

Chapter 21: Iron Bull

Zhang Ruochen carried the Wire Bow on his back and dashed into King Mount riding on the antelope-horse.

King Mount was the hunting ground for the Royal Family. It was high and steep, with waterfalls, cliffs, valleys, and forests all over it. Almost all the savage beasts there were at the first level and a few at the second.

Like a handful of sand thrown into the ocean, the 43 young warriors soon vanished into the woods after they were sent into King Mount.

“Phhf!”

A white shadow flashed through the one-meter-tall brambles. It instantly passed through the open field over 60 meters long and dashed into the distant thick forest.

The white shadow was so fast that a man without Martial Arts could never see it clearly.

With his ability, Zhang Ruochen saw that it was a rabbit-like savage beast.

It was a first-level savage beast, a Lightning Rabbit. It ran fast and had sharp claws and teeth, but was weak in defensive power.

Their power and speed were equal to a warrior’s in the Initial Stage and the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm, respectively.

“It’s just a Lightning Rabbit, not worthy of a Thunder Arrow.” Zhang Ruochen had already drawn his Wire Bow into a half-moon-shape, but then he shook his head and put it down.

It was known that the higher level the savage beast was at, the higher score a warrior could attain.

Lightning Rabbits were only from the inferior class among the first-level savage beasts. To Zhang Ruochen, wasting a Thunder Arrow on a beast like that was not worthwhile.

“Whew!”

A wind-breaking sound rang out from the other direction.

A Thunder Arrow with lightning-like splendor precisely slammed into the Lightning Rabbit’s head.

“Pfft!”

The Lightning Rabbit’s head was punctured by a Thunder Arrow. The Thunderbolt Crystals inlaid on the arrowhead blasted immediately and turned into fist-sized electric balls. The balls cracked and melted into flows of current.

The Lightning Rabbit died at once and fell by a tree.

The Sixth Prince rushed over on his antelope-horse. Without getting down, he leaned forward to the ground and lifted the beast by gripping the arrow that was in its head.

“My ninth brother, it’s your first time hunting in King Mount and you don’t dare to kill a savage beast? You need more courage to be a man.” The Sixth Prince sneered at Zhang Ruochen with the Lightning Rabbit in his hand.

In his eyes, Zhang Ruochen might be a genius in Martial Arts, but this was his first time hunting and it was normal to be frightened.

After all, fighting and killing were completely different.

The hunting in King Mount was intended to test not only warriors’ abilities, but also their courage.

If a warrior was so timid that he could not even kill a savage beast, he would be of no use, no matter how high his cultivation was.

The Sixth Prince reached the peak of the Dawn State when he was 18.

Zhang Ruochen said, “I just don’t want to waste a Thunder Arrow.”

The Sixth Prince gave a brittle laugh and said, “You are absolutely wrong. There aren’t too many savage beasts, and not everyone can hunt five beasts with five Thunder Arrows.”

The Sixth Prince rode off and vanished into the woods, leaving Zhang Ruochen with these words.

“King Mount is indeed not too large. It seems that I really have to speed up as there won’t be too many savage beasts for me to hunt!”

Zhang Ruochen rushed in the other direction on his antelope-horse.

Zhang Ruochen encountered three Lightning Rabbits in one hour. He, however, did not shoot any of them. Rather, he kept on searching for other higher-level savage beasts.

“Moo!”

An earsplitting whine rang out from Zhang Ruochen’s left side.

Zhang Ruochen was delighted. He immediately went to look for the sound and found three huge Brute Bulls next to the riverside.

Brute Bulls, inferior-class level-one savage beasts, had the power and the defensive power of a warrior at the Advanced Stage and the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm, respectively.

The Strength of a Bull referred to a Brute Bull’s power.

But someone had come here earlier, and now she was standing right in front of the three Brute Bulls.

The Ninth Commandery Princess, Zhang Yuxi, sat on an antelope-horse in her royal finch robe. Her black hair dropped to her waist. She smiled enchantingly and said, “My ninth brother, you are too late. These three belong to me!”

“Moo!”

The three Brute Bulls' eyes were glowing. They pedaled the ground with their iron heels that sparked when they crashed on the stones.

"Boom!"

The three Brute Bulls rushed toward the Ninth Commandery Princess at the same time.

She took out three Thunder Arrows at once, placed them on the bowstring, and drew the Wire Bow into a full-moon shape.

"Crash!"

All three Thunder Arrows were released at once and slammed into their foreheads seven inches deep.

Lightning blasted out of the arrowheads. The three Brute Bulls all died immediately and fell heavily into the river, splashing sheets of water.

The Ninth Commandery Princess put her Wire Bow away, looked at Zhang Ruochen in the distance and smiled brightly. "My arrow technique is in the Inferior Class of the Human Stage, and I've managed to master it. What do you think, my ninth brother?"

Zhang Ruochen stared at the water surface behind her and yelled, "Watch out!"

She also recognized the danger. She turned around to find a savage beast, which was twice as big as a Brute Bull, dashing out of the water.

It had metal-like skin and two sharp horns. It ran toward her abruptly.

"Boom!"

The Ninth Commandery Princess' antelope-horse roared with pain. Its bones were broken, a bowl-sized bloody hole was pierced in its body by the horn. It fell to the ground heavily.

This happened so suddenly that the Ninth Commandery Princess could not react and fell to the ground with her antelope-horse.

The Ninth Commandery Princess was overwhelmed. She rolled on the ground and was about to stand up quickly.

All of a sudden, a huge shadow appeared above her head. The huge savage beast lifted its iron heel and was going to step on her.

If one was stepped on by a savage beast, there was no doubt that his body would break into pieces.

"Bang!"

A Thunder Arrow flew from a distance and dashed on the beast's neck, knocking the beast away a little bit.

Its iron heels brushed past the Ninth Commandery Princess and hit the ground beside her, forming two half-inch-deep pits.

“This is certainly a medium-class level-one savage beast! The Iron Bull! But its defensive power is so strong that a Thunder Arrow can’t break through its skin!”

It was not only because of its strong defensive power, but also the far distance between Zhang Ruochen and the beast that weakened the power of the Thunder Arrow.

Zhang Ruochen stood up on the antelope-horse’s back. He quickly jumped up and rushed to the riverside.

An Iron Bull’s power was equal to a warrior in the Medium State of the Yellow Realm, and its defensive power was equivalent to a warrior in the Final State of the Yellow Realm, which was quite outstanding among medium-class level-one savage beasts.

“Moo!”

The Iron Bull was infuriated by Zhang Ruochen’s arrow. It lifted its iron heel up again and took a huge step next toward the Ninth Commandery Princess.

“Crash!”

Rising up four meters high, Zhang Ruochen took out a Thunder Arrow, drew the bow, and shot it out.

“Pfft!”

The Thunder Arrow accurately shot into the Iron Bull’s mouth. The Thunderbolt Crystal exploded in its throat and turned into an electric ball that completely smashed its throat.

The Iron Bull stepped back in great pain with blood coming out of its mouth.

“Bang!”

Finally, it fell to the ground heavily with a loud noise.

With a long sigh of relief, the Ninth Commandery Princess stood up with her legs shaking. It was so dangerous! She would have died under those iron heels if Zhang Ruochen had not shot the beast.

Zhang Ruochen walked toward her and asked, “Are you okay?”

She shook her head and said, “I wouldn’t be okay if you hadn’t shown up in time. My dear ninth brother, why is your arrow technique so excellent? An Iron Bull is a medium-class level-one savage beast, and has the defensive power of a warrior in the Final State of the Yellow Realm! But you killed it with only two arrows!”

Zhang Ruochen took a look at the beast’s body on the ground and said, “No matter if it’s a savage beast or a human, they all have weaknesses. You will easily win if you attack its weakness. Even if your power is weaker than his.”

The greatest advantage that humans have is wisdom. They could use soldiers and weapons, as well as the ability to analyze a savage beasts’ weaknesses.

Therefore, human warriors could kill the savage beasts that were a lot stronger than themselves.

In fact, the Ninth Commandery Princess also had the chance to kill the Iron Bull with her strength. Yet, the beast surprised her and had put her in a difficult position.

She put the Wire Bow on her back and picked up her quiver with only two Thunder Arrows in it. She said, "There are different marks on our Thunder Arrows. The royal security guard will collect the prey later, so we don't need to take them out in person. Let's go."

While she was speaking, she walked toward Zhang Ruochen's antelope-horse.

Zhang Ruochen slightly frowned and said, "What are you doing?"

She smiled and said, "My antelope-horse is badly hurt. I can only ride on yours now. You won't let me go hunt on foot, will you my ninth brother?"

The Ninth Commandery Princess was wearing a tight, royal finch robe that outlined her nice hour-glass figure, with plump breasts and a tiny waist. Every inch of her skin was white as snow and sent out a light fragrance.

She lightly pushed on the antelope-horse's back and elegantly jumped on it.

"Come on, my ninth brother! If we don't hurry up, other warriors will kill all the savage beasts!" She winked at him and stretched a hand out as an invitation.

At last, Zhang Ruochen walked over to her and took her hand in order to jump onto the antelope-horse's back.

The antelope-horse carried both of them off and rushed into the deep woods.

"If we work together, we are powerful enough to kill medium-class level-one savage beasts with our strength," said the Ninth Commandery Princess with an expectant look in her eyes. One could obtain a very high score if they could hunt down a medium-class level-one savage beast.

The calculation equation of the score was as follows: One superior-class level-one savage beast was equal to five medium-class level-one savage beasts.

One medium-class level-one savage beast was equal to five inferior-class level-one savage beasts.

In other words, although Zhang Ruochen only killed one Iron Bull, it was equivalent to five inferior-class level-one savage beasts.

Not everyone could kill a medium-class level-one savage beast. It took at least the cultivation of the Medium State of the Yellow Realm.

Furthermore, medium-class level-one savage beasts had outstanding speed and defensive power. Therefore, it was not easy to hunt them, even with the cultivation of the Medium State.

Although Zhang Ruochen's cultivation was only at the Peak of the Dawn State, his strength was much more powerful than many warriors at the Medium State. That was why he could kill the Iron Bull successfully.

With a sharp look in his eyes, Zhang Ruochen said, "It would be amazing if we can kill a superior-class level-one savage beast!"

“That’s impossible! The power of a superior-class level-one savage beast is equal to a warrior who has reached the Completion of the Yellow Realm. It will be a disaster if we actually encounter one! We will probably struggle to escape!”

The Ninth Commandery Princess continued, “The Seventh Prince is the only one who killed a superior-class level-one savage beast in the past 10 years. As for this year, I believe nobody has the ability to kill one.”

Chapter 22: Superior Class Level One

It was not the first time for Yuxi, the Ninth Commandery Princess, to participate in the hunt in King Mount. Therefore, she knew where those savage beasts would be.

“The Roar Slope is ahead of us. I used to hear a Red Smilodon Tiger roaring over there. You know, Red Smilodon Tigers are medium-class level-one savage beasts, which are even stronger than an Iron Bulls. Because I couldn’t kill it, I didn’t even get closer to it,” she said.

Zhang Ruochen and the Ninth Commandery Princess got off the antelope-horse and sneaked into the Roar Slope. They planned to find traces of Red Smilodon Tigers.

Zhang Ruochen found traces of some dust-ups on the ground.

A thick tree trunk had crashed down and its leaves had been burnt to ashes. There was a giant rock nearby and they saw some blood stains near the rock.

“So someone else has killed the Red Smilodon Tiger?” asked the Ninth Commandery Princess.

Zhang Ruochen shook his head and said, “Those blood stains are not from a Red Smilodon Tiger, but from humans. We should be careful because Red Smilodon Tigers can be nearby!”

“Huff!”

All of a sudden, they saw a crimson tiger come hurtling down a steep slope, whose sharp claws were very close to Zhang Ruochen’s neck now.

Zhang Ruochen had reached the Completion of Heaven Realm in his last life. Although he was now reborn, his soul and Spiritual Power remained at their previous levels. Thus, he was quite sensitive to any potential risks.

He took one step to the right to avoid the attack from the Red Smilodon Tiger. Due to his quick reaction, he made it.

After that, he pulled out a Thunder Arrow from the quiver on his back. He quickly injected Genuine Qi into the arrowhead and thrust the arrow into the abdomen of the Red Smilodon Tiger backhanded.

Then he immediately jumped from the ground and moved backward.

All this happened in just a few seconds. Before the Ninth Commandery Princess knew it, the Red Smilodon Tiger had been attacked and had an arrow in its abdomen.

“Bang!”

The arrowhead of the Thunder Arrow exploded, which left a palm-sized wound on the tiger’s abdomen. Now the Red Smilodon Tiger was bleeding.

However, because Zhang Ruochen had thrust the Thunder Arrow with his bare hand, the impact force was not as strong as that of a Wire Bow.

Because of this, the Thunder Arrow did not go deep enough to cause lethal damage to the tiger. The arrowhead was only three inches below the skin.

“Awoo!”

Red Smilodon Tigers were three times larger than normal tigers. They had two rows of sharp teeth, which were half a foot long. Each single claw could be used as a blade.

Their power could be as strong as that of a warrior in the Final State of the Yellow Realm, while their speed was as fast as a Final State warrior as well. If an average warrior met a Red Smilodon Tiger, unfortunately, his life would end there.

Now the Red Smilodon Tiger was just 10 meters away and the Ninth Commandery Princess’s face became even paler.

That was a powerful savage beast. At such a close distance, even a Thunder Arrow could not be used well.

Bows and arrows were long-distance weapons.

Fight!

She immediately took out a Thunder Arrow, placed it on a bowstring, and pulled the Wire Bow into the shape of a full moon.

“Whew!”

The Thunder Arrow flew out like a bolt of lightning.

The Red Smilodon Tiger jumped up at an amazing speed. Without a doubt, the arrow missed the target.

One second later, it was in front of the Ninth Commandery Princess. The Wire Bow in her hand was snatched and thrown away by this giant savage beast. It opened its huge mouth and tried to bite her.

The Ninth Commandery Princess did a backflip, during which she used one of her fingers to hit the ground in order to do another backflip. Now she was seven or eight meters away from the Red Smilodon Tiger and had managed to avoid the attack.

However, the tiger was even faster. It reached out one of its paws and hit the Ninth Commandery Princess’s head.

The Ninth Commandery Princess had just reached the level of the Medium State, therefore, her power was weaker than a Red Smilodon Tiger, while her speed was slower.

If the distance was longer, she probably could have used a Thunder Arrow to pose a threat to the Red Smilodon Tiger.

However, it was a short-distance battle, she could not use any Genuine Martial Arms as a Medium State warrior. She could not win against a Red Smilodon Tiger.

The movement of tiger claws caused a gale which hurt the Ninth Commandery Princess's face. What was even worse, the claws were very close to her now.

She thought she would die for sure, however, all of a sudden, she saw a man rushing over out of the corner of her eye. It was Zhang Ruochen! He was running toward the Red Smilodon Tiger!

"Elephant Galloping!"

Zhang Ruochen hit the back of the tiger with his palm. It seemed that his palm made a huge sound, like the roar of a brute elephant. The power of the hit was equivalent to the Strength of Sixteen Bulls, and the tiger was thrown outward in one second.

"Boom!"

The Red Smilodon Tiger crashed into a tree nearby and fell to the ground.

Zhang Ruochen rushed over there and utilized all of his Genuine Qi, making his palm as strong as a blade.

"Bang!"

His palm hit on the Red Smilodon Tiger's neck, crushing its trachea.

The tiger was shaking because of its broken trachea. It tried to get up and rush toward the jungle, however, it just died very quickly.

The Ninth Commandery Princess stared at Zhang Ruochen in shock. She was amazed that he had killed the Red Smilodon Tiger with his bare hands.

"Ninth brother, are you really a Dawn State warrior? You obtained your Sacred Mark just three months ago, right?" she asked.

Zhang Ruochen said with a calm voice, "Like I said before, both savage beasts and warriors have weaknesses. As long as you can spot their weaknesses, you can easily kill a warrior or a savage beast. The trachea is the weakness of a Red Smilodon Tiger."

"But I saw the hit, its power was at least as strong as the Strength of Ten Bulls."

The Ninth Commandery Princess said, "I am a Medium State warrior and I can't unleash such strong power. You just reached the Dawn State, however. How did you do that?"

Zhang Ruochen said, "With a good physique, even a Dawn State warrior can unleash the Strength of Ten Bulls. It's not strange."

The Ninth Commandery Princess stopped asking him. Zhang Ruochen's strong power had left a deep impression on her. This half-brother, who was just one day younger than her, was becoming harder to read.

They saw the dead body of that Red Smilodon Tiger in the jungle not far away.

A Thunder Arrow was thrust into the abdomen of the Red Smilodon Tiger. Yes, the arrow that was thrust by Zhang Ruochen earlier.

"Damn it. If I had my Blue Water Sword with me, I'm sure I could have had a chance to beat it, or even kill it," the Ninth Commandery Princess said, unreconciled.

She was one of the top two beauties in Yunwu City. As a beauty with great intelligence, she had been chased by two savage beasts and saved twice by Zhang Ruochen.

All that ruined her self-esteem. This proud princess told herself if she met savage beasts next time, she would hunt and kill them directly, utilizing her great skills.

"Ninth brother, let's go and hunt some other savage beasts..."

Zhang Ruochen tapped the Ninth Commandery Princess on the shoulder with an intense stare. He said in a low voice, "Don't move!"

She was confused right now. Before she could ask him why, she saw a deer with blue flames walking toward them slowly.

It was a Green-Fire Deer. The Ninth Commandery Princess could not stop trembling now and could feel that she was not breathing.

"Whomp, whomp!"

That Green-Fire Deer had a pair of eyes that looked like rubies. It was about two meters tall, and its deer antlers were like two coral jade sticks. The deer's hair seemed to be on fire.

Once the deer walked by, the topsoil was burnt by the fire from the deer.

As a superior-class level-one savage beast, a Green-Fire Deer could be as strong and as fast as a Final State of the Yellow Realm warrior.

The only weakness of a Green-Fire Deer was that it was not good at defending itself. Its defensive techniques were even weaker than those of a Red Smilodon Tiger.

Although this deer might not be good at defending itself, it was so fast that not many warriors could even get close to it, let alone attack it.

Many warriors could be killed by a Green-Fire deer without having the chance to attack it.

"What should we do now?" The Ninth Commandery Princess dared not to breathe now, feeling that her body was frozen.

With their current cultivation, they could not compete against a superior-class level-one savage beast. In other words, they would probably die here.

In previous years' mountain hunting on King Mount, it had happened that some warriors had lost their lives.

The Ninth Commandery Princess did not want to die here, which was obvious. She thought hard in order to save her life, however, given that a Green-Fire Deer was so fast, she probably would not even be given the chance to escape.

Right now, unlike her, Zhang Ruochen was still calm, with conviction in his eyes.

He took off the quiver and handed it to her and said, "I have two Thunder Arrows left and you have one, so altogether there are three. You may not be able to kill it with the arrows, but with your techniques, you can at least pose some threat to it, right?"

"What are you doing?"

She watched Zhang Ruochen walking toward the Green-Fire Deer, with her eyes wide open. She was confused. "Is he going to hunt and kill that deer?"

"That is a superior-class level-one savage beast!"

Chapter 23: Hunting Green-Fire Deer

Before making up his mind to hunt and kill that Green-Fire Deer, Zhang Ruochen had made a careful consideration.

With his current cultivation, he could not compete against a Green-Fire Deer. Besides that, he could not use Genuine Martial Arms, because his Flash Shining Sword and Abyss Ancient Sword were stored in the internal space.

Once he used them, others would know that the Time and Space Spinel was with him.

Luckily, it was a Green-Fire Deer. If he had met any other superior-class level-one savage beasts, he would have no chance to win at all.

But a Green-Fire Deer was different. It was fast, but it was not as strong as other superior-class level-one savage beasts. And a Green-Fire Deer was not good at defending itself.

Zhang Ruochen had reached the Completion of the Heaven Realm in his last lifetime. Therefore, his strong Spiritual Power and rich practical experience were his great advantages. He could make quick judgments on a Green-Fire Deer's movements and attacks. Then he could adjust his strategies flexibly.

Thus, although a Green-Fire Deer was fast, it did not mean that the deer could beat Zhang Ruochen easily.

"Haa!"

Zhang Ruochen roared at the Green-Fire Deer provocatively and aggressively.

"Phhf!"

The Green-Fire Deer was outraged now, and his flames were becoming even brighter. In a second, it had almost reached the place where Zhang Ruochen was. It was so fast that it looked like a green shadow when it moved. Obviously, this Green-Fire Deer was planning to attack Zhang Ruochen with its giant body.

But Zhang Ruochen bent his knees and exerted power by pushing off the ground. He jumped up seven meters high when the Green-Fire Deer was about to hit him.

“Dragon in the Sky!”

His running Genuine Qi was quickly moving inside his 11 Meridians. His body made a low-pitched sound which was like a dragon’s roar. All his muscles and bones were functioning together now, unleashing great power through his palm.

However, the Green-Fire Deer was too fast. Zhang Ruochen could not hit the Green-Fire Deer but hit the ground.

“Phhf!”

The deer ran toward Zhang Ruochen like a green shadow. It used its antlers to attack him, targeting his chest.

Zhang Ruochen unleashed power from his palm again and competed against the Green-Fire Deer.

“Bang!”

A strong impact force hit his palm. Suddenly, he felt that his right arm had lost feeling.

Zhang Ruochen quickly moved backward. He looked toward his arm and saw that his right palm was being burned by the fire from the deer. His sleeves were burnt to ashes, and his wrist and arm were exposed.

His Genuine Qi was running inside his Meridians, gradually making his numb arm return back to normal.

“Whomp, whomp!”

The Green-Fire Deer ran toward Zhang Ruochen again. Within a second, it had appeared in front of Zhang Ruochen.

Right now, two Thunder Arrows were shot by the Ninth Commandery Princess, who was standing far away. These two arrows were shot toward the eyes of the deer.

“Bang!”

“Bang!”

The deer had such a quick reaction that it hit the arrows back with its hard antlers.

“Elephant Galloping!”

Zhang Ruochen seized the opportunity and rushed toward the Green-Fire Deer. With the impact force of his body, Zhang Ruochen unleashed the Strength of Sixteen Bulls from his palm again, hitting on the head of the deer.

The Green-Fire Deer whined and its head was bleeding. It was injured and the blood was coming out of the wound on top of its head, which slowed its reaction.

“Phew!”

As the deer was distracted, the Ninth Commandery Princess got the chance to shoot the final Thunder Arrow at it. This time the arrow pierced through the deer’s left eye.

“Bang!”

The arrowhead of the Thunder Arrow exploded and shredded the left side of its head. The Green-Fire Deer’s left eyeball was turned into a mist of blood.

Zhang Ruochen tumbled to reach the corpse of the Red Smilodon Tiger. He chipped off a sharp, half-meter-long tooth from its mouth.

The injured Green-Fire Deer turned and ran away. The flames surrounding it went out as well.

Zhang Ruochen grasped that broken tooth from the Red Smilodon Tiger. The tooth in his hand was like a short blade. He stepped on the tree trunk and leaped with the help of the elasticity of the tree trunk.

“Crack!”

Zhang Ruochen stuck the sharp tiger tooth into the Green-Fire Deer’s forehead and pierced it through the deer’s skull.

“Bang!”

The Green-Fire Deer struggled, but finally, it failed. It fell down on the ground, becoming lifeless.

Zhang Ruochen pulled out the tooth and stuck it into the abdomen of the Green-Fire Deer. All of this finally terminated the deer’s life.

The Ninth Commandery Princess came over and saw the corpse of the deer. She could not believe what she had just seen. “Ninth brother... you just killed a superior-class level-one savage beast.”

Zhang Ruochen glanced at her and stood up. After simply binding up his burnt palm with some cloth, he said, “Not me, but us.”

The Ninth Commandery Princess knew clearly that she had not offered sufficient help. If it was not for the hit on its head slowing the reaction of the deer, she could not have shot the deer’s eye with her Thunder Arrow.

However, she was happy because she was involved in the hunt of that superior-class level-one savage beast. More importantly, it was a successful hunt.

She was so thrilled that she could not help hugging Zhang Ruochen.

“Ninth brother, we are the best battle-buddies. We always cooperate so well!”

She hugged Zhang Ruochen around the neck with her soft arms. Her big, soft boobs were pressed closely to his chest. She was so thrilled that she almost shoved him to the ground.

Zhang Ruochen raised his arm and held the Ninth Commandery Princess by her shoulder, in order to keep some distance away from her. He said in a calm voice, "We should go back!"

Seeing Zhang Ruochen's cold, indifferent face, she stamped her foot and frowned. "I am your sister. I won't eat you. Could you just put away your arrogance?"

Zhang Ruochen left the Roar Slope and mounted the antelope-horse. He glanced at the Ninth Commandery Princess and said, "Let's go!"

She rolled her eyes and put her hand in Zhang Ruochen's palm to mount his antelope-horse. She sat behind him with her arms around his waist. Her exquisite face was on his back and she laughed. "Your Majesty, would you mind taking your gorgeous sister to a peaceful place without any killings?"

Zhang Ruochen shook his head slightly. He steered the antelope-horse to exit the jungle and rushed to the Royal Coliseum.

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26 out of the 43 young participants had come back, whilst the remaining 17 warriors were still missing.

If a warrior had not come back, he would either have died somewhere, or he had not hunted any savage beast.

"Min, how's your hunt going?" asked Concubine Huo, the biological mother of the Fifth Prince, Zhang Min.

Wearing a smile on his face, Zhang Min said confidently, "Mom, don't worry. I'm confident that nobody can be better than me in this King Mount hunt!"

"Well done, Min." Concubine Huo nodded with a smile.

Lin Fengxian looked at his daughter, Lin Ningshan, and asked, "Shan, it's your first time here. I assume that you have encountered many problems, right?"

Lin Ningshan shook her head and confidently said, "It's easier than I expected. No problem at all. I'm confident that I will be on the top 10 list."

Lin Ningshan looked toward King Mount. She realized that Zhang Ruochen had not yet come back, which made her even more proud. She secretly grinned. "So, he hasn't hunted any savage beast. Well, that's reasonable. Taking those precious medicinal materials can strengthen his power. However, it can't enrich his practical experience."

Right now, Concubine Lin was becoming nervous. She stared at King Mount wistfully.

Later, more warriors came back.

But those warriors looked worried. Apparently, they had not hunted any savage beast in King Mount.

"Where are the Ninth Prince and Ninth Commandery Princess? Fingers crossed, they are okay."

People started to worry about them because some young warriors had been killed by savage beasts in previous years' King Mount hunting.

The Yunwu Commandery Prince frowned slightly and was about to send a troop of guards to look for his children.

All of a sudden, there was a person shouting in the crowd. "They are back! The Ninth Prince and the Ninth Commandery Princess come back together!"

Concubine Lin, Lin Ningshan, and other princes and princesses looked towards King Mount. They saw these two young people coming from that direction, riding on the same antelope-horse. They were getting closer and closer.

Zhang Ruochen and the Ninth Commandery Princess got off the antelope-horse immediately after arriving at the Royal Coliseum. They walked toward their father, the Yunwu Commandery Prince.

"Your Majesty!" said Zhang Ruochen.

"Your Majesty. Father!" said the Ninth Commandery Princess.

The Commandery Prince laughed, "Ruochen, why did you ride on Yuxi's horse?"

The Ninth Commandery Princess replied on behalf of Zhang Ruochen immediately, "Father, brother Ruochen and I met an Iron Bull. My antelope-horse got injured, so I had to ask him for help."

The Commandery Prince stared at Zhang Ruochen and asked, "Is that true, Ruochen?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," he replied.

The Commandery Prince nodded firmly. Suddenly, he saw that Zhang Ruochen's right arm had gotten injured. He said, "Ruochen, it's your first time here, and it's your first time battling with savage beasts. You just obtained your Sacred Mark three months ago, so don't be upset if you didn't hunt any savage beast."

"I know!"

Zhang Ruochen did not explain and he did not plan to explain. He just replied calmly.

The Ninth Commandery Princess was about to say something. However, she could not find anything to say in this situation.

The Fifth Prince and the Sixth Prince grinned secretly when they saw that Zhang Ruochen was injured.

A hint of a smile played on Lin Ningshan's face as well. During the Year-end Assessment, Zhang Ruochen had been outstanding. However, when it came to a real battle with savage beasts, he was still far from good enough.

Chapter 24: The First

Shortly afterward, the sergeants who had gone to count the number of savage beasts that were hunted down in King Mount arrived back in the Royal Coliseum.

The burly general, clad in silver kylin armor, handed over the booklet containing the results of the assessment to the Yunwu Commandery Prince.

He accepted the booklet from the general and took a quick glance at the results. His eyes were drawn to a name at top of the list. Gradually, a glimmer of a smile formed on his face. He said, "Ge Qian, why don't you announce the results of the King Mount Hunting Assessment this year? The first place warrior will be awarded a 'Heavy Bow'!" The Yunwu Commandery Prince then passed the booklet to Ge Qian.

When the young warriors in the Coliseum heard that the prize for the winner of the second assessment would be a "Heavy Bow", they became excited.

The Heavy Bow was classified as a Fourth Class Genuine Martial Arms, worth more than 10,000 silver coins.

To a young warrior, getting a Fourth Class Genuine Martial Arm was an honor. In fact, the Heavy Bow meant a lot more than just a valuable weapon. When the Yunwu Commandery Prince was young, he had won the King Mount Hunting Assessment and had been awarded a Heavy Bow.

Who was going to be the winner of the King Mount Hunting Assessment?

The kylin armor-clad general opened the booklet in his hand. He looked at the warriors in the Coliseum and said, "43 warriors participated in the King Mount Hunting this year. Two of them died and nine failed the assessment. 32 warriors successfully hunted down a savage beast."

The general announced the ranking starting from the bottom. "Ranking 32nd, Situ Hai of the Situs. He hunted down an inferior-class level-one savage beast, a Lightning Rabbit."

"Ranking 31st..."

...

"Ranking 14th, the Sixth Prince, Zhang Mi, hunted four inferior-class level-one savage beasts: three Brute Bulls and one Lightning Rabbit."

The Sixth Prince frowned after hearing his result. He thought hunting down four inferior-class level-one savage beasts would put him in the top 10. He looked disappointed.

"I never expected it would be so competitive this year!" the Sixth Prince said while looking at Zhang Ruochen. All of a sudden, the disappointment left his face. Rather, he had a hint of a smile.

The Sixth Prince looked down on Zhang Ruochen, just as everyone else did. He believed that Zhang Ruochen was one of the nine warriors who had failed the assessment.

Harassing Zhang Ruochen always made him feel better. He knew there was at least one person in the Royal Family who ranked lower than him.

The general continued, "Ranking 10th, Lin Tianwu of the Lins hunted down five inferior-class level-one savage beasts: four Brute Bulls and one Lightning Rabbit."

Brute Bulls and Lightning Rabbits were both savage beasts of the inferior-class level-one. Yet, the results obtained by hunting down either Brute Bulls or Lightning Rabbits was certainly different.

The general went on, "Ranking ninth, Gu Li from the Gus captured five Brute Bulls."

“Ranking eighth, Bai Wanli from the Bais. He hunted down six Brute Bulls, five of which were killed with Thunder Arrows. The sixth was killed by a martial technique from the Bais—the ‘Slaughter Fist’. It is a mid-class martial technique of the Human Stage.”

“Ranking seventh, Lin Ningshan, also of the Lins, captured one savage beast of the medium-class level-one and four from the inferior-class level-one.”

Lin Ningshan was quite satisfied after hearing her result. After all, she was only 15 years old and this was her first time joining King Mount Hunt. Her results fully demonstrated her talent.

She held her head up high and looked down on Zhang Ruochen, just like the Sixth Prince Zhang Mi had. “This is the first time for both of us to participate in the King Mount Hunt. Yet, he didn’t hunt down any savage beasts. This is the difference between us!” she thought arrogantly.

Lin Ningshan’s performance definitely impressed the crowd. People started whispering, “The daughter of Lin Fengxian is absolutely outstanding! She hunted down a savage beast of the medium-class level-one at the age of 15! How talented! She is going to have a wonderful future!”

“Give her two more years of practice, I’m sure no one will be able to compete with her in the Year-end Assessment!”

“Whoa!” Suddenly, there was a gasp of amazement outside the Coliseum.

Some of the warriors looked disdainful, such as Situ Linjiang, the number one genius of the Situs, as well as the Fifth Prince, and Xue Kai.

All three of these warriors had cultivated to the Final State of the Yellow Realm, which was the most powerful skill level. All of them were competitive enough to be the hotshot winner.

“Ranking sixth, Xue Hongqin from the Minister’s Mansion hunted down two savage beasts of the medium-class level-one.”

“Ranking fifth, Luo Cheng from Zhennan General Mansion. He hunted two medium-class level-one savage beasts and one inferior-class level-one beast.”

“Ranking fourth, Xue Kai, also from the Minister’s Mansion, captured three medium-class level-one savage beasts and two inferior-class level-one beasts.”

Xue Kai was quiet and vacant when he heard his result. He could not believe he did not make it into the top three.

He thought he would have been first or second.

“This is absolutely miserable!” said Xue Kai, with a cold-blooded look in his eyes and his fists firmly clenched.

The Fifth Prince and Situ Linjiang smiled grimly when they heard Xue Kai only came in fourth. They knew the chances of either one of them winning the prize were higher since their strong competitor was not even in the top three. Yet, their smiles soon froze.

“Ranking third, the Fifth Prince Zhang Min hunted down four medium-class level-one savage beasts and one inferior-class level-one beast.”

“Ranking second, Situ Linjiang from the Situs hunted five savage beasts of the medium-class level-one.”

“Ranking first, and the winner of King Mount Hunt is... the Ninth Prince, Zhang Ruochen! He hunted down one savage beast from the superior-class level-one and two from the medium-class level-one.”

After the announcement of the top three of the competition, every single person in the Royal Coliseum was completely shocked and speechless. They all stared at Zhang Ruochen. They could not believe that he had beaten all of the strongest warriors in the commandery capital.

Within a second, the whole Royal Coliseum became a cacophony.

“Oh my God! The Ninth Prince hunted down a superior-class level-one savage beast!”

“You know, every single one of the savage beasts of the superior-class level-one is as powerful as the highest of the Yellow Realm warriors. He has just reached the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm. How did he manage to do that?”

“This is amazing! In just three months’ time, his prowess has enabled him to hunt a savage beast of superior-class level-one! How incredible is this?”

...

In the Royal Coliseum, a lot of people were stunned and bewildered.

In the last 10 years of Year-end Assessments, only the Seventh Prince was able to hunt down a savage beast of superior-class level-one. Now, the Ninth Prince had become the first warrior to capture down a superior-class savage beast in a decade.

The Yunwu Commandery Prince was ecstatic. “Ge Qian, get me the Heavy Bow now. I want to hand it over to my ninth son myself!” he said, overjoyed.

“Wait!”

Zhang Ruochen walked out among all 43 warriors and said, “Hunting down the superior-class level-one savage beast wasn’t just my work. The Ninth Commandery Princess and I both hunted it down together. I can’t take all the credit.”

The Ninth Commandery Princess also walked out and stood next to Zhang Ruochen. She added, “Father, I would not have made it through the King Mount Hunt without the help of my ninth brother. He saved me from the savage beast’s claws! In fact, I didn’t help much when he killed that superior-class savage beast!”

“Haha! My ninth son, who should I give the Heavy Bow to? You tell me!” The Yunwu Commandery Prince was even more pleased when he saw Zhang Ruochen and Zhang Yuxi were both humble.

Zhang Ruochen responded, “Father, please give the Heavy Bow to my ninth sister. I’m good at fighting with a sword, not a bow. I may not be able to fully master it.”

Zhang Ruochen did not wait for his father's approval. He grabbed the Heavy Bow and handed it to the Ninth Commandery Princess.

"Ruochen... why...?" The Ninth Commandery Princess was completely flattered.

Although she really wanted the Heavy Bow, deep down in her heart she knew that the bow did not belong to her.

Zhang Ruochen casually replied, "You deserve it! Without your help, I wouldn't have been able to kill the Green-Fire Deer. Besides, we still have to fight in the Martial Arts competition. If I win the competition, the prizes will be even better!"

"Well... if you insist! When it comes to the Martial Arts competition, you have to put forth all your effort to win! With your ability, I'm sure you will easily go into the top five." The Ninth Commandery Princess received the Heavy Bow joyfully. She gently stroked the black bow with her tiny, soft hands. Words could not express how pleased she was.

Zhang Ruochen had good reasons to give the Heavy Bow to the Ninth Commandery Princess. First, she was there to help when he killed the Green-Fire Deer.

Also, he wanted to befriend the Ninth Commandery Princess and turn her into an ally. Zhang Ruochen and Concubine Lin were isolated in the palace. Even though he had demonstrated some of his power, the distance between the real warriors and himself was still too great.

Having an ally would surely improve their position.

The third round was the Martial Arts competition.

Only warriors who had successfully hunted down savage beasts were eligible to enter the third round of assessments.

The top five competitors would receive a huge prize—they would be allowed access to the Savage God's Pool for skill practice.

The winner's rewards would be even better.

Therefore, every warrior who entered the third-round was extremely fixated on the Martial Arts competition.

The Fifth Prince groaned and said, "My Ninth Brother, you are definitely mysterious! Let's see who is the best in the drill ground!"

Zhang Ruochen responded courteously, "If I do come across you in the drill ground, I'm afraid we will have to fight."

Zhang Ruochen felt someone's eyes on him. He looked up and saw Lin Ningshan standing far away.

Lin Ningshan was certainly beautiful. Her delicate features, glistening red lips, slender body, and long slim legs always stood out in a crowd.

She had not anticipated the speed with which Zhang Ruochen's skill would rise in just three months. He was even able to kill a superior-class level-one Green-Fire Deer. Although she was one of the people who looked down on Zhang Ruochen, she respected what he had achieved so far.

Yet, she had reached the realm of "Sword Following the Heart" and attained the Low Class of Spiritual sword technique. If she had to fight against Zhang Ruochen in the drill ground, she was confident that she would defeat him.

Those who finished in the top 10 of the King Mount Hunting Assessment would enjoy the advantage of skipping the preliminary contest and going directly to the second round.

The other 22 warriors would need to fight against each other head-to-head, and the top six competitors would enter the final. Altogether, 16 warriors would compete in the second round.

After four hours, the preliminary contest had finally come to an end. Six warriors, including the Sixth Prince and the Ninth Commandery Princess, had made their way to the next round!

The six winners, along with the top 10 in the King Mount Hunting Assessment, proceeded to the next round.

"Without further ado, the final tournament now begins! Round one, the Ninth Commandery Princess, Zhang Yuxi, versus Lin Ningshan of the Lins," said the armor-clad general.

No one expected that the first round would be a battle between the "Two Beauties in Yunwu City". It definitely intensified the entire competition. Everyone in the Coliseum was longing to watch this fight.

Chapter 25: The Final Eight

Both Lin Ningshan and the Ninth Commandery Princess, Zhang Yuxi, had just broken through to the Medium State of the Yellow Realm in the past three months. Their cultivations and abilities were fairly equal.

The Ninth Commandery Princess stepped out onto the drill ground first, holding a green Genuine Martial Arms sword. Her elegance and delicate figure were as beautiful as an artist's painting, standing in the middle of the field.

Then, Lin Ningshan also made her way out onto the drill ground.

A smile touched the corners of Zhang Yuxi's lips as she said, "Ningshan, it is said that you have reached the realm of the Sword Following the Heart. I wonder how strong you are in mastering this technique. I can't wait to test you with it!"

"Clang!"

Without further mockery, Zhang Yuxi waved her arm and the sword scabbard dashed out toward Lin Ningshan.

"Bluewater Forming the Surge!"

The Ninth Commandery Princess clearly knew that Lin Ningshan was a powerful enemy and that she had to be extra careful fighting against her. Therefore, the technique that Zhang Yuxi used first was from the Mid Class of the Human Stage.

By releasing the sword, seven shadows of the sword appeared, which gradually turned into 49.

The 49 sword shadows eventually connected as a greenish-blue water curtain, while making a sound of flowing water it compressed and flew towards Lin Ningshan.

Lin Ningshan stood solid and still, not moving an inch. She grabbed Zhang Yuxi's hand that held the sword and stared firmly into her eyes.

When the water curtain pushed in front of Lin Ningshan, she thrust her sword right into the middle of the water curtain, and it was powerful enough to collapse every single one of Zhang Yuxi's techniques.

"Phhf!"

Ninth Commandery Princess Zhang Yuxi realized that Lin Ningshan was going to quickly break down her technique, so she immediately changed to another approach. The sword techniques between the two beauties became sharper and intensified.

Up to this point, Lin Ningshan was still unshakable. She stood completely still without moving a muscle in her legs as if she had turned into a statue.

Lin Ningshan thought to herself, "I just need to thrust out a strong sword to break down all of her tactics."

Standing outside of the drill ground, Zhang Ruochen slightly shook his head and thought, "Lin Ningshan has already reached the realm of the 'Sword Following the Heart' in terms of Sword Comprehension. Yet, Yuxi has been stuck on the technique of 'play it by ear'. When it comes to a real fight, even though they are both in the same realm of Martial Arts, Yuxi is totally the weaker fighter. Within 10 moves, Yuxi is going to lose the fight!"

Just then, there was a tremendous change on the drill ground.

Lin Ningshan actively attacked Zhang Yuxi. She moved one step forward and whipped her arms until there was a massive sword flower in the air.

Zhang Yuxi could not counter and kept stepping backward. Lin Ningshan seized the opportunity to push her harder, step by step.

"Phhf!"

After all of the attacks and counterattacks from the beauties, Lin Ningshan's sword suddenly stopped. The sharp head of the sword was pointed right at the Ninth Commandery Princess's chest.

Lin Ningshan said with satisfaction, "Princess, you have lost!"

The Ninth Commandery Princess retracted her Blue Water Sword and walked off the drill ground. She was upset and confused when she went over to Zhang Ruochen and asked, "Ninth brother, my cultivation is obviously above average. Why did I lose in such a short time?"

“Your Sword Comprehension! In terms of Sword Comprehension, you still have a long way to go to catch up to her. Wait until you have put some effort into reaching the realm of the Sword Following the Mind, then you will eventually understand!” Zhang Ruochen explained.

Then the second fight began!

The two warriors who were now standing in the middle of the fighting field were Gu Li from the Gu family and Situ Linhai, the first ever young genius from the Situ family.

The distance between their abilities was very obvious. Situ Linhai kicked Gu Li out of the battlefield with just three moves. Gu Li did not even have a chance to fight back.

“The fifth match—the Ninth Prince, Zhang Ruochen, versus Bai Wanli from the Bai family,” the general announced the warriors coming up next.

Zhang Ruochen and Bai Wanli stepped onto the drill ground at the same time.

Zhang Ruochen’s performance in the first two rounds was absolutely outstanding and it shocked several of the other warriors.

He attracted attention from all of the warriors who had come for the Year-end Assessment. All of them were curious about how exceptional Zhang Ruochen’s abilities were.

Outside of the drill ground, Lin Ningshan, the Ninth Commandery Princess, the Fifth Prince, and the Sixth Prince were all looking at Zhang Ruochen. They wondered how a Dawn Stage warrior could beat a Medium State warrior.

Bai Wanli ranked number eight in the King Mount Hunting Assessment. His cultivation had reached the Medium State of the Yellow Realm. He was definitely a powerful warrior who could kill a Brute Bull barehanded.

“Ninth Prince, you have mentioned that you are good at using the sword, and yet this is not my strongest technique. In order to be fair, let’s fight without using any weapons. What do you say?” Bai Wanli asked Zhang Ruochen.

“Sure! Let’s fight with our bare fists,” Zhang Ruochen responded calmly, as if he did not care about winning or losing the fight.

Outside of the drill ground, many warriors and spectators furrowed their eyebrows in confusion as they clearly knew that the Bais were masters of the fist technique. They could not understand why Zhang Ruochen agreed to do what Bai Wanli suggested.

It was a fact that the cultivation of Zhang Ruochen was one realm weaker than Bai Wanli. On top of that, he had agreed to give up fighting with the sword technique that he was well versed in. He was very likely going to lose.

“Sha!”

“Ha...!” Bai Wanli yelled and shifted all of his Genuine Qi in his body, releasing the martial technique, “Slaughter Fist”, in the Mid Class of the Human Stage.

“Bang!”

The stone ground on the battlefield was shattered by Bai Wanli’s powerful footstep. He suddenly rushed toward Zhang Ruochen and aimed his fist at his chest.

With the power of the Human Stage Mid Class martial technique, Bai Wanli erupted with Strength of Nine Bulls. There was a layer of light, a halo, glimmering on his fist.

Zhang Ruochen stood still with both legs slightly bent. The muscles in his legs, his back, and his arms... the power from every single part of his body all consolidated together.

“Bang!”

The moment all of the power transferred into Zhang Ruochen’s fist, he thrust out solidly toward Bai Wanli and his fist collided with his slaughter fist.

“Crack!”

The sound of bones fracturing echoed loudly!

“You lose!” said Zhang Ruochen moderately, who stood straight while looking at Bai Wanli.

Bai Wanli held his arm painfully as if he had lost all the power in his broken arm. He took a few steps back, stared at Zhang Ruochen with panic, and asked, “You... you are powerful enough to resist my fist! How did you...”

Not only Bai Wanli, but also the young warriors outside the drill grounds, were all confused about what they had just witnessed—Zhang Ruochen just defeated the master of the fist technique!

Even though Bai Wanli’s fist had the Strength of Nine Bulls, Zhang Ruochen did not even have to use any martial technique and he shattered Bai Wanli’s arm with just one fist!

In the terms of a Dawn Stage warrior, this was impossible!

Only the elder warriors, with an advanced cultivation of Martial Arts, would notice the clues from Zhang Ruochen.

“Master Bai’s arm isn’t shattered but twisted out of its socket,” said the general who was in the kylin armor.

“Dislocated? How is that possible? I’m sure the Ninth Prince only struck out with a palm. How did he manage to twist Bai Wanli’s arm out of its socket?” asked a young frustrated warrior.

The general in the kylin armor explained,. “The mastery of the power of the Ninth Prince is sophisticated when he is at his best. The power from every inch of his muscles and bones all coalesced at the same time. Moreover, when he released his palm, the power of the palm technique actually carried the force of torsion.

“The torsion disappeared within just a second. It is totally normal if you guys can’t figure it out. Even with my cultivation, I still can’t master my power to match Zhang Ruochen’s finest!”

The one who commented on Zhang Ruochen's technique with courtesy was Ge Qian, the royal guard of the Yunwu Commandery Prince. No one would question the truthfulness of what the experienced and respected person just said.

"I can't believe how powerful the Ninth Prince is! Oh my god... he just started practicing Martial Arts three months ago! I guess even the Seventh Prince isn't as incredible as him!"

"After the Year-end Assessment this year, I'm sure that the Ninth Prince's name will be scattered all over the commandery capital and he will become the most influential warrior of the young generation!"

Zhang Ruochen left the drill ground embraced by the crowd's amazement.

Three more fights had finished. The eight spots in the quarter-finals were finally confirmed.

The top eight warriors were: the Fifth Prince, Situ Linjiang, Xue Kai, Zhang Ruochen, Lin Ningshan, Luo Cheng, Lin Tianwu, and the Sixth Prince.

Following the quarter-final was the semi-final, which was the battle to strive into the top four.

That meant that the warrior who won the next fight would surely enter the top five and also be given the opportunity to access the Savage God's Pool for practice.

"The first round, the Ninth Prince, Zhang Ruochen, versus the Lin's Lin Ningshan," the general announced.

When Zhang Ruochen heard that his opponent was Lin Ningshan, he lifted his head slightly and whispered, "What a coincidence!"

He then glanced at Lin Ningshan.

At that moment, Lin Ningshan's sight had also fallen on Zhang Ruochen.

The Ninth Commandery Princess, Zhang Yuxi, stood next to Zhang Ruochen, offered a smile, and said, "Ninth brother, I know you like Ningshan a lot but she doesn't like you! Therefore, don't be tender toward her, spare no effort in the fight and avenge my loss!"

Zhang Ruochen calmly stepped onto the drill ground.

"Oh, my cousin! I never imagined that you would acquire the Sacred Mark at the age of 16 and yet you still catch up at such a fast pace! Given that the best age of practicing Martial Arts has passed, your performance so far is indeed incredible!" Lin Ningshan said softly with a slight smile on her pretty face.

She stood opposite Zhang Ruochen elegantly, with her red lips chuckling, demonstrating a fresh and pure beauty.

After watching the fight between Zhang Ruochen and Bai Wanli, Lin Ningshan was completely impressed by Zhang Ruochen's performance and she stopped looking down on him. She clearly knew that the warrior who was standing opposite her was no longer the crappy guy in her mind, but a genius of Martial Arts.

Deep down in her heart, she had no confidence that she would defeat Zhang Ruochen. Indeed, she thought that Zhang Ruochen was scarier than the Fifth Prince, Situ Linhai, and Xue Kai in terms of his talent and technique in Martial Arts, which made her even more nervous.

Of course, she did not believe that Zhang Ruochen would use any sword strike toward her since she knew Zhang Ruochen had always loved her.

Back in the day, Zhang Ruochen had waited outside the Lin's Mansion for a whole night, on the coldest day in winter, in order to please her.

The next morning, when she went outside the mansion to wake Zhang Ruochen up, she realized that his entire body had been frozen, being mindful of the fact that Zhang Ruochen's physical quality was fragile before the reborn "Zhang Ruochen" acquired the Sacred Mark. After that night, his health got worse and, thus, resting in bed was the only thing that he could do.

Once in a while, she would see Zhang Ruochen with disdain. Even though he waited for her the whole night that winter, she considered Zhang Ruochen a fool who did not deserve her attention.

However, it was a totally different story now. The Zhang Ruochen in the fighting field was a Genius of Martial Arts. At the thought of having a generally recognized genius love her, Lin Ningshan felt vainglorious, as if all the hatred had left her in a second.

"My cousin, do you think we should fight? You should understand how much it means to me to go into the semi-final!" Lin Ningshan said softly since she was trying to take advantage of his love for her.

There was a sense of temptation in her glittering eyes as she looked delicately at Zhang Ruochen.

...

Chapter 26: The Outcome

Zhang Ruochen stared at Lin Ningshan and said wryly, "Making the top four is important for me too. How about this? I'll fight without a sword!"

"Really?"

A sense of excitement welled up in Lin Ningshan's mind. "Well, thank you for being so humble, my cousin."

As far as she was concerned, Zhang Ruochen had to be so loath to defeat her that he had proposed to fight empty-handed.

She had no idea that Zhang Ruochen clearly knew that defeating her did not require a sword.

The sword in Lin Ningshan's hand was the Splendor Sword, a Second Class Genuine Martial Arm.

Once she took the combat sword out of the sheath, it immediately emitted radiance. The sword shone like a star and had bright spots flowing on its surface.

Lin Ningshan's eyes sharpened. She activated the Genuine Qi inside her body and channeled it steadily into the blade. Her Qi stimulated the Inscription of Power Series and Inscription of Light Series forces in the sword.

"Boom!"

Lin Ningshan took three steps forward, covering three meters with each bound. She moved first and stabbed toward Zhang Ruochen's chest. A cyan sword flower bloomed out of thin air.

Momentarily, the cold tip of the sword pointed at Zhang Ruochen.

Lin Ningshan had defeated the Ninth Commandery Princess with the same sword technique. This sword technique was not easy to handle.

Zhang Ruochen's thrust his foot against the ground, dodging to the right immediately.

"Swish!"

Lin Ningshan changed her technique as well. With a twitch of her arm, she rotated the Splendor Sword in the air and made a backhand stab toward Zhang Ruochen's neck.

The Splendor Sword had almost become a part of her, like an extension of her hand. Her technique was sophisticated and her control of the sword was complete.

"Floating Clouds and Flowing Water!"

Lin Ningshan brought out a sword technique of the Mid Class of the Human Stage, stabbing toward Zhang Ruochen repeatedly.

Her technique was elegant and gave off an intense light.

"Wind Sweeping Away the Clouds!"

"Rain Stops and Clouds Show!"

...

Lin Ningshan used 13 sword techniques in a row. Every stab was well-executed, but they all failed to touch even the tail of his robe.

Her Sword Comprehension, after all, had reached the Realm of "Sword Following the Heart". How could it take that long to defeat a warrior who had a weaker cultivation?

"Parting Clouds!"

Lin Ningshan used one last sword technique. Its power was so staggering that Zhang Ruochen was forced to retreat step by step. He almost reached the edge of the drill ground.

The attack nearly pushed Zhang Ruochen out of the drill ground.

"It's almost time!"

Zhang Ruochen's eyes emitted two rays of light. Suddenly, he stopped. He stared into the overwhelming sword light and squeezed his index finger and middle finger into a finger sword.

All of a sudden, he unleashed his finger sword!

“Boom!”

The finger sword had broken through the Sword Breath in the void and pointed at Lin Ningshan’s chest.

“Boom!”

He transferred his Genuine Qi through his fingers and struck Lin Ningshan. She fell to the ground three meters away.

Zhang Ruochen stared coldly at Lin Ningshan on the ground and said, “You lose!”

Lin Ningshan covered her chest with her hand. She gritted her beautiful teeth and stared at Zhang Ruochen with humiliation in her eyes. She grabbed her Splendor Sword and said, “No, I don’t! Zhang Ruochen, let’s keep fighting!”

Zhang Ruochen shook his head slightly and turned toward the exit of the drill ground. He did not want to keep arguing with a defeated opponent.

“Sacred Guiding Sword!”

Lin Ningshan had a grim look in her eye. She channeled all the Genuine Qi and resentment in her body to the Splendor Sword and cast the Low Class of Spiritual Sacred Sword Skill.

All of a sudden, the Splendor Sword sprouted a meter-high light sword, emitting a huge stream of Sword Breath.

She waved her arm and seven meters of Sword Breath stabbed toward Zhang Ruochen.

When Lin Ningshan displayed this sword technique, the warriors gathered outside the drill ground were shocked.

They could not believe that Lin Ningshan would attack the Ninth Prince from behind as he was leaving the drill ground. Furthermore, she used a sword technique of the Spiritual Stage, a much stronger power.

Had the sword cut the Ninth Prince, he would have been a dead man.

“Ningshan, stop!” Lin Fengxian’s countenance changed as he roared toward his daughter.

If the Ninth Prince died under Lin Ningshan’s sword, their family would be doomed!

No one, however, expected that she would attack him after being defeated.

Yet, it was too late to stop her.

Everyone thought that Zhang Ruochen was going to die under Lin Ningshan’s sword, but he shot into the sky to evade the Sword Breath from Lin Ningshan’s sword.

“Dragon in the Sky!”

Zhang Ruochen had risen seven meters high in the air. He twisted his body, let out a dragon’s roar, and his palm struck Lin Ningshan’s shoulder.

“Boom!”

Lin Ningshan’s body shivered. She spat out a mouthful of blood. Her legs trembled and she fell to the ground.

Zhang Ruochen looked at Lin Ningshan laying in blood and callously shook his head. He was more than disappointed with his cousin.

Lin Fengxian rushed over to the drill ground at once. He glanced at Zhang Ruochen and the Yunwu Commandery Prince. Then he begrudgingly said, “Thank you for your mercy, Ninth Prince.”

Immediately afterward, Lin Fengxian helped Lin Ningshan get up.

He put his hands on Lin Ningshan’s back. Lin Ningshan channeled a large volume of Genuine Qi into Lin Ningshan’s body through his palms to help her condition of an injury.

Indeed, Zhang Ruochen had shown mercy just now.

If he had struck the top of her head instead of her shoulder, Lin Ningshan would have surely died.

Lin Ningshan woke up. She opened her eyes and glanced at Zhang Ruochen with heavy resentment. “Zhang Ruochen, one day I will return double the humiliation you gave me today.” She vowed to him.

But Zhang Ruochen had already walked out of the drill ground.

After Lin Fengxian helped Lin Ningshan get down off the stage, the competition continued.

The following three competitions were: Situ Linjiang versus Lin Tianwu,

the Fifth Prince versus the Sixth Prince,

and last but not least, Xue Kai versus Luo Cheng.

Lin Tianwu was another young master of Lin family. Although he was only 19 years old, he had reached the martial cultivation of the Medium State of the Yellow Realm.

However, Situ Linjiang had already reached the cultivation of the Final State of the Yellow Realm. With only one blow, he struck Lin Tianwu out of the drill ground.

The competition between the Fifth Prince and the Sixth Prince had ended with the Sixth Prince’s surrender.

The competition between Xue Kai and Luo Cheng was exciting.

Although Luo Cheng had only reached the cultivation of the Medium State of the Yellow Realm, his martial technique was powerful enough to compete with Xue Kai.

Eventually, the disparity in cultivation allowed Xue Ka to defeat Luo Cheng.

So far, the top 4 of the Year-end Assessment this year had all emerged. They were Zhang Ruochen, the Fifth Prince, Xue Kai, and Situ Linjiang.

Lin Ningshan, Luo Cheng, Lin Tianwu, and the Sixth Prince would have to compete for fifth place.

The following competitions would be quite brutal. The Fifth Prince, Xue Kai, and Situ Linjiang were all in the Final State of the Yellow Realm. Zhang Ruochen was only in the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm.

“Ninth brother, I can’t believe you’re in the top four. I definitely underestimated you before. Well, you won’t be able to go any further. The gap between the Dawn State and the Final State is too big for you,” the Fifth Prince said as he laughed.

Zhang Ruochen took no notice of him. Instead, he closed his eyes and rapidly recharged his Genuine Qi.

“The next competition: Zhang Ruochen, the Ninth Prince, versus Xue Kai from the Minister’s Mansion.”

Zhang Ruochen and Xue Kai simultaneously walked onto the drill ground.

Xue Kai looked Zhang Ruochen over. He laughed and said, “Ninth Prince, if I’m not mistaken, your specialty is swords.”

“You could say that,” Zhang Ruochen responded.

“Great! Let’s fight with swords!” Xue Kai stretched out his arm. Outside the drill ground, a young warrior from the Minister’s Mansion handed him a long sword.

Xue Kai had carefully scrutinized Zhang Ruochen’s two previous competitions. He suspected that Zhang Ruochen ability with swords was a facade. Rather, his true specialty was palm techniques.

After all, the palm techniques he showed in the last two fights had been astonishing. He did not seem to be a sword master at all.

Palm techniques focused on strong power.

Sword techniques, however, were about dexterity.

Warriors would rarely combine these two abilities.

Xue Kai, therefore, proposed to compete with Zhang Ruochen using swords.

He believed that Zhang Ruochen’s sword techniques would prove inferior to his own.

“Ninth brother, take this!” The Ninth Commandery Princess tossed her Blue Water Sword to Zhang Ruochen.

Zhang Ruochen took the Blue Water Sword. He held the handle of the sword and felt a draft of icy air emanating from it.

“A Third Class Genuine Martial Arms combat sword. There are three Inscriptions of Ice Series and three Inscriptions of Power Series engraved in this sword.” Zhang Ruochen estimated the grade of this sword just by holding it.

Chapter 27: Flame Snake Spear Technique

“Ninth Prince, you should be careful!”

With a twist in the corner of his mouth, Xue Kai poured his Genuine Qi into the body of the sword to activate three Inscription of Power Series at the same time. The sword in his hand immediately increased its weight to 175 kg.

He held the sword with both hands, waving it valiantly. There was an oscillatory Qi billow wherever the sword went.

His sword technique seemed simple, but it was efficient. It was not fancy, but every hit had shocking power.

Zhang Ruochen also poured the Genuine Qi into the Blue Water Sword to activate an Inscription of Ice Series and an Inscription of Power Series. The sword emitted freezing ice into the air and the air filled with white frost.

Zhang Ruochen knew that he did not have as much power as Xue Kai. He did not plan to confront the tough with toughness.

Zhang Ruochen did some mysterious footwork while waving his sword. He dodged almost every attack.

Meanwhile, Lin Fengxian, who stood outside the drill ground, watched Zhang Ruochen's footwork whole-heartedly. With surprise, he silently asked himself how he could be using the footwork of the Sacred Sword Skill?

The sword techniques of the Spiritual Stage all had corresponding footwork.

Only by combining it with footwork could the sword technique reveal its real power.

Right now, the footwork that Zhang Ruochen used matched the Sacred Sword Skill exactly. Seeing Zhang Ruochen using this footwork, how could Lin Fengxian not be surprised?

Xue Kai's sword was extremely heavy. Naturally, it consumed a great amount of Genuine Qi.

As the battle continued, Xue Kai began to feel tired. There was sweat on his forehead and his Genuine Qi was halfway depleted.

His original strategy had been to defeat Zhang Ruochen in a few movements. But after dozens of movements, he had not even touched Zhang Ruochen's sword.

"Crap!

"I fell for his trick!"

"He was depleting his energy and Genuine Qi on purpose."

Xue Kai drew back a part of his Genuine Qi the moment that he realized it. As he activated only one Inscription of Power Series, the heavy sword in his hands doubled in weight immediately!

"This is high time."

Zhang Ruochen made a move!

"Sacred Guiding Sword!"

Zhang Ruochen waved his arm and struck and an eight-meter-long Sword Breath flew from the ground, leaving a sword path in Xue Kai's direction.

Xue Kai did not see it coming. He had never expected that Zhang Ruochen could practice a sword technique of the Spiritual Stage.

In haste, Xue Kai could only activate all his Genuine Qi and move his sword crosswise to counter.

“Bang!”

The Sword Breath hit the sword in Xue Kai's hands and threw him away. All his clothes were torn into pieces.

When he fell back on the ground, he was outside the drill ground.

Xue Kai looked at his bleeding hands, then glanced at Zhang Ruochen, who was standing upright on the drill ground. Bitterly, he acknowledged, “I've lost.”

When the battle ended, the audience could not recover from their shock.

How could a warrior in the Final State of the Yellow Realm be beaten by one in the Dawn State?

“He's really practicing the Sacred Sword Skill. It's impossible!” Lin Ningshan was quite shocked. She could not believe that Zhang Ruochen could practice the Sacred Sword Skill. He even seemed better at it than she was.

“Could he be the mystery man we met at the Central Auction?”

Lin Fengxian seemed serious, and said, “It is not that simple, Ningshan. Don't forget that the Sacred Sword Skill we bought is not the master copy, but a hand-written copy by a superior of the Heaven Realm.”

“Daddy, do you mean that the reason for Zhang Ruochen's extremely fast practice speed is the strength of the Heaven Realm hiding behind him?” Lin Ningshan asked in surprise.

“Hush!”

Lin Fengxian made a gesture to silence her, and said in a low voice, “It's better to keep it in the family. We'll talk about it when we get back.”

Lin Ningshan nodded. Her grudge expanded as she stared at Zhang Ruochen. “No wonder he could so easily dodge the ‘Sacred Guiding Sword’ that I used. He also practices this sword technique. How many secrets do you have, Zhang Ruochen?”

“Even Xue Kai is defeated?”

“It seems that the Ninth Prince has practiced a sword technique of the Spiritual Stage. It is fair that he defeated Xue Kai.”

“The Ninth Prince must have reached the realm of ‘Sword Following the Heart’. He is indeed a genius of sword techniques.”

...

No one dared to look down upon the Ninth Prince. Instead, they treated him like an incredible genius martialist. Some even thought his talent was as great as the Seventh Prince's.

The following battle was the Fifth Prince versus Situ Linhai.

The Fifth Prince was 19 years old and had reached the Final State of the Yellow Realm with a Third Class Sacred Mark.

Situ Linhai, the first genius of the Situs, was 17 years old and had also reached the Final State of the Yellow Realm with a Fourth Class of Blaze Sacred Mark.

Situ Linhai had his own reputation within the young generation of the entire Yunwu City. With his talent, he even had the chance to break through to the Completion of the Yellow Realm and reach the Black Realm before the age of 20.

Situ Linhai carried a long black spear, standing on the drill ground proudly. He stared at the Fifth Prince across from him and exclaimed with confidence, "Fifth Prince, you are no match for me!"

The Fifth Prince said, "We are both in the Final State of the Yellow Realm. It will not be easy for you to win."

"You should know better than anybody else that my Genuine Qi has the power of Blaze. I have a Fourth Class of Blaze Sacred Mark. I have no equal in the same realm. You won't last 10 movements against my spear with your cultivation." Situ Linhai's eyes were firm and sharp, full of confidence.

Warriors with natural Sacred Marks were indeed more powerful than those with normal Sacred Marks in the same realm.

"Really? We should let the battle decide who is stronger." The Fifth Prince picked up the combat sword in front of him, then activated his Genuine Qi to move fast through his 12 Meridians. He poured all of it into the sword.

"Phhf!"

He activated three inscriptions in the sword.

It immediately radiated out a one-meter-high light.

The Fifth Prince made a move proactively, using a sword technique of the Mid Class of the Human Stage. He waved the combat sword continually to form a vortex of sword light and cleaved at Situ Linhai.

To obtain a shining rank in the drill ground of the Year-end Assessment, most of the young warriors had learned at least one, or often several, martial techniques of the Mid Class of the Human Stage. They wanted to achieve fame with one battle in the Year-end Assessment.

The Fifth Prince was no exception. He had spent half a year practicing the Heaven Light Sword Skill, a martial technique of the Mid Class of the Human Stage. It contained eight movements in total, and the Fifth Prince had mastered three of them.

"The Heaven Light Sword Skill is mediocre," Situ Linhai said with a sneer.

Situ Linhai seemed at ease under the Fifth Prince's continuous attack. He waved the long black spear to counter back the Fifth Prince's every hit.

"Bang! Bang!"

The long spear hit the combat sword and sparks flew out.

"Sword of Cloud and Rain."

The Fifth Prince shouted, then he jumped into the sky about six meters high, holding the hilt with both hands, and cleaved.

The light of the combat sword became brighter, like a shower of illumination, falling on Situ Linjiang.

Situ Linjiang had developed 13 Meridians, one more than that of the Fifth Prince.

The Genuine Qi moved fast in Situ Linjiang's 13 Meridians, gathering at his hands.

His hands looked like a burning flame, and the flame rushed to the long black spear, activating the power of the three Inscriptions of Fire Series at the same time.

"Fire Snake!"

The Flame Snake Spear Technique was a martial technique of the Superior Class of the Human Stage.

The spear thrust like a fire snake, breaking all of the sword radiance made by the Fifth Prince.

"Bang!"

The Fifth Prince flew backward. His royal boa robe caught on fire, burning to ashes immediately.

Situ Linhai rushed forward and thrust his spear again. The end of the long spear hit the Fifth Prince in the chest, knocking him out of the drill ground.

With a trace of blood in the corner of his mouth, the Fifth Prince raised himself from the ground and stared at Situ Linjiang, who was standing at the center of the drill ground like a reincarnate Spear God. He declared. "Flame Snake Spear Technique! Terrific! If you had practiced it from the beginning, I wouldn't have lasted three movements."

The spear technique that Situ Linjiang had just used was extremely amazing. He definitely had reached the Realm of "Spear Following the Heart". Plus, with the power of Blaze in his Genuine Qi, he had virtually no equal in the Final State of the Yellow Realm.

Outside the drill ground, Mo Hanlin said mildly, "Only the Ninth Prince and Situ Linjiang stand now! It seems appropriate that Situ Linjiang is the strongest of the Situ's young generation. Maybe we won't need the final battle."

"Why?" Qin Ya blinked. Her eyelashes were long and neat. The charming light in her beautiful eyes could attract any man at any time.

Mo Hanlin said, "With his cultivation, Situ Linjiang is absolutely a young superior who has no equal even in the Final State of the Yellow Realm. Although the Ninth Prince is a greater genius than Situ Linjiang, he

is only at the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm. He could beat Xue Kai, but beating Situ Linjiang is out of the question.”

Almost everyone present was of the same opinion.

They admitted that the Ninth Prince was a Genius of Martial Arts, but they would not believe that he could beat Situ Linjiang right now.

“If the Ninth Prince had another year to practice Martial Arts, it would be easy for him to beat Situ Linjiang. But as of now, there is still a gap.”

A small smile showed on Qin Ya’s red lips as she said, “Don’t bet on it. A genius is called a genius because they can create miracles. I hope the Ninth Prince can create a miracle. If that’s the case, I will have even more interest in him! Hehe!”

Qin Ya’s eyes narrowed a bit, like two bright crescents.

Chapter 28: Who is the Genius?

The final battle was between Zhang Ruochen, the Ninth Prince, versus Situ Linjiang, the first genius of the Situs.

Before the Year-end Assessment, Zhang Ruochen, who was once considered a waste, had just obtained his Sacred Mark. Yet, nobody dared to look down on him now, including Situ Linjiang, who stood across from him.

“Fight!”

Situ Linjiang groaned, and in the meantime, poured his Genuine Qi into the long spear.

The long black spear was covered with flames like a fire snake, thrusting toward Zhang Ruochen.

Situ Linjiang clearly knew that Zhang Ruochen’s cultivation and power were far beneath his own. But Zhang Ruochen’s control over his Genuine Qi and power was subtle, so he was unsettled by that.

If he wanted to defeat Zhang Ruochen, he had to attack fiercely so that he would not have the chance to fight back.

As long as Zhang Ruochen had no chance to attack, he would surely be the winner!

Situ Linjiang was indeed far more powerful than Xue Kai, and his spear technique was also perfect. But Zhang Ruochen stayed calm as usual, so there was not a trace of fear or panic on his face.

“Fire Snake!”

The spearhead was chasing Zhang Ruochen’s back like a fire snake, aiming at his heart.

Zhang Ruochen lowered his body to dodge the long spear, then suddenly he thrust the Blue Water Sword directly at Situ Linjiang’s right hand, which was holding the spear.

Situ Linjiang stepped back to duck the attack, then he struck back. He used the spear as a stick and slashed at Zhang Ruochen's head.

Sparks fell on Zhang Ruochen before the long spear hit him. They burned little black holes on his royal boa robe.

Zhang Ruochen whispered to himself, "Such a fast response!"

There was no time to dodge it now.

"Sacred Bell Sword!"

The 11 Meridians inside Zhang Ruochen had all displayed. His Genuine Qi kept injecting into the Blue Water Sword ceaselessly to activate the two Inscriptions of Ice Series in it.

He twisted his body and countered with his sword crosswise.

"Boom!"

A nattier blue, bell-like shadow covered Zhang Ruochen's body, and it spun fast, emitting freezing icy air.

Situ Linjiang cleaved the shadow's surface with his spear, but a powerful force stopped him from breaking the shadow.

"He countered my attack!"

"Boom!"

The power of re-bounce made Situ Linjiang's arm numb.

At this moment, Zhang Ruochen rushed from the Bell Sword and wielded his sword at Situ Linjiang, causing an eight-meter-long Sword Breath.

"Sacred Guiding Sword!"

Another sword technique of Low Class of Spiritual.

Situ Linjiang's face slightly changed. He immediately drew back to duck the Sword Breath, he then roared and thrust the spear at Zhang Ruochen again.

"Clap!"

The speed was so fast that it caused violent friction between the Blaze Spear and the air. The spearhead was burnt in red, dropping grains of sparks.

Zhang Ruochen did not counter Situ Linjiang directly. Instead, he jumped into the air to evade the attack.

"Stupid! One can't borrow power to move when one is in midair. It makes you an easy target. How can you dodge my next attack?"

Then Situ Linjiang seized the chance. He also jumped into the air and stabbed Zhang Ruochen at his chest.

"Who says I can't borrow power? I'll use yours!"

Zhang Ruochen waved his sword continually, hitting the spear.

“Bang, Bang!”

Every time the Blue Water Sword hit the long spear, Zhang Ruochen’s direction shifted a bit. In the blink of an eye, Zhang Ruochen hit the long spear nine times with his sword.

When the ninth hit was over, Zhang Ruochen was below Situ Linjiang. Now, Situ Linjiang was in midair, becoming an easy target for Zhang Ruochen.

All those nine hits happened in a flash. Without a keen eye, one could only see a series of sword glints but had no idea of what was really going on.

“Crap!”

Situ Linjiang panicked. He did not expect that Zhang Ruochen could control his power in such an amazing way.

In just a blink, the situation was reversed.

“Boom!”

Zhang Ruochen thrust the sword.

The icy air covered the Blue Water Sword. A layer of Ice Crystals wrapped its body. The cutting edge of the sword emitted white icy air.

At this moment, Situ Linjiang had not reached the ground. He could not borrow power and, thus, he could not dodge.

“Fire Snake’s Eyes!”

Situ Linjiang clenched his teeth and also thrust his spear. The Power of Blaze broke out from the spearhead.

“Boom!”

The combat sword and the long spear hit each other. The icy air and the flame collided and made a loud crash of metal.

A great power went to Zhang Ruochen’s arm through the sword, sending him seven steps backward.

Situ Linjiang was in a more embarrassing situation. He was thrown backward and almost fell to the ground. Fortunately, he managed to hit the ground with his spear at the last moment. With the help of the reaction force, he landed smoothly on his feet.

He did not realize that his right sleeve was frozen until he got a firm foothold. He activated the Genuine Qi inside and shook his arm. The sleeve broke apart at once and fell to the ground as pieces of ice.

They went on fiercely fighting without stopping.

An old eunuch wearing a cyan uniform, who was standing behind the Yunwu Commandery Prince, said in surprise, “This is a true battle between young geniuses. It’s eye-opening! Like father, like son!”

Although the Ninth Prince is only at the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm, he is fighting neck-and-neck with Situ Linjiang from the Situs. That is incredible!”

“Right! A great talent takes time to cultivate. The Ninth Prince’s future achievements are beyond our imagination. Congratulations, Your Majesty. There is another great genius in the Royal Family.” A senior general wearing armor flattered him from below.

Hearing all the compliments, the Yunwu Commandery Prince was surely happy. The truth revealed itself. The Ninth Prince did have an incredible talent in Martial Arts. Had they been in the same realm, the first young genius of the Situs might have lost already!

What kind of father would not be happy when his son had incredible talent in practice?

The Yunwu Commandery Prince said with a smile, “He doesn’t have such great power by chance. Haven’t you noticed that although he is only at the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm, he’s already developed 11 Meridians?”

“What? One at the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm can develop 11 Meridians?”

The concubines, eunuchs, princes, princesses, generals, and ministers all stared at Zhang Ruochen, who was on the drill ground.

If Zhang Ruochen did not activate his Genuine Qi, nobody could quantify his Meridians. But when he was fighting Situ Linjiang, Zhang Ruochen had to give it his all. The quantification of his Meridians was exposed immediately.

Of course, only the powerful elder warriors were capable to see through it.

“11 Meridians! Really? Is Ninth Brother that strong? I remember that my Seventh Brother only developed 10 Meridians when he was at the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm.” The Ninth Commandery Princess was so shocked that her pretty eyes were wide open.

If that was not said by the Yunwu Commandery Prince, she would not have believed that there was someone even more talented than the Seventh Prince in the entire Yunwu Commandery.

The more Meridians that a warrior developed, the more powerful his Body of Martial Arts became, and hence, the more potential he obtained.

Taking the Fifth Prince as an example—He was at the Final State of the Yellow Realm, but he had only developed 12 Meridians. Therefore, even if he had reached the Completion of the Yellow Realm, he could only develop 15 Meridians at most.

Which meant that even if he could reach the Black Realm or the Earth Realm in the future, he would only have 15 Meridians inside his body. He surely could not compete with warriors that had 16 or 17 Meridians.

The more Meridians the warriors of the Yellow Realm developed, the more potential they gained.

Of course, one with 15 Meridians was already more powerful than most warriors.

“11 Meridians! He has developed 11 Meridians when he is only at the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm. How could it be possible? Does that mean that he has more potential than the Seventh Prince?” Lin Fengxian was shocked. He did not at all expect that Zhang Ruochen could be such a genius.

This was beyond genius.

Lin Ningshan asked, “Father, has he really developed 11 Meridians?”

Lin Fengxian nodded with regards. Had he known the Ninth Prince’s amazing talent, he would not have been such a jerk when Concubine Lin went back to the Lin’s Mansion to beg him.

He should not have betrothed Lin Ningshan to the Seventh Prince. After all, she could only be a concubine at best if she married the Seventh Prince. There was no chance for her to be a Lady.

But if he had betrothed Lin Ningshan to the Ninth Prince, considering the Ninth Prince’s former love for her and their kinship as cousins, she would definitely be a Lady. If they could help the Ninth Prince to become the successor to the throne, the Lins would have much greater influence in the Yunwu Commandery in the future.

But it was too late now!

“Who said the Ninth Prince couldn’t defeat Situ Linjiang? Can’t you see that the victory still hangs in the balance! Hehe!” Qin Ya smiled.

Mo Hanlin nodded. “Showing a great talent like this, the Ninth Prince may obtain a higher achievement than the Seventh Prince. The situation in the Yunwu Commandery will change a lot after the Year-end Assessment!”

Chapter 29: Multitasking

On the drill ground, Zhang Ruochen fought against Situ Linjiang fiercely. The sword shadow and spear collided with each other, which let out a deafening bang.

“Boom!”

Gripping a long spear in his hands, Situ Linjiang stabbed it into the ground, shattering the flagstone, turning it into gravel instantly. He spun his spear and then all of the gravel flew toward Zhang Ruochen.

“Bang, Bang!”

Zhang Ruochen swung his sword and chopped straight down.

All of the gravel was smashed and altered into stone powder immediately.

Then Situ Linjiang seized his chance and tried to stab at the chest of Zhang Ruochen through the stone powder.

While Situ Linjiang was immersed in complacency since he thought he was sure to win, his eyes then blurred suddenly and a sword shadow flashed before him. All he saw was a streak of blue sword radiance.

Then Situ Linjiang felt a pain in his wrist. His long black spear slipped out of his grip and flew from his hand.

It was Zhang Ruochen who left a deep wound on his wrist, very close to cutting off his right hand.

“I still have a chance to win!” Situ Linjiang said to himself.

Situ Linjiang was being absent-minded when his long spear flew out of his fist. He immediately sobered and dashed toward Zhang Ruochen. This time, Situ Linjiang intended to plant his fist in the face of Zhang Ruochen.

Zhang Ruochen realized that Situ Linjiang was going to strike to win!

“Want another round of fighting?” Zhang Ruochen asked.

With one hand holding his sword, Zhang Ruochen used his other hand to use the first palm of the Dragon and Elephant Prajna Palm, Elephant Galloping. He bent his body and charged forward. After giving one palm, he unleashed the Strength of Sixteen Bulls.

When Zhang Ruochen shook his arm, a loud screech broke out from the Blue Water Sword. It looked like the landscape of a white rainbow crossing the sun, casting seven sword shadows onto the ground.

“The Sacred Sword Skill! The Sacred Breaking Plum Sword!”

By integrating his palm technique with his sword technique, Zhang Ruochen used them at the same time.

It was almost like Zhang Ruochen had split into two, and he made the attack simultaneously and smoothly with each hand.

His fighting capacity was suddenly doubled.

“Boom!”

When Situ Linjiang’s fist made contact with Zhang Ruochen’s fist, he was surprised to find that the palm strength of Zhang Ruochen was quite violent and the equivalent to his fist.

After all, Situ Linjiang could manifest the Strength of Sixteen Bulls. He wondered if Zhang Ruochen could also break out such awesome power.

Situ Linjiang had no time to really think about it since Zhang Ruochen was thrusting his sword toward him again.

“Phhf!”

A blast of sharp Sword Breath whipped through Situ Linjiang, leaving a red sword mark on his neck.

Zhang Ruochen easily shifted between his palm and sword, forcing Situ Linjiang to keep stepping back.

Situ Linjiang had never seen someone separate his left hand from his right hand. They could work independently without any difficulty. He thought that it was like contending with two incarnations of Zhang Ruochen, thus landing himself in a defensive position.

It was not long before he had another two wounds caused by Zhang Ruochen's sword.

"I've failed!"

Situ Linjiang gave in and had no intention to continue fighting.

Zhang Ruochen stopped his attack and withdrew his sword, planning to exit the drill ground.

Situ Linjiang asked, "Can you tell me how you were able to accomplish that level of multitasking? One hand for the palm, the other hand for the sword? It seems impossible."

Turning around, Zhang Ruochen glanced at Situ Linjiang and answered, "When your Spiritual Power is strong enough, you are able to do two, three, or even four things at the same time."

"Do warriors also need to practice their Spiritual Power?" Situ Linjiang asked.

"You can practice if you want. You can choose not to practice if you want. Your choice is your own," Zhang Ruochen replied coolly.

In Kunlun's Field, only weapon refiners, alchemists, and tamers often practiced their Spiritual Power.

Only after your Spiritual Power had become strong enough would you be able to depict the inscription and refine the Genuine Martial Arms and panaceas. In the meantime, only when one's recorded inscription was in the body of the savage beast were you able to tame them to be your flying mount or warbeast.

Generally speaking, warriors did not bother with practicing their Spiritual Power as it was a time-consuming process.

Actually, with the enhancement of Martial Arts cultivation, a warrior's Spiritual Power would also improve, but fairly slowly.

If the warrior did not practice their Spiritual Power purposely, they would not attain that level of Multitasking until they arrived at the Heaven Realm.

In his last lifetime, Zhang Ruochen practiced both his Martial Arts and Spiritual Power. Notably, the strength of his Spiritual Power had entered into a high realm.

In this lifetime, he had been reborn into this weak body. Although he had lost all of his cultivation, his Spiritual Power had been retained.

With his present Spiritual Power level, he could achieve Multitasking, doing even three things at one time.

When Situ Linjiang gave up the battle, the sound of a triton's trumpet and a war drum came from the military drill ground, which officially announced an end to this year's Year-end Assessment.

Arranged from high to low, the top five for the Year-end Assessment were: Zhang Ruochen, Situ Linjiang, Xue Kai, the Fifth Prince, and Lin Ningshan.

The top five young geniuses would get an extra reward besides the opportunity to practice in the Savage God's Pool.

Zhang Ruochen obtained the armor of a sixth-class Genuine Martial Arm called the Ice-fire Kylin Armour. Recognized for its great value and amazing defensive power, it was said to be refined from the scales of the king of the savage beasts, a kylin.

When compared to a warrior from the same class, the armor was considered more valuable than the soldier.

Namely, the value of the armor of a sixth-class Genuine Martial Arm was equal to a soldier of the seventh-class Genuine Martial Arm.

“At a cost of at least a million silver coins, this Ice-fire Kylin Armor is comparable to a martial technique of the Low Class of the Spiritual. It’s even scarce for the Royal Family in the Yunwu Commandery. I can’t believe such a treasure was given to me as a reward for first place.” Zhang Ruochen was astonished and looked at the Yunwu Commandery Prince, who was standing on the top.

After pondering for just a moment, he understood immediately.

After all, Zhang Ruochen was the son of the Yunwu Commandery Prince. The precious Ice-fire Kylin Armor, though it was presented to him, still technically belonged to the Royal Family.

If Situ Linjiang had ranked first place, he would not have been rewarded the same treasure. It would have been another treasure, inferior to the Ice-fire Kylin Armor.

Perhaps the Yunwu Commandery Prince felt regret for Zhang Ruochen and Concubine Lin, thus rewarding the Ice-fire Kylin Armor to Zhang Ruochen as a form of compensation for his faults over the past years.

The Ice-fire Kylin Armor was an armor that only covered one’s upper body. When Zhang Ruochen injected his Genuine Qi into the armor, the Ice-fire Kylin Armor appeared blue and red instantly, emitting a combined power of icy cold and roaring flame.

“Humph!”

Upon seeing Zhang Ruochen wearing the Ice-fire Kylin Armor, the queen, sitting at the top, pulled a long face and looked quite serious. With a murderous intent flashing across her eyes, she stood up from her seat.

The queen swung her sleeves and turned away, turning her back on the drill ground.

The Fifth Prince and the Sixth Prince all glared at Zhang Ruochen with great jealousy and admiration.

Harboring resentment in his heart, the Fifth Prince said with a grim smile, “It doesn’t matter how gifted he is in practice. The more outstanding he does, the sooner he will die. Wait and see. I believe our queen won’t let him reach his potential!”

“Even if he is extremely talented, he still falls far behind our Seventh Brother. Huh! Even his favorite woman will marry our Seventh Brother as his side imperial concubine. That’s nothing.” The Sixth Prince laughed coldly.

Actually, they just spoke out of jealousy. However, jealousy was the source of their hatred.

...

The Savage God's Pool was one of the most precious and treasured places of the Royal Family.

It took hundreds of years for the pool to catch tens of thousands of savage beasts and to collect their blood from the past, which then changed into a vast blood pool. That was why it was named the Savage God's Pool.

Only the most outstanding geniuses were allowed to practice in the Savage God's Pool.

The Savage God's Pool was beneath the Imperial Ancestral Temple.

The Ceremony of Worship was held annually in the Imperial Ancestral Temple, where people would kill savage beasts to replenish the Savage God's Pool with fresh blood.

A mysterious power came into being when the blood from the sacrifice blended with the Savage God's existing pool. Therefore, the young warriors who practiced in the Savage God's Pool absorbed the essence of blood, and it would build up their body of Martial Arts, opening up more Meridians.

The greater the talent of the warrior, the more benefits he would gain.

Under the guidance of the minister, Zhang Ruochen, Situ Linjiang, Xue Kai, the Fifth Prince, and Lin Ningshan were brought to the Imperial Ancestral Temple.

"Anyone who enters the Imperial Ancestral Temple should kowtow to the great emperors and queens of the past in Kunlun's Field. Everyone should show respect to them, especially to the Holy Queen of Majesty and Morality, Empress Chi Yao, my lord! She governs the world and enjoys the majesty in all directions. Wish her a forever young and eternal life!"

The minister was piously praying and reading aloud while kneeling on the ground.

"Empress Chi Yao, my lord! She governs the world and enjoys the majesty that is in all directions. Wish her a forever young and eternal life!"

Situ Linjiang, Xue Kai, the Fifth Prince, and Lin Ningshan read and prayed. They knelt and kowtowed to the stone statue of Empress Chi Yao.

Only Zhang Ruochen stood still showing no respect but was filled with a bitter hatred for her.

"Chi Yao, wait for me. I will come to see you when I succeed in my cultivation," Zhang Ruochen thought to himself.

"800 years have passed. You probably don't know that the one you killed 800 years ago was reborn anew!"

...

Chapter 30: Savage God's Pool

With displeasure, the minister rose to his feet, took a glance at Zhang Ruochen behind him and said, "Ninth Prince, won't you bow down to Empress Chi Yao?"

“Rather than her, I only worship heaven and earth, as well as my parents.”

After these words, Zhang Ruochen went through the Imperial Ancestral Temple and the secret door. Then he walked step by step along the stone ladder behind the door toward the Savage God’s Pool.

The Fifth Prince, Situ Linjiang, Xue Kai, and Lin Ningshan stood up and glanced at Zhang Ruochen.

“It’s his untamed characteristic that will hurt him sooner or later!” Situ Linjiang slightly shook his head.

After the fight with Zhang Ruochen, Situ Linjiang had come to admire him for his Martial Arts talents. But Zhang Ruochen was so haughty that he should not worship the empress. He would get into big trouble in the future.

“Who do you think you are? You just have the cultivation of the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm, which can only be counted as the initial stage of Martial Arts. No one can predict whether or not he will be a superior in the future!” said Lin Ningshan.

Then, led by the minister, the Fifth Prince, Situ Linjiang, Xue Kai, and Lin Ningshan also walked down the stone ladder and entered into an underworld filled with the smell of blood.

In the center of the underworld, there was a giant bloody sacred pool, with both a length and width of more than 100 meters.

The bloody waves ceaselessly surged with the rolling pool water.

In the center of the blood pool stood an ancient altar made of tons of megaliths with epitaphs and patterns on each of them.

A stone table extended straight up to connect the altar on earth.

“It’s time for all of you to practice in the Savage God’s Pool. Please keep in mind that due to the strong power of blood in it, leave it as soon as possible when you can’t stand anymore. Otherwise, it may be life-threatening,” the minister sternly warned.

The five young geniuses, Zhang Ruochen, Lin Ningshan, Situ Linjiang, the Fifth Prince, and Xue Kai, walked into the Savage God’s Pool in turns.

The water in the Savage God’s Pool seemed hot enough to boil people.

“Ouch!”

The five young geniuses groaned when the pool water touched their skin and melted them. Immediately, their legs became mangled and bloody.

They bit the bullet and held on by operating their internal Genuine Qi to defend against the Power of Blood.

“If you operate Genuine Qi to defend against the Power of Blood, you will stop it entering into the body,” the minister casually said at the poolside.

In order to acquire the Power of Blood of the Savage God's Pool, the five young people had to withdraw their external Genuine Qi. At that time, the familiar painful feeling appeared again to make their Meridians exposed.

Due to the strong Spiritual Power, Zhang Ruochen clearly detected that a trace of the hot Power of Blood entered into his body through the wounds and integrated into his blood and bones.

"It is indeed the Power of Blood! Hurray! With it, my physical quality is certain to be improved a lot! I need to take this chance!"

Slowly, as he closed his eyes, Zhang Ruochen walked to the center of the Savage God's Pool step by step.

The farther that he walked in, the deeper the water became.

After only 10 steps, the bloody water has reached Zhang Ruochen's waist.

The more that he touched the water, the faster the absorption speed of the Power of Blood became. Meanwhile, the pain grew stronger as well.

The minister at the poolside was surprised by him and marveled, "Awesome! How strong his willpower is, to walk into the central area the first time entering the pool... When the Seventh Prince first entered the Savage God's Pool to practice, it took him two hours to adapt to the shallow area before he went into the central area."

There were three areas of the Savage God's Pool: the shallow area, the central area, and the deeper area.

The shallow area was also known as the boundary of the Savage God's Pool, in where the deepest area could just only reach the knee of the warrior.

Generally speaking, the first time practicing in the pool, a warrior could only stand in the shallow area. None of them dared to enter the central area.

In the last decade, only the Seventh Prince walked into the central area his first time going into the pool.

The fact that Zhang Ruochen walked straight toward the central area his first time in the pool indeed shocked people there and caused great pressure on the other four young warriors.

It was the second time for the Fifth Prince to practice in the Savage God's Pool. However, he was still afraid of the central area and stubbornly stayed in the shallow area to take in more Power of Blood to refine his body and build his physical quality.

Four hours later, Lin Ningshan was the first to leave the Savage God's Pool. After all, the female physical quality could hardly compare to that of male warriors.

After she left the Savage God's Pool, the burnt skin of her legs began to heal at a speed visible to the eye. Shortly afterward, they became as flawless as the smooth surface of jade.

The insufferable pain disappeared and was replaced with a feeling akin to being immersed in Ice Crystals and milk, which gave her a comfortable feeling that was cool and refreshing.

"How could I recover so fast?" Lin Ningshan was surprised.

“It is the absorbed Power of Blood that helped you recover from the condition of an injury on your legs! Practice, right now. Try your best to refine the Power of Blood into your own power. Otherwise, all your previous cultivation effects will be greatly diminished,” said the minister.

Lin Ningshan sat with legs crossed at once and operated Genuine Qi to refine the Power of Blood that remained internally.

Xue Kai also quit an hour later and walked out of the Savage God’s Pool.

Four hours later, Xue Kai, Situ Linjiang, and the Fifth Prince quit almost at the same time.

The moment they walked out of the Savage God’s Pool, they began to sit with legs crossed in order to refine the Power of Blood.

Now, Zhang Ruochen was the only one that still practiced in the Savage God’s Pool. Furthermore, he was in the central area.

“Amazing! A half day has passed and he still practices in the central area. At that time, the Seventh Prince could only hold on for one day. Incredible!” The minister was visibly awed by this.

In the Yunwu Commandery, the Seventh Prince, who had opened the seventh-class Sacred Mark at the age of three, could be considered a rare genius, once in a blue moon. He had been using various treasure comprehension abilities to refine his body from childhood, which laid a solid foundation for Martial Arts practice. His talent and perception could be considered number one.

Could the Ninth Prince, who just opened the Sacred Mark at 16, be compared with him?

After transforming the remaining Power of Blood, Lin Ningshan, Xue Kai, Situ Linjiang, and the Fifth Prince all refined their physical quality, showing that they had benefited a lot from it.

No one left the Savage God’s Pool. All of them stood at the poolside and stared at Zhang Ruochen inside the pool.

“Why is there such a great difference between us, even though this is the first time here for all of us?” Situ Linjiang found it incredulous and frustrating.

He thought that his willpower was strong enough to bear the pain that ordinary people could not bear. But he could never think that there was such a huge gap between him and Zhang Ruochen.

One day later, Zhang Ruochen still firmly stood in the central area of Savage God’s Pool.

He did not walk out of the pool until the middle of the third day. Then, he sat with legs crossed in order to refine the remaining Power of Blood inside his body.

Zhang Ruochen slowly opened his eyes the moment that he finished the refinement, with a flash of blood flowing in his eyes and quickly retracting back into his pupils.

“My physical quality has indeed improved a lot. If so, I absolutely can open 19 or even 20 Meridians when making a breakthrough to reach the Medium State of the Yellow Realm,” Zhang Ruochen thought to himself.

After the Year-end Assessment, Concubine Lin had moved back into the Jade Palace again.

The moment that Zhang Ruochen arrived in the Jade Palace, he took out 10 small jade bottles with Marrow-washing Liquid in them from the internal space of the Time and Space Spinel and put them in a line.

“It’s time for the Medium State of the Yellow Realm!”

He emptied a bottle of Marrow-washing Liquid into his mouth, and then Zhang Ruochen began to develop the 12th Meridian.

...

At that moment, the minister reached the queen’s palace to report everything that he had witnessed in the Savage God’s Pool.

“Bang!”

The white Genuine Qi from the queen’s five fingers broke the glass into pieces.

“That’s really something. He could practice in the central area of the Savage God’s Pool for two and half days? I never imagined that he was so highly gifted! But it’s a pity that he hasn’t realized that people like to shoot others down before they even stand up,” said the queen in a deep voice.

The minister mentioned, “Your Majesty, the Year-end Assessment just ended. Thus, should anything happen to the Ninth Prince, you would be suspected.”

The queen sneered, “Do you think that I’m stupid? We certainly can’t kill him in the palace. But once he leaves the palace, it’s none of my business if he dies out there.”

The minister replied, “Actually, no matter how high the Ninth Prince’s gifts are, he’s just at the cultivation of the Dawn State of the Yellow Realm, which could never compare with the Seventh Prince. Thus, it’s unknown whether he will fully develop in the future. Your Majesty, it’s not necessary...”

The queen interrupted the minister and said coldly, “Whoever may threaten my son must die! Since he has not become stronger, we must kill the Ninth Prince to prevent trouble later.”