

## **A Record 201**

### Chapter 201: Unforeseen Turn of Events

According to the Mantra Axis Scripture, the two semi-transparent runes on the Mantra Treasured Axis were Time Dao Runes, which were a manifestation of the laws of time.

The more Time Dao Runes there were, the more powerful the Mantra Treasured Axis was going to be.

Under normal circumstances, someone who had manifested a Mantra Treasured Axis would have the chance to attain a new Time Dao Rune with each immortal acupoint that they opened up, but the probability of this happening each time was only around 50%.

After opening up 12 immortal acupoints, one would reach the mid-True Immortal Stage, and only after attaining six Time Dao Runes would one be considered to have mastered the first level of the Mantra Axis Scripture. Furthermore, only with six Time Dao Runes would the Mantra Treasured Axis be able to halve the speed of enemy attacks.

If a cultivator were struck by misfortune and attained fewer than six Time Dao Runes, then they would never be able to cultivate the second level of the Mantra Axis Scripture.

There were already extremely few people in the history of the Blaze Dragon Dao that had managed to successfully manifest Mantra Treasured Axes at all, and those who had reached the second level of the Mantra Axis Scripture were even rarer, but that certainly wasn't due to lack of trying.

Furthermore, six was a cardinal number when it came to the number of Time Dao Runes on the Mantra Treasured Axis, so even if one fell just short and had only five Time Dao Runes on their Mantra Treasured Axis, the slowing effect would be virtually non-existent.

As for those who had taken the shortcut and used treasures in the place of Mantra Treasured Axes, their probability of attaining Time Dao Runes on their faux axes would be significantly diminished. It was often the case that after mastering the first level of the cultivation art and opening up 12 immortal acupoints, one would only have attained two or three Time Dao Runes on their faux axis.

However, the advantage to using faux axes refined from materials that contained other law powers was that there was a chance to attain dao runes of other laws. However, the number of such dao runes that appeared were entirely down to luck and the materials used to refine the faux axis.

Those who were fortunate could add seven or eight dao runes of other laws onto their faux axis, granting it power that wasn't inferior to that of an Acquired Immortal Treasure, while those on the other end of the scale could only attain one or two such dao runes, thereby making their faux axis next to useless.

Han Li was both ecstatic and incredulous to see the two Time Dao Runes on his Mantra Treasured Axis.

Even if he were in luck, there should've only been a single Time Dao Rune attained from the opening of his first immortal acupoint, yet somehow, he had managed to attain two.

In any case, this was most definitely a good thing, and it would significantly lessen his cultivation pressure in the future.

With that in mind, Han Li took a deep breath before activating the Mantra Treasured Axis behind him, and it immediately sped up in its rotation while releasing a burst of faint golden ripples that instantly encompassed the entire surrounding area within a radius of around 100 feet.

The space in the area encompassed within the golden ripples trembled slightly, then instantly returned to normal, and looking at it from the outside, nothing seemed to have changed.

Han Li closed his eyes as he sensed the changes in his surroundings, and he discovered that everything around him seemed to have slowed down a little, including the flow of air and soundwaves, as well as even the circulation of the world's origin qi.

Upon first glance, it appeared to have a similar debilitating effect to the laws of speed and gravity.

Han Li couldn't help but be amazed by the effects of the laws of time, but unfortunately, the effects were virtually negligible at the moment.

Hence, in its current form, it wouldn't even have been as effective as a faux axis in battle, and that was presumably why so many cultivators were willing to compromise and refine faux axes instead.

A faint smile appeared on Han Li's face, and the golden light glowing from his body faded alongside the Mantra Treasured Axis behind him.

He rose to his feet and emerged from his secret chamber before arriving in another room, where there was an azure transmission array plate on the table.

The array plate was currently buzzing incessantly while giving off a watery azure glow that formed an azure light barrier, within which were two white transmission talismans were darting around in a haphazard fashion like a pair of headless flies.

Han Li made a beckoning motion, and the azure light barrier faded, following which the two transmission talismans flew into his grasp, and he injected his spiritual sense into them.

During the past three years, aside from in the final year and a bit, in which he had focused all of his attention on breaking through his cultivation bottleneck, he had explored the Blaze Dragon Dao the rest of the time to search for his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords. For this purpose, he had used his Bonded Eight Spirits Vat on numerous occasions as well, but to no avail, as if his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords had completely vanished.

Even though he wasn't able to accomplish his main objective, he had familiarized himself with True Immortals of comparable status to himself in the sect during his exploration, and he was currently on good terms with several attendant elders who had also previously been itinerant cultivators in the past.

As it turned out, the two transmission talismans had been sent to him by two of the inner sect elders that he was friendly with, inviting him to go on missions with them. He immediately pulled out a pair of blank transmission talismans and tactfully turned down their invitations without a second thought.

He was in no mood to be going on any missions at the moment.

Shortly thereafter, he appeared in the medicine garden in his cave abode, and he was in the process of carefully inspecting the Heaven Controlling Vial in his hand. Beside him stood a giant ape puppet that was around 10 feet tall.

During the final stage of his seclusion, he naturally didn't get a chance to continue to manifest those crystals that contained the laws of time. However, he didn't waste the green liquid, either, instructing the giant ape puppet to nurture several 10,000-year-old spirit herbs with the spirit liquid in case the need for those spirit herbs arose.

A contemplative look appeared in Han Li's eyes as he crouched down and dripped a drop of green liquid onto one of the spirit herbs in front of him, and right as he did so, an unforeseen run of events suddenly unfolded.

A burst of faint golden light abruptly appeared over his body, immediately following which his Mantra Treasured Axis emerged on its own without any warning.

The 10,000-year-old spirit herb that was closest to him in the medicine garden immediately began to tremble slightly as a layer of translucent light appeared over its surface, seemingly resonating with the Mantra Treasured Axis.

Han Li was quite startled by this as he sprang to his feet.

The golden light radiating from his body vanished in a flash alongside his Mantra Treasured Axis, and the 10,000-year-old spirit herb instantly returned to normal as well.

A bewildered look appeared on Han Li's face, and after some contemplation, he crouched down once again to get closer to that 10,000-year-old spirit herb.

Sure enough, the spirit herb began to tremble once again, while a layer of translucent light reappeared over its surface.

The Mantra Treasured Axis also appeared behind him amid a flash of golden light, and it was as if the two were resonating with one another.

What is going on?

Han Li's brows were tightly furrowed as he made his way even closer to the medicine garden.

In the next instant, all of the several spirit herbs in the garden that had exceeded 10,000 years of age began to tremble in unison, and the older the spirit herb was, the more severe the tremors it displayed. In contrast, the thousand-year-old spirit herbs didn't display much of a reaction.

After a brief moment of contemplation, a thought suddenly occurred to him, and he rose to his feet before flipping a hand over to produce a pair of jade boxes, then removed the lids of the boxes.

Each box contained a spirit herb that was giving off extremely rich spiritual qi, and they were both also over 10,000 years of age.

The dark green spirit herb in the jade box on the left began to quickly tremble, while the light red spirit herb in the box on the right remained completely still.

The dark green spirit herb had been matured using the green liquid, while the light red spirit herb had come from Fang Pan's storage bracelet.

"Could it be that this has something to do with how smoothly my cultivation of the Mantra Axis Scripture has gone, and why I was able to manifest two Time Dao Runes at once?" Han Li murmured to himself as he stowed the pair of spirit herbs away.

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One year later, on the Crimson Dawn Peak.

The light of the dying sun was spilling down onto the entire mountain summit, basking it in a gentle, warm glow.

All of the shadows in the spacious courtyard on the mountain summit were all elongated, presenting a rather dim yet serene sight to behold.

On a stone stool next to a stone table in the courtyard sat a beautiful young woman in red. She was resting on the stone table with her slender jade-like hands folded over one another beneath her chin, looking rather sullen and dejected.

Meng Qianqian had just emerged from seclusion close to half a day ago, having successfully reached the Core Formation Stage, and she wanted to share this piece of good news with her brother, but she discovered that everyone seemed to have been busy cultivating, leaving her feeling rather disappointed.

"I wonder what Elder Li is doing..." she murmured to herself as she turned her gaze toward the cave abode.

Aside from Meng Yungui, Han Li was the one that she most wanted to share the good news of her breakthrough with.

Everyone else, including her brother, held a great deal of awe and veneration toward Han Li, but she was the only one who felt like Han Li wasn't as cold and high-and-mighty as the other elders in the sect. Instead, he was more like a brotherly figure.

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At this moment, inside Han Li's secret chamber.

The white beads embedded into the walls were giving off a bright white glow, illuminating the entire secret chamber.

Han Li was seated with his legs crossed on a futon in his elder robes.

In front of him was a square, dark azure array plate that was hovering mid-air. Two of the Starshift Stones embedded into the array plate were glowing brightly to form a blue array, and it didn't take long before a burst of peculiar fluctuations began to emanate out of the array.

The space at the center of the blue array rippled slightly, following which a fist-sized ball of heavy water appeared.

Han Li made a beckoning motion to draw the ball of heavy water into his grasp, then stowed the Big Dipper Heavenly Star Plate away.

The ball of heavy water wasn't very large, but in contrast with the heavy water that had previously been delivered to him, this ball of heavy water contained a hint of law powers that Han Li had instructed his Earthly Deity Avatar to inject into it.

What he was planning to do was to refine a faux Mantra Treasured Axis using this heavy water that contained the power of laws.

In reality, he had already decided that he was going to refine a faux axis as soon as he noticed the abnormalities in his Mantra Treasured Axis and Time Dao Runes.

He couldn't be completely sure that this was definitely related to his Heaven Controlling Vial's maturation ability, but even so, he couldn't allow anyone else to discover this connection. Otherwise, he would've been in a world of trouble.

With that in mind, Han Li drew the ball of heavy water into his grasp while sweeping his other hand through the air, releasing a palm-sized piece of black meteoric iron, a watery blue jewel, a drop of blue liquid that resembled a drop of beast blood, and a piece of Water Shade Ore that was giving off a black glow.

## Chapter 202: Heavy Water True Axis

All of these materials had been recently secured by Han Li through various means, and none of them were extremely precious or powerful spirit materials, but it had still taken him a great deal of time and effort to gather them.

The refinement method for a faux axis wasn't difficult to find. It was laid out in the annotation scripture, and there was more than one method outlined.

The true axis was quite difficult to refine, but the faux axis was quite practical, so there were many people who had attempted to refine it in the past, and as a result, there were many pieces of insight collected from many past cultivators in the annotation scripture.

Due to the different materials used, the refinement process would always differ slightly from person to person, but the overall process was quite uniform.

At this moment, Han Li had already engraved the array necessary to refine a faux axis onto the ground. It resembled an ancient copper coin of the mortal world that was round on the outside and square on the inside. Its appearance was quite ordinary, but there was far more to the array than met the eye. [1]

Han Li placed the four types of spirit materials onto the four corners of the array's inner square, then opened his mouth to release a ball of nascent flames the size of a human head right onto the center of the array.

As he began to chant a low incantation, the Formless True Axis Scripture was activated in his body, and bright radiance erupted from the array on the ground as it fused as one with the ball of nascent flames.

The sound of rushing wind rang out within the secret chamber, and the ball of nascent flames began to rapidly revolve, forming a miniature fiery tornado that was giving off bursts of scorching heat.

Immediately thereafter, he swept a sleeve through the air, and the piece of Water Shade Ore rose up into the air before falling into the fiery tornado, where it quickly became extremely red and virtually completely transparent.

The drop of blue liquid then also fell into the fiery tornado at Han Li's behest, dripping onto the piece of Water Shade Ore.

A loud sizzling sound rang out as plumes of white smoke rose up into the air, and the piece of Water Shade Ore instantly melted into a liquid form.



Immediately thereafter, Han Li directed the other two materials into the flames as well, then switched to a different hand seal, and the fiery tornado instantly transformed into a massive fireball that enveloped all of the materials.

At the same time, the air temperature in the secret chamber cooled significantly, as if the majority of the fire's heat had been encapsulated within the ball of flames.

What came next was a long fusion process.

All he had to do from here onward was to control the nascent flame, so he pulled out the Mantra Axis Scripture and continued to study it.

Several dozen days passed by in a flash, and Han Li remained in his secret chamber the entire time, tending to the fireball in front of him.

Right at this moment, he slowly brought his hands apart in front of him, and the fireball slowly elongated, reverting back into a fiery tornado.

At the center of the fiery tornado was a crimson round plate-like object that was around a foot in size, and it was riddled with countless fine and complex spirit patterns.

However, judging from its aura, it appeared to have only been a treasure of a decent caliber, and there didn't seem to have been anything special about it.

With a flick of Han Li's wrist, the ball of heavy water that contained the power of water laws was sent flying through the air before slowly descending onto the crimson plate within the fiery tornado from above.

A dull thump rang out, both in the secret chamber and directly in Han Li's heart.

The crimson plate shuddered as it was instantly enveloped by the ball of heavy water, and it rapidly turned from crimson to black in color.

At the same time, many of the runes on the plate dissolved one after another into a hollow state, while a ball of watery blue light lit up on the edge of the plate, forming a Water Dao Rune on its own.

A long while later, the entire plate was already riddled with hollow runes, out of which were emanating an aura of water laws.

Han Li opened his mouth upon seeing this, and the ball of nascent flames flew back into his mouth.

The faux axis was already complete at this point, and without the fiery tornado to support it, it plummeted straight onto the ground with a resounding boom.

The ground in the entire secret chamber caved in drastically while countless deep cracks appeared, extending all the way to the surrounding walls.

The entire cave abode and courtyard were also affected, resulting in violent, earthquake-like tremors. Meng Yungui and the others were all startled by these tremors, and they hurriedly ceased their cultivation as they rushed out to see what was happening.

A resounding commotion rang out on the Crimson Dawn Peak, and countless birds flew up into the air in a panic, obscuring a large section of the sky.

Thankfully, the Crimson Dawn Peak was quite secluded in location, so no one else in the sect was alerted by the tremors.

Meanwhile, Han Li had already gotten up in his secret chamber, and he subsequently pulled the faux axis out of the ground as well.

After a close examination, he discovered that the faux axis wasn't imbued with any power of time laws, but it contained extremely pure water law powers. Furthermore, due to the injection of heavy water into the faux axis, it was far heavier than it appeared.

"Given its properties, I'll call it the Heavy Water True Axis," Han Li murmured to himself as he examined the faux axis in his hands with a pleased expression.

A short while later, the gates of the cave abode were abruptly opened, and Han Li emerged from within.

The first thing that he did was pay a visit to the fire vein cave at the foot of the mountain, where the Essence Fire Raven was still thoroughly enjoying itself.

It had devoured an enormous amount of the fire vein's spiritual qi, resulting in a massively elevated aura. However, due to the fact that it had only been residing in the cave for a short time, its aura still hadn't stabilized yet, so Han Li was unsure of exactly how much it had recovered.

However, through their spiritual connection, Han Li could tell that the fire raven was very happy with the area, so there was no need for him to be concerned.

After that, he returned to the courtyard of his cave abode and assembled Meng Yungui and the others before handing out some pills to them. He also answered some of their questions in cultivation before departing from the Crimson Dawn Peak to search for his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

Several days later, Han Li's search proved to have been completely fruitless, and he returned to the secret chamber in his cave abode to continue cultivating the Mantra Axis Scripture.

At the moment, this was his primary cultivation art, and the power of time laws was also the law power that he most wanted to master.

However, he would always make sure to go out every once in a while to scour the entire Bell Toll Mountain Range for his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, but his search proved to be futile every single time.

Four years passed by in the blink of an eye.

On this day, countless black clouds suddenly appeared in the sky above the Crimson Dawn Peak once again.

The world's origin qi converged in a frenzy, and another massive energy vortex was formed.

A long while later, the dark clouds in the sky slowly faded, and the enormous spiritual qi vortex also disintegrated into countless specks of spiritual light of different colors before vanishing into nothingness altogether quickly thereafter.

Inside the secret chamber of his cave abode, Han Li was seated with his legs crossed, and there was an elated look on his face.

There were two specks of golden light on his lower abdomen, indicating that he had successfully opened up a second immortal acupoint.

If anyone in the Blaze Dragon Dao were to hear that he had opened up two immortal acupoints in just seven years, they would've been astonished beyond belief, particularly considering he was cultivating the Mantra Axis Scripture, which was renowned for its inaccessibility.

After reaching the True Immortal Stage, one's cultivation progression was completely different from back when they were at or below the Grand Ascension Stage. Normally, it would've taken several centuries to open up a single acupoint, and for those with mediocre aptitude, it wasn't all that uncommon to take over 1,000 years to achieve such a feat.

Even in the history of the entire Northern Glacial Immortal Region, there were very few instances of anyone opening up two immortal acupoints in seven years, let alone in the Blaze Dragon Dao.

Han Li was also astonished by his own rate of progression, and he couldn't help but think of the Big Dipper Origin Arts that he had cultivated back in the Spirit Domain Realm.

At the time, he had refined his own body using starlight to open up the seven profound acupoints in his body, thereby becoming a Profound Immortal.

That cultivation art had been passed down by Patriarch Cold Flame from the Northern Glacial Immortal Region, and perhaps there was some type of connection between the two.

However, he didn't dwell too much on this thought as he closed his eyes to examine the pair of immortal acupoints.

Only after close to two hours had passed did he reopen his eyes, and a peculiar look appeared on his face.

A burst of dazzling golden light surfaced over his body, and this Mantra Treasured Axis appeared behind him at his behest, giving off a gentle golden glow.

Two more Time Dao Runes had appeared on the treasured axis, much to Han Li's elation and bewilderment.

At the same time, he couldn't help but wonder whether two Time Dao Runes would appear every single time he opened up an immortal acupoint. If that were the case, then wouldn't be able to attain 24 Time Dao Runes once he opened up the 12 immortal acupoints required for him to reach the mid-True Immortal Stage?

Of course, this was nothing but baseless speculation, but if this really were to eventuate, then this treasured axis of his would be incredibly powerful.

Han Li felt the faint buzzing ringing out from the four Time Dao Runes, and it seemed that they were resonating with one another in some way.

In the next instant, the Mantra Treasured Axis flashed with golden light, and a burst of golden ripples that were far brighter than before spread through the surrounding area.

After a brief examination, a wry smile appeared on Han Li's face.

Even with four Time Dao Runes, the effects of his Mantra Treasured Axis were still virtually negligible. It seemed that he would have to test it again after attaining six Time Dao Runes, which would hopefully be achieved with the opening of his next immortal acupoint.

Han Li suppressed the hint of excitement that had welled up in his heart, and the golden light radiating from his body faded alongside his Mantra Treasured Axis.

He then rose to his feet and made his way into the guest hall outside. As he did so, a thought seemed to have occurred to him, and his brows furrowed ever so slightly.

His cultivation of the Mantra Axis Scripture had been extremely smooth, but that seemed to have used up all of his luck, and he wasn't able to find any trace of his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords during the past four years.

He had virtually scoured the entire Bell Toll Mountain Range with no luck whatsoever, and he was beginning to grow a little agitated.

Right at this moment, a streak of white light flew in from outside, and it was a voice transmission talisman.

Han Li raised an eyebrow as he caught the talisman, then injected his spiritual sense into it, and his expression changed slightly as he immediately rose to his feet and exited his cave abode.

## Chapter 203: First Visit to the High Profound Palace

After emerging from his cave abode, Han Li discovered Meng Yungui standing outside, accompanied by none other than Qi Liang.

"Please pardon my intrusion, Fellow Daoist Li," Qi Liang said with a warm smile.

"Please come in, Brother Qi. What brings you here today?" Han Li hurriedly invited Qi Liang into his cave abode, then instructed Meng Yungui to brew them some tea.

Qi Liang was also an itinerant cultivator, and he had been Han Li's first connection in the Blaze Dragon Dao, so the two of them had been quite close during Han Li's time here, but this was the first time that Qi Liang was visiting his cave abode.

Qi Liang made his way into Han Li's cave abode, then took a casual glance at his surroundings as he remarked, "I've known you for quite a few years up to this point, but only now am I discovering that

you're quite a frugal cultivator, Elder Li. It's quite impressive that just these 10 servants of yours have been able to keep your cave abode in such good order."

"You're far too kind, Brother Qi. My cave abode is indeed in good order, but only because there's barely anything in it," Han Li chuckled.

His guest hall was extremely bare with no furnishings or ornaments aside from a table and some chairs.

He had visited Qi Liang's cave abode in the past, and it was far more extravagant and lavish than his own.

"As True Immortals, neither of us is truly attached to these materialistic things. I admire you greatly for focusing wholeheartedly on your cultivation and now allowing yourself to be distracted by materialistic indulgence, Brother Li," Qi Liang chuckled.

"So what brings you here today, Brother Qi?" Han Li asked.

"I just came over from the High Profound Palace, and I decided to come and pay you a visit on the way back. By the way, you still haven't heard about the mission released by Deputy Dao Lord Xiong today, right?" Qi Liang asked as a hint of excitement appeared in his eyes.

The High Profound Palace was where missions were released and taken in the Blaze Dragon Dao's inner sect, and Han Li was naturally aware of its existence, but he had been busy cultivating and searching for his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords this entire time, so he had no intention of taking on any missions, and as a result, he hadn't visited the High Profound Palace even once.

"What mission's gotten you this excited, Brother Qi?" Han Li asked.

"Deputy Dao Lord Xiong is searching for 10 True Immortal cultivators who are proficient in the art of flying sword manipulation to help him refine a treasure. He's offering a huge reward of this number of merit points to each person after the mission is completed," Qi Liang said in a mysterious manner as he held up five fingers.

"50 merit points?" Han Li asked.

"500! I know you're far more proficient in the art of flying sword manipulation than I am, and that's why I invited you to come with me," Qi Liang said as the excitement in his eyes grew even more pronounced.

Han Li was also rather tempted upon hearing this.

Even though he had never been to the High Profound Palace, he knew that 500 merit points was an extremely opulent reward for a single mission.

"It's been a very long time since there's been a mission with such a lavish reward and no danger involved. Many elders who are only slightly familiar with the art of flying sword manipulation have already signed up, I'm sure you're not going to pass up an opportunity like this, right, Brother Li?" Qi Liang asked with a smile.

Han Li contemplated the offer for a moment, then nodded as he replied, "You've already come to invite me in person, so it would be rude of me to refuse."

He wasn't in the mood to be carrying out any missions, but Qi Liang had come to extend an invitation to him in person, and they were on good terms with one another, so it would've been unbecoming of him to refuse. Furthermore, 500 merit points was a very tempting reward.

Thus, the two of them quickly departed from the cave abode, and Han Li instructed Meng Yungui to look after the Crimson Dawn Peak, following which he and Qi Liang quickly flew away into the distance as two streaks of light, leaving Meng Yungui to look on with deep admiration in his eyes.

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The High Profound Palace was situated on the Cloud Piercing Peak, and just as the name suggested, the mountain was extraordinarily tall, extending all the way up into the clouds.

Furthermore, vegetation was extremely sparse along the entire mountain, and the rock faces of the mountain were extremely smooth. As a result, even monkeys found it extremely difficult to climb.



A sea of rainbow clouds had been conjured up to conceal the mountain summit, and it was giving off rainbow radiance that could be clearly seen even from hundreds of kilometers away.

The High Profound Palace was situated atop the sea of rainbow clouds, and it was over 100 feet tall and entirely of a dark azure color. Its walls, bricks, and tiles were all made from extremely dense and sturdy materials, giving one the feeling they were looking at a heavy mountain, leading one to worry about whether the sea of rainbow clouds down below would be able to support its weight.

In front of the palace was a massive bluestone plaza with around a dozen thick stone pillars standing on its edges.

The pillars had all types of extremely life-like exotic beasts engraved onto them, including the Heavenly Dragon, the Rainbow Phoenix, the White Tiger, and the Xuanwu Turtle.

The view from the plaza was completely uninhibited, and the blue sky was as clear as a mirror, presenting a stunning sight to behold.

The High Profound Palace was one of the liveliest places in the entire Blaze Dragon Dao. There was a teleportation pavilion situated on the plaza, with people occasionally making their way in and out of the building.

There were also streaks of light that were hurtling through the air from all directions before landing on the plaza.

Strictly speaking, there were no restrictions when it came to the status of those coming to accept missions here, so even outer sect disciples could come here for missions if they felt that they were up to the task, but the vast majority of people here were inner sect disciples.

Right at this moment, two streaks of light arrived from the distant sky, then landed on the plaza to reveal Han Li and Qi Liang.

Respectful looks immediately appeared on the faces of the nearby disciples at the sight of their inner sect elder robes, and everyone gave Han Li's duo a wide berth.

Han Li took a glance at his surroundings, and he was forced to reevaluate his impression of the Blaze Dragon Dao's overall power.

The people entering and exiting the High Profound Palace were of a wide array of different cultivation bases, with the vast majority of them above the Nascent Soul Stage, and even some Body Integration and Grand Ascension cultivators could be seen.

It could be said that just the cultivators at the High Profound Palace at this moment would've already been countless times more impressive than the overall collection of cultivators of a major sect in the Spirit Realm.

Qi Liang was clearly already accustomed to this, and he strode directly toward the High Profound Palace.

Han Li trailed along behind him, and they quickly arrived in front of the palace before stepping inside.

As soon as they did so, Han Li instantly felt his field of view widen significantly, as if the space inside the palace had suddenly expanded by tenfold, and it was a rather indescribable feeling.

From the outside, the palace didn't appear to have been all that large, but its interior space wasn't much smaller than the plaza outside.

Could it be that there's some type of spatial law restriction cast upon the palace? Han Li speculated to himself.

After making his way into the palace, Qi Liang only paused for a moment before making his way deeper inside.

The most eye-catching things inside the palace were three massive stone walls situated at its center. Each wall was around 200 to 300 feet tall and over 100 feet wide, and one of them was white, the second one was azure, and the last one was golden in color.

The three walls were standing next to one another in the sequence of white, azure, and golden from left to right.

The white wall was situated closest to the outside of the palace, the azure wall was standing at the center, while the golden wall was situated in the deepest part of the palace.

Each wall had lines of clear text that were glowing with spiritual light displayed on their surface, denoting a series of missions.

Judging from the numbers of the lines of text, the white wall had the most number of missions, with over 1,000 in total, while the azure wall had fewer missions, and the golden wall had the least number of missions.

"The three walls hold missions of different levels of difficulty. The missions on the white wall are the easiest to complete and are generally suitable for those at or below the Deity Transformation Stage, the azure wall holds missions that generally cater to those at or above the Spatial Tempering Stage, while the golden wall is for True Immortal cultivators like us," Qi Liang explained as he made his way straight to the golden wall down the back.

There were even more people in the hall, and it was rather crowded. In particular, there were many people gathered near the white and azure walls.

However, there were only a few True Immortal Stage elders standing in front of the golden wall, and it seemed that none of the inner sect disciples dared to approach the wall.

Han Li had acquainted himself with some inner sect elders during the past few years, but he didn't know who these elders were.

In contrast, Qi Liang clearly had a larger network of acquaintances than Han Li, and he greeted all of the other elders in a friendly fashion, to which the elders responded in kind.

"Everyone, this is Fellow Daoist Li Feiyu. He joined our sect just a few years ago, and he currently resides on the Crimson Dawn Peak. Elder Li, these are..."

Qi Liang gave Han Li an introduction of all of the elders, and Han Li greeted them one by one, then engaged in some small talk before directing his gaze toward the golden stone wall.

Meanwhile, Qi Liang was still chatting with the other elders, and it seemed that he was quite socially outgoing.

There were quite a few missions on the golden wall, and sure enough, all of them were quite difficult to complete. Furthermore, the rewards also weren't very alluring, ranging from only several dozen to under 200 merit points per mission.

Han Li was rather concerned upon seeing this.

It seemed that earning merit points was going to be far more difficult than he anticipated. The second level cultivation art of the Mantra Axis Scripture was going to cost 9,000 merit points, and he didn't know how many missions he would have to complete to get to that number.

There were some missions that offered higher rewards, namely the dozen or so missions at the very top of the stone wall. These missions were denoted in special red text, in contrast with the white text of normal missions, and they were special missions released by the sect.

All of these special missions offered extremely lavish rewards, with even the lowest reward standing at 800 merit points, while the majority of the missions boasted rewards in excess of 1,000 merit points, but all of them were extremely difficult and perilous to complete.

Among these missions, the one that offered the lowest reward required one to slay a Windfire Fox at the pinnacle of the True Immortal Stage and bring back its complete carcass.

Han Li had read about Windfire Foxes in the past. They were a type of social spirit beast that resided in the northernmost region of the Ancient Cloud Continent. These foxes possessed Deity Transformation Stage power from birth, as well as both wind and fire-attribute abilities. Upon reaching full maturity, they would attain Body Integration Stage power, and only a Windfire Fox Monarch would be able to reach the pinnacle of the True Immortal Stage.

Han Li had witnessed the power of that late-True Immortal Stage octopus sea beast, and he knew that at his current level of power, he wouldn't have been able to slay such a creature, much less slay a Windfire Fox Monarch at the pinnacle of the True Immortal Stage among an entire pack of spirit beasts.

As for the other missions, they were even more difficult, such as venturing into extremely perilous places to search for near-extinct materials or hunting down certain notorious evil immortals who were said to have already reached the Golden Immortal Stage.

A wry smile appeared on Han Li's face. At the moment, all he could do was examine these missions to broaden his horizons, but there was no way that he could take on any of them.

However, in the next instant, his gaze fell upon one of the red missions.

This mission was tucked in between a pair of missions with lengthy descriptions, so he had failed to notice it earlier. The mission description was extremely simple and concise: "Cultivate the Mantra Axis Scripture to the second level".

Despite this, it boasted an extremely high reward of 5,000 merit points!

## Chapter 204: Conflict Between Factions

A hint of befuddlement flashed through Han Li's eyes at the sight of this mission.

The mission description didn't state any other requirements. Could it really be that all that was required to earn those 5,000 merit points was to cultivate the Mantra Axis Scripture to the second level?

This mission may have appeared to have been extremely difficult for other people in the Blaze Dragon Dao, but given how smooth his progression in the cultivation art had been thus far, reaching the second level certainly didn't seem out of reach.

The 5,000 merit points was very alluring, but if he were to claim this reward, countless troubles would most likely follow. At the very least, he most likely wouldn't have been able to continue to keep a low profile while cultivating in the Blaze Dragon Dao.

Furthermore, he had already successfully opened up two immortal acupoints and attained four Time Dao Runes during the past few years, and this was extraordinary progress that he didn't want anyone to know about.

With that in mind, Han Li immediately dismissed any thought of taking on this mission and shifted his gaze away.

After briefly reading through the remaining red missions, he returned his attention to the white mission and began to quickly read through them as well.

There were many missions outlined in white on the wall, but Qi Liang had already told him what to look for, so it didn't take long for him to track down the missions released by Deputy Dao Lord Xiong, and sure enough, the reward was 500 merit points.

"What do you think?" Qi Liang asked as he approached Han Li with a smile.

"The mission is exactly as you described, Elder Li," Han Li replied in an ambiguous manner.

"In that case, we need to make haste. I heard from the others that quite a few elders have already taken on this mission. If we wait any longer, there could be no spots left for us," Qi Liang said in a slightly urgent voice.

He flipped a hand over to produce his elder badge as he spoke, then pointed it at the golden stone wall, and a streak of light immediately flew out of the mission in question before entering his elder badge.

Han Li did the same thing, and another streak of light flew out to enter his elder badge as well, upon which a strange design appeared on the surface of the elder badge.

After accepting the mission, the two of them promptly departed from the High Profound Palace without any delay.

Having already been in the Blaze Dragon Dao for countless years, Qi Liang was naturally far more familiar with the layout of the sect than Han Li, and he was leading the way throughout this entire process.

First, the two of them departed using a teleportation array in the teleportation hall, then flew for close to half a day before arriving near a huge mountain.

The world's origin qi here was far more abundant than that of Han Li's Crimson Dawn Peak.

The mountain stretched all the way up into the clouds and was entirely golden in color, seemingly formed by some type of ore. Furthermore, the mountain was remarkably straight and even down the sides, resembling a giant golden sword that was piercing up into the heavens when viewed from a distance.

Concealed within the clouds and mist on the mountain summit were a series of undulating palaces that were basked in an indistinct golden glow, lending them an air of mystery.

There was also a slightly smaller mountain near this one, and some palaces were situated on the summit of this shorter mountain as well. Both mountain summits had restrictions placed upon them, so there was no snow gathered on either of them.

The two mountains were connected by a long golden bridge that resembled a glowing band of golden light hovering in mid-air, presenting a majestic sight to behold.

"This is the Heavenly Sword Peak, home to Deputy Dao Lord Xiong's cave abode," Qi Liang introduced as he pointed at the giant mountain from afar.

"It's certainly a breathtaking place," Han Li praised.

"Indeed. Deputy Dao Lord Xiong is a man of many rules, and the main peak is a restricted area that outsiders are not permitted to set foot on. All visitors must first go to the secondary peak, where they're then teleported to the main peak to meet Deputy Dao Lord Xiong," Qi Liang said in a low voice.

Han Li was rather taken aback to hear this, but then quickly nodded in response.

Moments later, the two of them descended onto a flat area on the summit of the shorter of the two mountains.

The area on the summit of the secondary peak wasn't very large, with only a few side halls and pavilions constructed on it. However, they were arranged in an extremely intricate fashion and didn't appear shabby in the slightest.

Han Li's duo was quickly greeted by a white-robed young man who appeared to have been a servant of Xiong Shan's, and he said in a respectful voice, "Welcome, elders. Have you taken on the mission from the High Profound Palace?"

"Precisely. Would you be able to inform Deputy Dao Lord Xiong of our arrival?" Qi Liang asked.

"He's currently on the main peak right now, please come with me," the white-robed young man said, then led the way toward the main peak.

Qi Liang and Han Li exchanged a glance before following along.

The white-robed young man led them onto the golden bridge before stepping onto it, and Qi Liang asked, "Is it alright for you to take us straight to Deputy Dao Lord Xiong without consulting him first?"

"Master Xiong has instructed me to take all elders who have taken on his mission straight to the main peak without delay," the white-robed young man replied in a respectful voice, and Qi Liang nodded in response.

"How many elders have already accepted the mission?" Han Li asked.

"27," the white-robed young man replied.

Qi Liang's expression changed slightly upon hearing this. There were only 10 spots available.



"It's alright. The fact that he's taking us there indicates that Deputy Dao Lord Xiong still hasn't decided who he's going to recruit yet. I presume we'll need to undergo some type of examination, and it won't be a case of first come first served," Han Li communicated to Qi Liang through voice transmission.

"Indeed. Thank you for the reminder, Brother Li," Qi Liang replied as a hint of embarrassment appeared on his face.

He had reached a critical point in his cultivation and desperately needed the 500 merit points, so in his urgency, he had somewhat lost his sense of reason.

Beneath the golden bridge was vast abyss that was filled with cloud and mist, a sight that would've been sure to give a mortal intense vertigo.

This was naturally not a problem for Han Li's trio, and they quickly crossed the golden bridge before arriving on the main peak.

The area on the summit of the main peak was over 10 times the size of that of the Crimson Dawn Peak, and it was littered with exquisite palaces and spires, as well as countless pavilions, gardens, and bodies of flowing water.

All of the buildings and even the ground had been constructed from precious materials, the most commonly used of which was the golden material that the mountain was entirely comprised of.

The palaces and buildings were all giving off bright radiance that further contributed to a sense of opulence, and under the guidance of the white-robed young man, Han Li and Qi Liang made their way down a wide white jade path for around 15 minutes before arriving in front of a golden palace.

This was a guest hall where the other 27 elders were already assembled, and they were split up into two circles that were seated to the left and to the right of the hall, with each side displaying some slight animosity toward the other.

The dozen or so people on the left were quite relaxed, and they were chatting amicably with one another with a hint of superiority on their faces, while the group on the right remained silent for the most part.

Most of the people in the hall immediately turned to Han Li and Qi Liang upon their arrival, but due to the fact that Han Li had only recently joined the sect, everyone looked away after taking only a brief glance at him.

Among the group on the right, a man with a coarse beard stood up and approached Han Li's duo as he said, "I knew you definitely wouldn't pass up a mission like this, Brother Qi. Why have you only just gotten here?"

"I'm not as well-informed as you are, Brother Nan. I came here as soon as I heard about this mission, but you still managed to beat me here," Qi Liang replied with a smile.

"I just have an impatient personality. There's no benefit to arriving early, all I've done is sit around and twiddle my thumbs," the bearded man chuckled, then turned his gaze to Han Li.

"Who's this?"

"This is Brother Li, an inner sect elder who only joined our sect a few years ago, and he currently resides on the Crimson Dawn Peak," Qi Liang introduced.

"I've heard much about you, Brother Nan," Han Li said as he cupped his fist in a salute.

"Come take a seat, Brother Li," the bearded man said as he dragged Han Li and Qi Liang to the circle on the right.

As soon as Qi Liang sat down, quite a few people immediately approached to greet him.

Han Li recognized one or two of the other elders present, but he wasn't very familiar with them at all, and they only exchanged a few nods and some small talk.

All of a sudden, the atmosphere on the right side of the hall had livened up a little, and those on the left side of the hall were rather displeased to hear the chatter ringing out from the other side. In fact, someone even cleared their throat to express their displeasure.

Han Li didn't recognize the people on the left side of the hall, but he had a rough idea of who they were.

Most of these people were former inner sect disciples who had managed to reach the True Immortal Stage through countless millennia of cultivation, and many of them were direct lineal descendants of certain major clans in the Blaze Dragon Dao, thereby granting them the status of inner sect disciple from birth.

These were people who had grown up in the Blaze Dragon Dao their entire lives, and they had always looked down on outsiders like Han Li, most of whom were formerly itinerant cultivators.

In addition to their status granting them a sense of superiority, they were also opposed to the existence of these outsiders who had joined the sect as they had to compete with these outsiders for cultivation resources.

Even though Han Li had only been in the Blaze Dragon Dao for several years, he had already developed a clear sense of the conflict and animosity between these two factions.

The higher-ups of the Blaze Dragon Dao were naturally aware of the situation, but they hadn't displayed any intention of mitigating this conflict. Instead, they were encouraging this type of competition as it was conducive for overall improvement.

This was one of the important reasons why the Blaze Dragon Dao had been able to churn out so many powerful cultivators of late.

Han Li cast his gaze toward the left side of the hall, and his attention was quickly drawn to a man who appeared to have been in his thirties.

He was wearing a golden crown and stood with his back ramrod straight, with a pair of wide shoulders that gave him an imposing appearance. His eyes were long and thin, and there was a sharp gleam flashing within them, much like the gleam of a sword.

Even though he was just sitting there, he clearly stood out from the crowd, and it felt as if everyone else were merely stars that paled into insignificance compared with the moon that he was.

Qi Liang noticed the direction of Han Li's gaze, and he introduced in a low voice, "That man's name is Zhu Feng. He managed to open his 12 immortal acupoints to reach the mid-True Immortal Stage as early as 10,000 years ago, and he cultivates a sword dao scripture.

"He resides on the Langya Peak, so he's known as the Langya Sword Immortal, and he's quite renowned among inner sect elders. Given his proficiency in the art of the sword, he's almost certainly guaranteed one of the 10 available spots for the mission."

Han Li nodded in response.

Zhu Feng appeared to have been quite an arrogant man, only speaking when spoken to by those around him, and he didn't even spare a single glance toward Han Li and the others.

Han Li observed Zhu Feng for a moment long before withdrawing his gaze as he closed his eyes to meditate.

Close to a day quickly passed by, and during this time, seven or eight more elders arrived one after another.

As a result, the number of people in the hall swelled to over 40, and almost all of the seats had been taken.

This was the equivalent of nothing more than the blink of an eye for True Immortal cultivators, and they were waiting for someone of a very lofty status, so no one displayed any impatience.

However, at this point, the hall was far more quiet than before, and most people had ceased their conversations, choosing to meditate with their eyes closed instead.

Chapter 205: Origin Defying Stone Sword

After roughly another two hours had passed, the sound of footsteps rang out from inside the palace, and Xiong Shan's short and stocky figure emerged.

A pleased look appeared on his face at the sight of the 40 or so elders gathered in the palace, and everyone rose to their feet in unison before extending respectful bows toward him.

"We pay our respects to Deputy Dao Lord Xiong!"

"No need for formalities. Come with me, everyone," Xiong Shan said with a dismissive wave of his hand, then made his way toward a door in the corner of the hall.

Everyone in the hall hurriedly followed along, while Xiong Shan made his way out of the hall and through a long corridor, then arrived in what appeared to have been a drill ground.

The area was over 10,000 feet in size, and it was completely empty aside from 10 huge stone swords laid flat against the ground.

Every single one of these stone swords was around 70 to 80 feet tall, and their blades were extremely thick with countless complex patterns engraved upon them, giving off a peculiar aura that resembled sword qi, but was also completely different.

Han Li swept his gaze over the stone swords, and a hint of surprise appeared in his eyes, followed by a look of realization.

"I'm sure all of you already know what this mission is about. I require 10 fellow daoists who are proficient in the way of the sword to help me refine a treasure. There are more than 40 of you here, so I've arranged a trial to examine your level of proficiency in the art of the sword," Xiong Shan declared in a direct and straightforward manner.

Everyone present had already roughly guessed that this would be the case, so no one was surprised by this announcement. However, the animosity between the native and non-native elders had only become more pronounced in the wake of this declaration.

Zhu Feng suddenly stepped forward with a smile as he said, "Deputy Dao Lord Xiong is the number one swordsman among all of the 36 deputy dao lords, so I'm sure just participating in this trial alone will be extremely beneficial to our future cultivation. How thoughtful of you, Deputy Dao Lord Xiong."

He was very cold and arrogant to everyone else, but in the presence of Xiong Shan he had adopted a humble facade paired with a fawning smile.

Many people immediately turned to look at Zhu Feng upon hearing this, and Xiong Shan's gaze was also drawn to him.

His expression remained unchanged, but a hint of warmth had crept into his cold eyes, and he continued, "The trial that I've arranged is very simple. These stone swords here are Origin Defying Stone Swords that I personally refined using special methods.

"There are special restrictions set up in the swords, making it so that only those who are truly skilled in the art of sword manipulation can control them. You can all come and give them a try, and the outcome of your trial will depend on the number of stone swords that you manage to control."

Everyone directed their attention toward the stone swords upon hearing this.

This was a very unique examination.

This was the first time that everyone had heard of these Origin Defying Stone Swords, and even though there were only 10 of them present, Xiong Shan's words clearly implied that this was not going to be an easy trial, so everyone was feeling rather hesitant. No one was willing to go first, and even Zhu Feng was looking a little unsure of himself.

Qi Liang approached Han Li with a slightly uneasy look in his eyes as he asked through voice transmission, "What do you think, Brother Li?"

"I don't see anything amiss for now, but there's definitely more to these Origin Defying Stone Swords than meets the eye, and I presume they won't be easy to control at all," Han Li replied.

Everyone else was also communicating with one another through voice transmission.

Xiong Shan was rather displeased by the hesitance that everyone was displaying, and he said in a cold voice, "I only want 10 people who can meet my standards. Once the 10 spots are filled, the trial will be over."

Everyone's expressions changed slightly upon hearing this, and they knew that they couldn't hesitate any longer.

A balding inner sect elder instantly flew over to the stone swords as he volunteered, "I'll go first!"

Xiong Shan gave a slight nod upon seeing this.

"When are you preparing to have a go, Brother Li?" Qi Liang asked through voice transmission.

"There's no hurry. Despite what Xiong Shan's saying, the fact that he's offering such a large reward for this mission indicates that he'll definitely want the best possible team that he can assemble. Hence, he'll definitely wait until everyone's attempted the trial before deciding who to select. Let's allow these people to go ahead of us so we can learn by observing them," Han Li replied.

An enlightened look appeared in Qi Liang's eyes upon hearing this. "That's a great idea, Brother Li!"

There were a few other people who seemed to have arrived at the same conclusion as Han Li, and they were looking on with relaxed expressions, seemingly in no hurry to attempt the trial.

Right at this moment, the balding elder gently exhaled, and a burst of faint white light appeared over his body, releasing a bone-chilling aura through the air.

A burst of dazzling white light then erupted out of his body before forming a projection of a giant white sword.

The sword projection was giving off glacial sword intent, and countless snowflakes immediately appeared in the nearby space, dancing through the air in a beautiful sight to behold.

Han Li couldn't help but be rather impressed with the balding elder's mastery over the way of the sword.

These snowflakes appeared to have been rather unremarkable, but they hadn't been formed by freezing the moisture in the air. Instead, they had been manifested by the countless streaks of sword qi that he had unleashed, and an exceptional degree of control was required to accomplish this feat.

The balding elder let loose a low roar as he made a hand seal with one hand while pointing directly forward with the other, and the giant sword projection above his head instantly split up into two, with one of the split sword projections flying into one of the stone swords.

The original sword projection instantly shrank a little as a result.

A layer of glacial white light appeared over the surface of the stone sword, yet right at this moment, the runes on the sword began to glow with faint black light while flashing rapidly like dancing flames.

Most of the white light clinging to the sword was instantly dispelled like a layer of melting ice.

The balding elder hurriedly made another string of hand seals upon seeing this, and another sword projection that was several times larger than the previous one split off from the giant sword projection above his head before surging into the stone sword in a flash.

The giant sword projection shrank down significantly once again, while a layer of bright white radiance appeared over the stone sword alongside countless white runes that resembled tiny swords.

At the same time, a layer of black light re-emerged over the surface of the stone sword to combat the white light, but on this occasion, the white light was far more resolute and was able to hold its own.

"Up!" the balding elder yelled in a forceful voice, and the stone sword shuddered momentarily before slowly rising up into the air.



Even though it had risen up from the ground, the black light released by the stone sword hadn't faded. Instead, it was only beginning to flash even more insistently, causing the stone sword to tremble incessantly.

A solemn look appeared on the balding elder's face, and he made a rapid string of hand seals, expending a great deal of effort to finally stabilize the stone sword.

After doing all of this, a faint sheen of sweat had appeared on his forehead as he cast his gaze toward the other stone swords.

Upon witnessing the trouble that the balding elder was having with the trial, everyone was becoming quite apprehensive.

Meanwhile, a layer of faint blue light appeared within Han Li's eyes, and he was staring intently at the stone sword that was hovering in mid-air, seemingly contemplating something.

The balding elder wasted no time as he made another string of hand seals, and a white sword projection vanished into a second stone sword, while his complexion gradually grew paler and paler.

White light flashed erratically over the surface of the second stone sword for a long while before it finally rose up into the air as well.

At this point, sweat was pouring down the balding elder's face, which had become as pale as a sheet of paper, as if he were under extreme strain.

After taking a moment to catch his breath, he gritted his teeth and turned to a third stone sword as he began to make a string of hand seals.

Controlling two stone swords was already close to his limit, and now that he was diverting his attention to a third sword, the two stone swords that were hovering in mid-air immediately began to tremble.

He let loose a low roar, doing everything in his power to stabilize the two airborne stone swords while focusing on lifting the third stone sword as well.

At this point, the giant sword projection above his head had already shrunk down significantly, and it flew through the air before vanishing into the third stone sword in its entirety.

The surface of the third stone sword began flashing with white light, and it looked as if it were about to rise up into the air, but right at this moment, the three stone swords shuddered in unison while emitting bright black light as if they were resonating with one another.

The white light on the surfaces of the three stone swords dissipated in unison, and the two airborne stone swords came crashing back down, plunging themselves deep into the ground.

The balding elder was panting heavily as a look of deep disappointment appeared in his eyes.

"Two stone swords," Xiong Shan declared in an indifferent voice with a slight shake of his head.

Everyone had fallen completely silent with grim looks on their faces.

The balding elder's heart immediately sank at the sight of Xiong Shan's reaction. He knew that there was most likely no chance that he would be chosen, and he heaved a faint sigh before backing away from the stone swords.

"Let me have a go!"

As soon as he stepped down, he was replaced by a red-haired young man, who strode toward the stone swords as dazzling red light began to radiate from his body.

Streaks of sword qi shot forth through the air, forming a massive crimson lotus flower around him. Every single flower petal was formed by countless streaks of crimson sword qi, and he was completely concealed within the lotus flower.

All of a sudden, a burst of crimson ripples erupted out of the lotus flower's stamen before surging into one of the stone swords.

A layer of crimson light instantly appeared on the surface of the stone sword, but just like before, a layer of black light emerged as well to viciously combat the crimson light.

I see... So this is why they're called Origin Defying Stone Swords.

Han Li nodded slightly to himself as blue light flashed within his eyes.

"You were right, Brother Li, there's definitely more to these swords than meets the eye. Can you tell what's so special about them?" Qi Liang asked through voice transmission.

"If I'm not mistaken, the patterns on the stone swords aren't just one type of restriction. Instead, they're able to react differently to those trying to control them in a bid to disrupt any such efforts," Han Li replied.

Qi Liang nodded with a contemplative expression upon hearing this.

While the two of them were conversing with each other, the red-haired young man had already picked up two stone swords, yet this seemed to have been his limit, and the crimson lotus flower around him was already beginning to waver.

Yet another burst of crimson ripples shot out of the lotus flower before surging into a third stone sword, and the stone sword shuddered momentarily, looking as if it were about to rise up into the air as well.

However, right at this moment, the three stone swords began to resonate with each other once again, and the two airborne stone swords instantly came plummeting back down onto the ground.

"Two stone swords. Next," Xiong Shan declared in an expressionless manner.

The crimson lotus flower faded to reveal the red-haired young man, who backed away with a dejected expression.

It looks like controlling three stone swords at once is a bottleneck, Han Li remarked to himself.

A third person immediately stepped up to the plate, but his proficiency in the art of sword manipulation was rather mediocre, and he was only able to lift one stone sword before backing away in embarrassment.

Before long, eight people had attempted the trial, but the most that anyone could lift at once was two stone swords, while the third stone sword stood before everyone like an insurmountable obstacle.

## Chapter 206: Moderation

After the eighth person stepped down, a seductive figure took his place.

It was a gorgeous white-robed woman with an extremely alluring figure, but her expression was as cold as ice.

She began to chant an incantation while making a series of hand seals, and rays of white light began to spread from her body like flowing water, forming a ball of white light that began revolving on the spot.

In the next instant, she suddenly switched to a different hand seal, and the ball of white light around her split up into three before surging into three stone swords at once.

Everyone was quite surprised by this approach, and they were looking on intently to see whether she would be able to successfully raise three stone swords at once.

Dazzling white light was glowing around the white-robed woman as she chanted a rapid incantation while flashing through a string of lightning-fast hand seals.

A white halo appeared around each stone sword, wrapping around their blades before lifting them up from the ground.

The three stone swords shuddered in unison, and it appeared that they were about to rise up into the air at once.

However, immediately thereafter, the patterns on the surfaces of the stone swords began to radiate dazzling black light, which pierced into the surrounding white light like sharp swords themselves.

The three white halos flashed erratically, but were able to withstand the assault and slowly lift the three stone swords up from the ground, much to everyone's amazement.

Someone had finally managed to control three of the stone swords at once!

Han Li was also quite impressed.

He recognized this woman as one of the non-native elders, and as a result, all of the elders who were exclaiming in amazement and approval were all formerly itinerant cultivators, while the native elders were far from impressed.

Instead, they felt as if they were being outmatched by the opposing faction, and it was far from a good feeling.

Three swords was clearly already the white-robed woman's limit, but she still attempted to control a fourth sword.

However, as soon as a fourth white halo appeared around the fourth stone swords, all four stone swords began to resonate once again, releasing black light that was far brighter than before and tore the white halos apart with ease.

"Three stone swords," Xiong Shan announced with a slight nod.

The woman heaved a faint sigh of relief, then stepped away from the stone swords.

The trial continued, and with the example set by the white-robed woman, everyone seemed to have been inspired, with the subsequent elders putting up better and better results. Out of the next dozen or so elders, three of them were ultimately managed to control three swords, one of whom was a non-native elder, while the other two were both from the opposing faction of native elders.

Even though this was only a trial, both sides were still treating this as a competition, but they were more reserved than they otherwise would've been had Xiong Shan not been present, only extending some quiet words of praise and encouragement to members of their respective factions.

At the moment, the two factions were evenly matched.

Xiong Shan was aware of the competition that was taking place, but he had no interest in which side was going to come out on top.

All of a sudden, a thought occurred to Qi Liang, and he closed his eyes, seemingly having been struck by a moment of enlightenment.

A few moments later, his eyes abruptly sprang open again, and an excited look had appeared on his face.

Having observed the proceedings up to this point and taken Han Li's subtle pieces of advice onboard, he was now confident that he would be able to lift three stone swords.

Han Li took a meaningful glance at Qi Liang, then cautioned through voice transmission, "Three swords alone may not be able to guarantee your selection. If you want to ensure that you'll claim a spot, you'll have to go a step beyond that."

"I'm well aware of that, but controlling four stone swords is far too difficult. Given my current level of mastery in sword manipulation, I may not be able to pull off such a feat even if I cultivate arduously for another 1,000 years," Qi Liang replied with a wry smile.

"There's no need to truly lift the fourth sword. All you have to do is use some tricks to put up a performance that's better than the other three sword elders," Han Li said, giving Qi Liang another vital tip.

Qi Liang's eyes immediately lit up upon hearing this, and he fell into deep thought once again.

While the two of them were conversing with one another, most of the elders had already undertaken the trial. The number of three sword elders had reached seven at this point, four of which were native elders, while only three were non-native.

The native elders were naturally quite pleased with this, and they were looking at the opposing faction with a hint of derision in their eyes, while the non-native elders were clearly not so happy.

Up to this point, no one had been able to control four stone swords.

"It looks like there's far more to this set of Origin Defying Stone Swords than meets the eye, Deputy Dao Lord Xiong. Allow me to give it a go," Zhu Feng said as he suddenly stepped forward and cupped his fist in a salute toward Xiong Shan.

Xiong Shan was clearly displaying a different attitude toward Zhu Feng compared with the other elders, and there was a hint of anticipation in his voice as he said, "I wasn't the one who invented these Origin Defying Stone Swords. Instead, they're a type of special treasure formerly used by the vastly renowned Boundless Sword Sect of the Northern Glacial Immortal Region to examine the level of sword mastery of its members.

"I managed to obtain them by chance, and it took me a great deal of effort to refine them. It's said that only those who have reached the very pinnacle of sword mastery will be able to control all 10 swords at once. You possess a good level of sword mastery, try and see if you can reach the four sword level."

"I'll do my best," Zhu Feng replied in a respectful voice.

Han Li's heart stirred slightly upon hearing mention of the Boundless Sword Sect.

Through his past readings, he had learned that this was an ancient sword cultivating sect that championed the way of the sword above all else, and an avid proponent of the idea that a single sword was all that was required to defeat even the most formidable of foes.

What was quite special about this sect was that it had extremely few members, never exceeding 10 members at a time, thereby making it a very mysterious organization.

The reason why the sect was so renowned was because its sect master, the Boundless Daoist, had left behind countless stories of legendary victories across the entire Northern Glacial Immortal Region.

However, for some reason, the sect suddenly fell into obscurity over 1,000,000 years ago, and it had completely disappeared at this point.

As these thoughts were running through Han Li's mind, Zhu Feng had already sprung into action as bright blue light erupted out of his entire body.

Countless thin blue threads then shot forth from his body, while waves of blue light proliferated outward in all directions, and the entire Heavenly Sword Peak was instantly enveloped by an incredibly sharp burst of sword intent.

Everyone present felt as if there were countless tiny blades piercing and slicing to their skin, while a bone-chilling sensation reached straight into the deepest parts of their hearts.

This amount of sword intent naturally felt like nothing more than a gentle spring breeze to Han Li, but Qi Liang abruptly shuddered as he was snapped back to his senses, and a hint of anger flashed through his eyes.

He was on the verge of grasping onto something after receiving those tips from Han Li, but he had been cut off at the most crucial juncture.

Qi Liang took a glance at the situation unfolding before him, then gave a cold harrumph before closing his eyes again as he continued to meditate.

Meanwhile, Zhu Feng was making a string of hand seals, sending countless blue threads sweeping through the air before surging into three of the stone swords at once.



The three stone swords trembled in unison before slowly rising up into the air.

Bright black light erupted from the stone swords in an attempt to struggle free from the blue threads, but the threads were extremely resolute, remaining firmly intact despite the vehement resistance.

There was a serious look on Zhu Feng's face, but he didn't appear to have been under much strain, and he opened his mouth to release another plume of thin blue threads that wrapped themselves around a fourth stone sword.

The four stone swords lit up in unison as streaks of black sword qi were released, slicing viciously against the blue threads.

Most of the blue sword threads were instantly severed, and Zhu Feng's complexion instantly paled as he gave a muffled groan.

As opposed to just ordinary sword threads, these threads were formed by a combination of his essential energy and spiritual power. Hence, the damage inflicted upon them was reciprocated straight to his soul.

Even though most of the blue threads had been severed, there were still some that were clinging on stubbornly, and a sharp gleam flashed through Zhu Feng's eyes as he let loose a loud roar.

The remaining threads instantly began to radiate dazzling blue light before latching onto the fourth stone sword, lifting it out of the ground and into the air.

In the next instant, streaks of black sword qi that were even more formidable than the previous ones emerged, severing all of the remaining blue threads with ease.

Zhu Feng's complexion paled even further as he threw up a mouthful of blood, but an excited look had appeared on his face.

Even though it was only for a moment, he really had managed to control four stone swords.

"With each additional Origin Defying Stone Sword, the difficulty increases by tenfold. Even though it was quite forced, you have reached the four sword level, which is already quite impressive, given the amount of time that you've been cultivating for," Xiong Shan said with an approving nod.

"Thank you for your kind praise, Deputy Dao Lord Xiong," Zhu Feng said as he cupped his fist in a gleeful salute.

"Next," Xiong Shan said with a dismissive wave of his hand.

Zhu Feng stepped away before swallowing a pill, and his complexion quickly recovered.

As soon as he stepped away, he was immediately surrounded by all of the other native elders who showered him with praise.

In stark contrast, the non-native elders were looking far from pleased, feeling as if they were being outmatched by their competition.

The trial continued, and there were fewer than 10 elders left. However, having observed the proceedings for so long, all of the remaining elders had developed some insight into how best to conduct the trial, and it didn't take long before three more elders capable of controlling three swords emerged, two of which were from the non-native elders' camp.

Thus, each side had five three sword elders, but thanks to Zhu Feng's four sword performance, the native elders held a clear edge.

Qi Liang's expression darkened slightly upon seeing this. If he wanted to be selected, then he would have to go beyond just a three sword performance.

Right at this moment, Han Li's voice rang out from beside him. "I'll go take my turn now, Brother Qi."

"Given your powers, this trial is definitely no problem for you. If possible, please attempt a fourth sword to show those other elders what we're made of," Qi Liang replied through voice transmission.

"I'll do my best," Han Li said with a wry smile.

He then took a deep breath, seemingly to steel himself before striding toward the stone swords.

Having observed the proceedings up to this point, his concern wasn't that he wouldn't be able to control enough swords to be selected. Instead, he was worried about attracting too much attention if he were to control too many swords.

In the face of Xiong Shan, who was at the pinnacle of the True Immortal, he had to exercise moderation in order to not stand out excessively.

Xiong Shan faltered slightly at the sight of Han Li, following which a hint of recognition appeared in his eyes. Prior to this, he hadn't noticed Han Li in the crowd.

Thinking back to the pitiful aptitude that Han Li had displayed back at the Ostentatious Palace, Xiong Shan averted his gaze with a derisive look on his face.

## Chapter 207: The Fourth Stone Sword

Han Li inhaled slightly as he stood in front of the Origin Defying Stone Swords, then began to chant an incantation while making a series of hand seals.

Streaks of azure spiritual light flew out like swords, surging into the first stone sword in a flash.

All of the non-native elders were rather disappointed to see Han Li adopting such a mundane approach, while all of the native elders looked on with mockery on their faces.

In their eyes, Han Li would've been lucky to control even a single stone sword with such a clumsy approach.

In fact, many of the elders had already turned their eyes elsewhere in disinterest.

The stone sword was enveloped by a layer of azure light, then slowly rose up into the air.

It was constantly releasing black light to combat the azure light, but the latter remained resolute, even though it was flashing erratically.

Han Li pointed a finger forward upon seeing this, and more streaks of azure swordlight surged out of his fingertip before vanishing into a second stone sword.

A burst of azure swordlight enveloped the second stone sword as well, and it also slowly rose up into the air.

Many people turned to Han Li with surprise in their eyes upon this, and they finally returned their attention to the ongoing trial, realizing that they had underestimated Han Li.

Han Li's face had paled slightly after lifting two stone swords, but he didn't appear to have been struggling very much at all.

Is this going to be another three sword performance?

Meanwhile, Qi Liang was watching with a confident smile. He was more aware of Han Li's sword mastery than anyone else present, and he knew that three swords definitely wasn't a problem for Han Li.

What he was concerned about was whether Han Li would be able to lift a fourth sword and rebuke the native elders.

Han Li took a moment to catch his breath, then extended a finger yet again to send a streak of azure light surging into a third stone sword.

Following a string of hand seals, the third stone sword rose up into the air as well, but it did so in a far more sluggish manner than the first two swords, indicating that Han Li was approaching his limits.

"That's three swords!"

A chorus of surprised voices rang out from the elders of both camps.

Xiong Shan was also quite taken aback to see this, and a hint of intrigue had appeared in his eyes.

It seemed that despite Han Li's terrible aptitude, he was quite a master of sword manipulation.

The black light released by the three stone swords was causing the azure light to flash erratically, looking as if it would shatter at any moment.

Han Li's complexion paled even further as large beads of sweat appeared on his forehead.

He made a rapid string of hand seals to release one streak of azure light after another, most of which surged into the first three stone swords to stabilize them, while the rest began surging into the fourth stone sword.

The surprise in Xiong Shan's eyes grew even more pronounced upon seeing this, while the chatter among the elders grew even louder.

Even Zhu Feng's brows had furrowed slightly upon seeing this.

Qi Liang couldn't help but take a step forward as he stared at the fourth stone sword with a tense look on his face, as if he were the one taking the trial instead of Han Li.

A layer of dazzling azure light appeared over the fourth stone sword, and everyone was watching with bated breath.

The fourth stone sword shuddered slightly before rolling over on the ground and rising up in a shaky fashion. However, in the next instant, dazzling black light erupted from all four of the stone swords in unison, tearing all of the azure light apart.

The four stone swords fell back down onto the ground, while Han Li gave a muffled groan as blood began to trickle down from the corner of his lips.

Everyone present was displaying different reactions to Han Li's performance, including elation, disappointment, relief, and surprise.

Qi Liang lowered his head as he heaved a long sigh, while Zhu Feng remained as expressionless as ever, but the looks in his eyes clearly betrayed his relief.

A wistful look appeared in Xiong Shan's eyes as he nodded and said, "I didn't think you would possess such outstanding aptitude in sword manipulation. You're not far away from the four sword level."

"Thank you for your kind praise, Deputy Dao Lord Xiong, I'm still far from reaching that level," Han Li replied in a modest manner.

"It's quite remarkable that you were able to reach this level as an itinerant cultivator. Make sure to work hard in your cultivation so you don't waste your talent," Xiong Shan praised in an uncharacteristic fashion.

Han Li felt this change in Xiong Shan's aptitude to be rather strange, but he still nodded in response.

A dark look appeared in Zhu Feng's eyes upon seeing this, but he quickly composed himself.

Han Li stepped away from the stone swords before taking a seat on the ground with his legs crossed, then took a Core Formation Stage pill that he was planning to bestow upon Meng Yungui and the others to aid in his recovery.

Some of the non-native elders were about to approach him to strike up a conversation, but they could give up on the idea upon seeing this.

The trial continued, and up to this point, Xiong Shan hadn't selected anyone, so it was clear that he was waiting until the end.

Upon making this realization, those who had gone earlier in the trial were left regretting their decision. Perhaps the outcome would've been different for them had they observed for a while longer.

As for those who were still yet to participate in the trial, they were all content to continue to observe, so no one stepped up to take Han L's place.

Xiong Shan's expression darkened slightly upon seeing this. "Why is no one stepping up? Are you forfeiting your right to take the trial? In that case, the trial concludes here..."

"I'll go next, Deputy Dao Lord Xiong," Qi Liang declared, then took a deep breath before striding toward the stone swords.

At this moment, faint azure light was flashing over Han Li's body, making it appear as if he were focusing on his own recovery, but in reality, he was pondering his own performance.

These Origin Defying Stone Swords did indeed provide quite a unique challenge, and Han Li was confident that he would've been able to at least control five swords had he gone all out. Perhaps he could've even challenged a sixth sword, but unfortunately, there was no way to find out, and that left him feeling a little forlorn.

However...

A thought suddenly occurred to him, and a barely detectable smile appeared on his face.

All of a sudden, the ground trembled violently as three stone swords came plummeting back down to earth.

Qi Liang's face had turned quite pale, but his eyes were full of elation.

Thanks to Han Li's guidance, he had put up a stellar performance, lifting three stone swords before also moving a fourth stone sword, so he had all but assured himself of one of the 10 available spots.

Han Li gave an undetectable nod of approval upon seeing this.

He had offered Qi Liang this guidance in order to repay him for acting as the guide that integrated him into the Blaze Dragon Dao.

"Three swords," Xiong Shan declared with a slight nod.

It didn't take long before all of the remaining elders had attempted the trial, but no one else was able to control three stone swords after Qi Liang.

Han Li opened his eyes before rising to his feet.

Out of the 40 or so inner sect elders who had taken on this mission, a total of 13 had managed to control three or more swords.

Among them, six were native elders, only one fewer than the non-native elder camp, and Zhu Feng was the only one who had managed to control four swords. However, Han Li and Qi Liang had both been able to budge a fourth sword, so ultimately, the two camps were quite evenly matched.

During the past contests between the two factions, the native elders had always held the upper hand due to the advantages that they enjoyed when it came to many aspects, such as resource allocation, so this outcome was naturally an extremely encouraging one for the non-native elders.

Only then did Xiong Shan slowly make his way toward the center of the room before sweeping his gaze over all of the elders assembled.

Those who had only managed to move one or two swords knew that they had no chance of being selected, so they were quite relaxed, and Zhu Feng's selection was obviously guaranteed. Hence, the only ones that were nervous were the 20 people who had managed to move three swords.

After a brief pause, Xiong Shan declared, "Zhu Feng, Li Feiyu, Qi Liang... Zhen Qi. The 10 of you can stay, the rest can leave."



Out of the 10 chosen, five were native elders, while the other five were non-native elders.

The bearded man with the Nan surname approached Han Li and Qi Liang, then cupped his fist in a salute as he said, "Congratulations, Brother Li, Brother Qi. If it wasn't for the two of you, we'd be looked down on again!"

His sword mastery wasn't of a very high level, and he was only just barely able to lift two stone swords, so he naturally wasn't selected, but he had quite an easygoing personality and wasn't bitter about it.

"I was just lucky," Qi Liang replied with a smile.

The other non-native elders expressed their congratulations to the five who were chosen, then promptly departed, leaving only Xiong Shan and the 10 selected elders in the hall.

A pleased look appeared on Xiong Shan's face at the sight of the 10 people standing before him, and he was just about to say something when a streak of black light suddenly appeared in the distant sky.

It was approaching like a bolt of black lightning, arriving directly above everyone in the blink of an eye amid a deafening thunderclap.

The streak of black light crashed down onto the drill ground, causing the entire area to shudder slightly, following which a purple-robed man was revealed.

The man wasn't exactly hideous in appearance, but his entire body was pitch-black in color, as if he had been smoked. He was over twice as tall as the average person, and his arms were as thick as a normal person's waist, while his fists were the size of washbasins. His entire body was comprised of thick bands of muscle that resembled black steel, causing his purple robe to bulge in many places.

"Brother Mo, this is my cave abode, not your Immortal Origin Palace. Don't you think it's a little inappropriate for you to just barge in like this?" Xiong Shan asked in a cold voice.

"My apologies, Brother Xiong. I heard that you were gathering sword cultivators to activate an array, so I immediately came here," the purple-robed man chortled, and his voice was so loud and penetrative that Han Li and the others could feel their eardrums ringing slightly.

Even though he was extending an apology, there was no hint of apology at all in his expression and the tone of his voice.

Xiong Shan gave a cold harrumph and didn't pursue the matter any further.

"Come to think of it, why didn't you tell me that you were going to use that sword array, Brother Xiong? According to our agreement, I lent you those things under the promise that I would be present when you refine your bonded treasure. Are you planning to go back on our agreement, Brother Xiong?" the purple-robed man asked.

"Is there any need for me to inform you? You know every little thing that goes on on my Heavenly Sword Peak like the back of your hand," Xiong Shan replied in a cold voice.

"Surely you jest, Brother Xiong," the purple-robed man chortled.

"Brother Li, this is Elder Mo Xie of the Immortal Origin Palace. It's said that he ran for the position of deputy dao lord 10,000 years ago, and after failing, he went into seclusion for close to 10,000 years, emerging far more powerful than before. I've heard that he's extremely close to reaching the pinnacle of the True Immortal Stage," Qi Liang informed.

Han Li gave a slight nod in response.

After hearing Xiong Shan refer to the purple-robed man as Brother Mo, Han Li had already guessed that this was Elder Mo Xie.

"Looks like these are the sword cultivators that you've gathered to help you. Tsk tsk, they don't look that great. I hope they can pull their weight," Mo Xie said as he took a condescending glance at Han Li and the others.

"That's not something for you to worry about. Let's go!" Xiong Shan harrumphed coldly, then flew into the distance as a streak of golden light.

Han Li and the others quickly followed along, while Mo Xie also sprang up into the air as a streak of black light.

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Not long after the departure of Xiong Shan and the others, a group of white-robed servants of the Heavenly Sword Peak made their way onto the plaza in an orderly fashion. All of them were at the Core Formation Stage, and they quickly set about carrying the Origin Defying Stone Swords away.

Not only were these stone swords very difficult to control, they were also extremely heavy, and it took around a dozen Core Formation cultivators just to be able to lift a single one of them.

Right as these people were beginning to lift the fourth stone sword, one of them suddenly let loose a cry of surprise, immediately drawing everyone's attention.

"What's going on, Senior Martial Brother Wang?"

"Look at the underside of this sword!"

## Chapter 208: Heavenly Sword Tomb

All of the Core Formation cultivators turned to inspect the underside of the fourth Origin Defying Stone Sword upon hearing this, and they were greeted by a peculiar sight.

A small line of text had appeared on the underside of the sword, and it read: "The number one sword cultivator of Heavenly South was here". [1]

It appeared that someone had forcibly engraved this line of text onto the surface of the sword, and every single stroke resembled a sharp sword in itself.

"What happened? I don't think this line of text was there before..."

"Could it be that one of the inner sect elders who just undertook the trial did this?"

"That's impossible! Deputy Dao Lord Xiong once said that these Origin Defying Stone Swords don't have any offensive power, but they're as hard as immortal treasures!"

"Then who could've done this?"

"It doesn't matter, just remember to never speak of this to anyone and pretend as if you saw nothing here. If Deputy Dao Lord Xiong finds out about this, all of us will be in huge trouble!"

"Of course."

"You're right, we have to keep this a secret."

"By the way, what kind of place is Heavenly South?"

"Who knows? Probably some insignificant place in the middle of nowhere..."

The chatter continued as the group of Core Formation cultivators carried the fourth Origin Defying Stone Sword away from the plaza.

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Meanwhile, Xiong Shan and the others had descended to the foot of the Heavenly Sword Peak, where they were hovering in the air in front of a golden mountain face.

With a rustle of his sleeves, four streaks of golden sword qi were released by Xiong Shan, and they circled around momentarily in the air before vanishing into a certain section of the mountain face up ahead.

Initially, the mountain face remained completely unmoved, and it was as if the two streaks of golden sword qi had simply vanished. However, in the next instant, bright golden light began to radiate from the surface of the mountain face, and countless golden runes sprang forth, intertwining in mid-air to form a strange diagram that resembled a sword array.

The section of the mountain face encompassed within the golden light gradually turned semi-transparent, and Mo Xie chuckled, "So this is the entrance of your vastly renowned Heavenly Sword Tomb. What an eye-opening sight this is."

Xiong Shan wore a solemn expression, and he offered no reply to Mo Xie as he swept his sleeves through the air while chanting an incantation, and more streaks of golden sword qi flew out of his sleeve before vanishing into the sword array, making it become clearer and clearer.

Han Li was inspecting the sword array before him with an intrigued expression, and through it, he could see a black passageway slowly taking shape on the mountain face.

Meanwhile, a hint of excitement had appeared on Qi Liang's face.

"You seem very excited, Brother Qi," Han Li remarked through voice transmission.

"You've only recently joined our sect, so it's no surprise that you haven't heard of the Heavenly Sword Tomb. Deputy Dao Lord Xiong is a renowned sword collector in our sect, and it's said that he's collected countless powerful swords in this Heavenly Sword Tomb, making it an extremely renowned place.

"However, it's also an extremely mysterious place, and barely anyone in the sect has had a chance to see it. I never thought that he would take us into the Heavenly Sword Tomb today. It looks like he must be intending to refine a treasure in there," Qi Liang explained.

"I see," Han Li replied with a contemplative nod, and he was also becoming rather intrigued.

At this point, Xiong Shan had already reached the final stage of his incantation, and the golden light radiating from the mountain face was growing even brighter, gradually forming a thick golden light barrier with countless runes shimmering on its surface.

A string of dull thumps rang out, and seven indentations appeared on the golden light barrier in a circular formation.

Xiong Shan abruptly ceased his chanting as he swept a sleeve through the air, releasing seven balls of white light that contained seven golden crescent-shaped talisman-like objects.

The seven golden talismans flew through the air before fitting seamlessly into the indentations on the light barrier at his behest.

Countless runes began to surge out of the golden light barrier, which gradually became thinner as the flow of runes continued, and the light barrier finally completely vanished after a full 15 minutes had passed.

A black passageway was revealed, and it was unclear where it led to. It was also impossible to examine what laid beyond the entrance with one's spiritual sense as some type of sensory restriction present.

"Come in," Xiong Shan said before leading the way into the passageway, followed closely by Mo Xie and everyone else.

Once everyone had entered the passageway, a burst of golden light surged over the mountain face, and the entrance of the passageway was closed again.

The dark passageway was quite long, and everyone only reached the conclusion after walking for a full 15 minutes. At the end of the passageway was a giant azure stone gate that was quite antiquated in appearance with countless runes engraved onto its surface.

Xiong Shan pulled out a badge before gently waving it at the azure stone gate, and a layer of azure light instantly appeared over the surface of the gate, as if it had awakened after a long slumber.

The azure light warped momentarily before forming an array that was even more complex than the one on the mountain face outside.

Immediately thereafter, Xiong Shan swept a sleeve through the air, and nine small azure swords came flying out one after another before plunging themselves into nine different parts of the stone gate.

The array on the surface of the stone gate flashed momentarily before gradually fading, and the gate slowly swung open.

Right at this moment, an incredibly bright burst of light erupted out from within, and the eruption of light had come so abruptly that everyone outside reflexively closed their eyes.

As the burst of dazzling light enveloped everyone, they instantly vanished from within the passageway, and by the time Han Li reopened his eyes, he could hear the sound of howling wind blowing past his ears.

It was as if the entire space were filled with countless bursts of powerful sword intent that were surging toward him from all directions.

After taking a moment to gather himself, he inspected his surroundings to find that he was standing on a vast grassland.

The grassland was riddled with dome-shaped graves, each of which had a flying sword plunged into it, and there were over 1,000 flying swords present.

Dispersed between the countless graves were 10 massive black stone pillars, each of which was separated by hundreds of kilometers, splitting up the entire Heavenly Sword Tomb into 10 sections.

Furthermore, there were three teams of cultivators stationed in each section, with each team consisting of a Grand Ascension Stage leader and nine Body Integration cultivators, amounting to a total of 300 cultivators.

Han Li swept his gaze over the grassland, and there was only a hint of surprise on his face, but in reality, he was astonished by what he was seeing.

Among the flying swords plunged into the graves, some were as slender as willow branches, some were as wide as palace gates, some were giving off glacial qi that had frozen all of the grass in a radius of several hundred feet, and some were burning with scorching flames that scorched the earth around them...

Every single one of the flying swords was swaying slightly from side to side while emitting a faint ringing sound, and astonishing sword qi was surging straight into the heavens, slicing all of the clouds up above into thin ribbons.

There were also some flying swords that would occasionally begin trembling violently while giving off a piercing screech as they attempted to pull themselves out of their graves. Whenever this happened, the cultivators stationed nearby would immediately make a string of hand seals to quell the unrest.

However, there were so many flying swords on the grassland that as soon as one flying sword was restrained, another one would begin struggling, with some even managing to pull themselves out of their graves altogether, so the cultivators present were constantly kept on their toes.

However, these cultivators seemed to have already grown accustomed to this, and they were able to perform their duties in a calm and orderly fashion.

Every single one of these flying swords was an exceptional treasure that a Body Integration or even a Grand Ascension cultivator would've sacrificed all of their belongings to acquire, and some of the premium flying swords in this tomb would've been extremely alluring even to True Immortal cultivators.

Such an astonishing collection of flying swords gathered in a single place would've been enough to shock anyone as this was no longer something that could've been acquired through wealth alone.

All of the True Immortal cultivators present had flying swords as their bonded treasures and were extremely proficient in the art of sword manipulation, so they were even more astonished by this extraordinary sight.



Zhu Feng reluctantly withdrew his gaze from the vast array of flying swords around him as he turned to Xiong Shan with an admiring expression and praised, "I had always heard that Deputy Dao Lord Xiong's Heavenly Sword Tomb was an extraordinary place, but even all of the rumors I've heard fail to do this place justice. I am truly humbled by what I have been shown today..."

There was some element of flattery to his words, but no one else found it to be overly sycophantic as they were thinking the same thing.

"I spent a great deal of time and effort over the past tens of thousands of years to gather these swords, and I must say, it was no easy task collecting the 1,080 flying swords required to form this sword array," Xiong Shan replied as a hint of pride flashed through his eyes.

However, Han Li wasn't listening to this conversation at all as his gaze was focused intently on the northwestern direction of the Heavenly Sword Tomb.

This was because there were 72 graves in that area, plunged into each of which was an azure flying sword. All of the azure flying swords were trembling incessantly as thin arcs of golden lightning flashed over them, as if they were trying to struggle free from their graves.

These 72 azure flying swords were none other than the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords that Han Li was searching for!

The flying swords seemed to have detected Han Li's presence, and they began to struggle even more violently, releasing dazzling arcs of lightning as they did so.

Han Li's pupils contracted slightly upon seeing this, and his first instinct was naturally to take back his flying swords.

However, there was no way that he could simply ask for them from Xiong Shan, and attempting to take them by force would've been no different from committing suicide.

With that in mind, he immediately suppressed his burning desire to recover his flying swords as he cut off the spiritual connection between himself and the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

## Chapter 209: Thousand Edge Spirit Gathering Array

With the spiritual connection severed, the lightning flashing from the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords immediately faded. However, for some reason, they were still struggling incessantly as if they were attempting to free themselves from their graves.

The three teams of cultivators stationed in that area immediately sprang into action upon seeing this, casting a series of incantation seals onto the graves of the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, which immediately began to glow with azure light while releasing bursts of tremendous restrictive force.

Even so, they were still unable to completely suppress the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords' resistance, and several of them were still struggling violently, as if they were trying to break free.

"What's going on, Senior Martial Brother Ye Feng? These flying swords have always done this every once in a while, but they've never been this hard to restrain," a purple-haired man mused with a perplexed expression.

Seated beside him was a dark-skinned young man who offered no reply, but he stood up from the ground before making his way over to the flying swords, then made a hand seal before raising his hands up into the air.

Several palm-sized black rocks instantly flew up into the air, then circled around in a series of gentle arcs before landing on the graves that the flying swords were plunged into with unerring accuracy.

The surfaces of these rocks were quite coarse, and they were giving off a faint black glow. They appeared to be quite ordinary, but in reality, these were Sword Restraining Stones, a type of strange material that could temporarily suppress the spiritual nature of flying swords.

As the Sword Restraining Stones descended from above, the graves began to glow brighter and brighter, while the struggles of the flying swords began to subside, and the arcs of lightning surging over them also faded.

Just like the Sword Restraining Stones, there was also more than met the eye to these unremarkable-looking graves. Not only were they able to nurture the flying swords that they held, ensuring that their spiritual nature didn't seep away without their former owners' care, they also restricted the swords and prevented them from flying away.

Once all of the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords had settled down, Ye Feng returned to his original spot before taking a seat again.

The purple-haired man could only heave an internal sigh upon seeing this.

Ye Feng had been one of the brightest rising stars in the sect, but for some reason, on a certain day several years ago, his personality suddenly underwent a massive change. He became extremely quiet, and his rapidly advancing cultivation base also stagnated, much to Elder Mo Xie's displeasure.

As these thoughts were running through the purple-haired man's mind, someone else approached him and said, "This is the final day that we'll be on duty in this Heavenly Sword Tomb. From tomorrow onward, we're going to struggle to find missions that are this safe and easy to complete while still yielding consistent merit points every month."

"Weren't you just complaining last time that this is the most boring mission you've ever been on?" the purple-haired man chuckled.

Meanwhile, at the entrance of the tomb, Han Li had severed his spiritual connection to the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, but his attention was still fixed on them.

Upon noticing that Ye Feng was one of the people looking after the swords here, one of the mysteries that had stumped him this entire time was solved.

Back when he first arrived in the Bell Toll Mountain Range, there was an occasion where Daoist Xie and the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords' auras had been cut off at the same time. As a result, he had assumed that they were together, and he was quite disappointed to have recovered Daoist Xie, only for there to still be no trace of the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

It had to have been the case that Ye Feng just so happened to have been on duty in the sword tomb on that day, and by activating the restrictive array here, both Daoist Xie and the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords' auras had been concealed at the same time, thereby leading to this misconception.

"I'm now going to tell you all about the mission that I gathered you here to complete," Xiong Shan said as he swept his gaze over everyone.

All of the True Immortal Stage elders, including Mo Xie, immediately fell silent to listen to what Xiong Shan had to say.

"The array that you're seeing right now is called the Thousand Edge Spirit Gathering Sword Array. Through the use of this array, I can erase the marks of the previous owners left in all of the flying swords in the Heavenly Sword Tomb and convert them into pure sword essence. My aim is to infuse all of this sword essence into my bonded flying sword," Xiong Shan declared.

Everyone was quite stunned by this declaration.

If it really were possible to gather all of the sword essence of these exceptional flying swords and infuse them into a single flying sword, then there was a very good chance that the recipient flying sword would become an Acquired Immortal Treasure of unimaginable power.

"As I'm sure you've already figured out, aside from the sword offering platform at the center, this place is split up into 10 areas. I need one of you in each area to control the flying swords there and help me erase the marks in those flying swords and convert them into sword essence," Xiong Shan continued.

Everyone immediately began to scour their surroundings upon hearing this, as if they were deciding which area they wanted.

Han Li was doing the same thing while pondering what Xiong Shan had just said, trying to gather some useful information from his words.

The graves in the sword tomb appeared to have been arranged in a random and haphazard fashion, but in reality, there was a clear order to them. For example, flying swords with similar sword intent or came

from the same origins would often be placed in the same area, while flying swords with conflicting sword intents would be split up into different areas.

At the center of each area was a black stone pillar that was over 30 feet thick and in excess of 100 feet tall. These were the array cores of each area, and each stone pillar had around a dozen longan-sized Immortal Origin Stones embedded into them.

Just this impressive collection of Immortal Origin Stones alone was already a stunning sight for all of the True Immortal Stage elders present.

"If you ask me, you should've erased the marks of the original owners of the flying swords in advance. Wouldn't that have made things far more convenient?" Mo Xie asked.

"You don't know anything! Once a mark is erased from a flying sword, it'll lose the majority of its spiritual nature, and what little remains will continue to seep away over time. Only by erasing the marks during the refinement process can I preserve their original spiritual nature and power to the greatest extent," Xiong Shan harrumphed coldly.

"I see, I've been enlightened," Mo Xie replied with a nonchalant smile.

Xiong Shan didn't waste any more time with words as he summoned a shimmering golden flying sword with a flick of his wrist.

The sword was over three feet in length and roughly two inches wide. It was entirely golden in color and was giving off peerlessly sharp sword intent. At the tip of the sword's hilt was a fearsome-looking ancient beast with its mouth wide open, and its eyes were giving off a sharp gleam, as if it were an actual living creature.

Everyone only took a single glance at the sword before looking away, as if they felt like the light radiating from the sword was too sharp for their eyes to behold without incurring harm.

"As expected of your bonded flying sword, Fellow Daoist Xiong. After the past few years of preparation, it's become even more formidable than before! Once its refinement is complete, I'm sure you'll be able

to use it to reach the Golden Immortal Stage after a few more centuries of seclusion," Mo Xie praised as his eyes lit up with amazement.

"Thank you for your kind words, Fellow Daoist Mo."

After summoning his bonded flying sword, Xiong Shan's aura had become even more formidable than before. He let loose a long roar as he rose up into the air alongside his sword, then flashed through the sky several times like lightning before arriving on the sword offering platform at the center of the grassland.

The platform was 360 feet in radius and 720 feet tall. It was entirely constructed from a glittering and translucent jade-like material, and there were all types of complex array patterns engraved upon it, as well as many unknown spirit stones embedded onto its surface, connecting together to form a massive array that encompassed the entire platform.

"I've been preparing for this day for tens of thousands of years. If everything goes well, we'll all be happy, but let me make this clear: if any one of you drops the ball at a critical moment, don't blame me for turning on you after the event," Xiong Shan said to Han Li and the others.

"Rest assured, Deputy Dao Lord Xiong, I'll be sure to do everything in my power to ensure everything goes smoothly," Zhu Feng vowed as he cupped his fist in a salute.

Several other native elders quickly followed suit and made similar promises, while Han Li and the non-native elders nodded in response.

"Get into position!"

With that declaration from Xiong Shan, Han Li and the other elders flew up into the air before racing toward different parts of the grassland.

Han Li immediately flew toward the northwest as a streak of azure light, but midway through his flight, he suddenly drew to an abrupt halt.

In the same instant, Zhu Feng flew past him, giving a derisive harrumph while glancing at Han Li out of the corner of his eye as he did so. He then flew into the area that the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were situated in before drifting down toward the black stone pillar in that area.

Han Li's eyes narrowed slightly upon seeing this, following which he turned and flew toward an area in the southwest.

These areas weren't split up very evenly, and not all of the areas had orderly shapes. Furthermore, the number of flying swords in each area also differed, with some containing only several dozen swords, while others contained over 100. The area where the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were situated was reserved only for the set of 72 swords.

If one had to describe exactly what shape the Thousand Edge Spirit Gathering Sword Array was, then it could only be likened to a flower bud that was about to bloom. The sword offering platform at the center of the area was like a stamen of the flower, while the 10 areas were like the petals around the stamen.

After everyone had adopted their positions, Xiong Shan brought his palms together in front of him before making a hand seal, and the golden flying sword hovering in front of him instantly began to radiate dazzling golden light.

He then began to chant an incantation, and there seemed to have been some type of strange force in the sword tomb resonating with his incantation, producing a sound that resembled heavenly music ringing out across the entire sky.

At the same time, the sword offering platform beneath him also began to glow brightly, as did the array on the platform.

A burst of loud rumbling rang out from the platform, and a white jade altar with side lengths of around three feet each began to slowly rise up from its center.

The altar was riddled with runes, and at its center was a black hole that perfectly matched the width of the sword.

## Chapter 210: Chaotic Swords Dance

Xiong Shan's incantation continued as he grabbed onto the hilt of the golden longsword with both hands, then slowly plunged it into the hole on the white jade altar.

A grating sound rang out, and as soon as the sword was plunged into the altar, the entire sword offering platform instantly shuddered violently, following which a dazzling pillar of white light rose up from its surface and erupted straight into the heavens.

At the same time, the Immortal Origin Stones embedded into the black stone pillars in all of the 10 areas began to glow brightly while releasing bursts of abundant spiritual power, which flowed into the patterns on the stone pillars like water.

The 10 black stone pillars shuddered in unison before releasing pillars of dazzling black light that shot high up into the sky.

The shreds of clouds in the sky were scattered even further by these pillars of light, and a gray light barrier that was visible even to the naked eye appeared up above, encompassing the entire sword tomb like an upside-down bowl.

A hint of excitement appeared in Xiong Shan's eyes upon seeing this, and his quiet chanting suddenly grew significantly louder, ringing out like thunderclaps in the heavens.

All of a sudden, golden light began to flash from the gray light barrier, forming a series of golden threads that connected with one another while swaying incessantly.

At the same time, a buzzing sound that resembled the flapping of wasp wings rang out across the entire sword tomb, and the sound was becoming louder and louder.

Han Li looked around to find that all of the flying swords in the area that he was situated in had begun to sway violently in unison, looking as if they were struggling with all their might to free themselves from their graves.



Due to how rapidly they were swaying from side to side, they were leaving sector-shaped afterimages above their graves.

Through his spiritual connection with his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, Han Li could feel a sense of intense fear, one that was shared by all of the other flying swords. It seemed that all of the swords in the sword tomb were terrified and wanted to leave this place.

He couldn't help but think back to how he had nurtured those Golden Lightning Bamboo trees back in the Mortal Realm, and how he had painstakingly refined those 72 Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords. An indescribable feeling welled up in his heart as these thoughts flashed through his mind.

On his long cultivation journey thus far, the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were the treasures that had been with him the longest aside from the Heaven Controlling Vial, enduring countless life and death situations alongside him.

At this moment, these flying swords that were connected to his soul were about to have their marks erased and their sword essence extracted, and Han Li was desperate to save them.

He wanted nothing more than to rescue his swords and flee the scene, but that would've been impossible.

The Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords seemed to have sensed his despair, and all of them began ringing even more loudly, as if they were working up the resolve to do something.

Through their spiritual connection, Han Li could sense the decision that they had made. If Han Li were unable to rescue them, then they would rather self-detonate than have their marks erased and be integrated into another sword.

Right at this moment, a faint buzzing sound suddenly rang out in the sky.

Han Li immediately looked up to find that all of the golden lines on the gray light barrier in the sky had fallen still, and they had formed countless golden sword visages.

These swords were all of different shapes and forms, with some as straight as arrows, while others had curved blades, and resembled ancient rulers, while others were shaped like sharp spikes.

Their sizes also varied drastically, with some standing at several thousand feet in size, resembling massive boats, while some were only around an inch in length, bearing a closer resemblance to a needle than a sword.

Thanks to Han Li's exceptional eyesight, he was able to see that even the tiniest of those swords were inscribed with a complete set of runes, and there weren't any visible imperfections.

As the giant sword array appeared, the sword qi within the entire heavenly sword tomb had swelled to several dozen times its original volume, and all of the grass on the ground was instantly torn to shreds, while a sharp aura permeated through the air.

The expressions of Han Li and the other inner sect elders standing on the black stone pillars all changed slightly upon seeing this.

The three teams that were stationed in each area were also looking on with solemn expressions as they remained completely still on the spot, not daring to move even in the slightest for fear of being torn to shreds by the sword qi that was surging around them.

All of a sudden, a hint of befuddlement welled up in Han Li's heart. Somehow, he felt like what he was witnessing right at this moment was rather familiar to him.

Right at this moment, all of the elders who were looking at the sword array up above gave a muffled groan in unison, as if they had been struck by an invisible blow, and all of them were forced to avert their eyes.

Even Mo Xie was only able to look at the sword array for fewer than 20 seconds before he was forced to look away by the sharp, unbearable pain in his consciousness.

Han Li was also experiencing the same thing, but thanks to his enormous spiritual sense, he was able to keep inspecting the array without pain after blinking a couple of times.

Right at this moment, Xiong Shan's voice suddenly rang out in everyone's minds. "The sword qi contained within this Thousand Edge Spirit Gathering Sword Array is quite harmful to spiritual sense, so I'd advise all of you not to look at it for too long."

Everyone naturally averted their eyes upon hearing this, not daring to try and glean the secrets that the sword array harbored any longer.

In contrast, a hint of enlightenment suddenly appeared in Han Li's eyes upon hearing this.

Back in that immortal abode in the Vast Glacial Realm, he had once obtained a Myriad Sword Scroll, and the aura and permutations of the sword array on that scroll were very similar to the sword array that he was witnessing at this moment. [1]

There were even some parts of the myriad sword artwork that were even more profound than this array.

He was quite elated upon making this realization, and he hurriedly began to carefully inspect the sword array up above.

A short while later, Xiong Shan suddenly let loose a thunderous roar from the sword offering platform, causing the entire grassland to shudder.

Immediately thereafter, a string of cracks and pops began ringing out incessantly as the graves on the grassland exploded one after another.

As a result, all of the flying swords in the entire sword tomb were released, and they began flying wildly in all directions, trying to escape from the tomb that they had been trapped in for so long.

The 30 teams stationed in the sword tomb immediately sprang into action, unleashing various abilities to control the flying swords.

In the eastern part of the grassland, a flying sword that was completely enveloped in scorching flames was flying straight up toward the heavens, leaving such a scorching trail of heat in its wake that the surrounding air was popping incessantly.

The three teams in that area immediately began to chant an incantation in unison, summoning a massive water dragon under the guidance of the three Grand Ascension cultivators, with which they were able to quickly drag back the fiery sword.

In the southern part of the grassland, a giant yellow sword that was around three feet wide and 18 feet long. The sword was giving off an earthy yellow radiance, and instead of rising up into the heavens like the other flying swords, it aimed its tip at the ground, then began rapidly revolving on the spot, attempting to burrow itself into the earth.

The three teams stationed there were already prepared for this, and under their joint efforts, the ground in that area had already turned a dark azure color and become as solid as rock, so no matter how much the giant sword attempted to drill itself into the ground, it was only able to raise a flurry of sparks in futility.

After Han Li's 72 Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were freed, they immediately gathered together like a swarm of bees with golden lightning flashing around them as they set off rapidly in Han Li's direction.

However, due to the fact that there were swords flying all over the place, it would've been impossible to discern the intentions of the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords unless one were paying particular attention to them.

"Stop those swords!" Zhu Feng immediately ordered upon seeing this.

The three teams situated in that area immediately sprang into action, unleashing their abilities as they drew upon the spiritual qi around them to form a massive cage formed by streaks of azure spiritual qi, which began to descend upon the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

The swords had only managed to fly for less than 10 kilometers before they were stopped in their tracks by the azure cage.

Lightning flashed through the air as all 72 Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords began to glow with dazzling golden light, releasing countless arcs of golden lightning that tore the azure cage into shreds.

Through their spiritual connection, he could sense that there was a hint of rage in the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords as they unleashed their Divine Devilbane Lightning, but there was nothing that he could do at the moment aside from emulating the other elders and restraining the flying swords in his area.

"Useless idiots!" Zhu Feng spat as he looked on with a disdainful expression.

He then made a grabbing motion, and several massive marks appeared out of thin air, enveloping the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords before forcibly dragging them back.

Xiong Shan seemed to have already anticipated this retaliation from the swords, and he only took a few glances at the unfolding situation before paying it no further heed.

Soon, most of the flying swords were restrained one after another, but there were still some that were unwilling to be controlled, constantly attempting to fly out of the sword tomb, while others were only able to fly in small, restricted areas, crashing into one another over and over again amid a string of incessant clangs.

Han Li was controlling the flying swords in his area while simultaneously recollecting the myriad sword artwork from the past.

Thanks to his experience in studying the myriad sword artwork, he was able to make very fast progress in his examination of the sword array up above, and he was quickly able to make several important observations. However, he was still far away from completely understanding it.

Right at this moment, Xiong Shan suddenly ceased in his chanting, then abruptly sprang up into the air before flying toward the east.

After entering the area that Qi Liang was situated in, he made a grabbing motion with one hand, and a massive golden palm projection appeared in the sky before closing itself around a silver flying sword.

The silver flying sword immediately began to struggle with all its might while bright silver radiance surged out of its blade like flowing water. It then transformed into hundreds of silver sword projections that fled in all directions, attempting to tear through the golden hand projection, but its efforts proved to be completely futile.

Xiong Shan raised his other hand and brought his hand together like a blade, manifesting another golden palm projection in the air before smearing it over the silver flying sword.

The silver sword shuddered violently as a layer of semi-transparent light appeared over its surface before being stripped away inch by inch by the second golden palm projection. As this process unfolded, the silver sword turned into a semi-transparent flying sword, as if it had become a spiritual sword, and it hovered obediently in mid-air, no longer displaying any movement.