

601 Finals 2

Supreme Demented Demon Fist was a secret art passed down within the lineage of the Gazing River Sect. It was never made known to outsiders, and once executed, one's strength would instantaneously rise by a small cultivation realm for a short period of time. However, one's original cultivation would suffer a sharp fall afterward.

It wasn't easy for Bi Jianghai to reach Consonant Spirit realm. If his cultivation were to regress due to this duel, not only it be a pity for Bi Jianghai, it would be a huge loss to the Gazing River Sect as well.

One must know that of the twenty-eight powers in the surroundings, the number of Consonant Spirit realm experts was truly limited. At the very least, it numbered below one hundred.

Not to mention, there was only a total of five of them in Gazing River Sect. An additional one to the lineup could bolster their forces significantly, deterring their enemies while elevating their position.

Besides, the other party was a top-notch genius who had broken innumerable records. If anything were to happen to him, how would their Gazing River Sect face the Master Teacher Pavilion?

"Insane! That fellow has gone insane!" a pale-faced elder uttered hoarsely.

"Can we stop him?" another elder asked, but the only response he received was the shaking of heads from his peers.

The rules of the Master Teacher Tournament prohibited anyone from interfering with an ongoing duel in view of fairness.

"Zhang shi will have to deal with this himself. Let's hope that he can produce a miracle once more!"

“Indeed. But still, I fear that it’s impossible for a Clarifying Turbidity realm primary stage to match a Consonant Spirit realm intermediate stage! Those are two completely different levels. There’s little hope, unless...”

“Unless what?”

“Unless... Zhang shi summons his tamed beast, Demon Cinque Beast!”

“Demon Cinque Beast? You’re right, why didn’t I think of that? As a beast tamer, Zhang shi has the right to bring his tamed beast to battle. With Demon Cinque Beast’s Consonant Spirit realm cultivation, defeating Bi shi would be a walk in the park!”

“Your words make sense, but will Zhang shi do so?”

“This...”

The person who offered the suggestion fell silent.

Even though Zhang shi might seem like a casual person, he had shown that he would never compromise on the fairness of a duel.

Since he had agreed to the duel, he would only use his own strength to triumph over his opponent. It was impossible for him to summon his tamed beast to assist him!

“Don’t think too much, let’s just watch on. Perhaps a miracle might really happen...”

Everyone continued watching the duel nervously.

Master Teacher Tournament emphasizes heavily on fairness. Many people already felt contempt for Bi Jianghai due to him exploiting the other party’s weakness and employing a mutually-assured destruction technique now only fanned the crowd’s displeasure.

On the contrary, Zhang shi, who fought on valiantly despite being in such a dangerous position, won everyone’s admiration instead.

While the crowd was worrying for Zhang shi, the duel on the stage had also reached its climax.

With the execution of the Supreme Demented Demon Fist, Bi Jianghai's cultivation surged, and his maximum strength rose to 2,400,000 ding. His attacks wielded such immense might behind them that it created a feeling of helplessness in those facing it.

"You came just on time!" Without the slightest hint of panic or fear, Zhang Xuan's eyes gleamed in excitement as he charged forward with a howl.

Peng peng peng peng!

The air in the surroundings billowed. The duo crossed blows, and to the crowd's astonishment, they were actually equally-matched.

"This..."

"Zhang shi's cultivation is indeed increasing continuously!"

"Clarifying Turbidity realm primary stage, intermediate stage, advanced stage... How much time has passed since the start of the battle?"

"Pinnacle! He's already at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle! Has it been ten breaths? Or is it twenty? He actually advanced from Clarifying Turbidity realm primary stage to pinnacle in this period of time? How can this be possible?"

...

Everyone thought that with the activation of the Supreme Demented Demon Fist, Zhang shi was doomed. Who could have known that not only did he manage to stand his ground, he was even getting stronger every moment. In just a short twenty breaths, he actually advanced all the way from Clarifying Turbidity realm primary stage to pinnacle!

It felt just like a dream even though they were witnessing the sight with their own eyes.

This was way too fearsome!

There were many who spent decades to progress from Clarifying Turbidity realm primary stage to pinnacle, and yet, in less than a single minute, Zhang shi had managed to achieve

the very same feat while reinforcing his cultivation on top of that!

His rate of progress would leave those who dared to proclaim themselves as geniuses ashamed.

Hong shi's face also paled upon seeing the sight, and he couldn't help but mutter to himself, "To use the pressure from the soul and zhenqi of a Consonant Spirit realm to temper one's body and quicken the separation of 'turbid' and 'clear' so as to raise one's cultivation, even I am miles apart from him in terms of guts and confidence!"

With his eye of discernment, he was able to see through Zhang Xuan's intentions as well.

For a Clarifying Turbidity realm cultivator to face a Consonant Spirit realm expert without fear and even use the latter to temper oneself and break through one's bottleneck, it was hard to tell whether even Pavilion Master Mo would be capable of such a feat.

Hong shi knew that Zhang shi would surely excel in all aspects as a master teacher. After all, with guidance of a potential 8-star master teacher, it would be hard to believe that he was ordinary... But it seemed like he was still underestimating the latter. Even the latter's seeming weakness-his cultivation-was also unmatched by others as well.

It was as if they were people from two different worlds.

"It seems like he is the champion of this tournament."

Only at this moment did Hong shi's floating heart finally find ground.

Pavilion Master Mo Gaoyuan had taken out one high-tier spirit stone to get on good terms with Zhang shi and Yang shi. Fortunately, Hong shi had managed to accomplish the implied mission the he had for him.

As expected of the student of an 8-star master teacher, Zhang shi was truly superior in all aspects, even his fighting prowess and mental fortitude.

Hong!

While anxiety and nervousness overwhelmed the crowd below, on the stage, Zhang Xuan had reached a very profound state of mind.

In truth, the plan to make use of the other party's might to advance his cultivation was just a thought he had all of a sudden. He thought that it would be extremely difficult to succeed, but the results turned out to be much better than he thought.

As concentrated zhenqi flowed through his meridians like a torrent, Zhang Xuan's aura and strength increased qualitatively.

Under normal circumstances, even when using a middle-tier spirit stone, it would take at least two hours before he could reach Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle. But this time, not only did he reach Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle within an extremely short period of time, on top of that, his zhenqi capacity had increased significantly, and his ability to drive zhenqi was also enhanced. All of these would be equivalent to several months of effort, thus saving him a lot of time on cultivation.

At Yin-Yang realm pinnacle, he possessed 1,000,000 ding of strength. At this moment, it had increased by twofold to 2,000,000 ding!

Factoring in the strength of 1,600,000 ding derived from his soul cultivation, it totaled up to 3,600,000 ding. With such might, he could kill even a Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle expert with a single punch.

After all, a normal Consonant Spirit realm cultivator would only possess 2,000,000 ding of might in primary stage, 2,400,000 ding in intermediate stage, 2,800,000 ding in advanced stage, and 3,200,000 ding in pinnacle!

Power!

While he was enjoying the changes his body was undergoing, Bi Jianghai was about to go insane.

Under normal circumstances, his opponent should have been subdued after executing his ultimate technique.

Who knew that... the more he fought, the colder his heart became. He had tried all means and tricks, but it seemed as though the other party could deal with his attacks leisurely as though they were nothing. This made him feel extremely embarrassed, and he found his tolerance hitting its limit.

“I’ll destroy you!”

Roaring furiously, he utilized every ounce of energy contained within his body without any reservations.

The rampaging zhenqi gushed out as though a torrent, swallowing Zhang Xuan whole in an instant.

“This is bad!”

Hong shi, Pavilion Master Kang, and the others narrowed their eyes.

This was no longer just a duel anymore. With such frenzied offense, this was already at the level of a life-and-death combat. The slightest mistake could lead to the death of one party.

“This is madness! He has gone mad!”

The faces of the elders of Gazing River Sect turned ghastly pale.

Even though they weren’t present in the encounter with Yang shi, they had heard some secret intelligence from their sources and knew that Zhang shi’s background was extraordinary.

Otherwise, given how many artifacts and humans he had broken, he would have already been stripped of his rights as a participant of this tournament. It wasn’t just once that they had seen the frenzied expression of the usually composed Hong shi in the course of this tournament, and the fact that he still allowed Zhang shi to continue despite all of the trouble he had caused affirmed their doubts.

To actually try to kill a figure with such powerful backing with all your might, what else can you be if not insane?

Just as everyone was panicking, Zhang Xuan, whose consciousness had finally returned from feeling his internal

changes, noticed the rampaging energy before him. Thus, he casually waved his palm.

Boom!

A cloud of dust flew up. But even amidst the cloud of dust...

Sou!

Bi Jianghai, who had channeled all of his strength against Zhang Xuan, was sent flying as though a mosquito struck by a fly swat. In an instant, just like Wu Tianhao from before, he flew into the sky.

“Ah?”

“What happened?”

“I’ve no idea too. I saw Zhang shi casually waving his palm and Bi shi was suddenly sent flying...”

Everyone was dumbstruck.

After so many matches, they had a clear gauge of Zhang shi’s strength already. Going by rational deduction, he should have been pummeled to the point that his head would have swollen to the size reminiscent to that of a pig’s head already. Yet, not only was he completely fine, the Consonant Spirit realm Bi shi was sent flying instead... What in the world happened?

When did Zhang shi become so mighty?

“This...”

Seeing Bi shi sent flying into the distance, Zhang Xuan finally awakened fully from his trance, and his eyes widened in shock. Scratching his head helplessly, he was extremely tempted to cry. He quickly tried to explain himself, “I didn’t do it intentionally...”

His concentration had lapsed for a moment due to his breakthrough, thus resulting in him overexerting his strength. On top of that, he also didn’t expect that seemingly formidable fellow a moment ago would be so weak...

What in the world was this? It was one thing for him to injure those participants before, but now, he even sent his opponent of the finals flying with a single slap. At this point, all he

could see of the other party was a black dot... If he were to say that he didn't do it intentionally, would anyone believe him?

“Bi shi...”

Seeing the genius of their sect disappearing further and further from sight, the few elders whose heart was hanging a moment ago heaved a huge sigh of relief.

“Hong shi and everyone else, it's due to the lack of discipline in our Gazing River Sect that we nearly caused a huge calamity. We'll bring Bi Jianghai back now and teach him a lesson immediately. We're too embarrassed to accept second place...”

One of the elders-in-charge of Gazing River Sect stood up and apologized in embarrassment.

In the Master Teacher Tournament, everyone knew the accepted limits and stopped appropriately. On the other hand, the genius of their sect actually tried to kill his opponent. If not for Zhang shi achieving a breakthrough at the very last moment, he might have actually died.

With such lack in decorum, it could be said that they had infringed on the rules of the tournament. Even if no one spoke a word, they would still be too embarrassed to remain here.

“This...”

Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

What in the world are you talking about? If that's the case, shouldn't my right as a participant have been revoked for many times already?

“Elder, you are being too harsh on yourself. Bi shi only lost his calmness and struck a little harshly due to my provocative actions. In truth, he hasn't caused any damage at all. Why don't we just call it quits...”

“You're willing to let the matter go? Thank you, Zhang shi!”

Hearing Zhang shi plead on behalf of their sect, the faces of the elders of Gazing River Sect reddened in agitation, and the entire group knelt to the floor.

Did you see that?

This is the magnanimity a master teacher should have!

Bi Jianghai watched tearfully in the air. 'Magnanimity? I would love to have it as well. But to do so... I would have to defeat this monster first...'

602 Combat Soul Constitution

“Alright. Since the champion of our tournament is already decided, let’s move on to determine the other placings...”

After calming down the agitated crowd, Hong shi continued on with the tournament.

At the current moment, only the first and second places were decided. The tournament still had to go on to determine the third to the tenth place.

After all the excitement, the crowd was lacking in interest for the duels that followed. Two hours later, the top ten places for the Master Teacher Tournament were finally out.

Wei Yuqing, who suffered a tragic defeat against Zhang Xuan, performed extraordinarily well in the remaining duels and successfully advanced into the top ten. Qin Lei, who was eliminated by Ruohuan gongzi back then, also displayed spectacular abilities and clinched ninth place.

Actually, if not for Zhang Xuan’s interference, he would be at least in the top five placing. Nevertheless, being in the ninth place, he was at least granted the opportunity to become a student of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy as well, thus making this trip worthwhile.

“Zhang shi, here is your prize!”

Once the placings were confirmed, the prizes were given out. The first place was given a high-tier spirit stone, an opportunity to study at Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, and three days to cultivate in the Cleansing Lake.

While presenting the prize to Zhang Xuan, Hong shi sent a telepathic message over. “Zhang shi, the high-tier spirit stone is a private gift from Pavilion Master Mo Gaoyuan to the participant in the first place...”

Since Pavilion Master Mo intended to express his goodwill to Zhang shi and Yang shi, naturally, his name should be made known to the other party. Otherwise, wouldn't everything be done in vain?

Only then did Zhang Xuan come to a realization.

This explained why the prize this year was much more generous than previous years!

In truth, it wasn't too difficult to guess this. Given 'Yang shi's' astounding means, it was natural that Pavilion Master Mo would want to get on his good side.

In any case, this matter was beneficial to Zhang Xuan.

After all, that was a high-tier spirit stone! Its value was equivalent to ten thousand middle-tier spirit stone. If not to embarrass himself, Zhang Xuan would have surely opened the jade box then and started examining the spirit stone already.

Placing the prize carefully in his storage ring, Zhang Xuan was filled with agitation and excitement.

With a high-tier spirit stone in his possession, his future cultivation would become much easier. At least in the short run, he wouldn't have to worry about spiritual energy anymore.

After distributing the prizes, Hong shi announced, "Alright. The Master Teacher Tournament has come to a conclusion. The top three of the tournament shall follow me to Huanyu Empire tomorrow to claim their prize of cultivating in the Cleansing Lake!"

"Tomorrow?"

"So soon?"

"There's no choice. Huanyu Empire is more than a million kilometers away, and if we don't rush there, we might miss the opening of the Cleansing Lake. If so, we might miss this opportunity!"

"That's true. The Cleansing Lake opens at the start of the year for each opening, and there's barely a month until then. If we don't rush now, we might fail to make it in time..."

Upon hearing from Hong shi that they were leaving tomorrow, the participants were astonished. However, they soon understood his intentions.

The Cleansing Lake was the most valuable treasure of the Huanyu Empire's royalty, as well as the foundation of its establishment. The grounds would be opened once every decade, and it wasn't too long to it now. If they didn't hurry now, they might just miss this opportunity by.

"Alright, you should return to make preparations. We'll set off tomorrow noon!"

Hong shi waved his hands to dismiss the group.

By now, it was already late at night, and the time left for them to prepare was less than a day.

"I should also make some preparations!"

Zhang Xuan stood up.

There were many things he had to deal with, and time was tight.

"Pavilion Master Kang, thank you for your care during this period of time. This is a cultivation technique my teacher prepared for you, and if you were to cultivate it accordingly, it should assist you in reaching Consonant Spirit realm!"

Flicking his wrist, a book appeared in Zhang Xuan's palm as he passed it over.

Pavilion Master Kang had really helped him a lot during this period of time, especially the trip to the Glacier Plain Court. Without his help, it would be impossible for him to nurture his soul sufficiently so as to divide into two and successfully forge his clone. At the same time, Zhao Ya wouldn't have met with such a rare opportunity either.

As such, Zhang Xuan specially compiled a cultivation technique manual to deal with the various flaws the other party suffered from. As long as the other party cultivated along with it, it would just be a matter of time before he reached Consonant Spirit realm.

“Reach Consonant Spirit realm? This cultivation technique was prepared by Yang shi?”

Pavilion Master Kang’s breathing immediately hastened, and his eyes reddened in agitation.

Yang shi, an existence likely to be an 8-star master teacher. Just receiving a single pointer from such a person was a huge blessing in itself. To think that he would even have a cultivation technique created just for him, he truly had no idea how he could ever repay this favor.

Putong!

Pavilion Master Kang kneeled onto the floor, and with a grim expression, he kowtowed eight times toward Zhang Xuan’s residence before standing up.

“Su shi and Ling shi, these are yours...”

Of course, Zhang Xuan couldn’t possibly forget about these two. Without them, he wouldn’t have been able to participate in the Master Teacher Tournament.

After receiving the cultivation technique, Su shi and Ling shi also thanked him profusely.

Zhang Xuan had always remembered grudges and favors clearly.

“Zhang shi, can I follow you to Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy?”

Knowing that Zhang Xuan was about to leave, Zhao Feiwu’s eyes reddened.

This young man had solved her ailment, granting her a whole new life. Gratitude, along with the experiences at Xuanyuan Kingdom, soul oracle tomb, and such, had left her with an indescribable emotion toward the latter. Just that, she was too embarrassed to face her own emotions.

But now that separation was right before them, she couldn’t hold herself back anymore.

After pondering for a moment, Zhang Xuan said, “Your cultivation is still too low, you might stumble into a lot of

trouble if you were to head there now. It would be safer if you study under Pavilion Master Kang here!”

After which, he turned to the elder beside him and said grimly, “Pavilion Master Kang, I’ll be entrusting Princess Feiwu to you!”

“Hehe, Zhang shi, you need not worry. I’ll take her in as my direct disciple and teach her well. I won’t let you or Yang shi down!” Pavilion Master Kang gave his word.

“Thank you!” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist.

Actually, this was also another reason why he gave Pavilion Master Kang the cultivation technique manual.

Along the way, Zhao Feiwu had helped him a lot. As the daughter of the alliance head, she was unlikely to care much about fortune, resources, or so. Rather than that, it would be more practical to help her find a good teacher. This way, she would be able to live the life she wanted.

And Pavilion Master Kang was clearly the most suitable choice.

“Thank you, Zhang shi...”

Hearing the arrangements, Zhao Feiwu flashed a bitter smile and thanked Zhang shi. She found the entire matter hard to accept, but knowing that Zhang shi was doing this with her welfare at heart, she eventually nodded her head.

Zhang shi was destined to achieve great things in the future. A small, little princess of the alliance like her couldn’t possibly compare to him. No matter how reluctant she was, she knew she had to let go.

After bidding Pavilion Master Kang and the others farewell, Zhang Xuan returned to his residence. The moment he entered, he saw Mo Hunsheng walking over with widened strides.

“Zhang shi!”

Mo Hunsheng clasped his fist.

“How is it?” Zhang Xuan asked.

He had asked the latter regarding Lu Chong's condition even before joining the Master Teacher Tournament. After a day of effort, the latter should have some results by now.

“Reporting to young master, Young Master Lu Chong has just finished his cultivation, and I've taken a look at his condition. If I'm not mistaken, it's a unique constitution among soul oracles... [Combat Soul Constitution]!” Mo Hunsheng said.

“Unique constitution?” Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

If the latter really had a unique constitution, the Library of Heaven's Path should have already long detected it. How could it elude him?

“Combat Soul Constitution is not something one is born with. Usually, it is developed after a life-and-death experience or a wave of immense emotions. Such a constitution is extremely rare and cannot be emulated by any means. If I'm not mistaken, Young Master Lu Chong has only just awakened it...” Mo Hunsheng explained.

“Let's go over to take a look!”

Nodding his head, Zhang Xuan walked into the courtyard.

Not too far from the corridor, Lu Chong was cultivating while standing. His soul was dancing in the air, and it seemed to carry a majestic aura to it.

“Transcendent Mortal 2-dan soul?” Zhang Xuan's eyes widened in shock.

When he left earlier this morning, the latter was still at Zongshi realm only. How could he become so powerful over a single day?

Soul cultivation was similar to zhenqi cultivation in the sense that it was slow and accumulative. To actually break through four cultivation realms-Zhizun, Half-Transcension, Prolonged Longevity, and Origin Energy realm-in a single day... that was really way too fast!

“Flaws!”

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan willed.

Weng!

With a soft buzz, a book appeared in the Library of Heaven's Path.

Quickly flipping it open, Zhang Xuan swiftly browsed through the content and froze.

Lu Chong was indeed different from before. Just as Mo Hunsheng said, he had awoken the Combat Soul Constitution.

But from the looks of it, this awakening seemed to be incomplete.

Recalling what he encountered in the other party's consciousness, a thought emerged in Zhang Xuan's head.

'This is probably what I saw back then...'

Back then, when he used the Soulrouse Incense to wake up the other party's soul, he had seen a gigantic figure lying in the other party's consciousness. Thinking about it now, that should be the result of the Combat Soul Constitution.

"Regarding this constitution... How can it be awakened?"

Zhang Xuan glanced at the Soulless Metal Humanoid before him.

After a moment of contemplation, Mo Hunsheng replied, "Reporting to young master, it's extremely troublesome to awaken such a constitution totally. It might require a visit to the Ancient Domain of Soul Oracles!"

"Ancient Domain of Soul Oracles?" Zhang Xuan was stunned.

Mo Hunsheng hesitated for a moment before he said, "Yes, that is the place where soul oracles originate from. In the Ancient Domain of Soul Oracles, one can find the energy of ancient souls, that is a crucial catalyst to awakening the Combat Soul Constitution completely. There's no other way around it!"

"Ancient Domain of Soul Oracles? Where is that?"

"It is... at the utmost east of the continent. I also don't know exactly how far it is from here..." Mo Hunsheng scratched his head.

“You don’t know how far it is from here?” Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

If it was too far, how was he supposed to head there?

The Master Teacher Continent was incomparably vast, and even several hundred thousand kilometers would require many days of flight. Yet, from Mo Hunsheng’s tone, it was apparent that he meant a distance of dozens or even a hundred million kilometers...

Without several years of traveling, it was impossible to cover such distance.

“Actually... if young master trusts me, I can take Young Master Lu Chong there. This way, it won’t interrupt your cultivation while allowing Young Master Lu Chong to grow swiftly,” Mo Hunsheng said.

“You’ll take him there?”

Zhang Xuan fell into deep contemplation.

If he wanted to climb up as a master teacher, he would have to remain in public view. Furthermore, with the threat known as the Innate Fetal Poison looming above him, spending several years searching for the Ancient Domain of Soul Oracles was clearly too much of a luxury for him to afford.

However, if he were to delay Lu Chong’s growth by forcing the other party to follow him, it would indeed be unfair for the other party.

The ideal situation was indeed to split up.

“We’ll see what he thinks!”

After a moment of thought, Zhang Xuan felt that Lu Chong should have the right to decide.

Thus, he interrupted Lu Chong’s cultivation and explained the matter to him.

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, the young man nodded his head earnestly.

“Teacher, I wish to go to the Ancient Domain of Soul Oracles!”

He shared the same thoughts as Zhao Ya when she made her decision back then. He knew that he would only be a burden if he were to remain by his teacher's side. If he were to grasp this opportunity, he might be able to be of true use to his teacher in the future.

He didn't wish to remain as a burden to his teacher.

“Since you've made up your mind, I'll respect your decision. Mo Hunsheng, I'll be leaving Lu Chong to your care!”

Seeing that Lu Chong had made his decision, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply before nodding his head.

603 Lecture 1

There would eventually come a day when a student would have to leave their teacher.

Zhang Xuan understood this fact, and he knew he would have to part with his students one day. Ever since the incident with Zhao Ya, he had been preparing himself mentally. But even so, he still found himself gripped with reluctance when faced with the situation.

“This is a surge of zhenqi from me. It should help you if you face danger!”

Pulling Lu Chong to a room, Zhang Xuan began delegating some matters to him.

His plight was very different from that of Zhao Ya. Zhao Ya would be taken care of by the Glacier Plain Court, and it was unlikely that she would be in any danger. On the other hand, Lu Chong and Mo Hunsheng would be traversing across the continent to search for a place which might not even exist. The journey would be fraught with danger, and this surge of zhenqi may help to protect them, even if just once.

“Demon Cinque, you shall follow Lu Chong...”

After instructing some matters, Zhang Xuan called Demon Cinque Beast over.

While safety shouldn't be a problem given that a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan expert, Mo Hunsheng, was escorting him, they would still require an aerial spirit beast for their travel. As a Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beast, Demon Cinque Beast should prove to be useful for them.

After settling all of the issues he could foresee, he brought Lu Chong to Wang Ying and the others for them to bid their farewell.

Two of the original six students have left, and everyone couldn't help but feel slightly depressed.

After settling the arrangements regarding Lu Chong, Zhang Xuan went to look for his 'junior', Garden Owner Xue.

For the time being, the latter didn't have any intention of heading to a higher-tier empire, so she wasn't going to tag along with Zhang Xuan.

By the time everything was done, the sun was already up in the sky, and it was soon going to be the meeting time with Hong shi and the others.

"Let's go!"

With everything settled, Zhang Xuan proceeded to the square near the Alliance Head Residence with Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, and the other students beside him.

Since he had promised to conduct a lecture, he decided to settle this too before leaving.

However, before he could even reach the square, he could already see an uncountable number of people in the square, stretching all the way to the limits of his eyes.

"Sect Leader Hu, you're here to listen to Zhang shi's lecture as well?"

"Well, this is the first champion of the Master Teacher Tournament who won with such a huge landslide. Since he is going to conduct a lecture, there's no way I can miss this!"

"Indeed. There are several centuries of history behind the Master Teacher Tournament already, and Zhang Xuan is the first person to achieve such astounding records. Look, even Sect Leader Zhi and Sect Leader Liu are here..."

"You're right! Even Hong shi's lectures wouldn't be met with such popularity..."

"I don't know about how popular Hong shi's lectures are, but at the very least, we half 5-star master teachers wouldn't be able to match up to this..."

"There are so many people here that I can't help but feel envious. Speaking of which, I tried putting myself into Zhang shi's position in the tournament, but I realized that I wouldn't be able to emulate his achievements at all! To think that a

person who has just passed the 4-star master teacher examination would be able to achieve feats beyond that of a half 5-star master teacher... It is no wonder why he enjoys such exploding popularity!”

...

The entire square was full of life.

“All of them are here to listen to my lecture?”

Zhang Xuan blinked his eyes in shock.

In his view, it would already be a huge achievement if several thousand people were to attend his lecture on the basics of cultivation. Never could he have expected that he would be able to rally so many people here. For a moment, he even suspected that there was a second, hidden stage to the Master Teacher Tournament that he was unaware of.

How many people are there here?

Hundred thousand? A million?

Not to mention... There were many who were hanging on walls and standing on trees as though ninjas as well.

And what is with those aerial savage beasts in the sky?

“I heard that those who were unable to get a seat in your lecture went to rent savage beasts from the Beast Hall...” Pavilion Master Kang explained awkwardly.

“I understand the part about aerial savage beast, but what about those grounded ones?”

Zhang Xuan couldn't help but ask about them.

He could understand the reason behind the mass of aerial savage beasts in the sky, but by the side of the square, there was also a bunch of land savage beasts lying down. There was the Sabretooth Tiger, Half-limbed Gale Wolf, Sable Ape...

What were they doing here?

“After hearing that you were going to conduct a lecture, Hall Master Han Chong of the Beast Hall sent all of the savage

beasts and spirit beasts in the Beast Hall over to support you,” Pavilion Master Kang said.

“...” Zhang Xuan.

This could be called support as well?

Just the beast tamers would suffice; what kind of support are you giving me through sending this bunch of savage beasts over?

“Actually, Zhang Shi’s reputation is simply too great. Knowing that you are going to conduct a lecture, there is no one who is willing to be left out!” Pavilion Master Kang said.

In truth, Hall Master Han had no choice either... After the Master Teacher Tournament, Zhang Shi’s reputation exploded. Everyone wanted to listen to the lecture that was to be conducted by this top-notch genius... Even the intelligent savage beasts and spirit beasts couldn’t hold themselves back...

And thus, such a sight occurred.

The square outside the Alliance Head Residence was extremely vast, and it could contain even a million people at once. And yet, at this very moment, it was so cramped that there was hardly room for one to fidget. Even Pavilion Master Kang himself found such a sight unbelievable.

He had conducted similar public lectures before, and with fifty thousand people participating, that event was proclaimed to have changed the history of Myriad Kingdom Alliance Master Teacher Pavilion. Never in his dreams did he expect the popularity of Zhang Shi’s lecture to be so over the top...

There were indeed vast differences even among fellow humans...

“Forget it. It doesn’t matter how many people are here, I just have to conduct my lecture properly!”

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan decided not to think too much into it. Thus, he raised his foot and began heading toward the stage at the very center of the square.

...

Li Hanbing was sixteen this year, and he was a beggar. He had been an orphan as far as he could remember, and he had always been a subject of mockery and a target for humiliation.

His greatest dream was to become an expert, but what a pity it was... His humble background disallowed him from obtaining any cultivation technique or cultivation resources.

As the saying goes, the poor study and the rich train. Without sufficient resources to back up one's cultivation and the guidance of teachers, it was difficult for him to make any progress.

As such, despite being sixteen this year, he was still trapped in Fighter 1-dan Juxi realm, unable to make any progress.

Most probably, he would remain this way for his entire life.

He thought that it would be impossible for him to ever listen to the lecture of a master teacher. But one day, he suddenly heard that an incredibly talented master teacher known as Zhang shi was going to conduct a public lecture on the basics of cultivation... Upon hearing this news, he rushed to the square the night before to secure a spot for himself before waiting patiently.

“It's starting...”

After a long wait, he saw a figure walking majestically up the stage.

“This Zhang shi doesn't seem much older than me...”

He thought that the champion of the Master Teacher Tournament would at least be in his late thirties, but the latter didn't even seem to have reached his twenties yet. He couldn't help but feel a tinge of disappointment.

He had waited for an entire day, but at this moment, he feared that he might have only wasted his time.

Would his hopes fall flat once again, just as they had many times before?

In truth, the Master Teacher Pavilion would organize public lectures every month, but the content tended to be rather profound. An orphan like him who had never gone through

proper education wouldn't understand a single word of it, and thus, wouldn't benefit from it as well.

He had tried attending those several times, but he quickly realized that it was futile. On the contrary, he lost confidence instead.

There were some master teachers, who like proud academics, wished to be recognized and wanted to be respected for their work. There was no problem with this, but they treated these public lectures as a platform to showcase their knowledge... and if the content of their lecture was too simple, it would seem as though they were incapable.

As such thoughts proliferated among the master teachers, the culture behind the public lectures seemed to change as well. Earnest cultivators attending the lecture soon realized that those lectures were impractical for them.

Considering the young age and astounding accomplishments of the person on the stage, it was likely he would just be yet another proud master teacher fishing for glory through this public lecture. It seemed that... he would only be disappointed once again.

“Seeking the Heaven's Path can be viewed as an arrow placed against a bowstring. Too high, it has to be lowered; too low, it has to be raised; too taut, it has to be loosened; too loose, it has to be tightened. Heaven's Path is about supplementing one's deficiencies with one's strengths...”

Hu!

A voice sounded in his ear.

Even though he was a thousand meters away from the stage, every single word of Zhang shi reached his ears with resounding clarity.

“As expected, I don't understand it at all...”

Listening attentively, he realized that this public lecture was no different from those he had attended before. He couldn't understand a word at all.

In the end, all master teachers were cut from the same cloth. Public lectures were just platforms for them to boast about their knowledge; it mattered not to them whether it was meaningful to their audience or not.

And those audiences were also equally hypocritical... For fear of exposing their ignorance, instead of questioning the lecturer, they feigned understanding and even showered the lecturer with praises.

After all, if one turned out to be the only unknowledgeable one in the room, how embarrassing would that be?

This is simply human nature...

Shaking his head in disappointment, Li Hanbing stood up and prepared to leave. But right after he took his first step, he suddenly felt a jolt in his acupoint. Following which, he felt a numbing sensation in his Baihai acupoint, and a huge wave of spiritual energy was drawn in from the surroundings and circulated continuously throughout his body.

Kacha! Kacha!

With a crisp sound, he noticed something similar to small lake appearing within his lower abdomen.

“This is... dantian?”

Li Hanbing’s eyes widened in shock, and his body trembled.

After breaking through Fighter 1-dan Juxi realm, one would form a dantian in one’s lower abdomen, allowing one to store spiritual energy... Li Hanbing had been trapped in Juxi realm for a very long time, and he thought that this would remain so... Who could have known that a few words from Zhang shi would actually induce a breakthrough within him?

“But I don’t understand the content of the lecture at all? Why am I still able to achieve a breakthrough?”

Li Hanbing was stunned.

He didn’t understand a single word of what Zhang shi said, so... how could he have suddenly achieved a breakthrough?

Shouldn't the lecture be ineffective to his cultivation if he couldn't understand a word of it?

Raising his head to look around, he saw several beggars, who had come here along with him, sitting on the floor with smiles overflowing with happiness on their faces. Their auras had also grown significantly stronger.

“Heaven's Path is about supplementing one's deficiencies with one's strengths... So, this is the law of nature. It means that only if we cultivate alongside the flow of nature can we improve quickly...”

Suddenly, a thought emerged in his head.

Even though the other party's words were extremely profound, completely incomprehensible to him, but for some reason, he could understand the intent behind the other party's words as though they were conceptualizing right before him.

Heaven's Path, the law of nature!

Quickly sitting down, he felt his spiritual energy flowing slowly through his dantian.

Kacha! Kacha!

A crisp echo sounded from his body again and yet again as his cultivation soared non-stop.

Dantian realm primary stage!

Dantian realm intermediate stage!

Dantian realm advanced stage!

His cultivation rose quickly as though he were a balloon and someone was blowing into him.

He still couldn't understand the other party's words, but for some reason, he was still able to gain a much deeper understanding of what cultivation was... and it aligned with his own comprehension of it as well.

“This is the lecture of a true master teacher...”

As though having drunk a heavenly brew, a smile slowly crept onto Li Hanbing's face.

His happiness wasn't derived from his rise in cultivation, but the knowledge that was slowly building up within him. He could actually understand the intent behind the other party's words clearly! It was as if the lecturer, Zhang shi, was conducting a one-to-one lesson for him!

As he listened on, the spiritual energy in his body continued circulating, and all of a sudden, his body jolted lightly-Fighter 3-dan Zhenqi realm, reached!

Zhenqi realm could be considered as one's official inauguration as a cultivator. To think that a beggar like him could actually reach such a level as well...

Zhang shi, from today onward, you will be the only teacher I will ever recognize!

Li Hanbing kneeled onto the floor as he made a solemn vow.

604 Lecture 2

In the vast main hall of the Fleeting Cloud Sect's base in Myriad Kingdom City, Sect Leader Luo Huang glanced at the young man before him.

“Others might not have realized anything in the previous duel, but don't think you can hide it from me. I've been your teacher for more than decade now!”

“I knew that I wouldn't be able to hide it from you...”

Smiling bitterly, Luo Xuan admitted to it frankly. “I did hold myself back in the duel with Bi Jianghai!”

“For what reason?” Sect Leader Luo Huang asked.

“Given Zhang shi's ability, there's no doubt that he would be able to progress on to the finals. If I were to defeat Bi shi, I would have to face him. As teacher knows, our relationship with Zhang shi is rather poor at the moment. Rather than worsen the conflict with him... I might as well forfeit and allow the Gazing River Sect to deal with this trouble!”

Luo Xuan clasped his fist, and with an apologetic look, he continued, “Teacher, please pardon me for making such a decision of my own accord!”

“Good. The fact that you were able to think that far means that you've already grown up!”

Sect Leader Luo Huang nodded his head in satisfaction.

“Don't worry. Not only am I not blaming you for that, I even want to commend you for your decision! To be able to weigh the pros and cons in the midst of a tournament and make such a decision is indeed no easy feat. Regardless of whether it is Zhang shi or Yang shi, they aren't people we can afford to cross. It's best that we stay out of their path for the moment and slowly mend our relationship with them in the future!”

“Yes. I was also thinking the same!” Luo Xuan nodded.

Seeing his student becoming so sensible, putting the welfare of the sect before his own pride, Sect Leader Luo Huang felt gratified. Stroking his beard, he asked, “So, you’ve seen Zhang shi’s capabilities with your eyes. What do you think about it?”

“Zhang shi?”

A sharp gleam flashed across Luo Xuan eyes, “I can’t deny that he’s a difficult opponent. There are even several aspects which I am inferior to him in... But if I had proceeded to the finals and challenged him in a duel, I don’t think that I would have lost!”

“Oh?” Sect Leader Luo Huang glanced at Luo Xuan in interest.

“Taking the round on knowledge impartation for example, even though he seemed to have fared impressively, if I’m not mistaken, he probably resorted to hypnotism. Otherwise, how could all of the hundred people possibly acknowledge him?” Luo Xuan declared confidently.

Smiling lightly, Sect Leader Luo Huang replied, “You said that he resorted to hypnotism, but what about Huang shi? He also acknowledged Zhang shi as well!”

In that duel, Zhang Xuan even made Huang Zheng desperately attempt to acknowledge him as his teacher, and the incident had made him a huge laughingstock. While the hundred people on the stage could have been hypnotized, how could a 4-star pinnacle master teacher be hypnotized that easily?

Hearing his teacher’s words, Luo Xuan sneered coldly, “Actually, if it wasn’t for how ridiculous he was behaving, I’d not have seen through Zhang shi’s ploy. How could a 4-star pinnacle master teacher possessing a Soul Depth beyond 14.0 possibly willingly acknowledge Zhang shi, who wasn’t even using Impartation of Heaven’s Will then, as his teacher? This in itself is a huge joke!”

As a fellow 4-star pinnacle master teacher, Luo Xuan knew how formidable and proud experts of his class were. If Zhang shi had used Impartation of Heaven’s Will, there might still be

a possibility of it happening; after all, one would be forced to move contrary to one's will. However, to win over Huang shi with just basic knowledge of cultivation in itself... Are you trying to fool a three-year-old kid?

"He must have feigned it to please Zhang shi. But in the end, his acting turned out to be too poor, and his plan backfired on him!" Luo Xuan harrumphed.

Even a 5-star master teacher couldn't possibly win over a 4-star master teacher by lecturing on basic knowledge. If Zhang shi was truly capable of such a feat, it would mean that his capability already surpasses that of a 5-star master teacher!

"It's a rational argument. Is that the reason why you refused to attend his public lecture?" Sect Leader Luo Huang nodded in agreement.

They had heard of Zhang shi's public lecture, but they didn't think there was any need for them to attend it.

"It's just a lecture on basic knowledge, what is there to listen to? In the end, it all boils down to the same old things. I'm sure I could conduct one as well as his, so there's no point wasting my time there," Luo Xuan replied. After which, he clasped his fist confidently and said, "Teacher, I wish to attempt a breakthrough to Consonant Spirit realm right now. Can you guard me for a moment?"

"Hehe, don't worry about it!" Sect Leader Luo Huang smiled.

"Thank you, teacher!" Replying gratefully, Luo Xuan sat on the floor, closed his eyes, and began cultivating.

In truth, he could have made a breakthrough during the fight with Bi Jianghai as well, but he intentionally suppressed his cultivation.

Once he achieved that breakthrough, his strength would soar. By then, he wouldn't have a legitimate reason to lose to the other party anymore.

Gugugugu!

Energy flowed through his body, creating a sound reminiscent to the croaking of frogs. Luo Xuan drove his cultivation

swiftly in an attempt to break through the final wall blocking his path.

“Hmm? Why can’t I absorb any spiritual energy?”

But a moment later, he opened his eyes.

No matter how hard he tried to draw in spiritual energy, it was completely ineffective. It was as if the spiritual energy in the air was dried out, rendering him incapable of cultivating.

“Sect leader! Sect leader! Bad news...”

Just as he was perplexed by the bizarre situation, an anxious voice suddenly sounded, and Luo Xuan’s junior suddenly dashed into the room.

“For you to get so anxious, what’s wrong?” Sect Leader Luo Huang’s face darkened.

“It’s Zhang shi’s lecture...” the junior hurriedly said.

“What’s wrong with the lecture? Did he create a miracle with the basic knowledge of cultivation?”

Luo Xuan shook his head. Following which, a frown appeared on his forehead, and he questioned, “Didn’t teacher ban everyone from attending the lecture? Did you all sneak out?”

“We... didn’t go to listen to the lecture. We only went to take a look!” The junior’s face turned crimson.

The sect leader did order that no one was to listen to the lecture, but out of curiosity, they sneaked out and saw something that they should have never seen there.

“Take a look? What did you see then?” Luo Xuan asked.

“We saw... in Zhang shi’s lecture, spiritual energy was pouring into the square, and many who had been trapped in their bottleneck achieved a breakthrough during the lecture...” the junior said.

“Spiritual energy was pouring into the square? How could that be possible!”

Luo Xuan shook his head.

Spirit Gathering Diction, this is an ability that only 5-star master teachers possess!

How could a 4-star master teacher possibly influence the spiritual energy in the surroundings to such an extent, not to mention, while lecturing on basic knowledge?

“It’s true! If you doubt my words, you can try sensing the spiritual energy in the surroundings...” the junior quickly said.

“Spiritual energy?”

Gedeng!

Luo Xuan suddenly recalled his inability to draw in spiritual energy a moment ago.

Just as astonishment struck him, his teacher narrowed his eyes and began trembling uncontrollably. “This is... Spirit Gathering Diction, Ten Li of Vacuum!”

(Li = 0.5km, 10li = 5km)

“Ten Li of Vacuum?”

The two were taken aback.

They had heard of Spirit Gathering Diction-it was an ability that only 5-star master teachers possessed. What does ‘Ten Li of Vacuum’ means?”

“I-it’s... an ability that only 6-star master teachers possess...” Sect Leader Luo Huang’s lips trembled as his eyes widened. It seemed like even he dared not believe this to be true.

“6-star master teacher?”

Luo Xuan and the junior trembled in astonishment.

“Rumor has it that 6-star master teachers are able to gather spiritual energy within a ten li radius through their diction for those cultivating under their tutelage, forming a huge vacuum...”

Sect Leader Luo Huang’s teeth clattered together. “Under such a situation, a cultivator would grow at a swift pace that is not any inferior to Cultivation Impartation...”

“Zhang shi is only a 4-star master teacher, and the topic he is lecturing on is only basic knowledge of cultivation. How could the ability that only 6-star master teachers possess be triggered?”

Luo Xuan was in disbelief.

It was just a moment ago that he declared confidently that the other party had cheated in a knowledge impartation match. Yet, in the blink of an eye, the other party had drawn in spiritual energy from a ten li radius for his lecture...

Are you serious?

“No matter how he did it, hurry up and gather the members of our sect and have them attend the lecture! Otherwise, our Fleeting Cloud Sect will lag behind the other sects, and it won't be long before we lose our title as the strongest power...”

Sect Leader Luo Huang immediately stood up in a panic.

A lecture that could create ‘Ten Li of Vacuum’ would definitely be highly beneficial to one's future cultivation... And yet, their entire sect actually missed it! The loss they suffered from this oversight in decision was incalculable!

It could be foreseen that the sects who went to listen to the lecture would surely find their overall fighting prowess soaring, and it would just be a matter of time before they surpassed their Fleeting Cloud Sect.

This was especially so for the Myriad Kingdom Alliance. Most of the people who attended the lecture were from the Myriad Kingdom Alliance. The deeper understanding of cultivation they gained from the lecture had created a bright future for all of them.

With this group of ‘potential experts’, in less than twenty years, the Myriad Kingdom Alliance could possibly soar to the peak of the twenty-eight regional powers.

It was for the ability to nurture many experts that high-tier master teachers were feared and respected.

“Attend the lecture? It’s too late. Zhang shi is only lecturing for two hours and... it’s about to end already. Besides, even if we were to head there now, there’s already no space for us...” the junior said.

“No space...”

Sect Leader Luo Huang’s face paled, and he nearly fell to the ground.

Indeed. Upon sensing spiritual energy disappearing from the surroundings, which cultivator wouldn’t rush over to listen to the lecture?

It was already too late for them.

“Our Fleeting Cloud Sect... We lost a chance to climb to greater heights... just like that...”

Sect Leader Luo Huang’s body trembled in regret.

If only they had attended the lecture, with the huge amount of resources their sect possessed, they would surely have risen the quickest. Surpassing Hongfeng Empire, where Hong shi came from, wouldn’t be a dream. But now... they could only sigh in lamentation.

The opportunity had already slipped past their fingers, and no matter how they clawed at it, they couldn’t possibly take it back.

“You said that... you would be able to conduct a lecture as well as him?”

The more he thought about, the more stifled he felt. Thus, he turned his gaze over to Luo Xuan.

“I...”

Luo Xuan’s body trembled, and he nearly burst into tears.

He thought that the gap between him and Zhang shi wasn’t too wide, and he could catch up with some diligence. Only at this instant did he realize that they were of completely different standing, and there was no basis of comparison at all!

It was laughable that he even got ahead of himself and lost intentionally in the fight against Bi Jianghai so as to not offend

Zhang shi in case he won the finals. Even if he had got into the finals... the only possible fate was to be crushed!

“It seems it wasn’t hypnotism that all one-hundred people acknowledged him... he indeed possesses such capability!”

How could a person capable of employing ‘Ten Li of Vacuum’ possibly lower his pride to hypnotize others just to win? Not to mention, a person with such capability could possibly win easily even without it...

Huang shi and the other cultivators were earnestly acknowledging Zhang shi as their teacher...

And they noticed this fact way too late!

...

The same sight was also occurring in the other sects who skipped the lecture.

Upon learning that Zhang shi had managed to induce Ten Li of Vacuum through a lecture, everyone flew into a frenzy.

Those who attended such a lecture would surely walk out of it with an incomparably solid foundation. Very few bottlenecks could stifle their cultivation in the future, and they would grow stronger swiftly.

It could be said that this two-hour lecture would determine their fate. No amount of gold or spirit stones could make up for this loss of opportunity.

...

“It seems like... the rise of Myriad Kingdom Alliance is inevitable. It’s time to redraw the map of the twenty-eight regional powers!”

In the Alliance Head Residence, Alliance Head Zhao stood up with his fists tightly clenched. He glanced at the young man lecturing on the stage with eyes reddened in agitation.

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Ever since inheriting the seat of the alliance head, he had been working hard to strengthen the alliance to protect and extend the borders of the empire. But the foundation of Myriad Kingdom Alliance was simply too weak.

The probability of success of the task that he was undertaking was nearly zero.

And yet, this impossibility was shattered with a single lecture from Zhang shi!

The million Myriad Kingdom Alliance citizens listening to the lecture would become sturdy pillars propping up the rise of the empire; it would be impossible to stop the rise of Myriad Kingdom Alliance anymore!

“Zhang shi, thank you...”

Alliance Head Zhao bowed respectfully.

This young man had brought new hope to the entire Myriad Kingdom Alliance!

...

“Using diction to draw in spiritual energy from the world for others to cultivate, is he really... lecturing on fundamental knowledge of cultivation?”

“I once thought that it was a waste of time to uncover the basics thoroughly. But from the looks of it now, I’m mistaken. Sorely mistaken.”

“This basic knowledge forms the very foundation of cultivating. It’s just like the foundation of a building; only with a strong foundation can it rise to greater heights...”

“I’ve truly benefitted immensely from this lesson. From today onward, Zhang shi is our half teacher. If anyone intends to

harm Myriad Kingdom Alliance, Zhang shi's homeland, in the future, we can't stand idly and watch anymore..."

...

The innumerable experts amidst the crowd thought and discussed similar things.

After listening to Zhang shi's lecture, they were considered as half a student of his. Thus, they felt obliged to stand up for him in the future.

"... protecting one's core and going along with nature, these are the basics of cultivation! Alright, I'll stop my lecture here."

With the lecture coming to an end, the young man on the stage flicked his wrist, and a brush appeared. Painting on midair, a massive phoenix soon appeared before everyone's sight.

Leaping off the ground, the young man stepped onto the back of the phoenix and flew into the distance.

This event would eventually go down in the annals of history.

Myriad Kingdom Alliance Year 3372, winter.

A million cultivators gathered to listen to Zhang shi's lecture, and Ten Li of Vacuum was induced in the course of the lecture.

At the end of which, he soared into the skies on the back of a phoenix.

The million cultivators kneeled down and addressed him as their teacher.

...

White clouds floated over the backdrop of a blue sky. Several massive aerial spirit beasts whizzed across the sky, sending innumerable savage beasts and birds escaping chaotically in fear.

On the back of a spirit beast, Zhang Xuan, who was in the midst of his meditation, slowly opened his eyes.

It had been nearly a month since the public lecture in Myriad Kingdom City.

In this period of time, they had spent nearly every day on the back of the aerial spirit beast, and mental exhaustion was starting to pile up.

As they would be leaving their homeland for a long period of time, the traveling master teachers brought along their family and servants, and Hong shi had to prepared ten whole spirit beasts to house everyone.

None of these spirit beasts possessed cultivation lower than Transcendent Mortal 4-dan, and they caused a huge ruckus no matter where they went, sending countless creatures darting away in fright.

Throughout his journey, Zhang Xuan had been spending his time studying and cultivating. Not only did he reinforce his zhenqi cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 4-dan pinnacle firmly, his soul cultivation even broke through the barrier to Transcendent Mortal 5-dan, and he advanced all the way to pinnacle-tier.

A soul cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 5-dan amounted to a strength of 3,200,000 ding. Stacking his zhenqi cultivation of 2,000,000 ding on top of that, he was able to wield a maximum might of 5,200,000 ding! That was comparable to Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm intermediate stage experts!

Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm; 4,000,000 ding at primary stage, 4,800,000 ding at intermediate stage, 5,600,000 ding at advanced stage, and 6,200,000 ding at pinnacle.

With a might of 5,200,000 ding, Zhang Xuan's strength was near to that of an advanced stage cultivator. At his current strength, it would be difficult for even Hong shi to defeat him.

The cultivation of 4-star master teacher usually ranged from Transcendent Mortal 2-dan to 4-dan.

Transcendent Mortal 5-dan Consonant Spirit realm usually equated to half 5-star master teacher.

Only upon reaching Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm would one be qualified as a 5-star master teacher.

It hadn't been long since Hong shi had been promoted to a 5-star master teacher, and his cultivation realm was around Cosmos Bridge realm primary stage. If Hong shi didn't exploit the unique ability of his current cultivation realm, he would be unlikely to be able to withstand even a single punch from Zhang Xuan.

To gain the strength equivalent to a 5-star primary master teacher within two months of being promoted to a 4-star master teacher; only a monster like Zhang Xuan would be capable of such a feat.

Zhang Xuan wasn't the only one whose cultivation increased by leaps and bounds. His students, Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, and the others, also witnessed significant growth in their cultivation as well.

Zhao Ya and Lu Chong's departures made them treasure their time with Zhang shi even more. They had been cultivating diligently every single day, and with the huge pool of spirit stones Zhang shi gathered, their cultivation was increasing at an alarming rate on a daily basis.

One by one, the four students managed to reach Transcendent Mortal realm, and at this very moment, their cultivation levels had already stabilized at Transcendent Mortal 2-dan Origin Energy realm.

Not only so, Zhang Xuan also reorganized the Heaven's Path battle techniques and imparted them to his students, thus inducing a massive rise in their fighting prowess.

The one who had improved the slowest was probably Butler Sun Qiang.

This fellow didn't possess the slightest interest in cultivation, and as such, he would slack off the moment no eyes were on him. If not for Wang Ying supervising him, he would probably remain in the same cultivation realm for his entire life.

Nevertheless, trapped on the back of a spirit beast, he had nothing better to do either. As such, he had also managed to

advance from Transcendent Mortal 1-dan Prolonged Longevity realm to 2-dan Origin Energy realm pinnacle.

At the current point, his cultivation was still higher than Wang Ying, who was the strongest among the remaining students.

The reason for his rapid improvement despite his indolence wasn't due to his talent. Rather, he had consumed a part of Mo Hunsheng's soul, which allowed him to inherit the other party's comprehension of cultivation. With this serving as his foundation, and factoring in Zhang Xuan's guidance and the seemingly endless supply of spirit stones for his use, his progress could be said to be slow already.

It should have been a joyous occasion that everyone was making progress in their training, but the current Zhang Xuan couldn't find the mood to celebrate.

This was because... the six hundred or so spirit stones which he had taken from the Fleeting Cloud Sect and other powers had just completely run dry.

Zheng Yang, Sun Qiang, and the others didn't consume many of them, the culprit behind this incident was mainly Zhang Xuan himself.

Back then, in order to hasten the maturing of the Nine Hearts Lotus, Zhang Xuan expended around two to three hundred middle-tier spirit stones. After which, he gave a portion to the departing Lu Chong and spent another huge bunch to advance his soul cultivation to Consonant Spirit realm...

It could be considered a blessing that the six hundred middle-tier spirit stones lasted them until now...

Rubbing his glabella, Zhang Xuan thought, 'Looks like I'll have to use the high-tier spirit stone for my future cultivation...'

So far, he hadn't used the high-tier spirit stone that he'd received from the Master Teacher Tournament yet as he couldn't bear to use it. But now that his supply of middle-tier spirit stone had run dry, he had no other choice.

"Zhang shi, we're about to reach Huanyu Capital!"

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to take the high-tier spirit stone to take a look, Hong shi suddenly walked over.

For this journey, Hong shi chose to share a ride with him, and along the journey, Zhang Xuan helped solve some of the problems he was facing in his cultivation. In a sense, this was his way of compensating the other party for destroying his artifacts.

Naturally, this was all done in the name of ‘Yang shi’.

In any case, the other party seemed to possess absolute trust to this ‘teacher’ of his, so there was no harm using the latter’s name.

After receiving Zhang Xuan’s pointers, Hong shi enjoyed significant improvement in his cultivation. At the same time, his respect for this young master teacher also deepened.

“The capital?”

Zhang Xuan stood up and walked over to the window. A massive city came into his sight.

Pitch-black city walls were embedded into the earth as though a thick iron mail. Countless elegant buildings rose all the way into the distant sky, and from afar, it resembled an undulating mountain range. They bore testimony to the long history of the city.

“Huanyu Capital has more than ten thousand years of history behind it. The founding emperor, Ye Huanyu, led four of his brothers to conquer the lands, thus eventually forming this immense empire!”

Hong shi glanced downward, and both graveness and awe were reflected in his eyes. “The eastern end of the capital is connected to the Verdant Mountain whereas the western end is connected to the Dragon-scaled River. From afar, it looks no different from a sprawling giant.”

“Un!” Zhang Xuan lowered his glance to examine the city.

Just as Hong shi had said, the capital was indeed majestic. It extended for hundreds of kilometers. As though a gigantic

fortress, just the sight of it created an indestructible image in the minds of onlookers.

Even though there was no complicated formation set up around the capital, it seemed to blend in with nature, creating an unblemished and soothing atmosphere.

“Huanyu Empire Master Teacher Pavilion’s Pavilion Master Wei Jiang is my teacher, a 5-star pinnacle master teacher and Transcendent Mortal 8-dan pinnacle expert. The emperor, Ye Wentian, has also reached Transcendent Mortal 8-dan as well,” Hong shi explained.

“5-star pinnacle master teacher? Transcendent Mortal 8-dan?”

Zhang Xuan’s mouth twitched.

Upon reaching Transcendent Mortal 5-dan Consonant Spirit realm, one’s soul and body would be harmonized together as one, and one’s strength would be brought to whole new heights. One’s enhanced soul would also significantly increase one’s comprehension of cultivation as well.

Beyond this realm is Cosmos Bridge realm.

Cosmos Bridge realm, a bridge that connects one with the world, creating a unique synergy between man and nature. Even without cultivating consciously, spiritual energy would flow along the bridge into one’s body and nourish it, thus inducing a constant rise in one’s cultivation.

At this realm, one’s zhenqi or soul would grow at a rapid pace. Eventually, one would gain the power to move mountains and displace oceans.

After this realm is Transcendent Mortal 7-dan Perfect Harmonization realm.

Perfect Harmonization realm, the unification of everything into one entity. One’s energy would become even purer and aligned with nature. At the same time, one’s soul would also grow stronger as well.

Following which is Transcendent Mortal 8-dan Ethereal Treading realm. At this level, one’s zhenqi and soul would enjoy a massive growth spurt. More importantly, one would

gain some control over the laws of nature, allowing one to step on thin air.

In other words... one would be able to rise up into the skies. However, horizontal motion is still too difficult at this realm, so it couldn't be considered flight yet.

To think that Huanyu Empire Master Teacher Pavilion's pavilion master would actually be an expert of this caliber, just the thought of this in itself was frightening.

Even though Zhang Xuan had improved greatly during this period of time, he was still far from matching up to such experts.

But of course, having grasped the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps, even if he found himself on the losing end of a fight, he could still escape into the skies safely.

“I've already had someone report our arrival to the Master Teacher Pavilion, and someone should be fetching us soon...”

After introducing Huanyu Empire's emperor and the Master Teacher Pavilion's pavilion master, Hong shi chuckled.

While the twenty-eight regional powers were significantly weaker than Huanyu Empire, the Master Teacher Tournament still held some weight in the empire. Otherwise, Hong shi, a 5-star master teacher, wouldn't have been dispatched to host the event

Qiu qiu qiu!

Roar roar roar!

But as soon as he was done saying those words, a series of beast calls sounded, and around a dozen gigantic aerial spirit beasts flew over toward the group.

These aerial spirit beasts weren't too large in size, and a single figure could be seen standing on top every single one of them.

Chuckling lightly, Hong shi said, “Alright, the escorting party is here. Later on, they'll lead us straight to the royal palace...”

But halfway through his words, an impassive voice suddenly sounded in the air.

“Hong Qian, it has been long since we last met... It is unfortunate, but it seems like you came at a bad time. I advise you to turn around and leave immediately!”

606 Obstruction

Came at a bad time?

Leave?

Zhang Xuan frowned.

Rather than welcoming, this group seemed to be provoking them instead!

If they were here to escort them in, why on Earth would they ask them to leave as soon as they met?

The other master teachers on the back of other spirit beasts also came out of their rooms, curious to see what was going on.

They wanted to see who was so audacious as to speak to Hong shi in such a manner.

“Feng Yu?”

Hearing those words, Hong shi frowned.

“You’re right!”

The man on the spirit beast that was leading the entire group chuckled lightly in response.

At this moment, both sides were only several hundred meters apart, and they could already clearly see the appearance of the other. The other party was a fifty-year-old elder dressed in a long, golden robe. His gray beard drifted along with a slight breeze. From his appearance, the other party resembled an enlightened sage.

“I came under the invitation of Huanyu Empire and the Master Teacher Pavilion, and naturally, I’ve no reason to leave. If Brother Feng wishes to leave, I don’t mind sending you off!” Hong shi said.

During which, he sent a telepathic message to Zhang Xuan to explain the situation.

“This Feng Yu is the pavilion master of Fengyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, and the both of us have never been on good terms before. While the twenty-eight powers under Hongfeng Empire were conducting the Master Teacher Tournament, they were doing the same as well...”

“Fengyuan Empire? One of the Four Great Vassal States, Hongfeng Empire?” Zhang Xuan asked.

In the one-month journey, while Zhang Xuan had devoted most of his time to cultivating, he would have occasional chats with this 5-star master teacher, and from the latter, he gained a rough understanding of Huanyu Empire.

Huanyu Empire was a Tier-2 Empire, and under it were four Vassal States: Hongfeng Empire, Fengyuan Empire, Qianfeng Empire, and Zhuyue Empire.

These four states were conferred to the four brothers who fought alongside Founding Emperor Ye Huanyu, and while they were said to be of equal standing to Huanyu Empire, their standing was slightly lower than the former.

The Four Great Vassal States had many smaller empires under them. Take for example Hongfeng Empire where Hong shi came from, it governed the twenty-eight regional powers, namely Myriad Kingdom Alliance, Fleeting Cloud Sect, and so on.

The other three Vassal States were also in the same position.

If Zhang Xuan were to use the knowledge from his previous life to classify this structure, Huanyu Empire would be the entire country while Hongfeng, Fengyuan, and the other Vassal States were provinces. The twenty-eight regional powers would be cities, Conferred Kingdoms like Xuanyuan Kingdom would be towns, and Tier-1 and Tier-2 Kingdoms would be villages.

Just like Hongfeng Empire, the other Vassal States were also conducting the Master Teacher Tournament to pick out the individuals who were qualified to enter the Cleansing Lake.

“Un. I thought that the members of Huanyu Empire’s royalty would be here to pick us up, but it seems like they managed to

catch hold of the news of our arrival and intercepted the news. As Master Teacher Pavilions of equal standing, a certain degree of rivalry is unavoidable. I fear that they bear hostile intentions.”

Hong shi frowned.

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Considering how rude the other party was, they were unlikely to be here to have a friendly chat.

And as expected, while the duo was speaking, Master Teacher Feng Yu, who was standing opposite to them, bellowed loudly, “I tried speaking kindly to you, but you just choose not to listen! Hongfeng Empire is the furthest away from Huanyu Empire, and you came late as well, so there may be some things you are unaware of. Since that’s the case, allow me to fill you in. While the slots for the Cleansing Lake haven’t changed, Crown Prince Ye Qian of the royal family suddenly requires three more slots, and thus, we’ve had to cut our numbers. In other words... your group has already lost its opportunity to enter the Cleansing Lake! I’ll advise you to return now rather than embarrass yourself inside!”

“Requires three more slots?” Hong shi frowned.

Just like the Yin-Yang Lake, the Cleansing Lake also had a strict restriction on the number of people who could enter it. However, the slots were decided on beforehand, so how could Hongfeng Empire lose its slots just because it came late? How could a respected crown prince steal the slots of a Vassal State?

“That’s right. Why don’t you all report to Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy first, there’s no point in staying here for you anyway!”

Feng Yu smiled.

“We’ll decide for ourselves whether there’s any point in staying here or not, so Feng shi need not worry for us!”

Knowing that the other party was surely up to no good for obstructing them here, Hong shi couldn’t be bothered to waste his breath. Thus, waving his hands, he turned around and

instructed, “Control your spirit beasts well, we’ll be heading straight for the Master Teacher Pavilion first.”

These aerial spirit beasts were rented from the Beast Hall and driven by its personnel.

Hualala!

Under the beast tamers’ control, the spirit beasts immediately formed a line, ready to advance at any moment.

“Hong Qian, aren’t you being a little too rude here? I came here to inform you of the matter kindly, and not only did you not reciprocate my favor, you even chose to snub me and leave. What do you mean by this?”

Feng Yu’s eyebrows shot up.

“I’ll ask teacher and His Majesty personally regarding the issue concerning the slots!”

Hong shi waved his hands.

Huala!

The aerial spirit beasts immediately spread their wings and attempted to bypass the other party by soaring to a greater altitude.

“You just want to do things the hard way. Chen Mo!”

Seeing the other party refusing to heed his advice, Feng Yu narrowed his eyes. He turned around and issued a command.

“Yes!” replied the young man behind him.

With a flick of his wrist, an ancient zither appeared in his palm, and pulling on it lightly, a melodious tune floated in the air.

Triiiing, triiiing!

The melody was constantly alternating between a high note and a low note. The tune was refined, and the melody sounded pleasant to the ear.

“What is he doing with the zither?”

“I’ve no idea...”

Not only did the zither lack the slightest hostile intentions, it was even gentle. It was extremely comfortable to the ears, and this left the Hongfeng Empire group perplexed.

Since the other party traveled all the way here to obstruct them, there was no reason for the other party to let them pass so easily. Yet, when they tried to leave, all the other party did was to have one of their members play a perfectly ordinary melody on his zither. What were they up to?

Demonic tunists did possess the ability to launch an offense on one's soul via sound, but for them to be injured by such gentle music... Impossible!

More importantly... while their group wasn't exceptionally powerful, every single of them was a 4-star pinnacle master teacher, and Hong shi, a 5-star master teacher, was present here as well. To influence everyone's psyche with music here felt like an impractical move.

"Wait, this offense isn't directed toward us, it's directed toward the spirit beasts!"

At this moment, Hong shi finally came to a realization, and his face darkened.

"Spirit beasts?"

Taken aback, everyone quickly turned their sights to the beast tamers driving the aerial spirit beasts, only to see a livid expression on each of their faces.

"Not bad, you sure realized it swiftly. Indeed, Chen Mo's [Void Tune of Heavens] possesses the ability to hypnotize spirit beasts and prevent them from advancing any further. In other words, as long as the music continues playing, you'll be unable to advance even the slightest inch..."

Feng Yu chuckled softly.

"Void Tune of Heavens?"

Hong shi tried to drive the spirit beast beneath him, but it seemed as though the connection between him and the spirit beast was severed. All it was capable of at the moment was to remain afloat in midair.

It was as if someone had put a cage around the spirit beasts, preventing them from going any further.

And unable to move any further, they wouldn't be able to enter the capital or the royal palace.

“Feng Yu, what are you up to?”

Enraged, Hong shi glanced at Feng Yu coldly.

“Nothing much. I just want you to accompany me here for a single day!”

Feng Yu smiled lightly before turning around to issue another instruction. “Chen Mo, continue playing the zither here. Don't allow them to advance a single inch forward!”

“Yes!” the young man known as Chen Mo replied as his fingers danced around the zither, producing a beautiful melody.

“Humph, do you think that you can stop me with this?”

Not expecting the other party to resort to such forceful measures, Hong shi's eyebrows shot up in displeasure. Emulating a sword through his finger, he flicked his forefinger lightly.

Wuuuuuu!

A piercing shrill echoed. A surge of sword qi was shot from the tip of Hong shi's finger, headed straight for Chen Mo's zither.

With the destruction of the zither, the melody would stop, and the bindings on the spirit beast would be dispelled.

But before the sword qi could even reach, ‘weng!’, a reverberation sounded. A huge protective barrier had appeared before Chen Mo, rendering Hong shi's offensive ineffective.

“It's a formation! The people on the dozen spirit beasts have coordinated with one another to set up a defensive barrier to protect Chen Mo. Given the long distance, it'll be difficult for us to break the barrier!”

Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He had been perplexed as to why Feng Yu would bring so many people over. After all, as fellow master teachers, it was unlikely that a battle would break out. It seemed like this was where his true intentions lay.

All of these people were likely to be formation masters, and they must be carrying some object on them. Using the spirit beasts as the formation flags, they succeeded in setting up a defensive formation around Chen Mo.

If not for the distance, putting aside Hong shi, even Zhang Xuan would be able to break the barrier easily with a single punch. The distance of several hundred meters was a difficult problem to solve. From such a distance, even the long-range sword qi would be unable to deal much damage. Not to mention, the other party seemed to be well-prepared, so it was unlikely that they would get a chance at stopping Chen Mo's zither.

This was also what made demonic tunists fearsome.

Physical barriers meant nothing to them as long as their melody could get through.

This was probably also the basis of the other party's confidence.

"Damn it..."

Hong shi gritted his teeth tightly.

He was also able to deduce this much.

They were in a bad plight. Under the effects of the melody, they were trapped at an altitude of several thousand meters away from ground, unable to descend or leave.

"The part regarding the slots should be true, and the results are likely to be out by today. He probably intends to keep us here to stop us from vying for those slots," Hong shi said.

"That's very likely!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

Actually, this matter wasn't too difficult to guess, and master teachers specialized in noticing even the most minor of details. If they couldn't deduce this much, they might as well knock their heads onto a wall and fall dead.

“The capital might look near from here, but if we were to go proceed ahead by foot, it would take at least half a day. Besides... we’re in midair right now. Given that our spirit beasts are unable to move at all, we’re completely trapped here... What should we do?”

Hong shi began to panic.

Once he lost those slots, he wouldn’t be able to get it back even if he were to wreak havoc with the Feng Yu.

But... they were stuck in midair, and they couldn’t reach the other party’s zither either. Were they really doomed to watch as the slots for the Cleansing Lake slipped by their fingers?

“Actually, there’s a very simple way to resolve this issue!” Zhang Xuan smiled mysteriously.

“Simple? How can this matter be resolved simply?” The other party’s words left Hong shi stunned. “Our spirit beasts are immobile, and we’re too far to reach them as well. You can’t expect us to fly over to destroy the zither...”

“Fly over? That would be way too troublesome...” Zhang Xuan shook his head. Turning around, he instructed, “Everyone, block the ears of your spirit beasts.”

“Alright!”

Even though everyone had no idea what Zhang Xuan was up to, they still nodded their heads and carried out his instructions.

They had a deep trust toward this champion of the Master Teacher Tournament.

Soon, they managed to plug the ears of the spirit beasts on their side.

Now that all preparations were done, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly as he turned to face the enemy.

“You said that there’s a simple way to resolve this matter? Despite your young age, you sure speak arrogantly. Hong shi, is this your student? Why do you seem to be regressing as time passes? Your juniors don’t seem to know the meaning of

etiquette at all. It's basic manners to remain silent while your seniors are talking..."

Hearing the words between the duo, Feng Yu sneered coldly. He was just about to reprimand the other party when the young man opposite to him opened his mouth, and a sound echoed into the surroundings.

"Moo!"

Hu! Hu! Hu! Hu!

Before they could even react, the spirit beasts beneath Feng Yu and the others began a free fall journey all the way to the ground.

"The heck, what is going on? AHHH..."

607 And They All Fell Down!

Surrounded by screams of agony and fear, Feng Yu felt frenzied.

Falling from a distance of a thousand meters, even if he was a 5-star master teacher, a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan expert, he would be severely injured.

These spirit beasts had been properly tamed, and their flight should be extremely stable. Why would all of them fall simultaneously out of the blue?

“It must be that lad’s call!”

After a moment of thought, he quickly came to a realization. The last thing that happened before their plummet was that fellow’s call.

That call was reminiscent of the voice of a dragon. While humans might not feel anything from it, the spirit beasts facing it immediately felt an immense pressure pressing against them. Unable to withstand the pressure, they spurted blood profusely in midair. It was only out of sheer willpower that they were able to retain their consciousness at this point.

But knowing that this wasn’t the time to be thinking about all of this, he anxiously communicated with the spirit beasts beneath him.

“Hurry up and fly up...”

But to his agony, he realized that the spirit beast seemed to have gone into a state of shock. Not only did it not reply to his words, it was even trembling non-stop. Given its current state, it was clearly incapable of flight.

“Damn it!”

Seeing the ground approaching him swiftly, Feng Yu nearly spewed a mouthful of blood out of frustration.

What the heck was this?!

He had come over here prepared-the formation and Chen Mo-and he was confident that he would surely be able to obstruct the other party's passage for sure. Never in his dreams could he have expected that the other party would possess a type of sound offense as well, and furthermore, from the looks of it... it was much more effective than his side's!

Chen Mo's melody was beautiful, and he could easily earn a fortune by performing concerts with this piece. On the other hand, the other party's sound was like the call of the grim reaper, threatening to take their lives mercilessly...

"Hong Qian, I'll be back!" Feng Yu roared furiously, but before he could finish his words, his body came to an abrupt halt, and an immense force rippled through his body.

Padah!

The sheer force of his crash created a colossal hole in the ground. A violent aftershock traveled through Feng Yu's body, breaking nearly all of the bones throughout his body. Mouthful after mouthful of blood spewed freely from his mouth.

He had come to intercept Hong Qian and his group to prevent them from entering the capital, but in the end, not only did he fail in his mission, he even sustained such heavy injuries instead... Just the thought of it made his blood boil.

He struggled to his feet and scanned the surroundings, only to see Chen Mo and the others in a worse state than him. Lying on the ground, they were inhaling much more than they were exhaling. If emergency treatment wasn't applied, they would all probably die here.

While they were all Transcendent Mortal 4-dan experts, falling from such a high altitude was still lethal to them. If not for the spirit beasts cushioning their fall, they would have probably died on the spot.

"Damn it..."

The more he thought about it, the angrier Feng Yu felt. He quickly took out a recovery pill and fed it to everyone.

They had come over here confidently, thinking that they would be able to accomplish their goal easily. But in the end, they

ended up being done in instead. Several spirit beasts had died from the impact, and even Feng Yu himself had sustained grievous wounds...

“Hong Qian and that fellow, I won’t let you go...” Feng Yu roared loudly in rage.

...

“All of them fell down?”

Watching as Feng Yu bellowed furiously below, Hong shi and the others stared at one another, dumbfounded.

They knew that Zhang shi was a formidable person, and they thought that he might be able to come up with some unique solution to their desperate situation. Who knew that his solution would actually be so unique...

To make more than a dozen spirit beasts fall from the sky with a roar, to the point that even their masters were unable to do anything about it... This was way too overpowered!

If that was the case, wouldn’t it mean that anyone who faced him on an aerial savage beast would face the threat of falling off his flight?

Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, Hong shi asked, “Are they... dead?”

No matter what, Feng Yu was a master teacher of equivalent standing as him. If he were to die from falling from a high altitude, he would probably become a laughingstock for the next few centuries.

“Unlikely, but even so... they will be in for a round of great suffering. Anyway, let’s put that aside for now. We should rush to the royal palace first. Considering how far the other party went to obstruct our advancement, something must have happened!”

Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

In truth, he had no choice but to resort to such a trick. While he was capable of flight, he couldn’t possibly expect to match a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan expert!

After some deliberation, this was the only feasible solution he had at hand.

As for whether the other party had crashed to their deaths, that was none of Zhang Xuan's business.

Since they came over to pick a fight, they should have known the potential consequences that could befall them... And honestly speaking, Zhang Xuan thought that he had gone light on them.

"You're right, let's go!"

As a 5-star master teacher, Hong shi was not an indecisive or overly kind person either. Nodding his head, he instructed for his spirit beast to advance to Huanyu Capital.

Without Chen Mo's zither influencing the spirit beasts, they swiftly recovered and advanced forward at a rapid pace. A few minutes later, a majestic building appeared before them.

Grand and refined, it exuded an incredibly noble atmosphere.

"This is the royal palace of Huanyu Empire. No aerial spirit beast is allowed to approach it, so let's stop at the square in front!"

Hong shi pointed forward, and the spirit beast beneath him began descending slowly to the square outside the royal palace.

As soon as the group stepped away from the back of the spirit beasts, several master teachers dressed in robes quickly rushed forward to welcome them.

"Hong shi, you're here..."

The one speaking had an emblem of 4 stars pinned on his chest—a 4-star master teacher.

"Zhuang Qin, didn't I tell you to inform teacher of our arrival? Why did no one come to pick us up, and Feng shi and his group came over instead?"

Hong shi frowned.

Zhuang Qin wasn't from Huanyu Empire but from Hongfeng Empire Master Teacher Pavilion. He was dispatched here

earlier so as to take care of various arrangements.

The person who was supposed to liaise with Huanyu Empire in their stead was him.

“You met Feng shi?” Zhuang Qin’s face darkened. He immediately looked over worriedly. “He... didn’t do anything to you all, right?”

“Fortunately, he didn’t!” Hong shi shook his head. Then, with a perplexed expression, he asked, “What happened?”

“I reported to Wei shi the news of your arrival, and he dispatched aerial spirit beasts to us to pick you up. But who knew that... before we could even fly on those aerial spirit beasts, we were stopped by Feng shi... He’s a 5-star master teacher, so there’s nothing I could do about it,” Zhuang Qin explained with a look of difficulty.

He should have been the one to pick everyone up, but in the end... his aerial spirit beast ended up being snatched away, and he could only wait here nervously.

To his relief, it seemed like Hong shi and the others were fine.

“I heard from Feng shi that the total number of slots has been reduced by three. Is that true?”

Knowing that there was nothing that Zhuang Qin could have done in the situation, and there was no loss incurred from that encounter as well, Hong shi decided to let the matter go. Thus, he began asking about the slots.

“That’s true!” Zhuang Qin nodded. “Each of the Four Great Vassal States should receive three slots to train at the Cleansing Lake, and taking into account the three from Huanyu Empire’s royalty as well, that totals up to 15.”

Hong shi nodded.

It was no secret that the Cleansing Lake only had fifteen slots when the grounds were opened each decade, and thus, he knew of it as well.

“The distribution of the fifteen slots was decided by the founding emperor, and it has never been changed before. However... something happened this time round!”

After a moment of hesitation, Zhuang Qin began explaining, “Upon learning of that the Cleansing Lake is going to be opened, Princess Fei-er of Hongyuan Empire specially made the trip here, and she needs a total of four slots! The royal family has given up one slot, and they have decreed that the remaining three slots will be contributed by the Four Great Vassal States...”

“Princess Fei-er?”

Hong shi was taken aback.

If the other party was a princess of Hongyuan Tier-1 Empire, she should have no lack of cultivation resources. Why would she head to a Tier-2 Empire and vie for resources with the locals?

Not to mention, she even demanded four instantly!

Besides... Who in the world was this Princess Fei-er?

I don't seem to have ever heard of her!

“Princess Fei-er... is a student of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, and from what I've heard... it seems like she's a senior of Crown Prince Ye Qian...” Zhuang Qin replied awkwardly.

Even though his words were a little unclear, it didn't take long for the crowd to understand the situation.

Crown Prince Ye Qian was a talented master teacher. Three years ago, he was recommended by Huanyu Empire Master Teacher Pavilion for further studies in Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy.

And this Princess Fei-er, a student of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy as well, was his senior and an extremely famous figure there. Due to either Crown Prince Ye Qian being infatuated with her or some other purpose, he intentionally revealed to her the secret of the Cleansing Lake and invited her over in hopes of getting on her good side... As a result, such a situation occurred.

Considering her fame in the Master Teacher Academy, it was likely that she was at least a half 5-star master teacher.

Considering her position as the princess of a Tier-1 Empire on top of that, she was indeed a person that the crown prince should get along with.

That was the reason why Feng shi said that the crown prince needed three more slots.

“To give out the slots of the Cleansing Lake to please the royalty of a Tier-1 Kingdom is fine by me, just that... how does His Majesty intend to divide the slots?” Hong shi asked.

To give out some slots to get acquainted with higher-ranked master teachers and higher-ranked empires was something understandable, and he could accept this part.

However... how were the three slots going to be divided among the Four Great Vassal States? Surely no Vassal State would be willing to give up their slots, so how would this matter be decided?

“His Majesty has instructed us to settle among ourselves, and there will be a banquet conducted by the crown prince in the Eastern Palace so as to determine the rules to solve this matter,” Zhuang Qin replied.

On the day that he reported that Hong shi was going to arrive today, Crown Prince Ye Qian fixed the date of the banquet for that night.

This was the reason why Feng Yu went so far as to obstruct Hong shi’s passage.

If they were unable to attend the banquet, without a doubt, the other three powers would surely have Hongfeng Empire fork out all three of their slots.

After all, each Vassal State was only given three slots once every decade, and thus, they were reluctant to fork out any slots. Since there was someone they could push everything onto, they were delighted to do so... Besides, who asked them to be late?

“This probably isn’t just Feng Yu’s intent. Those old fogeys of Qianfeng and Zhuyue probably contributed to this as well!”

Upon understanding what was going on, Hong shi harrumphed in anger.

Obstructing their passage was beneficial to the other two powers as well, and Fengyuan Empire was unlikely to go so far if they didn't have any allies on their side. Most likely, the other representatives of the other three Vassal States had decided on this plan, and Feng Yu was only the one to execute it.

It was fortunate that Zhang shi was able to foil their plans. Otherwise, Hongfeng Empire would have had to give up all three slots!

If so, they would have made the journey here in vain.

“Since there's some time before the banquet, you all should head to your allocated rooms to rest first. I'll go and pay a visit to those old fogeys!”

Hong shi flung his sleeves.

He had his pride and dignity as a 5-star master teacher, so how could he possibly overlook it when someone schemed so blatantly against him? Naturally, he had to get back at them!

“I've already prepared your living quarters, it's not too far away from here. I'll show you the way!”

Knowing that he couldn't interfere in a conflict among 5-star master teachers, Zhuang Qin could only change the topic and lead the group to their rooms. But all of a sudden, he thought of something and turned around to ask Hong shi with a doubtful expression, “Hong shi, from what I saw... Feng shi probably made a lot of preparations to intercept you. How... did you manage to get past them?”

“This...”

Hong shi hesitated for a moment before replying, “We were on our aerial spirit beasts when we met, and then... they fell down.”

“Fell down?”

Zhuang Qin was dumbstruck.

608 Master Teacher Confrontation!

What the heck does that mean?

Did they fall from the back of their aerial spirit beast? Or did the spirit beasts fall along with them?

These spirit beasts were tamed by experts engaged by the Huanyu Empire royalty such that even non-beast tamers were able to drive them. The main purpose of this was to create a powerful army for aerial combat.

Even the weakest of Feng Yu's group was a 4-star master teacher, how could a 4-star master teacher possibly allow himself to fall off the back of a spirit beast?

Zhuang Qin was bewildered by Hong shi's words.

"There's no need to bother about this, let's head to our living quarters first!"

It was unlikely the other party would believe him even if he were to explain it to them. Thus, Hong shi decided to save his breath.

"Alright!"

Since Hong shi was unwilling to speak, Zhuang Qin didn't push on. He led the group forward.

The living quarters weren't too far away from the landing point. It was a mansion so vast that despite the huge size of their group, there would be no problem housing all of them in it.

Zhang Xuan took an individual courtyard for himself, Sun Qiang, and his students. It would be quieter this way, and he wouldn't be interrupted when he was teaching his students too.

After settling everyone in, Hong shi and Zhang shi discussed for a moment to refine their plans before the former stomped out of the mansion.

Those fellows actually dared to scheme against him! No matter what, he had to return the favor!

...

Not too far away from the mansion Zhang Xuan and group were living in, in a relatively vast room, two old men were looking at a young man who just walked in to report a matter to them with a deep frown on their foreheads. “What did you say? Hong Qian and his group have entered the city and are now in their living quarters?”

“Yes!” The young man nodded.

“Impossible. Didn’t Feng Yu go to stop them?” one of the old men exclaimed.

“Could it be that the both of them didn’t meet? No, that can’t be... There’s only one route from Hongfeng Empire to here. If Hong Qian wanted to enter the city, he would surely meet with Feng Yu. What’s going on?”

The other old man was also clearly a little skeptical of the news.

“This... I’m not too sure either. I’ve sent someone to check on it, and they should be reporting back soon!” the young man replied.

When Feng shi and these two elders were discussing, he was by their side, and judging from their plan, he felt that Feng shi would surely be able to intercept Hong shi’s group for a day. But before they could receive any news from Feng shi’s side, Hong shi had already appeared in the city... Even he, despite being the person reporting the news, found it inconceivable.

“Un, quickly look into it. What in the world is that Feng Yu up to?”

The first old man shook his hands to dismiss the young man. Not too long later, the young man returned anxiously. It seemed like the news he had received was so shocking that he couldn’t even keep his composure.

“You managed to dig up something? What happened?” asked the first old man.

The young man reported the news that he had just gathered.

“Feng shi and Hong shi did meet one another outside the city, but for some reason... Feng shi and his group lost control of their spirit beasts and fell from the sky...”

In truth, even he himself found this matter hard to believe.

“Fell down? Lost control of their spirit beasts? Does that even make sense?” The two old men stared at one another in bewilderment.

Are you jesting?

Those were the elite spirit beasts of Huanyu Empire, and they had been trained for a very long time. Even if something happened, they would surely bring their rider safely to the ground. To fall from the sky on such well-trained spirit beasts, surely you must be pulling our legs!

“There’s no mistake on the news... Speaking of which, someone was coincidentally walking by when that happened, and he used a Record Crystal to take down the situation then!”

The young man flicked his wrist and took out a crystal ball. “Our men managed to buy it with spirit stones!”

A merchant party happened to pass by the area during the confrontation between Hong shi and Feng shi, and out of fascination, they recorded the scene. After which, when the young man sent his men to investigate the matter, they managed to track down the merchant party and procure this Record Crystal.

In that aspect, they were truly lucky.

“Hurry up and play it!” said the first old man anxiously.

Nodding his head, the young man infused his zhenqi into the Record Crystal.

Weng!

Amidst a buzz, dozens of aerial spirit beasts suddenly came into sight.

The recording was taken a significant distance away from the confrontation, so there was no voice to be heard. Even so, it

was clear that the both sides were clearly clashing with one another.

“It’s Feng shi and Hong shi!”

With a glance, the first old man immediately recognized the men standing on the spirit beasts.

They had known one another for several decades now, and they could identify one another even from afar.

“Chen Mo has made his move...”

The image swayed, and they saw a young man standing on top of a spirit beast taking out a zither and started playing.

Following which, Hong shi attempted to destroy the zither with his sword qi, only to fail.

“Everything went according to plan. How did Hong shi get past them...”

The first old man was perplexed. He was in the midst of figuring what went wrong when Feng shi and the others abruptly plummeted from the sky. And then... a mushroom cloud of dust rose into the sky.

“This...”

The group stared at one another blankly.

What... just happened?

After recovering from the shock, the two old men quickly asked the young man, “What happened to Feng shi? How is he now?”

That was a distance of more than a thousand meters! To fall from such an altitude... he couldn’t possibly be dead, right...

“I’ve sent someone to bring him back... they should be returning soon!” replied the young man.

At that moment, the door opened, and Feng shi was carried in by a few other men.

The current Feng shi was bandaged tightly with a white cloth, as though a mummy. His face was stained with mud and fresh blood, and a huge bunch of his prided beard had fallen off. It

was a huge contrast from his ‘enlightened sage’ image. If he were to sit by the streets, a passer-by might even throw him a gold coin out of pity for him.

“Feng shi, this...”

The first old man was flabbergasted by the sight.

“I... I’m going to kill Hong Qian and that bastard...”

Feng Yu roared furiously, but before he could finish his words, a cold voice sounded outside the main hall, “Kill me? Sure! I’m waiting for you right here, come!”

The few men quickly turned their heads around, only to see an old man walking into the room with a face livid with wrath. Who else could it be other than Hong shi?

“Hong shi...”

Seeing the man they teamed up to deal with standing before them, the two old men’s lips twitched.

“Hong Qian, you...”

Feng Yu gritted his teeth in anger.

“Humph!”

Ignoring the other party’s shock and anger, Hong shi flicked his wrist and took out a 5-star master teacher emblem. He flicked his forefinger with his thumbnail and a droplet of fresh blood fell onto the emblem. “I, 5-star Master Teacher Hong Qian, apply for a Master Teacher Confrontation against Master Teacher Feng Yu. I beseech for your approval!”

Hu!

The emblem shimmered brilliantly, and two giant words floated into appearance, “Permission granted!”

If irreconcilable conflicts occur between master teachers, they could apply for a ‘Master Teacher Confrontation’ with the headquarters through the emblem, and based on the relative strength of one’s opponent, the headquarters would determine whether to approve it or not.

Usually speaking, if both master teachers were of equal cultivation realm, the permission would be granted.

Rivalry is important for the growth of master teachers, especially with one's peers. As such, the headquarters promoted such duels.

This was the reason why Hong shi's duel application was granted nearly instantly.

“Master Teacher Confrontation? Permission granted?”

Seeing the two words on Hong shi's emblem, Feng Yu's vision went dark, and he nearly burst into tears.

I'm wrapped up like a dumpling, and there are broken bones throughout my body. Not to mention, I've suffered grievous external and internal damage. To fight against me at this moment... Doesn't your conscience pang in guilt?

“The headquarters have already agreed to the Master Teacher Confrontation. Feng shi, stop putting on an act. Let our fists do the talking instead!”

Hong shi flung his sleeves majestically.

“I...”

Exerting pressure on the walking stick in his hand, Feng Yu stood up from the stretcher and exclaimed, “I'm severely injured, how do you expect me to fight with you...”

“Severely injured? Feng shi, your joke isn't funny. I've heard that you were still in perfect condition when you left the royal palace two hours ago. In fact, you even offered some pointers to a guard. Since you didn't do anything, how in the world did you get injured? To think that a proud 5-star master teacher would stoop down to even feigning injury just so to not face me in a fight. And you call yourself a master teacher?” Hong shi replied righteously.

“You...” Feng Yu's lips twitched violently, and his eyes were about to pour.

He had secretly sneaked out to intercept Hong Qian and group. After all, this was an underhanded action, and if others were to learn of it, his reputation would be sullied.

Who knew that the other party would actually use this fact against him to claim that he was feigning injury... How could someone be so shameless?

You should be the more than aware whether I'm truly injured or not! I might not have fought with anyone, but falling from such a high altitude, it's already by a huge stroke of fortune that I'm still alive at this point. How do you expect me to fight with you?

“Feng shi, I hope that you won't make any more excuses!”

Harrumphing coldly, Hong shi replied, “If you refuse, I'll report to the headquarters that you, who fears even a challenge from your fellow peer, aren't worthy of your 5-star master teacher emblem.”

“Fine, fine! I'll accept your challenge... Are you happy now?”

Feng Yu gritted his teeth indignantly.

If only he knew this would happen, he would have never done this. If one didn't have any special reason to justify himself, one wouldn't be allowed to turn down a Master Teacher Confrontation...

If Feng shi were to claim that he was severely injured, considering how this matter concerned a 5-star master teacher, the headquarters would surely look into it, and the issue of him obstructing Hong shi's passage would be exposed. If so, he might be subjected to an even harsher punishment.

In other words, the other party had planned all of this to corner him!

What the heck was this...

“Since that's the case, let's start then!”

Bellowing furiously, Hong shi dashed forward and sent a kick over.

Sou!

How could the severely injured Feng Yu possibly protect himself? He was immediately sent flying into the sky.

Padah!

After flying several dozen meters high, he crashed back down into the ground and spewed mouthful after mouthful of blood.

He had just barely recovered slightly after consuming a recovery pill, but this kick had sent him back to square one. His face paled, and his vision was slowly darkening.

“I...”

Struggling to his feet, Feng shi was just about to speak when a humongous fist came flying toward him.

Peng!

Feng Yu was sent flying once more.

Pi pa! Huala!

The sound of fists and kicks digging into flesh sounded, and soon, all traces of humanity were beaten out of Feng Yu.

Hong shi had controlled his attacks well so as to maximize the other party’s suffering without worsening his current injuries too much.

For a proud 5-star master teacher to be schemed against, if he didn’t repay this favor, wouldn’t others think that he was an easy person?

Master teachers were humans, not saints! They couldn’t possibly accept and forgive when someone struck them in their faces!

In this case, tolerance is not a sign of magnanimity but weakness. If they couldn’t uphold their own dignity, how could they possibly protect Master Teacher Continent from the Otherworldly Demons?

It isn’t a crime to be good-tempered, but if one wishes to protect something, one needs to be strong.

Peng peng peng peng!

After a long round of beating, Hong shi finally finished venting his anger. Clapping his hands, he clasped his fist and bowed. “Feng shi, thank you for going easy on me!”

At this moment, Feng Yu was no different from Chen Mo and the others when they fell to the ground back then. He was breathing heavily but exhaling lightly, and it looked as though he might just breathe his last at any moment.

“You... Very well! Hong Qian! I, 5-star Master Teacher Luo Zhao, challenge you to a Master Teacher Confrontation right now. I beseech for your approval!”

Hong shi had beaten up Feng shi in the name of the Master Teacher Confrontation. His actions were within the rules, so there was nothing they could complain about. But after the ‘duel’ was over, the first old man immediately took out his emblem and challenged Hong shi.

He wanted to get back at Hong shi for Feng Yu!

Hong shi placed his hands behind his back and declared proudly, “My apologies, but I’ve just finished my battle with Feng shi and suffered grievous injuries in the process. I won’t be able to fight for the next ten years, so I’ll reject your challenge!”

“You...”

The trio staggered, and they nearly burst into tears.

Big Brother, can you get any more shameless than that...

609 Hong shi's Conditions

Severely injured...

Severely your head!

Could that battle between you and Feng shi even be called a battle?

More like a one-sided pummeling! Not a single droplet of sweat was produced in that fight, and yet you said that you were severely injured and can't fight for the next ten years?

The one who is severely injured is Feng shi, alright?

Look at him... His eyes are even rolling up now...

On the other hand, you look perfectly energized after the duel, and the bright smile on your face is about to extend to your ears...

The more he thought about it, the angrier he felt. Master Teacher Luo Zhao bellowed furiously, "The both of us know very well whether you are injured or not. Why don't you just say that you dare not accept my duel?"

"If you can really forsake your morals and dignity as a master teacher and take advantage of my weakness, then yes, I can accept your duel. But if that's the case, I'll decide the rules of the duel!"

Hong shi glanced at the other party calmly and continued, "We'll both ride on an aerial spirit beast each and fight a thousand meters high in the air. Do you... dare accept my proposal?"

"You..."

Luo Zhao felt his head spin.

An aerial battle?

The sight that he had seen from the Record Crystal a moment ago was still engraved into his eyes. If he were to really fight with that fellow in midair, he would probably fall out of the

sky just like Feng shi... and perhaps even suffer yet another round of beating afterward...

Putting aside teaching the other party a lesson, he might not even be able to survive the ordeal.

“You don’t dare?” Hong shi glanced at the other party with clear contempt in his eyes. “If you are that cowardly, don’t waste my time. You challenged an injured person, and yet, you dare not accept my proposal. How embarrassing!”

“...”

Luo Zhao’s face immediately turned crimson, and he nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

The Hong shi he remembered should have been an honest and upright person, when did he become so shameless?

Harrumphing coldly, Hong shi continued, “Alright. Since you dare not challenge me, let’s get to the main topic at hand. You obstructed my passage in midair, foiling the fairness of our competition. I demand an explanation for this matter!”

The purpose of his visit was to demand an explanation. Now that he was done beating up Feng Yu, his anger had already subsided mostly... But he was still reluctant to let things end here.

Initially, he was going to stomp here right after settling everyone in, but Zhang shi stopped him and offered him some advice.

And it seemed like the advice did work out as well.

Otherwise, if Hong shi had acted as he originally planned to—barging in here and criticizing the group—not only would the other party simply forget it after a night’s rest, his own anger wouldn’t be quenched either.

In fact, if the three of them were to gang up on him, he might even be put in a disadvantageous position.

But now, having gotten back at Feng shi through the Master Teacher Confrontation and silencing the others by proposing an aerial duel, the momentum was with him.

“Explanation? You still want an explanation?”

Luo Zhao and the other master teacher stared at one another, and they nearly exploded from anger.

You came here and pummeled Feng shi to the point that he is teetering on the brink of death already, and yet you still demand an explanation?

“Simple. Since you used an underhanded method to stop us, I want a compensation! How about this, I won’t go too far-500 middle-tier spirit stones and we’ll call it quits. I won’t report this matter to teacher or His Majesty. Otherwise, I’ll cause a huge fuss and see who’s at fault here!”

Hong shi waved his hands.

In truth, he had little fear even when facing another three master teachers of equivalent standing as him. No matter what, Zhang shi was a person whom even Pavilion Master Mo of Hongyuan Master Teacher Pavilion was willing to offer a high-tier spirit stone to get acquainted with. If this matter were to blow up, these three fellows would surely be the ones suffering in the end.

“500... middle-tier spirit stones?”

The bodies of the duo shuddered.

They might be 5-star master teachers, but they didn’t have too many middle-tier spirit stones in their hands either. One to two hundred middle-tier spirit stones were already a huge amount of wealth to them. To demand 500 in a single breath... this was no different from daylight robbery!

But it was true that they were at fault in this matter.

Going by their original plan, after this fellow lost his three slots, he would surely be too ashamed to face anyone, and thus, he would leave silently. On top of that, even if he were to protest, it would only reflect his own weakness...

Yet, not only did this fellow end up fine, he even came here, and standing on the moral high ground, they couldn’t even rebut at all.

The stifled feeling squeezing them made them feel extremely uncomfortable.

“I admit that we did act inappropriately in this incident, but Hong Qian, I advise you not to go too far. In any case, aren't you perfectly fine in the end? There's no need for you to go so far and create an irreconcilable grudge among us!”

Luo Zhao flung his sleeves.

“We're all proud 5-star master teachers here. You've already got your revenge, what else do you want? Do you really want to make an enemy out of all of us?” the second old man replied with a flushed face.

“Why? Are you unwilling to pay? Or do you not have the money to do so?” Hong shi said with his hands behind his back.

“Humph, middle-tier spirit stones are precious even to 5-star master teachers like us. Can you even take five hundred middle-tier spirit stones out at once?”

Luo Zhao harrumphed.

“Fine. I heard that the crown prince is going to hold a banquet tonight to discuss the matter regarding the three slots. Since you all arrived early, surely you must have heard something! As long as you tell me how this matter is going to be resolved, I can drop this!” Hong shi replied.

Even a 5-star master teacher would find it hard to fork out 500 middle-tier spirit stones!

The urgent matter at hand was actually to figure out how the matter regarding the three slots was going to be resolved so that he could make some preparations beforehand.

“This...”

Luo Zhao and the other old man stared at one another for a moment before eventually shaking their heads.

“The crown prince didn't reveal how he intends to resolve this matter, so we have no idea as well...”

“If we knew how it was going to be resolved beforehand, we wouldn’t have to resort to such a risky plan.”

While the crown prince was their junior, he was also a talented student of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. They didn’t dare to pull their weight before him.

“You don’t know?” Hong shi frowned.

“That’s right!” Luo Zhao answered

Hearing their answer, Hong shi could only shake his head helplessly.

The other party’s words sounded logical. If they had known what was going to happen, they would have simply prepared beforehand instead of risking themselves and going to such lengths to stop him.

Luo Zhao hesitated for a moment before speaking again.

“How about this? Even though we don’t know what the crown prince is going to do later on, I can tell you about the matter regarding Princess Fei-er and the other three slots. This is a matter that took us a lot of investigation before successfully uncovering.”

“Alright then. As long as you tell me all that you know, we’ll strike off everything that has happened!” Hong shi nodded in agreement.

It was just a matter of time before Zhang shi and the others would head to Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. Since Princess Fei-er was a student of the academy as well, knowing her background could potentially help them in the future.

“Un. Princess Fei-er is the sixth princess of Hongyuan Empire. Even though she’s still young, she has shown outstanding talent as a master teacher. Despite being only twenty-four this year, she has already received her 5-star master teacher emblem!” Luo Zhao revealed.

“A twenty-four-year-old... 5-star master teacher?”

Hong shi narrowed his eyes.

As a 5-star master teacher himself, he knew how hard it was to reach this rank. On top of outstanding talent, one had to reach astounding proficiency in five different supporting occupations as well, reaching the rank of 5-star in each of them.

He had spent a hundred and sixty years before succeeding, and yet, the other party actually accomplished it by twenty-four...

It was hard for him to believe it.

“Even Zhang shi would find it hard to rival such genius!”
Hong shi smiled bitterly.

True geniuses are indeed fearsome.

“Yes. It’s precisely due to this that Crown Prince Ye Qian wishes to get on good terms with her and asked His Majesty for four slots!” Luo Zhao nodded.

When he learnt of this news, he was also astounded. If not for his strong mental fortitude, he might have collapsed from shock then.

A twenty-four-year-old 5-star master teacher... He would have never been able to imagine this to be true in the past.

“But why would Princess Fei-er require four slots?” Hong shi asked in bewilderment.

He had posed this question to Zhuang Qin as well, but perhaps due to his lower standing, he was unable to obtain certain classified information. Since Luo Zhao knew what was going on, it would be best to clarify the situation with him.

“Tagging along with the princess are her friend and two other fellow peers of the academy. It seems like they are carrying out some kind of mission at Verdant Mountain, so the crown prince invited them over here as well. Otherwise, there’s no reason for the princess of Hongyuan Empire to make her way here just for the Cleansing Lake,” Luo Zhao replied.

Hong shi nodded in realization.

Hongyuan Tier-1 Empire could be considered as a sizeable power even throughout the Master Teacher Continent. There were at least hundreds of Tier-2 Empires like Huanyu under its

command, and if not for some compelling situation, there was no reason for her to specially make the trip here.

While the Cleansing Lake had mystical effects, this was mainly limited to only Consonant Spirit and Cosmos Bridge realm experts. On top of that, even though it was considered as a treasure in Huanyu Empire, there were many artifacts in a Tier-1 Empire that could easily replace it. There was no need for them to make such a long journey here just for this purpose.

“Do you know the identity and names of the others?” Hong shi asked.

“Princess Fei-er’s friend is known as Luo Qiqi. According to what I heard, it seems like she’s a princess of a certain Tier-1 Empire as well. As for the details, given how the royal family seems to be keeping it confidential, we also dare not look into it. However, it seems like her ranking as a master teacher doesn’t pale to Princess Fei-er at all, and her cultivation even surpasses the latter. Based on my estimates, even the four of us combined might not even be a match for her!” Luo Zhao said grimly.

He had only met Luo Qiqi once, but he could tell that the latter’s cultivation had reached an astounding level.

At the very least, he knew that he wouldn’t stand a chance against her.

“As for the remaining two, they are both fellow classmates of the princess. They’re both males, and their cultivation realm is comparable to the princess as well. More importantly, they carry a noble disposition, so I guess that they have a powerful background as well. As for their names...”

Luo Zhao pondered for a moment before continuing, “One seems to be called Xing Yuan while the other one is called Wu Zhen... Just as with Luo Qiqi, the specific details on them elude me as well!”

“Luo Qiqi, Xing Yuan, and Wu Zhen?”

Hong shi nodded.

Since all of them came from the Master Teacher Academy, they had to be master teachers. Also, considering they were classmates of Princess Fei-er, they must be 5-star master teachers as well.

Considering their capability despite their young age, they would surely achieve great things in the future.

Naturally, Huanyu Empire wouldn't miss out on an opportunity to get acquainted with them.

It was no wonder why Crown Prince Ye Qian went to the extent of offering the slots for the Cleansing Lake.

Recalling another matter, Luo Zhao anxiously informed him, "Right, I also heard that Princess Fei-er has a bad temper, and Luo Qiqi has an extremely cold disposition. If you meet them, it would be advisable for you to not to offend them. Otherwise, Huanyu Empire wouldn't survive their wrath!"

"Offend them? Don't worry, even if we were to meet, it's impossible for us to offend them!"

Hong shi chuckled earnestly, "After all, we're all honest men!"

610 Mystical Treasure Hall

Stretching his back, Zhang Xuan walked out of his room.

Cultivating an entire month on the journey here had left him rather exhausted.

“Teacher!”

Upon walking out of his room, Yuan Tao immediately rushed forward with a bitter face.

“Teacher, somehow, I feel that... my cultivation seems to have slowed. For some reason, I find myself unable to concentrate...”

Zhao Ya and Lu Chong’s departure had left an immense pressure of the four remaining students. For fear of lagging behind, Yuan Tao had been working extra hard, but for the past half a month, it was as if he had been shackled, preventing him from advancing no matter how hard he pushed.

Afraid that his teacher might reprimand him, he also dared not ask Zhang Xuan about it.

But eventually, he came to the limit of his tolerance.

The final trigger was Wang Ying’s recent breakthrough. If he didn’t solve his issue soon, the gap between him and the others would widen significantly.

“There’s no need to worry. I know of your condition, and it’s not due to your lack of concentration or talent. Rather... your cultivation has reached a point where if you don’t further awaken your Emperor’s Bloodline, it will hinder your future progress!” Zhang Xuan replied.

He had noticed Yuan Tao’s condition a few days ago on the back of the spirit beast.

It wasn’t that he wasn’t working hard enough, but that the bloodline running through his body was shackling him.

If one possessing a unique constitution were to fully awaken their potential, they would be able to achieve breakthroughs as easily as eating and drinking. But if they were to be unable to do so, it would bind them instead, rendering their cultivation useless.

Due to the very low number of people possessing unique constitutions, it was extremely difficult to find a clear heritage to awakening them. As such, many talented individuals had found their hopes being snapped due to being unable to find a way to awaken their unique constitution further or lacking the required resource for it.

This was precisely the reason why Zhang Xuan eventually agreed to allow Zhao Ya to go to the Glacier Plain Court.

The Glacier Plain Court had a complete heritage for the Pure Yin Body and plentiful resources to groom her. This was much better than Zhang Xuan fumbling around for a solution.

The current Yuan Tao was also facing such a problem. He had awakened his physical constitution by twenty percent and reaching Transcendent Mortal 2-dan primary stage was already his limit. If he wanted to grow any further, he would have continue awakening his unique constitution. Otherwise, his Emperor's Bloodline would shackle his acupoints and meridians, preventing him from making any progress.

If he could cultivate the complete version of Heaven's Path Divine Art, he wouldn't face such problems at all. It was a pity that he could only learn the simplified version.

Zhang Xuan had been thinking over the matter for the past few days, and he found a few viable solutions.

"Alright. Relay my instructions to Sun Qiang, tell him to find out if there's any place that sells artifacts around here. I'll look for some artifacts that can resolve your problem!" Zhang Xuan replied.

"Yes!"

Seeing that his teacher already knew about the matter, Yuan Tao felt a little embarrassed. He quickly left, and a while later, he returned with Sun Qiang beside him.

“Young Master, I’ve had someone look into the surroundings, and there’s a ‘Mystical Treasure Hall’ in the vicinity, and you might find what you want there!” Sun Qiang replied.

Knowing his job as a butler, he had been gathering information ever since the group arrived here, and he learned quite a few things as well.

“Mystical Treasure Hall?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

“That’s right. The Mystical Treasure Hall sells all kinds of unique and valuable artifacts. There are even a few whose worth is comparable to a Spirit high-tier artifact. However, what is bizarre is that... the owner never sells the goods. Rather, he gives it to those ‘fated’ with him!” replied Sun Qiang.

“Gives away?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

No matter how many valuable, unique collectibles, artifacts, and wealth one had, wouldn’t one go bankrupt if one were to give away everything?

“That’s right. But while I use the word ‘gives’, there’s actually a price to pay.”

Seeing the look of disbelief on the young master’s face, Sun Qiang chuckled. “It’s said that there are two rows of stone pillars within the Mystical Treasure Hall. Through some unknown technology, there is an artifact hidden within each stone pillar, and those who intend to obtain any goods from the store would have to identify the artifacts inside the stone pillar. The store works by a progressive point system. The first artifact identified from the stone pillar will award one point, the second artifact identified will award two points, the third artifact identified will award three points, so on and so forth. In other words, once one identifies one’s fiftieth stone pillar, one will be awarded fifty points straight!

“One can trade the points obtained from the identification of the artifacts for any treasure placed on the shelves of the Mystical Treasure Hall. With sufficient points, one can obtain anything one wants! However... one has to pay ten middle-tier spirit stones before attempting the identification, and if one is

able to identify even one of the artifacts hidden in the stone pillars, the spirit stones will be refunded. On the other hand, failure to do so means that the spirit stones go to the shop!”

“Oh!”

Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

In other words, the shop was leveraging on the curiosity of others to create something similar to a gambling den.

The artifacts were hidden in the stone pillars, making it nearly impossible to identify them through guesswork. Earning points would surely be difficult. Even though ten middle-tier spirit stones weren't much, the shop should be rather profitable if it could attract a crowd.

In a sense, it was somewhat similar to the Harmonious Stream of Flowing Goblet in Honghai City Appraiser Hall.

It hinged mainly on one's eye of discernment.

It might be difficult for anyone else to identify those artifacts, but to Zhang Xuan... those were as good as giveaways!

With a touch, a book would be formed in the Library of Heaven's Path, and he would be able to identify even the eighteen generations of one's ancestors. To him, identifying an artifact in a stone pillar was a walk in the park.

“Let's go and take a look. If there's anything useful to Yuan Tao, we can try to obtain it! If not, we'll just continue looking around.” Zhang Xuan showed a slight smile.

To awaken Yuan Tao's physical constitution, certain unique items were required. If the Mystical Treasure Hall possessed these items, Zhang Xuan would identify the artifacts in some stone pillars to obtain them.

While it was likely that Zhang Xuan would be able to easily identify everything in the shop, he didn't think that it was appropriate for him to do so. After all, a master teacher should behave in a way befitting of one. It would be inappropriate for him to grab all of the treasures of another when the other party was simply conducting his business.

Besides, in a foreign place such as Huanyu Empire, it was best for him to maintain a low profile.

“Yes!”

Nodding his head, Sun Qiang walked forward and led the way.

Since they were looking for a treasure relating to Yuan Tao’s constitution, naturally, he tagged along as well.

The Mystical Treasure Hall wasn’t too far away from the royal palace. After a short twenty-minute walk, they found themselves standing before a majestic, towering building.

Three grandly written words, ‘Mystical Treasure Hall’, were written on a board hung above the entrance. These words absorbed spiritual energy from the surroundings, and it felt as though they would leap out from the surface at any moment.

“A sixth level calligraphy?”

Upon seeing it, Zhang Xuan was stunned.

A sixth level calligraphy has already reached the level of Spiritual Wisdom. Even a 5-star painter would find it hard to produce a work of this tier.

Seeing such a work before entering the Mystical Treasure Hall, Zhang Xuan’s interest in it intensified.

Walking through the door, they arrived at an exceptionally vast main hall. There were shelves placed by the walls, and all kinds of artifacts filled its surface.

The three men walked over to take a closer look.

Sword, painting, chess, ore, spirit beast fur...

There were indeed all kinds of treasures here.

“The golden talon of a Transcendent Mortal 4-dan Foxeagle Beast?”

Walking along the shelf, Zhang Xuan suddenly came to a stop.

Placed on the shelf before him was a meter-long, giant, golden talon, and it felt both cold and sharp.

The Foxeagle Beast was a Transcendent Mortal 4-dan spirit beast. Not only were there very few of them, they were also

extremely cunning. Even the Beast Hall would be troubled to find one of them, needless to say, capture or kill one.

And the talons of this rare beast were exceptionally valuable treasures. This was especially so for those that were golden in color-it was the ideal material to forging a Spirit intermediate-tier pinnacle weapon.

Many people would die to obtain even just a small piece of its talons, and yet, there was a complete one here. Its price was inestimable.

Lowering his head to take a closer look, he saw a goatskin label placed beneath the claw, and written on it was, ‘Golden Talon of the Foxeagle Beast, 1!’

Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but ask Sun Qiang, “What does this ‘1’ mean?”

Sun Qiang pondered for a moment quickly before replying.

“The one refers to the number of points required to trade for it!”

“One can trade for this with just a single point?”

Zhang Xuan was stunned.

The Golden Talon of a Foxeagle Beast was incomparably rare and valuable. If one were to put it in an auction, it would be worth dozens of spirit stones. And yet, one could trade for it with just a single point. Wasn’t the worth of the points here a little... way too high?

“The items on the first floor can be traded with just one point. The higher one ascends, the more valuable the items become.”

Sun Qiang smiled.

“I can trade for any one of these items with just one point?”

Shocked, Zhang Xuan breathed in a large mouthful of cold air.

He suddenly could see why anyone would come and try their luck despite the seeming impossibility of the task. The items on display were simply too valuable!

Moving along, Zhang Xuan saw a few more valuable items whose worth weren't beneath that of the Foxeagle Beast's talon and labeled on the goatskins beneath them were '1' as well.

Impressed, Zhang Xuan exclaimed, "Impressive. This place indeed lives up to the words 'Mystical Treasure'!"

Soon, he finished looking around the first floor.

Even though the items on the first floor were indeed valuable, none of them were truly effective in awakening Yuan Tao's unique constitution.

The Emperor's Bloodline was special even among unique constitutions. While Zhang Xuan wasn't too sure what items would work, he had a rough idea in mind.

"Let's move on to the second floor!"

Knowing that there was nothing he needed on the first floor, Zhang Xuan lost his interest.

To Zhang Xuan, no matter how good an artifact or item was, its worth couldn't possibly exceed that of spirit stones or cultivation technique manuals.

As such, he didn't bear much interest in such stuff.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have returned the artifacts he claimed from the Harmonious Streaming of Flowing Goblets back to the Appraiser Hall back then.

The three men moved on to the second floor.

There were significantly fewer people on the second floor, and the number and variety of items were also more limited as well. But with just a glance, it was clear that the items here were much more valuable.

There were many one-of-a-kind artifacts and items that, despite Zhang Xuan's extensive knowledge, he couldn't name.

"This is... a painting of the seventh level?"

Soon, Zhang Xuan saw a painting of the seventh level. Judging from its quality, the painter who created it must be at least 6-star in rank. The animals and plants inside were so

lifelike that it felt as though they were truly living beings that would leap out of the painting at any moment.

A painting at the level of Enlightened Spirit already possessed spirit and sentience, and the creatures within were capable of leaving the painting on their own accord.

Taking a closer look, he saw a line of words written on the goatskin below, “Proud Conception of Spring and Autumn, 2!”

“It’s worth only two points?”

Zhang Xuan was astonished.

This painting was much better than ‘Rousing From the Drunken Dreams’ that was auctioned in Honghai City back then.

After all, the creation of that painting was a mistake in itself. Even though it barely managed to reach the seventh level under Zhang Xuan’s hands, it was ranked amidst the lowest within that tier, and it was eventually sold for only twenty thousand low-tier spirit stones, which was equivalent to two middle-tier spirit stones.

On the other hand, this was a masterpiece left behind by a 6-star painter. If placed in an auction, its price would surely soar above fifty middle-tier spirit stones. To think that its value would only be ‘2’ here...

This Mystical Treasure Hall was indeed fearsome. The range and value of the treasures displayed here had far exceeded his expectations.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to continue browsing around, a faint voice echoed from the stairway, and soon, two figures could be seen walking over.

“How can one find anything good in this remote place? If there’s anything you want, I can get it for you after we return!”

611 Inner Core of Great River Snake

It was man and a lady. The both of them carried a dignified air around them.

The lady walking in front was dressed in light-yellow, tight-fitting clothes that outlined her beautiful figure. Her long, black hair that fell on her shoulder contrasted with her fair skin, and she had a slender waist where one could easily hold. Her outer appearance was in no way beneath that of Mo Yu or Zhao Feiwu.

The man beside her seemed to be in his thirties. He had a broad figure with a well-defined face. There was a hint of authoritativeness etched between his brows, indicating that he was likely to be a person of high standing.

Nevertheless, Zhang Xuan wasn't interested in the other party's appearance. In terms of beauty, there was no one who could compare up to Zhao Ya, and Mo Yu and Zhao Feiwu were top-notch beauties as well. Yet, he didn't pay much heed to the three of them, so of course he wouldn't gawk at a lady whom he didn't recognize.

But taking a look at the other party's cultivation, he was shocked.

Even though the two of them were young, their cultivation was exceptional. They gave a feeling reminiscent of the deep ocean or endless abyss; they were definitely stronger than Hong shi.

“Transcendent Mortal 6-dan?”

Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up.

Of the twenty-eight regional powers, even the strongest expert hadn't reached Transcendent Mortal 6-dan. Yet, just by walking around town, he had already met with two of them. Not to mention, the both of them were extremely young as

well. As expected of Huanyu Capital, it was indeed filled with experts.

As expected, the might of the capital far exceeded that of the Vassal States.

“There’s no need for it. If you’re bored, you can return first!” the beautiful lady replied impassively, snubbing the other party’s goodwill. From the look of it, the duo didn’t seem to be close.

“Hehe, how could I possibly be bored? If you wish to look around, I’ll accompany you!” The man laughed awkwardly.

The duo continued walking around the shelves to take a look. Zhang Xuan couldn’t be bothered with the duo anymore, and he continued browsing through the items.

To awaken the Emperor’s Bloodline, he would require the blood essence or inner core of spirit beasts with similar attributes, or some unique medicinal herb, ore, and such. But these items were extremely rare and finding them was no easy task.

“Purpledawn Pearl? This artifact can cleanse the dirt from the person carrying it, thus making them immaculate!”

Zhang Xuan’s eyes fell on a round pearl.

He had read a record of it before. It was a peculiar artifact that specialized neither in offense nor defense, but even so, it was an accessory that cultivators liked to carry around.

After all, the one wearing it could keep their clothes in pristine condition, thus maintaining a glowing appearance even without bathing.

“To think that this item would actually be a ‘2’ as well...”

Zhang Xuan shook his head.

To think that a seventh level painting would be of the same price at this item.

It seemed like the Mystical Treasure Hall didn’t arrange artifacts by value but by rarity.

While a Purpledawn Pearl couldn't be said to be a necessity for cultivators, it was an extremely rare artifact, and it was deeply fancied by most ladies.

After all, given the broad continent, a single flight could easily take days, and during which, one would be unable to bathe. The feeling of being dirty would feel incredibly uncomfortable to some. However, with this artifact, one could remain clean at all moments; needless to say a month or two, even if one were to walk around in the same clothes for an entire year, one's appearance would still be immaculate.

It was highly-valued precisely because of its rarity.

Even so, part of the reason why it was priced equally with the painting was also because paintings were impractical in battle. As such, its value was beneath that of weapons and other practical mystical artifacts.

However, this restriction was only limited for paintings up to the seventh level. Once a painting reached the eighth level or even higher, it would gain the ability to realize illusions. For example, some of the more formidable paintings could even form a massive city that could trap a cultivator within it for an eternity to come. As such, the value of eighth level paintings was immeasurable.

Every single occupation that had been officially recognized by the Master Teacher Pavilion wields immense might upon reaching its pinnacle. Ordinary men can't hope to stand against such mystical abilities.

Taking the Celestial Chess for example, it was said that those who had reached the highest level in it would be able to manipulate the world as though it were their chessboard. Taking the stars as the stones, they could maneuver the essence of the world and reverse yin and yang.

However... it was a pity that what Hong shi received was an incomplete manual. Even the inheritance from the puppet was incomplete, thus making it impossible to unleash such might.

Looking on, Zhang Xuan soon browsed through all artifacts in the second floor, but he was still unable to find anything

suitable. Thus, along with the other two, they proceeded up to the third floor.

The artifacts on the third floor were much more valuable. The labeling of each artifact was no longer uniform; some were labeled with a '3', some a '4', and some a '5'.

Walking along the shelves, Zhang Xuan saw a sixth level painting labeled '4'. It was even more expensive than the seventh level painting from before!

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before coming to a realization.

Even though this painting might be a tier lower than the previous one seen, it was a masterpiece left behind by a very famous painter in Huanyu Empire. This piece was said to be a magnum opus that he put his final breath into drawing after suffering fatal injuries in a duel. Contained within it was the lingering will and resentment of a 5-star painter, thus making it exceptionally valuable. Naturally, its price would also be marked up to reflect that.

“Hmm? This is a Spirit intermediate-tier pinnacle sword?”

Soon, Zhang Xuan saw a weapon on the shelf.

His swordsmanship was impressive, but he had never been able to find a suitable weapon. If he could wield one fitting of his current cultivation, his fighting prowess would surely soar significantly.

This sword was even higher ranked than the ones he had seen at Honghai City. Its sharp, cold gleam could induce a freezing sensation in those that set its eyes upon it.

“Glacier Rain Sword, 6!”

Such was written on the goatskin label beneath it.

“It is actually worth six points?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

He had seen many Spirit intermediate-tier weapons in the shop, but those were only labeled '1'. Yet, this sword was actually priced at '6', wasn't this a little way too exaggerated?

Sensing Zhang Xuan's doubt, an attendant walked over to him and explained, "Gongzi, this sword was personally forged by Master Blacksmith Hu Qingzi, and it is an 'Upgradable Artifact'. It can undergo another round of tempering, thus making it incomparably valuable. It is nothing like those ordinary weapons displayed below!"

"Upgradable Artifact?" Zhang Xuan froze for a moment before nodding his head.

While he had never officially learned smithing before, he had collected quite a few books on the topic, and he knew of the various jargons in it.

Typically, a weapon was considered to be complete once its form became fixed. If one were to put it through another round of tempering, there was a good chance it might lose its sharpness and be rendered useless.

But Upgradable Artifacts were different. If one were to find better ores in the future, one could meld it into the artifact during the tempering process, thus raising the weapon's quality and possibly its tier.

In other words, while this artifact might be a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon at the moment, it was impossible to predict how strong it could become in the future. In that sense, it was indeed worthy of its pricing of '6'.

"Hmm? The inner core of a Great River Snake?"

While Zhang Xuan was interested in the sword, he wasn't in a rush to obtain it. Instead, he continued looking on, but right after he barely took two steps, his eyes suddenly lit up.

Placed on a shelf not too far away was a round inner core of a spirit beast. It was crimson in color, and it exuded a searing aura.

The inner core of a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beast, Great River Snake.

The Great River Snake was a spirit beast that lives in marshlands in mountain valleys. It had thick scales that granted it incredible defensive capability. But while its body was cold as though metal, its inner core was fiery like coal,

leaving one with a sensation as though one would be incinerated.

“The Great River Snake possesses the Dragon Bloodline, so it should be able to awaken Yuan Tao’s Emperor’s Bloodline!”

Zhang Xuan smiled.

While the Great River Snake was considered to be a type of snake, it possessed the bloodline of a flood dragon. On top of that, it was also a spirit beast possessing superior defensive ability, which was aligned with the Emperor’s Bloodline.

Lowering his glance to take a look, he saw the label on the goatskin: ‘Inner Core of a Great River Snake, 10!’

“Ten points... But it’s indeed worth this much!”

Only a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert could hunt and procure the inner core of a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beast. As such, it was no surprise that it would be labeled ten.

‘I’ll be taking this!’ Zhang Xuan made an internal decision. ‘However, the searing aura of the inner core is too strong, and I’ll need some medicinal herbs to mediate its properties. I wonder if I can find anything suitable here!’

Having found something suitable for Yuan Tao, Zhang Xuan nodded his head in satisfaction. He continued to browse through the shop in hopes of finding a medicinal herb with mediating properties when a faint voice suddenly sounded.

“I want this Sorrow Severing Grass. How much is it?”

It was the voice of a female. Glancing over, it was the dashing man and beautiful lady he had met back on the second floor. Unbeknownst to Zhang Xuan, the both of them had come up to the third floor as well.

“Sorrow Severing Grass?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

Sorrow Severing Grass was a medicinal herb possessing cold attribute. It had a gentle nature, and it was exceptionally potent in neutralizing fiery properties. On top of that, it nourished and formed a layer of protection around one’s inner organs and meridians, thus making it the best possible medicinal herb to go along with the inner core of Great River Snake.

“Replying this lady over here, our Mystical Treasure Hall doesn’t sell our treasure through normal means. If you wish to purchase anything, you will have to earn points and trade for it.”

The attendant managing the third floor quickly hurried over and explained.

“Points? What do you mean by points?” The young man beside her frowned.

“Our Mystical Treasure Hall has two rows of stone pillars on the fourth floor, and sealed within them are artifacts of all kinds. If one successfully identifies them within the time limit, one will be given points. The more artifacts one recognizes, the more points one earns...” The attendant quickly went through the rules.

It was exactly the same as how Sun Qiang described it, but it was even more detailed.

“How troublesome! But since it’s just identifying artifacts, there should be no problem at all!”

Hearing that there’s such a complex procedure in work here, the young man frowned. But following which, his face beamed with confidence, and he turned to the lady before him and said, “Sixth... Young Mistress, wait here for a moment. I’ll bring some points to you right now!”

A look of displeasure flashed across the face of the lady known as the Sixth Young Mistress upon hearing her companion’s words.

“I don’t need your help. I’ll earn the points myself!”

Waving her hands, she turned to the attendant and said, “Lead the way. I wish to take a look!”

“Yes!”

Seeing that someone was interested in challenging the stone pillars, the attendant quickly led the duo up to the next floor.

“Let’s follow them!”

Zhang Xuan beckoned for the other two.

The aim of his visit here was to find something to awaken Yuan Tao's unique constitution, and to procure those items, he would need to earn points as well.

Following behind the attendant's group on to the fourth floor, a vast room appeared before him. Dozens of stone pillars were placed neatly in two rows in the middle. They had a smooth exterior, and it was impossible to tell how it was carved. There were a few people shaking their heads before the stone pillars, depressed.

"There's no need to be depressed, it's fine to not identify anything!"

The chuckle of an old man sounded in front.

It seemed like these fellows who were shaking their heads had challenged the stone pillars only to end in failure.

Zhang Xuan glanced over and realized that they were wearing the robe of their occupation-appraiser. In fact, two of them were even 4-star appraisers!

Considering how even a 4-star appraiser failed in this challenge, it seemed like this test wasn't as easy as it looked.

"Hall Master, these two wish to challenge the stone pillars as well!"

The attendant walked over to the old man and gestured to the young man and young lady.

This old man was the hall master of the Mystical Treasure Hall, Gan Yiping.

"Alright..." Gan Yiping nodded. Turning his head over, he smiled. "I'll have to trouble you to pay the deposit first!"

Zhang Xuan froze for a moment before a sheepish expression covered his face.

'Deposit? Right, I forgot that I don't have any money to pay the deposit...'

612 Challenging the Stone Pillars

Too intent on winning some points, Zhang Xuan forgot that he only had a high-tier spirit stone on him.

Even though he had procured 600 middle-tier spirit stones from Fleeting Cloud Sect and the other powers previously, he had already used up all of them before reaching Huanyu Empire. The current him was as good as bankrupt.

The young man, unaware of the rules, asked, “How much is the deposit?”

“Ten middle-tier spirit stones!” Gan Yiping replied.

“Here you are! The both of us want to give it a try!” Without asking any questions, the young man flicked his wrist and passed twenty middle-tier spirit stones over.

Others would have to sell all of their property just to gather twenty middle-tier spirit stones, and yet, it seemed to be nothing to this young man at all.

Grabbing the spirit stones, Gan Yiping chuckled. Gesturing to the stone pillars, he went through the rules. “Contained within these stone pillars is an artifact each. There’s a hint inscribed on each of the stone pillars, and based on that, one has to deduce what kind of artifact is hidden in it.”

“Every challenger is only given an incense’s time, and as long as one successfully names the artifact, the stone pillar will break apart. The more stone pillars that break apart, the more points one will earn!”

“Alright!”

Nodding his head, the young man turned to the young lady beside him and said, “Sixth Young Mistress, wait here for me. I’ll return quickly!”

After which, he walked over to the stone pillar.

Zhang Xuan and group also looked at him curiously.

They knew of the rules, but it might still prove to be useful to see how the challenge would go and how difficult it would be.

Standing before the first stone pillar, the young man read the hint inscribed on it before circling around the pillar. Slowly, a crack appeared on his confident face, and confusion started to seep through.

There wasn't any unique mark on the smooth stone pillar, making it impossible to see, feel, or even determine the shape of the artifact at all. To guess the identity of an artifact through a layer of stone was more difficult than he had expected.

Walking another two rounds around the stone pillars, his face turned livid.

He had just boasted in front of the sixth young mistress that he would be back soon. He thought that he could return with some points to win the favor of the beauty, and yet, he ended up being unable to recognize anything at all. He would be extremely embarrassed if he were to return like that!

Scratching his head, the young man began to panic. He placed his palm on the stone pillar and tried to infuse his zhenqi in. However, the stone pillar seemed to possess the ability to ward off zhenqi, rendering his actions futile.

“This...”

Soon, he tried everything he could think of and he indignantly turned to look at Gan Yiping.

“Hall Master, there's nothing distinctive about your stone pillars at all. How are we supposed to guess?”

Isn't this a scam?

How in the world do you expect me to guess what is within the stone pillar without any conclusive clue?

Even a 6-star appraiser would be helpless before these stone pillars!

“Gongzi, you need not panic. There's a clue on the stone pillars, you can make a deduction based on it!”

As though having guessed that the other party would say these words, Gan Yiping smiled faintly.

“Make a deduction?”

Turning to look at the words on the stone pillars, the young man’s confusion only seemed to deepen. Seeing that an incense’s time was about to pass, he could only grit his teeth and make some guesses. “Sword... saber, medicinal herb, wooden bat...”

He listed several things at the top of his mind consecutively, but there was no response at all.

“Time’s up!” Gan Yiping shook his head with a bitter smile.

He could tell that this young man was extraordinary, and he thought that the other party’s presence could finally bring some progress to the uncovering of the stone pillar. But from the looks of it now, he was thinking too much into it.

“Alright...”

With a scarlet, stifled face, the young man walked back with an awkward expression.

What was this? He thought that it would just be like normal treasure speculation, and with his capability, he would surely be able to easily determine the type and name of the artifact. After winning some points, he would be able to buy whatever the sixth young mistress wanted and win her heart. Who knew that his attempt would end in such tragic failure?

His attempt to show off only ended in humiliation.

Sensing the other party’s poor mood, Gan Yiping consoled him.

“Gongzi, you need not be disheartened. I found these stone pillars in some ruins a long time ago. I don’t know who left them behind, but they seem to possess some mysterious ability. Despite observing them daily over the course of fifty years, I was only able to decipher three of them!”

“Fifty years? Three?” The young man was taken aback.

“Indeed. Only after knowing what the artifact inside is, along with its precise effects, can one open the stone pillars. I’ve tried all kinds of ways to open them throughout the years but to no avail. That is the reason why I opened this Mystical Treasure Hall to borrow the wisdom of others.”

Gan Yiping shook his head. “Actually, there’s no need for you to worry. The rule of an incense’s time is only to allow the others behind to take a look as well. Since you’ve already paid the deposit of ten middle-tier spirit stones, you can copy the text imprinted on the stone pillar to take back with you. If you were to decipher it, you can return anytime, and I won’t charge you the deposit again.”

“Return anytime?” The young man shook his head. “We’re only passing by Huanyu Empire, and we won’t be staying for too long. Besides, I’m only interested in that single medicinal herb!”

If not for the sixth young mistress insisting on coming here, given his identity and pride, he would have never come to such a remote location.

While this Mystical Treasure Hall possessed plentiful of valuable items, given his family background, it wouldn’t be too difficult for him to find and obtain something similar to them as well.

“Alright!”

Seeing the lack of interest in the latter, a hint of disappointment flashed across Gan Yiping’s eyes. Shaking his head, he said with a slightly downcast voice, “I’ve devoted half of my life to these stone pillars... it seems like I’ll have to carry my regrets with me to my coffin!”

“His lifespan...”

Hearing the other party’s lamentation, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but shake his head.

While this old man possessed extraordinary strength, there was a declining air shrouding his body. Clearly, his lifespan was reaching its limit.

Upon stepping into Transcendent Mortal 1-dan, one's level of existence would undergo a qualitative breakthrough, thus increasing one's lifespan significantly. Living to two hundred wouldn't be a problem at all.

After which, with a rise in cultivation, one's lifespan would also increase correspondingly, but the increase would be minimal. As such, unless one advanced to Saint realm, one would only be able to live to two hundred or so, three hundred if one maintained one's physical condition well.

This old man's lifespan was beyond two hundred and fifty, and it was clear he was nearing his end already.

Having dug out so many mysterious stone pillars, he was determined to uncover the secrets behind them. Yet, his own capability proved to be limited, so he could only establish with Mystical Treasure Hall and put out all of the treasures he had collected throughout his lifetime to attract others.

As for the deposit of ten middle-tier spirit stones, it was actually just a benchmark. Otherwise, if everyone were to come and try their luck every day, the truly capable appraisers might find themselves being squeezed out.

Unable to obtain even a single point, the young man glanced at the young lady apologetically.

“Sixth Young Mistress, I'm truly sorry...”

“I'll take a look!”

The difficulty of the challenge had piqued the competitive spirit of the sixth young mistress. She immediately proceeded over to the first stone pillar, and upon seeing the words, a deep frown appeared on her forehead as well.

It didn't take long for an incense's time to pass, and she couldn't help but shake her head in disappointment.

Clearly, she was helpless before the stone pillars as well.

“A pity it is!”

Seeing how the both of them failed to decipher the stone pillar, Gan Yiping sighed.

The duo's cultivation and disposition were extraordinary, and without a doubt, they were clearly rare geniuses. He thought that they would be able to bring some kind of breakthrough to this research, but who knew that they wouldn't be able to solve even a single one of these pillars.

"Hall Master, pleased to meet you. I'm a master teacher!"

Seeing that the sixth young mistress failed as well, the young man stepped forward, flicked his wrist, and an emblem appeared in his hands.

"5 stars..."

Gan Yiping's eyes narrowed.

He was able to tell that there was something extraordinary about the duo with a single glance, but he thought that they were just esteemed nobles from a prestigious clan. Never in his dreams did he expect that they would be 5-star master teachers!

If a master teacher of this caliber were to enter the capital, even His Majesty would have to welcome them with the most elaborate of ceremonies.

"That's right. We've come to Huanyu Empire to deal with some matters. Your Sorrow Severing Grass is of utmost importance to me, so may I humbly request you to sell it to me. I'm willing to offer double, triple, or even quintuple the price!"

Seeing that the other party seemed to be stunned by his identity, the young man nodded his head in satisfaction.

No matter where a 5-star master teacher went, he would be well-respected.

"You wish to buy my Sorrow Severing Grass?" Gan Yiping asked.

"That's right!" The young man nodded. "I truly have an important need for that herb, so I hope that you can grant my request!"

A moment later, Gan Yiping said, "How about this? I won't accept your money, but as long as you conduct a lesson for

me, I don't mind giving the Sorrow Severing Grass to you!"

His lifespan was already nearing its limits, and if he could achieve a breakthrough, he might still be able to live for a couple more years. Since the person before him was a 5-star master teacher, there was a chance that the other party might be able to help him.

Besides, it had been twenty years since the Mystical Treasure Hall opened, but no one had yet to decipher the stone pillars. Waiting on like that might be futile. Instead of obstinately sticking to his rules, he might as well give it away generously in exchange for getting acquainted with a 5-star master teacher.

"Alright!"

Initially, the young man didn't bear much hope. Thus, upon hearing those words, his face flushed with delight, and he hurriedly nodded his head.

A lesson didn't mean anything much to him.

"There's no need to stand on ceremony!" Gan Yiping waved his hands casually. Turning to the attendant, he instructed, "Go down to the third floor, wrap up the Sorrow Severing Grass carefully, and pass it to this gongzi..."

"Yes..."

Nodding his head, the attendant was just about to leave when a voice sounded.

"Wait a moment!"

Following which, a fatty stepped forward.

Sun Qiang!

The young master was here to look for certain items to help Young Master Yuan Tao awaken his unique constitution. While the young master didn't say anything, he noticed that the latter's eyes had stopped at the Sorrow Severing Grass for a slightly longer period of time. Clearly, it had caught his interest.

If the other party were to take this one away, it would be difficult to procure another one. Naturally, Sun Qiang had to stop him.

“What’s wrong?”

Seeing a fatty step forward to interfere in his business, the young man frowned.

“Nothing much, I just think that this is a little unfair!”

Sun Qiang turned to the elder and said, “As the owner of the Mystical Treasure Hall, since you established the rule that one can only trade for artifacts with points, you shouldn’t make an exception for someone. Otherwise, that would compromise the integrity of your business!”

Since he had established rules, naturally he had to follow them. If he were to change his rules every now and then, how could he possibly expect others to follow them?

“Rules do need to be followed, but my lifespan is already coming to an end. Since there’s little hope of deciphering the stone pillars... so I’ll give up then. From today onward, the Mystical Treasure Hall will be closed. Since I’m shutting down my business, the rules shouldn’t matter anymore, right?”

Sighing, Gan Yiping shook his head.

His lifespan was reaching its end, and nowadays, he felt his spirit drained. After decades of effort ending in futility, he knew that his chances were slim. Reluctant as he may be, he knew that it would be wiser for him to give up now.

“Little hope of deciphering the stone pillars? That’s because our young master hasn’t made a move yet! As long as he steps forth, everything you have here will be deciphered!”

Sun Qiang harrumphed.

The sixth young mistress’s face darkened upon hearing those words, and she harrumphed coldly.

“Everything deciphered? You sure speak arrogantly!”

613 A Bet With Sixth Young Mistress

This Sixth Young Mistress had just returned from the stone pillars, so she was unaware of the discussion the young man had with Gan Yiping.

Having taken a look, she realized that she was helpless before these stone pillars as well.

Even a knowledgeable genius like her was helpless before these stone pillars, and yet, this fellow actually bragged that he would be able to easily decipher everything... Intense displeasure immediately struck her, and she retorted angrily.

“Who do you think you are? Am I talking to you?”

Sun Qiang glanced at the Sixth Young Mistress with a proud stature.

“You...”

The sixth mistress was taken aback.

“What you?”

Sun Qiang flung his sleeves and tilted his head upward proudly. “Can’t you see I’m in the midst of talking to the hall master? This is no place for a fellow like you who couldn’t even decipher a single stone pillar to interrupt!”

“What did you say?”

The Sixth Young Mistress nearly fainted from anger. To think that a 5-star master teacher, a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan expert, would actually be looked down on by a Transcendent Mortal 2-dan butler. Her chest puffed up in anger, and she nearly exploded on the spot.

“Audacious!” Hearing the lady he was courting being insulted, the young man exclaimed in anger.

“Audacious? You still dare to speak? Just because I didn’t talk about you, you think that you’re any better than her? You also failed to solve any stone pillars and earn any points, and on top of that, you even tried to bend the rules after your failure... Do you think you are impressive just because you have that bit of money?”

Sun Qiang harrumphed in disdain.

What the heck do they think they are? Despite looking so decent, they actually tried to bribe the owner after their failure, even using their position to threaten him... How embarrassing!

You are just a 5-star master teacher. Before our old master, even Hongyuan Empire’s Pavilion Master Mo Gaoyuan, a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, dare not utter anything!

“You...”

Seeing the other party’s contemptuous glance, both the young man and the Sixth Young Mistress were about to go insane.

They were both incredible geniuses, people who would be respected no matter where they went. And yet, at this very moment, they were actually looked down by a mere butler. If not for their etiquette as a master teacher and nobles holding them back, they would have surely flown into a temper.

“Since you said that your young master is able to decipher the stone pillars, where is he? Why don’t you invite him over to give it a try?”

Flinging his sleeves, the young man harrumphed. “I sure would like to see whether he’s as incredible as you make him out to be!”

Even he himself couldn’t decipher a single stone pillar, and yet this fellow dared to boast that his young master could solve everything cleanly. Are you jesting?

“This...”

At this moment, a helpless voice sounded by the side.

“The young master he’s speaking of... seems to be referring to me!”

Following which, a young man with an awkward expression stepped forward.

After hearing the hall master promising to sell the item, Zhang Xuan wanted to step forward to say a thing or two. However, Sun Qiang managed to beat him to it, thus resulting in such a situation.

This fellow had been rather reliable recently, so Zhang Xuan thought it should be fine for him to do the talking. Who knew that the other party would actually have him pinned on a stake with just a few words...

What the heck was this?

If you speak like that, how am I going to keep a low profile?

“So, you are the one... who can decipher all of the stone pillars?”

The Sixth Young Mistress harrumphed coldly. “Arrogant!”

She thought that the young master the other party talked about was some incredible figure, but it turned out to be a young man who wasn't even twenty yet. She couldn't help but feel repulsed by the other party.

As a princess, not to mention one blessed with good looks, she had faced pursuers of all kinds. The most common type was those who thought that they were superior to others, such as this young man standing right before her at this moment! They liked to pretend they were something beyond their ability despite their ignorance. In her view, such actions were nothing more than foolishness!

“This... it's just words of flattery from my subordinate, please don't take it seriously!”

Seeing how he was detested before he could even say anything, Zhang Xuan waved his hands sheepishly.

Upon having his words refuted by his young master, Sun Qiang panicked, “What words of flattery? Young master, those are just mere stone pillars, you should be able to decipher them easily! You should show these greenhorns what true capability is!”

“Alright, stop spouting nonsense!”

Zhang Xuan’s face darkened. “Didn’t you hear that? The hall master has said that these stone pillars are hard to decipher. Despite fifty years of effort, only three of them have been solved to date. How could I possibly solve them easily?”

“Young Master...”

“Enough!” Interrupting the other party’s words, Zhang Xuan turned to the trio and apologized, “Pardon me, it’s due to my negligence that my butler got ahead of himself!”

“Humph!”

Seeing the other party admit his mistake, the young man and the Sixth Young Mistress’s complexion improved slightly, and they tilted their heads up proudly.

“It’s normal for a subordinate to speak up for his master, you don’t have to worry about it!” Gan Yiping replied.

It was normal for a subordinate to be in awe of their master and believe that their master was capable of anything.

“Thank you, Hall Master, for your understanding!”

Seeing that the awkward situation had been resolved, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. Then, facing Gan Yiping, he asked, “So, Hall Master... I would like the Great River Snake’s inner core, Sorrow Severing Grass, and Frost Rain Sword. How many stone pillars will I need to decipher?”

“...” The young man and the Sixth Young Mistress staggered.

Right after reprimanding his subordinate for spouting nonsense, he actually went ahead and asked which stone pillars he had to decipher... as though he could decipher as many stone pillars as he wanted...

Do you have some compulsive disorder for boasting?

Do you really think that you can decipher as many stone pillars as you want?

“How many stone pillars... do you need to decipher?”

Gan Yiping's eyebrows twitched. While he was displeased by the other party's arrogant words, he replied to the query, "The Great River Snake's inner core is worth ten points, Sorrow Severing Grass seven points, and Frost Rain Sword six points. All in all, you would need 23 points. The point awarding system is such that the first artifact identified grants you one point, the second artifact two points, the third artifact three points... so on and so forth. You'll have to decipher at least seven stone pillars before you'll have enough points!"

"Seven stone pillars?"

Hearing that it was exactly as Sun Qiang said, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. Scratching his head, he asked, "So... Can I give it a try?"

"Sure!"

Gan Yiping nodded.

"Also, there's another matter which I hope you can excuse me for..."

Seeing the other party answering his question so candidly, Zhang Xuan felt even more embarrassed. "I heard that as long as I decipher a single stone pillar, the deposit of ten middle-tier spirit stones will be returned. In other words, the challenge will be free as long as I can decipher a single pillar... Would it be fine if I go ahead without paying the deposit? At the very most, I'll decipher more so as to make it up to you..."

"..."

Gan Yiping, the Sixth Young Mistress, and the young man stared at one another and nearly spurted blood.

When they heard this fellow reprimand his fat subordinate, they thought that this young fellow was at least rather humble and polite. Who knew that he would spout such arrogant words in the very next moment...

Decipher more so as to make it up to him...

Your head! Do you think that deciphering these stone pillars is a child's play?

They thought that the fatty from a moment ago was arrogant, but his young master topped that...

“How conceited!”

A hint of wrath appeared on the Sixth Young Mistress’s face. “It sounds like you’re saying that you can decipher as many stone pillars as you want?”

“I’ll just try my best...” Not expecting a request on his part would make the other party so angry, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“Fine. Since you’re so confident, why don’t we have a bet?”

Seeing how the other party still refused to take back his word despite having it so clearly pointed out to him, the Sixth Young Mistress clenched her jaws in anger.

“A bet?”

Zhang Xuan blinked his eyes in surprise.

What does he challenging the stone pillars have to do with her? Why is she proposing a bet?

“That’s right. I’ll pay the ten middle-tier spirit stone for you, and for every stone pillar you decipher, I’ll pay you a hundred middle-tier spirit stones... On the other hand, if you fail, I’ll still be magnanimous and bear the cost for you. However, you’ll have to kneel down and reflect on your arrogance! How is it, do you dare take on the bet?”

The Sixth Young Mistress harrumphed.

Despite knowing nothing at all, how dare he speak of the challenge so lightly? Aren’t you being too arrogant!

If I don’t teach you a lesson now, your head might become so big that you won’t even remember yourself!

“You’ll pay me hundred middle-tier spirit stones for every stone pillar I decipher?”

Turning around, Zhang Xuan saw two rows consisting of a total of nearly a hundred stone pillars, and his breathing hastened. “Are you certain?”

If every single pillar was worth a hundred middle-tier spirit stone and he deciphered all hundred pillars, wouldn't that add up to ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones?

If he could earn that many spirit stones, he would have no worries for his future cultivation...

"Of course! Why? Are you intending to chicken out? If you dare not accept my bet, I advise you to act humble the next time around!"

The Sixth Young Mistress waved her hands.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan replied, "It's not that, I just fear that you might default on your debt..."

That was ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones! Zhang Xuan found it hard to believe that the other party would be able to produce so many spirit stones.

"You..."

The Sixth Young Mistress's eyes reddened in anger.

She was a proud 5-star master teacher, not to mention, she had an incomparably noble identity as well. How could she possibly default on her debt?

Gritting her teeth, she replied, "You need not worry. I, Yu Feier, never go back on my words! Since I dared to propose this bet, naturally, I won't default on my payments. Rather, I hope that you will hold on to the end of your promise and kneel down later on!"

"It's good that you won't default..."

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan glanced at the stone pillar with shining eyes before turning to Gan Yiping and clasp his fist. "As long as I identify the artifact inside the stone pillar, it'll automatically burst apart, am I right?"

"That's right!"

Gan Yiping nodded.

"That's good!"

Nodding his head, Zhang Xuan walked over to the first pillar.

The moment he approached the pillar, he immediately understood why the young man and the Sixth Young Mistress's faces would turn awry here.

The words inscribed on the stone pillar were, by no means, a hint. Rather, it was written in an unknown language that simply baffled those looking at it.

If one couldn't even understand the words inscribed, naturally, it would be impossible for one to guess the meaning behind them... Under such circumstances, it would be a wonder if one could still identify what was within the stone pillar.

Seeing how that fellow dared to accept the Sixth Young Mistress's bet, the young man sneered coldly.

“He sure is an arrogant fellow!”

He had undergone the challenge personally, and he knew how difficult it was to identify the stone pillar. He believed that even if a 6-star appraiser were to come here, he would only end up staring blankly at the stone pillars, confused. How could a lad who wasn't even twenty yet possibly decipher them?

Without a doubt, that lad would surely end up kneeling before the sixth young mistress!

“Just because he managed to achieve something minor at his young age, he became complacent and began boasting around. This will teach him that there's always a mountain higher than the other!”

The Sixth Young Mistress also harrumphed coldly. She stared at the young man intently with her eyes, and just as she was about to say something, the latter turned around with a smile.

“Can I start now?”

“Feel free!”

Lighting an incense, Gan Yiping nodded his head.

“Alright then...”

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan tapped the first stone pillar with his finger and said, “This is the Golden Heptahearts

Shuttle!”

Kacha!

In an instant, the stone pillar before him was reduced into dust. Following which, a golden-colored shuttle-shaped weapon appeared before everyone’s eyes.

“This is the Purple Sunset Meteor Hammer...”

“This is the Steel Bone Fist Imprint...”

“This is the Connected Hearts Bowl...”

Proceeding forward, Zhang Xuan would tap on each stone pillar, and those that came into contact with him shattered immediately. Rock fragments flew as if a grand parade welcoming him.

614 Taking You In As My Maid

“H-how is this possible?”

The Sixth Young Mistress and the young man stared at one another as their bodies trembled uncontrollably.

They had just checked the stone pillars themselves and tried all kinds of appraising methods, but to no avail. Eventually, they even resorted to random guessing, not not even that worked. They assumed that this fellow would be the same as well, but who could have thought that... without even examining the stone pillars, just by tapping on them and calling out names...

... the stone pillars would explode!

Are you serious?

Are you sure you aren't hacking?

“Th-this...”

Gan Yiping's eyes nearly popped out from his sockets.

While he didn't say anything previously, the truth was that he shared the same thoughts as the Sixth Young Mistress and the young man. Who knew that this fellow... would actually be so formidable!

With just a tap, he could identify whatever that was within the stone pillars. His speed was so fast that it was astounding. How in the world... did he manage to do it?

Fifty years of effort, and he only had three pillars deciphered...

And yet, just within twenty breaths, the other party had already deciphered thirty... no, forty, fifty pillars!

He was doing it even faster than they could see the artifacts!

When the butler said that his young master would be able to decipher everything, he thought that the latter was just boasting. Only at this moment did he realize that not only was the butler not boasting, he could even be said to be humble...

This isn't deciphering anymore, he is sweeping through everything here!

Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, Gan Yiping said, "This... Young lady, it seems like you have lost the bet..."

"..."

It was only with Gan Yiping's reminder did the Sixth Young Mistress recall the bet she had made just a moment ago. Realizing the implications, her body swayed, and her vision went dark.

Considering her standing, she did possess a sizeable wealth. However, she only had a few hundred of them on hand. As such, anything above a thousand would already be beyond her at the moment. Given a single stone pillar was worth a hundred middle-tier spirit stones, fifty of them would spell a debt of five thousand...

If she knew that he was that formidable, she would have never made the bet!

Wasn't she just finding trouble for herself?

With a face as bitter as a bitter gourd, the Sixth Young Mistress was on the verge of tears. Clenching her teeth, she spoke up. "Pause for a moment, I've something to tell you..."

"Something to tell me?"

Zhang Xuan came to a stop.

With a scarlet face, the Sixth Young Mistress said, "Yes. You've already made your point, and I understand that you're a capable person. There's no need for you to continue on!"

It was a moment ago that she was gleefully making this bet with the other party. To renege on her promise now made her so embarrassed that she would dive deep into the ground in this very instant if she could.

“You understand that I’m a capable person? I doubt that. Don’t worry, I’ll be done soon!”

With a bright smile, Zhang Xuan lifted up both of his hands and touched the stone pillars on both ends simultaneously and started running.

“Rain Assembling Thorn, Knocking Wood, Hundred Stem Scarlet, Three-leafed Golden Thorn Immortal...”

Peng peng peng peng!

The stone pillars on both ends exploded relentlessly, revealing an artifact one after another.

Five breaths later, Zhang Xuan finally came to a stop.

Clapping his hands, Zhang Xuan smiled.

“Alright, I’m done...”

Hualala!

Before him stood a hundred or so collapsed stone pillars, and the artifacts hidden within them were shining with a brilliant glow.

While these artifacts were not exceptionally powerful, they were still at a decent level. They could fetch a sizeable sum when sold.

“It has only been... less than a minute!”

Looking at the incense not too far away, only a small portion on top was burnt. Yet, within this short period of time, that fellow actually managed to decipher every last one of the stone pillars. The surroundings turned completely silent with the exception of the clattering of teeth.

They had seen plenty of formidable people throughout their life, but this...

“That... Hall master, after deciphering so many stone pillars, I should be able to take those three items, right?”

Zhang Xuan walked up to the old man and asked.

“Er...”

With a twitching mouth, Gan Yiping quickly turned to look at the attendant beside him and clenched his jaws. “What are you waiting for? Hurry up and wrap everything in the shop up for this young master over here! From today onward, he is the new owner of the Mystical Treasure Hall...”

“Yes!”

The attendant quickly rushed down the stairs.

“Hall Master?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“Yes. Going by the cumulative score system, the points you’ve accrued through breaking all 110 stone pillars adds up to more than six thousand...”

Gan Yiping nodded.

Honestly, with six thousand points, even if he were to put all of the treasures in his Mystical Treasure Hall together, it wouldn’t be sufficient to compensate the other party...

It would be a huge stroke of fortune if someone could decipher even one of these pillars, and this fellow actually managed to decipher 110 of them in a single breath. He felt as though everything he had known was being flipped upside down, and this left him terribly frenzied.

But after his frenzy came excitement.

While he did lose his entire wealth in a breath, the doubt that had been lingering in his heart for several decades had finally been resolved. He felt as though he would be content even if he were to die at this very instant.

“Thank you...”

Clasping his fist, he bowed deeply.

Fifty years! It had been an entire fifty years!

Ever since he obtained these stone pillars, he had been devoting his entire life to breaking them. He thought that he would end up carrying these doubts and regrets into his grave, but who knew that... this young man would actually resolve what would have been his greatest regret in less than a minute.

With the secrets of these stone pillars unraveled, he would have no regret even if he were to die at this very instant.

“Young Master... is the new owner of the Mystical Treasure Hall?”

“Despite having all of his wealth taken away, the hall master still thanked teacher?”

The dumbfounded Sun Qiang and Yuan Tao stared at one another blankly.

They came here to buy a couple of items, and yet, they ended up swiping everything within the Mystical Treasure Hall clean... Not only so, the hall master even thanks them for that. As expected of their young master and teacher, he truly couldn't be comprehended through common logic.

“Didn't you say that you would pay me a hundred middle-tier spirit stones for each stone pillar I decipher? I've deciphered more than a hundred of them, but I'll give you a discount... ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones!”

After trading some pleasantries with Hall Master Gan, Zhang Xuan turned to look at the Sixth Young Mistress.

Rather than the artifacts in the Mystical Treasure Hall, he was more interested in the spirit stones.

“I...”

With a face flushed red, the Sixth Young Mistress's body trembled.

She had thought that the other party would have been unable to even resolve a single one of the pillars, and she could have the other party kneeling before her to teach him a lesson. How could she have ever known that...

Not only did the other party decipher every last one of the stone pillars in the store, he even became the new owner of the Mystical Treasure Hall...

What in the world was this?

If only she'd known the other party was so formidable, she would have never gotten ahead of herself!

Ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones... Even if she were to take out everything in her possession, she still wouldn't have that much!

“Why? Do you intend to go back on your words?”

Noticing the other party's silence and pale face, Zhang Xuan frowned.

If not for the other party insistently interfering in his affairs, going to the extent of even making this bet, he wouldn't have bothered with her. Since she had tried to make him kneel through the bet, she should suffer the consequences of her own actions as well.

“I'll help the Sixth Young Mistress pay for her debt...” Seeing that the woman he was courting being forced to a corner, the young man stepped forward with gritted teeth.

Honestly speaking, he couldn't afford ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones either.

But at this point, it mattered not anymore. If he could win the other party's heart by standing up during her times of crisis, it would be worth it no matter how heavy a price he had to pay.

Of course, he had thought of refuting the bet. But the conditions were stated clearly, and if it was known that respected 5-star master teachers like them actually went back on their words, how could they face others in the future?

If the headquarters were to learn of this matter, they might even face punishment.

Only one who holds oneself with dignity would be qualified to teach others. If one couldn't even uphold the end of one's promise, who would dare to allow one to be a teacher?

“I don't need your help!”

Before the young man could finish his words, the Sixth Young Mistress gritted her teeth and said, “I'll repay it myself!”

After which, she lifted her gaze and looked at Zhang Xuan. “I'll repay all ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones to you. However... I don't have that much money on me at the moment, so you'll have to give me a few months' time!”

She couldn't even take out a thousand spirit stones at the moment, needless to say ten thousand. However, while ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones was a huge sum, her family was more than capable of repaying it.

“A few months?”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “If it's in a few months' time, I'd surely be able to take out ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones easily. By then, your debt would mean nothing to me!”

Huanyu Empire was just a small stop for him before heading to Hongyuan Empire. He wouldn't even remain here for half a month, let alone a few months.

Besides, it had only been half a year since he started cultivating, and who knows how far he would reach in a few months' time. By then, chances were that he wouldn't even need middle-tier spirit stones anymore.

Along with the raise of his cultivation, his Heaven's Path zhenqi was becoming purer and purer, the requirement demanded of the spiritual energy he absorbed was increasing swiftly as well. Even though he was only at Transcendent Mortal 4-dan pinnacle at the moment, he had already realized that the middle-tier spirit stones were gradually losing their effectiveness.

It wouldn't be long before it would become completely ineffective, just like how low-tier spirit stones were to him.

If it's going to be useless to me in a few months' time, what is the point of you returning me the debt then?

“You... Then how do you intend to resolve this matter?”

The Sixth Young Mistress gritted her teeth.

“This...”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

The other party had made this bet confidently a moment ago, saying that she would definitely be able to repay the debt. Who could have known she would be so poor?

If he had known beforehand, he would have never made this bet with her and bring himself so much trouble.

“Didn’t you say that you would make me kneel if I lost just now?”

After hesitating for a moment, Zhang Xuan replied, “Alright, I won’t make you kneel but I’m lacking a maid to serve me tea at the moment. I’ll put you under Sun Qiang’s command, and as long as you do well, we can forget about the ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones!”

Even if the other party couldn’t fork out the money, he couldn’t let this matter go just like that!

The other party had spoken so arrogantly a moment ago, trying to teach him a lesson. Since that was the case, he would return it to her.

Besides, considering how the other party had achieved a cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 6-dan despite her young age, she must be of considerable standing. With such a subordinate, he would be able to solve many of his problems.

Before the young lady could speak, the young man beside her leaped in shock and exclaimed, “Maid? You want to take Sixth Young Mistress in as your servant? Do you know who she is...”

Sun Qiang interrupted the other party’s word.

“Who she is? No matter how incredible she is, can she be more incredible than our young master? It’s your fortune that our young master is accepting you in as his maid. If you are unwilling to accept, why don’t you try repaying your debt first?”

Young Master is Old Master’s direct disciple, and his standing could be said to be even above Pavilion Master Mo. You should feel honored that he’s accepting you as his maid, to think that you still dare to talk about identity...

Know your place!

“I shall have you know that the Sixth Young Mistress is the pri...”

Hearing the fatty's words, the young man harrumphed, but before he could finish his words, the Sixth Young Mistress interrupted him.

“Enough!”

Gritting her teeth, the Sixth Young Mistress turned to look at Zhang Xuan proudly and said, “It's impossible for me to become your maid, and ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones aren't enough for that either. Change your terms!”

“You aren't willing? Kowtow then!” Zhang Xuan replied impassively.

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“You...”

The Sixth Young Mistress clenched her fists so tightly that her nails sunk deep into her flesh. Her face was dark, and her eyes were clouded with intense resentment. If she could, she would have dashed forward to slice this man into countless pieces.

She would never accept being a maid, and kneeling was a humiliation so great that she would rather die.

Clenching her jaws so tightly that her teeth might chip from the sheer force, the Sixth Young Mistress held back her wrath and spoke once more.

“Choose something else...”

Hearing the other party’s complaints, Sun Qiang interjected with a look of displeasure.

“Our young master has given you a lot of options already. To turn down everything, are you trying to be difficult? Since you refuse to kneel and won’t become a maid, our young master still needs someone to warm his bed for him. Do you want to take on that job? As long as you please our young master, ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones are nothing!”

What the heck is this? You should be thankful that Young Master’s temper is good! If it were me, I would have never given you any other alternative!

“What did you say?”

The Sixth Young Mistress’s eyes immediately turned red, and her hands trembled in rage.

“Which part of what I said do you not understand?” Sun Qiang shook his head. Turning to Zhang Xuan, he said, “Young Master, since this fellow is being difficult, can you allow me to deal with her?”

“She’s your underling, feel free!” Zhang Xuan shrugged nonchalantly.

Even though Sun Qiang might get reckless at times, he did possess wits when it came to dealing with others. He must have an idea in mind.

“His... underling?”

Hearing those words, the Sixth Young Mistress nearly puked blood.

She thought that the reason why this young man wanted to accept her as his maid was because he felt lust for her, considering her beautiful appearance. Who could have thought that she couldn't be any more wrong? He actually wanted her to come under this shady-looking person of a butler...

Besides, what is with your nonchalance?

Do you know who I am... Even the emperor of Huanyu Empire would have to welcome me with the grandest of ceremonies! If I were to tell you, you would surely faint from shock!

To actually be subjected to such conditions... What a tremendous humiliation!

“Thank you, Young Master!”

Turning to the Sixth Young Mistress, Sun Qiang measured her from head to toe and frowned. “Your appearance is sub-par, so I doubt our young master would want you to warm his bed. You should just serve him as an ordinary maid!”

“Sub-par? Would not want me?”

Blood gushed into the head of the Sixth Young Mistress, and she nearly exploded.

You actually dare to evaluate an appearance such as mine ‘sub-par’? Are you saying that intentionally to anger me?

Little did she know that Sun Qiang actually meant what he said.

The young master's students, Zhao Ya and Wang Ying, had appearances that didn't pale to her at all. Even Mo Yu and Zhao Feiwu possessed superior grace as well. But even so, Young Master still remained unmoved.

Considering that, how could he possibly be interested in such an obstinate and domineering lass?

“Considering that you’re doing this to repay your loan, we should talk about the duration too... Let’s make it five months! Since you owe Young Master ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones, over a course of five months, that would be equivalent to a wage of around sixty-six middle-tier spirit stones each day. I’ll round that up to a seventy!”

Counting with his fingers, Sun Qiang said, “But of course, if you feel indignant having to serve as a maid, you can purchase ‘days off’ by repaying your debt. On those days, you’ll be able to do whatever you want to do.”

“Seventy middle-tier spirit stones a day? Purchase ‘days off’?”

The Sixth Young Mistress was taken aback.

“That’s right. On the days that you’re off, you won’t be considered a maid. In other words, you are paying the ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones over a course of five months. Anytime within the five months, if you find sufficient money to repay your debt, you can back out of your responsibilities. As for why it’s seventy spirit stones a day instead of sixty-six, considering that we’re going by a daily basis, naturally, it should be more expensive. If you wish to go by month, I could lower the charge!” Sun Qiang replied.

“Daily basis, pu...”

Initially, the Sixth Young Mistress still found the idea acceptable, but upon hearing this part, she nearly fainted.

What does it sound as though she’s some kind of commercial good for sales?

Paying by daily and monthly basis...

The more she thought about it, the more frenzied she felt. She was on the verge of explosion.

However, after her anger subsided, she gave it some thought, and honestly speaking, she did find this solution acceptable to her.

She would never be willing to lower herself to serving as a maid for five months, but if they were going by a daily basis, as long as she could get past the first few days, her family should be able to send some spirit stones over to free her from her suffering!

“Alright, I’ll agree to it!” Having thought things through, the Sixth Young Mistress nodded her head, giving her consent.

“Good!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes couldn’t help but light up upon hearing Sun Qiang’s arrangements.

As expected of a merchant, his means were indeed extraordinary.

It would be difficult for anyone to take out ten thousand spirit stones in a breath, but if they were to split it over a longer duration, the repayment would seem much more reasonable.

The concept of interest payment wasn’t widely used in this world, but as an astute businessman, he knew how to use his words to shape the conditions into something the other party could accept. Not to mention, he even managed to hike up the price at that.

“Sixth Young Mistress!”

Not expecting that she would agree to such terms, the young man accompanying her panicked.

Others might be unaware of the Sixth Young Mistress’s identity, but he knew it very well. For a person of her standing to serve as a maid... You must be jesting!

If news were to spread, the royalty of Huanyu Empire would probably go insane.

The Sixth Young Mistress harrumphed.

“I’ll deal with my own affairs!”

“But...”

Veins were popping from the young man’s temples.

Interrupting the conversation between the duo, Sun Qiang said, “Enough. If the both of you have anything to say, put it off for now. From this moment onward, you’re our young

master's maid. If you don't have money to repay your loan, prepare whatever you need and follow us back to the residence!"

"There's no need for that. I'll pay for ten days first!"

Harrumphing coldly, the Sixth Young Mistress flicked her hands, and a pile of middle-tier spirit stones appeared before the eyes of the crowd. Counting it quickly, there were exactly seven hundred of them there.

"Un!"

Sun Qiang's eyes lit up. He turned to look at Zhang Xuan, and the latter said, "You should take them for now!"

"Yes!"

Sun Qiang quickly put the spirit stones into his storage ring before turning to look at the young lady once more. "You seem to be from a prestigious family, so I doubt that you will do anything as foolish as running away. But even so, we still need a guarantee. Thus, you'll need to leave something valuable with us, and after the five months are up or when you've repaid your entire debt, we'll return the item to you!"

"You..."

The Sixth Young Mistress's eyebrows twitched violently.

It was already sufficiently humiliating for her to have to agree to serve as a maid, and yet, the other party was even worried that she would escape... How infuriating!

But she knew that these two were fearless thugs, and arguing with them would only shorten her own lifespan. Thus, she flicked her wrist and took out an emblem.

Five bright stars shone brightly on them.

Her 5-star master teacher emblem!

"This emblem represents my identity. Surely it should suffice as a pawn for my debt!"

"It will do!"

Sun Qiang took it and placed it in his storage ring.

He was surprised to learn that this young lady was a 5-star master teacher as well, just like the young man.

But in his view, 5-star master teachers were nothing to fear as well. As the butler of an 8-star master teacher, if he couldn't even face a 5-star master teacher with nonchalance, he should have quit his job ages ago.

“Humph!”

Seeing how that fellow took her emblem without the slightest fear or astonishment, the Sixth Young Mistress froze for a moment. An awful complexion slowly spread across her face before she turned around and stomped out of the store.

She couldn't stay here even a moment longer. It was no longer about her loss in the bet but that... she couldn't stand facing these two anymore!

What the heck was with them?

She thought that a young 5-star master teacher like her would be respected and feared no matter where she went, but... the other party looked as though they didn't even give a damn. It was as if her identity was nothing more than a wisp of wind to them.

An intense feeling of indignation left her so frustrated that she could spew a bucket of blood.

“Sixth Young Mistress...”

Seeing his companion leave, the young man froze for a moment. Then, turning to Zhang Xuan and Sun Qiang, he threatened menacingly, “The both of you... just you wait!”

Leaving behind those words, he hurried down to catch up with Sixth Young Mistress.

“Sixth Princess, those two fellows sure don't know their place. Why don't I get Ye Qian to have them beheaded?”

A glint flashed across the young man's eyes as he harrumphed.

This time, he addressed the young lady before him not as Sixth Young Mistress but as Sixth Princess.

If Crown Prince Ye Qian of Huanyu Empire was here, he would have surely recognized the ‘Sixth Young Mistress’ as Hongyuan Empire’s Princess Fei-er! And the young man beside her would be her fellow classmate, 5-star Master Teacher Xing Yuan!

The both of them were strolling around when they caught sight of Mystical Treasure Hall. Curious, the both of them walked in. Little did they know that they were just moments away from suffering both financially and mentally!

Noble from birth, she was a great princess whom even the emperor of Huanyu Empire would have to regard with utmost respect. To think that she would actually end up as a maid. This was a huge humiliation!

“As an esteemed princess, a 5-star master teacher, should I kill someone just because I lost a bet?”

Princess Fei-er abruptly came to a halt, and her eyebrows shot up.

“This...”

Xing Yuan’s face reddened.

Losing was embarrassing in itself. If she were to kill someone due to that, even if no one would ever learn of it, she would never be able to come to terms with it.

“But even so... we can’t let this thing go. That person is simply too arrogant and infuriating!”

Xing Yuan gritted his teeth.

“He’s indeed infuriating, but admittedly, he does possess incredible capability. Against the stone pillars which even you and I are unable to decipher, he actually deciphered 110 of them in less than a minute... Furthermore, did you see the nonchalance on his butler’s face when he saw my 5-star master teacher emblem? The both of them are unlikely to be ordinary. Tell Ye Qian to look into their identity!”

Princess Fei-er gestured.

She didn’t agree to the arrangement out of recklessness.

Having reached 5-star, her Soul Depth had already exceeded 15.0, allowing her to separate her emotions from rational thinking. The master-and-butler pair might not anything special in terms of their cultivation, but their calm disposition that couldn't be fazed by anything wasn't normal.

Most likely, there was something deeper to them.

Besides, she was also curious to know how the other party deciphered those stone pillars so easily.

“Alright!” Xing Yuan nodded.

...

“Gongzi, may I know how to address you?”

After watching the Sixth Princess and Xing Yuan leave, Gan Yiping swiftly regained his composure, and walking up to Zhang Xuan, he clasped his fist and bowed.

“You can call me Zhang Xuan!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“So, it's Zhang gongzi. Here are all of the artifacts our Mystical Treasure Hall possesses. You've accrued more than sufficient points from deciphering the stone pillars, so these are all yours...”

The attendant had already packed everything neatly into a storage ring and passed it over.

“Un!”

Grabbing the storage ring, Zhang Xuan took a look into it and saw several shelves of precious artifacts inside.

“But if you were to give all of these to me, what will happen to your Mystical Treasure Hall?” Zhang Xuan asked with a slightly embarrassed look.

To tell the truth, he had little interest in these artifacts. However, rules were rules, and it would be impolite for him to refuse it. Thus, he was put in a difficult position.

If he were to accept it all, wouldn't the business of the Mystical Treasure Hall collapse instantly?

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“The reason why I built the Mystical Treasure Hall was to have these stone pillars deciphered. Since I’ve received the answers I sought, I can die without any regrets now. It’s time for me to return to my hometown and live my final years in peace.”

Gan Yiping chuckled. His face had a serenity like never before.

Attracted to the mystery of the unknown, he had spent fifty years on these stone pillar, attempting to decipher them. When everything was done, he felt as though a burden weighing heavily on his shoulders had disappeared, and he suddenly felt much lighter.

“This...”

A look of admiration reflected in Zhang Xuan’s eyes as he nodded.

It seemed like this person had thought everything through now that his limit was approaching.

Indeed. Since his greatest wish had been fulfilled, there was indeed nothing left for him to regret.

These artifacts might be valuable, but none of them could be taken to the afterlife.

Just as empty-handed as one came, empty-handed will be how one departs!

Knowing that the other party sincerely wished to give these artifacts to him, Zhang Xuan accepted them politely. In exchange, he offered the other party several pointers on his cultivation.

After hearing Zhang Xuan’s pointers, Gan Yiping thanked him profusely in excitement.

After chatting for a moment longer, Zhang Xuan left with Yuan Tao and Sun Qiang.

After leaving the Mystical Treasure Hall, Sun Qiang asked, “Young Master, where are we going now?”

“On top of the inner core of a Great River Snake and the Sorrow Severing Grass, we still need more medicinal herbs to mediate the properties before brewing a medicinal solution...”

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before adding, “We’ll head to the Apothecary Guild. Over there, we’ll be able to engage the help of an apothecary too!”

Even though he was an official 3-star apothecary, he only received his rank through the means of Pill Debate. It would be best for him to do leave the job of pill forging to another.

“Yes!” The duo nodded.

The Apothecary Guild was quite a far distance away. The trio searched for a carriage, and after around an hour-long journey, they finally arrived at their destination.

The building of the Huanyu Empire Apothecary Guild was tall and vast. In front of the main entrance was a stone sculpture of a cauldron a dozen meters tall, granting a solemn and grand atmosphere to the Apothecary Guild.

Stepping in, a whiff of fragrant medicinal herbs and spiritual energy gushing through the pores of their bodies left them revitalized.

Taking a slight sniff, Zhang Xuan remarked with a smile, “This is Pill Fragrance. It seems like someone has forged grade-5 pills here, and on a frequent basis at that!”

Upon the successful forging of a grade-5 pill, a deep Pill Fragrance could be produced by chance. Those who smelled it would immediately find themselves re-energized.

Only a place where pills of such grade had been frequently successfully forged could such a deep scent be produced.

“Since there are 5-star apothecaries here, it isn’t too surprising for there to be grade-5 pills as well!” Sun Qiang nodded.

The most capable apothecary of Huanyu Empire had reached the level of 5-star pinnacle.

“Un. Let’s enquire at the front reception to see if we can get a 5-star apothecary!”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

The inner core of a Great River Snake and Sorrow Severing Grass were extremely valuable, and he only had a set of them. No mistakes could be tolerated. Also, even though it was just a medicinal fluid, its concoction consisted of complex processes that demanded the hands of a 5-star apothecary. Otherwise, there was a high chance it would end in failure.

“Gongzi, may I know what you need?”

At the front reception desk stood an eighteen or nineteen-year-old lady. She greeted Zhang Xuan with a bright smile.

“I need to concoct a unique medicinal solution. May I ask if there’s any 5-star apothecaries here that I can engage the help of and what price it would be?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Since one could buy Tutelage Jade Tokens at the Master Teacher Pavilion, naturally, one could also engage the services of an apothecary at an Apothecary Guild too.

The price of engaging the service of an apothecary tended to be much lower than purchasing the completed product, but one would have to gather the ingredients himself.

“The services of a 5-star apothecary?” The lady receptionist was taken aback.

“Why? It can’t be done?” Seeing the other party’s reaction, Zhang Xuan frowned.

It would be troublesome if he couldn’t do so. Given that the Great River Snake had reached a cultivation realm of Transcendent Mortal 7-dan before its death, its inner core was likely to possess immense power, and a 4-star apothecary couldn’t hope to suppress its rampaging energies during the concoction.

On the other hand, the minimum requirement to becoming a 5-star apothecary was to achieve a cultivation of Transcendent

Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm, so it shouldn't pose much of a problem.

After a moment of hesitation, the receptionist replied, "We do provide such services, just that... a formidable 5-star apothecary from the headquarters has come by today to conduct a lecture, and all of the 5-star apothecaries in the guild have gone over to listen to it... In fact, even 4-star and 3-star apothecaries are all there as well. So, for the time being, we don't have anyone available. If it's possible, may I ask you to return tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?"

Zhang Xuan frowned.

They would be deciding on the final distribution of slots for the Cleansing Lake tonight, and it shouldn't be long before they go in. It was unlikely that Zhang Xuan would have much time left.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan said, "I can't wait that long. When does the lecture end? Can you help me ask around to see if any 5-star apothecary is willing to take on my job?"

"Ask around?" The receptionist's face darkened. "I am just a receptionist. 5-star apothecaries are too noble for me to approach."

As a receptionist in charge of the front desk, she was only an apprentice. Putting aside 5-star apothecaries, it would be difficult for her to even come into contact with 3-star apothecaries. There was simply too huge a disparity in their ranks.

"Besides, there will surely be a bout of discussion after the lecture to exchange experiences and learn from one another. Everyone will likely be busy for the entire day, so I doubt that you'll be able to engage their service no matter how much you pay!"

This was a precious opportunity to learn. They would never miss this chance just for a small sum of money.

While the apothecary from the headquarters was of equivalent rank to them, he was likely to possess more advanced techniques to pill forging and controlling the cauldron. This, in itself, was more than worthy of their attention and research.

“This...”

Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

This was indeed a good learning opportunity for the apothecaries, so it was unlikely that anyone would pass on it for his job. But on the other hand, it was impossible for Zhang Xuan to do it himself.

Putting aside whether it was too late for him to learn pill forging now, even if he could master it swiftly, his cultivation was only at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle, so it would be impossible for him to suppress a rebound from the Great River Snake’s inner core.

So... what should he do now?

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xuan asked, “Since that’s the case, can you bring me over to where the lecture is held?”

It would be impossible to get the concoction of the medicinal solution done if he were to wait for the entire session to end. Since that was the case, he decided to enter the lecture hall and ask them personally. After all, as fellow apothecaries, it should be easier for him to ask for their favor.

“Bring you over?” The lady frowned. “That’s a place where only apothecaries can enter...”

“Oh, I’m an apothecary too. It’s just that I haven’t taken a promotion exam in recent time!”

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out his apothecary emblem.

His current rank was still 3-star, obtained back when he was in Tianwu Kingdom. But even so, it was sufficient for him to attend the lecture as well.

Upon seeing the emblem, the receptionist immediately bowed deeply and said, “Master apothecary, this way please!”

While a 3-star apothecary might not rank at the top of the pyramid in Huanyu Empire, he was still not a person that a little receptionist like her could offend.

“Un!”

Nodding his head, Zhang Xuan proceeded along with Sun Qiang and Yuan Tao.

The Apothecary Guild was rather large. They had to walk a long distance before arriving at a huge hall.

Coming to a stop before the door, the lady apologized.

“I apologize but only official apothecaries can enter, so I can only bring you this far...”

“It’s fine!” Zhang Xuan smiled. Pinning his emblem on his chest, Zhang Xuan turned to Sun Qiang and Yuan Tao, and instructed, “The both of you should wait here. I’ll go in and take a look!”

After which, he pushed open the door and walked in.

As the both of them weren’t apothecaries either, they couldn’t enter too.

There was a guard standing on the other side, but seeing Zhang Xuan’s emblem, they didn’t stop him.

This hall was several hundred square meters huge, and a huge crowd was seated in here. Every single one of them was dressed in an apothecary’s robe. In a sense, it was similar to the selection round with Ruohuan gongzi and the others back at the Myriad Kingdom City.

Lifting his gaze to the stage, he saw a person standing before a cauldron, forging a pill while deciphering the process step-by-step.

Flames blazed as a pair of fair hands steadily added herb after herb into the cauldron.

‘It’s a young lady?’

Zhang Xuan was astonished.

He thought that a lecturer from the headquarters would be an elder in his seventies or eighties. To think that it would be a young lady in her twenties instead.

Female apothecaries were rare, and considering how she was qualified to conduct a lesson to even 5-star apothecaries, she was likely to a rather capable one at that. Thus, his interest was piqued.

The other party was dressed in a loose purple robe, and her long, black hair was coiled on top of her head. Her eyes sparkled like the stars, reflecting wisdom. However, her face was as cold as the middle of winter, and not the slightest emotion could be seen on it.

Surprisingly, her appearance was on par with the Sixth Young Mistress from before. In fact, the slight curvature that could be seen under her loose robe accentuated her beauty.

An emblem with 5 stars was pinned on her chest, indicating her identity as a 5-star apothecary!

‘Pill forging requires one to be accompanied with flames for a long period of time, and it can be considered to be one of the tougher occupations. To think that she would actually reach 5-star at such a young age, incredible!’

Zhang Xuan was impressed.

Most of the high ranked apothecaries were all males. It wasn’t that females couldn’t make it, but the intense heat from the cauldron was usually a huge deterrent factor. On top of that, there were plenty of rare medicinal herbs required for pill forging that grew on top of treacherous terrains, making the occupation a dangerous one as well.

As such, most ladies choose not to take on this occupation.

On the other hand, the lady before him actually reached a rank of 5-star at such a young age. Her forging technique was profound, and her movements were fluid... It showed that she had devoted a lot of effort into her pill forging usually.

Otherwise, regardless of her talent, she couldn’t possibly possess such level of skill!

Regardless of what occupation one was in, talent was only one of the many factors to one's success. In comparison, hard work played a much greater role.

Standing not too far away from the young lady was an elder, who was stroking his long, white beard in commendation.

‘He must be the guild leader here!’ Zhang Xuan deduced.

This elder carried an authoritative demeanor, and his cultivation felt deep like an abyss, revealing that he was likely in a position of power. On top of that, he seemed to be standing behind the young lady to take care of her, interjecting now and then to add on to the young lady's points. Even if he wasn't the guild leader, he was probably an influential figure here.

After looking around, Zhang Xuan found an empty seat and sat down.

At that moment, the young lady's voice sounded.

Her voice was crisp-similar to a jade and a stone knocking on one another-and listening to it, in itself, was a pleasure. However, her tone carried a cold edge that distanced her from others.

“Emerald Jade Grass has a cold attribute, and if you were to put it into the cauldron directly, it might cause a conflict with the Wooden Cypress Flower placed in previously. Thus, it has to be soaked in Hamachi Extract for two hours before it can be used. This can accentuate its medicinal properties while lowering the temperature in the cauldron, thus enhancing the quality of the pills forged!

“As for the Wood Incense Flower, it has to be soaked in Violet Flora Water and basked under the hot sun for five days to maximize its medicinal properties. Otherwise, considering how it is added at the very middle of the forging process when the cauldron is at its warmest, it is highly likely that it would be burned to crisp...”

...

The lady explained the forging process and the preparation of the ingredients one-by-one. Her words were backed by logical

explanations, leaving the listening crowd nodding their heads ceaselessly as though drunk.

“Impartation of Heaven’s Will? Could she be... a master teacher as well?”

Seeing the expressions on everyone’s face, and noting the unique intonation to the voice, Zhang Xuan shook his head with a slight smile.

Even though the young lady on the stage was lecturing on the Art of Pill Forging, she had infused Impartation of Heaven’s Will into her lecture to facilitate the learning process.

Only master teachers were capable of doing so.

From the looks of it, on top of being an apothecary, the young lady before him was also a master teacher.

It was just moments ago that he met two 5-star master teacher in his twenties, and right now, he was meeting yet another one. As expected of Huanyu Empire, it was indeed overflowing with talents.

If they had been within the twenty-eight regional powers as well, Zhang Xuan would surely have been in fourth place in the Master Teacher Tournament.

It was not that he was less knowledgeable than a 5-star master teacher, but his cultivation was simply too lacking. He stood no chance against them in a direct battle.

“Since she’s a master teacher, it should be easier for me to communicate with her. I should try to engage her help later on...”

Since the other party was a master teacher on top of being a 5-star apothecary, it should be easier for Zhang Xuan to engage her help.

The core ingredient of the medicinal solution was the inner core of a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan Great River Snake. To maximize its effectiveness, Zhang Xuan’s guidance would play a crucial part. However, an ordinary 5-star apothecary wouldn’t possibly listen to the words of a 3-star apothecary.

On the other hand, since the young lady was a master teacher as well, it should be easier to Zhang Xuan to win her trust.

“I thank everyone here for your cooperation. This is my comprehension of the grade-5 Spirit Revitalization Pill!”

Just as Zhang Xuan was pondering over how he should negotiate with the other party to have her concoct the medicinal solution for him, ‘jiya’, the cauldron on the stage was opened, and a dense aroma immediately gushed into the room.

Raising his gaze, he saw round, smooth pills emerging from the cauldron.

“A grade-5 pill at Perfection?”

“As a grade-5 pinnacle pill, the Spirit Revitalization Pill has always been one of the hardest pills to forge for a 5-star apothecary. Even if the guild leader were to forge it personally, probably only two in ten cauldrons of pills would reach the level of Perfection. Yet, she actually managed to achieve such a rank on her first try. Incredible, as expected of an apothecary from the headquarters!”

“On top of that, you might be unaware, but on top of being an apothecary, she’s also a master teacher! This is the reason why her explanations are so clear. If I were to study based on the content of this lecture, I would surely make huge progress in my research!”

“Indeed. I’ve also benefited greatly from this lecture. As expected of an apothecary from Hongyuan Empire. Regardless of whether it’s the pill forging or the preparation of ingredients, her understanding of those is far deeper and more accurate than ours!”

“Of course. The Apothecary School of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy has a much more complete heritage of pill forging than our branch.”

...

Upon seeing the pill emerging from the cauldron, a huge commotion broke out amongst the crowd.

The skill of an apothecary is determined by the quality of the pill he could forge. Even a pill forged through the same pill formula can have differing quality, ranked by: Formation, Satiation, Perfection, and Inscribed Pill.

Reaching Formation in a higher grade would qualify one for a promotion. On the other hand, if one could reach Satiation in the forging of a pill with a grade corresponding to one's current rank, one could be considered to be above most of one's peers already.

Achieving Perfection wasn't easy at all. Even a skilled apothecary might not produce a single cauldron of Perfection pills amidst ten. And yet, this young lady in her twenties, despite explaining the process to everyone while forging the pills, was actually still able to reach this tier. Her mastery in pill forging had reached an astounding level.

"Let's begin the discussion now. If you've any suggestions, feel free to raise them so that I can learn from it too!"

Putting the pill down, the lady on the stage glanced at the crowd.

"Apothecary Luo, I have a question. The Spirit Revitalization Pill has the effect of nourishing one's soul as well, but to achieve this end, one has to fuse a part of his soul energy into the pill in the midst of the forging process. I've tried to do so, but I always end up being burnt by the flames. May I know if there's any solution to that problem?" asked a 5-star apothecary on the front row.

Since it was a discussion, naturally, they could raise any questions they had.

"Considering the searing heat in the cauldron and the cold nature of one's soul, it's natural that one's soul would be burned if one carelessly attempts to infuse one's soul into the pill in the midst of the forging process. But in the first place, there's no need for us to do so. Amidst the ingredients for the Spirit Revitalization Pill, there's a Glacé Heart Grass which, being a spirit herb, possesses spirit."

The young lady on the stage, Apothecary Luo, explained, “As long as one harnesses the spirit contained within the medicinal herb properly before the forging process, it can grant the equivalent effect as well!”

“I see!”

The 5-star apothecary came to a realization and nodded his head in gratitude.

“I have a problem too...”

Following which, another 5-star apothecary stood up.

Before long, seven 5-star apothecaries had already posed their question, but the young Apothecary Luo didn't show the slightest hint of panic at all. She answered their questions calmly with rational arguments backed by logic, impressing the entire crowd.

“Does anyone have any other questions? The reason why I came here was to trade some feedback with everyone. If you've any opinions or advice, feel free to raise them!”

After answering several questions, Apothecary Luo glanced at the crowd.

Her study of pill forging had met a wall recently, and her apothecary teacher had told her that she had to interact more with other apothecaries to share ideas to further her own path.

That was the main reason why she came to the Apothecary Guild.

And honestly speaking, this was working out well as well. Before she started forging the Spirit Revitalization Pill, some of her concepts were still not clearly fleshed out, and there were some parts she was unsure of. However, as she explained it, she found her own understanding of pill forging deepening as well.

However, this wasn't sufficient.

She wanted to hear an alternative opinion to her own to improve.

“Apothecary Luo must be jesting. Your understanding of the subject is deep, and your skills are exquisite. There’s no advice we can possibly offer you!”

“Indeed! Your movements are perfect, and not to mention, you even achieved Perfection in your forging of the Spirit Revitalization Pill. Even if we wanted to criticize your work, there’s nothing we can raise!”

“Your understanding of pill forging is far deeper than ours. If not for your lacking cultivation, you could have been promoted to a 6-star apothecary by now. We really dare not offer any advice to you...”

...

Everyone shook their heads.

The person before them had come from Hongyuan Empire, and on top of being a 5-star apothecary, she was a master teacher as well. She was even qualified to be their teacher, so how could they possibly raise any objections against her? Even if they had any, they wouldn’t dare to speak up!

“Sigh!”

Seeing everyone shake their heads, Apothecary Luo sighed deeply.

In Hongyuan Empire, no one dared to criticize her in fear of her identity. She thought that since no one knew of her here, she would be able to garner some feedback. Yet, her hopes fell flat in the end.

“Do you really wish to hear my opinion?”

Just as she was feeling disappointed within, an indifferent voice sounded from the crowd.

“Yes!” Apothecary Luo quickly nodded her head.

“Alright then... Here is my opinion... After wasting so much time and effort, can this even be called pill forging?”

617 First Flaw

“What?”

“He said that Apothecary Luo’s actions cannot be considered pill forging?”

“This is way too much! Apothecary Luo is a 5-star apothecary from the headquarters. Everyone here can see that her forging technique and movements were flawless, and yet, someone actually dares to insult her pill forging? Who is that insolent fellow?”

“Audacious!”

It was as if someone had set gasoline on fire. Wrathful eyes immediately turned in the direction from where the voice came from.

And following which, they saw a young man in his twenties wearing a 3-star apothecary emblem on his chest.

“A mere 3-star apothecary actually dares to utter such nonsense?”

“Ignorant brat!”

Upon seeing the other party’s appearance, many among the crowd sneered, and some even bellowed angrily.

Apothecary Luo might be young, but her understanding of pills and pill forging technique were above most of them here.

Her succinct and precise movements in her pill forging were a pleasure to the eyes. If a pill forging of such level couldn’t even be considered as pill forging, what else could?

Besides, even if someone wanted to criticize her, one should at least be a 5-star apothecary. Can a 3-star apothecary like you even understand what has just happened? How dare you speak such arrogant words?

Apothecary Luo also frowned.

What she wanted to hear was a feedback, not an insult.

“The apothecary over there, may I know what mistakes there are in my pill forging for you to utter such words?”

“You want to know?” The young man raised his eyelids.

“Of course!” Apothecary Luo replied.

“There were a total of 127 mistakes in your pill forging just now. I fear that if I were to say them all... your confidence might be shattered, and you would find yourself unable to forge any pill from now on!” the young man said impassively.

“127 mistakes?”

Harrumphing coldly, Apothecary Luo flung her sleeves and said, “If you can really list out that many, even if I were to have my confidence shattered, it will be only due to my lack of expertise!”

Initially, she thought that the other party might have noticed some major flaws in her pill forging. But upon hearing such words, she immediately denied that possibility.

Her pill forging technique had been refined by the countless predecessors of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, forming a nearly perfect art. If there was a mistake or two, she would still be able to acknowledge it. But more than a hundred...

You must be pulling my leg!

With so many mistakes, putting aside whether it is possible to form a pill, it is more likely that the cauldron would explode even before the fire is lit!

Even if one wanted to boast, there should be a limit! Beyond that, one would just be a shameless fool!

“Are you certain that you want to listen to them?”

A slight smile crept onto the young man’s face.

“That’s right!” Apothecary Luo replied.

“Sigh! Since you wish to know, if I were to continue remaining silent, you all would only think that I’m doing this intentionally to cause trouble!”

Shaking his head, the young man stood up and walked onto the stage. He first placed his hand on the cauldron beside the young lady before walking around it. After which, he turned to her and said, “Before that, I would like to ask you if you know of the background of this cauldron.”

“Knowing the background of one’s cauldron is the very basics of an apothecary. Of course, I at least know of the background of my own cauldron!”

Apothecary Luo knitted her eyebrows slightly in displeasure. “This cauldron was crafted by 5-star Blacksmith Wu Feng, and it took him a total of twelve years to finish its crafting. It’s made by an alloy of the Frigid Metal found at the bottom of an ocean and Blue Coppersilver, thus making it resistant to high heat and extreme cold. It is a Spirit intermediate-tier pinnacle artifact...”

Hearing the young lady’s flawless explanation, the young man continued, “Correct! But do you know that this cauldron has once suffered an explosion?”

Naturally, that young man was Zhang Xuan.

To convince the other party to willingly obey his instructions in the forging of the medicinal solution, he would have to impress her first to establish his credibility.

He was contemplating how he could do so when the other party expressed that she was seeking the opinions or advice of others. Since that was the case, there was no reason for him not to grasp this opportunity.

While Zhang Xuan’s understanding of pill forging hadn’t reached 5-star yet, he was still able to see through the other party’s flaws through the Library of Heaven’s Path.

Apothecary Luo froze for a moment before replying.

“I do. It has suffered an explosion before, but the ingredients only ended up being charred black. The cauldron suffered no damage from the incident, and there are no cracks either. As such, it shouldn’t affect any subsequent pill forging!”

This cauldron was given to her by an elder of her family, and she had used it for three whole years. It did suffer from an

explosion once, but... she should be the only one aware of it. How did the other party learn of it?

“You’re right that the cauldron didn’t suffer any damage!” Zhang Xuan touched the surface of the cauldron with his finger. “There are indeed no cracks. But based on the slightly gray tint on the opening of the cauldron and the slight scent of metallic rust, if I’m not mistaken, you were forging [Searing Flame Pill], a grade-5 pill!”

“Indeed!” Apothecary Luo’s frown deepened as she nodded her head.

The previous explosion indeed happened in the midst of the forging of a Searing Flame Pill. Even though she wasn’t the one forging it, she was present then and knew of the condition.

But to be able to know what was being forged during the explosion just by looking at the color of the cauldron and the scent of it, this young man’s eye of discernment was way too formidable!

If she had thought that this fellow was making up lies to attract the attention of others a moment ago, at this moment, she was already thinking that he might possess true capability.

“An explosion really occurred before?”

“To be able to tell this much just by taking a look, even 6-star apothecaries aren’t capable of such!”

“Indeed. This fellow might actually not be lying...”

The crowd below was astounded to hear Apothecary Luo acknowledge the young man’s words.

Checking a cauldron’s background and condition was something all apothecaries had to do... But still, to be able to infer so much just by taking a brief look, wasn’t this young man’s eye of discernment a little, no, way too incredible?

Even a typical 6-star apothecary would find it hard to deduce this much.

Previously, everyone, just like Apothecary Luo, thought that this fellow was just trying to stir some trouble. But after

hearing his analysis, they realized that they might be sorely mistaken.

“But so what if the Searing Flame Pill was being forged during the explosion? Does that make any difference?” Apothecary Luo asked.

As a pill rich in yang energy, it was normal for an explosion to occur. There shouldn't be any problem with it.

“Of course, there is a difference!”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “If you were to continue forging Searing Flame Pill with this cauldron, then yes, it wouldn't have made a difference. However, you chose to forge the Spirit Revitalization Pill instead! The Spirit Revitalization Pill can calm one's nerves and nourish one's soul energy, thus making it a particularly valuable pill. The greatest taboo of this pill is to introduce any possible ‘violent attributes’ into it. And yet, you used a cauldron that a Searing Flame Pill once exploded in to forge it. Did you think that it wouldn't have any influence on the Spirit Revitalization Pill?”

“This...” Apothecary Luo fell silent.

Pills forged for the soul required the forging to be done under more stringent conditions, just that... even if a past explosion could have any influence on a pill, it should be minimal.

“Are you thinking that the effects it would have on the Spirit Revitalization Pill, if any in the first place, would be minimal?”

Seemingly having seen through the other party's thoughts, Zhang Xuan's lips curled up. “You would be right if it was an ordinary forging process. However, there's a mistake in your forging process that exacerbates this effect. I remember hearing you say that if the Emerald Jade Grass is placed directly in the cauldron, it would cause a conflict with the Wooden Cypress Flower. As such, it has to be soaked in Hamachi Extract beforehand. Am I right?”

“Yes!” Apothecary Luo nodded her head.

She had indeed said such words, and this was part of her forging process as well.

“The Emerald Jade Grass has a violent nature whereas the Wooden Cypress Flower has a gentle nature. Indeed, there would be a collision between the both of them, and using Hamachi Extract is a viable way to mediate between the both of the medicinal herbs. However... have you thought about what would happen if Hamachi Extract comes into contact with the main ingredient of the Searing Flame Pill, Blue-stemmed Wood?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It would cause a violent reaction. However, it has been years since the Searing Flame Pill was forged, and in the interval since then, the cauldron has been used to forge many different pills as well. Even if remnants of the Searing Flame Pill still remain, it should be minimal, right?” Apothecary Luo replied.

Blue-stemmed Wood would indeed react violently with Hamachi Extract; they are just like fire and water, incapable of coexisting simultaneously in the same location. However... it had been years since the explosion, so even if a reaction occurred, it shouldn't amount to much.

“Minimal?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. He turned to the old man on the stage whom he suspected before to be the guild leader and asked, “This apothecary over here, may I trouble you with something?”

“Feel free to speak!” the elder replied.

“May I trouble you to scrape a layer of this gray tint on the cover of the cauldron?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Alright!” Even though the old man had no idea what he was up to, he still took out a dagger, scraped off a layer of the gray tint, and placed it in a jade bowl.

“Do you have any Hamachi Extract with you? May I ask of you to pour some onto the gray scrapings?” Without touching the jade bowl, Zhang Xuan asked.

“Un!”

Nodding his head, the old man issued some instructions to an apothecary beside him, and the latter immediately rushed out. Soon, he returned with a calabash and poured a light-blue solution into the jade bowl.

Tzzzzzzzz!

As the solution came into contact with the gray scrapings, intense effervescence reminiscent to that of boiling water immediately occurred.

“This...”

Everyone was astonished.

No matter how dull-witted one could be, it was clear that this was a violent reaction.

Should this be subjected under the intense conditions within the cauldron, there was a high chance that an explosion would occur, thus reducing the medicinal herbs inside into mere dredges.

“How could this be?”

Shocked, Apothecary Luo’s face paled.

Clearly, she couldn’t believe what she was seeing to be true.

“An explosion in the midst of the forging of a Searing Flame Pill is indeed nothing, but you forgot about the strong adhesive property of its main ingredient, Blue-stemmed Wood. After the explosion, the Blue-stemmed Wood stuck onto the walls of the cauldron, and it is difficult to cleanse it using ordinary methods. While it wouldn’t pose any problem in the forging of other pills, it might result in serious problems when Hamachi Extract is involved in the forging process,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Is there any way to solve this issue?” Apothecary Luo asked.

“Of course, there is! Corrosive Lotus is capable of neutralizing Blue-stemmed Wood. If you add two liang of Corrosive Lotus before the forging of the Spirit Revitalization Pill, you will be able to clear away the remaining Blue-stemmed Wood easily. At the same time, it will also lower the temperature of the cauldron...”

(1 liang is about ~37.8g)

“As such, you won’t have to soak the Wood Incense Flower with Violet Flora Water and bask it under the sun for five days,

thus sparing you of this troublesome preparation process,”
Zhang Xuan said.

“This...”

Apothecary Luo was rendered speechless.

As a 5-star apothecary, she was familiar with medicinal properties and could easily deduce the authenticity of the other party’s words. After careful analysis, she realized that the suggestions the other party offered were feasible and flawless, and it even boosted the efficiency of the forging process.

“While there are standard steps in pill forging, one mustn’t follow them blindly. It’s similar to driving a carriage; while there are rules and a standard set of skills involved, one’s driving method must still alter according to the condition of the road!

“On top of noting the steps, one must also assess the condition of one’s own cauldron and environment and make suitable changes. Otherwise, even if one were to follow the pill formula perfectly down to the minute details, one might still find oneself stuck in a deadlock!”

With his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan turned to look at Apothecary Luo with an aloof expression. At this moment, he seemed as though a highly-esteemed, high-rank apothecary.

“This is... the first flaw I am pointing out to you!”

618 I Wish to Acknowledge You as My Teacher!

“This...”

Apothecary Luo was rendered speechless. She had no idea how she should respond to that.

The other party’s words were backed by concrete evidence, and this left her no grounds for rebuttal.

And she wasn’t the only with such an expression on her face. At this instant, the entire hall was silent.

This... Is this even possible?

How deep of an understanding must one have of the pill formula and cauldron to deduce this?

Everyone turned to look at the young man once more, but this time, their gazes seemed to suggest that they were looking at a monster instead.

“In the discussion phase, you said that instead of infusing one’s soul energy into the cauldron—which would cause one to be seared by the heat—one could harness the spirit of a Glacé Heart Grass instead... But have you considered the fact that the spirit infused into the Glacé Heart Grass could react with the Jeqi Wood added in previously, thus reducing its effectiveness?”

“This...”

Apothecary Luo was stumped once again.

Jeqi Wood possessed the effect of absorbing spirit; there was a high chance that the spirit infused into the Glacé Heart Grass could be devoured by it, thus reducing the effectiveness of the pill.

“This is the second flaw.”

Zhang Xuan continued, “If I’m not mistaken, you used ‘Hands of the Twilight Drizzle’ to forge the pill. While this forging technique does help to protect the spirit contained in the medicinal herb, it increases the number of steps required for the forging process of the Spirit Revitalization Pill. There are seven medicinal herbs that should have been added in simultaneously, but this technique forcefully added an interval of thirty-two breaths between the first herb and the last herb. This results in significant loss in their medicinal properties... The incompatibility between your forging technique and the pill, this is the third flaw!

“In the forging process, you used Lucid Frost Art to ward off the blaze from the cauldron to protect yourself. However, in the midst of doing so, you inadvertently sapped heat away from the cauldron, resulting in an incomplete fusion of the spirit beast blood essence and the pill... This is the fourth flaw!”

“... This is the fifth flaw!”

“... This is the sixth flaw!”

...

“... And this is the twenty-seventh flaw!

“A mere grade-5 pill, but you displayed a lack understanding of your cauldron, lack of knowledge of medicinal herbs, lack of expertise in your forging technique, lack of control in your movements, lack of clarity in your explanation, lack of depth in your analysis, and a lack of concentration in your actions, resulting in a disappointing performance...”

A sharp gleam flashed across Zhang Xuan’s eyes. “Do you think something riddled with so many mistakes is worthy of being called pill forging?”

“I...”

Apothecary Luo staggered feebly backward. Paleness swept across her face, and her slim body trembled uncontrollably.

The other party’s words were like a machine gun, each shot striking her in her vitals, rendering her incapable of catching her breath.

She thought that she possessed skill above most 5-star apothecaries, and never in her dreams could she imagine that what she had taken so much pride in would be nothing more than a joke in the eyes of a true expert!

“Do you need me to continue on with the remaining hundred flaws?” Zhang Xuan continued.

Apothecary Luo’s body jolted in shock, and she lowered her head fearfully.

The twenty-seven flaws the other party brought up were all true and existent, she had no way of denying them.

Just this much was more than sufficient to plant a seed of doubt that would make her question herself whenever she forged a pill. She feared that if the other party continued on, her confidence would be completely shattered.

“N-no, there’s no need...”

Clasping her fist and bowing deeply, she looked at the young man before her once more, this time in admiration and awe.

To be capable of seeing through so many flaws in her pill forging, how deep must his understanding of pills be?

Even her teacher wouldn’t be a match for him!

“Alright, there’s no need for you to feel disheartened. Unlike painting, where one can create a Reality Depiction work just by strictly following rules, pill forging requires hard work over a long period of time to build a deep understanding of the properties of medicinal herbs before one can achieve mastery.”

Seeing the pale face and trembling body of the young lady before him, Zhang Xuan realized that he might have gone a little too far. Thus, he quickly consoled her. “It’s an incredible feat for one of your age to forge a pill of such quality, so you should take pride in your skills... Alright, why don’t you alter your pill forging method based on what I’ve just said and try forging the Spirit Revitalization Pill once more. I promise you the results will be different this time!”

His words were infused with Impartation of Heaven’s Will, thus allowing him to win the trust of the young lady easily.

As a 5-star primary master teacher, the young lady's Soul Depth had barely reached 15.0. On the other hand, Zhang Xuan's Soul Depth was currently at 16.1, allowing him to win the other party's trust via Impartation of Heaven's Will easily.

As expected, upon hearing those words, Apothecary Luo's fragile confidence began to heal. Closing her eyes, she went through the words the young man had just spoken, and gritting her teeth, she replied, "Alright!"

She stepped up to the cauldron.

Typically speaking, apothecaries would prepare three sets of medicinal herbs in case of failure. She had only used one set in her previous forging, so there were still another two sets left on the table.

Driving her zhenqi, she lit the flames to heat up the cauldron. After which, she extracted the medicinal essence from the herbs swiftly, and one after another, medicinal herbs were thrown into the cauldron. Spiritual energy rippled in the air, and a slight fragrance permeated the hall.

Twenty minutes later, with a deep exhalation, Apothecary Luo's movements finally came to a halt.

The Spirit Revitalization Pill that should have taken her an hour to forge had taken less than half of her previous timing this time!

She stretched out her hands and pushed open the cauldron lid.

Jiya!

A dense and refreshing aroma gushed out from within, forming a beautiful white cloud.

Above the cloud was a smooth, round pill, and what could be clearly seen on the pill was a spectacular, golden stripe.

"This is... an Inscribed Pill?"

"How can this be?"

"Even though there's only a level of difference between Perfection and Inscribed Pill, a nigh unbreachable gap lay between the two tiers. Even 6-star apothecaries would be

incapable of forging a Spirit Revitalization Pill at the tier of an Inscribed Pill!”

“Indeed! An Inscribed Pill surpasses the notion of an ordinary pill. It possesses spirit, which makes it an existence worthy of being considered as a lifeform!”

“With a short lecture, this young apothecary allowed Apothecary Luo, who was still forging Perfection tier pills a moment ago, to successfully forge an Inscribed Pill... This is inconceivable!”

...

Upon seeing the pill rising from the cauldron, innumerable faces paled in shock.

Formation, Satiation, Perfection, and Inscribed Pill. While four tiers were established to grade the tier of a pill, Perfection was commonly known to be the limit. Only those who had managed to comprehend the Art of Pill Forging to an unthinkable level would be able to forge an Inscribed Pill.

Putting everything aside, despite the long history behind the Huanyu Empire Apothecary Guild and the many talented apothecaries who rose from this ground, there had never had been an Inscribed Pill emerging from here before.

It was said that only in Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy did a handful of pills of such superior quality appeared before. Every single one of such pills had caused a huge uproar, and the apothecaries who forged them became respected figures in their circles.

As such, the apothecaries of Huanyu Empire had always viewed this tier to be one that only existed in the legends, something far away from them. Never could they have imagined that... Apothecary Luo would actually succeed in forging one!

Fearsome!

Apothecary Luo was formidable to have forged the pill... but wouldn't the young man who guided her be even more so?

In an instant, everyone's eyes fell on the young man once more with deep admiration reflecting in their gazes.

This was the admiration one would only display to true experts.

The young man's cultivation might be lacking, but in terms of comprehension of pill forging, not even their guild leader would be able to rival him!

While everyone was still immersed in shock, Apothecary Luo finally recovered from the unique state she had been in. Staring at the golden stripe on the pill in her hands, her body trembled in agitation, and she abruptly kneeled down. "I'd like to acknowledge you as my teacher. I beseech you to accept me and enlighten me in the Way of Pill Forging!"

She could clearly feel the bottleneck which had limited her progress before shattering entirely. In this short period of time, she had gained a lot of insights into pill forging. As long as her cultivation reached the required level, there was a good chance she could clear the 6-star apothecary examination.

And this all... was thanks to the young apothecary standing before her.

It was only due to the other party's guidance that she was able to surpass her limits. In a way, the other party could already be considered as half a teacher to her. If she could become the other party's student and listen to his teachings constantly, her skills as an apothecary would surely improve by leaps and bounds!

"You wish for me to be your teacher?"

Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

His purpose behind this act was to win the other party's trust so that he could have the other party concoct the medicinal solution for him. Who could have thought that the young lady would end up asking him to be her teacher? This made him feel slightly embarrassed.

"I beseech you to accept me!" Apothecary Luo pleaded earnestly.

“Alright. I’ll be your apothecary teacher, but I’ll have to tell you beforehand that I won’t have much time to teach you...”

At which, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before adding, “How about this? I have a unique forging method for concocting a medicinal solution which could test your fundamentals, mental fortitude, and sincerity. Just a heads up, you’ll have to follow my instructions strictly for the concoction of this medicinal solution to succeed... If you succeed, I’ll take you in as my student. Otherwise, I can only say that we aren’t fated to be!”

“I won’t let you down!”

Apothecary Luo’s face flushed in agitation, and she anxiously nodded, seemingly fearful that the young man before her would change his mind.

“Un!” Seeing that he had succeeded in hoodwinking the other party, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. Flicking his wrist, he took out the Great River Snake’s inner core and Sorrow Severing Grass.

“These are the main ingredients. On top of that, I’ll need one liang of Dragon Beard Flower, one liang of Stardust, three qian of Woodyer Skin...”

(One qian = ~ 3.75g. One liang = 37.5g)

Zhang Xuan quickly listed a dozen of medicinal herbs; these were the core ingredients required to forge the medicinal solution.

Noting down the medicinal herbs and the quantity required, Apothecary Luo turned to the elder beside her and asked, “Guild Leader, may I trouble you to bring a set of these herbs over?”

“No problem, I’ll have someone prepare it now!” the old man chuckled.

These medicinal herbs weren’t exceptionally valuable, and they could all be found in the guild. In just a few moments later, an apothecary returned with the listed herbs in hand.

Zhang Xuan swiftly looked through the medicinal herbs to check if everything required was present. While doing so, he noted that the prepared herbs were of the highest maturity, and he nodded in satisfaction.

Indeed, he had made the right choice coming over here to hoodwink a 5-star apothecary. Otherwise, he would surely be unable to gather so many high maturity medicinal herbs. After all, these medicinal herbs were useful to the apothecaries as well, so it would have been difficult to buy these herbs from them with money.

Apothecary Luo swiftly looked through the herbs as well before turning to the young man before her.

“Teacher, I am ready.”

“Follow my instructions strictly, there mustn’t be the slightest deviation!” Zhang Xuan reminded gravely once more. “Warm the cauldron for forty-five breaths before adding in one Stardust. Seven breaths later, add in Dragon Dawn Flower and raise the flames for three breaths...”

The forging process for the medicinal solution required to awaken Yuan Tao’s unique constitution had undergone many refinements in Zhang Xuan’s hands, and the Library of Heaven’s Path had verified it as well.

Zhang Xuan’s instructions were extremely detailed, allowing Apothecary Luo to focus her attention on the forging.

The cauldron flames blazed intensely, and heatwaves rippled in the room.

As more medicinal herbs were thrown in the cauldron, the spiritual energy in the air gradually grew more and more concentrated, and the energy contained within the cauldron became more and more violent. It seemed as though it would reach a breaking point any moment soon and trigger a massive explosion.

“That is a Great River Snake’s inner core...”

“This object contains the essence of a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beast, and the energy contained within it is extremely violent. Even Transcendent Mortal 8-dan experts

would find it difficult to suppress the inner core's energy if it were to be placed under extreme conditions within the cauldron. To have Apothecary Luo deal with it... isn't that going beyond her limits?"

The 5-star apothecaries and the guild leader frowned upon seeing this scene.

619 Limit Revolving Pill

Forging Technique

The inner core of a Great River Snake was the most energy-concentrated part of the Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beast, and it could be said to carry almost the full cultivation of a Perfect Harmonization realm expert. Even the guild leader would find it difficult to suppress the violent energy contained within this thing, and yet the young man actually wanted the Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Apothecary Luo to deal with it? Was success really possible?

Dong dong dong!

Amidst everyone's doubtful gazes, a sound reminiscent of the rumbling of lightning and the knocking of a drum sounded from the interiors of the cauldron. The cauldron's lid danced about its opening, and it seemed as though the violent energy would burst out at any moment. From the looks of it, if the energy wasn't suppressed soon, an explosion would be inevitable.

"Shit, looks like an explosion is going to occur..."

Everyone clenched their fists tightly in trepidation.

As apothecaries, it wasn't too hard for them to deduce the current situation of the forging. Under normal circumstances, in order to prevent an explosion, one would use one's zhenqi to suppress the rampaging energy contained within the cauldron. But... Apothecary Luo clearly didn't possess sufficient strength to deal with such powerful energy!

"Guild Leader..."

A 5-star apothecary couldn't help but turn to look at the guild leader anxiously.

"Since the apothecary up there didn't ask for our help, it's best that we don't interfere..."

Knowing that this was a test for Apothecary Luo, the guild leader waved his hands.

While he did possess sufficient strength to suppress the explosion, it would be highly disrespectful for him to dash in and interfere with the forging process.

‘Don’t worry. While the situation may seem dangerous, an explosion could be easily stopped by removing the flames...’ the guild leader thought, consoling himself.

The situation before him might look dangerous, but as long as the intensity of the flames was lowered instantly, it shouldn’t pose any threat.

Controlling flames was one of the basic lessons an apothecary had to undergo. It shouldn’t be a problem for Apothecary Luo to do so.

Just as he was thinking so, the young man before him said, “Pump in more zhenqi, intensify the flames!”

“Intensify the flames?”

The guild leader was taken aback. His face paled, and he couldn’t help but exclaim, “But an explosion would occur...”

Hong long long!

Before he could finish his words, the cauldron suddenly shook violently, and a destructive aura gushed into the surroundings. Cracks appeared on the shaking ground, and heat waves came crashing down like waves. Under the powerful heat gale, Apothecary Luo’s hair danced in the air, and her robe fluttered.

“Run, it’s about to explode!”

“That’s a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan Great River Snake inner core! If it explodes, the whole hall will be utterly destroyed!”

“Lunatic, he really is a lunatic! How can one forge a pill like that...”

...

The legs of all apothecaries in the room trembled in fright, and there were even a few who immediately turned around to escape.

The might of the explosion of a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan pinnacle inner core was equivalent to an attack of full might from a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan pinnacle expert. While the hall might be sturdily built, it couldn't possibly survive such immense might. It would be reduced to dust in an instant.

The powerful 5-star apothecaries might still be able to stand their ground before such destructive force, but the 1-star to 4-star apothecaries would surely be crushed. They would have to be mad to not escape now.

Geji! Geji!

Amidst pandemonium, the cauldron reached its limit and would explode at any moment now.

Cold sweat also dripped down Apothecary Luo's forehead.

While she knew that the young man possessed incredible mastery of pill forging and he was likely to be in control of the situation, she still couldn't help but feel a shiver going down her spine.

"Don't panic!"

Just as anxiety was tackling her mind, a calm voice behind her brought her back.

Turning around, she saw a young man looking at her with a completely composed face, as though he cared not if the cauldron would explode or not.

The other party's calm demeanor and soothing voice washed away her worries, and her trembling body found its stability.

"Use the Descending Flower Technique to put the Harmony Grass in!"

Apothecary Luo heard the other party say so.

Without any hesitation, she immediately added the Harmony Grass into the cauldron.

Hong long long!

It was as if fuel had been added to the fire, and the shaking of the cauldron further intensified.

“Add in the Cottoneye Flower and Greenthorn Leaf...”

The voice continued instructing he calmly.

Knowing that there was no backing out now, Apothecary Luo continued throwing in medicinal herb after medicinal herb.

As more medicinal herbs were thrown in, the cauldron shook even more intensely. But what left her perplexed was that, no matter how violent the shakings became, an explosion didn't happen.

Even though the cauldron was clearly at the limits of its durability, it seemed to be treading along the lines of the breaking point, refusing to surpass that boundary.

Noticing the bizarreness of the situation, everyone stared at one another in confusion.

At this moment, a thought flashed across the mind of the guild leader. His face flushed red, and his body trembled in agitation.

“Could this be... B-but how can that be possible?”

“What is it, Guild Leader? Have you thought of something?” a 5-star apothecary asked, and many other apothecaries turned their gazes over as well, curious to hear his view on the matter.

“If my eyes are not playing tricks on me... this is the long-lost... Limit Revolving Pill Forging Technique!”

Perhaps due to his agitation, the guild leader's voice sounded slightly hoarse.

“Limit Revolving Pill Forging Technique?”

Everyone was perplexed by those words.

They had never heard of this name before, needless to say, they knew nothing about it.

“It was said that this pill forging technique was created by a fanatic apothecary. However, due to the excessive danger one would be exposed to when utilizing this technique and the long list of death toll in its history, no one dared to try it anymore, and thus, it eventually disappeared in the annals of history... I only happened to chance upon it while reading

through ancient texts. I thought that it was just a legend, yet... to think that it is actually real!”

The guild leader’s teeth were clattering with excitement.

“This...”

Noticing the excitement in the guild leader’s tone, the crowd felt even more curious about this legendary technique.

The guild leader also didn’t beat around the bush. “You all should have seen it for yourself. The cauldron has been on the verge of explosion for a while now, but yet... it hasn’t exploded yet!”

“Un!” Everyone nodded.

If it were them up there, the cauldron would have exploded long ago. But for some reason, despite the cauldron continuing to leap around furiously, it simply refused to explode.

This was something inexplicable to them.

“All things, including cauldrons, have a breaking point. I believe everyone should be aware of this,” the guild leader said.

The crowd replied, “Indeed!”

A cauldron would only explode if the stress it was put under exceeded its limits.

Taking water as an analogy, only below zero degrees Celsius will it turn into ice, and similarly, only at a hundred degrees Celsius will it turn into steam. Anything within the limits, not even one degrees Celsius nor ninety-nine degrees Celsius, could induce such change to water.

The same went for cauldrons as well. Anything within its limit would not cause an explosion.

An apothecary suddenly thought of something, and his eyes narrowed in disbelief.

“What you mean is that... that young apothecary knows what the breaking point of the cauldron is, and he’s intentionally controlling it at this point such that it is impossible for an explosion to occur?”

The others also found their jaws falling to the ground.

“The limit of every cauldron is different, and it can vary from situation to situation based on the medicinal herbs one is dealing with. How can he be so sure what the breaking point is?”

Sure, it did work theoretically... but the problem lay in whether one could accurately determine the breaking point or not.

The cauldron, the environment, the flames, the purity of the apothecary's zhenqi, and his forging technique... A difference in any of these would spell a difference in the cauldron's breaking point. How could this fellow be so sure that his perception of the breaking point was accurate?

It was similar to walking along a cliff blindfolded. The slightest mistake in one's perception could potentially lead to a disastrous outcome... But based on the other party's speech and demeanor, it seemed like he was extremely confident. Where in the world did his confidence come from?

“I've no idea how he can accurately determine the breaking point either, but in any case, it's clear that he has succeeded. Whenever the cauldron is about to exceed the breaking point, he adds a medicinal herb containing spiritual energy to dampen the rampaging violent energy within... In other words, he's continuously delaying the explosion by using the ingredients of the pill to dampen the energy level... the push and pull in this scenario is similar to revolving in a circle, thus the name of the forging technique!” the guild leader said slowly.

“Limit Revolving Pill Forging Technique... I see. But what is the advantage of this forging technique?” An apothecary asked.

Since such a technique was invented, surely it should have some kind of overwhelming advantage to it. Otherwise, who would risk their lives for it?

“Advantage? Its advantage is immense!”

The guild leader swallowed a mouthful of saliva and said, “Everyone should know that the most difficult part regarding processing the inner pill is to melt it. Without several hours of intense flame, it’s impossible to achieve. What makes it worse is that one must keep watch over it during this period of time or else there is a high chance an explosion may occur!”

“Un!” Everyone nodded in agreement.

The inner core was one of the most valuable parts of a spirit beast, as well as the most dangerous and destructive part of it.

It is just like steel, and melting it was no easy task. As such, most apothecaries were unwilling to process it.

“On the other hand, if one were to subject the cauldron to extreme conditions reminiscent of those prior to an explosion, it means that the inner core is also on the verge of explosion, and its emission of energy is also at the maximum tolerable limit!” the guild leader continued.

This wasn’t too difficult to understand. If not for the immense energy leaking from the inner core, it would be impossible to push this incredibly large and sturdy cauldron to its breaking point.

The guild leader said, “With a maximum emission of energy from the inner core, it would mean that the fusing process would be significantly faster, thus reducing the required several hours of effort into just ten minutes!”

“This...”

Everyone was stunned.

Using such a dangerous pill forging technique just to minimize the time required to fuse the inner core?

Wasn’t he treating his life a little too casually?

Cultivators had long lives, and often, they would spend a month or two at a time in seclusion. To them, time wasn’t of much worry. To use such a dangerous pill forging technique just for the sake of saving several hours... What in the world was he thinking?

“That’s not the only advantage!”

Seeing everyone's expression, the guild leader shook his head. "Under such intense conditions, the inner core can fuse better with other medicinal herbs, and the medicinal properties after the fusing would be maximized as well... As such, the quality of the pill would be brought up a notch as well!"

Only then did everyone come to a realization.

"Look, the medicinal herbs are all in! The forging is about to be complete..."

Amidst discussions, the guild leader's face turned grim, and everyone quickly turned their gazes over.

Apothecary Luo flicked her wrist, and the final medicinal herb was thrown into the cauldron. The cauldron shook violently for a moment before the lid burst open. Following which, a light golden medicinal solution shot out as though a fountain.

In an instant, a deep aroma wafted in the air, and spiritual energy gushed in from the heavens.

"Deep Aroma Drawing Spiritual Energy... This is... a grade-6 medicine?"

The guild leader narrowed his eyes.

620 Your Teacher, Zhang Xuan!

Legend had it that a grade-6 pill's aroma, similar to a master teacher's Impartation of Heaven's Will, could draw in spiritual energy that would further raise the quality of the pill.

The guild leader was already a 5-star pinnacle apothecary, and all along, he had been trying to forge higher grade medicine. But due to his lack of cultivation and the guidance of a formidable teacher, he had never succeeded.

He thought that the ultimate limiting factor was his cultivation, but upon seeing this sight, he realized that he was mistaken.

Even though Apothecary Luo came from Hongyuan Empire and was probably more knowledgeable than him, her cultivation was still two whole realms lower than his. After all, she was still much too young.

Thus, in terms of who would be able to forge a grade-6 pill first, he thought that he was in the lead...

But reality clubbed him in his face!

Considering how the other party's medicinal solution had drawn in spiritual energy with its deep aroma, it had clearly reached grade-6.

"It's him..."

The guild leader narrowed his eyes, and his body trembled in agitation.

He had been paying close attention throughout the forging process, and Apothecary Luo followed the other party's instructions strictly. The reason why this forging of a grade-6 medicine succeeded was clearly the credit of this young man.

To be able to allow a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan 5-star apothecary forge a grade-6 pill with his guidance... Wasn't this just too formidable?

How did he do it?

“Grade-6?”

Hearing the guild leader’s exclamations, everyone’s lips trembled in shock.

The higher grade a pill was, the harder it was to forge it. It wasn’t unheard of for a talented 1-star apothecary to forge a grade-2 pill... but a 5-star apothecary forge a grade-6 pill, never before!

“Having forged a grade-6 pill once before, both Apothecary Luo’s confidence and grasp over the medicinal herbs would surely achieve a great advancement. No doubt about it... she will surely become an incredible apothecary in the future!”

“Indeed. How could I have been so foolish? If I had rushed up to acknowledge him as my teacher, the chance would have been mine!”

“Such a pity! Say, do you think that it’s too late to acknowledge him as my teacher now?”

“I doubt that he would be willing to accept any more students...”

...

Many of the onlookers expressed their regret toward this matter.

As a 5-star apothecary, successfully forging a grade-6 pill was an exceptionally precious experience. Just this in itself would induce a huge improvement in one’s understanding and eye of discernment, thus making it highly likely that one would advance to become a 6-star apothecary in the future.

If they had rushed forward to acknowledge that young man as their teacher before Apothecary Luo, the chance would surely have been theirs... and they wouldn’t be sighing helplessly in regret now.

Hu!

While some of the crowd were wallowing in their disappointment and others were still stunned with shock, the

person in question, Apothecary Luo, heaved a huge sigh of relief. She stared quietly at the medicinal solution floating silently before her, and her face slowly flushed in excitement as her body began trembling intensely.

Just as others had guessed, her grasp of pill forging had been brought up a notch, and in the foreseeable future, pill forging would become her greatest expertise among all of her supporting occupations.

She would surely leave many sighing in awe when she returned to Hongyuan Empire.

“Impressive!”

She glanced at the young man before her once more, her eyes gleaming in admiration.

Through just the other party’s guidance, she was actually able to forge such a high-grade medicine. Even the number one apothecary of Hongyuan Empire, the head of the Apothecary School, would find it hard to match up to his eye of discernment and extensive knowledge.

“Teacher!”

Filling the medicinal solution in a jade bottle, she passed the bottle respectfully over to the young man.

“Un!” Grabbing hold of the jade bottle, a hint of agitation appeared in Zhang Xuan’s eyes as well.

He thought that a grade-5 medicinal solution would be a great outcome already, but due to the unexpectedly high maturity of the mediating medicinal herbs and the lack of errors in the forging process, it actually managed to hit grade-6.

If Yuan Tao were to consume it, his Emperor’s Bloodline would surely be awakened by a huge portion, and his cultivation would rise by leaps and bounds.

“The fact that you were able to forge the medicinal solution successfully shows that you possess incredible talent, and I can also see the sincerity behind your acknowledgement. Alright. From today onward, you shall be my apothecary student!”

Suppressing his excitement, Zhang Xuan assumed an indifferent front, as though forging a grade-6 pill was no different from eating or drinking to him.

Despite the threat of an imminent explosion from the cauldron, the other party was actually able to put her trust in him and followed his instructions precisely with composure. Just this in itself reflected the sincerity of her intention to acknowledge Zhang Xuan as her teacher.

“Teacher, thank you for accepting me!”

Upon hearing that she had been accepted by the ‘expert’ before her, Apothecary Luo clasped her fists in excitement and hurriedly kowtowed to complete the acknowledge ceremony.

Knowing the other party’s sincere intentions, Zhang Xuan was satisfied as well. He turned to look at the other party and asked, “Un. What’s your name?”

“I am Luo Qiqi, teacher can call me Qiqi!” Apothecary Luo said.

“Qiqi? Un. Then from today onward, I shall call you Little Qi...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Yes!” Luo Qiqi replied in delight.

“Alright, I still have things to attend to, so I’ll be leaving for now!”

The stone pillar challenge at the Mystical Treasure Hall and concocting the medicinal solution in the Apothecary Guild—all in all, around ten hours had passed. It was about time for the crown prince’s banquet to begin, and given that the slots for the Cleansing Lake were at stake, he had to be present.

“Yes...”

Seeing that the other party was going to leave, Luo Qiqi felt a little disappointed.

“Pill forging is an accumulation of experience, not something one can achieve mastery in all of a sudden. Try to comprehend what I taught you today, and you will surely improve greatly!” Having seen through Luo Qiqi’s thoughts, Zhang Xuan said.

Luo Qiqi nodded her head. Following which, Zhang Xuan took out ten middle-tier spirit stones and passed it over to the guild leader, “Here is the money for the medicinal herbs!”

If not for the guild leader bringing out so many valuable medicinal herbs, it would be impossible for the medicinal solution to have reached grade-6. Unwilling to take advantage of the other party, Zhang Xuan decided to pay a reasonable sum to the other party.

On the way here, Sun Qiang had passed the 700 middle-tier spirit stones which he took from the Sixth Young Mistress to him.

“This... It’s my honor to be able to see a medicine of such quality to be forged within my lifetime, how can I accept your money...” The guild leader hurriedly turned down Zhang Xuan’s gesture.

“Take it!” Zhang Xuan threw the spirit stones over.

If the other party didn’t accept it, it could be seen as that he owed the other party a favor, and Zhang Xuan detested incurring such a relationship. Instead of causing possible problems in the future, he would rather repay his debts on the spot.

“Alright!”

The guild leader also could tell Zhang Xuan’s intentions from his insistence. He shook his head in disappointment, knowing that he had lost a chance to get acquainted with a talented apothecary.

“Farewell!”

After throwing the spirit stones over, Zhang Xuan walked out of the hall.

Watching as he slowly disappeared into the distance, Luo Qiqi hurriedly shouted, “Teacher... Where can I find you?”

With his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan stopped, and an impassive voice sounded. “Remember this, my name is Zhang Xuan!”

...

“It has been some time already, why isn’t Young Master out yet? The crown prince’s banquet is about to start already!”

Outside the hall, Sun Qiang was pacing around the corridor anxiously.

“Indeed!” Yuan Tao tried to peek into the hall, but the doors were tightly shut, preventing him from seeing anything at all.

Before entering, Zhang Xuan had told them to wait outside. However, four hours had already passed, and there was no sign of him. It was inevitable that they would be worried.

Besides, the crown prince’s banquet was about to start. The motive of the banquet was to vie for the slots of the Cleansing Lake. If the champion of Hongfeng Empire were to not appear in such an important banquet, wouldn’t Hong shi be in tears?

Just the Master Teacher Tournament back then was enough to reduce that 5-star master teacher to tears. If Zhang Xuan were to miss out on this banquet as well, who knew if that old man would be able to take the blow?

“Young lady, may I trouble you to enter and call our young master out?”

After waiting another moment longer in futility, Sun Qiang turned to the young lady beside him.

It was the front receptionist who had brought them over.

“This... I’m sorry, but I can’t. Only official apothecaries can enter, and if I were to enter without permission, I would surely be punished. In the worst-case scenario, I might even face expulsion...”

The young lady quickly shook her head.

How could a mere receptionist like her be qualified to attend such a grand apothecary conference?

“This... but you’re all members of the Apothecary Guild, not to mention, you are only entering to find someone. Surely they won’t go that far?”

Sun Qiang frowned.

“They will!”

Deference surfaced on the eyes of the young lady.

“Apothecary, as an Upper Nine Paths occupation, possesses exceptional standing in society. Due to that, it also has strict rules governing its members, especially when it comes to etiquette. It’s not like you’ve never seen how official apothecaries, dressed in their occupation robes, hold themselves with grace and majesty...”

Just as she was in the midst of explaining the rules governing apothecaries, ‘jiya!’, the gate was suddenly knocked open.

Following which, a large group of 3-star and 4-star apothecaries dashed out of the room fearfully. Some of them dropped their hats while others had their robes torn. In fact, there was even one who, due to sheer panic, bumped into the pillar, and at this moment, was lying on the ground as though a dead pig...

At this moment, instead of proud apothecaries, they looked like a group of refugees instead.

“This... is the grace and majesty you were talking about?”

Yuan Tao and Sun Qiang widened their eyes in shock.

“...” The young lady found her vision darkening at the sight as well.

As the front receptionist, she often came into contact with these apothecaries. Usually, all of them would hold themselves proudly, exuding an air that distanced others from them. But now... they resembled defeated mercenaries, stripping of their armor and tossing apart their weapons to flee as fast as they could. Their appearances couldn’t possibly look any worse than this.

Weren’t they listening to a lecture inside?

Why were they fleeing like frightened lambs then?

Just what in the world was being lectured inside?

Apothecaries streamed out of the hall ceaselessly, and every single one of them had a panicked look on their faces. At the moment, Yuan Tao thought of something and swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

“It can’t be that teacher... has done something inside again?”

“This...”

Sun Qiang stroked his lower jaws and nodded his head. “Now that you say it, there does seem to be such a possibility!”

The young master was the type of person who had to cause a pandemonium no matter where he went. Just in the Master Teacher Tournament itself, he left all of the competitors on the verge of insanity. While he only said that he was going to find a 5-star apothecary to forge the medicinal solution for him, could he have caused some kind of trouble?

The possibility would be so low that they wouldn’t entertain such thoughts if it was someone else, but their young master... The more they thought about it, the more likely it seemed to be true!

“Your young master? How is that possible? Don’t worry, given that he’s only a 3-star apothecary, it’s impossible for him to stir something of such scale!”

Recovering from her shock, the young lady shook her head upon hearing the duo’s conversation.

She had met the person in question, and she knew that the other party was only a 3-star apothecary.

There was a huge bunch of apothecaries of such rank in the guild. Even if the other party did try to start something, how big of a mess could he cause?

“That’s hard to say...” Sun Qiang shook his head.

“You’re thinking too much. Our guild has a lot of 5-star apothecaries. While a 3-star apothecary might be a formidable existence in other branches, before them, he doesn’t mean much at all...” replied the young lady.

She was just about to continue speaking when, ‘jiya’, the entrance opened once more and the ‘young master’ from before walked out casually.

“Farewell, Apothecary Zhang!”

“Apothecary Zhang, if you find yourself with some spare time, our guild would be honored to have you here! If you could conduct a lecture, we’d be most grateful!”

Following which, the guild leader and the numerous elders of the guild walked out and bowed humbly as they saw him off. Within their eyes, one could see respect and admiration.

“...” The young lady burst into tears.

Shouldn’t that guy be unable to stir anything of sizeable scale?
Shouldn’t that guy mean nothing to you?

What in the world is going on?

621 Crown Prince's Residence

“Let's go!”

Ignoring the guild leader and the elders who were respectfully seeing him off, as well as the young lady who was crying pitifully by the corner, Zhang Xuan gestured to Yuan Tao and Sun Qiang before walking out with wide strides.

If he had more time, he would surely return here to clear all of the books in the guild. Otherwise, he could only drop the matter.

Walking out of the Apothecary Guild and getting into a carriage, Zhang Xuan passed the jade bottle over to Yuan Tao.

“Apply a portion to your skin each time, and only after you've fully absorbed everything can you apply it once more... Train properly, and your cultivation will surely soar swiftly!”

“Thank you, Teacher!”

Yuan Tao took the jade bottle from Zhang Xuan's hands in agitation.

Having followed his teacher for the entire day, he knew how valuable the medicinal solution was, and how much effort his teacher put into preparing it for him. The favor his teacher had shown him was so great that he didn't think he could ever repay it.

“Take these spirit stones. You'll need them when you cultivate!”

After which, he passed a few dozen middle-tier spirit stones over.

The medicinal solution could only awaken Yuan Tao's unique constitution. He would still require a huge amount of spiritual energy to fuel his cultivation. In any case, after the incident

with the Sixth Young Mistress, he didn't lack spirit stones at the moment.

Understanding his teacher's intentions, Yuan Tao took the stones.

“Sun Qiang, take these spirit stones with you. I might be gone for a few days when the Cleansing Lake opens, so I'll be counting on you to distribute them to Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, and Liu Yang when they require any. Make sure that everyone, including you, has sufficient spirit stones so as to not delay your cultivation!”

Saying so, Zhang Xuan passed around two hundred spirit stones over to Sun Qiang.

Once the Cleansing Lake opened, he would have to spend several days inside to cultivate. Thus, it was best for him to make preparations in advance so as to not delay his students' and butler's training.

“Don't worry, Young Master. We'll surely train hard!” Sun Qiang hurriedly nodded his head.

Hearing Sun Qiang's confident declaration, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“I'm not worried about others, you are the one whom I'm the most worried about...”

Zheng Yang and the others, perhaps spurred by Zhao Ya and Lu Chong, were extremely motivated, and he need not worry about them.

The main problem was Sun Qiang. He simply slacked off way too much, and the moment no one's eyes were not on him, he would immediately trail off. He was indeed a huge headache to deal with.

“Ah...”

Understanding the young master's intentions, Sun Qiang scratched his head awkwardly.

“Alright, these are the items obtained from the Mystical Treasure Hall. Split them among the others, and sell everything else that you don't need for spirit stones!”

Zhang Xuan took out the storage ring Gan Yiping gave him and passed it over.

Of everything in the Mystical Treasure Hall, Zhang Xuan only kept the ‘Glacier Rain Sword’, the Upgradable Artifact. Everything else was useless to him, so it would be best to trade them for spirit stones instead.

“Yes!” Grabbing the storage ring, Sun Qiang acknowledged Zhang Xuan’s instructions.

Knowing that there was nothing for him to worry about leaving everything to Sun Qiang, Zhang Xuan said no more.

In a rush for time, Zhang Xuan had the carriage travel at its full speed, and around an hour later, they finally returned to their living quarters.

As soon as he arrived, he saw Hong shi waiting at the entrance anxiously. Bi Jianghai and Luo Xuan were standing behind him.

There was a total of three Cleansing Lake slots for each Vassal State. For Hongfeng Empire, these slots were given to the top three rankers in the Master Teacher Tournament.

Since the banquet tonight was to determine the distribution of slots, naturally, the both of them were qualified to attend the banquet as well to witness how their fates would be decided.

“Zhang shi, you’re finally here! Did anything bad happen? If something really happened... you must tell me in advance so that I can have my teacher resolve it for you...”

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan’s return, Hong shi became so agitated that he nearly burst into tears.

Ever since returning from the confrontation with Luo Zhao and the others, he immediately returned to look for Zhang shi, but... despite waiting for eight whole hours, the other party still remained out of sight.

The fear that the other party might have caused some kind of trouble started to overwhelm him.

After all, this wasn’t the twenty-eight regional powers nor the Myriad Kingdom Alliance, where Hong shi could easily

resolve any problem with his influence... It would be best for them to maintain a low profile over here, at Huanyu Empire's capital. Otherwise, if something were to happen, they would have to ask his teacher, Pavilion Master Jiang Wei, for help.

“Don't worry, I only went to the Apothecary Guild to have a medicinal solution concocted!”

Seeing how Hong shi was fearing that he had caused some kind of trouble, Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

What the heck was this... What kind of person do you take me for?

Am I someone who causes trouble wherever he goes?

No matter what, I'm still a master teacher, and I have a reputation to uphold. Under the situation that no one steps on my toes, why would I go around causing trouble? Why are you speaking as though I'm the God of Destruction, as if I cause a pandemonium no matter where I go...

If Hong shi knew of Zhang shi's thoughts, he might have rushed forward to strangle the other party.

You said you aren't the God of Destruction? Then what about my Ghost Domain Illusory City? What about my Celestial Chess? What about my Book of Emptied River? What about my Otherworldly Demon...

Forget it, I should stop thinking about it. Otherwise, even my heart would become a goner...

“It's good that nothing happened. Alright, the banquet is about to start, so let's hurry there!”

Knowing that this wasn't the time to speak, Hong shi gestured to the others, and the four of them started walking to the Crown Prince's residence.

Crown Prince Ye Qian's Eastern Palace was only several hundred meters away from the living quarters. Before long, they were already at the entrance, and they passed their invitation letter to the guards.

“This way please!”

Upon seeing the invitation letter, a guard on duty stepped forward and led the way.

Following behind the guard, Hong shi asked, “This brother here, I would like to ask if Feng shi from Fengyuan Empire, Luo shi from Qianfeng Empire, and Chen shi from Zhuyue Empire are here yet?”

Naturally, Luo shi from Qianfeng Empire referred to Luo Zhao, whom he just extorted a moment ago, whereas Chen shi from Zhuyue Empire referred to the old man who was with Luo Zhao back then.

The both of them, along with Feng Yu and Hong shi, were the people in charge of the Master Teacher Pavilions of the Four Great Vassal States, as well as the hosts of the Master Teacher Tournament in their own regions.

“They already arrived an hour ago...” the guard replied.

“An hour ago?”

Hong shi’s mouth twitched.

He thought that he could take advantage of the fact that he had arrived early, but contrary to his expectations, the others had arrived an hour earlier than him.

An hour... It can’t be that the distribution of the slots had already been decided in that time!

After a moment of hesitation, Hong shi asked, slightly embarrassed, “Has the banquet... started yet? Am I late? If I’m late, it would be bad to bother the crown prince...”

“The banquet hasn’t started yet. The crown prince has gone off to invite the Sixth Princess and the others and hasn’t returned yet!”

The guard shook his head.

“The banquet hasn’t started yet? That’s a relief!”

Heaving a sigh of relief, Hong shi flicked his wrist and passed a spirit stone over. “Little brother, thank you for bringing us over!”

“You’re welcome!”

Seeing the other party giving him a generous tip of a middle-tier spirit stone, the guard's eyes lit up. His attitude immediately became much better, and he leaned over and began speaking in a hushed voice.

"I heard that the banquet is to confirm the distribution of slots for the Cleansing Lake..."

"We don't even know how the crown prince is going to determine the distribution the slots, needless to say, prepare ourselves for it..." Hong shi smiled bitterly as he shook his head.

"I'm not too sure about the rules as well, but... I heard that the primary aim of this banquet is to welcome the geniuses from Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, as well as to allow the talented master teacher from the various Vassal States to meet their seniors."

"Welcome? You mean... all four guests from Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy will be present for the banquet?"

Hong shi was taken aback.

He had heard from Luo Zhao previously that the crown prince was going to take away four slots for these geniuses from Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy.

He thought that this banquet was hosted only to solve the issue regarding the distribution of slots, he didn't think that the four guests would be invited over as well.

A thought suddenly surfaced in Hong shi's mind.

"Could it be that... they are related to the distribution of slots as well?"

The soldier scanned his surroundings before telling Hong shi what he knew in a lowered voice.

"I'm not too sure either. But in any case, if they were to speak up, it's unlikely that the crown prince would refute their words... As such, Luo shi and the others prepared many gifts to get on their good side. I think that you should also prepare some gifts. Anyway, there's no harm going the extra mile..."

"Gifts?" Hong shi's face paled.

His entire wealth had been destroyed by that fellow behind him in the Master Teacher Tournament! Even if he had wanted to present any gifts, there was nothing of value that he could offer!

After all, considering that the four of them had come from Hongyuan Empire, it was unlikely that one could win their goodwill with an ordinary present.

Oblivious to Hong shi's expression, the guard nodded his head and continued, "Indeed. After all, there's no one who would turn down a present. As long as one can get on good terms with them, it shouldn't be a problem to obtain a slot at all... Alright, the banquet hall is just ahead. I'll see you off here!"

"Thank you!"

Having been told so much information after the 'gift', Hong shi clasped his fist and thanked the guard.

Regardless of the time and place, money always works wonders.

At the very least, with this information, they would be prepared for what that was about to come.

Just that... with this new information came a new headache.

"A gift? What kind of gift should I prepare to win their favor? If only I still had the Book of Emptied River with me... or the Otherworldly Demon could work too..."

Rubbing his glabella, Hong shi's face turned bitter.

If those artifacts of his hadn't been destroyed, he was certain he could have surely made the eyes of the guests from Hongyuan Empire lit up with those. But now...

Noticing the other party's awful complexion, Zhang Xuan walked over and asked, "Hong shi, what's wrong?"

"I-it's nothing!" Hong shi quickly shook his head.

Since what was done was done, it was futile for him to blame Zhang shi for it. The important thing at hand was to find a way to get on good terms with those four guests.

"Are you worried over the present?" Luo Xuan asked.

“That’s right!” Hong shi nodded.

“Present? If only I knew, I wouldn’t have passed the storage ring to Sun Qiang...”

Seeing that Hong shi was worried about this problem, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He had just swept away everything in the Mystical Treasure Hall, and valuable artifacts worthy as a gift was truly one thing he didn’t lack right now. Just that... he had given everything to Sun Qiang already, and who knew if he could make it in time if he were to fetch the stuff now.

“Actually, there’s no need for us to worry about it now. There is an extremely high chance that the slots will be distributed based on our capability as master teachers. If gifts really work, what will become of the occupation?”

All those who were going into the Cleansing Lake were headed for the Master Teacher Academy, so the distribution of slots were likely to involve tests on one’s capability as a master teacher. In truth, the gifts could be considered as nothing more than an additional topping, so it shouldn’t be of much concern.

“I hope so!” Hong shi understood this fact as well, but lagging behind at the starting line still left him worried.

Zhang Xuan suddenly recalled the discussions they had and asked, “Right, Hong shi. When you went over to wreak havoc, did you receive any news from them?”

“Oh, I did receive some news regarding the four geniuses from the Master Teacher Academy...”

Nodding his head, Hong shi was just about to inform Zhang Xuan about the matter concerning the Sixth Princess and her companions when a pair of footsteps approached, and a voice sounded.

“Hong Qian, are these the talents you’ve chosen? They don’t look impressive at all!”

Following which, a figure walked over from the hall ahead of them. It was Master Teacher Luo Zhao from Qianfeng Empire.

622 Late

At this moment, Luo Zhao was dressed in a large crimson master teacher robe which looked magnificently beneath the lighting. He held a glass of fine wine in his hands as he glanced at the approaching group with a smile.

From his appearance, it seemed as though he wasn't in the least bothered by Hong shi's actions earlier in the afternoon.

“Luo Zhao, what do you mean by that?”

“Nothing much, I just feel that Hongfeng Empire has regressed too much. To think that even Transcendent Mortal 4-dan pinnacle cultivators could make it into the top three... Tsk tsk, you're truly getting worse with each passing generation!”

Luo Zhao shook his head as he spoke.

Both Bi Jianghai and Luo Xuan had already reached Consonant Spirit realm; only Zhang Xuan was still stuck in Transcendent Mortal 4-dan pinnacle.

Zhang Xuan also didn't intentionally hide his cultivation either, so Luo Zhao was able to notice it with a glance.

While the Four Great Vassal States might not be as powerful as Huanyu Empire, they had vast territories beneath it and countless geniuses. Often, those who managed to get into the top three would have already reached Consonant Spirit realm. Only a monster like Zhang Xuan would be able to leave the competitors on the verge of breakdown despite possessing a lower cultivation.

Seeing how the fellow was mocking Zhang Xuan's low cultivation, Hong shi retorted, “What's wrong with Transcendent Mortal 4-dan? It's not like the Master Teacher Tournament revolves around strength!”

You're only saying this because you don't know how fearsome he is...

Looks like Feng shi didn't tell you who the cause of his fall was. If you knew, you wouldn't have uttered so much nonsense.

As old acquaintances, Hong shi had a clear gauge of Luo Zhao's fighting prowess. But even so, he had a hunch that if the other party and Zhang shi were to be locked in the cage, Zhang shi would surely be the one walking out alive!

"Oh? You look very confident." Luo Zhao's lips curled up. "Just that, I wonder if you can maintain the same confidence you have after seeing my top three rankers!"

After which, he turned around and three young men came walking over. The aura of the trio was intensified and dampened as though a flickering light, but if one thing was for sure, none of them were weak.

"Consonant Spirit realm intermediate stage?" Hong shi frowned. "You gave them... Consonant Spirit Pills?"

Consonant Spirit Pill was a grade-5 pill that allowed any Consonant Spirit realm cultivator to increase their cultivation by one small realm without any conditions or side effects!

Only 5-star apothecaries are capable of forging this pill, and the quantity available was extremely limited. Of the entire region, only Huanyu Empire sold it.

The bodies of the trio harnessed the violent energy reminiscent of a medicine-clearly, they had achieved a breakthrough via consuming medicine. Furthermore, considering how they didn't possess full grasp of their strength, it shouldn't have been long since they made the breakthrough.

"Indeed. The Cleansing Lake nourishes one's soul, and as such, Consonant Spirit realm cultivators benefit the most from it... To think that there would be a person who hasn't even reached Consonant Spirit realm within your group... Given such, do you think that the crown prince would still give the slot to you?"

Luo Zhao chuckled lightly.

The other three Vassal States had come to the empire early and spent an exorbitant price to purchase Consonant Spirit Pills. It

was fortunate that they managed to obtain the pills before today, thus allowing their top three rankers to achieve a breakthrough.

Even though there was only a step of difference between Consonant Spirit realm and Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle, there was a qualitative difference in the physical body and soul of both realms.

As long as one hadn't reached Consonant Spirit realm yet, one would be unable to cultivate one's soul separately. Even if one were to enter the Cleansing Lake, the effects one could derive from it would be severely limited.

"This..." Hong shi frowned.

He had held the Master Teacher Tournament at the same time as the other three Vassal States, but unfortunately, the tournament was held in the Myriad Kingdom Alliance this year, and the Myriad Kingdom Alliance was simply too far away from Huanyu Capital.

The others had already arrived in Huanyu Capital earlier and made preparations in advance. In comparison, his group looked unready.

"The crown prince hasn't announced the rules for determining the distribution of the slots yet. Besides, so what if your men have reached Consonant Spirit realm intermediate stage? It's still too early to see who will have the last laugh!"

Even though Hong shi was worried, he couldn't possibly lose out in a fight of guts.

"Seeing how you're so confident, I'll look forward to your performance later!"

Luo Zhao chuckled before bringing the three men of his group back to the hall with a wine glass in hand.

"Humph!"

Hong shi flung his sleeves angrily.

He knew the other party was intentionally coming over to show off, but he still couldn't hold back his anger.

Taking a deep breath, Hong shi turned to the young man beside him and said, “Zhang shi, don’t think too much into it...”

“Me? I’m fine!”

Not expecting to be looked down upon and consoled due to his low cultivation realm, Zhang Xuan chuckled. “Right, did you fight him in a Master Teacher Confrontation earlier this afternoon?”

“He did challenge me... but didn’t you tell me not to accept it?”

Hong shi looked at Zhang Xuan in confusion.

Zhang shi had analyzed the situation he would encounter if he were to confront the trio. The ‘suffered grievous injuries, won’t be able to fight for the next ten years’ was actually a work of the young man before him.

Otherwise, how could an upright person like him possibly think of such downright shameless words?

“Both he and you are Transcendent Mortal 6-dan primary stage cultivators, so there isn’t a huge gap between your strength. It’s hard to tell who would win, so it was indeed unwise for you to accept his challenge back then. But now... the situation is different!”

Zhang Xuan chuckled.

“Different?” Hong shi was taken aback.

What was different about the situation?

It had only been a few hours since then; his cultivation hadn’t advanced, and Luo Zhao didn’t grow weak either...

“I’m here, so you don’t have to worry about facing him. I can guarantee your win!” Zhang Xuan said calmly with pride and confidence.

“What you mean is that... you’ll guide me in my battle against him?”

Hong shi was taken aback for a moment before his eyes lit up.

“Un!” Zhang Xuan’s lips crept up.

You actually dare to mock my cultivation?

Fine, let’s have Hong shi beat you to the point that even your own father won’t recognize you.

Consonant Spirit realm intermediate stage huh?

When your teacher is reduced to a pig head, let’s see whether you can get gleeful!

“Alright!” Hong shi nodded his head.

While this young man’s master teacher rank was lower than his, the other party had an 8-star master teacher as his teacher. Not to mention, he had witnessed the other party’s capability in giving pointers, and he could tell that he wasn’t a match for the other party.

With the other party’s help, his chances at defeating Luo Zhao would be increased by exponentially.

“Let’s go in!”

After a moment of discussion, the group of four entered the banquet hall.

As expected of the crown prince’s palace. The decorations were elaborate, and countless Night Illumination Pearls lit up the room as though it was day.

Resplendent carpets were laid on the floor, beautiful wallpapers brought elegance to the room, and many lush potted plants breathed life into the area... On the whole, the entire hall was extravagant and majestic, and its unique aesthetics were pleasant to the eyes.

“The crown prince possesses incredible talent. He managed to become a 4-star master teacher in his twenties, thus becoming the number one genius of the younger generation of Huanyu Empire. Thus, my teacher took him in as his student and sent him to the Master Teacher Academy!”

Hong shi sent a message over telepathically. “As such, he’s highly favored by the emperor. As if to reflect that, the scale of

the Eastern Palace is on par with the royal palace, and its design is even more elaborate than the latter...”

“Un!”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

Of all of the palaces he had been to, there was none that could compare to this Eastern Palace.

On top of murals, there were also many works from famous painters hung on the wall, causing spiritual energy to linger in the air. Not only so, upon entering the hall, they immediately felt the temperature change to a soothing level. There should be a temperature-regulating formation set up here.

It seemed like the talented master teacher of a crown prince was highly favored by the emperor.

Walking along the soft carpet, they saw two sets of table and chairs were placed at the two sides of the vast hall, probably reserved for the members of the Four Great Vassal States. Luo Zhao and his group were seated on one of them.

Feng shi, who was nearly shattered to smithereens from falling from a high altitude, was present too. However, his injuries seemed to be much more severe than before. His cheeks were swollen red, and he looks extremely fragile at the moment. This was probably Hong shi’s work.

The only reason why he could continue remain seated without any problems was probably due to the consumption of some kind of incredible recovery pill. But even so, he looked drained, a complete contrast from his gleeful self earlier this morning.

“This is... Feng shi?”

Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai stared at one another in astonishment.

Just earlier this morning, this man was stood majestically on the back of a spirit beast as he blocked Hong shi’s passageway. While he was an enemy, they had to admit that there was an air of grandness around him. However, with a word from

Zhang shi, he plummeted from the skies, reduced to... such a state.

Recalling what had been said just earlier on, they solemnly swore that even if they had to offend everyone in the world, they would never offend Zhang shi...

Ignoring Feng shi, Zhang Xuan turned his sight toward the other master teachers in the room.

Just as Luo Zhao said, the top three rankers from Fengyuan Empire, Qianfeng Empire, and Zhuyue Empire had all reached Consonant Spirit realm. In fact, there was even one who had reached Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage.

In terms of cultivation, Zhang Xuan indeed ranked at the bare bottom.

Other than the members from the Four Great Vassal States, there was a young man seated at the main table placed in the center. He was drinking alone, forming a stark contrast to the others in the room.

That man was wearing a robe, and five bright stars shone from the master teacher emblem pinned on his chest.

“5-star master teacher?”

Zhang Xuan was stunned. Turning to Hong shi, he asked, “Is this the crown prince?”

“He’s not the crown prince. The crown prince is only a half 5-star master teacher. That person is probably his senior from the Master Teacher Academy... Based on what I know, he must either be Xing Yuan or Wu Zhen!” Hong shi replied.

He had learned the names of the four guests from the Master Teacher Academy. Given that the person seated there was a man, it was impossible for him to be the Sixth Princess or Luo Qiqi. Thus, he had to be either Xing Yuan or Wu Zhen.

Otherwise, it was impossible for him to be seated so casually on the same table as the crown prince.

“Xing Yuan or Wu Zhen?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Un, there are a total of four guests from the Master Teacher Academy, and two of the 5-star master teachers go by those names!” Hong shi explained. After which, he gestured the group to a table and said, “Since the crown prince isn’t here yet, let’s take a seat!”

From the information they received from the guard, they learned that the crown prince had gone over to invite the Sixth Princess and the rest of the group.

“Hong shi, considering the distance between Huanyu Empire and Myriad Kingdom Alliance, we won’t say anything about your prior tardiness. However, you should have arrived in the capital this morning already! To keep Wu shi waiting and only arrive at this late hour... don’t you think you’re being a little too disrespectful?”

Right after the group got seated, an impassive voice suddenly sounded in the air.

It was an elder seated opposite to them.

The 5-star master teacher leading Zhuyue Empire’s group, Chen Yue!

Hearing his words, Hong shi frowned in displeasure.

His voice wasn’t exceptionally loud, but it was sufficient so for everyone in the room to hear. This, of course, included Wu shi, who was drinking at the main table.

If he were to admit his tardiness, considering how he arrived later than the esteemed guest from the Master Teacher Academy, that would be no different from admitting to a breach of etiquette. Given so, he would surely leave a bad impression with the other party.

On the other hand, given that he had indeed arrived later than Wu shi, if he were to attempt to dispute the fact, the results wouldn’t be any better either.

It could be said that those words had put Hong shi into a deadlock.

What should he do?

Hong shi's face darkened as he struggled to search for a reply. However, at that moment, he suddenly heard something, and his body stiffened.

Following which, his eyes lit up, and he turned to look Chen Yue in the eye.

“Chen Yue, please mind your words. This is just a banquet, a place that fosters camaraderie and harmony. To be talking about tardiness here... Are you going to blame the crown prince for arriving late later on as well?”

623 Two Different Evaluations

“Hmm?”

Hearing those words, everyone was awed.

Master Teacher Chen Yue’s question was clearly an attempt at soiling Hong shi’s reputation. And yet, Hong shi actually managed to counterattack against such a difficult question.

You said that I was late? Fine! But even the crown prince isn’t here yet, are you going to blame him for the same as well?

This is just a casual banquet, and yet here you are pointing fingers around. Let me ask you, what are you trying to do?

Not only did those words seamlessly respond to Chen Yue’s accusation, it even left him in a difficult position. He could neither agree nor disagree with Hong shi’s words, and his face gradually reddened in frustration. He felt so stifled that he could spew blood at any moment.

“Oh? It has only been awhile since we last met, and Hong shi has become much more eloquent than before!”

Seeing his alliance mate Chen Yue being placed in a difficult position, Luo Zhao stepped forward and intervened.

“Not just so, my cultivation also advanced significantly in the past few days. Luo shi, would you like to give it a try?” Hong shi filled his cup with fine wine as he glanced to the side.

“Don’t you agree, Feng shi?”

“You... Pu!”

Feng Yu’s body staggered. In an instant, his injuries were triggered, and a mouthful of fresh blood spewed from his mouth.

Didn’t we agree not to talk about this matter? Why are you bringing it up now? Besides, they are the ones who are causing

you trouble, not me! To think that I would still be shot despite sitting quietly in my corner over here...

“Feng shi was wounded by spirit beasts when he was out hunting a few days ago... he had been spending his time recuperating at his residence, so how could he possibly know how strong you are?” Luo Zhao harrumphed.

Luo Zhao’s words were indeed quite scathing. By saying that Feng shi was hurt by a spirit beast, he was hinting that Hong shi was no different from a vicious beast.

“So, he was hurt by a spirit beast? My condolences!”

Naturally, Hong shi could tell the insult hidden within the other party’s words, but he paid it no heed. He glanced at Luo Zhao calmly and said, “There are no clear cuts on his face, mostly swellings from region to region. The swellings on his face carry a tinge of redness amidst gray-this is a sign that zhenqi was harnessed behind the attack. The bridge of his nose is slightly caved in, forming a straight line with his forehead-this is clearly the result of a kick. The slightly redder print that stretched from his ears down to his lips-that is obviously caused by a slap...”

“These wounds are obviously caused by a human, and yet you claim that he was done in by a spirit beast...”

At this moment, a glint flashed across Hong shi’s eyes as he continued, “Luo shi, may I ask if you’re blind? Or have you learnt how to spout barefaced lies?”

“You...” Luo Zhao’s face reddened, and he nearly fainted then and there.

Master teachers possessed exceptional eyesight. There were distinctive differences between the wounds caused by a spirit beast and those caused by a human. The only reason why he said the words that he did was to change the subject and alleviate the awkwardness in the air... Who knew that Hong shi would point them out explicitly and claim that he was lying through his teeth...

Luo Zhao’s entire body trembled in rage, but he couldn’t find a single word to say.

If he were to claim that it was Hong shi who beat him up, the matter regarding them blocking the other party's passageway would be revealed as well...

Damn it, hadn't words always been his weakness? When did he become so sharp-tongued?

Everyone stared at one another in shock.

Hong shi was way too formidable!

Chen shi and Luo shi had worked together to corner Hong shi with their words, but they ended up being rendered speechless instead!

"What about me? Is there anything wrong with my words? Or could it be that... the 'spirit beast' that caused Feng shi's injuries refers to you, and you're feeling angry at having that pointed out by me?" Hong shi replied impassively.

"Humph!" Luo Zhao clenched his fists tightly. He was bubbling with rage, but he simply couldn't find the words to refute the other party's accusation.

"Alright, enough. This is just a casual banquet, there's no need to make things so tense here!" Seeing that Luo Zhao was about to explode from frustration, Chen Yue could only step in to mediate.

"Indeed, this is just a banquet. There's no need to go so far!"

Hong shi sipped on his wine.

"Damn it..."

Seeing Hong shi's attitude, Luo shi and Chen shi's face darkened.

They intended to get back at Hong shi for wreaking havoc at their place so as to vent their frustrations before the start of the banquet. Who knew that before they could even lift up their legs, they were already kicked in the face?

Furthermore, it was the type where their faces were stomped on viciously.

The more they thought about it, the more frustrated they became.

They quickly turned to the main table to check if they had inadvertently left a bad impression with that genius, but the latter simply continued drinking his wine nonchalantly, as though he hadn't heard the quarrel just a moment ago.

“That’s good...”

Seeing that Wu shi was no paying no heed to their affairs, they heaved a sigh of relief.

“For some reason, this fellow’s tongue is much sharper than before. There’s no benefits to arguing with him. We should wait for the crown prince to arrive first!”

Knowing that they would only get more frustrated the more they argued with Hong shi, Luo Zhao, Chen Yue, and Feng Yu came to an agreement.

And thus, the hall fell silent once more.

...

While the group over here were harboring their own thoughts, in one of the courtyards within the Eastern Palace, a well-dressed young man stood patiently as he waited for someone.

He seemed to have been standing there for quite some time now, but there wasn't the slightest impatience in his expression. On the contrary, he was smiling instead.

If Hong shi were here, he would surely recognize the young man to be the crown prince of Huanyu Empire, Ye Qian!

“Damn it, it’s all that fellow’s fault! If not for him taking away my Sorrow Severing Grass, I wouldn’t be in such a dilemma now... Xing Yuan, have you found out who that guy is?”

A furious complaint sounded. Following which, a beautiful figure walked into the courtyard.

A slightly apologetic voice the sounded.

It came from the young man following behind the beautiful figure.

It was the Sixth Princess and Xing Yuan whom Zhang Xuan met at the Mystical Treasure Hall earlier.

After leaving the Mystical Treasure Hall, the Sixth Princess continued looking around to search for a Sorrow Severing Grass, but despite searching until now, her efforts were in vain.

The more she thought about it, the angrier she felt.

“Six Princess and Senior Xing Yuan!”

The crown prince walked forward and bowed.

“Oh? It’s great that you’re here. I have something I need your help on!” Xing Yuan said.

“Senior, feel free to instruct me!” Ye Qian hurriedly said.

“In the day, Sixth Princess and I met a young man in Mystical Treasure Hall. That young man is in his twenties, and he was walking around with a plump butler. Help me look into his identity and report back to me as soon as there’s any result,” Xing Yuan instructed.

“Yes!” Ye Qian nodded.

Even though the other party’s description was very vague, considering that they were within Huanyu Capital, it wasn’t too difficult for Ye Qian, with his influence as the crown prince, to search for a single person.

“Sixth Princess and Senior Xing Yuan, I’ll have this done immediately. Also, I’ve prepared a banquet for you tonight, and I would like to invite you over. At the same time, you can also meet the freshmen Huanyu Empire will be sending over to the Master Teacher Academy this year...”

“I’m not interested!”

The Sixth Princess waved her hands in annoyance.

She was still a proud princess when she left the residence earlier this morning, but by the time she returned, she had become the maid of another man instead. Angry and humiliated, how could she possibly be in the mood to attend a banquet?

“This...” Not expecting the Sixth Princess to reject his offer so directly, Ye Qian turned to look at Xing Yuan awkward.

“Senior, you...”

“Oh, I’ll return to my residence first. I’ll be there in a moment!”

Xing Yuan waved his hands.

“Alright!”

Seeing that the Sixth Princess was at the peak of her anger, Ye Qian bowed and left the courtyard.

He might be the crown prince of Huanyu Empire, but his standing still paled far too much in comparison to the princess of Hongyuan Empire. The both of them weren’t of the same standing at all.

It would be a delight if the other party accepted his invitation, but even if that wasn’t the case, he dared not push his case.

Right before he was about to walk out of the courtyard, he heard Xing Yuan’s voice echoing by his ear, “Sixth Princess is currently at the peak of her rage. I’ll talk to her for a bit and come over with her later on!”

“Thank you, Senior!”

Hearing the other party’s promise, Ye Qian’s eyes lit up.

The purpose of this banquet was to welcome the Sixth Princess and the others. If they were to skip out on this banquet, it would indeed be embarrassing on his part.

“Sixth Princess, calm down. If we still aren’t able to find a Sorrow Severing Grass, we can always purchase it from the young man back then after Ye Qian uncovers his identity...”

After Ye Qian left, Xing Yuan immediately hurried forward to console the Sixth Princess.

“This is none of your business!” The Sixth Princess sat down angrily.

Standing at the spot, Xing Yuan was at a loss. It didn’t feel right for him to stay there, but leaving also felt wrong either.

The Sixth Princess had an extremely eccentric temper that made it difficult for him to court her.

She would be fine one moment and throwing a tantrum the next. As fickle as the weather, she often left him feeling puzzled.

Honestly speaking, you were the one who agreed to become that lad's maid. I tried to persuade you against it, but you simply didn't listen... I even proposed to have him killed, but you turned that down too...

And yet, here you are, throwing a tantrum before me and Ye Qian over that matter. What the heck is this?

The more he thought about it, the more frustrated he felt.

“Yu Fei-er, what's wrong?”

Just as Xing Yuan was at a complete loss, footsteps sounded from the outside, and a lady excitedly entered the room. There was a bright smile on her face, and she looked as though she was about to skip in joy.

“Lady Qiqi, you...”

Looking at the other party's expression, Xing Yuan was dumbstruck.

The lady before him, Luo Qiqi, was known for her coldness. She would always keep a distant aura no matter whom she was speaking to. Why would there be such a bright smile on her face today?

If those from the academy were to learn that this ice beauty was capable of smiling, would they go insane?

“It's nothing!”

Only upon hearing Xing Yuan's words did Luo Qiqi notice the smile on her face. She swiftly reverted back to her usual cold expression before walking up to the Sixth Princess and asked, “What's wrong? Who made you so angry?”

“I...”

Princess Fei-er was just about to speak but she suddenly lifted her gaze to look at Luo Qiqi with a frown. “Actually, I'm more interested in what happened to you for you to be so happy.”

She shared the same thoughts as Xing Yuan. Luo Qiqi had always maintained a nonchalant expression in public. If she recalled correctly, the latter said that she was going to the Apothecary Hall to conduct a lecture. But if that was the case, there should be no reason for her to be so happy.

This was contrary to her personality!

“What happened to me? It’s nothing much...”

Recalling Zhang Shi’s dashing figure, a hint of respect gleamed in Luo Qiqi’s eyes, and her lips subconsciously crept up once more. “It’s fine, you should speak first. I’m curious to see who can send our Sixth Princess to such a huge rage!”

“It’s all because of that shameless...”

But halfway through her words, Princess Fei-er shook her head and smiled. “Wait, why should I speak first? You should tell me who made our ice beauty Lady Qiqi so happy first!”

“I...” Luo Qiqi hesitated for a moment. “Alright, why don’t we speak together then!”

“Fine!” Princess Fei-er nodded. “Now!”

“It’s a despicable, shameless, ignorant, and infuriating young rascal!” Princess Fei-er gritted her teeth in resentment.

“It’s a refined, magnanimous, intelligent, and awe-inspiring young talent!” Luo Qiqi spoke in admiration.

624 Greeting Gif

Hearing the words of the duo, Xing Yuan felt a little light-headed.

The person whom Princess Fei-er met was indeed despicable and shameless, so there was nothing to comment about that. However, who in the world did Luo Qiqi met for her to admire the other party so much?

In fact... this didn't seem like plain admiration but adoration already!

“Despicable and shameless? What did he do to make you so angry?” Luo Qiqi asked.

“He... He's completely shameless...”

The more Princess Fei-er thought about it, the angrier she became. She quickly recounted the entire matter.

“He actually made you his maid?”

Hearing Princess Fei-er words, Luo Qiqi's mouth widened in disbelief.

Who was the lady before her?

Hongyuan Empire's Sixth Princess, the dear daughter that the emperor doted a lot on. Even Xing Yuan dared not overstep his boundaries before her... and yet someone actually tried to make her his maid...

Wasn't that person a little bit too daring?

Even if she became your maid, would you dare command her around?

Smiling lightly, Luo Qiqi shook her head and said, “Actually, I think that that person is rather formidable. To be able to make our obstinate Princess Fei-er so angry without you retaliating, he must be a person of great capability.

“You...” Princess Fei-er pouted. “Fine, continue gloating at my plight. Right, what about that person you spoke of?”

“Ah. Today, I went to the Apothecary Hall...”

Luo Qiqi came out clean with everything that happened today without any reservations.

“Just by looking at your pill forging, he was able to point out more than a hundred flaws? Furthermore, he even instructed you to successfully forge a grade-6 medicine... Th-this... More importantly, he’s only in his early twenties? Isn’t that way too dashing!”

Hearing her bosom friend’s words, Princess Fei-er widened her eyes in shock.

Luo Qiqi was a famous master apothecary across the entire Master Teacher Academy. She would get into the top few placings in every tournament conducted by the Apothecary School. And yet, such a genius had actually pointed out more than a hundred flaws in her pill forging?

How formidable must that young man be?

Putting aside Luo Qiqi, if Princess Fei-er could, she would definitely take the other party to be her teacher as well.

“Indeed. I, Luo Qiqi, have never admired anyone ever since I started cultivating. Zhang laoshi is the only exception!”

Recalling the confident and suave demeanor of that young man, Luo Qiqi’s lips began creeping up uncontrollably once more.

“Hmm, I’m also starting to feel a little bit of admiration for the Zhang laoshi you spoke of. When can you bring me to meet him? I also want to learn pill forging from him as well!” Princess Fei-er said.

“Sure! You should also bring me to meet that fellow you spoke of. I’m really interested to see the face of the man who dares have our Princess Fei-er serve as his maid. If he proves to be a mere weakling, I’ll help you pummel him until he forgets his own name!”

“Un!”

The duo chuckled intimately.

Seeing that the two ladies were chatting happily on and on, Xing Yuan suddenly interjected. “Cough cough. Ladies, Crown Prince Ye Qian has prepared a banquet to welcome us, and he’s invited some of the geniuses from Huanyu Empire over who will become our juniors very soon. Shall we go over to take a look now?”

“Right, there’s still the banquet!”

Only then did Luo Qiqi recall the matter. “Of course, we should go! However, we’ll need to prepare ourselves first!”

“Alright. Since you’re going, I’ll go as well!” Seeing that her best friend was going, Princess Fei-er also nodded in agreement.

After chatting with Luo Qiqi, the anger from before had mostly dissipated.

“ ... ”

Hearing that the ladies needed to prepare themselves, Xing Yuan slapped his forehead speechlessly.

Without a doubt, the ladies’ ‘preparation’ would surely be lengthy. It would be hard to tell whether they would be able to make it for the banquet in time now...

...

“The crown prince arrives!”

While Xing Yuan was staring speechlessly into the sky, Crown Prince Ye Qian arrived at the banquet hall.

“Your Highness!”

Hong shi and the others immediately stood up and clasped their fists.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony!”

Ye Qian waved his hands casually as he walked up to the main table. Looking at the young man seated on the table, he greeted with a smile, “Senior Wu Zhen!”

“Un!”

Wu Zhen nodded. “Where are Xing Yuan and the others?”

“The other seniors will be here very soon!” Ye Qian replied.

“Alright!”

Wu Zhen noted before turning his gaze back to the wine on the table.

Thus, Ye Qian turned around to look at the crowd and said, “I believe everyone here should know the purpose why I invited you here!”

“Yes!”

“We understand!”

Luo Zhao, Chen Yue, and the others nodded.

“Good. First, allow me to introduce Senior Wu Zhen from Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy to everyone here. He’s a Grade 2 student, a 5-star low-tier master teacher!” Ye Qian introduced.

Wu Zhen nodded as a gesture to everyone from his seat.

As one of the top geniuses of the Master Teacher Academy, it was normal for him to have such pride.

“5-star low-tier?”

Hearing the other party’s introduction, Zhang Xuan turned to look at Hong shi in bewilderment.

Shouldn’t master teacher rankings be divided into primary, intermediate, advanced, and pinnacle? What does low-tier mean?

“Upon reaching 5-star as a master teacher, progressing through the ranks starts to become extremely difficult!” Hong shi replied telepathically.

“Un!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Upon becoming a 5-star master teacher, one could be considered to have taken the first step to the upper society of the continent. However, at this point, not only would it be difficult for one’s cultivation to progress by even a small realm, it would also be difficult to raise one’s occupation rank as well.

“As such, in order to better divide the ranks, from 5-star onward, the sub-ranks of a master teacher are divided into low-tier, high-tier, and pinnacle instead!”

Hong shi continued, “This way, the sub-ranks can be corresponded to the cultivation of a master teacher. At Transcendent Mortal 6-dan, I’m a 5-star low-tier master teacher. At 7-dan, I’ll become a high-tier, and at 8-dan, pinnacle! But of course, the rise in one’s cultivation must be accompanied with an enhancement in one’s eye of discernment or else one wouldn’t be qualified for the next tier!”

Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

From 3-star master teacher onward, the cultivation of a master teacher in a certain rank could range over three different cultivation realms.

For example, the minimum requirement to becoming a 4-star master teacher was that one had to possess the cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 2-dan. However, one would have to reach Transcendent Mortal 5-dan to become a half 5-star master teacher.

In other words, at 2-dan, 3-dan, and 4-dan, one would be considered as a 4-star master teacher.

On the other hand, only upon reaching 6-dan would one be considered a full-fledged 5-star master teacher.

But of course, cultivation was only one of the criteria. There were a lot of other requirements in play as well.

“The grades of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy are divided based on one’s master teacher ranking. 4-star pinnacle and half 5-star master teacher freshman will be placed in Grade 1. If they advance to become a full-fledged 5-star master teacher, they will be promoted to Grade 2, and if they become a 5-star middle-tier master teacher, they will become a Grade 3 student... so on and so forth!

“There a total of 6 grades in Hongyuan Academy. In other words, even 6-star master teachers could be considered as students!”

“6-star master teachers are still students?”

Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in shock.

As expected of the Master Teacher Academy, it was indeed formidable.

He could already foresee the countless number of geniuses that would be in the academy.

He wasn't too interested in the academy at the start, but after hearing this introduction, he started to bear some expectations toward it.

Given that it was a place where so many master teachers were gathered... perhaps, he might just find a solution to the Innate Fetal Poison there! Even if he failed, studying among so many master teachers should also allow his master teacher rank to soar quickly.

At the very least, this was much better than him fumbling along alone.

“We've long heard of Wu Shi's name. A Grade 2 student, you are one of the top geniuses in the academy. It's a privilege for me, Luo Zhao from Qianfeng Empire, to meet you!”

Hearing the crown prince's introduction, Luo Zhao stood up and greeted with a bright smile. “As the locals here, surely we can't welcome you empty-handed... A while ago, when I was out training in the Western Mulberry Fields, I happened to find a few ‘Mulberry Sparrow Seeds’. Thus, I thought that I should give them to Wu Shi and the other esteemed guests from Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy to express our goodwill!”

Saying so, Luo Zhao flicked his wrist, and a few crimson lotus seed-like objects slowly flew toward Wu Zhen via his zhenqi.

“Mulberry Sparrow Seeds? Is this the legendary medicinal herb that only grows by the nest of the Transcendent Mortal 8-dan spirit beast Heaven Sparrow? It's said that this item can revitalize one upon consumption, and it could augment one's Soul Depth... To give out so many of them at once, what a valuable gift!”

“Incredible, these are truly good stuff...”

“As expected of the pavilion master of the Qianfeng Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, his generosity is indeed exceptional...”

...

Seeing the gift that Luo Zhao gave, everyone was awed.

Even Hong shi and Zhang Xuan stared at one another with a deep frown on their foreheads.

Mulberry Sparrow Seed was an invaluable treasure. Its worth wasn't beneath that of the Great River Snake's inner core. It seemed like Luo Zhao had come prepared this time around.

“That fellow wasn't completely honest...”

Hong shi's face darkened as he clenched his fists tightly in rage.

Earlier today, when he went to wreak havoc at the other party's place, while the other party did tell him whom the four guests were, they didn't reveal any other details. Thus, he thought that they really didn't know anything. Who could have known that... they would have actually prepared presents beforehand!”

Lag a step behind, and one will lag every step behind. It was already too late for them to find a gift anymore.

“Mulberry Sparrow Seeds? These are indeed valuable. I'll accept it in the stead of the Sixth Princess and the others then!”

Being offered such a valuable gift, Wu Zhen's eyes lit up. He walked forward and took the seeds.

His eyes lit in satisfaction.

These Mulberry Sparrow Seeds were extremely rare, and it was troublesome to procure them even in the wealthier Hongyuan Empire.

“Since Luo shi has prepared gifts, how could our Zhuyue Empire possibly come empty-handed? Here is the ‘Moonstar Bodhi’ that I spent ten days in Moundless River to find! I hope that Wu shi can accept this!”

With a flick of Chen Yue's fingers, four pearl-like objects carrying a warm glow flew toward Wu Zhen.

“Moonstar Bodhi? The Moonstar Tree only gathers sufficient essence of the stars and moon to produce one of these seeds once a millennium! The energy it harnessed is comparable to the inner core of a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan pinnacle spirit beast. If one were to hold in while cultivating constantly, it could allow one to feel the stars, thus expanding the horizons one's mind!”

“The value of this object can be said to be equivalent to the Mulberry Sparrow Seeds!”

“What do you mean by equivalent? I'd say that it exceeds it! Seems like Chen shi came prepared!”

“Given how they gave out so many valuable gifts, what about Hong shi?”

Seeing how even Chen shi had offered such a valuable gift, Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai stared at one another with a deep frown.

It seemed like the previous provocation was nothing more than an appetizer, this was the main course. Given that the other party had taken out such valuable gifts, what should Hong shi do?

Just as the duo was in the midst of worrying, the swollen-faced Feng Yu also took out a treasure, the value of which wasn't beneath that of the previous two gifts.

“Hong shi, this is our first meeting with Wu shi. We have all shown a token of our appreciation, where is yours?”

Luo Zhao turned to Hong shi and smiled.

Huala!

Everyone's gaze immediately fell on Hong shi.

625 Zhang Xuan's Indignation

“I...”

Hong shi's face darkened.

He didn't expect that the other party would be so vicious, intentionally bringing out all their treasures first before cornering him.

The other three had taken out gifts of extremely high quality, yet he hadn't prepared anything at all. He couldn't take out anything even if he wanted to!

While not giving a gift might not have a decisive impact on the slot allocation, granted that everyone had given a gift and he didn't, this might incur Wu shi's displeasure and thus the crown prince's in turn!

Besides, the other party was already clearly mocking him. He couldn't possibly just sit still and allow the other party to ridicule him, right?

“What's wrong? It can't be that you didn't prepare anything at all?”

“Are you serious? I told you this afternoon that Wu shi and the others would be attending the banquet, and I thought the reason why you arrived late was so you could prepare something. Was I mistaken?”

“You knew that we're meeting esteemed guests and yet you came empty-handed, where are your manners?”

Luo Zhao, Chen Yue, and Feng Yu gloated upon seeing Hong shi's face slowly darkening.

They had indeed told Hong shi about the four esteemed guests, but of course, they left out the part regarding the gifts.

“Hmm?”

As expected, upon hearing the words of the trio, Crown Prince Ye Qian frowned in displeasure.

While he didn't think too much of the gifts, he did feel that it was improper for Hongfeng Empire to come empty-handed when the others had brought such valuable gifts.

"I've just arrived today, so the item is still..."

Feeling the gazes on him growing more and more intense, and the questioning tone becoming sharper and sharper, Hong shi's face flushed, stifled. He was just about to say that the gift wasn't ready yet when a nonchalant voice sounded beside him.

"Of course, our Hongfeng Empire has prepared our own gift as well..."

Hearing those words, Hong shi panicked and hurriedly turned to look at the origin of the voice. It came from the young man sitting beside him, Zhang Xuan.

"Zhang shi, I didn't prepare anything at all..."

Hong shi's face immediately twitched, and he hurriedly sent a telepathic message to stop Zhang Xuan.

It was one thing to be mocked for not having prepared anything, but to claim that they had prepared something and yet be unable to produce it, that would only be even more embarrassing!

One must know that the gifts of the previous three had already set the stage. If they were to take out something that paled in value right now, they would still only be embarrassing themselves.

"Oh? Since you've prepared something, why don't you take it out so that we can take a look?"

Hearing the one with the lowest cultivation interjecting in their conversation, Luo Zhao harrumphed coldly.

"Take it out?" Zhang Xuan shook his head. "I'm afraid that it'll be a little difficult now."

Hearing that Hongfeng Empire couldn't take out their gift at the moment, Luo Zhao sneered coldly, "Difficult? What do

you mean by that? Are you trying to make a fool of His Highness and Wu shi?”

Hong shi’s body also swayed weakly, and he suddenly felt his head spinning.

To claim that they had prepared a gift and yet be unable to take it out. Big Brother, how do you intend to wrap this up?

If they were really unable to produce anything at this point, not only would Wu shi be offended, the crown prince would surely be displeased with them as well. With this, even a fool could tell how the slots for the Cleansing Lake would be distributed later on.

The crown prince and Wu shi glanced at one another with a deep frown etched on their foreheads.

Just the fact that a fellow in his early twenties could get into the top three placing had already left them slightly bewildered. Yet, at this very moment, the very same fellow claimed that they had something prepared but couldn’t take it out at the moment. This had left them dumbfounded. They had no idea what the other party was up to.

The same went for Bi Jianghai and Luo Xuan as well.

They had been with Hong shi the entire afternoon, and they knew better than anyone whether there was a gift prepared or not. If they couldn’t take anything out at this moment, wouldn’t that put them in a difficult position?

“I’m just a humble 4-star master teacher from Myriad Kingdom Alliance. Even if someone were to inflate my guts, I would dare not to make a fool of Your Highness and Wu shi!”

Ignoring the puzzled gazes from the crowd, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly and turned to Luo Zhao. “Luo shi, you’ve already taken a good look at the gift which Hong shi prepared with great difficulty. Isn’t it about time for you to return it?”

“Ah?”

Stunned, Luo Zhao’s complexion immediately darkened.

“What did you say? What do you mean by taken a good look? When did I take Hong shi’s gift?”

“I knew that you wouldn’t admit to it...”

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan shook his head. He stood up and clasped his fist toward the crown prince and Wu shi. “I hope that Your Highness and Wu shi can redress Hong shi’s grievance!”

“Redress Hong shi’s grievance? As long as you can prove your case, we’ll be more than willing to bring justice to Hong shi!”

Instead of the crown prince, Wu shi was the one who chuckled and replied to Zhang Xuan’s words.

“You have my deepest gratitude...”

Nodding his head, Zhang Xuan turned his attention back to Luo Zhao once more. “Since Wu shi has already agreed to redress our grievance... Luo shi, do you dare to match statements with me?”

“Match statements? Why would I dare not to?”

Seeing how confident the young man before him was, Luo Zhao was stupefied.

While he was acquainted with Hong shi, the both of them governed different territories and rarely came into contact. So, how could he have taken the other party’s item?

Yet, this fellow confidently ran up to the crown prince and Wu shi for them to judge this case. What was he up to?

Honestly speaking, even Hong shi himself was feeling a little frenzied at the moment.

When did Luo Zhao take my stuff? Why am I not aware of it?

“Good!”

Lifting his gaze, Zhang Xuan smiled. “May I confirm if Hong shi went over to your living quarters to look for you earlier today?”

“That’s right!”

Luo Zhao nodded.

Hong shi had walked into his living quarters openly, so it wouldn’t be too hard to check on this matter. He wouldn’t be

able to hide it even if he wanted to. Besides, the other party had only come to look for him. This couldn't serve as any conclusive evidence that he had taken the other party's gift!

“Did you challenge Hong shi to a Master Teacher Confrontation?”

Just as Luo Zhao was perplexed as to where this was going, the other party's voice sounded once more.

“This... That's right!”

After a moment of hesitation, Luo Zhao nodded.

After seeing Hong shi pummeling Feng shi, he felt angry and indignant for Feng shi, so he challenged Hong shi to a Master Teacher Confrontation.

Given that a Master Teacher Confrontation required one to activate their emblem through their blood and send a request to the headquarters beforehand, it wouldn't be too difficult to look into the matter. Thus, there was no need to hide it.

“It's good that you've admitted to it. I don't have to elaborate any further then!”

Nodding his head, Zhang Xuan turned to the crown prince and Wu Zhen, and clasped his fist. “Luo shi has already admitted to the matter, so I believe I need not continue on!”

“What are you talking about? You'd better clarify things right now...”

Luo Zhao clutched his hair in frenzy.

What the heck is this fellow up to? Halfway through the questioning, he simply stops and says that I've already admitted to the crime, so he needs not speak any further?

What in the world have I admitted to...

Hong shi was even more lost. Zhang shi's jump in logic was simply too big that even he couldn't comprehend what was going on.

“I think it'll be best that you clarify your words!”

Ye Qian and Wu Zhen glanced at one another and coughed.

“Alright. Since I’ve been asked to clarify my words, I hope that I won’t be punished on the accounts of from insubordination for speaking up against a higher rank master teacher!”

At this point, Zhang Xuan’s eyes suddenly brimmed with indignation and wrath, as though he had suffered an indescribable grievance. “Actually, Hong shi told me not to speak of it, but I simply can’t watch quietly as he is getting wronged...”

“Ah?” Hong shi widened his eyes in shock.

I told you not to speak of it?

Speak of what?

“Hong shi is a kind and honest person who is weak with words. For the sake of Huanyu Empire’s reputation, he intended to keep the matter a secret. However, as his junior, I can’t watch quietly as he gets wronged like this...” Zhang Xuan continued.

Hearing those words, Wu Zhen’s face twitched.

Kind and honest, I can’t really say anything about that... but weak with words? You are clearly lying through your teeth! It’s not like I didn’t see how Luo Zhao and the others nearly fainted from anger just now.

On the other hand, Luo Zhao was trembling in fury. The more he listened the young man’s words, the more furious he became. Eventually, his rage hit the point of eruption.

“Stop pulling out all of this nonsense and get straight to the point!”

“Fine, if you say so...”

As if mustering his determination and courage, Zhang Xuan gritted his teeth in indignation and said, “Earlier this afternoon, Hong shi went over to discuss some things with the other three pavilion masters. However, not only did the three of them collaborate with one another to beat Hong shi up... they even stole the gift he prepared beforehand!”

“Th-the heck! What did you say? We beat Hong shi up?”

Luo Zhao staggered and nearly spewed blood.

Beat your head! Hong shi rejected my Master Teacher Confrontation, remember? Besides, when did we collaborate to beat him up? Not to mention, steal his gift? Steal your head!

Even if you want to lie, at least choose something more believable than this!

Three master teachers beating up another in the courtyard... Do you think that we are some kind of ruffians?

Not giving Luo Zhao a chance to explain himself, Zhang Xuan pushed on.

“Since you won’t admit to it, let me ask you. Earlier this afternoon, not only did you challenge Hong shi to a Master Teacher Confrontation, Feng shi also did the same as well, am I right?”

“This...” Luo Zhao was taken aback. “The both of them did fight one another in a Master Teacher Confrontation, but...”

Feng shi did fight one another in a Master Teacher Confrontation... but it was a one-sided pummeling from Hong shi’s side, alright?

“But what? Just the fact that the battle happened proves everything!”

Zhang Xuan uttered furiously, “Hong shi and Feng shi are both 5-star low-tier master teachers, Transcendent Mortal 6-dan primary stage cultivators... I believe no one here has any qualms in agreeing that they’re equally matched, right?”

The crowd nodded.

As fellow master teachers of the same cultivation realm, there was indeed not much of a disparity in their fighting prowess.

“Given that they are of equal cultivation and had undergone a Master Teacher Confrontation, and looking at how badly Feng shi was beaten up, how well do you think Hong shi would fare?”

Zhang Xuan questioned on.

The crown prince and Wu Zhen suddenly froze.

“Luo shi, let me ask you again. After Hong shi and Feng shi fought with one another, did you immediately apply for a Master Teacher Confrontation? And did Hong shi say that he had suffered grievous wounds, and he won’t be capable of fighting for the next ten years or words similar to that?”

Zhang Xuan pressured on.

“He did say such words but...”

Luo Zhao froze once more. He tried to explain himself, but he found himself interrupted by the young man once again. “How gravely injured must a 5-star master teacher, a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan cultivator, be to be unable to fight with anyone for the next ten years?”

The more Zhang Xuan spoke, the more agitated he became. “But even so, Luo shi still insisted on challenging Hong shi to a Master Teacher Confrontation... How could Hong shi possibly be a match for him under such a state? Naturally, the gift that he prepared in his storage ring ended up being taken away as well...”

At this point, Zhang Xuan looked so angry that if he were to continue speaking, indignant tears might just start flowing from his eyes.

“Screw you... When did I beat him up and take his gift? You better stop lying...”

Luo Zhao’s body swayed weakly, and he nearly burst into tears.

It was obvious that Hong shi was the one who went over to beat Feng shi up! How did it suddenly turn into Feng shi and Hong shi being equally injured in a duel, and I became a despicable person who struck in his time of weakness?

Not to mention, I even took his stuff on top of that...

Is your mouth capable of uttering even the slightest truth?

To be lying blatantly like that, are you certain you are a master teacher?

Where’s your pride?

626 Luo Zhao on the Verge of Insanity

Chen Yue and Feng Yu's lips were also twitching uncontrollably.

Only the four of them were present and knew what had happened. Even before the duel between Feng shi and Hong shi, Feng shi was already incapacitated to the point that he was on the verge of death. How could he possibly be capable of fighting?

How in the world did it turn into a match between equals?

As for Luo shi beating Hong shi up, after Hong shi said that he was grievously injured, Luo shi didn't make a move at all...

On the other hand, seeing how indignant Zhang Xuan was as he depicted the situation back then, he suddenly fell into a daze... Was I really beaten up by Luo shi? Could I have suffered a concussion and forgotten about it?

"Stop spouting nonsense! The rest of us can testify that was not what happened then. Feng shi was already injured then..."

Unable hold himself back any longer, Chen Yue intervened.

As though knowing that the other party would retaliate through such words, Zhang Xuan flung his sleeves and refuted, "Feng shi was already injured then? Since you claim that to be the case, I would like to ask about how Feng shi was injured, who was the one who beat him up? After all, it's a major affair for a 5-star master teacher to be so severely injured. Surely there must be a report on the matter?"

"This..." Cold sweat began dripping down Chen Yue's head. "Perhaps I might have remembered wrongly..."

Feng shi's action in stopping Hong shi's passageway was contrary to the master teacher moral code in the first place, not to mention, he failed shamefully and crashed to the ground,

nearly dying in the process... No matter what, this matter mustn't be made known.

Otherwise, Feng shi would be a goner.

But if they didn't reveal this matter, what else could they say?

After all, earlier this morning, when they met with the crown prince, Feng shi was still perfectly fine. Yet, a few hours later, he was turned into a mummy... There was no other explanation they could offer that would be more logical than Zhang Xuan's!

"Are you trying to back on your words now that you can't find any other excuse?"

Zhang Xuan ranted furiously, as though he would only be content if he burned the surroundings down. "Nevertheless, Wu shi can testify that the three of you banded together to work against Hong shi. As such, surely it won't be too shocking for you to be speaking up for your ally now? This really brings the authenticity of your words into question!"

"This..."

Chen Yue's cheeks trembled in anger.

Even though Wu shi was drinking then, there was no doubt that he had seen how the three of them banded against Hong shi earlier. It was too late for them to refute it now...

"Since that's the case, I'll have to ask Feng shi and Chen shi to remain silent on this matter!" Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

Furious, Chen Yue was just about to speak up to refute Zhang Xuan's words when the crown prince suddenly interjected, "Enough, the two of you should back down for now. Allow this young man to finish his piece first!"

Even from the gift presentation just a moment ago, the trio was clearly working together to corner Hong shi. A person of the crown prince's caliber couldn't possibly have neglected this.

Since it was established that the three of them were working together, their words had lost credibility.

“Thank you, Your Highness!”

Zhang Xuan nodded. “Hong shi arrived in the banquet hall slightly later because he was in the midst of recuperating from his injuries from the previous fight. Yet, the other three pavilion masters ganged up against him and accused him for a breach of etiquette. Wu shi can testify to my words!”

“He isn’t lying!” Wu shi nodded.

“Wu shi, I thank you for speaking up for us.”

After which, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze back to the crown prince and clasped his fist. “After beating Hong shi up and stealing his gift, they intentionally caused a scene here so as to make Hongfeng Empire lose their slots. Now that the facts are in place, I ask of Your Highness to bring justice to the matter!”

The crown prince looked at Zhang Xuan and said, “Your argument is rational, and I am more than willing to redress your grievances... However, I’ll need to verify the matter first. For this, I would like to confirm what kind of gift you have brought.”

As the crown prince of an empire and a half 5-star master teacher, he was no fool. While there was no logical flaw in the argument of the young man before him, and Luo Zhao had admitted to many of the affairs personally, he still found it hard to believe that three 5-star master teachers would actually resort to stealing the gift of a peer of theirs.

“Indeed! You said that I took Hong Qian’s gift, but what exactly did I take? If you can’t say it, that would be equivalent to falsely accusing a higher ranked master teacher. If proven guilty, you would be stripped of your master teacher license or even sentenced to death...”

Hearing those words, Luo Zhao’s eyes immediately lit up.

As the saying goes, ‘catch an adultery in a pair, catch a thief by his loot’. Since you claimed that I took Hong shi’s item, why don’t you tell me what I took? Once your words are proven false... let’s see how you’ll deal with that!

Just the sentence of a 4-star master teacher slandering a 5-star master teacher is sufficient to seal your doom!

“I’ve seen plenty of shameless people before, but I’ve never seen one as shameless as you! It’s one thing for you to not admit to taking the item of another, but to spout such righteous words on top of that... Since that’s the case, I’ll make sure you concede willingly!”

Harrumphing coldly, Zhang Xuan turned to Hong shi and said, “Hong shi, I’ll have to trouble you on this matter!”

“Trouble me?”

Hong shi suddenly jolted upon hearing Zhang Xuan calling him. “Zhang shi, feel free to speak...”

At this moment, he was completely awed by the fellow before him.

The mouth of this fellow could probably turn even a corpse into a living being, a living being into a deity... They came late due to waiting for this fellow, but through the other party’s words, it somehow turned into him recuperating from his injuries...

The fellow even managed to incorporate it into the nonsense he rambled earlier on. What was even more amazing was that he even managed to form a complete story without the slightest disharmony!

Even he, the person in question, couldn’t help but admit that there were no flaws to the story.

To be able to craft such a thorough story, could this fellow have already thought so far when he advised him on the matter regarding how he should deal with Luo shi and the others?

If that was really the case... then the other party would be an extremely fearsome figure!

“What you have to do is simple, you just have to...”

This time, Zhang Xuan was speaking to Hong shi telepathically.

“You want me to...”

Hearing the other party’s words, Hong shi widened his eyes in shock.

“Un, go on. Whether we’ll be able to tear off their masks or not will depend on Hong shi!”

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly.

“Go? Go your head...”

Recalling the words, the other party sent to him telepathically, Hong shi’s body staggered, and he nearly burst into tears.

Are you sure you aren’t trying to have me killed instead...

Seeing the dilemma on the other party’s face, Zhang Xuan consoled him.

“Don’t worry. Try recalling the duel between Ruohuan gongzi and Qin Lei, and you’ll understand what I’m up to!”

“Ruohuan gongzi and Qin Lei?”

Hong shi suddenly froze.

Under normal circumstances, it was impossible for Ruohuan gongzi to advance to the top eight. Given that his opponent was Qin Lei, even Hong shi thought that he had no chance at victory.

Yet... After Ruohuan gongzi threw a bowl of meat soup on Qin Lei, he suddenly made a complete turnaround...

He couldn’t help but be mystified whenever he recalled the matter. But from the looks of it, there was no doubt that this fellow was involved in it.

But nevertheless, what he was going to do now was indeed similar to what Ruohuan gongzi did back then.

“Alright!”

Knowing that this was for their group, after a moment of hesitation, Hong shi gritted his teeth, stood up, and started walking over to Luo shi.

“What are you up to now?”

Luo Zhao was perplexed. Instead of revealing what he took from Hong shi, why was he sending Hong shi up to him instead?

“There is something I need to trouble Luo shi on, so I seek for your cooperation!”

Hong shi clasped his fist earnestly and replied. On the other hand, Zhang Xuan lifted up a wine glass and sipped on it nonchalantly, paying no heed to the happenings around him.

“Cooperate? Why should I cooperate with you?” Luo Zhao gritted his teeth.

You accused me of doing something I haven’t done, and now you want me to cooperate with you? Why should I? Should I just allow you to hurl more mud at me?

“If you don’t cooperate, it can only mean that you have a guilty conscience. Rest assured, if you’re truly innocent, we can’t possibly frame you for something you haven’t done!”
Hong shi replied.

Hearing the other party’s words, Luo shi knew that he would only look even more doubtful if he refused to cooperate. Thus, gritting his teeth, he conceded.

“Fine, I’ll cooperate then. What do you want me to do?”

You want me to cooperate? Fine! Let’s see what you can do then.

In any case, as long as you can’t reveal what item I’ve taken from you, you’re doomed. My victory is already assured.

“Stand up and place your hands behind your back!” Hong shi said.

“Humph!” Even though Luo Zhao was on the verge of exploding with anger, he still stood up and placed his hands behind his back.

“Right, this is the correct position. Maintain it and don’t move...”

Hong shi adjusted the other party’s position for a little bit before walking up to the other party’s face. Then, he suddenly raised his palm and slapped the other party.

Pah!

A crisp sound echoed loudly in across the banquet hall.

“What?”

The crown prince was stunned.

Wu shi was stupefied.

Everyone was dumbfounded.

This... is the cooperation you spoke of?

Maintaining his position just so you can slap his face?

“Screw you! Hong Qian, I’ll kill you...” Luo Zhao was stunned momentarily before immense rage gushed through his entire body.

This slap had left him light-headed and knocked out three of his teeth. He would really be a pushover if he didn’t retaliate now.

I was thinking why you wanted me to stand in position, but in the end, it turned out that it was just so that you could better slap me...

Hong Qian, I, Luo Zhao, swear that I’ll kill you...

Luo Zhao was completely clouded with rage. Ignoring the crown prince and Wu shi, he immediately raised his palm and struck it down toward Hong Qian.

Hu la!

Furious wind gushed into the surroundings, and the sheer force of the palm distorted even space itself.

As a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan master teacher, his eye of discernment and fighting prowess had already reached an astounding level. If he were to move with his full might, even a mountain could be crushed to smithereens easily, needless to say, a man.

Hu!

However, his attack landed on thin air. Looking around, he realized that unknowingly, Hong shi, who had just slapped him, had already returned to his seat and was currently holding onto a glass of wine with a leisurely expression, as if nothing had happened at all.

“You’re dead...” Luo Zhao bellowed with crimson eyes.

When had he suffered such immense humiliation ever since he became a master teacher? To actually be positioned well before being slapped...

Could there be anything more darned than this?

He was about to charge forward to destroy the man who had just insulted him when the young man from before suddenly roared righteously, “Enough, Luo shi! This is the palace of the crown prince, not your own home. What do you mean by displaying your aggression here?”

Luo Zhao nearly burst into tears.

You are only recalling that this is the crown prince’s palace now?

And yet you still allowed Hong Qian that rascal to knock out my teeth?

The one who had suffered injustice was me, what rights do you have to be uttering such self-righteous words... you aren’t the one who got hit...

In the midst of exploding with anger, Luo Zhao turned to Wu shi and the crown prince and bowed. “I cannot tolerate the insult from Hong Qian any longer. I beseech you to allow me to challenge him to a Life-and-Death Duel...”

But once again, before he could finish his words, he was interrupted.

“Your Highness and Wu shi, didn’t you ask me what item he had stolen from Hong shi? I’ll write it down now so that no one can accuse me of lying!”

Following which, Zhang Xuan immediately took out a brush, ink slab, and paper, and began writing on it.

627 What Else Do You Have to Say?

“Write it down now?”

The crown prince nodded.

It was indeed best for it to be written on paper. This way, there would be concrete evidence regardless of the outcome.

Through this, he would be able to confirm whether the three 5-star master teachers really did steal Hong shi's item or not.

“Alright, I'd like to see what you'll write. Once it's proven that you're nothing more than a liar, not only will I have a Life-and-Death Duel with Hong Qian, I'll also kill you afterward...” Luo Zhao bellowed furiously.

At this point, there was no longer any aspect of him that resembled a master teacher.

Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai glanced at one another with twitching lips.

Honestly speaking, if they were in Luo Zhao's shoes, their string of rationality would have long snapped. To be toyed by another like this, they would already be impressed with themselves if they could curb their urge to murder the other party.

“Kill me?”

Ignoring the other party's bellows, Zhang Xuan continued writing on the paper. A moment later, he kept his writing tools and passed the paper over to the crown prince and Wu shi.

The duo took a look at it and froze for a moment. After which, the crown prince put away the paper before turning to Luo Zhao. “Luo shi, can we take a look at your storage ring?”

“Of course, I've nothing to hide!”

Luo Zhao had no idea what was written on the paper, but since he didn't take anything, he had absolute confidence in this matter. Thus, he didn't fear others checking his storage ring.

He took off his storage ring, dispelled the ownership status on the ring, and passed it over.

Grabbing the ring, the crown prince scanned the contents, and not too long later, he flicked his wrist and took out a gourd.

“Luo shi, what is this?”

Looking at the item the other party took out, Luo Zhao clasped his fist and said, “Your Highness, I'm very fond of wine, and this is a bottle of top-notch wine that I've collected!”

“Wine?”

The crown prince looked at him questioningly. “Are you certain?”

“Reporting to Your Highness, it's indeed wine! I'm certain.” Luo Zhao nodded.

“Alright!” The crown prince pried open the lid, and a dense aroma of wine immediately wafted in the room.

“What a strong wine aroma!”

“It's indeed wine... Could it be that Luo shi took a bottle of wine?”

“But is there any point to it? Even if the wine possesses exceptional taste, it's still just a mere beverage. How much could it possibly cost?”

“You're right. Let's just watch on for now!”

...

Smelling the deep wine aroma in the air, everyone was perplexed.

It couldn't be that they had gone through so much trouble tonight just because Luo shi took a bottle of wine from Hong shi?

What a cultivator valued primarily were naturally their cultivation, and to that end, pills, mystical artifacts, spirit

stones, and the sort... On the contrary, their appetite for fine food gradually dampened over time. A refined wine it may be, but it wouldn't be worthy of a 5-star master teacher going so far for it.

“Is this it?”

The crown prince turned to the young man standing not too far away.

“Yes!”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

Hearing the latter confirm the matter, both the crown prince and Wu shi glanced at one another in confusion.

“But this is merely wine, right?”

When they opened the bottle, they took a look and confirmed that it was wine. This was something very much different from what the young man wrote.

“There's no need to panic. It'll be easy to confirm whether it's what I've written or not!”

Standing up, Zhang Xuan scanned the surroundings and eventually, his gaze fell on Feng Yu. “Feng shi, may I trouble you for something?”

“No...”

Alarmed, Feng Yu quickly shook his head and cowered backward.

Trouble me? You must be kidding!

You still aren't content with causing me such grievous injury?

The first time I met you, I fell from the skies. Afterward, I was beaten up by Hong shi...

Even if I were to put all that aside, just a moment ago Hong shi approached Luo shi for help and slapped him...

If I were to fall for your ploy after all of these, I must really be dumb!

“Don't worry, this will be something beneficial to you...”

Seeing how Feng shi was on the verge of fainting after hearing that he needed his help, Zhang Xuan was speechless.

I am really doing this out of goodwill, is there a need for you to be so scared...

I'm a master teacher, not a demon!

Why do you make my request seem as though making a contract with the devil?

"It matters not whether it is beneficial or not!" Feng shi shook his head profusely.

"Alright, fine then..." Seeing how the other party refused to accept his goodwill out of suspicion, Zhang Xuan scanned the surroundings once more and eventually, his gaze fell on Bi Jianghai. "Bi shi, come over..."

"I..." Bi Jianghai's mouth twitched, and he nearly burst into tears.

How in the world have I offended you?

All I did was boast a little before you during the finals, right? Surely you need not hold a grudge for so long!

Seeing the other party's expression, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed.

"Don't worry, I just want you to prove that this isn't just wine!"

"Fine!" Clenching his jaws, Bi Jianghai stepped forward.

Seeing that the other party was in position, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction. Following which, he flicked his wrist and whipped out a dagger. "Come, stretch out your arm!"

Bi Jianghai swallowed a mouthful of saliva before slowly raising his arm up.

"Good!"

With a slight smile, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and the dagger stabbed right into Bi Jianghai's arm.

"AHHH!"

A scream of agony echoed through the hall, and Bi Jianghai's body began to tremble. He nearly went insane on the spot.

He knew that it couldn't be anything good, but he never expected to have a dagger stabbed into him...

Watching as crimson blood flowed freely out of his arm, tears streamed down his face. He was already regretting dearly for listening to the words of the God of Destruction.

If he had known earlier, he would have surely played dead.

"I knew that it would be something bad..."

Seeing this sight, Feng Yu heaved a sigh of relief.

His history with this young man had deeply ingrained in him the idea that nothing good would come out from the association with the latter. Watching as blood flowed profusely out of the stabbed arm, he suddenly felt this was the wisest decision he had made in his life.

"Don't panic!"

Seeing Bi Jianghai twitching uncontrollably due to anxiety, Zhang Xuan quickly calmed him down before turning to the crown prince. "I'll be troubling Your Highness and Wu shi!"

"Un!"

The crown prince nodded his head and passed the wine gourd over.

Grabbing the gourd, Zhang Xuan swirled it slightly as he turned to Luo Zhao and asked, "Luo shi, I'll ask you one last time. Are you certain that what is inside here is wine?"

"Yes, it's definitely wine!" Luo Zhao nodded confidently.

"Alright then!"

Not bothering to explain, with his left hand holding the wine gourd and right hand on the dagger stabbed into Bi Jianghai's arm, Zhang Xuan slowly pulled the dagger out.

Tzzzzzz!

As the dagger was drawn out, blood immediately spurted wildly from the wound, reminiscent of a fountain.

Bi Jianghai's face immediately paled, and he could feel the sight before him blurring.

Even though he was only stabbed in the arm, the intense pain was still difficult for him to bear.

“Hold on!”

Seeing the other party's pained expression, Zhang Xuan quickly poured the content of the gourd onto the wound.

Tzzzzzzz!

As soon as the wine came into contact with the wound, an intense reaction immediately occurred. The muscle that was torn by the dagger healed at a pace visible to the eye, and in just a short moment, the wound had disappeared altogether, as though the injury had never happened.

“This...”

“Could this not be wine but a Saint recovery medicine?”

“Indeed! Only a Saint medicine could possibly heal a wound so quickly...”

Everyone widened their eyes in astonishment, but soon, it was replaced with envy.

There was no cultivator who would never be injured, and thus, recovery medicine was an essential that everyone had to carry along with them.

However, despite how expensive the typical recovery medicine was, it would still require days for a wound to heal back to its original condition. Otherwise, Feng shi wouldn't have come to the banquet with a swollen face.

On the other hand, this recovery medicine actually immediately healed such a glaring wound upon contact. Furthermore, not even the slightest scar was left behind... This was way too fearsome!

Probably only the legendary ‘Saint medicine’ could harness such effectiveness!

“My wound...”

Bi Jianghai thought that the gaping injury would take at least half a month of recuperation to recover from. He had never thought that just a few drops of the wine would bring his arm back to its original condition. Thus, the scene before him had left his eyes widened in disbelief.

Wasn't this a little bit too formidable?

While Bi Jianghai was stunned in shock, the previously gleeful Feng shi clutched his chest as he found himself unable to catch his breath. He felt so regretful that even his intestines were turning green.

It turned out that the fellow was inviting him up to test this Saint medicine. If only he had known, he would have surely rushed up in an instant, and the injuries he had sustained would have disappeared in an instant...

“Alright, I'm done proving my point. I'll leave it to Your Highness and Wu shi to judge the matter!”

Ignoring everyone's shock, Zhang Xuan placed the gourd back on the table and clasped his fists toward the crown prince and Wu shi before walking back to the Hongfeng Empire party.

“Luo shi, the wine that you spoke of turned out to be a Saint recovery medicine instead... Why don't you explain yourself?”

The crown prince turned to look at Luo Zhao impassively.

“I...”

Luo Zhao staggered, and his mouth twitched uncontrollably. “If I say that... that gourd is really filled with wine, will you believe me?”

He was really on the verge of going insane already.

He loved wine nearly as much as his own life, many people knew of this. As such, he filled this wine gourd with the wine he loved the most and carried it around with him... When in the world did it become a Saint recovery medicine?

“You still want to deny it at this point?”

The crown prince smacked the table in rage.

Everyone had seen the effects of the wine for themselves, and you still wish to deny the matter?

Do you take me for a fool?

“Chen shi, I’ll trouble you to read what is on this paper!”

Turning his gaze away from Luo shi, he threw the paper that Zhang Xuan had just written on to Chen Yue.

“Yes!”

Taking the paper, Chen Yue unfolded it and began reading aloud. “Luo shi took the recovery medicinal wine that Hong shi went to great lengths to obtain. This medicinal wine is particularly effective on physical wounds. With just a few drops, ordinary wounds are healed instantly...”

The further Chen Yue read, the paler his face became.

The crown prince turned his gaze back to Luo Zhao and questioned, “What words do you have to say?”

“I...”

Luo Zhao vision turned dark.

It was already a checkmate, what else could he say?

“If you didn’t steal it, how could Zhang shi know that it’s a medicinal wine and even know of its properties?” The crown prince pushed on.

Luo Zhao felt frenzied.

He had no idea what was going on anymore.

A thought suddenly flashed across Luo Zhao’s mind, and he glared at Zhang Xuan in savagery.

“It’s all your doing!”

It must be this fellow’s doing that his wine turned into a Saint recovery medicine... There was no one else but him!

Toward the other party’s furious howl, Zhang Xuan replied with composure, “This gourd of medicinal wine is the gift that Hong shi prepared for Wu shi and the others, but you ended up stealing it instead... It’s fortunate that Hong shi left a portion of it with me in case of emergency. That was why he was able

to recover so quickly and arrive at the banquet hall unscathed...”

“I see!”

Only then did everyone come to a realization.

They had been wondering how Hong shi could be completely fine after the Master Teacher Confrontation when Feng shi was so heavily injured.

It turned out that the other party had prepared a spare portion in case of emergency.

With this, all of the puzzle’s pieces fitted snugly together.

“Luo Zhao, what else do you have to say?”

The crown prince looked at Luo Zhao with deep disappointment reflected in his eyes.

628 Rules for the Distribution of Slots

“I... have nothing to say about this matter!”

After a long moment of thought, all of Luo Zhao’s words were eventually reduced to a long sigh.

He really couldn’t make sense of what had happened.

Stored within the gourd was the ‘Thousand Cups Drunk’ he had his apprentice buy from the Fragrant Sedge Brewery. Who could have known that it would suddenly turn into a Saint recovery medicine!

There was nothing he could say that could salvage the situation anymore.

If he were to claim that he didn’t take the other party’s item, he couldn’t explain how the other party’s medicinal wine was in his storage ring.

But if he were to admit to it... the deep indignation he felt simply wouldn’t allow it.

One must know that master teachers do care about their reputation. While he did attempt to corner Hong shi verbally, he had never gotten physical with the latter... so how could he have ever taken the latter’s item?

Not to mention, such a valuable medicinal wine!

Knowing what the other party was thinking about, Zhang Xuan spoke casually.

“You need not feel wronged. If you think that we’re framing you, we still have a spare cup of medicinal wine left after treating Hong shi’s wounds. I can show it to you once more!”

With a flick of his wrist, he took out a wine cup. The deep aroma of the wine cup gradually wafted across the banquet hall.

“Is there anyone who is willing to try the effects of this cup of wine?”

Zhang Xuan scanned the surroundings.

“Allow me...” Feng Yu stood up excitedly.

Zhang Xuan turned to the young man beside him and said, “Ah, Bi shi, I think it’ll be best for you to go again!”

“...” Feng Yu.

“Cough cough!”

Bi Jianghai, who was in the midst of drinking his wine, nearly choked to death. With a helpless expression, he stood up and said, “I’ll do it myself!”

After which, using his finger as a sword, he hurled a surge of zhenqi at his arm, producing a deep cut. Blood immediately started flowing down the wound.

With a slight smile, Zhang Xuan poured the wine in the cup onto the wound.

Tzzzzz!

A few breaths later, the wound healed, leaving no scars behind. The effects were exactly the same as before.

“Your Highness and Wu shi, this can prove our case, right?” After all was done, Zhang Xuan turned to the duo and clasped his fist.

“Of course!”

Ye Qian nodded.

Considering how the young man was able to identify the item within the other party’s storage ring and take out another with the exact same effects, the evidence was conclusive.

“Despite being a 5-star master teacher, you actually snatched the possession of another. This is unpardonable!”

Ye Qian flung his sleeves and stared at Luo Zhao in anger and disgust.

He had always felt deep respect for the pavilion masters from the Vassal States, but who could have known that they would

actually do this kind of underhanded stuff? He felt repulsed.

“Hong shi and Zhang shi, I apologize for the behavior of a master teacher under us. May I know... how do you intend to deal with this?”

He had heard Hong shi addressing the young man earlier as Zhang shi.

Hong shi clasped his fist and said, “Today is a joyous occasion, and I don’t wish to cause any trouble or disharmony. As long as he hands over the gourd of medicinal wine, I hope to let the matter rest just like that!”

“I share the same thoughts as Hong shi!” Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

“Let the matter rest?”

Everyone was stunned.

Given how Luo Zhao tried to corner them verbally earlier, they thought that the Hongfeng party would surely make things difficult for him through the hands of the crown prince. If this case were to be reported to the Master Teacher Pavilion, there was a good chance that Luo Zhao could even lose his master teacher license. Who knew that they would actually be willing to let the matter rest with just Luo Zhao handing over the medicinal wine...

What kind of magnanimity was this?

You’re both 5-star master teachers, and yet you keep trying to put down the other party at every opportunity. On the other hand, the other party is on the moral high ground and yet he remains humble and magnanimous!

Even the crown prince and Wu shi couldn’t help but be impressed by Hong shi and Zhang Xuan’s attitude.

“Luo shi, did you hear that? Are you going to return the medicinal wine, or are you going to continue keeping it for yourself?”

The crown prince glanced at Luo Zhao.

“I-I’ll return it!” Luo Zhao was slightly stunned.

He thought that given how the other party successfully framed him, they would make use of this opportunity to corner him and have him fall from grace. Who could have known that he would suddenly be let off the hook?

“Alright. Wu shi, this will be Hongfeng Empire’s gift to you!”

Hong shi clasped his fist and presented the medicinal wine to Wu Zhen.

“This...”

Agitation rippled within Wu Zhen’s eyes as he nodded his head. “I’ll thank Hong shi in Sixth Princess’s stead!”

This was a Saint recovery medicine! Regardless of the size of the wound, with just a few drops, one would be as good as new. This could potentially save their lives one day!

“It’s just a humble gesture on our part!”

Hong Qian clasped his fist and returned to his seat. He turned his gaze to the young man beside him, and the intrigue in his eyes deepened.

Under Luo Zhao, Chen Yue, and Feng Yu’s cornering, he was already prepared to make a fool out of himself. Who could have known that Zhang shi would suddenly appear and turn the tables around?

Not only so, Luo Zhao even nearly broke down in the process.

He knew better than anyone whether Luo Zhao had taken his item or not... but somehow, everything just somehow fell into place, and Luo Zhao ended up being deemed guilty.

“Zhang shi, the matter just now...”

Unable to hold back his curiosity any longer, he sent a telepathic message to the latter.

“Oh, it’s just a little trick. Teacher taught me, it’s nothing much!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The previous matter was clearly a ploy that Luo Zhao, Chen Yue, and Feng Yu prepared to trap and embarrass Hong shi. If they were to succeed, the chances were that they would have lost the slots for the Cleansing Lake.

Thus, Zhang Xuan had no choice but to step forward.

As for the medicinal wine, he had Hong shi provoke Luo Zhao into making a move, and the Library of Heaven's Path reflected that the latter was a habitual drinker. Through this, it wasn't too hard to deduce that the latter had wine in his storage ring.

Actually, what was in the gourd was indeed ordinary wine. The only reason why it could heal wounds was due to him infusing a few surges of zhenqi into the wine while swirling it.

The Heaven's Path zhenqi had no color or odor. Even a 6-star master teacher would hardly notice it amidst the overpowering alcoholic aroma, needless to say, the crowd here.

Naturally, Hong shi sparing the other party was also his intention as well.

Expelling a 5-star master teacher was a major affair. The headquarters would surely send someone down to look into the matter. Zhang Xuan might be able to fool the crowd here, but if a thorough investigation was conducted, there was a good chance that something might go awry.

This was especially so if the origin of the medicinal wine were to be questioned. He couldn't possibly make 'Yang shi' appear for every single matter, right?

Besides, Luo Zhao's actions didn't warrant for such extreme punishment as well. Since that was the case, he might as well drop the matter and win a good impression from the crown prince and the others instead.

Since he had already achieved his goal, there was no need to drive a cornered man up the wall.

Knowing that Yang shi was behind the matter, Hong shi scratched his head and dropped the matter.

Given that an advanced master teacher like Yang shi was involved in the matter, it was unadvisable for him to pry any deeper. Since that was the case, he might as well drop the matter.

...

“I thank everyone for their gifts. Other than to welcome Wu shi and the others to Huanyu Empire, there’s also another matter we need to settle at the banquet tonight. I believe I need not point out what it is.”

Knowing that he would only sully the name of Huanyu Empire if he were to continue pursuing this matter, Crown Prince Ye Qian decided to change the topic.

“Yes!”

Hearing that the main show was coming up next, everyone straightened their figure, and a graveness surfaced on their face.

There were two purposes to the banquet tonight. One was to allow the freshmen of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy to become acquainted with their seniors while the second was to determine the distribution of slots.

For the welcoming... in the end, only Wu shi was present, and after such a matter had happened, it would be awkward to have them interact now. Since that was the case, the crown prince decided to move on the matter regarding the distribution of slots. Perhaps, he could reverse the negative image that Wu shi had of Huanyu Empire through this.

“The Cleansing Lake is the foundation of our Huanyu Empire, and it possesses exceptional effects on Consonant Spirit realm experts. The reason why everyone here went through so many tests and traveled all the way here is naturally to enter the Cleansing Lake to cultivate!”

Ye Qian smiled. “However, due to some compelling circumstances, Huanyu Empire will have to take three slots from the rest of you!”

“I know that these slots are extremely important, so I invited you over to discuss this matter. I hope that you can come to an agreement on a feasible method to distribute the slots without sully the harmony among us before the Cleansing Lake opens.”

“We’ll follow Your Highness’s judgment!” The crowd clasped their fists.

“Since this matter concerns the slots for the Cleansing Lake, I dare not make a decision for you all on my own. Thus, I suggest we discuss this matter together!” Ye Qian said.

After a moment of silence, Chen Yue stood up and spoke.

“Your Highness, if the contribution of three slots were to be divided among the four Vassal States, three of the Vassal States would have to lose a slot. I fear that this might lead to discontent and disagreement amongst us. Thus, I have a suggestion to propose, but I’m not too sure whether it’ll be appropriate!”

“Feel free to speak!” Ye Qian gestured.

“Since each Vassal State happens to have three slots as well, why don’t we arrange it such that the representatives of each empire form a team each, and the team in the last place for the competition we’ll be having... will lose all of its slots!”

Chen Yue spoke his thoughts. “As for the format of the competition, I propose that since the top three rankers of the respective Master Teacher Tournaments held in each of the Vassal States are here, why don’t we have them fight against one another? Naturally, the victor will be determined by two out of three wins! In other words, each Vassal State will send out one representative to fight at a time, and the side to win two matches will be the victor... whereas the losing side will be eliminated!”

“I agree with Chen shi’s proposal! Since the slots are closely linked to their own benefits, they would have to do their best in the duels. If they were to lose, they only have themselves to blame for their lack of proficiency.”

Feng Yu spoke up.

“I agree with it as well!”

Luo Zhao nodded in agreement.

“To fight for one’s own rights, this is aligned with the master teacher’s value of tenacity!” Wu Zhen nodded.

After a moment of thought, Ye Qian also nodded in approval.

“Good!”

Honestly speaking, Chen Yue's suggestion was not bad.

With each empire forming a team together, they could spark the camaraderie among fellow cultivators and forge the spirit of working alongside one another against enemies.

“But if a competition is to be held, what will be the content?”
Ye Qian asked.

“I have also given this matter some thought as well!”

Chen Yue smiled as he continued. “Since it'll be a battle among master teachers, taking on a format similar to that of the Master Teacher Tournament would be appropriate. However, that would be too complex and troublesome to arrange. Since that's the case, why don't we limit it to just cultivation duels? Since the Cleansing Lake is beneficial to one's cultivation, one should prove that one is worthy of it through one's own strength. I believe that this is the most efficient and direct way to determine the distribution of the slots!”

“Indeed, a duel would be the best!”

“This saves a lot of trouble as well.”

Feng Yu and Luo Zhao chirped in agreement.

“Humph!”

Hearing those words, Hong Shi and Zhang Xuan glanced at one another. They would be a fool if they still couldn't understand the intentions of the trio at this point.

The top three rankers of the other three Vassal States had already consumed a Consonant Spirit Pill each, inducing a huge rise in their cultivation. Even the weakest of them was a small cultivation realm stronger than Luo Xuan. How could their team possibly be a match for them in a cultivation duel?

Even if the monster, Zhang Xuan, could face them, everyone could only fight in a match each. Considering how the victor was determined by the best out of three duels... if Bi Jianghai and Luo Xuan lost, they would still lose their slots.

It seemed like the other party had a backup plan in case their interception failed.

Shameless!

629 One-Sided Pummeling

“The Cleansing Lake nourishes one’s soul, thus making it highly beneficial toward one’s cultivation. It’s indeed apt to determine the slots based on a cultivation duel!”

After a moment of contemplation, Ye Qian nodded and said, “Alright, cultivation duel it’ll be then. Each Vassal State will form a team each, and the victor will be decided based on the best out of three! However, this will be a friendly duel, so show some restraint. If one side admits defeat, the fight is to be stopped immediately. There’s no need to go so far for a simple duel...”

“Your Highness, I disagree with this proposal!”

Hong shi stood up.

The other three were clearly trying to take advantage of Hongfeng Empire. If they were to accept to those terms, wouldn’t their loss be certain?

Despite all that had happened, in the face of significant material benefits, the trio still continued to maintain their alliance. After all, if they were to lose the slots, they would have to bear the blame from their own countrymen.

Besides, Luo Zhao was no fool. He knew he was framed, and even though Hong shi and Zhang Xuan had spared him, he would surely try to find ways to get even... and this was clearly a good opportunity to do so.

As for Feng Yu... To be pummeled to the point that he couldn’t even recognize himself when looking into the mirror, how could he possibly be content without exacting vengeance on Hong shi?

Chen Yue also had his own benefits at stake in the matter. As the only one who was still fine from the previous confrontations, he became the spokesperson of their alliance.

“Hmm?” Ye Qian turned to look at Hong shi.

“As Your Highness can see, the members of the other teams have already consumed a Consonant Spirit Pill each and enjoyed a significant rise in their cultivation. On the other hand, we have only just arrived at the capital and haven’t gotten a chance to purchase it yet. Naturally, our cultivation is far lower than theirs, and we stand little chance at victory!”

Hong shi spoke directly.

There was nothing embarrassing about his team being weaker. After all, they were indeed at a disadvantageous position given that they hadn’t consumed Consonant Spirit Pills yet.

Chen Yue harrumphed.

“While cultivation might not be everything to a master teacher, it is still an important aspect. Without sufficient strength, everything else is just illusory. You can’t possibly blame us just because you arrived late and couldn’t find any Consonant Spirit Pill!”

“Possessing lower cultivation isn’t an excuse!” Feng Yu interjected.

Luo Zhao glared at Hong shi coldly.

“Hong shi, the both of us know what happened this afternoon. I won’t talk about it now, but I’ll surely get even with you in the future. However... a cultivation duel is clearly the fairest and most apt way to determine the distribution of the slots. If you aren’t confident of winning, why don’t you just admit defeat now?”

The three of them banded together, forcing Hong shi into a corner instantly.

“Admit defeat?”

Just as Hong shi was stumped, Zhang Xuan suddenly spoke up once more. “Impossible. Even if one of us were to admit defeat, it should be you!”

“Indeed!”

Knowing that this young man possessed superior wits and was skilled at dealing with such situation, Hong shi gave him his backing.

“We admit defeat? Why should we? We have already stated the rules, and you’re the only one backing away from the challenge. What else do you want?” Chen Yue sneered coldly.

“What rights do you have to dictate the rules?” Zhang Xuan refuted calmly.

“Indeed! Why should you be the one to decide the rules?” Only then did Hong shi come to a realization, and he quickly chirped in as well.

“Indeed, we can’t dictate the rules. If you find it unsuitable, you can propose an alternative... but naturally, you have to win the majority vote first!”

Chen Yue’s lips crept up.

His intentions were clear. The three of us are an alliance, and no matter how fair your rules may be, as long as we aren’t agreeable to it, what can you do?

Frowning, Hong shi turned to the young man beside him to see how he would reply to this.

“Oh? I’m glad to hear that this matter is open to discussion. I happen to have an alternative proposal in mind which I would like to raise!” Zhang Xuan chuckled.

“Feel free to speak!” Chen Yue said. “However, do note that your proposal will have to undergo our approval first...”

“I believe that you’ll approve of it!”

At which, Zhang Xuan turned to look at the crowd and said, “Since it’s a team fight between the various Vassal States, why must the ones involved in the fighting be the top three rankers? If they were to be wounded in their duel, how would they enter the Cleansing Lake tomorrow?”

“You’re right!” Hong shi eyes lit up.

“Then what do you propose then?” Chen Yue frowned.

“Hehe!” Zhang Xuan chuckled. “My proposal is simple... I think that the 5-star master teachers leading the teams should fight instead!”

“That’s right, the 5-star master teachers... huh?”

Halfway through Hong shi's words, he suddenly realized what was being said and his remaining words jammed in his mouth. He turned to look at Zhang Xuan with widened eyes and asked, "We... will fight?"

"Indeed. Not only so, Hong shi will be facing the three of you at once!" Zhang Xuan added.

"I'll face the three of them..."

Hong shi staggered, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

Big Brother, I thought that you had a good idea in mind? After so much trouble, this is all that you have?

Are you so intent on sending me on my way?

Putting everything aside, just Luo Zhao himself is a difficult enemy for me already. To fight the three of them at once...

"You want him to face the three of us?"

Not only was Hong shi light-headed, Luo Zhao, Chen Yue, and Feng Yu were stunned as well. They turned to look at Zhang Xuan as though he was a fool.

Are you serious?

That is the fellow that we have been dying to pummel, and you just had to send him to us... Can such a good deal really exist in the world?

"Why? You dare not accept my deal?" Zhang Xuan taunted with a smirk.

"You are asking us if we dare to accept your challenge or not?" Luo Zhao turned to Hong shi and asked, "Are you certain about this?"

With a constipated expression on his face, Hong shi nodded with tears streaming from his eyes.

He didn't know what Zhang shi was up to, but given his previous experience, he knew that the latter wouldn't do anything he was uncertain of. Since he said such words, he must have an idea in mind.

“If you are scared, just say so. Let’s not waste our time on useless chatter.”

Zhang Xuan waved his hands in disdain.

“Scared? I only fear that he will end up kneeling, begging for his life in a moment!”

Confirming that the other party was serious on this matter, Chen Yue, Luo Zhao, and Feng Yu burst into laughter.

Fearing that Hong shi might take back his words, Chen Yue quickly turned to the crown prince and said, “Your Highness, you’ve seen what happened. It’s not that we want to take advantage of Hong shi, he’s is the one who challenged the three of us voluntarily to determine the distribution of the slots. Since Hongfeng Empire insists on the matter, I hope that Your Highness can approve of this matter!”

“This...”

Not expecting the situation to turn into this, Ye Qian turned to look at Hong shi with a frown and asked, “You are all 5-star low-tier master teachers, Transcendent 6-dan primary stage cultivators. Your fighting prowess is approximately equal to one another, are you certain you want to face the three of them at once?”

Given that their fighting prowess were approximate to one another, Hong shi facing the three of them simultaneously was as good as an act of suicide. Of this, the crown prince had no doubt.

“I’m certain!”

Before Hong shi could respond, Zhang Xuan had already replied in his stead.

“Alright then...”

Since the parties involved had come to an agreement, Ye Qian decided not to say anything about it. “Alright then, I’ll be announcing the rules of the duel now. Hong shi will be facing Feng shi, Luo shi, and Chen shi, and the distribution of the slots will be decided through the battle.”

After which, he waved his hands. A group of guards outside the door immediately came in to clear up the hall to create sufficient space for a duel.

“Make sure to not to go too far so not harm the camaraderie among fellow states!” Ye Qian instructed as the four stepped onto the dueling ring.

“Don’t worry, we’ll make sure to ‘hold ourselves back’...” Feng shi sneered coldly. He especially emphasized on the words ‘hold ourselves back’.

“Indeed, we’ve been buddies for many years, so how could we possibly do anything overboard?” Luo Zhao smiled.

The both of them had suffered greatly under Hong shi’s hands. Given that the other party was seeking death, they found no reason to let him off.

“Zhang shi, is there even a possibility that Hong shi can defeat the three of them...”

Seeing that the fight was about to start, Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai wiped the sweat off their foreheads nervously.

Zhang shi usually looked rather smart, so why would he suddenly make such a foolish decision?

One against three...

Wasn’t this courting death?

“If Hong shi doesn’t go up, do you think that you can win against them?” Zhang Xuan gestured to their counterparts from the other Vassal States.

“This...”

The duo’s mouths twitched, and they hurriedly shook their heads.

While they might have emerged victorious among the other talented master teachers in Hongfeng Empire, the same could be said about the rest of them as well. If they were to face them in a duel, given that the other party’s cultivation was higher than theirs, their chances at victory was nearly null!

In other words, had they proceeded on with the original duel proposal, their defeat would have been certain.

“But Hong shi...”

While they knew that they were unable to win, the same went go Hong shi as well.

“Just watch on!” Instead of answering the other party’s query, Zhang Xuan simply smiled.

“Alright then...”

The duo had no idea where Zhang Xuan’s confidence came from, but it was already too late for them to do anything as well. Thus, they could only turn their worried gazes onto the dueling ring.

Standing at the very end of the hall, the crown prince watched the dueling ring with a deep frown on his forehead. He had no idea why Hong shi would propose such a ‘suicidal’ duel.

Unable to hold back his intrigue, he turned to Wu Zhen beside him and asked, “Senior, who do you think will win?”

Wu Zhen was a 5-star master teacher, and his eye of discernment and experience in such matters were far above his. Perhaps, he might have noticed something that he didn’t.

“Under normal circumstances, it should be impossible for Hong shi to win. However, the very fact that he proposed such a duel means that he must have some kind of trump card...”

But the truth was that even Wu Zhen couldn’t make sense of this matter.

With his eye of discernment, he could accurately gauge the respective strength of the four.

Hong shi couldn’t be considered to be exceptional among the four, even facing one of them would be difficult for him. Yet, to face three of them singlehandedly, that was a recipe for disaster... To insist on fighting such a duel, just what could be going through his head?

“Let’s just watch on. Perhaps... there might be a turnaround!”

Wu Zhen racked his brain but couldn't find an answer. Shaking his head, he decided to simply watch on with an open mind.

“Un!”

The crown prince nodded. Turning his gaze to the dueling ring, he said, “Hong shi has always been a dependable person. Perhaps he might really have a good idea in mind... Look, it's starting!”

While the duo was speaking, the duel started.

Hu hu hu!

The three Transcendent Mortal 6-dan experts, Luo Zhao, Chen Yue, and Feng Yu, moved simultaneously and sealed space with the overwhelming pressure from their cultivation.

Fearing that Hong shi might have a trump card up his sleeves, the trio didn't use their full might instantly. Instead, they surrounded him and traded some blows with him to test him out first.

But after trading a few blows, a bizarre expression slowly crept onto their faces. At this moment, Feng Yu suddenly launched a fist.

Peng!

It struck Hong shi's face squarely, and blood immediately flowed out from his nose.

“Ah?”

Not expecting his sneak attack to succeed, Feng Yu's eyes widened, and his body trembled in agitation.

Due to his overexcitement, he accidentally tore open one of his wounds, and a wave of intense pain immediately struck him.

“Dependable? Must have some kind of trump card?”

Seeing that even Feng Yu, a fellow so severely injured that it looked like he might just fall dead at any moment, actually managed to strike Hong shi's face so easily, Wu shi was dumbfounded.

“Why... does it seem like a one-sided pummeling instead?”

630 Guiding Hong shi

“Indeed!” Crown Prince Ye Qian also widened his eyes in astonishment.

Given how you arrogantly declared that you were going to challenge the three of them at once, I thought that you must have some kind of trump card that would allow you to defeat them. Or at the very least, you should have been able to fight on par with them. And yet... in just a moment, you were already bleeding from your nose. What are you up to?

How was this a duel? This was clearly a one-sided pummeling!

“Perhaps he hasn’t caught the flow of the battle yet and accidentally got careless...”

Ye Qian tried to rationalize the situation before him, but before he could finish his words, Luo Zhao’s fist struck Hong shi’s nose as well. Blood immediately spurted out from the latter’s nose.

“Cough cough... Fine, I was mistaken. He isn’t a match for the three of them at all...”

Ye Qian nearly choked on his saliva, and eventually, he shook his head in disappointment.

Hong shi wasn’t weak at all, but fighting against three people with similar fighting prowess simultaneously was no easy feat. As the saying goes, ‘hardly can two fists rival four hands’. But at this moment, Hong shi was facing six!

In the blink of an eye, he was already struck several times, and his face started swelling up.

Watching the sight from the banquet table, Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai were on the verge of going insane.

They thought that, given how confident Zhang Xuan was, Hong shi would wipe the floor with the three of them and

successfully win the slots for them. Who knew that he would be beaten up right from the start...

“Zhang shi, what’s going on...”

They quickly turned their sights to Zhang Xuan, only to see the fellow with his eyes closed as if dozing off...

The duo immediately staggered on the spot.

It was just a moment that you convinced Hong shi to go up confidently, but now that the battle had begun, you actually started sleeping... What are you up to?

Even if you want to play a prank, you do know that now isn’t the time, right?

If not for the fact that they had come together from Myriad Kingdom Alliance, they would have really thought that the other party was a spy...

“Zhang shi, what do I do?”

Under the furious assault of the three 5-star master teachers, Hong shi was about to come to the limit of his endurance. He quickly sent a telepathic message to Zhang shi.

Before the battle, Zhang shi told him that he would offer him some pointers to win after analyzing the movements of the other three. At this moment, his face had already swelled to the size of a pig’s head already, but the other party hadn’t said a word at all. Panicking, he quickly turned his gaze over, but with a single look, tears immediately flowed down his eyes.

Aren’t you going to look at their movements and analyze their flaws so as to offer me pointers?

Can you even see their movements with your eyes closed?

“I’m done for...”

In an instant, desolation struck Hong shi.

If he had known earlier, he would have never believed the nonsense of this fellow. Not only were they going to lose the three slots, he was even going to get beaten up badly at that... What the heck was this...

Just as Hong shi was giving all hope, he suddenly heard a faint voice by his ear.

“Advance half a chi forward and inch slightly to the left. Use the Seventh Form of Origin Palm. Afterward, bend forward and use the Third Stroke of Dragon Capturing Palm...”

“Zhang shi...”

Hearing the voice, Hong shi suddenly jolted. He glanced to the side and saw that, at some point, the young man had already opened his eyes, and a bright gleam glowed in them.

“Alright!”

Seeing the composed and confident posture of the other party, Hong shi couldn't help but feel inclined to trust him. Gritting his teeth, he immediately moved as the other party said.

...

“I thought that you might have grown formidable given how you dared to challenge the three of us at once. To think that you would be such a disappointment...”

After striking Hong shi's face squarely twice, confidence glowed brightly from Feng shi's face. At this moment, his wounds didn't seem to hurt as much anymore.

“Stop spouting nonsense. Beat him into surrendering first!”

Luo Zhao was also equally excited.

He was still burning with rage from being slapped in public. With such an ideal opportunity for vengeance lying right before him, how could he possibly allow it to slip by? Roaring furiously, his hands thrust forward so quickly that it looked as though he had eight hands.

Spirit intermediate-tier battle technique, Hexad Arm Divine Fist!

“Indeed. Since he's courting death, let's grant his wish!”

Bellowing loudly, Chen Yue sent a kick over.

Even though his kick wasn't a battle technique, it was well-positioned to strike at Hong shi's blind spot.

Feng shi assaulting from behind, Luo Zhao from above, and Chen Yue from below. In an instant, the trio had sealed all routes of escape, putting Hong shi in a desperate position.

Just when it was almost certain that Hong shi would surely be severely wounded in this encounter, as though having predicted his opponents' attacks, he suddenly moved forward and stepped into a spot out of range for all three attacks.

While he had already stepped out of range, the attacks from the trio didn't stop—or rather, they couldn't stop.

Feng Yu was punched in the head by Luo Zhao, Luo Zhao was kicked in the crotch by Chen Yue, and Chen Yue was struck in the chest by Feng Yu.

Peng! Crack! Huala!

Three loud sounds echoed simultaneously in the air. The trio found their vision darkening, and they nearly fainted on the spot.

In order to teach Hong shi a lesson he would never forget, they had harnessed their full strength behind the previous attack. How could they have known that they would hurt their own teammate instead?

“Damn it...”

With a roar, Feng Yu got back up and thrust his fist at Hong shi furiously. But before his palm could reach, he saw a leg enlarging swiftly in his sight.

Peng!

His vision momentarily turned dark, and in the next instant, he was already flying in the air. His head crashed through one of the tables of the banquet hall, leaving the lower half of his body twitching violently.

“You're seeking death...”

The overwhelming embarrassment that Luo Zhao felt from having struck one another earlier on sent blood gushing to his head. Furious, he charged forward and sent a fist straight toward Luo Zhao.

But Hong shi seemed to have predicted his move as well. The other party adeptly positioned himself at the blind spot of the fist and sent a kick over.

Peng!

He was struck in the crotch yet again.

“Wuuuuuuu...”

A cry of agony, reminiscent of a rooster’s call, reverberated loudly in the hall. Luo Zhao immediately fell to the ground, curled up in a fashion similar to a prawn.

Even a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan expert like him couldn’t possibly tolerate being struck twice consecutively in his weakest region. His heart jolted wildly as he suddenly realized that... he couldn’t feel anything below...

“It’s your turn!”

Seeing that he had successfully sent two experts of the same tier flying, Hong shi’s confidence burst through the roof. He took two steps forward before suddenly turning around swiftly with an outstretched palm.

Pah!

The sound of a palm striking a cheek echoed. Chen Yue staggered backward weakly, and a mouthful of blood spurted from his mouth. If one were to take a closer look, one could see three to four teeth amidst the bloodied mess.

Previously, when he struck Luo Zhao, he had held back. But now that they were in a battle, there was no longer any reason to do so. If not for the other party’s enhanced physical resilience, the full might slap of a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan might very well have knocked his head off his neck.

Seeing this sight, the entire hall fell silent. Everyone’s eyes were popping from their sockets, and they found themselves pushed to the brink of insanity.

Wasn’t Hong shi still getting beaten up just a moment ago?

Everyone thought that he was moments away from an utter defeat, and yet... in the blink of an eye, he actually made such

an astounding comeback!

To think that even the combined might of three Transcendent Mortal 6-dan experts couldn't even stop him. But if he was this formidable... how did he get beaten up in the first place?

“He saw through the enemy's movements and took countermeasures in advance. That is why Feng shi and the others are completely helpless before him!”

The hand that Wu Zhen was using to hold the wine glass turned visibly paler, and a grim expression appeared on his face.

Honestly, he didn't have much interest in the duels in such a remote place. Who could have thought that Hong shi would be such a fearsome person?

In just a few moments, he had already finished analyzing the other party's movements and made countermeasures for it.

This was no longer about cultivation but eye of discernment!

But how formidable must one's eye of discernment and deduction ability be to make these kind of judgements ten breaths into a battle?

Even Wu Zhen knew that he was incapable of such a feat!

“Probably only those monsters in the academy can achieve such a feat...”

A few figures surfaced in Wu Zhen's mind.

He was a formidable genius as well, and in a remote place like Huanyu Empire, his talent and cultivation were indeed envied by many. However, in Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, where all of the talented master teachers gathered, his skills could only be said to be average.

In fact, one of his companions in this trip, Luo Qiqi, possessed such astounding talent in fighting that he couldn't even start to compare with her.

Considering how Hong shi only managed to reach 5-star at such an advanced age, he honestly didn't think too highly of the other party. Thus, he never expected to see a battle

adaptability that was on par with Luo Qiqi and the other monsters of the academy in him!

Are you for real?

“No, something is wrong. If Hong shi really possesses such capability, his name would surely be known throughout the entire Huanyu Empire. It also doesn’t make sense how Luo Zhao and the others managed to strike him earlier on either if that was the case.”

Wu Zhen frowned.

Earlier, when Hong shi was attacked by the three simultaneously, he panicked, causing his movements to be riddled with flaws and poor judgement. If he had such talent in battle, he should have shown it right from the start. It didn’t make sense for him to suddenly be ‘boosted’ in the midst of the battle.

“Could it be...”

A slight frown appeared on Wu Zhen’s forehead, and he quickly turned his gaze over to the young man who took the initiative to volunteer Hong shi for the battle.

The young man’s lips were quivering slightly. Clearly, he was sending instructions telepathically to Hong shi.

“Telepathic communication? As I expected!”

It was obvious that Hong shi was reluctant to face the three in battle, and he had only agreed to it under the insistence of this fellow. Since this fellow had put Hong shi up to it, he must be confident of victory. Thus, Wu Zhen turned his suspicions to this person, and it seemed like his doubts were proven right.

“But still, a 4-star master teacher actually managed to influence the outcome of a battle among 5-star master teachers through his pointers? How can that be?”

The more Wu Zhen thought about it, the more shocked he felt.

There were two realms between Transcendent Mortal 4-dan and Transcendent Mortal 6-dan, but more importantly, there was a fundamental difference in their fighting style as well due to the utilization of soul.

Rationally speaking, it should have been impossible for the other party to understand the fighting patterns of Feng shi and others given his current cultivation realm... But reality had proved that not only did he understand their fighting patterns, he was even able to decipher them, granting Hong shi an opportunity to make a complete comeback. This eye of discernment... was so impressive that it was fearsome.

“I can verify my hypothesis just by trying it out!”

After a moment of shock, Wu Zhen suddenly thought of something and his lips crept up.

“Zhang shi!”

With a loud shout, Wu Zhen’s voice reverberated throughout the entire hall.

“Hmm?”

Stunned, Zhang Xuan turned his head over.

He didn’t expect Senior Wu, whom even the crown prince had to treat with utmost respect, would suddenly call for him.

Peng peng!

“AHH!”

In Zhang Xuan’s momentary lapse of concentration, the sound of fists and legs sinking into flesh sounded, and a cry of agony accompanied it.

With the abrupt termination of Zhang Xuan’s guidance, Hong shi fell into a disadvantageous position and was currently in the midst of being lynched once again.

“An inch diagonally to your forward right. Then, turn around and execute the Eighth Stroke of Dragon Capturing Palm...”

Zhang Xuan began sending instructions telepathically once more.

Hu hu hu!

Under his instructions, Hong shi regained the upper hand once more, suppressing the trio to the point that they could hardly catch their breath.

“Zhang shi!”

But at that moment, Wu shi’s shout boomed across the room once more.

“Yes?”

Zhang Xuan turned around.

Peng peng!

“AHH!”

Hong shi screamed in agony once more.

“The hell!”

Seeing how Hong shi was struck the instant his instructions stopped, Zhang Xuan hurriedly turned his attention back and instructed, “Leap up slightly and once you land on the ground, retreat seven steps immediately...”

“Zhang shi!”

But before Zhang Xuan could finish his words, Wu Zhen’s voice boomed across the room once more.

“What do you want?”

Zhang Xuan was on the verge of breakdown.

“I... am just shouting casually, you don’t need to bother about me!”

Wu Zhen waved his hands casually.

“...” Zhang Xuan.

The hell, was this fellow really a talented student from Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy?

Why was he so childish?

While Zhang Xuan was sighing helplessly, in the dueling ring, Hong shi was crying. “Zhang shi, can you keep your attention here... You can’t toy with me like that. If this goes on, I really might just die...”

631 Lake Eye

Seeing that Hong shi was on the verge of a breakdown, Zhang Xuan couldn't be bothered with Wu Zhen anymore. He focused all of his attention into instructing Hong shi to victory.

On the other hand, Wu Zhen, having affirmed his hypothesis, no longer called Zhang Xuan anymore as well.

A few minutes later, Feng Yu, Luo Zhao, and Chen Yue were lying on the floor, their bodies filled with wounds. They had surrendered.

They had no choice but to do so. No matter what they did, Hong shi seemed to always be a step ahead of them, leaving them completely helpless. If it had gone on like that, they might even have died. Since that was the case, they admitted defeat.

The trio suffered such grievous injuries that even their own parents would probably find it hard to recognize them. If there was any consolation to them, it was that Hong shi wasn't in a good shape either. His cheeks and eyes were swollen red; his entire body was shaking unsteadily; there was blood all over him... If not for some kind of tenacity driving him, he would have also collapsed to the ground as well.

“Alright. Since Feng shi, Luo shi, and Chen shi have admitted defeat, the three slots shall be contributed by their teams!”

Ye Qian was also surprised to see Hong shi emerge victorious in the battle.

He didn't possess Wu Zhen's sharp intuition, so he failed to see through the little trick involved here. As such, he thought that Hong shi had defeated the trio with his own strength, and this had left him impressed.

Seeing the severe injuries Hong shi had sustained, Zhang Xuan felt a little guilt-ridden. Thus, he stood up and walked over to Wu shi.

“Wu shi, may I request for a cup of medicinal wine for Hong shi’s injuries?”

If not for this damned fellow calling him time and time again, even though Hong shi would still have suffered injuries, they wouldn’t be as severe as they were now.

“Un!”

Wu shi did also feel a little embarrassed by his previous actions, so he took out the medicinal wine and poured out a cup.

Zhang Xuan infused a surge of zhenqi into the medicinal wine before passing it over to Hong shi for him to drink it.

It was only in the body that zhenqi could be stored for extended periods of time. In other words, while the gourd of medicinal wine in Wu shi’s possession might still be effective now, it would slowly turn back into ordinary wine.

As the Heaven’s Path zhenqi contained in the wine flowed through Hong shi’s bloodstream, his injuries began to heal.

“Thank you, Wu shi and Zhang shi!”

With his injuries recovered, Hong shi felt refreshed. He quickly clasped his fist in gratitude.

He really thought that he would die just now. Honestly speaking, he didn’t expect Zhang shi to be so formidable as to be able to issue instructions that would lead him to an easy victory.

After all, those were master teachers of the same rank as him... Even in a one-to-one, he dared not say he would win. While he had suffered grievous injuries in this battle, he felt that it was worth it given that he was able to defeat the three of them.

With this, he had brought glory to Hongfeng Empire!

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony...”

Wu shi waved his hands. After which, he turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan in interest.

However, knowing that this wasn't the occasion to be asking anything, he eventually turned away without asking anything.

As soon as Zhang Xuan and Hong shi returned to their seats, Feng shi, Luo shi, and Chen shi walked up to Wu shi and asked, "Wu shi, can we get a cup of medicinal wine as well?"

They had seen Hong shi making a complete recovery after drinking the medicinal wine, and this had left them green in envy. Feeling the aches throughout their bodies, they toughened up their courage and walked over to ask.

"Fine!"

Wu shi eyelids twitched. He was unwilling to offer the medicinal wine to them, but eventually, he still took it out and poured a cup for each of them.

"Our gratitude to Wu shi!"

They quickly drank it down, and a spicy taste rushed up their throat.

After waiting for a moment, they realized that their injuries were still as severe as before. Perplexed, they asked, "Wu shi, could you have taken the wrong gourd..."

"Impossible, this is surely the one that I received earlier..."

Wu shi frowned. "It might not be working as well due to your severe injuries. Why don't you try applying it externally?"

Saying so, he poured another cup for them.

"You're right!"

Previously, Zhang Xuan also poured the wine on Bi shi's arm to heal it. Perhaps due to their injuries being much more severe, its effectiveness might be limited through consumption.

With such thoughts in mind, they poured the wine carefully on their injuries.

Tzzzzz!

The burning sensation of the alcohol left them gritting their teeth in pain. They waited for a long moment, but there was no

sign of their injuries recovering. On the contrary, there were signs that pus was forming instead. Feng Yu, Luo Zhao, and Chen Yue were stumped.

Isn't this a Saint recovery medicine that will fully heal our injuries just by applying it?

Then why are our wounds not healing that? On top of that, what is with that sharp pain accompanied with a slight itch on them?

Hong shi obviously recovered after drinking the wine given though! Could Wu shi have offered them a smaller portion out of his bias?

"Wu shi, I think we might need more medicine. Can you give us a few more cups?" Luo Zhao asked timidly.

"Scram!" Wu shi howled.

You must be joking! There is only a gourd of the recovery wine Hong shi gave, and yet you ask for a cup after another. That's enough of you!

But still, he did feel a little perplexed over the matter. Was the effectiveness weakened due to their serious injuries?

That must be the case!

After all, the few of them did look slightly better than they did before.

In truth, while most of the zhenqi that Zhang Xuan had infused into the wine had dissipated, some of it still lingered.

Thus, even though Luo Zhao and the others didn't make a full recovery like Hong shi, they still recovered significantly. Their wounds had stopped bleeding, and walking wasn't a problem for them anymore.

"..." Seeing Wu shi flying into a rage, Luo Zhao and the others didn't dare to push their case any further. Thus, they hurriedly returned.

...

"Since the slots have been decided, let's allocate the zones now!"

Since the distribution of the slots had been confirmed, Ye Qian turned to look at the crowd and said, “The Cleansing Lake is infused with the spiritual energy from the Verdant Mountain and Dragon-scaled River, granting it the ability to nourish one’s soul. As such, this spirit lake is known as the divine land of Huanyu Empire. Even members of the royal family are not allowed to enter the premises as they please—they have to obey the rules of entering only every decade, at the time of the opening of the Cleansing Lake.

“Since you all should know this, I won’t elaborate on it!”

Hong shi and the others nodded.

This was common knowledge for them.

“As a blessed land for cultivators, the Cleansing Lake possesses mystical effects to the soul. However, one thing you might be unaware of is that it’s also an extremely dangerous place. The slightest carelessness could possibly result in death!”

Ye Qian spoke grimly.

“An extremely dangerous place? Death?”

“Isn’t it a spirit lake rich in spiritual energy?”

“Indeed, why would it be dangerous?”

...

Everyone was taken aback.

Even Luo Zhao, Feng Yu, and the others also frowned questioningly.

They had heard of the Cleansing Lake’s unique property in nourishing one’s soul and advancing one’s cultivation, but they had never known it to be fraught with danger.

What kind of danger could a lake rich in spiritual energy possibly have?

“It’s no lie that the Cleansing Lake is a spirit lake. However, the current flowing within the lake is extremely violent, and even a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan cultivator could be killed easily in it! Back then, when our founding ancestor found this

blessed land, he sent in his men to investigate the region, only to have none of them return,” Ye Qian explained gravely.

“Even Transcendent Mortal 9-dan cultivators could be killed easily?”

Everyone was stunned. “Then...”

If even a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan cultivator couldn't survive the currents of the lake, weren't they seeking death by entering it?

What kind of blessed land for cultivation was this?

“There's no need to panic, allow me to finish my words first!”

Seeing the shocked expression on everyone's faces, Ye Qian chuckled. “The dangers regarding the Cleansing Lake are very real; I'm not exaggerating them in any way. However, there's a solution to the matter. After many years of scouting and innumerable lives paving the way forward, we finally uncovered some of the secrets of the lake. There's a safe zone in the Cleansing Lake where cultivators can enjoy the benefits of the lake without being crushed to a pulp!

“We call this location the ‘Lake Eye’. The Lake Eye is where the spiritual energy from the various sources intersect and form a fragile balance, thus creating a safe zone. However, the Lake Eye only appear once every ten years.”

“Lake Eye?”

“Once every ten years? Is this the reason why the Cleansing Lake only opens once every ten years?”

“That must be the case...”

Upon hearing the explanation, everyone suddenly came to a realization.

They had always been puzzled as to why the Cleansing Lake only opened once every ten years. Initially, they thought that the royal family was just maintaining a monopoly over the lake, but from the looks of it now, they were sorely mistaken. The true reason was to protect them from danger.

“Lake Eyes aren’t too big—each of them only has a radius of around two meters. Furthermore, the amount of spiritual energy harnessed in each of them is limited as well. Once all of the energy inside is fully absorbed, the Lake Eye will collapse inward! In other words, the person cultivating inside a Lake Eye must escape immediately upon realizing the spiritual energy inside is dying out. Otherwise, one might just lose his life in the lake,” said Ye Qian.

“Radius of two meters? The amount of spiritual energy harnessed is limited? Then...”

Everyone was perplexed.

Considering that fifteen people were entering the Cleansing Lake, how could a Lake Eye with a radius of two meters possibly be enough?

If they were to take turns, considering how the spiritual energy in the Lake Eye was limited, they would have to decide on the order of entry as well!

“As everyone should know, when a soul is trapped within a body, it is equivalent to having a cage around it. Under such circumstances, its growth will be severely limited!”

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

The body of an ordinary cultivator was no different from a shackle to a soul, locking it tightly in place.

Even if one were to obtain manuals to cultivate one’s soul, one’s soul would still be limited to the boundaries of one’s body.

To make an analogy, it was just like a potted plant. No matter how far the roots of a plant could reach, it would be confined to the limits of the pot.

“After making many calculations, we have found that the time limit for both Consonant Spirit realm and Cosmos Bridge realm cultivators is three days. Any longer than that and the Cleansing Lake will be rendered ineffective. Besides, three days is also the duration that a Lake Eye can maintain itself for. As such, the empire has determined a time limit of three days for this.”

Continuing, Ye Qian said, “The champions for the Master Teacher Tournament will be given three days, first runner-up two days, and second runner-up one day!”

The crowd nodded.

This was also the prize promised in the Master Teacher Tournament.

The first place will be given three days to cultivate at Cleansing Lake, the second place two days, and the third place one day.

“Everyone must be perplexed as to how a Lake Eye with a radius of two meters can have fifteen people cultivating in it at the same time... In truth, ten Lake Eyes will appear each time the Cleansing Lake opens!”

“Ten?”

“That’s right, ten! Based on previous rules, the five champions of the Master Teacher Tournament will be granted a Lake Eye of their own to cultivate for three days whereas the second and third place will share a Lake Eye, and they will cultivate for two days and one day respectively.”

The five champions would take up five Lake Eyes on their own, whereas the ten second places and third places, due to their differing cultivation duration as per their prize, would share the other five. In this way, the ten Lake Eyes were fairly distributed.

“However... this year is an exception!”

At which, Ye Qian paused for a moment before continuing. “Sixth Princess, Senior Wu, and the others would require a Lake Eye each, and I also need an individual one as well. Thus... you will have to share the remaining five amongst yourselves!”

632 I'll Challenge All of You

“We have to share the remaining five?”

Everyone frowned.

This was especially so for the champions in Feng shi, Luo shi, and Chen shi's groups.

Under normal circumstances, they would be entitled to an entire Lake Eye themselves. However, now that they had to share their resources, there would surely be insufficient spiritual energy in the lake for them to cultivate for three days.

But while they felt indignant, there was nothing they could do. The Sixth Princess, Wu Zhen, and the others were Grade 2 students from the Master Teacher Academy, as well as their future seniors. It would be improper to have them share the Lake Eye while they each took one up for themselves.

Putting everything aside, even if the Sixth Princess volunteered to share her Lake Eye... who would dare to take up the offer?

To dishonor the princess of Hongyuan Empire, a 5-star master teacher... only if one was tired of living.

“Un. I feel apologetic toward you regarding this matter as well. I'll leave the distribution of the Lake Eyes to you all!”

Ye Qian said apologetically. “I'm fine with any allocation you all decide upon!”

“We get to choose? Alright then!” Luo Zhao hesitated for a moment before nodding. “I have a proposal. Other than the crown prince, there's still another master teacher from Huanyu Empire. He, along with Hongfeng Empire, will share two Lake Eye, whereas Hongfeng, Qianfeng, and Zhuyue will take the remaining three!”

“Indeed, we'll concede since Hongfeng Empire won the duel. I'm willing to give them the two Lake Eyes!” Chen Yue and Feng Yu's eyes lit up.

If they could take down one Lake Eye each, they could have their top three cultivate a day each in the Lake Eye. This would be the best deal they could take.

“No way!”

Hong shi frowned.

In the previous duel, the other party had already lost three slots, and they only had six people who could enter the Cleansing Lake. Six people sharing three Lake Eye against four people sharing two Lake Eye, wouldn't their position be equal then?

What would be the point of the previous duel then?

You must be joking!

“Then what do you want?”

Luo Zhao frowned.

“We want the two Lake Eyes independently! The remaining three shall be shared among you and the master teacher from Huanyu Empire!” Hong shi said.

“You want to take two Lake Eyes independently? You're dreaming!” Feng Yu and Chen Yue harrumphed.

Even taking into account the three slots they had just lost, if they were to allow Hongfeng Empire to take two Lake Eyes independently, that would be equivalent to seven people sharing three Lake Eyes. That would be a huge disadvantage to them, how could they agree to it?

“I disagree to it as well!” Luo Zhao shook his head.

“You disagree to the matter? Then why don't we fight once more to decide this? Since we have all taken the medicinal wine and our injuries are mostly healed!”

Hong shi flung his sleeves and stood up.

After winning a match against the three of them, he was overflowing with confidence.

“Fight?”

The mouths of Luo Zhao and the others twitched.

Fight your head! Besides, which of your eyes saw that our injuries are mostly recovered?

You're able to walk perfectly fine, but everyone can clearly see that we're limping around. We weren't able to defeat you earlier on when we were in a better condition, how could we possibly defeat you now?

“Why? You dare not accept my challenge? Stop finding excuses! Each of you had two cups of medicinal wine earlier whereas I only took one. Even though I look fine on the surface, my injuries are as severe as yours!”

Hong shi raised his eyebrows.

“The heck with your ‘as severe as yours’!”

Luo Zhao and the others were rendered speechless.

You are able to walk around perfectly normally whereas we can't even sit steadily, and you say that your injuries are as severe as ours? You sure are thick-skinned, you know...

“Fine, let's fight then. However, it won't be us since we just had a match, and there would be little point in repeating the same thing. Why don't we have the other members of our group clash it out!”

Gritting his teeth, Chen Yue gestured to the members of his group behind him.

“Indeed, instead of fighting once more, why don't we leave it to them to determine the distribution of the Lake Eye? In any case, they are the ones who will be impacted by the ultimate outcome!”

Luo Zhao's eyes shone with excitement as he quickly nodded in agreement. “The winning team will get to choose which of the two proposals we'll go by!”

“No! Like I said just now, the members of your teams have consumed Consonant Spirit Pills, and this is unfair to my team!”

Seeing the other party insist on dueling with Zhang shi and the others, Hong shi hurriedly rejected the idea.

Even the member with the weakest cultivation amongst them was a small realm higher than the member with the highest cultivation in his group. How could his group possibly win the duel?

If he were to agree to the duel, there would be no doubt that they would lose.

“The Consonant Spirit Pill can only be found in the capital, and in this sense, we’re all on equal standing. You only have yourself to blame for a lack of preparation for the matter!”

Feng Yu harrumphed. “So, do you dare or not? Let me just remind you that we have the majority here. If you insist on having it your way, we can just bypass your objection when it comes down to it!”

“Indeed. We need not waste our time arguing with you. If you refuse to agree to the duel, I suggest you just admit defeat!” Luo Zhao added.

The three of them had already made up their minds to never fight with Hong Shi ever again, so it was impossible for them to accept the latter’s challenge.

On the other hand, the men that they brought here had already consumed a Consonant Spirit Pill each. With their superior cultivation, wouldn’t it be a walk in the park for them to suppress those from Hongfeng Empire?

“You...”

Seeing the three of them gang up against him, Hong Shi’s breathing hastened in anger. He was just about to say something when Zhang Xuan suddenly interjected.

“Alright then, we can accept your challenge... however, don’t you think a three versus three is a too troublesome?”

“Troublesome?”

Seeing the same fellow from before speaking up again, Feng Yu and Luo Zhao narrowed their eyes. “Then what do you suggest?”

“Simple, I’ll face all nine of your men alone. I don’t mind whether you come one by one or all at the same time. As long

as you defeat me, our Hongfeng Empire will give all of our Lake Eyes to you... but if you lose, you will give all of your Lake Eyes to us. What do you think of it?”

Zhang Xuan glanced at them with a faint smile.

“You want to fight nine people singlehandedly?”

“This fellow must be joking!”

“Indeed! A mere Transcendent Mortal 4-dan cultivator actually thinks he can defeat nine Consonant Spirit realm cultivators in a duel? He must be dreaming!”

...

In an instant, an uproar broke out in the room.

Having emerged triumphant from the Master Teacher Tournaments in their respective regions, they were all proud geniuses. How could they possibly allow a fellow who was far weaker than them to mock them? This was intolerable!

“Luo shi, allow us to teach that arrogant brat a lesson! He has been grating on my nerves right from the start!”

A young man standing behind Luo Zhao stood up, and his aura suddenly burst forth—Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage!

He possessed the strongest fighting prowess even among the other eight who had consumed Consonant Spirit Pills as well.

“Feng shi, I’ll go. That fellow caused you so much pain. If I don’t get him apologizing on his knees, I will be unworthy to be called a master teacher of Fengyuan Empire!”

A young man behind Feng shi also stood up.

Following the duo, the other seven people behind Feng shi, Luo shi, and Chen shi also couldn’t remain seated any longer, and they glared at Zhang Xuan furiously. If looks could kill, he would have been torn to shreds then.

Seeing the agitation and anger in everyone’s eyes, Luo shi asked once more, “Are you certain you want to duel with him?”

“That’s right!”

“That fellow has no respect for his elders at all; he deserves to be taught a lesson!”

The group of nine hollered angrily.

Very few people knew that Feng shi had plummeted from the sky due to this fellow, but they had seen how he made things difficult for Luo shi earlier.

In fact, the duel between Hong shi and the three pavilion masters was his idea as well. Not to mention, he was uttering such arrogant words at the moment. Unforgivable!

“This...”

Luo shi turned to Feng shi and Chen shi.

This matter was important; he dared not represent the entire group.

After all, no one thought that Hong shi would be able to defeat the three of them earlier as well... but reality shoved the contrary to their faces.

This fellow may seem to be the weakest of the group, but what if he had some trump cards up his sleeves?

“To think that you would hesitate so long at my challenge! If you dare not accept it, we can drop the idea... I knew that you were all spineless cowards! Master teachers? Geniuses? Pui!”

Before Feng shi and Chen shi could make their stand, the young man before them shook his head in disappointment.

“You...”

Luo shi and the others exploded into rage.

This fellow was really too much!

This was especially with the expression on his face at this moment, he was clearly making a mockery out of them!

Gritting his teeth savagely, Luo Zhao said, “Fine, we’ll accept the challenge! However, I want to confirm if you can represent your entire team.”

“If I lose, all of Hongfeng’s Lake Eyes will be given to you. If you lose, all of your Lake Eyes will be given to us. Rest

assured, my words can represent my team!” Zhang Xuan said nonchalantly.

“Alright then!”

Luo Zhao gestured to the person behind him. “Li Xiulian!”

“Luo shi!”

The Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage expert who was the first to confront Zhang Xuan earlier stepped forward.

He was the champion of Qianfeng Empire’s Master Teacher Tournament, Xiulian gongzi.

Clenching his fists tightly, Luo Zhao angrily instructed, “Go up and teach him a lesson. Make him know that there’s always a higher mountain!”

In a normal duel between master teachers, no matter how angry either side was at the other, they would be instructed to stop once the victor was clear. Yet, Luo shi was now telling Xiulian gongzi to beat Zhang Xuan up thoroughly. This reflected how angry he was at this moment.

“Don’t worry, Luo shi! I’ll have him know the difference between Clarifying Turbidity realm and Consonant Spirit realm!”

Harrumphing coldly, Xiulian gongzi stepped forward and gestured to Zhang Xuan. “Aren’t you arrogant? Come, let me see if your skills are as formidable as your mouth!”

“Zhang shi... be careful!” Hong shi said worriedly.

He had great confidence in Zhang shi’s skill... but the opponent he was facing was a Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage cultivator. There was simply too huge a gap between the both of them!

If he were to lose, Hongfeng Empire would lose all of their Lake Eyes, and everything they had done before would be in vain.

Behind him, Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai were frowning deeply.

Zhang shi had indeed performed spectacularly back in Myriad Kingdom Alliance, but still, they found it hard to believe that

he could match a Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage cultivator.

“Don’t worry!”

Noticing the worry in everyone’s eyes, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly. He walked to the center of the room and glanced at the young man before saying, “I don’t think you’ll suffice. You should have the eight of them come up as well. Otherwise, I would feel like I’m bullying you all!”

“You...”

Seeing how the other party was still spouting such arrogant words now, Xiulian gongzi clenched his fists tightly. “There’s no need for it! I’m more than enough to handle you!”

Hu!

Roaring angrily, he charged forward and smashed a fist at Zhang Xuan’s face.

At Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage, one’s soul was one with one’s body. Amidst the furious gust of wind, there was a soul pressure that rendered one incapable of sprouting any thoughts of retaliation.

If it was any other Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle cultivator, he would have lost instantly to this blow without making a single move at all.

But Zhang Xuan was no ordinary Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle cultivator. Upon seeing the fist, he simply chuckled lightly. Bending his middle finger and thumb together... he flicked lightly.

Peng!

The tip of Zhang Xuan’s finger collided with Xiulian gongzi’s fist. Before the latter could even process what was going on, he was flying in the air. After a flight of roughly a dozen meters, he crashed into one of the vats of wine placed in the distance, soaking his entire body in wine.

Placing his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan stared down on Xiulian gongzi, who was lying weakly on the floor, and chuckled “It seems like...”

“... you aren't enough at all!”

633 Fighting with His Eyes Closed

Silence.

Everyone rubbed their eyes forcefully, thinking that their eyes might be playing tricks on them.

That was a Transcendent Mortal 5-dan Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage expert! Despite executing an attack utilizing his full might, he was actually sent flying back with a light flick of the other party's finger...

How much strength did that flick harness?

“How could a Consonant Spirit realm expert be sent flying with a single flick...”

Hong shi widened his eyes, and he subconsciously swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

To achieve that feat with a flick, one must have perfect understanding of the force and trajectory of the attack. Even Hong shi himself would find it hard to accomplish such a feat in a real battle!

Yet, the other party managed to do it so easily... Could the other party's Clarifying Turbidity realm be feigned? Could the other party actually be at the Cosmos Bridge realm just like him?

But that couldn't be! He was around when the other party achieved a breakthrough to Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle. To reach Cosmos Bridge realm within a short month? Impossible!

Bi Jianghai widened his eyes in shock at the scene as tears threatened to flow down his eyes.

“It seems like... he didn't use his full strength when he fought with me back then. To think that I thought that I would be able to surpass him as long as I put in some hard work...”

He had thought that luck had played a huge factor in the other party's victory over him, and as long as he cultivated diligently, he would be able to catch up very quickly. But at this moment, he realized that... he couldn't be any more mistaken than that.

The other party probably didn't even use a tenth of his true strength when fighting with him!

Putting everything aside, even ten of him wouldn't survive that flick!

Luo Xuan also felt his throat turning dry.

He had bragged before his teacher, Luo Huang, that Zhang Shi was nothing when the other party induced Ten Li of Vacuum with his Spirit Gathering Dictum at the next moment. Now, the other party even defeated a Transcendent Mortal 5-dan Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage expert with a single flick of his finger...

How could he ever match up to him?

It felt like they existed in completely different dimensions!

"How in the world did that fellow do it?" Crown Prince Ye Qian uttered in disbelief.

Narrowing his eyes, Wu Zhen analyzed the move.

"That single flick from Zhang Shi... probably harnesses a might of at least 5,000,000 ding!"

"5,000,000 ding? This... Isn't he just a Clarifying Turbidity realm cultivator?"

Ye Qian swayed feebly from astonishment.

A typical Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle cultivator should only possess 1,600,000 ding of strength. In fact, even a Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle cultivator would only possess 3,200,000 ding of strength. 5,000,000 ding, that was a might comparable to a Cosmos Bridge realm intermediate stage cultivator! How could a Transcendent Mortal 4-dan harness such force?

“I’ve no idea either. However, the Master Teacher Continent is extremely big, and there are many unique constitutions out there. Based on what I know, there are indeed some people who possess the talent of Herculean strength. While their cultivation may not be particularly high, they are able to exert strength far beyond their cultivation realm!” Wu Zhen said.

Ye Qian suddenly recalled something and asked, “Senior is saying that he might have a unique constitution that augments his strength? Then... could he be just like that person?”

“Indeed, he’s probably just like that senior!”

Wu Zhen nodded. Turning back to look at Zhang Xuan, he said, “Seems like a formidable figure is about to rise from your Huanyu Empire!”

“If he really does possess that kind of talent, then indeed!” Recalling ‘that person’s’ extraordinary and fearsome abilities, Ye Qian couldn’t conceal his agitation.

Given that Zhang Shi originated from Huanyu Empire, if he were to make it big, the standing of the empire would also rise proportionately.

Ignoring the other party’s agitation, Wu Zhen said, “It’s still a little too early to come to a conclusion now. Let’s watch on first!”

“Un!” Ye Qian replied as he turned his sight back to the dueling ring anxiously.

...

Zhang Xuan’s feat of defeating Xiulian gongzi in a single blow had left everyone flabbergasted. Luo Shi and the others had their mouths widened, unable to utter a single word.

It took a while before Luo Shi recovered, and he immediately instructed anxiously, “There is something unusual about this fellow. The rest of you should attack together!”

All of their slots for the Cleansing Lake, which came only once every decade, were at stake here. It might seem a little underhanded, but there was no other choice now!

Hu!

Hearing those words, the remaining eight members immediately stepped forth and surrounded Zhang Xuan.

“You’re all coming at me together? Good!”

Zhang Xuan stretched his back lazily.

Previously, when he offered instructions to Hong shi in his battle, he suddenly thought of something. This group of people came at a perfect moment; he could use them to verify his doubts.

Hu!

With a quick dash, Zhang Xuan immediately appeared before one of the eight. Without any intricate movements, he raised his palm and thrust it toward the man.

“Damn it!”

Seeing that he was the first one to be attacked, the young man’s face darkened. Howling furiously, he gathered his strength from every muscle in his body and struck back.

Just as the fist and palm were about to collide with one another, Zhang shi’s figure suddenly swayed before him. Before he knew it, a leg suddenly flew toward his abdomen.

“The heck!”

The young man’s eyes nearly popped out from his sockets upon seeing the leg. Before he could even exclaim in shock, he was sent flying. Huge mouthfuls of blood spewed from his mouth.

He was on the verge of tears. Wasn’t this way too underhanded! Given how the other party looked as though he had put all of his strength into that palm, he could have never guessed that it was only a feint, and that the real threat was lying beneath!

After sending one flying, Zhang Xuan immediately stepped backward. His movement had allowed him to dodge the fist of another master teacher who was attempting to backstab him while his attention was preoccupied. Following which, he jerked his arm and struck the other party’s lower jaw.

Hu!

That master teacher immediately saw his vision darken before he flew into the air.

Peng peng peng peng!

After dealing with the two, Zhang Xuan treaded around the remaining six as though a phantom. It was as if he could foresee how his opponents would collaborate with one another and how they would attack. Every single time he launched an attack, someone would surely be sent flying.

“As I expected!”

As the group was being cleared one by one, the gleam in Zhang Xuan’s eyes gradually brightened.

When he instructed Hong shi on how he should deal with Luo shi and the others, he attempted to use the Library of Heaven’s Path to see their flaws. He thought there would be a total of three books compiled on Luo Zhao, Feng Yu, and Chen Yue respectively, but to his surprise, only one was formed.

Written in it was the flaws of the collaboration among the trio.

In other words, the Library of Heaven’s Path had viewed their collaboration as an entirety and evaluated the three of them as a whole.

Through exploiting the flaws written on the book, not only would one be able to interrupt one’s opponents’ momentum, one would also be able to predict one’s opponents’ movements and defeat them easily.

In other words, with this ability, it mattered not to Zhang Xuan how many opponents he had to face.

This was precisely the reason why he wanted to challenge all nine of them at once to test it out.

And the effects really didn’t let him down. Despite fighting eight opponents whose cultivation bases were significantly higher than his, he didn’t feel the slightest pressure at all.

“Un. I’ll exploit this flaw this time. Move left by three chi and launch a back kick...”

While Zhang Xuan's consciousness was immersed in the Library of Heaven's Path, his body was moving accordingly to exploit the flaws written on the books, thus dodging every single attack of his opponents and counterattacking at every possible opportunity.

After kicking another one flying, Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella stressfully.

"These fellows' collaboration is really poor. There are flaws here and there. Sigh, I'm finding hard to decide which flaw I should exploit from this huge list... How frustrating!"

The other party had only formed a team on the spot, so there were a lot of flaws in their collaboration. There were several hundred listed throughout the entire book. It was fortunate that Zhang Xuan didn't suffer from decidophobia or else he would surely faint from stress!

But even so, the huge range of possible flaws to exploit and counterattacks he could make still made him feel a little troubled.

Instead of getting tired from fighting, he was suffering due to the astounding number of ways to defeat his opponents. If his opponents were to learn of this, they would surely cry themselves to death.

"Forget it, I'll just point randomly at the flaws. Whichever I point on would be the one I'll exploit!"

Closing his eyes, Zhang Xuan randomly pointed at a part of the book, and the flaw he was pointing at immediately surfaced in his mind.

"Alright, this will be it!"

Having decided on the flaw to exploit, Zhang Xuan swiftly analyzed the way to best exploit it before diving into the crowd once more.

Peng peng peng peng!

Yet another scream of agony echoed in the hall.

...

In the royal palace located not too far away from the crown prince's Eastern Palace.

Emperor Ye Wentian was seated on his high throne.

Standing before him was a green-robed elder with snowy-white beard. He carried an exceptional aura that reflected both erudition and composure.

If Hong shi were here, he would surely be able to recognize the other party as his teacher, the pavilion master of the Huanyu Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, 5-star high-tier Master Teacher Wei Jiang!

“The Cleansing Lake will be opening tomorrow, I wonder how the matter regarding the distribution of the slots is going on!” Ye Wentian muttered with a frown.

It was Ye Qian's initiative to befriend the Sixth Princess and the others. As such, he decided to leave this entire matter for Ye Qian to handle. It had been awhile since the banquet had begun, so he began to wonder if the matter had been decided already or not.

“Your Majesty, there's no need to worry. His Highness has always been a composed and reliable person, not to mention, he's also a genius master teacher as well. A matter as small as this can't possibly trip him up!”

Wei Jiang smiled. “Besides, didn't you send someone to look into that matter? He should be coming back to report on the matter very soon.”

“You're right!” Ye Wentian smiled. “It might be my age catching up with me, I'm finding myself worrying over the smallest matters nowadays...”

Ye Wentian sighed deeply. At that moment, a guard suddenly walked into the room with a dumbstruck face.

“How is it? Is the matter regarding the distribution of slots confirmed yet?” Ye Wentian asked with a frown.

The guard hurriedly clasped his fist. “Reporting to Your Majesty, the matter has been settled...”

“Oh? How was it settled? Tell me about it!” Ye Wentian asked in curiosity.

“The matter regarding the slots to enter the Cleansing Lake was decided by a duel among the Four Great Vassal States,” the guard said.

“A duel? That is a wise decision. It would indeed be good to have the young geniuses from each Vassal State interact with one another...” Ye Wentian chuckled.

“That’s not it... it was not the young geniuses from the Vassal States who fought with one another but... Hong shi from Hongfeng Empire singlehandedly facing Luo shi, Feng shi, and Chen shi! Furthermore...”

At which, the guard suddenly paused for a short moment. It seemed as though he was still trying to convince himself that he wasn’t dreaming. “Hong shi managed to defeat all three of the pavilion masters... And thus, the three slots are to be contributed by Hongfeng, Qianfeng, and Zhuyue Empire!”

“You mean that... Hong Qian singlehandedly defeated Luo Zhao, Feng Yu, and Chen Yue?” Jiang Wei widened his eyes in disbelief. “Describe the duel to me in detail!”

“Yes!” The guard hurriedly recounted what he had seen previously.

“H-how can this be?” Hearing the other party’s recount of the story, Jiang Wei and Ye Wentian trembled in shock.

They were well aware of how strong Hong Qian was. To singlehandedly defeat three opponents of the same fighting prowess... How could that be possible?

After a moment of shock, Ye Wentian suddenly thought of something and asked, “Putting that aside, so the matter regarding the slots have been decided... Then what about the five Lake Eyes?”

As the emperor, he also knew that the allocation of the Lake Eyes was the crux of this matter.

“The young master teacher from Hongfeng Empire that I just spoke of, Zhang shi, fought against all nine young master

teachers from Fengyuan, Qianfeng, and Zhuyue simultaneously... and he emerged victorious. As such, Hongfeng Empire is now in possession of all of the Lake Eyes...” the guard said.

“He fought against nine master teachers simultaneously? Didn’t you just say that this Zhang shi only possesses a cultivation of Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle, and is the weakest among all of the master teachers there?”

Ye Wentian couldn’t help but exclaim. “Given that all nine opponents are stronger than him, how in the world did he fight? Did he use some kind of special means?”

A Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle fighting against nine Consonant Spirit realm experts? How could he possibly have won? How in the world did he fight against them? Did he use some kind of special trick?

“He... he...”

The guard swallowed his saliva, and a bizarre expression appeared on his face. “He fought with his eyes closed...”

634 Combat Master

Fought with his eyes closed?

Ye Wentian and Wei Jiang were stunned.

What kind of trickery was this? Could this be... some kind of secret art?

“That’s right! His eyes were closed, and he had a difficult expression on his face. It was as if his opponents were too weak, to such an extent that he was reluctant to lay his hands on them... and in a moment, all nine of his opponents were already lying on the floor...”

The guard recounted the sight that he had just seen a moment ago.

Ye Wentian and Wei Jiang stared at one another...

This was possible as well?

A Clarifying Turbidity realm fellow actually defeated nine Consonant Spirit realm with his eyes closed, and even felt troubled at his opponents being too weak for him...

The heck, are you sure you aren’t telling us a joke?

“It’s true...” The guard’s face flushed in agitation. He knew that no one would believe his story, but it was the absolute truth.

“To fight against a stronger opponent without any difficulty, could it be...” Jiang Wei narrowed his eyes.

“Has Wei shi thought of something?” Ye Wentian asked.

After a moment of hesitation, Wei Jiang slowly said, “Has Your Majesty ever heard of ‘Combat Master’?”

“Do you mean the sub-occupation of master teachers which specializes in fighting, combat master?” Ye Wentian asked.

“That’s right!”

Wei Jiang nodded his head. “While master teachers are known to be unrivaled among those of the same cultivation realm, their primary purpose is still to educate and nurture experts, thus strengthening the might of the human race. However... to fight against Otherworldly Demons and other forces that threaten the human race, we need a fighting force of the highest tier. As such, the sub-occupation combat master was born!

“Combat master is a branch of master teachers that specializes in combat. While they could be considered as master teachers as well, there’s a huge difference between them and a typical master teacher. For example, master teachers would require a fixed number of supporting occupations to be promoted to the next rank while combat masters have no such requirement—as long as they can pass a combat examination, they will be promoted to the next rank... Of course, the difficulty of the combat examination is staggering as well! Among ten thousand master teachers, it would be hard to tell if even a single one could pass such an examination. As such, most combat masters possess a unique constitution or special bloodlines that grant them innately superior fighting prowess...

“And given how this Zhang Shi was able to fight nine Consonant Spirit realm experts despite being at Clarifying Turbidity realm, could it be possible that... he possesses the talent to become a combat master?”

Wei Jiang’s eyes gleamed in excitement.

If the statistics of becoming a master teacher were one in ten thousand, the statistics of becoming a combat master would be one in ten thousand master teachers. Every single one of them could be said to be truly invincible in their tier, and they possessed the strength to challenge even those stronger than them.

Despite the millenniums of history behind Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, the number of master teachers who had been promoted to combat masters could be counted with one’s fingers.

If... a combat master could emerge from Huanyu Empire, the entire empire would prosper because of the individual.

“Now that you speak of it... it might really be possible!” Ye Wentian froze for a moment before his eyes slowly widened.

“Let’s hurry over to take a look. If it’s true, this is great news for our Huanyu Empire!”

Wei Jiang stood up and hurriedly walked over to the crown prince’s Eastern Palace.

Ye Wentian also quickly got up and hurried over.

...

Exhaling a deep breath, Zhang Xuan clapped his hands and shook his head.

At this moment, the nine master teachers from Fengyuan, Qianfeng, and Zhuyue were lying on the floor, moaning in pain.

Actually, without the Library of Heaven’s Path, given Zhang Xuan’s superior soul cultivation, the nine of them still wouldn’t be a match for him nevertheless. However, since the other party had flaws he could exploit, there was no reason for him not to do so.

“You all lost...”

Ignoring the injured group, Zhang Xuan turned his sights to Luo Zhao and the other pavilion masters and said, “Now, all five of the Lake Eyes belong to our Hongfeng Empire!”

“...” Luo Zhao, Feng Yu, and Chen Yue staggered. At this moment, they felt as though they were going mad.

Those were the top three in their respective Master Teacher Tournaments!

In order to raise their strength, they even bought a Consonant Spirit Pill for each of them... And yet, the nine of them couldn’t even rival a Clarifying Turbidity realm cultivator?

This should have been an easy win for them, and yet, they didn’t even manage to nick the other party’s clothes...

They thought that their alliance could allow them to push all of the bad things to Hongfeng Empire, but in the end, it simply left them without any Lake Eyes at all...

What the hell was this?

The more they thought about it, the more stifled they felt.

If only they had known earlier, they would have never created such a farce. If they had just gone down the conventional route, they would have at least gotten a Lake Eye!

Putting aside how their plan had failed utterly, every member of their team, be it the elderly or the young, were also thoroughly wounded on top of that. Their faces had swollen to almost double the size. How were they supposed to face the others like that?

After a long moment of silence, Ye Qian coughed and spoke up.

“Cough cough. Zhang shi, Luo shi and the others meant no harm. They only did these in hopes of obtaining the best for their juniors. No matter what, Hongfeng Empire is an ally of Huanyu Empire and the other Vassal States. Since there are five Lake Eyes and only three people in your group, why don’t you give the remaining two to them? This way, they can at least be accountable to their countrymen when they return.”

If three Vassal States that traveled all the way here were to return empty-handed without getting any of the slots, it would surely cause great discontent.

He wouldn’t be able to explain this farce to his father and Pavilion Master Wei either.

But... Hongfeng Empire did win all of the slots through fair means. All parties had agreed to it, so it was inappropriate for him to advise Zhang shi otherwise. As such, he felt extremely embarrassed.

“Give two Lake Eyes to them? That’s fine by us. However, the master teachers from the other empires are to share the Lake Eyes with each other as well so that our members can enjoy a Lake Eye each!” Knowing that he would be putting the crown

prince in a spot if he were to claim all of the Lake Eyes, Zhang Xuan nodded his head in agreement.

Since there were only three of them, three Lake Eyes were sufficient. Rather than letting the other two go to waste and potentially incurring the hostility of everyone else here, he might as well generously give them away.

“Thank you!” Not expecting the other party to be so agreeable to the matter, Ye Qian nodded his head in approval. He gestured for a guard to come over and instructed, “Bring me that Gold-scaled Armor!”

“Yes!”

The guard turned around and left, and not too long later, he brought a resplendent armor back.

“This is a Spirit intermediate-tier pinnacle armor crafted by the skin of a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Avalanche Gold-scaled Beast. In awe of Zhang Shi’s magnanimity, I would like to give this to you!”

Ye Qian waved his hand, and the guard immediately passed the armor over.

“This... How can I accept this?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony!”

Ye Qian waved his hands. “I will be embarrassed if you do not accept it!”

“Thank you, Your Highness!” Knowing that this was the compensation the other party was giving him for the two Lake Eyes, Zhang Xuan knew it would be inappropriate for him to turn it down. Thus, he nodded and placed the armor in his storage ring.

“Zhang Shi, you have my gratitude for giving the two Lake Eyes to us. Here are two Consonant Spirit Pills. I hope you can accept them as a token of goodwill!”

Luo Zhao also stepped forward and passed a jade bottle over.

Since even the crown prince had offered a gift as compensation, they couldn't possibly just sit still and accept the two Lake Eyes without any reciprocation.

The three Vassal States had bought a total of eleven Consonant Spirit Pills. After giving one each to their men, there were two remaining.

“Un!”

Grabbing the pills, Zhang Xuan casually put them in his storage ring.

Luo Zhao, Feng Yu, and Chen Yue had accepted the bet and lost fair and square. If the other party were to refuse to give them the Lake Eyes, there was nothing they could do.

Under such circumstances, it was indeed a great favor for them to be given two Lake Eyes. Taking two Consonant Spirit Pills from them in return was nothing much in comparison.

Besides, accepting the Consonant Spirit Pills also meant that the other party had already repaid their debt, so it was beneficial from the other three's point of view as well. As for Zhang Xuan, he had no interest in having them indebted to him either.

“Since the distribution of the slots and Lake Eyes have been determined, I hereby declare the start of the banquet. I hope that everyone can enjoy themselves tonight!”

Ye Qian gestured grandly, and beautiful court ladies immediately came in with many delicacies in hand.

This crown prince was indeed a man who knew how to enjoy himself. Every single dish in the banquet was worth a huge sum, and this entire feast could probably leave even the wealthy bankrupt.

“Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai, you should take these Consonant Spirit Pills. Consume them after we return from the banquet!”

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan passed the two Consonant Spirit Pills that he had just received from Luo Shi and the others to them.

While this pill could raise a Consonant Spirit realm expert's cultivation by a small realm unconditionally, this effect could be said to be negligible to him

As long as he could gather sufficient Consonant Spirit realm cultivation technique, achieving a breakthrough was not much different from eating and drinking to him. It would be a waste for him to consume it, so he might as well put it to better use.

“You're giving them to us?”

Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai were taken aback.

It was not like they didn't know how valuable the pill was. To think that the other party would be giving the two pills received to them, this...

“Un. Quickly raise your cultivation before entering the Cleansing Lake. Don't waste the slot that I've obtained for you all with great difficulty!” Zhang Xuan said calmly.

“Thank you, Zhang shi!”

The duo's eyes turned red, and they quickly bowed in gratitude.

While the others were scheming against one another to obtain the best resources for their cultivation, Zhang shi was generously offering such a valuable gift to them... and this gesture left them touched from the bottom of their hearts.

Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai was still thinking of pitting it out with the other party to see who was better in the Master Teacher Academy. Only now did they realize that they didn't just lose out to the other party in terms of cultivation, even their magnanimity was paling far in comparison to the other party.

If the thoughts of the duo were to be known by Luo shi and the others, they would surely burst into tears.

This fellow—magnanimous?

Magnanimous your head! Can't you see how badly we were done in?

Those slots and Lake Eyes should have been ours, and yet we still had to thank the other party humbly for them... You actually call such a despicable and shameless man magnanimous?

...

Outside the crown prince's Eastern Palace...

"Your Majesty, Wei shi!"

The two figures who walked over from the distance left the guards on duty leaping in shock.

"I'll inform His Highness right now to have him welcome Your Majesty and Wei shi..."

The two most authoritative men in Huanyu Empire had come to visit late at night abruptly, there was no one who wouldn't be scared out of their wits.

"There's no need for that, you should just continue remaining on duty. Wei shi and I are just going in to take a casual look!"

Ye Wentian waved his hands casually before walking in with Wei Jiang.

As the duo navigated through the Eastern Palace, Ye Wentian asked, "If... Zhang shi really possesses the talent to become a combat master, what should we do?"

"What else can we do? Of course, we should immediately report it to the Master Teacher Academy and have them groom him specially! This kind of talent is extremely important to the Master Teacher Pavilion. You should be aware of it as well!" Wei Jiang said with a grim expression.

"Un!" Ye Wentian nodded.

While he wasn't a master teacher, he did know a thing or two about combat masters.

Dubbed as the Emperors of Combat among the master teachers, if Zhang shi were to become an official combat master, his standing might immediately soar above that of the principal of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy!

“Just that... the conditions to becoming a combat master are extremely stringent, one has to go through many difficult tests to be qualified as one. How can we ensure that he’s really capable of becoming a combat master?”

Ye Wentian frowned.

There were many specific tests that a master teacher had to undergo before he could be officially accepted as a combat master. It was an extremely troublesome process.

“This... Let’s take a look first before deciding on anything...”
Wei Jiang hesitated for a moment before speaking. Halfway through his words, he suddenly heard footsteps ahead of him. Taking a closer look, he saw three figures just ahead of him.

Getting a clear glimpse at their appearance, Ye Wentian quickly rushed forward. “Ye Wentian pays respect to Sixth Princess! I see that Luo shi and Xing shi are here as well!”

They were no other than Sixth Princess Yu Fei-er, Luo Qiqi, and Xing Yuan, who were here for the banquet.

“So, it’s Emperor Wentian. I just happen to have something I need to talk to you about.”

Upon seeing that it was Ye Wentian, Princess Fei-er’s eyebrows shot up. “How in the world do you govern your Huanyu Empire? If you’re sick of your job, just give the word...”

635 Paying Respect to Zhang laoshi

“I...”

Ye Wentian leaped in shock at those words, and cold sweat immediately started trickling down his back.

He might be the emperor of Huanyu Empire, but before the other party, he dared not pull his weight.

Huanyu Empire was only one of the many Tier 2 Empires beneath Hongyuan Tier 1 Empire. If the other party really wanted to replace him with someone else, not even Wei Jiang would be able to help him.

“Pardon me, but may I know the reason behind Your Highness’s anger? I might not be talented, but I have worked hard in governing this country... If Your Highness thinks that I might have failed in certain aspects, I’ll definitely do my best to correct my flaws so as to not let down Hongyuan Empire’s trust in me...” Ye Wentian quickly said.

This Sixth Princess was still fine earlier this morning, why would she be chastising him all of the sudden?

“Humph, to think that there would be hooligans even within the capital...”

Recalling that shameless young man, Princess Fei-er gritted her teeth in anger.

To think that a princess like her would actually lose a bet and become the maid of another, this was truly the greatest humiliation she had ever suffered!

“Hooligan?” Ye Wentian was taken aback.

He thought that the other party was dissatisfied with his governance, but hooligan... what was with that?

What kind of hooligan could possibly provoke this princess like that?

“Indeed. It’s a young man in his twenties. Just from that shameless look on his face, one can tell that he’s no good person. I met him in the Mystical Treasure Hall!” Princess Fei-er said.

“Mystical Treasure Hall? Alright, I’ll send my men to look into the matter right now...”

Knowing that the other party’s dissatisfaction didn’t originate from a problem in his governance, Ye Wentian heaved a sigh of relief. He hurriedly clasped his fist and bowed. “When I find him, I’ll capture him and send him over to Sixth Princess so that you can deal with him as you deem fit!”

“Who wants to deal with him?”

Princess Fei-er stomped her feet in frustration. “Did I tell you to capture him?”

“I...”

Ye Wentian suddenly felt his head blowing up. He had no idea how to respond to the other party’s words.

He had long heard that Princess Fei-er had an eccentric personality, but to think that there would come a day that he would be subjected to it!

He was the emperor of Huanyu Empire, a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan pinnacle expert! To be chastised to his face as though a child, just the thought of him left him light-headed.

But even if someone were to inflate his guts, he would never dare to talk back to the other party.

Putting aside the other party’s identity as the Sixth Princess of Hongyuan Empire, just the fact that she was accepted as the direct disciple by the principal already made her a figure that few would dare to offend.

“What I? How can an emperor like you not know his own men?” Flinging her hands, Princess Fei-er harrumphed coldly.

“...” Ye Wentian looked as though he had eaten a bitter gourd.

Huanyu Capital extends for several hundred kilometers, and the population exceeds a hundred million... No matter how

formidable I am, I can't possibly know every last one of my citizens!

"Alright!" Seeing the situation turn awkward, Luo Qiqi stepped forward and smiled. "Emperor Wentian, Fei-er just has an eccentric personality, so you need not take this to heart! It's truly nothing much, so you need to worry about it!"

After which, she turned to the lady beside her and sent a telepathic message over. "Didn't you get Ye Qian to look into the matter already? When he finally uncovers that fellow, I'll help you get back at him for you and win you back..."

Princess Fei-er was already an adult, but she still retained some of her childishness. Sometimes, her behavior could really leave one at a loss as to cry or to be mad.

Losing a bet and becoming another's maid wasn't an honorable affair, so you shouldn't be going around telling others about it. Besides, it's your own personal matter, why are you venting your anger on Emperor Wentian instead?

"Alright!"

Hearing the promise from her best friend, Princess Fei-er felt her rage subsiding a little. Ignoring the emperor, she puffed up her chest and said, "Let's go to the banquet!"

"Un!"

Luo Qiqi and Xing Yuan hurried forward. Ye Wentian and Wei Jiang glanced at one another and shook their heads together. Afterward, they followed behind the trio to the banquet hall as well.

The Sixth Princess was famous for her eccentric personality. It was fortunate that his son, Ye Qian, didn't have any intention of courting her. Otherwise, he would probably suffer a great deal. Putting everything aside, Xing Yuan had pursued her for many years already, but he was still subjected to the rapid emotional changes of the latter.

...

As the group over here headed for the banquet hall, the guard at the entrance took a detour, rushed to the banquet hall, and

informed Ye Qian of this matter privately.

“Father and Wei shi are here? Sixth Princess, too? Why are they together?”

Taken aback, Ye Qian quickly stood up and announced, “Everyone, Sixth Princess, my father, and Wei shi will be arriving very soon, so let’s stand up to welcome them!”

“Sixth Princess is coming?”

“I didn’t expect Wei shi and His Majesty to be coming here too!”

Upon hearing that the Sixth Princess of Hongyuan Empire and the others were coming, everyone immediately stopped what they were doing and stood up.

Just like the others, Zhang Xuan also got to his feet and turned his gaze to the doors. At that moment, a few figures walked into the hall.

The one leading the way was a lady dressed in a purple dress which accentuated her beautiful figure. Paired with pale, smooth skin, her beauty was indescribable.

“She is the Sixth Princess?”

“How beautiful!”

“I think I’m falling in love with her, what should I do...”

“Falling in love with her? Why don’t you take a good look at yourself? With a face swollen like a pig’s head, I think you should pray that your appearance won’t disgust her instead!”

“Talk about yourself! Your nose is entirely crooked, you aren’t anywhere better than me...”

Upon seeing the beautiful lady, the eyes of the master teachers in the room suddenly glowed in excitement.

The Sixth Princess resembled a goddess who had stepped out of a painting, and her presence sent the blood of young men running.

Just that, with the exception of the crown prince and a few others, all of the young men in the banquet hall had been

beaten up badly by Zhang Xuan, and the sight of a group of disfigured men staring at one in agitation seemed more like a scene of horror instead.

“Sixth Young Mistress? Sixth Princess?”

Zhang Xuan was also taken aback.

He never thought that the Sixth Princess would actually be the Sixth Young Mistress whom he met at Mystical Treasure Hall.

It was no wonder why she could afford to take out several hundred middle-tier spirit stones in a single go...

On the other hand, as soon as the Sixth Princess and the others entered the banquet hall, they were immediately met with bruised and swollen faces, and this left them confounded.

Shouldn't a banquet involving master teachers be refined and dignified?

Why did all of them look as though they had come from a butchery instead then?

The swelling on their faces were so severe that their eyes could hardly open, and some of them even had an arm sling hanging before their chest... What was going on?

In fact, why were the 5-star master teachers in the room severely wounded as well?

“Sixth Princess, it's him...”

Just as Princess Fei-er was completely baffled by the scene before her, a voice suddenly sounded by her ear. Frowning, she traced the other party's finger, and the sight she saw immediately caused her to stagger.

It was the fellow who nearly angered her to death back at the Mystical Treasure Hall! He was actually here!

The other party was holding a wine glass in his hand casually, creating a leisurely atmosphere around him.

“Qiqi, it's that fellow...”

Gritting her teeth tightly, Princess Fei-er turned to point out her mortal enemy to her close friend, only to be stunned by the

sight before her once more.

The eyes of her cold and composed close friend were actually shining in agitation, as though they had caught sight of a treasure chest.

Princess Fei-er was stunned.

Could her close friend be fond of men who were beaten up?

“It’s him...”

Amidst her confusion, Luo Qiqi suddenly pointed her finger toward a young man.

“That... Qiqi, I know that he’s my enemy, but surely you need not... get so agitated!”

Upon realizing that it wasn’t due to some bizarre taste in men, Princess Fei-er became even more speechless.

I was the one who was forced to become the other party’s maid. The one who should be getting angry and agitated should be me, right? Then why are you getting so excited all of the sudden?

Perplexed, Princess Fei-er was just about to ask about the matter when her close friend suddenly started charging up to that hateful fellow.

“Qiqi, even if you want to teach him a lesson for my stead, you need to take note of the occasion...”

Princess Fei-er nearly fainted on the spot.

Qiqi has always been a reliable and dependable figure, why would she suddenly get agitated and act so recklessly?

There are so many master teachers in the room. If she were to teach the other party a lesson here, won’t the matter of me being the maid of the other party be exposed as well?

Just as Princess Fei-er was about to rush up to stop her, her close friend was already standing right before the hateful fellow. Following which, her close friend clasped her fist and bowed respectfully. “Student Qiqi pays respect to Zhang laoshi!”

“What?”

All of the words Princess Fei-er wanted to say suddenly jammed in her mouth, and her eyes widened in shock.

What is this situation?

Aren't you going to teach him a lesson in my stead?

Student... Zhang laoshi?

Could it be that... this hateful fellow is that... refined, magnanimous, intelligent, and awe-inspiring young talent you spoke of?

But he is a shameless hooligan, right? Why would he suddenly turn into such an impressive figure in your mouth?

What is with this situation?

Princess Fei-er's face twitched intensely, and she nearly burst into tears.

She was still thinking of having her close friend teach that fellow a lesson, but who knew that the latter would betray her as soon as the both of them met...

Where's your loyalty to your friend? Shouldn't you at least show some hesitation in your betrayal?

On the other hand, the others in the hall petrified instantly.

“The lady who's with Sixth Princess... should be Luo Qiqi Luo shi!”

“The famed ice beauty of the Master Teacher Academy is actually... Zhang shi's student?”

“What's going on?”

...

Luo Zhao and the others were aware of Luo Qiqi's nickname.

While the latter might be beautiful, she was known for being cold and distant... And yet, she was currently bowing excitedly before a person who was even younger than her, addressing him as teacher...

Did reality really need to be so exaggerated?

“ ... ”

Wu Zhen and Xing Yuan’s mouths twitched at that sight.

In terms of familiarity, they were relatively closer to Luo Qiqi than the others in the room, and they knew much more than about her as well.

Hongyuan Academy Apothecary School’s most talented genius, as well as a cultivator possessing a fighting prowess far above them, she was ranked in the top few amongst Grade 2 students, and her fame far exceeded the Sixth Princess in the academy.

For a proud phoenix like her to actually acknowledge Zhang shi as her teacher...

Are my eyes playing tricks on me, or are the both of them pulling our legs?

“Oh, Little Qi, it’s you! Why are you here?”

Zhang Xuan was taken aback to see Little Qi here.

Wasn’t this lass at the Apothecary Guild earlier?

But after giving it some thought, he suddenly came to a realization.

The fact she came from the headquarters of the local Apothecary Guild meant that she came from Hongyuan Tier 1 Empire... On top of that, given that she was a master teacher as well, it was highly likely that she was a group with the Sixth Princess and Wu Zhen. It was precisely due to these people that he had to fight over the Cleansing Lake slots that should have belonged to him in the first place.

“Little Qi?”

Dang lang!

The wine glass in Wu Zhen’s hand fell to the ground.

The Sixth Princess and Xing Yuan suddenly felt their legs turn weak, and they nearly fell to the ground.

Luo Qiqi nodded before hurriedly introducing her close friend to her teacher.

“I came here with my friends. Teacher, this is Hongyuan Empire’s Sixth Princess, Yu Fei-er!”

“Un, I’ve met her before!”

Zhang Xuan nodded. “I see, so your name is Yu Fei-er... What are you waiting for? Hurry up and pour me a cup of wine!”

“Zhang shi, you do know that she’s the Sixth Princess of Hongyuan Empire...” Hearing Zhang shi’s words, Ye Qian nearly fainted on the spot.

Ye Wentian also found his vision turning dark.

Even he dared not breathe loudly before the Sixth Princess. What is a 4-star master teacher like you acting so arrogantly for...

636 Silence Restrain

“You...”

Princess Fei-er nearly spurted a mouthful of fresh blood.

Pour you a cup of wine? Pour your head!

Didn't I redeem myself for ten days already?

I'm not your maid now, alright?

“I know!” Zhang Xuan nodded. “We've met previously, and we can be considered friends, right, Sixth princess?”

Glaring at Zhang Xuan with a look that exclaimed that she would strangle the other party if she could, Yu Fei-er clenched her teeth tightly and replied, “Of course!”

She had no other choice. By saying that she was his friend, the other party was already sparing her dignity. If the other party were to say that she was his maid, she would really die of shame.

“I'll pour it for you!”

Yu Fei-er stomped her way to the closest bottle and poured Zhang Xuan a bottle of wine while insulting the latter in her mind. If she could, she would really want to skin this hateful man alive.

But of course, she would never do that. She did lose the bet fair and square, and her master teacher emblem was the other party's hostage as well. She couldn't do anything even if she wanted to!

“Alright!”

Seeing the reluctance on the other party's face, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Back then, when we were having the bet, you tried to make me kneel before you! So what if you're a princess? This is just returning a little bit of the favor to you.

“Teacher... Fei-er is my good friend, so is it possible...”

Seeing that her good friend had turned so red that she might explode at any moment, Luo Qiqi didn't know whether she should laugh or cry at this situation.

She could never have expected that the rotten fellow her close friend wanted to strangle so badly would actually be her apothecary teacher.

She regarded the both of them highly, so she wished to resolve the conflict between them.

“She's your friend? Alright then, I'll give her ten days off...”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

On the other hand, Princess Fei-er thought that with her good friend intervening in her stead, the other party would drop the matter entirely. Who knew that it would only be ten days? Her face immediately flushed in anger, and she raged, “Qiqi, there's no need no need to plead with him. Isn't it just spirit stones? It's not like I don't have any...”

Zhang Xuan's eyes gleamed as he said, “It's good that you have spirit stones to repay me. Since that's the case, I believe there's no need for me to offer you any discount. The ten days off shall be voided!”

Ten days was equivalent to around 700 middle-tier spirit stones! If he could save it, he should definitely do it.

“You...”

Princess Fei-er nearly spurted blood on the spot.

“Teacher is just jesting with you, calm down...”

Seeing that her good friend was on the verge of collapsing from anger, Luo Qiqi shook her head and said, “Right, didn't you say that you want to learn pill forging from Zhang laoshi? He's right here...”

“Humph! I'd rather learn from a pig than from him!”

Princess Fei-er gritted her teeth.

“Alright then!”

Knowing that it was impossible to resolve the conflict between her good friend and Zhang laoshi at the moment, she could only try to pacify both of them in the future.

With the arrival of the guests, the banquet resumed.

However, with Emperor Ye Wentian and Wei shi in the room, as well as the Sixth Princess who could just erupt at any moment, the atmosphere grew visibly tenser, and the merry atmosphere from before dampened.

A while later, Luo Zhao and the others couldn't stand it any longer and bade their farewell.

Considering how their entire group was beaten up so badly, they had to return quickly and recuperate. Otherwise, considering how the Cleansing Lake was opening tomorrow, the two slots that they had might just go to waste!

“Your Highness, we'll be taking our leave as well!”

Seeing the others leave, Hong shi also stood up and clasped his fist.

“Wait a moment!”

Just as the group was about to leave, Wei Jiang stepped forward and approached them.

“Wei shi!”

When the group entered, Crown Prince Ye Qian had introduced the other party to be the pavilion master of the Huanyu Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, a 5-star high-tier master teacher. Not daring to pull his weight before such a figure, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and greeted him.

“Zhang shi, may I speak to you for a moment?”

Wei Jiang smiled.

“It's my pleasure to do so!”

Seeing that the other party wanted to talk to him privately, Zhang Xuan smiled in response.

Gesturing for Hong shi and the others to return to their living quarters first, Zhang Xuan followed behind Wei shi, and the

pair walked into a room.

“May I ask if... Zhang shi is a combat master?”

There was a formation set up in the room that prevented anyone from eavesdropping on the conversation inside.

“Combat master? What is that?”

Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

Combat master was a higher order secret of the Master Teacher Pavilion. As such, the books that Zhang Xuan had access to didn't have any details on them, so he wasn't too clear on what it was.

“Err... it's a sub-occupation of master teacher that specializes in combat...”

While explaining the matter regarding combat masters to the other party, Wei Jiang carefully examined the other party's expression.

Noting that the other party didn't seem to be putting on a front, he felt a little perplexed.

He did harbor some doubts that the other party was a combat master before—after all, how else could he possibly defeat nine cultivators with a cultivation higher than his?

He had seen the pitiful state of the master teachers the other party had beaten up. But while their faces were swollen, and it looked rather appalling on the surface, he could tell that the person who pummeled them went easy on them.

As long as they were to apply some medicine to their wounds, they would be as good as new in a day or two.

To be able to go easy while fighting nine master teachers with higher cultivation levels than him... how powerful must he be?

“There's such a branch of master teacher?”

Hearing that there was actually a sub-occupation known as combat master, Zhang Xuan was astonished.

He thought that all master teachers were responsible for imparting knowledge to the masses. To think that there would actually be a branch specializing in combat as well!

It did intrigue him how master teachers could drive away Otherworldly Demons when most of them were immobilized just by the killing intent of the latter.

What Wei shi said had addressed his doubts... the ones in charge of defending mankind weren't the average master teachers but a specialized group that possessed superior fighting prowess!

“Why would Pavilion Master Wei think that I'm a combat master?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

“I heard that you were able to easily defeat nine other people who possess higher cultivation than you...” Wei Jiang replied.

“I see!” Coming to a realization, Zhang Xuan shook his head. “I've only heard of this sub-occupation, so I can't possibly be one of their members!”

“Then... do you have a unique constitution?” Wei Jiang asked.

“The reason why I am able to defeat the nine of them is because I was able to see through the flaws in their battle techniques and exploit it against them,” Zhang Xuan replied. “It wasn't because of a unique constitution!”

Speaking of unique constitutions, he had three students who possessed them. Honestly speaking, he was a little envious of them.

“Alright then!”

Seeing the other party admitting that he wasn't a combat master and didn't possess a unique constitution, Wei Jiang was slightly disappointed.

If a combat master were to come from Huanyu Empire, it would surely strike its name across the entire world.

Unless awakened, a unique constitution was nearly undetectable. Not even a 5-star high-tier master teacher like him would be able to detect it.

The duo chatted a little longer, but the questions that Wei Jiang had were all adeptly sidestepped by Zhang Xuan.

The reason why Zhang Xuan was able to defeat multiple opponents far above his current cultivation was due to two reasons, the Library of Heaven's Path and Heaven's Path Divine Art, and his ability as a soul oracle.

But these two were secrets that mustn't be made known.

As such, despite Wei Jiang's questions, Zhang Xuan admitted to nothing at all.

A moment later, after realizing that it was impossible for him to gather any useful clues from Zhang Xuan, Wei Jiang could only clasp his fist and bid farewell.

"I've bothered Zhang shi!"

"Don't worry about it!"

Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly in response before walking away.

Not too long after Zhang Xuan left, the door to the room was opened, and Emperor Ye Wentian rushed in with an anxious look.

"How is it?"

"It's unlikely that he has a unique constitution, but... I'm not sure whether he's a combat master or not!" Wei Jiang shook his head.

"Not sure?" Ye Wentian was perplexed.

After a moment of contemplation, Wei Jiang said, "Un. To qualify as a combat master, one has to pass through multiple exams. Zhang shi might be able to defeat those with cultivations above him, but I feel that he's still rather lacking in comparison to a real combat master... Forget it, let's not think about it. I'll report this matter to Hongyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion and leave it to Pavilion Master Mo to make a judgement on this matter!"

With his current standing, he was indeed unqualified to make such judgement.

As such, he decided to simply report this matter and allow the headquarters to make a decision on it.

Ye Wentian pondered for a moment before nodding his head.

“Indeed, it would be best for this matter to be reported to the headquarters!”

Wei Jiang flicked his wrist, and an object that covered his entire palm appeared on his hand. He wrote his report on the object. Then, with a flash of light, the words written disappeared.

The effects of a Communication Token were similar to a Communication Wall, just smaller in scale, thus allowing one to carry it around easily.

Back then, Hong shi also made use of this object to send a message to Mo Gaoyuan.

Weng!

A few moments after the information was sent over to the other side, the Communication Token glowed once more.

“This...”

Seeing the words on the token, Wei Jiang’s eyes narrowed in disbelief.

“What did Pavilion Master Mo say?”

Seeing the bewildered expression of his old friend, Ye Wentian frowned.

“Look...”

Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, Wei Jiang passed the Communication Token over.

Ye Wentian lowered his head to look at the message written on the Communication Token, and he immediately froze in place as well.

There was only a single line of words written on the Communication Token.

‘For the matter regarding Zhang Xuan, do not discuss, ask, or speak of it!’

Hu!

Right after he looked at the words, the words on the Communication Token faded.

“A silence restraint... Could it be that Pavilion Master Mo is acquainted with Zhang shi?”

Ye Wentian narrowed his eyes in shock.

A silence restraint was usually a form of respect a lower ranked master teacher would show to a higher ranked master teacher. Given that Zhang shi was only at 4-star, why would Pavilion Master Mo issue such an order?

Could it be that... Pavilion Master Mo knew Zhang shi beforehand?

Otherwise, why would such a situation occur?

“He must have known the other party in advance. Otherwise, it would be impossible for him to give such a response so quickly...”

Wei Jiang nodded in agreement.

While Mo Gaoyuan did pay Myriad Kingdom Alliance a visit, he left right after paying Yang shi a visit. Other than Zhang Xuan, Hong shi, and a few other people, no one was aware of the matter.

Wei Jiang might be Hong shi’s teacher, but he wasn’t informed of this matter either.

“Then... What should we do?” Ye Wentian asked.

“Since Pavilion Master Mo has made such a decision, let’s not speak about it. In any case, Zhang shi is going to enter Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. If my memory serves me well, the academy has a Combat Master Selection once every five years. It should be starting very soon... If he does possess potential in that aspect, he will surely do well then!” Wei Jiang said.

Ye Wentian nodded his head and sighed.

“Combat Master Selection? Now that you speak of it, there is indeed such a matter... However, for an outsider to join the

ranks of the combat masters, he must be a half 5-star master teacher at minimum. Considering how Zhang Xuan is only at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle currently, who knows how long it would take for him to reach Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle!”

Wei Jiang nodded. “Regardless of when he can qualify as a combat master, since Pavilion Master Mo has already sent a silence restraint, let’s just remain silent and watch on!”

“You’re right!” Ye Wentian replied.

...

While the duo was having their discussion behind closed doors, Zhang Xuan found himself intercepted as soon as he left the crown prince’s Eastern Palace.

“Zhang shi, I would like to talk to you privately!”

A slender figure blocked his path.

“Sixth Princess?”

Upon realizing the other party’s identity, Zhang Xuan frowned.

It was the Sixth Princess whom he had taken as his maid. Why was she looking for him at such an ungodly hour?

“Un! This isn’t a convenient place, follow me!”

Princess Fei-er harrumphed before dashing off in one direction.

But a moment later, she realized that there was no movement behind her. Perplexed, she turned her head around and her body immediately shook in rage.

The young man didn’t follow behind her at all! The other party simply placed his hands into the pockets before walking in a completely different direction.

“You... Why didn’t you follow me?!” She hurriedly turned around and harrumphed angrily.

“I’m not interested in whatever you have to say!”

Zhang Xuan shrugged.

“You...”

Princess Fei-er’s breathing grew agitated, and yet again, she found herself on the verge of erupting.

637 Library of Yellow's Path

To think that despite her standing as a princess and her beautiful appearance, the other party would actually ignore her entirely and walk away. Could a person like him even be called a man?

“Fine, we’ll talk here then!”

Fearing that the other party would walk away once more, Princess Fei-er gritted her teeth and began talking telepathically. “I didn’t know of your aptitude in deciphering stone pillars and lost to you. On that, I’ve nothing much to say. I did lose the bet fair and square, and I’m willing to acknowledge them... However, I wish to propose another wager. Do you dare accept it?”

Given this fellow’s shameless face, how could she have ever expected for him to be a master teacher of such astounding capability?

She was willing to acknowledge her loss in the bet, but what angered her was the other party’s demand afterward.

If she didn’t rid herself of this ‘master-servant’ relationship soon, who knew when would this fellow suddenly go insane and command her to serve him wine or massage his legs?

Her pride as her princess would never allow her to do such things. If that was going to be the case, she might as well commit suicide this very instant.

“You still want to wager with me?”

Seeing how this lady refused to give up, even going to the extent of proposing another bet, Zhang Xuan stopped and turned to look at her with a peculiar expression. “As a maid, what rights do you have to propose a wager against me? Also, are you sure you have the capital to do so?”

“You...” Princess Fei-er glared at Zhang Xuan with eyes burning with rage.

If not for this fellow being a master teacher and winning a wager against her, she would have just smacked him to death.

“Alright, if you don’t have anything else, I’ll be taking my leave. It’s already late at night, and I’m exhausted. I don’t have the strength to be playing with you!”

Waving his hands casually, Zhang Xuan continued walking toward the living quarters of Hongfeng Empire. However, barely after taking two steps, a gust of air carrying a slight aroma suddenly blew behind him. The Sixth Princess had rushed forward and blocked his path yet again.

Due to her rage, her chest was expanding and contracting rapidly, seemingly intent on squeezing their way through her dress.

“Stop it right there!”

She waved her hands and zhenqi immediately gushed into the air, forming a wall.

“Just because I refused your bet, you decide to force me into it? Despite being a maid, you tried to lay your hands on your master. Don’t you have any basic etiquette?” Seeing the lass getting anxious, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly.

“I’ve paid you 700 spirit stones to redeem myself for ten days. At the moment, I’m not considered as your... maid!”

Harrumphing coldly, Princess Fei-er waved her hands. “If you provoke me any further, as your senior, surely it is within my rights to teach a junior a lesson!”

The top ten of the respective Master Teacher Tournaments were all given the opportunity to study at Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. As a Grade 2 student, Princess Fei-er could be considered as Zhang Xuan’s senior.

Going by this logic, it was indeed acceptable for her to teach Zhang Xuan a lesson.

After which, Princess Fei-er closed her hands, grabbing at the surrounding air.

She was simply too enraged at the fellow before her.

No matter what, she was determined to teach this fellow a lesson today so that he would know some manners!

Huala!

Through the might of a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm cultivator, the surrounding spiritual energy seemed to be drawn in by a bridge, forming a tight barrier that isolated the duo from the world.

She was clearly embarrassed at laying her hands on the other party after losing a bet. Thus, she sealed the space so that no one saw it.

“It’s indeed nothing much to teach one’s junior a lesson, but... are you sure you want to do this?”

Seeing the other party seal the space, Zhang Xuan glanced at her with a bizarre gaze.

It was just a moment ago that he pummeled a bunch of Consonant Spirit realm cultivators into shouting for their parents. This lady should be well aware that his true fighting prowess was far beyond Clarifying Turbidity realm. To intend to lay her hands on him before such uncertainty, she must be very confident in her strength!

“Stop spouting useless stuff! I’ll make sure you obediently have this bet with me!”

Harrumphing coldly, Princess Fei-er rushed up to Zhang Xuan and thrust a palm at him.

Huala!

Zhenqi gushed forth furiously from her palm and formed an intangible horizontal umbrella-like barrier, sealing all possible path of escape for Zhang Xuan. No matter where he tried to escape to, he would only crash into a wall of zhenqi.

Spirit high-tier battle technique, Seal of the Golden Umbrella!

Not only did this technique seal space, it also sealed a person’s zhenqi as well, thus limiting one’s mobility. On top of that, it was also tinged with the might of one’s soul, causing one’s opponent to feel immense lethargy.

It seemed she knew that even though her ‘junior’ may seem weak on the surface, his fighting prowess was astonishing. As such, she immediately executed her strongest attack at the very start of the battle.

“Hehe!”

Zhang Xuan’s soul had been tempered by his cultivation of the Heaven’s Path Soul Art. Even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert couldn’t faze his soul, so how could he possibly be afraid of the other party’s attack?

Swiftly flipping through the book compiled on the other party’s flaw in the Library of Heaven’s Path, Zhang Xuan shook his head and stomped his feet on the ground.

Huala!

Under the might of the stomp, a crack swiftly crept across the ground, causing Princess Fei-er’s to lose her balance. This caused the trajectory of her palm to shift slightly, thus creating an opening for Zhang Xuan to avoid her attack.

With a slight tilt of his body, Zhang Xuan dodged the other party’s palm. Following which, he clenched his fist tightly and immediately counterattacked with a punch.

While the other party was a Cosmos Bridge realm cultivator, she was still at primary stage. Given that the combined might of Zhang Xuan’s soul cultivation and zhenqi cultivation far surpassed the other party’s strength, it was hard to tell who would win at this point.

Not expecting the other party to deal with her Seal of the Golden Umbrella with just a simple stomp, Princess Fei-er was taken aback. But even so, she recovered quickly and swiftly returned the other party’s fist with another palm strike.

A head-to-head collision!

In her view, no matter how powerful the fellow before her was, he was only a Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle cultivator. As a Cosmos Bridge realm cultivator, she couldn’t possibly lose to the other party.

Peng!

The collision of the two fists jolted Zhang Xuan's body, and he was forced to retreat several steps to nullify the force. On the other hand, while Princess Fei-er managed to stand her ground, her face was filled with horror as though she had seen a ghost.

She had put her full might behind her battle technique, and she thought that the sheer force would inflict grievous injuries and send the other party flying several dozen meters. Who knew that he would be completely unscathed after taking several steps back...

Was he really at Clarifying Turbidity realm? Why did he seem no weaker than her, a Cosmos Bridge realm primary stage cultivator?

While she was overwhelmed with shock, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“Seems like it's time to upgrade my Heaven's Path Fist Art...”

His Heaven's Path Fist Art was flawless and invincible among those of the same tier... but its might was severely limited by the tier of fist art manuals that he collected.

While he could easily destroy a Spirit low-tier battle technique with his current tier of Heaven's Path First Art, it was hard for him to match up to a Spirit high-tier battle technique.

It was just like how even though a genius in a first grade could achieve full marks even in the hardest exams each time, he might not even pass an average seventh grade exam.

Heaven's Path battle techniques were indeed formidable, but they still had its limitations, especially against battle techniques of a far higher tier than it.

As such, despite his strength being superior to the other party, he was still forced back.

But even so, with this collision, he also got a good grasp on the other party's strength... and he could confidently say that it would be extremely difficult for the other party to defeat him as well.

“Humph!”

Seeing how her younger ‘junior’ was actually able to stand on equal grounds as her, Princess Fei-er harrumphed coldly and charged forward once more.

“This lass...”

The other party’s attacks gradually became faster and more forceful, but at the same time, more reckless as well, as though she had become desperate. Zhang Xuan shook his head. Aiming right at a flaw, Zhang Xuan raised his foot and kicked straight at the other party’s chest.

“You... Shameless!”

Seeing that the other party was going to attack her chest, Princess Fei-er cried in anger. She subconsciously cowered backward, causing the divergence in the attack she had just launched. Naturally, yet another flaw appeared with this mistake.

Hu!

Her palm which should have struck Zhang Xuan ended up striking thin air. Panicked, she quickly looked around, but the young man had already vanished from her sight.

“What? Where did he go?”

In the blink of an eye, the other party simply vanished from her sight. Taken aback, she quickly tried to look around when her eyes suddenly narrowed. She hurriedly turned around.

However, it was already too late. As the other party’s feet connected with her bottom, she felt a dull ache there.

Hu!

With a cry of pain, she flew twenty meters into the air before falling back to the ground. The impact from the fall had created some tears in her elegant clothes, and her face was covered in mud.

At this moment, rather than a princess, she seemed more like a beggar instead.

“You hooligan...” Princess Fei-er cried.

Carrying the royal bloodline, the others wouldn't even dare to defy her words, needless to say, disrespect her.

And yet, this fellow kicked her chest to push her away, and making use of the chance in the opening of her zhenqi barrier, he maneuvered to her back and kicked her bottom...

The heck!

Don't you know that a lady's chest and bottom are not to be hit?

And yet, you actually struck the both of them consecutively... How much more shameless can you get?

The stinging pain on her bottom left her both embarrassed and enraged. Pressing against the ground, she immediately got to her feet and charged forward in a rampage.

At this moment, her anger had already turned into frenzy.

But before she could reach the other party, the other party had sent yet another kick toward her.

Upon seeing where the kick was headed for, Princess Fei-er's lips twitched violently.

The trajectory and timing of the kick were precisely timed to seal off her attack. If she were to continue charging on, she would definitely crash into the other party's kick.

Furthermore... as well as most importantly of all, the region where the kick was headed for was once again... her chest!

"You thug!"

Gritting her teeth tightly, Princess Fei-er thrust her palm against the ground instead, and making use of the momentum, she leaped into the air. Just as she was considering how she should launch her next attack, she felt yet another stinging pain on her bottom.

"You..."

Hu!

Once again, she was sent flying and fed another mouthful of soil.

This time, she crashed much more heavily, and her clothes were torn even more badly. Her face and hair were completely covered with mud.

“Can’t you... fight fairly?”

Princess Fei-er was on the verge of tears.

As a man, you shouldn’t bully a lady like that! To kick two times consecutively on the bottom, how am I supposed to face others in the future?

Don’t you have the slightest morals or etiquette as a master teacher?

“If I were to say that I didn’t do it intentionally... would you believe me?”

While she was on the verge of tears, cold sweat was also flowing down Zhang Xuan’s back.

While he did possess strength superior to the other party, he was still at a significantly disadvantageous position due to his lower cultivation. Both his speed and reflexes were far beneath those of the other party. Thus, he had no choice but to move according to the flaws listed on the Library of Heaven’s Path...

But the attacking regions that the Library of Heaven’s Path reflected just had to be the other party’s chest and bottom...

Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly... Did he use the wrong library this time around? Could he have accidentally accessed the Library of Yellow’s Path instead?

“Fine... I’ll have a wager with you, alright?”

Frustrated, Zhang Xuan could only resign himself.

He was better off accepting the wager than continuing with the fight. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be long before the other party’s clothes were completely ripped and the stinging pain on her bottom prevented her from walking.

And if this were to be made known to others, he would die of embarrassment.

“Wager...”

Princess Fei-er's lips twitched as tears flowed down her cheek.

This is no longer a matter about having a wager or not,
alright...

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Seeing the two clear footprints on the lady's bottom, Zhang Xuan said awkwardly, "If we were to continue fighting, I fear that... you might sustain more severe injuries. Let's just forget about it! I'll wager with you whatever you have in your mind..."

He wouldn't be a match for the other party in a normal battle, but if he were to continue resorting to the Library of Heaven's Path, who knew what kind of awkwardness would evolve from it?

He already felt embarrassed kicking the other party twice on the bottom. Even if his skin was thick, he couldn't bring himself to do it anymore.

"Alright!"

While Princess Fei-er was so angry that she could tear out her hair at this very instant, she knew that she would be the one in a disadvantageous position should the fight continue. Thus, she took a deep breath and nodded.

But even so, the flames in her pitch-black eyes continued to blaze, seemingly searing the hateful man with her gaze.

"Since we're both heading to the Cleansing Lake tomorrow, let's have a wager on it!" Princess Fei-er said.

"That's fine by me. How do you want to do it?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"You should be aware that the Lake Eyes of the Cleansing Lake have a limited pool of spiritual energy. In truth, the three days limit given is only a rough estimation. Due to the differing cultivation speed of different cultivators, those entering the Cleansing Lake will be given a 'Spirit Cleansing Incense'!"

Princess Fei-er continued, saying, "The Spirit Cleansing Incense can detect the concentration of the spiritual energy in the Lake Eye, and it will burn down at differing rates

depending on the rate of depletion of spiritual energy. An average rate is one incense a day, so the three days estimate approximates to three incense sticks. Regardless of which Lake Eye one was in, once the three incense sticks burn out, one must leave its premises immediately.”

Given that there’s a fixed amount of spiritual energy in each Lake Eye and that every cultivator had a different rate of cultivation, the approximation of three days wouldn’t hold for everyone. As such, a more accurate way of detecting the depletion of spiritual energy in the Lake Eye was required so that the cultivators inside wouldn’t be exposed to danger—the Spirit Cleansing Incense.

These incenses would start burning immediately once they are put inside the Cleansing Lake, and based on the rate of depletion of spiritual energy in the Lake Eye, they could burn down at differing paces. Once three incense sticks had burned out, one had to leave immediately. This was a rule that had been set long ago, and no one was allowed to break it.

This had been explained back at the banquet, so Zhang Xuan knew about it too.

“So... our wager is very simple. Tomorrow afternoon, we’ll enter the Cleansing Lake at the same time, and whoever’s Spirit Cleansing Incense burns out first will be the winner!” Princess Fei-er said.

“Whoever’s Spirit Cleansing Incense burns out first will be the winner?” Not expecting this to be the wager, Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

The rate at which the Spirit Cleansing Incense burned down was proportionate to the rate of one’s absorption of the spiritual energy the Lake Eye. And to absorb the spiritual energy from the Lake Eye swiftly, a strong soul was required.

To put it simply... the stronger one’s soul was, the faster one’s Spirit Cleansing Incense would burn.

As a Cosmos Bridge realm expert, the other party’s soul had undergone the nourishment in the Consonant Spirit realm. Clearly, the other party was taking advantage of Zhang Xuan

for possessing a cultivation of only Clarifying Turbidity realm and thus having a weaker soul than her...

Just that... She would have never imagined that she was gravely mistaken. Not only was his soul not weak, it was far stronger than hers!

Having cultivated the Heaven's Path Soul Art, his soul could already operate independently from his body. In a battle of absorption of spiritual energy from the Cleansing Lake, not even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert would be a match for him.

"Are you certain you want to wager on this?"

Zhang Xuan looked at her with pity.

With such a wager, she was destined to lose.

"Indeed! Why? You were still so gleeful a moment ago, are you chickening out now?" Princess Fei-er spoke confidently.

"This..." Zhang Xuan scratched his head. "Fine, let's talk about the bets then!"

"Simple. If I win, I'll no longer be your maid anymore, and I won't owe you any spirit stones either! On the other hand, if you win... I'll pay you another ten thousand spirit stones... or remain your maid for another five months. How about it?" Princess Fei-er said.

"Remain my maid for another five months? There's no need for that..."

Zhang Xuan shook his head without any hesitation.

Honestly, he didn't need a maid at all, needless to say, he definitely didn't need a proud princess like the other party. Back then, he had only raised the matter to get even with the other party. In terms of practicality, spirit stones were definitely far superior.

Hearing the other party shooting down her offer, Princess Fei-er gritted her teeth in anger.

"What else do you want? Do you expect me to marry you?"

"Marry me?" Zhang Xuan was stunned. "You wish!"

“You...”

Princess Fei-er grabbed her hair in a frenzy.

There were countless master teachers in the Master Teacher Academy who were dying to win her fancy, and yet this fellow actually scorned at the thought of being married to her... Who do you think you are?

“I don’t need you to become my maid for another five months, just give me ten thousand spirit stones if you lose!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

“Fine, that’s a deal...”

With clenched jaws, Princess Fei-er stomped away.

She really couldn’t stand talking to this fellow for a second longer. She feared that she might just suffer a heart attack on the spot and die.

Sneaking through the premises, she managed to reach her living quarters without being seen when Luo Qiqi suddenly walked up to her. Upon seeing her unkempt state, the other party was dumbfounded. “What happened?”

At the current moment, Princess Fei-er’s clothes were ripped at several parts, revealing her snowy skin. Her hair and face had clumps of mud sticking onto it, as though she had been rolling on the ground. She looked extremely scruffy at this current moment.

“It’s nothing much... I suffered some injuries, so I might need you to apply some recovery medicine to me later on!” Princess Fei-er said.

She lost a bet fair and square, and yet she went to confront the other party and even attacked him... It would still be fine if she succeeded, but she ended up being beaten up instead. Even her bottom had swollen up due to being kicked...

She would rather die than tell anyone of this shameful affair!

“You’re injured?” Luo Qiqi frowned. “Who did it?”

“I said that I’m fine! Just apply the medicine for me...”

Princess Fei-er’s face flushed.

“Alright.”

Seeing that the other party was unwilling to talk about it, Luo Qiqi didn't push on either. “If it's superficial wounds, I happen to have a bottle of ‘Bloodwillow Balm’ forged by Dean Lu of the Apothecary School. It is exceptionally effective on external wounds, so it should get you healed up for tomorrow's Cleansing Lake!”

“There's no need for that, Wu Zhen just gave up a bottle of Saint recovery medicine. He said that it can heal any external wound, no matter how severe, within moments... Help me apply some!”

Princess Fei-er flicked her wrist and took out a wine gourd.

While she was a little embarrassed to have the other party apply the medicinal wine on her, especially on her bottom, it was much better than suffering and limping around.

“Saint recovery medicine?”

Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

“Un. It's said to be a gift from one of the Vassal States. They tested it out on the spot and it was shown to be extremely effective. Even a bleeding wound can be healed instantly with it!” Princess Fei-er said. “He insisted that I should accept it. Let's see whether it lives up to the rumors then!”

“There's actually such a formidable medicine?” Luo Qiqi commented in awe as she entered the room with Princess Fei-er.

But not too long later, a shout of agony reminiscent of a pig being butchered echoed out of their room. Following which, Princess Fei-er's furious howl echoed across the entire mansion.

“AHHH... WU ZHEN, TO HELL WITH YOU!”

With a doubtful expression, Wu Zhen looked out from his door.

“Who called for me?”

...

After parting with Princess Fei-er, Zhang Xuan returned to his own room.

He took out the Glacier Rain Sword and had it acknowledge him as its master. Giving the sword a try, he found it to be very handy.

After which, he put the sword away, sat down, and began conditioning his body to recuperate from the immense exertion from the previous two battles a moment ago. But soon, perhaps it was the exhaustion from flying for more than a month catching up with him, he soon fell into a deep sleep.

When he finally opened his eyes once more, it was already daylight. As soon as he walked out from his room, Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai immediately walked up to him with an agitated expression which reflected both excitement and gratitude.

After returning back to their rooms last night, they immediately consumed the Consonant Spirit Pill given to them and successfully achieved a breakthrough to Consonant Spirit realm intermediate stage.

While it was only one small cultivation realm, their souls had become much stronger, and their zhenqi had grown denser as well.

And all of this was thanks to the young man before them.

After eating breakfast, Hong shi walked over and said, "Let's go to the royal palace. The Cleansing Lake is opening today, so we'll have to hurry!"

Hongfeng Empire had performed exceptionally in deciding the distribution of slots this time around, crushing the other three Vassal States. This had left him excited and motivated.

The royal palace was much grander and larger than the crown prince's Eastern Palace. Its resplendent design carried a strong hint of authority which brought out a solemn atmosphere in the area. Those who entered would find a pressure pressing down against them, inducing deference in them.

Under the lead of two eunuchs, they walked into the main hall of the royal palace. Luo Zhao, Feng Yu, and the others had

already arrived at this point.

After a night of recuperation, everyone seemed to look much better. However, if one were to take a closer look, the swelling and wounds were still visible.

While one's physical body would grow stronger along with the rise in one's cultivation, one's recovery ability would slow in contrast.

While they did possess precious recovery medicine, its effectiveness pale far in comparison to Zhang Xuan's zhenqi, which could heal any wounds instantaneously.

"Hmm? What's with that fellow?"

It wasn't surprising to see injuries on them, but there was one who did leave Zhang Xuan a little taken aback.

For some reason, Wu Zhen, who had sat beside the crown prince last night and accepted everyone's gifts, had a black eye on his face. There were distinct hints of swelling which indicated that he had suffered a vicious beating by someone last night.

Given that he was a talented student of the Master Teacher Academy, a figure whom even Emperor Ye Wentian and Crown Prince Ye Qian had to regard with the utmost respect, who would dare to lay their hands on him, not to mention, reduce him to such a tragic state?

Zhang Xuan wasn't the only one who was surprised by the turn of events. Perplexed gazes from the others in the main hall would fall on him from time to time as well.

At that moment, Wu Zhen noticed Zhang Xuan and stomped over angrily.

"Zhang shi... I have something I would like to ask you!"

"Paying respect to Wu shi!"

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist.

"Don't give me this nonsense. Tell me, what's wrong with this medicinal wine?" Flicking his wrist, Wu shi took out the wine gourd angrily.

While this fellow claimed that this was a gift from Hong shi, he could tell that Zhang shi was surely involved in this matter.

“This medicinal wine?”

Zhang Xuan froze for a moment before coming to a realization. “You used it?”

This ‘medicinal wine’ was in fact just plain white wine. The only reason why it could heal injuries previously was due to him infusing his zhenqi in. But as time passed, the zhenqi would slowly dissipate, and thus, the healing property would gradually fade.

It seemed like this fellow had used it and it was ineffective.

“I wasn’t the one who used it... but it’s completely ineffective!”

The more Wu Zhen thought about it, the angrier he felt.

When he heard the Sixth Princess calling for him yesterday, he excitedly ran over, thinking that the other party wanted to reward him for giving her the medicinal wine. Who knew that he would only be viciously beaten up instead? Only then did he realize that the medicinal wine was completely ineffective.

The more he thought about this matter, the more furious he felt. Thus, he stomped straight up to Zhang Xuan as soon as he saw him.

“How could it be ineffective? Let me take a look. Alright, since your face is injured, why don’t you give it a try?”

How could Zhang Xuan possibly admit to it, especially given how angry the other party was? Thus, grabbing hold of the medicinal wine, he shook it and infused a surge of zhenqi into it.

“Give it a try?” Wu Zhen thought that the other party would surely tremble in fear upon being confronted, but seeing the calmness on the other party’s face, he frowned.

“Un, here...”

Passing the medicinal gourd over, Zhang Xuan said. “Since you doubt its effectiveness, you should try drinking it!”

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“Drink it?” Wu Zhen was taken aback. “Shouldn’t this medicinal wine of yours be applied externally?”

Last night, when Bi shi’s arm was stabbed by a dagger, his injuries healed just by applying the medicinal wine externally. Since that was the case, why was he so special that he needed to consume the medicinal wine then?

“Depending on the type of injury, one needs to either apply it externally or consume it. If one chooses the wrong method, not only will it be ineffective, it might even worsen the injury!” Zhang Xuan casually explained.

Since there wasn’t much ‘medicinal wine’ left in the gourd, Zhang Xuan decided to push on with the story. In any case, by the time the other party realized that something was wrong, the medicinal wine would have already finished, so any investigation done was bound to end inconclusive.

“There’s such a matter?” Wu Zhen was in disbelief.

“You did see me use the medicinal wine last night, and it was extremely effective... The only plausible explanation to its ineffectiveness is that you must have used it wrongly!” Zhang Xuan said without the slightest hint of embarrassment on his face. “Like you said, you weren’t the one using it. Most probably, the person who used the medicinal wine must have been confused between the two, resulting in the ineffectiveness of the medicinal wine!”

“Is that the case?” Wu Zhen was still slightly doubtful.

“Please, take a sip!” Zhang Xuan smiled.

“Alright then. If it proves to be ineffective, just wait and see how I take care of you!”

Harrumphing coldly, Wu Zhen picked up the wine gourd and took a sip.

As soon as the wine flowed down his throat, he immediately felt a warm surge of energy flowing through his bloodstream across his entire body. A moment later, the aching and swelling disappeared without a trace.

“This...”

Wu Zhen’s eyes widened in disbelief.

Only upon trying it personally did he realize how incredible this Saint recovery medicine was.

He was beaten up to a pathetic state last night, and he had tried applying the medicinal wine to his injuries, but it was completely ineffective. In the end, he had to use his own recovery medicine, but due to its limited effectiveness, he wasn’t able to make a full recovery. As such, here he was in the royal palace with a swollen eye.

Thus, he thought that Zhang Shi’s Saint recovery medicine was a fake, but who knew that it would possess such astounding healing ability?

Within moments of consuming the Saint recovery medicine, his injuries disappeared instantly... This was too incredible!

“I wasn’t lying, see?”

Seeing that the other party’s injuries had healed, Zhang Xuan nodded his head. “Without a doubt, the other party must have used the medicinal wine incorrectly. Why don’t you ask them where they are injured, I’ll help you analyze whether they should apply the medicinal wine externally or consume it.”

“Alright!” After a moment of hesitation, Wu Zhen nodded.

His credibility was at stake here. No matter what, he had to clarify the matter, or else he might just end up being labeled as a ‘fraudster’ for his entire life.

With the medicinal wine in hand, Wu Zhen immediately walked over to the Sixth Princess and clasped his fist.

“Sixth Princess, you’ve blamed me wrongly. It’s not that this medicinal wine was ineffective but that you’ve used it in the wrong manner!”

After receiving Zhang shi's reassurance, Wu Zhen was filled with confidence.

"Used it wrong?" The Sixth Princess had seen this fellow talking with Zhang shi privately, and she frowned upon hearing those words.

"Indeed. You just have to show me where you're injured, and I'll immediately tell you whether you should apply it externally or consume it. I guarantee that you'll heal in an instant!"

Wu Zhen tilted his head up proudly, glad that he would be winning back his credibility.

"Where I am injured? And I have to show you at that?"

The Sixth Princess's face immediately turned scarlet in embarrassment.

The heck, are you doing it on purpose?

My injuries were caused by Zhang shi, and after chatting with him, you came over here and asked me to give you a look at my injuries...

In other words, you're saying that you want to look at my... bottom?

"That's right. As long as I know the region and severity of your injury, I'll be able to confirm for you whether you should apply the medicinal wine externally or consume it. You must have used it the wrong way yesterday for it to be ineffective..."

Wu Zhen chuckled as he explained the matter to let the other party know that she had blamed him wrongly for the matter yesterday. However, halfway through his words, his sight suddenly turned dark. A slap was flying straight toward him.

Pah!

The slap caused a crisp echo in the main hall. Wu Zhen spun twice on the spot before regaining his balance. He was completely dumbfounded by the situation before him.

“You want to take a look? Why don’t I send you to meet your maker...”

With a livid face, Sixth Princess sent a kick straight toward the fellow before her.

Peng!

Before Wu Zhen could process what was going on, he was already struck in the abdomen and was sent crashing onto the ground.

“Sixth Princess, why did you hit me? What did I do...” Wu Zhen cried.

He had given the valuable medicinal wine, which he couldn’t even bear to use, to the other party out of goodwill, thinking that he could win the other party’s fancy with this. In the end, he only ended up being beaten up. After clarifying the reason and testing it out himself, he came over to redeem himself, only to be pummeled once more...

Can anyone tell me what is going on?

How in the world did my kind gesture end up like that?

Wu Zhen crawled up to his feet, only to see the Sixth Princess rushing forward angrily to continue beating him up. Frightened, Wu Zhen hurriedly plead for help.

“Qiqi, please help me talk to Sixth Princess...”

“To dare to tease even Sixth Princess, you deserve it!” Luo Qiqi harrumphed.

She had heard the previous conversation as well. The fellow before her actually asked to look at the Sixth Princess’s bottom! Even if he were to be executed on the spot, he would still be getting off lightly.

“Wu Zhen, how dare you tease Sixth Princess! You’re courting death!”

At this moment, Xing Yuan also finally realized what Wu Zhen was up to, and he immediately rubbed his palms, preparing to give the latter the beating of his life.

He was the most loyal fan of the Sixth Princess, and he had followed her everywhere... To dare to tease the Sixth Princess before my eyes, you must be thinking that I'm invisible!

"..." Wu Zhen burst into tears.

I... really intended nothing more than goodwill...

"This..."

Seeing that Wu Zhen was pummeled viciously, Zhang Xuan scratched his head in bewilderment.

As expected of the geniuses of the Master Teacher Academy, their thoughts truly couldn't be interpreted using common sense.

...

"Cough cough! Since everyone is here, let's head to the Cleansing Lake!"

Eventually, Emperor Ye Wentian couldn't watch on any longer so he interjected in the fight among the few geniuses.

"Let's go!"

Knowing that it was no longer early, everyone hurriedly followed him to the Cleansing Lake.

The Cleansing Lake wasn't in the royal palace nor within the boundaries of Huanyu Capital. Instead, it was located in the intersection between Verdant Mountain and Dragon-scaled River a distance away from the capital. The location was heavily guarded by the personal guards of the royal family.

The group rode on the aerial beasts prepared for them, and after half an hour of flight, a land filled with spiritual energy appeared before their sight.

The Verdant Mountain resembled an immense dragon lying on the ground whereas the Dragon-scaled River was reminiscent of a river of stars embedded on the ground.

Poets had once described this scenery as 'a dragon sipping from the winding river of stars'.

It was apparent that this land was a natural Spirit Gathering Formation with just a single look. Furthermore, under the suppression of the majestic aura of a dragon, the spiritual energy in the surroundings was gentle and nourishing to the soul.

“Incredible!”

With just a glance, Zhang Xuan’s eyes immediately lit up.

It was no wonder why this could become the foundation of a Tier 2 Empire. The Cleansing Lake was indeed formidable.

It was far superior to the Spirit Gather Formation that he made.

The spirit beast gradually descended to the ground.

“The Cleansing Lake is up ahead. Before entering, I’ll give everyone a Spirit Cleansing Incense as per the slots and duration agreed on previously!” Ye Wentian instructed.

As he said so, a guard walked over with thirty Spirit Cleansing Incense in hand.

The Spirit Cleansing Incense was made of a material very different from ordinary incense. From afar, it looked like it was made of some kind of metal. It could float on water, and it would begin burning upon coming into contact with the Cleansing Lake.

As the Hongfeng Empire had three Lake Eyes to themselves, they were given nine Spirit Cleansing Incense, and of which, Zhang Xuan took three.

Since one could only remain in a Lake Eye for three days, three incense sticks were sufficient for him.

By the time the Spirit Cleansing Incense was distributed, it was almost afternoon.

Seeing that the Cleansing Lake was just about to be opened, Zhang Xuan followed behind Ye Qian to the Lake Eyes when someone suddenly called out to him from behind.

“Zhang shi, I need to talk to you!”

Turning around, he saw Xing Yuan right behind him.

It was Wu Zhen a moment ago, and now it was this fellow.
What were they up to?

But even so, seeing the anxious look on the other party's face, Zhang Xuan decided to listen to what he had to say.

Thus, the duo moved to a corner beyond the sight of the others.

After which, Xing Yuan jumped straight to the point. "I know that you've made a wager with Sixth Princess!"

"Yes!" Zhang Xuan didn't deny the matter.

The first time they made a bet at the Mystical Treasure Hall, this fellow was right there, and the other party personally saw his beloved Sixth Princess turning into his maid.

"I want you to lose, and make sure that Sixth Princess doesn't notice it!" Xing Yuan said.

"Admit defeat?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

He was wondering what favor the other party was going to ask of him, but to think that it would be for him to admit defeat.

"Indeed. As long as you admit defeat, I'll accede to any request you have!"

Xing Yuan harrumphed.

"Any request I have?" Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Xing Yuan nodded.

"That's right!"

"Alright. I'm sure you know that ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones are at stake in my wager with Sixth Princess. Since that's the wager... if you can give me two high-tier spirit stones to compensate my loss, I don't mind admitting my defeat!" Zhang Xuan said calmly.

The Sixth Princess owed him ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones from the very start, and the bet at stake also involved another ten thousand. As such, that added up to twenty thousand, which was equivalent to two high-tier spirit stones.

He could easily control the speed at which he could absorb the spiritual energy in the Cleansing Lake. If he could earn two high-tier spirit stones from this matter, it would be a huge profit.

While a high-tier spirit stone was theoretically worth ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones, there were very few who would be willing to trade a high-tier spirit stone. As such, even if Zhang Xuan were to obtain twenty thousand middle-tier spirit stones, chances were that he wouldn't be able to get two high-tier spirit stones in exchange for it.

“Two high-tier spirit stone?”

Xing Yuan's lips twitched.

Even with his background, it wouldn't be easy for him to produce two high-tier spirit stones for a bet.

“Since you're unwilling to accept my offer, forget it then... In any case, if Sixth Princess loses, she will have to compensate me a total of twenty thousand middle-tier spirit stones anyway...” Zhang Xuan said.

Even though twenty thousand middle-tier spirit stones couldn't compare to two high-tier spirit stone, at the very least, he wouldn't be making a loss.

“Fine, I'll agree to your request!”

Xing Yuan gritted his teeth. “As long as you do as you've promised, I'll give you two high-tier spirit stones when we return to the academy. However... as promised, you mustn't reveal this matter to anyone!”

“Deal!”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

To earn two high-tier spirit stones with less than three days of effort, this deal was highly beneficial to Zhang Xuan.

On top of that, he could also avoid offending Xing Yuan while placating the Sixth Princess.

Just as the duo was done negotiating, a violent rumbling sounded, and dense spiritual energy suddenly gushed into the

surroundings. It was as if a massive Spirit Gathering Formation had just come to life.

“Look!” someone amidst the crowd suddenly exclaimed.

Everyone turned their gazes over and saw a pillar of concentrated spiritual energy bursting into the heavens. A refreshing gust of wind infused densely with spiritual energy blew at the crowd. With just a slight inhalation, one could feel one’s soul trembling with excitement, as though the road to achieving a breakthrough was within their reach.

At the empty grounds in the distance, a massive lake slowly surfaced. Spiritual energy currents reminiscent of massive dragons roared furiously in it, as though they were going to soar into the heavens at any moment.

Ten depressions of similar sizes could be seen around the lake. They were all of a radius of two meters, and they sat silently as though massive gemstones embedded on top of a tiara.

“The Cleansing Lake... is open!”

Upon seeing this sight, everyone clenched their fists tightly.

640 Cheating?

The main purpose of visiting Huanyu Empire was for the Cleansing Lake. After such a long wait, under everyone's expectant gazes, the Cleansing Lake finally opened.

“Let's go over!”

Without wasting any time, Zhang Xuan and Xing Yuan hurried over to the crowd.

Seeing the raging currents within the Cleansing Lake, everyone immediately realized that Ye Qian wasn't over-exaggerating at all.

The massive waves within the lake did emanate concentrated spiritual energy, but the energy flowing within it was also frightening in itself. Anyone who dares to enter it recklessly would surely be crushed into bits.

“Look!”

Amidst everyone's astonished gaze, Ye Wentian flicked his wrist, took out a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon, and threw it into the lake.

Kacha!

In the blink of an eye, the weapon which even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert would find difficult to destroy melted into a mass of liquid, which then sank to the bottom of the lake.

“This...”

Everyone's faces twitched in fear.

Even though their physical resilience was far above ordinary humans, how could they possibly compare to a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon? If even such a tough weapon was reduced to a puddle in the lake instantaneously, they could already see themselves turning to dust should they enter it.

It was no wonder Crown Prince Ye Qian said that even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert wouldn't survive in the

Cleansing Lake. Those words indeed rang true.

Ye Wentian wrapped it up with a warning.

“Given how violent the lake water is, I suggest everyone to cultivate calmly within the Lake Eye and not to venture beyond it. Otherwise, even a deity wouldn’t be able to save you!”

“Don’t worry, we won’t get reckless!”

“We cultivate to grow stronger, not to die. Your Majesty need not worry about this matter!”

“That’s too scary! There’s no way we’ll take such a risk...”

...

Everyone hurriedly shook their heads.

Given even a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon was reduced into a puddle in an instant, who would possibly dare to venture into that fearsome lake?

“Alright. Everyone, pick a Lake Eye. The ten Lake Eyes possess equivalent effectiveness, so there’s no need to worry. If it’s preferable, those from the same Vassal State can choose to remain together in order to look after one another...”

Ye Wentian waved his hands and said no more.

Since the ten Lake Eyes had the same effectiveness, there was no difference between picking one over the other.

Zhang Xuan scanned the Lake Eyes for a moment before walking over to a cluster of Lake Eyes closest to the lake with Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai.

The furthest Lake Eyes in the Cleansing Lake were shrouded with thick mist produced by the concentrated spiritual energy in the region. Even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert would find it hard to see through the mist. Zhang Xuan had specifically picked this region so that no one would be able to see him as he cultivated, especially since he intended to keep the Heaven’s Path cultivation techniques a secret.

“Let’s cultivate here!”

After finding the region where the spiritual energy and mist were the thickest, Zhang Xuan stopped and turned around to instruct Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai. “You two should cultivate at these two Lake Eyes. This way, if anything happens, we can help one another!”

“Alright!”

The duo nodded, and just as they were about to enter with the Spirit Cleansing Incense in their hands, they heard a shout.

“The two of you, pick another Lake Eye!”

Turning around, Zhang Xuan saw Princess Fei-er and Luo Qiqi walking over.

“We...”

Seeing that a princess was actually vying for their spot, Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai were stumped.

“The two of you should take the Lake Eyes over there. We hope to get a position closer to teacher!” Luo Qiqi said.

“That... Yes!”

Given that this was an order from Princess Fei-er and Luo Qiqi, they dared not talk back. Thus, they quickly rushed over to the other Lake Eyes.

In any case, since the Lake Eyes were all equal, it didn't matter where they were cultivating.

Noticing Zhang Xuan's gaze on her, Princess Fei-er harrumphed.

“Humph, you need not think too highly of yourself. Since we have a wager on, I want to check if you are cheating!”

“Think too highly of myself? I say you're thinking too much.”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “I'm just trying to see which nerves of yours have turned psychotic...”

“You...”

Princess Fei-er clenched her jaws angrily. “You won't stay gleeful for long. Your sharp words won't help you in the Cleansing Lake!”

Flinging her sleeves, Princess Fei-er leaped into the Lake Eye without any hesitation.

The Spirit Cleansing Incense that she was holding immediately floated to the water surface and lit up. A wisp of smoke began drifting into the air.

Hu hu hu!

Closing her eyes, Princess Fei-er began to cultivate. The spiritual energy in the Lake Eye seemed to flow faster and faster into her with each breath. At the same time, the smoke drifting from the Spirit Cleansing Incense thickened as it started to burn down even more swiftly.

Seeing how this lass dived straight into cultivating just to defeat him, Zhang Xuan shook his head and jumped into a Lake Eye himself.

Luo Qiqi also jumped into a Lake Eye, picking one that would flank Zhang Xuan between her and Princess Fei-er.

While Zhang laoshi was her apothecary teacher, it hadn't been long since the both of them met, so they were naturally not close enough for her to be coming over to cultivate with him. The only reason why she came here was to prevent a fight between her good friend and her teacher.

Princess Fei-er was obstinate, proud, and hated losing. If the two of them were to be left alone, who knew what would happen? As such, Luo Qiqi decided to tag along so that she could intervene if a fight were to occur.

Otherwise, the situation yesterday might just happen once more.

While the Sixth Princess didn't reveal the culprit behind the two footprints on her bottom, it wasn't too difficult to deduce from her words that it had something to do with this apothecary teacher of hers.

Usually, one would first strip their clothes before entering the Cleaning Lake. However, due to being in a public location, the two ladies decided against it. Even so, their drenched clothes that stuck to their skin still shaped out the beautiful curvature of their bodies.

Zhang Xuan glanced around for a moment before calming his mind. After which, he placed a Spirit Cleansing Incense into the lake and began to cultivate.

Closing his eyes, he immediately felt a surge of concentrated spiritual energy flowing through his entire body via his meridians and eventually nourishing his soul. A feeling of relaxation slowly spread across his entire body.

“This rate of absorption is too slow...”

After a moment later, Zhang Xuan realized that even though the spiritual energy in the Lake Eye was highly beneficial to his soul, it had to go through his body first, and this significantly weakened the effectiveness of the spiritual energy, as well as lowering the rate of absorption.

Furthermore, the body acted like a shackle whereas the soul was like a cotton inside the steel cage. Even the slightest growth had to take a painful amount of time.

A thought surfaced in Zhang Xuan’s mind.

“Can’t I just draw my soul out and absorb the spiritual energy directly?”

With his soul in his body, the body would become a natural barrier limiting the absorption of spiritual energy by it. However... what if he could draw his soul out and absorb the spiritual energy directly?

Would his rate of cultivation improve?

“I should give it a try.”

With this in mind, he took a look around and confirmed that the two ladies around him were currently deep in their cultivation and that there was no one who could see what he was doing. After which, he activated the Soul Guiding Method and drew a soul that was perfectly identical to him in appearance from his glabella.

As soon as his soul entered the Lake Eye, dense spiritual energy immediately gushed into his soul, leaving him revitalized.

“Indeed, this is much more efficient!”

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

He hadn't even started cultivating yet and the rate at which the spiritual energy was nourishing his soul was already faster than before. Closing his eyes, Zhang Xuan immediately drove the Heaven's Path Soul Art and began pulling in the spiritual energy from the air frenziedly.

Hong long long!

The entire Lake Eye began to shake. Concentrated spiritual energy rushed toward his soul, causing the size of his soul to grow gradually.

As his Heaven's Path Soul Art was only up to Transcendent Mortal 5-dan, he was unable to advance on to 6-dan. As such, the spiritual energy began to build on his soul instead, causing the size of his soul to grow bigger and bigger.

To make an analogy, it was just like water and mercury.

A difference in cultivation realm was qualitative, such as the difference between the two liquids.

However, even among fellow 'water', a tub of water and a lake of water were different—a difference in quantity.

While Zhang Xuan wasn't able to advance his soul cultivation to Transcendent Mortal 6-dan yet, he could make his Transcendent Mortal 5-dan soul grow stronger by piling up more soul energy.

“Hmm?”

As Zhang Xuan started to absorb spiritual energy frenziedly, Princess Fei-er suddenly felt an irregularity in the surrounding spiritual energy. She immediately turned her gaze to the side, and the scene she saw left her on the verge of fainting.

Two of the Spirit Cleansing Incense by Zhang Xuan's side had already burned out, and the third one seemed to be on the verge of burning out as well.

Are you for real?

How long... has it been?

Five minutes? Or was it ten minutes?

The Spirit Cleansing Incense was meant to be depleted within three days, and yet you are going to finish in within five minutes?

Is there a black hole within you?

Princess Fei-er's body trembled, and the urge to spew blood welled up in her.

She thought that as a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan expert with a far stronger soul than the other party, the other party stood no chance at all... Who could have known that right after she started, when she had yet to burn off the tip of the first Spirit Cleansing Incense, the other party was already about to finish all three incenses...

Did you need to be so exaggerated?

How am I supposed to compete with that? Am I going to lose?

“What's going on?”

Luo Qiqi was also alarmed by the agitation in the spiritual energy in the air. Upon seeing Zhang Xuan's Spirit Cleansing Incense, she nearly died from shock. “His incense...”

“He's already about to finish absorbing all of the spiritual energy in the Lake Eye. How am I supposed to compete against that?”

Princess Fei-er was on the verge of tears.

“This...”

Luo Qiqi scratched her head.

Neither of them was a soul oracle, and they did not possess the Eye of Insight either. With his soul hidden beneath the water and shrouded by the spiritual energy in the surroundings, it was impossible for them to notice it. From afar, it looked as though he was cultivating normally.

“Hmm?”

Hearing the discussion between the duo, Zhang Xuan stopped his cultivation, and his soul returned back to his physical body. Lifting his gaze to look at his Spirit Cleansing Incense, he nearly leaped in shock.

Frowning, Zhang Xuan bellowed, “Who stole my Spirit Cleansing Incense?”

He was certain he had three incense a moment ago, how could there only be one left in the blink of an eye? Someone must have stolen his incense!

“Stole?”

The two ladies were rendered speechless.

“You were the one who burned them out...”

“Me?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback. “That can’t be. If there is so little spiritual energy in here, how could it possibly be sufficient for three days?”

Zhang Xuan had barely started absorbing when the spiritual energy was already about to run out. Was this for real?

He was still intending to make use of this Cleansing Lake to boost his cultivation significantly. Yet, his training session was already nearing its end, almost before he’d even started...

Must the situation be so damned?

“So little?”

Hearing the other party’s words, both Princess Fei-er and Luo Qiqi’s eyebrows twitched violently.

They had also tried cultivating as well, and while the Lake Eye might be small, it was extremely rich in spiritual energy. It felt as though no matter how hard they cultivated, it would never run out. Only a monster like you would think that it was lacking in spiritual energy!

“Teacher, it is probably due to you absorbing the spiritual energy a little too fast... How did you do it?” Luo Qiqi couldn’t help but question him.

When Zhang laoshi began to cultivate previously, the Lake Eye began bubbling and the spiritual energy in the surroundings grew agitated—these were signs of spiritual energy being rapidly absorbed. To think that not only would a Transcendent Mortal 4-dan pinnacle cultivator be capable of absorbing spiritual energy to nourish his soul, he would also be able to cultivate so swiftly...

How did he do it?

“Indeed. Are you cheating?”

Princess Fei-er’s eyebrows shot up.

Even a Grade 2 top student like Luo Qiqi couldn’t comprehend what had just happened. Could this fellow be cheating?

641 Frenzied Absorption

“Cheating?”

Zhang Xuan scratched his head.

In a sense, what he did could really be considered as cheating.

While the others were using their physical bodies as a bridge to nourish their soul, he was plunging his soul straight into the Lake Eye and absorbing the spiritual energy directly.

This was just like how a retailer’s profit margin would be cut should there be an intermediary between them and the manufacturer.

But to be fair, he didn’t make use of any artifact or weapon; it was all done through his own ability. Thus, it couldn’t really be called cheating in the strictest sense.

“Indeed, cheating. If that’s not the case, how could you absorb spiritual energy so quickly?”

Princess Fei-er widened her eyes.

“This...” Zhang Xuan had no idea how he should reply to that.

The matter regarding soul oracles mustn’t be made known or things could prove to become troublesome.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan replied, “If I had cheated, surely you should know how I did it. If even a princess from Hongyuan Empire couldn’t find a way to cheat, how could I have possibly done so? If you don’t believe me, why don’t we swap Lake Eyes?”

“Your Lake Eye is nearly empty already, who would want to switch with you?” Princess Fei-er rolled her eyes.

Dream on! You have nearly finished absorbing your Lake Eye already. If I were to swap with you, what am I supposed to absorb?

“Teacher, I’ll swap with you...”

On the other hand, Luo Qiqi offered her own Lake Eye to Zhang Xuan.

She was the strongest among the group who came from the Master Teacher Academy, having reached Cosmos Bridge realm pinnacle.

Given her cultivation, the effects of the Cleansing Lake on her were already terribly limited.

As such, she was willing to trade it for a chance to see how the other party managed to absorb the spiritual energy from the Lake Eye so quickly.

“This...”

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan nodded.

His soul cultivation had only advanced by a small bit before his Lake Eye started to run low on spiritual energy. He couldn't possibly just wait idly for everyone to be done!

Leaving his Lake Eye, Zhang Xuan stepped Luo Qiqi's, and Luo Qiqi stepped into his.

“Alright, you can start cultivating now. If you can cultivate as fast as before, I'll believe that you didn't cheat!”

Princess Fei-er harrumphed.

This time, she stared at Zhang Xuan's Lake Eye without even blinking. She wanted to make sure the other party didn't put anything into the lake to cheat.

“Un!”

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan's body jolted slightly as his soul was drawn out from his physical body.

Even a 6-star soul oracle was unable to see his soul, needless to say, they couldn't see it either.

Hong long long!

As he started to cultivate, the Spirit Cleansing Incense floating on the Lake Eye began burning down swiftly. In less than five minutes, the three incense sticks were on the verge of burning out once more.

Zhang Xuan returned his soul back to his body helplessly.

He had thought that things would improve if he changed to another Lake Eye, but he didn't expect the results to be the same.

The lake dried out once more before his soul managed to get much spiritual energy in...

The spiritual energy inside was simply too little, how was he supposed to cultivate like that?

One should remember that for his soul to improve, he had sucked the entire seed water of the Yin-Yang Lake dry back then.

Frustrated, Zhang Xuan raised his head to look at the lady before him.

“You saw everything just now, did I cheat?”

“This...” Princess Fei-er fidgeted awkwardly, and her face reddened. “No!”

She had cast doubt on the other party's integrity, and yet the other party used his impressive capability to prove her wrong... What do you expect me to say?

She felt so stifled inside that she could spew blood at any moment.

If only she knew that this fellow absorbed spiritual energy so swiftly, she would have never competed with him.

Wasn't this just looking for a face slap?

It seemed like there was no point continuing this wager, she was already destined to lose...

“Alright, you should hurry up and cultivate.”

Seeing that the lady was on the verge of tears, Zhang Xuan felt awkward. He waved his hands and said, “There's no need to get anxious now, there's a chance that you might still win...”

He did promise Xing Yuan to allow the other party to win. He couldn't possibly allow the other party to give up as soon as the bet began!

“A chance...”

Luo Qiqi rolled her eyes.

Who do you think you are fooling?

You finished nearly three Spirit Cleansing Incense in five minutes whereas both of our incense have barely burned through the tip. How could Fei-er win like that?

Surely you could put more sincerity into your consolation!

“Teacher is right, we should hurry up and cultivate! Let’s not waste this opportunity...”

Even though Luo Qiqi felt frenzied by Zhang Xuan’s words, she still spoke up to advise her good friend.

“Un!”

Princess Fei-er nodded before closing her eyes to cultivate.

While she knew that her odds of victory were nearly zero, cultivating here was highly beneficial to the soul, and this was an opportunity not to be wasted.

Seeing that her good friend was still in the mood to cultivate, Luo Qiqi heaved a sigh of relief. She shot Zhang laoshi a glance before shutting her eyes.

While the spiritual energy in the Lake Eye was nearly depleted, given her rate of cultivation, it was still sufficient to last her half a day.

Watching as the duo continued cultivating, Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella.

If he were to continue using his soul to absorb, this Spirit Cleansing Incense would surely burn out in less than one minute.

It was a hard-to-come-by opportunity to enter the Cleansing Lake; was he going to walk out of here without gaining anything?

After all he had done, he felt like he had made a huge loss!

But there was nothing else he could do at the moment.

There was no point intentionally slowing his cultivation by absorbing it via his body.

“What should I do?”

Frustrated, Zhang Xuan was just considering if he should finish absorbing the spiritual energy in the Lake Eye and leave when a thought suddenly struck him, and his eyes lit up.

“Right! How did I forget about the Library of Heaven’s Path?”

He had been too busy cultivating that he forgot about it.

Placing his finger into the lake, he willed.

“Flaws!”

Following which, his head jolted, and a book appeared before him.

“Master Teacher Continent, Huanyu Empire Cleansing Lake’s Lake Eye. It possesses spiritual energy capable of nourishing one’s soul and raising one’s soul cultivation. Flaws: No.1, there is too little spiritual energy inside as compared to the water in the lake. If one were to absorb it directly via one’s soul, it’ll dry up very swiftly. No.2...”

Various flaws were listed in the book.

“Too little spiritual energy as compared to the water in the lake? That’s right! The spiritual energy from the Lake Eye originates from the lake, so if I can absorb the spiritual energy straight from the lake, I won’t need to worry about it the spiritual energy drying up anymore!”

Upon seeing the first flaw, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up as he turned his gaze to the lake beside him.

The furious surges of energy intersecting one another within the Cleansing Lake induced fear in those that set their eyes on it, leaving them daring not to approach.

In comparison, the Lake Eye was visibly much calmer. The spiritual energy here seemed much more inviting as compared to the raging ones on the other side.

Similar to how a pit dug on a beach would be filled in soon by the waves of the sea, the Lake Eyes were formed by the

spiritual energy from the lake permeating into these depressions. Naturally, the concentration of spiritual energy it contained was as good as a drop within an ocean.

If Zhang Xuan wanted to absorb more spiritual energy, the massive Cleansing Lake was his best bet.

“Just that... given how the Cleansing Lake was able to even melt a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon in an instant, it’s impossible for me to withstand it as well!”

While Zhang Xuan knew there was plenty of spiritual energy inside the lake, he didn’t dare move recklessly, especially with the previous sight still fresh in his mind.

That lake actually melted even a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon! Even though Zhang Xuan was confident in the resilience of his body, he knew he couldn’t compare up to a weapon of that tier.

After a long moment of contemplation, just as Zhang Xuan was about to give up, he suddenly slapped his forehead, and his eyes gleamed in excitement. “Hmm? Why am I so foolish?”

“My physical body might not be able to enter the lake, but my soul can!”

If others were to separate their souls from their bodies, death would be inevitable. However, Zhang Xuan was an exception. Having inherited the several dozen millennia heritage of the soul oracles, he could easily separate his soul from his body and have it enter the Cleansing Lake independently.

The searing energy contained within the Cleansing Lake which melted the Spirit intermediate-tier weapon previously would prove to be fatal to the souls of other soul oracles—they would be reduced to nothing in an instant. But having cultivated Heaven’s Path Soul Art, the concept of the Five Soul Declines didn’t apply to Zhang Xuan. Thus, his soul would be completely unfazed by the searing energy!

Furthermore, given the intangible nature of a soul, the violent energies rampaging in the Cleansing Lake that would have torn apart nearly anything easily wouldn’t pose a threat to his soul.

“I should give it a try!”

Having thought things true, Zhang Xuan sat cross-legged to maintain a meditation position. Then, he drew his soul out of his body.

His soul flew through the air all the way to the boundary between land and the lake. After a moment of hesitation, he finally stuck his hand in.

Hu!

His hand plunged into the water.

“I’m completely fine...”

After confirming that his soul didn’t suffer the slightest damage or discomfort, Zhang Xuan’s eyes gleamed in excitement. He immediately plunged his entire soul into the lake.

Tzzzzzzzzzzzz!

The raging currents of the Cleansing Lake that could melt even a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon was completely ineffective against him.

“Absorb!”

Moving to the center of the lake, Zhang Xuan sat cross-legged and began to drive the Heaven’s Path Soul Art.

Hong long long!

Spiritual energy immediately gushed into his soul through various acupoints, raising his cultivation swiftly.

Zhang Xuan moaned in pleasure.

“What concentrated spiritual energy...”

Indeed, when one door closes, another opens.

He initially thought that the Cleansing Lake would be ineffective on him considering how swiftly the Spirit Cleansing Incense burned down, but to his delight, his soul was actually able to absorb spiritual energy straight from the Cleansing Lake.

The quantity of spiritual energy in the Lake Eye couldn't even start comparing to this. There was no need for Zhang Xuan to hold back at all!

'Right, I should have clone out to absorb some as well!' Zhang Xuan thought.

His clone also had to raise its soul cultivation. Since this was a valuable opportunity, it would be best to have him cultivate here as well.

With a thought, Zhang Xuan's consciousness connected with the ring, and in the next instant, his clone appeared in the Lake Eye.

To prevent anyone from realizing that there were two Zhang Xuans, he swiftly instructed his clone to sneak here. Fortunately, under the cover of the veil of spiritual energy, the two ladies didn't notice anything at all.

"Given that clone is crafted of Nine Hearts Lotus, it shouldn't fear the water of this lake."

Considering that the material used to craft his clone was a God artifact, it was impossible that the water of the Cleansing Lake could possibly faze it.

But to be safe, he had his clone put his hand in first, and as expected, nothing happened.

"Come over here!"

Zhang Xuan had his clone move over to where his soul was, and the two sat side by side one another.

"Let's start cultivating!"

The clone drew out his soul, and the two souls began to absorb the spiritual energy from the lake.

Hong long long!

Hualala!

It was as though two gigantic vortices had appeared in the center of the Cleansing Lake. Spiritual energy flooded in at an insane rate.

Geji! Geji! Geji!

As though consuming an immensely nutritious pill, the two souls grew non-stop. From a size equivalent to their physical body, they grew larger and taller.

Two meters, three meters, four meters...

Back then, after consuming the spiritual energy from the seed water of the Yin-Yang Lake, Zhang Xuan's soul grew to three meters large. However, this was even more exaggerated.

Under the huge influx of spiritual energy, after four hours, the two souls had grown to a size of five to six meters.

It could be said that they were no different from giants at this point.

642 Zhang Xuan Is Dead?

“But I’m still far from Lu Chong’s size...”

Recalling Lu Chong’s mountain-sized soul body, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Five meters was already an astounding size for an ordinary soul oracle, but it was still far from matching up to Lu Chong.

“I should continue absorbing!”

Thus, Zhang Xuan continued to take in spiritual energy from the Cleansing Lake.

As he picked up his pace, his clone did the same as well.

Just like that, another four more hours passed. In this period of time, the spiritual energy in the Cleansing Lake visibly declined as the furious currents and rampaging energies dampened.

“The spiritual energy in the area has thinned, but I’m just a little way off to reaching ten meters...”

The spiritual energy in the air had thinned to the point that it seemed as though it would dry up at any moment. However, seeing that he was nearing his goal, Zhang Xuan decided to quicken his pace.

He was just a little off from reaching ten meters. Once he broke this limit, his soul cultivation would reach newer heights. With this breakthrough, he wouldn’t be too far off from matching the Lu Chong back then.

While Lu Chong’s soul was indeed huge, Zhang Xuan’s soul had been tempered with the Heaven’s Path Soul Art. While Heaven’s Path Soul Art required extremely pure spiritual energy, it also made his soul far stronger than other soul oracles’.

Hong long!

At that moment, his clone's soul suddenly jolted lightly. The other party had managed to surpass the ten meters mark.

To think that his clone would actually absorb spiritual energy at a rate faster than him!

Perplexed as to why one soul could absorb spiritual energy faster than the other despite being the same entity in essence, Zhang Xuan lowered his head to take a glance, and the sight he saw immediately rendered him speechless.

His clone had his body to absorb spiritual energy from the lake as well.

Forged out of a God artifact, the Nine Hearts Lotus, his clone's body wasn't fazed by the violent energies raging throughout the lake. Even though its rate of absorption was significantly slower than its soul, the additional boost from it allowed his clone's soul to cultivate much faster than the main soul.

After reaching ten meters, the soul of his clone grew visibly stronger. At the same time, its rate of absorption was also hiked up a notch.

"I should speed up as well!"

Feeling threatened by his clone, Zhang Xuan absorbed the spiritual energy from his surroundings with greater tenacity.

But no matter how much effort he put into absorbing spiritual energy, he seemed to be gradually slowing down. Lifting his gaze, he realized that a giant vortex had formed around his clone, taking in the spiritual energy around him. It was no wonder his growth was slowing.

A qualitative change would be induced in one's soul upon reaching ten meters. The other party's rate of absorption was at least three times faster than him now.

Seeing the other party frenziedly absorbing spiritual energy from the Cleansing Lake as though he wouldn't be content until the lake ran dry, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt a surge of rage. He slapped the other party's head and hollered, "What are you doing? Leave some for me!"

What the heck was this!

Get this clear, you're my clone!

Stop being so ungrateful. It's one thing for you to send me flying with a punch, now you're even snatching spiritual energy from me?

Where did your sense of shame go?

As an upright master teacher, how could I possibly have a shameless clone like you?

"I..." Slapped, the clone stopped his cultivation indignantly.

Zhang Xuan had the other party return to his physical body, and then back into the storage ring. Only then did he heave a sigh of relief.

"Hehehe. With no competition, I should be able to break the ten meters mark easily!"

Chuckling lightly, Zhang Xuan opened up all of the acupoints inside his soul.

With his clone no longer vying with him for spiritual energy, he could finally hasten his rate of cultivation.

"Start."

Muttering softly, he began to draw in spiritual energy furiously through his acupoints.

Hong long!

The spiritual energy flowing into his soul was swiftly converted into soul energy. At this moment, a violent rumbling suddenly sounded, and the Cleansing Lake beneath him began to shake violently before eventually bursting apart.

Hualala!

The lake water flooded into the surroundings as though a leaking dam.

"What happened?"

Stopping his cultivation, Zhang Xuan immediately looked around him to see what was going on, only to see that all of the cultivators had opened their eyes, alarmed by this sudden turn of events.

All of them had confused looks on their faces.

‘This is bad. If other people notice my motionless body, it will be hard to explain the matter!’

His body was currently lying by itself in the Lake Eye. At this moment, there was still some spiritual energy mist shielding his body from the eyes of others. However, once the water from the lake ran dry and the mist scattered, he would be exposed before others.

Given that everyone had already opened their eyes and that he was the only one ‘cultivating’, everyone would surely notice that something was amiss.

...

Outside the Cleansing Lake, Emperor Ye Wentian and Pavilion Master Wei Jiang were looking over the entire lake from a distance not too far away.

“Lying in the east of the Cleansing Lake is the Verdant Mountain whereas connecting from the west is the Dragon-scaled River. With the breath of the mountain and river, as well as the accumulation of energy from the earth vein, those that cultivate here will surely find their souls being enhanced, becoming even more resilient.”

Stroking his beard, Ye Wentian smiled.

As the foundation of Huanyu Empire, the effects of the Cleansing Lake couldn’t possibly be just to nourish one’s soul. Absorbing the spiritual energy tempered by the earth vein could make one’s soul more resilient, and this would be highly beneficial for future cultivation.

This was especially beneficial for one’s breakthrough to Transcendent Mortal 8-dan, Ethereal Treading realm.

The term ‘Ethereal Treading’ originated from the idea of stepping on the intangible, treating the void as stairs. Using one’s soul as an intermediary, one could borrow the strength from the surroundings to allow one’s physical body to float in the air for a short period of time.

Without a strong soul, not only would one be unable to float in midair, one might even find one's cultivation being capped. Perhaps even reaching Transcendent Mortal 7-dan Perfect Harmonization realm would be a huge struggle.

While the spiritual energy in the Lake Eyes was much tamer, it had also been tempered by the furious energies flowing through the river. Absorbing such spiritual energy was much more beneficial than absorbing the plain spiritual energy contained in spirit stones.

This was precisely the reason why the Cleansing Lake was so famous.

“Indeed!” Wei shi nodded. “A huge volcano lies under the Cleansing Lake, thus drawing in spiritual energy from the world. This spiritual energy would then be tempered by the volcano, thus raising its purity! On top of that, it also imbues a yang attribute to the spiritual energy, granting one the ability to ward off yin energy.”

“Un!” Ye Wentian chuckled. “Look at the spiritual energy bubbling from the lake, it's as though a pot of boiling water. Only through endless tempering will a gem finally show its glow... Hmm? Th-this... What is going on?”

Just as Ye Wentian was commenting on how incredible the Cleansing Lake was, he suddenly froze, and his voice quivered in shock.

Noticing the peculiarity in his companion, Wei shi quickly turned his head, and what he saw stumped him.

It was as though someone had poured a huge bucket of ice water into the bubbling lake water, thus returning it calmness.

Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, Wei shi suggested, “Perhaps... it might have been bubbling for too long, and it wants a rest?”

Having lived for more than a hundred years, he had witnessed the opening of the Cleansing Lake many times. In fact, he had even once cultivated in it as well... Logically speaking, under the ceaseless clash between the various energies harnessed within the lake water, its bubbling should have never

stopped... so why did it suddenly turn stagnant all of the sudden?

“Impossible!” Ye Wentian’s face paled. “Our ancestors set up a formation around the lake water, and it is powered by the spiritual energy in the lake. If the lake were to turn stagnant, it could only mean that the spiritual energy has been sapped dry. If that’s the case, the formation could break down anytime now...”

Hong long!

Before he could finish, the ground suddenly shook, and a huge crack slowly spread across the Cleansing Lake. Following which, the lake water immediately gushed out frenziedly.

“It really broke down...”

Wei shi felt the sight before him turning dark.

The Cleansing Lake was the greatest treasure of Huanyu Empire. If it were to fall apart, the number of future experts the empire would have would surely sharply decrease, and the entire empire would fall into panic!

How did this happen?

Everything went as it should... There was no reason why cultivators cultivating in the Lake Eye would cause a sharp decrease in spiritual energy in the Cleansing Lake, thus resulting in instability in the formation!

Watching as the water gushed out from the lake rapidly, Emperor Ye Wentian anxiously said, “I’ll get Sixth Princess and the others to evacuate now. Once all of the lake water runs dry... the pressure suppressing the volcano will be released, and this could result in a catastrophe! Wei shi, you should hurry up and get Guild Leader Wu and the others from the Formation Master Guild over here to fix the formation!”

The Cleansing Lake had been regulated by a massive formation to create a balance among the energies from the Verdant Mountain, Dragon-scaled River, and earth vein. However, with the formation breaking apart, the balance that had been suppressing the earth vein had been shattered, and as

the earth vein grew more and more active, there was a good chance that an eruption may occur.

Given the massive size of this volcano, no one incapable of flight would be able to escape should an eruption occur, not even a Half-Saint. Everyone here would surely be reduced to dust.

The might of nature is unrivaled. Only a true Saint could still stand their ground before it. Anything else would be nothing other than mere ants.

It was one thing for him to meet with danger, but if some kind of mishap were to come unto the Sixth Princess and the others... the entire Huanyu Empire could possibly be destroyed under the wrath of Hongyuan Empire!

He thought that by inviting the Sixth Princess here to train, he could make use of this chance to please the other party and raise Huanyu Empire's status. Who knew that the usually stable Cleansing Lake would suddenly explode!

What the hell was this?

Why did Cleansing Lake simply explode without any warning at all?

If he were to know that Zhang shi was the culprit behind it, he would surely feel extremely stifled inside.

“Alright! I'll go invite them over now!”

Understanding the severity of this matter, Wei shi whistled sharply, and an aerial beast immediately flew over. Jumping onto its back, the duo headed straight for the capital.

They had to repair the formation as soon as possible to keep the situation in check. Otherwise, with the earth vein becoming more and more active, it was just a matter of time before the volcano erupts. The land in a radius of several hundred kilometers would be flattened, and countless lives would be lost.

“Un!”

On the other hand, Emperor Ye Wentian immediately rushed toward where the Sixth Princess's Lake Eye was.

...

At this moment, Princess Fei-er had already awoken from her cultivation. Along with Luo Qiqi, she was staring at a young man in bewilderment.

Despite the huge commotion, and the entire Cleansing Lake being on the verge of exploding, this Zhang shi was actually still in the midst of his cultivation? How could he possibly keep his composure under such circumstances?

If he really was cultivating, they would have admitted it... But the Spirit Cleansing Incense floating before them was still as long as before... In other words, in the previous eight hours, this fellow didn't absorb the slightest spiritual energy!

But if he wasn't cultivating, what else could he be doing?

"Zhang laoshi..." Luo Qiqi shouted, unable to hold herself back any longer.

No response.

"Since something happened to the Cleansing Lake, and I'm unable to beat your record, we'll take this as your victory..."

Princess Fei-er harrumphed.

The other party had already expended five Spirit Cleansing Incense whereas she wasn't even done with her first one yet. Without a doubt, this bet was her loss.

Since I've already admitted defeat, stop putting on an act and come out!

But the young man before her remained completely motionless. There was no response whatsoever.

"What's wrong with him?"

No matter how foolish they could be, it was certain that something was amiss.

"I'll take a look!"

Anxious, Luo Qiqi rushed forward and jumped into Zhang Xuan's Lake Eye. She nudged the other party, but the other party remained completely motionless. Stumped, she

instinctively raised her forefinger to the other party's nostril, only to leap in shock.

The young man wasn't breathing at all.

With trembling lips, Luo Qiqi uttered in horror, "He... he... he's dead!"

643 Zhang Xuan Losing His First Kiss?

Shouldn't the spiritual energy in the Lake Eye be gentle and safe?

How could someone die in here?

A person couldn't actually cultivate to death here, could they?

"He's dead? How is that possible?"

Princess Fei-er was also shocked.

She had been thinking about how she could win a bet against this unreliable fellow, but never in her dreams did she expect the other party to simply drop dead like that...

"Let me take a look!"

She immediately leaped into the Lake Eye and touched the other party's body. In an instant, her face paled as well.

The fellow who was still smug over burning down five Spirit Cleansing Incense eight hours ago was now as hard as a rock, devoid of his breath and heartbeat.

To think that... he was actually dead!

Even though she didn't bear the slightest goodwill toward this fellow, she was still the other party's maid... how could this fellow die before she could even redeem herself?

Was this status going to remain with her for her entire life, unable to be dispelled?

"It can't be that he fell into this state because... he absorbed too much too quickly while trying to win the bet against me?" Princess Fei-er's body trembled, and her face paled at this realization.

The fellow had never left the Lake Eye, and this leaves only one single possibility—in an overly tenacious attempt to emerge victorious in this bet, he absorbed the spiritual energy

from the Cleansing Lake too vigorously, resulting in a fault which eventually killed him.

“That’s a possibility.”

Luo Qiqi nodded grimly. “But if that’s the case, there’s a high chance it might be a pseudo-death!”

As a talented apothecary, she knew a fair bit about various medicinal conditions as well.

“Pseudo death?” Princess Fei-er was taken aback.

“Yes. If one were to absorb too much spiritual energy within a period of time, it might result in one’s meridians being clogged up, thus obstructing one’s blood flow. As a result, one might suffer from asphyxiation, resulting in a state of pseudo-death. However, this kind of ‘death’ isn’t true death—as long as one is treated promptly, one can be saved... I’ve once read of such a condition on a book. Given that Zhang shi was still perfectly fine a moment ago, this is very likely to be the situation!” Luo Qiqi said.

“Then... do you know how to save him?” Princess Fei-er asked worriedly.

Frowning, Luo Qiqi contemplated for a moment before replying, “If I recall correctly... we need to remove the spiritual energy from his body in one swift stroke!”

“In one swift stroke?” Princess Fei-er couldn’t understand the intent behind these words.

“His meridians are currently bloated with spiritual energy, thus putting them under high strain. If we were to remove the spiritual energy from his body using traditional palm-to-palm method, it might cause a pressure difference in the spiritual energy in his body, and this could potentially result in his meridians rupturing. If this were to happen, it could complicate matters and make it even harder to save him. Even if we were to save him from such a condition by chance, he would be crippled for life. Thus, we have to remove the spiritual energy from his body in one swift stroke...”

At this point, Luo Qiqi’s face suddenly reddened. “In other words... we need to remove spiritual energy from his body

mouth-to-mouth!”

“Mouth-to-mouth?”

Princess Fei-er’s face twitched.

Removing the spiritual energy from the other party’s body palm-to-palm would indeed be inefficient, and a failure to maintain an apt pressure difference in the body could easily cause his meridians to rupture, given the feeble state it was in. Should his meridians rupture entirely, his life as a cultivator would be over.

But they were of different gender! To remove spiritual energy mouth-to-mouth...

With a face scarlet in embarrassment, Princess Fei-er urged, “Since he’s your teacher, you should hurry up and save him!”

“Me?”

Luo Qiqi shook her head swiftly. “The relationship between a teacher and student is sacred. This... is a little too intimate, I cannot sully this relationship with this... Rather, aren’t you intent on beating him in a bet? If he were to die, you’d have to carry the name of being his maid for your entire life...”

“This...” Princess Fei-er’s face paled.

The other party had struck right at her vitals. This was exactly what she felt the most conflicted about.

Given that she had lost the bet, she would remain as the other party’s maid. If this fellow were to die here, this shame would follow her for life!

Others might even think that she had killed him out of rage from losing. She could never cleanse her reputation were that to happen.

What the heck was this!

Just a mere bet, and she suddenly became responsible for the other party’s life. The thought of it left her incredibly stifled.

Seeing that her good friend was still hesitating at this point, Luo Qiqi urged her again. “You should hurry up if you want to

save him. The longer you delay, the lower the possibility of him being resuscitated!”

Conflicted, Princess Fei-er contemplated for a short moment before gritting her teeth. “Fine, I’ll save him!”

She had always been doted upon ever since she could remember, and never had she suffered such a huge humiliation. Not only did this fellow beat her in a bet, he even made her his maid and left her bottom swollen with a kick, leaving her nearly unable to walk.

She was furious, but what she wanted to do was to beat him fair and square.

If he were to die, how could she get even with him?

This regret would follow her for life!

Before this, the gender difference seemed less significant in comparison.

Gritting her teeth tightly, she drove her zhenqi and slowly approached the other party’s mouth.

“What are you doing?”

Zhang Xuan, who had just rushed over from the Cleansing Lake, happened to arrive on the scene at this moment, and he nearly fainted from the sight.

Due to the rapid growth of his soul, his control over it was lacking. Thus, to prevent anyone from noticing his soul, he had travel underwater, and as such, he wasn’t aware of what was happening above. Just as he was about to re-enter his physical body, he saw the Sixth Princess holding his body, ready to kiss him, and he nearly died of shock.

The Sixth Princess looked normal on the surface, and yet as soon as he was gone, she actually tried to kiss him! Indeed, you can’t judge a book by its cover.

Stifled, he was just about to push the other party apart when an anxious voice sounded.

“Sixth Princess!”

At that crucial moment, Xing Yuan arrived on the scene.

While he feigned calmness on the surface, his heart was crumbling within.

He had spent so many years wooing the Sixth Princess, only to be ignored and snubbed. Yet, the other party was now taking the initiative to kiss a fellow who nearly angered her to death a few days ago. What was with this crazy twist?

“Ah? Xing Yuan, you came at the perfect timing!”

Upon seeing that fellow, Princess Fei-er blushed in embarrassment. At the same time, she also heaved a sigh of relief. She quickly beckoned the other party over. “Hurry, come and save him!”

“Save him?” Xing Yuan was taken aback.

“That’s right. There isn’t much time to explain the matter in detail, but to save him... it would require one to draw the spiritual energy in his body out in a single breath through mouth-to-mouth contact. Hurry up, or else he’ll die...”

Princess Fei-er rushed the other party.

“Mouth-to-mouth contact?” Xing Yuan’s body swayed weakly. “Me and him?”

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan’s sight also darkened.

While I might not show too much interest in ladies... this doesn’t mean that I’m interested in guys!

If I were to really be kissed by him, wouldn’t I die of disgust...

“Indeed, hurry up. Otherwise, we won’t make it in time!”

Princess Fei-er nodded.

“I...” Zhang Xuan was about to puke blood. On the other hand, Xing Yuan was also on the verge of a mental breakdown.

Seeing the conflicted expression on the other party’s face, Princess Fei-er said, “If you won’t, I’ll do it!”

Xing Yuan clenched his jaws and replied, “Never mind, I’ll do it...”

He would rather sacrifice himself than see his goddess's lips stolen by another man!

Thus, he leaped into the Lake Eye, held Zhang Xuan's body in his grasp, and his lips began to approach the latter's.

"The heck!" Zhang Xuan was on the verge of crying.

"No, I must return to my physical body now. Otherwise, I'll lose my first kiss to a man..." At this moment, he couldn't care any longer. His soul immediately rushed straight toward his physical body.

As long as his soul entered his physical body, his body would regain its consciousness, and he would be able to salvage the situation before him.

"Hmm?"

But Zhang Xuan's soul came into contact with his glabella, he suddenly stiffened.

Due to his soul growing far too much in this round of cultivation, reaching a level beyond the tolerable limit for his physical body, he actually found himself unable to re-enter his body!

To put it simply, his soul was too big for his physical body, causing him to be unable to squeeze back into his body.

But... that fellow's lips were on the verge of touching his already!

"I can't care anymore..."

Seeing that the two lips were about to meet, Zhang Xuan couldn't hold it back anymore. Gathering his soul energy, he sent a kick at the other party.

While a soul may be intangible, it could materialize soul energy to fight with another.

Peng!

Not expecting that someone would attack him, Xing Yuan didn't even have the time to react before he was kicked in the face. With an anguished shout, he was sent flying into the Cleansing Lake!

“AH, SAVE ME...” Xing Yuan screamed in desperation.

He thought that, just like the Spirit intermediate-tier weapon, he would melt into goo upon falling into the water. But after shouting for a little longer, he realized that he was perfectly fine, and his face began to slowly flush.

As the spiritual energy in the Cleansing Lake had been sapped dry, it had lost its violent nature and its corrosive ability as well. Let alone him, even an ordinary human would be fine in there now.

It could be said that the Cleansing Lake was no different from an ordinary pool of water at this moment.

“What are you trying to do?” Princess Fei-er’s face was as dark and cold as the middle of winter.

She had thought that this fellow would be able to save Zhang shi swiftly, but who knew that before he would end up jumping here and there, screaming and shouting? What was he up to?

Did he suffer a stroke?

While an attack comprising soul energy might be intangible, they, as 5-star master teachers, should be able to notice that something was amiss if they were to pay closer attention. However, with everyone’s attention on saving Zhang shi, no one noticed anything at all.

“If you don’t wish to save him, just say so! There’s no need to put on such an elaborate act.” Not even waiting for the other party to explain himself, Princess Fei-er stomped forward angrily.

There was clearly nothing there at all, and yet this fellow leaped backward all of the sudden. It was clear that he didn’t wish to save the other party. If he didn’t want to do so, he should have said so earlier. This delay had robbed them of precious time.

“I...” Xing Yuan nearly burst into tears.

Can’t you see this huge footprint on my face...

However, Princess Fei-er couldn't be bothered with him anymore. Puckering her lips, she began moving her face closer to Zhang Xuan's.

“Sixth Princess, Xing Yuan gongzi, Luo Qiqi xiaojie, this is...”

Before her lips could come into contact, a shocked voice sounded. Lifting their gaze, they saw Emperor Ye Wentian standing before them.

Ye Wentian was also completely stumped by the situation before him. He was going to evacuate the Sixth Princess and the others out of the Lake Eyes as soon as possible when he stumbled upon such a scene.

While he was feeling extremely awkward, he couldn't help but sigh...

Youngsters nowadays are getting more and more liberal! Even in the middle of a day, in a public pool, they would do such stuff...

Upon seeing Ye Wentian, Princess Fei-er heaved a sigh of relief and said, “You came at the perfect time. Something has gone wrong with Zhang Shi's cultivation, so take a look quickly and see if you have any ideas on how he can be saved!”

The other party was a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan pinnacle expert, as well as the emperor of a country. In terms of eye of discernment and scope of knowledge, he was surely far above Luo Qiqi. Perhaps, he might have a better idea than mouth-to-mouth

“Something has gone wrong with Zhang Shi's cultivation?” Ye Wentian was taken aback for a moment before redness slowly crept across his face. He thought that the duo was giving in to their carnal needs, but it turned out that something bad had happened.

Following which, his eyebrows slowly came together to form a tight frown.

This young man was an existence that could potentially become a combat master in the future. More importantly, he

was also a person protected by Pavilion Master Mo of Hongyuan Empire. If something were to happen to him, he could probably retire from his position as the emperor...

Leaping into the Lake Eye, he walked up to Zhang Xuan, took a look, and frowned.

Seeing the grim expression on the other party's face, Princess Fei-er asked nervously, "What's wrong?"

"It seems like..."

Ye Wentian's eyes were widened, as though he could hardly believe what he was seeing.

"... his soul has left his body!"

644 Crawling Back In

“His soul has left his body?”

Princess Fei-er, Luo Qiqi, and the others were stunned.

Such an issue was also known as ‘missing soul’, and it was one of the most feared things of a cultivator. If one’s soul fails to return back to its body, the body would turn into an empty shell and die.

However, for one’s soul to leave its body, it must be sufficiently strong first. One must be at least Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle or even Cosmos Bridge realm to achieve that. How could such a situation occur on a Clarifying Turbidity realm cultivator?

Ye Wentian spoke grimly. “There are many causes for a soul leaving the body. For example, one’s soul could be attracted by some kind of unique formation or fail to suppress one’s inner demons... Zhang shi might have used a secret art beyond his means to cultivate his soul, resulting in such a situation... If we don’t quickly return his soul to his body, he might really die soon!”

While soul oracles were the most adept at it, they weren’t the only ones capable of drawing their souls out of their bodies. There were some formidable formations or secret arts that could achieve the same effect as well.

“Is there a cure for it?” Luo Qiqi asked anxiously.

This young man was her apothecary teacher, and she couldn’t watch as the other party died because of this.

“There’s indeed a cure. However, it’s extremely troublesome, and there isn’t any time for it now...”

Turning to look at the Cleansing Lake, which was being drained at an astounding rate, Ye Wentian frowned.

The steps to summoning one’s soul were extremely complex and troublesome. Without several hours or even days of effort,

it would be difficult for him to succeed. However, given that they were just moments away from the water in the Cleansing Lake running dry, and a volcano eruption was imminent, time simply wasn't on their side.

“Then what should we do?”

“Pull him up first!”

Knowing that this wasn't the place to speak, Ye Wentian picked Zhang Xuan's body up and leaped to shore.

“...” Watching as his physical body was being carried away, Zhang Xuan's massive soul was on the verge of tears.

Are you all trying to save me or kill me?

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan decided against following his body.

‘While it would have been difficult for my soul to enter like that, with sufficient time, I could still have succeeded. However, you actually allowed Ye Wentian to take my body away... If my soul were to try to enter my body now, Ye Wentian might just try to dissipate my soul, thinking that I'm just a specter...’

‘I can only wait for a chance to snatch my body back...’

While a soul formed via Heaven's Path Soul Art didn't carry a heavy yin aura, thus making it hard for one to sense it, there was still a good chance that he would be noticed if he were to run right up to the other party's face.

This was especially so given that Ye Wentian was a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan pinnacle expert. If he tried to creep up on the other party, he might just be killed before he could even identify himself.

Besides, even if he were to report his identity to the latter, he had to win the latter's trust first.

A Clarifying Turbidity realm cultivator possessing a ten-meter large soul that could leave its body and cultivate individually... How was he supposed to explain all of that?

Thus, the best course of action he could do now was to remain hidden.

As long as he could find a suitable opportunity to dive back into his physical body, everything would be solved. At the very most, he could just blame it on his anxiety to accomplish greater heights that resulted in his erring.

...

While Zhang Xuan's soul was still camping in the water, waiting for a suitable moment to strike, Ye Wentian had already carried his body over to the courtyard where they were previously.

Seeing that the other party was completely motionless, Hong shi, Luo shi, and the others immediately rushed up anxiously and asked, "How is Zhang shi?"

"Most probably, his soul has left his body!" Ye Wentian said with a grim voice.

"His soul has left his body?" Hong shi's face paled as his body shook in agitation. "How could that be?"

Zhang shi's teacher was an incredibly powerful existence that could possibly be an 8-star master teacher. To actually cause his student to lose his soul... If he were to learn of it, not only Huanyu Empire, perhaps even the entire Hongyuan Empire would be a goner!

"If I'm not mistaken, it could be due to the sudden agitation of the Cleansing Lake in the midst of his cultivation that caused his soul to be jolted away, thus leaving behind this empty shell," Ye Wentian said.

This was the only explanation he could think of.

Otherwise, how could others be fine while he was in such a state?

It must be due to the abrupt change in the lake that jolted his soul out of his body!

If his soul was still intact after the impact, it would still be possible to find him. However, if his soul were to have dissipated, it would be extremely difficult to save him.

“This...” With a pale face, Hong shi was just about to ask if Zhang shi could be healed when the ground suddenly shook. A searing aura suddenly burst forth from the center of the lake.

“This is bad; the volcano is about to erupt!”

Ye Wentian face immediately warped in shock. He quickly placed Zhang Xuan’s ‘corpse’ down on a stone table and turned his sight over.

The situation at the Cleansing Lake also caught the attention of others.

At this moment, the lake water was bubbling violently. Searing heatwaves flowed into the surroundings, and the ground shook non-stop. It was as if a massive savage beast was rampaging beneath the ground, threatening to leap out at any moment to slaughter them all.

“What’s going on?”

Feeling the shaking intensify, everyone frowned.

“I think it’s about to reach its limit...”

Clenching his fists tightly, Ye Wentian’s face was turning paler by the moment.

He thought that even though the formation was breached, given how many years that the Cleansing Lake had been maintained for, it should be able to suppress the volcano for another few more hours. Who knew that everything would unfold so quickly!

If everything were to go down at this rate, in less than ten minutes, the rampaging energy contained in the volcano and the earth vein would come gushing out!

“Ye Qian, quickly take Sixth Princess and the others away!”

Ye Wentian turned around and quickly instructed.

As the emperor, he couldn’t leave the scene. However, nothing bad must happen onto the Sixth Princess and the others.

“Alright!”

Ye Qian also understood the severity of the incident, and he rushed forward to Princess Fei-er. “Sixth Princess and Senior Xing Yuan, the Cleansing Lake isn’t going to hold on for much longer, and an eruption is imminent. This area is dangerous, so allow me to bring you to a safer location...”

“Alright!”

Xing Yuan nodded, and he quickly turned around to beckon Princess Fei-er to leave as well. However, the latter simply looked at Ye Qian with a frown and said, “Since this fellow’s soul isn’t in his body, does that mean that his soul is currently in the Cleansing Lake?”

“This...” Ye Qian was taken aback. “That should be the case.”

“Then what should we do? If we don’t find his soul and deliver it back to his body, he really will die...” Princess Fei-er said anxiously.

“Don’t worry, I’ll have my men look for it. Senior, you should hurry up and make use of the little time we have left to leave...” Ye Qian reassured.

“Un!” Nodding her head, Princess Fei-er turned to her good friend and said, “Let’s go first!”

The reason why she wanted to save Zhang Xuan was because she couldn’t bear the shame of being the other party’s maid for her entire life. Since the other party’s soul had escaped from his body, there was nothing else she could do. Even if she were to remain here, she would be completely useless. Thus, she decided to simply leave.

Luo Qiqi shook her head.

“You go first. I’m indebted to Zhang laoshi, and given that his life and death is uncertain at the moment, I really cannot leave at this moment!”

Zhang shi had once taught her pill forging, thus inducing huge growth in her pill forging skills... and above all, she had already acknowledged the other party as her teacher!

How could she leave on her own now that the other party was in a coma? She couldn’t bring herself to do so!

“Since you aren’t leaving, I’ll stay here too. I’m also interested to see what is happening to the Cleansing Lake...”

Seeing her good friend refusing to leave, Princess Fei-er decided to remain here as well.

“Ah?”

Hearing that the duo had decided to remain here, Ye Qian nearly went insane on the spot. Just as he was wracking his brains to find a way to persuade the two obstinate ladies, a gust of wind suddenly howled above them, and a massive aerial spirit beast appeared before the crowd.

Hu hu hu!

A few figures leaped down from the sky.

Taking a closer look at the men falling from the sky, Ye Qian’s eyes lit up.

“It’s Wei shi, and Guild Leader Wu from the Formation Master Guild!”

He knew about the secret of the Cleansing Lake as well, and this situation was clearly due to the energies in the lake being imbalanced, resulting in the collapse of the formation. As a 5-star pinnacle formation master, Guild Leader Wu might be able to find a way to reverse the situation.

“How did this happen?”

Reaching the ground, Guild Leader Wu looked around him and saw the lake water flowing into the surroundings, and the ground trembling violently, as though it would collapse under them at any moment. He frowned.

The Huanyu Empire royal family would invite him over each year to reinforce the formation, so he knew a great deal about the formation as well. If it was just cultivating in the Lake Eye, it should be impossible for such a situation to occur... then why was everything crumbling now?

“I don’t know the exact reason, but now isn’t the time to be talking about this. Guild Leader Wu, hurry up and see if there’s a way to salvage the formation so as to stop the

volcano below from erupting!” Ye Wentian instructed anxiously.

Nothing would change even if they were to point fingers now.

The urgent matter at hand was to see if there was a way to salvage the situation. Otherwise, none of them here would survive this ordeal.

“Un!”

Knowing the severity of the matter, Guild Leader Wu nodded. He turned his sight over to the lake.

“Elder Lu, you will take the kan position. Elder Han, you will take the gen position...”

After assessing the situation, he quickly issued orders to the other elders who came with him.

The few elders nodded and quickly got into their respective positions. Then, they each took out a formation flag and stabbed it deeply into the ground.

Hong long!

As soon as all of the formation flags got in place, the spilling lake water was suddenly held in place, as though it was being sealed by something.

However, it was as if sealing a rampaging dragon. The ground tremored more and more violently, like it would tear past whatever that was restraining it to burst forth.

“This isn’t right...” Guild Leader Wu frowned.

Emperor Ye Wentian walked up to the group and asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Located precisely at the intersection of the Verdant Mountain, Dragon-scaled River, and the earth vein, the Cleansing Lake should be rich in spiritual energy. The formation set up here tapped into the concentrated pool of spiritual energy here to suppress the violent energies from the three sides at this intersection... How come there’s no spiritual energy here now?”

Guild Leader Wu was astonished.

“No spiritual energy here?”

Ye Wentian froze. He closed his eyes and tried perceiving the surroundings carefully, and he realized that something was indeed amiss.

Just a few hours ago, the spiritual energy here was so powerful that even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert would be slaughtered easily if he were to enter the lake. How could it disappear so abruptly?

“Indeed...”

Guild Leader Wu nodded. He was just about to speak when someone behind him shrieked.

Hearing the voice, Ye Wentian quickly turned around to see what was going on.

He immediately saw Luo Qiqi and the Sixth Princess staring doubtfully at the master teacher known as Luo Xuan.

“Where’s Zhang laoshi?”

On the stone table right before them, Zhang shi’s ‘corpse’ had disappeared without a trace.

“H-he...”

Hearing the other party’s questions, Luo Xian’s mouth quivered uncontrollably. His eyes were widened, and he looked as though he was about to cry at any moment. He pointed at the lake not too far away and said, “He was still lying there a moment back, and in the moment that my attention was somewhere else, he... crawled back into the lake...”

645 Physical Body Too Weak

“He crawled back in himself?”

Everyone stared at one another in bewilderment, as though someone had struck the back of their heads with a wooden bat.

“Do you take me a for a fool? His soul has left his body, and he’s no different from a corpse now. How could he possibly crawl back into the Cleansing Lake himself?”

Princess Fei-er glared at Luo Xuan angrily.

Even if you wish to scare us, you should find a more believable story!

I took a look at Zhang shi myself, and his heartbeat and breathing had halted, and his body was stiff and cold. He was no different from a corpse.

Under such circumstances, how could his body possibly crawl back into the lake by itself?

Ye Wentian, Hong shi, and the others shared the same thoughts as well. They turned to look at Luo Xuan, wanting to hear his explanation.

“I’m not lying!”

Seeing how everyone was staring at him as though he was a lunatic, Luo Xuan found himself on the verge of really going insane.

The commotion caused by the Cleansing Lake previously was too large, and everyone’s attention was captured by it. He was no exception as well. However, at that moment, he saw a black shadow in his peripheral vision.

It was from the corpse-like Zhang Xuan!

Somehow, the fellow seemed to have found a surge of strength within him. Through pushing his hands against the ground, that fellow swiftly crawled toward the lake. Everything happened so quickly that Luo Xuan barely saw a gray blur.

Seeing the incredibly stifled expression on the other party's face, Luo Qiqi asked, "Calm down, how did he crawl into the Cleansing Lake? Did he wake up, or was he still in his previous state?"

"H-his eyes were still closed, and his body was still stiff and lifeless. It didn't seem like he had woken up at all..."

Even though it was just a momentary glance, as a half 5-star master teacher, Luo Xuan was still able to notice some details regarding the incident.

While that fellow did move, his movements looked like a puppet on a string that was being drawn forward instead.

But of course, that was also the limit of his eye of discernment.

"His body was stiff, and his eyes were closed... and he crawled to the Cleansing Lake by himself?" Princess Fei-er frowned. "You mean that... he has been possessed?"

"Cough cough!"

Ye Wentian choked on his own saliva. "Zhang Shi's soul has only escaped his body, he isn't truly dead yet... so it is impossible for him to be possessed!"

"Then... what was with him crawling away by himself?" Hong Shi asked.

Among those present at that moment, only he and Luo Xuan knew that Zhang Xuan was the direct disciple of an 8-star master teacher. Even though Bi Jianghai had participated in the Hongfeng Empire Master Teacher Tournament as well, he wasn't present for the affairs that night, so he wasn't too sure about the details.

If Yang Shi were to learn that on top of having his soul missing, his disciple had his body possessed as well... Hong Shi trembled.

"I'm not too sure either." Ye Wentian shook his head.

He had never stumbled before such a bizarre incident in his life before.

Hong long!

Just as everyone was completely perplexed by how a fellow who had his soul missing could possibly crawl away, the ground suddenly shook violent once more.

Everyone immediately staggered, nearly falling to the ground.

“We’re in a dire state now! The strength of the earth vein is growing by the moment, and the formation is on the brink of collapse. Everyone, we need you to infuse your zhenqi into the lake to maintain its stability!” Guild Leader Wu yelled anxiously.

Hearing the shout, no one could spare a single thought for Zhang Xuan anymore. They quickly turned their attention to the formation before them.

The lake water which had been sealed by the formation flag bubbled once more. As though it was set on fire, it threatened to knock down the barrier.

In order to stabilize the barrier, Elder Lu, Elder Han, and the others had infused all of their zhenqi in, and their faces paled in frailty. They seemed as though they would collapse at any moment.

“Alright, quickly infuse your zhenqi into the lake!”

Hearing his words, Ye Wentian understood that they were at an extremely crucial and dangerous moment. Thus, without any hesitation, he stepped forward and pumped his zhenqi into the lake.

Hong long!

With the infusion of fresh zhenqi into the lake, the shaking formation flags stabilized slightly.

Following which, Wei shi, Hong shi, Luo Qiqi, Princess Fei-er, and the others who were cultivating at the Lake Eye stepped forward and did the same as well.

Under the massive influx of zhenqi, the shaking formation flag began to show signs of stabilization. The rampaging lake water below also gradually regained its calmness. Even so, the furious rumbling of the volcano could still be heard below. It

was as if even though the massive beast had been suppressed for the time being, it would still break free with sufficient time.

“Guild Leader Wu, such a forceful measure isn’t feasible in the long-run!” Wei shi commented.

For the time being, they were still able to maintain the formation and suppress the earth vein and the volcano with brute force... but once everyone’s zhenqi ran dry, the situation could possibly rebound on them!

Besides, as time passed, the earth vein would gather more and more strength. In a way, it was similar to a spring. The further one tried to suppress it, the greater it would rebound back at one. By then, they would be placed in an even more dangerous situation.

“Indeed. You all continue suppressing the formation first, I’ll study the formation and see how I can re-establish the balance between the earth vein, Verdant Mountain, and Dragon-scaled River to control the volcano below!” Guild Leader Wu said.

The might of a formation was dependent on many factors, such as the geographical terrain or even the position of celestial bodies.

While the formation had been reactivated through the use of the formation flag, the intense trembling from a moment ago had changed the geographical terrain. Thus, some adjustments had to be made to the formation to bring out its greatest might.

If he could get the formation working properly once more, it would be able to draw in spiritual energy once more and possibly resolve the crisis they were in.

“Alright!”

Understanding the intent of Guild Leader Wu, Ye Wentian, Wei shi, and the others nodded their heads silently. Spreading their palms wide, they continued to infuse their zhenqi into the lake frenziedly so as to suppress any movement from the volcano.

On the other hand, with a compass in hand, Guild Leader Wu slowly walked around the formation in order to find the layout

to best bring out the might of the formation.

...

While a tense atmosphere weighed on the shore, within the lake, Zhang Xuan's soul heaved a sigh of relief.

It was fortunate that an abrupt movement in the lake had caught everyone's attention. Otherwise, it would never have been so easy for him to take back his body.

As his soul was simply too big, he wasn't able to slip in instantly. Thus, he could only forcefully control parts of his body to have it walk over by itself. His original thought was to move his legs, but due to the extreme stiffness in the region and the immense complexity of making his body walk, he had to give up on the idea. Thus, he had no choice but to move his arms and have his body... crawl into the lake.

However, Luo Xuan coincidentally caught sight of him, thus resulting in the 'possession' issue.

"Regardless, I should first have my soul enter my body first!"

Zhang Xuan could easily imagine the uproar that was happening outside, but he didn't have the luxury to be thinking about it now. His soul immediately rushed straight to his glabella in an attempt to enter his body.

No matter how difficult it may be, he had to do so. Otherwise, his body might just really die on him.

Tzzzzzz!

His massive soul trying to squeeze into his physical body was similar to an elephant trying to squeeze into a human-sized door.

"I can't get in..."

Zhang Xuan gave it all his might, but it was simply an impossible feat. He couldn't help but shake his head.

A ten-meter-tall soul forcefully entering a body of 1.8 meters... If not for his soul being intangible, his bones would probably have shattered into countless fragments by now.

His soul was squeezed to the extent that it was distorted scarily, but he still couldn't even get half of it in.

“Right, how did clone manage to get into his body so easily then?”

Zhang Xuan suddenly froze.

His clone's soul was much larger than him, but the other party didn't have any problems entering his body at all. Why was he having so much trouble then?

Hu!

Doubtful, Zhang Xuan brought out his clone and communicated with him. Soon, he found himself being rendered speechless.

His clone's body was forged using the Nine Hearts Lotus, granting it extraordinary flexibility. Putting aside a ten-meter-tall soul, even a hundred-meter-tall soul would be able to slip in easily without any trouble.

On the other hand, his main body was still mortal...

Staring at the clone, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but feel frustrated at how his main body ended up being inferior to his clone's.

But this couldn't be helped. Anything forged from a God artifact was bound to be extraordinary at birth.

“It seems like I have to focus my attention on cultivating my physical body when I finally get back into my body. Otherwise, it won't be able to withstand the further cultivation of my soul!”

Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella.

After communicating with his clone, Zhang Xuan finally understood that the main reason why he couldn't get into his body was because his body was still too weak!

If his body possessed abilities equivalent to the Nine Hearts Lotus, he would never have ended up facing such a difficult time now.

He had cultivated his physical body twice, but those were both when he hadn't reached Transcendent Mortal realm yet. While his physical body was superior to ordinary cultivators, it was still insufficient to house such a large soul.

“What the hell is this...”

Zhang Xuan was speechless.

To absorb too much spiritual energy and be unable to re-enter his body... he was probably the only one in the entire history of the Master Teacher Continent to meet with such a ridiculous situation.

“The only way I can resolve this problem is to find some way to cultivate my physical body...”

Only a strong body could harness such a huge soul. However, given that his body had no soul, how could he possibly cultivate?

This paradoxical relationship sure made one's head hurt.

Boom!

Just as Zhang Xuan was troubled over the matter, the lake water around him suddenly shook intensely. Lowering his head, he saw a searing heat wave suddenly rising from the bottom of the Cleansing Lake.

“This is... geothermal heat? Could there be a volcano underneath?”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

With his soul energy protecting his physical body, he was in no danger at all. However, to be able to cause the entire lake to boil in the blink of an eye, there must be a massive volcano beneath the lake.

Only the earth flame could possess such searing heat!

Back then, when retrieving the Crimson Flame Lotus Seed, Zhang Xuan happened to see it, and he understood how fearsome it could be.

At that moment, a thought struck Zhang Xuan, and his eyes lit up.

“Right! If I can draw the earth flame over and create an amalgamation of yin and yang through fusing it with the lake water... perhaps, I might be able to temper my physical body without controlling it!”

In his long journey, he had collected innumerable books, and a huge portion of them were regarding tempering one’s physical body.

Some involve the usage of poison, some involve pushing oneself to the limit... and some require earth flame and a spiritual energy lake.

Earth flame was a flame created naturally formed by the movements of the earth veins, and it harnessed the weight of the earth. On the other hand, spiritual energy lake was formed in a region where spirit veins intersected, and it carried the majesty of nature. If these two were to be fused together, they would create the perfect mix for tempering one’s physical body.

“However... My clone and I have nearly sapped the spiritual energy in the lake dry...”

With an idea in mind, Zhang Xuan felt a little more relaxed. However, a new problem soon emerged.

It took innumerable years for so much spiritual energy to gather in the Cleansing Lake, but in just eight mere hours, he and his clone had nearly sapped it dry... Without spiritual energy, the entire lake would only be engulfed by the earth flame.

If he didn’t resolve this problem before drawing the earth flame up, instead of tempering his physical body, he would only be barbecuing himself!

Give a few minutes and add a pinch of salt and cumin, and he would be ready to be tucked into.

646 A Shoe

“Forget it, this is a dire situation. I’ll use that!”

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out the spirit stone that he obtained as the prize for the Master Teacher Tournament.

The spiritual energy harnessed within a high-tier spirit stone was immense. Since there was no better choice, Zhang Xuan could only make use of it to temper his physical body first.

Hong long long!

While he was still hesitating over the issue, the ground trembled once more. Then, he heard some muffled voices above the water surface.

Following which, many surges of zhenqi began gushing into the lake, and the dying spiritual lake came to life once more.

“This...”

Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

He was just troubled about how he should return spiritual energy back into the lake when someone suddenly sent zhenqi over. It was as if a pillow was delivered when one was about to nap, or a feast was spread out just as one was hungry!

“Furthermore, this is zhenqi, refined spiritual energy. It’ll be easier for me to absorb it...”

If Zhang Xuan were to use spirit stones, given that the spiritual energy contained inside wasn’t refined yet, it would be inconvenient for him to absorb it. However, zhenqi was different.

Zhenqi was similar to a concentrated extract of spiritual energy, thus making it much easier to absorb.

“Could someone above know that I’m in dire need of tempering my physical body and intentionally delivered zhenqi over?”

Zhang Xuan scratched his head in confusion.

He had been too busy trying to return his soul back into his body to care about what was happening above. Could the others have realized that he needed spiritual energy, and decided to expend their own zhenqi to help him?

They were all too kind!

Touched, Zhang Xuan turned to his clone.

“You should draw the earth flame up. I’ll find the most suitable place to temper my physical body!”

“Alright!”

His clone nodded before rushing to the center of the lake, where the source of the heat was coming from.

As a God artifact, the Nine Hearts Lotus was fazed by neither heat nor cold. While the earth flame might be a formidable force, it wasn’t sufficient to damage it.

After the clone left, Zhang Xuan carried his physical body to look for the location most suited to temper his physical body.

Soon, Zhang Xuan came to a stop. He maneuvered his body such that it was sitting cross-legged on the ground. After a lot of trouble, he managed to open the pores throughout his body, and only then did the zhenqi floating in the river begin to gush into his body.

The single origin conceives two, two conceives three, and three conceives all. Heaven’s Path zhenqi was refined from the most fundamental and most accurate cultivation technique. It possessed no attribute, and it could fuse together with zhenqi of any attribute. Thus, even though there were many different types of zhenqi around him, it made no difference to him at all.

Just by drawing it into his body and driving it toward his dantian, it would be automatically refined to remove all impurities and form the purest Heaven’s Path zhenqi.

And under the tempering of these aura, Zhang Xuan’s body was gradually getting stronger and stronger.

...

With a compass in hand, Guild Leader Wu walked a few rounds around the entire lake silently. Seeing the sight, Wei shi couldn't help but ask, "Guild Leader Wu, have you found a solution yet?"

"Calm down, this is a grade-6 formation. With my capability, I can only reinforce it. It would be extremely difficult to modify it." Guild Leader Wu frowned deeply.

He was only a 5-star pinnacle formation master, and even if he were to give it his all, he still wouldn't be able to set up a grade-6 formation. The most he could do at the moment was just to sustain the formation. Even though he did say he intended to modify the formation based on the change in geographical terrain, it would be rather unlikely for him to succeed.

"Then what should we do? We can't possibly go on infusing our zhenqi in like this!" Wei shi exclaimed.

Infusing zhenqi into the Cleansing Lake could postpone the danger, but it wouldn't resolve the problem they had at hand.

"Give me some time!" Guild Leader Wu waved his hands. "Even though it's out of desperation that we're infusing zhenqi in, the consumption in maintaining the barrier through such isn't too high. With so many people, we should be able to last for two hours!"

As a lake that was concentrated in spiritual energy previously, it carried the ability to store spiritual energy and zhenqi. While this method might be troublesome, it should still buy them a decent length of time. Within this time period, perhaps he could find a solution to repair the formation!

"Alright then..."

Knowing that there was no better solution, Wei shi nodded. Just as he was about to speak, Ye Wentian's face suddenly warped in shock. "Wei shi and Guild Leader Wu, look..."

Turning their gazes over, they saw the center of the lake shaking violently, and a huge vortex gradually appeared.

Tzzzzz!

The vortex gradually grew larger. The zhenqi which the crowd had just pumped into the water seemed to have been swallowed whole, disappearing entirely.

“It seems like it’s consuming our zhenqi...”

“That seems to be the case. My zhenqi has disappeared...”

“It’s our zhenqi that is preventing the formation from collapsing. Once it is consumed dry...”

...

Everyone stared at one another with widened eyes.

What was going on?

Wasn’t this lake a place that could be used to store zhenqi? If that was the case, how was all of their zhenqi consumed in the blink of an eye?

Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, Wei shi turned around and exclaimed, “Guild Leader Wu... the lake is consuming our zhenqi. I fear that... we won’t be able to last two hours!”

“Then... How long can you all hold on for?”

Guild Leader Wu frowned.

Wei shi did a rough calculation based on everyone’s cultivation and said, “At most... ten minutes.”

“Ten minutes?”

Guild Leader Wu’s face warped in shock, and he clenched his jaw. “Ten minutes is fine too. As long as the earth flame doesn’t surge up, we will be safe. I’ll try to find a solution within this period of time. Or else...”

As he spoke, he stared at his compass intently to study the formation. However, at the moment, the ground shook once more.

“What happened this time?”

Turning his gaze back to the Cleansing Lake, he saw Wei shi and Ye Wentian looking at him with tearful faces. “It seems that the earth flame has surged up!”

“...” Guild Leader Wu felt as though he was about to faint.

What the heck was this!

When he thought that the Cleansing Lake could store spiritual energy, and by infusing zhenqi into it, the formation could last for a significant period of time, all of the zhenqi ended up being consumed instead. Just as he said that they would be safe as long as the earth flame doesn't surge up from the volcano, it immediately happened...

Dear heavens, are you toying with us?

Hong long long!

As the earth flame threatened to leap out from the lake, the Cleansing Lake raged once more, and unable to take the impact, an elder was sent flying as mouthfuls of fresh blood spurted from his mouth.

'Kacha!', the formation flag before him also broke into two halves.

"We're done for..."

With a pale face, Guild Leader Wu couldn't help but stagger backward feebly.

The formation was already on the verge of breakdown when there was no spiritual energy in the Cleansing Lake to maintain it. Now that even the earth flame was gushing up to the earth... the eruption of the volcano was inevitable now.

"We should hurry up and leave..."

Guild Leader Wu waved his hands in desolation.

With the eruption of this volcano, the entire Huanyu Capital would be plunged into a massive catastrophe. Countless lives would die due to this disaster.

"Is there really no solution at all?"

Ye Wentian clenched his jaws tightly.

"None at all, unless..."

Upon recalling something, Guild Leader Wu shook his head and said, "No, it's impossible to pull off!"

"Unless what?"

Ye Wentian and Wei shi turned their sights over to Guild Leader Wu.

“There’s no point. It’s something that can’t possibly be achieved!” Guild Leader Wu sighed.

“Why don’t you tell us? Maybe we can find a solution together,” Ye Wentian said anxiously.

With the earth flame gushing up, the group probably didn’t even have three minutes left. If Guild Leader Wu had a solution in mind, they could at least give it a try. After all, they couldn’t possibly watch idly as millions of lives were extinguished before them.

“The main purpose of the formation is to maintain balance among the energies from the Verdant Mountain, Dragon-scaled River, and the earth vein, thus suppressing the volcano underneath. This was the reason why Huanyu Capital was able to enjoy so many years of peace. However, in the end, a formation can only be considered as an external regulator... If we could find the exact point where the energies of the trio intersect and direct them to cancel one another out, we would be able to return stability to the region even without the formation!”

“But... we don’t have the luxury of time to do so at this point. Besides, this matter involves the energies from the entire Verdant Mountain, Dragon-scaled River, and earth vein. If we were to make a mistake here, we might just make things much worse...” Guild Leader Wu said.

Wei shi and Ye Wentian fell into deep contemplation.

The both of them understood the meaning behind Guild Leader Wu’s words.

In truth, the main purpose of the formation was to regulate the energies from the three sides to create a balance.

If they could find the balancing point where the three energies intersected and direct their flow such that they canceled one another out, they could create an equivalent effect as well.

But... how were they supposed to find this point?

Putting aside how the Verdant Mountain and Dragon-scaled River stretched for thousands of kilometers, just the fact that the earth vein was located underground already made it impossible for one to determine the intensity of its energy at specific locations.

If they were to make an error and have the energies superimpose on one another instead of canceling one another out, they could possibly worsen the disaster!

This was similar to balancing a gold coin. The slightest deviation would lead to the coin falling... it was no easy feat to balance the three energies!

Not to mention, they had no time now!

The earth flame was surging up, the zhenqi everyone pumped into the Cleansing Lake had been devoured, and one of the formation flags was destroyed... In less than three minutes, this entire area would be turned into ruins. Nothing would be left behind at all.

“Let’s evacuate everyone now...”

Guild Leader Wu waved his hands.

“Yes!”

Knowing that there was nothing they could do, Ye Wentian hurriedly issued instructions to everyone.

Hualala!

The beast tamers on duty were immediately beckoned, and eight aerial spirit beasts came flying over.

Knowing how dangerous the situation was, Ye Wentian had already made preparations should the worst occur.

“Everyone, hurry up and get on the aerial beast...”

Ye Wentian beckoned the group over. But at that moment, the ground trembled once more.

Hong long long!

The shaking was much more intense this time round. In that instant, it was as if the Cleansing Lake had been overturned. A

searing heat wave gushed forth as though a majestic dragon from the bottom of the lake.

Seeing that an explosion was imminent, Hong shi asked, “What will happen to Zhang shi if we were to leave like that?”

“It’s too late to save him, let’s go...” Ye Wentian shouted.

Hong long!

Before he could finish his words, a huge pillar of fire gushed into the air. Everyone felt a searing gust of wind rushing at them, burning their skin.

“It’s too late... We can’t get away anymore...”

Ye Wentian thought that they would at least have three minutes, but before they could even get onto the aerial beasts, the volcano was already erupting. A tight squeeze gripped his heart, and subconsciously, he closed his eyes, awaiting his imminent death.

But after waiting for a moment, he realized he wasn’t engulfed by the flames. Just as he was perplexed by what was happening, someone amidst the crowd suddenly shouted, “Wait a moment, look! Why is there a person on the flames?”

Ye Wentian quickly raised his head and looked over, only to see a man standing above the fire dragon. The other party had a sharp gaze reminiscent of a bolt of lightning.

Amidst curious gazes, the other party took off his shoe and threw it casually.

Jiya!

The fire dragon immediately withered. The clash among the energies from the Verdant Mountain, Dragon-scaled River, and earth vein immediately calmed down, as though a balance had been achieved.

647 Yang shi Reappears

“This?”

Wei shi and Ye Wentian stared at one another in astonishment, as though they had seen a ghost.

Guild Leader Wu’s entire body was trembling non-stop, as if someone was grabbing his neck. His eyes were widened so much that they were about to pop out. “I-it’s the balance point! By throwing his shoe, he directed the energies to cancel one another out at the balancing point...”

The main difficulty with balancing the energies from the Verdant Mountain, Dragon-scaled River, and earth vein was finding the balance point. Once it was found, it wasn’t too difficult to re-establish a balance.

Just that... Of all the things he had thought of that could resolve the situation, be it a formation plate, a formation flag, or some kind of formidable artifact, to think that it was a mere shoe that saved them from their impending doom... This was nearly inconceivable!

How formidable must that person be to achieve such a feat?

Who in the world was that person?

Just as Guild Leader Wu was completely dumbfounded, unable to utter a single word, Hong shi and Luo Xuan’s lips trembled, and they hurriedly kneeled to the ground.

“Junior Hong Qian pays respect to Yang shi!”

“Junior Luo Xuan pays respect to Yang shi!”

The duo immediately recognized the figure as soon as he appeared in the air—it was no other than the man who subdued the alliance of the fourteen strongest regional powers in Hongfeng Empire singlehandedly, the supreme expert... Yang Xuan!

They thought that they would surely die this time, but who knew that Yang shi would actually appear at this crucial

moment and resolve their crisis.

At this current moment, Yang Xuan was standing silently in the air, exuding a calm but unfathomable disposition.

Ye Wentian, Wei shi, and the others turned to look at Hong shi and Luo Xuan questioningly.

“He is...”

They were all in the midst of dire trouble when the other party suddenly appeared and resolved the entire crisis with the toss of a shoe. Upon seeing Hong Qian and Luo Xuan greeting the other party with utmost respect, they immediately turned to them for answers.

Given how the other party was able to easily resolve a situation that was beyond them, it couldn't be clearer that the other party was a formidable figure.

Hong shi swallowed a mouthful of saliva as he said, “This elder is... Zhang Xuan's teacher, Yang shi! Even Pavilion Master Mo from the Hongyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion has to respectfully address him as senior!”

Even though this wasn't his first time meeting Yang shi, the pressure which the other party exerted on him was still as powerful as always.

This was especially so on his soul. He felt as though he was facing an immovable mountain, rendering him incapable of even conjuring the slightest thought of aggression.

“Even Pavilion Master Mo has to respectfully address him as senior?”

“Zhang shi's teacher?”

Wei shi, Ye Wentian, Guild Leader Wu, and the others narrowed their eyes, and their lips twitched violently.

One must know that Pavilion Master Mo was a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, an expert who had reached Sainthood!

And yet, even a person like him had to address this person as ‘senior’... How strong must this Yang shi be?

Furthermore, they had lost Zhang shi's body, and after the previous burst of flames, it was unlikely that even cinders were left of him. For his teacher to appear at this instant... how could they possibly explain this matter to the other party?

If only they had known that the other party had such a fearsome teacher, they would have surely braved through danger to look after Zhang shi!

The more they thought about it, the more nervous they became. Thus, the trio hurriedly bowed down.

“Huanyu Empire's Ye Wentian, Wu Zun, and Wei Jiang pay respect to Yang shi!”

With his hands behind his back, Yang shi stared down at the group coldly.

“If my student Zhang Xuan has erred, you can reprimand and correct him. To leave him to fend for himself in the river... do you think that there's no one behind him?”

“We dare not think so...”

Seeing that the other party had come due to this matter, everyone froze in fear. At the same time, they felt indignant as well.

We really tried to save your student, but in just a moment that our attention was away from him, he leaped into the lake himself. The situation back then was simply too complicated, there was nothing we could have done...

“You'd better not.”

Harrumphing coldly, Yang shi turned his gaze away from the crowd. He turned his hand to the Cleansing Lake and grabbed. An unconscious figure slowly rose from the water.

It was Zhang Xuan!

Just by stretching his hand forward, this Yang shi actually managed to find Zhang Xuan and fish him up.

“Despite grabbing through space, there isn't the slightest sign of energy ripple in his movement at all?”

“Even a Saint 1-dan wouldn't be capable of doing so!”

Ye Wentian and Wei shi glanced at one another, and their bodies trembled in fear.

That movement might not seem like anything special, but as Transcendent Mortal 8-dan pinnacle experts, they had a clear grasp of how difficult the feat was.

They were also capable of grabbing something remotely through space as well, but to find a grab a person over a distance of several dozens of meters from the huge Cleansing Lake without the slightest energy ripple... This was a feat that no ordinary man was capable of!

Even Pavilion Master Mo Gaoyuan from Hongyuan Empire was probably incapable of such a feat!

Expert!

He was a true expert!

Ye Wentian, Wei shi, and Guild Leader Wu glanced at one another, and their bodies stiffened.

There were some master teachers who were very protective of their students, and they would take it personally if one dared to bully their students. If Yang shi were to really settle this score with them... while they might be esteemed figures in Huanyu Empire, they knew that they were nothing to him.

Gritting his teeth, Ye Wentian stepped forward.

“I apologize for failing to take good care for Zhang shi. I ask of Yang shi to... punish me!”

The Cleansing Lake was a possession of Huanyu Empire’s royalty, and he was the one who invited the others over as well. In a sense, the entire matter was intricately related to him, and he wouldn’t be able to shirk his responsibility.

Yang shi harrumphed.

“Punish you? If I wished to punish you, do you think that you would be talking to me at this very moment?”

Flicking his wrist, the unconscious Zhang Xuan came to a halt in midair, floating calmly just beside him.

Upon seeing this movement, everyone's faces were drained of all color.

Even without coming into contact with the other party, just by the energy he leaked, Yang Shi was actually able to allow someone to float by his side... This was a feat completely inconceivable to them!

“The Cleansing Lake is formed by the energies from the Verdant Mountain, Dragon-scaled River, and earth vein. If this power is not controlled well, it could result in mass destruction. As a master teacher, this isn't a sight that I wish to see, so I've resolved this problem for you!”

Glancing at Zhang Xuan and noticing that there was nothing wrong with the other party, Yang Shi's complexion alleviated slightly. Flinging his sleeves, he said, “However, this incident has caused massive damage to the Cleansing Lake. It will take around fifty years before it can recover back to its original state... however, with the three energies in perfect balance, your cultivators can now enter the Cleansing Lake directly to cultivate. Since there's no longer any dependence on the Lake Eyes, the ten-year limit can be abolished!”

“Can enter the Cleansing Lake directly to cultivate? Ten-year limit can be abolished?”

Initially, when Ye Wentian heard that it would take fifty years for the Cleansing Lake to recover, he was slightly disappointed. However, when he heard that there was no longer any need to be dependent on the Lake Eye and that the ten-year limit was no longer applicable, he nearly leaped in joy.

Even though the Cleansing Lake was highly beneficial to one's cultivation, the spiritual energy contained within was simply too violent. One could only cultivate in a Lake Eye, thus creating a natural restraint of three days every ten years.

Once this restraint was gone, given the size of the Cleansing Lake, a few hundred people would be able to cultivate simultaneously. Furthermore, there was no need for any interval in between... He could already foresee the exponential increase in experts in Huanyu Empire fifty years

from now. With this, they would surely be able to rise to the top among Tier 2 Empires.

While it was impossible for them to become a Tier 1 Empire with just this, this would surely bring their entire nation to greater heights.

“Thank you, Yang shi!”

Kneeling on the floor, Ye Wentian bowed in earnest gratitude.

When something happened to the Cleansing Lake, he'd thought that Huanyu Empire would come to an end under his rule. Who could have known that this would actually be a blessing in disguise? Not only did Zhang shi's teacher resolve the issue, he even removed the previous limits on the Cleansing Lake!

With this, the other party saved Huanyu Empire and granted it the potential to stand among the top of other Tier 2 Empires!

This favor was so great that there was nothing equivalent Huanyu Empire could offer!

Seeing Ye Wentian kneeling before him, Yang shi waved his hands casually before walking on thin air into the distance. Zhang shi's body floated closely behind him.

Soon, the duo disappeared from everyone's sight.

“To be able to bring another person along with him in a flight...”

Everyone swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

Due to their limited cultivation, most people present here weren't aware of exactly how fearsome Yang shi was. Even so, the fact that he could settle the Cleansing Lake, even though it was on the verge of explosion, just by tossing a shoe and bring another person on a flight with him had left them indescribably shocked.

No matter how dull-witted they may be, it was clear that Yang shi was someone they should never trifle with.

Even though Transcendent Mortal 8-dan Ethereal Treading realm cultivators could step on empty space as well, they were

only capable of vertical translation. In a sense, there wasn't much difference from leaping upward.

Only upon officially becoming a Saint and reaching 1-dan Void Pursuit realm would one be capable of true flight.

But even so, this ability would only be confined to the individual. To actually bring another person with him so casually... the other party's cultivation was beyond their imaginations!

“Zhang shi... actually has such a powerful teacher?”

Xing Yuan gulped down his saliva.

In truth, he had been thinking of finding an opportunity to teach this brat a lesson so that he would never cause Princess Fei-er any trouble in the future. But at this moment, he realized how foolish his thoughts were.

It was fortunate that he didn't make a move. Otherwise, even his entire clan combined wouldn't be able to withstand a single slap from the other party's teacher!

The gap between the both of them was this huge!

Even though the strongest man in his clan, the old ancestor, was capable of flight as well, he knew very well that the old ancestor wouldn't be able to bring another person along with him so casually.

‘It seems like I'll have to get on good terms with Zhang shi in the future!’ Xing Yuan thought.

‘Zhang shi's teacher...’ Yu Fei-er also widened her eyes in shock.

It was no wonder Zhang Xuan was able to defeat her time and time again. It turned out that he had such a formidable teacher!

With such a formidable figure grooming him, even if she was an incredible talent, it was inevitable that she wouldn't be a match for the other party...

‘Humph! Even if you have a strong teacher, I refuse to be your maid. Let's see who will have the last laugh...’

She gritted her teeth and clenched her fists.

‘So what if the other party has a powerful teacher? I, Yu Fei-er, am not one to trifle with either. Do you think I’ll serve as your maid obediently?’

‘Dream on!’

‘If an opportunity comes, I’ll surely defeat you in a bet and redeem myself...’

But at this moment, she suddenly recalled that she had just lost another ten thousand spirit stones... how frustrating!

“That’s a relief...”

Seeing Yang shi arriving on time to save Zhang shi, Hong shi and Luo Xuan each heaved a sigh of relief.

Luo Qiqi also came to a realization at this moment.

She had been wondering why Zhang shi possessed such astounding knowledge in pill forging. However, Yang shi’s presence explained everything. With such a formidable teacher, it was impossible for the student to be ordinary.

“The crisis in the Cleansing Lake might have been resolved, but given the current circumstances, we can’t continue cultivating any longer!”

After seeing off the incredible Yang shi, Ye Wentian turned to Luo Qiqi, Princess Fei-er, and the others and apologized.

He had invited them over to cultivate so as to get on their good side, but it turned out to be fraught with dangers, and they even almost died here. This was indeed a tragic failure.

“That’s right!”

Everyone nodded as they turned to look at the ruined Cleansing Lake with twitching lips. At the same time, a doubt sprouted within their minds.

Wasn’t this lake supposed to be safe? Why would it suddenly... act up?

648 Verdant Mountain

While everyone was staring at the Cleansing Lake with doubts in their mind, Yang shi, who had impressed all of them with his previous incredible feats, suddenly plummeted from the sky as soon as he got out of everyone's sight.

Peng!

Following which, pained moaning echoed. Slowly, the face of the majestic Yang shi slowly turned into Zhang Xuan's face.

“Can't you give me a hand instead of watching as I fall from the sky?”

Grabbing his spinning head, Zhang Xuan turned to glare at his clone in anger.

Naturally, he was the one feigning Yang shi whereas that 'Zhang Xuan' was his clone.

Back then, at the bottom of the Cleansing Lake, after absorbing everyone's zhenqi and the earth flame, he managed to strengthen his physical body considerably, thus allowing his ten-meter-large soul to enter his body.

Only after this all was done did he realize that the Cleansing Lake was on the verge of explosion.

In order to preserve his life, he immediately checked on the situation with the Library of Heaven's Path, and only then did he realize that he and his clone's action of absorbing all of the spiritual energy from the Cleansing Lake had disturbed the balance among the three energies, thus causing such a huge commotion.

In an instant, he felt embarrassed.

The other party had kindly brought him over to cultivate, but he actually caused their lake to explode instead...

It was indeed wrong of him to do so.

But honestly speaking, he didn't do it intentionally either!

All of this had to be blamed on... his clone! If not for that fellow absorbing the spiritual energy with all of his might, how could the balance have been disturbed?

But it was useless to be pointing fingers now. If he were to run out and explain the situation to Ye Wentian now, the other party would probably kill him with a single slap out of rage.

Left with no choice, he could only summon 'Yang shi' once more.

With this 'expert' appearing, he would be able to openly resolve this issue, as well as compensate the other party for the damage.

In order to make the entire matter more believable, he even instructed his clone to pass off as the unconscious him.

This way, he would be able to brush off everything when he returned. He could simply say that he didn't know anything other than the fact that his teacher saved him.

Given that the others had witnessed the previous sight, they probably wouldn't pursue the matter either.

And of course, the method of flight that Zhang Xuan used was the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Step. On the other hand, his clone was slightly different. As a God artifact, the Nine Hearts Lotus possessed the innate ability of flight, and this ability was transferred to his clone.

With these two working with one another to put on the act, even Wei shi, a 5-star high-tier master teacher, failed to see through it.

Right after reaching this area, Zhang Xuan suddenly found his zhenqi being depleted. Due to the breakthrough his soul and physical body had just undergone, he wasn't able to gauge his zhenqi accurately. As such, his vision just darkened all of the sudden, and he plummeted from the sky!

He thought that his clone would at least lend him a hand to help him land safely on the ground. Who knew that this fellow would simply watch idly as he crashed all the way down...

Zhang Xuan felt so angry that he could explode at any moment.

While he wasn't severely injured due to his physical resilience and the low altitude of his flight, he thought that his clone should at least share some of his burdens.

What the heck was this?

Remember, as a clone, you should rush forward when you see that I'm in difficulty...

Just as Zhang Xuan was just about to give this fellow an 'ideology lesson' so that he would learn his priorities, the other party slowly closed his eyes... It looked as though he was saying that 'it's not my fault that you're so dumb'.

"..."

Zhang Xuan spurted blood.

Just because I said you shouldn't just 'watch as I fall from the sky', you closed your eyes... How in the world did I create a fool like you?

The clones of others were fierce and loyal. When they saw their main body in trouble, they would immediately rush forward to save him. And yet, this fellow actually simply watched as the main body fell to the ground... Just the thought of it left Zhang Xuan light-headed!

What a darned clone he had!

"Forget it, let me see how much stronger I have grown first!"

Since he couldn't be bothered to lash out at this fellow, Zhang Xuan turned his attention to his growth instead.

Under the nourishment of the earth flame and spiritual lake, his physical body had grown by leaps and bounds. At this moment, every single cell of his felt strong and flexible, as though they had just gone through a metamorphosis.

Raising his arm, he sent a fist forward.

Hong long!

The might of his punch shot through the tree as though a fist-sized bullet, rattling the entire tree with its force.

“My physical body has grown this strong?”

Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

In the previous attack, he used neither his soul cultivation nor his zhenqi, just solely the strength of his physical body. He wanted to see how much power he could tap into. He didn’t expect the force of his punch to be able to create a gaping hole in a gigantic tree a dozen meters away.

Even a Transcendent Mortal 5-dan Consonant Spirit realm cultivator would find it hard to execute this kind of attack.

“Just my physical body itself wields a strength of 2,000,000 ding!”

Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

With this, he had confirmed the might his physical body wielded. It was actually on par with his zhenqi, reaching 2,000,000 ding.

In other words, without zhenqi or soul energy, just by the might of his flesh itself, he could destroy a Consonant Spirit realm primary stage cultivator.

Fearsome!

“What about my soul cultivation?”

After testing his physical body, Zhang Xuan raised his palm and drove his soul energy.

Hong long!

A small hill dozens of meters away was immediately reduced to dust.

“Even though the might is still capped at Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle – 3,200,000 ding – my stamina has improved. I’ll be able to sustain my soul energy longer in a fight...”

Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

Even though Zhang Xuan’s soul had grown to a height of ten meters, the might he could tap into didn’t increase. It was still

at 3,200,000 ding.

What improved instead was his stamina.

Making an analogy, if an ordinary human were to harness all of their might, they might be able to lift an object of 100kg. However, that would be their limit, and they would need to rest for quite a while before they could do so once more.

3,200,000 ding referred to the maximum might one could harness in an attack. In other words, it was impossible for one to launch such an attack continuously without rest.

However, as Zhang Xuan's soul reached a height of ten meters, the limits of his stamina were released. He was now able to launch attacks of 3,200,000 ding without tiring himself out.

This was an extremely fearsome ability. If he could sustain a might of 3,200,000 ding in every single attack, he could even kill a Cosmos Bridge realm primary stage cultivator.

“With 2,000,000 ding from my physical body, 2,000,000 ding from my zhenqi, and 3,200,000 ding from my soul cultivation, I can rival even a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm pinnacle cultivator in a fight!”

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan could feel overwhelming power flowing through his body, as though an undefeatable titan.

Despite being at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle, he already harnessed a might superior to Cosmos Bridge pinnacle experts, who wielded a might of 6,400,000 ding. There was probably no one who wouldn't feel excited at that thought.

“Come, let's cross fists!”

Chuckling lightly, Zhang Xuan turned to his clone.

Due to the limits of his physical body, he was sent flying by the other party's fist the previous time. However, with a breakthrough in all aspects, it would be difficult for the other party to do the same now!

Perhaps, he might even be able to teach the other party a lesson and let him know the difference between the main body

and a clone!

“Un!” His clone nodded his head. Gathering might in his fist, he punched forward.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan gathered the might from his body, soul, and zhenqi, and in an instant, his strength was brought to its peak.

With the current might he possessed, he felt that even a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan primary stage expert could be killed with a single punch.

Boom!

The two fists collided.

“You...”

A scream in agony echoed in the air. While his clone stood completely motionless on the spot, Zhang Xuan was sent flying backward. His body tore through a dozen huge trees over a distance of several hundred meters before finally coming to a stop. Blood spewed profusely from his mouth.

The heck!

Did you need to be so vicious?

He thought that with such a massive improvement, he would be able to easily teach the other party a lesson. Who knew that the gap between them only seemed to have widened...

He had used his full strength, but not only was the other party completely fine, he also nearly died from the encounter himself...

How could reality be so darned? Are you the clone or am I?

Struggling to his feet, Zhang Xuan glared at the other party.

“Your physical body is still too weak, so you aren’t able to bring out the full might of your soul!”

Just as Zhang Xuan was feeling displeased, his clone walked over with his hands behind his back, carrying an authoritative disposition. “If you wish to defeat me, you still need much

more practice. But of course, if you acknowledge me as your teacher, I can teach you...”

“Scram!”

With a darkened face, Zhang Xuan put that fellow straight into his storage ring.

His clone actually tried to take him as a student? What was the world turning into?

If you’re that capable, why don’t you try ascending to the heavens?

“That fellow’s words might be infuriating, but he does make sense.”

After putting away the other party, Zhang Xuan frowned.

It was indeed true that his physical body wasn’t able to bring out the full might of his soul cultivation.

While his physical body had made massive progress under the tempering of the earth flame and spiritual lake, the duration was too short. It was only sufficient for his massive soul to slip into his body.

It still wasn’t enough for his soul to fuse perfectly with his body and bring out the full extent of his strength.

“With a certain degree of incompatibility between my soul and physical body, I won’t have precise control over my strength...”

A powerful soul needs a powerful body to house it. Otherwise, it would be like an adult taking control over an infant’s body. No matter how powerful the adult was, it was impossible for him to bring out his full might through an infant’s body. In fact, the difference between the strength of the two might even cause the adult to be unable to control his own strength precisely as well.

This was exactly the situation that was happening with Zhang Xuan. Even though his soul had finally grown to be capable of housing his massive soul, it was still comparatively much weaker than it. As such, his control over his soul cultivation and physical body wasn’t as thorough as it used to be.

In a sense, it was similar to the situation when he first cultivated Heaven's Path Golden Body in Master Lu Chen's house.

Although he didn't feel that he had used too much strength, he ended up sending Master Lu Chen flying with a touch.

Just that this time, the lack of control worked both ways. His strength could be either much stronger or weaker than the what he perceived himself.

"It seems like... I'll have to train my physical body!"

Zhang Xuan massaged his glabella.

The momentary tempering just now was clearly insufficient. It seemed that he had to hurry up and raise the strength of his physical body. Otherwise, if he were to suddenly have a burst of strength and a moment of frailty now and then, others might just think that he was a lunatic.

"Or else, I could ask Emperor Ye Wentian for some cultivation techniques for training one's physical body. As long as I can compile Heaven's Path Golden Body 3-dan, my physical body should grow significantly stronger!"

As long as he had sufficient physical body cultivation techniques, his Library of Heaven's Path would be able to form a Heaven's Path Golden Body, and he would be able to improve swiftly.

"Where am I?"

Only after deciding on his next course of action was Zhang Xuan's attention brought back to his surroundings. Taking a glance, he was stunned.

"This is... the Verdant Mountain?"

Back then, he was in a hurry to escape as soon as possible so he didn't take note of it, but it seemed like he had traveled a long distance away from Huanyu Capital, reaching the depths of Verdant Mountain.

649 Heartthrob

A towering, winding mountain range filled with a light fragrance from primitive and foreign flora and fauna. Even though it was already deep into winter, the spiritual energy in the region was still filled with the vitality of spring.

After taking a look, Zhang Xuan complimented his surroundings.

“This Verdant Mountain is indeed a blessed land for cultivation!”

To rise above innumerable kingdoms to become a Tier 2 Empire, while having a strong Master Teacher Pavilion was important, so was attracting capable talents and possessing a good geographical terrain.

Be it the Verdant Mountain or the Dragon-scaled River, their lands carried a soothing atmosphere and gentle spiritual energy that boosted one’s cultivation.

“Let’s return first!”

After resting for a moment to recuperate from the injuries incurred from the previous fall, Zhang Xuan prepared to return to the capital when the leaves not too far away rustled.

‘Shh shhh.’

Following which, a massive Armored Beartiger came into view. It was trudging forward warily in a certain direction.

“Hmm?”

Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

The Armored Beartiger was an incredibly ferocious Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beast. Known as the Autarch of the Forest, even a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan primary stage cultivator would find it hard to defeat it.

This fellow usually hunted openly since nothing could possibly stand in its way. Why was it moving around carefully

as though it was some kind of wolf?

More importantly, since Zhang Xuan was able to see the other party, the other party should have noticed him as well, given its cultivation. Yet, it actually continued moving along its path, ignoring him entirely. This left some doubts in his mind.

‘Let’s see what that fellow is up to...’

Zhang Xuan’s curiosity was immediately piqued. He leaped onto a tree branch and followed behind the Armored Beartiger.

Soon, the large fellow bent low, looking around his surroundings in alarm as it advanced slowly.

Hu hu!

At a distance not too far away, Zhang Xuan could see a massive Grandlion Spirit Beast.

Just like the Armored Beartiger, the Grandlion Spirit Beast was a Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beast as well. Given that they were equally matched in strength and shared the same prey, they were usually in a hostile relationship.

‘It seems like its nemesis has appeared. Perhaps these two are intending on assaulting one another.’

Zhang Xuan chuckled.

He was still wondering what was happening, but it turned out that two nemeses had just met one another, and they were prowling around for an opportunity to strike at the other.

‘I should pay careful attention to their battle. Perhaps, I might be able to learn some new techniques to infuse into my battle techniques!’ Zhang Xuan thought.

Since everyone knew that he was taken away by his teacher, he was in no hurry to return.

Such a ferocious battle could broaden his horizons, so it would be a pity to miss it.

In fact, there were many incredible techniques that were created after watching spirit beasts fight one another.

Squatting on a tree branch, Zhang Xuan watched as the Armored Beartiger and Grandlion Spirit Beast slowly approached one another. Before long, they had already circled around the shrubs and saw one another.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan thought that a magnificent battle would break out instantly, but contrary to his expectations, the duo simply nodded their heads, seemingly coming to an agreement, before heading forward side by side.

‘This...’

Zhang Xuan blinked his eyes in surprise.

When did these two nemeses become good friends?

Furthermore, from the looks of it, they seemed to be working in unison.

Curious, Zhang Xuan followed behind them. A little distance away, the loud roaring of the wind echoed from above. A massive aerial spirit beast swooped down from the air.

‘Transcendent Mortal 5-dan aerial spirit beast... Dracoeagle Beast?’

Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in shock.

This fellow was extremely famous as well. With steel talons that could even rip apart Spirit intermediate-tier weapons, it was given the majestic name of Sky Overlord.

Even three of his Demon Cinque Beast wouldn’t be a match for the Dracoeagle Beast!

Were these two spirit beasts working together to deal with it?

But that shouldn’t be possible. The spirit beasts on land and in the sky usually didn’t cross one another. Besides, the other party was capable of flight, so how could the duo possibly attack it?

This was similar to how a lion would usually prey on rabbits and deer instead of sparrows and crows.

Since they were from two completely different worlds, there was no need for them to cross one another!

Huala!

By the time Zhang Xuan had recovered from his astonishment, the Dracoeagle Beast had already landed before the other spirit beasts. Just like before, it nodded its head toward the duo, and as though coming to an understanding, the trio advanced forward together.

‘The Dracoeagle Beast... is collaborating with them as well?’

Zhang Xuan’s shock was gradually deepening.

It was already baffling that two nemeses of the forest were working with one another. Now that even the Sky Overlord was cooperating with them, what in the world could they be up to?

What could have happened for them to put aside their differences and ally with one another?

Ssssssss!

Walking on, the group stumbled by a massive python, a ferocious ape, a swift sparrow... Before long, more than thirty spirit beasts were gathered together.

All of them possessed a cultivation of at least Transcendent Mortal 5-dan, and given their natural advantages as spirit beasts, Zhang Xuan would have a difficult time defeating even a single one of them. Yet, so many of them were gathered together at this instant. Even a person as brave as Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but feel his goosebumps rising in fear.

‘It will be difficult for me to escape if they notice me!’

Zhang Xuan moved carefully in fear, afraid that he would accidentally make a noise that would catch their attention. His palm was drenched with cold sweat.

If they were to manage to surround him, there was a chance that he would even be done in.

Flying, crawling, running, slithering... There were truly spirit beasts of all sorts. Every single one of them possessed might

that an ordinary Transcendent Mortal 5-dan pinnacle cultivator would find hard to stand against. Together, not even a 7-dan expert would escape from their clutches.

‘What is it that brought so many spirit beasts together? Are they going to fight an enemy?’

Despite the danger involved in this matter, Zhang Xuan couldn’t hold back his curiosity.

So many different species of spirit beasts were present here, and a huge bunch of them were even nemeses of one another. And yet, here they were, working together with one another. What could have happened?

‘Could it be that... they have found some kind of treasure?’

A thought popped into Zhang Xuan’s mind, and excitement begin to tingle within him.

It was rumored that true treasures would attract the presence of countless spirit beast or even incur a stampede. Could these fellows be gathered for some kind of incredible treasure?

‘That’s not it. If it’s a treasure, they would probably be fighting with one another over it at this instant...’

However, Zhang Xuan soon rejected the idea.

There would be no one who wouldn’t wish to claim a treasure for themselves. If that was truly the case, it would be impossible for them to work together—it would be a scene of bloodshed instead.

‘No matter what, I should just watch on. The answer should unfold itself soon!’

Since he was already up to this point, he had to get to the bottom of the matter. Thus, he followed behind the group discreetly.

Hualala!

While he was following behind the group, a slight rustling sounded from the trees ahead, and a group of silhouettes appeared.

‘This...’

Upon seeing those silhouettes, Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in shock.

All that came before were all spirit beasts, but this group were all humans!

There were seven to eight of them, and just like the spirit beasts, they had all reached Transcendent Mortal 5-dan as well. There was a slight but distinct scent of blood coming from them.

‘They are... beast hunters!’

A name appeared in Zhang Xuan’s mind, and excitement immediately overwhelmed him.

A spirit beast’s skin, bones, blood, and inner core were extremely valuable treasures to cultivators.

In fact, there was even a market specializing in such sales.

Given how lucrative the market was, there was naturally a group of people who specialized in hunting down spirit beasts and procuring the useful body parts, thus giving rise to a unique occupation... beast hunters!

However, just like herbologists, the beast hunter occupation wasn’t acknowledged by the Master Teacher Pavilion.

It wasn’t due to how cruel the occupation was but that it had no complete heritage.

Most people chose this life due to compelling situations, and as such, there were no organizations nor guilds regulating them and passing down knowledge. Furthermore, the death toll of this occupation was simply too huge. The hunters would often become hunted themselves, thus making it difficult to pass down their heritage.

As such, it couldn’t really be called a ‘unique occupation’.

But even so, there was quite a number of them over the entire continent, and they were recorded in books too. Just that... this group of beast hunters had actually come together with the spirit beasts!

The beast hunters simply walked up to the pack of spirit beasts, nodded, and then they began advancing together.

Beast hunters and spirit beasts were mortal enemies, and yet they were walking side by side at this moment... What the heck was going on?

What should have been a great battle between the spirit beasts and the beast hunters ended up as though an amicable meeting among old friends. This was contradictory and bewildering!

As the group slowly grew larger, in order to prevent himself from being noticed, Zhang Xuan could only fly amidst the lush leaves using the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps.

After advancing a little further, they arrived at the bottom of a waterfall. The water cascaded from a height of three thousand chi, creating a deafening roar.

A slight vapor rose from the bottom of the waterfall, nourishing the brilliant greenery in the area.

Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

‘It’s the middle of winter... how come the greenery is so verdant?’

While the greenery in Verdant Mountain wouldn’t wither due to the rich spiritual energy in the area, the color of the greenery would still darken in the middle of winter.

But the greenery in this region had a bright shade of green, as though it was the onset of spring. This very sight was baffling.

Could there be something special about this waterfall?

Hualala!

Beneath the waterfall was a massive lake. A white, furry spirit beast was swimming freely in it.

That fellow was around the size of a watermelon, and its bright eyes only made it more adorable.

‘This is a Snow Fox! Furthermore, it seems that it is a newborn!’

Zhang Xuan immediately recognized the spirit beast.

Snow Fox was an extremely rare spirit beast. It possessed nearly no offensive ability, but its inner core was exceptionally valuable. Rumor had it that it contained a unique energy that could allow both cultivators and spirit beasts to unconditionally raise their cultivation by a big realm!

This wasn't just primary stage to intermediate stage, or intermediate stage to advanced stage, it was a big realm... In other words, it could allow a Clarifying Turbidity realm cultivator to reach Consonant Spirit realm directly!

It was among one of the most sought after treasures in the world!

'But... a mere Snow Fox shouldn't require all of these fellows to work together though?'

The Snow Fox might be valuable, but considering its lack of offensive power, the Armored Beartiger, Grandlion Spirit Beast, or any of the other spirit beast could easily tear it apart. Why would they march here in such a large group then?

Furthermore, considering that this was a newborn Snow Fox, surely these fellows need not proceed so warily?

'No, it seems like the one they intend to deal with is...'

Baffled, Zhang Xuan took a closer look and realized that the spirit beasts and beast hunters were looking at a specific direction. Tracing their gazes, he was taken aback.

By the side of the lake stood a white-robed lady. She stood silently amidst flowers and grass, as if a peaceful painting.

It was simply too tranquil that even with a soul as strong as Zhang Xuan's, he didn't notice her presence at all!

As Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over, the white-robed lady also turned her face over. Her beautiful features seemed to meld together with the peaceful scenery. With just a momentary glance, Zhang Xuan's heart skipped a beat.

For the first time since he arrived in this world, Zhang Xuan's composed state of mind was sent into disarray.

650 Saving Her

Zhang Xuan had seen many beauties.

Shen Bi Ru, Mo Yu, Zhao Feiwu, Yu Fei-er, Luo Qiqi... Even his students, Wang Ying and Zhao Ya, were beauties in their own rights.

Among them, there were a few who bore feelings for him, and some even voiced their willingness to be with him...

But Zhang Xuan's heart remained unmoved.

He wasn't devoid of feelings, nor was he uninterested in beautiful ladies; he was simply unmoved.

Since he possessed no particular feelings for them, he wasn't willing to get involved with them.

He thought that it might be due to the Library of Heaven's Path in his head. Perhaps the library had come together with the unfeelingness of the heavens. Never had he imagined a day would come where his heart would actually beat helplessly at the sight of a lady.

It was as if the other party possessed some kind of quality that drew him in, leaving him with no choice but to leap forward.

She was extremely beautiful, such that even Zhao Ya would pale before her. Even so, Zhang Xuan's mind wasn't so weak as to be assailed by mere physical appearance. But for some reason, this lady had an extraordinarily intimate presence to him.

As if he had seen her somewhere before.

"I mustn't allow anything happen to her..."

Such a thought simply appeared out of nowhere.

Prowling in the area were more than thirty Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beasts and eight beast hunters. If they were to attack the white-robed lady, she would surely be unable to withstand their assault.

‘Save her!’

This thought sprouted in Zhang Xuan’s mind, and it was growing stronger by the second, compelling him into action.

He didn’t want to see this white-robed lady being torn apart by all of these spirit beasts.

‘If I were to rush forward to save her, I would be surrounded by them before I could even reach her. If so, I would be dead before I could even achieve anything!’

While the thought had gripped Zhang Xuan’s entirety, he knew that it would be foolishness to dive in without a plan.

There were plenty of formidable aerial spirit beasts amidst the group as well. Even with Zhang Xuan flight capability, it would still be difficult for him to outrun them.

‘Should I disguise myself as Yang shi to scare this group off?’

After a moment of thought, Zhang Xuan realized that he couldn’t find any better idea. Thus, he decided to resort to his specialty... hoodwinking!

If he could frighten this group off, that would be for the best.

Otherwise... he would have no choice but to face them.

At the most, he would just have to call his clone out at that time to fight alongside him. While victory was unlikely, he was confident that he could at least get away.

‘It’s settled then!’

Gritting his teeth, Zhang Xuan refined the details of his plan before standing up. His muscles slowly shifted, turning his appearance into that of Yang shi.

Hualala!

Right when he was done with his preparations, the spirit beasts finished circling the entire area. There was a bizarre glint in their eyes, and it seemed as though they would leap forward at any moment.

“I have to go in now or else I won’t make it in time...”

Frowning, Zhang Xuan immediately flew straight toward the side of the lake, where the white-robed lady was.

“Humph!”

While he was in the air, a cold harrumph resounded in the area. It sounded like the roar of a dragon, causing the entire forest to tremor.

His soul energy and zhenqi were devoted to this harrumph, and it carried a grandness that made one feel small in comparison.

Accustomed to playing as an expert, Zhang Xuan naturally commanded an aura befitting of one. With his majestic demeanor, he resembled a deity descending from the heavens.

The spirit beasts and beast hunters who were just about to pounce on the white-robed lady all halted their movements before his presence.

While the intelligence of spirit beasts hadn't reached the level of humans yet, they were still no fools.

Considering how the figure was able to fly in the sky, it was unlikely that they would be able to stand against him.

Hu!

Seeing that his presence had made everyone stop for the moment, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. With a few steps, he walked to the aerial space right above the white-robed lady.

From the current location where he was standing, he would be able to grab her and escape swiftly should the unexpected happen.

Now that he was closer to the white-robed lady, he was able to catch a clearer look at the latter's features. She was a young lady of a similar age to him. She had a composed look on her face, seemingly unaware that she was already completely surrounded by many spirit beasts and beast hunters.

With his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan's gaze fell upon the spirit beasts and beast hunters.

“I am fond of this scenery, and I don’t wish for blood to besmirch this land. Back down!”

After saying these words, he secretly sent a telepathic message to the young lady below him.

“Try to find a way to escape later on. Spirit beasts have already surrounded this area, and I fear that they... mean you harm!”

However, after waiting for a while, Zhang Xuan still didn’t receive the other party’s reply. Glancing downward, he saw the white-robed lady looking at him nonchalantly.

‘Could it be that... she doesn’t believe me?’

Zhang Xuan frowned.

Those spirit beasts and beast hunters had approached silently, and they were currently hiding amidst the greenery. It was possible that the other party did not believe his words.

Thinking about it, it wasn’t too surprising. Given that a man had suddenly appeared and sent a telepathic message to her saying that the area was filled with spirit beasts, she would probably think that he was a lunatic.

“Do my words mean nothing to you?”

Knowing that he would only make himself seem less credible the more he explained the matter, Zhang Xuan decided to turn his gaze back to the forest, flung his sleeves, and roared, “I told you to back down!”

Roar!

Zhang Xuan’s bellow had succeeded in inducing fear in the spirit beasts in the region. One of them unintentionally let loose a fearful whimper, revealing its presence.

Knowing that the other party was already aware of their presence, the spirit beasts and beast hunters decided to step out of their hiding spots.

Hualala!

The might of more than thirty Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beasts and eight beast hunters exerted an immense

pressure on Zhang Xuan.

“Now you should believe me, right? They are intending to deal with you and your Snow Fox...”

Cold sweat dripped off Zhang Xuan’s forehead as he sent a telepathic message to the white-robed lady.

The white-robed lady seemed to be slightly astonished by the arrival of the spirit beasts as well.

“You don’t need to fear. Since I’m here, I won’t allow them to do as they please. Don’t worry, I’ll chase them off for you!”

Zhang Xuan reassured her before turning to the crowd.

“Are you certain you want to challenge me?”

Hong long!

A powerful surge of soul energy swept through the entire area.

Zhang Xuan’s cultivation might be ordinary, but his soul energy was superior to even the Transcendent Mortal 8-dan Ye Wentian’s.

With the release of his soul energy, the spirit beasts and beast hunters immediately felt immense threat.

Padah!

One of the aerial spirit beasts even lost control of its body and plummeted from the sky.

A few spirit beasts also collapsed to the ground, unable to withstand the pressure.

Seeing this situation, the tense Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It seemed these spirit beasts were no fools. They knew better than to challenge an opponent beyond them.

Roar!

But just as Zhang Xuan thought that the group would back down from fear, a ferocious howling sounded. It came from the Armored Beartiger that he first met.

Hualala!

Hearing the howling, the frightened spirit beasts immediately regained their nerves. They turned their gazes over once more—this time, it was filled with savagery.

‘What’s going on?’

It was just a moment ago that all of them were trembling in fear. Yet, after this fellow’s howling, all of them seemed to have regained their fighting spirit. Zhang Xuan’s face immediately warped in fear.

Could it be that... this Armored Beartiger recognized him as the person from before?

In the previous meeting with this fellow, his true cultivation was probably exposed. But even so, the person whom he saw previously was Zhang Xuan while the current him was Yang shi. How could the other party possibly recognize him?

Roar!

While Zhang Xuan was still bewildered by the situation before him, the Armored Beartiger yelled furiously once more. Pushing its large paws against the ground, it leaped forward.

‘This is bad!’

Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

It was extremely clear that he had given himself away somehow.

It seemed that his disguise still needed a little more work for it to be effective under the scrutiny of spirit beasts’ astute senses!

Even though they didn’t possess intelligence on par with humans, they had sharp eyes and sensitive noses in exchange. Perhaps he had neglected an important aspect of his disguise that allowed the Armored Beartiger to see through it.

Or perhaps, it might be due to the lack of harmony between his soul and his body, resulting in his inability to hide his aura perfectly.

With his aura leaking out, it wasn’t too difficult for them to deduce that this ‘expert’ was a fake.

‘I have no choice but to fight them now...’

Seeing the large fellow rush over, Zhang Xuan knew that a fight was inevitable. Thus, he rushed in front of the white-robed lady and grabbed her hand. “Run!”

Hu!

But before they could escape, the Armored Beartiger was already right before Zhang Xuan. It swung its massive claws, and a sharp wave of might tore through space, heading straight for Zhang Xuan’s arm.

“Damn it!”

Zhang Xuan’s face darkened. The Armored Beartiger was much stronger and faster than he had expected.

The strongest aspects of an Armored Beartiger was its claws and strength. Even though Zhang Xuan’s physical body had been tempered by the Cleansing Lake, it would still be hard for him to clash with the other party face-on.

Letting go of the lady, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and the Glacier Rain Sword appeared in his palm. He immediately slashed it toward the other party’s claw.

Huala!

The sword qi immediately covered a distance of several dozen meters and collided with the other party’s attack.

Boom!

A loud explosion created two huge depressions of seven to eight meters deep.

Zhang Xuan remained unmoving on the spot whereas the Armored Beartiger was forced back. A shallow, white cut appeared on its body.

Even though the Armored Beartiger was one of the strongest even among Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beasts, Zhang Xuan’s soul, physical body, and zhenqi were simply extraordinary.

Even so, the other party was indeed formidable.

If it had been any other ordinary Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beast, Zhang Xuan's sword would have surely split it in two. To leave behind just a single shallow white cut said a lot about the other party's fearsome defensive capability.

Roar roar roar!

However, the very survival of the Armored Beartiger against Zhang Xuan showed that he wasn't sufficiently powerful to stand against all of them. The spirit beasts and beast hunters in the surroundings immediately realized that Zhang Xuan was just acting before. Thus, with a loud roar, they charged forward furiously.

Sou sou sou!

Numerous arrows also came flying straight toward Zhang Xuan—the beast hunters!

They specialized in long-range attacks, and their arrows were infused with dense zhenqi. Even from afar, astounding killing intent could be felt from them.

Narrowing his eyes, Zhang Xuan felt his goosebumps rising up.

There were aerial spirit beasts to guard the sky, land spirit beast to charge on land, and even long-range support fire from the beast hunters... If they managed to surround him, it would be difficult for him to break out from their encirclement even with the help of his clone.

“Flee!”

Flicking his wrists swiftly, multiple blasts of sword qi shot out to deflect the arrows. Following which, Zhang Xuan pulled the white-robed lady forward and leaped into the lake.

Amidst this perilous situation, this was the only possible escape route!

651 Consonance of Soul and Body

The white-robed lady seemed to be unwilling to leave, but Zhang Xuan knew that there wasn't time to persuade her. Thus, he pulled her along forcefully.

Putong!

The duo fell into the lake. Seeing the two of them enter the lake, the Snow Fox also came swimming over.

“Let's leave quickly. Otherwise, we'll surely die!”

Grabbing the Snow Fox with one hand and pulling the white-robed lady with the other, Zhang Xuan yelled anxiously as he swam to the depths of the lake.

He had examined the spirit beasts carefully and there were none that specialized in aqua combat. They would be much safer down here.

Furthermore, this lake was connected to a river. It was possible for them to escape from their pursuers through here.

Hula!

Not too long after they swam down into the depths of the lake, a violent disturbance rippled from the top of the lake. There were a couple of spirit beasts who jumped into the lake to pursue them.

Knowing that there was no time to be lost, Zhang Xuan drove his zhenqi, and they picked up speed. Based on his memory, he swam in the direction where the river was at.

As Zhang Xuan expected, they were indeed much safer in the water. While there were some spirit beasts who chased them, he managed to ward them off with relative ease. Slowly, the number of spirit beasts decreased. After around two hours, they managed to shake off all of the spirit beasts. Only then

did Zhang Xuan heave a sigh of relief and start swimming to the surface.

Holding his breath for two hours wasn't too hard for him given his current cultivation. Turning to look at the white-robed lady beside him, it seemed that the other party was fine as well.

Considering how the spirit beasts had to approach her so carefully, it was likely that her cultivation was on par with his.

Hu!

As the beast and two humans emerged from the water, Zhang Xuan immediately scanned his surroundings. Only after confirming that there was no danger did he heave a sigh of relief.

“It's safe now...”

Zhang Xuan pulled the lady to the shore.

After swimming for two hours, they were now a considerable distance away from the waterfall. Given the various splits in the meandering river along the way, it would be hard for the spirit beasts to track them down.

However, it was best for them to be careful anyway. The other party did have aerial spirit beasts who specialized in scouting on their side.

“Let's find a safe spot, get some food, and dry our clothes!”

The three of them were looking rather unkempt after the long swim. Their clothes were sticking firmly to their skin. Zhang Xuan smiled bitterly.

Knowing that Zhang Xuan had gone through so much to save her, the white-robed lady seemed much friendlier from before. Smiling, she nodded in agreement at his words.

There were several large caves dug out by the spirit beasts in Verdant Mountain. It didn't take too long for the duo to find an empty one.

Following which, they gathered a few dry branches and started a campfire. Only then did they feel their bodies warming up.

Even with cultivation levels such as theirs, swimming for two hours in the middle of winter was still no joke. The chill felt like a sharp dagger stabbing at their insides.

“I am Zhang Xuan! You are...”

After drying his clothes, Zhang Xuan took out a few pieces of dried jerky from his storage ring and offered them to the other party. Following which, he reverted his appearance and clasped his fist.

For some reason, this lady simply felt extremely familiar to him, as though he had known her all his life. Otherwise, he wouldn't have gone through so much trouble to save her.

With a faint smile, the lady shook her head. She took the jerky from Zhang Xuan's hands, tore off a small portion, and ate it. Her movements were extremely graceful and refined.

“You... can't speak?”

Realizing that the other party hadn't spoken a word since they met, Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Until now, it seemed like the other party had been replying to his words with a smile.

The lady shook her head.

“Is it due to some kind of persisting illness or... do you need me to treat you? I am actually quite a capable physician!” Zhang Xuan said.

There were some who would lose their voice due to injury or cultivating incorrectly. However, it was still treatable as long as one had the correct treatment method.

Considering how he had read many books on medicine, and also had the Library of Heaven's Path to fall back on, it shouldn't be too difficult for him to treat the other party.

The white-robed lady shook her hands.

“Are you afraid that I can't cure you... or are you unwilling to be treated?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

The lady continued to shake her hands nonchalantly. It seemed as though she was already used to being in such a situation,

and she didn't want to be treated.

“Since that's the case... I won't talk about it anymore then!”

Since the other party wasn't willing to be treated, Zhang Xuan couldn't possibly force his treatment on her.

For some reason, sitting beside this lady made him feel extremely calm, drawing him away from the material aspect of life.

“Hmm?”

Sitting silently, Zhang Xuan was searching for something, anything, to say when his face suddenly warped in pain. His entire body began shaking uncontrollably.

“Shit...”

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly.

Even though his physical body had grown much stronger after the tempering from the earth flame and Cleansing Lake, it wasn't sufficient for him to fully adapt to his massive soul. Thus, he should have avoided overexerting himself while training his physical body for it to adapt to his soul.

Who knew that he would have met with this white-robed lady and end up overexerting himself? He didn't feel anything in the face of danger back then, but now that they were safe, he immediately felt a sharp pain in his soul as though someone had stabbed needles deep into it, and dizziness suddenly overwhelmed him.

Using the shoe measurements in his previous life, his current soul was size 45 while his physical body was size 42. While he could still slip in with some force, he would still be injured should he walk too much.

The current situation was as such.

Even though his body and soul were incompatible with one another, he might still have been fine if he hadn't overexerted himself. But he did, and now he had to tolerate an insufferable pain in his soul.

Honestly, Zhang Xuan wanted to leave a good impression on the other party by saving her, but such a situation happened instead. He couldn't help but feel a little stifled.

“Suppress!”

Zhang Xuan forcefully suppressed his soul to force it to adapt to his physical body. Who knew that the more he tried to do so, the more violent the backlash became? It was as if the side effect of forcefully stuffing his soul back into his body was coming back to bite him all at once.

“AHHH...”

With a roar, Zhang Xuan couldn't hold on any longer, and his soul began gushing out of his glabella.

It was the previous problem playing up again—an overly powerful soul for a relatively weak physical body. Unless he could raise the strength of his physical body, the two wouldn't be able to fuse together perfectly.

“It's over...”

Feeling that his soul was about to leave his body, Zhang Xuan heart turned cold.

Actually, if his soul were to leave his body, he would be able to avoid such pain... but if he were to allow it to occur now, it would be as good as telling the other party that he was a soul oracle, and this would be difficult to explain.

Even though the soul oracle occupation was a complete one, its heritage had already gone missing for many years, and it had officially been eradicated by the Master Teacher Pavilion a long time ago. In the view of most cultivators, they were a callous and mysterious existence.

If the other party were to learn that he had such a sinister occupation, the goodwill that he had built up with much difficulty would definitely disappear instantaneously.

What in the world was this? Of all the times for his condition to work up, it just had to be now...

How would the other party view him after this? Would she think that he was up to no good?

Just as Zhang Xuan was at a complete loss, the white-robed lady stood up and pressed on his glabella lightly.

Hu la!

The soul that was about to slip out of his body was suppressed in an instant, and it returned obediently back into his body.

At the same time, a unique energy flowed through his entire body, relieving it of the extreme pain it felt instantaneously.

“This...”

Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in shock.

This was a problem which had troubled him greatly, and yet the other party resolved it with a single pat. What was this?

Could it be that... the white-robed lady possessed a cultivation far higher than the Transcendent Mortal 8-dan Ye Wentian?

One must know that not even Ye Wentian could resolve the problem of his soul going missing. Otherwise, he wouldn't have just placed Zhang Xuan on the stone table helplessly.

Doubtful, Zhang Xuan was just about to ask about the issue when a pang of exhaustion suddenly struck him. His vision darkened, and he gradually lost consciousness.

Amidst his sleep, he felt as though his soul and physical body were harmonizing once more, and the discomfort he felt previously gradually vanished...

Sometime later, he woke up.

“Hmm?”

Rubbing his eyes, Zhang Xuan sat up. Indeed, the incompatibility between his soul and physical body had vanished, and he felt much more relaxed than before.

“My physical body hasn't gotten any stronger, but my soul seemed to have undergone some kind of refinement. It has become much purer, making it easier to slip it into my body!”

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Even though his soul was still ten meters tall, it had become much more flexible, making it easier to enter his body and

control it.

‘I should give it a try!’

Closing his eyes, Zhang Xuan’s soul swept through his body, and he could feel that every single muscle and cell was within his control. He could now perfectly move his entire body.

Even before the affair at the Cleansing Lake, he had never felt such precise control over his body before.

‘This is... Perfect Consonance of Body and Soul?’

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly, and his body trembled in excitement.

At Transcendent Mortal 5-dan, a cultivator would be able to harmonize his body and soul as one. This consonance would refine his control over his strength and body, allowing for more precise movements.

Rumor had it that if this consonance were to reach the level of perfection, one would be able to look inwardly into one’s physical body and repair the damaged regions. One’s body would be able to become as flawless as a piece of white jade.

However, even Transcendent Mortal 9-dan experts would be unable to reach such a realm. Only Saints would have a chance of accomplishing this... and yet, Zhang Xuan actually succeeded!

In the midst of Zhang Xuan’s excitement, a thought suddenly flashed through his mind, and he froze.

‘But... if my soul and body are perfectly consonant, won’t my soul be unable to leave my body?’

Typically, becoming a soul oracle meant abandoning one’s natural body. As far as Zhang Xuan knew, no soul oracle had achieved a Perfect Consonance of Body and Soul before... If his soul and body were to be perfectly consonant while he was unconscious, would it mean that he had lost his ability as a soul oracle?

If that was the case, then there was nothing for him to be happy about!

Even taking the occupations from ancient times into account, the abilities of a soul oracle were one of the more practical and useful ones. For example, there would be no other occupation that would have allowed Zhang Xuan to absorb the spiritual energy from the Cleansing Lake earlier on.

Thus, Zhang Xuan quickly drove the Soul Guiding Formula. Fortunately, he realized that his soul could still part from his body and move freely.

Only then did he heave a sigh of relief.

Sending his soul back into his physical body, Zhang Xuan stood up and looked around the cave.

However, the cave was oddly silent. The campfire was already extinguished, and there was not a person to be seen. The white-robed lady whom he had saved previously had already disappeared without a trace.

“Lady?” Zhang Xuan yelled. He was just about to go out to look for the latter when he caught sight of a line of neatly written words on the stone wall not too far away.

‘You have saved me once, and I have returned the favor. Thus, we are even now. There is still a long time ahead of us, so may we meet again in the future!’

“Meet again in the future?”

Zhang Xuan was dumbstruck. “She left?”

652 Consonant Spirit Realm Pinnacle

Seeing the words left on the wall, Zhang Xuan felt disappointed.

This was the first lady that had sent his heart beating, but they ended up parting so quickly. He didn't even manage to get the other party's name.

Zhang Xuan raised his hand and wiped away the words on the wall before walking out of the cave.

The vast sky appeared before him, but there wasn't a single person in sight.

It seemed like the other party had already left long ago.

After searching around the perimeter and realizing that the other party was gone, he began calculating the time based on his surroundings, and the result left his head shaking.

"I was actually out for three days?"

He didn't expect to have been out for three whole days.

"The Perfect Consonance of Soul and Body has raised my zhenqi cultivation to Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle..."

Previously, Zhang Xuan's breakthroughs were dependent on completing the corresponding Heaven's Path Divine Art. But this time, just by fainting once, not only did his soul and body merge together flawlessly, his zhenqi cultivation even made a huge leap.

From Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle, he advanced all the way to Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle!

That was an entire cultivation realm!

However, considering that the main goal of Consonant Spirit realm was to harmonize one's soul and body together, as well as to nourish one's soul, that was to be expected.

The very concept of his soul being flawlessly consonant with his body was aligned with that of the Heaven's Path Divine Art. As such, he naturally achieved a breakthrough with this.

Zhenqi gushed through his body at rapid speed, nourishing his entire body and revitalizing his spirit.

“A normal Consonant Spirit realm cultivator would wield a might of 3,200,000 ding, but my strength has reached... 4,000,000 ding!”

Closing his eyes, Zhang Xuan immersed his consciousness into his dantian.

With the Perfect Consonance of Soul and Body, he could look inwardly to clearly see how much might he wielded at the moment even without testing it out.

With a might of 4,000,000 ding in Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle, he could rival a Cosmos Bridge realm primary stage cultivator with just his zhenqi strength.

If the 2,000,000 ding from his physical body and 3,200,000 ding from his soul cultivation were to be added into the equation, that would total up to a staggering 9,200,000 ding. Even a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan Perfect Harmonization realm intermediate stage cultivator might be killed with a single punch from him.

(Perfect Harmonization realm primary stage 8,000,000 ding; intermediate stage 9,000,000 ding; advanced stage 10,000,000 ding; pinnacle 11,000,000 ding!)

But of course, Perfect Harmonization realm involves harmonizing everything into a singularity. One's zhenqi, soul, and physical body would be enhanced significantly. At the same time, one would also achieve astounding mastery over one's control over the environment, thus granting one sharp instincts against danger. It wouldn't be easy at all to injure an expert of this caliber.

Take for example Zhang Xuan's fight with Princess Fei-er, even though he wielded the advantage in terms of strength, he still had to make use of the Library of Heaven's Path to defeat her.

A difference in cultivation realm meant a significant difference in speed, reflexes, and preciseness in movements as well. All of these advantages couldn't be made up for with mere strength.

While Zhang Xuan's strength might be superior to even Perfect Harmonization realm intermediate stage cultivator, his actual fighting prowess would allow him to draw with a Perfect Harmonization realm primary stage cultivator only.

But beneath that, none would be a match for the current Zhang Xuan. Even if a bunch of Cosmos Bridge realm pinnacle cultivators were to come charging at him, he would still be able to eradicate them easily.

“After reaching Consonant Spirit realm, my master teacher rank can be considered to have reached half 5-star...”

Zhang Xuan's cultivation had always been the greatest impediment to his progress as a master teacher. Now that he had raised his cultivation, he could be considered as a half 5-star master teacher just like Luo Xuan and the others.

“Three days have already passed, I wonder if they're still here...”

Given that their schedule was tight, it was hard to tell whether Hong Shi and the others were still in Huanyu Capital.

Under normal circumstances, as soon as the cultivation at the Cleansing Lake was over, they would have to head to Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. However, given that the Cleansing Lake had broken down, there was no point remaining here. Thus, it was possible that they might have headed off first.

It was a long distance to Hongyuan Empire, if they didn't make haste, they might fail to make it in time for the start of the opening ceremony, and this could spell the disqualification of their candidature.

The Master Teacher Academy would accept a bunch of freshmen in the second month and eighth month of each year. Their group was rushing in order to join the second month's

batch, and it was already the first month now. They didn't have much time left.

"I should return..."

Knowing that he didn't have much time left, Zhang Xuan took in a deep breath and prepared to fly back to Huanyu Capital to check if Hong shi and the others had left already or not.

However, flurried footsteps sounded at that moment, and a few human silhouettes came into sight.

"Xing Yuan, Princess Fei-er, and the others? Why are they here?"

Zhang Xuan immediately leaped silently onto a huge tree, and gazing downward, he was taken aback.

The people he saw were none other than Yu Fei-er, Xing Yuan, Luo Qiqi, Wu Zhen, and Ye Qian.

Luo Qiqi stood at the very forefront, and she had a map in her hands. She seemed to be looking for something while others were following behind her with grim expressions.

The group of five was in a rather unkempt state. All of them had clear injuries over them which indicated that they had just undergone a bitter fight.

"Qiqi, how much further?"

Anxiety could be seen on Yu Fei-er's face.

Luo Qiqi confirmed the terrain in the surroundings and replied, "Based on the map, it should be somewhere here..."

"Good. We should quicken our pace. Even though I've stopped those fellows with my formation plate for the time being, given their strength, they could overcome it anytime and come rushing in..." Yu Fei-er said.

"Indeed!"

Xing Yuan nodded as he subconsciously glanced behind warily. It seemed that the matter which had happened previously had left him fearful.

"It's truly weird. Spirit beasts usually operate alone, so why are the spirit beasts here cooperating with one another? They

were all prowling the area frenziedly in groups, as though trying to find something.”

Wu Zhen found the situation they were in unbelievable.

“I also find it weird as well. The two great land spirit beasts, Grandlion Spirit Beast and Armored Beartiger, are usually the nemeses of one another. Yet, they actually collaborated with one another and attacked in unison as though they were old buddies. And that Dracoeagle Beast as well... When did an aerial spirit beast become so intimate with land spirit beasts?” Xing Yuan added in bewilderment.

Since the Cleansing Lake couldn't be used anymore, they recuperated in the capital for nearly three days before entering the Verdant Mountain to complete the mission the academy had assigned to them. However, before they could even reach their destination, they stumbled upon a group of frenzied spirit beasts.

Possessing a might of Transcendent Mortal 5-dan, every single one of those beasts were incredibly powerful. To make things worse, they were even working with one another, hunting down every human that they saw. Under their frenzied onslaught, Luo Qiqi and the rest of the group nearly lost their lives.

If not for the many defensive artifacts that Yu Fei-er possessed, they surely wouldn't have been able to get away!

“Ye Qian, didn't you say that the Verdant Mountain is very safe? You call this safe?”

Recalling that huge bunch of spirit beasts pursuing them and the desperate situation they were in, Yu Fei-er found herself bubbling with rage.

Other than that darned Zhang Xuan, when had she suffered such injustice?

“I...” Cold sweat appeared on Ye Qian's forehead. With a tearful face, he replied, “The spirit beasts are usually tame and don't attack humans... I have no idea what's going on either!”

He also found himself incapable of comprehending the situation before him.

This wasn't the first time he had been in Verdant Mountain, and he knew a fair bit of the spirit beasts here. Under normal circumstances, these fellows rarely attacked humans. Yet, today, they were all collaborating with one another to strike down all of the humans they saw.

One must know that before coming here, he had reassured them confidently that the Verdant Mountain was completely safe!

Yet, for last few hours, they had been chased by the many spirit beasts around the entire mountain, and they felt so exhausted that they could spew blood. Just the thought of them left him stifled.

“Alright, you need not explain anymore. If those fellows come once more, you will block them by yourself...” Yu Fei-er waved her hands.

Ye Qian's lips twitched.

If he, a Consonant Spirit realm cultivator, were to stand against that rampaging horde singlehandedly, he would probably die in the very first wave of attacks. After a moment of hesitation, Ye Qian said, “Why don't I have my father dispatch some troops over to drive away the spirit beasts?”

Huanyu Capital wasn't too far away, and as long as they wanted to, they could have the army up here to save them. Dozens of Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beasts might be fearsome, but they couldn't possibly stand against an entire army of cultivators.

“Don't you know that this is a mission from the academy? To dispatch troops here, are you that intent to see us fail and return in disgrace?” Yu Fei-er harrumphed coldly.

“This...”

Ye Qian scratched his head.

The other party was right. The mission they were on was confidential and couldn't be made known to anyone. If others were to learn of it, failure to accomplish the mission would be the least of their worries—they might even be expelled for failing to maintain confidentiality.

“Alright, let’s stop talking about such useless stuff. Let’s hurry up and find the entrance to the underground chamber. As long as we enter the underground chamber, we should be safe. Otherwise, I’ll throw you to the horde of spirit beasts to let them have a taste for themselves what a crown prince tastes like!”

Frowning, Yu Fei-er waved her hands.

“Yes!” Ye Qian’s lips twitched, but he didn’t dare to argue back. Thus, he hurried over to Luo Qiqi’s side to help her with the navigation.

He might be the crown prince of Huanyu Empire, but there was nothing he could do before this obstinate princess.

After looking around, he pointed forward and said, “It seems like our destination isn’t too far away. The entrance should be behind that hill...”

“Good, let’s hurry then!”

The group immediately rushed forward to the coordinates denoted on the map.

Right after they left, Zhang Xuan’s figure appeared from his hiding spot.

“They must be trying to finish some kind of mission...”

He had heard that Yu Fei-er’s group had come to Huanyu Empire to accomplish some kind of mission for the Master Teacher Academy, but to think that their destination would be Verdant Mountain.

“Judging from their words, they must have met with those spirit beasts!”

Zhang Xuan scratched his head.

To save that white-robed lady, he offended more than thirty spirit beasts at once. Perhaps out of anger, those spirit beasts attacked all of the humans that came into their territories, and Luo Qiqi and the others just became a victim of their wrath.

“If they are still in the surroundings, it would be best for me not to leave via flight. Otherwise, they might notice me...”

Perhaps it was due to the difficulty of finding the exact position of their destination through the lush crown of the trees, but it was fortunate that Luo Qiqi and the others didn't ride an aerial spirit beast over as well.

Of the thirty spirit beasts, there were some that specialized in aerial battle. Had they chosen to ride on an aerial spirit beast, they would have been noticed and surrounded immediately, thus putting them in a very vulnerable position.

If they were surrounded on the ground, they would at least be able to retaliate and possibly escape. But in the air, the only fate awaiting them would be descending to their graves.

“This will be troublesome...”

Similarly, Zhang Xuan wouldn't want to be surrounded by those spirit beasts in midair as well.

Even though his cultivation had soared by a fair bit and he no longer feared those spirit beasts, he would still like to avoid a fight if possible.

653 Attracting Spirit Beasts

‘I guess I’ll walk to the capital!’

Jumping down from the branch, Zhang Xuan confirmed his direction before walking over.

The other party might be on a mission, but this had nothing to do with him. The most important matter for him at the moment was to liaise with Hong shi and the others and return to Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy rather than waste his time here.

Hualala!

After taking a few steps, Zhang Xuan heard some heavy footsteps. He immediately leaped up and hid in the tree. Following which, he saw a few large spirit beasts sniffing off the ground before rushing in the direction where Luo Qiqi and the others disappeared to.

‘They found them...’

Zhang Xuan frowned.

Even though these spirit beasts were only at Transcendent Mortal 5-dan—other than Ye Qian, Luo Qiqi and the others were all 6-dan experts—it would still be a difficult battle to fight against them.

‘I guess I should still offer them some help.’

Thinking so, Zhang Xuan followed behind the spirit beasts.

No matter what, he was acquainted with Princess Fei-er and the others, and Luo Qiqi was his apothecary student as well. He couldn’t just stand idly by the side knowing that they were in danger.

Roar! Roar!

“Damn it, they’re here again. Ye Qian, you’re up...”

A ruckus sounded ahead of him, and following which, a violent ripple of energy spread from the forest.

‘They’ve started fighting!’

Knowing that there was no time to lose, Zhang Xuan immediately rushed forward, only to hear a sharp gust of wind blowing above him. Raising his head, he saw a massive Dracoeagle beast swooping down to grab him.

It was the same one that had been amongst the beasts surrounding the white-robed lady back then.

As Zhang Xuan had been hiding within the lush crown of the trees while concealing his aura, he hadn’t been noticed by the spirit beasts yet. However, as soon as he drove his zhenqi and charged forward, they immediately noticed his presence.

Having met its mortal enemy, the Dracoeagle Beast’s eyes reddened in wrath. Its steel talons sliced through the air, producing a sharp screeching sound that seemed as though it would tear through even metal.

“If I get entangled with it, it’ll become hard for me to escape later on...”

Knowing that, if he were to waste time on this fellow, the other spirit beasts would soon gather around him and it would be hard for him to leave then, Zhang Xuan clenched his jaws.

“Moo!”

The Dracoeagle Beast possessed the Dragon Bloodline as well so the mysterious ‘beast language’ that he learned previously should be effective on it as well. Through practice, he had realized that its effects were less significant on those that didn’t possess the Dragon Bloodline. As this was the only spirit beast that possessed the Dragon Bloodline back then, he knew that he would be slaughtered by the other spirit beasts once he expends all of his zhenqi on the ‘beast language’—it had insane zhenqi consumption after all. Thus, the only viable course of action back then was to escape.

And as expected, after the shout, the Dracoeagle Beast suddenly froze in fear, and it began plummeting from the sky.

Putong!

The spirit beast with a wingspan of ten meters fell heavily to the ground, creating a cloud of dust in the air as it twitched uncontrollably.

Roar!

After dealing with this huge fellow, Zhang Xuan was just about to leave when he heard a roaring sound. The Armored Beartiger from before leaped up, and swinging its claws, a sharp force came falling onto him.

The commotion from before had attracted the attention of the spirit beasts. As the fastest spirit beast in the area, this fellow immediately rushed over to help.

“This will be troublesome.”

The other party had its eyes fixed on him as though he had killed the other party’s parents. Knowing that a battle wasn’t avoidable anymore, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

‘Since you want a battle, a battle you will get!

‘It just happened that my cultivation has raised by a fair bit, so I guess I’ll just try it out on you.’

Zhang Xuan thrust his palm forward with astounding might, creating a powerful shock wave that immediately covered a distance of dozens of meters to strike the Armored Beartiger.

Huala!

He hadn’t used his soul energy in this attack, but even so, with the strength of his physical body and zhenqi harnessed behind it, the might of the attack exceeded 6,000,000 ding. This was far beyond the tolerable limit for the Armored Beartiger. The force from its claws was immediately dissipated, and its body was pressed down firmly against the ground.

“Roar?”

The Armored Beartiger widened its eyes in shock, as though it had seen a ghost.

Just three days ago, it fought with this fellow, and while the other party’s swordsmanship was exquisite, he was still far lacking in strength to stand against it... How could it possibly

gain the strength to overwhelm him completely with just a single palm in just a few days?

This was... a little, no, way too exaggerated!

If it had known that the other party was so formidable, it wouldn't have dared to prowl around in search of him. Instead, it would have certainly made sure to hide well so as to stay out of the other party's way...

“Don't you dare pursue me anymore. Otherwise, I'll start spilling blood!”

A roar, and the Dracoeagle Beast plummeted to the ground. A palm, and the Armored Beartiger lost its fighting will. Harrumphing coldly, Zhang Xuan flung his sleeves and turned around to assist Luo Qiqi and the others. However, at this moment, the group of spirit beasts consisting of the Grandlion Spirit Beasts and a few others who were further in front turned around and encircled Zhang Xuan.

Most probably, the Dracoeagle Beast had called for them before engaging Zhang Xuan in a fight.

“Since you came knocking on your own accord, don't blame me if you were to get injured!”

Initially, Zhang Xuan had no plans of going after these spirit beasts. But since they had come over to challenge him, there was no reason for him to hold back at all. Leaping lightly off the tree, Zhang Xuan dashed forward.

Heaven's Path Movement Art!

Along with the growth of his physical body and cultivation, Zhang Xuan's control over Heaven's Path Movement Art was getting more and more adept, and his maximum speed had increased as well. In an instant, it was as if he had torn a hole through space and leaped through it, appearing right before the Grandlion Spirit Beast in an instant and knocking it down with his body.

‘You specialize in defense?’

‘Fine, I'll use brute strength to crush the defensive ability you are so proud of!’

Peng!

As the two came into collision, the Grandlion Spirit Beast suddenly found its massive body flying backward swiftly, crashing through dozens of trees in the course of his movement, leaving him light-headed from the impact.

After sending this huge fellow flying, Zhang Xuan twisted his body and charged toward a wolf-like spirit beast.

‘Pi pa!’, the sheer might of Zhang Xuan’s fist compressed even air itself. Unable to dodge the attack, the wolf-like spirit beast could only take it forcefully. However, its defense didn’t even last for an instant before it was crushed into the ground, subdued.

...

While an intense battle was going on here, Luo Qiqi and the others were dumbfounded.

It was just a moment ago that the group of spirit beasts had caught up to them and was readying to launch an attack. Furious, Yu Fei-er pushed Ye Qian forward to take the brunt of the attack.

Given Ye Qian’s Consonant Spirit realm cultivation, even if he were to survive this ordeal, he would surely end up lying on the bed for months afterward. Who could have known that, before anything could happen, those furious spirit beasts would suddenly back down?

“Could it be that they are aware of my identity as the crown prince, so they dared not lay their hands on me?”

Ye Qian scratched his head in embarrassment.

But that was impossible!

When had the savage spirit beasts ever considered a person’s social standing before ripping him apart? Even an emperor would be no exception to this rule!

“Someone has attracted the attention of the spirit beasts in our place. Look, there’s a battle going on there!”

With a frown on her face, Yu Fei-er was the first one to figure out the situation.

All of the retreating spirit beasts had headed in the same direction, and a violent disturbance in the spiritual energy could be felt from that direction as well. Adding the frenzied roars in that direction, it was clear that a battle was ongoing.

“Ye Qian, could it be one of your men?” Xing Yuan frowned.

Their mission had to be carried out in absolute secrecy. As such, they had strictly told Ye Qian that he was not to allow anyone to follow them. In order to ensure that, they even chose to walk on foot instead of riding on an aerial spirit beast...

Given that someone had lured the spirit beasts away as soon as they had met with danger, they found it hard to believe that it wasn't the doing of Ye Qian's men.

“It isn't me, I didn't allow anyone to follow me...”

Ye Qian quickly waved his hands to explain himself.

He knew how important the mission was, so how could he make such a serious mistake?

“We'll know once we get there...”

Luo Qiqi waved her hands.

“Un!” Xing Yuan nodded. “Nothing can be allowed to go wrong with our mission. If we really were followed, we will be in deep trouble...”

With this, the group silently advanced toward the direction where the battle was ongoing.

A moment later, they arrived at the scene, and with just a single glance, they all froze.

“It's... Zhang shi!”

“Why would teacher be here?”

“Wasn't this fellow taken away by his teacher? How could he appear here?”

...

Seeing that it was a familiar face, different expressions surfaced on their own faces.

The one who was delighted was naturally Luo Qiqi, whereas the one who despaired was Princess Yu Fei-er.

She had lost a wager with Zhang Xuan, so meeting him and having the bet enforced was the last thing she would want to see happening.

“I know! Teacher must have seen that we were getting attacked, so he intentionally attracted that bunch of spirit beasts over to him...” Luo Qiqi suddenly said.

“You’re overthinking the matter, when has he ever been so kind?” Yu Fei-er harrumphed.

“If that wasn’t the case, why would the aggression of these spirit beasts suddenly turn from us to him? Given how frenzied they were, it was unlikely that they would have changed target if not for Zhang laoshi intentionally drawing their attention!” Luo Qiqi said.

“This...”

Everyone was stunned.

Luo Qiqi’s words made perfect sense.

It was just a moment ago that all of the spirit beasts looked as though they would devour them whole. As such, they thought that a bitter fight awaited them. Yet, in the blink of an eye, they abandoned them and turned their hostility toward Zhang shi instead. It was a little hard to believe that Zhang shi hadn’t done anything to draw their aggression given such circumstances.

“Regardless of whether he intentionally drew their attention or not, look at their battle...” Wu Zhen interrupted the thoughts of the crowd, and pointed to the battle with a shaking finger.

Hearing those words, everyone immediately turned their gazes over; almost instantly, their pupils dilated in shock, and their mouths went dry.

“Wasn’t he still at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle a few days ago?”

Xing Yuan gulped down his saliva.

Just three days ago, when they were entering the Cleansing Lake, the other party was still at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle. How could he possibly be at Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle at this very instant?

They had seen geniuses who improved swiftly... but this was completely inconceivable!

More importantly... even though he had reached Consonant Spirit realm, their cultivation was still higher than him. Yet, despite fighting with so many spirit beasts that even they would feel threatened before, he was able to subdue them with ease as though an adult playing with a child...

Wasn't his fighting prowess a little way too strong?

Princess Yu Fei-er widened her eyes in shock, and her face twitched violently.

She never thought that this shameless figure would actually possess such astounding strength!

If the other party had displayed such astounding prowess in their previous battle as well, she would probably have been defeated in a single move.

If that was the case... did he do it intentionally?

'That must be it!'

Recalling how the other party kicked her bottom, her face flushed from rage.

If it wasn't intentional, how could his attacks so coincidentally land on her bottom each time?

He could have subdued her easily, but he chose to kick her bottom instead. A ruffian he was indeed! Shameless!

Unaware of everyone's thoughts, Ye Qian asked, "Senior, since Zhang Shi is so formidable, and he could already be considered as a member of the academy as well, is it possible for us to bring him on the mission with us? With him, I feel that we'll be in a much safer position."

“Bring teacher along with us?” Luo Qiqi’s eyes gleamed in excitement. “Indeed! With him, the success rate of our mission would be boosted significantly!”

“Un, your words do make sense. I approve of this matter!”
After a moment of contemplation, Xing Yuan nodded in agreement.

“No, he can’t go with us!”

Yu Fei-er’s eyes widened at that suggestion, and she quickly shot it down.

654 Wu Yangzi

“He can’t go with us?” Luo Qiqi frowned as she turned to look at her close friend. “Why?”

This mission was fraught with danger. Given teacher’s wisdom and superior cultivation, he would be able to aid them out of difficult situations. Why would her good friend turn down such a good idea?

“H-he... is lecherous!” Yu Fei-er exclaimed with gritted teeth.

“Lecherous? You’re overthinking it, he has no interest in you at all...”

Luo Qiqi shook her head at her good friend’s words.

She had confidence in this aspect.

Putting everything aside, Luo Qiqi’s appearance was top-notch as well, comparable to Princess Yu Fei-er. Yet, despite her beauty and her respect for Zhang shi, the other party never even spared her a glance.

Given how obstinate you are... that’s even more impossible!

“...” Yu Fei-er staggered backward as her vision darkened.

What do you mean by this? No interest in me?

I’m not that bad, alright?

Why does it sound as though I was turned down by the other party? As an esteemed princess, I should be the one turning others down...

“Qiqi is right. Zhang shi has high standards. He has a student known as Wang Ying who is much prettier than you—I’ve seen her myself—but he has no interest in her whatsoever. Given that, it’s unlikely for him to be interested in you either...” Xing Yuan nodded in agreement.

Given his fondness for Yu Fei-er, he felt threatened by Zhang Xuan’s capability and the intricate relationship between the duo. Thus, he had his men investigate the latter’s background.

Not only did Zhang Shi have a student who was even more beautiful than Yu Fei-er, he had also had many pursuers in the past, but he still remained unmoved by any of them.

Yu Fei-er might be beautiful, but her temper was simply horrendous. Even Xing Yuan could only barely tolerate it himself. For others... it was probably completely out of question.

“What did you say?”

‘Luo Luo!’, the sound of teeth gritting against one another sounded as Yu Fei-er glared at Xing Yuan with widened eyes while emanating blatant killing intent. “Xing Yuan, why don’t you try repeating what you have just said...”

“I...”

A cold shiver ran through Xing Yuan.

Seeing that Xing Yuan was frightened into such a state, Wu Zhen chuckled lightly beneath his hand. However, a cold glare from Yu Fei-er immediately removed any hilarity he saw in this matter. “What are you laughing for? Are you dying for another beating...”

“...” Wu Zhen trembled.

I’m just watching the commotion, there’s no need to involve me in your affairs, right...

“Alright, enough! I’ll invite teacher later on, and Fei-er, you’d better don’t talk at all. I fear that teacher might try to enforce the bet or command you to serve him if you get on his bad side.”

Seeing the group falling into an argument before the entrance to the underground chamber had even been found, Luo Qiqi shook her head.

“...”

Upon hearing the words ‘enforce the bet’, Princess Fei-er suddenly recalled the matter of her being a maid, and this immediately silenced her.

By the time the argument among them halted, Zhang Xuan was already done cleaning up the spirit beasts.

The thirty or so spirit beasts were lying on the floor, moaning in agony.

This time, the beast hunters didn't come along. However, even if they did, the same fate probably would have awaited them.

Seeing Zhang Xuan clap his hands and preparing to leave after clearing up the spirit beasts, Luo Qiqi yelled and walked over.

“Teacher!”

“Little Qi!” Zhang Xuan smiled.

In truth, he had noticed the group as soon as they arrived.

Since he had come to save them, there was nothing for him to hide.

Walking up to Zhang Xuan, Luo Qiqi bowed deeply and said, “Teacher, I have an insolent request that I need to ask of you.”

“Hmm?”

“I wish to invite teacher to participate in a mission from the academy...” Luo Qiqi began explaining the matter.

“Mission?” Zhang Xuan waved his hands. “I'll pass on the matter. I still need to meet up with Hong shi and the others, and head for Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy...”

Hearing Zhang Xuan's words, Luo Qiqi was taken aback for a moment before replying.

“Hong shi? They have already left!”

“Left?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

How could they leave without the champion of the Master Teacher Tournament?

“Indeed. In order to make it in time for the opening ceremony, they took a flying ship of the Huanyu Empire royalty along with the others. Before leaving, Hong shi consulted Pavilion Master Mo on your matter, and it was only with his agreement that they decided to leave...” Luo Qiqi replied.

“Flying ship?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

“Un. It’s a military transportation device found only within empires. It is driven by dozens of spirit beasts, and the ship can house up to a thousand people!”

Seeing that her apothecary teacher hadn’t even heard of such a thing before, Luo Qiqi looked at him in bewilderment.

There was no master teacher in the empire who didn’t know about flying ships. Given how knowledgeable he was and how formidable his teacher was, how could he have never heard of flying ships before?

Zhang Xuan nodded.

Truthfully, he had been thinking that given how far an empire’s territory stretched, if a war were to happen, wouldn’t it take years just to deploy troops, needless to say, send reinforcements in?

It turned out that there was a transportation device for this very purpose!

To use dozens of aerial spirit beasts to ferry a thousand people at once... probably only the royalty of an empire would possess the wealth and resources to do so.

“Right, Hong shi took teacher’s students along with him as well. He said that there’s no need to worry about you since you were with Yang shi, and it would be best for them to wait for you at Hongyuan Empire...”

Luo Qiqi continued filling Zhang Xuan in on the details.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan smiled bitterly.

He didn’t expect so many things to happen in the three days that he was out.

Everyone thought that given how formidable Yang shi was, he would be completely safe together with him. They probably never could have imagined that... the seemingly omnipotent Yang shi in their mind was actually just a hoax, a fictional character!

“Forget it!” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He was still worried about his students and Sun Qiang since Hong shi had left, but since Hong shi had taken them along with him, they should be fine.

All he had to do was to appear at Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy when the time comes.

Since there was nothing tying him down now, Zhang Xuan became curious about the mission Luo Qiqi spoke of.

“So, what kind of mission are you all on?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It’s...” Luo Qiqi hesitated for a moment before switching to telepathic message. “It’s the underground chamber of 6-star Blacksmith Wu Yangzi!”

“6-star blacksmith?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

“Un. Wu Yangzi is an extremely famous grandmaster blacksmith from three thousand years ago, and he possesses blacksmithing skills unmatched by any. He is known as Hongyuan Empire’s number one blacksmith in the past ten thousand years. In fact, even the royal seal currently used was crafted by his hands!” Luo Qiqi explained.

“If he is a grandmaster blacksmith of Hongyuan Empire... why would his underground chamber be located here?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

Hongyuan Empire was at least several million kilometers away from here. Why would a grandmaster blacksmith travel so far out here?

“This...”

Luo Qiqi scratched her head awkwardly and said, “He was... kidnapped!”

“Kidnapped?”

For a 6-star master teacher, whose cultivation had reached Saint rank, to be kidnapped... are you for real?

Besides, standing behind every single blacksmith was the entire Blacksmith Guild. It was one of the strongest occupation alliance even when considering the entire

continent. To dare to lay their hands on one of their esteemed members... who could be so arrogant?

“Un. Given how formidable his blacksmithing skills are... it is believed that someone captured him to have him forge weapons for them! Due to this matter, the Master Teacher Pavilion and Blacksmith Guild sent many experts out to search through the entire Hongyuan Empire, but they were still unable to find him,” Luo Qiqi said. “However, in the last few months, while I was reading through some ancient texts, I found some clues about the incident back then!”

“You?”

Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

Given how so many experts in the Master Teacher Pavilion and Blacksmith Guild failed to find anything at all, how could she, a mere 5-star primary master teacher and Grade 2 student of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, possibly find any clues? More importantly, there was an interval of several thousand years in between!

“Actually... it’s all just a deduction on my part. On top of forging pills, I have an interest in smithing as well, and Grandmaster Wu Yangzi has always been a person I deeply respected. I even once tried to learn his ‘Zither Forging Technique’... but due to his incomplete heritage, I was only able to learn a small portion of it.” Luo Qiqi explained.

“I did some research on the matter, and I realized that there were actually some weapons in Huanyu Empire that were created using such a forging technique. Perplexed, I did some investigation, and in the midst of doing so, I chanced upon a map to an underground chamber. That was why I applied for this mission with the academy. But of course, it’s still too early to tell whether it leads to Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s underground chamber or not.”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

To actually notice some clues based on how a weapon was forged, it seemed like Luo Qiqi was a truly tenacious person.

But thinking about it, if not for her tenacity, how could she, a talented Grade 2 genius and a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan pinnacle cultivator, possibly acknowledge him as her teacher without any hesitation?

“Even though teacher hasn’t reported to the Master Teacher Academy yet, you can already be considered as a member of the academy already. Thus, you’re qualified to participate in this mission as well... Furthermore, the purpose of this mission is just to find whether the underground chamber exists and whether it is related to Wu Yangzi. There is not much danger involved in it. As long as we succeed, we’ll obtain two academic credits, and this will surely prove to be useful to teacher in the future!”

Luo Qiqi smiled.

“Academic credits?” Zhang Xuan was baffled by those words.

As the librarian of a high school in his previous life, he had heard of this term before. Was there something like that in the Master Teacher Academy as well?

“Academic credits are something unique to Master Teacher Academies. It’s said to be a system enforced by Kong shi personally. It serves as a judging criterion, and students can use it to purchase better cultivation resources, lessons for higher ranked master teachers... or even a currency for purchasing anything at all! Without these, students will find themselves unable to make any progress within the academy. In fact, one could say that the most valuable items in the Master Teacher Academy aren’t spirit stones or Tutelage Jade Tokens but academic credits!” Luo Qiqi explained.

As master teachers, those in the Master Teacher Academy had no lack of Tutelage Jade Tokens and spirit stones, and thus, such resources had lower value there.

“Is there an academic credit criterion to graduation?” Zhang Xuan asked with a bizarre expression.

“Of course not! Academic credits are just a currency used among students, they aren’t a fundamental criterion for graduation... how can one possibly be barred from graduation

just because they don't have sufficient academic credits?" Luo Qiqi replied in exclamation.

Only then did Zhang Xuan heave a sigh of relief.

Taking the model from high schools in his previous life, he thought that academic credits would be a necessary requirement for graduation... but it seemed like the only thing alike was its name. In essence, they were two completely different items.

"Teacher... do you want to come with us? If this is the underground chamber where Grandmaster Wu Yangzi was locked in, there's a high chance that his heritage will be inside!" Luo Qiqi said.

"Heritage?" Zhang Xuan was taken aback for a moment before his eyes lit up. "I heard that blacksmiths specialize in training their bodies. Suppose that he really left his heritage there, is it possible that there will be a physical body cultivation technique within it?"

Even though Zhang Xuan's body and soul were in perfect consonance already, his body was still slightly weaker than his soul. If his soul were to grow larger than ten meters once again, the same incompatibility issue would crop up once more. Zhang Xuan couldn't possibly abandon his soul cultivation, so it would be best if he could find some physical body cultivation technique to train his body.

Given that blacksmiths spent their days with flames, ores, and metals, their body had to be exceptionally resilient. Thus, they usually possessed a unique physical body cultivation technique.

655 Formation Destroying Silver Needle

Not expecting to hear such a question, a bizarre expression appeared on Luo Qiqi's face as she replied, "There should be! Not only is Grandmaster Wu Yangzi a blacksmith, he's also an expert at tempering his physical body!"

"Alright, I'll go then!" Chuckling lightly, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

A high requirement for one's physical resilience and might stood in the way of those who sought the path of a blacksmith. Without sufficient strength, one would be unable to forge the best of weapons. Thus, every master blacksmith that had ever existed was an expert at tempering their physical body.

It would be much better for Zhang Xuan to obtain the cultivation technique of a 6-star blacksmith than to search through the entire Huanyu Empire for other physical body cultivation techniques.

"Great!"

Hearing her teacher agree to join them on this exploration, Luo Qiqi was filled with excitement.

Even though it hadn't been long since she had met this apothecary teacher of hers, the other party gave her the feeling of an unfathomable person. Somehow, she felt that they would be much safer were he to accompany them.

Having come to an agreement, Luo Qiqi beckoned the others over, and Princess Fei-er and the others walked up to the duo.

"I did lose the bet at the Cleansing Lake, but don't you dare use it to blackmail me!"

As soon as Princess Fei-er walked up to Zhang Xuan, she immediately gritted her teeth and said, "I'll prepare the spirit stones, but I'll only be able to repay you when we arrive at Hongyuan Empire!"

“Given that something abrupt occurred in the Cleansing Lake, and neither of us completed the conditions of the bet... why don't we just call it a draw?”

Seeing how the other party accepted the results of the bet candidly, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly.

He was the one who collapsed the entire Cleansing Lake. While he did make some compensation to Huanyu Empire, he still felt a little embarrassed by the matter. After all, the farce did occur due to his carelessness.

Since something abrupt occurred before any of them could finish the bet, naturally, there wasn't a winner or a loser.

“A draw?” Princess Fei-er was taken aback.

She'd thought that the other party would grasp onto this to force her to serve as his maid or taunt her, leaving her in a difficult and embarrassed position. Who knew that he would offer a truce instead?

Could he... really be that generous?

“That's right. But of course, if you're not content with the results, we could always have another bet!” Zhang Xuan continued.

Princess Fei-er's mouth twitched, and she hurriedly shook her head. “There's no need for it...”

It was just a moment ago that she thought the other party was generous when he uttered such kind words. But now it seemed like everything he said was a mere facade.

Have another bet? You must be taking me for a fool!

After losing so tragically twice, if I were to continue betting with you, it would just be a matter of time before I'm completely broke.

“What about you all? Are any of you interested in betting against me for Princess Fei-er's sake?”

Seeing how the lady paled upon hearing his words, Zhang Xuan shook his head and turned his gaze to Xing Yuan and the others.

Honestly, these bets were truly too good a source of income to miss. After all, even though he might have quite a few spirit stones at hand for the moment, considering the immense spiritual energy consumption for the Heaven's Path Divine Art, it probably wouldn't be too long before his wealth dried up.

“We'll pass...”

Xing Yuan and the others flinched upon seeing Zhang Xuan's sight on them.

‘Betting against you is like betting on a rigged game. No matter how foolish I am, I can't possibly bet on something that I can't win in.’

“Sigh, I don't even get a chance to lose at all.”

Seeing that no one dared to bet against him, Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment.

Are these truly geniuses from the Master Teacher Academy?

To dare not engage in a bet against him, weren't they a little too cowardly?

If the others were to learn of his thoughts, tears would definitely start streaming down their faces. We aren't the ones who are weak, it's you who is monstrously strong, alright?

The previous head of the Mystical Treasure Hall devoted decades to the deciphering of the stone pillars only to meet with little success, and you completed what he couldn't within seconds. The other master teachers took days to absorb the spiritual energy from the Lake Eye, but you actually took in almost everything within minutes... Who would possibly be so bored as to challenge you in an impossible bet?

...

“Let's hurry to the underground chamber!”

Knowing that Zhang Xuan had a formidable teacher whom even Pavilion Master Mo was deferential to, not to mention, he himself possessed exceptional strength as well, Xing Yuan and the others didn't dare to view him as an ordinary freshman. Instead, they thought of him as a fellow peer.

The next matter they had at hand was to find the entrance to the underground chamber. They swiftly introduced themselves before scaling across the mountain before them and walking into a vast valley.

Luo Qiqi came to a stop.

“Based on the descriptions in the map, the underground chamber should be located here!”

“Here?”

Xing Yuan and the others glanced at one another in confusion.

This valley wasn't too huge, and it looked perfectly ordinary on the outside. Surrounding them were trees and plants, and the chirps from birds echoed harmoniously in the area, creating an exceptionally lively scenery. However, after searching around, they couldn't find any entrance that could possibly lead to an underground chamber.

Could the news have been false, or did they get the wrong location?

“This is the very valley where the weapon forged using the [Zither Forging Technique] was found by a beast hunter three thousand years ago. Through my investigation, it seems that six other weapons forged using the same technique originated from this location as well. Corroborating these with my other intelligence, I'm certain that there's an underground chamber here!” Luo Qiqi said confidently.

“However... the spiritual energy in the air is exceptionally stable, and there isn't the slightest disturbance to be felt. It doesn't seem like there's a formation here though?”

Xing Yuan and the others frowned.

If the entrance to the underground chamber wasn't plain to their eyes, it could only mean that it was hidden beneath a formation... However, given the lack of disturbance in the spiritual energy in the surroundings, it was impossible for there to be a formation here.

“Let me take a look. I'm a 5-star formation master, so I should be able to find the formation and decipher it if there's one!”

Princess Fei-er stepped forward.

Their group didn't come together just based on their degree of intimacy. Their expertise also complemented the flaws of one another.

One would require five 5-star supporting occupations to qualify as a 5-star master teacher, and Princess Yu Fei-er happened to be a 5-star formation master as well.

“Un!” Everyone nodded.

Princess Fei-er flicked her wrist and took out a compass. Following which, she circled around the valley, searching around with every step she took. A moment later, she abruptly came to a halt.

Flicking her wrist, she took out a sharp needle reminiscent of a spear.

It was hard to tell what it was forged on by its outer appearance, but there was a unique inscription on it which emanated a cold gleam.

Noticing the doubtful gazes from Ye Qian and the others, Luo Qiqi explained what it was.

“This is a Formation Destroying Silver Needle!”

“Formation Destroying Silver Needle?”

“Un. There are some high-grade formations that absorb spiritual energy from the environment and hide themselves within their environment, thus making them extremely difficult to detect. Thus, such a tool is required to make their true forms appear. There are special formation inscriptions on it that can send the spiritual energy harnessed within a formation into disarray, forcing it to reveal itself,” Luo Qiqi explained.

Only then did everyone understand the situation and nod their heads.

Zhang Xuan also nodded too as he examined the needle with a peculiar gaze.

He had read about Formation Destroying Silver Needles in the books from the Formation Master Guild before, and it was written inside that they had the ability to dispel formations. Zhang Xuan thought that such a tool would only be seen in higher tier Formation Master Guilds, but to think that Princess Fei-er would have one with her as well.

It seemed like they did come prepared.

After drawing the Formation Destroying Silver Needle, Princess Fei-er didn't rush into action. Instead, she walked around with the compass in hand and even bent down to pinch the soil before and pluck a few blades of wild grass.

High-grade formations could change their weak point depending on the geography of the location. If one couldn't find the crux of the formation, nothing one did would be able to sway the formation.

It was just like how if one wanted to sink the boat, one had to open up a hole in the crucial regions. Otherwise, even if one were to crack open a gaping hole in the deck, it wouldn't do anything at all.

“Step back!”

After taking a look, Yu Fei-er seemed to have found something, and she turned around and waved her hands to gesture for the others to step back.

Knowing how dangerous the formation could be, Luo Qiqi and the others retreated to outside the valley without saying anything.

After the group stepped out of the valley, a deep frown appeared on Princess Fei-er's face. All of the sudden, her disposition changed into that of a valiant warrior on the battlefield.

Hu!

With a flick of her wrist, she threw the Formation Destroying Silver Needle out, and it fell onto a region not too far away from her. Following which, she formed a few seals with her hands before tapping on the needle forcefully.

Weng!

The silver needle began to spin.

As it spun, the formation inscriptions on the surface of the silver needle seemed to have turned into a vortex of spiritual energy, drawing in the spiritual energy in the surroundings into its center. Eventually, it formed a massive pillar of spiritual energy that extended to the heavens.

“The Formation Destroying Silver Needle can draw spiritual energy from the surroundings and cause a huge spiritual energy disturbance, thus forcing even the greatest of formation to show its marks,” Luo Qiqi explained.

Zhang Xuan nodded.

Formations were sustained by spiritual energy, and if the spiritual energy in the surroundings was sapped dry, it would lose its balance, thus revealing its form. It was the same logic as how the rocks at the bottom of the river would be revealed as the current ran dry.

The collapsing of the formation at the Cleansing Lake was also due to its balance being destroyed.

Hu hu hu!

As the rotation of the silver needle hastened, more and more spiritual energy was drawn from the surrounding. At the same time, a thick layer of sweat cloaked Princess Fei-er’s forehead.

“Open!”

With a slight buzz, the surroundings of the silver needle abruptly distorted. A slight mist came into appearance.

“Indeed, there’s a formation here!”

Upon seeing the mist, everyone’s eyes lit up.

The mist was the sign of the presence of a formation... This meant that Luo Qiqi’s deduction was accurate, and it was highly likely there was an underground chamber here!

Wuwuwuwu!

The rotation of the silver needle quickened even more, but Princess Fei-er was already wearied.

Given how this formation was able to remain hidden so many years without being noticed, there was no doubt that it was a high-grade formation. Even a 5-star formation master like her was finding it difficult to break open the formation.

Hu!

Exhaling a mouthful of turbid air, Princess Fei-er halted the Formation Destroying Silver Needle before falling to the floor weakly. Exhausted, she couldn't even care about her own appearance at this moment.

“How is it?”

Seeing her state, Luo Qiqi immediately rushed up and fed her a pill to recover her vitality. Only then did her pale complexion finally recover slightly.

After resting for a moment, Princess Fei-er stood up and shook her head.

“There's a grade-6 formation here. Due to my limited cultivation, I'm unable to force it to show itself.”

She had put her entire strength into the previous attempt, but she was only able to force out hints of the formation. Her current strength was still a little too low to force it out entirely.

“If even you are unable to force out the formation, how can we enter the underground chamber?”

Luo Qiqi frowned.

If they couldn't even force the formation to appear, naturally, they wouldn't be able to decipher it either, let alone, enter the underground chamber.

They had come here proudly to accomplish a mission, but who knew that they would be stopped right at the doorstep?

If they were to return like that, they would surely become a laughingstock.

“I don't know either...” Princess Fei-er shook her head.

She thought that with her capability as a 5-star formation master, even if she couldn't decipher the formation, it shouldn't be too hard for her to force the formation to show its form. Who knew that she would end in failure? She couldn't help but feel disappointed.

Gritting her teeth, Princess Fei-er said, "Allow me to rest for a moment first, I'll give it a try after I've recuperated fully..."

However, at that moment, a nonchalant voice suddenly sounded.

"This won't work!"

Turning around, she saw Zhang Xuan walking up to her.

"You know formation deciphering too?" Seeing that he was the one who spoke, Princess Fei-er harrumphed. "Since you said that this won't work, why don't you share your wisdom with us and tell us what incredible plan you have in mind?"

"I dare not say my plan is incredible, but since there's a formation here, all we have to do is to decipher it, right? Why must we go through an additional step to force it to show itself?" Zhang Xuan replied.

Since the purpose was to find the entrance of the formation, they could just decipher the formation straight. Why go through the additional step of forcing it out?

Princess Fei-er flung her sleeves and harrumphed coldly.

"You're proposing for us to decipher the formation directly? Humph, do you even know the slightest thing about formations?"

656 Underground Chamber

If a formation didn't show its form, could one tell whether it's a Confinement Formation, Slaughter Formation, Illusory Formation, or Beguilement Formation?

It was just like fighting an unidentifiable spirit beast. If one couldn't even see its form and identify its flaws, how did one intend to kill it?

'You must be kidding!'

Those who knew the slightest thing about formations wouldn't utter such amateurish words!

"The Way of Formation is deep and profound, and it has a long heritage behind of it. It's one of the top occupations throughout the entire continent, paling little in comparison to even master teacher. Such profound knowledge, and all you can say is to decipher it? You sure know how to speak rubbish!"

Princess Fei-er harrumphed coldly. This was her chance to get back at the other party for the previous two humiliations. Her eyebrows shot up, and she spoke majestically. "This valley might not be too big, but it is more than a hundred mu (6 hectare). Furthermore, there are a few thousand different flora and fauna in here. As for the geography, it is located within a mountain range and is connected to a forest and a lake. Its east is faced with yang whereas its west is faced with yin.

"In other words, it's a blessed land suited for setting up all kinds of formations. Just speaking of grade-6 formations, there are 14,372 types that could be set up here. Each of them also has innumerable different variations. Unless the formation is dragged into sight and analyzed, it's impossible to tell which it is!

"If one doesn't know the formation's type, variation, area, and strength... Let me ask you, how could one decipher the formation?"

Flinging her sleeves, Princess Fei-er harrumphed coldly.

Xing Yuan and the others nodded in agreement.

While Yu Fei-er could be obstinate at times, and she was extremely emotionally-charged in her actions, she did possess incredible talent in formations. She was a famous formation master genius even within the Master Teacher Academy.

This was also the main reason why Luo Qiqi invited the other party along after receiving the mission.

Not expecting her good friend to put down her teacher, Luo Qiqi frowned.

“Enough, Fei-er... even if teacher doesn’t know much about formation, you can still explain the situation to him calmly. There’s no need to use such a tone with him...”

Her teacher might be a rare genius in pill forging—even a 6-star apothecary would pale before him—but in the field of formations... he did seem to be a little lacking.

However, this was to be expected. After all, it was impossible for one to be proficient in everything.

Unfazed by the other party’s rant, Zhang Xuan continued making his point.

“You’re just making things pointlessly complicated. Formations are created by placing formation flags in alignment with the environment. As long as we find the formation flags, it should be easy to stop the formation.”

“Formations are indeed created by formation flags, but do you know how many combination of formation flags there are? Even if one were to know where the flags are located, one must remove it in a strict sequential order. Or else, it could possibly bring about a backlash from the formation, causing everyone here to die.”

Hearing the nonsensical words that the other party was spouting, Yu Fei-er’s face reddened in anger.

What the heck was this!

If she knew how ignorant this fellow was in the Way of Formations, she would have challenged him to a duel on that back then.

“Cough cough. Teacher, formations cannot be broken that easily, not to mention, this kind of hidden formation. It is impossible to find the formation flag under such circumstances...”

Luo Qiqi’s face also reddened as she quickly explained the situation to the other party. However, before she could finish her words, the young man before her scratched his head and stomped on the ground.

Sou!

A formation flag popped up and fell into his hands. Holding onto it, Zhang Xuan turned to look at the group with a sheepish expression.

“This should be the formation flag, right? It doesn’t seem to be as troublesome as you all make it out to be.”

“Ah?”

Everyone was stunned. In that instant, they looked as though they had seen a ghost.

It was just a moment ago that they thought the other party was just an ignorant oaf who was trying to show off. However, upon seeing this sight, their eyes were about to pop out from their sockets. This was especially so for Yu Fei-er.

Was this for real?

She had spent so much effort on trying to force out the formation that she was completely drained at this very moment. Yet, she could just barely see a slight hint of the formation. Yet, that fellow, with just a casual step... actually took out a formation flag!

What was with this huge disparity?

“This... does seem to be the formation flag...”

Luo Qiqi gulped down her saliva.

This formation flag looked ancient, and it had suffered significant wear and tear from the trial of time. With just a glance, anyone could tell that it had been buried underground for a very long time.

The chances were that it had originated from the formation that appeared earlier.

“Fei-er, look...” Luo Qiqi exclaimed.

Suppressing her shock, Princess Fei-er said, “Look at what? Even if he coincidentally found one formation flag, it would be futile if he can’t remove the remaining ones sequentially. If a grade-6 formation could be torn down that easily, 6-star formation masters wouldn’t have such a prestigious standing...”

So what if you found one formation flag by coincidence? Formations like this have at least a hundred formation flags scattered all around. You might have altered the structure of the formation by extracting one of them, but you are a long way off from destroying it!

In fact, a careless mistake might even cause the entire formation to explode.

The accumulation of spiritual energy of a formation that had been operated for several millenniums was frightening. If it were to explode, the consequences would be as dire as what happened in the Cleansing Lake. Even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert could be blown to bits in an instant.

Formations weren’t a joke. If it could be dispelled so easily, why would 6-star formation masters waste so much effort learning the art?

The more she thought about it, the angrier she felt. Princess Fei-er was just about to lecture the other party when she felt someone pulling on her arm. Shifting her gaze, she realized that it was her close friend, Luo Qiqi. Perplexed, she frowned. “What’s wrong?”

“Don’t say anything else, just look over there...”

Luo Qiqi’s face was pale in shock.

“Look over there?”

Princess Fei-er turned her gaze over, and the sight that stood before her left her face twitching uncontrollably. She nearly fainted on the spot.

Unknowingly, the young man who she'd thought was still standing beside her was already twenty meters away. While walking, he would bend down from time to time to pluck out a formation flag, just like a farmer pulling out onions from his field. As though to further exaggerate things, he was even whistling leisurely.

Hwee, hwee, hwoo...

“...”

Her eyes rolled up.

Princess Fei-er was on the verge of tears.

Do you really need to be so exaggerated?

That's a formation that I failed to force out despite using the entirety of my strength, and yet there you are, plucking out its flags one after another casually...

When dealing with hidden formations, even the greatest formation masters would use the Formation Destroying Silver Needle to force it out first before analyzing its type based on the spiritual energy it exuded before deducing the location of its Life Gate...

Yet, this ignorant fellow simply jumped past all those steps and began plucking out the flags... Have we gone crazy?

Of course, if it was just plucking out formation flags, most people could do it. But... you don't know the slightest thing about formations, and the flags were also hidden as well, so how could you do it so confidently and leisurely?

To even begin whistling on top of that... Are you that confident that there would be no backlash?

It was truly fortunate that she didn't bet with him earlier, otherwise she would be deeper in debt at this very moment...

“It seems like... teacher does know the location of every single formation flag, as well as the sequence so as to prevent any backlash...”

Luo Qiqi felt her throat turning dry.

Based on her teacher’s words previously, she thought that he didn’t know anything about formations at all. Only now did she realize that she was gravely mistaken... the other party was in truth a master at formations!

Even Princess Fei-er, a 5-star formation master, was far from a match for him!

In fact... she didn’t think that even the formation masters who expertise in deciphering formation could do it the way he did!

I mean, look at that... precise footsteps, leisurely posture, bored gaze, and relaxed whistling...

The hell! Tell us the truth, are you the one who set up this formation?

Otherwise, how could you be so familiar with it?

“This...”

“He actually... broke the formation just like that?”

Xing Yuan, Wu Zhen, and Ye Qian also rubbed their eyes in disbelief as they glanced at one another in astonishment.

Hidden formations were one of the hardest types of formation to decipher. If one couldn’t force it out, it would be impossible to decipher it.

Yet, to be plucking out the formation flags while whistling so leisurely...

They had never seen such an unbelievable sight in their life before! Why did it feel as though they were dreaming?

“I’m done!”

Amidst everyone’s dumbstruck gazes, the young man flicked his wrist and put the pile of formation flags into his storage ring. After which, he clapped away the dust from his hands before turning to look at the group.

Even though the formation flags were already worn out, he could still set up a grade-6 formation with them. Not to mention, they were also antiques, so they would probably fetch a hefty price in an auction.

The group hurriedly scanned the surrounding, and they noticed a clear change in the previously empty valley.

A massive gate—six meters tall—appeared right before their eyes. It was hard to tell what metal it was forged with, but it was full of aged marks that indicated more than a millennium of history behind it.

Beyond the gate was a flight of stairs that headed deep into the underground. From the spot they were standing at, it seemed to lead into an abyss.

“It’s indeed that underground chamber!”

Upon seeing the gate, everyone’s eyes lit up in excitement.

This proved that Luo Qiqi’s deduction was accurate!

While the evidence that Luo Qiqi provided was credible, and the odds were in their favor—if not, the academy wouldn’t have offered them this mission for academic credits after cross-checking the evidence—they still couldn’t hold back their agitation at having found a concrete lead on Grandmaster Wu Yangzi.

“Let’s enter!”

Xing Yuan’s eyes were gleaming with excitement.

“Wait a moment first. It’s hard to tell how long it’s been since the underground chamber was last opened, so there might be all kinds of poisonous fumes inside!”

Luo Qiqi stepped forward to stopped him. Flicking her wrist, she took out a jade bottle. “This is an antidote that I forged specially for this occasion. It can neutralize up to a thousand types of poisonous fumes found in underground chambers.”

After which, she opened the jade bottle, and round pills rolled out.

Given the lack of ventilation within a typical underground chamber, rotting corpses, insects, and natural-produced gases were among many factors that could lead to poisonous fumes in it. Thus, Luo Qiqi specially prepared pills to deal with this. Otherwise, even a Cosmos Bridge realm expert might fall under the venomous onslaught.

“Un!”

Knowing that this was a matter involving their safety, everyone took a pill and swallowed it without protesting.

Zhang Xuan was no exception either. He took a pill and swallowed it too.

After swallowing the medicine, Luo Qiqi turned to Wu Zhen and said, “Wu Zhen, since you specialize in mechanisms, we’ll be depending on you later on!”

Among the group, Wu Zhen was a proficient celestial designer, and he possessed extensive knowledge over the various kinds of mechanisms and traps. Given that they were stepping into uncharted territory, there was no guarantee that there would be no defensive mechanisms to fend off intruders.

“Leave it to me!”

Flicking his wrist, Wu Zhen took out an artifact reminiscent of an umbrella.

It was a tool that celestial designers use specially for deciphering mechanisms, a ‘Thousand Utility Umbrella’.

“Let’s go!”

Opening the Thousand Utility Umbrella, Wu Zhen led the way in.

Without any hesitation, the rest of the group followed along as well.

Seeing that they were prepared, Zhang Xuan also followed behind Luo Qiqi.

Hu!

Darkness immediately overwhelmed them as soon as they stepped through the gate, rendering them blind.

Xing Yuan stepped forward, flicked his wrist, and a few Night Illumination Pearls immediately rolled down the stairs, providing illumination for the group.

For the time being, the sound of pearls rolling down was still echoing ceaselessly throughout the chamber, indicating the deep depth of the underground chamber.

Scanning the surroundings and confirming that everyone was safe, Wu Zhen said “Let’s proceed then!” before leading the way forward.

657 Two Stone Tablets

The further down they proceeded, the colder they felt. A sinister sensation gripped them as though they had stepped into a graveyard.

It was fortunate that they were only surrounded by ordinary cavern walls. There were no mechanisms, formations, or any other traps, and this left them sighing in relief.

After descending for several hundred meters, they arrived at a vast underground chamber.

Xing Yuan took out another handful of Night Illumination Pearls and threw them forward.

Hu la!

The Night Illumination Pearls rolled across the entire chamber, bringing dim light to the room.

Due to the high cultivation of the group, they were still able to see the sight before them clearly despite the dim illumination.

Not too far from the stone stairs was a small bridge with a small stream flowing through it. Oddly, despite being sealed for innumerable years, the air in the underground chamber wasn't stale at all.

The group had expected to encounter pungent and poisonous gas that had accumulated over the years, but never had they thought that the air down here would be the same as the air at the surface.

“Everyone, be careful. This underground chamber was probably built to house many people. Otherwise, it's impossible for it to be so well-ventilated,” said Wu Zhen.

“To house many people?”

The others frowned.

“That's right. If that's not the case, there's no need to go through the effort of drawing a stream from the river over here

or ventilate it so thoroughly!” Wu Zhen explained.

Specializing in mechanisms, he knew how difficult it was to ventilate and draw a stream into an underground chamber.

If it was just a temporary lodging for a small group of people, given how vast the space was, they wouldn't run the risk of suffocating. There would be no need for them to go through so much effort to ventilate the place so thoroughly.

Hearing his explanation, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

He had visited the soul oracle tomb previously, and it did feel much more stifling than here. The airflow was clearly worse than here.

“Could it be that there was more than one culprit who kidnapped Grandmaster Wu Yangzi?”

Luo Qiqi blinked her eyes in shock.

Based on her investigation, this underground chamber was closely related to Wu Yangzi, and chances were that he was kidnapped and brought here back then... Given that the environment was built to house many people at once, could it be that Wu Yangzi was held hostage by a group of people?

“That I can't confirm...”

Wu Zhen shook his head. “There's a stone tablet over there, let's go and take a look.”

Right in front of the bridge stood an average-sized stone tablet. Under the dim illumination, they could still vaguely see the inscriptions on it.

Upon walking up, three huge words came into sight.

“Yearning Abode Lodge?”

Luo Qiqi frowned.

Underground chambers were usually either tombs or a secret gathering location of a power. What did these out-of-place three words mean then?

“These words are a little weird.”

Ye Qian frowned.

“Oh?” Hearing his interjection, everyone turned to look at him.

Even though this crown prince was only a half 5-star master teacher, he had already reached the level of 5-star in the Way of Painting. Thus, he possessed an exceptional sensitivity toward matters that were in the field of painting.

“Words can bring out one’s true thoughts and mental state. These three words have reached the third level ‘Infused Intentions’, thus allowing one to clearly feel the emotions of the writer then. The feeling I’m getting is that the writer feels out-of-place and wishes to stay away from the temporal world,” Ye Qian said.

Zhang Xuan nodded. He felt the same feelings from the words as well.

Yearning Abode Lodge, both the face meaning of those words and the emotions behind them reflected the writer’s intent to return to his hometown.

As a skilled painter himself, he could see this much even without the Library of Heaven’s Path.

“Longing for one’s home? It seems like this really is the underground chamber where Grandmaster Wu Yangzi was brought!”

Luo Qiqi’s eyes lit up. “Most probably, he was kidnapped by someone, and his yearning for Hongyuan Empire compelled him to leave behind these words. But regretfully, until the day of his death, he wasn’t able to return there.”

“Your explanation does sound plausible.” Xing Yuan and the others nodded.

The very fact that an underground chamber was called Yearning Abode Lodge was very bizarre in itself. However, if the person who wrote this was here against their will, that did explain it.

It was very possible, and these few words were left behind by Wu Yangzi to express his longing for his home.

“I disagree with your view. On top of one’s longing for his home, there is a strong killing intent reminiscent to that in a battlefield infused into these words as well...” Ye Qian frowned. “Grandmaster Wu Yangzi was known to be an amiable person, so it’s unlikely for such savage killing intent to originate from him!”

Grandmaster Wu Yangzi had spent his entire life accompanying metal and weapons. Even though his craft was centered around weapons of slaughter, he himself didn’t carry such a disposition.

However, these three words had glaring killing intent infused into them, and that in itself was intriguing.

“In truth, I think that it’s precisely due to the presence of the killing intent that makes it even more likely that it was Grandmaster Wu Yangzi who left it behind!”

Xing Yuan chuckled. “For a proud 6-star blacksmith to be kidnapped and locked in this kind of unholy location, it would instead be bizarre if he carried no killing intent at all!”

“This...”

Ye Qian was taken aback.

Indeed. For a person of such standing to be captured and locked in this kind of gloomy underground chamber, it was only natural that he would feel indignant and motivated to slaughter those who put him into his current state.

Luo Qiqi spoke grimly.

“As a 6-star pinnacle blacksmith, Elder Wu Yangzi’s cultivation had long reached Saint realm. Given that even a person of his strength was trapped here... Everyone, be careful. I fear that this underground chamber might not be as simple as it seems!”

“Un!”

Everyone nodded as tension built within them.

How could an underground chamber that could even lock a Saint realm cultivator possibly be anything simple? Even though three thousand years had passed, such means still

weren't something that a bunch of Consonant Spirit realm and Cosmos Bridge realm fellows could withstand.

“Let's go!”

After looking around the stone tablet and confirming that there was nothing useful around it, the group advanced forward.

At the back of the group, Zhang Xuan spared another glance to the words on the stone tablet and frowned. He walked up to it, touched it lightly with his finger, and seemingly realizing something, a deep frown surfaced on his face.

Passing the stone tablet, he proceeded onto the bridge.

The bridge wasn't too long, but the current of the stream below was surprisingly swift. The swishing sound of the water felt exceptionally pleasant amidst this ghastly quiet atmosphere.

Wu Zhen turned around to nod at the group before placing the Thousand Utility Umbrella in front to scout the way. The others followed tightly behind him.

At the opposite side of the bridge was a vast hall, and within it was yet another stone tablet.

Holding onto a Night Illumination Pearl, Xing Yuan walked forward, and under a dim yellow light, he saw three large words inscribed on it: Burying Sorrow Lodge.

“This...”

Seeing the words on it, the group blinked in astonishment.

Was this the name of the underground chamber as well? Does this place have two names?

Yearning Abode Lodge previously, and Burying Sorrow Lodge now, what exactly was the true name of this place?

“These three words are calm and upright. Only by finding joy again can one abandon sorrow; this means that there's something inside that he seeks which can help him to overcome his sadness...”

Ye Qian took a look and analyzed the words. “If I'm not mistaken, these must be the words left behind by those who

imprisoned Grandmaster Wu Yangzi!”

“You’re right. Since they had imprisoned Grandmaster Wu Yangzi to forge weapons or artifacts for them, naturally, they would be overjoyed enough to forget even their sorrows...”

Xing Yuan nodded.

Luo Qiqi and Princess Fei-er hesitated for a moment before nodding in agreement as well.

This was the most plausible explanation for the entire matter.

Just that, they still couldn’t understand why there was a stone tablet with different inscribing on each end of the bridge?

After looking at the stone tablet, they took a look around the hall. However, it was entirely empty, and there was nothing to be seen at all.

“Let me take a look!”

Wu Zhen walked around the walls, knocking on them as he passed them by, but he soon shook his head and said, “There isn’t any mechanism here.”

“Could there be a hidden formation then?”

With a formation compass in hand, Princess Fei-er also explored the area, but her face slowly darkened.

“There isn’t any formation here either.”

“It can’t be that this is it to the underground chamber?”

Everyone frowned.

Given the effort made to set up such a formidable hidden formation outside, dig out this deep underground chamber, setting up the ventilation, and drawing a river in here, all there was here was this big hall?

If that was the case, wouldn’t this be way too pointless?

“With just this empty hall, we won’t be able to determine whether Wu Yangzi once lived here or not. If that’s the case, it means that our mission is a failure...”

Luo Qiqi frowned.

She had confidence in Wu Zhen and Princess Fei-er's capabilities.

Since the both of them said that there was nothing here, that was likely to be the case.

However... given that this area was completely empty, there was nothing they could use to gauge whether Wu Yangzi had been here or not. How were they supposed to report this matter when they return?

What was even more bizarre was that if there was nothing here, where in the world did those weapons that were forged using Grandmaster Wu Yangzi's unique forging technique come from?

"Indeed. To think that all we would see was a mere empty hall after all the effort we took coming here."

Xing Yuan also shook his head in disappointment.

He thought that they would be able to find some clues by coming here, but there was nothing more than two stone tablets and a small bridge here. Was their mission destined to end in failure?

Just as everyone was shaking their heads in disappointment, Luo Qiqi suddenly said, "Teacher, did you... manage to discern anything at all?"

Everyone quickly shifted their gazes, only to see that Zhang Xuan was standing before the second stone tablet once more. The latter stretched out his hand and touched the tablet.

Zhang Xuan turned around and said, "I find that there's something very bizarre with these two stone tablets."

"Bizarre?"

Everyone walked forward and gathered around the stone tablets once more.

Zhang Xuan revealed his deduction.

"Un. Yearning Abode Lodge and Burying Sorrow Lodge... If I'm not mistaken, it should represent two different roads. The

words left on the stone tablets are probably a choice offered to those who stumble upon this area.”

“Now that you say it, that does seem possible!”

Everyone was taken aback.

Of the entire underground chamber, the most conspicuous objects were the stone tablets. Perhaps, there was some kind of mechanism hidden within it.

“Let me take a look!”

Wu Zhen hesitated for a moment before walking up.

He took out a Night Illumination Pearl and carefully studied the stone tablet. Suddenly his eyes lit up.

“There does seem to be... a mechanism hidden in here.”

“A mechanism?”

“Perhaps this mechanism will open up a passageway that lead us to another location. In other words, we are only at the entrance of the underground chamber!”

Everyone’s interest was immediately piqued, and they hurried forward to the tablet to take a look as well.

658 Indecipherable

Since there was a mechanism on the stone tablet, there was a good chance that the place they were in wasn't the real underground chamber. Perhaps, there might be a passageway leading to it, just that they hadn't found it yet.

“Teacher's eye of discernment is indeed formidable!”

Luo Qiqi turned to look at Zhang Xuan with eyes shining in admiration.

Indeed, she did well pulling her teacher along with them. His eye of discernment was proving to be incomparably valuable at this timing.

Otherwise, they would surely still be wasting their time, looking around futilely.

Seeing her good friend admiring Zhang shi, Yu Fei-er pouted in displeasure and harrumphed.

“He's just lucky!”

Even though she knew that Zhang shi possessed extraordinary capability, she still couldn't help but feel a little displeased when she saw the other party doing well.

Zhang Xuan turned to look at her and asked, “Lucky? Do you want to bet with me then?”

“You...”

Nearly choking on her saliva, Yu Fei-er gritted her teeth and turned her head away.

Knowing that it was best not to interfere in the conflict between the two—the previous time, he was pummeled due to it—Wu Zhen turned a blind eye to it. He hurried over to the stone tablet and said, “Let me see if I can decipher the mechanism!”

Closing his eyes tightly, he began feeling the tablet lightly with his fingers.

Since it was a mechanism, there must be a core controlling it. With his deep understanding of mechanisms as a celestial designer, he should be able to analyze its inner workings through the minor differences on its surface and find its weakness.

“Everyone, be silent. He needs to concentrate hard to find the core. As long as he finds it, he should be able to break open this mechanism without any trouble!” Xing Yuan said.

While the mechanisms created by celestial designers were formidable, they had their flaws as well. There was no mechanism that couldn't work without a core to power it, and once one finds it, even the most difficult of mechanisms could be undone easily.

“Un!”

Understanding this, everyone nodded and fell silent. In an instant, the only sound that could be heard in the area was the torrent beneath the bridge.

Controlling his breathing and heartbeat, Wu Zhen drove his zhenqi to make his touch even more sensitive. He quickly felt his way around the entire stone tablet, and after contemplating for a moment, he abruptly opened his eyes.

“Alright, I've found the core. I should be able to open the underground chamber now!”

Wu Zhen chuckled with deep confidence.

His cultivation might not be on par with Xing Yuan, Luo Qiqi, and Princess Fei-er, but he had the absolute confidence in dealing with mechanisms.

It was finally his turn to shine.

Taking a deep breath, he shook the Thousand Utility Umbrella in his hand.

Huala!

A sharp needle suddenly appeared at the top of the umbrella.

The needle was around three centimeters long, and under the warm glow of the Night Illumination Pearl it emanated a

fearsome cold gleam. With just a look, one could tell that it was extremely sharp.

“This is the Thousand Utility Thorn of the Thousand Utility Umbrella. It’s used to decipher all kinds of mechanisms. Just for this thorn, five 5-star blacksmiths would have to work tirelessly for ten days to successfully forge it!” Luo Qiqi explained.

“Five 5-star blacksmiths would have to work tirelessly for ten days?” Zhang Xuan was shocked.

This sharp needle that was as thin as a strand of hair actually required so much effort behind it?

But thinking about it, crafting such a sharp and narrow needle couldn’t possibly be an easy task.

After all, the narrower it was, the more prone it would be to breaking.

Luo Qiqi continued explaining. “Un. It is only because he’s a master teacher that he could mobilize so many blacksmiths at once. If it had been anybody else, it would have been impossible to hire them for such a laborious job!”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

As the number one occupation in the world, being a master teacher did have lots of benefits.

There was only benefits that stood to be gained from getting acquainted with a young and talented 5-star master teacher. Thus, it wasn’t too hard for Wu Zhen to get five 5-star blacksmiths to spend ten whole days to craft a weapon for him. If it had been any other occupation, that would have been impossible.

Weng!

While they were speaking, the aura around Wu Zhen suddenly surged, and his eyes widened. The Thousand Utility Umbrella abruptly stabbed the side of the tablet diagonally.

Ding!

As soon as the Thousand Needle Utility came into contact with the stone tablet, it seemed to sink into a small crack that was so small that one couldn't even see it with one's eyes.

Ji ji ji!

Some heavy creaking noises sounded from the stone tablet, as though it was grinding against the floor.

Upon hearing this noise, Wu Zhen's confident face suddenly darkened, and he hurriedly shouted, "Darn it, be careful!"

However, before he could finish his words, a storm-like noise suddenly came from the stone tablet, and countless sharp needles shot out from it.

Each of the needles moved at an exceptionally fast speed, and while it wouldn't be fatal were it to hit, it could cause one a fair bit of suffering.

Huala!

Wu Zhen immediately pressed a point on the Thousand Utility Umbrella, and it opened up.

The cloth of the Thousand Utility Umbrella was forged using a unique material, making it as resilient as a shield. Putting aside these needles, even a sharp weapon couldn't hope to tear through it.

If not for such incredible functionalities, the Thousand Utility Umbrella wouldn't be an artifact so well-loved by celestial designers such that they would go to the extent of bankruptcy just to have one forged.

Ding ding dang dang!

The resilient umbrella managed to deflect most of the needles, but there were still some which slipped through its defense.

"Retreat!"

Stepping forward, Xing Yuan flicked his wrist and took out a shield.

Knowing that underground chambers were usually filled with mechanisms and traps, he had brought many things in preparations for the various circumstances they could face.

This shield was both two meters in height and width, and it could easily cover everyone behind.

Hu la la!

With a sound reminiscent of rain pattering on banana leaves, the thin needles were stopped in their tracks. Quite a few of them ended up lodging themselves into the ground and the shield.

“That was close!”

Seeing the dense congregation of needles on the ground and the shield, everyone felt cold sweat trickling down their backs.

If not for Xing Yuan preparing this in advance, they would have been turned into pincushions. They would probably be wishing that they would be dead even though the attack wasn't fatal.

Wiping the cold sweat off his forehead, Xing Yuan turned to Wu Zhen and bellowed furiously.

“Are you trying to open the underground chamber or are you trying to murder us?”

You were supposed to decipher the mechanism, not to murder us. If we had reacted any slower than that, we would have been done in just now.

In fact, despite his swift reaction, he was still pierced by five small needles. He couldn't control the overwhelming rage bubbling within him.

It was just a moment ago that the other party confidently declared that he had solved it when such a matter occurred. Can't you look properly before piercing your umbrella into that mechanism?

“I...”

Knowing that he was at fault, Wu Zhen's lips twitched. “Every single mechanism will have some intentional flaws installed to serve as traps to prevent others from deciphering it successfully. I picked the wrong one just now. Don't worry, I won't make any mistake this time...”

Closing the Thousand Utility Umbrella, he closed his eyes and began feeling the stone tablet once more. Finally, he confirmed another point, and he declared with a look of confidence, “This is definitely right this time around...”

“Are you certain?” The face of a doubtful Xing Yuan appeared from the back of the shield.

“I’m certain. If I’m mistaken this time again, I’ll cut my head off!” Wu Zhen gritted his teeth, and without any hesitation, he pierced the Thousand Utility Thorn into it once more.

He was determined to succeed this time to cleanse off the humiliation from his failure, as well as to prove himself!

Hong long! Ji ya!

The Thousand Utility Thorn struck the stone tablet, and the heavy creaking sound echoed once more. This time, before Wu Zhen could say anything, countless thin needles shot out once more.

Wu Zhen’s face paled. At this point, he was already on the verge of crying.

I clearly checked it multiple times, how could I possibly be wrong...

While Wu Zhen was in disbelief, Xing Yuan was on the verge of explosion. Tearing away needles from his face, he howled.

“You’re courting death!”

Are you sure you are sufficiently capable?

Can’t you have at least given us a warning before you pierced the stone tablet? My head is still outside, you know... If not for me using my zhenqi to ward off the might of the needles, who knows what could have happened to me now?

But even so, having an entire face full of needles as though a porcupine had made him frenzied.

Can’t you be a little careful and aim for the correct point?

Two consecutive failures; are you really trying to pull everyone down to their graves along with you?

“Don’t worry! I’ll surely get it right the next time...”

Plucking away a few silver needles from his head, Wu Zhen’s lips twitched in frenzy. He closed the Thousand Utility Umbrella once more and began feeling the stone tablet.

After a long time, he paused, and gritting his teeth, he said, “I’m sure that it’s this one, no mistake about it...”

“Are you... very certain?” Xing Yuan asked questioningly.

“I’m very certain!”

Xing Yuan nodded.

“Alright... Do it then!”

Xing Yuan swiftly hid behind the shield, concealing his entire body behind it.

Even though this fellow had spoken confidently, he had also done the same the two previous times. After triggering the trap consecutively, he would be a fool to not seek cover.

“Un!”

Gritting his teeth, Wu Zhen held up his Thousand Utility Thorn and pierced the stone.

Ji ya ya!

This time, it wasn’t the sound of heavy creaking but the melodic tune of gears turning.

“Haha, I succeeded! There’s surely no problem this time...”

Hearing this sound, Wu Zhen’s eyes lit up, and he quickly turned around to share his joy.

“That’s more like it...”

Heaving a sigh of relief, Xing Yuan’s head peeked out from the umbrella. Given the difference in noise, the other party should have gotten it right this time...

Huala!

As soon as his head peeked out, a storm-like noise resounded in the air once more, and innumerable flying thin needles appeared in his sight.

“The heck!”

Xing Yuan was on the verge of crying.

Big Brother, will you only be content after you get rid of me?

Didn't you say that you had succeeded?

If you really had succeeded, what's with these thin needles?

In truth, Wu Zhen felt even more frenzied than him at this very moment.

He clearly heard the cogs of the mechanism turning, why would it still shoot out thin needles?

Even though he had opened the Thousand Utility Umbrella in time to ward off the majority of them, due to his slower reaction from having his guard down, he was still pierced by dozens of needles. The places stabbed by the needles swelled red, creating quite a glaring sight.

Xing Yuan, it's not that I want to kill you, but that this mechanism wants to kill the both of us...

“I got it...”

After a long moment, after Wu Zhen finally plucked out the thin needles from his body, he suddenly thought of something and his mouth twitched. “This seems to be... a grade-6 mechanism set up by a 6-star celestial designer...”

“Grade-6 mechanism?”

Everyone staggered.

If it was a grade-6 mechanism, what the hell were you doing up there?

As a 5-star celestial designer, you should know better than to make such an elementary mistake!

Knowing what everyone was thinking, Wu Zhen hurriedly explained himself.

“It is because there's a booby trap contained within the grade-6 mechanism!”

“A booby trap?”

“Un. Using some special means, this grade-6 mechanism is disguised as a grade-5, and fake flaws were installed on them to lure others to trigger them. Furthermore, there are different sounds to triggering these flaws to beguile those attempting to decipher it, thus putting their guards down momentarily... I’ve only seen this kind of mechanism in some books once, and I thought its heritage had already died out. Who knew that... I would actually find one here!”

Wu Zhen’s face paled.

This booby-trapped mechanism was designed so exquisitely that even a 6-star celestial designer could possibly fall into the trap, not to mention, him.

As an occupation specializing in the crafting of mechanisms, celestial designers had a unique heritage, and it was an occupation recognized by the Master Teacher Pavilion. There was a significant difference between the knowledge or capability of those in between every single rank. As a 5-star primary celestial designer, it was perfectly normal that he would be unable to see through the booby-trapped mechanism of a grade-6 mechanism.

It was fortunate that limited by the disguise, it was impossible to fill the stone tablets with anything stronger than the needles. Otherwise, they would have been dead by now.

659 Be Careful

Seeing the other party's depressed expression, Luo Qiqi asked, "In other words, you can't decipher it, right?"

"If I said that I could decipher it... would you allow me to continue?" Wu Zhen asked.

Everyone swiftly shook their heads.

Xing Yuan gritted his teeth and said, "If you dare to continue deciphering it, do you believe that I won't kill you right now?"

You must be joking! Even though I am really interested in opening the pathway to the true underground chamber, I still don't want to die yet.

Putting everything aside, after only three attempts at deciphering the stone tablet, his face was already swollen due to those needles. If this were to continue, he would probably die before the tablet was deciphered.

"Then what should we do?"

Since they weren't able to decipher the mechanism, they couldn't possibly just wait here for their entire lives!

"Let me give it a try!"

Seeing the look of frustration on everyone's faces, Zhang Xuan stepped forward.

When he touched the stone tablet previously, a book had already been compiled in the Library of Heaven's Path on it. It wasn't that he was interested in seeing Wu Zhen make a fool of himself, but that the complex mechanisms contained within the stone tablet were simply too fascinating that he found himself absorbed into it. By the time he had come to, Xing Yuan's face was already filled with silver needles.

"You?"

Seeing him step forth, Wu Zhen frowned and asked, "Are you... well-versed in the ways of a celestial designer as well?"

Given how formidable this fellow was in pill forging and formations, he couldn't possibly be an expert in mechanisms as well!

While celestial designers weren't as prestigious as formation masters and apothecaries, it didn't impede the ingenuity of their craft. Their work was extremely complex and difficult to master. Even the slightest deviation in the details could cause a vast difference in the results

And in this occupation, he could be considered as a rare genius already. Even so, despite his years of study, he had only reached 5-star. Considering how even he was unable to solve it, a fellow who was younger than him... It couldn't be that the other party was more capable than him?

But that was impossible!

Zhang Xuan chuckled. "I dabble."

"Dabble?"

Wu Zhen shook his head. "If you only dabble, it will surely be impossible for you to decipher it. You witnessed the situation just now; even the slightest mistake will trigger the silver needle mechanism. There was no poison on the needles previously, so we were still able to get by, but what if the needles from now on are coated with lethal poison? If that happens, none of us will get out of here!"

"So, if you don't have absolute confidence in your ability to decipher it, it'll be best not to give it a try. I fear that we might all die here..."

Seeing Wu Zhen obstructing his path, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

"Absolute confidence? Aren't you the same too?"

Despite not being completely sure, didn't you try three times? Still able to get by... Why don't you ask Xing Yuan whether he agrees with your words!

Let's see, he would surely pummel you to the ground if you were to utter such words before him.

“Humph, how could I be the same? I’m from a family of celestial designers, and I created my own automated mechanism when I was three. By seventeen, I was already a 4-star celestial designer, and after I entered Hongyuan Academy, I became the student of the only 6-star pinnacle celestial designer within the empire...”

Flinging his sleeves, Wu Zhen raised his head proudly. “Even though I’ve failed three times, that doesn’t mean that I’m unconfident. Even though this is a booby-trapped mechanism from a 6-star celestial designer, as long as I attempt it a few more times, I’m certain that I can decipher it...”

“But if you really insist on going ahead, there’s little I can do to stop you either. How about this, why don’t I ask you two basic questions, and if you can answer them, it will mean that you do possess some basic knowledge regarding celestial designers, and that you aren’t just fooling about!”

Wu Zhen turned to look at him.

“Hmm?” Zhang Xuan came to a halt.

“Who is the most famous celestial designer in the past ten thousand years of Hongyuan Empire?” Wu Zhen asked.

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

He had barely read any books on celestial designers, so how could he possibly know who the most famous celestial designer in Hongyuan Empire was?

Besides, he didn’t even know the name of the incumbent emperor of Hongyuan Empire was nor the name of the Master Teacher Academy’s principal, so how could he know anything about that?

“You don’t even know this?”

Seeing the embarrassed look on the other party, Wu Zhen frowned. “Since that’s the case, I don’t think you know who is the one who created the concept of a booby-trapped mechanism then?”

“I don’t.”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. "I'm just going to decipher the stone tablets, what do the questions you asked have to do with it?"

"Of course, it has everything to do with it!"

Hearing Zhang Xuan's words, Wu Zhen's eyes flashed in disappointment. "This is the most basic knowledge that every celestial designer knows, and the fact that you don't know it means that you don't know a thing about the occupation. How are you supposed to find the core and decipher the mechanism like that? I don't deny that you do possess a unique interpretation of pill forging and formation, but mechanism is something very much different from that. One cannot solve it with confidence alone..."

"Why don't I tell you about the origin and fundamental theories regarding mechanisms so that you can understand the complexity of the subject? By then, you can consider once more if you really intend to continue on..."

The more Wu Zhen spoke, the more Zhang Xuan felt that calluses would start growing on his ears. Bored of the other party, he stepped toward to the stone tablet, flicked his wrist, and took out the Glacier Rain Sword.

"What are you doing? This is a mechanism! Using a sword against it will only draw more aggression onto ourselves..."

Just as Wu Zhen was rambling on, he saw the other party draw a sword, and he nearly fainted from anger.

Are you kidding me?

Due to the small parts of the mechanism, there was very little room for any error. That was the reason why I had to search the stone tablet so thoroughly for the core before using the Thousand Umbrella Thorn to pierce it precisely. And yet, you actually took out a sword? Are you for real?

Just as he was thinking that the other party was just causing needless trouble, the young man before him seemed to have heard his words of advice and put his sword away.

"That's more like it..."

Just as Wu Zhen was thinking that fellow was still acceptable given how receptive he was to advise, the other party flicked his wrist and whipped out a huge hammer.

The hammer was even larger than the ones used by blacksmiths to forge weapons; it was on par with those used by workers on construction sites. On top of that, its material was also sub-par. It was hard to understand why a master teacher like Zhang Xuan would have such a weapon on him.

“What are you going to do...”

Wu Zhen was so shocked that he was even starting to stutter, but seemingly paying him no heed, the young man before him raised his metal hammer and smashed it against the stone tablet.

“The heck!”

Wu Zhen’s sight darkened, and a stifled sensation welled up in his chest. In that instant, he felt an urge to spew blood.

Even when using the Thousand Utility Thorn, he nearly ended up being killed by the onslaught of needles. Yet, you actually used a metal hammer to strike it... Even if you’re seeking death, that’s not the way to do it!

Wu Zhen opened his Thousand Utility Umbrella in a panic and hid behind it as though a quail, not daring to move at all. Following which, a sound reminiscent to a grandfather clock reverberated in the room, sending goosebumps up the skin of others.

Kacha! Kacha!

A series of crisp clicks sounded, as though an egg being peeled of its shell... and everything fell silent.

Just as Wu Zhen was doubtful why there were no needles shooting over this time, he suddenly heard the nonchalant voice of the young man from the stone tablet.

“Alright, the passageway has opened!”

He carefully emerged from the back of his Thousand Utility Umbrella, and upon taking a glance, he suddenly froze.

“This... this...”

His eyes widened as though he had seen a ghost.

The stone tablet before him had disappeared entirely from view, and in its place was a huge stone door and a series of stone steps, leading downward, toward the bottom of the stream not too far away.

“It’s open?”

Not just him, Luo Qiqi and Xing Yuan were stunned as well.

A famed 5-star celestial designer of the academy had gone through so much trouble and triggered the trap multiple times, only to fail miserably... and yet, this fellow simply smacked it hard with a metal hammer and it was immediately deciphered.

Wasn’t there something very wrong about this?

Was Wu Zhen the 5-star celestial designer, or was Zhang Shi?

After a moment of shock, Luo Qiqi said, “The true underground chamber lies beneath the stream. It’s no wonder we can’t find the source of the ventilation despite the smooth air currents here!”

When she first discovered that the air in this room was fresh, she tried looking for the source of ventilation, but to her surprise, she couldn’t find it at all. However, with the revelation of the underground passageway, she finally came to a realization—the secret lay beneath the stream.

The fresh air in the underground chamber originated from the stream!

Princess Yu Fei-er nodded. “Since we managed to find the underground chamber, let’s hurry down and check if this place is related to Grandmaster Wu Yangzi!”

Even though she detested Zhang Xuan, she had to admit that the other party did possess extraordinary capability.

There were simply too many things that had happened for her to deny it.

“The underground chamber may have opened, but I think we shouldn’t go in yet,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Why?” Princess Yu Fei-er turned her sight to him.

Given that there was such an elaborate mechanism hiding an underground chamber, the answers they sought were probably inside. Since what they were looking for were right before them, why shouldn't they enter?”

“All in all, we have seen a total of two stone tablets on both sides of the bridge; one is marked with Yearning Abode Lodge while the other Burying Sorrow Lodge. I think that there's another pathway hidden in the other stone tablet, so we should make a decision before entering,” Zhang Xuan explained.

Since an underground passageway was found in one of the two stone tablets, perhaps the same could be said for the other as well.

“That's right!”

The group nodded.

Blinded by their excitement in uncovering the stone tablet, they neglected this point. Thinking of it, it was indeed highly possible that another passageway hid behind the other stone tablet.

If that was really the case, then Zhang Xuan's conjecture would be spot-on—two names, two choices.

“Un. What we should do now is decipher the other stone tablet before making a decision...” Seeing that everyone had realized what he was talking about, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement. Just as he was about to speak, he suddenly felt his hand being relieved of the weight in it—someone had taken the metal hammer from his hand.

Following which, an impassive voice spoke. “I'll decipher the stone tablet over there...”

By the time Zhang Xuan lifted his gaze, Wu Zhen was already at the other side of the bridge. Lifting the metal hammer up, he smashed it powerfully on the stone tablet.

That fellow was too desperate to prove himself.

Despite being a 5-star celestial designer, he failed to decipher the mechanism behind the stone tablet despite three attempts.

Yet, an amateur actually opened it with a smash of a metal hammer. The embarrassment and frustration he felt was understandable.

However, there stood another stone tablet for him to redeem himself and prove his own capability. How could he possibly just give up this opportunity to showcase his ability to the other party? Thus, he snatched the hammer and rushed over immediately.

Recalling the direction, trajectory, and might of the other party's hammer strike, he bellowed loudly and smashed the hammer down onto the stone tablet.

“Be...”

Not expecting the other party to move so quickly, Zhang Xuan was taken aback. Before he could finish his words, the sound of heavy grinding sounded from the stone tablet at the opposite side of the river.

Following which, a whole rain of thin needles came flying forth.

Puhe! Puhe! Puhe!

Unprepared, Wu Zhen didn't even manage to open the Thousand Utility Umbrella before the rain of needles blurred his vision. In an instant, he turned into a cactus.

“... careful,” Zhang Xuan uttered, as he stared at the sight before him.

660 Another Be

“...” Wu Zhen cried silently.

I really only wanted to prove myself...

Who in the world did I offend for this to become of me?

Even though he had exerted his zhenqi at the final moment to protect his vitals, he was still pierced by several hundred needles. Furthermore, each of them had pierced at least an inch deep, leaving him in deep pain.

What is the use of saying be careful now?

Didn't you use the metal hammer to smash the stone tablet just now as well?

Why didn't it work for me?

The same location, the same strength, and the same technique... and yet, you opened up a passageway whereas I transformed into a human cactus...

Tears streamed down Wu Zhen's face as he trembled in indignation. Driving his zhenqi through his body, he flexed his muscles, and the needles lodged into his flesh were immediately jolted out. With a flick of his wrist, he took out the wine gourd he received from Zhang Xuan.

As Princess Fei-er didn't use it all back then, he still had a portion of the 'Saint recovery medicine'. Since he was wounded all over at the moment, this was the perfect time to use it.

“Since this is an external wound...”

Wu Zhen deduced the logic behind Zhang Shi's words before uncorking the cap and pouring the wine all over his body.

On the opposite side of the river, Zhang Xuan's lips twitched upon seeing the sight.

“Cough cough...”

Of course, he remembered this wine! He had no choice but to feign it as a gift due to Luo Zhao, Feng Yu, and Chen Yue cornering Hong shi back then... The basis behind its healing property was Heaven's Path zhenqi, but considering how a few days had passed, the zhenqi contained within the wine had already long dried out. In other words, what was within the gourd was just ordinary wine... and to pour alcohol on such gaping wound would surely be excruciating...

“AHH...”

While Zhang Xuan was still in his thoughts, the sound of a pig being butchered echoed in the air. Wu Zhen's entire body convulsed as though it had been shocked.

In terms of pain, rubbing alcohol on one's wounds was really not much different from rubbing salt on them. The immense suffering that he felt threatened to steal his consciousness away from him.

Watching as white foam started pouring out from the edges of the other party's mouth, Zhang Xuan immediately instructed, “Little Qi, quickly feed him a recovery pill. Otherwise... I fear that he might just die!”

“Yes!”

Luo Qiqi quickly rushed over, pinched open the other party's mouth, and fed him a recovery pill.

Only with the consumption of the recovery pill did the other party's complexion finally recover slightly.

While the needles weren't fatal, there were simply too many of them. Not to mention, the alcohol also had other ingredients in it that would only aggravate one's wounds.

Thus, even though Wu Zhen had managed to survive the ordeal with the help of the recovery pill, he was in terrible shape. His vision was a little unclear, his face was entirely swollen, and he felt listless.

Standing up, he shot a glare at Zhang shi and began weeping silently.

You liar!

Be it the metal hammer striking the stone tablet or the Saint recovery medicine...

I must have been a fool to trust you!

“Allow me.”

Not expecting Wu Zhen to be so rash as to rush to the other stone tablet without allowing him to finish his words, Zhang Xuan shook his head helplessly. Along with Xing Yuan and the others, he walked over to the other side.

He took the Thousand Utility Umbrella from Wu Zhen’s hands, and with a flick of his wrist, the Thousand Utility Thorn appeared. Then, he aimed it at the stone tablet before him and stabbed it in.

Ding ding ding!

Three crisp mechanical clicks sounded.

Jiya! Jiya!

The stone tablet slowly split apart, revealing a towering door.

“Aren’t you supposed to use the metal hammer...”

Wu Zhen staggered at that sight.

“Ah. Adaptability is a very important in deciphering mechanisms. The Thousand Utility Thorn works perfectly fine on this stone tablet!” Zhang Xuan said.

“...” Wu Zhen.

Ignoring Wu Zhen, who was on the verge of a breakdown, the group walked over to the entrance.

Within it was a flight of stone stairs leading to the bottom of the stream as well, but the direction was the complete opposite to the other passageway’s. Most likely, the two passageways led to different places.

“There are indeed two underground chambers...”

A grim expression appeared on everyone’s face. At that moment, the surface of the bridge not too far away from them shook, and the sound of cogs whirring into action echoed through the chamber.

A cold voice abruptly boomed.

“Congratulations for opening the two entrances. However, each one of you can only choose one door to enter. You’ll have an incense’s time to choose, and once you make your choice, retreat is no longer an option!”

Knowing the importance of this matter, Wu Zhen put aside his grudges and began explaining.

“It’s ‘Mechanical Recorder’!”

“Mechanical Recorder?” Everyone was confused.

“Un. On top of creating traps reminiscent of formations, there are some formidable mechanisms that are capable of recording human speech as well. Upon triggering it, the voice recorded within will play,” Wu Zhen explained.

“I see!” Zhang Xuan was surprised, but his astonishment didn’t last for too long.

There were plenty of similar gadgets in his previous life as well. For example, the music box consisted of various mechanisms to play a specific melody. Given the incredible technology celestial designers wielded, it shouldn’t be too difficult for them to create a machine that could emulate human speech.

Interrupting Wu Zhen, Princess Yu Fei-er said, “Now isn’t the time to be bothering about that, let’s discuss which passageway we should choose instead!”

“Un!” The group nodded.

The trigger to the recorded voice was probably the opening of both entrances. According to the words from the voice in the Mechanical Recorder, they had to choose between the two entrances within an incense’s time.

They hardly had the luxury to be thinking about anything else at the moment.

After a moment of hesitation, Luo Qiqi revealed her own conjecture.

“From the words left behind on the stone tablets, it should be clear how we should choose. On this side is ‘Yearning Abode Lodge’, which is highly likely to reflect Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s nostalgia for his own homeland. Since that’s the case, it’s likely to be the underground chamber where Grandmaster Wu Yangzi lived in. On the other hand, ‘Burying Sorrow Lodge’ is likely to refer to the place where those who confined Grandmaster Wu Yangzi here lived!”

“I agree with Qiqi’s point of view!” Princess Yu Fei-er nodded.

Xing Yuan, Wu Zhen, and Ye Qian also expressed their approval of that view.

They had agreed on this conclusion as soon as they saw the stone tablets, so it wasn’t too hard for them to agree with Luo Qiqi’s point of view.

Frowning, Zhang Xuan said, “I have an alternative point of view.”

“May I know what teacher thinks of this matter?”

Luo Qiqi turned her eyes over.

The others also gathered their gazes on Zhang Xuan.

This young man had displayed outstanding performance ever since their arrival, so no one dared to take his words lightly anymore.

“Contrary to your perspective, I feel that ‘Burying Sorrow Lodge’ is where Grandmaster Wu Yangzi lived instead. As for the reason, I can’t really put it out in words for you all!” Zhang Xuan said.

Touching the stone tablet only showed Zhang Xuan the mechanisms hidden within it. It didn’t explain the interior of the underground chamber within and whether it had anything to do with Wu Yangzi or not. As such, this conclusion actually came from his own hypothesis, and there was no concrete evidence behind it.

“How can that be?”

Princess Fei-er's lips curled up into a sneer, and she harrumphed coldly. "Captured by others to become a weapon-forging machine, Grandmaster Wu Yangzi is surely filled with indignation and wrath. How could he possibly bury his sorrows under such circumstances?"

"Indeed. Captured, Grandmaster Wu Yangzi would surely be missing his own homeland. I agree with Sixth Princess's view!" Xing Yuan nodded.

Knowing that her teacher wouldn't raise claims without any basis behind them, Luo Qiqi asked, "Teacher, for you to say so... could it be that you have noticed something peculiar?"

"I didn't notice anything out of ordinary, just that I am a little perplexed by the killing intent contained within the words 'Yearning Abode Lodge'. I have some understanding of painting, and I find it hard to believe that those words were left behind by a grandmaster blacksmith. On the other hand, the words 'Burying Sorrow Lodge' seemed to emanate calmness and contained a far deeper intent into it. It felt more like the work of a grandmaster. That is the reason why I think so!" Zhang Xuan said.

"I got the same feeling as well..." Ye Qian interjected.

As a 5-star painter, he also felt similar intents from the two inscriptions on the stone tablets.

"Like we said before, it's normal for there to be killing intent infused into his words. Captured and imprisoned, it would only be bizarre if he didn't have such emotions. Burying Sorrow Lodge... Hehe, probably only those who captured him could live their days happily without any sorrow!"

Princess Fei-er shook her head. "I'll still choose this passageway!"

From the very start, she harbored a great dislike for Zhang Xuan. Seeing that there was no strong basis behind the other party's words, her confidence began to increase.

"I also choose this passageway!"

Xing Yuan nodded.

He would follow Princess Fei-er no matter where she went... Besides, he also thought that her words were more reasonable at the moment.

Princess Fei-er turned to Wu Zhen.

“What about you?”

“I...”

After a moment of hesitation, Wu Zhen nodded and replied, “I’ll choose here as well!”

He also felt that Princess Fei-er’s words were correct.

Seeing another person standing on her side, Princess Fei-er felt as though she was finally going to achieve victory over the other party. Delighted, she turned to the crown prince and asked, “Ye Qian, what about you?”

“I... agree more with Zhang shi’s words...” Ye Qian replied, but halfway through, he suddenly noticed the eyebrows of the princess in front of him shooting up all of the sudden, and his courage immediately faded. “However, I’ll still choose this passageway!”

“That’s more like it!”

Seeing her junior supporting her as well, Princess Fei-er nodded her head in satisfaction. She turned to Zhang Xuan with a triumphant look and said, “Alright, four of the six have made their decisions. What about you?”

Aren’t you good at betting?

Let’s see how you’ll win this time!

“I’ll still choose the passageway on the opposite end!” Before the other party’s provocation, Zhang Xuan could only shake his head. Turning to Luo Qiqi, he asked, “What about you?”

“I...”

Luo Qiqi hesitated for a while before eventually replying, “I’ll follow teacher!”

“Qiqi!”

Not expecting her close friend to actually betray her at such a moment, Yu Fei-er hurried forward and tried to persuade her otherwise. “Don’t you agree with our deduction as well? That passageway definitely has nothing to do with Grandmaster Wu Yangzi at all...”

Hearing the other party spouting such words, Zhang Xuan interjected with a smile. “Definitely? You sure sound certain. Do you dare to bet on it?”

“Of course!”

Yu Fei-er flung her sleeves majestically.

She possessed absolute confidence regarding this.

“Good. With so many people witnessing this, I doubt that you would refuse to pay up. This time, instead of ten thousand middle-tier spirit stones, the bet will be one high-tier spirit stone instead...”

Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly. “The victory will be decided by which passageway leads to Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s living quarters. If the path I chose is correct, you’ll have to pay me one high-tier spirit stone. On the other hand... I’ll relieve you of your duties as my maid, and we’ll owe each another nothing!”

“Fine! But if you lose, not only must you relieve me as your maid, you must also repay the 700 middle-tier spirit stones back to me. Also... also...”

Princess Yu Fei-er gritted her teeth. “You must also serve me wine!”

“Sure, I’ll serve you wine if you win!”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

“It’s a deal then!”

Princess Yu Fei-er sneered coldly, “Just you wait! Let’s go!”

After which, she began walking into the stone passageway.

Xing Yuan, Ye Qian, and Wu Zhen followed closely behind her.

“Let’s go as well!”

Seeing them walking down the stone stairs, Zhang Xuan beckoned Luo Qiqi, and the duo crossed the bridge and descended down into the other passageway.

661 An Arm

A dark world lay behind the stone door. Luo Qiqi stepped forward and hurled a few Night Illumination Pearls down to light up the interior.

The further the duo walked down the stairs, the louder the flow of the stream above them sounded.

Even though they were beneath a stream, it didn't feel humid at all. On the contrary, it felt extremely dry. On top of that, the air seemed to be getting fresher and richer in spiritual energy.

“The spiritual energy is drawn in from the stream above. Most probably, a unique Spirit Gathering Formation was inscribed on top,” Luo Qiqi uttered with a hushed voice as she studied the surroundings.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

By building a huge Spirit Gathering Formation in the river, they would be able to draw in spiritual energy from the surface discreetly.

With this influx of spiritual energy, this underground chamber would become an excellent location to cultivate in.

Jiya!

However, a moment after they walked in, they heard the sound of something crashing down above them. Looking upward, they realized that the opening from the entrance where they came from had disappeared.

“This is bad...”

Their faces darkened, and they hurriedly rushed back to the entrance. However, some kind of mechanism had already sealed the entrance tightly.

“This is a Dragon Severing Lock which only 6-star celestial designers can forge!” Luo Qiqi's face paled.

A grave expression surfaced on Zhang Xuan.

“Un. It seems like the other party meant it when he said that we would only get a single chance at choosing the passageway. Once the Dragon Severing Lock is in place, even a 6-star celestial designer would be troubled to overcome it. No one amongst us would be able to get in or out!”

They didn't take the voice on the stone bridge seriously, thinking that it was just a figure of speech. Who knew that he would actually be serious about it!

He had encountered the Dragon Severing Lock back at the soul oracle tomb as well. Once this artifact was in place, unless one possessed the might rivaling a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan cultivator, one would never be able to overcome it. On top of that, for some reason, the Dragon Severing Lock installed here seemed to be much stronger than the one in the soul oracle tomb, making it even more impossible for them to bypass it.

In other words, they were both trapped in this underground chamber.

Luo Qiqi turned to look at Zhang Xuan anxiously.

“Teacher, what should we do now?”

Even though she was a feared genius among her fellow peers, before Zhang shi, she felt as ignorant as a child. For some reason, she found herself developing a dependency on the other party, and it felt as though the ideas that came out from the other party's mind would always be the best.

If not for this deep trust in the other party, she wouldn't have chosen to follow Zhang shi despite feeling that Yu Fei-er's words were more logical.

Frowning, Zhang Xuan replied, “Since we can only pick one passageway, it means that the other passageway where Xing Yuan and the others are at must be locked as well. Let's just advance for now. Perhaps there might be another exit here...”

“Un!”

Luo Qiqi nodded in agreement.

Thus, the duo continued downward. Soon, they arrived at an average-sized room. Under the illumination of the Night Illumination Pearls, they could see that there was a stone table and two stone chairs in here—a very simple layout.

There were no windows or doors here. They had come to the end of the path.

“So small?”

Luo Qiqi frowned.

The hall they were in previously spanned over a few hundred square meters, so they thought that the underground chamber below here should at least be larger. Who knew that it would only be around twenty square meters, not to mention, empty? Rather than an underground chamber, it felt like a cage instead.

“We’re at the end? Could it be that... I’ve really picked the wrong passageway?”

Zhang Xuan’s complexion also turned rather awful.

He didn’t pick this road on a whim... but judging from the narrow room and the lack of any further passage for them to walk down on, could his instincts have truly failed him?

Were they doomed to die here?

Looking around, Zhang Xuan suppressed his anxiety and said, “Regardless of whether I am mistaken or not, judging from how deep the underground chamber is, and the effort put into installing the Dragon Severing Lock, it’s not logical for the passageway to end with this small room. There must be some kind of trick to this room!”

Dragon Severing Lock was an extremely valuable artifact, even for a 6-star celestial designer. Putting aside the technology required to install it, just the resilient material that made it difficult for even a normal Saint to break it was incomparably expensive in itself.

It truly didn’t make sense to use such a valuable object to seal a passageway just to have such a small room at the very end of it.

“I’ll try looking around.”

Luo Qiqi nodded. She walked to the stone table and touched it, but she instantly withdrew her fingers with a shocked expression. “There’s no dust at all!”

Astonished, Zhang Xuan rushed up and touched the table as well. His face immediately turned grim.

The stone table and stone chairs had been here for innumerable years, and yet, there wasn’t the slightest dust to be found on them. It was as if someone had dusted them regularly...

“Could it be that... someone actually lives here?”

Luo Qiqi narrowed her eyes.

It was one thing for a voice to be recorded on a Mechanical Recorder, but if someone was alive... that would change the essence of things!

First and foremost, they would be in even graver danger than before.

This was a power that could even kidnap the 6-star pinnacle Blacksmith Wu Yangzi alive... Their true strength was unimaginable.

If someone were to be alive, given the current cultivation realms of the duo, it would be hard for them to escape with their lives!

“I took the formation flags outside one by one, and based on my observations, it should have been at least two thousand years since anyone has touched them... To remain in this underground chamber for two thousand years? No one has that long of a lifespan!” Zhang Xuan said with a grim expression.

Even after reaching Transcendent Mortal realm, and one’s physical constitution improves by leaps and bounds, one’s lifespan would still be limited to a maximum of around three hundred years. It was impossible to go beyond them!

In fact, even upon reaching Saint realm, where one’s level of existence evolved once more, a thousand years would still be

the limit. It was completely unheard of for any Saints to live for more than two thousand years.

Even Empyrean Kong shi also couldn't withstand the test of time, and eventually vanished in the annals of history.

Given that the formation flags hadn't been touched for two thousand years, it would mean that no one had come out and entered the underground chamber in this period of time. To still be living after such a long period of time... how could that be possible?

Even soul oracles had a limit to their lifespan as well. Back then, if not for the protection from the Nine Hearts Lotus, under the corrosion of the Five Soul Declines, it would have been impossible for Mo Hunsheng to live so long.

“But... if there are no living beings here, why is there no dust in here?”

Luo Qiqi also understood the logic behind this. However, it was extremely clear that this table had been cleaned on a frequent basis.

One must know that they were in an underground chamber which was filled with rocks and dust. It was perfectly normal for dust to accumulate on furniture... If no one was living here, how could the cleanliness of the furniture be explained?

Zhang Xuan interrupted her thoughts.

“That... I'm not too sure either. Let's not think about it now. The urgent matter at hand is to find if there any mechanism that can get us out of here. Otherwise, it will just be a matter of time before we run out of food and water!”

The urgent matter at hand wasn't whether there was anyone here or not—even if there was, given the size of this underground passageway, there was nowhere they could hide anyway.

The thing they had to do now was to find an escape route. The longer they remained here, the more likely it was that something bad would happen to them.

He didn't want to die here just for a mere mission.

“Un!”

Luo Qiqi nodded as she started placing her hands on the walls to feel them.

Zhang Xuan also placed his fingers against the wall while shouting ‘flaws’ in his mind.

Hu!

A book immediately appeared in the Library of Heaven’s Path. Zhang Xuan swiftly opened it up.

“Virescental Stone, a strong mineral found in the ground, created by the collision of earth veins...”

Taking a look, Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

The Library of Heaven’s Path only analyzed whatever it came into contact with. As what Zhang Xuan touched was the wall and not a mechanism, the Library of Heaven’s Path only reflected the properties of the rock.

He slowly slid his fingers along the wall.

He was certain that there was some mechanism along the wall, but due to the other party’s ingenious camouflaging of the mechanism with the surrounding Virescental Stone, he was unable to see it at the moment.

Kacha!

While Zhang Xuan was moving along the wall, he suddenly heard the crisp click of a gear. Following which, Luo Qiqi excitedly called out.

“I found the mechanism!”

Turning around, he saw the portion of the wall where Luo Qiqi’s hand was pressing against sinking several inches in, as though she was pressing on some kind of button.

Geji! Geji!

The mechanism released deep creaking sound, and an average-sized stone door slowly appeared in front of Luo Qiqi.

“Teacher, look...”

Exclaiming in excitement, she fetched a Night Illumination Pearl with her other hand to throw it in so as to see what was inside when ‘hu!’, an arm suddenly stretched out and grabbed her up by her neck.

That arm was incomparably thick, similar to the thigh of a human. The muscles, tendons, and junctions looked swollen. The skin was a dark shade of gray, unseemly of the tone a human should have.

“Damn it!”

Everything happened so quickly that Zhang Xuan didn’t even have time to react. He narrowed his eyes and hurriedly rushed forward by executing his Heaven’s Path Movement Art.

In his path of motion, he whipped out his Glacier Rain Sword and slashed down on that arm.

Before the sharp gleam of the sword, the palm released Luo Qiqi and flicked its finger toward the sword instead.

Ding!

As the black fingernails came into contact with the tip of the sword, a mighty force suddenly came gushing toward Zhang Xuan as though he was struck by a meteorite. With a stifled feeling in his chest, he was sent flying in an instant.

Peng!

His back crashed heavily against the wall, forming a human-shaped depression in it. A sweet sensation welled up in his throat, and fresh blood seeped from the edge of his mouth.

With his recent breakthrough, his fighting prowess had improved tremendously. In terms of strength, he could even rival a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan Perfect Harmonization realm intermediate stage cultivator. Yet, he couldn’t even withstand a single finger flick from the other party!

‘The opponent must be at least Transcendent Mortal 8-dan... or even higher!’

Zhang Xuan’s face turned livid, and his grip on his sword tightened to the point that the edges of his fingers were turning white.

Back then, he instantaneously realized the danger of the situation and executed the Heaven's Path Sword Art with all the might he could harness. Yet, he was still sent flying with a single flick.

The huge disparity between him and his opponent left despair creeping up on him.

Hu!

While Zhang Xuan was sent flying, the massive palm came grabbing at Luo Qiqi once more.

“Damn it!”

At that moment, Luo Qiqi also recovered from the shock from the sudden attack.

No matter what, she was one of the top geniuses of the Master Teacher Academy, a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan pinnacle expert. It was only due to her carelessness that the other party managed to grab her neck so easily. Having recovered her senses, she immediately bellowed loudly and stabbed her sword forward.

Her swordsmanship was forceful and elegant. Just from her movements itself, it could be seen that her understanding and mastery of swordsmanship wasn't beneath Zhang Xuan by too much!

She had reached the Sword Heart realm as well!

Hu la!

Seeing Luo Qiqi retaliate, the giant palm swiftly changed the trajectory of its motion and slapped her sword instead.

Ding!

Luo Qiqi's sword immediately flew out of her hands and stabbed deep into the ceiling of the room. The immense force from the motion left the sword impaled into the ceiling, shaking non-stop.

“Run!”

Knowing that it would be impossible for them to stand against that huge hand with their cultivation, Zhang Xuan immediately

executed the Heaven's Path Movement Art and appeared before Luo Qiqi. Covering her with his zhenqi, he picked her up and immediately retreated to the corner.

662 Miscalculated

“Teacher, what’s that?”

Until now, Luo Qiqi’s face was still pale in shock.

She had used her full might for that attack, and yet her sword was sent flying so casually without even harming the other party in the slightest. A sense of helplessness was rising within her.

“I don’t know either, but that thing isn’t something that we can deal with given our current capability!” Zhang Xuan said as he drove the Heaven’s Path zhenqi within him to recuperate from his previous injuries. “Most probably, you might have triggered the wrong mechanism and released it...”

“I released it?”

Luo Qiqi’s figure jolted in shock, and regret surfaced on her face.

Indeed.

It was only after she pressed a certain mechanism did that massive hand appear.

“Un. Even though I can’t tell exactly what the other party is, the appearance of the arm did remind me of something...”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

“What is it?” Luo Qiqi asked grimly.

“Otherworldly Demons!”

Upon exhaling a mouthful of turbid air, Zhang Xuan had completely healed from his previous injuries.

“You mean the tribe which Kong shi expelled from the Master Teacher Continent long ago... the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe?” Luo Qiqi’s entire body stiffened, and her eyes widened in disbelief.

“Indeed. I’ve seen an Otherworldly Demon before, and while the skin tone seemed a little different, there doesn’t seem to be much difference in terms of the skeletal structure!” Zhang Xuan said.

There was a specific reason why he chose this passageway instead of the other one where Yu Fei-er and the others went to.

‘Yearning Abode Lodge’, the killing intent infused within those three words wasn’t something that a human could possess... but an Otherworldly Demon!

Back during the Master Teacher Tournament, in order to test their courage, Hong shi had brought out an Otherworldly Demon. There was no way Zhang Xuan could forget the feeling from the killing intent back then.

And it was identical to the killing intent he felt from the three words.

As such, he didn’t think that it belonged to Grandmaster Wu Yangzi.

But even so, Zhang Xuan wasn’t too sure at the start. After all, it had been a long time since the Otherworldly Demons had disappeared... but to think that there would really be some here!

Furthermore, it appeared in the underground chamber he had specifically chosen to avoid them!

Could he have really made the wrong choice? Could it be that the Yearning Abode Lodge was truly the living quarters of Wu Yangzi whereas residing in this Burying Sorrow Lodge was a huge monster?

Geji! Geji!

While the duo was speaking, a creaking sound continued to echo from the mechanism, and the stone door kept opening.

The initial crack was only sufficient for a hand to pass through, but at this rate, it would only be a matter of time before the entire stone door opened and the monster trapped within charged out.

Hearing of the Otherworldly Demon and recalling the killing intent from a moment ago, cold sweat trickled down Luo Qiqi's head, and her face paled.

"Teacher, let's go up..."

Even though she was a 5-star master teacher, she was still young, and she had never come into contact with the Otherworldly Demons before. In a sense, she wasn't faring any better than Ruohuan gongzi and the others back then.

Having dealt with an Otherworldly Demon once, Zhang Xuan didn't panic. Instead, he activated the Eye of Insight and began to analyze the situation rationally.

"There's a Dragon Severing Lock up top, not to mention, the stairway is also narrow. We would be cornered over there, and that would spell our death!"

Escaping this narrow stone room was indeed his first thought as well, but it was far from the most correct move.

There was only one road in this passageway, and the duo could barely stand side by side with its width. If they were to escape up there, it would just be a matter of time before they were cornered.

"What should we do then?" Hearing the other party's words, Luo Qiqi also realized that the idea wasn't feasible, and her face paled in anxiety and fear.

"There's no other option before us now. We have to find another mechanism to escape this room. Otherwise, we'll die here!" Zhang Xuan said.

Under the effects of the Heaven's Path zhenqi and his Soul Depth of 16.0, the astounding killing intent from the Otherworldly Demon had little effect on him. As such, he was still capable of rationally analyzing the situation.

"I understand!"

Luo Qiqi clenched her jaws in determination.

Naturally, her reputation as the top genius of Grade 2 students didn't come from nowhere. Panicked as she may be, she knew

that there was no mistake in her teacher's words, so she nodded and hurriedly moved to the wall.

Zhang Xuan also moved to the wall and yelled 'flaws' in his mind as he touched every single part of it.

The stone room wasn't too large, spanning only several dozen square meters. It didn't take long for the duo to go around the entire room. Zhang Xuan swiftly flipped through the books in the Library of Heaven's Path, but a huge frown appeared on his forehead.

All of these books were on the type of mineral the walls were made of—there wasn't the slightest part detailing about a mechanism or that sort. Could he have been mistaken? Was there really no other mechanism in the room?

"How is it?"

He turned to look at Luo Qiqi.

Even though she may not specialize in mechanisms like Wu Zhen, as a 5-star master teacher, she still possessed an astounding eye of discernment. Otherwise, she wouldn't have triggered the previous mechanism and accidentally let that huge fellow out.

"Nothing at all!"

Luo Qiqi shook her head. Suddenly, a thought struck her, and she immediately paled. With a nervous look, she turned to look at Zhang Xuan and asked, "Teacher... is it possible that the mechanism to the exit is actually..."

Unable to continue speaking, she lifted her shaking finger and pointed.

Seeing where she was pointing at, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows twitched.

It was the stone door that the Otherworldly Demon was in.

In truth, when he found no other mechanism in the room, he also stumbled upon this thought. However, unwilling to accept it, he shoved the thought to the side of the mind. However, as Luo Qiqi pointed it out at this moment, he had no choice but to face it now.

“This will be a gamble. If the exit is down there, we might still stand a chance at survival... otherwise, the only path remaining for us is death!”

Looking at the stone door slowly creaking open, Zhang Xuan knew that it was just a matter of time before that fellow leaped out to slaughter them. They had to make up their minds now

Should their suspicions prove to be false, and it was actually a dead end beyond the stone door, they would be doomed!

However, if there was a passageway in there, they would get a shot at getting through this ordeal.

“Yes!” Understanding this, Luo Qiqi nodded in consent to the operation.

“You should hide behind the stone door first. Once that fellow leaps out, I’ll draw him away from the front. Meanwhile, you should enter the stone door, and if there’s a passageway, run away immediately. There’s no need for you to wait for me,” instructed Zhang Xuan telepathically with a grim frown on his forehead.

“I can’t!”

Hearing the other party’s arrangement, Luo Qiqi’s face flushed in agitation, and she yelled out.

She had experienced the strength of that fellow inside, so she knew that Zhang shi was putting himself at terrible risk just to create a chance to escape for her!

In times of danger, most would be thinking of how they could preserve their own life. On the other hand, Zhang shi was actually volunteering to sacrifice himself for her...

There was no way she could repay this favor.

“Teacher...”

Her eyes reddened in agitation.

Only in times of trouble would one’s true colors shine through.

This is what a real teacher is!

To be able to sacrifice everything for the welfare of their student!

Even though she was a 5-star master teacher, she realized that she would be unable to do the same if she were to be placed in the same position.

“Quick, stop hesitating! Otherwise, neither one of us will get away!” Zhang Xuan bellowed to her.

“I... Alright!”

Gritting her teeth, Luo Qiqi nodded before rushing to the side of the stone door.

Jiya! Jiya!

Just as she succeeded in concealing her figure, the stone door finally opened entirely, and a towering figure emerged from beyond it.

It was a three-meter tall fellow. Its entire body was dyed a shade of gray, and it carried an aura of death.

“This is... a puppet made from the corpse of Otherworldly Demons?”

Narrowing her eyes, Luo Qiqi covered her mouth in shock, her slender body trembling uncontrollably.

Otherworldly Demons were an existence blessed with superior strength at birth. Be it their physical body, soul, or cultivation, their innate abilities were far higher than an average human. In a sense, a puppet forged out of a corpse would be similar to the Soulless Metal Humanoid, but due to the superior physical body, it would be far stronger. In fact, due to the nature of its body, it would be able to exert the full might the Otherworldly Demon possessed before its demise.

This explained the mystery of the cleaned furniture from before...

They were wondering how there could be any survivors after a lapse of two thousand years, but to think that it would be a puppet instead!

This kind of artifact was driven by spiritual energy, and as long as it wasn't damaged, it could be said that there was no definite limit to its lifespan. Even though they were underground, the region was rich in spiritual energy, sufficient to fuel the puppet no matter how high its consumption of spiritual energy was.

Most likely, the furniture was cleaned by him.

Even though it possessed no sentience, it would still accomplish the mission its master commanded of it.

Just as Luo Qiqi was immersed in shock, Zhang Shi abruptly bellowed and slashed his sword.

“Die!”

Tzz la!

The immense might of Zhang Xuan's slash, along with the emanation of sword qi, creating a sharp buzzing noise in the air as the sword qi flew toward the puppet.

The puppet stepped forward from the stone door and slapped down Zhang Xuan's sword qi with its thick hands.

Hu!

The collision between Zhang Xuan's rampaging might and the puppet's slap was reminiscent of a lone boat before a tsunami, it dissipated entirely under the immense force of the slap without stopping the puppet for too long.

Just as Luo Qiqi was hesitating, unable to decide whether to assist Zhang Shi or flee, the other party's anxious shout suddenly echoed in the room.

“Hurry up and leave!”

“Un!”

Knowing that the other party was doing this so as to offer her a chance at survival, Luo Qiqi clenched her jaws and rushed toward the stone door.

Teacher, thank you...

If we can get out of here alive, I'll obey every single instruction you have of me. I'll be your student and your guardian for life...

Hong long!

While she was dashing through the stone door, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt an immense force crushing down on him. With a sharp exhalation of breath, he was sent crashing into the wall once again.

'This shouldn't be!'

Struggling off the wall, Zhang Xuan looked at the rampaging Otherworldly Demon puppet in bewilderment.

It wasn't out of his kindness that he drew this huge fellow to himself and allowed Luo Qiqi to escape first... Rather, he wanted to make use of the other party's gratitude to form a golden page!

With that, he was confident of destroying even a Saint!

Since the other party had acknowledged him as her teacher, and she did possess deep gratitude toward him, he thought that a golden page would surely be formed. Who could have thought that... there would be nothing at all!

Could it be that he failed to induce the other party's gratitude?

But that shouldn't be! From her eyes, he could tell that she was earnestly grateful to him for his sacrifice. However, if that was the case, why didn't the golden page form?

Suddenly, an idea popped into Zhang Xuan's head.

'Could it be that... there's a difference between the gratitude I receive from guiding someone and from saving someone?'

All along, the golden pages formed in the Book of Heaven's Path were due to him imparting a battle technique, cultivation technique, or clarifying the doubts of another.

But this situation was clearly much different from the others.

This time, the gratitude the other party had for him was for saving her life. While it was indeed a huge favor, it wasn't the

kind of gratitude between a teacher and a student. Rather, it was directed toward his magnanimity and his noble character.

‘I miscalculated...’

Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched, and cold sweat started dripping down his forehead.

He thought that the criteria for forming a golden page would be the relationship between of a teacher and a student, and gratitude between them. As long as a golden page was formed, he would be able to get out of this desperate situation. Who knew that he would actually fail...

This time, he would really have to fight against this huge fellow head on!

And clearly, he was no match for the other party at all.

Hu!

Just as he was stifled by the darned situation before him, the Otherworldly Demon was already right before him. Its massive fist smashed right toward his head.

From this moment on, every action Zhang Xuan took could spell his death.

This was the greatest crisis Zhang Xuan was in ever since his transcension!

663 Crimson Blaze Cauldron

“Clone!”

Knowing that he would be a goner if this fist were to land on him, Zhang Xuan immediately brought out his clone while his main body dodged to the side.

“Main body, did you find some good stuff again? Ah?!”

The clone had been in the storage ring all along, so he wasn't aware of what was going on outside. When he was summoned, he thought that there would be something for him, similar to how it was with the Cleansing Lake back then... but just as he was getting excited, a massive fist was already right before his eyes.

Peng!

Before he could even process what was going on, he was already punched in his head, and his head flattened as though a squashed pancake. His rage immediately flew off the charts.

“To dare to strike me, you're courting death!”

Not expecting to meet with something like this as soon as he appeared, the clone was frenzied. In a moment, the clone's flattened head immediately puffed up back to normal, and he raised his fist to punch the Otherworldly Demon puppet!

As the clone's body was molded out of Nine Hearts Lotus, it had no specific form, thus allowing it to recover even if it were to be reduced to a pile of mud. In a sense, it could be said to be indestructible. This was also the reason why Zhang Xuan used the latter as a shield at this crucial moment.

Hu hu!

Clashing fists with the Otherworldly Demon puppet, 'peng!', the clone was immediately sent crashing into a wall.

Despite its unparalleled physical resilience, the clone's cultivation and true strength were still way too low. As such, it wasn't a match for this monster either.

It was just like how a diamond might be tougher than steel, but a steel hammer could still shatter it into bits.

Hong long!

But while the clone couldn't stand on equal footing with the Otherworldly Demon puppet, it did manage to provoke it with its fist. The furious Otherworldly Demon puppet immediately rushed forward and kicked at the clone.

“This is bad...”

Just the fist itself nearly caused his entire body to fall apart, the clone instinctively knew that he wouldn't be able to withstand the might of this kick. Frightened, he swiftly dodged to the side.

“Die!”

At the same moment, Zhang Xuan, who was wielding a sword, immediately raised his sword and cut down on the Otherworldly Demon puppet's neck.

The main body and the clone shared their consciousness, allowing them to work together with exceptional synergy. While the clone drew attention away from the Otherworldly Demon puppet, Zhang Xuan made use of this opportunity when the other party's attention wasn't on him to launch an attack.

Ding!

However, as the sword struck the neck of the puppet, a crisp metallic sound echoed with a burst of sparks.

Zhang Xuan felt a dull pain in his arm. It was as if he had struck a metal pole with a wooden stick; his sword nearly fell out of his hands.

“Isn't he simply way too tough?”

Taking a look, Zhang Xuan realized that he had only managed to leave nothing but a white scar on the other party's neck. His face immediately darkened.

The sword he was wielding was a Spirit intermediate-tier pinnacle sword, and yet, an attack with his full might actually

failed to even cut through the other party's skin. How formidable must this fellow's defense be?

“Could it be that... on top of the corpse of an Otherworldly Demon, some other materials were used to forge this puppet into a weapon?”

Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed.

With an immense strength exceeding 9,000,000 ding and the might of a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon, even the head of a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert would be easily lopped off. And yet, he barely scraped the other party's skin. That could only mean one thing...

This fellow wasn't just an ordinary puppet forged out of a mere corpse. It was highly likely that its body was coated with a layer of some extraordinary alloy, turning it into a weapon exceeding Spirit intermediate-tier.

That was the only plausible explanation as to why Zhang Xuan's attack was rendered ineffective!

“How do I fight against something like this?”

Zhang Xuan's face turned exceptionally awful.

Even his strongest weapon wasn't sufficient to break through the other party's defense. In other words, he was incapable of hurting the other party, needless to say, kill it!

Hu!

While Zhang Xuan was in the midst of despairing, the Otherworldly Demon puppet, infuriated by his backstab, turned around and smashed its massive fist at him.

Its fist seemed to wield strength comparable to a mountain, compressing the air in space with a loud sonic boom. Even before it could reach Zhang Xuan, he could already feel a searing heat in his surroundings, as though he had been placed in a massive cauldron.

Might of a Searing Cauldron!

Legend has it that when one's fist reached a certain strength, the shock wave of one's punch would become reminiscent of a

searing cauldron, capable of even melting steel.

Zhang Xuan had always thought that it was just an exaggeration of old legends, but to think that he would experience it himself!

“Retreat...”

Knowing that it was impossible to stand against such a powerful punch, Zhang Xuan immediately rushed backward.

Peng!

However, the room was simply too small. Barely after retreating two steps, he felt the cold wall pressing tightly against his back.

“Dragon Scale Amulet!”

Knowing that it would be impossible for him to dodge this attack, Zhang Xuan was left with no choice but to activate the amulet from before.

There were only three uses to this object. He had used it once in the soul oracle tomb, and this was his second use.

A light barrier appeared and shrouded him.

Boom!

As the fist came into contact with the light barrier, an ear-splitting sonic boom sounded, and the latter immediately burst.

In an instant, Zhang Xuan felt an immense force transferring from the barrier and on to him. The stone wall directly behind him was reduced to dust while he spurted a mouthful of fresh blood.

If not for the physical body tempering he had undergone in the Cleansing Lake, his bones would have been shattered by that blow.

“To be able to destroy a barrier that could even withstand an attack from a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan pinnacle, this fellow’s strength must have reached Saint realm...”

Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan swiftly moved aside to create room for himself while driving the Heaven’s Path zhenqi

within him to heal his injuries.

He thought that as long as he collaborated with his clone, even if they couldn't defeat it, he would at least be able to escape.

Who could have known that, on top of being strong, the other party's defensive capabilities would be extraordinary as well?

Only a Saint could possibly possess such capabilities.

At Zhang Xuan's current cultivation, it was impossible for him to defeat the other party.

Unless...

"... there's a Spirit pinnacle weapon for me to wield!"

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly in agitation.

Due to the other party's overwhelming defense, even though he knew its flaws, with his current strength, it was impossible for him to exploit them against the other party. However, it was possible for him to make up for his weakness through a stronger weapon... If there was a Spirit pinnacle weapon here, he might still stand a chance against the puppet... otherwise, the only fate that awaited him would be death!

What should he do?

Ever since his transcension, everything had been smooth-sailing. He never thought that a day would come where he would meet with such a dangerous situation.

If the other party was a living being, he might still be able to hoodwink it through his Impartation of Heaven's Will, just as he had done with the Otherworldly Demon back then...

But a puppet possessed no sentience at all! No number of words could possibly sway a being whose only purpose of existence was to accomplish the instructions asked of it.

While Zhang Xuan was at a loss, he suddenly heard Luo Qiqi's telepathic voice in his head.

"Teacher, there's a passageway in here, come in..."

Many things had happened, but it had only been ten breaths since she entered the stone door. It seemed as though she found something within it.

“Alright!”

Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and exerted another wave of sword qi. At the same moment, he had his clone attack from behind. After all was done, he immediately turned around and fled for the stone door.

His clone was indestructible, so he had nothing to fear, but Zhang Xuan was different. Should his head be caved in by that fearsome fist, he would really die on the spot.

Geji! Geji!

Seemingly sensing Zhang Xuan’s intention, the Otherworldly Demon puppet flew into a greater rage. Paying no heed to his sword qi, it charged forward right at Zhang Xuan.

It wanted to use the fearsome might of its charge to smash Zhang Xuan’s body!

“Damn it!”

Zhang Xuan gritted with his teeth in frustration.

If it was just a single punch, he could still avoid it with his movement art. However, if it was an entire body... this narrow room had no space for him to dodge at all! Once that massive body crashed into him, even if he were to survive, he would be as good as dead.

“Scram!”

At that moment, his clone suddenly charged forward and struck the Otherworldly Demon puppet’s side.

Peng!

Even though his clone wasn’t sufficiently strong to knock down the puppet, he still managed to cause a slight deviation in the direction of its charge.

What should have struck Zhang Xuan’s body squarely ended up sweeping by his shoulder.

Weng!

At that crucial moment, Zhang Xuan activated the last Dragon Scale Amulet, and with a loud ‘kacha!’, the light barrier broke.

Under the immense force of that charge, Zhang Xuan fell through the stone door.

“Clone, come back!”

While Zhang Xuan was flying through the air, he returned the clone into his storage ring before crashing into the wall once more.

A worried voice called out from in front of him.

“Teacher...”

Turning around, he saw a passageway behind the stone door. It seemed like there was some kind of mechanism in here which Luo Qiqi had triggered in the time she was in here. The passageway was narrow, allowing only one person to pass through at a time.

The place where he had crashed into was the wall of this exact passageway.

Knowing that the huge fellow could come rushing in at any moment, Zhang Xuan immediately stood up and dashed inward, not daring to hesitate in the slightest.

The passageway wasn't too long, only around ten meters or so. Zhang Xuan came to the end within half a breath, and a vast stone chamber appeared before him.

It was much larger than the room from before, spanning over several thousand square meters.

“This...”

Not expecting that there would be such a huge space behind that narrow passageway, Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

While Zhang Xuan was examining the area curiously, Luo Qiqi said excitedly, “Teacher, you're right! These are indeed Grandmaster Wu Yangzi's living quarters. Here are the books and cauldron that he left behind...”

Lifting his gaze, he saw the young lady looking at her excitedly.

She was, of course, delighted to see that her teacher was fine, but it was something else that was causing her excitement.

“Books? Cauldron?”

Lifting his gaze, under the illumination of numerous Night Illumination Pearls, there was a row of giant bookshelves behind the young lady. Not too far away from the bookshelves stood a massive cauldron.

Unlike the cauldrons used for pill forging, this one looked like a huge furnace instead. Even though it wasn't lit, one could still feel a violent energy rampaging within it.

With just a glance, it was clear that it was an extraordinary artifact!

“Un. I've examined it, and it's the forging cauldron that Grandmaster Wu Yangzi used back then, the 'Crimson Blaze Cauldron'!” Luo Qiqi said.

A blacksmith's cauldron was equivalent to his pride and his life. The fact that his cauldron was here meant that he had definitely lived here before.

In other words... they were at the right place!

The Burying Sorrow Lodge was indeed where Grandmaster Wu Yangzi had lived after he had been kidnapped.

As long as they brought this Crimson Blaze Cauldron back to the academy, it would mean that they had succeeded in clearing their mission!

“Great! Have you found the exit yet?” Zhang Xuan asked.

In truth, he wasn't too interested in the mission. His current priority was to find an exit to leave this damned place!

The narrow passageway could hold back the massive fellow for a moment, but it would only be a matter of time before it charged in there and kills them. Before they could enjoy whatever treasures were in there, they had to ensure their survival first.

“Exit? I... I haven't found it yet...”

Luo Qiqi's face paled.

In truth, the sight of the Crimson Blaze Cauldron and the books had left her so excited that she had forgotten her current

goal.

Furthermore, given the size of the room and poor lighting, it would be hard for them to find it in an instant either.

Boom!

Before she could finish her words, the duo suddenly felt a powerful killing intent assaulting them. The puppet from before walked into the hall.

“This is really bad...”

Zhang Xuan’s face paled.

664 Zhang Xuan Sets Up a Formation

Before they could find the exit, the other party had already rushed into the chamber. They were now cornered like rats.

Not giving Zhang Xuan any time to think, the Otherworldly Demon puppet rushed straight toward Zhang Xuan as soon as it entered the room.

Clearly, it was currently blinded by rage such that it couldn't care less about Luo Qiqi.

“Damn it!”

Knowing that it was impossible for him to withstand the fearsome might of this fellow, Zhang Xuan immediately flew into the sky.

It was fortunate that the ceiling of the chamber was also much higher than the stone room, being over several dozen meters high. Even though Zhang Xuan was unable to fight against the Otherworldly Demon puppet, he could escape to the sky temporarily to think of a plan.

Sou!

As soon as he flew up, he immediately felt a powerful force rushing up to him. The puppet had leaped up in pursuit of him.

Limited by the nature of its existence as a puppet, this fellow wasn't capable of flight. But even so, a height of several dozen meters wasn't difficult for a puppet possessing might equivalent to a Saint to cover.

“Teacher, I'll help you!”

Seeing how that fellow was pursuing her teacher relentlessly, Luo Qiqi was anxious. She immediately whipped out a bow, drew an arrow, and shot it right toward the puppet in the sky.

Wu!

Harnessing the full might of a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan pinnacle expert, it appeared right before the puppet in an instant. However, with a single flick of its arm, it patted away the arrow easily.

However, this brief lapse in its concentration granted Zhang Xuan an opportunity to alter the direction of his flight to Luo Qiqi.

On the other hand, as the puppet was ‘flying’ through the force of its leap, it could only continue on with the trajectory of its motion.

“Teacher...”

At that crucial moment, there was no time for Luo Qiqi to question why Zhang Xuan was flying. She worriedly looked over and asked, “Are you fine...”

“I’m fine now, but if we don’t find the exit anytime soon, we will be goners soon...” Zhang Xuan said grimly.

Although he was able to maneuver around the ceiling to dodge the other party’s attacks, once his zhenqi ran dry, they would still be done for.

Knowing that there was no time to talk any further, Zhang Xuan quickly instructed, “Take the Crimson Blaze Cauldron and quickly look for the exit...”

“Yes...”

Luo Qiqi hurriedly nodded before rushing over to the cauldron. She placed her palm on it, intending to place it within her storage ring.

But before she could move it, the gears of a mechanism suddenly clicked, and a voice sounded.

“I am Wu Yangzi! Guests, if you can forge a Spirit high-tier weapon, you’ll be entitled to my heritage. Otherwise, if you were to forcefully claim my Crimson Blaze Cauldron, the entire underground chamber will collapse. Only through earning my heritage will I reveal the exit to this chamber. Otherwise, be prepared to be buried with me!”

“Collapse?”

“Buried with him?”

Zhang Xuan and Luo Qiqi were stunned for a moment before frenzy overwhelmed them.

Who in the world wants your heritage!

With such a damned puppet chasing after their lives, who has the time to forge your freaking weapons?

You must be trying to kill us!

Besides, forging a Spirit high-tier weapon... Only 5-star pinnacle blacksmiths can do so!

Even though Luo Qiqi had dabbled in weapon forging before, she was only a 5-star primary blacksmith. How could she forge a weapon which only a 5-star pinnacle could forge?

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan... could be said to know nothing about weapon forging at all. He wasn't even qualified as a 1-star blacksmith, so that was even more impossible for him...

Boom!

While the duo was still depressed about their current predicament, a shock wave suddenly burst in the chamber. The Otherworldly Demon puppet had already landed on the ground, and after determining its next path of motion, it dashed forward.

Given the latter's speed, it would be just a few breaths before it reaches them.

“Teacher, what do we do?” Luo Qiqi asked, panicking.

At the same time, Zhang Xuan also felt goosebumps rising up on his skin.

He had just crossed hands with this huge fellow, and despite working together with his clone, they could hardly even fend off a single move... To face it in a direct battle, they would probably be destroyed in just a few blows!

And according to Wu Yangzi's words, only those who had obtained his heritage could leave...

To obtain his heritage, they would have to forge a weapon... but under such circumstances, even if they wanted to give it a try, this huge fellow couldn't possibly give them any!

"Unless... there was some kind of formation that could trap this huge fellow temporarily. Otherwise, we won't be able to forge anything at all..." Luo Qiqi said anxiously.

"Indeed. Furthermore, the formation must be at least grade-6, or else he would break out in an instant..."

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement. He was just about to continue speaking when an epiphany suddenly struck him. "Grade-6 formation?"

"Little Qi, help me by distracting this fellow for a few breaths!"

Suddenly recalling something, Zhang Xuan leaped up and flew into the sky.

"Alright!"

Judging from her teacher's expression, he must have noticed something. Luo Qiqi immediately took out another handful of arrows and shot at the puppet.

Sou sou sou sou!

Every single arrow of hers harnessed immense might, leaving the puppet no choice but to deflect them properly.

Knowing that it was impossible for Luo Qiqi to sustain this, Zhang Xuan hurriedly flicked his wrist, and a bunch of formation flags appeared in his hands.

These were the ones which he had procured at the mountain valley outside earlier on.

Zhang Xuan knew a lot of the grade-3 formations, but his knowledge for anything beyond grade-4 was terribly limited. The only grade-5 formation he knew was a Spirit Gathering Formation.

As such, it should be impossible for him to set up a grade-6 formation.

Without the formation blueprint and formation flags, how could he possibly succeed?

But due to sheer coincidence, he did have the formation blueprint and formation flags for a grade-6 formation.

Yu Fei-er had used a Formation Destroying Silver Needle to trigger the formation, thus creating a detailed book on its flaws to be compiled in the Library of Heaven's Path. This had given Zhang Xuan perfect knowledge regarding the formation.

And this Hidden Formation happened to be grade-6... and he also had those flags in his storage ring as well!

Back then, he was only thinking that it would be a huge waste to leave behind such valuable objects. Who would have thought that it might actually save his life now?

Zhang Xuan examined the hall from his position in the sky.

'The chamber is sufficiently huge for me to lay out the formation...'

He intended to use this formation to hide the region where the cauldron and books were gathered.

As long as he could keep the puppet out for a period of time, they would be able to try to obtain Wu Yangzi's heritage through forging a weapon!

However, this Hidden Formation required substantial space to lay it out, and it was fortunate that this chamber was large enough. Otherwise, there would be nothing Zhang Xuan could do.

"Alright!"

Confirming the positions, Zhang Xuan flicked his fingers.

Weng!

A couple of the formation flags in his palm scattered across the entire room.

"Formation flags? Is teacher going to set up a formation?"

Luo Qiqi, who was busy stopping the puppet with her arrows, couldn't help but be slightly bewildered by Zhang Xuan's

actions.

Even though she hadn't studied formations before, her close friend was a 5-star formation master, so she had many opportunities to see how formations were laid out.

Even the most formidable formation master in the Master Teacher Academy had to use a compass to assess the surroundings first, searching inch by inch and placing flag after flag into the ground...

Yet, this fellow actually simply threw a bunch of formation flags down from the sky at once...

Was this for real?

Would a formation set up so casually really work?

Wasn't this taking formations too lightly?

While she was overwhelmed by astonishment, one of the arrows was accidentally shot with insufficient strength. As such, with a furious roar, the puppet on the receiving end stretched out its hand and grabbed it, before throwing it back at her.

Wu wu!

Even though the arrow was hurled with the puppet's bare hands, its strength was simply too great. It whizzed through the air, heading straight back at Luo Qiqi.

Alarmed, Luo Qiqi's eyes narrowed, and she quickly stepped aside. But even so, the sheer wind pressure from the trajectory of the arrow ripped the cloth by her shoulder and deeply cut her snow-white skin.

Roar!

At the same time, the Otherworldly Demon puppet, freed from the previous barrage of arrows, roared furiously and leaped at Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan swiftly twisted his body and changed his trajectory. At the same time, he continued to hurl flags downward to specific locations below.

"Your enemy is me, don't even think of going after teacher!"

Seeing that the fellow was pursuing Zhang Xuan once more, Luo Qiqi clenched her jaws and drew her arrows once more.

Weng!

This arrow pulled out of rage harnessed nearly her entire might. With a speed as swift as a shooting star, it appeared before the Otherworldly Demon puppet in an instant.

Ding!

Before the puppet could even react, it was already shot in its glabella.

However, this fellow's defense was simply too strong. Not to mention, as a puppet, concepts such as acupoint and the like didn't apply to it. As such, striking what that should have been a vital didn't damage it in the least; on the contrary, it only infuriated it further.

Roaring furiously, it changed its target from Zhang Xuan to her.

With that previous attack, its aggression had been pulled from Zhang Xuan to her. Its massive arms threatened to smash the woman before it into a lump of meat.

Hu!

Astonished, Luo Qiqi could hardly react when the Otherworldly Demon puppet was already standing right before her. With opened fingers, its hand stretched forward to grab her.

Even though its attack wasn't reinforced with zhenqi, the sheer brute force behind it still made the young lady's breathing hasten.

“Get lost!”

There was no time for her to shoot an arrow anymore. Thus, with an enraged roar, she smashed her bow at the huge fellow before her.

Even though it was unlikely to help her much, she had no other choice before her—her sword was still deeply lodged in the ceiling of the stone room. Besides, even if she wanted to

draw another weapon at this moment, she wouldn't make it in time.

Huala!

Before the bow could strike the puppet, the latter had already grabbed it firmly and twisted it forcefully.

Feeling an immense force threatening to rip her hands, Luo Qiqi swiftly released her grip.

Even Zhang Xuan couldn't stand toe-to-toe against this monstrous puppet, so how could she possibly do so?

Kacha!

With the bow in its hands, the Otherworldly Demon puppet ripped the Spirit intermediate-tier weapon into two before casually tossing it aside. Then, it reached out with its hand to grab Luo Qiqi once more.

Pi li pa la!

An incredible sonic boom exploded in the air. Luo Qiqi hurriedly backed away, but she was still too late. She managed to avoid the grip, but she was struck in her chest by a fearsome shock wave, causing her to flip several rounds in midair before crashing forcefully into a wall not too away.

Pssst!

A mouthful of fresh blood spewed out, and Luo Qiqi's face turned incredibly pale.

To think that a Grade 2 genius of the Master Teacher Academy would be incapable of even withstanding a single attack from the other party. This left her feeling incredibly frustrated and helpless.

'No, I must stall for some time for my teacher!'

Seeing as the puppet turned its eyes back to Zhang Xuan once more, Luo Qiqi clenched her jaws, climbed to her feet, and dashed forward.

With a furious roar, she threw her fist forward.

"Your opponent is me!"

Luo Feng Fist!

This was a Spirit high-tier fist art that her ancestors left behind. It was the most powerful technique she had at hand.

With this battle technique, she could even stand toe-to-toe with a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan Perfect Harmonization realm primary stage expert.

A pity it was, but this monster was neither a human nor a Perfect Harmonization realm expert. The Otherworldly Demon puppet lifted its finger and tapped lightly on Luo Qiqi's fist.

Pu!

Spewing blood frenziedly, Luo Qiqi was sent flying back into the wall once more.

Severely injured, if she were to crash into the wall one more time, she might just end up crippled. However, at that moment, a surge of zhenqi embraced her, cushioning the impact.

Following which, she heard a nonchalant voice by her ears.

“Leave the rest... to me!”

665 Heaven's Path Smith Ar

Hearing those words, Luo Qiqi's eyes immediately reddened. Unknowingly, Zhang Xuan was already standing before her.

Looking around, she saw more than a hundred formation flags erected in the surroundings. While they were placed in a unique formation, there wasn't the slightest disturbance from them.

"Teacher, are you done laying out your formation?"

"Almost!"

Chuckling lightly, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and a formation plate flew out.

Weng!

The formation plate was activated in midair, and spiritual energy was immediately drawn to it, forming a huge vortex.

"This is... Spirit Gathering Formation?"

Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

Wasn't he setting up a formation in the surrounding? Why was he activating a Spirit Gathering Formation now?

Besides, a Spirit Gathering Formation should be used for cultivating. She had never heard of anyone using it in a battle, especially against one that possesses the strength of a Saint.

Roar!

The puppet seemed to be taken aback by the formation plate as well, but after realizing that nothing had happened at all, it immediately charged forward like a rampaging beast.

As the other party swiftly closed the distance between them, Luo Qiqi grew tenser and tenser. But at that moment, the young man before her harrumphed coldly.

Following which, he stomped on the ground, and the area before him suddenly distorted. The puppet had disappeared,

and silence returned to the chamber.

It was as if the earlier sight was only a figment of her imagination.

“What is going on?”

Luo Qiqi examined her surroundings anxiously, but she realized that the Crimson Blaze Cauldron and the books were still present. However, the area where the puppet was earlier had disappeared completely from view and from touch, replaced by deep darkness.

It seemed as though the young man’s stomp had torn this space away to an entirely different dimension.

“This is... a Hidden Formation?”

A thought suddenly emerged in her mind.

There was only one type of formation which could produce this type of effect—Hidden Formations!

On top of hiding the formation itself, it would also hide a specific space. That was also the reason why they couldn’t find the entrance to the underground chamber no matter how thoroughly they searched.

If not for deciphering the formation, even if they were given three more years and dug up the entire ground in that valley, they would not find the entrance leading down here.

She was curious as to what Zhang shi was setting up earlier, but after seeing this bizarre sight, she suddenly recalled the formation flags and such a thought came to mind.

‘However... Hidden Formations require an immense amount of spiritual energy to trigger. One has to be at least a 6-star formation master to activate it. How did teacher manage to do so...’

Even though there was no doubt about the matter, she still found it hard to believe.

Grade-6 formations, not to mention such a profound Hidden Formation, required one to possess a cultivation of at least Transcendent Mortal 6-dan to activate. Given that Zhang shi

was only at the Consonant Spirit realm... this was inconceivable!

‘Could it be... the Spirit Gathering Formation from earlier?’

Luo Qiqi narrowed her eyes.

Just a moment ago, Zhang shi threw out a Spirit Gathering Formation. She didn’t think much of it earlier, but putting everything together, she immediately came to a realization.

That grade-5 Spirit Gathering Formation must have served as the engine to activating this Hidden Formation.

Using a formation to activate another... this was the legendary Augmented Formation! Even 6-star pinnacle formation masters would find it hard to install something as complex as this!

Yet, not only had Zhang shi managed to do so, he even did it with incredible ease...

Luo Qiqi’s eyes were about to pop out from their sockets.

Formations were formed by harnessing spiritual energy to influence the magnetic field in the environment to create specific phenomena. The concept of ‘one plus one equals two’ didn’t apply here. The interference between two formations could easily prove to be destructive, thus rendering both formations ineffective simultaneously.

To use a Spirit Gathering Formation to activate a Hidden Formation... even though she had just seen it with her own eyes, she still found it hard to believe.

How formidable must one’s understanding and control over formations be to achieve such a feat?

Oblivious to Luo Qiqi’s shock, Zhang Xuan stepped forward and said, “Alright. Now that we’re hidden, let’s hurry up and forge the weapon to obtain Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s heritage!”

Given his current capability, it was impossible for him to activate a grade-6 Hidden Formation. In fact, even if he were able to activate it, he didn’t have sufficient zhenqi to maintain it for too long.

In a sense, it was similar to a snail pulling a carriage. Even though he did possess strong zhenqi, it was insufficient to maintain the operation of a grade-6 formation.

Left with no other choice, he could only resort to the grade-5 Spirit Gathering Formation in his storage ring.

With this and a few hundred middle-tier spirit stones in his possession, he could activate and maintain the grade-6 Hidden Formation for a fair amount of time.

As for complementing the Spirit Gathering Formation with the Hidden Formation perfectly with one another, with the Library of Heaven's Path in hand, it truly wasn't a difficult problem for him at all.

And as expected, he succeeded eventually.

“Indeed. The urgent matter at hand is to forge a Spirit high-tier weapon, meet the requirements of Grandmaster Wu Yangzi's heritage, and uncover the way to leave this underground chamber...”

Recovering from her shock, Luo Qiqi nodded. Then, with a doubtful voice, she asked, “Is teacher going to forge the weapon personally?”

Even though her teacher was younger than her, he had shown capability that astounded her far too often.

At this point, she wouldn't be astonished even if the other party were to forge a Spirit high-tier weapon.

“Me?”

Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He couldn't do so even if he wanted to!

Blacksmith was one of the occupations of the Upper Nine Paths as well. Similar to pill forging, smithing emphasized heavily on one's basics. As such, it required many years of practice to refine one's movements. Given that Zhang Xuan had never forged a weapon before, how was he supposed to forge a Spirit high-tier weapon all of the sudden?

After all, despite his extensive knowledge of pill forging, he still wasn't able to forge a single pill at all. This was even more so for smithing.

"Teacher won't be doing it?" Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

"I won't. You should do the forging instead!" Zhang Xuan said.

"Me?" Luo Qiqi was astonished.

"Un. It won't be appropriate for me to acknowledge another person as my teacher. If the other party insists on taking me in as his student after I win his recognition, I would be put in a tight spot!" Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly.

"This... Your teacher is Yang shi, right? He... imparts the Way of Smithing to you as well?" Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

That day, at the Cleansing Lake, Yang shi rose from a blazing dragon and resolved the calamity with a single shoe. This astounding feat had left her incredibly impressed.

She'd thought that Yang shi was only Zhang shi's cultivation teacher, but to think that he would be teaching the latter smithing as well...

"Indeed!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

"But..."

Luo Qiqi was filled with envy upon hearing those words. But soon, a bitter smile surfaced on her lips, and a deep frown appeared on her forehead. "... I'm only a 5-star primary blacksmith. I don't think that I can forge anything that could satisfy Grandmaster Wu Yangzi..."

"Don't worry, I'll guide you along," Zhang Xuan said.

"Thank you!" Hearing that the other party would guide her along, Luo Qiqi's face flushed in agitation.

One must know that Zhang shi was the person who guided her to forging a grade-6 pill!

"Un. You should quickly recuperate from your injuries first. Otherwise, you might collapse while you're smithing..." Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

“Yes!”

Knowing that her severe injuries would impede her from forging a satisfactory weapon, Luo Qiqi immediately sat down and swallowed a recovery pill.

Gugugu!

Warm medicinal energy flowed through her body, healing her wounds slowly.

Hu!

While the other party was in the midst of recuperating, Zhang Xuan hurried over to the bookshelves.

Honestly speaking, while he did possess some knowledge of smithing, it was terribly limited.

While he had read some books on smithing in Tianxuan Kingdom and Tianwu Kingdom, they were limited in quantity, and as such, he was unable to form a complete system of the art. In other words, his Heaven's Path Smith Art was incomplete.

Under such circumstances, while it was possible for him to guide another to forge an ordinary weapon, a Spirit high-tier weapon was far out of his league.

Thus, the only course of action he could take at the moment was to quickly brush up on his knowledge.

Unlike the Hidden Formation set up outside previously, where the formation was harmonized with nature and gathered spiritual energy from the entire mountain range spanning over several thousand kilometers, this formation was only powered by his middle-tier spirit stones...

Once his hundreds of middle-tier spirit stones were sapped dry, the Hidden Formation would immediately fall apart.

By then, the puppet would be able to get in, and they would be doomed!

Fortunately, the books on the shelves were all regarding smithing.

It was either Grandmaster Wu Yangzi's own collection or it was given to him by the group who kidnapped him so that he could refer to it.

But nevertheless, the presence of these books was good news. Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan placed his finger on the first book and began running.

In a tea's time, he finished gathering the hundred thousand books on the shelves into the Library of Heaven's Path.

'Compile!'

With a thought, the hundred thousand books fused together to form six books.

They were the [Heaven's Path Smith Art] books from 1-star to 6-star.

As long as he studied all of them, his understanding of smithing would become on par with a real 6-star blacksmith.

He began flipping through it.

'Smithing is the art of creating tools suitable for human use. The best tool is a human's body, and the essence to Heaven's Path Smith Art is to forge a weapon through a human's body...'

The profound logic contained within the book left him refreshed, and countless doubts that had baffled him before immediately resolved themselves.

There might be countless variations to pill forging and smithing, but standing at the center of each of them was a set of fundamental laws. And those were exactly what the Heaven's Path books recorded.

Mastering the knowledge within the Heaven's Path Smith Art books meant to master the fundamental laws of smithing. With this, it wouldn't be difficult for him to smith any weapons.

Closing his eyes, Zhang Xuan began studying them book by book.

One hour, two hours, three hours, four hours...

Soon, twelve hours passed.

Zhang Xuan had finished mastering the knowledge within the six Heaven's Path Smith Art books.

At the same time, he had also turned from an ignorant amateur into a true grandmaster blacksmith.

Even if Wu Yangzi were to come to life now, it was unlikely he could compete with Zhang Xuan in the field of smithing.

But of course, this only applied to knowledge, not skill. Despite his extensive and profound knowledge of the art, it was likely that he would fail terribly if he were to try to smith a weapon.

Smithing is was a profound art that required many years of practice. Just forging the 'Metal Ingot' in itself required much practice.

It would be impossible to master the art within an instant.

If Zhang Xuan wanted to pursue this path, he would have to devote substantial time into practicing.

'Looks like there's no physical body cultivation technique here!'

After studying the Heaven's Path Smith Art, Zhang Xuan went through the remaining books and shook his head in disappointment.

His main purpose here was to obtain Wu Yangzi's physical body cultivation technique, but there wasn't one on the bookshelves.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan stood up and looked at Luo Qiqi. However, a frown immediately appeared on his face.

"You haven't... recovered from your injury yet?"

Luo Qiqi was still meditating on the spot, recuperating from her injury. Even though her aura felt significantly stronger than before, she hadn't completely recovered from her internal injury yet. Judging from her ragged breathing, she was still in pain.

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It had been twelve hours already, and despite consuming a recovery pill, the other party hadn't fully healed from her injuries. This was a little... way too slow!

Halting her meditation, Luo Qiqi lifted her head and replied, "My injuries are too severe... Even though I've consumed medicine, I'll still require around three days to make substantial recovery, and half a month to recover to my peak state."

She had incurred serious injuries from the previous battle, and to be able to heal within three days was already an incredible feat.

After all, recovering from one's injuries wasn't like eating, where one could speed up just because one wanted to.

Hearing that she would still require such a long period of time, Zhang Xuan frowned. "The longer we wait, the more danger we are in."

While they were currently hidden by the formation, no one could guarantee that there wouldn't be any abrupt changes, especially not in a foreign place like this. Time was a luxury for them at the moment.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan asked, "Do you have a Qi Regeneration Pill?"

"Qi Regeneration Pill? I do," Luo Qiqi replied.

Qi Regeneration Pill was one of the most common medicaments that cultivators used to recover their zhenqi. Naturally, there were different tiers to cater to those of different cultivation realms.

Similar to Spirit Gathering Formations, a single leap in the tier of the pill would spell a world of difference in its effectiveness.

The Qi Regeneration Pill in her possession was at grade-5 primary. Even if her zhenqi were to be sapped dry, by consuming one, she would be able to recover around fifty percent of her zhenqi for a short moment to cope with any danger before her.

Flicking her wrist, she took out one.

“Un.”

Grabbing the pill, Zhang Xuan circled it around his fingers before passing it back. “Eat it.”

“Yes!” Even though Luo Qiqi was perplexed, she still swallowed the pill.

Qi Regeneration Pills were only used to recover one’s zhenqi. Given that her zhenqi was currently full at the moment, what was the use consuming it?

Just as she was bewildered by Zhang Xuan’s actions, the Qi Regeneration Pill she swallowed slowly melted, and a warm surge of energy flowed through her entire body.

Wherever the energy flowed, her injuries, be they internal or external, healed at a noticeable pace. A few breaths later, she felt completely re-energized, as though a phoenix rising from the ashes.

“This...”

Luo Qiqi stood up and moved her body around, and her eyes immediately widened in disbelief.

The injuries that should have taken at least half a month of recuperation actually healed right after consuming a single Qi Regeneration Pill!

“Teacher, this Qi Regeneration Pill...”

No matter how slow she might be, it was clear that her teacher had done something to the Qi Regeneration Pill to turn it into such an incredible recovery medicine.

Without even using a cauldron or adding in any medicinal herbs, just by touching it, he was able to change the property of a pill... How in the world did he do it?

Zhang Xuan waved his hands casually and instructed,
“Alright, prepare yourself. We will start smithing soon!”

If they were to depend on Luo Qiqi’s means of recovery, it would have been a long while before they could have started smithing anything. The only way to have healed her injuries so swiftly via his Heaven’s Path zhenqi.

However, this type of zhenqi was too peculiar, and the other party was a 5-star master teacher as well. If he had infused it into the other party’s body directly, there was a high chance that the other party would have noticed the peculiarity in his zhenqi. Thus, he decided to make use of an intermediary.

The Qi Regeneration Pill, which contained rampaging spiritual energy, was the best intermediary for him to store his zhenqi in. It helped to conceal the presence of his zhenqi at the initial phase, and by the time the other party realized that something was odd, his zhenqi would have already melded with the other party’s zhenqi, thus making it impossible for her to investigate the matter.

In essence, it worked the same way as his Saint recovery medicinal wine as well.

Due to the spiciness of the wine, it drew one’s attention away from the already nearly indiscernible Heaven’s Path zhenqi.

“Un!”

Knowing that her teacher was unwilling to speak about the topic, Luo Qiqi also knew better than to probe the other party’s secrets. Thus, she stepped up to the Crimson Blaze Cauldron.

There were all kinds of materials around the cauldron, be it coal or ores, allowing her to start smithing any time she was ready.

“Let’s begin!”

Taking in a deep breath, Luo Qiqi flicked her wrist and placed the coal into the cauldron before lighting it up using a unique zhenqi infusion method. Under the infusion of her zhenqi, it didn’t take long for the cauldron to grow fiery hot.

The temperature required for forging a weapon was much higher than that required to forge a pill. The surroundings were scorching, and it felt as though any sword would melt as soon as it was thrown in.

“What is the highest tier of weapons you have forged?”

Judging from the fluid movements Luo Qiqi made as she lit up the flame within the cauldron, Zhang Xuan could tell that she had a good foundation and nodded in commendation.

“Teacher, the best weapon I’ve ever forged is a Spirit low-tier weapon... I’ve never succeeded in forging a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon before...” Luo Qiqi said with a reddened face.

The basic requirement to becoming a 5-star blacksmith was to be able to forge a Spirit low-tier weapon. It seemed like she barely reached the mark.

“5-star primary blacksmith... It’ll indeed be difficult for you to forge a Spirit high-tier weapon.”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

Unlike pill forging, the cultivation requirement for smithing was far stricter.

For the former, as long as one refined and fused the medicinal herbs in the most accurate manner, there would be a high chance of forming a pill.

On the other hand, in smithing, if one’s cultivation wasn’t sufficiently high, one would be unable to bring out sufficient heat from the coal, thus making it difficult to even melt the ores. Under such circumstances, it would be difficult to forge a good weapon.

Given that Luo Qiqi had never succeeded in forging a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon, chances were that there was a huge flaw in her control over the flames. Her current cultivation realm didn’t help either. If she couldn’t even generate sufficient heat to melt the ores properly, how could she succeed?

With a dark expression, Zhang Xuan began scanning through the various materials which Wu Yangzi had left behind.

“Crimson Flower ore, Gild Violet ore, Cold Emerald Stone...”

Every single ore that Zhang Xuan saw only made his complexion darken further.

All of them were hard to process, and even the easiest Cold Emerald Stone demanded a minimum cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 7-dan to melt. As for Crimson Flower ore and Gild Violet ore... these would require one to be Transcendent Mortal 8-dan or even 9-dan to process!

In other words... putting aside smithing, just melting these ores would be nigh impossible for them!

After a long moment of thought, Zhang Xuan finally said, “Given your current capability and cultivation realm, forging a Spirit high-tier weapon is impossible... However, if it’s just upgrading an existent weapon, it might still be possible!”

If they were unable to melt the ore, they would be unable to form metal ingots to smith weapons.

However, if it was just raising the tier of an existing weapon, the job should prove to be significantly easier.

As it was already a completed piece, they wouldn’t need to melt the ores entirely to upgrade it.

Since upgrading an existing weapon could be considered as forging as well, there was unlikely to be any fuss on this aspect.

“Upgrade?” Luo Qiqi questioned a little awkwardly.

“Upgrading an existing weapon would indeed be easier, just that... I lost my only Spirit intermediate-tier sword in the previous battle... not to mention, none of my weapons are upgradable!”

Upgrading a weapon may be easier, but there were specific prerequisites for a weapon to be upgradable.

She did have a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon, but it was smashed into the ceiling in the battle at the stone room earlier, and she hadn’t gotten a chance to retrieve yet.

More importantly, these weapons were completed products. If they were to be tempered any further, they might exceed their limits, resulting in a fall in quality instead.

Only specific upgradable weapons could be further forged and refined.

But these types of weapons were incredibly rare, even she had hardly seen any of those. How could they find any all of a sudden, especially given that they were trapped here?

“Let’s use mine then.”

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out his Glacier Rain Sword.

He had obtained this sword from the Mystical Treasure Hall back then, and it was an upgradable Spirit intermediate-tier pinnacle weapon.

“This... Alright then!”

Seeing how her teacher offered to use his own personal weapon despite the risk of having its quality lowered, Luo Qiqi felt a surge of warmth flowing through her heart.

Noticing the other party’s lack of confidence, Zhang Xuan encouraged her. “There’s no need to be nervous. Just do as I say, and it won’t be too difficult to raise the Glacier Rain Sword to Spirit high-tier.”

Having learned from the six books of Heaven’s Path Smith Art, his understanding of smithing had reached a level surpassing that of even Wu Yangzi.

Even though he was unable to melt most ores due to the limitation of his cultivation, it wouldn’t be too hard to raise the Glacier Rain Sword, which was already a step away from a breakthrough, to Spirit high-tier.

“However... our current goal isn’t Spirit high-tier but... pinnacle!” Zhang Xuan said grimly

“Pinnacle?” Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

Reaching high-tier would meet Wu Yangzi’s requirement, and they would be able to obtain the heritage already. Was there

really a need to reach pinnacle?

Even ordinary 6-star blacksmiths would find it hard to craft a Spirit pinnacle weapon.

For her to do so... even if it was just upgrading, she didn't think that it was possible at all.

“Indeed!”

Zhang Xuan nodded. “I don't know what kind of ores that puppet was coated with, but ordinary weapons can hardly scratch its skin. The only way to kill it is to wield a weapon of that tier...”

“Even if we obtain Wu Yangzi's heritage and find the exit, we will still be in danger as long as we are unable to get rid of this fellow. Instead of risking it, we should just forge a Spirit pinnacle weapon and slay it!”

A sharp glint flashed across Zhang Xuan's eyes as he clenched his fists tightly.

After fighting against the puppet, he realized that the only way to injure the puppet was to wield a Spirit pinnacle weapon.

Since there was a chance to upgrade his weapon now, it was best that he made full use of this opportunity and get rid of the threat looming before them.

“This...”

Luo Qiqi's face twitched.

She didn't even have the confidence to upgrade the weapon to Spirit high-tier, but now she had to upgrade it to Spirit pinnacle? How was that possible?

Unconfident, Luo Qiqi said, “Teacher. Given my current capability, I can only soften the Cold Emerald Stone and refine it slightly. I won't be able to melt it entirely... As such, I don't think I'll be able to forge a Spirit pinnacle weapon!”

“Don't worry, that's enough!” Understanding her worries, Zhang Xuan smiled and reassured her.

“Enough?”

Luo Qiqi blinked her eyes in confusion.

Cold Emerald Stone was indeed a rare and valuable ore, but it was significantly inferior to the Crimson Flower ore and Gild Violet ore.

Not to mention, her inability to fully melt the ore would make it harder to fuse it with the Glacier Rain Sword. Given that, it would be already difficult to raise it to Spirit high-tier, needless to say, pinnacle.

How could she possibly succeed?

“Of the entire smithing process, what is the most important step to making a weapon sharper and harder?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It’s... quenching!” Luo Qiqi replied.

Quenching could induce a qualitative change in a weapon through fusing the various materials within it better.

Performing the quenching process well could cause a significant quality difference in two weapons forged using the same materials and smithing techniques.

Using pill forging as an analogy, the more thoroughly the various medicinal herbs were fused together, the higher the quality of the formed pills.

As such, quenching was an extremely important process that would determine the ultimate tier of the weapon.

It was a technique that countless blacksmith dreamt of mastering, but very few succeeded.

Zhang Xuan chuckled.

“Indeed, it’s quenching! Under normal circumstances, the greater the difference in temperature, the better the effects of the quenching. However, given the limitations of your cultivation, it’ll be impossible for us to raise the temperature to a satisfactory level. Since that’s the case... we can always lower the temperature required for quenching!”

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“Lower the temperature required for quenching?” Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

Weren't weapons quenched with water? There was a limit to how cold a water could be before it would turn into ice, so how could the temperature required for quenching be reduced?

Besides, Zhang Xuan was viewing the matter too lightly. The difference in the temperature wasn't all that mattered. More importantly, quenching had to be done within the durability limit of the weapon. Otherwise, the weapon might be unable to endure the abrupt change in temperature and shatter!

There were many blacksmiths who had tried to change the substance used for quenching so as to further raise the tier of their crafted weapon, but more often than not, the quenching fluid ended up reacting with their weapon instead. As a result, the weapon they had forged with great difficulty shattered, resulting in a waste of their effort and precious ores.

Smithing was a very complex art—the proportion of ores, temperature, type of quenching fluid, timing... All of these factors played a crucial role in determining the quality of the ultimate product, and a shortcoming in any of them could easily lead to a subpar product or even failure. As such, the difficulty of smithing could be considered to be on par with pill forging. It was also due to the profoundness behind the art that blacksmith was classified as an Upper Nine Paths occupation.

“Indeed.” Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement. “Did you bring your pill cauldron here?”

“Pill... cauldron?” Luo Qiqi repeated in astonishment, thinking that she had heard it wrong.

Aren't we going to forge a weapon? Why will we need a pill cauldron?”

Zhang Xuan looked at her calmly and said, “I want you to forge Ice Soul Pills!”

“Ice Soul Pills?” Luo Qiqi was taken aback. Then, coming to a realization, her eyes widened. “Teacher intends to... use the frigidity from Ice Soul Pill to quench the weapon?”

Ice Soul Pill was a unique medicine that was used to awaken the Ice Soul Constitution. Should an ordinary human consume it, the special frost aura harnessed within it would freeze him to death instantly

“But no matter how cold the Ice Soul Pill is, how could it be used to quench the sword, especially considering its size...” Luo Qiqi was bewildered.

An average Ice Soul Pill was around the size of a grape whereas the Glacier Rain Sword was nearly a meter long. How could a small pill possibly be used to quench an entire sword?

One must know it was imperative for the entire blade to be plunged into the quenching fluid simultaneously so that it would undergo the quenching process simultaneously.

Otherwise, the blade could end up with differing degrees of hardness across it, and the imbalance would end up introducing vulnerabilities to it instead.

Using a pill to quench an entire sword... Why did it sound completely inconceivable to her?

Interrupting the other party’s queries, Zhang Xuan asked, “Put that aside for now. You just have to tell me whether you have a pill cauldron and medicinal herbs to forge an Ice Soul Pill now.”

After a moment of hesitation, Luo Qiqi said, “Ice Soul Pill is an uncommon pill, and it is rarely forged by apothecaries as well. As such, I don’t have the complete set of medicinal herbs to forge it. However, a while ago, I promised someone to forge a Frigid Yin Pill for her, and I prepared three portions of the medicinal herbs for it...”

Ice Soul Constitution was an extremely rare unique constitution that only handful of people of the entire Master Teacher Continent possessed. As such, Ice Soul Pills were

rarely forged. Even if one were to search through the entire Apothecary School of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, one would probably be unable to find even a single Ice Soul Pill.

“Frigid Yin Pill?”

Zhang Xuan frowned. “The effects of Frigid Yin Pill is inferior to Ice Soul Pill. However, if we were to use the three portions together, we might be able to make up for the qualitative difference through quantity...”

Frigid Yin Pill was a medicament used to treat injuries incurred from fire attribute cultivation techniques. Even though there was the difference of a grade between it and the Ice Soul Pill, if they were to use the three portions of medicinal herbs properly, they should be able to bridge the difference.

“Alright, we’ll forge the pill and the weapon simultaneously!”

Zhang Xuan contemplated for a moment to further analyze his plan and refine the details, and after which, he waved his hands, gesturing for Luo Qiqi to start.

“Yes!”

Knowing that her teacher must have already worked out the details, Luo Qiqi decided to just go along with him. With a flick of her wrist, she took out her pill cauldron and lit it up. At the same time, she also lit up the Crimson Blaze Cauldron

As an apothecary, she carried the materials she needed to forge a pill everywhere she went, be it the medicinal herbs, cauldron, or coal. As such, it didn’t take too long for her to get ready.

Not too long later, the flames surged, and searing heat emanated from the cauldrons.

“Teacher...”

After laying out the medicinal herbs required for the forging of Frigid Yin Pill neatly on the table not too far away, Luo Qiqi turned her gaze to her teacher.

While she didn't know what Zhang Shi was up to, after witnessing the various miraculous feats he had accomplished, she possessed a near equivalent of blind faith in the latter.

Perhaps... with the other party's guidance, she might just be able to upgrade a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon to Spirit pinnacle!

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan took a glance at the cauldrons and instructed, "The cauldrons still aren't hot enough, continue raising the temperature!"

"Frigid Yin Pill is a cold attribute medicine. If the pill cauldron is too hot, I fear that we might deprive it of its cold properties..."

Upon hearing the instruction to continue raising the temperature, Luo Qiqi's lips twitched.

Even the current temperature was already too hot for the forging of Frigid Yin Pill. Any further than that and the Frigid Yin Pill would melt before its formation, thus evaporating any frigid aura it should harness.

But instead of explaining, Zhang Xuan simply reiterated his instruction, "Continue raising the temperature!"

"Yes!" Gritting her teeth, Luo Qiqi drove her zhenqi and infused it into the coals.

Xiong xiong xiong xiong!

Huge flames burst forth from the cauldrons, threatening to melt down the pill cauldron.

"Place the Glacier Rain Sword and Cold Emerald Stone into the Crimson Blaze Cauldron!"

"Un!"

Perplexed as she was, Luo Qiqi decided to just follow Zhang Xuan's instructions. She picked up the sword and Cold Emerald Stone and placed it in the smithing cauldron.

Upon contact with the searing cauldron, the Glacier Rain Sword immediately glowed crimson as the intense heat whittled down its flexibility and durability. If it were to be

retrieved from the cauldron right now, it would surely suffer a sharp fall in tier.

At the same time, the Cold Emerald Stone also started to soften. However, the temperature of the cauldron seemed to be too low to melt it entirely.

“In the pill cauldron, add three stalks of Crimsontail Grass. Three breaths later, add a stalk of Frigid Yin Grass. After which, use the Seven Leaves Forging Technique to add in half a stalk of Void Severing Grass and three qian of Purplestar Smoke...” Zhang Xuan instructed swiftly.

Frowning, Luo Qiqi’s hands flew around the place as she added the medicinal herbs precisely according to Zhang Xuan’s instructions.

As a famous genius of the Apothecary School, her talent in pill forging far surpassed that of her smithing. Zhang Xuan’s instructions may have been swift, but she could still follow them with ease.

But as she continued to add medicinal herbs into the pill cauldron, amazement swiftly built up within her.

She found that she actually knew every single forging technique that the other party instructed her to utilize! There were even some of them that she learned coincidentally or secretly, and very few in the academy knew that she was aware of them. Yet, the other party included those in his instructions as well.

She didn’t think that it was a mere coincidence or that she was knowledgeable. Most likely, Zhang shi had grasped the full extent of her capabilities and designed a forging method tailored for her!

How profound must one’s understanding of pill forging be in order to achieve this?

This feat far exceeded the boundaries of incredible; it was terrifying!

Even her teacher, School Head Lu of the Apothecary School, would be incapable of such a feat!

‘To think that the Purplestar Smoke and the Void Severing Grass could be added into the cauldron simultaneously. Based on my previous conjecture, the two medicinal herbs would react violently with one another, inducing an explosion. Yet, there isn’t the slightest instability in the cauldron due to it now. If I’m not wrong, this has something to do with the intensity of the flames...’

While Luo Qiqi was astonished, she was also ruminating on the various steps of the forging process.

The sequence at which Zhang shi instructed her to add the medicinal herbs in was completely contrary to the Frigid Yin Pill formula that she learned in the past... On top of that, the speed of the forging this time round was so swift that it was mind-boggling.

Typically, it would take at least three to four hours for her to finish forging the Frigid Yin Pill. However, in less than half a minute, she had already added in half of the three portions of medicinal herbs.

A thought suddenly came to her, and her eyes narrowed in shock.

‘Wait a minute... Does Zhang shi intend to forge the three portions of medicinal herbs simultaneously? B-but this is impossible!’

The reason why three portions of medicinal herbs were usually prepared was to serve as a backup should the pill forging fail.

In other words, the medicinal herbs were intended to be used in three separate forging process... And yet, Zhang shi actually instructed her to throw all of them into the pill cauldron...

Putting three portions of medicinal herbs into a single cauldron... To make an analogy, it was similar to a person driving three horses at once.

Was that even possible?

Worried, she quickly turned to her teacher for reassurance, only to see the latter continuing to issue instructions nonchalantly.

“Use the Cascading Silk Forging Technique to add in three stalks of Tricoïn Grass and two petals of Red-leafed Flower...”

‘Never mind, there is definitely no mistake in listening to teacher’s instructions!’

Clenching her jaws in resolution, Luo Qiqi continued adding more medicinal herbs into the cauldron according to Zhang Xuan’s instructions.

Back then, in the Apothecary Guild, she was also worried that the cauldron would explode at any moment. However, following the other party’s instructions, not only did she succeed, she even managed to forge a grade-6 medicinal solution, gaining precious experience in the midst of doing so.

After witnessing the many eye-widening, tongue-tying means of Zhang shi, surely this should be nothing for her to worry about as well.

The further she progressed into the forging process, the faster the pace at which medicinal herbs were thrown in. As such, it didn’t take long before the cauldron was teetering before its breaking point.

She wasn’t able to overcome her anxiety the previous time, but after having experienced it once, she learned to let go of her fears.

Just as she was busy adding more medicinal herbs into the pill cauldron, Zhang shi’s instructions suddenly sounded again.

“Intensify the flames for the Crimson Blaze Cauldron!”

“Yes!”

The rapid pace at which the forging was going at currently had left her a little flustered. Upon hearing that the flames of the Crimson Blaze Cauldron had to be intensified, Luo Qiqi hurriedly drove her zhenqi and infused it over frenziedly through her left hand.

Hu la! The flames immediately intensified with zeal.

Using zhenqi to control the temperature of the flames was the most fundamental skill that every apothecary and blacksmith

would learn as soon as they come into contact with the art. As a talented apothecary, Luo Qiqi had no problem doing so. What she was truly struggling with at the moment was multitasking.

With a hand busy with the medicinal herbs while the other infusing zhenqi into the Crimson Blaze Cauldron, it didn't take long for her entire face to be drenched with sweat. The cauldrons before her also kept rocking non-stop, threatening to explode on her at any moment.

“Teacher...”

Flustered, Luo Qiqi quickly turned to look at Zhang Xuan.

While the explosion of the Frigid Yin Pill would be much weaker than the explosion of the grade-6 medicinal solution they concocted before, given the current cultivation of the duo, it still wasn't a force that they could withstand.

Not to mention, the Crimson Blaze Cauldron was also in an unstable position at the moment.

The explosion of the pill cauldron would surely agitate the Crimson Blaze Cauldron as well, and the combined might of the two cauldron explosions would kill them even before the puppet could.

It could be said that they were in far greater danger than they were back in the Apothecary Hall!

When they forged the grade-6 medicinal solution back then, the head of the Apothecary Guild was around, and the forging was done within the Apothecary Guild as well. Even if an explosion were to occur, the guild leader and the formation within the guild would surely suppress the explosion as soon as possible, thus minimizing the damage. However... there was no such insurance here!

“Don't panic. Add a stalk of Mintaroma Flower into the pill cauldron!” Zhang Xuan continued instructing calmly.

In truth, he was also anxious at the sight of the rocking cauldrons, but he knew that this was the only way they could survive the dire situation they were in.

If the Glacier Rain Sword didn't reach Spirit pinnacle, they would be unable to kill the puppet. Even if they were to find the exit, they would surely be unable to escape!

Having experienced the fearsome might of that puppet firsthand, he knew that they would never be able to outrun it given their current cultivation.

Thus, this was their best and possibly only shot at survival.

Seeing her teacher's nonchalant attitude to the matter; Luo Qiqi felt reassured. Nodding, she continued intensifying the flames in the Crimson Flame Cauldron with her left hand while grabbing the Mintaroma Flower with her right.

Hu la la!

As soon as the Mintaroma Flower was thrown into the pill cauldron, the energies within it seemed to abruptly calm down. Luo Qiqi heaved a sigh of relief. However, at that moment, she suddenly felt a bizarre sensation in her left hand, so she hurriedly turned her head to take a look. With a glance, her eyes immediately narrowed.

"Teacher, bad news! The Glacier Rain Sword... is melting!"

Unknowingly, the fiery-red Crimson Rain Sword had softened, and it was just a matter of time before it would be reduced to mere metallic fluid.

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Even though the Glacier Rain Sword was a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon, due to its cold attribute, its melting point was significantly lower than other weapons of the same tier.

The crux behind upgrading a weapon was to fuse one or a few rare metals into the original weapon. One of the greatest taboos in this process was to melt the original weapon.

If the original weapon were to lose its original shape, it would lose its original attributes, and the weapon would have to be reforged from scratch. That would mean an increase in the difficulty by severalfold!

As Luo Qiqi had been multitasking, she hadn't been paying attention to the Glacier Rain Sword. Who knew that while she was preoccupied with placing a few medicinal herbs into the pill cauldron, the Glacier Rain Sword would actually reach its melting point!

Upgrading a Spirit intermediate-tier weapon to high-tier was simple, but forging a Spirit high-tier weapon from scratch... At the very least, given Luo Qiqi's current capability, she didn't think that she was capable of it!

Just as she was completely flustered by the sudden situation, Zhang Shi's confident voice sounded, "Add a droplet of Purplestar Grass's medicinal extract onto the Glacier Rain Sword."

"Purplestar Grass's medicinal extract? Alright... Hmm?"

As soon as she took out the medicinal extract, she suddenly froze as she came to a realization. "Onto the Glacier Rain Sword?"

What kind of insanity was this?

Glacier Rain Sword was a weapon whereas the Purplestar Grass's medicinal extract should be used for pill forging!

Adding the medicinal extract to the weapon? That was no different to adding some minced meat and tomato ketchup on a metal ingot while trying to cast a metal pot! Are you sure you are forging a weapon and not barbecuing it to eat?

Are you certain you didn't issue the wrong instruction?

"That's right, hurry up!" Zhang Xuan urged.

"Alright!"

With twitching eyelids, Luo Qiqi flicked her wrist, and the medicinal extract immediately fell on the melting Glacier Rain Sword.

Tzz la!

The sizzling sound reminiscent of barbecued meat echoed in the air. The medicinal extract flowed down the sword as it gradually turned into a white mist, emanating a deep aroma.

"How fragrant..."

The aroma wafting in the air made Luo Qiqi subconsciously draw in a deep breath.

The Purplestar Grass did leave a pleasant smell upon contact with flames. Perhaps she could make something to eat with it in the future...

Just as she was harboring such thoughts, intense vertigo suddenly assaulted her, and her legs began wobbling weakly.

"This is bad!"

Luo Qiqi's eyes narrowed as it suddenly dawned on her what she had just done, and her heart froze.

The Purplestar Grass was an extremely rare medicinal herb. Its name originated from the purple spots reminiscent of little stars on its surface. The medicinal herb usually served as a mediating factor to facilitate the forging process of other pills, but if used individually, it carried a slight poison that could induce hallucination and dizziness!

Mesmerized by the pleasant scent, she actually neglected this!

They were currently at a crucial moment in the pill forging and smithing. If she were to faint, there was little doubt that a cauldron explosion would occur!

To be killed by a simultaneous explosion of a pill cauldron and a smithing cauldron... Should their bodies be found, they would probably go down as the first to do so in the long history of Hongyuan Empire!

Luo Qiqi attempted to gather her concentration, but her eyelid kept drooping down persistently. As hard as she struggled, drowsiness clung to her tightly, unwilling to relinquish its grasp over her.

Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

“This is bad!”

He had refined his plans in anticipation of the many different things that could possibly go wrong in the forging process, but how could he have expected Luo Qiqi to be so careless as to inhale the poisonous fume of the Purplestar Grass!

It was unbecoming of a 5-star apothecary to be so careless!

But still, Luo Qiqi couldn't be entirely blamed for the matter. The Purplestar Grass was a rare medicinal herb that was hardly used by apothecaries, and even on occasions that it was required, it would usually serve as a mediating factor. As such, it wasn't too surprising for her to neglect its other properties.

Furthermore, with her attention devoted to multitasking between the smithing and the pill forging, she had little capacity to process other thoughts either. It was the unfortunate combination of such factors that made her fall prey to the poisonous fumes.

If Luo Qiqi were to lose consciousness, they would be doomed. Even though Zhang Xuan had vast knowledge of pill forging and smithing, he was unable to translate them into practical skills for his own use... Under current circumstances, a double cauldron explosion would be inevitable!

Or perhaps... could the formation be retracted so that they could draw the puppet over to kill it through the explosion?

But Zhang Xuan couldn't control the timing and might of the explosion accurately either. If the explosion proved to be too strong, even if they were to survive the primary impact, there was a chance that the ceiling might collapse inward, burying them alive.

More importantly, the puppet possessed extraordinary defensive ability. The might of the explosion might be fearsome to them, but there was no guarantee that it would be fatal to that fellow.

Gu gu gu gu!

Anxious, Zhang Xuan was just about to rush forward to wake Luo Qiqi wake up when the cauldron before him shook intensely once more. Violent energies rampaged within it, and an explosion was imminent.

The essence of the Limit Revolving Pill Forging Technique was to keep the cauldron teetering just before the breaking limit. As a result, even the slightest lapse in concentration could easily result in an explosion.

With the sudden onslaught of the drowsiness spell, the forging sequence was already delayed by nearly two breaths. If the medicinal herb wasn't added in at this very instant, an explosion would really occur!

But given Zhang Xuan's current proximity to the medicinal herbs, even if he were to dash forward at this very instant, he still wouldn't make it in time!

“Add the Red-leafed Beard into the cauldron...”

Overwhelmed by anxiety, Zhang Xuan shouted. But this time, perhaps due to his sheer determination willing it to happen, his voice was subconsciously imbued with Impartation of Heaven's Path.

Hu!

Despite her lack of consciousness, Luo Qiqi's movements remained as fluid as ever. She stretched her hand forward to

grab the Red-leafed Beard and threw it into the cauldron.

Huala!

As the medicinal herb fell into the cauldron, the signs of explosion finally calmed down.

“This...”

Surprised by the turn of events, Zhang Xuan blinked in a daze for a short moment before excitement gushed through his body.

Why didn't he think of this from the very start?

As long as one's words were aligned with the quintessence of nature, one could induce another to follow one's instructions, willingly or not. Luo Qiqi might have fallen into a semi-conscious state, but this didn't hinder the effects of Impartation of Heaven's Will on her!

In fact, with her emotions out of the equation, the pill forging was progressing smoother than before!

“Place the Cold Emerald Stone beside the Glacier Rain Sword. Following which, use the Bamboo Drawing Forging Technique to add a blade of Frozen Yin Grass into the pill cauldron...”

Having succeeded once, Zhang Xuan continued using his Impartation of Heaven's Will.

Before this, Luo Qiqi still had to process the differing sets of instructions for the two cauldrons and work simultaneously, and this had caused her to fall into a fluster. However, under the effects of the Impartation of Heaven's Will, her hands could operate freely from one another—one focused on smithing while the other focused on pill forging.

In an instant, her efficiency doubled.

Tzzzzz!

As the Cold Emerald Stone was placed with the Glacier Rain Sword, ‘tz la!’, the two began fusing with one another.

Frowning, Zhang Xuan said, “Take out the sword and use the Layered Tempering Technique to hammer it 779 times!”

Hearing the instructions, Luo Qiqi shook her left hand, and the sword immediately fell onto a stone platform. She grabbed the hammer that Wu Yangzi had left behind and started hammering the sword.

Zhang Xuan continued instructing her.

“Add the Leisure Flower Stem and Baoxing Extract into the pill cauldron and raise the intensity of the flames by 30%. After that, use the Lucid Pitching Hands to shake the cauldron seven times!”

Hua hua la la!

Luo Qiqi followed his instructions calmly, without the slightest error.

Humans are subordinate to their emotions. Never having forged a pill and smithed simultaneously before, it was natural that Luo Qiqi had felt trepidation upon seeing the pill cauldron being brought to the verge of explosion. With this kind of fear plaguing her, her movements had become restricted, thus making it hard for her to succeed.

Who could have known that her losing consciousness would turn out to be a blessing in disguise, raising the effectiveness and efficiency of the entire forging process altogether?

Zhang Xuan’s instructions grew more and more rapid, and Luo Qiqi’s movements became faster and faster as well. The both of them were working together with such harmony that it seemed as though Zhang Xuan was forging the weapon and the pill himself.

Even though the cauldron seemed as though it would explode at any moment, under Zhang Xuan’s astute instructions, it was actually extremely safe.

After hammering the Glacier Rain Sword, which was fused with Cold Emerald Stone and Purplestar Grass, it regained its form as a sword, and it looked much sharper than before.

After an unknown period of time, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows suddenly shot up. Driving his Soul Depth to its maximum, he instructed, “Alright, open the pill cauldron!”

Hu!

Luo Qiqi's right hand reached forward and opened the lid of the pill cauldron. The concentrated bulk of medicinal energies immediately gathered, and a pill was about to form at any moment now.

“Place the Glacier Rain Sword into the cauldron!”

Upon hearing the instructions, the young lady subconsciously threw the long sword into the pill cauldron.

Weng!

A sharp buzzing sound reminiscent of a melody hummed by the dragons echoed in the stone chamber. It sounded so melodious that one could get drunk on it.

Hu!

Following which, the Glacier Rain Sword flew out from the pill cauldron and danced in the air, as though a bird which had just fled from its cage, releasing an excited call.

A cold gleam flashed from the body of the sword, and it felt as though it could easily tear apart any metal or jade. Just by looking at its sharp edge, one would feel as though one's eyes might be pierced through by it.

“Come here!”

Beckoning with his hands, the sword immediately flew over and landed in Zhang Xuan's outstretched hand.

Lowering his head to examine it, the Glacier Rain Sword was still of the same length. However, it looked much lighter, and its previously clear surface was now twinkling with stars. It felt as though the power of a celestial was infused into this blade, bringing an extraordinarily majestic disposition to the blade.

Flicking his finger on the blade lightly, the sword immediately released a loud metallic call. It seemed as though it would transform into a mighty dragon and rule the heavens.

“This is... Half-Saint?”

Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in shock.

Having mastered the knowledge contained within the six Heaven's Path Smith Art manuals, his eye of discernment for weapon had reached a new height. Even without the Library of Heaven's Path, he could easily tell that the Glacier Rain Sword had exceeded the boundaries of Spirit pinnacle to reach Half-Saint!

Weapons could be divided into God, Saint, Spirit, Phantom, and Mortal.

Even though a Half-Saint weapon hadn't truly reached Sainthood yet, it had already broken free from the shackles of Spirit, reaching an entirely different level of existence.

Even a 6-star pinnacle blacksmith like Wu Yangzi couldn't hope to successfully forge a sword of this quality!

Only a 7-star blacksmith could possibly forge such a masterpiece!

In other words, using the Impartation of Heaven's Will, Zhang Xuan actually forged a Half-Saint weapon through Luo Qiqi's hands. If word were to spread, innumerable people would surely die of shock!

Weapons of such a tier were rare even within Hongyuan Empire!

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan put away the sword before turning to Luo Qiqi.

At this moment, she was meditating on the floor with her eyes closed, seemingly in a state of enlightenment.

Even though she was unconscious during the forging process, the experience she gained from forging the Frigid Yin Pills and upgrading the weapon through the Impartation of Heaven's Will remained with her as her muscle memory.

With this, both her pill forging and smithing techniques would advance to greater heights.

Seeing the other party's state, Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

'Even though she was unconscious throughout the forging process, her movements and her zhenqi circulation will stay

with her as her muscle memory, forming a much stronger impression. The benefits she obtained from this were even greater than the guidance back in the Apothecary Guild!

‘It seems like Impartation of Heaven’s Will doesn’t only impart the way of cultivation to others. It also encourages them to cultivate and tempers their mental resilience, thus paving their way for improvement in the future!

‘Indolence and fear are a part of human nature, and inevitably, it is such. Should words fail to persuade them, enforcement will be necessary. Through forming muscle memory, this will pave the way for their future growth...’

Coming to an enlightenment, the underground chamber suddenly shook. A unique aura descended from the sky and shrouded Zhang Xuan entirely.

The third acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher!

669 Mind of Void

Back in Huanyu Empire...

At this moment, the collapsed infrastructure and cracked ground around the Cleansing Lake had already been fixed, and while the spiritual energy in the Cleansing Lake still wasn't as concentrated as before, it was showing signs of recovery.

By the side of the Cleansing Lake, a huge stone tablet was erected, and five words were inscribed on it—Yang shi Throws His Shoe!

These words carried a majesty that seemed to draw one's eyes to them. With just a glance, one could tell that it was the work of a 5-star painter.

Not too far from the stone tablet was where Zhang Xuan rose from the top of a fire dragon and threw his shoe.

By throwing the shoe, Zhang Xuan was just seeking the point where the three energies intersected—it need not necessarily be a shoe.

Nevertheless, the shoe was still taken by the Huanyu Empire as its national treasure, and a stabilizing formation flag was put in its place.

As long as the flag remained in place, the colliding spiritual energy would reach a state of equilibrium, thus providing energy to the Cleansing Lake, allowing Huanyu Empire to groom even more talents.

It was truly a blessing in disguise for Huanyu Empire.

Standing before the stone tablet, a historian recorded, “Huanyu Empire, 67th Year of Wentian's Reign, Winter. The spiritual energy from the Verdant Mountain, Dragon-scaled River, and earth vein collided, destroying the Cleansing Lake and threatened to lay ruin to the capital. However, Yang shi descended from the sky and broke out of the perilous situation with a single shoe...”

While the historian was in the midst of writing, the water in the lake suddenly grew agitated, and bells chimed in the distance. Countless birds soared into the sky, shrouding the heavens.

“What is happening?”

“I have no idea...”

...

Upon seeing this situation, the guards in the region stared at one another in confusion.

“Pavilion Master Wei, what is going on?”

Emperor Ye Wentian, who hadn't left the region, noticed the commotion as well and immediately rushed out from his room. Standing beside him was Pavilion Master Wei Jiang.

Pavilion Master Wei suddenly recalled a certain ancient record he had read in the past and froze.

“Blessings of the Hundred Birds... Someone is being acknowledged for a Celestial Occupation!”

Ye Wentian froze as well.

“Celestial Occupation? You mean someone has reached a proficiency in an occupation which even the heavens recognize?”

A Celestial Occupation represented the acknowledgement of the heavens for one's contribution and proficiency in a certain occupation. Those who could bring forth such a phenomenon were all top-notch geniuses who would surely achieve incredible feats in the future.

For such a situation to occur here, doesn't that mean that there's a top-notch genius emerging in Huanyu Empire?

“That's right!”

Pavilion Master Wei nodded. “Celestial Occupation means that one's blessed by the heavens... Don't worry, I'll go and investigate it right now to see what occupation it is and who the one who triggered it is!”

“Un, you should. Tell me after you uncovered that person’s identity; I must pay that genius a visit personally...” Ye Wentian replied.

“Alright!” Pavilion Master Wei leaped onto the back of the savage beast and flew off to the Master Teacher Pavilion.

However, before he could even enter the pavilion, an elder suddenly rushed over with a fearful expression on his face and reported, “Pavilion master, something bad has happened... The Teacher Acknowledgement Hall has collapsed, and all of the ancestral tablets... have fallen!”

“The Teacher Acknowledgement Hall has collapsed?”

Pavilion Master Wei was stunned. At that moment, he suddenly recalled another matter, and his body trembled in disbelief. “Trembling of the Myriad Tokens, Harmony of the Chimes... Could the Celestial Occupation be... Celestial Master Teacher?”

Celestial Master Teacher was an honor which only Empyrean Kong shi had undergone in the past. Even his direct disciples and the innumerable geniuses who rose after him had never been entitled to such honor before.

For such an incredible phenomenon to occur in the Huanyu Empire Master Teacher Pavilion... Who in the world was it?

A figure suddenly surfaced in Pavilion Master Wei’s mind.

“Could it be... Yang shi?”

The only plausible candidate in his mind was that unfathomable master teacher whom Pavilion Master Mo ordered a silence restraint for, Yang Xuan!

The image of how that elder descended by the sky and sealed the impending calamity with just a single shoe was still deeply-rooted in his mind.

Recalling the order from Pavilion Master Mo, Pavilion Master Wei swiftly issued an order.

“Inform all of the master teachers to remain silent on this matter! Those who defy this order shall be stripped of their master teacher qualification!”

Regardless of whether it was Yang Xuan or a Celestial Master Teacher, both of these were matters beyond them. It was best for them to remain silent on this matter, or else... they might just end up being wiped clean from the map.

Besides, there had only been a single Celestial Master Teacher in the entire history of the human race, Kong shi. While his affairs were recorded by historians afterward, no one could say for sure whether the records were accurate, and if this phenomenon really represented the acknowledgement from the heavens.

“Yes!”

Even though the elder was bewildered by the situation, he still quickly nodded in response before returning to carry out Pavilion Master Wei’s orders.

...

In Myriad Kingdom City...

Stretching her back lazily, Zhao Feiwu walked out from her room.

After cultivating in seclusion for a full month, she was feeling a little stiff all over.

But even so, she knew that this was the only way she could catch a glimpse of that man’s back, albeit the distance between them would only continue to increase.

“You’re done with your cultivation? Not bad, you have improved immensely!”

Pavilion Master Kang walked over, and after taking a look at Zhao Feiwu, he nodded in commendation.

Zhang shi had entrusted Zhao Feiwu to him before departing, so Pavilion Master Kang had been focusing his attention on her throughout the past month, and the latter had benefited greatly from his guidance.

Hong long!

At that moment, Pavilion Master Kang suddenly felt the ground beneath him tremble, and bells chimed furiously from

the direction of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

“This is... Celestial Master Teacher? Again?”

Pavilion Master Kang widened his eyes in shock.

It had just happened just a while ago, why would it happen once again all of a sudden?

When did the anticipated Celestial Master Teacher become so recurrent, as if it were an annual festival?

Zhao Feiwu was taken aback. She suddenly recalled the bits and pieces of the young man whom she spent several months with, and she couldn't help but ask, “Could it be Zhang shi?”

“Zhang shi? Impossible! He has already gone ahead to Huanyu Empire, and that is almost a million kilometers away from here. How could it be him?” Pavilion Master Kang shook his head.

Even the phenomenon of a Celestial Master Teacher's acknowledgement had a fixed range to it. Considering how Zhang shi wasn't in the Myriad Kingdom Alliance, how could he possibly trigger the phenomenon in here?

“I once read an ancient text, and it was said that when Kong shi became a Celestial 9-star Master Teacher, the entire continent celebrated his achievement. Phoenixes and true dragons arrived to offer their blessings, and rays of brilliant light fell from the heavens... Could the range of the phenomenon increase along with the rank of the Celestial Master Teacher?” Zhao Feiwu analyzed.

Even though she wasn't a master teacher, due to her disability, she'd spent her entire youth reading books. Not to mention, as an empire, the Myriad Kingdom Alliance did contain many confidential texts depicting the history and numerous secrets of the continent. In terms of general knowledge, she was comparable to Pavilion Master Kang.

“This...” Pavilion Master Kang was stunned.

It was reasonable to assume that the phenomenon behind a Celestial 1-star Master Teacher would be different from a Celestial 9-star Master Teacher.

Could this huge commotion really have been caused by that fellow?

...

Xuanyuan Kingdom.

Dressed in resplendent robes, Mo Yu sat majestically on a throne.

After several months of reorganizing, she had managed to bring the entire kingdom under her control.

After the news that Zhang Shi had become a 4-star master teacher reached this region, no one dared to utter the slightest complaint against Mo Yu's sovereignty anymore.

There was no one in this kingdom who didn't know of the intimate relationship between Empress Mo Yu and Zhang Shi. If anyone were to be so blind as to incite a rebellion, putting aside the impressive fighting force that Mo Yu had under her command, even the Master Teacher Pavilion would surely step in and teach that person a lesson!

Dang dang dang dang!

The officials were currently in the midst of reporting on the various affairs across the kingdom when the loud chiming of bells sounded from the direction of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

"This..." Astonished, Mo Yu subconsciously stood up. The other officials also turned their gazes over.

Every single master teacher across Xuanyuan Kingdom immediately rushed over to the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Everyone was bewildered by the sudden commotion, unable to comprehend what was going on.

...

The same situation also unfolded in Tianwu Kingdom and other regions as well.

It could be said that the phenomenon occurred in every single Master Teacher Pavilion under Huanyu Empire.

Most people had no idea what was going on, but even those who did had no idea who was the one who had incited it.

At the current moment, the culprit behind the uproar finally got to his feet.

After the Third Celestial Master Teacher came to an end, even though his cultivation was still capped at Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle, his comprehension of battle techniques and cultivation had grown even deeper.

At the same time, the consonance between his soul and his physical body had become even more perfect as well. Naturally, his fighting prowess had been brought to new heights too.

‘Even though I am still no match for Perfect Harmonization realm intermediate stage cultivators, there isn’t anyone in the primary stage who can rival me anymore!’

Sensing the difference in him, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly.

Even though Celestial Master Teacher didn’t affect one’s cultivation, it broadened one’s mind and analytical capability, allowing one to see past the superficial.

In a way, it was due to the previous two Celestial Master Teacher acknowledgements that Zhang Xuan was much calmer than Luo Qiqi when facing the puppet earlier.

‘My Soul Depth actually increased by 3.0!’

Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

His Soul Depth had actually increased by 3.0, more than it had done the previous two times.

In other words, his current Soul Depth was 19.1, which was comparable to even a 6-star master teacher!

To possess the Soul Depth of a 6-star master teacher despite being in one’s twenties... Just the thought of it was frightening!

A Soul Depth increase of 3.0 was equivalent to the leap of an entire master teacher rank. If it had been anyone else, it would

have taken dozens of years of cultivation to achieve the same breakthrough.

Along with the rise in Soul Depth, Zhang Xuan's Impartation of Heaven's Will and Eye of Insight had grown even more powerful as well.

In the past, Zhang Xuan could only view things that were two small cultivation realms above of him. After the rise in his Soul Depth, it had increased to three small cultivation realms.

In other words, given his current zhenqi cultivation of Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle, if a Cosmos Bridge realm advanced stage cultivator were to appear before him, he would be able to see through the flaws in the other party's moves through the Eye of Insight even without tapping into the Library of Heaven's Path.

The improvement in Zhang Xuan's Impartation of Heaven's Will was even more fearsome. Even if it was a 6-star middle-tier master teacher, he was confident he'd be able to beguile the other party with his words.

'The greatest gain from this acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher is not the increase in my Soul Depth or the enhancement of my Impartation of Heaven's Will and Eye of Insight... It is Mind of Void!'

After checking his physical condition, Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly together in agitation.

The acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher had furthered his various abilities as a master teacher, but what left him the most delighted was that his physical body had gained the ability of Mind of Void.

Mind of Void, this was a state where one's physical body could move solely on habit, even without a soul or intent driving it.

Back when Zhang Xuan was in the Cleansing Lake, his soulless body was reduced to a state reminiscent of a corpse, unable to be controlled or moved.

However, with the Mind of Void, his physical body was now able to cultivate or even fight without a soul!

In fact, without having to go through his mind, the reflexes of his body would be faster than ever!

If he were to face that puppet from before once more, he would be able to divide his body and soul to fight separately, thus exerting a far greater prowess than before!

‘This is incredible! With this ability, I’ll be able to multitask easily!’

Zhang Xuan smiled in delight at his immense gains. At that moment, he suddenly heard a moaning sound beside him. Luo Qiqi had recovered from her state of enlightenment.

670 Genocide

“Teacher!” As soon as she recovered, Luo Qiqi immediately got up and clasped her fist.

Immersed in her previous state of enlightenment, she was unaware that Zhang Xuan had gone through a Celestial Master Teacher acknowledgement. However, her understanding toward pill forging and smithing had improved significantly.

Her previous talent in smithing could only be considered as slightly above average, but with her current understanding, she was confident that she would be able to best those famous geniuses from the Blacksmith School as well!

“Not bad!”

Seeing the other party’s spirited gaze, Zhang Xuan knew that the other party must have benefited greatly from her state of enlightenment, so he nodded in satisfaction.

No matter what, the other party was his student. As her teacher, he would feel pride at her improvement.

“Teacher, thank you for your guidance!”

Luo Qiqi knelt down and kowtowed in gratitude.

Hu!

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to help the other party up, the Library of Heaven’s Path jolted, and the Book of Heaven’s Path appeared.

A golden page was within in.

Zhang Xuan had tried to create it previously when he was attacked by the puppet but to no avail. To think that it would appear now!

‘This is great...’

With this golden page, he would surely be able to turn that puppet into minced meat and escape without worry.

‘It seems like my conjecture was right. Only gratitude derived from the impartation of knowledge can induce the golden page!’ Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had won Luo Qiqi’s gratitude previously by stalling the puppet and allowing her to get away, but the golden page hadn’t been produced.

All of this was pointing to one fact—only gratitude earned from accomplishing his duty as a teacher would trigger the golden page. Anything other than that was ineffective.

“Stand up. Since you have managed to smith a weapon with quality exceeding Spirit high-tier, let’s see if you can receive Wu Yangzi’s heritage and find the escape route!”

Seeing the golden page, Zhang Xuan’s mood lifted. He hurriedly helped the lady up, before flicking his wrist and placing the Glacier Rain Sword on the platform before the Crimson Blaze Cauldron.

Jiyaya!

Having seemingly assessed that the quality of the sword had met the standard, the stone platform shook, and the voice from the Mechanical Recorder sounded once more.

“Congratulations, you have forged a weapon exceeding Spirit high-tier. As such, you’re qualified to become my student, and I’ll impart my life’s work to you!”

Hu!

As he spoke those words, the ground before him trembled, and a stone pedestal slowly surfaced.

To think that there was a mechanism below the stone chamber as well!

“On the stone pedestal, there’s a total of three objects. First, there is a manual on the forging technique that I created through consolidating the essence of my understanding of smithing, Zither Forging Technique. Second, there is my physical body cultivation technique, Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body. Last but not least, my experience here and the exit route!

“Even though I was trapped here, I didn’t feel the slightest anger or hatred at all. Instead, by devoting all of my attention to smithing, I was able to forget my sorrows instead... However, it was a pity that there is a limit to a man’s lifespan. My ultimate goal of forging a Saint weapon remains out of my reach even as I approach the end of my life, and it will forever remain my greatest regret.

“I hope that after receiving my heritage, you can accomplish my wish and smith a Saint weapon using my ‘Zither Forging Technique’ so as to appease my soul in the heavens above. This way... I’ll be able to rest in peace.

“If you are willing, make a vow and I’ll reveal an important piece of information to you. This information concerns a treasure left behind from ancient ruins, and if you manage to obtain it, there will be no problem reaching Sainthood!”

“Reaching Sainthood?”

Glancing at one another, Zhang Xuan and Luo Qiqi’s breathing hastened.

Transcendent Mortal 9-dan Chrysalis realm was also known as the Embryonic realm, Nascent Heart realm, or Golden Core realm.

The main purpose of that realm was to gather the entirety of one’s cultivation to form an Origin Embryo. Once the formation of the Origin Embryo was complete, one would be able to surpass one’s limitation and achieve Sainthood.

The formation of the Origin Embryo was the final, as well as the greatest, hurdle that Transcendent Mortals would face, and many found themselves unable to overcome this challenge.

Considering how this object provided a ticket to reaching Sainthood, its value was indeed immeasurable.

“I agree!”

After glancing at Zhang Shi and receiving his approval, Luo Qiqi stepped forward and bowed deeply to the pedestal to signify that her acknowledgement as of Grandmaster Wu Yangzi as her teacher.

Zhang Xuan was Luo Qiqi's apothecary teacher. While he did impart the art of smithing to the latter as well, he didn't accept the latter as his disciple, so there were no qualms with her acknowledging another as her teacher.

Not to mention, a precious treasure and a heritage were at stake here.

After making her vows, the voice in the Mechanical Recorder finally continued speaking.

“Since you have made a vow, I will reveal the secret to you now. I have left most of my treasures and the information beneath my old mansion. At the Three Stars of the Earth Dragon, you just have to put down three formation flags according to the Three Stars, and the items will surface automatically!”

The voice came to a halt.

“Three Stars of the Earth Dragon? Old mansion?”

Zhang Xuan and Luo Qiqi stared at one another, and they nearly fainted from anger.

Are you taking us for a fool?

It has been two thousand years since you died, who in the world would know where your old mansion was? Also, what the heck is the Three Stars of the Earth Dragon?

Given that this cryptic message was left behind on a Mechanical Recorder, there was no way they could ask about it, and this only left them even more frustrated.

To reveal the existence of a treasure to them but not identify the location clearly, just the thought of it left the duo light-headed.

“Considering how Wu Yangzi was captured and brought here, there's no way of telling who would challenge his trial and obtain his heritage. As such, it's understandable that he would speak in riddles!”

Even though Zhang Xuan was frustrated, he could understand the rationale behind the other party's actions.

Given that Wu Yangzi was brought here against his will, any precious treasures that were on him must have been already taken away by his captors. Considering how his captors had the easiest access to this stone chamber, there was a high chance that they would have uncovered this information and claimed the treasure for themselves should the clue be too direct.

Zhang Xuan couldn't help but ask, "But... where is his old mansion?"

"I have no idea either. However, if I recall correctly, Grandmaster Wu Yangzi used to live in Hongyuan Capital, the city where Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy is located." Luo Qiqi thought for a moment before continuing. "I'll check the records after I return to the academy. It has only been two thousand years, so I should be able to uncover some traces of it!"

"Un!"

Zhang Xuan nodded.

Two thousand years might be a long time to a small kingdom like Tianxuan Kingdom, and immense changes could happen to it in that timeframe, but to a massive behemoth like Hongyuan Empire, the effects of the passing of two thousand years wasn't as obvious.

Tier 1 Empires had Saint realm experts, and considering how they possessed a lifespan of around a thousand years, a span of two thousand years could only be considered as the passing of two to three generations. Thus, it shouldn't be too difficult to find Wu Yangzi's old mansion.

"Let's take a look at his heritage."

Since they couldn't access the treasure stuck in this underground chamber, there was no use thinking about it for now. Thus, Zhang Xuan gestured for Luo Qiqi to look at the items on the stone pedestal.

Luo Qiqi nodded and walked toward the stone pedestal.

Of the three items that Wu Yangzi left behind, she reached out for the third one immediately—the way to escape from here.

Naturally, their survival took precedence over everything else.

“Teacher!”

Luo Qiqi passed the book over.

“Un!” Taking the book, Zhang Xuan flipped through it casually before a bizarre expression appeared on his face.

Seeing Zhang Xuan’s expression, Luo Qiqi’s face tensed.

“What’s wrong, teacher? Is there no way to leave here?”

It would truly be a disaster if they couldn’t get out, but Zhang Xuan smiled reassuringly.

“Don’t worry, there’s a way out. It’s just that I saw something interesting. It seems like Grandmaster Wu Yangzi is a very different person from how we thought he was...”

“Different?” Luo Qiqi was perplexed.

“You should take a look yourself.”

Zhang Xuan passed the book over to Luo Qiqi.

Confused, Luo Qiqi took the book and browsed through it. After she was done, a bizarre expression appeared on her face as well.

Having expected this, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly.

Wu Yangzi was captured and brought to this underground chamber by the Otherworldly Demons.

In other words, this underground chamber was a lair for the Otherworldly Demons!

The Otherworldly Demons had once enjoyed great prestige ruling over the other races, including the humans. Yet, they had been forced to hide within remote places where the sun didn’t reach just to survive. Naturally, they would seek to return to where they had once stood.

As such, the first stone tablet inscribed with ‘Yearning Abode Lodge’ actually reflected their wish instead of Wu Yangzi’s.

This was the reason why the three words carried the unique killing intent of Otherworldly Demons.

This underground chamber was constructed by the Otherworldly Demons to avoid the pursuit of human cultivators, and it housed dozens of their brethren. Due to the skillful construction of the underground chamber, it didn't feel stifling despite the size of their group.

As for why they had chosen to capture Wu Yangzi, the reason was simple. This bunch of Otherworldly Demons had hidden from the Master Teacher Pavilion for many millennia, but due to their limited populace, they could only cross-marry, and this resulted in a degeneration in their genes, thus limiting their ability to reproduce. As such, their populace declined steadily, and they slowly approached extinction.

To resolve this problem, they decided to capture Wu Yangzi, who was renowned for his proficiency in smithing and mechanisms then, to temper their bodies and prolong their lifespan.

The idea was good, but... how could tempering one's body and prolonging one's lifespan be easy?

Putting aside how Wu Yangzi was only a 6-star blacksmith, even an 8-star or 9-star blacksmith wouldn't be able to achieve this feat!

Otherwise, that person would surely become renowned across the entire Master Teacher Continent, and countless people would flock to him in hopes of prolonging their lifespan.

Who would willingly accept death when there was an opportunity to live on?

As such, Wu Yangzi was captured and locked within this stone chamber. While it was vast, it did little to reduce the fact that it was a prison. The only way to escape this stone chamber was through the narrow stone door, but so long as someone was guarding it, it was impossible to escape.

Losing his freedom, even if he had smithing to accompany him, frustration and loneliness would surely slowly gnaw at him. As such, 'Burying Sorrow' was incomprehensible.

But through this book, Zhang Xuan learned why Wu Yangzi granted this stone chamber such a name.

The Otherworldly Demons who captured him wanted Wu Yangzi to temper their bodies and prolong their longevity... and that fellow was indeed tenacious. He went through all of the trouble and used every means at his disposal to temper their bodies to make them nigh indestructible...

But at the same time... while tempering their bodies, Wu Yangzi also robbed them of their consciousness, turning them into puppets who could only obey orders.

In other words... the puppet outside was actually one of the Otherworldly Demons who kidnapped Grandmaster Wu Yangzi, and it ended up being forged into nothing more than a puppet!

Wu Yangzi knew that the Otherworldly Demons would never allow him to escape, so he designed a mechanism to secretly release the weapons he forged out into the world. He intended for them to trace his location through those weapons and organize a party to save him... but who knew that this wait would take him more than two thousand years!

In these two thousand years, all of the Otherworldly Demons, except for those who had been tempered into mere puppets, had all died. This was the reason why the underground chamber seemed to be completely empty when their group entered.

Eventually, as Wu Yangzi's lifespan approached its limit, he began to accept the fact that he might not be able to escape, so he decided to leave his heritage here. As for the puppet outside, it was probably the guard in charge of looking after Wu Yangzi's chamber and preventing him from leaving. Considering how all of the Otherworldly Demons had died out, it was probably still in the midst of fulfilling the last command issued to it.

“This...”

Luo Qiqi was in disbelief.

Wu Yangzi was known to be an upright and honorable man. Who would have thought that he could be so scheming?

To actually turn the Otherworldly Demons that had captured him into puppets... he sure was vicious!

In a sense, this was as good as committing genocide!

671 Slaying the Puppe

“To forge the Otherworldly Demons into puppets and implant commands into them such that they would function as ordinary living beings... it would indeed be difficult to tell the difference in the short run. Grandmaster Wu Yangzi probably derived joy from seeing how the Otherworldly Demons slowly fell into his trap, and gradually, this source of entertainment allowed him to forget his sorrows!”

Zhang Xuan chuckled.

The human race and the Otherworldly Demons were mortal enemies. As a renowned blacksmith, Wu Yangzi understood this logic.

When he was first captured, he would have surely been filled with indignation and rage. However, as he killed all of them slowly by converting them into puppets, he was surely filled with exhilaration.

After all, none of these ancient Otherworldly Demons were weaker than him... and yet, singlehandedly, he turned them into puppets, thus eradicating every last one of them. Just the thought of it could send one's heart pumping in excitement...

With such a mission in life, it was no wonder he could forget his sorrows!

Judging from the joyful tone in his handwriting, it could be seen that the other party was so elated that it was almost as if he would float into the sky.

As for how he managed to convince so many Otherworldly Demon to be willingly tempered under his hands, thinking that they would become immortal... nothing was written in the book about it, so it was impossible to tell for sure.

Nevertheless, Zhang Xuan deduced that it was probably a gradual change.

For example, Wu Yangzi would temper the other party's arms first. Tempering the arms had little impact on one's ability to

think, and the primary success would convince everyone else to do it too.

Following which, he would move on to the legs, spine, and body...

And finally, when everyone had let down their guard, he would temper their heads, thus successfully converting them into puppets...

But of course, this was only Zhang Xuan's conjecture. Without seeing it for himself, there was no way of confirming it.

Under the perseverance of Wu Yangzi, the Otherworldly Demon who sought to lengthen their lifespans... ended up being eradicated instead.

“According to Grandmaster Wu Yangzi's records, there are at least twenty Otherworldly Demon in this underground chamber that fell for his ploy, thus ending up as puppets. If this merit were to be reported to the Master Teacher Pavilion, the reward obtained would be so great that it could ensure the prosperity of a clan for several generations to come,” Luo Qiqi said.

Killing Otherworldly Demons was a huge merit to the human race, and the Master Teacher Pavilion offered rewards for it.

The higher the cultivation realm and quantity of Otherworldly Demons killed, the greater the reward. Considering how Wu Yangzi had managed to slay over twenty Otherworldly Demons of nearly equal cultivation as himself, that was sufficient for his name to go down in history, and the Master Teacher Pavilion would help look after his descendants for generations to come in reciprocation for his contribution!

In fact, so long as he said the word, they could allow one of his descendants to become the emperor of Hongyuan Empire.

“Un. We'll report this matter to the Master Teacher Pavilion honestly. As for how they will reward his descendants, that is none of our business!” Zhang Xuan chuckled. “Let's leave first before talking about other matters!”

Luo Qiqi nodded.

“Based on Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s description, we have to return to the path we came from. Even though we can’t break the Dragon Severing Lock, there is a mechanism installed on it that we can make use of... In other words, if we wish to break out of this underground chamber, we’ll have to get rid of that fellow outside first!” Zhang Xuan said.

The method of leaving this place was recorded in the book.

This was a prison, a place to incarcerate Wu Yangzi. Naturally, there wouldn’t be side exits installed in this place. Thus, the only way to leave was through the Dragon Severing Lock.

As a grandmaster blacksmith, Wu Yangzi seemed to have left some kind of mechanism on the lock such that it would be easy for him to get away in the future.

However, it’s a pity that he never succeeded.

“Get rid of that fellow?”

Recalling the fearsome Otherworldly Demon puppet, Luo Qiqi’s face paled.

Even just thinking about it now was enough to send shivers down her spine!

It was swift, strong, and possessed impenetrable skin; there was no flaw that they could exploit against it!

Seeing through Luo Qiqi’s thoughts, Zhang Xuan chuckled.

“Don’t worry. We might not have been able to deal with it before, but now... we do have a weapon in our hands!”

Previously, even though the Library of Heaven’s Path reflected the location of the flaws of the puppet, Zhang Xuan had still been unable to exploit them due to his low cultivation realm.

It was similar to an ant attempting to kill a divine dragon. Even if the ant knew the flaws of the dragon, how could it possibly land a fatal blow when it couldn’t even bite through the other party’s skin?

While Zhang Xuan knew that the puppet would fall once its head was lopped off, its astounding defense covered for its flaws. Even an attack with Zhang Xuan’s full might and using

his strongest weapon could only leave a shallow cut on the other party's neck. So, how could he possibly defeat the other party?

While the Library of Heaven's Path allowed Zhang Xuan to rival opponents stronger than him, there was a limit to how wide a gap it could bridge... Sometimes, even the opponent's flaw could be way beyond his current cultivation.

However, that was then. Now that the Glacier Rain Sword had advanced to become a Half-Saint weapon, everything was simple.

Seeing Zhang Xuan pick up the Glacier Rain Sword, Luo Qiqi was stunned.

“Teacher means to... fight against it?”

She knew that the Glacier Rain Sword had exceeded Spirit high-tier, but how far beyond that still eluded her.

Her ability in appraising weapons was still far beneath that of Zhang Xuan. Not to mention, given her current cultivation realm, it was perfectly normal for her to have never encountered Half-Saint artifacts before.

“Un. I'll tear away the formation later on. You'll have to attract its attention from the front while I sneak to its back to attempt killing it with a single blow!”

Zhang Xuan began going into details regarding the plan of how they would deal with the puppet. “This is what you have to do...”

“Alright!” Hearing her teacher's instructions, Luo Qiqi nodded without any hesitation.

To guide her to forge a pill and smith simultaneously, and for it to be a success at that, what else could her teacher possibly be incapable of?

She walked up to the Crimson Blaze Cauldron and put it in her storage ring. Following which, with a flick of her wrist, she took out a bow and drew an arrow.

As the bow she used previously was destroyed by the puppet, she was currently wielding a lower tier one.

There was no other choice. This was the only long-range Spirit weapon she had in her possession.

Seeing that Luo Qiqi was ready, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath and pushed himself up to the sky.

After looking around for a moment, he finally stopped at a certain position before driving his zhenqi and grabbing downward.

Wuwuwuwu!

The formation flags were pulled out of the ground, and the originally pitch-black portion of the stone chamber gradually lost its darkness under the radiance of the Night Illumination Pearls. Slowly, the Otherworldly Demon puppet's huge silhouette came into appearance.

ROAR!

As they saw the figure of the Otherworldly Demon puppet, the other party also caught side of Luo Qiqi. With a furious roar, it dashed forward frenziedly.

“Die!” Luo Qiqi cried out, and arrows immediately rained down upon the large puppet.

Ding ding ding ding!

However, due to the lacking might behind her arrows, it did little to impede the other party's advance. In fact, none of the arrows pierced through the other party's skin.

Not expecting her arrows to be shrugged off so easily, Luo Qiqi clenched her jaws and threw her bow at it.

Kacha!

The Otherworldly Puppet flung its arm, and the bow shattered. By this moment, it was already standing right before Luo Qiqi. With a booming shock wave, its steel fist crushed toward her.

If Luo Qiqi were to be struck by this outrageously powerful fist, she would surely die on the spot.

Seeing that the fist was about to strike her, Luo Qiqi's eyebrows shot up, and she immediately flicked her wrist.

Dang!

With a metallic reverberation, the Crimson Blaze Cauldron which she had just placed in her storage ring appeared before her.

There was a small ventilation gap on the cauldron that was used to insert coal into it. The puppet's punch struck precisely into the ventilation gap, and its fist was immediately trapped inside the cauldron.

The Crimson Blaze cauldron was an artifact that Wu Yangzi used to forge his weapon, and even he himself was unable to destroy it. Naturally, the puppet was unable to do so as well. With its fist trapped, the puppet thrashed around furiously, but there was nothing it could do.

“I succeeded!”

Seeing that the plan was working, Luo Qiqi's eyes lit up.

When her teacher shared his plan with her previously, she thought that it would be very hard to put it into action. However, just by following the other party's instructions strictly, she actually managed to do it easily.

It was a wonder to her how the other party managed to plan this far ahead.

That kind of analytical ability and battle sense was nothing short of monstrous!

Huala!

Just as Luo Qiqi was filled with awe, a cold gleam suddenly flashed across her eyes, and the puppet abruptly staggered. Following which, its head slowly slid to the ground.

Unknowingly, her teacher had appeared behind the puppet and lopped off its head with a single slash.

“How sharp...”

Seeing how the Glacier Rain Sword easily cut through the other party's neck with a simple cut, Luo Qiqi's eyes widened in shock.

Even though her appraisal ability wasn't up to par with Zhang Xuan, she could tell that the might of the Glacier Rain Sword exceeded that of Spirit pinnacle weapons.

There was no Spirit pinnacle weapon that could achieve this feat so easily!

Luo Qiqi couldn't help but ask, "Teacher, what is the current tier of the Glacier Rain Sword?"

"Half-Saint!" There was no reason for Zhang Xuan to hide it from her either.

"Half-Saint?" Luo Qiqi's body trembled in astonishment.

Even 6-star blacksmiths would be unable to smith out such a weapon! And yet... in that groggy state, she actually succeeded in creating such a weapon?

"Alright. Gather everything that's of any value, and let's quickly leave this area!"

Seeing Luo Qiqi's eyes widening in disbelief, Zhang Xuan shrugged nonchalantly. At the same time, he also felt a little perplexed... Considering the prestige of the Master Teacher Academy—after all, most master teachers view it as their aim—why did these few talented students that he met seem so ignorant?

After going through so much effort to quench the Glacier Rain Sword, while it was a surprise that the Glacier Rain Sword was able to reach Half-Saint, it wasn't entirely unexpected. Was there a reason for her to make such a huge fuss out of it?

"Yes!"

Unaware of Zhang Shi's doubts, Luo Qiqi suppressed the astonishment deep within her and put everything that seemed to be valuable into her storage ring. At that moment, she suddenly recalled something. Turning around, she passed a book over to Zhang Xuan.

"Teacher, this is the physical body cultivation technique of Grandmaster Wu Yangzi, the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body, a Spirit pinnacle secret manual..."

The main reason why Zhang Xuan came with them was because he was seeking Grandmaster Wu Yangzi's physical body cultivation technique. Since they had obtained it now, it was only right for her to present it to him.

“Un!” Zhang Xuan's finger fell on the book for a moment before retracting it. “This isn't right. Since this is Grandmaster Wu Yangzi's personal cultivation technique, I don't think I'll take it after all. You should study hard so as to not let him down.”

Considering that the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body was a personal cultivation technique of Wu Yangzi's and that he intended to pass it down only to his student, it would indeed be inappropriate for an outsider to learn it.

This was the basic respect among cultivators.

“This...”

Not expecting the other party to reject it, Luo Qiqi's face reddened. She opened her mouth, but she couldn't find any words to say.

Before such a precious physical body cultivation technique, others would surely toss aside their etiquette and take it for themselves. Yet, her teacher actually turned it down...

This professionalism and character were indeed worthy of respect!

‘Zhang laoshi, from now onward, you shall be my role model! I shall strive to emulate your behavior!’ Luo Qiqi vowed in her heart.

While she was completely impressed with Zhang Xuan, at this moment, the latter was currently staring at the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body manual in the Library of Heaven's Path with a bitter face.

“78 flaws? The heck! Can this still be called a Spirit pinnacle physical body cultivation technique? You must be joking with me! To regard this kind of rotten book as your treasure and pass it down as an inheritance, screw this...”

672 Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body

When Zhang Xuan's finger came into contact with the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body earlier, he had already duplicated another one in the Library of Heaven's Path. Thus, it mattered not to him whether he had the physical copy or not.

Initially, Zhang Xuan thought that given how high-tiered the physical body cultivation technique was, it must be extremely profound and powerful. Who would have known that it would be riddled with flaws...

If only he knew how trashy this cultivation technique was, he wouldn't have wasted his time coming here. He would have just gathered the books at Huanyu Empire instead.

He was confident he could compile a far stronger physical body cultivation technique with the manuals in Huanyu Empire!

In other words, he had gone through so much trouble for nothing!

Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment.

However, it was too late for regrets. All he could do was to recoup his losses as much as possible. Thus, he stepped forward to the puppet and placed it in his storage ring.

Although the puppet had been incapacitated, considering how tough its defense was, it was likely to have been made out of some kind of valuable ore.

Thus, Zhang Xuan intended to take it back and examine it properly. Perhaps, he might be able to extract some precious ores from it.

Walking out of the stone chamber, Zhang Xuan and Luo Qiqi walked back through the passageway and into the stone room, where Luo Qiqi retrieved her sword. After which, they went

back up the stairs, and soon, they were standing before the Dragon Severing Lock.

Zhang Xuan's finger fell on the location written on the Dragon Severing Lock, and he pressed down lightly.

Kacha!

The creaking of a mechanism sounded, and following which, the Dragon Severing Lock shook.

"Is it done?" Luo Qiqi's eyes lit up as she walked forward to push the lock. However, despite exerting so much force that her face was turning red, the Dragon Severing Lock showed no sign of moving at all.

Zhang Xuan frowned.

As a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan pinnacle expert, Luo Qiqi wielded strength exceeding 6,200,000 ding. It was one thing for her to be unable to open the Dragon Severing Lock when it was sealed, but given that the mechanism had been activated, why was she still unable to move it?

"Let me give it a try!"

Frowning, Zhang Xuan stepped forward and pushed with all his might.

Boom!

Harnessing the strength of his physical body, soul, and zhenqi together, a force exceeding 9,000,000 ding was exerted against the Dragon Severing Lock.

Hu!

But even so, the huge boulder still remained completely motionless, as though it was perfectly stuck to the ground.

"This..." Retracting his arms, Zhang Xuan frowned in confusion. "It can't be that... the mechanism has stopped working after two thousand years?"

According to the book left behind by Wu Yangzi, as long as the mechanism was activated, the Dragon Severing Lock should have been able to be knocked open. But if that was the

case, why wasn't it budging even though they had put so much strength into it?

This shouldn't be the case!

If the mechanism was really broken, the both of them would be doomed.

Even a Saint realm cultivator would find it hard to break the Dragon Severing Lock, let alone them.

Was their only way out gone... just like that?

“It is recorded in the book that even after triggering the mechanism, the Dragon Severing Lock still can't be opened normally. One will have to exert pure physical strength to push it open. Once the mechanism senses the presence of zhenqi, it'll automatically deactivate...”

Taking Wu Yangzi's book out once more, Luo Qiqi read with a grim expression.

“Pure physical strength?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“Indeed. The mechanism against the Dragon Severing Lock is made out of a unique material which is exceptionally sensitive to zhenqi... Grandmaster Wu Yangzi probably did it this way so as to prevent the Otherworldly Demon from noticing and exploiting the mechanism. The killing intent that the Otherworldly Demon emanates possesses properties similar to zhenqi, so even if they were to notice the mechanism, they would still be unable to open it,” Luo Qiqi said.

“I see!”

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Given Wu Yangzi's meticulous personality, it was indeed possible for him to design such a mechanism.

Even if an Otherworldly Demon were to obtain his heritage, it would still be unable to leave this underground chamber alive, thus frustrating it to death.

“I'll give it another try!”

With this conjecture in mind, Zhang Xuan retracted his soul and zhenqi cultivation, and using just the might of his muscles,

he pushed the Dragon Severing Lock with all his might.

Geji! Geji!

The Dragon Severing Lock groaned, but Zhang Xuan was still unable to open it.

“I don’t have sufficient strength to open it.”

“I’ll help you!”

Luo Qiqi walked over, and the duo pushed the Dragon Severing Lock together. However, it still didn’t budge.

This meant that their combined strength was still insufficient.

However, the groaning sound did indicate that their line of thought was right, it was just that they were lacking sufficient strength to push open the Dragon Severing Lock.

“Even though we failed to open it, the mechanism seems to be working... the only option for us now is to quickly raise our physical strength!”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

Even though he could summon his clone, and with the combined might between him and his clone, it should be possible to open the Dragon Severing Lock. However... his clone was made of a God artifact, and he didn’t want anyone to learn of its existence yet.

Once his clone’s existence was made known, it was possible that others might doubt Yang shi’s existence, and the matter of him practicing the arts of a soul oracle would likely be exposed as well.

“Raise our physical strength? Teacher means that... we should cultivate the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body?”

Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

“Un. It is very likely that this is another test from Grandmaster Wu Yangzi—if we can’t even cultivate the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body, it is likely that we will be unable to fulfill his wish of forging a Saint weapon. And since our words are an empty promise... he would rather that we remain here to accompany him!” Zhang Xuan analyzed.

Wu Yangzi was indeed an extremely thorough person, having taken into account every single possibility.

But considering how he was the man who managed to dupe so many Otherworldly Demons into offering their heads to him, it didn't really come as a surprise.

Otherwise, he would probably have been killed by the Otherworldly Demons.

“Cultivate right now?” Luo Qiqi's face was plagued with dilemma. “A physical body cultivation technique cannot be mastered within a single day. It requires many years of hard work. Are we going to be trapped here for that long?”

Just like normal zhenqi cultivation techniques, physical body cultivation techniques also required many years of diligence for one to achieve mastery.

If they had to learn the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body before they could leave... how long would that take?

What if they never succeeded in it? Would this underground chamber really be their final resting place?

Seeing Luo Qiqi frown, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before he asked, “Other than the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body, do you have any other physical body cultivation technique manuals on you?”

Not knowing why her teacher would ask such a question, Luo Qiqi was dazed for a moment before replying.

“Other physical body cultivation technique manuals? I do have quite a few, but none of them can be compared to the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body!”

Possessing a strong physical body was one of the requirements for becoming a 5-star apothecary and 5-star blacksmith. As such, she did possess quite a few physical body cultivation technique manuals on her. However, none of their grades could match the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body.

“Allow me to take a look.”

Zhang Xuan had only asked that question casually, not expecting to receive a positive answer. His eyes immediately

lit up in delight.

“Alright.”

Knowing that her teacher must have an idea in mind for asking for them, Luo Qiqi flicked her wrist and placed a few piles of books on the stairs without any hesitation. There were probably around a few hundred books within the pile.

“There are so many of them...”

Not expecting the other party to be carrying so many books on her, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. He hurriedly brushed his fingertip across all of them.

“Actually... it was a friend who helped me collect all of these. Back then, when I was striving to become a 5-star blacksmith, my physical body was still too weak. So, a friend gave all of these to me...” Luo Qiqi said awkwardly.

Despite Princess Yu Fei-er’s difficult personality, she still had many pursuers. Given Luo Qiqi’s appearance, it was natural that she would have no lack of pursuers either.

Back then, when she failed the 5-star blacksmith examination, a senior in the Blacksmith School who was pursuing her gathered all of these physical body cultivation techniques and gave them to her.

She had been wanting to return them to the other party since then, but she hadn’t found an opportunity yet. Since her teacher needed them now, she brought all of them out.

“Good...”

After collecting all of the books into the Library of Heaven’s Path, Zhang Xuan stood up and muttered ‘compile’.

Hu!

A brand-new Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body appeared in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

Zhang Xuan quickly flipped it open, and amidst its content, there were only four errors.

“Great!”

Zhang Xuan chuckled in delight.

He was still troubled over the excessive flaws in the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body manual previously, but after assimilating the content from the other physical body cultivation technique manuals from Luo Qiqi, he was able to make up for most of the flaws. Even though there were still four flaws remaining, they were negligible.

With this, he would surely be able to strengthen his physical body to the required level within two hours!

“Let’s return to the stone chamber first.”

The stone chamber was narrow, dark, and damp, which weren’t conditions suited for cultivating. Thus, the duo returned to the stone chamber, and sitting down, they began cultivating.

Understanding her teacher’s intentions, Luo Qiqi flipped open the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body.

An introduction to the technique was written on the first page.

“The Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body wasn’t created by me; I found it when I was roaming through ancient ruins. There is a total of five levels to the technique, and they are otherwise known as the Five Incandescence. Upon mastering the technique, one’s physical body will be imbued with a five-colored light, granting one immense might... However, this technique is extremely difficult to cultivate, and even I have only been able to reach the Third Incandescence.”

After taking a look, Luo Qiqi couldn’t help but feel impressed.

Honestly speaking, the person who created the cultivation technique was indeed a genius.

She had seen many geniuses and formidable master teachers in the Master Teacher Academy, and she had heard of many different physical body cultivation techniques as well. However, none of them seemed to be able to compete with this one.

But while the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body was indeed strong, it was difficult to cultivate as well.

Putting everything aside, to reach the Second Incandescence and beyond, one would require some supporting materials to temper their body with.

Even though Luo Qiqi had plenty of pills and medicinal herbs on her, none of them fulfilled the requirements.

‘Forget it. I shall cultivate the First Incandescence and leave this place first...’

Putting all other miscellaneous thoughts aside, she began to browse through the content of the First Incandescence.

“To master the First Incandescence, one has to be able to gather the full might of one’s body. It will take at least two years for a genius to achieve Major Accomplishment, while those who are less talented can easily take more than ten years!”

Such a sentence was written in the very first paragraph depicting the First Incandescence.

‘Two years?’

Luo Qiqi’s mouth twitched.

If she were to be trapped here for two years, the entire school would probably think that she was dead!

Furthermore, this was still assuming that she possessed an affinity for the cultivation technique. If she lacked talent in it, wouldn’t they be trapped here for ten years?

‘What am I thinking all of this for? I should focus my attention on cultivating. The faster I master the technique, the earlier I’ll be able to leave this underground chamber.’

Luo Qiqi shook away other miscellaneous thoughts from her head. Clenching her jaws, she began to memorize the formula for the First Incandescence. Soon, just after she managed to memorize the content and was just about to decipher and cultivate it, Zhang shi suddenly stood up.

“Let’s go!”

“Where?”

Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

She hadn't even started cultivating yet, where were they heading to?

"To leave! Do you not want to leave?"

Zhang Xuan shot her a perplexed expression.

"I..."

Luo Qiqi was completely confused by the situation before her.

"Of course, I want to leave... but we aren't able to open the Dragon Severing Lock with our current combined strength! I have barely memorized the First Incandescence of the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body, and I haven't started cultivating yet..."

Zhang Xuan shook his head. "It's alright, I have already mastered it!"

"Mastered it?"

Luo Qiqi was taken aback. "What does that mean?"

At that moment, the duo was already standing right before the Dragon Severing Lock. Zhang Shi raised his arm and abruptly exerted an immense force on the Dragon Severing Lock.

Weng!

A bright light emanated from his body, and with a 'jiya!', the Dragon Severing Lock opened.

"Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body... First Incandescence? What is going on?"

Luo Qiqi's body trembled; she felt like she was about to go insane.

I thought you didn't read that cultivation technique manual?

What in the world was going on?

673 As Good as Dead

It was just a moment ago that she offered this secret manual to Zhang Shi, but the other party turned it down, saying that it would be inappropriate for him to take a look at it. But right after, as she was completely impressed by such noble behavior, the other party actually exerted the might of the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body...

‘So, did you look at the book or not?’

‘Wasn’t it written that even geniuses would require at least two years to master?’

‘But how long has it been since we started cultivating?’

‘To have remembered the content and finished cultivating within such a short period of time...’

‘Teacher, are you Zhang Shi or a reincarnation of Wu Yangzi?’

Luo Qiqi was completely dumbfounded by the sight before her.

It felt as though her understanding of the world was being overturned entirely.

Leaping by the Dragon Severing Lock, Zhang Xuan realized that the young lady was still dazing off within the passageway, so he turned around and beckoned her.

“What are you waiting for? Let’s go!”

Walking out of the passageway, Luo Qiqi couldn’t hold back her curiosity anymore, so she asked, “Teacher... did you just use the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body?”

“I guess it could be considered that way too.”

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan explained with a displeased expression, “I didn’t intend to learn it, but due to the urgency of the matter, I had no choice but to do so. This physical body cultivation technique is rather troublesome to cultivate so I

modified it a little. Even so, significant flaws still remain in it, so I've only cultivated to the First Incandescence!"

Zhang Xuan was truly frustrated. Initially, he was still delighted that there were only four flaws... but it turned out that he was sorely mistaken.

The four flaws just happened to be that he would require various rare materials in order to cultivate the Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Incandescence.

For example, he would require the Earth Flame Heart to reach the Second Incandescence, and for the Third Incandescence, he would require Origin Heavy Water...

When cultivating the Heaven's Path Golden Body, he only required Heaven's Path zhenqi. When had he needed the support of external materials before?

To still require so many items even after compiling a few hundred physical body cultivation techniques with it, this was truly damned.

It was fortunate that he could master the First Incandescence through just using his Heaven's Path zhenqi, or else he would surely have died of frustration.

While he was displeased by his situation, Luo Qiqi was about to go insane.

'Modified it slightly?

'Significant flaws still remain in it?

'This is a Spirit pinnacle cultivation technique... or perhaps, it might even be beyond it! I have just barely finished reading through the First Incandescence, and you are already done understanding, modifying, and cultivating it...

'To even pick on the flaws in the technique on top of that!

'Are you teasing me?

'I have seen many incredible geniuses and experts, but never have I seen one as absurd as you!'

Luo Qiqi's mouth twitched violently as vertigo struck her.

She felt that there was nothing that Zhang Shi was incapable of. It seemed as though doing the impossible was the norm for him.

“Hmm? They aren’t out yet? Have they left already?”

Just as Luo Qiqi was shocked speechless, she heard the voice of the young man. Shifting her gaze, she saw that Zhang Shi had already walked ahead and was currently standing before the other stone door. A deep frown was etched on his forehead.

Yu Fei-er, Xing Yuan, and the others had passed through this stone door to enter another passageway. Considering how they spent almost sixteen hours inside their passageway, they thought that the others would be out by now. But contrary to their expectations, there was not a single face to be seen amidst the dim radiance from the Night Illumination Pearl in the vast underground chamber.

Had they left already, or were they still stuck inside?

Luo Qiqi’s heart skipped a beat. Tossing away all other thoughts, she hurriedly rushed up to Zhang Xuan.

After examining the area, her expression turned grim. “It seems like they aren’t out yet. Otherwise, they would have surely come to look for us. Furthermore, the locations where the Night Illumination Pearls are scattered are still the same... This means that it is highly likely they are still inside there!”

Given her understanding of Yu Fei-er, the other party would have surely have come to look for them as soon as she left the passageway, or at the very least, she would have notified them through the Night Illumination Pearls. However, given that there was no trace of them in this vast underground chamber, it could only mean that the four of them were still trapped beyond the stone door, unable to leave.

“Un!”

Since she was able to deduce this much, Zhang Xuan, who possessed the Eye of Insight, was naturally able to do the same as well. At this moment, he was staring at the stone door with a perplexed expression. “But this door isn’t locked with the Dragon Severing Lock. Why aren’t they out yet?”

“It’s not?”

Luo Qiqi walked forward to push open the door, and it opened up easily, revealing a flight of stone steps downward. Unlike their passageway, this one wasn’t sealed with a Severing Dragon Lock.

In other words... Luo Qiqi and the others could have left whenever they wanted!

But if that was the case, why weren’t they out yet?

A thought suddenly struck Luo Qiqi, and her eyes widened in fear.

“Grandmaster Wu Yangzi said that the stone chamber, where we were previously, was a cell used to incarcerate him, and this side was the living quarters of the Otherworldly Demon... Considering how a group of Otherworldly Demons were forged into puppets under his hands, could it be...”

Wu Yangzi had converted more than twenty Otherworldly Demons into puppets, but there was only a single one in the stone chamber previously. Assuming that all of them were still functional...

Zhang Xuan’s face twisted in shock as well.

“Let’s go and take a look!”

Even though he didn’t possess much goodwill toward Yu Feier and the others, he didn’t bear them any hostility either. He couldn’t just stand idly when they were at risk of being ripped into pieces by the Otherworldly Demon puppets.

“Un.”

Knowing that her close friend was in danger, Luo Qiqi dared not hesitate. She quickly followed behind Zhang Xuan and headed down the steps.

Just like in the other, this passageway was cold and damp as well.

The recording from the stone bridge earlier on said that one could only enter one door.

While this door wasn't sealed by the Dragon Severing Lock, if one were to venture this path, one would be lynched by many Otherworldly Demon puppets simultaneously, making it impossible for them to return.

On the other hand, if one were to go through the other door and fail to obtain the heritage, one would be doomed as well. And if one managed to obtain the heritage, one would learn that the other passageway led to the Otherworldly Demon's nest, and no sane man would possibly venture down this path after learning that.

In retrospect, the previous decision was actually a choice between life and death!

"I can only hope that they are fine."

Grasping his Glacier Rain Sword tightly, Zhang Xuan slowly proceeded down the passageway.

Had he known that it was so dangerous, he would have surely stopped them no matter the means. If the four of them were to really die here, he would feel guilty his entire life.

After advancing a moment longer, they finally approached the end of the steps, and another huge underground chamber unfolded before them. Zhang Xuan turned to Luo Qiqi and said, "It'll be too conspicuous if we were to enter together. You should wait for me up there, I will enter alone."

"Teacher..."

Luo Qiqi was taken aback.

"You're currently still too weak, and you don't have any escape means either. If something really has happened to them, we will only be leaping to our doom pointlessly if the both of us enter together. But if they are fine... Trust me, I'll surely bring them out!" Zhang Xuan said.

If someone were to follow him, he would be unable to utilize a lot of his secret means. Thus, it would be better if Luo Qiqi were to head up first.

After a moment of hesitation, Luo Qiqi clenched her jaws and nodded.

“This... Alright!”

She was indeed too weak to be of help at the moment. Considering how she couldn't even wound the Otherworldly Demon puppet, all she could do was run for her life if she were to encounter one.

Not to mention, it was likely that they were going to face more than one this time around. If they were to get entangled with them, they might very well lose their lives here.

Even though Zhang Shi managed to kill the previous Otherworldly Demon puppet, a huge part of the reason was due to the other party being immobilized by the Crimson Flame Cauldron. Otherwise, in a direct battle, there was no way that it would expose its neck to him!

“Teacher, you must be careful... No matter how the others are, you must first ensure your own safety!” Luo Qiqi said worriedly.

“Don't worry, I can fly. Even if I can't defeat them, fleeing isn't a problem at all,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Un. I'll wait for you outside then.”

Hearing those words, Luo Qiqi suddenly recalled the various astonishing feats that Zhang Xuan had achieved, and her worry alleviated slightly. She nodded before turning around to leave. A moment later, she disappeared amidst the darkness.

After Luo Qiqi left, Zhang Xuan didn't enter the underground chamber straight away. Instead, he sat down and took in a deep breath.

Hu!

His soul tore away from his body.

If there were really twenty or so of the Otherworldly Demons he met previously, it would be difficult for him to escape even if he was capable of flying.

After all, his flying altitude was severely limited by the ceiling. If all of them were to rush for him simultaneously, it would be nigh impossible for him to avoid them.

Thus, he decided to utilize his soul to scout the area instead.

Due to the intangible and invisible nature of a soul, it would be hard for even the Otherworldly Demons to notice it.

Hu!

As soon as Zhang Xuan's soul left his body, he immediately rushed into the underground chamber.

There were a few Night Illumination Pearls in the underground chamber that Xing Yuan and the others had scattered. Despite the dimness, Zhang Xuan could still clearly see the situation around him.

Looking around, this underground chamber was much larger than the stone chamber Wu Yangzi had been locked in. Even when gazing across the horizon, the end couldn't be seen.

As it was meant to serve as the living quarters of the Otherworldly Demon, infrastructures were positioned neatly alongside one another. If not for the gloomy darkness, one might have even thought that one had stepped into a city.

'No wonder the Otherworldly Demons were able to survive for more than ten thousand years here...'

Zhang Xuan nodded.

In the end, the Otherworldly Demons did spend dozens of millenniums here. It would be hard to believe that it would be designed shabbily.

Thinking so, Zhang Xuan followed along the trail of light.

There was no doubt the Night Illumination Pearls were left behind by Yu Fei-er and her group. As long as he followed the source of light, it would surely lead him to them.

'There are signs of battle...'

Proceeding a little further, Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

Under the light of the Night Illumination Pearls, he could see many collapsed buildings and a slight trace of blood on the ground. Clearly, a fight had just occurred here recently.

'Eye of Insight!'

Lines of insight flowed in Zhang Xuan's eyes as he studied the battle traces.

'Fourteen hours ago... It must have been left behind by them!'

The Eye of Insight was a technique triggered by driving his Soul Depth, so he was able to activate it even as a soul. Through studying the traces left behind here, he was able to deduce when it was left behind.

Most likely, Yu Fei-er and the others encountered something not too long after entering the underground chamber and fought against it.

'But if that is the case, why is it so silent here? Are they already... dead?' Zhang Xuan thought.

Since a battle had occurred, Yu Fei-er and the others should have encountered the Otherworldly Demons. If they were still alive, they should still be in the midst of a battle. Yet, the underground chamber was completely silent. Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

He immediately examined the surroundings and saw a few sets of flurried footprints on the ground.

These footprints weren't too big, revealing that they were left behind by a human.

'These are their footprints!'

Having gone through the Third Celestial Master Teacher acknowledgement, Zhang Xuan's Eye of Insight was stronger than ever, allowing him to easily notice the slight footsteps above the layer of dust on the ground. Zhang Xuan quickly traced the footsteps, but not too long later, he abruptly halted.

Geji! Geji!

The sound of someone's footsteps sounded not too far away. Under the light of the Night Illumination Pearls, Zhang Xuan saw a massive Otherworldly Demon puppet walking over with large strides.

This fellow was around the same size as the puppet whom he slew not too long ago. Its skin was also gray, as if it was coated with a layer of metal alloy.

Zhang Xuan's soul cultivated the Heaven's Path Soul Art, so unlike other souls, his body didn't emanate yin energy. As such, the Otherworldly Demon puppet didn't notice him. It simply rushed by him. Following which, a few other Otherworldly Demon puppets also soon followed behind it.

'There are so many Otherworldly Demon puppets here...'

To actually meet with eight Otherworldly Demon puppets before he could find Yu Fei-er and the others, Zhang Xuan's heart pounded nervously.

Given how many Otherworldly Demon puppets were here, Yu Fei-er and the others were... as good as dead!

674 Finding Yu Fei-er

These puppets were pulsating with immense energy that was equivalent to the one he had met in the stone room. Judging from the looks of it, even a Saint realm expert would be killed even if he came here.

Luo Qiqi and Zhang Xuan had nearly died dealing with just one. It took them careful planning and much effort just to get rid of it. To encounter eight at once...

With an awful complexion, Zhang Xuan proceeded forward.

Boom boom boom boom!

A while later, the ground suddenly started shaking relentlessly with a peculiar rhythm.

‘Hmm?’

Zhang Xuan frowned.

The shaking was forceful, reminiscent of shock waves emanated in a clash between experts. However, what was bizarre was the constant short interval between each tremor. Nevertheless, this trace of battle raised Zhang Xuan’s hopes.

‘Could it be that they are still holding on?’

Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

Even though the Otherworldly Demons had been forged into puppets under Wu Yangzi’s hands, they possessed no emotions or irrationality that would make them fight one another... The only possibility was that Yu Fei-er and the others were still alive, and they were still fending them off!

But... those were Saint realm puppets. How did Yu Fei-er and the others manage to survive for so long?

Speeding up, Zhang Xuan flew to where the tremors were originating from. In the midst of his journey, he saw yet another three puppets walking in a straight line, similar to the ones he had seen previously.

‘This is already the seventeenth one...’

Making a quick count of the puppets he had encountered, Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

It was fortunate that he hadn’t come here in his physical body, or else it would have been no joke if he had been surrounded by these guys!

While his cultivation had advanced greatly in recent times, and he had the Library of Heaven’s Path behind him, he knew his own limits. He might have gotten past a Saint realm expert by hoodwinking the other party with his words before, but against lifeless puppets who only followed instructions... he knew that death would be the only outcome from an encounter with them.

‘Something is wrong! If Yu Fei-er and the others are still alive, why are these puppets walking away instead of encircling them?’

As Zhang Xuan encountered more and more puppets, a seed of doubt slowly sprouted in his mind.

After noticing that Yu Fei-er was still alive, those puppets should have been rallying one another to deal with them. Why would they be walking away instead in such an orderly fashion?

Even though Zhang Xuan was confused by the situation before him, he continued to advance at top speed.

Zhang Xuan didn’t dare to fly too fast for fear of inducing any significant reverberations in the air from his movement. After advancing for around another eight minutes, he finally arrived at the source of the tremors.

Along the way, he had seen many scars of battle as well, but they were of a relatively smaller scale compared to the first ones he encountered. Most likely, they were trying to fend off the Otherworldly Demon puppets as they retreated.

The fact that he had yet to see their corpses yet meant that there was a good chance that they were still breathing.

To be able to survive so long against so many Saint realm Otherworldly Demon puppets... they were indeed formidable.

‘Hmm? They are over there!’

After taking a detour around a high-rise building, Zhang Xuan noticed that the source of the tremors was right before him. Quickly raising his gaze to take a look, a vast square appeared before his eyes.

It covered an area of several dozen mu, and stationed at the very center was an altar. Most probably, it was a tool they used to pay respect to their ancestors or the heavens back when they were still alive.

(15 mu \approx a hectare)

Bizarre symbols were inscribed on the altar, leaving one with overwhelming dizziness just by looking at it.

There were various peculiar statues erected around the altar. They resembled a fusion of various beasts, forming an extremely sinister sight.

A powerful killing intent emanated from the statues, inducing a cold shiver down one’s spine.

‘They are still alive...’

As Zhang Xuan’s gaze fell on the center of the altar, his eyes lit up.

Over there, a barrier of light was erected, and two Otherworldly Demon puppets were striking it ceaselessly. This was where the tremors were coming from.

In the barrier of light, Yu Fei-er, Xing Yuan, and the others were seated cross-legged at the very center. Their faces were pale, and their bodies were drenched in fresh blood.

It seemed like they had suffered grievous wounds while attempting to escape from the Otherworldly Demon puppets.

‘What an incredible trump card!’

Looking at the barrier of light, Zhang Xuan was impressed.

To be able to fend off the relentless attacks from two Saint realm puppets, the resilience of the barrier was indeed incredible!

‘It probably belongs to Yu Fei-er or Xing Yuan... Considering the standing of those two, it wouldn’t be surprising for them to possess such means up their sleeves.’

Realizing what was going on, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

As the princess of Hongyuan Empire, it was natural that she would carry a lot of defensive artifacts so that she could protect herself in face of danger. Otherwise, due to her exceptional identity, it was unlikely that her family would be willing to let her venture out alone.

On the other hand, given how Xing Yuan could pursue the princess so openly, his family background was likely to be exceptional as well.

While their artifacts might not be sufficient for them to fight against the Otherworldly Demon puppets, it was sufficient for them to stand their ground temporarily.

‘But this barrier of light seems to be on the verge of crumbling...’

Zhang Xuan frowned.

No matter how powerful an artifact may be, it was limited by the amount of energy stored within it. Taking his Dragon Scale Protective Amulet for example, while it was able to withstand an attack with the full might of a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan, it was only limited to three uses.

While the barrier of light that the four were in was able to withstand the relentless attacks from the two puppets, its light was dim, and it seemed like it was going to break apart soon.

And once it did, it would spell the moment of their doom.

‘I must find a way to save them...’

The current situation placed him in a dilemma. If he were to instruct them to dispel the barrier of light, the two Otherworldly Demon puppets would surely rush straight at

them, and Zhang Xuan had no confidence in bringing all of them out alive with them on their trail. But if the barrier of light wasn't dispelled, they would be trapped here...

What could be done at this moment?

Furthermore, what puzzled Zhang Xuan the most was that, judging from where the other Otherworldly Demon puppets which he'd encountered on the way here were heading from, they were probably at this altar before. Why did the rest march away, leaving only two of them here?

If all of them were to strike the barrier of the light together, it would have surely shattered by now!

Assessing the situation a while longer, Zhang Xuan was still unable to make sense out of the situation. Thus, he decided to drift a little closer to the barrier of light to get a better look.

'Why is there a corpse in there?'

Moving forward, he saw Yu Fei-er, Xing Yuan, Wu Zhen, and Ye Qian were seated shoulder to shoulder in a circle at the center of the barrier of light, and seated at the center of the four of them was an old man.

Even though there was no visible damage to the body of the old man, his withered and emaciated body revealed that he was long dead.

A thought suddenly emerged in Zhang Xuan's mind.

'Could this be... Grandmaster Wu Yangzi?'

For a human corpse to appear here... Putting the clues together, the old man should be Wu Yangzi.

When Zhang Xuan couldn't find Wu Yangzi's corpse in the stone chamber previously, he had already been a little perplexed as to where it could be. From the looks of it now, the corpse had been here all along, and somehow, Yu Fei-er and the others had managed to find it, and they were currently guarding it.

Of course, it was also possible that the corpse was guarding them. It was impossible for Zhang Xuan to determine whether the barrier of light came from Yu Fei-er's group or Wu Yangzi.

While Zhang Xuan was assessing the situation carefully, cold sweat was dripping down the faces of Yu Fei-er and the others.

Panting deeply, Xing Yuan said with a pale face, “Sixth Princess, it seems like we won’t be able to get out this time.”

There was a glaring wound on his chest. Even though he had already applied some recovery medicine, fresh blood still kept oozing from it, forming a rather frightening scene.

“We’ll probably die here...”

Wu Zhen’s face also darkened.

They had all thought that it would be a simple mission—all they needed to do was to confirm the existence of the underground chamber where Wu Yangzi once stayed in. Who knew that this seemingly simple mission would actually lead them to so many formidable puppets!

Chased all the way here, if not for Yu Fei-er’s ample supply of defensive artifacts, they would have already died a few hours ago.

“At the very least, we chose the correct passageway. This is indeed where Grandmaster Wu Yangzi lived previously, and we even found his corpse!”

Yu Fei-er harrumphed.

Amidst this despair, this was the only consolation she received. At the very least, she managed to best that smug Zhang Xuan once!

Since Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s corpse was here, it could only mean that they had found the right place. Her greatest regret now was that she wasn’t able to see the smugness wiped out of that fellow’s face.

“You’re right.” Xing Yuan nodded weakly. Then, turning around to Yu Fei-er, he asked, “Sixth Princess, since we’re already on death’s door, can you tell if... you have ever liked me?”

Seeing as the barrier of light continued to grow thinner and thinner, Xing Yuan knew that it was a matter of time before it

shattered. Thus, he was unable to suppress the greatest question in his mind anymore.

He had been pursuing this lady for a very long time already, but the other party had never reciprocated his feelings. Now that they were on the verge of death, he wanted to at least know the truth so that he could rest in peace.

Hearing those words, Ye Qian and Wu Zhen immediately turned their heads away awkwardly.

Not expecting Xing Yuan to ask such a question, Yu Fei-er opened her mouth, but she soon bit her lips. After a long moment of hesitation, she shook her head.

“I have already told you that before I become a 6-star master teacher, I’m not interested in engaging in any romantic relationship...”

She had an extremely competitive nature, and she had always wanted to prove herself to others. As such, romantic relationships were something at the back of her mind.

Even though Xing Yuan had been pursuing her for some time now, her heart had never skipped a beat for him.

“I knew it. I didn’t stand a chance from the start...”

Hearing such direct words from the other party, Xing Yuan shook his head and smiled bitterly. “Then, are you interested in Zhang Xuan?”

Recalling that shameless face on that detestable young man, Yu Fei-er clenched her jaws in anger.

“Zhang Xuan? How could I possibly be interested in that despicable and shameless fellow? I must be mad before I can possibly fall in love with such a guy!”

She was a princess, a member of nobility, and yet the other party dared to force her to become his maid and serve him tea...

If only that was all... When she went to reason it out with him, he even kicked her bottom twice!

She had never seen someone as ungentlemanly as him!

If not for the fact that she wasn't able to defeat him, she would have long rushed over to crush that man with her hands.

'I...'

Zhang Xuan, who was loitering around the barrier of light to find an opportunity to save the group, heard Yu Fei-er's evaluation of him, and he staggered...

'I am such an upright, kind, and magnanimous person. How in the world did I become a despicable and shameless man?

'Just like the wise sages of the past once said, woman and hypocrite are the two most difficult species to please!

'Such is indeed the case!'

Hearing her furious howls, Xing Yuan wasn't delighted in the least. Instead, he shook his head in disappointment.

"The more ferociously you berate him, the greater the place he has in your heart. I have known you since we were little, and it has been more than twenty years since then, but have I ever occupied a space as big as him in your heart? When I said we weren't able to leave earlier, the first thing that came to your mind wasn't fear but that you have won a bet against him..."

Even in this desperate situation, all she could think of was Zhang Xuan...

From this fact, he knew that despite his years of pursuing her, his standing in the other party's heart couldn't even compare to that fellow she had just met.

"I..."

Yu Fei-er froze upon hearing those words.

Was she really in love with that fellow? But how could it be possible!

All she wanted was to rid herself of her identity as a maid and teach that shameless fellow a lesson!

Affirming her intentions inside once more, just as she was about to verbalize them to Xing Yuan, a voice suddenly drifted into their ears.

“Cough cough. This isn’t the time to be flirting with one another. You should be discussing how you can get away instead!”

Hearing that voice, Yu Fei-er eyes widened. “Zhang Xuan?”

675 Beating Hear

Right after calling out that man's name, Yu Fei-er's face turned crimson, and she quickly shook her head in denial.

'How can he possibly be here...'

Considering the duration they had been fleeing for, they were at least several kilometers into the depths of the underground chamber. On top of that, there were many Otherworldly Demon puppets patrolling the area, ready to take out any intruder. Most important of all, that fellow had clearly entered the other passageway, so how could he possibly appear here?

There was no doubt about it, she must be hallucinating!

Right after she reaffirming that she would never fall in love with that despicable fellow, she actually hallucinated his voice and thought that he would come to her rescue... How embarrassing!

"It was just a passing remark, none of you heard a thing at all... Got it?"

Yu Fei-er harrumphed furiously with a threatening edge in her tone.

"Cough cough..."

Wu Zhen and the others glanced at one another before replying, "Princess... it seems like we heard those words as well."

"You all heard those words too?"

Taken aback, Yu Fei-er quickly scanned her surroundings anxiously. But other than the two puppets which were still striking the barrier of light relentlessly, there wasn't anyone aside from them.

"Since all of us distinctly heard his voice, it is unlikely to be an imagination on our part..."

Xing Yuan nodded.

While he did detest Zhang Xuan, it was still consoling to hear the other party's voice at this crucial moment.

Seeing that the other party actually doubted his existence after he had spoken, he shook his head helplessly and continued transmitting his voice to them.

“Alright, none of you are hallucinating. I'm indeed Zhang Xuan, and I am here to save you all. My physical body is still outside, and I am currently using a secret art to transmit my voice over...”

As he couldn't reveal that he was a floating soul at this moment—this would expose his identity as a soul oracle—he could only explain it by this.

“If you're outside, could this be... Transmission Over a Thousand Li?”

Xing Yuan and the others widened their eyes in shock.

One must know that not even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan could possibly transmit his voice so clearly over several kilometers.

Could it be that... Zhang Xuan already possessed such immense strength?

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was aware of their situation and intended to save them, Yu Fei-er heaved a sigh of relief and asked, “How do you intend to save us? Do you have an idea in mind?”

This fellow might be hateful, but he did possess incredible capabilities.

Otherwise, how could she possibly have been bullied so many times and yet still be helpless against him?

“It's precisely because I don't have any ideas that I'm here to discuss this matter with you...” Zhang Xuan said.

He really had no idea in mind.

His soul might have been able to sneak in without catching anyone's notice, but if he were to attempt to bring the others

out, they would surely be surrounded and killed before they could get far.

“Discuss? If we had an idea in mind, we would have already escaped from this darned place long ago...” Xing Yuan said with a darkened face.

His spirits had lifted after hearing Zhang Xuan’s voice, but who would have thought that the other party was as lost as them?

“Alright, why don’t you all tell me the situation here in-depth? This will help me find a viable solution to your current plight. For one, I saw quite a few puppets walking away from your direction when I was scouting around just now. Under normal circumstances, they should have all gathered here to get rid of you together. Why did they walk away, leaving only these two here?”

Zhang Xuan raised the doubt that had been plaguing him all along.

If all of them were to attack at once, the barrier of light would have shattered long ago, and this group would be cold corpses by now.

While the puppets didn’t possess intelligence, it was reasonable to think that they were programmed to encircle and defeat any intruders into the underground chamber. After all, the puppet he had met in the stone room before had pursued him frenziedly, threatening to grind him into meat paste. As such, how could they possibly let such a huge group off?

Perhaps, there might be some fundamental logic to it. If he were to exploit this, he might be able to find a way to save the group.

“Not too long after we entered this underground chamber, we encountered those Otherworldly Demon puppets. We were immediately overpowered by them, and they deliberately blocked the way back to the passageway. Thus, we could only retreat deeper into the underground chamber while fending them off...”

Ye Qian swiftly explained everything that happened.

Right after walking down the flight of stairs, they immediately saw this underground town, so they quickly rushed to it excitedly, thinking that they had found a vital clue. Who could have thought that they would meet with the Otherworldly Demon puppets not too long later?

That was also the region where Zhang Xuan first found the traces of battle.

Surrounded by a group of Saint realm puppets, they were naturally not a match at all.

It was fortunate that Xing Yuan and Princess Fei-er possessed many valuable artifacts on them. Hurling them out while retreating, they managed to fend the enemies off. Even so, they were still severely injured through the many encounters.

Fleeing all the way to the altar, they happened to find Wu Yangzi's corpse and triggered the mechanism he had left behind. It was then that the barrier of light emerged, and they got a moment of breather.

Meaning, this barrier of light was indeed an artifact left behind by Wu Yangzi. It was probably a means to prevent his corpse from being defaced by the Otherworldly Demons after his death, but who could have known that it would unintentionally save the juniors who came searching for him two thousand years later?

However, judging from the current state of the barrier, it was unlikely to last too much longer.

After hearing Ye Qian's works, Yu Fei-er harrumphed.

“Who said that those fellows didn't gather here in an attempt to get rid of us? All twenty of them were here a moment ago, or else the barrier of light couldn't possibly wane so quickly. Just that... for some reason unknown to us, they left abruptly!”

It wasn't that those fellows didn't come to encircle them, but that they were unable to break the barrier and left. Who knows when they will return?

All of the defensive artifacts they possessed were depleted. Once the barrier of light shattered, they would lose their only

protection. Even if Zhang Xuan was here to support them, it was still highly unlikely that they would be able to escape.

“You said that they left after attacking the barrier for a moment?”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

That didn't make sense at all. If those fellows had continued, the barrier of light would have shattered by now. Why would those puppets march off during such a crucial moment, leaving only two of them to continue?

The group nodded.

“When did they leave?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Around ten minutes ago or so!” Ye Qian said.

“Ten minutes ago? That's around the time that Little Qi and I left the underground chamber...”

Frowning, a thought suddenly surfaced, and Zhang Xuan's face darkened. “Could it be...”

Could it be that... these fellows found out that he had breached the other passageway, and were heading over to support their ally?

If that was the case, he would be in great danger!

His physical body was still hidden in the passageway near the entrance of the underground chamber. If he were to be noticed by them, wouldn't his body be smashed into pieces?

“Give me a moment, I'll look around and figure something out...”

His physical body was of the greatest importance to him now, he couldn't allow anything to go wrong with it. Not to mention, if his physical body were to be ruined, there was no way he could help Yu Fei-er and the others out of their current plight.

Thus, leaving behind these words, he immediately rushed off.

“Hey! ...Hey!”

As his voice slowly faded, the surroundings grew silent once more. Yu Fei-er shouted in panic a few times, but she didn't receive any response. Infuriated, she smacked the ground with her fist.

What the heck was that?

He was here to save them, and yet he disappeared without doing anything at all. What was he up to?

...

Zhang Xuan couldn't be bothered with the resentment that was piling up on him at the moment. His soul rushed all the back to the passageway at the quickest speed possible.

It was due to his fear of being noticed that he moved slowly previously, but given that it was likely that his physical danger was in danger now, he couldn't bother about that anymore. Soon, he arrived back at the flight of stairs.

'There are no puppets here...'

On the stone steps, his physical body was still meditating quietly by the corner, untouched by anyone.

'Was I wrong?'

He thought that the other puppets were rushing to aid their ally in the other underground chamber after learning that it had been breached by intruders, but that didn't seem to be the case. Zhang Xuan scratched his head in confusion.

"Clone!"

Hu!

Releasing his clone, Zhang Xuan placed his physical body into his storage ring.

While his physical body couldn't survive for too long in the storage ring, this should be the safer course of action for the moment.

Naturally, the ring was left with his clone.

Even though his clone had proven to be unreliable on many occasions, the might of the Nine Hearts Lotus wasn't for show.

Those Otherworldly Demon puppets might be formidable, but it would still be extremely difficult for them to kill his clone.

At the very least, his clone should be able to ensure the safety of his main body.

“Wait here for me, I’ll take a look to see what the puppets are up to. At the very least, I’ll be able to prepare for whatever they are up to...”

After instructing his clone, Zhang Xuan’s soul flew into the depths of the underground chamber once more.

Given that those puppets weren’t going to the other underground chamber, they must be up to something. Otherwise, they couldn’t possibly let Yu Fei-er and the others go.

Thus, Zhang Xuan felt that there was an imperative need for him to uncover what those fellows were up to!

After flying for a moment, Zhang Xuan saw the first wave of puppets once more. They were currently moving to the corner of the ‘city’.

‘What are they doing there?’

The corner of the city wasn’t lit up by Night Illumination Pearls, so it was pitch-black. Nevertheless, the puppets marched on tirelessly, disappearing into the darkness swiftly.

‘Eye of Insight!’

With the Eye of Insight activated, the pitch-black area suddenly became visible to his sight.

The Eye of Insight wasn’t just capable of seeing through facade, even darkness couldn’t conceal its vision.

Examining the surroundings closely, Zhang Xuan continued following the puppets forward.

Very soon, the puppets left the city and arrived before a stream.

‘It’s probably connected to the stream I saw above...’

Zhang Xuan’s eyes shot up.

To think that the stream above would actually flow through this area as well!

However, what were they planning to do here instead of attacking Yu Fei-er and the others?

Huala!

In the midst of Zhang Xuan's confusion, one of the puppets stepped into the river.

Geji! Geji!

As soon as the puppet stepped in, a series of gears clicked, and a round pedestal appeared in the middle of the stream.

As soon as the round pedestal surfaced, an overwhelming killing intent immediately filled the surroundings.

The blast of overpowering killing intent induced an immense pressure weighing down on Zhang Xuan's soul.

'To think that the killing intent even affects souls?'

Zhang Xuan quickly drove the Heaven's Path Soul Art, and only then did he finally recover from the impact. He couldn't help but narrow his eyes.

He was currently a soul, possessing no shape and no form. Who knew that the killing intent emanated from the surfaced round pedestal would be so powerful that it nearly caused his soul to plummet to the ground?

The scale was completely incomparable to the living Otherworldly Demon that Hong shi caught.

'What in the world is that?'

Gathering more lines of insights in his energy, Zhang Xuan focused his gaze on the round pedestal. Even without thinking, it was clear that there was something wrong with the current situation.

On the round pedestal, there was an object around the size of the watermelon. It contracted and expanded at a constant frequency, creating a loud rumbling noise reminiscent of thunder along with its movements.

‘A heart?’

Zhang Xuan’s body froze.

He was doubtful at first, but the more he looked at it, the more apparent it became to him that the object placed at the center pedestal was a crimson heart!

Why was there a heart here? And more importantly... how was it still beating?

Just as Zhang Xuan was perplexed by the situation before him, he saw the puppet which leaped into the water kneeling before the round pedestal.

Hu hu hu hu!

Along with the beating of the heart, spiritual energy was drawn from the stream by the heart and infused into the puppet. The worn-out puppet immediately became energized once more.

‘The puppets are... recharging their energy?’

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists in agitation.

676 Reduced to a Lump of Mea

Even a cultivator would eventually find himself drained and exhausted after fighting for a long period of time, needless to say, a puppet!

These puppets were installed with a Spirit Gathering Formation in their bodies, and they relied on absorbing the spiritual energy from the surroundings or from spirit stones to move. Thus, if they were to overexert themselves, it was possible for them to stop functioning due to lack of power.

This explained why the twenty or so puppets left shortly after attacking the barrier of light. It seemed that they had overexerted themselves by striking the barrier of light with their full might relentlessly, and thus needed to recharge themselves.

“This underground stream is actually a spirit vein, and it gathers the spiritual energy from the meandering mountain range that spans a thousand kilometers. There is indeed sufficient spiritual energy contained in the stream to replenish the energy in those puppets... but even so, it shouldn't be easy for the puppet to absorb the spiritual energy in the stream so easily and quickly! There's something very weird about the heart!”

Just as a cultivator couldn't possibly restore their zhenqi to their full capacity in an instant, a puppet also needed some time to recharge itself.

To recover completely within a few breaths was downright absurd.

Most probably, this ridiculous situation must have something to do with the heart.

In the first place, it was already bizarre that a heart overflowing with killing intent would actually be placed

within a stream of spiritual energy. Furthermore, there was something very sinister about this heart that seemed to send endless chills down Zhang Xuan's spine as he looked at it.

This eerie sight was triggering all of his alarms!

Gugugugu!

While Zhang Xuan was still examining the beating heart in bewilderment, another Otherworldly Demon puppet stepped forward. Along with the beating of the heart, it recovered its strength.

“It'll be disastrous if this goes on...”

Seeing the Otherworldly Demon puppets regaining their strength one by one, Zhang Xuan's heart beat in anxiety.

If he didn't do anything, it wouldn't be long before all of the puppets recovered and returned to attack Yu Fei-er and the others. Should that happen, the latter would definitely die here!

“I must bring Yu Fei-er and the others out of here before all of these puppets regain their strength!”

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists together grimly.

In truth, this could be considered as an opportunity as well. Most of the puppets were currently busy recharging here, and it would take some time before they would return. This was probably the only chance he was going to get to save them. Once the other puppets returned, there would be nothing more Zhang Xuan could do.

“But even if that is the case... I am still unable to defeat the two remaining puppets to save Yu Fei-er...”

While Zhang Xuan knew that he had to firmly grasp this opportunity, the might of the two remaining Otherworldly Demon puppets was simply beyond him. Not to mention, if a fight were to occur, it was likely that the disturbance in the spiritual energy in the air, as well as the shock wave from the trading of blows, would catch the attention of the other puppets as well. Chances were the puppets would encircle

them before they could get away from this underground chamber.

The main reason why Zhang Xuan was able to kill the previous Otherworldly Demon puppet in the stone chamber was due to assistance from Luo Qiqi's side, and the apt usage of a valuable artifact, the Crimson Blaze Cauldron. Given that neither Luo Qiqi nor that artifact were here... it was nigh impossible for Zhang Xuan to slay two Otherworldly Demon puppets!

In the end, his options were restricted due to his low cultivation realm.

“Right, I could do that...”

Just as Zhang Xuan was rubbing his glabella in frustration, an idea suddenly streaked across his mind.

Carefully analyzing and fixing the various aspects of his plan, his eyes slowly grew brighter and brighter. After confirming that it was feasible, his soul immediately flew off.

He didn't head off to the altar where Yu Fei-er and the others were waiting. Instead, he quickly returned to the passageway to return his clone to his storage ring before wrapping his soul energy around the ring and carrying it to a remote, narrow alley within the city.

Then, he summoned his clone and a humongous corpse out from his storage ring.

The humongous corpse consisted of two parts—a head and a body. It was the Otherworldly Demon which he had decapitated back in the stone chamber.

“Possession!”

Zhang Xuan took in a deep breath before his soul dived into the puppet's body.

Hu la!

Similar to the Soulless Metal Humanoid, these puppets were forged out of real bodies as well. Thus, it wasn't too difficult for his soul to enter the body.

Just that, due to the overwhelming killing intent infused within the body, only a person who cultivated the Heaven's Path Soul Art like Zhang Xuan would be able to enter such a body.

Any other soul oracle would have had their soul dissipated before they could even come into contact with it.

Geji!

As soon as Zhang Xuan's soul seeped into the body, the puppet on the ground twitched, and it began to struggle to its feet.

"It's indeed possible..."

Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Just as Zhang Xuan was considering how he should save Yu Fei-er and the others, he'd suddenly recalled the existence of this corpse in his storage ring.

Even though the puppet's head was lopped off, that wouldn't hinder its ability to house a soul. As long as Zhang Xuan could possess it, he should be able to move it. Perhaps, he might be able to fool the other Otherworldly Demon puppets through this and save Yu Fei-er and the others.

The possessed puppet bent down to grab his head and place it on his neck. Then, it began to shake its limbs to adapt to the new body before running off to the altar excitedly.

But barely after taking a few steps, 'peng!', the puppet crashed into a pillar, and its head rolled far into the distance.

The puppet immediately fumbled its way to its head, picked it up, and installed it on its neck once more.

Typically speaking, it would be impossible for anyone to tell that the puppet was currently possessed. However, due to the puppet's head having been severed before, it could fall off very easily, and that would be a dead giveaway.

"I'll have to support it then..."

If the puppet's head were to shake on top of its neck while moving around, Zhang Xuan would surely be exposed. Thus,

he could only helplessly raise his palm to support his head while making his way to the altar.

The place he was hiding at previously wasn't too far from the altar, so it didn't take him too long to arrive there.

“We're doomed...”

Yu Fei-er and the others were waiting expectantly for Zhang Xuan to arrive and save them, but who knew that an Otherworldly Demon puppet would appear instead. Their faces immediately sunk.

The barrier of light was already on the verge of shattering under the combined offense of the two puppets. With one more here, their fates were sealed.

Just that, there was something very peculiar about this puppet. Its head was tilting unnaturally to one side, and it seemed as though it would fall if not for a hand placed by its head to support it. It was an extremely eerie sight.

The unnaturally bent-head puppet soon arrived before the barrier of light, and it tapped on the shoulders of the two puppets who were still striking the barrier.

The two puppets ceased their attacks and turned to look at the two.

Roar!

The bent-head puppet pointed to his back, and tracing his finger, Yu Fei-er and the others saw a human figure sneaking toward them under the dim light granted by the Night Illumination Pearls.

“Zhang shi!”

After taking a close look at the other party's appearance, Yu Fei-er and the others began to panic.

‘What the heck is that foolish man trying to do!

‘If you want to save us, you should at least try learning how to hide your presence first!

‘To actually stand right before a Night Illumination Pearl like that, aren't you just waiting to be discovered?

‘More importantly, after being noticed by the puppet with the bent head, not only did you not flee immediately, you even continued to advance forward. Does hell really interest you so much that you are bent on charging right into it?’

‘You aren’t trying to save us, you are trying to court death!’

Roar!

Naturally, the other two puppets also noticed Zhang Xuan. Roaring furiously, one stepped forcefully against the ground and charged toward him.

Against that fearsome charge, Zhang Xuan’s face immediately paled in shock. He immediately tried to escape, but there was no way he could possibly outrun a Saint realm puppet. Thus, he was struck squarely in his head.

Peng!

His face caved in as if a donut, and his body went flying through numerous buildings.

“Zhang shi...”

“Zhang Xuan...”

Not expecting that their ‘savior’ would have his head crushed before he could even reach them, the bodies of Xing Yuan, Wu Zhen, and the others trembled, and they nearly fainted from shock.

It wasn’t too long ago that the other party proudly declared that he would save them, and yet, he was killed as soon as he made an appearance...

This was probably the most anticlimactic rescue operation of all time!

Yu Fei-er’s eyes turned red upon that sight, and with quivering lips, she bellowed anxiously, “Aren’t you... supposed to be formidable? I haven’t won against you in a bet yet, you can’t die like that...”

‘What the heck is this!’

‘Weren’t you quite formidable when you were bullying me?’

‘Why did you become so weak before these puppets? How could you allow your head to be smashed in just like that?’

‘Shouldn’t you have at least learned your lesson after accidentally reducing your body to a mere corpse while cultivating in the Cleansing Lake?’

The others also shook their heads in disappointment. They weren’t in the position to grieve over Zhang Xuan—after all, they were next.

On the other hand, the puppet who smashed Zhang Xuan’s head in turned around and returned to the barrier of light after eliminating the intruder.

However, before it could get far, the bent-head puppet pointed to its back once more.

Frowning, the puppet turned around, only to see the fellow from before standing before it in an upright position. While his face was caved in and his legs were shaking, he was standing firmly on the spot.

“Ah?”

“This...”

Xing Yuan, Wu Zhen, and the others who had just given up all hope widened their mouths in shock.

To be able to stand up after his head was caved in to such an extent... Are you serious?

The dumbfounded Yu Fei-er mumbled in a daze, “He... isn’t dead?”

Recalling something, through her quivering red lips, she muttered, “Did he... get possessed by some spirit again?”

A similar situation had occurred back at the Cleansing Lake. Back when their attention had been captured by something else, his lifeless body had secretly crept back into the lake. Could it be that history was repeating itself? After all, how could a person whose face was caved in like that possibly stand up once more?

Being possessed in itself was completely inconceivable already, and yet for it to happen twice to the same person within such a short period of time...

Just how many vengeful spirits have you offended?

Roar!

The ridiculous scene left even the emotionless puppet stunned for a moment. But after which, it immediately dashed forward and kicked Zhang Xuan.

Peng!

Under the might of the powerful kick, Zhang Xuan's ribcage broke, and his chest sunk inward. Once again, he crashed through many buildings, disappearing amidst a cloud of dust.

Confident that it had managed to slay Zhang Xuan this time around, the puppet nodded in satisfaction. However, right after turning around, it saw the puppet with the crooked head pointing behind it with a look of fright yet again.

Turning its head around anxiously, the puppet saw an upright silhouette with a sunk-in chest amidst the cloud of dust. Its hands were placed against its waist, as if nothing had happened at all.

“AHHHHHHH...”

Yu Fei-er, Xing Yuan, and the others were already completely stupefied by the sight before them. All of them slapped their cheeks tightly to confirm whether they were in a dream or not.

What the heck was going on?

His face was caved in, and his chest was sunk in, and yet he was still standing... What kind of sorcery was this!

Hu!

Not expecting the fellow to still be alive after two consecutive strikes, the puppet roared furiously and dashed forward, striking Zhang Xuan relentlessly with its fists and kicks.

After a short moment, Zhang Xuan was completely disfigured.

Half of his head was blasted off, his body was crushed and had become almost as thin as a slice of a paper, and his bones had been reduced to dust.

Only after that fellow was reduced to just a lump of meat did the puppet finally end its attacks. Satisfied, it turned around and walked back.

But yet once again, the puppet with the bent head pointed behind it.

Roaring furiously, it turned its head around and saw that figure which had been crushed into something without the slightest resemblance of a human standing up once more. His crushed arms were placed weakly against his waist, and his eyes were filled with mockery.

“The heck...”

“Is that really Zhang Shi?”

“How in the freaking world can he still be alive after all that?”

“I must be dreaming!”

Yu Fei-er, Xing Yuan, Wu Zhen, and Ye Qian were completely overwhelmed by this madness.

Considering how a part of his head had been blasted away and the tragic state his body was in, it should be physically impossible for Zhang Xuan to stand up at all. This was probably not as simple as a mere possession.

Not even a spirit could possibly make this lump of meat stand up once more!

677 Thank You, Zhang Xuan

“Sixth Princess, you are the most knowledgeable of us here. Do you know what is going on?”

Gulping down a mouthful of saliva, Xing Yuan asked.

“I-I...”

At this point, Yu Fei-er was on the verge of tears.

As a princess, she had access to many secret manuals exclusive to the royal family, and she was also exposed to many unique techniques in the world. But even so, she couldn't imagine a single technique in the world that could allow a person to stand up after being reduced to a lump of meat.

“What about you?”

Xing Yuan turned to Wu Zhen and asked.

Given how the latter specialized in mechanisms, he might be able to see the secret behind this peculiarity.

“I...”

Wu Zhen's lips quivered as his face twitched violently.

He specialized in mechanisms, not cryptozoology! How could he possibly know what was going on?

While the few of them were rendered completely insane by the turn of events, the two puppets were also frenzied by the scene before them.

To still be able to stand up after all of that, are you still a human?

Huhuhu!

The bent-head puppet seemed to be frightened by the sight before it. He immediately patted the shoulder of the second puppet by the barrier of light and pointed to that monstrous

fellow, gesturing it to head over there to support the first puppet.

The puppet hesitated for a moment before nodding in agreement. Following which, it immediately dashed for Zhang Xuan.

The overpowering killing intent of the two puppets overlapped with one another, thus exerting a formidable pressure on those before their presence.

However, as soon as the second puppet came heading for him, Zhang Xuan immediately turned around to flee.

Hu!

With a swift leap, he disappeared into the darkness.

Roar! Roar!

Not expecting the other party to still be able to flee so quickly despite being reduced to such a state, the two puppets were astonished. They immediately rushed forward to pursue him, and before long, they disappeared into the depths of the darkness as well.

On the other hand, staring at the escaping Zhang Xuan, Yu Fei-er and the others were dumbstruck.

Since you are able to flee, what the hell were you doing just now?

To leave only after you are reduced to such a state, what is going through your mind?

“Hurry up! Lift the barrier of light and leave!”

Just as the few of them were bewildered by the situation, Zhang Xuan voice sounded.

Stunned, they immediately looked in the direction where the voice came from. To their shock, it actually came from the bent-head puppet.

“Zhang shi?”

The group stared at the puppet before them with perfectly widened eyes.

“Yes, it’s me. I managed to lure the both of them away with a special art. Hurry up and leave with me. Otherwise, it’ll be too late once the other puppets return!”

The bent-head puppet urged anxiously.

“Are you... really Zhang shi?”

Even though the voice was definitely Zhang shi’s, the savage expression on the puppet made it hard to put the both of them together.

Not to mention, they had just seen him getting smashed into a lump of meat... how did he become a puppet in the blink of an eye?

Even the most proficient disguiser wouldn’t be that exaggerated!

“I really am him. You lost a bet to me, and you are currently still serving as my maid...”

There was no time for them to waste. Knowing that it was normal for the other party to suspect him given his current appearance, Zhang Xuan immediately tried to validate his credibility. He turned Xing Yuan and said, “Back at the Cleansing Lake, you came to look for me, asking me to admit my defeat...”

“Fine, I believe you...”

“You are Zhang Xuan!”

Yu Fei-er’s face reddened whereas black lines streaked Xing Yuan’s face.

There weren’t many people who knew of Yu Fei-er becoming a maid, and the matter regarding Xing Yuan asking Zhang Xuan to admit defeat on the bet was known only by the two of them. Thus, these served as sufficient evidence to prove that the puppet was indeed Zhang shi.

Hu!

After affirming the other party’s identity, Yu Fei-er raised her hand and grabbed onto something, and the barrier of light vanished.

“Let’s go!”

Knowing that there was a limit to how long his clone could distract the two puppets, Zhang Xuan immediately led the way while holding onto his head.

But after taking two steps, he realized that no one was following him. Thus, he turned around, only to see the four of them still seated on the ground with pale faces.

“What’s wrong?”

He asked with a frown.

“Our wounds are more severe than we thought... We aren’t able to move at all...”

Xing Yuan said awkwardly.

The other party had spent so much effort planning this operation to save them, and yet they were unable to run away due to their severe injuries. The entire group felt that they had let Zhang Xuan down.

“I don’t think we’ll be able to get away, so please bring Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s body back with you. Tell the academy that we have accomplished our mission, and that we didn’t let the academy down...”

Xing Yuan said with clenched jaws.

It was at least seven to eight kilometers to the passageway. Given their severe injuries, they would surely be caught before they could reach it.

Since it was impossible for them to get away, they would rather Zhang Xuan bring back the corpse. At least, this would bring some value to their deaths.

“What is the use bringing a corpse back?”

Not expecting that fellow to utter such words at such a timing, Zhang Xuan shook his head. Of course, this action caused his head to fall down yet again.

Hurriedly picking it up and implanting it on his neck, he turned to look at Wu Zhen and asked, “Do you have any wine?”

“Wine?”

Wu Zhen was taken aback for a moment before nodding. Flicking his wrist, he took out a gourd.

He enjoyed wine, so he often carried such wine gourds along with him.

Zhang Xuan caught the wine and kept it in his storage ring. Following which, he established a connection with his main body he was currently storing inside the storage ring.

His Heaven’s Path zhenqi was contained only within his main body, so he couldn’t infuse it in through just his soul.

If it was before, he would have to bring his main body out and have his soul enter it first before he would be able to infuse Heaven’s Path zhenqi into the wine. However, having achieved Mind of Void, his physical body was able to move even without a soul in it.

Gugugugu!

After infusing seven to eight surges of zhenqi into the wine gourd, Zhang Xuan took it out from the storage ring and passed it to Yu Fei-er.

“Drink a few sips.”

“Un!”

Even though she didn’t know what he was up to, she knew that this wasn’t the time for questions. Thus, she immediately uncorked the gourd and drank it without any hesitation.

As the rich wine went down her throat, she felt a warm flow surging through her body. In less than two breaths, the excruciating pain she was suffering from turned into a mere numbing sensation, and the gaping wounds from before had healed completely.

“This...”

Looking at her recovered body, Yu Fei-er was stunned.

Could this be the... Saint recovery medicine that Wu Zhen talked about?

It was actually so formidable?

She quickly passed the wine gourd for the other three to drink, and soon, they were all fully-recovered.

“Xing Yuan, keep Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s corpse. Let’s go!”

Seeing that everyone had recovered, Yu Fei-er quickly instructed before the group hurriedly followed behind Zhang Xuan.

Having recovered their strength, they moved at a swift pace. The only problem they met was that Zhang Xuan would have to support his head carefully so that it wouldn’t accidentally fall off his neck.

“We need to speed up...”

Left with no choice, Zhang Xuan decided to just grab his head in front of his chest and charge forward.

Even though his soul wasn’t perfectly compatible with the puppet, he was still able to bring out a significant degree of the puppet’s Saint realm strength. With just a single leap, he would be able to cover a long distance.

Yu Fei-er and the others had to push themselves to the limit just to be able to catch up.

In a short moment, the four of them had already covered three kilometers. The passageway was slowly getting closer and closer to them.

“Everyone, hurry up! We’ll be safe once we escape from the passageway...” Zhang Xuan urged.

The narrow entrance of the passageway would be perfect for Zhang Xuan to set up his 6-star formation and block the Otherworldly Demon puppets, thus allowing everyone to escape safely.

Roar!

Just as they were fleeing with all their might, they suddenly heard a furious roar in the air. It seemed like the puppets had finally noticed that they were missing.

Along with that roar, shadows suddenly flashed across their surroundings, and the puppets who were recharging at the stream earlier appeared before them, blocking their path of advance.

“Damn it...”

Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

He had been rushing all along in fear that these fellows would return after they were done replenishing their energy. Who knew that despite his efforts, he would still be dozens of breaths late.

“What do we do now?”

Not expecting that they would be surrounded by so many puppets after escaping this far, Yu Fei-er and the others turned ghastly pale.

They were only able to escape previously due to their numerous defensive artifacts hindering the attacks of the puppets. Now that they were all consumed, how could they escape from this encirclement?

Roar!

Zhang Xuan stepped forward to explain, but a puppet rushed forward to kick him instead.

Peng!

His head and body immediately separated, both crashing heavily onto the ground.

“These puppets... are actually able to discern friend from foe even among themselves?”

Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

Zhang Xuan was currently in the body of an Otherworldly Demon puppet. Even though his head could fall off anytime, his outer appearance was no different from the others.

Under normal circumstances, the other puppets shouldn’t be able to recognize Zhang Xuan, and he would be able to blend in as their peer. Who knew that he would be struck without

any hesitation... Without a doubt, the puppets were able to determine their enemy!

Weren't puppets a type of mechanism which didn't possess self-intelligence?

How could it differentiate between an enemy and an ally?

“Damn it!”

Pushing itself up from the ground, the headless puppet charged toward the one which attacked it.

A strong gust of wind whooshed, and immense might poured forth from his fist.

Peng!

The opposing puppet met the fist of the headless puppet with a fist of his own, and the headless puppet was immediately knocked flying once more.

Even though the puppet was strong, Zhang Xuan's current soul cultivation realm was only at Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle, thus preventing him from drawing upon the full strength of a Saint realm. Naturally, he wasn't a match for the other party.

Geji geji!

While Zhang Xuan was clashing with one of the Otherworldly Demon puppets, the others were slowly closing in on Yu Fei-er and the others.

It seemed as if they would charge forward to kill the latter at any moment now.

“If this continues, they will surely die...”

With his current form as a soul, it was still possible for Zhang Xuan to escape. However, if he were to do so, Yu Fei-er and the others would be killed the next moment.

What should he do?

Was he supposed to give up after going through all that effort?

“Forget it, I'll gamble everything on this then!”

Just as Zhang Xuan was at a complete loss, he suddenly recalled that large beating heart he saw previously, as well as

the respect the puppets showed it. An idea suddenly popped into his head.

“Since you all want to kill us, let’s go down together then! I’ll crush the heart right now...”

Bellowing furiously, the puppet which Zhang Xuan was controlling immediately leaped up and dashed straight for the stream.

Roar?

Roar! Roar! Roar!

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s bellow and his direction of movement, the puppets were stunned for a brief instant before a streak of insanity infected every last one of them. Their attention were immediately torn away from Yu Fei-er and the others, and they hurriedly pursued Zhang Xuan.

“You all should leave right now, there’s no need to worry about me...”

Seeing those fellows pursue him, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He turned to Yu Fei-er and the others and howled.

“Zhang shi...”

“Zhang Xuan...”

Not expecting Zhang shi to draw away all of the puppets singlehandedly just so that they could get away, Yu Fei-er, Xing Yuan, and the others felt their hearts tightened, and their eyes reddened in agitation.

If they were harboring some grudges or even envy toward him previously, all that was left now was gratitude!

In order to save them, the other party willingly put himself in a position of grave danger...

It was no wonder why Zhang shi was so deeply respected by his students and deeply trusted by the group from Hongfeng Empire...

His character was indeed worthy of respect.

Zhang shi, thank you!

“We mustn’t waste this opportunity Zhang shi created by putting his life on the line. Let’s go!”

Gritting his teeth, Xing Yuan and the others quickly fled to the passageway.

678 Zhang Xuan Is Dead Again?

For them, Zhang shi willingly lured away the puppets away into the depths of the underground chamber, using himself as bait. If they were to remain here and allow themselves to be killed, they would truly be letting everyone down.

With eyes filled with indescribable, intense emotions, they exerted strength beyond their limits, and in just a few dozen breaths, they arrived at the passageway once more.

Looking into the distance, the underground city seemed to have been blanketed by a cloak of darkness. The dim light from the Night Illumination Pearls could no longer be clearly seen from their current location.

Roar! Roar! Roar!

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Vaguely, the shouts of the Otherworldly Demon puppets and the sound of objects shattering could be heard.

Knowing that the passageway wasn't safe either—just a single puppet here would be able to clear away all of them—Xing Yuan said, “This place isn't safe, let's go up first. Zhang shi... should have an escape plan in mind.”

“Un.”

Knowing that they would be of no help even if they were to wait here, the crowd headed up, and before long, they were standing at the entrance of the passageway.

Luo Qiqi, who was waiting on top, immediately rushed up to welcome the group excitedly upon seeing them.

“You've all finally returned! Are you all fine?”

“We're fine!”

There wasn't the slightest bit of relief or joy one should have after escaping from danger on Yu Fei-er and the others faces. Instead, they kept subconsciously sending worried gazes into the passageway.

“What’s wrong?” Noticing their peculiarity, Luo Qiqi frowned. Then, she suddenly realized something, and her body froze. “Where is teacher?”

“He...”

Xing Yuan clenched his fists tightly in agitation, and with a lump in his throat, he said hoarsely, “In order to save us, he used himself as bait to lure all of the Otherworldly Demon puppets away...”

“Bait?”

Luo Qiqi’s face immediately drained of all color. “How many puppets are there? If there is only one or two, teacher... should still be able to escape....”

Her teacher possessed incredible means. If it was only one or two puppets, he shouldn't be in too much danger.

With an ashen face, Xing Yuan said, “There are... more than twenty of them in there.”

“More than twenty?”

Luo Qiqi felt as if her heart had been plunged into an ice chamber.

She trusted her teacher’s capability, but it was still impossible for him to stand against so many puppets singlehandedly!

It took the both of them a great deal of effort to deal with a single puppet from the previous stone chamber. In the process of doing so, the two of them nearly died as well. To face more than twenty simultaneously... this was no different from suicide!

“No! I must go and save teacher...”

Gritting her teeth in determination, Luo Qiqi rushed into the passageway. However, before she could get far, Yu Fei-er stopped her.

“Qiqi, calm down! Zhang shi had put himself into such a predicament just to save us. If you were to go in now, won't all his effort have been for nothing?”

Even though Yu Fei-er was panicking inside as well, she understood Zhang shi's intentions, and that was why she was holding herself back.

They were simply too weak at the moment. Even if they were to rush in, they would be of no help at all.

“I...”

Luo Qiqi trembled in agitation, and beady teardrops slowly flowed down her white cheeks.

Even back at the stone room, in order to let her get away first, her teacher chose to fight against the puppet singlehandedly, despite the risk of death!

And now, to save Yu Fei-er and the others, despite knowing that it was a lair of Otherworldly Demon puppets below, he still rushed in without any hesitation!

And now, he even allowed himself to serve as bait so that the others could get away...

‘Teacher, how can we ever repay this debt to you?’

“Luo Qiqi, we understand your feelings, but do you think that you are the only one who wants to rush in and save him? But if we were to do so, we would only be letting down the expectations and feelings Zhang shi has entrusted to us!”

Xing Yuan stepped forward and said, “There's only one thing we can do now, that is to wait here patiently for his return! Let's pray that... he can create a miracle once more!”

As a talented student of the Master Teacher Academy, he was able to see the crux of the matter easily.

As 5-star master teachers, they were by no means weak. But against those puppets, their strength would be no different to throwing an egg against a rock. With their current cultivation realms, there was only one outcome that would arise from rushing in—death!

“Indeed. Zhang shi will have a higher chance of survival alone. If we rush in, not only will we not be of any help, we might even become a burden to him...” Ye Qian added.

A trail of tears flowed down Luo Qiqi’s cheeks as she replied with quivering lips, “I understand...”

She did understand all of this in the depths of her heart.

After all the time she had spent with her teacher, she was well-aware of what of person her teacher was!

Her teacher was a person who would choose his morals over his life!

It was exactly this quality that made him respected and admired by so many people!

She knew deep down that the others were right. If she were to barge in now, she would only become a burden to the other party.

“The best we can do for Zhang shi now is to wait here...” Seeing that Luo Qiqi had finally given up the thought, Xing Yuan nodded. But at that moment, his body suddenly shook.

Hong long long!

Cracks started appearing on the bridge, and the river beneath abruptly raged.

“What is happening?”

The group was taken aback.

Why would there be such an intense tremor all of the sudden?

Huala!

Just as they were perplexed, fragments of rock suddenly began falling from the ceiling. The bridge and the passageway leading down into the underground chambers collapsed instantaneously.

“This is bad, the entire underground chamber is going to collapse...”

Xing Yuan narrowed his eyes as he yelled, “Quick, go out!”

If the underground chamber were to collapse on them, they would be buried alive. No one would be able to save them. Thus, without any hesitation, they immediately dashed for the passageway out of the underground chamber.

Moving at their top speed, they were able to return to the mountain valley within seven to eight breaths. As soon as they were out, they suddenly felt another huge tremor, and a huge part of the valley's ground suddenly caved in, forming a large depression.

It was as if everything that had happened was a dream. The underground chamber had disappeared entirely without a trace.

“Teacher...”

Luo Qiqi's legs finally caved in, and she fell weakly to the ground.

If there had still been a chance that her teacher would be able to get out previously... how could there still be any hope now?

Yu Fei-er's face also paled, and she sat down feebly beside her close friend.

She had been competing with Zhang Xuan all along, wanting to beat him in a bet. But never had she wanted him to die!

Not to mention, all of this only happened because the other party was trying to save them.

Recalling bits and pieces about that fellow, she suddenly felt that she was very immature. In the end, all the prejudice she had against the other party was due to her indignation at being ignored.

In truth, after witnessing the other party's formidable strength and vast knowledge, even the haughty her couldn't help but admire him as well.

After a short moment of silence, Ye Qian clenched his fists tightly and declared, “I'll return to the royal palace and get my father to send troops over here... Even if we have to overturn the entire area, we must save Zhang Shi...”

After hearing those words, Yu Fei-er also stood up resolutely, prepared to leave with Ye Qian.

“That’s right! I’ll accompany you. If Ye Wentian doesn’t dispatch any troops, I’ll report this matter to my father!”

At this moment, her mind was only filled with a single thought... He mustn’t die!

“The both of you can’t go!”

Just as the two were about to leave, Xing Yuan dashed forward to blocked them.

“What are you doing?”

Narrowing her eyes, an aura of hostility began rising from Yu Fei-er.

The full might of a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm cultivator burst forth instantaneously, carrying fearsome power that caused even the air to moan in fear.

The reason she lost to Zhang Xuan previously was due to the latter’s attacks being aimed at her vitals, thus preventing her from utilizing her full strength. But against Xing Yuan, she wouldn’t face such a problem.

“I don’t intend to stop you, but... have you thought the matter through?”

Not expecting the Sixth Princess to actually intend to fight him, Xing Yuan’s face turned ghastly white. Gritting his teeth, he said, “This underground chamber involves both Wu Yangzi and the Otherworldly Demons. Do you know what consequences will arise if this news were to spread?”

“Screw the consequences! Get out of my way!” Yu Fei-er roared.

“Xing Yuan is right.”

At this moment, a soft but affirmative voice sounded. Luo Qiqi stood up and walked over, her body still trembling slightly. “If even a single one of the Otherworldly Demon puppets in the underground chamber were to be unearthed, it could potentially eradicate the entire Huanyu Empire... Many lives would be lost... I believe that this isn’t what teacher would hope to see either!”

“I...” Yu Fei-er tightened her fists in frustration.

“Teacher is a compassionate person. Since he is willing to give up his life for you all, how could he possibly bear to see millions of lives being lost like that?” Luo Qiqi said with reddened eyes.

A Saint realm puppet was already a formidable existence, and an army of twenty of them was nothing short of destructive!

No Tier-2 Empire could possibly stand against such a force. Even if Emperor Ye Wentian were to send every last soldier in Huanyu Empire over, they would still be unable to save her teacher. Only a real Saint could do so.

If they were to let the puppets loose while attempting to save her teacher, he would never forgive them, not even in death.

This was because...

He was simply such a noble person.

“Then... what should we do?” Yu Fei-er asked anxiously.

“What we must do now is to quickly return to the Master Teacher Academy and report this matter to the elders so that they will come here to handle the matter!” Luo Qiqi said.

Xing Yuan nodded in agreement.

“That’s right! If we wish to save Zhang shi, it’ll be best for us to quickly return to the academy and report this matter to the superiors and have them send men here. This is the best we can do at the moment.”

Yu Fei-er also nodded before issuing some instructions.

“Alright then. Xing Yuan, since Grandmaster Wu Yangzi’s corpse is in your storage ring, you and Ye Qian shall return to the academy right now. On the other hand, Luo Qiqi and I will wait here... for him to come out.”

“This...”

Xing Yuan was stunned. He didn’t think that Yu Fei-er would insist on remaining here.

“Fei-er is right, we’ll wait for him here. The both of you should hurry on. This matter is of grave importance, so you must report it to the elders face-to-face. Otherwise, there is no way the academy will dispatch Saint realm experts!”

Luo Qiqi nodded.

Even though she did have a Communication Token that allowed her to communicate with the academy, every single Saint realm expert was a valuable asset to the academy. Without sufficient evidence to back their story up, it was impossible for a Saint to be dispatched here. To do so, they would have to present Wu Yangzi’s corpse in person.

“Alright!”

Understanding the rationale behind it, Xing Yuan hesitated for a moment before nodding. “But if we take the aerial spirit beast away, how do you intend to return?”

The four of them came on a Transcendent Mortal 6-dan aerial spirit beast. If the both of them were to take it to the Master Teacher Academy, how would the other two leave the Verdant Mountain?

“There’s no need to worry about us. If it really comes to it, we’ll just head to the nearby Huanyu Beast Hall. With our identities as master teachers, it’ll surely be easy for us to loan an aerial spirit beast!”

Luo Qiqi shook her hand before turning her gaze back to the depression. Even at this moment, she was still praying for the dirt to overturn, and for her young teacher to climb out from the depression.

If that were to happen, no matter how dirty the other party was, she would definitely rush forward to hug him without any hesitation...

“Alright then. We’ll get going!”

Knowing that there was no time to waste, Xing Yuan immediately beckoned to the sky, and a loud screech sounded. Following which, an aerial spirit beast descended to the ground.

“Let’s go!”

Along with Ye Qian, he leaped onto the back of the spirit beast. The spirit beast took off, and before long, they had already disappeared amidst clouds.

After their departure, Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er stared at the depression before them, unblinking, waiting intently for Zhang Xuan to return.

With his formidable means... he couldn’t possibly be dead!

Even though they kept repeating this within their minds, they had no confidence whatsoever. With the ticking of time, their hope was slowly diminishing.

In the blink of an eye, three days had passed, but there wasn’t the slightest movement at all.

The flame of hope they had held dearly onto had already withered into despair.

Could it be that... Zhang shi had really died this time?

Even if he was really dead, if he could be possessed just once more and appear before them, it would still be a huge consolation to them...

679 My Name Is Vicious

Rewinding time back to when Zhang Xuan parted with Xing Yuan.

In the underground chamber, a bizarre Otherworldly Demon puppet holding its head in its hand ran frenziedly as more than twenty Otherworldly Demon puppets pursued it relentlessly. They were howling furiously, threatening to rip the other party to shreds should they lay their hands on it.

Seeing how the idea he'd thought of on a whim had sent all of these puppets into such a frenzy, Zhang Xuan's curiosity intensified.

In truth, this puppet body was disposable to him. As souls were intangible, it would be difficult for these puppets to stop him if he were to make a serious attempt at escaping. Not to mention, he had a golden page in the Library of Heaven's Path as well. Even if he were to be cornered, he still had a trump card up his sleeves, so there was nothing for him to fear.

This was also the reason why he had the others flee first while he drew the puppets away.

He thought that it would be great if he could draw some of the puppets away through his taunting. Who knew that he would actually successfully draw the aggression from all of the puppets, making them chase him rabidly as if he had murdered their parents?

To actually make these unintelligent puppets get so agitated, what in the world was that heart?

'No matter what, as long as I touch it, I should know the answer...'

The only way to let everyone escape successfully was for him to continue drawing the attention of the puppets. Thus, without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan continued dashing forward with his head in his hand. Seven breaths later, he was standing before the stream.

The small stone pedestal and the heart were still there.

‘Let’s see what it is!’

With the puppets right behind his tail, there was no room for other thoughts in Zhang Xuan’s mind. He immediately leaped forward and stepped into the stream.

Roar! Roar! Roar!

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan leap into the stream, all of the puppets were worried, but none of them dared rush forward. They glared at him angrily, seemingly wanting to grind him to dust.

“This...”

Seeing that the puppets didn’t even rush over as he had expected, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

In truth, back when he saw the puppets stepping into the stream one by one to accept a transfusion of energy from the heart, he was a little perplexed by the sight. And now, it seemed like his conjecture was right.

There was some kind of rule binding the puppets that only allowed one of them to step into the stream at any given time.

“Let’s see what this heart is...”

Zhang Xuan began walking to the stone pedestal that the heart was placed on.

Huala!

As soon his gaze fell upon the heart, he immediately felt an overwhelming killing intent piercing his mind just like a dagger.

Knowing that this would happen, Zhang Xuan immediately activated his Heaven’s Path Soul Art and drove his soul energy.

In an instant, that sharp pain weakened significantly, but even so, Zhang Xuan still felt as if his head was splitting apart.

Zhang Xuan stopped in his tracks.

‘It’s hard for me to stand against the killing intent without Heaven’s Path zhenqi...’

The killing intent emanated from the heart was far stronger than the Otherworldly Demon which Hong shi took out back at the Master Teacher Tournament. Even though his soul had been tempered by the Heaven’s Path Soul Art, it was still difficult for him to withstand that overwhelming killing intent without the protection of his Heaven’s Path zhenqi. Even standing at this point was sufficiently difficult for him. If he were to proceed forward any further, it was highly possible that his mind would be corroded by the killing intent, thus suffering immense damage.

Zhang Xuan turned around to take a look at the other puppets behind him. While they were infuriated by his actions, they dared not get too close. In fact, they didn’t dare to launch any attack at all. For the time being, there was no need for him to worry about his safety.

Huala!

He took out the body which he had placed inside his storage ring previously.

Then, he withdrew his soul from the puppet and returned back into his main body.

After entering his main body, he finally felt more comfortable, and he heaved a long sigh of relief.

Even though the Otherworldly Demon puppet’s body was much stronger than his current body, he wasn’t able to control it adeptly, and there was a strong feeling of incongruity when he was moving it.

‘Heaven’s Path zhenqi!’

As his soul fused perfectly with his physical body, he immediately drove his zhenqi. In an instant, the killing intent which had still been assaulting him a moment ago was immediately warded off entirely, as if it didn’t exist at all.

Heaven’s Path zhenqi seemed to possess the ability to curb the mysterious aura that Otherworldly Demons emanated; he had verified this back then during the Master Teacher Tournament.

Roar!

Seeing a human appear in the stream all of the sudden, the puppets' anger crescendoed. They bellowed angrily at him, but in fear of something, they dared not step forward.

As long as the puppets didn't dare to step into the stream, there was nothing for Zhang Xuan to worry about. Thus, he continued advancing to the heart slowly.

In order to trigger the Library of Heaven's Path, he would have to come into contact with it.

With a few steps, he was already standing before the stone pedestal. His hand slowly reached forward to touch the heart.

“HAHAHAHAHA!”

Upon contact, Zhang Xuan barely had the time to mutter 'flaws' when a deranged laughter suddenly echoed in the surroundings. Following which, a huge shadow suddenly appeared before his eyes.

“This body... Great! Great! Even the heavens are on my side!” That massive shadow before Zhang Xuan roared in delight. The heart also began to beat faster and faster, as if it had encountered some precious, nourishing medicinal herb.

“With this body, I can finally revive myself after many millenniums of hibernation!”

The massive figure was shaking with agitation. With a loud bellow, its eyes suddenly opened, and a sharp glint flashed in its eyes. “Kong shi, it's too bad you failed to kill me entirely! When I return, I'll crush your heritage and reduce your Master Teacher Pavilion to ruins...”

While roaring furiously, that massive figure stretched its hand forward to grab Zhang Xuan up.

That heart on the pedestal also suddenly rose up and flew to the left side of his chest. With immense force, it rammed itself against him, seemingly trying to penetrate his body to replace his heart.

If it were to succeed, Zhang Xuan's consciousness would be consumed, and he would lose his sense of identity.

‘What?!’

Zhang Xuan’s expression immediately froze.

Before that massive figure, he felt like an ant standing before a mountain. Helplessness clutched his heart.

‘It’s too powerful...’

The strongest person he had encountered in his journey was Pavilion Master Mo from Hongyuan Empire. But somehow, Zhang Xuan’s instincts told him that even a person as strong as Pavilion Master Mo would be no different from a worm before this fearsome heart.

The sensation he was feeling at this moment was similar to back when he first met Kong shi. His mind and body were no longer under his own control, and his life and death were held in the hands of the other party.

Zhang Xuan panicked.

‘Am I going to be possessed by this fellow?’

He was only interested in seeing what the heart was. Never had he dreamed that the heart would actually be alive, and he would even be possessed at that!

If the other party were to succeed in its possession, Zhang Xuan’s consciousness would be wiped clean. By then, he would be no different from a puppet.

‘Heaven’s Path zhenqi!’

Zhang Xuan immediately willed for his body to drive his Heaven’s Path zhenqi, but he realized that the mental connection between his mind and body had been snapped, preventing him from making any movements.

He felt as if he was trapped in a dream. He could perceive what was going on around him, but no matter how much he struggled, his body just wouldn’t move at all.

“Don’t even bother struggling!”

The massive figure before the heart seemed to have noticed what Zhang Xuan was trying to do, and it sneered coldly, “Even Kong shi had suffered a great deal before my prowess.

You might be a Celestial Master Teacher, but you're still too weak to stand against me! I suggest you obediently allow me to take over your body. In your body, I'll dominate the world and make the entire world tremor beneath my might!"

Zhang Xuan couldn't help but ask, "Even Kong shi has suffered before your prowess? Who are you?"

Kong shi was the most powerful figure in the world several dozen millenniums ago. He singlehandedly created the Master Teacher Pavilion to fend off the Otherworldly Demons and expel them from the Master Teacher Continent. His contribution to humanity was so great that none could compare to him, and his cultivation was so high that he had no peers.

And yet, this fellow actually said he was able to injure Kong shi? Who in the world was he?

"It has been too long for me to remember my name."

The heartbeat and an ancient aura slowly exuded from the massive figure. "But back then, everyone seemed to address me as 'Vicious'!"

"Vicious?"

"That's right! Are you afraid now?" Vicious asked.

"I never heard of you before," Zhang Xuan replied.

"..." The heart.

Most of the details regarding the ancient history with the Otherworldly Demons were stored in the higher tier Master Teacher Pavilions. As a 4-star master teacher, Zhang Xuan wasn't qualified to browse through those documents.

And thus, he had truly never heard of what 'Vicious' or 'Victim', whatever the other party was called.

"Humph, it matters not. Today, you shall witness my greatness!" Not expecting for a Celestial Master Teacher to not recognize him, the heart began beating intensely in anger, and with a loud roar, the huge hands of the shadowy figure grabbed Zhang Xuan's neck.

Ji ya!

The crushing pressure on Zhang Xuan's neck made him gasp desperately for air, and his sight began to darken.

In the other party's hands, he was no different from an infant. He was unable to retaliate at all.

Under this desperate situation, Zhang Xuan forcefully uttered, "You intend to... possess... me?"

"Indeed. A Celestial Master Teacher is a person whose body has been recognized by even the heavens themselves. Even though I am a member of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, I am still able to possess their body without incurring any side effects. In fact, I am even able to disguise as you humans without anyone noticing anything..."

The heart harrumphed.

"You are able to... tell that I am... a Celestial... Master Teacher?" Zhang Xuan stuttered with difficulty.

So far, there had been not a single master teacher who had been able to discern that he was a Celestial Master Teacher. Thus, he didn't expect this heart would be able to recognize this identity of his.

Could this heart really be an incredible expert on par with Kong shi?

To be able to stand against Kong shi... how powerful must one be?

And not to mention, if the other party had lived in the same era as Kong shi, how could he still be alive now?

The heart harrumphed coldly.

"That fellow Kong shi is one as well. Having fought with him my entire life, how could I possibly not recognize a Celestial Master Teacher?"

Back in that ancient era, he was Kong shi's greatest nemesis, and he had fought with the latter his entire life. Naturally, this had allowed him to grow accustomed to the various abilities and distinctive traits of a Celestial Master Teacher.

“Since you are from... the same generation... as Kong shi... I must be... nothing more than an ant... before you. Why don't you... let me down first... I won't be able to... retaliate against you... anyway...” Zhang Xuan said anxiously.

“Do you think that your tricks will work on me?” the heart sneered.

“Given how powerful... you are... I won't be... able to do... anything, even... if I wanted to!”

Due to the immense pressure crushing down on his throat, Zhang Xuan was finding it harder and harder to speak. “I am about to be... possessed by you soon. Before my death... I wish to know some things... so that I can... rest in peace!”

“Humph, there's no use playing such tricks before me!” the heart replied.

“Why? You don't... believe me? You spoke as if... you were a... formidable figure... and yet you are worried... about someone... as weak as me?” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Audacious! When I was roaming the world, even Kong shi was fearful of me. Even 9-star master teachers would be crushed easily under my hands. Why would I fear someone as weak as you?”

Hearing Zhang Xuan doubt his strength, the heart flew into a rage.

“If that's the case... why don't you... let me go? Anyway... someone like me... can't possibly hurt you...” Zhang Xuan continued.

The heart pondered for a moment, and seemingly agreeing with Zhang Xuan's words, he finally let go of his grasp.

Even though Vicious had been one of the strongest existences in the world in the past, his fight with Kong shi had left him severely injured. Even the many millennia of hibernation were insufficient for him to recover fully. With his current strength, possessing a Celestial Master Teacher would be no easy feat. If he could convince the other party to willingly give up his body, he could be spared a lot of unnecessary trouble.

Feeling the strength restraining him disappearing, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

“Ask whatever you want to, I’ll grant your dying wish at the very least!” the heart said.

“Alright...”

Zhang Xuan nodded. Feeling the connection between his mind and his body returning, he suddenly smiled. “I would like to ask if you recognize this object.”

After which, a golden book suddenly appeared before him.

“This? What is this?”

The heart was taken aback. While he was still pondering over this bizarre question, that book suddenly crushed down on him.

Following which, a frenzied howling reverberated across the entire underground chamber.

“Shit! What the hell! Who in the world are you?!”

680 Please Trust Me!

Zhang Xuan intention was to examine what the heart was, but right after coming into contact with it, his body immediately came under the control of the other party. Left with no choice, he could only try to convince the other party to let go of him.

It was a desperate attempt, but who knew that it would really work?

As soon as he was released, he rushed right into the Library of Heaven's Path to check the book that was just compiled on the heart, and after taking a look, he immediately realized what was going on.

Even though Vicious had described himself to be a powerful figure, he was nothing more than a fragment of his previous self. He had barely awoken from his long hibernation not too long ago, and he was still in a severely weakened state. Even if he could possess Zhang Xuan, he would have to pay a heavy price for it.

However, if Zhang Xuan were to relinquish control over his body, Vicious would be spared a lot of trouble.

In any case, this was the only opportunity Zhang Xuan was going to get to deal with Vicious. He immediately whipped out the Book of Heaven's Path and activated the golden page.

This was the strongest weapon he currently had in his arsenal. Even if Vicious had really come from the same era as Kong shi, it was impossible for him to withstand the wrath of heaven!

As expected, with the materialization of the book, the energy from the heart that was wrapped around Zhang Xuan to prevent him from escaping vanished, and he regained control over his body.

“Who am I? I am your grandfather!” Zhang Xuan roared furiously as the book smashed down on the heart.

However, before the book could crush the heart, the pedestal beneath the heart shattered instead.

Hong long!

With the destruction of the pedestal, the formation sustaining the entire underground chamber began collapsing. Spiritual energy from the stream began diffusing into the surroundings, and the underground chamber started to shake violently.

“This is bad, I forgot that this is the core of the formation...”

Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

He was too intent on dealing with Vicious and freeing himself from danger that he forgot that he was standing before the core of the formation sustaining the underground chamber.

This underground chamber was relying on a huge formation to regulate the spiritual energy and reinforce the structures here, and the center of the formation just happened to be the location where the heart was placed—the pedestal.

With the collapse of the pedestal, the reinforcement from the formation to prevent the underground chamber from collapsing vanished, and the ceiling began caving in on them.

From his current location, it would take at least two to three minutes for him to escape from the underground chamber.

Given the rate at which the underground chamber was collapsing at, it was impossible for him to escape. He would be buried alive!

But at this moment, the anxious yelling of the heart crushed under the golden book sounded, “Don’t kill me! I can bring you to safety...”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan stared at the heart hesitantly for a moment before replying, “Fine, I’ll trust you this once!”

Vicious was by no means a trustworthy person, but the dire situation Zhang Xuan was in didn’t grant him the luxury of choice. The underground chamber was going to collapse on him at any moment now, and it was already too late for him to escape. His only hope lay with Vicious.

Given the millenniums that the other party had lived for, he might be aware of certain secrets hidden in the underground chamber. Perhaps, the other party might just know of something that could save him.

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan was about to withdraw the book when a thought suddenly struck him.

‘I might be unable to kill him now, but I wonder if it’s possible for me to seal him with the golden page...’

Once Zhang Xuan withdraws the golden page, it would vanish. Without this weapon to keep Vicious in check, there was no saying that the latter might just renege on his promise.

Since the golden page could assimilate the content of the books in the Library of Heaven’s Path for his own, raise his Soul Depth, and slay enemies, then perhaps... it might be able to turn into something that could seal this heart too?

If he could seal Vicious into the golden page somehow, he would not need to worry about the other party’s retaliation.

Hu la!

As soon as the thought emerged in his mind, the book suddenly opened up, and a brilliant pillar of light rose from the book.

Wham!

In an instant, the book clamped down on the heart, and the pillar of light vanished as well. It floated in the air for a few seconds before abruptly falling to the ground.

“Hmm?”

Rushing forward to grab the book, Zhang Xuan opened it up and saw a heart beating ceaselessly inside. Realizing that it was trapped within the book, it struggled with all its might, but it wasn’t able to escape from the confine of the page.

It was a mystical sight to see a beating heart within a book.

“Let me go!” the heart roared savagely.

Delighted to see that the Book of Heaven’s Path possessed the ability to seal as well, Zhang Xuan chuckled and said, “Bring

me to a safe location first!”

“I am Vicious, a person whom even Kong shi fears. How dare an impertinent ant like you treat me like that...”

The heart bellowed ferociously, but before he could finish his words, he was suddenly flicked by a finger.

Peng!

As if struck by a bolt of lightning, the heart was sent tumbling into the depths of the page.

“Your name is Vicious, isn’t it? Why don’t you give me a bright smile? Let me see how vicious you can get!” Zhang Xuan smirked.

“...” The heart twitched violently, as tears of blood threatened to flow from its atriums.

To think that a day would come which he would find himself in such a position... Back then, he was the infamous Vicious who domineered the world. Even though he was still in a weakened state, having yet to recover his strength after his demise back then, the strength that he wielded was still more than sufficient for him to toy with Saint realm experts easily...

And yet, here he was, sealed by a twenty-year-old brat in a book, flicked around as if he was a mere toy...

To hell with this!

Where did my dignity as the Immortal’s Envoy go?

Even though he had no idea what kind of artifact he was trapped in, the imposing authority of heaven harnessed by the artifact induced a deep and instinctive fear within him, rendering him helpless before it.

Honestly speaking, in face of such overwhelming power, he knew that it was a blessing that he was still alive at this point.

“Why? You aren’t going to smile?”

Just as he was bubbling with rage, he saw the other party bending his forefinger, ready to send another flick at him...

The heart immediately cowered in fear.

“I’ll smile, I’ll smile...”

The heart formed a human face and smiled.

What choice did he have but to submit? He was already sealed in this book, and his fate was firmly held in the other party’s hands. He might have been a formidable figure in the past, but that was all history. It couldn’t possibly help him now.

As bright as the smile on his face was, his heart was bleeding profusely.

Back then, I stood toe-to-toe with Kong shi and crushed many 9-star master teachers.

And yet, here I am, forced to smile under the commands of a mere brat...’

“This is more like it. Now, lead me to somewhere safe!”

Having affirmed that the other party was under his control, Zhang Xuan heaved a long sigh of relief. However, this wasn’t the time for him to rest yet. At this point, the ground was shaking more vehemently than ever, and the ceiling was still moments from caving in on them.

“Yes!” Upon seeing Zhang Xuan withdraw his finger, the heart heaved a sigh of relief before turning to the Otherworldly Demons and yelled, “Hurry up and lead the way!”

Roar!

Upon receiving those orders, the Otherworldly Demon puppets standing by the edge of the stream immediately rushed forward.

Grabbing the book with Vicious in it in his hand, Zhang Xuan followed closely behind those puppets. At the same time, he also established communication with his clone and urged him over.

Not too long after, his clone came rushing over, and Zhang Xuan hid him in his storage ring.

Forged using the Nine Hearts Lotus, his clone could be said to be nearing the point of being indestructible. Even the

combined might of two Saint realm puppets couldn't threaten its existence.

Just that, due to the severe injuries it had incurred, it would require a long rest to recuperate from its wounds.

With the heart held hostage in Zhang Xuan's hands, those puppets didn't dare to show the slightest disrespect to Zhang Xuan. In fact, two of the puppets even stepped forward to carry Zhang Xuan.

When Saint realm puppets sprinted as fast as they could, the speed was truly nothing to scoff at. In less than two breaths, they were already standing in a vast room.

At this point, the underground chamber finally gave into the massive pressure and caved in.

With its collapse, the room was abruptly plunged into darkness.

Thus, Zhang Xuan whipped out a Night Illumination Pearl to light up the surroundings.

Following which, he opened the book, and the heart immediately began explaining, "This is a sanctuary we built to escape from the humans were they to enter this underground chamber. It is specially reinforced such that it will remain standing even if the underground chamber collapses... Just that, there's no exit from here..."

Back then, after the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe lost the war, their army was expelled from the Master Teacher Continent while the remnants were hunted down. As one of the top leaders of the Otherworldly Demons, Vicious had prepared a sanctuary in advance for such a situation.

Even if humans were to find his hiding location, he would be able to kill them all by collapsing the underground chamber while he hid in this sanctuary.

However, to prevent anyone from finding this underground chamber, there was only one entrance and exit. While they were still safe for now, it was hard to say whether they would be able to get out of here or not.

“There’s no exit?”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

If there was no exit here, wouldn’t it be a matter of time before he suffocated to death?

“That’s right...” the heart replied.

“Is that the case... Since I can’t get out, I might as well absorb you to raise my cultivation!”

Zhang Xuan raised his palm and pressed it down against the page.

The Book of Heaven’s Path had sealed Vicious’ abilities, thus rendering him completely helpless before Zhang Xuan.

“Wait a moment, wait a moment...”

The heart was on the verge of tears.

Back then, there was no one who didn’t fear him, not even the most ferocious demon in hell nor Kong shi. And yet, this fellow actually threatened to beat him up and absorb him. The sudden reversal in his position left him so frustrated that he found himself losing his mind.

But throwing a tantrum would be useless now. Judging from the other party’s attitude, he might really just end up being absorbed by the other party!

What the hell was this...

It wasn’t easy for him to wake up from his hibernation, and he thought that he could finally slowly recover his strength and rule the world. And yet, before he could even leave the underground chamber, he just had to meet with this kind of pervert possessing such a monstrous artifact...

Even the ‘Great Codex of Spring and Autumn’ that Kong shi went to great lengths to craft, which was said to harness the ability to reverse yin-yang and alter the flow of time, didn’t seem to be this powerful!

Just who was this fellow? Where in the world did he pop up from?

“There’s indeed no exit, but it’s possible to dig a way out. However, it might take a few days!”

The heart quickly placated Zhang Xuan’s worries for fear of being absorbed.

“Dig a way out? True. You should hurry up and get those puppets of yours to work then!”

Zhang Xuan waved his hands casually.

Considering how they were able to excavate such a huge underground chamber in the first place, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that they would be able to dig a passageway out either.

And since there were so many puppets here, there was no need for Zhang Xuan to work personally, either.

“Alright,” the heart replied.

He used an unknown means to communicate with the puppets, and they started to dig upward.

These puppets were commanded might equivalent to a Saint realm expert, so digging a tunnel for a human to pass through wasn’t too difficult. However, the tricky part was that the underground chamber had just collapsed, so the surrounding ground was a little unstable at the moment. If they weren’t careful, the sanctuary could collapse as well.

While the puppets were busy digging a path out, Zhang Xuan waited patiently below.

He turned his attention to the book once more.

“Alright, I have some questions I would like to ask you. Answer me honestly.”

“Yes...” the heart replied.

“Since you came from the same era as Kong shi and even exchanged blows with him, have you ever heard of his Innate Fetal Poison?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Through the Library of Heaven’s Path, Zhang Xuan could tell that Vicious was telling the truth. He did belong to the same

era as Kong shi, so there was a chance that he might know about the Innate Fetal Poison.

“Innate Fetal Poison? I’m not too sure either... Kong shi and I were enemies, and he was already considerably strong in the first time we met...” the heart replied.

In that era, the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe dominated the humans and all other races. It was during that period of time that Kong shi suddenly rose to power. Even from a very young age, he wielded exceptional strength surpassing that of most Otherworldly Demons. Under his leadership, the armies of humanity were rallied in a campaign against the Otherworldly Demons, and eventually, humanity emerged victorious in that war.

“Are you certain that you don’t know anything about that? Are you lying to me?”

Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

“I dare not...” the heart hurriedly explained, but before he could finish his words, he was flicked by the other party’s finger once more.

“AHH!”

Peng peng peng peng!

As if struck by a bolt of lightning, he was sent spinning in the Book of Heaven’s Path, and his body convulsed violently from the impact. White foam began leaking out from the heart.

“This is nothing. If I ever find out that you are hiding something from me, I’ll kill you!” Zhang Xuan said.

“Yes...”

Red tears streamed down the heart as it trembled in agitation.

‘I really am Vicious, the Vicious who dominated the ancient era, the Vicious whom even Kong shi feared...

‘Please trust me!’

681 Qin Zhong

After asking a few more questions, Zhang Xuan finally closed the book.

The fellow was indeed unaware of the matters surrounding Kong shi's Innate Fetal Poison, so it was impossible for Zhang Xuan to get anything out of him.

Being poisoned was a sign of weakness. One would hide it even from one's allies, not to mention one's enemies.

This was similar to how Zhang Xuan had never told anyone that he was poisoned. Most likely, Kong shi back then was the same as well.

But in any case, through the questioning session, Zhang Xuan did manage to understand the true reason for that fellow being reduced to a mere heart, and the real purpose behind this underground chamber.

The previous host of the heart did wield destructive power, and he did dominate the world at one time. Countless humans had died by his hand.

Kong shi had fought him several times, but the other party always managed to successfully get away. It was only at the very last battle that after several days of combat, Kong shi finally managed to tear apart his flesh and bones and dissipate his soul.

He had indeed died, but as one of the strongest experts of that era, one of the leaders of the Otherworldly Demon, how could he possibly have no aces up his sleeves? Before fighting with Kong shi, he had already left behind a drop of blood in this underground chamber in case anything happened.

And to protect that drop of blood, he dispatched an entire army of Otherworldly Demons to guard it.

After the passing of many millenniums, the drop of blood finally developed and metamorphosed into a heart. Slowly, he roused from his sleep, regaining consciousness.

He'd thought that he would very soon be able to rule the world, but before he could even get out from his hiding spot, he just had to meet with Zhang Xuan and end up being sealed in that book, becoming an existence that was little more than a picture.

As for those puppets, even though they had lost sentience, they were still his descendants. Their Otherworldly Demon instincts allowed him to easily control them and have them work for his resurrection.

At this point, a thought suddenly emerged in Zhang Xuan's mind.

Wu Yangzi thought that he had succeeded in his ploy by turning these Otherworldly Demons into puppets... but could it be possible that the Otherworldly Demons had already noticed what he was up to, but still chose to go along with it anyway?

There were only twenty Otherworldly Demon puppets here, and they were all male. Clearly, it was impossible for them to reproduce anymore. Could they have intentionally allowed Wu Yangzi to turn them into puppets so that they could guard 'Vicious'?

If so, they would be able to retain their cultivation while further tempering their defenses. More importantly, they would be able to continue carrying out Vicious' order and protect him. Perhaps, they might even be revived once Vicious regained his strength...

After all, as a race who had once dominated the entire Master Teacher Continent, how could none of them have noticed something at all?

But, of course, this was just a theory on Zhang Xuan's part, and it was impossible to verify his conjecture anymore.

Wu Yangzi died before the heart regained consciousness, and the Otherworldly Demons involved in the incident back then were either dead or turned into puppets.

From his answers, Zhang Xuan realized that even though Vicious had regained consciousness, his memory hadn't

completely returned yet. Many of his memories were fragmented, making it impossible for him to go into detail regarding certain matters.

This was especially so for cultivation techniques. After having sealed Vicious in the book, this was one of the first few thoughts that came to mind. However, it was a pity, but the other party only knew cultivation techniques that were exclusive to Otherworldly Demons.

This made Zhang Xuan extremely frustrated.

He thought that he would be able to obtain quite a few cultivation techniques after capturing an ancient monster and level up swiftly. Who knew that the other party would turn out to be so useless?

Zhang Xuan had to punch the other party a few more times before he was able to quell his frustration.

After asking all of the relevant questions, Zhang Xuan noted that it would still take some time before the puppets would finish digging a passageway. Thus, he sat down on the floor and began to cultivate.

Even though he had only cultivated the First Incandescence of the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body, the might of his physical body had increased from 2,000,000 ding to 4,000,000 ding!

Adding in the 4,000,000 ding from his zhenqi and 3,200,000 ding from his soul cultivation, his overall strength added up to 11,200,000 ding. That was comparable to a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle expert!

(Perfect Harmonization realm primary stage 8,000,000 ding, intermediate stage 9,000,000 ding, advanced stage 10,000,000 ding, and pinnacle 11,000,000 ding.)

Despite being only at Transcendent Mortal 5-dan Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle, Zhang Xuan actually wielded strength two realms beyond him. Even the most talented geniuses of the Master Teacher Academy were incapable of such a feat.

As the remaining Four Incandescence were flawed and required some kind of artifact to cultivate, Zhang Xuan could

only put the thought of cultivating his physical body away from the moment. He continued to refine his zhenqi and accumulate more zhenqi in his dantian.

...

“It has been five days!”

Looking at the huge depression below her, Luo Qiqi shook her head with irrepressible gloom.

Five days had passed, and she had yet to sleep at all. She had been waiting here intently, hoping that Zhang shi would produce another miracle and emerge from the ground, but... it seemed like miracles wouldn't be miracles if they happened as and when one willed it.

“Even a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan wouldn't be able to survive so long being buried underground.”

Yu Fei-er also looked a little dazed.

When the other party was right by her side, she dearly wanted to charge forward to bite off the other party's flesh. And yet, at this moment, the very thought of the other party being dead felt like a sharp knife pressed against her heart.

Even though the body of a Transcendent Mortal was far stronger than ordinary humans, buried several hundred meters underground, crushed by rocks and suffocated, three to four hours was likely the limit. To remain alive after several days... was completely impossible!

In other words... Zhang shi was really dead this time!

There was no doubt about it.

Gritting her teeth, Yu Fei-er stood up slowly and said quietly, “I'll go to the Beast Hall to borrow an aerial spirit beast and return to Hongyuan City as soon as possible. I'll report this matter to my father and have him send some men over! Even though Xing Yuan and the others might be able to mobilize the experts of the academy, I fear that they won't put their all in to finding Zhang shi.”

It wasn't a solution for them to continue waiting here. The only course of action they could take now was to find a Saint

realm expert to help them dig up the underground chamber. Regardless of whether Zhang Shi was dead or alive, they were determined to find him.

The experts from the academy might come for the Otherworldly Demons and Wu Yangzi, but it would be nigh impossible to convince them to help look around for Zhang Xuan.

While Zhang Xuan was a member of the academy in name, he hadn't passed the entrance examination nor reported to the academy yet. Thus, there was no reason for a busy Saint realm expert to waste his time finding a nobody.

Not to mention, the other party was very likely dead already.

“Alright.”

Luo Qiqi nodded slowly.

After waiting for five days, she also understood that it was unlikely for Zhang Shi to emerge alive anymore. As his student, the least she could do was unearth his body and bury him properly so that he could rest in peace.

Yu Fei-er did a rough calculation before saying, “The Huanyu Empire Beast Hall is located not too far away from here. As long as we sprint with all our might, we should be able to reach it in around half a day...”

“Half a day? There's no need for it. We are standing at a point where those traveling between the Beast Hall and Huanyu Capital have to pass through. We can try to hitch a ride here,” Luo Qiqi said as she glanced at the sky.

Even though they weren't too far away from the Beast Hall, they had to traverse across treacherous terrain, and it was highly likely they would meet spirit beasts lurking in the area as well. If they were to accidentally catch the attention of the spirit beasts while passing through the area, the half a day journey could easily drag on for three days.

Since that was the case, it would be wiser for them to pay a passer-by and hitch a convenient ride to the Beast Hall.

Since they were standing at a point between the Beast Hall and Huanyu Capital, there were often many aerial spirit beasts flying through the area. Perhaps very soon, they might be able to find one to ride. If so, they would be able to reach their destination within half an hour, thus sparing them a lot of trouble.

“Un.” Yu Fei-er nodded. Very coincidentally, the sound of something whizzing through the sky and the flapping of wings suddenly echoed in the sky. Raising her gaze, she saw a massive Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast flying toward them.

“Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast? This is a Consonant Spirit realm spirit beast that possesses the Dragon Bloodline. It is one of the better spirit beasts even when comparing the entire Beast Hall. Let’s take this then...”

After taking a closer look at the appearance of the spirit beast, Luo Qiqi immediately gathered her zhenqi in a dantian before shouting.

“I am Master Teacher Luo Qiqi. My friend and I wish to hitch a ride on your spirit beast!”

The identity of a master teacher was prestigious, and it was more likely that the other party would be willing to help after she reported it.

As expected, after hearing her words, the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast circled the sky for a moment before descending to the ground, right before the duo.

Instead of a usual lodging room on the back of the spirit beast, there was only a shabby rope. As soon as the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast landed on the ground, a young man immediately leaped off its back.

The young man looked to be in his thirties, and he was dressed extravagantly. His eyes had a sharpness within them that felt a little uncomfortable to look at. Just like Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er, he was a Cosmos Bridge realm expert as well!

“Beast Hall’s Qin Zhong pays respect to Luo shi!”

Not expecting that the ones who wished to hitch a ride would be such beautiful ladies, Qin Zhong’s eyes immediately lit up

in agitation.

Despite his identity, he had never met ladies as beautiful as this.

“The both of us wish to hitch a ride on your spirit beast to visit the Beast Hall. May I know if you’re willing to do us this favor?” Luo Qiqi asked.

“It’s my pleasure to take the both of you with me!” Qin Zhong said excitedly. “Just that... there is no lodging room on my spirit beast, so this ride might be a little uncomfortable for you two...”

“That isn’t a problem.” Luo Qiqi shook her head.

Their current aim was to reach return to Hongyuan Empire as soon as possible so as to rally help to find Zhang Xuan. Comfort was the least of their worries now.

“May I know what an acceptable price for you is?” Yu Fei-er asked.

It was customary for one to pay after hitching a ride. Usually, the price would be agreed on by both sides beforehand so as to avoid complications after the ride.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. It’s my pleasure to have such beautiful ladies onboard my spirit beast, how can I accept your money?”

Qin Zhong placed his hands behind his back and put on his most dashing face in hopes of attracting the other party’s attention. However, the other party didn’t seem to have noticed it at all.

“We’ll feel more at ease if you accept our payment.”

Seeing the flirtatious looks from the other party, Luo Qiqi could tell that he had other thoughts in mind, and she frowned in displeasure.

If not for the urgent situation at hand, she would never have bothered herself with such an arrogant fellow.

“This...”

Upon Luo Qiqi's insistence, Qin Zhong hesitated for a moment before replying, "How about this? You two seem to have spent quite some time in the mountains already. If you two accompany me for a meal at the Beast Hall, that'll suffice as the payment!"

"Accompany you for a meal?"

How could Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er possibly not know what the other party was thinking about? It was already as clear as day! Their faces immediately darkened.

How dare this fellow from the Huanyu Empire Beast Hall attempt to philander with two 5-star master teachers? How brazen!

"That's right. Don't worry, I don't have any other thoughts in mind. Besides, considering how the both of you are in such a hurry to the Beast Hall, you must be trying to find a formidable aerial spirit beast to ride on. As a 4-star beast tamer and the son of the incumbent hall master, I'm sure I will be able to help the both of you!"

Qin Zhong smiled proudly.

As long as he made his identity as the young master of the Beast Hall known, most people would immediately show some respect to him. Even if the young ladies were master teachers, judging from their age, they couldn't possibly be ranked above 3-star. After learning his identity, he was confident that the duo would surely think differently of him.

And before long, there would be two ladies in his embrace.

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“Pick another condition!”

Seeing that the other party was actually interested in them, Luo Qiqi frowned and waved her hands in disapproval.

If not for the other party being the young master of the Beast Hall, she would surely have slapped that thought out of him by now.

They were both 5-star master teachers, not to mention Yu Feier was the princess of Hongyuan Empire, so how dare a mere 4-star beast tamer try to take advantage of them?

But regardless, the two of them didn't know much about beast taming, and the other party seemed to be the vindictive type who would get back at them if they were to offend him. Thus, Luo Qiqi chose to hold herself back.

“Pick another condition?”

Not expecting the two ladies to reject even a meal, Qin Zhong frowned.

He took pride in his looks and identity, and very few had ever rejected his invitation before. They were the ones who had requested something of him, and yet, not only did they reject his invitation, they even had such displeased looks on their faces. What did they mean by this?

They were thinking too highly of themselves!

Qin Zhong harrumphed coldly.

“It's just a casual meal, surely there's no need for you to turn me down like this, right? If you were to continue acting so coldly and distant, I fear that it'll be difficult for you to get a good aerial spirit beast when you arrive at the Beast Hall...”

Luo Qiqi narrowed her eyes.

“What do you mean by that? Are you trying to threaten us? Do you know the consequences of threatening a master teacher?”

“Threaten? How could I possibly dare to threaten a master teacher! I’m just giving you a word of advice out of goodwill on my part. Besides, you are the ones who asked to hitch a ride. Is this the kind of attitude one should put on when asking for a favor?”

Qin Zhong chuckled playfully as he gazed at the duo. “I have already stated my price, it’s your choice to accept it or not. In any case, I am in no hurry. As long as I am here, I doubt anyone in the entire Beast Hall will be willing to offer you a ride!”

Seeing the other party acting so despicably, how could a person with an explosive temper like Yu Fei-er possibly hold herself back? Sneering coldly, she stepped forward so as to teach that shameless man a lesson and pummel into him the fact that there were some people in the world he should never offend. But at that moment, the sound of dirt being overturned sounded from the huge depression below.

Gugugugugu!

Dirt was hurled continuously into the air, as if a gigantic bubble was trying to break out from the earth.

“Could it be...”

Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi’s bodies immediately stiffened. At this moment, they couldn’t be bothered with that arrogant fellow anymore. Their eyes stared intently at the depression, willing for the person they were hoping for to appear.

Could he really be alive?

Was he going to create another miracle as he always did and climb out from the ground alive?

The duo’s eyes turned crimson at that thought. They had spent five entire days here, and in this duration, the spark of hope they once held onto slowly withered into despair... And right when they were about to let go of the final sliver of hope, such an incident occurred.

Gulong!

Just as their hearts were hanging with anxiety, the dirt on the surface of the ground finally broke open, and a massive head emerged.

“Puppet!”

The bodies of the two ladies became tense, and their faces immediately flushed ghastly pale.

They’d thought that it would be Zhang Shi, but who knew that it would be this puppet instead!

Hu!

The puppet climbed out from the hole and stood up. Then, it scanned the surroundings warily, as though waiting for someone.

Seeing that there wasn’t the slightest injury on this puppet, Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er felt as if a knife had torn through their hearts.

Zhang Shi had sacrificed his own life so that the puppets would remain buried for all eternity to come, but it seemed like his sacrifice had ended in futility.

On the other hand, Qin Zhong, who was waiting for the two beauties before him to submit, saw that the duo had ignored him and turned their attention to the depression instead. Frowning, he turned his gaze over as well, and his eyebrows shot up.

What the heck was that fellow? Why would he suddenly appear from the ground?

Even though Qin Zhong was a 4-star beast tamer, the matter regarding the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe was one of the greatest secrets of the continent, so he didn’t know too much about them. Not to mention, the Otherworldly Demon puppets did resemble humans in some respects, albeit being slightly larger.

A normal Otherworldly Demon was only two meters tall. The only reason the Otherworldly Demon which Zhang Xuan met in Myriad Kingdom City reached three meters and was less

‘humanly’ was because it was a hybrid between the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and a spirit beast.

Even though it was rare to meet someone two meters tall, it wasn’t something to make a fuss over.

‘Isn’t he just a little taller than average? He looks rather weak. Do these two ladies prefer this type of man?’

Seeing how the two beautiful ladies before him had ignored him and were getting ‘excited’ before that tall man, Qin Zhong’s face reddened, and a glint flashed across his eyes.

‘That fellow is just a little taller than average! Let me show you that height is nothing at all!’

With such thoughts in mind, Qin Zhong stepped forward, and with a proud gaze, he said, “I am Qin Zhong, a 4-star beast tamer from the Beast Hall. My friend over there, may I know how to address you? Is it convenient for you to come up to have a chat?”

“Hmm?”

Just as Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er were overwhelmed by grief and shock, they suddenly heard those words and froze.

Was there something wrong with this fellow’s head?

Chat with an Otherworldly Demon? How could Qin Zhong be sure that he knew how to speak human language?

Seeing the dumbfounded expression on the duo, Qin Zhong thought that he was on the right track, and his eyes lit up. Turning his gaze back to the tall fellow below, he realized that the latter wasn’t even looking at him. Furious, he howled, “What? Are you looking down on me? Fine, I’m interested to see what you are capable of anyway!”

After saying this, the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast roared and flew into the sky.

Qin Zhong leaped onto the back of his tamed beast, and the duo swooped downward to the tall fellow below.

‘You chose that tall fellow over me? Fine, I’ll beat him up right now and let you know how bad your eyes are!’

Halfway through the arc, Qin Zhong leaped off from the spirit beast. His robe fluttered along with the tug of the wind as he charged toward that tall fellow.

He had used his strongest movement technique in this leap. At this moment, he looked like he was gliding through the air, creating a dashing scene. Through this movement technique, he had incited the excited screams of innumerable beautiful ladies.

Halfway through his movement, he raised his gaze to peek at the two beautiful ladies, hoping to see eyes gleaming with excitement and admiration. But who knew that those two ladies would actually shake their heads in pity and close their eyes?

‘Closing your eyes?’

‘Is my performance insufficient to awe you?’

Just as Qin Zhong was perplexed by the bizarre situation, he had already arrived before the puppet. Before he could do anything, he suddenly saw a huge fist rapidly expanding before his eyes.

Peng!

A powerful force struck his body, and he suddenly felt a stifling sensation in his chest. Blood spurted profusely from his mouth, and his figure rapidly retreated through the air.

‘Strength that exceeds Transcendent Mortal 8-dan...’

Qin Zhong’s vision turned dark, and he nearly went insane.

The strength of the Otherworldly Demon puppets was derived from their physical bodies, making it nearly impossible for Qin Zhong to accurately gauge the other party’s true strength and capability. Nevertheless, taking pride in his ability, he’d thought that it would be a piece of cake for him to take down the other party.

Never had he expected for the other party to be so powerful. It felt like he was standing against the raging storms of a boundless ocean. Even his father, the hall master of the Beast

Hall, a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan pinnacle expert, didn't wield such prowess!

But if that was the case, wouldn't that mean that the other party's strength had already exceeded Transcendent Mortal 8-dan?

How could that be?

He had met all of the Transcendent Mortal 8-dan experts of Huanyu Empire, but he didn't recall one of them being of such tall stature...

Only after spurting several large mouthfuls of blood did he finally feel the stifling sensation in his chest alleviate slightly. His back crashed heavily against the edge of the depression, and the bones throughout his entire body rattled.

Just a single fist and he was already severely injured. If not for the several life preservation artifacts that he had activated in the midst of his trajectory, he just might have died from that single fist.

But even so, the injuries he had sustained would take at least a month or two to heal.

Struggling to open his eyes, Qin Zhong was just about to summon his Winged Dragon Beast to take him away when he saw yet another tall fellow climbing out from the hole, and the both of them stood respectfully beside the hole.

'Are they... trying to welcome someone?'

Seeing the attitude of the two tall fellows, Qin Zhong was taken aback.

However, the bizarreness didn't stop here. After which, more tall fellows emerged from the hole, and they stood on the both sides of the hole. With their heads lowered, it seemed like they were waiting patiently for the arrival of some important person.

Finally, after the appearance of the eighteenth tall man, a sedan chair slowly emerged from the hole.

Seated on top of the sedan chair was a young man, and upon seeing the sunlight outside, he stretched his back lazily. It

seemed like he had been deprived of sunlight for many days and was delighted to see it once more.

To be carried by four Transcendent Mortal 8-dan experts while another eighteen stood at attention to welcome him... Who in the world was this fellow?

And why did he appear from the ground?

Qin Zhong widened his eyes in bewilderment. For an instant, he forgot about the overwhelming pain he was suffering.

At that moment, an excited call suddenly came from above, and two figures immediately leaped into the depression.

“Zhang shi...”

Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er had thought that they would never meet this young man ever again. Who could have thought that he would actually appear before them in such a fashion?

Unable to hold back their agitation, they rushed forward without any hesitation.

The depression was around forty meters deep, but this height was nothing to a Cosmos Bridge realm expert.

“Little Qi and Princess Fei-er, what are you two doing here?”

Naturally, the man seated on the sedan was Zhang Xuan.

After five days of effort, the puppets had finally unearthed a passageway for him to leave the underground chamber.

In any case, since their leader was in his hands, these fellows had no choice but to obey his words. Thus, he had them prepare a sedan chair to carry him up.

Zhang Xuan thought that after so many days, the two ladies would have already left. As such, he was surprised to see them here.

“You are fine...”

After confirming that the other party was indeed Zhang shi, Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er were finally able to release the huge burden that had been weighing down on their hearts over the

past few days. But after recovering from their agitation, many doubts started to emerge in their minds.

Wasn't he chased by the puppets when they left?

Why would the puppets be carrying him out now?

More importantly, with the collapse of the underground chamber, the supply of oxygen inside was cut off entirely. How did he manage to survive for so long?

"I'm fine. It's a long story."

Zhang Xuan waved his hands. "I thought that I would surely die back then, but I happened to activate an artifact that my teacher left for me then. Through the effects of the artifact, not only did I survive the collapse, these puppets were also put under my control. Honestly speaking, I was truly lucky to have survived this!"

There was no way he could talk about the heart. Otherwise, he would have to explain how he managed to seal the heart in his Book of Heaven's Path too.

Thus, he chose to push everything onto that imaginary teacher of his.

In any case, the duo had seen his teacher's astounding performance back at the Cleansing Lake too, so it wouldn't be too difficult for them to believe this either.

"Yang shi?"

Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er glanced at one another before heaving a sigh of relief simultaneously.

The image of Yang shi descending for the sky and resolving the huge catastrophe with the single throw of a shoe was still inscribed deeply in their minds. Not even Mo shi would have been capable of doing the same. It wasn't entirely inconceivable for that legendary figure to tame all of the puppets given his means.

"It's enough that you are fine..."

Since a high ranked master teacher was involved in this matter, they knew that it wouldn't be appropriate for them to

pry into this matter. Thus, they decided to put this topic away.

“Un.”

Seeing the duo putting aside the matter, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. At that moment, he suddenly noticed Qin Zhong, whose face was swollen red from the punch earlier, and he frowned in confusion.

“Who is this fellow?”

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“He is...”

After a moment of hesitation, Luo Qiqi began recounting the matters earlier.

“You wish to get an aerial spirit beast to travel back to Hongyuan Empire?”

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement. “Indeed, five days have passed. I really should hurry to Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy!”

After leaving the Cleansing Lake, Zhang Xuan had spent three days in a coma, one day in the underground chamber, and five days digging a path out of it. All in all, it had been nine days since then.

If he didn't hurry now, he might miss the entrance examination to the academy.

While he didn't think that it was truly necessary for him to enroll at the Master Teacher Academy, considering the history behind it, the latter must have a huge collection of books. If he could gain access to them, he could potentially raise his cultivation quickly.

Luo Qiqi nodded. “Since teacher is fine, let's return together.”

The reason why they wanted to rush back earlier was to save Zhang Shi. But while the latter was fine now, it was indeed about time for them to return too.

“Alright!”

Getting up from the sedan chair, Zhang Xuan had the puppets march back down the hole before burying it entirely.

On the surface, it seemed like Zhang Xuan was ordering them to return to the underground chamber, but in truth, Zhang Xuan's soul was waiting below to place them into his storage ring.

As these fellows were lifeless puppets, he could carry them along with him in his storage ring.

Since he could control these fellows through the heart, it would be waste for him not to keep them around.

With this huge army of Saint realm puppets, he could easily destroy even a real Saint realm cultivator.

With this, his safety in Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy would be assured, and he wouldn't have to keep relying on 'Yang shi' either.

But of course, any matter regarding Otherworldly Demons was of grave importance, and it was best to keep Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er in the dark regarding this matter as well. Not to mention, there was an outsider lying not too far away.

This was the reason why he decided to go through so much trouble to keep his action of storing them in his storage ring a secret. This way, he could avoid unnecessary trouble in the future.

As for whether the experts of the academy would be able to find the puppets after they arrived, that was none of his business.

After all, the puppets were capable of moving. The experts couldn't possibly expect for the puppets to wait patiently at the same spot.

Having made up his mind to leave, Zhang Xuan immediately turned to the battered Qin Zhong and said, "Your name is Qin Zhong, right? We wish to hitch a ride on your spirit beast, so I ask of your cooperation."

"Alright."

Struggling to his feet, Qin Zhong looked at Zhang Xuan as a hint of envy and rage flashed across his eyes.

The reason why he was beaten up like that was due to this fellow.

He had no idea who those tall fellows were, but considering the respect they had shown to this young man, it was likely that he was the mastermind behind his current pathetic plight!

‘Humph, I may be no match for you here, but let’s see how well you’ll fare when we are in the air!’

Qin Zhong swallowed his pill and drove his cultivation. A moment later, he felt that his injuries had alleviated slightly.

Looking at the trio before him now, even though they hadn’t utilized their zhenqi, so he was unable to determine their exact cultivation, considering their age, it was impossible for them to have reached Sainthood.

And as long as one hadn’t reached Sainthood, one would be incapable of flight!

“There is no lodging room on top of my spirit beast, and the wind has been strong lately!”

Qin Zhong stood up and leaped onto the back of his tamed beast while he ‘kindheartedly’ warned them to be careful. On the inside, he was snickering gleefully.

“That’s no problem!” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly.

Hu!

The Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast flapped its wings and rose up into the air.

Even though there was no lodging room on top of the aerial spirit beast, its back was rather spacious. It wasn’t cramped even with all four of them standing on top.

The spirit beast flew higher and higher, and soon, they were soaring through the clouds. Due to the incredible speed of their flight, a cold gale pressed tightly against their skin.

The group had to gather their zhenqi to form a protective layer to ward off the strong wind.

Seeing the look of nonchalance on the young man, Yu Fei-er couldn’t help but ask worriedly, “Zhang Xuan, that fellow obviously harbors malicious intentions. Why did you still ask to hitch a ride?”

Even she could tell that the beast tamer was up to no good! If it was her, she would have ignored the other party and left immediately!

Besides, they had nothing urgent on at the moment. At the very most, they could just walk to the Beast Hall. There was no need for them to take this risk in the first place. After all, they would be helpless if the other party were to try something in midair.

‘Aren’t you normally extremely intelligent?’

‘So, why did you make such an elementary mistake?’

Luo Qiqi chuckled.

“Fei-er, just watch on. Teacher knows what he is doing!”

Yu Fei-er was unaware of it, but Luo Qiqi had once witnessed Zhang Xuan flying in the sky. Since Zhang Xuan chose to hitch a ride, he must have a plan in mind.

Zhang shi getting done in by someone else? You must be kidding! In the times accompanying him, Luo Qiqi had only seen him doing others in. Not once had she witnessed him being done in before!

“Damn it!”

Seeing the two cold-faced ladies who were unwilling to even spout a single word to him getting friendly with that average-looking fellow, Qin Zhong’s face twisted in anger.

As the young master of the Beast Hall, he grew up with a golden spoon in his mouth. Not to mention, he was also blessed with good looks and considerable talent, so he had always been admired and respected by others. When had he ever allowed another to hitch a ride even after he was pummeled?

This was a huge humiliation!

“Little Brother, were those tall fellows from before your subordinates?”

But even so, Qin Zhong knew that making a move without knowing the background of his enemy was nothing short of recklessness.

The tall fellow whom he faced possessed might exceeding that of a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert. While he understood

that the wiser decision was to stay out of the other party's way, he was reluctant to simply let this matter go, especially after the humiliation he had suffered. Thus, he decided to first attempt to understand the other party's background before deciding on what he should do.

"No, he's just a friend who was sending me out," Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly.

"A friend?" Qin Zhong frowned. "Then may I know how to address you, and where do you come from?"

This question was a little more direct.

"I'm not anything much, so I don't think Qin gongzi will have heard of me..." Zhang Xuan replied.

"Not anything much?"

Qin Zhong sneered coldly.

That was true as well. He had met nearly all of the renowned young geniuses of Huanyu Empire, but he had never met the young man before him. Thus, it was unlikely for him to be a formidable figure.

Nevertheless, he should still tread carefully.

"Then... may I know if you have studied the Way of Master Teachers?" he continued asking.

"Yes, I have. It has been around half a year since I started learning the Way of Master Teachers..." Zhang Xuan scratched his head in embarrassment.

He was speaking the truth. Less than a half a year had passed since he first took the master teacher examination in Tianwu Kingdom.

"Half a year? Considering how vast and profound the Way of Master Teachers is, it is indeed difficult for you to learn anything substantial in half a year. Even so, you need not feel bad about yourself!" Considering how the two beautiful ladies were master teachers, he thought that this young man would be a master teacher as well. However, after hearing that the latter had only been in the occupation for half a year, he couldn't help but sneer in derision inside.

Every single occupation of the Nine Paths had a whole heritage of knowledge that one had to devote one's entire life to studying before they could master it. This was especially so for master teachers, as the number one occupation in the world. Half a year... Even at best, he could only be an apprentice now!

Since the other party wasn't a master teacher, there would be no need for Qin Zhong to hold himself back then.

"Judging from how valiant Little Brother looks, could the reason you studied the Way of Master Teachers so late is because you went to study other occupations? What about pill forging? Are you well-versed in it?" Qin Zhong continued asking.

"I have studied it for a few days," Zhang Xuan replied.

"A few days? That's such a pity! Learning pill forging can temper one's mind, allowing one to focus their concentration and cultivate better. You lost an opportunity to cultivate a good habit..."

Qin Zhong sighed before continuing. "What about... beast taming?"

"I have dabbled in it a bit," Zhang Xuan answered.

"Beast taming can allow one to come into contact with nature. Dabbling in it a bit won't be sufficient for you to learn anything significant. You lost an opportunity to become closer to nature..."

Qin Zhong shook his head. "What about medicine, smithing, and formation?"

Soon, Qin Zhong went through all of the Upper Nine Paths, but it seemed like the other party wasn't well-versed in any of them. Eventually, after confirming that the other party hadn't achieved anything substantial in any occupation, his confidence immediately burst through the roof.

Most formidable experts would choose to take on several occupations and persevere in them. Yet, this fellow only learned each of them for a few days. Considering his lack of

patience, it was certain that he wouldn't be able to achieve anything great.

Since that was the case, what did he have to worry about?

Chuckling lightly, Qin Zhong instructed, "Hahaha. Everyone, make sure you have a stable footing. I'm going to speed up now!"

Following which, the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast flapped its powerful wings and surged across the sky.

Huala!

The abrupt increase in speed along with the intense movements of the spirit beast caused Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi immediately lose their balance, and they nearly fell from the back of the spirit beast.

To a beast tamer, dealing with the passengers riding on his aerial spirit beast was a walk in the park.

"You..."

Realizing what the other party was up to, Yu Fei-er's face turned scarlet, and she nearly exploded in rage.

Just as she was about to bellow angrily, she suddenly felt a surge of zhenqi behind her that stabilized her footing.

Turning around, she saw Zhang Xuan's outstretched hand supporting her back.

It seemed like the sudden vigorous movements of the Winged Dragon Beast didn't have much of an effect on this young man.

"Hmm?"

Qin Zhong thought that he could make that wastrel beg for forgiveness through shaking up the ride, but the other party maintained a nonchalant expression, seemingly not afraid at all.

Qin Zhong's face immediately darkened once more.

If he couldn't even make the other party scared, how could he exact his vengeance?

Just as he was about to order the Winged Dragon Beast to perform two 360 degree turns, he suddenly heard the young man asking calmly, “Brother Qin, there is a question I have been wanting to ask you all along. Do you know how to fly?”

“Fly?”

Not expecting the other party to ask such a question, Qin Zhong was taken aback. “Flight is an ability that only Saints are capable of. How can I possibly be able to fly?”

Following which, the apologetic voice of the young man was heard once more.

“I see. I have neglected to tell you this, but I am able to fly.”

“You are?”

Qin Zhong had no idea where the other party was going with this. However, at this very moment, a thunder-like boom sounded.

“Moo!”

Hu!

As soon as the sound reverberated in the air, Qin Zhong immediately felt the Winged Dragon Beast beneath him stiffening, and it began to fall to the ground.

“AHHHH...”

Scared out of his wits, Qin Zhong screamed in fear.

The aerial spirit beast beneath him was suddenly paralyzed, and he was incapable of flight. If he were to descend from an altitude of a thousand meters, he would be immediately brought to death’s door!

Amidst his screams, he suddenly heard the young man’s calm voice speaking by his ear. “I don’t know what kind of opportunities I have lost, but I do know that being incapable of flight has cost you your opportunity to live!”

Lifting his gaze, he saw the young man looking at him impassively. The other party was floating in the air with the two ladies from before standing quietly by his side, supported by his zhenqi.

“... Flight?”

Never could he have expected for the young man who had only studied a few days in every single occupation to actually be capable of flight!

What the heck was this? If he knew that the other party was capable of flight, he wouldn't have gone through all of that!

Qin Zhong cried.

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Master Han

“You... can fly?”

Seeing as the man and the beast fell through the sky, creating large mushroom-shaped clouds upon impact, Yu Fei-er turned to look at the young man beside her with widened eyes as if she had seen a ghost.

Wasn't flight an ability exclusive to Saints?

As a Consonant Spirit realm cultivator, how was he doing this?

Recalling Luo Qiqi's fearless demeanor previously, Yu Fei-er suddenly realized something and asked, “Qiqi, you knew of this in advance?”

“Back in the underground chamber, Zhang laoshi used this technique to save me once,” Luo Qiqi said. With a curious gaze, she turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Speaking of which, teacher, why are you able to fly?”

Actually, she had been wanting to ask this question all along, but there wasn't a suitable opportunity before.

If it were to be known that someone beneath Sainthood was capable of flight, it would surely leave the blood of many running wild in agitation. But at the same time, it could possibly spell trouble for Zhang Xuan.

“It is an artifact that my teacher gave me. Actually, rather than flight, calling it a temporary tool for gliding would be more exact. Furthermore, it has its flaws as well. For one, it has a high zhenqi consumption, so I can't sustain it for too long!”

Since there was no way Zhang Xuan could explain this well either, he decided to dump everything on to ‘Yang Xuan’, as per usual.

“Artifact? Yang shi is indeed amazing!”

Hearing that it was another one of Yang Shi's doing, the duo's eyes immediately lit up in excitement.

Considering how many valuable artifacts Yang Shi had given Zhang Xuan, it seemed like he truly valued the latter a lot.

Seeing that he had managed to get the duo off his hook after bringing his 'teacher' into the picture, Zhang Xuan smiled in relief.

"This artifact is rather rare, so I ask you two not to tell others about it so as to avoid unnecessary trouble!"

Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er nodded in response.

"Don't worry!"

It was an unspoken rule for one to not speak of the affairs of a high ranked master teacher unless a compelling situation warranted it.

Besides, they also didn't wish to bring trouble to Zhang Shi either.

As the trio spoke, they gradually landed on the ground.

Zhang Xuan exhaled a large mouthful of turbid air.

With his current cultivation, he could easily maintain flight for over an hour. However, holding onto two people with his zhenqi in the midst of his flight was still rather tough on him.

It was fortunate that he only had to bring them down and not proceed forward, or else he might just end up plummeting to the ground just like Qin Zhong.

"Is that fellow... dead?" Luo Qiqi asked.

Not too far away from the trio, there was a huge pit with a man and a spirit beast lying inside. The beast was still able to retain its consciousness, but the man, as he was already inflicted with grievous wounds even before the fall, was unable to endure the impact and fainted immediately.

"No matter what, Qin Zhong is a Cosmos Bridge realm expert. It's just a distance of a thousand meters; he won't die that easily!" Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Back then, Feng shi and his team also fell from an altitude of a thousand meters but they still survived the fall. Even if this fellow was severely injured by one of the puppets earlier on, considering the defensive artifacts he had in his possession as the young master of the Beast Hall, it was impossible for him to die from this.

At worst, he would only be bed bound for a few months.

After explaining the matter to the others, Zhang Xuan turned to the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast and commanded, “What are you waiting for? Hurry up and bring us to the Beast Hall!”

Even though this huge fellow was wounded as well, it was still conscious. Upon meeting Zhang Xuan’s gaze, it began to tremble in fear.

Roar!

Hearing those words, it immediately struggled to its feet and stepped forward.

Possessing the Dragon Bloodline, it possessed an innate fear toward those capable of uttering the Dragon Language. Naturally, it could only obey Zhang Xuan’s commands obediently.

Hu hu hu!

The trio leaped onto the back of the aerial spirit beast, and leaving the unconscious Qin Zhong behind, they advanced toward the Beast Hall.

This lesson should serve well to teach that arrogant Qin Zhong to remain humble for the rest of his life.

After flying for some time, the group finally arrived at the Beast Hall.

The Huanyu Beast Hall was larger and more majestic than the Beast Halls Zhang Xuan had seen in the past. Countless spirit beasts filled both the sky and the land, creating an extremely boisterous atmosphere that could be felt even from a distance away.

Several hundred meters away from Beast Hall, Zhang Xuan and Luo Qiqi alighted from the back of the spirit beast.

This fellow was the tamed beast of the young master of the Beast Hall. If they were to arrive there on it, it could potentially cause a lot of trouble, and it would be troublesome to explain the matter.

As for why they chose to ride the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast to the Beast Hall instead of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy directly, the answer was simple.

Hongyuan Empire was more than a million kilometers away from Huanyu Empire, and while the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast was at the Consonant Spirit realm, it would take at least one and a half months for it to cover that distance.

It was less than a month until the start of the school term, so Zhang Xuan would be late for the entrance examination if he were to ride on its back.

On the other hand, there should be higher ranked spirit beasts in the Huanyu Empire Beast Hall for them to ride on. Thus, they decided to stop by here first.

Upon stepping into the lounge of the Beast Hall, the trio was immediately stunned by the huge crowd.

The territory of Huanyu Empire stretched across the horizon, and there were countless who visited the Beast Hall every day to travel around on the spirit beasts.

There were around a dozen queues, and every queue had several hundred people lining up. Judging from the sight, some of them might have even been lining up since a month or two ago!

“The number of aerial spirit beasts, savage beasts, and beast tamers in the Beast Hall is limited. As such, it is normal to have to queue for days before getting a ride.”

Looking at the huge queue before her, Luo Qiqi smiled bitterly.

Due to the limited number of beast tamers, aerial spirit beasts, and savage beasts, it was impossible to fulfill everyone's

demands. As such, the Beast Hall would allocate queue numbers each day, and those whose numbers weren't called would have to wait till the second day, the third day, or even beyond that.

“In the Hongyuan Beast Hall, there are even a few who fail to get a ride after queuing for two months straight. Even though there are fewer people here, I fear that it will still take around ten days or so before we can get a ride.”

Yu Fei-er nodded.

The number of experts and esteemed personnel far exceeded the number of spirit beasts and beast tamers available in the Beast Halls. Traveling had always been and was likely to remain a huge problem on the Master Teacher Continent.

“If only Ye Qian were here. He is well-acquainted with the people here, so he may have been able to allow us to bypass the queue,” Luo Qiqi said bitterly.

“If he were here, there would be no need for us to come all the way here. The royal family should have some spirit beasts as well, so we could have just asked him to bring some over,” replied Yu Fei-er.

While most of the aerial spirit beasts were centered in the Beast Hall, the royal family of most empires and kingdoms would rear a few themselves. Back then, the flying ship that Hong shi and the others left on was powered by the aerial spirit beasts of the empire.

If Ye Qian was here, given his identity as a crown prince, he could easily have brought a few aerial spirit beasts out for them. They wouldn't have had to come all the way here to the Beast Hall just to find a ride.

Given the huge number of people here, it would be difficult for them to find a suitable aerial spirit beast.

“Forget it, borrowing a spirit beast from the empire is an extremely troublesome procedure, and one will also incur a debt to the empire. It will be much better to use the spirit beasts from the Beast Hall instead!” Luo Qiqi said.

Logically speaking, given Yu Fei-er's identity, even if Ye Qian wasn't around, it wouldn't be too difficult for her to borrow a few spirit beasts from Ye Wentian.

But her unique identity complicated the matter. As the princess of Hongyuan Empire and a master teacher, if she were to ask for a favor, she would incur a debt which she would have to repay in the future. Since that was the case, it would be better for them to rent a ride from the Beast Hall instead.

Not to mention, master teachers possessed a privilege on this aspect—they had a priority queue just for them!

On top of that, Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er were 5-star master teachers. They were qualified to find the hall master or the elders of the Beast Hall straight to request for a better spirit beast and beast tamer.

“Let's go!”

Thus, the group proceeded forward. At that moment, Luo Qiqi suddenly thought of something, and she turned to the young man beside her and asked, “Zhang shi, since you are a beast tamer, do you have any acquaintances here?”

“This is my first time here, so how could I possibly have any acquaintances here?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

It was his first time in Huanyu Capital, so how could he know anyone here?

“That's true...”

Recalling how Zhang shi had arrived later than them, it was indeed unlikely for him to have any acquaintances here.

“Alright then.”

Nodding, Luo Qiqi surveyed the surroundings to find a member of the Beast Hall whom she could ask to show them to an elder or the hall master when a delighted voice suddenly called out.

“Zhang shi... why are you here?”

Turning around, Zhang Xuan saw an elder walking to him with an excited smile on his face.

“Hall Master Han?”

Upon seeing the elder, Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

The person was none other than the hall master whom he met at Coax Ridge when he tamed the Demon Cinque Beast back then, Han Chong!

Why was he here?

“Thanks to Zhang shi’s help, I managed to triumph over Luo Ming in the competition and gained the opportunity to study at Huanyu Empire...”

Han Chong smiled.

He had once suffered a trauma which resulted in a sharp fall in his fighting prowess. Thus, he turned his attention to the Demon Cinque in the hope of taming it to defeat Luo Ming. However, while he was doing so, he met Zhang Xuan. Not only did Zhang Xuan save him when Demon Cinque Beast went on a rampage, the latter even treated his trauma, allowing him to regain his former strength. Due to that, he gained the opportunity to enter a higher ranked Beast Hall to further his knowledge of beast taming.

It could be said that Zhang Xuan was his benefactor!

If not for Zhang shi, he would already be dead by now!

He’d thought that it would be hard for him to meet this incredible genius again, but who knew that he would actually reunite with him here?

Hearing the explanation, Zhang Xuan immediately understood what was going on.

“It is through your own capability that you obtained this opportunity; I only did what I should.”

He recalled how much Han Chong valued this opportunity. For it, he spent three entire years trying to tame Demon Cinque Beast.

“Zhang shi is too polite!”

After trading a few pleasantries, Han Chong asked, “Is Zhang shi here to take the 5-star beast tamer examination or...”

“Actually, we are intending to head to Hongyuan Empire, so we would like to rent a fast spirit beast with good stamina.”

Zhang Xuan chuckled. “May I ask for Hall Master Han’s help with this matter?”

“This isn’t a problem at all. I’ll show you to the Beast Lodge!”

Hearing that it was just a small matter, Han Chong hurriedly nodded.

Even though he came from the branch in Myriad Kingdom Alliance, as an ex-hall master, his standing was still higher than ordinary beast tamers. It wasn’t a problem for him to find a spirit beast for Zhang Xuan.

“I’ll be thanking you then, Hall Master Han!”

Zhang Xuan smiled in delight.

Han Chong shook his head.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. Also, there’s no need to call me Hall Master Han. I am only an ordinary 4-star beast tamer here, so you can just address me as Beast Tamer Han.”

While he was a hall master in the Myriad Kingdom Alliance branch, he was nothing more than an ordinary beast tamer here except for his slightly higher standing.

It would be inappropriate for him to be addressed as ‘hall master’ here, and it could even be taken as insubordination.

“Alright.”

Zhang Xuan nodded. Following behind Han Chong, the group headed for the Beast Lodge.

On the other hand, seeing how Zhang Xuan walked away with a 4-star beast tamer right after claiming that he knew no one in the Beast Hall, Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi glanced at one another, and their eyelids twitched frenziedly.

‘You call this knowing no one here?’

‘Who are you trying to fool?’

Why did this Zhang shi feel so upright and dependable at times, and yet so unreliable and eccentric at others?

685 You Know the Beast Language?

The Huanyu Empire Beast Hall's Beast Lodge was established in the midst of the mountain forest. Countless spirit beasts lived leisurely in the area. Even though many of them were natural enemies of one another, they were still able to live harmoniously with one another after being tamed.

While walking to their destination, Han Chong asked, "Hongyuan Empire is more than a million kilometers away from here. How much time do you have for your journey?"

Zhang Xuan calculated for a moment before replying.

"Of course, the faster the better. It would be best if we can arrive within twenty days."

It had been nine days since Hong shi and the others had departed. If they wanted to catch up, they would have to shorten the month's journey to about twenty days.

"Twenty days?" Han Chong suddenly stopped and frowned. "If you wish to arrive at Hongyuan Empire within twenty days, you will require a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beast at the very least!"

Long journeys were very different from short journeys. Even if a spirit beast could cover a hundred thousand kilometers in a day at maximum, the journey could still easily stretch on for a month. After all, it would be impossible for the spirit beast to maintain its full speed throughout the entire journey, and it would also need to rest and recuperate as well.

Also, cultivation realm didn't necessary translate to speed either. Different aerial spirit beasts had different strengths, and there were plenty of powerful spirit beasts who had a slow flight speed.

Nevertheless, the minimum requirement for any aerial spirit beast to reach Hongyuan Empire in twenty days was for it to

be a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beast.

Zhang Xuan nodded.

He was a beast tamer as well, and he had a deep understanding of spirit beasts. He could also roughly gauge the traveling times of different aerial spirit beasts.

“Only 5-star pinnacle beast tamers are able to tame such a spirit beast. Alright, I’ll bring you to the Elder Hall to take a look then...”

Han Chong frowned.

If it was just a Transcendent Mortal 5-dan spirit beast, Han Chong would surely be able to rent it for Zhang Xuan easily. However, as Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beasts were extremely hard to tame, even for a 5-star beast tamer, their quantity was severely limited. As such, this matter would necessitate the approval of the Elder Hall.

“The Elder Hall? Will this be too troublesome?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It’s fine. My teacher happens to be a 5-star pinnacle beast tamer... If he learns that you are a 4-star beast tamer and a grandmaster physician at such a young age, he will surely be delighted to help you!”

Han Chong smiled.

While they were speaking, they circled around the mountain forest and arrived at a log house.

The entire residence was extremely simplistic in design, constructed using only wood and mud. It contrasted starkly to the extravagant infrastructures around the Beast Hall.

Pushing open the door of the log house, they saw cages of all sizes placed all around the vast living room. Savages beast and spirit beasts were housed in those cages, and they varied in terms of size and species. Making a quick estimation, there were around eighty cages in here.

“These are...”

Upon seeing all of these cages, Zhang Xuan was bewildered.

This should be the living quarters of the teacher whom Han Chong spoke of. However, most of the beasts in the cages possessed low cultivation, and there were even a few beneath Zongshi realm.

A 5-star pinnacle beast tamer, a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert, could easily flick a savage beast of that tier to death, so there should be no reason for him to rear them.

“Oh, my teacher is...”

Realizing the doubts Zhang Xuan was harboring, Han Chong was just about to explain when ‘jiya!’, a spirited old man suddenly walked into the room.

The old man’s hair and beard were both white, and he carried a book in his hands. Seemingly oblivious to the crowd in his log house, he continued walking forward while muttering something under his breath. His face slowly lit up with excitement along with his mutterings, as if he had deciphered a mystery.

“Teacher...”

Han Chong stepped forward and addressed him.

“Don’t interrupt me. We’ll talk after I’m done!”

Not even sparing a glance to Han Chong, the old man waved his hands and walked up to a cage.

Inside the cage were eight Zhizun realm Scarlet Coated Hamsters.

These hamsters were small in size, but their ability to burrow was astonishing. There were even some who specially groomed them to have them dig out some space underground to construct an underground chamber.

But of course, considering how the old man had them locked in a cage, that probably wasn’t his motive.

Seeing his teacher pay little regard to him, Han Chong turned to the trio in embarrassment.

“Teacher has always been like this. As long as he is in the midst of his research, he will ignore everything in his

surroundings...”

“No worries!”

Zhang Xuan smiled.

Even though he had to get to Hongyuan Empire as soon as possible, he had this bit of time to spare. On top of that, he was also curious about what the old man was up to.

Ignoring the crowd, the old man flipped a few pages on the book, and on a certain page, he suddenly stopped. As though he had finally found what he was looking for, his eyes lit up in agitation. He immediately turned his sight to the Scarlet Coated Hamsters, took in a deep breath, and shouted, “Boreohu lomesen...”

Along with the chanting of the old man, the Scarlet Coated Hamsters widened their eyes and began to puke, as if they had heard something extremely disgusting.

“They are vomiting? This isn’t right!”

The old man scratched his head as he flipped the pages of the book once more. “My pronunciation must be off. I should try again!

“Boreohu lomesen...”

Hu hu hu!

The eyes of the Scarlet Coated Hamsters suddenly rolled upward, and their legs began to spasm. Two of them tried to get away, but they ended up knocking against the bars of the cage and fainted.

“This...”

Everyone widened their eyes in shock.

Even Zhang Xuan was astonished by the sight.

What did the old man say to disgust the Scarlet Coated Hamsters so much that they would rather knock themselves out than to listen to it for a moment longer?

Suddenly realizing something, Luo Qiqi turned to Han Chong and asked, “Is this... Beast Language?”

Even though she wasn't a beast tamer, her occupation as a master teacher required her to have a degree of understanding of all occupations, and she did once read about the Ancient Beast Language before.

It was said to have been compiled by Kong shi himself, but with the passing of time, it gradually disappeared from the world. Even though the heritage was still existent, it was grasped in the hands of a small minority, and it was never passed down to outsiders.

Could it be that Han Chong's teacher had already learned the language, and was currently experimenting with it?

Just that, why would his words cause such an extreme reaction in the Scarlet Coated Hamsters to make them vomit like that?

"My teacher is in the midst of studying the Beast Language, and there has been some success in his research already..."

Han Chong nodded.

"Success?" Zhang Xuan and the others were speechless.

Making a savage beast puke, and you call that success?

One punch can easily do the same!

"Cough cough!" Hearing the conversation and seeing the reaction of the crowd, the old man was a little embarrassed. Closing his book and tidying his appearance, he turned around and said, "Han Chong, didn't I instruct you to study yourself? Do you have something for me?"

"Reporting to teacher, Zhang shi over here is my benefactor, and he wishes to rent a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan spirit beast to travel to Hongyuan Empire!" Han Chong quickly replied.

"Transcendent Mortal 8-dan?"

The old man frowned. "There are only three aerial spirit beasts of this caliber in the entire Beast Hall. Two of them were rented by the Huanyu royal family while the last one has just returned from a long journey and is exhausted. I'm afraid that there aren't any available at the moment! Besides, even though I am an elder, I don't have the absolute say in such matters. Dispatching a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan aerial spirit beast

requires the approval of the Elder Conference and the hall master!”

“This...”

Han Chong’s face reddened in embarrassment.

The management of the Huanyu Empire Beast Hall was much stricter than the Myriad Kingdom Alliance branch. Transcendent Mortal 8-dan spirit beasts were the strongest beings throughout the entire empire, so they wouldn’t be given any work unless truly required. Furthermore, the approval of the Elder Conference was required to dispatch them.

Back then, when Han Chong was the hall master of the Myriad Kingdom Alliance Beast Hall, he could move any spirit beasts with just a single word. He thought that his teacher, as one of the top leaders of the Beast Hall, would possess such authority here, but from the looks of it, the matter wasn’t as simple as it seemed.

“Then... are there any Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beasts available?”

Even though Transcendent Mortal 7-dan aerial spirit beasts were slightly slower, it was still within an acceptable range for Zhang Xuan.

“There is a total of fourteen Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beasts in our guild, but they are all the tamed beasts of elders, and only five of them are capable of flight. If you wish to rent one, you will need an elder to drive it personally, so it won’t be easy either.”

The old man shook his head. “Furthermore, most of the Transcendent Mortal 7-dan aerial spirit beasts aren’t suited for traveling long distances, so I fear that they won’t be much faster than most of the Transcendent Mortal 6-dan spirit beasts!”

Most of the spirit beasts in the Beast Hall were tamed by the beast tamers collectively or groomed by an apprentice of a low ranked beast tamer. These spirit beasts were often up for rent to the public.

On the other hand, there were also private spirit beasts, which were the tamed beasts that accompanied their tamers' side. Most of them were more suited than battle, so while they could cover short distances swiftly, it was difficult for them to persevere for long distances.

On top of that, most of the Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beasts in the Beast Hall were land-bound, and those capable of flight could only do it in short spurts. There were simply too few aerial spirit beasts who were capable of covering long distances such as that between Huanyu Empire and Hongyuan Empire.

“Is there no other solution?” Han Chong asked anxiously.

Zhang shi had helped him a lot, and it wasn't easy for him to obtain a chance to repay the debt. He felt embarrassed that he had boasted earlier that it wouldn't be a problem only to let the other party down a few moments later.

“There is no other way around it...”

The old man shook his head firmly. At that moment, he suddenly recalled something and said, “Unless... you manage to convince that spirit beast to help! If you can do it, you can probably reach Hongyuan Empire in less than ten days!”

“That spirit beast?”

Han Chong seemed to understand which spirit beast the old man was referring to, and he shook his head with a bitter smile. But at this moment, he suddenly recalled the various miraculous feats the young man had achieved with the Demon Cinque Beast, and his eyes suddenly lit up. “That's right! Teacher, even though we might have been unable to persuade it, perhaps Zhang shi... might be able to succeed!”

Seeing his student getting so agitated, the old man frowned. He glanced at Zhang Xuan doubtfully and asked, “Him?”

He didn't mean to look down on Zhang Xuan, but the latter seemed to only be in his early twenties. At this age, even if he was talented, he could only be a 2-star beast tamer at best. With such limited capability, what could he possibly achieve?

After all, not even the hall master had been able to deal with that fellow.

“Even though Zhang Shi is young, he is a true 4-star beast tamer. He was the one who tamed the Demon Cinque Beast, which I failed to do even after three years of effort!” Han Chong quickly explained. “Furthermore... it seems that Zhang Shi knows a bit of Beast Language as well, and... it seems to be more effective than teacher’s...”

“Beast Language? You are well-versed in the Ancient Beast Language?”

The old man was taken aback, and the doubt in his eyes deepened.

The heritage of the Ancient Beast Language had disappeared many millenniums before, and those who managed to lay their hands on it were all the top beast tamers on the continent. However, all of them viewed what they knew as their greatest treasure and were unwilling to share it with the public, so how could such a young fellow possibly know the Ancient Beast Language?”

“I... studied it for a while.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Studied it for a while? I have been researching it for more than fifty years, and I barely managed to scratch the surface. What is the use in studying it for a while?”

Hearing the other party’s words, disappointment flashed across the old man’s face. Just as he was about to continue speaking, he suddenly saw the young man before him inhale deeply before opening his mouth.

“Moo!”

Huala!

All of the spirit beasts and savage beasts in the room immediately crouched on the floor, trembling in fear. On the other hand, the old man also felt his entire body jolt upon hearing that sound. His vision went dark, and he fell onto the floor, convulsing ceaselessly.

686 Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragons

Even though Zhang Xuan's Dragon Language was the most effective on those possessing the Dragon Bloodline, due to the low cultivation realm of the savage beasts and spirit beasts in the room, it was able to instill fear into them as well.

Against the abrupt roar, it was already amazing that some of them were still able to retain their consciousness.

Zhang Xuan could understand why the spirit beasts and savage beasts would react like that to his roar, but...

Turning to the old man, he asked with a perplexed expression, "Elder, are you... fine?"

The reason why the spirit beasts and savage beasts lay down was due to their inborn instincts which instilled the fear of dragons into them.

'Why is a human like you behaving the same way as them?

'Not to mention, to be convulsing as if you have lost your soul, and that white foam flowing out from your mouth...

'Did my Dragon Language somehow disgust you?'

"Teacher..." Han Chong was also astonished. He hurriedly rushed forward to grab the other party's renzhong acupoint and infused zhenqi into his body. Only then did the old man finally regain his consciousness.

"The language you just spoke... Could it be the True Voice of Dragons?"

As soon as the old man came to, he hurriedly stood up and turned to look at Zhang Xuan in agitation and disbelief.

"I'm not too sure either. Those are just a few notes that I learned on a whim," Zhang Xuan replied.

In truth, he was not too sure what this language was, and all along, he'd thought that it was a part of the Ancient Beast Language as well. Of the three notes he had learned back at the Xuanyuan Kingdom Beast Hall, this one was the most useful. Thus, he always utilized this note whenever he needed to deal with spirit beasts.

Somehow, it seemed to have a restraining effect on all those that possessed traces of the Dragon Bloodline.

“Learned on a whim? A human... actually learned the True Voice of Dragons as well?” The old man stared at Zhang Xuan in disbelief. At that moment, he suddenly exclaimed, “Wait here for a moment!”

Following which, he ran out of the room. A moment later, he returned with an ancient book in his hands, and he flipped it open. “Take a look!”

Lowering his head, Zhang Xuan realized that the note which he had just vocalized was written in the book as well.

Grabbing the book, Zhang Xuan casually flipped through a few pages and took a look at the cover as well. Noticing some similarities in the content of the ancient book he found in the Library of Heaven's Path back then, he couldn't help but ask, “This is called the True Voice of Dragons?”

“Un. An ancient beast tamer compiled the knowledge known of the subject and wrote this book. According to it, the language you have just spoken is known as the ‘True Voice of Dragons’!”

“True Voice of Dragons?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

The old man nodded. “Legend has it that due to the overwhelming strength of the Dragon Tribe, they were bound by the natural laws of heaven, preventing them from vocalizing most tones. As such, they were limited to utilizing only eight tones to express their joy, anger, sorrow, reminiscence, and frustration. Nevertheless, you mustn't underestimate these eight tones! Even with just eight tones, the content of the Dragon Language is still far richer than human speech.”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

As a beast tamer, he had read innumerable records regarding beasts, and it was theorized that the heavens would take something away from beings that were too strong to maintain equity. Voice was one of them.

Nevertheless, even with just eight tones, the Dragon Tribe could easily express many different terms through a unique combination of tones. Under the long heritage of the dragons, their language had grown to be far richer than even the humans’.

The simplest things can sometimes prove to be the most powerful tools.

“There are simply too many combinations to the Dragon Language, so without interacting with a real dragon, it’s impossible for anyone to fully understand the language! More importantly...”

At which, the old man’s eyes widened in disbelief and he uttered, “The Eight Tones of Heavenly Dragons require one to possess a Pureblooded Dragon Bloodline to vocalize. The body of a human can’t possibly endure the pressure of such notes. So... h-how did you do it? Do you... possess the Pureblooded Dragon Body?”

“Pureblooded Dragon Body?” Zhang Xuan questioned in bewilderment.

“Yes. The Pureblooded Dragon Body is a unique constitution that is even more powerful than the Pure Yang Body and Pure Yin Body. Once the constitution is awakened, the Dragon Bloodline in one’s body will become incomparably close to a Pureblooded Dragon, and one’s cultivation and fighting prowess will be boosted significantly... and the concept of cultivation bottlenecks will become non-existent...”

The more the old man spoke, the more his face flushed in agitation.

Pureblooded Dragon Body, this was one of the strongest unique constitution in the world. Given that the man before him was able to vocalize the Dragon Language that all humans

should be incapable of, could he really possess such a constitution?

If that was true, then it would truly be fearsome!

“Teacher, do you really possess the Pureblooded Dragon Body?”

Hearing the words of the old man, Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er glanced at one another momentarily before turning their curious gazes to Zhang Xuan.

Based on Zhang Shi’s legendary record, his cultivation did improve at a monstrous pace.

All along, they had attributed it to Yang Shi, but could the Pureblooded Dragon Body have played an important part as well?

If that was the case, many things that had bewildered them previously could be explained.

“I...”

Zhang Xuan scratched his head.

How could he possibly possess the Pureblooded Dragon Body? The only reason he was able to vocalize the Dragon Language was due to the Heaven’s Path zhenqi and Heaven’s Path Golden Body.

But of course, he couldn’t explain any of this either, so he could only change the subject. “Does this book record all eight of the tones?”

“Record all eight tones? Of course not!”

Seeing that the other party was unwilling to divulge much, the old man also chose to put the matter aside. Shaking his head, he continued, “The Eight Tones of Heavenly Dragons is the language of the Dragon Tribe, humans aren’t qualified to learn and utilize it. In truth, this book only records the deductions on how those sounds came to be. The meaning of those words and the method to vocalizing them are unclear in it!”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan casually flipped through the book while he immersed his consciousness into the Library of Heaven’s

Path.

He could read much faster in the Library of Heaven's Path, and its innate function also allowed him to discern the truth from the false.

Hu!

Soon, Zhang Xuan swept through the entire book, and came to a realization.

Just as the other party had said, the book mainly recorded the origin of the Eight Tones of Heavenly Dragons and its relationship to the Dragon Tribe. As for the rest, it was extremely unclear.

Of the eight tones, the 'Moo' which he often used was also recorded in it. However, even though there were more than thirty pages depicting its vocalization, none of them were correct.

As for the other two tones that he had learned previously, they weren't among the eight tones, so they were probably not a part of the Dragon Language.

This explained why those two notes were ineffective against the spirit beasts when he tried them out.

It was also stated in the book that due to physiological differences, even if humans were to learn the proper way of vocalizing the sound, they would still be unable to imitate the dragons.

As such, the thirty-page depiction of its vocalization were just deductions on the author's part, and there was no evidence to back up his findings.

"Hmm? One of the tones seems to be correct?"

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to finish reading the book, his eyes suddenly lit up.

Nearing the end, there was actually a correct depiction of one of the eight tones.

The second tone of the Eight Tones of Heavenly Dragons, 'Mou!'

Memorizing the way to vocalize it, Zhang Xuan made a mental note to try it when he got the chance. At this moment, he suddenly recalled the peculiarity that happened just a while ago, and his eyes fell upon the old man before him.

“It’s written in the book that the Eight Tones of Heavenly Dragons only has the effect of restraining lifeforms possessing the Dragon Bloodline, and this is known as the Majesty of the Pureblooded Dragon... But if that is the case, why did you fall to the ground previously as well?”

Zhang Xuan wasn’t the only one curious about this matter. Luo Qiqi, Han Chong, and Yu Fei-er also turned their gazes over as well.

Even though Zhang Shi’s voice was loud, that was all it was to them. They weren’t influenced by the Eight Tones of Heavenly Dragons, and they didn’t feel any pressure from it either. So why would a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan pinnacle elder fall to the ground? Not to mention, the latter even convulsed ceaselessly and leak white foam...

“This...”

The old man didn’t seem to be surprised by the question at all. After a long moment of silence, he finally sighed and said, “Follow me.”

After which, he walked to the backyard of the log house.

“Teacher...”

Seeing his teacher beckoning them to the backyard, Han Chong was bewildered.

It had been some time since he had come under his teacher’s tutelage, but the latter had strictly warned him never to go to the backyard. There was one time that he sneaked in out of curiosity, but before he could get a good look, he was caught. He ended up being reprimanded and was given a stern warning against it.

However, all of that only heightened his curiosity. Nevertheless, for fear of angering his teacher, he didn’t dare to sneak in anymore. He didn’t expect his teacher to actually bring them in of his own accord.

Not knowing the history behind the backyard, Zhang Xuan and the others followed the old man casually around the log house and to the backyard.

There was a small mound in the backyard, and a tombstone was erected in front of the mound.

Glancing at the tombstone, six words were written on it: ‘The Grave of Draconic Granite Beast!’

“The Transcendent Mortal 8-dan spirit beast that rules over all land-bound lifeforms... Draconic Granite Beast?”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right!” The old man nodded. Gazing at the tombstone with complex emotions, he said, “He... is my tamed beast!”

“Teacher’s tamed beast?” Han Chong was stunned. His eyes slowly widened as he asked, “Teacher’s tamed beast... is dead?”

In truth, in the days he had been in the Huanyu Empire Beast Hall, he had never seen his teacher’s tamed beast before. He thought that it might have been dispatched on a mission or something, but never had he imagined that it would actually be dead.

Beast tamers could have more than one tamed beast, but they would have to do a lot to win their trust.

Most beast tamers would choose to view their tamed beast as their closest friend or even their kin.

As such, the death of a tamed beast could be a heavy blow to a beast tamer. There were quite a few who never recovered from the emotional trauma.

Was the death of his tamed beast the reason why his teacher chose to live in such a remote location?

“Un. My tamed beast is dead. Because of me.”

The old man shook his head.

“Because of you?”

“I tamed this Draconic Granite Beast when I was in the midst of my 5-star beast tamer examination...” The old man sighed as he recounted the story.

After taming the Draconic Granite Beast and successfully advancing to become a 5-star beast tamer, he grew complacent and fearless. Eventually, when he was fighting against an enemy one day, he sustained a fatal injury.

Back then, his severe injuries were threatening to claim his life at any moment. It was the Draconic Granite Beast who infused its blood essence into him to save him. Not too long later, it died.

He had always felt guilty about this matter, so he buried the other party here, erected a tombstone, and swore to accompany the other party until his death.

“Due to the presence of the blood essence of the Draconic Granite Beast in me, I am also subjected to the pressure from the Voice of True Dragons,” the elder said.

Zhang Xuan nodded.

It was no wonder.

Even though the Draconic Granite Beast had a huge stature, its blood essence was limited. Furthermore, in order to save him, the blood essence had to be of a certain purity. As such, even though the old man didn't exactly possess the Dragon Bloodline, it was still affected by it.

“Is this related to the reason why you studied the Ancient Beast Language and the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragons?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Considering how the other party had put everything aside to immerse himself in the research of the Ancient Beast Language, it was likely related to the experiences he had.

“Yes... Back then, when I was severely injured, it was Draconic Granite Beast who saved me. However, there was another spirit beast present there then... It was the spirit beast which I said that could reach Hongyuan Empire within just ten days—Great Violetwing Beast!”

The old man clenched his fists tightly together. “Before the Draconic Granite Beast passed away, it said many words to me. However, as it was extremely weak then, it was unable to communicate telepathically to me, so I was unable to understand what it had said. All these years, I have been trying my best to study the Ancient Beast Language so as to learn what it said with its dying breath... and what kind of regrets it had that it wanted me to fulfill...”

At this point, the old man’s eyes turned red.

687 I Am Done Studying I

A typical beast tamer would have to spend several years of selfless giving and intimate conversations to win the trust and loyalty of a savage beast. Not everyone was like Zhang Xuan, where a single beating would suffice.

As such, the relationships between beast tamers and their tamed beasts tended to be extremely strong. Furthermore, this tie was further strengthened when they engaged in collaborative cultivation and fused their bloodlines together.

This Draconic Granite Beast had spent many years accompanying this elder, and in the latter's heart, it had already become his closest kin. On top of that, it had even given up its life for him. Thus, no matter how much trouble it would take, he wanted to fulfill the latter's dying will.

“Has the Beast Hall tried taming the Great Violetwing Beast yet?”

Zhang Xuan frowned.

Even if a beast tamer couldn't comprehend the Ancient Beast Language, they were still able to communicate with one another telepathically. The only reason the elder wasn't able to interpret the Draconic Granite Beast's last words and ended up immersing himself in the research of the Ancient Beast Language was because the latter was too weak to communicate telepathically then.

However, considering how the Great Violentwing Beast was present at that moment, it should have heard the words of the Draconic Granite Beast. If someone tamed it, they would be able to learn of the Draconic Granite Beast's dying message, and the elder wouldn't have to go through so much trouble.

The elder shook his head.

“Even though a mature Great Violetwing Beast tends to be at Transcendent Mortal 8-dan, this one has reached the level of

half 9-dan. There's no one in the Beast Hall who is sufficiently capable to tame it..."

"Half 9-dan?"

"Yes. Even though it hasn't exactly reached 9-dan yet, the advantages it derives from its superior physique and bloodline allows it to defeat most 9-dan cultivators. Furthermore, the death of the Draconic Granite Beast has made it hostile to humans, thus making it impossible to tame it..." the elder said.

"The Great Violetwing Beast was a good friend of the Draconic Granite Beast?" Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

The elder hesitated for a moment before replying.

"They were... lovers!"

"Lovers?" Zhang Xuan was stunned.

There were plenty of powerful spirit beast species that were extremely limited in terms of their numbers. As such, it would be difficult for them to find a companion from the same species. Under such circumstances, they would choose to find another powerful spirit beast to mate with. But of course, it was uncertain whether they would be able to procreate together or not.

More often than not, they would regard the latter as their spiritual partner, a companion to fight and spend their days with.

In fact, there were some human couples who had such platonic relationships as well.

Upon reaching a certain level of cultivation, cultivators would begin to crave for spiritual intimacy rather than physical relationships. Procreation and physical pleasure would take the backseat instead.

Since the Great Violetwing Beast and Draconic Granite Beast were a couple, it was natural that they shared an intimate relationship.

As such, it viewed the elder, who took the Draconic Granite Beast away from it, in hostility. As such, how could it possibly

be willing to inform the latter of the Draconic Granite Beast's dying will?

Thus, the elder was determined to study the Ancient Beast Language so as to communicate and make peace with it.

Upon hearing his teacher's words, Han Chong couldn't help but ask, "But teacher, since the Great Violetwing Beast was the companion of teacher's tamed beast, why does it still wreak havoc in the Beast Hall once every few days?"

"Wreak havoc?" Luo Qiqi turned her gaze over curiously.

"Indeed. That fellow comes over several times a month to attack the Beast Hall and devour a few spirit beasts, resulting in immense fury among the beast tamers. The Beast Hall has gone to great lengths to capture it, but it was simply too strong and too fast, thus resulting in a failure each time..." Han Chong explained.

Even though he hadn't been in Huanyu Empire for too long, he was still able to learn of quite a few things.

In the past month, the Great Violetwing Beast had already attacked the Beast Hall several times and devoured several spirit beasts. This had left many people furious, but due to the Great Violetwing Beast's overwhelming strength, there was nothing that they could do.

All along, he had thought that the Great Violetwing Beast was just provoked by the spirit beasts becoming subservient to humans—there were plenty of spirit beasts who felt that humans weren't qualified to tame them—but from the looks of it now, it seemed like it was exacting vengeance for its companion.

"It is intentionally wreaking havoc in the Beast Hall because it is furious at the Draconic Granite Beast's death. The other reason I have been studying the Ancient Beast Language over the past few decades is to ask it exactly what it wants!"

The elder shook his head in disappointment. After which, it turned its eyes to Zhang Xuan and asked, "Since you are able to vocalize even the True Voice of Dragons, are you by any

chance knowledgeable in the Ancient Beast Language as well?”

Even if he possessed the Pureblooded Dragon Body, there was no way he could learn the True Voice of Dragons by himself. Thus, someone must have tutored him. Given that the certain someone was able to impart even the True Voice of Dragons, there was a chance that the person might just have imparted the Ancient Beast Language along with it.

While the other party said that he had only learned it for a while, he could just be saying so out of humility.

Scratching his head, Zhang Xuan said, “I am not too knowledgeable about the Ancient Beast Language.”

He did learn a few words back then, but it had only managed to enrage the spirit beasts he had attempted to speak with. Given how he didn’t even know the meaning of those words, it was no different from not knowing the language at all.

“Not too knowledgeable?” Hearing those words, the elder’s expectant eyes sank. “Then... what about the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragons?”

Even though the Great Violetwing Beast didn’t possess the Dragon Bloodline, if the other party could talk to it via the Dragon Language, he might just be able to convince it to reveal the truth regarding the matter back then.

While verbal communication would be impossible, there were still various other ways for a human to communicate with a spirit beast.

“I... only know a single note!” Zhang Xuan felt even more embarrassed.

The other party thought that he was well-versed in the Dragon Language, but in truth, Zhang Xuan only knew a single note.

He could still scare a few spirit beasts possessing Dragon Bloodline with it, but communicating with just that single note was clearly impossible.

“A single note?” The elder staggered speechlessly.

When the young man used the Dragon Language, he thought that he had found a solution to this problem. But in the end, nothing had changed at all!

“Forget it then...”

The elder shook his head helplessly.

He had gather many books on the Ancient Beast Language in the past few hopes in the hope that he could piece it together slowly. However, this language was simply far too difficult. Without anyone to guide him along, he couldn't even differentiate the true words from the false, so he wasn't able to make much progress in his research.

Considering how highly Han Chong thought of the young man, he thought that he could learn a thing or two from the latter. Who knew that the latter would be as ignorant as him?

Zhang Xuan gazed at the elder and asked, “It's still too early to give up. Given that you have been studying the Ancient Beast Language for decades, you must have gathered quite a number of books. May I borrow them to read? Perhaps I might be able to make a breakthrough in your research.”

“Borrow? Breakthrough?” The elder smiled bitterly. “You mean that you want to start studying now?”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Do you know how difficult the Ancient Beast Language is?”

Seeing that the other party had such an intention, the elder couldn't help but shake his head. “The Ancient Beast Language has lost most of its heritage, and the records that remain are all unclear and mixed with falsehood. Putting aside whether the vocalization method for the words in them are true or not, even if they are, are the meanings listed in the book even accurate? I have already spent fifty years studying the topic, but I haven't been able to make any advancement at all, so...”

The elder didn't finish his words, but his meaning couldn't have been clearer. He thought that Zhang Xuan was treating the entire matter too lightly.

He had spent his entire life studying the topic, only to find himself as ignorant as he was at the very start. If the Ancient Beast Language could be grasped that easily, it wouldn't have lost most of its heritage in the first place, and innumerable beast tamers wouldn't have failed in their attempts to restore it either.

“I am just very interested in the Ancient Beast Language, so I wish to take a look at those books. If I can comprehend something from them, that would of course be for the best. But if I can't, there's no harm in it either...” said Zhang Xuan, knowing the thoughts going through the other party's mind.

“Alright then. All of the books I have on the Ancient Beast Language are in my log house. Over the years, I have collected everything related to the Ancient Beast Language that has appeared in Huanyu Empire...”

The elder waved his hands in disinterest.

Even though it did take him a lot of trouble to gather his collection of books, it wasn't of particular importance to him. It mattered not to him whether the other party read them or not.

“You have my gratitude.”

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist before walking out.

As his figure disappeared into the log house, the elder couldn't help but shake his head in disappointment. “Even with someone imparting the Ancient Beast Language, it's impossible to learn it without several years of practice. If it could be learned that easily, wouldn't I have wasted the past fifty years of my life for nothing?”

He thought that the other party should possess incredible composure given that he was able to utter the True Voice of Dragons. In the end, the other party was still so impetuous.

The Ancient Beast Language was tied to a huge secret of the Beast Hall. If it could be learned that easily, beast tamers like them wouldn't face so much difficulty trying to tame beasts.

Hearing the doubt in the elder's voice, Luo Qiqi couldn't help but speak up for Zhang Xuan.

“Teacher... has always been a reliable person. Since he’s going to read the books, he must have an idea in mind. Perhaps, he really might just succeed.”

Hearing the young lady’s address for the young man, the elder was stunned. He immediately turned his gaze over to her.

“Teacher? You are his student?”

The young lady’s cultivation and disposition were both exceptional among her peers. Why would she acknowledge a person who was even younger than her as her teacher?

“That’s right.” Luo Qiqi nodded.

“If I recall correctly, you addressed him as Zhang shi previously. Could the young man be a master teacher?”

Hearing Luo Qiqi’s reply, the elder suddenly recalled how Han Chong addressed the young man as well.

Han Chong pondered for a moment before replying. “Zhang shi is a 4-star master teacher, as well as the champion of the Master Teacher Tournament. The reason he’s heading for Hongyuan Empire is probably to study at the Master Teacher Academy!”

Han Chong had left the Myriad Kingdom Alliance even before the Master Teacher Tournament had begun, so there were many things that he was oblivious of. Nevertheless, he did hear some news regarding the matter.

“The champion of the Master Teacher Tournament?”

The elder was taken aback.

“Not only so, Zhang shi is also a 4-star beast tamer and 4-star physician!” Han Chong quickly mentioned.

“4-star beast tamer?” The elder frowned. “Since he’s a 4-star beast tamer, he should understand how difficult it is to learn the Ancient Beast Language. It is unlikely for him to act so impulsively on the matter...”

If the young man was only a master teacher and was ignorant of beast taming, the elder could still understand the other party’s actions.

But a 4-star beast tamer should have already accrued considerable knowledge of the field, so how could he possibly not understand the difficulty involved in learning the Ancient Beast Language?

On the other hand, if he knew, how could he possibly utter such amateurish words?

Shaking his head, the elder decided to put this matter behind him for now.

“Inform me when he’s done reading the books. I’ll take you to meet the hall master!”

“Meet the hall master? Is teacher going to help them find an aerial spirit beast?” Han Chong’s eyes lit up.

“Un. Since he’s a 4-star master teacher and a beast tamer, there’s no reason for us not to help him. I recall that the hall master has a Transcendent Mortal 7-dan spirit beast. Even though he never lends it anyone, he might be willing to compromise if I request it of him personally,” the elder said.

“Thank you, teacher...”

Hearing that his teacher was willing to help, Han Chong hurriedly bowed in gratitude. At that moment, ‘jiya!’, the door opened, and the young man walked out.

“Ah?”

Everyone was taken aback. Even the elder couldn’t help but frown at the sight before him.

‘I thought you were going in to read the books in order to learn the Ancient Beast Language? Why are you out when it has barely been ten minutes?’

The elder couldn’t help but ask, “Is the Ancient Beast Language too hard to comprehend so you lost your interest?”

There was no doubt about it, this fellow must have faltered at the sight of the immense collection before him. Otherwise, how could he possibly finish in such a short period of time?

“It’s indeed very difficult, but the reason I am out is not because I have lost my interest. It’s because...”

At this point, Zhang Xuan looked a little hesitant, but eventually, he still spoke decisively.

“... I am done studying it!”

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“You’re done studying?”

Everyone was dumbfounded.

This was especially so for the elder. His face turned livid in rage.

He had gone to great lengths to collect the books inside the log house, and he knew how huge his collection was.

Over the past fifty years, through tapping into the connections of the guild, he had gathered as many ancient texts and scrolls regarding the Ancient Beast Language as he could, and they numbered at least in the hundred thousand. Even he had to spend an entire ten years to go through the whole collection. Yet, in just ten minutes, the other party actually claimed that... he was done!

‘Even if you want to lie, you should come up with something better than that!’

“What do you mean by you are done?” The elder couldn’t hold himself back anymore and harrumphed.

“Oh, it means that... I have roughly grasped the language, and basic communication shouldn’t be a problem...” Zhang Xuan said.

He had immediately started sprinting around to collect the books as soon as he’d entered the room. In just a few minutes, the massive collection of a hundred thousand works was duplicated in the Library of Heaven’s Path. Then, through the Library of Heaven’s Path, he’d sieved out the truth from the falsehood.

Astonishingly, he’d managed to find quite a few correct words.

Even though many of these records were just speculation, and some of them were even utter rubbish that the authors had made up, there were simply too many of them in terms of numbers. As the saying goes, pile up a bed of sand and you

will build a castle. By compiling all of them together, Zhang Xuan was still able to derive quite a few correct words.

The book which he had compiled contained the common phrases of the Ancient Beast Language, as well as their vocalization methods. While it would still be difficult to hold a proper conversation, basic communication shouldn't be a problem.

“Basic communication... shouldn't be a problem?” Hearing the other party's words, the elder's face darkened. “What arrogance!”

Even after fifty years of diligence, he hadn't even managed to grasp the tail of the language. Just take the experiment he did just a moment for example, his words had caused the Scarlet Coated Hamsters to puke in disgust. And yet, the young man before him actually claimed that he had mastered the basics of the language just moments after beginning to study?

‘If that is the case, I must be worse than a pig for achieving nothing at all after so many years of research!’

‘Even if you wish to lie, at least say something more credible than this!’

“I...”

Knowing that he would be doubted if he spoke the truth, Zhang Xuan was just about to find another logical explanation for this matter when a young man suddenly barged into the room.

“Elder, something bad has happened! The Great Violetwing Beast is back again!”

“It's back again?”

The elder's face darkened. “Take me there!”

“Yes!” The young man hurriedly rushed in the direction where the destruction was ongoing, and the elder followed him closely.

“Let's go take a look as well.” Seeing the elder leave hurriedly, Zhang Xuan glanced at Luo Qiqi and the others and followed behind.

Their primary intention here was to find an aerial spirit beast. Given that the Great Violetwing Beast was at half 9-dan, if Zhang Xuan were to tame it, it would save them a lot of trouble.

“Okay.” Knowing the severity of the matter, Han Chong nodded and followed the group.

Along the way, Zhang Xuan learned from Han Chong that the latter’s teacher went by the surname of Qian, and he was one of the more qualified and respected elders in the Beast Hall.

As the harassment of the Great Violetwing Beast was linked to Elder Qian, he would rush over to deal with the matter each time. While it hadn’t been long since Han Chong arrived at the Beast Hall, he had already encountered this situation numerous times already.

As such, he had a deep impression of that huge fellow.

“Every time that fellow arrives, it will either cause devastating destruction or kill the other spirit beasts, causing many complaints from the customers!”

Speaking of the Great Violetwing Beast, even Han Chong couldn’t help but feel a little frustrated.

It was one thing for it to hurt the beast tamers in anger, but the main problem was that it also bared its fangs against the spirit beasts as well. There were a few customers who, after queuing for numerous days, finally got to the end of the line, but due to the spirit beasts getting injured, their ride was delayed significantly. This had caused the credibility of the Beast Hall to plummet.

The Beast Hall did attempt to set several traps for the Great Violetwing Beast, but the latter seemed to always know of them in advance. Furthermore, its overwhelming strength also allowed it to break out of any encirclement easily and exact its wrathful vengeance once it returned.

The Beast Hall even reported this matter to the headquarters, and the Hongyuan Empire Beast Hall specially sent a 6-star beast tamer over to deal with it. However, seemingly having realized the lurking danger, it kept clear of the Beast Hall for

several months straight. And as soon as the 6-star beast tamer left, it immediately rushed back to wreak havoc once more.

After so many tries, the personnel of the Beast Hall found themselves incapable of dealing with it at all. Helpless, they could only invite Elder Qian over each time to deal with it.

However, there was indeed something very bizarre about the matter. Every time Elder Qian arrived on the scene, no matter how ferocious the Great Violetwing Beast had been a moment before, it would immediately turn away and leave, unwilling to harm him at all.

All along, Han Chong had been perplexed about this matter. He thought that it was due to his teacher's formidable beast taming capability that made the Great Violetwing Beast hesitant to face the latter. But from the looks of it now, it was probably related to the Draconic Granite Beast.

Chances were that the Great Violetwing Beast had made a promise to the Draconic Granite Beast. Thus, no matter how displeased the Great Violetwing Beast was with Elder Qian, it was unwilling to do anything that would hurt him.

“It's right in front!”

At that moment, Han Chong's eyebrow suddenly shot up, and he abruptly rushed forward. Zhang Xuan and the others also swiftly followed suit. Soon, a massive, violet spirit beast appeared before their eyes. With a Transcendent Mortal 3-dan spirit beast in its talons, it circled the sky majestically.

On the other hand, Elder Qian was standing beneath it with an anxious look.

Not too far away from Elder Qian stood eight white-bearded elders. Of them, the one standing in the middle bore striking resemblance with Qin Zhong. Most likely, he was the famed Hall Master Qin.

“To think that fellow would be back so soon...”

Behind those white-bearded elders, Zhang Xuan saw a familiar face.

It was that fellow ‘incapable of flight’, Qin Zhong.

Zhang Xuan thought that he would take some time to return to the Beast Hall considering how his spirit beast had left him.

“It seems the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast returned to fetch him...” Luo Qiqi whispered to Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan nodded.

They had let the Greenleaf Winged Dragon Beast go right after they had arrived at the Beast Hall. Knowing that its master was still lying unconscious in a ditch, it immediately rushed off to save him as soon as it was released.

The Beast Hall wasn't too far away from where they fell earlier, so it didn't take too long for it to return with Qin Zhong.

At this moment, Qin Zhong's body was completely wrapped up like a mummy. Even though he was severely injured, he wasn't in a critical condition.

His eyes were fixated on the Great Violetwing Beast above, unaware that his nemesis was nearby...

...

Gazing at the Great Violetwing Beast above, Elder Qian clenched his fists tightly and said, “Let the spirit beast go! I hope you won't involve the Beast Hall in our grudge. Otherwise, our Draconic Granite Beast would surely be unable to rest in peace if he were to see this sight...”

Roar!

Upon hearing Elder Qian mention the Draconic Granite Beast, the fellow above gritted its teeth in anger. Not only did it not release the spirit beast, it even tightened its grip. Under the humongous pressure, the spirit beast in its claws seemed to be on the verge of being crushed to death.

“Elder Qian and Hall Master Qin, please save my spirit beast...”

Looking at the sight in the sky, a 4-star beast tamer pleaded anxiously.

Clearly, the spirit beast held hostage in the Great Violetwing Beast's claws was his tamed beast.

It had taken him a lot of effort to tame the spirit beast, and throughout the long taming process, he had also come to bear feelings for the latter.

"Beast Tamer Li, don't worry. I'll surely save your tamed beast..." Elder Qian assured.

He understood very well the pain of having one's tamed beast killed. He didn't want anyone to go through the same pain he did.

After consoling Beast Tamer Li, Elder Qian turned to the sky and bellowed, "Great Violetwing Beast! As long as you free it, I'll give you anything as long as it is within my means, be it blood essence or spirit stones!"

Hearing those words, Hall Master Qin frowned.

"Elder Qian, you mustn't promise it that. Throughout the years, you have already given away nearly your entire wealth. Your cultivation will really stagnate if you continue giving in to the Great Violetwing Beast like that..."

Considering Elder Qian's talent, he should have already long reached Transcendent Mortal 9-dan. However, as he gave away nearly the entirety of his savings to the Great Violetwing Beast, he was deprived of his cultivation resources, resulting in a significant reduction in his cultivation speed.

On the contrary, through frequent blackmailing, the Great Violetwing Beast had managed to use those resources to reach half 9-dan first.

If this were to continue on, the Great Violetwing Beast would only grow stronger and stronger, thus making it a greater threat to the Beast Hall.

"This is what I owe to Draconic Granite Beast..."

Elder Qian shook his head.

"But..." Hall Master Qin's face turned livid.

“There are no buts. If not for the Draconic Granite Beast, I would have long been dead. It is already a huge mercy from the heavens that I’ve been able to live for so long. Putting aside my savings, if my death can bring Great Violetwing Beast solace, I’m willing to give my life up!”

With a resolute gaze, Elder Qian flicked his wrist and whipped out an entire bunch of beast essence, middle-tier spirit stones, and a few precious medicinal herbs.

However, the amount wasn’t large. It seemed like Elder Qian’s wealth had really been swiped clean over the years.

Just as Elder Qian was about to throw his remaining wealth over to the huge fellow in the sky, a nonchalant voice suddenly echoed through the surroundings.

“You owe a debt to your Draconic Granite Beast, not to Great Violetwing Beast. Elder Qian, you really don’t have to do so!”

Upon hearing the voice, everyone immediately turned their attention to the source, and they saw a young man walking over toward him.

“Father, he’s the one who left me in such a tragic state! You mustn’t let him off easily!”

Not expecting the fellow to actually stride up to them without fear, Qin Zhong’s eyes immediately reddened in wrath.

“Him?” Hall Master Qin’s face darkened. Turning to Elder Qian, he asked, “Elder Qian, do you recognize this young man?”

“He’s Han Chong’s benefactor, a 4-star master teacher and beast tamer...”

Following which, he turned to the young man with a frown and waved his hands. “This is none of your business, don’t get involved in it. If you wish to borrow a spirit beast from the Beast Hall, I’ll have to ask you to step aside!”

Of course, the young man who was walking over was none other than Zhang Xuan.

Unable to tolerate how Elder Qian kept giving in to the Great Violetwing Beast, he decided to step forward and intervene.

However, the other party didn't seem to welcome his interference at all.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to reply to the other party's words, a young lady behind him abruptly spoke up.

“What if we refuse?”

“Refuse? Then don't even dream about renting a spirit beast from the Beast Hall...”

Elder Qian flung his sleeves angrily and harrumphed. However, at that moment, he suddenly noticed Hall Master Qin's face turning pale, and his lips were quivering uncontrollably as well.

At the same time, the latter also kept shooting him some looks, seemingly trying to hint something to him, “Cough cough, Elder Qian. Calm down, that's not how we should treat our guests...”

“What's wrong?”

Seeing the bizarre attitude from the hall master, Elder Qian was perplexed. However, before he received a respond, the young lady standing behind Zhang shi suddenly stepped forward. She glanced at Hall Master Qin and smiled with a face devoid of any warmth.

“If my memory doesn't fail me, you're Qin Zhao, right? You're the hall master here?”

With a pale face, Hall Master Qin hurriedly clasped his fist.

“Qin Zhao pays respect to Princess Fei-er!”

“So, you recognize me?” With her hands behind her back, Yu Fei-er exuded a powerful, authoritative aura befitting that of a princess from a Tier-1 Empire.

“I once accompanied my teacher to the royal palace, and I had the pleasure of meeting Your Highness...”

Qin Zhao quickly bowed deeply. However, before he could finish his words, his severely wounded son suddenly howled furiously.

“Father, that woman is an accomplice as well! Together with that fellow over there, those scum manipulated my spirit beast and made it plummet from the sky. You must redress my grievances...”

With his vision blocked by the crowd, Qin Zhong didn't notice his father's peculiar attitude. Thinking that his father was going to get even for him, his eyes reddened with excitement.

On the other hand, upon hearing those words, Hall Master Qin staggered weakly, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

‘Don't you call me...

‘I'll let you be my father, but please don't call me Father...

‘Other people's sons practice filial piety, but why does mine seem so intent on dragging me down to the depths of hell?’

689 Still Alive?

“Princess?”

Seeing the hall master’s face twisting in frustration, Elder Qian couldn’t help but assess the young lady before him.

Ye Wentian did have a few daughters, but none of their appearances or ages seemed to coincide with this young lady here.

Besides, so what if the other party was a princess? As the esteemed hall master of the Beast Hall, a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan pinnacle expert, not even Ye Wentian would dare to do anything to him. Was there really a need for him to be so fearful of a mere princess?

“She’s not Ye Wentian’s daughter; she’s the Sixth Princess of Hongyuan Empire, Princess Yu Fei-er!”

Noticing Elder Qian’s confusion, Hall Master Qin immediately sent a telepathic message over for fear that he might say something rude.

“Hongyuan Empire?” Hearing those words, Elder Qian’s body suddenly trembled intensely, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

The reticent lady who followed behind Zhang shi like a maid was actually the princess of Hongyuan Empire?

Hongyuan Empire was a Tier-1 Empire, and it had many experts in its ranks. Furthermore, the great Master Teacher Academy was located there as well. As a result, the royal family which ruled over the region wielded great prestige and authority.

Not even Ye Wentian would dare to utter a word of complaint when berated by a princess from such an empire...

‘Are you sure you are not mistaken?’

‘If this young lady over here is really a princess, then considering how she was following behind Zhang shi subserviently, what in the world is Zhang shi’s background?’

Seeing Yu Fei-er bringing out her identity as a princess, Luo Qiqi stepped forward and asked, “Fei-er, you know him?”

“On my birthday a few years ago, Elder Bai from the Beast School gave me a White-tailed Green Wolf, and this Hall Master Qin happened to be behind him then,” Yu Fei-er replied nonchalantly.

“Oh.” Luo Qiqi nodded. “Now that you mention it, I seem to recall it as well... I thought that the person then was just an ordinary disciple under Elder Bai. To think that he would be the hall master of the Huanyu Empire Beast Hall!”

As a close friend of Yu Fei-er, there was no way Luo Qiqi would miss Yu Fei-er’s birthday. She could still remember how envious she was when she saw Elder Bai gifting Yu Fei-er a White-tailed Green Wolf as a present back then. Taking a closer look now, she also realized that Hall Master Qin looked extremely familiar.

“You are... Luo shi?”

Recognizing the close friend of Yu Fei-er, Hall Master Qin’s lips twitched.

“Yes, you are indeed sharp. I am 5-star Master Teacher Luo Qiqi!” Luo Qiqi nodded.

“5-star master teacher?” Elder Qian’s body shook.

‘If you are a 5-star master teacher, you should have said so earlier! If I knew earlier, I wouldn’t have put on such airs and immediately rushed off to find the best spirit beast in the Beast Hall for you...’

Thus, Elder Qian turned to stare at Han Chong in anger...

‘Didn’t you say that Zhang shi is a 4-star master teacher from the Myriad Kingdom Alliance? If that is really true, how can a 5-star master teacher possibly be his student...’

Han Chong also stared at Zhang Xuan indignantly.

‘Didn’t you just pass your 4-star master teacher examination a few months ago?’

‘When in the world did you turn the princess of the Hongyuan Empire royal family and a 5-star master teacher into your

follower and your student?’

They weren’t the only ones who were feeling frenzied by the turn of events. At this moment, Qin Zhong also realized what was wrong, and he nearly burst into tears.

He actually... teased the princess from Hongyuan Empire and a 5-star master teacher... In fact, he even tried to get his father to teach the other party a lesson!

It was fortunate that the other party didn’t follow up on the matter. Otherwise, not even his father would be able to save him if the other party were to behead him on the spot out of anger...

Seeing how they were getting sidetracked, Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, “Alright, now is not the time to be talking about such unimportant matters. We should deal with the Great Violetwing Beast first.”

The Transcendent Mortal 3-dan spirit beast was already on the verge of being crushed to death, and yet they were still chatting at this moment.

“Deal? How do we deal with it? Does Zhang shi have any idea in mind?” Judging by how Princess Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi seemed to hold the young man as the de facto leader of their group, Hall Master Qin could tell that the young man was not as simple as he seemed.

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xuan replied with a frown, “I’ll negotiate with it to see what it wants!”

If the other party possessed the Dragon Bloodline, he could easily stop it with a ‘Moo’ or the newly-learned ‘Mou’. However, that didn’t seem to be the case, and it was likely that he was just going to waste his efforts. Since that was the case, he might as well ask the other party what its goal was.

“Negotiate?”

Hall Master Qin and Elder Qian frowned.

It was precisely due to the communication barrier before them that made it difficult to negotiate with the vengeful Great

Violetwing Beast. Otherwise, they wouldn't be so helpless before it either.

Just as they were wondering what the young man was up to, the young man stepped forward and spoke.

“\$*%@ ¥ #3...”

The Great Violetwing Beast in the sky was visibly stunned for a moment, but a moment later, it began roaring.

“Roaroaroar!”

The young man, “# ¥ % ¥ ...%”

The Great Violetwing Beast, “Roaroaroar!”

...

“This is... the Ancient Beast Language?”

Seeing the man and the beast conversing with one another, Hall Master Qin's eyes nearly popped out from their sockets.

Any beast tamer, regardless of their capability, would be able to qualify as a 6-star beast tamer at the very least just by knowing how to speak the Ancient Beast Language once their cultivation reached the required level... Thus, it was unimaginable for him that this young man was actually able to speak the Ancient Beast Language.

“Elder Qian, aren't you trying to learn the Ancient Beast Language? You can study under Zhang shi...”

The excited Hall Master Qin turned to look at Elder Qian, only to freeze in astonishment at the very next moment.

The composed Elder Qian was currently clawing at his hair frenziedly, as though he was going insane.

But it was no wonder he was reacting like that! It was just a moment ago that the young man was completely ignorant of the Ancient Beast Language. Yet, ten minutes after entering his log house to browse through his collection of records, Zhang shi returned and claimed that he had learned the basics of the language... All this while, Elder Qian thought that the latter was just boasting, but to think that it was actually true!

When did the Ancient Beast Language... become so easy to learn?

Could he have really wasted the last fifty years of his life for nothing?

Otherwise, how could the results from his fifty years be unable to match up to ten minutes of the other party's efforts?

Just as he was on the verge of a breakdown, he saw the young man and the Great Violetwing Beast in the sky wrapping up their negotiation. Following which, the young man returned with a peculiar expression on his face.

“How did it go?”

Putting everything aside, Elder Qian quickly turned to look at Zhang Xuan and asked anxiously, “What did it say to you?”

Throughout these years, he had been dying to know what the Draconic Granite Beast had said before his death, as well as to understand why the Great Violetwing Beast had kept pestering the Beast Hall over the years.

This was the reason why he was able to persevere in his study of the Ancient Beast Language for fifty years.

“The Great Violetwing Beast says that...”

At which, Zhang Xuan scratched his head. “... it wants you to die!”

“I knew it. After all, I was the one who caused the death of our Draconic Granite Beast. As the culprit who resulted in the death of its lover, it is natural that it would harbor such deep hatred for me...”

Elder Qian suddenly looked as though he had aged ten years.

If not for his obstinacy and complacency back then, he wouldn't have been severely injured, and the Draconic Granite Beast wouldn't have sacrificed itself for him either. As the Draconic Granite Beast's companion, it was no wonder the Great Violetwing Beast wanted him dead!

“Cough cough! That's not it...”

Seeing Elder Qian falling into an endless spiral of self-reproach, Zhang Xuan hurriedly pulled him back.

“That’s not it? Then what is the reason?” Elder Qian was taken aback.

“It’s because of what the Draconic Granite Beast said before his death!” Zhang Xuan replied.

“What the Draconic Granite Beast said before his death? The Great Violetwing Beast... told you his dying message?”

Elder Qian was so agitated that his entire body began trembling.

Over the past few decades, he had been dying to know the dying will of the Draconic Granite Beast, but it was a pity that the Great Violetwing Beast refused to say anything at all. Or perhaps, he was simply unable to comprehend the latter’s words, and that only amplified his guilt.

Seeing how Zhang shi uttered these words after conversing with the Great Violetwing Beast... could it be that the Great Violetwing Beast had revealed the Draconic Granite Beast’s dying message?

“That’s right...”

The peculiar expression on Zhang Xuan’s face intensified.

“What did he say? Did he tell me to live well in his stead?”

Recalling the bits and pieces that he and his loyal tamed beast had gone through together, Elder Qian’s eyes turned red. Tears began flowing uncontrollably from his eyes.

“The Draconic Granite Beast said...” Conflicted, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a long moment before finally spitting it out. “He said that... ‘I am not dead!’”

“Not dead?”

Elder Qian’s body swayed weakly, and he spurted a mouthful of fresh blood. “B-b-but I buried him!”

Elder Qian had always thought the last words of the Draconic Granite Beast were entrusting its hopes and wishes to him.

Who would have thought that its words would be... 'I am not dead'?

'The heck!

'I have even felt his body! Stiff and frigid, how could he possibly still be alive?'

Furthermore, even if he wasn't dead then, having been buried underground for fifty years, he couldn't still be alive now!

Not only was Elder Qian frenzied, even Luo Qiqi and Yu Feier also widened their eyes, and they nearly fainted from shock.

They had shed a tear earlier on after hearing the touching story of how the loyal Draconic Granite Beast died for its master. Who could have known that... it would actually be a horror story instead!

To be buried alive...

After fifty years, it should have long suffocated to death!

Hall Master Qin and the elders also found their bodies trembling in shock at the revelation.

'For you, your tamed beast went to the extent of even offering its own blood essence, and yet you buried it alive... Given your doings, it would be a wonder if its companion was willing to let you off!'

Honestly speaking, it was already being very magnanimous by only wreaking havoc in the Beast Hall all these years!

Zhang Xuan and the others also shared the same thoughts as well.

But in the end, Elder Qian was also an innocent party too. How could he have known that the Draconic Granite Beast was still alive then? Furthermore, he had also been tortured with guilt throughout these years as well.

Thus, Zhang Xuan turned to him and asked, "Did you... cremate the Draconic Granite Beast?"

"That... I didn't!" Elder Qian shook his head.

In truth, he did intend to cremate it back then, but the Great Violetwing Beast came to wreak havoc. Thinking that the Great Violetwing Beast was unwilling to see its companion being reduced to ash, he decided to simply bury it in the mountain forest and accompany it for life.

“It’s good that you didn’t. Based on what the Great Violetwing Beast said, the Draconic Granite Beast is just in a state of pseudo-death. After a period of rest and nourishment, he should be able to be revived. Even though you’ve buried him, it’s fortunate that you didn’t cremate him... There might still be a chance!” Zhang Xuan said.

The Great Violetwing Beast had explained the matter thoroughly to him just now. The Draconic Granite Beast possessed the Dragon Bloodline and a tough exterior reminiscent of granite, thus the origin of the name.

After losing its blood essence, its body would become cold and rigid like a rock, similar to a corpse. Its breathing and heartbeat would also come to a temporary halt. However, this wasn’t death in the truest sense. As long as it was well-nourished in the time to come, it should be possible to awaken it very quickly.

As the Draconic Granite Beasts had always been a rare species, and there had never been a case where one voluntarily gave away a huge amount of its blood essence, such a phenomenon wasn’t recorded in the books. As such, not even a 5-star beast tamer like Elder Qian was aware of this ability of the Draconic Granite Beast.

Considering how the Draconic Granite Beast had stopped its breathing and heartbeat, even if it was buried... as long as it wasn’t cremated and hadn’t decomposed yet, there should still be a chance of survival.

No matter what, that was a powerful Transcendent Mortal 8-dan spirit beast harnessing the Dragon Bloodline within it! There was no way it could die that easily.

“There is still a chance?”

Elder Qian's eyes lit up for a moment before dimming again in sorrow. "But... he has been buried for fifty years already..."

If it had just been a few months or even a year, there might still be a chance. But fifty years had passed, and there wasn't the slightest sign of recovery for the Draconic Granite Beast. This period of time was more than sufficient for a pseudo-death to become real!

"Calm down, let's go over and take a look first. It'll be best if we can save him, but otherwise... it is still worth a shot."

Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

'Who asked you to bury your tamed beast alive? The only thing we can do now is to quickly bring him out and diagnose his condition. Even if it were to end up futile in the end, at least this matter can be put to an end.'

"Un!" Elder Qian quickly nodded and led the group to the backyard of the log house. At that moment, Zhang Xuan suddenly recalled something and turned to the Great Violetwing Beast with a frown on his face. "What are you waiting for? Put that spirit beast down!"

Roar!

The Great Violetwing Beast released its claws indignantly.

Boom!

Falling onto the ground, the spirit beast fainted.

690 Saving the Draconic Granite Beas

After saving that innocent spirit beast, everyone rushed over to the log house.

Soon, they saw a tombstone with a mound behind it.

Knowing that this matter was extremely urgent, Zhang Xuan firmly instructed, “Open it!”

Nodding, Elder Qian gathered his strength and grabbed at the soil.

Hong long long!

A dense layer of zhenqi surged from his hands, and a powerful might swept through the mound, pushing away the soil. Soon, a massive tomb came into appearance.

“You built a tomb? It seems like there’s still hope...”

Seeing that Elder Qian didn’t simply bury the Draconic Granite Beast in the ground, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Even in a state of pseudo-death, the organs of the Draconic Granite Beast were still functioning, albeit very slowly, to keep it away from death’s door. As such, it would still require oxygen to survive.

At the very least, with this massive tomb, the Draconic Granite Beast could be spared from the fate of asphyxiation.

In a sense, this was a blessing amidst a field of misfortune.

Opening the gates to the tomb, the crowd immediately rushed in. Soon, they arrived at a vast hall where the massive Draconic Granite Beast laid.

That huge fellow seemed to be made entirely of stones. Despite the passing of fifty years, there was no signs of decomposition on it.

“As expected of the Draconic Granite Beast...”

After taking a glance, Zhang Xuan nodded in awe.

Fifty years was more than enough time to decompose the entirety of an average spirit beast’s body.

And yet, perhaps it was due to the possession the Dragon Bloodline and a tough granite exterior, the Draconic Granite Beast’s physical body still seemed to be in a good condition.

Seeing that the ‘corpse’ was still completely intact, Elder Qian’s hands immediately started trembling in agitation. He hurriedly turned to Han Chong and instructed, “Hurry up and call a physician...”

“Teacher, Zhang shi is a very formidable physician himself!” Han Chong quickly replied.

Hearing Han Chong’s words, Elder Qian immediately kneeled down before Zhang Xuan and pleaded.

“Zhang shi, I beg you, save my Draconic Granite Beast...”

The Draconic Granite Beast was his closest companion, and ever since its passing, he had spent every single day living in self-reproach. He thought that he would never get a chance to see it again, but to think that the other party was still alive!

Even if he had to give up his life to resuscitate the Draconic Granite Beast, he would definitely offer it without any hesitation.

On top of that, he also felt deep guilt.

The other party had put himself in a state of pseudo-death to save him, and yet due to his inability to comprehend the other party’s words, he actually buried his tamed beast alive for fifty long years...

If the Draconic Granite Beast couldn’t be saved, then he would have no face to continue living in this world. Most likely, he would commit suicide out of guilt.

“Elder Qian, there’s no need to stand on ceremony. If there’s still a chance, I’ll surely try my best to save your Draconic Granite Beast.”

Understanding Elder Qian's sentiments, Zhang Xuan stepped forward and touched the Draconic Granite Beast.

After which, he circled around the latter and fell into deep thought.

A few moments later, he walked back with a stern face. Seeing the look on Zhang Xuan's face, Elder Qian's body stiffened in anxiety. "Can he... still be saved?"

"He is indeed still alive, but..." At which, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before continuing. "After being buried for fifty years, the vitality in his body has been completely depleted. To resuscitate him, I will require pills that can stimulate one's vitality, as well as spirit stones!"

"Pills to stimulate vitality? I have three 'Void Treading Creation Pills' over here. It's highly effective even on Transcendent Mortal 8-dan Void Treading realm experts!"

Hall Master Qin stepped forward and passed jade bottle over.

"I also have two 'Spirit Nurturing Pills' here. It's the ideal medicine to stimulate one's vitality!" another elder offered.

"I don't have any pills, but I do have quite a few spirit stones. Here are 500 middle-tier spirit stones..."

They were all old friends with Elder Qian, and they knew that the revival of the Draconic Granite Beast would surely be a huge relief to him. On top of that, this was also beneficial to the Beast Hall as a whole.

"Good!"

Seeing the huge collection of items before him, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

"I still need a Five Elements Formation Flag, Purpleink Bamboo, three big buckets of beast blood—for that, the Great Violetwing Beast outside will suffice—as well as Faint Verdant Incense, Purplecrystal Smoke..."

After seeing the pills and spirit stones that Hall Master Qin and the other elders had contributed, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but be impressed by the wealth of the Beast Hall.

Following which, Zhang Xuan also named a few dozen more items.

“These...”

Hearing the names of the items Zhang Xuan listed, everyone frowned in confusion.

They could understand why the treatment of the Draconic Granite Beast would require vitality pills and spirit stones. After all, those could help nourish one’s body. But what use would the Faint Verdant Incense and Purplecrystal Smoke be to the treatment?

An elder suddenly recalled something and spoke.

“I’ve heard of Faint Verdant Incense, it has the ability of stabilizing one’s soul. It is said that it was often used by the soul oracles in the past...”

Everyone was taken aback.

“Soul oracles?”

The occupation had already disappeared in the river of history several dozen millenniums ago... but could the young man before them be a soul oracle?

“It is just some unique method I know of, it doesn’t have much of a relation to the soul oracles.” Zhang Xuan waved his hands casually. “Right, prepare 108 three chi long silver needles and a cup of the Emerald-tailed Viper’s saliva!”

Despite their extinction, soul oracles were still viewed in revile by the populace due to their betrayal back then. Thus, there was no way Zhang Xuan could reveal that he was adept in the arts of the soul oracles.

“The saliva of the Emerald-tailed Viper? But that’s lethal venom...” Hall Master Qin exclaimed.

He might not have known the uses of the Faint Verdant Incense and Purplecrystal Smoke, but he knew of the properties of the Emerald-tailed Viper well.

Just a single drop was sufficient to kill a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert. Why would Zhang Xuan want such a dangerous

thing?

“Poison doesn’t just kill, it can heal as well,” replied Zhang Xuan.

“Healing another through poison? But... that’s an ability only poison masters are capable of...”

Everyone’s lips twitched in frenzy.

Even though poison was indeed capable of healing, poison was still poison in the end. Use it incorrectly and it could cost someone’s life. Thus, only poison masters would dare to use poison to concoct remedies to heal someone.

Wasn’t the young man before them a physician? Why was he able to utilize the means of a soul oracle? Why was he able to concoct poison like a poison master?

Not to mention, he was also a master teacher and a beast tamer capable of speaking the Ancient Beast Language...

Was he incapable of anything?

“Alright, I’ll need this stuff. Hurry up and prepare it all!” After listing down the items he required, Zhang Xuan gestured for them to hurry.

“Alright, I’ll have my men prepare it now!”

Elder Qian nodded and hurriedly left.

The Beast Hall’s financial power and connections were truly astonishing. Not only were the items which Zhang Xuan listed extremely rare, they were also diverse in terms of type and properties. If it had been an average occupational guild, it would have surely taken a long time for them to gather those items together. However, in less than six hours, the Beast Hall actually managed to obtain all of the required items.

In fact, they even prepared spares in case of emergencies.

“Now that all of the items are here, I’ll have to ask everyone to leave. I need absolute silence during my treatment, so I hope that you can help me by standing guard outside so as to prevent anyone from interrupting the treatment!”

Zhang Xuan had thought that even with the Beast Hall's connections, it would still take three to four days to gather all of the items. Yet, within a mere six hours, they had already succeeded. He couldn't help but be impressed by the Beast Hall's logistical ability.

The reason he asked them to leave was due to the nature of his treatment. He would need to utilize various means that could possibly sully his name as a master teacher, and on top of that, he would also have to continuously employ the Library of Heaven's Path. If outsiders were to be around, that could probably spell trouble.

“Alright!”

Hall Master Qian, Elder Qin, and the others nodded before backing out of the tomb. Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er exchanged momentary glances before leaving as well. Soon, Zhang Xuan was the only one remaining inside the tomb.

Looking at the pile of valuable items before him, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and placed them all inside his storage ring.

Then, with another flick of his wrist, he threw the formation plate of the Spirit Gathering Formation out.

He didn't ask for these items for his own use—he truly needed them to treat the Draconic Granite Beast.

Back then, when the Draconic Granite Beast depleted his blood essence to save Elder Qian, as long as Elder Qian had replenished the other party's blood essence, fed it nourishing herbs to stimulate its recovery, or nurtured it using spiritual energy, it would have been able to make a full recovery within a few years.

However, not only did Elder Qian fail to do any of the three above, he even buried it...

On top of that, the spiritual energy contained within the tomb was extremely limited, making it difficult for the Draconic Granite Beast to sustain its life. Placed in such conditions for fifty years, even though it still managed to hold on to its last breath, its life was hanging by a thread as though a candle

flame before a raging wind, ready to be extinguished at any moment.

Even if an 8-star or even 9-star physician were here, there would surely be nothing they could have done under such circumstances. However, Zhang Xuan was different.

He possessed the absolutely pure Heaven's Path zhenqi. As long as there was still a breath left in his patient, he would be able to sustain the latter's life.

However, just Heaven's Path zhenqi wouldn't suffice. The Draconic Granite Beast had suffered a severe loss of blood essence, and it was buried for several decades in such a weak state. It desperately needed an overwhelming amount of spiritual energy to nourish its feeble body, as well as medicinal herbs to boost its vitality.

And more importantly... its soul had to be summoned back to its body!

Just like what the elder before had said, the Faint Verdant Incense and Purplecrystal Smoke were mainly items that only soul oracles would use. Given that the Draconic Granite Beast had been unconscious for more than fifty years, it wasn't too far off from Lu Chong's situation back then.

Thus, such items were required to summon back its soul before it could be resuscitated.

As for the saliva of the Emerald-tailed Viper, Hall Master Qin was right in the sense that it was indeed a lethal venom. However, Zhang Xuan intended on using it to stimulate the other party's acupoint so as to trigger the other party's awakening.

It could be said that this treatment involved the means of a beast tamer, soul oracle, physician, poison master, and master teacher.

It would truly be difficult for anyone else to accomplish this feat. Only a monster like Zhang Xuan could possibly do so.

As soon as the formation plate landed, Zhang Xuan immediately threw in the spirit stones which the elders had just contributed, and a thick layer of spiritual energy

immediately filled the area, shrouding the ‘corpse’ of the Draconic Granite Beast.

With a snap of his fingers, the silver needles which he had prepared beforehand appeared in his hands, and he dabbed them in the cup of Emerald-tailed Viper’s saliva. With movements as swift as lightning, the 108 needles flew out and sealed the 108 acupoints throughout the Draconic Granite Beast’s body in the blink of an eye.

The Draconic Granite Beast was an extremely rare spirit beast. For the past several dozen millenniums, the beast tamers who had managed to tame it didn’t even number more than ten. As such, no one knew about the matter of its pseudo-death, and the knowledge concerning it wasn’t passed down either.

Since even its abilities were unrecorded, naturally, the same applied to its physical structure as well. It was only through the book formed by the Library of Heaven’s Path that Zhang Xuan knew where its various acupoints were.

After sealing the acupoints, Zhang Xuan took out the Faint Verdant Incense and Purplecrystal Smoke and positioned them in a unique formation before lighting them. Following which, he sat down on the floor and closed his eyes.

Hong long!

His soul was drawn out from his body.

Activating the Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan surveyed the surroundings before beckoning in a specific direction.

His movements were light and gentle, as though a gesture to call upon one’s lover.

Weng!

Seemingly sensing his beckoning, the silver needle at the specific location began ringing like a wind chime.

The unique ability of a soul oracle—Soul Beckoning!

Zhang Xuan had inherited the complete heritage of the soul oracles from Mo Hunsheng, and Soul Beckoning was one of the techniques included in it. Once executed, it could draw even the most deeply hidden souls out.

In fact, it could even draw out the souls of living beings.

Considering how the Draconic Granite Beast had been in a coma for fifty years, it would be exceedingly difficult to wake it using normal means. Thus, Zhang Xuan had no choice but to resort to such extreme methods.

He had to move very carefully or else this could end in a catastrophe!

Gugugugu!

The silver needle shook for an instant, and the Draconic Granite Beast suddenly began shaking. It slowly lifted its body up, seemingly coming to life.

“No, this shouldn’t be...” But upon seeing this sight, Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

691 Great Violetwing Beast Submits!

Under normal circumstances, Soul Beckoning should only draw out one's soul. The movement of the 'corpse' could only mean one thing—the soul was glued to the physical body.

Under such circumstances, it would be even more difficult to wake the Draconic Granite Beast up!

“Humph!”

With a light harrumph, Zhang Xuan flicked his finger, and the Five Elements Formation Flags which he'd had the others prepare beforehand were immediately lodged into the ground.

The gathering of the Five Elements to complement Yin-Yang!

This was yet another technique of the soul oracles, Soul Cleave!

A human soul comprises three hun and seven po, and the same applies to beasts as well. Due to the long dormant state of the Draconic Granite Beast, a portion of his hun and po had been fully integrated into his body over time, making it difficult to extract his soul.

Zhang Xuan was intending to use Soul Cleave to tear off the integrated hun and po from the entire soul so as to augment the extraction process.

But of course, altering the course of nature was no easy feat. Thus, he required assistance from the might of the Five Elements.

As the Five Elements amalgamate into one, Yin-Yang would be formed, creating a clear demarcation between clarity and turbidity.

Hong long long!

As the Five Element Formation Flags began to whirl into action, the flora and fauna around the tomb started to turn

yellow as the Energy of Wood was been sapped from them; the soil gradually turned white as the Energy of Earth was been drained from it; metallic objects began to rust as the Energy of Metal was robbed from them... The same applied to the Energy of Water and Energy of Flame as well.

The retrieved energy was gathered and fused into the glabella of the Draconic Granite Beast.

Along with the infusion of the Five Element energies, the yin and yang aura within the other party grew significantly stronger, and a tinge of redness began surfacing on the cold and rigid rock-like corpse.

Hu!

Knowing that his primary preparations were effective, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Zi la!

The soul of the massive Draconic Granite Beast was drawn from the massive Draconic Granite Beast, and it floated silently in the air.

However, its eyes were tightly shut, a sign that it was still deeply asleep.

Usually, when a soul was torn off from its body, it would swiftly weaken and eventually dissipate in the surroundings. However, the lit Faint Verdant Incense stabilized the Draconic Granite Beast's soul, allowing it to remain impervious before the chaotic energies lingering in the tomb.

“Go!”

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan flicked his finger, and the vitality pills which the other elders had given him were converted into a thick layer of mist that gathered within the concentrated spiritual energy in the region. The overwhelming vitality in the air made Zhang Xuan feel revitalized and comfortable.

Since these pills were highly useful even for Transcendent Mortal 8-dan experts, naturally, it would be effective on him as well.

Just that, as his body had been nourished by the Heaven's Path zhenqi, vitality wasn't something that he would lack. Thus, using these valuable pills on him would be a huge waste.

“Now, the final step!”

Holding his breath, Zhang Xuan stepped against the ground and soared into the air.

“Withdraw!”

108 faint surges of zhenqi shot out from Zhang Xuan's hands, each grabbing hold of the end of a silver needle and pulling on them simultaneously!

Tzz la!

The silver needles immediately flew out. The acupoints, which had been sealed by the venom a moment ago, immediately opened up as though a humongous flood gate. With a rumbling reminiscent of thunder, the spiritual energy and the mist were swiftly pulled into the Draconic Granite Beast's body as though a whirlpool had been formed on the spot.

Due to the overwhelming strength of the absorption, even the soul which had stabilized itself in the air was dragged in as well.

Hu la!

As the vitality medicine, spiritual energy, and soul were dragged into the Draconic Granite Beast's body, Zhang Xuan flicked his hand, and three pails of beast blood immediately appeared above the Draconic Granite Beast. It flowed down in a steady stream, seeping into the latter's body.

Slowly, the rock-like body of the Draconic Granite Beast began to turn crimson, and several mystical inscriptions abruptly appeared on it.

Eventually, the sounds of breathing and a heart beating gradually returned; it seemed the unconscious fellow would wake up at any moment.

“I have succeeded...”

Zhang Xuan's body suddenly staggered, and he fell from the sky, crashing onto the ground. Fortunately, the altitude wasn't too high, so he was unharmed. But even so, his face was pale with exhaustion.

Even though the duration of the treatment wasn't too long, Zhang Xuan had utilized nearly all of the ability at his disposal during it. This had resulted in significant depletion in his zhenqi, psyche, soul energy, and stamina.

Sitting on the ground, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out a spirit stone.

It was only after absorbing around twenty middle-tier spirit stones did Zhang Xuan finally recover fully from his depletion.

"I have made a loss..."

Looking at the powdery fragments of the middle-tier spirit stones before him, Zhang Xuan frowned in frustration.

He thought that it wouldn't be too difficult to save the Draconic Granite Beast, and he might even have some leftovers remaining that he could claim for his own use. But contrary to his expectations, not only were there no leftovers, he even had to use more than twenty of his own middle-tier spirit stones to recuperate from his exhaustion.

But at the very least, he didn't let down the expectations of those standing outside and soil his own name.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan pushed open the gates of the tomb and stepped out. As soon as he walked out, the anxious gazes of Elder Qian and the others immediately gathered on him.

"How is the Draconic Granite Beast?"

Perhaps due to excessive worry and anxiety, Elder Qian's face was extremely pale.

"The operation was a success. However, due to the prolonged period of its coma, he has yet to wake up yet. It might take a few days before he can regain consciousness," Zhang Xuan said calmly. The other party's soul had been dormant for more

than fifty years. Even with Zhang Xuan's means, it would still take a while for the latter to regain its strength and awaken.

"Great... I'll go in and take a look!"

Hearing Zhang Xuan's words, Elder Qian's eyes immediately lit up, and he immediately rushed toward the tomb. However, before he could enter it, he suddenly felt a sharp pain on his body. A huge talon had grabbed him and threw him to the side.

The Great Violetwing Beast!

This fellow had just lost three huge pails of blood, and its body was still a little weak at the moment. Nevertheless, its eyes were brimming with spirit, and the aggressive aura it emanated earlier on had disappeared without a trace. Scrunching its body together, it entered the tomb.

Seeing how the Great Violetwing Beast seemed to be even more excited than him, a bitter smile flashed across Elder Qian's face before hurriedly following behind it. When he finally came out a moment later, he immediately walked up to Zhang Xuan and knelt down in agitation.

"Elder Qian, this..."

Not expecting that Han Chong's teacher, an esteemed 5-star pinnacle beast tamer, would actually kneel before him so abruptly, Zhang Xuan was astonished. He hurriedly stepped forward to help the other party up.

Kowtowing heavily several times, Elder Qian raised his palm and made a vow.

"Zhang shi, please do not stop me. You have saved his life, and I am extremely grateful to you. I owe you a debt of life. Regardless of whatever request you have of me in the future, feel free to speak, and I'll surely accomplish it for you no matter the cost!"

Ever since the death of the Draconic Granite Beast, he had become nothing more than a living corpse. For the past fifty years, the only faith that was keeping him alive was his determination to learn the Ancient Beast Language so as to learn of the dying will of his closest companion.

Who could have known that not only would the young man be able to decipher the words of the Great Violetwing Beast, he would even undo the mistake he had made and bring his tamed beast back? The gratitude he was feeling at the moment was indescribable through words.

Even if Zhang Xuan were to order him to march off to his death now, he would do so without any hesitation.

“This...”

Seeing the determination in the Elder Qian’s eyes, Zhang Xuan knew that there was nothing he could do that could sway his decision. Thus, he shook his head and said, “Alright, I don’t need your life. It’ll suffice as long as you find me a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan aerial spirit beast so that I can get to Hongyuan Empire...”

The main reason he came to the Beast Hall was so that he could find an aerial spirit beast to ride on. With Elder Qian’s help, he should have no trouble finding one.

“Leave this to me...” Elder Qian nodded. But halfway through his words, ‘jiya!’, the gates to the tomb opened once more, and the Great Violetwing Beast walked out. Just like Elder Qian, it immediately walked up to Zhang Xuan and bowed down, and it began nudging Zhang Xuan with its head.

“This is... a gesture of submission?”

Seeing the Great Violetwing Beast’s response, everyone was astonished. Even Hall Master Qin was dumbfounded.

The Beast Hall had suffered greatly under the tyranny of the Great Violetwing Beast. Nothing they did and no one they sought help from could stop it, and they were completely helpless before it. They thought that considering its obstinate and domineering personality, it would be impossible for anyone to tame it. But who could have guessed that it would actually voluntarily submit to Zhang shi, whom it had only met eight hours ago?

“This fellow is even more sentimental than humans. It is out of gratitude to Zhang shi saving Draconic Granite Beast that it chose to voluntarily submit to him!” Luo Qiqi exclaimed.

Yu Fei-er nodded. “Indeed. Sometimes, beasts can turn out to be even more sentimental than humans.”

Despite the fact that it had been fifty years since the Draconic Granite Beast had been buried, the Great Violetwing Beast had still been unable to let the matter go. The only way it could alleviate its raging emotions was to ‘exact vengeance’ for its companion. Through this, it could be shown how deep its feelings for the latter were.

Upon seeing its lover come to life, an overwhelming feeling of indebtedness compelled it to acknowledge Zhang Xuan as its master and serve as his tamed beast. Such deep sentiments weren’t necessarily seen in all humans.

Zhang Xuan also came to realize what was going on. He turned to face the Great Violetwing Beast and asked the latter seriously, “Do you wish to become my tamed beast?”

It just happened that he needed a spirit beast to travel to Hongyuan Empire, and it would be for the best if the Great Violetwing Beast was willing to become his tamed beast.

“Roar!” The Great Violetwing Beast nodded its massive head.

“Good!”

With a flick of Zhang Xuan’s finger, a droplet of his blood flew to the Great Violetwing Beast, thus sealing the contract.

“Alright. You should get some rest and recover. Once the Draconic Granite Beast comes to, we’ll immediately set off for Hongyuan Empire!” Zhang Xuan said.

To save the Draconic Granite Beast, the Great Violetwing Beast had lost three huge pails of fresh blood, and it was currently in an extremely weak state. Even if it was still capable of flight in its current condition, it would surely be unable to maintain it for too long. Since that was the case, it would be much better for it to get a good rest and recover from its frailty first.

Furthermore, there were many nourishing medicines in the Beast Hall that could hasten the Great Violetwing Beast’s recovery. With Elder Qian taking care of it, it wouldn’t take too long for it to recover.

And most importantly of all, the Great Violetwing Beast had been waiting for the Draconic Granite Beast for an entire fifty years now. It would be cruel to separate them before the Draconic Granite Beast awakened.

In any case, the Great Violetwing Beast was a half 9-dan spirit beast, so Zhang Xuan had a few days to spare.

Learning that Zhang Xuan and the others would be staying there for some time, Elder Qian immediately had someone prepare some rooms for them.

In the first three days of his stay, Zhang Xuan traveled all around the Beast Hall and collected all of the books contained within it.

After which, he spent another day thoroughly mastering the Heaven's Path Beast Taming Art compiled from those books.

In just four days, Zhang Xuan's understanding of beast taming had already surpassed Elder Qian and even Hall Master Qin, reaching 5-star pinnacle or even beyond that.

Even though Zhang Xuan had successfully tamed the Great Violetwing Beast, due to his limited cultivation as a Transcendent Mortal 5-dan Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle, he only received a half 5-star beast tamer emblem.

Nevertheless, as long as he could achieve a breakthrough in his cultivation, he would be able to immediately apply for a 5-star beast tamer emblem.

On the eighth day, the Draconic Granite Beast woke up, and the Great Violetwing Beast and Elder Qian were delighted. At the same time, their awe for Zhang Xuan's capability also deepened.

Even Hall Master Qin and the others were also impressed by Zhang Xuan's skill.

To save a spirit beast who had been in a state of pseudo-death for fifty years... this was already on the level of a miracle!

On the tenth day, the Great Violetwing Beast finally made a full recovery. Thus, Zhang Xuan, Luo Qiqi, and Yu Fei-er

bade the Beast Hall goodbye and set off toward Hongyuan Empire.

“Zhang shi will surely become the brightest star of the Master Teacher Academy!”

Watching the trio leave, Elder Qian recalled the various incredible feats the young man had achieved and sighed.

Han Chong’s lips couldn’t help but twitch upon hearing those words.

“Brightest star? I only fear that... the Master Teacher Academy will find itself in the abyss of misfortune...”

692 Rules of the Master Teacher Academy

Han Chong had heard a little of the various trouble Zhang Xuan had stirred up in Myriad Kingdom City and Huanyu Empire. Like a tornado, he left nothing but destruction in his wake...

It was hard to tell whether it would be a fortune or misfortune for the Master Teacher Academy to have a student like him!

Han Chong couldn't help but solemnly pray for the long-established institution in his mind...

...

High above the clouds, Great Violetwing Beast glided across the sky.

It was dragging something that resembled a seven to eight meters ship behind it. The ship consisted of three rooms, and Zhang Xuan, Luo Qiqi, and Yu Fei-er took one each.

A flying ship!

The Beast Hall had crafted this for Zhang Xuan in gratitude to him for freeing them from the tyranny of Great Violetwing Beast. This magnificent flying ship had an elegant design, and all kinds of amenities were present on it.

It was said that this flying ship had cost the Beast Hall several thousand middle-tier spirit stones, and only after hearing this piece of news did Zhang Xuan feel a little more balanced inside.

After all, in order to save Draconic Granite Beast, he even had to use his own middle-tier spirit stones. At the very least, he should obtain something in return...

If those from the Beast Hall were to learn of his thoughts, they would surely spurt blood. Zhang Xuan had tamed the strongest spirit beast in their region and was gifted such a valuable

flying ship, and yet he only felt that it was a fair exchange at this point...

Wasn't he being a little too greedy!

Would he only be happy after he robbed the Beast Hall of its entire wealth?

While Zhang Xuan didn't have any intention of cleaning out the Beast Hall, he did secretly wish to receive one or two higher-tier spirit stones in exchange for his effort. However, it was a pity that all of Elder Qian's wealth had gone to the Great Violetwing Beast throughout the years, so even producing a hundred middle-tier spirit stones was impossible for him.

On the deck of the flying ship, Luo Qiqi walked up to Zhang Xuan.

"Teacher!"

Zhang Xuan turned to her and asked, "You came at a good time. I recall you saying that there is the Apothecary School and Blacksmith School in the Master Teacher Academy. Can you tell me more about it?"

Since he was about to enroll in the Master Teacher Academy, he should at least gather some basic knowledge regarding it.

"It is a fundamental prerequisite for a master teacher to have sufficient supporting occupations before they can be promoted to a higher rank. As such, on top of imparting the various ways of a master teacher, the Master Teacher Academy also provides supporting occupation classes for its students to take on," Luo Qiqi explained.

"After many years of development, the Master Teacher Academy has grown to consist of ten schools! They are namely the Apothecary School, Blacksmith School, Celestial Designer School, Formation Master School, Painter School, Martial Arts School, Beast Tamer School, Physician School, Demonic Tunist School, and Terpsichore School.

"The Apothecary School is a place where one studies the art of pill forging, and it is from there that I learned my pill forging skills. On the other hand, the Blacksmith School is a place where one learns how to smith weapons. Given my previous

mastery of smithing, I wasn't able to rank amidst the top hundred there. However, after receiving teacher's guidance, I'll surely be able to make a name for myself there!

“The same applies for the Celestial Designer School, Formation Master School, Painter School, and Physician School as well, so I won't explain them. I'll talk about the Martial Arts School, Demonic Tunist School, and Terpsichore School instead!”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

The Celestial Designer School was definitely a place where celestial designers learned about the complex engineering designs and mechanisms, he could tell so much from Wu Zhen. It was probably the same for the Formation Master School, Physician School, and Painter School as well.

Zhang Xuan had once studied these occupations, so he had a considerable understanding of them.

It was only the remaining three which he had an incomplete knowledge of.

“The Martial Arts School isn't a support occupation school. Rather, it is a place to temper the fighting prowess of the master teachers. It conducts tournaments every now and then, and those who perform well will be allowed to study the top-notch battle techniques of the academy, thus further enhancing their fighting prowess. As for the Demonic Tunist School, it is a place where demonic tunists are groomed. Has teacher heard of demonic tunists before?” Luo Qiqi asked.

“Un. I have heard bits and pieces of it before. It is a Lower Nine Paths occupation, but its members are able to beguile hearts and crush souls through the utilization of melody. Even true experts find it hard to guard against such attacks!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Not only had Zhang Xuan heard of demonic tunists, he had even met two of them before. However, neither one of them seemed to have fared well from the encounter with him. One was nearly driven mad by him while the other party plummeted straight from the sky.

“Yes, you’re right. As for the Terpsichore School, it is a place where terpsichores are groomed!” Luo Qiqi smiled.

“Terpsichores? You mean dancers?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“That’s right, dancers!” Luo Qiqi nodded. “Dancers are actually similar to demonic tunists in many ways. Through aligning their dance with nature, they can enthrall their target with their elegant movements, drawing in spellbound birds and bewitching even experts.”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

Since there were dancers in the world, it was only natural that there would be an occupation regarding it. The founder of the occupation went by the surname of Gongsun, and legend has it that her dances could even rivet Saints.

It was said that when Gongsun was younger, her entire clan was purged by the hands of its enemies. Having survived the calamity, this huge grudge was heaped onto her shoulders. One day, while she was in the midst of studying the freely flying birds in the air, enlightenment suddenly struck her, and she created the terpsichore occupation. After training for thirty years, she emerged from her seclusion and awed the world with her enthralling dances. Before long, she caught the attention of a certain Conferred Empire, and she was invited over to perform for the royal family.

The emperor of this Conferred Empire happened to be Gongsun’s enemy, and he was a Saint expert at that time.

However, as soon as Gongsun began dancing, it was as if the entire world was revolving around her. No eyes could tear away from her, and no mind could remain rational before her. In his riveted state, even the Saint realm emperor was killed easily.

Just as she was escaping from the capital, she was surrounded by a million guards. However, through her dance, she persuaded all of them to put down their weapons and allow her to leave, and eventually, the entire matter became a legend that

spread far and wide across the entire Master Teacher Continent.

After learning of this matter, Kong shi once visited Gongsun to witness her dance. After the performance, he was filled with compliments for the latter and left behind the following words: ‘Sighing at the fleeting moment, pursuing the terpsichore for one more gaze’. It was then that the occupation was put amidst the ranks of the Nine Paths, and the name ‘Terpsichore’ became known throughout the world.

This occupation was also among the Lower Nine Paths, and it was mainly pursued by women. As those who studied this art were even rarer than demonic tunists, not many knew of this occupation.

By some stroke of luck, Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy managed to receive the heritage for this occupation and established the Terpsichore School. However, due to its limited members, it was considered as the weakest of the ten schools.

Luo Qiqi chuckled.

“Yu Fei-er has been studying the art ever since she was young, and just recently, she passed the 5-star terpsichore examination.”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

The Master Teacher Academy was very similar to the universities in his previous life, where the academy was divided into many faculties as well.

The master teachers studying in the Master Teacher Academy could choose to undertake any supporting occupation that interested them and advance in that path.

Honestly speaking, it was indeed an excellent place to groom master teachers. It was no wonder why it was an esteemed organization even within a Tier-1 Empire.

“Even though many master teachers view the Master Teacher Academy as their goal, it is no paradise inside there. The Master Teacher Academy is extremely competitive, and regardless of what one intends to do, be it to study or to listen

in a lecture, one must have sufficient academic credits. Otherwise, it'll be hard for one to make any progress in there! And to earn academic credits, one will have to accomplish all kinds of missions or clear the difficult tests set by the academy... There are some master teachers who choose to withdraw from the academy due to their inability to withstand the stressful environment, and there are also a few who are expelled due to their poor results!"

At which, Luo Qiqi's face turned grim.

"Withdraw? Expelled?"

All along, Zhang Xuan had thought that entering the academy in itself was a gateway to success. However, that didn't seem to be the case.

"That's right. Back then, when Kong shi first established the Master Teacher Academy, he once said that the master teachers are the crux to the advancement of mankind. Only with strong teachers can humanity be strong! As such, the Master Teacher Academy didn't need any unmotivated students. The only choices before them are to push forward or to leave, it's that simple."

Saying those words, Luo Qiqi smiled bitterly.

"Only with strong teachers can humanity be strong?" Zhang Xuan's body trembled at those words.

Luo Qiqi was right. If mankind wished to advance further, the role of teachers was of utmost importance.

If students didn't have the right values in life, their accomplishments would be severely limited.

If even the teachers had stagnated in their studies, how could they possibly groom motivated, driven students and bring humanity to greater heights?

Zhang Xuan found himself relating deeply to these words.

The strong emerges victorious whereas the weak are eliminated.

Such was the way of the world. Not even the number one occupation of the world could be spared from this competition.

“Actually teacher, you need not worry too much. Given your abilities, it will be extremely difficult for you to be expelled from the academy...”

Recalling the monstrous proficiency her teacher had shown in numerous occupations, Luo Qiqi smiled bitterly. Then, she suddenly recalled something and added, “However, there is an esteemed Master Teacher Elite Board that teacher can strive for. It’ll be difficult, but I think teacher should be able to get a place on it with a few years of effort!”

“Master Teacher Elite Board?”

“Un. It is a ranking board in the Master Teacher Academy that automatically reflects the top hundred most outstanding students in the academy. Those who are listed in the ranks of the board are all formidable geniuses who are highly respected in the academy!” Luo Qiqi said.

Zhang Xuan asked, “The top hundred students of the academy? How many people are there in the academy?”

“The Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy doesn’t only accept students within Hongyuan Empire. It also recruits students from other Tier-1 Empire, so there are at least several hundred thousand people throughout the entire academy, and all of them are top-notch geniuses!” explained Luo Qiqi.

Those who were able to enroll in the academy were all top geniuses in their own region. To be able to rank amidst the top of such a group was as difficult as ascending the heavens.

Zhang shi might be formidable, but Luo Qiqi still thought that it would be difficult for him to get on the board without several years of hard work.

“You aren’t on the board?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Over the time Zhang Xuan had spent with Luo Qiqi, he could tell that the latter was an extraordinary genius. Just by her cultivation, pill forging, and smithing skills, there would be very few of her peers who could match up to her. But even so... she still wasn’t on the board?

“Me? How could I possibly be on the board? That board is tied to one’s academic credits, cultivation, and eye of discernment.

As such, it is mainly dominated by the upper grade students, so how could a Grade 2 student like me possibly get on it...” Luo Qiqi shook her head.

Naturally, the upper grade students had a higher chance of getting on the Master Teacher Elite Board as compared to the lower grade students.

They had been in the academy for many years now, and they had accomplished innumerable missions, thus granting them a huge wealth of academic credits. On top of that, the grades in the academy were determined by the student’s master teacher ranking, which was inadvertently related to one’s cultivation. Naturally, a Grade 2 student who had just joined the academy not too long ago wouldn’t be able to surpass them so easily.

“I see.”

Hearing the other party’s explanation, Zhang Xuan gained a substantial understanding of the Master Teacher Academy.

He’d thought that it was just a place for one to learn and study, but things were far more complex than he had expected.

It was no wonder even a princess like Yu Fei-er would have to participate in missions and face dangers for academic credits. It seemed like the academy doesn’t compromise its policies for nobility.

Such a competitive landscape was just to Zhang Xuan’s liking. At the very least, he wouldn’t be so bored.

In an instant, endless fighting spirit suddenly sprouted within Zhang Xuan, and he began looking forward to entering the renowned Master Teacher Academy.

In the next few days, whenever the both of them were free, Luo Qiqi would explain the various rules of the Master Teacher Academy to Zhang Xuan, and in exchange, Zhang Xuan would guide her on her pill forging and smithing. Thus, in just ten days, Luo Qiqi’s pill forging and smithing proficiency had risen significantly.

“Teacher, we have arrived at Hongyuan City!”

On a certain day, just as Zhang Xuan was explaining the essence of pill forging to Luo Qiqi, he suddenly heard the latter's exclamation and lowered his gaze to take a look. He saw a massive city that was far larger than Huanyu Empire below him.

693 Salvage the Situation?

Even with the Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan could hardly see the outskirts of the city.

“A capital of a Tier-1 Empire is indeed... grand!”

Zhang Xuan gazed across the lands.

As expected of a Tier-1 capital, it was grand and domineering. In comparison to this, Tianxuan Kingdom felt like a countryside village whose buildings were made of mud.

In fact, just this city itself could match up to the entire area of Tianxuan Kingdom.

It seemed there was a massive formation that was controlling the weather and various other conditions of the city, thus bringing convenience and comfort to the population in the city. On top of that, the formation also seemed to draw in spiritual energy, thus making it easier for cultivators in the city to advance their cultivation.

“The ability to go against nature and alter the conditions of the land is an ability that only Saints possess!”

Yu Fei-er walked over proudly.

In this period of time, before the other party’s formidable prowess, she felt nothing more like a countryside bumpkin. Thus, seeing the other party’s astonishment upon seeing Hongyuan City, she immediately grasped this opportunity to boast.

“Un.”

Even though Zhang Xuan was able to set up formations as well, and his capability was on par with most 5-star formation masters, it would still be difficult for him to create a massive environment-manipulating formation spanning over several thousand li.

To set up such a formation, precise control was of absolute importance. Otherwise, a slight inaccuracy in the formation

could easily result in devastating destruction.

Recovering from the astonishment, Zhang Xuan said, “It is still a few days before the start of the school term. Hong shi and the others should have just arrived as well, let’s meet up with them first.”

Three days were spent on the fusion of his body and his soul, and another four days was spent in the Otherworldly Demon’s underground chamber. Following which, the time in the Beast Hall and the flight to Hongyuan City took up a total of twenty days, so there was still around three days before the start of the school term. Making a rough estimation, Hong shi and the others should have arrived here already as well.

“The freshmen from Huanyu Empire usually reside in the Academic Sea. I’ll take you over there first to settle in. After which, we’ll have to return to the academy to report on our mission,” Yu Fei-er said.

They had uncovered such a huge secret in the midst of their mission, so it was necessary for them to make a formal report on the matter.

Even though Xing Yuan and Wu Zhen had returned in advance, Wu Yangzi’s handwritten book and the Crimson Blaze Cauldron were still in Luo Qiqi’s hand. On top of that, Zhang Xuan’s return was also an important matter as well. Thus, they would have to explain everything face-to-face.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Teacher, there are many other freshmen who reside in the Academic Sea as well. Most of them are geniuses in Tier-2 Empires, and there is a possibility that some of them might even be from Hongyuan Empire. Thus, you must be careful not to get into a conflict with them!” Luo Qiqi advised grimly.

Those who were termed as geniuses tended to be proud individuals. As the residence that the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy used to receive its freshmen, there were many geniuses amongst them. Some of them might even be from the royal family such as Ye Qian. Thus, if a conflict were

to occur, not even a princess like Yu Fei-er would be in a good position to interfere.

“Don’t worry, how could I possibly get into trouble that easily?” Zhang Xuan chuckled.

Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er glanced at one another and shook their heads.

‘With that natural disposition for trouble of yours, how can you say those words without blinking?’

‘On the very day of your arrival at Huanyu Empire, you sent Feng shi and his group plummeting to the ground from a high altitude. Afterward, you pummeled up the top three rankers of the other Vessel States. Following which, you turned into a corpse in the Cleansing Lake...’

‘In any case, calamity seemed to follow your footsteps, and you actually said that you won’t get into trouble easily?’

The Academic Sea named as such due to the large number of freshmen coming from all directions. It was also commonly known as Academic Manor and Freshmen Lodge.

From the direction Zhang Xuan and the others were coming from, they weren’t too far from the Master Teacher Academy. On top of that, the speed at which the Great Violetwing Beast traveled was also incredible. Thus, they arrived at their destination very quickly.

Stepping out of the flying ship, Zhang Xuan stowed it within this storage ring before bidding Luo Qiqi and Yu Fei-er farewell.

After which, he stepped through the gates of the Academic Sea, and numerous towering infrastructures immediately appeared before his eyes. Many young master teachers walked to and fro the compound with grace.

Most of them looked like they were in their twenties, but the four stars pinned on their chest reflected their 4-star master teacher rank. Most of their cultivation levels had reached Consonant Spirit realm.

As expected of the geniuses of the various sects, kingdoms, and empires. They were indeed exceptional.

Walking in the direction Luo Qiqi and the others had mentioned previously, Zhang Xuan soon arrived at a courtyard.

“Hmm? Why is there no one guarding the door?”

After ascertaining that this was the location where the freshmen of Huanyu Empire lived, Zhang Xuan was perplexed by the lack of security.

The other residences of the freshmen of other empires were either locked or heavily guarded. However, the door to Huanyu Empire’s residence was wide open, but there wasn’t a single figure in sight. Could it be that Hong shi and the others hadn’t arrived yet?

Bewildered, Zhang Xuan stepped into the residence.

The courtyard was clean, signifying that the residence was often cleaned. Along the empty corridors and gazebo, there were signs that there had been people living here recently.

“It seems they have arrived. But why aren’t they here then?”

Possessing the Eye of Insight, it wasn’t difficult for Zhang Xuan to determine whether someone had been living in the residence or not. Just as he was perplexed by the lack of people in the area, he suddenly heard a loud crashing sound reminiscent of something knocking heavily onto the wall.

“There is a fight ahead!”

Zhang Xuan’s face darkened, and he hurried forward. Turning around a corridor, he soon arrived at a vast main hall. Not too far away from the entrance was an average-sized dueling stage, and on it, two people were facing off with one another.

A large group of people were gathered beneath the stage, and Hong shi and Feng shi were amongst the crowd.

Ruohuan gongzi, Bi Jianghai, Luo Xuan, and the others were seated below as well. However, their faces were swollen and bruised, as if someone had beaten them up just a moment ago.

Zhang Xuan also recognized one of the fighters on the stage. It was one of the geniuses under Feng Shi's lead, and his name was Han Ling. His cultivation was at the Consonant Spirit realm intermediate stage the last time Zhang Xuan saw him, but in less than a month, he had already broken through to Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage.

Facing him was a gray-robed young man. The other party's cultivation was at the Consonant Spirit realm advanced stage as well, but his fighting prowess seemed to be far above Han Ling. In just a few blows, Han Ling was already forced to the corner of the stage.

“Go, Han Shi!”

“We mustn't lose anymore...”

“That's right! If we were to lose, we'll be at their disposal...”

...

Luo Xuan and the others clenched their fists tightly in indignation.

“What are they up to?”

As everyone was too engrossed in the battle, no one noticed Zhang Xuan's presence. Perplexed, Zhang Xuan scratched his head.

Why would there be a duel going on here?

“Haha, stop struggling pointlessly and just admit defeat. Considering how none of you are able to defeat me, how can you possibly rival Senior Feng, whom I can barely withstand three blows from? Given such, you still wish to win? Dream on!”

As the gray-robed young man slowly forced Han Ling to a corner, a gleeful smile surfaced on his lips, and he laughed heartily. “Don't worry, we'll surely take care of you well if you follow us. If you continue to act so obstinately, don't blame me for getting nasty!”

As the gray-robed young man spoke those words, his powerful blows continued raining down on Han Ling. Han Ling was

using all of his might to withstand those attacks, but his face turned a shade paler with each strike.

With just a momentary glance, Zhang Xuan could tell that Han Ling would fall in just a few more blows. Thus, he walked over to Hong shi and asked, “Hong shi, what is going on?”

“Ah... Zhang shi, you’re fine? This is wonderful!”

Upon seeing Zhang shi, Hong shi nearly leaped from his seat in excitement. The others beneath the stage, including Luo Xuan and the others, also noticed Zhang Xuan’s presence, and their faces immediately flushed red in excitement.

Even Xiulian gongzi, who had been beaten to pulp by him at Huanyu Empire earlier, gazed at him with eyes reddened in agitation, as though Zhang Xuan was his long-lost kin.

“What’s wrong?”

Seeing everyone’s responses, Zhang Xuan was bewildered. They’d only been apart for a month, was there any need for them to react so intensely to his presence?

“It’s the Freshman Examination!” Seeing the confused look on Zhang Xuan’s face, Hong shi hurriedly explained, “The examination topic has been decided—it will be hunting in the Hongyuan Mountain Range...”

Soon, Hong shi explained the entire matter to Zhang Xuan.

After hearing the explanation, Zhang Xuan finally got a grasp of the situation.

In truth, getting into the top ten of the Master Teacher Tournament didn’t signify a straight pass into the Master Teacher Academy. Rather, it would be more apt to consider it as an opportunity to take on the entrance examinations, and if they were to clear it, they would be allowed to enter the academy. The topic of the entrance examination would change each year; it had been an obstacle course in some years, formation deciphering in others, and even an academic examination was within the list of possibilities as well... And for this year, it was hunting.

The location of the hunt would be at the Leiyuan Peak of Hongyuan Mountain Range.

The Leiyuan Peak was a huge mountain in proximity to the Master Teacher Academy. Its exceptionally steep terrain made it extremely difficult to scale it. Even Consonant Spirit realm experts would find it laborious to travel to the top, let alone, hunt.

The duration was one day, and depending on the number of spirit beasts hunted, one would be allocated a set number of points, and this would be reflected as one's result at the end of the examination. To pass, one would have to hunt at least one Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle spirit beast.

Even though the powerful physique of spirit beasts allowed them to challenge cultivators possessing higher cultivation realms, the examination shouldn't be too difficult considering the formidable might that the master teacher elites from the various region possess. Not to mention, most of the examinees were at the Consonant Spirit realm as well, so defeating a Clarifying Turbidity realm advanced stage spirit beast shouldn't be a problem at all.

However, the problem was that... the number of spirit beasts across the entire mountain was limited! Furthermore, once the spirit beasts realized that they were being hunted, they would surely flee and hide.

On top of that, there was no limit to the number of spirit beasts one could hunt, and if one were to exceed the passing criteria, they could exchange the excess points for academic credits... Thus, the competition among examinees would be extremely intense!

To make things worse, Clarifying Turbidity realm spirit beasts weren't the only ones roaming the mountain. There were also Consonant Spirit realm spirit beasts, Cosmos Bridge realm spirit beasts, and even some beyond that! Thus, on top of hunting, they had to prevent themselves from being hunted as well.

Casualties were anticipated in this examination, and this was the norm for the entrance examination for the Master Teacher

Academy.

This examination served to test the examinee's resilience, strength, adaptability, eye of discernment, and various other aspects.

Only the strongest of experts would be able to emerge victorious amidst the group. Those who were weaker physically or mentally would surely find themselves breaking down in the midst of the examination and eventually return in tragic defeat.

This examination would eliminate the weak and frail from the group. Those who failed to meet the mark would be disqualified and forced to leave!

So as to increase the success rate and avoid danger, some of the examinees from various regions had decided to form an alliance.

With more people in their alliance, they would be able to vie for spirit beasts from other students and stand their ground against stronger spirit beasts.

However, an alliance also had its downfall as well. While it was definitely safer to remain in a group, more people operating together also meant that the group would be easily detected by the spirit beasts. As such, spirit beasts would choose to stay out of their way, making their hunting highly inefficient. On top of that, distribution was a problem as well.

After all, it was questionable whether the alliance would be able to hunt sufficient spirit beasts to go around the group. Thus, it was very possible that there would be some who would be tragically disqualified in the alliance.

As such, the priority in the distribution of spirit beasts became an extremely important problem in the formation of alliance. All factions in an alliance would be hoping to gain this priority in distribution.

The group from Huanyu Empire was the same as well. In order to stand their ground against other competitors, they decided to ally themselves with the master teachers from a Tier-2 empire, Jinhai Empire, and both sides had agreed on

determining the priority of distribution based on the results of their strength.

After hearing the explanation, Zhang Xuan immediately understood the situation, and he hurriedly asked, “How many more duels are there?”

If they were only halfway through the battle, he might still be able to salvage the situation.

694 A Single Finger

“The number of duels we have decided on is ten, and the victor of six rounds will be given the priority of distribution,” Hong shi said. “Han Ling is currently fighting the tenth round...”

“Since it has reached the tenth round, it means that the wins and losses are equal on both sides...” Hearing that it was the tenth round, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

After all, there would be no point continuing the competition after the sixth round as the victor had already been decided. Given that they had reached the tenth round, it could only mean that both sides were equal.

“That isn’t the case...”

Hong shi’s face reddened in embarrassment. “We have fought ten rounds, but we have lost in every single one of them... and to the same person at that!”

“Lost to the same person? You mean that the person on stage has already fought ten rounds, but he hasn’t been defeated yet?”

Zhang Xuan’s eyes widened in shock.

“That’s right...”

Hong shi covered his face in embarrassment, and the others were too ashamed to raise their heads.

They had gone up one by one to challenge the man on the stage, and yet all of them suffered tragic defeats. And more importantly... the man on the stage wasn’t their strongest fighter!

Speechless, Zhang Xuan was just about to speak when a dull thud sounded from the stage.

Peng!

Han Ling was sent flying out of the ring and crashed into the courtyard.

‘All ten matches have concluded... How in the world do I salvage this situation?’

Looking at the fellow moaning in pain on the ground, Zhang Xuan’s eyelids twitched.

He thought that he might still be able to reverse the situation, but with all ten matches finished, what else could he do at this point?

Was he supposed to challenge the master teachers from Jinhai Empire once more? But the other party had no reason to accept!

“Alright, the ten matches have already concluded, and you didn’t win a single match at all. What else do you have to say?”

After sending Han Ling flying, the man on the stage gazed down at the group below with a smirk on his face.

“We...”

The faces of Hong shi and the others turned red.

If they had at least won two to three matches, they wouldn’t be so ashamed. They could have explained it as due to their strongest fighter being absent. But all of them actually lost to the same person! How were they supposed to explain this?

Furthermore, if Zhang shi wasn’t an opponent for the other party as well, wouldn’t they be embarrassed further?

Zhang shi might possess incredible talent, but in the end, his cultivation realm was only at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle. Winning against this fellow who was able to singlehandedly win against ten of them without the slightest loss of breath seemed unlikely to them. Not to mention, this fellow wasn’t their strongest fighter.

(Zhang Xuan’s breakthrough to Consonant Spirit realm only occurred after the ‘corpse’ incident, so none of them are aware of it.)

“You don’t have anything else to say, right? Since that’s the case, then as per our agreement, we will be going by Senior Feng’s arrangements!” The gray-robed young man chuckled before turning around and clasp his fist. “Senior Feng!”

A white-robed young man then walked forward.

His aura felt significantly stronger than the gray-robed young man. At closer examination, Zhang Xuan realized that the white-robed man had already reached Half-Cosmos Bridge realm, and he could possibly make the full breakthrough at any moment.

The gray-robed young man who defeated ten of them was already extremely powerful in the eyes of Ruohuan gongzi and the others, but even so, he was still far from matching up to this white-robed young man.

In a sense, Huanyu Empire’s loss was inevitable. Even if they had been able to defeat the gray-robed young man, they would have never been able to win against the white-robed young man.

“Since we are allies, let’s clarify the terms of our agreement first!”

Standing on the stage, Senior Feng gazed at the Huanyu Empire group and declared forcefully, “Three days from now, at the start of the hunt, all of you will listen to my arrangements, and priority will be given to our Jinhai Empire regarding the hunted beasts! However, you need not worry. As long as we stand united as one, it is not a problem for all of us to pass the entrance examination!”

“They will be given priority over all of the hunted beasts?”

“What if we don’t hunt sufficient spirit beasts? Wouldn’t all of us be disqualified then?”

...

Even though they understood that the leader of the alliance would be given additional privileges, they still couldn’t help but feel frustrated upon hearing those words.

The benefit of an alliance was that they would be able to steer clear of danger before formidable spirit beasts, as well as vie for prey against other alliances. However, there was also a clear disadvantage to it as well. Take this case for example, the group from Huanyu Empire had no say in the distribution of the hunted beasts at all. Should the number of beasts hunted within the duration prove to be insufficient, they would all stand to be eliminated.

“Why? Are you reluctant to accept this arrangement? Given the strength of our Senior Feng, it’s your blessing to be able to ally with us!” Seeing the indignant looks of the group below, the gray-robed young man harrumphed coldly.

In truth, given their strength, they could easily pass the examination even without allying with Huanyu Empire. However, what they were aiming for was beyond that.

The teachers and elders of the academy would be paying attention to this entrance examination, and if they were to show an outstanding performance in this examination, they could win their favor and possibly become their disciples. This would make their lives in the academy smooth-sailing.

“You...”

Hearing the other party’s words, everyone’s faces flushed in anger. They wanted to retort, but there wasn’t a single word they could say.

After all, it was the truth that they were weaker than the other party!

“I am indeed reluctant to accept this agreement...”

Just as everyone was placed in a difficult position, Zhang Xuan’s nonchalant voice suddenly resonated through the air.

“Huh? What do you mean by that? Does Huanyu Empire intend to renege on its promise?” Seeing someone speaking up at this moment, the gray-robed young man frowned.

They were all master teachers, respectable figures of society. Given that they had agreed on everything beforehand, it would be shameful for the group from Huanyu Empire to back out just because it had lost.

If that were to really happen, they would become a huge laughingstock.

“We won’t renege on our promise, but I do have a suggestion...” Zhang Xuan said.

“A suggestion?”

Zhang Xuan replied, “That’s right. I am also a master teacher from Huanyu Empire, and I am unaware of your previous duel. However, since the results are already out, there’s nothing much that I can say. However, I would like an equal distribution of spirit beasts!”

“Equal distribution? We have won the position of the alliance leader fair and square, why should we agree to an equal distribution!” the gray-robed young man sneered.

“I understand. Since we have lost the duel, it is indeed difficult for you to accept an equal distribution. How about this then?”

Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back and smiled. “If your Senior Feng can withstand three strikes from me, I won’t speak about the matter regarding fair distribution anymore. You will have free reign over the distribution. In fact, we won’t even ask for you to give a single spirit beast to us!”

“What did you say?”

The gray-robed young man narrowed his eyes.

This fellow actually challenged Senior Feng to a fight?

He had seen plenty of arrogant people, but never had he seen such blind arrogance before!

‘Do you know how strong our Senior Feng is? Do you think that you are qualified to challenge him?’

‘Three moves? I doubt you could defeat him in a million moves!’

“Why? You don’t have the confidence to accept the challenge? I understand. Since that’s the case, what about one move? If your Senior Feng can withstand a single blow from me, our group will not take a single hunted spirit beast from you!”

Noticing the other party's hesitation, Zhang Xuan thought that the other party found his terms unfair, so he changed his offer.

“The heck!”

Upon seeing the fellow's earnest expression, the gray-robed young man nearly exploded in rage!

Senior Feng's vision also darkened, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

His cultivation had already reached Half-Cosmos Bridge, allowing him to fight on par with even some of the Grade 2 students. And yet, this fellow from Huanyu Empire was actually claiming that he could defeat him in a single blow?

What kind of a joke was this?

Just as the duo was about to die from anger, Ruohuan gongzi, Luo Xuan, and the others nearly spurted blood.

They knew that Zhang shi would surely stir some trouble here, but who could have known that he would actually utter such words?

They couldn't even defeat the gray-robed young man, and Zhang shi was actually betting that he would defeat Senior Feng in a single strike... How could that be possible?

If they were to lose, wouldn't they be working for nothing for Jinhai Empire in the entrance examination?

All of them would be disqualified then...

“Is a single blow still too much for you all? Sigh, since that's the case, I'll just use a single finger then... Surely that should be fine with you! I don't think I can go any further than that. If you still don't dare to accept the challenge with this, there's nothing more I can do...”

‘After all, I couldn't possibly defeat you without moving, right?’

‘Alright, actually that's not impossible, but it'll reveal my means as a soul oracle or poison master. Un, I should maintain a low profile.’

Since it was his first time being in Hongyuan Empire, Zhang Xuan thought that it would be best for him to proceed warily and not reveal too many trump cards. Thus, if the other party were to reject this offer as well, he would be really put at a spot.

Pu!

The gray-robed young man and Senior Feng nearly puked blood.

‘Too much your head!

‘Besides, what is with that troubled expression on your face?

‘Am I that weak in your eyes that you will feel troubled over it?’

“Fine! I would like to see how you can defeat me with a single finger...” Senior Feng roared in anger, unable to hold back his rage anymore.

“Senior... Allow me to teach this arrogant fellow a lesson...” Seeing his senior flying into a rage, the gray-robed man hurriedly stepped forward.

“There’s no need for that. I want to see how strong the person who dares to utter such arrogant words is!” Senior Feng spoke coldly as his sharp gaze fell on the arrogant young man before him.

Perhaps, the arrogant young man might have something up his sleeves that allowed him to speak such arrogant words. Thus, Senior Feng was interested to see whether the other party was simply uttering rubbish or really possessed the capability to do so.

With narrowed eyes, Senior Feng flung his sleeves furiously and said, “This friend over here, come up onto the stage! If you can win against me, we’ll drop the matter regarding the alliance. However, if you lose, you’d better remember your words. Every single hunted beast in the entrance examination shall go to us!”

“Fine!”

Hearing the other party agree to his challenge, Zhang Xuan walked up onto the stage.

“This...”

“Can Zhang shi win?”

“I don’t know either...”

Seeing Zhang shi settling on such a disadvantageous bet with the other party, everyone glanced at one another doubtfully.

Defeating Senior Feng with a single finger?

Was Zhang shi serious?

Their loss might have sent him into a panic, but even so... this bet was way too extreme!

“Senior Feng, allow me to teach this fellow a lesson in your stead...”

Seeing Senior Feng flying into such a huge rage, the gray-robed young man quickly stepped forward and said, “It won’t be too late for senior to face him after my loss!”

Given the arrogant words that the other party had uttered, there was a possibility that he might really possess the strength to back up his words. To be safe, the gray-robed young man thought that he should test the waters first. If the other party turned out to be weak, he would simply pummel the other party to get even for his provocations. On the other hand, if the other party turned out to be strong, Senior Feng could at least prepare himself.

“This...” Senior Feng hesitated upon hearing those words. However, at that moment, the young man impatiently declared, “If you are still scared, why don’t the both of you face me together? I’ll just use two fingers!”

Hearing those words, Senior Feng and the gray-robed young man nearly fainted.

“There’s no need for that. Let me see how strong you are!”

With a cold harrumph, Senior Feng charged forward.

The other party's words were simply too infuriating. He was afraid that he might just die from fury if he were to allow the other party to talk any more.

Stepping forcefully against the ground, he dashed forward as though a charging ferocious beast.

Releasing his full might as a Half-Cosmos Bridge realm expert, the wind raged furiously, and in that instant, his charge felt reminiscent of a massive stampede, inducing helplessness in those facing it.

“How powerful!”

The eyebrows of Hong shi and the others twitched.

Even they would find it hard to withstand such a powerful attack with their cultivation of Cosmos Bridge realm primary stage.

They hurriedly turned their gazes to the young man, curious to see how he would deal with it. Before their astonished gazes, the young man shook his head before raising a single finger and pointing it forward leisurely.

695 Defeated with a Single Finger

“He’s really going to fight with a single finger?”

Feng shi, Luo shi, and Hong shi pulled their hair in frenzy.

‘Given the other party’s strength, even Cosmos Bridge primary realm experts like us will find it hard to withstand that attack. It has been only a month since you reached Clarifying Turbidity realm, and yet you intend to face such an attack with just a single finger? You must be mad!

‘Furthermore, even if you are just using a single finger, surely you can move faster than that!

‘Your leisurely and unsteady movements are reminiscent of a dying granny, are you sure you are fighting?

‘This Senior Feng’s movements are as swift as a leopard’s. Even if your cultivation has advanced significantly in the past month, and you could defeat the other party with a single finger, surely you need to gather some force and move way faster than that!

‘It is one thing for your finger to be completely devoid of skill, but to move so slowly on top of that... Even the weakest cultivator could dodge it easily!’

Not only were Hong shi and the others on the verge of fainting, the mouths of Luo Xuan and the others were also twitching violently.

They had heard the content of bet clearly just now. Given the stakes on the line, shouldn’t Zhang shi act more seriously?

With such speed, one couldn’t even kill a fly!

Seeing Zhang Xuan’s slow movement, the gray-robed young man harrumphed coldly.

“To think that I thought that you might be a formidable foe. In the end, you are just a braggart!”

It was just a moment ago that the other party arrogantly boasted about defeating Senior Feng with a single finger. Who knew that he would turn out to be so weak?

‘Do you think that you can stop Senior Feng’s charge with such a weak finger?’

‘Senior Feng could probably smash you to your grave with a single slap...’

Just as he was sneering within, he suddenly heard a commotion in the surroundings.

“Something is wrong, look!”

Hearing everyone’s anxious exclamations, the gray-robed man frowned. He hurriedly turned his gaze to the stage, and his eyes immediately widened in shock.

He thought that the other party’s slow finger would be easily crushed by Senior Feng’s charge. But who knew that Senior Feng would actually slow his charge instead. There was a grim expression on his face at this moment, as if he was facing some formidable foe. He tried swerving to the side, seemingly trying to avoid the finger.

However, right after taking half a step, the trembling finger turned toward him, and his eyebrows immediately shot up in alarm. Thus, he tried leaping to the left.

But before he could make the movement, the finger pointed straight toward the direction of his intended movement.

Upon seeing the direction of the finger, Senior Feng’s face paled as if he had seen a ghost. Cold sweat flowed from his forehead, and he hurriedly tried to dodge to another direction.

However, the same sight only happened again. It felt like Senior Feng was leaping to the commands of the finger, as though he was being controlled remotely. The sight of the scene was extraordinarily bizarre.

“D-did that Senior Feng suffer a stroke?”

“That seems to be the case...”

Ruohuan gongzi, Luo Zhao, and the others were completely bewildered by the sight before them.

Zhang shi's finger seemed to be completely devoid of strength whatsoever. Why would Senior Feng leap around the spot just because that finger was pointing toward him? Not to mention, to be even sweating profusely before it...

Did he take the wrong medicine today, or did he see a ghost somewhere?

Even couples who had danced for many years didn't share such harmony!

Coming to a realization, Hong shi's body stiffened.

"No, he isn't suffering from a stroke. Rather... it seems like Zhang shi has found the other party's flaws. His movements might be slow, but it accurately points toward the flaws of the other party. Zhang shi has not struck yet, but if he were to shoot a surge of zhenqi from the tip of his finger, that Senior Feng would surely be defeated immediately... or perhaps, he might even die from the attack!"

"That's right!"

Feng shi and Luo shi nodded in agreement as well.

As 5-star master teachers, their eyes of discernment were far above Luo Xuan and the others, thus allowing them to see through the situation.

Clearly, Zhang shi seemed to have seen through the other party's flaws and was pointing straight at them. Fearful that he might be struck, his opponent could only leap around to dodge.

In a battle among experts, the most feared situation was for one's weakness or mingmen to be discovered by one's opponents. Senior Feng might be strong, but he still had to think twice before rushing in under such circumstances.

"Senior..."

Realizing something was amiss in this situation as well, the gray-robed young man clenched his fists tightly in worry.

He knew how powerful Senior Feng was. Even the average Cosmos Bridge realm primary stage experts might not necessarily be a match for him. Yet, at this moment, he was actually leaping around under the ‘control’ of the other party’s finger. This clearly reflected the other party’s strength!

To be able to see through his senior’s flaws in an instant and force him into defense, how powerful must one’s eye of discernment be?

“Damn it!”

While everyone was astonished by this situation, Senior Feng was grinding his teeth together in anger.

Just as Hong shi had guessed, even though Zhang Xuan’s finger moved extremely slowly, it pointed straight toward Senior Feng’s mingmen.

As long as Senior Feng dared to advance forward, the other party could easily curb him just by shooting out a surge of zhenqi.

Senior Feng had a strong foundation, and in the course of the battle, he had already changed his movement technique five times and battle technique eight times. But even so, the other party’s finger was still accurately aimed at the mingmen of his techniques. Even his teacher, a 5-star pinnacle master teacher, was incapable of such a feat!

When did such a formidable figure appear in Huanyu Empire?

“Forget it, I’ll go all out!”

After leaping several more times, Senior Feng knew that going on like this wasn’t a solution—it was just a matter of time before he lost at this rate. Thus, clenching his jaws, he gathered his strength and leaped forward.

This movement of his was reminiscent of a tiger pouncing on its prey. An elder of his sect had once examined the movements of a hunting tiger and leopard, and using that as a reference, he created this killing technique. In close-range combat, it was a nigh-invincible skill that could easily catch one’s opponent off-guard. Through this technique, that elder was able to defeat all of his peers easily.

Spirit intermediate-tier pinnacle battle technique, Howling Tiger!

Roar!

The roar of a tiger resounded in the air along with his movements.

“Good!”

Seeing his senior bringing out his ultimate technique, the gray-robed young man heaved a sigh of relief. Just as he thought that they would win this round, the young man whom Senior Feng was facing suddenly sighed, and he complained, “What are you roaring for? You nearly gave me a heart attack...”

Padah!

With a dull thud, Senior Feng was abruptly struck in his mingmen, and he immediately fell to the ground. His face swiftly turned pale, and white foam leaked from the corner of his mouth.

“Senior...”

The gray-robed young man’s eyes narrowed in shock, and he hurriedly rushed forward to help his senior up.

Howling Tiger could already be considered one of the strongest techniques in their sect, and only a genius of Senior Feng’s caliber could bring out its full might. This was a howl sounded through suppressing one’s zhenqi and circulating it to build up power before an abrupt release. Before it, even a Cosmos Bridge realm primary stage cultivator would find their spirit and fighting will shattered.

He thought that this technique would surely defeat the opponent, but who could have known that the one who fell would actually be his senior instead?

With just a light blow from his finger, the other party actually broke through his senior’s defense and struck the region where his zhenqi was circulating.

How in the world did he do it?

This move might have looked simple, but the gray-robed young man could tell how fearsome it was.

Putting aside how it was difficult to find and strike at a flaw before such a swift movement, more importantly, Senior Feng had specially trained himself to neutralize the flaw. Even swords and sabers wouldn't even be able to get past his defense, and yet a shaking finger actually pierced through it...

How powerful must the other party's strength be?

“His strength probably exceeds 5,000,000 ding. With such might, if he were to really harbor killing intent toward Senior Feng, he could easily send senior flying with just his brute might!”

Making a swift estimation, the gray-robed young man's body stiffened in disbelief.

He had once done the calculation—even if a Cosmos Bridge realm intermediate stage expert were to launch a frontal strike on his mingmen, his senior would still be able to withstand the blow and stand his ground. Yet, with just a single finger, not only did the young man manage to break through his senior's defense, he even managed to severely wound his senior. Just by this itself, it could be deduced that the young man's strength was beyond a Cosmos Bridge realm intermediate stage cultivator!

At Cosmos Bridge realm intermediate stage, one could harness a might of 4,800,000 ding.

Beyond that, one would wield a might of 5,000,000 ding at the minimum.

With such strength, there was no need for the young man to search for flaws at all. There was no one here who could withstand a single slap from him!

It seemed the other party was going easy on them when he said that he would only use a single finger!

Otherwise, if the other party were to utilize his fist, Senior Feng could very possibly have died on the spot.

“Thank you for your magnanimity...”

Just as the gray-robed young man was overwhelmed with astonishment, a feeble voice suddenly sounded. Lowering his head, he saw Senior Feng opening his eyes painfully.

Even though the other party had struck Senior Feng's mingmen, it seemed that he had held back. As such, Senior Feng's injuries weren't as severe as expected.

"It is just a spar, so there's no need to go all out!" Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly.

As fellow master teachers, there was no need for them to fight each other to the death. It would suffice to just defeat the other party.

Actually, just as the gray-robed young man was thinking, if Zhang Xuan truly had intended to deal with Senior Feng, given his immense might of 10,000,000 ding, he could easily slay the other party with just a flick of his finger. There was no need for him to go through so much trouble at all.

"Since I have lost, we'll call off the alliance!"

Gritting his teeth, Senior Feng struggled to his feet and walked out of the main hall.

To think that he, the number one genius of Jinhai Empire, would be unable to match a single finger of the other party! He would only embarrass himself by staying here. Since that was the case, he decided to leave that instant.

"We won?"

"That formidable-looking Senior Feng was actually unable to match a single finger from Zhang shi?"

Seeing the group from Jinhai Empire depart, a huge commotion broke out amidst the group from Huanyu Empire.

Luo Xuan and Bi Jianghai glanced at one another, and bitter smiles surfaced on their lips.

It seemed like... their gap with the other party had grown much larger than before.

Back in Myriad Kingdom City, while they might not be a match for Zhang shi, they were still able to cross some blows

with him. But now, if they were to rush at Zhang Xuan with all their might, they would probably meet the same fate as Senior Feng—defeated by a mere finger.

“Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle? Zhang shi... you have reached Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle?”

Hong shi’s eyes lit up in agitation.

Even though Zhang shi’s attack ended in an instant, he still received a clear glimpse of the other party’s strength—
Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle!

Back in Myriad Kingdom Alliance, Zhang shi had made a breakthrough to Consonant Spirit realm. It had only been around two months since then, and not only had Zhang Xuan successfully made the breakthrough to Consonant Spirit realm, he had even reached the pinnacle of the realm.

His rate of improvement was too astonishing!

The hurdle to Consonant Spirit realm had trapped innumerable cultivators, but not only did Zhang shi manage to cross the hurdle in just two months, he even raised his cultivation by one entire realm... How in the world did he cultivate to achieve such an astounding growth rate?

“Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle?”

In truth, most of them had intended to get even with Zhang Xuan once he returned to the party. After all, back at Huanyu Empire, many of them had suffered greatly under Zhang Xuan’s hands. However, upon hearing those words, a strong feeling of helplessness loomed over them.

How could they possibly rival this monster? Even if they were to guzzle down pills, they still couldn’t keep up with the other party’s pace.

Most likely, the gap between them would only grow greater and greater in the future, and one day, the other party’s back would disappear completely from their sight.

“It’s just a stroke of good luck!”

Zhang Xuan chuckled. “Hong shi, didn’t my students come here along with you? Where are they?”

Since the group from Huanyu Empire have arrived here, Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, and the others were meant to be there as well.

“They...”

Hearing those words, Hong shi subconsciously glanced at Feng shi and the others and hesitated.

Seeing Hong shi’s response, Zhang Xuan frowned, and his face darkened.

“What happened to them?”

696 King Huai Manor

Zheng Yang and the others were his direct disciples, and they had accompanied him all the way here from Tianxuan Kingdom. They had braved many life-threatening situations together, and Zhang Xuan already viewed them as his closest kin. If anything were to happen to them, he didn't mind wiping the entire Hongyuan Empire off the face of the world!

If he needed to, he would even punch a gaping hole through the heavens!

Anyone who meant them harm would have to suffer his wrath.

“Zhang shi, don't worry. They are safe!”

Seeing the latter's awful expression, Hong shi immediately realized that his hesitation had caused a huge misunderstanding. Thus, he hurriedly explained, “However, they were taken away by the men of the King Huai Manor yesterday, and we dare not stop them...”

Zhang shi had entrusted his direct disciples to his care, only to find them missing upon his return. Anyone would be angry when faced with such a situation.

It was already incredible that Zhang shi could still retain his rationality in this situation.

“King Huai Manor?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had never heard of this name before. Why would the other party take his direct disciples away?

“I am not too sure about what's going on either!” Hong shi said and then hesitated for a brief moment before further explaining.

“King Huai, Yu Longxuan, is the blood-related uncle of the incumbent emperor of Hongyuan Empire, thus making him the Imperial Uncle of the current era. Given his esteemed position, there's only a single man throughout the entire Hongyuan Empire who stands above him—the emperor himself. Even

Princess Yu Fei-er whom we met before would have to address him as Grandpa Xuan!

“The men from the King Huai Manor came over yesterday, and they insisted on taking them over to their manor to stay for a few days. Considering their respectful attitude and their esteemed standing in Hongyuan Empire, it didn’t seem like they were harboring any malicious intentions, so I didn’t stop them...”

“Stay for a few days?”

Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

He was certain that he had no ties with King Huai Yu Longxuan. As for his students, Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, Yuan Tao, and Liu Yang, only Wang Ying came from a distinguished background. However, it could only be considered as a distinguished clan in Tianxuan Kingdom.

Yuan Tao was an orphan, and he had been roaming the streets ever since he was young. Unable to find a proper cultivation technique manual, he could only fumble his way through his cultivation. As a result, even though he managed to pass the Hongtian Academy’s entrance examination back then, his examination results were the very lowest of the entire cohort. The same went for Zheng Yang and Liu Yang as well.

Since none of them could possibly be related to a king of a Tier-1 Empire, why would the latter take them to his manor?

This was way too bizarre!

A thought suddenly surfaced in Zhang Xuan’s mind, and he immediately asked worriedly, “When did you all arrive? Did they cause any trouble?”

His students and his butler were true troublemakers, and this was especially so for the latter. With ‘Yang shi’ serving as his backing, he put on a brazen attitude regardless of whom he was standing before. Could they have offended the King Huai Manor somehow, thus resulting in the latter finding an excuse to take them to the manor?

“We only arrived yesterday afternoon. As soon as we arrived, we immediately headed toward this residence, so there is no

way they could've caused any trouble..."

Hong shi frowned as he went through his memory to see if he might have missed out something.

"But they did! Did you forget what the plump student of Zhang shi did before arriving at this residence?" Feng shi suddenly interjected.

Under Feng shi's prompt, Hong shi also recalled the matter and quickly explained it.

"Plump student? Oh! Yuan Tao did fight with someone yesterday, but that was a small matter. Besides, the other party was an ordinary person who had no ties with the King Huai Manor!"

Hearing that Yuan Tao had caused some kind of trouble, Zhang Xuan immediately asked with a livid expression, "What happened?"

"Actually, Yuan Tao is not to be blamed for this matter. Right after we arrived, an itinerant cultivator came to provoke us into dueling with him. Thus, Yuan Tao stood forward to teach that person a lesson. Due to this matter, Yuan Tao sustained some injuries and shed some blood. However, after Yuan Tao defeated the itinerant cultivator, the latter gave him some recovery pills in compensation for the matter. Judging from that person's dress-up, it seemed like he is a merchant. Could the both matters be related?"

Hong shi frowned as he recalled the happenings yesterday.

The person who fought against Yuan Tao was an ordinary merchant, and his cultivation was also so-so. It was unlikely for him to be related to King Huai Manor, so Hong shi didn't think too much into the matter.

However, the frown on Zhang Xuan's forehead deepened after hearing of the matter.

"Duel? And Yuan Tao was injured at that?"

Yuan Tao, Zheng Yang, and the others might be brazen, but they still knew better than to get into conflict with someone in a foreign land, especially when their teacher was not around.

Furthermore, with the awakening of Yuan Tao's unique constitution, his defense had reached an absurd level. Making him bleed was no easy task at all.

Could this matter really be related to King Huai Manor?

Otherwise, there was no other plausible explanation as to why the other party would take his students away.

Unable to come to a conclusion, the frown on Zhang Xuan's forehead tightened. Eventually, he turned to Hong shi and asked, "Where is King Huai Manor?"

"Zhang shi intends to head to King Huai Manor to find your students?" Hong shi was taken aback.

Given that King Huai was the Imperial Uncle of Hongyuan Empire, his manor would surely be well-protected by top-notch formations and Saint realm experts. It would be extremely dangerous for Zhang Xuan to head there alone without any preparation.

"Just tell me where it is!" Zhang Xuan harrumphed.

While his cultivation realm was lower than Hong shi's, the legendary feats he had accomplished, his extraordinary disposition, as well as the powerful aura he carried made it difficult for anyone to stand against him.

"Yes..."

Knowing that Zhang Xuan's mind was made up and that nothing he said could change the other party's mind, Hong shi could only relent. "King Huai Manor is not too far away from here. After leaving the Academic Sea, turn left and walk several dozen kilometers down the streets. You should see it then..."

Saying so, Hong shi pointed in a direction.

But before he could finish his words, a shrill call suddenly resounded in the air, and the massive Great Violetwing Beast landed on the courtyard. Zhang Xuan leaped onto its back, and the duo immediately flew in the direction in which Hong shi was pointing toward.

"Zhang shi...:

Not expecting Zhang shi to actually dive straight into action, Hong shi's face paled in fright.

Who was King Huai?

The uncle of the incumbent emperor, the highest standing official in the Hongyuan royal court. Even the emperor would have to show him some respect. And yet, Zhang shi actually rode an aerial spirit beast over to his manor. It wouldn't be a joke if he were to offend a person of such standing...

“Ruohuan, accompany me to find Princess Yu Fei-er now. She is probably the only one who can salvage the situation now...”

Gritting his teeth, Hong shi beckoned for Ruohuan gongzi to go along with him.

The only royalty they were acquainted with at the moment was Yu Fei-er. The most they could hope for at this moment was for the latter to help Zhang shi on account of the time they had spent together in Huanyu Empire...

...

The Great Violetwing Beast was extremely swift. From the back of the beast, Zhang Xuan scanned the buildings below, and before long, a massive manor came into sight.

The manor was resplendently designed, and many of the guards on the compound were all dressed in golden armor. Even before getting into proximity, Zhang Xuan could already feel an aura of invulnerability from it.

“This should be it...”

After circling around the area to further assess the situation, Zhang Xuan instructed the Great Violetwing Beast to land on the ground.

He didn't dash right into the other party's manor—after all, the other party was an Imperial Uncle of the state. Without ascertaining the situation of Wang Ying and the others, it was best not to offend the other party first.

Landing on an empty street several hundred meters away, Zhang Xuan changed into a brand-new master teacher robe before walking to the gates of the manor.

At the entrance, he saw a huge plaque with three grand words, 'King Huai Manor', written in gold. The words seemed to be dancing around, as though they would break free of the surface of the plaque and soar into the greater world any moment now.

"This is probably the work of a 6-star painter!" Zhang Xuan assessed.

Considering the incredible skill and astounding disposition behind those words, the painter of it had to be at least at 6-star.

There were four guards standing at the entrance. Each of them was dressed in steel armor, and their presence exuded a strong pressure on one's soul.

"Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm experts?"

Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

He didn't expect even the guards to be Cosmos Bridge realm experts as well. That would mean that their cultivation realms were even higher than his!

An expert of this caliber would at least be an esteemed official or a commander of an army of several thousand in Huanyu Empire. Yet, in Hongyuan Empire, they were only an ordinary entrance guard. Huaiwang Manor was indeed powerful!

It was no wonder Hong shi was worried. Entering this place was no different from venturing into a lion's den.

But so what if that was the case?

If the other party had malicious intentions toward Yuan Tao, Zheng Yang, and the others, even if he was a member of the royal family, Zhang Xuan was determined to cause a huge uproar.

If it came down to it, he could also bring out his Otherworldly Demon puppets to wreak havoc. With twenty Saint realm experts with nigh-invulnerable defense and no lack of stamina along with the unfathomable Vicious, he was confident that he could easily destroy the entire King Huai Manor!

Taking in a deep breath, Zhang Xuan walked up to the gate.

Seeing Zhang Xuan walk over, a guard raised his spear and harrumphed.

“Our King Huai Manor forbids the approach of any unrelated personnel!”

“I am Master Teacher Zhang Xuan, and I am here to pay respect to King Huai. I hope that you can relay the message.”

Zhang Xuan took out an identity scroll and passed it over.

Before confirming the other party’s intentions, it was best not to offend them first.

“Master teacher?”

The guard assessed Zhang Xuan doubtfully before grabbing the identity scroll.

There were only four words written on the identity scroll—Master Teacher Zhang Xuan. There was nothing on his rank at all.

4-star master teacher might be the strongest existence in Myriad Kingdom Alliance, but in a Tier-1 Empire, it would be insufficient for him to meet someone of King Huai’s caliber.

If Zhang Xuan were to write it down, it was highly likely that he would be denied entry immediately.

The guards wouldn’t even bother showing his identity scroll to their boss.

“This...”

The guard passed the identity scroll to the other guards to see as well, and they were all perplexed when they saw the content as well. One of them spoke up hesitantly. “May I know what Zhang shi’s master teacher rank is? Are you an acquaintance of our old master? Have you made an appointment with him?”

Since there was nothing written on it, they could only ask the person in question.

Naturally, a person of their master’s standing wouldn’t meet a person just because the other party had provided an identity scroll.

“I have never met King Huai before, but I am a close buddy of Princess Yu Fei-er. Oh, Pavilion Master Mo Gaoyuan is also an old friend of mine!” Zhang Xuan chuckled.

If he were to say that he was a 4-star master teacher, he would immediately be chased away. Thus, he could respond to the other party’s questions in a roundabout manner, hoping that the other party wouldn’t pursue the matter.

But in any case, what he was saying was the truth as well. He had gone through a life-and-death situation with Yu Fei-er, so it wouldn’t be going too far to address her as a close buddy. On the other hand, he had met Mo Gaoyuan, and the latter had expressed goodwill toward him. Thus, it wasn’t exactly wrong to call them old friends as well.

“Mo shi’s friend?”

As expected, upon hearing those words, the faces of the guards immediately turned grim.

Mo Gaoyuan was the pavilion master of the Hongyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, a 6-star pinnacle master teacher. Only another 6-star master teacher would dare to address him as a friend!

Just that... was it even possible for a 6-star master teacher to be so young?

“Zhang shi, this way please. We will report your arrival to our old master!”

Even though the guards were doubtful, they didn’t dare take any chances. Thus, they quickly invited Zhang Xuan into the residence.

The means of a master teacher should never be underestimated. While the fellow before them might look young, it might not necessarily be an accurate indicator of his age. Furthermore, regardless of whether the other party was truly a 6-star master teacher or not, just the fact that he was a master teacher would have to make them think twice before offending him.

“Thank you.”

Seeing that the guards were going to report his presence to their old master, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. With a nod, he followed the guards into the manor.

697 Scram!

King Huai Manor was so huge that it was impossible to see the end of it with a single glance. Many powerful guards dressed in golden armor patrolled the soundings of the majestic buildings rising throughout the entire estate. It felt like even an army wouldn't be able to take down this manor easily.

It was no wonder Hong shi was so worried when Zhang Xuan said that he would come here. This was indeed the den of a ferocious tiger.

'The movements of these guards seem to be aligned with some kind of formation. They will be difficult opponents!'

As a formation master, Zhang Xuan could easily tell that despite the seemingly random movement of the guards, their movements were actually aligned with something to form a powerful offensive formation.

If anyone were to attempt to intrude into the manor, they would be able to immediately bring forth a destructive assault upon him.

'Wang Ying and the others should be fine. If the men from King Huai Manor really intended to mean them harm, no one from the Huanyu Empire party would be able to stop them. There is no reason for them to go through so much trouble...'

Upon seeing the astounding might of the manor, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief instead.

Considering how the other party could easily overcome the entire group from Huanyu Empire just by dispatching a few guards, there was absolutely no need to go through the trouble of inviting Wang Ying and the others to the manor.

Possessing absolute power, there was no need for the other party to hide his actions at all.

"Zhang shi, please wait here. We'll report your arrival to our old master!"

Soon, they arrived at an elegant gazebo. The guard invited Zhang Xuan to take a seat before taking his leave.

Understanding the rules around here, Zhang Xuan sipped on the fragrant tea that a maid served while waiting patiently.

It must be said that the etiquette of King Huai Manor toward guests was truly impeccable. Even the tea leaves used were freshly picked, and the fragrance drifting from it left one feeling deeply revitalized.

While sipping on the tea, Zhang Xuan took this opportunity to activate his Eye of Insight to examine the area.

After taking a brief look, he couldn't help but shake his head in disappointment.

Even though the security in the manor seemed tight, he could still see many openings under the scrutiny of the Eye of Insight.

Zhang Xuan was confident that with his current cultivation, he could easily enter and leave the residence without being discovered.

“Zhang shi!”

Just as Zhang Xuan was scanning his surroundings, the guard from before suddenly rushed back and announced, “The old master invites you to the main hall!”

“Un.”

Retracting his curious gaze, impassiveness returned to Zhang Xuan's face. Standing up, he followed the lead of the guard.

After strolling through a maze of corridors, they soon arrived at a vast main hall with a high ceiling.

“Old master, Zhang shi has arrived!”

Upon reaching the main hall, the guard immediately rushed forward and reported their arrival with clasped fists before backing out of the room. Following which, Zhang Xuan stepped into the main hall.

At the center of the massive room sat an austere middle-aged man who exuded a strong authoritative disposition. On the

guest seat by the side was a white-haired elder, and a young man was standing behind him.

These were the three people in the room.

The middle-aged man carried a demeanor which reflected the many years in which he'd held his position of power. The chances were that he was King Huai. As for the white hair elder, his very presence felt unfathomable, making it extremely difficult to assess him. On the other hand, the young man behind him unreservedly exerted his aura, revealing his cultivation as a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan primary stage expert!

A Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert in his twenties!

Even among the geniuses in Hongyuan Empire, he could be considered as the cream of the crop!

Walking to the center of the room, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and greeted, "Master Teacher Zhang Xuan pays respect to Your Highness!"

"You are Zhang Xuan?"

Before the middle-aged man could even speak, the young man turned his sharp gaze on Zhang Xuan and questioned him coldly.

Seeing how that young man was devoid of the slightest respect, Zhang Xuan ignored him and walked to the guest seat on the opposite side.

"Didn't you hear my words?" Realizing he had just been snubbed, the young man's face darkened.

While he was standing subserviently behind the elder, his cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 8-dan at his age made him a respected figure no matter where he went. How dare the other party act so arrogantly as to ignore his words?

Zhang Xuan glanced at the young man and replied, "I heard them."

"Then why aren't you answering me?" The young man harrumphed furiously.

Ignoring the young man once more, Zhang Xuan turned to the middle-aged man and clasped his fist.

“Your Highness, I believe you should know the reason for my visit!”

“You...”

Seeing how the other party disregarded him yet again, the young man staggered.

‘Stop ignoring me, I am talking to you!’

Gritting his teeth, the young man bellowed furiously, “If you want His Highness to answer your question, you’d better answer mine first!”

“Fine.”

Zhang Xuan finally turned his gaze back to the young man, “Speak.”

“Answer me, are you Zhang Xuan?” the young man asked rudely.

Zhang Xuan turned his face back to King Huai once more and said, “I heard that my students have been invited to your manor as guests. I hope that you will allow me to take them away with me.”

“...”

Fury gushed to the head of the young man, and his body swayed weakly from side to side.

At this point, how could he possibly not tell that the other party was making a fool of him? The other party had no intention of answering his question in the first place!

“How dare you make a fool out of me! Do you know who I am?” With a furious roar, a powerful aura reminiscent of the expansive ocean burst forth from the young man.

Even though his cultivation wasn’t on par with Ye Wentian, the strength he wielded seemed to be far mightier. Especially now that he was enraged, his muscles began bulged out furiously, creating a formidable sight. With just a glance, one

could easily tell that he possessed an exceptionally strong body.

“You?”

Despite the other party’s rage, Zhang Xuan remained completely impassive. “Do you think it matters to me who you are? I am a noble master teacher who stood against the Otherworldly Demons for humanity, a respected figure of all mankind. How dare a mere cultivator like you act so haughtily before me? Who gave you the guts to act this way?”

Driving his Soul Depth, Zhang Xuan’s words were imbued with the Impartation of Heaven’s Will. Paired with the inviolable aura he possessed as a Celestial Master Teacher, Zhang Xuan’s presence suddenly towered before the young man as though a giant before an ant.

It was as if desecrating him was an act of blasphemy.

“I...”

The young man froze in fear.

As the number one occupation in the world, the prestige of the master teachers wasn’t just for show. All cultivators had to respect them.

Dishonoring them was equivalent to provoking the Master Teacher Pavilion, as well as the entire human race!

This was simply the prestige that master teachers commanded!

If anyone could shout and order a master teacher around, how was the Master Teacher Pavilion supposed to establish order on this continent?

The young man tried to take advantage of Zhang Xuan’s weakness to instill fear into him, but he forgot about this unspoken rule. Thus, upon being questioned under the effects of the Impartation of Heaven’s Will, he was immediately rendered speechless. His face swiftly paled.

Seeing that the young man was suppressed entirely by him, Zhang Xuan continued, “No matter what, I am a guest in King Huai Manor. His Highness hasn’t even spoken yet, and a subordinate like you actually dares to overstep your bounds

and cause such a fuss. Do you have no respect for His Highness and the elder before you?”

“I...” The young man’s body trembled weakly. The ferocious aura he had exuded on earlier vanished completely at this moment.

He had been too engrossed with forcing some humble pie onto Zhang Xuan that he forgot that he was in the presence of King Huai and the elder before him. He had gotten ahead of himself, and his actions could be easily interpreted as insubordination.

“To forget your own place and act so conceitedly before your elders... You aren’t welcomed here. Scram!”

Zhang Xuan flung his sleeves.

“I-I...”

The young man couldn’t find a single word to say. His complexion swiftly turned awful, and after a moment of hesitation, he turned around and walked out.

Zhang Xuan’s current Soul Depth was 19.1, making him comparable to even a 6-star master teacher. Even though the young man was a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert, he was far too weak to withstand Zhang Xuan’s Impartation of Heaven’s Will.

With just a few words, Zhang Xuan had made him lose himself.

“This...”

The middle-aged man and the elder were stunned. They didn’t expect Zhang Xuan to be able to beguile the young man into leaving just like that, and they glanced at one another in astonishment.

Wasn’t Zhang shi supposed to be a 4-star master teacher?

How could his words be effective even on a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert?

In the end, the elder shook his head and uttered, “Enough.”

Boom!

That voice wasn't loud, but it resounded clearly in one's ears as though a clap of thunder.

The departing young man suddenly froze. The elder's words had shaken him out of the effects of Zhang Xuan's Impartation of Heaven's Will, and he immediately turned around to glare at Zhang Xuan in animosity.

He was on the verge of going insane.

To think that he, a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert, would actually be beguiled into leaving the room while trying to teach the other party a lesson. The immense humiliation induced a furious blaze within him.

"I will kill you!"

Howling angrily, the young man stepped against the ground and charged forward.

However, at that very moment, the elder's voice rang in his ears. "Enough! Don't you think you have embarrassed yourself enough today?"

"Yes!"

Hearing the displeasure in the elder's tone, the young man shuddered and hurriedly retracted his aura. He swiftly returned back to his place behind the elder and fell quiet. Even so, his vengeful eyes were still fixated on Zhang Xuan, seemingly trying to tear him apart.

However, Zhang Xuan couldn't care less.

While he wasn't a match for the other party, there was no need for him to fear the other party either.

After all, the Saint realm puppets he had on him weren't just for show.

Ignoring the young man, Zhang Xuan turned to look at the elder instead.

Zhang Xuan knew how strong his Impartation of Heaven's Will was. Those whom he had beguiled couldn't be awakened that easily by external force. Yet, with just a single word, the

elder actually managed to return the young man's rationality. Without a doubt, the elder was a formidable expert!

In fact, even Mo Gaoyuan didn't seem to wield such capability either.

"Zhang shi's students are indeed guests in my manor. I'll have my men invite them over."

Noticing the peculiar atmosphere drifting in the air, the middle-aged man chuckled awkwardly and hurriedly issued some instructions to a servant.

The servant swiftly left the room.

"I'll be thanking His Highness in advance then!"

Hearing that his students were indeed just guests of the manor, the heavy stone weighing down Zhang Xuan's heart was finally released. But even so, he still had some doubts in mind and said, "My students are mischievous, so I beg Your Highness's pardon if they have troubled you in any way!"

"Troubled me? How can that be? Zhang shi's students possess astonishing talent. If anything, I am impressed by them..."

Knowing that it would be impossible for him to hide the truth from the master teacher before him, King Huai shook his head and explained, "To tell you the truth, it was by Elder Yuan's request that I invited Zhang shi's students to the manor!"

"Elder Yuan?"

Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

Elder Yuan? He didn't recall ever meeting such a figure. Why would the other party invite his students to King Huai's manor?

The elder before the young man stroked his beard and said, "I am Yuan Cheng, the elder of Boundless Empire's Yuan Clan!"

"Boundless Empire? Yuan Clan?"

Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

On the way here, Yu Fei-er had told him about the various Tier-1 Empires and Tier-2 Empires around Hongyuan Empire,

but he didn't recall any of them going by the name of Boundless Empire.

Could it be... a Conferred Empire?

698 Yuan Tao's Heritage

Conferred Empires were a rank higher than Tier-1 Empires. 7-star master teachers stood at the core of the empire, ensuring the prosperity of the nation.

Considering how King Huai didn't fly into a rage despite the rudeness of the young man, intervening to mediate the situation even, it was likely that the elder and the young man possessed extraordinary standing.

If they were truly from a Conferred Empire, everything would make sense.

After all, when Yu Fei-er and Xing Yuan visited Huanyu Empire, Ye Wentian had to act prudently around them, not daring to offend them at all.

“That's right!”

The elder chuckled. “Zhang Shi sure is incredible. To think that you would possess a Soul Depth superior to most 6-star master teachers at such a young age. Your talent is incredible even among the multitude of geniuses I have seen. You will surely achieve great things in the future!”

“Soul Depth superior to most 6-star master teachers?”

King Huai was astonished to hear that.

He had sent his men to investigate the background of Zhang Xuan, and the other party was only a 4-star master teacher of Huanyu Empire. He'd thought that it would still take many years before the other party could achieve anything sizeable, but who could have known that his Soul Depth would actually be so high?

It was extremely difficult to raise one's Soul Depth.

There were many master teachers whose cultivation had reached the mark but were unable to be promoted due to their Soul Depth not reaching the prerequisite.

And yet, the fellow before him, despite his low cultivation, possessed an extraordinarily high Soul Depth. This meant that it was just a matter of time before the other party became a 6-star master teacher!

If he were to be given some time to grow, he would surely make a name for himself... It seemed like there was a need to establish close ties with the other party.

Hearing the other party's evaluation, Zhang Xuan frowned.

Without using a Stone of Insight, not even a 6-star master teacher was able to gauge his Soul Depth accurately. And yet, the other party was actually able to evaluate it accurately. Clearly, the other party's eye of discernment and cultivation had truly reached a fearsome level.

With a grim expression, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and said, "Elder Yuan is being too generous!"

"Given your cultivation and talent, there's nothing generous about my praise. Since Zhang Shi's surname is Zhang, may I know if you are related to the Sage Ancestry Zhang Clan?" Elder Yuan asked doubtfully.

"Sage Ancestry? Zhang Clan?" Zhang Xuan shook his head. "I have never heard of them before, and I am unrelated to them."

He was an orphan as well as a transcender, so how could he have known of this Zhang Clan and Sage Ancestry?

"Unrelated?"

Elder Yuan was taken back for an instant before saying, "It doesn't matter whether you are related to them or not. It is admirable in itself that you were able to advance so far in your Soul Depth cultivation given your age, as well as your composure and steadiness in dealing with matters, and your lack of complacency and impatience. It is no wonder Young Master Tao views you so highly, refusing to acknowledge anyone else as his teacher except for you!"

"Young Master Tao?" Zhang Xuan frowned. "Do you mean... Yuan Tao?"

Zhang Xuan only had a few students, and the elder also went by the surname of Yuan. It wasn't too difficult to figure out who the other party was referring to.

Just that... wasn't Yuan Tao an orphan? On top of that, he grew up in Tianxuan Royal City as well. How could he be the young master of the Boundless Empire's Yuan Clan?

“That's right. We found Young Master Tao through the resonance in our bloodline. I have heard stories about his travels with you, and I would like to thank you for the care you have shown him!”

Elder Yuan nodded.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was bewildered.

Bloodline resonance... Could Yuan Tao really be a missing young master from the Yuan Clan? But... this was way too inconceivable!

If this was really true, considering how the Yuan Clan was likely to be a powerful clan in a Conferred Empire, how could their young master possibly be left behind in a place as remote as Tianxuan Kingdom?

Seemingly noticing Zhang Xuan's doubts, Elder Yuan asked with a smile, “As Young Master Tao's teacher, are you aware of his ancient bloodline?”

“He possesses the Emperor's Bloodline!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Zhang Xuan had noticed Yuan Tao's Emperor's Bloodline from the very start through the Library of Heaven's Path. It was due to his bloodline that he accepted Yuan Tao as his student.

Just like unique constitutions, there were many differing types of bloodlines too. Ancient Bloodlines, New Bloodlines, inheritances, and mutations...

The Emperor's Bloodline was an extremely powerful bloodline from the ancient era which boasted invincible defense.

Zhang Xuan had met so many talented people, but not even a 6-star master teacher like Mo Gaoyuan was able to discern Yuan Tao's Ancient Bloodline. As such, it was unlikely that the elder was lying.

"Zhang shi indeed has keen eyes!" Elder Yuan nodded. "That's right, Young Master Yuan possesses the purest Emperor's Bloodline of our clan, and to our surprise, Zhang shi has managed to awaken it."

"... Clan?"

"Our Yuan Clan is built on the Ancient Emperor's Bloodline, and every single one of our members possesses it. However, with each passing generation, our bloodline grows thinner and thinner."

Elder Yuan sighed. "However, the heavens have taken pity on us! They have given us Young Master Tao, who possesses the perfect Ancient Emperor's Bloodline. With his return, it'll only be a matter of time before our clan rises to power once more!"

"This..."

Zhang Xuan was taken aback. He suddenly recalled the young man who tried to act arrogantly before him earlier.

Judging from the other party's bulging muscles, it was clear that he specialized in physical body cultivation. Thinking about it, the Emperor's Bloodline probably ran through his blood as well.

The Emperor's Bloodline boasted invincible defense, and if one were to fully awaken it, the might of one's physical body would reach unimaginable levels.

In truth, Zhang Xuan had been wondering how the rare Emperor's Bloodline could possibly appear in Yuan Tao—it turned out that he had such a huge clan behind him after all!

"But if he is from your clan, how did he end up in Tianxuan Kingdom?"

Zhang Xuan voiced his doubts.

Considering how Yuan Tao was born with the complete Emperor's Bloodline, how could the Yuan Clan possibly leave him alone in a remote kingdom?

"It was out of helplessness that we chose this course of action. As time passes, the bloodline running through our veins only continues to grow thinner. In order to revive the Ancient Bloodline, we could only send our offspring to ancient ruins via Teleportation Formations and allow them to grow by themselves! Only in places like that could the recovery of the bloodline be triggered," Elder Yuan explained.

An Ancient Bloodline could only retain its complete form in ancient ruins. If they were to stay cooped up in their clan, the bloodline would only grow thinner and thinner, and eventually disappear entirely.

"Ancient ruins? You mean... Tianxuan Kingdom is considered as ancient ruins as well?"

Zhang Xuan was astonished.

Tianxuan was an Unranked Kingdom located in the most remote part of the continent, but there was actually more to it?

"That's right. The war between the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and the human race was spread across the entire continent, and we term the regions unaffected by the conflict as ancient ruins! Such places tend to be more backward, and there are no Teleportation Formations in the vicinity. Even the Master Teacher Pavilions wouldn't dispatch any personnel to such a region, thus isolating it from the entire world," Elder Yuan explained.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan widened his eyes.

It seemed like... Tianxuan Kingdom fit that description aptly!

Devoid of a Master Teacher Pavilion or Teleportation Formation... Remote and thin in spiritual energy...

"Such lands tend to be located by the borders of the continent, and they spread across a wide area. We send our offspring to these ancient ruins via Teleportation Formations shortly after their birth, but we are unable to clearly locate their specific coordinates, so we could only slowly look for them... and

throughout the years, many have failed to survive there as well!”

Elder Yuan shook his head.

They couldn't choose where their offspring were teleported to nor whether they would be able to survive there or not. If they had another choice, they wouldn't have sent their offspring to such places either.

Many of their offspring ended up dead, and those who lived on to restore the Ancient Bloodline numbered even more in the minority.

It was truly fortunate that they had managed to find Yuan Tao, who had recovered the Ancient Bloodline. How could they not be agitated?

After conversing for a moment longer, Zhang Xuan finally gained a good grasp on the situation.

Back then, the war between the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe and the human race had spread far and wide across the entire Master Teacher Continent. The regions that were unaffected by the conflict were known as ancient ruins. But while such places were closer to the ancient era, they were extremely backward, especially in terms of cultivation techniques and battle techniques.

Without anyone to care for the Yuan Clan offspring who were sent there, there was a lot of doubt about whether they could survive or not, let alone, restore the Ancient Bloodline.

But this was the only course of action they could take.

Otherwise, if they were to allow their bloodline to continue thinning, it would only be a matter of time before they were consumed by other powers and disappeared in the annals of history.

‘But still, to possess Teleportation Formations, the Yuan Clan is far stronger than I had thought!’

After hearing the other party's words, Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

Rumor had it that an 8-star formation master possessed the ability to construct a formation capable of teleporting lifeforms. Considering how the Yuan Clan sent their offspring to the ancient ruins through such formations, how could they be an ordinary clan?

Elder Yuan then revealed his true intentions.

“Since we have found the young master, we intend to bring him back to our clan to inherit our heritage... However, Young Master Tao insists on meeting you, and he wants to receive your approval before deciding anything. I hope that Zhang shi can express your support for this matter.”

It wasn't easy for the Yuan Clan to find an offspring that possessed the complete Emperor's Bloodline, so Elder Yuan was determined to bring Yuan Tao back to inherit the heritage regardless of the situation. However, Yuan Tao insisted on meeting his teacher before making a decision, thus resulting in the present situation.

On the other hand, the young man behind Elder Yuan felt that it was humiliating that the actions of the Yuan Clan had to be dictated by a mere 4-star master teacher. On top of that, he didn't think that Zhang Xuan was qualified to serve as Yuan Tao's teacher either, and that was the reason he provoked Zhang Xuan earlier.

“This...”

Zhang Xuan was hesitant to respond.

First Zhao Ya, and now Yuan Tao was standing before a crossroad as well.

Considering how the Yuan Clan had a complete heritage of the Ancient Emperor's Bloodline, the best course of action was clearly for Yuan Tao to return with them... But after the days they had spent together, Zhang Xuan was reluctant to part with the other party, especially since Zhao Ya had left. Who knew when they would be able to meet, or whether they would even meet again at all?

“I have heard of the methods Zhang shi used to awaken Young Master Tao's bloodline, and they are indeed novel... However,

our Yuan Clan possesses the complete heritage regarding the Emperor's Bloodline, so Young Master Tao will surely be able to awaken his bloodline much faster, allowing his cultivation to soar. Thus, I hope that Zhang Shi can agree to this matter. After all, this is for Young Master Tao's welfare!" Elder Yuan urged.

He had already discussed the matter with Young Master Tao, and he could see the deep relationship they had for one another. If Zhang Xuan were to say no, Young Master Tao would surely refuse to leave with them.

However... the fate of their clan lay on their shoulders. A prospective successor was standing before them, so how could they possibly allow him to continue roaming instead of bringing him back?

"I understand."

Zhang Xuan sighed gloomily.

Life is a cycle of reunion and separation. There is no teacher who can stay by his student's side for life. Sometimes, letting go is the best way to unleash a student's potential.

Take Zhao Ya for example, after heading to the Glacier Plain Court and receiving the best heritage and resources, her cultivation was probably on par or even beyond Zhang Xuan's right now.

The same applied for Lu Chong as well. He and Mo Hunsheng had gone on a journey to search for the Ancient Domain of Soul Oracles. They might not have reached their destination yet, but once they did, Lu Chong's cultivation would surely soar.

Seeing the look of hesitation on Zhang Xuan's face, the young man by the side said coldly, "Our elder has already said so much, and yet you are still reluctant? Young Master Tao possesses the complete Emperor's Bloodline, and it is a matter of time before he grows to become a mighty dragon.

"You might be a master teacher, and your talent is not bad, but in terms of physical body cultivation... you are far from a match for us. You aren't qualified to be the young master's

teacher at all. You'd better learn your place, it is only out of politeness that we are discussing this matter with you!"

Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

"Did you just say that I am unqualified to be Yuan Tao's teacher?"

699 Zhang Xuan's Physical Body

“That’s right!” the young man sneered in disdain. “If you think that I am speaking nonsense, why don’t we verify it through a physical fight? If you lose, you’d better hand Young Master Tao obediently to us and admit that you are unqualified to be his teacher! On the other hand, if you win, I can even acknowledge you as my teacher...”

The young man roared, “How is it? Do you dare to take on the challenge?”

Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

The other party was a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert. Even without the use of the Library of Heaven’s Path or Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan could still easily tell that the other party possessed tremendous physical strength and resilience. Even if Zhang Xuan were to gather the entirety of his 10,000,000-ding strength, he couldn’t be sure whether he could break the other party’s defenses or not!

Not to mention, his physical strength only amounted to 4,000,000 ding!

But if Zhang Xuan couldn’t defeat the other party, what right did he have to be ‘Young Master Tao’s’ teacher?

While it might look as if the other party was acting recklessly by challenging Zhang Xuan to a battle all of the sudden, the truth was that he had grasped Zhang Xuan’s weakness accurately and placed him in check.

Furthermore, if it was just a battle involving only their physical strength, the other party would be able to avoid Zhang Xuan’s Impartation of Heaven’s Will too... His move was indeed ingenious.

Placing his hands behind his back, the young man taunted derisively, “That’s right! Do you dare to accept the

challenge?”

“Humph!” Seeing how the other party arrogantly attempted to push him to a corner, Zhang Xuan flung his sleeves and harrumphed. But at that moment, an excited voice suddenly sounded, “Teacher...”

Turning around, Zhang Xuan saw Yuan Tao, Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, and the others walking over with eyes brimming with agitation.

Over the past month, his students seemed to have made significant advancements in their cultivation.

From this, it could be seen that they had been working diligently over this period of time.

“Young Master!”

Sun Qiang was also amidst the group.

At this moment, he had already reached Transcendent Mortal 3-dan Yin-Yang realm intermediate stage.

Even though his cultivation was slightly beneath Wang Ying and the others, considering Sun Qiang’s usual indolent nature, it could be considered rather impressive.

Seeing that each and every one of them was spirited, Zhang Xuan felt heartened, and a slight smile crept onto his face. All of the sudden, a majestic aura flowed out of Zhang Xuan as he turned around toward the young man and replied nonchalantly, “Fine, we’ll have a duel using just our physical bodies!”

“Duel? Teacher...”

Hearing those words, Yuan Tao and the others immediately panicked.

Even though their teacher’s cultivation had improved swiftly, it was still much too difficult for him to defeat a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan expert who specialized in physical body cultivation in a physical duel.

“Don’t worry, he’s nothing more than a little pebble in the way. Just watch how I crush him!”

Chuckling softly, Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back grandly.

Since the other party had already gone this far, how could Zhang Xuan possibly back down now, especially before his students?

“It’s good that you agreed to the duel. Come!”

Hearing the other party agreeing to the duel, the young man immediately burst into laughter. He proceeded to the center of the room, and just by flexing his muscles, he seemed to have grown a few inches taller. His bulky and powerful frame gave him a sharp appearance reminiscent of a ferocious tiger.

“There’s no need to rush into it.”

Even though the young man was already preparing himself for the duel, Zhang Xuan still remained on his seat. With a smile, he turned to King Huai and asked, “Your Highness, there’s a matter I need to trouble you with. Is there a secret chamber here that I can use here? There are some matters that I need to attend to!”

“Secret chamber? Of course there is!”

King Huai was still busy finding a way to form a close relationship with Zhang Xuan when the latter delivered an opportunity for him to express his goodwill. Thus, he immediately waved his hand, and ‘jiya!’, the wall by the side of the room suddenly split apart, revealing a hidden chamber.

As a member of the royal family of a Tier-1 Empire, it wasn’t too surprising for him to install have several secret chambers in his main hall so as to discuss confidential matters.

A special formation was set up here in order to prevent anyone, regardless of strength, from peering into the room or eavesdropping into the conversation.

“Thank you.”

With a smile, Zhang Xuan entered the chamber and closed the doors. After which, he flicked his wrist, and his clone appeared before him.

With the measly 4,000,000 ding of strength that Zhang Xuan could harness in his physical body, it was surely impossible for him to teach the other party a lesson. However... his clone was different.

His clone had been forged of the Nine Skies Lotus Embryo, thus making its physical body far stronger than his. Zhang Xuan had little doubt that the young man wouldn't be an opponent for his clone as well.

Zhang Xuan swiftly filled his clone up on the details through their mental connection.

“That’s how it is. So, go there and smash his teeth out!”

“Don’t worry!”

His clone nodded, put on Zhang Xuan’s previous clothes, and walked out of the secret chamber.

Considering how the clone had the same form as the main body, and the main body was hidden within the secret chamber, there was no need to worry about the trick being exposed.

“You’re finally out!”

Upon seeing ‘Zhang Xuan’ coming out from the chamber, the young man sneered coldly.

‘Geji! Geji!’

Cracking sounds echoed from his body, and the aura shrouding him rapidly grew stronger. He flicked his wrist, and a deafening sound boomed in the air, seemingly threatening to shatter everything in the area to pieces.

When one’s physical body reached a certain realm, the prowess it could exert would be on par with zhenqi.

No matter how thin it was, the young man still possessed the powerful Emperor’s Bloodline. On top of that, the long heritage of his clan meant that he had access to the best physical body cultivation techniques, thus resulting in the might of his physical body to exceed even his zhenqi cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 8-dan.

‘Zhang Xuan’ chuckled lightly as he walked to the center of the room as well.

“Humph!”

Seeing how a Consonant Spirit realm brat actually dared to pit his physical body against him, the young man’s face twisted in savageness. Kicking against the ground, he dashed forward.

Boom!

Due to the absurd speed he was traveling at, a deep rumbling reminiscent of thunder boomed along with his movements.

Even before he reached Zhang Xuan, the air in the surroundings had already been torn apart, forming a huge vacuum around Zhang Xuan.

“Teacher...”

Seeing how the young man executed his strongest technique from the very start, Yuan Tao clenched his fists tightly.

Even though the young man could be considered his fellow clan member, the relationship between him and his teacher ran far deeper than that.

Wang Ying and the others were anxious as well.

They were well aware of the strength their teacher wielded. Just a month ago, their teacher was only at the Clarifying Turbidity realm, so even if he had made a breakthrough in the past month, he would only be at Consonant Spirit realm at the moment. A Consonant Spirit realm against a Transcendent Mortal 8-dan... The gap was simply too huge!

It could be said that both parties weren’t even on the same level, how could Zhang Xuan triumph against him?

“Don’t worry, since the young master agreed to the duel, he won’t lose!” Sun Qiang said by the side.

Before his students, the young master always put on an austere face to uphold his prestige. It was not that Wang Ying and the others didn’t believe in Zhang Xuan, but the gap between the two was simply too huge.

At the same time, considering the upright personality of their teacher, he wouldn't do anything despicable just to achieve victory.

However... Sun Qiang had a differing opinion.

After living with the young master for a period of time, he had gained a good grasp of the latter's personality. Had the young master ever done anything he was unconfident at?

Since the young master agreed to the other party's challenge, there was no doubt that he must have found a way to pummel the other party. Besides, it was suspicious how the young master asked to use the secret chamber before the duel.

"Won't lose?"

Wang Ying and the others were a little doubtful upon hearing Sun Qiang's words.

Hu!

Before the young man's ferocious attack, their teacher didn't bother to dodge. Instead, he raised his right arm and sent a fist over.

"A frontal attack?"

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan's reaction, everyone's eyebrows shot up. Even Elder Yuan also frowned in confusion.

Elder Yuan knew very well how strong the young man was. Even Transcendent Mortal 8-dan intermediate stage experts would find it hard to breach his defenses.

'A Consonant Spirit realm small fry like you actually dares to face him head on... Aren't you courting death?'

Peng!

In just the blink of an eye, the two fists clashed with one another, and a frenzied wind burst into the surroundings. The ground beneath the duo's feet immediately cracked from the tremendous impact of the clash.

Upon the collision of fists, the young man's excited face slowly turned in astonishment. He felt as if he had struck a steel plate, and an intense pain assaulted his knuckle.

Kacha! Kacha!

In just a brief moment, the bones in his fist were shattered. Following which, an immense force traveled through his arm, seemingly trying to suppress him altogether.

Hu!

The young man was sent flying backward.

Due to the limitations of his cultivation, it was impossible for the clone's strength to match up to the other party. However, a unique property of a physical body crafted by the Nine Skies Lotus Embryo was its incredible toughness that was on par with any other God artifact...

To make an analogy, it was equivalent to an ordinary man striking a wall with his full strength, not to mention that the young man's strength was beyond ordinary. When the immense force of his attack rebounded back on him, how could he possibly withstand the impact?

On top of that, the qualitative difference in the bodies of the duo was also way too great. If the young man's body was iron, the clone's body would be diamond. No matter how compact the iron was, it could still be easily torn apart by diamond.

“How can you have such a powerful physical body...”

The young man widened his eyes in astonishment. At this moment, he felt as if he was going crazy.

He possessed the Emperor's Bloodline, and he cultivated one of the strongest physical body cultivation technique in the clan. It was no joke to say that he was almost invincible in his power class. Even Spirit high-tier weapons might not necessarily be able to pierce his skin...

And yet, the other party's fist actually crushed his bones...

‘Are you sure that I am the one possessing the Emperor's Bloodline, not you?’

How could such a powerful physical body possibly exist in the world?

Howling furiously, the young man tried to steady his flying figure. But at that moment, a blur abruptly flashed across his eyes, and unknowingly, his opponent had appeared behind him.

Peng!

Once again, the two bodies clashed with one another.

Kacha! Kacha!

Two cracks resounded clearly in the air. The prized bones that the young man had devoted a very long period of time to cultivating had broken yet again.

“I...”

The intense pain he was experiencing left him frenzied. He immediately twisted his body and elbowed the other party with his intact left arm.

It must be said that the young man was indeed a skilled fighter. His reaction was swift and deadly. With this blow, the other party would surely have to dodge, thus giving him time to take a breather and regain his momentum in the battle.

But Zhang Xuan didn't move at all. He simply stood idly, allowing the young man's elbow to strike him.

Peng!

The elbow struck Zhang Xuan's head.

“Great...”

The head was the weakest spot of a human body. Upon striking it squarely, the young man's eyes immediately lit up in excitement. However, before he could celebrate, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his arm once again.

His bones had been shattered to pieces.

“What is going on?”

The young man finally cried.

The Emperor's Bloodline was known for its invincible defense, thus making him far stronger than any cultivator of his power tier. He thought that he would be able to crush

Zhang Xuan as easily as tearing a cabbage into pieces, but the other party remained completely unfazed by his attacks. On the contrary, it was his bones that had been shattered in the collisions...

It was as if he was fighting against a Saint artifact.

What the heck was with this?

“This...”

By the side, Elder Yuan’s eyes were widened as much as humanly possible.

Zhang shi was the one being beaten up, and yet he was able to rebound the might back onto his opponent and crush the other party’s bones... And this was taking into account that his opponent specialized in physical body cultivation!

How powerful must Zhang shi’s physical body be?

Even Elder Yuan, despite the long years of cultivating his body, had to admit that he was incapable of such a feat!

Could it be that... he had identified the wrong young master? Was Zhang shi the true possessor of the Emperor’s Bloodline instead of Young Master Tao?

“Teacher... is actually so strong?”

Wang Ying, Yuan Tao, and the others stared at one another in astonishment.

They’d thought that their growth rate in the past month was already incredible, but it seemed their teacher had improved far more than them!

To actually crush the other party’s bones by being pummeled, who else in the world was capable of such a feat?

Kacha! Kacha!

The same astonishment also surfaced on King Huai’s face. Amidst gazes of disbelief, Zhang Xuan went on to shatter the bones in the legs of the young man before standing quietly at the main hall.

With a nonchalant gaze, he gazed down at the young man lying on the ground and asked calmly, “So, with the strength of my physical body...

“... am I qualified to be Yuan Tao’s teacher?”

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The entire room was silent.

Everyone stared at one another, unable to utter a single word.

‘You said that the other party’s physical body was too weak for him to be qualified to teach a person possessing the Emperor’s Bloodline. Yet, you ended up shattering nearly all of your bones while trying to pummel the other party. What else do you have to say?’

Many gazes turned toward the young man, only to see him lying on the ground in a mess. His body was contorted in awkward angles. With his bones shattered to such a degree, he was unable to stand up.

‘You... are qualified to be Young Master Tao’s teacher...’

Tears were threatening to spill from the young man’s eyes.

Never had such an incident occurred to him ever since he’d started cultivating his physical body.

He used his full might to pummel the other party, and yet, the other party remained completely unharmed whereas his bones were shattered instead. Not even the elders of the Yuan Clan possessed such astounding defensive ability!

Was the other party still mortal?

‘If I knew that your physical body was this strong, I would have never provoked you!’

‘If this was going to be the case, I should have just left obediently just now when you asked me to. At the very least, I would still be unharmed. And now... With my bones shattered to such a degree, how am I going to fare in the future?’

‘Cultivation is an endless journey. We might possess the Emperor’s Bloodline, but that doesn’t mean that we are

invincible. Zhang shi has only taught you that there's always a mountain higher than the other.”

Sighing, Elder Yuan flicked his finger, and a pill was shot into the young man's mouth.

The reason he didn't stop the young man from challenging Zhang shi earlier was because he intended to see the depths of the latter's prowess as well. Who would have thought that he would be so powerful?

The pill immediately dissolved as soon as it entered the young man's mouth. A moment later, the young man finally recovered slightly, and he struggled to his feet strenuously.

Seeing the young man's state, Elder Yuan sighed in lamentation.

“Given the degree of damage to your bones, it'll be hard for you to recover to how you were. You won't be able to cultivate your physical body anymore in the future.”

The greatest taboo for physical body cultivators was the breaking of their bones. If it was just a bone or two, it could still be healed via consuming pills. However, considering how the young man's bones were shattered into near smithereens, there was no way he could get back to how he was before.

In other words, the young man's cultivation had been crippled through this fight, and his future achievements had been capped.

While there were Saint recovery pills within the clan which was capable of healing even such grievous injuries... given that the young man didn't belong to the main family and that his bloodline wasn't pure either, he wasn't qualified to use such precious resources.

“Yes!” The young man nodded with a desolate expression.

His cultivation wasn't outstanding in the clan in the first place, and he had been despised due to that. Now that he had lost his cultivation, it wasn't hard to imagine how tragic his plight would be in the future.

“Alright, only with setbacks will one grow wiser, so don’t be too harsh on yourself.”

After which, Elder Yuan turned to Zhang Xuan, and admiration gleamed in his eyes. “To be able to cultivate your physical body to such an astounding degree despite your young age, Zhang shi is indeed worthy of admiration. May I know... if you’re interested in coming to our Yuan Clan? Given your age and your physical body prowess, as long as you persevere, it is just a matter of time before you become an honorary elder there!”

“An invitation to the Yuan Clan?” On the main seat, King Huai widened his eyes upon hearing those words, and his breathing hastened.

Zhang shi might not have heard of the Boundless Empire’s Yuan Clan, but he knew very well what that power represented.

Even if it was just an offer to become a guard of the Yuan Clan, he would surely grasp the opportunity without any hesitation.

But just as he thought that Zhang shi would immediately agree to the request in delight, the latter shook his head in disdain and said, “I don’t have any interest in that.”

Hearing those words, King Huai’s body jolted in astonishment. “Zhang shi, do you understand the significance of becoming an honorary elder in the Boundless Empire’s Yuan Clan?”

“Who cares what kind of significance it has, I don’t have any interest in it!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands nonchalantly.

No matter how impressive becoming an ‘honorary elder’ might be, in the end, he would be nothing more than a subordinate. He was a person who would become a 9-star master teacher one day. Before that, all powers were nothing more than fleeting clouds.

Besides, how could he possibly lower himself to serve as an honorary elder for his student’s clan?

“That’s a huge pity...”

Seeing Zhang Xuan rejecting the offer without any hesitation, Elder Yuan shook his head in disappointment. Sighing, he raised his head once more and asked, “Zhang shi, about our young master...”

Zhang shi hadn't given his opinion regarding Yuan Tao's matter yet. Even though Elder Yuan possessed incredible power, he dared not offend a person who could possibly become the next head of his clan.

“Sigh!”

With a deep sigh, Zhang Xuan turned to the young man not too far away and said, “Yuan Tao, come over here!”

“Teacher!”

Yuan Tao responded and hurriedly rushed forward.

Zhang Xuan rubbed the plump boy's head with his hand as complex emotions surfaced in his eyes. Memories flashed across his head as reminisced about the time they had spent together. The sorrow of parting jabbed at his heart, but as a teacher, he knew that he couldn't limit his own students.

“Cultivate well after you return to your clan. Don't let me down!”

“Teacher...”

With reddened eyes, Yuan Tao kneeled on the floor. “I won't go! I want to stay by your side...”

Zhang Xuan shook his head slowly. “Since the Yuan Clan possesses the complete heritage of the Emperor's Bloodline, you should leave with Elder Yuan. This is the route you should take if you aspire to reach for greater heights! Following behind me will only limit your accomplishments.”

Yuan Tao's body stiffened upon hearing those words.

“Alright, as my student, you should decisively grasp any opportunity that comes your way. Work hard, awaken your bloodline, and make me proud!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

No matter how reluctant he was, he knew that he had to let go.

Students are just like birdlings. No matter how well one taught them, if they don't try to venture beyond their nest, they will never learn to fly.

A greater world lies out there for them! That is the place where they belong!

Only by experiencing the various elements of the world will they fly higher and higher, and eventually reach the peak.

“Alright!” Seeing that his teacher had made up his mind, Yuan Tao clenched his jaws and nodded.

After convincing Yuan Tao, Zhang Xuan turned to Elder Yuan and said, “Elder Yuan, my student is a troublemaker, so I'll be depending on you to take care of him in the future!”

“Of course, you can count on me for that...” Elder Yuan froze for a moment upon seeing that sight, and admiration slowly gleamed through his face.

He could tell the deep concern Zhang Xuan harbored for Yuan Tao, and it would surely be difficult for him to part with the latter. Nevertheless, upon realizing that his student had a much better path before him, he still decisively chose to send the latter there. There were very few master teachers who could do the same!

As long as he could survive amidst the harsh world, Zhang shi would surely achieve great things in the future!

“Yuan Tao is my direct disciple. If I hear that he has been subjected to some grievances or unfair treatment, have no doubt that I will come knocking on the gates of the Yuan Clan!” Zhang Xuan warned with a grim expression.

He might be weak at the moment, but he was growing stronger rapidly. If the Yuan Clan dared to torment Yuan Tao, he wouldn't mind trampling them into the ground!

“Don't worry. Young Master Tao possesses the complete Emperor's Bloodline, making him the future hope of our clan. How could he possibly subject him to grievances or unfair treatment?” Elder Yuan hurriedly reassured.

It had been more than a dozen millenniums since a complete Emperor's Bloodline had appeared in the Yuan Clan. Yuan Tao played a pivotal role to the revival of the Yuan Clan, so how could the Yuan Clan possibly treat him unfairly?

“That would be for the best!”

Zhang Xuan nodded. Following which, he grabbed a wine cup from a table a distance away and smiled. “Allow me to propose a toast to Elder Yuan!”

“This...”

Zhang Xuan's action of grabbing the wine cup may seem normal, but Elder Yuan's eyes narrowed upon seeing that sight.

Zhang Xuan was around one and a half meter away from the table, and yet, he was still able to grab the wine cup without the utilization of zhenqi... In other words, Zhang Xuan's arm had instantaneously extended by a length of half a meter!

To extend one's arm abruptly without the use of zhenqi...

Elder Yuan's body stiffened as the thought flashed across his mind.

‘Could he have cultivated his bones and muscles to the Undying realm?’

Legend had it that upon reaching a certain level of cultivation in one's physical body, not only would one's physical body become extremely tough, their body would also become incredibly flexible.

Upon reaching that realm, their bones and muscles would be able to extend in a way that defied common sense. At the same time, the enhanced elasticity also allowed their bodies to revert back to its original form even when squashed like a pancake!

As such, this was known as the Undying realm.

Even though it wasn't invulnerability in the strictest sense, the ability to extend one's limbs freely and recover from lethal force were already exceptionally valuable capabilities, especially in battle.

Even in their clan, only the legendary old ancestor had achieved such a feat!

Considering how the young man before him was able to extend his arm half a meter without tapping into his zhenqi, even if he hadn't truly reached the Undying realm, he was surely not too far from it!

To actually train one's physical body to the limits and reach Undying realm at twenty...

Was this even possible?

Was the fellow before him some kind of monster in human skin?

It was no wonder his junior lost so tragically. Even he himself hadn't advanced this far in his physical body cultivation!

If it was before, he would have taken the other party's threat to be a joke. However, such thoughts had vanished completely from his mind.

No matter how weak the other party's cultivation was at the moment, given how his physical body had already reached or was extremely near to the Undying realm, his future achievements would surely be immeasurable. Even despite the dozens of millenniums of history behind the Yuan Clan, a day might come when the entire Yuan Clan would have to bow before him.

Caught up in his astonishment, when Elder Yuan finally recovered, he realized that the young man had already gulped down the wine in his cup and returned back to the secret chamber. A moment later, he returned with an impassive expression.

"Let's leave!"

Zhang Xuan beckoned for his students before striding out of the main hall.

"We'll be leaving now!"

Zheng Yang and the others bade Yuan Tao farewell before hurriedly leaving behind Zhang Xuan.

Having accompanied one another on this long journey, a strong relationship had already been forged among them. Thus, they couldn't help but feel dejected by this parting.

“Zhang shi...”

Seeing Zhang Xuan leaving decisively, Elder Yuan was just about to say something when the other party suddenly flicked his hand and tossed a wine gourd over.

Catching it instinctively, he heard the other party's voice sounding in the air.

“Connect the fractured bones carefully before drinking this medicinal wine. He will be able to make a full recovery.”

“This...”

Elder Yuan was stunned for a moment after hearing those words. Following which, he swiftly passed the medicinal wine to his junior to drink.

The young man had already reconnected his bones using his zhenqi earlier on. Upon learning that the medicinal wine could possibly heal his injuries, he gulped it down without any hesitation.

Gugugugu!

As the medicinal wine rushed down his throat, a warm surge of energy abruptly burst from his stomach and gushed through his entire body. He felt a numbing sensation in the broken bones throughout his body as the warm surge washed over them. In just a few breaths, he could already stand up even without relying on zhenqi to balance himself. All of the injuries he had sustained vanished into thin air, as if he hadn't been injured in the first place.

“This...”

The young man narrowed his eyes, and his body began trembling in agitation. He thought that he was doomed for life, but this turnaround came so abruptly.

Elder Yuan's body stiffened as well.

“Saint... recovery medicine?”

This kind of medicine was invaluable even in their clan. Yet, the other party actually tossed it to them as though it were nothing at all. This was truly a huge favor to them!

“Zhang shi... thank you!”

Understanding the value of the medicine, the young man immediately dropped to the floor and kowtowed in gratitude.

He had provoked the other party intentionally with a sharp tone earlier on, intending to harm him even. Yet, not only did the other party not harbor a grudge against him for that, he even gave him such a valuable medicine...

How magnanimous he must be to repay malice with such great benevolence!

‘So this is a master teacher!’

It was no wonder Young Master Tao would be willing to turn down even the heritage from the Yuan Clan to pursue him. The other party’s character was indeed worthy of respect.

While the young man was kowtowing in gratitude, Yuan Tao’s clenched fists were trembling with overwhelming emotions. Looking at his teacher’s departing back, tears streamed freely down his face.

It was Zhang laoshi who didn’t scorn him for being the last place in Hongtian Academy and accepted him as his student!

It was Zhang laoshi who turned him from an ignorant and reckless weakling into a Transcendent Mortal realm expert!

It was Zhang laoshi who went to great lengths to search for medicinal herbs to awaken his unique constitution!

It was Zhang laoshi who stayed up at night to modify his cultivation technique for him...

‘Teacher... rest assured. I will surely work hard after returning to my clan so as to not let down your expectations!’ Yuan Tao vowed with great determination.