

2101 The One Who Returned

The Hall of Gods stood above a black vortex, reminiscent of a rock plugging up a leaky roof. He had been wanting to check it out for some time now, but due to the limitations of his cultivation, he hadn't been able to approach it. However, now that he had become a real god, even though the forces surrounding the black vortex were frightening, he had no fear of it anymore.

It had taken him four hours to leave the Hall of Gods previously, but this time around, it only took him a few minutes to get there.

It still looked as grand and splendid as before. Black mist could be seen revolving around the Hall of Gods, and if one peered into the vortex beneath, one could see dimension rifts within.

Zhang Xuan flew to the top of the vortex and sensed a peculiar energy trying to claw its way toward him, as if attempting to devour him whole.

“I should head in to take a look!”

Wrapping himself with his newfound divine powers, he dived into the vortex.

Tzzz!

The spatial turbulence within the vortex struck him relentlessly with a force that even Semi-Divinity realm cultivators were unable to withstand. However, to the current Zhang Xuan, it was not sufficient to hurt him.

At the eye of the vortex, he saw a pitch-black passageway that led to uncharted territories.

But for some reason, he felt as if there was a utopia lying on the other side. He felt a desire to venture in to take a look.

“Could this be the entrance to the Firmament?”

Zhang Xuan could not help but remember the spatial passageway leading to the Azure from the Kunxu Domain. From the Hundred Schools of Philosophers to the formation and the Ancient Sage corpse, traces of Kong shi could be seen in it.

The same went for the passageway right before him.

The Hall of Gods above was guarded by Kong shi's will, and the first bundle of Aura of Divinity that he had received was from Kong shi as well.

After his will replaced Kong shi's to guard the Hall of Gods, he became cognizant of the rules governing the Hall of Gods. As long as someone could defeat his will, he would be able to obtain a bundle of Aura of Divinity too.

The only issue with that was that... his will was simply too strong. There was no way Zhao Ya and the others would be a match for him, or else he would have long brought them over to harvest a bundle.

"I should head back and wrap everything up before exploring this area once more..."

He turned around and flew out of the vortex.

Zhao Ya, Han Jianqiu, and the others would likely be dying of worry after seeing Kong shi chasing right after him. At the very least, he should return to take a look.

He flew across the boundary once more, and before long, he was already back at the Ethereal Hall headquarters.

With a thought, he lowered his aura to the level of a Semi-Divinity realm cultivator.

Based on what he knew, there would be a cultivation ordeal after reaching the level of the gods. If he disguised his cultivation, he might be able to push it back a little.

After he was done, he tore apart the space ahead of him and stepped into the dimension rift.

When he finally appeared once more, he was already standing right above the Heaven Anchoring Boulder.

He swiftly confirmed his direction before tearing apart the space ahead of him once more, and this time, he arrived at the area right above Starchaser Palace.

Seeing that a cultivation ordeal had not fallen on him yet, he heaved a sigh of relief before quickly assessing the surroundings.

The war against the Ethereal Hall, Blackmirror Citadel, and Evanescent Immortal Sect had already ended, leaving behind many corpses on the ground.

“Teacher, you’re back!”

Sensing Zhang Xuan’s aura, Zhao Ya and the others immediately rushed over in agitation.

Even though they looked a little unkempt, fortunately, it did not seem like any of them were severely injured. Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan asked, “How did the battle go?”

“We have captured Citadel Lord Bai and Sect Leader Gu of the Blackmirror Citadel and Evanescent Immortal Sect respectively. The others have also surrendered. With their top powers taken down, those two sects are pretty much goners. As for the Ethereal Hall, we managed to capture everyone as well!” Zhao Ya explained.

After Hall Master Kong left the battlefield to pursue Zhang Xuan, the alliance among the three powers had swiftly collapsed into a pile of scattered sand.

Zhao Ya and the others had reached the Semi-Divinity realm, and all of them were wielding Semi-Divinity artifacts. Even though the enemies had a lot of experts in their ranks, they did not stand a chance against Zhao Ya and the others. Furthermore, the 100,000 True Immortals joined the fray, thus resulting in a completely one-sided battle.

It was a complete wipeout for the enemy. All those who were still alive had surrendered.

“It’s good that everything has been settled.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

With Zhao Ya and the others joining in the fray, they had been able to easily curb the enemy Semi-Divinity realm experts. Once the top experts had been taken care of, the rest would be a walk in the park.

The casualties at the starting phase of the battle were high, but they swiftly reduced after Zhao Ya and the others joined the battle as well. As such, the damage suffered by the four sects and the aquatic creatures was not too great.

“Did you manage to collect Little Chick’s ashes? Where are they?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Little Chick had died for his sake.

If not for it sacrificing itself to block Kong shi, there was no way he would have managed to cleanse the Aura of Divinity in time and successfully make a breakthrough.

“We did manage to collect them, but...”

Knowing the feelings their teacher had for his tamed beast, Zhao Ya and the others had immediately gathered the ashes of Little Chick as soon as the battle ended.

“But?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“Even as we gathered the ashes together, they continued to burn with fervor,” Zhao Ya said with a bitter smile as she pointed at the ash pile.

Zhang Xuan quickly turned his head and saw a bundle of golden flames burning ceaselessly. It was the very same location where Little Chick had been killed and razed to ashes by Kong shi’s clone.

Perplexed, he quickly made his way over to take a closer look at the bundle of golden flames. Slowly, a frown formed on his forehead.

The golden flames right before his eyes were not too strong, but he could clearly sense life being nurtured within them.

“What does this mean? Is Little Chick... still alive?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

The little yellow chick had been sliced into dozens of pieces by a sword before being burned to ashes. Even a real god would have died after sustaining such damage! So, how could he still sense the presence of life within the golden flames?

Hu!

While Zhang Xuan was still staring at the golden flames with narrowed eyes, an altar suddenly materialized right beneath them.

It was the one that he and Wu Chen had brought over from the Master Teacher Continent. Tzzzzzz!

A black aura seeped out of the altar and surged right into the golden flames.

Xiong xiong!

The golden flames flared up in response to the black aura. From the size of a football, it grew to roughly the height of a man before abruptly expanding into a fiery ball of over ten meters in diameter.

Even so, the flow of black aura from the altar to the golden flames showed no signs of stopping.

Young Master, the altar seems to have formed a connection with another altar, forming a portal...”

Wu Chen and Du Qingyuan swiftly made their way over together to take a closer look at this baffling situation.

“Portal?” Zhang Xuan asked with narrowed eyes.

“It’s similar to the portal we used previously in order to teleport over to the Hall of Gods.” Wu Chen nodded.

Back then, Zhang Xuan had specially made a trip down to the Master Teacher Continent in order to use the altar to conduct a ritual and forge a connection between the two altars. He could tell that the same thing was happening right before him.

It was just that...

“Didn’t Kong shi’s clone destroy the other al...” Zhang Xuan was halfway through his words when his eyes suddenly

widened in bewilderment. “Wait a moment. Is it... coming from the altar in the City of Collapsed Space?”

Back then, he had been told that there was only one such altar on the Forsaken Continent. Due to that, he had specially made a trip back to the Master Teacher Continent to fetch it.

However, not too long ago, he had encountered a similar altar in the City of Collapsed Space! Du Qingyuan had been with him back then, and she had verified that the altar shared the same origin as the one from Starchaser Palace and the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

With such a thought in mind, Zhang Xuan walked forward to examine the black aura.

“It’s indeed the air of degeneration...”

In fact, it was more than just the air of degeneration. It had been refined and compressed into a form that was extremely similar to the corrupted Aura of Divinity that he had received from the black skeleton.

“Could it be that...”

A thought suddenly arose in Zhang Xuan’s mind. He swiftly brought his hands together to tear a rift in space so that he could teleport over to the City of Collapsed Space to verify his deduction. But before he could do so, a towering pillar of flames rose into the sky before abruptly bursting apart, revealing a cute little yellow chick.

The little yellow chick stretched its back lazily before waddling out from the lingering flames.

“Little Chick!”

Zhang Xuan’s eyes widened in astonishment, as if he could not believe what he was saying. Then, a mixture of delight and relief seeped into his eyes as he hurriedly rushed up to the little yellow chick.

The fellow in front of him looked not much different from before. It was still covered with a thin layer of yellow fur, reminiscent of a new hatchling. However, its cultivation had already reached the same level as him—godhood.

“You managed to make a breakthrough...” Zhang Xuan muttered in disbelief.

He had previously fed the other party a fair number of Immortal Pills and plenty of Semi-Divinity realm blood... Heck, it had even drunk a droplet of god blood!

Yet, its cultivation had refused to advance even a fraction.

It was one thing for it to survive Kong shi’s assault, but how did its cultivation manage to shoot up two realms simultaneously and reach the level of the gods?

Suddenly, Zhang Xuan felt a little indignant inside.

It was through his efforts and talent that he was able to raise his cultivation so quickly. On the other hand, the fellow in front of him only ever put all sorts of weird things into its mouth, but it was still able to improve almost as quickly as him!

He felt like a diligent student who always studied for all his tests, but somehow, the friend who squandered his time playing games always managed to score better grades than him!

“Of course!” Little Chick flapped its wings as it tilted its chin upward smugly.

“Did you manage to recover your memory?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Not yet!” Little Chick replied with the same smugness.

Zhang Xuan felt an urge to berate Little Chick for its unjustified smugness, but as he watched the little yellow fellow waddling around the area energetically, he eventually exhaled deeply with a helpless smile on his face before saying, “Forget it. Your memory will eventually come back to you. You can take your time for that.”

He was only glad that the latter was still alive.

That being said, he still felt a little cheated of his feelings. It was as if he had gotten agitated over nothing. Not to mention, the little fellow had managed to become a god as a result of this incident.

Was this what they meant by ‘rising from the ashes’?

Thinking about it, it was a little surprising that Little Chick had survived the ordeal. He doubted that his clone could have survived if the latter had been in the same position.

“The Aura of Divinity is a necessity to reach the level of the gods. The black aura that Little Chick took in earlier seems to be the same as what the black skeleton gave me...” Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

Chances were that Little Chick had used the corrupted Aura of Divinity in order to reach his current state.

But that too presented a doubt. The corrupted Aura of Divinity harnessed such pure air of degeneration that even gods would face great trouble if they absorbed it into their bodies.

That was why he had used it as one of his cards to curb Kong Shi’s clone, and it had ended up playing a vital role in the battle.

Even he had needed to use the will of 100,000 True Immortals to cleanse the air of degeneration from the corrupted Aura of Divinity before he was able to assimilate it into his body...

Yet, Little Chick just absorbed it directly!

“Speaking of which, Little Chick’s bathwater has the effect of dispelling the corrosion of the air of degeneration...” Zhang Xuan swiftly came up with a deduction. “Does this mean that the air of degeneration has no effect on it at all, such that it can even be considered a tonic to it? That would also explain why it wanted to eat the black skeleton back then...”

When they paid a visit to the City of Collapsed Space, Little Chick had cried that it was hungry and asked if it could eat the black skeleton. However, in view of the tremendous strength of the black skeleton, he did not allow it to act audaciously.

But thinking back, Little Chick had never really eaten anything that it did not need before. Could it be that it wielded the power to curb the black skeleton and the air of degeneration around it?

Well, it seemed like its true form was not just any ordinary cock. There was a chance that it might really be an extraordinarily powerful legendary beast!

It was just a pity that it had lost its memory. Otherwise, he could have found a way to help it regain its strength swiftly, and he would have had someone to rely on when he headed over to the Firmament.

Perhaps this was for the best. If others realized that he was backed by a chick or a cock, it would not do his image any good.

While Zhang Xuan was still deep in thought, Little Chick suddenly waddled over and spoke to him furtively. “Master, I think I found the way for me to advance my cultivation...”

“Oh?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. “Tell me more.”

“Back then, I was completely powerless after breaking out of the Dongxu Gourd. However, after being nearly burned to death by the Nine-headed Fiery Phoenix, my cultivation rose all the way up to the Heavenly High Immortal realm. This time, I was also burned to a crisp, and my cultivation rose again... So, I was thinking that perhaps the trigger to raise my cultivation lies in being roasted?” Little Chick said.

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

“It does seem that way. Shall we give it a try?”

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Tracing back the history of Little Chick's breakthroughs, in both cases, it was nearly burned to crisp before it managed to make its breakthrough.

They did try experimenting with flames once and it turned out to be ineffective, but back then, they had stopped before Little Chick could be scorched black... Could Little Chick's improvement really have something to do with the flames?

"Come!" Little Chick nodded as it looked at Zhang Xuan in determination.

It also desired to swiftly raise its strength so that it could regain its memories.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before saying, "Your cultivation has already reached the level of the gods, so it's unlikely that there are any flames on the Azure which could affect you... I'll try summoning my cultivation ordeal now, and you can try and see how it is."

There was no force in the world that could possibly be stronger than the divine retribution from the heavens. Zhang Xuan's original intention was to conceal his breakthrough from the heavens till he got to the Firmament to avoid trouble, but since Little Chick needed it, he might as well just get it over and done with.

It would be a good chance for him to reinforce his cultivation anyway.

Thus, he swiftly released the seal he had placed on his cultivation, allowing his newfound divine energy to flow freely through his body.

Boom!

The sky immediately darkened. Lightning bolts, accompanied by pitch-black flames, began gathering at a ridiculous speed above him.

This was the God Ordeal!

An ordeal for the gods was bound to harness terrifying might. Zhang Xuan felt the full hostility of the Azure crushing down on him, attempting to smash him into bits.

Zhao Ya and the others sensed danger as soon as the God Ordeal began, and they had already fled thousands of li away to be safe.

Even though they had reached Heavenly Semi-Divinity realm, they knew that they could very well lose their life if they were to let their guard down around the God Ordeal.

It was not without reason that the Forsaken Continent revered anything that had the word 'God' within it!

The dark clouds grew thicker and thicker, and it felt almost as if the sky was going to collapse from the weight and crush the human and little yellow chick standing beneath it.

Looking at the overwhelming force gathered above him, Zhang Xuan was just about to make a move when the dark clouds above him suddenly began to billow. A sudden streak of lightning that harnessed the might of the dark heavenly flames bolted down and struck Little Chick squarely.

Tzzzzzz!

This zap caused the little yellow chick's yellow fur to turn completely black, and a slight aroma began drifting in the area.

Witnessing this sight, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up in bewilderment.

Why would the cultivation ordeal he summoned strike the little yellow chick instead of him?

"The heck..." Little Chick was also completely flabbergasted by the abrupt situation too.

It raised its head to glare at the heavens in fury, but before it could finish cursing...

Kacha! Kacha!

Another few more streaks of lightning fell on its head, and the scent of the aroma deepened. This time, even Little Chick's beak had been scorched black.

“Wow. Will that fellow who has survived the assault of Kong shi's clone really end up being zapped to death by the cultivation ordeal?”

As the aroma in the air deepened, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt deeply regretful that he hadn't brought any seasoning in his storage ring. With a deep sigh, he rushed over to where Little Chick was and stood right between it and the dark clouds, intending to protect it from the cultivation ordeal.

“Since I was the one who summoned you, why don't you come after me instead?” Zhang Xuan roared as he wrapped his divine energy around his body to reinforce his defenses.

With a grim look on his face, he was prepared to withstand the might of the lightning strikes.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

A series of lightning bolts fell at this moment.

Zhang Xuan swiftly channeled his sword qi to fend against the might of the lightning bolts, but even as several seconds passed after the thunderous rumbling, nothing was striking down on him at all.

Bewildered, he lowered his head, only to see the lightning bolts making a huge detour just to circumvent him and strike down on Little Chick, causing smoke to rise from the top of its head.

“AHHHHHH!”

A cry of despair, together with puffs of black smoke, escaped from Little Chick's mouth.

Freak! Are you here to help me or to sabotage me?

Even when I was standing here alone, the force of the lightning bolts hadn't been so strong!

“This is weird. However, there's no need to worry. Since this is my cultivation ordeal, there should be a way to deal with

it...” Zhang Xuan was also feeling a little flustered by the bizarre happenings.

Why would the cultivation ordeal he summoned choose to target Little Chick instead of him? This didn't make sense at all!

Gathering his energy at the tip of his finger, Zhang Xuan sent a burst of sword qi right toward the dark clouds.

Since the cultivation ordeal refused to attack him, he would just have to be the one taking on the active role then!

Hu!

The dark clouds dissipated right in the face of the sword qi, but the attack went through so easily that it felt almost as if the dark clouds were evading his attack instead.

For some reason, despite the frightening prowess of the God Ordeal, it seemed to be terribly afraid of him.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

Yet another flurry of lightning bolts descended from the heavens, causing the innocent little yellow chick to convulse under the electrocution. It was shaking so hard that its fur was scattering all around the place.

If one were to look carefully, one would be able to see tears of sorrow brimming at the edge of its beady eyes.

Just what did I do to offend you? Why are you coming after me as if I was your sworn enemy?

“You still won't come after me, huh? Let's see how you deal with this then!”

Seeing that this plan still wasn't working out, Zhang Xuan dashed right toward the sky, planning to pit his life against the dark clouds.

But before he could even get far, a tiny, trembling wing grabbed the corners of his robe tightly and pulled him down. “Don't! I'll really die if you continue to provoke it...” Little Chick cried out indignantly.

Bro, do some good over here and spare me, will you?

I am still a young hatchling! I don't want to die yet!

Every time you provoke the dark clouds, the one who suffers is me... You can do whatever you want without facing any consequences, but can't you see that I'm already around medium done?

I am already starting to wonder whether I should start sprinkling cumin over myself!

Seeing the nearly roasted hatchling pleading so desperately with him, Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly. In the end, he could only back down as he said, "Yeah, you should probably deal with it yourself..."

Then, he quickly retreated from the area.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

A furious onslaught of lightning bolts descended right after, electrocuting the little yellow chick to the point where its head was literally spinning around. Despaired, it turned to Zhang Xuan and cried, "Don't go! Help me block the lightning, will you?"

Zhang Xuan.

In the end, Little Chick had to face 36 lightning bolts before the cultivation ordeal finally dissipated.

After the turmoil it had just been through, it was completely sapped of its strength.

"I'll be heading back in to rest..."

Before Zhang Xuan could say a word, Little Chick had already dived into his dantian. Covering its head with its pitch-black wings, it swiftly drifted off into deep sleep.

Seeing that it was fine, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Then, he pointed to the dissipating dark clouds in the sky and bellowed, "You, come over here!"

Hu!

Even though the dark clouds were already dissipating, it was happening at a relatively slow pace. However, as soon as it

heard Zhang Xuan's bellow, it immediately bolted away as swiftly as it arrived, clearing up the sky in a heartbeat.

Zhang Xuan clutched his hair in frenzy.

Wasn't the God Ordeal a major tribulation all cultivators would have to face upon reaching godhood?

Why did the cultivation ordeal he summoned end up striking the Little Chick to a state of near-death before abruptly dissipating?

"Does this have something to do with my Pathos of Heavens?" Zhang Xuan wondered.

Unable to make sense out of the situation, he eventually descended from the sky and returned back to where Zhao Ya and the others were at.

"Here are seven '神 (God)', characters. Take the one you need and store it well in your respective sects. The subsequent generations shouldn't face too much trouble reaching Semi-Divinity realm anymore," Zhang Xuan said as he took out seven books.

As long as a cultivator were to follow the poses and their sequencing in the books strictly, he would be able to draw in the lingering Aura of Semi-Divinity that was found on the circular platforms along the Azure Bridge. That would mean that there was a good chance they could reach Semi-Divinity realm without challenging the Azure Bridge!

"Thank you, Sect Leader Zhang!" Han Jianqiu and the others accepted the books with trembling hands.

This was what the predecessors of their sects had been striving for, only to fail again and again over the past several thousand years. Who could have thought that their present sect leader would actually successfully get seven of the ■神 (God)' characters at once...

Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, "Don't address me as your sect leader anymore. You can either take back the position yourself or appoint someone eligible. I'll be leaving the Forsaken Continent very soon."

He could sense it after reaching the level of the gods. The world couldn't suppress him anymore. As long as he willed so, he could tear apart the fabrics of space and ascend to a higher world.

He had never been interested in becoming the head of a sect, and the only reason why he eventually agreed to take on the position was either because he needed to tap into the connections of the sect or to unite the sects against Kong shi's clone.

However, with Kong shi's clone defeated and his business in the Azure resolved, there was no need for him to continue holding onto those positions anymore, especially when he was going to leave very soon.

“We understand!”

The crowd nodded, but a hint of reluctance could be heard in their voices.

There had been quite a bit of controversy when they had decided to nominate this young man as their new head. They had chosen to forcefully go ahead with it despite significant opposition from elders and disciples within the sect. However, from the looks of it now, that was probably the wisest decision they had made in their life.

If they hadn't nominated him, there was a good chance that they might have ended up walking down the same path as the Blackmirror Citadel and the Evanescent Immortal Sect.

Even though the young man had only been their head for a very short period of time, his lectures had benefited the disciples and elders greatly, significantly increasing the average level of cultivation within their respective sects. Not to mention, he had even bestowed upon them a complete ‘神 (God)’ character!

It could be foreseen that the number of experts in their ranks would only continue to increase, and the four sects would grow more and more prosperous in time to come.

“Palace Master Du, I need you to accompany me to the City of Collapsed Space.”

After settling the affairs regarding the four sects, Zhang Xuan quickly headed to the City of Collapsed Space together with Du Qingyuan.

After achieving godhood, the air of degeneration lingering in the City of Collapsed Space no longer posed a threat to him anymore. It took him a mere ten breaths to return back to the area where he had found the altar previously.

“Huh? Where is the altar?” Zhang Xuan murmured in astonishment.

The two of them quickly searched the area, but the altar was nowhere to be seen at all. It was as if it had never appeared before.

Zhang Xuan released his Spiritual Perception as far as he could in order to scan the surroundings, but he wasn't able to find anything at all.

“It seems like the black skeleton has hidden the altar to prevent others from finding it,” Zhang Xuan shook his head and said.

Given his current level of cultivation, even if the altar had shifted position, he should still be able to track it down through its trail of movement. The fact that he was unable to find any traces of it could only mean one thing.

The black skeleton didn't want him to find it.

But why would that be the case?

Based on what he had heard, the altar had been in the same place for thousands of years. Kong shi's clone seemed to have visited the area on multiple occasions before too, which likely meant that the black skeleton didn't fear detection. Why would it choose to only hide the altar from him then?

Was it because he had successfully made a breakthrough to godhood?

Zhang Xuan searched around for a bit longer, but he still wasn't able to find any clues. In the end, with a deep sigh, he swiftly returned to the Starchaser Palace with Du Qingyuan.

The two of them entered an isolated chamber together. There, he turned his gaze to Du Qingyuan and asked, “Tell me what you know about Ruoxin.”

There were simply too many matters he had to attend to after saving Du Qingyuan from the Ethereal Hall headquarters that he hadn’t had the opportunity to talk to her yet.

Thousands of years ago, when the City of Collapsed Space fell from the heavens, we lost contact with the Spirit God as well. Despite so, we chose to devoutly observe our traditions and continue worshipping of the Spirit God. It was all in order to convince the other sects that we were still in contact with the gods, thus making them dare not to make a move on us,” Du Qingyuan explained with a bitter smile.

It was for this reason that she would immediately lose her temper and even resort to violence in order to divert the topic whenever other powers spoke about the Starchaser Palace’s links with the gods.. It was through putting up such an act of short-temperedness and eccentricity that she was able to avoid incurring the suspicions of others.

The Starchaser Palace had always been different from the rest of the Six Sects, be it the characteristics or the origin of their people. Such differences could easily be exploited by the greedy to rally the other sects against them.

It was due to this that the entire Starchaser Island had remained terribly hostile to outsiders so as to ensure that this secret wouldn’t be leaked.

“But four months ago, while we were conducting our annual ritual, we received a message from the Spirit God. She told us that she intends to descend to the Forsaken Continent through a ritual, and she instructed us to make preparations in advance,” Du Qingyuan said.

“She relayed the procedures of the ritual to us, and since it was an order from the Spirit God, we had to obey her orders.”

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“Everything else after that is pretty much the same as what you know. Despite the tremendous strength wielded by the Spirit God, she was still unable to withstand the pressure coming from the dimension barrier, resulting in her sustaining severe injuries. Her blood fell into the Ocean of Exiled Stars and nourished the Blackback Tortoise, Shark One, and the others. At the same time, I gave a droplet of her blood to Wu Chen and Jiang Yao, allowing them to reach the Semi-Divinity realm too,” Du Qingyuan said,

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

It was roughly the same as what he had deduced thus far.

“Not too long after she arrived here, she received Wu Chen’s summoning and descended to the Master Teacher Continent. I don’t really know what happened afterward. However, one thing that is certain is that she has already returned to the Firmament. She didn’t stop too long in the Azure, simply instructing me to take care of you before rushing right back to the Firmament.”

“Then... did she mention where she is in the Firmament?”

This was also what Zhang Xuan was the most concerned about.

Du Qingyuan shook her head and replied, “I’m afraid that she hasn’t mentioned anything along those lines to me. However, as the Spirit God, I reckon that she should be in Spirit God Palace, which is also the place I told you about previously. She told me to tell you that the two of you will eventually meet if she survives the ordeal. If things don’t go as planned, there’s no need for you to grieve too much over her.”

“Survive the ordeal?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes widened in horror. “Did she mention what she is facing?”

The fact that Luo Ruoxin was able to tear apart the dimension barriers and enter the Firmament directly bore testimony to her immense strength. There was no doubt that she was far stronger than even the current him.

Yet, such pessimistic words came out of her mouth despite her strength. Did she encounter some sort of problem that she was unable to resolve?

“The Spirit God didn’t mention the details, so I don’t really know much about the matter. However, based on what she said, it appears to be a life-and-death duel with another individual,” Du Qingyuan replied grimly.

As a subordinate, all she had to do was obey the Spirit God’s orders. She would be overstepping her bounds if she tried to pry into the private affairs of the Spirit God.

Zhang Xuan asked a few more questions, but from the looks of it, it did not seem like Du Qingyuan knew much about Luo Ruoxin’s affairs. In the end, he could only shake his head helplessly.

“Zhang shi, what do you plan to do next?” Du Qingyuan asked.

“From the looks of it, I think I’ll have to make a trip to the Firmament,” Zhang Xuan said with a wry smile.

It had been quite some time since he parted from Luo Ruoxin, but just the knowledge that she was in danger left his heart beating in anxiety.

Had it been before he encountered the tombstone of the Undying Monarch, he would have thought that gods were immortal and eternal. However, it was apparent to him that he was gravely mistaken. Even those who had wielded powers as great as the gods did not have the ability to govern their own fate.

Du Qingyuan had expected Zhang Xuan to make such a decision, so she simply nodded quietly.

After obtaining the answers that he wanted from Du Qingyuan, Zhang Xuan quickly gathered Zhao Ya and the others and informed them of his decision.

“Teacher, we wish to go with you!” Zhao Ya stepped forward with a firm look in her eyes.

“I want to head to the Firmament together with you!” Wei Ruyan nodded, her voice devoid of any hesitation.

“Teacher, we wish to follow you. We hope that you won’t throw us behind as you did previously...” Zheng Yang and the others nodded in agreement.

Facing his determined students, Zhang Xuan felt a headache. He looked at them grimly and said, “I don’t know what the current situation in the Firmament is, and there’s a good chance that we might face grave danger there. We might even be torn apart by the spatial turbulence before reaching there. Are you certain that you want to follow me despite that?”

Back then, Zhang Xuan had faced a spatial turbulence and sustained severe injuries while making his way from the Master Teacher Continent to the Azure. If he was not so lucky as to have been saved by the kind-hearted Dan Xiaotian, it was hard to imagine what could have happened to him.

As a teacher, he felt responsible for his students’ safety, so he was reluctant to involve them in situations of unknown danger.

“We aren’t afraid!” Zhao Ya replied determinedly. Teacher, even if you don’t bring us along with you, we’ll still eventually find a way to get to the Firmament ourselves. It makes no difference at all!”

Zhao Ya’s words echoed the will of the other direct disciples. Even though the others were not saying a word at all, their gazes conveyed their intentions.

Seeing this, Zhang Xuan fell silent.

If he could have his way, he would definitely leave Zhao Ya and the others behind. At the very least, he would want to be able to ensure the safety of his direct disciples before bringing them along with him.

The situation in the Azure was a perfect example.

Kong shi’s clone had actually planted his subordinates at the entrance of the spatial passageway, ready to capture him as

soon as he arrived. If not for the real Kong shi discreetly leaving a hand in the spatial passageway, he could have died long ago!

However, he could also tell that his direct disciples had no intention of letting this matter rest so easily. If he left them behind, his direct disciples would surely find a way to enter the Firmament themselves. That could potentially put them in greater danger.

The answer was clear.

“Let’s head to the Firmament together then.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “We might meet fearsome adversaries in the Firmament, but so what? I believe that we’ll surely be able to overcome any problems that stand in our way!”

“Thank you, Teacher!”

Zhao Ya and the others bowed deeply in agitation.

Shortly after they ended the discussion, an elder walked into the room and reported, “Sect Leader Zhang, there are two people standing outside who claim to be your parents!”

“My parents?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

He quickly headed out of the room, and there, he saw Sword Saint Xing and Sword Saint Meng in the courtyard.

“What brought you two here?” Zhang Xuan asked with a hint of surprise and joy in his voice.

The last time he had met them was on the Master Teacher Continent. However, as he had been about to have a showdown with Kong shi and had not been absolutely confident of victory, he had chosen not to take the two of them along with him. Who could have thought that they would have come over through the spatial passageway of their own accord, just as Sun Qiang did?

“Xuan-er, we’ll follow you wherever you go. We have been separated for twenty years, and I don’t want to miss any more time with you.” Sword Saint Meng walked forward and hugged Zhang Xuan.

Wrapped within Sword Saint Meng's tight embrace, Zhang Xuan found himself at a loss for words. He did not know what the right way for him to respond to her emotions was.

At the same time, he realized that he had not thought through the consequences of his decision.

The difference in the flow of time between the Firmament and the Azure was 1:100, a very significant difference. He had no idea how long he would be in the Firmament for, but if he spent just ten years there, it would translate to a thousand years in the Azure.

By then, his parents would have already returned to the earth!

His parents had spent twenty years looking for him, and they had spent barely a few days together with one another in total. He would have to be the most unfilial son in the world to abandon his parents just like that!

"Let's go to the Firmament together then." Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement. "However, you'll need to raise your cultivation first!"

There was nothing to hesitate about since he had already come to a decision. So, he immediately got to action.

With a flick of his wrist, he brought out the sealed Kong shi's clone.

"What are you planning to do?"

Not expecting to be let out so suddenly, Kong shi's clone had a premonition that something bad was going to happen to him.

"Weren't you thinking of ways to steal my Library of Heaven's Path this whole time? You know, the more I thought about the matter, the more I feel that it wasn't fair for me to let things rest just like that. So, it's about time for you to return the favor!" Zhang Xuan said with a sinister smile on his face as his hands slowly reached out toward Kong shi's clone.

A few moments later, a powerful sphere of energy was revolving on top of Zhang Xuan's palm. With a flick of his finger, it diverged into two portions, each of them surging into Sword Saint Xing and Sword Saint Meng's body respectively.

Zhang Xuan had also made sure to infuse his divine energy into the sphere of energy in order to protect them from harm.

Hong long!

In the blink of an eye, their cultivation began surging forth from Ancient Sage 4-dan.

Three days later, they had already reached the Heavenly Semi-Divinity realm, just like Zhao Ya and the others. Furthermore, as they had absorbed the powers of Kong shi's clone directly, their bodies had been refined by the latter's divine energy, enhancing their potential. As long as they could acquire sufficient Aura of Divinity, they would be able to swiftly make a breakthrough to godhood.

“This is the swordsmanship that I have comprehended. Study it carefully,” Zhang Xuan said as he imprinted his comprehension of swordsmanship into their minds.

As individuals who were able to rise to the very top of the Master Teacher Continent, there was no denying Sword Saint Xing and Sword Saint Meng's talent in swordsmanship.

The advancement of their mastery in swordsmanship had been slowing into stagnation back at the Master Teacher Continent, but with the knowledge they had just received from Zhang Xuan, it was as if a set of doors leading to a new world had been opened to them. They trembled excitedly as they swiftly assimilated Zhang Xuan's comprehension of swordsmanship, leading to an exponential growth in their fighting prowess.

“Young Master, can you bring me with you? I will put my heart and soul into cultivating this time around! Look, I have already reached the True Immortal realm. Even though I haven't managed to reach the High Immortal realm yet, I'm not too far away from it,” Sun Qiang said meekly from the side.

He had thought that he would be able to stay by Zhang Xuan's side and live the adventurous life of showing off and bragging that he desired, but who could have known that the latter would be leaving for the Firmament so quickly?

This time, he was determined to clutch onto this opportunity. He was not going to be the only one who was left behind!

“Fine!” Zhang Xuan replied without too much hesitation.

Sun Qiang might be unreliable at times, but there was no doubt that he was a highly competent butler. He was much more useful than Cao Chengli, and he had also taken good care of Zhao Ya and his parents in the past.

Since he had already chosen to take the others with him, there was no reason for him to exclude only Sun Qiang.

He took out the corpse of a Semi-Divinity realm cultivator, extracted the power from within, and passed it over to Sun Qiang. At the same time, he made sure to prepare plenty of Premier Immortal Pills and all sort of treasures in order to ensure that Sun Qiang did not lack cultivation resources.

As a result, it did not take too long for Sun Qiang to raise his cultivation all the way up to the Heavenly Semi-Divinity realm.

With everyone ready to set off, Zhang Xuan bade Han Jianqiu, Kui Xiao, Du Qingyuan, Qing Yuan, and the others farewell before placing everyone else into his folded space.

With a spatial leap, he was already standing right at the top of the Heaven Anchoring Boulder. Then, he began ascending the Azure Bridge, and it did not take him long to arrive before the Hall of Gods.

The black vortex beneath the Hall of Gods was still revolving slowly with a furious gale raging all around. It was a sight that would leave any rational man halting in his footsteps.

Driving his divine energy, Zhang Xuan swiftly formed a tight net around his storage ring through A Heart of Intertwined Threads, ensuring that there was nothing that could hurt it at all.

Having reached the level of the gods, he was confident that he would be able to deal with most dangers that came his way. The only thing he was afraid of was the safety of the others in the folded space.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to step into the vortex, a voice sounded in his ear. “There’s no need to go through so much trouble. I can just swallow the storage ring and hide inside your dantian. Even if there is danger, you need not worry about the safety of the storage ring unless you encounter something that even you are unable to overcome...” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up as he asked, “You’re awake?”

The one who was talking to him was none other than Little Chick, who had nearly been roasted while facing the God Ordeal.

He did not think that the latter would suddenly regain consciousness at a time like this.

Scanning Little Chick with his Spiritual Perception, Zhang Xuan found that the little yellow chick’s cultivation had only increased by one cultivation stage after the God Ordeal. Nevertheless, it showed that there was some credence to their previous deduction that the latter could raise its cultivation through tempering via flames.

“We’ll do as you’ve said.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The idea proposed by Little Chick would be much safer than him carrying the storage ring on his fingers.

Even though it might not look like it, Little Chick was a being that had reached the level of the gods. In fact, in terms of the quantity of divine energy, it seemed to be above his!

Hu!

With a peck, Little Chick quickly swallowed Zhang Xuan’s storage ring before diving into his dantian to laze around.

“Let’s go then!”

Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan made his way into the vortex right ahead of him.

At the center of the vortex was a pitch-black passageway that seemed to lead on and on, reminiscent of an endless abyss.

Space seemed to have broken down in this vortex, and there was a lot of spatial turbulence raging in the area. Even a Semi-

Divinity realm cultivator would be swiftly reduced to dust in the face of the devastating force of nature.

However, Zhang Xuan had already reached the level of the gods, and he had also comprehended a cultivation technique that surpassed the Heaven's Path Divine Art. It was not to say that he was having it easy, but it was still within his means to deal with.

He continued ahead for three whole days, covering an unimaginable distance before some major spatial turbulence appeared before him. It was similar to what he had faced when he was traveling from the Master Teacher Continent to the Azure.

Braving through the destructive spatial turbulence, he immediately felt the world spinning swiftly around him. It was such a powerful force of disorientation that he had to cast a net of sword qi to protect himself.

Right after, boundless destructive force bombarded his net of sword qi, threatening to tear him to shreds. Gritting his teeth, Zhang Xuan drove his divine energy to his limits as he leaped forth, disappearing from the spot.

2104 Such is the Firmamen

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The Firmament.

A seemingly eternal existence which had been around since time immemorial. There were a few ancient gods who had stood at the very peak of the Firmament since anyone could remember, and their positions had been immovable.

A blood crimson setting sun accompanied with dagger-like winds that blew ferociously, a figure was walking slowly amidst a remote barren valley.

All of a sudden, he halted his footsteps for a brief moment before swiftly bolting behind a nearby boulder. Barely after he hid, a gray silhouette hopped out from not too far away.

It was a gray hare.

Licking his parched lips, the figure picked up a wooden stick from the ground and swung it downward. A sharp arc of energy shot forth from the end of the wooden stick before it diverging into a net of sword qi.

Po!

But just as it was a meter away from the hare, the net of sword qi abruptly dissipated into the air.

Seeing that his sword qi wasn't strong enough to take down the hare, the figure unhesitatingly tossed the wooden stick toward the wild hare, as though a released arrow.

Sou!

However, the hare was guarded this time around. With a powerful hop, it leaped six meters away in an instant, leaving the wooden stick impaled on the ground where it was standing a moment ago.

It turned around to look at the figure who had assaulted it with a mocking smile on its lips. Then, with a few hops, it

disappeared from view.

What a pity...

The figure shook his head bitterly.

He was no other than Zhang Xuan.

As the World's Teacher of the Master Teacher Continent and the most powerful man on the Azure, he was actually unable to catch even a single hare after arriving at the Firmament. Not only so, he was even mocked by the other party!

If others were to learn of this matter, he would really die of embarrassment!

As the situation would have it, this was indeed the current plight he was in.

It seems like we have no choice but to eat wild grass today as well...

Knowing that it would be hard for him to find another prey, Zhang Xuan shook his head helplessly. It had been half a month since he had arrived at the Firmament.

After passing through the spatial turbulence, he found himself standing in the valley. Unlike the last time when he ascended to the Azure, he didn't lose consciousness this time around.

Nevertheless, it didn't change the fact that he had taken massive damage from the journey. He had protected himself with the sword net formed via 'A Heart of Intertwined Threads', but the spatial turbulence was so powerful that he was still nearly torn to shreds.

If not for Luo Ruoxin's crimson pendant activating at the critical moment to protect him, he really might have lost his life.

That being said, after he brought himself to a safe zone, he still lost consciousness for a short while due to the sheer severity of his injuries.

The valley could be said to be filled with the ill will of nature. A strong wind kept blowing on and on without stop, and every so often, a downpour so heavy that it could smash even Semi-

Divinity realm cultivators to death would occur without warning.

And the worst of all? There was nearly no spiritual energy in the valley!

As a result, it took half a month of recuperation for Zhang Xuan to suppress his injuries, and it was still a long time off before he could make a full recovery.

Another thing that he noticed was that the Immortal Pills and the other treasures he had brought from the Azure weren't too useful here, and even Little Chick's bathwater wasn't as effective anymore. This probably had something to do with the different atmosphere of the Firmament.

In any case, his heavy wounds prevented him from hunting, so he could only feed on wild grass. Fortunately, while the plants were awful to eat, they still harnessed a fixed amount of spiritual energy within them, supplying him with sufficient energy to fulfill his daily needs.

While he termed them as 'wild grasses' as they were indeed wild grasses and he couldn't think of any term more appropriate to call them, if these wild grasses were to be brought back to the Azure, they would definitely be a cultivation resource that equaled top-notch medicinal herbs and Premier Immortal Pills in terms of value.

The difference between the two worlds was simply too massive. Just the hundredfold difference in the flow of time and stability in space was enough to highlight the differences between the two worlds.

Despite being the strongest man in the Azure, it was likely that he was no different from an ordinary human in the Firmament.

Such was the Firmament!

Not only am I unable to fly, I would get tired from walking too. In fact, I have started to feel hunger once more too!

Just recalling his experiences over the past half a month filled Zhang Xuan with fatigue.

Given the difficulties he had gone through to become a god, he thought that he would at least be on the level of a powerhouse here. Yet, in the blink of an eye, it felt like he had returned back to the starting point as an ordinary human...

Walking for too long exhausted him, failing to eat starved him, running too quickly made him breathless, and staying up for too long made him drowsy...

He hadn't felt so weak before even when he was a trashy teacher back at Hongtian Academy!

It was then that it dawned upon him that it was likely that he was at the lowest cultivation realm in the Firmament. To put it bluntly, he might not even be a match for a rabbit in terms of raw strength!

Take that wild rabbit he met yesterday as an example, after they brawled for a long time, not only did that darned rabbit scratch his hand, it even managed to get away in the end!

It was the same for the rabbit he encountered earlier too.

Gugugu!

All of a sudden, Zhang Xuan felt his stomach rumbling. It seemed like he had spent too much energy thinking that it made him even hungrier.

Forget it, I should continue looking around. Who knows, some fool of a rabbit might just run right into a tree and die. If so, I'll be able to have a feast of a dinner!

Zhang Xuan licked his lips as he endured his fatigue and continued to trudge onward.

After circling around a hill, he caught sight of something that made his eyes light up.

"A fruit tree!"

There was a fruit tree growing diagonally out of a crack in the hill. There were eight greenish fruits sprouting from it.

They were roughly the size of a baby's palm, and it didn't seem like they were ripe yet. Nevertheless, for someone who

had been feeding on wild grass all this while, it was like encountering an oasis in the middle of a desert.

Excited, he quickly plucked out of the fruits and smelled it.

It had a refreshingly sour scent. He felt the pores of his body opening in delight.

He quickly plucked out all of the fruits before bringing one to his mouth. However, before he could bite down on it, he changed his mind and placed the fruit down. Then, he gathered all of them together and wrapped them in a bag before making his way back.

Forget it, their cultivation realms are lower than mine, so it must be even harder for them.

He had already reached the level of the gods, but he still felt hungry swiftly after exerting himself a little. It felt like he was pushing the limits of his body every day.

If that was the case for him, it was indubitably worse for Zhao Ya and the others, who were only at Semi-Divinity realm.

Having only eaten grass over the past few days, they were becoming as skinny as beansprouts. It wasn't easy for him to find fruits filled with spiritual energy, so naturally, he had to reserve them for them.

Furious winds and sparse spiritual energy, I feel like I might have entered the wrong world...

Zhang Xuan shook his head as he made his way back.

He thought that the Firmament would be a place suffused with the Aura of Divinity, such that anyone could absorb it freely and make breakthroughs swiftly. He thought that he and his disciples would be able to swiftly rise to the top and become indomitable existences.

But reality came smacking down hard on him.

Even survival was an issue for him right now. It felt like they would all die from starvation before they could even become indomitable existences.

It was on the seventh day after reaching the Firmament did he manage to heal up his injured body sufficiently to get Little Chick to let the others out.

Barely after everyone was released, the folded space they were in previously finally caved in and collapsed under the pressure of the world. At the same time, all of the items they had stored within were reduced to dust.

Seven consecutive days of starvation would have not been anything much for them on the Azure, but here on the Firmament, it was enough to push them to the brink of death.

They had to gobble down quite a few bowls of vegetable salad without the dressing before they were able to recover.

As for Little Chick, it was hard to tell whether it hadn't fully recovered from its injuries or it simply hadn't adapted to the Firmament's environment yet, but it continued to lie asleep in his dantian, showing no signs of waking up to date.

Zhang Xuan was initially hoping to use Little Chick as a bait to lure some wild beasts over so that he could hunt them down and fulfill his meat cravings, but from the looks of it, it didn't seem like he could count on it anymore.

While pondering upon such miscellaneous matters, Zhang Xuan soon arrived back to the cavern which he had used as their temporary living quarters.

Teacher!" Zhao Ya swiftly walked up and greeted him. "Quick, come and take a rest. You are still injured so you should take care of yourself better."

As she spoke, she helped carry some of the supplies Zhang Xuan had brought back and placed them down neatly by one corner.

You should allow us to head out and gather food with you. We aren't injured, and we can share some of your burdens..."

They had been hiding inside Little Chick's stomach while Zhang Xuan was pushing his way through the spatial turbulence, so they didn't sustain any injuries.

The incredible pressure from the Firmament left them feeling as weak as little children, but foraging for fruits and grass or finding a way to lynch a weak beast should still be within their means.

“That won’t do,” Zhang Xuan shook his head vehemently. “The valley out there is filled with divine beasts. Even the slightest mistake can easily cost your life! You should stay put for the time being and find a way to reach the same level as me first!”

“But...” Zhao Ya protested anxiously.

They didn’t think that it would end up like this.

They had followed their teacher to the Firmament in hopes that they would be able to share his burdens, but they ended up becoming his baggage instead.

“Are you not going to listen to me anymore?” Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure.

“I dare not to...” Zhao Ya replied with a lowered head.

“Alright, let’s not talk about this matter anymore. Take a look at what I have brought you this time around,” Zhang Xuan smiled as he took out the fruits he was carrying close to him all this while.

In an instant, the refreshing fragrance of fruits filled the cavern.

“Are those... fruits?” Yuan Tao and Sun Qiang’s eyes lit up as saliva dripped from the edges of their lips.

They had been eating wild grass over the last few days that they had already long gotten sick of it. As such, the appearance of these fruits was like a rain after a drought.

“Dig in!” Zhang Xuan said with a chuckle. “However, there aren’t too many of them so make sure to share them. I’ll be heading out later on to see if there are more around. Sun Qiang, I’ll be leaving you to distribute the fruits. Make sure everyone gets a share.”

“Yes, Young Master!” Sun Qiang replied as he walked forward to grab the fruits.

Aside from Zhang Xuan, there were fourteen people present in the room at the moment—his eleven direct disciples, Sun Qiang, and the Xingmeng Sword Saints.

“There are eight fruits in total. Young Master, you’ll take one while the rest of us will get half each,” Sun Qiang swiftly worked out the math and said.

“I just ate one outside, so you can share the rest amongst yourselves,” Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand. “Right, make sure to leave a portion for Little Chick too. Even though it’s sleeping at the moment, it’ll definitely complain if we didn’t reserve a portion for it once it wakes up.”

Sun Qiang swiftly distributed the fruits accordingly.

While the fruits tasted unripened, the spiritual energy they harnessed was far more than that in the wild grasses. As soon as they bit into it, they felt the fatigue they had accumulated over the day vanishing in an instant. It was as if someone had injected their bodies with energy and vitality.

Zhang Xuan looked at the smiles on everyone’s faces from the entrance of the cavern and nodded in relief.

At this moment, Wang Ying suddenly walked over and said, “Teacher, you can my half instead...”

“There’s no need for that, I had one earlier myself. Eat it and raise your cultivation as quickly as possible. You’ll be able to help me once you reach the level of the gods too...” Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand.

Halfway through his words, his eyebrows suddenly shot up. With a grim expression on his face, he told Wang Ying, “Tell everyone to stay here quietly. Unless I call for you, don’t come out no matter what happens!”

Right after saying those words, he immediately dashed out of the cavern, disappearing amidst the valley in a few moments.

After Zhang Xuan departed, Wang Ying quickly adjusted the vines hanging outside the cavern so as to conceal it from view. Then, she turned around and looked at the crowd within the cavern with her eyes slightly reddened.

Noticing that something was amiss, Zhao Ya quickly walked over and asked worriedly, “What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing,” Wang Ying quickly lowered her head and replied. “Teacher told us to be careful and don’t head out no matter what happens. I think he went out to find food again.”

Staring at the half a fruit in her hands, Wang Ying found her eyes tearing up uncontrollably. So, with her head still lowered, she quickly walked over to a corner of the cavern.

Others might not have noticed anything at all, but through her keen observation, she could tell that her teacher hadn’t taken a single bite of these fruits.

Due to the peculiar environment of the Firmament, her teacher often returned back to the cavern exhausted by the end of the day, but even so, he always reserved the most delicious food for them. Despite being the one who worked the hardest, he was also the one who starved more than any of them.

Just thinking about left her heart aching deeply.

There was no decision she had made better in her life than to walk into the classroom back then and acknowledge Zhang Xuan as her teacher!

Even with tears flowing down her cheeks, she felt that life in the Firmament wasn’t that bitter after all, It was tinged with a little bit of sweetness too.

2105 The Continuation of the Legend

Oblivious to the fact that Wang Ying had already seen through him, at this very moment, Zhang Xuan was hiding amidst tall bushes, looking ahead of him discreetly.

Humans.

Several of them, all in their youths.

He had heard some commotion coming from this distance earlier, so he instructed Wang Ying and hide well before rushing over anxiously.

There were both men and women amidst the group, and they were carrying a bag each as they trudged deeper into the valley. They appeared to be searching for something.

The oldest individual in the group of seven appeared to be around seventeen-years-old, but his cultivation felt firm and steady. Just like him, the other party had reached the level of the gods too!

What caught Zhang Xuan's notice was that despite the difficult terrain in the valley, these youths seemed to be perfectly adapted to it. They were able to navigate their way around without too much trouble.

Looking at the crimson sun setting in the west, the white-robed young man leading the group turned his head and around and instructed with a smile, "It's getting dark, so let's take a rest here. After we find it tomorrow and accomplish our mission, we'll be heading back right away, alright?"

"Alright!"

Hearing that they could take a rest, the remaining youths looked visibly relieved, They quickly placed their heavy bags down before swiftly getting to work.

Some of them sprinkled special medicinal powder around the area to deter insects and beasts from entering the area, some of them began scouting the area for potential water sources, some of them took out their rations and began cooking...

It was clear that they were an organized and disciplined team. Every single member had their own roles, and they were familiar with it as well.

I need to find a way to leave together with them... Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

He had no idea which darned mountain range in the Firmament he was at, but there was nearly no spiritual energy around at all. Putting aside cultivating, even finding food was an issue here!

It was one thing if he had been alone. He could have just decided on a single direction and walk on straight till he got out of the mountain range. However, with his parents and direct disciples behind him, he dared not to move recklessly.

So, he spent the last few days scouting the area, and he realized that despite the scarce concentration of spiritual energy here, there were still quite a few powerful divine beasts in the area.

It would be difficult for him to deal with the divine beasts, especially if a pack of them appeared at once. That made him realize that it would be too dangerous for them to go out venturing the area together since he wouldn't be able to ensure their safety.

Of course, it wouldn't do for them to remain on this mountain range either. But at the very least, he would have to ascertain a feasible path first.

As such, he had been scouting the area to see if there were any human settlements around the area. It wasn't easy for him to find such a large group of people here, so naturally, he couldn't let this opportunity slip past his fingers.

The only problem was that these youths weren't weak either. If he were to approach them carelessly, they might just view him as a bad person and make a move on him. Considering how he

hadn't recovered from his injuries yet and he had been weakened from having only wild grass over the past half a month, he wasn't sure whether he would be a match for them.

Besides...

Activating his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan gazed deeply in a certain direction and shook his head slowly.

The Eye of Insight had proved to a reliable asset over the past half a month. It was the key that allowed him to detect danger beforehand and move around freely in the valley.

As for the Library of Heaven's Path, it had gone quiet for half a month ever since he arrived at the Firmament, and he recovered it only today. Most likely, it had been in the process of snatching some power from the heavens of the Firmament so that he could use it.

Through the Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan realized that these youths hadn't come here alone. A powerful expert was following them at a distance of several hundred meters away.

Most likely, this expert was here to ensure their safety.

Otherwise, how deranged must a person be to think that it was a good idea to send a bunch of youths into a mountain range devoid of spiritual energy?

With such an expert protecting the youths, it would be infeasible for him to force them to talk through force. He had to find a way to win their trust so that he could leave the valley together with them. If that wasn't possible, it would be a great help if he could learn the location of the closest town from them too.

It seems like there's only one way then...

After thinking for a long while, an idea finally popped into Zhang Xuan's mind.

He quickly altered his appearance before walking out of the bushes quietly.

The disguise amulet which Luo Ruoxin gave him was not only effective here, it seemed to be considerably powerful too. Even with his current level of cultivation, he would still be

unable to see through his own disguise even with the Eye of Insight.

He changed his appearance to an amiable gentleman in his early thirties, emanating an aura of warmth. As for his cultivation, it appeared to be unfathomable in the eyes of others!

At the very least, he was confident that those youths in front of him wouldn't be able to see through his disguise.

Done with his preparations, Zhang Xuan revealed his presence and said, "Who are the ones who have intruded on my territory and disturbed my peace?"

"Who is it?"

The youths were in the midst of cooking and resting when they were surprised by those abrupt words. Flustered, they quickly picked up their weapons before turning to the source of the voice.

There, they saw a man in his thirties standing atop a boulder. His robe fluttered gracefully in the face of the strong winds, leaving one with the impression that he was a deity that had descended to this world.

There was a slightly cold look in the man's eyes, hinting at his displeasure.

"What an actor..."

One of the ladies harrumphed coldly as she took a step forward, but before she could do anything, the white-robed young man suddenly raised his hand and stopped her.

"Elder, we are students from the Twilight Academy. We are here to carry out a mission entrusted to us, and I beg your pardon if we have disturbed your rest."

"Twilight Academy?" Zhang Xuan made sure to jot that name down in his mind.

Maintaining a nonchalant expression on his face, he said, "Is that so? It sure is a coincidence. I have brought my students here for a mission too."

“Ah!” Hearing those words, the white-robed young man heaved a sigh of relief. A moment later, he asked with a doubtful glint in his eyes, “May I know which academy are you from?”

Since the other party was a teacher, it was unlikely that he was someone without principles and morals. It should be unlikely for him to make a move on them for no reason.

“They are just a few slow-witted fellows that I met on my journey. I brought them here to take a look around.”

Fearing that he would give himself away, Zhang Xuan was extremely vague with his words.

On the other hand, the white-robed young man took it as a sign that the other party was unwilling to share his personal details, so he clasped his fist and said, “Elder, since you were here first, we’ll find another place to rest so as to not disturb you then!”

He was a little fearful of the man standing before him because he found that he was actually unable to see through the latter’s cultivation.

It was only normal for him to be afraid of a powerful expert who had suddenly appeared in the midst of a remote mountain.

“There’s no need for that. You mentioned that you are from the Twilight Academy, right? I happen to be acquainted with your principal, and there are a few matters which I would like to ask you.”

It wasn’t easy for Zhang Xuan to find these people, so how could he let them get away so easily?

“Oh? Elder, you are acquainted with our principal?”

The white-robed young man narrowed his eyes in surprise.

Their principal had already reached the level of a Superior God, making him one of the most powerful individuals in Twilight City. Yet, the person standing before them was actually acquainted with him? Didn’t that mean that the other party had also reached the same level as well?

That would explain why he was unable to see through the other party. If the other party really intended to make a move on them, it was likely that they wouldn't even be able to hold on for a single breath before being killed.

On the other hand, after discreetly raising his standing again and again throughout the conversation, Zhang Xuan was finally going to get to asking where the Twilight Academy was located at when the voice of a middle-aged man echoed in the air, "Our principal has been in seclusion for a very long time. I am acquainted with all of his current friends, and I don't think he has any other friends either. May I know how I should address you?"

Following that, a middle-aged man in his forties flew forth from the woods and stopped right in front of the white-robed young man.

He was no other than the expert who had been discreetly following the youths to protect them.

"Teacher! What are you doing here?"

The youths were visibly taken aback by the sudden appearance of this man. Clearly, they were unaware that this middle-aged man had been following them all along.

"As your form teacher, how could I possibly allow you to head out for your first mission without taking any safety precautions?" the middle-aged man replied with a bitter smile before turning his sights to Zhang Xuan once more.

He had been a teacher in the Twilight Academy for twenty years now, and he had met almost all of the friends of the principals so far. He didn't recall the principal having a friend that was as young as the person standing before him.

Despite looking to be in his early thirties, he found that he was actually unable to see through the cultivation of the person standing before him. This left him a little taken aback.

In terms of strength, it was likely that the other party wouldn't pale in comparison even against their principal.

"I noticed that your Taiyang Acupoint was throbbing whereas your Sibai Acupoint was a little dark while you were using

your movement technique earlier. This shows that you have been cultivating two cultivation techniques at once. It's true that those two cultivation techniques complement your movement technique, allowing you to move at incredible speeds, but due to the complexity, you ended up making an error in your cultivation, resulting in your failure to harmonize the two cultivation techniques together. As a result of that, you are constantly facing the issue of your divine energy refluxing..." Zhang Xuan remarked calmly.

"If I'm not mistaken, you must be Mo Yuan laoshi from the Twilight Academy, am I right?"

"H-how did you know that?" the middle-aged man widened his eyes in shock.

He wasn't shocked by the fact that the other party knew his name. He was considerably famous in the Twilight Academy, so it didn't come as a surprise that others would have heard of him." What that had shocked him was how the other party was aware of the problems he faced in his cultivation. That was definitely something that couldn't be uncovered that easily.

The fact that the other party was able to see through him so easily showed that he had an incredible eye of discernment.

"That's not all. I noticed that you are having trouble trying to channel your energy to your Huihai Acupoint, resulting in your inability to overcome your bottleneck. If you cultivate for an extended period of time, blood will start seeping out of your mouth and nose, and you will feel a stifled feeling in your chest."

"This..." Mo Yuan's body trembled in disbelief.

It was understandable that a true expert would be able to discern the slight disharmony between his cultivation techniques and movement technique, but what that came afterward was a secret regarding his cultivation! For the other party to know about that as well...

There were usually two possibilities for such a situation. Either the person was extremely familiar with him, or else...

It could only mean to say that the other party was far stronger than him, perhaps surpassing the principal even!

Only an expert of this caliber would be able to see through the problems in his cultivation techniques and movement technique, as well as the issues he had been facing in his cultivation!

This lent credence to the other party's claim that he was acquainted with their principal.

After all, there was no reason why an expert of such caliber would have to resort to claiming that he was acquainted with their principal.

"I can tell that you are very diligent in your cultivation, but it's a pity that you have erred in your decisions. The Netherworld Sea Formula is highly demanding on one's soul, but your soul clearly hasn't reached the required level to practice this technique. You should be relieved that you haven't suffered a backlash so far despite adamantly forcing your way through!" Zhang Xuan chastised Mo Yuan.

While the middle-aged man was making his way here using his movement technique, Zhang Xuan was able to use the Library of Heaven's Path on him to compile a book on him.

According to what he had heard from Kong Shi's clone, as he ascended through the worlds, the backlash he suffered from using the Library of Heaven's Path would only get worse and worse. As such, he felt that he should avoid using it wherever possible.

However, in order for him to gather the information he needed to leave this area, he knew that he had no choice but to resort to it.

Most cultivators were extremely secretive about the flaws in their cultivation, guarding it as a tight secret in the depths of their hearts. As such, pointing them out directly was usually an effective move to unnerve them.

Furthermore, his disguise amulet allowed him to appear unfathomable in the face of other cultivators. Given so, it wasn't too difficult for him to beguile the other party.

“Thank you for your pointers!” Mo Yuan’s head was already drenched with cold sweat by now.

If he had been harboring any doubts beforehand, right now, such thoughts had already vanished from his mind.

Just like what the other party had said, he had forcefully cultivated the Netherworld Sea Formula despite his soul not meeting the prerequisites, resulting in him accumulating damage over time. Right now, it had already become a trauma in his body, and it was extremely unlikely for him to recover from it anymore.

“Elder, may I know how I should address you?” Mo Yuan lowered his posture a little to express his respect as he asked earnestly.

“I am...” Zhang Xuan tilted his chin up loftily as he responded.

“Yang Xuan!”

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“So, it’s Elder Yang Xuan! I have long heard of you!” Mo Yuan quickly clasped his fist.

“Long heard of what? Have you heard of me before? Do you know who I am?” Zhang Xuan replied curtly.

He had simply brought the alias that he often used on the Master Teacher Continent here as well, but the other party could still make such a statement. It seemed like those in the Firmament were not that honest.

“This...” Mo Yuan’s face reddened upon hearing those words.

Those words were just pleasantries to alleviate the awkwardness in the air! How disrespectful would it be if he were to claim that he had never heard of the other party before?

Yet, the other party asked such a question right after, leaving him completely stumped.

“Alright, you can spare me those formalities. Since I’m acquainted with your principal, there’s no need for you to be so polite to me. I don’t have the habit of making things difficult for juniors. However, it just so happens that I have some things that I might need your help with,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Elder, please feel free to speak. As long as it’s within my means, I’ll do my best to accomplish what you ask of me,” Mo Yuan replied politely.

“My students are on a mission here at the moment, but as they are unfamiliar with the local geography, they are a bit lost,” Zhang Xuan replied. “I fear that it would make them overly dependent on me if I were to appear and resolve their issue so easily, and it happens that there are some urgent matters that I need to attend to as well. So, I hope that you can help me

guide them around and, if possible, ensure that they return safely to Twilight City.

“Of course, I don’t intend for you to help me only to get nothing in return. I’ll give you a detailed analysis on the problems surrounding your cultivation, and as for whether you are able to resolve them or find a more suitable path for yourself, that’ll depend solely on your talent and capability.”

“Thank you, elder!” Mo Yuan clasped his fist in excitedly.

The main reason bottlenecks happened was due to a lack of awareness of one’s own condition.

If someone could just offer him some guidance by the side, even without giving out the correct answer, he was still confident that he would be able to overcome his current problems.

As such, he was extremely thankful to the other party for offering such help.

As for leading the other party’s students back to Twilight City, that was not a problem at all. He was going to have to take his students back there at the end of their mission anyway, so it was not an inconvenience.

On top of that, if he could get close to the other party’s students, he might be able to establish a connection with the powerful expert standing before him!

“I’m glad that you are willing to help. For now, it’ll do for you to remain here. Based on my estimations, they should be heading here very soon,” Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

Then, he turned around, and just as he was about to leave, he suddenly released a powerful aura that gushed right down to the heavens, reminiscent of the natural dominating pressure that dragons emanated.

“Elder...”

Taken aback by the abrupt happenings, Mo Yuan quickly turned his head over anxiously.

“Since you have given me your word, I hope that you will do your best to guarantee their safety. If I find a single strand of

hair missing from my students... You understand, right?"

With his back facing the crowd, his voice sounded nonchalant. However, paired with the overwhelming pressure that he was emanating, his nonchalant tone felt indescribably terrifying.

"Elder, please rest assured! I'll surely give it my all to not let you down!" Mo Yuan replied grimly.

"I'll discreetly instruct one of my students to pass my analysis over to you," Zhang Xuan added before walking away with leisurely footsteps.

Despite his relaxed footsteps, his movements were not slow at all. In just a few moments, he had already disappeared amid the woods.

Only after his silhouette had vanished completely did Mo Yuan finally wipe away the cold sweat trickling down his face.

The aura that Zhang Xuan had emanated was so terrifying that even ten of him would not suffice as a match for him.

It was fortunate that he had not acted recklessly, or else he and his students might have lost their lives.

"Teacher, is that Elder Yang Xuan... really that formidable?" the young lady who had stepped forward earlier asked Mo Yuan doubtfully.

She came from a huge clan, and she had never liked those who put on airs before her. Somehow, she found it hard to believe that Yang Xuan was really that incredible a person.

"Formidable? That would be an understatement. He's terrifyingly powerful!" Mo Yuan replied with a shake of his head. "Alright, you should get on with whatever you're doing. Have a good meal and rest well. We'll be heading back to Twilight City tomorrow morning, got it?"

"We're already heading back? But we are just about to reach the destination of our mission!" The young lady was stunned.

If they turned back, was that not as good as giving up on the mission despite their progress?

“I was supposed to protect you all from behind, so the fact that I have appeared before you means that you have already failed the mission. However, given the peculiar circumstances, I’ll request the academy to give special considerations so that you’ll still receive marks accordingly,” Mo Yuan replied.

The mission that they were going to carry out was not completely risk-free. He would not be able to take responsibility if something really happened to the elder’s students.

Since that was the case, it would be better for them to return immediately.

Thank you, Teacher.”

Hearing that they would still be receiving marks for the mission, the crowd heaved a sigh of relief.

The very reason they had gone on the mission was to earn marks, and since they could acquire them without going through danger, there was no reason for them to complain.

So, the youths continued preparing their food and encampment to rest for the night.

Not too long later, the rustling of leaves echoed from the woods. Following that, a group of people walked over.

“Are you Mo Yuan laoshi? I am Zhang Xuan, Yang Xuan laoshi’s student. I heard from my teacher that you are acquainted with him, so I made my way over here to ask for your assistance...”

As those words sounded, a tall silhouette emerged from the woods. Fourteen other people followed close behind him.

“So, it’s Brother Zhang Xuan! This way, please!” Mo Yuan clasped his fist as he assessed the group with a slightly doubtful frown on his face.

To his surprise, Elder Yang Xuan’s students seemed to be... a little weak!

It was no wonder the other party had requested his help in ensuring the safety of his students. It was really a miracle that

they could survive amid the dangerous mountain with their current cultivation levels.

At the same time, as the young lady behind Mo Yuan caught sight of Zhao Ya, her complexion immediately turned awful. She quickly turned her eyes to the other youths around her, and indeed, all of their eyes were fixated on Zhao Ya.

It was normal for those who were good-looking to be more welcomed by others.

“We have prepared some food here, so please feel free to join us for our dinner.” The white-robed young man invited them over.

Zhao Ya and the others shot a glance at Zhang Xuan, and upon receiving his nod, they swiftly took their seats. They had been hiding in the cavern for quite a few days now, so it felt exhilarating for them to be out once more.

“Mo Yuan laoshi, this is the compilation that my teacher instructed me to pass on to you. He says that you can alter your cultivation technique according to what is written on top first, and he’ll pass you the complete version the next time he sees you at Twilight City!” Zhang Xuan said as he passed a leaf over.

There were some words written on the leaf using black ink.

After Mo Yuan was done reading through the contents on the leaf, his eyes narrowed in astonishment.

The analysis that Yang Xuan had provided was far more detailed than he could have imagined. As long as he made modifications according to the errors he saw, he should be able to resolve his physical trauma in no time. Once that happened, his fighting prowess would surely soar!

“Please help me relay my gratitude to your Elder Yang for his help!” Mo Yuan replied.

Of course, he knew the other party’s intentions for only giving him only half of the analysis. He would have to prove his worth in order to obtain the other half.

Despite that, he did not feel any grudge toward Yang Xuan. If anything, he felt much more assured.

A person who paid heed to even the minor details in order to ensure the safety of his students was bound to be a respectable individual. There was definitely no harm in getting to know a person like that!

Mo Yuan's students had brought quite a bit of food for the mission, and Mo Yuan himself also headed out to hunt down a few divine beasts to supplement the dinner. As such, it became the first proper feast that Zhang Xuan and the others had enjoyed ever since they arrived at the Firmament.

Yuan Tao also fully unleashed his appetite this time around. The sheer amount of food he ate left the others wondering if there was a mystical beast hiding inside his stomach.

It was fortunate that Little Chick was still in hibernation. Otherwise, Mo Yuan and the others would have found the prepared feast devoured before they could enjoy it.

Zhao Ya and the others were around the same age as Mo Yuan's students, and the natural environment they were in created the ideal atmosphere for conversation. As such, it did not take long before they started chatting with one another.

They had heard of the situation from Zhang Xuan earlier, so they knew what could be said and what could not be said. As such, they were able to avoid incurring the suspicion of Mo Yuan and his students.

“You rascals have been asking me about the current political situation in the Firmament. Since Brother Zhang Xuan here asked me about it earlier as well, why don't we hold a quick lesson here?”

After filling their stomachs, the crowd gathered in a circle, and Mo Yuan began speaking with a smile on his lips.

The Firmament was vast and boundless. Even Twilight City was nothing more than a minor dot on the map. As such, even though most of Mo Yuan's students had come from major clans in Twilight City, they did not know much about the Firmament as a whole.

Zhang Xuan also turned his gaze over.

Throughout the entire dinner, he had been trying to steer the conversation naturally in that direction so as to get Mo Yuan talking, and it seemed like he had succeeded in doing so.

“The Firmament can be divided into nine major powers, and they are collectively known as the Nine Skies!” Mo Yuan said.

“I know! Are you referring to the Nine Skies Ten Monarchs?” As if to flaunt his knowledge to the ladies he had just met, the white-robed young man chirped in at this moment.

At the same time, the other young lady of Mo Yuan’s students clenched her fists indignantly upon seeing this sight.

“Indeed, I am referring to the Nine Skies Ten Monarchs.” Mo Yuan nodded in response. “The Nine Skies consist of the central Sky of Freedom, the eastern Sky of Cloud Dragon, the southern Sky of Spirit Origin, the western Sky of Adamant Gold, the southern Sky of Netherworld, the southeast Sky of Blazing Sun, the northeast Sky of Heavenly Sword, the southwest Sky of Linglong, and our northwest Sky of Drifting Specters!

“The Nine Skies represent nine major powers, and they are headed by nine monarchs. Every single one of the monarchs wields absolute power that allows them to look upon the world loftily. They are existences who are respected by all.”

As Mo Yuan spoke, there was a hint of respect in his eyes.

Based on what Zhang Xuan had heard thus far, it seemed like the nine monarchs were equivalent to the heads of the Azure’s Six Sects, existences who could make the world tremor with just a stomp of their foot.

“Teacher, I heard that the peerless Heaven Subjugating Monarch rose into their ranks recently, making it the Nine Skies Ten Monarchs now!” another one of Mo Yuan’s students added.

“You’re right. The Heaven Subjugating Monarch only appeared in recent years,” Mo Yuan nodded.

“Speaking of the Heaven Subjugating Monarch, one really has to acknowledge the unbelievable talent he possesses. In just a few years after the world heard of his name, he ascended through the ranks like a brilliant shooting star. He has already forced eight of the monarchs to acknowledge his identity, meaning that he only lacks the acknowledgement of the Sky of Freedom’s monarch. As long as he can receive that monarch’s acknowledgement, it will mean a mass reshuffling of the power distribution in the Firmament.”

“Nine Skies Ten Monarchs?” Zhang Xuan nodded contemplatively. “Those monarchs are existences so far away from us. I wonder just how much stronger they are than the rest of us...”

As soon as those words were spoken, one of Mo Yuan’s students immediately nodded in agreement as he curiously asked, “Mo Yuan laoshi, how powerful are the Ten Monarchs? I heard that they are able to crush a major city with just a single finger of theirs. Is that true?”

“Of course!” Mo Yuan nodded matter-of-factly. “Look, the rest of you are currently low-tier Gods whereas I am a middle-tier God. As for high-tier Gods, our principal is one such example. You should know about this, right?”

The crowd nodded in agreement.

“Beyond high-tier Gods are the Celestial Gods, and they are divided into low-tier, middle-tier, and high-tier.

“Above the Celestial Gods are the God Kings. They aren’t divided into low-tier, middle-tier, and high-tier; they are categorized into Ordinary God Kings and Conferred God Kings. Conferred God Kings can be considered the top powerhouses of the Firmament. Our entire Sky of Drifting Specters might not even have ten Conferred God Kings in total!” Mo Yuan explained excitedly.

“And the only ones to stand above the Conferred God Kings are the God Monarchs... They are the only experts recognized by the heavens, and their births are predetermined by the heavens. There have been no more or no less of them since time immemorial, and it has been expected to remain this way

till the end of eternity. There's only one way for new God Monarchs to emerge, and that was for an individual to earn the acknowledgement of the pre-existing God Monarchs. That's also the reason the Heaven Subjugating Monarch is challenging all of the other monarchs one after another!"

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God, Celestial God, God King, Conferred God King, God Monarch... Zhang Xuan jotted down the various realms in his head.

I wonder what realm is Ruoxin at...

She was able to ascend from the Azure to the Firmament without going through the Hall of Gods, tearing the dimension barrier apart to pass through it without sustaining wounds that were too severe.

Without a doubt, that was a feat that no Gods or Celestial Gods would be able to pull off.

Given so, was it possible that she was a God King?

As for whether she was a God Monarch or not, well, he honestly dared not push his thoughts in that direction. After all, there were only nine of them in the world. Every single one of them stood at the peak of the universe, so it was unthinkable for one of them to fall in love with someone from a lower world like him

Even if he had the Library of Heaven's Path, the gap between him and a God Monarch was still likely to be unbelievably huge.

Even though those were the thoughts that Zhang Xuan had in mind, he still could not resist asking, "Mo Yuan laoshi, may I ask if you know of the names of the Nine God Monarchs?"

A hint of doubt appeared in Mo Yuan's eyes when he heard that question, but he still nodded and replied accordingly. "The Nine God Monarchs are highly esteemed individuals whose names ordinary people like us aren't qualified to speak. I only know some of their aliases.

"The God Monarch of our Sky of Drifting Specter is the great Qiankun Demon Monarch, otherwise known as the Qiankun

Monarch. He's responsible for guarding the southeast of the Firmament, and he governs the Six Paths of Reincarnation.

"His direct nemesis is the Sky of Blazing Sun's Blazing Sun Monarch. He governs the day and the growth of all beings. The southwest Sky of Linglong is headed by Fairy Linglong, who is known to possess unparalleled beauty.

"I fear that this is the extent of my knowledge. I don't really know anything more than this."

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

The Nine God Monarchs of the Nine Skies were probably comparable to the emperors in his previous life. They were existences that ordinary citizens dared not speak lightly about. Considering how Mo Yuan was a teacher in a minor region, it was understandable how he only knew of three of them.

"Brother Zhang, you should ask your teacher if you wish to learn more about the matter. Considering the strength of your teacher, I believe that he should have a far deeper understanding of the Nine Skies Ten Monarchs than me," Mo Yuan added.

While ordinary people dared not speak carelessly of the Nine Skies Ten Monarchs, they still knew some of the general details about them. It was unthinkable for a cultivator to know nothing about the monarch ruling over the lands they lived in. As such, Mo Yuan could not help but harbor some doubts toward Zhang Xuan after hearing that question.

Seeing through Mo Yuan's thoughts, Zhang Xuan said with a bitter smile, "To be honest with you, we are all ordinary people. Our teacher took pity on us and took us in so that we can survive in this world, but that being so, he's an extremely busy person. We rarely get a chance to meet him, so there wasn't any opportunity for us to learn such stuff from him. If that wasn't the case, we wouldn't have to trouble Mo Yuan laoshi to bring us out of the mountain range either."

"Ah..."

The doubt in Mo Yuan's heart dissipated upon hearing those words.

There were indeed teachers in the Firmament who were extremely strict on their students. They kept piling missions upon their students in order to train their skills and temper their character, choosing not to waste time on words.

If Yang Xuan was such a teacher, it would be understandable for his students to know nothing about the Nine Skies Ten Monarchs.

“Not only so, we have yet to reach the God realm. Our teacher refused to tell us how we can make a breakthrough, only telling us that the time isn’t right yet and that we should just focus our efforts on our training. He often tells us that only with a sturdy foundation can one draw forth greater strength. But the spiritual energy here is simply too scarce! I can’t imagine how it’s possible for anyone to cultivate here...” Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed.

“Elder Yang Xuan is a strict but good teacher. I reckon he would be worthy of being a master teacher,” Mo Yuan remarked.

“A master teacher?” Zhang Xuan repeated as his heart skipped a beat.

Master teacher was the occupation created by Kong shi back when he was still on the Master Teacher Continent.

Those two words had never been spoken during Zhang Xuan’s time on the Azure, so he did not expect to hear them on the Firmament.

“Ah, you must not have heard of it. Over the past few decades, there has been a group of people who call themselves master teachers. They established the Master Teacher Pavilion, and they view it as their mission to impart knowledge to others and clarify doubts. They have a unique interpretation of the relationship between a teacher and a student, and they have worked hard to create a formal tier system to assess one’s abilities. It has proven to be extremely effective so far, but a huge downside is that students studying from a master teacher tend to have to go through more hardship than ordinary cultivators,” Mo Yuan explained.

Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in bewilderment.

Without a doubt, the existence of master teachers and the Master Teacher Pavilion must be related to Kong shi.

This proved that the one that he had suppressed back in the Azure was indeed the clone. The main body had already advanced to the Firmament many years ago.

It had been tens of thousands of years since Kong shi left the Master Teacher Continent, which translated to roughly a few thousand years on the Azure.

Given the limitations of his cultivation, he could not accurately perceive the flow of time in the Firmament. Nevertheless, assuming that the rate at which time flowed on the Firmament was 1:100 against the Azure, it meant that Kong shi had arrived here several decades ago.

That tallied with the timeline when the master teachers first started appearing.

So, Zhang Xuan beat around the bush and remarked, “Wouldn’t the creation of the Master Teacher Pavilion pose a threat to the rule of the Nine God Monarchs? Furthermore, other academies will be affected by their presence, right? Is there no opposition to the master teachers at all?”

One of the main reasons master teachers were so highly esteemed on the Master Teacher Continent was due to the lasting effect of Kong shi’s fame. Kong shi had become a figure so respected that anything associated with him would be viewed highly. Kingdoms and empires viewed the presence of master teachers in their territories as a huge honor, and it had even become a symbol of power.

On the other hand, in the Firmament, the Nine Skies Nine Monarchs were viewed as the core of the world. Having ruled at the top for a very long time, their presence was so great that it could not be ignored by anyone. In terms of influence, they were definitely far above that of the Six Sects in the Azure.

The Master Teacher Pavilion sought to impart knowledge to others, but at the same time, such actions would inevitably shake up the established order on the Firmament. It was hard

to think that the Nine God Monarchs would allow something like that to happen beneath their noses.

Furthermore, would the other pre-existing academies tolerate what the master teachers were trying to do? Creating a system that was completely different from what the academies had implemented was equivalent to challenging the established status quo, and inevitably, there would be significant competition between the different systems.

“What is unique about master teachers is that they promote education without discrimination. Most of the students they choose to take in are those who have failed to get into the other academies due to a lack of talent...”

At this point, Mo Yuan suddenly realized that he had misspoken, so he quickly added with an awkward smile, “Brother Zhang, I have no intention of looking down on you all. Please overlook my words.”

A moment prior, he had said that Yang Xuan was strikingly similar to a master teacher before mentioning that master teachers took in cultivators that were untalented. That could easily be misconstrued as a masked insult toward them.

“It’s fine,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile. “It’s true that we aren’t too talented, or else we wouldn’t have been stuck at our current realms for so long!”

Knowing that it would be unwise to linger on this depressing topic, Mo Yuan continued speaking. “Anyway, the Aura of Divinity on the Celestial Mountain is limited, so the academies usually get the priority when recruiting disciples.

Master teachers usually just take in the leftovers after all of the talented individuals have been chosen, so the presence of the master teachers doesn’t really affect us too much. It’s just that...”

At this point, Mo Yuan paused for a moment to gather his words before continuing. “I must say that the master teachers are truly incredible people. Often, those whom we deem to be hopeless are able to rise to heights unthinkable to us under their guidance. In fact, some of their students are able to grow

faster than our students! Without a doubt, the presence of the master teachers does cause some stress to the pre-existing academies, which is also why we see a need to start pushing our students as well so that we don't lag behind. Otherwise, I wouldn't have brought this bunch of young rascals here for a mission..."

If not for the presence of other competitors, they would have been more than content to conduct lessons in the safe environment of a classroom. To take a bunch of youths who had never experienced the outside world into the wilderness for a mission...

To be honest, Mo Yuan did not agree with such a course of action, but he knew that it had to be done in order to maintain the prestige of the academy.

Furthermore, the students were also more motivated than ever so as to not be outdone by their counterparts. It was a powerful driving force, and it would be a pity not to tap into it to push their students to high grounds.

"As for the Nine Skies Nine Monarchs, naturally, they forbade the presence of master teachers in their territories. It's for that reason that the Heaven Subjugation Monarch challenged the other God Monarchs to a battle. Around a decade ago, he had a closed duel with the Qiankun Demon Monarch. We don't really know the results of the battle, but ever since then, the Sky of Drifting Specters decided to overlook the existence of the Master Teacher Pavilion, allowing it to operate freely," Mo Yuan explained.

Even though the results had not been officially announced, it was clear from the subsequent actions that the Qiankun Demon Monarch had lost the battle.

Otherwise, there was no way that the Qiankun Demon Monarch would have allowed the Master Teacher Pavilion to do as it pleased in his territory.

"Wait a moment, you mentioned that the Heaven Subjugation Monarch challenged the other God Monarchs over the issue concerning the master teachers? He's the newly ascended God Monarch, right?" Zhang Xuan asked.

“That’s him.”

“No wonder...” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in realization.

He had heard that the Nine Skies Nine Monarchs were existences that had existed since time immemorial. It was hard to imagine that someone with the strength to challenge them would suddenly appear in the world. However, from the current looks of it, it was extremely likely that the Heaven Subjugation Monarch was none other than Kong shi!

Tens of thousands of years on the Master Teacher Continent, thousands of years in the Azure, and decades in the Firmament... The timeline fitted.

More importantly, Kong shi had often been addressed as the Sage of Heaven Subjugation during his time on the Master Teacher Continent. The aliases were a match.

To think that in the short span of several decades, Kong shi would rise to the top of the continent, create the Master Teacher Pavilion once more, challenge eight of the God Monarchs, and force them to acknowledge the existence of the Master Teacher Pavilion.”

As expected of Kong shi!

Even in the Firmament that was filled with countless experts, his strength was still so overpowered that it was almost despair-inducing.

Of course, whether the Heaven Subjugation Monarch was truly Kong shi or not, Zhang Xuan’s desire to pay the other party a visit had already waned tremendously.

After going through whatever had happened with Kong shi’s clone, he knew that it would be foolish for him to find Kong shi before he possessed the strength to protect himself. If the real Kong shi, by any chance, wanted to take away his Library if Heaven’s Path as well, he would have sought his own doom.

It was not to say that he did not believe in Kong shi’s character, but the Library of Heaven’s Path was simply too powerful. Until he acquired the strength to stand on the same level as Kong shi, it would be best for him to avoid him.

It was true that Kong shi already possessed a fragment of the heavens as well, but if he could acquire another fragment, there was no doubt that he would grow far stronger than before. He might even reach a level that no one had thought to be possible.

Such temptation might be something that even Kong shi was unable to resist.

Making sure to conceal his astonishment, Zhang Xuan continued his questioning. “Mo Yuan laoshi, you mentioned earlier that the Aura of Divinity on the Celestial Mountain is limited... May I know what that means?”

This was the other thing that Mo Yuan had mentioned that had left him a little perplexed.

“It seems like Yang shi really hasn’t explained anything to you... But again, considering that you haven’t tempered yourselves to the limits yet, it’s understandable that he kept it a secret from you!” Mo Yuan nodded slightly.

Then, he pondered for a moment before asking a question, “Brother Zhang, in your view, what do you think of the concentration of spiritual energy on this Grand Spirit Mountain?”

“Grand Spirit Mountain?” Zhang Xuan jotted down the name of the mountain that had caused him such trouble for the past half a month in his head.

At the same time, he shook his head and replied, “This mountain has barely any spiritual energy at all. It’s impossible for anyone to properly cultivate here.”

He had noticed this ever as soon as he arrived in the Firmament. The ferocious winds were one thing, but the lack of spiritual energy in the area was really a huge pain to deal with. He could not gather any spiritual energy from the surroundings to fuel himself, which was why he had eventually been forced to resort to eating wild grass for survival.

It was fortunate that the wild grass at least had some spiritual energy within it, or else he might have ended up starving to

death on this mountain!

“Indeed. This isn’t just isolated to the Grand Spirit Mountain. In the Firmament, all places with no cities in the area are suffering from a major receding of spiritual energy. In fact, many places have turned barren as a result of that!” Mo Yuan said with a shake of his head.

“Receding of spiritual energy?” Zhang Xuan could hardly believe what he was hearing.

The Firmament should have been the very pinnacle of the universe, and yet, it was suffering from a receding in spiritual energy? It was really difficult to imagine something like that to be true!

2108 The Declining Firmamen

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Zhang Xuan had always thought of the Firmament as a utopia for cultivators. It would be filled with many experts who had reached the top of the world. Its atmosphere would be rich in spiritual energy, allowing any cultivators who had reached the mark to achieve a breakthrough. Even a tree branch that one picked up off the road would be as powerful as a High Immortal-tier artifact.

And he was not completely off the mark about that.

The wild grass on the ground was an invaluable cultivation resource that was on par with Premier Immortal Pills. But based on what he had just heard from Mo Yuan, it felt as if the Firmament was slowly crumbling apart. The receding of spiritual energy spelled the regression of life. Places that were devoid of spiritual energy would eventually be reduced to ruins.

For example, even though there were still plants growing on the Grand Spirit Mountain, with the disappearance of spiritual energy in the air, the amount of spiritual energy going around the place was slowly depleting, to the point where everything wilted and died off.

It was probably for this reason that Zhang Xuan had to travel long distances in order to gather the wild grass, and even so, the quantity that he found would often be severely limited.

Was this really the Firmament?

It felt almost as if he had walked into the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe's otherworldly battlefield instead!

Everywhere was barren and wilting, almost as if the world was slowly dying away.

“There’s still some wild grass and fruits that harness spiritual energy on the mountain. That means that the receding of spiritual energy is a fairly recent affair, right?” Zhang Xuan asked.

If it had happened a long time ago, the Grand Spirit Mountain should have already become inhospitable a long time ago. The fact that he could find wild grass, fruits, and even beasts in the area meant that the receding only happened in the recent years.

Hearing such a question from Zhang Xuan, Mo Yuan looked at the young man with doubt in his eyes and asked, “It can’t be that you’ve only just arrived in the Firmament, right?”

“Of course not. All of us lived in a small village isolated from the world, so we don’t really know much about what’s happening out there. However, a plague suddenly struck us one day, and before we knew it, we are the only ones left in our village. It was then that we met Yang Xuan laoshi, and he brought us out of our village. As a result of that, there are a lot of things that we don’t know about,” Zhang Xuan replied awkwardly.

He had no idea how those in the Firmament viewed those coming over from a lower world, but it was still best for him to proceed carefully.

“I see.” Mo Yuan nodded. “The first time that the receding of spiritual energy occurred was around forty to fifty years ago. Back then, the skies fell, and earth sank. An entire half of the sky collapsed. Water rained down relentlessly and flooded the earth, causing great casualties. Eventually, the God Monarchs who guarded the north, south, east, and west slew the World Tortoise and used its four limbs as pillars to prop up the sky, thus bringing the world back to stability.”

At this point, Mo Yuan chuckled a little before continuing. “Well, these are just the stories that spread around like wildfire after the catastrophe, so there’s no way we can tell for sure whether they are true or not. There are also some that claim that the monarch of the Sky of Freedom used his unique ability to mend the collapsed heavens. Anyway, all kinds of rumors

went around after that incident. However, it was clear that the collapse of the skies was only the start of something greater.

“Spiritual energy began receding swiftly everywhere. Eventually, except for major cities, most lands around the Firmament became barren, just like this Grand Spirit Mountain!”

“This...” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

Forty to fifty years ago... That was around four thousand years ago on the Azure and forty thousand years ago for the Master Teacher Continent.

It marked the time when Kong shi first appeared in the world and the Six Sects first came to be.

The calamity of the Firmament and the collapse of the skies and earth, as well as Kong shi’s possession of the Heavens’ Order... Could there be some kind of link between the two?

If there was a link between those two, what did his possession of the Library of Heaven’s Path mean?

After all, a fragment of the heavens would not naturally appear in the world. The fact that he could use the Library of Heaven’s Path in the Firmament meant that the fragment of the heavens that he had received was no weaker than the heavens of the Firmament.

As such, he could not help but harbor some doubts regarding the origin of the fragments of the heavens.

Mo Yuan continued with the story. “As a result of the receding spiritual energy, it’s no longer as easy as before to reach the God realm. Furthermore, each breakthrough takes a significant amount of spiritual energy from the environment, and that could hasten the destruction of the Firmament. As such, the Nine Skies Nine Monarchs had no choice but to control the number of gods in the world. So, they constructed nine Celestial Mountains around the world, and all those who wish to become a god have to head to the Celestial Mountains and search for the Aura of Divinity.”

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in realization.

In a sense, it was similar to what had happened in the Kunxu Domain. Due to the scarcity of resources, those who possessed little talent lost the right to advance their cultivation in order to ensure optimal social welfare.

It was extremely cruel for the cultivators who had worked hard their entire lives to advance their cultivation, but this was the only way to slow down the collapse of the Firmament.

“I reckon that the reason Elder Yang Xuan is putting you through hardship right now is to build up your foundation while you are still at the Semi-Divinity realm. This will allow you to adapt faster to the environment on the Celestial Mountain, thus increasing the chances of acquiring the Aura of Divinity and successfully making a breakthrough!” Mo Yuan said.

“As expected of those from the Master Teacher Pavilion, they are really detailed and thorough in what they do. It’s no wonder the students are able to achieve the same feats as geniuses despite their lacking talents... Ah, pardon me. I have no intention of looking down on you...”

Zhang Xuan blinked blankly, unsure how he should respond to those words.

On the other hand, Zhao Ya and the others nearly burst into laughter.

The person before them sure was gutsy to dare say that their teacher was lacking in talent. Their teacher was someone who had cultivated for less than two years on the Master Teacher Continent and slightly more than two months in the Azure to get where he currently was.

If one translated that to the time in the Firmament, he would have only spent 0.73 days on the Master Teacher Continent and 0.6 days in the Azure, which added up to a grand total of 1.33 days. In just 1.33 days, their teacher had overcome bottleneck after bottleneck to become a real god. Yet, someone dared to suggest that he was lacking talent?

What a joke!

“Cough cough, it’s fine. I don’t mind it at all.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He continued asking a few more questions, and fortunately, Mo Yuan was an extremely forthright person who freely shared everything he knew. Soon, Zhang Xuan was able to form a preliminary understanding of the situation in the Firmament.

Without a doubt, the Firmament was filled with all kinds of experts. However, this came with a huge pitfall... A world filled with strong people was bound to be less restricted by laws.

In a world where there were significant differences in strength, the strong would be able to do as they pleased whereas the weak could only stay within the safe confines of the city walls, not daring to venture too far for fear of encountering bandits.

Of course, this was only applied to places beyond the city. Within the city, even the strong would have to obey the laws imposed upon them. This was because each city lord wielded absolute strength and authority in the region they ruled over.

In Twilight City, for example, City Lord Wu Fangqing was a Celestial God realm expert. He was known for his steel arms that allowed him to defend against swords and spears with ease. He held the record of eliminating eighteen bands of bandits singlehandedly with his bare hands, making him an unstoppable force.

Everyone that resided within the city had to obey the rules he had set, and those who dared to flout his rules would have to face the consequences.

The rules set by the strong had to be followed, or else one might just end up getting killed and having their Aura of Divinity extracted.

This was how the Firmament worked. It was not complete anarchy, but it was clear that the world favored the strong.

“Mo Yuan laoshi, can you tell me more about the Heaven Subjugation Monarch?” Wang Ying asked with eyes filled with curiosity.

She had also noticed that something was amiss.

“The Heaven Subjugation Monarch is a powerful expert who appeared in the past few decades. He came to fame around forty years ago after he, as a high-tier God, fought and defeated eight low-tier Celestial Gods successfully. That single fight placed him at the top of the Celestial God Aptitude Board!” Mo Yuan explained excitedly.

From the looks of it, it was clear that he carried great admiration for the Heaven Subjugation Monarch.

“Celestial God Aptitude Board?”

“Each of the Nine Skies would have a Celestial God Aptitude Board that gauges the potential of the cultivators within its territory. Those who are able to get into the top ten will eventually reach the level of a high-tier Celestial God, and those are within the top three have a good chance of becoming a God King eventually! For this reason, many cultivators seek to place their names on the board. As long as one can get within the top ten, they will be entitled to the best cultivation resources within their sects, paving their way to greatness!” Mo Yuan replied.

Due to the scarcity of resources in the Firmament, most sects and major powers would only choose to groom individuals who had displayed exceptional talent. As a result, there were all kinds of boards existent that cultivators would squeeze their heads to get into.

The rankings were important for them to secure enough resources for them to advance their cultivation.

This was strikingly similar to how the Kunxu Domain worked.

“After the Heaven Subjugation Monarch rose to the top of the Celestial God Aptitude Board, his growth suddenly surged forth with unstoppable momentum. In less than a year, he reached the level of a God King. After that, during the Flowing Tide of Spiritual Energy, he accomplished feats that no one has done before, leading to seven of the God Monarchs bestowing him with the honor of a Conferred God King simultaneously.

“Less than a year after that, he began to challenge the Nine God Monarchs. Initially, everyone thought that he had gone mad. Contrary to everyone’s expectations, he actually won the first match... In the following decades, he challenged the God Monarchs one after another, and based on what I have heard so far, it seems like the only one that he has yet to challenge is the monarch of the Sky of Freedom. Well, to be exact, the results of the duel aren’t publicly announced, but the fact that the other monarchs have acknowledged his identity likely means that they lost the battle,” Mo Yuan said with a hushed tone.

While there were rumors going around about the Nine Skies Nine Monarchs, it was still best to be discreet when gossiping about such matters. Carelessness could possibly cost him his life.

“He challenged eight of the God Monarchs one after another...”

Even listening to the story left Zhang Xuan feeling hot-blooded.

As expected of Kong shi! No matter which world he was in, he was still able to claw his way to reach the top of the hierarchy.

“May I know more about the monarch of the Sky of Freedom?” Zhang Xuan asked. “I’m quite curious to know why the Heaven Subjugation Monarch hasn’t challenged him yet.”

While others might not know about the results of duels, as fellow God Monarchs, the monarch of the Sky of Freedom should be aware of the outcomes. So, it was a little peculiar to see that the other party had not made a move in response.

Could it be that the monarch of the Sky of Freedom did not dare fight with the Heaven Subjugation Monarch after hearing about how the others had been defeated?

“To be honest, I don’t know that. The Heaven Subjugation Monarch controls the center of the Firmament, and they’re viewed as the lord of the Nine Monarchs. They’re the most formidable God Monarch of the Firmament, as well as the

most mysterious one... There is an utter lack of information regarding them, such that even their gender, age, name, and his alias are mysteries. However, since time immemorial, no one has dared to lay their hands on the Sky of Freedom, and that is the greatest proof of that monarch's strength..."

At this point, Mo Yuan suddenly realized that he might have talked too much. With an awkward smile, he waved his hands and said, "Alright, let's end the conversation here for today. We are just minor figures of the Firmament, so the affairs surrounding the Nine Skies Nine Monarchs have no relevance to us. There's nothing we can do to change anything, so let's not bother ourselves with those matters, alright?"

"Un."

Knowing that he would not be able to get anything more out of Mo Yuan, Zhang Xuan decided to stop there.

Everyone had exhausted themselves over the day, and before long, Mo Yuan's students had already started dozing off with their heads leaning against the cliff. Even Mo Yuan himself had shut his eyes, making it hard to tell whether he had fallen asleep or not.

Only Zhang Xuan and his direct disciples remained seated on the ground, completely focused on their cultivation.

Even though the spiritual energy there was extremely thin, making it difficult for them to cultivate, they were unwilling to waste any time at all.

As midnight approached, Zhang Xuan was just about to stand up and stretch a little before heading off to rest when his body suddenly halted.

"Hmm?"

Seemingly having sensed something, he turned his head in a certain direction as his eyebrows knitted together into a frown.

2109 Greenbeast Ancient Grass

Mo Yuan had also opened his eyes by this point.

Carrying the heavy responsibility of protecting his students, there was no way he could have really drifted off to sleep. He had been keeping a close eye on their surroundings, and upon taking a closer look, his eyes lit up in excitement.

Noting Mo Yuan's response, Zhang Xuan shot a questioning glance over.

"If I'm not mistaken, that should be the thing my students are supposed to find for the mission, the Windgale Fox!" Mo Yuan explained as he stood up.

Zhang Xuan's frown only deepened as a result of that. He knew next to nothing about the Firmament, so it went without saying that he had no idea what kind of beast that was.

With a light chuckle, Mo Yuan explained, "It's a low-tier God realm divine beast. Its offensive and defensive abilities are below average, but it's extraordinarily agile. Its blood and beast core harness the wind attribute, allowing cultivators who consume it to move with enhanced agility. It's a mission that has low risk yet still poses some challenge, making it highly suitable for students. Based on my investigations, its lair should be roughly half a day's journey away, but it seems like we are in luck!"

After explaining it to Zhang Xuan, Mo Yuan turned to his students and woke them up with a hushed voice. "Shen Cheng and Wu Xiaoxiao, wake up!"

Even though those youths had already fallen fast asleep, as God realm experts, they still maintained a certain degree of awareness of their surroundings even in their sleep. Upon hearing their teacher's call, they swiftly got up and shook off

their drowsiness. In just a few moments, they were already prepared for battle.

“What’s wrong, Mo Yuan laoshi?” the white-robed young man known as Shen Cheng asked with a hint of doubt in his voice.

“Listen to it yourself,” Mo Yuan said as he pointed in a certain direction.

Shen Cheng focused his attention on his ears for a moment before his eyes suddenly blazed with excitement. “Is it the Windgale Fox?”

“Indeed.” Mo Yuan nodded.

“Great! It looks like we might just be able to finish our mission today,” Shen Cheng exclaimed excitedly. He swiftly leaped to his feet and beckoned his fellow classmates over. “Everyone, prepare yourselves! We’ll be moving according to the plan we devised earlier!”

“Yes!” everyone replied in hushed voices before flitting forward quietly.

Their movements were very organized, and there were no excessive movements whatsoever. There was absolutely no sound to be heard from their movements. Seeing this, Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

As expected of the talents of the Firmament, there was no denying that they were indeed skilled cultivators.

Even though they were only low-tier Gods, their fighting prowess was nothing to scoff at.

“Brother Zhang, you should continue resting here for the time being. I’ll head over there to look after them,” Mo Yuan said with a light chuckle before swiftly following his students.

“Zhao Ya, I’ll leave it to you to take care of your juniors and my parents. I’ll be right back,” Zhang Xuan instructed Zhao Ya before heading forth.

He felt that it would give him a good gauge of the average fighting prowess of cultivators in the Firmament if he could watch how those students moved to capture the Windgale Fox.

As Zhang Xuan had not fully recovered from his injuries, he was only barely able to keep up with Mo Yuan and his students. By the time he arrived, Shen Cheng and the other students had already managed to encircle the Windgale Fox.

The Windgale Fox was relatively small in physique, and through the clashes between the divine beasts and the students, Zhang Xuan could tell that it was not too strong. The only advantage it had in the battle was its speed.

“These students are really not bad,” Zhang Xuan murmured as he studied their offensive maneuvers carefully.

He had thought that they would be amateurs, especially given how young they were. However, the tactics and flexibility they had displayed so far showed a completely different story.

Each and every one of them was mindful of their collaborative formation when they made their moves, making absolutely sure that they did not carelessly open up any gaps that would give the Windgale Fox an opportunity to slip past them. As a result, the Windgale Fox found itself unable to escape despite its speed advantage.

It was no wonder Mo Yuan subconsciously looked down on the disciples taken in by the master teachers. Just by looking at Shen Cheng and the others, it was obvious that the students taken in by the Twilight Academy were the cream of the crop.

Be it their flexibility, timing, or battle sense, Shen Cheng and the others had proved that their capabilities far exceeded those of an ordinary cultivator.

“It looks like it’ll be impossible for the Windgale Fox to escape,” Zhang Xuan remarked thoughtfully.

Given how meticulous Shen Cheng and the others were, there was no way they would allow the Windgale Fox to escape. With this, the conclusion of the battle had already been decided.

Thinking that there was no point watching any longer, Zhang Xuan turned around to return to Zhao Ya and the others.

However, barely after he took a few steps, another thought suddenly surfaced in his mind.

Based on his understanding, most beasts would only move around in a fixed area that they had claimed to be their territory. Other than predators heading out for a hunt, most beasts would not step out of their territory easily due to the risks.

Based on what Mo Yuan had said, the habitat of the Windgale Fox was roughly half a day away, so why would it venture so far out of its territory in the middle of the night?

This was contrary to common sense.

Holding onto such a doubt, Zhang Xuan activated the Eye of Insight and began to study the Windgale Fox carefully.

Many movement trails intersecting one another appeared in his sight. It took him just a short moment to discern the one that belonged to the Windgale Fox, and his eyes lit up a little.

Its footprints were exceptionally light, suggesting that it was in the midst of chasing something. During its hunt, it suddenly sensed the presence of Shen Cheng and the other students nearby, causing it to immediately turn tail to run, but it was already too late for it to get away.

Zhang Xuan carefully traced the Windgale Fox's footsteps before it started running away, and it did not take long for the shadows of the night to envelop his silhouette.

Something that could bring the Windgale Fox out of its lair and travel over half a day in the middle of the night was likely something extraordinary. Zhang Xuan had a feeling that the results of his search would not disappoint him.

He traveled for a while before finally coming to a halt.

The Windgale Fox's footsteps stopped in the middle of a dense forest. Most likely, this was where the Windgale Fox had first noticed the presence of Shen Cheng and the others and started escaping.

So, Zhang Xuan slowly walked toward the dense forest as he studied his surroundings carefully.

The crescent moon in the sky was not a particularly bright source of light, and the shadows of the leaves above only

made everything appear darker. Zhang Xuan found that his visibility had been reduced significantly even with his Eye of Insight activated.

Finally, he arrived at the very spot where the footsteps stopped and began to examine his surroundings carefully.

However, except for some ordinary plants, he did not notice anything that was out of place. There was nothing that hinted at what the Windgale Fox was trying to find.

This peculiarity piqued Zhang Xuan's curiosity.

The Windgale Fox could not possibly have taken such a huge risk to venture out of its lair just to chase nothing, so there was bound to be something around. He just had to figure out what it was.

Zhang Xuan had not been able to use the Library of Heaven's Path over the past month, and the plants in the Firmament were vastly different from those in the Azure and Master Teacher Continent, so he was not able to accurately identify any of them. Nevertheless, through his Eye of Insight, he was still able to tell which ones were safe to eat.

Even if he was somehow wrong, they happened to have someone who possessed the Innate Poison Body with them. They could go through her first, and if she found the plants unpleasant, there was a good chance that it would be fine for them to eat it.

As he had been using the Eye of Insight all along, he knew that it was definitely effective in the Firmament. If the Windgale Fox had really been pursuing something, there was no way he would not be able to find any traces of that thing.

That only left one possibility—the thing that the Windgale Fox was looking for was still in the vicinity!

So, he conducted another thorough scan of his surroundings, but he was still unable to find anything worthy of note.

By now, a frown had already formed on his face.

Unless the thing the Windgale Fox had been pursuing was able to fly in the air or dig underground, there was no way he

would not pick up anything with his Eye of Insight.

If the thing is capable of flight, there's no way the Windgale Fox would have been able to catch up with it. So, is it in the earth?

He looked at the dry earth beneath him, but it showed no signs of having been dug up. In his confusion, his eyes suddenly fell upon a verdant blade of wild grass.

This wild grass did not stand out in contrast to its surroundings, but Zhang Xuan swiftly noticed something off about it. He had searched this area at least ten times for wild grass, but he had not seen this blade of grass before.

If it had been there all along, he would have already plucked it out and guzzled it down. There was no way he would have left it till now.

So, Zhang Xuan reached out and touched the plant.

Weng!

A book materialized in his head.

“Greenbeast Ancient Grass, it's a unique creature that has the ability to freely change between the form of a beast and the form of a blade of grass. It's a medicinal herb that is highly nourishing to one's soul. If it's concocted together with Mayang Beast Blood, the resulting medicine has the effect of raising a God's soul to the level of a Celestial God. No. 1: It carries extremely potent poison, making it highly detrimental to the human body. If one is unable to break down the poison, even if one's soul grows stronger under its nourishment, one's body will gradually wear down under the effects of the poison. No. 2: It's an extremely rare medicinal herb in the Firmament...”

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

If not for the fact that he could use the Library of Heaven's Path, he might have been fooled by the other party's appearance.

This thing looked no different from real grass, such that he could not tell the difference even with his Eye of Insight.

This was really similar to the cordyceps in his previous life. It was a worm in winter but a plant in summer, and it was known for its medicinal value.

It was really a huge blessing for him to have stumbled upon such an invaluable treasure. Just the fact that it could allow a soul to advance from the God realm to the Celestial God realm was enough to show just how potent its medicinal energy was.

It was no wonder the Windgale Fox had braved through danger in order to hunt it down.

As for its poisonous property, as someone who cultivated the Heaven's Path Divine Art, it did not pose a problem to him at all.

Coming to realize the value of the plant before him, there was no way he would allow it to escape. Without any warning, his hand swiped forth to grab it.

The Greenbeast Ancient Grass seemed to have realized Zhang Xuan's intent to capture it. It immediately leaped out of the soil and bolted forward.

Its movement was so swift that it felt like a furious tempest had just blown past the area.

“Where do you think you are going?”

The only reason Zhang Xuan had difficulty capturing even a rabbit previously was due to the severity of his injuries weighing down on him and his energy deficit. However, after enjoying a satisfying dinner earlier, he had managed to recover a fair bit of his stamina. If he could not even catch a blade of grass in his current state, he would not be able to face himself anymore!

With a step, he covered eight meters in an instant as he extended his hand.

Divine energy burst forth from the tips of his fingers, and it swiftly weaved together to form a tight net.

A Heart of Intertwined Threads!

Under the prowess of a swordsmanship that had surpassed even the Heaven's Path Sword Art, the blade of grass was

swiftly captured.

With a light pinch, he picked up the Greenbeast Ancient Grass and channeled his soul energy into it. A moment later, he felt a soothing energy flowing back into his soul, leaving him feeling warm and fuzzy all over.

Satisfied with the results of his hunt, Zhang Xuan bound the Greenbeast Ancient Grass in yet another net of sword qi in order to ensure that it would not be able to escape before wrapping it carefully with a piece of cloth.

His soul cultivation was only at the level of a low-tier God at the moment. If he could raise it to the level of a Celestial God, he was confident that he would be able to stand toe-to-toe with any other Celestial God!

After securing his medicinal herb, he swiftly made his way back to their gathering spot, where Zhao Ya and the others were. Mo Yuan and his students had already returned by the time he arrived, and the Windgale Fox was in their hands. It struggled with all its might, but it was completely powerless to reverse its fate.

As he expected, they had managed to succeed without too much trouble.

So, Zhang Xuan walked over and said with a smile, “Congratulations, you have managed to accomplish your mission!” “Brother Zhang, where did you go?” Mo Yuan asked.

He had been slightly surprised to see that Zhang Xuan was not around when they arrived earlier.

“I wanted to see how you were going to capture the Windgale Fox, so I followed you earlier. However, I didn’t manage to catch up with you, and I lost my bearing for a moment while trying to make my way back,” Zhang Xuan said.

You must be really dumb to be able to lose your way even though it’s such a short distance!” The young lady under Mo Yuan’s tutelage, Wu Xiaoxiao, looked at Zhang Xuan with disdain in her eyes.

This bunch had nearly caused them to fail their mission. It would have been one thing if they were strong, but it turned out that they were merely buffoons who could lose their way just like that. Why in the world did they have to get involved with this bunch of fools?

More importantly, Senior Shen Cheng's eyes had always been on her before, but he had not even spared her a glance ever since those few ladies appeared. Just thinking about this filled her with fury.

2110 Streak of Grey

“Who do you think you are insulting?” Zhao Ya immediately stood up and spoke with an utterly cold voice.

She could still overlook it if the other party had insulted her, but she would never allow anyone to insult her teacher!

“You should know very well who I am talking about!” Wu Xiaoxiao spoke with a voice filled with contempt. “If you are weak, you should have the sense to stay put and not run about. Otherwise, you’ll only be troubling us to save you when you run into danger!”

“Enough!” Mo Yuan bellowed furiously.

“Teacher...” Wu Xiaoxiao turned to look at Mo Yuan indignantly.

“Look at how you are behaving! Is this how a student of the Twilight Academy should conduct herself?” Mo Yuan berated.

After that, he turned to Zhang Xuan and said, “Please don’t take it to heart. Xiaoxiao is still young, so she’s still a little lacking in etiquette. Do forgive her if she has said anything that has offended you.”

“It’s fine,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

Given everything he had been through in the Master Teacher Continent and the Azure, there was no way he would lose his temper over the mere words spoken by a young lady.

After resolving this conflict, Mo Yuan brought the Windgale Fox to one side and interrogated it using his special means. Following that, he left the group discreetly for roughly two hours before returning with a deep furrow on his forehead.

It seemed like he had noticed that something was amiss as well, but he didn’t manage to find anything in the end.

He was a little perplexed by the outcome, but he didn’t really turn his suspicions toward Zhang Xuan. Considering how even a beast as swift as the Windgale Fox wasn’t able to capture the

Greenbeast Ancient Grass, it was practically impossible for Zhang Xuan to obtain it, assuming that he was even able to see through its disguise in the very first place.

The night proceeded on without words.

At the first crack of dawn, the group began packing up before returning back to Twilight City.

Mo Yuan was glad that he was able to fulfill the task which Elder Yang Xuan had tasked him without compromising his students' mission. Even though it was regretful that he didn't manage to obtain the Greenbeast Ancient Grass, on the whole, it had still been a fruitful trip.

As they were returning via the same path they came by, Mo Yuan and his students were extremely familiar with the directions. Perhaps it was due to the receding of the spiritual energy, most of the divine beasts in the mountain had already fled the area, so they didn't encounter any major threat on their way back.

Just like that, they traveled for three days straight.

With Mo Yuan, a middle-tier God, traveling along with them, hunting down beasts and securing ample food was not an issue for the group at all. With each sumptuous meal, Zhang Xuan was able to gradually replenish his Heaven's Path zhenqi, which in turn allowed him to swiftly heal from his injuries.

He was still a far way off from making a breakthrough, but at the very least, he wasn't as frail as when he first arrived in the Firmament anymore.

"We should be able to get out of the mountain range by today," Mo Yuan said. "However, it's still too early to lower our guard yet. There are quite a few powerful bandits in the vicinity of the Grand Spirit Mountain. Those fellows are tenacious fools who would stop at nothing!"

The receding of spiritual energy had happened so quickly that many cultivators suddenly found themselves in a position where even they had trouble making a living. As a result, many of them ended up resorting to plundering merchants or travelers passing by the area.

The City Lord Manor had launched numerous operations in order to get rid of the bandits, but it barely made a difference at all. With their survival at stake, it was unlikely that the bandits would stop out of fear of the City Lord Manor.

As long as the root of the problem remained unsolved, more and more cultivators would eventually turn to plunder for survival over time.

Hearing that there were bandits in the area, the faces of the crowd turned grim.

Dealing with humans was often much more dangerous than dealing with beasts. It was very likely that the trip from the mountain range back to Twilight City was the most dangerous part of the entire mission.

“All of you have heard it, right? Make sure not to run about as you please. Also, we aren’t necessarily able to protect you in the face of bandits either, so you’ll need to buck up and pull your own weight!” Wu Xiaoxiao looked at Zhang Xuan and the others and harrumphed coldly.

That being said, none of Zhang Xuan and his direct disciples paid her any heed.

From the very start, they had never intended to count on them for protection.

“Zhao Ya, you should stay by my side in case we encounter bandits. I’ll make sure to protect you with my life,” Shen Cheng walked over and said confidently.

“There’s no need for that,” Zhao Ya replied curtly as she headed over to her teacher’s side without any hesitation. “This…” Shen Cheng was left standing awkwardly on the spot after being rejected so bluntly.

Behind him, Wu Xiaoxiao gritted her teeth in fury.

In order to prevent any mishaps, the group hastened their footsteps and flitted ahead.

“Teacher, why don’t we rest for a while? We’re only four hours away from Twilight City anyway, so I think it should be

fine for us to slow down our pacing a little...” Wu Xiaoxiao proposed with a weary tone.

Having rushed their way throughout the night, all of Mo Yuan’s students were showing signs of extreme exhaustion.

Surprisingly, Zhao Ya and the rest of Zhang Xuan’s direct disciples hadn’t shown any signs of fatigue despite their weaker cultivation yet, and they were able to catch up without pulling down the group’s pacing.

Mo Yuan was a little hesitant to stop here, but seeing that it would be difficult for his students to push on in their current state, he eventually nodded and gave his approval.

The crowd quickly found an obscurely located ditch and got in. They lit up a bonfire and gathered around it to warm themselves up.

Heaving a sigh of relief, they were just about to take a break when the galloping of horses sounded in the distance. The ground trembled ceaselessly, foreboding a catastrophe.

“Damn it!” Mo Yuan cursed lividly.

He didn’t think that they would be so unlucky as to be attacked barely when they had just settled down to rest. With a wave of his hand, he swiftly put out the bonfire before carefully rising up to check out the situation.

Neighhhhh!

The galloping finally came to a halt. A group of thirteen figures riding atop tall and powerful steeds had gathered around the ditch they were in, encircling them rightly.

Amidst the group, a middle-aged man wielding a crescent saber was escorted by two guards by his sides. From the looks of it, it would appear that he was the leader of this pack of bandits.

Despite his clean facial features, a portion of his fringe was dyed grey, forming a stark contrast with his relatively young appearance.

“Streak of Grey?” Mo Yuan’s eyes quivered at that sight.

There were many bandits around Twilight City, but most of them wouldn't pose much of a threat to them... However, y was particularly notorious around Twilight City for wielding the greatest strength amongst the bandits!

No one knew the real name of this bandit, and they only remembered him by the streak of grey hair at his fringe. That was also how his alias, 'Streak of Grey', came around. Not only was he vicious, he also had the strength to go along with it, making him a widely feared individual by those living in the vicinity of Twilight City.

It was said that his cultivation had already reached middle-tier God realm pinnacle.

"It seems like I am still quite well-known here," Streak of Grey chuckled playfully.

"Of course, who wouldn't recognize our boss?"

"Since you know us, you should know the rules. Cut the crap and hand over everything you have. Don't let your bravado cost you your life!"

The bandits by the side laughed heartily.

It was clear that Mo Yuan was a little intimidated through his tightly-clenched fists. Nevertheless, knowing that everyone else was relying on him, he forced himself to step forward and say, "I am a teacher from the Twilight Academy, Mo Yuan. My students and I have left the city to carry out a mission, so we didn't bring much wealth with us. I beseech you to let us off this once..."

"Mission?" Streak of Grey frowned in disappointment. With a dismissive wave of his hand, he continued, "Since that's the case, I'll make do with just your weapons and that Windgale Fox in your hands then!"

This time around, Mo Yuan didn't respond right away.

And this moment of silence opened a gap for Wu Xiaoxiao to interject in, "Why should we give you the Windgale Fox that we hunted with great difficulty? You better scam right now, or else I'll have my father capture all of you once we return to the city!"

“Your father?”

“That’s right! My father is the city lord of Twilight City, Wu Fangqing! You should be well aware that he’s a powerful Celestial God, so I advise you to stop this foolishness. How out of your minds must you be to even dare to rob me? Just touch a single hair of mine, and you can be sure that he’ll lop off all of your heads!” Wu Xiaoxiao spoke proudly.

It was one thing for a bunch of Semi-Divinity realm lasses to steal her crush away from her, but these bandits actually dared to eye the Windgale Fox that they had hunted with great difficulty! They must really be tired of living!

“You are the daughter of the city lord?” Streak of Grey was surprised for a moment before he roared in laughter, as if he had heard the funniest thing in his life.

He looked at his band around him and asked, “Lads, tell her! Have we ever feared that city lord before?”

“Fear? Hahaha! If we were scared of that city lord, we would have never chosen such a life!”

“You sure did us a huge service! Aren’t you curious to see how much your darling daddy would be willing to fork out in order to save you?”

“That city lord has left us tight on our toes over the past few years. We can finally return the favor to him now so as to show him that we aren’t to be trifled with!”

The bandits cheered excitedly.

“What are you all trying to do?”

Wu Xiaoxiao thought that these pesky bandits would surely flee in fear after hearing her identity, but instead, her words seemed to have furthered their determination. Completely taken aback by such a turn of events, her voice quivered in fear, betraying her uncertainty.

One must know that her father was a Celestial God, such that no one in Twilight City would dare to defy him. Yet, this bunch of lowlifes actually didn’t fear her father at all... Were they really not afraid of death?

“What are we trying to do?” Streak of Grey laughed. “We were thinking of robbing a bunch of poor students, but it appears that there’s a big fish hidden amongst them. Lads, make sure that not even a single one of them escapes. If we succeed, you can be sure that every single one of you will be handsomely rewarded!”

“Roger that, boss!”

The bandits laughed sinisterly as they tightened the encirclement.

Seeing such a sight, Mo Yuan shook his head with a deep sigh before whispering to Shen Cheng discreetly, “I’ll buy some time. Find a way to break out of their encirclement with everyone else!”

Then, he charged right at Streak of Grey without any hesitation.

In his view, the only way they could turn the tables around was to quickly defeat Streak of Grey and persuade the other bandits to surrender through that.

Hula!

Without any hesitation, he released a burst of sword qi in Streak of Grey’s direction, causing the latter to narrow his eyes.

Middle-tier Gods were still considered to be in the lower echelons of the Firmament, but without a doubt, their strength and agility far surpassed that of low-tier Gods. Furthermore, as a teacher, Mo Yuan’s maneuvers exceptionally polished, making a potential threat to Streak of Grey.

“You are courting death!”

Streak of Grey knew that it would eventually come down to this, so he raised his crescent saber and pulled it down upon Mo Yuan.

It was a terribly simple move, but the sheer might behind the attack made it difficult to deal with.

Mo Yuan was forced to quickly pull his sword in to defend against the blow.

Kacha!

As overwhelming might crushed down on him, Mo Yuan's sword trembled endlessly. He felt a sharp pain stabbing the webbing between his thumb and his forefinger, and crimson blood flowed down his palm. The sheer force caused his knee to cave him, causing him to kneel to the ground.

Through his superior strength and the height advantage from being on horseback, Streak of Grey was able to subdue Mo Yuan in a single strike.

“True strength conquers all obstacles...” Zhang Xuan remarked softly.

He knew that the situation was going to turn awry when he heard Wu Xiaoxiao reporting her background. The city lord might be a powerful cultivator, but his sphere of influence wasn't so great as to extend beyond the city walls.

Furthermore, those men standing before them were bandits. Bandits!

Telling them ‘I am the daughter of the city lord’ was as good as saying ‘My family is loaded so suck me dry’!

It was one thing for this young lady to be spoiled, but her lack of worldly experience made that even more fatal. It was the perfect recipe for someone to dive recklessly into oblivion.

But again, it was not like it really made much of a difference anyway. The bandits wouldn't let them go either way.

In the first place, those who could get into the Twilight Academy were the top-notch geniuses of Twilight City, and most of them had illustrious backgrounds. To rob such people and let them walk away alive, that was as good as setting up a time bomb for themselves.

As someone who was able to make his name as a bandit, there was no way Streak of Grey would show mercy to them just because they were students.

The only reason why the other party claimed that he was only going to take the weapons and the Windgale Fox was so as to

numb everyone, making it easier for them to take down the group.

It was because they had seen through this that neither Zhang Xuan nor Mo Yuan stopped Wu Xiaoxiao when she went on her ‘Big Missy Tantrum’.

Peng!

While such thoughts were passing through Zhang Xuan’s mind, Streak of Grey abruptly retracted his crescent saber and swung it down on Mo Yuan once more with greater force.

This strike sent Mo Yuan slamming onto the walls of the ditch, and his body slid to the ground before slumping forward weakly. He hadn’t passed down yet, but it would be hard for him to move in his current condition.

“Tie him up!”

Huala!

Two of the bandits quickly galloped forward with ropes and tied Mo Yuan up tightly.

“So, what are the rest of you planning to do? Are you going to try fighting back?”

After knocking out the most powerful Mo Yuan in two blows, Streak of Grey turned to look at the remaining members of the group with a haughty look in his eyes.

“This...”

Shen Cheng, Wu Xiaoxiao, and the others subconsciously took a step back as they looked at the bandits with quivering eyes.

They thought that their teacher would at least be able to fend off the bandits for a moment, buying some time for them to escape. Yet, contrary to their expectations, their teacher was defeated within two blows...

Their teacher was the only one amongst them who was a middle-tier God. If even he was no match for the bandits, how could the rest of them stand a chance at all?

Just as everyone was at a loss as to what to do, Zhang Xuan suddenly walked forward with a weirdly relaxed look on his

face.

2111 I Am A Bandit But I Have Been Robbed!

The young man walked silently with a natural posture, but he wasn't walking in the direction where Streak of Grey was. Instead, he was heading toward where Mo Yuan's sword had fallen earlier, and he bent his body down to pick it up.

His movements were so leisurely and composed that it felt almost as if he was oblivious to the fact that he was completely surrounded by bandits.

Streak of Grey hadn't expected the twenty-year-old low-tier God to be able to remain so calm in his presence. He assessed the young man before him with narrowed eyes and said, "Brat, you sure have guts!"

Is that fellow a fool?

I have already defeated the most powerful expert amongst them in two blows, but not only is that young man unafraid, he even walked over to pick up a sword... Does he think that the sword is more important than his life?

Mo Yuan was taken aback by Zhang Xuan's action as well.

It was true that his sword was no ordinary weapon, being a middle-tier God artifact, but it was something that he had already tamed and assimilated. The young man wouldn't be able to use it even if he were to pick it up, so why was he doing something so futile?

"Shh, don't speak."

After picking up the sword, Zhang Xuan brought his finger to his lips before looking around calmly, "Listen closely with your heart."

"Listen closely with our hearts?"

Everyone was flabbergasted. What was this young man trying to do over here?

“Don’t waste our time with such crap!”

One of the bandits eventually lost his patience after listening to the gibberish Zhang Xuan was uttering. He raised his brawny arms to slap the living daylights out of the young man.

Weng!

But before his slap could land, a joyful reverberation suddenly echoed from the sword in the young man’s hands. Tamed!

In less than two breaths after picking it up, the young man had already managed to assimilate the middle-tier God sword, claiming it for his own!

Tzla!

A cold glint flashed from the tip of the middle-tier God sword, and in the next moment, the bandit felt a sharp pain in his wrist.

Plop!

Before he even realized it, his hand had already fallen to the ground.

“Ahhh!” the bandit cried in agony, nearly fainting from the excruciating pain.

He had intended to slap that fool of a young man awake, but never in his wildest dream would he have expected the young man to tame the sword so quickly. Not to mention, the young man aimed his sword at his blind spot, leaving him with no time to react at all.

As a result, he lost his hand in an instant.

You...”

Streak of Grey also hadn’t expected such a situation either. His astonishment swiftly turned into wariness and fury, and without any warning, he charged forth and swung his crescent saber down upon the young man.

Hu!

His saber tore down through the air with tremendous force, crushing down everything that stood in its path.

He thought that the young man would raise his sword to fend against his attack, just like what Mo Yuan did earlier, but things didn't go in the way he planned. The young man chose to dash forward instead, rushing up to his steed in an instant.

After that, the young man tossed his sword over to his left hand and used his freed right hand to stroke the forehead of the horse.

As Zhang Xuan was too close to the horse, Streak of Grey wasn't able to follow through with his attack for fear of harming his steed, leaving him with no choice but to forcefully retract his saber.

“WangYing!”

Zhang Xuan called out as he touched the cheeks of the horse.

Wang Ying immediately caught Zhang Xuan's drift. She sprinted over to the steeds of the other bandits and touched them one after another too.

? ? ?

Seeing how his hostages were trying to flirt with their horses instead of attempting to retaliate or escape, Streak of Grey was on the verge of going insane.

The other bandits were dumbstruck as well.

Bro, do you even realize what is happening? We have you surrounded, and your life is in our clutches! Can you have some realization as a hostage? Why the heck are you trying to play with our horses instead of fighting back? Are you all idiots?

“It's a waste of time to talk with you. Die!”

With a cold sneer, Streak of Grey raised his crescent saber to strike down on Zhang Xuan once more.

No matter what the young man was up to, it would all be meaningless once he was dead.

“Neighhh!”

But before the saber could strike, the steed beneath Streak of Grey's crotch neighed loudly before leaping up into the air.

The sudden movement of the steed disrupted Streak of Grey's attack, causing his slash to miss the mark. Making use of this opening, Zhang Xuan's left hand reached out and touched the saber from the side.

Weng!

The saber released a soft humming reverberation...

"You..." Streak of Grey widened his eyes incredulously as he swiftly realized what had just happened.

He had fought alongside the crescent saber for at least twenty years now, such that there was no weapon that felt right in his hand other than it anymore. But in the blink of an eye, his saber actually submitted to another man?

The breakup was so decisive that he actually felt cuckolded!

Furthermore, why would his steed suddenly leap up at that instant? It was almost as if it was trying to interfere with his movements!

Streak of Grey was a little spooked by all of the unexplainable happenings around him, but he knew better than to be distracted in the midst of a battle. Regardless of who the crescent saber had submitted to, everything should come to an end once he had dealt with the young man.

So, he tried to lift the crescent saber to cut down the young man before him, only to find that the crescent saber had become too heavy for him to lift anymore.

Shocked, he lowered his gaze, only to see the young man looking at him calmly.

You are holding onto my possession. Let go."

Right after saying those words, the young man swung the sword in his left hand in a trajectory parallel to the crescent saber, aiming straight toward Streak of Grey's wrist.

Streak of Grey immediately tried to move to dodge the attack, only to find that he was unable to move due to the weight of the crescent saber. Flustered, he was left with no choice but to release his grip.

The young man before him immediately made use of that opportunity to grab hold of the crescent saber before launching a follow-up slash with it.

Streak of Grey instinctively leaned backward to move out of range from the attack, only to have his steed take a step forward at that moment.

Streak of Grey.

This is too much! To think that I have doted on you for so many years!

Due to the steed's forward movement, his evasion maneuver was rendered ineffective, resulting in his head being moved right in the trajectory path of the crescent saber.

In that instant, Streak of Grey realized that the young man had tamed his steed too through some sort of sorcery, and it was likely that he would be in greater danger if he were to remain on horseback. Thus, he quickly rolled to the side and tumbled down from the horse.

With this, Streak of Grey was able to dodge the crescent saber in the nick of time. While gasping heavily for air, he immediately pushed his hands against the ground to prop himself back to his feet. As long as he could regain his momentum, he was confident that he would be able to defeat the young man before him with his superior strength.

But just as he was in the midst of getting back to his feet, he suddenly felt a shadow falling down on his face, mercilessly pushing him back to the ground.

A horse hoof had been imprinted at the center of his face.

On a positive note, that solved one of the doubts in his mind. He was now certain that his steed had indeed betrayed him, just like the crescent saber.

You bastard! Slaughter them all!"

Streak of Grey was on the brink of losing his mind. He would have never dreamed that he would be defeated in such an unbelievable manner.

The young man was surely weaker than him, he had no doubt about that. However, by swiftly taming his crescent saber and his steed through some sort of miracle, the young man was actually managed to push him, a middle-tier God, to a corner. It was one thing if he was overpowered by an even more powerful opponent, but he couldn't accept losing in such a ridiculous manner!

It was only after hearing Streak of Grey's shout did the rest of the bandits return to their senses. Recalling the situation they were in, they struck the sides of their steeds, prompting them to charge toward Zhao Ya and the others

But as fate would have it, the story unfolded in a completely different direction than they had expected.

All of the horses which the young lady had touched previously turned toward one another and unhesitatingly raised their hooves to kick the riders down.

None of the bandits were prepared for such a situation, resulting in them being struck squarely in their core. They fell to the ground while spurting large mouthfuls of blood.

“What the hell is going on over here?” Streak of Grey felt like his thread of sanity was about to snap at any moment.

The reason why they rode on horses was so as to ensure that they could strike their enemies unaware and escape before reinforcements arrived. It should have been a key advantage they had over their targets, but all of a sudden, it had turned into a liability to them instead!

Tzla!

Just as Streak of Grey was at a complete loss to what he should do, a burst of sword qi suddenly surged in his direction. The sword qi swiftly unfurled itself to form a resilient net that bound him in place in the blink of an eye.

And before he could even attempt to struggle out of the net, a sword had already been placed next to his neck.

“Stop!”

Feeling the chilling sharpness of the sword pressed against his neck, Streak of Grey hurriedly issued the order for his subordinates to stop their attack.

If one thing was certain, the bandits were indeed veteran fighters. Despite the initial chaos injuring over half of them, they were able to swiftly regain their footing and continue the attack. With just a few blows, they were able to knock Shen Cheng and the others to the ground.

So, when they heard the order to stop, they couldn't help but turn to look at Streak of Grey indignantly.

It was humiliating for them.

As the most notorious group of bandits in the area, they should have been able to deal with a group of students even with their eyes closed. Yet, their boss ended up being done in at this critical moment...

"That's more like it," Zhang Xuan nodded with a satisfied smile.

With his current strength, if he were to bring forth the full prowess of his A Heart of Intertwined Threads, he would have been able to defeat Streak of Grey with ease.

However, he didn't choose to do so out of considerations of how thin the spiritual energy in the surroundings was. He wouldn't be able to recover his energy quickly, and that could pose a disastrous situation if they were to come under the attack of another group of bandits.

He knew that he would have to win the fight strategically so as to not risk losing the war.

So, he tamed Mo Yuan's sword and Streak of Grey's steed in order to throw the latter off... And finally, once the latter let his guard down, he launched the decisive blow.

He could tell that the bandits were loyal to Streak of Grey, so as long as he could take down the latter, everything else would fall in place.

"Have them hand over all of their weapons," Zhang Xuan commanded as he pressed his sword tightly against Streak of

Grey's neck.

Streak of Grey felt incredibly humiliated, but with his life in the young man's hands, he had no other choice.

“What are you waiting for? Hurry up and do as he says!”

Yes...

The bandits swiftly placed the weapons in their hands onto the ground.

“Zhao Ya, Zheng Yang, and the rest of you, I want you to take a weapon each and tame it as quickly as possible,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

“Yes!” Zhao Ya and the others nodded before heading over to grab the bandits' weapons.

After arriving at the Firmament, they swiftly realized that the Semi-Divinity artifacts that they were carrying were already not of much use to them anymore. If they could tame those low-tier God weapons those bandits were wielding and assimilate them, their fighting prowess should rise significantly.

Pressing his sword even more tightly against Streak of Grey's neck, to the point that a trail of blood was flowing down his body, Zhang Xuan said coldly, “Tell your men to hand over their treasures, Divine Coins, and everything that is of value!”

Streak of Grey felt frenzied to see how the tables had turned, but valuing his life, he turned to his men with teeth and shouted, “Didn't you hear him?”

The heck, I am the one who is the bandit!

I should be the one that is threatening you lot to hand over your money!

“y-yes...”

The bandits glanced at one another in uncertainty, but eventually, they emptied out all of their pockets and handed over their wealth.

Through his conversations with Mo Yuan, Zhang Xuan found out that the Nine Skies of the Firmament used a common

currency known as Divine Coins. It was similar to the gold coins of the Master Teacher Continent, but these coins harnessed the essence of the Firmament, rendering fraud impossible.

Watching as the bandits whipped out over 200 Divine Coins, Zhang Xuan nodded his head in satisfaction. He then turned his gaze toward Streak of Grey and assessed him from head to toe before swiping away his storage ring.

It was difficult to create spaces that were strong enough to withstand the spatial pressure of the Firmament, making storage rings an incredibly valuable and rare commodity. Not even Mo Yuan had a storage ring.

Most likely, Streak of Grey must have spent a huge portion of his ill-gained fortune in order to acquire it. In any case, the storage ring was his now.

Zhang Xuan quickly assimilated the storage ring before keeping all of the Divine Coins and items on the ground into it. Then, he instructed Zhao Ya and the others to swiftly tie up all of the bandits.

After that was done, he had Zhao Ya, Shen Cheng, and everyone else get onto the bandits' steeds in pair before swiftly galloping off toward Twilight City.

Those bandits have done much evil over the past few years... If we capture them, we can trade their heads for a bounty..." Mo Yuan said weakly.

The City Lord Manor had placed Streak of Grey and his band of bandits on the bounty list for quite some time now, so if they could apprehend them and bring them to the City Lord Manor, it was likely that they would be rewarded handsomely for their service.

"There's no need for that. Someone will clean up after us," Zhang Xuan said with a mysterious smile as his horse galloped swiftly ahead.

Considering that the daughter of the city lord was here with them, it was hard to believe that there was no one around to protect her other than her middle-tier God realm teacher.

And just like what Zhang Xuan had thought, shortly after they left, two silhouettes suddenly emerged from the shadows to stand before Streak of Grey and his band of bandits.

Upon catching a closer look at the appearances of the two silhouettes, Streak of Grey's face paled in despair before he released a desolate cry.

“Damn it! We should have been the ones who are the bandits, yet we ended up being the ones who were robbed instead... Damn it!”

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It was true that handing those bandits over would allow them to earn a sizable bounty, but it would also mean that they would have to hand over what they had looted from the bandits. No matter how much the bounty was, it was likely only to be forty to fifty Divine Coins.

That wouldn't even hold a candle to what they had snatched directly from the bandits.

After assimilating Streak of Grey's storage ring, Zhang Xuan found more than 400 Divine Coins inside, which meant that he had just earned around 600 Divine Coins from them. This was still excluding the pills, medicinal herbs, and weapons that they had collected.

Streak of Grey must have done quite a lot of bad things over the years, or else there was no way he would have been able to accumulate such wealth.

Given that he had left Streak of Grey to the City Lord Manor, which was a golden opportunity for the City Lord Manor to assuage the rising dissatisfactions with the City Lord Manor due to the tyranny of the bandits, as well his merit for saving the city lord's daughter, it was unlikely that the city lord would be so thick-skinned as to ask him to fork out what he had taken from the bandits.

Taking all of these aspects into consideration, Zhang Xuan eventually made the decision to tie the bandits up and leave them there for the City Lord Manor to deal with.

“That fellow is sharp-witted!”

The two silhouettes in the shadows looked at the cloud of dust lingering in the distance and the despaired bandits in front of them before remarking quietly.

Tasked with protecting the Young Miss, they had been keeping a close eye out on the situation all this while.

Till now, they were still unable to figure out whether the young man was really that resourceful or that he was actually a powerful expert in disguise.

“Report this matter to the city lord!” one of the silhouettes in the shadows instructed. “Also, get someone here to bring these bandits back. We’ll be holding a public trial!”

“Yes, I’ll have it done!” the other silhouette replied before melding back into the shadows.

With steeds to ride on this time around, Zhang Xuan, Mo Yuan, and the others were able to proceed forward with unprecedented speed. It took them only an hour before the tall and sturdy city walls appeared in their view.

This must be Twilight City!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

The city before him was far beyond the scale of any city he had seen previously, such that it was no exaggeration to say that it was even larger than Starchaser Island!

The grey city walls seemed to extend endlessly, and a massive formation shrouded the entire city, dyeing it with a color of mystery.

Mo Yuan nodded to affirm Zhang Xuan’s exclamation.

He had sustained heavy injuries from his encounter with Streak of Grey earlier, but as a veteran cultivator, he made sure to bring basic recovery items with him no matter where he went. After using those recovery items and recuperating for roughly an hour, he was already able to move around without much trouble.

Arriving before the city gates, Mo Yuan took out the special Access Token he had been given, and the guards permitted them entry without conducting any checks.

As soon as they stepped into the city, Zhang Xuan could sense a vast difference in the atmosphere.

The world outside was barren and vicious. Ferocious winds would often stir up out of nowhere, and the temperature would plummet to levels where it was hard for even cultivators to

endure during nighttime. More importantly, spiritual energy was hardly existent in the atmosphere.

On the other hand, the interiors of the city felt warm like spring, and the spiritual energy in the air was concentrated and refreshing. It was just a single wall of difference, but it felt like he had walked from one world into another.

“This is an amazing formation,” Zhang Xuan remarked in awe.

It would take an extremely powerful formation to isolate the city from the outer world so thoroughly, such that the conditions between both places were entirely different.

Zhang Xuan knew that he wouldn't be able to pull something like that off in his current state. Even at the very least, he would have to reach the levels of a Celestial God in order to do it.

“This formation is the key to sustaining the cities. Shortly after the receding of spiritual energy began, the Nine God Monarchs ordered the God Kings under them to construct these formations over major cities so as to preserve their conditions. Unless an equivalent expert were to make a move, or else it would be impossible to damage these formations,” Mo Yuan explained.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

It seemed like he had made an underestimation. He thought that the formation was made by a Celestial God, but it would appear that one had to be at the level of the God Kings in order to create such a stable formation.

Zhang Xuan closed his eyes and took in a deep breath as he opened up his pores.

Spiritual energy from the surroundings immediately dived into his body, freeing him from the fatigue he had accumulated thus far.

The spiritual energy of the Firmament is indeed formidable!” Zhang Xuan nodded in awe.

Just breathing in a little of it was enough to leave him revitalized.

It had been twenty days since he arrived at the Firmament, and despite stuffing himself with plants and various food, his cultivation still remained stagnated at where it was. This was his first glimpse of how potent the spiritual energy in the Firmament was.

It was not as concentrated as the Aura of Divinity that he absorbed back then, but it was sufficient for a low-tier God like him. It was definitely not something the mercury-like spiritual energy of the Azure could compare to.

It was already the middle of the night when they entered Twilight City, but the streets were still crowded with all sorts of people and vehicles.

Taking a swift look around, even the weakest cultivator that could be seen was at Semi-Divinity realm, and they numbered in the minority.

That explained why Mo Yuan was surprised when he saw him, Zhao Ya, and the others. It would appear that those in the Firmament were born with the cultivation of a Semi-Divinity, and as long as they could acquire some Aura of Divinity, they would be able to become a god.

As it turned out, powerful experts that appeared once every few millenniums in the Azure weren't worth a thing in the Firmament at all.

“Brother Zhang, thank you for saving our lives!” Mo Yuan heaved a sigh of relief and he shot a look of gratitude toward Zhang Xuan.

He thought that Zhang Xuan was only an ordinary person that was lucky enough to catch Elder Yang Xuan's eyes, but it was obvious that the latter had various tricks up his sleeves.

Even Wu Xiaoxiao's opinion of Zhang Xuan had changed after the previous incident. From time to time, she would discreetly shoot a glance toward Zhang Xuan with a conflicted expression before turning away with a face reddened with embarrassment.

All this while, she thought that Zhang Xuan and the others were nobodies, and the only reason they were qualified to

travel with them was due to their teacher's standing.

Yet, with their own strength, they were able to subdue the notorious Streak of Grey, a criminal who was powerful and sly enough to slip past her father's grasp numerous times.

Just thinking about how she had mocked them throughout the journey filled her with shame.

She realized that she was only lucky that Zhang Xuan and the others didn't pay her any heed. Otherwise, even ten of her wouldn't suffice as an opponent for them!

"We are grateful to you too. If not for you leading the way, we could very well still have been wandering aimlessly around the Grand Spirit Mountain right now," Zhang Xuan chuckled.

He slipped his hand into his chest, took out a piece of leaf, and passed it over to Mo Yuan, "This is the other half of the note which my teacher passed to me."

Thank you," Mo Yuan's eyes lit up as he took the leaf from Zhang Xuan's hands.

On the journey back to Twilight City, he had been modifying his cultivation technique based on the list of flaws Elder Yang Xuan had given him back then, and he immediately felt a clear improvement in his physical condition. His stagnated cultivation had grown a little, and his precision of control over his powers had sharpened a fair bit as well.

This was more than enough to show that Elder Yang Xuan was the real deal. His encounter with Elder Yang Xuan could very well be the turning point of his life.

Perhaps, only an expert of Elder Yang Xuan's caliber could groom such extraordinary students. Take Zhang Xuan for example, despite being a realm weaker than him, the other party was able to subdue Streak of Grey.

At this point, Mo Yuan pondered for a moment before making an offer, "Since it's your first time at Twilight City, I suppose you haven't decided on any lodging yet. Why don't you follow me to the Twilight Academy? I can arrange for some accommodations for you!"

“That would be imposing too much on you. You have been taking good care of us throughout the journey, and it would weigh on me to trouble you any further. Alright, it has been a long day for you and your students, so you should quickly head back and take a good rest,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

The only reason why he traveled together with Mo Yuan was so as to ensure that he, his parents, and his students could get to the nearest city safely. Since they were already here, there was no reason for them to stay together anymore.

Furthermore, if they were to go with Mo Yuan, it would only be a matter of time before others learned that they were the ones who had subdued Streak of Grey. That would pose some inconvenience to them.

For one, even if the city lord was too embarrassed to get them to fork out the money and items they had taken from Streak of Grey, there was a good chance that the merchants who had been robbed by Streak of Grey in the past would still look for them in hopes of getting back the money they had lost. Things could really get ugly if they were to refuse.

Not to mention, Zhang Xuan didn't wish to be put in the limelight, especially not when he didn't have the strength to protect himself, his parents, and his direct disciples yet.

His priority at the moment was to become stronger and gain a better understanding of the Firmament before making any future plans.

“I see. If there's anything you require my help for, feel free to look for me at the Twilight Academy,” Mo Yuan replied.

He thought that Elder Yang Xuan might have made some other plans for Zhang Xuan and the others, so he didn't insist on the matter.

“Let's go,” Zhang Xuan beckoned the others to follow him before heading into the bustling streets.

“Young Master, where are we going?” Sun Qiang asked.

“We'll find a place to stay and gather some information on where we can acquire the Aura of Divinity. The priority at the

moment is for all of you to reach God realm,” Zhang Xuan said.

Only after reaching God realm would Zhao Ya and the others have the strength to protect themselves in this world. Otherwise, they would be completely helpless against anyone who intended them harm.

“I understand,” Sun Qiang nodded.

He was exceptionally skilled at getting such miscellaneous stuff done, so it didn’t take him long to secure lodging from the group. It was a relatively spacious residence that could house all of them without being too squeezey.

It wasn’t too expensive either. The rent was only two Divine Coins per month.

It was through this that Zhang Xuan realized that the purchasing power of Divine Coins was far greater than he thought.

A single Divine Coin could be traded for a thousand Semi-Divinity Coins, and Semi-Divinity Coins were usually sufficient to complete most transactions in this world.

“It’s a pity that there’s no Aura of Divinity in the surrounding spiritual energy, so you won’t be able to achieve a breakthrough just by cultivating here. Nevertheless, the spiritual energy here is still very beneficial to your cultivation. The last few days have been rather difficult on you all, so make sure to rest early after you are done cultivating,” Zhang Xuan said.

It had been four hours since they had moved into the residence, and the crack of dawn could already be seen at the horizon.

After everyone was settled down, Zhang Xuan went into his room and sat down.

He immersed his consciousness into the storage ring he had taken from Streak of Grey, and a moment later, a heap of pills and medicinal herbs appeared in his hands.

This was the wealth that Streak of Grey gradually accumulated over the years through his plundering.

Through touching each and every one of the medicinal herbs, it didn't take too long for Zhang Xuan to fully understand their properties. They were indeed all expensive stuff, but the Mayang Beast Blood that he needed wasn't amidst the pile.

It was the ingredient he needed to complement the Greenbeast Ancient Grass in order for him to raise his soul cultivation.

He knew that it was unlikely for him to raise it all the way to the level of a Celestial God in one shot, but it would still be great if he could reach the level of a high-tier God realm through this.

The more he came to know about the Firmament, the more urgent he felt it was to quickly bulk up his strength. Unlike his time in the Azure, he was no longer alone. He couldn't allow anything to happen to his direct disciples and his parents.

Since the ingredient he needed wasn't inside, he quickly turned his sights to the pills. There was a diverse selection of them, ranging for recovery pills to those used for replenishing spiritual energy.

All in all, there were three bottles of the pills that replenished spiritual energy.

God Essence Pill, this was the name of the pill.

It could replenish one's god essence, which was basically another name for the divine energy that Gods harnessed.

Other than that, there were also some books in the storage ring too. Zhang Xuan quickly went through them, and they broadened his understanding of the Firmament considerably.

Most of what he had heard from Mo Yuan was covered inside too, but of course, the information in the books was much more detailed.

He realized that the God Essence Pill was actually quite an expensive product. Due to the receding of spiritual energy, many medicinal herbs had withered and died, causing a great

spike in the prices of pills. Pills that replenished one's spiritual energy were especially in demand.

As a result, even though the God Essence Pill wasn't particularly potent, it was still priced at a jaw-dropping one Divine Coin each.

Also, it appeared that the God Essence Pill was rather similar to the Immortal Pills of the Azure. It was also split into four tiers as well, namely low-tier, middle-tier, high-tier, and pinnacle.

Usually, low-tier God Essence Pills were enough for the cultivation of God realm cultivators. Only after reaching Celestial God realm would one require middle-tier God Essence Pills.

“Let me give it a try!”

Zhang Xuan placed a God Essence Pill into his mouth, and a great amount of spiritual energy was swiftly released inside his body. He quickly drove his divine energy to refine and absorb the spiritual energy.

Through the cultivation technique he had comprehended during his fight with Kong Shi's clone, Camaraderie of Brothers, he was able to assimilate the spiritual energy quickly.

One thing he had realized about comprehending the Pathos of Heavens was his emotions weren't individual entities. Looking at the materialization of his emotions in the form of his cultivation technique, he could see that they were interlinked, weaving closely with one another to form a massive network.

Rather than simply stacking onto one another, each emotion he comprehended synergized with his previous enlightenments, causing the entirety of the cultivation technique to be raised to a new level.

Under the nourishment of the spiritual energy, he was able to swiftly reinforce his God realm cultivation, creating a firm foundation for him to advance to greater heights. Slowly but surely, his aura was growing stronger.

2113 Lottery

Before Zhang Xuan knew it, he was already standing before a vast and boundless ocean. He could feel a great amount of divine energy pulsating within the ocean, and he could see innumerable surges of golden Aura of Divinity swimming freely within the water.

For some reason, he had to concentrate really hard in order to move his hand. He wanted to reach out to grab a surge of Aura of Divinity from the water, but as his body moved, his surroundings suddenly receded from him like an ebbing tide, plunging him into darkness.

When he opened his eyes once more, he found himself seated back in his room.

It was as if what he had just seen was nothing more than a dream.

“Was it a hallucination?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had never encountered any inner demons of his own ever since he started cultivating, and the inner demons that dared to appear before him ended up becoming his students. As a result, he had never seen experienced any hallucinations before. Why would he suddenly start facing such a problem now?

Did this mean that the cultivation technique he comprehended was flawed?

With such a thought in mind, Zhang Xuan quickly took out an empty book and began writing his comprehension of the Pathos of Heavens down on it.

But before he could even finish jotting it down, the book suddenly dissipated into ashes.

This shocked Zhang Xuan.

He had not used any cultivation technique, and he did not exert much strength. He was simply writing as he usually did,

but the book abruptly dissipated, as if its pages were unable to harness the knowledge of the Pathos of Heavens.

Zhang Xuan looked at the ashes before him in bewilderment for a while before he took out a resilient alloy from his storage ring.

Judging from its quality, it should be possible to forge a middle-tier God artifact using it. Even with Zhang Xuan's strength, it would be difficult for him to leave a dent in it.

With a brush in hand, he began writing down the Pathos of Heavens on it.

Hu!

Once again, before he could even finish jotting down his cultivation technique, the alloy suddenly disintegrated into dust. It looked as if it was also unable to harness the knowledge of the Pathos of Heavens...

“The Pathos of Heavens is a cultivation technique that is beyond the understanding of the heavens. This is a sign that the heavens of the Firmament forbid its existence here...”

Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

He knew the strength of the Pathos of Heavens. Even though it was free and unrestrained, it was far stronger than the perfect Heaven's Path Divine Art that he had cultivated thus far. This meant that it was a cultivation technique that had surpassed the heavens.

How could the heavens permit the continued existence of something even stronger than itself in the world?

“This explains why I was unable to summon the God Ordeal back when I was still in the Azure...” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in realization.

Cultivation ordeals were the manifestation of the heavens' rage toward the cultivators who dared get too close to them.

Yet, when he summoned his cultivation ordeal, the latter had completely disregarded him, choosing to strike Little Chick instead. That bizarre occurrence had left him baffled for a long while, but thinking about it, he might have unwittingly stepped

out of the heavens' jurisdiction, becoming an existence that even the heavens dared not punish.

“Even if I can somehow find a way to write down the Pathos of Heavens, there's no guarantee that the Library of Heaven's Path will be able to evaluate it. It seems like I can only count on myself!”

All along, Zhang Xuan had relied on the Library of Heaven's Path in order to perfect all the techniques he had practiced, thus ensuring that he was on the right path. However, it seemed like he had finally reached a stage where he could not rely on his trusty golden finger anymore.

He only had himself to count on. He would have to slowly figure things out through trial and error and take a step forward at a time.

Fortunately, the sheer amount of knowledge he had accumulated through reading millions upon millions of books provided him with the foundation and intuition he needed for this daunting task.

With a helpless sigh, he quickly reviewed his understanding of the Pathos of Heavens, and so far, he was unable to find any incongruencies in his comprehension. So, he took out the God Essence Pills in the jade bottle and continued swallowing them one after another.

Some time later...

Pilipala!

A series of cracking sounds could be heard from Zhang Xuan's body as he rose to his feet. Somehow, he looked much taller than before.

Vaguely, one could feel 沛 stupendous amount of divine energy circulating within his body. Judging just from the quantity of energy, he was at least two times stronger than before.

“I have reached low-tier God realm pinnacle,” Zhang Xuan murmured as he stretched his body to loosen up his stiff joints.

The last few hours had been rather fruitful. He had managed to raise his cultivation from low-tier God realm primary stage to pinnacle, and he was not too far off from making a breakthrough.

If not for the fact that he did not have sufficient God Essence Pills, he might have already become a middle-tier God. “But again, it wouldn’t be wise for me to force a breakthrough right now...”

Having read through the books that Streak of Gray had left behind, he had been able to gain some understanding of the various cultivation realms of godhood.

Given his current condition, it would be possible for him to become a middle-tier God as long as he had sufficient spiritual energy.

However, he had only managed to bulk up his divine energy thus far. His physical body and soul had not grown correspondingly stronger.

If he forced a breakthrough, his body and soul would be placed under great pressure from the immense divine energy flowing through his meridians.

Once that happened, not only would he be unable to exert his full strength, it would also be equivalent to having a ticking time bomb within him. He would be taking on unnecessary risks.

Looking out the window, he saw that the sun had already risen high in the sky. It was probably around noon.

Barely after Zhang Xuan walked out of the room, Sun Qiang immediately approached him.

“Young Master, I have managed to gather some information regarding the Aura of Divinity! Just like Mo Yuan mentioned previously, the Aura of Divinity is a carefully controlled resource, and the only way one can acquire it is through scaling the Celestial Mountains. However, the Celestial Mountains are not places where a cultivator can visit anytime he likes. They only open once every half a year, and only those who are deemed qualified are granted entry to the region.”

“Deemed qualified?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right. Only a thousand cultivators are allowed to enter the Celestial Mountain at a time, which means that one must find a way to get onto the name list in order to be granted an opportunity!” Sun Qiang replied.

“I see... How long do we have before the Celestial Mountain opens once more?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“We have less than one day. The Celestial Mountain opens tomorrow,” Sun Qiang replied with an awkward smile.

This abrupt news left Zhang Xuan slightly stunned. He did not think that time would be so tight. Taking in a deep breath, he asked, “How can we make it onto the list of candidates?”

“Those who are beneath thirty-years-old and possess cultivation beneath the God realm are qualified to apply for the candidacy to enter the Celestial Mountain, but the results of the selection are already out... The only way we can get onto the list now is by challenging those on the name list and defeating them. We’ll be able to replace them.”

Sun Qiang paused a moment here before continuing. “It’s just that the presence of this rule has led to those who are on the list going into hiding. There’s no way they will risk losing their chance to enter the Celestial Mountain. Furthermore, most of the candidates are from major powers, so it won’t be easy to replace them!”

There was a good chance that they could become a god after entering the Celestial Mountain tomorrow, so who would be so foolish as to stake their future on a duel?

There was a huge difference between a god and a non-god. If they missed this opportunity, they would lose their right to continue cultivating.

“Is there no other way to go about this?” Zhang Xuan asked with a deep frown.

Given the capabilities of him and his students, he was confident that he would be able to acquire the required slots by tomorrow. That did not pose a problem at all.

However, he felt uncomfortable doing that. He would be robbing others of the hope for a better future, and that would weigh down on him.

He knew that the Firmament was a place where the powerful could do whatever they pleased, but that was not the kind of person he wanted to be. If possible, he did not want to resort to that.

Sun Qiang pondered for a brief moment before replying, “Based on what I have heard, there is another way. Perhaps because the Sky of Drifting Specters felt that giving a thousand slots to Twilight City is too little and would risk major chaos, it bestowed another two hundred slots to the City Lord Manor, otherwise known as Netherworld Palace. Netherworld Palace placed these slots on sale, and those who successfully acquire these slots are also able to enter the Celestial Mountain.”

Twilight City was governed by rules, and those who flouted the rules would be severely punished. But when a person was completely deprived of hope, they would not hesitate to take risks to achieve what they wanted.

It was to avoid such a situation from happening that the Sky of Drifting Specters prepared such a hand.

“On sale? So, the slots go to the highest bidder?” Zhang Xuan frowned in confusion.

If that was the case, a person who had enough money would potentially be able to take all the slots. This was no different from open bribery!

“That isn’t it. The price of the slots isn’t too expensive. The key to acquiring the slots is not money but luck!” Sun Qiang replied.

“Luck?” Zhang Xuan repeated in bewilderment.

How did luck find its way into the equation?

Nodding earnestly, Sun Qiang explained, These slots aren’t sold directly to the cultivators but through a system similar to dice rolling. Netherworld Palace put a hundred numbers on sale for each slot, and a cultivator can choose to buy any of the

numbers. Once all hundred numbers have been bought, the results will be announced right after. The person who bought the right number will acquire the slot, and the rest can only try again next time.

“To prevent abuse of the system, there are certain rules put in place. A person can only purchase one number a day, and each number can only be bought by one cultivator.”

“This...” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

This sounded no different from gambling!

With a doubtful look on his face, he asked, “How much does it cost to buy a number?”

“I wouldn’t say that it’s really expensive, but it isn’t cheap either. Each number costs a Divine Coin!” Sun Qiang replied. Zhang Xuan nodded slowly.

A Divine Coin was expensive to the common populace, but it was not a completely unreachable goal. In a sense, they still stood a chance even though it was extremely slim.

At the same time, it was not cheap enough for the rich to abuse the system. It was true that they had an advantage in terms of money, but given a probability of one percent, they would have to spend dozens or even hundreds of Divine Coins before they were guaranteed a slot...

That was one hell of a lot of money, and even those from wealthy clans could not afford to squander their fortune like that!

While it was practically gambling, Zhang Xuan had to agree that it was a fairly good idea in order to placate the various parties within the city.

“Where is Netherworld Palace? I want to take a look at it myself,” Zhang Xuan said as he began walking over to the entrance.

After taking a few steps, a thought suddenly passed through his mind, and he instructed, “Bring Zhao Ya and the others over.”

Naturally, they should be present too since it concerned their chances of entering the Celestial Mountain.

Furthermore, since a person could only buy a single slot each day, they would need as many people as possible to maximize their chances.

“Alright. However, Netherworld Palace seems to be quite far from here, so it might take seven to eight hours in order to get there,” Sun Qiang said.

“It’s fine. We can ride the horses there,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

They still had the Semi-Divinity realm horses that they had taken from the bandits. Riding on horseback, they should be able to get there in an hour’s time.

Without further ado, Sun Qiang quickly moved around the residence to gather Zhao Ya and the others in the courtyard.

Judging from the thrilled looks on their faces, it seemed like Sun Qiang had already filled them in on the details.

“Let’s set off!”

Zhang Xuan and the direct disciples quickly climbed onto their horses and set off.

Just as he had estimated, they arrived before Netherworld Palace in around an hour’s time.

The group quickly found a place to dismount from their steeds before heading in.

The so-called Netherworld Palace was rather spacious, but it lacked the magnificence of the Ethereal Hall. Rather than a palace, it might be more accurate to call it a marketplace.

The area was flooded with people when they entered.

“I managed to acquire a slot! Is there anyone who wants to buy it? It’s on sale for fifty Divine Coins! I only accept full payment on the spot!”

“I want it!”

“Sell it to me instead. I’ll offer 51!”

“Hah! I’ll offer 52!”

A group of people immediately gathered around the person who had acquired the slot to make offers.

“A single Divine Coin is sufficient to buy a sliver of hope, so there are quite a few people who come in hopes of trying their luck. If they succeed, they will be able to sell the slot to others. As long as the price is beneath one hundred Divine Coins, there’s bound to be buyers. After all, even if you have one hundred Divine Coins, it would still be troublesome to gather trustworthy people to buy up every number of a certain slot, and that’s assuming that others haven’t taken up the other numbers...”

A probability of one percent didn’t mean that one would succeed just by buying a hundred numbers. Unless one found a way up to buy up all one hundred numbers of a certain slot, there was no guarantee that one would be able to obtain a slot.

“As time went by, people began making a business out of this. There are quite a few people that are trying to spot a trend in the numbers, hoping to make a killing out of this,” Sun Qiang remarked.

“Spot a trend in the numbers?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

This was similar to the lottery in his previous life, so what kind of trend could there possibly be?

One would be better off living a down-to-earth life. The chances of making it big through working hard were much higher than winning the lottery!

Of course, there were many people who could not understand that, so there were still many people who lived day after day groggily, hoping that Lady Luck would favor them eventually.

He had seen too much of that in his previous life.

2114 The God of Gambling

The device to select the winning number was basically a massive roulette wheel with the numbers one to a hundred on it. There was a needle above the roulette wheel that would start spinning randomly as soon as the device was activated. As it was controlled by a special formation, it was impossible for anyone to tamper with the results.

The needle would first be spun right before the crowd's eyes, but after turning a few rounds, a formation would be activated to conceal the needle from sight. Once the needle came to a halt, the crowd would be able to start buying the numbers that they thought could be the winning number.

The process of buying a number was simple as well. It was similar to those olden days casinos where you simply place your money on the number you are buying on the table.

All it took was a glance for Zhang Xuan to figure out what was going on.

“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, as you know, the biannual trial of the Celestial Mountain is going to held tomorrow, but we still have thirty slots here. Today, we'll be throwing all of them out, so if you have yet to secure a slot for yourself or your loved ones, this is an opportunity that is not to be missed!”

The young man who was in charge of selling the numbers took a look at the crowd before shouting, “Begin!”

Right after those words were spoken, the needle on the roulette wheel immediately began spinning. After spinning a few rounds, the formation came to life, concealing the needle and the roulette wheel from sight.

“Based on my experience, whenever the needle on the roulette wheel spins that quickly, the number is likely to be ten or below.”

“Hey hey hey, don’t be so certain about that. I’ve encountered this situation before, and I can tell you your best bet is to buy the numbers between eighty to ninety.”

“Ignorant! It was eighty the last time and nine the time before that, so in my opinion, it should be around twenty. If you have been paying close attention, you will have realized that it has been a while since the needle has pointed to the twenty to thirty region!”

As the needle on the roulette wheel began spinning, the spectators by the side began fervently discussing what the chosen number would be.

A while later, the formation around the roulette wheel stopped shaking, indicating that the needle had stopped spinning.

Shua shua shua!

Those that were holding onto booklets began calculating the initial momentum of the needle, air resistance, frictional force, wind speed, and many other factors, fitting them into their self-created equations to derive the ‘correct answer’.

“Place your bets! Once you have decided on your number, put your money down and back away!” said the young man managing the roulette wheel.

Surprisingly, not a single person rushed forward to put down their bet. Instead, they were looking around to see what the others were doing.

“Eye of Insight!” Zhang Xuan willed as he attempted to peer into the formation.

If he could see through the formation, he would be able to see the results of the roulette wheel directly. That would spare him from having to waste precious Divine Coins.

A moment later though, he shook his head.

It appeared that the formation had been created by a God King in order to ensure that no one would be able to tamper with the results before the formation was released, thus ensuring the fairness of the selections.

“What about the Library of Heaven’s Path then? Flaws!”

Given that the formation was active at the moment, he did not need to touch it in order to compile a book.

He swiftly flipped open the book that had materialized in his Library of Heaven's Path.

“Twilight City Celestial Mountain Slot Roulette Wheel Concealment Formation. Flaw 1:...”

What was written in the book were the various flaws of the formation, such as the problems with the material that was used to create the formation, the deficiencies of the one setting up the formation, and the fundamental errors with the blueprint.

But none of that had any relevance to Zhang Xuan. He had no need for such information. What he needed to know was what number the needle was pointing at.

With a deep sigh, he was just about to shut the book when he caught sight of the very last line on the book.

“Flaw 68:1, 2, 3,4, 5, 6,7, 8,9...”

It was an entire string of numbers, ninety-nine of them. The only one that was missing from the string was seventy-three.

Does this indicate that the needle is pointing at seventy-three? The reason the other numbers are labeled as flaws is because the needle isn't pointing at them? Zhang Xuan thought as his heart skipped a beat.

If that was really the case, it would be no different from him walking into an examination hall with all the model answers on hand. With this, he would be able to guarantee that he won every single bet he made!

“Sun Qiang, go over there and buy number seventy-three!” Zhang Xuan instructed without any hesitation.

“Seventy-three?” Sun Qiang frowned. “Young Master, I was looking at the calculations done by the veterans here, and the common consensus is that we'll have to bet between thirty to forty in order to stand a chance at winning. I'm not sure if betting on seventy-three is a really good idea...”

There were a lot of people who had calculated where the needle was likely to stop at based on the information they had gathered prior to the activation of the formation.

While it was beyond them to calculate the exact number that the needle would land on with absolute precision—they would have already made the bets themselves if that was the case—it was still able to provide those who were going to participate in the bets some direction to work with.

“Just shut up and do it,” Zhang Xuan replied impatiently.

With a helpless shake of his head, Sun Qiang walked over to the table and placed a Divine Coin, saying, “I’ll bet on number seventy-three.”

“You are betting on number seventy-three? You really don’t fear death, do you?”

Seeing how the first number bought was completely at odds with the common consensus, the crowd burst into laughter.

Based on the calculations done by the crowd, they had agreed that the chances of the needle being on thirty to forty was the highest. Thus, they could not help but feel that it was foolish and ignorant of the young man to place a bet on something that was completely at odds with their professional analysis.

At that moment, an old man with strands of white hair walked over with confidence in his eyes and said with gusto, “Friend, you bought number seventy-three? Let me tell you, you are sure to make a loss with that number. Listen to me and buy number thirty-six instead. I guarantee that you will surely hit the mark!

“You don’t know who am I, right? I am Yao Shan, and I have been here since the roulette wheel system was first implemented! I have been at every single number drawing over the last few decades, and I have helped more than thirty people successfully acquire a slot. How about it? Trust the words of a professional, and you’ll never go wrong!”

“Professional?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows rose. “May I know why you are offering your help to me?”

“It’s simple. If you select the right number, I hope that you can give me ten Divine Coins as a reward for my services. If you don’t select the right number... if the difference is within three numbers, you’ll have to give me one Divine Coin. If the difference is within ten numbers, you’ll have to give me one hundred Semi-Divinity Coins. If the difference is above ten numbers, I’ll pay you one hundred Semi-Divinity Coins!” Yao Shan said confidently.

Hearing these words, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly and asked, “What if the difference is beyond thirty numbers?”

“If the difference is beyond thirty numbers, I’ll pay you a Divine Coin!” Yao Shan replied confidently.

Based on years of studying and analysis, he had already developed a complete system of laws that only he himself understood. Based on how the needle on the roulette wheel spun earlier, he deduced that the number was between one to ten. Even at the very worst, it would not go beyond thirty to forty.

Zhang Xuan blinked contemplatively for a moment before replying, “I think I’ll still go with my seventy-three. You can bet on your thirty-six if you want. As for the wager, why don’t we do this instead? If you get your number right, I’ll pay you two Divine Coins. However, if my number is right, you’ll have to pay me two Divine Coins. How does that sound?”

Yao Shan hesitated a little.

To be honest, Yao Shan did not have absolute confidence in his number. He only appeared confident in order to inspire confidence in him. He had set up the payouts in a manner that favored him, such that as long as he could win the trust of others, the chances were high that he would walk away with a profit. If he somehow got the right number, he would even be able to make a huge killing!

In his view, this was much safer and more lucrative than betting on the roulette wheel directly. In fact, he had earned quite a lot of money through this over the years, and he had managed to buy a residence in a prime location within Twilight City!

2LDK, it had two rooms, a living room, a toilet, and a kitchen.

So, wagering on the numbers directly left him feeling rather iffy, and the stake was a jaw-dropping two Divine Coins at that!

“What if neither of us hit the mark?”

“Hmm. Since I am the one proposing the bet, if neither of us hit the mark, we’ll count it as my loss too. I’ll pay you two Divine Coins,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

“Deal!”

Hearing those words, Yao Shan’s eyes immediately lit up. He quickly headed into the crowd, and a moment later, he brought a young man over. It looked like the young man had listened to his words and bought down number thirty-six.

The discussions continued for ten minutes before all the numbers were finally bought up.

“Now that all of the numbers have been taken, I’ll be removing the formation right now in order to determine the allocation of the slot!” The young man laughed heartily as he tapped his finger on the formation.

Hu!

The veil of mist within the formation gradually dispersed, allowing the results of the spin to unfold right before the eyes of the crowd.

“I hope that you’re ready to pay up,” Yao Shan said with a light chuckle as he looked at Zhang Xuan gleefully.

He did not think that anyone would be so foolish as to make such a skewed bet with him. As long as the needle pointed at any of the ninety-nine numbers other than seventy-three, he would be able to earn two Divine Coins!

Thinking about the small fortune that he was going to earn very soon, he began debating whether he should use it to buy the latest horse carriage model so that he could flaunt it before his friends or spend it at a bar and have a lovely time with a beauty.

At this moment, the results were finally revealed, and the young man at the forefront announced, “The one to acquire the slot is... number seventy-three!”

“Seventy-three?” Yao Shan was stunned by the announcement. He quickly turned to look at the roulette wheel, and the needle had indeed stopped at number seventy-three. It was extremely far from the thirty-six that he had proposed.

“How is this possible? Did we calculate it wrong?”

“Even if one of us made a mistake, there’s no way all of us could have possibly made the same mistake together!”

“I told you that the roulette wheel is completely random, and there’s no way those calculations of yours work, but you just wouldn’t listen!”

The results had left the many professional analysts among the crowd stunned.

They swiftly reviewed their calculations, and there were no mistakes at all. So why would the final result end up being so different from their predictions?

“So, the slot goes to... Sun Qiang!”

Paying no heed to the discussions beneath, the young man in charge of the roulette wheel passed a jade token to Sun Qiang.

As Sun Qiang accepted the jade token, he could not help but stare at Zhang Xuan so hard that it looked as if his eyes would fall to the ground at any moment.

Given that so many professional analysts had deduced that the needle would fall between thirty to forty based on their calculations, he had thought that the seventy-three proposed by Zhang Xuan would definitely stand no chance at all. Yet, who would have thought that it was actually right!

“Young Master...” Sun Qiang was in such disbelief that he started to wonder if Zhang Xuan was the real deal.

“It was simply good luck,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly before turning his gaze to Yao Shan. “The results are out. Two Divine Coins.”

“Fine!” With a reddened face, Yao Shan gritted his teeth and passed over two Divine Coins.

Having hung out there for several decades, he could be considered a reputable figure. If he avoided his payment, there was no way he would be able to make a living there anymore.

Soon, the needle on the roulette wheel had begun spinning once more, and it did not take long for the formation to activate and conceal it amid a thick layer of mist.

Having watched the entire process carefully to take careful note of every single detail, Yao Shan turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Do you dare bet with me again?”

“Sure!” Zhang Xuan shrugged nonchalantly.

“I’ll bet on fifty-seven and the numbers within a range of ten around it,” Yao Shan said. “Just like before, the wager is two Divine Coins!”

“Fine by me,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile. He turned to Zhao Ya and said, “Head over there and buy number ninety-five.”

Yes, Teacher!” Zhao Ya quickly walked up and bought number ninety-five.

Yao Shan also quickly found someone to buy number fifty-seven.

A moment later, the result was out...

Ninety-five!

Yao Shan clutched his hair in a frenzy.

His calculations had turned out to be extremely off the mark both rounds, and in contrast, the other party had actually hit the mark both times! How in the world did the other party manage to do it?

Was the roulette wheel not supposed to have some degree of randomness?

Or was it actually possible to calculate the right number?

With tightly clenched jaws, Yao Shan reluctantly passed another two Divine Coins over to Zhang Xuan.

He was on the verge of a mental breakdown. Having been there for decades, he was able to tell that the other party was a first-timer based on how he acted. This was also why he had approached the other party to make a deal with him, hoping to profit off him. Yet, from the looks of it, it felt like he was the one being baited instead!

He had lost four Divine Coins in the blink of an eye!

More importantly, the other party had even managed to obtain two slots on top of his earnings from him.

“Do you want to continue?” Zhang Xuan asked with a smile as the needle started spinning once more.

He could not help but think that this Yao Shan was a really kind soul. At this rate, he might just be able to walk out of the casino with the slots he required and some extra income.

“No, I’ll pass...” Yao Shan shuddered at the notion of losing another two Divine Coins.

If he continued betting with this young man, he had a feeling that he might just lose the house that he had just bought too. In fact, he felt as if he had just lost a toilet already!

Looking at the young man before him with incredulous eyes, he could not help but wonder...

Was he actually staring at the reincarnation of the God of Gambling?

2115 My Horse Too!

He had no idea if there was an actual God of Gambling in the Firmament, but the fact that the young man was able to guess the number correctly consecutively despite the odds was more than enough to show that the young man was not too far such an existence.

He was tempted to continue, but his rationality told him that he could lose it all if he did. So, he forced himself to take a step back.

Even if he wanted to continue betting with the young man, he should at least wait a few more turns to see if the young man actually had the ability to guess the numbers accurately.

Paying close heed to the spinning needle, Yao Shan deduced that the winning number would be in the fifties. Then, he secretly glanced at the young man and saw the latter instructing the young lady beside him.

“Wang Ying, buy number twenty-seven.”

Yes!” the young lady replied.

Some time later, the result was announced, and the winning number was indeed twenty-seven!

Cold sweat dripped down Yao Shan’s back.

It was fortunate he did not continue gambling, or else he would have lost his kitchen too!

He gave up all thoughts of getting his four Divine Coins back from the young man in that instant, but he could not help but wonder... how in the world did the young man manage to predict the winning numbers so accurately?

It was a one in a hundred chance, but he was still able to get it right three times consecutively...

The first time might have been luck, and the second one could have been a great coincidence, but three consecutive times...

It would really be pushing the boundaries to think that it was luck again!

Yao Shan was not the only one who found the situation baffling. Zhao Ya and the others were equally baffled, but their eyes were glowing with admiration and respect.

As expected of their teacher!

He was outstanding even in the Firmament, where the most powerful experts in the universe roamed!

Fu Yuan was one of the Three Grand Elders of Twilight City, making him one of the most influential and respected figures here. He was only second in position to City Lord Wu Fangqing, and he was in charge of managing the administrative affairs regarding Netherworld Palace.

The slot roulette was also under his jurisdiction.

After having a sumptuous lunch, he stretched his back lazily before making his way over to the opera house to watch a play.

He knew that despite his high-ranking position, he was neither the most influential nor powerful person in Twilight City, but he was content with his current life. As a high-tier God and a grand elder, he saw no need to climb any further up.

It was not that he never harbored such thoughts, but he knew that given the limitations of his talent, there was no way he would be able to become a Celestial God. Since that was the case, there was no reason for him to waste the little time he had left pursuing something that was futile to him.

It would be much better for him to take life easy and enjoy the fruits of the hard work he had put in his entire life!

“Luo Sheng, check if Little Lotus of the Red Jadeite Pavilion is free or not. If she’s free, inform her that I’ll be heading over to look for her after I’m done watching my play!” Elder Fu Yuan instructed.

Little Lotus of the Red Jadeite Pavilion was one of his close companions, and he visited her often.

The subordinate named Luo Sheng nodded before quickly heading out. However, not too long later, he returned with an

anxious look on his face.

Seeing the flustered state of his subordinate, Elder Fu Yuan rose to his feet and tidied up his robe before asking, “What’s wrong?”

“Old Master, we have just received a report that someone has managed to buy the correct number on the slot roulette wheel eleven times consecutively!” Luo Sheng replied in astonishment.

“Wait a moment, you are saying that he won the slot roulette eleven times straight?” Elder Fu Yuan was stunned. “What do you mean by that? Did he purchase a hundred slots in one go, or... What happened?”

There were indeed cases where the ultra-rich would buy all one hundred slots in a single go, thus ensuring that they would acquire a slot no matter what the result was.

“No, that’s not it. That person only bought a single slot every time, but he would get the winning number each time. It’s almost as if the roulette wheel formation is bowing to his demands,” Luo Sheng said with an incredulous look on his face.

“He only bought a single number, but he was still able to hit the mark each and every time?” Elder Fu Yuan widened his eyes in disbelief. “You aren’t lying to me?”

“It’s real! It’s already a complete mess out there!” Luo Sheng exclaimed.

“This... Have you checked on the formation to see if there are any problems?”

“We have already done a thorough check, and everything is working as normal!”

“Let’s go take a look!” Fu Yuan said as he quickly headed over to Netherworld Palace.

It did not take him long to arrive at his destination.

At that moment, a huge crowd had already gathered around the slot roulette wheel.

“He got it again! This is the thirteenth time, right?”

“Holy cow! He has gotten the right number thirteen times in a row! How is he doing this?”

“It looks like the rest of us don’t stand a chance at all...”

The faces in the room were filled with disbelief.

Elder Fu Yuan walked over and examined the formation, but he was unable to find anything wrong with it. The young man that everyone in the room was encircling was not making any suspicious actions either. In fact, his hands had been behind his back the whole time.

Was it really possible for one to guess the right number thirteen times in a row without doing anything?

Seeing that the needle on the roulette wheel was about to be spun for the fourteenth time, Elder Fu Yuan quickly walked up to the platform and said, “Allow me!”

Then, with a flick of his finger, the needle on the roulette wheel immediately began spinning.

A while later, the formation flickered a little before shrouding the roulette wheel in mist.

Elder Fu Yuan made sure to check every nook and cranny of the roulette wheel, but he could not find anything wrong with it.

“Buy number thirteen,” the young man in the limelight instructed.

A moment later, when the formation was released, the needle on the roulette wheel was indeed pointing at number thirteen.

This marked the young man’s fourteenth consecutive victory.

Elder Fu Yuan knew that the young man was definitely doing something—there was no way a person could guess the correct number fourteen times in a row—but he was unable to figure out just what it was, and this left him incredibly frustrated.

Eventually, he lost his patience and marched right up to Zhang Xuan. “Who the hell are you? What are you trying to achieve?”

“I am just a nameless nobody. I am buying some slots here so that I’m able to scale the Celestial Mountain,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

Yet, you were able to select the winning number fourteen times in a row?” Elder Fu Yuan scoffed in skepticism. “Men, escort this esteemed guest to the room. I think there’s a need to ask him a few questions!”

“You want to take me into custody? Netherworld Palace is the one that placed those slots on sale, and yet, you want to arrest me just because I’ve been lucky enough to guess the winning number each time?” Zhang Xuan looked at Elder Fu Yuan mockingly.

This system basically worked the same as a lottery. One could not possibly arrest a lottery winner just because he won each and every single time, right?

He was not doing anything that broke the rules, and he had never approached the roulette wheel or the formation.

The reason Netherworld Palace has taken out two hundred slots to be sold in such a fashion is to ensure that everyone has an equitable chance of scaling the Celestial Mountain. If you acquire all the slots by yourself, what will become of the other cultivators? It’ll be unfair to them!” Elder Fu Yuan said.

“You are talking about fairness? Those people over there have been trying to calculate the trend of the roulette wheel to make predictions. Do you think that it’s fair to the others for them to do so? There are also a lot of people who devote their lives to studying the roulette wheel and even make a living out of it. Just how do you define something as fair or not?”

With an irritated wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan said, “Forget it. Since you don’t welcome me here, I’ll just take my leave. Farewell.”

He needed slots for his parents, eleven direct disciples, and Sun Qiang, and he had already managed to acquire the fourteen that he needed. There was no need for him to continue.

After all, his goal was to acquire the Aura of Divinity on the Celestial Mountain, not to cause a huge ruckus.

Since it was his first time in the Firmament, maintaining a low profile should take precedence over everything else.

“Hold it there for a moment!” Before Elder Fu Yuan could even speak, an old man amid the crowd stepped forward and blocked Zhang Xuan’s way.

It was none other than the old man who had lost two bets to him earlier, Yao Shan.

“Don’t you think that it’s too convenient that you are able to leave so easily after monopolizing so many of the slots?”

“Indeed!”

“We are here to acquire a slot, too, but you ended up taking nearly all of them, depriving us of our chances. You can’t leave just like that!”

“You should at least take seven slots and share with the rest of us. It isn’t too big a request, is it?”

Such complaints could be heard here and there as cold smiles formed on the lips of the crowd.

They had no idea whether the young man was really cheating or not, but since someone was taking the lead, they might be able to get something out of it if they joined in.

The frowning Zhang Xuan looked at Elder Fu Yuan and asked, “Is this the rule of Netherworld Palace? You put the slots on sale and yet don’t allow anyone from to walk away with them.”

“Of course not! However, how you managed to identify the winning number fourteen times consecutively is rather sketchy, so we can’t help but suspect that you are cheating.”

“Cheating? Very well!” Zhang Xuan looked at the crowd imposingly. “Show me how I cheated! If you can show me how I managed to cheat despite all the security measures in place, I’ll hand over all fourteen slots to you!”

“Ah...”

The crowd fell silent.

If they knew how the young man did it, they would not still be here. They would have long struck it rich and retired! “None of you are able to do it?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “Farewell!”

Right after saying those words, Zhang Xuan beckoned his direct disciples to follow him out of Netherworld Palace.

You can’t leave!”

The crowd quickly encircled him.

You don’t want to allow me to leave? Fine by me as well. If I recall correctly, there are still sixteen slots remaining, right? I’ll stay here and win all the remaining slots!” Zhang Xuan crossed his arms before his chest as he spoke with a smile.

That statement shocked everyone there. Recalling the miracles that he had pulled off thus far, they began to doubt themselves.

If they allowed the young man to leave, they might still stand a chance at obtaining a slot. However, as long as the young man continued participating in the draws, they would simply be spending their money in vain on the slot roulette!

“Don’t listen to his words!” Yao Shan exclaimed. “He only has fourteen Semi-Divinities by his side. He won’t be able to draw any more than that!”

Due to the rule that a person could only buy a single number each day, Zhang Xuan would not be able to participate in the subsequent bets even if he wanted to.

“Wait a moment, you’re right!”

“Even if we keep him here, he won’t be able to do anything...”

Widening their eyes in realization, the crowd bucked up their determination and continued blocking Zhang Xuan’s way.

As long as they kept him there, it was only a matter of time before he spat out some of the slots that he had acquired.

They were in the majority anyway, and there were plenty of experts in their ranks. No matter how powerful the young man

was, he did not stand a chance against them. Besides, given that they were in the city, the young man would not dare make a move on them recklessly, or else he might face trouble with the law.

“Is that what you think?” Zhang Xuan turned to Elder Fu Yuan and said, “Elder, if I’m not mistaken, the bets aren’t just limited to humans, right?”

After spending quite some time in there, he had already familiarized himself with the rules of the slot roulette.

“Of course,” Fu Yuan replied with a nod.

There were quite a few divine beasts in the Firmament who were able to transmogrify into the form of a human. If they were to limit the participation to just the humans, they would risk offending the divine beasts.

For this reason, there were no restrictions on who could participate in the bets.

Very well.” Zhang Xuan nodded as he turned to Sun Qiang and passed down some instructions.

Sun Qiang’s lips twitched a little as he looked at Zhang Xuan with a bizarre expression on his face. Then, he walked out of the room before returning with the fourteen steeds a moment later.

“Since you aren’t allowing me to leave, it just so happens that these horses of mine are only at the Semi-Divinity realm and need some slots. It’s not too much if I get them to participate in the bets too, right?”

Zhang Xuan waved his hand lightly, and a horse immediately walked over and wrote down the number sixty-four with his hoof before passing a Divine Coin over.

The young man managing the roulette wheel was perplexed. He had no idea whether he should accept the Divine Coin or not.

However, when he thought more deeply into it, there were indeed no rules forbidding such an act. So, he hesitantly

accepted the Divine Coin and passed a token with the number sixty-four on it.

Weng!

Some time later, the formation disappeared, and the number reflected on the roulette wheel was... 64!

“Even horses are able to buy numbers too?”

“There are indeed no rules that prohibit animals from buying numbers. If each of his horses buy a winning number... Hell, that will mean that there are none left for us!”

“What should we do?”

The crowd was really panicking at this point.

They had thought that the young man was cornered, but who could have known that the young man would still have such a hand?

More importantly, that horse actually had the ability to hand over money and choose the right number. Just what is this world coming to?

Are we even less than a mere horse?

With twitching cheeks, Elder Fu Yuan eventually passed down an order. “Release him!”

If they did not allow the young man to leave, the latter might very well sweep away all their available slots.

This was the first time that he had felt so exasperated about this slot roulette system ever since it was implemented. Who could have known that it could be exploited in such a manner?

If not for the fact that those were the rules that he had come up with, he would have really rushed forward to beat up that darned rascal!

2116 Underground Black Marke

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You have my deepest gratitude, Elder!”

Zhang Xuan chuckled softly as he walked through the path that the crowd had reluctantly opened for him. Just as he was about to leave the area, he suddenly halted for a moment before turning around.

“One last thing. Since Twilight City is serious about maintaining fairness and equity among the cultivators, I am just curious to know if it’s considered an act of cheating for someone to sell the number they have calculated to another person in order to profit from this slot roulette system.”

“It’s considered as an act of cheating,” Elder Fu Yuan replied with a confused look on his face.

The slot roulette system was designed with the intention of making the acquisition of the slots random. If a person sold a number that was calculated inaccurately, his actions would be considered fraud. On the other hand, if the person was really somehow able to calculate the number accurately, that would be cheating.

“That person over there, Yao Shan, has been selling the numbers he has deduced to the other cultivators here. I believe that there are many people here who will be able to testify to that,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile. “With that, farewell!”

After saying this piece, Zhang Xuan left Netherworld Palace without waiting for any response.

That fellow, Yao Shan, had riled the crowd up against him, attempting to prevent him from leaving. Did the other party really think that he was a pushover?

As for the evidence of his fraud, he had convinced quite a few people to purchase the numbers that he recommended.

Considering that none of them had won, they should be more than willing to give Yao Shan away. After all, they might just be able to recoup the money that they had given to Yao Shan this way.

Yao Shan had never expected to have the tables turned on him like that. With his body trembling fearfully, he immediately tried to explain, “Elder Fu Yuan, I...”

But Elder Fu Yuan was not even interested in hearing his explanation. “Take him down!”

Huala!

A group of people rushed forward and apprehended Yao Shan.

There was absolutely no doubt that Yao Shan’s fate was going to be tragic. He had only lost a toilet and a kitchen earlier, but at this rate, he was going to lose his entire flat.

Completely uninterested in whatever was happening inside, Zhang Xuan and the others swiftly got onto horseback and left Netherworld Palace. After galloping across various streets, Zhang Xuan checked his surroundings and confirmed that there was no one following them before indicating for everyone to stop.

“The rest of you should head back to prepare yourselves for the trial of the Celestial Mountain. It’ll be good if all of you can achieve a breakthrough to godhood. I’ll be heading off to settle some other matters first.”

The crowd nodded in response.

After that, Zhang Xuan turned around and galloped in another direction. It did not take him long to disappear at the end of the street.

Shortly after, Zhao Ya and the others quickly made their way back to their residence.

They knew that they had to reach the level of the gods in order to not be a burden to Zhang Xuan. Thus, it was important for them to exploit this opportunity to the fullest.

After parting from the group, Zhang Xuan galloped straight ahead, and it did not take him long to arrive before a certain

building.

This building looked perfectly ordinary, not standing out in the least along the street. It was the kind of building that one could easily overlook as part of the scenery. Furthermore, the doors and windows were tightly shut, making it look as though it had been abandoned.

Zhang Xuan walked up to the building and knocked on the wooden doors six times, four long knocks and two short knocks.

Jiya!

The doors creaked open.

A blind man walked out and said impatiently, "Follow me."

Without saying a word, Zhang Xuan followed the blind man closely.

The interior of the building was a little dark, creating an eerie atmosphere.

The two of them walked all the way to the innermost room before the blind man suddenly halted and lifted his palm.

Understanding the blind man's gesture, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and passed a token over.

The blind man touched the token carefully to assess its authenticity before nodding slowly. Then, he placed his palm on the wall.

Weng!

There was a soft humming sound, reminiscent of a formation coming to life, and the walls swiftly turned transparent. The blind man walked into a transparent wall and passed through it without any problem.

Zhang Xuan followed behind him.

Proceeding ahead, there was a flight of stairs that led downward. The entire area was shrouded in deep darkness, making it impossible to discern what lay beyond. All one could see were the inscriptions on the ground that served to conceal this place from view.

The flight of stairs was surprisingly short. It did not take them too long to reach the bottom.

Zhang Xuan found himself faced with a boat floating atop an underground river.

He quickly got on top of the boat together with the blind man, and the latter began ferrying him forward. The surroundings were completely dark, such that Zhang Xuan could not see too far ahead even with the Eye of Insight. He could only trust the blind man to take him to where he wanted to go.

For the next hour, all Zhang Xuan could hear was the sound of oars pushing against the water. At some point, the boat bumped lightly against an incredibly large boulder before lodging into it. It swayed for a brief moment before coming to a complete halt.

The blind man got off the boat and led the way forward once more. There was yet another flight of stairs, but this time, it was heading upward. Then, they passed through another wall, and when they finally walked out of the door, they were in a bustling market. It was filled with many different voices, creating a lively atmosphere.

“Wait here for me. I’ll be right back after completing my transaction,” Zhang Xuan instructed before walking into the crowd.

The place he was currently at was the black market of Twilight City!

Where rules existed, people would always find ways to circumvent them, and the black market was such an existence.

The bandit named Streak of Gray would often visit the underground market to sell the goods that he had plundered from the merchants. There were detailed instructions in one of the books in his storage ring on how one could enter the black market.

One could buy practically anything one wanted in this thriving black market, including illegal goods that would be impossible to procure in legal markets. It was just that the prices there tended to be on the higher side.

The manager of this massive black market was a particularly seductive lady in her mid-thirties. There was an exquisite crimson rose filled with thorns tattooed on her neck that hinted at a capricious personality, and the slightly overpowering scent of perfume she emanated served to further reinforce this judgement.

The seductive lady leaned in toward Zhang Xuan as she spoke. “Hey, you look unfamiliar to me...”

“Do you refuse to do business with people who look unfamiliar to you?” Zhang Xuan met her gaze calmly.

“Of course not!” the seductive lady replied as she walked out from the back of the counter. With a smile on her lips, she asked, “May I know what kind of business this dashing young man has with me? We sell all sorts of stuff here, and that includes me.”

After saying those words, she intentionally breathed out slowly on Zhang Xuan’s face.

However, Zhang Xuan remained completely unfazed as he nonchalantly replied, “I need Mayang Beast Blood. Is it possible to acquire it here?”

He already had the Greenbeast Ancient Grass on hand, so as long as he could find some way to obtain some Mayang Beast Blood, he would be able to raise his soul cultivation right away.

“Mayang Beast Blood? The Mayang Beasts are low-tier Celestial Gods, so it won’t be easy to acquire their blood...”

The seductive lady took a step back before looking at Zhang Xuan with a frown on her face.

Celestial God realm divine beasts were mostly able to transmogrify themselves to assume forms similar to those of humans, making it extremely difficult to capture them. As such, procuring their blood was no easy feat.

“I understand. I’ll look for another person to work with.” Zhang Xuan rose to his feet and began walking away.

“Hey, hey, wait a moment!” The seductive lady quickly rushed forward to block his way. “Why are you so hasty? What I said is that it won’t be easy to acquire it, not that I am unable to acquire it...”

“I need a liter of it,” Zhang Xuan added.

“You need so much of it?” The seductive lady frowned at those words. “Since you are here to buy the blood of a Celestial God realm divine beast, I trust that you know how much it’s worth, so I’ll just get straight to the point. Three thousand Divine Coins.”

Three thousand Divine Coins?” It was Zhang Xuan’s turn to frown. “The price doesn’t sound right to me.”

All in all, he had only received roughly six hundred Divine Coins from Streak of Gray, a long way off from three thousand Divine Coins. Was Mayang Beast Blood really that expensive?

He had no idea how much the blood of Celestial God realm divine beasts was worth, but he had a feeling that the price offered to him by the seductive lady was way beyond market price.

He felt that it would cause too much of a ruckus if an ordinary-looking person like him with no particular background was spotted looking around for the blood of a Celestial God realm divine beast on the market, so he had chosen to head to the black market straight away. As such, he actually was not too sure about the pricing.

“I’m sure you understand how difficult it is to procure the blood of Celestial God realm divine beasts. To be frank with you, three thousand Divine Coins really isn’t much. Besides, as a lady living in a shady place like this, how am I going to find a good husband if I don’t earn more while I can?”

The seductive lady slowly walked around Zhang Xuan as she giggled flirtatiously. “If that’s not acceptable, why don’t you marry me then? I’ll give you a discount.”

“Six hundred Divine Coins. I’ll give you some advice in exchange,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Six hundred Divine Coins? Are you here to cause trouble?”

The face of the seductive lady immediately darkened.

Huala!

As soon as she spoke, black-robed middle-aged men swiftly rushed out from the streets. Every single one of them had a fairly strong presence, displaying their might as middle-tier Gods.

“I have no interest in wasting my time on something that doesn’t provide value to me,” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly, unaffected by the sudden turn of events. “If I’m not mistaken, due to the cold, wet, and spiritual energy-deprived environment of the black market, you have been consuming Dampness Expulsion Pills to preserve your youthful appearance.”

The seductive lady scoffed coldly. “What about it?”

Living in the underground regions where the sun would never reach, there were plenty of people there who frequently consumed Dampness Expulsion Pills. It would not take a genius to figure out that she was doing the same.

“It wouldn’t be a problem for others to consume the Dampness Expulsion Pill, but the same doesn’t go for you. If I’m not mistaken, your neck and chest area are filled with red bumps, and you have been unable to get rid of them,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Where did you hear that?” The seductive lady frowned.

The young man was right. Her body was indeed covered in red bumps, and those red bumps emanated an odor. It was for this reason that she had to douse herself in perfume and tattoo her neck with a crimson rose.

“I didn’t have to hear it from anyone to know that. It’s pretty obvious just by looking at you.”

Placing his hands leisurely behind his back, Zhang Xuan continued. “You have been cultivating the yin attribute Rising Tide Cold Wave Art. This cultivation technique requires you to absorb the yin attribute energy from rising tides and cold waves, resulting in your body being wetter than the others. Consuming the Dampness Expulsion Pill appears to have

resolved the various problems you face from living here, but at the same time, it has also deprived you of the essence of your cultivation technique.

“The effectiveness of your cultivation technique has been reduced by half as a result of that, and the growth of those red bumps is just the primary symptom of your condition. As time goes by, your skin will begin to rot, and your rate of cultivation will continue to slow down till it finally stagnates. Eventually, you will go berserk and die.”

“Are you trying to scare me, little boy? Your big sister over here didn’t get this far by trembling in fear!” the seductive lady spat with narrowed eyes.

The other party had hit the mark on quite a few things regarding her, including her cultivation technique and her current condition. However, she still found it hard to believe that a mere Dampness Expulsion Pill could induce such symptoms in her. Furthermore, she had not noticed any major issues in her body thus far.

“Of course not,” Zhang Xuan replied. “Just the Dampness Expulsion Pill itself isn’t potent enough to cause any problems in your body. However, what if we consider the Concealment Formation cast over the underground black market too? Correct me if I’m wrong, but you reside in the southwest area of the black market, right?”

The seductive lady frowned upon hearing how Zhang Xuan was aware of where she lived.

Paying no heed to the seductive lady’s expression, Zhang Xuan said, “The sun rises from the northeast and sets in the southwest. The rise of the sun ushers in the birth of the yang energy, and the setting of the sun symbolizes the opening of the yin gates. Southwest is the direction where yin and yang intersect with one another. Most life usually thrives in such a place, but that happens to be the very opposite for you.

The Rising Tide Cold Wave Art is a pure yin cultivation technique, so the conditions of the southwest should have been ideal for you to advance your cultivation. However, you chose to consume Dampness Expulsion Pills, which in turn makes

you extremely vulnerable to yang energy. As a result, there's a chaotic mess of yin and yang ravaging your body at this very moment. The growth of red bumps is just the starting symptom.”

2117 Beauty Pill

“This...”

The seductive lady was rendered speechless.

She had previously thought that the young man was just making up lies to scare her, but after hearing what he had to say, doubts began to arise in her mind.

The area that she was living in was indeed the southwest area of this underground black market. She had chosen the area because it was close to the underground river, which would have made it easier for her to absorb the yin energy from the damp environment and further her cultivation.

However, if what the young man said was true, she had made a major mistake.

“Are you still doubting my words?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “The Concealment Formation of this underground black market is powered by the underground river, so it carries a tinge of yin. It’s this yin attribute that allows the underground black market to circumvent the Spiritual Perception of a Celestial God, thus allowing it to remain hidden from the world.

“The southwest region happens to be where the yin energy originates. Living there is bound to eventually cause some problems to your body...”

“Enough. I don’t deny that there’s some truth to what you are saying, but anyone can come up with a believable theory. There’s no concrete evidence to prove that what you are saying is true. Unless...”

With a wave of her hand, the seductive lady gestured for the four middle-aged men to back off before looking at Zhang Xuan once more. “Do you have a way to make my red bumps disappear? If so, I can sell you the Mayang Beast Blood at the price you mentioned.”

“That isn’t a problem at all,” Zhang Xuan said. “Pass me ten bottles of God Essence Pills.”

Ten bottles of God Essence Pills?” the seductive lady asked doubtfully for confirmation.

As spiritual energy receded from the Firmament, the value of God Essence Pills had been continuously on the rise. While she was still able to afford ten bottles of God Essence Pills, it was still a substantial sum to her.

“Indeed. If you wish to resolve your affliction, you’ll need to pay a certain price. God Essence Pills are usually used as a source of spiritual energy, but they can do much more than that. Of course, if you are unwilling to pay the price, you can just ignore what I just said. Three thousand Divine Coins isn’t a small sum, but I believe it shouldn’t take me too long to acquire it with my means!” Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand.

“Very well, I’ll trust you this once. However, if you are unable to solve my affliction, you need not think of leaving here alive!” The seductive lady harrumphed coldly.

“It’s your first time here so you might be unaware of it, but the underground black market is a lawless place, unlike Twilight City. No one will say a thing even if I kill you right here, right now!”

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan simply stood quietly on the spot. He could not be bothered to even respond to the seductive lady’s threats.

Soon enough, the ten bottles of God Essence Pills were brought right before Zhang Xuan.

“I need an isolated chamber in order to refine these God Essence Pills into something that can resolve your affliction,” Zhang Xuan said.

The seductive lady stared at Zhang Xuan quietly for a moment before waving her hand impatiently. An attendant immediately stepped forward and led Zhang Xuan over to a chamber.

Entering the chamber, Zhang Xuan closed the door before setting up multiple layers of isolation barriers.

After that was done, he took out a single God Essence Pill, and with a tap of his finger, he infused a surge of Heaven's Path zhenqi it.

The affliction that the seductive lady was suffering from was by no means easy to cure. However, the attributeless Heaven's Path zhenqi was exceptionally powerful in assimilating all sorts of energy and fusing them together, making it the perfect cure.

The reason he had asked for ten bottles of God Essence Pills was, of course, so that he could use them himself. In order to raise his cultivation swiftly, he was bound to require as many cultivation resources as possible.

In any case, the underground black market was bound to have done many evil deeds over the years, so he did not feel any guilt obtaining these God Essence Pills from her.

He kept the placed of the God Essence Pills into his storage ring and waited in the isolated chamber for roughly fifteen minutes before walking out of the room with a pale face.

As soon as he walked out of the room, he saw the seductive lady standing right in front of the entrance, as if trying to prevent him from running away.

Zhang Xuan passed the God Essence pill infused with his Heaven's Path zhenqi over and said, "Swallow this pill!"

"You used ten bottles of God Essence Pills to forge a single one?" The seductive lady looked at Zhang Xuan suspiciously.

A single bottle contains ten God Essence Pills, which means that I have given you a hundred pills in total. Yet, all you returned me is a single God Essence Pill...

it doesn't seem like the God Essence Pill has changed in any way either... Do you take me for a fool?

"Just give it a try, and you'll know whether it's worth the price or not," Zhang Xuan replied with a confident smile.

The seductive lady carefully assessed the pill to check if it was laced with poison before swallowing it. A moment later, her eyes lit up.

She quickly lifted her hand to touch the crimson rose on her neck before ripping her robe to examine her body. Overwhelmed with agitation, her body simply would not stop trembling.

The medicine that the young man had given her was truly miraculous! Within just two minutes of consuming it, the red bumps that had plagued her for over two years actually vanished entirely! At the same time, she found her body feeling lighter than ever.

Was this medicine not a little too amazing?

“You...” The seductive lady stared at Zhang Xuan in shock.

She had tried all kinds of medicine and visited all sorts of physicians in order to resolve her affliction, but nothing had worked. It was with no other choice that she had resorted to using perfume and tattoos to hide the symptoms.

Who could have known that the young man would be able to see through the root of her problem and solve it with a single pill?

This was too frightening!

“Boss, I don’t know if I’m seeing things, but your complexion seems to be much better than before!” one of the middle- aged men remarked.

The seductive lady was surprised to hear such words. She quickly took out a mirror, and her eyes widened in astonishment when she saw her own appearance.

Due to her affliction, her skin had become a little rough and coarse. As a result, she had no choice but to apply a thick layer of foundation in order to conceal her worsening skin tone. Yet, just by eating that pill, not only did she manage to get rid of the red bumps, her skin also became much smoother.

It was almost as if time had regressed a decade for her!

Was this medicine really that incredible?

“Do you have any more of that medicine?” the seductive lady asked.

She had resolved the problem of the red bumps for the moment, but she was not certain if she would suffer a relapse in the future. What would she do if she did not have any more medicine then?

Besides, even if she did not suffer a relapse, the pill would still allow her to preserve her youthful appearance. Just this was enough to make her spend huge sums of money on it!

“It took me half my life just to successfully forge this single pill, but you still want more? Bring me another ten bottles of God Essence Pills!” Zhang Xuan said.

The reason the other party suffered from the red bumps was due to her inability to amalgamate the yin energy and yang energy within her body properly. That was a problem that could easily be solved with his Heaven’s Path zhenqi.

However... what was with her complexion getting better and more youthful?

Could it be that his Heaven’s Path zhenqi had become much more potent after he started cultivating the Pathos of Heavens?

A thought arose in Zhang Xuan’s mind.

A person’s emotions can affect their appearance as well. This is similar to how a person in love will look as if they’re glowing. Could it be that my Pathos of Heavens has changed the nature of my Heaven’s Path zhenqi?

Emotions were known to be a source of motivation and tendencies, but they could create tangible differences in one’s appearance as well. There was a saying that those who were constantly happy would age slower than those plagued with worries.

Who could have known that comprehending the Pathos of Heavens would have such an effect on the Heaven’s Path zhenqi?

“Give me a moment...”

The seductive lady quickly headed out, and a moment later, she returned with another ten bottles of God Essence Pills.

“I’ll forge another one for you right now,” Zhang Xuan said as he returned to the isolated room.

Another fifteen minutes later, he walked out with a face even paler than before, such that it looked as if he would stumble and faint at any moment.

The seductive lady took an even more detailed look at the pill this time around, analyzing even the slightest marks on it. However, she was still unable to discern any differences between it and a normal God Essence Pill.

After a moment of contemplation, she raised her hand and relayed some instructions to one of the middle-aged men.

Soon, a middle-aged lady was brought over.

Possessing the cultivation of a middle-tier God, she appeared to be in her forties. However, it was likely that she was much older than that as there were signs of age spots on her skin, and her skin tone had turned a little yellowish.

It was likely that she was around seventy to eighty years old.

Having read through the book left behind by Streak of Gray, Zhang Xuan had gained some understanding of the average lifespan of gods in the Firmament.

Before the receding of spiritual energy, normal gods would usually be able to live to 150 and beyond. However, due to the worsening environmental conditions, most cultivators could only live till eighty nowadays.

As for Semi-Divinities, those who could live to sixty could already be considered to have lived a long life.

The only way for a god to lengthen their lifespan was to rise to the level of a Celestial God. Celestial Gods enjoyed a lifespan of around a thousand years.

God Kings were known to be able to live ten thousand years, and Conferred God Kings were rumored to have at least a hundred thousand years to their lifespan.

As for God Monarchs...

The Nine God Monarchs were known to have existed ever since the Firmament came to be. In the eyes of the world, they were eternal existences that could never be destroyed.

“Swallow this pill!” the seductive lady said.

Without any hesitation, the middle-aged lady took the pill and swallowed it.

A moment later, her appearance began to change. Her age spots gradually lightened till they could not be seen anymore, and her face began to glow with vitality. It was almost as if someone had reversed her time by decades, returning her to the time when she was still an alluring lady in her early thirties.

“This...”

The middle-aged lady looked at her new appearance in the mirror with her mouth agape.

There were plenty of capable geniuses in the Firmament, but none of them were able to create such a miraculous beautifying pill. Even the most expensive beautifying pill available on the market would not be able to pull off such a transformative change in one go!

The middle-aged lady felt as if she had been born anew through the pill.

“It’s indeed effective... Hahaha! With this, even if I cast aside the underground black market, I’ll still have a never-ending supply of money!”

With an excited gleam in her eyes, the seductive lady looked at Zhang Xuan and said, “Brother, may I know how I should address you?”

It had just been a transaction between the both of them previously, so it would not matter even if they did not know each other’s names. They would soon part with one another and likely never see one another again.

However, the situation had changed. The person standing before her was a potential business partner.

“Zhang Xuan.”

“I am Qi Ling-er. I believe that you are aware that the pill you forged has the effect of bestowing a person with a second youth. So, why don't we work together to turn this into a huge business? You'll be responsible for forging the pills, and I'll secure the distribution network to sell the pills. As for the profits, how does 50:50 sound to you?” the seductive lady, Qi Ling-er, offered.

“50:50? Sounds fine by me.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Considering the widespread connections that she had built up over the years as the boss of the underground black market, it was not unreasonable for her to demand half of the profits. Besides, it would not be too much trouble for him to forge the pills anyway.

“Good! First and foremost, I need you to forge ten of these pills for me. I'll be marketing them in Twilight City over the next few days in order to create some hype,” Qi Ling-er instructed.

“That isn't a problem, but I will need sufficient God Essence Pills for that,” Zhang Xuan said as he looked at Qi Ling-er.

“I understand. However, the God Essence Pills will be treated as the cost of our business venture,” Qi Ling-er replied with a soft chuckle. “A God Essence Pill costs around a Divine Coin, so ten bottles of them amount to one hundred Divine Coins.”

“Let's do just that then.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

2118 Descendant of a God Monarch

Low-tier God Essence Pills could be used by those whose cultivation was beneath the Celestial God realm. Zhang Xuan was still a long way off from becoming a Celestial God, so he was bound to need a lot of them. Not to mention, he had a lot of people behind him that he needed to take care of.

“Great!” Having received Zhang Xuan’s approval, Qi Ling-er turned to the middle-aged man behind her and said, Tell Old Ye that I’ll be taking all the God Essence Pills he has.”

The middle-aged man nodded before backing out of the room. Soon, he returned with a storage ring in hand.

“Boss, I bought all of his God Essence Pills. There’s a total of three hundred of them in here. He says that he’ll find a way to procure more if you still need more of them.”

“Good.” Qi Ling-er nodded in response. She quickly moved the God Essence Pills in the storage ring into another one before passing it over to Zhang Xuan. “I have 1,3〇〇 God Essence Pills here. I need thirteen pills. I know that you are still in a feeble condition at the moment, so I’ll give you ten days to forge the pills.”

“There’s no need for that. I don’t like putting things off for later. Wait here for a moment. I’ll pass them over to you in a moment’s time.”

Zhang Xuan dragged his weakly slumping body into the isolated chamber and closed it shut. Around fifteen minutes later, he walked out and passed two jade bottles over to Qi Ling-er.

He looked even more haggard than before. His face was pale, and a trail of blood was trickling down his lips. His body was swaying weakly from side to side, and he looked so exhausted

that it was hard to believe that someone could remain alive in such a state.

After prying open the jade bottle to take a look, Qi Ling-er widened her eyes in surprise.

This is... twenty pills?”

Previously, the young man had only been able to make a single pill out of one hundred God Essence Pills, so she was delighted to see that there seven extra in the jade bottle.

“I was lucky to succeed more this time,” Zhang Xuan replied hoarsely.

“Wonderful, you have truly done well! This is a Divine Card that is commonly used in the Firmament. I’ll be transferring the profits from the pills directly into the card, and the amount will be fifty percent of the profits, just as we agreed on before,” Qi Ling-er said gleefully as she passed a card over.

Zhang Xuan could tell that the Divine Card was likely to be equal in terms of value to a storage ring, so he accepted it with a satisfied smile. Then, he asked, “As for my Mayang Beast Blood...”

•You’ll have to wait a day for the Mayang Beast Blood to arrive. I don’t have that much here at the moment, so I’ll ne[^] to have the goods transferred over from the other black markets. Even at the fastest speed, it’ll still take a day at the minimum,” Qi Ling-er replied.

“Don’t worry, I always make sure to take good care of my business partners. As for the money, there’s no need for you to give it to me. We’ll just deduct it from your share of the profits, alright?”

Zhang Xuan nodded in response before bidding farewell. “I’ll be taking my leave then.”

After saying his piece, he turned around and left the store. He swiftly found the blind man and returned to Twilight City via the same boat.

As soon as he left, the middle-aged lady who had consumed the beautifying pill earlier asked, “Young Mistress, since that

fellow was able to create such a formidable pill, why don't we just imprison him and force him to fork out the pill formula? Isn't it a huge waste to share the profits with him?"

Qi Ling-er was providing the raw materials and handling the marketing, the distribution network, and everything else. All the young man had was the know-how to forge the pills. There was no reason for them to pay him such a huge amount of money for that.

It was not as if they were in Twilight City. As long as they captured the young man, it was only a matter of time before he was forced to spit out the formula.

"Do you think that he overexerted himself while forging the pills earlier?" Qi Ling-er suddenly asked.

"Isn't that so? I checked on his condition, and it appeared that his vitality was impaired due to pushing himself too far," the middle-aged lady replied with a frown.

"I understand that the process of forging this pill can be highly damaging to one's body, but as long as we offer a decent price, I believe there should still be plenty of apothecaries who will be more than willing to offer their services..."

Humans were creatures who would charge into danger for the sake of fulfilling their greed.

Qi Ling-er shook her head. "He is feigning weakness."

"Feigning weakness?" the middle-aged lady repeated in astonishment.

"That's right," Qi Ling-er said. "Despite his severely weakened appearance and aura earlier, I sensed that his soul remained wholesome. There weren't any signs of deterioration at all. That goes to show that he wasn't injured in the first place.

"As a low-tier God, he wouldn't pose a threat to us regardless of whether he was injured or not. However, the token that he used to enter the underground black market belonged to Streak of Gray, and I received news that Streak of Gray and his band were utterly defeated by an unknown fellow last night. According to what I heard, Streak of Gray wasn't able to hold

his ground against his opponent even in a one-on-one fight. Chances are, the person he fought with was that young man.”

“Young Mistress, are you saying that the lad possesses the strength to subdue middle-tier Gods despite only being a low-tier God himself?” The middle-aged lady was taken aback by that news.

A thought surfaced in her mind, and she hurriedly added, “Does it mean that he possesses an exceptionally powerful bloodline?”

There was a significant power gap between every cultivation realm after reaching godhood, thus making the hierarchy of power among gods extremely strict. To put it simply, it was viewed to be impossible for a god to defeat opponents of a higher cultivation realm.

There were only two possibilities if someone was able to pull something like that off.

The first possibility was that the individual was a genius that boasted unbelievable talent, similar to the Heaven Subjugating Monarch. Through sheer talent, these geniuses were able to surpass the limitations of their bloodline to reach a height beyond any of their predecessors. However, these geniuses were extremely rare to come by, and most of them already possessed exceptional strength at a young age.

The second possibility was that the individual possessed an extremely powerful bloodline, similar to that of the Dragon Tribe, Phoenix Tribe, or some other unique divine beast.

Given that the young man was already in his twenties, it was unlikely for his talents to have not bloomed yet. The fact that he was still low-tier God at his age meant that his talent was average or subpar. So, it was more likely for him to possess a powerful bloodline!

Most formidable divine beasts, prior to their transmogrification, would tend to advance their cultivation slowly, so their strength would be rather limited in their earlier years.

“We’ll know whether that’s the case or not with a quick test,” Qi Ling-er remarked calmly.

She waited quietly on the spot for a moment before one of the middle-aged men brought a bottle before her.

Qi Ling-er took the bottle, inspected its contents, and chuckled softly. “This is the fresh blood that he has spat out while he was forging the pills in order to deceive us. Even though it has already dried up, it’s still possible to test the strength of the bloodline.

“We’ll set his dried blood alight on the Netherworld Pool to pay respects to the heroic spirits of the preceding Celestial Gods, God Kings, and Conferred God Kings worshipped by Netherworld Palace. If the heroic spirits are able to harness the blood, it means that the young man’s bloodline is beneath them. On the other hand, if the heroic spirits dissipate, it means that the young man’s bloodline is more powerful than theirs...

“If the young man’s bloodline is more powerful than theirs, it’s highly likely that he has powerful backing behind him. It would be courting death to touch such a person... On the other hand, if his bloodline is weak, I have left a Soul Imprint on the Divine Card that allows us to track him down whenever we want to. Hahaha! My business partner should at least have enough strength not to be devoured whole by me in order to work with me, don’t you think?”

“I understand.” The middle-aged lady nodded, impressed by how thorough the Young Mistress was in dealing with matters.

Then again, there was no way an incapable individual would have been to govern such a massive underground black market.

Having made their decisions, the two of them quickly changed their clothes and put on disguises before leaving the black market. Two hours later, they arrived at Netherworld Palace, where Zhang Xuan had been earlier.

Through their connections, they were able to head straight to a tightly sealed room.

At the very forefront of the room was an altar filled with many rows of tablets. Each of these tablets represented a renowned expert of the Sky of Drifting Specters.

Out of respect for the predecessors, this room was carefully maintained by those of the Netherworld Hall, such that there was not the slightest speck of dust to be seen around. From time to time, visitors would stop by to pay respects to the predecessors.

At the center of the room was a crimson pool that was filled with an unidentifiable fluid that bubbled furiously, emanating domineering energy that left one's heart thumping fearfully.

“Let's begin!”

With a toss, Qi Ling-er threw the jade bottle filled with the dried blood that she had acquired from Zhang Xuan earlier toward the crimson pool.

Tzzz!

The dried blood immediately burst into flames.

Sensing the energy emanating from the dried blood, a powerful presence swiftly emerged from the crimson pool, creating great pressure on the surroundings.

Weng!

An illusory middle-aged man dressed in a tight suit of armor manifested above the crimson pool. He raised his sword to strike down on the blazing dried blood.

“It's the heroic spirit of Celestial God Wu Jiang!” Qi Ling-er recognized the armored middle-aged man.

Celestial God Wu Jiang was not from Twilight City, but he possessed great fame in the Sky of Drifting Specters. He had made great contributions during the first receding of spiritual energy, and even when he was encircled by his enemies, he had managed to kill several experts of the same caliber as him before finally succumbing.

It was due to this that his tablet was allowed to be placed on the altar to be worshipped despite only being a Celestial God.

Through the powers of the Netherworld Pool, he would be able to forge a heroic spirit and continue existing in the world.

Just as the sword was about to strike down on the burning blood, an illusory figure suddenly manifested right above the blood. It was the young man whom they had met earlier.

The young man had his eyes tightly shut. It seemed like he did not know where he was or what was happening at all.

Paying no heed to Celestial God Wu Jiang's incoming sword, he stood motionless on the spot and muttered some words beneath his breath.

Hearing those words, Celestial God Wu Jiang froze. A moment later, his knee caved in, and he knelt on the ground.

"He is... paying respects to the young man?" Qi Ling-er's eyes narrowed in disbelief. "Does this mean that the young man carries the bloodline of a God King?"

There was only one instance where a Celestial God would bow down to another person, and that was if the person's bloodline was stronger than his...

The only beings possessing stronger bloodlines than the Celestial Gods were the God Kings!

Even the city lord of Twilight City was only a low-tier Celestial God, but this young man actually possessed a bloodline that was comparable to the God Kings? Did that not mean that there was a good chance that he might become a God King in the future?

Hu!

Shortly after Celestial God Wu Jiang knelt down, the crimson pool began to bubble furiously once more, and yet another illusory figure manifested in the air. This time, it was a young man with a crown on his head. He carried a spear in his hands, and he stood with imposing airs.

"It is the God King of Transcendent Flames! I have heard of his legend before. With a spear in hand, he achieved the outstanding record of slaying three God Kings one after another, making him a feared existence even among the God

Kings. If not for his premature death, he might very well have become a Conferred God King by now..." Qi Ling-er clenched her fists tightly as she spoke in agitation.

In the midst of her words, the illusory figure of the God King walked over to the young man and thrust his spear toward him.

Just as everyone thought that the powerful God King of Transcendent Flames would devour the young man whole in order to buff himself, the spear suddenly halted at the very last moment. Then, just like Celestial God Wu Jiang, he knelt on the ground like an obedient student.

Qi Ling-er felt a little light-headed upon witnessing such a sight.

Even a God King had submitted to him?

Just how powerful could that fellow's bloodline be?

Sou!

The crimson pool bubbled yet again, and another illusory figure manifested in the air.

Dressed in a silver helmet and armor, this young man carried whips in both hands. His arms were bulging with power, hinting at the unbelievable strength that he wielded.

"It's Conferred God Nangong Ping!" Qi Ling-er exclaimed with a hushed voice, fearing that she would offend the other party.

Conferred God Kings were existences who enjoyed lifespans of beyond a hundred thousand years. Under normal circumstances, it was extremely difficult for them to die. However, there were exceptions.

Forty years prior, Nangong Ping's body had been torn to shreds by a single finger of the Heaven Subjugation Monarch, leading to instant death.

Even though he was defeated by a single finger, that did not mean that he was weak. It would be sheer naivety to think that a person who could rise to a position that was second only to the God Monarchs could possibly be weak.

The young man should finally cave in!

Nangong Ping brandished his whip to strike the young man.

But before anyone could react, he suddenly retracted his whip and knelt down beside Celestial Wu Jiang and the God King of Transcendent Flames.

“Even a Conferred God King has kneeled down to him. Could it be that...”

The cheeks of Qi Ling-er and the middle-aged lady quivered as a terrifying thought popped in their minds.

“... the bloodline of a God Monarch?”

2119 Valley of Falling Clouds

God Monarchs.

They were existences who stood at the very peak of the Nine Skies and the Ten Thousand Worlds.

Every single one of them wielded transcendental powers such that even the Firmament would bow to their wills, making them beings that none dared oppose.

And the young man whom they had met earlier actually carried the bloodline of such powerful experts? What the heck was going on?

“Is there a mistake somewhere?” the middle-aged lady asked with a meek voice. “Based on what I know, His Majesty Demon Monarch Qiankun doesn’t have any offspring or successors...”

There were only nine God Monarchs in the world, so those who possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch would have to be a direct descendant of the nine of them. However, the God Monarch of the Sky of Drifting Specters was the Qiankun Demon Monarch. It was a known fact in the Firmament that he was single and did not have any offspring, so how could a person who possessed his bloodline suddenly appear out of nowhere?

“There are ten God Monarchs in the Nine Skies. Just because the young man appeared in the Sky of Drifting Specters doesn’t necessarily mean that he’s the offspring of God Monarch Qiankun,” Qi Ling-er replied with a quivering voice. “Based on the information I received, back when he was killing Streak of Gray, he used a powerful sword art. Using the words of the informant, ‘the conceptualization of the sword art was more profound than anything I have seen before’...”

The middle-aged lady widened her eyes. “Young Mistress, do you mean to say that there’s a good chance that he’s someone

from the Sky of Heavenly Sword? The descendant of the retired Sword God of the Sword Hut?”

“I have no way of knowing that for sure. I dare not speak carelessly about the affairs of the God Monarchs...” Qi Ling-er shook her head before taking in a deep breath to calm herself. Then, she said, “Make sure not to speak of this matter to anyone else.”

“I understand.” The middle-aged lady quickly nodded in response.

Even if Qi Ling-er had not said such a thing, she also would not dare speak lightly about the personal affairs concerning a God Monarch.

“Pass down my order. We’ll be increasing his share of the profit to 9:1. If he asks for something, no matter what it is, make sure to fulfill his requests by hook or by crook. Also, regarding the Mayang Beast Blood, have it sent over to him as quickly as possible!” Qi Ling-er swiftly passed down a series of instructions.

Given that she was dealing with the offspring of a God Monarch, it was very clear what she had to do.

Even if the young man was not from the main lineage, as someone who possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch, he was bound to reach great heights in the future. Furthermore, how could someone like that possibly not have any experts protecting him by his side?

Only those who were tired of living would dare provoke him!

“I’ll have it done right now!” The middle-aged lady quickly left the room.

Qi Ling-er looked at the three illusory figures kneeling before the young man for a moment longer with a complex look in her eyes before leaving the room as well.

“She even left a Soul Imprint on it...”

After returning to Twilight City, Zhang Xuan took out the Divine Card while walking out of the building and scanned it carefully with his Eye of Insight.

The Soul Imprint was left very discreetly, but there was no way it could have slipped past his detection.

Zhang Xuan channeled a surge of Heaven's Path zhenqi into the Divine Card and destroyed the Soul Imprint.

Walking down the streets, he stretched his back lazily as his pale face swiftly regained a reddened glow. At the same time, he pondered, "I should be able to raise my soul cultivation once I receive the Mayang Beast Blood, so I should think of ways to cultivate my physical body now."

Having acquired sufficient God Essence Pills, he was confident that he would be able to raise his cultivation swiftly. However, before raising his zhenqi cultivation, he would have to train his physical body and raise his soul cultivation too.

"The best way to temper my body is using the blood of divine beasts!"

There was a common consensus among cultivators that it was difficult to train one's physical body. If he just absorbed spiritual energy to refine his body, it would take him ages before he would be able to achieve a breakthrough.

However, if he could acquire the blood of divine beasts, the process could be hastened significantly.

Such a method made use of the power of the divine beast's bloodline. The more powerful the bloodline was, the more pronounced the effects would be.

And the most powerful divine beast in the Firmament was indubitably the Pureblooded Dragons!

The problem was that it was already difficult enough for him to procure the blood of a Mayang Beast, an ordinary Celestial God realm divine beast, let alone the blood of a Pureblooded Dragon.

"Forget it! I should first head over to the Divine Beast Market to take a look!"

There were markets selling divine beasts in the Firmament as well, but beasts that were sold there were extremely weak and

had yet to transmogrify, such as the rabbits that he had failed to hunt time and time again at the Grand Spirit Mountain.

As for the powerful divine beasts who were able to transmogrify, there was no way anyone would dare sell them in an open market. If someone laid even a finger on one of them, the rest of their pack would immediately rush forward to exact vengeance!

The Divine Beast Market was located not too far away from his current location. Riding on his steed, it took him just an hour to arrive at his destination.

Located at the edge of the city where the price of land was lower, the Divine Beast Market spanned over a huge plot of land.

Of the divine beasts on sale, most of them were captured by hunters to be sold. However, there were also some that came over voluntarily to be sold as well.

The spiritual energy beyond the walls of established cities had already reached a dire level. If a divine beast wanted to grow stronger, it would have to find a way to enter a city... and becoming the tamed beast of a human was the most direct way to do so.

In the Firmament, there was no occupation called beast tamer. As long as a cultivator was willing to provide an opportunity to cultivate, there were many divine beasts that would leap at the opportunity.

Zhang Xuan swiftly found the manager of the place and asked, "May I know if you have any divine beasts here who possess the Dragon Bloodline?"

"Dragon Bloodline? Dear guest, you must be joking!"

The manager was shocked by how audacious Zhang Xuan's words were.

Zhang Xuan shook his head and replied, "I'm not. I'm being serious."

Seeing that the young man really knew nothing at all, the manager explained with a hushed voice, "Those who are in the

business of trading divine beasts would know that the Dragon Tribe is the royalty of the eastern Sky of Cloud Dragon. Any beasts who are found to possess the Dragon Bloodline must be sent over right away. Anyone who dares to sell a descendant of the Dragon Tribe will be executed without exception!”

“The royalty of the Sky of Cloud Dragon?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

This was the first he had heard of such a thing. Most of what he knew about the Firmament came from Mo Yuan’s explanation and Streak of Gray’s books.

If the Sky of Cloud Dragon passed down such an order, it was indeed unlikely for anyone to challenge its authority.

Could it be that... the God Monarch of the Sky of Cloud Dragon is a Pureblooded Dragon? Zhang Xuan thought.

He had long heard about the tremendous prowess of the Dragon Tribe even while he was still on the Master Teacher Continent. However, to date, he had not met a real Pureblooded Dragon, so he was unable to gauge how powerful they were.

Considering the name of the Sky of Cloud Dragon, as well as the fact that members of the Dragon Tribe were considered their royalty, it did seem likely for the God Monarch to be a real Pureblooded Dragon.

Knowing that the manager would be reluctant to talk about experts of that caliber so lightly for fear of his safety,

Zhang Xuan decided to get straight to the matter at hand. “I need some divine beast blood to temper my physical body. Do you have anything appropriate?”

Since it was impossible to procure beasts possessing the Dragon Bloodline, he could only compromise and go for something else. As long as he could raise his physical body to the level of a high-tier God, he would be able to raise his cultivation swiftly.

The last time he cultivated, he realized that the ‘Camaraderie of Brothers’ he had comprehended was enough for him to cultivate up to high-tier God realm.

The Greenbeast Ancient Grass and Mayang Beast Blood would be able to get his soul cultivation up to high-tier God realm, and he already had sufficient God Essence Pills on hand to raise his zhenqi cultivation up to that level.

So, as long as he could acquire what he needed to temper his physical body, he would be able to raise his cultivation all the way to high-tier God realm in one shot.

“Temper your physical body?”

The manager thought deeply for a moment before shaking his head.

“I’m afraid that we don’t have anything that fits your criteria. However, I heard that there’s a high-tier God realm Phosphor Armored Beast in the Valley of Fallen Clouds. It’s known for its powerful defense and physical body. Even a Celestial God of our city lord’s caliber would have trouble breaking through its defense! Its bloodline should be exceptionally effective in tempering one’s physical body. We have tried to capture and tame it on multiple occasions, but nothing worked. So, we had no choice but to drop the idea in the end. If you really need something to temper your physical body, perhaps you could give it a try.”

“Phosphor Armored Beast?”

“That’s right. However, that fellow isn’t easy to find, and it’s particularly vicious as well. Over the years, those who tried to tame it ended up getting devoured by it,” the manager said.

“Where is the Valley of Falling Clouds?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It’s directly north of here. If you ride on an aerial divine beast, it’ll only take you roughly six hours,” the manager said with a chuckle. “You don’t have an aerial divine beast yet, right? Why don’t you buy one from me here? I have quite a few good ones in stock.”

“Is that so? I want a fast one then,” Zhang Xuan said.

The Firmament was even larger than the Azure and the Master Teacher Continent, so it would be much more convenient if he could travel on an aerial divine beast.

Soon, the transaction was completed.

Zhang Xuan spent roughly twenty Divine Coins to buy a low-tier God realm aerial divine beast.

Watching Zhang Xuan leave, the lips of the manager curled into a cold sneer as he scoffed, “Yet another fool! Does he think that the Phosphor Armored Beast can be captured that easily? If that’s the case, the City Lord Manor would have long made a move! There’s no way they would have left such a treasure lying around for so long!”

After saying his piece, the manager turned to the apprentice beside him and said, “Did you see that? That’s how you manage to get sales! You need to fulfill the demands of your customers while making use of the opportunity to promote your products. Make sure to take note of this while you are dealing with customers!”

Seated on the back of the divine beast, Zhang Xuan closed his eyes and cultivated.

He consumed a few more God Essence Pills to reinforce his cultivation further, and in the process of doing so, he realized that if he forced a breakthrough to middle-tier God, he would really risk placing a huge burden on his body. Thus, he could only stop his cultivation with a helpless sigh.

The Firmament was vastly different from what he had imagined.

Somehow, the gods did not appear to be as happy as he thought they would be. Instead, it felt like people were much happier and content on the Master Teacher Continent.

After leaving the city, the spiritual energy in the air immediately became incredibly thin. At the same time, the wind currents in the sky grew tumultuous.

Fortunately, the divine beast was not flying at too high an altitude, and Zhang Xuan was no longer as weak as he had been. So, the strong wind currents did not pose much of a problem to them.

Four hours later, a massive valley appeared before their eyes. The setting sun fell at the very center of the valley, dyeing the

two cliffs of the valley a brilliant shade of scarlet.

The aerial divine beast descended right in front of the valley. Zhang Xuan instructed it to find a place to rest in the vicinity before heading into the valley.

Based on what he had heard from the manager previously, the Phosphor Armored Beast should be somewhere in there. As long as he could find it and procure some blood from it, he would be able to immediately raise his cultivation to greater heights.

The valley was much larger than it looked outside.

Zhang Xuan walked for two hours straight, to the point that the sun had set, but he was still unable to find anything. Disappointed, he was just about to return to Twilight City when he saw a faint flame in front of him. It appeared to be a bonfire.

Zhang Xuan frowned. Could it be that there's someone else looking for the Phosphor Armored Beast here?

This valley was remote, sparse in spiritual energy, and did not have any valuable medicinal herbs or anything. It was likely that the person who had started the bonfire had gone there with the same motive as him.

After all, even the manager of the Divine Beast Market was aware of the existence of the Phosphor Armored Beast, and it did not seem like he had any qualms telling others about the matter. It stood to reason that there should be quite a few people in Twilight City who knew about this matter.

Similar to how it was on the Master Teacher Continent, whenever a powerful beast appeared, plenty of people would gather around to try their luck. If they could somehow tame the beast, their fighting prowess would rise by leaps and bounds.

Even though the beast tamer occupation did not mean anything here anymore, taming high-tier divine beasts was likely to be no easy feat.

I should head over to take a look.

With such a thought in mind, Zhang Xuan began advancing carefully in the direction of the flame.

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Zhang Xuan stopped roughly a hundred meters away from the flames and hid behind the leaves of a large tree.

He reined in his aura to conceal his presence before discreetly peeking at the sight ahead of him.

The bonfire was lit right in front of a cavern. Seated in front of the bonfire was a powerfully-built young man. He was roasting a skinned gazelle above the bonfire.

Roasted to golden perfection, a thin layer of juicy oil could be seen seeping out of the gazelle. Even from a distance away, one could smell the saliva-inducing fragrance.

Roasting out here in the middle of the night? Zhang Xuan frowned in confusion.

He had encountered a gazelle during his time at the Grand Spirit Mountain. He had tried to capture it in hopes that it could improve the diet of the group, but even though the gazelle was not too strong, it was fast on its feet. The rate at which it was able to climb cliffs was even faster than a monkey climbing a tree.

Even with his current strength, he felt that he would still have some difficulties trying to capture one. Yet, this brawny young man was actually able to hunt one down. Furthermore, he was even roasting it so openly in the middle of the night, not fearing the high-tier God realm Phosphor Armored Beast at all.

From the looks of it, it seemed like he possessed strength that should not be underestimated.

Zhang Xuan was perplexed, but he waited quietly on the spot.

Soon, the gazelle was finally cooked. The young man tore off a leg and began biting the meat in large mouthfuls. Between bites, he would gulp down wine from the gourd placed beside his foot heartily.

It did not take him long to finish the gourd of wine, so he casually took out another one from his storage ring and continued drinking.

In less than fifteen minutes, he had already eaten half of the gazelle and downed three gourds full of wine.

His face was flushed from intoxication, and his head was swaying from side to side. It appeared as if he was going to doze off very soon.

Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

Does he really have the skill to back it up, or is that just blind courage?

He had learned from experience that the darkness of the jungle was fraught with danger. Many ferocious beasts would choose to make a move at this time, yet the young man still roasted his meat so openly.

Just the scent coming from the meat was enough to cause him a great deal of trouble!

More importantly, he even drank wine! What if someone attacked him at this moment? Would he really be able to protect himself properly?

Zhang Xuan was a little bewildered by the young man's actions, but he still chose to keep his distance and watch on.

The reason he had gone there was to hunt down the Phosphor Armored Beast. There was a good chance that the young man was there for the same purpose, making them competitors.

It would be to his benefit for the young man to drink himself silly. That would spare him a great deal of trouble.

Hu hu!

Soon, the sound of thunderous snoring filled the air.

Less than an hour after stuffing himself full, this fellow fell asleep without any hesitation. Furthermore, it looked like he had completely dropped his guard, not even maintaining a basic level of awareness.

Forget it, I should just circumvent him!

Zhang Xuan slid down the tree and proceeded to take a detour around the cavern.

Based on what he had heard from the manager, the Phosphor Armored Beast resided in this valley. After walking around for so long, he was nearing the end of the valley. He should be able to find the Phosphor Armored Beast ahead.

Since the young man was asleep, it was a good chance for him to proceed and take the lead.

Barely after taking a few steps, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows suddenly shot up in alarm. He swiftly flitted to the side and hid amid the crown of a large tree.

After he hid himself, two cold flashes of light appeared amid the bushes not too far away from where he was.

With a grim look on his face, Zhang Xuan activated the Eye of Insight to take a closer look. It allowed him to peer through the darkness to discern the happenings around him clearly.

There were two figures dressed in black garbs hidden amid the bushes. The two cold flashes of light had originated from the reflection of the moon off their weapons.

Zhang Xuan was slightly surprised by their presence because he had not noticed them till just a moment ago, so he could not help but wonder when they had gotten there.

While he was still deep in thought, the two figures suddenly flitted quietly out of the bushes and charged right toward the intoxicated young man snoring loudly next to the bonfire.

It was clear that those two figures were skilled assassins just by looking at how their bodies glided alongside the wind, not causing the slightest disturbance in the airflow at all. The two of them swiftly flanked the young man before converging their swords together to slay the young man in a single strike.

Their movements were sharp, precise, and controlled, which showed that they had practiced these maneuvers many times. Even if the young man woke up right then, it was unlikely that he would be able to react on time.

Damn it! Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

He had never liked to interfere in the affairs of others, but he was quite fond of the young man's hearty personality. It would leave a bitter taste in his mouth if the latter died right before his eyes.

Forget it, I guess I'll just save him. We might be competitors vying for the same Phosphor Armored Beast, but that doesn't mean I should simply watch as he gets killed, Zhang Xuan thought.

Thus, he leaped down from the tree he was on and shouted, "Be careful!"

As he spoke, he tossed his sword right toward the two assassins.

Weng!

Channeling his full strength into this strike, the sword whizzed through the air like a falling comet, producing loud sonic booms in the path of its trajectory. In the blink of an eye, it surged thirty meters ahead to deflect the attacks of the two assassins.

"How dare you foil our plan!" One of the assassins harrumphed coldly as he deflected Zhang Xuan's sword.

Ding!

With a crisp echo, the sword that Zhang Xuan had tossed out was deflected back to where he was. At the same time, Zhang Xuan had managed to close to distance till he was less than ten meters away from the two assassins, allowing him to get a closer look

He was a middle-aged man in his late forties, and his cultivation had already reached high-tier God realm. His body was charged with divine energy, ready to unleash great strength at any moment.

In the face of this, Zhang Xuan did not step forward any further. Instead, he turned his gaze to the intoxicated young man, who had already woken up after hearing his shouts.

However, instead of getting to his feet, he simply stretched his hand out and grabbed the other assassin's sword.

No matter how that assassin struggled, he was unable to shake his sword free of the young man's grasp.

"Did you think that you could assassinate me just because I'm drunk? Shameless weaklings!" the young man sneered coldly as he flicked his wrist.

Kacha!

The sword in his hand was immediately snapped apart.

This sight made Zhang Xuan widen his eyes.

He could tell that the assassin's sword was a middle-tier God artifact, and even if he used his full strength, it would still be difficult for him to destroy it. It was already shocking to see the young man grabbing the sword with his bare hands, but he was even able to snap it apart just like that.

His strength was truly horrifying!

"Sh*t! Let's go!"

The loud snapping of the sword brought the two assassins to their senses. Realizing that there was no way their assassination could succeed anymore, they immediately turned tail and fled.

As decisively as they launched their assault, they had no hesitation in making their escape.

The assassin whose sword was snapped to two immediately released his sword and sprinted off in the direction that Zhang Xuan had come from.

"Rude fellows. Don't you know it's customary to leave a gift when you are paying someone a visit?" the young man scoffed coldly as he rose to his feet.

Roar!

A sound reminiscent of a lion's roar shook the entire mountain valley, causing small pebbles and rocks to roll down the cliffs. It was almost as if a landslide was going to occur.

Pu! Pu!

As if struck by a hammer in the back, the two assassins stumbled forward as blood spewed from their mouths. That roar actually inflicted them with severe internal injuries!

Zhang Xuan was shocked. Is that a technique like the Lion's Roar[1] or something?

It was a soul art that used sound as a medium, reminiscent of the means of the demonic tunists. He had never seen anyone utilizing such moves in battle ever since his time on the Master Teacher Continent, so he was a little surprised to see how proficient the young man was.

“Damn it! Go!”

Knowing that they would really die at this rate, the two assassins flicked their wrists, took out a jade token each, and threw them on the ground.

Boom!

The two jade tokens exploded, causing dust to rise all over the air.

By the time the dust settled, the two of them had already vanished from sight.

From their assault to their retreat, their movements were very fluid. Not once throughout the battle did uncertainty or hesitation induce any brief pauses in their movements. From this, it could be seen that they were veterans in the field.

Hu!

Instead of attempting to chase the two assassins, the powerfully-built young man sat back down by the bonfire before assessing Zhang Xuan curiously. Intrigued, he asked, “Why did you save me?”

“Save? I think you are overstating it. Given your prowess, even if I didn't warn you, there's no way those two would have been able to injure you. It looks like I interfered unnecessarily,” Zhang Xuan replied with a wry smile.

He had thought that this young man was in a precarious position earlier, which was why he had stepped forward to save him. Yet, who could have known that the young man was

more powerful than he thought? In fact, it appeared that the young man had feigned sleep in order to lure those two into action!

So, it would indeed be inaccurate to say that he had saved the young man.

“If I say that you have saved me, it means that you have saved me. Why can’t you just cut the nonsense and accept it?” The young man frowned in displeasure. Then, he lifted the wine gourd beside him and threw it over. “Want a drink?”

“Thanks!” Seeing how open-minded the young man was, Zhang Xuan decided to drop all formalities. He uncorked the gourd and took a gulp of it. With a refreshed sigh, he exclaimed, “Fine wine!”

Even though Zhang Xuan rarely drank, he could still discern good wine from bad ones.

The wine in the gourd had a smooth texture and refreshing taste. At the same time, one could still feel the impact of its high alcohol content without feeling discomfort. It was very different from the wine sold on the market.

Seeing how Zhang Xuan had taken a huge mouthful of his wine heartily, the young man nodded in approval.

Such meetings between strangers in the outdoors would inevitably carry some wariness. Most would usually turn down food and drinks offered to them by strangers for fear that it might be laced with poison. Yet, this fellow drank his wine candidly without appearing too pretentious.

He liked people with such personalities.

“Have some meat too!”

The young man tore off the front leg of the gazelle and tossed it over to Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan was already starving, so he did not hesitate to take a bite out of the gazelle.

He had to admit that the flesh of divine beasts was indeed on a whole new level. He expected the gazelle meat to be tough and difficult to chew, but contrary to his expectations, the meat

seemed to melt right in his mouth before sending a surge of warmth throughout his body.

After finishing the gazelle meat given to him and drinking a few mouthfuls of wine, Zhang Xuan felt deeply satisfied. It was almost as if the fatigue he had accumulated over the day had vanished.

With a smile on his lips, he got up from the bonfire side and stretched his body lazily before saying, "I will take your meat and wine as repayment for saving your life then. I still have some matters to attend to, so I'll be heading off."

After saying those words, he continued into the depths of the mountain valley.

It was on a whim that he had decided to lend the young man a hand. This was nothing more than a momentary stopover for him. He still needed to find the Phosphor Armored Beast so that he could raise his cultivation quickly.

The young man took a glance at the direction Zhang Xuan was heading in and said, "It's the middle of the night. What are you going to do in the valley at such a time?"

Great dangers lurked within the mountain valley in the middle of the night. Why would the young man choose to travel then instead of waiting for dawn?

"To be frank with you, I have reached a bottleneck in my cultivation, so I'm seeking a way to overcome my current bottleneck," Zhang Xuan replied.

"A way to overcome your bottleneck?" The young man nodded contemplatively.

He had taken a look at the other party's cultivation, and it was true that the other party was already on the verge of becoming a middle-tier God. It was understandable that he was anxious to take the final step forward given how close he was to a breakthrough.

"I have been to this mountain valley many times, so I am still quite familiar with the surroundings. Tell me what you are looking for. I'll help you look for it," the young man offered.

“Well, it’s like this...” Zhang Xuan pondered for a brief moment before deciding to be honest with the young man.

“Due to the unique nature of my cultivation technique, I’ll need to achieve a breakthrough in my physical body and my soul cultivation before I can advance my zhenqi cultivation. I have already found a way to raise my soul cultivation, but I’m still having some trouble finding a way to temper my physical body.

“Just earlier today, I heard that there’s a Phosphor Armored Beast here whose blood is particularly useful for tempering one’s physical body. So, I decided to head over to take a look.”

“Phosphor Armored Beast? You want to procure its blood?”

The young man was surprised by what he had just heard. With a bizarre smile on his lips, he asked, “Do you think that someone of your fighting prowess will be able to deal with a high-tier God realm divine beast?”

[1] This is a technique from Louis Cha’s famous novel, Heavenly Sword and Dragon Slaying Sabre.

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“I doubt so,” Zhang Xuan replied awkwardly.

Possessing both the Pathos of Heavens cultivation technique and sword art, he could defeat even middle-tier Gods easily. However, it would not be as easy for him to deal with a high-tier God.

Not to mention, the other party was a powerful divine beast!

Of course, his goal was not to kill the Phosphor Armored Beast but to acquire some of its blood. Through the abilities of the Library of Heaven’s Path and his persuasive speech, he was confident that he could convince the other party to give its blood or even submit to him!

After all, the key to his beast taming skills had never been his fighting prowess but the overflowing charisma dripping from him!

Well, in the very slim chance that his charisma failed to work its charms, it was always possible to make a trade using God Essence Pills too. He had plenty of it anyway.

Given that the mountain valley was lacking in spiritual energy, the Phosphor Armored Beast should be more than glad to make a trade with him.

“You sure are brazen, aren’t you? Despite not being all that confident, you still dare to come all the way here...” The young man shook his head and sighed. “There’s also another thing that bewilders me... You claim that you want to obtain the Phosphor Armored Beast’s blood, but do you even know where it stays and what kind of form it takes?”

“I figured that as long as I’m able to find a high-tier God realm divine beast possessing exceptional defense, that should be it,” Zhang Xuan replied.

The manager had told him that the Phosphor Armored Beast was in the Valley of Falling Clouds, but when he tried to probe further, it turned out that the other party did not know too much about the matter. He had heard about it from another person, so he was not well informed.

Thus, his plan was to quickly tame one of the divine beasts in the Valley of Falling Clouds so that he could gather some information from it, but who would have thought that despite walking around for hours, he still had not found anything at all!

As a result, he had not been able to acquire the critical intelligence that he needed.

That being said, there was only a single path through the valley. As long as he continued walking down this path, he was confident that he would eventually find the Phosphor Armored Beast.

“So, you are planning to bank entirely on luck? Don’t you think that you are taking the issue too lightly?”

The young man leaned leisurely against the cliff as he looked at Zhang Xuan playfully.

“Well, I have tamed quite a few beasts before, so I know their temperaments quite well. I am confident that I’ll be able to convince it to heed my words once I meet it!” Zhang Xuan replied with a wave of his hand. “Thanks once more for the fine wine and meat. I don’t have much time to waste, so I really must leave now. Otherwise, I won’t be able to get back before dawn...”

After saying those words, Zhang Xuan began making his way deeper into the valley.

“What a naive little boy...” The young man got to his feet and said, “Forget it! Since you saved my life today, I’ll help you look for the Phosphor Armored Beast!”

“That would really be imposing too much on you,” Zhang Xuan replied with a shake of his head. “I know that you are strong, but the Phosphor Armored Beast is a divine beast known for its defensive capabilities. I reckon that even you

will face difficulties trying to deal with it. I don't think that I should put you at risk over my own personal issues."

"It's fine, it's fine. I'm free at the moment anyway. What kind of person would I be if I nonchalantly watched as my benefactor dived into danger? Besides, I reckon that you won't be able to find the Phosphor Armored Beast before dawn given how you are fumbling around the place."

Picking up the half-filled gourd of wine beside him, the young man walked up to Zhang Xuan.

It was only at this moment that Zhang Xuan noticed that the young man was extremely tall, towering at a height of more than two meters. His height, paired with his powerfully-built body, gave him a very strong presence.

"Since that's the case, I'll accept your goodwill graciously then. Of course, it wouldn't be right for me to engage your help without giving you anything in return. Here are five God Essence Pills. Treat it as compensation for your help!" Zhang Xuan said as he tossed a jade bottle over.

He did not like to owe others favors.

Since the young man was insistent on helping him, he would just have to make sure he rewarded the young man accordingly.

Even for a high-tier God, five God Essence Pills could be considered a relatively hefty sum.

"Oh?"

The young man was slightly surprised by the offer. He took the jade bottle from Zhang Xuan's hand and uncorked its lid.

There were indeed five God Essence Pills inside.

He picked one up and sniffed it to ensure that it was indeed a real God Essence Pill before his eyes lit up in delight.

"Thanks!"

Popping it into his mouth, he felt warm spiritual energy flowing through into his meridians, nourishing his body. With a satisfied smile, he stowed the remaining God Essence Pills

into his pocket before walking toward Zhang Xuan. “Come, follow me. I’ll bring you to the Phosphor Armored Beast!”

Zhang Xuan followed him, and together, they headed even further into the valley.

Due to the unique terrain of the valley, the wailing of the wind grew louder and louder the deeper they proceeded.

The two of them continued walking for almost an hour before the young man finally stopped before a pitch-black cavern and said, “We’ve arrived. The cavern over there is the home of the Phosphor Armored Beast!”

The entrance of the cavern was incredibly tall, the height of ten humans. At the same time, its interior was completely dark, making it impossible to discern what was within from the outside.

“That’s it?” Zhang Xuan asked in confusion.

It appeared that the Phosphor Armored Beast was larger than he thought. Otherwise, there was no way it would have been able to create such a massive cavern to use as its lair.

Yup. You wish to capture it, right? Go in then. I’ll be right behind you, so call out to me if you really need help,” the young man said.

“Alright then.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He took a deep breath before discreetly flitting toward the cavern. The young man quickly followed him.

It did not take them long to arrive before the entrance of the cavern.

Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight before heading into the cavern. To be safe, he made sure to walk alongside the walls of the cavern.

Soon enough, the passageway opened up, revealing an empty clearing. A hint of light could be seen from the empty clearing.

“It should be there,” the young man told Zhang Xuan through zhenqi telepathy.

Zhang Xuan raised his head and saw a massive divine beast sleeping atop the stone pedestal within the clearing. It was roughly seven meters in length, and its body was covered in grayish fur.

“Why does it look more like a wolf to me?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

No matter how he looked at it, the divine beast before him clearly resembled a wild wolf.

The Phosphor Armored Beast was rumored to possess unparalleled defense. It was hard to imagine that the fur was so resilient as to provide ‘unparalleled defense’.

“That fellow is definitely it. I come here often, so there’s no way I can be wrong,” the young man replied with a nod.

“I understand,” Zhang Xuan replied solemnly.

Taking a deep breath, he took out a sword and released a barrage of sword qi.

Before the barrage of sword qi could strike the Phosphor Armored Beast, the latter seemed to have already noticed the presence of intruders and swiftly rose to its feet. With a sweep of its thick tail, a ferocious gale was whipped up within the cavern.

“It’s indeed a high-tier God!” Zhang Xuan remarked as he dodged the attack with a grim look on his face.

Knowing that it would be dangerous for him to hold back against an opponent so much stronger than him, he chose to use his strongest technique without any hesitation.

“A Heart of Intertwined Threads!”

In an instant, his sword qi swiftly intertwined together to form something reminiscent of a fishing net as it fell upon the Phosphor Armored Beast.

“What a formidable sword art!” the young man behind Zhang Xuan exclaimed in wonderment.

He had been wondering what kind of trump card Zhang Xuan had that allowed him to confidently confront the Phosphor

Armored Beast despite the obvious gap in their fighting prowess. Upon seeing the sword art, he realized that even though Zhang Xuan was only a low-tier God, his true fighting prowess was comparable to most high-tier Gods!

Roar!

Trapped by the fishnet made of sword qi, the Phosphor Armored Beast released a ferocious roar as it clawed at the net furiously. Through its devastating might, it was able to free itself within seconds.

As soon as it regained its mobility, it immediately charged at Zhang Xuan with terrifying momentum and tore its claw down upon him wrathfully.

Having seemed to have foreseen its attack, Zhang Xuan calmly took a step back to dodge the claw swipe. At the same time, he turned to the young man behind him and said, "I need your help."

"Sure. That's what I'm here for, right?"

The young man seemed to have been waiting for those words. He propelled himself forward with a powerful forward leap to send a punch right into the guts of the Phosphor Armored Beast.

At the same time, Zhang Xuan executed a sword art to assault the other party's weakness.

Peng!

The Phosphor Armored Beast was caught off guard by the young man's sudden gut punch, and he was slammed right into the wall of the cavern, leaving a huge depression behind him.

Zhang Xuan quickly rushed forward to follow up with a barrage of sword qi, determined not to give the Phosphor Armored Beast any time to catch its breath.

The young man was also thorough in his attacks as well. He released a series of swift punches toward the Phosphor Armored Beast to overwhelm it, to the point that it seemed as if his two fists had multiplied into eight.

On top of that, his body was also surprisingly resilient.

In the midst of its desperate struggles, the Phosphor Armored Beast struck the young man twice, but it actually did not even leave a scratch on the latter.

Within ten breaths, the Phosphor Armored Beast realized that there was no way it could win the battle. After spurting out a puddle of fresh blood, it rushed out of the cavern and disappeared into the darkness of the night in the blink of an eye.

“Great!”

Seeing the puddle of blood that it had left behind, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief and hurriedly stored it into a jade bottle.

After he was done, he turned to the young man and clasped his fist. “Thank you for your help earlier on.”

“There’s no need to thank me. Since I offered you my help, I expect to receive compensation in return. Just give me another fifty of the God Essence Pills you gave me earlier, and we’ll call it quits!” the young man said with a grand wave of his hands.

“Fifty God Essence Pills?”

Every single God Essence Pill was worth one Divine Coin, and they were not that easy to procure on the market. The young man’s act of demanding fifty of them in exchange for his help was no different from ripping him off.

Who could have thought that the young man would have this greedy side to him?

“Yep. If I hadn’t helped you earlier, you definitely would have been killed. Don’t you think that your life is at least worth fifty God Essence Pills?” the young man asked.

“I am just an ordinary cultivator, so how could I have that many God Essence Pills on me? How about this? I’ll give you all ten God Essence Pills I have with me at the moment...”
Zhang Xuan said.

“You are saying that you only have ten God Essence Pills? Well, shall we check that out?”

With a wave of his hand, the young man swiftly sealed the surroundings with his divine energy, making sure that there was no way Zhang Xuan could get away from there.

“What are you trying to do?” Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure.

“Nothing much. I am just returning the favor to you. Since you came here to kill me, isn’t it only fair for me to do the same to you as well?” the young man sneered coldly.

“Kill you? What do you mean by that? I saved your life earlier!”

“Saved my life? Hahaha!” The young man burst into laughter. “Didn’t you mention earlier that you came here to hunt the Phosphor Armored Beast?”

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

The young man harrumphed coldly. “I am the Phosphor Armored Beast!”

In the next moment, his body began to distort, and in a few moments, he had already turned into a massive divine beast covered in scales.

“You are the Phosphor Armored Beast?” Zhang Xuan was stunned. “You have already learned transmutation?”

He knew that divine beasts were able to transmogrify into humans, but he did not think that it would be to the extent where even he was unable to distinguish the difference!

“That’s right. You tried to kill me, so I made the first move to kill you first. Isn’t that fair?” The Phosphor Armored Beast laughed gleefully.

“Those who choose to hunt should be aware that they could be hunted as well. It’s indeed fair.” Zhang Xuan nodded in response. “However, did you think that I wouldn’t put up my guard against someone who dares to cook and drink alone in the forest at night? Not to mention, your body is actually resilient enough to grab a middle-tier God sword directly without sustaining any damage...”

“I have already seen your strength and your trump cards. There’s no way you could have any other cards in hand!” the Phosphor Armored Beast sneered.

The reason it had brought Zhang Xuan over to fight the divine beast earlier was to see how powerful Zhang Xuan was. After seeing that the latter did not have anything much other than his swordsmanship, it heaved a sigh of relief and decided to make its move.

“I don’t deny that I don’t wield the strength to defeat you, but it’s unfortunate that you ate something that you shouldn’t have a moment ago,” Zhang Xuan said as his lips curled up mysteriously.

Peng!

The next instant, the Phosphor Armored Beast suddenly widened its eyes, and cold sweat began dripping down its forehead. An excruciating pain coming from its stomach caused its massive body to tremble uncontrollably.

2122 Pledge Your Loyalty to Me

“The God Essence Pill you gave me was poisoned?”

The body of the Phosphor Armored Beast stiffened as it swiftly realized what was going on.

From the start to the end, it had only eaten a God Essence Pill given by Zhang Xuan. Back then, it had made sure to inspect it carefully, and only after confirming that there was nothing wrong did it swallow the pill. Did the other party really put something in it?

But-

Just what kind of poison could it be that would cause it to feel as if the entire heavens were crashing down on it, to the point where the Phosphor Armored Beast was even losing its will to retaliate?

You are quite smart after all,” Zhang Xuan replied.

As someone who had risen to the top of the Master Teacher Continent and the Forsaken Continent, he had been through so much that anyone who dared think of him as a naive little boy would eventually regret underestimating him dearly.

A human who dared to openly eat and drink in the woods in the middle of the night, such a situation was practically shouting ‘dubious’ at him!

For this reason, he had prepared a hand.

In the God Essence Pills that he had given to the other party, he had made sure to infuse several surges of his Heaven’s Path zhenqi into them.

If the other party did not show him any ill will, the Heaven’s Path zhenqi would help him clear up his blocked meridians and remove any bottlenecks that stood in his way. The unique nature of the upgraded Heaven’s Path zhenqi would aid him in

preserving his youth as well. It would have been a huge fortuitous encounter for him.

On the other hand, if the other party had other intentions in mind, the Heaven's Path zhenqi would turn into lethal poison in an instant, scourging every nook and cranny of his body, inflicting unbearable pain to him.

“Haha... Hahaha! I never thought that I would be outwitted like that. However, it's still too early for you to relish in your victory. The gazelle meat and the wine you had earlier have my poison as well. I guess we'll just have to trade antidotes,” the Phosphor Armored Beast sneered with gritted teeth.

The meat and wine were poisoned?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “Do you expect me to believe such words?”

On top of everything else, he was a poison master. He could easily tell whether something was poisoned or not. It was obvious that the Phosphor Armored Beast was trying to fool him.

“My wine is indeed free of poison, but it's brewed using a special kind of fruit. It's only suitable for us Phosphor Armored Beasts. If anyone else ingests it, while it won't cause too much of a problem initially, within half a day, his body will be completely covered in scales. An unbearable itch will quickly spread throughout his entire body, making you know what it means to live a life worse than death,” the Phosphor Armored Beast said.

“As long as you give me the antidote to your poison, I'll teach you how you can cure the poison. Not only so, I'll allow you to leave safely as well...”

“There's no need for that,” Zhang Xuan interjected sharply.

You don't believe me?”

“No. On the contrary, I believe everything that you have just said. Thanks to your reminder, I have just managed to cure the poison,” Zhang Xuan replied.

The Phosphor Armored Beast widened its eyes in disbelief upon hearing those words. Then, it quickly shook its head and

smiled. “I know what you are doing. You are trying to bluff me. It won’t work.”

Seeing how the Phosphor Armored Beast was still deluding itself, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply and said, “Your wine is brewed using the Zizhen Fruit found only within this valley. It’s the key source of nourishment that ensures the resilience of your scales, and it’s for that reason that you aren’t able to leave this valley. You know that your ‘unparalleled defense’ will become a joke if you don’t have the Zizhen Fruit anymore.”

You...” The Phosphor Armored Beast was stunned.

Was the young man a monster?

How could he know a secret which it had been hiding all this while?

The city lord of Twilight City had tried to tame it once, and the terms that he had offered it were truly generous. If it had been in the past, it would have surely turned down the offer without any hesitation.

However, in this generation of receding spiritual energy, it knew that it would only grow weaker and weaker if it remained in this valley. There was no future for it there.

Nevertheless, it had still chosen to turn down the city lord’s offer, and it was all because of the Zizhen Fruit!

This fruit was the key to its superior defense. As long as it continued to consume it, it would become stronger and stronger. However, once it stopped its consumption of the fruit, its scales would slowly lose their resilience, thus stripping it of its key strength.

Furthermore, the Zizhen Fruit could only be nurtured using its blood. Once it left the Valley of Falling Clouds, the Zizhen Fruit would swiftly wither and die. For this reason, it could only continue guarding this area.

This was its greatest secret, and it was determined to hide it from the rest of the world. As such, it would pit its life against anyone who entered the valley to chase them away.

Yet, the young man actually knew about its secret!

How was this possible?

“The reason you use the Zizhen Fruit to brew wine is to conceal your consumption of the Zizhen Fruit from the rest of the world. As you have been nurturing the Zizhen Fruit with your blood, anyone else who consumes it will immediately feel discomfort. However, the poison of the Zizhen Fruit means nothing to me at all!” Zhang Xuan replied.

Even the most lethal poison in the world meant nothing before the Heaven’s Path zhenqi, let alone mere fruit wine.

“Alright, I hope that I have satisfied your curiosity now.”

Zhang Xuan clapped his hands together as he sat down on the stone pedestal where the massive divine beast had been sleeping earlier. With a nonchalant look on his face, he said, “I’ll give you two choices. Give me one hundred Zizhen Fruits and two liters of your fresh blood. Of course, I don’t intend to make you do it for free. I’ll give you twenty God Essence Pills, and you can be assured that none of them are poisoned this time around.

“Otherwise, you can slowly feel your life wilting away with the poison. I can absolute guarantee that no one other than me is capable of lifting that poison. Even if you beg God Monarch Qiankun for help, there’s nothing he can do to save you.”

“Darn it! I’ll kill you!” the Phosphor Armored Beast roared furiously as it charged forward to rip the young man into pieces. However, before it could even move, it suddenly felt its body tensing up.

Before it knew it, the poison within its body had sealed off all its meridians, preventing it from exerting the slightest force at all.

“What the... How is this possible? Just what kind of poison did you feed me?” the Phosphor Armored Beast exclaimed in fear.

There were many experts who had tried to tame it in the past, and some of them had resorted to poisoning it. For this reason, it was considerably well-versed with the most types of

poisons. Through its superior constitution, it was able to nullify the effects of most poisons.

But shockingly, it actually found itself completely helpless against the young man's poison!

“You are asking something that you don't need to know about. I have already given you two choices. You should know that I am giving you an opportunity here. Even after your death, I will still be able to gather your blood and the Zizhen Fruits without any difficulties!” Zhang Xuan replied.

The complexion of the Phosphor Armored Beast turned incredibly ugly. It hated to admit it, but the young man was right. Once it was dead, the young man could simply do whatever he wanted with it.

There was a moment of silence before it asked, “Is there a third option?”

“There is.”

With his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan stood up and said, “Be my tamed beast and provide me your blood whenever I need it. In exchange, I'll show you the way out of the Valley of Falling Clouds without compromising your defensive ability. Not only so, I'll even help you overcome your bottleneck and become a Celestial God!”

“Hah! Big words, but that's impossible,” the Phosphor Armored Beast scoffed.

As a beast that had already transmogrified, it was more than capable of sneaking into human cities. With its strength, it would easily be able to earn enough money for it to enjoy a decadent life.

However, it knew that everything would swiftly unravel once it lost its unparalleled defense. As such, it had been looking for a way out all this while, and it had even snuck into Twilight City many times in hopes of finding a cure, but it could not even find a speck of hope.

It was hard to believe that some twenty-year-old would be able to do it.

Not to mention, the other party even said that he would help it become a Celestial God?

If it was that easy to become a Celestial God, there was no way the city lord would have been the only one to reach that level in Twilight City.

“There’s nothing impossible about it,” Zhang Xuan replied with a confident glint in his eyes.

He tilted his head up confidently and looked at the Phosphor Armored Beast deeply as he spoke. “The Zizhen Fruit strengthens your defense, but you should also be aware that its side effects are severe. As long as you stop consuming it, you will be consumed by an irrepressible itch, putting you in great agony. It’s like a drug. Once you start, you will be forever bound by it.”

“Even if you know about its properties, what can you do about it?” the Phosphor Armored Beast replied coldly.

It went without saying that it understood all of that as well, but it still had not been able to find a solution to it even after so many years.

If it had been able to free itself from the restraints of the Zizhen Fruit, it would have long done so!

“All things in the world are complementary to one another. Where a venomous snake roams, an antidote can often be found within seven steps. There’s bound to be something that can nullify the side effects of the Zizhen Fruit, and the key for you to become a Celestial God lies in that ‘something’. Over the years, your meridians have lost their flexibility due to the toxins in the Zizhen Fruit, resulting in your inability to channel your divine energy properly,” Zhang Xuan said.

“How did you...” The Phosphor Armored Beast was going to ask how the young man knew about it, but thinking about it, it seemed like a meaningless question. All its secrets seemed to have lost their veil of secrecy before the young man’s penetrating gaze. So, it sighed deeply and nodded. “Yes, you’re right.”

Many years of consuming the Zizhen Fruit had resulted in the loss of flexibility of its meridians, resulting in its inability to expand and contract freely. As a result, it was much harder for the Phosphor Armored Beast to control the flow of its zhenqi.

In the pursuit of perfection, it was inevitable that one would have to give up something. For the Phosphor Armored Beast, it was its control over its divine energy.

While the Zizhen Fruit toughened its scales and made it impenetrable, it had also induced the hardening of its meridians.

“If you were able to control your divine energy as finely as you did before, do you think that you’d be able to become a Celestial God?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Of course!” the Phosphor Armored Beast replied in agitation.

The foundation that it had built up over the years was already more than enough for it to make a breakthrough. The only issue was that the inflexibility of its meridians made it impossible for it to channel its divine energy fast enough to overcome its bottleneck.

“I can solve that problem for you,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

Then, he snapped his fingers lightly.

Tzzz!

The poison that had sealed off its divine energy and inflicted excruciating pain suddenly turned into a tonic that nourished its meridians.

Swiftly, its hardened meridians began to loosen up, regaining the flexibility it used to have. At the same time, the various blockages within its body also cleared up.

“This...” The Phosphor Armored Beast widened its eyes in disbelief.

The young man was actually able to turn the lethal poison in its body into tonic with just a single thought, and it actually achieved something it had not been able to do so despite decades of effort. This was unbelievable!

Feeling the regained flexibility of its meridians, the Phosphor Armored Beast quivered in excitement. Everything that it had wanted was within its grasp. As long as it drove its divine energy, it would be able to reach the level it had been dreaming of!

Yet, just as it was about to do so, its flow of divine energy suddenly ground to a halt.

Hula!

Its meridians became stiff once more, and the bottleneck in its cultivation suddenly reappeared. What was within its grasp moments ago suddenly grew distant once again.

It had just felt as if it had the world in its hands, but in the next moment, the world came crashing down. The vast contrast between the two feelings left it feeling so frustrated that it could have exploded on the spot.

Seeing this, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly and said, “The energy I have planted in your body is too weak. It can only sustain you for a short period of time. However, I have already proved to you that I am not making empty promises.

The choice is in your hands.”

The Heaven’s Path zhenqi could indeed loosen its stiffened meridians, allowing it to regain its flexibility. However, such a change was temporary. Besides, there was no way Zhang Xuan would allow the Phosphor Armored Beast to make a breakthrough before it had made its choice.

“I...”

The Phosphor Armored Beast fell silent.

All the doubts it had harbored regarding the credibility of the young man’s words had been shattered when its meridians regained their flexibility. It knew that the young man would be able to resolve the problems caused by years of consumption of the Zizhen Fruit and help it become a Celestial God.

Given so, it was obvious which of the three choices it should choose.

“I’ll pledge my loyalty and my life to you.”

The Phosphor Armored Beast bowed down and offered a droplet of its blood essence to Zhang Xuan.

“Excellent decision. You won’t regret your choice.”

With a smile on his lips, Zhang Xuan drew the blood essence infused with the Phosphor Armored Beast’s Soul Imprint into his glabella, creating a Soul Contract with it.

2123 Physical Body Breakthrough!

“Alright, let’s head to where the Zizhen Fruit grows to take a look!” Zhang Xuan said.

The Phosphor Armored Beast quickly led the way forward.

They returned to the cavern where it had been drinking and eating at previously. Heading into the depths of the cavern, they soon found a few trees that were not too tall.

The ceiling of the cavern had been dug out, allowing starlight to shine right onto the leaves of the tree. A series of crimson fruits hung on the tree, looking fresh and delectable.

There was a formation cast around the trees that prevented anyone whose cultivation was beneath that of the Phosphor Armored Beast from getting to the trees. Of the entire cavern, other than these trees, there was nothing else to be seen.

Zhang Xuan walked up to the formation and stopped it with a stomp of his foot before proceeding further in.

Seeing this sight, the Phosphor Armored Beast shuddered in fear.

It would not have dared imagine that there was a person who could stop its formation with just a stomp of their foot. Even though its master was young, it was apparent that he possessed exceptional capabilities.

Zhang Xuan plucked one of the Zizhen Fruits to take a closer look at it.

It was roughly the size of an apple, and it emanated rich spiritual energy. Just breathing it in left one’s muscles pulsating in excitement.

Zhang Xuan slit the back of his palm with his fingernail, causing blood to ooze out from the cut. After that, he squeezed

the Zizhen Fruit and allowed a droplet of its essence to fall on his cut.

Hu!

In just a few moments, his cut had already healed completely.

“Just as I thought,” Zhang Xuan remarked with a smile.

The Zizhen Fruit did not just strengthen a person’s body. More importantly, it also carried exceptional rejuvenation properties.

The Zizhen Fruit strengthened a person’s defense through continuously destroying and regenerating a person’s muscles, forcing them to grow stronger and stronger. As the cycle repeated itself, it was only a matter of time before one’s defense reached a point where nothing could breach it anymore.

It was actually quite similar to how he used his Heaven’s Path zhenqi to temper his body.

“Master, have you found a solution to curing my stiffened meridians?” the Phosphor Armored Beast asked worriedly.

This was its nest, so it was well aware that there was nothing there other than those trees. If there was really something that could cure it in there, it should have long found it.

“That’s right,” Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

Then...”

“I know that you frequently consume the Zizhen Fruit, but have you eaten its core before?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“The core? Isn’t it inedible?” The Phosphor Armored Beast was taken aback.

The flesh of the Zizhen Fruit was sweet and fragrant, and it was highly beneficial to one’s body as well. As for its core... it had never heard that it was edible before!

“Just give it a try,” Zhang Xuan said as he tossed a Zizhen Fruit over.

The Phosphor Armored Beast sliced the fruit in two, revealing its hard, dry core. As soon as it tossed it into its mouth, a bitter

taste immediately spread all over his tongue.

The Phosphor Armored Beast cringed. “It tastes awful.”

“I know that it tastes awful. Try to absorb the spiritual energy released by the core,” Zhang Xuan said.

The core of the Zizhen Fruit harnessed rich spiritual energy as well.

The Phosphor Armored Beast nodded. It closed its eyes and channeled the spiritual energy into its meridians.

Hu!

As soon as it drew the spiritual energy into its body, its meridians, which were as tough as stone, began to soften up. “This...” The Phosphor Armored Beast widened its eyes.

Even though many years of eating the Zizhen Fruit had strengthened its scales, it had cost it the flexibility of its meridians, making it nigh impossible for it to become a Celestial God. It had despaired over this matter at one point in time, but it eventually resigned itself to its fate.

Yet, who could have known that the cure was actually in the bitter fruit core, which it had never eaten before?

If only it had known the solution beforehand, it would never have acknowledged Zhang Xuan as its master.

Ah, its freedom...

“The flesh hardens one’s meridians whereas the core softens them. This is the balance the heavens have granted the world.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The world was divided into yin and yang, day and night, and the five elements. These were all powers of mutual generation and mutual overcoming, and it dictated that all beings were bound to have a complementary being.

There was nothing in the world that transcended this law.

Even feelings came in pairs as well. With love came hatred, with happiness came sorrow... There was a corresponding counterpart to each and every emotion.

“I see,” the Phosphor Armored Beast replied with a slightly confused look.

It walked over to the corner of its cavern, where the cores of the Zizhen Fruits that it had eaten were stacked up. It had intended to find a place to plant them so as to nurture more Zizhen Fruit, but now that he knew that it was the crux to resolving its affliction, it immediately swallowed all of them without any hesitation.

Geji! Geji!

The cores of the Zizhen Fruit might be tough, but they were swiftly ground down by its powerful jaws. It did not take long for the Phosphor Armored Beast to swallow all of them.

The spiritual energy from the cores flowed through its body and nourished its meridians, swiftly granting it the flexibility that it had lacked for many years. In return, the enhanced flexibility allowed his divine energy to flow faster and faster, causing its aura to swiftly rise.

“I’ll lend you a hand!”

With a chuckle, Zhang Xuan swiftly took out dozens of silver needles and infused them with Heaven’s Path zhenqi before tossing them over toward the Phosphor Armored Beast.

Puhe! Puhe!

The needles lodged themselves into the acupoints of the Phosphor Armored Beast, and the Heaven’s Path zhenqi swiftly tore down the bottleneck standing in its path.

Hong long!

With nothing standing in its way, the Phosphor Armored Beast’s cultivation sprinted all the way toward the Celestial God realm.

“Not bad!” Zhang Xuan remarked.

With a flick of his wrist, he tossed five bottles of God Essence Pills over to the Phosphor Armored Beast.

Even though it had a firm foundation, it would still require a fair amount of spiritual energy to achieve a breakthrough to

the Celestial God realm. Given that the valley was devoid of spiritual energy, it would take ages for the Phosphor Armored Beast to complete its breakthrough at this rate.

Zhang Xuan did not have much time to waste, so he could only lend it a hand.

In any case, the Phosphor Armored Beast had already submitted to him, so it was not really a waste of resources.

On the other hand, the Phosphor Armored Beast did not expect its master to give it so many pills at once. With a look of gratitude on its face, it opened its mouth and swallowed all fifty God Essence Pills.

In an instant, it felt spiritual energy charging up its body.

Boom boom boom!

A series of dull explosions echoed within its body. A faint glossy layer formed on top of its black scales, granting it a texture reminiscent of black jade.

Knowing that the Phosphor Armored Beast was set for a breakthrough, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Once the other party succeeded, he would have a Celestial God on his side. Furthermore, considering its unparalleled defense, it was unlikely that there were many opponents of the same tier who were a match for it.

In other words, he did not have to fear anyone in Twilight City.

After the Phosphor Armored Beast successfully became a Celestial God, Zhang Xuan passed it a few more bottles of God Essence Pills over the next four hours for it to reinforce its cultivation. Once everything was done, the Phosphor Armored Beast reverted to its form as a young man and knelt on the floor.

“Master, thank you for your help!”

It had previously felt as if it had been coerced into becoming the young man’s tamed beast, and that had made it feel incredibly indignant. However, such emotions had completely vanished from its mind, leaving nothing but relief.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. Give me some of your blood. I need to temper my physical body,” Zhang Xuan said.

Without any hesitation, the Phosphor Armored Beast reverted to its original form, and with a swipe of its claws, fresh blood began flowing down its body.

With a wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan turned the fresh blood into a crimson mist before absorbing it into his body through his pores. At the same time, he grabbed a Zizhen Fruit from the tree, reduced it into juice, and swallowed it.

He had already come up with a way for him to temper his body in the four hours that the Phosphor Armored Beast had spent making a breakthrough.

As the Phosphor Armored Beast’s blood and the juice of the Zizhen Fruit flowed through his body, Zhang Xuan’s body began to undergo a change.

Boom boom boom!

His muscles were swiftly torn apart and regenerated, going through an endless process of life and death. It was an extremely excruciating process, but without a doubt, his body was swiftly becoming more compact and powerful.

“Making a breakthrough in one’s physical body is much more difficult than making a breakthrough in one’s zhenqi cultivation...”

Seeing that its master was tempering his body, the Phosphor Armored Beast chose to guard him in case any mishaps occurred.

Even with powerful recovery medicine, many things could still easily go wrong while tempering one’s physical body. A delicate balance had to be struck between the rate of destruction and recovery in order for it to work out well.

As someone who had undergone the process, the Phosphor Armored Beast knew just how much pain it had to go through in order to reach its current level. It had taken decades of hard work before it reached its current level.

On the other hand, its master was only a low-tier God. Even if he was blessed with superior talent, it would take at least several years for him to succeed.

With such thoughts in mind, the Phosphor Armored Beast looked at the young man, only to see that the latter had finish absorbing the blood mist and the fruit juice. The potency of the two ingredients caused the young man's body to turn incredibly red.

But in the blink of an eye, the young man's body suddenly turned golden before reverting to normal.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan exhaled deeply. He opened his eyes once more, and for a moment, one could see golden iridescence in his eyes before they swiftly turned black once more.

“Master, aren't you going to cultivate anymore?” the Phosphor Armored Beast asked in bewilderment.

It could not understand why the young man suddenly stopped cultivating ten breaths after he started.

“I've finished cultivating,” Zhang Xuan replied.

You have already finished cultivating?” The Phosphor Armored Beast blinked blankly. “What do you mean by that?”

It was said to be blessed with superior aptitude in terms of its physical body, but even so, it had taken decades of training in order to temper its physical body to its current level. Yet, the young man was actually done cultivating barely after a few breaths? What did that mean?

Was he going to put aside his cultivation for the time being?

Instead of responding to the Phosphor Armored Beast's question, Zhang Xuan instructed with an excited gleam in his eyes, “Strike me.”

The Phosphor Armored Beast hesitated for a moment before nodding. “Alright.”

It raised its claws and pulled it down on Zhang Xuan.

Fearing that the young man would not be able to withstand its strength, it chose to use only a hundredth of its full might.

However, when its claw met with Zhang Xuan's fist, it found itself faced with a might far beyond its imagination.

It felt as powerful as the might of a natural disaster. In that instant, the Phosphor Armored Beast had a feeling that it would be crushed into bits if it continued at this rate.

Not daring to waste any time, it immediately increased the exertion of its force.

Five percent!

Ten percent!

Fifteen percent!

Fifty percent!

In a split second, it raised the might of the claw swipe to over half of its full strength.

Peng!

Nevertheless, the Phosphor Armored Beast was still sent crashing into the walls, causing a cloud of dust to fall from the ceiling.

“Master...”

The Phosphor Armored Beast looked at the young man with a look of disbelief.

It had just seen the full extent of the other party's strength. It admitted that the other party's swordsmanship was indeed powerful, but when did he become so strong?

Even though it had only used half of its strength, the young man was still able to send it flying into the distance.

In terms of raw strength, that was an attack that even an average low-tier Celestial God would have difficulty withstanding!

In other words, in just ten breaths or so, the young man had managed to raise his raw strength from that of a low-tier God to that of a low-tier Celestial God.

Did you really get so powerful within just ten breaths of cultivating, or have you been lying to me this whole time?

Just as the Phosphor Armored Beast was feeling utterly frenzied by the situation, it noticed that the young man had a depressed look on his face. Instead of celebrating his swift growth, it seemed as though he was disappointed with the results.

“Sigh, my rate of cultivation has really slowed down a lot. Am I starting to run out of talent?”

“Slow down? Run out of talent?”

The Phosphor Armored Beast nearly burst into tears upon hearing those words.

To raise your raw strength from the level of a low-tier God to that of a low-tier Celestial God... Bro, that's three whole realms!

Yet, you are complaining about slowness?

Are you being serious, or are you trying to show off?

2124 Beauty Pill Goes on Sale 1

2124 Beauty Pill Goes on Sale (1)

Zhang Xuan was not trying to brag. Those were his honest feelings regarding his breakthrough.

Even though it might appear that he had only cultivated for ten breaths to the Phosphor Armored Beast, in truth, he had spent nearly twenty-eight hours in the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn.

He had needed a day in order to make a breakthrough!

The flow of time in the Great Codex of Spring of Autumn was ten thousand times faster than that in the Firmament. As long as he immersed his consciousness into it, he would be able to hasten the flow of his divine energy in the real world, allowing him to cultivate much faster than before. It was for this reason that the artifact was so overpowered.

It was also due to this artifact that he had been able to become a God within ten breaths while facing off against Kong shi_s done, thus achieving a victory in that dire situation.

Given his past experience of cultivating using the Heaven's Path Golden Body, he had thought that it would only take him two to four hours in order to advance a single cultivation realm, but it had actually taken him an excruciating twenty-eight hours in order to get to advance from low-tier God to high-tier God.

He found it hard to accept that his rate of cultivation had gotten so slow. He had never been so slow before while cultivating the Heaven's Path Divine Art!

This was probably the slowest he had ever cultivated, and it would surely remain a dark stain on his history. He could only pray that no one else learned about this, or else he might just die from embarrassment!

It seemed like his self-created cultivation technique was still lacking in some ways compared to the Heaven's Path Divine Art.

Forget it. At least I managed to grow much stronger than before!

Choosing not to worry too much about the slowdown in his rate of cultivation, Zhang Xuan gazed at his fist as he relished in the newfound strength harnessed within his body.

Even though he did not manage to temper his physical body beyond the level of a Celestial God, in a close-quarter battle, he was confident that he would at least be able to stand his ground against a low-tier Celestial God.

This was especially so with his enhanced defense. After being tempered by the blood of the Phosphor Armored Beast and the Zizhen Fruit, his body was at least as tough as a low-tier Celestial God artifact. In other words, even a full might attack from a high-tier God would not be able to harm him at all.

It was due to this that he had been able to force back the Phosphor Armored Beast earlier with his punch.

Ever since arriving in the Firmament, he had felt pressured by his weakness. He was afraid that he would not be able to protect his parents and his direct disciples in times of crisis, and that left him deeply anxious. However, with this breakthrough, his fears had lessened a bit.

In this world filled with experts, he was no longer in the bottommost echelon anymore.

Based on the books he had read so far, Celestial Gods could be considered as elites in most cities. Such strength should be enough for him to plant his foot in the Firmament.

With a wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan stowed all the Zizhen Fruits into his storage ring before saying, "Let's return to Twilight City."

"But my defense..." The Phosphor Armored Beast was still a little iffy about this.

He would lose his constant supply of Zizhen Fruits if he left the area. Would he grow weaker as a result of that?

“Don’t worry. I resolved that issue for you while you were making your breakthrough earlier,” Zhang Xuan said.

The effects of the Zizhen Fruit could only be said to be semi-permanent. Once the Phosphor Armored Beast stopped consuming it, his defense would slowly regress back to its original level.

So, Zhang Xuan had used his Heaven’s Path zhenqi to reinforce its scales earlier, turning the effects from semipermanent to permanent. As such, his defense would not regress as a result of not eating the Zizhen Fruit anymore.

“Thank you, Master!” The Phosphor Armored Beast heaved a sigh of relief.

It was actually delighted by such an outcome. Ever since its birth, its movements had mostly been limited to this valley due to the Zizhen Fruit. It was glad that it was finally free of its restraints and able to travel the greater world out there.

Not too long after leaving the valley, Zhang Xuan quickly found the aerial divine beast that he had tamed from the Divine Beast Market. At this moment, the Phosphor Armored Beast had also transmogrified into its human form. The two of them got onto the back of the aerial divine beast and made their way back to Twilight City.

Ye Qiuyan was a special envoy of the Sky of Drifting Specter to Twilight City.

Even though she was only a high-tier God, due to her background, not even City Lord Wu Fangqing would dare to rebuke her decisions.

That being said, most of the matters she handled were relating to the policies and edicts passed down from the Sky of Drifting Specters. She was not so arrogant as to overstep her boundaries to interfere in the internal management of Twilight City.

After a busy day at work, she stretched her back to loosen her stiffened joints before sitting before her dressing table to

examine her right cheek.

There was a glaring crimson scar that looked as if a centipede was climbing up her face.

As a famed beauty, she had always been rather proud of her appearance. Yet, this centipede-like scar had marred her beauty, destroying the overall aesthetics of her face.

“Sigh!”

Ye Qiuyan shook her head helplessly.

This scar came from a battle with an enemy some time ago. As the wound had been inflicted through a unique power the enemy possessed, she found that she was unable to remove the scar no matter what she tried.

On top of that, her cultivation had also fallen from Celestial God to high-tier God due to the severity of her injuries. Eventually, she had chosen to leave Royal City to serve as a special envoy in this remote city.

She quickly dolled herself up a little before covering her face with a veil.

Walking out of her room, she glanced at the elder standing guard outside and asked, “How is the investigation going?”

The elder clasped his fist and replied, “Envoy Ye, I have confirmed the existence of a black market within Twilight City. The person heading the black market is Qi Ling-er, and she’s from Royal City’s Qi Clan!”

The Qi Clan is a distinguished clan that wields great power even within Royal City. The fact that their old ancestor, Qi Meng, is a Conferred God King is more than enough to cement their standing. Why would their descendant open a black market in a remote place like this?” Ye Qiuyan frowned.

“Does she not know that such an act is an infringement of the laws of the Sky of Drifting Specters?”

“I don’t really know the details, but I think it might be something related to the lower worlds...” The elder paused for a moment before revealing his thoughts.

“Lower worlds...” A deep frown formed on Ye Qiuyan’s forehead. “His Majesty has found a particularly pure soul in recent days, and he made a special exception to allow it to recuperate in the Netherworld Lake within the royal palace. According to some sources, the soul originated from the lower worlds. However, this is something that only happened twenty days ago whereas Qi Ling-er should have been here for several years now.”

“That’s indeed the case. However, the place the Heaven Subjugating Monarch first appeared happens to be this Twilight City as well. I feel that the movements of the Qi Clan could be related to that,” the elder said.

The God Monarch of the Sky of Drifting Specters, Demon Monarch Qiankun, had never really been too interested in the governance of his territory. As such, he delegated the responsibility of governance to the Conferred God Kings under him, resulting in them amassing a great deal of power.

As such, despite the seeming peace in Royal City, there was a great deal of political rivalry.

The rise of the Heaven Subjugation Monarch was one thing that no one had ever expected, and it was a game-changer.

Other than the Nine God Monarchs who had lived since time immemorial, no one had ever come close to reaching them before. As such, it became common knowledge that it was impossible for any being to become a God Monarch, thus making Conferred God King the highest level that any cultivator could ever reach.

However, the Heaven Subjugation Monarch had shattered these conceptions and become an existence on par with, if not stronger than, the God Monarchs.

As such, everyone wanted to know what he had gone through to uncover the mystery behind his ascension.

For the past forty years, the investigation had never stopped.

Aside from financial benefits, the black market was also a place where a great deal of information went around, making it a strategic location to build an intelligence network.

Ye Qiuyan pondered for a moment before saying, “Tell Qi Ling-er that I’ll turn a blind eye if she’s just using the black market to gather information, but she would do well not to go overboard. If she goes too far, regardless of whether she’s a member of the Qi Clan or not, she’ll be punished strictly in accordance with the laws of the Sky of Drifting Specters.

“Also, I need you to continue keeping a lookout on what she’s up to. If you notice anything suspicious, make sure to report it to me as soon as possible.”

It was true that the Qi Clan was a powerful faction in Royal City, but she was the special envoy in Twilight City. She represented God Monarch Qiankun himself. No matter how powerful the Qi Clan was, they would be wise not to supersede her authority here.

There was no greater sin in the world than sullyng the honor of a God Monarch.

This was something that anyone who had any semblance of common sense in the Firmament would know.

“I understand.” The elder nodded before walking out.

Some time later, the elder returned with a perplexed look on his face, suggesting that he had just uncovered news that even he could hardly believe to be true.

“Envoy Ye, Qi Ling-er isn’t in the underground black market at the moment. Instead, she’s in the Twilight Market!”

“Twilight Market?” Ye Qiuyan was surprised by the news as well.

What in the world was the boss of the underground black market doing in the authorized marketplace of Twilight City?

Was she trying to wash her hands clean and retire from the underground world?

“She has gathered some of the more distinguished female cultivators in Twilight City, and it seems like she’s going to sell something... I think it’s called the Beauty Pill!” the elder said.

“Beauty Pill?” Ye Qiuyan scoffed. “Ridiculous! When the most famous apothecary of the Firmament, Master Fu Jiangchen, visited Royal City, I had the opportunity to talk to him, and he said that one’s appearance is something predetermined by the heavens, and nothing can change it. There’s no such thing as a ‘Beauty Pill’ in the world. If so, I wouldn’t have allowed the scar of my face to remain till now!”

The elder nodded in agreement.

If there was truly something like a ‘Beauty Pill’, it would have long made its name all over the Firmament!

The higher a person’s cultivator was, the longer they would be able to live. Living a long life was enviable, but it would be even more so if one could maintain a youthful appearance while at it.

If there was really such a thing in the world, cultivators would have already gone crazy over it!

“Are we going to interfere in the matter?”

“There’s no need for that. The city lord will deal with it on his own...” Ye Qiuyan shook her hand as she walked back to her room to rest. But barely after taking a few steps, she changed her mind and said, “Never mind, let’s head there to take a look!”

After saying those words, she swiftly left the room.

Twilight Market was the largest market in Twilight City. All kinds of treasures were placed on sale there, attracting the greatest crowd within the city. As such, it was viewed as the symbol of prosperity of Twilight City.

Concealing her face with a veil, Ye Qiuyan swiftly arrived in the event venue where the Beauty Pill was sold. Through her connections, it did not take her too long to secure an entry pass to enter the area.

The event venue was already filled with people by the time she entered. Even with a swift glance, she could tell that there were at least a thousand people in there.

Nearly all of them were female cultivators, and even the weakest of them was a low-tier God.

“It seems like Qi Ling-er has quite some connections in Twilight City...” Ye Qiuyan harrumphed.

Despite being the boss of an underground black market, she was still able to gather so many people within hours. Furthermore, there were a few distinguished figures among the crowd. One would require some means in order to pull something like that off.

“Have you heard? It seems like the Beauty Pill is going on sale today!”

“Is there such a pill in the Firmament?”

“I have never heard of it before. It seems like it’s a new product by a formidable apothecary...” “It’s still too early to tell whether it’s real or not. I just came by to join in the commotion...”

There was a slight hint of anticipation and curiosity in the atmosphere. It would appear that most people had gone there out of curiosity to see what was going on.

“Ladies, may I have your attention?”

A shout echoed from the forefront of the room. Following that, a tall and beautiful lady walked onto the stage with widened strides.

It was none other than Qi Ling-er.

Taking a seat on a posh chair placed on the stage, Qi Ling-er got straight to the point. “You must be curious as to why I have gathered all of you here today.”

She immediately caught everyone’s attention with her confident demeanor.

“I live by the motto that everyone’s time is precious, so I won’t bother boring you with unnecessary pleasantries. As you might have heard, my apothecaries have recently forged a new kind of pill that is particularly effective in beautifying a person’s appearance. So, I have invited all of you here today in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Beauty Pill to

you. If any of you are interested in it, you may approach me after the event to make reservations.”

After saying her piece, Qi Ling-er calmly raised her hand, and a lady swiftly carried an elaborately ornate box onto the stage.

The box was made of the precious Ink Jade, which was well-known for its ability to completely seal off spiritual energy. This made it ideal for storing precious medicinal herbs or pills without degrading its medicinal effects. However, this material was extremely rare and expensive to purchase as well.

Just the one over there would likely cost at least ten Divine Coins.

Qi Ling-er rose to her feet and opened the box. There was a pill placed neatly within that emanated concentrated spiritual energy.

“Isn’t that just an ordinary God Essence Pill?” A middle-aged lady among the crowd stood up and berated Qi Ling-er. “Not to mention, it’s a low-tier one... If that’s the Beauty Pill you’re talking about, I must say that you are really taking us for fools!”

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2125 Beauty Pill Goes on Sale (2)

“Indeed, that’s the God Essence Pill!”

“Our clan has been producing God Essence Pills for decades now, so there’s no way I could be mistaken about that!”

“Even though I knew that it’s likely an exaggeration, I still came here with some anticipation. Yet, the organizer is trying to fool us with a mere God Essence Pill? Does she take us for bumpkins?”

The rest of the crowd also swiftly realized the same thing, and furious voices echoed through the crowd.

Seeing such a sight, Ye Qiuyan frowned.

As an ex-Celestial God who had come from Royal City, she possessed a sharp eye. No matter how she looked at it, the thing inside the container was definitely the most ordinary low-tier God Essence Pill. There was nothing special about it.

Qi Ling-er should be a pretty smart person considering her accomplishments so far, so it was hard to imagine that she would make a fatal mistake like this.

A female cultivator stood up and spoke with raised eyebrows. “Based on what I know, not even the apothecaries in Royal City have been able to produce anything close to a Beauty Pill. Miss Qi, I hope that you haven’t invited all of us here just to look at a mere God Essence Pill. I expect you to have a satisfactory explanation for this.”

This female cultivator was a high-tier God. Even though she had barely reached the realm not too long ago, the fact that she had reached this realm was more than enough to make her one of the top elites of Twilight City.

After all, even the principal of Twilight Academy had only reached this level of strength.

“Like you mentioned earlier, our time is precious. You’d better have a good reason for this!”

Voices of agreement echoed through the crowd.

“Quiet down! Do you think that I, Qi Ling-er, would have gathered all of you here over a mere God Essence Pill?” Qi Ling-er’s authoritative voice suppressed the chaos happening in the room.

“Rest assured, I have no intention of sullyng my own reputation. Men!”

She raised her hand and beckoned her subordinates beneath the stage.

Hula!

The subordinates quickly brought a divine beast onto the stage.

Gedeng!

Upon seeing the divine beast, everyone’s heart skipped a beat.

“It’s a high-tier God realm divine beast, Lava Python!”

“This divine beast lives within the lava, making its body unbearably hot. It’s said to be an extremely difficult foe to deal with due to its ability to freely spit flames!”

“Why is she bringing such a beast onstage? It’ll be a huge problem if someone’s burned by its flames...”

“My close friend had her arm burned by that fellow. She used all sorts of medicinal herbs in order to heal her scars, but twenty years have passed since then, and her scars show no signs of disappearing.”

The divine beast that had been brought into the room was exceptionally notorious in Twilight City. It was one of the more difficult flame attribute beasts to deal with.

“Judging from your reactions, I reckon I need not explain the ability of this divine beast. Is there anyone among you who

wishes to fight with it?” Qi Ling-er asked with a smile.

The crowd immediately frowned.

It was a known fact that divine beasts were usually stronger than cultivators of the same realm. Given that the enemy was a high-tier God realm divine beast, there was probably no one in the event venue who would stand a chance against it in a one-on-one.

“If no one is going to volunteer, I’ll just have to use my own people. I hope that none of you will view this as an act of cheating,” Qi Ling-er said.

The female cultivator who had spoken earlier harrumphed. “With so many eyes on you, it’ll be hard for you to cheat even if you want to! Hurry up and do whatever you are planning to do. Don’t waste our time!”

“Since Madam Chen has already said so, I won’t stand on ceremony then!”

Qi Ling-er raised her hand and beckoned.

Huala!

A young lady walked over to the Lava Python. Her body was shivering, but she took a deep breath and forced herself to remain rooted to the spot.

“Begin!” Qi Ling-er ordered.

Hula!

The Lava Python suddenly released a furious cry and opened its massive mouth. A searing bundle of flames immediately poured out of its mouth, incinerating the young lady.

A moment later, when the flames vanished, the young lady’s body was completely covered in burns. She collapsed to the ground due to the severity of her injuries. At the same time, her delicate skin was completely ruined as a result of the flames, causing her to look a little frightening.

“Qi Ling-er, what the hell are you doing?” Ye Qiuyan roared in fury.

That woman was really making light of a person’s life!

Regardless of whether that lady was her subordinate or not, or whether they had some sort of deal with one another, Qi Ling-er was going overboard by using a divine beast to ruin a person's life like that. That was a major infringement of the rules of the Firmament and Twilight City!

Just this act in itself was enough to warrant Qi Ling-er's arrest and subject her to heavy punishment!

Seeing the pale faces all around the room, Qi Ling-er quickly waved her hand and said, "Please calm yourselves. I have no intention of harming anyone. Since I have subjected her to the flames of the Lava Python, it goes without saying that I have my means of fully treating her!

"Madam Chen, you come from a clan of apothecaries, and your husband, Chen Yixiong, is the most famous apothecary in Twilight City. May I know if you know of any ways that this young lady can be treated?"

Madam Chen pondered for a moment before shaking her head. "The flame of the Lava Python isn't just any normal flame. Once the fire toxin seeps into one's body, even high-tier Gods will have trouble trying to expel it from their body. I'm afraid that I don't have any good remedies for this."

"What about Madam Liu? Your husband, Liu Mingyang, is the best physician in Twilight City. Do you have any ideas on how this young lady can be treated?" Qi Ling-er continued asking around.

"There's no way at all. The fire toxin is hard to expel, so there's nothing much I can do," Madam Liu replied.

"Allow me to extend the question to the rest of you. Is there anyone who knows of a way to treat that young lady over here? Also, in case there are any skeptics among the crowd, may I verify with the professionals here whether there is a possibility that we could have faked the fire toxin to put on an act?" Qi Ling-er continued.

"We aren't able to treat such a condition."

The crowd shook their heads.

There was no way they would be able to resolve an illness that even Madam Chen and Madam Liu were helpless before. As for faking the fire toxin... that was even more impossible.

The Lava Python was right before their eyes, and they had witnessed just how vicious the flames were. There was no one here who had not felt the searing heat released by the python's mouth earlier.

No matter how one looked at it, there was no chance that this was a staged ploy.

“Since we have a consensus, allow me to proceed to treat her. This will be a good opportunity to showcase the potency of the ‘God Essence Pill’ that you have been talking about!”

Seeing that she had managed to build up the suspense long enough, Qi Ling-er gestured for the lady holding onto the jade container to take out the pill within and feed it to the burned lady.

Hu!

As soon as the pill slid down her throat, the body of the burned lady immediately began trembling. In less than three breaths, a layer of black skin fell from her arm, and the same happened all over her body.

Qi Ling-er raised her hand once more, and another subordinate rushed forward to clean the burned lady's body with clean water. As the latter's body was rubbed clean, a layer of delicate skin was revealed beneath the black skin.

Everyone was stunned.

All of them had witnessed how the lady was nearly burned to death.

But just by consuming the Beauty Pill, not only did she manage to recover from her burns, all the burn marks vanished without a trace. In fact, the lady's skin seemed to be much better than before, almost as if it had all been a magic trick.

How did this happen?

Was it because the lady had eaten that God Essence Pill?

Were its effects really that great?

The surroundings fell silent. Even those with the loudest criticism earlier had nothing to say anymore.

Everyone was simply too shocked to even say a word.

Satisfied by the astounded looks all around her, Qi Ling-er continued with her introduction. “These are the effects of the God Essence Pill forged by our apothecary. Not only does it beautify one’s appearance, it can also heal scars and help to preserve one’s beauty.

“This miraculous pill will be sold at a price of one thousand Divine Coins each. If you reserve some doubts regarding its effectiveness, you can consume it on the spot and pay only after the pill takes effect. Due to the difficulty in producing them, we were only able to prepare twenty pills for the first sales, and we have already used one of them here. In other words, there are only nineteen of them left. If you were to miss out on this opportunity, I can’t guarantee when there will be new stock!”

“My goodness, that pill costs one thousand Divine Coins each? That’s daylight robbery...”

Everyone was bewildered.

Even Streak of Gray, despite years of plundering from merchants, was only able to accrue a wealth of several hundred Divine Coins.

Yet, a single pill cost one thousand Divine Coins...

This was ridiculous!

“One thousand Divine Coins is indeed overpriced, but she says that she only has nineteen of them in hand. Once they’re sold out, there’s no guarantee whether there’ll be a second batch...”

“I thought that she might be a fraud, so I was watching everything very closely earlier. There’s no way she could have played any tricks during the demonstration. Given the powerful potency of the pill, I think that charging one thousand Divine Coins for it actually isn’t too much!”

“That’s true... We have all aged, and our appearance isn’t what it used to be. If I don’t find a way to reverse it, it’s only a matter of time before a foxy vixen succeeds in seducing my husband. By then, it will be futile no matter how much money I spend...”

“Indeed. Those transmogrified foxes are bom with seductive looks, making it hard to resist their advances...”

Fervent discussions could be heard here and there.

Even though there were quite a few people who thought that the pricing was fair, that did not change the fact that one thousand Divine Coins was a price beyond what most could afford.

Qi Ling-er had made sure to invite only the wealthiest merchants and female cultivators in Twilight City, but it would still be difficult for them to fork out so much money on the spot.

Seeing the looks of hesitation all around, the middle-aged lady standing behind Qi Ling-er whispered worriedly into her ear, “Young Mistress, don’t you think that the price is a little too high?”

This was a price that was set arbitrarily by Qi Ling-er without discussing with anyone, so she had only learned about it just a moment ago as well.

“It’s not high at all. I intend to push out the Beauty Pill as a high-end extravagant product. Don’t worry. They would be willing to spend as much as it takes for them to preserve their youth,” Qi Ling-er replied with a smile.

She understood the mentality of those women very well.

The desire for beauty was encoded in the genes of all humans. As cultivators became more affluent and lived longer lives, they would begin to become more concerned about their reputation and appearance.

The only thing was that it had been impossible for them to change their appearance, at least till that very day. If an opportunity to become more beautiful appeared before their eyes, most of these people would surely grasp it.

“I understand!”

The middle-aged lady nodded after seeing how confident Qi Ling-er was.

“Are there no buyers?”

After waiting for a while, there was still no one who was willing to step forward to buy the Beauty Pill.

Despite that, Qi Ling-er did not look anxious in the least. The fact that they were staying meant that they were already hooked. All they needed was one last push.

So, she turned her eyes toward Ye Qiuyan and smiled.

She calmly rose to her feet, walked over, and clasped her fist. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Envoy Ye.”

Ye Qiuyan nodded slightly to acknowledge Qi Ling-er’s presence, but she did not say anything else.

“Since everyone is still harboring some reservations toward the Beauty Pill, I would like to invite Envoy Ye up to give it a try if it isn’t too much trouble,” Qi Ling-er said. “Envoy Ye, you can be assured that I won’t charge you if the effects of the pill aren’t to your satisfaction.”

Ye Qiuyan frowned upon hearing those words.

However, seeing that the other party did not mean anything else with those words, she pondered for a moment before nodding. “Very well.”

Qi Ling-er raised her hand, and a subordinate immediately carried another Ink Jade Box over and opened it.

Ye Qiuyan first inspected the Ink Jade Box carefully before picking up the God Essence Pill placed within and examining it. After ensuring that there was nothing amiss, she placed it into her mouth.

Hu!

The pill melted as soon as it entered her mouth, and a surge of energy swiftly gushed through her body. Shortly after, she felt a tingling yet slightly numbing sensation on her right cheek.

She subconsciously raised her hand to hold her right cheek, but at this moment, Qi Ling-er suddenly took out a copper mirror and offered it to her.

She hesitantly accepted the copper mirror and looked at her own reflection. Even through the veil, she could tell that her skin was much smoother and more delicate than before. Furthermore, something that was there previously seemed to have disappeared.

With trembling hands, she carefully removed the veil around her face.

And she gasped.

The glaring scar that had plagued her for many years had vanished without a trace. Not only so, she also looked ten years younger than she did before. The difference in her appearance was so great that it was hard to believe that she was still the same person she had seen in the mirror earlier in the day!

“How did you manage to do this?”

Ye Qiuyan could hardly believe her eyes.

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“Envoy Ye...” the elder following behind Ye Qiuyan muttered with reddened eyes.

Even in the Firmament, people still discriminated based on appearance.

Over the years, Ye Qiuyan had faced the scorn and derision of those around her. While she had tried to ignore them, she still found herself affected by their words. She had thought that she had no other choice but act numb before the insults of others, but who could have known that a pill would resolve her problem so easily?

This was a feat that even the God Kings of Royal City might not necessarily be able to pull off!

At the same time, the crowd widened their eyes in shock.

There were not many people in Twilight City who knew about the existence of Envoy Ye. However, those who were in the top echelon of the city, even if they had not met the beautiful Ye Qiuyan, would have at least heard of her before.

She was an expert from Royal City, but due to her cultivation plummeting as a result of the injuries she had sustained, she had been eventually dispatched to Twilight City. It was rumored that she had a glaring scar on the face, which was also why she always veiled her face.

Yet, a single pill actually removed her scar and made her look many years younger.

This was really a miracle!

“How is it? If any of you still harbor any doubts, you are free to give a try. Just as I’ve said before, if the results are not to your satisfaction, I won’t collect a single coin!” Qi Ling-er said with a confident smile.

As someone who governed the massive underground black market, she was extremely skilled at controlling the scene.

And at that very moment, she knew that everything was already in her grasp.

“I’ll give it a try!”

The person who had spoken the loudest against her earlier, Madam Chen, walked out from the crowd.

She had come from a family of apothecaries, and her husband, Chen Yixiong, was famed for being the greatest apothecary in Twilight City.

Ye Qiuyan took a closer look at the other party’s appearance as she walked over.

The other party appeared to be in her mid-fifties. Even though she had taken good care of her skin, it was inevitable that there would be some signs of aging on her body.

Madam Chen picked up a God Essence Pill and swallowed it. She closed her eyes in an attempt to feel the medicinal energy within it so that she could decipher the ingredients used to forge the pill. However, before she could discern anything, she was already hearing excited mutterings all around her.

She quickly opened her eyes, only to see a lady in her early thirties staring back at her in the mirror.

“This is... me?” Madam Chen trembled in disbelief as she hurriedly touched her own face.

The person in the mirror was exactly how she had looked decades ago. Just by eating a single pill, her skin had regained its tension, and her appearance had regressed back in time.

Was it really possible to forge a pill like that?

Astonished, Madam Chen quickly drove her zhenqi to check if it was just an illusion that would disappear after some time, but the result of her inspection was that... her body had really changed!

The pill had not just made her skin smoother and younger than before. More than that, the traumas she had sustained before and the pill toxins that had accumulated in her body had all been cleared away as well. While her cultivation had not increased, her strength was much greater than before!

“This... It isn't just a normal Beauty Pill. It actually has powerful recovery effects as well,” Madam Chen exclaimed in agitation.

As a descendant from a lineage of apothecaries, she could immediately understand just how valuable the Beauty Pill was. Just its effect of beautifying's one appearance was already amazing in itself, but to think that it would aid in one's cultivation as well.

It was definitely a bargain to buy such a pill for just one thousand Divine Coins!

“Madam Chen, how is it?” Qi Ling-er asked with a smile.

“Ahem... The effects are excellent so far, but I still need to test it out a little to check if there are any side effects. As you know, potent pills tend to have some side effects.” Madam Chen suppressed her excitement and replied nonchalantly.

“That's true...”

The crowd nodded in agreement.

It was common knowledge that the stronger the medicinal effect of a pill was, the more likely it would be damaging to one's body. Madam Chen's remark immediately left everyone wondering if there was some kind of fatal flaw in the Beauty Pill.

Qi Ling-er frowned in response to Madam Chen's words.

It was clear from the latter's expression earlier that she had already understood the effects of the Beauty Pill, but why was she playing the fool?

“Madam Chen, may I know what kind of side effects you suspect it to have?” a person amid the crowd shouted out.

“Well, I'm not too sure. I'll have to look into it carefully,” Madam Chen said contemplatively. She turned to Qi Ling-er. “You have eighteen Beauty Pills with you at the moment, right? Why don't you sell them all to me? I'll be able to research them with my husband to check how severe the side effects are. If we can resolve all the issues surrounding it, I believe that everyone will benefit greatly from it...”

“Is that so?” Qi Ling-er remarked as a mocking smile crept onto her lips.

She had been wondering if there was really something wrong with the Beauty Pill, but it turned out that Madam Chen was just impressed by the effects and wanted to monopolize all of the current pills.

Madam Liu also quickly noticed that something was amiss, so she stepped forward and said with a displeased look on her face, “You want to buy all of them? That won’t do. I want to try it as well!”

“Me too!”

“Give me one!”

“I’ll be taking this one then!”

“Don’t you snatch with me. I’ll offer 1,100 Divine Coins!”

“I’ll offer 1,200 then!”

None of those present were fools. As figures in the top echelon of Twilight City, they were able to swiftly discern Madam Chen’s real intentions.

There were only eighteen pills available. If they did not make a move, who knew when else they would be able to secure a treasure like this?

Under the panic buying, it did not take long for all eighteen Beauty Pills to be sold out. Furthermore, the prices went up to as much as 1,500 Divine Coins, which was much higher than they had initially estimated.

Seeing how such a small pill was able to be sold at such an astronomical price, the middle-aged lady could not help but look at Qi Ling-er impressed.

As expected of the Young Mistress, her means were indeed extraordinary.

There was no doubt that the Beauty Pill was an amazing product, but it would be all for naught without an effective marketing strategy.

It was through emphasizing the limited quantity and showcasing its miraculous effects that the price had been hiked up so swiftly. Otherwise, even if they priced it at five hundred Divine Coins each, chances were, no one would even spare the Beauty Pill a glance.

But within a single hour, they had managed to sell everything.

On top of that, they had managed to build up the reputation of the Beauty Pill. The next time they put it out on the market, they could be assured that it would be sold out within moments.

Ye Qiuyan was also looking at Qi Ling-er curiously.

She had thought that Qi Ling-er was just all talk, but the effects of the Beauty Pill exceeded her wildest expectations. Just where in the world did Qi Ling-er manage to procure such a formidable pill?

She had scoured Royal City, but she had not been able to find anything like this at all. Even when everything was happening before her, she still felt a little dreamy inside.

Ye Qiuyan turned around and instructed the elder behind her, “Investigate it. Find the origin of the pill. I doubt that even Conferred God King Qi Meng would have been able to forge something like that.”

“Yes, I understand!” The elder nodded before vanishing in the crowd.

As the envoy to Twilight City, she had her own sources to gather intelligence within the city.

In City Lord Manor, a middle-aged man wearing armor looked at the box in his hands with a deep frown between his eyebrows.

City Lord Wu Fangqing.

He was the father of Wu Xiaoxiao, the haughty young lady whom Zhang Xuan had met previously.

“Is the pill really as effective as you say?” Wu Fangqing raised his head to look at the middle-aged man before him.

The elder standing before Wu Fangqing clasped his fist and said, "That's right! I witnessed it with my own eyes."

Even though the price of the pill was eventually hiked up to an astronomical price, given the connections of the City Lord Manor, it was not too much trouble for them to secure one.

Wu Fangqing still appeared to have some reservations regarding the matter. He pondered for a moment longer before passing down an order. "Get Xiaoxiao to come here."

"Father, you were looking for me?"

It did not take long for Wu Xiaoxiao to be brought before Wu Fangqing. With a sheepish look on her face, she said, "I was cultivating seriously. I really wasn't slacking off at all!"

"I didn't call you here to talk about your cultivation. Swallow this pill!" Wu Fangqing instructed.

"Swallow this pill?" Wu Xiaoxiao was perplexed as to why her father would call her there only to eat a perfectly ordinary God Essence Pill. Nevertheless, she still picked it up and swallowed it whole.

Barely after swallowing it, she saw her father's usually impassive face slowly warping in shock, as if he was looking at something unbelievable.

"Father, what's wrong?"

She had always viewed her father to be a solemn individual who rarely showed any emotions on his face. As such, she was taken aback by the shocked look on his face, fearing that she had done something wrong.

Young Mistress, you should take a look yourself!"

The elder in the room quickly passed a mirror to Wu Xiaoxiao.

Perplexed, Wu Xiaoxiao took the mirror and brought it up to her face. Her body began trembling as she pinched her cheeks incredulously. "Is this really me?"

In the mirror, she saw her freckles and acne scars vanishing without a trace. While there was not too much difference in

her overall appearance, she looked much more beautiful than before.

Furthermore, the change was not just limited to her appearance. Somehow, her disposition seemed to have become more graceful.

To think that consuming a pill would induce such a massive change in her.

“Father, the pill that you gave me...” Wu Xiaoxiao looked at Wu Fangqing anxiously.

“It’s nothing,” Wu Fangqing replied curtly as he stood up and paced around the room quietly with his hands behind his back.

Then, he suddenly turned to Wu Xiaoxiao and asked, “Tell me about Zhang Xuan, whom you met back then.”

“Zhang Xuan?” Wu Xiaoxiao was a little bewildered by the abrupt request.

Nevertheless, she still nodded and told her father everything she knew about him.

After she was done, Wu Fangqing waved his hand and said, “Got it. You are dismissed.”

As the city lord, it went without saying that he was aware of the existence of the underground black market. In fact, some of his spies had infiltrated it.

As such, he was able to swiftly uncover that the creator of the so-called Beauty Pill was Zhang Xuan.

Recalling the earlier report that he had received regarding how Zhang Xuan had consecutively won fifteen slots to the Celestial Mountain, it was hard for him to ignore the young man even if he wanted to!

“City Lord Wu, the value of the pill is inestimable!” the elder said with a glint in his eyes right after Wu Xiaoxiao left the room.

Anyone who was not completely blind would be able to tell with a glance that that the Beauty Pill would become a money fountain in the future.

Wu Fangqing nodded in agreement. “If we can obtain the pill formula, we will be able to further develop Twilight City. There is also a good chance that I will be able to advance to greater heights... However, as you’ve just heard, Zhang Xuan appears to have an extremely powerful teacher, and there’s a good chance that his teacher is a master teacher! It’s likely that the pills were forged by his teacher.”

The reason he had invited his daughter over was to have the latter test out the medicine and confirm Zhang Xuan’s background.

“Mo Yuan is no more than a middle-tier God, so his ability to discern a person’s cultivation might still be sorely lacking. There’s no guarantee that Yang Xuan is as powerful as he thinks. Why don’t I conduct some further investigation into this?” the elder asked with narrowed eyes.

“Be careful. Also, I want you to negotiate with him on my behalf to see if he’s willing to sell the pill formula. If he isn’t willing, we’ll just have to find some other ways. Naturally, make sure that he doesn’t know that I’m the buyer!” Wu Fangqing instructed.

“I understand.” The elder nodded before vanishing on the spot.

Someone who could rise to the position of a city lord and stand above the rules could not possibly be someone without any means.

It was inevitable that he would be moved by the existence of such a formidable pill.

It would be great if he could acquire it through proper channels, but if that failed, he would just have to find some other way.

“Someone who can forge the Beauty Pill, guess the numbers on the slot roulette accurately each and every time, capture the middle-tier God Streak of Gray despite being only a low-tier God himself... Zhang Xuan is really no ordinary person...” Wu Fangqing clenched his fists tightly together.

“But so what if you aren’t an ordinary person? In Twilight City, I call the shots. Even if you are a dragon, you’ll have no

choice but to lie low before me. Who you are won't make a difference to me at all, even if you are a master teacher!"

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“Do not call me master after we enter Twilight City. That’ll make it easy for others to figure out your identity. Call me Young Master instead,” Zhang Xuan instructed while sitting atop the aerial divine beast.

“Also, you don’t have a surname yet, right? You shall follow my surname ‘Zhang’. Zhang Jia, that will be your name.”

“Got it,” the young man, Zhang Jia, replied with a nod.

“Also, I like to maintain a low profile, so make sure not to make any trouble or do anything that stands out too much within the city.”

“Rest assured, Young Master. I also like to maintain a low profile as well,” Zhang Jia replied leisurely as it picked its ear.

Despite being the strongest divine beast in the vicinity of Twilight City, it had obediently remained in its own territory and never left the area. That should probably be the epitome of humility and low profile.

“That’s good. By the way, who are the ones who attacked you last night?” Zhang Xuan asked.

The first time he encountered the Phosphor Armored Beast, there had been two fairly strong individuals who attempted to assassinate it.

“They should be from City Lord Manor. Wu Fangqing has been trying to tame me for some time now, but he has never succeeded,” Zhang Jia replied.

“If the city lord is trying to tame you, shouldn’t he challenge you personally? Why would he choose to assassinate you instead?”

Given the prowess of the Phosphor Armored Beast, the City Lord Manor’s prestige would be significantly boosted if the city lord was able to tame it. However, if it was made known

that the city lord had been launching underhanded assaults on the Phosphor Armored Beast, it would really sully his reputation!

If it was found that the one who had set the rules had not been observing them, it would surely cause a major public uproar!

“Why would he choose to assassinate me? Isn’t that obvious? He’s a hypocrite!” Zhang Jia scoffed coldly.

“Putting aside assassination attempts, he has already tried time and time again to poison me. If not for my powerful constitution that allows me to break down most poisons, I would have died by now!”

“He tried to poison you as well?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

If that was the case, he would really have to tread carefully around the city lord in the future.

He had thought that the person who established the law in Twilight City would be someone honorable and dignified, but from the looks of it, it seemed like the rules were only a way for him to control others.

Just like that, Zhang Xuan and Zhang Jia chatted atop the aerial divine beast as they swiftly made their way back to Twilight City.

At the same time, in the residence where Zhang Xuan and the others were staying, a name scroll was delivered.

Ting Fei?” Sun Qiang read the name on the name scroll with a frown.

The young master was not home, and the others were busy cultivating. So, he was the one who was handling all the miscellaneous matters at the moment.

“Based on how he introduced himself, he appears to be a merchant that came from another town. He’s here to visit the young master for an urgent matter,” the servant who received the name scroll reported.

Even though they had only moved in not too long ago, Sun Qiang had managed to recruit a few servants to cook for them

and clean the residence. It would be unfortunate if they had to cultivate on an empty stomach after earning so much money.

“Invite him in,” Sun Qiang instructed.

Very soon, an elder was brought to the main hall.

“Butler Sun,” Ying Fei greeted with a bright smile.

He had already investigated the group carefully prior to visiting the residence, so he knew the names of everyone there.

Sun Qiang nodded as he gestured for Ying Fei to take a seat by the side. After that, he looked at Ying Fei and asked, “May I know the reason behind your visit?”

“I’ll get straight to the point. I heard that the Beauty Pill that the entire city has been raving over is forged by Young Master Zhang Xuan,” Ying Fei said.

“Beauty Pill?” Sun Qiang repeated in confusion.

What the heck has Young Master been up to?

I’ve never heard of this before!

Seeing how the fatty was able to hide his emotions so well despite his low cultivation, Ying Fei chuckled softly and said, “There’s no need to put on an act before me. I did my homework before coming all the way here.”

“Is that so?” Sun Qiang replied calmly. “Then... what’s your motive here?”

He knew that the Young Master had many means, and he tended to do whatever he wanted based on his whims, never bothering to inform him in advance. Given the current situation, it seemed like he could only try to sound out the other party, assess the situation carefully, and adapt accordingly.

“I like your forthright personality, Butler Sun! Since you have asked me straight, I won’t beat about the bush either. My motive is very simple. I hope that you can sell the pill formula behind the Beauty Pill to me. Of course, the price is negotiable,” Ying Fei said.

“Pill formula? You wish to buy the pill formula of the Beauty Pill?”

“That’s right.”

“My apologies, but the pill formula was something that our Young Master came up with after countless sleepless nights. It’s not for sale. Men, send our guest out!” Sun Qiang spoke with imposing authority, leaving no room for rebuttal at all.

He had no idea what the Beauty Pill was, but there was no way he would sell the pill formula created by the Young Master.

Those words immediately wiped the smile off Ying Fei’s face.

“Butler Sun, I think you should give this matter some more consideration. There’s no need to rush into an answer. Twilight City is indeed a place governed by law, but your group has just arrived here, and you even offended Streak of Gray before entering the city. It would be unfortunate if the other bandits were to exact vengeance on you, don’t you think?” Ying Fei sneered.

At the same time, he snapped his finger, and an eerie mist quietly crept toward Sun Qiang’s feet.

The will of the city lord was very clear. They had to acquire the pill formula of the Beauty Pill by any means necessary. Since Zhang Xuan’s group had dealt with Streak of Gray, they could use him as a cover to make a move on them.

It was not without reason that Streak of Gray had managed to live to this day.

Sometimes, the City Lord Manor needed a cover to move, and there were no scapegoats better than bandits.

“Are you threatening me?” Sun Qiang’s eyes narrowed into slits as he rose to his feet and stepped forward.

With imposing majesty behind his movements, he sneered coldly. “I have weathered countless storms with the Young Master, and it was through overcoming difficulty after difficulty that we managed to come this far. Do you think that the likes of you will be able to scare me?”

“We’ll know whether I’m scary enough for you very soon...”
Ying Fei smiled coldly as he quietly counted down to the moment that his poison took effect.

Then, he stood up as well, tilted his chin upward smugly as if victory was already his, and said, “How is it? Are you starting to feel some discomfort in your chest...”

Pah!

But before he could even finish his words, a slap had already fallen on his face, causing his cheeks to sting in pain.

“Discomfort? The hell with your discomfort!” Sun Qiang spat with fury. “Stop trying to put on airs before me. While I was gazing down upon the world, you were still playing in the mud! How many times do I have to say it to get it through your thick skull? You aren’t welcome here, so scram!”

You...”

The fatty should have collapsed from the poison by now, so Ying Fei was completely stunned by the abrupt slap. Just thinking about the humiliation that he had just suffered caused his body to tremble in fury.

He was really tempted to slap the living daylights out of the other party at that very instant, but thinking about the possible evidence it would leave behind, he suppressed his rage and held himself back.

Instead, he flicked his finger once more and sent a surge of poison energy toward Sun Qiang.

Pah!

Barely a moment after the poison energy seeped into Sun Qiang’s body, Ying Fei’s face suddenly flew to the side from another slap.

“Do you not understand words, or do you intend to challenge me?”

“H-how are you fine?” Ying Fei was bewildered.

He might have failed by an accident the first time, but the second time, he had seen the poison energy seeping right into

the other party's body. Yet, the other party was still moving around vigorously, seemingly unaffected by his poison. What the heck was going on?

While this poison was not enough to deal with the Phosphor Armored Beast, it should have been more than enough to force any ordinary high-tier God to their knees!

Given that the other party was not even a god, there was no way he should have been able to withstand his poison! Or could it be that... the other party was actually concealing his true cultivation?

"I don't believe it. There's no way such a thing could happen!"

With gritted teeth, Ying Fei took out all the poison powder he was hiding under his cloak and tossed it all over.

Pah!

Sun Qiang dealt yet another slap on Ying Fei's face as he bellowed, "What the heck are you doing? If you don't want to die, you'd better get out of here right now. Or else, don't blame me for getting nasty on you!"

Do I look like a helpless lamb to you? Is that why you are scattering powder all over me?

It seems like I have really been too kind to you!

Even though the three slaps were not too heavy, they had really crushed Ying Fei's dignity. He had never felt so humiliated. If not for his fear that Sun Qiang might have been hiding his true strength, he would have long made a move.

"You're asking for it..."

However, he had finally come to the limits of his patience.

He raised his arm to return the slap to the arrogant butler, but at that moment, his ears suddenly twitched a little. It was a transmission from his subordinates.

Hu!

He shot a piercing glare at Sun Qiang before turning around and leaving the residence.

A short moment after walking out of the residence, two silhouettes suddenly appeared before him.

They were the ones who had attempted to assassinate the Phosphor Armored Beast just a while ago.

“What’s wrong?” Ying Fei frowned.

“Lord, someone stepped in when we were trying to capture the Phosphor Armored Beast, resulting in the failure of the mission!” one of the silhouettes reported.

“Who was it?” Ying Fei asked lividly.

“Zhang Xuan. Furthermore, it seems like he has somehow managed to tame the Phosphor Armored Beast!” the silhouette replied.

“Zhang Xuan managed to tame... the Phosphor Armored Beast?” Ying Fei could hardly believe what he was hearing.

He knew full well just how proud the Phosphor Armored Beast was. The city lord had visited it time and time again, offering it all kinds of treasures, but the latter simply refused to lower its head. Yet, it actually submitted to a mere low-tier God...

“There’s no mistake about it. Not only so, I also suspect that Zhang Xuan might have been hiding his true strength all along!”

Ying Fei felt a little light-headed.

He had found it weird how a low-tier God like Zhang Xuan was able to capture the middle-tier God Streak of Gray so easily, and now, the latter had actually managed to tame the divine beast that even the city lord had trouble dealing with.

It was indeed very possible that Zhang Xuan had been hiding his true strength, just like Butler Sun!

Even though he had yet to meet Zhang Xuan in person, he could still deduce a thing or two from how his subordinate acted.

If Butler Sun was really as powerless as he appeared, how could the other party face him with such confidence and slap

him without any hesitation?

Furthermore, his poison actually turned out to be completely ineffective against the other party!

If the other party was truly a mere Semi-Divinity, any one of his poisons would have been enough for the other party to die many times over!

On top of that, Butler Sun had said something about ‘gazing down upon the world’. It was definitely no easy feat to gaze down on the Nine Skies of the Firmament!

“It’s fortunate that I didn’t make a move earlier,” Ying Fei murmured as he wiped the cold sweat from his forehead.

He felt relieved that he had held his anger back when he was slapped earlier. Otherwise, if he had really confronted the other party directly back then, he might have died in there!

Having realized this, he subconsciously shot a glance back at the residence that he had just left. The gates had not closed yet, allowing him to catch a glimpse of the fatty standing at the very center of the courtyard with his hands behind his back.

He was gazing at the sky with a firm look on his face, and it felt as if even the greatest of problems would not be able to faze him.

“Despite appearing to be a mere Semi-Divinity, he actually wields unfathomable strength!” Ying Fei widened his eyes in realization.

From beginning to end, Ying Fei had never concealed his cultivation as a high-tier God. There was no way a mere Semi-Divinity would have dared slap him without showing the slightest hint of fear!

It was very likely that he had met the real deal.

“Lord, what do we do?” one of the silhouettes asked.

“Let’s wait out here for the time being. Perhaps we’ll catch sight of Zhang Xuan while he’s coming back,” Ying Fei replied.

Even though he was semi-convinced that Zhang Xuan and his group were far stronger than they appeared, he still wanted to verify the matter once more. The value of the Beauty Pill was definitely worth the extra effort.

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Ying Fei quickly found a place to hide in the vicinity.

Not too long later, a black shadow walked up to the entrance of the residence and passed a name scroll over to the guards.

Jiya!

A few moments later, the gates to the residence creaked open.

Judging from the silhouette of the black shadow, Ying Fei judged the person seemed to be a lady with a particularly alluring figure. He nimbly climbed up a tree, and behind the cover of the leaves, he peeked at the courtyard of the residence.

“It’s the boss of the underground black market, Qi Ling-er!”
Ying Fei gasped in shock.

As the aide and confidant of the city lord, there was no way he wouldn’t recognize Qi Ling-er.

Wasn’t she still selling the Beauty Pill at the Twilight Market a moment ago? Why would she suddenly appear here? Sensing that something was up, Ying Fei pricked his ears up so as to ensure that he wouldn’t miss any vital information. “Qi Ling-er pays respect to Butler Sun!” Qi Ling-er clasped her fist and bowed with a surprisingly respectful attitude. “Un. May I know the reason behind your visit?” Sun Qiang asked.

Despite his calm exterior, he was starting to feel a little overwhelmed inside.

It was just a day after they arrived, but an old man had already come knocking a moment ago demanding for the sale of what Beauty Pill. Yet, barely after the old man left, another person came knocking on the doors of their residence...

Just what in the world had the Young Master been doing last night after parting with them?!

The Beauty Pill is a joint venture between me and Young Master Zhang Xuan. Under the agreement we have come to previously, we were going to split the profits equally. However, after contemplating over it once more, we decided to offer Young Master Zhang Xuan 90% of the profits instead as a symbol of our sincerity. Not only so, we'll also absorb the cost of production as well!"

With an earnest smile, Qi Ling-er took out a card and a storage ring and entrusted them respectfully into Sun Qiang's hands, "Stored in the card is the profit we have earned from the earlier sales. All in all, there should be 28,000 Divine Coins inside. Also, we have managed to procure the medicinal herb that Young Master Zhang Xuan requires, and it is currently in the storage ring. May I know where is Young Master Zhang Xuan at? It would be my honor to pay my respects to him..."

"My apologies, but our Young Master isn't around," Sun Qiang replied.

"Ah, it seems like I have come at a bad timing. Alright then, I won't impose on you any longer..." Qi Ling-er clasped her fist once more before backing out of the residence.

"They are going by a 9:1 split in profit? Furthermore, it's Zhang Xuan who is receiving the 90%?"

Taking everything in sight, Ying Fei's teeth clattered against one another.

Having kept tabs on Qi Ling-er for many years, he was certain that he had gained a good grasp over the latter's personality. She was extremely sharp-witted, and she had no qualms with exploiting others for her own profit. Furthermore, as a descendant of the Royal City's Qi Clan, she didn't fear any powers within Twilight City at all.

In fact, she didn't have much respect for the city lord either.

If not for that, she wouldn't have dared to open an underground black market here and trade all sorts of prohibited goods.

Yet, someone as domineering as her was actually acting like an obedient child. She willingly gave away 90% of the profits

and bore the cost of production!

He would never fathomed that there would actually be a person in Twilight City who could curb Qi Ling-er like that!

It seems like Qi Ling-er knows of Zhang Xuan's true identity or strength... Otherwise, there's no way she would have acted in such a manner, Ying Fei thought.

Once again, he was gladdened by the fact that he managed to keep his impulse in check earlier.

If he had really made a move on Butler Sun, he would have been kicked right through the gates of the netherworld.

"I have to report this news to the city lord..."

Knowing how important and urgent this matter was, Ying Fei sprinted all the way to the City Lord Manor.

You said that Zhang Xuan has tamed the Phosphor Armored Beast, and Qi Ling-er paid her respects to his butler and even willingly gave away 90% of the profits from selling the Beauty Pills to him?" Wu Fangqing could hardly believe what he was hearing.

He was still thinking a moment ago that no matter how impressive a figure Zhang Xuan might be, he would be able to curb the young man through his authority as the city lord. But as it turned out, he might have been underestimating the young man's capabilities!

"There's no doubt about it, I saw it with my own eyes!" Ying Fei nodded vehemently, as if fearing that the city lord would doubt his words.

"The Phosphor Armored Beast is rumored to possess invincible defense. Even though its cultivation is at high-tier God realm at the moment, its true fighting prowess wouldn't pale too much in comparison to me. I have already offered it the most valuable things I am able bring out, but instead of submitting to me, it actually chose that young lad instead!

"And just as you have said, Qi Ling-er's bizarre attitude toward him is also highly suspicious as well. We'll really have

to look deeper into the young man's background..." Wu Fangqing said solemnly.

Twilight City had never been lacking in talented individuals, but this was the first time he was encountering such a peculiar case!

"Look into Qi Ling-er's movements after she met Zhang Xuan back at the underground black market. She must have stumbled upon some crucial information regarding him for her to suddenly change the allocation of profits!" Wu Fangqing instructed.

"I understand!" Ying Fei nodded before leaving the room.

Around an hour later, Ying Fei returned back to the room and reported, "City Lord Wu, I have managed to compile a detailed report on Qi Ling-er's movements. Right after meeting Zhang Xuan, she headed straight to the Netherworld Pool of the Netherworld Palace!"

"The Netherworld Pool... Was she trying to test Zhang Xuan's bloodline?" Wu Fangqing frowned.

The greatest use of the Netherworld Pool was its ability to test the prowess of one's bloodline. There was a good chance that she might have stumbled on a great secret after visiting the Netherworld Pool, leading to the change in her attitude.

Ying Fei nodded in agreement, "I believe so too. It's just that... I don't have the clearance to look deeper into the matter."

"It's fine, I'll head there personally to take a look," Wu Fangqing replied.

He swiftly rushed over to the hall where the Netherworld Pool was, and with a wave of his hand, a crystal-like recording device flew into his hands.

He channeled his divine energy into it, and Qi Ling-er silhouette slowly swirled into appearance.

"Celestial God Wu Jiang submitted to him?"

"God King of Transcendent Flames has bowed down to him as well..."

“Isn’t that Conferred God King Nangong Ping? He’s actually paying respects to Zhang Xuan too?”

Wu Fangqing was absolutely flabbergasted. He didn’t even notice that he had bit on his own tongue.

The bloodline test of the Netherworld Pool was famed for its impeccable accuracy, and the fact that a Conferred God King had submitted could only mean that...

Zhang Xuan possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch!

One must know that there were only ten God Monarchs in the entire Firmament, and one of them had only appeared recently...

Wu Fangqing could hardly fathom just how high Zhang Xuan’s standing would be if he was really the descendant of a God Monarch!

Could it be possible that the young man was currently traveling under another alias in order to train himself?

“Hurry up and prepare a gift! I must visit Young Master Zhang Xuan right now!”

Walking out of the Netherworld Pool with hastened footsteps, Wu Fangqing passed down an instruction to Ying Fei anxiously.

“Wait a moment. If I recall correctly, Xiaoxiao has offended Young Master Zhang Xuan previously as well. Get her to kneel in front of Young Master Zhang Xuan’s residence to seek his forgiveness!”

“Yes, I’ll have it done right now!” Ying Fei replied as he rushed all the way back to the City Lord Manor.

“You should be quite familiar with the city lord since he has tried to tame you many times. How is he as a person, and exactly how powerful is he?”

As the majestic buildings of Twilight City appeared in the horizon, Zhang Xuan turned to the young man beside him and asked.

No matter what, it was a fact that he was residing in Twilight City at the moment. It would be best for him to take precautions for all possibilities, or else no one would be there to save them if any mishaps were to occur.

“That fellow’s cultivation is a low-tier Celestial God, and he’s pretty powerful. I could barely withstand his attacks before my breakthrough, and retaliation is out of question. The only reason why I could stand my ground against him thus far is because he hasn’t had any intention of killing me so far. Otherwise, I would have been a goner by now!” Zhang Jia, the Phosphor Armored Beast, pondered for a moment before replying,

Its ‘unparalleled defense* was only applicable against fellow high-tier Gods. Against a low-tier Celestial God, a higher existence than it, it was inevitable that its defense would prove to be lacking.

“What about now?”

“In a fair battle, now that I’m a Celestial God as well, I can probably send that fellow flying with a kick on his ass. However, I suspect that he has a low-tier Celestial God artifact with him. If he were to use a weapon, it won’t be that easy for me to defeat him. But of course, there’s only so much that he can do about me too. I would say that the chances of winning are about 50:50,” Zhang Jia replied.

In the Firmament, artifacts could be divided into God artifacts, Celestial God artifacts, God King artifacts and God Monarch artifacts, and every single tier could be further subdivided into low-tier, middle-tier, high-tier, and pinnacle.

The prowess of a low-tier Celestial God was not to be underestimated. Even with the Phosphor Armored Beast’s superior defenses, it would still be difficult for it to deal against a low-tier Celestial God wielding a low-tier Celestial God artifact.

Zhang Xuan nodded in comprehension.

The greatest strength of the human cultivators lay in their ability to use their body and weapons effectively. While divine

beasts possessed naturally powerful bodies, they often tended to lack skills.

“As for how that fellow is as a person, he is a cold-hearted and deeply self-centered individual. Years of being in authority has bred his desire to control everything around him. If he were to find out that you have tamed me, it’s very likely that he’ll come at you one way or another,” Zhang Jia said worriedly.

The city lord was the typical ‘come under me or die’ type of villain. It was likely that Zhang Xuan’s act of taming the Phosphor Armored Beast ahead of him would breed much hostility in him.

“He’ll come at me?”

“Yeap. Magnanimity is one thing that he doesn’t have. Two years ago, an outsider accidentally touched his daughter, and that fellow severed his hands without any hesitation before tossing him into prison. No one has heard of that outsider ever since, and there are rumors going around that he might already have been killed...” Zhang Jia shook his head.

Narrow-minded individuals were particularly hard to deal with because they had the tendency to overreact over the slightest matter.

“I will be careful,” Zhang Xuan replied.

In any case, he was planning to leave Twilight City after Zhao Ya and the others reached godhood. He wanted to start looking for Luo Ruoxin and Kong shi, so it wasn’t likely that he would get too involved with the city lord.

After chatting a while later, Zhang Xuan glanced below and smiled, “We have arrived. My residence is right below.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Jia looked down as well and saw a decently-sized residence below.

“Oh? Why are there two people kneeling in front of your residence?” Zhang Jia asked curiously..

Bewildered, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over and saw a young lady and an old man kneeling right in front of his main

entrance. A fatty was gazing down at them coldly with his hands behind his back, as if berating them.

Aside from them, there was also a middle-aged man nodding respectfully with a humble smile on his face.

“Just because our Young Master is kind and magnanimous doesn’t mean that I’ll forgive you easily for affronting him! The least you can do is to kneel till daylight as a show of sincerity!” the fatty harrumphed with astounding authority in his voice.

“What the hell is Sun Qiang up to?”

Seeing how his butler’s ‘delusion of grandeur’ was acting up again, Zhang Xuan quickly urged his divine beast to land. Then, he turned his gaze behind to explain things to Zhang Jia, only to see the latter trembling uncontrollably, as if he had just seen something out of the world.

“What’s wrong?” Zhang Xuan was bewildered to see this fearless divine beast acting in such a way.

With a trembling voice, Zhang Jia said, “The ones who are kneeling on the floor are the city lord’s daughter and an expert from the City Lord Manor, and the middle-aged man apologizing over there is no other than City Lord Wu Fangqing!”

It was just a moment ago that it said that the city lord was narrow-minded and could very well make things difficult for Zhang Xuan, but in the blink of an eye, his daughter and subordinate actually came all the way here to kneel on the floor and apologize...

Holy heavens! Can anyone tell me what’s going on here?

Zhang Jia felt like he was losing touch with reality.

2129 The Gifts of the City Lord

Turning away from the frenzied Phosphor Armored Beast, Zhang Xuan took a closer look and swiftly identified the young lady kneeling on the floor to be no other than the young lady he had met back at the Grand Spirit Mountain, Wu Xiaoxiao!

However, this young lady seemed to have just undergone a transformative change. Her facial features appeared to be the same as before, but perhaps due to the difference in her disposition, she emanated a more graceful and feminine charm that made her appear different from before.

Due to that, Zhang Xuan actually failed to draw the link at first glance.

“Did she eat the pill I made?” Zhang Xuan quickly came to a realization.

Vaguely, he could sense the presence of his Heaven’s Path zhenqi within Wu Xiaoxiao’s body.

Once the divine beast got close enough to the ground, Zhang Xuan leaped off its body and landed within the courtyard. Upon noticing Zhang Xuan’s return, Sun Qiang quickly walked over to greet him.

“What’s wrong?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Young Master, that man over there claims to be the city of Twilight City, and he says that he’s here to ask for your forgiveness!” Sun Qiang said as he quickly went through everything that had happened a while ago.

After hearing the full story, Zhang Xuan finally turned his assessing gaze toward Wu Fangqing.

The latter was a middle-aged man in his mid-forties. What particularly stood out about him was how deep his eyes were,

almost reminiscent of the boundless ocean. He didn't appear to be an easy figure to deal with.

Not only so, his presence was quiet but imposing. Just like what the Phosphor Armored Beast had said, he seemed to be quite a powerful cultivator.

“City Lord Wu, you are too courteous. It's all just a misunderstanding,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

While Zhang Xuan was assessing him from head to toe, Wu Fangqing was doing the same as well.

There was no doubt that the young man before him was indeed a low-tier God. There was nothing at all that really stood out about him, such that it was easy to overlook him amid other cultivators.

If he hadn't known that the young man possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch beforehand, it was questionable whether he would have even paid this young man a second glance.

“Even though it's a misunderstanding, it's still a huge oversight on my part to allow such a thing to happen. This is a token of sincerity from the City Lord Manor, and I hope that Young Master Zhang Xuan could accept this gift so as to assuage my guilt,” Wu Fangqing said as he passed a storage ring over.

Zhang Xuan felt that it was dubious how the city lord was acting out of character, but nevertheless, he still responded to Sun Qiang's questioning gaze with a nod.

It would be rude for him to turn down a person's goodwill, not to mention that the other party was the city lord. It would be terrible if the city lord thought that he was looking down on him by rejecting his gift.

Receiving Zhang Xuan's signal, Sun Qiang immediately stepped forward to accept the storage ring on his behalf.

“This way please!”

After helping up the kneeling Wu Xiaoxiao and Ying Fei, they proceeded to the main hall and took their seats. Once everyone

was settled in, Zhang Xuan looked at Wu Fangqing quietly for a moment before asking, "Pardon my candidness, but I am no more than an ordinary low-tier God who has just arrived in Twilight City. I feel a little unnerved by how polite you are, City Lord Wu."

There was bound to be something wrong if someone was acting out of character.

He had made sure to stay out of the limelight over the past day since he arrived at Twilight City, but why would the city lord personally pay him a visit, even preparing such a huge gift?

"I have heard about Young Master Zhang Xuan's affairs from my daughter. You have saved her life, so it's only right for me to express my gratitude to you," Wu Fangqing quickly replied.

The fact that he, despite being the city lord, had received no news about the arrival of an individual possessing the bloodline of a God Monarch meant that the other party was likely traveling incognito.

Given that the other party was hiding his identity, it would be unwise if he were to step forward and attempt to expose the other party. He would just be landing himself in trouble if he were to do so, so it might be better for him to feign ignorance.

Zhang Xuan proceeded on to ask Wu Fangqing a few more questions, but he sensed that the latter wasn't being completely honest. So, he eventually stopped asking altogether.

And after chatting for a while, Wu Fangqing bade his farewell.

With a wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan beckoned for Sun Qiang to pass the storage ring from Wu Fangqing over in order to examine the contents within. With just a glance, he couldn't help but be impressed at how rich the City Lord Manor was.

Wu Fangqing actually gave him 10,000 Divine Coins, a high-tier God sword, and innumerable medicinal herbs!

If it was regarding the matter concerning Wu Xiaoxiao, there was definitely no need for the other party to give him so much.

However, since the city lord was interested in getting on good terms with him, Zhang Xuan couldn't be bothered to question his motive either. He had Sun Qiang pass over the stuff that Qi Ling-er had brought over, and through a unique method he had devised, he swiftly forged the Mayang Beast Blood and Greenbeast Ancient Grass together.

Then, returning to his room, he set up an isolation barrier around before drawing out his soul to absorb the energy harnessed within those two medicinal herbs.

Since he had acquired everything he needed, it went without saying that he should raise his cultivation right away. Once he had absolute strength, nothing else mattered at all anymore.

Tzzzzz!

His soul swiftly devoured the spiritual energy harnessed by the two medicinal herbs, allowing him to grow at a visible pace. Tapping into the time difference between the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn, on the surface, his growth appeared to be terrifyingly swift.

Some time later, a crisp cracking sound reminiscent of a broken egg echoed in the air. Following that, the Greenbeast Ancient Grass and the Mayang Beast Blood suddenly burned into cinders simultaneously, terminating his source of spiritual energy.

“What a pity!” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply as his soul returned back into his body.

While he knew it was unlikely, he was still secretly hoping that he would be able to raise his soul cultivation all the way to Celestial God realm. Unfortunately, his hopes fell flat.

As he rose through the ranks, his soul had been tempered by lightning, heavenly flames, and all sorts of natural forces, resulting in its vastly superior resilience. Due to that, it was much harder for him to make a breakthrough as compared to other cultivators.

As potent as the Mayang Beast Blood and Greenbeast Ancient Grass might be, they would only suffice for him to raise his

cultivation to high-tier God. He was still a fair distance away from reaching Celestial God realm.

That being said, with his physical body and soul cultivation having achieved breakthroughs, he was finally able to raise his zhenqi cultivation as well.

So, Zhang Xuan took some time to reinforce his soul cultivation before taking out bottles of God Essence Pills. He devoured them without any hesitation and channeled the spiritual energy through the unique circulation pathways of the Pathos of Heavens.

Just like that, it didn't take him too long to overcome his current bottleneck.

He had ample God Essence Pills with him at the moment anyway, so there was no need to be worried about wasting them. So, he continued gobbling them down, providing him with the momentum for his cultivation to surge.

Hong long!

Barely a few seconds had passed in the outside world, but his aura had already undergone an unbelievable change. His cultivation had risen from low-tier God to high-tier God realm.

At this point, the spiritual energy harnessed within the low-tier God Essence Pills was already not of much use to him anymore. If not for that, he would have been able to push all the way to high-tier God pinnacle.

Nevertheless, he was still contented with his improvements.

With his high-tier God physical body and soul, he would be able to put up a fight even against a low-tier Celestial God. Perhaps, he might even stand a chance against Zhang Jia too!

It had been less than a day since he had arrived in Twilight City, but he had already reached the pinnacle of the city.

I have managed to raise my cultivation, but I don't really have an appropriate sword art to go along with it. Let me see if I'm able to create one... Zhang Xuan thought as he reinforced his cultivation.

'A Heart of Intertwined Threads' was still fairly powerful at the moment, but it was starting to lag behind his current cultivation.

More importantly, it was a sword art designed to confine one's opponent, resulting in its limited offensive prowess. If he were to be faced with a powerful opponent whom he was unable to trap, he would find himself completely at a loss as to what to do.

So, Zhang Xuan quickly went through all sorts of sword maneuvers in his head and began trying to piece them together. But some time later, he let out a deep sigh and shook his head.

It was not that easy to create a sword art that surpassed the heavens. Even when he created 'A Heart of Intertwining Threads', he was facing great pressure from the soul imprint Kong shi had left behind in the Hall of Gods. It was in the whim of a moment that he came up with it and created it.

At this very moment, he could sense a sword art at the tip of his finger, waiting to be completed. Yet, for some reason, even though he couldn't put his finger on it, he felt that something was simply missing from the sword art.

Until he finally uncovered what it was, this sword art would remain incomplete.

"I might need another battle that pushes me to my limits in order to do it..."

Knowing that the problem he was facing wasn't one where he could resolve just by dwelling on it, he shook his head and left the room.

From the start of his seclusion to the end, as he had used the prowess of the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn, all in all, it had only been twenty seconds in the outside world. However, his cultivation had already undergone a transformative change.

He was at least several times more powerful than before.

"The Celestial Mountain is going to open very soon, so why is the Young Master going into seclusion at a time like this?"

Outside the room, Sun Qiang paced around anxiously as he complained to Zhang Jia, who was guarding Zhang Xuan outside.

In order to make it in time for the opening of the Celestial Mountain, they would have to head to the City Lord Manor right now. Yet, the Young Master actually chose to go into seclusion when time was already tight for them!

At this rate, the slots they had acquired with great difficulty... Alright, maybe 'great difficulty' was an overstatement, but it would still be a huge waste if they missed this opportunity!

"Stop buzzing around here. If you have anything to say to him, wait till he comes out of his seclusion," Zhang Jia replied in irritation.

"Did the Young Master say when he's coming out? Zhao Ya and the others are going to be late if they don't leave right now. Does the Young Master not intend to follow them to the Celestial Mountain?"

Sun Qiang was still unable to calm his nerves.

Entering the Celestial Mountain and searching for the Aura of Divinity came with a certain degree of danger. Was the Young Master really going to leave them be? Were there no words of advice or anything he had to offer them?

"The Young Master didn't say mention how long he's going to seclusion for, but no matter how fast he is, it'll still take at least a few hours. In the past, the duration of my seclusions is usually in terms of months. I would just eat fruits when I'm starving and drink some spring water when I'm thirsty... What's the point of going into seclusion without at least going that far?"

The very purpose of going into seclusion was to toss aside all distractions and focus entirely on one's cultivation. During this period of time, one would pay no heed to whatever that was happening in the outside world. Through this enhanced level of focus, one would be able to improve much faster than usual.

"This..." Sun Qiang clenched his fists in distress before finally exhaling deeply. "Forget it, we'll just head there ourselves

then. I think we would have all already become gods by the time the Young Master comes out of his seclusion...”

Jiya!

Just as Sun Qiang was about to turn around and leave, the doors in front suddenly opened up. Zhang Xuan walked out and said, “Let’s go together. How can I be absent for your trip to the Celestial Mountain?”

Young Master, aren’t you going into seclusion?” Sun Qiang was slightly bewildered.

“I just did,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“You are done cultivating?” Zhang Jia was perplexed too.

It hadn’t even been a minute since Zhang Xuan went into his room, so what kind of seclusion could possibly be so fast? When did going into seclusion become something so trivial?

Baffled by how ridiculous the situation was, Zhang Jia took a closer look at Zhang Xuan, and what it saw left its cheek quivering ceaselessly. It nearly fainted from shock in that instant!

Young Master, you have already reached high-tier God?”

As Zhang Xuan didn’t intentionally conceal his cultivation as well, Zhang Jia was able to tell that he had already managed to raise his cultivation from low-tier God to high-tier God within the few seconds he had spent in his room.

“Indeed. Hit me. I would like to try out my strength after my breakthrough,” Zhang Xuan said with a hint of excitement in his voice.

Considering that the Phosphor Armored Beast was a Celestial God, he thought that it might just be able to pressure him enough to make a breakthrough.

“This... Alright then!”

While baffled by how ridiculously fast Zhang Xuan was growing stronger at, Zhang Jia raised its fist and hammered it down upon the young man.

Hong long!

The ground tremored, and a shockwave gushed into the surroundings.

Zhang Jia had used its full strength as a Celestial God for this attack, and the might he exerted was indeed extraordinary. It felt like the entire residence would collapse under its strength.

“Heh!”

With a light chuckle, Zhang Xuan calmly stepped forward to tapped lightly on Zhang Jia’s fist.

Weng!

Zhang Jia’s fist immediately stopped in midair, unable to push forward at all. It was as if he had been sealed in place.

“This...” Knowing that it wouldn’t be able to hurt Zhang Xuan even if it were to attempt to force its wah through, Zhang Jia retracted his fist and remarked in disbelief, “Young Master, on top of raising your zhenqi cultivation, your soul cultivation has reached high-tier God realm as well...”

“I had ample time on hand, so I made a breakthrough for that as well,” Zhang Xuan replied. “Ample time?”

A shudder ran through Zhang Jia’s body.

Are you trying to provoke me over here?

A seclusion that didn’t even last for a minute, and you are telling me that you had ample time? In other words, the months I have spent in seclusion has been spent in vain, is it?

What the heck...

Zhang Jia felt like the boundaries of its common sense were being challenged.

2130 The Order of Seating

Earlier, while they were still in the valley, the Phosphor Armored Beast had traded blows with Zhang Xuan. Even though the latter's physical body was powerful, his zhenqi cultivation and soul cultivation were pathetically weak.

Yet, in less than a minute, not only did the latter manage to advance his cultivation considerably, more importantly, he had even managed to harmonize the three perfectly together, achieving a balance that it had never been able to attain despite having cultivated for more than a hundred years.

The Phosphor Armored Beast subconsciously turned its sights to Sun Qiang, expecting to see the latter equally shocked. However, what it saw instead was an 'as expected' expression on the latter's face.

It was almost as if the butler did not think that there was anything weird about what had just happened!

Did this mean that they expected Zhang Xuan to be able to achieve breakthroughs within such short periods of time?

Just what kind of people had it gotten itself involved with?

Just as the Phosphor Armored Beast felt utterly bewildered, a tint of yellow suddenly appeared in its peripheral vision. A frail-looking little yellow chick had suddenly appeared on Zhang Xuan's shoulder.

"Did you just wake up?" Zhang Xuan asked with a hint of relief in his voice.

"Un. You managed to get your hands on quite a few God Essence Pills, right? I'm starving..." the little yellow chick muttered with a dazed look in its eyes, reminiscent of a person who was still groggy from waking up.

Seeing this sight, the Phosphor Armored Beast flew to a rage and bellowed, "Audacious! As a tamed beast, how can you demand things from the Young Master? This is inappropriate!"

It had no idea why Zhang Xuan was rearing a chick, but tamed beasts should have some realization of the positions they were in. How could a tamed beast ask its master for food? If all the tamed beasts in the world acted in such a manner, what would become of the master's dignity?

“Who are you?” The little yellow chick turned its gaze over and assessed the transmogrified Phosphor Armored Beast from head to toe. Then, its mouth curled up as it muttered, “It’s a Phosphor Armored Beast. It shouldn’t taste too bad...”

Hu!

Before the Phosphor Armored Beast could even react, the little yellow chick had already opened its mouth wide and swallowed it whole.

“What are you doing? Hurry up and spit it out! It’s a tamed beast that I took in not too long ago!” Zhang Xuan exclaimed in shock, and he hurriedly smacked the little yellow chick’s head.

He did not expect the latter to start causing trouble shortly after it regained consciousness.

It had not even been a minute since the little yellow chick reappeared, but he was already starting to miss his peaceful life in its absence...

Ah... Just thinking about all the trouble that the little yellow chick would put him in was enough to make him feel exhausted.

On the other hand, after hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, the little yellow chick looked at Zhang Xuan with an indignant pout, as if protesting against his command. However, Zhang Xuan’s gaze remained resolute.

So, with a reluctant harrumph, it spat out the Phosphor Armored Beast.

Pu!

By this point, the Phosphor Armored Beast had already reverted to its original appearance. Just recalling how it was

gobbled up by a mere low-tier God chick was enough to send its fury through the roof.

You brat, how dare you eat me? I'll tear you apart!"

With a ferocious roar, the Phosphor Armored Beast charged at the little yellow chick furiously.

Zhang Xuan was going to stop the Phosphor Armored Beast, but the conceited little yellow chick shook its bottom gleefully and taunted it further. "Quick, come and tear me apart! Rip me into a thousand pieces! Otherwise, how can a big and mighty beast like you possibly have the courage to continue living in this world after having been gobbled up by a cute little chick like me? Heh!"

You..." The Phosphor Armored Beast was frenzied.

The heck! What does a little chick like you have to brag about?

Peng!

A powerful claw struck down and slammed the little yellow chick into the ground. But when the Phosphor Armored beast lifted its claw to take a look, it realized that not only was the little yellow chick not dead, it was even crossing its legs with a relaxed look on its face. "Harder! Have you not eaten yet?"

The Phosphor Armored Beast was frenzied.

It slammed its claw into the ground several more times, creating tremors so powerful that some of the walls in the surroundings crumbled. But at the end of everything, the little yellow chick was remained completely unharmed, and it was even looking at him with a bored look on its face

No matter how foolish the Phosphor Armored Beast was, it was apparent that the little yellow chick was no ordinary low-tier God. It quickly reverted to its human form before looking at Zhang Xuan anxiously. "Master!"

"Alright, stop messing around! Little Chick, if you want to die, I'll take you over to City Lord Manor later on to see if there are any ways to do it," Zhang Xuan said.

After being nearly torched to death twice, the little yellow chick had figured out that the way for its cultivation to grow was to have near-death experiences. As such, it was getting more and more fearless of death.

On the other hand, seeing that the Phosphor Armored Beast had finally stopped, the little yellow chick patted off the dust from its body before fluttering its small wings to return to Zhang Xuan's shoulder.

Having been through the spatial turbulence, while its cultivation had not grown too much, its defense had become much stronger than before. Even the Celestial God Phosphor Armored Beast would not be able to kill it too easily.

Little Chick looked at the Phosphor Armored Beast smugly and said, "Alright, there's no need for you to get too depressed. I am a legendary beast who used to rule the lands, so it's only normal for you to be unable to kill me. Work hard, and I'll consider taking you in as my little brother!"

"You want me to be your little brother?" the Phosphor Armored Beast sneered coldly. "It's true that I'm unable to kill you, but you aren't able to do anything about me either. There's no way I'll be your little brother, so you suggest you stop daydreaming!"

"Daydreaming?" The little yellow chick burst into laughter.

Then, it abruptly widened its beady eyes, and a powerful aura burst forth from its body.

Padah!

The Phosphor Armored Beast immediately kneeled to the ground and bowed deeply. "Big Brother!"

"That's more like it!" The little yellow chick nodded in satisfaction.

On the other hand, the Phosphor Armored Beast wiped off the cold sweat on its face.

It had thought that the other party was just another ordinary divine beast, but as soon as the other party released the prowess of its bloodline, it felt as if the entire world was being

tom to shreds. Its bloodline that it had always been so proud of was nowhere close to matching the other party!

Just what kind of divine beast could that little yellow chick possibly be?

The Phosphor Armored Beast had gone through so many shocks in one day that it could practically see its own common sense falling part.

To be honest, it felt that it was beneath a Celestial God like it to acknowledge a mere God as its master, but with everything that had happened, it looked as if it was the one who had benefitted instead!

“The Celestial Mountain is very far away from Twilight City, and it’s shrouded by a seal left behind by a God Monarch. It would be impossible to get there through conventional means. The only route is through the Teleportation Formation within the city!”

Paying no heed to the Phosphor Armored Beast and the little yellow chick, Zhang Xuan listened carefully to Sun Qiang’s explanation.

Even though he had heard about the Celestial Mountain, he had no idea where it was and where one could acquire the Aura of Divinity from.

“Each city is allocated a set number of slots each year, and those who have obtained a slot are teleported right into the midst of the Celestial Mountain. From there, they have to find ways to locate the Aura of Divinity lingering on the mountain, absorb it, and push for a breakthrough. However, it appears that it isn’t as easy as it seems though. There are quite a few people who have been to the Celestial Mountain a number of times, and they still haven’t succeeded...” Sun Qiang swiftly revealed the news that he had heard.

“Let’s head there to take a look. I don’t think that it’ll be too hard for Zhao Ya and the others to succeed,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

He was not worried about Zhao Ya, his parents, and the others at all... Well, maybe except for Sun Qiang.

Even though they were only at the Semi-Divinity realm, their experiences on the Master Teacher Continent and the Azure far surpassed the indigenous candidates from the Firmament. It might have been possible for others to fail, but when it came to them, he could not even imagine it at all.

To put it harshly, they would not be qualified to be his students if they really failed!

“Make sure to follow close behind them. Try to make use of this opportunity to reach godhood as well, or else you’ll just lag behind the others,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

“I understand.” Sun Qiang nodded.

By this point, everyone was already packed up and ready to set off. So, they began making their way over to City Lord Manor.

The location where the candidates would be teleported to the Celestial Mountain was the square right in front of the City Lord Manor. It took them less than two hours to arrive at their destination, and by then, the entire place was already flooding with people.

Twilight City was not considered to be a major city within the Firmament, but nevertheless, it still had 1,200 slots.

Furthermore, most of the candidates were accompanied by their family members and friends. As a result, the vast square ended up being completely packed with people.

“Young Master Zhang Xuan, this way please!”

Before the group could even enter the square, the old man from before, Ying Fei, quickly walked up to them and ushered them in with a respectful smile.

Under Ying Fei’s lead, they were brought into a room.

Wu Fangqing was already sitting inside when they arrived.

Upon seeing them, he quickly rose to his feet and smiled.

“Young Master Zhang Xuan, have a seat.”

Zhang Xuan responded with a nod as he took a look around the room.

There were roughly twenty other people inside, and a few of them were seated beside Wu Fangqing.

Judging from the auras that they were emanating, it was not too hard to deduce that they were the group of the most powerful and influential people in Twilight City.

Without any hesitation, he walked over to the seat right beside Wu Fangqing and sat down.

But barely after his bottom touched the chair, a middle-aged man sitting along the row looked over questioningly. “City Lord Wu, aren’t you going to introduce this friend of yours to us?”

The others also quickly turned their gazes as well.

They were curious about Zhang Xuan’s identity.

Etiquette was exceptionally important within the upper echelons as it was a symbol of power, respect, and authority, especially toward someone higher up in the hierarchy.

The seat that Zhang Xuan had been given was one that was higher in standing than them. If he was a distinguished elder within the city, they might have considered letting it slide.

However, he looked too young to have any considerable achievements, and his cultivation did not stand out compared to the rest of them.

“Ah, he is Brother Zhang Xuan. He has brought his students here to challenge the Celestial Mountain,” Wu Fangqing said as he gestured to Zhao Ya and the others.

“Students?”

It made the crowd even more curious to hear that someone as young as Zhang Xuan was actually a teacher. So, they turned to look at Zhao Ya and the others, and deep frowns swiftly formed between their eyebrows.

From their point of view, the fact that Zhao Ya and the others had not reached godhood despite being eighteen to nineteen this year meant that they were sorely lacking in talent!

“City Lord Wu, I understand that you have your own reasoning for ordering the seating in such a manner, but with so many people looking, I feel that there’s still a need to ensure equity as a sign of respect to all of us here. If Brother Zhang Xuan or his students displayed exceptional skills, I would have silently acknowledged it... but I honestly don’t see how they are worthy of such high honor. I can’t help but feel that this is a major faux pas,” the middle-aged man said.either

“We have spent a great deal of money in order to get in here, and I don’t recall seeing Brother Zhang Xuan in the auction back then. I don’t think it’s appropriate for you to arrange for his seating to be in front of us. Not to mention, he has so many people with him!” another middle-aged man said.

“Seating?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had only come over to take a seat at the invitation of the city lord. He did not think that the order of the seating would hold such great significance as well.

With a perplexed look, he turned to look at Wu Fangqing, only to hear the latter sending a telepathic message over. ‘Young Master Zhang Xuan, my apologies for not informing you in advance. It’s like this... The closer one’s starting point is to the mountain peak, the higher the chances of obtaining the Aura of Divinity. In comparison, one’s chances are much lower if one starts at the foot of the mountain.

“As you know, the Celestial Mountain only opens once every six months, and all of the Semi-Divinities of the Firmament try to get in. As such, it’s extremely inefficient for the Teleportation Formation to simply teleport them to the foot of the mountain. Furthermore, that could lead to conflicts.

“For this reason, a group of people are teleported straight to the midpoint or even the peak of the mountain. Naturally, these people receive a much greater chance of obtaining the Aura of Divinity.

“However, due to the slot restrictions in each city, in order to maintain fairness, the City Lord Manor auctions the slots to

the mountain peak, and everyone that is here has acquired their slot through the auction!”

Hearing these words, Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Given that the entire Twilight City only had 1,200 slots, it was understandable that the slots leading straight to the mountain peak or the midpoint were in short supply. It was a given that the others would be displeased if he cut right in and used up fourteen of them just like that.

“My apologies. If your candidates aren’t able to get into the midpoint of the mountain, I’ll refund what you paid.” Wu Fangqing clasped his fist and apologized.

It would be one thing if Zhang Xuan was an ordinary human, but he was someone who could very well be the offspring of a God Monarch. No matter how conceited Wu Fangqing might be, he knew better than to offend a person of such standing.

Thus, he could only find a way to satisfy the other party.

This isn’t a matter of money but rules!” the middle-aged man who had spoken up earlier snapped.

“Why don’t we do this then? If his students can defeat our candidates, I’ll turn a blind eye to this matter. However, if he is unable to do so, I hope that he can apologize to us and scam to the back of the line!”

Furrowing his brows, Wu Fangqing was just about to reason with the middle-aged man when Zhang Xuan suddenly spoke up. “Sounds fine by me.”

After that, he turned to Zhao Ya and the others and asked, “Who wants to give it a try?”

Sun Qiang stepped forward and placed his arms on his hips. “I’ll do it!”

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“You?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Sun Qiang had never been too interested in cultivation. Despite that, he had still managed to reach the Semi-Divinity realm after putting in much effort in the Azure. That being said, he still did not feel too assured letting him compete with the geniuses of the Firmament.

Understanding Zhang Xuan’s considerations, Sun Qiang added, “I don’t think that they are worthy of fighting Zhao Ya and the others. In the worst-case scenario, you can have Zhao Ya fight them after I lose!”

“Alright then,” Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand.

“I will be your opponent!”

A young man with sharp eyes and an air of valiance stepped forth to accept Sun Qiang’s challenge.

“Tian Heng, it’ll do for you to just defeat him. Make sure not to cause any injuries,” the middle-aged man said.

“Yes!” the young man known as Tian Heng replied before walking up to Sun Qiang. With disdain in his eyes, he raised his hand and beckoned, “Let’s not waste any time and get down to it then.”

A middle-aged man who had not reached godhood yet had already missed the ideal timing for a breakthrough. Even if he obtained the Aura of Divinity, there was no guarantee that he would be able to succeed.

“You are going to challenge me alone?” Instead of making a move right away, Sun Qiang lazily pointed at the others behind him and said, “Why don’t all of you come at me together instead?”

“I alone will suffice!” Tian Heng harrumphed coldly as he struck a fist out.

The fast momentum of his punch caused the air to be severely compressed, producing a sound reminiscent of the lash of a whip.

Even though he was only in his teens, he was still rather skilled. He had a sharp grasp over his strength and the timing of battle.

In response, Sun Qiang shook his head as he pulled out his left arm from his back. The next moment, his left arm suddenly blurred into a flurry of punches, producing innumerable after images in its wake.

Peng!

Before Tian Heng could even react, he was already struck in his chest, forcing him to retreat three steps before he stumbled and landed on his bottom.

Seeing this, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Even though Sun Qiang was not diligent in his cultivation, he was, at the very least, still a practitioner of the simplified Heaven's Path Divine Art and Heaven's Path battle techniques. Furthermore, he had been through quite a few battles back in his time on the Master Teacher Continent and the Azure.

Even though the young man was considerably talented, he was still far from matching Sun Qiang.

“Like I said, you aren't a match for me. It would be so much easier if all of you were to come at me together!”

After defeating Tian Heng with a single strike, Sun Qiang looked at the remaining young men with the forlorn expression of an undefeatable expert.

Yuan Tao stepped out and said, “Uncle Sun, you have already fought a battle. Shouldn't I take the next battle instead?”

“Hey, that's enough of you all! Take a look at where you are, alright? Let me do it instead!” Zheng Yang whipped out his spear and stood valiantly. “Of course, all of you can come at me together as well. Otherwise, if the elders wish to make a move too, you can lower your cultivation and come at me. Don't worry, I won't get any help from the others.”

“Aren’t you getting ahead of yourself? I haven’t made a move for a very long time either!” Wei Ruyan said with a chilling smile on her lips.

Zhang Xuan clasped his face.

Zhang Jia looked over with a dumbfounded expression on its face.

Did its master not tell it that he liked to maintain a low profile? If that was the case, why were his students such troublemakers?

No matter how it looked at it, none of them came close to fitting the idea of ‘low profile’.

“How conceited! Fine, I’ll be your opponent then!”

“I want to fight that green-robed girl!”

“Heh, I’ll teach that fatty a lesson. His words are simply too maddening! It’s as if he thinks that he’s the best in the world...”

The actions of Zheng Yang and the others had really invoked the rage of the youths in the room. With a ferocious roar, all of them charged at them.

A few breaths later though, they were all left lying on the floor.

Even though they were considered above average among the cultivators in Twilight City, they were nothing in comparison to Zhao Ya and the others. Even Sun Qiang was more than enough to deal with them!

“This...”

Seeing how their candidates were defeated before they could even put up a decent fight against their oppone^^ middle-aged men who had cast their doubts on Zhang Xuan earlier felt extremely light-headed. They nearly spurted blood from their mouths.

They had thought that Zhang Xuan had relied on his connections in order to obtain his seat, but who could have known that he actually had the strength to back it up!

Since his students were that formidable, why did he still waste his money buying his slots? He should have just had them participate in the fight for it in the first place!

They would have surely dominated the top rankings without fail!

At the same time, even though Wu Fangqing had remained silent as all of this transpired, it had affirmed the thoughts in his mind.

No matter how he looked at it, it was apparent that these youths before him were monstrously talented. It would take great luck to accept one of such cultivator as one's student, but for so many of them to come under the same person...

There was bound to be something more to it than just luck!

Even if Zhang Xuan did not possess the bloodline of a God Monarch, he likely did not pale too much in comparison to that.

"Is this enough to prove that Young Master Zhang Xuan and his students are qualified to be in here?" Wu Fangqing asked with a smile.

"Of course, of course..." the crowd quickly replied.

It was true that teleporting to the mountain peak or the midpoint gave one a much greater chance of obtaining the Aura of Divinity, but ultimately, whether one really obtained it or not boiled down to one's strength.

No one would be able to snatch the Aura of Divinity from the one who boasted the greatest strength.

If all fourteen of them were that powerful, there was no way their candidates would be able to snatch the Aura of Divinity from them. Since this was the case, it would be better to sell them this favor instead.

Otherwise, if those fourteen people targeted their candidates on the Celestial Mountain, there would be nothing they could do about it.

"Since everyone is fine with it, let's begin the teleportation. It's already about time."

Wu Fangqing stood up and took out his City Lord Token. With a light tap on it, a pure burst of white light swiftly enveloped the entire square.

Then, a massive gate appeared at the very center of the square, drawing crowds to congregate around it.

Young Master Zhang Xuan, let them enter first,” Wu Fangqing said with a smile.

Zhang Xuan took a closer look at the gate and noted that it was only a Teleportation Formation, so there was no danger. Heaving a sigh of relief, he beckoned for Zhao Ya and the others to gather around him.

“Take five pills each. I have infused my power inside it, and it’ll help you to overcome your bottlenecks and save you in times of crisis.”

With a flick of his hand, he passed a bottle of God Essence Pills to each of them.

The God Essence Pills were not of much use of him anymore, so he might as well give them to the others. Once they acquired the Aura of Divinity and successfully made a breakthrough, they would be able to immediately push for higher realms with this.

“Thank you, Young Master!”

“Thank you, Xuan-er!”

“Thank you, Teacher!”

Zhang Xuan did not have anything else for them, so he urged them to quickly enter the Teleportation Formation.

The group swiftly passed through the gate and vanished from sight.

As he was already a god, he could not pass through the Teleportation Formation. So, he could only wait for them outside.

In less than an hour, all 1,200 Semi-Divinity realm cultivators in the square had passed through the gate to enter the Celestial

Mountain. The gate wavered a little before slowly vanishing from sight.

“The Teleportation Formation will reappear a day from now. If you aren’t in too much of a hurry, City Lord Manor has prepared a banquet so that you can wait there for your kin to return,” Wu Fangqing said with a smile.

“Sounds great!”

The crowd nodded in agreement.

To a cultivator, a day was not too long at all.

Zhang Xuan could not be bothered to make the trip back to his residence, so he followed the group into City Lord Manor.

There was slight disorientation from passing through the gate, causing Zhao Ya to stumble out. By the time she regained her balance, she realized that she was already standing amid clouds. Taking a closer look, she realized that she was on top of a mountain.

Unlike the Grand Spirit Mountain, the surroundings were rich in spiritual energy, creating an environment for plants to thrive. Vitality, instead of barrenness, filled the area.

“I should look for the Aura of Divinity...”

Knowing her priority for going to the Celestial Mountain, Zhao Ya swiftly flitted toward the peak.

She swiftly realized that the concentration of spiritual energy increased the higher she ascended, making it more likely for her to find the Aura of Divinity.

After traveling several hundred meters, she suddenly heard the moaning of the wind echoing not too far away. She quickly hid behind a tree before looking in the direction where the sound had come from.

It was from an arrow.

Following that, a frightened white animal reminiscent of a rabbit quickly dashed away, as if fleeing from a hunter.

“Is that... the Aura of Divinity?” Zhao Ya’s eyes lit up.

Sun Qiang had gathered some information regarding the Celestial Mountain and relayed it to them the day before. According to him, the Aura of Divinity could morph itself into lifeforms on the Celestial Mountain, making it highly difficult to capture.

“Stop it!”

Two silhouettes dashed out from the woods to chase the rabbit. They were the ones who had shot the arrow before.

Sou sou sou sou!

Another volley of arrows shot forth and struck the fleeing rabbit. The rabbit struggled on the ground for a moment before dissipating into a bundle of golden fluid.

“I’ll go first!”

One of the silhouettes who shot the arrows rushed forward to grab the golden fluid and swallowed it.

The next moment, Zhao Ya sensed the other party’s cultivation swiftly surging. From the looks of it, it seemed like it would not take too long for him to overcome his current bottleneck and become a real god.

“I should hurry up!”

Seeing that it was not too difficult for hunt down the Aura of Divinity, Zhao Ya unhesitatingly continued to charge up the mountain.

Along the way, she encountered quite a few rabbit-shaped Auras of Divinity, but as there were already cultivators hunting them down, she could not be bothered to snatch from them.

It did not take her too long to reach the peak.

The atmospheric pressure was clearly much stronger at the top of the Celestial Mountain compared to elsewhere.

Zhao Ya took a look around, but there did not seem to be anyone in the area. This made her frown a little. Nevertheless, she quickly analyzed the tracks on the ground to search for traces of the Aura of Divinity.

She had assessed the footprints left behind by the rabbits on her way there, so she had a good idea of how she could locate them.

“This trail seems a bit off. It’s a bit too big to be a rabbit... but it doesn’t matter!”

Having located her target, she drove her Pure Yin Body to its limits and followed the trail.

Hu!

At the end of the trail, a white tiger carrying an imposing aura suddenly leaped out.

“This...” Zhao Ya was shocked.

While the Auras of Divinity that others found were all rabbits, why did she end up stumbling onto this large, ferocious fellow instead?

However, she did not think that it would make much of a difference to her. So, with a flick of her wrist, she charged forth and began her assault on the white tiger.

As the First Senior of all of Zhang Xuan’s direct disciples, Zhao Ya had always been very strict on herself. Her diligence paired with the prowess of her unique constitution made her undefeatable among her peers such that even Zheng Yang was not a match for her.

With her exerting her full force, the area swiftly turned frosty cold.

This fellow is powerful...”

After fighting for a while, cold sweat began dripping from Zhao Ya’s forehead.

If it had been the rabbits before, as long as she could catch up with them, she would have been able to subdue them with a single finger of hers. Otherwise, there was no way they would have been subdued by arrows so easily.

On the other hand, the white tiger that she was facing was extremely powerful, stronger than her even. In terms of strength, it was at least comparable to a low-tier God.

In other words, she was facing a true God despite only possessing the strength of a Semi-Divinity!

Under normal circumstances, it would be extremely difficult for her to achieve victory. She knew this as well, but it was already too late to escape. She could only attempt to push her way through.

Thus, gritting her teeth, she swallowed the pill given to her by her teacher.

The pill swiftly melted in her mouth, filling her body with the Heaven's Path zhenqi.

In an instant, the fatigue and injuries she had accumulated throughout the battle vanished without a trace.

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Hu hu!

With Zhao Ya's rapid recovery, she immediately began launching a barrage of forceful and deadly strikes against the white tiger.

In the blink of an eye, the tables were turned.

The sheer aggressiveness that Zhao Ya was fighting with made it impossible for the white tiger to stand its ground, causing it to slowly accumulate injuries.

However, it was no easy feat for Zhao Ya to continue attacking with such fervor. It was inevitable that her stamina would be swiftly whittled down if she maintained such high-intensity offense.

But when it looked as if she was about to run out of energy, she would simply pop another pill into her mouth and continue with her attacks. Shortly after Zhao Ya consumed her third pill, the massive white tiger finally lost its strength and slumped to the ground.

Seeing that she had finally defeated her opponent, Zhao Ya wiped the sweat off her forehead and heaved a sigh of relief.

If not for her teacher's pills and her Pure Yin Body, there was no way she would have been able to hold on for so long. That was a battle she had to put her life on the line in order to win!

"Isn't it supposed to be rather easy to obtain the Aura of Divinity? What's going on?"

Perplexed, Zhao Ya turned to the white tiger on the ground, which happened to dissipate right at that instant to form a bundle of golden fluid.

It was like what she had witnessed with the rabbits previously, but what was different about it was the sharpness the golden fluid formed by the white tiger. To make a comparison, if the golden fluid formed by the rabbit was a stream, what she was looking at before her was a boundless ocean.

And this left her feeling slightly shocked.

“Could it be that... the Aura of Divinity can be classified into different tiers as well?”

She had never heard of something like this before, but everything before her was pointing in that direction.

“That’s not important at the moment. I should first get down to business...”

Knowing that there was no way for her to know for sure, she chose to quickly sit down on the ground and started to meditate.

Hu!

The golden fluid immediately surged into her body.

Kacha! Kacha!

As soon as the energy seeped into her body, her bottleneck was swiftly shattered, and her cultivation grew at a visible rate.

“What formidable Aura of Divinity!” Zhao Ya remarked with narrowed eyes.

The Aura of Divinity carried a sharp metal aura that made her feel as if her meridians were going to be ripped apart. At the same time, it felt like the roar of sword qi, clearing away all the obstructions hindering her within her body.

In less than ten minutes, she surpassed her own limits and became a real god.

Weng!

The moment she became a god, a brilliant light gathered around her and embraced her, making her seem as though an angel.

But Zhao Ya herself remained oblivious to it. She was too absorbed in her cultivation to notice any of this.

As Zhao Ya made her breakthrough, Lu Chong also arrived at the other end of the mountain peak. Shortly after his arrival, he encountered a dark silhouette.

It was neither a rabbit nor a tiger. Rather, it had an appearance that was similar a human, but it was made entirely out of mist.

Using the pills given to him by his teacher, even though the fight was not easy for him, he still managed to defeat the dark humanlike silhouette eventually.

The defeated silhouette dissipated to form a bundle of golden fluid, becoming a powerful source of energy that fueled the growth of Lu Chong's soul.

The others were all facing the same situation.

Wang Ying encountered a snowy ancient tree, Zheng Yang encountered a behemoth covered in flames, Wei Ruyan encountered a river that could consume life...

North of the Firmament, there existed a vast, boundless ocean. At the very middle of this ocean was a humongous palace floating right above its surface. Like the searing sun in the sky, it radiated a brilliance that cast it in an angelic glow.

The clear water beneath the palace reflected its grandeur perfectly, crafting out a dreamlike landscape.

Within the palace, there was a bearded elder sitting on a grand and majestic throne. He was staring intently at the empty space in front of him, seemingly deep in thought.

“Monarch.”

A middle-aged man entered the splendid hall and clasped his fist.

The elder glanced downward before nodding slightly to acknowledge his presence. Then, he asked, “When will the duel between that person from the Sky of Freedom and the Heaven Subjugation Monarch be held?”

“It’ll be held on the fifteenth of the next month,” the middle-aged man replied with a deep voice.

“Fifteenth... The night of the full moon?” the elder muttered beneath his breath. “That person from the Sky of Freedom accepted the duel faster than I thought.”

“Monarch, pardon my insolence, but there’s a question that has been bothering me for some time,” the middle-aged man said.

“You have been with me for many years now, so there’s no need for you to behave so warily around me. Feel free to pose your doubt,” the elder replied.

“Thank you for your kind words, Monarch.” The middle-aged man nodded. “I was just wondering if the Heaven Subjugation Monarch is really that formidable, such that even the other eight God Monarchs aren’t a match for him.”

The elder paused for a brief moment upon hearing those words as he raised his head in reminiscence. Then, with a deep sigh, he remarked, “Unfathomably so.”

“What about that person from the Sky of Freedom? They have never appeared in public before, so no one knows just how powerful they are. Compared to the Heaven Subjugation Monarch, who is more powerful?” the middle-aged man asked.

That person from the Sky of Freedom is unfathomably powerful as well. I have never met them in person before, but the aura they emanate was as towering as the lofty heavens, as if the entire universe revolved around them. It was not a force that any being in the world could contend with. But as for who is more powerful, I am unable to say for sure.” The elder shook his head.

“That means that the battle between the two of them will be the greatest battle ever since the Firmament came into existence...” The middle-aged man widened his eyes in realization. Then, a bitter smile crept onto his lips as he sighed deeply. “It would really have been a great honor to witness their battle, but it’s unfortunate that a person of my caliber

would have disintegrated to ashes before I could even approach them.”

Even a Conferred God King would be easily killed if he was caught between the battle between God Monarchs.

It might appear to be just a realm of difference, but the gap between those two realms was absolute. Nothing could bridge the difference. That was also why the position of the God Monarchs had been unshakable ever since the founding of the Firmament.

This might also be why there had only been nine God Monarchs in the Firmament since time immemorial till recent decades.

“You wish to witness the battle? This is something that concerns the reputation of the Nine Skies, so you should drop that idea of yours.” The elder shook his head.

But all of a sudden, the elder’s movements halted for a brief moment, and his pupils dilated ever so slightly, reflecting the huge fluctuations in his emotions.

The keen-eyed middle-aged man noticed the difference and asked worriedly, “Monarch, did something happen?”

“That person from the Sky of Freedom has just passed down a message... They are inviting the eight of us to witness the battle!” the elder replied with a slow and contemplative tone, as if he was trying to discern the other party’s intentions.

He did not think that the person from the Sky of Freedom would make such a call.

Even for the other God Monarchs, they had chosen to fight the Heaven Subjugation Monarch behind closed doors. As a result, not even the Conferred God Kings beneath them were aware of the results, even though they could probably fathom a guess.

“Does this mean that the person from the Sky of Freedom is confident in defeating the Heaven Subjugation Monarch?” the middle-aged man asked.

“Perhaps,” the elder remarked with a doubtful edge to his tone. “The difference in their strength is unlikely to be too great, given that they have both reached the pinnacle of the world. It’s hard to tell who will win at this point, so we can only watch what happens. Speaking of which, the Fourth Flood of Spiritual Energy is coming soon, right? Are there any outstanding geniuses in our Acheron Ocean at the moment?”

“Not yet,” the middle-aged man replied. “Even though most cultivators treasure the opportunity they have to cultivate more than ever after the receding of spiritual energy, it still isn’t that easy to find outstanding geniuses among them. Furthermore, in order for them to stand out in the Flood of Spiritual Energy, they must possess top-notch capabilities. Such people will eventually become God Kings at the very minimum... Sigh, there are simply too few of such people around.”

“I heard that Old Geezer Qiankun of the Sky of Drifting Specters recently secured himself a decently talented soul,” the elder remarked questioningly.

“There’s indeed such a thing. According to the rumors, he found him from the lower worlds and absorbed his soul right into the Netherworld Pool. Based on our sources, it seems like God Monarch Qiankun is currently helping him forge a new body.”

“If that soul is able to move Old Geezer Qiankun into action, his capabilities must be truly extraordinary. What a pity that he didn’t appear in our Sky of Acheron! Otherwise, I would have made sure to groom him regardless of how much it costs and turn him into a top-notch expert in the shortest time possible...”

“Indeed...” The middle-aged man shared the elder’s lamentation. “Rest assured, Monarch. I have left a mechanism in the Celestial Mountains so as to ensure that we’ll be able to get to any emerging top-notch geniuses as soon as they appear!”

The elder nodded silently before slowly closing his eyes, a gesture that symbolized that the middle-aged man was dismissed.

But at that very moment, the sound of a clock suddenly echoed outside the room.

The elder immediately opened his eyes and rose to his feet.
“The Bell of Conferred Kings?”

The middle-aged man also trembled in agitation upon hearing the chimes.

“The sounding of the Bell of Conferred Kings means that a cultivator who possesses the potential to become a Conferred God King has appeared!” the middle-aged man exclaimed.

There were only so many Conferred God Kings in the world, making them existences that were almost as rare as God Monarchs. Their power was second only to the God Monarchs, so it went without saying that they were highly sought after by all powers.

“Hurry up and recruit that genius to our side,” the elder instructed anxiously. But before finishing his words, he changed his mind and said, “Forget it, you’re too slow. I’ll do it myself!”

Right after saying those words, the elder disappeared on the spot.

Those who had become God Monarchs were capable of instantaneous teleportation. As powerful as the spatial laws of the Firmament were, they were insufficient to curb them anymore.

“It seems like our Sky of Acheron is set for the Flood of Spiritual Energy then...”

Seeing that the God Monarch had personally made a move to recruit the genius, the middle-aged man heaved a sigh of relief.

In the Sky of Adamant Gold-

God Monarch Fumeng was in the midst of a court assembly when he heard the Bell of Conferred Kings chiming loudly.

“A genius suited for our Sky of Adamant Gold has appeared. I’ll receive him personally.’ Hu!

God Monarch Fumeng disappeared on the spot.

In the Sky of Cloud Dragon...

“Even in the long history of Firmament, the appearance of geniuses of such a caliber has been extremely rare. The last time it happened was the Heaven Subjugation Monarch and his direct disciples. We mustn’t miss this opportunity. The rest of you should make preparations here while I head over to take a look personally!”

With a slight jolt, the Cloud Dragon Monarch morphed back into his true body, a Five-clawed Golden Dragon, before vanishing on the spot.

“Hahaha! Who would have thought that such a formidable genius would appear for our Sky of Blazing Sun? I still remember how that darned Qiankun bragged about the soul he found before me just a while ago. This time, I’ll make sure to groom the prodigy personally. No matter how much I have to accelerate time by, I’ll make sure that he becomes a Conferred God King before the Flood of Spiritual Energy!”

With a brilliant chuckle, God Monarch Zhuoyang flung his robe to the side, revealing his bare thighs.

Seeing this sight, an aged attendant beside him immediately rushed forward and awkwardly advised, “Monarch, if you are heading out, may I humbly request for you to put your undergarments on? It’ll diminish your honor if someone sees it!”

“As someone who governs the blazing sun, the heavenly flames that I harness within my body will swiftly reduce any clothes I wear to ash. It’s simply too much trouble to put them on again and again! I might as well just bare it all!” God Monarch Zhuoyang harrumphed impatiently.

“I understand that it’s more cooling for you to bare it all, but aren’t you heading out to receive someone? You might leave a bad impression if you leave like that,” the aged attendant advised.

As a subordinate serving God Monarch Zhuoyang, he was too familiar with the habits of the latter for his own comfort. No

one could have imagined that one of the Nine God Monarchs would actually detest putting on underwear!

It was fortunate that he rarely left his palace, or else the honor and dignity of the Sky of Blazing Sun would really be tossed into the gutters!

“Enough, you are too naggy. I’ll be right back with that fellow!”

Hu!

God Monarch Zhuoyang swiftly created undergarments around his bare bottom with his divine energy before vanishing.

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Other than the elusive Sky of Freedom, the next most mysterious existence in the Firmament was probably the Sword Hut.

The palaces of the God Monarchs were known for their grandeur and splendor, but the God Monarch of the Sky of Heavenly Sword lived in an ordinary-looking straw hut.

“Monarch...”

A middle-aged man walked into the Sword Hut to report something, but he was interrupted before he could finish his words.

“I have heard. A genius who specializes in swordsmanship has appeared on the Celestial Mountain.”

“Y-yes, that’s the case...” the middle-aged man nodded in response.

“I have seen his swordplay, and it’s indeed remarkable. He has achieved a level of conceptualization that’s almost on par with ours... But he’s not someone we are looking for,” a calm voice sounded from within the straw hut.

“But the Bell of Conferred Kings has sounded...”

The middle-aged man was taken aback. He exclaimed in a fluster, “If we don’t hurry, the other powers might just beat us to it. That would mean that our Sword Hut will receive fewer slots in the next Flood of Spiritual Energy, and we will have our territories taken away from us as well...”

“Are those important to us? Our Sword Hut aims to nurture sword practitioners to forge a Sword Intent and conceptualization that belongs to them and them alone. It’s not about charging ahead and learning blindly,” the voice in the straw hut said.

“No matter how well one learns, the highest level one can reach will just be a mere reflection of what others have already achieved. There’s no need to worry about the Flood of Spiritual Energy. The person I am waiting for has already appeared, and I’ll be paying a visit to him personally very soon.”

“I understand...”

Seeing that the God Monarch had his own plans, the middle-aged man lowered his posture and backed out of the room respectfully.

“Sigh!”

Shortly after the middle-aged man left, a deep sigh echoed within the straw hut. A quiet, lamenting mutter sounded, “I really don’t know whether it was the right decision for you to do that.”

...

On a towering mountain concealed amidst clouds, a tall elder gazed upon his disciples standing right in front of him.

Profound words reminiscent of symphonic music flowed out of his words, delighting his disciples. Absorbing the knowledge that was being imparted to them, the disciples found their cultivation growly swiftly.

“Let’s stop here today!”

But all of a sudden, the elder stopped his lecture and turned his sights toward a certain direction.

Noticing that something was amiss, a middle-aged man amidst the crowd stood up and clasped his fists before asking, “Teacher, did something happen?”

His teacher believed deeply that the impartation of knowledge was crucial to the betterment of the world, and he was devoted to that cause as well. As such, he would always ensure that the lesson was complete before concluding it. Yet, he chose to halt halfway through this time around...

It was clear that something major had happened.

“That person of the Sky of Freedom has decided on the date. The battle will be held on the fifteenth of the next month,” the elder said with a faint smile on his lips.

It was almost as if he was talking about someone else instead of himself. He showed no hints of stress as a result of that battle.

“The Sky of Freedom is the center of the Nine Skies, and its monarch is the supreme ruler of the myriad worlds... Teacher, I fear that your battle with her will...”

The middle-aged man couldn't help but feel deeply apprehensive about the battle that would be held not too long away from now.

He trusted in his teacher's capabilities, but no matter what, the enemy was the strongest individual of the Firmament. Even the other God Monarchs bowed in the presence of that person...

It would surely be a tough battle even for his teacher.

More importantly, the battle between them would be a life-and-death duel, unlike the 'casual spars' his teacher had with the other God Monarchs.

“It's fine,” the elder replied as he stroked his beard. “Since it's a battle, there's bound to be a victor and a loser. No one can win all his life. It'll be fine as long as I give it my all.”

“But... In order to deal with you, that person descended to the lower worlds to find the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn so that she could gain a deeper understanding of your powers! I'm afraid that the real reason why she's accepting your challenge is because she already knows your abilities... In a battle between two equals, understanding the abilities of one's opponent can make a world of a difference!” the middle-aged man remarked anxiously.

His teacher had challenged that person of the Sky of Freedom for some time now, but there had been no response all this while. Recently, however, they heard that that person descended to the lower worlds some time ago, and as soon as she returned, she immediately set the date of the duel.

This could be taken as a sign that she was fully prepared and was confident of victory.

In a battle between two equally powerful individuals, the factor that determined the winner was often the asymmetry of knowledge. If that person really knew about his teacher's abilities, that would mean that his teacher was in an extremely dangerous position.

“So what if she knows about my abilities? It won't be easy for her to defeat me!” the elder looked at the middle-aged man and smiled calmly.

Despite his leisurely tone, the elder's voice carried deep confidence. After defeating so many God Monarchs, his strength had already reached the peak of the Firmament as well.

“I have no doubt in teacher's strength, but I'm just a little bit confused... Why do you have to fight with the monarch of the Sky of Freedom, and why does it have to be a life-and-death duel?”

The middle-aged man simply couldn't make sense out of this.

His teacher had already received the acknowledgement from eight of the current God Monarchs, and he had already gained widespread recognition as the Tenth God Monarch of the Firmament. So, was there really a need for him to fight against the monarch of the Sky of Freedom?

Was it something that was worth having him put his life down for?

“This is an inevitable fate that neither of us will be able to avoid. You won't be able to understand that...” the elder sighed with a shake of his head.

Then, he looked at the middle-aged man quietly for a moment before saying, “If I were to lose my life in the duel, I want you to wait quietly. Don't make any moves. Wait for my successor to appear and heed his words.”

“Successor? Teacher's successor?” the middle-aged man asked in bewilderment.

He had been following his teacher since a very long time ago, and a step at a time, they had climbed to the top of many worlds. But he had never heard of his teacher having a successor before!

“Indeed. He’s from the Master Teacher Continent as well, and he possesses capabilities on par with mine,” the elder said with a faint smile.

“May I know what is the name of teacher’s successor then? How can we identify him?” the middle-aged man asked anxiously.

“You will know him once you see him,” the elder replied with a deep look in his eyes. “As for his name... I guess I can tell it to you. His name is Zhang Xuan!”

...

Meanwhile, in a certain room in the Sky of Freedom...

Thick puffs of steam filled the room, hindering one from seeing what was within.

Huala!

The sound of water splashing resounded in the room, and a beautiful and flawless figure rose from a pool in the middle of the room.

Silky black hair paired with skin that was so delicate that it seemed as if it would crumble at a touch, that figure was so beautiful that it was hard to believe that someone like this could exist in the world.

With a graceful wave of her hand, she covered her body in a thin layer of silk.

“Young Mistress!”

A green-robed lady quickly walked up to the beautiful lady to pass a comb over to her.

The beautiful lady unfurled her hair and began to comb it slowly. Her movement was so graceful and natural that it was pleasing just to look at it.

“Have you passed down the news?” the beautiful lady asked.

“I have,” the green-robed lady nodded.

“The response?”

“None at the moment,” the green-robed lady shook her head. She pondered for a moment before adding on, “However, Young Mistress, we have managed to uncover what you asked for.”

“Oh?”

The eyes of the beautiful lady twinkled. She stopped combing her hair and turned her gaze over, gesturing for the green-robed lady to continue on.

“A young man named Zhang Xuan has appeared in Twilight City. He and his disciples are rather talented, such that while they were scouring the Celestial Mountain for the Aura of Divinity, they managed to trigger quite a few Bells of Conferred Kings!” the green-robed lady replied.

“It’s indeed him...” the beautiful lady muttered as a sweet smile subconsciously blossomed on her lips.

“Young Mistress, are you intending to meet him?” the green-robed lady asked.

The sweet smile faded to a frown. The beautiful lady hesitated with a conflicted look on her face before shaking her head, “There’s no need for that. I need to prepare for battle over the next few days, so I won’t be meeting anyone, especially him... I’m afraid that I might lose my determination...”

“Young Mistress, pardon me for saying this, but if you are already wavering... why don’t you just back out of the fight? The Heaven Subjugation Monarch is powerful enough to defeat the other eight of the God Monarchs. I’m worried that...” the green-robed lady said.

The Young Mistress possessed strength that was at the peak of the world, but the enemy she was going to face was not weak either.

In just forty short years, that man had managed to make himself a place amidst the top echelons of the Firmament, becoming an existence that no one didn’t know of.

He challenged the other eight God Monarchs, and even though no one knew the details of the battles, from the fact how they eventually recognized him as the Tenth God Monarch, it was apparent that he was the victor in those battles.

His achievements had opened up a new chapter in the history of the Firmament.

It might appear to be a cowardly decision, but escaping from the fight was always an option. Besides, even if they had to fight with one another, it shouldn't be a big deal who won or lost the battle. Was there a need to make it a life-and-death duel?

“It is an inevitability. I have to kill him with my own hands. There are no other paths I can take... This is the mission the world has given to me, and I can't shirk away from this responsibility,” the beautiful lady replied solemnly.

“But..”

“You need not say more. This matter has already been decided, and nothing will change it,” the beautiful lady said with a wave of her hand. “Alright, I'll be going into seclusion to cultivate...”

Leaving behind those words, the beautiful lady turned around and walked away.

“Young Mistress...”

The green-robed lady didn't think that her master would be so obstinate. Even though she was unhappy with how things were going down, she heaved a deep sigh and decided to keep her opinions to herself.

2134 The Anxious Zhang Xuan

“I heard that the Aura of Divinity on the Celestial Mountain can be divided into various tiers.”

After filling their stomachs with sumptuous food and fine wine, the figures who represented the top echelons of Twilight City gathered together with a cup of wine in hand to have a leisurely talk.

“Hmm, there seems to be such a thing now that you talk about it. The higher tier Aura of Divinity is harder to tame, but at the same time, it is much purer and harnesses greater power. It can better temper one’s divine energy, thus forging a strong foundation for future breakthroughs.”

“I heard that the higher tier Auras of Divinity are refined by the Nine God Monarchs personally, so it harnesses their power. As such, those whose constitutions or cultivation techniques are at odds with the powers of the God Monarchs won’t be able to assimilate it. As such, only a small handful of the top-notch geniuses will be able to do so.”

“It has been forty years since the receding of spiritual energy occurred, and the Celestial Mountain has opened for 79 times to date. But to date, only three people have been able to induce the sounding of the Bells of Conferred Kings!”

“Now that I think about it, they appear to be all disciples of the Heaven Subjugation Monarch too...”

“I wonder if the Bells of Conferred Kings would sound this time around...”

“That’s unlikely to be the case. So far, those who have been able to become Conferred God Kings so far are those who possess superior bloodlines. In other words, a cultivator’s fate is already decided at his birth. This is not something that diligence can make up for!”

“Bloodline determines everything. Without a sufficiently powerful bloodline, no matter how talented one is, one’s accomplishment will still be capped...”

The discussions swiftly reduced to a couple of sighs of lamentation.

Hearing their words, Zhang Xuan turned to Wu Fangqing and asked doubtfully, “Is bloodline really that important to a cultivator?”

“Of course!” Wu Fangqing replied frankly. “Through his talent, a series of fortuitous encounters, and diligence, there’s still a chance for ordinary cultivators to become a Celestial God. However, all those prove to be insufficient for one to become a God King. The hurdle is simply too high. In terms of probability, the chances of a person with a strong bloodline becoming a God King is a hundred times higher than that of other cultivators. As far as I know, of the hundred or so God Kings of the Nine Skies, the only ones who managed to reach the level of God King without relying on their bloodline are the Heaven Subjugation Monarch and three of his disciples!”

“The disciples of the Heaven Subjugation Monarch?”

“That’s right. I heard that his disciples are from the lower world, but other than that, there’s not much information about them. There are simply too many secrets surrounding the Heaven Subjugation Monarch that are yet to be unraveled, “Wu Fangqing remarked.

If anyone else were to speak about a God Monarch in such a manner, he would have already been berated for his rudeness. If Zhang Xuan was really the descendant of a God Monarch, there was a good chance that he would have felt strongly about this matter.

In a sense, Wu Fangqing intentionally phrased things in that manner in order to test the latter’s reaction.

But unexpectedly, the latter simply nodded quietly with no particular expression on his face. It was really hard to read the thoughts that were in his mind.

There was a brief moment of silence before Zhang Xuan asked once more, “If I may ask, what difference does the tier of the Aura of Divinity make?”

All along, he thought that the Aura of Divinity he received on the Azure would be the same as what that was on the Firmament. He didn’t think that it could be differentiated into multiple tiers.

“Hmm... Frankly speaking, I don’t really know either. I would say that it’s more of hearsay in the Firmament. There have always been rumors that the Aura of Divinity is differentiated into multiple tiers, and only those who boast the greatest of talents would be able to obtain the highest tier Aura of Divinity, paving their way to greatness...” Wu Fangqing replied contemplatively before chuckling softly.

“But in the end, these are just nothing more than rumors. There’s no need to take them for real...”

While Wu Fangqing was speaking, the door on the square right in front of the City Lord Manor suddenly jolted, and a silhouette emerged from it.

“Someone has already returned from the Celestial Mountain? Doesn’t the trial typically take a day at the very minimum?” Zhang Xuan asked in confusion.

This abrupt situation induced Zhang Xuan to rise to their feet and walk to the courtyard to take a closer look.

On the other hand, the rest of the crowd in the hall didn’t seem to be surprised by such a development.

“The Celestial Mountain is indeed open for a day, and within this period of time, those who have yet to reach godhood can continue scouring the grounds to look for the Aura of Divinity. However, those who have succeeded will be instantly teleported back to where they came from,” Wu Fangqing explained.

Zhang Xuan widened in realization.

“Hahaha, it’s my son! It has only been two hours, but he has already managed to reach godhood!” a middle-aged man

amidst the crowd burst into hearty laughter as he walked out of the courtyard as well.

Even if the cultivator started out at the mountain peak, it was still an impressive feat to be able to acquire the Aura of Divinity within two hours and successfully make a breakthrough. This, in itself, was proof of the cultivator's talent.

This result would be recorded down, and it would influence one's overall standing on the ranking boards.

“Congratulations! With such a talented son, I reckon that the Hu Clan is bound to rise to great heights in the future!”

“Old Brother Hu Xu, after much contemplation, I think that it would still be best to partner with you for the business we have discussed previously. Even though we have never worked together before, I have heard much about how you do things, and I must say that I feel at ease leaving things to you!”

“Brother Hu, your son and daughter are already of marriageable age. Why don't you settle this matter quickly?”

The crowd quickly gathered around the middle-aged man, Hu Xu, with heated gazes.

The very feat of acquiring the Aura of Divinity and successfully making a breakthrough within two hours was enough to place Hu Xu's son at the peak of Twilight City in terms of talent. Without a doubt, the young man would achieve great things in the future.

This was the best chance for them to get close to Hu Xu, or else the latter could become a figure way beyond their reach soon.

Hu Xu tilted his chin up proudly as he replied to the questions of the crowd patiently with a gleeful smile on his face. It was the typical look of a parent after hearing that his son had gotten into a prestigious university.

After settling the passionate crowd around him, Hu Xu turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan and sneered disdainfully.

It was true that his son had lost Zhang Xuan's students earlier, but it seemed like the tables had turned around. His son had already achieved a breakthrough, but what about the other party's students?

They were still struggling on the Celestial Mountain!

In the end, despite the superior strength they possessed, their potential was severely lacking. Just the fact that they were still at Semi-Divinity realm despite their age spoke loudly about this. They might be powerful amongst their peers at the moment, but their achievements were already capped.

"Young Master Zhang Xuan, it seems like my son was lucky to succeed ahead of your disciples... I look forward to finding out how long it will take for your disciples to reach godhood too," Hu Xu walked up and said in a mocking tone.

It was only human nature for a parent to brag about his child's accomplishments. How boring it would be if everyone simply lived humbly in the world!

Given that he had just been humiliated further, he wanted to repay the favor back to Zhang Xuan.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan frowned slightly upon hearing Hu Xu's words.

It was not that he felt insulted by Hu Xu's provocations, but he couldn't help but think that something was amiss about this matter. Given the cultivation technique he had imparted to his disciples, they should be able to achieve a breakthrough within less than an hour after obtaining the Aura of Divinity.

But even after the passing of so much time, not a single one of his disciples had returned yet. Could it be that... they had encountered some sort of danger?

But that shouldn't be!

He was still rather confident in the abilities of Zhao Ya and the others.

Even Sun Qiang was able to deal with dozens of the Semi-Divinity realm cultivators here earlier, so there was even less

of a chance that Zhao Ya and the others would face any danger on the Celestial Mountain!

“I reckon that they have been delayed by some matters,” Zhang Xuan replied.

This was the only explanation he could think of at the moment.

Due to the severance in space between the Celestial Mountain and the rest of the world, he was unable to sense whether the Heaven’s Path zhenqi he had infused into the God Essence Pills he had given them had been used or not.

“Delayed? Hahaha! I pray that Young Master Zhang Xuan’s disciples will be able to overcome whatever problems they are facing at the moment then...” the middle-aged man replied smugly as he raised his head even higher than before.

So what if your disciples are more powerful than the average Semi-Divinity?

As long as they weren’t able to reach godhood, they would be no different from trash!

Hu!

While the middle-aged man was still skipping around the courtyard gleefully, the door in the middle of the square jolted once more. This time around, it was a group of twelve people.

Zhang Xuan quickly scanned their faces, but none of them were the ones he was looking out for.

“Young Master Zhang Xuan, it appears that my child has returned as well.”

Those disciples of yours were the first to enter, and they were granted a position closest to the mountain peak, which boasts of the greatest Aura of Divinity. It doesn’t make sense for them not to be out yet...”

“Are they having trouble making a breakthrough to godhood? Oh my, that would mean that they are severely lacking in potential...”

The others who had been humiliated by Zhao Ya and the others earlier also walked out with gleeful smiles on their faces.

They weren't able to do a thing earlier because City Lord Wu was clearly shielding this young man, and their children ended up being no match for the young man's disciples at all. As such, they were forced to swallow their grievances.

However, now that the tables were turned, how could they possibly miss out on this ideal opportunity to make a jab at that young man?

I admit that your students are incredibly powerful as Semi-Divinities, but so what? Aren't they still lacking in talent in the end?

Compared to my talented son, they are nothing at all!

It will really be the joke of the century if they couldn't reach godhood despite the favorable conditions they were given...

"Young Master Zhang Xuan, please pay no attention to them. Luck plays a huge part in determining whether one is able to find an Aura of Divinity or not... Perhaps, they might be the next ones to appear!" Wu Fangqing consoled awkwardly.

"It's fine, I won't take those words to heart," Zhang Xuan shook his head and replied.

He had no idea why Zhao Ya and the others hadn't returned yet, but he had faith in their capabilities. Furthermore, he even prepared five pills for them. Nothing could go wrong.

Another four more hours passed in the blink of an eye, and over 300 of the 1200 cultivators who entered the Celestial Mountain had returned. However, Zhao Ya, Sun Qiang, and the others were still nowhere to be seen.

Those words of ridicule had also slowly turned into disdain.

The fact that those youths weren't able to make a breakthrough even after so much time had passed was concrete evidence of their lacking talent. To think that City Lord Wu actually regarded them as VIPs! How could such people be worthy of being placed on the same pedestal as them?

“Something is amiss...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He could understand it if his students weren't able to return within two hours; they might have faced some sort of difficulty or dilemma inside. But three hours had already passed so far, and none of them had reached godhood yet? That clearly made no sense at all!

As individuals who cultivated the simplified Heaven's Path Divine Art, they should be able to achieve a breakthrough much faster than him and his 'Pathos of Heaven'. There was no way they would need that much time!

So, why were they nowhere to be seen?

Worried, Zhang Xuan turned to Wu Fangqing and asked, “City Lord Wu, do you know of any way to check if a person on the Celestial Mountain is doing fine?”

“Check if a person is doing fine?” Wu Fangqing nodded, “It's indeed possible to do so, but the cost is rather steep. Each check will require 100 Divine Coins!”

The Celestial Mountain was considered to be generally safe, but it was still possible for cultivators to face danger, whether from the natural environment or from their peers. For those who were worried, there was indeed a way to check the current condition of the candidates inside. However, it was just that it was terribly expensive to do so.

A slot only cost a Divine Coin, but each check on an individual would cost 100 Divine Coins. The difference in price was truly frightening.

Zhang Xuan nodded without any hesitation, “I would like to check on the conditions of those whom I have brought.”

He couldn't allow anything to happen to his parents, his students, or his butler. They were the people who were closest to him in the world, and he felt like he would go on a rampage if anything were to happen to them.

“I understand. Please follow me,” Wu Fangqing nodded as he walked back into the City Lord Manor.

“Shall we follow them to take a look as well?”

“What’s there to see? It just means that his disciples haven’t made a breakthrough, that’s all there is to it!”

“He must have a lot of money to spare.”

“It doesn’t take much time to head there to take a look. If his disciples have really found an Aura of Divinity but aren’t able to make a breakthrough, that would really be a show to behold, don’t you think so?”

“I can’t deny that.”

Hearing the conversation between the two, the middle-aged men who had mocked Zhang Xuan earlier smiled in unison as they quickly followed the footsteps of those two.

They had some time on their hand anyway, and it was always a delight to see a person whose head was in the sky a moment ago being harshly tossed back to the cold, hard ground.

Navigating through the City Lord Manor, it didn’t take them too long to arrive in a narrow room.

Wu Fangqing pointed to the wall ahead of them and said, “Write down the name of the person you are checking on and place 100 Divine Coins on the pedestal over there, and the wall will reflect the condition of the person you are looking up...”

2135 Insulting the God Monarchs

After learning how the wall worked, Zhang Xuan unhesitatingly took out 100 Divine Coins and placed it on the pedestal. Weng!

The Divine Coins disappeared, and white light began to glimmer on the wall in front, forming a screen.

Zhang Xuan quickly walked up and wrote down Zhao Ya's name.

Of everyone who had entered the Celestial Mountain, the one who was most likely to achieve a breakthrough first was indubitably Zhao Ya.

Thus, he wanted to see what was going on inside that prevented her from achieving a breakthrough within the past six hours.

Hu!

The screen flickered a little, and it looked as if the characters would appear on the screen at any moment.

“This is the time of reckoning...”

“Do you recall what happened with Wang Xiao three years ago? He was unwilling to believe that his son was really a wastrel, so he spent 100 Divine Coins to check on his condition. But as it turned out, his son actually fell asleep on the Celestial Mountain! To this day, I still can't help but chuckle when I recall how his face crumbled when he saw the results on the wall!”

“Due to how widespread that matter became, the Wang Clan lost its prestige and honor overnight. Once, it was one of the top ten clans of Twilight City, but in a matter of days, it fell to the point where it couldn't even be considered as a third-rate clan anymore!”

“This fellow is probably doomed as well. City Lord Wu is a true pragmatist at heart. The only reason why he treated that fellow so well is probably because there is something he stands to earn from him. If that fellow loses his worth as a result of this, there’s no doubt that City Lord Wu would immediately change his tune!”

The middle-aged men behind shook with mirth.

Just as they were filling their minds with scenarios of Zhang Xuan’s impending downfall, they suddenly felt an unbelievably powerful and authoritative body clutching their bodies, causing their laughter to fall flat.

Boom!

It felt almost as if the world was caving in on them. The entire room rattled fearfully in the presence of this aura.

“This is...the aura of a God Monarch?”

Someone amidst the crowd exclaimed, and everyone quickly kneeled to the ground as a sign of respect.

“I am Monarch Fumeng of the Sky of Adamant Gold. Zhao Ya is suited to practice the cultivation techniques of our Sky of Adamant Gold, so I’ll be taking her with me...”

A voice that seemed to be completely devoid of emotions sounded slowly from the wall.

It wasn’t loud, but it seemed to hammer right into one’s soul. Those on the receiving end of the voice couldn’t help but tremble in fear and deference. Before such a presence, they couldn’t even bring up the will to retaliate at all.

“God Monarch?”

“His disciple has been taken away by a God Monarch?”

The crowd felt as if their heads were going to blow up from how ridiculous the situation was becoming. They turned to look at the young man before them with eyes filled with frenzy.

They thought that the young man’s disciple, like Wang Xiao’s son, would probably be sleeping or lying injured somewhere

on the Celestial Mountain... But who could have thought that she would have actually caught the eye of the God Monarch, inducing the latter to fetch her personally!

More importantly, the God Monarch even left behind a message to explain the situation...

When had the God Monarchs needed to explain their decisions to others?

This honor was greater than anything else in the world!

They were thinking of making use of this opportunity to mock the other party, but who could have thought that things would turn out in such a manner?

They turned their heads toward Zhang Xuan, expecting the young man to lose himself amidst happiness, but what they saw instead was the frown between the young man's brows tightening.

The young man's face was growing so dark that it looked as if it would drip ink.

To have one's disciple taken away and trained personally by a God Monarch, there was probably no greater honor than that in the world. Shouldn't he be so happy that he could skip in joy?

Why would he have such an expression on his face instead?

"Young Master Zhang Xuan, hurry up and thank the God Monarch for his benevolence..." Wu Fangqing tugged at Zhang Xuan's robe and urged.

It was one thing to offend others, but offending a God Monarch...

There was no one in the world that could possibly save him from the wrath of a God Monarch!

But before he could finish his words, the young man's angry voice had already echoed in the room, "Sh*t... Are God Monarchs that arrogant as to take away my people without my permission? Are they bandits without any pride and honor?"

Zhang Xuan was on the verge of blowing up from anger.

Did the God Monarchs think that they could do as they please?

That was his disciple! How could they take her away from him without even informing him? That was too shameless!

“Master!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Jia nearly burst into the tears.

Didn't you emphasize again and again to me the importance of humility and low profile?

Yet, you actually lost your temper and berated a God Monarch when your student has been taken away by the latter... Is this what you mean by humility and low profile?

Even though it will be beneath the God Monarch's standing to settle the score with you, still... is it really alright for you to insult them so openly?

While Zhang Jia was on the verge of fainting from shock, it saw the Young Master writing down Zheng Yang's name on the wall.

Barely after his name was written down, another powerful aura suddenly burst from the wall once more.

“I am the Monarch Zhuoyang of the Sky of Blazing Sun. Zheng Yang has the aptitude for the cultivation techniques of our Sky of Blazing Sun, so I'll be taking him away with me.”

“Screw you! How can you lot be so shameless?”

Zhang Xuan was on the verge of going insane.

Getting a really bad feeling about this, he quickly wrote down Lu Chong's name on the wall as well.

“I am Demon Monarch Qiankun of the Sky of Drifting Spectre. Lu Chong has displayed an exceptional talent for the cultivation techniques of our Sky of Drifting Spectre, so I'll be taking him away with me...”

Zhang Xuan felt even more light-headed. He hurriedly wrote down the names of his other direct disciples too.

“I am Fairy Linglong of the Sky of Linglong. Wang Ying and Wei Ruyan fit my palate, so I'll be taking them away with me...”

“I am the Cloud Dragon Monarch of the Sky of Cloud Dragon. Kong Shiyao and Liu Yang have caught my eye, so I’ll be ki—I mean taking them back with me...”

As Zhang Xuan went through the names of his disciples, the God Monarchs made their appearances one after another, each of them leaving some words behind. By the end of which, Wu Fangqing and the others were left completely dazed.

Those middle-aged men who had come along to watch Zhang Xuan’s humiliating downfall hadn’t expected things to turn out like that instead.

The elusive God Monarchs actually appeared one after another, almost as if they were watching a street parade...

One must know that they were the top existences of the world, and most people wouldn’t even get to see them once in their entire lifetime!

Yet, why the heck were they suddenly appearing all at once?

Wasn’t this a little too much?

While swallowing mouthfuls of saliva, the middle-aged men looked at one another, and they could see the horror in each other’s eyes.

How in the world did they find the courage to mock the young man’s disciples earlier?

Compared to the young man’s disciples, their offspring were really nothing in comparison!

One must know that their offspring weren’t even talented enough to catch the eye of a Celestial God whereas the young man’s disciples actually drew God Monarchs over to snatch them up as though housewives tussling with one another over a bargain sale...

Thinking about it, it was laughable how they actually felt a sense of superiority over the other party a moment ago...

They immediately turned to Zhang Xuan anxiously, hoping to placate him out of fear that he would exact vengeance on them in the future. However, what they saw was the young man pointing at the wall in agitation and bellowing, “You bunch of

shameless scoundrels! They are my disciples... My disciples!!!”

Everyone trembled even more intensely. None of them dared to speak a word at all.

Insulting the God Monarchs... Was this fellow insane?

Young Master... What happened to low profile?” Zhang Jia tugged at Zhang Xuan’s robe as it begged with tears in its eyes.

It thought that its master was a smart and reliable person, but in this very moment, it could almost see itself meeting its end at its master’s recklessness...

On the other hand, Wu Fangqing felt the world spinning around him. He was pinching himself so hard that his flesh was going to tear off, but he was so shocked that he couldn’t feel a thing at all.

After berating the God Monarchs for a while, Zhang Xuan finally calmed down a little.

Looking at this from a rational standpoint, it was not necessarily a bad thing for the God Monarchs to take Zhao Ya and the others away.

Given the limited resources he had on hand, it would be hard for Zhao Ya and the others to raise their cultivation swiftly if they were to follow him. As much as he hated to admit it, the God Monarchs could provide much better conditions for them.

“What about my parents and Sun Qiang?”

He had nurtured his direct disciples from young, nurturing and cleansing their bodies with his Heaven’s Path zhenqi. It was understandable why they would catch the eye of the God Monarchs. But when it came to Sun Qiang and his parents...

They didn’t build their foundation well, and their age was also on the higher side. It should be unlikely for them to catch the eyes of the God Monarchs...

He quickly wrote his mother’s name, Wang Mengya, down on the wall.

“I am an envoy from the Sky of Heavenly Sword. I’ll be imparting Sun Qiang, Zhang Zhenxing, and Wang Mengya swordsmanship. I’ll be sending them back to your side after their training is complete.”

This time around, a calm voice sounded from the wall.

“Even the secluded Sky of Heavenly Sword has sent an envoy over?”

Everyone was rendered speechless once more.

Just like the Sky of Freedom, the Sky of Heavenly Sword was closed off from the rest of the Firmament, making it a mysterious existence to the rest of the world. As such, it was perplexing why it would join in the crowd this time around just to teach three Semi-Divinities swordsmanship.

Of the fourteen people that Zhang Xuan had brought, eleven of them were taken away by the God Monarchs and the remaining three were going to learn swordsmanship from an envoy of the Sky of Heavenly Sword...

Heavens, just what kind of fortuitous encounter was this...

“Alright then...”

Seeing that at least his parents and Sun Qiang hadn’t taken away, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

At least, they left some people for him so that he wasn’t all alone.

That being said, it would probably take some time for his parents and Sun Qiang to grasp the swordsmanship from the Sky of Heavenly Sword.

Zhang Xuan would have never thought that the trip to the Celestial Mountain would end like that. Heaving a helpless sigh, he turned around, only to see everyone kneeling on the floor, looking at him with admiration gleaming in their eyes.

He immediately recoiled in shock.

It took him a while before he realized what they were up to. Given that his disciples had come under the tutelage of the

God Monarchs, it was clear how they should act around him in the future.

Shaking his head, he said, “I don’t wish to be in the center of attention, so I hope that you can keep whatever you have seen here today a secret.”

He could already imagine the hassle that would occur if others were to learn of this matter. Perhaps, some might even view him as a threat and attempt to make a move on him!

In the end, it was still wiser for him to maintain a low profile and continue life as it was.

“You don’t like to be in the center of attention...”

The lips of the crowd twitched upon hearing such unbelievable words.

Those words don’t seem to hold much credibility after watching how you berated those God Monarchs without holding back at all...

Even though that was what they were thinking on the inside, they were smart enough not to allow it to show on their faces. Nodding their heads obediently, they replied, “We understand. Our lips are sealed.”

“Let’s head back out,” Zhang Xuan replied before taking the lead out of the room.

While walking back to the main hall, he turned to Wu Fangqing and asked, “City Lord Wu, do you have any sword art manuals that I can browse through here?”

He knew that it would take some time for his parents and Sun Qiang to return, and there was no way he could leave without them too. So, he decided to settle this matter first.

He was no longer fully reliant on the Library of Heaven’s Path for his cultivation techniques and battle techniques, but it was still important for him to acquire new knowledge so as to broaden his horizon.

It would be foolish to not tap into the wisdom of the predecessors and attempt to do everything by himself. He would just be making things difficult for himself for no reason.

Only with a vast base of knowledge would he be able to create more profound techniques, and that was the most sustainable way for him to continue growing stronger.

Young Master Zhang Xuan, our clan has plenty of books that you can refer to.”

“Our clan has quite a notable collection as well. I’ll have my subordinates send some over this instant!”

“I dare not say for other things, but our clan is known for the diverse array of cultivation techniques on our shelves!”

Before Wu Fangqing could respond, the middle-aged men at the back had already volunteered their services subserviently.

This was the perfect opportunity for them to suck up to the young man, so they were more than happy to do him this favor.

“I’ll be troubling the rest of you then.”

Seeing how passionate this group of people were, Zhang Xuan accepted their goodwill. They would probably live in fear if he didn’t give them a chance to ‘redeem themselves’ after all of the mockings they had done.

Zhang Xuan first entered the City Lord Manor’s library, and it took him four hours to collect all of the books inside.

Shortly after he was done, the middle-aged men returned with the full collection of books they had, so he quickly began browsing through those as well.

It took him another six hours to clear everything.

Most of the manuals in Twilight City were limited at high-tier God realm, and there was very little that covered the Celestial God realm. Nevertheless, it still gave him a much deeper understanding of the Firmament and the cultivation techniques that were practiced here.

“I reckon that my next realm will be regarding the ties between a teacher and his students...” Zhang Xuan thought.

After what he had gone through today, he found a new direction for the next level of his Pathos of Heaven.

While he hadn't worked things out yet, with a concrete direction to work toward, it shouldn't take him too long to perfect the theory.

Once everything was in place, he should be able to become a Celestial God easily.

2136 Anima of Yearning

A day as my teacher, a lifetime as my father.

Due to the culture of the Master Teacher Continent, he had a very firm view of what the relationship between a teacher and his students should be. This was especially so after the time he had spent with Zhao Ya and the others.

Even though they were not related by blood, they were already closer than kin.

Thinking about his students filled him with many different emotions, such as the worry for their safety, the sorrow of their parting, the delight at their achievements, the expectations for their future... These feelings filled his chest, and just like hard liquor, they were slowly maturing in his heart.

Even though he had the ingredients in place, creating and mastering a feasible cultivation technique was not something that could be done on the spur of a moment. So, instead of rushing right into it, he chose to broaden his understanding of the Firmament first.

He immersed himself in his studies for an unknown period of time, till a voice in the distance suddenly called out to him.
“Young Master!”

Opening his eyes, he realized that Sun Qiang and the Xingmeng Sword Saints were already standing right in front of him.

Not only had they already reached godhood, they had managed to advance their cultivation to the same level as him, high-tier God.

Not only so, he could sense the sharpness of a sword from their very presence, creating an unfathomable aura around them.

“That swordsmanship...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

As someone who had created ‘A Heart of Intertwined Threads’, he was someone who had already found his own path in swordsmanship, creating a style that belonged to him and him alone. This was what sword practitioners termed as the level of transcendence.

He could tell with a glance that the Sword Intent that the three of them had practiced was vastly different from before.

For example, the swordsmanship that Sword Saint Xing had practiced previously tapped into the temporal laws of the world. It was built upon the fusion of swiftness and slowness, a little similar to Taiji.

However, after undergoing the swordsmanship training of the envoy from the Sky of Heavenly Sword, his Sword Intent felt more like a sealed fortress, embracing the concept of ‘protect’.

While ‘protect’ might have appeared to carry a similar meaning to ‘defense’, they were two vastly different concepts.

Defense was about fending off all malicious intent that was coming at one, similar to what a tortoiseshell was to a tortoise. On the other hand, protect encompassed the idea of counterattack as well. It was about using any means to eliminate the danger.

“Is this the swordsmanship of the Sky of Heavenly Sword?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

“This is the swordsmanship imparted to us by an expert of the Sky of Heavenly Sword. You went through all sorts of hardships when you were younger, and we weren’t able to give you the love and protection that a parent should offer to their child. So, we swore we won’t let any more harm come to you, even at the expense of our lives,” Sword Saint Meng said with a solemn nod.

Having to put her child through the turmoil of having his bloodline stripped would always remain an unhealable wound in the depths of her heart. She was determined to never let anything similar happen again.

It just so happened that the conceptualization of the Sky of Heavenly Sword’s Sword Intent was aligned with her state of

mind, thus allowing her swordsmanship to grow by leaps and bounds. In less than a day, not only did she manage to reach a new height in her mastery of swordsmanship, her cultivation had advanced greatly as well.

Zhang Xuan turned to look at his father, and even though the latter remained silent, his eyes were unwavering like his mother.

Last but not least, he turned to look at Sun Qiang, and the latter scratched his head awkwardly and explained, “Well, Young Master, you are my backing and my greatest source of support. It goes without saying that I must ensure your safety, right? Or else, how am I to brag and show off before others?”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan could not help but chuckle a little.

While the level of swordsmanship of those three was not on par with him, it was heartening to see that they finally had the ability to protect themselves.

Furthermore, he could tell that they were already on the verge of achieving a breakthrough to become Celestial Gods.

With a Celestial God tamed beast and four high-tier Gods, not to mention that there was also the enigmatic little yellow chick, they had finally accrued enough power for them to at least make a place for themselves in the Firmament.

“City Lord Wu, may I know if you have heard of the Spirit God?” Zhang Xuan asked.

While he was browsing through the books earlier, he could not help but notice that there were no records regarding the Spirit God. However, based on what he had heard from Du Qingyuan, there was no doubt whatsoever that Luo Ruoxin was in the Firmament.

Previously, due to his lack of strength, he had worried that asking too much could bring trouble to himself, so he had not dared inquire carelessly about this matter. However, now that they had all become high-tier Gods, they would be leaving Twilight City very soon. So, it was time for him to start gathering some news regarding Luo Ruoxin.

The fact that she was able to traverse through the dimension barrier of the Firmament meant that she was likely a God King at the very least. Considering the limited number of God Kings in the Firmament, it should not be too difficult for him to acquire some news on her.

While Mo Yuan might not know too much about the God Kings and God Monarchs of the world, as the head of Twilight City, Wu Fangqing was likely much more knowledgeable than him.

“Spirit God?” Wu Fangqing contemplated for a long while before shaking his head. “I’m afraid I have never heard of such a person. The Firmament is vast and boundless, and there are countless experts that roam the lands. Inevitably, there are a lot of people I haven’t heard of. That being said, do you know what kind of unique abilities or battle techniques that the Spirit God you speak of specializes in? I think that would be a good place for you to start your investigation from.”

There were simply too many aliases in the Firmament, and there were some people who went by multiple aliases as well. For example, most addressed God Monarch of the Sky of Drifting Specter as Demon Monarch Qiankun, but there were also those who addressed him as Demon Emperor Qiankun, and so on...

Even though the alias ‘Spirit God’ did not ring a bell with him, he should be able to deduce a thing or two based on what this Spirit God was capable of.

“Unique abilities... I guess it would be the use of rituals then. She’s able to perform spatial teleportation through the use of rituals,” Zhang Xuan replied.

When he met Luo Ruoxin on the Master Teacher Continent, most of the cultivation techniques and battle techniques that she displayed were those that were present on the Master Teacher Continent. As such, none of them could be considered her specialty.

However, if one spoke about the feats that she had achieved so far, her ability to descend or ascend from world to world

through the use of rituals was indubitably an extremely powerful ability.

Through the books he had just read, he realized that not even Conferred God Kings were necessarily capable of such a feat.

“Spatial teleportation?” Wu Fangqing frowned a little. “The spatial teleportation you speak of should be referring to instantaneous movement through space, right? That’s a feat that only God Monarchs are able to pull off. So, I don’t think that I’m in a good position to talk too much about it... As for rituals, I’m not too sure for the other eight Skies, but I do know that our Sky of Drifting Specter is particularly proficient in that. Most of the Celestial Gods and God Kings in Royal City are able to summon the souls of the dead through the use of rituals...”

“The Sky of Drifting Specter specializes in rituals?” Zhang Xuan was surprised.

“Indeed. In every major city of the Sky of Drifting Specter, there is something that we call the ‘Netherworld Pool’. Twilight City has one as well. It absorbs the Anima of Yearning coming from those living in the city to regather the souls of heroic spirits. The process is extremely slow, but it is definitely doable,” Wu Fangqing said.

“Absorbing the Anima of Yearning to regather the souls of heroic spirits? What is the Anima of Yearning, and how are the souls of heroic spirits regathered?” Zhang Xuan was a little confused.

Perhaps because this concerned the secrets of the Sky of Drifting Specters, there were no records about this in the books that he had read.

On the other hand, knowing how esteemed the young man standing before him was, Wu Fangqing did not dare hide anything from him.

“To put it simply, the Anima of Yearning refers to one’s desires and yearnings. For example, if a loved one passes away, it’s normal for a person to want to somehow reverse it all. This desire gives rise to the Anima of Yearning, which can

be absorbed and accumulated in the Netherworld Pool. Over time, it nourishes the fragmented souls within the Netherworld Pool and bestows upon them consciousness.

“However, this is an extremely lengthy process, easily taking centuries, millenniums, and even dozens of millenniums. Ordinary humans won’t live long enough to see to the end of the process. Once they pass away, the Anima of Yearning fueling the regathering of the fragmented soul will come to a halt as there’s no one else who remembers such a person anymore. As such, even if ordinary cultivators were placed inside the Netherworld Pool, it’s impossible for them to be revived. However, it’s a different case for the kin of God Kings.

“God Kings have a much longer lifespan, allowing them to provide a constant supply of the Anima of Yearning to the Netherworld Pool, so more often than not, the person that they yearn are able to return back to the world. At the same time, for those who have made a meritorious contribution to the Sky of Drifting Specter, they will enjoy the privilege of having their ancestral tablet put up on altars after their death. Over time, the Anima of Yearning of those who pay respects to them will build up, allowing them to return to the world.”

“I see...” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

He did not expect the Sky of Drifting Specter to actually have such a side to it. Using the Anima of Yearning to reconstruct the souls of the dead... that was indeed a formidable feat.

Sword Saint Meng could not help but ask, “In other words, as long as a person who has died is remembered by the living, there’s a good chance that they will be able to live an eternal life in the Netherworld Pool?”

“I guess you could say so.” Wu Fangqing nodded.

As long as a person was remembered, they would constantly receive the Anima of Yearning, allowing them to remain alive in the Netherworld Pool. Of course, the amount of Anima of Yearning one received would also affect whether one was able to take form and regain consciousness.

“However, the key to it is that a ritual must be held for the possession of the deceased to be seeded in the Netherworld Pool. Otherwise, the Anima of Yearning will not help to regather that person’s soul,” Wu Fangqing explained.

“I see. Other than the Sky of Drifting Specter, do you know any other powers that specialize in rituals?” Zhang Xuan asked on.

“I can’t think of anything else on the spot. If you wish to know more about this, it would help if you made a trip over to Royal City. The people over there are better connected, so you should be able to find out what you need over there more easily... Oh right, your business partner, Qi Ling-er, is someone from Royal City. She should have some connections over there that can help you acquire news on what you need,” Wu Fangqing said.

“Oh? Alright, I understand. Thanks for your help,” Zhang Xuan replied.

With his business at City Lord Manor done, he quickly returned to his residence and instructed Sun Qiang to send a message over to Qi Ling-er.

In less than fifteen minutes, a seductive lady was already standing at the entrance of the residence.

“Young Master Zhang!”

Qi Ling-er’s attitude was particularly respectful.

Even though she had no idea which power Zhang Xuan was from, she knew very well that she would be courting death if that someone of her caliber dared oppose someone who possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch.

“I need you to help me look into something. Have you ever heard of the ‘Spirit God’ or ‘Luo Ruoxin’?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Qi Ling-er pondered for a moment before shaking her head in response. “I don’t think I’ve heard of those names before.”

“Then, do you have any connections that can help me look into this matter?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“I can do that, but I’ll have to return to Royal City first. Twilight City is simply too remote, so it’s hard to find out anything here,” Qi Ling-er replied.

“If that’s the case, I’ll have to trouble Miss Qi to follow us to Royal City. May I know if you have time for that?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Even the strongest individual in Twilight City, Wu Fangqing, was only a low-tier Celestial God. If Zhang Xuan wanted to advance to greater heights and learn more about the Firmament, he would have to head to a higher tier city.

However, the issue was that he did not have any connections in Royal City, which would make it terribly difficult for him to move around. Without a doubt, things would be much more convenient if he could tap into Qi Ling-er’s connections.

“Hahaha! Since it’s you who has made this request, Young Master Zhang, I am more than delighted to be of assistance to you.” Qi Ling-er’s eyes lit up in excitement as she hurriedly nodded in response.

She was just thinking of how she could get on good terms with this young man when this opportunity fell right into her lap. Her shrewd mind was already calculating the benefits she would stand to gain from strong ties with someone who possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch.

So, she put on a slightly hesitant look and remarked worriedly, “It’s just that...”

“Feel free to tell me if you need anything. I don’t expect you do this favor for me for free,” Zhang Xuan replied.

He knew that Qi Ling-er was not a generous person. The only reason she had agreed to help him was because she expected to receive something in return.

“I’m relieved to hear those words from you. Well, it’s actually not that big a matter, so let’s discuss the matter further when we arrive at Royal City. Don’t worry, I have no intention of forcing you to do something against your own will,” Qi Ling-er said.

Very well.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

If the other party was unwilling to speak, there was no need for him to force her into it.

“How far is Royal City away from here? How do we get there?” Sun Qiang asked.

“The Royal City of the Sky of Drifting Specter is millions of li away from here. If we ride a divine beast there, the chances are that we won’t reach our destination even after tiring ourselves to death. A more feasible way is to use the Teleportation Formations, and it just so happens that there’s one in Twilight City,” Qi Ling-er said with a smile.

“Teleportation Formation?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

There was actually such a thing in Twilight City? Why had he not heard anyone talking about it then?

2137 Dusklight City

Qi Ling-er nodded. “That’s right. The ability of moving through space is modeled after the God Monarch’s ability of instantaneous movement. It allows one to traverse millions of li instantly without any restraints. However, the Teleportation Formation is a facility that only the city lord and nobles are allowed to use. It’s completely off limits to ordinary cultivators.”

“It’s something that only the city lord is able to use?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

If that was really the case, the restrictions to use the Teleportation Formation would really be tight. It was no wonder most ordinary cultivators had not heard of it before.

“That’s right. Rather than to phrase it as a special privilege, it’s more like a condition to protect those who are being teleported. As you might have heard, the Firmament stands at the top of the myriad worlds, so the spatial laws governing the Firmament are exceptionally powerful. Even Conferred God Kings have trouble trying to overcome them. For this reason, using the Teleportation Formation can create major spatial turbulence that poses great risk to the ones using it. Those who aren’t powerful enough will swiftly be torn to shreds,” Qi Ling-er explained.

“The City Lord Token that each city lord has contains the Anima of Yearning of the entire city, allowing him to remain impervious to the dangers of the spatial turbulence.”

“Anima of Yearning?” Zhang Xuan repeated contemplatively.

That was the second time he had heard this term.

“The act of obeying the laws set by the city lord is a symbol of subservience to the city lord. If something happens to the city lord, the entire city will descend into chaos, resulting in hardship for the populace. So, the desire for peace and stability contributes to the Anima of Yearning within the City Lord

Token, protecting their wishes. It's for this reason that the newly ascended Heaven Subjugation Monarch is intent on acquiring the recognition of the Nine God Monarchs. This is because the recognition of the Nine God Monarchs represents the acknowledgement of all life forms within their jurisdiction, thus allowing him to gather more Anima of Yearning," Qi Ling-er explained.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

It would appear that the so-called Anima of Yearning was an extremely powerful and important force in the Firmament.

He was convinced that the Heaven Subjugation Monarch was Kong shi, and based on what he knew about the World's Teacher, the latter was a person who was devoted to the betterment of the world. In contrast, the latter viewed fame and honor with little importance.

So, the very act of him forcing the Nine God Monarchs to acknowledge him was out of character, and it had left Zhang Xuan perplexed for quite some time.

However, it seemed like this was the reason behind it.

The very act of recognition from others would allow him to obtain the Anima of Yearning, allowing him to further his goals.

"So, if I wish to head to Royal City or anywhere else within the Firmament without any impediment, I need to acquire the identity of a city lord?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"That's right," Qi Ling-er replied with a smile.

"That's simple. I'll head to the City Lord Manor right now with Little Jia to slit Wu Fangqing's throat," Sun Qiang said.

Funnily enough, after the first quarrel they had with one another, Sun Qiang and the Phosphor Armored Beast had swiftly gotten closer with one another, and they had become gossiping buddies.

Even if Wu Fangqing had a low-tier Celestial God artifact, he would still have trouble trying to deal with the Phosphor Armored Beast.

But in response to Sun Qiang's proposal, Zhang Xuan shook his head and rejected it.

Wu Fangqing had not done anything to him, so it was not right for him to kill the other party just to claim his position.

“There's no need to go that far. Even though the Firmament seems to be quite peaceful on the surface, there are actually battles going on everywhere. There are quite a few cities that are without a city lord at the moment,” Qi Linger replied.

“Putting everything aside, I am actually a city lord as well. The territory I rule pales much in comparison to Twilight City, but still, the Anima of Yearning I receive in my City Lord Token is enough for me to use the Teleportation Formation.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement.

It appeared that there were many ways to circumvent the rules in the Firmament. It was a huge relief to hear that he did not need to resort to violence in order to acquire a City Lord Token.

Just for the privilege of using the Teleportation Token, it was definitely worth the hassle for him to become a city lord.

It was not as if he had not had his fair share of notable positions on his way here, be it a principal, a clan head, or a sect leader... Taking on another city lord position should not be a problem at all!

So, he turned to Qi Ling-er and asked, “Are there any cities nearby that are without a city lord at the moment?”

“Dusklight City, which is around a day's journey away from here, doesn't have a city lord yet. The local powers have been fighting for the spot for the past half a year, but no one has been able to gain a decisive advantage over the others so far,” Qi Ling-er said with a smile.

Her information network as the underground black market boss was still rather impressive.

“However, that city is much larger than Twilight City, governing three provinces. The strongest expert there has also reached middle-tier Celestial God. If even an expert of that

caliber hasn't managed to become the city lord yet, the difficulty in trying to do so is bound to be very high.”

“There are three provinces under Dusklight City? Do those province lords have tokens that would allow them to use the Teleportation Formation?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Of course! Young Master Zhang, it is in view of your circumstances that I am recommending Dusklight City!” Qi Linger replied.

She knew that Zhang Xuan would likely want to take the three people beside him around, and it was for that reason that he was recommending Dusklight City.

Otherwise, she could have just recommended any minor city. There was no need to go for a place that was as difficult as Dusklight City.

“That's perfect. If there aren't any other issues, let's set off right away,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Ah, pardon me, Young Master Zhang, but I need to make some preparations first. Why don't we leave here in four hours?” Qi Ling-er said.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

Qi Ling-er was extremely efficient in her work. Even though she asked for four hours, she was already back in the courtyard within three. Furthermore, she brought several massive aerial divine beasts along for everyone to ride on.

Stepping onto the back of the divine beasts, they swiftly made their way toward Dusklight City.

“They have left?”

Hearing that Zhang Xuan had left, Wu Fangqing's face crumbled in disappointment. He had hoped to forge close ties with Zhang Xuan over the next few days to get something good in return.

He did not think that the latter would leave so quickly.

“City Lord Wu, Young Master Zhang told me to pass this to you as a gift in return for all your help,” Ying Fei said.

“Is that so?” Wu Fangqing remarked with a perplexed frown as he received the jade token that Ying Fei was passing him.

He placed his finger on it and infused his divine energy in, and the next moment, his eyes widened in astonishment.

“T-this ...”

Recorded in the jade token were all the flaws in his cultivation, as well as the ways to resolve them. As long as he cultivated according to what was written there, he would be able to resolve the traumas in his cultivation and possibly achieve a breakthrough to high-tier Celestial God in the future!

“But how did he know?” Wu Fangqing was stunned.

It had only been a day since he met Zhang Xuan, and he had never mentioned anything relating to his cultivation or the sort before. Furthermore, the content on the jade token contained many things that he had neglected as well.

Just how did the young man manage to see through all that and even formulate ways to resolve the issues?

A long time later, Wu Fangqing shook his head and remarked with a deep sigh, “It’s not without reason that he possesses the bloodline of a God Monarch!”

Perhaps it was meaningless to try to apply common sense to someone who had already transcended his comprehension. It was arrogance in itself to claim to understand the powers of the God Monarchs.

Zhang Xuan’s departure did not cause any visible changes to Twilight City.

After all, he had been keeping a low profile ever since he arrived there, so there were not too many people who knew him.

After flying for roughly a day, a massive city finally appeared before Zhang Xuan’s sight.

In terms of width, it was three to four times larger than that of Twilight City. On the streets between tall buildings, there were many people milling about.

From the moment the divine beast landed on the ground and the group entered the city, Zhang Xuan could not help but frown at just how packed the streets were. It was as if he was trying to squeeze through a horde of locusts.

Seeing right through Zhang Xuan's thoughts, Qi Ling-er explained, "Ever since the receding of the spiritual energy, the area of habitable locations in the Firmament has decreased rapidly, forcing most people to move into cities. As a result, it has led to overpopulation. Any man who has a house of forty square meters here can already be considered rich and will have many girls leaping at him."

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

This was rather similar to the capitals in his previous world. Most people were frantic to squeeze into where the heart of the economy was, resulting in a scarily high population density. Houses had to be built higher and higher in order to keep up with the demand. At the same time, the prices of housing shot up insanely, reaching a level that was unaffordable for ordinary people.

That was the same for the Firmament. It was simply impossible to make a living outside of cities anymore, so everyone could only enter cities and hope for the best.

"Where do we go to compete for the seat of the city lord?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"It isn't due to the lack of eligible candidates that the Dusklight City hasn't been able to decide on a city lord thus far. Rather, it is due to the intense opposition coming from the political rivalry among different factions," Qi Ling-er explained.

"All in all, there are three strong contenders for the city lord position. They are namely a scion that specializes in saber arts, Lin Xie; an unaffiliated cultivator who specializes in swordsmanship, Wu Yang; and a young lady who goes by the name of Ming Laixiang. The former two are middle-tier Celestial Gods, and both possess exceptional fighting prowess. The last one, Ming Laixiang, is only a low-tier Celestial God, but it would be foolish to underestimate her due to her lower

cultivation. According to the rumors, she's the most fearsome of the three!"

"Ming Laixiang..." Zhang Xuan jotted down that person's name mentally.

To be able to become a contender for such a massive city, there was no way this Ming Laixiang would be an ordinary person.

"There aren't any complicated procedures that you have to go through in order to become a city lord. Technically speaking, all you have to do is defeat the three of them and make them acknowledge you from the bottom of their hearts, and the city lord position will be yours to take," Qi Ling-er said.

"So, Young Master Zhang, who should we challenge first?"

In the past, one would have to clear a whole string of administrative processes and receive the approval of the Netherworld Hall before one could run as a contender to become a city lord, which effectively meant that one would have to make an application several months in advance.

However, the receding of spiritual energy had resulted in a major change in the state of affairs in the Firmament. It was inevitable that processes had to undergo a paradigm shift in order to cater to the needs of the changing environment.

The current era was an era of scarcity, which made it inevitable that people would have to compete over the limited resources. In the cities, where most of the people and resources were concentrated, there was bound to be significant infighting and chaos.

As such, it was imperative that the city lord possessed absolute strength in order to enforce order and security. Only a person who could keep everyone within the city under their rule was qualified to receive the mandate of the Sky of Drifting Specters.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a brief moment before asking, "Before that, do you know where I can get some middle-tier God Essence Pills? I'll need to gather some before challenging them."

“Middle-tier God Essence Pills?” Qi Ling-er did not think that Zhang Xuan would suddenly request for this. She pointed to a massive building in the distance and said, “It should be possible to get some in that market over there, but I’m not sure if they will sell any to you without any connections. As you know, the God Essence Pills are highly sought after resources... Wait a minute, I think I know a place where we can procure them in high quantities, but it might not be easy to negotiate with that person...”

“Oh?” Zhang Xuan looked at her. “Tell me more.”

“He’s an unaffiliated cultivator in Dusklight City, and if I’m not wrong, he seems to be in his sixties. His cultivation isn’t too high, being only a high-tier God, but he specializes in pill forging. It’s just that he usually keeps the pills he forges for his own consumption. At the same time, he’s also a dedicated chess fan. He looks for people to play with him every day, and it’s rumored that his skills are excellent. He once declared that he would give a middle-tier God Essence pill to anyone who is able to beat him once. But even after so many years, no one has succeeded,” Qi Ling-er said.

“If his cultivation isn’t too high, hasn’t anyone thought of stealing from him before?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

In the first place, it was weird that a high-tier God was in possession of a middle-tier God Essence Pill. Was he not afraid that someone would attempt to steal from him?

In the other cities, perhaps the cultivators might still hold back a little out of fear of crossing their city lord, but Dusklight City was a place that did not have a city lord at the moment. As such, it was not too hard to imagine that the rules would be all over the place.

“Even though his cultivation is weak, he has a particularly formidable younger brother. According to the rumors, his younger brother is a God King in Royal City, and his younger brother has given him a jade token to protect him in times of danger. There were two low-tier Celestial Gods who once attempted to assassinate him to claim his fortune for themselves, but they ended up dying from the aura emanated

by the jade token. Ever since then, no one has dared make a move on him,” Qi Ling-er explained.

2139 The Game

“Of course!” Zhang Xuan nodded as he took a seat. He picked up a chess piece with his left hand and gestured to the chessboard with his right. “Please!”

Without saying a word, the Three Bearded Cultivator picked up a chess piece and placed it on the board.

With a faint smile on his lips, Zhang Xuan immersed his consciousness into the Library of Heaven’s Path, where a book had just been materialized.

Written on the book was the description of the chessboard, as well the flaws of each and every position on the chessboard.

Each position on the chessboard had some flaws, some more than others. There was only one position that did not have any flaws.

It indeed works, Zhang Xuan thought in delight.

After learning the rules, he had compiled the knowledge that he knew together with the chessboard before him, and through that, he was able to uncover the flaws of each and every move in the game. As long as he followed the impeccable calculations of the Library of Heaven’s Path, he should be able to achieve a decent outcome.

“That move... seems to be very steady.”

Zhang Jia and Qi Ling-er anxiously looked at the move that Zhang Xuan made before heaving a sigh of relief each.

To be honest, they had already tossed aside all hope of winning after being asked for the rules a moment ago. All they hoped was that Zhang Xuan would not embarrass them too much.

Even though each player had only made a single move so far, they were very conventional moves that conformed to the usual starting formations. There were no hints that one of the players was actually a newbie yet.

Hu hu hu!

The first few moves consisted mainly of setting up one's formation on the board, so there was no need to think too deeply yet. Experience was more than enough to determine where one should move.

The Three Bearded Cultivator swiftly placed chess pieces down one after another, and Zhang Xuan followed suit. It was as if they were playing solely on instinct, barely needing any time to think.

Within five minutes, they had already made thirty moves each.

“This...”

Upon catching a closer look at the circumstances on the chessboard, Zhang Jia and Qi Ling-er were a little taken aback.

Zhang Xuan's moves so far had been simple and conventional, similar to how an amateur player would play. There were no particularly complex ploys or traps to bait and catch the opponent. Yet, it was this simplistic playing that proved to be a huge pain in the ass to deal with.

Every single move he made seemed to be impeccably calculated to achieve the greatest gains and minimize losses, so the opponent's chess ended up being tightly sealed within his pieces, unable to struggle free at all.

As the person facing off with Zhang Xuan, the Three Bearded Cultivator was completely dumbfounded.

How can there be no openings at all?

Even though it had not been too long since the game had started, he could say with certainty that this was one of the most frustrating games he had ever played.

There were no terrific plans or incredible strategies at play at all. All that was happening was the other party calculating everything that was happening with precise accuracy and curbing every single move he was making.

If they were to compare it to a battlefield, where they were commanders leading their troops to battle, it would be that his

formations and strategies had been completely seen through. No matter what he attempted to do, he would be blockaded in advance. Just like that, he and his troops were slowly being strangled to death...

And the worst part was that despite having seen through it all, he was completely helpless to do anything!

Cold sweat began dripping down his back.

He swiftly switched from one advanced playing style to the next, attempting to pull off all sorts of ingenious moves that he had encountered over the years. Against any other opponent, the abrupt change in playing styles would have surely thrown the other party off, leaving him befuddled.

Yet, the young man simply continued to put down his pieces one after another without any thought.

It was almost as if he was playing with a moving puppet instead of a living human!

Often, he would think that the young man's moves were poorly thought out and inconsequential in the game. Yet, three moves later, it would suddenly dawn on him just how ingeniously the young man had positioned his piece in order to corner him.

It felt as if he had a fishbone stuck in his throat. He could neither swallow nor spit it out, stifling him so.

This is impossible...

The old man began to knock his finger against the stone table impatiently.

He had absolute confidence in his chess skills. He was unmatched in Dusklight City, and even in Royal City, there were no more than a handful of people who could put up a fight against him!

Even if those famed grandmasters were able to defeat him, most of them would take at least a hundred moves. He had only played forty moves against the young man so far, but he was already cornered so badly.

He had never imagined that a day would come where he would be rendered so helpless in a match.

But what left him even more despaired was that he could not even visualize a way in which he could win the match.

The opponent he was facing showed no openings. Every single move that he made only served to push him closer to the edge of the cliff, leaving him no chance at all.

Wiping away the sweat on his head, he continued making a few more moves.

Just like before, Zhang Xuan continued putting down pieces without much thought.

Soon, the moves of the Three Bearded Cultivator got slower and slower. He was taking more and more time to think his moves through.

This won't work... That won't work either. ••

Holding the piece in his hand, he was starting to hesitate. He had no idea where he should put his pieces anymore.

“The Young Master's chess skills...”

Even though Zhang Jia was not too proficient in the game, it could also tell that something was amiss. It snuck a glance at Qi Ling-er, only to see the latter with her eyes bulging out.

It had thought that the Young Master would perform badly because he had only learned the rules a moment ago, but it seemed like it had underestimated the Young Master's capabilities.

Every move that he had made seemed to have been revised innumerable times, ensuring that there were completely no flaws that the opponent could exploit. Despite the Three Bearded Cultivator's high level of mastery in the game, he still ended up being placed in a vulnerable position.

“Did he really just learn the game a moment ago?” Qi Ling-er's eyelids fluttered up and down as she stared at the sight before her with a look of disbelief.

As a divine beast, Zhang Jia's ability to read the chess game was lacking. On the other hand, as someone who had come out of a prestigious clan, even though she was not too interested in chess, she was still rather familiar with it.

The Three Bearded Cultivator was sufficiently skilled to stand his ground even against the chess experts of the Qi Clan, but he was actually unable to do a thing about the young man before him at all...

To put it bluntly, the Three Bearded Cultivator was getting wrecked. It was obvious that he was not a match.

But... did Zhang Xuan not just learn the rules a moment ago?

Was it really possible for someone to be so formidable playing the game for the first time?

The chess piece in the Three Bearded Cultivator's hand never landed on the chessboard. He tossed it aside casually and shook his head bitterly. "I've lost..."

He had no choice but to admit defeat. All his paths had been sealed, and the young man had not left the slightest gap for him to exploit at all. He would only be humiliated further if he continued the game.

"Thank you for going easy on me. Actually, I have also just learned the game, so I haven't fully understood most of the rules yet," Zhang Xuan replied with a clasp of his fist.

To be honest, he had no idea what he was doing. He only followed the most perfect moves based on the Library of Heaven's Path, placing his chess pieces one after another based on that.

And before he knew it... his opponent had already admitted defeat!

Because he had won so easily, he could not help but think that the other party had actually gone easy on him.

"Going easy on you?" The Three Bearded Cultivator thought that Zhang Xuan was only saying those words out of humility. His face reddened, and he said, "Friend, you are really embarrassing me by saying those words. In truth, I already

knew that I'd lost this match by the tenth move. What happened afterward was nothing more than a desperate struggle for survival. Given how tragically I've lost, you should just spare me those words. If someone of your caliber hasn't fully understood the rules yet, I really don't know what I should make of myself..."

If he had only lost by the difference of a piece or two, it would be understandable if Zhang Xuan had said that he had gone easy on him. However, it was clear that they were not even on the same level at all. It was as if he was a low-tier God facing a Conferred God King!

Even words of humility should be reasonable!

Anything beyond that would just be humblebragging...

You are too polite," Zhang Xuan replied awkwardly.

"Alright, since I have admitted my loss, you can feel free to speak of any request you have for me!" the Three Bearded Cultivator said with a wave of his hand.

"Elder, I wish to purchase the middle-tier God Essence Pills that you have. I hope that you can sell them to me," Zhang Xuan replied.

You only want to buy middle-tier God Essence Pills from me?" The Three Bearded Cultivator was slightly taken aback.

Considering how the young man had gone all the way there with an offspring of the Qi Clan, he had expected the young man to have an even more difficult request for him. Who could have thought that it would be something as simple as this?

While middle-tier God Essence Pills were not readily available on the market for ordinary cultivators, those who had some connections in Dusklight City would still be able to acquire them with ease. Most wealthy merchants and clans would have a sizeable stockpile of them.

Did this grandmaster chess player really challenge him for the sake of something as minor as this?

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

“There’s no need for you to buy them. I’ll give you all thirty middle-tier God Essence Pills I have with me.”

With a flick of his wrist, the Three Bearded Cultivator passed three bottles over without any hesitation.

“You are giving them to me? How can accept such a valuable present?” Zhang Xuan quickly waved his hands in rejection.

He had looked into the price of middle-tier God Essence Pills previously, and it seemed like they were a hundred times more valuable than low-tier God Essence Pills. Furthermore, it was a commodity that was not readily available on the market.

As such, he did not think that it was right for him to accept such a valuable gift so easily.

“I forged them myself, and they aren’t as expensive as you think. If you really feel bad about that, why don’t you have a few more games with me?” the Three Bearded Cultivator said.

“I would be more than willing to accompany you for a few more matches. It’s just that... elder, didn’t you mention earlier that you have sworn to only play three matches each day?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

“That’s only because I have not met a worthy rival yet. Against a grandmaster of your caliber, even thirty matches won’t be enough!” the Three Bearded Cultivator replied with a chuckle.

Zhang Xuan smiled as well.

It was nothing much for him to play a few more rounds with the old man in repayment of so many middle-tier God Essence Pills.

All he needed to do was follow the sequencing of the Library of Heaven’s Path anyway. There was no need for him to use his head.

They quickly cleared the chessboard and started on another game.

Five minutes later, the Three Bearded Cultivator’s face flushed red, and he exclaimed, “One more round!”

Four more minutes later: “One more!”

Three more minutes later: “Again...”

One more minute later: “Alright, I admit defeat...”

After losing so many rounds at once, the Three Bearded Cultivator was starting to doubt his own life.

He had thought that luck played a part in allowing the young man to play the pieces in the way he did before, but who could have known that no matter how he started the game and no matter what playing style he used, he would still end up bumping into a wall? There was completely no room for him to squeeze in a victory.

“There aren’t too many people in the world who will be able to overcome that playing style of yours. You can easily participate in chess tournaments to earn rewards...” The Three Bearded Cultivator looked at Zhang Xuan with eyes gleaming with expectations.

“I have no plans of joining those at the moment!” Zhang Xuan replied.

In his mind, he was just an outsider in chess who relied on the Library of Heaven’s Path to win. He did not think that he was qualified to join those sorts of tournaments yet.

“That’s such a pity...” Seeing that the young man had no thoughts of developing in such a direction, the Three Bearded Cultivator shook his head regretfully.

Zhang Xuan quickly bade the Three Bearded Cultivator farewell, and the group headed back to the streets.

Qi Ling-er shot a glance over and asked, “Shall we find a quiet place to assimilate the God Essence Pills first?”

She could tell that the reason Zhang Xuan wanted the middle-tier God Essence Pills was to advance his cultivation, and since that was the case, the next thing he would want to do was find a quiet place to cultivate.

“There’s no need for that,” Zhang Xuan replied.

This response left Qi Ling-er bewildered.

What did that mean?

Did he have some other reason for gathering these pills instead of using them to advance his cultivation?

Just as she was perplexed as to what the young man was up to, she saw the latter taking out the thirty middle-tier pills that he had just received and popping them one by one into his mouth, almost as if eating candy.

Her eyebrows shot up in astonishment.

Middle-tier God Essence Pills were potent medicine even for Celestial Gods. Ordinary high-tier Gods would need at least a month of cultivation in order to 滅y assimilate the energy contained within. Yet, this fellow was eating the^ if they were candies”.

Was he not afraid that his body would blow up and explode?

However, the swift growth in Zhang Xuan’s aura answered her question.

High-tier God primary stage!

High-tier God intermediate stage!

High-tier God advanced stage!

High-tier God pinnacle!

In less than two breaths, he had already advanced three cultivation stages, leaving him one step away from becoming a Celestial God.

Qi Ling-er shuddered in frenzy.

As someone from a distinguished clan, she had seen plenty of geniuses and experts...

But for someone to eat pills so casually and make breakthroughs so easily... This was definitely the first time that she had seen something like that!

It was as if he was not human!

Was the bloodline of a God Monarch really so frightening?

2140 Ming Laixiang

Zhang Jia also fell into a daze. Only at this moment did it realize that when the Young Master said that he cultivated slow, he was not trying to brag.

His normal rate of cultivation was really that fast!

Most cultivators would first have to condition their state and revise their cultivation technique before attempting to knock down their bottlenecks, but this young man did not have to do all of that at all. As and when he liked, he could simply channel his energy to make a breakthrough.

At this moment, Zhang Xuan suddenly said, “Little Jia, come here and strike me with your fist!”

Knowing that the Young Master wanted to test his newfound strength after his breakthrough, Zhang Jia stepped forward and said, “Alright.”

It just happened that it was curious to see how powerful its master was at the moment as well.

Over the past day since it had become a Celestial God, it had not been slacking off. It had been practicing the cultivation technique that its master had imparted to it, and that had allowed it to resolve most of the traumas and flaws in its cultivation. Even though it had only been a single day, Zhang Jia felt like it had improved more than it did over the past ten years.

Hu!

A massive fist flew over with a powerful gust of wind, carrying the deafening explosion of a sonic boom.

This sight made Qi Ling-er narrow her eyes in shock.

She could tell that the Phosphor Armored Beast had successfully become a Celestial God, but she did not think that it would be so powerful. After all, it had just overcome its

bottleneck, so it would probably take some time for it to adapt to its newfound powers.

However, the strength it was displaying had far surpassed her expectations. With its tremendous strength and invincible defense, putting aside a low-tier Celestial God, it would be able to stand its ground even against a middle-tier Celestial God!

She could not imagine how the high-tier God pinnacle Zhang Xuan would be able to endure such a devastating punch. Looking at the situation worriedly, she saw the young man calmly raising his hand before flicking it outward.

Peng!

Zhang Jia was immediately sent flying, and he slammed right through the trunk of a massive tree and into a wall before the momentum of the attack finally faded. It slumped to the ground while panting raggedly for breath.

“Young Master...” Zhang Jia really had no choice but to submit to Zhang Xuan’s prowess.

It had thought that it should be able to narrow the gap against its master with the recent advancements that it had made, but from the looks of it, their disparity was only getting larger and larger despite its diligence!

Zhang Xuan turned to Qi Ling-er and asked, “Do you think that I’ll be able to defeat the three of them with my current strength?”

The reason he had challenged Zhang Jia earlier was to get a gauge of his current strength, as well as to check how powerful the other three contenders for the city lord position were from Qi Ling-er’s mouth.

You should be able to defeat most low-tier Celestial Gods easily, but against middle-tier Celestial Gods, you are still slightly lacking... I wouldn’t say that you don’t stand a chance, but it’ll be a really difficult fight,” Qi Ling-er replied hesitantly.

In order to become contenders for the city lord position, those three had to be one of the strongest experts within Dusklight

City. As such, despite the prowess that Zhang Xuan had displayed earlier, Qi Ling-er still did not think that his chances of winning were too great.

Not to mention, after competing for the position for so long, there was no way they would submit to a young man who was not even a Celestial God that easily.

“Is that so? Let’s look for them now then!” Zhang Xuan said with a sigh of relief.

Given that he had only advanced his cultivation from low-tier God primary stage to pinnacle, he did not think that he would be able to defeat the three of them with an overwhelming advantage. It was only normal for it to be a difficult battle.

However, as long as it was not completely impossible, with his Eye of Insight and the Library of Heaven’s Path, he felt that he should still be able to emerge victorious in the end.

“We’re heading over just like that?”

Qi Ling-er had no idea where Zhang Xuan’s confidence came from, and she felt a little uncertain about this matter. Thus, she advised worriedly, “Once you challenge them, you’ll be officially in the race. Until the results are finally out, you’ll face endless harassment from them. Young Master Zhang, are you sure you don’t want to make a breakthrough to Celestial God first? Given your fighting prowess, it would be much easier for you to deal with them once you make a breakthrough...”

She would not have made this recommendation if it was anyone else. After all, the breakthrough to Celestial God was known to be a rather high hurdle. However, if it was Zhang Xuan they were talking about...

Given how he was able to advance three cultivation stages in a matter of seconds, she didn’t think that it would take him too long to become a Celestial God, perhaps just three to five days at most.

“It’s fine. I know my limits. Let’s go meet them now,” Zhang Xuan replied.

The way he cultivated was very different from the others. Even though he had a general direction of where he wanted to go, it would still take him some time in order to formulate the entire cultivation technique. Furthermore, it was impossible to forcefully hasten the process since he was attempting to devise something that did not exist yet.

Since that was the case, he would rather settle the matter concerning the city lord.

“If you’re confident, there’s no reason for me to stop you... Who do you wish to challenge first?” Qi Ling-er asked. “While Ming Laixiang is the weakest at the moment, she’s rumored to be the most terrifying. Lin Xie and Wu Yang are roughly equally powerful, but if we really compare them, I’d say that the unaffiliated cultivator is in a disadvantageous position. So, my suggestion is that you can challenge Wu Yang first, and once you defeat him, you’ll be able to replace his position. His faction will be left with no choice but to back you, and you’ll be in a more favorable position. The first opponent you choose is actually really important. It will serve as the basis for others to gauge your strength and determine whether you will gain their support or not.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded contemplatively before saying, “Let’s challenge Ming Laixiang first then.”

Qi Ling-er froze in place.

Did my words go in one ear and out the other?

Didn’t I just say that she was the scariest of them all?

“Why?” Qi Ling-er blurted out.

“She’s the closest to us at the moment. It’ll save us the trouble from walking back and forth,” Zhang Xuan replied.

While they were walking toward the Three Bearded Cultivator’s residence earlier, he had asked about where the three contenders resided, and based on the information he had received, it appeared that Ming Laixiang lived closest to where they were.

Qi Ling-er nearly clawed her hair out.

Are you actually an alien impersonating as a human? That's clearly not how a normal human thinks!

We are competing for the seat of the city lord! Look at how powerful your competition is. There's a chance that we might lose the battle... What you should be thinking about is how you can win the battle, not who's the closest to you!

After all, you can't possibly be thinking of defeating all three of them in one go, right?

Aren't you going to condition your state to make sure you are at your peak before challenging them? After all, you are going to fight against opponents that are stronger than you! Furthermore, won't you need time to recover after each battle?

Have you even considered that?

Qi Ling-er tried to dissuade Zhang Xuan from making such a reckless move, but the latter did not seem to care at all and kept insisting on fighting Ming Laixiang first. In the end, she had no choice but to follow him there.

An hour later, they arrived at a residence.

It was where Ming Laixiang lived.

"Send in the name scroll," Zhang Xuan said.

"I haven't prepared the name scroll yet. Each city has their own rules for challenging an opponent, and I haven't fully uncovered the rules for Dusklight City yet," Qi Ling-er replied.

Since she was unable to talk Zhang Xuan out of his rashness, she could only hope to slow his footsteps a bit through this to make him calm down and think more rationally about the matter.

Zhang Xuan shot a glance at Qi Ling-er and immediately understood her intentions. So, he turned to Sun Qiang and said, "You do it."

"Alrighty!" Sun Qiang replied excitedly.

He walked up to the residence and raised his voice to a level where it shook the surroundings. "Our Young Master is going

to compete for the position of the city lord! The person in this residence, get out here and accept his challenge, or else we'll take it as your loss!"

Qi Ling-er was stunned.

Is this still considered as making a challenge?

More like a provocation!

The fight for the city lord position was indeed intense, but there was no need to make enemies due to this. Even if one lost the battle, it would just end with some light injuries here and there.

However, after how disrespectful Zhang Xuan had acted, if Ming Laixiang did not retaliate viciously, others would take her lightly even if she did become a city lord. She would have to make an example out of Zhang Xuan in order to build up her reputation!

"Audacious! Who dares make a big fuss outside the Young Mistress' residence?"

Shortly after Sun Qiang spoke those insolent words, it caused a huge uproar within the residence. Those from the surrounding residences also walked out to see the face of the fool who dared to insult the great Ming Laixiang like that.

Ming Laixiang was the one who was the most likely to become the city lord despite her lower cultivation.

Against someone of such standing, that fool actually dared act so insolently...

Just what the heck was running through his mind?

With his chest puffed up, Sun Qiang roared, "If you wish to become the city lord, you should stop your yapping and obediently come out here to accept our challenge. Our Young Master doesn't have time to listen to your prattling!"

"Preposterous! Someone of your caliber actually dares challenge our Young Mistress..."

But before the person could finish his words, the voice of a young lady echoed in the air. "Come in."

Jiya!

The gates to the residence opened.

Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan and Sun Qiang made their way in.

The courtyard of the residence was rather spacious. Standing inside was a valiant young lady with a particularly tall profile. It was a little weird to call her a young lady as she was extremely built. Looking just at her profile, it was extremely easy to mistake her for a guy instead of a girl.

“You wish to become the city lord?” The young lady looked at Zhang Xuan and scoffed. “Little brother, take a look at your age and cultivation. Someone like you should head back home and sleep in your mother’s cradle. It’s good that you have great ambition, but you should know your own limits!”

“You seem to be terribly concerned about me,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile. “Since I have already made that declaration, I have no intention of backing off. I’ll give you two options here. You can either choose to compete with me and lose tragically, or I can give you a Beauty Pill and you surrender to me.”

Those words left Ming Laixiang a little taken aback. “Beauty Pill? You were the one who forged the Beauty Pill of Twilight City?”

It had not been long since the Beauty Pill appeared, but it had already made its name out in the world. There was hardly anyone who would not be moved by its name.

Ming Laixiang was no exception.

She had been born with a large bone structure, giving her a physique that was similar to a man. As a result of that, while her friends had already gotten attached and married, she could only cultivate quietly on her own.

But due to that, she was able to achieve great feats in her cultivation, giving her the right to compete for the seat of the city lord.

She had heard of the effects of the Beauty Pill from Twilight City, and she had intended to head there to purchase it. The only problem was that there were only twenty of them, and they were all sold out.

She did not think that the person who had forged the Beauty Pill would come looking for her a day later.

“Indeed.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “I am the apothecary who created the Beauty Pill. This is Qi Ling-er. You might know her as the person who sold the Beauty Pills at Twilight City!”

“Qi Ling-er?”

Ming Laixiang turned her gaze over and saw a seductive lady standing leisurely behind Zhang Xuan. Even though she had never seen the underground black market boss of Twilight City in person, she was still able to recognize the other party swiftly at a glance.

“Paying respects to Miss Ming.” Qi Ling-er stepped forward and bowed slightly.

“Un.” Ming Laixiang turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Your Beauty Pill, other than making a person prettier, does it have the effect of altering a person’s bone structure?”

In terms of appearance, she was not ugly by any means. Her only concern was her huge frame, which tended to scare other people away.

“I’m afraid it’s hard to change a person’s physique.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He could change a person’s complexion by nourishing their skin and muscles with the Heaven’s Path zhenqi, but the alteration of one’s bone structure required a much more complicated medical procedure. It could not be done just by swallowing a single pill.

“If that’s the case, I’ll have to say that your Beauty Pill doesn’t really hold much attraction to me anymore. Make your move. I’m interested to see just how powerful the person who forged the Beauty Pill is to dare openly challenge me here!” Ming Laixiang said as she assessed Zhang Xuan from head to toe.

She could tell that Zhang Xuan was no fool, and the fact that he dared challenge her despite so meant that he had some tricks up his sleeves.

“Sure!” Zhang Xuan nodded as he whipped out a sword.

It was the one that he had received from Wu Fangqing back in Twilight City. He had already tamed it into his own possession along the way.

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In preparation, Keguan Please wait a moment, after the updates, you need to refresh the page to get the latest updates!

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As soon as the sword appeared in Zhang Xuan's grasp, his aura immediately changed. All emotions vanished from his eyes, leaving behind just the sheer intensity of his concentration.

Ming Laixiang took out a whip, and with a powerful flick of her wrist, the whip shot in Zhang Xuan's direction.

Hula!

What Qi Ling-er was worried about turned out to be true. Even though Ming Laixiang was a low-tier Celestial God, her fighting prowess was exceptional. She possessed the strength to stand her ground even against middle-tier Celestial Gods.

Furthermore, her skill with the whip was also remarkable. She was able to control it to an extremely fine degree.

Having no intentions of facing the whip directly, Zhang Xuan took a step back and tilted his body backward to dodge her attack before stabbing his sword forward.

The length and flexibility of the whip was both its greatest advantage and disadvantage. It allowed for a wide range of maneuvers, but at the same time, it also made it extremely difficult to control. As a result, there were very few cultivators who chose to specialize in it.

This was also Zhang Xuan's first time facing such a weapon. He quickly looked through all the books he had collected relating to whips in order to understand the principles behind his opponent's moves.

Hualala!

Ming Laixiang leaped backward to create some distance before cracking her whip several more times in Zhang Xuan's direction, but each and every time, Zhang Xuan was able to dodge it by a hair's breadth.

Seeing that her attacks were not connecting at all, her complexion turned grim. Without any hesitation, she switched her tactics and launched a barrage of whips instead.

In the face of a ferocious flurry of whips, Zhang Xuan calmly deflected them one after another with his sword. Even though he was handling Ming Laixiang's offense fairly well, it did not seem like he was interested in counterattacking at all.

"Is he... practicing his swordsmanship?" Qi Ling-er could not help but frown.

It was apparent that Ming Laixiang had the advantage in terms of strength and speed, but by somehow predicting Ming Laixiang's attacks in advance, Zhang Xuan was always able to deal with her. The bizarre attack trajectory of the whips did little to throw him off at all.

The fact that Zhang Xuan could accomplish this meant that he had a fairly good chance at victory. However, each and every time Zhang Xuan attempted an attack, he would eventually back away at the last moment instead of pressing on. It was almost as if he was afraid of hurting Ming Laixiang.

More importantly, his fighting style was changing throughout the battle.

There was no reason for someone to keep changing their fighting style in the midst of the battle unless they were practicing their swordsmanship!

To actually think of practicing your swordsmanship while facing an enemy that is a cultivation realm stronger than you...

Are you serious about this?

Zhang Jia's eyes also widened in astonishment at that sight.

It had no idea whether its master was doing it intentionally or not, but it was starting to wonder if its master had some sort of attention-seeking disease. No matter where its master was, he simply had to do things that would leave the mouths of others agape.

Or could it be that the humans had a very different notion of what 'low profile' meant compared to divine beasts?

"Humph!" Ming Laixiang swiftly noticed Zhang Xuan's intentions as well, and her face turned incredibly livid.

As the strongest contender for the city lord position, she had never been underestimated by another person in such a way before, not to mention that the other party was weaker than her.

You seem to look down on me quite a bit, huh? Very well, I'll give a taste of my strongest move. The reason Lin Xie and Wu Yang don't dare fight me is because they can't deal with this move. If you wish to defeat me, you'll have to withstand it somehow!"

With a cold harrumph, the whip in Ming Laixiang's hands suddenly shot forth like a piercing sword right toward Zhang Xuan's neck. It accelerated so quickly that it seemed to appear before the latter in the blink of an eye.

Seeing how the speed of Ming Laixiang's whip was actually faster than his swordsmanship, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Just as the others had thought, he was indeed practicing his swordsmanship on Ming Laixiang.

He had been working on a new sword art for some time, but he had not been able to find anything that was suited to him. It was then that he realized that he needed to fight a real battle in order to spark some inspiration.

For that reason, he did not bother looking into Ming Laixiang's flaws. He intended to use this as an opportunity to try things out.

It had not been long since the battle began, but he had already made significant gains. He could somewhat visualize the sword art that he wanted to create.

Judging from the swiftness of Ming Laixiang's whip, it was apparent that she had put her all into this attack. So, Zhang Xuan flicked his sword upward and released a burst of sword qi against the whip.

Weng!

A sword qi swiftly unfurled to form a fish net-like shape to trap whatever stood in its way.

A Heart of Intertwined Threads!

Ming Laixiang was not an easy opponent for the current him, so he could not afford to hold back against her strongest move. Otherwise, he would really be courting his own doom.

“Heh!”

However, Ming Laixiang did not appear to be taken aback by Zhang Xuan’s move. Instead, a light chuckle escaped her lips.

Hu!

With a slight flick of her wrist, the whip that was heading straight toward Zhang Xuan’s neck suddenly bent slightly downward to strike his abdomen.

The change in the trajectory of her attack was swift, vicious, and completely out of expectations. Even though it was not striking his neck anymore, he would still be severely injured if it landed a clean blow on his abdomen.

“This was her goal from the very start...” Zhang Xuan quickly came to realization.

The change happened too quickly, and Zhang Xuan was completely unguarded against it. It was already too late for him to do anything.

Pah!

Qi Ling-er widened her eyes in horror as she quickly turned over to examine Zhang Xuan’s condition, but what had really happened was the opposite of what she had expected.

Not only was Zhang Xuan completely uninjured, there was a slight smile on his face.

Looking at his opponent, Ming Laixiang was clutching her chest, and fresh blood was seeping from the edges of her lips. She was sweating profusely.

“What happened?”

The earlier clash had ended in a flash. Qi Ling-er did not manage to clearly see what had happened.

“Young Master comprehended a new sword art at the very last moment. With it, he managed deflected Ming Laixiang’s whip back to her, causing her to sustain severe injuries,” Zhang Jia explained.

With its sharp eyes as a low-tier Celestial God, although everything had happened very quickly, it had still managed to see the happenings clearly.

Zhang Xuan was literally a split second away from sustaining severe injuries when he suddenly released a powerful outburst of sword qi. Not only did the powerful outburst of sword qi stop the whip in place, it even knocked it back to Ming Laixiang, causing her to suffer a rebound.

Qi Ling-er was absolutely stunned.

This was not just bravery anymore; it was as if he did not value his life!

What if he had not comprehended the sword art in the end?
What if the sword art he comprehended did not work?

He could have become a cripple from that blow!

The abdomen was where one’s dantian was. If it had suffered a severe impact, he might have lost his cultivation for good!

“So, that’s how it works!”

While the onlookers were shocked by just how reckless Zhang Xuan was, the person in question was currently laughing heartily.

He had been stuck all this while, but the earlier clash seemed to have parted the shadows veiling his eyes. All his confusion and doubts vanished in an instant.

“Camaraderie of Brothers... It turns out that the sword art was in my cultivation technique all along!” Zhang Xuan exclaimed excitedly.

Camaraderie of Brothers was the sentiment and cultivation technique he had comprehended when he saw the little yellow

chick getting killed right before his eyes.

Humans were always searching the world for someone who understood them, but how many of them were able to find someone whom they could entrust their all to? The sorrow of losing such a person was no different from having one's heart torn to shreds.

When Ming Laixiang's whip was about to approach his abdomen, everything had suddenly made sense to him.

He had allowed those emotions to guide his sword art, and not only did it deflect Ming Laixiang's attack, it was even able to injure her.

"I admit defeat..." Ming Laixiang surrendered.

She had no choice but to admit defeat.

She had been certain that she was going to win the battle when the sword art appeared completely out of nowhere, catching her off guard. What made it worse was that she could not even tell how it had all happened.

If she was at her peak, she could have still tested the other party out a little to see if she could decipher the sword art. Unfortunately, the earlier retaliation had left her severely wounded, leaving her no choice but to surrender.

Seeing that he had won the battle, Zhang Xuan glanced at Qi Ling-er and said, "Let's head to Lin Xie's residence."

He still had two opponents left to defeat. Since he had already dealt with the most troublesome one of them all, he shouldn't have too much trouble with the other two.

"Wait a moment."

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was going to leave, Ming Laixiang quickly got to her feet and said, "With your strength, I reckon that Lin Xie and Wu Yang won't be a match for you either. However, the real reason none of us have become the city lord yet isn't because none of us were able to claim a decisive advantage. Rather, it's due to our inability to assimilate the City Lord Monument, which is an insignia of one's identity as

the city lord. As long as you are able to assimilate it, they will surrender of their own accord.”

“City Lord Monument?” Zhang Xuan repeated.

“The previous city lord of Dusklight City was a middle-tier Celestial God, and he died fighting in the Flood of Spiritual Energy. After his death, his soul fused together with a stone monument. In order to become the next city lord, one must receive his recognition, and none of the three of us have been able to do so,” Ming Laixiang explained.

“Where is the monument?” Zhang Xuan asked.

It would be more convenient if he could get the other two to surrender just by assimilating the City Lord Monument. He would be spared the trouble of traveling here and there.

“I’ll take you there. However, I’ll just tell you in advance that it’s no easy feat to obtain its approval,” Ming Laixiang warned.

The young man standing before her possessed unnaturally great talent and fighting prowess. His ability to defeat her despite only being a high-tier God said as much. That being said, she still did not think that he stood a good chance.

This was because the crux to assimilating the City Lord Monument had nothing to do with one’s cultivation or talent but whether one could catch the eye of the previous city lord.

In the ten years since the previous city lord died, many experts had tried to assimilate it, only to fail in the end. No one was able to figure out what the previous city lord wanted.

She felt like the young man before her would be no exception.

They quickly left the courtyard and proceeded ahead. It did not take them long to arrive at the heart of the city.

It was a massive square, and erected at the center of it was a humongous stone monument. The laws and commandments of Dusklight City were inscribed on it.

The stone monument was over ten meters tall, and a shimmer seemed to swim ceaselessly across its lustrous black surface.

Even at first sight, one could tell that the monument was made out of no ordinary materials.

“That over there is the City Lord Monument!” Ming Laixiang introduced it to Zhang Xuan.

Nodding quietly, Zhang Xuan walked up to the City Lord Monument and lightly placed his hand on it.

A book materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

“City Lord Monument, made of Dark Jadeite. Seals the fortune of Dusklight City. Harnesses a sliver of Celestial God Yeyu’s will. Flaws:...”

There were detailed descriptions on the structure, history, and flaws of the City Lord Monument, but there was nothing that told him how he could assimilate it.

“We have strictly obeyed and enforced the rules inscribed on the City Lord Monument, and we have also made sure to pay the utmost respect to the previous city lord’s soul. But for some reason, the previous city lord refuses to acknowledge anyone,” Ming Laixiang said in frustration.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

He activated the Eye of Insight and began examining the City Lord Monument carefully.

Vaguely, he could sense an indignant will sealed within the City Lord Monument struggling and roaring furiously. This made Zhang Xuan frown a little.

He slit his finger and flicked a droplet of blood harnessing his will toward the monument.

Hula!

As soon as the sliver of his will came into contact with the monument, he sensed a powerful force gushing in his direction, seemingly wanting to devour his soul.

“There’s indeed something weird about this...” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Typically speaking, if a cultivator failed to assimilate an artifact, the blood essence containing their will would be

rejected.

Even though the monument refused to be assimilated, it had still devoured his blood essence. This was different from what he had seen before.

But again, it was not as if it made much of a difference to him anyway.

With a light chuckle, Zhang Xuan was just about to use his Heaven's Path zhenqi to destroy the will within and reenchant the monument when he suddenly noticed something and frowned.

As if noticing his intentions, the spirit in the monument swiftly diffused itself all over the monument. If he attempted to destroy the spirit in its current state, the monument could very well sustain severe damage as well.

If he was caught destroying the City Lord Monument, he would surely become the public enemy of the entire Dusklight City. By then, there was no way anyone would accept him as the city lord.

It seemed like the forceful approach would not work. However, he did not know what the will within the monument really wanted.

This was a huge dilemma.

Zhang Xuan's complexion turned grave.

2142 City Lord

Zhang Xuan turned to Qi Ling-er and asked, “Is it the same for other cities? Do other cities have City Lord Monuments that city lords infuse their will into?”

Since she was a city lord, she should be familiar with the processes.

“Each city has a City Lord Monument, and it’s indeed used as a record of the city rules. However, I have never heard of a city lord infusing his will into it. That would be equivalent to enchanting the City Lord Monument, turning it into an artifact. It would cause the Anima of Yearning of the entire city to be focused on the monument,” Qi Ling-er replied.

She was also a little bewildered after hearing the story.

She would have never thought that anyone would do such a thing.

The City Lord Monument represented the laws of the city. Infusing one’s will into it would cause the Anima of Yearning to flow into the will, nourishing it. For the city lord, this was not necessarily a good thing.

For one, there was no guarantee that the sliver of will would remain under his control even after it had been nourished. It was a highly dangerous move to make.

Zhang Xuan turned to Ming Laixiang and asked, “What was Celestial God Yeyu’s personality like?”

Celestial God Yeyu was the previous city lord of Dusklight City who had passed away during the Flood of the Spiritual Energy.

“He was a righteous and impartial man. The citizens often sing his praises,” Ming Laixiang replied. “It’s because none of us can match his character that we aren’t able to assimilate the monument. This is also why Dusklight City has remained without a city lord for so many years.”

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

That explained things.

Just the convenience of being able to use the Teleportation Formations made it worth it for one to become a city lord. There were bound to be many experts vying for the spot. So, it was bizarre how Dusklight City had remained without one for almost a decade.

From the looks of it, it was not that easy to become a city lord.

This was probably why Ming Laixiang did not seem particularly concerned that she had lost to him. This was because she knew that one would have to first overcome the City Lord Monument in order to become the city lord, or else he would just be nothing more than another contender in the running, just like her.

Since I can't destroy the will inside, I should just try to assimilate it just like an ordinary weapon!

While it might take years for others to tame an artifact spirit, Zhang Xuan was able to circumvent the lengthy process with his abilities.

So, he walked up to the black monument once more and tapped it a few times. Then, he whispered silently to it.

Weng!

The City Lord Monument shook a little, but it refused to submit to him.

Zhang Xuan's usual method was to employ both the carrot and the stick. He would offer the artifact two choices— submit to him and rise to greater heights or continue refusing and be destroyed.

However, such a trick would not work on the City Lord Monument. This was because it knew that the young man before it would not dare destroy it.

Seeing this, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly and whispered to the monument, "I know what you are thinking. You knew that you would meet with danger, so you infused your will into the

monument ahead of time, hoping that you could revive from the Anima of Yearning supplied by the entire city.

“I can’t say that it’s a bad plan, but you made a miscalculation—the amount of time it will take for you to succeed. Dusklight City has been without a city lord for nearly a decade now, so there has been no one to enforce the rules you have implemented. As a result, the amount of Anima of Yearning you are receiving has decreased tremendously. You won’t succeed at this rate. I’m sure you know that deep down.

“I don’t have much desire to become the city lord. All I want is to obtain the City Lord Token so that I can make use of the Teleportation Formations. If I become the city lord, I’ll have the city continue enforcing the rules you have set and even allow your will to remain inside the monument. Only the rise of a new city lord will bring order back to this city, and only then will you continue receiving a steady supply of Anima of Yearning.”

Zhang Xuan’s voice was infused with the Impartation of Heaven’s Will, allowing him to sway the emotions of the will within the monument. The indignant and hostile intent that was within the monument a moment ago slowly cooled down.

He had no interest in being a city lord at all.

Even if he, just like Kong shi, needed Anima of Yearning in the future, the amount he required would likely be far more than what the entire Dusklight City could offer him.

So, he had no qualms allowing most of the Anima of Yearning to go to the previous city lord. It was also better for him that the rules did not change. He had no spare time to care about that anyway.

“Make up your mind quickly; I am not a person with a lot of patience. You should be able to tell that I’m an outsider, and I have no attachments to Dusklight City. I don’t mind not becoming the city lord, but I’ll have this monument destroyed before leaving this place. I’ll give you ten breaths to think it through.”

It was those who had nothing to lose that should be feared the most. They would not hesitate to do the unthinkable, and there was nothing that could scare them.

After saying his piece, Zhang Xuan took two steps back and waited patiently for the monument's response.

"How did it go? Are you able to assimilate it?" Ming Laixiang asked with a slight smile.

Even though she posed it as a question, she already knew that the young man had failed. On the inside, she was greatly relieved that the monument was not responding to the young man.

You might be stronger and more talented than me, but that doesn't mean a thing before the City Lord Monument...

Ming Laixiang was expecting to see a frustrated look on the young man's face, but what she saw instead was the young man calmly opening his mouth and counting, "Ten, nine, eight, seven..."

"Hmm?" Ming Laixiang was confused. I am asking you whether you were able to assimilate it, so why are you counting down instead?

"...Three, two, one!"

Having counted down to zero, Zhang Xuan looked at the monument before him and said, "Make your choice."

As he said those words, he quietly gathered a surge of sword qi at the tip of his finger and pointed it at the monument calmly. His relaxed demeanor showed that he had no particular deference toward the monument at all.

Sensing that the young man would really carry out his threat if it did not agree to it, a crisp buzz echoed from the monument as it began shaking intensely.

"That's more like it," Zhang Xuan said with a satisfied smile.

He dripped a droplet of blood harnessing his will onto the monument, and it was absorbed right away. This was a sign that the monument had accepted him as its master.

“This...” Ming Laixiang was stunned.

She had tried everything that she could think of to convince the monument to accept her, but from the start to the end, it had never reacted to her. On the other hand, all the young man did was count down from ten, and the monument submitted to him just like that...

What was with this discrimination?

“Since I have assimilated the monument, does it mean that I am the city lord now?” Zhang Xuan asked.

He could sense that a portion of his will was already embedded within the monument.

Ming Laixiang was completely taken aback by the situation, and she felt deeply indignant. But in the end, she had no choice but to nod.

Given all that had happened, she had no choice but to accept the outcome.

“Here is a Beauty Pill. I’ll give it to you. Even though it can’t change your physique, I believe that it’ll still make a huge difference to you,” Zhang Xuan said as he flicked a low-tier God Essence Pill over.

“In exchange, I hope that you can deal with Lin Xie and Wu Yang on my behalf. Within four hours, I want the whole city to know that I’m the new city lord, and the rules of the previous city lord will be swiftly enforced.”

He had gained legitimacy as the city lord for assimilating the City Lord Monument, but in terms of influence, he was still nowhere close to Ming Laixiang. It would be more effective if he could have her do it on his behalf.

“Alright then.” Ming Laixiang nodded.

She knew that it would make no difference to the outcome whether she helped him or not. Given that the young man had obtained the recognition from the previous city lord, there was no one who could shake his position anymore.

Since that was the case, she might as well do it on his behalf and get on good terms with him. In fact, her effort would be

worth it even if it was just for the Beauty Pill.

After agreeing to Zhang Xuan's request, Ming Laixiang swallowed the pill right away.

She took out a copper mirror after that to look at her own reflection, and her eyes lit up in excitement.

It was really as miraculous as the rumors suggested. The effects started showing as soon as she swallowed the pill.

Her skin became suppler and smoother, and her facial features became more distinct. Even though her bulky physique remained the same, she emanated a newfound charm that would make others want to take a second look at her.

Ming Laixiang did not view herself as a vain person, but it would be a lie to say that she was not concerned about her own appearance. With her standing, there was no need for her to try to intentionally please anyone anymore, but if she had a choice, she would rather be more beautiful and feminine.

As such, she was very satisfied with the effects of the Beauty Pill.

With a broad smile on her lips, she took Zhang Xuan to the City Lord Manor and settled him in before swiftly heading out on an aerial divine beast to settle the task entrusted to her.

Her reputation as the strongest contender for the city lord position was not just for show. In less than four hours, almost everyone in Dusklight City knew that a person named Zhang Xuan would be taking over the position of the city lord.

News swiftly spread, and by the evening, Royal City had already delivered the Conferment Edict and City Lord Token over to acknowledge his position.

"It's finally done..." Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

With this, he would be able to use the Teleportation Formation within Dusklight City to travel to the Royal City swiftly.

"These are the tokens for the three provinces of Dusklight City," Qi Ling-er said as she passed three tokens over.

She was honestly a little speechless at just how efficient Zhang Xuan was. She had nearly lost her life competing for her city lord position!

On the other hand, the young man had managed to do it in less than half a day. It sure was maddening just to think about it!

Zhang Xuan passed the three tokens to Sun Qiang and his parents and said, "Assimilate these tokens, and you'll be able to use the Teleportation Formation."

After that, he turned to Qi Ling-er and asked once more, "Little Chick and Zhang Jia are my tamed beast, so it should be alright for them to travel together with me, right?"

"That isn't a problem at all," Qi Ling-er replied with a nod.

The City Lord Token was designed in a manner that allowed its master to extend its effects to their tamed beasts via the Soul Contract. After all, it was not uncommon for city lords to travel together with their tamed beasts.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He turned to look at Sun Qiang and his parents once more and said, "If possible, try to assimilate the tokens today. We'll be heading to Royal City tomorrow morning!"

There were some matters that he needed to attend to as the new city lord. First and foremost, he needed everyone to learn of their existence, or else they would not be able to earn Anima of Yearning in their City Lord Token and Province Lord Tokens.

So, he walked out of the City Lord Manor to the square right in front of him. With a leap, he jumped on top of the City Lord Monument and sat down on it casually.

At this moment, a huge crowd had already gathered around after hearing the news that they had a new city lord. They were a little curious yet fearful to know who their new city lord was.

After all, this was the man who had the power to determine their fate.

"You might have heard, but I am the new city lord of Dusklight City. My name is Zhang Xuan. I don't intend to

change how this city has been functioning so far, but it is my wish to see Dusklight City becoming stronger over time. So, in four hour's time, I'll be holding a lecture here to impart my comprehension of cultivation to you." Zhang Xuan addressed the crowd beneath him with a leisurely but authoritative tone.

To be honest, he did not have a concrete idea of just what the Anima of Yearning was, but based on what he had heard about it so far, he should be able to receive a steady stream of it as long as he could make others have a deep impression of him.

The fastest way he knew he could do that was through a lecture.

It was similar to how Kong shi's reputation had become synonymous with his teachings, and it was remembered even after tens of thousands of years on the Master Teacher Continent.

Until the day that his impartations became obsolete and forgotten, his name would continue to be passed down from generation to generation.

News that the new city lord would be holding a public lecture spread like wildfire. Over the next four hours, millions of cultivators gathered in the city square and its vicinity.

With a satisfied nod, Zhang Xuan started his lecture.

"Cultivation lies in the heart, the spirit, and the soul..."

His voice drifted into the surroundings with the warm breeze of spring, nourishing those taking it in.

Everyone was swiftly enraptured by it.

Standing amid the crowd was Wu Yang, another ex-contender for the city lord position. He was still wondering why Ming Laixiang would suddenly submit to a young man in his early twenties and even went to the extent of warning him not to oppose him.

However, when he came over personally to hear the public lecture, the significance of those words immediately became apparent to him.

It was no wonder that young man was able to become the city lord.

Putting everything aside, his comprehension of cultivation surpassed that of any expert they had seen before.

Profound concepts were conveyed in simple, comprehensible terms, leaving countless citizens nodding vehemently as epiphanies struck them. They were able to swiftly understand ideas that had eluded them previously and draw links between seemingly abstract aspects of cultivation.

All in all, one thing was for sure. Dusklight City would never be the same again after this lecture!

2143 Lin Xie

2143 LinXie

Due to Lin Xie's superior talent, the Lin Clan had risen to the top of the Three Great Clans over the past few years. His strength surpassed even that of Lin Xie's mother, the current matriarch, a low-tier Celestial God. Their combined prowess made it so that few dared oppose them in Dusklight City.

As for the Zhao Clan, they were the weakest of the Three Great Clans. Be it the potential successor or the current clan head, they came nowhere close in comparison to Lin Xie and his mother. The only reason they were classified as one of the Three Great Clans was because of their absolute dominance in the markets of the city, making them the wealthiest family of all.

In the Lin Clan's manor...

"Lin Xie, your current strength doesn't pale in comparison to that Ming Laixiang at all. Why do you have to heed her words and give up on the city lord position? You must know that you aren't alone. You have the entire Lin Clan behind you!" The clan head of the Lin Clan looked at the middle-aged man before him in disappointment.

There was no doubt that Lin Xie was one of the most powerful cultivators in Dusklight City. The entire Lin Clan was looking forward to the day that Lin Xie took the city lord position and took the clan to greater heights, but who could have known that a nobody would actually beat him to it?

Even if someone took the city lord position, all they had to do was snatch it away from him. Yet, Lin Xie simply chose to acknowledge him without even putting up a fight.

The more he thought about it, the more furious he became.

This was the only chance that the Lin Clan had to rise to the top of Dusklight City, but Lin Xie was giving up on it just like that!

“If Ming Laixiang isn’t a match for him, I won’t be able to defeat him either. Furthermore, he has managed to assimilate the City Lord Monument. Instead of humiliating myself, I might as well concede willingly.” Lin Xie shook his head and replied calmly. “Alright, I’ll be heading in to cultivate now. Don’t bother me if there isn’t anything else.”

After saying those words, Lin Xie turned around to return to his room.

At this moment, a butler suddenly rushed over and clasped his fist. “Clan Head, Young Master Lin Xie! The new city lord announced that he will hold a public lecture, and it began a moment ago. Quite a few people have gathered around to listen to it. Shall we send our people over to listen in as well?”

“Send our people over to listen in? That fellow just stole our Lin Clan’s city lord position! He should be grateful that we aren’t trying to wreak havoc in the midst of his lecture, let alone join in. Does he really expect our Lin Clan to become his students?” The clan head waved his hand angrily.

“This...” “The butler could tell that the dan head was furious, but after a moment of hesitation, he still chose to meekly add, “According to the reports from those participating in the lecture, it seems like the public lecture is quite beneficial to one’s cultivation. There are many cultivators who have been enlightened by his words...”

“Enlightened by his words? Tsk, those are nothing more than rumors that fellow is spreading around to bulk up his reputation! I have watched plenty of such charades over the years!” the clan head replied impatiently. “Enough! Warn the members of the clan that they aren’t allowed to listen to the lecture and receive his teachings. Anyone who disobeys the orders will have their names taken out of the clan registry, and they won’t be allowed to step through the doors of our manor ever again!”

“I understand...”

Seeing that the dan head had already made up his mind, the butler could only hold back his words and leave the room helplessly to relay the orders.

“Lin Xie, do you see that? That fellow started buying the hearts of the populace as soon as he became the city lord! Once he manages to reinforce his position, the whole of Dusklight City will fall under his control! You mentioned that you want to cultivate, right? Very well. I’ll have our eight elders to use our Lin Clan’s secret formation to raise your cultivation. By hook or by crook, you have to get the city lord position!” the clan head said with gritted teeth.

“The secret formation? That won’t do! It’ll cause the eight elders to sustain significant damage, and even their lifespans will be shortened!” Lin Xie was astounded.

The Lin Clan had a secret formation that channeled the powers of several cultivators into one single person, thus raising that individual’s cultivation. As the increment was minor and it caused great damage to those participating in the formation, it had hardly been used before.

Lin Xie did not expect the clan head to propose such a thing all of a sudden.

“There’s no need to say any more. As long as you become the city lord, it will all be worth it. There’s only one thing you have to do now, and that’s to condition your current state and prepare yourself to accept the powers of the eight elders!” the clan head said with a resolute wave of his hand.

Soon, the eight elders of the Lin Clan, all low-tier Celestial Gods, entered Lin Xie’s room and swiftly prepared the formation and channeled their energy into Lin Xie’s body.

All in all, the process took eight whole hours.

Boom!

Lin Xie felt refreshed and reinvigorated. He could feel incredible strength surging through his body, and he felt like there was nothing in the world that could stop him.

Channeling all this power toward his dantian, his cultivation immediately rose to new heights.

Half high-tier Celestial God!

Even though he did not manage to raise his cultivation all the way to high-tier Celestial God, there was no doubt that his fighting prowess was significantly stronger than before.

“With such strength, the city lord position is already within my grasp...” Lin Xie exhaled deeply as an ambitious glint flashed across his eyes.

His chances of victory against Ming Laixiang were only 50:50 in the past, but after absorbing the powers of the eight elders, he was confident that he would be able to overpower the latter easily!

The city lord position was his for the taking!

Thank you, everyone...” Lin Xie bowed deeply in gratitude to the eight elders were lying on the floor, looking as if they had been sucked dry.

In essence, the eight elders had traded their cultivation in order to raise his cultivation a little...

Losing eight low-tier Celestial Gods at once was indubitably a huge blow to any power in Dusklight City. No one would make such a choice under normal circumstances.

However, the sudden change in the situation forced them to make this desperate move. Once the new city lord built up his base of support and consolidated his power, it would be nigh impossible for them to overthrow him.

As long as he became the city lord, he would make sure to compensate the eight elders who had sacrificed themselves!

“Say no more. Get that city lord position, and it’ll be worth it even if we lose our lives...” a snowy bearded elder said weakly.

“Go. The city lord position can only belong to our Lin Clan...” another elder added.

Yes!” Lin Xie bowed deeply to the elders once more before leaving the room.

Just as he was about to head out, the butler from before rushed over to report, “Clan Head, Young Master Lin Xie...”

Unaffiliated Cultivator Wu Yang, Clan Head Tian Fei, and Clan Head Zhao Meng have arrived with their juniors!”

“They have come? What are they planning to do?”

The clan head and Lin Xie traded perplexed glances.

It was true that the Three Great Clans had ties with one another, but as they were in a position of rivalry, they were very wary around one another. It was bewildering to see all of them rushing there in the middle of the night.

“Invite them in!” the clan head said.

Soon, the crowd were all settled within the main hall.

“It’s a pleasure to see you, Clan Head Lin and Young Master Lin Xie,” the crowd greeted.

“Yes, it’s great to see the rest of you as well. I would like to know the reason behind this surprising late-night visit.”

Clan Head Lin got straight to the point.

Clan Head Tian chuckled softly before replying, “We came here right after listening to the city lord’s lecture. We noticed that there was no one from the Lin Clan around, so we came over to take a look.”

The city lord’s lecture? Humph! Our Lin Clan is the number one clan of Dusklight City. We are not so desperate as to listen to the lessons of a young brat!” Lin Xie immediately blew his top upon hearing those words. “You must be joking with me!”

“Clan Head Lin, we have come here out of goodwill. We were concerned that you would be missing out given that none of your members were present for the lecture, so we specially recorded it down in a Record Crystal so as to share it with you. It’s one thing for you to turn us down, but don’t you think you are going overboard by insulting our teacher?” Clan Head Tian also lost his temper as well.

It had only been a short four-hour lecture, but that was more than enough for him to be completely awed by the young man sitting atop the stone monument. The insights he had gained from the young man were more than enough for him to view the latter as his teacher.

Your teacher? Hahaha! I know that he's the new city lord, but surely you don't have to grovel before him so quickly!

He might just be ousted very soon, making him the shortest-lived city lord in the history of the Sky of Drifting Specter!"

Lin Xie sneered.

"Ousted? You wish to stage a revolt?" Clan Head Tian was stunned before bursting into laughter. "I see! It's because you've made a breakthrough, that's why you are saying such words..."

At this moment, Wu Yang, who had been silent all this while, suddenly stepped forward and said, "Since Brother Lin has made a breakthrough to half high-tier Celestial God, would you be interested in fighting me?"

The two of them had been competing for the city lord position for over half a year now, and they had traded blows several times in the past. As such, they were quite familiar with each other's skills.

"I would gladly accept your challenge!" Lin Xie replied with a confident smile.

He had been wanting to test his newfound strength after his breakthrough. It would be good if he could make an example out of his previous rival so as to show everyone in Dusklight City that he was no longer the same Lin Xie as before!

Hu!

Lin Xie flitted forward with swift footsteps as he raised his palm to strike Wu Yang.

Since he had decided to make an example out of Wu Yang, it would be ideal if he crushed the latter with an overwhelming advantage •

So, he used his strongest move right from the start, choosing not to hold back at all.

Pah!

But before Lin Xie could get close to Wu Yang, he suddenly felt a stinging pain on his cheek, and his body spun twice in the air before crashing to the ground.

Flabbergasted, he anxiously raised his head to see what had happened, only to see Wu Yang dusting off his palm leisurely after slapping him.

You...”

Lin Xie’s eyes reddened with rage as he dashed forward once more.

Pah pah pah!

Three consecutive slaps struck Lin Xie’s face, causing him to stumble onto the ground. He clasped his swollen cheeks as he looked at Wu Yang in bewilderment.

Your strength...”

No matter how he looked at it, it was clear that Wu Yang was still a middle-tier God. So, how could the latter be so powerful?

They had been equally matched before, and he had just achieved a breakthrough. It should not have been possible for him to be so helpless before the other party!

“Lin Xie, I have always viewed you as a rival, but you aren’t worthy of it at all!” Wu Yang gazed down at Lin Xie disdainfully from above. “Also, if you dare to speak badly about the city lord once more, I’ll take your life!”

With those words, he turned around and left the manor.

“This...”

Lin Xie was on the verge of going insane.

He had thought that he would be unmatched in Dusklight City after his breakthrough, but who could have known that he would only end up being slapped by a long-time rival instead?

How did the other party get so powerful all of a sudden?

They had just fought one another the day before, and he had not been anywhere close to being that powerful.

“Since our allegiance differs, it would only be awkward for us to continue associating with one another. Young Master Lin, in view of our past relations, I would just like to leave you with

some words of advice before I leave. Don't go against the city lord anymore. You will only be hastening the Lin Clan's downfall," Clan Head Tian said as he rose to his feet.

"Hah, who do you think you are to speak so arrogantly before me?"

Seeing how even the low-tier Celestial God Clan Head Tian was making light of him, Lin Xie lost his cool. He immediately got to his feet and hurled a fist toward the other party.

He might be no match for Wu Yang, but it would still be a walk in the park for him to deal with a fellow who was so much weaker than him!

Pah pah pah!

Once again, before Lin Xie's fist could strike, several slaps landed squarely on his cheeks and sent him crashing to the ground.

The beating really made Lin Xie go silly.

The entire world should be his after his recent breakthrough.

Why did he regress to getting pummeled by even a mere low-tier Celestial God?

Hu!

Just as Lin Xie was still trying to make sense of the situation, a shadow suddenly loomed above him. Raising his head, he saw Clan Head Zhao Meng standing right before him with an awful expression on his face.

"I also can't turn the other way when you have spoken badly about my teacher."

Then, without warning, his leg whipped forward to strike Lin Xie's abdomen.

Lin Xie immediately attempted to dodge, only to find the trajectory of the kick following him no matter where he went. He could not escape at all.

Peng!

His body was immediately kicked into the sky and flew over ten meters.

“How could this be...”

Lin Xie did not think that he would also be no match for Zhao Meng, who was supposed to be the weakest of them all.

The latter was actually able to kick him flying so easily...

He was really going to lose his sanity at this rate.

We paid such a huge price to raise my cultivation, but why does it seem like everyone else is progressing faster than me?

Am I actually untalented as a cultivator?

2144 Library of Heaven's Path's Anomaly

“Tian Fei and Zhao Meng, the two of you are too much!”

Clan Head Lin did not think that the first genius of his clan would actually be trampled by those two, and he immediately lost his temper.

Peng peng peng!

Just like Lin Xie, after a few firm slaps, Clan Head Lin was left sitting on the ground with a dazed look on his face.

Before, he had been respected as the head of the strongest Lin Clan. While he was no match for Lin Xie, he could still deal with the likes of Tian Fei and Zhao Meng with ease. When had they reached a level that was unreachable for him?

For some reason, those two seemed to be able to see through his maneuvers. No matter what he tried, those two could defend and retaliate impeccably.

“Challenge all of the offspring of the Lin Clan and leave them on their knees!” Tian Fei ordered coldly.

After those words were spoken, a crippled young man limped out from behind.

Clan Head Lin recognized the crippled young man. He was known to be the trash of the Tian Clan. After an unfortunate accident that crushed his legs, he had fallen into negativity and eventually become the weakest among his peers.

The crippled young man swiftly made his way over to the offspring of the Lin Clan, and with a sword in hand, he dominated all of them like a wolf amid a pack of sheep.

In less than ten minutes, dozens of Lin Clan offspring were sprawled all over the ground, subdued.

Clan Head Lin was losing his mind.

When did this trash become so powerful as well?

Just what in the world was going on with those from the Tian Clan?

Over the next hour, all the experts of the Lin Clan were challenged by the counterparts of the Tian Clan and Zhao Clan, but all of them ended up suffering tragic defeat. It was as if the world was signaling that it was about time for the Lin Clan to retire from the top echelon.

After the Tian Clan and the Zhao Clan left, Clan Head Lin turned to his butler and bellowed in a fluster, “Quick, go and check! How in the world did all of them suddenly become so formidable?”

In a position of rivalry, the Three Great Clans of Dusklight City had often clashed with one another both on the surface and in the shadows. Usually, the Lin Clan would be in an advantageous position due to its superior strength, making the other two not dare voice their opposition.

But in the span of a few hours, the tables had suddenly turned on them.

Clan Head Lin could not accept this. Had those two been lying low all this while in order to catch him off guard?

“Yes!”

The butler quickly rushed out of the manor, but not long later, he returned with a bruised face.

“What happened? Are they camping outside the entrance to humiliate us?” Clan Head Lin asked with gritted teeth.

Was there a need for them to be so petty? All they did was complain about the city lord a little! There was no need to go this far, right?

“No, it’s not those two clans. Two beggars provoked me while I was walking down the street. I thought that I could crush them easily with my strength, but even they seemed to have become experts all of a sudden. I ended up getting pummeled by them instead...”

The butler's eyes were filled with so much indignation that it seemed as if tears were going to be squeezed out from them very soon.

“Beggars?” Clan Head Lin was rendered speechless.

To think that the esteemed butler of the Lin Clan would actually be bullied by beggars!

“According to word on the street, it seems like everyone became powerful from listening to the lecture of the city lord. This has caused a major growth in the combat sense and cultivation of everyone,” the butler said.

“It's due to the lecture of the city lord? Did you manage to get a recording of the lecture?” Lin Xie asked anxiously.

“I had to go through much difficulty and pay a hefty price in order to obtain a copy,” the butler replied as he passed a Record Crystal over.

Lin Xie took the Record Crystal anxiously and channeled his divine energy into it. The surface of the crystal rippled a little before revealing a young man seated atop a monument. The young man was speaking with a calm but powerful voice.

Just by listening to a short segment of it, Lin Xie and Clan Head Lin fell paralyzed to the ground.

It was at this instant that they realized why the Tian Clan and the Zhao Clan had suddenly become so powerful, such that none of them were their match. It was all because they had listened to the lecture of the new city lord!

“It's impossible to emulate the effects of the lecture just by listening to the recording, so any learnings we gain from it will be greatly discounted. It seems like our Lin Clan has really missed out this time, and this has caused us to lag far behind the others. It's only a matter of time before we are kicked out of the Three Great Clans and fall to the ranks of a second-tier power,” Clan Head Lin said with a bitter look on his face.

It was impossible to recreate the enlightenment that those cultivators present at the lecture had received just by looking at the recording. It was the atmosphere of the lecture and the gradual buildup of knowledge that brought about the

epiphanies they had received, and they had all missed out on this golden opportunity.

With this, the decline of their Lin Clan was sealed.

“If only I’d known that the new city lord was that formidable, I would have listened to Ming Laixiang’s words,” Lin Xie remarked as tears flowed down his cheeks.

It was no wonder even the vicious Ming Laixiang had chosen to come under the new city lord and help him consolidate his power. It was an honor, as well as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, to serve such a capable master.

If they had been willing to let go of their pride and listen to the new city lord’s lecture, they would still have been the esteemed number one clan of Dusklight City. It was just a pity that there was no way for them to go back in time and do it all over again.

They had sapped the cultivation of their eight elders, only to fall in defeat at the hands of Tian Fei and the others.

Once news spread, Lin Xie, as well as the entire Lin Clan, would become the greatest laughingstock of Dusklight City!

Oblivious to the major changes that had happened in Dusklight City as a result of Zhang Xuan’s lecture, Qi Ling-er looked at the dizzy group before her and explained, “This is the heart of the Sky of Drifting Specter, Drifting Specter Royal City!”

The group was currently standing atop a massive circular Teleportation Formation. They had just teleported over to Royal City, and the spatial turbulence around them had yet to calm down sufficiently for them to regain

The previous night, in the four hours that Zhang Xuan had lectured, many low-tier Gods had become middle-tier Gods, and many middle-tier Gods had become high-tier Gods. Overnight, the overall prowess of Dusklight City had grown more than it had in the past thirty years.

This caused a temporary vacuum of spiritual energy to appear above the city.

Be it humans, divine beasts, or even artifacts, those who had listened to Zhang Xuan's lecture were deeply inspired by his words, and they had grown in one way or another.

As a result, his reputation had soared right to the top, earning him a loyal following.

Of course, none of this meant much to Zhang Xuan. Such things had happened so many times that he did not even pay much heed to it anymore.

As the spatial turbulence finally faded, the group left the Teleportation Formation and looked toward Royal City.

At a glance, it was clear that Royal City was many times larger than Dusklight City, and the buildings around were much grander and more exquisite. Naturally, the streets were crowded as well, but not to the extent of being as packed as Dusklight City.

The streets were generally clean, and the positioning of the buildings made sense as well. This hinted that the city had been governed well.

Looking toward the sky, there were all sorts of divine beasts flying around. However, what was even more mystifying were the massive mountains shrouded amid clouds floating in the air. It was as if one had stepped away from reality and into a fantasy world.

Those who are able to reside on the divine mountains above Royal City are mainly those from major clans and powers. Almost all these clans and powers are headed by high-tier Celestial Gods and above," Qi Ling-er explained.

"High-tier Celestial Gods... As expected of Royal City, it's indeed a frightening place," Zhang Jia muttered to itself.

Even while it was still a high-tier God, it was able to do as it pleased in Twilight City, disregarding even the city lord. But Royal City was simply filled with so many experts that it would have to lie low if it wanted to survive.

Putting everything aside, just by scanning its surroundings, it was already able to find five divine beasts that were more powerful than it.

It immediately reined in its bulging pride and quieted down.

This was kind of similar to a nouveau riche walking into high society for the very first time. Only upon seeing how rich the rich truly were would one realize that one was nothing special at all.

“What’s there to fear? Brother Sun is here with you! It’s only a matter of time before we conquer Drifting Specter Royal City together!” Sun Qiang said with a confident smile as he hooked his arm around Zhang Jia’s neck.

Those words made Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows twitch a little.

Every time Sun Qiang said those words, he would have a premonition that trouble was trailing not too far away from him.

Zhang Jia coldly pushed Sun Qiang’s arm away from him before turning to the small Little Chick sitting atop Zhang Xuan’s shoulder and smiling fawningly. “Boss, is there anything I can do for you?”

Without even looking at it, Little Chick replied nonchalantly, “I want to die. Do you want to die with me?”

Zhang Xuan covered his face from sheer embarrassment.

Just what mess of a group did he land himself in?

With a deep sigh, he decided to ignore this bunch of eccentrics and turned to Qi Ling-er instead. “Let’s find a place to stay. Do you have any suggestions?”

He would not mind living in a shabby place if he was all alone, but with his parents coming around with him, he was determined to at least find a decent place so that they could have a good rest.

Even though the Teleportation Formation was nearly instantaneous and his parents were protected by the Province Lord Tokens, the Xingmeng Sword Saints still inevitably sustained some damage due to their low cultivation realm.

“I spent most of my younger years living in the Qi Clan’s manor, and I left Royal City as soon as I came of age,” Qi Linger replied awkwardly.

“Since that’s the case, let’s just find any suitable place!” Zhang Xuan replied.

Even though Qi Ling-er came from one of the major clans in Royal City, her standing was not high enough to allow her to bring an outsider back with her.

Furthermore, most major clans were bound to have many rules, and that would be very stifling to them. It would be much more comfortable and convenient for them to find their own place.

As travelers frequently dropped by Royal City, it was quite easy for them to secure accommodation. In less than two hours, they were able to find a satisfactory residence. The only issue was that the price was much higher than the one they had lived in back at Twilight City.

Fortunately, the cost was still within Zhang Xuan’s spending power.

“Here are fifty Beauty Pills. I need you to help me sell them one way or another. At the same time, I hope that you can help me look into all news regarding the Spirit God,” Zhang Xuan said as he passed several bottles of God Essence Pills over.

Along the way, he used the money that he had earned previously to buy more low-tier God Essence Pills.

To him, the Beauty Pill was as good as free money. All he needed was a surge of his zhenqi.

“Alright,” Qi Ling-er replied as she left the courtyard.

Following which, Zhang Xuan turned to Sun Qiang and sent a telepathic message to him. “I need you to investigate the current political situation in Royal City. While you’re on it, I want you to look into Lu Chong as well. He was taken away by Demon Monarch Qiankun, so he should be somewhere in the city at the moment...”

Shortly after Lu Chong’s breakthrough on the Celestial Mountain, he had been taken away by Demon Monarch Qiankun of the Sky of Drifting Specter. Given so, he should be in Royal City at the moment.

“I understand.” Sun Qiang nodded before leaving the residence.

After they left, Zhang Xuan helped to settle his parents in their rooms before returning to his room. He sat down on the chair, took out the crimson pendant hanging around his neck, and fondled it quietly.

Where are you, Ruoxin?

What is your identity in the Firmament?

Through his interaction with Luo Ruoxin, he could tell that her standing should be rather high in the Firmament. Otherwise, she would not have been so prudent around him.

Perhaps I could try to figure something out from this droplet of blood, Zhang Xuan thought as he looked at the crimson fluid flowing within the pendant.

The pendant had been given to him by Luo Ruoxin. He was not sure if the blood inside was really hers, but even if it was not, it was likely a vital clue that would lead him to her.

Let me give it a try...

In the past, he had been unable to channel the powers in the blood due to his lacking strength. However, with his physical body, soul, and zhenqi cultivation reaching high-tier God, he should finally be able to do it.

He quickly set up a formation within his room before finally floating the pendant at the very center.

Then, he began to channel his consciousness into the pendant.

The exterior of the pendant seemed to be made of some sort of incredibly resilient crystal, such that he could not break it even with his current strength. Fortunately, his consciousness was still able to seep through it, albeit with some difficulty.

It did not take long for his consciousness to finally arrive before the droplet of blood.

The droplet of blood sat quietly within the pendant, not revealing the slightest hint of power. If not for all the times it

had saved Zhang Xuan in the past, he might have been duped by its seemingly ordinary appearance.

Determined to get to the bottom of this, he pushed consciousness toward the droplet of blood.

Boom!

As soon as his consciousness came into contact with it, his body jolted in astonishment. A familiar aura shrouded his body, and the words that he had heard shortly after his transcension to the Master Teacher Continent sounded in his mind.

The callous heavens regard all beings as nothing more than straw dogs.

“The sun sets, and the moon wanes. The heavens are imperfect...”

“The arrogant heavens dictate the rules of the world, enforcing order upon all beings...”

“Impartially, the heavens assess all beings on the path to enlightenment...”

Boom!

As those voices sounded in Zhang Xuan’s head, the Library of Heaven’s Path in his head suddenly jolted. The world spun around him before everything went dark.

Peng!

He collapsed from the chair he was sitting on and fainted.

Straw dogs are basically dogs made out of straw, and they serve as ceremonial objects in ancient China....

A meaningful quote from Wikipedia regarding the topic from Su Zhe:...

“The heavens are not partial. They do not kill living things out of cruelty or give them birth out of kindness. We do the same when we make straw dogs to use in sacrifices. We dress them up and put them on the altar, but not because we love them. And when the ceremony is over, we throw them into the street, but not because we hate them.”

2145 The Firmament's Master Teacher Pavilion

In his groggy state, Zhang Xuan vaguely saw himself standing on top of a cloud. His surroundings were completely empty, and there was nothing to be seen.

The cloud wandered freely along with the wind, embarking on a journey with no start and no end.

When he took a closer look though, he realized that he was mistaken.

There was another silhouette standing on the cloud as well.

That silhouette was gazing upon on the humongous world beneath them, a world filled with countless gods and magnificent buildings.

However, it was also a completely still world. Nothing was moving or breathing at all. It felt like the entire world was holding its breath for something to arrive.

“Elder...”

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan walked over to the silhouette doubtfully.

Those at his cultivation realm would rarely dream. He himself had only dreamt once ever since transcending over to this world. So, he had a feeling that there was a deeper reason as to why he was seeing such a sight before his eyes.

The silhouette neither spoke nor looked at him. Instead, a voice echoed right within his head. “You didn’t let me down. You were able to forge your own path forward with your own strength. Follow the path you have chosen for yourself, and you should be able to climb higher and higher. But you might need to hurry up a little. I can’t hold on for too long. One more thing. Try to create more Heaven’s Parchment, and you should be able to receive something that will help you on your journey...”

Boom!

Before the silhouette could finish speaking, Zhang Xuan's body suddenly surged forward, and the scenery around him vanished. His eyes opened, and he realized that he was back in his room.

It was almost as if it was all a hallucination.

“What's going on?”

It was a brief encounter, but everything felt so real to him. He found himself unable to discern what was real and what was not anymore.

Even though his cultivation was not too high, he was protected by the Library of Heaven's Path, and his willpower and soul were extraordinarily powerful as well. This had allowed him to remain unfazed by most inner demons and illusions.

Yet, his senses and mind were confused by what he had seen.

Furthermore, who could that silhouette be?

He seemed to know about the existence of the golden page too.

“Is he Kong shi?”

As far as he knew, the only ones who knew about the golden page and the Library of Heaven's Path were Luo Ruoxin and Kong shi. He was unable to clearly distinguish the appearance and physique of the silhouette, but he could vaguely tell that the other party was male.

Since that was the case, the silhouette was very likely the World's Teacher!

“He mentioned that he can't hold on for too long... Does that refer to his fight against the monarch of the Sky of Freedom?”

Shortly after he arrived in the Firmament, he had heard that the Heaven Subjugation Monarch and the monarch of the Sky of Freedom were going to have a final showdown. They were both top-notch experts of the Firmament, so the outcome was impossible for anyone to predict.

“Regardless of whether I am right or not, it’s true that I’m too weak at the moment. Those things are still too far away for me to get involved with at the moment...”

As a high-tier God, even dealing with a middle-tier Celestial God would pose difficulties to him, let alone the God Kings and God Monarchs.

Even if he looked for Kong shi, there was nothing he could do to help the latter. He might even drag the latter down instead.

What he should be focusing on was raising his cultivation and looking for Ruoxin.

Shaking those thoughts out of his mind, he turned his focus to his Library of Heaven’s Path.

The earlier jolt from the Library of Heaven’s Path had caused him to lose consciousness, so he was anxious to check if there was any changes to it.

But after examining the area for a while, he was unable to find anything different. It did not seem like the earlier incident had made any changes to it at all; it looked the exact same as before.

However, there was one thing he remembered clearly from the earlier exchange, and that was regarding the golden page.

The golden page was a weapon that harnessed the power of the heavens. After entering the Firmament, the Library of Heaven’s Path would have stolen a fragment of the powers from the heavens of the Firmament, thus significantly enhancing the might of the golden page.

With it, perhaps with the exception of God Monarchs, he should be able to deal with even God Kings and Conferred God Kings easily.

If he could just gather a bunch of them, he would pretty much be the most powerful cultivator in the Firmament aside from the God Monarchs.

With those thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan tucked his pendant beneath his robe and stood up.

The earlier experience had made him realize that he was not strong enough to examine the origin of the crimson pendant yet, so he decided to postpone the matter.

He pushed the door to his courtyard open and walked into the courtyard, and it was only then that he realized that he had actually been unconscious for four hours. Sun Qiang had already finished his investigation and was waiting outside to report the matter.

“Young Master!”

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Sun Qiang quickly passed a jade token over.

Zhang Xuan took the jade token and scanned the contents inside with his consciousness.

The information within described the current political situation and power distribution within Drifting Specter Royal City, making it highly confidential information.

Without a doubt, the most powerful expert in Royal City was Demon Monarch Qiankun, who was one of the Nine Monarchs.

Demon Monarch Qiankun had no interest in secular matters, let alone governing his territory, and he spent most of his time cooped up inside the Qianyuan Hall of his Qiankun Divine Palace. As such, barely anyone had seen him in person before.

Directly beneath him were the three Conferred God Kings, namely the old ancestor of Qi Ling-er’s Qi Clan, Qi Meng; the old ancestor of the Shangguan Clan, Shangguan Wufeng; and the old ancestor of the Nangong Clan, Nangong Ping!

Forty years prior, Nangong Ping’s body and soul had been crushed by a single blow from the Heaven Subjugation Monarch, resulting in his premature demise. However, his descendants had used the Netherworld Pool to nourish his fragmented soul, and over the past few decades, he had managed to regain his consciousness. At this rate, it was only a matter of time before he made a comeback.

Furthermore, there were two other God Kings to hold the fort for the Nangong Clan, so their position remained unwavering.

“As for the matter regarding Young Master Lu Chong, as this issue directly concerns Demon Monarch Qiankun, I wasn’t able to gather any news at the moment... However, I did manage to figure out where Demon Monarch Qiankun lives. He resides in the floating Qiankun Palace that is located right above the center of Royal City!” Sun Qiang said. “I think that it’s highly likely that he will have taken Young Master Lu Chong there if he intends to personally groom him.”

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

His students had been practicing the simplified Heaven’s Path Divine Art right from the start, and that had allowed them to build up a strong foundation. Furthermore, they had a deep comprehension of battle techniques, which granted them superior fighting prowess over their counterparts in the Firmament.

It was only natural for them to catch the eye of God Monarch experts.

Given that Demon Monarch Qiankun had left those words personally on the Celestial Mountain, it was unlikely for him to renege on his words and mistreat Lu Chong.

So, he did not think that Lu Chong was in danger at the moment.

Nevertheless, as Lu Chong’s teacher, he still could not help but be worried, so he wanted to know how Lu Chong was faring at the moment. After all, he did not know the God Monarchs personally, so he had no way of gauging their characters.

If his students were really suffering under the God Monarchs, he would have to find a way to save them.

“Is Qi Ling-er back yet?”

“Not yet. However, she had her attendant inform us that she has managed to sell thirty Beauty pills so far, and the money has been deposited into your card. As for the matter concerning the Spirit God, there hasn’t been any progress yet,” Sun Qiang said.

Zhang Xuan took out the card that Qi Ling-er had given him previously and scanned its contents with his consciousness. As

expected, there was a change with the numbers reflected inside. The money inside had nearly depleted due to his many purchases over the past day, but at this moment, the number had risen to over 45,000 Divine Coins.

According to his quick math, it meant that each Divine Pill was being sold at around 1,500 Divine Coins.

Even while they were in Twilight City, the demand for the Beauty Pill had been explosive. Given that they were in Royal City, where the most affluent cultivators of the Sky of Drifting Specter resided, the demand for the pills was bound to be even higher.

The only issue that Qi Ling-er had to consider was how she wanted to start the market for the Beauty Pills here.

But again, this was not an issue that he needed to be worried about. All he was responsible for was infusing his Heaven's Path zhenqi into the God Essence Pills.

Hearing that Qi Ling-er still had no news about Luo Ruoxin, Zhang Xuan could not be bothered to leave the residence anymore. So, he returned to his room to reinforce his cultivation.

A night later, he managed to recover from the side effects resulting from the Library of Heaven's Path's jolt. While he had not managed to advance his cultivation, his fighting prowess grew a fair bit.

"It's a pity that I haven't managed to come up with the Celestial God realm cultivation technique of my Pathos of Heaven..."

He had not been slacking the past few days. He had spent any free time refining his cultivation technique.

But even though he had already identified a direction he wanted to work toward, creating a brand-new cultivation technique from scratch was still no easy feat.

As a result, despite being only a small push away from a breakthrough, he was still unable to take that final step forward.

“I need more information. If I could gather the Celestial God realm Heaven’s Path Divine Art, I should be able to figure something out...”

If he relied solely on himself, he would need at least a month’s time in order to figure things out. However, if he could compile the corresponding Heaven’s Path Divine Art manual, he felt like he would be able to put the missing puzzle pieces together and complete his cultivation technique.

So, he walked out of his room and looked for Sun Qiang.

“Is there a Master Teacher Pavilion in Drifting Specter Royal City?”

The Master Teacher Pavilion was known for generously sharing knowledge back on the Master Teacher Continent. Furthermore, it regarded the bonds between a teacher and a student very highly. If he could find a talented student while he was there and impart some cultivation techniques to him, he might just be able to invoke the creation of a golden page.

“It was previously banned in Royal City, but after the fight between the Heaven Subjugation Monarch and Demon Monarch Qiankun, they were allowed to create an official branch here. It’s just that the students they take in tend to be less talented than the students in the other academies of the Sky of Drifting Specters,” Sun Qiang replied.

“That being said, I heard that the master teachers there are highly capable individuals. Despite the lacking talent of their students, the master teachers are still able to groom them into cultivators on par with the students of the other academies. For this reason, most people send their less talented offspring over to the Master Teacher Pavilion.”

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Master teachers were known for their ability to identify the individual strengths of a student and craft a lesson plan tailored for them, thus allowing the individual to grow swiftly. As a result, even if the student was untalented, as long as they were willing to put in hard work, there was still a good chance that they could do well in the future.

“Bring me over to take a look!”

Hearing that there was a Master Teacher Pavilion, Zhang Xuan immediately instructed Sun Qiang to lead the way there.

Even though the Sky of Drifting Specter no longer discriminated against the master teachers, it was inevitable that the Master Teacher Pavilion in Royal City was not as grand as those on the Master Teacher Continent. Master teacher was just another ordinary occupation here, and in terms of standing, it might even be beneath blacksmiths and apothecaries.

As such, the scale of their branches was much smaller, too.

Looking at the ordinary wooden doors and humble building, Zhang Xuan could not help but shake his head.

Even though Kong shi had defeated Demon Monarch Qiankun, and the Master Teacher Pavilion had shown significant results over the years, it was still viewed as an unorthodox organization. Many viewed it as inferior to ordinary academies.

“Are the two of you here to listen to Fan Zhe laoshi’s lessons?”

As soon as they walked through the wooden doors, a young man quickly walked up to them and welcomed them with a warm smile.

“Fan Zhe laoshi?”

“Ah, it must be your first time in our Master Teacher Pavilion. Fan Zhe laoshi is a middle-tier Celestial God realm master teacher, as well as the star teacher of our Master Teacher Pavilion. His lessons are deeply insightful. However, due to some parents questioning his abilities a while back, he decided to make the lecture today open to the parents as well. If you wish to join the lecture, I can take you over,” the young man replied.

“What is the topic of the lesson?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Middle-tier Celestial Gods could be considered experts in the Firmament, but if the content of the lecture was unsuited to

him, there was no need for him to waste his time there.

“The topic for today is about making a breakthrough to the Celestial God realm, as well as an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Celestial Gods and an evaluation on their true fighting prowess!” the young man replied.

“Oh? If that’s the case, I’m interested in listening to the lecture,” Zhang Xuan replied.

The lecture sounded like something he needed at the moment. He might just find some inspiration from it.

“The lecture is free for the parents of the students, but otherwise, you’ll have to pay an entrance fee of ten Divine Coins,” the young man said as he took out two tickets.

The price appeared to be exorbitant, but it was expected given that it was a lecture by a middle-tier Celestial God. Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan signaled for Sun Qiang to pay.

After that, the two of them followed the young man toward the lecture hall.

Along the way, Zhang Xuan examined the interior of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

He really had to say that this building was much shabbier than the magnificent Master Teacher Pavilions on the Master Teacher Continent. On top of that, the atmosphere was not too lively.

Just as Sun Qiang had mentioned, most of the students were not too talented, and a significant number of them were either crippled or wounded.

It was not easy for Kong shi to initiate change in the Firmament when most territories were already under the rule of the Nine God Monarchs.

The lecture hall was in a corner of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Zhang Xuan pushed open the doors of the lecture hall and walked in.

There were both students and parents seated inside, and all in all, there seemed to be roughly fifty people. A spirited old man

was standing on top of the stage located at the front of the lecture hall.

His aura felt pure, and even by looking at him from afar, his presence felt imposing.

Zhang Xuan and Sun Qiang traded gazes before heading toward the seats demarcated on their tickets.

After waiting roughly ten minutes, Fan Zhe laoshi looked at the time before saying, “We’ll be starting the lesson now!”

2146 Incompetence

“For this lesson, I’ll be talking about the crux to becoming a Celestial God. This is a hurdle that many cultivators have stumbled on, but if they are able to overcome it, their life will undergo a transformative change. They will be able to become city lords in some of the minor cities, and even if we are just looking at the Royal City, it’s the minimum requirement for one to become a leader in the City Guards!

“As is commonly known, there are two main routes to becoming a Celestial God. The first way is through a pure bloodline. With a pure bloodline, even if one doesn’t cultivate much, one will still be able to make a breakthrough easily. An example would be the experts of the Dragon Tribe in the Sky of Cloud Dragon. Those possessing the core bloodline will be able to become a Celestial God upon maturity, and that’s why they are the envy of most human cultivators. The same goes for the first generation of descendants from a Conferred God King. They are set to become Celestial Gods upon adulthood. For the second generation, the probability falls to ninety percent, and for the third generation, the probability falls further to eighty percent. . . Basically, going down the lineage, the bloodline will become thinner and thinner, till the chances of becoming a Celestial God are no different from those of any other cultivator.

“One’s bloodline is determined at birth, and nothing will change that. So, most cultivators can only rely on the second method to make a breakthrough—cultivation. There is no denying that cultivating to become a Celestial God is fraught with difficulty, and I’m sure most of you can agree with me on this. Not only must the cultivator find a cultivation technique suited to themselves, they must also have unyielding determination and confidence, as well as plenty of fortuitous encounters. All in all, less than a one in a hundred high-tier Gods are able to make a breakthrough to Celestial God.

“For this reason, every Celestial God didn’t come about easily. So, I’ll first touch on some of the conventional methods that high-tier Gods use in order to advance their cultivation...”

Fan Zhe began his lecture.

After listening for a moment, Zhang Xuan could not help but nod in agreement.

Even though the lesson prepared by Fan Zhe was a little too technical, which could easily bore a person, the knowledge that he was imparting was spot-on. He conveyed the full picture before going down into the specifics, and he was very thorough in his information. For those who were already close to his breakthrough, there was no doubt that his lessons would be very inspirational.

Zhang Xuan was able to gain a more thorough grasp of what becoming a Celestial God meant after listening to the lecture for a while.

But beyond that, most of what that was covered were things that he already knew. So, he felt that there was no point in him staying and listening anymore.

So, he got to his feet in preparation to leave the lecture hall, only to see the tightly sealed doors being blasted open the next moment.

Pah!

Following that, two figures walked into the lecture hall.

The figure walking in front was a middle-aged man. He had a towering stature, and he was dressed in silver armor. His movements were very disciplined, and his eyes instinctively scanned through the interior of the room with rational coldness.

With just a glance, it was obvious that he was a soldier who had been through the battlefield.

Behind him was a slim young man with a pale face. His aura felt withered, a sign that he had sustained severe internal injuries. Even though his life did not seem to be at risk, the traumas that he had sustained so far would probably make it

difficult for him to advance his cultivation any further in the future.

“It’s a Silver Armored General of the military!”

“One must be a middle-tier Celestial God at the very minimum to become a Silver Armored General, right?”

“That’s not all. On top of possessing powerful cultivation, one must display superior fighting prowess and accrue a great deal of merit in the military...”

“Why would such a figure come here?”

“It’s his son. His son has very poor talent in cultivation, resulting in him being rejected by all academies in Royal City. In view of that, he decided to place his son under Fan Zhe laoshi’s tutelage...”

Hushed discussions echoed around the room.

“Silver Armored General?” Zhang Xuan murmured as he assessed the middle-aged man before him.

Indeed, he could sense tremendous power pulsating within the other party’s body. In terms of fighting prowess, he would indeed be much more powerful than Ming Laixiang and the others.

“You are Fan Zhe?”

The Silver Armored General walked right to the center of the lecture hall and glared at Fan Zhe with narrowed eyes. One could clearly sense the billowing rage coming from his presence.

“Yes. May I help you?” Fan Zhe replied.

“You incompetent teacher! Today, I’ll teach you a lesson for leading my son astray!”

With a furious roar, the Silver Armored General leaped forth and threw out a punch right toward Fan Zhe.

Pah pah pah!

Even while he was in the midst of his movement, the might of his punch had already compressed the surrounding air tightly

to the point that a shockwave rippled all over the room.

You...”

Taken aback, Fan Zhe immediately retreated fearfully.

Padah!

The shockwave of the punch was so great that it crushed the nearby wooden podium. Alarmed, Fan Zhe quickly raised up his arm to counterattack, but recalling the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion, he gritted his teeth and assumed a defensive posture instead.

Peng!

He was struck square in his chest, causing his back to slam into the wall. At the same time, fresh blood spurted from his lips.

In terms of strength, he was probably on par with the Silver Armored General. However, perhaps due to his experience on the battlefield, the Silver Armored General’s attacks carried extreme aggression and bloodthirst that made him difficult to defend against.

It was like facing a frenzied beast.

“Hold it right there!”

“If you have any problems, we can always talk it out.”

“What are you doing? This is against the law!”

At this moment, the others in the lecture hall finally recovered from their shock. A few parents immediately rushed forward to hold the Silver Armored General back.

Infuriated, the Silver Armored General bellowed, “What the hell do you all think you are doing? This incompetent teacher is not worthy of living on the face of this world!”

Struggling to his feet, Fan Zhe quickly took two deep breaths to recover a bit of his energy before turning to face the Silver Armored General.

“Excuse me, parent, but even if you wish to kill me, you should at least let me know what I have done wrong and give

me a chance to make amends!”

He was certain that he had never seen the middle-aged man before him before.

On the other hand, the Silver Armored General grew even more enraged upon realizing that Fan Zhe was not aware of his misdeeds. He pointed at the severely injured young man behind him and questioned, “You don’t even know what you have done wrong? Humph! Do you acknowledge that my son, Zhuo Yan, is your student?”

Fan Zhe nodded in response.

“It’s out of trust for you that I entrusted my son to you, but what did you do? Instead of teaching him well, you forced him to attend additional supplementary class after formal lessons and charged him for it. I understand that you might have some urgent need for money, so I can still turn a blind eye to that, but the least you should do is teach him properly! Yet, you imparted an erroneous cultivation technique to him, causing his cultivation to go berserk. How can you have the face to continue living in this world?” the Silver Armored General roared in fury.

“Zhuo Yan’s cultivation went berserk?” Fan Zhe was taken aback.

He quickly turned to look at the young man and swiftly noticed that there was something amiss about his internal injuries. There were indeed hints of his cultivation having gone berserk. He shook his head in disbelief and said, “What I taught him were rudimentary cultivation techniques, so there’s no way there could be any mistakes with them. How did things turn out like this?”

Enduring the pain from his injuries, Fan Zhe walked over to Zhuo Yan and placed his fingers on the latter’s pulse.

Meanwhile, Zhang Xuan, who had been planning to leave earlier, decided to stay back and see how this matter turned out.

He could not help but recall how his previous self had imparted the wrong knowledge to a student, causing the

latter's cultivation to go berserk. However, back on the Master Teacher Continent, the standing of teachers was so high that even the parents would have to think twice before confronting a teacher.

Yet, the Silver Armored General had barged right into the Master Teacher Pavilion to beat the star teacher up...

It seemed like the standing of master teachers was not too high here.

Perhaps it was because Kong shi had only been in the Firmament for a few decades. If his heritage was passed down for another thousand years or so, people might start to recognize the value of master teachers and view them with greater respect.

That being said, if what the Silver Armored General said was true, Fan Zhe would have infringed on the principles of a master teacher. A teacher should be willing to impart knowledge to their students, but Fan Zhe had intentionally held back his lessons and forced his students to pay for supplementary lessons in order to acquire greater wealth for himself.

Looking at this matter from a moral standpoint, Fan Zhe was indeed unqualified to be a teacher.

It was not to say that teachers should be completely selfless and devoid of greed, but at the very least, they should uphold a basic level of professionalism. Their need for money should not be a reason for them to neglect their responsibilities.

"His cultivation has really gone berserk," Fan Zhe muttered with a frown.

"It's good that you have finally admitted it. I'll kill you today and rid the world of an incompetent teacher!" Hearing those words, the Silver Armored General immediately threw another punch.

"Calm down, calm down!"

The other parents quickly tried to pull him back in order to stop him from doing anything reckless.

This was Drifting Specter Royal City, the territory where Demon Monarch Qiankun lived. All who lived in the same city would do well to heed his orders, and this was including the God Kings, or else they might very well be obliterated.

“Zhuo Yan’s father, please calm down. It is impossible for there to be anything wrong with what I imparted to him. The reason his cultivation went berserk must be due to some mistake he made in his cultivation. Let’s first find out the reason behind this matter and resolve the problem, alright?” Fan Zhe said with a wave of his hand.

After that, he turned to the young man. “Tell me what happened before your cultivation went berserk in detail...”

“Yesterday, after going through your supplementary lesson, I returned home and cultivated as you taught me... and somehow, everything just turned out like that!” The young man’s body trembled as he spoke.

“This happened after you followed my cultivation technique? Tell me what you did step by step,” Fan Zhe instructed.

“Just as you said, I channeled my divine energy through the Nascent Helios Three Focused Meridians in my hands before directing them toward the Chongyang Acupoint... In the end, I converged it together in the dantian!” The young man quickly went through the cultivation technique he had been taught.

Hearing the story, Zhang Xuan frowned once more.

What Zhuo Yan had just described was a cultivation technique for low-tier Gods to advance to middle-tier Gods. As he had compiled the Heaven’s Path Divine Art for it, he was extremely familiar with it.

While the method that Zhuo Yan had described was vastly inferior to the Heaven’s Path Divine Art, for an ordinary cultivator, it was quite a decent one. There were not too many mistakes with it, and generally speaking, it could be said to be almost foolproof.

Using such a method, as long as Zhuo Yan could gather sufficient divine energy, it should not be too difficult for him to make a breakthrough. So, how did his cultivation go

berserk? Furthermore, judging from the severity of his injuries, it seemed to be quite a severe case.

“There shouldn’t have been any mistakes...”

Fan Zhe was thinking that Zhuo Yan might have remembered the cultivation technique incorrectly, resulting in him making a fatal error in the midst of his cultivation. But contrary to what he thought, Zhuo Yan’s description was all correct.

This left Fan Zhe deeply bewildered.

It was a major sin for a teacher to cause a student’s cultivation to go berserk. Even if he was a master teacher, this was not a sin that he could bear.

“If there’s no mistake, how could my son land in such a state? It’s clearly your incompetence that led to such an outcome!” the Silver Armored General shouted furiously.

“Please calm down. Let’s see if we can treat your son first,” Fan Zhe said as he channeled his divine energy into Zhuo Yan’s body to take a closer look.

Zhuo Yan’s cultivation had indeed gone berserk, and based on the injuries the young man had sustained, the culprit seemed to be the cultivation technique that he had imparted to the young man...

To put it in other words, he did not teach the cultivation technique incorrectly, and Zhuo Yan did not practice the cultivation technique incorrectly, but somehow, Zhuo Yan’s cultivation simply went berserk.

“Just what could have gone wrong?”

Fan Zhe was at a complete loss.

He had been a master teacher for fifteen years now, and he had at least taught eight thousand students to date. This was the first time that he had encountered such a bizarre situation.

Unable to find an answer, he turned to the student behind him and instructed, “Invite Physician Yu Feng here!”

“Physician Yu Feng is one of the more famous physicians in Royal City. He should be able to resolve this problem easily.”

“As long as we can identify the root cause, it shouldn’t be too difficult for us to resolve the problem!”

“Let’s treat your son first. We have plenty of time to discuss the reason for your son’s cultivation going berserk once he’s well.”

“Indeed. That being said, I must say that Fan Zhe has really failed as a teacher. Instead of teaching well during class, he chose to extend his lessons into supplementary classes in order to earn extra income. I have long heard of that.”

“If not for the fact that my daughter is under his tutelage as well, I would have taught him a lesson myself. It’s only out of fear that he would shortchange my daughter that I am holding myself back. Otherwise, if he just misleads my daughter, her future would be ruined!”

“I heard that he sells priority seats in his classroom as well. Parents have to pay an additional sum in order to secure front seats for their children...”

2147 Zhang Xuan's Intervention

The discussions of the crowd made Zhang Xuan's frown even deeper.

If what the crowd was saying was true, it really meant that Fan Zhe was unqualified to be a master teacher no matter how formidable he was as a teacher.

Judge a person by his principles first, then capabilities.

Back on the Master Teacher Continent, there was a culture where teachers were viewed with great respect, and they were expected to conduct themselves in a noble and selfless manner. Under such influence, over the course of tens of thousands of years, even though they had strayed a little from their primary cause, most master teachers still took pride in what they did, never stooping below a certain level.

Fan Zhe, on the other hand, had chosen to abandon his responsibilities and compromise his professionalism so that he could earn some extra money.

While he should be paying heed to what his students really needed, his mind was filled with ideas on how he could monetize his lessons so as to squeeze as much as he could out of his students...

It was no wonder the Silver Armored General lost his temper and got violent with Fan Zhe even though he would be infringing the laws by doing so.

It was through selflessly giving their all to their students that the master teachers were able to earn the respect of the masses back on the Master Teacher Continent...

With what Fan Zhe was doing, even if he was truly a person with great capabilities, it was inevitable that others would look down on him.

The crowd did not intentionally lower their volume, so Fan Zhe heard their words loud and clear. His face immediately flushed red in agitation. He wanted to refute their words and tell them that they were wrong, but he was unable to do so.

This carried on for a very long time until an old man walked into the lecture.

Physician Yu Feng.

“Let me take a look at the patient!”

Without bothering with any pleasantries, Yu Feng walked right up to Zhuo Yan and examined his condition. Slowly, his expression turned grim.

He has sustained significant injuries to his organs, and his meridians have been severely damaged. It's good that you have treated him in time so as to prevent his condition from deteriorating any further, but his divine energy has already scattered all over his body. To make an analogy, the dam that has been keeping his powers in check has crumbled, causing his energy to scatter everywhere. I'm afraid that it'll be hard for him to make a recovery...”

Those words made Fan Zhe's eyebrows shoot up.

If Zhuo Yan could be treated, there was a chance that he might still be able to placate the Silver Armored General. However, if Yu Feng's diagnosis was spot-on, he would really be in deep trouble. If this matter blew up, there was no way he could remain in Royal City as a master teacher anymore.

“You b*stard of a teacher! Even if the military punishes me for this, I swear that I'll tear you apart today!”

Yu Feng's diagnosis reignited the rage burning in the Silver Armored General's chest. With a furious roar, he threw a punch with frightening momentum.

Even though his son was lacking in talent, he still had great expectations in him. He hoped that the latter could become a respected figure in the city as well. It was for this reason that he had made the decision to send his son over to the Master Teacher Pavilion.

No matter what, his son had still inherited his genes. As long as his son was willing to put in hard work, even if he could not become a Celestial God in the end, he should still be able to become a high-tier God eventually and live an ample life...

But this...

He had spent huge sums of money only to have this scoundrel Fan Zhe ruin his son's future!

How could he accept this?

Peng!

Fan Zhe swiftly raised his arms to protect himself, but the imposing might of the other party's fist still knocked him back several steps, and fresh blood spurted from his mouth once more.

"Don't treat me as a pushover just because I've been holding back all this time!" Fan Zhe bellowed as he began driving his divine energy.

He knew that this matter could not be resolved amicably anymore, and he might really lose his life if this went on. So, he had made up his mind to retaliate.

As a middle-tier Celestial God realm master teacher, while his fighting experience paled in comparison to the Silver Armored General, his fighting prowess was still not to be underestimated.

Peng peng!

The two of them rushed at one another and exchanged blows, only to find that they were equally matched with one another. The rebound caused both of them to retreat simultaneously, and the shockwave shattered many chairs in the room.

"I swear on my family's name that I'll send you down the pits of hell today!" the Silver Armored General roared ferociously.

Facing such a tenacious opponent, Fan Zhe did not dare to hold back at all. He quickly took out his sword and drove his divine energy to its limits.

Just as the two of them were about to go for a second round, a voice sounded by the side. “Please hold it a moment. Could you allow me to examine the condition of the wounded young man over there to see if I am able to treat him before the two of you continue with your fight?”

Everyone quickly turned their sights over, only to see a young man walking over with a plump man following behind him.

“You wish to treat him? His meridians have already deviated as a result of his cultivation going berserk. How do you intend to treat him?” Yu Feng harrumphed.

“You are...” Fan Zhe asked doubtfully upon seeing that someone actually dared to step up at such a juncture.

“I am Zhang Xuan. I have dabbled in medicine a little in my pastime. While my skills may pale in comparison to Physician Yu Feng, I have experience treating a cultivator whose cultivation went berserk. I think I know of a way to treat that young man,” Zhang Xuan said.

He could tell that someone would really be killed at this rate, so he could not help but step forward.

He did not like getting involved in matters that did not concern him, but no matter what, he still identified himself as a master teacher. After hearing about what Fan Zhe had done, he felt deeply uncomfortable leaving things as they were.

After saying those words, he walked straight up to Zhuo Yan without bothering to wait for the responses of those two.

Zhuo Yan appeared to be seventeen or eighteen this year, but his face was a slightly sickly yellow color. Due to the immense pain he was in, his face was covered in cold sweat.

Zhang Xuan placed his finger on the young man’s pulse and infused his divine energy into the young man’s body to conduct a preliminary scan.

A moment later, he retracted his finger.

Just as Yu Feng had mentioned earlier, Zhuo Yan’s cultivation had gone berserk, and that had inflicted tremendous damage to his body. A lot of his meridians had collapsed, causing his

divine energy to leak all over his body and harm his internal organs.

The Silver Armored General had probably used many precious pills in order to prevent his son's condition from deteriorating further. If not for that, his son might have died by now.

Given so, it was understandable why the Silver Armored General was so enraged. There was no one in his place who would not be.

“Do you have any ideas in mind?” the Silver Armored General asked.

He did not bear much hope in Zhang Xuan after seeing how young the latter was, but given the state his son was already in, he could only grasp at every straw of hope available to him.

“I do have an idea in mind, but it's just that...” Zhang Xuan spoke hesitantly.

“I'm willing to pay any price as long as you are able to bring my son back to how he was!”

Misunderstanding the intention behind Zhang Xuan's pause, the Silver Armored General immediately took out a card and passed it over.

“There are one hundred Divine Coins in this card. All I ask of you is to do your best for my son. As long as he's cured, I'll pay you ten times what is already in the card for your service!”

All in all, the Silver Armored General was offering Zhang Xuan one thousand Divine Coins to cure his son. This was a hefty sum even going by the standards of Drifting Specter Royal City.

Those words caused the crowd in the area to gasp in astonishment.

“I won't be accepting your money. Please take it back.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He could understand why Fan Zhe wanted to hold supplementary lessons to build up his wealth.

Ever since the receding of spiritual energy, all lifeforms of the Firmament flocked over to the cities, causing housing prices and the average cost of living to rise exponentially.

A great amount of money and resources were required if one wanted to live a good life. Furthermore, the parents were often willing to pay more than what was required as long as it was to the benefit of the children, which had led to Fan Zhe succumbing to the temptation.

If not for how readily others were giving him things, Fan Zhe probably would not have thought of starting supplementary classes and the like.

After rejecting the Silver Armored General, Zhang Xuan turned his attention back to Zhuo Yan and instructed, “Execute a punch. I want to see if you are still able to drive your divine energy.”

Zhuo Yan was a little hesitant, but seeing that Zhang Xuan’s attitude was amiable and his eyes were clear, he chose to ensure the pain and raised his arm to execute a punch.

Weng!

A book was compiled in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

“Zhuo Yan, a citizen of Drifting Specter Royal City, low-tier God. Due to a mistake made in his cultivation, his cultivation went berserk...”

Soon enough, Zhang Xuan finished reading the entire book and shook his head.

It turned out that the anger of the Silver Armored General was not unfounded. The reason Zhuo Yan had ended up in his current condition really had much to do with his teacher, Fan Zhe.

“How is it?” the Silver Armored General asked worriedly upon seeing Zhang Xuan’s response.

“His condition doesn’t look too good, but I think I should be able to cure him,” Zhang Xuan replied with a reassuring smile.

“You are able to cure him?” The Silver Armored General slowly widened his eyes before claspng his fist together in

agitation. “Please, save my son. I’m willing to do anything for you as long as he can be well again!”

“There’s no need to be so polite. I’ll do my best.”

With a flick of his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out several silver needles before instructing Zhuo Yan, “Bear with it and don’t resist it by any means.”

Then, he released all the silver needles into Zhuo Yan’s acupoints.

The latter was still wondering what was going on when he suddenly felt a numbing sensation washing all over his body. After that, a peculiar energy flowed into his body.

As this peculiar energy circulated around him, the meridians that had collapsed as a result of his cultivation going berserk swiftly reconstructed themselves, reverting to their previous state.

“This...”

Zhuo Yan widened his eyes in disbelief.

He might be young, but having come from a general’s clan, he had seen and heard of many things. With the collapse of his meridians after his cultivation went berserk, he subconsciously knew that he was already ruined. Putting aside recovering to his previous state, what he should be worrying about was how long he could live...

But with just a few needles, the person before him was actually able to reconstruct his meridians. Not only so, the divine energy that had diffused all over his body was also gradually regathering in his dantian!

It was so inconceivable that he could hardly believe that such a thing was really happening to him!

The Silver Armored General keenly noticed the bizarre look in his son’s eyes after the silver needles were inserted into his body, so he quickly asked worriedly, “How are you feeling?”

“Father, I think... I have recovered...”

As he spoke, the feeble Zhuo Yan slowly stood up and assumed a combat pose.

Hu hu hu hu!

In the blink of an eye, he executed a powerful fist technique that caused wind to blow around the lecture hall. “A-are my eyes playing tricks on me?”

“He was able to recover just by putting a few needles into his body?”

“This is unbelievable! I have never seen anything like this before...”

The crowd was stunned.

They had seen the severity of Zhuo Yan’s condition earlier, and even the esteemed Physician Yu Feng had given a pessimistic diagnosis. They had thought that Zhuo Yan was already crippled for good, but who could have thought that the latter would recover with just a few simple needles?

Not only so, it even seemed like the young man was more vigorous than before!

This was unbelievable!

“Brother Zhang, this is...”

The Silver Armored General was stunned as well.

If not for the fact that the patient was his son, and he had tried all sorts of means to cure him, he would really wonder if those two were working together to make a fool out of him!

Zhang Xuan stood up and said, “I have channeled his diffused divine energy back into his dantian, and I have also repaired his collapsed meridians.”

Fan Zhe and Yu Feng’s eyebrows flew around the place.

A person’s cultivation going berserk meant that the energy in their body had turned violent and gone into disarray. To be able to tame such violent energy and repair the collapsed meridians as well... How in the world was this being done?

“Since you were able to treat him so quickly, I reckon that you know the reason behind why his cultivation went berserk. I taught him in the same manner as the other students, and none of them have faced any trouble so far. Why would it be different for his case?” Fan Zhe asked.

If he could not get to the bottom of his matter, he would have to live with the label of an incompetent teacher.

“I do know why his cultivation went berserk,” Zhang Xuan said. “Do you really want to know?”

“Yes, I would like to know.” Fan Zhe nodded.

The others in the lecture hall also looked over attentively.

They also found it hard to believe that a person’s cultivation could go berserk just by cultivating the most fundamental cultivation technique. If they could learn the reason behind it, they could take precautions against it in the future.

“It has something to do with the supplementary lessons you held,” Zhang Xuan said.

“The supplementary lessons?” Fan Zhe was confused.

Zhang Xuan turned to the Silver Armored General and said, “This is my first time meeting this Silver Armored General, but based on what I have observed so far, it seems like you are very anxious to see your son succeed in life. You hope that he will become an expert just like you.”

The middle-aged man nodded in agreement, not denying the matter at all.

As a general of Drifting Specter Royal City, he carried great influence and prestige within the city. Everyone thought that his son would move on to do great things as well, but who could have thought that his son’s talent would be so lacking as to be unable to even clear the entrance examinations of most academies?

It was inevitable that the Silver Armored General would feel anxious and attempt to push his child forward.

The fact that he had sent his child here and had him attend all kinds of supplementary lessons was evidence of that. He

hoped that his child could become a Celestial God and carry on the family's name.

The Silver Armored General was initially delighted to see his son's cultivation rising to that of a low-tier God, but he did not expect his son's cultivation to go berserk just for a minor breakthrough from low-tier God to middle-tier God, even nearly losing his life.

2148 Becoming a Celestial God 1

2148 Becoming a Celestial God (1)

The Silver Armored General often followed the military for campaigns, and it just so happened that he had received a short break for the last few days. Thanks to that, he had noticed his son's issue and saved him. If he was outside, it would already have been too late by the time he heard the news.

How much self-blame would he feel if that had been the case?

Just thinking about it left him deeply frightened. That was why he had lost his temper and barged in.

"From young," Zhang Xuan said, "Zhuo Yan has been instilled with the notion that he has to become a Celestial God like you. Despite his lacking talent, he has been enduring all kinds of stress, diligently going through supplementary lesson after supplementary lesson, all in the hope of not lagging behind his peers. He might not even have had a single day of rest from cultivation over the years!"

At the back, Zhuo Yan lowered his head silently.

On the other hand, the Silver Armored General spoke up. "A cultivator should push himself to the limits when he's young. What's the use if he only pushes himself when he reaches my age? I'm doing this with his future in mind! Furthermore, if he doesn't become a Celestial God, given the lifespan of an average god, it will be difficult for him to live past a hundred. My lifespan is a thousand years. Am I to watch helplessly as my young son ages and passes away earlier than me?"

"I am not saying that the plans you have in mind for your son aren't justified, but cultivation is not about unending diligence," Zhang Xuan replied. "A balance must be struck in order for one to go further. More than just raising his cultivation, a cultivator must temper his will and his state of

mind. If he trudges on without having any time to rest and reflect, it will be hard for him to go beyond a certain point.”

He could understand the feelings of a parent wanting his child to do well in life. He felt the same way for his direct disciples. However, that was simply infeasible.

Doing well in life’ was often viewed as a relative term, so it was impossible for everyone to do well together.

“He has been working hard to meet your expectations, such that he anxiously attempted to make a breakthrough before he could reinforce his cultivation. The overwhelming stress pinned on him weakened his will, preventing him from gathering his focus to overcome the hurdle ahead of him. Furthermore, if I am not mistaken, Fan Zhe laoshi seems to have said something to him during the supplementary lessons that worsened his stress.”

Fan Zhe was slightly confused for a moment before his eyes suddenly widened in shock.

“He has been attending your supplementary lessons for some time now, but he hasn’t managed to become a middle-tier God to date,” Zhang Xuan said. “My guess is that you issued an ultimatum to him, telling him that he has to make a breakthrough by tonight!

“His will was already worn down from all of the stress around him, and your words were the final straw that crushed him. He lost to his own impatience, causing his inner demons to get the better of him. This resulted in the current situation that we see.”

The Silver Armored General was silent for a moment before looking at Zhuo Yan with a complicated expression on his face. “Is what Brother Zhang said true?”

He wanted his son to fare well in life, but what was the use if something happened to his son in the process of doing so?

Yes...” Zhuo Yan meekly looked at his father as he fidgeted a little uncomfortably.

He had never seen such a look on his stern father’s face before, and he was afraid that he would be reprimanded for his

weakness.

As the person in question, he knew very well how he ended up in his current state. It was exactly as Zhang Xuan had said.

The Silver Armored General sighed deeply before speaking in resignation. “I won’t push you anymore, so don’t force yourself to take on more than what you can bear. No matter where you find yourself in the future, so be it.”

If that was the fate for his son, there was no point forcing it.

He was tempted to criticize Fan Zhe for pushing his son so hard, but he realized that he was equally guilty. This made him feel deeply conflicted within. He wondered if what he had been doing all this while was really wrong.

Shaking his head, he turned to Zhang Xuan and said, “Brother Zhang, you have saved my son and given him a new life. I, Zhuo Feng, owe you a favor. No matter what you ask of me in the future, even if it costs me my life, I’ll do my best to fulfill what you need without a word of complaint!”

“General Zhuo, you are too courteous... I didn’t help your son with the intention of obtaining any compensation. I just hope that the reputation of master teachers won’t be sullied by the fiasco here. I can’t say that master teachers are selfless individuals, but they are people who prioritize the welfare of their students above everything. I would be grateful if you don’t look at master teachers in a negative light over this isolated incident,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

He had been a teacher ever since he transcended over to this world, and he had come to view the occupation that Kong shi had created with pride. Naturally, he felt uncomfortable when he saw someone undermining it.

“Could it be that... Brother Zhang, are you a master teacher as well?” Fan Zhe asked.

The others also turned their gazes over curiously.

They had never seen Zhang Xuan before, but the fact that he could cure Zhuo Yan easily showed that his medicinal skills were above those of Physician Yu Feng. Could he actually be a formidable master teacher?

Normal master teachers were nothing much in the Firmament, but the direct disciples of the Heaven Subjugation Monarch were known to be masters of multiple occupations. Even though the person standing before them looked young, could he possibly be related to them in one way or another?

You can say so,” Zhang Xuan replied frankly.

Back on the Master Teacher Continent, he had been known to be the strongest master teacher, and just like Kong shi, he had been dubbed the World’s Teacher. That being said, the Master Teacher Pavilion in the Firmament probably had its own set of tests in order to assess a person’s qualifications as a master teacher, but he had never been through those formal procedures.

“I see, that’s a huge relief.” Fan Zhe heaved a sigh of relief.

He had caved in to his greed, but he still felt a great attachment to the occupation. He remembered the days where he had devoted his all to teaching his students, and he viewed those days as his greatest pride.

He was glad that Zhang Xuan was around, or else his misdeeds would have left a stain on the reputation of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

“Fan Zhe laoshi, may I offer you a suggestion?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Please feel free to speak.” Fan Zhe clasped his fist.

Despite being weaker than him, the young man’s knowledge was far greater than his. Furthermore, the young man had saved him from the dire situation earlier. So, he was willing to heed any advice that the young man had to offer him.

“Indolence is a natural trait of most cultivators, and that is even more so for youths. Putting the rationale of your actions aside, I don’t think that it’s a bad idea for you to set up supplementary classes so that your students have more time to learn, but rote learning will only grind down their motivation and induce impatience. Eventually, they could walk down the same path as Zhuo Yan, rendering your efforts futile.”

Fan Zhe was silent for a moment as he reflected upon those words. Then, he raised his gaze and asked, “Is there any other way to go about doing it then?”

There were cases where students had benefited greatly from his supplementary classes, but he had also noticed that there was a lack of substantial improvement in most students.

He had tried investigating the reason behind it, and the conclusion that he had come to was that they had grown tired of cultivating.

But he could think of no way to resolve this issue. Cultivation was meant to be a dull and boring process, and there was no way to circumvent it.

“As a teacher, you should take the individual traits of each student into consideration and nurture them accordingly. There is no one fixed formula that works when it comes to teaching; you need to purposefully adapt to the needs of each of your students. Use their unique traits to encourage good learning habits in them and encourage them to overcome their indolence. Once those good habits have been instilled in them, they will be able to find their own way forward,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Use their unique traits to encourage good learning habits...” Fan Zhe repeated while nodding slowly. “But that’s easier said than done!”

It was no easy feat to get close to a person and understand him, not to mention that he had to take care of dozens of students at once. Even if he wanted to do it, he did not have that much time and energy to spare for everyone.

“There are limitations to what you can feasibly do, but every small step you take makes a huge difference to the outcome. Take Zhuo Yan for example. He has faced great pressure from a young age, and his inability to meet the expectations of those around him shattered his confidence. If you gave him some encouragement, it would help him greatly.”

At this point, Zhang Xuan turned to Zhuo Yan and said, “You have also heard what I have just said. While I was checking

your body earlier, I found that you aren't lacking in talent, unlike what you have heard from those around you. On the contrary, your talents far surpass those of most of your peers. It's just that you haven't been able to utilize them well."

"My talents surpass those of most of my peers?" Zhuo Yan looked at Zhang Xuan skeptically before shaking his head.

However, in the depths of his eyes, there was an unmistakable glimmer of hope.

Ever since he was young, he had been described as a wastrel. Any resources that were put into him would just go to waste. Even ordinary academies had turned him away.

The views of those around him had shaped his internal perception of himself. As such, he found it hard to accept the compliments of others.

"I don't speak empty words, so there's no need for you to doubt me. It's the stress that you have been mounting on yourself that fills you with fear, preventing you from making a breakthrough. Listen to my words and open yo Use the method that Fan Zhe laoshi imparted to you and try to make a breakthrough again..."

Zhang Xuan had infused the Impartation of Heaven's Will in his speech, causing Zhuo Yan's emotions to sway along with his words. The young man subconsciously heeded his words and sat down on the floor.

His eyes were initially filled with confusion and incomprehension, but they gradually grew firm and determined under Zhang Xuan's encouragement. Gritting his teeth, he took a deep breath and began driving his divine energy around his body.

Gugugugugu!

With a resounding burst, the bottleneck that had restrained him as a low-tier God was blasted apart, causing his cultivation to surge all the way up to middle-tier God.

In actuality, the perception that others had of Zhuo Yan was not wrong. Zhuo Yan was indeed severely lacking in talent,

such that it was no exaggeration to say that he was unsuited to become a cultivator.

It had probably taken the Silver Armored General Zhuo Feng a lot of resources in order to raise his son's cultivation to low-tier God.

There was a good chance that Zhuo Yan might never become a middle-tier God in his entire life.

However, while Zhang Xuan was healing his injuries earlier, he had nourished the young man's body with his Heaven's Path zhenqi, altering his constitution.

As a result, while Zhuo Yan's talents still could not be described as top-notch, he would probably be able to stand his ground against most of his peers.

What he was lacking now was confidence. As long as he could regain his confidence, he should be able to reach considerable heights in the future.

"Zhang shi, I really don't know how to thank you for your help..." The Silver Armored General Zhuo Feng lowered his head in agitation.

"It's what I should do," Zhang Xuan replied with a smile before falling silent.

At this moment, he could not help but think about how humble and low profile he had become ever since severing his clone from himself. This thought left him feeling deeply assured.

Hu!

A while later, Zhuo Yan opened his eyes to perceive the raging energy coursing through his body. With reddened eyes, he struggled on the inside for a while before kneeling before Zhang Xuan. "Zhang laoshi, please take me in as your student!"

He had been following Fan Zhe for several years now, but the improvement in his cultivation had not been substantial. On the other hand, he had met Zhang Xuan a moment ago, and all of a sudden, he had already made a breakthrough in his cultivation.

He realized that this might be the opportunity of a lifetime for him. If he could have such a man as his teacher, his achievements in the future would be boundless.

Y-yes, that's right. Zhang shi, I ask of you to take my son as your student!" Zhuo Feng hurriedly nodded in agreement. All this while, he had thought that his son was a little slow on the uptake, but it turned out that he was quite sharp-witted when it came to this matter.

At the same time, he also switched from using Brother Zhang to Zhang shi as a sign of respect.

"If you really wish to take me as your teacher, I don't mind taking you in as my student either," Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

Given that the other party had not built his foundation up well, it was unlikely that he would take the other party as his direct disciple. However, he did not mind taking the other party in as an ordinary student and imparting some knowledge to him.

"Student Zhuo Yan pays respect to Zhang laoshi!" Zhuo Yan kneeled to the floor and kowtowed deeply.

There was also a distinction between a student and a direct disciple in the Firmament.

Even though Zhang Xuan did not take him in as his direct disciple, Zhuo Yan was already glad that he had been able to become the student of such a great teacher.

"Since you address me as your teacher, it's only right for me to impart something to you." Zhang Xuan sent a telepathic message over to Zhuo Yan. "I'll give you a cultivation technique that's suited for your constitution, and as long as you cultivate it diligently, there's a chance that you might be able to become a Celestial God in the future."

He was extremely familiar with the cultivation techniques beneath the Celestial God realm, and while he was checking on Zhuo Yan's condition through the Library of Heaven's Path earlier, he had already gotten some ideas.

It did not take him long to impart a set of cultivation techniques over to Zhuo Yan.

After going through the details of the cultivation technique, Zhuo Yan's eyes lit up in delight. He quickly bowed deeply to Zhang Xuan once more as a show of gratitude.

His cultivation might be lacking, but that did not hinder the fact that he had come from a relatively prestigious family. He had the opportunity to come into contact with many formidable cultivation techniques, but in terms of ingenuity, none of them came close to what his teacher had just imparted to him!

As long as he cultivated it diligently, he should be able to make a breakthrough to high-tier God and reach for higher realms in the near future!

The value of such a precious cultivation technique was priceless!

To actually bestow such a thing upon him without asking for any compensation...

So, this was a true teacher!

For the longest of time, he had been viewed as a wastrel in the eyes of others. This was the first time that someone had regarded him so highly, and it left him with mixed feelings.

Zhang Xuan walked forward to help the young man up.

Weng!

At that moment, the Library of Heaven's Path suddenly jolted, and a golden page materialized.

Seeing this, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

It seemed like his trip to the Master Teacher Pavilion had not been wasted. This golden page would allow him to protect himself against most experts in the Firmament.

Not only so, coming into contact with the academies of the Firmament's Master Teacher Pavilions and the teaching style of other master teachers had given him a newfound understanding toward the education and the relationship between a teacher and a student.

2149 Becoming a Celestial God (2)

Zhao Ya is proud, so it's best to impart knowledge to her in a concise manner. Zheng Yang has a candid and fearless personality, so it works best to get straight to the point with him. Wang Ying is meticulous, so the details are very important to her when it comes to learning new things. Yuan Tao is broad-minded and doesn't like the nitty-gritty details, so it's better to focus on the larger picture when it comes to him. As for Liu Yang, he doesn't have any particular strengths or flaws, but he has an unyielding heart, similar to that of Zhuo Yan...

The personalities of the students he had taken in so far flowed through his head, and a smile crept onto Zhang Xuan's lips.

Lu Chong is resilient and obstinate. Once he decides on something, nothing will be able to shake his determination.

Wei Ruyan is cold-natured, and she would only reveal her true feelings to those whom she deems dear to her. The life and death of those outside her circle are not within her consideration at all.

Zhang Jiuxiao is a little too eager for success, but he has matured greatly after becoming my student.

Kong Shiyao comes from a major clan, and that allows her to be able to view things from a higher point of view.

Dan Xiaotian is innocent and optimistic. Even in the face of adversity, he is able to persevere on without losing himself. His purity and kindness is a rare gem in the world.

Bai Ruanqing is rather similar to Lu Chong in the sense that she has a one-track mind, but unlike him, she does not inhibit her emotions. Instead, she is extremely verbal with her feelings. As a result of that, she rarely holds grudges against others, choosing to embrace hope instead.

Every single one of Zhang Xuan's students was unique and had their own personality. In view of that, he had created training plans and cultivation techniques tailored to their needs, tutoring them one by one. The time that he had spent with them was limited, but the amount of effort he had spent was them was undeniable.

He did not teach them with the intention of getting something back from them in the future. If anything, the bonds that were forged through that was the greatest repayment of all.

All he hoped was that they would achieve great things in the future with the knowledge he had imparted to them.

This was the true meaning of what it was to be a teacher, as well as the purest form of the relationship between a teacher and a student.

“A flower does not drop from the tree because it is heartless. It morphs into spring soil and nourishes the next generation of flowers,” Zhang Xuan muttered.

Boom!

Spiritual energy began surging toward Zhang Xuan at a furious rate, and before anyone knew it, he had already overcome the final bottleneck of a Celestial God.

“He has become a Celestial God?”

“But he was doing nothing earlier!”

“I went through hell in order to become a Celestial God, but why does it seem to be so easy to him?”

“I wonder what epiphany struck him for him to suddenly make a breakthrough on the spot...”

Everyone was rendered flabbergasted by the sight before them.

Becoming a Celestial God was a goal that most cultivators had set their eyes upon and devoted their whole life to pursuing. The difficulty of making the breakthrough was no joke at all. Most cultivators needed years of preparation and a mountain of resources in order to attempt a breakthrough, and even so, the process was still fraught with danger.

But the young man in front of them had actually made a breakthrough while chatting with them!

This must have been the easiest and most anticlimactic breakthrough in the world!

Hu!

Divine energy flowed through Zhang Xuan's meridians like water flowing through a gentle stream, producing a sound reminiscent of a crisp bell.

Zhang Xuan was currently in a state of complex emotions.

The purest relationship between a teacher and a student required both parties to selflessly give their all to each other. Only a bond untouched by greed and other temptations would be able to remain strong and unyielding.

At the very beginning, he had only taken Wang Ying and the others as his students to avoid being expelled from the Hongtian Academy. But as he got to know them better, the sentiments he had for them had grown deeper and deeper, and before he knew it, he had already fallen deep into the abyss.

For them, he was willing to give his all. But at the same time, his students were willing to sacrifice themselves for his sake as well.

This was a bond created by their intertwining sentiments for one another. They did not share blood bonds with one another, but their relationship had already transcended that.

A flower does not drop from the tree because it is heartless. It morphs into spring soil and nourishes the next generation of flowers.

As spiritual energy flowed through Zhang Xuan's body, his soul, physical body, and zhenqi were being swiftly refined. He quickly swallowed the remaining middle-tier God Essence Pills that he had as well to ensure that he had sufficient energy for the breakthrough.

As his cultivation grew, his disposition went through a transformative change.

Young Master is still as fierce as before," Sun Qiang remarked proudly.

Be it on the Master Teacher Continent, the Azure, or the Firmament, his Young Master was always the brightest star of them all!

Like a firefly, he emanated a natural glow that made him the center of attention no matter where he went. There was nothing in this world that could cover his brilliance.

Everyone else in the room was also staring at Zhang Xuan with all sorts of expressions on their faces, be it shock, envy, or awe.

The person who was the gladdest of all in the room was none other than Zhuo Yan. He felt that it was his greatest fortune to have found such a person in his life, and he made up his mind to work hard and never embarrass his teacher in the future.

It was this conviction that drove him to climb higher and higher, and he eventually accomplished things that even his father had yet to. Even Zhang Xuan himself was slightly surprised when he finally met Zhuo Yan once more.

But of course, that was a story to be told for the future.

“So, this is what a Celestial God is,” Zhang Xuan murmured beneath his breath as realization struck him.

When he became a god, his zhenqi had adapted to the powers of the Firmament and become divine energy. When he surpassed his limits and became a Celestial God, his divine energy further evolved into celestial energy.

This transformation marked a huge difference in terms of power.

Celestial Gods were able to tap into a portion of the natural powers of the Firmament. While the amount of power they could call upon was limited, they were already able to hold some sway over their environment.

In comparison, gods could only rely on their own cultivation.

Zhang Xuan felt his own strength growing. While he would have faced difficulties against a more powerful middle-tier Celestial God in the past, with his current strength, he was confident that he would be able to hold his own ground even against most high-tier Celestial Gods!

More importantly, this marked a difference in his level of existence. His lifespan had increased from a hundred years to

over a thousand years.

A thousand years in the Firmament was equivalent to a million years on the Master Teacher Continent. Not even the history of the Master Teacher Continent went that far back...

Looking at this from the perspective of someone on the Master Teacher Continent, he could indeed be considered as an immortal being.

With a thought, he converted his consciousness into Spiritual Perception and extended his senses beyond his body, allowing him to clearly perceive everything that was happening within a hundred-meter radius.

Having used up the last few middle-tier God Essence Pills that he had with him, he was unable to raise his cultivation any higher. So, he exhaled deeply and slowly opened his eyes.

Once again, he found himself lacking cultivation resources.

If he had sufficient God Essence Pills, and he could find a way to raise his physical body and soul cultivation, he would have been able to push his cultivation all the way to high-tier Celestial God and even attempt a breakthrough to God King!

While my self-created cultivation techniques allow me to be less reliant on the Library of Heaven's Path, at the same time, it has also slowed down my progress. The rate at which I am able to raise my cultivation has decreased significantly, Zhang Xuan thought with a deep sigh.

A cultivation technique built around the emotions of life was completely unheard of in the world. He could not just rely on the wisdom of his predecessors anymore.

He would have to forge his own path forward if he wanted to rise to higher realms, but that was much easier said than done. For example, it took him two whole days in order for him to raise his cultivation to the Celestial God realm. In terms of the Master Teacher Continent, that was equivalent to two thousand days or five whole years!

He had never been so slow ever since he started cultivating!

I'll have to look deeper into what my capabilities as a Celestial God are after I return to the residence, Zhang Xuan thought.

His main reason for going to the Master Teacher Pavilion was to browse through their collection of books in hopes of finding impetus for a breakthrough. Unexpectedly, just by intervening in a conflict, he had ended up inspiring himself, allowing him to make a breakthrough.

With this, there was no longer any need for him to look through the books.

Of course, if he accrued more knowledge, it would make it easier for him to offer pointers to others, and that was the key for him to earn more golden pages.

“Zhang shi...”

Watching as Zhang Xuan's aura stabilized as a Celestial God, a commotion broke out amid the crowd. Fan Zhe nearly collapsed to the ground from shock.

It is still understandable if you achieved a breakthrough on a whim. You might have built up your foundation and raised your cultivation so much that you were already teetering on the verge of a breakthrough...

But it has only been several breaths since you made a breakthrough! How in the world were you able to reinforce your cultivation and sharpen your soul, spirit, and psyche within such a short period of time?

Is this even humanly possible?

Breaking Fan Zhe's train of thought were the words of the very man who had left him so deeply shocked. “Fan Zhe laoshi, may I know if I can access the library of the Master Teacher Pavilion? I am interested in browsing the collection of books that you have here.”

“The library? Under normal circumstances, only the master teachers of Drifting Specter Royal City are allowed to access the library. However, since you have salvaged the reputation of all master teachers and saved a student from a tragic fate, Zhang shi, you are more than welcome to browse everything we have here!” Fan Zhe said with a smile.

2149 Becoming a Celestial God 2

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2150 Sky of Deathlessness

Two hours later, Zhang Xuan walked out of the Drifting Specter Royal City Master Teacher Pavilion's library.

As expected of a Master Teacher Pavilion located at a prime location. Even though it looked humble at first, piling far in comparison to the magnificent buildings on the Master Teacher Continent, its collection of books was really nothing to scoff at.

There were cultivation technique manuals and battle technique manuals ranging from low-tier God all the way to high-tier Celestial God. Browsing through all of them, it did not take him too long to compile the corresponding Heaven's Path Divine Art and battle techniques.

It was just a pity that there were no God King realm manuals.

But thinking again, there were very few God Kings in the Firmament, and most of them belonged to a major power. Naturally, their heritage would only be passed down within their own lineage.

It was nigh impossible for an outsider to lay their hands on their cultivation techniques and battle techniques.

"It's still too early for me to make a breakthrough to God King. I'll probably need a few more days first. For the time being, I should focus on reinforcing my cultivation and find a way to raise my cultivation to high-tier Celestial God."

Knowing that he had to take a step at a time in order to lay a firm foundation, Zhang Xuan had no intention of rushing.

Even though he was progressing very slowly at the moment, that did not hinder him from working diligently toward his goal. He believed that as long as he persevered, he would eventually be able to reach great heights!

"For starters, I should try to acquire some middle-tier or even high-tier God Essence Pills."

He had depleted all his middle-tier God Essence Pills for his breakthrough, so he had not been able to reinforce his cultivation properly. If he just cultivated by absorbing the spiritual energy in the air, who knew how long it would take before he was done?

That was simply too slow for him.

At the same time, middle-tier God Essence Pills were not as effective on him anymore. He could sense that the pills' efficiency had decreased greatly after his breakthrough. Most likely, he would not be able to use them very soon.

From this, he knew that he should prioritize the procurement of high-tier God Essence Pills. The only issue was that he had no idea where he could source any.

“There are middle-tier God Essence Pills on sale at the Mingyuan market not too far away,” Fan Zhe told him. “As for high-tier God Essence Pills, those are restricted products in Royal City. It won't be easy for you to get your hands on them.”

As the capital of one of the Nine Skies, Drifting Specter Royal City could be considered one of the major cities in the Firmament. Naturally, the tier of goods that were sold here was much higher than that of Dusklight City.

The middle-tier God Essence Pills that were hard to procure in Dusklight City could easily be bought here in large quantities.

Middle-tier God Essence Pills were a cultivation resource that Celestial Gods needed, and there was no lack of Celestial Gods in Royal City. It would cause a huge uproar if the authorities restricted the sale of middle-tier God Essence Pills.

On the other hand, the high-tier God Essence Pills were mainly used by God Kings, so the difficulty of procuring them was on a whole new level.

Anyway, for the time being, he would raise his cultivation with middle-tier God Essence Pills first and see how far he could go.

He turned down Fan Zhe's offer for dinner before heading toward the Mingyuan Market together with Sun Qiang. With

40,000 Divine Coins on him, he should be able to get quite a few middle-tier God Essence Pills.

Soon enough, Sun Qiang walked over to him with a victorious smile on his lips and passed over a storage ring filled with four hundred middle-tier God Essence pills.

Under normal circumstances, a middle-tier God Essence Pills was worth one hundred Divine Coins. However, as middle-tier God Essence Pills were not as common as low-tier God Essence Pills, it was not easy to procure them in large quantities. In fact, most sellers would attempt to hike up the price when dealing with mass purchases.

“Young Master, do you need me to rent a silent chamber for you so that you can focus on your cultivation?” Sun Qiang asked.

“Silent chamber?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “There’s no need for that. We don’t have much money left, so let’s save it for emergencies.”

“Are we returning to our residence then?” Sun Qiang asked.

Given how seriously the young master took his cultivation, Sun Qiang thought that the young man would want to cultivate as soon as he obtained the middle-tier God Essence Pills, but surprisingly, he was deferring it till they returned.

“Of course not. Wait a moment,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

He took out all the jade bottles from the storage ring and poured bottle after bottle of middle-tier God Essence Pills in his mouth.

In a matter of seconds, he had already swallowed over a hundred middle-tier God Essence Pills.

Just as Sun Qiang was wondering what Zhang Xuan was up to, the latter’s cultivation began surging at a visible pace. Low-tier Celestial God primary stage...

Low-tier Celestial God intermediate stage...

In else than two breaths, he had already reached low-tier Celestial God pinnacle!

Zhang Xuan swallowed another bottle of pills, but his cultivation no longer rose. Shaking his head helplessly, he said, “It seems like my bottleneck came earlier than I thought...”

He had thought that he would be able to raise his cultivation to middle-tier Celestial God with the God Essence Pills that he had bought, but it seemed like he was too optimistic.

His cultivation was no longer rising after he reached low-tier Celestial God pinnacle.

It was no wonder this was the case. Even when he was cultivating the Heaven’s Path Divine Art, he needed exceptionally concentrated spiritual energy in order to raise his cultivation, such that he often faced the problem of procuring the cultivation resources he needed.

Given that he was cultivating the even stronger Pathos of Heaven now, the concentration of spiritual energy that he needed would inevitably be higher than before.

“Well, I wouldn’t be able to make a breakthrough now anyway. In order to remain in a balanced state, I must make sure that my physical body and soul cultivation remain on par with my cultivation.”

Harnessing the powers of nature meant that the cultivator would have to endure the pressure coming from nature. For this reason, it was important for a cultivator to maintain the balance among their zhenqi, soul, and physical body.

Otherwise, he would only be dragged down by his weakest link.

Zhang Xuan understood the logic behind this, but the problem was that even though the library of the Master Teacher Pavilion had plenty of books on cultivation techniques and battle techniques, there was nothing concerning soul cultivation and physical body enhancement.

Once again, he would have to look for other ways to raise his soul cultivation and enhance his physical body.

All in all, the time Zhang Xuan took to cultivate and ponder over these matters was no more than three seconds. When he

looked up again, he saw Sun Qiang staring at him with googly eyes, as if he could hardly believe what he was seeing.

“Young Master, you are already done cultivating?”

Sun Qiang had always envied Zhang Xuan’s swift cultivation speed, and he had felt like there was nothing about the latter that could surprise him anymore. However, he just could not wrap his mind around how the time that the latter took for a breakthrough had reduced after arriving in the Firmament.

In the past, Zhang Xuan would still take at least two to four hours before he was done, but he did not need any of that anymore. It felt like the speed of the young man’s breakthrough was only limited by how quickly he could stuff God Essence Pills into his mouth!

Or perhaps... could gorging on pills actually be the secret to his fast pace of cultivation?

After all, there were cases where cultivators underwent a transformative change from amassing a massive amount of spiritual energy within their bodies.

Stroking his chin, a bold idea surfaced in Sun Qiang’s mind.

Oblivious to his butler’s thoughts, Zhang Xuan turned around and asked, “Did you manage to find out more about ways to enhance the physical body while I was cultivating?”

Sun Qiang’s eyebrows twitched in response to those words.

In this moment, he actually felt an urge to plunge a knife into the young man’s head to see what was inside.

You took only three breaths for your cultivation. What did you expect me to find out within this teeny-weeny bit of time? Do you think that information somehow pops into my head as and when I will it to?

“I’ll have it done right now.”

Sun Qiang had to take a deep breath before he could calm himself enough to say those words. Just as he was about to leave, he suddenly recalled something and said, “Oh right, Young Master. Zhuo Feng has been following us for some time now, saying that he wishes to repay you for your help.

Given that he's a general in Drifting Specter Royal City, as well as a middle-tier Celestial God, I think that he should know a fair bit about such stuff."

Zhuo Feng was that Silver Armored General.

Given Zhuo Feng's standing, it was likely that he knew some information that would be difficult for them to source otherwise.

Having become a Celestial God, the ways in which Zhang Xuan could temper his physical body and soul cultivation were bound to have reduced significantly.

Furthermore, cultivation resources that were effective on Celestial Gods were bound to be invaluable, so there was no way one could acquire such information easily.

"Let's invite him to our residence," Zhang Xuan said.

It did not take long before they were settled within the main hall of Zhang Xuan's residence.

"Zhang shi!" Zhuo Feng greeted.

The young man before him had saved his son and bestowed him with hope for a brighter future. This was a great favor, and he could not fathom just how he could possibly repay the debt. Nevertheless, he was determined to repay his son's benefactor.

"There's one thing that I would like to ask you," Zhang Xuan said.

"Zhang shi, ask anything of me."

"I would like to temper my body and refine my soul. Do you know any ways I can go about doing that? If you could point a feasible direction out to me, I think we can consider our scores settled. We will no longer owe each other anything."

"This..." Zhuo Feng did not expect Zhang Xuan to ask him for such a simple request. He pondered for a moment before replying, "I know quite a few physical body tempering methods from the military, but most of them are intended for the God realm. For someone of your caliber... I know something that would have been suitable for a Celestial God like you, but it might not be very feasible now."

“Oh?”

“It’s rumored that the best place for a Celestial God to temper their physical body is the Deathless Lava Reservoir. The Deathless Lava is filled with spiritual energy that can allow one to swiftly recover from all wounds, making it an ideal location to train one’s body. However, the heat in the Deathless Lava Reservoir suddenly extinguished forty years ago, causing the entire reservoir to solidify. The Deathless Monarch hasn’t repaired it since then, so it has been left in its derelict state,” Zhuo Feng said.

“The Deathless Monarch?” Zhang Xuan’s heart skipped a beat. “One of the Nine God Monarchs?”

That name struck a chord in Zhang Xuan’s head.

He recalled seeing the tombstone of the Deathless Monarch back in the Azure’s City of Collapsed Space.

Back then, he did not know about the various realms in the Firmament, and he had assumed that the Deathless Monarch was nothing more than a simple god. As such, he did not really take it to heart.

But when he heard the name from Zhuo Feng’s mouth once more, everything suddenly clicked together in his mind.

The Nine God Monarchs were known as the strongest individuals in the Firmament, and they had been around since time immemorial. How could one of them simply die like that?

Was the tombstone really the grave of the Deathless God Monarch, or did it represent something else?

“That’s right.” Zhuo Feng nodded. “The Deathless God Monarch is quite a low-profile individual. He hasn’t appeared in public for a few decades now.”

“A few decades?” Zhang Xuan frowned upon hearing those words. “Didn’t he have a fight with the Heaven Subjugation Monarch within the past forty years?”

At this point, Zhuo Feng lowered his voice and spoke telepathically. “That’s what has been said officially, but there are no details about where the battle has occurred, the outcome

of the battle, or even if the battle happened at all. I heard a rumor that the Heaven Subjugation Monarch headed over there to challenge him, but the Deathless Monarch simply admitted defeat without bothering to meet him. But again, this matter concerns the privacy of the God Monarchs, so it's better not to talk too much about it.”

If Zhang Xuan had not been the benefactor of his child, Zhuo Feng would never have said so much to him.

The information that he had spoken of was hardly known among the common populace, but as a middle-tier Celestial God, he had still heard some rumors about it.

“I see...” Zhang Xuan muttered with a confounded look on his face.

If that was the case, the tombstone of the Deathless Monarch that he had seen in the City of Collapsed Space might very well turn out to be real.

Was it possible for God Monarchs to die?

Not to mention, the person who had died was ironically known as the Deathless Monarch!

If it was forty years ago, that coincided with the period that the spiritual energy started receding. Just what in the world happened back then?

“May I know which of the Nine Skies the Deathless Monarch governs?” Zhang Xuan asked.

He had read much about the Nine Skies so far, but weirdly enough, there was not much information regarding the God Monarchs even though he thought that they should be common knowledge. It was almost as if it was forbidden to talk about them.

“The Deathless Monarch governs the Sky of Spirit Origin,” Zhuo Feng said. “Informally, the Sky of Spirit Origin is also called as the Sky of Deathlessness. Located at the south of the Firmament, it's right next to our Sky of Drifting Specter. It's known for its Five Rivers and Three Marshes, which span over large swathes of land. I had the privilege to visit the Spirit Origin Royal City once, but I was only able to tour its

outskirts. I heard that the inner city is extremely prosperous, even more so than our Drifting Specter Royal City. However, it seems like the Deathless Monarch took the city away with him several decades ago...”

Zhang Xuan nodded quietly.

He had read about the Sky of Spirit Origin, but he did not think that it would be related to the Deathless Monarch. If he had known that it was called the Sky of Deathlessness, he would have long made the link between the two.

2151 Lucid Lunar Lake

“The Deathless Lava Reservoir was open to all of the Nine Skies back then. Every year, each the Nine Skies would receive some slots, and they would be able to send their talents over to temper themselves. It was previously viewed as a great honor to be selected to train there. However, with the extinguishing of the lava, that system came to a grinding halt. In response to that, each of the Nine Skies created their own facilities to temper the physical body of their cultivators.

“Our military barrack has one as well, but it’s intended mainly for Gods. The best place for Celestial Gods to temper their body in the Drifting Specter Royal City is definitely the Lucid Lunar Lake of the Qi Clan. It’s just that the Qi Clan is highly exclusive, and even old subordinates like us aren’t allowed to access it,” Zhuo Feng said with a bitter smile.

“Old subordinates? You are under the Qi Clan?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Yeah, you can say that I used to be under the Qi Clan.”

It might be because this concerned confidential military secrets, so Zhuo Feng’s answer was very vague.

Getting the drift, Zhang Xuan diverted the topic away and said, “It can’t be helped if the Qi Clan doesn’t allow outsiders to access their facilities. Do you know of any other ways I can temper my physical body?”

He couldn’t possibly sneak into the Qi Clan and use their stuff, right?

He was a law-abiding citizen and would never resort to such underhanded actions!

If he had somehow done something similar to that before, that was all due to the folly of his youth.

That had to be the case. There was no other reason why he would do something like that.

“Nothing else comes to mind,” Zhuo Feng shook his head.
“Given the resilient bodies that Celestial Gods have, ordinary methods wouldn’t work at all. Most of the resources that are effective are either very rare or they have already been monopolized by officials or major clans. Ordinary cultivators won’t be able to get to them. Most cultivators can only use their celestial energy to slowly temper their bodies...”

Zhang Xuan fell silent.

Zhuo Feng was right.

It was only after he became a Celestial God himself did he realize how formidable they were. Only items that had reached a certain level of potency was effective on him, and those items were darned expensive. There was no way ordinary cultivators would have the money for that!

So, they could only take their time in tempering their physical body.

“If... Zhang shi really needs to use the Lucid Lunar Lake, I can put aside my dignity and ask for you. However, I would just like to say that the chances of it working out is very slim...” Zhuo Feng added.

“I understand. That would be greatly appreciated,” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and replied.

He needed to raise his cultivation swiftly, so the opportunity as the Lucid Lunar Lake was indeed important to him.

“I’ll give it a try then,” Zhuo Feng nodded before walking out of Zhang Xuan’s residence.

Shortly after Zhuo Feng left, Zhang Xuan walked to the courtyard and saw Qi Ling-er sitting on one of the stools. It would seem like she had a long day as her beautiful face showed signs of exhaustion, and helpless sighs would escape from her time to time.

“Young Master Zhang...”

“How is your information gathering coming along?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“I went to the black market of the Royal City and found some past close friends, hoping to gather some news from them. However, Qi Xun-er found that I have returned and intentionally reported my return to the Qi Clan... I have just received a return order from the clan, so I’ll have no choice but to make my way there,” Qi Ling-er shook her head.

“Once I return to the Qi Clan, there’s a good chance that my movements would be severely restricted. So, I came back here to inform you in advance.”

Zhang Xuan was confused by what he had just heard from Qi Ling-er.

Why would the Qi Clan severely restrict her movements after hearing of her return? It was not as if she was a criminal.

He understood that major clans tended to have strict rules, but this seemed a little too extreme to him.

“Black markets are technically illegal in the Firmament. Most of those in the upper echelons are aware of their existence, but they also understand that it would be hard to maintain peace within the cities without the presence of black markets as well. So, they choose to overlook their existence...” Qi Ling-er began to explain.

The receding of spiritual energy from the Firmament was a catastrophic blow to all cultivators. It hindered them from acquiring the resources they needed to cultivate and survive.

Most resources were currently within the cities, and they were regulated by the authorities. That meant that it would be difficult for ordinary cultivators to access the resources, and that could potentially result in major unrest.

If ordinary cultivators found themselves in a desperate position where they couldn’t advance their cultivation as well, there was a good chance that they would band together and try something.

Of course, a revolt was unlikely given the absolute power that God Monarchs, Conferred God Kings, and God Kings wielded, but there were many other ways for ordinary

cultivators to spark chaos within the cities. Banditry was one perfect example.

For this reason, the existence of the black market was of paramount importance.

It was the place where cultivators knew that they would be able to acquire what they need, even though the price might be a little hefty at times. It drew attention away from the dissatisfactions from the governance, bringing stability to the cities.

In a sense, this was similar to how, in Zhang Xuan's previous world, some occupations were considered illegal, but authorities still chose to turn a blind eye to their existence due to the necessity of their existence in the world.

It was not that they didn't want to intervene, but there could be a severe backlash if the authorities were to put a foot into it.

“Pretty much all of the black markets of the Sky of Drifting Specter are under the control of the Qi Clan. It might appear impressive at first look, but in the higher echelons, the black markets are viewed to be shady and dishonorable. For this reason, those operating the black markets are mainly the members who have been sidelined and oppressed,”

Qi Ling-er said with a bitter smile.

The top echelons had reluctantly acknowledged the existence of the black markets, but that didn't change the fact that the black market was still illegal.

Even if she were to show splendid results as the boss of a black market, that was no way she could flaunt about in the upper echelons!

This was similar to how spies couldn't be officially recognized for their merits even if they had contributed more than the generals.

“To be frank, the lineage that I have descended from can be considered to be extremely close to the core lineage. However, due to the conflicts in the previous generation, my lineage has been oppressed by Qi Xun-er's lineage all this while. She

knows that we won't be able to do anything about her due to her brother, and she's making full use of that..."

"Her brother?"

"Her brother is the most talented offspring of the Qi Clan at the moment. He's in his late thirties at the moment, but his cultivation has already reached high-tier Celestial God. Furthermore, he was able to persevere in the Lucid Lunar Lake for more than four hours.

"According to the elders of our clan, he has the constitution of a God King! He has been receiving the best cultivation resources in our clan, and naturally, that means that the standing of the lineage he has descended from rises as well," Qi Ling-er said.

"The Lucid Lunar Lake?" Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

"It's a place where the members of the Qi Clan refine their bloodline and temper their physical body. The purer one's bloodline is, the longer one will be able to stay within the Lucid Lunar Lake. Even the core disciples who are able to stay in there for an hour can already be considered geniuses. In the history of the Qi Clan, including him, only five people have been able to last that long in there, and the previous four eventually went on to become God Kings!" Qi Ling-er nodded.

Due to such precedences, the Qi Clan viewed Qi Xun-er's brother as a God King in the making.

The top clans competing for dominance in the Drifting Specter Royal City were those who had Conferred God Kings, and the old ancestor of the Qi Clan, Qi Meng, was a Conferred God King himself.

What that set those clans apart was namely the number of God Kings they had under their command. Thus, if another God King could rise up from the Qi Clan, it would surely give the Qi Clan an edge over the others.

A person viewed as a potential God King would surely be placed on a pedestal compared to the others. Naturally, the clan would favor him over anyone he was in conflict with.

That would explain why Qi Ling-er ended up being sent to the faraway Twilight City despite being a member of the Qi Clan. It seemed like the politics within the Qi Clan was complicated.

“Have you been to the Lucid Lunar Lake before?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“I went in once, but I couldn’t even last 15 minutes in there,” Qi Ling-er shook her head.

If she could persevere four hours on there, the Qi Clan would surely be desperate to fawn on her. Not even that wench Qi Xun-er would be able to cross her!

Those who were weak were bound to be oppressed, this was something that couldn’t be helped.

“You couldn’t last 15 minutes in there? Is it very uncomfortable to be within the Lucid Lunar Lake?”

“The energy in the lake is very violent, and it suppresses one’s celestial energy and soul. As a result, it’s impossible to protect yourself with celestial energy in there. It will be difficult to stay in there for too long just by enduring it with one’s physical body. Those who are able to do it are usually those who have purer bloodline and possess great talents,” Qi Ling-er explained.

It was not that she was unwilling to endure the pain, but she was really at her limits then.

Just entering the Lucid Lunar Lake made her feel as though every single cell on her body was being sliced into two simultaneously. If she were to force herself to press on, she might have either died or lost her mind there.

“Usually, I would have avoided the Royal City at all costs due to the situation within the Qi Clan. However, after consuming your Beauty Pill, I realized that the injuries I have sustained before has disappeared, and my recovery ability has enhanced significantly. I have a feeling that I might be able to last much longer within the Lucid Lunar Lake in my current state... So, I hope to return to my clan and give it another try!” Qi Ling-er said hesitantly.

“So, you want me to forge some Beauty Pills for you so as to boost your chances in the Lucid Lunar Lake?” Zhang Xuan saw through Qi Ling-er’s thoughts.

When he first asked Qi Ling-er to come with him to the Royal City and offered to compensate her for her services, the latter hesitated for a moment and eventually chose to defer her request. From the looks of it now, it should be related to the Lucid Lunar Lake.

The Lucid Lunar Lake was representative of a person’s talents in the Qi Clan, and those who were able to last longer in it would be highly regarded within the clan.

Most likely, she was thinking that as long as she could obtain sufficient Beauty Pills, she would be able to endure the violent energy within the Lucid Lunar Lake and last long enough for her to solidify her position within the clan.

“That’s right...” Qi Ling-er replied frankly.

Very well, I can help you with that!” Zhang Xuan replied. “However, you’ll need to bring me along with you to the Lucid Lunar Lake.”

It just happened that he was interested to see the highly-acclaimed physical body tempering spot of the Sky of Drifting Specters when Qi Ling-er suddenly spoke about it. Even if he were to just look at it, he might be able to figure out a way to emulate its effects so as to temper his body.

“Thank you, Young Master Zhang!” Qi Ling-er’s eyes lit up in happiness.

In truth, her objective was not the Beauty Pill but Zhang Xuan himself.

She couldn’t deny that the effects of the Beauty Pill were incredible, but even so, it would only increase the amount of time she could last inside the Lucid Lunar Lake by ten minutes or so.

What she valued more at the moment was her relationship with Zhang Xuan. In her journey with him, she had witnessed how the young man had created miracles one after another.

If she could just convince the young man to help her on this matter, she might just be able to pull off the unexpected.

“I can bring you to the Lucid Lunar Lake, but without the Qi Clan’s bloodline, you won’t be able to enter the area. Otherwise, the violent energy will tear you apart,” Qi Ling-er replied.

She wasn’t worried about bringing Zhang Xuan in as well due to the special nature of the Lucid Lunar Lake. Those who weren’t from the Qi Clan wouldn’t even be able to come into close proximity with it without sustaining severe damage.

For this reason, the Qi Clan also didn’t set up strict restrictions preventing outsiders from coming close since it would be redundant to do so.

“Rest assured, I’m just interested to see what it’s like,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

He wasn’t intending to enter the lake, at least not at the moment anyway.

That being said, if a chance presented itself where he could temper his physical body, he wouldn’t give up on it either. As long as he were to take it easy and not spoil the Lucid Lunar Lake, it should be fine...

“That’s a relief...” Qi Ling-er remarked.

2152 God King

Having resolved the issue plaguing her mind, the tension immediately released from her shoulders. She took another look at the young man before her, and she suddenly realized that there was a huge change in the strength and disposition of the other party.

“Low-tier Celestial God... pinnacle? You’ve made a breakthrough?”

Qi Ling-er felt a little lightheaded.

“I stumbled upon a fortuitous encounter,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

Qi Ling-er clutched her stifled chest as she felt her breathing becoming a little erratic.

It was as if the young man was someone sent down by the heavens to traumatize her!

If I recall correctly, you were only a low-tier God when we met a few days ago, right?

Just how many days has it been, and you are already a Celestial God!

That’s three whole cultivation realms!

Is the bloodline of a God Monarch really that formidable, such that it allows one to overcome all cultivation bottlenecks with ease?

And what makes things worse is that fellow’s attitude!

It’s one thing if he managed to raise his cultivation with ease, but he makes it sound as if it’s no big deal at all, feeling no sense of accomplishment whatsoever...

Do you know how difficult it is for others to become a Celestial God?

However, this made Qi Ling-er even more certain of Zhang Xuan’s identity.

Other than someone who possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch, who else would have been able to pull off something as dastardly as this?

The Qi Clan was one of the top clans in Drifting Specter Royal City, and this gave them the privilege to reside on one of the floating mountains in the sky. Qi Ling-er rented an aerial divine beast, and the two of them were soon on their way toward the floating mountain.

It was at this moment that Zhang Xuan took a close look at Qi Ling-er's cultivation—high-tier God.

While her cultivation was lower than his, as an inheritor of the bloodline of a Conferred God King, it would be wise not to underestimate her strength.

“As members of the same clan, your fates are intertwined with one another. Ideally, wouldn't you all usually work together to surpass the other powers instead?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully as he recalled what Qi Ling-er had mentioned previously.

“There weren't many arguments within the clan before as the resources that a Conferred God King was entitled to were nearly unlimited. So, there were no conflicts in the interests among fellow clan members, and it was easier for everyone to get along with one another.”

Then, with a deep sigh of lamentation, she said, “But forty years ago, when the spiritual energy in the atmosphere receded, the cultivation resources we are entitled to suddenly plummeted. It's inevitable that conflicts arose as a result of that. Twenty years ago, an accident occurred, and Qi Xun-er's father ended up dying from that. Due to that, she harbors great hatred toward my lineage, swearing to never let any of us off...”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

When resources became scarce, even blood brothers would turn on one another!

That was simply human nature.

“In the past, our lineage was one of the more powerful ones, so she didn’t dare do anything to us. However, as her older brother rose through the ranks, the standing of our lineage gradually fell...”

Thinking about all the suffering that she had gone through over the years, Qi Ling-er could only shake her head bitterly.

If she had remained with the Qi Clan, she would have long become a Celestial God by now. It was due to the scarce resources that she had in Twilight City that she was stuck as a high-tier God.

“Tell me more about Qi Xun-er’s older brother,” Zhang Xuan said.

A person who was deemed to have the potential to become a God King was bound to have something more than just a powerful physical body. It was extremely likely that he possessed something far beyond what ordinary cultivators had.

“Her older brother is Qi Yue, and his bloodline is much purer than most of the clan members. On top of that, he is able to grasp any cultivation technique and battle technique swiftly, allowing him to rapidly improve. Currently, he is ranked seventh on the Board of Potential God Kings!” Qi Ling-er replied.

Even though they were in opposing factions, she was still pretty awed by Qi Yue’s talent and strength.

“Board of Potential God Kings?”

“Yes. It’s a formal ranking system within Drifting Specter Royal City that evaluates the possibility of a person becoming a God King. Most of those on the board fail to make the final step forward eventually, but nevertheless, the very fact that their names were once on the board is testament to the great strength that they possess,” Qi Ling-er replied.

“If Qi Yue is in seventh place, doesn’t that mean that there are six people who are even more talented than him?” Zhang Xuan was slightly astounded.

As a Conferred God King Clan, the Qi Clan was indubitably one of the strongest powers in Drifting Specter Royal City.

It was a little perplexing to see that their most talented member—not to mention that Qi Ling-er had even said that there had only been four others like him in the history of the Qi Clan—was only ranked in the seventh place.

“Ah, you are thinking too simply!”

Qi Ling-er understood where Zhang Xuan was coming from, so she quickly explained the significance of the ranking.

“Celestial Gods have a lifespan of one thousand years, and most of those who are ranked in the top ten have lived for at least five hundred years. Qi Yue is only in his late thirties, but he has already managed to squeeze into the seventh place of the ranking. This means that he could very well climb to first place within the next fifty or hundred years!”

Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in realization.

Youth, in itself, was a sign of potential. One had much more time than the others to achieve something that others had not yet done.

Just by considering the disparity in age, Qi Yue was indeed much more likely to become a God King compared to the others on the Board of Potential God Kings.

After flying for a while longer, Qi Ling-er turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Young Master Zhang, have you forged the pills that will help me to endure the energy within the Lucid Lunar Lake yet?”

They were about to arrive at the Qi Clan, but so far, she had not seen Zhang Xuan forging any pills. She could not help but worry that the young man had not prepared what she needed yet.

If so, it would be best for them to delay the matter a little.

Once they were at the Qi Clan, Qi Xun-er would not allow them to take a breather or make preparations at all.

“It’ll be difficult for me to prepare anything effective without seeing the Lucid Lunar Lake in person. Otherwise, the medicinal effectiveness of the pills will be severely discounted,” Zhang Xuan replied casually.

“Alright then...”

Seeing how confident Zhang Xuan was, Qi Ling-er decided to trust him.

Before long, the floating mountain shrouded by clouds was already right ahead of them.

Different from most mountain ranges, it felt as if someone had flipped the mountain upside down using overwhelming might. The bottom was sharp and pointed whereas the top was as flat as a mirror. A resplendent and massive manor sat on top of it, and countless celestial cranes flew around the mountain.

It really felt like a place where deities lived.

As expected of one of the top clans of Drifting Specter Royal City, it was really on a whole other level!

“Is there a formation around the mountain?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully as he assessed the mountain with his Eye of Insight.

He could clearly sense the presence of a formation shrouding the floating mountain, but for some reason, he was unable to see it with his Eye of Insight.

His Eye of Insight had become much stronger after he became a Celestial God, yet this formation was still able to escape his sight. This only meant that the formation was extremely powerful, most likely the doing of the Qi Clan’s Conferred God King.

“There’s a formation around the mountain, but you need not worry. It has the effect of discerning a person’s bloodline, and as long as a visitor is around a clan member, the formation will automatically open up a passageway,” Qi Ling-er replied.

Just as Qi Ling-er said, the aerial divine beast did not trigger the formation while flying toward the floating mountain. Soon, they were already standing before a set of humongous gates.

“Big Sister Ling-er, you’re back!”

The two young men guarding the humongous gates recognized Qi Ling-er and rushed up to her with excited smiles on their faces.

“I’m here to meet the clan head!” Qi Ling-er informed them with a solemn look on her face.

“This way please.”

Knowing that Qi Ling-er was there for official business based on her appearance, one of the young men glanced at Zhang Xuan before leading the way into the manor.

As soon as Zhang Xuan entered the manor, he felt rich spiritual energy surging into his body through his skin, leaving him with an urge to sit down and cultivate on the spot.

As expected of a power with a Conferred God King!

The spiritual energy in Royal City came nowhere close in comparison to this.

Zhang Xuan was confident that he would be able to become a middle-tier Celestial God quickly even without any high-tier God Essence Pills if he cultivated there.

Following the young man, they soon arrived before an empty grand hall.

They waited for a few minutes before two figures walked into the hall.

One of them was a middle-aged man in his early thirties. He walked all the way to the center seat in the room.

The other person was a young lady who was around the same age as Qi Ling-er. She was dressed in tight clothes that shaped out her curvaceous figure. She took her position behind the middle-aged man.

“Clan head!”

Qi Ling-er clasped her fist and greeted the middle-aged man.

Zhang Xuan knew that it was not his place to speak, so he decided to stand quietly by the side and simply watch the proceedings.

“Un,” the middle-aged man replied with a slight nod.

He gazed at Qi Ling-er, assessing her, for a moment before he began speaking. “Even though Twilight City is located at a

remote and backward location in the Sky of Drifting Specter, it is of great strategic importance to us. I remember telling you to stay there and gather intelligence, and you were not to return till I gave you permission to do so. Why did you return of your own accord without informing us? If not for Xun-er telling me about it, I would still have been kept in the dark!”

His voice was not loud, but it carried a lot of power. The atmosphere suddenly grew so heavy that it felt difficult to breathe.

God King! Zhang Xuan thought.

Even though the other party had not displayed his cultivation, he found that he was unable to perceive the depths of the other party’s strength. Furthermore, his very presence seemed to meld harmoniously with the surroundings, such that it felt like nature would punish anyone who dared defy him.

Zhang Xuan quietly reined in his cultivation and watched quietly by the side, not showing any hint of standing up at all.

He had come out of curiosity for the Lucid Lunar Lake. He had no intentions of getting into a conflict with a God King from the Qi Clan.

As a result of that, the middle-aged man did not find anything amiss about Zhang Xuan. He thought that Zhang Xuan was just a subordinate that Qi Ling-er was bringing about with her, so he did not pay much heed to him.

“Clan head, I...”

The immense pressure coming from the middle-aged man left Qi Ling-er a little nervous. She was about to speak up and explain herself when the clan head suddenly interjected once more. “I’ll only give you a single chance to explain yourself. If you can’t give me a satisfactory explanation, I’ll have to deal with you according to the clan rules!”

“I understand...” Qi Ling-er took a deep breath before she started speaking. “I stumbled upon a fortuitous encounter a while back, which resulted in my body undergoing transformational changes. So, I came back to request an opportunity to cultivate in the Lucid Lunar Lake once more.”

“Don’t you think your reason is a little too forced?” Before the middle-aged man could even speak up, the young lady beside him had already sneered coldly. “A person’s talent is determined as their birth. Are you telling me that you are so naive as to think that it’s possible for your talent to improve over time?”

Under the rules of the Qi Clan, the members of the core family had the right to enter the Lucid Lunar Lake three times, and Qi Ling-er had only used it once thus far. Thus, she had the discretion to apply for the opportunity to enter it once more.

However, it was a known fact within the Qi Clan that Qi Ling-er did not perform well the first time around, so what was the point of her entering it a second time?

If it was possible for a person to improve their talent, the Qi Clan would have been filled with geniuses.

“I also find it unbelievable as well, but I believe that the clan head should be able to tell whether I am lying or not,” Qi Ling-er replied calmly.

“I can sense some changes in your aura, but I find it hard to believe what you are saying.” The middle-aged man shook his head. “I am not very satisfied with the reason you have given me...”

“If you doubt my words, you can always test it out,” Qi Ling-er quickly added.

“Test? How do you expect us to test your talent?” the young lady sneered.

It was possible to test a person’s fighting prowess and cultivation, but how could something as abstract as ‘talent’ possibly be tested?

“Clan head, you can impart an identical battle technique to both Sister Xun-er and me and give us an hour to learn it. After that, we’ll suppress our cultivation to the same level and compete with one another. The person who is able to comprehend it to a higher level is bound to be more talented than the other. Xun-er, you should have no issue with that, right?” Qi Ling-er proposed with a smile.

As someone who was able to consolidate her power and rule over a black market for many years without facing any problems, she was no pushover at all. Qi Xun-er's tipoff had left her in a difficult and awkward position, so she was determined to return the favor.

2153 Qi Yue

“Oh? It seems like you are very confident in yourself?” Qi Ling-er’s words did not cause Qi Xun-er to panic at all. On the contrary, a smile of ridicule spread on her face. “If I recall correctly, you were only able to persevere inside the Lucid Lunar Lake for fifteen minutes, right?”

“Indeed,” Qi Ling-er replied without any awkwardness. “I wasn’t even able to last for fifteen minutes, but Sister Xun-er, you were able to last an hour in there. Given your talent, this test should be a walk in the park for you, right?”

“Of course. I’m just afraid that you’ll embarrass yourself!” Qi Xun-er chuckled as she walked to the center of the hall.

“Clan head, I am willing to go along with Ling-er’s request and compete with her. However, I think that Ling-er’s actions of shirking her responsibility and lying to you are unacceptable. If she isn’t able to prove herself here, I beseech you to strip her of her identity as one of the core members and imprison her.”

To strip Qi Ling-er of her identity as a core member of the Qi Clan meant taking away her bloodline, and that was an extremely grave punishment.

This was a sentence usually used only on traitors. Not only would it dishonor the individual herself, her entire lineage would be disgraced.

It seemed like Qi Xun-er was determined to do Qi Ling-er in thoroughly this time so as to ensure that she would never get a chance to make a comeback.

“Sister Xun-er, don’t you think that a bet should go both ways? If I’m going to be punished severely for losing the duel, it’s only fair for the same to happen to you,” Qi Ling-er replied.

“I’m not the one who came back from Twilight City without permission, disobeying the commands of the clan head. Even

if I lose, it just means that I'm lacking practice. Why should I be punished if I lose?" Qi Xun-er harrumphed. "Besides, do you honestly think that you can defeat me with your caliber?"

Seeing how Qi Xun-er was not falling for her provocations, Qi Ling-er shrugged and said, "Don't you think it's a little disproportionate for you to suggest kicking me out of the Qi Clan if I fail a test of talent? I can't help but think that you have some personal grudge. If this is not a bet, am I to take it that you are trying to make a judgement on the clan head's behalf?"

"Audacious!" Qi Xun-er's face immediately flushed at that accusation.

She was just about to lash out at Qi Ling-er for bringing up such a ridiculous notion when the clan head suddenly interjected. "Enough! One's ability to comprehend battle techniques is indeed a gauge of one's talent. Since neither of you object to it, we'll go ahead with that."

God Kings had a lifespan of over ten thousand years, so they had plenty of time.

Even though he only appeared to be a generation older than Qi Ling-er and Qi Xun-er, the truth was that there were many generations between them, such that he did not feel much sentiments toward them.

From his perspective, he did not think that Qi Ling-er's words were very credible. However, since the latter was determined to prove herself, there was no reason he should stop her from doing so. He simply viewed it as a momentary break from work.

If Qi Ling-er was able to raise her talent, it would be a blessing for the Qi Clan. It was not as if he had anything to lose anyway.

Right after saying those words, he flicked his wrist and tossed a book over.

"This is a battle technique that I have created. I have never shown it to anyone before, so you can be assured that this test is absolutely fair."

Then, with a snap of his finger, an stick of incense placed by the side of the room lit up, and a slight fragrance wafted around the room.

“The two of you have an hour each. Begin.”

Right after those words were spoken, the book floating in the air began flipping on its own.

Qi Ling-er and Qi Xun-er quickly turned their sights over and focused deeply on the books.

The book was being flipped at a rapid pace, but as powerful cultivators, they were able to process the content of the book without too much trouble. In less than three minutes, they had already finished looking through and remembering the content of the book.

Hu! Hu!

The two of them sat down and began interpreting the secrets of the battle technique. By the side, Zhang Xuan quietly shot a glance at the book as well.

Hu!

The Library of Heaven's Path jolted, and a new book was compiled within it.

He quickly flipped through the content before shaking his head in disapproval.

There are so many mistakes in here!

Through the Library of Heaven's Path, he could tell that the battle technique was riddled with errors. There were almost a hundred of them inside it!

He had expected a technique created personally by a God King to be close to perfection, but right now, it was a long stretch to even call it a decent battle technique!

A thought suddenly arose in Zhang Xuan's mind.

Did he intentionally make it this way so as to challenge them? The technique seems to be flawed in a manner that makes it incredibly unnatural and awkward to grasp...

Qi Ling-er and Qi Xun-er were competing to prove their talent. If one of them was able to interpret and make sense out of this flawed battle technique, that would really be concrete proof to her talent.

This sparked Zhang Xuan's curiosity to take a closer look at the battle technique, but the sheer number of issues in it made him feel nauseated. So, he was left with no choice but to quickly clear his mind of it.

Just looking at it was enough to make him feel queasy inside!

He was simply spoilt by the Heaven's Path Divine Art and the other perfect techniques from the Library of Heaven's Path.

Forget it"

With a deep sigh, Zhang Xuan gathered the books around the Library of Heaven's Path and compiled them together in order to rid the errors in the battle technique.

As this was a test for Qi Ling-er and Qi Xun-er, the middle-aged man could not take out something that was too advanced. It just so happened that he had gathered a huge collection of books from the Master Teacher Pavilion not too long ago, so it was not difficult for him to correct the errors.

He quickly looked at the battle technique once more and drove his celestial energy in accordance with it. Soon enough, he had already mastered it.

This is too simple.

Could this even be considered a test?

It was child's play!

He turned his gaze toward Qi Ling-er to see how she was faring, only to see sweat dripping down the latter's head. It felt like she was having difficulties interpreting certain parts of the battle technique, resulting in her inability to practice it.

I see... Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in realization.

From the very start, the middle-aged man had never intended for Qi Ling-er and Qi Xun-er to cultivate the technique as it

was. He wanted them to adapt the battle technique into something that was suited for their own need!

Only someone who could go beyond memorizing to integrate his web of knowledge together would be able to climb higher as a cultivator. Only such a person would be worthy of being called a genius!

As expected of someone who had lived for millenniums. He had a lot of ideas in his mind.

Why? Why isn't this working? Why is nothing working at all? Is my talent really that bad?

If it's a technique created by the clan head, he must have tested it rigorously. There's no way it can't be cultivated. There must be a way out of this. I must have interpreted it incorrectly somewhere.

The faces of the two ladies were scrunched tightly in frustration and anxiety.

There was simply too much at stake! Neither of them wanted to lose!

But for some reason, no matter how they examined the cultivation technique, there were simply some parts that would not connect. They were unable to construct a feasible system out of the entire battle technique, and this really baffled them. How were they supposed to cultivate something that felt so... incomplete?

Time flew by, and it looked as if an hour was going to pass very soon. Yet, the two of them were still completely lost. It felt like they were not fated with this battle technique.

"What a pity!" the middle-aged man remarked softly as he looked at the performance of the two ladies before him.

Just as Zhang Xuan had guessed, he had intentionally filled the battle technique with a lot of errors such that it was impossible to master without some modifications. Of course, he had also made sure to conceal the errors well so that normal cultivators would not be able to notice them easily, or else he would have been giving away the crux of the test too easily.

If one of them had been able to comprehend this logic, even if she didn't manage to come up with anything in the end, the attitude she had toward learning would still have been a sign of her aptitude.

Those who blindly believed in books would never become anything great in the future.

The middle-aged man had intentionally mentioned that this was a battle technique that he had come up with to further exert pressure on the two of them, but they had fallen for those words and ended up cornering themselves in their thoughts.

Shaking his head in disappointment, he was just about to end the test prematurely when something caught his eye. With raised eyebrows, he turned his attention to Qi Xun-er.

Her previously scrunched face had relaxed considerably, and a smile emerged on her lips. It appeared as if she had finally managed to make sense out of the situation.

“It seems like Xun-er is still a notch above Ling-er,” the middle-aged man noted with a nod.

As someone who could persevere in the Lucid Lunar Lake for more than an hour, Qi Xun-er was indubitably a genius. This duel only served to further drive in that fact.

Noticing the same change, Zhang Xuan frowned. At this rate, Qi Ling-er will lose...

It was clear that Qi Ling-er was still stuck, and time was swiftly running out. If she still could not comprehend the crux of the test, she was doomed to lose.

If she loses, I won't get a chance to see the Lucid Lunar Lake. I might even be implicated as well...

Even though he had already made a breakthrough to the Celestial God realm, from the instant he met the middle-aged man, he knew that it would be futile for him to attempt to barge into the Lucid Lunar Lake forcefully.

A God King was far beyond what he could currently deal with. Even if he could somehow amplify his strength tenfold on the spot, he would be no match for the middle-aged man.

But he could not help Qi Ling-er so explicitly either.

They were under the watchful eye of a God King, and even if he used zhenqi telepathy to communicate with her, the middle-aged man would surely notice it right away and disqualify her.

That being said, given Qi Ling-er's personality, she wouldn't have put herself in a dangerous position if she wasn't confident of victory. It's weird how she ended up placing herself in such a bad position so easily.

Qi Ling-er was a person who knew the value of preparation and planning. She was extremely thorough in whatever she did, and that could be seen from how she dealt with the sales of the Beauty Pill.

In fact, she was the one who had proposed the duel. How did she end up landing in such a position?

Perplexed, he took a closer look at Qi Ling-er, but he was not able to find anything amiss about her. She was earnestly struggling with the battle technique.

Then, he turned his sights to Qi Xun-er and willed, Flaws!

A book materialized in his head.

As Qi Xun-er was in the midst of practicing a battle technique, he could easily compile a book on her.

Zhang Xuan flipped open the book and looked through the contents.

This...

After looking through the details of the book, his forehead slowly scrunched up.

Qi Ling-er's evaluation of Qi Xun-er's ability was not wrong—the latter did not manage to figure out the true intention of the middle-aged man either!

What she failed to calculate was the possibility of Qi Xun-er getting external help.

It was understandable though, given that it would indeed be hard to deceive the discerning eyes of a God King, but Qi Xun-er had managed to do it.

It was through her external helper that she was able to practice the battle technique, and most likely, the external helper was none other than the famed genius that Qi Ling-er had talked about, Qi Yue!

Only a person of his caliber would be able to see through the problems of the battle technique, modify them, and impart it to another person in a way that the latter could understand.

They sure know how to work around things!

Qi Xun-er and Qi Yue had prepared beforehand in order to ensure that the middle-aged man would not notice their cheating, and to be honest, if Zhang Xuan had not used the Library of Heaven's Path, their actions would likely have escaped his notice.

That being said, what they did was actually very simple.

Qi Yue had tamed a particularly small bug and placed it inside Qi Xun-er's body.

The bug allowed him to communicate directly with Qi Xun-er's soul, making it hard for a God King to notice unless he observed closely.

Through controlling the movement of the worm in her body, Qi Xun-er would be able to drive her celestial energy in accordance with the movements of the worm and eventually master the battle technique!

2154 The Final Victor

Since you are already cheating, I guess there's no reason for me to hold back. Zhang Xuan chuckled softly beneath his breath.

If they had adhered to the rules, he would have still thought twice about helping Qi Ling-er. In a sense, this was a personal grudge between the two of them, and he did not think that it was right for an outsider like him to get involved.

So, even though the outcome would affect him as well, he was willing to accept it.

However, since Qi Xun-er and Qi Yue were already cheating in this duel, he had no intention of letting Qi Ling-er fend for herself.

While it would be difficult to pull any strings before a God King, that did not mean that Zhang Xuan had absolutely no way of doing it at all.

Even though it has been a while since she ate the Beauty Pill, she probably hasn't managed to fully assimilate the Heaven's Path zhenqi I infused inside it.

He carefully focused his consciousness toward Qi Ling-er's body, and soon, he felt a slight connection with the zhenqi in her body. It was flowing alongside her divine energy in her meridians.

Qi Ling-er had consumed a Beauty Pill back when they were still at Twilight City's underground market. Back then, he had given it to her so that he would be able to deal with her if she betrayed him.

Who could have thought that this surge of zhenqi would become their trump card to dealing with Qi Xun-er and Qi Yue?

Through this surge of zhenqi, Zhang Xuan would be able to guide Qi Ling-er much more efficiently than a worm could,

and more importantly, it was so discreet that it was impossible to see through.

Hu hu!

Under Zhang Xuan's control, the Heaven's Path zhenqi slowly circulated around Qi Ling-er's body through a certain pathway, tearing down all blockages and bottlenecks in its path.

Qi Ling-er had been utterly lost a moment ago, such that she had nearly resigned herself to a despairing defeat against Qi Xun-er, but the abrupt changes within her body made her eyes glow in excitement.

She had no idea why she suddenly experienced such changes in her body, but her intuition as a cultivator told her that as long as she channeled her divine energy through the opened circulation pathway, she would be able to master the battle technique!

Many of the issues that she had faced in the battle technique over the past hour would be resolved as well, granting the battle technique far greater might than before.

Tzzzzzzz!

Qi Ling-er swiftly drove her divine energy through the newly-opened circulation pathway, and amazingly, she felt her comprehension of the battle technique surging at a ridiculous rate. It was as if someone was guiding her step by step, allowing her mastery to rise all the way to Major Accomplishment in an instant.

She was excited by the changes that were happening to her, but she concealed her emotions impeccably under a mask of anxiety.

“Hmm?”

Her act might be able to fool Qi Xun-er, but it was insufficient to deceive the God King sitting before her. The middle-aged man was slightly bewildered to see the confused young lady from a moment ago suddenly grasping the battle technique.

He was well aware that it was no easy feat to resolve the flaws in his battle technique to make it feasible to practice. It would really take great brilliance in order to do so...

I reckon she has only grasped the preliminary crux of my battle technique. She probably is some way off mastering it. He glanced at the incense by the side and raised his hand. "Time's up!"

Qi Ling-er and Qi Xun-er rose to their feet at the same moment.

"Begin," he ordered.

Qi Xun-er took a look at Qi Ling-er's state, and she could not help but smile gleefully when she saw the cold sweat dripping down Qi Ling-er's face.

She had been trying to quash Qi Ling-er and her lineage for some time, but that was much easier said than done. The Qi Clan would not allow her to do anything that would compromise their reputation, so she could not make a move on Qi Ling-er and her lineage too openly.

She needed a legitimate reason if she wanted to take them down.

Right now, Qi Ling-er had openly defied the orders of the clan head. Even though neither of them had acknowledged the earlier duel, it was implied that Qi Ling-er would be severely punished if she won the duel.

This was to uphold the clan's dignity and the legitimacy of the clan rules.

Otherwise, if everyone in the Qi Clan neglected their responsibilities and did as they pleased, what would become of them?

"This battle technique is simply too complicated. It's hard to achieve anything significant within an hour. Clan head, if you could just give me another hour, I will be able to reinforce my understanding of the technique..." Qi Ling-er gritted her teeth in desperation.

“The time given to us was an hour’s time. Don’t you think it’s inappropriate for you to ask for an extension? Cut the cr*p and get ready for battle!” Qi Xun-er sneered coldly.

She earnestly believed that Qi Ling-er was trying to postpone the battle out of fear.

On the other hand, seeing how Qi Xun-er had fallen for such a shallow ploy, the middle-aged man could not help but sigh in disappointment.

Due to her close relations with Qi Yue, he had thought that Qi Xun-er was a talented individual who could become a pillar of support for the Qi Clan in the future. However, it seemed like she was still very lacking.

She allowed her pride to blind her, causing her to be so easily deceived by the other party.

But again, it was not surprising for Qi Xun-er to underestimate Qi Ling-er. The two of them had grown up together, so they were well-aware of each other’s capabilities.

Furthermore, despite being someone who was able to persevere for an hour in the Lucid Lunar Lake, she was unable to comprehend the crux of the test until the very end.

It was only natural for her to assume that the situation would be worse for Qi Xun-er.

It was based on this confidence that she dared to take up Qi Ling-er challenge in the first place.

“Begin!” the middle-aged man ordered.

Qi Ling-er closed her eyes and sighed deeply before turning to the middle-aged man to request, “Clan head, please inspect our cultivation.”

Soon, both of their cultivation levels had been suppressed to the same level. Even the amount of divine energy they had in their bodies had been adjusted to the same amount.

Hu!

After was done, Qi Xun-er unhesitatingly leaped forward and rained down a flurry of palm strikes upon Qi Ling-er. “Not

bad!”

Seeing this, the middle-aged man nodded in approval.

Qi Xun-er had managed to leap out of the limitations of the battle technique that he had given her and altered it to improve its might drastically. Even though it still paled far in comparison to what he had come up with, this was still a sign of Qi Xun-er’s talent.

After that, the middle-aged man turned his gaze to Qi Ling-er, and his eyebrows immediately leaped up in shock. “This...”

He had just witnessed something that had left him flabbergasted.

Qi Ling-er had not finished executing her attack yet, but just by looking at the circulation pathway of her divine energy, he could tell that she had managed to modify the battle technique to a level that even surpassed what he had come up with!

It was just a simple modification, but it ingeniously turned a second-rate battle technique to an unparalleled secret manual that even he had trouble understanding.

How did she manage to do it?

Pah!

A sound reminiscent of the cracking of a whip echoed in the air.

The confident Qi Xun-er was struck squarely on her cheek, causing her body to spin in the air before crashing heavily onto the ground.

“You have lost.”

Qi Ling-er did not continue her attack after subduing Qi Xun-er in a single move. She placed her hands behind her back and gazed down on Qi Xun-er haughtily.

Years of being oppressed by Qi Xun-er had filled her with rage and indignation. Finally, she had a chance to give that darned wench a tight slap to her face!

“You...” Qi Xun-er was stupefied.

She had thought that she could easily deal with Qi Ling-er with the battle technique her older brother had imparted to her, but she had ended up being blasted away by the other party instead!

Had the other party not been struggling over the battle technique earlier?

How in the world did she manage to master it to such a degree?

That was impossible!

Watching everything through the worm in Qi Xun-er's body, Qi Yue frowned, too.

As the top genius of the Qi Clan, he could tell just how terrifying Qi Ling-er's slap was.

It was still the same battle technique that the clan head had imparted to them... but how did Qi Ling-er manage to modify it so ingeniously? Not even the God King realm clan head would have been able to improve the battle technique to such a level!

Could it be... the old ancestor?

Is this a warning from the old ancestor? He's displeased by our internal conflict, so he's using Qi Ling-er to warn us not to go too far? Qi Yue thought as he felt a cold chill running down his spine.

There was only one person in the Qi Clan who could possibly modify the battle technique to such a degree, and that was Old Ancestor Qi Meng!

If the old ancestor was really getting involved in this matter, they would have to rethink their plans.

While Qi Yue had fallen deep in thought, Qi Xun-er finally recovered from her shock. Her pale face swiftly flushed crimson with rage as she furiously roared, "You bitch! You aren't using the battle technique that we were given at all.

I'll slaughter you!"

Without any warning, she released her seal and charged right toward Qi Ling-er.

She could not stand the humiliation of being slapped by a person who was so much weaker than her!

Astonished, Qi Yue quickly snapped out of his thoughts and leaped into the hall to stop Qi Xun-er. “What are you doing? Haven’t you embarrassed yourself enough?”

This duel was conducted before the clan head himself. Questioning the result of the duel was no different from questioning the clan head’s judgement.

They would only be incurring the clan head’s ire at this rate.

“Brother, I have known this bitch for many years, and there’s no way someone of her caliber could have comprehended that battle technique and modified it to such an extent! There’s no way that bitch could have done it!” Qi Xun-er roared indignantly.

Even though she would never admit it to herself, she had always viewed Qi Ling-er as her rival subconsciously, and she knew very well that the latter did not possess such capability!

Qi Ling-er was a wily fox, but her talent in cultivation was far beneath hers. The Lucid Lunar Lake had already shown so!

Qi Ling-er should have been nothing before her!

Not to mention, she had even used the battle technique that her older brother had personally modified!

Seeing the disgraceful act that Qi Xun-er was putting on, the middle-aged man looked at her with utterly cold eyes as he spoke with the imposing authority of a God King. “You have already lost. Don’t embarrass yourself any further than this.”

Then, he turned to Qi Ling-er and said, “Demonstrate the battle technique that you have comprehended for me once more.”

Yes, clan head.”

Qi Ling-er took a deep breath before executing the battle technique once more.

Hu hu hu!

Tremendous might was compressed together to an extreme degree, causing sonic booms to echo endlessly in the air.

“Incredible! This is truly incredible! I never would have thought that it’s possible to do something like this...”

The eyes of the middle-aged man were shining in amazement. It looked as if he could hardly believe what he was seeing.

Creating a good battle technique was not just about the arrival of a sudden bout of inspiration. More than that, the cultivator would have to review it again and again in order to perfect it.

The process was similar to a poet calligraphing a poem. Even the simplest detail could have rippling effects on the harmony and prowess of the entire battle technique.

The battle technique that Qi Ling-er had come up with was absolutely flawless. There was no fault that he could pick with it at all.

This was the first time that the middle-aged man had seen such a battle technique, so it was no wonder he was unable to curb his agitation.

Perhaps the key for him to get to greater heights might lie in this.

“Did you comprehend this battle technique yourself?” the middle-aged man asked.

To be honest, he found it hard to believe that Qi Ling-er really possessed such talent. There was no way the Qi Clan would have overlooked her if that was the case!

Even if Qi Ling-er was only able to persevere for fifteen minutes in the Lucid Lunar Lake, her very ability to create and refine techniques was enough to make her an even more likely candidate to become a God King than Qi Yue!

Yes, I did,” Qi Ling-er replied.

She had no idea why her body had acted the way it did, but her instincts told her that Zhang Xuan had played a part in that. However, she also knew that Zhang Xuan was an extremely

low-profile person, and he was unwilling to garner too much attention.

Thus, she could only admit to it.

“Not bad. Not bad at all!” The middle-aged man nodded excitedly.

Thank you, clan head,” Qi Ling-er replied respectfully.

Then, she turned to Qi Xun-er and asked, “Is there anything else you have to say about this?”

Qi Xun-er clenched her fists indignantly, but faced with her older brother’s stem gaze, she could only swallow her pride and reply, “I have nothing to say...”

Qi Xun-er was hot-headed, but she was not dumb. Even without Qi Yue holding her back, she could tell that the tides were no longer in her favor. Qi Ling-er had won the clan head’s approval, and there was nothing that she could say to change that.

With this, Qi Ling-er’s rise in the clan was sealed.

Qi Ling-er turned to the middle-aged man and clasped her fist. “Clan head, as you have seen, Qi Xun-er bears great hostility toward me, and she tried to use this matter to fulfill her own personal vendetta. Since I have won the battle, I think that it’s only right for me to hold the bet against her.”

“The bet was nothing more than a passing remark. There’s no need to take it seriously,” the middle-aged man said with a wave of his hand, signaling that he was done with this issue.

Then, he added, “It must have been hard for you, having to fend for yourself in Twilight City all these years. From today, you need not go back. You shall manage our clan’s Lucid Lunar Market instead.”

Those words made Qi Xun-er’s face pale further.

The Lucid Lunar Market was one of the Qi Clan’s business in Royal City. All along, it had been managed by her, but the clan head was actually handing it over to Qi Ling-er. That was no different from taking back her authority!

In the end, the clan head was still punishing her for this matter!

She had expected to win the duel with her older brother's help, but somehow, things had ended up differently.

She felt as if she had placed her face out for Qi Ling-er to stomp on.

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“Thank you, clan head!” Qi Ling-er bowed deeply.

With this, she was finally in an advantageous position in the conflict. Once the rest in the Qi Clan heard that she was given the Lucid Lunar Market, they would understand that the winds were changing, and no one would dare to take advantage of her lineage anymore.

The middle-aged man then turned his sights to the man standing behind Qi Ling-er and asked, “This person is...”

The fact that Qi Ling-er was willing to bring this man to the Qi Clan with her likely meant that they had an extraordinary relationship.

More importantly, despite the man’s young age, he was exceptionally composed. Even standing in his face, the man showed no hint of being intimidated.

Putting aside those of the younger generation, most of the high-tier Celestial God elders within the Qi Clan were unable to remain perfectly calm in his presence either.

“I am Zhang Xuan, and I serve as Miss Ling-er’s subordinate. It’s my honor to be able to meet Clan Head Qi in person!”

Before Qi Ling-er could reply, Zhang Xuan had already taken a step forward to make his greeting.

The middle-aged man assessed Zhang Xuan quietly, but the latter simply stood with his head lowered, not flinching in the least at his assessment. He finally nodded in acknowledgement and remarked, “Ling-er, you have found yourself a good subordinate. Anyway, your ability to comprehend the battle technique to this level shows that your talent has indeed improved. If you have some time on hand right now, let’s head over to the Lucid Lunar Lake to see how long you can last in there.”

“Thank you, clan head!” Qi Ling-er heaved a sigh of relief.

“May we come along to observe?” Qi Yue suddenly spoke up at this moment.

The middle-aged man nodded in approval.

Just by how Qi Ling-er interpreted his battle technique earlier, it was clear that she was no longer the same person she used to be. She and Qi Yue were likely to become God Kings in the future, and once that happened, the Qi Clan could very well become the most influential power in the Sky of Drifting Specter!

The Lucid Lunar Lake was located not too far away from the main hall. Looking at it from a distance away, it looked like a mirror embedded in the midst of the mountains.

Before coming close to it, one could already feel the rich spiritual energy coming from the lake. It suffused the air and pulsated with great vigor, making it seem as though it would flee into the heavens.

Zhang Xuan quietly observed the surroundings as he followed behind Qi Ling-er.

He noticed that the Lucid Lunar Lake was the center of the formation shrouding the upside-down floating mountain they were on.

Rich spiritual energy wasn't the only thing that the Lucid Lunar Lake had. It seemed to be connected with the lava rumbling within the mountain and the lightning of the sky. This meant that the lake harnessed the powers of three elements, water, lightning, and fire.

“There seems to be the blood of innumerable powerful beasts inside too...” Zhang Xuan murmured.

Just the power of three elements wasn't enough to temper the body of a Celestial God. More than that, the lake harnessed the blood essence of countless powerful beasts too.

With just a swift look, Zhang Xuan could discern the blood essence of several hundred divine and celestial beasts within the lake. The clashes and collisions amongst the blood essences made the energy within the lake extremely violent,

such that even a Celestial God-tier weapon would melt swiftly in it.

It must have taken a great deal of effort for the Qi Clan to set up the Lucid Lunar Lake. Most powers wouldn't even be able to gather that many blood essences of different beasts, let alone set up a formation with all of them.

Based on the books that he had read so far, there was a period of chaos and turmoil after the spiritual energy receded. During that period of time, many rare divine and celestial beasts ended up going extinct.

This meant that Zhang Xuan wouldn't be able to recreate something similar to the Lucid Lunar Lake even though he knew how to do it.

There's no choice then. I'll have to search for an opportunity to enter the waters myself... Zhang Xuan thought with a sigh.

As much as he didn't want to use the property of another person without permission, his priority at the moment was still to raise his cultivation. At the very most, he would just make sure to properly compensate the Qi Clan in the future.

Soon, they finally arrived at the lake, and the middle-aged man said, "You should head in now."

"Clan head, please give me a moment. There are a few things which I need to relay to him before entering the lake," Qi Ling-er said gracefully.

Then, she walked right up to Zhang Xuan, and the composure on her face vanished. With a slightly anxious look on her face, she asked, "Young Master Zhang, what should I do?"

It was true that she said that she wanted to enter the Lucid Lunar Lake, but she didn't expect to be asked to enter it right away without any preparations. Not to mention, the clan head even came along with her...

That had really taken her aback even though she managed to keep a poker face all this while.

"There's no need to worry. Swallow this pill and you'll be fine," Zhang Xuan said as he passed a middle-tier God

Essence Pill over.

Qi Ling-er looked at the middle-tier God Essence Pill hesitantly for a moment before swallowing it decisively, not asking a question at all.

To her disappointment, it didn't feel like there were any changes with her body after swallowing the pill. Feeling slightly unnerved, she looked at Zhang Xuan in hopes of receiving reassurance.

However, the latter had already lowered his head, indicating that he had already done everything that needed to be done.

Knowing that there was no backing out of this, Qi Ling-er took in a deep breath before leaping into the Lucid Lunar Lake.

Tzzzzz!

As soon as she entered the water, the violent energies within immediately surged in her direction.

Qi Ling-er swiftly channeled the power of her Qi Clan bloodline to form a protective layer on the surface of her skin.

The presence of the protective layer seemed to calm the surrounding violent energies down, thus reducing the burden on her.

“So that's the reason why the Lucid Lunar Lake is exclusive only to the Qi Clan...” Zhang Xuan nodded contemplatively.

He had been wondering how a high-tier God could ensure the Lucid Lunar Lake when even a Celestial God-tier artifact would face difficulties trying to survive in it. As it turned out, the key lay in the bloodline prowess of the Qi Clan!

In clans descended from powerful cultivators, the purer one's bloodline was, the stronger one's talent would be. On top of tempering one's physical body, the Lucid Lunar Lake also served to assess how powerful the bloodline of an offspring in the Qi Clan was.

Even though Qi Ling-er had managed to hold her own against the lake for the time being, it didn't stop her heart from beating in trepidation.

She knew that the prowess of her bloodline would slowly be whittled down by the violent energies. And just like what had happened before, she felt her energy starting to run out after fifteen minutes had passed.

Just as she was about to reach her limits, she suddenly felt a new surge of energy rising from her dantian. The middle-tier God Essence Pill she had eaten earlier was releasing great amounts of pure spiritual energy, replenishing her energy and reinvigorating her spirit.

This granted her the energy to continue fending off the violent energies.

“But this flow of energy... It somehow feels similar to the experience I felt when I comprehended the battle technique earlier?” Qi Ling-er widened her eyes in realization.

Once again, she was reminded of how right it was a decision for her to agree to return to the Royal City together with Zhang Xuan.

If she had chosen to remain in Twilight City, she would have really become sidelined in the Qi Clan. And once Qi Yue became a God King, the oppression of their lineage would have worsened even further, such that it would be a huge question whether they would have been able to keep their lives.

But now, the clan head had permitted her return to the Royal City, and she was even given the management rights of one of the major businesses of the Qi Clan in the Royal City. There was no better stepping stone for her to build her own influence in the Royal City than this.

And all of this was due to the young man’s help.

“Her talent has really increased...”

Watching how Qi Ling-er was able to remain unfazed even after entering the Lucid Lunar Lake for fifteen minutes, Qi Xun-er muttered with tightly clenched fists.

She thought that Qi Ling-er had only said those words out of desperation, hoping to somehow wiggle her way out of crisis

she was in. Yet, the ridiculous claim she made was actually true!

An hour passed, but she was still inside.

Time ticked over to the two-hour mark, but Qi Ling-er still showed no signs of getting up and leave.

Over this period of time, even Qi Yue's complexion had turned slightly grave as well.

The purity of one's bloodline was determined at birth. Considering how Qi Ling-er had only been able to last fifteen minutes in there initially, it was hard to believe that she had already lasted two hours in the Lucid Lunar Lake right now.

Just how much stronger had her bloodline become over the past few years? Could it be that she had reached the same level as him as well?

If that was really the case, they would be in deep trouble!

Hong long!

Just as they were looking at the scene before them in disbelief, a series of cracking sounds suddenly echoed from the lady within the lake. Great power surged from her body as her cultivation rose from that of a high-tier God to low-tier Celestial God.

She had already hit her bottleneck a while back, but she hadn't been able to find the impetus for her to make a breakthrough so far. However, with the rich spiritual energy in the Lucid Lunar Lake and the nourishment of the blood essences, while her physical body was being tempered, her zhenqi cultivation was rising rapidly as well.

Hu!

She leaped out of the lake and returned back to the shore.

Had she not made a breakthrough, the energy within the middle-tier God Essence Pill would have allowed her to last a little longer inside the water. However, as she had ended up using the energy for her breakthrough to Celestial God realm, she ran out of energy faster than expected.

Nevertheless, she still lasted for more than three hours in there. That was enough to put her amongst the top of the younger generation, second only to Qi Yue.

“Just what did you go through for your bloodline to suddenly get so powerful?” the middle-aged man asked as Qi Linger dried herself.

The ability to enhance an individual’s bloodline was invaluable to most clans. It meant that the clan would be able to increase the number of talented experts in their ranks freely as long as they had sufficient resources on hand.

That would really pave the way for Qi Clan’s ascension to the top. Putting aside the Sky of Drifting Specters, they would have no one to fear in the Firmament!

“Clan head, I didn’t go through anything special. I only consumed the Beauty Pill,” Qi Ling-er hesitated for a moment before replying.

She considered hiding the matter, but given the means of the Qi Clan, they should be able to root out the truth soon enough.

“The Beauty Pill?” the middle-aged man asked with a frown.

As a God King, there were very few things in the world that could catch his eye. Clearly, the Beauty Pill wasn’t one of them.

“It’s a particularly powerful pill. It can rid lasting scars and make one’s skin more supple, enhancing one’s appearance. Initially, I thought that its effects are only limited to aesthetic purposes, but I soon realized that the pill has changed my constitution as well, allowing me to cultivate much faster than before. I thought that my talent might have risen due to that, so I returned to the Royal City hoping to challenge the Lucid Lunar Lake once more!” Qi Ling-er replied.

“There’s actually such a medicine in the world?”

“On top of making one beautiful, it can change a person’s constitution?”

Qi Yue and Qi Xun-er were stunned.

This was especially so for the latter. Her eyes were filled with envy.

From the moment she saw Qi Ling-er earlier, she couldn't help but notice how the latter looked much younger than before. Her skin was suppler than ever, and there were hardly any defects on her face.

She thought that the latter might have been consuming some sort of tonic, but to think that it was the Beauty Pill!

The middle-aged man appeared to be a little skeptical of Qi Ling-er's words, but he didn't refute the possibility right away. "Do you have any Beauty Pill with you at the moment?"

"I do," Qi Ling-er nodded as she passed a jade container over.

It was the exact same packaging she used when she first launched the product at Twilight City.

The middle-aged man opened the container, took out the Beauty Pill, and examined it carefully. The knit between his brows grew tighter the more he examined it.

No matter how he looked at it, the pill in front of him was indubitably an ordinary God Essence Pill... But Qi Ling-er said that it could make one more beautiful and improve one's constitution?

Why couldn't he tell at all?

"Clan head, I know that it might be hard to believe, but you can give it a try. The effects might not be too apparent for you due to your superior cultivation, but I believe that it should still be effective to some extent!" Qi Ling-er said.

"Is that so?" the middle-aged man remarked.

He opened his mouth and swallowed the pill.

A moment later, his eyebrows shot up.

Even though it looked no different from an ordinary God Essence Pill, it harnessed a unique kind of energy that repaired his internal traumas ever so slightly as it flowed through his body.

Just as Qi Ling-er had mentioned, the effects were greatly discounted on him because he was a God King, but the very fact that the pill was effective on him meant something.

“Even I was unable to do anything about those internal traumas...” the middle-aged man murmured in disbelief.

Those internal traumas were deeply lodged within his body that there was nothing he tried that worked on them. Never in his wildest dreams would he expect a low-tier God Essence Pills to actually be effective on them...

This so-called Beauty Pill sure was frightening!

“Where did you get this medicine from?” the middle-aged man asked Qi Lng-er anxiously. The slight quiver in his voice was more than enough to betray his agitation.

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2156 Paying Respects to the God Monarch! [2in1]

Qi Ling-er discreetly snuck a glance at Zhang Xuan, but the latter showed no hints of wanting to reveal himself at all. While feeling impressed by the young man's humility, she pondered for a moment before adding, "I got it through a friend for quite a hefty price. Each of them costs 1500 Divine Coins, and they aren't readily available on the market either."

"1500 Divine Coins? That's not expensive at all. Tell your friend that our Qi Clan will take whatever all Beauty Pills he has in the future!" the middle-aged man said with a grand wave of his hand.

Even though the effects of the pills on him was limited, the fact that it had any effect at all was terrifying in itself.

One must know that the only one within the Qi Clan who was capable of doing the same was likely to just be the old ancestor.

If he could monopolize the distribution of the Beauty Pills to just within the Qi Clan, it shouldn't take too long for the Qi Clan to rise through the ranks!

"I understand," Qi Ling-er nodded.

She didn't really expect the clan head to become the greatest buyer of their Beauty Pill. She flicked her wrist and took out the remaining Beauty Pills she had inside her storage ring, "I still have 14 of them here."

"I'll take all of them," the middle-aged man said.

He took the jade containers from her and stashed them into his own storage ring before flicking his finger lightly.

In the next moment, Qi Ling-er sensed an additional 22,250 Divine Coins in her card.

The clan head had paid her for the Beauty Pill she had offered up to him as well. It would be beneath a God King to take advantage of a junior too.

“Thank you, clan head!” Qi Ling-er bowed deeply.

The true value in this transaction lay not in the money but the attitude of the clan head. Now that she had been given the Lucid Lunar Market, money would simply roll into her pockets even if she did nothing at all. However, the fact that she was in a business relationship with the clan head would increase her say in the Royal City greatly.

Those who intended her and her lineage harm would have to think twice before pulling off anything, or else she could possibly tap into this relationship to give them hell to pay for.

Nodding quietly, the clan head waved his hand to dismiss them before walking away.

He still had quite a few internal traumas that needed to be treated, so he was intending to find a quiet place to consume them. Perhaps, he might be able to further his cultivation a little.

It was impossible for him to become a Conferred God King anymore, but at the very least, he could become one of the top experts amongst the God Kings.

“Clan head...”

Qi Xun-er fell silent.

She thought that the clan head would punish Qi Ling-er sternly after ratting out on her, condemning the latter to a place where she would never see the light of the day. Yet, the tables turned on them. They ended up sustaining great losses instead.

Putting everything aside, the annual dividends from the Lucid Lunar Market was more than enough for a lineage to live extravagantly for decades.

And this was putting aside the influence and power that came from having the position. Where the money flowed, connections would follow.

“Qi Ling-er, you must be really smug right now. I don’t know what tricks you used to be able to last three hours in the Lucid Lunar Lake, and I don’t know how miraculous your Beauty Pill actually is. However, you can be certain that I, Qi Xun-er, will definitely get back everything that belongs to me!”

Leaving those words behind, Qi Xun-er turned around and left as well.

She had already lost this battle, so there was no point saying anything more than that. Since Qi Ling-er was already back at the Royal City, they were bound to clash more in the future.

She didn’t believe that Qi Ling-er would be so lucky as to outdo her each and every time!

Even as Qi Xun-er left, Qi Yue still continued standing on the spot. There was a contemplative frown on his face, as if he was trying to make sense of something. He looked at Qi Ling-er for a moment before turning his gaze to the quiet Zhang Xuan by the side.

Eventually, he shook his head and left the area as well.

He was much more farsighted than his younger sister. In his view, there was no point competing over something that was transient. As long as he could become a God King, all of the obstacles in his path would vanish from sight!

No matter how powerful one’s influence was, it would be futile if one didn’t have the strength to maintain it.

As long as one had sufficient power, everything else, be it money, influence, or connections, would all be within reach.

“Young Master Zhang, thank you for your help.”

After everyone else had left, Qi Ling-er turned to Zhang Xuan and bowed deeply.

If not for the young man before her, it was likely that she would have been trapped in Twilight City for life, having no choice but to serve as the manager of an underground black market for her entire life.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony,” Zhang Xuan replied. “There’s one favor which I would like to ask of you. I am

actually quite interested in the Lucid Lunar Lake, and I would like to give it a try.”

This was his motive for coming to the Qi Clan, and his goal was already right before him. It was inevitable that he would be tempted.

Zhang Xuan’s request shocked Qi Ling-er, such that her true emotions actually slipped onto her face for a moment. This was no simple request at all.

She hesitated for a moment before replying carefully, “The energies in the Lucid Lunar Lake are extremely violent. Those without the Qi Clan’s bloodline will face great danger in there!”

As someone who had experienced the Lucid Lunar Lake personally, she knew just how terrifying it could be. Without the protection of the bloodline, there was a good chance that one would be reduced to ashes as soon as one’s body came into contact with it.

“I’ll just give it a try. If there’s any danger, I’ll come up right away,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Sigh... Alright then.”

Recalling that the young man before her was someone who possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch, Qi Ling-er knew that her worries were unfounded.

With a resigned nod, she added, “I’m sure you are aware that outsiders aren’t supposed to enter the Lucid Lunar Lake. I’ll stand guard for you outside, so make sure that no one sees you. Also, you mustn’t speak of whatever that happens here to anyone else...”

There were no restrictions that disallowed members of the Qi Clan from bringing the outsiders to the vicinity of the Lucid Lunar Lake, but allowing an outsider to go into it was, without a doubt, an infringement of the rules.

“Don’t worry, I don’t like drawing attention to myself either. I won’t say anything unnecessary to others,” Zhang Xuan replied with a reassuring smile.

Was it even necessary to voice that out loud to him? A person as low profile as him would never share such matters to others!

In any case, Zhang Xuan took in a deep breath before walking into the lake.

Tzzzzzz!

He immediately felt violent energies that threatened to tear his body apart surging over in his direction. It felt as though he was facing spatial turbulence once more. In a matter of moments, his body had been torn to the point that fresh blood wouldn't stop flowing from his body.

“Heaven's Path zhenqi!”

With a thought, Zhang Xuan began driving his celestial energy through his body, nourishing and healing his tattered muscles.

However, the violent energies in the lake were simply too destructive. His rate of recovery was fast, but it wasn't sufficient to stop his body from breaking down.

“Come out!”

Zhang Xuan brought Little Chick out from his dantian.

“What incredibly hot-tempered spiritual energy this is... I love it! Tear me into pieces and rip me apart, baby!”

Upon seeing the Lucid Lunar Lake, the little yellow chick's beady eyes immediately lit up.

It unfurled its tiny wings and began waddling all around the lake.

Zhang Xuan's eyebrows twitched.

The reason why he brought out the little yellow chick was to have it produce some chicken soup so as to boost his rate of recovery, but it actually started swimming around instead...

Remember your identity! You are a chicken, not a duck!

Chickens aren't supposed to swim!

Just as Zhang Xuan was going to berate the little yellow chick, the latter suddenly lowered its head and dived into the depths

of the lake.

Tzzzzz!

The lakewater bubbled as the violent energies shot toward the little yellow chick. As if it was struck by multiple arrows, it took only a few instants for it to be reduced into a huge cloud of crimson blood.

“This...”

Watching the sight from the shore, Qi Ling-er was utterly dumbfounded.

What the heck was that chick? Where did it come from? Why was it seeking to kill itself? Was it really that afraid of being slaughtered and eaten as food?

A bunch of question marks popped up endlessly on Qi Ling-er's head.

“You useless wastrel!” Zhang Xuan nearly burst into tears.

Can you at least show some basic pride and dignity? I brought you out to save me, but you ended up committing suicide instead...

Shouldn't a legendary beast like you be more concerned about its reputation?

Zhang Xuan covered his head from the sheer embarrassment of being associated with a waddling furball of disgrace.

It seemed like he could only rely on himself then. Somehow, nothing ever went to plan whenever that darned chick was involved.

Gritting his teeth, he drove his celestial energy to its maximum in order to hasten his recovery to the greatest extent. However, it was around this moment that the unexpected happened.

The Lucid Lunar Lake suddenly began trembling nonstop, signaling that something was about to happen.

Taken aback, Zhang Xuan quickly took a look around him, only to see that the lake he was in shaking so vigorously that it felt as if an explosion was going to happen anytime soon.

How did this happen? Zhang Xuan was frenzied.

The previous time this happened was at the Cleansing Lake of Huanyu Empire. Back then, it was due to he and his clone absorbing too much energy, and he admitted that it was indeed his greed that led to such a situation too.

But he hadn't even begun cultivating after entering this Lucid Lunar Lake! He was too preoccupied with fending against the violent energies within that he didn't even have the time to pull anything off!

It is one thing if I have tried to suck the lake dry and ended up succumbing to it, but I haven't done anything at all... This is injustice!

Why the heck is the lake exploding?

It really has nothing to do with me this time!

Zhang Xuan felt so stifled that he could lose his mind. He knew that the God King from before would really rip him apart if the lake in front of him were to really explode, so with a deep sigh, he attempted to leap out of the lake to stop whatever that was happening first.

But before he could even get up, the energies rumbling within the Lucid Lunar Lake suddenly gushed in his direction, sealing the space around him. In the blink of an eye, he found himself unable to move at all, as if someone had used a rope to tie him up.

Just like that, he was robbed of his ability to escape too!

“Shit!” Zhang Xuan cursed.

He was already going to leaving, so why was the lake still latching onto him like a relentless ex?

He tried to free himself from the restraints of the lake, but the violent energies were way more than what he, as a low-tier Celestial God, could deal with. He felt as if he was stuck in the midst of a whirlpool, and it was already taking his all trying not to get swept away by it, let alone escape from it!

Tzzzzzz!

The energies finally collided onto Zhang Xuan's body from all directions, and in that instant, he felt many hands pulling his body with insane force, trying to tear him into pieces.

Even the Heaven's Path zhenqi was helpless against a force of such magnitude.

Qi Ling-er was able to persevere in the lake for over three hours using just a surge of the Heaven's Path zhenqi, but that was mainly because her bloodline had the ability to calm the violent energies within the water.

On the other hand, the violent energies seemed to be reacting explosively to his presence, almost as if they were trying to decimate an unwelcome intruder. Facing the full aggression of the lake, there was only so much that the Heaven's Path zhenqi could do.

Peng peng!

Fresh blood flowed out of Zhang Xuan's body, and he started to feel a little light-headed.

"Will I really die just like that?" Zhang Xuan felt like crying.

It was one thing if the Lucid Lunar Lake didn't welcome him, but it even trapped him and tried to explode on him like a suicide bomber! It was almost as if it would only be satisfied after he died.

This won't do. Should I just use the golden page to smash the entire lake? Zhang Xuan thought.

He had wanted to reserve the golden page for stronger opponents that he could very well encounter in the future, but it would all be futile if he were to lose his life to the lake. Given the current circumstances, he really didn't know what else he could do.

Gritting his teeth, he was just about to deploy the golden page he had just received when a thought flashed across his head.

"The Lucid Lunar Lake reacts explosively against those who didn't possess the Qi Clan's bloodline. Even though I don't have the Qi Clan's bloodline, I should be able to disguise

myself as having one through the disguise amulet Ruoxin has given me. Would that stop the aggression of the lake?”

Back then, he had used the disguise amulet to take on the persona of Luo Tianya, and he was even able to dupe artifacts that assessed one’s bloodline. Perhaps, it might just work here as well.

Knowing that time waited for no one, he immediately changed the aura of his spirit and zhenqi as soon as the thought emerged in his head.

In the blink of an eye, his presence became rather similar to that of Qi Yue and the middle-aged man from before. The aura of the Qi Clan’s bloodline suffused from his presence.

Weng!

As soon as he began to disguise himself, the rumbling lakewater began to gradually calm down a little, and the violent energies crashing into him reduced significantly. It seemed like his identity was being recognized.

“It worked...” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief as he wiped the cold sweat off his head.

He wasn’t too sure about how effective disguising his bloodline would be, but it was great that it worked out in the end.

And now that he was finally out of danger, the notion of leaving the Lucid Lunar Lake also slipped from his mind as well.

He began to absorb the energies surging in from the water, and the cells in his body began on an endless cycle of breaking down and reconstructing themselves, becoming more resilient and powerful.

“The rate at which my body is getting tempered is amazing!”

Zhang Xuan could feel himself evolving with every breath that he took. His slightly apprehensive eyes began to light up in anticipation.

At the rate he was going, he should be able to push his physical body to a level surpassing that of ordinary Celestial

Gods in less than ten minutes!

It was no wonder why the Lucid Lunar Lake was so highly-acclaimed for its ability to temper one's body.

High risk high reward. Even though he had nearly lost his life back then, he felt that the result was worth the danger. Otherwise, he would probably have to spend many days figuring how he could strengthen his body.

Low-tier Celestial God realm primary stage!

Low-tier Celestial God realm intermediate stage!

He reached low-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle in the blink of an eye, but his physical body was still growing stronger by the moment. Vaguely, a golden glow emerged from the depths of his muscles, forming a bridge that enhanced the compactness of his body.

Even though he had no idea what it was, its existence felt incredibly natural to him. The golden glow allowed him to channel his physical strength wherever he wanted, granting him far greater fighting prowess than before,

“Brother, I really can't accept this!”

As soon as they returned back to their rooms, Qi Xun-er shattered all of the flower pots and tea set in the room to vent her anger.

After all of the preparations she had made to seal Qi Ling-er's fate, she would have never thought that the situation would bite back at her.

“There's no point losing your temper now. In the end, it's all because you don't understand Qi Ling-er as well as you think you did. Treat it as an expensive lesson and never underestimate your opponents ever again,” Qi Yue said with a wave of his hand.

The main reason why everything turned out the way it did was because Qi Xun-er was unable to gauge Qi Ling-er's capability accurately.

If only she had done some investigation beforehand, she could have found out about Qi Ling-er's newfound abilities and

prepared better against it.

“I know. I understand all of that, but I just feel so indignant inside!” Qi Xun-er exclaimed.

She had to take a few deep breaths before she finally calmed down a little.

“I grew up with her, so I knew the extent of her capabilities very well. There must be something more to the growth of her talent. The Beauty Pill, is it? Hmph! I’ll investigate it right now to see who is the one forging that stuff!”

As the person who was managing the Lucid Lunar Market before it was passed on to Qi Ling-er, Qi Xun-er was no mediocre character as well.

“Un. Other than that, you need to look into the person that was following her earlier too. I recall that his name is Zhang Xuan,” Qi Yue said.

“Brother, are you suspecting that fellow is her backer?” Qi Xun-er asked doubtfully. “But he looks ordinary!”

Qi Yue shook his head and replied, “In terms of cultivation, he’s only a low-tier Celestial God. From that aspect, he does appear to be no more than an ordinary cultivator. However, he is simply too composed. Even I would feel my soul shuddering a little when I am standing before the clan head, but that fellow was able to remain perfectly calm. I felt no hint of anxiety or nervousness from his soul. There might be more to him that we think!”

“This...” Hearing her brother’s words, Qi Xun-er quickly recalled what had happened earlier, and looking at the matter from her brother’s perspective, it did seem weird for the young man to act in such a manner.

“You’re right. He seems too composed for someone of his strength, and I realized that... he’s quite a hottie too!”

Qi Yue’s eyebrows twitched violently upon hearing those words.

“Alright, let’s not discuss that anymore. None of that is any of our business at the moment. The important thing at hand is to

raise our cultivation as quickly as we can. She has already become a Celestial God, so if you don't double your effort, you might lose your standing before the clan head very soon."

"I get it..." Qi Xun-er replied with a deep sigh.

Just as she was about to continue speaking, the ground suddenly started trembling. The spiritual energy in the air suddenly began surging swiftly in a certain direction, as if something major was happening.

Hu!

Qi Yue stood up and swiftly discerned the direction in which the spiritual energy was moving toward, "It's the Lucid Lunar Lake. Let's go!"

Without waiting for Qi Xun-er, he immediately rushed out of the room.

The place where they resided wasn't too far away from the lake. Moving at their top speeds, it took him only a few breaths to arrive at the destination. There, he saw a young man standing in the middle of the pool while Qi Ling-er sat on the shore, looking at her surroundings uneasily.

"Qi Ling-er actually allowed an outsider to enter the Lucid Lunar Lake? Hahahaha! She has really courted her own doom this time around!"

At this moment, Qi Xun-er also arrived at the scene. Seeing the same thing in front of her, her eyes lit up in agitation.

It just happened that she was looking for a way to curb the rising Qi Ling-er when such a thing happened. The act of allowing an outsider into the Lucid Lunar Lake was a huge infringement of the Qi Clan's rules. No matter how highly the clan head valued Qi Ling-er, she would still be severely punished for this act.

Wuuuuuuu!

Just as Qi Xun-er's heart was thumping in excitement at the fate that would soon befall Qi Ling-er, many gusts of wind suddenly echoed in the air. Following that, the clan head and

many high-tier Celestial God realm elders arrived by the Lucid Lunar Lake as well.

When they saw the sight before them, their faces immediately turned livid.

The Lucid Lunar Lake was one of the most important resources to the Qi Clan. While there was no rule preventing outsiders from observing it, outsiders were strictly prohibited from entering the premises.

Yet, not only had an outsider entered the waters this time around, he even created such a huge commotion in it, leaving the lake on the verge of explosion. This was unforgivable!

“What is going on here?” the clan head harrumphed furiously.

He had barely returned back to his accommodations and was preparing to study the Beauty Pill carefully when he suddenly felt a disturbance in the spiritual energy around him. So, he rushed over as quickly as he could.

“Clan head, Qi Ling-er has allowed an outsider to enter the Lucid Lunar Lake!”

Knowing that this was a golden opportunity to do her archnemesis in, Qi Xun-er hurriedly stepped forward and reported with a clasped fist.

The clan head looked over and saw a young man standing in the middle of the lake with his eyes tightly sealed. It seemed like he was struggling to fend off the violent energies colliding into him within the water.

“Preposterous!”

Seeing that an outsider was really trying to cultivate inside their Lucid Lunar Lake, the clan head immediately blew his top, “Qi Ling-er has really allowed her pride to get to her! Men, arrest her and send her to the Punishment Bureau! She is to be punished for revealing the clan’s secrets and colluding with outsiders. There’s no need to interrogate her. She will be stripped of her identity as a core member right away!”

It was just a moment ago that he felt that Qi Ling-er had some potential, but in the next moment, she actually dared to pull

something like this off. She was really courting her own death!

“Yes!”

Excited, Qi Xun-er volunteered herself and walked right up to Qi Ling-er.

It was only upon hearing the footsteps did Qi Ling-er notice the crowd, and her face immediately paled from fright.

She quickly kneeled onto the floor.

“Hehe, Qi Ling-er. I didn’t think that you would be so eager to die that you would plan your own downfall in such a spectacular manner!”

Qi Xun-er was just thinking about how she could return the favor to Qi Ling-er, but who could have thought that the latter would do something like this right after?

With a derisive chuckle, Qi Xun-er was just about to make her move to apprehend Qi Ling-er when she suddenly felt an overwhelming power descending from the sky.

Raising her head, she saw an elder descending to the ground. His aura was so powerful that it caused the space around him to waver.

This elder had a clean white beard, and he was dressed in simple clothes. Despite so, the sharp and regal gaze he used to assess everything around him gave him an air of authority that surpassed that of the clan head.

“Paying respects to the old ancestor!” Qi Xun-er immediately kneeled down and paid her respects. The others, including the clan head, swiftly did the same as well.

The elder was no other than the strongest person in the Qi Clan, Conferred God King Qi Meng!

“What happened?” Qi Meng’s gaze eventually fell on Qi Xun-er as he asked.

“Old ancestor, an outsider has snuck into our Lucid Lunar Lake. I was just about to arrest him...” Qi Xun-er replied anxiously.

If even the old ancestor was getting involved in this matter, Qi Ling-er was definitely doomed. No one would be able to save her.

“An outsider?”

Qi Meng slowly turned his gaze to the lake, and in the next instant, his eyes narrowed in astonishment. He quickly kneeled to the ground, and with a quivering voice, he spoke, “Conferred God King Qi Meng of the Sky of Drifting Specters pays respects to...

“... God Monarch!”

2157 Spirit God!

As the lake was shrouded in a thick layer of mist formed by the condensation of spiritual energy, it was impossible to see his appearance or silhouette clearly. Nevertheless, Qi Meng was still able to feel a pressure that pierced right into his soul.

It was a feeling so deeply etched into him that he could not get rid of it no matter what he did.

It was the absolute power of a God Monarch.

The only ones who could leave a Conferred God King like him feeling like that were the Ten God Monarchs. There was no way he could possibly perceive it wrongly.

He had no idea which of the ten God Monarchs was in the lake, but one thing was clear. If the Qi Clan wished to continue existing in the world, it would be wise not to offend the other party.

For this reason, he kneeled down without much hesitation.

“God Monarch?”

Those words were not spoken too loudly, but they resonated in the ears of those present like thunder. The head of the Qi Clan and the elders quickly lowered their heads fearfully, not daring to look up at all.

The Qi Clan was possibly the most formidable power in Drifting Specter Royal City, but it was still no match for the God Monarchs. A mere thought was all it would take for a God Monarch to obliterate them from the face of the world.

They were not even living on the same plane of existence.

Padah!

Qi Xun-er was unable to cope with the shock. Her knees caved, and she tumbled onto the ground.

She had thought that she had found the ideal opportunity to get rid of Qi Ling-er once and for all, but who could have thought

that the person who entered the Lucid Lunar Lake would actually be a real-life God Monarch?

Even Conferred God Kings would not dare to say anything excessive in the face of a God Monarch. In fact, it could be considered an honor for the Qi Clan to have been graced by a God Monarch's presence.

Finding it hard to believe the situation, Qi Xun-er secretly peeked at the lake. Through the thick veil of spiritual energy mist, she was still able to roughly make out the silhouette in the water.

It was none other than Zhang Xuan!

Was he the God Monarch?

Qi Xun-er's eyes widened with fright, and her heart beat so quickly that she found herself unable to breathe.

She had even said that the other party was ordinary a moment ago! If the other party was truly ordinary, what was she?

Why would Qi Ling-er, a person who had been demoted to the remote Twilight City, be related to a God Monarch?

Furthermore, she was even able to invite the God Monarch to grace the Qi Clan.

God Monarch?

While everyone was shocked speechless, Zhang Xuan, who was cultivating at the middle of the lake, was also stupefied by what he had just heard.

Did he recognize the wrong person?

The elder who had just appeared had a presence that harmonized with the heavens. The pressure that he exerted was so powerful that it was a struggle just to face him.

Such a powerful person was calling him 'God Monarch'...

Did Conferred God Kings suffer from bad eyesight or something?

Nevertheless, this was a good opportunity for him to resolve the current situation. So, Zhang Xuan lowered his voice to a

very deep level and said, “I don’t like being disturbed by others.”

This misunderstanding worked in his favor. At the very least, he would not be blamed for secretly using the Lucid Lunar Lake.

Otherwise, given the limitations of his current strength, he could only use the golden page to smash the Conferred God King before him to death.

Hearing the will of the God Monarch, Old Ancestor Qi Meng immediately gestured for the crowd that had gathered around to leave. In fact, fearing that the other clan members might just stumble into the vicinity and disturb the God Monarch, he even went to the extent of creating a formation to seal off the surroundings.

“I...” Qi Ling-er was at a complete loss. She had no idea what was happening, and she had no idea what she should do.

While she had allowed Young Master Zhang to enter the Lucid Lunar Lake, she had expected him to come out quickly after realizing that he was unable to cultivate. She had never expected such a huge commotion to arise, drawing even the attention of the clan head and the old ancestor.

When they appeared before her, she thought that it was the end of her... but the turnaround came equally fast!

God Monarch...

All along, she had thought that Zhang Xuan only possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch, but who could have known that he was a God Monarch himself?

And she had traded with him and tried to earn his money...

Her body trembled uncontrollably as she could not help but doubt her sanity.

“Come out! Don’t disturb the God Monarch’s peace!” Qi Meng ordered with a frown.

Yes!”

Hearing the command from the old ancestor, Qi Ling-er hurriedly walked away from the Lucid Lunar Lake.

The group followed Qi Meng all the way to the main hall, where the latter quickly set up many formations. Then, Qi Meng looked at the crowd. “Explain what happened.”

He was completely taken aback to see a God Monarch standing within the Lucid Lunar Lake.

“It’s like this...”

The clan head stepped forward and explained everything that had happened with Qi Ling-er earlier.

“You are the one who brought him here?” Qi Meng turned to Qi Ling-er.

“Old ancestor, I only knew that he possesses the bloodline of a God Monarch. I didn’t know that he was a God Monarch himself,” Qi Ling-er replied apprehensively.

“He possesses the bloodline of a God Monarch?”

The crowd were taken aback by that news.

The clan head turned his head to her and gestured for her to explain her words.

So, Qi Ling-er swiftly filled them in on what she had seen at the Netherworld Pool.

“The God Monarchs are able to alter their forms freely,” Qi Meng said with a nod. “They often conceal their cultivation so as to experience the life of an ordinary person... I heard that the God Monarch of the Sky of Freedom suppressed their cultivation to visit the lower worlds once.

Your ability to see through his disguise, accurately assess the situation, and come up with the best response is not bad. I can see that you are a smart person. From today onward, I’ll have Qi Xiao entrust you with more important work and bestow you with the best cultivation resources. As someone who is working with the God Monarch, it wouldn’t do for your identity to be too shabby.”

Qi Xiao was the name of the clan head.

“Thank you, old ancestor!” Qi Ling-er bowed down and kowtowed deeply. She felt a little light on her feet, as if she had been dreaming all this while. She could hardly believe that such a thing was really happening to her.

“I believe all of you should understand what can and cannot be said. Anything that concerns the privacy of a God Monarch is a taboo in the Firmament. If I hear anyone running their mouth, no matter who it is, don’t expect me to show any mercy!” Qi Meng ordered.

“Yes, old ancestor!”

The crowd trembled a little at Qi Meng’s threats.

At the very back of the hall, Qi Xun-er was trying her best to hold back her tears.

If only she had known that the young man had such an incredible identity, she never would have stepped forward and run her mouth. Given what she had done, even if the Qi Clan did not punish her for this, she would definitely be sidelined in the future.

Even her older brother would not be able to save her from this. After all, between a God Monarch and a God King, even a fool would know which side to choose!

“Forget it!”

Zhang Xuan felt both a little astounded and confused, but he could not care that much anymore. It was not as if anything would happen just by him caring about it.

So, he closed his eyes and continued cultivating.

Surges of pure spiritual energy flowed into his body, causing it to continuously evolve.

Hu!

Some time later, his cultivation came to a halt. He found that he was unable to raise his physical body cultivation any further than that.

“High-tier Celestial God pinnacle...”

Perceiving the strength and resilience of his tempered body, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

He had entered the Lucid Lunar Lake in hopes of raising his physical body to middle-tier Celestial God at the very least, but who would have thought that he would be able to raise it all the way to high-tier Celestial God? In fact, he was not too far from reaching God King.

With his current body, he would be invincible against any opponents beneath God King in close-quarter battles. This meant that he was finally approaching the top echelons of the Firmament.

It was at this point that the energies of the Lucid Lunar Lake finally became ineffective on him. No matter how much he absorbed beyond this point, it did not make a difference to his body.

“But what are those golden lines?” Zhang Xuan murmured doubtfully as he assessed the internal state of his body.

For some reason, innumerable thin, golden strands had appeared within his muscles all over his body. They did not seem to harness any particular power, but they felt unfaltering.

It felt as if they were charged with an unending supply of vitality.

Nevertheless, knowing that this was not a good time to study the changes with his body, he leaped out of the lake.

Tzzzzz!

Through his zhenqi, he was able to swiftly evaporate the water that was on his drenched clothes. When he turned back to look at the lake behind him, he saw that the bubbling surface had already reverted to its initial calm state.

A few moments later, a slight ripple appeared in the water, and a little yellow chick swam to shore.

You’re fine as well,” Zhang Xuan murmured.

He knew that the little yellow chick had the ability to revive from ashes ever since the last time Kong shi’s clone killed it.

So, he was not too surprised to see the little yellow chick alive and kicking.

“Your cultivation...”

Watching as it swam over, Zhang Xuan’s mouth fell agape.

Just a moment ago, the little yellow chick had only been a low-tier God, but at this very moment, he could sense the aura of a Celestial God coming from it. Its earlier death in the lake had allowed it to catch up with him, becoming a Celestial God too!

He had put in so much effort and put his life on the line just to become a Celestial God, but all it took the little yellow chick was one death...

Darn it! It felt really frustrating losing to a chick like that!

“I’m going to rest for a bit,” the slightly exhausted little yellow chick said wearily before diving into his dantian.

“Rest well,” Zhang Xuan replied.

He knew that it was normal for it to get extremely exhausted after its breakthrough, so he did not pay that matter much heed. Instead, he looked at the main hall not too far away with a complicated look on his face, and after a moment of hesitation, he finally began making his way over.

He had no idea why the Conferred God King mistook him for someone else, but it was only a matter of time before he would have to face the other party.

So, he walked out of the seal, and the next moment, Old Ancestor Qi Meng and Clan Head Qi Xiao, who seemed to have been waiting outside for him, immediately walked over to greet him.

“Paying respects to the God Monarch!”

Old Ancestor Qi Meng kneeled down and bowed formally before discreetly glancing at the young man before him. What he saw left him nodding in wonderment.

Earlier, he had been able to clearly perceive the overwhelming pressure of the bloodline of a God Monarch from the lake, but

at this very moment, the pressure had disappeared completely. The young man before him seemed no different from an ordinary person, such that he would not have been able to tell that the other party was a God Monarch either.

As expected of a God Monarch.

He was able to control his powers to such a fine degree that no one was able to see through his disguise.

“I have used your Lucid Lunar Lake. As repayment, I’ll offer you some pointers.”

Zhang Xuan was glad to see that the Conferred God King still carried the same misunderstanding, and he heaved a sigh of relief on the inside.

Even though he did not break the Lucid Lunar Lake, he did sap a substantial amount of energy from it for his breakthrough. As a master teacher, it would not be right for him to walk away without offering anything in return.

“This...”

Old Ancestor Qi Meng’s first reaction was to turn down the God Monarch’s offer. After all, this was an invaluable opportunity for them to strike up a relationship with the latter.

But on second thought, he realized that there was no way a God Monarch would allow himself to owe anything to anyone, and his heart sank a little.

So, he turned to Clan head Qi Xiao and said, “Show the God Monarch your skills.”

On the other hand, hearing that Old Ancestor Qi Meng was giving this precious opportunity to him, Clan Head Qi Xiao excitedly got to his feet

Hu hu hu!

He demonstrated the battle technique from earlier on. He had already grasped the crux of the battle technique when Qi Ling-er executed it before him.

It was only at this moment that he realized why the battle technique Qi Ling-er had executed was devoid of any flaws.

After all, how could anything that had come out from the hands of a God Monarch possibly be flawed?

“There aren’t any major problems with your cultivation. The only issue is your internal injuries. They have limited your strength, preventing you from reaching greater heights,” Zhang Xuan replied with a slow but authoritative voice.

He was able to see through the flaws of a God King through the Library of Heaven’s Path.

He elaborated more on the internal injuries that Qi Xiao was facing and pointed out a general direction for him to work toward. With that, he had compensated the Qi Clan for the use of the Lucid Lunar Lake.

“I don’t have any other business here. I’ll be leaving.”

As Zhang Xuan said those words, he turned around and began walking out of the main hall.

“Qi Ling-er, escort the God Monarch!” Old Ancestor Qi Meng quickly ordered.

Qi Ling-er immediately shot to her feet and walked behind Zhang Xuan subserviently.

After Zhang Xuan’s departure, the atmosphere in the room immediately lightened as everyone subconsciously heaved a sigh of relief.

There was a slight moment of silence as everyone adjusted their tense state of mind back to normal before Clan Head Qi Xiao turned to the Old Ancestor Qi Meng and said doubtfully, “Old ancestor, the things that the God Monarch spoke about are all the flaws in my cultivation. He didn’t give me any pointers as to what I should do...”

The words of the God Monarch did give him a deeper understanding of the problems he was facing, but he still was not too sure how he could go around solving them.

Old Ancestor Qi Meng harrumphed. “This is a test from the God Monarch. He pointed out your flaws so that you could work hard and think of ways to resolve them. If he helped you rectify your flaws as well, wouldn’t that make you his direct

disciple? Do you think that you are worthy of becoming the direct disciple of a God Monarch?"

"O-of course not! It was too greedy..." A shudder ran down Clan Head Qi Xiao's spine as he quickly waved his hands.

"Un." Old Ancestor Qi Meng nodded before falling silent.

Hearing the advice that the young man gave Qi Xiao had dissipated all the lingering doubts in his mind.

Only the keen eyes of a God Monarch would have been able to see through the flaws that even he had missed.

"Old Ancestor, may I know which of the Ten God Emperors he is?" Clan Head Qi Xiao asked curiously.

"I've had the honor of meeting a few of the God Monarchs, so I have a rough idea who that God Monarch is. If I'm not mistaken, he should be...

"... the Spirit God!"

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“The Spirit God?” Clan Head Qi Xiao narrowed his eyes.

“You are referring to that...”

“Yes, I am indeed referring to that person. However... Forget it, it’s beyond us to fathom the affairs surrounding the God Monarchs. It’s good enough for us to know about it, but make sure not to speak it out loud. Otherwise, our entire clan might get into deep trouble,” Old Ancestor Qi Meng advised.

“I understand, old ancestor.” Clan Head Qi Xiao quickly nodded in response.

“You may leave now.”

The crowd respectfully backed out of the main hall before going on their own ways.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan flew all the way back to his residence and returned to his room. Then, he finally heaved a huge sigh of relief as the tension escaped from his shoulders.

That was a close one.

He had thought that he would just temper his physical body discreetly; he did not think that it would cause such a huge commotion, drawing out even Conferred God King Qi Meng.

But why would Old Ancestor Qi Meng think that I’m a God Monarch?

It was hard to imagine that a Conferred God King would make such a grave mistake on something as important as this. It simply did not make sense!

Of course, there was no way he could ask the person in question about this.

It was for the same reason that he did not ask the other party about the Spirit God even though he was certain that a Conferred God King like him would be aware of it.

He knew that he would compromise his identity as a 'God Monarch' if he asked such a question. It would simply raise the other party's suspicion.

Forget it. Even though I wasn't able to gather the information I want, at least the trip was rather fruitful. I was able to temper my body, and Qi Ling-er managed to reinforce her standing in the Qi Clan. With her new standing, she should be able to gather essential information more easily now, Zhang Xuan thought with a smile.

His zhenqi cultivation was still at low-tier Celestial God, but the tempering of the Lucid Lunar Lake had made his body on par with the strongest Celestial God-tier weapons. In other words, even if he allowed a high-tier Celestial God to freely attack him, it was likely that the other party still would not be able to hurt him.

Furthermore, based on the pulsating vitality from the golden strands in his muscles, he had a feeling that he would be able to swiftly recover from any injuries.

To test that out, he took out a weapon and swung it at his own arm.

Kacha!

The sword shattered into numerous fragments, but the impact did not leave even the slightest mark on his wrist.

I reckon that it'll take a God King-tier weapon at the very minimum in order to hurt me...

He had hoped to injure himself slightly in order to test if his guess was right, but he did not have any weapons that could do that. This sure was troublesome.

That reminds me. It's about time for me to find a better weapon to use...

Due to the swift advancement in his cultivation, the rate at which he had to change weapons was getting faster and faster. However, weapons were usually one of the more expensive commodities, and God King-tier artifacts were definitely not readily available on the market.

Forget it! My cultivation should come first. Since I have managed to temper my physical body, next up is my soul cultivation!

In the end, weapons were just good to have. What was more important was his own cultivation.

If he could become a God King, he would have a lot more say in the Firmament. It would increase his chances of finding Luo Ruoxin, and he might even be able to speak to Kong shi as an equal.

After sorting out his thoughts, Zhang Xuan walked out of his room, and he found the Silver Armored General, Zhuo Feng, waiting for him outside.

The latter walked up to him with an apologetic look on his face and said, “Zhang shi, my apologies. I tried making a request with the Qi Clan, but the Lucid Lunar Lake is simply not open to outsiders. I’m afraid that there’s no way around it...”

“Thank you for your help, but there’s no need for that anymore,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

Feeling that Zhang Xuan was just saying those words so that he would not feel bad, Zhuo Feng’s face reddened in embarrassment.

He was the one who had told Zhang Xuan about the Lucid Lunar Lake, and he had tried to pull all of his connections in hopes of securing an opportunity to enter the Lucid Lunar Lake for Zhang Xuan so as to repay the latter for the favor of saving his son. Yet, despite trying everything, the Qi Clan simply would not change their mind on this matter.

“Zhang shi, you really are a kind person. You have done so much for my family, but I can’t even help you on a matter as simple as this. I feel deeply ashamed by my incompetence...”
Zhuo Feng lowered his head in shame.

He flicked his wrist, took out a jade bottle, and passed it over. “This is the Body Tempering Pill that I have prepared for you. Even though its effects are inferior to those of the Lucid Lunar Lake, I believe that it should still be of some help to you...”

“There’s really no need for that!” Zhang Xuan chuckled softly. “To be honest with you, I have just been to the Lucid Lunar Lake, and I am already done cultivating in there.”

You have been to the Lucid Lunar Lake?” Zhuo Feng was struck dumb by those words.

He had approached quite a few people over the past few hours, and he had even asked an elder of the Qi Clan whom he was closer to. Based on what the other party had said, the Lucid Lunar Lake was so potent that it would kill anyone who was not an offspring of the Qi Clan in a heartbeat.

Furthermore, the Qi Clan had paid a heavy price to build it, so there was no way they would allow outsiders to enjoy the privileges of using it.

Yet, the young man said that he had just been there and was done cultivating in there...

Was this for real?

Did the young man not just learn of the Lucid Lunar Lake from him? Furthermore, he was a newcomer to the Royal City and did not know anyone, right?

“If you don’t believe me, you can try to stab me with your full strength,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

Zhuo Feng was slightly taken aback by those words, but looking at the serious look on the young man’s face, he realized that the latter was really not kidding.

So, he whipped out his sword and stabbed at Zhang Xuan.

He devoted his full strength to this strike, just as Zhang Xuan had said. A sword imbued with sword qi flew forth and struck Zhang Xuan’s arm.

Kacha!

Yet, it was the middle-tier Celestial God sword in Zhuo Feng’s hand that ended up shattering. In contrast, there was not the slightest harm to be seen on his body.

“This...” Zhuo Feng’s lips twitched in horror.

It was just a few hours ago that Zhang Shi had just become a Celestial God. Yet, within this short period of time, he had not only found a way to enter the Lucid Lunar Lake, he had even managed to temper his physical body to such a level.

Such terrifying speed... Was he a demon?

Furthermore, even high-tier Celestial Gods did not have bodies that were powerful enough to shatter middle-tier Celestial God artifacts!

“What a pity...”

Seeing how the middle-tier Celestial God artifact did not leave a scratch on him either, Zhang Xuan shook his head in pity.

Why was it so hard for him to just injure himself and test out the effects of the golden strands in his muscles? It was no wonder they said being invincible was no fun!

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan turned his attention to the next matter at hand. “Do you know of any place where I can raise my soul cultivation quickly?”

The other party had provided him with accurate news on where he could temper his physical body. The other party might be able to offer invaluable advice for his soul cultivation as well.

He needed to raise his soul cultivation first before he could raise his zhenqi cultivation.

“I don’t really know much about how the other skies do it, but in the Sky of Drifting Specter, the only way to raise one’s soul cultivation is through the Netherworld Pool!” Zhuo Feng replied.

The Netherworld Pool? Are you referring to the place where the Anima of Yearning gathers?”

Yes. The Anima of Yearning can nourish the soul of the dead and allow them to come back to life. The same applies to the souls of the living. Most cultivators rely on the Netherworld Pool to raise their soul cultivation. Putting everything aside, our God Monarch recently found a powerful soul within the Netherworld Pool and nurtured it. Within less than a month, it

has already become on par with God Kings!” Zhuo Feng revealed the news that he had heard.

“It has become on par with God Kings in less than a month?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

It had been almost a month since he had come to the Firmament, but he had only managed to become a low-tier Celestial God within this period. To think that there would be someone even faster than him...

The Firmament sure was filled with hidden experts!

“I heard that the person wasn’t even a god at the very start. He was just a wisp of a soul from the lower worlds, but for some reason, he was accepted by the Netherworld Pool and brought here. His tenacity to survive led him to devour the Anima of Yearning around him, and it was that which caught our God Monarch’s attention. According to what I have heard, it seems like our God Monarch is currently trying to forge a body for him!”

“That soul came from the lower worlds?” Zhang Xuan muttered with clenched fists as a thought arose in his head.

Could it be Qiqi?

According to what Luo Xuanqiang had said, Luo Qiqi was the spirit inside the Dimension Silencer. After breaking the dimension barrier of the Master Teacher Continent, she had not returned again.

He had ordered the Six Sects in the Azure to search for her, but there was no sign of her to be found. It was then that he wondered if Luo Qiqi had entered the Firmament as well.

Furthermore, the soul had appeared a month ago, which coincidentally fitted the time period in which Luo Qiqi departed from the Master Teacher Continent.

Thus, he immediately pressed on and asked, “Do you know whether the soul taken in by the Netherworld Pool is a male or a female, and what do they look like?”

“How would I know that? I only heard the news while I was asking about the Lucid Lunar Lake!” Zhuo Feng replied.

His standing was comparatively higher than that of most people as a Silver Armored General. Nevertheless, he was still not privy to the confidential secrets that concerned the God Monarchs.

At most, he would only hear rumors here and there.

“Then, do you know which Netherworld Pool the soul is in?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“I suppose the soul should be in the Netherworld Pool in the God Monarch’s royal palace since the God Monarch was going to forge a body for them. If that’s not the case, I don’t really know where else the soul could be,” Zhuo Feng said.

“I see...”

Fearing that it would appear too suspicious if he was too curious about the matter, Zhang Xuan simply nodded contemplatively.

It was not easy for someone of the lower world to enter the Firmament, and the last known person to do so before him and his direct disciples was Kong shi. Given so, the odds were very likely that the soul was Luo Qiqi.

He did not have many romantic feelings for Luo Qiqi, but he still cared for her as his student. Furthermore, the latter had done many things for him, and he owed her a lot. So, he was determined to find her no matter the price.

You mentioned that the Netherworld Pool can temper one’s soul. Is it a place where anyone can go, or does it require a kind of special application?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

No matter whether the other party was Luo Qiqi or not, since she was already on par with the God Kings, it was unlikely that she was in any danger. What was more important for him was to quickly raise his cultivation so that he would not become a burden.

Otherwds, it would be really awkward if he was too weak when they met once more.

“There’s no need to go through any procedures or pay any money in order to access the Netherworld Pool. However, you

need to have considerable fame, such that people know of your existence,” Zhuo Feng said.

“Fame?”

“Conferred God Kings are more powerful than ordinary God Kings due to their conferred titles and their fiefs, thus allowing them to gather more Anima of Yearning. If ordinary cultivators wished to use the Anima of Yearning, they first have to leave their Soul Imprint in the Netherworld Pool and make more people remember or be thankful to them. That’s the only way to generate a steady stream of Anima of Yearning to nourish the soul and advance one’s soul cultivation quickly,” Zhuo Feng explained.

“So, what you mean is that I’ll have to build up my reputation. Based on the number of people who know about me and the degree of gratitude they have toward me, I’ll gain a corresponding amount of Anima of Yearning within the Netherworld Pool, and this will be the key to nourishing my soul, right?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“That’s how it works theoretically. However, the nature of the sentiments that people have toward you matters as well. You can still gather Anima of Yearning if people feel ill will toward you, but the Anima of Yearning will be filled with something that can induce inner demons within you. It’s not worth absorbing something like that,” Zhuo Feng said.

“This is why every city is so concerned about the rules, and experts don’t kill others indiscriminately. They are fearful that it might affect their soul cultivation.”

These words really enlightened Zhang Xuan.

It seemed like the Anima of Yearning was an indispensable force in the Firmament.

In order to become a known celebrity, build up a good reputation, and earn the gratitude of others... It’s finally time for me to start flexing.

Er... that was not right. I am unlike that braggart of my clone... What I am going to do is official business!

2159 Is It Time to Put on a Huge Show?

But what should he do?

What would be the best way for everyone to think well of him without sticking out like a sore thumb?

He was currently in Drifting Specter Royal City. It was a place filled with experts.

Even though he had grown much stronger after soaking in the Lucid Lunar Lake, he was not so arrogant as to think that he was already invincible.

Putting everything aside, it might be hard for him to defeat Qi Yue in a proper battle.

Achieving a breakthrough in one's zhenqi cultivation was wholly different from making a breakthrough with one's physical body.

The latter allowed him to become nigh invincible in close-quarter battles, but once the opponent realized his weakness and kept his distance, he would be in grave danger. Not only would he have trouble attacking, he would have difficulty trying to defend himself.

The ability of Celestial Gods to tap into the power of nature should not be underestimated.

For this reason, while trying to earn the recognition of others to gather the Anima of Yearning, he had to make sure not to go overboard. Otherwise, he might draw unwanted attention, and that would only lead to endless trouble in the future.

Zhang Xuan turned to Zhuo Feng and asked, "What do you recommend I do?"

It had not been long since he arrived in the Firmament, so he was not familiar with how things worked there. In contrast,

there should be many cultivators who had tried all sorts of ways to gather the Anima of Yearning in the past.

It would be much safer to follow their footsteps than to come up with something on his own.

“Well, the fastest way to generate Anima of Yearning is to challenge the God Monarchs directly. That’s how the Heaven Subjugation Monarch came to prominence. Once you succeed, your name will spread far and wide around the Firmament, and you’ll receive an endless supply of Anima of Yearning!” Zhuo Feng replied.

You are joking, right?” Zhang Xuan asked with widened eyes.

If he did that, he would probably die in a heartbeat!

He might have never met a God Monarch before, but he had just gotten a glimpse into the overwhelming power that a Conferred God King possessed. It would probably only take a mere finger for Qi Meng to crush him to death, let alone the stronger God Monarchs!

“Haha, it’s just an afterthought.” Zhuo Feng chuckled to himself.

He would not usually joke like this, but it seemed like he was a little too overjoyed at his son’s breakthrough, so he was not as careful as he usually was.

“The conventional way to obtain Anima of Yearning is to reach the top of an occupation, for example, blacksmith. As long as your weapons are powerful and useful, and cultivators view obtaining your weapon as a great honor, the amount of Anima of Yearning you earn will naturally increase correspondingly. The same goes for apothecaries. If your pills are effective yet inexpensive, it’s natural that people will be thankful to you,” Zhuo Feng explained.

“Pills?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up as a thought came to his mind.

He was unskilled in smithing, and it was no easy feat to mass produce weapons. However, when it came to pills... all it took was just a surge of his Heaven’s Path zhenqi!

As long as he could gather sufficient low-tier God Essence Pills, he could produce as many Beauty Pills as he wanted. Not only would it accentuate one's appearance, smoothening their skin and enhancing their disposition, more importantly, it could heal their internal traumas and clear their meridians, allowing them to overcome their bottleneck!

The only issue with that was... the price.

The Beauty Pill was currently priced quite exorbitantly, making it a commodity that most people could not afford.

If he sold them too cheaply, it would tear down the market that had just barely been built up. It would surely incur much dissatisfaction among those who had spent lots of money to buy them, and this was significant given that a God King of the Qi Clan had just made a bulk purchase.

“What kind of pills are cheap and accessible to all cultivators in Drifting Specter Royal City?” Zhang Xuan asked Zhuo Feng.

There was no need for him to rely on the Beauty Pill to make his name. He could infuse his Heaven's Path zhenqi in other stuff. Back when he was still on the Master Teacher Continent, he used to infuse his Heaven's Path zhenqi into vats of wine!

Zhuo Feng pondered for a moment before replying. “Well, the best-selling pill in Royal City is definitely the God Essence Tablet. It's basically a simplified version of the God Essence Pills, and you can buy around ten of them with a single Divine Coin. There are no restrictions on how many of them you can buy. Most cultivators usually bring dozens around with them as even though the effects are inferior to those of God Essence Pills, they can allow people to swiftly recover their strength in times of danger.”

“I guess that'll be it then!” Zhang Xuan nodded as his mind swiftly churned to formulate a feasible plan.

He needed something cheap and inexpensive for him to earn the gratitude of others.

Focusing on the higher-end market would only bring him more money. It would be difficult for him to earn the gratitude of

others quickly through that.

So, his current plan was to continue producing the Beauty Pills to win over the high-end aesthetic markets, and he would produce a counterpart to the God Essence Tablet in order to win over the ordinary cultivators. With that, he would make the cultivators of Drifting Specter Royal City go crazy over him!

Of course, he would have to make sure to control the amount of Heaven's Path zhenqi that he infused into each pill carefully.

Each Beauty Pill would have a surge of Heaven's Path zhenqi, and for each God Essence Tablet, he would probably just infuse a hundredth of that. This way, it would still be effective, but it would not be as obvious.

Otherwise, the market of the Beauty Pill would collapse.

Not only so, it would also cause a huge commotion. If one sold a highly effective pill at a low price, it would disrupt the markets. He might still be able to win people over, but at the same time, he would make enemies out of those in the pill business.

Some might even send assassins after him in hopes of learning the formula behind his pill so that they could copy him.

"Thank you!" Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

It was lucky that he had consulted Zhuo Feng about this matter, or else it would have taken him some effort to figure this out as an outsider.

"It's nothing at all. Zhang shi, if there's anything you need, feel free to tell me. I'll do my best to help you," Zhuo Feng explained.

"Ah, there is something that I'll really need to trouble you for. I need to acquire a huge amount of God Essence Tablets. If you are free, General Zhuo Feng, I would really be thankful if you could help me buy as many God Essence Tablets as you can," Zhang Xuan said.

"That's no trouble at all. Our military has connections with the suppliers, so I should be able to get them for you at a low

price,” Zhuo Feng replied with a chuckle.

That would be great!” Zhang Xuan nodded. “Help me get as much as you can, and I need them in seven days’ time. Money is not an issue.”

“Alright, leave it to me!”

Zhuo Feng had no idea what Zhang Xuan was up to, but he was glad to be of help to his son’s benefactor. He bade farewell and left the residence.

Right after Zhuo Feng left, Zhang Xuan called Qi Ling-er and Sun Qiang over. “I need you two to carry out something for me.”

“Young Master, feel free to relay your orders!” The two of them bowed deeply.

“Firstly, I need you to help me acquire at least ten thousand God Essence Pills. I’m intending to forge all of them into Beauty Pills and sell them. I need you to get it done within seven days.”

“I can handle that. Buying ten thousand God Essence Pills isn’t feasible in Twilight City, but here in Royal City, I should be able to bring them to you within half a day!” Qi Ling-er nodded. “As for selling them, while our clan head has said that he wants all of them, I doubt that the Qi Clan has the financial resources to buy ten thousand of them in one shot.

“That being said, with the influence I have from the Qi Clan, I should be able to sell at least half of them within seven days.”

Given her new position as the head of the Lucid Lunar Market, as well as the implicit backing of the old ancestor, she could tap into most of the resources in the Qi Clan for this. Even with the popularity of the Beauty Pills, selling ten thousand Beauty Pills was no easy feat due to the high price.

Nevertheless, as long as she laid the groundwork properly and built up sufficient momentum, she should be able to do it.

Of course, there was a great deal of work that she would have to do beforehand in preparation for that.

“Other than that, I need you to help me mass purchase jade bottles. They must be cheap but look decent. They must also be able to store medicine properly without allowing any spiritual energy to leak out. Similarly, I need as many of them as possible.

“Last but not least, I need you to tap into the influence of the Qi Clan to gather renowned figures and ordinary cultivators of Royal City together. I’m looking at a crowd of at least a hundred thousand people. At the same time, I also need a venue large enough to house all of them. I need you to get all of this done within seven days,” Zhang Xuan said.

If he wished to build a good reputation for himself in the shortest time possible, this was probably the way to go. He had to do it large and do it well.

And he would also need a decent-sized crowd in order to get the word out. It would be similar to what Qi Ling-er had done back in Twilight City. The effect would be the greatest if people could see it with their own eyes!

“I’ll start working on it right now,” Qi Ling-er said with a nod.

It would have been difficult for her to handle something of this scale in the past, but now that she had the full support of the clan head and the old ancestor, it was no exaggeration to say that there were no resources in the Qi Clan that she could not tap into. As long as she used what she had at her disposal well, it was not impossible to get everything done within seven days!

After receiving an affirmative response from Qi Ling-er, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze to Sun Qiang and instructed, “I’ll leave the second matter for you to handle. I need you to rent a hundred shops within the city. They don’t have to be too large, probably around ten to twenty square meters would do. Renovate them to make them look professional, and change their name to... Zhang Xuan’s Pills!”

“Zhang Xuan’s Pills?” Sun Qiang’s cheeks twitched a little.

It was not that he was trying to put down the young master, but was the name not a little too direct? It felt like a celebrity

wannabe desperately trying to plaster his name everywhere!

“This is the easiest way for me to get everyone to remember me. Most cultivators won’t remember the name of the apothecary who forged the pill they are eating. So, the only way for me to force them to make the association is to label all the stores under my name. This way, they will have no choice but to think of me each time they eat my pills!” Zhang Xuan explained with a smug smile.

He could do it in a more implicit and refined manner, but the effectiveness would be reduced. Sometimes, the simplest and most coarse method was the most effective.

Zhang Xuan’s Pills did sound a little awkward, but that was precisely what would help him spread his name all around town. Once everyone associated his name with the pills that he made, the Anima of Yearning would start rolling in!

More importantly, once he started making his name, it would only be a matter of time before Luo Ruoxin or Luo Qiqi heard about him. Perhaps they would come and look for him, which would be far easier than him searching around in vain for them.

“I’ll give you ten days to source and renovate those shops. Are you confident in getting it done?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“This...” Sun Qiang hesitated for a moment before gritting his teeth in determination. “I’ll definitely get it down somehow!”

To procure over a hundred stores and renovate them within ten days was definitely no easy feat. He would have to keep tabs on the progress of each of the stores in order to ensure that they would be ready by the tenth day. However, as long as the cost was not an issue, it should still be possible to get it done if he could find a good intermediary to work with.

“Good. Time is tight, so you should start getting to work,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Yes!” Qi Ling-er and Sun Qiang quickly walked out of the room to start on their work.

Once I gain enough fame, I’ll have a steady supply of Anima of Yearning... What I have to do now is leave my Soul Imprint

in the Netherworld Pool. The Netherworld Pool of the Qiankun Demon Monarch is probably out of access to me, but I can try dropping by Drifting Specter Royal City's Netherworld Pool, Zhang Xuan thought as he rose to his feet.

Naturally, he also had things to do.

What he had to do first was leave his Soul Imprint in the Netherworld Pool, or else he would not be able to gather Anima of Yearning even after he had spread his name.

He had learned quite a bit about the various places in Drifting Specter Royal City through the books in the Master Teacher Pavilion, so he knew his way around. Since he had time at the moment, it was best to get it done now lest he forgot about it in the future.

So, he left his residence and headed toward the Netherworld Palace.

Four hours later, a magnificent palace appeared in his line of sight.

“Outsiders aren't allowed to enter the Netherworld Palace! What business do you have here?”

As soon as Zhang Xuan walked up to the entrance, the two guards on duty immediately raised their spears to block his passageway.

“I wish to make a trip to the Netherworld Pool,” Zhang Xuan replied.

You wish to visit the Netherworld Pool? Do you have a reservation? Are you meeting someone?” a guard asked with a frown.

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“I’m not visiting anyone. I wish to leave my Soul Imprint in the Netherworld Pool in order to gather Anima of Yearning,” Zhang Xuan replied.

The guard was a little perplexed to hear those words, and he said, “Not everyone has the power to withstand the Anima of Yearning, and those who haven’t made any contributions to the Sky of Drifting Specter are unlikely to earn any Anima of Yearning. However, if you really wish to do it, the Netherworld Palace has no reason to stop you. That being said, you’ll have to pay a fee of 10,000 Divine Coins for that.”

“10,000 Divine Coins?” Zhang Xuan nodded. “Alright.”

Qi Ling-er had passed everything that the clan head of the Qi Clan sent her earlier over to him. To most cultivators, 10,000 Divine Coins was probably their entire family fortune, but to Zhang Xuan, it was an easily affordable sum.

He took out his card and sent the money over.

After confirming that he had received the money, the guard led him into the palace.

The Netherworld Pool was located at the depths of the palace. Different from the Lucid Lunar Lake, the energy within it felt warm and soothing. It seemed to be constantly accumulating some sort of elusive energy that nourished whatever was within the pool.

Zhang Xuan could vaguely perceive the existence of elusive energy, but he found that he was unable to faze it at all. In that sense, it was kind of similar to an apparition, where one could only see it and nothing more.

“This is the Netherworld Pool. In order to leave a Soul Imprint in it, you’ll have to place a droplet of fresh blood on the stone tablet over there.” The guard pointed.

Zhang Xuan looked over and saw a small stone tablet standing by the side of the Netherworld Pool. There were peculiar

inscriptions on it, reminiscent of something that one would use in rituals.

It looks similar to the altars of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe at first glance, but there are also many differences as well.

He recalled how he had asked someone in the past which power in the Firmament specialized in the usage of altars, and the answer that he had received was the experts of the Sky of Drifting Specters. So, he wondered if the Sky of Drifting Specter was related to the Spirit God somehow, but the inscriptions on the stone tablet seemed to disprove it.

In terms of construct and content, it was obvious that the inscriptions on the stone tablet were vastly different from those used by the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and Starchaser Palace.

It seemed like the Spirit God did not belong to the Sky of Drifting Specter.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to walk over to the stone tablet to drip a blood droplet on it, the Netherworld Pool suddenly began bubbling furiously. A series of apparitions gradually rose from the surface of the pool.

There were many different types of people among the apparitions. There were those who were almost a zhang[1] tall, and there were those whose height barely reached that of a thumb. All in all, there were more than a thousand people.

As the water beneath them bubbled, they moved in response.

The elusive energy that he felt previously scattered down on the apparitions, almost as if sunlight was shining on them. The larger apparitions slowly became more and more tangible whereas the smaller ones flickered like candlelight, seemingly on the verge of extinguishing.

Po!

A thumb-sized apparition suddenly dissipated, vanishing from view.

“What happened?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

“Those larger apparitions have more people thinking about them, so they receive more Anima of Yearning, which bulks them up. In contrast, the smaller apparitions are probably remembered only by some family members and friends. As time passes and their kin pass away, no one else in the world remembers them. Naturally, they run out of energy and extinguish.”

The guard glanced over at Zhang Xuan and shook his head. “There are quite a few people who pay a hefty sum in order to leave their Soul Imprint here each year. They hope to somehow come back to life after their death, but the splendor of life only lasts while you are alive. Life is already tiring enough. How many people have the time to constantly keep you in their minds once you aren’t around? More often than not, the Anima of Yearning that one receives comes solely from their closest kin and friends.

“It’s actually a waste of money for most people to leave their Soul Imprint here. Only a very small proportion of them eventually earn sufficient Anima of Yearning to come back to life. But I guess it’s still comforting to leave a spark of hope here. Death is something that is feared after all.”

Zhang Xuan could relate to those words.

All sentiments—be it gratitude, love, or hatred—were transient. There are things that we tell ourselves never to lose sight of no matter what happens, but time has the mysterious ability to dull out those emotions and make us forget.

This reminded Zhang Xuan of web novel authors in his previous life. If they just stopped updating for a few days, the readers would have already forgotten about them.

Once a person was forgotten by most people, the Anima of Yearning that they received would become so small that even maintaining their current state was difficult, let alone coming back to life.

Just as the guard had said, it was probably just the possibility of it happening that comforted people from the fear of death. In the entire history of the Firmament, there were probably no more than a handful of people who had succeeded in doing so.

“Who is that tallest apparition here? He looks like he’ll be ready to revive soon!” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

Based on what had been said thus far, it seemed like the size of the apparitions was indicative of the amount of Anima of Yearning they had accumulated. Those who had gotten beyond a certain size should be able to be revived.

He could not help but wonder what that towering apparition of over a zhang in height had done, such that he would be so dearly remembered by those around him.

“I don’t know who he is exactly. He suddenly appeared forty years ago. We aren’t able to see his appearance clearly, and we couldn’t find a record that corresponds to him. As such, we aren’t too sure about who he is,” the guard replied.

“Even an anonymous person is able to receive Anima of Yearning in the Netherworld Pool?” Zhang Xuan was slightly surprised.

“The Anima of Yearning is generated based on those who remember him. As long as there are people who keep him in their heart, he will be able to receive the Anima of Yearning. There isn’t a need for everyone to remember him. After all, there are God Kings whose souls have been in the Netherworld Pool for over a thousand years, and it’s inevitable that most people have already forgotten about them.”

Nodding quietly, Zhang Xuan walked up to the stone tablet, bit his thumb, and dripped a droplet of fresh blood on it. Weng!

As soon as the blood droplet landed, energy began rippling across the stone tablet. Following that, he felt something linking up together with his soul.

At the same time, a small apparition roughly the size of a thumb appeared in the Netherworld Pool.

“This is my Soul Imprint?” Zhang Xuan was a little speechless at how small it was.

The guard took a look at it and said, “It’s not too bad given that you have just created it...”

Most people would not even be able to form an apparition when they first left their Soul Imprint on the stone tablet. The fact that the young man was able to create an apparition the size of a thumb showed that there were quite a few people who constantly thought of him.

“Are there usually differences in sizes when the apparitions are first formed?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Most cultivators have smaller apparitions than this, and there were quite a few that can’t even be seen with the naked eye,” the guard replied. “In the twenty years that I have worked here, the largest apparition I have seen upon formation is that of God King Bai Yi. He was killed during the Flood of Spiritual Energy, and his subordinates placed his possessions in the Netherworld Pool. The next instant, an apparition of the size of a palm appeared inside. It really shocked quite a few people back then!”

“Is God King Bai Yi extremely popular among the people?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Well, that’s not really the case. It was mainly because he had quite a few powerful subordinates under him. They were probably the ones generating the bulk of the Anima of Yearning,” the guard replied.

“Hmm? Does the Anima of Yearning generated have something to do with the strength of the people thinking of him?”

“Of course! The stronger one is, the greater the sway they have over the world. Furthermore, their longer lifespan means that they will be able to generate more Anima of Yearning over the course of their life. Typically speaking, the amount of Anima of Yearning generated by a Celestial God is hundred times that of a God, and the amount generated by a God King is hundred times that of a Celestial God, and so on!” the guard replied.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

If the Anima of Yearning was depicted to be a force of nature generated by a cultivator, it stood to reason that the strength of

the cultivator would affect the amount of energy generated.

It was common for humans to associate themselves with those who were like them. The reason it was more likely for those with higher cultivation to revive was not just because of how well-known they were, but more importantly, their circle of family and friends were mostly powerful experts. With that, they would likely be able to revive.

The guard chuckled. “You’re not too bad. The fact that your apparition is the size of a thumb shows that you are remembered not just by Gods but by Celestial Gods as well.”

“Celestial Gods?” Zhang Xuan nodded contemplatively.

Qi Ling-er and Zhang Jia were both Celestial Gods, and they were both loyal to him. They were probably the ones who were generating his Anima of Yearning.

He focused his consciousness on his soul, and he could vaguely feel some sort of energy flowing through the connection between his soul and the apparition to nourish his soul, causing his soul cultivation to grow. Seeing that it was working, he clasped his fist and bade his farewell.

Shortly after Zhang Xuan left, a guard walked in and asked the guard from before curiously, “How was it? What do you think of that fellow?”

“His apparition is only around the size of a thumb. I reckon that it’ll dissipate within less than half a year,” the first guard scoffed.

“Well, that’s not too bad given that it’s his first time here,” the second guard replied.

“I beg to differ,” the first guard said. “If he’s already desperately thinking of ways to keep himself alive when he’s that young, I doubt that he’ll be able to do anything great in the future. Even I look down on coward like him, so why would people think of him and admire him? I reckon that the only reason there are people still thinking of him is because they don’t know his true personality. Once they learn who he is, their remembrance of him will probably stop right away!”

“That does make sense. Let’s see how it turns out,” the second guard replied with a slight chuckle.

In the Firmament, people carried great respect for the strong and the valiant.

It would have been understandable if the young man was already in his later years and wished to seek a way to circumvent death. However, he was only in his early twenties, and he had a long life ahead of him. Yet, out of fear of death, he had actually spent such a hefty sum to leave his Soul Imprint there.

From this, it was clear that the young man was a coward. How could a coward possibly win the respect of others and make others remember him?

Even if he was able to create a decent-sized silhouette, chances were that it would dissipate soon enough!

“Let’s go!” the first guard said as he turned around to leave the room.

Suddenly, the Netherworld Pool began to shake.

The two guards halted and turned around.

The apparition left behind by the young man was trembling nonstop. Despite its small size, it was causing the entire pool to tremble ceaselessly.

“This...”

The two guards were perplexed for a moment before the first guard suddenly thought of something. His eyes narrowed as he said, “Could it be that more people have thought of him, causing more Anima of Yearning to surge over?”

Boom!

Shortly after those words were spoken, the thumb-sized apparition suddenly jolted and became the size of a palm. At the same time, its translucent silhouette became more tangible, making it look more lifelike.

“Even though there are quite a few people who are thinking of him, they are mostly Gods. The effects are unlikely to be too

long-lasting...”

Even though they had no idea why it took so long for this surge of Anima of Yearning to arrive, based on the concentration of it, they could tell that it mostly originated from God realm cultivators. While it did increase the size of the apparition, the increment was slight and unlikely to be long-lasting, given the short lifespan of Gods.

Boom!

Before he could even finish those words, the palm-sized apparition suddenly began growing frenziedly at a visible rate. This is...the Anima of Yearning from a God King?”

The first guard was stunned.

The other party was just a low-tier Celestial God, so why would he receive Anima of Yearning from a God King?

Huhu!

The apparition suddenly grew once more.

“Two God Kings?”

The second guard was stunned as well.

“Three God Kings actually provided him with Anima of Yearning... Is that fellow really just a low-tier Celestial God?” the first guard muttered with trembling lips.

It was just a moment ago that they had said that the apparition would disappear in less than half a year, but who could have known that the young man would suddenly receive such a huge surge in Anima of Yearning from innumerable Gods and three God Kings?

Boom!

The apparition suddenly grew once more, becoming the size of a normal human.

The two guards looked at one another with their bodies trembling uncontrollably, as if they had just witnessed something unbelievable. It took some time before words finally came out of their mouths once more.

“That is... the Anima of Yearning from a Conferred God King?”

[1] 1 zhang = 3.33m

2161 It's Time to Reveal My Real Skills

Strictly speaking, Conferred God Kings were considered God Kings as well.

The difference between the two lay in their conferment. Conferred God Kings were bestowed with the powers of the heavens and the God Monarchs, granting them far greater powers than ordinary God Kings.

The difference was such that even if a Conferred God King remained completely still, a God King still would not be able to kill him.

This was the absolute difference in powers between the two of them.

For this reason, only powers that had a Conferred God King were considered lasting, top-notch powers and could remain prosperous for millenniums.

The only people who could make Conferred God Kings generate Anima of Yearning for them could only be experts of the same caliber or God Monarchs!

It was unbelievable that this young man actually received Anima of Yearning from three God Kings and a Conferred God King. Was it possible that he was not an ordinary Celestial God but actually a hidden powerhouse of the Firmament?

“No matter who he is, he isn't a person we can simply afford to gossip about!” The first guard could barely say those words through his clattering teeth.

It was just a moment ago that he thought the young man was cowardly and looked down on him for that. However, it was clear now that he was jumping too quickly to assumptions. There were simply too many things in this world that were beyond his understanding.

“What is he called?” the second guard asked.

The first guard was stumped by the question. He racked his brain for a moment, but he found that he actually did not remember the young man’s name at all.

“I don’t know either!”

He assumed that the other party was just a rich young master from some affluent clan, so he did not bother asking for the other party’s identity. He had thought that the other party’s apparition would simply vanish soon enough, so it was inconsequential to remember the other party’s name.

He had never thought that the young man would be such a great figure!

“We should pretend that we didn’t see anything for today. Otherwise, we might risk offending someone if we run our mouth recklessly...” the second guard said.

Yes, we should do that...” The first guard nodded in agreement.

If they were to say something that they should not, they would simply be bringing trouble to themselves. Their heads might even roll due to it.

As soon as he left the Netherworld Palace, Zhang Xuan immediately felt himself receiving a surge of Anima of Yearning, allowing his soul cultivation to grow quite a bit. His thought process became a little faster, and his low-tier Celestial God soul cultivation showed hints of making a breakthrough.

“It’s indeed effective!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in delight.

If he had chosen to cultivate normally, it would take several years of effort in order for him to raise his soul cultivation to middle-tier Celestial God. However, even at the current rate it was growing, it would only take him several months!

In other words, just by leaving his Soul Imprint in the Netherworld Pool, he was able to increase the rate of his soul cultivation by tenfold!

Once he carried out what he was planning, he should be able to raise his soul cultivation to the God King realm fast enough.

It was no wonder Zhuo Feng had recommended this method. The effects were far better than expected.

Furthermore, he did not have to do anything much. He had already tossed the bulk of the work over to others, so all he really had to do was wait for a huge gush of Anima of Yearning to come rolling in!

So, he was able to pass his days leisurely in the time to come.

Other than working on his soul cultivation, he would visit the Master Teacher Pavilion to conduct some lessons and impart knowledge to them.

He won himself some diehard fans among the students through his lessons, but he did not manage to earn any golden page.

Just as he had thought before, as the culture of master teachers was not as deeply ingrained in the Firmament, there was a lack of respect and recognition toward teachers.

What had happened with Zhuo Yan and Zhuo Feng was more of an exception due to their peculiar circumstances. Given so, it seemed like it would be much more difficult for him to earn golden pages there.

That being said, even though he did not manage to earn any golden page, he did manage to bulk up his reputation quite a bit. As the number of people who were grateful to him increased, the rate at which his soul cultivation grew increased as well.

On the fifth day, his soul cultivation finally rose from low-tier Celestial God to middle-tier Celestial God.

He immediately had Qi Ling-er get him some high-tier God Essence Pills, and soon enough, his zhenqi cultivation rose to middle-tier Celestial God as well.

High-tier God Essence Pills were resources that were mainly exclusive for the usage of God Kings, making it impossible for ordinary cultivators to lay their hands on it. However, having received the 'go ahead' from the head and the old ancestor of

the Qi Clan, Qi Ling-er managed to procure this hard to acquire cultivation resource with ease, and at a relatively inexpensive price at that.

Seven days passed in a flash.

“Of the ten thousand Beauty Pills, the Qi Clan has taken in one thousand of them, and I have managed to sell another six thousand. However, I reckon that the market in Drifting Specter Royal City has already reached saturation at this point. It’ll be hard to sell any more here,” Qi Ling-er reported to Zhang Xuan.

Due to the exorbitant price of the Beauty Pill, despite its miraculous effects in terms of aesthetics and cultivation, the number of people who could afford it was severely limited.

“That’s already better than I thought,” Zhang Xuan replied.

He was very satisfied with Qi Ling-er’s work. She had managed to push out the Beauty Pills into the market faster than expected, and she even managed to sell so many of them within such a short period of time.

At the price of 1,500 Divine Coins each, seven thousand Beauty Pills would equate to a jaw-dropping sum of 10,500,000 Divine Coins!

There were probably fewer than twenty powers in Drifting Specter Royal City whose total fortune had reached that level.

In other words, within just seven days, he had transformed from a penniless outsider into one of the twenty wealthiest individuals within Drifting Specter Royal City!

Not even the Qi Clan had the capacity to earn so much money within such a short period of time!

Not only so, the name ‘Zhang Xuan’ had spread far and wide within Drifting Specter Royal City within those seven days. He had gained lots of admirers and supporters, and his name would always come up whenever cultivators were gathered together.

That was probably what people meant by becoming a ‘household name’.

“I have also sent out the invitations for the event that will be held later.” Qi Ling-er continued her report. “Based on the replies I have received so far, there will be distinguished figures from both within Royal City and the other Skies joining us. In view of the large crowd that will be joining us, I have booked the largest square in Royal City.”

Just thinking about the huge commotion that they had stirred up in Royal City over the past few days left Qi Ling-er feeling a little overwhelmed. She could not believe that she was actually part of something so massive.

Even the old ancestor of the Qi Clan did not have the ability to rally so many experts and distinguished figures, but the young man standing before her had managed to do it!

The main reason for that was not really because of the young man himself but the widespread popularity of the Beauty Pill throughout the Firmament, which had grown tremendously over the past few days.

Ladies would be able to preserve their youth by consuming it, and men could heal their internal traumas, enhance their talent, and advance their cultivation...

The effects were nothing short of miraculous! It was for this reason that no one held any grudges against Zhang Xuan despite the exorbitant price of the pills.

Of course, the positive reviews for the Beauty Pill were mostly due to Qi Ling-er's effort. She had really gone all out, tapping into all the connections the Qi Clan had in order to ensure everything worked smoothly.

On top of that, an incident that happened four days ago also played a crucial role in forging the reputation of the Beauty Pill.

An affluent merchant of Royal City was reaching the limits of his lifespan, and just as everyone was making preparations for his impending passing, a junior of the family suddenly presented a Beauty Pill before him.

And right after consuming the Beauty Pill, the bedridden merchant regained his vitality, leaped right up to his feet, and

began running all around the residence to exert his overflowing energy.

While no one knew how much longer his lifespan had been extended, judging from his newfound vigor, it was unlikely that he would pass away anytime soon.

As soon as this news started spreading, many cultivators realized that the hype behind the Beauty Pill was not just for show, and the demand for the pill grew explosively.

It was amazing that a pill could beautify a person, repair their internal traumas, and raise their talent. However, as most of those who were currently in power had already passed their prime, those benefits meant little to them. The only thing that really attracted them was the ability to extend their lifespan, and that was precisely what the Beauty Pill did too.

It was due to this that the sales of the Beauty Pill exceeded Qi Ling-er's initial expectations by two thousand.

However, what drew so many powerhouses and distinguished figures to gather together in Drifting Specter Royal City was not just the allure of the Beauty Pill. More importantly, it had something to do with the news that Zhang Xuan had tasked Qi Ling-er with releasing to the public.

On the day of the event, the creator of the Beauty Pill would be releasing an inexpensive spiritual energy recovery pill with superior effects to what was available in the market, as well as the Breakthrough Pill aimed specifically at cultivators!

The Breakthrough Pill was effective on all cultivators regardless of their cultivation realm. Be it a God or a Celestial God, as long as they had reached the peak of their current cultivation realm, consuming it would increase their chances of making a breakthrough by fifty percent.

Even the most potent Breakthrough Pill on the market at the moment could only increase the chances of making a breakthrough by twenty percent, and despite that, it was enough to make all cultivators go crazy over it.

It was a known fact that it was a huge hurdle for a God to become a Celestial God, and those who managed to overcome

the hurdle would not only become much stronger, their lifespan would also increase by tenfold.

Most importantly of all, it was said to have no side effects. In other words, it would not hinder one's cultivation in the future.

With that alone, it was not too hard to imagine just how valuable the pill would be. All high-tier Gods would probably be dying to lay their hands on it!

As such, the news caused an even greater uproar than when people realized that the Beauty Pill had the ability to extend one's lifespan!

If not for the precedence with the Beauty Pill, most people would probably have thought that it was all a hoax. Of course, there were still many people who doubted the matter, given how unbelievable it sounded, but nevertheless, most people were still hopeful.

This was also the real reason that they were able to draw in such a huge crowd within such a short period of time. "That's good!"

Zhang Xuan had been paying close attention on this matter over the last few days, and he knew that Qi Ling-er had done a good job carrying out the task that he had entrusted to her.

With a nod of approval, he turned his gaze to Sun Qiang and asked, "How are things going on your side?"

Young Master, the renovation of all one hundred stores has been completed. General Zhuo Feng has also passed the God Essence Tablets to me, and there are over 3,000,000 of them at the moment. The jade bottles you requested are also ready," Sun Qiang reported proudly.

He had slept less than four hours over the past seven days, but even though it was exhausting, he was extremely satisfied with what he had accomplished.

As Qi Ling-er had been constantly selling Beauty Pills, he did not face any difficulties in financing. This made it much easier for him to acquire the stores that he wanted. Otherwise, it would have been difficult for him to prepare ten stores, let alone a hundred of them.

He respectfully presented a storage ring containing the pills and the jade bottles over to Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan quickly took a look at the contents in the storage ring before nodding in approval.

He was aiming to tackle all segments of the market at once.

The Breakthrough Pill was aimed at high-end customers whereas the Beauty Pill was aimed at middle-class customers. Last but not least, the God Essence Tablets that he had prepared were for the low-end customers, the ordinary cultivators of the Firmament.

These cultivators consisted of ordinary Gods and Semi-Divinities, so the amount of Anima of Yearning each of them generated was severely limited. However, what made them significant was the sheer number of them around.

As long as he could open up this market and let everyone know of his name, he was certain that he would receive an endless influx of Anima of Yearning, allowing him to swiftly raise his soul cultivation to high-tier Celestial God and beyond!

He reckoned that Kong shi had probably used such a method to become the Heaven Subjugation Monarch, the tenth God Monarch of the Firmament.

Zhang Xuan continued asking a few questions, but it seemed like the two of them were extremely meticulous in their work, resolving all possible problems without a hitch. With a satisfied nod, he said, "Let's head to the square."

Getting on top of an aerial celestial beast, the crowd swiftly made their way over to the square where the event was to be held.

They had managed to gather the crowd they wanted, and everything was prepared and ready to go. So, all that was left was for Zhang Xuan to show them his true skills!

As long as he could put on a good show...

Pui!

How could he call this a show? He was a master teacher, and all of this was real!

Anyway, as long as he performed well, he was certain that the name 'Zhang Xuan' would be remembered by everyone in the Sky of Drifting Specter. As time passed, it would slowly spread to every nook and cranny of the Firmament, thus allowing him to achieve his goals!

Ruoxin, since I am unable to find you, I will become the brightest star in the Firmament so that you can find me instead!

2162 Beitang Xue

It was not time yet, but the largest square of Drifting Specter Royal City was already filled with a bustling crowd.

Zhang Xuan expected to receive around a hundred thousand people at most, but it was clear with a glance that the scale of the crowd was far higher than that.

There were already elevated platforms erected in the square for him to address the crowd. The entire place was jam-packed, such that there were some cultivators who chose to ride on aerial divine beasts in order to avoid being packed like sardines.

There must be at least five hundred thousand people here, right?”

A gray-robed elder sitting on the back of an aerial divine beast looked down at the massive crowd below with a frown on his forehead.

“I can only say that the allure of the Beauty Pill is greater than I thought!” the black-robed elder beside him replied.

“I have tried examining the content of the Beauty Pill, and no matter how I analyze the ingredients and the forging method, it appears to be no different to other low-tier God Essence Pills. It’s baffling how it can bring out such miraculous effects!” the gray-robed elder said with a shake of his head.

Upon learning of the sudden spike in the popularity of the Beauty Pill, he had immediately ordered a subordinate to buy a couple of them for him to study. He had spent three whole days examining it from the outside to the inside, and the conclusion he had eventually arrived at was that... it was simply an ordinary low-tier God Essence Pill!

Back then, he had been shocked beyond words.

A low-tier God Essence Pill could be bought for just one Divine Coin, and the cost of the Beauty Pill was a staggering 1,500 Divine Coins! Yet, he could not call it a scam at all. He

had tried out the effects, and it was as spectacular as the rumors made it out to be!

A severe trauma that he had suffered many years ago was easily removed, and his complexion also looked much better than before.

That was not something an ordinary God Essence Pill could do.

Eventually, he could only give up on the notion of deciphering the Beauty Pill.

It was also for this reason that he had rushed all the way here to attend this event. He was interested to see the genius who had forged such an amazing pill.

“I also tried studying the Beauty Pill, and I came to the same conclusion as you,” the black-robed elder remarked with a bitter smile. “I know many other apothecaries who tried to decipher the Beauty Pill. In fact, the Apothecary Guild of Royal City has been working tirelessly on it over the past few days. However, none of them have been able to figure out the secret behind its effects. I heard that the guild leader is on the verge of losing his mind.”

“You are referring to Apothecary Zhou Feng?” the gray-robed elder looked over curiously.

“Yep, that’s him!” the black-robed elder replied.

“Zhou Feng is Fu Jiangchen’s direct disciple, right? His skills in pill forging should be far superior to the both of ours!

He is unable to figure out the Beauty Pill, too?” the gray-robed elder asked in disbelief.

Fu Jiangchen was the most famous apothecary in the entire Firmament. Rumor had it that he had once forged pills for the God Monarchs.

He had many disciples all over the Firmament, and every single one of them was famous among the apothecaries. Zhou Feng was known to be one of his better disciples.

“An apothecary that I have once taught is in Royal City’s Apothecary Guild at the moment, and he told me about it. It

seems like they bought three pills back when the Beauty Pill first appeared on the market, and they have examined the medicinal components and the forging techniques used for the pill innumerable times. The conclusion that they arrived at each and every time was the same—it is identical to how low-tier God Essence Pills are made!” the gray-robed elder replied.

It was no easy feat to reverse engineer the process of how a pill was made. It would take a great deal of knowledge, time, and effort. Nevertheless, it was still possible, and that was also how many of the exclusive pills eventually became less exclusive.

“There must be something inside the Beauty Pill that makes it different from the God Essence Pill, but we just aren’t able to find it...” The black-robed elder shook his fist in frustration.

He knew for sure that there was something special about the Beauty Pill, but it was eluding their notice, and this left him feeling deeply exasperated.

At this moment, the gray-robed elder beside him suddenly exclaimed in agitation, “Wait a moment... Look over there! Is that person Master Fu Jiangchen?”

The black-robed elder immediately turned his head over and saw an aerial beast floating not too far away. Sitting at the very front of the beast was an old man with a snowy beard. There were a few other people standing diligently behind him, seemingly not daring to take a seat in his presence.

One of them happened to be Apothecary Zhou Feng, whom they had just spoken about.

“It’s him!” the black-robed elder exclaimed in disbelief. “I had the honor of meeting him and listening to one of his lectures back when I was touring the Nine Skies. You don’t know how impressed I was with his teachings... Why would he come here personally?”

“Indeed. He’s a God King realm expert, but he still came here personally. Could it be that he’s researching the Beauty Pill too

but was unable to make sense out of it?” the gray-robed elder asked hesitantly.

That was the only reason he could think of.

“It’s possible... But if even the most formidable apothecary in the Firmament is unable to decipher the Beauty Pill, I can’t begin to imagine how remarkable the person who forged the Beauty Pill is!” The black-robed elder turned to the stage with an incredulous look in his eyes.

That was Fu Jiangchen, a God King realm expert, as well as a person who had once forged pills for the God Monarchs! If even he was unable to decipher the secrets of the Beauty Pill, this might be bigger than they thought!

“If the Beauty Pill is that formidable, why don’t we just kidnap the apothecary and force him to reveal his pill formula?” a middle-aged man amid the crowd asked his companions. “Don’t tell me that you are afraid of making a move just because we are in Drifting Specter Royal City!”

As the capital of the Sky of Drifting Specter, rules were strictly enforced in Drifting Specter Royal City. That being said, thievery still occurred from time to time.

The Beauty Pill was obviously a business with tremendous potential for profits. Furthermore, its surfacing in the market had also affected the business of numerous apothecaries within Royal City. Given so, there were bound to be many people who would want to claim his life.

“Of course not! Do I look like a lawful citizen to you?” the companion of the middle-aged man scoffed. Then, he shook his head and sighed. “I dispatched a team of three high-tier Celestial Gods to kidnap him, but I suddenly lost contact with them in the midst of their mission. I tried looking into it, and it turns out that they were killed!”

“Three high-tier Celestial Gods have been killed? Is that apothecary that formidable?” The middle-aged man narrowed his eyes in shock.

Given the limited number of God Kings and Conferred God Kings in the Firmament, a group of three high-tier Celestial

Gods could already be considered an elite force. Yet, all three of them ended up dying in the midst of their mission. Could the apothecary possibly be a God King?

“It’s not that the apothecary is formidable. Rather, it’s because of the Qi Clan!” his companion replied.

“The Qi Clan?”

“That’s right. The clan head of the Qi Clan has let out word that anyone who dares to touch the apothecary will be an enemy of their Qi Clan. There was a God King who opposed the interference of the Qi Clan, viewing it as tyranny.

However, before he could even finish his words, he was struck with a heavy blow and evicted from Royal City. Rumor has it that it was the old ancestor of the Qi Clan who made a move on him!” his companion said.

“The old ancestor of the Qi Clan? You are referring to... Conferred God King Qi Meng?” The middle-aged man’s face paled in fright.

If the medicine was as invaluable as the rumors suggested, it was worth taking the risk to capture the apothecary and coerce the pill formula out of him. However, if the old ancestor of the Qi Clan was involved...

Qi Meng was a person who had once dominated the world alongside the Qiankun Demon Monarch! His authority was unrivaled in the Sky of Drifting Specter. Unless the God Monarch made a move, no one would be able to bear the burden of his rage!

If the apothecary was under the protection of such a person... unless they were tired of living, they had better not lay their hands on the apothecary!

You get it, right? I’m only telling you this because of our relationship. I advise you to rein in your thoughts, or else you won’t even know what struck you when you die!” the companion warned.

If the apothecary did not have ways to protect himself after pushing out such a formidable medicine, he would have been killed many times over by now!

The Firmament, even in the capitals of the Nine Skies, was not as peaceful as it seemed on the surface.

In a massive floating manor in the Sky of Drifting Specter, a middle-aged man clasped his fist and reported, “Old ancestor, I have looked into that matter, and it was indeed the doing of that person from the Qi Clan!”

A slightly bewildered voice echoed from the room. “Qi Meng sustained grave injuries in the past, just like me, and his lifespan is already nearing its end. He has been lying low in order to avoid making any more enemies for the Qi Clan, so why would he suddenly choose to protect a medicine peddler? Even if the pills sold are incredible, it’s unlikely that they have much effect on a Conferred God King!”

He was another Conferred God King of the Sky of Drifting Specters, Beitang Xue!

Having reached their level of cultivation, there were very few things that could catch their attention anymore.

Most of them had retired from the secular world, wishing to live in peace and quiet. It was incomprehensible to him why Qi Meng would suddenly get involved in a matter as minor as this.

Not only so, he even made a move on a God King and severely injured him...

That was equivalent to offending the power behind the God King, thus creating another potential enemy for the Qi Clan.

“I don’t really know the details. So far, I only know that the Qi Clan has bought one thousand Beauty Pills for their younger generation, causing their potential and fighting prowess to grow significantly. This is especially so for Qi Yue. I heard that he has started to grasp the secrets of a God King, and it’s likely that he will make a breakthrough in the near future,” the middle-aged man reported.

“He’s already on the verge of a breakthrough?” Beitang Xue was taken aback. “Is that medicine really that amazing?”

“It is,” the middle-aged man replied. He took out a jade container and presented it. “Please, do take a look.”

Hu!

The jade container flew right into the room.

Within the room, Beitang Xue picked up the pill and examined in bewilderment. Then, he swallowed it.

“This...” Beitang Xue narrowed his eyes in shock. “I sense the aura of a God Monarch in the pill!”

“God Monarch?” The middle-aged man jolted in horror.

“Indeed! If I’m not mistaken, this pill is indeed nothing more than an ordinary low-tier God Essence Pill. It’s the infusion of a God Monarch’s zhenqi that resulted in its spectacular effects,” Beitang Xue analyzed grimly.

“This is only my speculation at the moment. Based on what I know, the zhenqi of a real God Monarch should be even purer than this... But at the same time, it shouldn’t have the ability to heal internal traumas. I guess I’ll have to meet Qi Meng to understand the situation!”

Together with Qi Meng, he had fought alongside the Qiankun Demon Monarch a very long time ago, and they had been privileged to catch a glimpse of the overwhelming power that the God Monarchs wielded.

The energies that they wielded were extremely pure, and they emanated tremendous pressure that felt almost as if the whole world was crushing down on them.

Such was the feeling that he felt from the Beauty Pill, but the prowess of the energy within had been dampened innumerable times.

“Old ancestor, are you planning to meet that person from the Qi Clan?” the middle-aged man asked.

“It’s only right that I should. I thought that old fellow has decided to wash his hands of everything, but it seems like I have misjudged him. Instead, I am the one who is lagging behind. Even if the person who has forged the Beauty Pill isn’t a God Monarch, it’s likely that he has close ties with one. Lag one step behind, and we’ll always be a step behind them. It’s one thing if we didn’t know about this matter, but now that we

have learned of it, we can't just turn a blind eye to it. Otherwise, our Beitang Clan will forever be behind the Qi Clan!" Beitang Xue said as he rose to his feet.

Even though he had no idea how the pill was forged, the fact that it was effective was enough to show that it was authentic.

If there was something in the world that even a Conferred God King like him was unable to comprehend, chances were high that a God Monarch was involved.

This was both an opportunity and a threat. If he could get on the bandwagon together with the Qi Clan, there were great benefits to be earned. Otherwise, the Beitang Clan would only start to lag behind the others.

2163 Is It a Transaction Error?

In the depths of the floating mountain on which the Qi Clan resided, Old Ancestor Qi Meng was sitting atop of a boulder with a fishing pole in his hands.

In front of him was a small lake, and from time to time, one could see fish swimming by.

Qi Meng sat there quietly without moving at all, as if a statue. However, at some point in time, a slight smile crept onto his lips, and he started speaking. “You can ask me directly if you have any doubts in mind. There’s no need to try sounding me out.”

There was no one in front of him when he said those words.

Hu!

But shortly after he spoke, a figure suddenly appeared on the surface of the water. He appeared so abruptly that it seemed like he had teleported over. On top of that, his movements had not caused any disturbance in the wind, and there was not the slightest ripple to be seen atop the water. It was almost as if his presence was just a figment of one’s imagination.

The old ancestor of the Beitang Clan, Beitang Xue.

“Old Qi, what’s with the Beauty Pill and that Zhang Xuan fellow?”

Having expected to hear such questions, Qi Meng raised his hand and said, “Wait a moment. Shentu Liuxiang is coming. I’ll explain once he’s here too.”

Shortly later, another figure appeared above the surface of the lake.

He was the last Conferred God King of Drifting Specter Royal City, Shentu Liuxiang.

“Follow me.”

Seeing that everyone was present, Qi Meng stood up. With a slight wave of his robe, a few ripples appeared in the air, and the next moment, he was already standing before the Lucid Lunar Lake.

Qi Meng turned to them and asked, “Are the two of you able to see the changes in the lake?”

The changes in the lake?” The two Conferred God Kings took a closer look at the lake, and their faces immediately paled in astonishment. “Is that... the blood of a God Monarch?”

The aura in the Lucid Lunar Lake was extremely chaotic. There were all sorts of blood essences and medicinal herbs mixed in, making it difficult to accurately discern what was inside with just a glimpse. Nevertheless, the two of them were still able to tell the difference with a glance.

The Lucid Lunar Lake had just been an ordinary body tempering location in the past. Even though it was indeed one of the better ones in the Sky of Drifting Specter, it was still possible to find better ones in the world.

However, after it had been mixed together with the blood of a God Monarch, it had become a blessed land for cultivation, probably second only to the Deathless Lava Reservoir.

“That’s right.” Qi Meng nodded. “Are you able to tell which God Monarch it belongs to?”

“This...” Beitang Xue extended his Spiritual Perception across the entire lake, and a moment later, he quickly turned to look at Shentu Liuxiang, as if seeking confirmation from him.

The two of them nodded before Beitang Xue hesitantly asked, “Is it... the God Monarch of the Sky of Deathlessness?”

“That’s what I thought!” Qi Meng nodded in agreement. “The lake became like that after Zhang Xuan cultivated here. That being said, even though the energies within have become much more potent than before, it can’t be used anymore.”

The ability of the Lucid Lunar Lake to temper a cultivator’s body did become more effective after being mixed with the blood of a God Monarch, but at the same time, the energies

had gotten even more violent, making it infeasible for any cultivator to enter it.

God Monarchs were lofty existences. Their blood essence was not something that just any cultivator could easily absorb.

In its current state, even a genius of Qi Yue's caliber would not dare approach it carelessly.

Thinking about how the Lucid Lunar Lake, which he had spent a heavy price to create, had been crippled just like that, he could not help but feel a little stifled inside.

The other two Conferred God Monarchs were rendered speechless by that news. It took a while before Beitang Xue asked uncertainly, "What you mean to say is that there's a good chance that Zhang Xuan is..."

He finally understood why the Qi Clan would go all out to support Zhang Xuan, even at the risk of offending other powers. In the end, it was because an even higher power had gotten involved!

All in all, including the Heaven Subjugation Monarch, there were only ten God Monarchs in the Firmament. There were two of them who never appeared before others, namely the God Monarchs of the Sky of Freedom and the Sky of Heavenly Sword.

In other words, there were only eight active God Monarchs in the world.

It was viewed as the greatest honor in the Firmament to be related with a God Monarch in one way or another, no matter how shallow it might be. The act of a God Monarch dropping by the Qi Clan to cultivate and altering the nature of the Lucid Lunar Lake was proof of such a relationship!

As Conferred God Kings, they wielded strength that was envied by the entire world. However, they knew full well that the strength they possessed was nothing before the God Monarchs.

"Wait a moment, that's not right..." Shentu Liuxiang suddenly spoke up at this moment. "If it's that person's blood, even if

this place didn't become on par with the Deathless Lava Reservoir, it still shouldn't pale too far in comparison to it.

“Do you remember just how terrifying the Deathless Lava Reservoir was? Except for the people whom he has explicitly acknowledged, no one will be able to enter it without paying a heavy price, and that includes Conferred God Kings like us! However, it's clear that the Lucid Lunar Lake hasn't reached such a level. We are still able to absorb spiritual energy from it, which shows that the blood in the lake is still far from reaching the level of a God Monarch, no matter how similar they might be!”

The blood of a God Monarch should harness enough power to easily destroy the entire floating mountain that they were on. It was true that the Lucid Lunar Lake had changed under the effects of the blood, but in terms of power, it was severely lacking.

This disproved what they had said so far.

“This is also what's left me baffled. However, you should have also heard of the situation of that person from the Sky of Deathlessness,” Qi Meng said carefully.

Recalling the rumors that they had heard a while back, the two Conferred God Kings fell deep into contemplation.

A long time later, Beitang Xue raised his head and said, “If that's really the case, we'll have to report this matter to His Sovereignty.”

Qi Meng shook his head. “His Sovereignty has gone to the Acheron Ocean, so we won't be able to get in contact with him anytime soon.”

“Acheron Ocean?” the other two asked in bewilderment.

They had not heard of this matter.

“His Sovereignty intends to forge a body for that person who appeared in the Netherworld Pool a month ago,” Qi Meng replied.

“I see...”

The two of them nodded in agreement.

Just a month earlier, a soul had appeared in the Netherworld Pool. The soul was exceptionally powerful, and it swiftly caught the attention of Qiankun Demon Monarch. In order to groom the soul, the latter went to the extent of using his spacetime abilities just so that it could improve swiftly.

Even though the powers of the soul had not reached Conferred God King yet, it was already strong enough to subdue most God Kings.

The Qiankun Demon Monarch was even going to the Acheron Ocean to forge a body for it. It was no exaggeration to say that he was sparing no efforts in this.

“This is the first time that His Sovereignty has been so concerned about another person,” Shentu Liuxiang remarked curiously. “I really wonder what’s so special about that soul. Is that soul a lady?”

Putting aside God Kings, even Conferred God Kings would be nothing special in the eyes of a God Monarch.

After all, it was the God Monarch who conferred their powers in the very first place.

Such a powerful expert was actually forging a body for a mere soul. It would be a lie if they said that they were not intrigued.

They had known Demon Monarch Qiankun for many years, but they had never seen such a side to him before.

Could it be that the soul had caught Demon Monarch Qiankun’s affection?

Qi Meng’s eyebrows shot up, and he swiftly warned the other two, “Watch your words!”

Shentu Liuxiang laughed awkwardly and said, “Hahaha, it was just a passing remark...”

He had no intention of probing into Demon Monarch Qiankun’s secrets. It was just that he was curious, and those two in front of him were old friends as well. That was why he could not help but be a little more chatty than usual.

“I have heard some things about this matter. It’s said that the soul came from the lower worlds, but the soul isn’t a lady. It

seems like after the soul was infused with the Anima of Yearning, the constitution it displayed became bizarrely similar to that of His Sovereignty's. It was out of curiosity that His Sovereignty decided to lend the soul a hand."

Beitang Xue revealed what he had heard.

The Qiankun Demon Monarch had washed his hands of the affairs of Drifting Specter Royal City, so they were in charge of most matters. Due to this, they were able to learn of many secrets that others did not know about.

Upon hearing that it was not a lady, the other two nodded quietly in relief.

"Regardless of whether Zhang Xuan is related to that person from the Sky of Deathlessness or not, this matter is already beyond our jurisdiction. I don't think that it's wise for us to make a reckless move," Qi Meng said. "Now that you have learned the truth from me, I trust that you would know what you should and should not do. Let's part here and do what we should do then."

Shentu Liuxiang and Beitang Xue nodded in agreement before disappearing.

Conferred God Kings did not have the ability to teleport, but the sheer speed that they were able to move at had already surpassed what the eye could see, thus creating an effect similar to that.

Drifting Specter Royal City, Netherworld Pool.

The guard who had received Zhang Xuan back then entered the Netherworld Pool once more to examine the situation there.

Over the past seven days, Zhang Xuan's apparition had become bigger than that of an ordinary human. Furthermore, his figure was gradually getting more and more corporeal, and the aura that he emanated felt heavier than ever.

"There are even more people providing him with Anima of Yearning now. There is such a huge increase in the number of Gods and Celestial Gods..."

The guard gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

Previously, when the Anima of Yearning generated by a Conferred God King and three God Kings allowed the apparition to grow to the size of a real human, they had thought that it would be hard for the young man to do anything more than that. They did not think that it would continue to grow further at such a swift pace.

But this time, as the Anima of Yearning came mostly from Gods and Celestial Gods, the effects were not as pronounced.

“It’s just that the Anima of Yearning coming from Gods and Celestial Gods is still a little lacking. If he could receive the acknowledgement of a few other God Kings, he might just become the second largest apparition in here!” the second guard remarked with a nod.

You’re right, but it isn’t that easy to gain the support of a God King. It’s already amazing that he has been acknowledged by three God Kings! It’s hard to imagine him going any further than that...” The first guard shook his head.

But before he could finish his words, the apparition suddenly jolted once again.

Boom!

It began expanding swiftly, reaching two times its previous size in an instant.

Just like that, its height surpassed a zhang[1], making it the largest apparition in the Netherworld Pool!

“This is... the Anima of Yearning from two Conferred God Kings?”

The knees of the two guards caved in, and they immediately fell to the ground. The excessive shock had left them speechless, and they felt like they would lose their minds

Just a moment ago, they had said that it was no easy feat to receive the acknowledgement of God Kings, and then the apparition suddenly received the Anima of Yearning from two more Conferred God Kings...

In the entire Firmament, there were only around thirty Conferred God Kings in total. On average, a God Monarch would only receive Anima of Yearning from three Conferred God Kings...

But this young man had actually managed to do that!

Just what in the world was his background?

For a long while, the two of them could only look at each other in astonishment.

In the end, it seemed like they had still underestimated that young man's limits.

Upon reaching the vicinity of the square, Zhang Xuan was shocked by how packed the entire area was.

The crowd that was present far exceeded his wildest imagination.

Taking a deep breath, he maneuvered the aerial celestial beast to bring him to the stage so that he could begin his performance. But at that instant, he suddenly felt a surge of warmth in his soul, and his soul cultivation suddenly began growing once more.

It did not take long for his soul cultivation to reach middle-tier Celestial God pinnacle, putting him a step away from reaching high-tier Celestial God.

“What’s going on?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

He had not even started his performance.

Did someone transfer their Anima of Yearning to him by accident?

[1] A zhang = 3.33m

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It had not been too long since Zhang Xuan's soul cultivation reached middle-tier Celestial God. According to his estimations, it should still have taken him around half a month before he could raise it to the level of a high-tier Celestial God.

Yet, why did his soul cultivation suddenly experience such a massive growth spurt?

It was as if the ordinary stream of Anima of Yearning flowing into him had suddenly turned into raging river...

At this rate, I'll be able to advance my soul cultivation to high-tier Celestial God by tonight!

Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

When he first made a breakthrough to Celestial God, he had been a youth filled with hope and ambition. He had thought that he could reach God King within just a few days, but after a week passed, he had not even reached high-tier Celestial God.

He felt deeply embarrassed by his inability.

If his cultivation continued stalling at it was, he had no idea how he was going to face his students in the future.

Under the tutelage of the God Monarchs, they were bound to have many resources at their disposal. Given so, it was to be expected that their cultivation would surge like never before.

Ahh... Cultivation sure was tough. It was filled with the blood, sweat, and tears of the cultivators. He was really starting to understand why people would say such words.

Heaving a deep sigh, Zhang Xuan leaped onto the stage together with Qi Ling-er and the others.

Seeing that the star of the show had arrived, the crowd immediately fell silent, and intrigued gazes turned their way.

“Is that the apothecary who forged the Beauty Pill?”

“He looks so young!”

“Not only is he young, he’s quite dashing too! Fine fine, I’ll admit it. I’m interested in him, alright?”

“More like you’re interested in his Beauty Pill!”

With the rising popularity of the Beauty Pill and the name ‘Zhang Xuan’, people started to become interested in what this rumored apothecary would look like. There were many who thought that he would be a decrepit old man who had devoted all of his life to forging pills.

No one expected him to just be a young man in his early twenties.

Most importantly of all, he was good-looking.

A person blessed with both looks and talent was bound to be popular among the ladies. The eyes of many fangirls among the crowd became glazed with excitement.

Qi Ling-er stepped forward and started speaking. “Ladies and gentlemen, it’s my honor to have all of you here with us today. I am Qi Ling-er from the Qi Clan, and I was the one who extended the invitations to you all.”

As a low-tier Celestial God, she was still unable to project her voice properly to ensure that everyone amid the crowd could hear her. As such, formations were prepared beforehand to ensure that her message reached everyone, regardless of how far they were or the distractions around them.

Qi Ling-er was new to the circles in Royal City, but the fact that she had the full support of the Qi Clan in organizing this event told everyone loud and clear that she had substantial say within the Qi Clan.

It would be foolish to make an enemy out of someone who had powerful backing within the Qi Clan.

“The person standing beside me is Zhang Xuan, the apothecary behind the Beauty Pill. I invited all of you here not just to talk about the Beauty Pill but to introduce all of you to two new pills that Apothecary Zhang has come up with,” Qi

Ling-er said before stepping back to pass the stage over to Zhang Xuan.

“I believe most of you present here should be quite familiar with the effects of the Beauty Pill,” Zhang Xuan said.

Most of those who were present had either heard of the effects of the Beauty Pill or were direct beneficiaries of it.

Otherwise, who had the time to participate in a meaningless gathering that they could not get anything out of?

The Beauty Pill can nourish your skin, making it more tender and supple than before,” Zhang Xuan said. “Aside from that, it can also heal your internal traumas and even extend your lifespan slightly... There are some among the crowd who have tried the pill out themselves and spoken about it, so I won’t talk too much about it.

“Just as Qi Ling-er mentioned, the aim of this event is to introduce the two new pills that I have recently perfected.

“First and foremost, I would like to introduce an upgraded version of the Beauty Pill, and that is none other than the Breakthrough Pill. The information I relayed to you previously through the invitations contains no falsehood nor exaggeration. It does have the effect of increasing the chances of a cultivator making a breakthrough by fifty percent, which means that those who consume this pill is almost guaranteed to be able to overcome the bottleneck they are facing.

“One thing that concerns most people about such pills is the major side effects they come with, but I can assure you that the Breakthrough Pill has none. You need not worry about facing any hindrances in your cultivation because you have consumed the Breakthrough Pill before. On top of that, the Breakthrough Pill also carries the benefits of the Beauty Pill as well. It can make your skin more supple, heal your internal traumas, and extend your lifespan... “And most importantly of all, it’s delicious!”

“Increase the probability of making a breakthrough by fifty percent?”

“That’s almost an assurance of a breakthrough!”

“It also has the effects of the Beauty Pill too?”

“Most cultivators can increase their chances of making a breakthrough by twenty percent by reinforcing their cultivation properly. If they consume the Breakthrough Pill on top of that, the chances will be raised to a mind-boggling twenty percent! That’s insane!”

“What’s more, he mentioned that there are no side effects! Isn’t that crazy?”

Such discussions could be heard throughout the crowd. Many of the experts riding on aerial divine beasts were tempted by what Zhang Xuan had said.

They might not need the pill themselves, but they could still get one for their offspring. It would allow them to bulk up their forces within a short period of time, and that would be the key for them to expand their influence.

Standing on top of an aerial celestial beast, Zhou Feng looked at the elder sitting in front of him and asked in bewilderment, “Teacher, is it really possible for such a pill to exist?”

The most famous apothecary of the Firmament, Fu Jiangchen!

“I can’t say for sure whether it truly exists or not, but it’s best not to make judgements too quickly. There are far too many things that are beyond our understanding in this world... Let’s continue watching. We’ll be able to tell once the pill appears,” Fu Jiangchen replied without tearing his eyes away from the stage.

As a God King, he had already lived for several thousand years and encountered many unbelievably talented individuals.

Going by his common sense, he thought that a pill that could increase a person’s chances of making a breakthrough by fifty percent was utterly ridiculous, and something as convenient as that could not possibly exist... But nothing was absolute.

Just a few decades back, the Heaven Subjugation Monarch had also achieved what most people thought was impossible.

It might be the same for this young man.

“I understand that you may harbor some doubts regarding what I have just said, so I have brought the pill here in order to demonstrate its effects!”

With a flick of his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out a jade container and opened it. A round pill appeared before everyone’s view.

There was no amazing pulsation of spiritual energy or incredible emanation of aura. Looking at it from afar, the pill simply looked ordinary.

“That is a middle-tier God Essence Pill, right?”

“I have been forging that pill for a hundred years now, so there’s no way I wouldn’t recognize it...”

“The Beauty Pill looks identical to the low-tier God Essence Pill whereas the Breakthrough Pill looks identical to the middle-tier God Essence Pill... Can’t he choose another look for his pills?”

The crowd frowned upon seeing the pill. Even Fu Jiangchen was speechless.

He had thought that he would at least be able to discern the effectiveness of the pill just by looking at it... but it seemed like he was thinking too much!

From the moment he saw the Breakthrough Pill, he realized that it would be just like the Beauty Pill. Even if he sliced it apart and analyzed it for days, he still would not be able to figure out the secrets behind it.

“That person sure is a rare prodigy when it comes to forging pills...” Fu Jiangchen sighed deeply.

“Teacher, what makes you say that?” Zhou Feng asked.

The young man had not even demonstrated the effects of the pill yet, but his teacher was already complimenting him in advance.

“No matter what kind of pill it is, there are usually signs that allow us to identify its true nature. Recovery pills are bound to contain the Blood Agglutination Grass or the Anti-clotting Flower. Breakthrough Pills are usually made with the Breakthrough Flower or the Meridian Soothing Fragrance...”

However, the Beauty Pill that the young man has made, despite its amazing effects, appears to be no different from a God Essence Pill. Do you know the reason behind that?” Fu Jiangchen asked.

Zhou Feng shook his head.

If he knew the truth, he would not have gone to the extent of inviting his teacher there to decipher the young man’s secrets.

“It’s simple. The young man used a special forging technique to conceal the secrets behind his pill,” Fu Jiangchen replied.

“Conceal? Is that possible?” Zhou Feng asked in confusion.

Instead of answering his disciple’s question directly, Fu Jiangchen asked him a question instead. “The Low-tier God Essence Pill is one of the most basic pills in the Firmament. With your current ability, in how many ways do you think you are able to forge a low-tier God Essence Pill?”

“About several hundred ways, I guess,” Zhou Feng replied.

To put it simply, the low-tier God Essence Pill was basically the act of drawing out spiritual energy from medicinal herbs and sealing it within a physical container. There were many different combinations of medicinal herbs and forging techniques that could achieve the same effect, so the only issue was with finding the most efficient and economical way to do it.

“The reason you are able to deduce hundreds of ways to forge a low-tier God Essence Pill is mainly due to your strong foundations as an apothecary. You don’t just blindly follow pill formulas. You understand the nature of medicinal herbs well, and you are able to deduce how different medicinal herbs interact with one another under different conditions. That, in turn, allows you to come up with multiple ways to create a certain effect.”

Fu Jiangchen’s gaze moved over to the young man on the stage, and a hint of reverence flickered across his eyes.

“It’s the same for the young man over there! Even though the Breakthrough Pill that he’s forged appears to be no different from a middle-tier God Essence Pill, such that it’s impossible

to perceive the difference by Spiritual Perception, in truth, he has already refined it with many invaluable medicinal herbs. He intentionally chose to forge it in the form of a middle-tier God Essence Pill in order to conceal his pill formula and prevent copycats from emulating what he has done!”

“That would really be an amazing feat!” Zhou Feng widened his eyes in realization.

In a sense, what that young man did was similar to how poison users in the Firmament could sneak lethal poison into ordinary pills without anyone noticing.

It was just that what the young man was concealing was not poison but the true nature of his Breakthrough Pill!

And that made perfect sense. After all, how could a middle-tier God Essence Pill increase the chances of a person making a breakthrough by fifty percent?

Over on the stage, Zhang Xuan was still going.

“All words are empty until they are proven to be true. Since I have brought the pill out, it goes without saying that I should demonstrate the effects to assure all of you that this is no sham!

“Is there anyone who is interested in trying out the Breakthrough Pill? In order to eliminate speculations that I am putting on an act, I’ll need that person to be a distinguished individual who has great credibility in Drifting Specter Royal City. On top of that, they need to be on the verge of a breakthrough.”

The purpose of the demonstration was to convince the crowd that the Breakthrough Pill was truly as effective as he had made it out to be. Thus, it would be meaningless if the person that he selected was not credible enough to convince everyone that they were not conning them.

“I am Zhang Heng from Drifting Specter Royal City’s City Guards. My cultivation has been stuck at high-tier God pinnacle for more than a decade now, and all of the guards in the city can testify on my behalf!”

Before anyone could react, an old man had already volunteered himself and leaped onto the stage.

“What’s the use of having the guards testify for you? Who knows whether they are covering up for you? Let me do it instead! I am a mercenary from the Awesome Escort Group. My cultivation is currently at low-tier Celestial God pinnacle, and the butler of the Qi Clan can vouch for me!”

“All of you lack credibility! Let me do it instead!”

A huge uproar broke out, and within just a few moments, forty people had already leaped onto the stage.

They were not fully convinced that the Breakthrough Pill was true, but the young man’s act of gathering such a huge crowd to announce the product’s launch, as well as the fact that the Qi Clan was giving him their full support, sparked some hope in them.

There was a fair chance that it might just be real, and it would be the golden opportunity for them to make a breakthrough.

So, they decided to take the risk and volunteer themselves.

“This...”

Seeing that there were suddenly so many people standing before him, Zhang Xuan was left a little conflicted as to who he should choose.

At this moment, a voice suddenly sounded in the air. “May I volunteer one of my juniors instead?”

Following that, Fu Jiangchen finally rose to his feet.

2165 Just 998!

“It’s the number one apothecary of the Firmament, Fu Jiangchen!”

’_Hey hey hey, hold on for a moment. He might be the most famous apothecary in the Firmament, but he_s still not number one, right? I heard that the Heaven Subjugation Monarch is a true maestro in pill forging as well, and there’s no one in history who has even come close to what he has accomplished!”

“What the hell are you thinking about, comparing a God King to a God Monarch? Of course, there’s no way a God King can compete with a God Monarch! But putting aside the God Monarchs, Fu Jiangchen’s skills are top tier. Even if he isn’t number one, he’s definitely ranked within the top five!”

“I guess I can’t disagree with that. Speaking of which, shouldn’t he be in the Sky of Linglong? Why’s he here?”

The crowd swiftly recognized Fu Jiangchen’s identity, and gossip ensued.

Putting aside the fact that he was a God King, just his identity as the most formidable apothecary was enough for him to be known all around the Firmament.

Zhang Xuan did not recognize Fu Jiangchen, but he could tell that the latter was no ordinary figure just by gauging the reactions of the crowd. So, he nodded and said, “Of course, you are more than welcome to do so.”

Without standing on ceremony, Fu Jiangchen raised his hand, and a young man behind him leaped down from the celestial beast and landed on the stage.

“He’s my grandstudent, Han Qi. He’s a high-tier God, and as it hasn’t been long since he reached that cultivation realm, I estimate the chances of succeeding if he attempts a breakthrough right now are around thirty percent,” Fu Jiangchen said.

Since his grandstudent was the one chosen to test the Breakthrough Pill, it was only right for him to explain everything clearly. Otherwise, it would ruin his reputation if others accused him of colluding together with the young man.

Right after Fu Jiangchen said those words, on the stage, Han Qi immediately displayed his cultivation to the crowd. He was indeed a high-tier God, but there were hints that his cultivation was still a little loose and had not been reinforced yet. This showed that it had not been long since he made his breakthrough.

“We trust Apothecary Fu’s integrity. Given his standing, there’s no reason for him to lie!”

“I trust him as well!”

“I have long heard of Apothecary Fu’s impartial character...”

Shouts of support for Fu Jiangchen swiftly filled the entire square.

The crowd would have harbored some doubts no matter who Zhang Xuan chose from the crowd. Given the Qi Clan’s influence, it was very possible for anyone to collude with them.

However, it was a whole different matter if the one who volunteered was Fu Jiangchen.

As one of the few God Kings in the Firmament, there was no need for Fu Jiangchen to intentionally suck up to anyone. Furthermore, in the thousands of years since he came to fame as the number one apothecary of the Firmament, he had been known to be a fair and impartial person. There were hardly any negative rumors about him, which made him a highly credible person.

Since he was getting involved, it should be safe to trust the results of the test.

“Let’s begin the test,” Zhang Xuan said.

He had thought that he would still have to spend a bit of effort in order to win the crowd’s trust, but Fu Jiangchen’s intervention had spared him the hassle.

With a flick of his finger, Zhang Xuan passed the pill in the container right over to Han Qi.

Han Qi grabbed the pill and swallowed it right away.

Hong long!

Rich spiritual energy immediately surged into his dantian.

Not daring to hesitate in the least, Han Qi immediately sat down and began assimilating the medicinal energy within the pill.

Meanwhile, the crowd beneath watched the scene with bated breaths. None of them dared say a word, fearing that they would interrupt his cultivation.

Fortunately, this did not continue too long. In less than three minutes, the crowd could clearly sense Han Qi's divine energy accumulating at a swift pace, and a loud thunderous rumbling could be heard from his body. The sound grew louder and louder before reaching a climax...

Boom!

Everything cumulated into an explosion, and a powerful aura surged right into the sky. In that instant, Han Qi managed to overcome the bottleneck capping his cultivation.

“This... He made a breakthrough just like that?”

“It hasn't even been five minutes yet!”

The crowd gulped in shock.

Nearly none of the cultivators in the Firmament thought of becoming a God King, making Celestial God realm the greatest trial of their life.

Many Gods struggle desperately their entire lives to reach this goal, only to find that their efforts had been futile. Yet, the young man in front of them had succeeded in less than five minutes!

Was that Breakthrough Pill really that remarkable?

Fu Jiangchen also narrowed his eyes in disbelief.

He was capable of forging pills that increased the chances of a God becoming a Celestial God, but the most effective pill that he could make would only increase the chances by twenty percent, and a person could only afford to consume one in their entire life or risk severe side effects.

In fact, even if the other party's pill was capable of increasing the chances of a breakthrough by fifty percent, the breakthrough should not have come so quickly.

Given his understanding of his grandstudent's capabilities, his grandstudent should still have needed to circulate his divine energy several dozen times in order to refine it sufficiently, and that should have taken at least fifteen hours!

Yet, the duration taken was reduced to a mere five minutes...

It seemed like the Breakthrough Pill was even more powerful and frightening than expected.

He anxiously turned to his grandstudent and asked, "How do you feel?"

At this moment, Han Qi had barely managed to stabilize his cultivation. With a brilliant gleam in his eyes, he stood up and said, "It is even more amazing than I thought! Instead of fifty percent, it feels like the Breakthrough Pill has increased my chances... by at least sixty percent or more!"

Knowing his own condition well, Han Qi knew that the chances of him making a breakthrough at this very moment was extremely slim. Claiming that his probability of success was thirty percent was flattering him!

Yet, he managed to achieve a breakthrough so easily and so smoothly, as if there was no bottleneck at all. In his opinion, the Breakthrough Pill was far more effective than what the young apothecary had said.

In fact, he was willing to go as far as to say that the Breakthrough Pill had increased the odds of him making a breakthrough to one hundred percent!

"Is it really that remarkable?" Fu Jiangchen was stunned to hear how high an opinion Han Qi had of the Breakthrough Pill.

“I dare not lie to you, Grandteacher Fu! I swear on my pride as an apothecary and my own life that there isn’t the slightest falsehood in my words!” Han Qi replied solemnly.

Hearing how Han Qi was willing to even swear on it, the crowd, who were harboring some doubts after hearing his unbelievable claims, fell silent in shock.

This was exactly the effect that Zhang Xuan wanted to create through the demonstration, and he knew that he should strike while the iron was hot. So, he stepped forward and began speaking.

Thank you for your words, Brother Han. I believe that this should be enough to prove that there has been no exaggeration on my part regarding the effects of the Breakthrough Pill! Right now, I shall announce the price of the pill and the quantity that will be on sale today!”

Those words immediately snapped the crowd out of their daze, and they hurriedly shifted their attention back to him.

This was the main point of the show. No matter how formidable the Breakthrough Pill was, it would be meaningless if they could not afford it.

There was a brief pause at this moment, which caused the crowd to fidget anxiously, before Zhang Xuan began speaking. “As a pill that allows a cultivator to overcome his bottleneck, the price of the Breakthrough Pill is naturally even higher than that of the Beauty Pill. The sales price of the Beauty Pill is 1,500 Divine Coins, and the Breakthrough Pill happens to be ten times that. In other words... 15,000 Divine Coins!”

“15,000 Divine Coins?”

“Isn’t that daylight robbery?”

“That’s too expensive! Most cultivators wouldn’t be able to buy it even if they were to save a lifetime’s worth of fortune!”

“Even though it’s exorbitant, if the effects are really as amazing as we saw, it would indeed be worth that price...”

Bitter looks emerged on the faces of the crowd upon hearing the price.

15,000 Divine Coins... That was enough for one to buy a house near the heart of Drifting Specter Royal City, and to dump that humongous wealth on a single pill...

Then again, even though it might appear as if there was only the difference of a word between a high-tier God and a low-tier Celestial God, it signified a difference in the level of existence. If the Breakthrough Pill really allowed one to overcome this difference, it would be worth it no matter how much one spent.

The difference in terms of lifespan and standing could not be bought with any amount of money—until the launch of the Breakthrough Pill!

“Do you think that it’s too expensive?” Zhang Xuan asked as he looked at the faces amid the crowd.

Then, a smile appeared on his lips as he said, “I think so, too. It’s the first day I’m unveiling the Breakthrough Pill, and if I were to go with that pricing, most of you would probably be scared off. For this reason, just for today, you won’t need 15,000, 12,000, or even 10,000... All you need is 9,980! Yes, you didn’t hear wrong! At just 9,980 Divine Coins, you will be able to buy a Breakthrough Pill! Make no mistake, what you will be buying here is not just a pill. At a price lower than 10,000 Divine Coins, you will be able to secure assurance for you or a loved one’s brighter future!”

“9,800 Divine Coins?”

“That’s not even 10,000...”

This is great! The price dropped a third just like that!”

The eyes of the crowd immediately turned fiery hot.

9,980 Divine Coins was still an exorbitant price for a single pill, but it was much better than the previous offer of 15,000 Divine Coins. To secure a chance to make a breakthrough to the Celestial God realm at a price less than 10,000 Divine Coins... was there a better deal than this?

As long as one had the financial resources to do so, one would be a fool not to buy the pill!

“I want it!”

“Apothecary Zhang, I’ll get two pills!”

“Four pills for me, four pills for me!”

The crowd was immediately provoked into action.

Seeing how the brainwashing television advertisement tactics from his previous life had managed to rouse the crowd into action, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He raised his hand and said, “Please calm down for a moment.

“It’s not that I am unwilling to sell the pills to all of you, but the forging process is extremely complex. Due to the limitations I have as a result of the ingredients and my own energy, I don’t have enough Breakthrough Pills to satisfy everyone. Right now, I only have one hundred Breakthrough Pills with me, and once they are all sold out, I can’t guarantee when there will be a second batch or whether there will even be a second batch at all!”

Scarcity marketing!

Even if he could produce Breakthrough Pills easily, he knew better than to take his whole stockpile out at once. Otherwise, its value would plummet, and the crowd would swiftly forget about him. If so, he would not be able to receive a steady stream of Anima of Yearning from them anymore.

“Did you hear that? There are only a hundred pills! Hurry up and get our family to prepare the money! What? Are you seriously asking me how we are going to raise the money? Use your brains! Sell our house, sell our beasts... Just raise the money needed right now! As long as I can make a breakthrough to Celestial God, we’ll be able to buy as many houses as we want in the future!”

“Hey, handsome fellow. Won’t you buy me a Breakthrough Pill? If you can get me one, I’ll be yours for tonight...”

The hell! Even if I have to pawn away everything in my home, you can be darned sure that I will be getting one of those Breakthrough Pills!”

“Oi, stop trying to jump the queue. Do it again and I’ll slit your neck!”

Everyone went crazy in an instant. There was nearly no one who could keep their cool in the face of this massive temptation.

Watching this entire scene, it took Fu Jiangchen a long while before he was finally able to close his agape mouth.

He was the most prestigious apothecary in the entire Firmament, and his pills were greatly sought after by all cultivators. There were many who would kneel before him just to get him to forge a pill for them...

But none of that came close to being as crazy as the chaos happening right before him.

The Breakthrough Pill had not even started selling, but people were already so inflamed that they looked as if they would come to blows with one another!

“Everyone, I haven’t finished speaking yet!” Zhang Xuan quickly raised his hand as an indication for the crowd to keep quiet.

Then, with a nod, he continued. “There’s no need for you to worry about where you can buy the Breakthrough Pills. Later, when this event is over, you can proceed to where Qi Ling-er is to make a reservation with her. As long as you are within the first hundred registrants, you will be given priority in the purchase of the Breakthrough Pill. Aside from that, I’ll also be lowering the price of the Beauty Pill from 1,500 Divine Coins to just 998 today. There will be three thousand of them on sale, and it will also be on a first come first serve basis. After today, the prices will revert to normal.”

Those words caused another flurry of excitement amid the crowd.

Those who had not managed to buy a Beauty Pill thus far trembled in excitement.

The Breakthrough Pill costs 9,980 Divine Coins whereas the Beauty Pill costs 998 Divine Coins. I know that this price might be far beyond what some of our less privileged friends

here can afford. However, worry not. The last pill that I have prepared today is just for you!”

Zhang Xuan gestured to Qi Ling-er, and the latter immediately took out a jade bottle and poured out the tablets inside onto her hand.

“Aren’t those God Essence Tablets?”

“Ah, I know them. They are incredibly cheap. With just a single Divine Coin, you can buy ten of them...”

“They might look like God Essence Tablets, but there’s bound to be more to it...”

Curious, the crowd’s attention swiftly focused on Zhang Xuan once more.

Standing at the center of the stage, Zhang Xuan intentionally left a moment of silence for the crowd to talk among themselves and build up anticipation before introducing what it was.

“This tablet is known as the Spirit Channeling Tablet. It looks identical to a God Essence Tablet, but its effects are much more than that. Not only does it heal one’s expended energy, it also has the effect of gathering one’s focus and revitalizing one’s spirit, thus enhancing one’s rate of cultivation. However, it’s only effective on cultivators who are at the God realm or lower. As for the price... it’s just 9.98 apiece, which is less than ten Divine Coins!”

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“If you wish to purchase any, you can head over to any of the Zhang Xuan’s Pills stores around Royal City in three days. I have prepared a hundred tablets, so whoever is interested in testing its effects can come onto the stage to test one for free. However, your cultivation mustn’t be too high, preferably a low-tier God,” Zhang Xuan said.

Hulala!

As soon as he finished speaking, several hundred people immediately charged up, and they were all low-tier Gods.

Zhang Xuan was not stingy. He had Qi Ling-er take out a few more bottles so that all of them could get a tablet.

After consuming the Spirit Channeling Tablet, the cultivators felt their focus sharpening more than ever before. Ten of them were even able to make use of this heightened condition to make a breakthrough to middle-tier God.

With that, another wave of excitement swept across the crowd.

Even the effects of the cheapest Spirit Channeling Tablet had exceeded their imagination. It turned out to be an incredible medicine for making a breakthrough as well.

Furthermore, the price was not even ten Divine Coins. It was a sum that most cultivators could afford.

In an instant, all 500,000 people in the crowd made sure to jot down the name ‘Zhang Xuan’s Pills’ into their minds.

Naturally, the image of the young man behind all these pills was also imprinted deeply in their heads.

Looking at the thrilled crowd below, Zhang Xuan smiled in satisfaction. It seemed like the event was a huge success.

Just as he was about to start concluding the event, his eyes suddenly widened slightly before glowing in excitement.

The main reason he had chosen to push out these three pills was to receive more Anima of Yearning and raise his soul cultivation. He had thought that he would only be able to overcome the hurdle to high-tier Celestial God realm that night, but who could have known that he would be able to make a breakthrough on the spot!

He casually swallowed a high-tier God Essence Pills that he had in his storage ring, and two breaths later, his zhenqi cultivation swiftly surged as well.

High-tier Celestial God realm, reached!

Delighted with the results, Zhang Xuan gazed down at the crowd with a bright smile and said, “In the future, regardless of whether you need Breakthrough Pills, Beauty Pills, or Spirit Channeling Tablets, you can get them at Zhang Xuan’s Pills!”

Since he had already achieved his aim, he threw the crowd back to Qi Ling-er to handle. Without any hesitation, he leaped onto the aerial celestial beast that he had arrived on and returned to his residence.

Even though he had gone all out, he only did so because the situation necessitated it. On the inside, he was a humble and low-profile person. Since he had already achieved his goal, it was only natural for him to get out of the spotlight as soon as possible.

Barely after Zhang Xuan returned to his room and took a seat, Sun Qiang suddenly came over and reported, “Young Master, a person named Fu Jiangchen is at the entrance, and he has requested to meet you.”

“Invite him in!”

Zhang Xuan got to his feet and walked to the main hall to meet his guest.

He had been able to learn of Fu Jiangchen’s identity from the discussions of the crowd earlier. Considering how the latter had helped him, it was only natural for him to welcome him warmly.

Without his intervention, there was no way the Breakthrough Pill would have been able to win widespread recognition so

quickly.

“Apothecary Zhang!”

Fu Jiangchen greeted Zhang Xuan before settling on a seat. He began observing the young man in front of him curiously.

The young man had concealed his cultivation well. While others might not be able to discern it clearly, he could tell that the young man was already a high-tier Celestial God.

Furthermore, the energy flowing through his body was truly terrifying. In terms of strength, the young man might be comparable to him, a God King!

Be it in terms of fighting prowess, ability as an apothecary, or business sense, there was no doubt that the young man sitting in front of him was an outstanding individual.

“I’m honored by your visit, Apothecary Fu,” Zhang Xuan said politely.

“We are both apothecaries, so there’s no need for you to be so polite with me. I have dropped by in hopes that we could share insights regarding pill forging with one another,” Fu Jiangchen said.

“I’m more than delighted to chat with you,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

The art of pill forging was vast and profound.

However, Zhang Xuan had already reached the peak of the field back when he was still on Master Teacher Continent. While pill forging in the Firmament was slightly different from that of the Master Teacher Continent, the fundamental principles were mostly the same. As such, he was able to converse with Fu Jiangchen about pills without any difficulties.

It did not take long for Fu Jiangchen to be colored impressed. There was a brief moment that he was deeply tempted to acknowledge the young man before him as his teacher.

He had the reputation of the number one apothecary in the Firmament, but in truth, he knew that he was still far from the peak.

He had the honor of meeting the Heaven Subjugation Monarch once, and the two of them had briefly chatted about their insights regarding pill forging. From that conversation, he had realized that the Heaven Subjugation Monarch was actually a true master in pill forging, such that it was no exaggeration to say that his skills were unrivaled.

And right now, after having a deep discourse regarding the profoundness of pill forging, he realized that the young man before him did not pale in comparison to the Heaven Subjugation Monarch at all!

To think that a young man in his twenties would actually possess skills rivaling those of the Heaven Subjugation Monarch...

Just how in the world did he manage to acquire his capabilities?

After chatting for a while, Fu Jiangchen awkwardly raised a request. "Apothecary Zhang, if you don't mind, do you have some Breakthrough Pills here that you could sell to me? I'm willing to buy them at the original price!"

In truth, this was his main aim.

Considering that only a hundred Breakthrough Pills were being sold out there, it did not seem appropriate for a reputable apothecary like him to fight with the crowd over the Breakthrough Pill. With this consideration in mind, he had decided to pay a visit to Zhang Xuan personally, hoping that he could buy some from the person in question.

Of course, his goal was not to use the Breakthrough Pills to raise his cultivation but to study them.

"That's no trouble at all!" Zhang Xuan replied heartily.

With a wave of his hand, he gestured for Sun Qiang to bring a jade bottle over.

Fu Jiangchen uncorked the lid and saw ten Breakthrough Pills inside.

His face immediately reddened in agitation. He quickly took out a card and passed it over. "Here, 150,000 Divine Coins..."

“Ah, it’s fine. There’s no need for you to pay me. However... Apothecary Fu, do you have any pinnacle God Essence Pills with you? I would be really grateful if you could sell some of them to me,” Zhang Xuan said.

He could feel that the effectiveness of a high-tier God Essence Pill on him had reduced significantly, such that it was likely that he would need pinnacle God Essence Pills in order to push for a breakthrough to God King.

The only problem was that pinnacle God Essence Pills were incredibly valuable and were effective even on Conferred God Kings. Putting aside the exorbitant price tag on them, it was extremely difficult to source them.

Considering that Fu Jiangchen was renowned as the number one apothecary in the Firmament, he should be able to forge the hard-to-acquire pinnacle God Essence Pills.

If he could buy more from the other party, he would be spared a great deal of trouble in the future. As long as he could successfully raise his cultivation to the God King realm, he would have sufficient strength to squeeze into the top echelon of the Firmament.

“Pinnacle God Essence Pills? Sure, I do have some...” Fu Jiangchen was stunned for a moment before nodding in agreement.

One could count on one’s fingers the number of apothecaries in the Firmament who were capable of forging pinnacle God Essence Pills, but he happened to be one of them. Not only so, he was ranked among the top few.

With a flick of his wrist, he passed a jade bottle over as he said, “The Pinnacle God Essence Pill is a very high tier pill, and the medicinal herbs that are required for its forging are extremely difficult to source. Even I must spend a great deal of time and effort in order to forge one. Currently, I only have three pinnacle God Essence Pills in my possession.”

“That’s enough...”

Zhang Xuan could hardly hide his disappointment when he heard that Fu Jiangchen only had three of them, but he quickly

concealed it with a smile. He accepted the jade bottle before beckoning Sun Qiang over.

“Here, 2,900,000 Divine Coins. Please accept it!” Sun Qiang humbly passed a card over to Fu Jiangchen.

The price of God Essence Pills went up a hundredfold for each difference in tier. A Divine Coin for a low-tier God Essence Pill, one hundred Divine Coins for a middle-tier God Essence Pill, ten thousand Divine Coins for a high-tier God Essence Pill... Naturally, a pinnacle God Essence Pill was worth 1,000,000 Divine Coins, and that was assuming that one had the connections to procure one!

In comparison, the Breakthrough Pill that he was selling really was not expensive at all.

Fu Jiangchen had Zhou Feng accept the card before rising to his feet. He had already accomplished his business there, so it was time for him to bid farewell and leave.

“Apothecary Fu, please hold on a moment,” Zhang Xuan said as he stood up as well.

Perplexed, Fu Jiangchen turned around and asked, “Do you need anything from me, Apothecary Zhang?”

“I’m not really sure how to put it...” Zhang Xuan said hesitantly as he quickly prepared his words. “Apothecary Fu, you are a God King expert, as well as a renowned apothecary. I believe that you must have visited many different places in the Firmament and know many things. There’s something that I would like to ask you about...”

He was hoping that the old man before him might happen to know something about Luo Ruoxin.

An apothecary who was able to forge pinnacle God Essence Pills that Conferred God Kings needed was bound to be respected and treated like a VIP no matter where he went.

Given so, it was likely that he might know of secrets that others were unaware of.

“Apothecary Zhang, feel free to ask me anything. I’ll answer your question as long as it’s something that I know of,” Fu

Jiangchen said with a smile.

He had traveled around the Firmament over the past thousands of years, and he prided himself as a person who was very knowledgeable about the affairs concerning the Firmament.

“I would like to inquire about the status of a person that I know. If I’m not mistaken, she should be a God King at the very least. Her name is Luo Ruoxin!” Zhang Xuan said expectantly.

“Luo Ruoxin?” Fu Jiangchen frowned slightly. “I have heard of all of the God Kings in the Nine Skies, but I don’t know anyone who goes by that name...”

There were only a hundred or so God Kings in the Firmament, so it was not difficult to remember every single one of them. He was certain that none of them went by the name ‘Luo Ruoxin’.

This, in turn, caused Zhang Xuan to frown.

Was he mistaken? Was Luo Ruoxin not a God King?

Was she actually a high-tier Celestial God just like him?

As for Conferred God King and God Monarch...

To be honest, he dared not even think about that!

Seeing the bewildered look on Zhang Xuan’s face, Fu Jiangchen added, “Could you have made a mistake? If she’s truly a God King, I would have heard of her. Do you remember anything else about her?”

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before adding, “She has once told me that she’s the Spirit God.”

He had once guessed that Luo Ruoxin was just a pseudonym, and it seemed like he was right about that.

“Spirit God?” Fu Jiangchen’s eyes narrowed in disbelief upon hearing those words. He anxiously asked, “Are you certain about that? Did she tell you that personally, or did you hear it from someone else?”

Zhang Xuan was slightly taken aback by how Fu Jiangchen was reacting. He quickly replied, “She told me that

personally.”

He had asked Luo Ruoxin about her identity as the Spirit God before, and she had also admitted it. In that sense, it was indeed true that she had told him about it personally.

“When did it happen?” Fu Jiangchen pressed on. He seemed to be extremely agitated, such that his breathing had hastened a little.

“When did it happen?” Zhang Xuan quickly calculated the timing in terms of the Firmament’s flow of time and replied, “It was around a month ago...”

All in all, the time he had spent on the Master Teacher Continent and the Azure equated to barely more than a single day in terms of time on the Firmament.

“A month ago? H-how... How is that possible!”

Fu Jiangchen widened his eyes in shock. His body was trembling, and his voice had become a little hoarse.

“What is wrong?” Zhang Xuan asked carefully.

He had not expected Fu Jiangchen to react in such a manner to his question.

Fu Jiangchen’s voice was trembling so much that even his disciples were staring at him in shock. It was very unlike his usual composed self.

“That’s because... forty years ago, the Spirit God...”

“...passed away!”

Author’s Note:

With this, we conclude our 16th Arc, [The Death of the Spirit God], and usher in our next arc [The Demise of a Monarch]!

In this arc, Zhang Xuan finally settled into the Firmament and became an existence second only to the God Kings. His students also found their own places. In the next arc, we’ll be drawing the curtains on the real arc shrouding the Firmament. Kong shi and Luo Ruoxin will finally appear in this arc and make their stands. At the same time, Zhang Xuan will become stronger and become a God King and beyond.

Please look forward to it!

2167 The Titles of the Nine God Monarchs

Weng weng!

Zhang Xuan's head stalled for a moment before something clicked in his head. In a voice that was nearly shouting, he exclaimed, "The Spirit God died forty years ago? How is that possible? Is the Spirit God a hereditary title? The person I am looking for should be the newly-appointed Spirit God!"

Luo Ruoxin had only parted with him a month ago, so how could she have already been dead for forty years?

It could not possibly be that he was haunted by a ghost, right?

If he was not mistaken, 'Spirit God' should be nothing more than a title. With the death of the previous Spirit God, the successor would take their place.

It should be the same as the title 'Sovereign Chen Yong', where the title was passed down from generation to generation.

"This... Can such a thing be passed down?" Fu Jiangchen's face was filled with skepticism. "I don't think that the possibility is very likely. If such a thing happened, the entire Firmament should have learned about it by now. There's no way we wouldn't have heard a thing till now..."

The entire Firmament should have learned about it?" Zhang Xuan was getting more and more confused by the moment. "Is the Spirit God a very prestigious title?"

Even if a Conferred God King passed down their position to their successor, it would not go to the extent where the entire Firmament knew about it.

"The Spirit God is one of the Nine God Monarchs. How could it not be a prestigious title?" Fu Jiangchen replied with a bitter smile.

Zhang Xuan immediately froze on the spot upon hearing those words.

“Wait a moment, Luo Ruoxin, no, the Spirit God is one of the Nine God Monarchs?”

He knew that his girlfriend was unlikely to be an ordinary person, but never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined that she would actually be one of the Nine God Monarchs, the strongest existence in the entire Firmament...

This was way too much for him to absorb quickly.

Zhang Xuan could not help but feel a little dreamy. If that was really true, it would explain why she had been unwilling to get together with him initially, as well as why she was so hesitant to reveal her identity.

There was simply too huge a gap between the two of them. Given the mortal he was then, there was no way he would have been compatible with her.

“That’s indeed the case.” Fu Jiangchen nodded.

Zhang Xuan took a deep breath to calm himself down first before asking, “May I know which of the Nine Skies the Spirit God rules over?”

He knew of the Nine Skies, but he had a limited understanding of the Nine God Monarchs. He wanted to know which of the Nine Skies Luo Ruoxin ruled over so that he could head over to find her.

“You don’t know?”

Fu Jiangchen was surprised by Zhang Xuan’s question. He stared at the young man for a moment, but it did not seem like the young man was joking with him. So, he shook his head and replied, “The Spirit God is naturally the monarch of the Sky of Spirit Origin!”

“Sky of Spirit Origin?” Zhang Xuan was stunned as another name for the Sky of Spirit Origin suddenly surfaced in his mind. “You are referring to the Sky of Deathlessness, right? Which means to say that...the Spirit God is the Deathless Monarch?”

“Indeed!” Fu Jiangchen nodded in response.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was utterly dumbfounded.

The Spirit God was actually the Deathless Monarch... but the Deathless Monarch was already dead! He even saw the latter's tombstone back at the Azure?

“Could it be that Ruoxin inherited the position of the previous Deathless Monarch, thus becoming the Spirit God of the new generation?” Zhang Xuan swiftly came up with a plausible answer to this bizarre occurrence.

This was the only explanation that he could think of that made sense of everything.

“Well, I'm afraid that I don't really know about that...” Fu Jiangchen replied awkwardly.

A moment later, he added, “It's hard to say when it comes to the God Monarchs. They aren't beings whom we can talk about casually, and it would be foolish to apply our common sense to them... No God Monarch has ever passed away since the inception of the Firmament, and this is the first time something like this has happened. So, be it the identity of the successor or whether there is even a successor in the first place, we don't really know much about it...”

Zhang Xuan continued asking a few more questions, but it appeared that Fu Jiangchen did not know much about the Spirit God of the Sky of Spirit Origin. So, he decided not to ask about that anymore.

“Then, do you know the God Monarch for each of the Nine Skies?”

For some reason, the information regarding the Nine God Monarchs was not detailed in any of the books at all. Most of what he had knew about the God Monarchs had come from Mo Yun, the teacher that he met shortly after he arrived in the Firmament.

Since Fu Jiangchen appeared to be extremely knowledgeable about the Firmament, it would be best to direct these questions to him.

Those aren't secrets at all. Anyone who tries to look into it will be able to receive answers quickly!" Fu Jiangchen said. "It appears that you know about the Nine Skies, so I won't touch too much on them. As for the Nine God Monarchs...

"The Cloud Dragon Monarch rules over the eastern Sky of Cloud Dragon. As a Pureblooded Dragon, he's an unparalleled existence in the world.

"Monarch Fumeng, known for his valiance and brawling abilities, governs the western Sky of Adamant Gold.

"The Sky of Spirit Origin, also known as the Sky of Deathlessness, is located at the south of the Firmament, and its ruler is the Deathless Monarch, who is also addressed as the God of Spirit Origin or Spirit God for short.

"Located directly opposite of that is the northern Sky of Acheron, also known as the Acheron Ocean. It's a massive ocean that even God Kings can easily lose their way in... Its ruler is the Acheron Monarch!

The Sky of Blazing Sun is located to the southeast of the Firmament, and it is ruled by Monarch Zhuoyang, who is also known as the Blazing Sun Monarch. His presence itself casts an inferno over the lands, making him a deeply feared figure.

"To the northeast is the Sky of Heavenly Sword, one of the most mysterious places in the Firmament. It doesn't have much land, but there is no power that dares to trifle with it. There are rumors that the Heavenly Sword Monarch possesses strength that triumphs over the other God Monarchs, and only that person of the Sky of Freedom is able to curb him.

"The southwestern Sky of Linglong is where I spend most of my time nowadays. Fairy Linglong is the only female monarch of the Nine God Monarchs as far as I know. I have met her a few times, and she doesn't put on airs and is very down to earth. I respect her a lot.

"Northwest of the Firmament where we are at now, the Sky of Drifting Specter. The monarch of the Sky of Drifting Specter is the Qiankun Demon Monarch. You should be more familiar with this than me, so I'll just skip him.

“And at the very center of those eight Skies is the Sky of Freedom. The monarch of the Sky of Freedom is a huge mystery. I have never met them before, so I don’t know who they are or what their gender is. In fact, I don’t even know what their title is, and I dare not talk too carelessly about them either. All I know is that they possess unfathomable strength, such that the other eight God Monarchs appear to view them as their de facto leader.”

Fu Jiangchen swiftly went through the details of the Nine God Monarchs to Zhang Xuan.

“Cloud Dragon Monarch, Monarch Fumeng, Monarch Zhuoyang...” Zhang Xuan committed the names of the Nine God Monarchs to memory before nodding quietly.

Given that Luo Ruoxin addressed herself as the Spirit God, it was very likely that she was the successor of the Deathless Monarch. He would have head down to the Sky of Spirit Origin to verify this matter for himself.

However, the problem was that the Sky of Spirit Origin was located in the south of the Firmament whereas the Sky of Drifting Specter was in the northwest. He would probably have to use the Teleportation Formations. The distance was simply too far for him to traverse through normal means.

“If you have no other questions, I’ll be leaving then!”

After talking about the Nine God Monarchs, Fu Jiangchen filled Zhang Xuan in on a few other secrets that he could afford to talk about before bidding farewell.

“I am deeply grateful for your honest response to my questions, Apothecary Fu,” Zhang Xuan said as he bowed deeply.

Most people would avoid talking about the Nine God Monarchs for fear that they would draw trouble to themselves. It could be said that Fu Jiangchen had really done him a great favor.

“Apothecary Zhang, you are too courteous. As someone who is able to become high-tier Celestial God and come up with the Breakthrough Pill and Beauty Pill at such a young age, I

believe that it's only a matter of time before you become a God King. Even if I chose not to speak today, it would only be a matter of time before you learned about these things yourself. So, you need not feel too burdened by this!" Fu Jiangchen chuckled softly.

He would not have spoken about the Nine God Monarchs under normal circumstances, but he saw great potential in the young man before him. In terms of strength, potential, and skills in pill forging, the young man did not pale much in comparison to him.

It was very likely that the young man would become his peer or surpass him even in the near future. Since that was the case, it would be better to do him a favor now.

2168 Great Displacement Teleportation Formation

Zhang Xuan did not rush into action after Fu Jiangchen left. Instead, he fell into deep thought.

There were two paths right before him at this very moment.

First, he could head to the Sky of Spirit Origin to find Luo Ruoxin and tell her that he was in the Firmament and that his cultivation had already reached high-tier Celestial God. Even though he was still a long way off from becoming a God Monarch, as long as he persevered, with the cheat code known as the Library of Heaven's Path, he was confident that he could narrow the gap between the two of them.

Second, he could stay there and continue selling his Breakthrough Pills and Beauty Pills. Through this, he could expand his influence and gather more Anima of Yearning. In the future, he could push for a breakthrough to God King, Conferred God King, and possibly, just like Kong shi, reach God Monarch too!

He could only become worthy of Luo Ruoxin by reaching the same place where she was.

Otherwise, with his current cultivation realm, even if he found Luo Ruoxin, they still would not be able to make their relationship public.

But there was a problem with that.

“After the huge event that was just held, it doesn't seem likely that I can spread my name any further any time soon...”

The Anima of Yearning that he received ever since he announced the release of the three pills had been increasing nonstop, but the rate of increase was slowly decreasing. Furthermore, after his cultivation reached high-tier Celestial God realm, the amount of soul energy that he needed to make a breakthrough became much higher.

At the very least, it would take a month or two before he was ready to attempt a breakthrough to become a God King.

Furthermore, he had not found any inspiration for his advancement to the God King realm yet. All of this meant that it was unlikely for him to make a breakthrough anytime soon.

If it was already that difficult for him to become a God King, did that not mean that it would at least take him several years before he could become a God Monarch?

That was too slow!

Zhang Xuan sighed once more.

It was one thing when he did not know where Luo Ruoxin was, but now that he knew where he could find her, there was no way he could hold himself back.

“Forget it, I’ll head to the Sky of Spirit Origin first. I’ll decide what to do next after meeting her...” Zhang Xuan solemnly made up his mind.

He had no idea why the old Deathless Monarch had passed away, but if Luo Ruoxin had taken over his position, it was unlikely that she would be in a comfortable position at the moment. Her strength likely paled in comparison to the rest of the God Monarchs, and that would mean that she was in a precarious situation.

If she was facing any difficulties, it was only right for him to stand by her side and face them together.

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan stood up and began walking out of the main hall. However, Qi Ling-er suddenly walked in at this moment.

“Young Master Zhang, the one hundred Breakthrough Pills and three thousand Beauty Pills have been sold. As for the Spirit Channeling Tablets, we’re still waiting for Zhang Xuan’s Pills to officially open for business in three days before putting them on sale.”

As the Spirit Channeling Tablets were aimed at normal cultivators, it was best to let the anticipation ripen a bit before selling them. Otherwise, if everyone got their hands on them

right away, the sense of accomplishment upon obtaining one would be greatly reduced.

That would reduce the amount of Anima of Yearning that he received considerably.

“You have done well.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “I am planning to head over to the Sky of Spirit Origin to handle some matters. I’ll be counting on you and Sun Qiang to handle the business.”

With these two sharp-witted businessmen holding the fort, there was nothing he needed to worry about. His time would be much better spent on trying to find Luo Ruoxin.

“You are heading to the Sky of Spirit Origin?” Qi Ling-er was taken aback. “Young Master, how are you planning on heading there? Given the distance, even if you fly there on an aerial celestial beast, it’ll take you several years at the very minimum!”

The Sky of Drifting Specter was located in the northeast whereas the Sky of Spirit Origin was situated in the south. Given how large the Firmament was, the distance between these two places was frighteningly great!

“Aren’t there Teleportation Formations that connecting the Sky of Drifting Specter to the Sky of Spirit Origin?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Qi Ling-er was the one who had suggested that they use the Teleportation Formation to reach Royal City from Twilight City. Why would she suddenly ask such an obvious question?

“That Teleportation Formation, also known as the Minor Displacement Teleportation Formation, only allows you to teleport within the boundaries of the Sky of Drifting Specter. If you wish to transcend boundaries and teleport straight to the Sky of Spirit Origin, you’ll need the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation. However, it won’t be easy to use it,” Qi Ling-er explained.

“Great Displacement Teleportation Formation?”

This time, Zhang Xuan was the one who was confused.

Qi Ling-er shook her head helplessly at Zhang Xuan's incomprehension. It was really amazing how the young man was so knowledgeable about all sorts of stuff, only to be utterly ignorant about some of the most basic things.

The Nine Skies Nine Monarchs are basically nine different countries. Each country has its own borders, so there's no way outsiders would be allowed to cross the borders easily, not to mention using Teleportation Formations. If it was that easy to move from one Sky to the other, the major powers would have to constantly guard against one another, and chaos would ensue as soon as any power displayed the slightest hint of weakness!" Qi Ling-er explained.

It would not pose a problem if a cultivator wanted to move within the boundaries of the country that they belonged to, but of course, that could not be allowed when it came to other countries. If each of the Skies allowed outsiders to freely teleport into their own land, that would be pretty much giving them the ability to launch an invasion as and when they liked!

"I see... What's the criteria required in order to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"As far as I know, there are three ways in which you can use that formation," Qi Ling-er replied. "First, if you become a God King or get into the top thirty of the Board of Potential God Kings and are highly skilled in a non-combat occupation, similar to Master Fu Jiangchen, you will be able to use the Teleportation Formations to travel around the Firmament without any restrictions!

"Alternatively, you could become an envoy of the Sky of Drifting Specter! However, the minimum rank requirement for becoming an envoy is to be a Golden Armored General in the military. Furthermore, you must accumulate sufficient contribution and receive a mandate straight from the Qiankun Demon Monarch.

"Last but not least, you can also receive a special permit from the Sky of Freedom. The Sky of Freedom is viewed to be the de facto leader of the Nine Skies, so their special permit will allow you to freely use the Teleportation Formations around

the Firmament. However, the criteria for receiving the special permit are the same as the first option. You must be a God King or get into the top thirty of the Board of Potential God Kings. Otherwise, you'll be crushed by the distortion in spatial laws when attempting to travel through the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation.

“No matter which way it is, you'll need to have the cultivation of a high-tier Celestial God at the very minimum. However, Young Master Zhang's current cultivation is...”

Feeling that she had gotten the point across, Qi Ling-er stopped her words right there.

She had seen how the young man's cultivation rose from low-tier God to middle-tier Celestial God within the span of a few days.

There was no way she would not have been triggered after seeing something like this. So, she had begun to focus her effort on cultivating as well.

Fortunately, with the rise in her standing in the Qi Clan, she was provided with everything she needed in her cultivation. But even with ample resources and unyielding diligence, she had only managed to reinforce her low-tier Celestial God realm cultivation over the past week. It would still be a long time before she could make a breakthrough to middle-tier Celestial God realm.

Since this was the case for her, surely it would be the same for the young man.

The advancement in every single cultivation stage for a Celestial God was many times harder than that of a God.

Given so, there was no way Zhang Xuan would be able to withstand the pressure on his body from going through the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation.

The Minor Displacement Teleportation Formation was so frightening that one would require the protection of the City Lord Token, so the Major Displacement Teleportation Formation was bound to be even more fearsome. It was not a facility that anyone could use easily.

“Ah, are you worrying about my cultivation? You don’t need to. My cultivation has already reached high-tier Celestial God!”

As Zhang Xuan spoke, he revealed his cultivation to Qi Ling-er.

As a humble and low-profile person, there was no way he would brag about his breakthrough to others for no reason. A God King might still be able to see through his cultivation, but it was perfectly normal that a low-tier Celestial God could not do so.

You...”

The great pressure coming from Zhang Xuan made Qi Ling-er unwittingly take a step back. Her eyes widened in shock as her mouth fell agape.

Trembling nonstop, she slowly raised her right hand to clutch her chest so as to soothe her twitching heart.

This was too much!

It had only been ten or so days since they first met, but the young man had managed to raise his cultivation from a low-tier God all the way to a high-tier Celestial God, becoming a figure far beyond her reach.

Was it even possible for a human to cultivate that quickly?

It was at this moment that Qi Ling-er swore to the heavens that she would avoid talking about cultivation or the like before Zhang Xuan. Otherwise, she felt like her heart might really cave in one of these days...

2169 High-tier Celestial God Realm Pinnacle

“What? Is my strength still lacking at the moment? Do I have to reach high-tier Celestial God for it to work?”

Seeing how Qi Ling-er had gone silent all of a sudden, Zhang Xuan could not help but frown.

Qi Ling-er took a deep breath and suppressed her stifled feeling before finally speaking up. “Those who are able to get into the top thirty of the Board of Potential God Kings are all at high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle. That’s the minimum requirement for them to differentiate themselves from other high-tier Celestial Gods...”

Even though Zhang Xuan had managed to advance his cultivation to high-tier Celestial God, there was still a huge gap before he could reach the top of the cultivation stage.

The step after high-tier Celestial God was God King. Even though it was just a single cultivation stage, the amount of energy that was required to make this breakthrough was massive, such that there were cultivators who had reinforced their foundation for hundreds of years, only to fail to make the breakthrough time and time again.

For this reason, the gap among high-tier Celestial Gods could be surprisingly huge. A person who had just become a high-tier Celestial God was bound to be drastically different from one who had reached that level centuries prior.

Even with Zhang Xuan’s potential, he would have to cultivate for at least a year in order to climb his way to the top.

Even with Qi Yue’s talent and the huge amount of resources the Qi Clan had invested in him, he had still taken almost ten years to raise his cultivation from high-tier Celestial God realm primary stage to pinnacle.

“Is that so?”

Hearing that he had to raise his cultivation to high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle at the very minimum, Zhang Xuan clearly hesitated for a moment. Then, with a deep sigh, he murmured, “I guess I have no choice but to use that then...”

With a flick of his wrist, he took out a pill.

It was one of the God Essence Pills that he had bought from Fu Jiangchen just a moment ago.

Ordinary high-tier God Essence Pills were no longer as effective on him. So, he had to rely on this in order to raise his cultivation to higher realms.

Without any hesitation, he popped the pinnacle God Essence Pill into his mouth.

Young Master Zhang, you are...”

Seeing how Zhang Xuan abruptly popped a pill into his mouth after hearing her words, Qi Ling-er was a little dumbfounded.

What in the world are you up to?

You can’t be trying to make a breakthrough now, can you?

Don’t you need to condition yourself and prepare?

It can’t be that you are able to raise your cultivation just by stuffing yourself with medicine, right?

Qi Ling-er was just about to pose her doubts when she saw the young man suddenly closing his eyes. Two seconds later, he opened his eyes once more and said, “Alright, I’m done. I am at high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle now.”

Boom!

Following his words, an indomitable aura flowed out of his body. The pressure that was coming from him felt so powerful that she felt as if she was going to be crushed to bits.

“T-this...” Qi Ling-er was really flabbergasted.

I only said five words after you swallowed the God Essence Pill, but within that short period, you were actually able to achieve what took Qi Yue ten years to accomplish?

Feeling more stifled than ever, Qi Ling-er clutched her chest and rubbed it to soothe the congested feeling within.

It was a good thing that Qi Yue was not there, or else he would have been traumatized out of his wits!

It sure was darned frustrating to see someone pulling off something that took others years to achieve so easily...

The heck, was it really fine for the creator to unleash a monster like that upon the world?

It was unfair!

“How is it? Am I strong enough now? If this isn’t enough yet, I can wait a little longer till my soul cultivation rises to high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle too,” Zhang Xuan said.

His physical body and zhenqi cultivation had already reached high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle, but his soul cultivation was not at that level yet. He still needed to accumulate some more Anima of Yearning in order to pull that off.

“T-there’s no need for that...”

Fearing that the young man would really pull something off that would allow his soul cultivation to grow on the spot. Qi Ling-er quickly turned him down. She closed her eyes for a moment to adjust her emotions before speaking. “Young Master Zhang, you are already strong enough. It’s just that the three ways which I have listed out aren’t easy to accomplish... Putting aside the ones that require you to become a God King or reach the top of an occupation, even becoming a Golden Armored General of the Sky of Drifting Specters isn’t easy. And when it comes to the elusive Sky of Freedom, receiving a special permit is as difficult as trying to scale the heavens...”

“You’re right...” Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

The three ways that Qi Ling-er had stated were indeed not easy at all.

If that was the case, should he spend another month or two there to reinforce his cultivation and become a God King first?

But that would take way too much time. It was his last option at the moment.

Was there a way for him to make a breakthrough that night or within the next two days?

That did not seem too likely either, especially since he did not have a clue which direction he should develop the Pathos of Heaven in.

Furthermore, he knew that the hurdle to overcome to become a God King was not low at all. He would surely face plenty of trouble doing so.

“You mentioned earlier that those who have reached the top of their occupation and are within the top thirty of the Board of Potential God Kings can use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation. What occupations are considered under this?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Apothecaries, physicians, blacksmiths, master teachers... These are the four main ones, I think,” Qi Ling-er said. “They are not centered around fighting, and they can contribute greatly to the cultivators around them. Most powers are eager to poach talents in those fields.

“The fact that you are able to create the Breakthrough Pill goes to show that your proficiency in pill forging is extraordinary. If you could just take the exam and be officially recognized as a member of the occupation, you would be given the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation!”

“How does the exam work?”

The exam for Drifting Specter Royal City’s Apothecary Guild requires its examinees to forge a pill on the spot. As long as a cultivator is able to forge a high-tier God Essence Pill, they will have cleared the examination,” Qi Ling-er replied.

“High-tier God Essence Pill?” Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

While he was the man who had created the extraordinary Breakthrough Pill and Beauty Pill, his true skills in pill forging were disastrous. Putting aside a high-tier God Essence Pill, it was a huge question whether he could forge even a low-tier God Essence Pill at all.

He would be immediately exposed as a fraud if he attempted to forge a pill before another apothecary...

As for smithing, it seemed like he was not capable of forging anything other than bricks.

So, after much thought, the only viable option left for him was to focus on the path of a master teacher or a physician.

“If I were to seek the path of a physician, how high must my mastery be in order to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation? Also, how does the examination work?” Zhang Xuan asked.

If he walked the path of a master teacher, he would inevitably get tied up together with Kong shi. At least till he was sufficiently strong to stand his ground, he did not wish to catch Kong shi’s eye.

The affairs of the Azure had taught him to be wary.

“Physician?” Qi Ling-er frowned contemplatively. “This... I’m afraid that I don’t really know. I’ll have to head to the Physician Guild to ask them about it.”

Aren’t you an apothecary? Why are you taking the physician examination instead? Or are you telling me that... you are skilled in medicine as well?

“Let’s head there together,” Zhang Xuan said

It was just a matter of time before he took the examination anyway, so he might as well make his way there and clear it as soon as possible. It would save him some time.

“Alright!” Qi Ling-er nodded.

There were organizations representing all sorts of occupations in the Firmament; it was just that they were not as influential as they were on the Master Teacher Continent.

In the Firmament, what people valued most was still strength. As long as one displayed sufficient strength, all sorts of talented people would congregate around one.

For this reason, while apothecaries, physicians, and blacksmiths were viewed in high regard by others, their

standing was not as high as on the Master Teacher Continent.

The master teachers in the Firmament aren't as organized and disciplined as those on the Master Teacher Continent either... Zhang Xuan sighed deeply as he recalled Fan Zhe's doing.

On the Master Teacher Continent, the expectations of a master teacher were very extreme. Not only did they have to be knowledgeable about cultivation, they had to be skilled in multiple occupations as well. Every 9-star master teacher would have to be a master in nine different occupations.

As for the Firmament, it seemed like master teachers just had to be decently good at teaching, and it did not seem like there were strict rules on their ethics.

Perhaps Kong shi was in a rush to initiate the system of master teachers all over the world so as to obtain more Anima of Yearning. He did not have the luxury of time to take a step at a time to develop the occupation properly.

Given how quickly he had risen through the ranks, challenging the Nine God Monarchs one after another, if he had really taken his time, the Master Teacher Pavilion would have been crushed by other powers in the initial phase of its establishment.

2170 Physician Tournamen

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Zhang Xuan's residence was quite far away from the Physician Guild. Even while riding on an aerial celestial beast, they took more than an hour before they arrived at their destination. Just like the Master Teacher Pavilion, the building of the Physician Guild did not look particularly grand.

If Zhang Xuan had to describe it, it seemed like a private medical clinic instead.

The Physician Guild was filled with people. Most of them were dressed in robes, and they had anxious looks on their faces.

“Physician Wang Qing, Physician Yue Quan, Physician Shen Zimu...”

Looking at the crowd in the hall, Qi Ling-er swiftly recognized them and frowned in bewilderment.

“Are they very famous?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“They are the most formidable physicians in the Drifting Specter Royal City! Usually, most of them are so busy that they wouldn't meet one another even though all of them live in Royal City. It's weird how all of them are gathered together in the Physician Guild today!” Qi Ling-er replied.

Physician Wang Qing was the principal physician of their Qi Clan, and the health problems faced by the upper echelons of the Qi Clan were all entrusted to him.

Similarly, Physician Yue Quan was the principal physician of the Beitang Clan, and Physician Shen Zimu was the principal physician of the Shentu Clan.

While the three clans appeared to be peaceful on the surface, there was a great deal of rivalry happening in the shadows. As such, even during the usual meetings held by the Physician

Guild, those three physicians tried to avoid one another as much as possible.

It was bizarre to see the three of them appearing together in one place.

“We just have to ask someone to find out what’s going on,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

He stopped a young physician that was passing by and handed him ten Divine Coins. “May I know what’s going on here at the moment?”

The young physician accepted the money and replied, “It’s the Physician Tournament!”

“Physician Tournament?” Zhang Xuan frowned doubtfully.

He had heard of people competing in their proficiency in pill forging and smithing... but was it possible for people to compete with their abilities to cure a patient?

The apothecary that was able to best extract the medicinal energy from the medicinal herbs and maximize the potency of the forged pill would be the most skilled of all. The blacksmith who was able to create the most resilient and sharpest weapon would be the most proficient of all...

But how were physicians supposed to compete with their skills?

The Way of Medicine was vast and broad, and each physician had their own specialty. Furthermore, was it safe for them to test out their cures on their patients to see which was more efficient?

A life was at stake! That would be making light of their patients!

“I guess it’s normal that you outsiders wouldn’t know about it. The evaluation method of the Physician Tournament is not perfect, but it’s the most direct way to gauge a physician’s skills. It is basically a simulation of the treatment process, where the physicians will diagnose the patient and treat him. Based on a set of assessment criteria, we will be able to

determine which physician is more skilled,” the young physician explained.

The Physician Tournament was currently the most official way used to set skilled physicians apart from the weaker ones.

It was not every day that a difficult patient would come by, so the chances that physicians had to prove themselves were extremely limited.

As such, most physicians joined the Physician Tournament in order to prove their skills. As long as one was able to emerge victorious in the tournament, everyone would recognize one’s skills.

“But to simulate the whole treatment process, you need to have patients, right? It can’t be that the Physician Guild is keeping a stockpile of patients with difficult symptoms just to conduct the Physician Tournament, can it?”

He agreed that a simulation of the treatment process was the best way to evaluate a physician’s skills. However, without patients to treat, any simulation would be meaningless!

And if they really prepared patients beforehand just to hold this tournament... that would really besmirch the reputation of the Physician Guild. As people who held power over the lives of their patients, it would be unacceptable for them to take life lightly.

“Of course not! Depending on the nature of the Physician Tournament, there are some tournaments that require live patients, and there are some that don’t need patients. After all, it would be highly ineffective if a Physician Tournament could only be held when there are certain patients,” the young physician replied.

Time was of the utmost importance in most medical treatments. By the time all the participating physicians were present, the patient would likely have died or become untreatable by then.

Therefore, changes had to be made to the format of the Physician Tournament accordingly.

Zhang Xuan was just about to ask how the Physician Tournament would work when a commotion suddenly broke out within the room.

A middle-aged man walked up onto the stage in front with widened strides.

“That is the leader of the Physician Guild, Sun Xuan,” Qi Ling-er whispered to Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan glanced over to take a closer look.

The guild leader had the appearance of a forty-year-old middle-aged man, and his presence felt firm and reliable. His cultivation had also reached high-tier Celestial God.

“Everyone, the Sky of Cloud Dragon has challenged our Sky of Drifting Specter to a battle of medicine. They demand that we recognize their superiority and dispatch the top ten physicians of our Physician Guild to work for free in the Sky of Cloud Dragon for a hundred years if we lose. As you all should know, I don’t like to get involved in unnecessary trouble, but this is intolerable. I can’t accept this humiliation. What do the rest of you say?” Guild Leader Sun Xuan declared furiously.

“We won’t tolerate such humiliation either!”

“That bunch from the Sky of Cloud Dragon are only good for their bloodline! What medicine can they possibly know? What gives them the guts to challenge us to a battle?”

“Hah! They want us to serve them for a hundred years? If we don’t teach them a lesson, we’ll become the laughingstock of the world!”

Burning fury could be felt in the atmosphere as everyone’s complexion turned ugly.

“Since that’s the case, let’s accept their challenge and pound them to the ground! The honor of the Sky of Drifting Specter is at stake. We can’t afford to lose this fight!” Sun Xuan declared imposingly. “Right now, I shall declare the names of those who are going to face the physicians of the Sky of Cloud Dragon. There are five candidates in total, and they are the most esteemed physicians of our Sky of Drifting Specters.

Speak up if you have any disagreements, but make sure that you have the capability to back up your words!”

The crowd nodded in agreement.

Similar to how there was no concept of first when it came to literature, it was hard to determine the best physician. Nevertheless, everyone still had some gauge as to who was more skilled out of those around them.

“As someone who has been elected to become the leader of the Physician Guild, it would be a huge disgrace if I remained unmoved when our Physician Guild has been insulted by an outsider. So, I’ll be volunteering myself as one of the candidates who will be facing the Sky of Cloud Dragon. Are there anyone who has any objections?” Sun Xuan asked.

“We have no problem with Guild Leader Sun facing the challenge from the Sky of Cloud Dragon!” the crowd replied resoundingly.

“Moving on, Wang Qing, Yue Quan, and Shen Zimu are the physicians serving the Three Great Clans of Royal City, responsible for treating the ailments of their Conferred God Kings. There’s no doubt that their medical skills are exceptional. So, I’ll be nominating them as our candidates too!” Sun Xuan announced.

The crowd nodded in agreement.

The fact that those three were chosen as the principal physicians of the Three Great Clans was testimony to their skills. Given so, they were qualified to represent the Sky of Drifting Specters in the battle ahead.

After confirming the four candidates, Sun Xuan looked at the crowd and said, “As for the last candidate, I don’t have any one particular in mind, so I would like to leave the choice to the rest of you. Is there anyone who has a candidate in mind that can represent us?”

“I would like to nominate Physician Chen Chao as our representative. Eight years ago, when the Chaos Pandemic struck, he was the one who came up with a cost-effective cure that could be pushed out to the masses, thus saving thousands

of experts from the clutches of death. In terms of accomplishment and skills, he would be more worthy than any of us!”

“I’ll nominate Physician Zhao Chong! Everyone here has seen with their own eyes what he has done for our Physician Guild over the years. He has solved all sorts of difficult illnesses with ease, and over the past ten years, he has saved at least several hundred lives. The populace in Drifting Specter Royal City all address him as the Divine Doctor! I believe that he is the most appropriate candidate to represent us in the battle against the Sky of Cloud Dragon!”

“But in terms of experience, Physician Qian Hai is the most appropriate. His reputation might not be as resounding compared to the others, but he has worked in this field for many years now. In terms of reliability, I don’t think that there’s anyone in the Physician Guild who can compare with him...”

In just a few moments, the crowd had already nominated eight other potential candidates.

Most of them were well-known, respected figures in Drifting Specter Royal City.

The discussion among the crowd grew more and more fervent as they argued with one another over why the candidate that they had nominated was the most suitable to represent them.

Meanwhile, Zhang Xuan turned to Qi Ling-er and asked, “Do the five chosen candidates have the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation?”

He had gone in hopes of receiving the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation, but looking at the current circumstances, there was probably no one who was in the mood to test him. Since that was the case, it might be better if he competed for the final slot instead...

“Hmm... As far as I know, Wang Qing, Yue Quan, and Shen Zimu don’t have the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation. Of all physicians in the Sky of

Drifting Specters, only Guild Leader Sun Xuan has the right to use it.

“If you wish to prove yourself worthy, on top of being chosen as one of the five candidates, you’ll probably have to defeat the opponents from the Sky of Cloud Dragon and achieve victory in the Physician Tournament as well,” Qi Linger said.

“What? The requirement to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation is so strict?” Zhang Xuan was slightly taken aback. “If that’s the case, doesn’t it mean that the Nine Skies don’t really have much interaction with one another?”

If only the person at the top of each occupation could use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation, the number of people who could use that facility would really be pathetically low.

If it was that difficult for each Sky to access one another, how did they do business with one another? Did they even do business with one another?

Were they actually isolated entities who barely interacted with one another, like a puddle of dead water?

You’re thinking too much!” Qi Ling-er shook her head. “What you are competing for is the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation, not the right to enter the other Skies. The boundaries to the other Skies are practically open, so you can enter and leave freely. Given the long lifespan of cultivators, most people can afford to spend a few years traveling to get to the other Skies, so they simply travel on aerial divine beasts or celestial beasts!”

“Ah, this is really a huge pain to deal with...” Zhang Xuan struck his head helplessly.

Qi Ling-er was right.

The right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation should be viewed as a privilege. This privilege allowed one to teleport right into the heart of another Sky in an instant, which could be terribly dangerous if someone used it for malicious purposes.

As such, there was a need to restrict this privilege.

In this world where normal cultivators usually needed weeks to travel from one city to another, it was perfectly normal for them to spend years traveling to another Sky.

For ordinary Gods, spending years travelling felt like a huge luxury due to their short lifespan, but it was a different case for Celestial Gods, who could easily live up to a thousand years. They could easily spend months in isolation anyway, so it was not a big deal for them to spend years traveling from one Sky to the other.

While Zhang Xuan was still communicating with Qi Ling-er, Sun Xuan finally interjected into the commotion. “Since we aren’t able to come to an agreement, why don’t we have these physicians compete with one another? Whoever proves to be the most competent of all will represent our Sky of Drifting Specters in the battle!”

“Sounds fine!”

The crowd nodded in agreement.

Everyone had their own opinions on who was the most suitable candidate, so naturally, they would not come to a conclusion even if they continued arguing with one another. Since that was the case, it would be best if they could hold a selection to decide it.

This way, everyone would be more willing to accept the final verdict.

“Since that’s the case, let’s invite the physicians who have been nominated onto the stage!” Sun Xuan said.

It did not take long for the nominated physicians to gather on the stage. All in all, there were eight of them. They were all the most outstanding physicians in Drifting Specter Royal City, and each of them had made significant contributions to the world.

Sun Xuan looked around the crowd and asked, “Is there anyone else who wishes to join the selection as well? As long as you are able to emerge victorious, you will be given the opportunity to represent the Sky of Drifting Specter against the Sky of Cloud Dragon!”

Hearing those words, Qi Ling-er turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Young Master Zhang, are you planning on joining in the selection as well?”

To be honest, she had no idea how proficient in medicine the latter was. However, knowing that the young man before her possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch, she did not dare underestimate his abilities. So, she decided to ask his opinion on it instead.

2171 Unqualified

“Of course, I am participating in the competition as well!”
Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

His main purpose there was to win the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation. He could not allow the opportunity right before his eyes to slip through his fingers just like that.

“Alright then...” Hearing that response, Qi Ling-er stepped forward and declared, “Our Young Master intends to participate in the selection as well!”

Her voice was resounding and authoritative, and it immediately drew gazes onto her.

“Lady Ling-er, you...”

On the stage, Physician Wang Qing looked at her doubtfully.

As the principal physician of the Qi Clan, he was well aware of the shuffling of power that had happened in the Qi Clan recently. He had also met Qi Ling-er several times, and he knew just how highly regarded she was at the moment.

So, who could the Young Master that she spoke of possibly be? Could she be referring to the few more famous geniuses of the Qi Clan? But he had watched the younger generations of the Qi Clan as they grew up, and he did not know any of them to be proficient in medicine!

So, he could not help but be a bit baffled by the current situation. He looked around the room, but there did not seem to be anyone else from the Qi Clan around.

“May I know who the Young Master you speak of refers to?”
Physician Wang Qing asked.

“It’s none other than Young Master Zhang Xuan!” Qi Ling-er replied.

“Zhang Xuan?”

“Could she be referring to the person who created the Breakthrough Pill?”

“Wait, that young man beside her is Zhang Xuan, right? I was there for the event, so I’m pretty sure he looks like that!”

“You’re right! That young man is indeed Zhang Xuan! But... isn’t he an apothecary? Why would he suddenly come here to participate in our selection? Though physicians and apothecaries deal with medicinal herbs, they are two completely different occupations!”

“But if you think about it, the Breakthrough Pill and Beauty Pill have the ability to heal internal trauma. He might be knowledgeable about the Way of Medicine too!”

Due to the widespread fame of the Beauty Pill and Breakthrough Pill, there was nearly no one in Royal City who had not heard of Zhang Xuan anymore. Of course, this included the Physician Guild.

They were full of respect toward the young man who managed to create such a miraculous pill... but as an apothecary, why would he be participating in the Physician Guild’s selection event instead of the Apothecary Guild’s?

“Are you a physician?” Sun Xuan asked with a frown.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response. “I have read quite a few books relating to the Way of Medicine and treated a few patients.”

“Do you have a physician qualification?” Sun Xuan asked.

“I haven’t had chance to take the examination yet,” Zhang Xuan replied.

He was a 9-star physician back at the Master Teacher Pavilion, but of course, such an identity would not be recognized in the Firmament.

“Young Master Zhang, I am in awe of your abilities as an apothecary, but I feel like you might be looking down on our Physician Guild. How can someone who doesn’t even have a physician license represent us? Are you mocking our Physician Guild for being inept, such that we need an

apothecary to face our battles for us?__ Sun Xuan swung his hand backward in displeasure.

“Guild Leader Sun, that’s not my intention,” Zhang Xuan replied with a frown. “I know that my words lack credibility as I don’t have a physician license at the moment, but I am confident in my skills as a physician. If that’s the issue, I am fine with taking the examination for the license right now. I believe that it won’t take too long for me.”

“You want to take the examination right now? I know that I might sound a little harsh when I say this, but do you think that I’ll trust someone who has just obtained the physician license to represent our Physician Guild?” Sun Xuan’s face was livid.

“Most of our physicians here have been in practice for decades now, and from their record thus far, we know that we can trust in their skills. They are prepared for this fight. Even if you are skilled in the Way of Medicine as you claim, I’m afraid that I can’t allow you to participate on the spur of a moment. Please try again next time.”

“Apothecary Zhang, we respect you for bringing the Beauty Pill and the Breakthrough Pill to this world, but being a physician is very different from being an apothecary. The knowledge between the two occupations isn’t fully transferrable!”

“If you make a mistake in forging a pill, you can still try again with a new set of medicinal herbs. However, if you make a mistake with a patient, that’s a life potentially lost! You can’t simply hit the reset button and try again!”

“We appreciate your eagerness in helping us defeat those from the Sky of Cloud Dragon, but you aren’t the person we are looking for...”

“Just concentrate on your pill forging, alright? Don’t come to our Physician Guild to cause a mess...”

Physician Wang Qing and a few others also stepped forward to dissuade Zhang Xuan from his decision.

Zhang Xuan was at a loss for words.

What Guild Leader Sun Xuan said made perfect sense. This battle concerned the reputation of the Sky of Drifting Specters. Even if he cleared the physician examination and proved his capabilities, it would still be hard for him to build up credence among the other physicians. The other physicians had a huge track record behind them whereas he had nearly nothing.

From their perspective, they would be taking a huge risk by nominating him.

“Pardon me for interrupting you. I’ll take my leave...” Zhang Xuan shook his head and walked out.

Qi Ling-er was left dumbfounded for a moment before she quickly left the Physician Guild as well to catch up with Zhang Xuan. With an incredulous voice, she asked, “Young Master Zhang, do you really not have a physician license?”

It was ridiculous that he would go all the way to the Physician Guild in hopes of earning the rights to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation when he did not even have a physician license...

Just how much confidence did he have in himself to attempt something like that?

Zhang Xuan shook his head in response.

Qi Ling-er closed her eyes and exhaled deeply before asking, “What do you intend to do now?”

Physicians were not like any other occupation; they dealt with lives!

Even if he wanted to participate in the Physician Tournament, it was doubtful if the patient would allow someone who did not have a physician license to treat him.

With these considerations in mind, he decided that it was impossible for him to get permission to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation from the Physician Guild, which was also why he had left without saying too much.

“Let’s put that aside for the time being. You mentioned that on top of reaching the top of an occupation, I must get into the

top thirty on the Board of Potential God Kings, right?”

Given the current circumstances surrounding the Physician Guild, it was likely that he would be disallowed from attending the Physician Tournament. As a humble, low-profile person, he would not do something as atrocious as challenging an entire guild.

Of course, if he had done anything similar to that in the past, it was due to the folly of his youth. He was a different man now!

Anyway, he had no intention of making the Physician Guild his enemy. Since that was the case, he might as well focus on the other requirement first.

“Yes. Each of the Nine Skies has its individual Board of Potential God Kings. You just have to get into the top thirty for one of them,” Qi Ling-er explained. “The procedures for getting onto the board aren’t too complicated. You just have to find someone within the top thirty, challenge them to a battle, and defeat them in an open battle. Of course, the rules of the duel have to be supervised by the Overseers of the Board, the Free Knights of the Sky of Freedom.”

“The Free Knights?”

“That’s right. The Boards of Potential God Kings of the Nine Skies are moderated by the Free Knights of the Sky of Freedom. The Free Knights is a group made up entirely of God Kings, and their eye of discernment far surpasses that of ordinary God Kings. It’s said that they are able to accurately gauge a person’s ranking on the board through the strength they display in a duel.”

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

Was that not the same as the Guinness World Records in his previous world?

The key to becoming a record holder was not about one’s capabilities but the extent to which one was able to display one’s capabilities before the judge!

In any case, it was unlikely for anyone to object to the fairness of the Board of Potential God Kings when it was moderated by a neutral group of God Kings.

“Where can I find the Free Knights? Are they around Drifting Specter Royal City?” Zhang Xuan asked.

It would really be a load of trouble if he had to go all the way to the Sky of Freedom just to get his strength assessed. “They should be in the Netherworld Palace right now. Qi Yue is currently getting tested by them,” Qi Ling-er said.

“Is that so? Let’s head over to take a look then!” Zhang Xuan said.

“Young Master Zhang, which rank are you aiming for? Shall I compile the information of the current top thirty rankers for you?”

Seeing how quickly Zhang Xuan had come to a decision, Qi Ling-er felt a little speechless.

He always acted in such a manner, diving into all sorts of things without the slightest hint of worry or anxiety. With how lightly he was taking everything, she could not help but feel worried on his behalf.

The opponent that you are going to face isn’t going to be any ordinary cultivator. Those who are able to get into the Board of Potential God Kings are geniuses who have undergone hundreds of battles.

If they could be defeated easily, they would have already dropped out of the list by now!

To dash over there without the slightest preparation...

That’s just blind recklessness!

“It’s fine. It would be too troublesome to gather information on them. Let’s just find a Free Knight and have him send a challenge letter to those who are in the vicinity. I’ll just fight with the person who is closest to us!” Zhang Xuan replied.

It did not matter to him who his opponent was.

While he did not have a clear gauge of his current fighting prowess, he was confident of defeating any Celestial Gods with his current strength.

His physical body, after being tempered by the Lucid Lunar Lake, had become resilient enough to withstand any attack from a high-tier Celestial God, and his Pathos of Heaven was far superior to any other cultivation technique in the Firmament. There was no way he would be defeated by any other high-tier Celestial God.

Admittedly, his soul cultivation was a little weaker at the moment, but that would not pose much of a problem!

You are going to challenge everyone in the vicinity?” Qi Ling-er’s lips twitched.

As expected of someone who had the bloodline of a God Monarch, he sure was domineering!

In any case, those words probably meant that he was confident in defeating any opponent that had not reached God King yet. Since that was the case, her worry was probably unfounded.

The Netherworld Palace was more crowded than it was on usual days, but somehow, a tense atmosphere could be felt in the air.

Qi Yue was among the crowd as well.

“I am a cultivator who is within the top thirty of the Sky of Cloud Dragon’s Board of Potential God King. I was invited here by the Sky of Drifting Specter’s Physician Guild to trade insights regarding the Way of Medicine.

“Since the Physician Guild isn’t ready to receive us yet, I am quite free at the moment. Thus, I came over here out of curiosity to see how strong those who are in the ranking board of the Sky of Drifting Specter are. I am really interested to see how your cultivators compare to us from the Sky of Cloud Dragon. So, may I know if there’s anyone here who’s willing to face me in a battle?”

A white-robed young man looked at the crowd around him with his hands behind his back. There were two dragon horns peeking out from his forehead, gleaming with a golden luminescence. While the horns were not too long, they stood out quite a bit.

2172 Ao Hua

“What arrogant words!”

“In the past, we would always send invitation letters in order to interact with those from the other Skies. It’s preposterous that a physician like you actually dares to talk to us in such a manner!”

“Everyone, calm down. The fact that he has a pair of golden dragon horn shows that he possesses the bloodline of the Cloud Dragon Monarch, making him the descendant of a God Monarch. Things probably aren’t as simple as they seem.”

“He’s just a person who relies on his bloodline! We are all experts of our respective powers, so I don’t believe he can be that powerful!”

The conceited words of the white-robed man induced outrage within the crowd.

The other party was a physician who was there to exchange insight with their Physician Guild. Even if he was in the top thirty in the Board of Potential God Kings for the Sky of Cloud Dragon, it was inappropriate and insolent of him to rush over there to provoke them. It was a huge faux pas.

This breach of etiquette could be viewed as a lack of respect for the Sky of Drifting Specter.

If they did not respond accordingly, the Sky of Drifting Specter would be mocked by the other Skies.

“May I know how I should address you? And what is your ranking in the Sky of Cloud Dragon’s Board of Potential God Kings?”

A young man walked out from the crowd, and with a wave of his hand, he got the crowd to quiet down. With narrowed eyes, he assessed the white-robed man.

The young man was none other than the top ranker of the Sky of Drifting Specter’s board, Shentu Feng!

He was the strongest expert of the younger generation in the Shentu Clan, and he had once attempted a breakthrough to God King, only to fail in the end. Nevertheless, he had survived the ordeal, and it had allowed him to advance his physical body and soul cultivation to the level of a God King.

It was just that he had not been able to make a breakthrough with his zhenqi cultivation.

He probably would not pale too much in comparison to an ordinary God King with his current fighting prowess.

There was no questioning that he was the number one cultivator beneath the God Kings, and his position had gone unchallenged for years.

“I am Ao Hua. I am honored to be able to get into the ninth place in the Sky of Cloud Dragon’s board!” the white-robed man replied proudly.

“Ninth place?”

The faces of the crowd turned grim.

It was a known fact that the Cloud Dragon Monarch was a Pureblooded Dragon, the sovereign of all beasts. His bloodline was extremely powerful, to the extent that there were few who could rival it. Those who possessed his bloodline, once they morphed into a Pureblooded Dragon, would be invincible in their power class.

Before the receding of spiritual energy, the Nine Skies had once conducted a tournament among Celestial Gods. Aside from the Sky of Freedom and Sky of Heavenly Sword, the cultivators of the Sky of Cloud Dragon had the highest win ratio.

This was especially so once their cultivators morphed into Pureblooded Dragons. With a body that extended for hundreds of meters and scales that provided them with absolute protection, human cultivators had no way of dealing with them at all.

For this reason, the ranking board in the Sky of Cloud Dragon carried much more weight.

It was also due to this that Ao Hua dared to challenge them so arrogantly.

To be ranked in ninth place, Ao Hua's strength was likely frighteningly powerful.

“Since you have issued the challenge, it would be unseemly if we turned you down. Allow me to face you. I'm interested to see if the experts of the Sky of Cloud Dragon are really powerful enough for you to speak so haughtily!”

As those words sounded, a young man in his thirties stepped out and walked right up to Ao Hua. He was dressed in a black robe that flowed along his figure like a fitting armor.

”What is your name? I don't fight with nameless individuals , ” Ao Hua remarked nonchalantly.

Seeing how he was being looked down upon, the young man clenched his teeth and spat coldly, “I am tenth place on the Sky of Drifting Specter's board, Chen Mu. I'll only represent myself in this battle; the outcome of this battle has nothing to do with the Sky of Drifting Specter!”

Seeing this, Shentu Feng and the rest of the crowd nodded quietly, not stopping the young man at all.

Considering that Ao Hua was ninth place on the Sky of Cloud Dragon, it was not an unwise move for their tenth place to challenge him. If he won, it would boost the glory of the Sky of Drifting Specter. If he lost, it would not look bad on them.

This was a good chance to test out Ao Hua's strength. This way, if Chen Mu lost, those who faced him afterward could prepare themselves in advance.

You sure are filled with nonsense!” Ao Hua harrumphed coldly as he took a step forward.

It should have just been a single step, but as if he had teleported, he suddenly appeared right before Chen Mu. Without making any excessive move, he chose to ram his body right into Chen Mu.

“You're courting death!”

Not expecting the other party to forsake defense completely, choosing instead to rely entirely on his own physical body to deal with him, Chen Mu's face flushed red in fury.

It was almost as if Ao Hua did not think that his attack would pose a threat at all.

So, Chen Mu raised his palm furiously and struck down on the incoming Ao Hua. His palm was tinged crimson, and it caused the air to distort a little.

Palm of Blazing Flames!

In order to master this palm strike, Chen Mu had used the underground lava flowing through the earth veins to temper his palms. The execution of this palm strike caused his palms to become as hot as a furnace, such that anything that came in contact with it would be seared.

It was through the mystical effect of this palm that he had managed to defeat many of his rivals to get within the top ten places on the Board of Potential God King.

As infuriated he was by Ao Hua's underestimation, he knew that the latter was likely a formidable foe. So, he chose to use his strongest strike right from the start.

Peng!

The white-robed man did not bother dodging Chen Mu's attack at all, allowing the Palm of Blazing Flames to land right on his body. Seeing this, Chen Mu's face lit up in delight.

But just as he thought that victory was within grasp, he noticed a hint of ridicule on the opponent's face.

Sh*t, is this a trap?

The look sent chills down his spine, and the warning bells in his head began ringing incessantly. Realizing that Ao Hua was up to something, Chen Mu quickly retracted his palm and retreated.

As someone who was able into the top ten in the Board of Potential God Kings, his battle sense was not ordinary.

However, as fast as he reacted, Ao Hua was even faster than him. The latter increased the speed of his ram, determined to knock Chen Mu down.

Kacha!

Chen Mu raised his arm to protect himself, but the impact of the collision fractured it. Not only so, the impact also collided with his chest, and before he could even speak, a dull groan escaped from his mouth as he was sent flying.

Pu!

Fresh blood spurted into the air as his shoulders and ribcage shattered.

“Done!” Ao Hua placed his hands behind his back nonchalantly.

It was as if the one who had made a move earlier was not him at all. There was no crease in his clothes as a result of that battle, and his voice remained calm and relaxed.

The crowd gasped a little as they began to reassess Ao Hua’s strength once more.

From the start to the end, Ao Hua had only used a single move, and that was his body ram. Yet, this single move was more than enough to overwhelm Chen Mu, rendering him powerless.

“I am Qi Yue, sixth place on the board!” Qi Yue walked out and introduced himself.

The encounter with Zhang Xuan at the Qi Clan had sparked his motivation anew, driving him to work harder than ever. In just a few short days, he had managed to further reinforce his cultivation, making his aura and zhenqi more condensed than before. This allowed him to wield greater strength at his disposal.

“Yes, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Let’s begin the battle!” Ao Hua replied nonchalantly before charging forward once more.

Just like that, the two of them began battling one another.

Zhang Xuan followed Qi Ling-er into a vast room in the Netherworld Palace, but there was no one in sight. He could not help but frown. “Is this really the place where the Sky of Drifting Specters selects those who are worthy of getting onto the Board of Potential God Kings? Why isn’t there anyone here?”

“This is weird. There should be quite a few people here according to what I know...” Qi Ling-er was stunned, too.

The battles between those competing for the positions of the Board of Potential God Kings would be logged within this room. For this reason, quite a few people would stop by every day to view the recordings, hoping to receive some inspiration.

This room was almost never empty, so it was bizarre that there was no one there at all.

“There seems to be people over there,” Zhang Xuan said.

Without waiting for Qi Ling-er’s response, he began making his way over there.

The two of them passed by a door, and a massive dueling ring came into sight. There, they saw a sight that left them stunned.

There were more than a dozen people lying weakly in the dueling ring with pale faces. Among them stood a white-robed man who revealed a hint of haughtiness.

Half a minute ago...

After all the battles that had happened, only Shentu Feng was left.

“Is this the Sky of Drifting Specter’s Board of Potential God Kings? I don’t know if there is any reason for it to continue existing if such is the quality of its rankers...”

Ao Hua’s voice did not carry any disdain at all. It was nonchalant, almost as if he was just stating a fact.

He did not think that the top ten experts of the Board of Potential God Kings would actually be so weak. If so, it seemed like the board did not hold much purpose.

“Aren’t you speaking a little too early? Why don’t you speak after defeating me?” Shentu Feng spat coldly.

In just a few short minutes, Ao Hua had defeated not just Qi Yue but also the other seven people in the top ten. He did not use any battle techniques in the battle at all, relying solely on his physical body to beat his enemies.

Regardless of the strength of his opponent, he was able to defeat the latter in a single move.

This showed that Ao Hua’s physical body had already reached an extremely frightening level.

“Let’s cut the chatter and get straight to the battle, alright?” Ao Hua said calmly as he started charging forward once more.

Shentu Feng flicked his wrist and whipped out a sword. With incredible swiftness, he thrust it forward.

Wu!

A cold glint flashed from the blade of the sword and severed the air with incredible sharpness.

The strength of someone who had the capability to become the top expert of the Board of Potential God Kings was indubitable. The prowess of his physical body was amazing, and the swordsmanship he executed was so powerful that his high-tier Celestial God sword seemed to be unable to withstand his strength.

“Interesting!”

Seeing how formidable Shentu Feng’s swordsmanship was, Ao Hua did not dare continue fighting as recklessly as he did previously. He abruptly halted his charge and stretched his arm forward. With a jolt, his arm turned into the massive claws of a dragon.

In that instant, a domineering aura blasted from his presence, leaving others with a stifled feeling.

The bloodline of a Pureblooded Dragon!

Ding ding ding!

Shentu Feng's sword struck heavily down upon the dragon's claw, but the sound of metallic clangs echoed instead. No matter how much strength Shentu Feng put behind his sword, he found that he was unable to pierce through those scales.

God King realm physical body? Shentu Feng felt his body turning cold.

Only after facing Ao Hua in person did he realize just how frightening the other party was.

That explained why the other party was able to defeat the other nine with just a simple body ram. In truth, his body was already comparable to a God King-tier artifact.

No, that isn't it. I reckon that only his claws have reached such a level. His physical body is only at the level of a high-tier Celestial God artifact, but it's still frightening enough, Shentu Feng thought.

If Ao Hua's entire body had reached the level of a God King, there was no way that he would have only been ninth place on the Sky of Cloud Dragon. Nevertheless, having a single claw of that prowess was frightening enough.

As expected of a Pureblooded Dragon...

Their bloodline sure was frightening. It was enough to induce despair in any cultivator facing them.

Peng!

After several strikes, the sword in Shentu Feng's hands shattered before he was struck square in the chest. Just like those before him, he was struck heavily to the ground.

Clutching onto his heart tightly, he panted raggedly, unable to speak a word at all.

Despite being the number one expert on the Board of Potential God Kings, he was still no match for Ao Hua!

"Is that all to the Sky of Drifting Specter's Board of Potential God Kings?" Ao Hua shook his head in disappointment.

At this moment, two figures suddenly walked in.

Zhang Xuan and Qi Ling-er.

“Oh? We seem to have come at a good time. They are competing for the ranking right now!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in delight.

He had been worried that he would have to wait for quite long before someone would accept the duel, but who could have known that he would see someone in the dueling ring right away? From the looks of it, it seemed like they had just concluded the duel.

Since that was the case, he just had to challenge the person who was still standing at the moment in order to replace him in the ranking.

How convenient!

His luck was not too bad after all!

2173 Pureblooded Dragon

“I see that you have defeated quite a few opponents. You must be pretty strong,” Zhang Xuan said as he glanced at the injured cultivators sprawled all over the dueling ring.

If even the sixth rank Qi Yue was defeated, it meant that the white-robed man on the stage was of an even higher rank, right?

However, that was not important to him. He was not aiming to be at the top of the Board of Potential God Kings anyway. All he wanted was the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation.

“Yet another fearless fool, eh?”

Seeing how the young man was walking toward him without the slightest hint of fear, Ao Hua burst into laughter. He looked at the young man and asked mockingly, “Do you intend to challenge me to a duel?”

“That’s right. What rank are you on the Board of Potential God Kings? I’m sorry to say this, but I don’t want to waste my time fighting anyone who is beneath thirtieth,” Zhang Xuan replied.

Even though the sixth rank Qi Yue was lying on the ground, he had no way of knowing if it was the doing of the white-robed man. Furthermore, he did not see any God Kings in the area to judge the duel, so he was not too sure whether the battle had caused a reshuffling in ranks.

Thus, it was better for him to verify if the white-robed man on the stage fit the criterion first.

Ao Hua did not expect the newly arrived young man to be even more arrogant than him. His cheeks twitched a little as his eyes turned cold. “I’m ranked ninth.”

“No wonder...” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Most likely, this ninth rank must have stumbled upon some sort of fortuitous encounter that resulted in his fighting prowess becoming far stronger than before, such that even the sixth rank Qi Yue was no match at all.

Seeing how the young man was absorbed in his own thoughts, not paying any heed to him at all, Ao Hua felt a little displeased.

“Do you know who I am? I am...”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. There’s no need for you to go through the trouble of introducing yourself. As long as you are within the top thirty, it makes no difference to me,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

Leaping onto the stage, Zhang Xuan beckoned with his hand and said, “Shall we begin?”

You arrogant little... it seems like you are asking for a beating!”

Ao Hua knew the best way to crush an arrogant person’s ego was to overpower him with his fists. So, without wasting any time, he pushed his feet forcefully against the ground and dashed right toward Zhang Xuan with a speed that was reminiscent of teleportation.

This sight made Zhang Xuan’s eyes light up.

As expected of a high ranked cultivator on the Board of Potential God Kings, his speed was above that of ordinary high- tier Celestial Gods!

Instead of dodging, Zhang Xuan stepped forward to face Ao Hua’s ram.

It just so happened that he wanted to make this battle a duel between their physical prowess, so it could be said that everything went in the direction he wanted it to. His only weakness right now was his soul cultivation.

On the ground, Shentu Feng was shocked to see this young man recklessly facing Ao Hua’s ram directly. Enduring the excruciating pain of his body, he shouted out to warn the young man, “Don’t face his attack straight on!”

Ao Hua was an expert of the Sky of Cloud Dragon, and he specialized in his physical prowess. Facing him in a physical fight was as good as courting death!

Just as everyone thought that Zhang Xuan would be knocked down by Ao Hua, just like the rest of them, the unexpected happened.

Peng!

Ao Hua's supposedly indestructible rammed squarely into Zhang Xuan's body, but somehow, the impact of his charge was rebounded back to him instead, causing his body to fly back and crash into the ground.

"What?" Shentu Feng and the others lying on the ground widened their eyes in disbelief.

Ao Hua had used such a move to defeat them previously. They had never expected the fellow who had popped out of nowhere to actually use the same move to defeat him.

To actually triumph over that monster from the Sky of Cloud Dragon in a battle of physical prowess...

This was insane!

Ao Hua was startled by how things turned out as well. He raised his head to assess the opponent before him in disbelief, only to see the latter stretching his neck, as if he was just getting warmed up.

The young man also looked back at him with eyes filled with enthusiasm, saying, "Remarkable! You have really cultivated your physical body well. Come, let's continue the battle. There's no need to look at me with such frightened eyes, I'll remain still and allow you to do whatever you want, alright?"

Since tempering his body, he had not been able to find a suitable weapon that he could use to pierce his skin, so he was not able to verify the effects of those golden threads hidden amid his muscles.

It had not been easy for him to find someone whose physical body was decently strong, so there was no way he would let

this golden opportunity to test out the extent of his physical resilience go to waste.

“You...” Ao Hua was nearly driven mad with anger.

Are you trying to humiliate me by showing me that there is nothing I can do that will hurt you?

Damn it, you son of a b*stard!

How dare you mock a person from the Dragon Tribe like me?

Unforgivable!

Ao Hua pushed his hand against the ground and immediately rose to his feet. With a powerful step, he charged toward Zhang Xuan with a speed as swift as lightning.

Geji! Geji!

Even while he was flitting through the air, layers of scales were already starting to appear on the surface of his body. This was known as a Partial Transformation to those of the Cloud Dragon Tribe.

It was mainly used as a defensive technique that granted one enhanced protection against physical assaults. The resilience of the scales also made one’s skin impenetrable by swords and spears.

It would be difficult for most cultivators to breach such defense.

Peng!

But as Ao Hua rammed into Zhang Xuan once more, the same excruciating pain that felt as if his entire skeleton was falling apart surged through his body, and he was sent flying again.

“Oh? That was much better than before. Not bad! It seems like you can do it after all if you really try. Come on, let’s go again. As long you can injure me, I don’t mind giving you money or even accepting you as my student!” Zhang Xuan said excitedly.

This was the first time that he had encountered an opponent who had managed to temper his physical body to a level that he thought was decent...

More importantly, the white-robed man was still quite young!
It seemed like the Firmament had quite a lot of hidden experts!

This white-robed man was clearly much more talented than Zhuo Yan, possibly enough to become his student.

“You b*stard... you’re courting death!” Ao Hua was on the verge of exploding.

He had gone there to challenge the Sky of Drifting Specter’s Board of Potential God Kings, and when he defeated the first rank Shentu Feng with ease, he naturally thought that the Celestial Gods there were trash.

Yet, who could have known that he would encounter such a monster right after?

Not only was his physical body so powerful that it felt like there was no way to overcome it, his arrogance was also one-of-a-kind, too!

To say that he would take his opponent in as his student if his opponent could injure him...

The heck, who in the world do you think you are to say such words?

Get your head out of the clouds!

“This...” Shentu Feng and the others felt frenzied as well.

They had thought that Ao Hua was already very conceited, but there was still someone who could top his act...

“It’s him...”

Among the injured cultivators lying all around the dueling ring, there was one person who recognized Zhang Xuan—Qi Yue. He clenched his fists tightly and held his breath, not daring to even breathe loudly in his presence.

While everyone in Royal City might have heard of Zhang Xuan’s name, very few knew of Zhang Xuan’s true identity. However, he was one of the few people who had seen with his own eyes how the old ancestor kneeled in Zhang Xuan’s presence and addressed him as ‘God Monarch’!

How could such a person possibly be defeated by a mere Celestial God from the Sky of Cloud Dragon?

“I’ll kill you!”

This time, Ao Hua decided to go all out.

His palm morphed into the claw of a dragon once more as he swiped it down right toward Zhang Xuan.

“Hmm? You are a transmogrified celestial beast?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

As it was just an ordinary duel, he did not bother using his Eye of Insight and the Library of Heaven’s Path. So, only at this moment did he realize that his opponent’s true form was actually a celestial beast.

“What about it? It’s too late for you to beg for mercy now!”

With a furious roar, Ao Hua’s claw swiped down on Zhang Xuan’s shoulder, and the latter, just as before, did not even bother to move.

Kacha!

The sound of a bone shattering echoed loudly in the air. Zhang Xuan glanced at his shoulder and saw that his robe had been ripped apart, revealing his skin. There was a long white mark on his skin, and it looked like he was just a little bit away from bleeding.

“Wonderful!” Zhang Xuan exclaimed excitedly.

But barely after he said those words, the white mark suddenly vanished, as if it had never appeared before.

It seemed like his regenerative ability was simply too strong. The white mark that was imprinted on his skin was not deep enough to last even a split second, such that he did not have time to test out the effects of the golden threads.

So, he anxiously raised his head and urged Ao Hua to continue. “You did well with your previous attack. Come on, let’s continue. I’ll stand on the spot and allow you to hit me as you please. If I dodge, you can consider it my loss!”

“Argh! I’ll kill you!” Ao Hua clutched his head in madness.

Sou sou sou sou!

Two claws struck Zhang Xuan relentlessly with a nice rhythm. Every strike he threw out harnessed his full strength, causing Zhang Xuan's clothes to be ripped to shreds.

White marks appeared one after another on his body, but he still did not bleed. Furthermore, those white marks disappeared moments after they appeared, almost as if Ao Hua was scratching his itch.

Kacha! Kacha!

A few moments later, Ao Hua finally stopped in despair. He looked at Zhang Xuan's completely unharmed body before examining his own claws, and he began wailing sorrowfully.

Zhang Xuan's body was like a freakishly hard stone that simply would not dent no matter how hard he struck it.

Swiping his claws relentlessly on such a surface had caused his nails to tear off and his scales to drop off. It looked as if he was the one who had been ravaged.

And when he raised his head to look at the young man before him once more, the latter looked more excited than ever, "Hurry up, let's continue. You just need to put in a little bit more force. You nearly got me bleeding, you know!"

Ao Hua staggered. Can't you tell that I'm trying to kill you? Can you stop saying such suggestive words that make it seem as if we are flirting with one another?

Even dragons have our pride!

You have truly angered me this time around."

With an imposing roar that caused the whole dueling ring to tremor, Ao Hua's clothes ripped apart as his body morphed instantaneously into a massive dragon of several hundred meters long. He coiled around the sky of the Netherworld Palace, almost as if a deity gazing down on the world.

"Wait a moment, you are a Pureblooded Dragon?" Zhang Xuan was stunned.

He had honestly thought that the other party was just an ordinary celestial beast, making him slightly stronger than the average cultivator. It did not even cross his mind for a moment that the other party was a member of the Dragon Tribe!

He had heard about the Dragon Tribe ever since his time on the Master Teacher Continent, but most of those that he encountered were just crossbreeds with impure bloodlines. Even in the Azure, he had only encountered a Pseudo Dragon.

Given how the opponent was able to transmogrify into such a powerful and imposing beast, it was clear that he was a Pureblooded Dragon!

“Indeed. Do you understand what you have done? You have humiliated a Pureblooded Dragon today. Prepare to face the rage of the Dragon Tribe!” Ao Hua bellowed furiously as he unleashed his flame breath upon the Netherworld Palace.

An inferno swiftly spread all over the room, causing everything to be set alight.

“We’re doomed...”

Shentu Feng, Qi Yue, and the others paled in fright.

Dragon Breath was the strongest offensive move of the Dragon Tribe, its might surpassing even that of their claws. The Dragon Breath of a high-tier Celestial God Pureblooded Dragon held sufficient might to even overpower a God King temporarily!

Zhang Xuan had really gone too far taunting Ao Hua.

He should have shown some restraint, but he ended up provoking Ao Hua to reveal his true form and trump card. How were they supposed to face something like that?

Even the strongest Celestial God could not possibly stand against something of this caliber!

Young Master Zhang?” Qi Ling-er muttered in fright.

Before she could make sense of what was happening on the dueling ring, somehow, Zhang Xuan had started fighting with the young man on the stage. She had been a little apprehensive

at first, but seeing how Zhang Xuan had managed to claim the upper hand, she had decided to leave things be.

But the instant that the white-robed man morphed into a dragon, she had realized that they were in deep sh*t.

Pureblooded Dragons were known to be the strongest lifeforms in the world, and Ao Hua was a Pureblooded Dragon who managed to be ranked in the ninth place among all his peers, making him a truly fearsome force to behold.

Everyone was shocked beyond words, but Zhang Xuan did not show the slightest nervousness when faced with such an overpowering existence. Instead, he stroked his chin contemplatively as an idea emerged in his head.

It is said that the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragon are effective on all beings possessing the Dragon Bloodline... I wonder if it'll be effective on a Pureblooded Dragon too... Well, I should probably just give it a try. It won't take too much of my time...

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan raised his head and...

“Mou! Moo!”

Boom!

The massive dragon in the sky who was busy unleashing his breath to kill everyone suddenly seemed to have been struck by something, causing his face to pale. He crashed helplessly to the ground, and his long body twitched nonstop.

He looked like a reptile that had just been electrocuted.

“Huh?”

The surroundings suddenly fell utterly silent.

Shentu Feng, Qi Yue, and the others were stupefied. They did not even realize that they were tearing out clumps of their hair.

2174 Sky of Cloud Dragon, Leader of the Physician Guild

It was no wonder they reacted in such a manner.

The long reptile convulsing on the floor was the ninth rank on the Sky of Cloud Dragon's Board of Potential God Kings. Even the first rank Shentu Feng was far from a match for him.

They had thought that the Sky of Drifting Specters would be humiliated after this incident, becoming the joke of the Nine Skies, but who would have thought that a savior would appear at this moment?

Not only did he managed to defeat Ao Hua in a physical brawl, he even managed to jolt the latter to the ground with a roar even after he had morphed into his dragon form!

How in the world did he manage to do that?

“It's the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragons...”

“I thought that all Pureblooded Dragons are able to make those sounds? Why would Ao Hua be jolted to such a state?”

“You're right to say that all Pureblooded Dragons are able to voice the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragons, but it seems like the language can be classified into various tiers. There's a legend concerning that, but I don't really know how true it is...”

“A legend?”

“It's said that many years ago, when the heaven and earth had just parted and the world was in great chaos, the eastern land was susceptible to the pull of gravity caused by the rising sun in the east. It was then that the Cloud Dragon Monarch appeared and pinned the land in place. Through observing the state of the world, he created the Eight Notes of Heavenly

Dragon. These eight notes can be voiced by any pureblooded Dragons, but the prowess of them is dependent on how harmonious one's voice is with nature, and that is affected by the purity of one's bloodline!"

"Unlike our Qiankun Demon Monarch, who lives a life free of desires, the Cloud Dragon Monarch is known to have a lot of descendants. He has nine sons in total, and that's also where the saying 'The Nine Sons of the Dragon' comes from..."

"Indeed. Over the years, his family tree has expanded to encompass countless generations. Even though those in the current generation are still considered Pureblooded Dragons, their bloodline is unbelievably thin. As a result, if they encountered a Pureblooded Dragon whose bloodline was even purer than them voicing the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragon, they would feel an innate suppression resulting from the hierarchy in bloodline."

"I see... If that's the case, does it mean that the young man over there is an expert of the Dragon Tribe as well and likely possesses a bloodline even purer than that of Ao Hua?"

With hushed voices, Shentu Feng and the others lying on the ground began discussing the situation with one another discreetly.

By the side, Qi Yue and Qi Ling-er were looking at the situation before them with widened eyes. They felt so incredulous that they could not help but wonder if they were really in reality.

Did the old ancestor not say that he was the Spirit God? Why would he suddenly be affiliated with the Sky of Cloud Dragon?

Just how many identities did that fellow have?

Was it possible for someone who possessed the bloodline of a God Monarch to switch the nature of their bloodline around?

This was getting more and more ridiculous by the moment!

If they had not known that the Spirit God and the Cloud Dragon Monarch were both guys, they would have wondered

if the two of them had some sort of secret relationship with one another.

On the dueling ring, however, Zhang Xuan was still oblivious to the huge uproar that he had stirred up. He calmly walked up to the convulsing massive dragon and gazed down on the other party's eyes, which were ironically even larger than Zhang Xuan's body, and said coolly, "How is it? Do you want to admit defeat? I would have loved to play around with you a bit more, but I still have some other matters to attend to..."

Hu!

Amid the convulsions, the massive dragon began to shrink before finally returning to his human form.

Biting his lips anxiously, Ao Hua immediately kneeled onto the floor and kowtowed. "Junior Ao Hua pays respects to his ancestor!"

"Ancestor?" Zhang Xuan was stunned.

What was going on?

He was just testing out to see if the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragon were effective on Pureblooded Dragons; he did not expect it to work so well. Not only did it cause his opponent to crash to the ground, his opponent even started calling him... ancestor?

Did the earlier fall rattle his brain too much or something?

Zhang Xuan was perplexed, but somehow, he was already accustomed to facing such bizarre situations. Without revealing the slightest hint of emotion on his face, he nodded and remarked, "I should have replaced you as ninth rank on the Board of Potential God Kings now, right?"

"A-ah?" Ao Hua looked at Zhang Xuan with a hint of bewilderment and fear, and he asked hesitantly, "H-have you never participated in the test back in the Sky of Cloud Dragon?"

The young man before him had a bloodline that was innumerable times purer than his own. If the young man had participated in the test before, his ranking should be quite

high... but he knew whom the top eight were, and the young man was not among them!

Had he really not participated in this test before?

Zhang Xuan looked at Ao Hua speechlessly and remarked, “I am in the Sky of Drifting Specter. Why in the world would I take the test in the Sky of Cloud Dragon?”

The earlier impact must have struck the intelligence out of his opponent as well! Why would the other party ask such an obvious question?

“A-ah?” Ao Hua was surprised by Zhang Xuan’s response once more.

Could it be that the young man before was an ancestor who had been left behind in the Sky of Drifting Specter?

Thinking about it, their Sky of Cloud Dragon did indeed find quite a few people with their bloodline from the other Skies every year...

It was just that most of their bloodline would have already thinned out by then. This was his first time encountering someone outside whose bloodline was even purer than his.

Ao Hua wanted to ask more about the matter, but when he saw the young man looking at him impatiently, as if he was a scammer who was going to deny his loss, he sighed deeply and replied, “I am ninth rank in the Sky of Cloud Dragon, so our duel won’t affect the Sky of Drifting Specter’s board. The first rank of the Sky of Drifting Specter, Shentu Feng, is the guy over there whom I have just beaten up. Yes, you are pointing at the right guy. The one with dried blood on his mouth, yep...”

Seeing how the attention of the crowd had suddenly turned to him, Shentu Feng tried to put on his coolest smile and said, “Indeed, I’m the first rank in the Sky of Drifting Specter!”

It might have looked cool if his mouth was not leaking air due to the swelling of his face.

Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched.

That fellow was actually first rank?

So, in other words, before he even got there, that fellow had already been downed by someone else?

That explained why the other fellow was able to turn into a Pureblooded Dragon! After all the confusion, it turned out that he was from the Sky of Cloud Dragon!

Qi Ling-er was also dumbstruck.

It had not been long since she returned to Royal City, so she had not managed to strike up connections with the figures on the Board of Potential God Kings yet. As such, she did not notice that the first rank was also present.

She had thought that the others lying on the ground were weaker than Qi Yue, but who could have known that even the first rank was there?

So, the person whose eyes were swollen and nose was broken was actually the number one expert beneath the God Kings in the Sky of Drifting Specter, the person whom countless women viewed to be their ideal type?

Weak!

It was no wonder Young Master Zhang had said that it did not matter who he challenged. It turned out that he really had the strength to back up his words...

Despite only taking two breaths to make a breakthrough, he was still able to easily defeat someone who had cultivated for centuries to get to first place...

The bloodline of a God Monarch sure was scary!

Qi Ling-er could not help but sigh at how different people could be just on the basis of their birth.

It seemed like it was time for her to change her train of thought. She should stop trying to interpret Zhang Xuan with her common sense.

The very existence of the God Monarchs was an aberration of nature. It was because they could achieve what others deemed impossible that others had no choice but to revere them.

“If you defeated the first rank, and I defeated you right after, shouldn’t that count as well?”

After all the effort that he had put into the fight, Zhang Xuan did not think that his opponent turned out to be nothing more than an extra. With a troubled look, he glanced at the cultivators lying on the ground and murmured, “Should I just challenge these fellows just to be safe?”

The so-called Free Knights were not there to supervise the duel, so he was not sure if his earlier fight was valid. In any case, there was no harm in getting a guarantee. Otherwise, it would be troublesome if he had to return there to fight again.

“W-what? L-let’s not do that!” Shentu Feng quickly spoke up. “I’ll report this matter honestly to the Free Knights and surrender my spot to you!”

He would rather surrender the position of his own accord than suffer a tragic defeat against someone who was clearly out of his league.

Even Ao Hua appeared nothing more than a toddler before him, and he was probably nothing more than a toddler to Ao Hua...

Even if he cultivated for another century, he could not see himself defeating the young man unless he made a breakthrough to God King. Since that was the case, he might as well admit his defeat and spare himself needless agony.

“Is that so? That would really be helpful.” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

This matter was settled far easier than he had expected. But as soon as he thought about the criterion about having to reach the top of an occupation, he felt another headache coming on.

Oh, wait a moment...

Zhang Xuan turned to Ao Hua and asked, “Did you mention that you’re from the Sky of Cloud Dragon?”

Yes, ancestor,” Ao Hua replied obediently.

“I heard that the Sky of Cloud Dragon has dispatched a group of physicians here to challenge the Sky of Drifting Specter’s

Physician Guild. Is that true?”

“There’s indeed such a thing. I am part of the group,” Ao Hua replied.

“I would like to have my skills in the Way of Medicine assessed so as to earn the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation, but as those in the Physician Guild are preoccupied with preparing to face you in the Physician Tournament, they don’t have the time to care about anything else. Is it possible for me to request for your group to hold the test for me instead?” Zhang Xuan asked.

After asking Qi Ling-er more about it, he realized that what he needed was just to have his skills in medicine recognized by someone esteemed in the field.

Since those in the Sky of Drifting Specter were busy, he could just ask those from the Sky of Cloud Dragon for help instead!

His goal was just to receive the rights to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation anyway. It did not matter to him who handled his test.

“You wish to have your skills in the Way of Medicine assessed?” Ao Hua asked.

Zhang Xuan nodded. “That’s right.”

Ao Hua pondered for a moment before replying. “Well, I think it should be possible since our guild leader and the elders came with us. With their standing in the physician community, they should be qualified to hold the test... I’ll bring you to them then!”

While the Sky of Cloud Dragon was headed by the Pureblooded Dragons, it did not consist solely of members of the Dragon Tribe. There were many ordinary humans living among them as well, and the leader of their Physician Guild was one such example.

Despite not possessing the bloodline of the Pureblooded Dragons, his medicinal skills were astounding, such that he was well-respected in the other Skies as well.

“That would really be great.” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

When one door closes, another door opens.

It was just a moment ago that he was turned away at the Physician Guild, but who could have thought that he would encounter a physician from the Sky of Cloud Dragon while he was trying to get into the top thirty in the Board of Potential God Kings?

Everything worked out so conveniently for him, sparing him the trouble of having to approach the other guilds.

While he was confident in his skills in the other occupations, he was hesitant to reveal them in public. He had already displayed his superior talent in pill forging, and if he continued revealing more of his hands, he would really start drawing unwanted attention to himself.

He quickly looked for a Free Knight together with Shentu Feng in order to confirm his placing on the Board of Potential God Kings before following Ao Hua all the way to the accommodation of the physicians from the Sky of Cloud Dragon.

Fortunately, their accommodation was not too far away. That was also why Ao Hua had the time to spare to drop by and challenge the others.

“You wish to earn the qualification to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation on the basis of your skills in the Way of Medicine?”

Shortly after entering a residence, two elders walked out to hear Zhang Xuan out. The old lady on the left looked at him with a grim look on her face.

“That’s my intention,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“The right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation is no joke. It concerns the safety of the Nine Skies, so there’s a cap on the number of people who can receive this right. Only two physicians in our Sky of Cloud Dragon are entitled to this privilege, the two of us.

“However, we can give you a chance to prove yourself. As long as you are able to defeat either of us, we can pass on the right to you,” the old man on the right replied.

“Sounds fine by me!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He knew that he would have to compete for the right, and he had already prepared himself mentally prior to going there.

“Good!” the old man said.

“I am the leader of the Cloud Dragon Royal City’s Physician Guild, Liao Xin. May I know how I should address you?”

It was only right to ask for the other party’s name since they were going to compete in a duel.

“My name is Zhang Xuan.”

“Zhang Xuan?” Liao Xin repeated with a slight nod before abruptly freezing in place. His eyes widened in shock before his body began trembling in agitation.

“Is it possible that... you are the person who created the Breakthrough Pill and Beauty Pill, Apothecary Zhang Xuan?”

“Yes, that’s me,” Zhang Xuan replied.

Liao Xin staggered back a little before abruptly bowing deeply before Zhang Xuan. “Thank you for saving my life, benefactor! There’s no need to compete anymore. Your skills in medicine are indubitably superior to mine...”

Zhang Xuan was stunned. Qi Ling-er was flabbergasted.

What is it this time?

Why is everyone getting so overexcited today? Do you know how exhausting it is trying to match your energy?

2175 A Tournament Regarding the Way of Medicine

Seeing how confused Zhang Xuan and Qi Ling-er was, a middle-aged physician sitting by the side of the room explained, “Guild Leader Liao suffered some grievous internal injuries in the previous Flood of Spiritual Energy. Over the past decade, he has been studying medical records and trying out all sorts of remedies, but there was nothing that worked.

“In the last two years, his internal injuries worsened significantly, becoming more and more severe. Guild Leader Liao thought that he would meet his end just like that... but a few days ago, someone bought a Beauty Pill and gave it to him. Initially, he didn’t think much of it, but after consuming it, he found that his internal injuries were actually lightening. So, he requested a friend to get him some more. After eating ten of those pills, not only did he manage to recover fully from his injuries, he noticed that his lifespan increased considerably. Due to that, he’s extremely grateful to you!”

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

The wonders of the Beauty Pill stemmed from the infused Heaven’s Path zhenqi. It was capable of healing internal traumas and fortifying one’s vitality, thus granting one greater longevity.

“I devoted all of my time and effort to understanding and curing my internal traumas, but I couldn’t find a cure at all. In the end, it was your pill that did the job so easily. Isn’t that more than enough to show that your skills in the Way of Medicine are above mine?”

“This... Well, I guess it’s not entirely wrong if you interpret it that way.”

Zhang Xuan was planning to turn down the compliment humbly, but when he thought about it, there was some truth in what Guild Leader Liao said. He would be humblebragging if he refused a compliment that was true, so he could only reluctantly accept those words.

The Heaven's Path zhenqi was capable of healing most afflictions, and in the cases where the Heaven's Path zhenqi did not work, the patients were more or less doomed.

Besides, his knowledge in the Way of Medicine went beyond just using the Heaven's Path zhenqi. The fact that he was a 9-star physician back on the Master Teacher Continent was evidence of his skills.

He would be going against his conscience if he said that his medical skills were beneath those of Guild Leader Liao!

“Alright, I'll send a message back right now to handle the processes. I'll pass you the token required to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation once it's done!” Liao Xin replied.

In truth, there was no need for him to go all the way there to partake in the Physician Tournament. He was esteemed enough in the physician community to not have to prove himself. The main reason he had gone there was to meet his benefactor and thank him in person.

Since his benefactor had a request, it was only right for him to fulfill his request so as to repay the favor.

Just as Guild Leader Liao was about to take out a special Communication Token to pass down the order, another old man rushed into the room and exclaimed, “Guild Leader Liao, you mustn't do that!”

“Vice Guild Leader Wang, is there a problem?” Guild Leader Liao asked with a frown.

The person who barged into the room was the vice leader of Cloud Dragon Royal City's Physician Guild, Wang Fei.

“Apothecary and physician are two separate occupations. It isn't right to mix them together just because there are some

similarities between the two. It is... inappropriate!” Wang Fei argued.

He admitted that the young man’s skills as an apothecary were probably unrivaled in the current generation, especially after witnessing the effects of the Beauty Pill in person, but pill forging was pill forging. No matter how formidable one’s pills were, that would not make an apothecary a physician!

The role of a physician was to diagnose a patient and come up with the best treatment method to cure the patient. On the other hand, apothecaries forge pills out of medicinal herbs in order to elevate their medicinal properties.

There was a vast difference in their specialties.

By giving the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation over to this young man, Guild Leader Liao was indirectly admitting that his skills in the Way of Medicine were beneath those of the young man. If the latter showed a lack of capability afterward, that could possibly tarnish the reputation that Guild Leader Liao had painstakingly built!

“Guild Leader Liao, please reconsider your decision!”

The other physicians in the group entered the room and bowed deeply.

“I am indebted to Apothecary Zhang, and I wish to repay his favor. Besides, it’s about time for me to retire. Alright, there’s no need to say anymore. My mind is made up.” Guild Leader Liao waved his hand.

In truth, he shared the same assessment as the other physicians. He felt that while Zhang Xuan was able to forge incredible pills, his medical skills were likely lacking in comparison.

The main reason he had accepted the request was to repay Zhang Xuan’s favor.

Compared to his life, he felt that a small stain on his reputation did not mean much.

Understanding the worries of the other physicians, Zhang Xuan did not lose his temper. “If that’s the case, shall we follow the proper process instead? The usual way to do it is through the Physician Tournament, right? Since everyone is here, shall we do that?”

He was still young, and it had not been long since he arrived in the Firmament. It was normal for others to doubt his capability.

“You wish to challenge us in a Physician Tournament?” Guild Leader Liao asked.

“I’m already here anyway,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

“This...”

Guild Leader Liao was a little hesitant, but seeing that Zhang Xuan had made up his mind, he eventually nodded in agreement.

There are four main segments to the Physician Tournament, namely Observation, Scent, Inquiry, and Contact. In each step, you must jot down your diagnosis, determine the illness, write down a cure, and verify whether the cure is effective or not.”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had been wondering how the Physician Tournament would work, but from the looks of it, it appeared to be no different from how physicians usually diagnosed their patients. It was just that...

“What about the patients? Do we involve patients in the duel?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

It did not seem right to him to make a tournament with the life of the patients at stake.

That infringed on the ethics that a physician should have.

“Of course not!” Guild Leader Liao replied. Then, he looked at Zhang Xuan doubtfully as he asked, “Could it be that... you don’t know what the Physician Tournament is?”

The young man was the one who proposed having a Physician Tournament, but based on what he was saying, it seemed like

he knew nothing about it!

He had thought that he could just admit defeat to the young man in order to return the favor. Even though he did not think that the young man would actually be more skilled than him when it came to the Way of Medicine, as someone who was able to create the Beauty Pill, he thought that the young man still would not be too bad.

But based on what he had seen thus far, that did not seem to be the case.

A physician who did not even know what the Physician Tournament was... Was he even a physician at all?

“The top physicians of the Nine Skies have worked together to create an artifact known as the Stone of Symptoms, and it’s through this that we hold the Physician Tournament.”

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was really ignorant of it, Guild Leader Liao shook his head and explained the matter.

It seemed like Vice Guild Leader Wang’s worries were not unfounded.

From the current looks of it, it appeared that the young man’s medical skills were not too amazing. There was no way a skilled physician would not know about the Physician Duel.

“Stone of Symptoms?”

Yes, it’s a unique treasure that is able to record a patient’s physical condition with great precision. Through the data stored in it, it’s able to generate a projection of the patient in real time to provide the physician with information. If you can provide it with a feasible cure, the projected patient will be able to recover from their ailment.”

As Liao Xin spoke, he took out a stone and tapped lightly on it.

The stone released a light buzz before generating ten human projections.

These projections were created through a formation inscribed on the stone.

Every single one of these projected humans appeared sickly, as if they had been afflicted with some sort of lethal disease. It looked like they would not live much longer without treatment.

“These ten people are afflicted with diseases that have been discovered and treated from several hundred years to several millenniums ago. Through a special procedure, their conditions are logged in the Stone of Symptoms, allowing us to recreate a lifelike projection of them. Just like real patients, we can observe their symptoms, smell their scent, ask about their status, and feel their pulse. Through these four methods, we can determine the cause of their affliction and devise a treatment method for them.”

Seeing how Zhang Xuan was still looking at the projected patients with an uncertain look on his face, Liao Xin added, “Don’t worry, the illnesses faced by these patients are not entirely obsolete. Most of these ailments are around today, even though they have been altered in one way or another through interactions with different environments. Furthermore, as the records go many years back, it’s impossible for a person to memorize every case.

“Also, the patients projected change randomly each time the Stone of Symptoms is activated, so you can rest assured that there’s no way one can cheat!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded in relief.

Treating a patient was much more than memory work. The same disease could have vastly different symptoms depending on a person’s constitution. Based on these conditions, the treatment method devised and medicine dispensed by the physician must adapt accordingly.

So, if the projected patients were the same each time, one could simply memorize the specific symptoms of the patients in advance and treat them impeccably with ease. That would render the test utterly meaningless. However, it seemed like he had underestimated the Physician Tournament.

While the cultivators of the Firmament had exceptionally good memory, there was no way they could remember all of the

ailments from the current date to over tens of thousands of years back, and that was assuming that they could even find the medical records of all the patients stored within the Stone of Symptoms.

This made cheating nigh impossible.

“After every step of the diagnosis, you are to write down your deductions. Once the Observation, Scent, Inquiry, and Contact procedures are over, you have to jot down a medical treatment and hand it over to the patient. If the medical treatment you proposed is in line with the one that cured the patient, the projected patient will be cured of his suffering. On the other hand, if you make a mistake, it’ll show the corresponding results!”

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

He tapped his finger on the Stone of Symptom once more, and just as Guild Leader Liao said, all ten projections changed immediately.

“Now that you know of the rules, let’s begin.”

Guild Leader Liao raised his hand, and two physicians quickly passed a few pieces of paper and a brush to them.

As physicians, observing one’s patient was the first step for a diagnosis. Through taking in the patient’s expression, color, state, and form, one would be able to make a preliminary assessment of the symptoms he was facing.

Seeing that Guild Leader Liao had headed toward the leftmost patient, Zhang Xuan quickly walked over to the rightmost patient.

With one swift glance at all the projected patients, he was already able to deduce their symptoms with eighty to ninety percent confidence.

Nevertheless, he still decided to mutter ‘Flaws!’ beneath his breath.

Huhuhuhu!

Ten books immediately materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

While he was quite confident of his analysis, he wanted to have an absolute guarantee for this. So, he tapped into the powers of the Library of Heaven's Path to double check his diagnosis.

The result of this Physician Tournament would determine how long it would take him to get to the Sky of Spirit Origin and find Luo Ruoxin. He did not want to risk losing the duel and waste precious time.

Even though the patients before him were only projections, he was still able to compile the analysis of their conditions through the formation that projected them. After quickly browsing through it, he heaved a sigh of relief after seeing that his diagnoses were spot-on.

He had not really come into contact with medicine ever since he arrived in the Firmament, but back when he was still on the Master Teacher Continent, he had encountered all sorts of bizarre afflictions and resolved all of them with ease. His understanding of the human body and medicinal herbs had already reached a level unthinkable to most physicians.

Right now, the only thing that was hindering him was the difference in constitution between Gods and ordinary cultivators. As long as he could work that out, he should be able to tap into the vast knowledge in his head to cure these patients.

He sat down on the floor and spent a few moments organizing his thoughts to deduce the best treatment method. Then, he swiftly wrote down the treatment methods.

"Alright, I'm done," Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

"What? You are done?"

"Really? It hasn't even been ten minutes since the Physician Tournament started, right? Furthermore, you didn't even conduct the other steps of the diagnosis before going right into jotting down the medical treatment!"

You must be joking! How can someone diagnose all of these patients and come up with corresponding solutions so quickly?"

Everyone was stunned.

There was a saying that physicians were constantly wrestling with time to save their patients from the clutches of death, but still, it was impossible for a physician to diagnose and cure ten difficult diseases in less than ten minutes!

Are you sure you aren't pulling our legs?

The crowd looked at one another before turning their heads over to see how Guild Leader Liao was doing. The latter was still standing before the first patient with a deep frown. He had finished asking the patient for more details regarding his condition and was just about to move on to reading the patient's pulse.

He read the pulse for quite a while before finally picking up a piece of paper and writing down the corresponding illness and treatment method.

After he was done, he heaved a sigh of relief before turning toward his second patient. It was at that moment that he realized Zhang Xuan had come to a halt, so he urged with a frown, "Don't waste time. If our results are the same, the determining factor will be the time taken!"

He had been so preoccupied with diagnosing his patient earlier that he had not noticed the movements of the young man.

Right after saying those words, he was just about to turn his focus to the second patient when he noticed all the physicians in the room looking at him with speechless faces.

"What's wrong?" Guild Leader Liao asked.

"Guild Leader Liao, Apothecary Zhang has already finished diagnosing and writing down all of the treatment methods.

You might be the one who needs to hurry up," Vice Guild Leader Wang replied awkwardly.

2176 Crushing Victory

“He has finished writing down the treatment methods?” Guild Leader Liao was startled.

He was barely done with the first patient, but his opponent was already done devising the treatment methods for all ten of them.

Guild Leader Liao shook his head as his opinion of the young man fell a little further.

Diagnosing a patient was not just about acquiring information. It was about piecing all the details together—be it the patient’s age, strength, health history, or drug allergies—and creating a complete picture out of them. If one neglected even one of these factors, it could cause the situation to run out of control, thus placing the patient’s life at risk.

In his view, it was utterly ridiculous for someone to formulate a treatment without going through the four key steps of diagnosis. It was such arrogance that would eventually cost a patient’s life!

Sighing deeply, Guild Leader Liao made a mental note in his mind to talk to the young man about this later before moving on to his next patient.

All in all, it took Guild Leader Liao two hours in order to finish diagnosing all ten of the patients and devising their treatment methods.

A little exhausted, he rubbed his glabella before turning in the papers with his answers.

“Let’s check the results!”

With the answers of both participants in hand, Vice Guild Leader Wang took the first paper from Guild Leader Liao’s stack and flipped it over.

Everyone else in the room craned their necks over to see what was written on it—“Likely to be Ephialtes Bane Symptom.”

This was the first conclusion that he came to after observing the first patient.

Vice Guild Leader Wang moved on to flip the second and third pieces, which reflected his diagnoses from the scent and inquiry, and the answer was the same.

However, on the fourth piece of paper, which he wrote after feeling the patient's pulse, he overthrew his previous diagnosis, writing, "Not Ephialtes Bane Symptom but Night Terror Affliction. Treatment method:..."

The Ephialtes Bane Symptom was a symptom that tortured one's spirit. The patient would suffer from constant nightmares during their sleep, as if they were haunted by a devil. Their spirit would continue to wither as time went by, causing their great distress.

In truth, it was just the side effect from a deficiency in a cultivator's spirit resulting from the damage caused by one's cultivation going berserk. As long as the cultivator cultivated their spirit and avoided putting stress on themselves, the symptom would eventually disappear.

This symptom was almost identical to what a patient plagued by the Night Terror Affliction would face. The only difference was that the former would only appear during any types of sleep and was not lethal whereas the latter would only occur during deep sleep, and once the symptoms struck, there was a chance that the cultivator would never wake up again.

Through just observation, scent, and inquiry, the information one would receive from patients suffering from those two diseases would be nearly identical. Unless one felt the pulse and sensed the differences in the fluctuation of energy, it would be impossible to discern the two.

"A perfect answer." Vice Guild Leader Wang nodded.

In the diagnosis procedure, the first step, observation, would only suffice for a preliminary assessment. It did not provide enough information for one to fully ascertain the illness. For most physicians, it was only at the fourth step that they were able to eliminate other possibilities and decide on one.

Guild Leader Liao used this method to determine the cause of the illness and identify the root factor that he had to resolve.

Taking the sheet of paper detailing the treatment method, Vice Guild Leader Wang walked up to the first patient and placed it in his hand.

Weng!

The next moment, as if having eaten medicine, the complexion and spirit of the projected patient began to recover gradually.

There was only one scenario in which such a situation would happen—the medicine was effective!

Guild Leader Liao stroked his beard in satisfaction.

It had been many years since he had participated in a Physician Tournament, but it seemed like he had not grown rusty yet. He had treated the first patient impeccably.

With this, he turned to Zhang Xuan.

He wanted to see what kind of answers the young man could come up with in less than ten minutes.

With a smile, Zhang Xuan passed over the treatment method he had jotted down.

Vice Guild Leader Wang took the piece of paper, but upon seeing the content, he frowned.

The crowd also glanced over, only to frown in bewilderment.

“There isn’t any illness jotted down here?”

“Did he fail to diagnose anything from the patient?”

“But why would he write down a treatment method if he failed to diagnose anything from the patient?”

“I have no idea...”

On the paper was a list of medicinal herbs, but there was nothing that indicated what kind of illness the first patient was suffering from.

“Furthermore, it seems like the prescription he wrote down is a little different from that of Guild Leader Liao...”

“A little different? They are two completely different sets of herbs!”

“But Guild Leader Liao’s prescription is correct, right? Given that Apothecary Zhang’s prescription is entirely different, doesn’t that mean that he has already failed?”

At this point, everyone in the room had already come to a conclusion about Zhang Xuan.

The young man was really just an apothecary. He knew nothing about diagnosing and treating a patient at all.

It was one thing for him to fail to diagnose a patient’s condition accurately, but he even boldly came up with an incorrect prescription. It was fortunate that it was just a projected patient. If it had been a real patient, the consequences would have been dire.

“Is there even a need to continue this?” Vice Guild Leader Wang remarked in disappointment.

In his opinion, Zhang Xuan was no physician at all. It was pointless to continue the Physician Tournament like that.

“Are you suggesting that I have already lost without even testing my treatment method?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

“Isn’t it already obvious from this?”

“Why don’t you try placing my treatment method on the projected patient and see what happens?”

“You are only humiliating yourself at this rate, but since you insist...” Vice Guild Leader muttered in exasperation as he walked up to the projected patient and took away Guild Leader Liao’s treatment method.

As soon as the paper left the projected patient’s hand, the latter immediately reverted to his sickly state.

Vice Guild Leader Wang then placed Zhang Xuan’s treatment method in the projected patient’s hand.

Weng!

As soon as the projected patient came into contact with the paper, his sickly yellowish face immediately turned pale. Just as everyone thought that the patient was going to pass away from the wrong prescription, a minor explosion suddenly sounded, and the aura of the projected patient abruptly surged.

It took a while before the surge finally came to a halt, and the fluctuations in energy calmed down.

Taking another look at the projected patient, the physicians in the room realized that not only did the patient manage to recover from his illness, his complexion also looked redder from before. In fact... he seemed to have grown stronger!

“Is this... Did he make a breakthrough in his soul cultivation?”

“Hang on a moment. Are you saying that Apothecary Zhang’s prescription has not only cured the patient but even helped him make a breakthrough?”

Silence.

Even Guild Leader Liao’s eyes had widened in shock.

His treatment had only alleviated the patient’s condition. On the other hand, the young man before him had not only cured the patient from the root cause—he had even turned this crisis into an opportunity to make a breakthrough!

In other words, the young man’s proposed treatment method was not just on the level of perfect. It had surpassed perfect to reach an even higher level!

“That’s not all. The medicinal herbs in Apothecary Zhang’s prescription are quite common. They can be found in most dispensaries in town, and they aren’t too expensive...” Ao Hua pointed out excitedly.

On the way there, he had received strict instructions from Zhang Xuan not to address him as ancestor but Apothecary Zhang.

Clearly, the young man did not want to expose his identity as a Pureblooded Dragon, or rather, he did not wish for the Sky of Cloud Dragon to investigate his affairs.

“Indeed!”

The crowd widened their eyes in astonishment upon noticing that fact. Realizing that this could be revolutionary, their eyes reddened in agitation.

With the medicinal herbs in the prescription being inexpensive, it meant that they could easily apply this treatment to other patients facing the same affliction.

In other words, the treatment was easily replicable!

Such a prescription could potentially be used to save many lives in the future.

What was the use of a prescription if the ingredients could not be obtained or were unaffordable? This was a very practical problem that most physicians faced while treating their patients.

There were some physicians who were kind enough to pay on their patient’s behalf, but that was clearly not sustainable! Physicians had to earn a livelihood as well, and it was perfectly normal for them to expect compensation for their hard work. It was ridiculous to expect them to pay on a patient’s behalf.

They were not saints!

After a long while, Guild Leader Liao finally recovered from his shock, and he asked hoarsely, “How is it that your prescription is able to accomplish so much?”

“To be frank, he is not suffering from the Ephialtes Bane Symptom nor the Night Terror Affliction. Instead, it’s a poison that causes him to be susceptible to hallucinations!” Zhang Xuan replied. “In the strictest sense, it can’t be considered an illness, so I refrained from writing it down...”

“He is poisoned?” Guild Leader Liao’s eyes dilated in disbelief. “But those are clearly the symptoms of the Night Terror Affliction!”

Having diagnosed the patient carefully, he was certain that his judgement was not wrong. Furthermore, the patient had also

recovered after consuming his medicine. So, how could it be a poison?”

“The patient does have symptoms of the Night Terror Affliction. However, the Night Terror Affliction only damages one’s soul, making one feel constantly exhausted and lethargic. It doesn’t have much of an effect on one’s physical body. However, the patient’s body showed clear signs of deficiency, such that even his skin has turned yellowish. Like a tree in autumn, he looked as if he was going to hit the limit of his lifespan at any moment. From this observation, it’s clear that there are some issues regarding the vitality of his body as well.

“The body of a Celestial God is strong and resilient, making it highly resistant to most physical anomalies. Given so, it seems a little hard to imagine that a mere Night Terror Affliction would leave the patient’s body in such a state.

“So, I wondered if the patient had been poisoned. Through my careful observation, I realized that the patient is actually from the Sky of Deathlessness’ Wangyue Mountain, which is known to be the habitat where Night Terror Cobras thrive in. So, I deduced that the patient might have encountered a Night Terror Cobra there and ended up getting bitten, resulting in his current state. While most prescriptions dealing with the Night Terror Affliction alleviate the effects caused by the venom of the Night Terror Cobra, they are unable to neutralize the venom itself.

“Short term, the patient will appear to have been cured. However, the venom will act up once every two years, and on the fifth time that the condition relapses, the venom will have already circulated throughout the patient’s body. By then, there’ll be nothing that can be done to save the patient anymore!”

The crowd in the surroundings blinked blankly. They were having trouble trying to process what they had just heard. This...

Are you sure you are a physician and not a prophet?

The person in the projection has been dead for innumerable years, and his corpse has already been reduced to dust. How in the world did you manage to tell that he is from the Sky of Deathlessness' Mountain Wangyue?

From what I remember, you only looked at the patient and didn't ask any questions, right?

Guild Leader Liao quickly turned to the projected patient and asked, "Where do you live?"

As the environment where a cultivator lived could potentially reveal the cause of the illness, the projected patients were allowed to answer this question.

"Sky of Deathlessness, Mountain Wangyue," the projected patient replied.

"This..."

Hearing the response, everyone staggered a little from shock.

Perhaps calling it shock was an understatement. Things were starting to develop in a creepy direction.

With just a single look, the young man had not only been able to diagnose the patients accurately but also figured out where the patients were from.

It was almost as if the young man was born with an innate talent to become a stalker!

Terrifying!

The Sky of Deathlessness is located at the south of the Firmament, and the climate is hot and humid. Through his clothes, it's possible to deduce as much!"

Zhang Xuan could see through the doubts the physicians had in mind, so he explained his thought process to them.

Hearing those words, the crowd quickly turned their gazes over, and indeed, the patient was wearing light, cooling clothes.

"Nourished by the moist atmosphere, southerners tended to have paler and smoother skin. In comparison, northerners tend to have drier and rougher skin. It's possible to discern the region

that one originates from through such physical traits,” Zhang Xuan said.

That is not the conclusive evidence though. Regardless of whether he was afflicted with the Night Terror Affliction or venom, his soul would have been injured. However, the condition of the injury would have been different. If it was the former, it would have been an overall deterioration of his soul. If it was the latter, his injuries would have been more severe at the location where the poison first seeped in. Through careful observation, I was able to sense that the deterioration of his soul was uneven, and that proved that he had been poisoned.”

“I see!”

The crowd nodded in realization as they looked at the young man in awe and admiration.

They had thought that the latter was an inept physician wannabe, but who could have known that he was actually a grandmaster way beyond their league!

“Let’s continue!”

Vice Guild Leader Wang continued to verify the remaining nine patients. Guild Leader Liao’s treatment methods were all correct, but they paled far in comparison to what Zhang Xuan had come up with.

All of the prescriptions that Zhang Xuan suggested allowed the patient to achieve some sort of breakthrough after they were cured, making it clear which method was superior.

Of the ten patients, all his treatment methods were beyond perfect!

“I have lost,” Guild Leader Liao remarked with a bitter smile.

“It was a great battle. I have learned a lot from it.”

2177 Deducing a Sword Ar

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Guild Leader Liao was initially certain that Zhang Xuan's medical skills would be way beneath his, but at this moment, he realized that he was nothing more than a firefly standing before the radiant sun.

Their skills were not even in the same league!

“Does this mean that I have earned the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation now?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Of course! There are still some procedures that must be cleared; I'll have to report this matter upward first. However, you should be able to receive your token by this afternoon at the latest,” Guild Leader Liao said.

Even though Zhang Xuan had already met the criteria, there was still a need to report this matter to the other Skies and have a token forged specifically for him before he could use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation.

“I understand.”

He had already been in this city for quite a few days; he did not mind waiting for another half a day. So, he bade farewell and left the residence together with Qi Ling-er.

Shortly after they left, the room fell silent.

Guild Leader Liao could not help but ask, “Ao Hua, did he really manage to defeat you with the prowess of his physical body?”

“Yes, that's indeed what happened,” Ao Hua replied.

The resilience of his physical body surpasses yours, his skills in pill forging have won Fu Jiangchen's praise, and his mastery in the Way of Medicine has reached an unfathomable level that even I am unable to see through. The world sure has

many amazing individuals!” Guild Leader Liao remarked deeply.

He had thought that he would be able to ravage Drifting Specter Royal City’s Physician Guild and catapult the reputation of Cloud Dragon Royal City’s Physician Guild to new heights. Yet, who could have known that he would suffer such a tragic defeat before he could even encounter the lot from Drifting Specter Royal City’s Physician Guild?

If even he was not a match for Zhang Xuan, it was likely to be even more so for the rest.

“Let’s go back!” Guild Leader Liao instructed with a deep sigh of helplessness.

“What about the Physician Tournament with Drifting Specter Royal City’s Physician Guild?”

“As long as Physician Zhang is a citizen of the Sky of Drifting Specter, even if we defeat Drifting Specter Royal City’s Physician Guild, we still won’t be able to establish our dominance over them. There’s no point in going ahead with it,”

Guild Leader Liao replied.

As long as Zhang Xuan existed, they would never be able to claim that their physicians were superior to those of the Sky of Drifting Specters. Their goal in going there was to buff up their reputation, but since it was not going to work out, there was no point in it anymore.

It would just be a waste of effort and time.

“Alright then...”

Understanding where Guild Leader Liao was coming from, the other physicians nodded in agreement.

In Drifting Specter Royal City’s Physician Guild...

“Congratulations, Physician Zhao Chong!”

After a few rounds of selections, the candidate that was chosen to represent them was Physician Zhao Chong!

While his reputation was not as sound as the other candidates, there was no questioning that his medical skills were amazing. The set of medical maneuvers he performed during the selection phase had really astounded the crowd.

“Of course, Physician Zhao Chong is the real deal. He isn’t someone whom the likes of an apothecary can compete with!”

“Are you referring to Zhang Xuan? Hehe. I admit that he’s indeed a prodigy when it comes to pill forging, but medicine? Hah! He still has a long way to go!”

“Each occupation has its own challenges to surmount. It’s lucky that we turned him away, or else I would have cringed each time he made a mistake!”

Seeing Zhao Chong’s amazing performance, the crowd could not help but think of the conceited young man from earlier, and they could not help but burst into laughter.

So what if the young man was good at forging pills?
Physicians did not compete on the grounds of pill forging!

If they had really allowed an apothecary to represent them, others would mock their Physician Guild for being so desperate as to send even those of the other occupations forward!

At this moment, a middle-aged man suddenly rushed into the room.

“What’s wrong?” Guild Leader Sun Xuan asked with a frown.

The physicians of the Sky of Cloud Dragon have left!”

They’ve left? What do you mean by that? Are they going to forfeit the challenge?” Guild Leader Sun Xuan was taken aback.

The opponent had arrived with the intention of using them as stepping stones, so why were they backing out before the battle even began?

“They said that since their skills are lacking, it’s meaningless to proceed with the challenge. So, they decided to leave,” the middle-aged man exclaimed.

Their skills are lacking? What do they mean by that?”

Everyone was stunned.

They had not faced each other yet!

Why would the opponent suddenly come to such a conclusion?

“According to what I heard, it seems like a physician from our Sky of Drifting Specter went to their accommodation and defeated Guild Leader Liao with ease. They were awed by the proficiency he displayed in the Way of Medicine, so they decided to admit defeat!” The middle-aged man revealed what he had heard thus far.

“Someone challenged Guild Leader Liao and won against him?”

“Are you serious? Guild Leader Liao’s medical skills are known to be at the forefront of the Nine Skies!”

“Indeed! He’s the person who I look up to the most, you know!”

“Wait a moment! Who defeated Guild Leader Liao?”

Everyone stared at one another blankly before a physician spoke up in bewilderment. “All of the physicians registered in Royal City are here at the moment, and none of us have left here since a while ago. It doesn’t make sense. Are we missing someone here?”

“I was confused as well so I asked them about it earlier, and it seems like the physician’s name is... Zhang Xuan!” the middle-aged man exclaimed.

“Zhang Xuan?”

“The person whom we just drove away... Apothecary Zhang?”

“Are you sure? That’s a physician who was able to defeat the great Guild Leader Liao! I find it hard to believe that Apothecary Zhang wields such capability...”

“Could you have heard wrong somehow?”

The crowd was dumbstruck. Recalling how they had driven the young man out earlier, their faces turned so red that it looked as if someone had given them a few firm slaps.

It was not too long ago that they mocked the apothecary for wanting to participate in their selections, but who would have thought that the apothecary was even more skilled than the highly respected Guild Leader Liao?

Guild Leader Sun Xuan's lips twitched in shock.

At this moment, he wanted to just burrow his way into the ground so that he would not have to feel so awkward and embarrassed.

Oblivious to the mental breakdown that Drifting Specter Royal City's Physician Guild was going through at the moment, Zhang Xuan looked at the token on the table before him before raising his head to ask, "Is this the token to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation?"

Just a few minutes prior, Guild Leader Liao had arrived personally to pass the token to him.

The token was roughly the size of an infant's fist, and there were some inscriptions carved on it. Vaguely, one could feel a powerful will lingering within the token, inducing deference in the depths of one's soul.

"This is a token carved personally by a God Monarch. It has the power to withstand the spatial turbulence caused by the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation," Qi Ling-er explained as she looked at the token in envy.

Even though she was a core member of the Qi Clan and had great power in her grasp, she still was not qualified to possess such a token.

This token would allow one to travel from one Sky to another in a matter of seconds. As long as one had enough money, one could easily tour around the Nine Skies without any trouble.

Zhang Xuan nodded silently in response.

He could also tell that the inscriptions on the token were imbued with extraordinary power that was even greater than

what he had felt from Conferred God King Qi Meng.

“Alright. I’ll leave you to continue handling the sales of the Beauty Pill and Breakthrough Pill. Remember, my aim is to create as much hype around the pills as possible. Other than that, I hope that you can also help look after my parents and Sun Qiang. If there’s anything that they require for their cultivation, try to meet their demands,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

As he would be venturing into the foreign Sky of Spirit Origin, it was likely that he could encounter some danger there. So, he had chosen not to take his parents along with him.

After the Xingmeng Sword Saints received the guidance from the experts of the Sword Hut, their comprehension of swordsmanship had become significantly deeper. This had a synergistic effect on their cultivation, allowing them to grow swiftly.

On top of that, Zhang Xuan was providing them with all the cultivation resources they needed. They were gobbling down the invaluable and much sought-after Beauty Pills and Breakthrough Pills as if they were cheap candy balls.

Due to that, they had managed to raise their cultivation to low-tier Celestial God!

At this rate, it would not take them too long to reach high-tier Celestial God.

After making arrangements, Zhang Xuan swiftly confirmed the location the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation before riding an aerial celestial beast over.

As long as the Qi Clan thought that he was a God Monarch, they would surely do everything within their means to protect his parents and Sun Qiang, so they should be relatively safe in Drifting Specter Royal City.

But their safety would no longer be guaranteed once they ventured beyond the city walls.

The lucrative market created by the arrival of the Breakthrough Pill and Beauty Pill had stirred the greed in the hearts of many powers. Most of these powers did not dare

make a move in Drifting Specter Royal City out of fear of the Qi Clan, but once they left the protection of the Qi Clan, there was no doubt that those powers would make use of the opportunity to strike.

In fact, he felt that his journey to the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation and teleporting straight over to the Sky of Spirit Origin might not be as smooth as he would like.

Sitting on the aerial celestial beast, Zhang Xuan closed his eyes and began conditioning his current state.

As a symbol of neutrality, the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation was not located within Royal City but at the top of a mountain several hundred li away.

So, if one wanted to use the Teleportation Formation, one had to leave Royal City. This meant that there was a good chance that Zhang Xuan could be assaulted by another person while traveling to the Teleportation Formation.

As the person who knew the pill formulas of the Breakthrough Pill and Beauty Pill, there were probably many who viewed him as a fountain of wealth. Anyone who could capture him would gain the key to endless fortune.

There are still fifteen minutes before I finally leave the city, Zhang Xuan thought. I guess I should use this time to work on my Celestial God realm sword art...

It had not been too long since he became a Celestial God, and all this while, he had been too preoccupied with other matters and ended up neglecting his sword art. Since he had some time on hand, it would be good for him to work on it.

He noticed that in order to grasp the sword art of the Pathos of Heaven, he would have to immerse himself in the environment of the Firmament.

If he channeled his consciousness into the isolated Great Codex of Spring and Autumn, even though he would be able to enjoy the benefits of a time acceleration of ten thousand times, it would not help him in his comprehension at all. "The first level of the Pathos of Heaven is Bond of Allegiance, and the sword art is A Heart of Intertwined Threads.

“The second level of the Pathos of Heaven is Camaraderie of Brothers, and the sword art is Unyielding Loyalty.

“The third level is Ties of Teacher and Student.”

The cultivation techniques and sword arts that Zhang Xuan had comprehended from the Pathos of Heaven revolved in his mind, drifting quietly.

Like a painting, they slowly unfurled to reveal a grand picture that depicted his journey thus far.

Some of the times were exciting, and some of the times were sweet. Some of the times were horrifying, and some of the times were heart-wrenching...

It was a picture filled with all sorts of flavors and sentiments, and these were what made him what he was.

Passion and affection, these were emotions.

Hatred and abhorrence, these were also emotions.

Happiness and pain, these were emotions, too.

There were no sentient beings in the world that could escape their emotions, and if the world was devoid of sentience, the heavens would have no reason to exist.

It was as if emotions were the bane of the heavens. They hindered the rationality of the heavens, but they were a natural part of the world as well.

Perhaps emotions could be viewed as an even higher force. The heavens could be destroyed, but emotions would continue to exist as long as life persisted.

A teacher and a student were two people who would be otherwise strangers if not for the bond of mentorship. This bond signified the continuation of one's knowledge, wisdom, and values, binding the two people tightly together.

It appeared to be a transient relationship bound by nothing more than societal values, but it could become strong enough to rival the bond of kinship...

“I see...”

Zhang Xuan's heart quivered as an emotion surged. Just as he was about to execute the sword art, he felt goosebumps rising all over his body.

Without any hesitation, he leaped off his aerial celestial beast.

Peng!

The next instant, the aerial celestial beast that he had been riding on suddenly burst apart, and Zhang Xuan was left plummeting from the sky.

2178 Fighting a God King 1

2178 Fighting a God King (1)

An assault!

Lowering his head, Zhang Xuan saw a lush forest beneath him. The massive buildings of Drifting Specter Royal City were no more than five meters behind him.

In other words, as soon as he left Royal City, there was already someone who could not hold himself back from making a move on him.

He had not told anyone about his intention to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation today except for Sun Qiang, Qi Ling-er, and his parents. Yet, they were still able to lay an ambush for him there in advance.

It seemed like someone had been keeping tabs on his movements.

He had underestimated the temptation of the Breakthrough Pill and the Beauty Pill.

The ground was moving toward Zhang Xuan at an accelerating pace. It would not be long before he finally crashed into the ground. However, what he really had to be wary of were the ones above him.

There were six aerial celestial beasts charging toward him from above. Each beast had a black-robed person standing above them with a spear in hand.

One of them had killed his celestial aerial beast.

In the Firmament, only God Kings possessed the ability to fly. Even though Zhang Xuan's cultivation had already reached high-tier Celestial God, it was still impossible for him to maneuver in the sky without the help of an aerial beast.

It seems like I'll have to learn how to fly before I perfect my sword art, Zhang Xuan thought.

With his current strength and his experiences from the Master Teacher Continent and the Azure, it should not be too difficult for him to figure out how to fly. It was just that it had not been long since his cultivation reached high-tier Celestial God, and there had been no time for him to spend on it.

Given his current plight, if he did not learn how to fly within the next few seconds, even though he would not lose his life from falling from such a high altitude, he would have still lost half of his fighting prowess as a result of that.

It would be difficult for him to deal with the encirclement of enemies in a weakened state.

Boom!

The six people in the sky brandished their spears and pierced them right toward Zhang Xuan, causing a gust of cold air to be blasted in his direction.

They were all high-tier Celestial Gods!

Furthermore, they had chosen to use their full strength right from the start.

With the resilience of Zhang Xuan's body, he was not too bothered by the assault of the six. Not even the claw swipe of a Pureblooded Dragon could make him bleed, so what could the spear thrust of those six possibly do?

The only issue was that if he faced the spear thrusts directly, the impact of the collision would further accelerate the speed of his fall. If so, the fall might prove dangerous, even for him.

While his physical body was much tougher than before, he did not want to gamble on something that he was not certain about, especially not in the face of his enemies.

I guess I have no choice. I can only do this...

As the spears came closer and closer to him, Zhang Xuan closed his eyes.

Question marks popped out on the heads of the charging six.

Was their target giving up just like that?

Why don't you at least try to struggle a little?

Do you know how many strategies we have prepared beforehand to deal with you? It will be awkward if we manage to take you down so easily after spending long hours coming up with countless countermeasures against you!

At that moment, Zhang Xuan's consciousness was already immersed in the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn.

The enemies were swiftly approaching him, but from the looks of it, there were still two more seconds before he reached the ground. In the Great Codex of Spring and Autumn's terms, that would be 20,000 seconds or five and a half hours!

That was more than enough for him to figure out a flying technique so that he could stand his ground even in an aerial battle.

The reason he had such confidence was because he had cultivated a technique called the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps back on the Master Teacher Continent.

That technique had allowed him to fly back when his cultivation was still in the Transcendent Mortal realm. Although his environment was a little different from before, he should still be able to get the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps working as long as he made some adjustments to the technique.

With such a thought in mind, he quickly took out the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps from the shelves of the Library of Heaven's Path and fused it together with the other books he had collected in the Firmament.

Compile!

A new book was created.

With a tap of his finger, the knowledge contained within the newly compiled book flowed into his head.

It seems like it's impossible to directly convert the techniques from the Master Teacher Continent over to the Firmament...

He had thought that he would be able to compile a Heaven's Path technique through compiling the Red Dust Heaven

Ascending Steps together with the books that he had gathered in the Firmament, but what he received was mostly gibberish.

As the heavens of the two worlds differed, the meridian network and constitutions of the cultivators were vastly different from one another. As such, he could no longer practice the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps as it was.

He had to manually modify it to fit his own constitution before cultivating it.

So, he began reviewed the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps and making modifications to it bit by bit. It took some time before he was finally done with his work.

The Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps required the cultivator to circulate his zhenqi in a certain manner to offset the pull of gravity. The principles behind it were not that tough to understand, but pulling it off was another matter.

It was the kind of technique that a cultivator would either have to perform impeccably, or it would fail.

As such, even if a new practitioner had fully grasped the concepts behind the technique, it would probably still take quite a few tries before they could start maneuvering themselves around the sky.

Fortunately for Zhang Xuan, he had used the technique before. As such, he should be able to use it adeptly right away. Driving his zhenqi around his body, he could feel himself swiftly gaining control over his surroundings.

At this moment, he was already less than twenty meters away from the ground, and the spears were right before him. A sharp glint flashed through his eyes as he verbalized two powerful notes from his mouth.

“Moo! Mou!”

Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragon!

While they were less effective on beasts that were not from the Dragon Tribe, similar to the ferocious roar of a lion, it could still shake their spirits and reduce their fighting will.

He was a little too close to the surface for comfort. He could not afford to make any mistakes now!

After disorientating the six celestial beasts to mess up the assault of the six black-robed individuals momentarily, Zhang Xuan swiftly executed the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps to break his fall.

By now, the speed of his fall was already too great for him to stop entirely, so he still ended up landing on the ground with a loud explosion, the impact creating a large crater with a ten-meter radius around him. Even so, he managed to overcome the crisis with minimal injuries.

As soon as he landed on the floor, he immediately leaped upward and maneuvered past the six aerial celestial beasts to fly in the air.

Meanwhile, the six aerial celestial beasts, together with their riders, continued to fall with increasing velocity. They were not able to stop earlier due to the effects of the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragon momentarily befuddling their senses.

By the time they snapped out of it, the ground was only a mere meter away from them.

Peng! Peng! Peng! Peng! Peng! Peng!

Six resounding explosions ensued as the six celestial beasts and their six riders charged right into the ground one after another, causing massive craters that spanned several hundred meters in their wake.

Zhang Xuan had been flying at an altitude of more than two thousand meters earlier, and under the effects of gravity, the speed that he was moving at was already scary enough. On the other hand, those six assailants were dashing right toward him in order to catch up with him.

As one could expect, the fall had nearly cost them their lives.

This was especially so for the six celestial beasts, who bore the brunt of the impact. Their organs had ruptured. If they were not treated in time, they might pass away.

Looking at the mess beneath him, Zhang Xuan snorted coldly.

He had no sympathy for those who went after him in order to fulfill their greed.

With a flick of his finger, he sent six surges of sword qi toward the six assailants below.

Puhe!

The sword qi passed through their glabellae without any resistance. Before they could even say a word, they had already breathed their last breath.

After killing them, Zhang Xuan swiftly collected their storage rings and spears with a wave of his hand.

Those spears were high-tier Celestial God artifacts, so they were still rather useful to him. As for the storage rings, there was quite a bit of money inside, but other than that, there was nothing worthy of note.

After looting everything of value, Zhang Xuan walked up to one of the aerial celestial beasts. He was intending to heal it to continue on his way, but all of a sudden, his temples started pulsating.

It was the feeling of danger encroaching on him.

Alarmed, he immediately darted to the side.

Huala!

The next instant, a surge of sword qi sliced through the spot where he had been standing a moment ago, creating a gorge several hundred meters long.

Even the tough bedrock beneath was sliced in two so easily as if it was a blob of tofu.

Despite his powerful body, he would have sustained severe injuries if he had taken that attack head-on.

With a grim look on his face, Zhang Xuan turned to look in the direction where the attack came from. There, he saw a middle-aged man making his way toward him one step at a time from the sky.

Flight... He's a God King? Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly together.

It seemed like the true mastermind who wanted his pill formulas had finally made an appearance. To think that a God King would actually be behind this!

Every single God King was highly respected in the Firmament, but this one was so eager to claim his possessions that he made a move on him as soon as he was out of the protection of Royal City!

“I’m surprised. You are able to fly despite not being a God King, and you were able to kill six of my strongest subordinates without a hitch. I should have expected as much of the person behind the Beauty Pill and the Breakthrough Pill. I must say that this is quite an eye-opener for me,” the middle-aged man said as he stopped around thirty meters away from Zhang Xuan.

He had thought that he would be able to capture a mere apothecary without having to make a move himself, but the target turned out to be more formidable than expected. Before he knew it, all his subordinates had passed away.

Looking at the middle-aged man coldly, Zhang Xuan asked, “Who are you, and what do you want? Are you not afraid of offending the Qi Clan?”

According to what Qi Ling-er said, it seemed like the Qi Clan had already made it known that they were protecting him. Yet, this God King still dared to make a move on him. Was he not afraid of the wrath of the Qi Clan?

“The Qi Clan? Hahaha, of course I am afraid of them! How could I not be afraid of them? Someone as intelligent as you should have already guessed my intentions. I don’t wish to make an enemy out of the Qi Clan, so as long as you hand over the pill formulas, I am willing to let you go,” the middle-aged man said with a smile.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan frowned.

Those words did not tally at all. The God King should have known that he would definitely face the wrath of the Qi Clan if he get out of there alive, which meant that...

He took a swift glance around him, and his complexion immediately darkened.

There were special formations set up around the forest in order to conceal any traces of battle! He had been so preoccupied with cultivating earlier that he failed to realize that his aerial celestial beast had led him right into this formation!

The enemy might have even used some sort of method to lure his aerial celestial beast into this formation.

“Are the pill formulas all you want?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Indeed. If you die here, the Qi Clan will surely scour the entire world just to hunt me down. I don’t want that to happen, you see,” the middle-aged man said. “However, since I’ve made a move, I have no intention of leaving here empty-handed. You might be thinking that you are powerful enough to give me the slip, but I can tell you frankly that your strength is still far beneath the level of God Kings like me!”

“And what if I refuse?” Zhang Xuan said.

“You wouldn’t want to do that. I am quite a short-tempered person myself. If you make me angry, I might accidentally hurt you,” the middle-aged man replied as his lips curled up sinisterly.

The middle-aged man would likely kill him regardless of whether he brought out the pill formulas or not. He could not possibly risk allowing the Qi Clan to get on his trail, or else he would be placing himself in grave danger.

Zhang Xuan looked at the middle-aged man in the eye and asked, “So, you are determined to achieve your goal no matter what happens?”

You seem to be awfully confident in your strength.”

2179 Fighting a God King 2

2179 Fighting a God King (2)

“You plan on fighting against me?”

The face of the middle-aged man turned livid. He drew his sword, causing a metallic reverberation reminiscent of a dragon’s roar to echo in the air.

The next moment, the middle-aged man suddenly appeared right before Zhang Xuan. His sword tore through the air to strike right down on Zhang Xuan’s waist.

As a God King, his cultivation was strong enough to put him in the highest echelon of the Firmament.

His offense did not appear to be as imposing as the attacks from a Celestial God, but that was only because his strength was fully channeled into harming his enemy. There was not the slightest bit of energy wasted as heat or sound.

Furthermore, the world seemed to sway along with his movements, reinforcing the might of his attack.

“Humph!”

Seeing how the middle-aged man made a move on him as soon as negotiations broke down, Zhang Xuan knew that the other party had other means to extract the pill formulas from him even after he was dead. After all, the concept of Soul Search and similar techniques existed on the Firmament as well.

It was clear that there was nothing he could say that would make the middle-aged man hold back on him.

Since words would make no difference at this point, Zhang Xuan immediately retreated using the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps.

However, even though the movement technique allowed him to fly, the speed at which he could move was drastically beneath that of a God King.

Zhang Xuan could barely retreat a dozen steps before another slash was right before him.

In that moment, Zhang Xuan opened his arms.

As he drove his zhenqi to its limits, he took out the six spears that he had collected from the six assailants earlier and directed them toward the middle-aged man.

Each of these spears was infused with his Spear Quintessence, granting them superior might. Furthermore, they were positioned in a manner that allowed them to synergize their powers through a collaborative formation.

“You do have some means!”

The middle-aged man did not expect Zhang Xuan to be such a skilled spear practitioner. With a cold harrumph, he redirected his sword away from Zhang Xuan to deal with the spear formation instead.

Peng! Peng! Peng!

With a single strike, the six spears were broken at their intersection by a sword, causing the formation to collapse.

The difference in the tier of the weapons and their cultivation made the result of this collision a foregone conclusion.

“You would have been a truly terrifying adversary if you had been able to become a God King. It’s a pity that such a day will never come,” the middle-aged man remarked as he swung his sword once more.

His movements were not too large, but the despairingly powerful pressure produced by the slash made no question of the might of the attack.

Even with the Pathos of Heaven, it was still difficult for Zhang Xuan to bridge the humongous gap that existed between a God King and a Celestial God.

If not for that, God Kings would not have been so revered in the world.

“I think that I’m already plenty terrifying as an adversary for you as I am right now though,” Zhang Xuan retorted

nonchalantly.

He admitted that his strength was indeed lacking compared to the middle-aged man, but the latter was just a mere God King. A good smash from a golden page would probably be enough to grind even a Conferred God King down to smithereens, let alone a God King!

The only reason the middle-aged man was still alive was because he did not want to waste his treasure on the likes of him!

“Conceited, aren’t you?” the middle-aged man scoffed as he brandished his sword furiously.

In an instant, the entire sky was covered with sword qi, plunging the surroundings into darkness.

This time around, instead of dodging, Zhang Xuan dashed forward.

He gathered his sword qi at the tip of his finger, producing a spark of light amid the darkness. It felt incomparably insignificant compared to the barrage of sword qi that was swarming the surroundings, yet there seemed to be some compelling power to it that one simply could not ignore.

It was a very weird feeling.

Despite being a God King, the middle-aged man could not help but feel a little apprehensive at the congregation of sword qi at the tip of Zhang Xuan’s finger. It made him feel like he was wrapped in layers of silk, leaving him unable to run.

Huala!

The sword qi covering the sky suddenly surged into the congregation of sword qi at the tip of Zhang Xuan’s finger, as if it was being devoured. At the same time, the aura of the congregation of sword qi surged to a terrifying extent.

“What is that sword art?” the middle-aged man asked with eyes widened in shock.

The sword art was already so powerful even though the young man was only using his finger. If the young man had a sword

in his hand, would the sword art have been even more powerful?

He had never seen such a ridiculously powerful sword art before!

Even God Kings would have some difficulties trying to execute such a powerful move!

Feeling goosebumps rising all over his body, the God King immediately raised his sword in preparation to deal with whatever was coming. At the very same time, the young man before him muttered, “Only on demise will a silkworm run out of thread; only as ashes will the tears of a candle dry up.”

The third level of the Pathos of Heaven’s sword art had finally been created!

Prior to the assault, he had figured out what kind of sword art he wanted to create, and in this moment of danger, he had managed to connect with his emotions to pull it off.

A day as a teacher, a lifetime as a father! [1]

A teacher had to have the same sternness that a parent would have when educating their students, or perhaps even more than that.

A teacher should also be a friend. They should communicate with their students with care and concern so as to understand their circumstances and guide them based on their nature.

A teacher, as though a nanny, would also worry about everything relating to their students, taking everything about them into consideration regardless of how large or small they were.

The relationship between a teacher and a student was complex, and it could not be summarized with just a few words. This was a bond that could be so powerful and lasting that it could linger till death.

Only on demise will a silkworm run out of thread; only as ashes will the tears of a candle dry up!’

This sword art was built upon the deepest emotions in his heart, and like a black hole, it swallowed the middle-aged man

whole.

Even as a God King, he was unable to stand against the prowess of the sword art. Before he knew it, he was struck square in the chest.

A gaping laceration appeared right across his chest.

“You...”

The middle-aged man did not think that he would be injured in a fight against a high-tier Celestial God, and he could no longer keep his composure. With a furious roar, he was just about to toss everything aside to slay the young man when he felt a chill behind him.

Acting solely on his instincts, he channeled his energy to his back to fortify his body. *Padah!*

With a resounding sonic boom, a powerful force rippled across his back as his body catapulted forward before tumbling to the ground.

The middle-aged man adeptly leaped to his feet before turning around, only to see another figure that was identical to the young man he was facing.

“This is... a clone?”

The middle-aged man narrowed his eyes.

It was a clone that shared the same strength as the main body.

Where in the world did that fellow manage to find something like that?

“Attack!”

Paying no heed to the middle-aged man’s shock, Zhang Xuan charged forward as he flicked sword qi from his finger. At the same time, the clone also dashed forward.

Due to the unique nature of the Nine Hearts Lotus, the clone did not have to temper its physical body at all. As long as it had an ample amount of God Essence Pill, it was able to strengthen its body and raise its cultivation sufficiently.

If not for the Pathos of Heaven, even Zhang Xuan would not have been a match for it.

The coordination of the two of them was terrifying. Even with his strength as a God King, the middle-aged man found himself under a lot of stress.

Usually, God Kings should have been able to suppress high-tier Celestial Gods easily with just a single finger, but he found himself struggling to cope against the two opponents before him. This made him feel extremely stifled.

He had never felt so indignant fighting with someone who was not a God King!

“It seems like I was looking down on you. However, it doesn’t make a difference. You won’t be getting away alive!”

The middle-aged man released his full strength, and in that moment, it felt like the surrounding space had frozen in place. Zhang Xuan and his clone immediately felt great resistance to their movements, causing them to slow down significantly.

Zhang Xuan’s sword art was powerful, but he did not have an appropriate weapon to use it with. The clone boasted a powerful physical body, but his real cultivation was a little too low. As such, it was still hard for them to match up to a God King.

Peng peng!

Zhang Xuan and his clone were struck simultaneously, causing them to fly backward.

Hu!

The clone’s body wiggled a little, and its injuries vanished without a trace. At the same time, Zhang Xuan channeled his zhenqi toward his injuries, and they swiftly healed up as well.

You...”

The middle-aged man was stunned.

He was certain that he had dealt a near fatal wound to Zhang Xuan and his clone in that earlier strike, but the two of them were able to heal up in the blink of an eye.

Just what kind of freakish enemy did he just get himself tangled up with?

Lowering his head, he saw that the gaping laceration across his chest was still dripping blood, and he immediately felt less well.

With his constitution as a God King, he would usually be able to heal up from most wounds fast enough as long as he channeled his energy to it. However, he dared not lose his concentration in his fight against the other party, so his injuries only got more and more severe with time.

His vigorous movements had caused the laceration to tear further, and a greater amount of blood was flowing out from it.

He had thought that as long as he could wound the enemy, he should be able to catch a breather to heal his injuries.

And he did manage to wound the enemy eventually... but how was he to know that the enemy could heal up in the blink of an eye?

Furthermore, it felt like their auras had grown even more violent and powerful after healing up...

Are the two of you the incarnation of the God of Cockroaches?

Just what in the world do I have to do in order to kill you?

At this rate, the situation would only get more disadvantageous to him the more it dragged out.

“Let’s come him!” Zhang Xuan said as he rushed forward with his clone once more.

It was clear that their greatest trump card against the middle-aged man was the difference in their recovery ability. They could afford to attack recklessly whereas the middle-aged man had to tread carefully.

Peng peng peng!

Three minutes later, the middle-aged man’s face had already turned ghastly pale from weakness. On the other hand, even though his opponent was in an unkempt state as well, there was not the slightest injury to be seen on them.

They were still as vigorous as ever.

The middle-aged man clutched his hair in frenzy.

How am I supposed to win this battle?

He should have been able to kill a high-tier Celestial God easily enough, but before he knew it, the tables had already turned on him. He was the one who was going to be killed.

“Damn!”

Knowing that he was in a disadvantageous position, the God King immediately turned around and ran away.

Even though he had concealed the area with a formation, it did not change the fact that they were in proximity to Drifting Specter Royal City, if he could not kill his opponent fast enough, he might draw the attention of the Conferred God Kings.

You must be thinking that I am a pushover. I should make an example out of you so that others know better than to cross me!”

If he let his assailant get away so easily, he could be certain that he would face more ambushes in the future!

So, Zhang Xuan stowed his clone away and chased the God King using the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps.

However, the speed of his flight was simply too slow. He could not catch up with the middle-aged man.

“Hahaha! I might be unable to kill you, but you aren’t able to stop me from leaving!” The middle-aged man turned around and harrumphed. “Just you wait! It’ll be the date of your death the next time we meet!”

Right after saying those words, he turned around and bolted away.

But before he could get far, he was forced to come to a halt.

“Ah? What is...”

Before he could finish his words, a massive beak appeared before him.

Glub!

Just like that, the middle-aged man was swallowed whole.

Then, a small chick in front of Zhang Xuan.

Burp!

It released a resounding belch as it shook its bottom leisurely.

“Little Chick, you’re awake?” Zhang Xuan asked in agitation.

The Little Chick that had gone into hibernation after dying in the Lucid Lunar Lake had awakened once more, and judging by the tremendous power within it... it had actually become a God King!

Zhang Xuan had thought that he would be able to become a God King soon enough, but he was unable to gather the Anima of Yearning fast enough, causing his soul cultivation to lag behind. As a result, he was still some way off from making a breakthrough.

In the end, this chick even beat him to it!

A God King chick!

Just the thought of it filled him with excitement.

[1] This saying literally means: You might be my teacher for a day, but I’ll view you as my father for a lifetime.

2180 Sky of Spirit Origin

After his initial delight, Zhang Xuan could not help but feel a little self-conscious.

It had been a month since he arrived at the Firmament, but he had only managed to cultivate up to high-tier Celestial God thus far. He could not even match up to a chick.

Just thinking about it made him feel so upset that he could hardly breathe.

Was his talent really that bad?

It seemed like he would have to spend more time on his cultivation in order to make up for his lack of talent then! He really needed to become a God King as soon as possible. He would not be able to lift his head up if he could not even match a chick in terms of cultivation!

This little yellow chick had been with him ever since his time at the Sanctum of Sages on the Master Teacher Continent. They had been through the Kunxu Domain and the Azure, and after so long, it was still ahead of him in terms of cultivation. If it had been anyone else, he would surely have felt suicidal.

“I just woke, burp, up!”

Little Chick stretched its neck as it patted its round tummy with its wings. It suddenly looked at Zhang Xuan worriedly with its beady eyes and asked, “You won’t blame me for eating that fellow, right?”

It had been scolded many times by Zhang Xuan for eating things that it should not have.

“It’s fine. Feel free to eat it,” Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand. “If it’s not enough, you can eat the others who are coming after me too!”

If Little Chick had not awoken in time, there was a good chance that he would have used the golden page to subdue the

God King. In a sense, it did save him from a great deal of potential trouble in the future.

“Thanks, boss!” Little Chick grinned in delight.

Then, its beak suddenly puffed up, and it spat out a sword.

“This is the weapon that fellow was using. I have already erased the Soul Imprint on it, so you should be able to use it after you enchant and tame it!”

While swallowing the God King, it had also swallowed his weapon.

Zhang Xuan picked up the sword and swiftly enchanted and tamed it. Once that was done, he looked at Little Chick and directed a nod of approval toward it.

As expected of someone who had traveled through three worlds with him. At least it still had some conscience.

As the sword was a God King artifact, if Little Chick had not removed the Soul Imprint and weapon spirit in it, he would not have been able to enchant or tame it. With such a powerful weapon in his arsenal, his fighting prowess immediately increased a great deal.

With the three sword arts that he had comprehended, even if he encountered another God King, he should be able to put up a decent fight against the other party!

Looking at the reverberating sword in his hand, Zhang Xuan raised it into the air and proudly declared, “From this day forth, you shall be called... God King Sword!”

Wu!

The reverberation abruptly halted. It seemed like the spirit within the sword had fallen into a daze.

I am a dignified God King artifact! Others have cool names such as Empty Spring, Dancing Swallow, Venom Dragon, Hidden Canary, Fish Guts, and the like, such that people know their class just by hearing their name...

What the heck’s with my God King Sword?

Can you be any more perfunctory than this?

“You don’t like it?” Zhang Xuan stroked his lower jaw contemplatively. “Well, you were a gift from Little Chick. Why don’t we go with Chicky Sword?”

Aooo!

The sword nearly fell to the ground in shock. It immediately zipped up its mouth and refrained from making any noise. Fine! So be it, God King Sword!

At least it sounds better than Chicky Sword.

After confirming its name, Zhang Xuan tried to execute a Sword Formation through it, and indeed, it felt exceptionally smooth. He was able to channel his full strength through it with ease.

Satisfied with the weapon, he nodded with a pleased smile.

Even though it had been a dangerous fight, he had managed to get quite a few things out of the battle. He had gained some experience fighting a God King, and he had obtained this Chicky... ah, God King Sword!

Using it together with his newly comprehended sword art, he would be able to put up a fight against ordinary God Kings and even slay them!

More importantly, he had also finally managed to verify that his body really had an extraordinarily powerful regenerative prowess that did not pale in comparison to that of his clone at all!

As long as his soul was not destroyed, even if his head was lopped off, he would still be able to recover easily.

It was no exaggeration to say that he had gained a deathless body!

Wait a moment... Zhang Xuan thought. Could this be because the energy that I’ve absorbed has Little Chick’s blood mixed into it?

In the history of the Qi Clan, there had been many cultivators who entered the Lucid Lunar Lake. However, there had never been a case where any one of them gained a deathless body like him.

Now that he thought about it, Little Chick had been there with him, and its blood had seeped into the lake when it was killed by the violent energies within. Could that have something to do with this?

Little Chick had been revealing many unique abilities ever since his time in the Azure. While it was still a gourd, its bathwater had been even more effective than the Heaven's Path zhenqi in healing injuries.

Furthermore, it had been blasted into bits several times, but each time, it had revived successfully without any issues.

Even though it was still unsure what kind of 'legendary beast' it was, it was clear that normal damage would not pose any harm to it. Instead, it seemed to nourish it!

Each time it died, it would come back stronger than ever!

Was that why his fighting prowess seemed to go up when he sustained more and more injuries while fighting against the God King earlier?

"Little Chick, are you able to transmogrify yet?" Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

Ordinary divine beasts were able to transmogrify once their cultivation reached low-tier God. Some stronger beasts required their cultivation to reach high-tier God before they were able to transmogrify.

As for Pureblooded Dragons like Ao Hua, they needed their cultivation to reach high-tier Celestial God before they were able to morph into humans.

Given that Little Chick was already a God King, it should be able to transmogrify, right?

"I haven't given it a try yet, but I think it should be possible..." Little Chick glanced at its fluffy body as it replied uncertainly.

"Give it a try then," Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

With a nod, Little Chick began to drive the energy within its body.

Hu!

Its little yellow body shuddered a little before swiftly morphing into a tall, well-built human body.

“I succeeded... I actually managed to transmogrify!” Little Chick exclaimed excitedly.

It turned to look at its master, hoping to share its joy with him. However, its master simply stared at it with googly eyes before smacking his own forehead in exasperation.

“Huh? What’s wrong? Do I not look handsome to you?” Little Chick asked in bewilderment.

All this while, it had been thinking that it would transmogrify into a tall, dashing man and make its master envious.

It did not expect its master to react in such a manner. What did he mean by that facepalm?

Perplexed, Little Chick reached out to touch its own face, only to freeze on the spot.

“Eh? Why didn’t my head transform?”

At this very moment, even though its body had turned into that of a human, its face remained that of a yellow chick. From afar, it looked like a little chick with a monstrously well-toned body.

It had hoped to become dashing once it transmogrified, but if it really walked down a crowded street in its current form... there would probably be no more effective social distancing method than this!

“I think you should drop the idea of transmogrifying. Just be content with being the chick you are,” Zhang Xuan said helplessly.

Knowing that it would really scare people off in its current form, the stifled Little Chick returned to its little fluffy body and nested itself on Zhang Xuan’s shoulder.

“Let’s go!”

Zhang Xuan walked over to one of the injured aerial celestial beasts and treated its injuries. Soon, he was well on his way

toward the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation on its back.

“The God King earlier is an unaffiliated cultivator...”

During the earlier battle, Zhang Xuan had used the Library of Heaven’s Path to check his opponent’s background, and it turned out that he was just an unaffiliated cultivator in the Sky of Drifting Specters.

Thinking about it, that did make sense. Those who were in a clan did not have the privilege to take such a risk and act recklessly. Otherwise, they risked being obliterated by the Qi Clan.

As good as the Beauty Pill and Breakthrough Pill were, they were not worth gambling an entire clan’s fate on.

Knowing that there was no greater power behind the God King who assaulted him, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. It would have been annoying if he got involved in a whole string of incidents as a result of this.

Fortunately, there were no more attempts by other cultivators along the way. He arrived at the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation without a hitch.

At the peak of the mountain were dozens of towering pillars. Each of them was around several hundred meters tall, and they warded off the surrounding spiritual energy. Most likely, the Teleportation Formation was located at the center of these pillars.

The Great Displacement Teleportation Formation required significant manipulation of spatial laws, so the surrounding spiritual energy had to be as stable as possible. For this reason, the pillars were erected in order to limit any disturbances from the surroundings.

Zhang Xuan directed the aerial celestial beast to land a distance away from the Teleportation Formation. To not reveal the fact that he could fly, he walked over a step at a time.

At the entrance, a guard stepped forward and blocked Zhang Xuan’s path, saying, “Please show your token!”

Qi Ling-er had really not been exaggerating when she mentioned that the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation was tightly guarded.

There were over a hundred cultivators on standby here, and every single one of them possessed the strength of a high-tier Celestial God. With their combined prowess, even a God King would have some trouble trying to bypass them.

It seemed like the Sky of Drifting Specters really viewed the Teleportation Formation with great importance. That explained why it was so difficult to obtain the right to use it.

Zhang Xuan passed his token over.

The guard examined the token carefully before clasping his fist respectfully. “Young Master Zhang, this way please!”

Those who were able to obtain the token were all the top experts in their respective fields in each of the Skies. The guards would not dare to offend them.

Following the guard, it was not long before Zhang Xuan was brought before the Teleportation Formation.

However, it was a little different from what he had expected. There was no circular formation where one had to adjust the coordinates and altitude before activating it, which was how normal Teleportation Formations worked.

However, what he saw instead was a cylindrical room with eight doors.

“Young Master Zhang, may I know which Sky you are planning to visit?”

“I intend to head to the capital of the Sky of Spirit Origin, Spirit Origin Royal City,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Please take the southern door over there.” The guard pointed the way.

With a grateful nod, Zhang Xuan walked toward the door with Little Chick. He pushed open the door and entered it.

Beyond the door was a swirling screen of light.

When he stepped in, his token released a brilliant glow that enveloped him and Little Chick together. The next moment, the world began spinning around him as a mysterious energy swallowed him whole.

Hu!

He vanished from the spot.

The effects of the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation were much more fearsome than the Minor Displacement Teleportation Formation. Even though Zhang Xuan's cultivation had already reached high-tier Celestial God, he still felt as if his body was going to be torn apart by the spatial turbulence.

When he was finally able to open his eyes once more, he was standing right before a door. He took some time to drive his energy and recover from the toll of the teleportation before opening the door.

The guard at the entrance standing on the other side of the door verified his token before allowing him to leave.

“Is this the Sky of Spirit Origin?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Yes. The city over there is Spirit Origin Royal City!” the guard replied.

Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over, and he could not help but gasp a little in astonishment.

What appeared before him was a massive volcano with a large crater in the middle. The crater's radius was thousands of li, making it impossible to see the other end at a glance. It was also hard to tell just how deep it was, especially since it was impossible to extend one's Spiritual Perception into the volcano.

Above the crater floated a city that was made up of massive volcanic rocks placed together.

“Spirit Origin Royal City is floating?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

The Sky of Drifting Specters had multiple floating mountains, but they were smaller, and they were resided by major powers

within the city...

But the entire Spirit Origin Royal City was actually floating!

This sure was scary!

2181 Disguising as a God Monarch?

“Young Master Zhang, if you wish to enter Royal City, I can have my men take you up!” the guard said with a smile.

It was common for first-time visitors in the Sky of Spirit Origin to react in such a manner.

The sheer amount of energy required to continuously float an entire city was mind-boggling to most. Neither God Kings nor Conferred God Kings would be capable of pulling off something like that.

It would require the intervention of a God Monarch to do something like this.

Soon enough, the guards brought an aerial divine beast over.

The guard invited Zhang Xuan onto the back of the divine beast before getting on it himself, and the two of them began making their way toward the floating city.

Even while they were making their way over, Zhang Xuan could feel a heavy pressure coming from the massive city above him.

He activated the Eye of Insight to look before widening his eyes in surprise. He turned to look at the guard and said, “I can’t help but notice that there isn’t a formation beneath the city to keep it in the air. How does it remain afloat?”

Typically speaking, an incredibly powerful formation would have been needed to keep such a massive city in the air. Yet, even when using his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan was unable to spot anything of the sort.

Hearing those words, the guard chuckled softly before replying with a hint of pride, “Spirit Origin Royal City doesn’t rely on formations to remain afloat!”

“Hm? What does it rely on then?” Zhang Xuan asked.

The laws governing the Firmament were exceptionally strong. The fact that only cultivators who had reached the God King realm were able to fly in the air was proof of that.

Surely it was impossible for such a huge city to be a God King, right?

If so, what could it be relying on other than formations to remain in the air?

“It’s a feather,” the guard replied with a smile. “Back when the city was first constructed, it simply wouldn’t fly no matter what we did. Just as everyone was at a loss as to what to do, the Fire Feather Conferred King found a mystical feather somewhere and placed it beneath the city. Amazingly, supported by the feather, the entire city started floating in the air!”

Zhang Xuan was slightly surprised by the story.

He turned to look at the bottom of the floating city, and there was indeed a humongous feather over several hundred li[1] long there. It seemed to be providing the force that kept the entire city floating stably in the air.

At this moment, the voice of the yellow chick suddenly sounded by his ear side. “I want to eat it...”

“Eat your head!” Zhang Xuan retorted speechlessly. Why is it that all that’s in your head is food?

It was one thing when you were a cute little chick, but you are a God King now! Could you pay more heed to your image?

You might not care about your reputation, but I still value mine a lot!

“No, I don’t want to eat my head. I want to eat that feather over there!” Little Chick replied earnestly.

“Stop talking nonsense. You can’t eat that feather,” Zhang Xuan replied strictly.

Putting aside how it was impossible for Little Chick to eat that massive feather, just the imposing aura it emanated was already far beyond what ordinary God Kings could deal with!

Furthermore, Spirit Origin Royal City was relying on that feather to prop it up. If Little Chick somehow managed to eat it, he was certain that everyone in the Sky of Spirit Origin would charge frenziedly at him to mince him!

“Fine...”

Seeing how its master was not allowing it to eat the feather, Little Chick shook its head in dejection. It leaped down from Zhang Xuan’s shoulder and returned to his dantian.

Since it was not allowed to eat that feather, it should just keep it out of sight so that it could ignore the feather. Otherwise, it would just get more and more hungry looking at it.

The divine beast was extremely fast. It was not long before they arrived at the floating city.

“Can you tell me some of the things I should take note of while I’m at Spirit Origin Royal City? Also, just out of curiosity, I would also like to know more about the Fire Feather Conferred King that you mentioned earlier,” Zhang Xuan said as he passed a middle-tier God Essence Pill over.

Given that the other party was an ordinary high-tier Celestial God, a middle-tier God Essence Pill was already a substantial sum to him.

As expected, the guard’s attitude immediately changed as soon as he saw the middle-tier God Essence Pill. Accepting the gift heartily, he began explaining with a smile, “As you know, Young Master Zhang, Spirit Origin Royal City is the capital of the Sky of Spirit Origin. It’s ruled by the Spirit Origin Monarch, otherwise known as the Deathless Monarch. The fact that you were able to gain the rights to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation means that you possess strength on par with God Kings. Since that’s the case, the only beings you really need to take note of are the three Conferred God Kings.

“The first one is the Fire Feather God King whom I mentioned before. He possesses the bloodline of the Inferno Phoenix. He’s exceptionally fearsome when he’s in a state of rage; there’s nothing in the world that he won’t burn down! He’s one

of the stronger Conferred God Kings in the Firmament, and he governs the southern area of Royal City.

“The second one is the Glacier Feather Conferred God King. He descends from the lineage of the Glacier Phoenix. Everything that he touches will be covered in a layer of frost. He governs the northern area of Royal City.

“Last but not least is the Tempestuous Feather God King. He has inherited the bloodline of the Tempestuous Phoenix, and he is known for his swift movements that are almost like teleportation. While his fighting prowess is lacking compared to the other two, he’s the hardest to deal with of all. He governs the western area of Royal City.”

While hearing the guard’s explanation, Zhang Xuan looked at the floating city beneath him and noted that the southern area was covered with heatwaves whereas the northern area was snowing.

There was a massive difference in the climates of the two sides of the city, as if they were two different worlds that were forcefully fixed together.

While looking at the sight in wonderment, Zhang Xuan asked the guard beside him, “Since the three Conferred God Kings possess the bloodline of phoenixes, does that mean that the Spirit Origin Monarch...”

It felt too much of a coincidence for three Conferred God Kings in the same region to be of the same species. Thinking about it, most of the top experts of the Sky of Cloud Dragon were descendants of the Dragon Tribe.

Could it be the same for the Sky of Spirit Origin?

“You don’t know about it?” the guard asked in bewilderment.

“Know about what?” Zhang Xuan was equally bewildered.

Seeing how Zhang Xuan was really ignorant about this, the guard sighed deeply before replying, “The Sky of Spirit Origin is known as the Sky of Deathlessness, and our God Monarch is also known as the Deathless Monarch. Do you know why our God Monarch is addressed as such?”

Zhang Xuan shook his head in response.

The first response that came to his mind was that the Deathless Monarch might be an existence that was unaffected by death, but when he thought about the tomb that he had encountered in the Azure, he eventually chose to hold back his words.

Perhaps the concept of eternity was not truly existent in the Firmament either, even for the seemingly omnipotent God Monarchs.

While God Monarchs were known to be lofty existences that transcended the laws of the world, they might not necessarily be as infallible as they appeared.

The rise of Kong shi was one perfect example.

Furthermore, the fact that they were subordinates of the God Monarch of the Sky of Freedom also meant something.

“The reason our God Monarch is addressed by such is because he’s a transmogrified beast as well. His true form is the noblest bloodline of the Nine Skies Phoenix Tribe, the Deathless Celestial Phoenix,” the guard explained with a hushed voice.

If not for Zhang Xuan’s generosity, he would not have spoken about the affairs of a God Monarch so easily.

“Deathless Celestial Phoenix?” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

It appeared that many of the God Monarchs were not humans after all.

“Do you know which God Monarchs of the Nine Skies are transmogrified beasts?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Seeing how a person of such high standing was actually oblivious to such common knowledge, the guard shook his head and said, “Those who are guarding the north, south, east, and west of the Firmament are all transmogrified beasts. The true form of the Cloud Dragon Monarch from the Eastern Sky of Cloud Dragon is an Azure Dragon; God Monarch Fumeng of the Sky of Adamant Gold is a White Tiger; the Deathless God Monarch of our Southern Sky of Spirit Origin is the Deathless Celestial Phoenix, otherwise known as the

Vermilion Phoenix; and the Acheron God Monarch of the Northern Sky of Acheron is the Black Tortoise!”

Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in realization.

Even though he had learned quite a bit during his conversation with Fu Jiangchen, his knowledge regarding the Nine God Monarchs was still sorely lacking. He did not know that there was such a thing.

Azure Dragon in the East, White Tiger in the West, Vermilion Phoenix in the South, and Black Tortoise in the North...

“Alright, I have already said what I can say. You should get along with whatever you need to do. However, you should take note that the rules in Spirit Origin Royal City are pretty strict, so it’d be best if you try to stay out of trouble. There are cases where God Kings have been killed after causing trouble here.” The guard offered his final word of warning before leaping back onto his aerial divine beast.

“Just give me a moment more. There’s one last question that I would like to ask you!” Zhang Xuan exclaimed to stop the guard from leaving. “May I know where the God Monarch of the Sky of Spirit Origin resides? Also, do those in the city address him as the Spirit God?”

“Indeed, our God Monarch is also known as the Spirit God. In fact, the place where he resides is known as Spirit God Palace. However, it’s said that Spirit God Palace has remained shut for decades now, and even the Fire Feather Conferred God King hasn’t been able to enter the premises,” the guard said. “I’m afraid that there’s nothing more I can tell you about our God Monarch. This is really the extent of my knowledge!”

Zhang Xuan understood that he would be putting the guard on the spot by asking any more than this. Furthermore, it was unlikely that he would know much about what was happening in the upper echelons of the city.

Thus, he asked, “Then, do you know anyone I could visit if I want to learn more?”

“That depends on what you want to learn about,” the guard said. “If it’s just typical news, you can try your luck at the

market. There are people from all walks of life there, so there's a great deal of information going around. Putting everything aside, I heard that those who are well-connected in the market are even able to access the Beauty Pill that has recently gained a lot of attention in the Sky of Drifting Specter!

“If what you are trying to investigate is sensitive in nature, similar to what you asked about earlier, the market would surely prove insufficient. You would have to look for those in the clans of the three Conferred God Kings. Given their higher standing, they will surely know more about the matter!”

“You have my gratitude!” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist before bidding farewell.

The guard was right.

It would indeed be unlikely for the ordinary citizens to know much about the affairs of the God Monarch. If he wanted to know if Luo Ruoxin had really inherited the position of the Deathless God Monarch and become the next Spirit God, his best bet would be the three Conferred God Kings.

After all, they were likely the closest to the God Monarch.

The only issue was that...

Conferred God Kings were incredibly powerful existences, wielding strength that even God Kings could not match. It would be hard for him to come into contact with them and make them listen to his words, unless...

He assumed an identity that even the Conferred God Kings feared!

One perfect example would be how Qi Meng had mistaken him for a God Monarch back in the Sky of Drifting Specter.

Due to that, not only had he been able to purchase high-tier God Essence Pills with ease, most of his requests had been swiftly fulfilled. It was due to their support that the event he held to introduce the Breakthrough Pill had gone so successfully.

With a solid identity, he would be able to easily uncover any information that he needed.

Rubbing his glabella, he muttered thoughtfully, “Should I try disguising myself as a God Monarch?”

[1] One li = 0.5km.

2182 The Right to Enter Spirit God Palace

This thought had barely surfaced in his mind for a moment before it was cast away.

God Monarchs were the strongest experts in the world. It was one thing if others misunderstood his identity; after all, they were the ones who would be humiliated if others realized that they had recognized the wrong person as their God Monarch.

However, if he was caught impersonating a God Monarch, that could be viewed as an act of challenging the long-established authority of the God Monarchs!

That could make him an enemy of the God Monarchs.

So, unless he was able to raise his strength, it was best to avoid such a risky move.

This was similar to how if an artisan dared to forge the imperial seal and act as if they were the emperor, everyone in their lineage would be beheaded as a warning to others.

Besides, even if he wanted to impersonate a God Monarch, who should he impersonate?

He knew far too little about the Nine God Monarchs and their special abilities. He had asked Qi Ling-er directly about it previously, and it seemed like the Qi Clan thought that he was the Spirit God.

Perhaps the Qi Clan only made such a mistake due to their lack of understanding of the Spirit God, but if he continued assuming the same identity in Spirit Origin Royal City...

If the current Spirit God was really Luo Ruoxin, that would be fine. If not, he would be royally screwed.

Besides, what would be the point of it? Once the Conferred God Kings start asking questions, I'd end up giving myself

away for sure. And a God Monarch would be able to see through my disguise instantly...

With Luo Ruoxin's disguise amulet, he could disguise himself as the member of some clan and fool ordinary humans.

He had no confidence that he could do the same when it came to the God Monarchs.

It might be possible for Conferred God Kings to make a mistake, but would the God Monarchs fail to recognize their own peers?

If he could not get in contact with the Conferred God Kings and God Monarchs even after impersonating a God Monarch, there would be no point in him doing so in the first place.

Thus, he pondered for a while longer, but no ideas came to mind. In the end, he looked at the guard ahead of him once more before saying, "To be frank with you, I need to meet the Deathless God Monarch by hook or by crook. Do you know of any ways I could possibly do so?"

"You wish to meet our God Monarch?" The guard shook his head. "We would love to meet our God Monarch too, but it's a pity that our cultivation is too low... Probably only those who have reached the level of a Conferred God King are qualified for that!"

As the citizens of the Sky of Spirit Origin, it was only normal for them to be curious about their own God Monarch.

However, if everyone was allowed to meet the God Monarch, the latter would not have to do his work anymore.

Just meeting everyone would be enough to tire him to death!

"Then... what about entering Spirit God Palace?" Zhang Xuan asked. "As the center of the Sky of Spirit Origin, it shouldn't be possible for Spirit God Palace to be completely closed off from the world, right?"

"It is possible to enter Spirit God Palace, but that won't be easy either. Usually, only those summoned by the God Monarchs are allowed to enter the area... Even for the members of the Three Great Clans, only the one who has

triumphed over all others will be granted the right to enter Spirit God Palace to cultivate for a night,” the guard replied.

“The strongest can cultivate for a night in Spirit God Palace?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“The most powerful ability of the Phoenix Tribe is their ability to revive from ashes,” the guard said. “However, the only lineage to have inherited this ability is the Deathless Celestial Phoenix. Furthermore, our God Monarch has no offspring. So, he permitted the Phoenix Tribe to hold a tournament among themselves every hundred years to select the most talented offspring to enter the Deathless Lava Reservoir. Through the powers of the Deathless Lava Reservoir, there’s a chance that they can comprehend the Quintessence of Deathlessness, and with such a foundation, their cultivation and standing will catapult straight up. It’s highly possible that the cultivator would be able to make a breakthrough to God King swiftly after that!”

“The Deathless Lava Reservoir?” Zhang Xuan was slightly surprised. “Didn’t the facility fall to ruin decades ago?”

He had heard about it from Zhuo Feng, and it was known to be the number one body tempering spot in the Firmament. The only problem was that it had grown obsolete and could not be repaired anymore. Due to that, he had gone to the Lucid Lunar Lake instead.

“I don’t know the details, but even if it has fallen to ruin, the spiritual energy and laws infused into it should still exist. Furthermore, there are traces of our God Monarch in Spirit God Palace. It would still be highly beneficial for a cultivator to cultivate inside the palace,” the guard replied.

Zhang Xuan nodded silently.

The higher one’s cultivation, the deeper one’s comprehension of the heavens.

The God Monarchs had reached a level where even a mere thoughtless gesture from them could become inspiration for others, such that one could contemplate over it for their entire life.

This was similar to how Kong shi's teachings were still being interpreted by the cultivators in the Master Teacher Continent through the artifacts he had left behind.

Even though the Deathless Lava Reservoir had been destroyed, the opportunity to enter Spirit God Palace and cultivate for a night would still be highly beneficial to one's future cultivation.

"As long as I can enter Spirit God Palace, there's a good chance that I'll be able to meet Ruoxin..." Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly.

Currently, it was difficult for him to ask about the affairs of the Deathless Monarch, and there was a good chance that the news he received wouldn't be reliable either. Furthermore, he might just get himself into trouble for probing too deeply.

There was nothing more effective than entering Spirit God Palace himself and seeing the truth with his own eyes.

With such a thought in mind, he hurriedly asked, "You mentioned that the most talented offspring of the Three Great Clans is allowed to enter Spirit God Palace, right? How do they select the most talented offspring?"

"It's through a tournament, of course," the guard replied. "You arrived just in time. The centennial tournament will be held just five days from now. Each of the clans will elect ten of their most talented offspring to represent them in the tournament, and the one who emerges at the top will gain the right to enter Spirit God Palace. As for what kind of tournament it is, I'm afraid that I don't really know the details. So far, the news has caused quite a bit of commotion in Royal City, and there are many people looking forward to it."

After asking a few more questions, Zhang Xuan finally had a good grasp of the situation.

There was only a single slot to enter Spirit God Palace every hundred years, so the tournament for it was extremely brutal. It was viewed as a huge festive affair that would attract a lot of spectators every single time.

Even among the members of the Three Great Clans, there were some requirements that one had to meet in order to become a candidate.

Their cultivation had to be at high-tier Celestial God at the very minimum, and their age must not have exceeded thirty.

Even with the superior bloodline of the Phoenix Tribe, the criteria were more than enough to filter off most of the people.

After all, not everyone was as monstrous as Zhang Xuan, who was able to overcome his bottleneck so easily.

Other than that, one's bloodline needed to be sufficiently pure, and one's intelligence had to be decent as well. Otherwise, it would simply be a wasted opportunity if the winner of the tournament failed to comprehend the Quintessence of Deathlessness.

While the guard was not sure about what the tournament format was, the tests were likely designed in a manner that assessed one's cultivation, temperament, and intelligence. Only those who had ticked off all the criteria would be able to rise to the top.

“Over the past month, the Three Great Clans have been summoning their offspring back to Royal City so that they can make it in time for the selection,” the guard said.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

It was common for offspring of clans to journey around the Firmament to accrue some worldly experiences. Nevertheless, they would still gather together for something as important as this.

Zhang Xuan proceeded to ask a few more questions, and the guard answered what he knew honestly. It was only after the guard bade farewell and left that he began venturing into the city.

Spirit Origin Royal City was a floating city, but somehow, it did not feel any different from any landbound city. Walking through the streets, Zhang Xuan swiftly internalized the information that he had just received.

Similar to the Dragon Tribe of the Sky of Cloud Dragon, the Phoenix Tribe likely has a lot of offspring around the Firmament. Some of them eventually returned whereas the others chose to settle down elsewhere. As such, it's impossible for them to keep track of everyone in their lineage. Is it possible for me to come up with an alternative identity, similar to that of Luo Tianya, and try to sneak my way into one of the clans to acquire the opportunity?

2183 Feng Jiuge

A lineage with tens of thousands of years of history behind it would inevitably grow too big to log every single one of their members in their records. Some of their members might be killed while they were carrying out their mission; some of them might be trapped somewhere after stumbling upon a fortuitous encounter...

There were simply too many people whose records were inconclusive, but in truth, their offspring were still living in the world.

It was for this reason that the Sky of Cloud Dragon announced to the world that it would strictly deal with anyone who dared to trade or tame any beast possessing the Dragon Bloodline. The purpose of that was so that they could protect the members scattered all over the Firmament and bring them back.

This was a perfect identity for Zhang Xuan to gain the right to become one of their ten representatives in the upcoming tournament.

As long as no issues arose while his bloodline was being checked, he should be in a pretty safe position.

As for whom he should impersonate...

Was that a problem at all? Those clans would have no idea how they could start tracking down his background!

“This is settled!”

Zhang Xuan ran through his plan once more, but he could not find any glaring issues with it. So, he began making his way toward the closest of the Three Great Clans—the Inferno Phoenix Clan.

The buildings within the jurisdiction of the Inferno Phoenix Clan were crimson in color. Basked in the searing glow of the sun, the entire city was as hot as a furnace.

If not for the fact that everyone who lived in this area was at least at the God realm, they probably would not even have lasted a single minute there.

Zhang Xuan's body had been tempered by the Lucid Lunar Lake, making it on par with high-tier Celestial God artifacts. Such a level of heat was well within his means to deal with.

While walking through the streets, he asked the passersby for where the Inferno Phoenix Clan resided before heading over.

Soon enough, he found himself standing before a humongous mansion. Just like with the Qi Clan, it was surrounded by a powerful formation that prevented outsiders from entering the premises.

Zhang Xuan did not try to barge his way through the formation. Instead, he headed to the tavern opposite the mansion.

The guard whom he had talked to previously did not know too much about the political situation of the Three Great Clans. As the saying went, the best place to gather information was the tavern, where people from all walks of life gathered.

He might be able to gather some useful news that would help him later. At the very least, he would not be completely lost after entering the Inferno Phoenix Clan.

He chose a seat by the window and ordered some wine and meat before digging into his meal leisurely.

At some point in time, the doors of the Inferno Phoenix Clan suddenly creaked open, and a silhouette stumbled out before collapsing to the ground.

“Scram!”

Following that, two young men walked out with a haughty attitude.

The fallen youth struggled to his feet as he glared at the two haughty young men before him furiously. “Feng Chao and Feng Xiang, you are too much!”

The youth was in his early twenties. One thing that stood out about him was the flame mark on his glabella. However, his

face looked unnaturally pale, suggesting that he was not in the best condition.

“Too much?” the young man known as Feng Chao sneered coldly. “Feng Jiuge, are you still living in the era two years ago? You are no longer the genius you think you are, and your bloodline has also been burned dry. Don’t you know that you have already been kicked out of the core lineage? Don’t make us waste our time on you and scram!”

“You were strong and talented two years ago, and we were nothing more than ants compared to you back then. But right now, you are nothing more than useless trash! Hurry up and get out of here! No one will speak up for you even if we throw you into the beast cages!” Feng Xiang harrumphed.

Geji! Geji!

The youth named Feng Jiuge clenched his fists tight in anger. Indignation was written all over his face, but in the end, he did not say a word at all. With a darkened expression on his face, he quietly left the area.

“What a pity!”

“Tragic, isn’t it? Feng Jiuge was the most brilliant genius of the Inferno Phoenix Clan several years ago, but due to an accident, his bloodline was ruined. All of a sudden, he was no longer able to raise his cultivation; on the contrary, he even grew weaker with time! Soon enough, he was kicked out of the core lineage, becoming a person whom anyone could pick on!”

“This is how it is with large clans. If you are strong and talented, you will be a member of the core lineage that everyone respects. If not, you are nothing at all!”

“With the receding of spiritual energy, even the Inferno Phoenix Clan is facing a shortage of cultivation resources. Those who aren’t in the core lineage receive very limited resources, so their accomplishments are essentially capped. This is simply the harsh reality of the world!”

There were many in the tavern who saw the earlier sight, and they began discussing with hushed voices.

After hearing for a while, Zhang Xuan was able to roughly understand the story behind it.

Two years earlier, Feng Jiuge had been the most radiant star in the Inferno Phoenix Clan. Despite his young age, he had already been a middle-tier Celestial God. Not only so, his grasp of battle techniques also far surpassed his peers, making him an existence that countless look up to.

It was just that fate liked to play pranks on people.

In one of the missions he took on, he encountered something that caused him to sustain great injuries. Not only so, his bloodline seemed to have been forcefully torn out of his body, vanishing without a trace.

As soon as the clan found out about it, the cultivation resources that he was entitled to decreased drastically, and many questioned his standing in the clan.

Just a few days ago, there had been yet another check on his bloodline, and it was found that the purity of his bloodline had become so sparse that it could not even be compared to ordinary members in the side family.

As a result, he was evicted from the core lineage and driven out of the clan.

Unwilling to accept such an outcome, Feng Jiuge tried to appeal, only to be kicked out by Feng Chao and Feng Xiang. The earlier scene was a result of that.

“Back when he was the brightest star in the Inferno Phoenix Clan, everyone was dying to fawn over him and lick his boots. The experts on the Board of Potential God Kings viewed him as their brother, and Feng Chao and Feng Xiang did everything they could to get on his good side. But now that Feng Jiuge has fallen from grace, those two were the first ones to turn their backs on him!”

“Well, this is just how the world is. It’s usually the most humble and subservient lapdog that bites the most viciously when its master falls from grace!”

The crowd shook their heads.

Those without strength were nothing at all in the Firmament.

This was simply how the world was, there was no one to blame for this.

Amid discussions, the severely wounded Feng Jiuge walked into the tavern and sat down not too far away from Zhang Xuan. Without saying a word, he began gulping down wine in huge mouthfuls.

Xuan. Without saying a word, he began gulping down wine in huge mouthfuls.

The renowned genius from before indeed did not look too powerful. His cultivation was only at low-tier Celestial God, and his zhenqi felt exceptionally weak and sparse. From the looks of it, it seemed very possible for his cultivation to fall once more.

I wonder what he encountered for his cultivation to start falling like that...

Zhang Xuan did not feel particularly sympathetic to Feng Jiuge's plight, but he was intrigued by the latter's situation.

Under normal circumstances, unless a cultivator suffered severe injuries to their meridians or dantian, it was very difficult for their cultivation to regress.

He could tell that what the crowd had gossiped about earlier was not wrong. It was likely that Feng Jiuge had been a high-tier Celestial God back at his peak, but right now, it felt like he would fall from the ranks of Celestial Gods very soon...

Just what did he encounter to be faced with such a situation?

Let me take a look...

Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight to take a closer look at the young man. A moment later, he frowned.

Killing intent?

The young man in front of him harnessed a surge of concentrated killing intent within his body. Even though the young man had hidden it well, it was still insufficient to circumvent the detection of the Eye of Insight.

Most of those who have been on battlefields will have some degree of killing intent inside their body. Such was the case for Zhuo Feng. But the killing intent in Feng Jiuge's body is oddly similar to that of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe...

To think that the young man, Feng Jiuge, would have the killing intent of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe inside him!

This had really spurred Zhang Xuan's curiosity.

2184 Treating Feng Jiuge

Having been through the Master Teacher Continent, Azure, and the Firmament, Zhang Xuan was able to understand how the difference in spiritual energy could affect the lifeforms living in the environment.

The differences between the three worlds lay mainly in the stability in spatial laws and temporal laws and the concentration of spiritual energy.

It was mainly the difference in spiritual energy that resulted in a vast difference in the prowess of their cultivators. That was why lifeforms in the Firmament were mostly born as Semi-Divinities, and with just a bit of cultivation, they could easily become Gods.

The Otherworldly Demonic Tribe carried extremely concentrated killing intent inside their bodies, making them extremely restless and bloodthirsty.

However, through the absorption of the mercury-like spiritual energy in the Azure, the concentrated killing intent within their bodies would be neutralized significantly.

The spiritual energy in the Firmament should have the same effect.

Despite being a Sovereign of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, ever since arriving in the Firmament, Liu Yang had found that no matter how he tried to drive his simplified Heaven's Path Divine Art in reverse, he was unable to recreate the killing intent of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

This meant that the spiritual energy in the Firmament was more than enough to neutralize the killing intent in his body.

So, it was rather bewildering that Feng Jiuge actually had such killing intent within his body.

Zhang Xuan turned toward the mansion of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, where there were guards on standby outside. Through the Eye of Insight, he could tell that those people shared the

same bloodline as Feng Jiuge, but they did not have any killing intent in their bodies.

The Deathless Celestial Phoenix is the old ancestor of the Phoenix Tribe, as well as the Spirit God of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. Given so, it isn't too odd for his descendants to harness killing intent within their bodies...

What was odd, however, was that only Feng Jiuge possessed killing intent within his body.

What made him so special that he had something that his peers did not?

Zhang Xuan examined Feng Jiuge a little longer, but he still was not able to discern the cause of this anomaly through his Eye of Insight. So, picking up his wine vat, he began walking toward Feng Jiuge's table.

He sat opposite to the young man, and without saying a word, he began gulping down his wine.

Noticing Zhang Xuan's presence, Feng Jiuge frowned in displeasure. He waved his hands impatiently as he grunted, "Scram! I might have become the trash of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, but I'm still not someone that just anyone can make fun of!"

"I happened to hear of the tournament that will be happening within the clan very soon, so I rushed all the way to Spirit Origin Royal City. I only happened to hear of your affair coincidentally. Don't worry, I bear no ill will toward you. I just wanted some company for a drink," Zhang Xuan replied heartily.

"You are a member of the Inferno Phoenix Clan too?" Feng Jiuge raised his head to look at Zhang Xuan doubtfully.

"You can say that," Zhang Xuan replied without explaining further. Then, he leaned in a little and said curiously, "I noticed that your foundation is quite firm, and there are no visible injuries on your body. Why is your cultivation regressing?"

"Humph!"

Feng Jiuge was just starting to feel some goodwill toward the young man before him when the latter suddenly started rubbing salt in his wound. His face immediately turned livid.

His cultivation might have regressed, but his eyes were still sharp.

He could tell that the young man before him was even stronger than him when he was at his peak. If not for that, he would have already lost his temper.

You are thinking too much. On top of being a member of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, I am also quite a renowned physician. Well, to be frank, I only approached you because I found your condition quite mystifying. That being said, I believe that I might be able to help you.”

Noticing Feng Jiuge’s enmity, Zhang Xuan took out the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation’s token and passed it over.

The name of the owner and his accomplishment that granted him the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation was inscribed on the token.

Taking a look at the token, Feng Jiuge narrowed his eyes in astonishment. Then, he slowly lifted his gaze to look at Zhang Xuan once more, but this time, his eyes were filled with agitation.

As someone who had once been part of the core lineage of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, he knew just how difficult it was to earn the right to use the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation. He could not have obtained it even if he wanted to back when he was at his peak.

Yet, the young man before him had earned the right to it on the basis of his medical skills.

That effectively meant that his medical skills were at the forefront of the Nine Skies.

“I don’t know what is going on either,” Feng Jiuge replied with a deep sigh as he placed the wine vat on the table.

“Ever since that mission, it feels like my body is full of holes. No matter how I try to absorb spiritual energy, I’m unable to retain it in my body. That’s not all. My cultivation is also slowly slipping away with time... Over the past two years, my cultivation has fallen all the way to my current state!”

You aren’t able to retain spiritual energy in your body?” Zhang Xuan nodded pensively. “Can you execute a punching routine for me?”

“Of course!”

Knowing that the young man was a formidable physician, Feng Jiuge stood up without any hesitation and released a punch.

As if a massive dragon rising from the sea to seek its prey, his punch carried a domineering pressure that forced his opponent to submit to him. Just by looking at the conceptualization behind his punch, it was obvious that he was a true genius in martial arts.

However, barely after the punch advanced halfway through, it suddenly came to a halt. It felt like Feng Jiuge had suddenly run out of steam, preventing him from utilizing his true strength.

At the same time, Feng Jiuge’s face paled, and a grunt escaped his lips.

Back at his peak, he could easily execute such a move a hundred times without feeling the slightest bit of exhaustion. Yet, he could not even finish a single punch now before feeling utterly fatigued.

This made him feel deeply despaired.

He felt like the him from two years ago had really vanished and would never return. The thought of having to live his life like that frightened him greatly.

Sighing deeply, Feng Jiuge looked at Zhang Xuan with a wry look on his face and said, “Pardon me, I’ll try again...”

“There’s no need for that,” Zhang Xuan interjected as he immersed his consciousness in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

He had already managed to compile a book on the young man's condition.

It doesn't seem like there's anything here that could affect his cultivation though... Zhang Xuan frowned.

There were many flaws recorded in the book, but none of them explained the reason behind Feng Jiuge's fall in cultivation. In other words, even the Library of Heaven's Path was able to discern the reason behind his falling cultivation!

This was really perplexing.

Ever since the Library of Heaven's Path reawakened in the Firmament, he had been able to see through even the flaws of a Conferred God King. So, why was he unable to uncover the reason behind Feng Jiuge's current condition?

"Do you mind if I check your pulse?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"I am grateful that you are willing to offer your help, but it's fine if you aren't able to solve it. I have already grown used to it now..."

Feng Jiuge keenly noticed the changes in Zhang Xuan's expression, and his expectant gaze slowly died off.

He had consulted many physicians on his situation before, and some of them were well-known in the Sky of Spirit Origin. Unfortunately, none had been able to determine the reason behind his condition.

He dared not get his hopes up out of fear that he would only be disappointed once more.

"I'm just taking a look. It's not as if you will lose anything," Zhang Xuan grumbled.

"I guess so... There's nothing more I can lose in my current state anyway..." Feng Jiuge sighed deeply.

With his cultivation and standing taken away from him, he found himself completely alone in the world. There was no one who was willing to associate themselves with him after his downfall. He felt like he had already lost everything.

Besides, the young man seated in front of him was far stronger than him. There was nothing he could do if the other party intended him harm.

So, he stretched his arm out toward Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan placed his finger on Feng Jiuge's pulse and infused a surge of Heaven's Path zhenqi discreetly into his body. Tzzzz!

Zhang Xuan navigated his zhenqi through Feng Jiuge's meridians carefully, and just as it was passing through a certain point, it suddenly halted.

Hu!

The surge of zhenqi abruptly dissipated without a trace, as if it had never existed.

"This..."

Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in shock.

The Heaven's Path zhenqi had never failed him. Ever since he cultivated the Pathos of Heaven, its prowess had been greater than ever. Yet, there was something inside Feng Jiuge's body that was able to make his Heaven's Path zhenqi dissipate...

Just what in the world was happening?

2185 Pufferfish

Dumbstruck, Zhang Xuan drove another surge of zhenqi to the same area once more.

But before he knew it, the surge of zhenqi dissipated.

It was as if there was some sort of peculiar energy lurking inside Feng Jiuge's body, swallowing his Heaven's Path zhenqi.

This unusual situation made Zhang Xuan narrow his eyes.

Even a God King would be restrained by him after swallowing his Heaven's Path zhenqi, but the thing in Feng Jiuge's body was able to devour his Heaven's Path zhenqi.

Could Feng Jiuge's falling cultivation be the result of the thing inside his body constantly swallowing his zhenqi?

Let's see how much you can take in!

This situation had triggered Zhang Xuan's competitiveness. He began to drive his zhenqi into Feng Jiuge's body furiously through his meridians.

Initially, he had only sent in an extremely small amount out of fear that Feng Jiuge would notice it, but at this point, he pulled out all the stops.

He did not believe that the thing inside Feng Jiuge's body would be able to swallow all the energy he was sending over!

Meanwhile, sensing an insane amount of zhenqi suddenly surging into his body, Feng Jiuge's eyes widened into circles. An overpowering pressure carrying the weight of the heavens rushed rampantly into his body. He felt like his soul would be torn apart at this rate.

So, he anxiously tried to withdraw his wrist, only to realize that the other party's fingers were holding onto him firmly like a pair of metal tongs. No matter how he tugged and pulled, he was unable to retract his hand.

“Let...”

Feng Jiuge wanted to shout out loud, but the other party's zhenqi was simply too strong. He felt like he was being utterly subdued by the force, preventing him from even speaking properly.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was completely unaware of Feng Jiuge's state. He had closed his eyes in order to focus entirely on dealing with the thing in Feng Jiuge's body.

Under the rush of his Heaven's Path zhenqi, he was finally able to perceive what the thing was. It was a gray congregation of energy, but he could not tell exactly what it was.

As Zhang Xuan channeled his zhenqi to charge at the gray congregation of energy, the latter immediately released a green glow.

No, it isn't swallowing my zhenqi... Rather, the two forces are neutralizing one another?

He was perplexed as to what kind of force was capable of swallowing his Heaven's Path zhenqi, but it seemed like he was mistaken. The two forces were actually thinning down one another.

When his Heaven's Path zhenqi collided with the gray stream of energy, the two forces transformed into a green glow of energy before dissipating.

No, that doesn't seem to be it. The gray congregation of energy doesn't seem to be neutralizing all of my Heaven's Path zhenqi...

His Heaven's Path zhenqi was swiftly vanishing as it collided with the gray congregation of energy, but weirdly enough, while a huge chunk of it was vanishing, there was still a small portion that was being left behind.

Going by proportions, in about a hundred surges of zhenqi, there would be one surge that was retained.

Wait a moment! Is this... refinement? Zhang Xuan's heart skipped a beat.

He could sense it. The Heaven's Path zhenqi that remained had been purified by at least tenfold. While he could not sense exactly how much stronger it had become, it was clear that it had gone through a transformative change.

That's not exactly it either. It seems to be neutralizing my Heaven's Path zhenqi, leaving behind just the zhenqi I've cultivated after comprehending the Pathos of Heaven...

Currently, there were two different types of zhenqi mixed into Zhang Xuan body—the Heaven's Path zhenqi, which he cultivated using the Heaven's Path Divine Art, and the upgraded version of it after he started cultivating the Pathos of Heaven.

Those two were mixed together, and it was extremely hard to separate them from one another. Given the difficulty in doing so, Zhang Xuan had not bothered dealing with it.

Yet, who could have known that he would be able to do it through the gray congregation of energy?

The gray congregation of energy was able to neutralize his Heaven's Path zhenqi, but it was utterly helpless against the zhenqi that he had cultivated using the Pathos of Heaven. As a result, it created an effect similar to refinement.

I didn't think you'd be so useful to me. Since you can refine my zhenqi, I'll give you more of it!

With such a thought in mind, Zhang Xuan continued blasting his zhenqi into Feng Jiuge's body.

As the two continued colliding with one another, the green glow grew brighter and brighter.

Even though there was only a single congregation of the gray energy, it seemed to be exceptionally pure. He had been at this for quite a few minutes, but he had only managed to dissipate half of the gray congregation of energy.

It seemed like the opponent was tougher than he thought.

Taking a deep breath, he was just about to clear away the gray congregation of energy in one shot when he suddenly felt someone patting his shoulder.

His instincts told him that the person did not bear any malicious intention toward him. That being said, a slight frown still etched its way onto his face from being disturbed.

While continuing to infuse zhenqi into Feng Jiuge's body, he turned to look at the person, only to freeze in place.

Unknowingly, dozens of people had gathered around him. Most of them were the customers who had been drinking there, and that included the middle-aged men who had been gossiping about Feng Jiuge.

As for the one who had patted his shoulder, he was an elder who had a walking stick in hand.

"What's wrong?" Zhang Xuan asked in confusion.

"I didn't want to get involved in your business, but no matter what, we are in the territory of the Inferno Phoenix Clan.

If something happens here and we are found to have simply watched on silently, we will all get into a great deal of trouble. It won't be good for you to get on the bad side of the Inferno Phoenix Clan. As one of the elders in this tavern, I can only intervene in this matter. So, pardon me for asking, but what kind of grudge do you have with Feng Jiuge?" the elder asked while stroking his beard.

His voice was very refined. From his tone of speech, he was likely an academic.

Zhang Xuan was surprised by the question. He shook his head and replied, "There's no grudge between us."

The elder frowned. "If that's the case, why are you grabbing his wrist?"

Zhang Xuan was still wondering what was going on when he heard those words. He chuckled softly and replied, "He has been afflicted with an abnormal condition. I am treating him in my capacity as a physician."

"I-Is that so? Well, I'm not very sure how I should put this in a way that doesn't sound rude, but..."

The elder slowly moved his glance toward Feng Jiuge before asking hesitantly, "Are you certain that you are really treating

him?”

“Am I certain if I am treating him?” Zhang Xuan was completely baffled by that question.

He subconsciously followed the elder’s gaze, and when he saw what was before him, he could not help but freeze in place once again.

The person he was holding onto was not the devilishly dashing Feng Jiuge. Instead, it was a well-rounded man that was two meters in height and at least four hundred jin[1] heavy.

“Who are you?” Zhang Xuan quickly released his grasp in shock.

When did this round man get there?

How in the world did he not realize that the person he was holding onto had changed?

Noticing that the look of surprise on Zhang Xuan’s face was genuine, the elder shook his head and explained, “I was watching the situation, so I can tell you with certainty that he’s none other than Feng Jiuge. Shortly after you grabbed his wrist, he turned into his current state...”

“He is Feng Jiuge?” Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched.

He was certain that Feng Jiuge had still been perfectly normal a moment ago. How did he turn into such a state?

Wait a moment... Is this the result of me infusing my zhenqi endlessly into his body? Zhang Xuan covered his mouth as he gasped in shock.

He did pump quite a lot of energy into Feng Jiuge, and the collision of the two energies produced the potent green glow. Given how forceful he had been, there was no way Feng Jiuge could have expelled or withstood the accumulating energy within his body.

But was it possible for a person’s body to really swell up like a balloon?

The situation felt ridiculous.

Zhang Xuan closed his eyes and created a mental image of how Feng Jiuge looked earlier. Then, he blew up his features by approximately five times...

Yup, there was no mistake about it. The person sitting before him was indeed Feng Jiuge.

Zhang Xuan suddenly found himself at a loss as to how he should respond. Should he apologize right away, or should he attempt to brush it off as a joke?

It had to be said that Feng Jiuge did bear some resemblance to the Otherworldly Demons.

Was that the concept behind the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe?

[1] One jin = 0.5kg

2186 Feng Jiuge's New Teacher

“Since you have no enmity with him, I’ll pull my weight as the elder here and offer you some words of advice,” the elder exclaimed. “Even though Feng Jiuge has been expelled from the Inferno Phoenix Clan, he used to be one of their members. If you’d killed him discreetly, they might have turned a blind eye to it. However, your act of torturing and humiliating him in public blemishes the reputation of the Inferno Phoenix Clan. They won’t allow anyone to undermine the honor of the Phoenix Tribe... So, I have to ask you to think twice about your decision!”

Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella. Am I actually the villain here?

As expected of an old academic. He sure knew how to beat about the bush to build his case, even though it made him seem really naggy.

However, it seemed like the other party had misunderstood his intention. He was earnestly trying to help Feng Jiuge, not torture him.

Knowing that the old man was advising him with goodwill, Zhang Xuan clasped his hand politely and replied, “I appreciate your advice, and I’ll take it in mind. However, allow me to reassure you that this is a part of the treatment process.”

After saying his piece, he immediately turned his gaze back to Feng Jiuge.

The latter had rounded so well that his face, as well as his body, looked like a sphere.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before taking out a jade token. He swiftly infused a cultivation technique into it before

passing it over to Feng Jiuge. “Cultivate this technique. It’ll alleviate your current condition!”

“What are you up to?” Feng Jiuge was finally able to speak after being released by Zhang Xuan. He felt so stifled that he could have exploded on the spot.

Initially, when he first saw the other party’s token, he had thought that the other party might just be able to save him. It was with such thoughts in mind that he had allowed the other party to feel his pulse.

Yet, who could have known that the other party would suddenly start sending zhenqi furiously into his body, causing him to end up in such a state?

“I...” Zhang Xuan was just about to explain that he did not know such a situation would happen, but at the very last moment, he halted himself from doing so.

If he said such words, he would immediately lose his credibility as a physician.

So, he stood up from his seat and placed his hands behind his back. With a solemn and profound look on his face, he said, “I have already found the way to save you. This is merely the first step!”

“The first step?” Feng Jiuge was stunned.

So, your first step is to blow me up into a balloon?

I’ve never heard of such a treatment method before!

“If you wish to resolve your current condition and restore your talent and strength, you will do well to heed my words and practice the cultivation technique I have given you!” Zhang Xuan replied gravely.

The seriousness of his tone made Feng Jiuge fall into deep thought.

For the past two years, he had consulted many skilled physicians, and all of them had told him that they were utterly helpless. In fact, they were not even able to figure out the reason behind his condition.

On the other hand, the young man before him had actually told him that he had found a way to cure him, and they were already at the first step.

Was this for real?

“Forget it, I’ll bet everything on this!”

Right now, he did not have the right to doubt the credibility of the young man before him.

He was no longer the talented young man of the Inferno Phoenix Clan whom everyone was dying to fawn over. He had nothing but his life to lose.

Since that was the case, he might as well take a gamble!

Without any hesitation, he placed his finger on the jade token and immersed his consciousness into it. A cultivation technique flowed into his mind.

With just a swift look at the cultivation technique, his body starting trembling.

As an ex-core member of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, he had a sharp eye for good stuff.

Even though the cultivation technique was just an ordinary formula for him to refine and assimilate energy, it was far more ingenious than any secret manual that he had seen. In fact, even the most confidential secret art within the clan paled in comparison to it.

To offer him such a cultivation technique without any hesitation...

Was the other party sincere about saving him?

This immediately reignited the flames of hope in his eyes.

Without any hesitation, he began channeling his zhenqi in his body according to the cultivation technique.

Even though his cultivation had been regressing over the past two years, there was no doubt that his intelligence was beyond ordinary. It did not take him long to fully master the cultivation technique that Zhang Xuan had imparted to him,

allowing him to swiftly assimilate the energy that had caused his body to bloat.

Tzzz!

Each time he drove his zhenqi a circulation around his body, his bloated body would contract a bit. By the time he was on his twentieth circulation, his body had already reverted to normal!

Feng Jiuge stood up and looked at his own body with a mystified look on his face. Being able to assimilate that much energy so quickly felt like a miracle. This made him trust the young man before him even more than before.

He excitedly looked at Zhang Xuan and asked, “May I know what the next step is?”

Feng Jiuge could also tell that the treatment was incomplete as even though he had just gained a huge bulk of energy, he was still losing energy as time passed.

“I need to repeat step one again in order to properly cleanse your body of what is within it,” Zhang Xuan replied.

There was little doubt at this point that the gray congregation of energy was the cause of the constant decline in Feng Jiuge’s cultivation. Thus, the only way to save him was to find a way to clear his body of the gray congregation of energy.

In that sense, he was not exactly lying to Feng Jiuge.

However, Feng Jiuge’s lips started twitching upon hearing those words.

He was going to have to go through that painful experience again?

Seeing the look on Feng Jiuge’s face, Zhang Xuan harrumphed coldly. “It looks like you are quite reluctant to continue.

If that’s the case, I don’t see any need for me to take on something that is more effort than it’s worth. Let me tell you this, this treatment is not only unbeneficial to me, it’ll also affect my cultivation. Do you think that it’s without cost that I infused my zhenqi into your body?”

As he spoke, he rose to his feet and started walking back to his original seat.

“Bro—I mean elder, please wait a moment!”

There was no way Feng Jiuge could allow his only ray of hope to walk away just like that. He immediately rushed over to stop Zhang Xuan.

Given that he had nothing on him, the other party had indeed nothing to gain by saving him. On the other hand, if he missed this opportunity, his cultivation would only continue to become weaker and weaker, and eventually, he would be killed by his enemies.

“Please save me! I’ll do anything for you as long as you can resolve my affliction!” Feng Jiuge pleaded.

Zhang Xuan turned around and looked at Feng Jiuge quietly for a moment before harrumphing once more.

“I hope that you can appreciate the sacrifices I am making. In order to save you, not only will we have to repeat the steps from earlier, I’ll also have to teach you some of the cultivation techniques of my lineage. These cultivation techniques are highly confidential, so I can only proceed if you acknowledge me as your teacher!”

From how quickly Feng Jiuge was able to comprehend the cultivation technique imparted to him earlier, it was apparent that he was indeed a genius.

On top of that, Feng Jiuge possessed the bloodline of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, and he possessed a huge secret. If he could accept Feng Jiuge as his disciple, it would be easier for him to ask the other party questions, and the latter could also help him find a way to get into Spirit God Palace.

“Teacher, I ask you to save me!”

It did not take too long before Feng Jiuge made up his mind and knelt on the floor.

He could tell that from the cultivation technique that he had been given earlier that the other party was no ordinary figure. Furthermore, the fact that he possessed the token to the Great

Displacement Teleportation Formation showed that he was both strong and skilled in medicine.

Since his clan had already forsaken him, leaving him to fend for himself, there was no harm in him acknowledging the young man as his teacher. At the very least, the young man would become his backing.

“Good!”

Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction upon seeing how decisive Feng Jiuge was. He sat down once more and placed his finger back on top of the latter’s pulse.

He had no idea whether he would really become stronger or not after refining his zhenqi—after all, he was compromising quantity for quality—but it should still be beneficial to him in the long-run.

With such thoughts in mind, he began to channel his zhenqi into the latter’s body once more.

Under Zhang Xuan’s rapid infusion of zhenqi, Feng Jiuge’s body swiftly bloated up once more, to the point that he looked no different from a ball from afar.

Seeing that Feng Jiuge had reached his limit, Zhang Xuan stopped his infusion and instructed Feng Jiuge to practice the cultivation technique that he had just imparted to him once more to alleviate his condition.

Just like that, the cycle repeated again and again.

Finally, after the fourth cycle, the gray congregation of energy within Feng Jiuge’s body had finally been completely cleansed. Seeing this, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

“You should be fine now. Give it a try!” Zhang Xuan urged Feng Jiuge with a smile.

With the gray congregation of energy neutralized, Feng Jiuge should be able to recover his previous strength and talent easily... and he might reach an even higher level than before!

2187 The Disaster of Spirit

Origin Royal City

As Feng Jiuge was unable to sense the presence of the gray congregation of energy, he could not sense any distinct difference in his physical condition as a result of Zhang Xuan's treatment.

So, with a skeptical look on his face, he quietly sat down and began driving his zhenqi according to his cultivation technique.

It did not take him long to notice that something had changed within him.

Previously, his zhenqi would suddenly start vanishing before he could even circulate it a full round through his meridians, and the more vehemently he tried to drive his zhenqi, the more energy he would lose.

But this time, his zhenqi did not vanish. Not only so, his dried out dantian was suddenly flourishing with energy, threatening to erupt in him like a volcano.

In truth, the spiritual energy he had cultivated over the past two years had not completely vanished. Instead, it had been hidden by the gray congregation of energy.

As if a river freed of its dam, it spurted out uncontrollably and gushed all over his body. It was as if he was being born anew!

Boom!

His cultivation that was on the verge of falling beneath Celestial God realm began shooting up at a crazy pace, barging through bottleneck after bottleneck relentlessly.

Low-tier Celestial God realm intermediate stage...

Low-tier Celestial God realm advanced stage...

Low-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle...

In less than fifteen minutes, he managed to surpass his former peak to reach high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle! “I...”

Feeling the overflowing energy within his body, Feng Jiuge’s eyes reddened.

At this very instant, he knew that he had managed to overcome the adversity that stood in his path to rise once more. And the reason he could do so was due to the young man before him.

“Teacher!” Feng Jiuge kneeled on the floor and kowtowed.

Previously, he had only acknowledged Zhang Xuan as his teacher because he thought that he had no other way out of this. Yet, he was starting to realize that this might be the wisest decision he had made in his life.

“Rise!” Zhang Xuan said as he helped Feng Jiuge up.

At the same time, he took a look at his Library of Heaven’s Path and saw that, just like with Zhuo Yan, a golden page had formed.

The two golden pages were placed on the bookshelves side by side, emanating a brilliant sheen.

“Feng Jiuge has recovered his cultivation?”

“No, that’s not all. He even managed to advance further than before!”

“Who is that physician? He’s amazing!”

The crowd in the tavern could hardly believe their eyes.

The elder from before also widened his mouth in shock.

“This... This...”

In the end, it turned out that the young man had really been trying to treat Feng Jiuge! To think that he wasted so many of his words for nothing! Humph!

Paying no heed to the shocked crowd, Zhang Xuan looked at Feng Jiuge and asked, “What did you encounter two years ago that caused your cultivation to start dropping so drastically?”

“I took on a mission that required me to visit the abyss beneath Royal City,” Feng Jiuge said. “I unintentionally entered a

hidden dimension, but for some reason, I lost consciousness. By the time I came to once more, I was already like that. I have no idea what really happened to me...”

The abyss beneath Royal City?” Zhang Xuan repeated the key phrase in Feng Jiuge’s words.

Spirit Origin Royal City was indeed floating right above a massive abyss. Was there some sort of secret hidden inside the abyss?

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was unfamiliar with the history of Spirit Origin Royal City, Feng Jiuge began explaining it. “The abyss suddenly appeared several decades ago, causing the entire Spirit Origin Royal City to collapse into it. The three Conferred God Kings spent a great deal of their strength and a feather of the Deathless Monarch in order to rebuild Spirit Origin Royal City back to its prosperous state, which is also what you see today...”

As an ex-core member of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, he knew quite a bit about the confidential secrets regarding the city.

“The entire Spirit Origin Royal City collapsed into the abyss?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

To be honest, he had been quite intrigued when he first saw Spirit Origin Royal City. There was no reason for the city to have been built above an abyss, and there was no reason it should be flying. In the end, it turned out that things had only happened that way because they had no other choice.

The capitals of the Nine Skies were situated at the center of the territories so as to gather all of the fortune and Anima of Yearning around. For this reason, they could not be shifted easily.

As such, even when Spirit Origin Royal City collapsed decades ago, in order to avoid any instability, they could only continue building upon where the land had collapsed.

The result of that was the current floating city.

“If the city collapsed abruptly, what happened to the people living there?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“I wasn’t born back then, so I don’t really know the details. However, based on what I have heard from the elders in the clan, it seems like even though the collapse was very abrupt, quite a few people still managed to escape with their lives due to the protection of the Deathless Monarch. Basically, almost everyone who had reached the God realm survived that crisis!”

But then, Feng Jiuge sighed deeply before continuing. “Still, as you know, the Firmament is mostly filled with people whose cultivation has yet to reach the God realm. In other words, that crisis took away nearly ninety percent of the population of Spirit Origin Royal City. No one knows whether they are living within the abyss or are already dead. The abyss is simply too deep, such that even the Fire Feather Conferred God King isn’t able to get to the bottom of it.”

The tier of life on the Firmament followed a pyramid shape.

Most of the population were just ordinary people, or in other words, Semi-Divinities. Only ten percent of them were able to earn the rights to cultivate and rise to greater heights.

“An abyss suddenly appeared, causing ninety percent of the people in the city to vanish all of a sudden...”

Zhang Xuan’s body jolted as four words surfaced in his mind—City of Collapsed Space.

Legend had it that the City of Collapsed Space of the Azure had suddenly fallen from the heavens several thousand years ago. The lifeforms and buildings within the city had gradually transformed into the air of degeneration under the corrosion of the Azure’s spiritual energy, making it a dangerous land that no one dared to enter easily.

Could that have something to do with Spirit Origin Royal City?

This hypothesis was not completely without basis as Zhang Xuan had seen the tomb of the Deathless Monarch back in the City of Collapsed Space!

If he thought deeper into it, the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and the Azure’s Starchaser Palace came from the same origin,

and those from Starchaser Palace had the altar of the City of Collapsed Space...

Could it be that Spirit Origin Royal City had fallen through the cracks of the dimension barrier and plummeted into the Azure. A portion of those living there had managed to survive the impact, and they went on to create Starchaser Palace. On the other hand, there was also a portion of people who plummeted further into the Master Teacher Continent and eventually came to be known as the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

If that was the case, it meant that the ancestors of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and Starchaser Palace were actually gods of the Sky of Spirit Origin!

He really had to look deeper into this matter.

If there was a power that could kill the Deathless Monarch and thrust countless lives through the dimension barrier and onto the lower worlds, he needed to be wary. It could pose a terrifying threat in the future.

Traveling through the dimension barrier was no easy feat. He had experienced it himself, so he knew how difficult it was. Even an expert of Luo Ruoxin's caliber had nearly lost her life in the process of doing so!

This was a cause for concern.

Then again, all of this was just his conjecture. Perhaps he would only uncover the truth after meeting Luo Ruoxin or Kong shi.

"Oh right, I can ask him... Vicious! Is there any chance that your predecessors possess the bloodline of the gods?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Sealed in the Book of Heaven's Path, Vicious had followed him to the Firmament as well. All this while, Zhang Xuan had been giving him God Essence Pills so that he could cultivate as well. Over the past few days, he managed to overcome his bottleneck as a God to become a low-tier Celestial God.

2188 Returning to the Inferno Phoenix Clan

“I don’t really know,” Vicious replied. “However, after coming to the Firmament, I can clearly feel that my rate of cultivation has become faster than before. It feels like my meridians and bloodline are thriving in this environment...”

Previously, in order to reconstruct Zhao Ya’s meridians, Zhang Xuan had studied many meridian networks, and eventually, he had found that there were very few flaws in the meridian network of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

After coming to the Firmament, he had also noticed that their meridian network was very similar to that of the Gods.

The meridian network of the Gods was indubitably the most aligned with the heavens and the nature of the myriad worlds. It was based on this foundation that they were able to raise their cultivation far beyond the lifeforms on the Master Teacher Continent and the Azure.

It was also for this same reason that the Otherworldly Demons were blessed with superior strength and greater longevity, putting them at a decisive advantage over the humans.

If not for Kong shi’s ascendance, the cultivators of the Master Teacher Continent would never have been able to drive them back to the otherworldly battlefield by themselves.

A thought suddenly came to Zhang Xuan. “If your rate of cultivation has increased after coming here... is it possible that your predecessors were also afflicted with the same problem as Feng Jiuge, resulting in their cultivation gradually falling with time?”

If the reason Feng Jiuge’s cultivation had started falling was because he had come in contact with something in the abyss, perhaps the original population of Spirit Origin Royal City had also been afflicted with the same things ^ in their cultivation

falling further and further. From Semi-Divinities, they fell through the ranks to become High Immortals, True Immortals, Pseudo Immortals, Ancient Sages, Great Sages, Saints...

“This... I don't really know,” Vicious replied.

“I guess I'll have to find a way to enter the abyss in order to know the results,” Zhang Xuan murmured.

Having come to a decision, he raised his head to look at Feng Jiuge. “Can you bring me to the place that you mentioned earlier?”

“This...” Feng Jiuge hesitated.

That place was simply too dangerous! Even with his current strength, he still felt apprehensive about getting close to the abyss.

“There's no need to worry. We can retreat right away as soon as we encounter any danger. Furthermore, your condition is a little unique. I've managed to suppress the issue in your body for the time being to prevent it from devouring your energy, but a relapse is always possible. If you wish to completely cure your affliction, we'll have to head to the place where everything started and search for the root cause!” Zhang Xuan said.

He knew that he had to pay a visit to the abyss regardless of the cost. He knew that Feng Jiuge would be hesitant to approach the area once more, so he could only phrase it in such a manner.

Strictly speaking, he had not lied. Till now, he still had not figured out what that gray congregation of energy was. As long as they could not get to the bottom of the matter, there was no saying that the gray congregation of energy would not make a comeback.

“Alright then. I'll take you there...” Feng Jiuge bit his lips as he agreed reluctantly. “However, in order to enter the abyss, you will need a certain object, and that object can only be found within the clan. I'll have to make a trip back to my clan to fetch it.”

“An object?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“The abyss is fraught with danger. Even Conferred God Kings aren’t able to venture to the bottom of it. To avoid any accidents from occurring, the Three Conferred God Kings devoted a tremendous amount of energy to seal up the passageway, such that only those who possess their token can enter the area,” Feng Jiuge replied. “Without the token, even if you stand before the abyss’ entrance, you will have no way of entering it!”

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

Even though he had managed to raise his cultivation considerably over the last few days, it would indeed still be difficult for him to bypass a formation set up by the Three Conferred God Kings.

Rather than courting trouble, it would be more convenient if he followed Feng Jiuge back to his clan. Anyway, it just so happened that he needed to complete his disguise as a member of the Inferno Phoenix Clan anyway, and he would appear much more credible if he had Feng Jiuge by his side.

Having made up their minds, the two of them quickly left the tavern and walked over to the manor opposite it.

“Are you still unwilling to leave? Do you need us to get Lord Feng Chao and Feng Xiang again before you are willing to give up?”

Seeing how the youth who had just been driven out like a beggar had returned, the two guards standing in front of the entrance frowned in displeasure.

“You’re right. I have decided that I am not going to leave after all. Get Feng Chao and Feng Xiang out here to meet me!” Feng Jiuge replied smugly.

His confidence had returned along with his cultivation.

“You are just making things harder for yourself.” One of the guards harrumphed before entering the manor.

Not too long later, Feng Chao and Feng Xiang, the two people who had insulted Feng Jiuge earlier, walked out.

Feng Chao sneered coldly as he pointed right in Feng Jiuge's face. "I was wondering who's looking for us, and it turns out to be the trash of the Inferno Phoenix Clan! Was the beating earlier not enough for you? Do you need us to go for another..."

Ever since Feng Jiuge's cultivation began regressing, he had become a sandbag for the two of them to vent their anger on, and they did whatever they wanted to him.

Peng!

But before Feng Chao could finish his words, he was suddenly blasted right into the doors of the manor. The impact caused his face to turn pale, and he spewed huge mouthfuls of blood.

"You're right. The beating earlier wasn't enough. But this time around, we'll be swapping positions!" Feng Jiuge sneered as he flitted right up to Feng Xiang.

You..."

Feng Xiang had never thought that the trash they had been bullying for the past two years would be able to send his brother flying with a mere kick. Realizing that Feng Jiuge might have regained his cultivation, he immediately retreated fearfully.

It was a pity that his speed was nowhere close to that of Feng Jiuge. A slap flew in his direction faster than he could dodge it.

Pah!

With a resounding echo, the arrogant Feng Xiang collapsed to the ground as his teeth scattered all over the floor.

"Feng Jiuge, you regained your strength? This is impossible... Wait a moment, what are you trying to do?"

Feng Chao, who had regained his consciousness, exclaimed in disbelief as he slowly backed away in fright.

Two years ago, this youth was the one person that everyone in the younger generation had looked up to and respected. So, when he fell from grace, those who had been envious of him

made full use of the opportunity to trample on him, including those who had been close to him.

Everyone thought that Feng Jiuge's era was long gone and that there was no way he could make a comeback. Who could have known that in a short hour, not only did he regain his cultivation, he even became more powerful than before!

“What am I trying to do? Nothing much. I'm just picking up the pieces of my dignity that have been robbed from me,” Feng Jiuge replied with a chilling voice as he looked at Feng Chao with hostile eyes.

It had not been easy for him to recover from his downfall, so naturally, the first thing he needed to do was pay back those who had put him down. He would make them know that they had chosen the wrong person to mess with!

The man whom they had betrayed and callously spat on had returned to haunt them!

Seeing how Feng Jiuge's aura was growing stronger and stronger by the moment, Feng Xiang gritted his teeth and bellowed, “You... You no longer have our bloodline in your veins. You have already been exiled from the clan! If you dare make a move on us, the Inferno Phoenix Clan will severely punish you!”

So what if Feng Jiuge had regained his cultivation?

Earlier, when they checked his bloodline, they had found that his bloodline had nearly vanished. Even if he had regained his cultivation, there was no way he would be reaccepted into the Inferno Phoenix Clan as a member of the core lineage without their bloodline!

This would make him no more than an unaffiliated cultivator. With limited resources on hand, what he could achieve in the future would be capped as well.

The God King realm would be a huge hurdle that he would never be able to overcome! “This...”

Those words made Feng Jiuge stall.

Feng Chao and Feng Xiang were right. It was unheard of for a person's bloodline to disappear just like that, but that was indeed the result of the test that he had taken earlier.

Fearing that he would land his teacher in unnecessary trouble, he turned to look at Zhang Xuan hesitantly, only to see the latter replying with a smile.

“Since you have regained your cultivation, you might have regained your bloodline as well. Just do what you need to.

I'm here anyway.”

2189 Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation

Based on what Zhang Xuan knew, the gray congregation of energy within Feng Jiuge's body would only consume his zhenqi, not alter his bloodline. Most likely, the reason his bloodline could not be sensed earlier was due to it being suppressed.

However, with the gray congregation of energy cleared, he should have regained his bloodline. On top of that, given that his meridians had been cleansed by the Heaven's Path zhenqi, it would likely have become purer than ever!

Thank you," Feng Jiuge said deeply before turning his gaze back to the manor.

He was not certain about his bloodline returning, but no matter what, he would never forget the debt that he owed to his teacher.

Paying no heed to the incapacitated Feng Xiang and Feng Chao, the two of them made their way through the doors and into the courtyard. The next moment, though, a group of people rushed forward to encircle them.

It seemed like the news that Feng Jiuge had regained his cultivation and injured someone at the entrance had already started spreading within the mansion.

To be able to gather so many people within just tens of seconds, the Inferno Phoenix Clan was indeed formidable. As expected of the de facto leader of the Three Great Clans!

"Jiuge, you have already been expelled from the clan. How dare you barge in here and wound our core members! Are you trying to stage a mutiny?" a young man aggressively demanded.

The current Feng Jiuge was nothing more than an outsider to the Inferno Phoenix Clan. An outsider barging into their

territory could be considered an attempt to challenge and undermine the Inferno Phoenix Clan's authority.

“Humph! Feng Jiang, you sure are quick to pin crimes on me! I believe that the bloodline test earlier was inaccurate, so I came back here to have it tested again,” Feng Jiuge replied nonchalantly. “As long as I can clear the test, I will still be a core member of the Inferno Phoenix Clan. If so, a spar between fellow clan members can't be considered a mutiny, right?”

Those words made Feng Jiang frown, and he took a closer look at Feng Jiuge.

In just one short hour, the other party's aura had become completely different. It felt firm and unyielding. Just like him, the other party was at high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle!

More importantly, his confident disposition felt exactly like two years earlier.

Two years ago, the other party had been a genius who dominated the younger generation. Viewed as one who would potentially become a God King in the future, there was no one who had dared cross him. Even Feng Jiang himself would have had to lower his head whenever he encountered Feng Jiuge, not daring to show the slightest hint of disrespect.

Feng Jiang did not think that the trash of two years would actually be able to make a comeback. He found the situation very hard to accept.

“You want to test your bloodline once more?” Feng Jiang burst into laughter. “Do you think that our bloodline test is a joke, such that anyone can test it as and when they please?”

The bloodline test of the inferno Phoenix Clan was not cheap. Most disciples would only get a chance to test it once in their entire life. It was only due to Feng Jiuge's exceptional circumstances that he had been tested twice, and yet, he wanted to do it once more.

Did he think that he was in the same position as he was two years ago, that he could do as he pleased?

“I have the money to pay for it!” Feng Jiuge replied coldly.

Even though his cultivation had been slipping continuously over the past two years, he still had quite a substantial fortune to his name. It was nothing much compared to Zhang Xuan, but it was more than enough for him to pay for a test.

"You'll fork out the money?" Feng Jiang harrumphed coldly as he struggled to think of a reason to stop Feng Jiuge.

He had a feeling that things would go awry if he allowed Feng Jiuge to do as he pleased.

At this moment, an idea suddenly came to his mind, and his lips crept up mockingly. "Well, no matter what, you still used to be a core member of our clan. It's only right for us to give you a chance. Clear the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation. If you can clear it, we'll allow you to return to the clan and have your test. Otherwise... I'm afraid that there's nothing much we can do!"

"Yes, that's right! Clear the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation, and we'll give you a chance!"

"Didn't you regain your strength? Prove it! As long as you can clear the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation, we'll recognize you. Otherwise, you only have yourself to blame for your weakness!"

The crowd gathered in the area burst into laughter as they watched Feng Jiuge mockingly.

"The Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation..." Feng Jiuge's face immediately turned grave upon hearing those words.

"Oh ho! Why do you have such a look on your face? Are you not confident in clearing the formation? If that's the case, we'll just have to take this incident as a deliberate attempt to undermine the Inferno Phoenix Clan's honor. Men! Capture him and drag him over to the Hall of Interrogation! We'll have to question him properly to see what his true motives are!" Feng Jiang said with a grand wave of his hand.

"Yes!" Four young men immediately walked out from amid the crowd.

"Let's go, our dear Young Master Jiuge!"

“Even if you have regained your cultivation, without your bloodline to back you up, you are nothing more than an unaffiliated cultivator. Did you think that things would return to how they were two years ago just because you have regained your cultivation?”

Feng Jiuge was not a bad person at heart, but having achieved success at a very young age, it was inevitable that he became complacent and arrogant. Furthermore, there was no one who dared to talk back to him and correct his attitude.

This had resulted in him looking down on his peers, so his relations with the others in the clan were not good.

“What is the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation?” Zhang Xuan asked Feng Jiuge with a frown.

“Teacher, the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation is the only way that members who have been driven out of the Inferno Phoenix Clan can be recognized by the other clan members. It’s a formation made up of nine experts within the clan. One has to defeat all nine of them in order to clear the trial,” Feng Jiuge replied with a slightly pale complexion. “In the past three thousand years of our clan’s history, there were 317 expelled members who returned to challenge the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation, but in the end, only three of them cleared the trial. As for the rest... they lost their lives while challenging the formation!”

“They’re dead?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Out of three hundred people, only three people had managed to clear the trial. That was a one percent probability of success!

Even though those members were driven out of the clan, no matter what, they still shared blood ties with one another. Surely there was no need to be so vicious with them.

“More often than not, those who are driven out of the clan have committed some sort of heinous sin that makes them deserving of such treatment. There is almost no one who welcomes their return. For this reason, those who challenge the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation are often viewed with

hostility. Those who have been selected to conduct the trial won't hold back against them, so they won't hesitate to resort to vicious strikes..."

"If the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation is that dangerous, and there is no one within the Inferno Phoenix Clan who is willing to recognize them even if they return, why would they still challenge it despite the risks?" Zhang Xuan asked.

In his view, it seemed ridiculous for one to brave such danger, only to become a person that was snubbed within the clan.

If no one was going to accept them in the first place, it would have been much easier for them to live in the outside world. In the first place, if they were talented enough to clear the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation, they would probably fare well anywhere else.

Feng Jiuge shook his head and replied, "Teacher, there's actually a deeper reason for them challenging the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation. Regardless of whether they clear the trial or not, they will be buried in the ancestral grave. This might appear to be nothing much, but this gesture effectively means that their descendants have a chance to return to the Inferno Phoenix Clan. On the other hand, if they don't attempt the trial, it means that they will be permanently severed from the Inferno Phoenix Clan!"

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

A fallen leaf returns to the ground.

Most people would wish to return to their origins after their death; furthermore, this concerned the future of their descendants as well.

"So, most of those who challenge the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation are those whose lifespan is already reaching its limit. In other words, they have already steeled their will to die in the trial. For this reason, the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation is also called the Suicide Formation!"

With an awful complexion on his face, Feng Jiuge remarked grimly, "Their very suggestion of having me challenge the

Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation is as good as condemning me to death!”

He was only in his early twenties, and he still had many years ahead of him. It was clearly inappropriate for him to challenge the formation in his state.

“How strong are the opponents one will have to face in the trial?” Zhang Xuan asked.

The Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation consisted of nine cultivators. As important as the formation was, what was even more crucial was the strength of the nine cultivators.

“They are of the same power level as the one challenging the trial. In other words, it is a one versus nine scenario. Given that we possess the same bloodline, and they have been augmented by the formation, how can one possibly clear this trial through normal means?” Feng Jiuge cried in despair.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan burst into laughter.

He had been wondering how scary the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation was, but it did not seem like anything worth worrying over.

Everything aside, even the Dragon Gate Formation that Zheng Yang had gone through to become the Progeny of Combat was much more difficult than this!

2190 Challenging the Trial

The Dragon Gate Formation that Zheng Yang had gone through consisted of the Dragon Tail, Dragon Body, and Dragon Head, and in every phase of the trial, he had to face someone who was even stronger than him in terms of cultivation.

In order to clear the trial, he would have to defeat everyone.

It was clear that the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation paled far in comparison.

Granted, the formation itself might be harder to deal with, but if the challenger could manipulate the formation to their advantage, it could make the battle easier.

Every formation was bound to have its weaknesses, and as long as one could find these weaknesses and exploit them, it would become a supporting force.

The stronger the formation was, the more effective it would be to exploit these flaws.

“Without a doubt, Feng Jiang will be participating in the formation as well. Two years ago, even though there was some gap between our fighting prowess, it wasn’t too big. During the period when my cultivation regressed, he was cultivating hard, and he made full use of the cultivation resources that the clan gave him. Given so, it would be difficult for me to defeat him in a normal battle, let alone having to face a formation that consists of him and eight equally powerful opponents...”
Feng Jiuge’s voice was filled with despair.

He did not think that he could win this battle.

Over the past two years, he had not been able to receive any cultivation resources from the clan. As such, even though he had regained his cultivation, his progress was bound to be much slower than the other party.

Furthermore, Feng Jiang still was not the strongest cultivator in their power class.

It could be said that his death was guaranteed if he agreed to challenge the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation.

Seeing how shaken Feng Jiuge was, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply before looking straight Feng Jiuge. “Jiuge, do you trust me?”

“Of course!” Feng Jiuge nodded right away.

If not for his teacher, he would probably have wasted his life away in despair and depression.

It was the other party who gave him hope and a new life. Who else would he trust if not his teacher?

“If you trust me, accept the other party’s challenge and face the so-called Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation,” Zhang Xuan said.

“We are going to accept the trial?” Feng Jiuge was stunned. “But...”

“Rest assured. Nothing will happen to you,” Zhang Xuan said with a chuckle.

“Alright then...” Feng Jiuge was a little uncertain where this was going, but seeing how confident his teacher was, he eventually nodded.

With a wave of his hand, he stopped the two young men who were walking toward him and said, “I agree to it. I’ll face the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation!”

“You’ll face the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation?”

Those words left everyone dumbstruck for a moment.

Even Feng Jiang thought that he had heard wrong. “Are you certain?”

He was the one who had suggested it, but he had never thought that Feng Jiuge would accept his ridiculous demand.

After all, it was so dangerous that only those who were on their deathbed would think of attempting it. As someone who had become a high-tier Celestial God in his early twenties, Feng Jiuge had a long life ahead of him, and there was a good

chance that he could achieve great things even outside the Inferno Phoenix Clan.

Was there was a need for him to court death like that?

“Of course!” Feng Jiuge replied.

“You must have become much more powerful after you regained your cultivation. Very well, let me see just how capable you are!” Feng Jiang sneered.

Without any hesitation, he pushed his feet against the ground and dashed forward.

At high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle, Feng Jiang was just a notch beneath the God Kings. His movement caused the air in the courtyard to grow heavy as the powers from nature surged toward him at a rapid pace.

It seems like he has already comprehended some of the secrets of a God King. As expected of an expert of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, Zhang Xuan thought.

In terms of individual strength, Feng Jiang was probably beneath Ao Hua of the Sky of Cloud Dragon. However, just looking at how easily he was able to tap into the powers of nature, it was clear that he had a preliminary grasp of some God King powers.

It would be difficult to subdue him in a direct clash of powers.

Facing Feng Jiang’s attacks, cold sweat trickled down Feng Jiuge’s back.

Even though he had managed to make a breakthrough earlier, it did not change the fact that he had been crippled for two years. Putting aside the fact that he could not utilize his newfound strength properly, his ability to use the powers of nature was also lacking greatly in comparison to Feng Jiang.

His chances of achieving a victory were very slim.

Peng peng peng!

Within three blows, Feng Jiuge was already forced to retreat seven steps. While neither side had sustained any injuries, it was already clear who was the stronger of the two from this.

“You aren’t even a match for me, but you want to challenge the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation?” Feng Jiang harrumphed coldly. “You sure are brazen!”

“I...” Feng Jiuge gritted his teeth furiously.

He turned to look at Zhang Xuan with an indignant expression.

He would not have been a match for the formation even at his peak two years ago, let alone in his current state. He had no idea why his teacher had asked him to accept the trial.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze to Feng Jiang and smiled. “Jiuge would indeed be unable to clear the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation in his current state, but can you give us two hours to make some preparations? That should be more than enough for him to clear your formation with ease.”

“Who are you?” Feng Jiang asked with a frown.

As Zhang Xuan had been standing behind Feng Jiuge the whole time, Feng Jiang had assumed that he was Feng Jiuge’s subordinate. However, from what had just been said, it was apparent that he was wrong.

“I am... Feng Xuan! I am a member from the side family who has returned for the tournament,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

“Feng Xuan?” Feng Jiang was stunned for a moment before he scoffed disdainfully. “A mere member of the side family dares to make such boastful claims?”

The key difference members of the side family and members of the core lineage lay in the purity of their bloodline.

Even if they were of the same cultivation realm, due to the difference in bloodline, the members of the side family still would not be a match for members of the core lineage.

Thus, it was utterly absurd for a member of the side family to make such a huge claim. It was really a wonder what gave the other party the confidence to boast like that.

“I don’t see anything wrong with that. There’s no reason a member of the side family would be inferior to a member of the core lineage!” Zhang Xuan pointed out with a composed smile.

“Preposterous! Men, take that brazen young man down!” Feng Jiang roared.

Huala!

The two young men from before stepping forward once more to grab Zhang Xuan’s arms simultaneously. But before they could even touch him, Zhang Xuan suddenly shook his shoulder twice.

Peng peng!

With two dull thuds, the two young men were knocked into the nearby wall. Judging from their pained expressions and how tightly they were clutching their chests, it seemed like they had sustained quite the injury from the earlier encounter.

“What?” Feng Jiang narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

He was capable of pulling off the earlier maneuver as well, but he was not confident of pulling it off as smoothly and leisurely as the other party did.

Could it be that the other party, despite being from the side family, was actually even stronger than him?

“This explains why you dared spout such brazen words. It seems like you aren’t as inept as I thought. Very well, let’s see what kind of ability you have!”

With a cold harrumph, Feng Jiang released an intimidating aura as he dashed right toward Zhang Xuan.

He was using the same move that he had used to curb Feng Jiuge, and based on the domineering pressure he was exerting, it seemed like he had decided not to hold back at all.

“This is a great opportunity, Jiuge, so make sure to keep your eyes open and watch carefully. It would have been more difficult to impart these theories to you without showing you the practical side of it...”

Even in this tense moment, Zhang Xuan turned his attention over to Feng Jiuge and spoke with a calm voice. “Since he’s using the same move against me as well, I’ll show you one way you can counter his offense with your current strength.”

As he spoke, he stepped forward till he was roughly five meters away from Feng Jiang before finally coming to a halt.

For some reason, the very act of stopping at that point seemed to have disturbed Feng Jiang's offense. It was clear that the momentum of Feng Jiang's offense had taken a nosedive, as if someone had severed his flow of energy.

The main difference between Feng Jiang and Feng Jiuge's strength lay in their ability to tap into the natural energies in the surroundings, and the spot that Zhang Xuan had walked over to happened to be the mingmen[1] of this battle technique.

By standing in this spot, Zhang Xuan had managed to sever the flow of energy into Feng Jiang, leaving the latter with no choice but to rely solely on his cultivation.

However, Feng Jiang was no weakling. Noticing Zhang Xuan's intention, he immediately began driving his zhenqi to its limits and augmented the might of his strike so as to avoid losing momentum. As a result, he was able to retain the might of his offense.

Over the past two years, Feng Jiang had managed to reinforce his high-tier Celestial God realm pinnacle again and again through the extravagant use of cultivation resources within the clan. While he was still a way off from becoming a God King, there was no doubt that he was far stronger than most of his peers.

In fact, it was questionable whether the genius of the Qi Clan, Qi Yue, would be a match for him.

[1] Mingmen is a traditional Chinese medicine term, but in the context of martial arts, it refers to a blind spot or the location of a weakness.

2191 Impartation

Despite facing such a strike from Feng Jiang, Zhang Xuan showed no signs of wanting to dodge. Instead, he calmly placed his hands behind his back, as if opening himself up for Feng Jiang.

And just as the strike was about to connect, Zhang Xuan suddenly pouted and blew out lightly.

Hula!

His breath formed a surge of sword qi that, like a pin piercing a balloon, popped the ferocious might behind Feng Jiang's attack, causing his energy to dissipate into the surroundings.

It was a rather bewildering maneuver that seemed to defy common sense.

Ding ding ding ding!

Alarmed, Feng Jiang immediately launched several other strikes to follow up, but the same thing happened again and again. It was like rain falling on an umbrella; no matter how Feng Jiang tried to attack, none of the attacks landed.

Instead, the dissipated energy from his offense caused a depression everywhere else except for a two meters radius where Zhang Xuan was standing.

Zhang Xuan walked in front silently amid Feng Jiang's attack, undoing each and every strike of his with just a blow of his breath.

It was almost as if he was a tiger walking amid a pack of goats; it was very clear who the predator was and who the prey was.

Zhang Xuan glanced at Feng Jiuge and imparted his first teaching of the day. "No matter how powerful an attack is, as long as you are able to find its weakness, you will be able to overcome it easily. This applies to everything. Your opponent is rarely as frightening as you think."

Then, in the blink of an eye, Zhang Xuan traversed across the uneven ground to appear around half a meter away from Feng Jiang.

On the other hand, Feng Jiang was already in full panic mode. He had not expected the other party to be so powerful that even his strongest attack was not doing a thing at all.

Seeing how the other party had managed to close the distance so easily, the flustered him immediately attempted to leap backward so as to distance himself from the other party. Yet, during his movements, his leg seemed to trip on something.

Peng!

Just like that, he fell to the ground and cloaked himself in a layer of dust.

The surroundings fell completely silent.

The spectators saw what happened clearly. Feng Jiang's fall was caused by the young man stretching out his leg to trip him.

This was a very low-tier move that usually only happened in a scuffle among ordinary people. None of them would have imagined that they would see someone using such a move in a battle between two high-tier Celestial God, much less that it would actually be effective.

Knowing what everyone was thinking, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly as he said, "It's foolish to rank maneuvers as if they belonged on a hierarchy. What works works."

Under normal circumstances, such a simple move would not even work on a low-tier Celestial God, let alone Feng Jiang. However, as reality had shown, it turned out to be extraordinarily effective.

It was not that Zhang Xuan's legs had some kind of magic that allowed them to trip anyone that he wanted to with perfect accuracy. However, it was simply the easiest maneuver to make for him to subdue his opponent in that context.

Feng Jiang's offense had already been unraveled by him, and his mind had already been shaken, so he was in no state to

keep tabs on his surroundings. Furthermore, they were in close proximity to one another.

All these conditions allowed Zhang Xuan's simple maneuver to work with extraordinary effectiveness.

A duel was not just about who was stronger and faster, or else it would be nothing more than pitting numbers against one another.

“Did you learn anything from that?” Zhang Xuan asked as he calmly walked back to Feng Jiuge's side.

Based on what he had seen thus far, the cultivators in the Firmament were simply too reliant on their cultivation, bloodlines, and battle techniques. They would release their zhenqi and create all sorts of hoo-ha in their battle.

It was true that putting on an imposing front would unnerve the opponent, but the key to winning a battle was not the flowery movements one made—it was one's ability to take everything that was happening into account and react flexibly.

One could throw out a hundred punches in a second, but if none of them struck the opponent, it would be nothing more than a show. In fact, more often than not, the key to winning lay in just one good punch.

With quivering lips, Feng Jiuge nodded in a daze as he murmured, “I think I understand...”

He knew that his teacher would have to be in the top thirty of a Sky's Board of Potential God Kings in order to obtain the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation, so it should not be too difficult for him to defeat Feng Jiang.

However, he did not think that his teacher would actually be this powerful!

Then again...

It was one thing to be powerful, and it was another thing to make someone else powerful. He really could not imagine anything that his teacher could do to allow him to clear the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation within just two hours.

“Is that so? What did you comprehend from that then?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Feng Jiuge pondered for a moment before replying, “A move is only strong if it lands on the opponent. Otherwise, it’s nothing more than a performance.”

“Indeed. Your understanding is spot-on,” Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

He had noticed that Feng Jiuge was a smart person who could catch on quickly as long as one dropped some hints before him.

It was a pity that Feng Jiuge had wasted his last two years, but he was confident that the young man could swiftly surpass the others as long as he was given proper guidance.

It was for this reason that Zhang Xuan had dared claim that he would make Feng Jiuge strong enough to clear the trial within two hours.

He might not even need that long!

While Zhang Xuan was talking to Feng Jiuge, Feng Jiang rose to his feet and asked doubtfully, “Are you really a clan member from the side family?”

Even though he felt humiliated by the earlier display, he took a deep breath and suppressed his anger.

“Un!” Zhang Xuan nodded quietly. “If you don’t believe me, you can always check my bloodline!”

With the disguise amulet in hand, he was confident that he would be able to clear all sorts of checks with ease.

Feng Jiang assessed Zhang Xuan for a moment before turning his body around. “Wait there for a moment. I’ll report this matter and have the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation prepared. Feng Jiuge has been expelled from the clan, so he must go through the trial in order to return. On the other hand, you are a member of the side family, so you need not undergo the trial...”

As long as members of the side family could reach a certain cultivation realm, they would be entitled to a chance to verify

their bloodline.

Given how he was unable to defeat the other party, it was obvious that the other party had already met the minimum requirement.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response before turning his attention back to his disciple. “Alright, we should start on your training.”

Most likely, it should take at least two hours to prepare the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation no matter how efficient the Inferno Phoenix Clan was. That was more than enough time for him to impart his combat insights to his new disciple.

Activating the Impartation of Heaven’s Will, Zhang Xuan began his lecture.

Initially, Feng Jiuge was still feeling very iffy about this entire matter, but as soon as he heard the first word, the anxiety in his heart vanished, and he found himself completely absorbed in the lecture.

The knowledge that his teacher was imparting to him was far more profound than what he had learned in the past. The more he learned, the more he realized how shallow his understanding of combat had been.

It was only when Feng Jiang returned once more that Feng Jiuge returned to his senses. By this moment, his anxiety had already been replaced entirely with anticipation. He was looking forward to testing what he had just learned.

It had not even been two hours yet, but his comprehension of combat and battle techniques had risen to a whole new level. In fact, when he looked back, he could not believe just how ignorant he had once been.

To be honest, he was not sure if he could clear the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation in his current state, but he felt like he at least stood a chance.

“Thank you, Teacher!” Feng Jiuge kneeled to the ground yet again and kowtowed deeply.

He did not know how else he could thank his teacher other than that.

He felt like all the suffering he had gone through was worth it. It had allowed him to meet his teacher, and that was all that mattered.

In terms of comprehension of combat, he felt like the only one who could match his teacher was the old ancestor.

Meanwhile, Feng Jiang's complexion turned a little awful when he saw how Feng Jiuge, a highly esteemed genius of the Inferno Phoenix Clan in the past, was kneeling and kowtowing to a member of the side family. But in the end, he chose not to say anything.

Instead, with a cold harrumph, he gestured for the two of them to follow him with a swerve of his head.

Following Feng Jiang, it did not take long for the two of them to arrive at the destination.

Right before them was a dueling ring sealed up tightly by dozens of massive phoenix sculptures.

Feng Jiang paused for a moment before speaking. "This is the training ground of our Inferno Phoenix Clan. The Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation has already been prepared, but it's not too late if you wish to back down now... You won't be able to turn back once we start the trial!"

While he harbored a deep grudge against Feng Jiuge, he did not hate him to the point that he wanted him to die.

"It's fine. I have no plans of backing down after coming this far," Feng Jiuge replied.

"Since you have made up your mind, let's begin!"

Without any hesitation, Feng Jiang walked straight into the center of the dueling ring.

Weng!

With a slight buzz, the mist shrouding the dueling ring dissipated, revealing another eight figures within.

"Feng Xu, Feng Yuancheng, Feng Qingyan..."

Recognizing the people inside the dueling ring, Feng Jiuge clenched his fists tightly.

He had thought that he would only face opponents around Feng Jiang's level, but it seemed like he had underestimated the trial.

With just a swift count, there were at least five cultivators in there who were even stronger than Feng Jiang!

How was he supposed to win this?

2192 Breaking the Formation

This was especially so for Feng Xu.

He was known as the strongest cultivator beneath God Kings in the Inferno Phoenix Clan, and he was ranked third on the Sky of Spirit Origin's Board of Potential God Kings!

In the past, the reason Feng Jiuge had been so highly regarded in the clan was because of his talent, not his fighting prowess.

Feng Xu was already in his six hundreds, which meant that the chances of him reaching God King were extremely slim. It was for that reason that the clan had favored Feng Jiuge over him. However, his fighting prowess was definitely not for show.

Just the fact that he was in the third place on the Board of Potential God Kings was enough to leave most people despaired.

“Are you frightened?” Zhang Xuan suddenly asked.

“No, that's not it. I'm just ...not very confident...” Feng Jiuge replied.

Even though the earlier lecture had opened his eyes to many things, he had not had time to put his new knowledge into practice. As such, he was not sure how far he could go with the knowledge that he had just absorbed.

If he slipped up inside against so many powerful experts, he might really lose his life.

“As long as you are able to put what I have taught you into practice, you will be able to overcome the formation easily,” Zhang Xuan reassured him calmly.

“I understand!” Feng Jiuge nodded.

Taking a deep breath, he tossed aside all his doubts and leaped right into the dueling ring.

As soon as he stepped into the dueling ring, the nine opponents that he was going to face suddenly vanished from sight. The formation had concealed their presence, preventing Feng Jiuge from perceiving their whereabouts.

Feng Jiuge warily took a step forward, but all of a sudden, he felt a chilling sensation behind him.

Teacher said that such a situation is likely to be a decoy. If I turn around, it would be as good as leaping right into the enemy's trap. It's also highly likely that they will have a countermeasure on the off chance that I rush forward in an attempt to barge out of their encirclement. The only step I can make is to return to my position while launching an offense...

Without any hesitation, Feng Jiuge stepped back to where he had been standing previously.

It was an extremely dangerous move to retreat when there was someone coming at him from behind. One mistake, and he could be impaled by the enemy's weapon. However, he had no other choice given the situation.

So, as soon as he placed his foot on the ground, he immediately whipped up his other leg to kick right in front of him.

Peng!

He could feel his leg striking something. It seemed like there was indeed a person there.

This... Feng Jiuge's eyes lit up in excitement.

To be frank, he was still in the phase where he was trying things out to see if the theories really worked in practice. So, he did not really bear much hope regarding it, especially since it was clear that he was in a disadvantageous position.

So, he was pleasantly surprised to see that it had actually worked.

Teacher said that if my attack connects, in order to prevent me from following up with another strike, those at the side will surely make use of this opportunity to assault me. In order to overcome such a situation, there's no need for me to make any

elaborate dodging maneuvers or run away. All I have to do is return to the spot where I stepped forward to earlier...

Feng Jiuge recalled Zhang Xuan's teachings.

The fact that there was no one who attacked him earlier when he stepped forward meant that there was no enemy there. He could exploit this fact to his advantage.

Thus, he took a step forward once more, and he immediately felt two forces colliding against one another behind him. It worked!

Seeing how things worked just as his teacher had said, as if he had predicted all of this beforehand, Feng Jiuge trembled in excitement. That being said, he did not allow his excitement to get the better of him. He decisively twisted his body ninety-degrees before kicking toward a certain spot.

Peng!

There was yet another dull thud.

Another opponent who was trying to make a sneak attack on him ended up being kicked in the chest before he could land his attack.

With everything that had happened so far going just as his teacher had planned, Feng Jiuge finally cast away his fear and devoted his all to the battle.

Meanwhile, outside the dueling ring...

On another side of the ring from Zhang Xuan, there was a tower that rose into the clouds. There were several elders looking out of the window from there.

"Feng Jiuge actually regained his cultivation and willingly challenged the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation... I must say that I didn't expect such a development," a gray-bearded elder said.

He was the First Elder of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, Feng Danqing.

Previously, he had held high hopes for Feng Jiuge. He had thought that the young man, just like the clan head, would

eventually rise to the heights of a God King and expand the Inferno Phoenix Clan's influence.

Never had he expected that the young man's potential would suddenly vanish just like that.

Over the past two years, he had called in many favors from his close physician friends, but none of them had been able to solve his condition. Left with no choice, he could only cast Feng Jiuge aside.

After all, even though he was the First Elder, he had to be accountable to the rest of the clan.

But who could have known that Feng Jiuge would be able to make a comeback shortly after he was expelled from the clan? Not only so, he even confidently challenged the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation...

Just what did Feng Jiuge encounter in the hour that he was gone?

"I had my men look into it, and it seems like right after he left the clan, he encountered a descendant of our clan outside. The latter treated his condition and helped him make a breakthrough in his cultivation," the old man standing beside Feng Danqing said.

He was the Second Elder, Feng Tianyun's.

"I heard that the descendant defeated Feng Jiang in a battle?" Feng Danqing asked.

"Yes, I heard the same. It seems like he's no ordinary person," Feng Tianyun remarked.

"Feng Jiuge seems to have changed quite a bit as well over the years. It was unfortunate that his cultivation started regressing for no reason, but it did help him to mature quite a bit. Even if he doesn't clear the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation, he's still qualified to return to our clan." Feng Danqing stroked his beard as he spoke.

Feng Tianyun nodded in agreement.

As elders of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, they prioritized the interests of the clan over everything else. Naturally, they

would be delighted to have Feng Jiuge back if he really had regained his cultivation.

It was just that being expelled from the clan was not a matter to be made light of. In view of the pride of the clan, they could not allow a person to simply join and leave the clan as they pleased.

So, the trial had to continue.

It was just that they had the discretion to decide which side should win.

Feng Danqing quickly counted the time that had elapsed since Feng Jiuge entered the formation before instructing, be good for Feng Jiuge to face a bit of hardship in the trial... However, tell Feng Xu and the others that it will suffice to make him suffer a bit. Just don't do anything that will hurt his foundation and affect his future cultivation!"

The Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation was a particularly powerful formation within their clan, such that not even Feng Danqing and Feng Tianyun could peer through the mist to see what was happening within.

The formation allowed Feng Xu, Feng Yuancheng, Feng Qingyan, and the others to pool their powers together synergistically. Even if Feng Jiuge was three times stronger than he was, he still would not stand a chance.

The only reason Feng Danqing had allowed the trial to go ahead was to temper Feng Jiuge's character, hoping that he could rid himself of complacency and work harder in the future.

"Alright, I'll send the message right now..." Feng Tianyun nodded.

A moment later, however, a slight frown appeared on his face.

"They aren't answering. Could it be that... Feng Jiuge is so weak that he couldn't even survive the first phase of the trial?"

Even if they wanted to temper a person, the person should at least be strong enough to be tempered. If Feng Jiuge was so

weak that he collapsed before the others could utilize their full prowess, he could only blame himself for his weakness.

“Killed?” Feng Danqing also frowned as well. He immediately ordered, “Stop the formation!”

“Alright!”

Feng Tianyun flicked his finger and infused a surge of his energy into the mist.

Even though it appeared that the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation was controlled by the nine cultivators within, in truth, the master key was still in their hands. They could stop the formation with a mere thought.

Hu!

The air in the dueling ring jolted violently before the mist began dispersing.

“If Feng Jiuge couldn’t even last for three minutes, I must say that it doesn’t matter even if he died in the trial...” Feng Tianyun harrumphed.

But before he could finish his words, he saw the real situation in the dueling ring and froze.

Feng Danqing’s eyes also nearly bulged out.

In the dueling ring, Feng Jiuge, whom they had thought might have lost his life, was chasing after his opponents spiritedly whereas Feng Xu and the others could only tremble in fear as they retreated again and again...

2193 Bloodline Tes

t

“How is this possible?” Feng Tianyun was speechless.

Even he did not have the strength to deal with Feng Xu and the others. In fact, even the God Kings of the clan would face some difficulty trying to subdue such a powerful lineup of cultivators...

Yet, how long did Feng Jiuge take to pull it off?

Five minutes?

In less than five minutes, all nine of them were already pummeled enough to fear Feng Jiuge and run away from him so desperately...

Was there not something very wrong here?

Feng Danqing was similarly bewildered by the sight before him.

Subconsciously, he had already decided that Feng Jiuge would suffer a tragic defeat in the trial. Yet, events had not unfolded as he expected. Looking at the dueling ring, it was Feng Jiuge's opponents who were running away from him as if he was the devil.

“All of you, squat down on the floor, hold your heads, and declare that you have lost the duel!”

“We have lost the duel...”

The trembling Feng Xu, Feng Jiang, and the others immediately did as they were told. Their faces had been punched so badly that one could hardly tell them apart.

“That's more like it!” Feng Jiuge nodded in satisfaction.

After that, he leaped out of the dueling ring and walked over to Zhang Xuan's side before bowing deeply. “Teacher, I have managed to clear the trial...”

Words could not begin to describe how just much he respected his teacher at that moment.

Through his teacher's impartation, he had been able to easily predict where the next attacks would come from. Not only so, he had even managed to figure out the weaknesses of the formation!

By exploiting the weaknesses of his opponent, he had defeated them easily, just as his teacher had told him.

Before Zhang Xuan could respond, a voice suddenly echoed from afar. "Congratulations, Jiuge, for clearing the Nine Phoenix Stellar Formation. I welcome you back to our clan!"

Following that, First Elder Feng Danqing and Second Elder Feng Tianyun walked over.

Even though they had no idea what had caused Feng Jiuge to change so much, there was no denying that he had indeed become strong.

"First Elder, Second Elder!" Feng Jiuge quickly clasped his fist to greet the two elders.

The two elders nodded in response to Feng Jiuge's greeting before turning his gaze to Zhang Xuan.

"I heard that you are a descendant of our clan," Feng Danqing said.

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and replied, "Yes, I am Feng Xuan."

"Good. Let's test your bloodline together with Jiuge's. As long as you are able to reach the level of purity expected of an external member, I'll accord you the title and privileges of a core member," Feng Danqing said.

Based on what they had heard so far, the changes in Feng Jiuge likely had something to do with Zhang Xuan.

Furthermore, the strength that he had displayed thus far was definitely not beneath that of Feng Jiuge's.

As long as the other party possessed the bloodline of their clan, it would be foolish for them not to nurture such a talent.

After saying those words, the First Elder flicked his wrist and took out a round stone.

“We call this artifact the Phoenix Resonance Stone. It’s even more accurate than the Blood Reservoir in testing out one’s bloodline,” Feng Danqing explained. “If a person possessing the bloodline of the Inferno Phoenix Clan drip their blood on the stone, a fire phoenix will surface on it. The clearer the phoenix, the purer one’s bloodline!”

“I understand.” Feng Jiuge nodded as he took the Phoenix Resonance Stone from the First Elder’s hand.

In the previous test, it had been found that his bloodline had completely vanished. Due to that, he had been expelled from the clan.

He could not help but feel a little apprehensive as to what was going to happen.

He took a deep breath to calm himself before nicking his finger and dripping a droplet of blood on the Phoenix Resonance Stone.

Weng!

The brilliant call of a fire phoenix echoed in the air. The outline of a fire phoenix swiftly formed on the stone before becoming clearer and clearer. Despite its miniature size, one could see its wings fluttering as it flew around the surface of the stone. It appeared so lifelike that it seemed as if it would soar out into the sky at any moment.

“Formation of the Phoenix, Convergence of Flames... The purity of your bloodline has reached the eighth level. Not only did you regain your bloodline, it has become even purer than before!” Feng Danqing was shocked.

All in all, there were ten levels to the bloodline of the Inferno Phoenix Clan. Over the years, their bloodline had become sparser and sparser, such that those who could reach the third level were already eligible to be considered a part of the core lineage.

As for the side family, due to frequent intermarriage with humans and other beasts, there were some of them who would

struggle to even trigger the Phoenix Resonance Stone.

Feng Jiuge's bloodline had been tested for the first time shortly after his birth, and it had been found that the purity of his bloodline was at the sixth level. That was more than enough to put him at the forefront of the clan.

Who could have known that he would overcome his previous record, reaching the frightening eighth level?

With such a level of purity, he was practically set to become a God King in the future!

"This..." Feng Jiuge was also a little taken aback by the results.

His bloodline had become even purer after he regained it.

He subconsciously turned to look at his teacher once more, and if it was possible to materialize his emotions, Zhang Xuan would have been drowning in an ocean of admiration.

He knew right away that it was the doing of his teacher. There was no way his bloodline could have become purer for no reason.

To achieve what was thought impossible, it seemed like his teacher's capability had really reached an unfathomable level.

Feng Danqing turned to Zhang Xuan and said, "It's your turn."

To be honest, he was quite curious about how this 'Feng Xuan' would do in the bloodline test.

Without the support and backing of the clan, he had still become a high-tier Celestial God at such a young age. Could his bloodline possibly be even purer than Feng Jiuge's?

Zhang Xuan took the stone from Feng Danqing's hands, but he did not prick his finger to conduct the bloodline test right away. Instead, he turned his attention to something else...

Weng!

The disguise amulet that Luo Ruoxin had given him began to work its wonders, turning his bloodline into that of the Inferno Phoenix Clan's.

Only after that was done did he take out the God King Sword and create a small incision at the tip of his finger.

He had made sure to conceal the God King Sword to make it appear no different from any other sword so as to avoid stirring a commotion. Unless he wielded it in battle, even a God King would be unable to tell the difference.

A droplet of blood fell onto the Phoenix Resonance Stone.

Nothing.

Nothing happened at all. There was no fire phoenix or anything else appearing.

It appeared that Zhang Xuan's blood was completely ineffective.

“Are you sure you are from our clan?” Feng Danqing asked with a frown.

Feng Tianyun was also confused.

Unless a person was absolutely certain that they were from the Inferno Phoenix Clan, they would not have dared to walk right into their home turf, claiming to be one of them!

Zhang Xuan was dumbstruck as well. If one could peer into his mind, one would probably see a mountain of question marks piled up.

Could it be that the Inferno Phoenix Clan's bloodline was too advanced for the disguise amulet that Luo Ruoxin had given him to emulate?

“Hahaha, this sure is weird, isn't it? Should I try again?”

If he could not get the Inferno Phoenix Clan to recognize him, he would not be able to enter Spirit God Palace. If he could not enter Spirit God Palace, how was he supposed to find Luo Ruoxin?

“You can only test your bloodline once...”

Halfway through Feng Danqing's words, the stone in Zhang Xuan's hand suddenly flickered a little as a brilliant phoenix abruptly surfaced.

It was not shrouded in flames, and it was unable to soar freely. Instead, it seemed to be swimming weakly on the surface of the stone...

“The Flash of a Phoenix, A Deficiency in Vigor... This is the mark of a third level bloodline. You barely qualify as a core member!” Feng Danqing announced as he patted his chest in relief.

While it was not as amazing as they had hoped, a third level bloodline was decent. After all, Feng Danqing himself only had a fourth level bloodline.

“Congratulations, Feng Xuan, for having returned to our clan. From today onward, you shall be a member of our core lineage, and you’ll be entitled to all the privileges of a core member!” Feng Tianyun proclaimed loudly.

Then, he passed a token over to Zhang Xuan and said, “This is the token that represents your identity. With it, you can receive stipends and cultivation technique manuals from the clan every month!”

“Thank you!” Zhang Xuan accepted the token.

While the results were not as amazing as when he had disguised himself as Luo Tianya, it was perfect for him. The disguise amulet might have sensed his inherently low profile and humble disposition, so it had adjusted itself accordingly so that the results were just enough for him to join the Inferno Phoenix Clan.

In any case, all that mattered was that he was finally there. Hu!

In this moment of celebration, no one noticed that the fire phoenix, which was soaring freely around the stone, had flown to the bottom of the stone and suddenly plummeted from the sky, crashing to the ground.

It had abruptly lost all its strength.

At the same time, the old ancestor of the Fire Phoenix Clan, the Fire Feather Conferred God King, suddenly opened his eyes.

2194 Melodramatic

The bloodline test of the Inferno Phoenix Clan was designed to test the similarity of a descendant's bloodline to that of the Fire Feather Conferred God King. The Phoenix Resonance Stone was actually an artifact created from his bloodline.

That being said, the testing of a descendant's bloodline usually would not faze him at all. But for some reason, his heart suddenly began pounding quickly in agitation.

It was like something was squeezing his soul tightly, leaving him breathless.

“Your Sovereignty?”

The Fire Feather Conferred God King widened his eyes.

He was a Conferred God King, and there was only one type of existence in the world that could leave him feeling like that.

But...

The God Monarch of the Sky of Spirit Origin had already breathed his last breath.

So why was it that he could still feel the other party's aura?

“I might just be thinking too much... Even if our God Monarch revives, the process is unlikely to be so quick...”

The Fire Feather Conferred God King shook his head as he remembered the words that the God Monarch had told him back then.

“Still, I should check on it just in case...”

So, the Fire Feather Conferred God King closed his eyes and focused his attention on that sensation that he had just felt.

It was a fleeting feeling that had disappeared as quickly as it appeared.

He tried to grasp onto the feeling, but for some reason, it felt like something was standing in his path, something

reminiscent of the heavens...

Even with his strength, he was still unable to trace the origin of the feeling.

Eventually, he could only shake his head and give up.

Since that was the case, there was no point in him thinking too much into it. His time would be better spent raising his cultivation.

The Firmament was in an unprecedented era. It was an era in which even God Monarchs could lose their life if they got careless.

If he, as a Conferred God King, did not try his best to raise his cultivation, he could very well lose his life in the next Flood of Spiritual Energy...

The old Firmament was as calm as a lake of stagnant water. Most Conferred God Kings lived their lives peacefully before coming to the end of their time. Everything had changed so quickly within such a short period, be it the receding of spiritual energy, the occurrence of the Flood of Spiritual Energy, or the rise of the Heaven Subjugation Monarch...

It was no longer a safe haven for Conferred God Kings.

For this reason, most Conferred God Kings devoted their time to cultivating if they did not have anything else to do. All they wanted was to become strong enough to survive through this turmoil while protecting their clan.

With his official acceptance into the Inferno Phoenix Clan, Zhang Xuan received the right to participate in the internal selections for the tournament.

All in all, the internal selections lasted three days, and the results were pretty much determined right from the start. There was no one in the Inferno Phoenix Clan who was a match for Zhang Xuan, so he easily took first place.

As for Feng Jiuge, he naturally claimed second place.

When news started spreading that the person in first place was an unknown figure who had just returned to the Inferno Phoenix Clan and the second place was a young man who had

once been expelled from the Inferno Phoenix Clan, a huge commotion broke out in Spirit Origin Royal City.

Those two dark horses were indubitably strong contenders for the champion seat of the upcoming tournament.

Zhang Xuan knocked on Feng Jiuge's door and said, "The tournament among the three clans will be held on the day after tomorrow. Since there isn't anything today, I hope that you can lead me to the abyss where the mishap occurred."

The Inferno Phoenix Clan had set the date of their internal selections to end two days before the official tournament so that their candidates would at least have a day to rest properly. Since he had some free time, Zhang Xuan hoped to take a look at the abyss to uncover the mystery behind the bizarre gray congregation of energy.

Feng Jiuge was a little apprehensive at heading to the abyss once more, but recalling what his teacher had said about the possibility of a relapse occurring, he bucked up his courage and nodded.

It had not been easy for him to regain his bloodline and cultivation. He was not ready to lose it once more.

The two of them were core members of the Inferno Phoenix Clan, and after the internal selections, their reputation and prestige were currently at their peak. In terms of standing within the clan, they might even be higher than the elders. As such, there was no one who stopped them leaving the clan.

The two of them got onto an aerial celestial beast, and in less than two hours, they were standing right beneath the floating city.

The floating city that seemed to block out the entire sky was being propped up by a single feather. This feather emanated a light golden glow and seemed a little reminiscent of the sun's rays.

Curious, Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight to examine the feather closely, and he realized that it looked surprisingly familiar to him. He tried to jog his memories, but somehow, he was unable to recall where he had seen it before.

Eventually, he shook his head and put that matter to the back of his mind.

Beneath the floating city was a pitch-black abyss that seemed to stretch endlessly downward. It felt like terrible things were lurking within the cryptic darkness.

“Teacher, I went down from here before,” Feng Jiuge said as he pointed to the cliff by the side.

Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over and saw a small manmade passageway right next to the cliff. It circled the walls of the abyss downward.

“Let’s head down to take a look.”

Zhang Xuan instructed the aerial celestial beast to wait for them by the side before walking over.

The passageway was narrow enough to allow only one person to pass at a time, and by the side was an abyss that was unimaginably deep. All it would take was one misstep for one to fall into oblivion.

Following closely behind Feng Jiuge, the two of them slowly made their way down the abyss.

The abyss commanded a powerful presence that suppressed even his Heaven’s Path zhenqi, making it difficult for him to drive his cultivation. Fortunately for him though, the Pathos of Heaven that he had cultivated seemed to be impervious to that.

Just like that, they traveled downward for two hours amid unnerving silence, but they were still nowhere close to reaching the bottom of the abyss.

Suddenly, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up, and he took out the pendant hanging around his neck. Feeling the slight warmth that it was emanating, he muttered, “It seems like Ruoxin has been here too...”

The two of them continued walking for a while longer, and some time later, Feng Jiuge finally came to a halt. He glanced backward and said, “Teacher, we have come to the end of the path. Back then, I also came to this point before falling into

some bizarre location. It was then that my cultivation began falling rapidly!”

He had nearly lost everything the last time he was there. He was not willing to let it happen to him once more.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan looked forward and saw that the narrow passageway had indeed suddenly vanished. Most likely, the cultivator who created this passageway had either passed away at this point or returned along the path.

“It doesn’t seem like there’s anything special here. What was the content of the mission that led you here?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

Like the Six Sects of the Azure, the clans in the Firmament often sent their members to carry out missions so as to temper their strength and character while gathering more resources for the clan.

However, the abyss was completely barren. Other than the endless darkness that followed them everywhere they went, there was nothing there at all. It did not make sense for a member of the Inferno Phoenix Clan to head down there for a mission.

“Legend has it that there is a herb in the abyss that can help a cultivator become a God King, and that herb is known as the Grass of God King,” Feng Jiuge explained with a reddened face. “I thought that the rumor was true, so I came here to give it a try ...”

“Grass of God King?” Zhang Xuan pondered for a while before shaking his head.

Putting aside whether such a thing existed or not, even if it did, it would not be so simple as to allow one to become a God King just by swallowing it.

Becoming a God King required one to have a thorough grasp over the powers of nature, and that was not something that a medicinal herb could help with.

That being said, even if the Grass of God King only increased one’s chances of making a breakthrough, it was still more than enough to draw countless cultivators over to try their luck.

After all, becoming a God King was a great honor in the Firmament. There were just slightly more than a hundred God Kings in the Firmament, so the temptation of being able to rise to a position that others were unable to was particularly alluring.

“Wait here for a moment. I’ll head down to look. If I don’t return within four hours, I want you to head back up without me. Don’t attempt to come down to find me,” Zhang Xuan instructed sternly.

If Feng Jiuge headed down with him, it was likely that his cultivation would get sealed by the gray congregation of energy once more. Since that was the case, it would be better for Zhang Xuan to proceed alone.

“Teacher... you must stay safe!”

Seeing how his teacher was venturing on fearlessly despite the dangers in order to resolve the possible complications of his condition, Feng Jiuge’s eyes reddened in gratitude.

He was just an ordinary student, but his teacher was willing to go so far for his sake. This was an expedition that could possibly cause one’s cultivation to vanish, but his teacher did not show the slightest hesitation. With such a teacher, what else could he ask for in life?

Zhang Xuan responded with confusion.

He could not understand why Feng Jiuge was looking at him with eyes so filled with passion that he actually felt goosebumps all over.

What is wrong with this child?

I’m just heading down there to take a look, and I’ll return as soon as I encounter danger. Is there a need for you to be so touched? Please! We’re not shooting a melodramatic soap opera over here.

2195 Grass of God King

Grabbing onto the face of the cliff tightly, Zhang Xuan slowly climbed his way down the abyss.

There was an unnerving pressure that came from the depths of the abyss that seemed to threaten to swallow him whole, so he did not dare lower his guard.

Proceeding downward, the pendant lying in front of his chest grew hotter and hotter, to the point that he felt like it would meld into him. It was also becoming extremely arduous for him to drive his Heaven's Path zhenqi.

It felt like this abyss was the very antithesis of his cultivation technique.

“Pathos of Heaven!”

Finally, it came to a point where Zhang Xuan was forced to circulate the even purer Pathos of Heaven zhenqi, and the pressure vanished. Heaving a sigh of relief, he continued downward.

Tzzz!

After advancing a little further, he suddenly felt surges of gray energy flowing discreetly into his body.

“So, this is where it came from...”

Having expected such a situation in advance, Zhang Xuan was able to keep his cool. He quickly channeled his Heaven's Path zhenqi toward the gray energy, and the collision of the two produced a brilliant green light within his body.

The glowing Zhang Xuan amid the pitch-black abyss made him seem as though he was a deity descending upon a land of doom.

As he went deeper, the surges of gray energy grew more numerous, and the rate at which he had to expend his Heaven's Path zhenqi increased at a terrifying rate. The surrounding

space also began showing hints of instability, wavering a little here and there.

“It might get dangerous if I continue like this...” Zhang Xuan’s hands and feet finally came to a halt.

He was capable of flight, so he did not have to worry about falling into the abyss.

What he was really concerned about was the instability in space. If he ventured deeper in, he could become mired within spatial turbulence and vortices.

With his current cultivation, it would be hard for him to withstand such powerful forces of nature.

“I’ll stop here for a moment and refine all of my zhenqi to the Pathos of Heaven zhenqi first...”

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan took out the God King Sword and gouged out a small cavern in the cliff face before sitting down in it.

He had spent a few hours getting down to this point, so he was reluctant to leave without having uncovered anything at all. Since the gray surges of energy were able to neutralize his Heaven’s Path zhenqi, it would be good for him to use them to refine his zhenqi, such that only the Pathos of Heaven zhenqi was left.

He began drawing the gray surges of energy into his body and channeled his Heaven’s Path zhenqi against them. It took roughly two hours for him to expend all his Heaven’s Path zhenqi, leaving behind only the Pathos of Heaven’s zhenqi.

“I don’t even have a hundredth of the amount of zhenqi I used to have now...”

Previously, when the two types of zhenqi were still fused together, they formed a massive ocean within his dantian, supplying him with an almost never-ending source of energy. However, with the neutralization of all his Heaven’s Path zhenqi, the amount of energy left within the ocean was not even a hundredth of before.

He had no idea whether it was a good thing for him to have refined all his zhenqi so quickly.

In any case, with the absence of his Heaven's Path zhenqi, the pressure from the gray surges of energy also vanished, so it seemed like it was doing him some good at the moment.

He walked over to the entrance of the cavern and glanced downward contemplatively. It was a while before he made up his mind and continued to climb downward.

Soon, he arrived before a spatial vortex.

This was a region where space flowed as easily as fluid, making it impossible for even God Kings to pass through such a region normally. Zhang Xuan took out a high-tier Celestial God artifact and stretched it toward the spatial vortex.

Weng!

The sword immediately began bending along with the flow of space, as if it had fallen into a distorting mirror.

Alarmed, Zhang Xuan quickly took out the sword from the vortex. Examining the sword's condition, he realized that the bent areas could not be fixed anymore, and the spirit within the sword had been destroyed as well.

“Stability of space is one of the fundamental requirements for life to exist. Even if it was possible for a lifeform to adapt to such an environment, it would also be distorted to become completely different from what it was before...”

Zhang Xuan knew that he would likely end up like this sword if he got caught in the spatial vortex. Heaving a deep sigh of helplessness, he was just about to start climbing when he noticed something bobbing up and down within the spatial vortex, forming ripples all around.

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight to take a closer look.

Within the spatial vortex, there were a few intriguing plants rooted on the cliff face. They would move alongside the flow of the spatial vortex.

“It’s actually possible for life to thrive in such an environment?” Zhang Xuan was shocked.

The spatial vortex was filled with many different currents that flowed in different directions, such that any lifeform that fell into it would be pulled in innumerable directions, causing their form to distort.

Even with his current cultivation, Zhang Xuan had no confidence in defending against the forces of the spatial vortex. Yet, those plants were able to survive under such circumstances. Why was that so?

“Could it be that...the plants over there is the Grass of God King? Is that it?”

Previously, when he heard about the existence of such a herb from his student, he had thought that it was impossible. However, he was starting to see the plausibility of it now.

One of the distinctive traits of a God King was his comprehension over spatial laws, and the fact that this grass was able to survive amid a spatial vortex showed that it had adapted to distortions in the spatial laws.

If one could forge this grass into a pill and swallow them, it would indeed boost one’s chances to become a God King.

“The only problem is that how can I obtain them?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Those plants were not too deep within the spatial vortex, but the problem was that he could not even afford to get in contact with it. How was he supposed to retrieve those plants?

If he could not obtain them, it would be futile no matter how valuable those plants were!

“Little Chick, I have something I need you to help me do!” Zhang Xuan began communicating with the little yellow chick in his dantian.

The latter had already reached the God King realm, and it possessed an undying body. It might be able to get those plants for him.

“I was sleeping!” Little Chick exclaimed grudgingly before coming out of Zhang Xuan’s dantian. It looked at the sight beneath it, and its beady eyes narrowed in confusion. “This place... I seem to have been here before...”

“You have been here before?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “Did you remember something?”

All this while, Little Chick had been saying that it was a legendary beast that ruled over the lands, but it had never been able to figure out what it was exactly. Even after it made a breakthrough to God King, it had still been unable to recall anything related to its heritage.

Could this spatial vortex be the key to triggering its memories?

“Not really. I just find this sight particularly familiar...” Little Chick cocked its head to the side as it racked its head to form associations. In the end, it threw its tiny wings into the air in frustration and cried, “Nothing is coming to me at all! Forget it, I shan’t think about it anymore. I’ll surely recall everything once I regain my cultivation. Oh right, so why did you call me out here?”

If there was nothing up, its master usually would not disturb it.

“I suspect that the plant within the spatial vortex is Grass of God Kings, a herb that can help one to make a breakthrough to the God King realm. I can’t retrieve it with my current level of cultivation, so I’m wondering if it’s possible for you to do it.”

“The plants over there?” Little Chick pondered for a moment before nodding a little. “It seems possible for that to be the case. The plant is indeed a little bizarre...”

“Un. Are you able to get it?” Zhang Xuan asked. “I just need you to harvest it, not to eat it.”

Little Chick was known to be extremely greedy when it came to food. If it rushed over and gobbled up all the plants... well, he could not possibly put his hand into Little Chick’s mouth and dig those plants out, right?

He would rather remain a Celestial God for life than do something as disgusting as that...

Little Chick looked at Zhang Xuan and replied, “Of course, I am already a God King realm expert, you know! That thing is no longer useful to me... Don’t worry, I won’t eat it... I’ll just try one blade of grass to see how it tastes. If it isn’t nice, I won’t eat it anymore... Why are you looking at me like that? There is more than one blade of grass down there, right?”

Zhang Xuan looked at Little Chick speechlessly before eventually nodding helplessly. “Alright, go and do whatever you need. However, this spatial vortex seems a little odd. If you encounter any danger, make sure to retreat at once.”

That Grass of God King was nothing in comparison to Little Chick. If obtaining the Grass of God King would place the latter in danger, he did not want them at all.

2196 Is Little Chick the Deathless Monarch?

“Sigh, I have been wanting to die for a long time now. If this thing can kill me, I’ll be more than glad to do it,” Little Chick said as it flapped its wings.

The previous time it transmogrified, it had retained its chick head for some reason. If the spatial vortex could kill it somehow, it might just be able to pull off a full transmogrification.

“Un...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He would be lying if he said that he was not worried, but when he recalled how Little Chick could come back to life even after it had been blasted to bits, he decided to let things be.

Hu!

Flapping its little wings, Little Chick dived right into the spatial vortex. In an instant, its body began warping like a reflection in a distortion mirror. Its small golden body bloated up to the point that it resembled the fire phoenix that he had seen on the Phoenix Resonance Stone.

“Wait a moment, could it be that... Little Chick is from the Phoenix Tribe?”

Such a thought suddenly arose in Zhang Xuan’s head.

There were not many legendary beasts in the world, and there were even fewer of those whose bloodline was so powerful that they could not fully transmogrify even after becoming a God King. If that was the case, how powerful a beast was Little Chick?

Was it a Conferred God King... or a God Monarch?

“It can’t be that it is actually the Deathless Monarch, can it?” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in shock.

In the first place, it was weird that the Deathless Monarch, known for its ability to defy death, had passed away just like that.

He recalled the first time he met Little Chick. He had still been on the Master Teacher Continent, and Little Chick had still been a mere gourd. It had grown swiftly through absorbing his Heaven's Path zhenqi.

While in the Azure, when they were before the tomb of the Deathless Monarch, Little Chick had mentioned that he wanted to devour the skeleton that was guarding the grave.

Furthermore, when Little Chick revived after it was killed by Kong shi's clone, there had been a sudden outpour of air of degeneration from the City of Collapsed Space to fuel its growth, and how it was able to absorb the concentrated air of degeneration with ease as well...

Other than that, there was also a feeling of familiarity when he saw the massive feather propping up Spirit Origin Royal City, as well as Little Chick mentioning how it found this abyss familiar...

Most importantly of all, Conferred God King Qi Meng had addressed him as a God Monarch back when he was at the Lucid Lunar Lake. Most likely, it was due to Little Chick's blood seeping into it.

Due to absorbing Little Chick's blood, his body had also gained a portion of the Deathless Monarch's undying attribute, allowing him to swiftly recover regardless of the severity of his injuries.

“Did I really take a God Monarch as my tamed beast?”

The more Zhang Xuan thought about this matter, the more his face twitched in horror.

During his time in the Firmament, he had come to learn about just how highly respected the God Monarchs were. Even Kong shi had to receive the recognition of the other nine God Monarchs if he wanted to become one.

A mere high-tier Celestial God like him had taken in a God Monarch as his tamed beast. For the time being, Little Chick

had not recovered its memories, so it was not able to say anything about it. But once it remembered its past, would it try to kill him to erase this humiliating history?

“But this doesn’t fully make sense. Ruoxin, as the Spirit God of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, should be the successor of the Deathless Monarch, and she met Little Chick as the Dongxu Gourd while we were still on the Master Teacher Continent. Thus, she should have recognized it and made a move...”

According to what he had heard so far, this was the first time that a God Monarch had died, so it was understandable how no one was certain what had become of the Deathless Monarch. However, as the successor of the Deathless Monarch, Luo Ruoxin should have been able to recognize the Deathless Monarch even if it was in a very different state.

Of course, everything was just his conjecture at this point, so he could not say for sure.

Even God Monarchs were bound to have their enemies. If someone found the Death Monarch in a severely weakened state, there was a good chance that it might be killed before it was able to grow back to its peak.

Luo Ruoxin might have chosen to intentionally turn a blind eye to it in order to conceal it from the eyes of the others.

“Forget it, what’s the point of thinking about it now?” Zhang Xuan muttered to himself. “The mystery should unravel itself once I meet Ruoxin tomorrow at Spirit God Palace...”

Casting aside his miscellaneous thoughts, he turned his attention back to the spatial vortex and saw the little yellow chick having a great battle with the Grass of God King.

This herb, being able to survive in a spatial vortex and help cultivators reach God King realm, was not weak at all. While its fighting prowess was not on par with that of a God King, it would be wise not to underestimate it.

It was just unfortunate that Little Chick happened to be a God King, and a considerably powerful one at that. Soon enough, it

defeated the Grass of God King, and holding onto it with its beak, it swam back up to where Zhang Xuan was.

Its body remained distorted even after it left the spatial vortex, but this degree of damage was not enough to pose a threat to it. It passed the herbs over to Zhang Xuan before diving into his dantian and returning to sleep.

All in all, there were four stalks.

There should have been five of them, but Little Chick had eaten one while it was fighting, only to realize that it tasted horrible. So, it had left the rest of them to Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan took out a jade container and stored the herbs inside it before sealing it off with his zhenqi. Heaving a sigh of relief, he quickly flew back to the top of the abyss.

He had used the Library of Heaven's Path to check the medicinal herbs when he received them, and it was exactly as he thought. They were indeed the Grass of God King, and they had the effect of increasing one's chances of becoming a God King by fifty percent.

Furthermore, the effects could be further enhanced if the herb's medicinal properties were complemented with other medicinal herbs.

With this, as long as he could come up with a God King realm cultivation technique for his Pathos of Heaven, he should be able to make a breakthrough easily.

Teacher, are you fine?"

Upon returned to the place where he had parted with Feng Jiuge, he saw the young man looking at him worriedly. Zhang Xuan nodded. "Let's head out first before talking."

They had proceeded down slowly in case they encountered any danger, but there was no such worry now that they were heading upward instead. In less than an hour, they were already back on the surface.

Zhang Xuan called for the aerial celestial beast, and the two of them returned to the Inferno Phoenix Clan.

“I found the reason your cultivation plummeted, and you can rest assured that you will not face the same problem in the future,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile. “I also managed to find the Grass of God King that you spoke of. I’ll have it forged into a pill and give you one. So, make sure to cultivate diligently so that you can become a God King soon!”

“You managed to find the Grass of God King?” Feng Jiuge exclaimed in shock.

He had been a little skeptical about the existence of the Grass of God King when he went down the abyss as well, but who could have known that it really existed and that his teacher would even manage to procure some of it!

Not only so, his teacher was going to give some of it to him...

His eyes reddened once more as he gazed at Zhang Xuan with gratitude.

Zhang Xuan shuddered a little when he saw Feng Jiuge looking at him with such sparkling eyes yet again. He quickly glanced away as he said, “Focus on your cultivation for the rest of the day. I’ll be heading out for a while, and I should be back in time for tomorrow’s tournament.”

There was still half a day before the tournament, which should be plenty of time for him to get the Grass of God King forged into pills. With those pills, he would be able to make a breakthrough as long as he could come up with a corresponding God King realm cultivation technique.

Of course, the problem was that a pill that increased one’s chances of making a breakthrough to God King was not easy to forge. It would be highly testing on one’s skills as an apothecary, and the first person that came to Zhang Xuan’s mind was none other than... Fu Jiangchen!

Fu Jiangchen was reputed to be the number one apothecary of the Firmament, and he was a powerful God King as well. It should be safe to entrust the Grass of God King into his hands.

Most importantly of all, he had interacted with Fu Jiangchen, and he felt that the latter was a trustworthy person.

Otherwise, if news regarding the Grass of God King leaked, it would surely cause an even larger uproar than the Breakthrough Pill. After all, each God King was an invaluable asset to any clan in the Firmament, and this included clans with Conferred God Kings.

He would surely face yet another wave of even more powerful assassins once that happened.

“Teacher, stay safe...” Feng Jiuge clasped his fist.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response. He strictly instructed Feng Jiuge not to tell anyone about the Grass of God King before riding the aerial celestial beast all the way to the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation.

Through such a convenient tool of travel, he should have more than enough time to head to the Sky of Linglong to look for Fu Jiangchen, have his pill forged, and make it back within half a day.

2197 Sky of Linglong

2197 Sky of Linglong

It was a peaceful journey to the Great Displacement Teleportation Formation, so there was no God King to deliver dinner to Little Chick and provide him with free weapons and pills.

To be honest, Zhang Xuan was a little disappointed by that.

Roughly an hour later, he finally arrived at Linglong Royal City.

Sky of Linglong, whose name was derived from the phrase ‘Linglong Heart of Seven Apertures[1]’, stood at the southwest of the Firmament, and its land was shaped like a seven-sided polygon. Its monarch, Fairy Linglong, was a female God Monarch.

Fairy Linglong was reputed to have a ravishing appearance that was unrivaled. Her cultivation had also reached a terrifying level, not paling in comparison with the powerful Cloud Dragon Monarch or Deathless Monarch at all.

The two Conferred God Kings serving under her, Shangguan Yunwan and Baiye Qinghong, were known to be gorgeous beauties as well. Rumor had it that there were many Conferred God Kings and God Kings who had expressed their fancy toward those two, only to be rejected.

Unexpectedly, the mature-looking Fu Jiangchen was a loyal fan of those two as well, and they were the true reason he had chosen to settle down in the Sky of Linglong. After all, with his top-notch skills as an apothecary, he would fare well no matter where he went.

A fallen flower parts from the tree of its own volition, only to be swept away by the heartless river.

Just like their God Monarch, these two Conferred God Kings viewed the courtship of any men with nonchalance. As such, they had never gotten a companion over the years, and there

was absolutely no history of them even getting close to any men.

Zhang Xuan knew that he only had half a day and no time to waste, so he quickly entered Linglong Royal City and sent a message to Fu Jiangchen. It did not take him long to receive a response.

He waited on the spot for a while, and soon, he saw the number one apothecary of the Firmament flying right in his direction.

“My friend, Zhang Xuan! I didn’t expect you to visit me so soon!” Fu Jiangchen stroked his beard with a smile.

Before they parted at Drifting Specter Royal City, they had exchanged their contact information, and Zhang Xuan had promised to drop by when he had some time on hand. It was just that Fu Jiangchen did not expect to reunite with the young man so quickly.

Fu Jiangchen had been looking into the Breakthrough Pill over the last few days, and the more he examined the Breakthrough Pill, the more impressed he was by its effects.

His pill forging skills was definitely top in the Firmament, but even so, he was unable to figure out the pill formula of the Breakthrough Pill. No matter how he looked at it, it appeared to be completely identical to a middle-tier God Essence Pill.

In fact, there was even a period of time when he wondered if Zhang Xuan had given him the wrong pill.

Yet, when he tried out the effectiveness of the pill, it was indeed able to repair a cultivator’s internal traumas and help them overcome the bottleneck of their cultivation.

In the end, he could only conclude that the young man’s mastery of pill forging was far beyond his.

It was also due to this that he felt particularly excited to see the young man once more.

“To be frank with you, I came here because I have a request of you.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist as he spoke.

“Oh?” Fu Jiangchen was slightly surprised. “There’s no need to stand on ceremony with me. I would be glad to help you with any trouble you are facing!”

“Allow me to thank you in advance, Brother Fu!”

Since the other party addressed him as a friend, he would appear to be too formal if he continued addressing the other party as ‘Apothecary Fu*’.

Switching over to zhenqi telepathy, he said, “To be honest, I need you to help me forge a pill.”

“Forge a pill?” Fu Jiangchen was a little surprised to see Zhang Xuan acting so cautiously.

A moment later, a thought struck him, and he nodded comprehendingly as he replied via telepathy as well. “Your pill forging skills are far beyond mine. If you need my help... are you intending to forge a God King realm pill?”

As someone who was able to forge something as incredible as the Breakthrough Pill and Beauty Pill, it went without saying that the other party’s comprehension of pill forging far exceeded his.

Yet, the other party had travelled so far to ask him for such a favor. That likely meant that the pill he needed to forge was beyond his current capability.

“Yes, that’s indeed the case,” Zhang Xuan replied frankly.

In strict terms, the God King Breakthrough Pill forged from the Grass of God King was unlikely to reach the level of a real God King realm pill. Nevertheless, its value would not pale in comparison to any God King realm pill.

“Come, let’s head to my manor first before discussing the details!”

Knowing that such a pill would surely draw unwanted attention to them, Fu Jiangchen embraced Zhang Xuan with his zhenqi, and the two of them swiftly flew toward his manor.

Fu Jiangchen, known as the top apothecary of the Firmament, had an exceptionally high standing in the Sky of Linglong.

Despite only being a God King, the manor that he lived in was on a scale comparable to that of the Qi Clan.

With the massive number of disciples in his lineage, he was practically a sect leader at this point.

Fu Jiangchen led Zhang Xuan into his private room in the manor before activating the isolation barriers. Once it was all done, he turned to Zhang Xuan and said, “Brother Zhang, to be frank with you, due to the limits of my cultivation talent, I am only able to forge eight types of God King realm pills at the moment. If the pill you wish to forge isn’t within these eight types, I fear that there isn’t much I can do to help you.”

Due to the nature of God King realm pills, the success rate of forging a God King realm pill was highly dependent on the apothecary’s ability to manipulate the power of nature and his comprehension of the God King cultivation realm itself played a huge part.

There was no doubt that Fu Jiangchen was a talented apothecary, but his talent as a cultivator was not particularly exceptional among God Kings. As a result of that, the types of God King realm pills that he could forge were limited to only eight types.

“Eight types?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He did not know how many types of God King realm pills there were in the Firmament, but if one thing was for sure, there were definitely way more than eight of them. However, it was already too late to search for other apothecaries, so Zhang Xuan got straight to the matter at hand.

“The pill I would like to forge is a God King Breakthrough Pill. May I know if you have heard of such a pill, Brother Fu?”

“God King Breakthrough Pill?” Fu Jiangchen was taken aback. “Is there such a pill in the world?”

Even with his vast knowledge of pill forging, he had never heard of any pill that could help one make a breakthrough to the God King realm.

“I came up with the pill formula not too long ago, and I haven’t gotten a chance to test it yet,” Zhang Xuan replied.

With his current mastery of pill forging, he was already capable of changing a pill formula flexibly so as to suit his needs.

Along the way, he had studied the attributes and potency of the Grass of God King, and through that, he had devised a formula that best brought out its medicinal properties. However, all of it was still in a theoretical stage; he had not tried it out in practice.

That being said, he had already verified the plausibility of it through the Library of Heaven's Path, and there were no mistakes. As long as the pill formula was strictly followed from the start to the end, the pill forged should be able to help a high-tier Celestial God become a God King.

“You came up with the pill formula?”

Fu Jiangchen looked at Zhang Xuan with his mouth agape for a long while.

He had thought that it was already amazing enough that the young man was able to come up with the Breakthrough Pill that allowed a cultivator to overcome the bottlenecks they faced in the earlier stages of their cultivation. He did not think that the young man would be able to go so far as to even deduce a God King Breakthrough Pill...

That was sure a terrifying talent that the young man had!

“Indeed!” Zhang Xuan nodded. “However, my cultivation is still severely lacking at the moment, so I’m unable to forge the pill. Thus, I came here hoping to ask for your help. As long as you are able to help me forge the pill, I’m willing to compensate you accordingly!”

“You are too courteous! It would also be the utmost honor for an apothecary like me to witness the birth of such an amazing pill!” Fu Jiangchen replied excitedly. “Is it fine for you to show me the pill formula first? I have never forged anything like this before, so I’ll need to take a look at the pill formula to know whether it is within my means.”

“Here you go!”

Since Zhang Xuan was there to ask Fu Jiangchen for help, there was no reason for him to be stingy. He took out a jade token and infused the pill formula that he had come up with into it before passing it over.

Fu Jiangchen accepted the jade token and quickly took a look at the contents. His eyes widened upon seeing the details of the pill formula, and he quickly turned to Zhang Xuan to ask with an incredulous tone, “Are you certain that this pill formula is feasible?”

[1] Linglong Heart of Seven Apertures refers to a mystical heart that has seven apertures, and it's said that someone who has such a heart must have an innocent nature, and they can hear the voice of nature and communicate with it.

2198 A Perfect Forging Method

The pill formula that Fu Jiangchen had seen was simply horrifying. Even as a top apothecary in the Firmament, he still felt his heart pounding anxiously at the thought of it. He dared not believe that someone would dare use all those medicinal ingredients together!

The main ingredient of the pill formula, Grass of God King, was a medicinal ingredient that he had never seen or heard of before, but the other complementing medicinal herbs left chills running down his spine.

Putting everything aside, the sixth complementing medicinal herb, Spittle of the Green Serpentine Dragon, was known to be one of the most potent poisons in the Firmament. Even a God King would be unable to curb its poisonous properties! To actually use something like that to forge a pill...

Subconsciously, Fu Jiangchen was already starting to calculate the chances of a cultivator surviving if they consumed such a pill!

And the fourteenth medicinal herb, the Hundredleaf Violetscent Flower, despite possessing no poison at all, had the ability to freeze a cultivator's zhenqi, preventing them from exerting their cultivation...

Should a Breakthrough Pill not be filled with ingredients that were rich in spiritual energy so that the cultivator could gather sufficient momentum for a breakthrough? But this medicinal herb would halt a person's zhenqi! How was someone supposed to cultivate like that?

And the twenty-first medicinal herb, Pureblooded Dragon Blood...

Was that something that a normal cultivator could endure? Putting aside a single drop, even half a drop of it would be

enough to make him explode!

With his many years of experience in pill forging, Fu Jiangchen's conclusion was that... this was not a pill formula but an enigmatic hotpot filled with sketchy ingredients!

It was similar to how a cook might add pepper, onion, ginger, and anise into their meat in order to elevate its flavor... But if he added in a teaspoon of ash, a pinch of dust, and three spoonfuls of wood shavings into his cooking, could it be eaten?

That was just how illogical the pill formula appeared to Fu Jiangchen!

"I have already revised it once, and there are no problems with it," Zhang Xuan replied.

"You have revised it once?" Fu Jiangchen was on the verge of clawing his hair out.

Was the young man that confident, or did he misunderstand what pill forging was?

Even the most skilled apothecaries he knew of would make sure to revise their new pill formula dozens of times before attempting to forge it so as to prevent wastage of medicinal ingredients. In fact, there were some who went to the extent of simulating the process hundreds of times to ensure that it was errorless before daring to move on to the forging process.

Yet... you only went through it once? Are you sure that this is fine?

It feels like you are making light of everything!

"Rest assured, I am confident in the pill formula. We'll definitely be able to forge it," Zhang Xuan replied with a chuckle to assuage Fu Jiangchen's fears.

Even the Library of Heaven's Path had given him the green light, so there could not be any problem with it!

Seeing how certain Zhang Xuan was, Fu Jiangchen knew that he would not be able to talk him out of it, so he sighed deeply and said, "Well, since you have already put it like that, I guess we can give it a try... However, I'll need to give you a

disclaimer beforehand. I have never forged such a pill before, so there's a chance that all of the medicinal herbs might end up going to waste!"

If the pill forging process failed, it would usually result in all the medicinal herbs going to waste. The medicinal herbs required to forge something as potent as a God King Breakthrough Pill were bound to be incredibly valuable.

Even with the vast fortune that Fu Jiangchen had at his disposal, it would still take a huge toll on his finances if so many precious herbs of his went to waste.

"Don't worry, it won't go to waste!" Zhang Xuan smiled. "Brother Fu, as long as you follow my instructions carefully, there won't be any problems!"

"Alright then." Fu Jiangchen nodded.

The other party's mastery of pill forging was clearly higher than his, so it could be possible that the other party was seeing a very different picture from him.

He was there just to help out anyway.

"Shall we begin then?" Zhang Xuan asked.

He only had half a day, and two hours had already passed so far. If he did not rush things a bit, he might fail to make it in time for the tournament.

"Un!"

With a flick of his wrist, Fu Jiangchen took out a cauldron. Then, with a wave of his hand, a burst of flame descended from the sky and fell right into the cauldron, setting it alight.

The cauldron that he used specifically for pill forging was God King-tier, and the flame that he used was a type of Celestial Flame. With these, he could refine even God King-tier medicinal herbs easily.

"You have my gratitude!"

Seeing that Fu Jiangchen had the equipment required to conduct the pill forging, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. That happened to be something that he lacked.

With a wave of his hand, a huge pile of medicinal herb materialized before him, floating in the air.

He had managed to procure quite a lot of medicinal herbs back in the Sky of Drifting Specter through Qi Ling-er.

Furthermore, when he devised the pill formula, he had altered it according to what medicinal herbs he had on hand so that he would not need to go looking for them.

Fu Jiangchen looked at the medicinal herbs floating around the room before asking with a frown, “Brother Zhang... you only prepared a set of medicinal herb?”

It was pretty standard for apothecaries to prepare three sets of medicinal herbs before beginning to forge their pill. This way, they would be able to quickly make adjustments if a problem occurred.

However, if there was only a set of medicinal herbs and a problem cropped up in the refinement of a certain medicinal herb, they would not be able to correct the problem right away, and this could lead to the entire cauldron of medicinal herbs going to waste!

“Just a set is enough. To be frank with you, I’m pushed for time, so I can only attempt the forging process once,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“You are pushed for time?” Fu Jiangchen was rendered speechless.

That, too, was a taboo of pill forging, especially for such an advanced pill.

Presenting me with a completely messed up pill formula that has only been revised once, preparing only a single set of medicinal herbs, and being in a rush before the pill forging’s even begun...

Are you sure you are here to ask me to forge a pill for you?

It was not too long ago that Fu Jiangchen had been completely impressed by Zhang Xuan, and he had even thought that the latter might be most capable apothecary in the Firmament with the exception of the Heaven Subjugation Monarch, but looking at it now...

How could an apothecary be this unreliable?

“Let’s begin right away!”

As Zhang Xuan said those words, Fu Jiangchen saw the young man grabbing one of the medicinal herbs and tossing it into his cauldron.

For a moment there, Fu Jiangchen nearly flipped his cauldron over, and he might have done so if not for the fact that they were in his manor.

The cauldron hasn’t been heated properly, but you have already started tossing a medicinal herb in... And the way you did it somehow appeared so amateur, almost as if you have never forged a pill before...

Fu Jiangchen felt his confidence level reaching a new low.

“I’ll pass it over to you now. Follow my instructions strictly, alright...”

Nearly having burnt his hand while tossing the medicinal herb in, Zhang Xuan immediately took a step back and held back his urge to continue tossing the other medicinal herbs in.

With a deep sigh, Fu Jiangchen said, “The cauldron isn’t warm yet...”

“There are some medicinal herbs that don’t require the cauldron to be too hot. On the contrary, if the temperature is too high, it might have adverse effects even,” Zhang Xuan swiftly explained before following up with the next set of instructions. “In two breaths’ time, place the Woodleaf Grass and Goldgazelle Leaf in. Increase the temperature of the flame by seven percent right away. After that, use the Wood Reversal Spirit Resurrection Forging Technique to place the Soleleaf Grass in...”

The procedure for forging the God King Breakthrough Pill was incredibly complex, and there were many details to take note of. In order to ensure that his words could reach in time, Zhang Xuan used his zhenqi telepathy to relay his instructions.

“You know of my Wood Reversal Spirit Resurrection Forging Technique?”

Fu Jiangchen had been filled with uncertainty a moment ago when he suddenly heard those words, and his heart skipped a beat.

The Wood Reversal Spirit Resurrection Forging Technique was a particularly obscure and profound forging technique. It had taken him nearly a decade in order to fully grasp it.

However, after he learned it, due to how obscure it was, there were hardly any pill formulas that necessitated its use, so he had ended up shoving it aside. A lot of time had passed since then, and he had nearly forgotten about it...

He did not think that Zhang Xuan would be aware of that pill forging technique, as well as the fact that he knew about it!

In any case, Fu Jiangchen knew that this was not the time to be asking questions. Without a moment's delay, with his right hand, he quickly did as what Zhang Xuan instructed and threw stalk after stalk of medicinal herbs in with precise movements at precise timings.

As for his left hand, it was busy infusing spiritual energy into the cauldron in order to raise the intensity of the flame.

Tzzz!

While placing the medicinal herbs in according to Zhang Xuan's instructions, Fu Jiangchen could not help but notice that the medicinal herbs, which looked as if they would burst into flames at any moment, would somehow melt together with impeccable timing and fuse perfectly together with one another.

Could this be... a perfect pill forging technique? Fu Jiangchen thought in disbelief.

The reason fire was required in pill forging was to fuse the individual medicinal herbs together better. However, due to certain incompatibilities in terms of flames and forging techniques, it could prove difficult to fuse some medicinal herbs together.

For most apothecaries, it was fine as long as they could mix the two medicinal herbs together to some degree.

However, by following the timing and forging technique as the young man instructed, he was actually able to make all of the medicinal herbs fuse together perfectly!

This was a perfect forging technique!

This was a legendary feat that even God Monarchs would find hard to pull off... but it was happening right before his eyes from the words of a young man!

2199 Need to Breakthrough

As the number one apothecary, Fu Jiangchen's skills in controlling flames and his grasp of medicinal properties were indeed top-notch. All Zhang Xuan had to do was verbalize the timing and the steps, and Fu Jiangchen would be able to pull them off with an amazing level of precision.

It did not take long for over a hundred medicinal herbs to be added into the cauldron, each of them perfectly fused with one another. All in all, they formed a sphere of medicinal fluid that was roughly the size of a fist.

At the start, Fu Jiangchen was still getting shocked each time he saw medicinal herbs that were usually hard to mix together fusing together perfectly, but there eventually came a point where he got numb to the shock.

It was starting to feel like as long as he followed Zhang Xuan's instructions, he would even be able to fuse even the heaven and earth impeccably together with one another.

He had been a little doubtful at the start about why that would be the case, but eventually, he had come to realize that the young man's grasp over medicinal herbs had reached a level where he had an absolute grasp over each and every one of them.

For example, at the very start, he had been extremely skeptical about adding the Spittle of the Green Serpentine Dragon into the pill since the medicinal herb was renowned for its domineering poison. However, by abruptly raising the temperature to 1,300 degrees within a single breath, it was possible to make the poison disappear temporarily for half a breath. As long as he fused the Densewood Flower together with it in this interval, not only would the poison not reappear, it would even have the beneficial effect of stimulating the cells in one's body.

The same went for the Hundredleaf Violetscent Flower. It was known for its ability to freeze a person's zhenqi, but by

mediating it with certain medicinal herbs at a specific temperature, it would instead reinforce the cultivator's meridians, thus allowing the cultivator to drive their zhenqi with greater vigor than before!

The young man had managed to draw out the beneficial medicinal properties from these herbs perfectly without wasting anything.

Fu Jiangchen had thought that he was nearing the peak of pill forging, but that day, he had witnessed something that he had never thought possible. He felt like the ceiling above him had shattered to reveal a brand-new sky.

“Wait a moment, this isn't right...”

Just as Fu Jiangchen was going to heave a sigh of relief after seeing that nothing had gone wrong so far, he suddenly recalled something and anxiously turned his gaze toward Zhang Xuan. “I have already refined and fused the 107 medicinal herbs together, but why aren't we adding in the main ingredient yet?”

He had been so preoccupied with the forging process that he had not noticed it before, but once his workload finally lessened slightly, it immediately struck him.

According to the pill formula, there was a total of 108 medicinal herbs, and he had already fused 107 of them together. So, why had the main ingredient not appeared yet?

The main ingredient was usually the crux of the pill. Like the foundation of a building, its presence served as the structure to build up the final product.

For most pills, the main ingredient was the first one to go into the cauldron, and the other medicinal herbs would be added in subsequently to mediate and fuse with it. Yet, strangely enough, he had forged 107 of the medicinal herbs already, and they were all just side ingredients...

Are you sure that this is going to work out?

This was similar to fried rice almost being ready to serve, but all that was in the bowl were onions, ginger, pepper, thirteen

spice powder. Somehow, the main ingredient was nowhere to be seen!

Could the young man be pulling an elaborate prank on him?

“There’s no need to worry. Continue raising the heat in the cauldron,” Zhang Xuan replied with his eyes still staring intently at the cauldron.

“Alright...”

Fu Jiangchen was perplexed, but he did not dare go against Zhang Xuan’s instructions out of fear that his mistake would cause the failure of the pill forging process. So, he continued infusing his zhenqi into the cauldron, causing the flames to intensify furiously.

The temperature in the cauldron was rising at a terrifying pace.

Soon, the medicinal fluid started bubbling, but Zhang Xuan did not give the order for him to stop. Before long, it looked as if an explosion was on the verge of occurring.

Fu Jiangchen turned to Zhang Xuan and worriedly asked, “Is this enough?”

The medicinal herbs had already fused together, so there should be no need for the flame anymore. Furthermore, if they continued raising the heat, an explosion would really occur.

That would render all their previous efforts futile.

“It isn’t enough yet. Continue raising the heat,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

Fu Jiangchen gritted his teeth as he channeled his zhenqi into the cauldron furiously, causing the flame in the cauldron to surge rapidly once more.

“I have already raised the temperature to the extent of my limits...”

It was just a short five seconds, but the number one apothecary of the Firmament had already started sweating.

Due to the limitations of his cultivation, he could only intensify the flame within the cauldron to this extent. Running out of zhenqi would be a problem if he went any further than

this, but more importantly, he could also lose control of the flame and cause an explosion.

The temperature is still slightly lacking...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

The Grass of God King was a medicinal herb that could thrive even within a spatial vortex, so the temperature needed to be extremely high in order to properly refine it. Even though Fu Jiangchen had managed to raise the temperature considerably, it still was not enough.

“I can’t go any further than this anymore,” Fu Jiangchen said with a pale face. “Furthermore, I only have enough energy to sustain the flame for thirty seconds. Beyond that, my zhenqi will dry up...”

He was infusing as much zhenqi as he could into the cauldron already, so it went without saying that this would take a huge toll on both his zhenqi reserve and his spirit. By his estimations, thirty seconds was truly his limit.

Once he ran out of energy, all his previous hard work would have gone to waste.

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly upon hearing those words.

Despite all his planning, he had failed to plan for Fu Jiangchen’s sorely lacking zhenqi capacity...

Furthermore, if they could not reach the required temperature, it would be futile even if the other party held on for another thirty minutes!

“I guess I have no choice then...”

With a solemn look on his face, Zhang Xuan finally turned his gaze to Fu Jiangchen and started speaking. “You are currently at God King realm advanced stage, and you are already on the verge of making a breakthrough... While that won’t increase your zhenqi capacity by too much, it should increase the purity of your zhenqi considerably. That will allow you to further raise the temperature of the flames inside to meet the requirement.”

This was a very dire situation.

From the looks of it, there was only one way to prevent the pill forging process from failing, and that was for Fu Jiangchen to make a breakthrough in his cultivation!

As long as the latter reached God King realm pinnacle, he would be able to raise the temperature within the cauldron even higher. With that, he would be able to refine the Grass of God King and complete the pill!

Otherwise, all their hard work thus far would go to waste.

“Breakthrough?” Fu Jiangchen was rendered speechless after hearing Zhang Xuan’s words. “Now isn’t the time to be kidding around!”

Fu Jiangchen knew where his limits lay, and if it was possible for him to make a breakthrough, he would have long so. He would not have waited so long.

Furthermore, he was in the midst of forging a pill. It was taking everything just to maintain the flame within the cauldron, yet he was supposed to make a breakthrough under such conditions?

“I’m not kidding with you. This is the only way we can avoid the pill forging from ending in a failure,” Zhang Xuan said. “The reason your cultivation has stagnated thus far is due to your overreliance on pills. That has resulted in pill poison accumulating within your body, and no matter what you did, you aren’t able to rid yourself of it...”

As the saying went, ‘no medicine is devoid of poison’. Even the best pill would still leave all kinds of poison within one’s body. This would not pose much trouble in the short run, but as one’s cultivation rose through the ranks, and the requirement on the purity of one’s zhenqi grew more and more stringent, even the slightest hint of pill poison would make a world of a difference.

As one of the top apothecaries of the Firmament, there was no doubt that Fu Jiangchen had greater access to cultivation resources compared to other God Kings. In fact, it was mostly through pills that he had been able to reach his current realm.

It was inevitable that a huge amount of pill poison would accumulate in his body after consuming so many pills.

“I will help you clear your pill poison right now. There’s no need for you to think of anything except advancing your cultivation!” Zhang Xuan said.

Dozens of silver needles appeared between his fingers with a flick of his wrist.

Weng!

With a gust of wind, all of them flew straight toward Fu Jiangchen’s acupoints.

Fu Jiangchen was initially taken aback by his movements, and his first instinct was to resist the needles. However, he suddenly changed his mind and closed his eyes instead. “Screw it!”

Just like that, the silver needles pierced right into his body.

2200 Pill King

From the moment they started forging the pill, Fu Jiangchen's respect for Zhang Xuan had been increasing exponentially. He could not think of a reason someone who was so skilled in pill forging would want to hurt him.

Money? Fame?

The other party could have all of that just by revealing a sliver of his true skills!

Therefore, he chose to hold himself back and allowed the silver needles to pierce his body.

He knew that he was taking a gamble, but he felt that this gamble would work in his favor.

Pu pu pu!

Surges of zhenqi flowed into his body through the silver needles, and under the gush of energy, the meridians that had been clogged up due to the accumulation of pill poison were swiftly blasted open one after another.

With this, the sealed zhenqi within his body immediately gushed forth, reminiscent of a flood crashing down in the wake of a collapsed dam.

Kacha! Kacha!

The sudden influx of energy elevated his vitality and his zhenqi to a higher level. At the same time, his disposition became more refined and powerful.

With this, he successfully took the last step forward to reach the pinnacle of the God King realm.

"I... made a breakthrough?" Fu Jiangchen was a little stunned.

The bottleneck that he had struggled for so many years to surmount was overcome so easily.

He had once used a favor that he had received from Fairy Linglong to request for her help in curing his condition, but

even she was helpless. Yet, the young man before him had done it so easily?

“It has already been twenty breaths! Stop hesitating and quickly intensify the temperature in the cauldron!” Zhang Xuan bellowed anxiously when he realized that Fu Jiangchen had allowed his mind to wander.

Those words snapped Fu Jiangchen out of his thoughts, and he quickly infused his newfound strength into the cauldron.

All in all, he could only last for thirty seconds, and he had already spent twenty seconds on making a breakthrough. If he did not speed up the process, he might run out of zhenqi before the cauldron reached the required temperature, and that would effectively spell their failure.

That being said, even if it ended in failure, it would still be fine since they had not added the Grass of God King yet. Of all the medicinal herbs within, the one that was nigh impossible to procure was that. Furthermore, the pill formula could always be altered according to what Zhang Xuan had on hand.

The real issue was that... Zhang Xuan simply did not have that much time to spare!

They had spent nearly four hours trying to refine the other 107 medicinal herbs, and they would not be able to make it in time if they had to restart. Not only would they have to waste time gathering a new set of medicinal herbs, Fu Jiangchen would also need some time to recover his energy.

He would not be able to make it back to the Sky of Spirit Origin in time!

So, he had to succeed by hook or by crook!

“Alright!” Fu Jiangchen replied determinedly.

Even though he had managed to make a breakthrough to God King realm pinnacle, he had not managed to cultivate yet, so the amount of zhenqi he had within his body was still roughly the same.

He was not too sure why Zhang Xuan was so adamant about raising the temperature of the cauldron, but he knew that the most important thing that he had to do was follow Zhang Xuan's instructions.

Xiong xiong!

A purer surge of zhenqi rushed into the cauldron, causing the flames to burn with greater fervor. With this, the temperature within the cauldron began rising.

Another five breaths passed, and beads of perspiration flowed down Fu Jiangchen's head. He glanced at Zhang Xuan and said, "I have reached my limits again. I won't be able to raise the temperature any higher than this..."

While he had managed to make a breakthrough, he had not had the opportunity to reinforce his cultivation. If he still had not met the required mark after that, there would really be nothing he could do anymore.

The temperature is high enough. Maintain it!" Zhang Xuan instructed.

He was starting to feel a little tired. He should have known—a drug junkie's cultivation foundation was bound to be weak.

He had thought that the other party would be able to easily raise the temperature of the flames beyond what was required after his breakthrough, but in the end, the other party could only just raise the temperature to what was needed.

This 'what was needed' referred to the minimum temperature required to melt the Grass of God King, but it would not be enough to facilitate a perfect fusion. Due to that, he no longer had complete confidence that the pill could be formed properly.

"Forget it!"

Knowing that he could not afford to hesitate at this point, Zhang Xuan took out four stalks of Grass of God King and infused his Pathos of Heaven zhenqi into them before tossing them into the cauldron.

Boom!

As soon as Zhang Xuan's zhenqi came into contact with the boiling medicinal fluid, the flames within the cauldron suddenly intensified. With this, the temperature rose to a new high.

Huala!

The resilient Grass of God King began melting and fusing with the medicinal fluid.

Three breaths...

Two breaths...

"Hurry up!" Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly together.

It would take some time for the Grass of God King to fuse perfectly with the medicinal fluid, but it was clear that Fu Jiangchen was already at his limits.

One breath!

"I'm sorry. I really can't hold on anymore..."

With a ghastly pale face from overexertion, Fu Jiangchen's body swayed weakly like a noodle before collapsing to the ground.

He had used up the very last droplet of zhenqi he had within his body.

Losing its source of energy, the flame in the cauldron immediately died out, and the temperature within began to plummet.

Hong long!

Fortunately, the instant that the Fu Jiangchen collapsed, the fusion between the medicinal fluid and the Grass of God King had been successfully completed. An intense rumbling echoed from the cauldron as four pills dashed out of the cauldron.

The God King Breakthrough Pills had been completed!

"I don't have the strength to chase the pills anymore..."

Looking at the pills rushing out of the cauldron, Fu Jiangchen felt a little excited yet helpless.

He was glad that he had managed to pull through at the very last moment and successfully fuse the medicinal herbs together to form the pills. It had been a long time since he felt such a sense of accomplishment when he forged a pill.

But due to him running out of strength, he was unable to seal the cauldron with his energy to prevent the pills from escaping. Pills of such tier possessed their own spirit, so if they did not catch them quickly and erase their spirit, they might walk out of this pill forging process empty-handed!

The young man before him, Zhang Xuan, was only a high-tier Celestial God whereas these four pills, despite not having reached the God King realm yet, were already not too far from that.

Even Fu Jiangchen himself would face some difficulties trying to capture those four pills prior to his zhenqi running dry, let alone Zhang Xuan!

In other words...

Even though they had successfully formed the pill, they were doomed to watch helplessly as the pills that they had painstakingly forged flew away.

Wu!

Just as Fu Jiangchen thought, those pills immediately breached the barriers he had set up around the room beforehand and escaped into the sky.

“Why are there so few pills?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Based on his estimations, with four Grass of God King stalks and Fu Jiangchen’s precise pill forging technique, there should have been at least ten pills. He did not think that there would only be four of them.

However, this was not the time for him to be brooding. He swiftly took out his sword and leaped into the air.

Hula!

Countless surges of sword qi burst forth to form a massive net in the air.

A Heart of Intertwined Threads!

Zhang Xuan knew how formidable the pills were, so he did not hesitate to use one of his strongest sword arts against them.

This was the sword art that he had comprehended back when he was in the Azure, but as his comprehension of the Pathos of Heaven deepened, its conceptualization and prowess were enhanced as well. Furthermore, he was executing it with a God King-tier sword.

In an instant, a massive net had already spread loosely all over the sky, encircling all the escaped pills.

Then, with a tug, the net of sword qi immediately began to retract back to Zhang Xuan.

Jijijiji!

The pills struggled desperately, but they were not able to escape the net. Under the effects of the sword qi, their spirits were swiftly vanquished.

With a swipe of his hand, Zhang Xuan collected all the pills and stowed them into a jade container. “Done!”

After capturing all the escaped pills, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. Just as he was about to walk over to Fu Jiangchen to check on his condition, a shadow suddenly flashed past his eyes.

Another pill had emerged from the cauldron, and it bolted away at a speed so fast that before Zhang Xuan could react, it had already dived into the clouds, becoming no more than a black dot in the sky.

“Sh*t, there’s actually a Pill King!” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

Usually, the pills forged within the same cauldron would have the same level of medicinal potency. However, there were exceptions.

Too much Grass of God King had been added to the cauldron given the short fusion process due to Fu Jiangchen running out of energy. This resulted in an unequal distribution of medicinal energy across the pills.

As a result, one pill, otherwise known as the Pill King, ended up taking up the lion's share of the medicinal energy.

In fact, the medicinal energy of the Pill King was several times that of the other pills. In terms of energy, it was already on par with a God King!