

Chapter 101: Brutality

Lu Yin felt the power of the Desolate Palm drawing out the life in his body, and immediately knew that this was a powerful technique. His eyes glinted as he raised his own hand; since this guy was courting death, he didn't need to hold back.

BOOM! The two engaged at full-force. The battle technique passed down by the Vastdearth Sect had immense power, but the five-star Cosmic Palm had once defeated a Melder in Yu Academy and given Lu Yin a top ten ranking in the school according to Gerbach. Shockwaves split the earth like a typhoon and dispersed the frost, while a group of Sentinels that were unlucky enough to pass by at this moment were gravely injured by the shockwave. The earth split apart, and Lulu quickly dodged away in surprise; this exchange between the two of them was more powerful than even a Melder interaction.

When the Desolate Palm that had defeated numerous Melders was blocked, Meng Yue was astonished. However, he and Lu Yin retreated at the same time, with this one exchange not deciding a victor. Lu Yin was just as surprised; there were few Sentinels that could defeat Melders, and this person didn't seem to have an innate gift, either.

"There are very few Sentinels that can block the Desolate Palm. What's your name?" Meng Yue asked excitedly.

Lu Yin wrinkled his brows, "I don't have time to waste on you. Out of the way."

Meng Yue thought it over and gave Lu Yin a long look before withdrawing his star energy. Recalling Lu Yin's speed, he understood that he couldn't win in a true fight. He nodded, "My name is Meng Yue; remember it."

Meng? Lu Yin was startled. Was that one of the primeval surnames? He knew very little about the primeval surnames and wasn't sure if this was one of them.

"Hey, do you want a fight? I can fight you!" Lulu was eager to give it a go, trembling with excitement as she stared at Meng Yue.

However, the youth just glanced past her, "I'm not interested in fighting girls."

"You're underestimating me," she said with a frown, her body suddenly blinking right in front of him. She kicked out quite ordinarily, and while Meng Yue wasn't as fast as her, he was still quick enough to raise an arm to block. BOOM! Shockwaves rattled the area once more, and Meng Yue's eyes narrowed as he felt intense pain from his right arm. The blow sent him flying through three little hills and buried him into the ground.

Lu Yin grimaced at the sight, watching Meng Yue with a hint of pity. He'd really underestimated Lulu's strength; that kick must have been pretty powerful.

"How dare you underestimate me? Hmph, let's go." Lulu looked up and waved to Lu Yin, leaping into the distance. Glancing at Meng Yue who was covered in dirt, Lu Yin left as well.

"What a vicious woman." Underground, Meng Yue gritted his teeth. His arm was bent in an unnatural manner; that kick had been powerful enough to break it. He downed a healing potion, but by the time

he walked out, the two had already left. He sighed and looked bitterly at his right arm; he'd really underestimated that monster.

"Lulu, don't you think you were a little harsh?" Lu Yin asked as they flew along.

The girl snorted, "It's his fault for looking down on me. Serves him right."

He burst into laughter and reminded himself not to ever provoke her. This woman was just way too strong, perhaps that was her innate gift.

After that, Lu Yin and Lulu didn't meet any enemies along the way. The Astral-10 exam wasn't competitive, any number of people could enter as long as they passed the assessment. Few people would go out of their way to cause trouble in such an environment; Meng Yue really was one of a kind.

However, that didn't mean there weren't any dangers. The number of beasts increased the further one went, and all sorts of strange creatures roamed the frozen path. Quite a few were flying in the sky as well, and had killed many Sentinels. Lu Yin and Lulu were unfortunate enough to run into a terrifying beast; while it was also at the Sentinel level, its defences were impenetrable. Lulu managed to smash its innards to bits with a punch, but it didn't actually seem injured on the outside at all. That kind of defense sent a chill down his spine.

There was also a quick mutant beast that could launch lightning from its mouth, its attacks more powerful than Gerbach's lightning arrow. The two managed to dodge those easily, but the creature was too quick to pin down. Fortunately, it only seemed to be protecting its territory and didn't pursue them.

Alongside the mutant beasts were a lot of strange plants, as well as terrible weather. Every once in a while, they'd see a few more bodies on the ground. Those who could take part in the Sentinel examination were the best in their realm. Even the weakest were at Eddy's level, but the shadow of death was ever present. It wasn't too far from there that a trembling Raas was hidden away in an alcove, abandoned by all the people he'd arrived with. He didn't have the courage to keep going, and was thus waiting for the assessment to end.

Eventually, the frozen suns in the sky suddenly exploded, the blazing heat coming all at once and too much for a few people to bear. Some of those who'd been in the middle of fights lost their lives to the sudden distraction. The mix of cold, warm, and glaring light even confused Lu Yin for a moment, and he had to flash away as the earth cracked apart. Strange flowers peeked out from the ground, cut apart by horrifying gusts. He looked up and sighed; things had changed again. The heat would be around for at least 48 hours.

"It's getting warmer. The longer you look, the lower the suns get. They've nearly fused with the ground already," Lulu complained.

Lu Yin gazed into the distance. It was true that the suns were descending and the entrance was still quite far away. Some stronger people could deal with warmth, but the heat in this area was already at a point where only Seekers could take it. Perhaps even Sentinels would find it difficult to withstand the heat near the end, and there was still the endless array of mutant beasts and plants alongside hidden enemies. This assessment was a brutal one.

While the Sentinel paths were still quite competitive, the Melder routes were downright cruel. Jenny and Xiaoling had been disqualified from the get-go, having run into Melder beasts that could have killed them right upon landing. If it wasn't for Schutz saving them, they truly would be dead; it was clear immediately that they had no choice but to give up. Nearly eighty Melders from the Great Yu Empire had participated in this assessment, but most of them had been eliminated in just one day. Thirty had even died; these were the true elites of the Great Yu Empire, hailing not just from Yu Academy, but also the other top institutions of the Empire. Even The Undying Yushan would feel terrible after such losses. Even more terrifying was the fact that even one of the five hall masters—Logan— had been disqualified. That left Dorren and the rest grim. The hall masters were the most powerful youths in the Great Yu Empire, and his elimination was certain to cause fear among the rest.

“Gerbach and Yan Gang are moving together,” someone reported, but Dorren simply nodded without surprise. Few people knew of the attack on the Sentinel routes; if Yan Feng truly wanted to marry Wendy, Yan Gang needed a good relationship with the Empire. Yan Gang was thankfully almost as powerful as Gerbach. Hopefully, he wouldn't bring Gerbach down.

More and more spaceships arrived at the ten paths as time passed, the powerhouses within gazing at the roads that stretched into the distance.

Near Lu Yin and Lulu on the Sentinel path, a young man was currently clutching his left arm as he cried out in pain. This was Wukai Mathers, Sigmund's son. He had come to participate in the assessment without his father's knowledge, but an attack from a strange plant had shattered his arm. He managed to kill the thing, but this seemed to be where he would fall. While a near-equal Raas was quivering in fear somewhere, he had proceeded with astounding perseverance until he could go no further.

Wukai felt very bitter as his blood stained the hilly ground below him. Was this how things would end? However, his eyes suddenly fell on something within the walls of the cave, strange carvings that he was quickly lost in. This was a fist technique that had no name and no origin; lost in the dust and sand for a long time. It had been revealed in the aftermath of his battle, and it seemed like this would be his chance.

Lu Yin and Lulu flew ahead, but hundreds of kilometers away, a hundred-meter-tall dinosaur beast roared and tore the ground with its sharp claws. Surrounded and being attacked by dozens of Sentinels, it was beyond frustrated and opened its mouth to launch a beam of star energy that razed everything in its path.

“No, our attacks are useless against it. We can't get through its defenses.”

“Let's work together!”

“It won't work. It's smart enough to attack the side with more people. It's impossible to work together like this.”

Chapter 102: Coco

A girl was peering through the branches of a giant tree a few kilometers away, sticking out her tongue from time to time, “It's so scary here. Should I go away? No, I won't be able to help anyone if I'm further.”

When Lu Yin and Lulu reached the battlefield, there were almost a hundred Sentinel cultivators surrounding the dinosaur beast. The two looked at the creature and exchanged shocked glances. He said gravely, "This thing isn't simple; it's faster, hardier, and more experienced. Do you see that shadow of a battle technique in its attacks as well?"

Lulu acknowledged and clenched her fists, "It's obviously very hard to fight against, so why are these people fighting it to the death?"

Lu Yin looked across the battlefield and finally below the beast's legs. No matter what the battle situation was, that beast never stepped on a small mound underneath. "There's something there."

Lulu grew excited, "Let's go, too. I want to know how many punches it can take!"

He'd wanted to wait a little longer, reckoning that there were many other experts waiting for an opportunity, but she'd already charged out before he could stop her. Unable to let her just go alone, he followed helplessly while keeping an eye out for others. It seemed strange that almost a hundred Sentinels couldn't defeat a mutant beast of equal level, but Lulu grew excited as it dodged her first strike. This thing could sense the danger!

The beast howled, its giant tail sweeping in her direction. Lulu dodged easily, but a dozen others were struck, and almost half their bodies were broken apart and they died immediately while others were sent flying with heavy injuries. Lu Yin was astonished by the violent attack; this wasn't one whit inferior to the five-star Cosmic Palm.

The biggest difference between beasts and humans was imagination. Humans knew how to be creative, while beasts relied on their bodies and innate gifts. The latter were far more powerful under similar conditions, but humans had the ability to change the environment using their own innate gifts and battle techniques.

"Good!" Lulu shouted, vanishing from her place and appearing behind the creature's back. She raised her right hand and struck out, forcing the beast to turn around and chomp down to force her to give up. But she hadn't planned to attack in the first place; she was only giving an opportunity for Lu Yin to flash onto its head and strike. He shot down with both palms, one the Three Stacks Shockwave Palm, and the other the twentieth form of the Skybeast Claw. A loud explosion rang out as his hands smashed into its head, dropping it to the ground in an instant. A hundred-meter-tall creature collapsing was a magnificent sight, and the mere shockwaves forced dozens of Sentinels to back off. Everyone was shocked at the sight; they understood the beast's power, instincts, and defenses. Someone capable of killing it had to be an absolute powerhouse.

Lulu blinked to the mound in the earth and waved her hand, exposing a small, glowing tree. There were several light-yellow fruits hanging from it that seemed quite alluring. As she was puzzled over what they were, the beast roared and exerted all of its strength to get back up.

"Lulu, careful!" Lu Yin barked, and she avoided with the White Flash. Another figure appeared and looked at her in astonishment before reaching towards the tree, but a furious Lulu kicked out with one leg. That figure blocked the attack with his left shoulder, a scene that would have been all too familiar if Meng Yue was around. Sure enough, the figure was sent flying in the next moment.

Lulu snorted and left, grabbing the fruits along the way. Lu Yin felt curious, but didn't ask more and took to the skies as well. The beast snarled and charged out from underground as he left, intimidating a dozen Sentinels who had run in from hiding into fleeing once more.

"How many did you take?" he asked as they left.

She threw five fruits over, "Ten in total, half each."

"You didn't take more?" he grew suspicious.

She answered seriously, "Leave something in everything you do, do not exhaust a natural treasure. That is part of my family's teachings."

He nodded and said so more, looking to the dozen people who had suddenly appeared nearby. One of them spoke cheerlessly, "Friend, don't mind sharing some of what you took."

"Come on, let's get this done quick," Lu Yin remained indifferent, vanishing at the same time as Lulu. All of the aggressors rained down from the sky in the next moment. Many other cultivators grew apprehensive at the sight, and were secretly glad that they didn't act themselves. Someone capable of defeating that beast with one attack definitely wasn't simple; those two were some of the strongest in this assessment.

Within the big tree in the distance, the dainty girl sighed, "So powerful, I wonder how he compares to Sister Zora."

Many Sentinels were still surrounding the beast, and the occasional person managed to snatch some fruits. Most of the dozens of fruits on the small tree were picked off when the beast finally exploded with condensed star energy, forcing everyone to hide. The sun froze once more at this point, and the frost blanketed the ground while the heavens and earth turned dark. Lu Yin and Lulu didn't stop this time, leaving immediately. After thinking for a while, the girl in the tree followed them.

The Astral Combat Academy's assessments weren't simple. Many people could pass through a path filled with extreme climates and powerful beasts, and it incentivized moving around in large teams which was antithetical to the goal of filtering out elites. Everyone watching from the heavens watched with bated breath; the real tests were yet to come.

Even as the frost swept across the ground, the Sentinels didn't manage to grab all the fruits. They quickly realized something was amiss as the beast changed, growing more irritable and unrestrained than before. It stomped down and crushed the tree, but before the Sentinels could even grow furious, more and more howls rang out from all directions. The earth started to rumble.

"Not good!" Lu Yin's expression changed and he shot to the ground, "It's a beast wave, we should hide!"

The two dashed to a mountain peak near them, braving the attacks of hundreds of flying beasts. Blood soon filled the sky as all the flying cultivators were attacked, but the two fortunately used their extreme speed and avoided the attacks easily. They were almost at the peak when a squeal rang out, and Lu Yin turned around to see an adorable young girl with a pale face who was shakily dodging the attacks. He frowned and flashed towards her, "You go ahead."

Lulu glanced at him and then dashed even quicker to the peak, watching as the girl wailed in the face of an attacking beast. Lu Yin caught her at the crucial moment and carried her towards the mountain. The girl panted heavily and leaned into him, carefully looking on as more and more flying beasts almost covered the entire sky. She was eventually brought to a peak where they entered a recessed cavern with Lulu and covered the entrance.

The sky was filled with flying beasts at this point, and the dark earth had grown even dimmer with bloodstains. Shrieks rang out from everywhere. Lu Yin squinted and looked outside; this was the Astral Combat Academy's examination, and a good majority of the million candidates would probably be wiped out by these beasts. It was a cruel reality, but conversely, those that survived were absolute elites.

"Th-Thank you," the girl carefully looked at Lu Yin and spoke softly, a little nervous and uneasy.

Lu Yin looked at her but did not speak, while Lulu glanced between the two before her eyes brightened, "So this is your type."

"Wait, what?" Lu Yin was confused, but she just giggled.

The girl blushed, "I-I'm Coco, from the Windrift Hall. Nice to meet you."

Lu Yin nodded, while it was Lulu was shocked, "The Windrift Hall from the Innerverse?"

Coco nodded and pursed her lips like a wounded doe.

Lu Yin looked at Lulu, "You know them?"

"Of course. The Windrift Hall loves saving others and is good at healing. They're not quite numerous, but they have a great reputation in the Innerverse just like Shamrock Enterprises. But their aims are different; Shamrock Enterprises is looking for profit, but I don't know about these guys. Maybe they just have nothing to do."

Coco blinked, "No, we're training!"

"Training to save others?" Lu Yin was incredulous.

The girl grunted softly, "Master has taught us that the more we save, the greater our fortune, and the longer we may live."

Lu Yin and Lulu exchanged glances, with the latter unable to let it go, "Your Master's fooled you well."

Chapter 103: Unconventional Innate Gift

Coco opened her mouth as if she wanted to say something, but kept mum in the end. Looking around, she noticed that Lu Yin's right arm was bleeding, "Oh, you're injured."

Lu Yin looked down and shrugged, "No worries, it's just a nick."

"Let me treat you," she promptly replied, "Or you might get infected. The universe is filled with strange diseases that can take your life if you're not careful."

"It can't be that bad," he raised a brow.

"I'm not lying; any small wound might be the cause for someone to lose their life one day." Coco said seriously.

Did doctors like scaring people? "Alright, will you treat me?"

"Of course!" Coco's eyes lit up, and she suddenly seemed like a different person from before. Lu Yin suddenly had a bad premonition, and that came true as a three-meter-long syringe appeared in her hand the next second, stunning him and Lulu. The needle itself was a meter long and glinted coldly in the dark cave, the syringe filled with a strange green liquid that left him terrified. He felt his scalp go numb as he backed away subconsciously, "What are you doing?"

Coco hugged the syringe and looked at him excitedly, "Treatment. Let's go, one poke and it'll be fine!"

Lu Yin choked on his saliva and swiftly rejected, "No need, I can do it myself, you don't have to treat me!"

Coco grew anxious, "Let me treat you, you won't be able to heal completely yourself! There'll be residual effects, and it will be too late if there are other pathological changes. Come on!"

He retreated a little more and insisted, "No need, I can do it myself."

Coco tutted and looked at his shoulder unwillingly as the syringe vanished, "Oh."

It was only then that Lulu managed to react, "That's your innate gift?"

Coco returned to her timid and adorable self, nodding, "Mm, my innate gift can treat injuries, but no one lets me use it."

Lu Yin rolled his eyes; that thing could pierce through him and end his life. Only an idiot would let her use that on them; it was far more terrifying than a sword.

"Your innate gift is really unique!" Lulu exclaimed, prompting a bashful chuckle.

The conversation was suddenly interrupted as a beast roared nearby and dashed into the distance. Lu Yin glanced outside and wondered how Schutz and the rest were faring on the Melder path. That brat Gerlaine was sensible enough to give up on the assessment, or he would've had another burden.

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The Melder road faced a similar beast wave, and luck wasn't on Gerbach's side. He was injured at the very beginning by a mutant beast; if he hadn't hidden well, he would have become food already. Yan Gang was in the same situation, so the two had basically failed already.

Far away, Tianming had blocked himself into a valley with a giant rock, successfully avoiding the beast wave. However, his luck was just as bad as Gerbach's because he met someone he didn't want to—Silver Tiger, a young expert from the Grandtop Weave's Nine Stacks Sect; the man was also his enemy.

Silver Tiger stared at Tianming excitedly, "I never thought I'd meet you here. I heard you became a Hall Master of Yu Academy? Congratulations."

Tianming's expression turned solemn, "I never thought I would meet you here, either. I can finally have my vengeance."

Silver Tiger sneered, "Vengeance? What a joke. You're just trash evicted by the Nine-Layered Gate; even trying to Learn the Nine Stacks, you only got to three. The Great Yu Empire actually accepted trash like you, I'll help them clean up today."

The youth then swatted towards Tianming, energy condensed within the strike. An apprehensive Tianming struck out and shockwaves cracked the earth thrice in a row. This was Three Stacks, but Tianming's eyes narrowed in the next moment as he felt acute pain from his hand, "You actually understood the fourth stack!"

Silver Tiger laughed maniacally, "Trash like you will never be able to understand me. Fourth stack? I'll show you desperation!"

Another wave of terrifying energy flooded forth, and the fifth stack broke Tianming's right hand to strike his abdomen. He was sent crashing into the mountainside and spat out blood. Standing in place, Silver Tiger looked at him coldly, "You were trash then, and you're still trash today. I'll send you on your way."

Tianming spat out blood and raised his left hand, forming a claw that howled in the void. Everything within a hundred meters was enveloped by the Skybeast Claw, and a dense bloodlust crushed the boulders and valley floor. Silver Tiger was stunned by the 43rd form of the Skybeast Claw, and failed to defend against the attack even as beast after flying beast crashed down from above. All creatures within a hundred meters were smashed apart, while his clothes were torn apart to reveal four deep wounds on his right shoulder. When he raised his head again, Tianming had vanished.

"You can't escape!" Silver Tiger leapt up, but a shadow covered him as a giant hairy claw swept across and pierced his body. His body was turned into dust as only a head fell back into the valley; the last he saw was a heavily wounded Tianming hiding under the ruins of the mountain.

Tianming stared at the unresigned head that was glaring at him and smiled bitterly. He had enacted his vengeance, but his examination would end here. As for whether he would live, that depended on the will of the heavens.

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The beast wave lasted an entire day, but that day was enough to feel like hell to the cultivators who participated in the examination. The beasts could appear to take their lives at any time, and each one was just as powerful as them. Even the stronger ones had to avoid the countless beasts, and they could only watch as their friends, family, and comrades perished. They could only shiver in a corner as the apocalypse raged outside.

When the wave ended, the suns were unsealed and scorched the earth once more. This time, this boiling heat was a warmth that replaced the cold, murderous winter. When Lu Yin's trio walked out of the cavern, the smell of baked earth was compounded with the stench of blood.

Coco sniffed and turned pale, "Thousands of people must have died nearby." There were many broken corpses even at the peak right below them.

This assessment was like purgatory, and it reminded Lu Yin of Earth's evolutionary trial. How many people had turned into zombies in that one moment? How many had died in the mouths of mutant

beasts? How many powerful students had been killed? The powerhouses of the universe were more concerned with cultivating strength than preserving life. The weak always fell prey.

At this point, the high temperatures could not dispel the cold in certain people's hearts, like Raas. He had been completely frightened and barely escaped from the wave; all he wanted to do was return to the Great Yu Empire.

"Those who do not wish to continue the examination, yell 'I give up!' thrice. The rest will have to take three attacks, survival is not guaranteed," a voice rumbled through the void, echoing through the ten paths and the heavens nearby. Those who heard it had a change in expressions. Were the three attacks unavoidable?

Three attacks? Lu Yin raised his head, while Coco shivered on the verge of tears.

"I give up, I give up, I give up!" a cry sounded from a mountain ledge below them, the young man screaming so loudly it was as if he was afraid he wouldn't be heard.

"I give up, I give up, I give up!" someone else shouted soon after.

"I give up, I give up, I give up!" "I give up, I give up, I give up!" "I give up, I give up, I give up!"

The voices rang out from further and further along the path, but there were still many that refused to admit defeat. This assessment gathered the elites of various factions, and there were quite a few people who weren't lacking in willpower. One young man right below the peak had already lost his right leg, but passion still burned in his eyes.

"Aren't you going to give up, Coco?" Lulu asked.

Coco looked fearfully at the skies then shook her head, "I don't want to. Master said that Windrift Hall has no cowards."

Lu Yin glanced at her and was suddenly quite interested in this master. Meanwhile, the girl saw the man below the peak and grew eager once more, "He's broken his leg, let me go treat him."

"You'll scare him," Lulu stated.

Coco acted innocent, "I want to help him."

"Let him go," Lu Yin added.

Coco felt wronged but watched dazedly as everything went silent. Lu Yin and Lulu moved apart without explanation, staring at the heavens. This was a test where no one could help them; they had to make their own preparations and face the incoming strikes.

He breathed in deeply, feeling a strange sense of crisis as an invisible attack crashed down from the void. The force tore through the mountain peak as he dodged with the Flash, the feat replicated by Lulu who was nearby. On the other hand, Coco didn't have such speed. Summoning her syringe once more, she placed it on her head and cowered. The invisible attack crashed down ferociously and sent her entire body a few meters underground, but when Lu Yin and Lulu looked over, she was perfectly fine. The syringe had blocked the attack.

Chapter 104: Attack

Lu Yin's trio successfully endured the attack, but not everyone was as lucky. The broken-legged guy was killed immediately; the Astral Combat Academy had unleashed a ruthless strike on each of them at once. He switched on his gadget and watched as the readings on his scanner disappeared one by one; the first attack alone had shown those who planned to continue just how terrifying the Astral Combat Academy was. This was an attack that would kill the mediocre among them.

The same thing happened on the Melders' path, and everyone from the Great Yu Empire outside of Schutz and Xia Luo failed.

"I give up, I give up, I give up!" someone shouted immediately, quickly followed by many others. This was just the first attack, and the next two would only grow stronger.

Although the path for the Sentinel assessment was quite long, it still had an end. Some people from the leading batch quickly reached the end, even seeing the distant beam of light that connected the sky to the ground. They would pass the moment they stepped into that light, but the temperature around was so high that it almost melted the ground.

A few Sentinels were hidden in the shadow of the cliff, but despite constantly drinking water they felt parched in the blistering heat.

"I won't give up, I won't give up. I want to enter the Astral Combat Academy, I have to!" a girl muttered to herself as she watched the distant light with hope in her eyes. No one wanted to give up at this stage; with the end in sight, many would rather die to the next two attacks than admit failure. At this time, another attack came from the sky. The girl dodged it anxiously; although she wasn't as fast as Lu Yin and Lulu, she still surpassed Lu Yin's Roving Step from when he was back on Earth. She'd managed to dodge the first attack, but the second attack slammed her body into the ground. Dozens of cultivators near her faced the same situation, none of them had managed to dodge.

Now, there was only one attack left. The girl coughed and rose into the sky, but she froze as she looked at the end of the path. A new silhouette had appeared there, a man who looked normal but whose body was faintly glowing with heat. He resembled a descended sun that looked upon them with arrogance.

The clothes on the man were perfectly intact and he stood with his hands behind his back, his gaze sweeping over everyone there including the girl. She was stunned. This man was far more powerful than her, who was he? Someone from the Astral Combat Academy? If not, he would have been attacked as well. No one could dodge the second attack.

At a spot further away from the end of the Sentinel path, Lu Yin and Lulu dodged the second attack. However, it was much harder to dodge compared to the first attack, and they knew that the third attack was definitely unavoidable. On the other hand, Coco still had the syringe on top of her head, she seemed like she was planning to endure all three strikes. Now that he thought about it, the syringe was unimaginably sturdy; it wasn't damaged at all even after two attacks. Since the body was so strong, the needle had to be so as well. No one would dare touch that needle; this girl definitely wouldn't find anyone willing to endure her treatment.

The third attack descended as Lu Yin was looking at the syringe. He knew he wouldn't be able to avoid it when the Cosmic Art couldn't pinpoint the direction, and only felt an alarming strength strike him right

into the mountain. Lulu was the same, and Coco held onto her syringe for dear life and crashed into the foot of the mountain as well. Countless people were killed or maimed by that attack.

At the end of the path, the girl screamed in pain, her face as pale as paper. The third attack was too powerful, and she could barely endure it. Meanwhile, the man right in front of her also endured the attack, the heat turning into a surging sea of fire that disappeared instantly. She gritted her teeth while kneeling on the ground, taking out some pills to treat her injuries as she looked at the distant man in awe. He had endured that attack too, did that mean he was also participating in the assessment? Why was he just standing there instead of going ahead?

The man waved his hand and scorching heat surged towards the distance as he raised his head, "So this is the third attack. It's really powerful, those who can endure it are quite capable. It's a shame that none of you can join Astral-10, since it's fated to disappear." He looked at his gadget and smirked, "There's seven people left? That's not bad. Well, let me show you the final despair."

He leapt up into the sky under the gazes of the seven people who had endured all three attacks, smiling and lifting his head up high, "I am Archino of the Blaze Realm; no one is allowed to pass through, you are all destined to fail."

The seven of them were astonished, and the girl was stunned. The mighty Blaze Realm of the Inniverse? No wonder he was like a burning sun. The Blaze Realm was one of the greatest forces of the Inniverse with an ancient inheritance. But why would one of them appear here, and why was he stopping them from entering?

Archino didn't care about their concerns. He only had one mission, which was to stop anyone from going through this path. He was not alone, either; each of the ten paths had their own final guardian, and their goal was to ensure that Astral-10 would take in no students.

In the sky, Dorren Yushan's expression changed, "What? Forces from the Inniverse are attacking the assessment? Why are you only telling me now?"

Rocky Auna said bitterly, "His Imperial Majesty has just received the news from the Fifth Princess, she heard from the Myriad Swords Peak that three forces from the Inniverse are trying to replace Astral-10 and obtain access to the trial zones. They have sent disciples to guard the final section of the path to ensure that no one will pass this assessment."

"Which forces are involved?" Huo Qingshan asked.

Rocky answered in a low voice, "The Blaze Realm, the Ross Empire, and the sylvan dragons."

Dorren's face turned pale; these were powerful forces in the Inniverse, and they were to the Great Yu Empire what the Great Yu Empire was to Earth. There was no comparison. Huo Qingshan was astounded, he had been to the Inniverse before and had experienced how scary the Blaze Realm was. Who could pass someone from the Blaze Realm?

Jue Lang said slowly, "Is the Ross Empire the one that's rumored to have obtained an ancient inheritance?"

Dorren nodded, "Mm, but the most powerful are the sylvan dragons that betrayed the Astral Beast Domain. Any grown dragon is near-invincible."

These three forces cast a gloom over everyone. The Great Yu Empire weren't the only ones to hear this news, but every power that got hold of it went silent. Astral-10 was the only hope for the Outerverse to catch up with the Innerverse, but the assessment was now under siege. The three forces from the Innerverse completely disregarded them as they stole their chance at improvement, which was a bitter pill to swallow.

There was a beam of light connecting the sky to the ground at the end of the path, and one could enter Astral-10 through it. When the people from the three forces appeared, someone within the academy asked, "Are they so anxious to make us disappear?"

"We can't chase them away since they are here as assessees."

"They aren't cheating, either; they fall in line with all requirements."

"Then let's just treat this as the hardest challenge. The initial assessment for the Outerverse was made easier, but this can be considered bringing it up to the other nine academies.."

"Not many will pass; I'm afraid there's a chance that none will succeed, even."

"It is all destiny. If Astral-10 really has to exit the stage, then we will leave. This place is just a prison to us, anyway."

On the Sentinel Path, Lu Yin walked out of the ruins of the mountain and looked up. The final attack was extremely powerful, but it was still bearable. Lulu walked out from underground as well, and Coco flew out from the foot of the mountain while wincing in pain. A pang of disappointment flashed past her eyes as she saw that the other two were completely alright, but she quickly grew happy, "You're fine, that's great!"

Lulu pouted, "You were hoping that something was going to happen to us, weren't you."

"Err... Nooo...." Coco shook her head promptly, stowing her syringe away as she tutted in secret. She'd really hoped they would sustain slight injuries for her to treat.

"Let's go, we should be near the end," Lu Yin said as he looked at their surroundings. The beast wave had already charged towards the beginning of the path, making it much easier to move ahead now. There likely weren't many cultivators left, either.

Lulu nodded, and the trio flew into the distance.

Chapter 105: The Blaze Realm

The Blaze

Lu Yin switched on his gadget en route to the end of the assessment, finding that there were only a few cultivators that had made it this far. Many of the survivors they saw along the way were also desperate, their confidence broken by the situation. Passing through another winter and another heatwave, they finally saw the light beam that connected heaven and earth.

“That’s the end, it’s there!” Coco grew excited, a flush crawling up her face. Lu Yin’s own gaze was passionate; this was the Astral Combat Academy, the greatest institution in the universe where millions died just to enter. Only a select few could rise beyond the rest; just how strong were they? Expectations were high.

There were a total of three Sentinel paths, and at the end of one, the sun-baked the earth. A dozen Sentinels were rooted in place, staring dumbfoundedly at a giant beast. No, this wasn’t any beast; it was an enormous sylvan dragon!

Just like humans, the many races of beasts had galaxies of their own. Man and beast had fought for a long time, and sylvan dragons were a specific breed of dragon that had betrayed their own kind after one battle and defected to the human side. They had deer antlers, a snake’s body, rabbit eyes, oxen ears, and huge sharp claws. On both sides of the head were two enormous yet thin wings that were dark red, and at the tail was a sphere of flesh that was bundled up in tough armor. This dragon’s fearsome aura was radiating out for all to feel, making people shudder just from a glance.

“Wha-What is this thing?” someone shouted, quaking in fear. The others all stared blankly; this traitorous race of astral beasts lived in the Inniverse, so not many knew about them. And yet, the dragon’s terrifying aura ensured that not a single cultivator dared to step forward.

Two figures suddenly charged towards the light beam in a bid to circumvent the dragon, but the creature’s cruel gaze turned sinister as its enormous body split in twain. Bang! Bang! Both cultivators were sent flying back, one even staining the ground with blood as his body was cut apart. Everyone inhaled sharply; this was absolute speed. The beast seemed large, but it was also terrifyingly fast.

“This road is blocked, ants. Scram!” the dragon snarled, its huff creating a large storm, but the dozen Sentinels remained unresigned. They had endured the terrible climate, beast wave, and three invisible attacks to get here; they weren’t about to give up now.

“Everyone, charge together. That thing’s also a Sentinel, it can’t block all of us!” someone shouted. The next moment, everyone gritted their teeth and dashed towards the beam of light.

The sylvan dragon roared and its enormous body split into two, then three. Three giant figures completely sealed off the path towards the light beam, and a ground-shattering rumble accompanied the intense attacks that repelled the figures one by one. Any Sentinel that could get here had their own formidable battle techniques, but those were useless in the face of this giant beast. The sylvan dragon roared towards the sky, its sturdy claws stained with blood as it forced a retreat. The path was defended alone, allowing no one to pass.

“You shall not pass, humans!” the dragon proudly raised its head, scratching the ground with its claws as it stretched towards the Sentinels in front. However, a silver streak suddenly flashed across the ground, and before the stunned dragon could even react, a figure had stepped into the beam of light. Back turned, he waved goodbye as he vanished.

No one had expected someone to actually cross the dragon without a trace. They had only felt a wind blowing past the trees, but that had vanished by the time the leaves even moved. The sylvan dragon stared at the light beam and roared in fury; this was an utter disgrace, but the person had already left. Helpless, it turned and stared savagely at the rest to warn them against trying the same.

On the final Sentinel path was a man whose body was half-machine. He was Vanko of the Ross Empire, an Innerverse organization that claimed an inheritance of ancient technology. The Ross Empire aspired to combine man and machine to achieve eternal life; their powerhouses were cultivators with technology fused into their bodies.

The Sentinels opposite Vanko couldn't cross him, either. He was even harder to deal with than the sylvan dragon, as he had guns everywhere to seal off the region. Each individual gun only had a Sentinel's offensive power, so this didn't even count as cheating. The Astral Combat Academy could do nothing to him. A purple energy wave sizzled across the earth and vaporized the surface, forcing the Sentinels back. Vanko had developed a defensive fort at the end, and used the suns to create a terrifying heat attack that would kill an average Sentinel upon contact.

"Give up, the Astral Combat Academy is not a place you Outerverse trash can reach," Vanko remained haughty. This was the arrogance of the Innerverse; to those from within, the Outerverse was just a collection of nobodies.

The Sentinels all gritted their teeth and looked at the fortress of guns before them helplessly, but a figure high in the skies suddenly shot towards the end. They were standing upon a simple longsword and gave off a fearsome aura; Vanko initially planned to obstruct them, but his expression changed at the sight of that figure and he resisted the urge to attack. He let the figure pass through directly as he mumbled, "Someone from the Myriad Swords Peak? How did they come to Astral-10?"

Lu Yin's trio also came to their path's end and experienced the heat. He quickly learned of the wall called Archino that had blocked all the other arrivals and stared in amazement. The Blaze Realm? Why was one of the most powerful organizations of the Innerverse blocking their way? Did they not want anyone enrolling in Astral-10?

On the other hand, Lulu bumped her fists together and stared at him excitedly, "I never thought I'd bump into someone from the Blaze Realm here. Interesting, leave this to me!"

She leaped up and past the dozen Sentinels, barreling straight towards the youth and striking out with her fist. Archino was looking down on the Outerverse trash at first, planning to say something to show the power of the Blaze Realm, but a green silhouette suddenly sent a fist flying his way. He was enraged by the audacity of someone to challenge the Blaze Realm and showed no mercy, "Skyburning Flame."

The Skyburning Flame was the Blaze Realm's battle technique, and the scorching heat of the sun only multiplied Archino's power. A simple upwards gesture spawned a sea of flames that spread all around, intent on destroying the surroundings.

Lulu grew excited at the sight of this blistering sea of fire that would strike fear in even Melders. She struck out with what looked like a normal punch, but the aftershocks ripped apart the flames and landed directly on Archino. While the youth was proud, he knew he wasn't invincible and dodged the moment his flames were dissipated. The earth was shattered by the punch, and strong winds turned the blaze into a rain of fire.

Archino's eyes narrowed at the sight of this thorny opponent, and he didn't hesitate to erupt with full force. The ground burned once more, the fire spreading quickly to ten meters, a hundred, a thousand...

There seemed to be no end to it, and all the watching Sentinels were affected, including Lu Yin and Coco who had to retreat together. Most of the people around were burnt in moments, some even to a crisp.

Lulu remained calm amidst the raging flames, her right fist smashing down once more. Her philosophy was that there was nothing one fist could not achieve; no matter how terrifying Archino's flames were, this fist still brought him down and extinguished the boundless sea of fire. Archino's body drilled so far down he couldn't be sea, his breath stolen away by the attack.

Lu Yin was shocked at the terrifying power of Lulu's fist. This was the power of the Mavis Family, a real behemoth whose descendants could crush opponents with a technique-less fist.

"How powerful," Coco exclaimed in admiration, her eyes gleaming, "Even stronger than sister Zora, is she really a Sentinel?"

When Lu Yin pulled the girl over, Lulu looked down at the hole in the ground, "Was that overkill?"

"Let's go, we've passed," he replied.

Coco nodded and turned to admire Lulu, "Sister, I don't think you should expose this strength if it isn't needed, or you won't be able to find a boyfriend."

Lulu snorted, "I'm so beautiful, suitors would line up from the Inniverse to the Outerverse, it's alright."

Coco believed it and took out her giant syringe, "Sister, are you injured? How about a jab?"

Lulu immediately declined. Coco's syringe was much scarier than Archino's flames.

Chapter 106: Old Friend

By the time Archino was defeated, almost everyone on Lu Yin's path was either heavily injured or dead. The trio didn't speak much, simply heading towards the light beam and stepping across to vanish from the Sentinel path. He heard a few words before disappearing: "Age: Passed. Cultivation: Passed. Trial: Passed. Astral-10 application approved."

Up in the sky, Dorren Yushan and the others from the Great Yu Empire were looking at the ten paths nervously, unsure if anyone from the Great Yu Empire had gotten through. It would be a great embarrassment if not even one of their youths entered Astral-10 when the academy had effectively landed in their backyard. The Empire would become the laughingstock of the entire universe.

But no one could help them in this matter, either. There were three great powers of the Inniverse lying in ambush during this examination that no one had known about beforehand. Dorren didn't dare hope too much because he knew just how powerful those elites would be.

"Look, screens are popping up on every path. They're listing the people who passed," Rocky Auna commented, prompting Dorren and the rest to look nervously at their screens while gripping their fists. Of the three screens on the Sentinel paths, one already had a name and origin upon it: Silver—Great Yu Empire. On another path was Zhao Yilong—Myriad Swords Peak.

Dorren and the others stared at the name of Silver in a daze, "Silver? Did we bring such a person?"

Someone examined the list of student names, “No one on our list, Your Highness; he should have come by himself.”

The Crown Prince’s eyes gleamed, “Investigate him. It isn’t simple to join the examination on his own.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

Huo Qingshan gazed at the name Zhao Yilong and exclaimed, “It’s no wonder someone from the Myriad Swords Peak got through the blockade. This person should be a very powerful Sentinel.”

Dorren nodded, “I’ll ask Fifth Sister if she knows them.”

Of the ten paths, the battles among the Sentinels were relatively simpler. Not a single name appeared on the screens of the seven Melders’ paths; the battles there weren’t just more intense, but the paths were longer as well. Thus, Dorren Yushan and the rest all focused on the last screen from the Sentinel paths, where all of the youths from the Great Yu Empire had walked.

The first name to appear here was Lulu Mavis, with her origin listed as the Mavis Bank. There were no gasps of surprise here; the Mavis Family was an absolute monster that could easily surpass the three powers present.

Coco’s name caused a bit more conversation, “There are even people from the Windrift Hall here. Looks like the Inniverse didn’t ignore Astral-10 entirely.”

And then, the third name appeared. Lu Yin—Great Yu Empire. This one left Dorren and the rest jubilant; Lu Yin was someone truly of the Great Yu Empire, and he was even the Zishan King. His success would give some credence to the Empire in a way that Silver’s could not; a suspicious youth they hadn’t heard about could not compare to the absolute joy of a royal establishing himself.

Rocky Auna nodded in approval; the Zishan King truly was worthy of the Auna Family. Even if he was just an idle prince, Lu Yin’s status as a student of the Astral Combat Academy would be enough to cover up the humiliation of Princess Wendy rejecting his engagement.

Huo Qingshan’s eyes twinkled as he looked at Lu Yin’s name, and no one could tell what he was thinking. Jue Lang was silently staring at Lu Yin’s name as well. On the other hand, Dorren laughed in excitement and immediately contacted the Empire to relay the good news.

“Your Highness, wait a moment, let’s see the results of the Melder paths,” Huo Qingshan stopped him.

The Crown Prince patted his own head, “That’s right, we’ll wait a little. My bad, I was too impatient.”

To the powers of the universe, the Sentinel realm was just a starting point. Melderhood was the true beginning of cultivation, and a person’s power when they were a Melder was enough to determine their life. Astral-10 had explicit requirements for this enrollment that only passed Sentinels and Melders; the logic was that anyone beyond this point was a lost cause. To the Empire, any Melder that managed to enter the Astral Combat Academy would be a big surprise.

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The beam at the end of the Sentinel Path brought Lu Yin’s trio to a limestone platform. The cozy place was full of lichen, but the first thing they noticed when they landed was the constant patter of

raindrops. They looked up at the peculiar, towering plants and the rain that drowned the world. They were in the depths of some forest growing out of the limestone, the rain forming several rivulets on the ground that flowed down to some unknown place in the murky green sky.

“Silver?” As he looked around, Lu Yin was surprised by a familiar smiling face. He hadn’t expected to see Silver here, especially having passed the examination earlier than himself.

Silver nodded in greeting, “Long time no see, friend!”

On the other side, another figure stood silently and looked at the rain. There was an unsophisticated long sword on his back, and he gave off a sharp aura that seemed to cut the very rain apart. Lu Yin suddenly felt a great sense of pressure when he saw this person; he was certainly very strong.

“Someone from the Myriad Swords Peak?” Coco yelped, shocking Lu Yin as well. Wasn’t that the power Wendy came from? Meanwhile, Lulu looked at the man and then Silver with excitement, cracking her fists with bloodlust. Coco had to stop her in a hurry.

Lu Yin grew curious about Silver’s power once more. How had he passed so quickly despite the blockade from the Inniverse power? This person improved just as fast as himself. It had felt like they were around the same level when they first met, and that feeling held true even now. This person who was related to the Neohuman Alliance certainly wasn’t easy to deal with.

The man from Myriad Swords Peak kept staring at the rain and did not bother with Lu Yin and the rest. Lu Yin glanced at Silver and did not bother to reminisce, minding his own business to scan through the surroundings. However, there was nothing around except the green sky, green forests, and never-ending rain.

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The path of Melders was considerably longer than the Sentinels’, but even so, some powerhouses had reached the end. Five Melders looked excitedly at the light beam in the distance, “Finally here, Brother Meng. The next part will be the hardest, where we have to face the obstruction from the Inniverse’s powerful elites.”

News of three powers from the Inniverse dispatching people to obstruct the examination had spread. Many in the paths had received the information—and some directly gave up—but the majority were unwilling to do so this close to the end. They had invested too much to give up.

Meng Tao’s face remained firm. He was from the Vastdearth Sect and was among the top three in its younger generation. They were the overlords of their own weave, and would never allow anyone to flee without at least trying battle. He wanted to personally experience the power of the elites of the Inniverse. His group joined up with others that were already waiting, quickly totaling more than twenty people who were facing off against an enormous sylvan dragon with a fearsome aura. The dragon had an immeasurable ocean of star energy, and every fluctuation caused cracks in the earth. Its breaths shot out blades of wind that could cut skin apart.

The sylvan dragon surveyed the people and let out an ear-splitting roar, “I am Dragon Nine. Remember the name of the person who will block your hopes of entering the Astral Combat Academy.”

All the Melders were enraged, and Meng Tao stepped forward, “Meng Tao from the Vastdearth Sect, here for a challenge.”

Dragon Nine lowered its head and looked at Meng Tao, then sneered and a powerful stream of air rushed out, “As you wish.”

Not half a minute later, Meng Tao cried in agony as his body was bitten by Dragon Nine and directly snapped. His blood dripped down its enormous body, all his dignity fading away into death. Everyone felt their scalps going numb; this was one of the strongest among them, and he had faced such an end. Who else would dare take the challenge?

“Everyone, let’s attack together. This joker is a sylvan dragon, and that meatball at its tail is its weakness,” a girl’s voice echoed, brightening everyone’s gazes.

“Who dares slander my race?” Dragon Nine bellowed, but all twenty Melders joined forces in the next moment. This was their only chance of victory; none of them were confident in beating this dragon in single combat.

Dragon Nine was irate, and its giant eyes desperately sought out the one that had dared utter those words. It specifically attacked the women in the group, leaving many of them heavily injured, but several people broke through and headed straight for the light beam. The dragon growled and showcased its extreme speed, its body rapidly splitting into five silhouettes that formed a watertight wall blocking the portal. The Melders were left stunned; the speed of an Inniverse genius was simply too scary.

Chapter 107: Those Who Passed

Dragon Nine swatted someone away with ease, but suddenly sensed a threat from its rear. It turned around and snarled in a rage just as a silver needle stabbed into its tail through the void, prompting an anguished howl. The woman who’d shouted out its weakness wasn’t wrong; the meatball on a sylvan dragon’s tail was a weakness, but while many Inniverse powers knew that, few at the same realm could break through its defense. Dragon Nine hadn’t expected to meet such a person in the Outerverse, but thankfully, the attacker did not continue. The injury she had left was only minor, and she used the distraction to break through the blockade and enter the beam of light. The sylvan dragon vented on everyone else.

On the limestone platform, Lu Yin was gazing at the distant rain, his heart calmed by the constant patter. He felt like it wasn’t simple, a hypothesis that was shared by Lulu who similarly immersed herself. A new figure blinking in among them disrupted that immersion, prompting several astonished gazes at the average-looking man who’d joined. The one captivating thing about him was his black hair; it wasn’t reflecting any light at all. The hair seemed like a void that captured all light, adding a sense of mystery.

The newcomer didn’t bother with the crowd, standing motionless in his original spot, but another figure appeared not long after. This one was female, and Coco shouted in delight when she noticed, “Sister Zora!”

The woman saw Coco and her face brightened, “Coco! Are you alright? Did you get injured?”

Coco shook her head and looked back with excitement, “How about you? Are you wounded anywhere?”

“No.” Zora promptly shook her head.

“Oh.” Coco was disappointed.

“Sister Zora, let me introduce you, these are Brother Lu Yin and Sister Lulu. They’re the reason I could pass this exam; I wouldn’t have made it myself.” Coco pulled Zora to the two others she had traveled with. Lu Yin nodded towards this woman who also seemed to be from the Windrift Hall, while Lulu maintained a polite indifference. Zora thanked them and then pulled Coco aside to speak to her.

At the end of another Melder path, a deathly silence pervaded the sweltering atmosphere. The ground seemed to have been flattened out by something and there was no one alive; even the expert from the Ross Empire that was guarding the light beam had turned into scrap metal covered in blood. This was a path of absolute extermination.

“Incredible, that black-haired youth has an excellent innate gift.”

“Pity it’s too fatal.”

“That is fine, given his experience. We need such people.”

For those who were waiting in the sky, two more screens lit up. One read “Zora—Windrift Hall” while the other only mentioned “Darkvoid” with no origin.

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Time passed slowly, and another day crept by. At the end of another Melder path was a proud Arshim, standing before a dozen Melders that he had roasted. He was from the Blaze Realm and placed fifth in the Blaze Rankings, far beyond the trash all around. The sun froze once more as extreme cold descended upon the path, leaving the baked Melders ecstatic at the thought that he would have the terrain disadvantage, but flames raged all around him and left them desperate once more. He had an innate gift of fire; coupled with his fire battle techniques, no one could contend against him.

Arshim enjoyed watching their expressions change from hope to despair. This was why people like him looked down upon the Outerverse; it only produced weaklings. However, he was stunned when a beautiful silhouette walked out of his flames, her gait an alluring dance atop the fire. Most people’s gazes locked onto the dark red eyes in her pretty face as well as the graceful snow-white hair. Many choked on their saliva and looked blankly at the absolutely charming girl, her bare feet treading on the flames to pass Arshim and enter the light. Only after she’d vanished did the crowd realize that he hadn’t obstructed her at all.

Arshim was rooted in place; he recognized the woman the moment he saw her; this was Michelle, the Red Lotus Witch. She was the younger sister of the Red Lotus Witchbow Mira, not someone who could be provoked.

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With the one-day delay, someone new finally joined the limestone platform. Everyone’s attention turned to Michelle when she arrived, including the black-haired youth and the one from the Myriad Swords Peak who had been silently observing the rain. She was too captivating, be it in her appearance or the aura of her personality. Even Coco was dazed.

Lu Yin's gaze was fixed on Michelle as well, though in his case it was because he thought he'd seen Mira for a moment. Both girls shared their alluring figures, white hair, and dark red eyes. Michelle was unbelievably attractive, but her expression was filled with indifference after a single pass across the rest. Paying no further attention to them, she looked into the distance. No one tried to chat her up, as those that could pass the exam all had incredible willpower and would not be unnecessarily charmed by beauty alone.

Michelle was followed by Meng Yue, the youth from the Vastdearth Sect who had been following the same path as Lu Yin. Archino who was guarding that path had been crushed by Lulu's punch, so anyone who could make it to the end would automatically pass. Unfortunately, Meng Yue was the only one powerful enough to get through the path who'd been delayed long enough to avoid Archino's attacks. He stared at Lu Yin and then Lulu with an apprehensive gaze before silently walking to one side.

As more time passed, anxiety started to take over Dorren Yushan and the others from the Great Yu Empire; no one from the Great Yu Empire had passed through the Melder paths. The freezing night was a perfect manifestation of their own mental states right now.

Down below, Schutz and the rest were experiencing endless cold. The cyborg before them put his arm down, ten Melders who had united to barge through falling behind him. His mechanical voice rang harshly, "I said you cannot pass. The difference between the Innerverse and Outerverse is like the chasm between heaven and earth."

The dozen Melders were dumbstruck; that half-machine freak's attacks were each within Melder limits, but the superposition left onlookers trembling. He was in a class of his own. Schutz gritted his teeth and stepped forward. As the top expert of the Great Yu Empire's youth generation and the only one that managed to walk to the end, he could not retreat; the only way to stop Princess Wendy from looking down on them was to enter Astral-10 or die trying.

"Stepping out means death," the mechanical man looked towards Schutz and said impatiently, raising his hand and firing his gun. A succession of energy beams screamed forwards at a strange angle.

Schutz howled softly and slashed out with his blood-colored warblade. The splendid strike streaked through the sky and pressured its surroundings, the shockwaves leaving the dozen Melders gasping in admiration. However, Schutz's strongest attack was easily torn apart by the light rays which congealed into an irresistible strength in moments. That power struck forward and ripped everything apart, aiming straight for his heart.

Schutz bellowed and defended with his blade, but it broke within a second. He felt the undefeatable strength of that cyborg in that instant; this was might that surpassed his wildest imagination.

Just as everyone thought that Schutz would perish, however, the light beams suddenly vanished. Everyone stared dazedly at him; he wasn't dead? Schutz raised his head and gazed at the cyborg, his eyes narrowing as he saw a youth with a gentle smile behind. Schutz recognized this man as one of the Melders from the Great Yu Empire who wasn't from Yu Academy. He had seen him around, but not conversed much. This person had appeared at a crucial moment to save him.

"Who are you?" The cyborg asked coldly.

“Xia Luo. Sorry, please let us pass.”

“Sure.”

Xia Luo nodded at Schutz, then turned and walked towards the light beam. Schutz was left a complicated expression. That powerhouse from the Inniverse was intimidated and completely subdued by this Xia Luo. Did he really come from the Great Yu Empire?

Everyone looked at Xia Luo and Schutz slowly walked towards the light beam. The cyborg didn't look back at all from start till end, but his gaze was icy-cold. He had felt the cold embrace of death in that instant, and subconsciously stopped his attack in order to prepare for defense. He was certain that the man had the ability to kill him. How could the Outerverse have someone so scary?

Chapter 108: Hidden Gifts

“I'm Wair. Remember my name, Xia Luo, I will come find you in the Academy,” the cyborg suddenly howled. He could not accept that he had been threatened to the point that he didn't have the courage to retaliate.

Xia Luo smiled and stepped into the light beam, with Schutz taking a deep breath and closing his eyes before walking in. This time, he was brought in by someone else. When he walked out of Astral-10, he had to have achieved the glory to hold his head up high.

Up above, Dorren Yushan and the rest were pleasantly surprised to find Schutz's name appearing on the screen. Xia Luo's name appearing as well left countless others jealous of the Great Yu Empire.

“Hahahaha, Schutz had passed, worthy of being the top expert of the Great Yu Empire's youth generation,” Dorren Yushan was ecstatic. Huo Qingshan and the rest nodded. It looked like Schutz had improved significantly if he could break through the Inniverse elites guarding the examination.

“Who is that Xia Luo?” Rocky Auna asked curiously, prompting a shake of everyone's heads and an order from Dorren to look into it.

“What? Top secret?” the Crown Prince asked in amazement a moment later, saying solemnly, “Even I don't have the authority to check; we can only ask His Imperial Majesty when we return. But enough of that—our Empire was the biggest winner in this examination! A total of four students accepted, this is worthy of a national celebration!”

“Don't be too happy yet, the three powers of the Inniverse have not succeeded in their endeavors and they will definitely not be happy with us sending four people through,” Jue Lang warned.

Huo Qingshan's gaze turned cold, “So what? The Great Yu has its own military power; we don't fear war!”

The mood on the distant Zenyu Star was just as Dorren Yushan had predicted. Everyone sank into euphoria, and The Undying Yushan's order to waive taxes for the year only elevated the atmosphere.

There was only one person fuming; Bazeer. Lu Yin's success meant he couldn't cause trouble in the short term; he had heard there was far more to Astral-10 than meets the eye. Perhaps this person could really be a threat in the future. Thinking of Ghostfire's miserable state, an unbearably ugly expression overcame his face and he slammed his hand into the floor.

Within Zenyu Star's palace, The Undying Yushan looked at the screen before him with a permanent smile. There was a stunning young woman on the screen with a quiet expression and serene gaze, "Your Imperial Majesty, you should not let anyone enter Astral-10."

The Emperor sipped his tea, "The gap between the Outerverse and Innerverse is too great, and we must think of a way to bridge it."

"It is not possible to reduce this gap. You've entered the Innerverse before and should know how terrifying it is. Do you think that sending some imps into Astral-10 will be able to bridge this gap? They will only realize how insignificant they are," the girl remained apathetic.

The Undying Yushan stared at his daughter, "Little Fifth, you are too arrogant. The workings of the universe follow some laws, as do toppling of the heavens. One moment strong, and the next weak, no one knows when it will happen, and the skies will change. Your father is old and cannot protect the Empire, while you are unwilling to return as well. This is the only way we can fight; the future might be on the shoulders of these youths."

Wendy Yushan's gaze remained cold, or perhaps she truly did not care, "As you wish. The Great Yu Empire is just one speck of dust in the universe. If you must hold on so tightly, I have no choice either. But I must warn you that the Astral Combat Academy is not a stairway to heaven. They will clearly see how small they are and how laughable their ambitions."

The Emperor watched as the screen winked out and sighed. He clearly knew the cruelty of the Innerverse, but a frog in a well would never know how big the sky was. Its desire to swallow that sky might be laughable, but one had to respect that grit.

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As the rain continued to patter constantly on the limestone platform, Lu Yin looked at the two newcomers with astonishment. Xia Luo? Schutz? The former smiled back with no signs of surprise, while the latter instead looked around at those present. There were a total of eleven people here, six Sentinels and five Melders. Minus Xia Luo and himself, only three other Melders had passed the examination. Of them, Schutz fixed his gaze on Darkvoid, who gave off an incredible sense of danger.

Not far away, Silver smiled at Xia Luo just as he looked over. They exchanged glances and Silver maintained his smile, but Xia Luo's lukewarm gaze morphed into something sharper. Coincidentally, a new figure arrived between the two.

Lu Yin looked over and his eyes narrowed as he noticed the black and white hair of the Daynight Clan. Everyone else turned towards him as well; the Daynight Clan was well-known among the cultivators of the Innerverse, and the black-and-white hair was easy to recognize as well. The man had a haughty look and scanned his surroundings, gaze lingering slightly on Michelle with his breath taken away.

At this point, a voice rang through the void, "The examination has ended. Congratulations to the twelve of you who passed."

The voice died down, and one more name appeared on one of the screens on the Sentinels' path in the heavens. Under Zhao Yilong's name was Hui Daynight.

Lu Yin turned his gaze to the emptiness in the skies; the voice seemed to have come from all directions. All he noticed was the dark green curtain of rain that connected the skies to the earth, with the occasional puff of mist.

“Congratulations to all that have entered the Tenth Astral Academy. We have specially prepared five gifts and hidden them in the rain. Finders, keepers.”

Everyone’s eyes brightened; gifts from Astral-10 would not be simple. Lu Yin looked towards the rain and wondered what those words meant. Gifts hidden in the rain?

Twelve individuals, each with their own thoughts, looked into the distance in the pouring rain. There were no signs of any gifts whatsoever, but Michelle walked to one corner of the limestone platform and silently looked eastwards. Xia Luo did the same, as did Hui Daynight. He might have been a Sentinel, but no one would view him as one. All twelve eventually chose their own directions and stared at the rain, trying to sense something.

Lu Yin allowed the rain to splash on his palm. It was nothing but normal in his perception, but the Academy seemingly wanted them to understand something from it. His mind drew a complete blank when faced with this natural phenomenon.

Not long after, star energy ebbed and flowed around him from Michelle and a few others, as though they had discovered something. Lu Yin frowned and glanced at Lulu, whose eyes were gleaming with some understanding. He then looked at Xia Luo, the youth’s ever-gentle gaze concealing all thought. He breathed in deeply; he could not carry on like this, or he would fall behind.

Lu Yin’s gaze grew steady as he thought over it. He hadn’t wanted to use the Cosmic Art in case someone recognized it, but he had no choice. This was only their first task, and he didn’t want to fall behind with every step. Six stars started to circle around him, the result of many days of training. At this point, he believed he could give Gerbach a run for his money.

A pair of wizened eyes opened within the curtain of rain, peering through a great distance to watch Lu Yin with surprise, “Someone from the Outerverse got a hold of this technique? Interesting, very interesting.”

Gadgets were cut off from the moment everyone entered the world of rain, and the new students did not have an idea of how time flowed in Astral-10 compared to the rest of the world. Three days quickly passed; for Lu Yin, they were three days of constantly staring at the rain. Even with the Cosmic Art, he could not see a thing. The rain helped him cleanse any impurities in his star energy, but the only thing outside of that was vague images flashing within bursts of star energy nearby.

Soon, he saw all sorts of strange phenomena within those images. The sound of raindrops cleared his mind, turning those sights into what felt like an experience of stepping onto the road of cultivation. As he immersed himself in that feeling, Michelle opened her eyes and her star energy erupted to sweep the rain aside. A burst of air rushed forth and tore open a tiny crack in the curtain; her eyes brightened and she stepped out into the rain to grab a chip of some sort.

The others looked at Michelle in astonishment, while Lu Yin watched her star energy and then his own. He quickly realized what the problem was: her energy had taken physical form to disperse the rainwater, while his own was incorporeal. He simply could not push the rain apart. The gifts were right in

front of their eyes and not hidden. Whoever could see them first would obtain them. This was a test of their star energy. Lu Yin breathed deeply and adjusted the star energy within his body, feeling the raindrops again. He had to turn his star energy into something substantial before he could tear the curtain open. It sounded simple but was a difficult challenge.

Chapter 109: Rain Observatory

Moments after Michelle's success, Xia Luo smiled and stretched his hand out as well. Star energy spread out and allowed him to pluck a chip out of the rain. Hui Daynight frowned coldly in response.

A desolate gaze swept past Michelle and Xia Luo from the depths of the rain, a faint trace of approval within, "Star energy is the foundation of cultivation, and the same battle technique can have vastly different capabilities depending on the user's star energy. Normal people focus on quantity while true powerhouses focus on quality. Even people who have focused on training in this cannot easily materialize star energy within three days; these children are quite smart. But the next step is the realm of infinite change; they will need to be geniuses to achieve that quickly."

A day later, Hui Daynight suddenly opened his eyes and his hand grabbed at the rain, tearing it apart brashly. He then retrieved a chip arrogantly, matching gazes with Lulu who also got one near the same time. She glared at him provocatively; prompting a brow-rise out of annoyance. How dare an ant from the Outerverse glare at him?

Lulu raised her fists out of her dislike for the Daynight Clan, and Hui Daynight's eyes narrowed, "You're looking for trouble, woman."

"Just someone from the Daynight Clan," Lulu sneered.

"Who are you?" Hui was surprised by her indifference.

"Lulu Mavis," she answered proudly.

He was stunned and didn't continue talking, knowing how terrifying the Mavis Family was.

Michelle and the rest had already gotten four of the presents, but they continued standing in the rain and observed the scenery around them. This was a magical place that brought peace to the soul.

Lu Yin had been using the Cosmic Art to comb through the star energy while watching the rain. He tried imitating the raindrops in order to liquify the star energy, but that failed. An attempt to evaporate his star energy wasn't successful either, requiring vast skill that he did not possess.

Hang on... He was STUPID! He recalled that the Cosmic Art was based on the movement of the stars, objects that were physical manifestations of star energy. He had been training with physical star energy from the start, but he hadn't realized it until now. He opened his eyes and stretched a hand out, a star appearing on his palm to tear the rain apart. He saw the fifth chip and was about to grab it, but three swords suddenly pierced towards him from afar.

The star in Lu Yin's palm erupted and crashed against the three swords. Unfortunately, this had happened too abruptly and he had only formed one star in his palm, which wasn't enough to abate the pressure. His hand recoiled immediately, and Zhao Yilong stole the chip away.

Lu Yin looked at the youth from the Myriad Swords Peak, but Zhao Yilong ignored him and focused on the chip. He said coldly, "It's not very nice to attack me, Friend."

Zhao Yilong glanced over, "You can come get it from me."

Lu Yin was just about to attack when a shadow suddenly landed on a mound north of the platform. Everyone looked over at the new arrival, who let loose a wave of star energy that astounded them; this was a Limiteer. They all fell silent, watching his longish hair waving in the rain. This was someone with the aura of a master.

"Congratulations, ju—" the man blinked as he turned around, looking at them dazedly, "Wait... Where are all the students who passed the assessment?"

Coco immediately answered like a good girl, "We are them."

The man was stunned and smiled reluctantly, "Don't joke with me, little girl. There are so few of you, we normally recruit a thousand students."

Zora lifted her head, "We're the only ones, are you a senior here?"

"Rainmaster, is something wrong?" the man suddenly shouted, "Why are there so few people? Where are all the cute juniors I was promised? Where are they?"

"Shut up, only twelve people passed the assessment this time," the voice bellowed from the rain.

The man's expression sank, "How did this happen? Has Astral-10 really become that abject that only twelve people passed the assessment? What a shame."

Michelle frowned, "Senior, please talk about official business."

The man sighed, looking as if he had been dealt a huge blow. His gaze swept past all of them and landed on Michelle, his eyes gleaming as he appeared in front of her in an instant. He bowed her politely, "My name is Big Pao, may I know your name, Junior?"

Michelle was annoyed, "Senior, please talk about official business."

The raindrops suddenly grew larger and the whole sky turned gray, "Big Pao, do anything embarrassing again and you can go to the Sand Ocean for a year."

The man was shocked and immediately retreated to the mound, coughing a few times and turning serious, "Hello, juniors. My name is Big Pao, and I'm a student of Astral-10. Let me introduce all of you," he winked at Michelle, "As you already know, the Astral Combat Academy is the best land of learning in the universe, with a rich history that makes it a treasure of civilization. This is a place countless powerhouses dream to enter..."

"Senior, please don't talk nonsense," Hui Daynight said coldly.

Big Pao glared at him irritably, "Don't interrupt when your senior is talking. You should be more polite."

Hui Daynight ignored him, while Michelle repeated a third time impatiently, "Senior, please talk about official business."

Big Pao coughed again and continued awkwardly, "Alright, Astral-10 doesn't have tutors to teach you personally and you can learn on your own. There are three renowned training spots here: the Rain Observatory, the Stargazing Deck, and the Sand Ocean. This is the Rain Observatory, where it has rained continuously for countless years; it is a great boon to training in your star energy. You'll understand the other two places when you visit them..."

After some introductions, Big Pao suddenly thought of something, "A friendly reminder that you should use the teleporters if you want to leave the Rain Observatory. If you don't, I can't guarantee how long you will need to reach the other two places."

"Senior, is the academy very big?" Coco asked obediently with a face full of curiosity.

Big Pao looked at Coco's adorable face and beamed, "Yes, it's very big. You only see one small corner of the entire Rain Observatory; the place is made of tens of thousands of enormous trees."

"Tens of thousands? That's not a lot."

Big Pao laughed, "Not a lot? What if I told you that the platform you're on right now is just the crown of a tree, and the endless greenery that you can see in the distance is just a single branch?"

Everyone was stunned, and Coco covered her mouth while looking at the distance in shock. Those trees were just a single branch? So they were only looking at one tree? That big? They were cultivators and had quite the field of view, but they couldn't even see the next tree.

"Given your speed, it will take at least a day to cross the Rain Observatory," Big Pao explained.

Lu Yin was surprised, a day is enough for him to fly from Asia to the westernmost part of Europe, so that meant that the Rain Observatory was equivalent to the size of Asia and Europe on Earth. How could it be so huge? And that was just the Rain Observatory, could the entire Astral-10 be as big as Zenyu Star? Was that still an academy?

"There are a few things that you have to pay attention to in Astral-10, you won't understand it if I just tell you. Let me send you the information now; remember, you can't contact the outside world when you're in the academy, and can only contact each other. Come, let's exchange numbers."

Michelle and the others didn't even move, ignoring Big Pao completely. The situation grew a little awkward, and the man was left speechless. This was completely different from what he had imagined. Where were the cute juniors that were promised? Only that one adorable small girl? This was a tragedy!

"Senior, where are the tutors?" Schutz asked.

Big Pao had already lost his enthusiasm and replied listlessly, "Look at the information yourself."

Lu Yin and the others looked at their gadgets promptly, seeing a new message about Astral-10. There wasn't much new there; only some tidbits about the treasury and the trial zones.

Something in the information caught Lu Yin's attention; as long as one obtained the approval of the Rain Observatory and the Sand Ocean, one could become the student of the tutors there.

There were tutors in Astral-10, but if one wanted to be taught by them, they needed approval. Lu Yin didn't know whether it was the same situation in the other academies, but he felt that this method was quite weird. Michelle frowned while looking through the information and looked at Big Pao, "Is this the teaching method of Astral-10? The other nine academies all have tutors to help the students, why doesn't Astral-10 have that?"

Chapter 110: Ported Battle

Big Pao glanced at Michelle in astonishment; this brat seemed to know quite a lot. "I don't know why we don't have standard tutors; I'm just a student. Now, I admit I'm a little more handsome and better qualified than most, but I don't have the authority to intrude on academy matters."

Michelle looked down at her gadget and noted something down, prompting a change in Big Pao's expression. He muttered into his own, "Sandmaster, this isn't good. The rumors might be real; she might be the one the Ten Arbiters' Council sent to inspect us. What? You don't care? How? This kid will spill all our secrets! Yes, yes, I know we don't have secrets, only problematic education policies. But it won't be too good if your mantra of 'only idiots study' leaks out. Ugh, whatever. If you're not concerned, then so be it. Don't blame me when the Council cracks down on us."

"How do we confirm that we have obtained the Rain Observatory's acknowledgment?" Lu Yin suddenly asked.

"Simple. Just write your name out with star energy and send it out; you're acknowledged if it doesn't shatter," Big Pao replied.

Zhao Yilong stuck out his hand and lightly plucked his fingers, turning the star energy on his fingertips into swords that he twisted into his name. He pushed this name out, but it was dissipated in moments.

Michelle spoke coldly, "One's understanding of star energy has to be so deep to gain acknowledgment here; no wonder Astral-10 hasn't produced any outstanding geniuses in thousands of years. There are problems with your policies; the tutors just don't want to teach."

Big Pao rolled his eyes. This woman was pretty, but she seemed to be picking fault at everything.

"Is it true that the tutors here are all very powerful?" Coco raised her hand to ask.

Michelle was the one to reply, "One needs to be at least a Hunter to qualify."

"A Hunter? So strong!" Coco cried.

Lu Yin squinted. Hunters were at the same level as The Undying Yushan, a veritable powerhouse in the Outerverse, but they were only tutors in the Astral Combat Academy. It went without saying that they were all much stronger than the Emperor; why did tutors have such power?

"If only we could ask them to teach us individually," Coco murmured.

Big Pao smiled, "Of course it's possible. As long as the conditions are met, you might even become direct disciples and learn the formidable battle techniques passed down in Astral-10 through the generations."

Everyone's eyes gleamed, "What conditions?"

Big Pao laughed in a strange way, "One is sending your name past the Rain Observatory. There are absolute beasts from ancient times that have sent their names right through and left them intact for a myriad years. They float endlessly in the curtain of rain and form the Rain List. If you enter the Rain List, you can become a direct disciple of any of the tutors and receive the ancient battle techniques."

Rain List? Ancient battle techniques? Their gazes brightened at the mention of names that had lasted a myriad years.

"Where can we see the Rain List?" Zhao Yilong asked loudly.

Big Pao laughed mischievously, "No idea, only those who qualify to enter the list supposedly see it."

Michelle turned to the rain curtain and drew her name with star energy, pushing it away. Everyone looked on curiously; although there hadn't been a proper comparison, she was likely the most powerful of them all. She was the first to obtain the gift, had the most knowledge about the battle academy, and many were curious about her origins and especially her power. Even Zhao Yilong from the Myriad Swords Peak couldn't send his past a hundred meters, but her's pushed much further in only moments.

Still, her name shattered before long, causing her to frown as Big Pao commented, "Pity, it didn't even make it past the tree."

Everyone experimented successively. Lu Yin used five stars to open a path through the rain, but his name shattered at about 300 meters. Hui Daynight managed 500, while Xia Luo almost reached Michelle before his name shattered.

"No need to try that hard, I haven't managed it even after spending so many years here; you guys are still too far away. The Rain List supposedly only has a hundred names; you need to be a prodigy to squeeze in there," Big Pao consoled them.

Hui Daynight felt this was beneath him. He may not have had confidence in the other nine academies, but Astral-10? There were no powerful individuals birthed here. He was confident that if he was given some time to achieve enlightenment, he would definitely enter the Rain List.

"Senior, I want to go to the trial zone," Lulu said excitedly. Everyone was shaken and looked at Big Pao; there was no greater attraction among the Astral Combat Academies than the Nine Trial Zones. There were rumors of ancient battle techniques, cultivation methods, bloodline enhancements, and the like all waiting to be obtained. Even the Ten Arbiters had grown through these trial zones, so they were a huge attraction.

Big Pao shrugged, "Sorry Junior, the trial zones cannot be entered as one pleases."

Michelle's gaze turned cold, "The Astral Combat Academy holds the key to the Nine Trial Zones, and those that have enrolled in the Academy can enter. Why can't Astral-10?"

Big Pao spread his hands, "There are conditions."

Everyone was left helpless again. Condition after condition, was this even a school? Shouldn't they have no restriction on educating their students? Was it even logical for the Academy to not teach if the student wanted to learn?

“What conditions?” Hui Daynight asked coldly.

“You should have heard of the ported battles. As long as you win a hundred matches, you can enter the Six Daos,” Big Pao said with a little sympathy in his eyes.

Michelle was enraged, “Ridiculous, as a representative of the Ten Arbiters’ Council, I suggest that any student who has entered the Academy should be allowed to enter the trial zones. This is a universal rule among the other nine, why does Astral-10 not follow it?”

Ten Arbiters’ Council? Everyone stared at Michelle in awe. Big Pao felt helpless. It turned out that this woman really was picking them apart; it was a pity that she was a beauty. “As I said, Junior, this is not something I can decide. Why don’t I bring you to the Trialmaster?”

“Lead the way,” Michelle snorted.

The new students did not know how far the trial zone entrance was from the Rain Observatory, but they followed Big Pao through the teleporter and arrived there directly.

“Brother Xia, what are ported battles?” Lu Yin asked. He hadn’t heard of them before.

Schutz and Meng Yue looked over as well, so Xia Luo picked his words, “How do I put it... The universe is very mysterious, and has birthed many strange things. One of these things is a teleportation stone. So long as you touch it, it can send a perfect copy of you into another space to battle someone who touched another stone simultaneously. These are called ported battles.”

“It’s matchmaking?” Lu Yin asked in shock, recalling many games he had heard of from centuries ago.

Xia Luo shook his head, “Matchmaking implies that you’re actually looking for suitable opponents based on qualifications. Ported battles don’t care; you can come across anyone. You can fight a Seeker or an Explorer; there is no fairness. These stones are extremely rare and controlled by the strongest academies and powers in the universe. Any opponent in a ported battle is an absolute elite; we should be on the lowest rung.”

Lu Yin was stunned that there was actually such a thing. According to what Xia Luo had said, anyone that qualified to use the teleportation stone was a force to be reckoned with, and there would be no lack of bullies like the Daynight Clan, Mavis Family, or even the first nine academies. The strength would also be varied, but Sentinels should be the weakest. It was no wonder that Michelle was incensed; they were simply too weak to achieve a hundred victories. Their opponents wouldn’t be weaklings like Eddy or Raas, but truly exceptional elites. They would almost never find opponents at their own realm, and defeating those opponents would be a huge challenge.

Lu Yin felt some pressure for a moment, like he had seen countless proud experts who would be his opponents in the future. His eyes glinted as they teleported out of the curtain of green rain and entered a savannah where the dry grass swayed gently in the wind. Each stalk had a dim radiance with a strange evening color, giving off a delightfully fresh smell.

“This is the entrance to the trial zones, and the location of the teleportation stone as well. The Trialmaster is within that tree’s hollow, everyone; you can go ahead. See you later!” Big Pao waved and left. He had pointed out an enormous curved tree that looked like a crescent moon, the surface wilted

with countless cracks across the bark. The tree was so tall that it pierced the clouds, its interior holding a full forest of its own.

As everyone entered the tree, their gazes were drawn to a stone that was floating in mid-air, emitting a bright light that pierced through the hazy mist.

“That should be the teleportation stone. How mysterious,” Xia Luo sighed; this was his first time seeing such a thing as well.