possesses the Dimension Silencer, she commands near absolute authority over space. It’s questionable whether the folded space of the Mountain Gate examination would have been able to handle her strength if she really went all out!”

“The only one who stands a chance against the little princess of the Luo Clan is the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan!”

...

The surrounding master teachers discussed with one another.

As guides, they had led many intakes of candidates into the Sanctum of Sages, and without a doubt, the performance of the current intake was the highest within the recent decades!

The top ranker, Feng Ziyi, had even scored 70,000 points.

That was truly a frightening accomplishment!

“Zhang Yu isn’t too bad either. With a score of 69,000, he’s only 1,000 points away from first place!”

“I didn’t think that Yuan Haiqing would be able to push up a rank at the very last refresh, obtaining the third place.”

“Bai Qingxuan isn’t not too bad either. He managed to secure the fourth place...”

The guides commented on the top scores as they looked through the list of names on the scoreboard.

Listed before them were the names of the experts who would be entering the Elite Division, the most talented youths in the Master Teacher Continent. Perhaps, several hundred years from then, those names would be spoken by countless mouths, resounding through every street and alley.

“Bing Lingqing and Chen Leyao of the Glacier Plain Court have also managed to get into the Elite Division as well. Bing Lingqing’s ranking has constantly remained between tenth and twentieth throughout the examination—not too bad. As for Chen Leyao, her ranking was around the seventies to the eighties in the first two days of the examination, but in the very last day, she suddenly managed to make a push into the top fifty!”

“She must have completed some kind of formidable test for her results to soar by so much. I really must say that her luck is not too bad.”

“Indeed. Well, it’s a huge pity for Zhang Qian though. He was in the top fifty throughout most of the examination, but his ranking abruptly fell through at the final juncture, disqualifying him from the Elite Division.”

...

They had been observing the scoreboard over the past three days, so they had a rough idea of how each candidate had fared throughout the course of the examination.

Suddenly, someone amid the crowd exclaimed, “Wait a minute... Everyone, look at the person in fiftieth place, Zhang

Xuan. Where did he pop out from? I don't recall seeing his name on the screen throughout the examination."

Everyone quickly turned their gazes over, and indeed, sitting in fiftieth place on the scoreboard was an extremely unfamiliar name... Zhang Xuan!

"This name has never gotten into the top five hundred throughout the course of the examination, so how could he leap up to fiftieth place in the final refresh?"

"His score is 12,700. The last time I checked, the score for five hundredth place is 2,400. In other words, within the period before the final refresh, his score increased by more than 10,000? How is that possible?"

"Ten thousand within two minutes... Not even Feng Ziyi would be capable of something like that!"

"Could he have cheated?"

Soon, voices of doubts began spreading throughout the hall.

The Jade Tablet of Trials would refresh once every two minutes, and not once had the name 'Zhang Xuan' appeared before. The fact that 'Zhang Xuan' had never appeared in the top five hundred meant that he had never, at any point in time, achieved a score higher than the five hundredth ranker's 2,400 points!

Yet, for his score to surge up to 12,700 in an instant... that was too exaggerated!

The ten thousand candidates had toiled for three whole days, but most of them did not even come close to reaching 10,000 points. Yet, that fellow actually obtained that many points within two minutes? Was this even humanly possible?

Forming a stark contrast to the bewildered and doubtful crowd was Zhao Xingmo, who visibly heaved a sigh of relief upon seeing Zhang Xuan's name.

That fellow sure was worrisome, leaving him on edge for the past three days.

His heart had been restless ever since he failed to find that fellow's name on the first day, and he had thought that the

young man did not stand a chance anymore. Yet, who would have thought that he would actually shoot up by 10,000 points at the very last moment, successfully clearing the entrance examination? Not to mention, he even snuck into the very last slot of the Elite Division at that! It sure was a thrilling ride of emotions.

To him, the fact that a candidate he had brought to the Sanctum of Sages had successfully gotten into the Elite Division was a great source of pride and honor to him.

“Zhang Jiuxiao, Ma Minghai, Sun Gan... All in all, seven of the candidates whom I have led here have successfully cleared the examination. Not bad!” Zhao Xingmo nodded in approval.

While it was slightly beneath expectations that only seven out of thirty-three cleared the examination, considering that one of them managed to make it into the Elite Division, it was still not too bad. With such results, he would be qualified to head to better places to recruit more stronger candidates into the Sanctum of Sages.

Similar to how most of the guides were reacting, Elder Liu also frowned in disapproval. “There’s something peculiar about the results.”

He had served as an elder in the Sanctum of Sages for a very long time now, and he had encountered plenty of geniuses in his time. However, he had never seen or heard of anyone who remotely came close to earning 10,000 points within two minutes before.

Elder Liu pondered for a moment before he turned to the old man by his side and instructed, “Elder Han Zhu, go and check the situation.”

“Yes!” Elder Han Zhu nodded.

Elder Han Zhu quickly backed out of the hall, and not too long later, he returned with an unreadable expression on his face.

Noting the peculiar expression on Elder Han Zhu’s face, Elder Liu asked, “What’s wrong?”

“I have just checked the records, and based on what I saw, until the final refresh, Zhang Xuan didn’t have any points at

all. In other words... he earned 12,700 points at the very last moment!” Elder Han Zhu replied with a frown.

While the Jade Tablet of Trials only reflected the names and scores of the top five hundred candidates, it still kept track of the results of the other candidates as well. Otherwise, it would not have been able to determine who had cleared the examination and who had failed it accurately.

Earlier, he went to check the past records of that ‘Zhang Xuan’ candidate, and to his shock, he realized that up till the final two minutes, that candidate did not have a single point! It was only when the examination was coming to an end that he suddenly leaped to the fiftieth place. Clearly, there was something very bizarre about the situation.

“He earned 12,700 points at the very last moment? Is there any test in the Mountain Gate examination that can earn that many points in a single go?” Elder Liu asked contemplatively.

“As you know, the Mountain Gate examination was left behind by Sage Kui, and even elders like us don’t have the authority to check on what kinds of tests are within, let alone uncover the point allocation of the tests. Nevertheless, in the records of the past hundred years, the highest number of points that was allocated in one go was for deciphering a grade-8 intermediate Illusory-Slaughter Formation—5000 points!”

At this moment, Elder Han Zhu hesitated for a moment before continuing. “This record was left behind by the Zhang Clan’s Zhang Chen, and it caused a huge uproar then!”

“I know of the matter, too. 5,000 points is already unbelievable, but this Zhang Xuan actually earned 12,700 points in a single go. Just what kind of test did he go through for that?” Elder Liu still found the matter a little hard to believe.

There were indeed tests in the Mountain Gate examination where one could earn a great deal of points in a single shot, but those tests were proportionately difficult to pass as well.

Furthermore, 5,000 points was already an astounding reward for a single test. So, for a candidate to receive 12,700 points at

once... Honestly, he really could not bring himself to believe such a thing to be possible.

Elder Liu pondered for a moment before issuing his instructions. "For the time being, let's announce the results. Afterward, conduct a Challenge of the Defeated to check if Zhang Xuan really has the ability to earn so many points at once."

"Very well." Elder Han Zhu nodded.

After three days of examinations, the candidates were all bound to be exhausted. Thus, the Sanctum of Sages would usually announce the results quickly so that they could rest as soon as possible.

However, there were also exceptions to the convention.

For instance, there were times when the scores of several candidates appeared to be abnormal. In such situations, the Sanctum of Sages would organize a Challenge of the Defeated to allow those who did not clear the examination to challenge those who did and those in the Ordinary Division to challenge those in the Elite Division.

Firstly, this served to showcase the strength of the students so that teachers could tailor their guidance to their needs in the future. Secondly, it was to reassure the candidates that the examination was fair and impartial. There was no cheating, nepotism, or anything of the sort involved.

If the candidates learned that Zhang Xuan had gotten into the top fifty in the last two minutes, there were bound to be many who would question the integrity and fairness of the entrance examination. In such a case, the Challenge of the Defeated served to show that he had obtained his position through his true strength.

"Let's go." After saying those words, Elder Liu beckoned for the others to follow him before taking the lead.

The others quickly followed him, and before long, they arrived in the square.

At this moment, all the candidates were already out of the Mountain Gate, and they were staring in the sky with

expectant and tense looks on their faces.

“Congratulations on completing the three-day examination. You have all worked hard. Now, I shall announce the results of the examination. First and foremost, I shall announce the names of the candidates who have been selected to join the Elite Division...” As Elder Liu’s resounding voice echoed through the square, he grabbed the space ahead of him, and the sky suddenly seemed to have turned into glistening jadeite. With a brilliant radiance, names began appearing one after another.

Feng Ziyi, Zhang Yu, Yuan Haiqing, Bai Qingxuan...

With the appearance of each name, there would be resounding cheers from the crowd.

“I have heard of Feng Ziyi; he’s the direct disciple of one of the grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters!”

“He’s the direct disciple of a 9-star master teacher? No wonder he’s so formidable! Having received the most accurate guidance from a young age, he’s bound to be impeccable in all fields, be it in terms of his strength or his zhenqi. It’s a given that he would take first place.”

“I thought that Zhang Yu would have a chance to take first place in this entrance examination!”

“The Zhang Clan is too big, and they have too many geniuses in their ranks. While Zhang Yu might possess exceptional talent, he’s still far from being ranked at the top. Naturally, the resources he can tap into are limited as well.”

Most of the names that appeared were familiar to the crowd here, and to them, they were existences reminiscent of the untouchable stars in the sky.

Chen Leyao? She got into the Elite Division, too? Zhang Xuan noted.

Considering how Chen Leyao had been able to get into the top fifty despite being only at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, it seemed like she did possess some exceptional means.

As more and more names were revealed, Zhang Xuan could not help but wonder, There are so many candidates with the surname ‘Zhang’. Are they all from the Zhang Clan?

So far, forty names had already appeared, but ten of them went by the surname ‘Zhang’. Were they all from the Zhang Clan?

For the Zhang Clan to take up ten out of the fifty slots of the Elite Division... were they not a little too powerful?

Hu!

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to turn to Zhang Jiuxiao to ask him about the matter, the light in the sky flickered for the last time, and a certain name appeared at the very end of the list.

“Zhang Xuan? Is he from the Zhang Clan, too?”

“I don’t think so. I saw the list of candidates dispatched by the Zhang Clan this year, and there wasn’t such a name on it...”

“He seems to be some master teacher from the Qingyuan Empire. As soon as he arrived in the square, he offended Chen Leyao from the Glacier Plain Court and pummeled Zhang Qian from the Zhang Clan.”

“He actually dared pummel Zhang Qian? He sure is brave!”

“Well, how could one who possesses the strength to get into the Elite Division possibly lack self-confidence?”

...

When Zhang Xuan’s name appeared, a huge commotion immediately broke out among the crowd.

Everyone present knew of the first forty-nine names—they were all from distinguished clans or were famed geniuses whose names had spread far and wide. Only the name in fiftieth place, Zhang Xuan, was completely unfamiliar to all of them.

In such a bizarre manner, his name ended up standing out in the list.

Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, not to mention that he was just an insignificant figure from the remote Qingyuan Empire, and yet, he still managed to get into the top fifty.

Truly inconceivable.