

Keyboard Immortal

Chapter 4: The First Secret Manual

Translator: Pika

“Of course I do.” Old Mi stroked his beard gently, but he inexplicably pulled out several strands of it. He tucked them quickly into his sleeves, his eyes turning cold.

“What’s the method?” Zu An was so anxious that he didn’t notice this minor detail.

Old Mi looked at him sharply and said, “The seal is located in a sensitive area which is extremely fragile. Dispersing it with an external force could easily result in internal damage. You have to rely on your own power to dissolve it. Once you reach the Master rank of cultivation and your ki becomes spiritual, you’ll naturally have the ability to unseal it.”

“Master rank? What is that?” Zu An stared blankly at Old Mi.

Old Mi frowned. “You don’t even know such rudimentary concepts? No wonder everyone considers you useless.”

Old Mi began to explain, allowing Zu An to understand the cultivation ranks of this world. The vast majority of cultivators were graded across nine ranks.

Cultivators of the first rank would learn to use unique breathing techniques to harmonize with the natural world, drawing elemental ki into their bodies. This signified that they had formally embarked upon the path of cultivation. The second rank involved using that ki to temper their skin, increasing the rate of ki absorption. The third rank involved tempering the flesh, while the fourth rank involved tempering the muscles. The fifth rank tempered the bones, the sixth rank tempered the marrow, the seventh rank tempered the blood, while the eighth rank tempered your internal organs and established a network of ki meridians throughout your body. The ninth rank tempered the brain and the senses, allowing the storage of raw ki.

Once cultivators were able to unite the raw, unruly streams of ki in the body into a ki vortex, the ki would continuously strengthen their limbs and bones, allowing them to attain the rank of Master. Masters who managed to develop their spiritual perception would be able to further rise to the rank of Grandmaster and control the fates of all those beneath them.

Above the Grandmasters stood the ‘Earth Immortals’, who could topple mountains and overturn the seas with a wave of their hand. They were like the gods of the ancient legends.

“Temper the skin, flesh, and bones? That’s a rather casual way of setting up the ranks,” Zu An mused to himself, an odd look on his face. “So what comes after Earth Immortals?”

“After Earth Immortals?” Old Mi gazed at the stars with a hint of eager anticipation. “It is said that one will be able to wander through the stars and gain eternal life. Alas, no one in all of history has ever reached this rank.”

Zu An was not interested in far-flung possibilities. He quickly brought the conversation back to the most pressing topic. “I’ve been told that I have no talent, and I’m already an adult. How can I possibly reach the Master rank?”

Old Mi glanced at him. “It is indeed pointless for you to train in any ordinary techniques. I, however, just so happen to possess a peculiar, ancient technique that I acquired in my early days. It should suit you perfectly.”

“What’s so peculiar about it?” Zu An’s heart tightened.

Old Mi replied, “Ordinary cultivators rely on ki stones as well as various medicines and herbs to help them absorb natural energy. They use this energy to strengthen the body by creating ki meridians throughout their bodies. With your talent though... Putting aside the fact that you are already an adult, you would only be able to attain the third rank even if you had access to vast amounts of ki stones. No one in their right mind would waste such a rare and valuable resource on one such as you.

“But my technique is different. It is the essence of rebirth through destruction. To master it, all you need to do is to get beaten up. Repeatedly. The more badly you get beat up, the more easily you will rise through the ranks.”

Zu An’s head spun. “Why would such a ridiculous technique even exist in this world?”

Old Mi was furious. “Ignorant child! This divine technique is the only technique in the world that can grant etern-... ahem.” He cut off abruptly and pulled himself back on track. “So, do you want to train in it or not?”

“Yes! Of course I want to train in it!” At this moment, Zu An was a drowning man grasping at straw. For the sake of his pride and joy, even the most ridiculous of techniques was worth a shot. “But the two of us have never even met. Why are you being so kind to me?”

Old Mi let out a long sigh. “The truth is, I don’t have much time left. I do not wish for this technique to be buried in the dirt with me.”

Zu An finally understood the situation. “Elder, may I ask your venerable name? I will definitely bring this technique to new heights and uphold your reputation.” By now, he was convinced that ‘Old Mi’ wasn’t the man’s real name.

"You should continue to address me as Old Mi. Heh heh... I'm glad to hear those words from you. It looks like I've chosen well." Old Mi chuckled eerily. "Take this book back and slowly analyze it. Seek me out if there's anything you don't understand."

Old Mi tossed him a black scroll, then turned to leave. He struggled to hide his delight. Finally! After so many years, I've finally found an appropriate host!

Many years ago, he had been given a top-secret mission. He had faced death countless times before finally managing to acquire this secret manual, but he chose not to turn it in afterwards. Instead, he killed his comrades, feigned death, and hid away, training in the art in secret. Alas, there's no such thing as a perfect secret. The organization that had hired him had caught wind of him and was close to uncovering his location.

He had yet to fully master this marvelous art, and so was not fully equipped to face them head-on. The best option left to him was to completely alter his identity by employing a possession-and-rebirth technique he had acquired in his youth.

In the first place, Old Mi's current body was frail and decrepit. He had long sought to find a new body, and the current threat facing him only intensified his need.. However, finding a suitable host was no easy task. First and foremost, his target had to be trained in the same technique as him - only then would he be able to pour his base of cultivation into the target. Second, his target had to have a yin-dominant body.

Possession was a highly dangerous endeavor; the possessor had to find a host that matched them almost perfectly. Old Mi himself was a eunuch; if he tried to possess a forceful, yang-dominant personality, he would most likely be burned alive.

On the other hand, he was reluctant to transfer himself into yet another eunuch. In every world, eunuchs dreamed of being full and complete men. Who would be willing to be reborn as a eunuch?

As a result of these conflicting requirements, Old Mi had yet to find a suitable candidate - until now, when he finally encountered this useless son-in-law of the Chu clan. The way the child had been sealed made him equivalent to a eunuch, but he wasn't really one. Old Mi was confident of slowly repairing it once he took over the child's body.

Just as importantly, he didn't seem to have any real family or friends. Even if he were to be possessed, any strange new mannerisms or personality changes would most likely go unnoticed. Moreover, this person was the son-in-law of the Chu clan; in the future, he would have plenty of opportunities to win fortune and glory. And, he had an absolutely gorgeous wife!

Even a eunuch like Old Mi was aroused by the thought of Chu Chuyan's beautiful visage.

Zu An knew none of this, of course. He eyed the scroll in his hands with excitement. This was his only hope, after all. He quickly made his way back to his room, eager to examine the scroll in private.

He could not puzzle out what the scroll was made of. It seemed to be solid gold but was somehow silken to the touch. While he was browsing through its content, a cold, mechanical voice reverberated in his mind:

“Detected: Mountain Secret Scroll - [Phoenix Nirvana Sutra]. Consume it to activate a keyboard function?”

Zu An was stunned. He hadn't expected a secret manual to fall into his lap so easily. Aren't the 'Twelve Unknowable Places' supposed to be super-deadly and super-mysterious places? Aren't the scrolls supposed to be almost impossible to get?

Despite his shock, he agreed to it without hesitation.

In a heartbeat, the keyboard appeared before his hands. The scroll transformed into a streak of golden light that was sucked into the 'F2' key. The runes inscribed in the key glowed with that golden light, and the keyboard came to life, its keys glowing with subtle backlighting.

You have found your first secret manual and have activated the Rage system. Part of the lottery rewards system is now available.

Rage System: As a dedicated Keyboard Warrior, your noble mission is to constantly drive the people around you berserk with rage. Once you have successfully trolled your target, the owner of the keyboard shall receive an amount of Rage points commensurate to how furious the target has become. Rage points can be used to purchase items, use techniques, and play the lottery...

A holographic display with the above text materialized on an holographic display above the keyboard. Zu An noticed that there were several function buttons and a cursor on the display. He was able to move the cursor over the various function buttons. The 'Lottery' and 'Shop' functions were clearly visible, but a number of other functions remained blurred out and inaccessible.

For now, the 'Lottery' function flashed insistently, while the 'Shop' function was grayed out. Zu An surmised that it was the next function to be unlocked.

At the bottom of this holographic screen was something resembling an 'item bar' or 'skill bar' present in the UIs of many RPGs, but it was dishearteningly empty. At the very top of the screen, there was a short line of text:

Current Rage Points: 0.

Zu An was puzzled. I'm sure that I just pissed Snow off so much that I almost sent her period into disarray. Why didn't I receive any Rage points for it? I guess the keyboard hadn't been activated yet.

He moved the cursor over the 'Lottery' function, then hit the enter key on the keyboard. A new paragraph of words appeared on the screen.

Each lottery ticket costs 100 Rage points. As this is your first time activating a keyboard function, you are permitted to draw three tickets for free. The drop rates for these three tickets have been greatly increased, and the specific drops will be randomized. In the future, all lottery drops will be based on the user's level. Do you wish to begin drawing your tickets? Y/N.

Holy shit, so this is a newbie gift package? Zu An excitedly clicked on 'Yes'. A light marker suddenly appeared on the keyboard and began randomly flashing across the keys.

Zu An watched with eager anticipation. What sort of reward would come up? A level 999 artifact saber? An incomparably powerful pet? A hot little fairy maiden companion wouldn't be bad either...

As he was salivating over the possibilities, he saw the light marker suddenly come to a halt on the 'Space' key. Three words appeared on the screen: Thanks for playing!

"?"

"???"

"??????"

Zu An was dumbfounded. Didn't you say the drop rates were greatly increased? I want my Midas Touch! I want my completely overpowered MC powerup system! After all the exciting things he had imagined, this was a real downer. This keyboard system must be the laughingstock of whatever system-universe it comes from!

Do you wish to continue drawing prizes? Y/N.

"You can go straight to hell!" Zu An gritted his teeth. Just as he was about to push the 'Yes' button, a sudden thought came to his mind. He quickly ran to a basin of water and washed his face before finally drawing his second prize.

This time, he didn't let himself get lost in wild flights of fantasy. He stared unblinkingly at the light marker, calculating how much time the light spent atop each key. It would stop the longest on the 'Space' key, linger a little shorter on the number keys, and flit across the letter keys at lightning speed.

I bet the amount of time it spends on each key corresponds to how valuable the prize under that key is. Still, his expectations had been lowered significantly by the earlier dismay. Anything would be better than the spacebar!

His prayers were seemingly answered. The light marker slowly came to a halt atop the 'Q' key. Something appeared on the screen, and this time it wasn't a 'Thank you for playing'.

Zu An was overjoyed, but his smile quickly morphed into a rictus of disgust. Why does this 'reward' look exactly like the steel wool pads we used for scrubbing pots in the kitchen? Is the system encouraging me to walk the path of a chef? Or perhaps the path of a transmigrant merchant?

Hell, I used to buy those things in packs of four! Why the hell would it appear in this reward system?! Zu An was beginning to question the meaning of life itself.

Congratulations! You have won an 'Heiress Ball of Delights'! [1]

1. This is based on a Chinese internet meme that supposes the existence of rich women who pay large sums of money to hire boy toys, then perform SM acts on them. One of the meme-jokes is that these rich women like to use steel wool pads to scrub their boy toys' nether regions. The 'artifacts' used to do this are jokingly referred to as a 'Rich Lady's Ball of Delights'.

