

1301 Being Able To Sleep Is An Important Skill!

“Damn it! Damn it!” With a trembling body, Zhang Qian cursed furiously beneath his breath.

He had performed beyond his usual limits in the examination, and he thought that it would allow him to soar through the ranks. Yet, contrary to all of his expectations, he still failed to get into the top fifty. Not only that, as if adding insult to his injury, it was that Zhang Xuan bastard who took the final position, squeezing him out of the Elite Division!

He had been thinking that with the authority he would gain from getting into the Elite Division, he would be able to teach that fellow a lesson. But as if the heavens were playing tricks on him, the situation somehow evolved to this point.

“Brother Yunfeng, it’s that Zhang Xuan fellow who made a move against me. He was also the one who squeezed me out of the top fifty as well!” With clenched fists, Zhang Qian complained indignantly to a young man not too far away.

Zhang Yunfeng was another candidate from the Zhang Clan who managed to qualify for the Elite Division. He was ranked in the 46th place in the examination.

“I know, but you brought it upon yourself.” Zhang Yunfeng glanced at Zhang Qian and harrumphed indifferently. “Even I would hesitate to approach those from the Glacier Plain Court carelessly, but you eagerly rushed up to them as soon as you arrived, wanting to fawn on them. You are really courting trouble!”

“I admit that I was too arrogant and deserved to be humiliated, but that fellow showed blatant contempt for the Zhang Clan in public, saying that those from the Zhang Clan would put a leg into any affairs that concern a beautiful lady... And you really can’t begin to imagine the haughty tone he took when he said those words too! We can’t allow him to get away with

defaming the Zhang Clan so easily!” Zhang Qian exclaimed indignantly.

“Don’t even try using those little ploys of yours on me. Nevertheless, regardless of whether he has shown blatant contempt for the Zhang Clan or not, he was indeed rather arrogant to make a move on you even after you have expressed your identity. Don’t worry, I’ll teach him a lesson later on and make him learn that just that bit of talent he has won’t be enough for him to act so smugly in the Sanctum of Sages!”

“Thank you, Brother Yunfeng!” Hearing that the other party was willing to step up for him, Zhang Qian’s eyes lit up in excitement.

Zhang Yunfeng’s bloodline was far purer than him, reaching the level of Tier-1. On top of that, the other party’s cultivation was also significantly higher than his, reaching Grand Dominion realm primary stage. If the other party was willing to make a move in his stead, that Zhang Xuan fellow would surely be thrashed.

“Un.” Zhang Yunfeng replied impassively.

To him, a fellow who had originated from humble lands was just a short disturbance to his cultivation. It wasn’t a problem worthy of his note.

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“Moving on, these are the people who have qualified for the Ordinary Division!” Ignoring the crowd’s astonishment, Elder Liu waved his hand grandly once more.

Silver lights gathered in the sky, and one by one, names flickered into existence.

It didn’t take too long for all 450 names of the candidates who had made it into the Ordinary Division to appear. After confirming that Zhang Jiuxiao’s name was amidst them too, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Zhang Jiuxiao’s ranking wasn’t too high, ranging in the 460s, but nevertheless, what was important was that he had cleared the entrance examination and successfully became a student of the Sanctum of Sages too.

As for the others who had journeyed here with them from Qianchong Empire, Ma Minghai and six others had managed to clear the examination too. Their rankings weren't too good, but on the overall, their group did fairly decent in terms of passing rate.

After revealing the list of students who had made it into the Ordinary Division, Elder Liu continued, "Now, I'll be announcing those who are qualified as listening in students!"

Then, with a wave of his hand, another list of five hundred names appeared.

All in all, the Sanctum of Sages accepted five hundred normal students, inclusive of both the Elite Division and Ordinary Division, and five hundred listening in students each intake.

Soon after the list of five hundred listening in students was revealed, excited and disappointed murmurings swiftly rippled across the crowd.

Zhang Xuan took a swift look at the list of listening in students and noted that four of them were from their Qianchong Empire group too. All in all, eleven out of the thirty-three of them had got into the Sanctum of Sages, so it was a passing rate of one-third. As compared to the results of the previous years, this could be said to be not too bad.

Waving his hand casually, Elder Liu said with a firm voice, "Those whose names are in any of the lists, please remain in the area for a while longer. As for the rest, do head down to take a rest!"

Despite Elder Liu's polite choice of words, the authoritative undertone in his voice showed that it was a command instead of a request.

No matter how indignant those disqualified candidates failed, they knew that it would be utter foolishness to question Elder Liu's judgement. Thus, they could only depart in dejection.

In the end, the Sanctum of Sages wasn't a charity organization, and the true nature of the entrance examinations was to sieve out the proficient from the non-proficient. An inevitable result

of that, there were bound to be those who would be left behind or eliminated.

Unfortunately, their failure here would set them behind by a great deal. If they wanted to make a comeback, they would have to pay a far higher price than the others.


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In less than ten minutes, only a thousand people were left standing on the square.

“First and foremost, allow me to welcome all of you into the Sanctum of Sages!” Elder Liu tapped his finger in the air, and identity tokens immediately appeared in the hands of each and every one of the qualified candidates. “These are the jade tokens representing your identity. They will be automatically updated to reflect your respective roles as a student in the Sanctum of Sages.”

Zhang Xuan glanced at his jade token before glancing at the others around him.

The jade tokens for listening in students were light-blue color, those in the Ordinary Divisions had light-yellow tokens, and those in the Elite Division like him had black tokens.

Taking a closer examination at his jade token, he noted that there was a character, ‘ (Sage)’ carved in seal script on it, and it emanated an air of ancient yet grand history. There were also some miscellaneous inscriptions by the side of the jade token resembled the eyes of a human, as if signifying that the predecessors were looking over one.

With a flick of his finger, Zhang Xuan dripped a droplet of blood onto the jade token, and it immediately fused into it. Instinctively, he sensed that as long as he had the jade token with him, he would be able to freely walk through the protective formations surrounding the Sanctum of Sages without triggering them.

At the same time, Zhang Jiuxiao had also claimed ownership of the jade token in his hand, and the elation on his face was impossible to miss.

As an offspring from the side family, he wasn't a highly regarded member of the Zhang Clan. However, with his successful enrollment into the Sanctum of Sages, there would be a vast change in his standing.

“Perhaps, I might even be able to attend the Annual Assembly this year!” Zhang Jiuxiao thought with his eyes glowing with excitement.

The Zhang Clan would organize an Annual Assembly each year, and only the inner clan members and accomplished members of the side family would be invited to participate. Under normal circumstances, Zhang Jiuxiao wouldn't have been worthy of receiving an invitation, but now that he had become a student of the Sanctum of Sages, his standing within the Zhang Clan would surely ascend to new heights. With his newfound status, he was already qualified to attend such high-tier clan assemblies.

“This is all thanks to Zhang shi!” Knowing that he would have never been able to achieve so much without Zhang Xuan's help, Zhang Jiuxiao instinctively shot a grateful glance toward the latter.

While he was an offspring of the Zhang Clan, the Zhang Clan hadn't offered him much help in his cultivation and development as a master teacher at all. On the other hand, it was Zhang Xuan who tirelessly guided him along, not spurning him despite the hostility he had directed toward the other party previously. He had nothing but deep respect toward the young man's character and depth of knowledge.

At this moment, Elder Liu's voice sounded once more, “The entrance examination might have ended, but I can still see disappointment and regret in many of your eyes. So, the Sanctum of Sages will be conducting a Challenge of the Defeated so as to give you one last opportunity to rise through the ranks!”

“That's wonderful! All I need is just an opportunity like that!”

“Is this for real? The Challenge of the Defeated is rarely conducted, so who could have thought that we would actually

encounter one here. This time, I shall become an official student of the Sanctum of Sages by hook or by crook!”

Upon hearing the announcement, the eyes of the candidates immediately lit up in excitement.

While it wasn't common that for a Challenge of the Defeated to be conducted, it did occur a couple of times in history, so most candidates were still aware of its existence.

“The rules of the Challenge of the Defeated are simple. Listening in students will get an opportunity to challenge a student of the Ordinary Division, and if they were to emerge victorious, they will be able to claim that student's position. Similarly, students of the Ordinary Division will be able to challenge a student of the Elite Division, and they will be able to claim that student's position if they win. Everyone will only get one opportunity to choose and challenge an opponent, and those who fail the challenge will have to suffer a penalty.” Elder Liu announced.

“I believe most of you should be familiar with these rules, so I shall not elaborate too much on it. For those who are still a little unsure, feel free to refer to the identity token you have just received.”

“Refer to the identity token?”

Zhang Xuan extended his Spiritual Perception into the jade token in his hand, and the many rules of the Sanctum of Sages immediately appeared before him. There was indeed a portion regarding the Challenge of the Defeated.

This challenge was established for the sake of equity. The strong would rise through the ranks whereas the weak would be eliminated and cast away. In other words, survival of the fittest. However, the act of challenging someone who was more 'senior' to one could be considered as a highly disrespectful act, so failure would mean incurring a penalty.

There were various different types of penalties possible, ranging from paying compensation, physical punishment, to issuing a public apology. This was up to the winner to choose.

In other words, while it was an opportunity for weaker candidates to rise through the ranks, they had to make sure to work within the limits of strength.

“Begin!” With a resounding bellow, Elder Liu waved his hand, and a round dueling ring gradually emerged from the ground.

On the other hand, the crowd swiftly went through the names they had seen on the name lists earlier in their minds so as to decide on whom they should challenge.

“I want to challenge the candidate who is ranked 500th in the entrance examination, Xue Ning!” a voice suddenly sounded from the crowd.

It was from one of the listening-in students.

“I recognize him. He’s Zhao Qi, the first place amongst the listening-in students, ranked 501th in the examination. I knew that he would want to challenge the candidate that is one rank above him!”

“That’s to be expected. Considering how there is only a rank difference between the two of them, the disparity in their capabilities shouldn’t be too great. No matter what, he would have to give it a shot, or else he would regret it for life.”

“Indeed. Anyone in his position would be reluctant to give up without a try!”

...

The crowd remarked as they saw someone amongst them standing out to issue a challenge.

It was just a single rank of difference, but it made an entire world of difference of being a listening in student and being an official student in the Sanctum of Sages.

No matter who was in Zhao Qi’s shoes, he would have to at least give it a shot. After all, how could one possibly be content to retire just like that when they were only a single step away from reaching the peak?

Hu la!

After issuing the challenge, Zhao Qi leaped onto the ring.

“As you wish.”

A young man also walked out from the crowd and stepped onto the ring as well.

Taking a closer look, Zhang Xuan realized that the young man was no other than the person who had fought with him over the Tianchen Brew back at Qianchong Empire, only to lose fifteen concentrated high-tier spirit stones to him in a bet—the Third Young Master of the Xue Clan, Xue Ning!

In that battle back then, the latter ended up vomiting for a long while due to moving too quickly, and he had been mocked by many due to that incident as well.

But over the past few days, perhaps motivated by the experience with Zhang Xuan, he actually managed to take his cultivation a step further, reaching Quasi Leaving Aperture realm.

While that kind of strength might not mean much against the ridiculously talented geniuses of the Sanctum of Sages, there was no denying that he was also amidst the cream of the crop of mankind.

“Xue Ning, what were the tests you have faced in the Mountain Gate examination? What kind of duel do you want to accept Zhao Qi’s challenge with?” Elder Han Zhu asked.

The Sanctum of Sages didn’t just select its students on the grounds of strength but an overall evaluation of capability. For this reason, the challenger would have to surpass the challenged in the latter’s field of specialty in order to prove that he was worthy of taking the latter’s place.

“The reason why I was able to clear the selection is due to my attacking speed and might. As long as he can defeat me while his cultivation is suppressed down to my level, I’ll admit my loss!” Xue Ning declared confidently with his head raised up high.

Even though the Xue Clan was only a Tier-3 Sage Clan, its ultimate technique, Golden Silk Thread, was not to be underestimated.

Had he not met with an anomaly like Zhang Xuan, the battle technique would have very well made him nigh invincible in his power class.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to clear the Mountain Gate examination to become a student of the Sanctum of Sages either.

“A fight? Very well!” Zhao Qi nodded. With a ferocious howl, his cultivation realm swiftly plummeted down to Quasi Leaving Aperture realm as well.

Hong long!

A moment later, the duo was already clashing with one another.

The both of them were indeed worthy of their titles as geniuses. Ingenious maneuvers were dashed out one after another, and powerful shockwaves rippled relentlessly into the surroundings. For the time being, the both of them seemed to be equally matched, making it difficult to discern who wielded the upper hand.

“Zhang shi, who do you think will win?” Zhang Jiuxiao asked curiously.

“Xue Ning seems to be in an advantageous position in terms of his skills.” Zhang Xuan replied.

“My thoughts exactly!” Zhang Jiuxiao remarked. Then, with a curious gaze, he turned to face Zhang Xuan and asked, “Right, Zhang shi. What kind of test did you encounter in the Mountain Gate examination? I'm curious to know how you were able to get into the Elite Division!”

The young man before him seemed to be a master in every art, be it in terms of cultivation, master teacher, appraising, painting... It was as if there was nothing he didn't know, nothing he didn't specialize in.

As such, Zhang Jiuxiao simply couldn't help but wonder what capability did Zhang Xuan rely on to get into the Elite Division.

“How I got into the Elite Division?” A look of rumination appeared on Zhang Xuan’s face before he replied,

“Well, I guess I slept my way through?”“For those who have forgotten, the bloodlines of Sage Clans can be categorized into below Tier-2, Tier-2, Tier-1, Earth-tier, and Sky-tier

1302 Challenging Zhang Xuan

“You slept your way through?” Zhang Jiuxiao widened his eyes, flabbergasted, unable to comprehend what was going on.

He asked how Zhang Xuan became a student of the Elite Division, hoping to learn from his experiences, but the latter told him that... he slept the way through?

“Indeed. Not everyone will be able to handle three whole days of it straight!” Zhang Xuan continued with a tone reminiscent of a forlorn expert who was unable to find a single person who could rival him.

To be honest, he never thought that he would actually be able to sleep for three days in a single go, and he was truly shocked when he woke up. But thinking back, it was really well worth it.

Even if he were to remain awake, there was also nothing much he could do. There were too many flaws in the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld, so it was impossible for him to continue cultivating it. On the other hand, Sage Kui, for some inexplicable reason to him, seemed to be overly traumatized by what he had said as well. Rather than being placed in an awkward position for three whole days, it was really a much wiser decision to use this time to refresh himself for his future journey in the Sanctum of Sages.

After all, having the time to sleep his fill was a luxury that he might not be able to afford anymore later on.

“Three whole days straight?” Zhang Jiuxiao had an expression that looked as if he had seen a ghost. “Zhang shi, you mean to say that while we were busy clearing tests in the Mountain Gate, not daring to rest for an instant for fear of being overtaken, you were actually sleeping for three days straight?”

“Indeed. I didn’t think that I would be able to sleep for so long either...” Zhang Xuan replied with a bitter smile.

“Despite sleeping for three days, you were still able to qualify as a student of the Elite Division...” Gulping down a mouthful of saliva, Zhang Jiuxiao felt that he was going mad.

From the moment he entered the Mountain Gate, he had been doing everything he could to showcase his talents, fearing that a second of rest would mean the difference between success and failure. Yet, the young man before him actually slept the three days through, and even so, he was still able to make it into the Elite Division... Could the world be any more unfair than this?

“Wonderful!”

“Splendid!”

“Third Young Master Xue, beautifully done!”

While Zhang Jiuxiao was about to explode from shock, a wave of cheerings suddenly broke out in the surroundings. Raising his gaze, he saw that the duel on the stage had already concluded.

The challenger, Zhao Qi, had been tightly bound by the Golden Silk Thread like a cocoon. No matter how hard he struggled, he found himself unable to move at all.

Xue Ning’s Golden Silk Thread might have been ineffective against Zhang Xuan, but it was still a formidable weapon against most other cultivators. Zhao Qi wasn’t weak either, but he was still eventually cornered by it.

“I admit defeat!” With dejection glooming between his brows, Zhao Qi sighed deeply and conceded defeat.

He thought that since the difference in score between the both of them wasn’t too big, with a little bit of luck, he should be able to emerge victorious. However, from the looks of it now, it seemed like the Mountain Gate examination was indeed fair and impartial. Its ability to accurately gauge the capability of each candidate was unquestionable.

“I’m willing to accept the punishment!” After being freed, Zhao Qi left behind these words before walking down the ring quietly.

Seeing that the first duel had concluded, Elder Liu asked once more with a smile, “Is there anyone else who wishes to issue a challenge?”

“I wish to issue a challenge! The person I want to challenge is the person in the 50th rank, Zhang Xuan!” A loud bellow boomed across the square, and a figure leaped onto the stage.

“It’s the 52nd rank Meng Fanxing!”

“He’s the offspring of the Sage Clan, Meng Clan. Even though his bloodline is only at Tier-2, his cultivation has reached Half-Grand Dominion realm!”

“How could someone like him possibly tolerate having the Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle Zhang Xuan getting into the Elite Division when he couldn’t qualify for it?”

“Indeed. As soon as the Challenge of the Defeated was announced, I knew that there would surely be plenty of people who would want to challenge Zhang Xuan. Not only is his cultivation realm low, more importantly, he’s taking up the very last seat to the Elite Division. There’s bound to be many people eyeing his position!”

“That reminds me, I just heard news from a friend of mine in the Sanctum of Sages. I can’t verify whether it’s true or not, but it’s said that Zhang Xuan had never gotten into the top five hundred throughout the course of the examination. It was only when the Jade Tablet of Trials refreshed for the final time that his name suddenly appeared in the 50th place, taking up the very last slot for the Elite Division. In other words... his score just increased by more than 10,000 points all of a sudden!”

“His score increased by more than 10,000 points all of a sudden? Isn’t that obviously cheating?”

“Well, we can’t really say for sure at this point yet. If he has really cheated, the Sanctum of Sages would have dealt with him.”

...

Hearing that someone had challenged Zhang Xuan, a huge commotion immediately broke out in the surroundings.

Amidst the crowd, Zhang Qian's eyes also reddened in excitement.

The happenings in the Hall of Result had begun spreading amidst the crowd, and quite a few people were already aware of the peculiarity in Zhang Xuan's results. Every single one of them was interested to see just what kind of unique ability did that master teacher named Zhang Xuan possessed to be able to qualify as a student of the Elite Division.

Elder Liu and Elder Han Zhu also turned their gazes over. They wanted to see the young man's performance so as to have the doubts they had been harboring answered.

"You want to challenge me? Sure!"

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan didn't think that someone would challenge him, and he shook his head helplessly. With a leap, he headed up the dueling ring as well.

As much as he wanted to keep a low profile and stay out of trouble, he wasn't someone who was afraid to stir the pot. If someone wanted to take his place, the other party would do well to show strength worthy of doing so!

"May I know what kind of test did Zhang shi undergo in the Mountain Gate examination? I'll just compete with you on whatever you faced in there!" Meng Fanxing harrumphed with a slight hint of disdain in his voice.

"What kind of a test I just underwent? But I just woke up and I don't feel like sleeping anymore... Forget it, let's not waste our time then. Why don't we just settle it with a normal duel?" Zhang Xuan thought about the previous examination he had and shook his head.

He had just slept for three days straight, and it hadn't been even an hour since he had woken up. If he were to compete with the other party right now in who could sleep for a longer period of time, he would definitely be in a disadvantageous position. Besides, the crowd wouldn't be interested in watching such a duel either.

All in all, it would be much more convenient to settle it with a fight, just like what Xue Ning did earlier.

It would be swift, trouble-free, and more importantly, effective.

“You want to have a duel with me? Are you serious?” Meng Fanxing stared at Zhang Xuan as if he was looking right at a fool.

I am a Half-Grand Dominion realm expert whereas you are just at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle... Are you certain that you want to have a match with me?

You aren't daydreaming at the moment, are you?

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded affirmatively.

“Very well. I'll suppress my cultivation to the same level as you then.” Meng Fanxing nodded before swiftly suppressing his cultivation down to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle.

After which, he got into an offensive stance and said, “Let's begin then.”

“Very well.” Zhang Xuan replied.

In truth, it didn't matter much to him whether Meng Fanxing suppressed his cultivation or not. However, since the other party had already done so, he couldn't be bothered to waste his breath either. It was not like there would have been a difference in the outcome anyway.

With a swift dash, Zhang Xuan's figure suddenly appeared right before Meng Fanxing, and his hand darted forward to strike the latter.

“You...” In the face of the palm strike, Meng Fanxing felt as if the world was crushing down on him.

He found that the space around him had been completely sealed, be it his front, back, left, or right, rendering it completely impossible for him to flee.

In an instant, Meng Fanxing's breathing rapidly hastened to the point where he was wheezing for air, and his face turned completely red.

But before the palm strike could land, Zhang Xuan abruptly withdrew his hand.

Due to the strike and the withdrawal of the palm happening in quick succession, to the eyes of most spectators, it would appear that he was only carrying out a particularly crude feint.

But it was such a move that caused Meng Fanxing's head to turn completely blank in an instant, almost as if someone had used a sword to sever his flow of thoughts. His body staggered in a manner reminiscent of a drunk man for a moment before collapsing to the ground with a resounding 'padah!'.

Meng Fanxing had fainted.

"This..."

"What happened? I didn't even sense the slightest disturbance in the spiritual energy in the air, so why would Meng Fanxing faint all of a sudden?"

"I'm not too sure either. All I saw was Zhang Xuan's feint..."

The crowd stared at one another in bewilderment, unable to make sense of the situation before them.

The movements of Zhang Xuan's previous palm strike was extremely simple, consisting of just a forward thrust and a withdrawal. There didn't seem to be anything particularly ingenious about it, and there wasn't even any zhenqi infused into the strike. Yet, such an attack actually left Meng Fanxing fixated on the spot, not attempting to dodge it at all, and even though the attack didn't land, he still fainted on the spot...

What was going on?

Even though the square was filled with 7-star master teachers, each and every single one of them were confounded by what they were seeing.

"What a formidable palm strike!" In contrast to the looks of incomprehension from the crowd, Elder Liu remarked with narrowed eyes.

As a Saint 8-dan expert, he was able to notice what was wrong with the palm strike in an instant.

“The imposing momentum behind the palm makes one believe that it’s a physical attack, but the truth is that it’s an attack directed right at the soul instead. It aims to wedge in overwhelming pressure and helplessness into its target’s mind, forcing it into a state of extreme tension. Then, when the pressure abruptly vanishes, the instinctive relaxation of the mind results in a massive amount of blood leaving the brain, thus bringing about a faint spell!”

Elder Han Zhu also nodded in agreement to Elder Liu’s analysis, “Indeed. While the mind and body may seem separate, huge fluctuations in emotions can affect a person’s physical state tremendously. What this palm utilizes is fear tactic. But still, to be able to make his opponent faint with just a casual strike devoid of any surge of zhenqi or powerful emanation of aura... Just how precise is his control over his soul energy?”

As simple as it may seem in theory, carrying it out in practice was fraught with difficulties. Putting all aside, even he would find it difficult to achieve such a feat if he were to suppress his cultivation down to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle.

“It seems like there’s indeed something extraordinary about Zhang Xuan after all. Looks like there’s nothing wrong with the results in the Mountain Gate examination.” Elder Liu nodded.

While it was unlikely for there to be any problems with the point allocation system of the Jade Tablet of Trials, he had wondered if the young man had received his results through sheer luck. However, from the looks of it now, it was apparent that there was no such thing as luck in the outcome of the Mountain Gate examination. It was either one had the capability or one didn’t.

When Meng Fanxing finally roused to once more, his dazed look swiftly turned into a face reddened in embarrassment as it dawned upon him what had just happened, and he muttered in disbelief, “I’ve lost...”

He had no idea how it happened, but he actually fainted from a single blow. How embarrassing!

“It’s fine.” Zhang Xuan replied.

“I’m willing to accept my punishment...” Knowing that he had failed the challenge, Meng Fanxing gritted his teeth tightly.

“There’s no need for that. We are all students from the Sanctum of Sages, so it’s nothing much for us to have a casual duel with one another.” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

To be honest, he only received this placing due to Sage Kui tampering with the score, so it was normal that the other party would harbor some doubts toward his strength.

“Zhang shi is really a magnanimous person. It’s no wonder why you were able to become a student of the Elite Division, I’m impressed!” Meng Fanxing clasped his fist and bowed respectfully.

To be able to keep an open heart before the skepticism and doubts of others, he was really still lacking in his cultivation of the mind as compared to the young man before him.

“You’re too polite.” Zhang Xuan replied with a nod as he began making his way down the stage.

However, a voice suddenly sounded at this moment, “Hold it for a moment! I also wish to try out Zhang shi’s hand too!”

Turning his head over, Zhang Xuan saw a familiar face walking up.

It was the man whom he had smacked to the ground with a single palm prior to the start of the Mountain Gate examination, Zhang Qian!

“Did that fellow fail to see through my strength?” Seeing that the other party was still intent on challenging him despite all that had happened, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

It was one thing if Zhang Qian had never challenged him before, but the fact that the other party couldn’t even withstand a simple palm strike from him should be sufficient to highlight the vast disparity in strength between the both of them. Yet, to challenge him at this moment... Did he think that he hadn’t been humiliated enough yet?

“It’s Zhang Qian! Wasn’t he defeated already?”

“I don’t get it either. Why would he challenge Zhang Xuan again at this point?”

“Could he have some kind of trump card which he hasn’t used yet?”

“Well, he’s placed in the 51st place after all. How could he give up without a fight?”

...

Most of those in the crowd were also aware that the both of them had traded blows in the past, and looks of bewilderment surfaced on their faces.

It was just three days ago that Zhang Qian was utterly defeated by Zhang Xuan, so wasn’t it just pure foolishness to challenge him once more at this point?

“You want to have a duel with me?” Zhang Xuan shot a glance toward Zhang Qian and asked.

“That’s right! However, since you are from the Elite Division, surely you wouldn’t make me fight you with my cultivation suppressed, would you?” Zhang Qian harrumphed.

Zhang Xuan shrugged, “You can choose not to suppress your cultivation if you want to.”

“Very well, let’s begin then!” Zhang Qian’s smile curled up triumphantly as a powerful aura burst forth from him.

“Half-Grand Dominion realm? No wonder.” Feeling the strength emanated by the other party, Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

That would explain why Zhang Qian still dared to challenge him despite the humiliating defeat he had suffered the previous time around. It seemed like he had managed to achieve a breakthrough in his cultivation over the past three days!

1303 The Strength Of the Zhang Clan's Bloodline!

Hong long!

While Zhang Xuan was still in deep thoughts, Zhang Qian was already dashing toward him while gathering might in his palm.

He had chosen to drive his Half-Grand Dominion realm cultivation to its very limits from the very start, and the overwhelming energy that was emanating from him caused the surrounding air to turn viscous. It felt as if the entire dueling ring had turned into his Dominion, and anyone who stepped into the area would be completely under his control.

Not bad. Zhang Xuan remarked leisurely.

As expected of one of the geniuses of the Zhang Clan. Even though it was just an advancement by a cultivation stage, Zhang Qian's strength had grown significantly as compared to three days ago.

If he were to continue taking the other party lightly, he might really lose the duel.

With a slight tap of his finger, Zhang Xuan shot a brilliant burst of sword qi straight toward to the other party's palm strike.

He was only at Primordial Spirit realm at the moment, and due to his lacking cultivation, he could only rely on his comprehension of swordsmanship to rival the other party.

Si la!

The surge of sword qi emanated a chill which seemed to pierce right into one's bones, and it felt as if it would be able to slice through anything that stood in its path.

“What?”

Zhang Qian didn't expect Zhang Xuan to have such a deep comprehension of swordsmanship. He realized that if he were

to clash with the sword qi directly with his palm, he could very well be sliced into two.

Thus, he quickly clenched his remaining free hand into a fist and threw it forward.

Hong long!

Even though this punch was hurled forward all of a sudden, that didn't hinder the fluidity and agility of his movements. At its current speed, it would be able to strike Zhang Xuan and severely wound him before the sword qi could reach him.

He's indeed much more powerful than Zhang Jiuxiao! Zhang Xuan noted.

Three days ago, he was able to subdue Zhang Qian with just a single palm strike, so he thought that it should be a walk in the park for him to defeat the latter once more. However, considering the current circumstances, he would really be underestimating his opponent if he were to continue fighting with such a mindset.

Just the speed of the transformation in Zhang Qian's maneuver meant that his comprehension of combat had already achieved an extremely high level, considerably higher than an average combat master.

Nevertheless, despite Zhang Qian's immense growth, he would still require a lot more work before he would be a match for him.

Lines of insight rippled in Zhang Xuan's eyes as he gazed at Zhang Qian's movements once more.

This time around, it seemed like the latter's movements had slowed down, slowly displaying before his eyes.

Zhenqi telepathy? Through his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan also swiftly noticed that something was amiss.

There was a thin thread extending from afar, connected right to Zhang Qian's ear.

Clearly, someone was offering pointers to Zhang Qian for this duel.

It seemed like this line of communication was established using a sort of unique secret art, making it far more difficult to notice than ordinary zhenqi telepathy. Had it not been for Zhang Xuan's Eye of Insight, it would be doubtful whether he would have been able to notice it or not.

Most likely, this was a mean to hide the matter from the eyes of Elder Liu and the others.

But still, to possess means capable of deceiving even a Saint 8-dan expert... It seemed like the Zhang Clan was really not to be underestimated.

Fortunately, the Eye of Insight had the ability to track down even the faintest of traces. As discreet as the matter was carried out, it was still incapable of fooling his eyes.

Tracing the line, Zhang Xuan's gaze was soon led to a young man beneath the stage.

That's... the candidate in the 46th rank, Zhang Yunfeng? Zhang Xuan recognized the young man as the person who had been sitting with Zhang Qian all this while.

It's no wonder why this fellow dares to challenge me, and his grasp over combat also seemed to have abruptly improved by leaps and bounds. No doubt about it, Zhang Yunfeng must be offering him pointers from the back!

Processing all of these in an instant, a smile crept onto Zhang Xuan's lips as he stood calmly before Zhang Qian's punch.

Instead of dodging, he raised his other hand and tapped forward.

Hu!

The space ahead of him suddenly began twisting together, causing Zhang Qian to feel as if he had been plunged into a bog. No matter how he pushed his fist forward, he found that he was unable to advance his punch any further.

Dominion!

Ever since leaving Qianchong Empire, other than guiding Zhang Jiuxiao along with his cultivation and swordsmanship, he hadn't been idling on his personal growth either. At this

point, he had already fully assimilated the use of his 1-meter Dominion into his fighting style.

In the past, his Dominion took a form reminiscent of a light barrier, surrounding his entire body. However, with his enhanced grasp over the technique, he was able to cast a miniaturized Dominion around him at will. This way, not only would he be able to alleviate the frightening consumption of zhenqi, the presence of his Dominion would also be almost indiscernible as well, making it more difficult to guard against it.

With his fist locked in place, Zhang Qian's punch fell flat, and Zhang Xuan's sword qi continued flying for his other palm.

Si la!

A spray of blood splattered into the sky as the zhenqi gathered in Zhang Qian's palm dissipated under the severance of the sword qi.

“AHHHHH!!”

There was a scream of agony as Zhang Qian's palm was pierced through by the sword qi, and a walnut-sized hole appeared on his hand.

“You have lost.” Having subdued the other party with a single strike, Zhang Xuan took a step back and halted his offense.

This single strike should be more than enough to show the disparity in the strength between the both of them. Besides, considering that Zhang Qian wasn't a match for him while he was still at full strength, he would stand even less of a chance now that there was a hole in his palm.

“I have lost? No way. There's no way I would lose!” Zhang Qian quickly took out several medicinal herbs to halt the bleeding of his palm before glaring at Zhang Xuan with eyes reddened in frenzy.

Hong long!

A rampaging aura burst forth from Zhang Qian, and astonishingly, it felt like he was growing stronger at a rapid pace.

In the sky, Elder Han Zhu was overlooking the duel when he saw this sight, and his face turned livid with graveness, “Zhang Qian is tapping into the power of his bloodline. Should we intervene in the battle?”

It was only a friendly duel, but Zhang Qian actually went to the extent of tapping into the power of his bloodline. This could potentially be dangerous for both Zhang Xuan and Zhang Qian.

“Take a look at Zhang Xuan.” Instead of responding to Elder Han Zhu’s question straight, Elder Liu pointed at the area ahead of him.

Perplexed, Elder Han Zhu turned his gaze over, and what he saw left his eyebrow shooting up in surprise.

On the stage, there was not the slightest hint of nervousness or anxiety to be seen on Zhang Xuan’s face. It was almost as if he knew that Zhang Qian would make such a move.

“A Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle defeating a Half-Grand Dominion realm. I’m really interested to see what other miracles can Zhang Xuan bring us.” Elder Liu chuckled softly.

It was simply too astounding for a single candidate to earn 12,700 points within two minutes that Elder Liu thought that there might have been an error in the Mountain Gate examination. However, the sight before him had proved his initial assumptions to be completely wrong.

The young man before him was really just that fearsome!

“I understand.” Elder Han Zhu nodded. “I’ll make a move only when he’s really in danger.”

Considering the composed attitude Zhang Xuan held toward Zhang Qian’s outburst, it was likely that he was confident of neutralizing the latter’s offense. Since that was the case, it might be worth waiting a little to see what would happen.

Boom!

While the two elders of the Sanctum of Sages were chatting with one another, on the stage, Zhang Qian had finally fully activated his bloodline. Even though his cultivation was still

capped at Half-Grand Dominion realm, his aura had turned far more violent than before, a little reminiscent of a ravenous ancient beast awakening from its long sleep.

Hu!

With a swift charge, Zhang Qian threw his fist toward Zhang Xuan once more.

“Hm?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He thought that Zhang Qian’s moves would change after his bloodline had been activated, perhaps utilizing a more powerful battle technique or that sort. He didn’t think that the latter would attack him with just a straightforward jab.

Surely such a move would be beneath even the most basic of battle techniques?

Could it be that the activation of his bloodline had enhanced his strength but limited the flexibility in the type of attacks he could utilize?

If that was the case, was there any point to activating his bloodline?

Forget it, I should be able to know the answer soon enough. This will be a good opportunity for me to find out just what is so special about the Zhang Clan’s bloodline. Knowing that it was pointless to think about such matters at this point, Zhang Xuan raised his palm to meet Zhang Qian’s punch.

This time, he didn’t use any battle technique either. He was intending to clash straight on with Zhang Qian.

Hu la!

The palm and the punch swiftly closed in on one another, but just as when they were about to meet, Zhang Xuan suddenly saw something blur across his field of vision, and cold sweat immediately broke out all over his body.

Eye of Insight!

Sensing that something was wrong, he swiftly activated his Eye of Insight, and only then did he realize that the other

party's punch had, at some point, arrived right before his chest, just a split instant away from striking him.

How can this be? Can a fist even be teleported? Zhang Xuan's eyes widened in horror.

There was no way he would have made such a fatal calculation error in battle. Given the trajectory of Zhang Qian's punch, it would have to collide with his palm first before getting to him. Yet, to actually bypass his defense and arrive before his chest in an instant... Could it really be teleportation?

But... as one who had practiced the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, even if Zhang Xuan couldn't bend space according to his will yet, he would still have noticed the warping in space if Zhang Qian had really teleported. It was apparent that Zhang Qian's punch hadn't resulted in any disturbance in the surrounding space, so it would be safe to assume that it was a perfectly ordinary attack...

The situation was truly inconceivable!

However, at this current moment, Zhang Xuan didn't have the luxury to think any deeper into the matter either.

Dominion!

With a deep exhalation, Zhang Xuan immediately pressed his chest backward as he swiftly retreated back with a powerful leap as well. At the same time, a meter of Dominion appeared around him.

Weng!

But before Zhang Xuan's Dominion could be formed, a sharp ache struck his chest.

Peng!

His body was sent flying backward, but fortunately, he managed to ward off the momentum of the strike and regain his balance in mid-air. Nevertheless, the strike had still dealt considerable damage to him, and his face turned pale.

How swift... Zhang Xuan clenched his fists in disbelief.

This was the first time he had suffered such a huge setback fighting against others!

His Dominion could be activated at will, which meant that he was able to trigger it in an instant. Logically speaking, the other party's fist should still have been a distance away from him, so why would it strike him all of a sudden?

Fortunately, his Dominion still managed to impede Zhang Qian's fist significantly at the crucial juncture, or else if that punch were to land squarely on him, even if he didn't sustain grievous injuries, his fighting ability would have been severely compromised too.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan swiftly drove his Heaven's Path zhenqi to recover his energy while he assessed Zhang Qian with narrowed eyes.

All along, he didn't think that Zhang Qian was a formidable adversary, so he didn't think much of the latter either.

However, this setback had taught him that those who had the bloodline of the Sage Clans running through their veins were more frightening than he had imagined them to be.

With Zhang Qian's current strength, even ordinary Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivators wouldn't be a match for him!

"Where do you think you are running off to?"

With his first strike landing effectively on his foe, a hint of cruel glee surfaced in Zhang Qian's eyes. With a swift leap, he dashed forward once more.

He had only taken a single step, but for some reason, he appeared before Zhang Xuan in the next instant with a fist charged with power.

Huala!

A deafening sonic boom exploded in the air, and it felt as if even space would be torn down by the sheer might of the fist.

Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm!

Knowing that he would stand no chance against Zhang Qian through ordinary means, especially given the bizarre sight that had happened earlier, Zhang Xuan raised his palm and executed Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's battle technique.

Hong long!

Using the might of his palm, Zhang Xuan sealed the space around Zhang Qian, intending to prevent the latter from making any abrupt actions. But once again... before his palm could land, Zhang Qian's fist had already bypassed his attack once more, appearing right before his chest.

Just what's going on? Zhang Xuan's face turned awfully ugly.

Under normal circumstances, his Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm should have been able to overcome the other party's attack with ease! It was as if the other party had known that he would make that move and launched a series of countermeasures before he could even react, bringing the punch to somewhere his palm couldn't affect.

Just what in the world was going on?

Sword Quintessence, Sea of Blades!

With a furious roar, Zhang Xuan opened up all of his acupoints and ejected sword qi into his surroundings.

Ding ding ding ding!

Under the furious onslaught of the sword qi, Zhang Qian had no choice but to withdraw his attack.

At this moment, Zhang Qian's face had also turned slightly pale, and he was panting heavily. It seemed like the two punches earlier had drained him greatly as well.

That was a close one... With a livid face, Zhang Xuan swiftly retreated several steps back to create some distance between him and Zhang Qian.

At this moment, an anxious voice suddenly sounded in his ears, "Zhang shi, that's the ability of the Zhang Clan's bloodline—Time Compression..."

It was Chen Leyao's face.

“Time Compression?” A deep frown emerged on Zhang Xuan’s face.

1304 Make A Breakthrough While I'm At I

He knew that the ability of the Luo Clan's bloodline had something to do with space. As the little princess of the Luo Clan, Ruoxin wielded the Dimension Silencer in her hand as well, which granted her fearsome might.

As for the Zhang Clan... thinking back, he had never asked Zhang Jiuxiao about their bloodline ability either, so he didn't know what it was. But never in his dreams could he have imagined that it would be related to the secrets of time!

Time and space, these were the two fundamental building blocks of the world.

Without a doubt, a person who could grasp time would have the world in his grasp too.

This would explain why despite his timely reflexes, the enemy still managed to bypass his defenses to land his attacks. Most likely, through burning his bloodline, Zhang Qian's fist had affected his perception of time, thus resulting in his attacks appearing to be teleporting to him.

In a clash between experts, the difference between life and death banked on a fraction of an instant. If one could compress time, even if it was just one-hundredth of a breath, it could play a crucial role in the midst of a tight battle.

With such a powerful bloodline ability, it was no wonder why the Zhang Clan was able to remain as the number one Sage Clan on the Master Teacher Continent over the years.

However, it appears that burning his bloodline to tap into the Power of Time drains him swiftly as well. It doesn't seem like he will be able to maintain that state for too long... Zhang Xuan analyzed.

As one who had cultivated the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, he knew very well that tapping into abilities that

exceeded one's cultivation would drain one's life force or even potential.

It's fortunate that I have the Eye of Insight, or else those two punches would have surely left me severely wounded at the very least... Zhang Xuan thought as a terrified shudder ran through his body.

It was due to the Eye of Insight that he was able to clearly perceive the other party's punch trajectory in the nick of the moment and react accordingly. Otherwise, he would have surely suffered severe injuries.

"I'll defeat you!"

While Zhang Xuan was still immersed in his thoughts, Zhang Qian had already managed to catch his breath, and with a furious roar, he charged forward once more.

He won't be able to sustain that ability for too long. As long as I were to avoid his attacks and put some distance between the both of us, it shouldn't be too difficult for me to defeat him! Zhang Xuan swiftly came up with a countermeasure.

So far, it appeared that there was a limit to the range of Zhang Qian's Time Compression. So, if Zhang Xuan were to resort to long-range attacks instead, he should be able to overcome the other party's attacks easily.

And everything else would be easy.

Hu!

With a step, Zhang Xuan executed the Unbounded Voyager, and reminiscent to teleportation, he abruptly appeared at the other end of the dueling ring.

Padah!

Barely an instant after Zhang Xuan left, Zhang Qian's punch fell heavily on the area where he was standing previously. Had he been a split second slower, that punch could have very well landed on him.

Now!

Knowing that this was the ideal opportunity to launch an attack, Zhang Xuan tapped his finger in Zhang Qian's direction.

Wu wu wu wu!

Four surges of sword qi burst forth, and they whizzed across the dueling ring to arrive before Zhang Qian in less than a fraction of a second.

Puhe! Puhe! Puhe! Puhe!

Those four sword qi stabbed right into Zhang Qian's feet and palms, pinning him firmly onto the dueling stage with their momentum.

Hu!

After doing all of that, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It was fortunate that Chen Leyao had given him a timely reminder of the matter, or else it would have been difficult for him to turn the tables around on Zhang Qian without using his Library of Heaven's Path.

"You have lost." Placing his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan gazed down on Zhang Qian coldly.

"I..." Zhang Qian's eyes were filled with craze, but just as he wanted to speak, the complete exhaustion of his strength and the severe injuries he had sustained finally took a toll on him, and he caved in and fainted.

He had exerted himself too much by burning his bloodline.

He had gone all out in hopes of exacting vengeance and acquiring the final slot into the Elite Division, but his efforts ended up in futility.

While the cultivation of the young man before him wasn't too high, his fighting prowess was nothing short of terrifying.

Hu!

A light breeze swept across the square, and a figure suddenly appeared on top of the stage—Zhang Yunfeng. He took a glance at Zhang Qian on the ground, and after confirming that the sword qi hadn't struck any of the vitals, he heaved an

inconspicuous sigh of relief. Following which, he waved his hand toward the bottom of the dueling ring.

Noting the gesture, Zhang Yu hurriedly rushed onto the dueling ring and fed Zhang Qian several recovery pills before carrying him down.

Zhang Yunfeng finally turned his attention to Zhang Xuan, and with a face devoid of expression, he remarked, "It seems like you are quite powerful after all."

"To offer pointers to Zhang Qian remotely such that he could at least take a blow or two from me... You aren't too weak yourself either." Zhang Xuan replied composedly.

"Offer pointers to Zhang Qian remotely?"

"Isn't that flouting the rules?"

"The Zhang Clan is really getting arrogant!"

"This is too much. Just because they wield great influence in the Sanctum of Sages doesn't mean they can blatantly disregard the rules like that!"

A huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

The Challenge of the Defeated was a fight to vie for the precious and limited slots in the Sanctum of Sages, so fairness was extremely important. It was one thing for Zhang Qian to burn his bloodline, but to think that he would have another person guiding him from behind. This was a clear infringement of the rules!

Not expecting the other party to be able to see through his little moves and even expose them publicly, Zhang Yunfeng's impassive expression immediately darkened a little, "Do you dare to face me in a duel?"

"Sure, it'll be my pleasure." Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

He had been rather pissed off at how the other party had been playing little tricks behind his back. Since the other party had come knocking on his door, he didn't mind teaching him a lesson.

“Good!” Seeing that Zhang Xuan had agreed to it, Zhang Yunfeng smirked.

He stood unmovingly on the spot, but for some reason, his figure suddenly seemed to tower. His aura swiftly intensified, to the point that it seemed as though he would tear apart the seals around the dueling ring.

Weng!

In the next moment, a faint light barrier of roughly five meters in radius materialized around Zhang Yunfeng.

And standing in the middle of the light, Zhang Yunfeng felt like an indomitable existence.

This is a true Dominion? Zhang Xuan’s face turned grim.

This was the first time he was seeing a Grand Dominion realm expert casting a Dominion. Not only did it cover an area greater than his, the power pulsating within it was also even purer and more profound.

“The difference in the fighting prowess between each realm grows progressively larger as one advances further up the Saint realm. Zhang Xuan might be powerful, but against a Grand Dominion realm cultivator of Zhang Yunfeng’s caliber, it’s unlikely that he would stand much of a chance.” Elder Han Zhu frowned.

From Leaving Aperture realm onward, the gap of a single realm could possibly mean a difference in fighting prowess by severalfold.

It was for this reason that while Zhang Xuan could easily defeat opponent eight to nine cultivation stages stronger than him at Transcendent Mortal, but beyond Saint realm, most of the time, challenging an opponent that was even six to seven cultivation stages higher than him was already difficult for him.

It was not that Zhang Xuan was getting weaker, but the gap between each cultivation stage was simply increasing exponentially.

This was similar to how even though the differences between one and two and one billion and two billion were both by a factor of two, their differences in terms of absolute values were immense.

Such was the case for Primordial Spirit realm and Grand Dominion realm too. The four lightning tribulations in between created a vast gap that was nearly unbridgeable between the two realms.

In the first place, it was already a huge surprise to see Zhang Xuan defeating the Half-Grand Dominion realm Zhang Qian. Now that he was faced against the Grand Dominion realm primary stage Zhang Yunfeng... No matter how Elder Han Zhu looked at it, there was just no way Zhang Xuan could win.

“Based on the situation in the previous battle, he would indeed be no match for Zhang Yunfeng.” Elder Liu nodded.

As a Saint 8-dan master teacher, he possessed a keen, discerning eye. From the earlier fight, he could roughly gauge Zhang Xuan’s strength.

Against normal Grand Dominion realm experts, Zhang Xuan might still stand a chance. However, faced with a genius from the Zhang Clan... the odds were that he would lose.

“Then...” Elder Han Zhu was taken aback.

Since the outcome of the battle is already clear, why are we still allowing them to fight?

“As geniuses, they have their own pride. Even if we manage to stop them here, Zhang Yunfeng will just find another way to challenge Zhang Xuan. Since that is the case, it would be much better to settle everything here!” Elder Liu replied.

“More importantly, I’m interested to see just how much potential does Zhang Xuan harness within him!”

If they didn’t settle the matter today, the Zhang Clan would just continue to find other reasons to harass Zhang Xuan in the future. It was probably in view of this that Zhang Xuan accepted Zhang Yunfeng’s duel without any hesitation too.

“Alright then.” Hearing those words, Elder Han Zhu nodded before falling silent.

At the very least, if they were to settle their scores in the Challenge of the Defeated, should any life-threatening circumstances arise out of the duel, they would be able to intervene immediately, so Zhang Xuan’s life wouldn’t be in danger.

“You can go first.”

While the two elders were conversing with one another, Zhang Yunfeng was finally done with his preparation. He raised his hand and gestured for Zhang Xuan to make the first move.

On the other hand, knowing that Zhang Yunfeng wouldn’t be an easy opponent, Zhang Xuan had no intention of holding back either. With a flick of his left hand, the furious might of the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm rushed toward Zhang Yunfeng. At the same time, he also lifted his right hand and tapped forward.

Grand Constellation Finger!

Executing two Saint intermediate-tier battle techniques simultaneously, Zhang Xuan had gone all out from the start.

Hu!

Standing before the two attacks, Zhang Yunfeng leisurely took a step forward.

Weng!

As soon as the palm strike and the finger art came into contact with his Dominion, they were immediately deflected just like how a river flow parted before a massive boulder. It didn’t seem to have caused the slightest bit of effect on Zhang Yunfeng at all.

“This...” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

As expected of a Grand Dominion realm expert of the Zhang Clan, the other party was much more frightening than he had thought!

“What about this?” With a furious roar, all kinds of attack burst forth from Zhang Xuan—palm strikes, punches, finger arts, and many more. In the blink of an eye, the entire dueling ring seemed to have been plunged into an ocean of zhenqi.

Boom boom boom!

The furious assault caused sonic booms to explode relentlessly in the air.

Even if it was Zhang Qian who had tapped into the power of his bloodline, he would have surely been sent into a fluster from this overwhelming barrage of attacks.

But Zhang Yunfeng simply chuckled lightly and waved his hand lightly.

Hu la!

Upon contact with his Dominion, the barrage of attacks was deflected to his back as well, inducing countless ripples to diffuse on the seal around the dueling ring.

He’s still perfectly fine even after all that? Zhang Xuan felt as if his mind was going to explode.

That was really way too overpowered!

He thought that with that barrage of attacks, he would at least be able to tear open the other party’s defenses. Yet, it barely did a thing at all!

Was he really completely helpless before the other party without a sword in hand?

“I have already given you a chance to attack me, so it should be my turn now.” After deflecting all of Zhang Xuan’s attacks, Zhang Yunfeng spoke up before tapping his finger forward.

Tz la!

A surge of pure energy immediately shot forth from the tip of his finger.

“Hm?”

Accelerated by Zhang Yunfeng’s Dominion, the surge of pure energy appeared right before Zhang Xuan’s chest in an instant.

Realizing that he would have no time to dodge at all, he could only hurriedly raise his palm to defend himself.

Tzzzz!

The powerful momentum of the finger art traveled through Zhang Xuan's palm and struck his body like a comet, forcefully pushing him back. As a result, a massive gorge was dragged out on the dueling ring.

Hu!

It took a great deal of effort before Zhang Xuan was able to regain his balance once more. He felt his zhenqi running erratically in his body, and as if someone had scalded with palm with blazing inferno, an indescribable pain assaulted his hand.

Even a simple finger art of his wields so much strength? Zhang Xuan was alarmed.

He might have successfully withstood the finger art, but if this were to go on, the duel would surely end with his loss.

“Not too bad. The fact that you were able to withstand my attack shows that you do have some capability.” Zhang Yunfeng remarked as he raised his palm, preparing for the next attack.

At this moment, however, the young man before him abruptly raised his hand up high.

“What's wrong? Are you going to surrender?” Zhang Yunfeng asked with a contemptuous smile on his lips.

“That's not it. I just would like ten breaths to myself.” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Ten breaths?”

“I admit that I am not a match for you with my current strength. In any case, it's already unfair that a Grand Dominion realm cultivator like you is facing a Primordial Spirit realm cultivator like me at your full strength. So, I want ten seconds to sort out my thoughts...”

Exhaling deeply, a smile emerged on Zhang Xuan's lips as he continued, "... as well as to make a breakthrough while I'm at it!"

1305 He's Bathing!

“Make a breakthrough while he's at it?”

“Is it possible to make a breakthrough as and when you like?”

“What can he possibly do in just ten breaths? It won't even be sufficient for a short toilet break!”

Upon hearing Zhang Xuan's words, a huge commotion broke out beneath the stage.

The various elders in the sky also looked at one another in confusion, uncomprehending of what the young man was up to.

A typical cultivator would have to find an isolated chamber, prepare all kinds of cultivation resources, and condition his body for many days before attempting for a breakthrough, and yet, this fellow actually asked for a ten breaths break from the battle in order to make a breakthrough...

Do you think that making a breakthrough is as easy as breathing, able to do it as and when you like?

“Fine, I'll give you ten seconds then. Let's see if you have the ability to make a breakthrough within this period of time!” Zhang Yunfeng was startled for a moment before he nearly burst out laughing.

He had seen plenty of eccentric people in his life, but the young man before him sure was one-of-a-kind!

To ask for a ten breaths break in the midst of a battle in order to make a breakthrough... Can you come up with something any more ridiculous than that?

And even if you did manage to achieve a breakthrough, you would only be at Half-Leaving Aperture realm. Do you think that you would be a match for me like that?

Fine, I'll give you the time that you desire so much then! Let's see what you can do with it!

“Great.” Zhang Xuan nodded. Flicking his wrist, he took out the Wintry Spirit Essence, uncorked the bottle, and swallowed it whole.

“That isn’t for drinking!” At the bottom of the dueling ring, Chen Leyao saw that sight and nearly keeled over.

The Wintry Spirit Essence was a cold attribute spirit essence capable of freezing one’s very blood and bones. Even the members of the Glacier Plain Court would just dab a little bit of it on their fingers and slowly absorb it over a very long period of time each time they cultivated. That bottle of Wintry Spirit Essence was intended for several years of use, and yet... he actually swallowed it whole!

While it was true that the Wintry Spirit Essence was rich in spiritual energy, it was simply too cold. Swallowing it directly was worse than ingesting lethal poison directly!

Putting aside a Primordial Spirit realm cultivator like you, even Grand Dominion realm experts would die from having their innards freezing over!

Just what in the world are you doing?

It was in view that the young man was her benefactor and the teacher of their young court chief that Chen Leyao gave him a bottle of Wintry Spirit Essence. If he were to die because of that... there was no way she would be able to escape responsibility!

Gugugu!

Just as Chen Leyao was scared out of her wits, she saw that not only did the young man on the stage not turn into a sculpture of ice, the aura he emanated was even growing stronger by the moment. It felt almost as if a dam which had accumulated several decades worth of water was beginning to shatter, ready to let loose a furious flood upon the world.

Following which, with a resounding buzz, the young man successfully overcame the bottleneck of Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle and reached Half-Leaving Aperture realm.

Despite so, the advancement in his cultivation didn’t stop just there. It continued surging forward furiously.

Two breaths later, he reached Quasi Leaving Aperture realm.
“This...” Chen Leyao’s face paled, and her throat turned dry. Her eyes were bulging so much that it seemed as if they would pop out to the ground anytime soon.

She was certain that the young man would be frozen to death by the cold energy of the Wintry Spirit Essence, but... not only was he fine, he even managed to swiftly assimilate the spirit essence into his body and advance his cultivation swiftly.

Just what kind of constitution did he have? That was really frightening!

Amidst her shock, Zhang Xuan’s advancement in cultivation finally slowed to a halt.

It seemed like he had finished devouring all of the spiritual energy contained within the Wintry Spirit Essence.

“This...”

“To achieve a breakthrough of two cultivation stages within three breaths?”

“Isn’t this a little too fast?”

Everyone stared at the sight before them in a daze.

In the sky, Elder Liu and the others also nearly plummeted to the ground from shock.

They thought that the young man asking for a break of ten breaths was just a joke, but in just three breaths, he had already managed to advance his cultivation by two cultivation stages. And furthermore, from the looks of it, if not for the insufficient spiritual energy from the Wintry Spirit Essence, he could have very well pushed for even higher realms.

Zhang Yunfeng was also dumbfounded by how Zhang Xuan actually succeeded in achieving a breakthrough so swiftly, and a deep frown emerged on his forehead. But a short moment later, the frown gave way to a cold chuckle, “You are merely at Quasi Leaving Aperture realm. Even if you did succeed in achieving a breakthrough, you still won’t be able to defeat me with such strength.”

Even with two consecutive breakthroughs, that fellow would only be a mere Quasi Leaving Aperture realm. There was still a huge gap between the other party and a true Grand Dominion realm expert like him!

Boom!

All of a sudden, the deep rumbling of thunder abruptly bellowed in the sky above, and it took only a short moment for the clear skies to be covered in darkness.

Raising his head anxiously, Zhang Yunfeng saw ominous clouds looming above the square.

“He... can’t be thinking of challenging the lightning ordeal here, could he?” Zhang Yunfeng’s body shuddered involuntarily upon that realization.

To dare to draw out the lightning ordeal a moment right after you have reached Quasi Leaving Aperture realm... Do you know how frightening the lightning ordeal is?

Primordial Spirits were of the yin attribute, and they needed to be nourished by the lightning ordeal before they could make the transformation into the yang attribute. Only then would they be able to travel freely without being limited by their bodies.

However, lightning was the natural nemesis to all beings of the yin attribute. Even Zhang Yunfeng had to reinforce his cultivation for more than half a year before daring to challenge the lightning ordeal... but even so, he still sustained grave injuries from it, nearly crippling himself for good. He had to rest for three whole months before he was able to recover back to full health.

It was one thing for that fellow to rush his breakthroughs, but to actually draw in the lightning ordeal on top of that...

Are you really that intent to die?

“That’s too reckless!” Zhao Xingmo exclaimed in horror.

To be honest, it was no big deal for Zhang Xuan to lose the duel. After all, Zhang Yunfeng was ranked higher than him, so it wouldn’t affect his status and prestige as a student of the

Elite Division. There was really no need to take the risk and rush for a breakthrough at all!

This was really a foolish action!

Perhaps noticing Zhao Xingmo's worry, Zhang Jiuxiao consoled, "Don't worry, Zhang shi will be fine!"

Zhao Xingmo might not be aware of how monstrous Zhang Xuan was, but he had experienced it firsthand.

So many times, he had worked hard to reinforce his cultivation so as to push for a breakthrough in hopes of surpassing Zhang Xuan, but in the end, the latter would just casually say "I have accumulated enough" and easily achieve breakthrough after breakthrough, steadily widening the gap between the both of them...

After all the traumas he had been through, there was no longer anything Zhang Xuan could do that would surprise him anymore.

Admittedly, the situation occurring before him was inconceivable to him too. But considering that it was Zhang Xuan who stood at the eye of the storm, everything didn't seem as unbelievable anymore.

After all, that young man was a Celestial Master Teacher like Kong shi. How could an existence like that be gauged using the common sense of ordinary men?

"Fine? How could he be fine? Do you know that the very first Leaving Aperture Ordeal is the most dangerous to a cultivator? There are countless geniuses in history who had died because of it... Just look at the dense congregation of storm clouds in the sky! I know that he's a person of great capability, but it takes only a moment of complacency to make an irreversible mistake!" Zhao Xingmo bellowed anxiously.

"Besides, even if he were to survive the lightning ordeal, he would surely suffer grievous injuries too. Given so, how is he going to continue fighting against Zhang Yunfeng?"

Considering how powerful the Leaving Aperture Ordeal was, it was inevitable that one would suffer great damage to one's Primordial Spirit... And considering how he was already

outmatched when fighting at his full strength, how could he possibly be a match for a Grand Dominion realm expert when he was in a severely wounded state?

Even without looking at the outcome, it was obvious what the conclusion of the duel would be!

“This...” This time, even Zhang Jiuxiao was stumped.

He had deep confidence in Zhang Xuan, but given how disadvantageous the circumstances were to the latter, even he couldn't help but waver at this point in time.

“My heavens, has Zhang Xuan gone mad? Are my eyes playing tricks on me, or is Zhang shi trying to draw his Primordial Spirit out from his body?”

All of a sudden, a loud exclamation echoed through the square. Alarmed, Zhang Jiuxiao turned his head toward the sky and saw that Zhang Xuan had drawn his Primordial Spirit out of his glabella, and in this very moment, his Primordial Spirit was charging right into the congregation of storm clouds.

“Is Zhang shi intending to face the Leaving Aperture Ordeal with his Primordial Spirit? But that would only put him in greater danger!” Zhang Jiuxiao widened his eyes in shock.

Considering that the Primordial Spirit was weak against lightning, a cultivator would stand a better chance at surviving the Leaving Aperture Ordeal if he were to face the lightning tribulation with his Primordial Spirit housed within his body. This way, the body would at least help to block out a fair bit of the lightning.

Back at the Marshlands of the Northern Meadows, he had seen the deep agony that Hall Master Xing was put through from facing the lightning tribulation directly with his Primordial Spirit.

Zhang Xuan was present then as well, so he should be aware of the dangers of his actions. Why was he still taking such a risk then?

While Zhang Jiuxiao was wondering if Zhang Xuan had gone bonkers, the latter's Primordial Spirit had already charged

right into the storm clouds. Countless streaks of lightning flashed within the clouds, fully displaying the treacherous environment within.

Kacha! Kacha!

Under the relentless lightning strike, Zhang Xuan's Primordial Spirit began moving in a bizarre fashion, as if the lightning strike had caused him to lose control of himself.

“The Leaving Aperture Ordeal is the first hurdle that Saint realm experts would face. The violent energy harnessed within the lightning tribulation is simply too great such that most Primordial Spirits would end up succumbing to it, resulting in dissipation. Yet, that fellow actually dashed right in complete unprepared... He really shouldn't have done that. Having gotten into the Elite Division, he had such a bright future lying before him, but now...”

“Recklessness is really the bane for all cultivators. Look at how he's convulsing uncontrollably!”

“This is his very first lightning tribulation, so his Primordial Spirit wouldn't have the slightest resistance to lightning at all. Even if his Primordial Spirit doesn't dissipate from this, it's likely that his sanity would be wiped away by the violent force of the lightning ordeal... That fellow is really too hasty for success... Wait a moment, are you sure he's convulsing? Why doesn't it seem that way to me?”

Long sighs of lamentation sounded one after another from the crowd, but all of a sudden, the sudden exclamation left the entire crowd stunned for a moment.

“You're right! His Primordial Spirit isn't convulsing. It's more like... more like...”

Half a breath later, another master teacher finished the sentence with a shrill voice, “... More like he's bathing!”

“Bathing?”

Bewildered by that perplexing remark, everyone quickly turned their gazes over, and indeed, there was something really amiss with the situation.

The Primordial Spirit amidst the lightning clouds was moving around, but it wasn't a spasmodic movement. Rather, if they really had to describe it, it would be more of a rhythmic scrubbing movement, as if he was trying to spread the lightning equally throughout his body.

As if he was trying to scrub it into the depths of his Primordial Spirit.

“Primordial Spirits are naturally averse to lightning, but not only is he unfrightened, he's even heartily bathing in it...”

“Are my eyes playing tricks on me? How could something like this possibly happen?”

Madness. This was truly madness.

Three breaths to push from Primordial Spirit pinnacle to Quasi Leaving Aperture realm, and even challenging the lightning tribulation face on straight afterward...

Their minds could still accept it if Zhang Xuan managed to survive the Leaving Aperture Ordeal by a close shot, but to be bathing so joyfully amidst it...

No words could even begin to describe the emotions they were feeling at this very instant.

“T-this...” Elder Liu gulped down a mouthful of saliva as his eyelids twitched uncontrollably.

As an elder of the Sanctum of Sages, he had seen plenty of outstanding geniuses over the past several hundred years, such as the current head of the Zhang Clan, the little princess of the Luo Clan... They were all the most outstanding figures of the Master Teacher Continent, the stars that shone the brightest in the night sky.

But... not even they dared to play with the Leaving Aperture Ordeal like that!

Elder Liu clawed at his hair frenziedly, tearing out huge patches of it.

“He...” Zhang Yunfeng had frozen in shock from what he was seeing.

He thought that it was utter foolishness of the young man to bring forth the lightning tribulation so casually, and that he was simply courting death. Yet, as if a resilient cockroach, the lightning ordeal didn't seem to faze him in the least. On the contrary, he was even having plenty of fun 'bathing'!

"Ten breaths are up!" This daze continued for quite a while before Zhang Yunfeng suddenly remembered the situation he was in and bellowed loudly.

Hu!

The Primordial Spirit in the sky seemed to have heard his voice and immediately stopped his 'scrubbing'. He opened his mouth wide and devoured the entire sky of lightning through his mouth before dashing right back into his body.

In the next moment, Zhang Xuan opened his eyes and looked at Zhang Yunfeng apologetically.

"Pardon me. It was my first time experiencing the lightning tribulation, and I had a little too much fun that I accidentally took another additional breath. To make up to you, why don't I give you a three moves advantage?"

1306 Wave Treading Stride

From the moment he said those words to his breakthrough and the lightning tribulation, a total of eleven breaths had passed... It was a single breath more than what he had promised earlier, and the fact that the other party didn't try to assault him within this period of time was honestly praiseworthy.

No matter what, he must return the favor!

“What did you say?” Zhang Yunfeng gritted his teeth so tightly as it felt as if they would chip under the immense force.

It was just a moment ago that he thrashed Zhang Xuan upside down, but all of a sudden, Zhang Xuan was actually offering to give him a three moves advantage? That was blatantly underestimating him!

“Make your move. I promise you that I won't retaliate in the next three moves you make!” Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back and smiled.

“You're really seeking death!” Zhang Yunfeng couldn't suppress his rage any longer.

While he wasn't one of the most talented individuals in the Zhang Clan, he had a composed and steady personality. It was for this reason that he didn't rush into agreeing to help Zhang Qian exact his vengeance... But Zhang Xuan's words had really struck the thorn in his heart this time around.

For the longest of time, he had been extremely concerned about the widening gap between him and the other geniuses of the Zhang Clan, and Zhang Xuan's casual attitude and words of underestimation only served to further remind him of the matter.

In an instant, rage consumed his entirety, and he couldn't help but want to tear the young man before him into shreds.

Tzzzzzz!

Zhang Yunfeng began walking forward slowly.

Even though he was walking atop the smooth dueling ring, somehow, his movements felt as if he was riding upon a wave. Despite his slow speed, there was an imposing momentum behind his movement reminiscent of the choppy waters of a stormy sea.

Previously, in view of his standing, he had decided to hold himself back a little. However, now that he had decided to go all out, his overwhelming strength immediately showed through.

“It’s the Zhang Clan’s Wave Treading Stride!”

“Rumors have it that the Wave Treading Stride was created by an elder in the Zhang Clan while he was observing a water strider moving along the ripples in the water. Not only were its movements agile, it was also well poised for offense and defense, similar to a leaf floating atop the ocean—no matter how treacherous the waves get, it would still remain afloat.”

“This technique is similar to Shadow Tracking, but it’s much more profound and grander!”

“Since Zhang Yunfeng has gone to the extent of using this technique, it seems like he has started getting serious!”

“Zhang Xuan is likely going to be defeated... His ability to withstand the lightning tribulation is indeed incredible, but a cultivation of Leaving Aperture realm primary stage is just too low!”

...

Discussions broke out amidst the crowd.

While Zhang Xuan’s breakthroughs were shocking, in their view, it was likely that Zhang Xuan had just reinforced his cultivation immensely over the months, thus allowing him to easily take this final step forward in this critical juncture.

As formidable as Zhang Xuan had performed in the lightning tribulation, his true strength was still bound to be lacking as compared to the genius of the Zhang Clan, especially given the huge disparity in their cultivation realms.

“I shall make you regret looking down on me!” Zhang Yunfeng raised his palm and forcefully pushed it down upon Zhang Xuan.

This palm may seem unimpressive on the surface, but as the one standing before it, Zhang Xuan felt as if a torrential tsunami was towering before him, inducing a slight feeling of helplessness in him.

Saint intermediate-tier battle technique, Air Propulsion Palm!

Completely overwhelmed with anger, Zhang Yunfeng didn't bother to hold back at all. In an instant, Zhang Yunfeng had turned the dueling ring reminiscent to the bottom of an ocean. Any movement made within the range of his attack would require his permission.

“Not bad!” Zhang Xuan remarked calmly with his hands still beneath his back.

With an agile flit, he dodged Zhang Yunfeng's lethal attack and materialized at the other end of the dueling ring.

After achieving a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, his fighting prowess had increased by at least twofold. While he hadn't really tried out how powerful he was at the moment, he was confident that if he were to use his full strength, Zhang Yunfeng wouldn't stand a chance at all.

It was for this very reason that Zhang Xuan dared to give the other party a three moves advantage.

While he only had the Primordial Spirit realm Heaven's Path Divine Art with him at the moment, the Leaving Aperture realm cultivation technique manual books he had collected back at Qianchong Empire's black market, along with those he had obtained from Ji Lingfeng's storage ring, had given him a deep insight Leaving Aperture realm. Even though they weren't sufficient to form the Leaving Aperture realm Heaven's Path Divine Art, he was still able to compile out a decently wholesome cultivation technique manual. Furthermore, his diligent cultivation over the past few days had firmly reinforced his cultivation.

It was due to all of these factors that he was able to push for multiple breakthroughs so easily after ingesting the potent Wintry Spirit Essence.

As for the lightning tribulation, he had gone through the Saint Ascension Ordeal, which granted him significant resistance toward lightning. On top of that, as he cultivated the Heaven's Path Soul Art, his Primordial Spirit was already yang in nature. As a result, the lightning tribulation which all cultivators were so frightened of was actually nothing more than a walk in the park for him.

This was also the reason why the 'bathing' scene earlier occurred. He wasn't showing off but attempting to spread the lightning over his Primordial Spirit in the shortest time possible so as to best temper his Primordial Spirit.

Even so, he still exceeded the time by a single breath... How embarrassing.

As for his massive soul, he had used the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel to compress it into a smaller form so that it wouldn't stand out too much. Otherwise, if a ten-meters large Primordial Spirit were to slip out of his body, there was no saying that the lightning tribulation might even be scared into escaping.

"Do you think that I would let you run away?" Seeing that Zhang Xuan had dodged his first attack, Zhang Yunfeng narrowed his eyes and flicked his finger toward the sky.

Tz la!

A powerful sword qi burst into the heavens. From this move, it could be seen that his comprehension of swordsmanship had reached a decent level as well—Upper Sword Heart.

Wu wu wu!

Halfway through its trajectory, the sword qi abruptly burst into several hundred surges of smaller sword qi, scattered all around the area as they surged for Zhang Xuan.

A battle technique? Zhang Xuan was slightly surprised.

He thought that it was only a casual flick of sword qi, but the move turned out to be a battle technique too.

While the splitting of the sword qi would result in each of them harnessing significantly weaker might, such a barrage of attack was more effective in inducing panic in the opponent.

In a fight between experts, one's state of mind was extremely important too. As soon as the opponent started to lose his composure, one would be able to drag him into one's momentum and influence his movements, thus gaining full control over the flow of the battle.

But while such a move might have incredible effects when directed toward other opponents, it wasn't too effective against Zhang Xuan.

With another flit, Zhang Xuan arrived at the other end of the dueling ring, evading every single one of those mini sword qi cleanly.

"Is dodging the only thing you are capable of?" Zhang Yunfeng harrumphed coldly.

Two moves had already passed, but he didn't even come close to catching the young man's shadow. This had borne some feelings of frustration within him.

"I said that I would give you a three moves advantage, so of course, I won't back down on my words." Zhang Xuan said with a soft chuckle.

"You..." Zhang Yunfeng's face reddened in rage.

Unable to take it anymore, he charged forth once more.

This time, his speed was severalfold faster than before. It was still far from a match against Zhang Xuan's Unbounded Treader in terms of speed, but it was definitely far faster than ordinary movement techniques.

"What incredible speed! What movement technique is that?"

"It's the highest level of mastery of the Wave Treading Stride, Rippleless Treading!"

“He actually cultivated the Wave Treading Stride to the highest level? As expected of a genius from the Zhang Clan!”

...

A few amongst the crowd recognized the movement technique that Zhang Yunfeng was using, and shock surfaced on their faces.

Wave Treading Stride, this was an extremely difficult movement technique to master. Not only was it highly demanding on one's talent, it also took many experimentation and practice before one could grasp the feeling of it. Yet, to be able to reach Rippleless Treading, the highest level of the technique, at such a young age, it must be said that Zhang Yunfeng was truly an outstanding individual.

Hu la!

Amidst shocked gazes, Zhang Yunfeng had already arrived at an area less than five meters away from Zhang Xuan. With a shrill buzz, he activated his Dominion, and it swiftly engulfed Zhang Xuan as well.

In an instant, Zhang Xuan felt immense pressure crushing him from all directions. It was as if he was grasped in the palm of another, unable to move at all.

He's indeed formidable... Zhang Xuan's face turned livid.

Typically speaking, at Saint 6-dan primary stage, a cultivator would have just formed his Dominion, and it would assume a form reminiscent of flowing water, so the pressure it could exert wouldn't be as great. At later stages, it would take a form reminiscent of a bog, followed by mercury, and finally lead... As one progressed through the various cultivation stages of Saint 6-dan, the prowess of one's Dominion would grow significantly stronger.

As such, even though the radius of one's Dominion would barely change at all, it was rather easy to classify its strength.

While Zhang Yunfeng was only at Saint 6-dan primary stage, his Dominion was already extremely compact and dense, such that even Zhang Xuan would have some trouble trying to blast it apart.

“It was a grave mistake to give me a three moves advantage. Since that’s the case, you need not dream about making a move at all!” Zhang Yunfeng bellowed coldly as he struck his palm down upon Zhang Xuan.

Augmented by the strength of his Dominion, this palm strike was at least two times as powerful as before. Even before it reached its target, its sheer might would have already suppressed one’s soul and physical body, destroying any thoughts of retaliation in one’s mind.

Raising his head, all Zhang Xuan could see was a dark shadow looming above him. His movements were restricted by Zhang Yunfeng’s Dominion, preventing him from escaping at all.

If it had been a moment before, there is no way I’ll be able to withstand that palm strike without counterattacking. But now...

There wasn’t any hint of nervousness to be seen on Zhang Xuan’s face, and he showed no signs of counterattacking either. Instead, he simply hugged his body together to protect the vitals of his body.

“He can’t be dreaming of facing the attack head on like that, can he?”

“Even Grand Dominion realm cultivators would be unable to withstand that blow from Zhang Yunfeng! To attempt to withstand it without putting up any significant defenses at all, is he courting death?”

“I really don’t know whether to say that the fellow is fearless or plain dumb!”

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan’s actions, the crowd fell into a daze.

If one were to execute a battle technique within one’s Dominion, the might of the battle technique could be easily enhanced to twofold stronger than before. Zhang Yunfeng’s Air Propulsion Palm wielded devastating might even without his Dominion, and yet, Zhang Xuan was actually intending on taking it face on? If things were to go wrong, he might even be smacked to his death!

“Should we intervene in the duel?” Elder Han Zhu watched on the situation in jitters.

“There’s no need for that. Zhang Yunfeng isn’t a reckless person, he won’t kill another candidate right before us.” Elder Liu’s fists were also tightly clenched despite his words, and there was a contemplative gleam in his eyes which made one wonder what he was thinking about.

Huala!

Amidst shocked gazes, Zhang Yunfeng’s palm landed squarely on Zhang Xuan’s back, and amidst a resounding sonic boom, a powerful blast of shockwave swept into the surroundings.

“It’s over...”

Seeing that the young man who had just achieved consecutive breakthroughs really didn’t attempt to dodge at all, many amongst the crowd couldn’t help but cover their eyes with a cringe, not daring to see what had just happened.

However, before they could hear an anticipated cry of agony from the young man, another explosion abruptly sounded, and a deep groan escaped from Zhang Yunfeng’s throat instead.

Quickly turning their eyes over once more, they saw the genius of the Zhang Clan retreating in a fluster with a pale face. His hands were trembling non-stop, and his eyes were marked with horror.

“What happened?”

Those who had covered their eyes before didn’t see what had happened previously, and they were baffled by the abrupt change in circumstances.

“It’s the lightning tribulation!” a master teacher amidst the crowd exclaimed in agitation.

“Lightning tribulation?”

“That’s right! Just a moment ago, Zhang Xuan’s Primordial Spirit devoured the entire sky of lightning, but instead of assimilating it, he allowed it to wrap itself all over his body instead. Not only was Zhang Yunfeng’s palm strike neutralized by that very lightning, he even suffered a backlash from his

attack! Just look at his pale face! I reckon that his Primordial Spirit has suffered significant damage from that previous move!” the master teacher remarked excitedly.

“You said that he allowed the lightning tribulation to wrap itself all around his body so as to use it to protect himself?”

The crowd staggered on the spot.

It was true to devouring lightning would help to temper one’s physical body and Primordial Spirit, but there was a huge problem in that course of action—it was extremely difficult to release the accumulated lightning within one’s body. Over time, it could slowly wear down one’s body, causing significant damage to one.

But when Zhang Yunfeng’s palm strike fell on Zhang Xuan, he ended up drawing away the lightning within the latter’s body, thus sparing the latter from the agony of the lightning while significantly injuring himself... It was two birds in a stone for Zhang Xuan.

“Could it be that... Zhang Xuan had guessed that Zhang Yunfeng would utilize this palm strike, so he intentionally gave the latter a three moves advantage in hopes of using the latter’s strength to draw out the lightning within his body after tempering his body and soul?”

Someone suddenly shouted out.

In an instant, looks of disbelief and horror appeared on the faces of every single expert in the square.

If that was really an intentional act on Zhang Xuan’s part, that would really be terrifying. That would mean that not only did he grasp the might of the lightning tribulation well, he had also seen right through Zhang Yunfeng’s strength and personality as well!

Otherwise, if anything were to go wrong, the one who would be severely injured would be Zhang Xuan himself!

“Can he still be considered a human?”

Upon realizing what was going on, the crowd gulped down a mouthful of saliva as they glanced at one another. A deep fear

rose from the depths of their souls.

It was one thing to be highly talented, but to be able to keenly see right through others as well...

If they were to face Zhang Xuan in a battle as well, would they stand a chance at all?

1307 Here Comes My Sword Sheath!

“This is exactly the aspect about Zhang shi that amazes others without fear. No matter how inconceivable a feat is, he’s able to pull it off with perfect ease using unconventional methods...” Zhang Jiuxiao’s eyes gleamed in admiration.

As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, he had grown up hearing about the greatness of the ‘young prodigy’. As a result, he had grown up admiring the talents of the young prodigy, but in this moment, there was no one else in his eyes but Zhang Xuan.

No matter how formidable the young prodigy was, it was all based on the purity of his bloodline. How could he possibly compare to Zhang Xuan?

With sufficient time, Zhang Jiuxiao had no doubt that Zhang Xuan would be able to exceed the young prodigy and reach the very pinnacle of the world.

“He’s indeed... exceptional.” Zhao Xingmo muttered in a daze.

From the moment Zhang Xuan managed to defeat him easily during the preliminary selection, he had already known that the young man was anything but normal. Just, he couldn’t have imagined that the young man would be so abnormal!

From the current looks of it, he would be able to forge a legend for himself even in the Sanctum of Sages, where geniuses were aplenty.

“You have had your three moves. It’s my turn!” Zhang Xuan loosened his huddled body and stretched his neck before speaking with a grin.

The attack from the lightning tribulation was indeed within his calculations. He had compiled a book on Zhang Yunfeng through the Library of Heaven’s Path, and there were several hundred flaws reflected there. Picking one of them out and

designing a scheme to do him in was, honestly, not that difficult.

Sou!

With a swift movement reminiscent of a streak of lightning, he dashed right up to Zhang Yunfeng and stabbed his finger forward.

Huala!

A brilliant burst of sword qi reminiscent of a shooting star shot forth, and upon contact with the latter's Dominion, it easily creating an opening and pushed ahead.

Back when he was still at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle, his strength was still too weak to overcome Zhang Yunfeng's Dominion. However, after the consecutive breakthroughs, his strength had already surpassed the limits of the latter's Dominion, such that it couldn't impede him any longer.

“Break!”

Seeing how the sword qi actually managed to breach the defenses of his Dominion, cold sweat immediately rained down Zhang Yunfeng's forehead. With a flick of his palm, he hurriedly took out a sheathed sword to fend against the sword qi.

Ding ding ding!

The sword qi collided with the sword sheath and produced a resounding sonic boom before dissipating entirely. On the other hand, Zhang Yunfeng was forced to retreat two steps before he was able to ward off the might of the sword qi.

“He used a weapon?”

“Considering that it's supposed to be a fair duel, his act of drawing a weapon should suffice for this duel to be ruled as his loss!”

“Those of the Sage Clans possess innumerable powerful artifacts in their possession. If artifacts were to be allowed in the duel, it would become a battle of wealth instead of a battle of strength!”

...

Even though Zhang Yunfeng didn't draw his sword out of his sheath, his very act of taking out a weapon still induced a wave of disapproval from the crowd.

Offspring of the Sage Clans had no lack of good artifacts. Any single one of them could easily drive others into despair. For this reason, even though there was no explicit rules banning the usage of artifacts in the Challenge of the Defeated, there was a tacit agreement amongst the candidates against it.

On the dueling ring, Zhang Yunfeng paid no heed to the commotion of the crowd beneath and quickly popped a pill into his mouth in order to recover from the injuries he had sustained from the lightning tribulation. After which, he turned to Zhang Xuan and said, "I must admit, you are indeed a formidable adversary.

"I might have drawn my weapon, but you don't have to worry. I know that you are a cultivator from Qingyuan Empire, so I won't bully you either. This sword of mine is known as Glacial Frost, and it's a half Saint high-tier artifact. It would be indeed unfair for me to fight you with it, but its sheath is only at Saint intermediate-tier... I'll just use this sheath, but you can use any weapon you want."

After which, Zhang Yunfeng pulled out his sheath and wielded it. A surge of concentrated Sword Intent flowed forth from him, emanating a great pressure on those standing before it.

Even though he was armed with a sheath instead of a sword, his sheer mastery in swordsmanship enhanced his fighting prowess by more than twofold.

"He's only going to use his sheath?"

"Well, considering that his sheath is a Saint intermediate-tier artifact, I guess that it would still be acceptable since he won't be relying on the superior strength of his weapon to achieve victory."

"On top of being a talented sword practitioner himself, he practices the profound sword arts of the Zhang Clan too. If

Zhang Xuan were to accept the duel, there was no way he would be a match...”

“I’ve heard of how frightening the Zhang Clan’s swordsmanship is as well. Zhang Xuan won’t stand much of a chance against it...”

...

Such mutterings could be heard from the crowd.

As a half Saint high-tier artifact, once the Glacial Frost Sword was drawn, there would be no cultivator of the same cultivation realm as Zhang Yunfeng who could match him, much less Zhang Xuan. Naturally, the circumstances would be extremely unfair to Zhang Xuan.

However, if Zhang Yunfeng were to wield only the sheath of his sword whereas Zhang Xuan could choose to use any weapon of the same tier, the duel could still be considered to be fair.

“How about it? Do you dare to fight me?” Zhang Yunfeng looked at Zhang Xuan with a hint of provocation in his eyes.

“You’re only going to use your sword sheath?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right. You don’t have to feel restrained by me, you can use any weapon you want!” Zhang Yunfeng replied, heaping even more pressure on Zhang Xuan to accept the duel.

“We have already competed on movement techniques and battle techniques, so shouldn’t we compete on our weapon mastery as well? After all, only with a weapon in hand can a cultivator display his true fighting prowess. Besides, what I specialize in isn’t bare-handed combat either.”

“This...” Zhang Xuan revealed a hint of hesitation.

Indeed. With a weapon in hand, a person’s fighting prowess could potentially rise exponentially.

Take Zheng Yang for example, without his spear in hand, there was no way he could have cleared the Dragon Gate Formation and become the Progeny of Combat.

Personally speaking, Zhang Xuan rarely used any weapons because his opponent tended to be too weak. After all, why go through the trouble of holding a weapon when a punch was sufficient to resolve the problem?

“May I first take a look at your prowess with the sheath before deciding whether I should use one or not?” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before asking.

If Zhang Yunfeng’s prowess with a weapon was formidable, he could still consider wielding a weapon. Otherwise, there was really no need to take out the Lingxu Sword for something as minor as this.

After all, it wasn’t really his hobby to bully the weak.

“You want to take a look at my prowess with a weapon? Alright then, I’ll grant your wish.” With a light chuckle, Zhang Yunfeng pushed his palm forward, and his sheath immediately flew forth like a prowling snake pouncing upon its prey.

This was a rather peculiar move, carrying distinctive traits of both swordsmanship and spearmanship. It was ingeniously angled in a manner that aimed to seal multiple acupoints at once. If the strike were to really land on its target, the target would surely be incapacitated, losing all fighting prowess and even sustaining severe injuries!

“Not bad!” Zhang Xuan remarked as he flicked his fingers forward.

Multiple sword qi sprung forth, blocking the way of Zhang Yunfeng’s sheath.

Ding ding ding ding!

It was a melody similar to a torrential shower raining down upon a roof. Watching as the sword qi clashed against his sheath, Zhang Yunfeng’s eyebrows shot up as he pushed his palm up.

Hua la!

With a powerful sweeping movement, the sheath forcefully deflected the sword qi on it back toward Zhang Xuan.

Facing this sight, Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes and quickly retreated.

It was no wonder why Zhang Yunfeng proposed fighting with their weapons! In just a single encounter, it was already apparent that he was extraordinarily gifted in weaponry.

Even though he was only armed with a sheath, his pierce was as sharp as a spear, his sweep was as forceful as a pole, and every single maneuver was conducted with the agility and flexibility of a sword... With all these three coming together in a sword art, it became a technique nigh impossible to guard against.

Despite cultivating the Heaven's Path battle techniques of numerous weapons, Zhang Xuan still found himself in a fluster for a short moment there.

It seemed like weapon battles were really where Zhang Yunfeng's true forte lay.

Hula!

However, despite how swiftly Zhang Xuan was retreating, the sheath seemed to move at an even swifter speed, pursuing closely behind him. No matter how he attempted to swerve and dodge, he was unable to escape from the pursuit of the sheath.

"That is... Wave Treading Stride? He actually managed to infuse the movement technique into the manipulation of his weapon?" Elder Liu exclaimed in astonishment.

Wave Treading Stride was a movement technique that made use of the momentum of the opponent in order to advance or retreat, reminiscent of how a water strider drifted along with the waves.

As a movement technique, it was developed with the intention of facilitating the movement of a cultivator. Yet, who could have thought that Zhang Yunfeng would have actually integrated the technique into the manipulation of his weapon as well!

If Zhang Xuan couldn't find a way to knock away the sheath, it would continue following him as if a shadow. No matter

where he escaped to or how fast he moved even, it would track his movements tightly, unable to be shaken off.

Hu hu!

Over on the dueling ring, Zhang Xuan had come to the same realization as well. Thus, he executed the Unbounded Treader and flitted away.

In the blink of an eye, he appeared at the other end of the stage. At the same, he raised his palm and thrust it forward.

Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm!

Due to the excessively swift movements of the Unbounded Treader, the sheath found itself unable to catch up for a moment when it was abruptly faced with the overwhelming strength of the palm strike. Colliding face on with it, a resounding explosion sounded. Following which, intense shockwaves rippled from the collision, causing the entire dueling ring to shake non-stop.

With this abrupt intervention, the sheath was forcefully shook out of its previous state.

“How about it? Does my prowess with a weapon in hand satisfy your criteria?” Retracting his sheath, Zhang Yunfeng asked with a hint of pride in between his brows.

He had viewed his ability to integrate Wave Treading Stride into the utilization of weapons as one of his greatest pride, and indeed, it was something worth being proud about as well.

“Not too bad!” Zhang Xuan nodded earnestly.

Using just a mere sword sheath, Zhang Yunfeng was actually able to leave him in a fluster for a moment there, nearly trapping him. Truly, as expected of a genius of the Zhang Clan. The means that he possessed were indeed formidable.

“Do you dare to fight against me for a round? You appear to be rather proficient in swordsmanship, so I presume that you are a powerful sword practitioner yourself too. Since that’s the case, your fighting prowess should be much greater with a sword in hand, right?” Zhang Yunfeng continued.

“I’m indeed more powerful with a sword in hand, but my weapon is a little too powerful... I’m afraid that it will be unfair for you!” Zhang Xuan said with a conflicted look.

“Why don’t I use my sword sheath as well?”

“You are going to use your sheath too?” A disdainful sneer escaped from Zhang Yunfeng’s lips. “What I have shown you earlier is just the tip of the iceberg of my ability with a sword. In a real battle, I’ll be far stronger than that... If you were to only wield a sheath as well, I fear that you might be severely injured in the battle!”

“That won’t happen, you don’t have to worry about that. Even without drawing my sword, I’m still plenty formidable.”

Zhang Xuan replied to Zhang Yunfeng’s words with a leisurely smile.

“Oh? Very well, let me witness the prowess you are able to bring forth with just your sheath then!” Harrumphing coldly, Zhang Yunfeng raised his arms, and a powerful aura burst forth from him.

He had started practicing weaponry from a very young age, be it saber, spear, sword, halberd, pole... He had some degree of mastery in every single one of these conventional weapons, which was also how he could give spirit to a seemingly ordinary sheath, granting it strength that would make it invincible in its power class...

And yet, the other party actually wanted to face him with a sword sheath as well...

Are you joking with me?

Since you are that arrogant, let me put you back in your place then! You shall know that not everyone can be like me, Zhang Yunfeng, displaying superior prowess even with just a mere sword sheath equipped in hand.

“Are you certain... that you want us to fight using sword sheaths?” Zhang Xuan asked hesitantly.

“Of course, you were the one who said you want to use a sword sheath too!” Zhang Yunfeng sneered coldly. “Why? Are you planning on backing down at this point?”

“It’s not that. I’m just a little worried. Well, look out then. I’ll be taking out my sword sheath now...” With a conflicted expression on his face, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist.

Hu la!

Zhang Yunfeng was startled for a moment before he felt a mighty gale gushing at him. Raising his head, he saw a round platform several meters in radius falling right for his head.

Padah!

Before he could even process what was going on, he was already smacked onto the ground in a ‘太’ shape. His feet which were barely exposed at the end of the round platform were twitching non-stop—at least a consoling indication that the poor man beneath was still alive. Nevertheless, this smack should have rendered him incapable of fighting anymore.

“This...” Seeing that the other party wasn’t even able to take a single one of his attacks, Zhang Xuan scratched his head and said with a flat tone, “Ah, I should have warned you beforehand. My sheath is a little bigger than the others...”

1308 Accommodation

For many millenniums, the Lingxu Sword had been sealed in a mechanical stone platform. Back when he took the Lingxu Sword, Zhang Xuan did not neglect to take the stone platform with him as well to serve as the sheath.

As the stone platform was the work of a celestial designer, it was not ranked in the same manner as artifacts usually were. Nevertheless, if one really had to assign a tier to it, it was definitely insufficient to be considered a Saint high-tier artifact. Thus, from such a perspective, Zhang Xuan could not be considered to be cheating.

Just that... the stone platform was exceptionally heavy, and even Grand Dominion realm experts would have trouble lifting it. Otherwise, there was no way it could have kept the Lingxu Sword sealed in place for so many years either.

The fact that Zhang Yunfeng was able to survive having it smacked over him was already a huge blessing in itself.

“That’s his sword sheath?”

“There’s really a sword inserted on top of it!”

“But why in the world does he have such a massive sword sheath?”

“Poor Zhang Yunfeng...”

...

There was a brief moment of silence beneath the dueling ring, and everyone gulped subconsciously as they stared at the sight before them with twitching eyes.

This is too shameless!

The other party was holding a perfectly normal-sized sheath, but you took out such a massive one... who in the world would be able to withstand that?

At the same time, there were many candidates who heaved a huge sigh of relief as well.

It was fortunate that they did not foolishly step forward to challenge Zhang Xuan, or else the one lying beneath that slab of stone could have been them!

In any case, while Zhang Xuan's actions were unconventional, there was no questioning that it was within the scope of the rules that Zhang Yunfeng had come up with. Furthermore, Zhang Xuan had even given a warning in advance. Ultimately, Zhang Yunfeng only had himself to blame for his tragic plight!

Paying no heed to the shocked crowd, Zhang Xuan casually flicked his hand and returned his 'sword sheath' back to his storage ring, revealing the poor man crushed beneath.

Zhang Yunfeng's tongue was stuck out, his eyes had rolled backward, and his body was twisted like a dough stick. The deep fear that he felt prior to being knocked out was still firmly etched on his face.

His current state was truly wretched.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to infuse a surge of Heaven's Path zhenqi into Zhang Yunfeng's body to heal his injuries, a powerful gust of wind suddenly blew, and a young man leaped onto the dueling ring.

"Hold it right there!" the young man yelled with a livid expression on his face.

After which, the young man walked over to Zhang Yunfeng and placed his fingers on the latter's acupoints. Upon realizing that the latter had only lost consciousness and that his wounds were not too severe, the young man heaved a sigh of relief. He fed a pill into Zhang Yunfeng's mouth before waving his hand, and Zhang Yunfeng's body slowly floated into the sky before drifting into the crowd below.

"Thank you for going easy on Yunfeng. I am Zhang Zhuo, Yunfeng's cousin. Allow me to apologize for Yunfeng's previous rashness." Zhang Zhuo clasped his fist as he spoke.

The impassive look on his face made it hard to discern whether it was an earnest apology or a threatening remark.

Nevertheless, Zhang Xuan still responded politely with a nod.

He remembered seeing Zhang Zhuo's name on the list of candidates who made it into the Elite Division—he had finished in 31st place.

“It's impressive that you possess such strength at your age despite coming from the Qingyuan Empire. If there's an opportunity in the future, I would be delighted to trade blows with you. However, I think that most of our fellow peers here must be exhausted from the entrance examination and are eager to rest, so let's not keep them any longer. Farewell.” After saying those words, Zhang Zhuo turned around and leaped down from the dueling ring.

His movements were exceptionally nimble, perhaps a sign that he possessed exceptional capability in movement techniques.

Since Zhang Zhuo had departed as well, Zhang Xuan knew that there was no point in him remaining on the dueling ring any longer. Thus, he turned around and returned to his seat.

With the current fight concluded, Elder Liu turned to the crowd and asked if there were any other challengers.

A couple of candidates stood forward, unwilling to part with this hard-to-come-by opportunity to rise through the ranks.

Even though Zhang Xuan had used questionable methods to knock out Zhang Yunfeng previously, his ability to break through Zhang Yunfeng's Dominion still bore testimony to his true strength. As such, there were no Ordinary Division students who were so foolish as to challenge him anymore.

By the second hour, there were no more challengers. So, Elder Liu stepped forward with a smile and said, “Alright. Your accommodations have been prepared, and you can check them on your identity token. Lessons will officially start tomorrow, and you will be expected to report to your classes. So, take the chance to rest well today!”

The crowd swiftly nodded in response.

Zhang Xuan took out his identity token, and when he scanned it with his Spiritual Perception, a road leading to his accommodation appeared.

“Let’s go!” Beckoning Zhang Jiuxiao along, Zhang Xuan began making his way over to the Sanctum of Sages.

Across the square, there were a set of towering doors with the words ‘Sanctum of Sages’ written on a plaque above. By the right side was the word ‘Confucianism’.

Zhang Xuan could not tell what level of painting it was, but the conception behind those words was extremely deep, to the point that it felt as if he was seeing an entire world through those words.

“These words were left behind by the first sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages, Sage Kui. Studying these characters will be highly beneficial to furthering one’s comprehension of painting,” Zhang Jiuxiao told Zhang Xuan with a hint of excitement in his voice.

As a 7-star pinnacle painter himself, he knew how valuable these words were.

Without a doubt, high level paintings were definitely hard to come by. After all, there were only so many high-ranked painters on the Master Teacher Continent.

Even though those words had been there for several dozen millenniums, there was not the slightest hint of damage on them. They still looked as wholesome and fresh as if they had just been written a moment ago.

These words are able to absorb spiritual energy in order to heal any wear and tear on the ink, Zhang Xuan noted.

He could not have expected that the fellow who had been busy whittling a metal bar into a needle in the folded space would actually have such a deep comprehension of painting, capable of writing words with such deep conception.

Had he known it in advance, he would not have spent his time sleeping. If he had spent that time learning painting from the other party, he might have been able to make significant advancements in that occupation.

Knowing that those words would not escape from the entrance and he would have plenty of chances to study them in the future, Zhang Jiuxiao’s gaze did not linger on them. Instead,

eyes reddened in agitation, he looked at the tall doors before him and exclaimed, “So, this is the highest training institute on the Master Teacher Continent. Sanctum of Sages, I’m finally here!”

Born in a side family of the Zhang Clan, he had put in so much more effort than the members of the main family in order to obtain what came easily to them.

Wanting to be recognized by the Zhang Clan, he had traveled down to the Qingyuan Empire many years ago, just to vie for the slot that he would never obtain from the Zhang Clan!

For a very long time, he had viewed getting into the Sanctum of Sages as his dream, but he also knew too well how difficult it would be to do so. He had devoted his heart and soul to it, but not once did he dare bear too much hope, fearing that the disappointment upon failure would crush his soul. However, after going through so much, he had still finally accomplished his dream.

Perhaps it was because he had seen through Zhang Jiuxiao’s feelings, Zhang Xuan suddenly spoke up. “A powerful bloodline will only put you at a starting line above others. Ultimately, to reach the top, you can only rely on yourself.”

There was no one in that world who did not desire a superior constitution, an overpowered bloodline, and outstanding talent. However, those would only put one at a higher starting point than others. In order to reach the very peak, what was more important was undying perseverance and unyielding diligence.

Zhang Xuan, for example, did not possess outstanding talent, a formidable teacher, or an overpowered bloodline. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that he had started from zero. Yet, he still managed to slowly take one step forward at a time from the Tianxuan Kingdom to the Sanctum of Sages.

This was not because he possessed astounding talent that far surpassed the others or that he had exceptionally good luck that would get him out of every single quandary he faced. Rather, it was because he had an unyielding heart that pushed him forward relentlessly!

Without such an intense desire to grow, it was impossible for one to become a true expert!

“Yes!” Zhang Jiuxiao nodded.

As soon as they walked into the Sanctum of Sages, the first thing that they noticed was that the concentration of spiritual energy in the surroundings was many times higher compared to a moment prior. On top of that, there was a unique aura drifting in the area that seemed to refresh one’s mind, granting greater clarity of thought.

“No wonder it can draw so many humans in, it’s indeed a blessed land for cultivation!”

Rich in spiritual energy, as long as Zhang Xuan could gather the required Heaven’s Path Divine Arts, even if he did not go through the trouble to search for spirit stones, he would still be able to advance his cultivation swiftly.

In ten years, he would still be able to become a 9-star master teacher and stand at the peak of the world.

The place where he was living was not located too far away from the entrance. Following the directions on the jade token, he soon arrived at a residence. The concentration of spiritual energy within the residence was even more impressive. Even a non-cultivating human would be able to enjoy an increased lifespan and gain immunity to all diseases by walking in the area.

By this moment, Zhang Jiuxiao had already parted from him. As the latter was a student in the Ordinary Division, he could only live in the shared dormitory. Naturally, the privileges of the two could not be compared.

In a sense, the system was rather similar to that of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. The top students were granted accommodation in manor-like residences whereas ordinary students could only live in shared dormitories.

However, while Zhang Xuan’s lodging was much better than most of the other students, as he was ranked at the very last in the entrance examination, the residence he was allocated was

located at one of the more remote edges, and it was the worse one out of the many others.

Walking up to the gates of the residence, Zhang Xuan took out his jade token, and the seal immediately opened. Zhang Xuan pushed the door open, and just as he was about to walk in, an elegant figure suddenly walked up to the residence beside him and stopped.

It was the young lady from the Glacier Plain Court, Chen Leyao!

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and said, “Fairy Leyao, thank you for your words of advice during the duel.”

If not for the other party informing him that the Zhang Clan’s bloodline ability was Time Compression, he would have taken a bit more effort to defeat Zhang Qian.

“Zhang shi, you are too polite,” Chen Leyao quickly replied. “I was only doing what I should do!”

The young man before her was the teacher of their young court chief, and she was also indebted to him due to his revision of the Yin Formula. To be honest, she felt a little embarrassed that she had not stepped forward to help him when he was in a difficult position.

Watching as the young lady unlocked the adjacent residence, Zhang Xuan asked in puzzlement, “Is this where you are staying?”

He was in the very last place of the Elite Division, so it was only given that he was allocated the residence at the very corner. However, he was certain that Chen Leyao’s ranking was in the thirties, so it did not make sense that they were living adjacent to one another!

“I heard that Zhang shi was staying here, so I swapped with another person,” Chen Leyao said with a smile.

Considering that the adjacent residence was the accommodation of the person ranked 49th, it went without saying that the person had been more than willing to make the swap with Chen Leyao.

“Swap?” Zhang Xuan was slightly startled to hear that.

“Yes. You are the teacher of our young court chief, and you have resolved the most major problem of our cultivation techniques, so you are my benefactor too. If there’s anything you need, feel free to request it of me; I’ll rush over and have it done as soon as possible!” Chen Leyao said with a smile.

Actually, a greater part of the reason was that she was worried that the Zhang Clan would make things difficult for Zhang Xuan. By living in the adjacent residence, she would be able to look out for him.

No matter what, she was the one who had caused the conflict between them.

“You’re too polite.” At this point, Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

That explained why the young lady’s attitude toward him had changed all of a sudden. She had realized that he was Zhao Ya’s teacher.

The reason he dared not say that Zhao Ya was his student was because he feared that an ordinary disciple of the Glacier Plain Court would not be aware of the matter, and it would only worsen the conflict between the both of them. However, since the young lady was aware of it... that made things much easier.

“Since you know of the relationship between Zhao Ya and me, may I ask if you have a long-distance Jade Communication Token or something of the sort? I would like to speak a few words to her, if that isn’t a problem.” Zhang Xuan immediately looked at Chen Leyao expectantly.

Back then, when Zhao Ya left, he still did not have a Communication Jade Token to give her. Besides, even if he did, considering the vast distance that sat between them, there was no way his messages could have gotten to her.

Since the young lady before him was a disciple of the Glacier Plain Court, she was bound to have a channel of communication to contact the headquarters. Perhaps, she might just be able to put him in contact with Zhao Ya.

After half a year apart, it would have been a lie if he said that he did not miss his student.

“I do have a long-distance Jade Communication Token here, but from the Sanctum of Sages, it would have to be augmented by a supporting formation before it can reach our young court chief. This supporting formation isn’t easy to set up, and due to my lacking cultivation, I will require three months at the minimum,” Chen Leyao said.

“Three months?” An inconspicuous hint of a frown emerged on Zhang Xuan’s forehead. “May I know what grade the supporting formation is? I happen to know a thing or two about formations, so perhaps I might be able to offer some help!”

In view of the long lifespan that cultivators had, three months could not be considered a long period of time. A simple seclusion could easily take this amount of time. But to Zhang Xuan, it was a little too long. If it was a simpler formation, perhaps he would be able to help to set it up so as to save some time.

“It’s a grade-8 formation,” Chen Leyao replied.

“Grade-8?” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding. “As long as the formation isn’t too complex, I should be able to set it up. May I take a look at the formation blueprint?” “Kong shi is a reference to Kong Zi, who is known for being the founder of one of the major school of thoughts in China, Confucianism. It’s not a religion but rather a set of beliefs of how society should function and the values that the people should embrace. In fact, the entire setting of the Master Teacher Continent is loosely built on the ideals of Confucianism. For example, under Confucianism, it’s believed that parents play a crucial role in a child’s upbringing, and if a child grows up spoiled or immoral, the parents would be equally guilty.

1309 Vicious' Awakening

While his comprehension of formations was still limited at 7-star, his foundations were firm because he had studied the Heaven's Path Formation Art. If required to, as long as he studied the formation blueprint carefully, he would be able to set up basic grade-8 primary formations with ease.

“Alright!”

The supporting formation was a specialized formation to augment the transmission range of the Jade Communication Token, and it was not really a confidential secret or that sort, so Chen Leyao did not have to hold it back from Zhang Xuan. With a flick of her wrist, she passed a formation blueprint over.

Zhang Xuan took the blueprint and began studying it.

To make an analogy to his previous world, if the Jade Communication Token could be viewed as a cell phone, the formation would be a cell towers, serving to strengthen the transmission signals so that the message would be able to travel a greater distance.

As simple as it sounded in theory, it was not that easy to carry it out in practice.

It's a grade-8 primary formation, and with my current comprehension of formations, I should be able to set it up easily. Zhang Xuan frowned. However... I'll still take around three days, and the work required for that will be highly intensive. That'll be too troublesome.

While his comprehension of formations was already on par with most 8-star low-tier formation masters, there were simply too many aspects that one had to take note of when setting up the formation. The slightest mistake in the amplification of the transmission signal could very well destroy the structure of the Communication Jade Token, so it was imperative to be absolutely careful in every single one of the details. As a

preliminary estimate, Zhang Xuan deemed that it would take at least three days for him to finish setting it up.

Three days just to set up a formation... that was too extravagant!

Knowing that he was limited by his understanding of formations, Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before coming up with a plan. Looks like it's time for me to take the 8-star formation master examination!

It was due to his lack of understanding of formations that resulted in his inability to effectively set up the formation. However, as long as he could clear the 8-star formation master examination and access the books about grade-8 formations, he should be able to reduce the time required significantly.

Noticing Zhang Xuan's frown, Chen Leyao asked, "Is Zhang Shi able to set up the formation?"

"I'm still a little lacking." Zhang Xuan shook his head before asking with a smile, "Right, do you know where I can take the 8-star formation master examination in the Sanctum of Sages? I would like to first take the examination before studying how I can set up the supporting formation. I think it would be safer this way."

As the highest training institute of the Master Teacher Continent, the Sanctum of Sages was bound to house branches of the other occupations. Otherwise, how would the students of other occupations advance their skills here?

Most importantly of all, master teachers had to clear the prerequisite for their supporting occupations before they could take the master teacher examination.

"Everything related to the examination of supporting occupations and the sort can be found in the Hall of Erudition. I have looked into the matter previously, so I know its rough location. Why don't I show you there?" Chen Leyao answered with a smile.

"I'll be troubling you then."

Through the identity token, he had also gained a rough idea of how the Sanctum of Sages functioned. It was divided into

multiple halls, each of them serving a different purpose. However, the structure still differed significantly from that of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy and the Combat Master Hall.

The Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy and Combat Master Hall were divided into respective occupation schools or cultivation divisions, such as the Beast Tamer School and Apothecary School for the former, and Martial Arts Division and Soul Division for the latter.

On the other hand, the Sanctum of Sages mainly consisted of Five Halls, and they had nothing to do with occupations or the sort.

They were namely: Attainment, Solidarity, Propriety, Erudition, and Integrity![1]

Hall of Attainment[2], the place where teachers taught and students learned as well as where the impartation of knowledge, learning of techniques, and inheritance of culture took place.

Hall of Solidarity, a training ground with all kinds of trials in order to temper one against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. It served to promote camaraderie and cooperation among fellow students.

Hall of Propriety, the area where duels and battles were conducted.

Hall of Erudition, where occupation examinations were conducted and cultivation technique manuals were stored, the place where students would unlock their wisdom.

Hall of Integrity, the place where students reinforced their state of mind and tempered their character.

Attainment, Solidarity, Propriety, Erudition, and Integrity[3]; Graciousness, Altruism, Respect, Frugality, and Tolerance[4]. These were the five pillars of the Sanctum of Sages.

Students who had come here to cultivate not only had to be strong—more importantly, they had to be principled and cultured.

“Zhang shi, you are too courteous!” Chen Leyao nodded before leading the way forward.

The Hall of Erudition, despite being termed as a hall, was not an actual building. Rather, like the Ten Schools of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, it referred to an entire branch of the academy.

Just the type of occupational examination grounds numbered more than a hundred.

The duo proceeded forward swiftly, and roughly ten minutes later, they arrived at the entrance. The first thing that they saw was a massive wall that was crafted using some unknown material, and carved at the center was a massive character that induced warmth and tranquility in one.

智 (Erudition).

This calligraphy... looks very familiar... Zhang Xuan unwittingly halted his footsteps.

The calligraphy for the ‘智 (Erudition)’ character was vastly different from that of the ‘Sanctum of Sages’ plaque at the entrance. Even though it did not emanate an overwhelming aura, it created a conception of vastness that was as high as the heavens, as broad as a seemingly endless plain. This reflected the broad-mindedness of the one who had left behind the calligraphy, the great dreams that he harbored for the world.

While Zhang Xuan was still bewildered by the sense of familiarity he felt from the painting, a voice suddenly sounded in his mind.

“This is... Kong shi’s writing!”

“Vicious, you are awake?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

The person was no one other than Vicious, who had fallen into a dormant state for nearly an entire month after consuming the other Vicious of the Marshlands.

“Yes. Fortunately, I have managed to assimilate that fellow into me!” Vicious replied with a slightly agitated voice.

“How are you feeling? Is there any advancement in your cultivation?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Vicious was his trump card, so if the other party’s strength grew, it would indubitably be beneficial to him.

“Master, after fusing together with my head and my eyes, my strength has grown by leaps and bounds. In my current state, even Saint 7-dan cultivators won’t be a match for me,” Vicious replied proudly.

“Saint 7-dan?” Zhang Xuan was slightly astonished.

Just a month ago, that fellow had only been at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, and yet, just by fusing together with his brain and eyes, he had managed to advance two cultivation realms! This sure was scary!

Just what kind of people was he surrounded by? Each of them seemed to be even more monstrous than the other. How pressuring...

There was nothing he needed to say about his clone, and judging from what Chen Leyao had said earlier, Zhao Ya’s cultivation was bound to be far higher than his at the moment.

And now, even his subordinate had gained the ability to subdue Saint 7-dan cultivators.

“After assimilating the head, I have received a more wholesome understanding of my heritage, especially in terms of soul cultivation. Currently, I have soul cultivation techniques all the way up to Saint 9-dan,” Vicious said.

“That’s great!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

The soul cultivation technique manuals he had obtained from Mo Hunsheng only reached Transcendent Mortal, so after reaching Saint realm, he had no choice but to stop his soul cultivation for quite a while. After which, he managed to compile the complete Heaven’s Path Soul Art for the first four dans of Saint realm, and he had also raised his soul cultivation up to Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle.

With the soul cultivation techniques from Vicious, as long as he could find soul cultivation-related manuals in the future, he

would be able to compile them together to form complete Heaven's Path Soul Art manuals and advance the might of his soul.

Wait a moment... A doubt flashed across Zhang Xuan's mind. Aren't soul cultivation techniques unique to the heritage of soul oracles? Why would Vicious possess them as well?

According to what he had gathered from Mo Hunsheng, soul cultivation techniques were a unique heritage of the soul oracles whereas Vicious was an Otherworldly Demon. So, why would Vicious possess such a deep understanding of soul cultivation techniques, possessing complete manuals of them even?

Forget it, there's no point thinking about that at the moment.

Knowing that it would be pointless to think too deeply into matters that he did not have an answer to at the moment, Zhang Xuan continued asking, "Other than soul cultivation techniques, do you have any zhenqi cultivation techniques?"

Vicious was an expert who had rivaled Kong shi many years ago, so the cultivation techniques that he practiced were bound to be incredibly profound. If he could learn them too, that would be deeply beneficial to furthering his fighting prowess.

"I do have a few cultivation techniques, but those are intended for Otherworldly Demons, so I fear they might not be compatible with your constitution. Nevertheless, I'll just send them over to you."

After hearing those words, Zhang Xuan immediately felt a surge of knowledge shooting into his mind.

Since even he was capable of transmitting knowledge, considering how Vicious had assimilated the knowledge of the other Vicious too, such a thing was bound to be even easier for him.

After browsing through the knowledge he had just received, Zhang Xuan shook his head. "Indeed, I won't be able to cultivate those cultivation techniques."

He could still study the soul cultivation techniques, but the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe's cultivation techniques were

completely useless to him.

There was a vast difference in the physique of a human and an Otherworldly Demon, and this was a fundamental problem that even the Library of Heaven's Path could not bridge. As a result, no matter how talented he was, there was simply no way he could practice those cultivation techniques.

“What a pity...” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

If only he could practice those cultivation techniques, he would have been spared from a great deal of trouble, and it would have been more convenient for him to achieve breakthroughs.

But from the looks of it, it seemed like it was all a pipe dream.

After which, both of them continued chatting for a while.

Even though the brain did possess most of Vicious' memories, the immense damage that it had suffered then and the passing of several millenniums had resulted in quite a few memories blurring out. For example, he could only remember the vague outlines of the affairs concerning Kong shi.

Knowing that there would be plenty of opportunities to interrogate Vicious in detail now that he was awake, Zhang Xuan decided to get back on track for the time being.

Recalling what Vicious had mentioned earlier, he could not help but ask, “Right. you said earlier that this character was left behind by Kong shi. What do you mean by that?”

“Exactly what it means! The ‘**智** (Erudition)’ character was written by Kong shi, and it's of a much higher level than the writing he left at the Saint Ascension Platform. If I could devour it, I would be able to call forth power far greater than before!” Vicious remarked in excitement.

“Devour?” Zhang Xuan's face immediately darkened.

This fellow sure knows how to dream!

This is the Sanctum of Sages, the highest training institute of the Master Teacher Continent! You actually want to eat Kong shi's writing here... Before you can even do the deed, you will be pummeled into the ground first!

Perhaps, even I would be implicated by you as well!

“You’d better wipe that thought out of your mind!” Zhang Xuan harrumphed coldly before turning his gaze back to the calligraphy.

It was no wonder it looked familiar to him. He had studied the writing he had obtained from Kong shi back at the Saint Ascension Platform many times, so he was already familiar with the latter’s handwriting.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had abruptly stopped before the calligraphy, Chen Leyao explained with a chuckle, “This ‘智 (Erudition)’ character is wholesome and well-connected, reminiscent of the sparks of inspiration within a person’s mind. Frequent admiring of the calligraphy will help to enhance one’s analytical ability, thus opening the doors to erudition.”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

This character was indeed far more profound than the words Kong shi had left behind back at the Saint Ascension Platform, be it in terms of conception or aesthetics. Even Zhang Xuan felt like whatever turbidity was weighing down his mind would be cleansed if he observed it for prolonged periods of time, thus enhancing his thinking ability.

As expected of a work from Kong shi... In comparison, it seemed like Sage Kui’s words still needed much more work.

“No wonder most powerful clans are intent on sending their offspring over to the Sanctum of Sages to study. Putting everything aside, just this calligraphy alone already has the ability to stabilize one’s Primordial Spirit and reinforce one’s cultivation. On top of that, it can also suppress any inner demons, granting peace and tranquility,” Zhang Xuan remarked in awe.

With Kong shi’s massive character standing guard, even inner demons would not dare wreak havoc.

Perhaps, this was the main reason most powerful clans would willingly send the most outstanding of their offspring to receive the heritage and guidance of the academy.

After staring at the calligraphy for a little longer, Zhang Xuan turned his head back to Chen Leyao and said, “Let’s go in!”

“Un.” Chen Leyao nodded, and the two of them headed into the Hall of Erudition.

[1] These words have multiple meanings, so I translated them to those that are most contextualized to the functions of the halls and attempted to cover as many of the meanings as possible.

[2] The word used here usually means compassion for the masses, a greater love for the world. However, the word also happens to have the meaning of advancement as well, the concept of improving oneself for the better.

[3] Basically, Attainment (Compassion), Solidarity, Propriety, Erudition, and Integrity is what we call Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism. I have translated it a little differently from more official sources for the sake of the novel, but the main idea of it is in there. They refer to the fundamental values which those living in a community should follow by in order to ensure collective harmony.

[4] As for Graciousness, Altruism, Respect, Frugality, and Tolerance, they are actually from a story regarding Kong Zi. Basically, these are traits which Kong Zi/Kong shi is perceived to possess by one of his students.

1310 King of Destruction 1

After passing several streets, Zhang Xuan finally found the location where the formation master examination was held. He pushed open the door and walked in.

Its interiors were exceptionally cold and quiet, and there were only a couple of people inside. This formed a stark contrast to the bustle that the other Formation Master Guilds outside enjoyed.

“There’s a strict limit to the number of candidates that the Sanctum of Sages recruit each year, and only formation masters possessing extraordinary talents or capabilities would be able to get in. On the other hand, ordinary students would rarely come over here unless they had to take the formation master examination.” Chen Leyao explained.

“It’s better this way. I like the quiet.” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

Most of the examination he had undergone in the past were filled with people, such that regardless of what he did, he would have to queue up. It was terribly troublesome.

This should be able to spare him a fair bit of trouble, and it was also aligned with his humble and quiet personality.

“Are the two of you here to challenge the formation master examination?” At the front reception, a receptionist who seemed to be in his early thirties stepped forward with a bright smile on his face.

The emblem weaved into his robe reflected that he was a 6-star formation master.

“Un. I would like to take the 8-star formation master examination.” Zhang Xuan said.

“8-star?” The receptionist was stunned for a moment before asking, “You?”

“Yes.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The occupations of the Master Teacher Continent maintained a very strict hierarchy concerning the access to books. Only when one's mastery of the occupation had reached the required rank would one be able to read the books deemed to be corresponding in terms of profoundness.

If he wished to browse through grade-8 formation books, he would have to become an 8-star formation master first.

And with his current proficiency, it shouldn't be much of a trouble for him to clear the examination.

"Ah, pardon me. It's just that you are so young and I was slightly taken aback for a moment." An awkward smile flashed across the receptionist's face as he quickly continued on. "May I know if you have brought your 7-star emblem with you here? I'll help you process your application."

"Here." Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan passed the 7-star formation master emblem over.

Guild Leader Han of the Qingyuan Empire Formation Master Guild had helped him apply for it after witnessing his skills relating to formations back at the Qiu Wu Palace.

Catching it, the receptionist took a look at the name and flipped open a book. After checking for a moment, he suddenly raised his gaze and looked at Zhang Xuan doubtfully, "According to the records, Zhang shi, it has only been two months since you cleared the 7-star formation master examination. Are you certain that you want to challenge the 8-star formation master examination so quickly?"

Typically speaking, even the highly talented students of the Sanctum of Sages would require several decades of accumulated experience and knowledge before they would be ready to take the 8-star formation master examination. Yet, this fellow had just barely cleared the 7-star formation master examination two months ago, and he was already challenging the 8-star examination? This was too fast!

"That's right." Zhang Xuan nodded affirmatively.

"Noted. I have processed your application. Alright, come with me." Seeing that the young man was certain on the matter, the

receptionist quickly went through the administrative procedures before leading the way forward with a smile.

Those who were able to enter the Sanctum of Sages were either from prestigious clans or possessed extraordinary talents. He was only an ordinary receptionist, so there was no way he would dare to show any disdain or disrespect toward them.

Very soon, they arrived in a room. The receptionist bowed to an elder standing in the midst of the room and said, “Elder Su, Zhang shi over here wishes to challenge the 8-star formation master examination.”

Weaved before the elder’s robe was a formation master emblem, and on it, eight brilliant stars shimmered. At the same time, Zhang Xuan felt a wholesome sensation from the elder’s cultivation, and he found that he was unable to tell how strong the latter was without the latter making a move.

Given so, it was likely that the elder’s cultivation realm was at Saint 7-dan at the bare minimum.

“Kong shi has once preached education without discrimination. Those who seek to learn can all become his students. As such, the Sanctum of Sages doesn’t just have master teachers but those of other occupations as well. The elder is probably a pure formation master.” Zhang Xuan thought.

Through reading the information contained in his identity token, he managed to gain quite an understanding of the Sanctum of Sages.

While master teachers practiced supporting occupations as well, due to their time being divided over a wide span of occupations, it was inevitable that their mastery and depth of knowledge concerning specific occupations would be beneath that of those who specialized solely in it.

Take Pavilion Master Wu of the Qingyuan Empire for example, while he possessed considerable mastery as a formation master, when put in comparison with Guild Leader

Han who specialized as a formation master, his skills would be barely worth a mention.

Every single unique occupation was profound and powerful, such that even the devotion of a lifetime wouldn't be sufficient to explore the depths of it, let alone for master teachers who regarded them as supporting occupations.

And the disparity in proficiency would only grow larger and larger as one approached the top.

For this reason, the teachers who taught supporting occupations in the Sanctum of Sages were those who specialized in the specific occupations instead of master teachers.

This way, the students would be able to gain a better insight into what each of these occupations fully comprise and was capable of.

“You wish to take the 8-star formation master examination?” Elder Su took a look at the information which the receptionist had passed to him, and a deep frown emerged between his brows. “To take the 8-star examination, your cultivation would have to reach Grand Dominion realm at the very minimum, but you are only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage at the moment. You won't be able to set up a grade-8 formation due to your lacking cultivation.”

The difficulty in setting up higher grade formations didn't just lie in their enhanced complexity but the greater demand in terms of zhenqi purity and capacity as well. For such a reason, there was a strict requirement on cultivation for formation masters.

Zhang Xuan didn't attempt to conceal his cultivation, so Elder Su was able to see through it with a single look.

“Reporting to Elder Su, even though Zhang Shi's cultivation is only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, in terms of zhenqi, he pales nowhere in comparison to a Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator!” Chen Leyao interjected.

“If that's true, I guess I can consider making an exception for you. Alright, follow me.” Elder Su nodded.

Having resided in Sanctum of Sages for a very long time, he had seen all kinds of geniuses. If the young man did possess such capability, it would be fine to make an exception for him too.

“Thank you, Elder Su. If I may ask, how do you intend to assess my zhenqi?” Seeing that he wasn’t shut down on the basis of his lacking cultivation, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It would really be troublesome if he could only take the examination once his cultivation reached Grand Dominion realm primary stage. He would have to find higher tier spirit stones and the corresponding cultivation techniques for it too. By the time he was done, it would already be several days later.

“We do have a formation that’s specially used to assess one’s zhenqi.” Elder Su said before shaking his head in exasperation. “However, it was just destroyed by that ‘King of Destruction’ when he came over earlier, and we haven’t been able to fix it yet!”

“King of Destruction?” Zhang Xuan was perplexed by that term.

“Indeed. He’s a student who just got into the Sanctum of Sages a few years back. On his very first year, he challenged the examinations of three supporting occupations and brought about great devastation to all three examination grounds. This is already the third time he’s taking the 8-star formation master examination... Hai! This is the reason why our branch appears so cold and quiet too. All of our elders have rushed over to supervise his examination, fearing that he would tear down our Steps of Formations...” Elder Su rubbed his glabella in distress.

“Brought great devastation?” Zhang Xuan was intrigued by those words. “What kind of devastation did he bring?”

In the past, he used to cause an upheaval each time he took an examination, but as the days went by, he eventually calmed down, becoming more dignified and mature. Putting

everything aside, just look at how the Mountain Gate was still standing even after he had made his round through it.

“What kind of devastation did he bring?” Those words left Elder Su snorting so angrily that even his beard flew into the air. “I don’t know for the other occupations, but in the three occasions that he had come over, he had destroyed at least an item each time! The first time, he destroyed the formation plate which I spent two months inscribing with difficulty! The second time, he destroyed an isolation chamber... And this time around, I thought that he just wanted to try out his strength, but he ended up destroying that strength-assessing formation of ours. Honestly, if it’s possible, I would ban that King of Destruction from setting foot onto our branch ever again!”

“To actually devastate the same location three times... he sure is too much!” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in disbelief at what he was hearing.

Even in times that he accidentally caused any damage to an examination facility or the sort, it would only be a one-time off affair. Yet, that fellow actually caused destruction in the same place thrice... That was really going overboard!

It was no wonder why the other party was addressed as the King of Destruction!

“Indeed. It’s just an examination, does he really have to cause some damage each time he comes? You really can’t imagine how furious I get each time I see him!” Elder Su slammed his palm on the table furiously.

“My sentiments exactly! I also find those who destroy public property and make themselves public nuisances abhorrent... But of course, if one were to do it unintentionally, that would be a different matter altogether...” Zhang Xuan remarked vehemently in agreement.

It was one thing to do it unintentionally, but those who create destruction with malicious intentions sure were abominable!

“Forget it, let’s not talk about that fellow anymore!” The more Elder Su spoke about the matter, the more furious he felt. If he

hadn't felt so indignant regarding the matter, a person of his standing would have never nagged about the issue before a student like that either.

After venting his frustrations, Elder Su turned to Zhang Xuan and nodded in satisfaction, "You aren't too bad."

Normally, whenever he spoke bad things about the King of Destruction, the other students would fidget timidly on the spot, not daring to even breathe loudly. Yet, not only was this young man unafraid, he even unabashedly revealed his resentment for the King of Destruction as well.

This made the goodwill he felt for the young man before him shooting furiously up the meter.

"Alright, you should start making some preparations. I'll assess your strength right now." Elder Su contemplated for a moment before saying.

"Preparations? Elder Su, didn't you say that the strength-assessing formation has been destroyed? How do you intend to assess my strength?" Zhang Xuan asked in intrigue.

"Simple. I'll suppress my cultivation to Grand Dominion realm primary stage and cross blows with you. As long as you can withstand three blows from me, I'll consider it as your pass!" Elder Su said with a smile.

Under normal circumstances, he had the right to refuse a candidate if his cultivation was beneath the mark, not to mention that the strength-assessing formation was destroyed too... But what could he do? The student before him just happened to meet his eye!

So, he decided to make a special exception.

"Alright!"

Zhang Xuan was still wondering what kind of examination he would face when he heard those words, and he heaved a sigh of relief.

"Good. Let's do it here then!" Elder Su stood up and walked to the center of the hall.

The hall was extremely spacious, so there were no problems having a fight here.

Geji! Geji!

Suppressing his cultivation down to Grand Dominion realm primary stage, Elder Su waved his hand and said, “Feel free to use your full strength. Even though this is an impromptu test to assess if you possess strength on par to a Grand Dominion realm cultivator, it is still a formal test, so don’t expect me to go easy on you!”

“I’ll try my best!” Zhang Xuan nodded grimly.

Even though the elder had suppressed his cultivation, it was very likely that he was a Saint 7-dan expert. Be it in terms of eye of discernment or reflexes, he was bound to be far stronger than Zhang Yunfeng. It would be foolish to hold back against such an opponent.

Hu!

With a swift Z-step maneuver, Zhang Xuan dashed for Elder Su.

The movement technique he was utilizing was a Saint intermediate-tier battle technique from the Qingyuan Empire Combat Master Hall. It aimed to prevent one’s opponent from launching any surprise attack through a constant change in positioning and movement trajectory.

Due to the intricacies in the movement technique, there were very few who would use it in a real battle. However, Zhang Xuan managed to integrate it perfectly into his attack, flitting swiftly from left to right as if a specter.

“Not bad.” Elder Su’s eyes lit up.

Considering how the young man before him was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, he had thought that it was an exaggeration to say that the young man possessed strength on par with a Grand Dominion realm cultivator. However, looking at the swiftly-moving silhouette before him, he realized that there might be some credence to those words after all.

Weng!

While harboring such thoughts, Elder Su released a powerful surge of energy from his body, forming a Dominion of five meters radius around him.

Tz la!

Shrouded within a Dominion, Zhang Xuan's movements immediately slowed down, as if he had descended into a bog.

"I'm going to be making my move. The first attack will be Palm of the Elephant-Dragon. It's a technique that harnesses the might of elephants and dragons, and further enhanced by my Dominion, it won't be easy for you to overcome it. So, do be careful..."

The young man before him had heartily listened to his grumbles and even displayed enmity toward the King of Destructions as well. This had left him with a deep feeling of goodwill for the young man. As such, even though he wasn't planning on going easy, his very warning showed his care and concern for the young man.

"I'll give it my all." Hearing that, Zhang Xuan immediately felt an adrenaline rush through his body.

With a swift flit, he executed the Unbounded Voyager.

Fighting against Zhang Yunfeng had given him a deeper insight into how a Dominion worked. In essence, being impeded by a Dominion was somewhat equivalent to having a force acting against one. In a sense, it could be viewed as a rope pulling one back, hindering one from making any movement.

However, while the rope was taut on one end, it would be relatively slackened on the other.

The reason why Zhang Xuan had used a Z movement earlier was to draw Elder Su's attention into impeding his sideward movement, so that the abrupt use of the Unbounded Voyager would be able to catch Elder Su off guard. And as expected, before the latter could process what was going on, he had already managed to close the gap between the both of them.

With a flick of his wrist, he attacked with a palm strike of his own.

The other party had said that the Palm of the Elephant-Dragon wielded immense strength, so just to be cautious, he used the most powerful palm art he knew against it in retaliation—Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm!

Boom!

The two palms collided with one another.

“What?”

Not expecting the other party to close in the distance between the both of them so swiftly and even execute such a powerful palm art, Elder Su’s eyes narrowed in alarm. Before he could even speak, a force harnessing crushing momentum was already crashing down on him.

“How could he be so powerful...” Feeling as if he had been struck by a comet, Elder Su’s lips twitched uncontrollably.

In the instant of collision, he felt as if someone had shattered every single bone in his body, and he was immediately sent flying backward.

In mid-air, he attempted to unseal his cultivation to ward off the momentum of the attack, but the relentless might of the other party’s palm crushing down on him denied him of any chance of doing so.

Boom!

He crashed heavily into the wall of the room, creating a massive hole behind him.

Kacha kacha!

Due to the overwhelming might of the crash, a massive crack swiftly crept up the wall, all the way up to the roof.

1311 King of Destruction 2

“This...” Chen Leyao’s eyebrows shot up as an ominous premonition arose in her mind.

If she recalled correctly, all that supposed King of Destruction did was destroy a formation. But what Zhang Xuan had just done was tear down the entire main hall of the branch...

“Ah?”

While Chen Leyao’s expression had turned unnatural, Zhang Xuan was also scratching his head in incomprehension.

Where is the might of the elephants and dragons that we agreed upon?

Where is the indomitable strength that will be difficult for me to withstand that you spoke of?

Just a single palm, and you were already sent flying. Not to mention, you even crashed through the wall. Is it really fine for you to go that easy on an examinee you are assessing?

“You...” Struggling out of a pile of dust, Elder Su’s face was so warped that it almost felt as if he would lose his mind.

As an elder invigilating an examination, he had actually been sent flying by the examinee.

More importantly, he had even warned the other party to be careful of the formidable might behind his palm.

Be careful your head!

The one who should be freaking careful is me!

“This... Elder Su, there are still two blows remaining. Actually, I only used a half of my strength in the earlier attack, so...” Zhang Xuan said hesitantly.

“You only used a half of your strength?” Elder Su suddenly wobbled on his feet as he became lightheaded.

“I held back a little when I executed my palm strike earlier,” Zhang Xuan explained.

That was not a lie. He did rein in his strength a little.

He would rarely display his full strength in a battle unless he deemed it absolutely necessary to do so. In view of Elder Su’s supposed powerful palm strike, he had chosen to face it with his strongest move, Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, but he had still held back in terms of strength.

On top of that, in order to maximize the might of the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, the attack should come down a downward trajectory. In order to capitalize on the speed of the Unbounded Voyager earlier, he could only execute it with a horizontal trajectory, so its strength was further reduced.

“...” Elder Su’s lips twitched uncontrollably.

Despite only facing half of the young man’s strength, he still nearly ended up crippled.

If the young man had used his full strength in the previous palm strike, would he have lived to see tomorrow’s sun?

Are you really sure you are a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator and not a Saint 7-dan cultivator?

Silence drifted in the air for some time, and unable to endure the suspense, Zhang Xuan spoke up once more. “Elder Su, if you find that I’m still lacking, I’ll put in my full strength for the two remaining moves!”

“Cough cough! It’s enough. There’s no need for you to face my remaining two moves. I believe that you wield strength comparable to a Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator!” Elder Su quickly waved his hand.

As a formation master, his strength would not be on par with master teachers. Nevertheless, even when suppressing his cultivation, he would still be far stronger than most Grand Dominion realm cultivators. Yet, despite his strength, he had been sent flying with a single palm strike from the young man.

With that alone, there was no need for him to continue with the remaining two blows.

“Thank you, Elder Su!” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Since his strength had reached the mark, that meant that he was eligible to take the 8-star formation master examination. Once he succeeded, he would be able to contact Zhao Ya later in the night.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony,” Elder Su said as he rubbed his two trembling hand together.

He discreetly whipped out a pill, swallowed it, and released the seal on his cultivation; only then did he feel his injuries alleviating slightly. After which, he glanced at the massive crack in the middle of the hall, and his mouth twitched slightly. Just as he was about to find someone to repair it, flurried footsteps sounded, and an elder abruptly barged into the room.

“Old Su, you were right. This time, with the whole lot of us staring at him, that fellow didn’t dare cause damage anymore, and he’s currently challenging the examination obediently. Do you want to take a look as well? It’s not a common sight to see him so calm...” the elder exclaimed in agitation.

Kacha! Kacha!

Before the elder could finish speaking, the crack on the wall suddenly began advancing once more, crawling over the entire ceiling. It seemed that the elder barging into the room and his loud voice had destabilized the condition in the room.

Hualala!

Dust began fluttering to the ground.

The elder who had just entered the room finally noticed that something was amiss, and lifting his head to look at the ceiling, he shrieked in shock, “Ah! What’s that?”

That shriek happened to be the straw that broke the camel’s back. Unable to endure it any longer, the room began to shake intensely.

Boom!

The entire room came crashing down.

Rocks, dust, and everything that was in the ceiling collapsed to the ground. Zhang Xuan and the others hurriedly drove their zhenqi to fend off the falling rubble, and only then were they spared from the calamity.

When everything finally settled down, Elder Su took a look at the complete wreckage around him, and he nearly burst into tears.

It should have been a simple test to assess the lad's strength, resolved with three simple blows. How did it come to this?

Admittedly, the hall had not been built with durability in mind; nevertheless, as a work of celestial designers, its resilience was not to be underestimated. For several centuries, he had lived here with nary a problem, and even after the previous visits of the King of Destruction, the hall had managed to remain standing. Yet, just by crossing palms with this fellow, the hall had been reduced to such a state.

The more he thought about it, the more stifled Elder Su felt. Eventually, he could not help but direct an accusatory gaze at the standing young man not too far away.

Upon catching sight of the daggers in Elder Su's eyes, Zhang Xuan's hands instinctively shot up and pointed to the elder who had just entered, and he exclaimed in an innocent and indignant voice, "I wasn't the one who destroyed the hall; he did! It has nothing to do with me!"

"..." Elder Su.

"..." The elder who had just entered.

"..." Chen Leyao.

A moment later, the elder swept away a brick on his head and the debris on his shoulders before turning to Elder Su with a look of bewilderment. "Old Su, this is... Just what's going on?"

"It's nothing much. I was in the midst of assessing Zhang Shi's strength when in a moment of carelessness..." Hearing the elder's question, Elder Su's face immediately flushed red. Eventually, he still found himself unable to speak of the exact reason.

He was simply too embarrassed to speak of that matter! Even though he did lower his cultivation to Grand Dominion realm primary stage, the opponent he faced was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage! Furthermore, not only was he sent flying, the impact of his crash even caused the entire hall to collapse. How could he possibly admit to a matter like that before his old acquaintance? Did he not want his pride anymore?

If he really came clean, that blabbermouth would surely spread it far and wide, and it would be a matter of hours before every soul in the Sanctum of Sages knew of his humiliation.

“In a moment of carelessness?” The elder scratched his head in confusion, and dust rained down from his hair.

“Alright, there’s no point talking about this matter anymore. Zhang shi over here intends to take the 8-star examination, so take him to the Steps of Formations!” Fearing that his old friend would continue pursuing the matter, Elder Su anxiously changed the topic at hand.

“He wants to take the 8-star examination too? Very well, follow me.” Nodding, the elder began leading Zhang Xuan away.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan and Chen Leyao quickly followed him.

Elder Su hesitated for a moment, but eventually, his gut feeling told him that it might not be safe to leave Zhang Xuan alone, so he decided to follow along as well.

After leaving the rubble, they walked for some time before a staircase came into view.

This staircase was extremely bizarre. There was nothing above or below supporting it, and it simply floated off the ground, ascending straight into the sky, as if leading to a heavenly palace of some sort.

“What’s this?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

He could tell that there were many formations inscribed on each of the steps of the staircase and in the surroundings in order to allow them to float. Nevertheless, it was still a rather impressive feat.

“This is what we call the Steps of Formations, and this is where we conduct the formation master examination!” the elder explained with a chuckle.

“Steps of Formations?”

“Un. Every single step here contains a unique formation, be it Illusory Formation, Slaughter Formation, Beguilement Formation, and many others. Some of them even require one to set up a formation in order to decipher it. All in all, there are ninety steps here, and every ten steps is equivalent to the increment of a star in rank,” the elder explained.

“As long as you can reach the 80th floor, that will mean that you have cleared the 8-star formation master examination!”

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

In a sense, this was similar to the Sea of Formations that he had encountered previously. Basically speaking, the formation master had to display their prowess through overcoming all sorts of formations that stood in their way in order to clear the examination.

Once the examinee reached a certain mark, that would signify that they had cleared the examination.

Also, depending on where the examinee had stopped, that could also be used to determine how far had their mastery of formations had reached. For example, reaching the 75th step would mean that they had achieved the proficiency equivalent to a 7-star high-tier formation master.

Of course, this examination was clearly at a different level to the Sea of Formations. Some of the formations even required one to set up a formation in order to clear. It would be highly testing on one’s state of mind, creativity, and knowledge of formations.

Even for Zhang Xuan, this examination could pose quite a bit of a challenge.

While the both of them were still chatting, Chen Leyao could not help but ask, “Elders, may I ask if those standing on the steps are all challenging the examination too?”

Taking another look, Zhang Xuan realized that there was a total of five people standing on the staircase.

These students did not continue heading up. Instead, each of them was standing atop a step. Their eyes were tightly shut, almost as if they were in a daze or in the midst of deep contemplation. Or maybe, they were already consumed by the formation, unable to struggle free.

“Indeed, they are currently challenging the formation, too!” Elder Su nodded. “Two are taking the 5-star and 7-star examinations, and one is taking the 8-star examination!”

Zhang Xuan took a closer look and noted that two of the students were standing on steps in the forties, two on steps in the sixties, and one on steps in the seventies.

After a moment, Zhang Xuan asked curiously, “The King of Destruction you spoke of earlier must be the highest student up there, right?”

He had heard from the elder who barged in earlier that the King of Destruction had not completed his examination yet. Given so, it would make sense for the latter to still be on top.

Previously, Elder Su had said that the King of Destruction was intending to take the 8-star formation master examination as well, just like him, so by deduction, he would be the one in the seventies.

Elder Su harrumphed in displeasure. “Indeed, that’s him!”

Who in the world would like to be around someone who could cause massive devastation all of a sudden?

Intrigued, Zhang Xuan took a closer look at the King of Destruction and noted that he was a young man who seemed to be in his thirties. His figure looked a little slim and slender, and he was dressed in a light gray robe. As the other party’s back was facing him, he was unable to make out his facial features, but he could vaguely feel a cold and lofty aura emanating from him.

Zhang Xuan did a swift calculation before remarking with a smile, “He seems to be on the 79th step. I wonder if he will be able to take the final step forward.”

In this moment, all the steps suddenly began shaking wildly, as if a rampaging beast had crashed heavily onto it.

“The hell, the King of Destruction is attempting to destroy our Steps of Formations! Hurry up and stop him!” an anxious voice yelled.

Shortly after hearing those words, Zhang Xuan suddenly realized that there were a couple more elders sitting by the staircase, and they were dressed similarly to Elder Su. Most likely, they were the other elders dispatched to keep the King of Destruction in check.

The elder who had shouted earlier had an anxious look on his face, and as he spoke, he quickly gathered zhenqi in his palm and pumped it into the staircase before him, seemingly attempting to stabilize the Steps of Formations.

Unfortunately, there were simply too many formations on the steps. As powerful as that formation was, he was not strong enough to stabilize the entire structure by himself.

“What are you all waiting for? Hurry up and help out!”

In this moment, Elder Su could not pay attention to Zhang Xuan any longer. He quickly flew forth and pumped his zhenqi into the Steps of Formations as well.

With six powerful formation masters making a move simultaneously, the staircase’s shaking did lessen. However, in this moment, the young man on the 79th step suddenly opened his eyes and lifted his leg. Just as he was about to step on the 80th step, the steps beneath his feet finally reached their limits.

Hong long!

With a resounding explosion, everything collapsed. Countless formations flew across the air, causing the spiritual energy in the surroundings to fall into chaos.

“This...” Zhang Xuan gulped subconsciously. “He really is the King of Destruction!”

1312 It's Really, Really Hard To Obtain One's Emblems Through Application

Hu!

The steps were eroding and the formations were collapsing. Before the other examinees could process what was going on, they suddenly felt the ground beneath them vanishing, and 'putong!', 'putong!', all of them fell to the ground, creating huge depressions beneath them.

Opening their eyes, they scanned their surroundings with a dazed look, unsure of what was going on.

We are only here to take the formation master examination. Can anyone tell us... what in the world is going on?

"King of Destruction, you must compensate our Steps of Formations!"

"If you can't fix it well, don't even dream of leaving!"

"You bastard, I'll kill you!"

"Elder Su, don't get reckless. You won't be able to defeat him..."

Elder Su and the others felt burning rage gushing into their minds, and they immediately sealed the surrounding space as they stared at the young man in the sky with hatred burning in their eyes.

The Steps of Formations had been in the Sanctum of Sages since time immemorial. Countless geniuses had been assessed by it, but never had any problem cropped up before. Yet, it was reduced to rubble as soon as that fellow came!

How could they possibly not be burning with rage?

"I..."

The King of Destruction also didn't seem to know what was going on either. With a dazed look on his face, he looked down at the collapsed staircase beneath him, as if still trying to figure out what had just happened.

"I really didn't do it on purpose... Could it be that the quality of the Steps of Formations is made out of inferior materials?" the King of Destruction asked with a helpless shrug.

"Inferior your sister!" Unable to take it any longer, Elder Su roared in anger.

You said that it was made out of inferior materials?

So many people had challenged it, but it was still able to remain standing across all those years. Yet, as soon as you came, it ended up collapsing... How can you have the cheek to say it's made out of inferior materials?

"Su Bing, I have warned you before. Don't you dare insult my sister..." Upon hearing the cursing, the King of Destruction's face immediately darkened as a threatening glint emerged in his narrowed eyes. A hint of killing intent emanated from him.

Hong long!

In the blink of an eye, the figure in the sky had already appeared right before Elder Su.

Alarmed, Elder Su raised his hand to receive the King of Destruction's attack in a fluster, but before he could make it in time, he already felt a sharp pain in his chest. A foot had struck him squarely.

Peng!

While spurting blood in mid-air, he crashed right into a wall not too far away and created yet another massive hole in his wake.

"That fellow is strong..." Zhang Xuan's lower jaw fell in astonishment.

Elder Su's true strength was at Saint 7-dan at the very minimum, and yet, he was still unable to withstand a single strike from the King of Destruction... It seemed like despite

the young age of the King of Destruction, the strength that he wielded was not to be underestimated!

What was particularly impressive was the speed he traversed from the sky to Elder Su at. It was as if he had stepped right through space, achieving a speed that was on par with his Unbounded Voyager!

“Calm down, calm down! Su Bing didn’t do it intentionally... It’s just out of a moment of rage that he misspoke...” Seeing that one of their companions had been sent flying with a kick, the other elders glanced at one another in shock for a moment before hurriedly rushing up to placate the King of Destruction, fearing that the young man would fly into a rage once more.

“I told you before. Criticize me if you want, but never ever insult my sister. If I were to hear a single word regarding my sister coming out from your mouth...” the young man said as he glared coldly at the elders standing before him.

Facing the young man’s menacing gaze, the lips of the elders twitched in fear.

“Y-yes... Old Su, what are you waiting for? Get over here and apologize!” one of them turned around and bellowed.

“Cough cough!” Climbing up from the rubble with difficulty, Elder Su spurted a mouthful of blood upon hearing those words. With a tearfully indignant expression, he walked forward, clasped his fist, and said, “I apologize for my previous faux pas, and I seek your forgiveness for the matter...”

To be sent into the wall twice in a single day...

What the heck is this!

Hearing Elder Su’s apology, the coldness on the King of Destruction’s face finally alleviated, and he nodded in satisfaction, “That’s more like it. You better take note of it in the future, alright?”

“Ah...” Zhang Xuan and Chen Leyao glanced at one another in utter shock.

No words could describe what they were feeling at this moment.

Too arrogant!

That fellow had turned the examination ground to rubble, and yet, when one of the elders reprimanded him for the matter, he actually just rushed forward to beat him up...

It was in this moment that a seed of doubt was planted in Zhang Xuan's mind—Had I actually been too amiable in the past?

Admittedly, he did cause quite a bit of destruction in the past, but he would always try to make up with it by offering all kinds of compensation, sometimes even offering to repair it back to perfection. On the other hand, the young man in front of him was completely unreasonable, not even bothering to apologize for what he had done!

So what if I destroyed it?

Just try criticizing me, and I'll make you crawl all over the ground, searching for your fallen teeth!

“Alright. There's no need to give me a gift or anything of that sort as an apology. I am a rather casual person, and I don't like to cause excessive trouble either.” the King of Destruction waved his hand leisurely.

Those words left the elders of the Formation Master Guild branch nearly collapsing to the ground.

We are only apologizing to you... Who in the world is going to give you a gift?

Furthermore, casual? Don't like to cause excessive trouble?

At the rate you are going, even killing all of us here would be a trivial matter to you, right?

“Is that how it's supposed to go?” Overwhelmed with shock, this was the only thing that was on Zhang Xuan's mind at this moment.

It was no wonder why the other party was called the King of Destruction, he was indeed vicious!

Compared to the other party, he was truly lacking. There was really no ground for comparison between the both of them.

“Regarding the Steps of Formations...” With faces reddened in indignation, Elder Su and the others couldn’t stand it any longer, and they pointed to the rubble on the ground.

“Don’t bother with words of apology or that sort anymore. What’s more important right now is that I haven’t finished by 8-star formation master examination yet. You all should hurry up and find a way to repair it first.” the King of Destruction interjected.

“This...” The crowd was stifled speechless by those words.

Even Zhang Xuan was left in a state of shock.

Was it really fine for one to be that shameless?

It was one thing not to offer any compensation after destroying the other party’s property, but to pummel the other party up and even demand it to be fixed as soon as possible... Really, did that fellow have no sense of shame?

“It seems like I’m still thin-skinned as compared to him!” Zhang Xuan thought in embarrassment.

All those who had chased after me due to the destruction I have caused, did you see that?

That’s the real King of Destruction standing right there!

What I did can only be considered as a small disturbance at the very most, not even worth a mention!

“The Steps of Formations was constructed by eight 9-star formation masters dispatched by the headquarters, and they took three months in total before they finished building it. Our strength isn’t sufficient to repair it.” Elder Su said with a reddened face.

9-star formation masters were basically capable of creating any formations beneath grade-9 in an instant. However, to compress a formation into the size of a single step, and have it trigger immediately as soon as someone came into contact with it so as to assess him... That was definitely no easy task.

Even formation masters of their rank would need to take a fair bit of time before they could pull off something like that.

“You aren’t able to repair it? But I need to clear the formation master examination as soon as possible. I don’t have much time to waste!” the King of Destruction frowned in anger.

“Actually, there’s no need for you to worry. We have all seen that the circumstances of the examination earlier, and you have already reached the 79th step, just a step away from reaching the 80th. That is sufficient to show that your prowess is already on par with 8-star formation masters. We can help you apply for an 8-star emblem straight so that you don’t have to take the examination anymore!” At this point, Elder Su didn’t even want to argue with the King of Destruction anymore. All he wanted to do was to send the other party away as quickly as possible.

It was already bad enough for it to be destroyed once. If they were to allow that fellow to challenge it once again after it was repaired, who knew what would happen the next time around? Since that was the case, they might as well just clear the fellow and send him on his way.

In any case, given the previous circumstances, it was apparent that he was about to reach the 80th step when the Steps of Formations abruptly collapsed. Thus, in a sense, they weren’t compromising on the examination either.

“You want to apply for an 8-star emblem for me?” the King of Destruction was taken aback. “How can that do? I always seek to clear my examinations with my own ability. Such shortcuts just aren’t for me! Besides, formations have always been my greatest weakness, and since I’m already taking the examination, I should use it as an opportunity to temper my skills too... I don’t need you to apply the emblem for me!”

“...”

Elder Su and the others clawed at their hair.

Are you done yet?

We have already admitted defeat, even offering to give the emblem right into your hands, so why are you still rejecting

it... Will you only be content after you have driven all of us mad?

“This... Elder Su, may I interject for a bit?” Seeing how the atmosphere had turned awkward, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but step forward to interject.

“Zhang shi, feel free to speak!” Elder Su clasped his fist.

Zhang Xuan had also destroyed the hall earlier on, but compared to the King of Destruction, the other party still felt pure like an innocent, white lily. Furthermore, after what the King of Destruction had done, the contrast between the both of them made him feel that Zhang Xuan’s character was actually not too bad.

“Is it impossible to take the examination now that the Steps of Formations have collapsed?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Actually, this was what he was more concerned about.

He needed to clear the 8-star formation master examination as soon as possible so that he could access the grade-8 formation books. This way, he would finally be able to meet the disciple that he hadn’t meet for a very long time... Would the collapse of the Steps of Formations mean that his plans were going to fall through?

“This...” A conflicted look surfaced on Elder Su’s face.

“Actually, it’s not that there’s no other way to conduct the examination, but the time required might be a little longer...”

“Oh? What’s the other way?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

“We can make an application to the headquarters right now and have them send over a brand new formation blueprint over. The examinee will start studying it on the spot and attempt to set it up. As long as the examinee succeeds, and the tier of the formation meets the mark, he would be considered to have cleared the examination...” Elder Su paused for a moment before saying.

In truth, this was the most direct manner to assess a formation master. However, having a 7-star pinnacle formation master set up a grade-8 formation would require at least several months of effort. Due to how exhausting and lengthy the

examination was, as well as the great number of examinees that challenged the formation master examination each year, such an ineffective method had been gradually eliminated with time.

“In order for a formation to display its true prowess, one would have to harmonize it together with the surrounding environment, and considering the complexity of a grade-8 formation, it would indeed be far more time-consuming.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“However, I’m willing to undergo this examination!”

It was true that most 7-star formation masters would take a very long time to set up a basic grade-8 formation, but Zhang Xuan was different. With just a sweep of his Eye of Insight, he would be able to determine the ideal locations where he should plant the formation flags at. Even if that didn’t work, he still had the Library of Heaven’s Path to fall back on.

As such, setting up a basic grade-8 formation could be said to be a walk in the park for him.

“Since there’s such a method as well, I want to take the examination too!” Before Elder Su could reply to Zhang Xuan’s remark, the King of Destruction had already spoken up once more.

“You wish to take the examination too?” Hearing that the King of Destruction was going to continue with the examination, everyone shuddered in fear.

“That’s right!” the King of Destruction nodded affirmatively.

Seeing the frightened look on the faces of the elders, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but step in, “This friend over here. Actually, since Elder Su and the others are going to apply for an emblem for you, there’s really no need for you to take the examination anymore. Why do you want to go through so much trouble?”

Since that fellow could already obtain the 8-star formation master emblem, why in the world was he being so troublesome here?

“Having an emblem applied for one is like being taken pity upon. I don’t need anyone’s pity!” the King of Destruction harrumphed coldly.

“Since the Formation Master Guild is willing to give the emblem out to you, it shows that they have already acknowledged you. Since that’s the case, how can that be considered as pity?”

At this point, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out his emblem. “Look, this formation emblem I have over here was applied for me by Guild Leader Han of the Qingyuan Empire Formation Master Guild. I didn’t even attend the examination!”

“This…” The King of Destruction frowned in dilemma. “It should be hard to get an emblem applied for one, right?”

To be able to have one’s emblem directly applied for one was definitely no easy task. If the other party was able to get the head of a Formation Master Guild to do it for him, could it mean that the other party was an incredible genius as well, just like him?

“You’re right. It’s really, really hard to obtain one’s emblem through application. After all, how often do you see a person obtaining his emblem through application?” With a deep sigh, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and a whole string of emblems appeared before him.

“But well, what can I say… my 7-star demonic tunist emblem—applied. 7-star apothecary emblem—applied. 7-star painter emblem—applied. 7-star terpsichore emblem—applied. 7-star appraiser emblem—applied. 7-star physician emblem—applied…”

“…” King of Destruction.

“…” The elders.

“…” Chen Leyao. I know this might sound awkward because I usually translate it to “your head!”, but this is actually the original version of it.

1313 Your Sister

“Cough cough! Zhang shi, it’s fine. You can keep your stuff!” Clutching his heart, Elder Su couldn’t bring himself to look at them.

What the heck was with all of them?

In a sense, having one’s emblem applied for one was similar to being given a direct admission into branded schools. Typically speaking, it was extremely difficult to encounter something like that, almost nigh impossible. Yet, the fellow before him actually took out a whole pile of emblems and they were all freaking applied for...

More importantly... he even had the cheek to say that it was really, really difficult to obtain emblems by application...

Is this really how ‘really, really difficult’ is to you?

Why does it seem like you are intentionally bragging about it to us instead?

“You obtain all of these through application?” The eyes of the King of Destruction widened as his breathing hastened. “Just how much destruction did you cause to receive such treatment?”

He had to visit this branch thrice and destroy the Steps of Formations before Elder Su offered to apply for the emblem in his stead... Could he have possibly found a comrade in the same path?

“Destruction? Of course not! It’s not like I’m into destroying stuff or anything!” Zhang Xuan hurriedly waved his hand in denial. “I had all of these applied for me through my personal charisma!”

“Personal charisma? Hmph, I don’t believe you! If you weren’t destroying any of their stuff, why would they go through so much trouble to specially make an application for your emblem? Alright then, why don’t you tell me how you

managed to receive your 7-star formation master emblem then?”

“Back then, they encountered a grade-8 seal which they were unable to decipher. I managed to open up a hole in the formation, and it’s through that which I earned the approval of the Qingyuan Empire Formation Master Guild...”

Thinking back, he met Guild Leader Han back at the entrance to the Qiu Wu Palace. He was attempting to create an opening in a seal containing the rampaging energy in the volcano, and after a series of misunderstandings, he eventually managed to win Guild Leader Han over through his capabilities.

“Open up a hole in a formation? How is that any different from destroying?” The King of Destruction clicked his tongue in displeasure. “What about your 7-star apothecary emblem then?”

“I obtained that through rendering the head of the Qingyuan Empire Apothecary Guild speechless during a Pill Debate. The spectacle was truly amazing then, the entire Apothecary School of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy ended up... ended up...” It was at this moment that Zhang Xuan realized he had misspoken, but with everyone’s eyes staring intently on him, he had no choice but to continue on. “... being torn down...”

The lips of the King of Destruction curled up into a smirk, “Aha, I knew it! What about your 7-star appraiser emblem?”

“While appraising a painting, I scraped off a layer of it and exposed a problem in it...” Zhang Xuan’s voice gradually grew more and more diffident.

“Your 7-star demonic tunist emblem?”

“I ended up knocking out all of the divine cranes in charge of the examination, and as there weren’t sufficient cranes to conduct the examination anymore, School Head Jiang ended up specially applying for the 7-star emblem for me...”

Thinking back on those incidents, cold sweat started to rain down Zhang Xuan’s back.

True, he didn't destroy buildings frenziedly like what the King of Destruction did... But it honestly felt like his actions were not any better though?

All along, he had viewed himself to be a good person, but the more he spoke, the more he felt that he was the villain instead...

“And you still refuse to call that ‘destruction’?” The King of Destruction stared at Zhang Xuan with a smug look. “Earlier, I seem to have heard some explosion sound from the direction where you all came from earlier. Did something happen?”

“While testing out my strength, I accidentally... tore down the main hall...” Zhang Xuan replied awkwardly.

The King of Destruction clicked his tongue, “Is this the personal charisma you speak of?”

“I...” Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

He was still confident in himself a moment ago, thinking that it was how outstanding he was that he managed to get others to apply for his emblems. But looking back now... could they have done so out of fear to placate him, so as to prevent him from causing any more damage?

But... it was not like he did all of that intentionally!

Anxious, Zhang Xuan turned to Elder Su and the others in hope of finding some support from them, only to see their bodies trembling uncontrollably and their faces livid in fear.

It was already bad enough for a King of Destruction to barge into their home... Just what in the world did they do so wrong for the heavens to send two homewreckers into their branch?!

All they wished for was a life of peace, was this simple wish of theirs really that difficult to fulfill?

Seeing all of the fearful looks directed at him, Zhang Xuan could only lower his head in resignation. Realizing that it was impossible for him to salvage his reputation anymore, he quickly changed the topic, “Elder Su, I think you should hurry up and make the application with the headquarter. I intend to

take the examination to obtain the 8-star formation master emblem...”

Really, all he wanted to do here was to take the examination. He had no intention of causing any trouble at all!

No wonder why the King of Destruction was unwilling to have his emblems applied for him. At this point, it seemed almost as if the occupation guilds would only specially apply emblems in order to placate troublemakers...

“I’ll take the examination together with him!” the King of Destruction interjected.

Elder Su looked at the two of them for a moment before slowly nodding. Then, he turned around and left the room.

An examination to set up formation was troublesome, but it shouldn’t be possible to cause too much damage through that. This course of action was at least acceptable to him.

Not too long later, Elder Su returned. “This is the elementary grade-8 formation which I have just applied for from the headquarters. I’ll give you three days to study it, and as long as you can successfully construct it within three months, I’ll consider it as your pass!”

After which, he flicked his hand, and a formation blueprint appeared before the duo.

The blueprint was extremely complex, making it extremely hard to harmonize it with the surrounding environment. Even though it was only an elementary grade-8 formation, it was at least several times more intricate than that of a 7-star pinnacle formation.

However, it’s still a lot easier to set up than the supporting formation Chen Leyao showed me... After taking a look, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Even though he was a 7-star formation master, his understanding of formations was already on par with most 8-star primary formation masters. While he would have trouble constructing some of the more profound grade-8 formations, for elementary ones like this, it was still no trouble at all.

“Haha, I am known to be one of the fastest readers in my clan. It seems like I’m going to complete it faster than you!” While Zhang Xuan was still harboring such thoughts in mind, he suddenly heard the hearty laughter of the King of Destruction beside him.

“You are a fast reader?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan turned a glance over.

“Indeed. Despite the complexity of this formation, I’m confident that I would be able to fully comprehend it within half a day!” the King of Destruction declared proudly.

For a young man in his thirties to wield strength which even Elder Su was no match against, there was no doubt that the King of Destruction was a person of great talent, possessing skills that surpassed most ordinary men.

“What about you?” After speaking his piece confidently, the King of Destruction turned to look at Zhang Xuan intently. There was a bright smile of his face, but the look of competitiveness in his eyes was impossible to miss.

It wasn’t rare for him to find a fellow ‘avid destroyer’, and it was even more coincidental that the both of them were challenging the 8-star formation master examination at the same time. Considering the various similarities between the both of them, it was inevitable for him to compare himself against Zhang Xuan, wanting to see who would be the superior one.

“You are asking me?” Zhang Xuan was slightly surprised by that abrupt question.

He hesitated for a moment, and instead of answering the question straight, he turned to Elder Su and asked, “Are there formation flags for grade-8 formations here?”

“Of course, we have them all prepared!” Elder Su wasn’t sure why Zhang Xuan would suddenly ask such a question, but he still flicked his wrist, and a huge pile of grade-8 formation flags appeared on the ground.

“Thank you.” With a smile, Zhang Xuan waved his hand, and all of the formation flags immediately flew into the air.

Then, he snapped his fingers.

Huala!

The several hundred flags immediately flew into the surroundings, plunging themselves into the ground all around the room.

“What is he up to?”

Seeing Zhang Xuan tossing the formation flags all of a sudden, everyone was startled. They had no idea what he was up to.

On the other hand, paying no heed to the crowd’s shock, Zhang Xuan took a few steps back and stomped his feet.

Weng!

With a buzzing sound, a formation came into life. Mist immediately crept into the room, hindering the sight of all those who stood within.

Grade-8 formation... activated!

“I’m done!” Zhang Xuan clapped his hands to rid the dust on them. “I have finished setting up the grade-8 formation.”

“...” The King of Destruction.

“...” Elder Su and the others.

“...” Chen Leyao.

“Cough cough!”

It took a very long time before Elder Su and the others were able to recover from their shock. The various elders quickly checked the various aspects of the formation for the first time, the second time, and the third time, but they were unable to find any single problem with it at all. In the end, they could only give a nod of approval, “There’s no problem with the formation Zhang shi has set up. I hereby declare that Zhang Xuan, Zhang shi, has cleared the 8-star formation master examination!”

“...” The King of Destruction felt so stifled on the inside that he could hardly breathe.

To be honest, he was intending to compete with Zhang Xuan and show off a bit before him, but in the end... he only ended up having his own face slapped instead!

He wasn't even done reading through the content in the formation, but the other party was already done setting up the formation...

Wasn't this a little too fast?

"Forget it, Elder Su. I don't want to take the examination anymore. Help me apply for my 8-star formation master emblem instead!" The King of Destruction waved his hand and harrumphed in displeasure.

"This... Alright then!" Elder Su nodded.

This was what he had offered the other party from the start anyway. Besides, considering that it was the King of Destruction they were dealing with, it was always better to be safe than sorry.

"Thank you." The King of Destruction nodded. He took a glance at the destroyed Steps of Formations and said, "I'll have my men to compensate the damages here, and I'll find someone to have the Steps of Formations repaired back to its original state as soon as possible too."

"We'll be counting on you then..." Hearing those words, Elder Su and the others visibly heaved a sigh of relief.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan nodded inconspicuously in approval as well.

All this while, he had thought that the King of Destruction was an extremely unreasonable person, causing damage here and there without taking responsibility for his actions. But from the looks of it now, that wasn't exactly the case.

While his actions did inconvenience others, he did make reparations for them afterward, so his actions were still barely acceptable.

"There's no need to stand on ceremony." the King of Destruction replied before turning over. "Your name is Zhang Xuan?"

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“You are a freshman who just came in this year? Otherwise, there’s no way I wouldn’t have heard of your name!” the King of Destruction asked with uplifted eyebrows.

The ability to set up grade-8 formation instantaneously was, without a doubt, an extremely powerful capability. If there had been such a figure in the Sanctum of Sages before, he would have surely heard of him before.

“That’s right.”

“Not bad. Talented and skilled, yet humble and low profile, just like me. I like you!” The King of Destruction nodded in satisfaction.

“You’re too kind.” Zhang Xuan replied with a polite smile.

Considering the King of Destruction’s strength, he was bound to be from an extraordinary background.

Being on good terms with a person like the King of Destruction was definitely a good thing for him.

“I’ll be leaving now. If you intend to challenge the examinations of any other occupations in the future, feel free to call me along. I have connections in many of them, so they would usually give me some leeway!” the King of Destruction said.

Zhang Xuan quickly thanked the other party.

After which, the King of Destruction began making his way out.

Watching at the departing back, Zhang Xuan turned to Elder Su and the others with a doubtful look and asked telepathically, “Elder Su, may I know which clan is the King of Destruction from?”

It was apparent that Elder Su and the others had been relatively docile before the King of Destruction. While it was true that the King of Destruction possessed great strength, Elder Su and the others should have connections in the Sanctum of Sages too, and they were backed by the Formation

Master Guild as well, so they shouldn't have been any need for them to treat the other party so respectfully.

In other words, the King of Destruction must have a powerful background which even Elder Su and the others were fearful of. Otherwise, given his track record, he would have long been expelled from the Sanctum of Sages!

“You... don't recognize him?” Elder Su and the others were speechless.

After all that had been said and done, you actually don't know who the King of Destruction is?

Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

“He's from the Luo Clan, Luo Xuanqing!” Elder Su replied.

“Luo Clan, as in the Sage Clan?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

It just happened that he was looking for members of the Luo Clan, but who could have thought that the young man before him would actually be one of them! To wield such strength at his age, he should possess considerable standing in the Luo Clan, right?”

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan asked anxiously, “May I know what is Luo Xuanqing's identity in the Luo Clan?”

“His identity?” Seeing that Zhang Xuan really didn't know a thing at all, a helpless look surfaced on Elder Su's face. “He's the sixth son of the head of the Luo Clan. If you still don't know who he is, you should have heard of the famed little princess of the Luo Clan, right, The little princess is his younger sister...”

He is... Ruoxin's elder brother? So, my brother-in-law? Zhang Xuan froze in the spot.

In the next moment, he quickly turned around, and upon seeing that King of Destruction Luo Xuanqing hadn't gotten far, he immediately shouted out, “Broth... Luo Xuanqing, Brother Luo...”

Hearing that someone was shouting for him, Luo Xuanqing turned around with a frown.

Upon seeing that the other party had turned around, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but tremble in agitation at the thought that he would be able to learn about Luo Ruoxin's affairs very soon. He began speaking, "Your sister..."

"Your sister!" But before Zhang Xuan could finish his words, a furious bellow boomed across the air.

Following which, Luo Xuanqing abruptly appeared before him, and a fist crashed right into his face.

Peng!

Zhang Xuan was sent flying away, and he struck the wall behind him head first.

Boom! Huala!

The entire building had already been in a fragile state after Elder Su's crash, and with Zhang Xuan crashing into it now too, everything around them began collapsing.

1314 Reunion

“In view that this is your first offense, I’ll let you off this time. However, if you dare speak another word about my sister, don’t blame me for taking your life!” After sending Zhang Xuan flying, Luo Xuanqing harrumphed coldly and left.

In the blink of an eye, he had already vanished from the spot.

“ ... ”

Rubbing his head, Zhang Xuan quickly climbed up from the rubble. He wanted to stop Luo Xuanqing from leaving, but it was already too late. Thus, he could only stare helplessly at the entrance of the branch.

All I wanted to ask is some news on Ruoxin... I have no intentions of scolding you or your sister!

Do you need to get that agitated?

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan drove his Heaven’s Path zhenqi to recover from his wounds.

He couldn’t help but feel a little dispirited. Despite all the breakthroughs he had made recently, he was still too weak.

Earlier, the other party had appeared before him in an instant, such that he didn’t even have time to react before his body was sealed in place, preventing him from even speaking a single word. If only he was a little stronger, he wouldn’t have been in such a passive position, subdued by the other party within a single strike.

It was fortunate that the other party had gone easy on him, or else that encounter could have very well claimed his life.

Still, this was a very bad first meeting... To think that his future brother-in-law would send him flying in a single punch!

Zhang Xuan was helpless for a moment before he raked together his determination, and his eyes turned resolute once more, “I really should focus on raising my cultivation as soon as possible. If I can’t even defeat my brother-in-law, how can I

stand against the Zhang Clan and Luo Clan and negotiate with them for Luo Ruoxin's marriage in hand?"

This brother-in-law of his was one of the younger generations in the Luo Clan, but even so, the strength that he wielded was already so frightening. Considering that Zhang Clan was famed to be the number one clan in the Master Teacher Continent, they were bound to be even more powerful. At the very least, he would have to unseal the Sanctum Head Token by the third month of next year in order to be able to hold a candle to them!

Only so would he be able to wield a standing and power that the Zhang Clan and Luo Clan would have to think twice before shrugging him off.

"Zhang shi, you..." Just as Zhang Xuan was deep in thoughts, a voice suddenly sounded in his ear. Turning his head over, he saw Chen Leyao looking at him with a deeply worried look, "Is your head alright?"

The young man had a punch smashed into his head by the King of Destruction, and ever since then, he had been in a very long daze. It was no wonder why she would get worried.

"I'm fine!" Zhang Xuan shook his head before turning to the other elders not too far away. "Elders, since I have become an 8-star formation master, is it possible for me to access the 8-star formation master books now? If it isn't too much to ask, may I ask you to bring me there?"

In any case, there was no way for him to rush his strength. In order to build a strong foundation, he would have to slowly advance a step at a time. Since he had successfully cleared the formation master examination, it would be better for him to bring his mastery of his occupation up to par first before deciding on anything else.

"You want to visit our library? Follow me." Elder Su nodded.

"Fairy Leyao, I think it would be better for you to return first. After I'm done finding a way to swiftly set up the supporting formation, I'll head over to look for you!" Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

“Very well.” Chen Leyao nodded before she turned around and left.

Following behind Elder Su, Zhang Xuan walked through quite a few corridors before he finally arrived before a room with tall doors.

“Here is our library. As we are still in the midst of processing your emblem, I’ll give you this one-time use token instead. With it in hand, you’ll be able to enter the area and browse through any books you want.” Elder Su said.

He had no idea why the young man would suddenly ask to read at this moment, but showing a desire to learn was always a good matter.

“Thank you!” After taking the token, Zhang Xuan began making his way in.

Just like the libraries of most other guilds, it had many shelves, each of them densely filled with books. In terms of quantity and variety of books, it couldn’t hold a candle to the Master Teacher Pavilion, but when it came to the depth of knowledge in formations, there were definitely no other libraries that could compete with it.

Zhang Xuan began sweeping through the shelves with a swift glance of his eyes.

In less than an hour, he had already collected every single book in the room into his Library of Heaven’s Path.

“Compile!” Zhang Xuan willed, and the Library of Heaven’s Path jolted.

A book appeared before him.

With a tap on the book, the knowledge that was concealed within it immediately flowed into his consciousness.

“Time to start studying!”

Zhang Xuan quickly scanned the area for a quiet spot before sitting down and fully immersing himself in his study.

It was a steep learning curve from grade-7 formations to grade-8 formations, especially when it came to Teleportation

Formations. The enhanced complexity was already a tough nut to crack, but more than that, one would have to possess a firm grasp over spatial laws in order to set them up. Without that, it would be impossible to set it up even if one were to comprehend the full complexity of the grade-8 formation.

Four hours later, Zhang Xuan stood up while rubbing his glabella.

“It’s really getting more and more difficult! In the past, I would take two hours or so to finish browsing through any of the Heaven’s Path books, but this time, I actually took two times of that...” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

The fact that he took four hours to finish studying the 8-star Heaven’s Path Formation Art fully reflected how difficult it was... If not for his excellent state of mind, it was questionable whether he could have lasted that long.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan decided not to think too much into it. He quickly ran through the knowledge he had just assimilated, and he couldn’t help but be astonished by how profound the art was.

As expected of the 8-star Heaven’s Path Formation Art! The knowledge contained within really brought his understanding of formations to a far higher level, opening a new world before him. In terms of depth of knowledge regarding formations, he was already comparable to an 8-star pinnacle formation master.

However, due to his cultivation still only being at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, it would still be difficult for him to set up some of the more advanced grade-8 formations.

The four hours of studying had left him feeling deeply fatigued.

The more advanced a formation was, the more complex it would be. This would mean that one would have to make far greater calculations, thus creating a greater burden on one’s mind as well. Had Zhang Xuan not possessed decent talent in formations, it would probably have been impossible for him to

finish learning the 8-star Heaven's Path Formation Art that quickly.

"I should be able to set up Chen Leyao's supporting formation easily now!" Even though Zhang Xuan was exhausted, there was still an excited glint in his eyes.

He rested on the spot for a while, and after feeling that his fatigue had vanished and his mind was refreshed, he walked out of the library and headed back to his own accommodation.

Not too long later, he was already standing right before his residence. But instead of entering it, he headed for Chen Leyao's residence and knocked on the door instead.

"Enter!" Chen Leyao's crisp voice sounded from within.

Pushing open the door and entering, he saw the young lady standing quietly at the center of the room, her body pulled into a rather peculiar position. This position accentuated her curvaceous features, fully displaying her physical charms.

Her acupoints were all opened, and she was drawing in the surrounding spiritual energy into her body swiftly.

With just a look, Zhang Xuan could tell that it was one of the alterations he had made to the Yin Formula back then. As bizarre as the body posture may seem, it enhanced the rate at which one could absorb spiritual energy at, and on top of that, it also resolved the damage which the Yin-Yang Lake would deal to one's body.

If one were to constantly cultivate using this method, it would accentuate one's figure too.

Judging from how standard Chen Leyao's posture was, it could be seen that she often used this method to cultivate.

"Zhang shi, you have found a way to set up the supporting formation quickly?" Chen Leyao slowly halted her cultivation and returned back to a normal standing position before turning to look at Zhang Xuan with a faint smile.

Perhaps too used to maintaining a cold demeanor, she was unable to fully shake off her coldness even when she smiled. However, that only seemed to add another layer to her charm,

creating a feeling somewhat reminiscent of the cold moon smiling slightly down upon one.

It must be said that Chen Leyao was indeed an incredible beauty, on par with even Hu Yaoyao and the others.

Otherwise, Zhang Qian wouldn't have specially come over to please her either.

"Un. Where do you think would be convenient to set up the supporting formation?" Zhang Xuan replied.

To him, it mattered not whether Chen Leyao was beautiful or not. What was most important was that he would be able to get in touch with Zhao Ya very soon!

"That room would do." Chen Leyao said.

The accommodation which the Sanctum of Sages allocated to the students of the Elite Division was rather spacious, containing several rooms. They could be used as places to cultivate or welcoming one's guests.

The room which Chen Leyao was pointing to was a room that was neighboring her courtyard.

"Alright." Zhang Xuan quickly entered the room and scanned the area with his Eye of Insight. A moment later, he turned to Chen Leyao and asked, "Do you have grade-8 formation flags with you?"

"Here you go!" With a snap of her finger, Chen Leyao passed several hundred formation flags over.

"Go!" Zhang Xuan bellowed deeply, and the formation flags immediately rose to the sky.

They simultaneously shot forth to a different direction in the room, and it took only the blink of an eye for all of them to be in place.

After which, Zhang Xuan confirmed his position once more before stomping his feet.

Weng!

The formation was immediately driven into action.

After confirming that there was no problem with the formation, Zhang Xuan turned to Chen Leyao and asked in agitation, “Where’s the Jade Communication Token?”

Chen Leyao flicked her wrist, and a jade token fell lightly onto the very center of the room.

The fact that she was able to set up the supporting formation too, even though it would take several months, meant that her comprehension of formations had also reached 8-star as well. Naturally, she was able to easily discern where the core of the formation was, as well as where she should place the Communication Jade Token to best amplify its transmission signals.

Weng!

As soon as the jade token fell onto the core of the formation, the formation shook for a bit. A warm glow rippled through it, as if trying to establish communication with someone far away.

Knowing that the young man was eager to meet his student, Chen Leyao didn’t waste any time on words. She walked up to the Communication Jade Token, and with a few strokes, she sent a message over.

Weng!

Not too long later, a slight buzzing sound echoed, and the formation shook once more. Following which, a round portal similar to a mirror appeared before his eyes.

As the mist slowly cleared, a face so beautiful that it could even freeze one’s heart gradually came into appearance.

Zhao Ya!

Half a year of absence, the young lady in Zhang Xuan’s memories had grown much more mature. She naturally commanded a disposition of elegant, and her facial features had gotten far more ravishing as well, as if they had been painstakingly carved into perfection. With just one look, one would find oneself unwittingly holding one’s breath.

She was simply too beautiful!

Every single aspect of her seemed to be the embodiment of beauty itself, making it impossible to pick out a single flaw in it.

Even when compared to the undisguised Luo Ruoxin, her looks still didn't pale in comparison at all.

“Zhang shi, feel free to speak of anything to our young court chief. I'll be taking my leave first.” Knowing that the reunited teacher and student would have much to say to one another, Chen Leyao backed out of the room and took her leave.

“Teacher, is that really you? Are you at the Sanctum of Sages?” Shortly after Chen Leyao left, the young lady in the mirror couldn't hold herself back anymore. She asked with a quivering voice, and her reddened eyes reflected the myriad of emotions running through her mind.

On the other hand, through the changes Zhao Ya had undergone, Zhang Xuan could tell that the Glacier Plain Court hadn't been mistreating her, and there was a hint of relief in his eyes.

There were countless words that he had thought that he would ask when they finally met, but in this moment of reunion, he found himself at a loss for words.

All of those feelings and anticipation that overflowed in this moment of reunion left his mind completely blank. He couldn't find the right words to convey what he wanted to say in this moment.

Looking at the young lady who had once walked behind his back, calling him 'teacher' again and again, Zhang Xuan's hesitant and worried voice finally sounded.

“Zhao Ya, how... have you been?”

1315 Corridor of Puppets

In the courtyard, Zhang Xuan instructed, “Sun Qiang, find out if there are any pills, spirit essence, or spirit stones that are more effective than concentrated high-tier spirit stones. I wish to buy some.”

After the chat with Zhao Ya, he had returned to his residence.

As his butler, Sun Qiang had moved into the Sanctum of Sages to stay together with him. Fortunately, his residence was rather spacious, so even with the both of them staying together, it did not feel cramped at all.

“Yes!” Sun Qiang nodded before backing out of the residence.

Most of those in the Elite Division were important figures from powerful organizations, and to them, what was most important at the moment was to raise their cultivation as much as possible. As such, they were assigned personal attendants to take care of miscellaneous affairs, just like how Zhang Yu was assigned to Zhang Qian.

As Zhang Xuan’s butler, as long as he was registered with the Sanctum of Sages, he would receive an emblem that allowed him free access in and out of the Sanctum of Sages without coming under the attack of the defensive formation.

Watching at Sun Qiang’s departing back, Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed deeply. I really need to cultivate faster now...

When he chatted with Zhao Ya the day before, he had found that although it had only been half a year since they last met, the latter’s cultivation had already reached Saint 7-dan!

That was many times stronger than him.

It was one thing for him to be sent flying by his future brother-in-law, but to be weaker than his students on top of that... With his current strength, how could he win Luo Ruoxin’s hand in marriage?

All along, he had thought that his talent was still okay, and the rate that he cultivated at was not too bad either... but at that moment, he had realized that he was nothing at all!

Those around him were simply too monstrous!

For this reason, as soon as he returned, he instructed Sun Qiang to find items that were rich in spiritual energy so that he could cultivate.

Currently, this was also what he was lacking the most.

After Sun Qiang left, Zhang Xuan stroked his lower jaw and thought contemplatively.

There are two ways for me to swiftly raise my fighting prowess!

Firstly, I can find Leaving Aperture realm and Grand Dominion realm cultivation technique manuals and compile the corresponding Heaven's Path Divine Arts and cultivate them swiftly.

Secondly, I can find soul cultivation technique manuals and compile the corresponding Heaven's Path Soul Art to strengthen my Primordial Spirit. Either of these two should bring about a significant growth in my strength.

Of course, if I have time, it would be best for me to find optic art manuals so as to complete the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld. If I can't cultivate the technique, I won't be able to become the head of the Sanctum of Sages!

There were two ways he could quickly raise his cultivation at the moment—zhenqi and Primordial Spirit. Currently, he had only compiled a portion of the Leaving Aperture realm Heaven's Path Divine Art, and as for Grand Dominion realm cultivation technique manuals, he had not seen a single one of them yet. He would have to make haste on that.

So, Zhang Xuan took out his identity token and took a look at it for a moment before nodding slightly.

In order gain access to the cultivation technique manuals of the Sanctum of Sages, I have to prove my fighting prowess first by clearing the Corridor of Puppets! The longer I can last

in there, the more formidable the cultivation technique manual I will be able to access.

The rules of the Sanctum of Sages were vastly different from those of the Master Teacher Pavilions and Master Teacher Academies that Zhang Xuan had been to.

If anyone wanted to browse the sanctum's cultivation technique manuals or secret manuals, they would first have to prove that their fighting prowess had reached a level worthy of doing so.

The stronger their fighting prowess, the more profound the secret manuals they would be able to access. In a sense, this was aligned with Kong shi's philosophy of 'personalized guidance'.

If top-notch cultivation techniques were given to those who were incapable of cultivating them, it would only harm the person in question.

To use an analogy from Zhang Xuan's previous life, this was like giving a racing car to an amateur driver. That would not be goodwill but murder.

For this reason, the Corridor of Puppets served to evaluate the fighting prowess of those challenging it so as to determine the cultivation technique that the individual was suited for. This way, they would be able to better bring out their strength.

The Corridor of Puppets is divided into ten levels, namely Jia, Yi, Bing, Ding, Wu, Ji, Geng, Xin, Ren, and Gui, and each of these levels corresponds to a couple of cultivation technique manuals. Due to the many different levels in the trial, they are able to segregate the types of cultivation techniques totally. However, what I require is quantity, not quality!

Zhang Xuan frowned in distress.

To him, it mattered not whether the cultivation technique he practiced was profound or simplistic.

This was also the reason he had not been too happy when he obtained the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld and the Heavenly Art of Dimensional Unravel, perhaps showing disdain for them even. It was not because he was intentionally

acting aloof to humblebrag but because no matter how profound a technique was, it was bound to have its flaws.

Practicing a flawed technique made him feel as if a fish bone was stuck at the back of his throat. If he had a choice, he would rather collect a thousand ordinary books and compile a Heaven's Path technique instead!

As such, the Sanctum of Sages' method of segregating the cultivation technique manuals into various tiers worked to his disadvantage.

In the past, when the manuals were placed alongside one another, he could collect all of them with just a sweep of his eyes. However, now that they were divided across different levels, compiling them together would not be that easy anymore.

After a moment of dilemma, Zhang Xuan was still unable to come up with an alternative, so he could only shake his head in defeat. Forget it, there's no point thinking so much about it at this point. I should just head over to take a look instead.

Pushing open the door, he left his residence.

The Corridor of Puppets could be considered as a type of trial, so it was located at the Hall of Solidarity.

Through asking those walking along the streets for directions, it did not take long for him to arrive before a gate with a massive '义 (Solidarity)' character inscribed on it. Just like the '智 (Erudition)' character that he had seen earlier, there was a deep conception behind it as well, but the sensation that it evoked was completely different.

The '智 (Erudition)' character induced sparks within one's mind, cultivating one's wisdom with a prolonged period of examination, granting one greater clarity of thought.

On the other hand, the '义 (Solidarity)' character seemed to encourage magnanimity, expanding one's narrow state of mind. All of the petty frustrations and worries that plagued one's mind in the past would vanish without a trace, and

feelings of friendship and brotherhood would wrap around one's heart, lingering for a very long time.

The calligraphy looked simple on the surface, but it carried an imposing and forthright aura, reminiscent of a soldier charging valiantly across the battlefield.

“Where my solidarity lies, I shall persist even if the entire world opposes my will,” Zhang Xuan muttered in a daze.

The conception behind the ‘义 (Solidarity)’ character served to promote the unity of mankind, encouraging individuals to let go of all internal grudges and unhappiness to unite against external foes.

Without a doubt, this character had been left behind by Kong shi as well.

Otherwise, there was no way it could have placed Zhang Xuan in a daze.

Vicious' voice suddenly sounded at this moment, and vaguely, Zhang Xuan could hear him gulping. “Master. If I could just eat this calligraphy, my cultivation will definitely rise by leaps and bounds...”

“Go and play by the side!”

Ignoring that fellow who was thinking about eating every single day, Zhang Xuan began making his way into the Hall of Solidarity.

The Corridor of Puppets was located at a corner in the Hall of Solidarity. Zhang Xuan swiftly found the trial that corresponded to the Leaving Aperture realm before heading in.

The area inside was not as quiet as the Formation Master Guild branch where he had his examination previously, but there were still not many people inside.

According to the details on the jade token, it seems like multiple people can enter the Corridor of Puppets simultaneously. Most likely, they are all here to challenge the trial together, Zhang Xuan noted as he walked up to the reception.

“I would like to challenge the Corridor of Puppets for Leaving Aperture realm cultivation technique manuals. May I know how I go about doing it?”

Even though his identity token did contain some details concerning the Corridor of Puppets, the information provided was very brief.

The receptionist was a young lady in her early twenties, and she had a particularly refreshing appearance.

Upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s question, she raised her head and explained with a smile, “You need to first pay one hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones as a registration fee, and of the ten corridors here, you choose any of them to challenge. However, just a word of advice in advance, do not try to be too ambitious. The Corridor of Puppets is not easy, and arrogance may lead to you being severely wounded.”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Depending on the corridor one entered, there would be a significant difference in the strength of the puppets as well.

Zhang Xuan passed one hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones over, and after a moment of hesitation, he said, “I choose...”

However, before he could finish his words, a voice suddenly sounded from not too far away. “I’m going to challenge the Bing Corridor. I’ll be counting on you, Qing Yu.”

The voice had a clear ring to it—a little reminiscent of the jingling of bells—and it felt very soothing to the ears. Zhang Xuan turned his head over to look, and he saw a young lady dressed in purple standing not too far away. She seemed to be in her twenties, and there was a slightly cold and aloof air around her.

Putting aside her refined disposition, the young lady also possessed an exceptional physical appearance. In terms of beauty, she could be said to be on par with Chen Leyao.

“Senior Shui, you are here again. You really are diligent!” The eyes of the receptionist, who had been addressed as Qing Yu

by the young lady, lit up, and with a chuckle, she passed a card over. “Here is your challenge token!”

“Un.” Senior Shui took the card with a nod before she turned around and left.

After Senior Shui’s departure, Qing Yu turned her gaze back to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Alright, which corridor do you wish to challenge?”

Zhang Xuan contemplated for a brief moment before replying.

“I... I think I’ll choose the Bing Corridor as well!”

Judging from the looks of it, the Jia Corridor was the most difficult one whereas the Gui Corridor was the easiest. Even though his cultivation was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage at the moment, in terms of fighting prowess, he could be said to be comparable to a Grand Dominion realm primary stage expert.

However, he did not have any gauge of how difficult the Corridor of Puppets would be yet. If it was too difficult, he would not be able to clear it; if it was too easy, the cultivation technique manuals he received would be riddled with far too many flaws. Since the young lady ahead of him had chosen the Bing Corridor, it would be good for him to tag along to get a rough gauge of how powerful the puppets would be.

“You want to challenge the Bing Corridor? Are you sure?”
Qing Yu frowned in astonishment.

“Yes, I’m certain.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “Why? Is there a problem with me challenging the Bing Corridor?”

“That isn’t what I mean.” The young lady shook her head before continuing. “Senior Shui is a genius who entered the Elite Division several years ago, and her cultivation has already long reached Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle. Even so, despite devoting an entire month to challenging the Bing Corridor, she still hasn’t cleared it. Given so, are you really certain that... you want to challenge the Bing Corridor? If I’m not mistaken, your cultivation should only be at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, right?”

“A Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator has challenged it for a month now but has still yet to succeed?” Zhang Xuan was shocked.

He thought that he would not have much trouble clearing the Corridor of Puppets, but after hearing what Qing Yu had said, he realized that he might have been underestimating the trial.

“Indeed. The Jia Corridor is the hardest corridor to clear in the Corridor of Puppets, and in the several dozen millenniums since the Sanctum of Sages was established, there has only been a small handful of people who have managed to clear it. There were slightly more people who had cleared the Yi Corridor, but even if one adds all of them up, the number definitely won’t exceed a hundred.

“Considering how difficult the first two corridors are, it should not be too difficult for you to image the difficulty of the Bing Corridor too. In some years, there are cases where not even a single student manages to clear the Bing Corridor. In fact, the last person who cleared the Bing Corridor was the little princess of the Luo Clan. As such, I really don’t recommend challenging it!” Qing Yu shook her head.

The difficulty of the Jia, Yi, and Bing Corridors had already reached a horrifying level. Putting aside a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator, even a pinnacle cultivator would find it hard to clear the challenge. For him to challenge it when it was his first time there...

Truly, the ignorant know no fear!

Zhang Xuan was startled for a moment before his eyes lit up in agitation. “You said that the little princess of the Luo Clan has challenged the Bing Corridor previously?”

“That’s right!” Oblivious to the changes in Zhang Xuan’s emotions, Qing Yu continued with her earnest persuasion. “My view is that, given your current strength, it would be best for you to challenge the Gui Corridor first. It’s the easiest one to clear. Even though you are only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, as long as you possess a decent knowledge of combat, you stand a good chance of clearing the trial. As for

the Bing Corridor, it would be best if you dropped that notion from your mind!”

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan said, “Thank you for your goodwill. However, I still wish to give the Bing Corridor a try. If it doesn’t work out, I’ll return here and give the other corridors a try.”

Since Ruoxin had cleared the Bing Corridor, he was determined to do the same as well.

“You’ll return here to give the other corridors a try?” Seeing that the other party was unwilling to listen to her advice, Qing Yu frowned. “Once the mechanism whirs into action and the puppets move, if you don’t have sufficient strength to stand your ground, you could end up suffering immense damage.”

Knowing that the other party was trying to persuade him out of goodwill, Zhang Xuan replied with a smile, “I understand, but I still wish to give it a try.” Those words refer to the Ten Heavenly Stems, which was historically used to record time. In modern day context, and here as well, it’s used more of for a numbering device. In this case, Jia would refer to the most difficult corridor, followed by Yi, Bing, Ding... all the way until Gui, which would be the easiest corridor. The Bing Corridor is the third most difficult corridor. The Gui Corridor is the 10th corridor, as well as the easiest one.

1316 Banzai

“Alright then. Don’t regret it when you get injured.” Qing Yu shook her head as she passed a challenge token over to Zhang Xuan. “If you really can’t hold on any longer, just crush the challenge token, and the puppets will stop their attack.”

“Thank you.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist before turning to head in the direction that Senior Shui had headed off in.

Watching as Zhang Xuan departed, Qing Yu harrumphed coldly. “He really is courting death!”

At this moment, another receptionist walked in, and upon seeing the displeased look on Qing Yu’s face, he asked with a smile, “What’s wrong?”

“A Leaving Aperture realm primary stage fellow just came by earlier, and he insisted on challenging the Bing Corridor. No matter how I tried to talk him out of the idea, he just wouldn’t budge!” Qing Yu replied indignantly, seemingly upset that her goodwill had fallen on deaf ears.

The lower jaw of the newly arrived receptionist fell to the ground from shock. “A Leaving Aperture realm primary stage fellow actually wanted to challenge the Bing Corridor? Is there something wrong with his head?”

As receptionists in the Hall of Solidarity, they were well aware of how difficult the Bing Corridor was. Countless Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle geniuses had attempted it, only to return with looks of disappointment on their faces. So, for a mere Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator to attempt to challenge it... that was clearly seeking death!

“I don’t know if there’s something wrong with his head or not, but I do know for sure that he’s quite a lustful fellow!” Qing Yu harrumphed in disdain.

Not understanding what the two matters had to do with one another, the newly arrived receptionist asked in incomprehension, “Lustful?”

“Just a moment ago, Senior Shui said that she wanted to challenge the Bing Corridor, and a second later, that fellow said that he wanted to head there, too. Given so, aren’t his intentions clear for all to see?” Qing Yu sneered with a clear hint of derision in her tone.

“This...” The newly arrived receptionist swiftly came to a realization. “The Corridor of Puppets in the Hall of Solidarity is centered around the idea of ‘solidarity’. Depending on the number of individuals who enter a certain Corridor of Puppets simultaneously, the number of puppets that appear will increase correspondingly. As such, participants will have to collaborate with one another and entrust themselves to the others before they will be able to achieve victory. For that fellow to enter right behind Senior Shui, it’s apparent that he wants to use this opportunity to forge intimate ties with Senior Shui... How shameless!”

One could challenge the Corridor of Puppets as an individual or as a group.

As an individual, it would be an assessment on one’s individual strength. As a group, it would be an assessment on the team’s ability to perform synergistically to fend off the puppets.

Considering how that fellow wanted to challenge the Bing Corridor despite his lacking strength, it was apparent that he wanted to team up with Senior Shui so as to strike up a connection with her.

After all, Senior Shui was blessed with a beautiful appearance, and she came from a good background. Even within the Sanctum of Sages, she could be considered a celebrity. There were countless students who wanted to get close with her, but that fellow was probably the first one who dared to be so bold about the matter.

It seemed like lust had really shrouded his rationality for him to act so impudently.

“Indeed. However, with strength like his, he will only be a nuisance to Senior Shui in the examination. This will only make him incur her ire!” Qing Yu smirked smugly.

Senior Shui had been visiting their Corridor of Puppets for more than a month now, and it was apparent that she intended to clear the trial alone. So, if that young man barged in at this moment and forced a collaboration with her, it would result in the foiling of her plans, and more importantly than that, he would be dragging her down.

It would already be a miracle if Senior Shui did not resent him for that, so how could she possibly generate goodwill toward him over such a matter?”

“You’re right. Let’s just wait and see. He’ll probably climb out in a half-death state later,” the newly arrived attendant said with a smile.

...

Unaware of the conversation between the two receptionists, Zhang Xuan followed behind Senior Shui, and not too long later, he found himself standing before a door.

Inscribed on the door was a ‘丙 (Bing)’ character.

Senior Shui took out the challenge token that she had been given and swiped it lightly in front of the door. With a deep rumbling sound, the stone door gradually opened.

Shortly after the stone door closed behind her, Zhang Xuan headed forward and copied what she had done, and he successfully entered the door as well.

The sight before him blurred for a moment, and before he knew it, he found himself standing in a vast room.

The room was circular in shape, reminiscent of a dueling ring. There were seals that could isolate auras and neutralize might installed all over the room so as to ensure that the walls would not be damaged.

“Who are you?”

Senior Shui had already positioned herself at the center of the room, and she had just prepared herself to face the puppets when she suddenly saw Zhang Xuan walk in. In an instant, her face darkened.

If two or more people entered prior to the start of the trial, the collaborative mode would be triggered instead. At least two puppets would appear, and the nature of the duel would become vastly different from before.

“I’m here to challenge the Corridor of Puppets, too. Isn’t there no limit to the number of people who can participate in the trial? You don’t need to care about me, just do whatever you have to do,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

In his identity token, it was only reflected that it was possible for multiple students to challenge the Corridor of Puppets simultaneously, but there was no clear explanation of the rules. As a result, he had no idea that the crux to a multi-challenger mode was teamwork. On the contrary, he even thought that it was an independent trial, where everyone would be taking the test one by one.

After all, it was rare for there to be any examination involving teamwork.

It worked in his favor that the other party had come in earlier. This would be a good opportunity for him to spectate the happenings in the trial, and through doing so, he would be able to roughly gauge the difficulty and make preparations in advance.

“Don’t hold me back, or else I’ll make you die a horrible death!” Senior Shui narrowed her eyes threateningly and harrumphed coldly.

“Hold you back? What do you mean by that?” Zhang Xuan was startled by the abrupt remark. He was just about to probe deeper when the gears of a mechanism in the room began whirring into the action.

Geji geji!

Following which, the door ahead of them opened, and a puppet walked out.

Dressed in black, the puppet looked no different from a real man. Upon seeing Senior Shui at the center of the room, it immediately dashed out.

Hong long!

At the same time, a formation in the surroundings activated.

This formation had an effect similar to a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator's Spatial Lock, turning the surrounding air exceptionally viscous, thus hindering one's movement and exertion of strength.

“Humph!”

Facing an abrupt assault from the puppet, Senior Shui had no time to say anything at all. Thus, with a swift step forward, she engaged the puppet.

It had to be said that Senior Shui did wield considerable strength. While her cultivation was at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, in terms of fighting prowess, she would not lose out to any Half-Grand Dominion realm cultivators.

The cultivation technique that she practices is of the water attribute, carrying a concept of ‘relentless’. Individually, her strikes don't wield much power, but when they are strung together, they turn into a raging flood that none will be able to withstand! Zhang Xuan noted.

In terms of absolute strength of their strikes, Senior Shui seemed to be severely lacking as compared to the puppets. However, what was fearsome about her was how she was able to build on the momentum of her previous move to enhance the might of her subsequent strikes, causing her to build up more and more power over the course of the battle, till the point where she was no longer stoppable.

A single droplet of water might seem insignificant, but with time, it could pierce through even a boulder.

Such was the type of strength that Senior Shui wielded. Despite her seemingly gentle movements, the rampaging blows from the puppets were still unable to breach her defenses, reminiscent of a steel hammer attempting to strike a flowing river.

No matter how powerful one struck, after the might subsided, everything would just revert to its original form.

After trading roughly a dozen blows, the young lady's eyebrows shot up as she bellowed furiously.

“You aren’t going to get the better of me!”

Then, she raised her palm and pressed it furiously on the puppet’s chest during an opening.

Peng!

With a burst of zhenqi, the puppet was forced back eight steps, leaving a series of footprints on the ground.

Roar!

However, despite the immense force behind her strike, the puppet still managed to swiftly regain its balance. On the contrary, it seemed to have grown even more enraged due to the attack, and it began moving at a faster speed than before.

Si la!

Sharp claws tore through the air with a frighteningly shrill gale as they rushed right for the young lady before them.

Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. Even though she’s able to maintain the might behind her attack, and her defense is excellent, her flaws are apparent. It’s a pity that she takes too long to charge up sufficient power, thus making it difficult for her to strike during opportune moments.

It was true that the young lady could become an extremely fearsome adversary once she built up sufficient might, but the problem was that everything would begin anew once her chain offense was broken.

Furthermore, there were times where the puppet had shown openings in the midst of the battle, but because her strength had yet to build up sufficiently, she had been unable to capitalize on those opportunities to deal a decisive blow to her opponent.

For example, with the previous move, if it had been Zhang Xuan in her place, he would have blasted the puppet’s head open with a single punch. However, the young lady had only managed to push it back several steps, failing to deal critical damage.

It really is a huge pity! Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed.

While he was shaking his head and sighing, Senior Shui was on the verge of going insane. Watching the overwhelming might that the puppet was attacking her with, her face turned ghastly pale. She retreated hurriedly, forming an elegant trajectory in the air.

Tz la!

Even though her evasive maneuver was swift, it was still insufficient to outrun the nimble movements of the puppet's claw. With a resounding rip, a portion of her clothes were torn off, and a bloodied gorge appeared on her shoulder.

Boom!

Seeing that its strike had failed to strike Senior Shui's vitals, the puppet seemed to have gotten a little frustrated. Thus, right after seeing that its claws had missed its mark, it immediately switched its attack to a palm strike and pressed it firmly down on the young lady.

While there was no zhenqi devoted to the palm strike, the puppet wielded strength on par with Half-Grand Dominion realm experts. On top of that, the surrounding formation was making it difficult for the challenger to exert her strength.

As a result, when the palm fell, it felt as if the space within the room had completely frozen in place, making it impossible for anyone to escape.

Seeing that the palm strike was just about to land on her, Senior Shui gritted her teeth in resolution. It was probably a secret art of some kind, but her figure suddenly elongated into what looked like a long strand of noodle, allowing her to escape from the palm strike in the nick of time.

However, when she reverted to her original form, her face had turned visibly paler. It seemed like the secret art had taken a heavy toll on her.

As she panted heavily, she turned around to see what the young man, who had forced her independent battle into a team battle, was doing, only to see the latter with one arm crossed over his body and the other supporting his lower jaw, seemingly enjoying the spectacle before him.

“You...” Seeing this sight, Senior Shui nearly exploded on the spot.

Since it’s a team battle, you should at least make a move, right? To be standing without moving, as if a corpse, what the heck are you planning to do?

Just as Senior Shui was able to beckon Zhang Xuan to join in as well, another door in front abruptly opened with a resounding ‘jiya!’, and yet another puppet rushed out.

As the young man had not stepped onto the battlefield, the puppet rushed right for Senior Shui as soon as it appeared.

Just one puppet was already enough to corner her, and yet, in this moment, two of them were rushing at her simultaneously. In an instant, Senior Shui felt immense pressure heaping down on her, cloaking her face in sweat.

These puppets wield strength comparable to Zhang Qian...

Unaware of the young lady’s thoughts, Zhang Xuan continued assessing the situation before him.

It was no wonder others would say that the Bing Corridor was extremely difficult to clear. The strength of the puppets was indeed fearsome.

It was true that Zhang Qian was unable to even evade a single move from him prior to the entrance examination, but that still did not change the fact that he was a Half-Leaving Aperture realm cultivator. On top of that, he also wielded the unique bloodline ability of the Zhang Clan. With such prowess, there were few who would be a match for him, and the fact that he had nearly gotten into the Elite Division was proof of the fact.

Considering that Senior Shui was faced against such an opponent, it was truly impressive that she had been able to survive for that long against the puppet.

It’s a pity. It seems like she’s going to fail the trial! Zhang Xuan sighed.

Having watched the battle ever since its start, he already had a clear picture of the level of strength that Senior Shui wielded.

It would have been difficult for her to defeat a single puppet, let alone subduing the both of them simultaneously.

It was just a matter of time before she failed the trial.

It was no wonder she had been unable to clear the trial despite devoting an entire month to it. The trial was truly merciless.

Later on, when it's my turn, I'll knock out the two puppets simultaneously, not giving them an opportunity to work together at all. Zhang Xuan quickly ran through his decided course of action before nodding confidently.

The collaboration between the two puppets was incredible, such that even he could have had trouble dealing with them. Since that was the case, it would be better for him to take the initiative and knock them out as soon as the examination began.

At the very least, he should get rid of one of the puppets instantaneously first.

“Damn it...” With her face drenched in sweat, Senior Shui found herself swiftly approaching her limits.

She had thought that the young man would step in to help her, but he was still standing by the side, staring at the situation curiously as if he had nothing to do with it at all.

Overwhelmed with rage, Senior Shui puffed up her chest and roared, “Just how long do plan on staring at the situation for?”

“Ah?” Not expecting to be reprimanded over that, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before asking, “Then... what else am I supposed to do?”

“Y-you...”

So furious that she could explode, Senior Shui accidentally lost her balance in battle, resulting in her being struck by one of the puppets' palm strikes. The fiery pain in her shoulder left her feeling even more frenzied, and she furiously bellowed, “Aren't you going to make a move?”

What the heck is this! You were the one who barged in to trigger the multi-challenger mode, but in the end, you left me

to deal with the puppets by myself while you idle by the side...

Even if you are weak, surely the least you could do for the team is to disturb the puppets and hinder them from attacking me.

“Make a move?” Zhang Xuan had a conflicted look on his face. This was the young lady’s trial, so if he interfered in it, would he not be flouting the rules?

After some thought, an idea came to Zhang Xuan’s mind. He placed his fist horizontally against his body, and with earnestness and anticipation written all over his face, he yelled, “Senior Shui, you can do it! Senior Shui, you can do it! Banzai!” “The Bing Corridor is the third most difficult Corridor of Puppets to challenge.

1317 I Didn't Do It on Purpose

Upon hearing the shouting, Senior Shui looked as if she had seen a ghost. She turned her head over to look at the young man cheering fervently for her, and unable to withstand it any longer, she spurted a mouthful of blood.

The hell!

While other teams have reliable experts to watch their back, what is with this fool I was assigned?

You can do it? Banzai?

Banzai your head!

I am about to be killed over here, and I'm seeking for your help. Yet, why the heck are you cheering for me over there? Do I look like I need your cheering?

I want you to make a move! Make a move!

Senior Shui's body trembled uncontrollably from frenzy, and she felt as if she was on the verge of losing her mind.

If two challengers were to enter the Corridor of Puppets within a short interval of one another, the mechanism of the trial would immediately deem them as a team. This was common knowledge among those of the Sanctum of Sages, and even those who did not know would at least have enough sense to ask about it.

We are in a two-player challenge mode, so how can you stand idly by the side? How am I supposed to deal with so many puppets by myself!

Initially, Senior Shui thought that the fellow had entered the trial in order to claim her affection, but from the looks of it now, it seemed to be the complete opposite. The young man was not trying to claim her affection but her life!

Otherwise, why would he continue spectating by the side when the second puppet had already appeared?

Hu la!

On the verge of exploding, her first instinct was to lash out at the young man. Unfortunately, the puppet before her did not give her a chance to do so. The first puppet sent a fist flying toward her.

The deafening sonic booms around her made Senior Shui realize that if she got distracted at this point, she might very well lose her life. Cold sweat broke out all over her body as she activated her secret art once more. Her body immediately began to thread through the attacks of the puppets nimbly, reminiscent of a water snake. It was a close shave, but she managed to escape from the punch.

After escaping from the attack, her breathing visibly hastened further, and her face turned even paler.

Her secret art was actually the ability of her unique bloodline, and it drained her deeply each time she used it. She would have to rest for an extensive period before she could recover from her exertion. Over the past month, she had not used it once.

That day, she had made up her mind to go all out, especially since she had already gotten accustomed to the fighting pattern of the puppet, and she was planning to create a new record this time around.

But who would have thought that she would end up being dragged down by this atrocious young man? Being forced to face two puppets alone, she ended up using her secret art twice in a short interval. At this point, her body was already nearing its limit.

This won't do. If this goes on, I might very well lose my life. Do I really have to admit defeat? Senior Shui gritted her teeth in indignation.

It had already taken an entire month for her to grow accustomed to the fighting style of the puppet, and she was certain that she could have cleared the trial with relative ease

by tapping into the power of her unique bloodline. Yet, such a situation ended up happening instead.

Once her bloodline was activated, it would take at least a month of rest before she would be able to return to her peak condition. Too many things would have to be put back like that.

I can't give up! Senior Shui clenched her fists tightly in determination. I must find a way to throw one of the puppets to that fellow, and once I get rid of one of them, the rest will be easy!

While panting heavily, she made up her mind.

Competition in the Sanctum of Sages was extremely strife. She could not afford to lose a month over this, so she could only gamble.

While that fellow who was shouting 'do your best' by the side was unreliable, as long as she could get the puppet over to his side, as one of the teammates, he would come under attack as well. If she could fling off one of the puppets to him, she would be able to find a chance to turn the tables around!

Of course, she understood that the young man would be put in danger as a result of that, but there was nothing that could be done. Since he had chosen to challenge the Bing Corridor, he would have to shoulder some of the danger.

As long as that unreliable fellow can last a dozen breaths for me to destroy the first puppet, I should be able to come to his aid afterward. Senior Shui harrumphed. Humph, who told him to sabotage my attempt in the first place? He ought to suffer a little bit for his actions!

Without any hesitation, she jolted her body slightly, a little reminiscent of the strings of a zither being pulled on.

Hu!

As if a taut rubber band being released, her figure abruptly vanished from the spot. The next moment, she was already in Zhang Xuan's vicinity.

“Do your best...” Zhang Xuan was still in the midst of cheering when the young lady abruptly appeared in front of him, and he froze in astonishment.

“I’ll be leaving one of them to you!”

Looking at the startled look on the young man’s face, even though Senior Shui felt a little infuriated on the inside, she still felt obliged to warn him.

“You will be leaving one of them to me?”

While Zhang Xuan was confused by the situation, two puppets had already rushed up to him. The immense might that they wielded caused an overwhelming pressure to weigh down upon him.

Kacha!

One of the puppets smashed a fist right toward Zhang Xuan’s face.

Isn’t this... against the rules? Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

He was there just to watch the commotion and learn from his senior. If he intervened in the duel, wouldn’t her results be invalidated?

Would he be disqualified from the trial as a result of that as well?

However, considering the furious assault that one of the puppets was launching against him, this was not the time for him to be thinking about such stuff. He dodged the puppet’s attack nimbly with a side step, and at the same time, he shot a glance at the young lady not too far away.

She was currently dealing with the other puppet. A spurt of fresh blood escaped her mouth, and an immense power was swiftly engulfing her body, bringing her fighting prowess up to great heights in an instant.

Is there a need to go this far to challenge a trial? Zhang Xuan could tell that she was using a secret art more potent than the one before, and he could not help but shake his head.

Secret arts had the ability to enhance one's fighting prowess greatly in the short term, but they had their downfalls as well.

For one, they were extremely damaging to one's body. While secret arts allowed a cultivator to exceed their limits temporarily, this overexertion would result in an unbearable toll on their spirit, zhenqi, and physical body, thus placing them in a long down period. In fact, there were some that would sap one's life force, causing one's lifespan to be shortened.

It was for this reason that Zhang Xuan never used secret arts.

Well, another reason was that he did not know any of those secret arts.

The young lady was already spurting blood, and yet, she was still insistently using her secret arts. She was really putting her life on the line!

Zhang Xuan sighed deeply, but before he could delve deeper into his feeling of lamentation, the puppet before him was already charging toward him with a body slam.

"Wait a moment, you are supposed to be assessing her. Aren't you attacking the wrong target over here?" Zhang Xuan exclaimed as he halted the charging puppet back by placing a finger of his on the latter's head.

Just who the heck designed the Corridor of Puppets? Shouldn't the puppets at least have the basic ability to discern who the challenger is?

I am only here to watch how the trial works! It isn't my turn yet, so why are you flinging your fists and howling at me?

Roar! Roar!

Being blocked out by a single finger further enraged the puppet. An aura of ferocity emanated from it as it drove its strength to its very limits, rotating its arm so swiftly that it almost appeared like a wheel.

However, with its head being kept at bay by Zhang Xuan's finger, no matter how fast its hands rotated, it was unable to hurt Zhang Xuan.

Instead, it felt like an electric fan, bringing a cooling breeze to him.

Since I didn't harm the puppet at all, this can't be considered as an infringement of the rules, right? Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

As he did not really interfere with the trial of another—his actions could only be considered as legitimate self-defense, and he did not destroy anything—his right to challenge the trial should not be revoked. After all the trouble he had gone through to come here, it would really be a huge annoyance if that was the case.

After keeping the puppet before him under control, he turned his sight back to the battling young lady and puppet.

After executing her secret art, while Senior Shui's complexion appeared to have considerably worsened, her fighting prowess did soar by leaps and bounds—she was nearly twice as strong as before.

Peng peng peng peng!

Previously, she had been forced to evade the puppet's attacks and find an opening to strike, but with her enhanced strength, she was already able to go head-to-head with the puppet. Under their furious clash, even the formation around the Corridor of Puppets seemed to shake unstably.

Her secret art is powerful, but... as a practitioner of water attribute cultivation techniques, she's abandoning her own strengths by going head on with the enemy. Zhang Xuan frowned.

With his current comprehension of combat, even without using the Library of Heaven's Path and Eye of Insight, he could still be considered a grandmaster. Those who cultivated water attribute cultivation techniques were capable of encompassing everything, and yet, the young lady actually chose to go head-to-head with her opponent.

She was clearly abandoning her very own roots.

It's true that this is the most efficient way for her to defeat the puppet given the current circumstances, but she will suffer

tremendous damage as well. In fact, even her state of mind might waver.

Cultivators pursuing their own paths had to have absolute confidence in their cultivation techniques. Considering that the young lady practiced arts of the flexible water, it would be in contradiction to her own beliefs to engage in rigid and forceful offense. This would be a reflection that she had started doubting her path, and just like how the mind could influence the body, the body could also influence the mind.

Even if she managed to eventually defeat the puppet, this seed of doubt planted in her mind could have massive repercussions in the future.

Since I have already seen it, it wouldn't do for me to just watch idly by the side...

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan still chose to speak up.

"That... Senior Shui, you won't last long like this!"

"I won't last long like this?" Senior Shui was in the midst of battling against the puppet when she heard those words and jolted for an instant.

She had thought that by dumping a puppet with him, the young man would surely be chased all around the room like a rat running across the street. Yet, why was his voice still so clear, devoid of the slightest hint of exertion? He even had the leisure to say that she could not last long. She was a lady, so who said that she could not last long?

The one who is unable to last long enough should be you!

Senior Shui harrumphed coldly as she shot a glance in the direction where the voice originated from.

The next moment, her body froze.

The puppet that had left her in such a tough spot was currently throwing its arms forward like a shrew, and it was running forward so forcefully that a huge depression had been left on the ground. Yet, due to a finger placed on its forehead, it was simply unable to advance a single step forward.

What the heck is going on?

Wasn't the puppet extremely ferocious and powerful when it was fighting against me?

Why does it seem like it is acting coquettishly at this moment instead?

Could it be that this unkempt Leaving Aperture realm primary stage fellow is actually a hidden expert?

Hula!

Even though Senior Shui was shocked beyond words, the puppet she was facing could not possibly give her any time to take a breather. It immediately launched its second wave of attacks.

Left with no time for thought, she could only put aside the matter and hurriedly raise her guard.

However, due to her guard being put up in a rush, she was eventually overpowered and was forced several steps back. A suffocating sensation devoured her chest, and she felt her blood running erratically in her body, causing her body to ache greatly.

Suppressing the urge to vomit blood, Senior Shui asked with gritted teeth, "What do you mean by I can't last long like this?"

"It won't do for you to go head on against the puppet. Given your strength, there's no need for you to do this to defeat it," Zhang Xuan explained.

Hu la!

An abrupt gale of wind blasted toward Senior Shui's face. Astonished, she hurriedly backed away, but the shockwave from the puppet's punch still resulted in a red streak forming across her face, dealing her a searing pain.

With a few swift maneuvers, she quickly created some distance between her and the puppet before asking anxiously, "Then how else should I face the puppets?"

“This... Will it be against the rules if I offer you guidance?”
Zhang Xuan asked hesitantly.

“Of course not!” Senior Shui’s body staggered upon hearing those words.

We are in a two-player challenge mode! How in the world would you offering guidance to me be against the rules?

“That’s a relief...” With a quick sigh, Zhang Xuan was just about to impart some wisdom to Senior Shui when the puppet before him suddenly went on a rampage.

Roar!

It had struggled free from the might of his finger and charged forward.

“What are you roaring for? Can’t you see that I’m busy?”

Displeased, Zhang Xuan sent a casual slap toward the puppet.

Pah!

The puppet’s head rotated twice on its neck before being sent flying.

Putong!

It collapsed on the ground convulsing, clearly losing all fighting prowess.

“This...” Not expecting that a casual punch from him would cause that fellow’s head to be sent flying, Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched in frenzy. “Did I accidentally use too much strength? But I didn’t do it on purpose...”

1318 Continue with the Trials

He honestly did not do it on purpose.

The puppet was simply moving too fast, so he subconsciously dealt it a slap. Who was to know that it was so fragile, such that its head would be blown right off?

Senior Shui was dumbstruck as well.

While the puppet had her tortured to the point where she nearly wanted to die—she had used everything at her disposal but was still unable to defeat it—that fellow had managed to knock off the puppet’s head with just a casual slap. Did it really have to be that exaggerated?

He’s actually that powerful? Senior Shui’s body trembled out of sheer astonishment.

No matter how slow-witted she might have been, it was apparent that the young man before her was an extremely powerful expert!

With just a finger, he was able to keep the puppet at bay, and with a palm, he was able to slap away the puppet’s head. His fighting prowess was countless times more powerful than hers!

“I really didn’t do it on purpose. Why don’t we do this instead? As long as you don’t revoke my right to challenge the trial, I’ll help you fit back your head, and you can continue on your attack.”

With how things had played out, he could not be bothered with offering guidance to Senior Shui anymore. He quickly squatted down and placed the puppet’s head back onto its neck.

He had only entered the Corridor of Puppets to gain some insight into how the trial worked. It would truly be a tragedy if

he was disqualified just because he accidentally interfered in another challenger's trial!

"You..." Just as she finally found a slight bit of respect for the young man, the latter's subsequent actions caused her rage to surpass previous levels.

There are plenty of challengers who accidentally destroy the puppets in the midst of the trial. Do you really need to be so apologetic?

Besides, it's useless for you to install the puppet's head right back on!

While puppets, unlike humans, would not die just because their heads had been lopped off, their internal structure was still an intricate system of gears and so on. Only professional celestial designers would be able to fix them.

What in the world do you hope to achieve by pressing the head back on?

Just as Senior Shui was just about to lecture the young man on the matter, the puppet she was facing suddenly charged at her once more, leaving her with no choice but to turn her attention back to the battle.

After trading a few blows, she finally managed to knock back the puppet and gain a temporary moment of respite.

She immediately turned her gaze toward the young man and saw the latter helping the puppet up. In this moment, the puppet's head had already been placed back onto its neck.

"I'm done..." Zhang Xuan patted his hands together as he nodded in satisfaction. "Not only did I help you repair your damage, I also fixed some of your flaws as well. With this, you should be able to exert your full strength once more!"

"Roar?" The puppet glanced at Zhang Xuan with a look of incomprehension.

"Don't worry. I didn't mean to interrupt in your battle earlier. Feel free to continue what you were doing—I won't intervene." Zhang Xuan waved his hand.

“Ah?” The puppet scratched its head as it slowly extended its fist toward Zhang Xuan.

Just as it was about to hit Zhang Xuan, it suddenly recalled how the latter had managed to lop off its head with a single slap, and it hurriedly retracted its hand and leaped backward fearfully.

It looked at Zhang Xuan with a slightly tilted head, as if asking, Are you really not going to intervene?

“I won’t, don’t worry!” Zhang Xuan replied with an affirmative nod.

“Roar!”

With an excited war cry, the puppet turned around and dashed for the young lady in the room.

“I...” Senior Shui’s goosebumps immediately rose from her arms, and she nearly fainted on the spot.

Brother, did you really come here to sabotage me?

Do you know that we are a team? By smacking off the head of one of the puppets, we were already halfway there to victory, so why in the world are you fixing the puppet’s head?

Is the issue perhaps in your head?

It’s already difficult for me to cope with one of them, but you want me to face two of them simultaneously?

Will you only be glad after killing me?

Initially, Senior Shui had thought that the other party had come here to catch her attention and win her fancy, but from the looks of it now... To be honest, she would rather it have been the former! At the very least, she would not lose her life.

Just as she was about to curse Zhang Xuan, the other puppet arrived before her.

Its punch was way faster and more powerful than the puppet she was facing. Even before it came close to Senior Shui, she already felt as if her body had been suppressed by a Dominion, preventing her from moving at all.

What's going on? Senior Shui narrowed her eyes in bewilderment.

She had fought with the puppet of the Bing Corridor for a month now, and even if the puppet was more powerful than her, the disparity between the both of them should not have been too great. When did the puppet become so strong?

However, this was not the time for thought. She quickly raised her fists to defend against the latter's attack.

Pah!

As soon as her palm came into contact with the other party's fist, a crushing pressure pushed at her chest, leaving her feeling as if something heavy had crashed into her.

The next moment, her entire body shot backward.

Pu!

Even while she was in midair, fresh blood spurted from her mouth.

She crashed heavily into the wall behind her, creating a '大'-shaped imprint behind her.

"You..." While hanging on the wall, Senior Shui's body convulsed non-stop.

The world seemed incomparably dark to her.

Previously, the strength of the puppet had been acceptable to her. If she were to use her full might, she would have been able to achieve victory. But why was it that, after its head had been lopped off and it had been modified slightly by the young man, it grew so powerful?

How were they supposed to fight like that?

Forget it, it might be better for me to just admit defeat...

It really felt like she had used up her entire lifetime's worth of frustration on this trial.

Just as she was about to crush her challenge token to halt the trial, she suddenly recalled that it was a collaboration. If one of them were to admit defeat, it would be deemed as a loss for

the entire team. So, with gritted teeth, she turned to the young man standing not too far away.

“I can’t defeat the puppets, so I’m going to admit defeat now. As this is a team battle, you will be deemed to have lost as well.”

“Team battle?” Zhang Xuan was startled by those words. “What do you mean by that?”

“You really don’t know?” Senior Shui harrumphed coldly. “As you entered the Bing Corridor right after me, the mechanism automatically registers both of us as a team. As long as one of us admits defeat, it’ll be considered a loss for the entire team.”

“We are actually a team? And if you admit defeat, I will lose as well?” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in shock.

All along, he had thought that the trial would be an individual assessment, especially since this was how most examinations worked in the Master Teacher Pavilion. Yet, after the whole farce that they had been through, it turned out to be a team battle?

There was actually such a system in the Sanctum of Sages?

“Of course! What else did you think would happen?” Senior Shui snapped impatiently.

In the end, it turned out that the young man really did not know anything at all. That explained everything. Nevertheless, even knowing that he did not do it intentionally could not quell the rage and frenzy she was feeling at that very moment.

“Wait a moment, don’t admit defeat!” Zhang Xuan exclaimed in shock.

If she admitted defeat, his trial would finish before he could do anything at all!

He had not even collected the cultivation technique manuals in the corridor yet, so how could he admit defeat?

“I apologize for doing nothing earlier; I honestly did not know that it was a team battle. Give me a moment. I’ll get rid of those puppets right now.”

After understanding what was going on, how could Zhang Xuan still dilly-dally? He turned to the two puppets on the field and declared, “Your opponent is me! Come at me together!”

“Roar?” The puppet whose head had been sent flying by Zhang Xuan earlier took a step back as it shook its head fervently, indicating its complete refusal toward the notion of fighting against Zhang Xuan.

Didn’t you say that you wouldn’t intervene in the battle earlier? Why are you looking at me with that cold glint in your eyes?

“You aren’t coming? I guess I’ll have to go over there myself then!” With a cold harrumph, Zhang Xuan took a step forward and entered the battlefield.

Roar!

Facing Zhang Xuan’s provocations, the other puppet could not hold itself back anymore and charged at him.

However, before it could get far, it immediately felt something grabbing at its arm, holding it back.

Turning around, it saw its puppet comrade shaking its head desperately, seemingly pleading for it not to go.

“Roar, roar?” The other puppet was completely bewildered by the actions of its comrade. It tried to shake off the grip of its comrade to challenge Zhang Xuan to a fight.

“Roar ah roar!” Seeing that the other puppet refused to back down, the puppet comrade decisively sent a slap over to its face.

Not expecting its comrade to make a move on it, the other puppet blacked out before it could even process what was going on.

Putong!

Unconscious, it collapsed flimsily to the ground.

After which, the puppet carefully turned its gaze to Zhang Xuan and bowed slightly. “Heh heh roar!”

Then, it struck its head with its own palm.

Padah!

It collapsed to the ground as well.

“That’s more like it!” Seeing how obedient the puppet he had modified was, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction. He turned his gaze to Senior Shui and asked, “This should be considered a clear for the trial, right?”

“...” Senior Shui.

It took quite some time before she managed to recover from her daze. She looked at the young man in front of her with a look that was even more shocked than she would have been if she had seen a ghost instead.

To make the puppets fight among themselves and even knock itself out...

Just how in the world did he manage to do that?

“We really... cleared the trial?” After consuming a pill and recovering slightly from her injuries, Senior Shui struggled out from the wall while panting heavily.

To be honest, she could still hardly believe what was going on.

It was already extremely difficult to clear a trial by oneself, and the difficulty of a team battle was many times greater than an individual battle. To succeed under such circumstances... she could not help but feel as if she was dreaming.

But again, it was no wonder she would feel like that. Even after a month of hard work, she still had not succeeded in clearing the Bing Corridor. It was a little hard for her to believe that she had really cleared the trial just like that.

Zhang Xuan was not too sure about the rules, and he took a glance at the two unconscious puppets on the ground before remarking, “Since we have defeated the puppets, it should be considered a clear for us.”

The modified puppet seemed to have noticed Zhang Xuan’s gaze on it, and its body trembled slightly. It hurriedly shut its eyes tighter.

“Un...” Senior Shui nodded. There were many questions that she would have liked to ask, but in her moment of shock, she had no idea how she should construct her words.

In this moment, the sound of whirring mechanisms sounded, and a door slowly opened.

“Let’s head in to take a look.”

Walking into the door, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in excitement.

Inside was a bookshelf with several books stacked on it.

This was probably the prize for clearing the Bing Corridor.

“Un.” Senior Shui’s motive for challenging the Bing Corridor was to obtain these cultivation technique manuals, so she hurriedly walked up to the bookshelf in agitation.

There were only ten books or so, but they were all extremely profound cultivation techniques, far stronger than those he had seen in the black market.

Grandiflora Cultivation Technique, Jadetree Sky Piercing Formula, Art of Golden Flames...

With a swift sweep, Zhang Xuan collected them into the Library of Heaven’s Path, and after compiling them together with the other books, he could not help but shake his head in disappointment.

He had thought that he would be able to compile a complete Leaving Aperture realm Heaven’s Path Divine Art like this, but it seemed like quantity was indeed far more important than quality when it came to compilation.

“Jeez!” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply, thinking that the compensation was not worth the effort at all.

To spend a hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones just to see ten or so books, that really was not worth the price for him.

At this moment, a female’s voice sounded. “Alright, I’ve made up my mind!”

Shifting his gaze over, Zhang Xuan saw that Senior Shui had picked out the Rippling Water Profound Art, the only water attribute cultivation technique in the limited collection.

“That book is indeed not too bad.” Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

While that cultivation technique was not necessarily stronger than the one that Senior Shui was already cultivating, it did complement her current cultivation technique well. Studying the manual could serve as a great source of inspiration for her future cultivation.

“Un, I’ll begin copying the content now. Have you chosen your book yet?” Senior Shui asked.

Those who had cleared the Corridor of Puppets could not take away the physical copy of the manuals inside, but they were allowed to copy them.

“Me?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “I won’t be copying any. I still need to continue with the trials, so I’ll be taking my leave.”

He had already collected all of those books in his Library of Heaven’s Path, so there was no need for him to copy them again.

“Continue with the trials?” Senior Shui was taken aback for an instant before her eyes lit up in agitation. “It can’t be that... you are going to challenge the Yi Corridor?”

Considering how easily the young man before her had managed to clear the Bing Corridor, it was a given that he would not be interested in the cultivation techniques here, especially since he stood a good chance at clearing the higher levels.

It would already be a blessing if a single student cleared the Yi Corridor every decade. Would the young man before her be able to successfully clear it as well?

In an instant, she felt as if she might just be lucky enough to see a miracle being forged right before her eyes.

“Yi Corridor? That’s not it.” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “I intend to challenge the Gui Corridor!” “Yi Corridor is the second strongest. Bing Corridor is the third strongest. That’s the tenth strongest corridor, also the weakest one.

1319 Sounds A Little Inauspicious

“What?” Senior Shui’s body jolted, and her eyes widened in shock.

In this moment, she felt as if blood was flowing to and fro her throat, threatening to spill out at any moment, “You are going to challenge the Gui Corridor?”

The Gui Corridor was the easiest trial of all, and only the weakest students of the Sanctum of Sages would head there... Given how you were able to easily defeat two puppets of the Bing Corridor so easily, why in the world do you want to challenge the Gui Corridor?

While others were slowly advancing forward, that fellow was actually regressing with time...

Are you here just to brush up your existence?

“That’s right. The manuals in the Bing Corridor isn’t too good, so I’m intending to head to the Gui Corridor for a look.”

Zhang Xuan replied earnestly.

The more profound and powerful a cultivation technique was, the fewer of them there would be. What Zhang Xuan needed was to collect as many cultivation technique manuals as possible... As such, he was extremely disappointed when he saw the pitiful collection of books that was at the end of the Bing Corridor. He felt that he had made the wrong choice and should have gone to the Gui Corridor instead.

There were bound to be many more books there, and that would be more useful to him than challenging the Bing Corridor.

“...” Senior Shui clutched her hair.

Are you a lunatic?

Every single cultivation technique in the Bing Corridor is extremely profound and powerful. Admittedly, they can't compare with the cultivation technique I have inherited from my ancestors, but they still wield formidable prowess!

Are you honestly comparing such treasures to the trash in the Gui Corridor?

Just what in the world is going through your mind?

“Alright, you should continue copying your notes. I have to get going now!” Zhang Xuan turned around and began making his way out of the Bing Corridor.

As he walked, sighs of lamentation would escape from his lips.

This trip had truly been a huge waste.

By the time he walked out of the Bing Corridor and arrived before the reception once more, he found that other than the female receptionist named Qing Yu, there was another male receptionist sitting beside her.

Seeing how the young man had come out so quickly without any injuries on him, Qing Yu was stunned. She couldn't help but ask in bewilderment, “Are you... fine?”

She was certain that the fellow would be pummeled to the point that no one would be able to recognize him anymore, an incomparable sight of misery, so how could he still be completely fine?

One must know that the Bing Corridor was a trial which even the talented Senior Shui had yet to clear after a month of hard work!

“Fine? Why would I not be fine?” Taken aback by the abrupt question, Zhang Xuan was startled for a moment. Then, seeing that there was no response from Qing Yu, he took out a hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones and passed it over, “I wish to challenge the Corridor of Puppets once more. Here are the spirit stones.”

“You want to challenge it once more?” Qing Yu frowned in bewilderment. “Each person can only challenge a Corridor of

Puppets once a day. I'm afraid that you will have to return tomorrow."

If each challenger could keep challenging the same Corridor of Puppets again and again, putting aside that he would be depriving other challengers of the opportunity to challenge, the Corridor of Puppets would not have sufficient time to recover as well.

As such, each challenger was limited to challenging a Corridor of Puppets once per day.

And under normal circumstances, those who had managed to clear the Corridor of Puppets wouldn't challenge the same corridor once more, and those who failed would be left in a tragic state, possibly being unable to move even after an entire day of rest. Only someone as tenacious as Senior Shui would be able to persistently challenge the same Bing Corridor every single day for a month straight.

"I'm not going to challenge the Bing Corridor." Zhang Xuan explained.

"So, you have finally thought things through..." Qing Yu heaved a sigh of relief. "Which Corridor of Puppets will you be challenging then? The Ding Corridor?"

"No, I'm intending on challenging the Gui Corridor." Zhang Xuan replied.

"The Gui Corridor..." Qing Yu was rendered speechless.

She was still wondering how formidable that fellow was when he challenged the Bing Corridor as soon as he came, but from the looks of it now, it seemed like the results had been rather disastrous for him... In the end, he still had to start from the very bottom.

Well, to be fair, for a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator, even the Gui Corridor would pose a great difficulty.

In a sense, it was good that the young man was able to think things through and pursue something that was more feasible to him than to cling on to his meaningless pride.

“I told you earlier that you should have just challenged the Gui Corridor, it’s really a huge pity for you to have wasted a hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones just like that. But nevertheless, it’s still good to see that you have come to your senses...” Qing Yu smiled as she took out another challenge token and passed it over. “Right, where’s the challenge token you have used in the Bing Corridor? Regardless of whether you have used it or not, you’ll have to return it to us.”

“Here it is.” Zhang Xuan took the challenge token which Qing Yu was offering him before passing back the Bing Corridor’s challenge token he had received earlier. After which, he turned around and headed off to the Gui Corridor.

Shortly after he left, the male receptionist turned to Qing Yu and asked, “Is that the lustful fellow that you have spoken about earlier?”

“That’s right.” Qing Yu nodded.

“I have to say that he’s rather handsome, but to challenge the Bing Corridor with his Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivation... He’s indeed a little over his head.” the male receptionist remarked.

“It’s apparent that he’s not a person who lacked money, he probably did that in order to strike up a connection with Senior Shui. But from the looks of it, his efforts seem to have ended in futility. Realizing the limitations of his strength, he had no choice but to challenge the Gui Corridor instead...” Qing Yu shook her head as she prepared to toss the challenge token which she had received from the young man earlier back into the drawer, but all of a sudden, she froze on the spot.

“This challenge token...”

“What’s wrong?” The male receptionist turned his gaze over as well, and in the next moment, his body stiffened as well. “There are actually golden marks on it... Isn’t that a sign that he has cleared the trial?”

Speaking up to this point, the male receptionist traded gazes with Qing Yu, and the both of them gulped down a mouthful of saliva in shock.

“It can’t be that... he managed to clear the Bing Corridor?”

As receptionists of the Corridor of Puppets, they were well aware of the difficulties surrounding the Bing Corridor. Many geniuses of the Sanctum of Sages had marched in confidently, only to return with dispirited looks on their faces. There were years where not even a single challenger would manage to clear it successfully... and that Leaving Aperture realm primary stage fellow actually managed to clear it?

How in the world was that possible?

And if he had already cleared the trial, what about Senior Shui?

Considering how she had entered the trial before him, why was she nowhere to be seen?

“I’ll head over to take a quick look...” The bewildering situation left Qing Yu feeling completely crazed. Unable to hold herself back anymore, she stood up from her seat and prepared to make her way over to Bing Corridor to check the situation out.

“Wait a moment...” But before Qing Yu could leave the area, the male receptionist beside her abruptly grabbed her hand. Perplexed, she turned around to look at the male receptionist, only to see the latter pointing at the area in front of him with eyes widened in disbelief.

She traced the male receptionist’s finger and looked over as well, and the sight she saw left her entire body freezing on the spot. The young man who had just left for the Gui Corridor a moment ago had returned. With a brilliant smile on his face, he took out another hundred concentrated high-tier spirit stones along with a challenge token and passed those over to them. “I wish to challenge the Ren Corridor now.”

Despite her dazed state, Qing Yu still managed to instinctively take out a challenge token from the drawer and passed it over to the young man before her.

“Thank you.” the young man replied before turning around elegantly to take his leave.

“He managed to... clear the Gui Corridor too?” Taking a glance at the challenge token which had just been returned, Qing Yu’s lips twitched once more.

Even if the Gui Corridor was easy, surely it should be impossible to clear it that quickly?

How long had he been gone for?

One minute?

Two minutes?

In any case, it was not any more than three minutes... Within such a short period of time, even getting there and back would take two and a half minutes, which meant to say that he only spent a couple of seconds to clear the Gui Corridor?

Trading gazes with the male receptionist, the both of them could see the horror in each other’s eyes.

Just as they were stunned with fright, the young man’s voice sounded once more, “Sorry to interrupt, but I would like the challenge token for Xin Corridor. Thank you.”

While shuddering in fear, Qing Yu passed a challenge token over before taking the other party’s spirit stones and challenge token. Then, taking a glance at the challenge token once more, her body jolted.

It was another pass...

To clear both of them equally quickly, did this mean to say that the difficulty levels of both the Gui Corridor and the Ren Corridor were no different to him?

She widened her mouth so wide that it almost seemed as if she was a fish that had fallen on shore. Just as she was about to check with the male receptionist to see if she was dreaming, the young man walked over once more.

“Give me the challenge token for the Geng Corridor.”

“...” Qing Yu.

“...” The male receptionist.

...

“Hu! I’m finally done copying down all of it. By coupling this “Rippling Water Profound Art” with my current cultivation technique, I would surely be able to bring my fighting prowess up to a new level!” Senior Shui remarked with a satisfied smile.

As soon as the young man left, she immediately started copying, and all in all, it took her twenty minutes in order to finish copying down the thick manual entirely.

Of course, she would be able to memorize the entire book within a shorter period of time if she wanted to, but while cultivators of her caliber possessed a photographic memory, that didn’t mean that their memories were infallible. Ultimately, it would still be safer to keep a physical copy of the manual.

Even a word of difference for a cultivation technique as profound as this would result in a vast difference in its conception. She didn’t want to take on this needless risk.

She had spent an entire month challenging the Bing Corridor, only to fail each time. If not for that young man she had encountered earlier, it was doubtful whether she would have been able to obtain the Rippling Water Profound Art or not.

It wasn’t easy for her to come by this opportunity, so it was best not to waste it.

“I wonder if he has finished clearing the Gui Corridor yet. Given his strength, it should be a walk in the park for him!” Placing the cultivation technique manual carefully back onto the shelf, Senior Shui slowly made her way out of the room, returning back to the front reception.

“What’s wrong?”

As soon as she arrived at the front reception, she immediately noticed that something was amiss. The boisterous and cheerful Qing Yu from before was, at this moment, sitting on a chair with a completely dazed look, reminiscent of a lifeless zombie. Her eyes were staring blankly at the ground, as if someone had stolen her soul.

The male receptionist beside her wasn't doing any better either. His mouth was wide open, as if his lower jaw had been dislocated.

“Qing Yu... What's wrong with the two of you?” Senior Shui asked out of worry.

“Senior Shui, you are finally back...” Some spirit finally returned back to Qing Yu as she raised her head up slowly. Then, she anxiously stood up and asked, “There was a young man named Zhang Xuan who entered the Bing Corridor right after you, right? Did he really clear the trial?”

“He did. His strength is truly extraordinary!” Senior Shui replied.

After a twenty minutes rest or so, she had mostly recovered from her exertion. While her complexion still looked unnaturally pale, she was in a much better state than before.

“It seems like all of that really isn't a dream then...” With a pale face, Qing Yu staggered back onto her chair. Her hand opened up, and ‘huala!’, a bunch of small tokens fell all over the ground.

“These are...” Perplexed, Senior Shui bent down to pick up one of those small tokens, and her eyes widened in shock. “These are all challenge tokens? Furthermore... cleared?”

After an entire month of challenging the Corridor of Puppets, she had come to know what the golden marks on the challenge token represented.

But why would there suddenly be so many cleared challenge tokens here?

“That's right... These are the doing of Zhang shi...” Qing Yu nodded in a daze.

“You mean to say that he cleared all of these trials?” Senior Shui could hardly believe what she was saying. She quickly picked up all of the challenge tokens with a sweep of her zhenqi and examined all of them closely.

“Gui Corridor, Ren Corridor, Xin Corridor, Geng Corridor, Ji Corridor, Wu Corridor, Yi Corridor... he cleared so many of

them?” Senior Shui’s body began trembling uncontrollably.

In the short twenty minutes that she spent copying down her Rippling Water Profound Art, the other party actually cleared seven corridors?

How could he possibly do it so quickly?

Fighting so many puppets in succession, wouldn’t he run out of zhenqi? Wouldn’t he feel exhausted?

“That’s right. He cleared all of those without taking a breather at all...” Qing Yu nodded.

“Then... where is he at the moment?” Senior Shui asked.

“He’s currently challenging the Jia Corridor!” Qing Yu replied.

“The Jia Corridor?”

Senior Shui hurriedly lowered her head to take a look, and indeed, there was no Jia Corridor amongst challenge tokens. In other words, the young man hadn’t cleared the hardest corridor yet.

“Wait, that’s not right... Since he has already cleared the Bing and Yi Corridors, why didn’t he challenge the Ding Corridor?” Flipping through the challenge tokens once more, Senior Shui frowned in bewilderment.

That fellow had started from the Gui Corridor, and he had challenged every single corridor from the bottom up... So why would he skip the Ding Corridor?

“Ah...” Qing Yu’s face flushed red, and after a long moment of silence, she swallowed a mouthful of saliva and finally spoke up, “He said that... the name of the corridor didn’t sound nice, and as an upright man, there was no point challenging it!”

“...” Senior Shui. Bing Corridor is the third most difficult corridor whereas the Ding Corridor is the fourth most difficult corridor. Gui Corridor is the tenth corridor, as well as the easiest one. Ren Corridor is the ninth corridor, as well as the second weakest one. Xin Corridor is the eighth most difficult corridor. Basically, the 10th to the 5th, and 2nd most difficult corridors. The first and most difficult corridor. Zhang Xuan has

already cleared the 2nd and 3rd hardest corridor, but he skipped the 4th hardest one. The character for Ding used here, in modern day slang, has the meaning of a male reproductive organ.

1320 Challenging the Jia Corridor!

Geji! Geji!

Standing at the very center of the room, Zhang Xuan watched as a puppet walked out from a door ahead of him, and he heaved a deep sigh of helplessness.

He had already cleared eight of the ten Leaving Aperture realm Corridor of Puppets, but he was still unable to compile a complete Heaven's Path Divine Art.

Left with no choice, he could only head over here to challenge the most difficult trial of all.

In the long several dozen millennium years of history behind the Sanctum of Sages, only seven people had cleared the trial in total. From this, it wasn't too difficult to imagine how difficult the trial was.

The puppet in the Yi Corridor has already reached Grand Dominion realm intermediate stage, so the one in the Jia Corridor is bound to be even stronger! Zhang Xuan thought as he assessed the puppet before him with narrowed eyes.

Challenging the Yi Corridor had already posed a great challenge to him. He had to use the flaws he had found in the puppet from the Library of Heaven's Path and the keen discernment of his Eye of Insight in order to design a whole series of maneuvers before he was finally able to corner the puppet and subdue it.

But even so, he still suffered some injuries in the midst of the challenge. It was fortunate that he was able to recover swiftly through his Heaven's Path zhenqi, or else he might have to retire for the day.

According to what the female receptionist, Qing Yu, has said, Ruoxin has cleared the Jia Corridor... So, the least I can do is

to clear it as well! Zhang Xuan thought determinedly as a powerful fighting spirit flowed forth from him.

Of the seven people who had cleared the Jia Corridor, Luo Ruoxin was one of them.

Since his girlfriend was able to clear it, he mustn't lose out either! Otherwise, how could he be qualified to ask for her marriage in hand?

After walking out from the door, the puppet abruptly opened its eyes and announced grandly, "To dare to challenge the Jia Corridor, you must be really confident in your strength. Very well, let me see what you are capable of then!"

"You are able to speak?" Zhang Xuan frowned in bewilderment.

Even the puppet he had modified earlier in the Bing Corridor was only capable of muttering a couple of incoherent syllables. Yet, the puppet before him was actually capable of voicing human speech. This was inconceivable!

"Let's begin the battle!" Couldn't even be bothered to waste its breath on words anymore, the puppet uttered coldly before charging forward.

Hu!

Its movements were as swift as a bolt of lightning, and it took only an instant for it to appear before Zhang Xuan.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan didn't expect the puppet to move so quickly, covering the ten meters between them instantaneously as if teleportation. He quickly took a step forward as well to build up some momentum as he thrust his palm toward the puppet.

In an instant, countless palm prints materialized all over the area, as if a garden of resplendent flowers had blossomed in the midst of the battlefield all of a sudden. They converged with one another to form a seemingly relentless current of force that threatened to wear down any opponent.

This was a battle technique he had obtained from the Yi Corridor, Overlapping Palm.

This palm art worked in a manner strikingly similar to the Thousand Hands of Rulai. Its prowess would stack up layer after layer on one another, leaving one feeling as if one would be washed by its might.

While this attack wasn't as powerful as the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm in terms of offensive, it was an excellent move when used in defensive maneuvers. More importantly, due to how complex the technique was, it was extremely difficult to distinguish real threats from feints, thus possibly creating unexpected results in battle.

Hong long!

But while Zhang Xuan's palm strike was formidable, the puppet was even stronger. Using some sort of bizarre battle technique, the sheer might of its fist seemed to seal the surrounding space completely, preventing the countless palms from converging with one another, thus rendering it completely ineffective.

The puppet has cultivated Overlapping Palms too... Zhang Xuan frowned in realization.

To be able to make such instantaneous judgement to effectively neutralize his attacks, there could only be one possibility... The puppet must have a deep understanding of Overlapping Palms as well, and it knew the ideal moments to strike in order to nerf the offense.

While Zhang Xuan did improve the palm strike significantly through compiling it with various other palm art manuals in the Library of Heaven's Path, those who were familiar in the technique would still be able to find an opportunity to step in and counterattack.

This wasn't about exploiting the flaws in the palm technique but simply the natural manner how the certain maneuvers would curb one another.

"Break!" Knowing that he would only be placed in a deeply disadvantageous position if he were to continue pushing his Overlapping Palms on, he decisively changed his palm strike

into a sword art instead. With a flick of his finger, a powerful surge of sword qi burst forth.

Having comprehended Sword Quintessence, every single movement that Zhang Xuan made could be considered as a sword art. Even though he didn't execute any battle techniques, he might he could exert at will was still not beneath any ordinary sword art.

Pu! The sword qi instantaneously sliced through the space which the puppet had constructed and flew straight for the latter's glabella.

"Hmph!" In face of the swift transformations in Zhang Xuan's attacks, it harrumphed coldly.

Without the slightest hint of panic, it calmly opened up its tightly-clenched fist like a blossoming orchid, and several surges of sword qi short forth from it.

Po! Po! Po!

The sword qi collided with one another, causing a resounding explosion in the air before vanishing simultaneously.

The clash in sword qi left Zhang Xuan with suffocating sensation welling up in his chest. It seemed the backlash of the collision had caused some internal injuries to him.

Sword Quintessence? A puppet actually managed to achieve the level of Sword Quintessence?

He had known that the puppet of the Jia Corridor would be formidable, but he didn't think that the latter would be such a powerful opponent!

It was one thing for it to have grasped the Overlapping Palms, but to actually possess such a deep comprehension of swordsmanship as well, achieving the level of Sword Quintessence... This was really unbelievable!

From how Zhang Jiuxiao was able to rely on his Half-Quintessence comprehension of swordsmanship and his shallow understanding of the Three Swords of Lingxu to get into the Sanctum of Sages, it could be seen how rare top sword practitioners were.

For a puppet to actually wield such deep understanding of swordsmanship as well, it would have been a lie if he were to say that he wasn't astounded.

Wait a moment, it's impossible for a puppet to comprehend Sword Quintessence by itself. Its innate flaws render it incapable of comprehending such conceptualizations. From the looks of it, it appears that an expert sword practitioner who has comprehended True Quintessence had infused a part of himself into the puppet's body, thus granting it the ability to execute such a powerful sword qi! A moment after his shock, Zhang Xuan swiftly realized that something was amiss with the situation.

Puppets weren't capable of cultivation or comprehension unless under certain unique circumstances. They could fight on command, but every single moves they made would be programmed beforehand.

In other words, the Sword Quintessence which the puppet had displayed wasn't its own comprehension but merely a fragment of memory of a sword expert.

In other words... even though the puppets were capable of executing moves that wielded the prowess of Sword Quintessence, its failure to grasp the fundamental principles behind it would limit the flexibility of its moves.

But even if that was the case, it still wouldn't be easy to deal with the puppet.

It'll be difficult for me to outmaneuver the puppet in terms of swordsmanship since it has grasped Sword Quintessence and wields far greater strength and speed than me, and in terms of palm arts, I'm not an opponent for it either... Zhang Xuan's mind swiftly whirred into action.

If the puppet was still of equivalent cultivation realm as Zhang Xuan, he might still have been able to outmaneuver it in terms of swordsmanship with time, but the vast disparity in their fundamental abilities would make it nigh impossible to do so. Also, in the previous clash using his Overlapping Palms, the puppet had displayed prowess far above his...

How in the world was he supposed to win this battle? The odds were overwhelmingly against his favor!

Dominion!

A light sphere of roughly a meter radius appeared around Zhang Xuan's body.

It seemed like there was no other choice than to use his ultimate skill then!

Weng!

But before Zhang Xuan could make any move with his Dominion, he suddenly felt the surrounding space crushing heavily down upon him.

The puppet had released its Dominion as well.

Astonishingly, the puppet's Dominion was twenty meters in radius, and just by standing in its perimeter, Zhang Xuan felt as if steel chains were wrapped tightly around his body, rendering it impossible for him to move even a single inch.

This is... Grand Dominion realm pinnacle? Zhang Xuan's lips twitched in frenzy.

It was no wonder why every single move he executed was neutralized so easily! The puppet's cultivation had already reached Grand Dominion realm pinnacle!

Currently, Zhang Xuan wielded the strength to subdue a Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator without any problem; perhaps a little strenuous against intermediate stage cultivators but definitely still possible to achieve victory, but against advanced stage and pinnacle experts... He barely stood a chance at all!

Hu!

With cold sweat breaking throughout Zhang Xuan's body, he immediately executed the Unbounded Voyager and forcefully escaped from the shackle-like restraints of the puppet's Dominion to a corner of the room.

Then, with a flick of his wrist, he took out the challenge token and crushed it.

Weng!

An aura rippled from the token, and the puppet who was just about to charge toward Zhang Xuan once more immediately halted its attacks. It took a few steps back before asking coldly, “Are you admitting defeat?”

Despite how intricacies behind their exchange of blows, in truth, the three moves that they had traded—a fist art, a sword art, and Dominion—lasted less than three breaths in total. Considering how they had barely explored the depths of each other’s strength yet, it seemed a little too early to be admitting defeat at this point!

“I’m no match for you in my current state.” Zhang Xuan shook his head helplessly.

In the first place, this trial was designed for Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle experts whereas he was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage. To be honest, it was not entirely impossible for him to emerge victorious if he were to utilize all of the means at his disposal, but... the circumstances hadn’t grown so desperate for him that necessitated such a course of action yet.

“Farewell!” Zhang Xuan turned around unhesitatingly and left the room.

But without clearing the Jia Corridor, I won’t be able to compile out a perfect Leaving Aperture realm Heaven’s Path Divine Art to cultivate... It’s almost like a paradox! It seems like I’ll just have to find other alternative methods to raise my fighting prowess then. Zhang Xuan thought as he made his way over to the front reception.

Currently, the greatest room of improvement for me should lie in the Three Swords of Lingxu and the Divine Eyes of the Ninth Netherworld.

There were two direct ways of raising one’s fighting prowess. First, through raising one’s cultivation, and second, through cultivating formidable battle techniques.

He wouldn’t be able to advance his cultivation without compiling the complete Leaving Aperture realm Heaven’s

Path Divine Art, so it seemed like he could only pursue the second route.

He had two extremely powerful battle techniques at hand, and the successful cultivation of any of them would raise his fighting prowess immensely. However, it was a pity that they were terribly flawed, which was why he had put off cultivating them up to date.

I should ask around to see where I can find sword art manuals! Zhang Xuan thought as he arrived before the front reception.

“Zhang shi... did you clear the Jia Corridor?” Senior Shui had been lingering around the area out of curiosity, and she immediately spoke up in agitation as soon she saw Zhang Xuan.

“I didn’t.” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “The puppet in the Jia Corridor is simply too powerful, I’m still unable to match it with my current strength...”

“I see...” Senior Shui instinctively heaved a sigh of relief, but after realizing the rudeness of her action, her face immediately reddened in a fluster.

It was already unbelievable how the young man had managed to clear eight of the corridors successively without any rest, and if he could clear the Jia Corridor as well, she might have really been scared out of her wits.

“Excuse me, do you know where I can learn sword arts in the Sanctum of Sages?” Paying no heed to Senior Shui’s actions, Zhang Xuan passed the challenge token back to Qing Yu as he asked.

“You wish to learn swordsmanship?” Before Qing Yu could reply, Senior Shui had already interjected with a frown.

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“If you intend to learn swordsmanship, you are in luck! Senior Shui over here happens to be the most formidable sword practitioner amongst the younger generation in the Sanctum of Sages, and her teacher is the most powerful swordmaster around here!” Qing Yu said.

“You are a sword practitioner?” Taken aback, Zhang Xuan turned his sight to Senior Shui.

Back at the Bing Corridor, the young lady had used all kinds of battle techniques and secret arts to deal with the puppets, but sword art wasn't one of them.

“Of course!” Hearing those words of skepticism, Senior Shui frowned in displeasure. With a flick of her wrist, she whipped out a sword and said, “Why? Do you want to try my swordsmanship?”

The usage of weapons and artifacts were banned in the Corridor of Puppets, and the lack of a sword would have severely limited the might of her swordsmanship, so she decided against using it altogether in the battle. However, this didn't mean that she would allow others to question her accomplishment in swordsmanship. She raised her sword up, and concentrated Sword Intent burst forth from her.

“Not too bad, but there's still room for improvement...” Seeing that Senior Shui had achieved the level of Upper Sword Heart, Zhang Xuan offered a few rare words of compliment. “If it isn't too much trouble, may I ask you to lead me to where sword art manuals are stored?”

“There's still room for improvement? Let me see how deep of an understanding you have in swordsmanship then!” With a cold harrumph, Senior Shui's body seemed to warp into a sharp sword as she charged forward with imposing momentum.

Paji!

But before she could even come close to Zhang Xuan, the sword she was wielding suddenly dragged her entire body down to the ground, shaking uncontrollably in her hand. Yi Corridor is the second most difficult corridor whereas Jia is the most difficult corridor. Rulai Palm is a series of technique that originated from a Hong Kong television show back in 1964, and it has become quite a popular technique that permeated many films and works afterward, most notably, Kung Fu Hustle. The picture looks a little shabby, but it looks something like this:

[https://gss3.bdstatic.com/7Po3dSag_xI4khGkpoWK1HF6hhy/
baike/w%3D268%3Bg%3D0/sign=21dd1e95c81b9d168ac79d
67cbe5d3b2/8601a18b87d6277fc934be722e381f30e924fc52.j
pg](https://gss3.bdstatic.com/7Po3dSag_xI4khGkpoWK1HF6hhy/baike/w%3D268%3Bg%3D0/sign=21dd1e95c81b9d168ac79d67cbe5d3b2/8601a18b87d6277fc934be722e381f30e924fc52.jpg)

1321 Unless You Are the Sanctum Head!

“You...” Struggling up from the ground, Senior Shui’s lips were twitching crazily. The gaze she directed at the young man before her had changed altogether. “Your comprehension of swordsmanship... has already reached the level of Sword Quintessence?”

As a genius in swordsmanship, she was well aware of the various levels in swordsmanship. Her sword had dropped to the ground in fear before it could even nick the young man at all, trembling non-stop; she had only encountered such a situation with her teacher before! In other words, the young man who appeared to be in his early twenties already possessed an understanding of swordsmanship that was on par with her teacher!

But how in the world could that be?

To achieve Sword Quintessence required not only an extremely deep understanding of swordsmanship. More than that, one also had to accumulate sufficient experience and insight before one would be able to achieve the conceptualization necessary for the realm. The reason her teacher was able to achieve that realm was because he had once traveled a distance of ten thousand li on foot, experiencing the suffering and agony that ordinary mortals underwent, and that was what became the foundation for his breakthrough.

Even if the young man were to start cultivating from his mother’s womb, that would only be a short twenty years. To achieve Sword Quintessence within this limited period of time... was truly inconceivable!

Zhang Xuan did not deny the matter. Instead, with a flick of his wrist, the sword that was bowing to him was released from its pressure.

Weng!

It flew into the air and landed in his hands.

He flicked it lightly, and a crisp metallic reverberation echoed from it.

“This sword is not bad. It’s compatible with you,” Zhang Xuan remarked before tossing the sword back.

The sword was light and flexible, which was well-suited for a water attribute cultivator like Senior Shui.

“My teacher picked it out for me,” Senior Shui replied as she stored her sword. Following which, she turned to look at Zhang Xuan and asked, “You said that you wish to browse through books relating to swordsmanship?”

Since the young man had comprehended Sword Quintessence, there was no point in challenging him in a duel anymore.

The disparity between them was simply too big, so she would only be humiliated in the end.

“My teacher has quite a vast collection of books relating to swordsmanship, and I can bring you over,” Senior Shui said hesitantly.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. “Ah, then I’ll be troubling you to lead the way then.”

“However,” Senior Shui said, “I should warn you first. You have already comprehended Sword Quintessence, which means that you have already found your own way, so it would be best for you not to harbor too much hope regarding the matter. I think that there’s a good chance that you may be kicked out before you can see any books.”

“Kicked out? Why?” Zhang Xuan frowned in confusion.

To achieve the level of Sword Quintessence at his age, he could already be considered an outstanding genius. Most sword practitioners would welcome him with opened arms, wanting to trade insights with him, so why would he be kicked out instead?

“This... As you may know, my teacher is the number one sword expert in the Sanctum of Sages, Jian Qinsheng. He possesses exceptionally powerful cultivation, and he’s an extremely respectable man as well...”

At this point, Senior Shui paused for a moment before continuing with a suppressed voice. “Just that... he tends to be a little too rigid and inflexible when it comes to rules.”

“Inflexible when it comes to rules?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

As Jian Qinsheng’s student, Senior Shui was not in a good position to criticize her teacher, but basically, what her words meant was that Jian Qinsheng was an austere person, possessing the attitude reminiscent of an old academic.

Such people tended to be extremely forthright in their words and actions. If they harbored goodwill for you, they would treat you with the utmost sincerity and offer their assistance magnanimously. However, if they found that they could not get along with you, then no matter how high a standing you had, how illustrious a background you had, nothing would be able to change their view of you.

“Yes. He used to be an elder of the Hall of Propriety, so he regards rules and formalities very highly. If you want to browse through his collection of books and receive his guidance, you will have to clear his test and receive his acknowledgement.

“The Zhang Clan has a genius sword practitioner known as Zhang Xu, and he’s a renowned figure even in the Inner Sanctum. In terms of swordsmanship, he’s reputed to be the indisputable number one, having achieved the level of Sword Quintessence. Yet, when he paid my teacher a visit in hopes of browsing through his collection of books, he was still mercilessly kicked out. So, I thought that it would be good to give you a heads up so that you won’t be shocked later on,” Senior Shui said hesitantly.

“Even a Sword Quintessence expert was kicked out? Why?” Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

As someone who had comprehended Sword Quintessence, Zhang Xu could already be considered one of the top figures of the Sanctum of Sages, even though his cultivation was lacking compared to the elders. In a sense, he could even be considered a fellow peer of Jian Qinsheng's in terms of swordsmanship.

It simply did not seem rational for Jian Qinsheng to kick Zhang Xu away on a whim!

“Like I have said before, my teacher is someone who regards formalities and the sort very highly. The person that he respects the most is the Third Sanctum Head.

“The Third Sanctum Head was one of the rare few who trod the path of cultivation through his sword, standing unchallenged in the world through his profound comprehension of swordsmanship. Those of the Sage Clans had to defer to him, and even the elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters dared not face him head on! In his generation, the prestige and strength of the Sanctum of Sages were pushed to the very peak.

“However, despite the overwhelming prowess of the Third Sanctum Head, it is a pity that he was slightly lacking when it came to his ability to impart knowledge. As a result, he was unable to pass down his full heritage, and it was then that the swordsmanship in the Sanctum of Sages began declining!

“My teacher is a descendant of the Third Sanctum Head, and over the years, he has been guarding the hint of Sword Intent left behind by the Third Sanctum Head. In order to become my teacher's student or learn anything from him, you have to gain the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent first.

“To be honest, I think the reason I was able to emerge among dozens of genius sword practitioners and become my teacher's student is mainly because of my water attribute. As you know, the water attribute's nature is to encompass everything. On the other hand, Zhang Xu has already comprehended a path of swordsmanship belonging to himself, and it's at odds with the Sword Intent. As a result... my teacher kicked him out.”

“I see!” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Once one's comprehension of swordsmanship reached the level of Sword Quintessence, the Sword Intent one exerted would be able to gain some degree of consciousness. Given so, it was indeed possible for a Sword Intent to have the ability to choose a suitable successor to inherit its way.

A different conceptualization of Sword Intent could result in a clash of ideology.

Senior Shui cultivated a water attribute cultivation technique, and due to its gentle and flexible nature, it was easier for her to receive the recognition of the Sword Intent. On the other hand, those who had a deeper comprehension of swordsmanship were likely to already have their own conceptualization of what swordsmanship should be like, and that meant it was highly likely that there would be a conflict of ideology with the Sword Intent, thus making it even more difficult for them to receive its recognition.

A thought surfaced in Zhang Xuan's mind. Does this mean that the books that Jian Qinsheng has collected were all left behind by the Third Sanctum Head?

In a sense, receiving the Sword Intent's recognition could also be interpreted as 'walking on a similar path of swordsmanship'.

Only those who walked a similar path would be able to browse through his books and receive his guidance. To put it plainly, Jian Qinsheng was simply looking to cultivate his own lineage of sword experts.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. Every single person has a unique comprehension of swordsmanship, so I wonder what conceptualization Jian Qinsheng has comprehended. Chances are that it's different from the Old Sword Maestro's!

His current comprehension of swordsmanship mostly originated from the Old Sword Maestro.

So far, he had never heard of anything between the Old Sword Maestro and the Third Sanctum Head, so it was likely that the two of them were from different schools.

In other words, if he headed over, there was a good chance that just like Zhang Xu, he would be rejected by the Sword Intent and kicked out.

After a moment of dilemma, Zhang Xuan could not help but ask, “What if I just take a look at the books from afar, not copying or scanning them with my Spiritual Perception?”

The way he read books was different from the others. As long as it was within his range of sight, he would be able to take anything into his Library of Heaven’s Path.

He did not need Jian Qinsheng’s guidance, notes from the books, or even access to see the content within at all. All he wanted was a look at them from afar...

This should be fine, right?

“Take a look at the books from afar?” Senior Shui shook her head with a bitter smile. “My teacher treasures every single one of those books dearly, and he created a room that only those who have his token in hand will be able to enter. So... unless you are the sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages, there’s no way you will be able to get in!”

Surprised by that, Zhang Xuan asked, “The sanctum head will be able to get in?”

It seemed like he was the only candidate for the position of the sanctum head at the moment.

Well, he was not the sanctum head, but it would not take too long before he inherited the position.

“Of course! The sanctum head is the highest leader of the Sanctum of Sages! No matter who my teacher dares offend, he would never turn down a request from the sanctum head,” Senior Shui replied matter-of-factly.

A moment later, she shook her head and sighed. “However, it has been more than three hundred years since the Sanctum of Sages had a sanctum head. Currently, all affairs are taken care of by the deputy sanctum head.

“Alright, there’s no point discussing about such matters too much. We aren’t in a position to talk much about someone as

esteemed as the sanctum head. So, after all I have said, are you still interested in heading over to take a look? If that's the case, let's set off now."

"I still want to give it a try. Let's go!" Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

1322 Hierarchy Among Sage Clans

While Zhang Xuan knew that Jian Qinsheng's conceptualization of swordsmanship was bound to be different from his, he still felt compelled to head there to take a look. If, by some chance, he really managed to acquire the sword art manuals required to perfect the Three Swords of Lingxu, he would be able to clear the Jia Corridor and finally form his Leaving Aperture realm Heaven's Path Divine Art.

Besides, every single cultivator had a unique interpretation of cultivation, forged by their individual experiences and insights. Only through interaction with others would one be able to broaden one's horizons and raise the ceiling for further improvement.

"Let's go." Seeing that the young man was still insistent on heading over, Senior Shui nodded. She bade farewell to Qing Yu, and the both of them made their way out of the Hall of Solidarity.

While advancing forward, Senior Shui sent a telepathic message to Zhang Xuan. "Later on, if you fail to gain the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent and my teacher asks you to leave, I advise you to just turn around and walk away. Don't expect to be able to sway him with words; on the contrary, you will only be making things difficult on yourself."

"Those who live for their swordsmanship usually have a temperament similar to a sword: sharp and straightforward. Don't worry, I understand," Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

Those who were able to raise their comprehension of swordsmanship to the level of Sword Quintessence would have devoted their life, mind, soul, and spirit all to the sword, so naturally, their personality would also gradually morph into something resembling their swordsmanship as well.

For this reason, sword practitioners tended to be true to their feelings, and they hated it when others beat around the bush.

Taking the Old Sword Maestro for example, he was extremely decisive in his actions. Even when he dissipated, he did it with absolute gusto, not showing the slightest hesitation!

“It’s good that you understand.” Senior Shui heaved a sigh of relief.

Considering how the young man was able to wield such great strength and achieve such astounding accomplishment in swordsmanship at a young age, there was little doubt that he came from an extraordinary background. She did not wish for her goodwill to end up causing dissension on both sides!

Thinking up to this point, Senior Shui could not help but turn to Zhang Xuan and ask curiously, “Your name is Zhang Xuan, right? Are you from the Zhang Clan? Why haven’t I heard of you before?”

Seeing that someone was misunderstanding his identity yet again, Zhang Xuan shook his head. “I’m not from the Zhang Clan.”

“You aren’t?” Senior Shui could hardly believe what she was hearing.

If he was not from the Zhang Clan... did he manage to obtain such astounding strength at his age without relying on the power of a Sage Clan’s bloodline? How could that be possible?

“I am from the Qingyuan Empire, and I guess the reason I possess decent strength would be because I am extremely hardworking,” Zhang Xuan explained earnestly.

“This...” Recalling how the young man had just cleared eight corridors in succession within thirty minutes and yet still chose to follow her to learn swordsmanship instead of taking a break, Senior Shui could not help but nod in agreement. “To be able to wield such strength at your age despite being an unaffiliated cultivator, you do have some tenacity in you.”

“Senior Shui, if I recall correctly, you tapped into the power of your bloodline earlier, right? Are you from a Sage Clan as

well?” Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

“You... don’t know me?” Senior Shui nearly choked on her saliva.

Her cultivation might only have been at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, but due to her background and physical appearance, she could be said to be a celebrity in the Outer Sanctum, a person who would catch the eyes of others no matter where she went. And yet, this fellow actually did not know her background?

Are you for real?

“Well, this is the first time I have seen you. Am I supposed to know who you are?” Zhang Xuan asked with a perplexed frown.

“First time you are seeing me?” Realization struck Senior Shui as she widened her eyes in astonishment. “You can’t be a freshman who has just enrolled into the Sanctum of Sages today, can you?”

“I am.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Right after you cleared the entrance examination, you ran straight to the Hall of Solidarity and cleared eight corridors in succession?” Senior Shui gulped as her cheeks began quivering non-stop.

Is it just me, or are the freshmen nowadays a little too formidable?

Even after an entire month of preparation, she was still having trouble clearing the Bing Corridor, but barely after arriving in the Sanctum of Sages, that fellow had already cleared eight of the corridors?

“Ah. After the entrance examination ended in the afternoon, I took a trip to the Hall of Erudition to take the 8-star formation master examination and successfully cleared it by setting up a grade-8 formation. After which, I chatted with someone for two hours before returning to my residence. Then, I took a bath before going over to the Hall of Solidarity,” Zhang Xuan said.

“...” Senior Shui’s body petrified on the spot.

It was, by no means, easy to clear the 8-star formation master examination. Even the elder brother of the little princess of the Luo Clan had challenged it twice, only to fail both times around. So, why was the young man talking about it with a light tone that seemed as if he had just taken a walk around the park?

More importantly... most 7-star pinnacle formation masters would require at least a few months of hard work before they were able to set up a grade-8 formation. Considering that the entrance examination had ended in the afternoon, and at this very moment, the sky had not darkened yet...

Are you a monster?

Unable to hold herself back any longer, Senior Shui asked, “If I may ask... how long did you take to clear the 8-star formation master examination?”

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned as he tried to recall the entire course of events. “If we exclude the strength assessment... roughly around five to six minutes? Well, if that Elder Su hadn’t dawdled, I should have been able to clear it faster!”

“Five to six minutes...” Senior Shui’s body began trembling wildly from frenzy. At this moment, she felt so traumatized that she did not know if she would ever recover from this blow.

She had been wanting to take the 8-star formation master examination for a long time, too, but it was a pity that her cultivation was too low, so she was unable to receive the qualifications for it. Yet, even though the young man possessed cultivation beneath hers, he still managed to clear the examination in a few minutes.

The more she thought about the matter, the more suffocated she felt on the inside, to the point where she could not catch her breath anymore.

Seeing how the young lady’s face was turning red at a moment and white in the other, clutching her chest at one moment and tearing at her hair in the other... she really looked mentally

deranged. Knowing that it would be disrespectful to point that out, Zhang Xuan very conscientiously changed the topic.

“Right, you still haven’t answered my question yet. Are you from a Sage Clan?”

Suppressing all of those overwhelming emotions inside her, Senior Shui Qianrou replied, “My name is Shui Qianrou, and I come from a Sage Clan, the Shui Clan!”

“Shui Clan?” Zhang Xuan suddenly thought of something, and he lowered his head contemplatively for a moment before asking in bewilderment, “I have a friend who is from the Mu Clan, and he practices wood attribute cultivation techniques. Water and wood... Could it be that there are clans relating to the Five Elements among the Sage Clans?”

Mu Yuan, whom he had met in the Hongyuan Empire, was a member of the Mu Clan. For a Shui Clan to appear here... could there really be some kind of Five Elements Clans among the Sage Clans?

Otherwise, would it not be really coincidental for the Shui Clan to practice water attribute cultivation techniques and the Mu Clan to practice wood attribute cultivation techniques?

“The clans relating to the Five Elements are Tier-1 Sage Clans... You don’t know this?” Shui Qianrou was really rendered speechless this time around.

On top of being Tier-1 Sage Clans, the Five Elements Clans had a history of being deeply united with one another, such that even the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan had to think twice before getting on bad terms with them. As someone who had managed to get into the Sanctum of Sages, how could the young man have never heard of them?

Do you live beneath a rock?

But thinking about the matter once more, it was not like the matter was completely impossible.

Despite being a Conferred Empire, the Qingyuan Empire was located extremely far away from the center of the Master Teacher Continent. Considering that, it was not too surprising

that they were not well-informed on the power structure of the Sage Clans.

The summer worm would never come to know of ice, and the frog in the well would never understand the vastness of the sea!

At this, Shui Qianrou shook her head and began explaining. “Sage Clans are divided into various tiers... You should have at least heard of that, right?”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

There were Sage Clans in the Eight Conferred Empires too, such as the clan that Xue Ning had come from. However, they were mostly Tier-3.

“Sage Clans can be basically divided into four tiers. Standing at the top of the pyramid are the Premier Clans. While their standing pale in comparison to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, their standing surpasses that of the Apothecary Guild headquarters, Blacksmith Guild headquarters, and such. They wield immense authority and an exalted position in the Master Teacher Continent. All in all, there are three Premier Clans, namely the Zhang Clan, the Luo Clan, and the Jiang Clan,” Shui Qianrou explained.

“Beneath them are Tier-1 Sage Clans. The Five Elements Clans such as the Shui Clan and the Mu Clan are listed in this category. Some of the stronger organizations in the Master Teacher Continent, despite not being Sage Clans, may also be placed in this category for comparison sake, such as the Glacier Plain Court, Apothecary Guild, so on and so forth.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

All along, he had heard much about the strength of the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan, and he knew that they were behemoths as well. However, he did not think that they would actually wield that much influence and power in the Master Teacher Continent, possessing a position that surpassed even that of the Apothecary Guild headquarters.

It was no wonder Wu Shi and the others had been so worried when they learned that the person he liked was the little princess of the Luo Clan!

“After that are the Tier-2 Clans. These clans wield a position on par with the Empire Alliance, and overall, they number around a hundred. Last but not least, there are the Tier-3 Clans, who wield influence equivalent to Conferred Empires. There are many of them spread across the entire Master Teacher Continent, such that I can’t even give you a rough estimate as to how many of them there are.”

Shui Qianrou briefly went through the four different tiers of Sage Clans while Zhang Xuan nodded along. The young lady had pretty much laid out everything clearly for him, albeit in a rather simplified way.

It seemed like the Sage Clans obeyed a very strict hierarchy as well.

At this point, Zhang Xuan suddenly thought about Yuan Tao, and he could not help but ask, “I have a stu—friend who is from the Yuan Clan. May I know which tier the Yuan Clan is in?”

Considering that the Glacier Plain Court was on par with Tier-1 Sage Clans, if the Yuan Clan were to be beneath that... Well, perhaps he should consider finding Yuan Tao and bringing him back.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan really did not know anything at all, Shui Qianrou shook her head helplessly and said, “For the Five Elements Clan, the Mu Clan, Shui Clan, and Jin Clan have names that correspond directly to the element that they represent. On the other hand, the clan that represent fire has the surname Chi, and the clan that represents earth has the surname Yuan. As far as I know, there should be no other Yuan Clan among the Sage Clans, so the friend that you spoke of should be a member of the Five Elements Clans’ Yuan Clan!”

“The Yuan Clan represents earth of the Five Elements Clans? So, it’s a Tier-1 Clan?” Zhang Xuan was slightly startled.

To be honest, he really did not think that the Yuan Clan would be so formidable.

“Indeed. Not only so, the Yuan Clan is also known as the strongest of the Five Elements Clans. They boast fearsome might and invincible defense, making them infallible berserkers of the battlefield!” Shui Qianrou explained.

The cultivation technique and bloodline ability passed down in the Shui Clan had the ability to encompass everything, using flexibility and technique to curb overwhelming force with ease, but the problem with that was that their offensive prowess was too weak!

Of the Five Elements Clans, the clan that boasted the greatest offensive power was the Jin Clan. However, if other factors were taken into account as well, the Yuan Clan was the unquestionable number one.

“I see. That’s a relief...” Hearing that the Yuan Clan was not too weak, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Since the Yuan Clan had such a powerful heritage, he would not need to worry about Yuan Tao for the time being. A clan as powerful as that should have plenty of means to raise Yuan Tao’s cultivation and fighting prowess swiftly. In fact, there was a chance that his cultivation might even be on par with Zhao Ya’s.

At this moment, Shui Qianrou suddenly sent a telepathic message over. “Our teacher’s residence is just ahead. Later on, try not to speak unless necessary...”

Raising his head, Zhang Xuan realized that they had arrived before a rather stately-looking residence. Even before entering its premises, he could feel a powerful Sword Intent emanating from within, leaving him feeling as if he had returned to the Sword Lagoon.

“Is this where Elder Jian Qinsheng lives? Truly extraordinary!” Zhang Xuan remarked.

As expected of the number one sword practitioner in the Sanctum of Sages. Despite comprehending Sword Quintessence, he still felt his Sword Intent being suppressed

by the aura emanating from the residence, leaving him feeling slightly stifled on the inside.

“There’s a surge of sword qi in the entrance that serves to keep ordinary students at bay. Give me a moment, I’ll report your presence to my teacher so as to open up the path for you...”

Taking a deep breath, Shui Qianrou walked up to the residence, and just as she was about to enter, she suddenly noticed a sword qi thrashing around between the fingers of the young man beside her. The sword qi was struggling with all its might to escape, but as if clamped tightly between two steel bars, it was unable to free itself.

“Sword qi? Do you mean this?” Zhang Xuan was asked in bewilderment. Shui is the Chinese word for water, and Mu is the Chinese word for wood. Xue Ning is the guy who challenged Zhang Xuan back in the Qianchong Empire with his Golden Silk Thread, only to spin too much and vomit from vertigo. Mu → Wood, Shui → Water, Jin → Metal

1323 All Wrong

“You...” Goosebumps immediately rose all over Shui Qianrou’s body, and she nearly lost all rationality.

It was just a moment ago that she had reminded the young man to act with prudence so that he would not offend her teacher accidentally, and then he actually grabbed the surge of sword qi protecting the residence as soon as he arrived.

Can’t you just cool it down a little?

Realizing his mistake as well, Zhang Xuan hurriedly apologized. “Ah, pardon me. I’ll release it right now!”

He had sensed the surge of sword qi as soon as he arrived by the entrance of the residence, and he had feared that it would accidentally harm Shui Qianrou, so he had secretly captured it. He did not think that it would actually be a doorkeeper left behind by Jian Qinsheng to fend off uninvited guests!

In fear of the sharp sword qi, there would surely be no one who would dare mess around with it. This was as good as turning away all guests.

Regardless of what Jian Qinsheng’s intentions for leaving behind the sword qi were, that was not something for Zhang Xuan to interfere with. As a guest, it was indeed rather inappropriate for him to have captured the doorkeeper.

Thus, he swiftly released his grip on the sword qi.

The struggling sword qi did not think that it would be released all of a sudden. Similar to a wild cat abruptly being released from its restraint, it whizzed uncontrollably outward.

Sou!

The stone pillar propping up the entrance gate was immediately sliced apart

Jiya!

It fell to the ground, raising a cloud of dust.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was completely dumbfounded by the unexpected damage.

All he had done was release the sword qi. How was he to know that the latter would be so unreliable, whizzing off to destroy the very place that it was supposed to guard.

Still, to capture the other party’s doorkeeper and indirectly result in the destruction of the gate... what would Jian Qinsheng think of him?

But he really did not do it intentionally!

“...” Shui Qianrou’s vision turned dark.

She had reminded Zhang Xuan time and time again to be careful, but it was as if her words had fallen on deaf ears. Now that he had caused such a huge commotion even before meeting her teacher...

You are really putting me at a difficult position, do you know that?

While Zhang Xuan was still feeling deeply stifled by what had happened so far, a loud bellow suddenly sounded from the residence. “Who is it?”

Following which, eight men suddenly rushed out and encircled them.

“Senior Xie, it’s me!” Alarmed, Shui Qianrou swiftly stepped forward to calm down the situation.

“Junior Shui? What happened over here?” Senior Xie frowned.

“Zhang shi over here has heard of our teacher’s reputation, so he wanted to pay a visit to him. I forgot to warn him in advance about the sword qi, which resulted in this mishap,” Shui Qianrou swiftly explained on Zhang Xuan’s behalf.

“Our teacher’s sword qi is known for its incomparable sharpness. To not know of it in advance and yet remain unharmed in the face of it, even turning it against the gate instead, it seems like the friend you have over there is a skilled sword practitioner!” Senior Xie’s eyebrows shot up, and he began assessing Zhang Xuan intently from head to toe.

Senior Xie was a young man in his early thirties. He was dressed in a green robe, and with a sword in hand, he exuded a sharp and domineering aura.

His cultivation had already reached Saint 6-dan, Grand Dominion realm intermediate stage!

“I have only learned swordsmanship for a short moment and am lacking in skills, so I wasn’t able to react in time when the sword qi appeared previously. I am sorry for the trouble I have caused.” Zhang Xuan swiftly spoke up, too.

He had come with a favor in mind, so it would be best for him to maintain a humble attitude.

Besides, he had not forgotten his motto of maintaining a low profile at all times yet!

“There’s no need for any apologies here. The reason our teacher has left this surge of sword qi here is to assess the visitors’ comprehension of swordsmanship. Only those who possess an innate sensitivity toward swordsmanship will be able to notice it in advance and avoid being harmed by it,” Senior Xie replied with a hearty smile. “Alright, I’ll bring you to meet our teacher!”

“You’ll bring me to meet your teacher?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

Did he accidentally take the wrong script?

In the past, when he accidentally caused some damage here and there, the other party would be convulsing all over, glaring at him with such hostility that he felt like he would combust under it. But this time around, no one was angry at him? And they were even inviting him to meet their teacher?

Was this a trap? Were they afraid that he would run as soon as they talked about compensation, so they decided to first bring him into the heart of their base before extorting a fortune out of him?

Or perhaps... was the demolition of the residence a part of Jian Qinsheng’s test for his visitors?

Thinking back, most powerful experts had rather bizarre quirks of their own. Taking Sage Kui for example, he was nothing but a fragmented soul now, and yet, he was still diligently whittling down that metal rod of his. Perhaps, demolition was the little quirk that the austere top swordmaster of Sanctum of Sages had?

It would be wonderful if that was really the case. Zhang Xuan was confident that he would be able to score full brownie points from Jian Qinsheng if so!

Having guessed this much, Zhang Xuan turned to look at Shui Qianrou, wanting to see the answer from her face. However, the latter had a look of utter confusion on her face, which suggested that she was not aware that Jian Qinsheng had such practices.

Forget it! Regardless of whether it's a blessing or a disaster, I'll just have to deal with it when the time comes!

After a moment of dilemma, Zhang Xuan heaved a deep sigh on the inside before he clasped his fist and directed a polite smile to Senior Xie. "I'll be troubling you then!"

After which, he followed Senior Xie into the residence.

Perhaps because it was located in the Sanctum of Sages, Jian Qinsheng's residence was not too big. However, as if to make up for the lack of quantity with quality, it was exquisite. For starters, it was surrounded by a massive formation that allowed sword qi to flow freely on the inside. These surges of sword qi moved in accordance to some kind of a profound pattern, as if inviting sword practitioners to decipher its secrets.

Such an environment would be highly effective in aiding sword practitioners in deepening their comprehension of swordsmanship, allowing them to improve by leaps and bounds within a short period of time.

Secretly activating his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan studied the formation carefully and swiftly identified the locations of the formation flags and formation core. This way, if anyone were to dare make a move on him, he would be able to reduce the

entire residence to rubble in an instant. This knowledge left Zhang Xuan feeling reassured inside, and he nodded in satisfaction.

While Zhang Xuan was still examining his surroundings, Shui Qianrou discreetly walked to Senior Xie's side and asked through zhenqi telepathy, "Senior Xie, what's going on here?"

She was Jian Qinsheng's disciple as well, and all along, she had known the sword qi guarding the residence to be a measure to prevent outsiders from barging in casually. When in the world did it become a test?

"Our teacher went to watch the earlier entrance examination, and he said that there are a few talented individuals among the new batch of freshmen who possess a profound understanding of swordsmanship. So, he altered the strength of the sword qi slightly, saying that those who are able to notice it in advance and remain unharmed in the face of it are those who possess great aptitude in swordsmanship. He tasked me with bringing anyone who manages to fulfill these two criteria to him. You didn't hear of the news because you left early in the morning," Senior Xie replied.

The entrance examination was a huge affair in the Sanctum of Sages, and most elders would pay close attention to it in the hope of finding a suitable successor.

As austere as Jian Qinsheng was, it was his deepest wish to pass down his ancestor's swordsmanship, so he wanted to find a suitable successor to groom.

"I see!" Coming to realize the situation, Shui Qianrou finally heaved a sigh of relief.

All was fine as long as her teacher was not angry!

Circling around a flower garden, a gazebo soon came into appearance. An elder was standing within the gazebo with a sword in hand, seemingly cultivating some kind of sword art.

"Our teacher is currently practicing his swordsmanship, so I'll have to ask you to wait here for a moment." Senior Xie waved his hand.

“Alright.” Zhang Xuan halted as he looked at the elder in the gazebo intently, interested to see what he was going to do.

The elder’s movements were extremely slow, but there was a distinct feeling of unbounded flexibility from it, a little reminiscent of the Taiji Fist.

Every single slash seemed to seal off an entire area of space, leaving those facing it with no way to escape from the attack.

“What profound swordsmanship,” Zhang Xuan remarked in awe.

As one who had comprehended Sword Quintessence, Zhang Xuan could be considered as one who had reached the very pinnacle of swordsmanship. To the untrained eye, the elder’s movement might seem to be nothing much, full of openings for one to exploit. However, with just a glance, Zhang Xuan could tell the extraordinary prowess of the sword art.

Slow as it might have been, the elder’s swordsmanship harnessed the very essence of swordsmanship in it.

It actually bears some semblance of the Heaven’s Path Sword Art!

It was an indubitable fact that swordsmanship was valued for its flexibility and swiftness in movements, but it would be sheer foolishness to equate swiftness to strength.

A swift sword wielded fearsome prowess, but if it was unable to strike the vitals of the opponent, it would merely be a waste of strength.

Anyone could pick up a weapon and slash it wildly in quick succession. Such a maneuver would appear frightening, keeping most at bay. However, a true expert would be able to instantaneously see through the openings in the attacks and subdue the individual with a single strike.

In a battle, swiftness was far from enough. Precision was of the utmost importance as well.

The elder’s swordsmanship was extremely slow, such that it would be more accurate to call it a performance than a real sword art, but every single movement of his was aligned with

the essence of swordsmanship. Even the air seemed to tremble in resonance to his movements, sealing the entire space altogether. This bore a striking resemblance to his Heaven's Path Sword Art!

It was the kind of swordsmanship that was completely devoid of excessive actions. As soon as the blade was drawn, it would surely strike a vital spot.

It was due to this property that Zhang Xuan had been able to instill fear in the hearts of his opponent through his Heaven's Path Sword Art, and none of those in the same cultivation realm as him stood a chance against his swordsmanship.

After the initial shock, Zhang Xuan soon shook his head. However, while it does bear a striking resemblance, it's still lacking a little!

As similar as it was to the Heaven's Path Sword Art, it simply was not it.

In swordsmanship, even the slightest of difference could create the greatest difference in results!

If the elder were to face him with such swordsmanship, even if the elder wielded strength similar to the puppet in the Jia Corridor, Zhang Xuan would be able to defeat him easily!

It was not to say that the elder's swordsmanship was weak, but the current sword art he was executing could be said to be a poor imitation of the Heaven's Path Sword Art. Every single move it made would simply be naturally curbed by the real Heaven's Path Sword Art, thus placing the elder in an absolutely disadvantageous position.

Regardless of whether this sword art was created by him or the Third Sanctum Head, the very fact that he could achieve this level of swordsmanship is a frightening feat in itself. Still... I can only say that it's a huge pity! Zhang Xuan sighed on the inside.

The Heaven's Path Sword Art was created by compiling innumerable sword arts together, and it had already achieved the level of simplified profoundness.

As an ordinary human, it was indeed incredible for the elder to have been able to come so close to comprehending the essence of swordsmanship.

Hu!

While Zhang Xuan was still deep in thought, the elder in the gazebo finally halted his movements and retracted his sword. His aura felt as steady as a mountain, and his zhenqi swiftly retracted like the ebbing tide, making it impossible to discern anything extraordinary about him with the naked eye.

If not for witnessing the wonders in his swordsmanship, Zhang Xuan might have thought of him as an ordinary old man.

With a light smile, the elder turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “This friend over here, I saw you shaking your head earlier. Is there something inappropriate with my swordsmanship?”

“Inappropriate? That’s not it.” Zhang Xuan paused for a moment before continuing.

“It would be more apt to say that... it’s completely wrong!”

1324 A Strand of Hair

Completely wrong? Shui Qianrou was stunned for an instant before her face swiftly warped in horror.

It felt like she had received enough shocks for a lifetime that day.

She had already told the young man in advance to mind his words, and the latter had responded positively to her words.

Is this what you mean by being careful with your words?

Her teacher's swordsmanship was number one in the Sanctum of Sages. In fact, even when taking the entire Master Teacher Continent into account, he was definitely ranked amid those who stood at the zenith. In face of such a master, an ordinary man would not even dare breathe loudly, fearing that his actions would incur her teacher's wrath. Yet, this fellow actually said that his swordsmanship was completely wrong!

Are you incapable of speaking properly?

At the same time, Senior Xie's face also turned livid with anger. "What did you say?"

Those words could be taken as a clear insult toward his teacher.

He still had some respect for the young man in view of how he was able to discover and subdue the sword qi at the entrance, but who would have thought that he was just a person with his head in the clouds?

"Let him finish his words." The elder, Jian Qinsheng, waved his hand before turning his gaze to Zhang Xuan. "This sword art was passed down to me from my ancestor, and it was with this sword art that he rose to the very peak of the Master Teacher Continent. It would be an exaggeration to say that he was infallible, but there was hardly anyone who was a match for him then... So, why would you say that this sword art is completely wrong?"

“Well...” Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment, but he soon realized that there were so many flaws that he did not know where he should start from. If he were to start listing all of them, he was afraid that the elder might just lose all confidence in his swordsmanship. Thus, he could only sigh and say, “There are simply too many of them. I don’t know how I should put it...”

You don’t know how you should put it?

Shui Qianrou’s fists were so tightly clenched together that her fingernails were sinking into her flesh.

If you don’t know how you should put it, why don’t you consider not speaking at all?

Are you really not afraid of death, or are you just tired of living?

Overwhelmed with rage, Senior Xie stepped forward and bellowed, “Arrogant fellow! Do you really think that you will be able to impress my teacher by spouting such nonsense over here?”

On the other hand, Jian Qinsheng frowned upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s words.

As one of the most esteemed swordmasters throughout the Master Teacher Continent, there were countless young talents who wished to come under his tutelage. However, due to his severe demands when selecting his disciples, only a rare few were accepted. Perhaps in an attempt to stand out from the others, there were those who would utter arrogant words before him each year in hopes of catching his attention.

It was a pity that their arrogance would be proven empty after a quick test.

However, on top of wielding top-notch swordsmanship, Jian Qinsheng was an 8-star high-tier master teacher as well, possessing a superior eye of discernment.

When the young man before him spoke those words earlier, there were no unnatural fluctuations in his voice, and his aura remained steady throughout. This was a sign of conviction, meaning to say that he had confidence in what he was saying.

This was in stark contrast to the hint of anxiety and apprehension he had sensed from the previous students who had dared speak arrogantly before him.

For this, rather than being angered by the young man's words, he was intrigued. He wanted to get to the bottom of the matter.

Senior Xie clasped his fist and said, "Teacher, please permit me to challenge that arrogant fellow to a duel and assess his swordsmanship! If his words prove to be empty, I wish to teach him a lesson so that he will learn some humility!"

How could he stand idly when someone was doubting his own teacher? As a student, it was his obligation to uphold his teacher's reputation and honor!

Instead of replying to Senior Xie's request, Jian Qinsheng turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, "You are a freshman, right?"

"Yes, I am," Zhang Xuan replied with an attitude that appeared neither subservient nor arrogant.

"Un. Among the freshmen, there's a student who possesses exceptional swordsmanship. His name is Zhang Jiuxiao. Could you be him?" Jian Qinsheng asked.

He had watched the entrance examination, and he had seen that Zhang Jiuxiao had achieved the level of Half-Quintessence in swordsmanship despite his young age. There was no doubt that he harnessed boundless potential within him. Could the young man before him possibly be Zhang Jiuxiao?

"Jiuxiao is a friend of mine." At this point, Zhang Xuan bowed slightly before continuing. "I am Zhang Xuan."

"Zhang Xuan?" Jian Qinsheng pondered for a moment before shaking his head.

Throughout the entrance examination, he had only been keeping an eye out for those who possessed exceptional talent in swordsmanship. While Zhang Xuan did cause a huge commotion when he rose to the top fifty in the final moment, to Jian Qinsheng, that was nothing worthy of note at all.

“You said that my sword art is completely wrong, but when I asked you about it, you aren’t able to say anything either. Since that’s the case, why don’t you have a duel with my student? I’ll have him suppress his cultivation to your level. Of course, the both of you will compete only in terms of swordsmanship, and it’ll be a friendly duel,” Jian Qinsheng proposed.

Since the other party was not Zhang Jiuxiao, it was likely that his comprehension of swordsmanship was not too deep either. Thus, he decided to have his student try the other party out so as to see just what gave him the confidence to utter such brazen words.

“Sure, I’m fine with it.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Since he was unable to voice the flaws, it would be good if he could demonstrate it to the other party instead. Perhaps, he might be able to give the other party some insights regarding it.

“Follow me!” Hearing that the young man had agreed to the duel, Senior Xie harrumphed coldly before leading the way forward.

A moment later, they arrived at an empty clearing not too far away from the gazebo. It was around twenty meters in diameter, a decent size to hold a battle.

Huala!

After taking his position in the clearing, Senior Xie slowly drew his sword.

The instant that his sword left its sheath, the air around him immediately changed. It felt sharp and dangerous, reminiscent of a dagger that would plunge right into one’s body at any moment.

Geji! Geji!

Even though he had suppressed his cultivation down to Primordial Spirit realm primary stage, Senior Xie still carried an imposing presence that made him tower over others.

Upper Sword Heart?

With just a look, Zhang Xuan was able to tell that Senior Xie had already achieved the level of Upper Sword Heart, just a step away from achieving a breakthrough.

To be able to achieve such a level of mastery in his swordsmanship at his age, even if he was still slightly lacking compared to Zhang Jiuxiao, he could already be considered an expert.

Channeling his spirit and mind to the peak, Senior Xie gazed at Zhang Xuan coldly. “Where’s your sword? Make your move!”

“My sword?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

Considering that he was dealing with someone of his cultivation realm, and his comprehension of swordsmanship had already reached Sword Quintessence... he would really be bullying the other party if he wielded a sword.

Thus, he quickly took a look at the surroundings before his eyes finally fell upon Shui Qianrou. “If it’s not too much trouble, I would like to borrow something from you, Senior Shui!”

“You want to borrow something from me?” Shui Qianrou was bewildered by that abrupt request for a moment before realization struck her. She flicked her wrist and passed her sword over. “Here!”

Given how the young man had examined her sword previously, he must have been thinking of borrowing it from her.

Typically speaking, due to the presence of a spirit within the sword, it would be difficult to borrow the sword of another. However, given that the young man had achieved Sword Quintessence, that should not be a problem.

“That’s not what I mean.” Instead of taking the sword, Zhang Xuan walked up to Shui Qianrou, and with a light pinch, a strand of hair from the young lady fell into his palm. “I don’t need the sword. I’ll just borrow a hair.”

After saying those words, he infused zhenqi into the strand of hair.

Weng!

The hair immediately stood up as if a rapier.

Returning to the clearing, Zhang Xuan said with a smile, "Let's begin!"

"You are going to use that against me?" Senior Xie's eyes reddened in rage as his body trembled non-stop.

He was one of the top sword practitioners among the student populace in the Sanctum of Sages, not to mention, the student of Swordmaster Jian Qinsheng. It was already beneath his standing to challenge a mere freshman, and yet, that fellow actually wanted to face him with a single strand of hair.

That was a blatant show of derision toward him!

"Un. I don't have a hobby of bullying others." Zhang Xuan nodded calmly.

"Now you're asking for it!" Rage consumed his rationality as Senior Xie whipped his sword through the air with a piercing shrill.

The difference between a professional and an amateur would clearly show as soon as they made a move.

Even though Senior Xie was clearly in an enraged state, he did not allow it to affect his swordsmanship at all. As soon as he made a move, he had already sealed eight of Zhang Xuan's acupoints with his sword qi, sealing the major zhenqi circulation pathway associated with most sword arts.

That fellow's rage is faked? Zhang Xuan noted with a nod of approval.

There was truly no one mediocre among the students of the Sanctum of Sages.

Despite appearing to be incomparably angry on the surface, appearing as if he would explode at any moment, Zhang Xuan realized that Senior Xie was actually analyzing his posture and movements with absolute calmness, and the maneuvers he had executed were also calculated precisely to seal off his escape routes.

Were the one facing this attack another Upper Sword Heart expert or even Zhang Jiuxiao, they would surely be sent into a fluster, forced to face him head-on.

But if Zhang Xuan were to do that, the hair in his hand would surely be destroyed by the force from the collision. With his weapon destroyed at the very first encounter, that would signal the end of this sword duel.

Forcing others to go on the defensive with a single strike, sword experts really should not be underestimated.

However, it was a pity that the opponent Senior Xie was facing was an expert who had comprehended Sword Quintessence!

With a light smile, Zhang Xuan did not bother to retreat or side step. Instead, with a leisurely diagonal pierce, he aimed for Senior Xie's shoulder.

To most, it would be hard to understand why he would ignore the blade that was swiftly falling upon him and launch an offense on the opponent's shoulder instead. However, upon seeing this sight, a deep frown appeared between Jian Qinsheng's eyebrows, and a look of disbelief surfaced in his eyes.

That was one of the moves he had executed earlier in the gazebo.

Just that, the young man had managed to make it even more ingenious and fluid. The very movement seemed to naturally harmonize with the world, granting it compelling might.

He had only made slight changes in the movement here and there, but the prowess he is able to bring forth is at a whole new level. Jian Qinsheng clenched his fists tightly in agitation.

As a renowned swordmaster on the Master Teacher Continent, his eye for swordsmanship was irrefutable.

The young man's movements appeared to be naively simple, but the crux to it lay in its impeccable timing to overwhelm the enemy's swordsmanship. Through it, even a strand of hair could display might on par with a sword!

“Hmm?” At this moment, Senior Xie’s face also warped in astonishment.

As soon as the young man made a move, he immediately felt his zhenqi circulation pathway being severed, and as if his chest had been clawed apart, intense pangs of pain assaulted him.

“Damn it!” With reddened eyes, Senior Xie swiftly retracted his attack and began flitting around the clearing.

He was intending on launching a forceful attack to capitalize on the strength of his sword to sever the young man’s hair strand. However, after his initial plan fell apart, he decided to take a more careful approach, flitting around the battlefield in wait for a suitable opportunity to take the young man down in a single move.

It was only a brief encounter, but it had eroded all disdain he had for the young man before him. He realized that the young man’s comprehension of swordsmanship was not beneath his.

“This...” On the other hand, the various juniors who had gathered in the area to spectate Senior Xie’s duel were confused as to why Senior Xie would take a defensive position right after a single clash, and perplexed murmurs could be heard among them.

Even Shui Qianrou was completely bewildered by the situation as well.

While Jian Qinsheng was able to sense the ingenuity behind Zhang Xuan’s move, his disciples were limited by their own understanding of swordsmanship and could not see through it.

As a result, it appeared to them that Senior Xie was intentionally going easy on the young man.

“Senior Xie is simply too kind!”

“Indeed. If it was me, I would have that fellow sliced apart in a heartbeat!”

“Don’t worry. Since Senior Xie has proposed the duel, he will definitely make that young man deeply regret his earlier arrogance!”

Such whispers could be vaguely heard in the area.

Zhang Xuan heard those whispers, too, but he shrugged them off with a light chuckle.

He had to admit that Senior Xie was sharper and more flexible than he had thought. The latter seemed to have realized that his shoulder pierce was not as simple as it looked—the timing and trajectory of the motion allowed for countless transformations that would allow him to easily suppress anything that the latter could have thrown at him—so he decisively withdrew his attack, opting to bide his time and wait for an opening.

But how could the Heaven's Path Sword Art be avoided just by moving around the area?

Holding the strand of hair tightly, Zhang Xuan used the very same move to launch another diagonal pierce.

This time, the hair strand was not aimed for Senior Xie's shoulder but his throat.

Once again, it looked like a simple maneuver, but due to its impeccable timing, it allowed for countless transformations. No matter how Senior Xie tried to evade, Zhang Xuan had plenty of ways to drag him back into the center of the attack, as if he was trapped in an inescapable whirlpool. In other words, there was no way to avoid it at all!

The same move, but due to a slight difference in the trajectory of attack and timing, there was a manyfold difference in terms of prowess!

It was difficult to believe that something like this could be possible even when witnessing it with one's own eyes.

There's actually such a transformation to the move as well?

By the side, Jian Qinsheng widened his eyes in shock, not daring to believe what he was seeing.

1325 A Strand to Shatter the Sword

Having devoted many years of his life to uncovering the secrets behind his ancestor's swordsmanship, Jian Qinsheng was already well-versed in all the different transformations in the swordsmanship.

The move that Zhang Xuan had executed earlier consisted of eighteen different types of transformations, but there were none that were an attack from this angle!

A simple pierce it might have been, but it was indubitably a masterful stroke, cornering the opponent in a single move!

Jian Qinsheng could not believe his eyes. But to do this, one must have an absolute grasp over the timing of the battle and the maneuvers of the opponent. Even I would require a lengthy period of contemplation before I could think of something like that, and to do so during a tense battle, where life and death hinge on the slightest millimeter of difference...

Even he would struggle to execute such a movement in battle.

“You...”

While Jian Qinsheng was stunned by the situation, Senior Xie felt an extremely stifling sensation that threatened to blow his chest up.

Even though he could not comprehend the profundity of the pierce, he could feel his flow of zhenqi and momentum being completely thrown off when the hair strand pierced toward him. Given his current movement, if he could not find a solution fast, he would crash right into the hair!

Although it was just a strand of hair, with zhenqi infused into it, its sharpness was on par with any sword. It was definitely more than capable of piercing through his throat or even decapitating his head!

Retreat!

Knowing that he would only incur severe injuries if he pushed on ahead, he gritted his teeth and thrust his palm forward.

Pah!

A sonic boom sounded in the air, and Senior Xie made use of the reaction force from the palm thrust to retreat.

Due to the abrupt reversal in his energy flow, Senior Xie lost control of the raging zhenqi in his body, and it rampaged throughout his body like a heavy hammer tossed around the area. His face swiftly reddened, and fresh blood began trickling down from the corners of his mouth.

So far, they had traded two moves, but without even touching one another, he was already injured.

Most likely, no one would believe him if he told them.

“What is going on?”

“I have no idea either. What is Senior Xie up to?”

With their eye of discernment, they were unable to see through the prowess of Zhang Xuan’s sword art. All they saw was that Senior Xie had the upper hand when he abruptly retreated, resulting in a backlash in his energy flow.

This bewildering situation left all of them dumbstruck.

“Could it be that... our Senior Xie is actually a masochist?”

“Now that you mention it, that could very well be the case. I remember that Senior Xie once pursued our Senior Shui before, but the very next day, his entire face was swollen.”

“I heard about that, too. After that, he didn’t dare take even a second glance at Senior Shui, right? Just that, what does that have to do with being masochist?”

“It has everything to do with being masochist! Every single person in the academy knows that that person likes Senior Shui, and he still dared to court her. Isn’t that just asking for a beating?”

The various juniors gossiped by the side.

On the other hand, seeing the bizarre expressions that his juniors were shooting him by the side, Senior Xie could roughly guess what they were thinking of, and his face turned completely livid.

He had planned to teach that arrogant fellow a lesson in his teacher's stead, but despite wielding a Saint intermediate-tier sword to deal with a fellow who was holding nothing but a strand of hair, he ended up inducing an energy backlash himself and spurted blood.

“If you can withstand this move, I'll admit defeat!”

Taking a step back, Senior Xie took a deep breath before his eyes abruptly narrowed dangerously.

Huala!

A powerful surge of Sword Intent immediately burst forth from it, rising straight up into the sky.

“It's Senior Xie's trump card, Sorrowless Sword!”

“This is the sword art created by our teacher, right? A sword to sever all frustrations, distancing oneself from worry and sorrow. Within the same cultivation realm, there is none who can withstand this sword art!”

“Our teacher is able to create 99 surges of sword qi instantaneously when executing this move. Of us, Senior Xie has shown the greatest aptitude toward this sword art, and even though he cannot compare to our teacher, he's already able to produce 32 surges of sword qi in a breath!”

“With 32 surges of sword qi sealing his acupoints, the young man won't even be able to find the strength within him to counterattack...”

...

A commotion broke out in the surroundings, and worry surfaced in Shui Qianrou's eyes.

She was the one who had brought Zhang Xuan here, so she would feel deeply guilty if he was injured in the duel against her senior.

But with his strength, this shouldn't pose a problem at all...

However, recalling how the young man was able to clear even the Yi Corridor, it was unlikely that Senior Xie would be a match for him.

Tzzzz!

Driving his aura to its very peak, Senior Xie rose into the sky, and entering the state of Sword-Man Union, he pushed his sword forth.

“Not bad!” Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

This sword art required the sword practitioner to devote their spirit, mind, and soul into their swordsmanship in order to heighten its prowess. Without exceptional aptitude toward swordsmanship, it would be difficult to achieve this feat.

With a single pierce, he was able to seal off 32 of the opponent's acupoints, thus placing the opponent in a disadvantageous position. A truly incredible technique it was.

Eye of Insight!

In an instant, the various flaws in Senior Xie's movements appeared in clarity right before Zhang Xuan.

The might is decent, but it has too many openings.

With just a glance, Zhang Xuan could already see more than a dozen openings. Instead of stepping back, he chose one of the openings and charged forth.

“What is that fellow doing?”

“Does he intend to clash directly with Senior Xie's sword with that strand of hair?”

“I can't even bring myself to watch any longer. That's suicide!”

...

A huge uproar rippled through the crowd upon seeing Zhang Xuan's actions.

In their view, the logical course of action to make before Senior Xie's ferocious offense was to evade. Yet, that young

man actually dashed right up instead. He was really courting death!

Even Jian Qinsheng could not help but feel deeply perplexed by the sight before him.

He was the one who had created the Sorrowless Sword, and he knew very well what frightening offensive power it wielded. Even sword practitioners who wielded sword arts of the same tier would not dare clash with it directly, and yet, the young man actually wanted to face it with just a strand of hair. Not only was it likely that he would be injured in the encounter, there was even a chance that he might be killed in the clash!

Huala!

Before many bewildered gazes, the sword finally came into contact with the hair.

Hu!

Just as everyone thought that the hair strand would be sliced into countless shreds by the rampaging sword qi, the taut hair strand suddenly slackened, and it moved in an unexpected trajectory to strike the back of Senior Xie's sword.

Weng!

It was a resounding metallic clang, and following right after was a series of crisp sounds.

Kacha! Kacha!

Taken aback, everyone quickly took a closer look, and they saw cracks swiftly creeping across the sword. In just the blink of an eye, it had already shattered into countless fragments, scattering all over the ground.

Pu!

With his sword shattered, Senior Xie once again suffered a backlash of his zhenqi. His face reddened, and blood spurted from his mouth. With a jolt, his body collapsed to the ground.

The Sorrowless Sword was indubitably a powerful sword art, but it required an extreme level of concentration into one's sword. The shattering of the sword would inevitably result in

the abrupt severing of one's mind, spirit, and soul, dealing immense damage to the sword practitioner.

"This..." The surroundings fell unnervingly silent. Everyone stared at the young man, aghast.

Swallowing a pill, Senior Xie struggled to his feet as he muttered despondently beneath his breath, "I've lost..."

No matter how unwilling he was to accept it, he had no choice but to admit his defeat.

For a sword practitioner like him to lose to a strand of hair while wielding a Saint intermediate-tier sword...

Everything was so unbelievable that it felt unreal to him, as if he was in the midst of a dream.

"There's no need to feel discouraged by your loss," Jian Qinsheng told Senior Xie. After which, he turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan with a heated look in his eyes, as if he had found a gem. "This young brother over here has achieved a level of swordsmanship far above yours!"

"I understand..." Senior Xie nodded in embarrassment.

Noting the slight air of awkwardness, Zhang Xuan quickly spoke up. "It's just a friendly duel to learn from one another. I'm also in awe of Senior Xie's extraordinary swordsmanship."

"To be able to use a strand of hair to shatter his sword, your grasp over the sword has really reached the apex of the continent." Jian Qinsheng did not hold back on his compliments at all. "If I didn't see wrongly, your strand of hair should also be severed too, right?"

"That's right." Zhang Xuan nodded as he released his zhenqi.

Hu!

With the slight tug of a light breeze, the taut hair immediately dissipated on the spot.

The crowd was astonished once more.

It wasn't too difficult to infuse one's zhenqi into an intact strand of hair to pull it taut, but the strand of hair that the

young man wielded had already dissipated into countless fragments. To be able to circulate one's zhenqi through it to maintain its form and even shatter Senior Xie's sword... just how frightening was the young man's control over his zhenqi?

After confirming his guess, Jian Qinsheng consoled his disciple with a smile. "Actually, you don't have to be too disheartened. Your sword wasn't shattered by the strand of hair in his hand."

Hearing those words, a look of incomprehension surfaced on Senior Xie's face. The other disciples were equally confused as well.

The shattering of the sword had only begun after the hair struck the sword. If it was not the hair that had caused the shattering of the sword, what else could it be?

"When you execute the Sorrowless Sword, due to your piercing action, you focus all your might at the tip of the sword, hoping to concentrate your strength to defeat your opponent.

"As a result of that, the blade of your sword was left completely unguarded. Furthermore, the spot that the hair strand struck was where the exertion of might intersected, thus causing the zhenqi you have infused into the sword to run amok.

"To put it in more direct terms, it's your own strength that caused the shattering of the sword. All your opponent did was find the ideal position and timing to strike!" Jian Qinsheng explained earnestly, fearing that his disciple would lose all confidence in his swordsmanship as a result of this encounter.

After which, he turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, "May I know if what I have said is true?"

"Elder Jian is indeed keen-eyed!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

Jian Qinsheng was right. No matter how he concentrated his zhenqi into the strand of hair he wielded, it was impossible for it to be able to shatter a Saint intermediate-tier weapon. The reason he had been able to produce such an effect was because he had tapped into Senior Xie's strength as well.

When the intersection of might within the sword was struck by his strand of hair, the gathered zhenqi ran amok, resulting in the swift destruction of the blade.

Due to the backlash from the strike, the feeble strand of hair also ended up being reduced into countless shreds. If not for Zhang Xuan's pure zhenqi, it would have long disappeared along with the wind.

“To be able to see through flaws in the swordsmanship of another and launch a precise counterattack, if I'm not mistaken...” With a hint of agitation and disbelief in his eyes, Jian Qinsheng stared at Zhang Xuan intently as he asked, “Has your comprehension of swordsmanship already achieved the level of Sword Quintessence?”

Only those who had achieved the level of Sword Quintessence could possess such sensitivity to swordsmanship, clearly perceiving the movement of sword qi in the area to launch an effective counterattack, thus easily subduing Senior Xie even while he was executing the Sorrowless Sword.

“That's right!” Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

He might still have been able to conceal it if he had not made a move, but if Jian Qinsheng could not tell this much after the previous display, the many years he had spent practicing swordsmanship really would have been in vain.

“To comprehend Sword Quintessence despite being only in your twenties... Are you from the Zhang Clan?” Even after hearing the affirmative response from Zhang Xuan, Jian Qinsheng still found it difficult to believe what he was hearing.

Just how much aptitude must the young man possess in swordsmanship in order to climb this far at an age as young as his? One must know that he had also been reputed to be a peerless genius back in his time, but still, he had to devote many years of effort into his swordsmanship before he was able to achieve the level of Sword Quintessence.

“Zhang Clan? I'm not from the Zhang Clan,” Zhang Xuan replied with a bitter smile.

Why would everyone assume that he was from the Zhang Clan after hearing his name?

Were the offspring of Zhang Clan the only Zhangs who were talented?

It was as if they were saying that it was impossible for normal cultivators to achieve this level through their own hard work!

“You aren’t from the Zhang Clan?” Jian Qinsheng was taken aback for a moment before breaking into a heart laughter.

“That’s truly great, hahaha!”

“This…” Seeing how excited Jian Qinsheng had suddenly become, Zhang Xuan could not help but fall into a daze.

To get so excited after hearing that he was not from the Zhang Clan, could it be that Jian Qinsheng had some kind of grudge with the Zhang Clan?

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“Pardon me, it seems like I have acted inappropriately...”
With a smile, Jian Qinsheng swiftly regained his composure as he looked at Zhang Xuan with a satisfied look. “The swordsmanship you executed previously is also the Flowing Water Swordsmanship, right?”

Hearing that name, Zhang Xuan was startled. He shook his head and replied, “Flowing Water Swordsmanship? What’s that?”

“You have never heard of it before?” Jian Qinsheng frowned. “The swordsmanship that you practice was created by my ancestor, the Third Sanctum Head, Jian Liushui, and it has been passed down for many generations before coming down to me. It is also practiced by many other sword practitioners in the Sanctum of Sages. The swordsmanship that you executed earlier, be it in terms of Sword Intent or maneuvers, bears a close resemblance to it. It should be the Flowing Water Swordsmanship.”

Even though the swordsmanship was created by his ancestor, it was not just passed down through his lineage. There were many students of the Sanctum of Sages’ Sword Sanctuary who practiced the Flowing Water Swordsmanship as well.

He thought that even if the young man before him was not from the Zhang Clan, he must have grasped the crux to the Flowing Water Swordsmanship through some kind of fortuitous encounter, allowing him to achieve such strength within a short period of time.

Yet, to think that the young man had not even heard of the Flowing Water Swordsmanship before!

Realizing that Jian Qinsheng might be referring to that terribly flawed swordsmanship of his, Zhang Xuan replied with a polite smile, “To tell you the truth, the sword art that I

executed earlier was something that I came up with. Even though it's similar to your Flowing Water Swordsmanship in form, they are two different sword arts!"

That nonsensical swordsmanship might have appeared fine at first glance, but upon further examination, the flaws that it was riddled with would leave one feeling disgusted all over. He would have to be mad to practice such swordsmanship!

"You came up with that sword art?" Jian Qinsheng widened his eyes in disbelief.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

Considering that he was in the Sanctum of Sages, one of the top institutes in the Master Teacher Continent, he could not afford to use Yang Xuan's name anymore. Otherwise, if the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters looked into the matter and proved his statement false, he would be in deep trouble. Since that was the case, it would be safer for him to say that he was the one who had come up with it.

In any case, after comprehending Sword Quintessence, he could already be considered a swordmaster. As such, it would not be unusual for him to have come up with a couple of sword arts or something.

"This..." Jian Qinsheng was still unable to believe what he had just heard. "Can you display the sword art that you have created once more?"

"Of course!" Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

With a flick of his fingers, several cold glints shot forth from his fingertips, slicing right through the air.

His movements were straightforward and to the point, devoid of any complexity. However, they carried an inescapable sharp edge, as if one would be unable to escape from him once the sword qi had laid its eyes on them.

Another thing to note was that the sword art executed was extremely slow, but it carried a devastating momentum that left others feeling deeply helpless.

It was as if standing against the sword art was equivalent to standing against the very heavens.

“It really isn’t the Flowing Water Swordsmanship...” Jian Qinsheng muttered in disappointment.

He had thought that the young man before him had managed to grasp the crux of his ancestor’s swordsmanship, but from the looks of it, the conceptualization of the two sword arts were vastly different. This was a clear sign that they were from two separate lineages.

Furthermore, he could tell that the other party’s sword art was even more profound than his ancestor’s Flowing Water Swordsmanship, containing innumerable transformations.

Unfortunately, it was still severely lacking in terms of prowess. From the looks of it, it was likely to be a rather low tier sword art, not exceeding Saint intermediate-tier.

Tossing aside the feelings of disappointment within, Jian Qinsheng looked at the young man before him once more. “Since Zhang shi was able to create such a formidable sword art, and your comprehension of swordsmanship has also achieved the level of Sword Quintessence, you probably aren’t here to learn.”

Considering how accomplished the young man before him was in the field of swordsmanship, possibly achieving a level that was close to him, it was unlikely that the young man was there to learn from him.

“I did come to visit with a humble request in mind. I heard that Elder Jian has a vast collection of sword art manuals, and if it’s not too much to ask, I would like to browse through it.” Zhang Xuan revealed his true intentions.

“You wish to browse through my collection of sword art manuals? That isn’t a problem, just that...” At this point, Jian Qinsheng hesitated for a brief moment before continuing. “To tell you the truth, my Compendium of Sword Arts was created by my ancestor, Jian Liushui, and he has infused his Sword Intent into it. Only those who have acquired the recognition of his Sword Intent will be able to enter its premises. In fact, I

use that as a basis for deciding whom to accept as my disciples so as to ensure that they will be able to enter and study in the Compendium of Sword Arts.”

“Only those who have acquired the recognition of his Sword Intent will be able to enter its premises?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had heard of this matter from Shui Qianrou prior to heading over, and back then, he had thought that it was a rule that Jian Qinsheng had come up with. But from the looks of it now, that was not the case.

“That’s right. My ancestor reached the very pinnacle of the Master Teacher Continent in his time, and his strength far surpassing mine. The Sword Intent that he left behind is exceptionally powerful, such that even I am unable to flout his rules,” Jian Qinsheng said with a bitter smile.

Everyone said that he was too rigid and inflexible. He possessed an exceptional sword heritage, but he chose to selfishly keep it to himself, and that was what that led to him being unable to find a suitable successor to his lineage of swordsmanship.

Only he himself knew that he was restricted by the rules imposed by his ancestor, and there was nothing he could do about it.

“There are only two possible ways one can enter the Compendium of Sword Arts. First, possessing the Sanctum Head Token. Second, earning the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent. There are no other alternatives. If you really wish to access the book collection, feel free to give it a go. Once you have earned the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent, you will be able to freely enter and leave the Compendium of Sword Arts.”

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding.
“Alright.”

While he possessed the Sanctum Head Token, he still was not entitled to the privileges that it came with. His cultivation realm was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, and

his master teacher rank was at 7-star; he was a long way off being able to unseal the token.

Putting aside the fact that Sage Kui had warned him against revealing the Sanctum Head Token to anyone before he managed to successfully unseal it, it could lead to a great deal of trouble if he did so.

This simply was not aligned with his motto of humility and keeping a low profile.

Since that was the case, it would be good for him to see if he could receive the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent first. Perhaps, he might just be able to clear it easily with the unique nature of the Heaven's Path Sword Art.

“Follow me!” Jian Qinsheng nodded before beckoning Zhang Xuan over.

Considering how talented the young man before him was and, most importantly of all, he was not from the Zhang Clan, Jian Qinsheng was more than willing to grant him access to his collection of books. However, it was a pity that he was helpless before the rules.

Zhang Xuan followed closely behind Jian Qinsheng, and Shui Qianrou, Senior Xie, and the others glanced at one another before deciding to tag along.

The fact that they were all present meant that they had earned the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent. They were curious to see if this young swordmaster would be able to do the same.

It did not take long for them to arrive at a rather spacious room. Inscribed at the very center of the room was a wall with a massive ‘劍’ (Sword) character. Its strokes were sharp and powerful, carrying a disposition that felt as if it would pierce through the heavens.

It was somewhat similar to the character that he had seen back at the Sword Lagoon, but the both of them were completely different in terms of conceptualization.

Carved beneath the ‘劍’ character were all kinds of explanations and interpretations. With just a glance, it was

apparent that there was some history to those carvings. Most likely, they were the insights and experiences left behind by generations of sword practitioners in the lineage.

“This character was left behind by Ancestor Liushui many years ago,” Jian Qinsheng explained. “As long as one can step within five meters of it without coming under its attack, one will have earned the Sword Intent’s acknowledgement.”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Once a sword practitioner had tempered their Sword Intent to a profound level, the Sword Intent could gain a certain level of consciousness, allowing it to assess a situation instinctively and move of its own accord to protect its owner. The character inscribed on the wall harnessed Jian Liushui’s very will, and it would be a grave mistake to underestimate the prowess of the Sword Intent harnessed within it. If it sensed a conceptualization of swordsmanship that was at odds with it, it would automatically launch a series of attacks.

“Allow me to give it a try.” Knowing what it would take for him to access the collection of books, Zhang Xuan took in a deep breath and began walking forward slowly.

However, barely after taking a single step, he was already feeling immensely pressured by the massive character before him. It felt as if he was a mortal standing before a stupendously massive sun, and every step forward resulted in a swift intensifying of the searing sensation on his Primordial Spirit.

Is the swordsmanship I have cultivated really incompatible with the Sword Intent?

Zhang Xuan had been hoping that the odds would be in his favor, but given the current circumstances, it was clear that he was not going to receive the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent.

This was really troublesome.

He could attempt to sneak into the Compendium of Sword Arts to read the books, but considering that he was in the Sanctum of Sages, perhaps that might not be a good decision.

Ignoring the tight defenses around the Compendium of Sword Arts, if it was revealed that he, the future sanctum head, had broken into his own academy like a thief, he would become the laughingstock of the town!

Jeez, with great power comes great responsibility!

It seemed like becoming the sanctum head was not necessarily a blessing.

He really missed those days when he was a nobody and could do whatever he wanted freely without being restrained by anything!

While Zhang Xuan was thinking such thoughts, his feet did not stop. He continued advancing forward, and the pressure from the character continued heaping down on him. It was as if he was standing right beneath a guillotine, and the blade was about to fall upon his neck at any moment.

Feeling threatened by the might of the Sword Intent harnessed within the ‘金’ character, the Sword Intent within Zhang Xuan’s body also began stirring in unease, eager to charge out to stand its ground against the other.

“Will he be able to obtain the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent?” Shui Qianrou asked worriedly as she watched the young man advancing toward the ‘金’ character.

Jian Qinsheng shook his head. “I’m afraid that things don’t look too good for him...”

Through his observation, he could tell that the young man had already found his own path in swordsmanship, and it was of a vastly different conceptualization to his ancestor’s Flowing Water Swordsmanship. It was not possible for the young man to successfully obtain the Sword Intent’s acknowledgement.

Wu wu wu!

While Jian Qinsheng was in the midst of his words, the ‘金’ character on the wall abruptly jolted, and a surge of sword qi shot straight for Zhang Xuan.

“Haa...” Knowing that this was a sign of failure, Jian Qinsheng sighed deeply as he waved his hand forward.

A powerful might burst forth from his finger, deflecting the sword qi emanated from the ‘劍’ character.

“Come back!”

“Alright.” Knowing that the result was already clear, Zhang Xuan could only shake his head in disappointment before retreating.

“It seems like you aren’t able to win the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent. Perhaps, this is a sign to say that you aren’t meant to enter the Compendium of Sword Arts,” Jian Qinsheng said in lamentation.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan could only sigh deeply again.

Considering that the Heaven’s Path Sword Art harnessed the very essence of swordsmanship, he had been hoping that it might just be able to earn the acknowledgement of the Flowing Water Swordsmanship. However, it seemed like his thoughts were too naive.

“May I know if there’s any way for me to obtain the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent?”

“There’s only one true peak to swordsmanship, but there are many different Sword Quintessences that pave the way to the top. The Sword Quintessence comprehended by my ancestor is one such way, and the one comprehended by the head of the Zhang Clan is another. Even though they lead to the same peak, different Sword Quintessences still repel one another due to their fundamental differences. Thus, I fear that it’s impossible for you to succeed in your current state.

“That being said, perhaps, just perhaps... if you could comprehend the Flowing Water Swordsmanship to the level of Sword Quintessence, you might just be able to earn the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent,” Jian Qinsheng said.

If the comprehending of true swordsmanship was the destination that all sword practitioners hoped to reach, Sword Quintessences could be considered the pathway that sword practitioners tread upon on their way there. Naturally, even if

there was only one destination, there were innumerable pathways that could lead one there.

This was just like how a question could be resolved in many different manners, but the answer would still be the same.

“What you mean is that... as long as I comprehend the Sword Intent harnessed in the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character on the wall and achieve the level of Sword Quintessence, I might be able to obtain the Sword Intent’s acknowledgement?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“That’s right.” Jian Qinsheng nodded. “However, don’t even think about trying that. It’s only a possibility I am proposing theoretically. Achieving one Sword Quintessence already requires a sword practitioner to devote their entire life to it. Achieving a second one... that would be practically impossible! There have been countless swordsmanship geniuses in the Sanctum of Sages, but none of them have ever succeeded in that before. It will only be a waste of effort...”

“Is it really that difficult?” Zhang Xuan wondered doubtfully as he turned his gaze toward the words beneath the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character and closed his eyes.

“Indeed. The difficulty is so great that it’s almost unimaginable. From what I read in the records, my ancestor, Jian Liushui, attempted to comprehend another Sword Quintessence after completing the Flowing Water Swordsmanship, only to fail terribly, nearly causing his cultivation to go berserk...”

With a deep sigh, Jian Qinsheng turned his gaze to the young man to usher him out with an apology when a loud buzzing sound suddenly echoed.

A surge of Sword Intent burst forth from the young man’s glabella. Seemingly sensing something, the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character ahead suddenly began trembling excitedly, and even the room itself began creaking loudly.

Jian Qinsheng’s eyes widened in astonishment. “Is that... the Sword Quintessence of the Flowing Water Swordsmanship?”

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It was a sensation that reminded him of the relentless, rapid tides, carrying an imposing momentum that would blast through anything that stood in its path. For someone who had been in contact with his ancestor's Flowing Water Swordsmanship from a very young age, Jian Qinsheng was extremely accustomed to that feeling.

The both of them should have been at odds, but why would the young man suddenly emanate Sword Intent that was identical to his ancestor's?

Furthermore, judging from the overwhelming aura, it seemed like he was in the midst of reaching Sword Quintessence?"

Weng weng weng!

In his moment of confusion, the swords in the hands of the sword practitioners in the area suddenly began shaking uncontrollably as their swords flew out of their sheaths. They swiftly fell to the ground, paying respects to their new emperor.

"He actually managed to reach Sword Quintessence..." Jian Qinsheng muttered as he felt his throat running hoarse.

Those who had comprehended Sword Quintessence would receive the blessings of the world. As long as a sword was not stronger than them, a Sword Quintessence expert would be able to force the sword to submit to them unconditionally.

However, it was apparent that the young man before him had already comprehended Sword Quintessence, and for him to achieve yet another breakthrough now... It could not be that he had comprehended two different types of Sword Quintessence, could it?

One must know that even achieving a single Sword Quintessence was a feat that most sword practitioners failed to

achieve despite devoting their entire life to the sword. Yet, the young man before him was only in his twenties, and he had already comprehended two of them...

More importantly, it was just a moment ago that he had said that it was impossible to comprehend two different Sword Quintessence simultaneously when the young man immediately made the breakthrough.

Must you really slap my face that quickly?

Jian Qinsheng's lips trembled uncontrollably as the entire world he had known collapsed right before his eyes.

He had started practicing swordsmanship when he was three, comprehended Lower Sword Heart when he was seventeen, Upper Sword Heart when he was forty, and Sword Quintessence when he was sixty-three... Without a doubt, his talent was legendary, and there were countless who were envious of him. But in face of the young man before him, all those glorious accomplishments of his felt like an embarrassment instead.

"He has achieved the same Sword Quintessence as teacher?" Shui Qianrou widened her eyes in disbelief as her body trembled uncontrollably.

Prior to coming over, the young man did not even know what the Sword Quintessence that her teacher had comprehended was, and yet, just by chatting a bit here and there, he suddenly attained the same Sword Quintessence as her teacher.

One must know that she had cultivated under her teacher for many years, but despite that, she had only managed to grasp the bare basics of it.

In this moment, the overwhelming sense of defeat that she felt rendered her completely incapable of speech.

Hu!

A while later, Zhang Xuan finally reined in his aura before opening his eyes once more.

This time, he walked unhesitatingly toward the '劍' (Sword) character and placed his finger on it. In response to his touch,

the character seemed to dance exuberantly, seemingly ready to fly out of its restraints and soar into the sky.

Zhang Xuan turned to Jian Qinsheng and asked with a smile, “Elder Jian, can this be considered as having obtained the acknowledgement of the Sword Intent?”

“O-of course!” Jian Qinsheng lips twitched a bit as he hurriedly nodded in response.

Even the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character left behind by his ancestor looked ready to elope together with the young man! What else could it be if not a sign of acknowledgement?

“That’s a relief!” Zhang Xuan patted his chest and sighed in relief.

As soon as he had heard Jian Qinsheng say that it was theoretically possible to comprehend a second Sword Quintessence, he had immediately collected all of the insights and interpretations concerning the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character into the Library of Heaven’s Path.

Those who were qualified to leave their words beneath the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character were all those who had reached or had been on the verge of reaching Sword Quintessence. Even though there was not too much of such text in the area, it was all incredibly insightful and concise, allowing him to compile a perfect manual.

With prior experience in reaching Sword Quintessence, it was much easier the second time around, which was also the reason he had been able to achieve a breakthrough so quickly.

“The Compendium of Sword Arts is just right ahead. I’ll open it for you now!” Jian Qinsheng headed over the corner of the wall and pushed lightly, and the two sides of the wall slowly slid apart, revealing a door behind it.

“Thank you. I happen to have several doubts concerning swordsmanship that require verification from the books, and I’ll leave once I’m done looking through the relevant books...” With his eyes lit up in excitement, Zhang Xuan quickly explained his current situation to Jian Qinsheng before heading in.

It had to be said that the collection of books in the Compendium of Sword Arts was truly amazing. It must have taken countless years before they managed to expand the compendium to such a scale.

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan began scanning the area with his eyes.

Wherever his gaze fell, the books would automatically be replicated in the Library of Heaven's Path in neat rows.

Walking in between the shelves, he quickly took in all the books around him.

A moment later, Zhang Xuan suddenly halted his footsteps.

Hmm? The Flowing Water Swordsmanship?

To his surprise, there was actually a Flowing Water Swordsmanship secret manual lying casually in one of the innermost bookshelves.

But then, he suddenly remembered that he was currently in the Compendium of Sword Arts, a sacred ground where only those recognized by the ancestor of the Jian Clan would be able to enter. Those who could enter already had their identities verified, so there were no qualms about leaving any secret manuals out in the 'open'.

After collecting the Flowing Water Swordsmanship secret manual, Zhang Xuan tapped on it lightly in the Library of Heaven's Path.

“Flowing Water Swordsmanship conceptualizes Sword Intent as a flowing stream of water, relentless and unending. Sword practitioners specializing in this swordsmanship will be able to form a tight guard of sword qi, thus granting them superior defensive prowess. This swordsmanship was created by the Third Sanctum Head of the Sanctum of Sages, Jian Liushui, and it's possible to achieve the level of Sword Quintessence through this conceptualization. Flaws: ...”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. It sure has plenty of flaws...

Admittedly, the Flowing Water Swordsmanship was extremely powerful. In terms of concept, it bore a striking resemblance to

the Heaven's Path Sword Art, but it was a higher tier sword art, wielding far greater might.

Currently, the Heaven's Path Sword Art that Zhang Xuan had compiled was only Saint intermediate-tier. He could easily overwhelm those of the same cultivation realm through its devastating strength, but its prowess was severely lacking when put against a Saint high-tier battle technique.

On the other hand, while the Flowing Water Swordsmanship was plagued with flaws, it had reached the level of Saint high-tier. If he could master it, his fighting prowess would surely rise by leaps and bounds.

To make a comparison, it was like the difference between a ballista and a crossbow. A crossbow was much more flexible and nimble in terms of usage, but in terms of prowess, it could not compare to a ballista.

Zhang Xuan continued reading through the manual.

This swordsmanship is highly demanding on one's eye of discernment!

The Flowing Water Swordsmanship required one to mold one's Sword Intent into a form reminiscent of flowing water.

However, in order to successfully break down one's Sword Intent into a fluid and flexible form, one had to possess an eye of discernment far surpassing the ordinary. In fact, without the Eye of Insight, it was technically impossible to cultivate the technique up to the level of Major Accomplishment.

No wonder Shui Qianrou said that other than the Third Sanctum Head, no one has succeeded in mastering the Flowing Water Swordsmanship. From the looks of it now, the problem didn't lie in their lack of hard work or talent. Rather... their eye of discernment just wasn't up to par!

As a past sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages, the Third Sanctum Head had possessed the Eye of Insight as well. It was probably because of that he was able to create such a powerful sword art. However, it was pity that none of the sanctum heads after him specialized in the sword, thus causing the lineage of this swordsmanship to be buried in the dust.

As a descendant of Jian Liushui, Jian Qinsheng had tried his best to learn the Flowing Water Swordsmanship, but without the Eye of Insight to peer directly into the very essence of the Sword Intent, he could only create a very crude conceptualization of water flow. It was no wonder he was not able to bring glory and honor to the swordsmanship!

Possessing the Eye of Insight, the Flowing Water Swordsmanship happened to be compatible with Zhang Xuan.

Let me see if I can perfect the Flowing Water Swordsmanship!

If the flaws could be resolved, it would be worth considering practicing the sword art.

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan continued his collection of books. In just ten minutes, the hundred thousand sword art manuals in the Compendium of Sword Arts were all within the Library of Heaven's Path.

I'll see if I can perfect the cultivation technique of the Three Swords of Lingxu...

Compile!

Zhang Xuan retrieved the cultivation technique for the Three Swords of Lingxu and placed it together with all the other sword art manuals.

His very purpose here was to perfect the Three Swords of Lingxu. Everything else could wait.

Huala!

A new book materialized before Zhang Xuan's eyes.

Swiftly flipping it open, a deep frown was etched onto Zhang Xuan's forehead.

Only one of the sword arts is perfected?

The Three Swords of Lingxu consisted of three different sword arts, namely Sea Severing Sword, Ocean Cataclysm Sword, and Heaven Desecration Sword!

Each of these three moves was stronger than the previous. Even though Zhang Xuan's cultivation was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, if he could fully execute

Heaven Desecration Sword, putting aside Grand Dominion realm pinnacle cultivators, he would even be a match for Saint 7-dan primary stage cultivators!

It was due to this that the Old Sword Maestro had been able to stand undefeated in the Empire Alliance.

This Compendium of Sword Arts had a massive collection of more than a hundred thousand sword art manuals, so Zhang Xuan had thought that he would be able to perfect all three sword arts by compiling them together. It was a little disappointing to see that only one sword art had been perfected after all that effort.

Nevertheless, this was still better than nothing.

Due to the Three Swords of Lingxu being a Sword Formation, even the very first move, the Sea Severing Sword, had possessed more than 360 flaws! It would have been impossible to resolve all of them without that many books.

Even though the Ocean Cataclysm Sword and Heaven Desecration Sword haven't been perfected yet, the number of flaws they have has also been greatly reduced... All in all, there's less than ten for both of them. I'll just have to find a way to resolve them in the future!

While he could not start cultivating the remaining two sword arts yet, the reduced number of flaws in them meant that it would be much easier for him to perfect them in the future.

There are various different classifications to Sword Quintessences. The Sword Quintessence that Sanctum Head Jian Liushui comprehended leans more toward defense whereas the one that the Old Sword Maestro comprehended leans more toward offense...

Through the knowledge of the books he had gathered, many aspects concerning swordsmanship became much clearer to Zhang Xuan.

Since there are Sword Quintessences that are directed toward offense and defense, there should be those that are directed toward speed and agility too.

These theories were explained in one of the books that Jian Liushui had left behind. As there were simply too many books within the compendium, Zhang Xuan would have probably overlooked them if he had not collected everything into the Library of Heaven's Path.

Perhaps it was because Jian Qinsheng did not see the book, so he only knew that there were classifications to Sword Quintessences but not what kind of classifications there were.

Let me try out the Flowing Water Swordsmanship!

With a thought, Zhang Xuan placed all the defensive sword art manuals together with the Flowing Water Swordsmanship secret manual.

Hu la!

A brand-new book materialized, and with a tap, the knowledge within flowed into Zhang Xuan's head.

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up. It's perfected!

Perhaps due to Jian Liushui's swordsmanship lineage being more sided toward defensive swordsmanship, the proportion of defensive sword art manuals were far higher than offensive sword art manuals. This made perfecting the Flowing Water Swordsmanship secret manual much easier than perfecting the Three Swords of Lingxu.

I'll cultivate this one first then!

Since Zhang Xuan had managed to perfect the Flowing Water Swordsmanship, he quickly found a quiet place in the compendium to sit down and start studying.

Just as the name suggested, the Flowing Water Swordsmanship required the sword practitioner to cultivate their swordsmanship until their sword qi was as fluid and flexible as water, flowing relentlessly like a seemingly unending river.

Once mastered, the sword practitioner would be able to put up a perfect guard that boasted even greater defensive power than a Dominion!

Going through the perfected Flowing Water Swordsmanship in his head, Zhang Xuan focused his mind, and gradually, his zhenqi formed small little blades that circulated within his body.

The hardest aspect of the Flowing Water Swordsmanship was not to convert one's zhenqi into swords—Zhang Xuan had been able to do that for a very long time—but to convert the zhenqi into a compact stream of Sword Intent to protect oneself.

Nevertheless, having cultivated the Heaven's Path Divine Art and possessing the Eye of Insight, this was not much trouble for Zhang Xuan. Two hours later, he exhaled a mouthful of turbid air before getting to his feet once more.

After an arduous training session, he had finally brought his mastery of the Flowing Water Swordsmanship up to the level of Major Accomplishment.

I can't test out the prowess of the Flowing Water Swordsmanship here, but I reckon even Grand Dominion realm pinnacle experts will be unable to breach my defenses now! In fact, even Saint 7-dan experts will have to struggle a fair bit before they can lay a finger on me! Zhang Xuan thought in agitation.

What he was lacking the most at the moment happened to be a good defensive technique—this had been displayed very clearly to him when he was sent flying with a single punch from his future brother-in-law.

However, with this sword art, even if he was still no match for Luo Xuanqing, at the very least, he would not be incapacitated in a single punch anymore.

Furthermore, the defensive ability of the Flowing Water Swordsmanship would only grow stronger as his cultivation rose, possibly making it one of his stronger trump cards at the moment.

1328 It's Time to Show Some Real Skills

Sensing the might that he could exert through his Sword Intent, Zhang Xuan was deeply pleased. After immersing himself in his glee for a moment, he sat back down on the floor and crossed his leg to cultivate the first sword art of the Three Swords of Lingxu—Sea Severing Sword.

This sword art required the simultaneous cooperation of 108 swords, but fortunately, he had managed to make a decent number of Saint intermediate-tier swords submit to him back at the Sword Lagoon, so that was not an issue.

He imaged the movements of every single sword and sword art in his head, examining each of them in detail and refining all of them to the sharpest precision.

Two hours later, he got up to his feet once more.

After a long session of arduous work, he had successfully mastered the Sea Severing Sword.

Of course, as he had mastered the two sword arts through imagery, he had not gotten an opportunity to see them in action yet. As such, he could only fathom a guess about their true might.

With my mastery of the Sea Severing Sword, even without using the Lingxu Sword and the others, I would still be able to drown a Grand Dominion realm advanced stage cultivator with my sword qi. If I use my full strength, slaying even a Grand Dominion realm pinnacle expert could be possible! Zhang Xuan thought with eyes gleaming in excitement.

As expected of an offensive Sword Quintessence, its might was truly frightening!

Even without wielding a weapon, he could defeat a Grand Dominion realm advanced stage cultivator with ease. If he

utilized all his means, even a Saint 7-dan primary stage cultivator could possibly fall under his offense!

With such fighting prowess, he would at least be capable of protecting himself in the expert-filled Sanctum of Sages now.

After cultivating the two top-notch sword arts, Zhang Xuan exhaled a mouthful of turbid gas as his heart shuddered in excitement.

With his current fighting prowess, he was confident that he would be able to clear the Jia Corridor with ease!

Alright, I should be done here. I should leave now!

Seeing that it was getting late, Zhang Xuan got to his feet and walked out of the room.

As soon as he stepped out, he saw that Jian Qinsheng was still standing at the very center of the room, and Shui Qianrou, Senior Xie, and the others were seated on the ground in kneeling positions. They were staring intently at the ‘剑’ (Sword)’ character on the wall with creases on their foreheads, seemingly deep in thought.

“Zhang shi, you’re out,” Jian Qinsheng remarked with a smile.

Despite only being a freshman, the young man had achieved the level of Sword Quintessence. In Jian Qinsheng’s heart, the young man could already be considered his peer. As such, he did not take the tone that he would usually speak to his juniors with.

“What are they doing?” Zhang Xuan pointed to Shui Qianrou and the others in confusion.

“Ah. They saw how you managed to comprehend Sword Quintessence just by studying the ‘剑’ (Sword)’ character for a short moment, and that has ignited their drive. So, they decided to sit here to study the ‘剑’ (Sword)’ character as well in the hope that they will be able to take the final step forward and achieve the level of Sword Quintessence, just as you did,” Jian Qinsheng replied with a hint of satisfaction to his voice.

It was not like he had never encouraged his students to study the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character in the past, but they had never heeded his advice before. In their view, there was simply nothing interesting about the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character to study.

However, after witnessing what Zhang Xuan had achieved, they were now all more driven than ever to succeed.

“I have ignited their drive?” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

The reason he had been able to achieve a breakthrough so swiftly was because he had successfully compiled a Heaven’s Path technique from the insights carved beneath the ‘劍 (Sword)’ character. To expect to achieve a breakthrough just by staring at a mere character... Weren’t they daydreaming?

However, since they were Jian Qinsheng’s students, it would be rude for an outsider like him to interfere too much in their affairs. Thus, he could only suppress his overwhelming urge to bellow at them and plaster on a smile. “Well... All the best then!”

Unaware of the thoughts in Zhang Xuan’s mind, Jian Qinsheng simply chuckled softly before asking, “Did you receive any insights from the books in the Compendium of Sword Arts?”

“Thank you for granting me access to your collection of books, Elder Jian. I have benefited greatly from it!” Zhang Xuan bowed deeply.

If not for those books, he would not have been able to learn the Flowing Water Swordsmanship and cultivate it to the level of a Heaven’s Path technique.

He would not have been able to master the first sword art of the Three Swords of Lingxu either and, through doing so, induce an immense surge in his fighting prowess.

“Oh?” Hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, Jian Qinsheng’s eyes lit up. “Since that’s the case, would you like to trade some blows with me? It would be a delight to see the swordsmanship of the only sword practitioner in history to have comprehended two different types of Sword Quintessence!”

“It would be an honor to receive Elder Jian’s guidance!”

He had just mastered those two sword arts, and he was seeking an opportunity to try out its strength. Considering that the person standing before him was one of the rare swordmasters in the Master Teacher Continent, there was definitely no one better for him to practice his skills on!

Stroking his beard, Jian Qinsheng said with a smile, “Good! Let’s not disrupt their cultivation and head to another location.”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

While Zhang Xuan thought that it was impossible for Shui Qianrou and the others to grasp Sword Quintessence just by staring at the character, it would still be highly beneficial in helping them advance their comprehension of swordsmanship.

Since it was not anything bad, there was no reason for Zhang Xuan to pour a pail of cold water over their fiery drive.

Following behind Jian Qinsheng, they soon arrived in a room. It seemed to be a specialized training room, and the walls were reinforced with Fortification Formations.

The formations were all at grade-8, and even with Zhang Xuan’s current strength, he would still have trouble trying to break them open.

“Let’s do it here.” Jian Qinsheng gestured with a smile as he walked to the center of the room. Flicking his forefinger, a surge of sword qi shot forth from his fingertips.

Upon seeing Jian Qinsheng’s actions, Zhang Xuan was taken aback. “Elder Jian, aren’t you going to suppress your cultivation?”

Jian Qinsheng was at least a Saint 8-dan expert whereas he was only at Saint 5-dan primary stage. The disparity between them was simply too great.

How was he supposed to fight against Jian Qinsheng if the latter did not suppress his cultivation?

“If I were to suppress my cultivation, I fear that my old bones would not even survive a single blow from you,” Jian

Qinsheng replied with a bitter smile.

The sight of the young man before him crushing his disciple with ease was still fresh in his mind. He did not think that he would stand much of a chance if he suppressed his cultivation down to the same level as the other party.

After all, the young man's comprehension of swordsmanship and combat had reached a level that was inconceivable even to him.

He had encountered many geniuses in his years in the Sanctum of Sages, but only the little princess of the Luo Clan and two or three others could leave him with such a feeling of apprehension.

"But..." Zhang Xuan frowned. "There's no way I will stand a chance against you in your current state."

He was well aware of the limitations of his strength. The old man before him was not just any ordinary Saint 8-dan expert—he was also a swordmaster. Given the vast disparity in their cultivation, Zhang Xuan would only be crushed in the battle.

"Why don't we do this instead? I won't suppress my cultivation, but I'll use only 1% of my full strength. That will roughly be equivalent to the might a Saint 7-dan primary stage cultivator possesses. Don't worry, I won't allow you to be injured. At the same time, through such an arrangement, you can let loose without worrying about injuring me. This way, you will be able to better test your strength," Jian Qinsheng said with a smile.

"Alright then." Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

For some inexplicable reason, his heart started beating in excitement.

So far, he had not had a chance to clash with a Saint 8-dan expert. If he could test himself against Jian Qinsheng's strength, he would be more prepared when he faced opponents of that caliber in the future.

"I'll be making my move then!" With a flick of his hand, a sword appeared in Zhang Xuan's hand, and a brilliant cold

glint flashed across the room, emanating a chilling intent.

The Lingxu Sword.

He had never wielded it ever since obtaining it. It was simply too strong; he feared that he would accidentally decimate his opponent with it.

But since Jian Qinsheng was coming at him without suppressing his cultivation, that would not be a problem.

Hong long!

With a swift slash, boundless sword qi barraged forth with astounding might, and for an instant, it felt as if space was crushing in on one.

“Is that... a Saint high-tier artifact?” Jian Qinsheng’s mouth twitched, and his eyes narrowed in astonishment.

Saint high-tier artifacts were rare even in the Sanctum of Sages. Considering that the young man was only an unaffiliated cultivator, it was a little hard to believe that he would have such a weapon with him.

In terms of pure strength, Saint high-tier artifacts harnessed might surpassing that of Saint 7-dan cultivators. If a swordmaster like the young man were to wield it against him...

“Cough cough! It won’t be good for you to rely too much on the strength of your sword. Here, why don’t I lend you a spare one for the duel?” With a reddened face, Jian Qinsheng handed a sword over.

“That will do as well.” Thinking about it once more, the might of the Lingxu Sword was indeed too great, and it would be unfair to use it in a friendly duel. Thus, Zhang Xuan nodded and took the sword that was passed to him.

With just a few taps of his fingers on the blade, a resounding buzz echoed, and the sword acknowledged Zhang Xuan as its master.

Seeing how swiftly Zhang Xuan managed to make the sword submit to him, Jian Qinsheng’s lips twitched.

As expected of a genius who had comprehended two different Sword Quintessences, even his ability to tame swords was far more effective than that of ordinary sword practitioners.

It's a Saint intermediate-tier weapon, Zhang Xuan noted as he felt the sword in his hand.

At this point, he suddenly recalled another matter, and he turned his gaze to Jian Qinsheng once more. "Right, Elder Jian. In this duel, it will be fine for me to do anything as long as I don't wield a weapon exceeding Saint intermediate-tier, right?"

"That's right." Jian Qinsheng nodded. "You are able to easily drive Saint intermediate-tier artifact easily with your current strength, but you are still too weak to regulate the might of a Saint high-tier artifact. Even if you win the duel with it, it will be pointless if you aren't the one in control."

Even the most ordinary Saint high-tier artifacts wielded a fighting prowess on par with Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm pinnacle cultivators! Considering how the young man only possessed a cultivation of Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, he would be led astray by the Saint high-tier sword he had!

Eventually, the one who was in control would not be him but his sword.

"That's good." Hearing that he could do whatever he wanted as long as the weapon he wielded was no more than Saint intermediate-tier, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

He had not yet executed the Sea Severing Sword after mastering it. This would be a good chance for him to try it out.

In any case, the opponent he was facing was far stronger than him, so there was no need to worry about accidentally hurting him at all.

With a jolt of the sword in his hand, a cold glint flashed across the air, and an imposing tide of sword qi immediately burst forth, slashing through whatever stood in its path.

"Not bad!" Seeing Zhang Xuan's move, Jian Qinsheng chuckled softly.

By weaving his fingers across the air, it took only an instant before a current of sword qi flowed right in front of him, reminiscent of a massive barrier.

Flowing Water Swordsmanship!

Just as Jian Qinsheng had promised, he had only used a hundredth of his strength in his defense.

Nevertheless, the strength he wielded was not to be underestimated. The sword qi flowing within the massive barrier was extremely compact, leaving not even the slightest space for anything to bypass it. It was reminiscent of an immense, unbreachable Dominion.

Ding ding ding ding!

The barrage of sword qi that Zhang Xuan had sent forth collided with the flowing wall of sword qi, inducing innumerable ripples on it. Under the violent attacks, the formation in the room shook intensely, and glaring scars appeared on the ground.

The formations inscribed into the room were extremely resilient, but Zhang Xuan's full strength paired with the frightening might of the Sea Severing Sword was so powerful that even the formations seemed as if they would collapse at any moment.

He's indeed formidable!

Even though Jian Qinsheng had managed to keep Zhang Xuan's attack at bay for the moment, he could clearly sense that the might from the tide of sword qi was swiftly growing stronger by the moment, and his expression turned grave.

As expected of a genius who commanded two different Sword Quintessences. His strength was truly extraordinary!

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan felt so excited that he could leap in joy.

Even when using his full strength, he was unable to deal even the slightest harm to the Saint 8-dan swordmaster. Since that was the case, it seemed like it was time for him to show his true skills!

1329 The Stifled Jian Qinsheng

“Let me try out the real Sea Severing Sword then!” With eyes gleaming with excitement, Zhang Xuan grabbed at the surrounding air forcefully.

What he had executed earlier was only the Sword Intent of the Three Swords of Lingxu, he didn't really go all out. However, seeing how Jian Qinsheng had managed to deal with his first attack with such ease, the final shred of hesitation within him finally vanished.

Pilipala!

A series of resounding cracking sounds echoed as more than a hundred Saint intermediate-tier weapons floating in the air shot forth.

“Go!” Lines of insight rippled in Zhang Xuan's eyes as he adeptly maneuvered an extremely complicated sword art toward Jian Qinsheng.

The Sea Severing Sword might only be a single sword art, but it was also a massive Sword Formation made up of 108 swords. Every single sword would be executing a sword art of its own, and collectively, it was as if an entire army was charging at one.

Boom!

The barrage of swords swiftly turned into an imposing wave collapsing down upon the room, and countless intersecting sword qi permeated the room.

“Th-this is... the Old Sword Maestro's secret art? But...” Jian Qinsheng, whose tension had just alleviated slightly after successfully fending off the first attack, suddenly saw the formation of swords before him, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

The Old Sword Maestro was a renowned swordmaster in history, so he had heard of his name and secret art before.

In fact, when he was traveling around the world, in seek of inspiration to further his swordsmanship, he had paid the Sword Lagoon a visit and trained there for quite a while, but due to the clashes in ideology, he eventually gave up on the notion.

He thought that the Old Sword Maestro's heritage should have already died out by now, but who could have thought that he would see it from the young man before him? Furthermore, it seemed to be sharper, swifter, and stronger than what he had heard in the legends.

And more importantly... he had just thought that the other party had no suitable weapon and gave him a Saint intermediate-tier sword, but in the blink of an eye, he suddenly whipped out this entire bunch.

If you have so many swords with you, why in the world did you accept my Saint intermediate-tier sword?!

Jian Qinsheng's face twitched uncontrollably. However, in this moment, he had to devote his all into fending against the attack that was diving right at him. Thus, he opened up his two both hands and skillfully weaved another barrier of flowing sword qi, just that it was clearly much more fortified this time around.

Boom!

Barely after he was done, the assault of the hundred swords arrived right before him. With overwhelming force, they collided on the barrier. 'Kacha! Kacha!', amidst a series of crisp echoes, the barrier of flowing sword qi began shattering like a broken mirror.

"How could those sword qi know the flaws of my Flowing Water Swordsmanship?" Jian Qinsheng's body jolted.

The Flowing Water Swordsmanship was extremely difficult to overcome due to its ability to spread out any force falling upon it over its entire area, but the young man was still able to shatter it in an instant. This could only mean to say that the

latter had found the openings within his Flowing Water Swordsmanship, making it impossible for him to sustain its flowing state.

One must know that even someone as strong as that man from the Zhang Clan was unable to accomplish such a feat, so how did the young man before him manage to do it?

Shocked by the situation before him, Jian Qinsheng swiftly moved to repair the barrier of flowing sword qi, but he realized that it was already too late. The hundred swords had already slipped through the openings in his defenses, and they were surging swiftly toward him from all directions with devastating forces reminiscent of a storm.

Before he could do anything, the swords had already pierced into him.

Pu!

A sweet sensation welled up in Jian Qinsheng's throat as he was sent flying. Peng! He was slammed into the wall.

Hulala!

The Fortification Formations reinforcing the room also creaked loudly under the overwhelming impact, seemingly ready to break apart at any moment.

Hu hu hu!

Jian Qinsheng was already plastered on the wall, but Zhang Xuan's attack wasn't over yet. The hundred swords overlapped with one another and launched attacks one after another, reminiscent of the relentless waves of the sea, each more powerful and imposing than the previous.

In a moment, Jian Qinsheng's body was surrounded by the silhouettes of countless swords, and the cold glint reflected from them made it difficult for one to see what was ahead.

Boom!

Unable to withstand it any longer, the Fortification Formation finally burst apart, and 'jiya!', the room swiftly collapsed under the immense force.

Rock fragments ricocheted around the room amidst a rain of dust.

But even at this moment, the offense of the swords still showed no signs of halting. Jian Qinsheng attempted to flee to regain his momentum, but the swords were ingeniously aimed at the openings of every single he made, such that even fending against them already took up all of his strength and attention.

Boom boom boom!

Forced back by the barrage of the swords, Jian Qinsheng eventually knocked down seven to eight rooms before everything finally came to a halt.

Hu!

Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan retracted his palm. His face had turned pale at some point in time, and his body was aching from head to toe. He couldn't even find the strength within him to lift his fingers.

When he had practiced the Sea Severing Sword earlier in the Compendium of Sword Arts, he did so through mental imagery to sharpen his form, so it wasn't possible for him to get a clear idea of how powerful it would be. It was only after executing it did he realize how frightening the sword art actually was. In fact, in the midst of the execution, he found that he had lost all control over the sword art, and every last bit of zhenqi was squeezed out of his body before the sword art finally came to a halt.

“This is too scary, losing control of my body. I better not use this sword art unless in times of emergency...” Cold sweat rained down Zhang Xuan's head as he patted his heart fearfully.

It was not to say that there was something wrong with the Sea Severing Sword but that his cultivation was simply too low, making it impossible to him to wield full control over the sword art. This was similar to how a child could swing a hammer too, but the child's lack of strength would make it

difficult for him to control it, especially when the hammer was in motion.

In this moment, Zhang Xuan was the child swinging the hammer. Once the Sea Severing Sword was executed, he couldn't stop until every last drop of zhenqi in his body was sapped dry.

Ever since he had undergone the Saint Ascension Ordeal and reached Saint realm, he had never depleted his zhenqi before. Yet, the Sea Severing Sword was actually able to drain every last bit of energy within him, which went to show just how powerful the sword art was.

However, it was also extremely dangerous for a cultivator to use up all of his zhenqi in the midst of a battle. It would mean that he was powerless against anything that his opponent would throw at him next.

“Right, is Jian Qinsheng alright?” Too engrossed in himself, Zhang Xuan forgot about the plight Jian Qinsheng was in. Looking at the rubble all over the ground, he couldn't help but feel a little worried.

Even though Jian Qinsheng said that he wouldn't lower his cultivation, he still suppressed his strength to a hundredth of his original might. There was no saying that the other party might just succumb to his sword art in his weakened state... and that would mean that he was a murderer!

Hu!

Fortunately, a silhouette suddenly rose from the rubble at this moment—Jian Qinsheng.

He wasn't able to maintain his image as an expert anymore. His clothes were in tatters, and his body was cloaked in dust. His wretched state felt as if someone had just taken advantage of him.

“Elder Jian...” Zhang Xuan's lips twitched for a moment before he called out worriedly.

“I'm fi—pu!” Jian Qinsheng chuckled awkwardly, but before he could finish his words, another mouthful of fresh blood

spurted from his mouth. Putong! Jian Qinsheng plummeted from the sky and fell headfirst into a pile of mud.

At this very moment, he was suffering from a mental breakdown. Under normal circumstances, given his strength, it was impossible for the young man who hurt him no matter how powerful his sword art may be.

However, he had suppressed his strength down to a hundredth of it, and his Flowing Water Swordsmanship was breached so quickly that he hardly had any time to react. To be honest, he was extremely lucky to be alive at this very moment.

Lying in the pile of mud, Jian Qinsheng swallowed a pill, and it took a long while before strength slowly returned back to him.

Getting back to his feet, he took a look at his surroundings and sighed deeply.

He was curious to see how powerful a person who had comprehended two Sword Quintessences would be, only to end up being reduced to such a state in a single move... It was fortunate that no one was around to see it, or else he might have just died from embarrassment...

“Teacher, are you fine?”

“Old Master, what happened?”

“Everyone, be on your guards! Don’t let the culprit get away!”

And just like that, Jian Qinsheng’s final bit of consolation was utterly shattered.

Turning around, he saw his butlers, guards, Shui Qianrou, Senior Xie, and his other disciples all standing not too far away, looking at him in worry.

“What are you all doing here?”

If not for Jian Qinsheng’s mental fortitude, he might have just passed out on the spot.

He was still feeling thankful that no one saw him earlier when more than a hundred people suddenly materialized behind his back. That was almost everyone in the residence!

“Teacher, Zhang shi said that you were injured and he asked us to hurry over to take a look. Senior Xie was worried that something bad might have happened, so he called all of us to follow him...” Shui Qianrou quickly explained.

“...” Jian Qinsheng clutched his chest, clawing at his heart which was aching so much that he could hardly breathe.

It was one thing for the young man to reduce him to the pitiful state he was currently in, but to even call his disciples and servants here to spectate his misery...

This was too much!

“Don’t worry, I’m not injured. I just accidentally used too much force when I was practicing my swordsmanship earlier...” With a reddened face, Jian Qinsheng shrugged the matter off casually with a wave of his hand.

“Not injured?” Senior Xie, Shui Qianrou, and the others looked at one another with rather complicated looks in their eyes.

Completely tattered clothes and a swollen face... Is it really possible for anyone to be reduced to such a state from practicing his swordsmanship?

“Cough cough! Where’s Zhang shi?” Knowing that his students were thinking, Jian Qinsheng coughed loudly twice and changed the topic.

He still saw the young man when he flew up earlier, so why would the latter be nowhere to be seen at this moment?

“Zhang shi has asked me to relay his gratitude toward you for allowing him to browse through your collection of books. It has provided him with some inspiration regarding his swordsmanship, so he bade his farewell to return back to his residence to cultivate...” Shui Qianrou said.

“He returned back to his residence to cultivate?” Jian Qinsheng felt even more stifled inside after hearing those words.

After causing a mess around here and severely injuring him, that young man actually secretly fled the scene... Gratitude,

you said? Is this how you show your gratitude?

Just as Jian Qinsheng was contemplating whether he should capture that young man back here to teach him a lesson, Shui Qianrou suddenly walked up and presented him with a book, “Right, teacher. Before he left, Zhang shi instructed me to hand this over to you personally...”

Jian Qinsheng took the book with a deep frown and casually flipped it open. With just a single glance, his entire body froze on the spot, and disbelief plastered itself on his face.

“T-this...” Jian Qinsheng trembled uncontrollably.

Considering how the ink on the book had barely dried, it was clear that it was just written down a moment ago. Detailed on it was the various mistakes he had made on his cultivation, as well as the aspects which he had erred in his comprehension of swordsmanship.

In fact, a large handful of those points written down were questions which had left him deeply confused for many years...

In other words, as long as he were to make corrections according to what was written on the book, he would definitely be able to bring his fighting prowess up to greater heights...

“It was just a brief encounter, and I hardly made any move at all... But he was still able to see through so much about me?” Despite squeezing the book tightly in his hand, Jian Qinsheng still felt as if he was in a dream.

On top of being a swordmaster, he was a teacher in the Sanctum of Sages as well. It wasn't rare for him to have to analyze the problems that a student was facing in his cultivation or swordsmanship and offer him pointers to resolve them. Naturally, his eye of discernment was extremely formidable as well, far surpassing that of his peers.

Even so, he was still completely helpless toward the problem he was facing. Yet, the young man was able to uncover and concisely detail all of the problems he was facing, and more importantly, he had even provided solutions to them as well...

Just what kind of monstrous eye of discernment did that young man possess?

“It’s no wonder why he was able to comprehend two different types of Sword Quintessences at his young age. In terms of comprehension of swordsmanship, I don’t even come close to holding a candle against him...”

In this moment, Jian Qinsheng finally understood why the young man was able to earn the recognition of his ancestor’s Sword Intent so quickly.

From the very start, they weren’t even at the same level as one another.

“Perhaps, that’s what a true prodigy is!” Jian Qinsheng remarked deeply as he closed the book and kept it into his storage. Then, a thought suddenly came to his mind, and his eyes lit up, “Wait a moment!”

“Given that young man’s deep understanding of swordsmanship, if I were to bring him to the Zhang Clan, perhaps I might be able to exact vengeance for the grudge back then!”

1330 Let Everything Collapse 1

It took six hours of rest, till the sun was starting to rise over the eastern horizon, before Zhang Xuan finally felt his zhenqi fully recovering, and his mind, spirit, and soul once again returned to their peak.

He instinctively knew that it would be a bad idea to remain there after injuring Jian Qinsheng, so he decisively collected all of his swords and returned to his residence.

As expected of an offense-based Sword Quintessence, its might is really not to be underestimated!

Recalling the battle that had happened the previous night, Zhang Xuan's eyes gleamed in excitement.

Even though Jian Qinsheng had suppressed his strength to a hundredth of his original might, his fighting prowess was still not something that any ordinary Saint 7-dan primary stage cultivators would have been able to compete with. Since that was the case, wouldn't the fact that he had been able to send the other party flying mean that no Saint 7-dan primary stage expert would be a match for him once he went all out?

Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm—at that level, a cultivator would be able to grasp the very essence of space. Their Dominion would begin to morph into a form in between a phantasm and reality, making it extremely difficult to deal with.

The Dominions created by Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm experts would manifest in a physical form, such as an area of mist or a barrier of light, thus making it discernible to the eye. However, upon reaching Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm, one's Dominion would become intangible, similar to one's Spiritual Perception. Invisible to the eyes, untouchable to the hands, its discreetness could create unimaginable effects.

For example, back when Luo Xuanqing kicked Elder Su Bing flying, the reason the latter did not dodge was because Luo Xuanqing had already shrouded the latter in his Dominion, trapping the latter firmly in place.

With his Saint 5-dan primary stage cultivation, it should have been impossible for Zhang Xuan to faze an expert of that caliber. However, with the Sea Severing Sword, this impossibility had become a real possibility.

It's daybreak! I should head over to the Jia Corridor and finish it.

The rising crimson sun had forced the dark night to retreat, bringing light back to the world.

Zhang Xuan began making his way over to the Hall of Solidarity once more.

He soon arrived at the front counter, and Qing Yu was still seated there.

“I wish to challenge the Jia Corridor once more!”

Accustomed to the procedure, Zhang Xuan wasted no time and passed the concentrated high-tier spirit stones over straight away.

After all he had done, reading, learning swordsmanship, and recovering from his exertion, a day had already passed. Thus, he could continue challenging the Corridor of Puppets once more.

Seeing that it was Zhang Xuan, Qing Yu passed a challenge token over with a nod.

Upon receiving the token, Zhang Xuan immediately turned around and left.

“He wasn't able to clear the Jia Corridor yesterday, but he rushed over as soon as the sun was up.” The male attendant from before was also around, and he could not help asking, “Within this short period of time, there shouldn't have been any substantial change in his strength, right? So, what is he in such a hurry for?”

Cultivation was a process of consistent effort, not a way to achieve great things in a heartbeat. How could one night of cultivation possibly help him?

If the young man wanted to clear the Jia Corridor, he would require a few months of hard work at the very least!

“I’m not too sure either...” Qing Yu shook her head.

“Perhaps... he might have successfully cultivated some kind of secret art and wants to give it a try!”

“But the stronger a secret art is, the harder it is to grasp it.” The male attendant shook his head. “There are some who devote their lives to studying a secret art, only to gain a superficial grasp of it. How much could he possibly have learned in a single night?”

It was not that he had no trust in Zhang Xuan’s strength, but some things were simply impossible!

The Jia Corridor was the hardest corridor to clear, and even most Grand Dominion realm advanced stage cultivators would have trouble defeating the puppet within. Even if Zhang Xuan had managed to clear the Yi Corridor the previous day, it still did not seem possible for him to clear the Jia Corridor after one day of hard work.

“The previous one to challenge the Jia Corridor was the Luo Clan’s little princess, right? I seem to recall that she’s the current record holder,” the male attendant suddenly remarked.

“She’s indeed the current record holder. She cleared the Jia Corridor within just three minutes...” Upon speaking of the Luo Clan’s little princess, admiration and respect immediately seeped into Qing Yu’s eyes.

While other challengers struggled with all their might but were still unable to clear the Jia Corridor, the little princess was able to clear it within a short three minutes. More importantly... when she left the room, there was not the slightest speck of dust on her, maintaining her ever-elegant and poised appearance.

Every time she recalled this matter, she could not help but tremble in excitement.

Ever since the Corridor of Puppets was created, there was not a single person who had achieved such a record in the Jia Corridor!

In other words, the accomplishment of the Luo Clan's little princess was unrivaled. There was no one who could compete with her even in the past tens of thousands of years, and it was unlikely that anyone would be able to break her record any time soon.

"Indeed, she's really too formidable..." The male attendant nodded in agreement. He was just about to speak when ripples suddenly appeared in the tea placed in front of him. Following which, the cup began trembling, followed by the table.

"What's going on?" The both of them sprang right up to their feet, and they began scanning their surroundings warily.

"I have no idea..."

Halfway through Qing Yu's words, she suddenly felt the ground shaking intensely, as if there was an earthquake. After which, a resounding explosion rumbled from the distance.

"That seems to be... from the Jia Corridor?"

The eyebrows of the duo shot up as they hurriedly rushed in the direction that the explosion came from. Before they could arrive at the Jia Corridor, they saw a young man walking over with an apologetic look on his face. "My apologies, I failed to rein in my strength when making a move earlier..."

Qing Yu glanced at the Jia Corridor, or to be more exact, the rubble that was once the Jia Corridor. Smoke was pouring out of it. Sweeping through the contents with her Spiritual Perception, she saw that the puppet of the Jia Corridor had already been dismantled into countless pieces, such that there was not even an intact spare part anymore. It truly was complete and utter destruction.

"You..." Unable to hold herself back anymore, Qing Yu asked Zhang Xuan in agitation, "Just what did you do?"

She was well aware of the strength that the puppet in the Jia Corridor wielded. Even ordinary Grand Dominion realm advanced stage experts would not be a match for it, and yet,

that fellow still managed to crush it so easily. Just how in the world did he manage to do it?

More importantly... it had not even been three minutes since he had taken the challenge token from her!

Within this period, he had actually defeated the puppet and torn down the entire Jia Corridor while he was at it?

“I was only using a sword art,” Zhang Xuan said awkwardly.

Due to the rules of the Jia Corridor, Zhang Xuan was unable to wield his swords, so he could only use his sword qi in substitution. Nevertheless, the might of the Sea Severing Sword was still far beyond his control. The puppet was reduced to dust as soon as it appeared, but even so, he was still unable to stop the sword art until it depleted a massive portion of his zhenqi. The current destruction was the result of that.

He had thought that since the Corridor of Puppets was a formal trial by the Sanctum of Sages, the Fortification Formations reinforcing the corridors would be rather powerful, so it should have been fine for him to let loose. It was never his intention to cause such a huge commotion!

It was fortunate that the trial had deemed it a success right after the puppet was destroyed, and the books at the very end of the corridor had come into his sight, allowing him to swiftly collect them into his Library of Heaven's Path. Otherwise, if his efforts had ended in vain after all the trouble he had been through, he really might have burst into tears on the spot.

“Sword art?” Qing Yu and the male receptionist were really at a loss of words.

Sword arts, they had seen plenty of those. But one that could destroy not only the puppet but the entire corridor along with it? They had never seen one that wielded such might before!

“Wait right here for a moment. I'll report this matter to the elder,” Qing Yu told Zhang Xuan before hurriedly leaving.

The destruction of the Jia Corridor was a huge matter, far beyond the jurisdiction of a mere receptionist like her.

The Hall of Solidarity could be considered property of the Sanctum of Sages. If everyone were to destroy it without care, not even the Sanctum of Sages would have enough money to pay for the reparations.

“Alright.” Knowing that it was only right for him to make compensation after causing destruction, Zhang Xuan had no intention of leaving either. He found a place to sit down and began meditating to recover his zhenqi.

While the strength of the Sea Severing Sword was reduced because he had not wielded any swords, the execution of the sword art still depleted nearly half of his zhenqi!

Previously, I thought that the Old Sword Maestro was just unable to gather sufficient swords for the execution of the technique, but from the looks of it now, even if he had gathered sufficient swords, it is uncertain whether he would have been able to execute it or not.

As one who had cultivated the Saint Ascension Decipher, the capacity of Zhang Xuan’s zhenqi far exceeded that of other cultivators, but even so, he was still nearly unable to keep up with the depletion of energy. Despite being the creator of the move, the Old Sword Maestro probably still had a fair bit of trouble trying to execute the technique.

Knowing that it would be impossible for him to fully recover without several hours of cultivation, Zhang Xuan decided to immerse his consciousness into his Library of Heaven’s Path to take a look at the books that he had just collected.

There were only five books in the Jia Corridor, and they corresponded to the Five Elements: Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth. The tier of the books was extremely high, plausibly the most profound and powerful Leaving Aperture realm cultivation techniques in the Sanctum of Sages.

Putting all the Leaving Aperture realm cultivation techniques together, Zhang Xuan commanded, Compile!

Huala!

A new book materialized. Flipping it open, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in delight.

After all his hard work, he had finally succeeded in compiling the Leaving Aperture realm Heaven's Path Divine Art! Just thinking about the difficulties that he had been through was enough to make tears stream down his cheeks.

I wonder if Sun Qiang has managed to find a source to procure pinnacle spirit stones, Zhang Xuan wondered as he swiftly memorized the cultivation technique.

Without a source of sufficiently pure spiritual energy, he would not be able to further his cultivation.

Above concentrated high-tier spirit stones were the pinnacle spirit stones, which boasted extraordinary purity. If he could find a source for those, his quandary concerning a lack of spirit stones would be resolved!

There were no pinnacle spirit stones in the Qingyuan Empire, but it should not be too difficult to find them in the Sanctum of Sages.

“He's the person who destroyed the Jia Corridor, Zhang shi...”

While Zhang Xuan was still in thought, he suddenly heard a voice. Raising his head, he saw Qing Yu leading an elder over.

The elder took a look at the Jia Corridor, and his eyebrows immediately began twitching.

Zhang Xuan hurriedly got up.

“Zhang shi, Elder Liao over here is in charge of everything concerning the Leaving Aperture realm Corridor of Puppets,” Qing Yu introduced.

“Paying respects to Elder Liao!” Zhang Xuan quickly clasped his fist.

There was nothing else he could do. Under the roof of another, he had no choice but to lower his head.

He still could not bring himself to be as domineering as his future brother-in-law.

With a voice of suppressed rage, Elder Liao asked, “You said that you managed to reduce this place to this state just by executing a sword art?”

“That’s right...” Zhang Xuan nodded hesitantly.

“Pass me your challenge token!”

Zhang Xuan did as he was told.

Elder Liao took a close look at the challenge token that Zhang Xuan had passed over, and a moment later, a deep frown appeared on his forehead.

The Jia Corridor did not just have a formidable puppet—it had a powerful formation as well. Under normal circumstances, even a Grand Dominion realm pinnacle expert would not have the strength to cause such devastation in this place... unless the individual had cheated!

But on the challenge token, the young man was reported to have cleared the trial fair and square. In other words, no acts of cheating had been detected by the system.

Was it really possible for a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator to cause such destruction with his sword art?

Perplexed, Elder Liao instructed, “What sword art did you execute earlier? Show it to me!”

“Show it to you? This...” A conflicted look surfaced on Zhang Xuan’s face. “To be honest with you, my grasp over the sword art is still lacking, so I am unable to control it properly. I fear that I will accidentally harm you if I execute it here!”

“Harm me?” Elder Liao sneered. “While I am only a managerial elder here, my cultivation has at least reached Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm. A Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator like you actually fears that you will accidentally harm me? What arrogant words!”

There were various tiers to the elders of the Sanctum of Sages. Personnel who had reached Saint 7-dan would be eligible to take on the role of a managerial elder, such as Su Bing and Elder Liao.

“This... Elder Liao, even if you are confident in your strength, I still fear that my sword qi will destroy the other buildings in the area too...” Zhang Xuan was still a little hesitant about executing the Sea Severing Sword here.

“Do you think that your sword qi will have a chance to escape from my Dominion? You must be joking!” Elder Liao harrumphed coldly with deep confidence reflected in his eyes.

1331 Let Everything Collapse 2

As a Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space expert, Elder Liao wielded incredible control over the space around him. If he couldn't even suppress the sword qi suppressed by a mere Leaving Aperture realm fellow, he would really be a failure of a cultivator.

“If you are really that confident, I guess it should be fine. Be careful then...” Since Elder Liao was confident about the matter, Zhang Xuan decided not to say anything more.

With a tap of his finger, surges of sword qi flew forth from his fingers, but instead of flying toward Elder Liao, they floated in the air as if they were blades of swords.

“So many of them?” Elder Liao was slightly surprised to see the young man's ability to manipulate so many sword qi adeptly simultaneously. He quickly drew a semi-circle before his chest and formed a protective barrier.

He wanted to try for himself whether the other party's sword qi really wielded the strength to destroy the Jia Corridor.

Wuwuwu!

Barely after he was done with that, a hurried buzzing sound suddenly echoed in the air, and as if the space before him had collapsed, more than a hundred surges of sword qi arrived within a five meters radius of him in the blink of an eye.

“So fast?” Horrified by how quick the young man's sword qi was, Elder Liao hurriedly activated his Dominion to stop the latter.

Boom boom boom!

The sword qi collided with Elder Liao's Dominion and produced a sound reminiscent of a mixer being plunged into a water vat. The violent impacts caused his face to redden, and

his Dominion nearly dissipated under the relentless barrage of attacks.

Sou!

Under the overwhelming pressure pushing against his Dominion, Elder Liao was slammed heavily into the wall behind him, bashing a huge hole through it. Even so, the might of the sword qi pressing against his Dominion didn't seem to show any sign of weakening. At the same time, more and more sword qi were surging forth toward him as well, causing the entire area to be flooded with cold glints.

In an instant, the entire main hall was permeated with sword qi.

Jiyaya!

Under the relentless barrage of sword qi within and Elder Liao crashing around the place, the main hall finally reached the limits of its durability. A glaring crack swiftly crept its way across the walls, and with a resounding explosion, the entire room collapsed inward.

...

Hu!

Sometime later, Zhang Xuan finally came to a halt after expending every last drop of his zhenqi, and he panted heavily on the spot.

When he finally caught his breath and regained some strength, he took a look at his surroundings, and his eyebrows couldn't help but shoot up.

In this very moment, the Jia, Yi, Bing, Ding, Wu, Ji, Geng, Xin, Ren, and Gui, all ten corridors had been reduced to rubble, and smoke was rising from their midst. In fact, even the main hall which was meant to receive challengers had been destroyed as well.

“Cough cough!”

A silhouette rose from the rubble—Elder Liao. His hair was half shaven off from the torrent of sword qi, and his body was

inflicted with cuts all over. It was nearly impossible to use words to describe the sheer state of misery he was in.

Zhang Xuan recoiled at the sight, and he swiftly chirped in anxiously, “Elder Liao... you were the one who told me to make a move...”

You declared confidently that you would be able to withstand my sword art, so what the heck is this then?

Aren't you putting me in a spot?

It wasn't easy for me to shake off my title as the ‘God of Destruction’, and your overconfidence just set back all of the hard work I have put in all this while...

With such a happening, how do you think others will see me?

I just wanted to quietly clear the examination and read my books peacefully!

“I...” Elder Liao's face flushed red as he looked at the collapsed corridors with a look of despair in his eyes.

All he wanted to do was to check if the young man had been cheating... How did everything come to this?

What left him even more frustrated was that he was the one who had insisted on the young man to make a move, so he couldn't blame the latter for this matter either.

“Get out of my sight!” Elder Liao felt so frustrated that he thought he would explode on the spot. There were so many words he wanted to speak but couldn't, and eventually, he could only wave his hand with furiously gritted teeth.

“You are telling me to leave?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback. “I don't have to compensate for the Corridor of Puppets?”

While most of the responsibility for the destruction lay on Elder Liao, considering how huge this matter had blown up to, he didn't expect to be able to get out of this scot-free either.

“Are you able to pay for it?” Elder Liao bellowed with a voice seething with anger.

Zhang Xuan's lips twitched, “I guess not?”

He didn't think that he was poor, but his fortune, in contrast to the powerful puppets and formations set up in Corridor of Puppets, was truly insignificant in comparison. There was no way he would have enough money to compensate for the damage.

“So, scram!” Elder Liao bellowed.

“Yes...” Zhang Xuan swiftly turned around to make his leave, but barely after taking a few steps, he suddenly turned around and said, “Elder Liao, in the fight earlier, I found that your body is suffused with cold energy, so I advise you not to practice your Hiemal Yin Formula anymore...”

“How do you know that I practice the Hiemal Yin Formula?”

This was the first time the both of them were meeting, so how could the other party know what cultivation technique he practiced?

“I heard of it from someone else. If, by any chance, you feel... unwell, feel free to find me at my residence in the Elite Division.” Zhang Xuan advised before decisively turning around and leaving.

He had destroyed the Corridor of Puppets, but Elder Liao didn't forcefully keep him in the area or make things difficult for him. In a sense, he owed the other party a favor for this. In the battle they had earlier, he had compiled a book on the other party in the Library of Heaven's Path and noticed that there was a problem with the other party's cultivation technique, so he decided to advise him out of kind will.

Actually, it wasn't a major issue either. As long as Elder Liao stopped cultivating the Hiemal Yin Formula, the body should be able to recover by itself. Even if he didn't stop cultivating, as long as he sought treatment in time, the issue should be manageable.

But considering how the other party was in the heat of his anger, it didn't seem like a good time to elaborate too much about it.

After all, from experience, he knew that if he were to tell Elder Liao “You are sick” after destroying his place, there was a

good chance that he would be pummeled to death on the spot...

On the other hand, watching as the young man leave hurriedly after leaving behind those abrupt words, Elder Liao was baffled. However, when he saw the rubble all around him once more, rage began surging through his body once more.

“It seems like I shouldn’t use the Sea Severing Sword easily in the future anymore...” Glancing at the rubble behind him, Zhang Xuan shook his head in dejection.

He had only executed this sword art thrice ever since mastering it, but he had already unintentionally harmed two people, destroyed a puppet, and devastated a crucial infrastructure of the Sanctum of Sages...

Who knew what kind of mess he would get himself into if he were to continue using the sword art recklessly?

It would be best for him to avoid using this sword art unless he was in a desperate situation, or else he might just be stealing his future brother-in-law’s title as the King of Destruction.

He was the man who was destined to become the sanctum head, a person revered and admired by countless! He mustn’t end in a position where others would shun him, as if he was a hated troublemaker!

“I should go and check on how Sun Qiang is faring... Also, I need to find some means to earn more money. Even if Elder Liao didn’t demand any payment from me, I should at least make some compensation for what I have done.” Zhang Xuan thought.

Had it been any other occasion, it wouldn’t have been a big deal to him whether he could become the sanctum head or not. However, this matter had a profound effect on whether he would be able to stop Luo Ruoxin’s marriage in the third month of the next year or not.

Without becoming the sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages, it would be nigh impossible for him to vie with the Zhang Clan’s young prodigy for Luo Ruoxin’s marriage in hand

So, he was determined to obtain the position, by hook or by crook.

According to what Sage Kui had said, prior to unsealing the Sanctum Head Token, it would be best for him to win as many people's respect as possible so that his prestige would be higher after his inauguration... But within just two days of his enrollment, he had already destroyed Jian Qinsheng's home and the Corridor of Puppets...

No matter what, he should at least do something to salvage his crumbling reputation!

But of course, the fact that he didn't have much money at hand still held, so it was about time to bolster his finances.

Thus, Zhang Xuan quickly returned back to his residence, and not too long later, Sun Qiang, returned as well.

Perhaps it was due to an entire night of hard work, Sun Qiang appeared to be a little weary.

"How is it?" Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over and asked.

"Young Master, I have looked into the matter, and there is a wide range of items of cultivation resources available in the Sanctum of Sages. In terms of effectiveness, there's nothing that compares to pinnacle spirit stones, but it appears that those can only be sourced in the Inner Sanctum." Sun Qiang revealed his findings.

"Inner Sanctum?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had heard that the Sanctum of Sages was divided into two main categories—Inner Sanctum and Outer Sanctum. Most likely, Luo Ruoxin was in the Inner Sanctum.

"That's right. Other than pinnacle spirit stones, I also found grade-8 Energy Repository Pill. I had someone purchase some of those for me. Please take a look" Sun Qiang said as he passed a jade bottle over.

Uncorking the jade bottle, Zhang Xuan took a look at the contents inside and nodded.

There were three pills in total, and they were indeed rich in spiritual energy. The energy contained within them were

significantly greater than the grade-7 Spirit Reinforcing Pills he had a while back.

“It’s indeed useful to me, but... I’ll need a lot more of it. At the very least, I would require at least thirty of them in order to push for a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage...” Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in distress.

While these Energy Repository Pills were at grade-8, perhaps due to the limitations of the pill forging skills of the apothecary, they had only reached the level of Formation. As such, the spiritual energy they harnessed was rather limited.

“Are there any other cultivation resources?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“There are. It seems like it’s possible to earn rewards through clearing missions in the Sanctum of Sages, and one of the rewards available is the Jade Spirit Essence!” Sun Qiang said.

“Jade Spirit Essence?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

Just like spirit stones, Jade Spirit Essence would only be formed in areas that were rich in spiritual energy, so the spiritual energy it harnessed was extremely pure. While it couldn’t compare up to pinnacle spirit stones, it was indeed a much better cultivation resource than concentrated high-tier spirit stones.

The problem was that Jade Spirit Essences were extremely rare, rumored to be harder to find than pinnacle spirit stones. Even Zhang Xuan had only seen them in the books before.

“What missions are there?”

“There is quite a huge variety of them. Missions can be requested by both students and teachers, but most of them would be rather difficult to complete. Based on what I have seen earlier, there are a total of three missions that have Jade Spirit Essence as their reward, and of them, one awards three Jade Spirit Essences!” Sun Qiang said.

“Three Jade Spirit Essences?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in excitement.

Jade Spirit Essences were far larger than spirit stones, and a single one of it could be easily worth up to ten thousand concentrated high-tier spirit stones. The spiritual energy that was harnessed within three of those was definitely more than enough for him to successfully advance through the Leaving Aperture realm!

If he were to sell them, even if it couldn't compensate the losses sustained by the Corridor of Puppets, it would at least help to supplement a substantial portion of the reparation cost.

"That's right." Sun Qiang nodded.

"To offer such a hefty award, what's the mission?" Even though Zhang Xuan was excited by the notion of earning three Jade Spirit Essences, he knew that a mission that would offer such a reward would definitely be proportionately difficult as well.

The Sanctum of Sages was filled with countless experts, but despite the handsome reward offered for the mission, there wasn't a single person who dared to take it up. That spoke a lot about the difficulty of the mission.

"It seems to be a mission from the Beast Tamer Hall... As for the details, I'm afraid that you would have to head there to learn more." Sun Qiang said.

Ultimately, he still wasn't a student of the Sanctum of Sages, so he didn't possess most of the privileges that all students have. In fact, it took him a lot of effort in order to gather this much information.

"Where are the missions posted? Bring me over to take a look..."

Zhang Xuan was just about to have Sun Qiang bring him over when a frown suddenly made its way to his forehead. Flicking his wrist, he took out his identity token and swiped his finger on it.

A line of words came into appearance.

"Zhang shi, come to the Hall of Attainment's Court of Elites immediately. We have to report in today!"

It was a message from Chen Leyao.

“Report in... Right, I have to report in!”

Regardless of whether one was a student from the Elite Division or the Ordinary Division, they were to report in today in order to select or be assigned a teacher.

Otherwise, without any backing in the Sanctum of Sages, it would be hard for the students to secure resources for themselves.

Most of the master teachers in the Sanctum of Sages wouldn't go so far as to deprive a student of his allocated cultivation resources, but there was no guarantee that the others wouldn't do so.

After all, the Sanctum of Sages took in not only master teachers but geniuses of other occupations as well.

And most importantly, the reason why most geniuses chose to enroll in the Sanctum of Sages was to build up their own connection network. Disciples under the same teacher would inevitably be closer to one another, and it would be easier for them to ask favors from one another in the future too. Thus, choosing the correct teacher was of utmost importance.

“I want you to continue looking into the matter, I'll go report in first.” Knowing that it would reflect badly on him if he were to be late on the very first day, Zhang Xuan hurriedly made his way over to the Hall of Attainment.

Attainment, Solidarity, Propriety, Erudition, and Integrity. The fact that Attainment was placed first clearly reflected its position in the Sanctum of Sages.

The most important responsibility of a master teacher was to impart their knowledge to the world, and the Hall of Attainment was the place where this happened.

By the time Zhang Xuan arrived, the entire area was already packed with people. Making just an estimate from what he could see, there were nearly ten thousand people in the area.

Just like the Hall of Solidarity, there was a massive character written at the entrance to the Hall of Attainment as well.

“It seems like Kong shi’s handwritten characters can be found at the entrance of all five halls. Perhaps this is to remind the later generations to hold those values close to their hearts...” Zhang Xuan thought.

Following which, he heard the sound of Vicious gulping down a mouthful of saliva.

Zhang Xuan callously sealed the fellow back into the Book of Heaven’s Path before proceeding in behind the crowd.

The Hall of Attainment was divided into many sectors, and the classes for the Ordinary Division and Elite Division were located at different sectors. Students of the Elite Division had the privilege to choose their own teacher whereas those of the Ordinary Division could only be selected by the teachers.

Zhang Xuan quickly scanned the area, and after finding the reporting location for the Elite Division, he swiftly walked over.

As soon as he entered the room, he immediately saw the other 49 who had made it into the Elite Division together with him were all present.

Chen Leyao had been pacing around the room anxiously, and it was only when she saw Zhang Xuan walking through the door did she finally heave a sigh of relief. She quickly walked over and said with a hushed voice, “Why are you only arriving now? Something big has happened. The Mountain Gate has collapsed!”

1332 Self-Introduction

“The Mountain Gate has collapsed?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Everything had been perfectly fine when they challenged the Mountain Gate examination the previous day. Everyone had displayed their capabilities as best they could in order to get into the top five hundred. Why would it collapse all of a sudden?

“That’s what Fei shi said earlier.” A hint of disbelief could be heard in Chen Leyao’s voice as well.

Clearly, she was also shocked by the news, or else she would not have been in such a hurry to relay it to Zhang Xuan.

“Fei shi?”

“He’s the elder standing at the front. He’s the person in charge of all affairs relating to the Elite Division, so you can look for him if you have any problems in the future,” Chen Leyao said as she gestured to the front.

Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over as well and saw a middle-aged man standing at the very front. He was surrounded by several students, who seemed to be asking him about something.

“Did they mention the reason behind the collapse of the Mountain Gate?”

The Mountain Gate had survived several dozen millenniums in the Sanctum of Sages, so why would such a thing suddenly happen at this point in time?

Chen Leyao pondered for a moment before saying, “I’m not too sure, but based on what I heard, it seems like the sculpture of Sage Kui has shattered.”

Hearing that, Zhang Xuan was confused.

What did the shattering of Sage Kui’s sculpture have anything to do with the collapse of the Mountain Gate?

“The Mountain Gate and the folded space were created single-handedly by Sage Kui, and most of the tests within were also supervised by his will. The shattering of the sculpture means that the will he left behind has dissipated, and without his support, the folded space ended up collapsing as well,” Chen Leyao replied.

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

To be honest, he was extremely grateful to Sage Kui for the help he had offered back during the entrance examination, and he had been planning on returning to find the latter after he gained the strength to activate the Sanctum Head Token. Who would have thought that the latter’s will would dissipate so swiftly?

Zhang Xuan sighed deeply. “Even if he has spent most of his time over the past several dozen millenniums asleep, it’s still inevitable that his life would eventually reach its end...”

There was a limit to the lifespan of all living beings. Not even Kong shi was able to free himself from the shackles of time.

Even if Sage Kui was a powerful expert prior to his death, there was still a limit to how long his fragmented soul could survive. If it had remained constantly asleep, he might still have been able to last for quite some time. However, each time a new sanctum head candidate appeared, he had to wake up once, and this ended up depleting his lifespan significantly. It had merely been a matter of time before his will dissipated.

“Indeed.” Chen Leyao nodded in agreement. “Now that Sage Kui’s will has dissipated, it’ll be difficult for the next sanctum head to establish his position...”

“Difficult for the next sanctum head to establish his position?”

“Ah, you must still be unaware of it. According to the rumors, Sage Kui’s will doesn’t just sustain the entire Mountain Gate examination. More importantly, he is also the one who is in charge of selecting the next sanctum head. In fact, every single sanctum head has been personally chosen by him. Now that his will has dissipated, it’ll be difficult for the next sanctum head to build legitimacy and credence to his position...”

As one of the top geniuses of the Glacier Plain Court, Chen Leyao had her own connections. While these matters might have been confidential secrets in the Sanctum of Sages, it was not too difficult for her to learn this much from her sources.

“This...” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan was just about to continue speaking when a resounding voice arose from the center of the room.

Turning his head over, Zhang Xuan saw that the one who was speaking was Fei Shi.

“It seems like everyone from the Elite Division is here. First and foremost, I would like to congratulate every single one of you for successfully becoming a student of the Sanctum of Sages. I’ll be accompanying you for the next few years of your journey here, but before I get to anything, I would like each of you to introduce yourself to the others. The people gathered here will be your fellow classmates, and you will be seeing one another frequently in your time in the Sanctum of Sages. So, it would be good for you all to familiarize yourselves with one another as soon as possible. Alright, in first place, Feng Ziyi...”

Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over curiously, wanting to see the face of the top ranker of the entrance examination.

Feng Ziyi had outperformed even those of the Zhang Clan to come top in the entrance examination. From this feat alone, there was no doubt that the other party was a person of great capability.

A young man who appeared to be in his mid-twenties walked out. He had an ordinary-looking exterior, no imposing aura or dashing appearance. He was the type of person who would blend right into the crowd if one did not pay close attention to him.

However, under the assessment of Zhang Xuan’s Eye of Insight, he could still clearly perceive the fearsome flow of energy that coursed through Feng Ziyi’s body like the rapid tides of a river. There was little doubt that this fearsome flow of energy could be converted into devastating might within moments if willed so.

Grand Dominion realm advanced stage... He's indeed a formidable individual. Zhang Xuan nodded.

A cultivator had to possess unthinkable talent in order to possess such strength in his mid-twenties.

"My name is Feng Ziyi."

The young man simply introduced his own name before falling silent.

It would have seemed silly if anyone else had done the same, but for the mysterious Feng Ziyi, such actions only seemed to deepen the enigma around him.

"In second place, Zhang Yu!" Fei shi announced.

He had the details concerning every single student who enrolled into the Sanctum of Sages, but if Feng Ziyi was unwilling to say anything more about himself, it was not be his place to talk too much either.

Following the announcement, another young man stepped forward and clasped his fist.

This young man appeared to be even younger than Feng Ziyi, around his early twenties, but his strength did not feel any weaker than the latter's. It felt like he could bring forth a calamitous storm with just a wave of his hand.

"My name is Zhang Yu, and I'm from the Zhang Clan. I hope that we can work together and strive for greatness!" In contrast to Feng Ziyi's cold disposition, Zhang Yu spoke with a warm smile on his face.

Under the scanning of the Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan found that there were no major flaws to be found in Zhang Yu's physical body, zhenqi, or soul, which made his strength exceptionally wholesome.

In comparison, the other offspring of the Zhang Clan that he knew of, such as Zhang Jiuxiao, Zhang Qian, or even Zhang Yunfeng, were truly not even worth mentioning.

If the two of them were to go all out in a battle, even though Zhang Yu's cultivation was only at Grand Dominion realm

advanced stage, Zhang Xuan was not confident that he would be the one to emerge victorious in the end.

As one of the inner members of the Zhang Clan, Zhang Yu's bloodline ability was bound to be far stronger than Zhang Qian's. Along with the various profound battle techniques and powerful means he would have learned in the Zhang Clan, Zhang Yu likely possessed the strength to rival opponents several cultivation stages stronger than him as well.

Following Zhang Yu was Yuan Haiqing, Bai Qingxuan...

Zhang Xuan assessed every single one of them carefully, and while most of the rest came nowhere close to comparing to Feng Ziyi and Zhang Yu, they still left him feeling deeply bewildered.

It was no wonder these clans and powers were able to remain at the top of the Master Teacher Continent for so many years. They really did possess exceptional means in cultivating the talents of the younger generation.

All in all, the only one who could be said to have truly come from a humble background among the fifty students of the Elite Division was him.

It seems like the Master Teacher Continent is rather similar to my previous world. Due to the difference in upbringing and resources available to each individual, the powerful grow even more powerful whereas the weak grow even weaker. This gap will only continue to widen with time...

Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

The stronger powers and clans had high-ranked master teachers amid their ranks and superior resources, thus allowing them to provide the best upbringing for their younglings right from the very start. This was not something that ordinary clans could afford to do.

As for those who had paved their way forward a step at a time, rising from the humble Tianxuan Kingdom all the way up here... well, such cases could be said to be practically non-existent. In a sense, Zhang Xuan's case could be considered a miracle among miracles.

It was really no wonder others automatically assumed that he was an offspring of the Zhang Clan.

It did not take too long for the front forty-nine students to finish introducing themselves.

“Last but not least, Zhang Xuan!”

As soon as those words were spoken, all eyes in the room immediately turned toward Zhang Xuan.

Despite not being from the Zhang Clan, Zhang Xuan had beaten up Zhang Qian and Zhang Yunfeng. This was a sight that everyone had seen with their own eyes back then, and that matter had left a deep impression on them.

Zhang Xuan introduced himself with a smile. “I am Zhang Xuan, and I am from the Qingyuan Empire.”

“He’s really from the Qingyuan Empire!”

“Despite coming from such a humble place, he still dared to make a move against the Zhang Clan? He sure is brazen!”

“But don’t you think that it’s weird how he was able to defeat Zhang Yunfeng despite being in fiftieth place?”

“That’s indeed rather bizarre. Perhaps, he might even be a secret student of some 9-star master teacher of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters...”

Upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s introduction, the crowd immediately began discussing him in whispers.

Considering how Zhang Xuan was able to achieve such strength despite being unaffiliated to any powers and the very fact that he dared stand against the Zhang Clan fearlessly, there was no one in that room who thought that he was as simple as he had introduced himself to be.

“Alright. Now that you have made your introductions, I shall first talk about some of the basic rules in the Sanctum of Sages that you must abide by, followed by the various aspects you have to take note of when choosing your teacher,” Fei shi said with a smile.

“Regarding the rules, they are all thoroughly explained in your identity tokens, so I won’t waste your time by going into detail about them. However, there’s one thing I would like to remind all of you on.

“As students of the Sanctum of Sages, you can compete with one another, but under no circumstances should you attempt to claim the life of your peers. If you have any irreconcilable conflict with anyone that you must settle at any cost, you can apply for a Master Teacher Confrontation with us. As long as three elders agree to your request, you’ll be accorded a Life-and-Death Contract to carry on with it. Under the terms of the Life-and-Death Contract, the power affiliated with the individual who has lost their life in the Master Teacher Confrontation must not attempt to exact vengeance against the victor.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded.

In a sense, these rules were similar to those of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy.

Regardless of whether one was a master teacher or not, wherever humans existed, there was bound to be conflict. Even the most enlightened of individuals were no exception to the rule.

Even Kong shi had also lost his rationality to rage and sorrow before.

Conflicts would have to be resolved in a timely and appropriate matter, or else they would only continue growing bigger and bigger.

This was also why most organizations, be it Master Teacher Academies or the Sanctum of Sages, had systems in place to deal with such situations. Otherwise, if an individual was forced to bottle up their hostility and rage due to the rules, it could eventually lead to them committing far worse acts.

“As for the selection of teachers, I only have a very simple piece of advice for you all. Choose a teacher who is aligned with your strengths.

“The fact that you were able to rise above the other ten thousand candidates means that you possess an outstanding talent or skill. As such, I hope that you can sharpen this strength of yours and bring it to its very limits.”

Following which, Fei shi began introducing some of the more formidable master teachers and exceptionally talented individuals of the other occupations in the Sanctum of Sages.

Upon hearing these introductions, Zhang Xuan shook his head in disinterest.

The Library of Heaven’s Path was far better than any teacher he could have. As such, this topic held no purpose to him at all.

“Fairy Leyao, do you still have any more of the Wintry Spirit Essence that you gave me previously? May I buy some of it from you?”

According to what Sun Qiang had said, it seemed like it would be difficult for him to obtain pinnacle spirit stones without entering the Inner Sanctum, and the other alternatives seemed to be rather troublesome as well. However, upon seeing Fairy Leyao, he suddenly remembered the Wintry Spirit Essence. He had consumed some previously, and it had been extremely effective on him. He could raise his cultivation swiftly with it.

“That... I do have some Wintry Spirit Essence, but I’m planning on using it to push for a breakthrough to Grand Dominion realm,” Chen Leyao replied hesitantly.

The young man was her benefactor, as well as the teacher of their young court chief. Under normal circumstances, she would not have turned down any request he had of her, but... she really needed the Wintry Spirit Essence to push for a breakthrough, so it was not convenient for her to give it away.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up upon hearing those words. “If I can help you achieve a breakthrough to Grand Dominion realm without using the Wintry Spirit Essence, would you be willing to sell your Wintry Spirit Essence to me?”

“If you can help me achieve a breakthrough, I’ll give the Wintry Spirit Essence straight to you!” Chen Leyao said.

1333 Offering Pointers to Chen Leyao

There was no treasure that was more important than raising one's own cultivation realm. If Zhang Xuan could help her push for a breakthrough to the Grand Dominion realm right now, even if she were to give the Wintry Spirit Essence straight to the other party, she would still have won big-time.

“Good!” Zhang Xuan smiled in delight.

He was just about to get Chen Leyao to execute a punching routine so that he could offer her some pointers when he suddenly heard a voice.

“Brother Zhang!”

Zhang Xuan turned around and saw a young man standing not too far away from him.

“Zhang Zhuo?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

The other party was none other than Zhang Yunfeng's cousin, the person ranked 31st place in the entrance examination.

“Just as I said yesterday, I am interested in testing out Brother Zhang. Since it's a free interaction time right now, I would like to invite you to a duel!” Zhang Zhuo clasped his fist respectfully.

He showed no hint of arrogance due to his identity as an offspring of the Zhang Clan.

“Free interaction time?” Zhang Xuan took a quick glance at his surroundings and saw that while he was chatting with Chen Leyao, Fei shi had already stopped talking to allow the students to familiarize themselves with one another.

As geniuses of the Sanctum of Sages, they spoke not only through words but their capabilities as well. As such, there was quite a number of people who had come to blows with one another.

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

In truth, Zhang Zhuo’s challenge meant nothing much to him. Even if he was ranked 31st place in the entrance examination, it would not take Zhang Xuan too much to defeat him.

However...

He had depleted all of his zhenqi after executing the Sea Severing Sword twice in the Corridor of Puppets, and while he had managed to recover a bit of his strength since then, he was still in no state to fight against a cultivator of Zhang Zhuo’s caliber.

“What? Is Brother Zhang unwilling to face me in a battle?” Zhang Zhuo narrowed his eyes playfully.

Considering how many freshmen had been watching in the square yesterday, it would have been bad to his reputation if the offspring of the Zhang Clan kept challenging Zhang Xuan in succession.

Today, every single student of the Elite Division was around, so this was a good opportunity to suppress the other party’s haughtiness. He was determined to have the other party learn that not everyone could afford to offend their Zhang Clan!

“It’s just a duel; why would I be unwilling to face you in a battle? I only fear that I will fail to keep my strength in check and accidentally cripple you. It would be a pity if something like that hurts the camaraderie we have as fellow students of the Elite Division,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

While he might have depleted his zhenqi, he still had plenty of means to deal with a mere Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator.

At the very worst, he would just let his clone out to bite at the other party.

Alas, that fellow was a little too aggressive and hard to control. It would be a little embarrassing if he accidentally crippled Zhang Zhuo while he was at it.

“You...” Zhang Zhuo’s face darkened. Harrumphing coldly, he beckoned with his hand and said, “Since you are willing to

accept my challenge, let's begin!"

After saying those words, he turned around and walked to the center of the hall.

"I guess it can't be helped then." Zhang Xuan sighed deeply as he got up and walked over as well. However, barely after he could take a step, Chen Leyao suddenly blocked the path ahead of him.

"Zhang shi, you have depleted your zhenqi, haven't you?"
Chen Leyao sent a telepathic message over.

"You can tell?" Zhang Xuan was slightly taken aback.

He had not told the other party about the matter of his zhenqi running dry, and he did not think that he had showed any hint that would betray that either. Thus, he could not help but be slightly surprised to see that Chen Leyao was able to see through it.

"Your acupoints were wide open while you were talking earlier, absorbing the surrounding spiritual energy desperately to replenish your zhenqi. With just a look, it's apparent that you are suffering from severe depletion of zhenqi," Chen Leyao explained.

"How can you fight with another in the state you are currently in. Why don't I help you turn down the battle instead? Even if he's from the Zhang Clan, he should at least sell me this favor..."

Ultimately, the foundation of a cultivator lay in their zhenqi. Admittedly, experts of their level could draw on incredible strength from their physical bodies and Primordial Spirits too, but to fight without zhenqi was similar to a tiger attempting to hunt down its prey without its fangs and claws.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. "I will lose my honor and reputation if I turn down his challenge."

To be honest, he cared about nothing of that sort, but considering that the other party was from the Zhang Clan and had provoked him first... What a pity it would be if he were to let this precious opportunity to pummel the other party into the ground slip by?

“But you won’t be able to fight in your current state!” Chen Leyao exclaimed.

It was not that she harbored any special feelings for the young man before her. However, just on the basis that the young man was the teacher of their young court chief, she could not allow any harm to come to him.

Otherwise, if the young court chief started assigning blame for the matter, there was no way she could take responsibility.

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned. He knew that he could only rely on other means to resolve this situation, too, and he was actually planning on finding an opportunity to slip off for a moment to change his clothes. However, a thought suddenly came to his mind in this moment, and he asked, “Fairy Leyao... why don’t you fight for me instead?”

“You want me to take your place?” Chen Leyao was stunned for a moment before hurriedly shaking her head. “The only reason I was able to get into the Elite Division is due to my secret art. As such, my fighting prowess is still lacking compared to most of the others in the Elite Division. I fear that I won’t stand a chance against Zhang Zhuo!”

Her cultivation was only at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle at the moment. In the eyes of others, she could be considered an astounding genius, but compared to Zhang Zhuo, she was still severely lacking.

If they were to clash in a real battle, the one who would fall was indubitably her.

“Who said that you don’t stand a chance against Zhang Zhuo?” Zhang Xuan patted Chen Leyao’s shoulder reassuring before walking up to Zhang Zhuo. “Brother Zhang, I would love to accept your challenge, but I happen to be at a crucial moment in my cultivation, so it won’t be convenient for me to fight with you right now. Why don’t I have Fairy Leyao fight in my place instead, and I’ll offer her pointers by the side. If you are able to defeat her, I’ll consider it my loss.”

“Crucial moment in your cultivation?” Zhang Zhuo harrumphed coldly.

It was obvious that the other party was just finding a random excuse to turn down his challenge.

You made a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm before all of us yesterday; are you trying to tell us that you can still achieve a breakthrough today?

Even if you want to give an excuse, surely you can find something that's more logical than that!

If you think that you can turn down my challenge with such an excuse, you are dreaming!

The previous day, he had asked Zhang Qian and Zhang Yunfeng about the conflict they had with Zhang Xuan, and it seemed like everything had started from this Chen Leyao. Since she was intent on standing up for Zhang Xuan, he did not mind teaching her a lesson.

He knew that the young lady was far weaker than him, and if they were to really clash with one another, he would be able to defeat her easily within three moves.

“Fairy Leyao, are you sure you want to stand up for him?” Zhang Zhuo directed a cold gaze toward Chen Leyao.

“I...” Chen Leyao's eyebrows shot up.

She had only intended to dissuade Zhang Xuan from fighting in the duel, but who would have thought that she would suddenly be dragged out to fight the duel instead?

However, due to how loudly the both of them had spoken, everyone had already turned their gazes over. At this point, it was already too late for her to back down.

“That's right! If you wish to have a fight with Zhang shi, you'll have to get past me first,” Chen Leyao replied coolly.

“Very well. Let me see how powerful your Glacier Plain Court is then!” Harrumphing coldly, Zhang Zhuo's figure vanished with a swift step forward.

His fingers were cupped in a shape reminiscent of a bowl as they crushed down heavily upon Chen Leyao.

This technique was not a battle technique, and it looked incredibly straightforward. However, the instant that his palm fell, the surrounding space was immediately sealed, forcing Chen Leyao to face him head-on.

Facing such a situation, Chen Leyao's eyes narrowed slightly as a hint of panic flashed through her eyes.

With her current fighting prowess, she could only match Zhang Qian. She would have trouble fighting even Zhang Yunfeng, let alone the stronger Zhang Zhuo.

The moment that Zhang Zhuo's palm fell, she immediately felt her zhenqi slowing. Even if she were to gather all of her strength to counterattack, she still would not be able to withstand Zhang Zhuo's attack.

“Move half a step to the left and stab your finger rightward as if a sword.”

Just as Chen Leyao was feeling utterly helpless, a voice suddenly sounded calmly by her ears—Zhang Xuan.

I guess I have no other choice...

Seeing that there was no better alternative before her, she slid her feet to the left and pierced her finger forward.

Padah!

Her movements were slight, but it caused Zhang Zhuo's palm strike to miss with a resounding sonic boom. At the same time, her finger also accurately pierced an opening in Zhang Zhuo's offense, catching him off guard for an instant.

It must be a coincidence! Zhang Zhuo thought as he hurriedly retracted his hand and took a step back.

“Left hand, Sword Traversing into the Sea. Right hand, Dragon Soars into the Wilderness!” Zhang Xuan continued issuing instructions.

Just as Chen Leyao was feeling deeply despaired, she saw that she had actually successfully fended off Zhang Zhuo's attack by following Zhang Xuan's instructions. In an instant, confidence filled her heart. Without any hesitation, she

continued obeying the latter's instructions, executing a sword art in her left hand and a palm art in her right.

In terms of strength, she was far from comparing to Zhang Zhuo, but through executing the two moves simultaneously, she managed to seal off the latter's attack trajectory, forcing the latter to take up a defensive position.

Zhang Zhuo also could tell that the momentum of the battle was against him at the moment, and a forceful attempt to go on the offensive could only result in him getting injured. Thus, he had no choice but to continue retreating.

“Ursae Majoris Steps, Quenching of the Three Yang!” Zhang Xuan instructed.

Chen Leyao immediately began shuffling her feet, executing the Ursae Majoris Steps. At the same time, her finger tapped forward, seemingly drawing out a triangle in the air, as she drove her zhenqi for the other party's Three Yang Meridians.

These moves were not particularly profound, but they were apt for the current circumstances. It coincidentally sealed off the zhenqi circulation pathway of the next move that Zhang Zhuo was going to execute, leaving him feeling so stifled that he could spurt blood.

Something is very weird here... Zhang Zhuo thought as he leaped backward in alarm.

“What is Zhang Zhuo up to?”

“Chen Leyao's moves should be extremely easy to deal with. Why is he not defending against them, choosing to retreat again and again instead?”

“Extremely easy to deal with? Are you honestly saying those words? Look at where Chen Leyao's finger is pointing! If he attempted to retaliate, his Chihai acupoint would have been struck. If he attempted to charge forth, his Ziyang acupoint would have been kicked. If he attempted to flank from the left, his Huaihai acupoint would have been slammed by her shoulder. If he attempted to flank from the right, he would have been faced with an even more intense barrage of attacks! In such a situation, there's no choice but to retreat!”

“This...”

The battle between the both of them had caught the attention of everyone in the room. Initially, the crowd did not think much of the battle, but as it went on, looks of disbelief gradually began surfacing on their faces.

As fellow offspring of powerful clans, they were well aware of the backgrounds of one another. Under normal circumstances, Chen Leyao should not have been able to withstand three moves from Zhang Zhuo. Yet, at this very moment, she actually managed to corner Zhang Zhuo to the point that he could not even retaliate!

Were Zhang Xuan’s pointers really that formidable?

“Interesting!” Leaning against the table, Zhang Yu watched the battle with a fascinated look in his eyes.

Usually, he would not have much interest in battles such as this, but upon seeing such a sight, his gaze could not help but linger on the battle.

For the weak to triumph over the strong, the weak would have to control the flow of battle impeccably, dealing with whatever techniques the strong threw over promptly. To be honest, it was hard for him to believe that Zhang Xuan would be able to allow Chen Leyao to achieve this much just through his pointers.

Deng deng deng deng!

Before everyone’s bewildered gazes, Chen Leyao and Zhang Zhuo traded ten more blows, and shockingly, Zhang Zhuo did not even manage to fend off a single one. He kept retreating non-stop, and before long, he was backed against the wall.

“Damn it!” Zhang Zhuo’s face turned livid.

This should have been an easy battle for him, but ten moves had passed, and he had not gotten a chance to counterattack yet. The intense frustration made him feel like he was going to explode.

“Since this is the case, don’t blame me for not having mercy on you!”

Seeing that there was no longer any path to escape to, Zhang Zhuo narrowed his eyes, and a powerful surge of energy began gushing through his body.

1334 Chen Leyao's Breakthrough

“That’s the power of his unique bloodline?” Sensing the abrupt surge in Zhang Zhuo’s aura, everyone was taken aback.

It was just a friendly spar between fellow students! Was there a need to tap into such a mutually harming trump card?

“No, it isn’t the power of his unique bloodline. Rather, it’s a secret art he has been practicing for quite a while. Once it’s activated, even Grand Dominion realm intermediate stage cultivators would struggle to match his might...” a young man from the Zhang Clan explained with a smile.

Tapping into the power of one’s unique bloodline would inflict massive damage upon one, and one would have to rest for at least a month after that. For this reason, not even those of the Zhang Clan would resort to it easily.

But even without tapping into the power of their unique bloodline, the Zhang Clan was still the number one Sage Clan on the Master Teacher Continent. They possessed plenty of secret arts which could raise their fighting prowess swiftly within a short moment.

Cornered by a young lady whose strength was far beneath his time and time again, Zhang Zhuo’s frustration eventually hit its limit, and unable to tolerate it any longer, he resorted to his secret arts.

“Things are going to get hard for Chen Leyao!”

“Indeed. She might be able to claim the upper hand for the time being with her superior skills, but in the face of absolute strength, she won’t be able to hold on for too long!”

...

The crowd didn’t think that the situation was too optimistic for Chen Leyao.

It was true that technique would allow one to overcome an opponent stronger than one, but there was a limit to that as well.

Otherwise, cultivators wouldn't have to cultivate relentlessly in seek of greater strength.

In the view of the crowd, Chen Leyao had only managed to clinch a temporary upper hand, but the situation was still unfavorable to her. The massive gap between Zhang Zhuo and her ability would eventually result in the tables turning on her.

Her defeat was inevitable, it was just a matter of time.

Hearing the discussion from the crowd, Chen Leyao's expression also turned grim.

Just as she was at a loss as to what she should do, Zhang Xuan's voice suddenly sounded in her ear once more, "Traversing Crane Palm, Third Form!"

At this point, obeying Zhang Xuan's instructions had already become a reflexive action to her. Without even thinking about it, she had already raised her arm, and reminiscent to a soaring divine crane, she pressed it down upon Zhang Zhuo.

The Traversing Crane Palm was a technique created by a senior in the Glacier Plain Court while watching the flight trajectory of cranes. It was a technique which harnessed very little strength, but the speed of its attacks was extraordinary. Furthermore, the complicated trajectories of its movements also made it even harder for the opponent to cope with the battle technique.

And the Third Form harnessed the very essence of the Traversing Crane Palm. Once activated, a sight reminiscent of a beautiful crane spreading open its wings and soaring into the heavens would unfold before the eyes of the onlookers.

Pah!

The spreading of the wings was swiftly accompanied with the crisp echo of a palm accurately falling on Zhang Zhuo's face.

"A slap?"

"Zhang Zhuo just got slapped?"

The surroundings were abruptly plunged into silence, and even Chen Leyao was stunned by the situation before her.

Chen Leyao's attack was extremely swift, allowing her to catch others off guard, but considering Zhang Zhuo's cultivation realm, he should have been able to dodge her attack easily! Yet, he still ended up being struck squarely in the face, leaving five clear fingerprints on his face... This was simply too shocking!

Not only was Chen Leyao dazed, Zhang Zhuo, who had just undergone a power up after activating his secret art, was completely dumbstruck as well. It took a long while before he recovered from his shock, and his zhenqi began surging from his sheer rage.

"Bastard, I'm going to kill you!" Zhang Zhuo's eyes turned bloody red, and veins were popping up from his forehead.

It was already a great embarrassment for him to be cornered by a person whose strength was far lower than his, but as if that wasn't enough, he was even dealt a resounding slap to his face. The humiliation he felt burned down every last shred of rationality he had.

Hong long!

Driven by his rage, his energy began gushing out as if a burst dam, and in an instant, his aura had already grown two times stronger than before. Under the overwhelming power which he was emanating, Chen Leyao was forced to retreat again and again with a pale face.

"She just had to mess with the wrong opponent." Zhang Yu remarked with a leisure smile as he lay on the table and watched the situation in interest.

"Hm?" A young man seated not too far away from Zhang Yu shot a curious glance over.

"The secret art which Zhang Zhuo is using is called the Searing Blood Formula. It uses one's blood essence as fuel to temporarily boost one's fighting prowess significantly. Under normal circumstances, it would only be able to raise one's strength by 30%, but due to the sheer rage from the

humiliation he had suffered, the effects of the Searing Blood Formula ended up being amplifying his strength by twofold instead. At the current moment, Zhang Zhuo's strength is already comparable to a Grand Dominion realm intermediate stage cultivator... If Chen Leyao hadn't dealt that slap, she might have still been able to last a little longer in the battle, but now... I can only wish her the best of luck!"

Zhang Yu's words were very clear.

Chen Leyao had won the battle but lost the war. She might have managed to embarrass Zhang Zhuo, but her actions ended up amplifying his strength instead, and the eventual result of it would be her own suffering.

"From such a sense, Chen Leyao has indeed dug her own grave... Zhang Zhuo has always been known to be a cold person. To him, there's only friends and foes. He wouldn't go easy on his opponent just because she's a lady..." The young man shook his head.

Even he would have trouble coping with Zhang Zhuo after his abrupt surge in strength, let alone that Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle young lady.

While the both of them were chatting, Zhang Zhuo's strength had finally hit its peak. Just by taking a single step forward, Chen Leyao immediately felt the air around her distorting disturbingly. She suddenly felt as if she was bound by ropes, and no matter how she struggled, she was unable to shake free from it.

"This is really bad..." With a flustered look, the young lady turned to Zhang Xuan and said, "Zhang shi, what should I do?"

She had made her moves strictly according to Zhang Xuan's instructions, but who could have thought that she would only end up provoking Zhang Zhuo further, resulting in the situation completely going out of control!

"I guess there's nothing to be done. Given how much his strength has increased, you won't be a match for him in your current state!" Zhang Xuan said as he stretched his back lazily.

“But...” A hint of despair flickered across Chen Leyao’s face when she heard those words, and she nearly burst into tears.

I also know that I’m no match for him as well, but... am I really going to be beaten up by him?

“You really need to have more flexibility in your thoughts. Since you aren’t able to defeat him with your current strength, all you have to do is to achieve a breakthrough then!” Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment.

“Achieve a breakthrough?” Chen Leyao was stunned.

Do you really think I am like you, capable of achieving a breakthrough as and when I like?

If it’s that easy to reach Grand Dominion realm, I would have already succeeded a month ago. I wouldn’t have been stuck at my current realm at so long!

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “From this moment on, heed my words very closely. There’s no need to be afraid or panic, it’s just a mere breakthrough to Grand Dominion realm. Ten breaths is all it takes!”

“Ten breaths...” Chen Leyao nearly fainted from rage.

Aren’t you bragging a little too much over here?

On top of having one’s zhenqi accumulated beyond a certain point, one must also achieve some comprehension of the spatial laws in order to reach Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm... Due to that, there were simply too many talented geniuses on the Master Teacher Continent who found their footsteps halted at this point, unable to push for a breakthrough.

Even the most talented genius of our Glacier Plain Court took three whole months for her breakthrough!

And you’re telling me that you would make me to do it within ten breaths?

Even the most unreliable of salesman wouldn’t dare to utter such big words!

“Ten breaths?”

“He can’t be serious, can he?”

“In the first place, don’t you think that it’s ridiculous for a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage to offer guidance to a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle in making a breakthrough? To make promises which he’s unable to uphold, that fellow is really unworthy of being a master teacher!”

...

Zhang Xuan didn’t bother concealing his voice, so everyone in the room heard his words loud and clear. They looked at one another with faces marked with disbelief.

You really need to know what you can brag about and what you can’t!

At this rate, you are just only going to be humiliated by your own words!

By the side, a deep frown appeared on Fei shi’s face as well. Even he didn’t think that it was possible for Chen Leyao to make a breakthrough within ten breaths.

“You want to make a breakthrough? Dream on!” Zhang Zhuo roared as he raised his palm, and overwhelming might gushed toward the young lady standing opposite to him.

“I...” Chen Leyao felt her bones being pushed to their limits under the sheer pressure of the palm. She wanted to escape, but she realized that her escape routes had been completely sealed, leaving her completely helpless.

Lost and not knowing what to do, Zhang Xuan’s voice suddenly sounded in her ears once more.

“Lonesome Footsteps, Second Form. Drive your zhenqi using the Glacier Formula into your Tianmen acupoint and Qixin acupoint.”

“... Alright.” Knowing that she had no other choice but to put her trust in Zhang Xuan, she gritted her teeth and made her move.

Instead of retreating, she chose to head forward instead.

The Second Form of the Lonesome Footsteps was a forward dash maneuver.

“I’m doomed...” With a pale face, Chen Leyao prepared herself for the very worst.

She moved instinctively upon hearing the instructions, not bothering to think the actions through.

Even from afar, Zhang Zhuo’s palm was already one which she couldn’t withstand. Charging right over would only increase the force of the other party’s palm, pushing her further down the cliff.

Barely after dashing forward by two meters, the pressure before her had already increased by twofold. Not only were her bones tightly pressed together now, even her muscles were pushed to their limits, as if they would be torn to shreds at any moment.

“Forget it, I have no other choice now! I’ll just have to put my trust in Zhang Shi’s judgement!” Chen Leyao despaired, but she knew that there was no longer any alternatives before her.

Thus, she began driving her zhenqi according to the Glacier Formula, channeling her energy toward her Tianmen Acupoint and Qixin Acupoint.

These two acupoints were the crux to achieving a breakthrough to Grand Dominion realm. Naturally, she had attempted to open these two acupoints several times in the past, but her attempts had all ended in failure.

But surprisingly, she felt her zhenqi flowing smoother than ever instead. The immense pressure weighing down on her was facilitating the movement of her zhenqi forward!

In this moment, she couldn’t help but feel that the other party wasn’t attacking her but aiding her in her breakthrough!

Boom!

Under the furious torrent of zhenqi channeled to them, the Tianmen acupoint and Qixin acupoints were swiftly opened up. Following which, Chen Leyao’s vision suddenly blurred

for a moment. Lines had appeared before her. She couldn't tell for sure, but they appeared to be the folds of space.

She instinctively reached forward to grab at them, and a surge of power suddenly coiled around her body.

Half-Grand Dominion realm, reached!

“She really achieved a breakthrough?”

“How did she do it?”

Everyone was flabbergasted to see Chen Leyao successfully overcoming her bottleneck in less than two breaths after dashing into Zhang Zhuo's attack. The sight was simply so shocking that it seemed to sap the oxygen out of their lungs.

Every single one of them had thought that Zhang Xuan was just bragging, but who could have thought that... he really wielded the power to make the impossible happen!

Not only was the crowd shocked, even Chen Leyao's body was shaking from sheer agitation. Disbelief could be seen in her eyes, reflecting how inconceivable the situation was to her as well.

She had pushed herself time and time again for a breakthrough, but no matter what she did, she was simply unable to break through the ceiling that was capping her strength. It was unbelievable to her how that ceiling could be shattered so easily.

“Switch to the Yang Formula, drive your zhenqi through the Three Meridians of the Yin Formula...” In her moment of agitation, Zhang Xuan's voice continued sounding.

Not daring to hesitate in the slightest, Chen Leyao swiftly drove her zhenqi strictly to how the young man had instructed her to do so.

Boom!

There was a slight jolt in her meridians, and all of a sudden, Chen Leyao felt the palm strike which Zhang Zhuo was pushing toward her lightening considerably. Following which, a feeling of unprecedented harmony resonated through her

body, and the power which had coiled around her body previously began to expand outward.

Under normal circumstances, if one's zhenqi was unable to keep up with the expansion of one's Dominion, one would suffer severe injuries. However, due to her driving her Yang Formula toward the Three Meridians of the Yin Formula, it ended up creating a powerful suction force around her, reminiscent of a black hole.

Tzzzzzzzz!

It took only a mere instant for the attack which Zhang Zhuo was sending over to be devoured clean, and Chen Leyao unhesitatingly used it to fuel the expansion of her Dominion. Before long, a stable five meters light barrier formed around her.

"I... really achieved a breakthrough?" Feeling the Dominion that had formed around her and the overwhelming strength flowing through her body, Chen Leyao's body froze in shock. She could hardly curb the agitation she was feeling inside.

"I really achieved a breakthrough! And it has only been... five breaths!" For those who are wondering, Dominion works something like gravity to oppose one's movement. So if Chen Leyao's movement backward is sealed, she would still be able to move forward.

1335 Fei shi's Warning

The entire main hall was deathly silent. Including Fei shi, each and every face that could be seen was marked with shock.

Achieving a breakthrough to Half-Grand Dominion realm, that was still acceptable to them. But to make a leap to Grand Dominion realm just three breaths after that due to a single sentence spoken by Zhang Xuan... There was really no words that could describe their current feelings.

They had never heard of anyone being able to make another person achieve a breakthrough so quickly in succession, not even with 9-star master teachers!

“He sure is a resourceful lad!” the leisurely Zhang Yu from a moment ago remarked with narrowed eyes.

“Resourceful?”

“That slap earlier should be an intentional move from Zhang Xuan's side to anger Zhang Zhuo. The purpose was to push Zhang Zhuo's secret art to its limits, maximizing his increment in strength!” Zhang Yu said with a nod.

“Secret arts with the ability to raise one's strength significantly are formidable weapons in battle, but there is a fatal flaw in them. The strength derived from them would be all ‘virtual power’.”

“Virtual power?” The young man not too far away wasn't too sure what Zhang Yu meant by those words.

“Virtual power refers to strength which doesn't belong to one. To make a metaphor, it would be like a bubble. It's possible to increase the size of a bubble to a colossal degree, but as soon as something happens, it would disappear without a trace. Virtual power simply isn't as concrete as the zhenqi one cultivated, and its attributeless nature would make it easy for others to steal as well.” Zhang Yu harrumphed.

“On the surface, it appeared that Zhang Xuan had chosen to make Chen Leyao fight the battle in his place, but in truth,

right from the very start, it was his intention to have Chen Leyao make use of Zhang Zhuo's virtual power to overcome her bottleneck and reach Grand Dominion realm!"

The young man could hardly believe what he was hearing, "In a battle, the slightest mistake could lead to grievous injuries or even death... To attempt to absorb the power of an opponent and push for a breakthrough in the midst of a battle, isn't that too risky?"

It wasn't uncommon for powerful experts to infuse their energy into their juniors in order to raise their strength swiftly. This process was otherwise known as Cultivation Impartation.

Cultivation Impartation could allow one to achieve a breakthrough swiftly, but its requirement was extremely severe as well. Firstly, the ones conducting and receiving the Cultivation Impartation must be from the same lineage, practicing the exact same cultivation techniques. Secondly, both parties must be willing to undergo the Cultivation Impartation, and there must be no resistance in the entire process. Otherwise, the slightest lapse in the process could cause the receiver to lose control of the immense energy being pumped into him and literally explode on the spot.

Given how dangerous Cultivation Impartation was, to attempt to steal the opponent's strength and push for a breakthrough in the midst of a tense battle... Just how confident must a person be in his own strength in order to do so?

"Zhang Xuan must have investigated Zhang Zhuo's background beforehand to gain a thorough understanding of the latter's strength, cultivation techniques, secret arts, and the sort beforehand. Putting that information along with what he knew of Chen Leyao, he would be able to craft out scenarios for Chen Leyao to safely achieve a breakthrough in the midst of a battle with him... It shouldn't be too difficult to obtain all this information if he were to tap into Chen Leyao's connections." A glint flickered across Zhang Yu's eyes as he saw through the 'crux' of the matter.

Stealing the opponent's strength to push for a breakthrough in the midst of a battle may seem extremely complicated, but as

long as one had a thorough understanding of the fighting prowess of both parties and designed a plausible scenario with countermeasures for unexpected situations in place, there was still a good chance that one would be able to pull it off safely.

“More importantly, Chen Leyao probably isn’t as weak as we thought. Most likely, she’s already on the verge of a breakthrough. In other words, as shocking as the situation may seem, she was actually collaborating with Zhang Xuan to play out a show to garner attention. Otherwise, do you think that a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator, not to mention one that is unaffiliated with any powers, would possibly possess an understanding of cultivation that surpasses Chen Leyao, Zhang Zhuo, and even us?” Zhang Yu said confidently.

“This...”

The young man came to a realization.

Of course, even if one were to make ample preparations beforehand, pushing for a breakthrough in the midst of battle was still an extremely difficult and risky process. Nevertheless, it was at least at a level where the matter wasn’t completely implausible to them anymore.

“Despite his young age, he sure is scheming...” Coming to realize ‘what was going on’, the young man harrumphed coldly.

“Those who come to the Sanctum of Sages dream of leaving a mark on the Master Teacher Continent, and the best way to do so is to trample on the name of the Zhang Clan. That Zhang Xuan sure is an ambitious fellow!” Zhang Yu sneered coldly.

“Do you want me to teach him a lesson in your stead?” the young man asked.

“There’s no need for that. He can do whatever he likes as long as he doesn’t trample on my toes. If he really is so brazen as to do so, I don’t mind teaching him a lesson which he would never forget.” Zhang Yu waved his hands leisurely before falling silent.

To him, while Zhang Xuan did possess some talent, he wasn't a person who posed any threat to his position.

While the two of them were discussing this matter by the side, in the middle of the hall, Zhang Zhuo was nearly losing his mind.

The secret art he had used ended up being used as nourishment for Chen Leyao's breakthrough. That was another tight slap on his face! His body trembled from the overflowing rage coursing through his body, and with a wrathful roar, he dashed forward once more.

"Alright. Since you have achieved a breakthrough, he should pose no threat to you anymore. It'll do for you to knock him out. Take three steps back using the Seventh Form of the Lonesome Steps and execute the second move of the Vacuum Palm!"

Before Zhang Zhuo's attack could strike, Chen Leyao heard Zhang Xuan's voice in her ears once more.

Without any hesitation, she carried out what was being said, and half a breath later, Zhang Zhuo stared at Chen Leyao with eyes widened with disbelief before collapsing powerlessly to the ground.

"I won... I actually won!" Overwhelmed with agitation, Chen Leyao rushed back to Zhang Xuan's side and exclaimed in delight.

Zhang Yu thought that Zhang Xuan had a thorough grasp of her strength, which allowed him to design a situation where she would be able to tap into Zhang Zhuo's power to push for a breakthrough. However, as the person in question, Chen Leyao knew very well that she had only met Zhang Xuan the previous day, and even though they had spent some time together, she had never executed her moves or displayed his cultivation to him before.

In other words, prior to her battle with Zhang Yu, Zhang Xuan knew nothing about her abilities at all!

Relying solely on his eye of discernment, he was able to analyze the depths of her abilities in the midst of a battle and

offer spot-on pointers for her to turn the tables around, not to mention, even allowing her to achieve a breakthrough within five breaths!

His ability had far exceeded her wildest expectations.

It was no wonder why he was able to modify the Yin Formula and Yang Formula and resolve the problem which had plagued the Glacier Plain Court for countless dozen millenniums!

“You should be thankful that this is just a friendly spar. If it had been a life-and-death battle, you would have been long killed!” Seeing how excited Chen Leyao was, Zhang Xuan poured a bucket of cold water over her with his words.

In truth, it was only possible to carry out such a situation in a friendly spar. Otherwise, if Zhang Zhuo had executed killing blows one after another right from the start, there would have been nothing Chen Leyao could have done to reverse the situation.

As such, it would be nigh impossible to replicate this success again.

“Furthermore, considering that you have achieved a breakthrough by absorbing the strength of another, the foundations of your cultivation is bound to be rather shaky. I’ll prepare a cultivation technique for you to reinforce your cultivation later on, so make sure to practice it well so that you don’t leave behind any traumas in your cultivation.” Zhang Xuan continued.

Considering that Chen Leyao had made a breakthrough on Zhang Zhuo’s ‘virtual power’, her current breakthrough could be said to be built upon weak foundations. She would have to work hard on reinforcing her cultivation so as to ensure that this wouldn’t cause any problem in the future.

It was a little troublesome, but this couldn’t be helped. After all, not everyone was as talented as him.

“I understand.” Chen Leyao nodded. At this moment, she suddenly recalled the agreement they had made earlier and flicked her wrist, “Here are three bottles of Wintry Spirit

Essence. That's all I have at the moment. If Zhang Shi has a need for them, feel free to take them."

Just as what she had said before, as long as Zhang Xuan could help her achieve a breakthrough, she would give the Wintry Spirit Essence to the other party for free.

And since the other party had managed to carry out the end of his promise, she wouldn't renege on her words either.

"Thank you." Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up as he took the bottles of Wintry Spirit Essence unreservedly.

To be honest, without his guidance, it took take at least half to an entire year of accumulation before Chen Leyao would be able to make a breakthrough to Grand Dominion realm.

Considering how much time he had saved the other party, it wasn't too much for him to receive these as compensation.

Zhang Xuan uncorked the bottle and felt the concentrated spiritual energy and frigid chill emanating from within.

Without any hesitation, he gulped down the entire bottle of Wintry Spirit Essence.

Then, he paused for a brief moment before gulping down the other two bottles as well.

Time waits for no one.

It had been nearly a day since he had arrived at the Sanctum of Sages, but he had only raised his cultivation by two cultivation stages so far. This was too slow, too slow!

Since he had already compiled the full Leaving Aperture realm cultivation technique, he should just push for a breakthrough on the spot!

"He drunk all three bottles at once?"

Chen Leyao knew that the young man before him possessed means far beyond her imagination, but even so, she couldn't help but shudder in terror when she saw the young man swallowing three whole bottles of the Wintry Spirit Essence at one shot.

As soon as the Wintry Spirit Essence entered his body, Zhang Xuan immediately drove his Heaven's Path Divine Art, and it

didn't take long for his depleted zhenqi to be restored completely. Following which, as more and more spiritual energy was converted into zhenqi and deposited into his dantian, his aura grew stronger and stronger.

“It's truly an honor to be able to witness such an exciting breakthrough. As expected of geniuses of the Elite Division, the means that every single one of you possesses are truly astounding!”

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to push for a breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle in a single go, he suddenly heard Fei shi's voice sounding beside him.

He turned his head over and saw that Zhang Zhuo had already regained consciousness, and he was currently sitting gloomily by the side. On the other hand, Fei shi was looking at him with deep agitation reflected on his face.

While he harbored the same thoughts as Zhang Yu, thinking that Chen Leyao's breakthrough was a carefully planned maneuver between the two beforehand, that didn't hinder his deep respect for the young man.

Even the most meticulously designed plan could flop if it were to be executed badly.

“However, I would just like to re-emphasize something over here. No matter what the outcome of the duel is, please consider it as a friendly spar to learn from one another. Don't harbor any grudges against one another over a matter as minor as this.” Knowing that the previous battle could very well incur the ire of Zhang Zhuo or even the Zhang Clan toward Zhang Xuan, Fei shi stepped in and spoke with a smile

“Most of you have come from powerful clans and backgrounds, so I believe you should understand the importance of building up your connections. It's fate that brought all of you together in the same class, so I hope you can treasure the relationship you have with one another. Even if you were to rise to a great position in the future, these connections you forge with one another here will surely help you all greatly in the future...”

“Indeed, there’s no need to sour relations with one another over a friendly spar.”

“Don’t worry, Fei shi. We understand that!”

Knowing the rationale behind Fei shi’s words, the crowd swiftly chirped in with a smile.

Coming from powerful clans and backgrounds, even if they didn’t enroll in the Sanctum of Sages, they would still be able to rise through the ranks with ease. The two reasons why they went through the trouble to do so was to, firstly, temper their state of mind through the characters that Kong shi had left behind and the atmosphere that drifted in the Sanctum of Sages, and secondly, build up their connections.

With powerful connections, they would be highly valued even when they returned back to their clans, which would aid them in vying for a greater degree of authority in the future.

“Alright, I won’t impose on you all any further. Feel free to speak and interact with one another, and don’t forget to select a teacher suited for you later on...” Seeing that everyone understood his intentions, Fei shi decided to speak no more.

The crowd also knew that it wasn’t easy for them to be gathered together in one place. Once they started cultivating, they would be scattered all over the place. So, they deeply treasured this opportunity to socialize with one another.

Looking at this situation with a smile, Fei shi slowly made his way over to Zhang Xuan.

“Zhang shi, I have taken a look at your background, and I must say, it’s truly astounding that someone of your age is able to come this far from Tianxuan Kingdom. Not only did you become the principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, you have also successfully crashed two Master Teacher Pavilions. To be honest, even I am deeply in awe with your talent.”

As the person in charge of this class of the Elite Division, he had read Zhang Xuan’s profile in advance, and even for someone like him, he couldn’t help but find himself filled with respect for Zhang Xuan.

Even if it was in a remote location like Qingyuan Empire, the fact that he could successfully crash the Master Teacher Pavilion was more than enough to prove his talent and strength.

“Fei shi is too polite.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist in response.

Fei shi nodded slightly before continuing on, “Possessing talent is important, but so is forging connections with others... The Zhang Clan is the number one Sage Clan in the Master Teacher Continent, so I hope that you can make reconciliations with them. It won’t be good for you to get into a conflict with them.”

It hadn’t been a day since the young man had arrived in the Sanctum of Sages, but he had already pummeled three students from the Zhang Clan. This was really putting him at a spot.

1336 Luo Xuanqing Visits

As the top Sage Clan in the Master Teacher Continent, the Zhang Clan had many offspring in the Sanctum of Sages. As long as they were not the core members of the Zhang Clan, it would not cause too much of an uproar to harm them. However, within less than a single day, Zhang Xuan had pummeled three of them. While they were all the less important inner members, that could still be considered an act of provocation toward the Zhang Clan!

He might still have been able to make some actions in the shadows to mediate the conflict between both parties had it been any other power, but as for the Zhang Clan... it was a power that was not much weaker than the Sanctum of Sages, and he was only an ordinary teacher in it.

If Zhang Xuan really incurred the ire of the Zhang Clan, and the latter sent some of their more formidable offspring at him, there would be nothing he could do at all.

As long as the Zhang Clan acted within the rules, there would be nothing he could do as a teacher in the Sanctum of Sages.

Knowing that the other party was advising him out of goodwill, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist politely in response. "Thank you for your advice, Fei shi. I'll take note of that."

"That would be for the best. As an unaffiliated cultivator, you must pay careful heed to your relationships. It's always better to make friends than enemies. After all, you aren't the sanctum head!" Fei shi remarked.

"Sanctum head?" Zhang Xuan looked at Fei shi with a bewildered look.

What did this have to do with being the sanctum head?

Seeing the confusion on Zhang Xuan's face, Fei shi said, "The Sanctum of Sages is a subsidiary of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, an organization that is of equal standing

to the Combat Master Hall. You should be aware of this matter as well, right?”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

If one were to view the Master Teacher Pavilion as a feudal empire, the regional Master Teacher Pavilion would be the local governors, responsible for dealing with the issues that occurred in the area. The Combat Master Hall would be the military, under the command of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, ready to be dispatched should any conflict or war break out.

As for the Sanctum of Sages, it would be something similar to the Imperial Academy, responsible for grooming top-notch geniuses for the Master Teacher Pavilion to shoulder the responsibility of guiding and protecting mankind.

As such, the Sanctum of Sages was viewed to be equal standing to the Combat Master Hall.

“The Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters is a transcendental organization in the Master Teacher Continent. As long as one doesn’t betray mankind or carry out actions that harms the interest of mankind, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters would usually take on a neutral position to all conflicts. Naturally, as a subsidiary to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, it would be inappropriate for the Sanctum of Sages to get too close to any clan or power too,” Fei shi explained.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

In a sense, this was similar to how the Combat Master Hall branches would remain unaffiliated to any powers in the region they resided in, or else the Master Teacher Pavilion would swiftly step in and deal with them.

The Sanctum of Sages was a place to groom the talents of mankind. Following the ideology of Kong shi, education without discrimination, anyone who had displayed sufficient talent would be able to enter the Sanctum of Sages and learn. As a result, there were many powerful clans and organizations who had their core members here. If the Sanctum of Sages

were to make use of its position to get close to a certain power, they would risk sidelining the others, and that would be at odds with Kong shi's ideology.

“The sanctum head is the figure who represents the entire Sanctum of Sages. In order to win the respect of others, they must tower over the other students. Take our previous sanctum head for example. When he was still a candidate for the position of sanctum head, he would frequently challenge the offspring of the Zhang Clan, the Luo Clan, and the Jiang Clan, pummeling them again and again, thus forging a reputation of power for himself.

“Naturally, as the sanctum head, he didn't have to fear offending others, and he didn't have to butter up to anyone either. On the contrary, through displaying his strength, he would be able to better earn the recognition of others. However, the same can't be said about you. As an ordinary student, it would be best for you to maintain a low profile. There are simply too many geniuses in the Sanctum of Sages. Despite your incredible background, you are still considerably lacking compared to the true geniuses!” Fei shi warned.

Zhang Xuan's experiences could be said to be legendary, but if one were to compare him with the little princess of the Luo Clan and the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan... he was still too lacking.

This was especially so for the former. In just two years after arriving in the Sanctum of Sages, she had already cleared nearly all the trials here. And when someone asked her the reason for doing so, her reply was that she was simply too bored!

To clear all the difficult trials just because she was bored...

The little princess' words had truly dealt a huge mental trauma to all the geniuses in the Sanctum of Sages back then.

While Zhang Xuan was a very talented individual, he still paled in comparison to those monsters.

“I understand.” Zhang Xuan stroked his lower jaw contemplatively and nodded.

The preceding sanctum heads before him had gone around challenging others, showing blatant disregard for the prestige of the other clans and powers. It seemed like he had really been too low profile all this time!

To destroy only a Corridor of Puppets and pummel three offspring of the Zhang Clan so far... it really did feel like he was not doing enough!

It would be difficult for him considering his humble personality and his motto of maintaining a low profile, but for the sake of building up prestige for his inauguration as the next sanctum head, he had no choice but to force himself to go high profile!

If Fei shi were to learn of Zhang Xuan's thoughts, he might very well faint from anger.

Even though the other sanctum heads were high profile, they only did so after building up a powerful foundation, cultivating for a century or even several centuries before rising to the top in a single shot. Yet, this fellow...

On the very first day after arriving at the Sanctum of Sages, when his cultivation was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, he was thinking of how to wreak havoc! There was not a single preceding sanctum head who had been as unruly as him!

Seeing that Zhang Xuan understood what he was getting at, Fei shi nodded in approval. "It's good that you understand. Over the next two days, find an opportunity to apologize to those of the Zhang Clan."

Possessing great talent was not frightening. Only those who knew how to adapt and could live till a ripe old age were truly fearsome.

He harbored great expectations in Zhang Xuan, and naturally, he did not wish to see the latter being suppressed by others in his time at the Sanctum of Sages, resulting in the stagnation of his growth.

"Apologize?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right. It’ll be extremely helpful to your future if you can get on good terms with them. For one, if you can just obtain the position of an honorary elder in the Zhang Clan, you won’t have to fear not having sufficient resources for your cultivation. With their help, you’ll be able to rise to the top of the Master Teacher Continent easily!” Fei shi explained.

What unaffiliated cultivators tended to lack was resources, be it spirit stones or cultivation technique manuals. If Zhang Xuan could obtain those two, he would surely be able to advance his cultivation swiftly.

“Honorary elder?”

“Yes. Powers as big as the Zhang Clan often establish systems similar to empires and sects. In addition to their clan members, they also have many subordinate powers and experts under them, and a huge bulk of their power actually comes from them!” Fei shi remarked.

“Of course, considering that you are a master teacher, it would be best if you could join the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters. However, there are many requirements and tests one has to undergo in order to enter the headquarters, so that course of path will be much more difficult.”

“I see!” Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

In essence, what Fei shi was saying was that the extent of the Zhang Clan’s influence did not just stop at their own clan members. It would be more accurate to liken it to a warship with countless frigates surrounding and protecting it.

There were many unaffiliated cultivators who would try to forge a good relationship with the powerful clans or organizations so that they could join them after graduating from the Sanctum of Sages.

Of course, the best option for master teachers was to get into the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, but it was terribly difficult to do so. The Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters only accepted the strongest of experts across the entire Master Teacher Continent, such that even experts like Fei shi were unqualified to join their ranks.

“Alright, before I stop right here, let me just offer you one last piece of advice. The Sanctum of Sages revolves around connections, and the Zhang Clan is a power in the Master Teacher Continent that one cannot circumvent. I hope you can choose what is best for you,” Fei shi said earnestly before he turned around to leave.

At this moment, however, a student suddenly rushed over and exclaimed, “Fei shi, bad news! The King of Destruction is here!”

“King of Destruction? What is he doing here?” Fei shi was taken aback.

The King of Destruction was a figure in the Sanctum of Sages that left all the teachers and personnel with a huge headache. He loved to challenge trials, or maybe, it would be more accurate to say that he loved to cause destruction under the pretext of challenging trials. Wherever he appeared, pandemonium was soon to follow. As a result, it did not take long for his presence to be associated with trouble.

Just that... they were in the Hall of Attainment, a place where lessons were held! Why would the fellow run over here?

There were no trials for him to destroy here!

“I don’t know either... but he’s currently making his way over!”

Barely after those words were spoken, a tall, dashing young man suddenly barged into the main hall. As soon as he stepped in, he began scanning the room, as if trying to find a certain someone.

Several figures immediately walked up to Luo Xuanqing to block his path, and one of them coldly bellowed with a frown, “Luo Xuanqing, this is where the classes of the Elite Division are located. If you’re here to cause trouble, I’ll have to ask you to leave!”

He was the genius of the Zhang Clan, Zhang Yu!

“Elite Division? Wow, how formidable! You speak as if that’s a huge deal. Let me tell you, back when I was in the Elite Division, you were still playing with mud! Don’t waste my

time; scam to the side!” Luo Xuanqing replied coldly with a wave of his hand.

Given that they were from two of the strongest clans on the Master Teacher Continent, the two were long acquainted with one another.

“You...” To be told such words in public, Zhang Yu’s face turned livid.

Not wanting to waste his breath with the other party, Luo Xuanqing waved his hand impatiently. “Scram!”

Boom!

A rampaging might suddenly swept across the area, and before Zhang Yu could even process what was going on, he was already sent flying across the room.

Padah!

He was slammed forcefully into the wall, unable to move at all.

Even though Zhang Yu possessed incredible talent, due to the difference in their ages, he was still nowhere close to being a match for the older Luo Xuanqing.

Upon seeing that Luo Xuanqing had made a move on Zhang Yu, the other offspring of the Zhang Clan immediately rushed forward with hostile looks on their faces.

However, before they could even get close, Luo Xuanqing waved his hand once more.

In an instant, as if smacking away flies, the offspring of the Zhang Clan were all slammed into the wall as well.

Even though Luo Xuanqing’s actions might have seemed violent, his actions were actually well-controlled. He had only smacked them to the wall, taking care not to hurt them severely.

Unable to take it any longer, Fei shi stepped forward and said, “Luo Xuanqing, this is the Elite Division. There’s nothing for you to destroy over here. You’d better leave right now.”

No matter what, he was still the person in charge of this class. If he remained idle when his students were being slammed into the wall by another, it would not reflect well on him either.

“I’ll leave after I find the person I’m looking for.” Luo Xuanqing waved his hand as he continued looking around the room. All of a sudden, his eyes lit up. “Zhang... Zhang Xuan, right? I’ve been looking for you!”

“You’ve been looking for me?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“He’s here to find Zhang Xuan?”

“Luo Xuanqing is known to be a very violent individual. It seems like Zhang Xuan is in for a good beating!”

“Well, he’s as obstinate as a mule, listening to no one but his younger sister. It seems like Zhang Xuan has offended him somehow, so he decided to come over here to exact vengeance.”

“Over the years, he has beaten up nearly all of the seniors and juniors in the school. I bet that Zhang Xuan is a goner.”

...

Hearing the words of the crowd, the eyes of Zhang Zhuo and the others lit up.

Luo Xuanqing was known throughout the Sanctum of Sages as an unreasonable individual. The very fact that they had been smacked into the wall when they had not even done anything was more than enough to show that.

Now that Zhang Xuan had been eyed by Luo Xuanqing, he would surely be pummeled to the point where he would regret being born in this world!

“That’s right, brother. Come with me. I have something big to talk to you about!” Before Zhang Xuan could even process what was going on, Luo Xuanqing had already grabbed his neck with a hearty laughter and dragged him out.

“...” Zhang Zhuo, Zhang Yu, and the others.

Aren’t you the King of Destruction?

Where is the fight you promised us?

Hey, you should play the rules, shouldn't you? The Imperial Academy, or Taixue, was the highest rank of education establishment between the Han to the Sui Dynasty, providing the Han Dynasty with well-educated bureaucrats.

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Zhang Xuan was completely stunned.

He had only met this brother-in-law of his once in the past, and the latter had even sent him flying with a punch. Why would the latter suddenly come to look for him?

Could it be that... he had come to learn of his relationship with Ruoxin and was agreeable to it?

As these thoughts flashed across his mind, Zhang Xuan could not help but tremble in agitation.

If he could receive the approval of this future brother-in-law of his, things would be much more convenient for him in the future.

Following the other party out of the Elite Division, Zhang Xuan was just about to speak when his body suddenly shuddered. A cold burst of energy suddenly rose from the depths of his body.

I forgot about the matter of my breakthrough...

After consuming the Wintry Spirit Essence, before he even had chance to cultivate, Fei shi had suddenly come over to talk to him. Right after that, his future brother-in-law suddenly appeared and dragged him out hurriedly.

Even the geniuses of the Glacier Plain Court could be turned into ice pops if they drank a single sip of the Wintry Spirit essence directly, and Zhang Xuan drank three bottles successively. Had it been anyone else, there was no doubt that the person would have already frozen to death by now. While Zhang Xuan was able to endure it due to his possession of the Heaven's Path zhenqi, he could not last too long without assimilating the energy either.

As soon as the cold burst of energy began to act up, it swiftly grew more and more powerful with imposing momentum. Zhang Xuan felt as if his inner organs were going to be frozen solid, causing him to tremble non-stop.

This won't do. I need to cultivate and assimilate the energy swiftly.

Knowing that it would be unsafe for him to remain in this state, Zhang Xuan swiftly drove his zhenqi to ward off the cold energy while converting it into zhenqi, preparing to push for a breakthrough.

“What are you doing?” Sensing the changes in Zhang Xuan's body, Luo Xuanqing halted his footsteps and frowned.

“I... need to... cultivate,” Zhang Xuan uttered, quivering from the coldness.

The cold energy had already permeated the depths of his body, such that even speaking felt like an arduous task to him. He tried to use zhenqi telepathy as well, but he found that he was too busy trying to ward off the cold to divert his zhenqi away for other uses.

“You can always cultivate whenever you like. I have urgent matters for you right now!” Luo Xuanqing was still wondering what kind of important matter it was when he heard that it was just cultivating, so he waved his hands impatiently and said, “Hurry up and follow me. Forget it, you walk a little too slowly. I'll just carry you there!”

Before Zhang Xuan could even explain the matter, he suddenly felt his body being wrapped a surge of energy

Hu!

His body suddenly flew forward as if leaping through space.

There was a terrifying gale howling loudly in the surroundings, but Zhang Xuan could only see flickering lights around him. It was hard to tell how fast he was moving, but it seemed to be even faster than his Heaven's Path Movement Art.

As expected of a genius from the Luo Clan... Zhang Xuan thought.

Considering how this future brother-in-law of his was Ruoxin's brother, his grasp over space was clearly more

formidable than most other people. Naturally, there was no questioning his speed either.

Even though Zhang Xuan had cultivated the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel and the Unbounded Voyager, due to the limitations of his cultivation, the average speed that he was able to move at was still a little beneath that of the other party.

Forget it, I need to focus my attention on assimilating the power in the Wintry Spirit Essence, or else I will become an ice sculpture!

Knowing that this was not the time for him to be shocked, Zhang Xuan quickly closed his eyes and desperately processed the cold energy in his body into his own zhenqi.

As time passed, the amount of zhenqi in Zhang Xuan's body swiftly built up, pushing him closer and closer to a breakthrough.

At some point in time, while Zhang Xuan was still busy cultivating, his body suddenly jolted.

They had finally come to a stop.

Opening his eyes, the scenery that appeared before Zhang Xuan was not the familiar buildings of the Sanctum of Sages but an empty field.

He was still sealed within the bundle of zhenqi that Luo Xuanqing had wrapped around him, and the latter was standing not too far away with his hands behind his back, seemingly thinking of something.

With his lips still quivering from chill, Zhang Xuan asked, "Brother-in... Brother Luo... where are... we? Why did you... bring me here?"

"Don't speak!" Luo Xuanqing exclaimed sharply.

Silenced, Zhang Xuan was completely bewildered.

The other party had brought him here without saying a word at all, and when he asked, the other party told him not to speak. Just what in the world was the other party up to?

Wuwuwu!

Just as Zhang Xuan was still racking his brain to figure out his current circumstances, a sound reminiscent of the moaning of the air suddenly echoed in the area. Peculiarly, the sound seemed to echo closer one moment yet farther the next.

“Heh!” Harrumphing coldly, Luo Xuanqing took a step forward.

Boom!

A powerful aura burst forth from him, and Zhang Xuan immediately saw the space before him warping due to some kind of compelling force. At the same time, his Spiritual Perception was also uncontrollably brought into some kind of dimension.

This is the prowess of a Phantasmal Space realm expert? Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

At Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm, not only would one’s Dominion become harder and more unfathomable to guard against, more importantly, one would also gain the power to construct a Phantasmal Space. Within this area, as long as one disallowed it, it would be difficult to notice one’s presence even with one’s Spiritual Perception.

This was the ability that Luo Xuanqing was executing at this very moment. When Zhang Xuan attempted to extend his Spiritual Perception toward Luo Xuanqing, it felt as if he was dropping a stone into a marshland. Whatever entered the space around Luo Xuanqing would bizarrely vanish, leaving him unable to sense anything within it at all.

He knew for sure that Luo Xuanqing was right before him, but it was as if the latter had vanished from the world. No matter how he tried to perceive his surroundings, he could not find the latter.

Phantasmal Space realm experts were already able to control the space around them to a frightening degree. If they really hoped to conceal their presence, it would be impossible to find them, regardless of whether it was with one’s eyes or Spiritual Perception. Unless one had reached Saint 7-dan as well, one would be completely helpless before them!

Eye of Insight!

Intrigued by the prowess of Phantasmal Space realm cultivators, Zhang Xuan decisively halted his cultivation to examine the situation before him closely.

Hu la!

The vanished Luo Xuanqing appeared before his eyes once more. While his silhouette was still a little blurred, he was no longer imperceptible anymore.

Boom!

Under the discernment of his Eye of Insight, he could vaguely tell that Luo Xuanqing was currently fighting with someone else, and immense power was diffused into the surroundings from their clashes, causing powerful shockwaves to ripple across the field.

It had to be said that despite Luo Xuanqing's violent and reckless personality, his fighting prowess was not to be underestimated. Even if Zhang Xuan were utilized all of his current means against him, it was unlikely that he would be a match for him.

Zhang Xuan could not help but ask, "Vicious, would you be able to defeat him in your current state?"

Vicious had once said that Saint 7-dan cultivators would not be a match for him, but it was apparent that Luo Xuanqing was no ordinary Saint 7-dan cultivator.

"I can easily destroy any ordinary Saint 7-dan cultivator, but as for that young man over there... I don't think that I'll be able to defeat him," Vicious said awkwardly.

Devouring the Vicious of the Northern Marshlands had induced a significant rise in his fighting prowess, allowing him to match most Saint 7-dan experts.

However, as the elder brother of Luo Ruoxin, Luo Xuanqing was likely a figure who stood at the very center of the Luo Clan, so putting aside his superior talents, the resources that he was entitled to were bound to be top-notch. Besides, without

sufficient strength, how could he become known as the King of Destruction in the Sanctum of Sages?

“I thought that you have grown so strong that no Saint 7-dan cultivators would be a match for you...” Zhang Xuan grumbled in displeasure.

Back when that fellow first regained consciousness, he bragged as if there was not a single person who would be a match for him in the world. Back then, Zhang Xuan had really thought that he was formidable, but looking at it now, it seemed it was all empty talk after all.

“This...” Hearing the displeasure in Zhang Xuan’s voice, Vicious’ voice grew noticeably anxious. “Master, as long as you let me devour that ‘智 (Erudition)’ character, I’ll definitely be able to defeat that fellow with ease! Add another ‘义 (Solidarity)’ in, and even Saint 8-dan cultivators won’t be a problem. And if you were to top up with another ‘仁 (Attainment)’ character in, Saint 9-dan cultivators might not necessarily be a match for me anymore...”

“Alright, stop bragging. Don’t even dream about devouring those characters, you hear me?” Zhang Xuan replied in disdain.

Those were the treasures that Kong shi had left for the Sanctum of Sages, and they held the crucial role of sealing the luck in the land. To even dream of devouring those characters... he sure was brazen!

But thinking about it again, Vicious was a figure who was able to trap even an expert like Kong shi for numerous days back in his peak, so naturally, the value of Kong shi’s writing was not as significant in his eyes.

“Alright then...” Having been reprimanded, Vicious did not dare say anything.

Zhang Xuan turned his gaze back to the fight before him.

“Haha, as expected of a genius from the Luo Clan, you are indeed formidable. I’ll take you up on your offer then!”

Hu la!

The blurred scenery abruptly reverted to normal, and Zhang Xuan saw a young man of short stature standing just by Luo Xuanqing's side. To emphasize how short that young man was, he was only half of Luo Xuanqing's height, barely even reaching up to the latter's chest. His skin was as black as charcoal, but his eyes gleamed with a blinding light that seemed to warp space itself.

Due to the intense battle that had transpired between the two of them earlier, the field in the surroundings was filled with huge depressions and deep gorges. If Zhang Xuan had not seen the state of the field before, he would have thought that he was in the midst of a mountain range plagued with treacherous terrain.

That young man is a Saint 7-dan cultivator, too, Zhang Xuan thought.

He could not tell how powerful the short young man was at the moment, but the fact that the latter was able to clash with Luo Xuanqing and even end up in a draw, it could only mean that the latter's fighting prowess was definitely not beneath Saint 7-dan.

“Who is he? Why did you bring him here?”

At the same moment that Zhang Xuan noticed the short young man, the latter also noticed him, and a conspicuous frown surfaced on his forehead.

“He is...”

Luo Xuanqing was just about to explain the situation when the resounding call of a crane echoed through the sky. Following which, a massive divine crane descended swiftly in their direction.

The divine crane was not completely white in color. Instead, reminiscent of a phoenix, its tail was filled with feathers of all colors, and if one stared at it intently, it felt as if flames were flowing through them.

That's a... Seven-colored Heaven Crane! Zhang Xuan noted in astonishment.

This crane was completely different from those buffoons he had attracted with his zither playing back when he was taking the demonic tunist examination. The Seven-colored Heaven Crane was a lineage of saint beast that came from the ancient era, and even without cultivating, they would attain strength equivalent to a Saint 7-dan cultivator upon maturity!

“The both of you sure came early!”

Raising his head, Zhang Xuan realized that there was a young man seated on top of the back of the crane.

The young man was in his early thirties, too. He had a towering stature, a head taller than Luo Xuanqing in fact, but his figure was rather plump. Placed next to him, Sun Qiang would look nothing more than a mere chubby child.

It must be difficult on the Seven-colored Heaven Crane to have to carry him... Zhang Xuan remarked internally.

To be honest, be it in his past life or his current life, this was the first time he had seen someone as plump as that. Just the thought of having to carry a person that huge sent shivers down his spine.

“It’s not that we came early; you arrived late. Come down!” Luo Xuanqing harrumphed coldly as he raised his hand and grabbed forward.

In an instant, the surroundings began warping once more. The divine crane in the sky seemed to have knocked into a wall, causing it to shake uncontrollably.

“Oh? Your ability to manipulate space seems to have grown significantly stronger, but you will need much more than that to hurt me!” The fatty chuckled softly.

Without bothering to dodge, he stepped forward powerfully and leaped down from the back of the divine crane.

Hu hu hu hu!

Due to his weight and the momentum of his leap, it took only a moment for his speed to reach a frightening level, exceeding even the speed of sound.

Kacha!

His plump body collided heavily on the sealed space, and a massive crack swiftly slithered across the seal swiftly before shattering with a resounding explosion. Under the impact, even Luo Xuanqing was forced to retreat several steps.

Boom!

The fatty landed on the ground, creating a massive depression beneath him.

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“This...” Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched.

After reaching the Transcendent Mortal realm, it was already extremely difficult for a cultivator to die from falling from great heights. Considering how the fatty was no weaker than Luo Xuanqing, there was no way he would have any trouble falling from such a height.

However... to be able to destroy a spatial seal set up by Luo Xuanqing in midair and still create such a huge depression beneath him, that was already a force far greater than smashing a mountain right upon one’s head! Zhang Xuan could not help but think what would have happened if he had been in that fatty’s place. Would he have died from the impact?

That would have been a rather hilarious situation.

Before Zhang Xuan could remain shocked for long, a plump silhouette rose up from the huge depression and shook his body. The dust that he was cloaked in fell from his clothes, and shockingly, he was completely unharmed!

It was as if the person who had just fallen to the ground was not him but someone else.

Zhang Xuan was astonished. What incredible defensive ability!

After cultivating his Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body to its limits, his physical body was already on par with Saint intermediate-tier artifacts. However, if he had fallen with the momentum that the fatty did earlier, his organs would have ruptured from the impact of the fall. Even if he did not die, his health bar would at least have depleted by half.

This meant, in terms of physical body resilience, the fatty had already reached a level far beyond his!

That was truly frightening!

“Who’s this lad? I have never seen him before.”

After shaking off the dust on him, the fatty took a look at Zhang Xuan, and his lips cracked into a smile.

“Sealed on the spot, and it seems like there’s something wrong with his body as well. Did this lad offend you somehow? Do you need me to crush him for you with my bottom? Well, it’ll be his honor to die beneath my bottom...”

Black lines streaked across Zhang Xuan’s face.

Did this fatty have the same hobby as Golden Origin Cauldron—sitting on others?

Fearing that the fatty would really do as he had said, Luo Xuanqing quickly waved his hand and explained, “He’s a person whom I have specially invited here to assist us!”

“You specially invited him over?”

Looks of disbelief surfaced on the faces of the fatty and the shorty.

They knew Luo Xuanqing’s personality very well—a proud and condescending person, a troublemaker who refused to submit to anyone. For such a person to engage the help of a twenty-year-old lad who was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage... just what was the background of this lad?

“Indeed.” Luo Xuanqing nodded. Just as he was about to begin on his introduction, he noticed that the surroundings had, at some point, been shrouded with a light mist.

Following which, an entrancing melody sounded.

“A melody of sorrow to mark the passing of the beautiful years of youth, replaced by tears upon one’s robe. I have kept you waiting...”

The voice was fleeting, sounding as if it was a whisper in one’s ears or a resonance within one’s soul. It carried a quality that seemed to hook one in, compelling one’s emotions to sway along with it.

Grave looks surfaced on the faces of Luo Xuanqing, the fatty, and the shorty, and they drove their zhenqi to the point where

white smoke was rising from their heads, seemingly desperate to keep out the attack of the voice.

Demonic tune! Zhang Xuan noted in alarm.

Even though the effects of demonic tunes were not as pronounced on him since he cultivated the Heaven's Path zhenqi, the slightest carelessness could still end with him being placed in a trance, resulting in the breeding of inner demons.

For the time being, he already had enough inner demon subordinates.

Sensing that the offense of the voice was growing more and more intense, Luo Xuanqing harrumphed coldly in displeasure. "Bi Hongyin, it has been long since we last met, but it seems like your means are still the same as ever!"

"Oh? Why don't you give it a try to see if they are still the same then?"

The tone of the voice abruptly changed to take on a more seductive edge. At the same time, the mist in the area seemed to intensify, and apparitions seemed to flash in the air, playing on the deepest fear within one's heart, making it difficult for one to focus one's attention.

"Sure, give it your best shot! Do you think that I'll be afraid of you?" Luo Xuanqing stepped forward and stomped on the ground. A resounding boom reminiscent of a drumbeat reverberated in the surroundings.

A blinding burst of zhenqi erupted from Luo Xuanqing, making it hard for one to open one's eyes before him.

With the diffusion of the light, the mist was forced to dissipate considerably. After which, Luo Xuanqing scanned his surroundings with keen eyes, and a moment later, he abruptly grabbed at the space ahead of him.

A massive palm print immediately appeared in the sky, covering more than ten mu. Immense energy coiled endlessly around his body. In that moment, it felt as if the space of the sky above had been frozen in place, threatening to collapse at any moment.

“Your control over space is superb. I didn’t think that you would have made such huge progress since the last time we met.”

The demonic tune seemed to have grown a little weaker, a sign that the demonic tunist had suffered a setback in the previous clash.

“Of course. How could I possibly be the only one who remained stagnant?” Luo Xuanqing retracted his palm and returned to Zhang Xuan’s side.

Tzzzzzz!

The mist in the distance began to gather, and a tall, slender figure slowly materialized before everyone’s eyes.

It was an extremely beautiful young lady. Her slim figure paired with her tall stature gave her a type of unique elegance, and this was especially accentuated by her pair of beautiful legs. In terms of height, she was even taller than Zhang Xuan.

After cultivating the Heaven’s Path Golden Body, Zhang Xuan’s skin had not only become smoother than a baby’s, his height had also risen to 1.8 meters. At that height, he could already be considered one of the taller ones among the males in the Master Teacher Continent. It was truly rare to see a lady whose height was even above his.

“Since everyone is here, allow me to make the introductions.” As the young lady walked over, Luo Xuanqing took a look around him before getting straight to the topic at hand. “Zhang Xuan here is a freshman who enrolled into the Sanctum of Sages just a day ago. We met for the first time yesterday.”

“Luo Xuanqing, why did you bring a freshman over here?”

“It’s not as if you don’t know the strength of the freshman. He’ll drag us down if you bring him there as well!”

“That place is extremely dangerous! What are you thinking, bringing a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator there? Wait a moment... If his surname is Zhang, could he be from the Zhang Clan? No, that’s not right. You have always hated those from the Zhang Clan, so how could you be willing to work with them?”

...

Upon hearing that the person whom Luo Xuanqing had brought over was only a freshman, the trio frowned in displeasure.

It was no wonder they would react in such a way. They were all Saint 7-dan experts, and yet, Luo Xuanqing actually brought a mere Saint 5-dan primary stage cultivator over. This course of action was clearly detrimental to the success of the mission that they were about to undertake.

“Don’t underestimate Zhang Shi. He might be young, but he’s an incredibly talented formation master. The speed that he can construct formations at is unmatched by anyone that I know of. In fact, even 8-star pinnacle formation masters might not necessarily be a match for him!” Luo Xuanqing explained.

Even though he was rather displeased that the young man had insulted his sister yesterday, that did not hinder the awe he felt for the young man’s talent in formations. To be able to construct a grade-8 formation that he had never seen before, albeit the most basic one, in just several breaths... With this young man with them, their chances of success would be increased manyfold!

Formations? Zhang Xuan finally understood what was going on.

He had thought that Luo Xuanqing had brought him over because the latter had found out about the relationship between him and Luo Ruoxin, but it was apparent to him now that he was mistaken.

Most likely, Luo Xuanqing required some help concerning formations for some kind of mission or trial, and recalling his incredible ability in setting up formations, Luo Xuanqing chose to specially invite him over.

Yes, specially invite him over!

“You are telling us that a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator is able to set up a formation faster than a grade-8 pinnacle formation master? Are your eyes playing

tricks on you?” The shorty frowned doubtfully, clearly not believing Luo Xuanqing’s words at all.

The other two also shot looks of skepticism toward Luo Xuanqing and Zhang Xuan.

It was not without reason that formations masters had strict cultivation requirements on one’s promotion. Without sufficient strength, it would be impossible for one to set up a certain formation.

Considering how Zhang Xuan was only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, it was hard for them to take Luo Xuanqing’s assessment of the other party seriously.

“Do you all think that I’m lying?” Luo Xuanqing clearly looked at little displeased. “I took the 8-star formation master examination with him, and back then, before I could even finish browsing through the formation blueprint, he had successfully set up the formation. If not for that, do you think that I would go through so much trouble to invite him here?”

“He had set up the formation before you could even finish browsing through the formation blueprint?”

The trio was taken aback for a moment before the disbelief on their faces deepened.

As a cultivator’s cultivation advanced, their Primordial Spirit would gradually grow stronger, which would in turn further the prowess of their Spiritual Perception. As Saint 7-dan experts, as long as the content was not too profound, they would be able to memorize most cultivation techniques and secret arts with a sweeping glance.

Yet, for the young man to successfully set up the formation before Luo Xuanqing was done browsing through the formation blueprint... it was a little hard for them to conceptualize just how fast that was.

The tall lady, Bi Hongyin, casually pulled her hair behind her ear as she suggested with a smile, “I happen to be quite proficient in formations, too, so why don’t I assess him?”

Hu!

Before Zhang Xuan could even say a word, his surroundings suddenly blurred, and the seal that Luo Xuanqing had placed around him vanished without a trace. He could tell in an instant that he was standing in the midst of a formation activated from a formation plate.

His surroundings were pitch-black, and a sinister wind whistled in the area. There was a powerful mental pressure weighing down on his mind, attempting to inflict him with a splitting headache.

It seems like that Bi Hongyin lady has achieved quite a deep understanding of formations as well, Zhang Xuan thought.

Thinking back, the appearance of the mist around them as soon as she appeared was likely to be the doing of some kind of formidable formation plate as well. It would be hard to produce such an effect otherwise.

To be able to activate a formation plate instantaneously and trap all of them, it meant that Bi Hongyin's comprehension of formations had already reached 8-star at the very minimum.

"Bi Hongyin, what are you up to?" Not expecting the tall lady to make a move on Zhang Xuan all of a sudden, Luo Xuanqing was enraged. He was just about to step forward to stop her when he suddenly felt a tug on his hand pulling him back.

"Don't worry, she won't go overboard... Just let her give it a try, otherwise it'll be hard for us to entrust our safety to him later on."

The person who had just spoken was the fatty.

Clearly, he also harbored some reservations toward the ability of the freshman. Thus, he hoped to see what the latter was capable of through Bi Hongyin's move.

"This..." Luo Xuanqing hesitated for a moment before grumbling reluctantly in agreement. "Fine then!"

Those who were gathered there were his close friends. While none of them were willing to submit to the other, they were very conscientious individuals, and they would never hurt others for no good reason.

“Luo Xuanqing says that you are highly skilled in the field of formations. This is the formation plate that I had an 8-star high-tier master teacher craft for me, and if you can break out of it within four hours, I’ll acknowledge your skills and allow you to come along with us.”

Unaware of the happenings outside, Zhang Xuan swiftly heard a voice from within the formation.

Acknowledge my skills and allow me to come along with you all? Zhang Xuan shook his head helplessly.

He was in the midst of attending a social event to interact with the other students of the Elite Division when he was suddenly dragged off by Luo Xuanqing. It was one thing for Luo Xuanqing to not explain anything to him, but before he knew it, they were suddenly trying to assess his skills. This bewildering turn of events really left him feeling deeply stifled.

Does it look like I’m really all that interested in joining your group?

But after taking in a deep breath and calming down, he thought through his circumstances once more, and the fact that Luo Xuanqing had invited him over showed that the latter acknowledged his skills. Since that was the case, if he could prove himself worthy this time around, he might just be able to win the goodwill of his future brother-in-law.

As troublesome as it would be, for the sake of Luo Ruoxin, he would just have to do it!

Flaws!

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan immediately leaped into action. A book materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

Taking a look at the content of the book, Zhang Xuan clicked his tongue in disdain.

What a trashy formation plate this is. There are so many flaws in it!

The tall lady had said that she had specially engaged the help of an 8-star high-tier formation master to craft this formation plate for her, so he had thought that it would be some ingenious artifact. Perhaps, his expectations were simply too high from the start.

I can think of 138 ways to decipher the formation.

It took only a moment of calculation for Zhang Xuan to come up with this conclusion.

After studying all the 8-star formation books over at the Formation Master Build branch in the Hall of Erudition, his comprehension of formations had already reached 8-star pinnacle. In fact, in terms of knowledge, he might even be a match for some 9-star low-tier formation masters.

With his knowledge, it was a walk in the park for him to overcome a grade-8 formation plate like this!

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before making up his mind. I guess I should use the most direct and fastest method to decipher the formation so as to please my future brother-in-law.

After choosing the method to use, Zhang Xuan was just about to realize his plan when his body suddenly stiffened. To his astonishment, the meridians in his body had frozen solid.

Crap, I forgot. I have yet to assimilate the Wintry Spirit Essence... 1 mu = 666.67 square meters. It also equals 26.36 square rods, whatever that unit is.

1339 What an Easy Lightning Ordeal!

Shortly after he consumed the three bottles of Wintry Spirit Essence, before he could even start assimilating them, Fei shi had suddenly come over to have a heart-to-heart talk with him. Following which, his future brother-in-law had suddenly dragged him to this field. While he did assimilate a portion of it on the way, there was still a lot left within him.

There had not been much of a problem when he was still seated on the ground, but as soon as he attempted to draw upon his strength to break the formation, he suffered backlash.

The rampaging cold energy within his body caused his face to turn ghastly pale, and his body shuddered non-stop. He felt as if his organs had turned into ice sculptures, and even driving his zhenqi became an extremely difficult act.

This won't do... I need to assimilate the cold energy right now, or else I'll really freeze to death there! Zhang Xuan thought in alarm.

He had been hoping to break the formation swiftly and leave a good impression on Luo Xuanqing, but that was clearly impossible now.

It was one thing for him to waste the Wintry Spirit Essence, but in the worst-case scenario, the rampaging cold energy might leave some trauma in his body, resulting in unexpected situations with his body.

Assimilate!

Knowing that there was no time to waste, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath before swiftly gathering his Heaven's Path zhenqi together to push for a breakthrough in his cultivation.

Due to the attributeless nature of the Heaven's Path zhenqi, not only was it capable of neutralizing all types of poison in the world, it could even imitate the Slaughter of Zhenqi unique to

the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. Back then, not even the Ten Kings of the Qingtian Lineage were able to see through his disguise.

Due to that, the Wintry Spirit Essence, which even the members of the Glacier Plain Court were fearful of, posed very little threat to him.

Gugugugu!

Driving his zhenqi swiftly, his stiffened body gradually regained flexibility, and with imposing momentum, he drove his zhenqi to crash into the bottleneck hindering his advancement.

Kacha! Kacha!

It took only an instant for the bottleneck leading to Leaving Aperture realm intermediate stage to be torn through.

Even after the breakthrough, the zhenqi in Zhang Xuan's body continued to surge furiously with imposing momentum, charging right for the next bottleneck.

Zhang Xuan had long committed the Leaving Aperture realm Heaven's Path Divine Art to mind after a few hours of reading through it, and with ample spiritual energy to fuel his breakthrough at this moment, the rest was easy. Driving his growing accumulation of Heaven's Path zhenqi, it took less than five breaths for him to successfully overcome the bottleneck to Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage.

And ten breaths later, he successfully reached Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle!

Hu!

It was only after achieving three breakthroughs that the spiritual energy in the Wintry Spirit Essence finally completely sapped up.

Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. I succeeded...

As expected of a treasure from the Glacier Plain Court. It was indeed not without reason that Chen Leyao wanted to save it for her breakthrough to the Grand Dominion realm!

It was far easier to convert the Wintry Spirit Essence into zhenqi, thus making it much easier to push for a breakthrough with it.

I should just clear the lightning ordeal while I am at it, Zhang Xuan thought.

Boom!

Storm clouds emanating frightening might were swiftly drawn over.

Upon achieving a breakthrough in the Leaving Aperture realm, as long as a cultivator did not intentionally suppress their cultivation and conceal it, the lightning ordeal would be immediately drawn over. On top of that, the prowess of the lightning ordeal would also vary according to the strength of individual drawing it over.

The stronger one was, the more formidable the lightning ordeal would be.

...

“Luo Xuanqing, since you have so much confidence in Zhang Xuan, why don’t you guess how long he will take to overcome Bi Hongyin’s formation plate?” the fatty asked Luo Xuanqing with an interested smile.

“Bi Hongyin’s formation plate is at grade-8 intermediate, so it might still take him quite a bit of effort in order to decipher it.”

At this point, Luo Xuanqing paused and thought contemplatively for a moment before adding, “My guess is that he will take at least an hour.”

Deciphering a formation was slightly easier than setting one up. Considering how Zhang Xuan was able to set up a grade-8 formation within just a few breaths, even if it was the most basic one, it was more than enough to show that he possessed an extraordinarily deep understanding of formations. As formidable as Bi Hongyin’s formation plate was, Luo Xuanqing did not think that Zhang Xuan would have a problem with it.

Nevertheless, this should have been first time Zhang Xuan was coming into contact with such a formidable formation plate, so it would still take an hour or so at the very least.

“An hour? Heh, you are confident in him. However, my thoughts differ from yours. I don’t think that he’ll be able to succeed!” The shorty shook his head with a sneer.

“It’s not like you have never experienced Bi Hongyin’s formation yourself. It’s intertwined with her demonic tunes and soul attacks, making it difficult to focus one’s attention inside. In such a state, deciphering the formation won’t be easy. Even an average 8-star pinnacle formation master would require at least six hours in order to do so. Regardless of whether that lad inside is as formidable as you make him out to be or not, it will be impossible for him to succeed without at least two hours of work!”

The fatty shook his head. “You all sure have ample confidence in that lad. My take is that he might not even succeed at all!”

As a Saint 7-dan expert, he had seen plenty of formidable formation masters in his time, and he had a clear gauge of what the capabilities of a top-notch formation master were.

Bi Hongyin was not just a skilled demonic tunist—her prowess in formations was equally terrifying. By pairing those two abilities with one another, her grade-8 intermediate formation could display might comparable to a grade-8 pinnacle formation.

This was likely the first time that the lad inside had experienced such a formation, so it would already be a huge blessing if he could keep himself from panicking, let alone deciphering the formation in time.

“This...” Hearing the comments from the duo, Luo Xuanqing found his previous confidence in Zhang Xuan eroding slightly.

It was possible that Zhang Xuan might really possess an extraordinary talent in formations, allowing him to identify the various cruxes in any formation and set it up in an instant.

But as unlikely as it was, he could not discount the possibility that Zhang Xuan might have seen and practiced beforehand.

He might not have seen the grade-8 primary formation used in the formation master examination before, but he could not say the same for Zhang Xuan.

If Zhang Xuan had really seen the formation before and practiced it multiple times, it was only natural that he could set it up within a few breaths.

Boom!

Just as Luo Xuanqing was feeling a little uncertain inside, the formation before him suddenly jolted. It seemed like there was a huge mass of power swiftly building up inside.

It lasted for roughly twenty breaths before the sky above abruptly darkened. A frightening Power of Lightning was starting to gather right above them.

They could not assess the situation in the formation due to the formation's mist hindering their Spiritual Perception, but the overwhelming might harnessed by the storm clouds gathering right above them caused goosebumps to rise all over their arms.

“What's going on?” The person who was controlling the formation, Bi Hongyin, was astonished by the abrupt changes in the surroundings.

She had only activated this formation to test Zhang Xuan's strength—it was not as if she was committing some kind of heinous crime! Why were the heavens sending lightning upon her, as if she was some kind of sinner?

Surely her little actions should not warrant such extreme punishment?

Bi Hongyin did not think that Zhang Xuan would make much progress at the start, so other than infusing her zhenqi into the formation, she did not pay much attention to the situation inside. As such, she had no idea that the young man inside had advanced his cultivation from Leaving Aperture realm primary stage to Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle within less than twenty breaths.

Of course, she could not have fathomed that the lightning ordeal was summoned by the young man inside either.

“Damn it!” Seeing that the lightning was directed toward her formation plate, ready to reduce it to smithereens at any moment, Bi Hongyin clenched her fists tightly and leaped up, launching an attack at the storm clouds.

Boom!

However, before her attack could strike the storm cloud, a lightning bolt roughly the thickness of a human’s waist suddenly descended.

Kacha!

With seemingly unlimited power, the falling lightning bolt instantaneously devoured Bi Hongyin and her offense.

TZZZZZZZZ!

Bi Hongyin fell back to the ground with her body spasming now and then. Her hair was standing on end, and her face had been charred black. The elegant and seductive lady from a moment ago had disappeared without a trace, leaving behind a wretched victim of a lightning strike.

Even though her cultivation had reached Saint 7-dan, her strength was still far from sufficient to stand against the imposing might of the natural world.

Fortunately, her sacrifice was not in vain. The ominous clouds in the sky seemed to dissipate slightly after that powerful lightning strike, seemingly ready to vanish at any moment soon.

Just as Bi Hongyin heaved a sigh of relief, another surge of energy suddenly exuded from within the formation, and upon sensing that surge of energy, the ominous clouds in the sky began gathering together once more. In just a few breaths, the storm clouds had already grown two times larger than before.

“What in the world is going on?” Bi Hongyin felt a numbing sensation on her scalp, and her head felt as if it would blow at any moment.

At this rate, she really felt like she would go insane.

Luo Xuanqing and the others were flabbergasted by the scene before them as well. They had no idea what to make of the

situation.

Kacha! Kacha!

There was no time to think at all. Almost right after the storm clouds had formed together, a bolt of lightning immediately surged down.

This time, it was far larger than before. Just the diameter was already more than two meters wide!

With legs trembling in fear, Bi Hongyin watched the lightning bolt with a pale face.

Knowing that she would not be able to avoid it, she gritted her teeth and bucked up her courage. Raising her hands, she drove her zhenqi to its maximum and sent a burst of force upward to counter the lightning bolt.

Kacha!

While her desperate move did manage to weaken the lightning bolt considerably, it was not sufficient to neutralize it entirely. It fell on her once more, and her body was completely charred black. The smell of burnt flesh drifted from her, and a stream of white smoke rose from her body.

Due to the severity of her injuries, she could not help but spurt a mouthful of blood.

“I have at least managed to hold on for the time being...” Bi Hongyin’s knees caved in from weakness, and she fell onto the ground on her bottom. Despite her current state, she still heaved a sigh of relief.

The previous bolt of lightning was extremely powerful, but judging from the magnitude of the storm clouds, two strikes should have depleted its energy entirely. It would dissipate very soon.

But barely after this thought formulated in her mind, another surge of energy exuded from the formation yet again.

Hong long long!

The dispelling ominous, storm clouds suddenly gathered together once more, and this time, they were far stronger and

condensed than before.

The previous storm clouds only covered an area of roughly several hundred meters, but this time around, they covered roughly five to six li. Even before the fall of the lightning bolt, the crowd could feel the cataclysmic might harnessed within the storm clouds, as if an imposing dragon was hidden in their midst. It rumbled and roared, seemingly declaring its intention to reduce everything to dust.

“Why?” Bi Hongyin could only stare at the sight above her with her mouth agape.

From sheer shock, even her mind had whirred to a halt.

The previous lightning bolt had nearly claimed her life. If she faced the next one head-on, there was no doubt that she would be reduced to ash!

But why was it so intent on striking her?

From the looks of it, it seemed like it would not rest until it had accomplished that!

Knowing that she would not be able to cope with something of this scale alone, Bi Hongyin anxiously bellowed, “Stop looking at the commotion! Come over and help!”

“A-alright!” Realizing the severity of the matter as well, Luo Xuanqing and the others quickly rushed over.

Hualala!

Under the collaboration of the four experts, a hole was torn right through the sky.

A seven-colored burst of energy clashed directly with the lightning bolt, and a deafening explosion echoed over a hundred li. With the collision of the two devastating forces, cracks began surfacing on the earth.

The faces of Luo Xuanqing and the others were flushed crimson from all their exertion. They had driven their zhenqi to the extent that it felt like their bodies would burst apart. Every single one of them was charred from head to toe, and their hair was standing on end. One by one, they spurted large mouthfuls of blood.

Powerful as they were, the lightning bolt descending from the sky was simply too fearsome. Even with their prowess put together, their combined might still fell slightly short of the lightning bolt.

It was fortunate that they were all offspring from powerful clans or organizations, so they had plenty of life preservation means up their sleeves. Otherwise, that lightning bolt would have inflicted severe injuries on them, the kind that they would have to spend several months in bed to recover from.

...

While the crowd outside the formation was being tortured by the lightning tribulation, inside the formation that severed one's sense of hearing and Spiritual Perception from the outside, Zhang Xuan was staring at the layer of mist above him in confusion.

After my breakthrough, the heavens should have noticed the power I am exuding and cast the Leaving Aperture Ordeal upon me. So, why isn't it coming?

He had been waiting there for quite some time now, but nothing had happened at all. Could there have been a problem in the way that he exuded his strength?

Hu!

He exuded another surge of energy.

Silence.

He exuded yet another surge of energy.

Still silence.

Could it be that I cleared the lightning tribulation too easily the previous time, and now it doesn't dare appear before me again?

Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in bewilderment as he continued exuding his strength.

I thought that the Leaving Aperture Ordeal would at least be as difficult as the Saint Ascension Ordeal, but this is really disappointing.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

Outside the formation, Luo Xuanqing and the others were jolted by the lightning bolt again and again, and a stream of white smoke rose from their heads. 5 to 6 li is 2.5 to 3km.

1340 This Is My Leaving Aperture Ordeal?

Luo Xuanqing and the others might have been Saint 7-dan experts, but they were still far too weak against the lightning that represented the might of the world.

As the ominous clouds grew denser and larger, the lightning bolts also became thicker and thicker. The group of four was in no danger yet due to the multitude of life preservation means they possessed, but under the relentless zapping of the lightning, they still ended up being charred black. In this moment, rather than experts, they looked like wretched beggars.

Having been in lofty positions ever since they got into the Sanctum of Sages, they had never suffered such indignation before!

After suffering four consecutive zaps, Bi Hongyin finally reached her limit, and a furious spurt of blood escaped from her mouth.

Of the four of them, she was currently in the most pitiful plight. She used to be graceful and noble like a fairy, but at this moment, she seemed more like a witch. If one did not look at her closely, it would be hard to even ascertain whether she was a human or not.

“Why does it want to strike my formation plate so badly?” Bi Hongyin simply could not comprehend it no matter how she racked her mind.

Why would such a powerful lightning tribulation be so intent on destroying her formation plate?

It was as if her formation plate had done something unforgivable to it!

She had paid a heavy price to an 8-star high-tier formation master to inscribe it for her, and she only had one. If it was

destroyed, her fighting prowess would be halved at the very least!

At this moment, a thought suddenly struck Bi Hongyin's mind. "Luo Xuanqing, could it be that the fellow in the formation has just achieved a breakthrough?"

The storm clouds had gathered too fast, and its might had already far exceeded the scale of ordinary Leaving Aperture Ordeals, so that possibility did not strike her mind. However, watching as the storm clouds gathered again and again, she began to realize that something was amiss.

She had used her formation plate so many times in the past, but it had never drawn the ire of the heavens before. It was only after she trapped that lad in it that the lightning bolt was so determined to destroy it. Could that really be the case?

"A breakthrough? That shouldn't be possible. When I met him earlier, I heard that he had achieved a breakthrough from Primordial Spirit realm to Leaving Aperture realm primary stage just yesterday." Luo Xuanqing shook his head.

"Considering that he has just raised his cultivation by two cultivation stages, how could he possibly achieve another breakthrough now?"

Even though it had not been long since that fellow enrolled into the Sanctum of Sages, his affairs had already been spread far and wide in the Elite Division and Ordinary Division, to the point that he could nearly be considered a legend.

Based on the news he had heard, the fellow had achieved a breakthrough within an interval of ten breaths while fighting against someone else. Given so, he should not have the momentum to push for another breakthrough again.

After all, cultivation was a process of accumulation. Putting him aside, even his incredibly talented younger sister had to advance a step at a time.

Never had he heard of anyone who could achieve a breakthrough one day and still continue doing so the next.

"He achieved a breakthrough just yesterday?" Bi Hongyin was taken aback for a moment before shaking her head.

She had been wondering if the mess was caused by the fellow in the formation, but given what Luo Xuanqing had said, that was unlikely to be the case.

“Are you thinking that this is the lightning tribulation he drew over due to his breakthrough?” Luo Xuanqing asked.

“That’s right.” Bi Hongyin nodded.

“Even if he did achieve a breakthrough, he would only face the Leaving Aperture Ordeal. His lightning tribulation couldn’t possibly be so powerful.” Luo Xuanqing shook his head, expressing his skepticism toward Bi Hongyin’s thoughts.

“Regardless of the truth, given how the lightning tribulation is growing stronger and stronger, we’ll all die here if we continue like this. Bi Hongyin, why don’t you just give up on your formation plate?”

At this point, the shorty had also been zapped to the point where he felt like he was already on the verge of a mental breakdown.

The lightning bolts that had fallen were clearly all directed toward the formation plate. As long as they abandoned the formation plate, the problem would be resolved.

It really was not worth it to lose their lives over a mere artifact.

“You want me to abandon my formation plate? Impossible!” Clenching her fists tightly, Bi Hongyin declared resolutely, “It is the foundation of my strength; I’ll never give it up, even at the cost of my life!”

Only she knew how much she had to go through in order to obtain the formation plate. She had nearly lost her life for it! How could she give it up that easily?

There was no way she could accept its destruction just like that!

“There’s no way I’ll allow my formation plate to be destroyed, over my dead body!” Bi Hongyin looked at the lightning gathering in the sky above, racking her mind for a solution.

In this moment, a deafening explosion suddenly sounded beside her.

Kacha!

A powerful shockwave rippled into the surroundings, causing Bi Hongyin's already feeble body to stagger weakly. Following that, cracks began creeping across the formation plate floating not too far away from her, and with a crisp echo, it shattered in half.

Pu!

Watching the sight before her, Bi Hongyin's breathing hastened, and her eyes reddened in frenzy. Unable to withstand the mental blow from the destruction of her precious artifact, she spurted yet another mouthful of blood.

In order to protect it, she had gritted her teeth to endure the lightning strikes, so why did it still shatter in the end?

Hu!

Just as she was trying to figure out what was going on, the mist produced by the formation dissipated, and a young man walked out from within. "Alright, I have deciphered the formation... Ah? You all... What happened?"

Zhang Xuan had tried multiple times, but he found that he was unable to call forth the lightning tribulation at all. Eventually, he could only attribute it to some kind of property of the formation shrouding him hindering the fall of the lightning tribulation. Thus, after some thought, he used the most direct method to escape from the formation—destroying the formation plate.

He was hoping to make a majestic return after escaping from the formation so as to win some goodwill from Luo Xuanqing, but who would have thought that he would see a couple of charred figures instead?

He had to squint his eyes before he could finally recognize them as the various experts whom he had met previously.

How did they end up in such a state all of a sudden?

“Are you the one who destroyed my formation plate?” Bi Hongyin asked with a quivering tone.

“Yes. There were simply too many flaws in the formation, such that I couldn’t even decide which one I should exploit to escape from the formation. In the end, I decided to just go with the easiest one—destroying the formation plate.” Zhang Xuan nodded in response. “How is it? I should have cleared your test, right?”

While he did hesitate a little before destroying the formation plate, considering how the tall lady had chosen to trap him without any prior warning or the sort, he eventually decided that there was no reason to stand on ceremony with her either.

At this point, earning the recognition of his future brother-in-law was more important than anything else.

“Y-you... I’ll kill you!” Bi Hongyin roared in a craze.

It was just a moment ago that she had said that she would only allow the formation to be destroyed over her dead body, but then the young man shattered it. In the face of such a situation, her rage burst forth like an erupting volcano.

She raised her hand, preparing to launch a killing strike against Zhang Xuan. However, the next moment, a violent rumbling echoed from the sky. The storm clouds had built up sufficient power once more, and another frightening lightning bolt was just about to descend upon the world.

Kacha!

Despite her life preservation artifacts protecting her, Bi Hongyin’s hair was still jolted up from the lightning, and white smoke rose from all around her.

Even though the one who should have been undergoing the lightning tribulation was Zhang Xuan, Bi Hongyin’s act of hindering the lightning tribulation was considered as an act of defiance against the authority of the heavens, thus incurring their ire. From the looks of it, it seemed like the lightning tribulation would not let this matter rest until it finally struck down Bi Hongyin.

This... Is she going through a lightning tribulation as well?

It was only at this moment that Zhang Xuan noticed the storm clouds that had gathered from all around. Lightning dragons were traversing imposingly amid the dark sky, threatening to dive down at any moment.

Wait a moment, that's not exactly right. It seems like the lightning tribulation is related to me... Zhang Xuan was bewildered.

It was a little bewildering to him why the lightning bolt was specifically striking Bu Hongyin, but when he drove his zhenqi, the storm clouds in the sky visibly grew more rampant. Without a doubt, this lightning tribulation was his!

Then, realization struck Zhang Xuan as he widened his eyes in horror. It's not that my lightning tribulation is easy, but these guys have been blocking it all along, preventing it from falling into the formation... B*stards!

Zhang Xuan gritted his teeth furiously as his eyes reddened from rage.

It was no wonder nothing happened no matter how long he waited within the formation. It turned out that the tall lady had been sabotaging him!

There was no way to circumvent the lightning tribulation, and it was impossible to find a substitute to endure the lightning tribulation for one. Otherwise, the offspring of powerful clans could simply have their elders fend off the lightning tribulation in their stead. There would be nothing for them to worry about.

On the contrary, any attempts to interfere in the lightning tribulation would only cause the lightning tribulation to grow more and more powerful, to the point that the cultivator who had drawn in the lightning tribulation would be struck to death.

This was also the reason none of them dared to interfere back when Hall Master Xing found himself in a precarious position while undergoing the Leaving Aperture Ordeal.

In other words... due to Bi Hongyin's interference, his lightning tribulation had grown so powerful that not even Saint

7-dan cultivators could withstand it anymore. How in the world was he supposed to survive such a lightning tribulation?

If it really fell on him, he would be dead in a heartbeat!

The more Zhang Xuan thought about it, the more enraged he felt.

Are you sick in the mind? It's not your lightning tribulation, so why are you interfering in it?

Look at what you have done! With the storm clouds that have gathered here, it's only a matter of time before you succumb to it. And once it's done with you, I'll be next!

It's one thing for you to want to seek death, but surely you need not drag me down with you!

At this point, Zhang Xuan really felt like crying.

Boom!

As stifled as he was feeling, the lightning tribulation would not grant Zhang Xuan the time to soak in his despair. A deafening rumble echoed from above, and raising his head, he could not help but shudder in fear.

The lightning tribulation had already grown to a scale countless times stronger than the Saint Ascension Ordeal. The one that he had faced in the square right after the Mountain Gate examination back then could not begin to hold a candle to this.

Even after raising his cultivation to Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, there was no way he would be able to survive a lightning bolt of this scale.

But... only I can resolve my own lightning tribulation. There's no way I can escape from it. If I allow her to continue wreaking havoc here, my chances of clearing it will only grow slimmer, Zhang Xuan thought anxiously.

With this in mind, he could not help but curse at Bi Hongyin once again.

You crazy bastard, why in the world are you messing with something that is none of your business? Look at the trouble

you have caused me!

In his moment of panic, a thought suddenly came to Zhang Xuan. Right! Is it possible for me to see the flaws of the lightning tribulation?

Compile! Zhang Xuan quickly willed in his mind.

The Library of Heaven's Path has the ability to discern the flaws of everything in the world, so the lightning tribulation should be no exception too, right?

Hu!

With a jolt, a book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path.

Zhang Xuan quickly flipped it open to take a look.

Ah? Why is it empty?

Completely empty, there was nothing on the book at all

It seems like the Library of Heaven's Path is unable to compile a book on anything that concerns me... Zhang Xuan swiftly came to a conclusion.

He had given it a try in the past, and he realized that anything that was directly associated to him could not be compiled as a book. For one, he was unable to compile a book on himself in the Library of Heaven's Path.

Perhaps, the lightning tribulation that he faced was also considered an extension of him, so the Library of Heaven's Path could not compile any information on it either.

Eye of Insight!

Realizing that he could not count on his Library of Heaven's Path, he swiftly activated his trump card to analyze the lightning in the sky, hoping to find any flaws that he could exploit.

At that very moment, the storm clouds had already covered up an area of several dozen li around them, and the lightning that was traversing amid them was at least ten meters thick, reminiscent of massive dragons soaring in the sky.

Every single bolt of lightning wielded strength comparable to a Saint 7-dan. Even Luo Xuanqing and the others would be injured in a direct encounter with them.

Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly uneasily. With my current strength, there's no way I'll be able to withstand all of that.

Under the analysis of his Eye of Insight, he found that there was no possible way he could withstand the overwhelming lightning in the sky, even with his enhanced cultivation.

A sharp glint flashed through Zhang Xuan's eyes. But there's no other choice; I have to give it a try no matter what. It seems like I can only dash into the midst of the storm clouds, just as I did yesterday.

It might seem to be a highly dangerous action to dash into the storm clouds in the midst of one's lightning tribulation, but as someone who had done so personally, he knew that it was actually much safer than waiting for the lightning bolt to fall upon one below.

This was because the lightning bolt would only fall after the energy harnessed within it reached the peak, making it highly difficult to withstand. However, if one were to dash up into the storm clouds before the energy had been concentrated into the lightning bolt, one would be in a considerably safer position.

Of course, this might only have been applicable to Zhang Xuan. For a typical cultivator, plunging into an environment permeated with lightning would still result in their body being slowly worn down, resulting in gradual electrocution to death. In a sense, that was even more frightening than facing an entire bolt of lightning at once.

However, Zhang Xuan, who possessed the Heaven's Path zhenqi, could easily recover any damage sustained by his physical body and soul. As such, the most frightening maneuver ironically turned out to be the safest option for him.

1341 Charging into the Lightning

But... I'm still too weak at the moment. If I could advance my physical body and soul cultivation a little more, at least to the point where I can match a Saint 7-dan cultivator, I would be able to overcome the lightning tribulation.

As complicated as the thought process was, it took only an instant for Zhang Xuan to come to realize all of it.

At this moment, the storm clouds were beginning to charge up energy once more after striking down Bi Hongyin.

After spurring several mouthfuls of blood and swallowing two pills, Bi Hongyin finally recovered slightly from her injuries. As soon as she regained her strength, she immediately directed an antagonistic glare toward Zhang Xuan.

It was to protect her formation plate that she offended such a powerful lightning tribulation, and yet... that fellow actually destroyed her formation plate!

"I don't care whether you were invited here by Luo Xuanqing or not," Bi Hongyin roared furiously. "If I don't teach you a lesson today, my surname won't be..."

But before she could finish her words, the young man opposite to her interjected with a frosty face. "Shut your mouth!"

Zhang Xuan's voice was not too loud, but it was infused with the power of his demonic tunes and Impartation of Heaven's Will. It sounded loud and clear even amid the deafening rumbling of the thunder, and it left a lingering buzz in their ears.

"That Leaving Aperture realm lad actually told Bi Hongyin to shut her mouth?" The shorty nearly fell to the ground from shock.

Luo Xuanqing also widened his eyes in frenzy.

As the King of Destruction, he rampaged freely in the Sanctum of Sages, fearing not even the managerial elders. But before the Bi Hongyin, who would turn into a banshee whenever she got angry, he always made sure to watch his language and actions.

Yet, not only did that fellow destroy her formation plate, he even told her to shut her mouth.

Aren't you being a little too brazen?

“What did you say?” Bi Hongyin asked with a threatening edge to her voice.

The bulging, crimson eyes that glared at Zhang Xuan could truly send shivers down one's spine. If not for her charred face, she would have definitely been extremely frightening.

“Shut your trap if you want to live!” Given the precarious situation he was in, Zhang Xuan could not even be bothered to maintain a polite front anymore.

With a leap, he slowly advanced toward the storm clouds above.

Hong long long!

As soon as he approached the storm clouds, the lightning immediately sensed the aura he was emanating and slowly gathered toward him.

“He... Is he intending to withstand the lightning tribulation for me?” Zhang Xuan's abrupt action had bewildered Bi Hongyin so much that she even forgot about her rage in this moment.

“But if even I am unable to withstand the lightning tribulation, there's no way he can survive it!”

Even a Saint 7-dan expert like her was completely helpless against the devastating might of the lightning bolt above. Given that the young man was a mere Leaving Aperture realm cultivator, there was no way he stood a chance against it!

Is he intending to compensate for my broken formation plate with his life?

Bi Hongyin widened her mouth in shock. As this thought came to her mind, all of her fury vanished without a trace, and she

even felt a little touched inside.

Despite facing death, the young man still charged forward to protect her. It seemed like he was not that bad a person after all.

“Wait a moment, is that... his lightning tribulation?”

In contrast to the emotional Bi Hongyin, Luo Xuanqing, the shorty, and the fatty noticed that the storm clouds were swiftly gathering toward Zhang Xuan, and realization dawned upon them.

That explained everything; it was all due to that fellow.

The fatty gulped unconsciously. “Didn’t you say that he just achieved a breakthrough yesterday and can’t possibly make any advancement today? Why does it seem like... he’s at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle?”

“That really seems to be the case...” Luo Xuanqing’s lips were twitching as well.

Based on what he had heard, that fellow had made a breakthrough from Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle to Leaving Aperture realm primary stage within ten breaths the previous day, and he had spent that afternoon taking the 8-star formation master examination at the Hall of Erudition, so he should not have had any time to even reinforce his cultivation. How in the world did he manage to make a breakthrough again now?

Not to mention, a breakthrough of three cultivation stages!

Boom! Boom!

While the crowd was still in a state of shock, the storm clouds had already finished gathering around the young man, and lightning energy was swiftly gathering together, threatening to spill forth at any moment to tear the young man apart.

“This won’t do. Even if his cultivation has reached Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, he won’t be able to withstand something of that scale,” Luo Xuanqing exclaimed.

Even with his recent breakthroughs, the young man’s strength was still far too weak in comparison to the lightning energy

that had gathered above. Even Saint 7-dan experts like them were unable to withstand the lightning energy in the storm clouds, let alone that young man!

He could already see the young man being reduced to ash as soon as the lightning bolt fell, and no one would be able to save him.

“I was the one who brought him here; I can’t let him die as a result of this,” Luo Xuanqing uttered in panic. Even someone as domineering as him felt completely helpless before this situation.

He was the one who had brought Zhang Xuan over, and they were also the ones who had blindly interfered with the lightning tribulation, resulting in it growing stronger and stronger. He would not be able to get past his guilt if the young man died as a result of that.

Just as he was in a complete state of loss, the young man’s voice suddenly sounded. “I’ll deal with the lightning tribulation. If you have any physical body cultivation technique manuals or soul cultivation technique manuals, hurry up and bring them out. I need as many of them as possible.”

“Cultivation technique manuals?”

Everyone was taken aback.

The important thing now is to resolve the current quandary we are in, so why are you seeking cultivation technique manuals?

The lightning bolt is going to fall on you anytime soon! Even if we give you cultivation technique manuals now, will you have time to study them?

Seeing that the crowd was still hesitating, Zhang Xuan bellowed furiously, “Hurry up!”

“Yes!”

They had no idea what Zhang Xuan wanted cultivation technique manuals for, but since he was adamant about the matter, Luo Xuanqing and the others quickly nodded in agreement.

Were it any other situation, they surely would have killed the other party if a Leaving Aperture realm lad dared to speak to them in such a manner. However, with the threat of the lightning bolt weighing down on them, none of them had the time or effort to bother about his attitude.

They knew that they had incurred the wrath of the lightning tribulation too, and if the young man failed to clear his lightning tribulation, they would become its next victims.

“I have physical body cultivation technique manuals here!” The fatty flicked his wrist, and a huge collection containing several thousand books appeared before him.

With just the sheer power of his physical body, he was able to knock Luo Xuanqing back and shatter sealed spaces. Considering how the prowess of his physical body had already reached an extremely frightening level, it was not too surprising for him to have plenty of physical body cultivation technique manuals.

“I have some soul cultivation technique manuals here!” Bi Hongyin also whipped out some books.

“I have both physical body and soul cultivation technique manuals, but I don’t have too many of them...” The shorty and Luo Xuanqing took out a few books as well.

It was apparent that they were all from powerful clans or organizations just by how they were able to reach Saint 7-dan at their young age. These manuals might have been rare treasures to other cultivators, but to them, these were resources that they had no lack of.

“Thank you.” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up upon seeing the number of manuals before him.

He hurriedly scanned through them with his eyes.

Hu la!

It took just an instant for him to collect them all into the Library of Heaven’s Path.

Not only are there physical body and soul cultivation techniques, there are even Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm

and Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm cultivation techniques! It's a pity that their quantity is a bit lacking, so I'm still unable to compile complete Heaven's Path Divine Art manuals from them, Zhang Xuan thought in pity.

Even though there were Grand Dominion realm and Phantasmal Space realm cultivation technique manuals amid the pile, he was still a long way from compiling the Heaven's Path Divine Art. Even if they collected them all, it would not do much to help his current situation.

Forget it, I'll take a look at the physical body cultivation technique manuals instead... Zhang Xuan thought.

Compile!

His mind jolted slightly, and a new book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path.

He placed his finger on the book, and the knowledge harnessed in it swiftly flowed into his mind.

Success!

As expected of a top-notch physical body cultivator! The books he had were numerous, and they covered over a wide range of aspects concerning physical body cultivation. Through compiling all of them together, Zhang Xuan actually managed to compile a complete Heaven's Path Golden Body!

As long as he cultivated according to it, he would be able to temper his physical body to achieve a level of resilience on par with Saint high-tier artifacts!

Let's see if it's the same for the soul cultivation technique manuals...

Knowing that time was a luxury he could not afford to waste, Zhang Xuan swiftly turned his sight to the other group of books that he had just collected.

As a demonic tunist, Bi Hongyin specialized in soul offense. As such, she had a huge collection of books regarding souls. As for Luo Xuanqing and the fatty, even though they specialized in neither physical body cultivation nor soul

cultivation, as offspring of powerful clans or organizations, they still had plenty of books regarding those topics.

All in all, the collection of books the three of them had numbered over a thousand.

Taking out the soul cultivation technique manual he had obtained from Vicious and placing them together, Zhang Xuan willed, Compile!

A new book materialized before his eyes.

Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment. I only managed to perfect the Leaving Aperture realm Heaven's Path Soul Art from that...

Ever since the eradication of the soul oracle's lineage, there had not been any occupation or power that had been able to display prowess on par with them with regards to the soul. Even with the soul cultivation techniques that he had obtained from Vicious, he had only managed to form the Leaving Aperture realm Heaven's Path Soul Art. The Grand Dominion realm Heaven's Path Soul Art was still plagued with flaws, and it would be hard for him to cultivate it right now.

Forget it, I should just use whatever I can get for the time being. Every slight increment in strength will mean a higher chance of survival for me...

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan turned to the crowd and asked once more, "Do any of you have pinnacle spirit stones, Jade Spirit Essence, or cultivation resources that harness concentrated spiritual energy?"

Even with the required cultivation techniques in hand, it would be futile if he did not have any spiritual energy to raise his cultivation.

"I have the Jade Pearl Sap! It has similar properties to the Wintry Spirit Essence of the Glacier Plain Court!"

"I have a piece of Jade Spirit Essence over here, but it isn't too big..."

"I have a grade-8 Origin Spirit Pill..."

...

Upon hearing Zhang Xuan's needs, the crowd hurriedly took out the pills, spirit stones, and spirit essences they had and tossed them toward Zhang Xuan.

"Thanks!" Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement.

It would have taken him a great deal of effort to gather these items on any other occasion, but due to the crucial moment, the others also understood the urgency of the situation and did not hesitate to pass their resources over to him.

With a sweep of his hand, Zhang Xuan took the Jade Pearl Sap, Origin Spirit Pill, and Jade Spirit Essence and swallowed the former two decisively without any hesitation. After which, he turned his gaze back to the storm cloud and noted that the bolt of lightning was done forming and was about to strike down. Knowing that he had no time to waste, he immediately dashed into the storm clouds.

"What is he doing?"

"He'll die if he dashes in recklessly like that!"

Everyone's body recoiled from horror upon seeing Zhang Xuan's actions.

Dashing straight into the storm clouds was equivalent to placing oneself in the midst of a sea of lightning! Under such conditions, it was only a matter of time before one's physical body and Primordial Spirit wore down and dissipated into nothing!

Hong long long!

Zhang Xuan's charge into the storm clouds seemed to have angered the lightning. Countless smaller bolts of lightning swiftly gathered in the area that he had disappeared into, and it took only a blink of an eye for the entire sky to be filled with lightning sparks. It was to the extent that one would be shocked just by attempting to extend one's Spiritual Perception into the storm clouds.

"What should we do?"

"There's nothing we can do but to wait. This is his lightning tribulation, and if he manages to clear it, it will disappear soon

after. Otherwise... there's a good chance that none of us will be getting out of here alive!" Luo Xuanqing said with a livid face.

They had all interfered with the lightning tribulation, so unless Zhang Xuan cleared his lightning tribulation, it would only continue to grow larger and larger until it struck down every single one of them.

This was also the reason they did not hesitate to take out whatever Zhang Xuan demanded earlier.

After a moment of silence, the fatty suddenly remarked, "For a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator to clear such a formidable lightning tribulation... things aren't looking too optimistic!"

He was known for his superior defensive ability, but even he had no confidence that he would be able to survive the onslaught of such powerful lightning. If such was the case for him, the chances that the young man would survive the ordeal were even slimmer.

"Indeed. Prepare yourselves. If the lightning tribulation continues its attack, we'll just have to use the ability of our bloodlines to vanquish it," the shorty said.

"I guess there's no other choice..."

The others nodded in agreement as well.

The lightning tribulation might have been powerful, but they had their trump cards as well. If they went all out, it was not completely impossible for them to destroy it. However, they would sustain grievous damage in the midst of it, and that could potentially hinder the future advancement of their cultivation.

Unless they were truly cornered, they would not even consider such a course of action.

1342 The Lightning Tribulation Escapes

Kacha!

As soon as he stepped into the storm clouds, a bolt of lightning immediately came zapping his way. Zhang Xuan swiftly gathered his zhenqi to defend against it.

Pu!

A spurt of fresh blood escaped from his mouth as his hair stood up from the static electricity.

Due to Bi Hongyin and the others' interference, the lightning tribulation had already grown to a level far beyond what he could deal with. Even if he used all of his means possible, he was not absolutely confident that he would be able to withstand it.

Zhang Xuan swiftly realized that even when driving his Heaven's Path zhenqi to its maximum to heal up his injuries, his recovery was unable to keep up with the rate at which the lightning was burning away his body. Thus, he raised his eyebrows and tapped at the area before him.

Flowing Water Sword Intent!

Tzzzzzz!

Countless surges of sword qi burst forth from his acupoints, forming a massive barrier.

It had to be said that the Flowing Water Swordsmanship was indeed very powerful. It formed an absolute defense shell that not even the fluidity of water was able to breach.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

Nevertheless, under the relentless strikes of the lightning bolts, Zhang Xuan's face swiftly paled.

Even though I am able to keep the lightning bolts completely at bay with my Flowing Water Swordsmanship, the might that they harness is simply too strong. I won't be able to sustain this for long...

This was similar to how even though an umbrella was able to fend off a downpour, it could not shelter one from a hailstorm.

The absolute defense shell formed by his Flowing Water Swordsmanship allowed him to keep the lightning bolts at bay, but due to the limitations of his cultivation, he could not maintain it for too long.

In at most ten breaths, his sword qi would dissipate under the furious onslaught of lightning, and he would be back to square one.

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan drew out his Primordial Spirit without any hesitation. I won't be able to survive at this rate. I must raise my physical body cultivation and soul cultivation swiftly.

Unlike the time when he made a breakthrough right above the entrance to the Mountain Gate, he had dived into the depths of the storm clouds this time around, so no outsider was able to see what he was doing, and this cover allowed him to utilize all of his means without any fear.

Cultivate!

Zhang Xuan's body had already comprehended Mind of Void, which granted it the ability to cultivate independently. It would be much more efficient if he cultivated both his soul and body simultaneously.

Tzzzzzz!

After ingesting the Jade Pearl Sap and Origin Spirit Pill, Zhang Xuan's body reflexively drove its zhenqi according to the method detailed in the Heaven's Path Golden Body, and his physical body grew stronger at a rate visible to the eye. Dead skin peeled off layer after layer from his body, creating a sight reminiscent of a cicada escaping from its shell.

Once one's physical body cultivation had reached Zhang Xuan's current level, advancing it even slightly was an

incredibly difficult feat. Typical means such as tempering one's body with flames or ice were no longer effective anymore.

In one of the manuals that the fatty had taken out, it detailed how an expert physical body cultivator studied the molting of cicadas when a sudden inspiration struck him, and he created a technique that allowed humans to strip off their old cells, a little like cicadas. Each time one molted away old cells, one's physical body would be able to grow a little stronger.

Through repeating this process over a long period of time, one would become extremely powerful.

The Heaven's Path Golden Body that Zhang Xuan had just compiled was centered around this notion. As Zhang Xuan shed more and more layers of old cells, his skin grew younger and supple. However, in contrast to his appearance, his body was actually growing more and more resilient, slowly creeping up from the level of a Saint intermediate-tier artifact to Saint high-tier artifact.

While his physical body swiftly grew stronger, his Primordial Spirit was also frenziedly absorbing spiritual energy from the Jade Spirit Essence.

As he drove his zhenqi according to the Leaving Aperture realm Heaven's Path Soul Art, spiritual energy was diving into the acupoints on his Primordial Spirit like mini vortices, nourishing it.

Hong long!

In the blink of an eye, his soul had already achieved a breakthrough to Half-Leaving Aperture realm, and it was swiftly surging forth toward Leaving Aperture realm primary stage...

However, it did not take long before the spiritual energy within the Jade Pearl Sap, Origin Spirit Pill, and Jade Spirit Essence was completely depleted.

Even though items that Luo Xuanqing and the others had given him were superior cultivation resources, the simultaneous cultivation of his physical body and soul

required too much spiritual energy. They simply were not sufficient for him to master those two cultivation techniques together.

I can't keep up with the Flowing Water Swordsmanship much longer.

As if adding to his injury, the sword qi that was protecting him was starting to falter as well, threatening to collapse in on him at any moment.

Knowing that he was still in no state to face the lightning tribulation yet, Zhang Xuan quickly flicked his wrist and instructed the figure materializing before him, "Clone, help me fend off the lightning tribulation for a while and buy me some time!"

He and his clone were considered a single entity, so even if he were to use his clone to fend off the lightning tribulation, it would not result in the intensification of the ordeal.

"It's just a mere lightning tribulation. Look how scared it has made you... Pass the Heaven's Path Soul Art to me!" As soon as his clone appeared, he harrumphed coldly with a lofty look on his face. Without any hesitation, he leaped right into the sea of lightning.

Kacha! Kacha!

Bolts of lightning immediately surged toward him, but his clone stood fearlessly in their face. Stretching his back lazily, he casually whipped out a towel and began scrubbing his back.

The scrubbing of the towel spread the lightning shocks equally throughout his clone's body, and his aura and soul began to grow at a visible rate.

"This..." Zhang Xuan's lips twitched.

He had also used this method to temper his Primordial Spirit back at the entrance of the Mountain Gate, but who would have thought that this fellow had actually learnt this from him...

If he's able to endure the lightning, I should be able to do so. Perhaps, I might even be able to induce a significant

enhancement in my soul and physical body under the tempering of the lightning bolts!

Watching as his scrubbing clone sent a disdainful look toward him, seemingly mocking his weakness, Zhang Xuan gritted his teeth and made up his mind.

He did not have any other cultivation resources that were suited for his cultivation at the moment, and he was completely surrounded by lightning bolts, leaving him nowhere to escape to. If he did not find a solution soon, he really might lose his life.

Since his clone was able to survive the lightning bolts without trouble, surely, he, as the main body, should be able to do so as well!

Thus, Zhang Xuan returned his soul to his physical body and retracted the defensive barrier of sword qi that he had put up, allowing the lightning in his surroundings to wash over him.

Pu!

The immense surge of electricity caused his body to stiffen, and a mouthful of blood splattered from his mouth.

A thought suddenly came to Zhang Xuan's mind.

Perhaps, if I could have my Heaven's Path zhenqi imitate the attribute of the lightning energy around me, I might be able to withstand its might?

Considering how the Heaven's Path zhenqi was able to imitate even the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe's Zhenqi of Slaughter, it should have no trouble copying the lightning attribute of the energy around him as well!

Thus, Zhang Xuan began focusing his attention in an attempt to grasp the Power of Lightning around him, and as he slowly circulated the zhenqi in his body, a hint of the lightning attribute really emerged in his Heaven's Path zhenqi!

Kacha!

Right after he converted his zhenqi to the lightning attribute, another lightning bolt fell upon him. Even though it still left

him feeling deeply uncomfortable, it was no longer as intolerable as it had been previously.

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in delight. Great!

He had only tried it on a whim, but it really worked out for him!

Another thought suddenly emerged in Zhang Xuan's mind, and his body began trembling in agitation. Since my zhenqi has changed to the lightning attribute, will I be able to absorb the lightning energy in the surroundings?

Just as a practitioner of cold attribute cultivation techniques like Chen Leyao could cultivate through absorbing the Wintry Spirit Essence, considering that his zhenqi was currently of the lightning attribute... would he be able to absorb the surrounding lightning energy as well?

Just looking at the unimaginable congregation of lightning energy around him was enough to make the edges of Zhang Xuan's lips creep up uncontrollably!

His soul had once absorbed the lightning energy within Qiu Wu Palace. Of course, the lightning energy he had absorbed back then had originated from a formation, so naturally, it could not hold a candle to that of lightning tribulations, the violent might of the heavens. But still, that showed that the notion was not completely impossible!

I should give it a try...

Knowing that absorbing the rampaging energy of the lightning tribulation was bound to be extremely difficult, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath and resolved himself.

Swinging the sword in his hand, he began executing the Flowing Water Swordsmanship to protect himself once more, but he left a small gap to allow a small spark of lightning to creep in.

Hong long long!

As soon as Zhang Xuan absorbed the lightning spark into his body, it began wreaking havoc, knocking forcefully here and

there to cause as much destruction as it could. In the blink of an eye, several of Zhang Xuan's meridians were torn apart.

Even with lightning attribute zhenqi, it was still extremely difficult for a cultivator to control the violent energy of the lightning tribulation. Otherwise, with lightning attribute cultivators drawing upon the might of the heavens at their whim, who would be able to match them?

I should try merging the lightning spark with my zhenqi.

Zhang Xuan had expected at least this amount of damage to occur. Even though the rampaging lightning spark left him feeling as if thousands of needles were ripping him apart from the inside, he forced himself to keep his calm and began converging his Heaven's Path zhenqi on the lightning spark.

Tz la!

Perhaps due to the encompassing nature of the Heaven's Path zhenqi, as soon as his lightning attribute zhenqi came into contact with the lightning spark, they immediately merged together, forming a much purer, more powerful surge of energy.

It really works!

This success meant that he would be able to use all of the lightning energy gathered there as spiritual energy to fuel his cultivation!

Without the slightest hesitation, Zhang Xuan retracted his sword and simultaneously opened all of his acupoints wide.

The surrounding lightning energy was swiftly drawn to his body as if a vortex, and he desperately assimilated the massive influx with his Heaven's Path zhenqi.

It did not take long for Zhang Xuan's soul cultivation to exceed Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, and his physical body was swiftly growing stronger and stronger as well.

...

"Are you all ready?" Luo Xuanqing asked.

“Un.” Bi Hongyin and the others nodded.

As powerful as the lightning tribulation before them was, they had no other choice at this point. After all, they could not possibly watch idly by the side as Zhang Xuan was zapped into ashes.

Thus, after some discussion, they eventually decided to dash in to save him, and at the same time, they would use their most powerful moves to forcefully dissipate the storm clouds.

If everything worked out, they would be freed from the danger they were in. Even if their attempt failed, at the very least, they would have another pair of hands on their side.

“Alright, ready yourselves!” Luo Xuanqing looked at the storm clouds above as he drove his zhenqi furiously.

However, just as he was about to call for them to set off, a shocked voice suddenly exclaimed beside him.

“Wait a moment! Is it just me, or is something amiss with the lightning tribulation?”

The one who had just spoken was the shorty. His eyes were fixated on the sky, and there was a doubtful frown hanging on his forehead.

“Something amiss?” Luo Xuanqing was perplexed by shorty’s sudden remark. “What do you mean by that?”

The other two also turned their sights over.

“Take a closer look. Doesn’t it seem like the storm clouds... are moving?” the shorty asked.

“Moving?”

Bewildered, the crowd quickly turned their gazes to the sky as well, and just as what shorty had said, the storm clouds were indeed moving. The densest congregation of storm clouds had been right above them a moment ago. However, at that moment, it seemed to have deviated to the side.

Bi Hongyin frowned in incomprehension. “Once the lightning tribulation falls, unless the person undergoing the ordeal flees, it shouldn’t move.”

Lightning tribulation was an ordeal from the heavens. As long as the one undergoing the ordeal did not flee, the lightning tribulation would not move easily. Considering that Zhang Xuan was currently in the midst of the storm clouds, completely surrounded by lightning energy, there was no way he would be able to move around the place.

So, why were the storm clouds moving then?

While they were still perplexed, the storm clouds completely evacuated from the area just above them, revealing a figure in the blue sky.

It was Zhang Xuan.

“He’s fine?”

Seeing that the young man had not yet been burnt to a crisp, Luo Xuanqing and the others instinctively heaved a sigh of relief. Just as they were about to beckon him to hurry down, the young man suddenly opened his eyes and bellowed furiously.

“Where do you think you are going?”

After which, the young man dashed forward and charged right into the midst of the storm clouds.

Pilipala!

A series of lightning sparks and thunderous rumbling echoed.

Following which, the clouds deviated to the side, revealing the young man’s figure once more.

“Hey, stop running away!” the young man roared before dashing forward once again.

Hu hu hu!

This time, even though Zhang Xuan’s movements were swift, the storm clouds were even faster. As if chased by some kind of monster, they flitted away desperately.

“You...” Seething with rage, Zhang Xuan chased the storm clouds persistently.

However, the fact that the lightning tribulation was able to appear whenever a cultivator was to undergo an ordeal meant that the speed that it could move at was far beyond that of any cultivator. It took only a few moments before it disappeared beyond the horizon.

“This... He scared away the lightning tribulation?”

“All along, it has always been the lightning tribulation who chased after cultivators, but he actually made the lightning tribulation flee in a fluster?”

Luo Xuanqing, Bi Hongyin, and the others grasped at their hair as they stared at the sight before them in utter shock.

1343 Treasure Hunters

“What a pity!” Seeing that the lightning tribulation had been scared into fleeing, Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment.

After converting his Heaven’s Path zhenqi to lightning attribute, he was indeed able to absorb the lightning energy to advance his cultivation swiftly.

But upon witnessing how happy he was absorbing the surrounding lightning energy, his clone also began absorbing as well... And the result of that was the sight which everyone had just seen. Seeing how furiously its energy was being devoured, the lightning tribulation was terrified, and it immediately turned around and fled...

For the lightning tribulation, the existence of fear to all cultivators, to end up running away instead...

There was no way they would have believed such a thing to be possible if they hadn’t seen it unfolding before their very eyes.

However, even though the lightning tribulation didn’t have any sentience, considering how it had the ability to grow stronger in accordance to the strength of the one undergoing the ordeal, it wasn’t too surprising to think that it would have the ability to ‘avert danger’ as well. Given how furiously he and his clone were absorbing its energy, it was only natural that it would be frightened.

“I should have absorbed more while I could! I only managed to advance my cultivation up to Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, and I’m not done cultivating my Heaven’s Path Golden Body yet. My physical body is only on par with half-Saint high-tier artifacts at the moment...” Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed deeply.

He was still thinking that given how huge the lightning tribulation was, he would at least be able to master the Heaven’s Path Soul Art and Heaven’s Path Golden Body. Who

could have thought that it would suddenly turn around and run away?

“Oh well! At the very least, I did manage to advance my fighting prowess considerably. With my current strength, I should be able to match Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm pinnacle experts even without using the Three Swords of Lingxu. In fact, even Half-Phantasmal Space experts shouldn’t pose too much of a threat to me!” Zhang Xuan consoled himself.

In this short period of time, not only did he manage to raise his zhenqi cultivation to Saint 5-dan Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, he also managed to advance his soul cultivation to Leaving Aperture realm advanced stage, and his physical body achieved a level of resilience comparable to half-Saint high-tier artifacts...

All in all, they added up to a severalfold increment in his fighting prowess.

Previously, there was no way he would be able to defeat the puppet of the Jia Corridor without using the Three Swords of Lingxu, but with his newfound strength, he would be able to crush the latter with just a single finger.

In fact, even if he stood on the spot and allowed the puppet to attack him freely, the latter would still be unable to inflict the slightest bit of injury on him.

And of course, if he were to use the Three Swords of Lingxu, he would be able to match even Saint 7-dan intermediate stage experts!

If he were to face Luo Xuanqing once more, even if he was still no match for the other party, at the very least, he wouldn’t be as powerless as he was previously.

“Alright, I’ll be heading off to rest first. Remember to inform me the next time something as good as a lightning tribulation occurs, I haven’t had my fill yet...” the voice of Zhang Xuan’s clone echoed in his mind.

As soon as the lightning tribulation showed signs of fleeing, his clone had decisively returned back to the Myriad Anthive

Nest in order to prevent anyone from noticing his presence.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Just like how Zhang Xuan’s fighting prowess had grown substantially from absorbing the energy from the lightning tribulation, his clone had also benefited greatly from the earlier free buffet. In fact, it seemed like his clone had grown by a greater degree at that.

In the first place, his clone was forged out of the Nine Hearts Lotus, which was invulnerable to lightning. Due to the immense amount of lightning energy it had absorbed, it gained the ability to infuse the power of lightning in its attacks, thus resulting in a significant enhancement in its fighting prowess!

Even without crossing hands, Zhang Xuan was well aware that he was no match for his clone in his current state...

Thinking of this, he couldn’t help but sigh deeply once more.

Others might think that he possessed decent talent, but the truth was that he was someone who couldn’t even match up to his disciple, subordinate, his girlfriend... and even his own clone! Was there anyone in the world who was as pathetic as him?

He couldn’t help but feel deeply stifled within.

It felt like the long year he had spent cultivating had been all in vain.

“Are you... alright?”

When Zhang Xuan finally returned back to Luo Xuanqing and the others, he saw that everyone was staring at him with looks of disbelief.

“I’m fine.” Zhang Xuan nodded before grumbling indignantly, “If not for that coward fleeing so quickly, I would have definitely taught it a good lesson!”

“...” The crowd.

“Let me introduce this bunch over here to you.” Knowing that they would only feel more stifled if they were to continue chatting about the topic, Luo Xuanqing gestured to the other

three and introduced them, “You should know Bi Hongyin by now, she’s a genius from the Demonic Tunist Guild headquarters. This towering fatty over here is a prodigy from the Yuan Clan, Yuan Xiao. And last but not least, this shorty over here is a genius from the Yun Clan, Yun Lianhai.”

“Pleased to meet all of you.” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and greeted them.

Indeed. People of a certain social standing did tend to hang out with those of the same standing as them.

The Yuan Clan and Demonic Tunist Guild headquarters... He had never heard of the Yun Clan before, but given how the shorty was able to fit into their group as well, the Yun Clan must be a rather formidable power as well.

“As for this young man over here, he’s Zhang Xuan, Zhang shi. I met him yesterday while I was taking the 8-star formation master examination. I believe you all should have gotten a good glimpse of his capabilities by now.” Luo Xuanqing said.

“Of course, of course...”

The others quickly nodded in agreement.

Not only did the young man manage to shatter Bi Hongyin’s formation plate with ease, he even sent the lightning tribulation fleeing in fear... They had no idea of knowing what the young man did in the storm clouds to produce such an inconceivable outcome, but just based on what he had accomplished so far, they dared not to underestimate him anymore.

“Brother-in... Brother Luo, you haven’t explained why you brought me here yet.” Seeing that he had received the acknowledgement of the crowd, Zhang Xuan turned a doubtful gaze toward Luo Xuanqing and asked.

He was in the midst of a networking event in the Elite Division when Luo Xuanqing suddenly dragged him here. Despite all that had happened, he still wasn’t too sure what the latter was up to.

Luo Xuanqing sealed the surroundings with a wave of his hand in order to prevent others from eavesdropping in before whispering with a hushed voice, “Just a while ago, I discovered a blessed land, and within it, I found a growing [Dongxu Gourd]!”

“Dongxu Gourd?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Despite the huge number of books he had read, he had never read of the Dongxu Gourd before.

“Dongxu Gourd is a treasure of nature. Using the earth veins as its roots, it absorbs the essence of the sun and the moon, and it takes ten thousand years before it flowers, and another ten thousand years before it bears fruit. In each earth vein, there can only be one Dongxu Gourd... As a result of that, Dongxu Gourds are extremely rare and valuable. If one can cultivate it and fuse it into one’s body, the chances which one would be able to achieve a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan would be increased by at least 50%!” Luo Xuanqing said.

“50%?” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

Beyond Saint 5-dan, while cultivation resources were still as important as always, the cultivator must also achieve a deep understanding of the surrounding heaven and earth and the spatial laws too... As such, any artifact which could increase one’s chances of success by 10% or 20% would be highly sought after by all cultivators!

It was unimaginable for an item to be able to raise one’s chances of achieving a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan by 50%!

“Indeed. However, the blessed land I have found is fraught with dangers, and it’ll be difficult for me to succeed alone. That’s the reason why I gathered everyone here, and as long as I can obtain the Dongxu Gourd, I’ll compensate all of you handsomely for your efforts.” Luo Xuanqing said with a sharp glint in his eyes.

The Dongxu Gourd would be a crucial factor in determining whether he would be able to achieve a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan or not. He was determined to obtain it, by hook or by crook.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

He thought that they had gathered here to challenge some kind of trial, but that was clearly not the case now. Luo Xuanqing had invited all of them here to engage their help in obtaining the Dongxu Gourd!

“Is there a powerful formation guarding the Dongxu Gourd or something?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Considering how his cultivation paled far in comparison to the rest of the group, the only reason he could think of why Luo Xuanqing would invite him here was due to his proficiency in formations.

“Un, there’s a grade-8 pinnacle formation around the Dongxu Gourd. I’m not too sure who set the formation up, but I have attempted to breach the formation twice but failed on both occasions.” Luo Xuanqing replied with a nod.

“As one of the top clans on the Master Teacher Continent, the Luo Clan should have plenty of capable formation masters. It shouldn’t be too difficult for you to engage the help of a couple of them to help you breach the grade-8 pinnacle formation, right?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

Given the strength and standing of the Luo Clan, putting aside a grade-8 pinnacle formation, they would surely have talents who could easily decipher grade-9 formations as well. Why would Luo Xuanqing seek his help instead?

“The situation is not that easy. The blessed land I spoke about has strict restrictions on it. Those whose ages are over forty or cultivations are at Saint 8-dan or above are prohibited from entering. If one were to forcefully barge in, there’s a very good chance that the blessed land would collapse inward, thus causing the treasures within to disappear for good!” Luo Xuanqing said with a bitter smile.

“There’s such a restriction?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback. Suddenly, a thought came to his mind, and he asked, “Is it possible that... the blessed land is an ancient domain left behind by an old expert?”

As Luo Xuanqing had said that the Dongxu Gourd was a treasure of nature, he instinctively assumed that the blessed land it was located in would be a natural terrain as well. However, the presence of a formation and restrictions sounded too much like a manmade work.

“Of course! The Dongxu Gourd can grow in natural conditions too, but as soon as it starts to flower, the aura that it emanates will swiftly draw others to it. Under such circumstances, there’s no way it would be able to survive until maturity!” Luo Xuanqing replied.

“I see...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Treasures like the Dongxu Gourd were extremely valuable. If it wasn’t guarded by a formation or something of the sort, there was no way they would have been able to get a shot at it.

“This is how it is. So, I would like to formally invite you to join our team, and regardless of whether we succeed or not, I’ll compensate you with a pinnacle spirit stone and a half-Saint high-tier artifact for your efforts!” Luo Xuanqing said.

“Pinnacle spirit stone?” Those three words immediately sparked up a radiant glow in Zhang Xuan’s eyes.

Putting aside that Luo Xuanqing was his future brother-in-law, a close kin of Luo Ruoxin and soon-to-be close kin of his, just on the pinnacle spirit stone itself, there was no way he would turn down this mission!

After all, that was what he was lacking the most at the moment.

If he could obtain even a pinnacle spirit stone, he wouldn’t have to worry over a lack of spiritual energy for quite a while. At the very least, it should be sufficient for him to reach Saint 6-dan, or if luck had it, perhaps even Saint 7-dan as well!

“That’s right. I don’t have the pinnacle spirit stones on me yet, but I have already applied for them from my clan. They should be here by the time we return from the blessed land.” Luo Xuanqing continued.

“Alright, I’ll accept your offer!” Without much hesitation, Zhang Xuan expressed his agreement.

Other than the pinnacle spirit stone, there were also several other reasons why he chose to accept the mission. Firstly, through the shared experiences they would have while trying to obtain the Dongxu Gourd, they should be able to swiftly grow close with one another. And as long as he could take down this future brother-in-law of his, he just might be able to convince the other party to bring him to meet Ruoxin!

Of course, from his previous experiences, it was apparent that Luo Xuanqing was a siskon. Until they grew sufficiently close enough to one another, it was best for him not to speak of or express any interest in Ruoxin before the latter. Otherwise, all of his efforts could very well be undone.

Also, given that he had already been dragged here and learned of such a confidential secret, there was already no room for him to back down!

Otherwise, should the news leak out somehow, he would definitely be the first suspect!

“Good! You are still lacking in strength at the moment, but worry not. I’ll protect you, so just follow closely behind me. You just have to make a move when we reach the grade-8 pinnacle formation.” Seeing that he had managed to bring Zhang Xuan to his team, Luo Xuanqing heaved a sigh of relief and patted the young man on the shoulder with a peal of hearty laughter.

A cost of his domineering attitude in the Sanctum of Sages, he didn’t have too many friends. He did know quite a few individuals who were skilled in formations, but he didn’t feel safe revealing the existence of the Dongxu Gourd to them.

After all, the significance of the Dongxu Gourd was simply too great to Saint 7-dan cultivators.

It would be a disaster if his own teammate were to sabotage him at the last moment.

On the other hand, even though Zhang Xuan possessed extraordinary capability as a formation master, his cultivation wasn’t too high and he didn’t have a powerful background

either. Such a person was easier for him to control, which was the reason why he chose Zhang Xuan eventually as well.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

To be honest, with his current strength, if he were to utilize all of his means, he was confident that he would at least be on par with the rest of the team... But well, it was still best for him to maintain a low profile wherever possible.

Otherwise, as awe-inspiring he would be after using all of his trump cards, he would only end up with the others putting their guard against him and his means. That would only put him in an even more dangerous position in the future.

Besides, his strongest trump cards weren't really suited to be shown in public either, such as Vicious...

“Since we are going to be working together, allow me to give you a brief introduction of these three's abilities so that we can better collaborate with one another later on.” Luo Xuanqing said.

“Bi Hongyin specializes in demonic tunes and formations, you should have seen her prowess for yourself earlier, so I won't elaborate too much about that. Yuan Xiao boasts superior defenses, such that it would be no exaggeration to call him a human shield. As for Yun Lianhai... his fighting prowess is slightly beneath the rest of us, but he's from the Sage Clan, Yun Clan... And as you might know, the Yun Clan specializes in seeking out treasures, and they are known around the Master Teacher Continent as a clan of treasure hunters!”

“Treasure hunters?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback. “There's such an occupation in the world?”

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“Indeed. The activation of their bloodline can grant them heightened sensitivity toward treasures, allowing them to perceive the presence of treasures even through obstacles such as formations!” Luo Xuanqing nodded with a hint of envy in his eyes.

“For this reason, despite being only a Tier-2 Sage Clan, the standing of the Yun Clan is not beneath that of the Shui Clan and the Mu Clan.”

Cultivators required a huge deal of resources in order to advance their cultivation, and there were countless treasures and ancient domains that had been hidden by old experts using all kinds of mystical means. Just the ability to perceive the presence of treasures through formations was already an ability that would leave countless brimming with envy.

“Is that considered a unique occupation?” Zhang Xuan asked in curiosity.

“Of course not! They are only able to seek out treasures through their bloodline, so it’s impossible for them to propagate such an ability to the masses.” Luo Xuanqing chuckled.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Kong shi had determined that in order for a certain heritage to be considered a unique occupation, it had to meet two requirements. Firstly, it needed to form a complete, individual system with a perfect heritage. Secondly, it had to be able to be available to the masses, such that most cultivators would be able to learn it.

Herbologists met the second requirement, in the sense that most cultivators were able to learn it, but there were simply too many different heritages in order to form a complete and

wholesome system. As for the Yun Clan, they probably had a complete heritage, but due to their capability being built on a bloodline, ordinary individuals were unable to learn it, so it could not be considered a unique occupation.

“It seems like there’s no way for me to learn it then...” Zhang Xuan shook his head regretfully.

What he lacked at the moment were cultivation resources. If he could gain the ability to perceive the presence of treasures, he would be able to easily gather the resources he required to advance his cultivation. However, since it was only limited to the bloodline of the Yun Clan, it seemed like there was no way for him to learn it.

As powerful as the Library of Heaven’s Path was, there was no way it could allow him to imitate the bloodline ability of others.

“If it was a unique occupation, there would surely be countless willing to die to learn it!” Luo Xuanqing nodded.

After a moment of chatter, Zhang Xuan gained a deeper understanding of the strengths of the group.

His future brother-in-law was the strongest of all with a cultivation of Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm pinnacle, followed by Bi Hongyin at Phantasmal Space realm advanced stage.

The one who boasted the strongest defensive prowess turned out to possess the weakest offensive power in the group, such that even subduing Yun Lianhai would be a trouble to him. But at the same time, due to his superior defensive prowess, even Luo Xuanqing would have trouble defeating him.

“Alright, let’s set off now!”

After gaining an understanding of each member’s strengths and weaknesses, they swiftly got onto the back of the Seven-colored Divine Crane. With a resounding chirp, the divine crane warped into a flash of seven colors and soared into the horizon.

There were no protective formations or structures on the Seven-colored Divine Crane, so there was nothing to guard

one against the unrelenting assault of the wind resulting from the swift movement of the divine crane. As Saint 7-dan experts, Luo Xuanqing and the others were unaffected by the wind, but they could not help but be surprised to see that Zhang Xuan was completely unfazed by it as well.

Even if the young man had made a massive breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, there should have been a huge gap between his fighting prowess and theirs. To be able to stand steadily before the raging winds despite his lacking cultivation, it was apparent that the young man's astounding talent did not just stop at formations.

“Given Brother Zhang's deep understanding of formations and decent strength, you must have achieved quite a result in the Mountain Gate examination, right?” the shorty, Bi Lianhai, asked with a rather unnerving grin.

The others also directed curious gazes over as well.

Most senior students who had reached their level of cultivation had already grown disinterested in the affairs of the freshmen, so very few of them paid heed to the entrance examinations. As a result, despite the huge commotion that Zhang Xuan had caused, they were completely unaware of it.

“I did just alright,” Zhang Xuan replied. “I'm ranked fiftieth, just enough for me to get into the Elite Division.”

“You are fiftieth?” Yun Lianhai was shocked. “Just who in the world is in your cohort? To think that we would have so many formidable freshmen this year!”

With the level of proficiency in formations the young man before him had, he should have been able to easily get into the top three. Why would he only be fiftieth?

That was a really dangerous position to be in! The slightest carelessness could have spelt the loss of his candidacy for the Elite Division!

“There are indeed quite a few talented students in their cohort.” Before Zhang Xuan could reply, Luo Xuanqing had already spoken up. “You should have heard of the Zhang

Clan's Zhang Yu before, right? He's in the same cohort as them!"

"Zhang Yu? You mean the lad who possesses Earth-tier bloodline? I have met him once, and he's indeed a formidable individual. In time to come, there's a good chance that he could reach a level on par with you!"

"Humph!" Luo Xuanqing harrumphed in displeasure upon hearing those words.

"There's no need for you to get so mad at that. Even though there have been many talented individuals among the Zhang Clan in recent years, none of them come close to comparing with the little princess of your Luo Clan!" Yun Lianhai chuckled softly.

Speaking of the little princess, a hint of admiration unwittingly crept into the depths of his eyes.

Clenching his fists tightly beneath his sleeves, Zhang Xuan asked with feigned nonchalance, "Brother Yun, is the little princess you speak of... the renowned figure who managed to cultivate the Dimension Silencer?"

"Indeed! I'm referring to Xuanqing's younger sister!"

Paying no heed to Luo Xuanqing's darkened complexion, Yun Lianhai began gossiping enthusiastically. "Speaking of which, Xuanqing, I heard that your younger sister has been betrothed to the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan since her birth. May I know if that young prodigy is really as talented as everyone makes him out to be?"

"Shut your mouth!" Luo Xuanqing bellowed as he glared at Yun Lianhai with narrowed eyes. "I warned you never to bring up this matter before me, or else don't blame me for getting nasty!"

The fatty, Yuan Xiao, shrugged nonchalantly at Luo Xuanqing's rage. "Regardless of whether we speak of the matter or not, that is a decision made by the elders of both clans. Your rage won't change anything."

As an offspring of the Yuan Clan, which was second only to the Three Great Sage Clans, he was well-informed of the

matter concerning the betrothal between the little princess of the Luo Clan and the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan. He knew that the overly-affectionate brother was afraid that his younger sister would be unhappy after marrying into the Zhang Clan, but as the offspring of one of the strongest Sage Clans, there were some responsibilities that they simply could not shirk off.

Such an important decision was bound to have received the mutual consensus of the elders of both clans. Not even the head of the Luo Clan had the power to reverse the decision at this point.

“I might not be able to change anything from my side, but I can at least try to pull some strings from the other end. If I ever get my hands on that fellow, I’ll definitely pummel him until he backs down from the engagement!” Luo Xuanqing gnashed his teeth furiously.

“Why do you have to make things difficult for yourself?” Yun Lianhai sighed deeply. “If that young prodigy of the Zhang Clan is really as great as the legends make him out to be, the purity of his bloodline will be a match for even that of your younger sister. Do you really think that you’ll be a match for him?”

“I...” Luo Xuanqing’s face flushed crimson.

As powerful as he was, he was well aware that he came nowhere close to matching his younger sister!

Even though his younger sister was more than a decade younger than him, her cultivation and fighting prowess had already reached a level far beyond his.

If that young prodigy of the Zhang Clan was really a genius of the same caliber as his younger sister, there was no way he would be a match for the other party.

At this point, the silent Bi Hongyin suddenly chirped, “Speaking of the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan, I happen to have overheard of some secrets surrounding him. Are you all interested in hearing them?”

“Secrets?”

Everyone quickly turned their gazes over, and even the cold-faced Luo Xuanqing pricked up his ears to listen in as well.

“Twenty years ago, my teacher was invited to the Zhang Clan as an honorary guest. One night in his accommodation, the head of the Zhang Clan suddenly knocked on her door, requesting her to follow him to save someone,” Bi Hongyin said with a contemplative look in her eyes, seemingly trying to recall the conversation she had with her teacher back then.

“The head of the Zhang Clan? Are you referring to the ‘Xingmeng Sword Saint’?” Yuan Xiao asked with a hint of respect in his voice.

“Indeed, that’s him!” Bi Hongyin nodded. “Back then, my teacher was extremely perplexed by his actions. As a demonic tunist, she wasn’t adept in treating and curing others, so it was bewildering to her why the head of the Zhang Clan would suddenly request her presence. However, as soon as she saw the patient, the answer was immediately apparent to her.

“The person who was ill was an infant. My teacher couldn’t tell whether the infant was poisoned or what, but his soul was in an extremely feeble state, about to dissipate at any moment. The Xingmeng Sword Saint wanted my teacher to play a demonic tune to stabilize his soul.”

The crowd nodded.

Demonic tunes could crumble a person’s mental fortitude and destroy their mind, but at the same time, it could also reinforce one’s soul and induce a significant rise in one’s cultivation.

It would be unwise to feed medicine to a weak infant, so in such a scenario, it was indeed much more suitable to engage the help of a demonic tunist than a physician.

“My teacher agreed to make a move, but the effects weren’t too pronounced. Nevertheless, the Xingmeng Sword Saint still compensated my teacher handsomely for her assistance. Following that, my teacher was escorted out of the residence, and she has no idea what happened to the infant afterward...”

Coming to a realization, Yuan Xiao could not help but ask, “Are you trying to say that the infant that your teacher treated

back then is likely... the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan?"

"Well, there's no way to tell for sure anymore, but considering how coincidental the timing was and the fact that the Xingmeng Sword Saint invited my teacher over personally... But thinking again, given how the young prodigy was assessed to possess unmatched purity in his bloodline even when he was still in his mother's womb, there should be no doubt that the Zhang Clan would devote all of its resources into protecting him. It's unthinkable that anyone would be able to breach the tight defenses of the Zhang Clan and harm him!" Bi Hongyin analyzed with a confused frown.

"My teacher didn't think too much into the matter then, but since that encounter then, it seems like no one has seen the young prodigy in public. Thus, she couldn't help but harbor some doubts about the matter."

If nothing was wrong with the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan, how could he have hidden from the sight of the world for twenty whole years?

Not to mention, to even opt against enrolling into the Sanctum of Sages?

There were indeed too many doubts shrouding the young prodigy that one could not help but think deeper into.

"If the person whom your teacher treated twenty years back was truly the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan, that would mean that someone severely injured him shortly after he was born. It's really hard to believe something like that to be true..." Yuan Xiao frowned.

As offspring of Sage Clans, they knew how protective their clans were toward offspring who possessed the purest of bloodlines. This was the first offspring in the several dozen millenniums' history of the Zhang Clan to possess a bloodline comparable to their founder, so how could they possibly allow anyone to harm him right after his birth?

Zhang Xuan could not help but ask, "Could it be the work of internal rivalry within the Zhang Clan?"

If the person who was severely ill back then was truly the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan, that would truly be for the best. Naturally, the worse state the young prodigy was in, the more unworthy he was of marrying Luo Ruoxin!

“Impossible! A Sage Clan like the Zhang Clan pays particular heed to its reputation and prestige. There’s no way internal strife or anything of that sort could happen in their midst!” The one who spoke up was Luo Xuanqing.

As a genius of the Luo Clan, he was deeply aware of how Sage Clans operated.

“But just because the Zhang Clan pays particular heed to its reputation and prestige doesn’t mean that it’s impossible for such a thing to happen. Who knows? There might just be an ambitious elder who would attempt to assassinate the young prodigy out of desire for the position of clan head!”

As a librarian in his previous life, Zhang Xuan had read plenty of books and stories. This was a common plot in most family strife.

Before Luo Xuanqing could speak, Yuan Xiao shook his head and replied, “You aren’t from a Sage Clan, so you aren’t aware of the rules that govern us... I can tell you very clearly right now that the situation you have proposed is impossible to happen!”

“Impossible to happen?” Zhang Xuan blinked in incomprehension.

Power could blind the eyes of others, and not even 9-star master teachers were infallible to that, let alone the elders of the Sage Clans. How could anyone guarantee that it was impossible for such a thing to happen?

There was bound to be a reason such a plotline became a cliché!

Seeing the look of confusion on Zhang Xuan’s face, Yuan Xiao shook his head once more. “You might not be able to comprehend it if I explain it from our perspective, so why don’t I phrase it this way instead?”

“You should know that there’s a sanctum head to our Sanctum of Sages, right?”

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“I do!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Not only was he aware of that there was a sanctum head to the Sanctum of Sages, he was also the only candidate in line for that position.

“There’s a set of unique selection criteria in order to decide one’s eligibility to become the sanctum head. Those who are unqualified will not be able to inherit the heritage of the Sanctum of Sages. You should have heard of this too, right?” Yuan Xiao asked.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

In order to become the head of the Sanctum of Sages, one must possess the Eye of Insight, be a master teacher, have an upright, humble, and low-profile personality, be of noble character, and possess dashing looks that were second to none and charisma that could capture the hearts of others. It was only after clearing all of that criteria that Sage Kui finally bestowed the Sanctum Head Token to him.

Without achieving those factors, there was no way he would have been a candidate for the position of sanctum head.

“Such is the same for the heads of Sage Clans! Only those whose bloodline has reached a certain level of purity are qualified to become the next head of the clan. One can’t just claim authority within the Sage Clan on the basis of strength alone. Take the current head of the Zhang Clan for example. In fact, the Xingmeng Sword Saint is only the stand-in clan head of the Zhang Clan at the moment. The real clan head is the young prodigy! In the past several millenniums, he’s the only one whose bloodline has reached the level of purity necessary to become the head of the Zhang Clan!” Yuan Xiao said.

“The same goes for the Luo Clan as well. Even though Brother Xuanqing possesses a pure bloodline as well, it’s still insufficient for him to inherit the position of the clan head. The real head of the Luo Clan is his younger sister. It’s just that his younger sister is still too young at the moment, so everything is still being managed by the elders for the time being.”

Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

The situation in the Sage Clans was indeed rather similar to his current circumstances.

Even though the Sanctum of Sages had a deputy sanctum head who was managing the affairs for the time being, once Zhang Xuan broke the seal on the Sanctum Head Token and became the real sanctum head, there would be no one who could steal his position from him.

This was the rule that Kong shi had set, and this was in accordance with the virtue of propriety that Kong shi had preached. No one would dare undermine Kong shi’s ideology, especially not in a place where his heritage was passed down.

Otherwise, the public would immediately turn against that person, and that person would be criticized and insulted for their immoral actions for many years to come.

“So, it’s impossible for any clan member of a Sage Clan to turn against the incumbent clan head in an attempt to wrestle power away from him. Not to mention, with the sheer purity of the bloodline that the young prodigy possesses, his maturity will only bring the Zhang Clan to greater heights in terms of power, bringing every single member greater honor and prestige. Just who would be so foolish as to foil their own future by harming the young prodigy?” Yuan Xiao explained.

“Ah...” Zhang Xuan scratched his head in embarrassment.

He really did not think that even the powerful Sage Clans would be restrained by so many conventions.

If everything that Yuan Xiao had said was true, it was indeed not too likely for anyone to have assaulted the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan.

“I heard this secret from my teacher many years ago, and to be honest, I can’t verify whether the details are exactly as I remembered them or not.” Bi Hongyin shook her head.

“Furthermore, for a clan as big as the Zhang Clan, there would at least be several thousand infants who are born in the same year, and we can’t discount the possibility that the infant my teacher encountered is a child of the Xingmeng Sword Saint’s friend.”

With over several dozen millenniums of history behind it, the Zhang Clan had already grown to become a massive empire by itself. The population of the entire clan was so numerous that it was impossible to count all of them, and the family structure of both the main family and the side family had grown incredibly complicated. Each year, the clan would usher in several thousand new members, so there was no way to ascertain for sure that the person whom Bi Hongyin’s teacher had treated was definitely the young prodigy.

Furthermore, it was a ridiculous notion to think that a peerless genius that the Zhang Clan had never seen before ever since the time of its founder would actually be left on the verge of death not too long after his birth!

“That’s true...” Everyone nodded.

“Alright, let’s not discuss the Zhang Clan anymore.” Knowing that it would be pointless to talk about this matter, especially since they had no way of verifying it anymore, Bi Hongyin turned her gaze to Luo Xuanqing and asked, “Brother Luo, I heard that the little princess left the Sanctum of Sages a while ago. Has she returned yet?”

Upon hearing those words, Zhang Xuan’s eyes immediately lit up, and he anxiously turned his gaze to Luo Xuanqing.

Her words eroded all grudge and anger Zhang Xuan had felt toward her, leaving nothing but gratitude instead.

“She has long returned,” Luo Xuanqing replied with a slight nod.

“She has returned? Wonderful! If there’s a chance, do bring me to meet her. Despite being fellow students of the Inner

Sanctum, I still haven't got a chance to meet her yet!" Bi Hongyin said excitedly.

Even though it had been two years since the little princess arrived in the Sanctum of Sages and she had left behind countless records as well, there actually were not too many people who had truly met her before.

There were only countless rumors of her floating around in the Sanctum of Sages, some praising her unparalleled beauty and others in awe of her talent.

"She has been in seclusion ever since her return, desperately cultivating non-stop as if she has offended someone powerful. Even I am unable to meet with her, let alone others!" Luo Xuanqing shook his head and sighed deeply.

"Desperately cultivating non-stop? But she's already so powerful..." Zhang Xuan exclaimed beneath his breath as he felt a sharp pain stabbing into his chest.

Back at the Qiu Wu Palace, the young lady had hesitated for a very long while before accepting his confession. Most likely, she had known then that it would be difficult for her to go against the engagement, and it was unlikely that there would be a happy ending for the both of them. Nevertheless, she still courageously took a leap of faith and accepted him.

But this acceptance came at a price. It would mean that she would have to defy the orders of the elders of her clan, and in order to do so, she had no choice but to desperately immerse herself in her cultivation in the hope that she could soon wield the strength to dictate her fate.

Otherwise, she could only be swept along by the pace of others.

Noticing the huge fluctuations in Zhang Xuan's emotions, Luo Xuanqing shot a narrowed glance over. "You seem to be very interested in my younger sister."

"I..."

For a moment there, Zhang Xuan thought of coming clean and telling him, Your younger sister has already agreed to become my girlfriend.

But at the last moment, he eventually abandoned the idea.

Putting aside whether Luo Xuanqing would be able to believe his words or not, even if the other party did, this matter would only turn in a catastrophe.

Just thinking about it, the fiancée of the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan had fallen in love with an unaffiliated cultivator with a humble background...

That was bound to cause a huge uproar, and if things went wrong, he might even be putting more on Luo Ruoxin's plate for her to deal with.

She was already cultivating hard for their future together, so naturally, he could not possibly allow a moment of recklessness to drag her down.

Just wait till I break the seal and become the real sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages... With such a position, no one will dare underestimate me anymore... Zhang Xuan took in a deep breath and suppressed his agitation.

What was more important for him at the moment was to cultivate humbly and strive to break the seal on the Sanctum Head Token as soon as possible.

He did not fear trouble, but it would be unforgivable if he caused more trouble for Luo Ruoxin in the midst of doing so.

Driving his state of mind, Zhang Xuan swiftly returned to a state of composure before replying with a smile, "The fame of the little princess has spread far and wide. I heard of her affairs back when I was still in the Qingyuan Empire, and to be honest, I have nothing but praise and admiration for her. That's why I can't help but be rather curious about her affairs!"

"Humph, that'd better be the case! If I learn that you harbor any kind of thoughts toward my younger sister, even though we are acquainted with one another, rest assured that I'll pummel you to the point that you won't even be able to recognize which way's up!" Luo Xuanqing harrumphed with a voice dripping with threat.

"Of course, of course..." Zhang Xuan nodded with a bitter smile.

To be threatened by his future brother-in-law... Just what was this!

At the same time, he felt incredibly glad that he had stopped himself from blabbering earlier, or else he could very well have been lying on the ground, bruised all over.

“Alright, let’s not talk about that anymore.” After chuckling softly, Yun Lianhai changed the topic. “Right, Zhang shi. In your cohort, other than Zhang Yu, there’s another student who possesses incredible talent despite not being from any Sage Clan. If I recall correctly, his name should be... Feng Ziyi! Do you know him?”

“Feng Ziyi? I know of him. He’s the person who was ranked in first place for the Mountain Gate examination this time around!” Zhang Xuan nodded. “According to what I know, he seems to be the direct disciple of one of the grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters.”

“Indeed. There is a total of three grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, and their whereabouts are usually a mystery. To be able to become one of their direct disciples, I must say that Feng Ziyi’s luck is really good. On top of that, the person who took him in is the person who is the strongest of the three grand elders... Yang shi!” Yun Lianhai remarked in envy.

“Yang shi?” That familiar name made Zhang Xuan instinctively turn his gaze toward Yun Lianhai.

“Indeed. Yang shi, Yang Xuan!” Yun Lianhai replied.

“Yang... Xuan?” Zhang Xuan’s body stiffened.

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All along, Zhang Xuan had been introducing himself as Yang Xuan's disciple. He did not think there would be really such a figure since it was a name that he had come up with, but to think that there would actually be such a huge coincidence!

To think that there would actually be a master teacher named Yang Xuan in the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters... and he was even one of the three grand elders!

Just how lucky did he have to be to meet with such a coincidence?

It was no wonder Luo Chengxin panicked upon meeting and hearing the name 'Yang Xuan'! It was not that he had impersonated Yang Xuan well—there was really such a person in real life! That was why the other party was horrified and panicked.

Throughout his journey, as long as he reported 'Yang Xuan's' name, the Master Teacher Pavilion would immediately suppress all news concerning him. Most likely, they had seen that it involved one of the three grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and decided that it would be best for them to keep out of the matter!

So that's the reason...

He had thought that his disguise was so good that he managed to fool everyone into thinking that he had a powerful backer and that was why no one dared to lay their hands on his Heaven's Path Divine Art and Heaven's Path techniques... But it turned out that there was really a Yang Xuan in the world!

Everything had only gone smoothly for him because he had borrowed the other party's reputation to bolster his authority!

How can there be such a huge coincidence in the world? Zhang Xuan could hardly accept this fact all of a sudden.

He knew that it was only on a whim that he came up with his 'Yang Xuan' persona, and it was simply too much of a

coincidence for the persona he had created to actually be a real person!

Could it be the Library of Heaven's Path? Zhang Xuan thought in alarm as he dived his consciousness into his mind.

He returned to the entrance of the Library of Heaven's Path and stared at the four words inscribed on the plaque above the massive gates. They emanated an aura of ancient history, reminiscent of an artifact that had lived through the eons, traversing from world to world. It was hard to describe the sensation that those words evoked, but the closest phrase that he could think of was the 'solemnity of age'.

Perhaps, this might be what they mean by the threads of destiny? There's a certain trajectory that the world gravitates toward under the will of the heavens. Even a decision made seemingly at a whim could have far greater implications than one can ever imagine, Zhang Xuan thought as his body tensed up.

He had no idea why he would feel like that, but his intuition was telling him that this matter was far more than a coincidence. Perhaps, the Library of Heaven's Path might have even influenced his subconscious mind to mouth out those two words.

He suddenly felt like the will of the heavens was omnipresent, and it was gradually guiding him along the road it wanted him to tread on.

The authority of the heavens is inviolable; the will of the heavens is absolute.

Zhang Xuan suddenly felt a shiver run through his body as a possibility came to his mind.

I might control the Library of Heaven's Path, but... what if the heavens want to destroy me one day? Will I be completely helpless then too?

"Zhang shi? Zhang shi? What's wrong?" Just as Zhang Xuan's thoughts were wandering, a voice suddenly sounded in his ear. Lifting his gaze, he saw Yun Lianhai looking at him with a worried expression.

Zhang Xuan quickly suppressed his apprehensions and fears and replied with a smile. “Ah, I’m fine!”

For someone of his state of mind, it was not too difficult for him to conceal his emotions from the eyes of others.

The Library of Heaven’s Path was his greatest secret, and he could not allow anyone to learn of its existence.

“I was just surprised to hear that Feng Ziyi would have such a background...” Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly.

“Indeed. I was almost as shocked as you when I first heard of the news.”

The grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters were deeply elusive figures, and each one of them was more secretive than the others.

Yun Lianhai nodded before leaning forward with a look of curiosity. “Right, Zhang shi. Someone as young and talented as you should also have a capable teacher, right? May I ask who your teacher is?”

The fact that the other party was not from the Zhang Clan and yet possess cultivation on par with the geniuses of the Zhang Clan was more than enough to tell that he had the backing of a strong teacher.

“This...” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched.

If it had been in the past, he would have unhesitatingly replied, ‘My teacher is Yang Xuan.’

However, with Yang Xuan’s real direct disciple, Feng Ziyi, being in the Sanctum of Sages, it would only be a matter of time before his lie was exposed if he said such words!

Noting Zhang Xuan’s silence, Yun Lianhai quickly waved his hand to shrug the matter off. “It’s fine if it’s inconvenient for you to answer my question. I know that there are some old hermits out there who dislike their students using their name to brag before others, so there’s no need to worry.”

He had only intended it to be a casual question. If the other party felt uncomfortable replying to that, he had no intention of pressing for a response.

After all, everyone had their own secrets, and it was not like they were close friends. It was understandable that the other party harbored some reservations about revealing his background to him.

Zhang Xuan clasped his fist. “Thank you for your understanding.”

“It’s nothing,” Yun Lianhai replied with a smile.

The group chatted for a while longer before dispersing to do their own things.

Zhang Xuan calmed down his unnerved heart before sitting on the ground to reinforce his newfound strength.

It was meaningless for the current him to think about matters that were too far ahead—it was not as if he could make a difference in this moment anyway. The best thing he could do at the moment was quickly raise his strength in preparation of what was to come.

Ultimately, there was nothing to rely on but cold, hard strength.

In silence, the group swiftly advanced toward their destination.

During this period of time, Zhang Xuan had tried to sound Yuan Xiao out for some news regarding Yuan Tao, but as Yuan Xiao had not returned back to the Yuan Clan over the past year, he did not know too much about the genius who had recently returned to their clan.

In response to that, Zhang Xuan could only sigh deeply in disappointment.

It was five days later that the Seven-colored Divine Crane finally arrived at a meandering mountain range, which extended as far as the eye could see.

After the past few days of hard work, Zhang Xuan had managed to fully reinforce his cultivation. He was not able to make any breakthroughs without the relevant cultivation technique manuals and spirit stones on hand, but having adapted to his power, his fighting prowess still grew a fair amount.

If Jian Qinsheng were to challenge him with his strength lowered to a hundredth once more, there was a very good chance that Zhang Xuan would be able to kill him before he could even react to his move.

“The Dongxu Gourd is hidden over there.” Luo Xuanqing gestured to the area beneath him as he instructed the Seven-colored Divine Crane to stop near a valley.

Turning their gazes downward, the crowd saw a long gorge that slithered through the vicinity like a gigantic anaconda. It was conspicuous from where they were currently situated, but had they been anywhere else, their sight would have definitely been impeded by the towering mountain cliffs all around, causing them to overlook this gorge.

A land that naturally harnesses wind and water, it's the type of terrain where spirit veins tend to form, Zhang Xuan noted internally.

With his knowledge as an 8-star pinnacle formation master, he could tell that the gorge beneath them was the ‘center line’ that connected the entire mountain range together, thus forming a natural deposit of spiritual energy.

But on second look, a frown emerged on his forehead. However, it seems like someone has altered the terrain in a manner that prevents it spirit mines from developing.”

Places where spiritual energy tended to gather, such as the gorge beneath them, would usually result in the development of spirit mines over time. Zhang Xuan could not tell for sure whether it was due to someone's intentional action or some sort of natural fault, but the earth veins beneath had been completely destroyed. While they could still gather the surrounding spiritual energy, it had already become physically impossible for spirit mines to form.

While Zhang Xuan was still analyzing the situation contemplatively, Luo Xuanqing said, “Let's head down!”

Following which, the divine crane began descending, and before long, the group was standing at the entrance to the valley.

“This place is called the ‘Valley of Earth Spirits’. Due to the rich spiritual energy harnessed within this area, there are many saint beasts who choose to reside in this area, and there’s no lack of Saint 8-dan experts among their ranks. As such, we can’t afford to fly straight in. Otherwise, if we catch the attention of any Saint 8-dan beasts, there’s a good chance that we’ll lose our lives here,” Luo Xuanqing explained grimly.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan was astonished.

The Seven-colored Divine Crane was already the strongest saint beast that he had seen so far, but to think that there would be plenty of beasts that were stronger than it within the valley.

The Master Teacher Continent was far larger than he had thought, and there were countless experts hidden all over the world. It would be foolish of him to gauge it by what he had seen so far.

But thinking again, if not for the powerful saint beasts guarding the valley, it would be impossible for the Dongxu Gourd to remain undiscovered for such a long period of time.

“Try your best to rein in your aura when we enter later on; make sure not to leave any traces behind. Otherwise, we could very well meet with trouble even before arriving at our destination,” Luo Xuanqing instructed solemnly.

He then moved on to instruct the divine crane to keep a lookout for them from afar and cover them should any unexpected situations happen before leading the way into the valley.

The remaining members of the group quickly followed suit.

Due to Zhang Xuan’s cultivation being the lowest of the group, he was positioned at the center so that they could protect him should any unexpected situation arise.

The gorge was unnervingly calm. Stepping in, all they could hear was the moaning of the wind flitting through the gorge.

The spiritual energy within the gorge was indeed considerably more concentrated than the rest of the mountain range, but due to the deficiencies in the terrain, it was impossible to

concentrate the spiritual energy at one point. Nevertheless, it was still a decent area to cultivate in.

Following closely behind Luo Xuanqing, Zhang Xuan warily assessed his surroundings with his Eye of Insight.

He could see surges of spiritual energy slowly flowing forward peacefully like a stream.

Is such an environment really sufficient to fuel the growth of the Dongxu Gourd?

The more Zhang Xuan studied his surroundings, the more perplexed he became.

He was not too sure what requirements the Dongxu Gourd needed to be in to mature well, but according to what Luo Xuanqing had said, it could only grow in the presence of a spirit vein. There was indeed a spirit vein flowing through the gorge, but the deficiency in the terrain had weakened it so much that he felt hesitant to call it a spirit vein anymore.

Perhaps noticing the doubtful look on Zhang Xuan's face, Luo Xuanqing sent a telepathic message over. "Actually, we are already in the midst of the formation that ancient expert set up."

"We are already in the midst of a formation?" Zhang Xuan was astonished.

Given that he had already mastered the 8-star Heaven's Path Formation Art, there was no way he could not have realized that they were standing in the midst of a formation... unless the formation had reached grade-9!

A grade-9 formation... Just how powerful was the ancient expert who had left behind the Dongxu Gourd?

"That's right. This formation serves to alter the flow of the spiritual energy in the surroundings, rendering it impossible for one to find the real spirit vein and locate the Dongxu Gourd. If not for this, the Dongxu Gourd would have long been harvested by someone else!" Luo Xuanqing explained. "It's also out of sheer luck that I managed to find this place..."

“Luck?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “It would have been hard to discover this with luck alone!”

Even he was unable to notice any anomaly in the surroundings with his Eye of Insight activated. The notion that one would discover the possible presence of a Dongxu Gourd in the area based on sheer luck itself was improbable.

“Well... to be honest with you, I heard of this matter from my younger sister. Reading is a huge hobby of hers, and she loves to put clues together to make deductions about the various places,” Luo Xuanqing remarked proudly. “Through a certain formation and a detailed map of the entire mountain range, she deduced that there’s a high chance that there is a grade-9 Hidden Formation located in this region, and I took note of it back then... After which, I came to examine this area carefully, and as expected, there was indeed something amiss about this gorge!”

Several dozen millenniums was a very long duration, even with the long lifespan of cultivators. If it was possible to find this location on sheer luck, someone would have found the Dongxu Gourd long ago.

It was only with the help of his ridiculously talented younger sister that he was able to zone in on this gorge.

“Your younger sister was able to deduce all of this with just a formation and a map in hand?” Zhang Xuan was shocked.

As expected of his girlfriend!

Her eye of discernment and analytical prowess were indeed nowhere weaker than his.

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before sending another telepathic message. “Right! Brother Luo, I have something that I am really curious about that I would like to ask you!”

“Feel free to speak,” Luo Xuanqing said with a slight nod of his head.

“I was wondering, given how powerful the Luo Clan is, is there really a need for the little princess, the head of the Luo Clan, to be betrothed to the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

This was something that had been plaguing his mind over the past few days.

The purity of one's bloodline determined one's standing in the Sage Clans. Since Luo Ruoxin was the head of the Luo Clan, was there really a need to go to the point of forcing her to marry the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan?

Was that not equivalent to entrusting their entire clan to the hands of the Zhang Clan?

Luo Xuanqing's face darkened upon hearing those words, and he uttered with a dangerous edge to his voice, "Who told you to ask such a question?"

In an instant, Zhang Xuan felt a surge of cold air pressing up toward him as overwhelming killing intent pressed down on him. Spirit veins are similar to ley lines, somewhat similar to 'underground rivers' where spiritual energy tends to gather. Whereas spirit mines are places where spiritual energy crystallize to form spirit stones, presumably requiring the presence of certain conditions such as high temperature and high pressure, similar to how most other ores are formed.

1347 Zhang Xuan, the Formation Master

This killing intent was so powerful that it felt palpable, permeating through his skin and into his soul, causing his body to stiffen uncontrollably.

With eyes narrowed in alarm, Zhang Xuan's mind swiftly whirred into action.

This was not the first time he had asked about Luo Ruoxin's affairs, but back then, Luo Xuanqing had not shown such an agitated response to his question.

Could there really be some kind of secret involved?

As if oblivious to the threatening aura that Luo Xuanqing was emanating, Zhang Xuan replied with an innocent smile, "I just find the matter rather bewildering."

Luo Xuanqing stared at Zhang Xuan intently, as if trying to find any falsehood in his words. However, all he saw was an earnest smile from an honest man, so he eventually released the killing intent that he was emanating with a harrumph and coldly said, "This is a matter between our Luo Clan and the Zhang Clan. As an outsider, you shouldn't get too involved in this matter. Understood?"

"Yes, Brother Luo." Zhang Xuan nodded.

Luo Xuanqing might not have said anything at all, but his very response told Zhang Xuan a very important fact—the two clans were determined to go through with the betrothal by hook or by crook, and no one would be able to stop them!

It was apparent to all how doting and protective Luo Xuanqing was of his younger sister, as well as how much he abhorred the Zhang Clan, but even so, he was still unable to do anything to terminate the engagement between both clans. Most likely, there were other factors that made it critical that the engagement carried on as planned.

This is really a huge dilemma! Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in distress.

His previous thought was that as long as he could become the sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages, he would be in a position not beneath that of the head of the Zhang Clan. On top of that, given that Luo Ruoxin and he were in love, there should have been a good chance that he would be able to gain the approval of the Luo Clan.

However, it seemed like there was a need to reassess the current situation now.

Despite being the head of the Luo Clan and possessing extraordinary strength, she was still unable to struggle free from the engagement she had with the Zhang Clan. He would really have to look into this matter when he got back.

Wuwuwu!

While Zhang Xuan was still deep in thought, a sound similar to the buzzing of a group of mosquitoes suddenly echoed through the air.

Bi Hongyin narrowed her eyes and exclaimed with a hushed voice, “Crimson-tail Wasps!”

Shortly after Bi Hongyin’s exclamation, an entire legion of wasps, each roughly around the size of a longan, suddenly pressed in their direction in the form of an ominous, black cloud.

“Crimson-tail Wasps?” Zhang Xuan’s heart skipped a beat after hearing those words.

This saint beast was detailed in some of the beast tamer books that he had read. The Crimson-tail Wasp was small, and its strength was not too frightening, typically being only at Saint 3-dan to Saint 4-dan. However, what was frightening about it was the potent poison it carried on its sting.

In a group, even a Saint 7-dan expert could easily be poisoned to death in a moment of carelessness.

What was worse was that they tended to hide within mountain forests in legions. In a sense, they were even more frightening

than Saint 8-dan beasts.

The killing intent that Luo Xuanqing released earlier has alarmed them! Zhang Xuan swiftly realized what was going on.

They had concealed themselves really well ever since entering the mountain valley, keeping their auras tightly reined in within their bodies. Under normal circumstances, they should have been able to bypass the detection of most saint beasts, and yet, a legion of Crimsontail Wasps was suddenly heading their way.

Most likely, the Crimsontail Wasps had felt threatened by the earlier burst of killing intent and decided to seek out and kill the source of the threat.

Looking at the fearsome cloud of wasps heading in their direction, Yun Lianhai's face suddenly turned ghastly pale. "What should we do?"

It was a rather unnatural reaction for an expert of his caliber. It seemed like he had an innate fear toward lifeforms that carried poison in them.

"We'll cause too much of a commotion if we engage the Crimsontail Wasps in a battle, and that would likely draw in even more powerful foes. More importantly, there are simply too many Crimsontail Wasps. Putting aside the question of whether we'll be able to eliminate all of them or not, Crimsontail Wasps have a group defensive mechanism that prompts it to release poison clouds upon their death. Once the poison clouds build up to a certain concentration, we'll be doomed as well." Bi Hongyin swiftly analyzed the situation for the group.

The Crimsontail Wasps were the very enemies that they feared encountering in the valley. The Crimsontail Wasps were currently standing in their way from advancing deeper into the valley, but killing them was not an option, and there was no way they would be able to circumvent the entire legion safely. It was truly a helpless situation they were in.

“There’s no choice, let’s just retreat out of the valley and find a way to get rid of them outside,” Luo Xuanqing instructed decisively.

As a member of the Luo Clan’s main family, as well as a future leader of the Luo Clan, Luo Xuanqing definitely was not as rash and hot-headed as he appeared on the surface. In times of adversity, he would weigh his options rationally and make the most logical choice on the spot.

“Very well!” Knowing that this was the best course of action they could take, the group immediately began retreating.

After fleeing barely several hundred meters, with a shake of his head, Zhang Xuan remarked, “It doesn’t seem like we’ll be able to make it in time...”

Following which, another legion of Crimsontail Wasps suddenly appeared right in front of them with a resounding buzzing noise that left one with goosebumps.

As Saint 3-dan to 4-dan beasts, there was no doubt that the Crimsontail Wasps possessed intelligence. It was not easy for a meal to walk onto their plate, so they had made preparations beforehand to corner their prey.

“There’s no other choice.” Knowing that a fight was inevitable, Luo Xuanqing roared, “Prepare for battle!

“Zhang shi, I’ll be counting on you to set up an Aura Isolation Barrier to prevent the shockwaves or sounds from the battle from leaking into the surroundings.

“Bi Hongyin, use your demonic tunes to hinder their communication so that they won’t be able to arrange themselves in formations and collaborate with one another.

“Yun Lianhai, use your secret art to determine the whereabouts of the Wasp King.

“Yuan Xiao, your body boasts the highest defensive capability and immunity to poison, so I’ll need you to follow me later on to strike down the Wasp King.

“Once the Wasp King is killed, the remaining Crimsontail Wasps would fall into confusion. We can make use of the

opportunity to escape!”

The crowd nodded grimly. “Yes!”

Hearing how concise and rational Luo Xuanqing’s commands were, each of them aimed right at the flaws of the enemies, Zhang Xuan could not help but nod in approval.

Were it to be anyone else in his position, they would have already lost their nerve. However, not only was Luo Xuanqing able to remain perfectly calm, he was even able to instantaneously capitalize on everyone’s strengths to craft the ideal plan to cope with the danger they were facing. The geniuses groomed by the Sanctum of Sages were indeed on a whole new level, reacting completely differently from the others in times of danger.

After seeing that everyone had received his commands, Luo Xuanqing bellowed, “Move!”

At the same time, he lifted his hand and closed his palm. As if falling under his control, the surrounding space suddenly turned incredibly viscous, and even the slightest of movements would be met with the greatest of resistance.

“Zhang shi, I’ll fend off the wasps for the time being, but I won’t be able to last too long like that, so I need you to set up the formation as soon as possible!”

“I understand, just that...” A hint of embarrassment suddenly surfaced on Zhang Xuan’s previously solemn face, and he looked at the group around him awkwardly. “Do any of you have grade-8 formation flags?”

He had cleared the 8-star formation master examination just one day ago, and he had not had time to purchase any grade-8 formation flags yet... if he could afford some in the first place, that was.

“You don’t even have any formation flags?” Bi Hongyin face twitched upon hearing those words.

The expert formation master whom Luo Xuanqing had specially invited into their group actually had no formation flags at all!

The other members of the group could not help but feel a little light-headed. Their journey had barely started, but everything was already looking so grim.

“Here, take mine!” Exhaling deeply in frustration, Bi Hongyin flicked her wrist and threw roughly five to six hundred formation flags over to Zhang Xuan.

As one who specialized in formations, it was a given that she would bring large quantities of formation flags wherever she went in case of emergencies. Of course, considering that she was a genius from the Demonic Tunist Guild, there was no questioning their quality too.

“Thank you.” Zhang Xuan swiftly grabbed all of those flags as he drove his zhenqi.

Sou sou sou!

The next moment, the flags flew out in all direction.

“You...” Seeing how Zhang Xuan tossed all of the flags out without even giving them a second look, Bi Hongyin’s face flushed scarlet in fury. “I only have that many flags! If you throw all of them out at once and fail to form a formation, we’ll have no choice but to force our way through using brute...”

But before she could finish her sentence, a huge congregation of mist suddenly settled into the surroundings. A formation had been successfully formed and activated.

Grade-8 Aura Isolation Formation, typically used to prevent any noise, shockwaves, or any sort of intangible disturbances from traveling in and out of the formation.

“T-this... He’s already done?” Bi Hongyin gulped in awe, but that hardly helped alleviate the hoarseness in her throat.

Not only was she in such a state, even Yun Lianhai and Yuan Xiao were completely dumbstruck as well.

Even though Luo Xuanqing had showered plenty of praise upon Zhang Xuan about how swift he was in setting up formations, the sight before them was still too inconceivable. It was simply beyond the limits of their imagination!

To complete a grade-8 formation within less than a breath...
Could 9-star formation masters even set up a grade-8
formation that quickly?

After all, setting up a formation was a very complex business. It involved analyzing the surrounding geographical terrain, environment, strength of the opponent, diffusion of power, and many other factors. Yet, to finish it in the blink of an eye without even assessing any of those conditions... or was his mind capable of processing all of that complex information in an instant?

Recalling that they were still in the midst of a battle, Bi Hongyin swiftly shook herself out of her shock and whipped out her zither, preparing to play an offensive demonic tune. However, she suddenly realized something then, and she widened her eyes in astonishment. “Wait a moment... this formation doesn’t seem to have just concealed our presence—it seems to harness the effects of a Beguilement Formation as well. Look, those Crimsontail Wasps are clearly in a disorientated state, traveling aimlessly around the area.”

To her shock, she realized that the formation did not just isolate their presence from the rest of the world. It seemed to be trapping all of the Crimsontail Wasps within it as well, not allowing even a single one of them to escape.

This was extremely significant to their current situation. If even a single Crimsontail Wasp got away, they could possibly draw the powerful saint beasts in the valley over to save their comrades.

“Oh. You gave me quite a few flags there. There were still some remaining after I finished the Aura Isolation Formation, so I compounded a Beguilement Formation while I was at it,” Zhang Xuan replied with a cheery smile.

“You compounded a Beguilement Formation while you were at it?”

Everyone’s cheeks convulsed wildly after hearing how casually Zhang Xuan spoke of the matter.

Within a short span of less than a breath... that fellow actually set up two formations!

And as if that was not enough... the both of them were compounded upon one another!

Overlapping two formations on top of one another was a task that was many times more complicated than just setting up just a single formation. Many more variables and factors had to be taken into account when making the calculations. Even expert formation masters would have to spend several months working with multiple compasses in hand, and yet, that fellow was actually able to achieve it on a whim.

Bi Hongyin felt a searing pain on her cheeks, as if someone had just dealt a tight slap to her face.

She was considered a genius formation master as well, but compared to the other party, she felt like she was not anything at all.

It was almost as if she was a complete amateur standing before a professional.

Yun Lianhai also quickly shook himself out of his shocked state before asking, "With this Beguilement Formation, those Crimsontail Wasps shouldn't be able to get away. With that, we shouldn't have to fight them anymore, right?"

"This..."

The others were dazed for a moment before hurriedly nodding in agreement.

Indeed! Their goal was not to kill these Crimsontail Wasps but to bypass them so that they would not hinder the group from finding the Dongxu Gourd! Since they were already trapped by the Beguilement Formation, there was no reason for them to fight anymore.

They could just walk away, and the disoriented and trapped Crimsontail Wasps would not be able to stop them.

"That won't do." Luo Xuanqing shook his head and said, "A formation that is set up on a whim won't have sufficient spiritual energy to sustain it for too long. Soon, it will run out

of energy and deactivate. We might be able to get away from them now, but if we encounter them once more in the depths of the valley, we'll be in a far more dangerous position!"

Formations required a constant input of spiritual energy in order to remain active. This was similar to how a carriage required a horse to drive it. Once the horse ran out of strength, the carriage would not remain moving for long.

The Beguilement Formation might have been able to last for quite a while if it was only trapping one or two Crimsontail Wasps, but there was an entire legion of them in here! Under their furious thrashing, the Beguilement Formation would only deplete its spiritual energy faster than ever. By Luo Xuanqing's estimate, it should be collapsing very soon.

Rather than be placed into an even more dangerous situation later on, it would be much wiser for them to get rid of the threat then and there, while they still had the upper hand.

"Run out of energy? Brother Luo, that won't be a problem. I also noticed that problem while I was setting up the formation earlier, so I compounded a Spirit Gathering Formation on top of that. With the Spirit Gathering Formation drawing in the surrounding spiritual energy to fuel the other formations, I think it should have no trouble running for several hundred years!" Zhang Xuan quickly clarified.

"You even compounded a Spirit Gathering Formation on top of that?"

The others staggered upon hearing those words.

They quickly turned their gazes over to assess the formation, and indeed, it was as sturdy and stable as it could get. It seemed like there was an endless source of spiritual energy fueling its power depletion.

"This..."

The crowd felt as if their minds had just blown up.

A triple compounded formation... and finished in a breath at that. Brother, are you high?

It took a long while before the deeply stifled Luo Xuanqing was able to find his words once more. “Since that’s the case, it should be safe for us to leave then...”

He had prepared so many contingency plans, but in the end, he did not get a chance to use any of them at all. Just by throwing out a pile of flags, the young man had already resolved the crisis they were facing. This left him with a crushing feeling of defeat.

“Leave? Isn’t it a huge waste to leave behind so many formation flags?” Zhang Xuan blinked in confusion.

These formation flags were of top-notch quality, and every single one of them was worth a bomb! It would be too wasteful to toss away such a huge fortune here!

“What other choice do we have? These Crimsontail Wasps produce poison clouds upon their death. Even if we manage to slaughter every last one of them, we’ll also suffer heavy damage,” Luo Xuanqing said with a frown.

“Heavy damage? Why would that be the case? There were still some spare formation flags after setting up those three formations, so I decided to add in a Slaughter Formation. It will activate automatically once the formation gathers sufficient spiritual energy. All we have to do is wait here,” Zhang Xuan replied with the same cheery smile.

1348 I Am a Physician

There were no words that could describe the shock that the other members of the group were feeling.

In fact, they might even have started to feel numb to it already.

There was an exponential rise in the difficulty for each additional formation overlapped on a compounded formation.

Even the most talented of 8-star formation masters that they knew of would require a minimum of four months to set up the most basic grade-8 double compounded formation and sixteen months for the most basic triple compounded formation. As for a quadruple compounded formation... Without at least two decades of work, there was no way one could succeed!

Yet, with just a shake of his hand, the young man before them managed to set up four of them in less than a breath...

His comprehension of formations could not just be defined with the word 'formidable' anymore. It was already beyond their imagination, reaching the realms of 'terrifying'!

Bi Hongyin could not help but ask, "Zhang shi, did you really just clear your 8-star formation master examination just a few days ago?"

"I did. I took it together with Brother Luo, and it was really quite troublesome..." Recalling the examination he had that day, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

"Troublesome..." In this instant, Luo Xuanqing was seriously contemplating whether he should ever speak to the young man again.

From looking through the formation blueprint to activating the formation, it took you only five breaths... and you freaking call that troublesome?

If anyone was troubled by that examination, it should be me!

Even until now, my 8-star formation master emblem hasn't arrived.

“The Slaughter Formation is about to execute!” Zhang Xuan suddenly interjected.

While they were chatting, the Slaughter Formation that he had set up seemed to have absorbed sufficient spiritual energy, and with a brilliant burst of light, it began to whirl into action.

The next moment, countless bursts of sword qi shot forth.

All the others could see was innumerable cold glints flashing before all of the Crimsontail Hornets collapsed to the ground, severed into two.

“How powerful...”

Witnessing the might of the Slaughter Formation, the others felt shivers running down their spine.

Even though it was only a grade-8 primary Slaughter Formation, it was complemented by a Beguilement Formation and Spirit Gathering Formation, which raised its prowess to an unbelievable extent. Even for them, they would require a great deal of effort before they could break out of the formation.

“Something is wrong...” Luo Xuanqing suddenly noticed something. “Considering the powerful might of the Slaughter Formation, why are the Crimsontail Wasps floating stationary in the air, allowing the sword qi to slice right through them? Even if their sense of direction has been confounded by the Beguilement Formation, their innate sensitivity to danger should still prompt them to dodge the sword qi!”

“You’re right!”

“What’s going on?”

Luo Xuanqing’s words had jolted everyone into realization as well.

As formidable as a grade-8 Slaughter Formation was, it should not have the power to kill Crimsontail Wasps so easily. Yet, the situation before them... the Crimsontail Wasps were floating around idly, as if they were completely oblivious to the assault of the Slaughter Formation!

This was a really mystifying situation.

“Oh. Regarding that, I had set up an Illusory Formation as well. These Crimsontail Wasps aren’t too powerful, and their minds aren’t too resilient. As such, they are particularly susceptible to Illusory Formations,” Zhang Xuan replied with a light chuckle.

“Again?” Luo Xuanqing’s cheeks twitched intensely, and unable to stand it anymore, he asked, “Just how many formations did you compound in here!”

He had only expected Zhang Xuan to set up a single formation to prevent sound and shockwaves of combat from leaking out. Yet, he actually ended up performing far beyond expectations, setting up five formations on top of one another!

Just how many more were in there that they did not know of?

“Well, didn’t you all say that the Crimsontail Wasps would release poison clouds upon their death? I implemented a Gathering Formation to channel the poison clouds together. Other than that, I also set up a Compression Formation. Considering how the poison of the Crimsontail Wasps could kill even a Saint 7-dan expert, if I can just extract some, I should be able to sell it for quite a hefty sum!”

Zhang Xuan continued calculating with his fingers. “Oh, there’s also a formation to search for the Wasp King. Since that fellow is the king, it’s bound to have many valuable parts to it. However, I still am not too sure how powerful the Wasp King is, so out of safety considerations, I set up a Confinement Formation so that I would at least be able to trap it should I fail to kill it. Other than that, there’s also a Visibility Formation for us to look through the mist, a Ventilation Formation to ensure that we receive fresh air so that it won’t feel too suffocating here. Oh, and not to forget, a Temperature Regulation Formation as well so that we can watch the show comfortably... I think that should be all.”

After saying those words, he turned back to the crowd and saw Luo Xuanqing and the others with their mouths wide open. They were all looking at him as if he was a monster.

It took a long while before they managed to recover from their shock, but even so, a stifling sensation still continued to

suffocate their chests.

Talking to that fellow felt almost as if they were stabbing a dagger into their own hearts.

Their current feelings could totally be described in five words—Screw this sh*t, I'm out.

“Brother Luo, I heard that the little princess is quite a proficient formation master as well.” Bi Hongyin turned to Luo Xuanqing and discreetly asked, “Is she able to set up formations this quickly, too?”

“S-she... She's unable to do it that quickly!” Luo Xuanqing replied while gulping. “But again, my younger sister didn't spend too much time studying each occupation either—she simply masters them too quickly. Well, perhaps except for pill forging I guess.”

His younger sister was not just a highly talented cultivator—she also grasped each of the occupations extremely quickly. What took others several decades to master, she could become proficient within just several months and reach the peak.

The only supporting occupation that she was slightly lacking in was pill forging.

This was just like how formations were what he was the worst at. He had to take the 8-star formation master examination three times before he managed to barely scrape by.

“I see...” Bi Hongyin nodded. A moment later, she turned to Zhang Xuan and asked out of curiosity, “Zhang shi, are you proficient in pill forging?”

“I'm afraid I can't really forge pills.” Zhang Xuan shook his head dejectedly.

He had a tight grasp over the various theories and knowledge concerning pill forging, but he lacked the skills to put this knowledge into practice. Otherwise, he would not have to engage the help of others each time.

Upon hearing that, the others heaved a sigh of relief.

Considering how monstrous he already was in the field of formations, he would really be inhuman if he was equally

formidable in the other supporting occupations.

At the very least, the fact that he could not forge pills showed that he was not infallible.

“Wait a moment, don’t you have the 7-star apothecary emblem?” Luo Xuanqing asked with a doubtful frown.

Back then, the fellow had even whipped it out to flaunt to him that he had received the emblem through special application. That was one memory that he would probably never forget.

“Ah, regarding that, I really am unable to forge pills. I only managed to be promoted through clearing the Pill Debate examination,” Zhang Xuan explained.

“Pill Debate...” Another bout of light-headedness assaulted Luo Xuanqing. At this point, he really wanted to bang his head on the wall.

There was no apothecary who did not know that Pill Debate was many times more difficult than the pill forging examination!

The clearance rate for the pill forging examination was at least several dozen in a thousand, but there might not even be a single apothecary out of a group of a hundred thousand who would be able to clear the Pill Debate examination!

A moment later, after sensing that the formation was not moving anymore, Zhang Xuan told the other members, “Alright, all of the Crimsontail Wasps are dead.”

The others did a swift sweep of their surroundings, too, and as expected, all of the Crimsontail Wasps had collapsed to the ground.

With a quick scanning of his formation, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in excitement. “I have managed to capture the Wasp King too. Let’s head over to take a look!”

After which, he hurriedly advanced forward.

Fearing that they would make a misstep and end up being attacked by the formation, the other members of the group followed tightly behind him. Not long later, they saw a

withered Crimsontail Wasp floating in the air, seemingly on the verge of death.

In terms of appearance and size, this wasp was actually not much different from the others, making it nigh impossible to differentiate it from the rest.

Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight to conduct a closer examination of the Wasp King.

While the other Crimsontail Wasps were at Saint 3-dan to 4-dan, the Wasp King wielded a cultivation of Saint 6-dan Grand Dominion realm pinnacle.

“The Wasp King’s poison is too strong; I think it would be best to just kill it so that needless trouble doesn’t arise from this,” Luo Xuanqing proposed.

Even ordinary Crimsontail Wasps could kill Saint 7-dan experts when sufficient poison built up. Given how this one was able to become the Wasp King, its poison was bound to be far more potent. Just to be safe, it would be best to kill it quickly.

After all, it would be a disaster if any single one of them was pricked.

“Yes, its poison is indeed rather potent!” Zhang Xuan nodded as he reached out to grab the Crimsontail Wasp between his forefinger and middle finger.

“Be careful!” Seeing that Zhang Xuan actually used his bare hands to grab the Wasp King, cold sweat immediately trickled down everyone’s back.

Weng!

At that moment, an unexpected change occurred. The seemingly debilitated Wasp King dived forward, and the venomous sting on its tail shot straight toward Zhang Xuan’s skin.

Puhe!

A small incision was made on Zhang Xuan’s forefinger, and the venom immediately flowed into his bloodstream.

The Wasp King had actually been feigning weakness all along! As soon as it saw that Zhang Xuan was going to grab it, it immediately leaped up to retaliate!

“That’s the Wasp King’s Lifebound Venomous Sting! Its known to be lethal to even Saint 8-dan cultivators. This is really bad. There’s no antidote in the world for it!”

Seeing how Zhang Xuan had ended up being stung in his moment of negligence, everyone’s face paled in fright.

The Crimsontail Wasp’s Lifebound Venomous Sting was a weapon that even 8-star pinnacle physicians were helpless before, and any cultivator of Saint 8-dan and beneath would die within moments after being stung.

Without a doubt, the countdown to the death of this genius formation master had already started ticking.

Padah!

While everyone was panicking, the Wasp King suddenly collapsed to the ground. It convulsed twice before breathing its last breath. Even at its death, its eyes were widened in indignation.

“The Wasp King... has been poisoned to death?”

Everyone leaped in shock.

It was apparent from the situation that not only did the Wasp King fail to poison Zhang Xuan, it even ended up being poisoned to death instead.

“This...” Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly, unsure of how he should explain the situation.

The Wasp King’s assault was so sudden that he did not even have the time to react before the sting was plunged into his finger. At the same time, the Heaven’s Path zhenqi flowing through his body also ended up entering the Wasp King’s body, and as a result of that... the Wasp King died.

“You are a poison master?”

Everyone turned to Zhang Xuan with shocked faces.

“I...” Zhang Xuan was at a loss as to what to say.

The Wasp King attempted to poison him, only to be poisoned to death instead. This situation had unfolded right before their eyes, so there was very little he could say to vindicate himself.

“If I said that it died on its own, would you believe me?”

Zhang Xuan asked hesitantly.

The others shook their heads.

“Alright, I’ll tell you the truth then.” Driving his state of mind, Zhang Xuan calmly explained, “Actually... I am a physician! Prior to entering the valley, I swallowed some antidotes. The Wasp King tried to kill me, but it ended up being afflicted by the poison of the antidote I consumed, thus resulting in its death.”

Poison masters were capable of poisoning others to death, and so could physicians.

It was just that the former specialized in the concocting of poison whereas the latter sought to create medicine. Nevertheless, both occupations still intersected at some points.

“Physician?”

“Antidote? Just what kind of antidote could possibly poison the Wasp King to death?”

The others frowned in disbelief.

“It’s this one.” Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out a pill.

“This one?”

The others took the pill and examined it closely. Before long, deep frowns were etched onto their foreheads.

No matter how they looked at it, it was only an ordinary antidote pill. Could such a thing really be able to poison even the Wasp King to death?

“If you don’t believe me, you can give it a try. There are many poisonous substances in the area, so you can just take a few breaths here and there to test the potency of the antidote.”

Zhang Xuan shrugged.

“Forget it... we’ll believe that you are a physician.”

The eyebrows of the others twitched upon hearing Zhang Xuan's words.

Who in the right mind would willingly ingest poison, even to test out the effects of an antidote pill?

In any case, every single one of them had their own secrets keep. There was no reason for them to pursue the matter to the very end.

“Alright, let's go then.” Seeing that the others had given up on interrogating him, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. With a wave of his hand, he swiftly retracted the formation flags in the surroundings, and after a moment of hesitation, he eventually decided to chuck the carcass of the Wasp King into his storage ring as well.

While the carcass of the Wasp King was not of much use to him, he could always use it to deal with others.

After retracting the formation flags, their surroundings returned to absolute silence. It seemed like their earlier battle did not draw the attention of other saint beasts.

The group heaved a sigh of relief.

Holding the antidote that Zhang Xuan had passed them tightly, Luo Xuanqing hesitated for a moment before carefully storing it in a jade bottle. After which, he hurriedly headed to the front of the group once more and began leading the way forward.

1349 Soulbinding Golden Bead

“These are your formation flags.” With a wave of his hand, Zhang Xuan passed the pile of formation flags back to Bi Hongyin.

“You can keep them for the time being. They are much better off with you than with me,” Bi Hongyin replied.

After witnessing the other party’s proficiency in formations, she knew that the formation flags would be put to much better use in the other party’s hands.

Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. “Thank you.”

These formation flags were indeed of much use to him.

If he could only kill a Half-Phantasmal Space expert with his current strength, with these formation flags in hand, as long as he could catch the enemy off-guard, even a Phantasmal Space realm intermediate stage expert could be cornered by him!

After their previous encounter with the Crimsontail Wasps, the group was far more careful than before.

They continued advancing deeper into the valley for four hours straight.

Within those four hours, they got into several small skirmishes with saint beasts, but thanks to Zhang Xuan’s formations and the superior fighting prowess of the group, it did not take them too much effort to resolve those situations.

At some point in time, Luo Xuanqing suddenly stopped behind a massive boulder and gestured to the area ahead of him. “The Dongxu Gourd is located in the cavern just ahead.”

Tracing the trajectory of the valley, the others soon saw an average-sized cavern appearing before their eyes. Due to the lush vines that grew along the cliff, the entrance was concealed to the point that only small slits could be seen. If

one did not pay close attention, one would have overlooked the presence of the cavern easily.

“This place... doesn’t seem to be any different from the other areas though,” Bi Hongyin said with a confused frown.

In her view, there was nothing unique about the cavern. There was no astoundingly powerful aura or concentration of spiritual energy. It felt no different from the other parts of the mountain range.

Would something as valuable as the Dongxu Gourd really be inside?

“That’s because there’s an Aura Isolation Formation around his cavern. Otherwise, someone else would have long harvested the Dongxu Gourd,” Luo Xuanqing said.

The others also nodded in agreement after hearing these words.

Indeed. If the cavern emanated a powerful aura or had a high concentration of spiritual energy, even the saint beasts would have charged in upon noticing it to dig out the treasure within.

“Let’s head in then. Why are we waiting out here?” Yun Lianhai urged excitedly.

As a qualified treasure hunter, his blood raced in exhilaration upon hearing that the treasure was right before them.

“We can’t head in right now. We have to wait till nighttime,” Luo Xuanqing informed the group through zhenqi telepathy.

“Nighttime? Why?” Yun Lianhai was baffled by Luo Xuanqing’s words.

The others also could not understand why Luo Xuanqing wanted to wait till nighttime before making a move. One must know that they were currently in the midst of a valley where Saint 8-dan beasts lurked. Every additional second there put them in greater danger.

“A Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast lives in the cavern,” Luo Xuanqing explained.

“Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast?”

Bi Hongyin and the others narrowed their eyes in astonishment.

Noting the changes in the expressions of those around him, Zhang Xuan could not help but ask, “Is it a really formidable saint beast?”

So far, his knowledge of beast taming had only reached 6-star. While he had read quite a variety of books and come to learn of some of the more formidable saint beasts, he still was not too well-versed with the rarer and more elusive saint beasts.

“The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast is a saint beast that possesses the bloodline of the Dragon Tribe. Just by reaching maturity, they would already achieve a strength on par with Saint 8-dan experts,” Yuan Xiao explained grimly.

“Saint 8-dan?” Zhang Xuan’s expression turned grave.

To be honest, he had never seen a saint beast of that tier before.

If he could just tame one of those, he would stand a much better chance in the struggle against the Zhang Clan for Luo Ruoxin.

“Indeed. Even with all of our strengths combined, we won’t be a match for that fellow, so it would be best for us to wait till nighttime so as to not draw its attention,” Luo Xuanqing said grimly.

Due to their innate talents and superior physical prowess, Saint 8-dan beasts tended to wield fighting prowess far stronger than Saint 8-dan cultivators. Even though they were offspring of powerful clans and organizations, possessing multiple means up their sleeves, they were still insufficient to deal with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

“Saint beasts of that tier should possess a keen awareness of their surroundings and be able to perceive even the slightest disturbance in their surroundings. Is there any difference between entering now and at nighttime?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Saint beasts would also unlock their Spiritual Perception at Saint 2-dan, allowing them to be impervious to the reduced visibility of nighttime. At Saint 8-dan, the Netherworld Azure

Dragon Beast could be considered one of the strongest saint beasts in the world, so what difference would day and night make to it?

“It’s because I have this artifact.” Luo Xuanqing flicked his wrist, and a jade container appeared in his palm. He pried it open lightly, and a ray of brilliant light flickered out.

Sitting at the center of the jade container was a golden bead. It was made of a material that Zhang Xuan could not recognize, but its radiance was amazing.

“What is it?” Bi Hongyin asked.

It seemed like Zhang Xuan was not the only one who did not recognize what the golden bead was.

“This is a Soulbinding Golden Bead that I had someone specially craft for me,” Luo Xuanqing replied.

“Soulbinding Golden Bead?”

“The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast possesses the Dragon Bloodline, and due to that, it’s particularly sensitive to golden, shiny objects. So, I specially had this artifact forged so as to capture its attention. Look at the formation marks inscribed on top of it. It’s carved in a way to induce drowsiness if one stares at it for an extended period of time,” Luo Xuanqing explained.

“However, in the day, sunlight would compromise the effectiveness of the Soulbinding Golden Bead, making it harder to draw the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast’s attention. So, it would be best to wait till nighttime.”

The crowd nodded in realization.

It was no secret that those of the Dragon Bloodline possessed a crazed fancy for objects that were particularly shiny or dazzling. As long as they used the Soulbinding Golden Bead well, it could indeed lead to exceptional results.

Once they lulled the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast to sleep, they would be able to bypass it safely as long as they proceeded carefully.

“Brother Luo, can I allow me to examine your Soulbinding Golden Bead?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Here you go,” Luo Xuanqing said as he tossed the golden bead over.

Catching it, Zhang Xuan began examining it closely.

He had to admit that it was an exquisite work. The person who had forged the bead must have been an 8-star celestial designer at the very minimum.

Flaws!

A book materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

“Soulbinding Golden Bead, forged by 8-star Celestial Designer Jiang Feifei...”

The book detailed the origin of the Soulbinding Golden Bead, its effects, and its flaws.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was studying the Soulbinding Golden Bead closely, Luo Xuanqing asked in curiosity, “Zhang shi, are you well-versed in the artifacts of celestial designers too?”

“I have read quite a few books regarding that, so I do know a thing or two about that field.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

He was still a 6-star celestial designer at the moment, not having taken the examination ever since leaving the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy.

6-star celestial designers could already be considered professionals in the field, but in comparison with the true experts in the Sanctum of Sages, his mastery and knowledge could only be considered minor at the very most.

“Oh? Since you are well-versed in celestial designer artifacts too, what do you think about my Soulbinding Golden Bead?” Luo Xuanqing asked in interest.

Since there was some time to waste before nighttime, he was curious to see how much this genius formation master knew about celestial designing.

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before speaking up.

“Judging from the exquisiteness of the work, I deduce that this artifact was forged by an 8-star celestial designer. However, as exquisite as the work is, there are still quite a number of flaws

in it, so I am a little apprehensive as to whether it will be sufficient to deal with a Saint 8-dan beast or not.”

He had to admit that the Soulbinding Golden Bead was well-designed, such that it could easily lull any Saint 7-dan beasts to sleep. However, if it was used against a Saint 8-dan beast... it probably would not be that simple.

“I spent a heavy price to get the genius celestial designer of the Inner Sanctum to forge it for me. There are no saint beasts possessing the Dragon Bloodline that could resist its allure and remain unfazed by the effects of the formation marks on it,” Luo Xuanqing declared confidently.

Out of safety consideration, he had even had the elders in his clan appraise the Soulbinding Golden Bead after it was forged, and the response he had received was that it was highly effective against Saint 8-dan beasts.

“The formation marks do harness the secrets of the soul, which makes it highly hypnotizing to humans. However, I can’t say for sure whether it’ll have the same effectiveness when used on a saint beast. After all, the soul of a beast is vastly different to the soul of a human. When you engaged the help of the genius celestial designer, did you tell the person that you were intending to use the artifact to deal with a Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“This...” Luo Xuanqing was taken aback by Zhang Xuan’s questioning.

As this involved the confidentiality of his mission to acquire the Dongxu Gourd, he had only told Jiang Feifei that he was intending to use the Soulbinding Golden Bead to deal with a Saint 8-dan expert, not specifying the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast in his request.

He had thought that as long as it could work on Saint 8-dan experts, it should not have any trouble with saint beasts too!

“In proportion to their physical mass, saint beasts tend to possess larger and stronger souls than humans. Nevertheless, as long as the Soulbinding Golden Bead is well-used, it’s not entirely impossible for it to lull the Netherworld Azure Dragon

Beast to sleep. However, it would probably require quite some time, so it might not be as convenient as you thought it to be,” Zhang Xuan said.

“As long as it succeeds in lulling the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast to sleep, the duration doesn’t matter!” Luo Xuanqing shook his head.

As long as he could knock out that massive fellow, what would an additional hour or two matter?

He had already made half a year of preparations for the Dongxu Gourd; another day or two would not make a difference to him.

Zhang Xuan was silent for a moment before replying.

“Considering that it’s a Saint 8-dan beast we are dealing with, every second will spell a greater degree of danger. What I’m trying to say here is that if you have any other alternative means, it would be best to use it instead. Counting solely on the Soulbinding Golden Bead won’t be a safe option.”

Standing before a Saint 8-dan beast was almost equivalent to being in the same room as a ticking time bomb. It would be one thing if they succeeded in lulling the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast to sleep, but what if they were to fail?

“Alternative means? Can you forge an even better Soulbinding Golden Bead?” Luo Xuanqing asked impatiently.

Zhang Xuan shook his head in response.

Due to the limited number of celestial designer books he had read, he was not too sure what he could do to resolve the flaws in the Soulbinding Golden Bead.

“Then, what’s the point of saying so much? I had to look through many books before I was able to discover this method to deal with saint beasts possessing the Dragon Bloodline. Alright, there’s no need to say anything more. Let’s just give it a try first. If it doesn’t work out, we’ll just have to resort to forceful measures. Even if we are unable to kill the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, as long as we can stall it for a few hours, we should still be able to harvest the Dongxu Gourd,” Luo Xuanqing said.

In any case, his goal was to obtain the Dongxu Gourd, not to kill the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. Even if they could not knock out the latter, as long they could find a way to stall it for some time, it was still possible for them to succeed in their mission.

“Alright then.” Having no better solution in mind either, Zhang Xuan could only go along with the current plan.

The group continued discussing for some time to sort out their plan to deal with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. Just as they were about to rest up to prepare themselves for the battle later in the night, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows suddenly shot up. “Someone is here.”

“Someone is here?”

The crowd frowned.

They were all Saint 7-dan experts, but even they did not perceive anyone’s presence. How would the young man know?

“I left some small formations while making my way here. As long as someone comes into their vicinity, they will activate and alert me,” Zhang Xuan explained.

His Spiritual Perception was far larger than that of ordinary cultivators, but of course, he could not possibly tell them that. So, he could only find another excuse.

“Who is it?” Luo Xuanqing asked.

“I don’t know either. They are currently making their way over here. They should be emerging from behind that boulder over there soon,” Zhang Xuan said as he pointed behind him.

Luo Xuanqing immediately turned around to stare at the boulder behind him, and right after, a couple of figures emerged from behind the boulder.

“It’s him?” Luo Xuanqing’s face immediately turned livid.

“Who are they?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Luo Xuanqing clenched his fists tightly and narrowed his eyes. “They’re from the Zhang Clan... Zhang Heng!”

1350 I'll Poison Him to Death

“Zhang Chun? Why is he here?” Yuan Xiao’s face immediately darkened.

Bi Hongyin and the others also frowned upon hearing that name.

“He is...?” Zhang Xuan asked in confusion.

Of the Zhang Clan members, he had only heard of Zhang Yu and the young prodigy. He had never heard of Zhang Chun before.

“Brother Luo and Zhang Chun are geniuses who entered the Sanctum of Sages in the same cohort. They have always competed with one another, and their relationship...” Yuan Xiao took a glance at Luo Xuanqing before whispering with a suppressed voice, “They are not too amiable!”

“Not too amiable?” Hearing those words, Bi Hongyin burst out laughing. “More like mortal enemies! No matter what they do, they just have to compare with and outdo the other. If Luo Xuanqing destroys a hall, that fellow would run off to destroy two. Just think of all the trouble they have caused throughout the years!”

“This...” She did not bother lowering her voice, so Luo Xuanqing heard her words loud and clear. His face immediately reddened in embarrassment. He wanted to retort, but he found that there was nothing he could say.

“Destroys a hall? You are saying that Brother Luo’s reputation of being a King of Destruction... is intentional?” Zhang Xuan was shocked.

“Of course not!” Luo Xuanqing harrumphed in displeasure. “It’s just that... I was too focused on winning and forgot to hold back a little...”

“Too focused on winning?”

“If Zhang Chun clears a trial in ten minutes, Luo Xuanqing would desperately do everything he could to clear the trial in nine minutes. Of course, there’s no way he would be able to control himself when he’s going all out!” Bi Hongyin uttered leisurely.

It was indeed hard to control one’s strength when one was attempting to break a record, so it was inevitable that mishaps would occur.

Looking back, Zhang Xuan found that even though he had caused a fair bit of destruction as well, he was at least in control of himself. He never caused trouble for the sake of it, and more often than not, they were all freak accidents resulting from unfortunate coincidences or misunderstandings.

In comparison to Luo Xuanqing, he felt like he was just a gentle lamb.

“If that’s the case, does this mean that Zhang Chun heard news about the Dongxu Gourd and came here to stick his nose into the matter as well?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

Given that Zhang Chun and Luo Xuanqing were rivals of one another, their cultivation was likely around the same level as one another. If Zhang Chun was really there to meddle in the matter, things could get really troublesome for them.

“Don’t worry, I have only told you about the matter concerning the Dongxu Gourd. There’s no way he could know about that. He’s here for something completely different,” Luo Xuanqing replied confidently.

“Oh?”

The others were slightly surprised by Luo Xuanqing’s words.

What other business would Zhang Chun have there other than the Dongxu Gourd? The Sanctum of Sages was at least several million li away, so he could not possibly have been there to sightsee, could he?

“Look at the group with him. Zhao Xun and Zhao Yi from the Beast Tamer Hall, Li Heng from the Celestial Designer Guild, and Yu Wen from the Physician Guild here—if I’m not

mistaken, he's here to tame a saint beast," Luo Xuanqing replied.

"Tame a saint beast?" Yun Lianhai pondered for a moment before widening his eyes in realization. "Now that you mention it, I do remember hearing something related to that. Not too long ago, Zhang Chun posted a beast taming mission, offering three Jade Spirit Essence for helpers to aid him in the taming of a saint beast that possesses the Dragon Bloodline. Could it be that the saint beast he is hoping to tame is the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast?"

"I also recall something like that!"

Everyone was taken aback by those words.

Even Zhang Xuan was slightly surprised.

A few days ago, Sun Qiang had told him that there was a beast tamer mission that offered generous rewards. He had intended to take it up, but he had eventually forgotten about the matter because he was in a rush to report for the Elite Division. Who would have thought that the mission was actually posted by Zhang Chun!

More importantly... to think that they would meet one another here!

"That seems to be the case!" Luo Xuanqing said as a sharp glint flashed across his eyes.

"That's way too much of a coincidence!"

"Indeed! Just as we were planning to deal with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, they suddenly arrived here to tame it. Brother Luo, could this actually be your doing?"

Everyone quickly turned their gazes toward Luo Xuanqing.

Considering how many saint beasts there were in the world, it was far too much of a coincidence for them to meet one another in somewhere as remote as this. It was hard to believe that Luo Xuanqing did not play a part in orchestrating this matter.

"Who else could it be?" Luo Xuanqing's lips crept up gleefully. "That fellow constantly keeps a tab on my

whereabouts. So, I knew that it was only a matter of time before he found out what I'm up to no matter how discreet I am. In order to prevent the secret of the Dongxu Gourd from getting out, I went around buying beast taming tools and had the Soulbinding Golden Bead forged so as to create an image that my goal is to tame the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. Who could have known that fool would really fall for my ploy?"

The crowd glanced at one another.

Such a thing was possible?

But thinking again, everything made sense.

There had always been bad blood between the both of them, so it was only natural that Zhang Chun would attempt to sabotage Luo Xuanqing's efforts after learning that the latter was intending to tame a Saint 8-dan beast.

"Smart!" Zhang Xuan remarked.

This was truly two birds in a stone. Not only did he manage to turn Zhang Chun's attention away from his real goal, he even managed to get the latter to clear away the danger for him!

Regardless of whether Zhang Chun would successfully tame the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast in the end or not, he would surely be a great aid to them by helping them distract the latter's attention, thus opening a gap for them to sneak past the latter.

As expected of an offspring of the Luo Clan, his future brother-in-law sure was skilled in scheming against others. Hidden beneath his reckless, brash exterior was a calculative, black-hearted soul!

After coming to realize what was happening, Yun Lianhai's eyes glowed in respect as he asked, "Since he's intending to tame the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, should we hide ourselves and wait for the two to engage one another first before heading in?"

He had been feeling a little apprehensive about how they would deal with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast should the Soulbinding Golden Bead fail to work its wonders. Since

Zhang Chun was willing to confront that beast in their place, they were more than willing to sit back and enjoy the show.

“That won’t do either.” Luo Xuanqing shook his head. “I have competed with Zhang Chun for many years, and as much as I hate to admit it, I can roughly fathom his train of thoughts. Most likely, he realized that I was on my way here, so he quickly chased over here as well. He will become suspicious if I am nowhere to be seen. Furthermore, if he chooses to explore the cavern further, there’s a good chance that he will notice the existence of the Dongxu Gourd as well.”

“What should we do then?” Yun Lianhai asked.

“Simple,” Luo Xuanqing said with a sharp glint in his eyes, “aren’t they intending to tame the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast? We’ll act as if we are hindering them while luring the saint beast over to them. Once they have their hands preoccupied with it, we will be able to do whatever we want!”

“Good idea!”

The others quickly gave their approval to that course of action.

Since they were putting on a show, they should go all the way.

Since you are here, don’t you think that you will be letting down the audience if you don’t make a move?

So, why don’t I set the stage for you?

It will be two birds with one stone like that. Not only will your vanity and pride be satisfied, I can also reap the fruits of victory at the same time.

It was apparent that Luo Xuanqing had an idea in mind from how confident he was, so Zhang Xuan asked, “Brother Luo, do you have a plan in mind?”

“Of course!” Luo Xuanqing nodded. “My plan is for us to split into two teams. One team will aim to hinder their advancement whereas the other will engage the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and act as if they are trying to tame it. Once Zhang Chun realizes that I am a step ahead of him, he will surely panic and hurriedly make a move... and the rest will be simple!”

The others nodded upon hearing his plan.

Considering that Zhang Chun ‘knew’ that Luo Xuanqing was there to tame the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, he would surely realize that something was off if Luo Xuanqing allowed him to engage it without hindering him. Since that was the case, it would be best for them to struggle a bit and enrage the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast while they were at it before passing the mess over to Zhang Chun.

With Zhang Chun’s strength and means, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast would not be able to kill him. However, it would be able to give him a hell of a time and stall him, thus preventing him from stopping them from obtaining the Dongxu Gourd.

“Since everyone agrees that there’s no problem with this, I’ll start making arrangements.”

Seeing that the crowd approved of his idea, Luo Xuanqing first turned to Zhang Xuan and Yuan Xiao and said, “The two of you will proceed ahead to engage the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. Yuan Xiao, you possess stronger defense so you should take the front line whereas Zhang shi will support you from the back with his formations.

“If that bastard Zhang Chun hasn’t appeared, we still might have some trouble dealing with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, but since he just has to stick a leg into my business, there’s no need for us to hold back against him anymore. Try to make the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast as angry as you can later on, we’ll find a way to make Zhang Chun take over. Got it?”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan and Yuan Xiao nodded.

The instruction was actually rather simple. He and Yuan Xiao were in charge of pulling the aggro of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast until Zhang Chun’s group appeared.

“As for Hongyin and Lianhai, follow me. We’ll be engaging Zhang Chun and his group. Remember, we must try our best to stop them from advancing!” Luo Xuanqing said.

After saying those words, he began making his way over Zhang Chun’s group, and Bi Hongyin and Yun Lianhai

followed behind.

“We should make a move, too.” Seeing that the others had left, Yuan Xiao walked past the boulder and carefully entered the cavern.

“Zhang shi, you should set up your formation over here first. It doesn’t have to be too strong, just sufficient to trap the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast for a short while. Meanwhile, I’ll try to draw it out of the cavern and into your formation. That should suffice for our part,” Yuan Xiao told Zhang Xuan telepathically as he proceeded ahead.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

That was indeed the simplest way to go around doing that. Their goal was not to tame or kill but to anger that huge fellow.

“After trapping the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, we’ll have to rush over to assist Luo Xuanqing and the others. Zhang Chun isn’t a weak opponent; even in the Inner Sanctum, he is considered one of the strongest experts! The battle between the both of them is spectacular even by the standards of the Inner Sanctum. I’m sure you’ll be able to learn a lot from spectating their battle,” Yuan Xiao said with a hint of excitement in his voice.

Cultivators loved to watch duels between true experts as they were a good opportunity for them to reflect on themselves and learn new things.

Luo Xuanqing and Zhang Chun were figures who stood at the very top of the Inner Sanctum, so naturally, a fight between them was worth watching.

“Alright.” Zhang Xuan nodded indifferently.

To be honest, he was not too interested in the fight between the two of them. As his cultivation had not reached Saint 7-dan yet, there were bound to be many details that he would not really be able to make sense of.

Besides, he would definitely have to invoke the Library of Heaven’s Path in the midst of watching the battle, and he was

certain that he would feel so disgusted that he might even puke once he saw all of those ridiculous flaws in their techniques.

“What? You aren’t interested?” Seeing through Zhang Xuan’s thoughts, Yuan Xiao chuckled. “Are you thinking that a fight between the both of them will just be another ordinary spar? You are greatly mistaken then. Whenever the two of them cross blows, each and every single move they make is sharp and deadly!”

“Sharp and deadly?” Zhang Xuan was astounded. “Just what kind of grudge do they have to go that far?”

As fellow students, surely there could not be a reason for such animosity.

“You are really unaware of the matter? Well, I guess that’s to be expected, considering how you have only arrived at the Sanctum of Sages a couple of days ago,” Yuan Xiao said with a nod.

He swiftly scanned his surroundings, and after confirming that there was no one around, he said with a hushed voice, “According to rumors within the Sanctum of Sages, it’s said that Zhang Chun intends to court the little princess of the Luo Clan... Wait, where are you going?”

Before Yuan Xiao could finish his story, the young man behind him suddenly turned around and left.

“I’m going to poison that Zhang Chun to death!” Zhang Xuan uttered coldly.

“...” Yuan Xiao.

1351 The Shameless Zhang Clan

Despite being filled with indignation, Zhang Xuan eventually decided against going. With a deep frown, he asked in a doubtful voice, “Isn’t the little princes of the Luo Clan already engaged to the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan? As an offspring of the Zhang Clan, does that Zhang Chun really intend to vie for his clan head’s bride?”

“He definitely wouldn’t dare do something as brazen as vying for his clan head’s bride, just that... the young prodigy has been missing for a very long time, and there are... some rumors going around.”

Yuan Xiao warily scanned his surroundings once more, and after confirming again and again that there was no one eavesdropping on their conversation, he secretly sent a telepathic message to Zhang Xuan. “It’s said that even if the young prodigy doesn’t appear by the third month of the next year, the Zhang Clan will still send an outstanding offspring with pure bloodline of around the same age to complete the marriage ceremony... and Zhang Chun happens to be in the list of candidates! In the end, what’s important is for the marriage to go through, by hook or by crook.”

“There’s actually such a matter?” Zhang Xuan’s face reddened in fury, and he nearly exploded on the spot.

Even though he had been displeased about Luo Ruoxin’s engagement with the young prodigy in the past, he had still been able to reluctantly tolerate it given that both parties were top-notch geniuses from their respective clans.

But the young prodigy was simply showing blatant disrespect for Luo Ruoxin over here. Not only did he disappear irresponsibly into thin air, he even wanted to find others to replace him in the engagement!

That was far too much!

It was not like Luo Ruoxin was a commodity for sale! Did the Zhang Clan think that just anyone would be worthy of her?

How could the number one Sage Clan of the Master Teacher Continent be so shameless?

If I have a chance to visit the Zhang Clan, I swear that I'll raise up a storm there or else my surname isn't Zhang! Zhang Xuan vowed in his heart with gritted teeth.

“But again, that is only hearsay. I can't guarantee its authenticity, so do take it with a pinch of salt,” Yuan Xiao explained with a frown upon noticing that something was wrong with Zhang Xuan's complexion.

“The little princess of the Luo Clan isn't just supremely talented; she's also renowned for her unparalleled beauty as well. There's no one who wouldn't be charmed by her after catching a glimpse of her allure. Zhang Chun had the honor of meeting her once, so I guess it wouldn't be too surprising for him to be infatuated with her. And as you know, Luo Xuanqing is an overly-affectionate brother. How could he remain calm upon seeing that Zhang Chun is lusting over his younger sister? Due to that, whenever they start fighting, there's no one who can pull them apart.”

Recalling the previous few times that the two of them battled with one another, Yuan Xiao could not help but cower a little.

Even though he boasted nigh invincible defense, he knew that he would be no match for Luo Xuanqing once the latter activated his bloodline ability.

The reason that human-shaped tornado had left so many managerial elders with a splitting headache was not just due to his aptitude in causing destruction. More importantly, it was due to the overwhelming fighting prowess he commanded.

Suppressing the fury in his heart, Zhang Xuan waved his hand. “Got it. I'll set up a formation here, so you just have to lure the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast over, and I'll immediately activate the formation to have it trapped temporarily.”

That fellow dared lust over his girlfriend? He would have to see just how formidable that fellow was! If that fellow was not

up to standards, he would have him poisoned to death!

It happened that he had just acquired the poison essence of the Crimsontail Wasp King, so he could poison even a Saint 8-dan expert to death. Considering how Zhang Chun was roughly around the same cultivation realm as Luo Xuanqing, he should not be able to withstand the effects of the poison either.

“Alright.” Yuan Xiao nodded. With a grim look, he lowered his body and began rolling toward the cavern as a round ball.

Upon reaching the entrance of the cavern, he had to struggle a bit before he could squeeze his way in.

After seeing that Yuan Xiao had entered the cavern, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath before waving his hand, and several hundred formation flags immediately floated into the air.

Due to the limitations of his cultivation, he was only able to set up grade-8 primary formations. Anything beyond that would be putting far too great a strain on his strength.

But the problem was that it was impossible to trap a Saint 8-dan beast without a grade-8 intermediate or even advanced formation!

My cultivation is still far too lacking...

If one were to just look at Zhang Xuan’s current understanding of formations, setting up a grade-8 pinnacle would not pose a problem to him. In fact, even grade-9 primary formations would not be too much trouble. However, his lacking cultivation was a problem that no amount of understanding of formations could resolve.

In order to set up a grade-8 intermediate formation, he would require the ability to construct Phantasm Space. No amount of zhenqi could substitute that.

Zhang Xuan’s mind quickly spun into action, and in just the blink of an eye, a formation surfaced in his thoughts. It’s not viable for me to set up a formation to confine the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast in for long, but if it’s just trapping it for an hour or so... I should be able to do it with the Ptilopsis Confinement Formation!

Even though the Ptilopsis Confinement Formation was just a grade-8 primary formation, it had the remarkable ability to seal all of one's senses, and this included Spiritual Perception. Those who stepped into its area of effect would find themselves plunged into complete darkness, leaving a feeling of helplessness and despair arising from the bottom of their hearts.

It was said that the elder who designed the formation had once captured 108 owl-type saint beasts that were adept in navigating through the darkness. By the time his formation was constructed, every single one of them was trapped within it, unable to escape.

It was not particularly effective against human cultivators, who could navigate their way through using a compass or the sort, but it was definitely a powerful weapon to deal with saint beasts. Of course, he would be being too optimistic to think that it could trap a Saint 8-dan beast for too long, but an hour should not be too difficult.

I'll choose this one then! Zhang Xuan swiftly imagined a few scenarios to gauge the viability of this course of action, and he eventually came to the conclusion that the Ptilopsis Confinement Formation was the most suitable one of the formations that he could construct.

Thus, he flicked his fingers.

Sou sou sou sou!

Formation flags darted across the air, falling into place in the surroundings. They dived forcefully into the various gaps in the nearby boulders or soil, disappearing from sight.

It did not matter whether formation flags were located above ground or underground. As long as they accurately harnessed the flow of spiritual energy from the surroundings, there would not be too much difference in the prowess of the formation.

After this was done, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief and began waiting patiently for Yuan Xiao to return with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

But after waiting for roughly ten minutes or so, Yuan Xiao still did not appear. A frown emerged on Zhang Xuan's forehead.

All Yuan Xiao has to do is pull the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast over, should it really take such a long time?

I should head over to take a look!

Deciding to check out the situation, Zhang Xuan began making his way over to the cavern. However, before he could even walk through the entrance, an overpowering shockwave suddenly burst forth from within.

His eyes narrowed in alarm, and he hurriedly executed the Unbounded Voyager and retreated from the scene.

Peng!

However, Zhang Xuan's reaction was still a little too slow. The powerful shockwave struck him forcefully from the back.

Pu!

A sweet sensation gripped his throat, and he was sent flying into the nearby cliff, smashing out a huge hole in it.

From the impact of the collision, Zhang Xuan felt his entire body being strained to its limits. The muscles throughout his body were mostly torn, and it felt as if his bones were on the verge of being shattered into innumerable pieces. A pain that was so excruciating that it seemed to stab right into his soul assaulted him.

It was just a brief instant, but Zhang Xuan had already sustained severe injuries. If not for his recent breakthroughs—especially the enhancement of his physical resilience through the cultivation of the Heaven's Path Golden Body, which made his body as strong as a half-Saint high-tier artifact—there was a good chance that he might have died on the spot.

“Who is it?” Zhang Xuan roared as he swiftly drove his Heaven's Path zhenqi to heal his injuries.

At the same time, he pushed his palm against the wall to turn himself around, wanting to see who the culprit was. However, before he managed to do so, he suddenly felt goosebumps

rising all over his body once more. Another shockwave wielding crushing might was pressing down on him.

It seemed like the other party was intent on forcing him into a corner.

“Damn it!” Knowing that he could very well lose his life if this shockwave were to strike him, Zhang Xuan hurriedly activated his Dominion.

With his cultivation reaching Leaving Aperture pinnacle, his Dominion no longer spanned over a radius of one meter. Instead, just like a normal Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator, it covered a radius of five meters around him.

On top of that, the power of his Dominion was extremely compact, making it far stronger than a Grand Dominion realm primary stage cultivator’s.

The emergence of his Dominion managed the incoming attack significantly, but before Zhang Xuan could heave a sigh of relief, cracks suddenly began creeping across his Dominion.

Kacha! Kacha!

They swiftly consumed his entire Dominion before eventually shattering it with a resounding explosion.

Pu!

Another spurt of fresh blood spilled forth from Zhang Xuan’s mouth as the incoming shockwave pushed him further into the cliff, threatening to reduce him into a lump of meat paste.

The other party is simply too strong! At the very least, they must be a Saint 7-dan pinnacle expert! Zhang Xuan thought as a chilling sensation arose in his heart.

After the two consecutive blows they had traded, it was apparent that Zhang Xuan was in an absolutely disadvantageous position. In fact, he did not even manage to catch who his opponent was throughout the entire encounter.

This deeply reminded him of the plight that he had been in when he first met Luo Chengxin.

In face of the devastating strength that the other party wielded, Zhang Xuan found a hint of helplessness arising in his heart.

“Just who in the world are you?” Knowing that there was no time to be wasted, Zhang Xuan flicked his hand as he roared, “Puppets, block him!”

Hu la!

The hundred or so puppets he had in his storage ring immediately emerged in the area.

These were the puppets that he had managed to tame from the Vicious of the Northern Marshlands.

While most of them were only at the Leaving Aperture realm, their combined strength was still a sight to behold!

Boom!

As soon as the puppets appeared, they immediately positioned themselves in a formation before launching an assault on the fellow who had attacked him from behind.

After becoming an 8-star formation master, Zhang Xuan had made some rearrangements to the collaborative formation of the puppets, thus bringing their prowess to a whole new level. Sonic booms erupted here and there under their powerful might.

Back then, while the puppets were using the offensive formations of the Combat Master Hall, they had been able to defeat the Saint 6-dan primary stage Pavilion Master Yue with ease. With their current enhanced ability, even dealing with Saint 7-dan opponents was within their means!

Sou sou sou sou!

What was frightening about them was how relentlessly their attacks fell, reminiscent of the endless waves of an ocean. However, before they could reach their full strength, another powerful force burst forth once more.

It was a strength that carried the imposing air reminiscent of an avalanche. It felt as if, no matter how one struggled, there was just no way to escape from it.

Peng peng peng peng!

Amid a series of sonic booms, the collaborative formation of the puppet was forcefully torn apart. Following which, the puppets were sent flying one after another. With astounding force, they were slammed into the cliff face around the area, incapacitating them for good.

Sou!

While the puppets were sent flying one after another, a slight buzz suddenly sounded in the air. At some point in time, a sword had appeared right above them. It warped into a streak of light blue as it charged forth with incredible prowess.

It was apparent that this sword had been charging up for a very long time. Its emergence swiftly caused a massive vortex to gather in the area, and it took just an instant for it to appear behind the assailant.

Lingxu Sword!

Zhang Xuan knew from the start that the puppets would be no match for the assailant, so he had hidden the Lingxu Sword among them to ready the true killing strike!

Even though he had no time to execute the Sea Severing Sword, the Lingxu Sword was still a blade that was no weaker than Saint 7-dan experts. Its assault clearly displayed its superior might, and it charged forth with strength that threatened to slice even the world apart!

Weng!

Zhang Xuan thought that this assault would send the assailant into a panic, but then he suddenly heard a slight buzz.

Following which, the structure of the surrounding space warped, and it felt as if the Lingxu Sword had fallen into a folded space, resulting in a complete termination in their telepathic link.

Saint 8-dan... Zhang Xuan thought as his body stiffened in horror.

1352 I'll Accept Your Challenge!

At Saint 8-dan Dimension Sundering realm, cultivators would gain the ability of Dimension Sundering, allowing them to temporarily isolate spaces from the world and establish dominance over it. This ability would usually be manifested in their Dominion, and it would completely sever any telepathy links, making it impossible for other cultivators to even communicate remotely with their weapons within their sphere of control. At the same time, any attacks that were launched into the Dominion would simply run out of control, like a boulder being thrown into the sea.

To draw a comparison, if one could be said to have gained a primary control over the space around them at Grand Dominion realm and Phantasm Space realm, at Dimension Sundering realm, their strength would have already fully matured, granting them the strength to create their own personal space!

As long as they willed it, they could steal a space from the world and establish their dominance over it!

The strike launched by the Lingxu Sword was indeed powerful, such that even Phantasm Space realm experts would falter before its might. However, against Dimension Sundering realm experts, its strength was truly lacking!

Weng weng weng weng!

The Lingxu Sword trembled non-stop in horror, but no matter how it struggled, it was unable to advance or retreat in the slightest. It was as if it was a nail hammered into a wall.

“Vicious, prepare to make a move too!”

Zhang Xuan was astonished by the situation as well, but he knew that panic would be of no use to him. He immediately entered the Heart of Tranquil Water state and established

communication with Vicious within the Book of Heaven's Path.

Unless pushed to it, he would never tap into the power of Vicious, his clone, and his poison master abilities. Once those means were used, he would have no choice but to kill his opponent. There was no second alternative to that!

He had thought that he could cope with just his puppet and the Lingxu Sword, but clearly, the assailant who had attacked him far exceeded what he could cope with those means. Thus, he could only resort to his trump card.

Knowing the perilous situation Zhang Xuan was in, Vicious swiftly replied, "Yes, Master!"

At Zhang Xuan's will, a finger suddenly materialized behind the assailant.

Hu la!

With a seemingly light tap, a mysterious power shot forth from the finger, and the Dominion began shattering as if a mirror.

Even though Vicious' cultivation was only at Saint 7-dan pinnacle, and even subduing Luo Xuanqing would pose some difficulty to him, he was still a figure who had once stood at the very top of the Master Teacher Continent, so his eye of discernment and experience were still spectacular. On top of that, the assailant had his hands full dealing with Zhang Xuan's puppets and suppressing the rampaging Lingxu Sword.

As a result, the assailant actually ended up being caught off guard by Vicious' attack.

Kacha! Kacha!

As the Dominion swiftly approached its limits, Zhang Xuan also felt the overwhelming force that was pressing down on him abruptly releasing, so he quickly pushed himself out of the cliff and turned around to face the assailant.

What he was met with a thirty-meter-long dragon-shaped beast floating nearby. Its body was grayish in color, and its eyes were dyed crimson. It emanated an aura of imposing authority.

"Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast?"

Gedeng!

Zhang Xuan's heart skipped a beat.

He had thought that Luo Xuanqing and the others might have lost, and Zhang Chun and the others had proceeded over to make a move against them. However, who would have thought that the person who was making a move on him was actually the saint beast they were supposed to be dealing with!

If it was standing here... didn't that mean that there was nothing in the cavern at all?

It was no wonder Yuan Xiao still was not out yet! Most likely, he was still busy looking through the empty cavern, unaware of the fact that the massive beast that he was looking for was not inside at all!

A Saint 8-dan beast...

It was only natural that his means did not work on the other party. Against an expert of such a caliber, there was indeed very little that he could do.

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast harrumphed coldly. "Brazen fools, do you really think that you are able to tame me?"

Its voice was not too loud, but it seemed to echo endlessly within one's mind, reminiscent of the reverberations of a bell.

Zhang Xuan heart shuddered upon hearing those words, and he quickly spoke up to refute that claim. "How could someone of my strength possibly dream of taming you? I think there must be a misunderstanding somewhere."

Why would that huge fellow suddenly speak such words?

Saint beasts were proud, lofty individuals, which made taming them an incredibly difficult act. This was also the reason 8-star beast tamers were particularly respected in the Master Teacher Continent.

Under normal circumstances, in order to tame a saint beast, one would need to prepare all kinds of gifts and find a way to befriend it. Only after one had reached a certain level of intimacy with the saint beast would they extend an invitation

to it. As such, even for 8-star pinnacle beast tamers, it would take several years before they were able to tame a Saint 8-dan beast!

And yet, to be told such words when they had not even done anything yet... Just how did the situation come this?

Saint beasts hated the notion of submitting to others. It was one thing if the other party was stronger than them and helpless to retaliate, but for a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator to even dream of taming it, it was no wonder the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was enraged!

“Hah! What other business can you possibly have here if that’s not the case? Someone has already told me that your group plans on enslaving me to make me a tool to further your ambitions!” the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast roared furiously, and its voice caused the entire ground to tremble.

“Someone has told you that?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback for a moment before his eyes widened in realization. “It must be that Zhang Chun...”

It was just a moment ago that he had thought that Zhang Chun was foolish to have been played by Luo Xuanqing, but from the looks of it now, it seemed like they were the ones who were being played.

He had specially paid a visit to the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast beforehand to inform it that someone wanted to tame it. Firstly, he would be able to obtain the other party’s goodwill through that, and secondly, he would be able to turn the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast against Luo Xuanqing, making it impossible for the latter to tame it!

As expected of someone from the Zhang Clan, he was indeed as shameless as he could get!

Just that...

If you want to pick a bone with someone, look for Luo Xuanqing! Why are you assaulting me instead?

Feeling deeply stifled, Zhang Xuan hurriedly waved his hands and said, “I’m not the one who’s planning on taming you, but

the person who told you that is. His name is Zhang Chun, and he's intentionally saying those words to use you against..."

"Humph! None of you humans are trustworthy!"

Boom!

Before Zhang Xuan could finish his words, the tail of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast suddenly swept in his direction with devastating force.

Hu la!

At the same time, he felt as if the surrounding space had turned into a vortex, firmly holding him in place, preventing him from fleeing.

Knowing that he only had himself to rely on in this critical juncture, Zhang Xuan desperately willed, Flaws!

Wu!

A book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path, and touching it, a huge influx of information flowed into his mind.

"The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast cultivates independently, so its comprehension of the Dimension Sundering realm isn't too deep..." After reading the content in the book, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Despite being a Saint 8-dan beast and wielding frightening power, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast had a fatal flaw.

Due to cultivating independently, its comprehension and ways of manipulating spatial laws were rather narrow, thus limiting the prowess of its offense.

"Vicious!" Upon realizing that, Zhang Xuan swiftly sent the information that he had received over.

With a slight sway, Vicious' finger seemed to have flitted through space. The next instant, it suddenly appeared at the flank of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, and it pierced forward once more.

Kacha!

The Dominion of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, which harnessed the power of Dimension Sundering, dissipated once more.

“Hmm?” Not expected a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator to possess the means to undo its attacks twice, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast widened its eyes in confusion.

Even though it had cultivated independently, that did not mean that it had never encountered human cultivators before. It knew that it was abnormal for a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator to possess the strength to undo its attack, and it didn't expect the latter to be able to see right through its flaws either.

Hu!

Along with the dissipation of the power, Zhang Xuan felt the pressure weighing on him disappearing once more. Knowing that it would be dangerous for him to remain in the vicinity of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, he decisively flitted a hundred meters away through the Unbounded Voyager.

There was no way he would be able to defeat the massive fellow with his current strength, so he could only stall for time and wait until Luo Xuanqing and the others returned.

While the strength of those fellows was beneath the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, they should still be able to defeat the latter if they were to coordinate closely with one another and exploit its flaws.

“There is really something weird about the finger you have here!” Harrumphing coldly, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast swept its tail over once more.

Having its power of Dimension Sundering foiled twice, it was curious to see whether the other party had managed to do so through sheer luck or real strength.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan knew that there was no way he would be able to withstand the other party's attack, so he had Vicious aim his attack at one of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast's flaws once more.

Kacha!

Just like before, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast's Dominion was shattered.

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast widened its eyes in disbelief. "You are able to see through the flaws in my Dominion?"

If it had been an expert of the same caliber who managed to achieve this feat, it would not have thought much of the matter. However, a mere Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle nobody actually succeeded in crushing its Dominion thrice. This had really piqued its intrigue.

Seeing that the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast had actually stopped its attack, a thought swiftly arose in Zhang Xuan's head, and he spoke with an imposing tone. "Of course! I am a master teacher. Not only am I able to see through the flaws in your Dominion, I can correct them as well. As long as I offer you guidance on your cultivation, your strength will be far greater than it is now!"

He did not plan for this at the start, but if he could convince the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast into becoming his tamed beast now, the remaining problems would be resolved. Not only so, he would also be able to make use of the strength of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast to teach Zhang Chun a lesson!

He had long thought that that fellow was an eyesore.

"You, offer me guidance?" The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast pondered for a moment before calmly replying. "If you can defeat me with your own strength, I'll acknowledge you as my teacher!"

"Defeat you with my own strength?"

"This finger over here has a completely different aura from yours, so it should be a type of artifact, right? As for these puppets and sword, they are just external tools. If you can defeat me without relying on any of these, putting aside becoming my teacher, I'll even acknowledge you as my master!" the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast said.

Despite being only at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, the young man before it was actually able to see through the flaws in its Dominion easily. If it could receive the young man's guidance, it might just really be able to achieve heights far beyond its imagination.

Of course, the young man would have to display strength worthy of becoming its teacher and master first. Otherwise, as a proud saint beast who had the Dragon Bloodline flowing through its veins, how could it bow down to others easily?

“Defeat you?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

To be honest, even his clone was no match for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, let alone him!

Beyond Primordial Spirit realm, every difference in cultivation realm would result in a vast difference in fighting prowess. This was especially apparent between the Phantasm Space realm and the Dimension Sundering realm—they were truly worlds apart from one another!

Even while utilizing all of his means, he was only just able to fend off the other party through exploiting the other party's flaws that he had found using the Library of Heaven's Path. If he fought the other party bare-handed, victory was clearly impossible!

Wait a moment... I can use that on it, right?

A thought suddenly came to Zhang Xuan's mind, and he swiftly raised his head to look at the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. “Since your name is Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, that should mean that you possess rather concentrated Dragon Bloodline, right?”

If the other party really possessed the Dragon Bloodline, perhaps, he might just be able to win by his skills.

“Indeed,” the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast said proudly.

“Since that's the case...” A confident smile crept onto Zhang Xuan's lips as he gazed down on the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast with the disposition of an expert from above. “If you can withstand this call of mine, I'll consider it as my loss.”

“Call?” The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was slightly taken aback by the abrupt change in disposition of the young man.

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Then, he took in a deep breath and spoke.

“Moo!”

“Mou!”

Two sounds echoed resoundingly through the air.

Following which, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast’s body suddenly began convulsing.

Padah!

It collapsed to the ground with white foam spilling out from the edges of its mouths.

1353 Give Him a Taste of the Floor!

The Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragon that he had learned back then allowed him to subdue any beast possessing the Dragon's Bloodline as long as it had not reached the purity of a Pureblooded Dragon.

At the start, he had been a little apprehensive at using the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragon as he thought that it would not be too effective against a Saint 8-dan beast. On top of that, it also expended a great deal of his zhenqi, which would only result in his weakening. Yet, contrary to his expectations, it worked much better than he predicted!

If only he had known that it would be like that, he would have just done so right from the start and spared himself some pain.

“You are... a Pureblooded Dragon?”

While Zhang Xuan was still in thought, the convulsing Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast stared at him with deep terror reflected in its eyes.

The hierarchy within the Dragon Tribe was extremely strict. Even though it was known as the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, it was still far from matching up to a real member of the Dragon Tribe.

“I am not a Pureblooded Dragon, but as long as you submit to me, I can help you refine your bloodline and make you stronger.” Zhang Xuan walked over with a domineering attitude, as if saying that he would use the Eight Notes of Heavenly Dragon against it once more if it dared say no.

It did not take too long for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast to lower its head. “I'll submit...”

The fact that the other party was able to voice out the Eight Notes of the Heavenly Dragon meant that the young man was definitely associated with the Pureblooded Dragon, even if he

was not one of them. Submitting to such a figure was not only not a shame, it could be said to be a blessing even!

He would have to be a fool not to grasp such an opportunity.

Seeing that the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast had agreed to it, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

He had come here only to help Luo Xuanqing find the Dongxu Gourd, but who would have thought that he would end up taking in a Saint 8-dan beast instead? However, this was good too. Among the student populace, there were not many who would be able to defeat the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. With such a tamed beast, he would be able to stand unmatched in the Sanctum of Sages.

...

Within the cavern, Yuan Xiao was still slowly advancing.

Knowing that there was a Saint 8-dan beast in the cavern, he dared not use his Spiritual Perception too far nor fly for fear of alarming it. He could only cautiously advance, relying solely on his sense of sight to detect danger. However, the cavern was simply too big. Despite advancing for ten whole minutes, he still had not reached the end of it.

Just where in the world is the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast?

After walking a little longer and finding himself back at the entrance of the cavern, Yuan Xiao frowned.

He had already walked an entire lap around the cavern, so why was the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast still nowhere to be seen? Could it be that it was out hunting and was not back yet?

It would be wonderful if that was the case. He would be able to set up a formation at the entrance of the cavern and activate it as soon as the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast returned to trap it. This way, he would not have to endanger himself by luring it.

If that's the case, I should hurry out to inform Luo Xuanqing and the others of this matter...

With this thought in mind, he extended his Spiritual Perception throughout the cavern and swiftly swept across it.

As expected, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was really nowhere to be seen. Thus, he quickly made his way out of the cavern.

The fact that the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was not around meant that they could not rely on it to deal with Zhang Chun and the others anymore, so there was no point for them to wait anymore.

Squeezing out of the entrance of the cavern once more, he was just about to beckon Zhang Xuan over when he suddenly saw a massive figure lying on the ground, licking the young man's feet subserviently.

"This..." Yuan Xiao widened his eyes in horror, unable to believe what he was seeing. "Zhang shi, w-what is going on?"

How in the world did something like this happen?

It's one thing for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, which he had been searching all around the cavern for, to be outside, but for it to be lying before Zhang Xuan, licking his feet subserviently...

Am I dreaming?

"Oh. The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast happened to meet with me while it was on its way back to the cavern, and I happened to be free, so I decided to tame it," Zhang Xuan replied.

"You decided to tame it..." Yuan Xiao nearly fainted on the spot.

That's a Saint 8-dan beast! It's a figure that we would have to flee as far as possible from when encountering it, and yet, to just 'decide to tame it'... Furthermore, how long has it been?

Ten minutes? Twenty minutes?

In any case, it hasn't even been thirty minutes yet!

Suppressing the frenzy that was threatening to turn him hysterical, he looked at Zhang Xuan deeply for a long while

before asking, “You... are skilled at beast taming too?”

“I did clear the beast tamer examination,” Zhang Xuan replied with a nod.

At that very moment, Yuan Xiao felt so stifled that he was not even sure what he should say anymore.

It was one thing for that fellow to possess inconceivable prowess in terms of formations, but for him to wield such formidable capabilities as an apothecary, physician, and now a beast tamer as well. Really, was there anything in the world he was incapable of?

With the danger of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast resolved, there was no longer any point in them remaining there. So, Zhang Xuan waved his hands and said, “Let’s head over to check up on Brother Luo and the others!”

Considering how there could be formations within the cavern and that Yuan Xiao dared not use his Spiritual Perception for fear of alarming the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, it was understandable that he was oblivious to the commotion outside.

However, Luo Xuanqing and the others should not have been too far either, so they should have heard the commotion. Yet, for none of them to attempt to come over to check things out, it could only mean that either things were really tight on their side or something had already happened to them.

Thus, the both of them quickly headed over to where Luo Xuanqing and the others were.

Before even arriving, they could feel a powerful gale rushing at them, and pebbles and boulders were flying all around. However, perhaps out of fear that their fight would draw in even more saint beasts, there was an intentional attempt on both sides to suppress their strength such that the shockwaves of their attacks would disappear after travelling a certain distance.

Walking through the various boulders flying around the area, Zhang Xuan and Yuan Xiao soon saw two figures exchanging blows in the air. Every single move they executed harnessed

astounding might; even someone of Zhang Xuan's prowess would hesitate to close in on them recklessly.

Zhang Xuan could recognize that one of the figures belonged to Luo Xuanqing, so he turned to Yuan Xiao and asked, "Is he Zhang Chun?"

The person whom Luo Xuanqing was facing was a young man in his thirties. He had thick, bushy eyebrows and a pair of long and slender arms. He commanded a wholesome power that seemed to have very few openings for one to exploit. Just like Luo Xuanqing, he was at Saint 7-dan pinnacle, too.

"Un." Yuan Xiao nodded.

Zhang Xuan took a closer look at the battle, and just as Yuan Xiao had said, the blows that both parties were using were indeed vicious and callous.

However, it seemed like both parties were extremely familiar with one another, such that they could actually predict the move of the other party in advance. As such, despite how dangerous the battle was, neither side was actually able to harm the other, even slightly.

On the contrary, they felt like brothers of the same lineage trying to feed one another moves.

To the side, Bi Hongyin and Yun Lianhai were standing opposite two people from Zhang Chun's side with their arms crossed before their chests, watching the battle interestedly from the sidelines.

Yuan Xiao walked up to Bi Hongyin and Yun Lianhai and asked with a suppressed voice, "Why did the both of them start fighting with one another?"

Was the plan not to put on a show to stop Zhang Chun's advancement? Why did Luo Xuanqing end up fighting so seriously with the other party?

"We tried to stop him, but Zhang Chun proposed that they settle the problem through force, saying that the winner would gain the right to tame the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast whereas the loser would have to scam as far away as he could!

“Provoked by those words, Brother Luo ended up fighting with him. However, as they are on the same level and are simply too familiar with each other’s moves as well, the battle has dragged on till now,” Bi Hongyin explained.

Then, she suddenly recalled a matter and asked with a frown, “Where is the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast? You didn’t lure it over?”

“Regarding that...” Recalling what he had seen earlier, Yuan Xiao was not sure how he could explain this matter to Bi Hongyin, so he shook his head and said, “It would be best for you to ask Zhang shi instead.”

Bi Hongyin shot Yuan Xiao a perplexed look, but she still turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Zhang shi, how did the matter with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast go?”

“Oh. I fought with it earlier, and...”

Zhang Xuan was just about to explain the matter that had just happened when a powerful shockwave suddenly burst forth from ahead.

In the sky, Zhang Chun forcefully pushed Luo Xuanqing away before retreating from the battlefield. Then, he noticed Zhang Xuan and Yuan Xiao’s figures and frowned. “The both of you are actually fine?”

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast had clearly marched off angrily to deal with the two of them, so how could they have returned completely unharmed?

Zhang Chun’s words made Luo Xuanqing realize that there was something amiss with the situation as well, and he questioned, “What do you mean by that?”

“Xuanqing, that fellow met with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast before us and told it that you were going to tame it in order to provoke it. This way, it would harbor hostility toward us and attack with the utmost aggression if we were to ever encounter it,” Yuan Xiao explained.

Zhang Xuan had already explained the matter to him while they were making their way over, and this made him realize that he had fallen for the other party’s ploy too.

“Indeed, I did meet with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast before you. I knew that you were intentionally trying to block my way, but tough luck for you, that happened to work in my favor. You know, I was actually quite curious to see how powerful an enraged Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast would be!” Zhang Chun chuckled heartily, admitting to the matter forthrightly.

However, he still could not help but direct questioning gazes toward Zhang Xuan and Yuan Xiao. “The both of you should have encountered with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, so how can you be completely fine?”

It was no wonder he was perplexed by the matter.

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was a Saint 8-dan beast, and even he would be no match for it when it was in an enraged state. Yet, those two actually managed to escape unscathed from its clutches... This was simply illogical!

His plan had been to intentionally stall Luo Xuanqing from saving the others, thus causing two of his companions to sustain some injuries and be incapacitated. After which, he would lure the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast over to deal with Luo Xuanqing. Through this, not only would he be able to sabotage Luo Xuanqing, he would be able to earn the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast’s goodwill too.

If the two of them managed to return unscathed, could it mean that they did not manage to meet with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast?

Instead of answering Zhang Chun’s question, Zhang Xuan instead asked, “You are Zhang Chun?”

“That’s right. Who are you?” Zhang Chun asked with a frown.

For a mere Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle fellow to address him directly with such an insolent tone, he sure had guts.

“You don’t need to know who I am. I heard that you have intentions of courting the little princess of the Luo Clan. Is that true?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“What are you getting at?” Zhang Chun asked with narrowed eyes. He turned to Luo Xuanqing and asked coldly, “Luo

Xuanqing, is he your man?”

“Zhang shi...” Hearing how his younger sister had been brought up, a frown emerged on Luo Xuanqing’s forehead as well.

Zhang Xuan turned to Luo Xuanqing and said with a firm voice, “Brother Luo, just tell me if he harbors any inappropriate thoughts toward the little princess.”

“Humph, he’s just a toad lusting over the flesh of a swan. How could someone like him possibly be worthy of my younger sister?” Luo Xuanqing was not sure what Zhang Xuan was getting at either, but hearing about the matter between Zhang Chun and his younger sister still made him harrumph in displeasure.

In the first place, he was already filled with many dissatisfactions about the Zhang Clan, especially with the disappearance of the young prodigy. Yet, that bastard Zhang Chun still dared to harass his younger sister. If not for the limitations of his strength, he would have had Zhang Chun pummeled to the point where not even his parents recognized him!

“Since Brother Luo has said such words, he really does deserve a beating,” Zhang Xuan said with an affirmative nod, seemingly making up his mind on something.

“Deserve a beating? Hah, you are thinking of beating me up?” Zhang Chun was still wondering what this nobody was up to, but upon hearing that the other party was dreaming of beating him up, he felt so enraged that he actually began laughing instead.

He was one of the top experts in the Inner Sanctum as well as an influential offspring of the Zhang Clan. There was no one who would not shudder before his wrath.

And yet, a Leaving Aperture realm nobody actually uttered such arrogant words to his face, showing a complete disregard for him!

“Zhang shi...” Luo Xuanqing was bewildered by those words, too.

Did someone knock Zhang Xuan silly earlier?

Zhang Chun was a figure who even he had trouble defeating, and that young man actually declared that he would give the other party a beating?

“Oh? You are smarter than I thought. I thought that I would have to repeat those words a few more times before you were able to get my point,” Zhang Xuan replied condescendingly.

“You... Very well! I hope you possess the strength to back up the arrogant words you have spouted here!” With a cold sneer, Zhang Chun flicked his hand, and an overwhelming pressure immediately crushed down upon Zhang Xuan.

“Give him a taste of the floor!” Zhang Xuan snapped his fingers leisurely, showing complete nonchalance toward Zhang Chun’s offense.

Roar!

The next moment, a massive shadow abruptly covered the entire area above them. Following which, something reminiscent of a whip suddenly swept over with frightening speed.

Peng!

Before Zhang Chun could even process what was going on, he had been sent flying into a nearby cliff, creating a huge pit in it.

1354 The Strength of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast!

There was a moment of complete silence as everyone stared at the sky with a dazed look in their eyes.

“The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast... is heeding Zhang Shi’s commands?” Luo Xuanqing’s lips twitched as he finally awoken from his dazed state.

He had seen that massive fellow from afar the first time he came over, and it was incomparably ferocious. Most Saint 8-dan cultivators would struggle to be a match for it.

It was for that reason that he had gone to the extent of forging out the Soulbinding Golden Bead to knock it out so that he could sneak into the cavern without facing the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

It was a complete coincidence that Zhang Chun appeared just then, so he had decided to lure the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast to the latter instead.

But before they could even carry out that plan, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast had suddenly flown over itself, and from the looks of it, it seemed like it was completely devoted to carrying out Zhang Xuan’s orders, not daring to disobey them in the least.

Luo Xuanqing quickly turned his gaze over to Yuan Xiao, seeking an explanation. Perhaps harboring the same thoughts in mind as well, the others also turned their gazes over.

“Don’t look at me, I don’t know what’s going on either!” Facing the gazes from the crowd, Yuan Xiao could only shrug helplessly as well. “Earlier, I went into the cavern to search for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, intending to taunt it and lure it out, but I wasn’t able to find anything at all in the end.

But as soon as I walked out of the cavern, I saw the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast lying right before Zhang Shi, licking his feet. I have no idea what happened in the time that I was gone!”

“You say that it was licking Zhang Shi’s feet?” Luo Xuanqing’s eyebrows shot up in astonishment. “Are you saying that... Zhang Shi has already tamed the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast?”

“Just look at that! Is there even any doubt about it? It should be apparent to anyone who isn’t blind!” Yuan Xiao exclaimed.

“But...” Luo Xuanqing did not dare believe what he was seeing. “It has only been twenty minutes so far, and he has already managed to tame a Dimension Sundering realm saint beast despite being at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle himself?”

Fast in terms of forging pills? Possible. Fast in terms of neutralizing poison? Possible. Fast in terms of setting up compounded formations? Arguably possible. But taming beasts required the cultivation of intimacy and feelings between the beast and the beast tamer!

To succeed in such a short period of time, are you actually some kind of love guru?

Not even 9-star beast tamers could accomplish something like this!

Seeing the disbelief in Luo Xuanqing’s eyes, Yuan Xiao asked, “Before meeting this fellow, would you have believe it if someone told you that it’s possible to set up a grade-8 formation faster than one can activate a formation plate?”

“This...” Luo Xuanqing was stifled.

Coming from the main family of the Luo Clan, he had seen plenty of formidable formation masters. In fact, he had many opportunities to meet with and interact with 9-star master teachers too, but not even they were able to set up formations that swiftly!

Even his younger sister, who was known to possess unparalleled talent, could not come close to that speed!

“Would you believe it if someone told you that it’s possible for one to remain completely fine after being stung by the Crimsontail Wasp King and even poison the latter to death?”

Yuan Xiao pressed his point on.

“Would you believe it if someone told you that it’s possible for a cultivator to send a lightning tribulation fleeing in fear?”

Luo Xuanqing did not know how he should respond to those words.

All along, he had viewed his younger sister as the very peak of talent in the Master Teacher Continent, and he was only second to his younger sister. However, upon seeing this fellow, he realized that he might have been too narrow-minded.

The world sure was far bigger than he had thought.

While Luo Xuanqing’s group was discussing with hushed voices, Zhang Chun pushed himself out from the cliff face and flew over with a furious look on his face.

“Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, what are you doing? We have a deal with one another!”

He had not thought that the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast would turn against him all of a sudden.

“Deal? That doesn’t matter anymore. Since my master has asked me to give you a taste of the floor, I have no choice but to imprint that flavor in your mind. Come, be obedient and don’t fight back,” the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast replied nonchalantly as it sent another tail whip toward Zhang Chun.

Previously, that human had promised it valuable treasures in exchange for a truce. However, since it had already acknowledged a master, it could not possibly commit acts that were contrary to its master’s orders.

Kacha!

Driving its Dimension Sundering realm strength to its limits, the surrounding space around it seemed to have suddenly froze in place, thus hindering Zhang Chun’s attempts to retreat. As a

result, it ended up being slammed into the cliff face once more.

This time, his state was even worse than before. His internal organs had been jolted out of position, and several of his bones had splintered. Before he could climb out from the cliff face, a sudden spurt of blood escaped from his mouth, and his face paled.

Zhang Chun swallowed a pill, and after recovering slightly from his severe wounds, he pushed himself out from the depression in the cliff and stared at the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast with gritted teeth. “You... actually acknowledged this fellow as your master?”

In order to tame this fellow, he had prepared many good items, and he had been extremely confident of success. Yet, who would have thought that within a short span of twenty minutes, the saint beast was actually tamed by another person and even launching a barrage of attack against him!

“How dare you speak of my master in such disrespectful terms? You are courting death!” The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast narrowed its eyes menacingly as it swept its tail over furiously.

The might of its assault was far stronger than the previous two times, such that it nearly burst even the space in the valley itself. In the form of a black streak, its tail appeared before Zhang Chun, carrying might so imposing that it threatened to tear him apart.

Zhang Chun instantaneously realized that there was no way he would be able to withstand that attack with his current strength, so he gritted his teeth, whipped out a jade token, and crushed it without any hesitation.

Weng!

A series of ripples reminiscent of flowing water appeared before Zhang Chun, and in the face of the water-like barrier, the might of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast’s tail whip vanished without a trace.

“Grand Cosmos Protective Amulet! What an extravagant move!” Yuan Xiao remarked in astonishment.

“Grand Cosmos Protective Amulet?” Zhang Xuan repeated doubtfully.

“It’s a protective amulet that only 9-star master teachers are capable of forging. Once activated, as long as the opponent’s cultivation isn’t beyond Saint 9-dan, one will be able to withstand any assault with ease,” Yuan Xiao explained. “As expected of a genius from the Zhang Clan, to think that they would have such an item in their possession as well!”

Zhang Xuan was astounded as well.

The fact that the protective amulet could only be forged by 9-star master teachers and that it could withstand the attack of any opponent whose cultivation was not beyond Saint 9-dan was sufficient to show that the artifact was of immense value.

“Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, don’t think that I am afraid of you! You might be strong, but you’ll need far more than that to kill me!” Seeing as his protective amulet successfully intercepted that devastating attack, Zhang Chun heaved a sigh of relief. At the same time, however, he could not help but feel a pinch in his heart.

He had spent a heavy price in order to obtain the protective amulet, and it could almost be said to be the most valuable artifact he had on him. It was his final trump card to fall back on in a critical situation, but who would have thought that he would have ended up using it there?

Paying no heed to Zhang Chun’s fury, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast continued flicking its tail over, causing the water-like barrier to ripple endlessly.

Seeing that the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was relying solely on brute force, Zhang Xuan shook his head. “You won’t be able to break the protective amulet that way.

“Follow my instructions. Gather your strength in your tail and pierce the point three chi left of the intersection of the ripples...”

“Yes!” Hearing that, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast nodded before gathering all of its might at its tail and piercing it forward at a point.

Kacha!

A shattering sound echoed in the air, and as if a balloon popped by a needle, the ripples in the air abruptly burst.

Pu!

With his protective amulet destroyed, Zhang Chun swiftly succumbed to the overwhelming might of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. His chest deflated inward as his body was slammed into the air, and fresh blood spewed endlessly from his mouth.

“This...”

This time, it was not just Luo Xuanqing and the others who were shocked speechless. Those who had come along with Zhang Chun also widened their eyes in disbelief, unable to believe what they were seeing.

No matter how strong a protective amulet was, it was still impossible for it to provide absolute defense. After all, it was only an artifact. There was no way it would possess the flexibility to adapt to situations like a 9-star master teacher.

However, an artifact on the level of the Grand Cosmos Protective Amulet would have already been refined to the point where no one of Saint 9-dan and beneath would be able to see through its flaws. Yet, that young man was actually able to see through it with just a look.

Just how was that possible?

Zhang Chun flew out from the cliff face and furiously roared, “Who in the world are you? This is a grudge between me and Luo Xuanqing, are you certain that you want to barge into this matter? Do you understand the consequences of your actions?”

Blood could be seen trickling down the edges of his lips, and a look of absolute fury was reflected on his features.

Taming the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast should have been a competition between him and Luo Xuanqing, and that

young man should only have been an assistant recruited by Luo Xuanqing. Typically speaking, he would not even have bothered to spare someone of that young man's caliber a second glance, but to think that the young man would actually cross him time and time again.

Do you know what the consequences of offending the Zhang Clan are? With just a word from me, I can make it so that every single thing you attempt to do in the Sanctum of Sages will be fraught with difficulty!

“Do I know the consequences of my actions? Of course I do,” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly before turning his gaze to the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast once more. “Continue pummeling him. I don't want to hear the slightest rubbish from his mouth anymore!”

“Yes!” The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast nodded before abruptly charging forward.

Despite its immense size, its speed was truly no joke. In the blink of an eye, its sharp claws were already right before Zhang Chun.

With its medium of attack switching from its tail to its claws, the offensive might of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast instantaneously surged by a significant degree.

“You...” Not expecting the young man to actually disregard him, choosing adamantly to make a move on him despite all that had been said, Zhang Chun felt so enraged that he could have vomited blood.

He swiftly flicked his wrist and drew a sword before piercing it forward to defend against the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast's offense.

Zhang Chun's swordsmanship was vastly different from the two Sword Quintessences that Zhang Xuan had comprehended.

His movements were simple and concise; there was no particular elegance or beauty to them. But for some reason, his swordsmanship felt extremely heavy, and it carried an

unstoppable momentum to it, as if a comet falling from the high heavens above.

“Not too bad, I must say,” Zhang Xuan remarked.

The sword that Zhang Chun wielded was at least on par with the Lingxu Sword, which meant that it was a Saint high-tier artifact at the minimum. Furthermore, he could tell that the other party possessed an understanding of swordsmanship that was far deeper than Shui Qianrou’s, at least reaching the level of Half-Quintessence.

It was no wonder the other party was able to draw with Luo Xuanqing in a battle; his strength was indeed not to be underestimated.

However, as frightening as his strength might have been, it was still far from matching up to the Saint 8-dan Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

The claws continued advancing forward, unimpeded by the sea of sword qi standing in its path. Then, with a light grasp...

Peng!

The sea of sword qi immediately dissipated without a trace.

Weng!

With a resounding clang, Zhang Chun’s sword was knocked into the cliff face, and Zhang Chun himself coughed a mouthful of blood. Eight bones of his ribcage had shattered under the impact, and crimson blood dyed his body.

Knowing that he could very well lose his life if this continued, Zhang Chun bellowed, “You lot, listen to my instructions. We’ll fend off that massive beast together!”

“Yes!”

The other four young men who had accompanied him there swiftly flew over.

These four were roughly around the same strength as Yuan Xiao and the others, each of them reaching Saint 7-dan. If the five of them were to put their strength together, they would indeed be a match for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

Hu!

Collaborating with one another, the five experts swiftly formed a light noose and hooked it around the neck of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

“Zhenqi Bind? They have really come prepared!” Bi Hongyin harrumphed coldly.

“What’s a Zhenqi Bind?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It’s a technique that high-tier beast tamers commonly use. In essence, it’s a noose formed by putting the zhenqi of a huge crowd together to bind a beast. Once caught within the Zhenqi Bind, it will be difficult for even a Saint 8-dan beast to be able to struggle free!” Bi Hongyin said.

“Many high-tier beast tamers use this method to capture a saint beast before slowly taking their time to make the beast submit to them!”

Hu la!

While they were speaking, the Zhenqi Bind finally tightened around the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast’s neck.

In response to that, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast roared furiously and raised its claws to tear it apart.

Peng!

The Zhenqi Bind was torn apart. The five experts immediately felt a suffocating sensation assaulting their chests, and as if being struck by a massive hammer, all of them plummeted down from the sky.

Even with the prowess of all five of them combined, they were still no match for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast!

1355 One-On-One!

“So that’s Saint 8-dan!” Looking at how the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was able to deal with the five experts with absolute ease, Luo Xuanqing felt deeply envious.

Having comprehended the power of Dimension Sundering, Saint 8-dan experts were able to tear a rift in the world and create their own miniature world when they activate their Dominion. Within this miniature world, they were the absolute conquerors. Unless one had achieved the same level of cultivation as them, otherwise there was no way to defeat them.

Zhang Chun might be one of the strongest students of the Inner Sanctum, but even he didn’t wield the ability to breach this gap in strength!

“Truly formidable.” Zhang Xuan uttered in agreement too.

He thought that the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast had used its full strength against him previously, but from the looks of it now, it hadn’t even brought out a tenth of its true strength back then.

Otherwise, he would have been crushed into minced meat before he could even bring out Vicious’ finger.

“If I could wield such strength too, I would be in a much better position to ask for Luo Ruoxin’s hand in marriage in the Luo Clan...” A glint flashed across Zhang Xuan’s eyes.

Saint 8-dan might not mean much to top-notch Sage Clans like the Luo Clan, but it was already a representation of the top-tier fighting prowess of the Master Teacher Continent.

Considering how he was only twenty this year, if he could reach that level before the time for Luo Ruoxin’s engagement, he should be able to make the Luo Clan take him seriously.

Boom boom boom!

While Zhang Xuan was still contemplating over such thoughts, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast swiftly struck out at the

five experts, slamming all of them into the nearby cliff.

“Lad, what hero are you if you can only rely on your tamed beast to fight with us? Do you dare to fight me one-on-one?” Knowing that the odds were not in his favor, Zhang Chun spat through gritted teeth.

“You want to fight me one-on-one? Hah, a Saint 7-dan pinnacle expert like you is actually challenging me, a Saint 5-dan cultivator, to a one-on-one? You sure are a hero!” Zhang Xuan sneered disdainfully.

While he wielded the strength to rival opponents stronger than him, he knew that he was still a far way off from matching up to a Saint 7-dan pinnacle expert. Naturally, he wouldn't be so foolish as to fall for Zhang Chun's taunting!

He would only be asking for a beating if he were to accept that duel!

“I'll suppress my cultivation down to your level!” Zhang Chun added.

Zhang Xuan waved his hand derisively, “I'm not free!”

As a beast tamer, the strength of his tamed beast was considered as a part of his strength too, so there was nothing dishonorable in his actions by the conventional standards of the Master Teacher Continent. Since he was able to make their life a living hell without making a move, there was no need for him to soil his hands at all.

On the other hand, seeing that nothing that he said was working, Zhang Chun was on the verge of going berserk.

As an individual who was born with astounding talent, his life had always been smooth-sailing, be it back in the Zhang Clan or at the Sanctum of Sages. He had never suffered such grievances before!

“You coward!” Zhang Chun clenched his fists so tightly that his fingers nearly fractured from the pressure.

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was simply too strong, it would be nigh impossible for them to defeat it. Even if he were to utilize the power of his bloodline, he would only be

able to barely escape... However, the price that he would have to pay for tapping into his bloodline was extremely heavy, such that he dared not to use it lightly.

As such, the best solution out of the current predicament he was in was to defeat that young man!

As long as he could subdue that young man instantaneously, not only would be able to exact vengeance for the humiliation he had suffered, he would also be able to force the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast to obey his commands and teach Luo Xuanqing a lesson too.

Otherwise, if others were to learn of the humiliation he had been put through here, how could he possibly uphold his position and honor in the Sanctum of Sages?

“You’re right, I’m a coward.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“...” Zhang Chun staggered on the spot.

Other cultivators, especially ones that were as young as them, would turn blind in rage and charge forth furiously as soon as they heard those words. Yet, the fellow before him was actually able to remain completely nonchalant to his provocations, and the smug look on his face even suggested that he was proud of his cowardice...

How could he be so thick-skinned?

“Tell me what Luo Xuanqing gave you. I’ll pay you the same price as long as you are willing to have a duel with me.”

Zhang Chun took in a deep breath and said.

Since that fellow had followed Luo Xuanqing here to help him tame the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, it was safe to assume that the latter would have offered him handsome rewards in exchange. Right now, he was offering the same sum of money just to have a duel with him... Surely that fellow wouldn’t turn him down with such a generous offer!

As long as that huge fellow didn’t make a move, teaching a mere Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator would be a walk in the park for him.

“Brother Luo gave me one... I mean five pinnacle spirit stones! If you can take out that many too, not only will I have a duel with you, I’ll even allow your entire group to come at me simultaneously!” Upon hearing Zhang Chun’s offer, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

“...” Once again, Zhang Chun was stifled speechless.

You were going to say one pinnacle spirit stone just now, right? I clearly heard you say one!

It is just a moment ago that you were professing your cowardice haughtily, but as soon as I said that I will pay you for it, you immediately accepted the offer and even said that the five of us can come at you together... Do you really need to be that greedy?

“Fine, I’ll pay you five pinnacle spirit stones. However, I don’t have any of it with me at the moment. As long as you agree to have a duel with me, regardless of whether you win or lose, I’ll apply for those five pinnacle spirit stones as soon as I return to the Sanctum of Sages and compensate you!” Even though Zhang Chun felt so furious that he could explode, he still forced himself to calm down.

“This...” Hearing that Zhang Chun didn’t have any pinnacle spirit stone with him, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before saying, “Why don’t you write down a debt note first to indicate that you owe me five pinnacle spirit stone? Once I obtain the debt note, I’ll have the duel with you!”

“Very well!” Afraid that Zhang Xuan would back out, Zhang Chun didn’t dare to hesitate for too long before making a decision. He took out a paper, bit his finger, and wrote a line of words on it.

“This is a debt note writing using my blood, so it contains the power of my bloodline. There’s no way for me to shirk off the debt with this.”

Zhang Xuan took the debt note and examined it closely. It was only after confirming that there was no trick hidden within the debt note did he finally nod his head in satisfaction. He turned

to the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and said, “Let go of them.”

“Yes!” the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast replied.

The power of Dimension Sundering which was trapping the Zhang Chun’s group in place dissipated.

Hu hu hu hu hu!

The five of them immediately plummeted to the ground, but fortunately, they still managed to stabilize their posture in midair, thus avoiding an embarrassing fall to the ground.

“Take this.” Zhang Chun took out a jade bottle and poured out five pills. He gave one each to the other members before swallowing one himself, and only then did he feel his injuries alleviating slightly.

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was simply too powerful. Even with the five of them collaborating with one another, they still came nowhere close to being a match for it.

“Alright, suppress your cultivation!” Zhang Xuan allowed them a long moment of recuperation before uttering nonchalantly.

“I know.” Suppressing his cultivation, Zhang Chun’s aura swiftly fell from that of a Saint 7-dan pinnacle to one that was of equivalent level to Zhang Xuan—Saint 5-dan Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle.

The suppression of his cultivation might have led to a dip in his fighting prowess, but at the same time, it also helped to alleviate the severity of his injuries as well, thus enhancing his mind, spirit, and soul.

“Since it’s a formal duel, I hope that you can obey by our agreement earlier. I won’t unseal my cultivation, but similarly, you shouldn’t have the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast interfere in the duel either!” Zhang Chun harrumphed coldly.

“Of course!” Zhang Xuan replied.

“That’s good then.” A cold glint flickered across Zhang Chun’s eyes as a hint of savagery emerged on his face.

Currently, the only thing that was holding him back was the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. As long as the latter didn't make a move, a mere Leaving Aperture realm cultivator couldn't possibly pose a threat to him. With his superior comprehension of battle and talent, he would be able to crush the other party with ease!

Even though the young man had managed to tame the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, Zhang Chun felt that the other party had used some kind of unique means instead. Over the many years of heritage, beast tamers had come up with many innovative ways to make powerful beasts submitting to them, and there were a handful of them which didn't require one to possess too high of a cultivation.

As such, he didn't have too high of a view of Zhang Xuan's fighting prowess either.

"Let's begin!" Zhang Chun bellowed as he prepared to make his move..

"Hold it for a moment." Zhang Xuan suddenly interjected.

"What's wrong? Are you having regrets now?"

"You must be joking. I just want to suggest having the other four of your companion to suppress their cultivation and join the battle as well. I fear that you'll be crushed if you were to face me alone." Zhang Xuan shook his head and said.

It was not that he was looking down on Zhang Chun, but it was simply a fact that there would be no one of the same cultivation realm who could possibly be a match for him.

He had already made the other party write a debt note for him, so the least he could do was to offer the other party some benefits in return for the pinnacle spirit stones. After all, he was a principled man.

"Zhang shi... It'll be best not to underestimate Zhang Chun. Even amongst Saint 7-dan experts, there are very few who could match him..." Luo Xuanqing couldn't help but advise.

As one who had competed with him for the longest of time, he knew very well what Zhang Chun was capable of.

In the first place, it was already worrying how Zhang Xuan had accepted a one-on-one match with Zhang Chun, and yet, he was still insisting on a one-on-five...

Wasn't he being a little too conceited over here?

"It's fine." Zhang Xuan waved his hand to gesture for Luo Xuanqing not to worry.

He had just reinforced his cultivation and hadn't found someone to try his hand out on yet. Since the five of them happened to be around, why not?

"But..." Luo Xuanqing still wanted to persuade Zhang Xuan against it, but in this moment, Yuan Xiao stepped forward and interjected.

"Zhang shi must have an idea in mind for proposing something like this, so it should be fine. Besides, given how Zhang shi was able to even scare a lightning tribulation away, he might just wield the strength to subdue Zhang Chun!"

"That's true!" Nodding in realization, Luo Xuanqing decided to remain silent and watch the situation first. Nevertheless, he still felt that it was important to remind the crowd to remain on their guard, "Most likely, the reason why Zhang Chun challenged Zhang shi to a one-on-one is to make use of this opportunity to capture Zhang shi and use him against us. So, as soon as you realize that things are going awry, don't hesitate to leap forward and save him!"

"Un."

The others nodded.

Luo Xuanqing had competed with Zhang Chun for many years, so his grasp over the latter's temperament and style of doing things was bound to be rather accurate.

"You are the one who said those words yourself, I hope that you don't come to regret your decision."

Even though Zhang Chun was so furious that he could explode, he knew that the situation was currently disadvantageous toward him—Luo Xuanqing and the others would surely move as soon as they realized that something

was amiss—so he beckoned the others over and sent a telepathic message over, “Later on, I’ll be focusing on attacking that fellow. What you all should do is to help to stall Luo Xuanqing and the others, along with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, from saving him... As long as you can keep them at bay for a single breath, I’ll definitely be able to put that fellow back in his place!”

Hearing those instructions, the other four members of Zhang Chun’s team nodded discreetly.

They also felt deeply stifled after being pummeled by the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, and if there was an opportunity to get back at the culprit, they wouldn’t hesitate to play a part too.

Hu la!

After deciding on their course of action, the four members suppressed their cultivation as well and stood in a circle around Zhang Xuan, encircling the young man.

“Let’s begin!”

With a resounding roar, the five of them made a move simultaneously.

Even with their cultivation suppressed, their experience, eye of discernment, and reflexes as Saint 7-dan experts still remained, not to mention that they were still top geniuses of the Inner Sanctum. Their zhenqi swiftly permeated the entire valley, and it took only an instant for a barrage of sword qi, saber qi, and the sort to congregate all around Zhang Xuan, leaving no space for the latter to escape at all.

“Formidable!”

The bodies of Luo Xuanqing and the others stiffened after seeing this sight.

In order to deal with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, Zhang Chun and the others had practiced a grade-8 collaborative formation. While their cultivation was lowered to Leaving Aperture realm, the tier of their formation still remained the same. With their combined might, even a Saint

7-dan primary stage cultivator could be killed in the blink of an eye!

“Will Zhang shi be fine?” Bi Hongyin asked worriedly.

The others also directed apprehensive gazes over.

They had completely no confidence that they would be able to withstand the onslaught of the five of them were they to be in Zhang Xuan’s place, even if they were to suppress their cultivation down to Saint 6-dan pinnacle instead of Saint 5-dan pinnacle!

Thus, they swiftly drove their zhenqi, preparing to dive forward to save Zhang Xuan. However, in this moment, a voice carrying a tinge of confusion sounded in the air.

“Is this all you are capable of after collaborating with one another?”

A moment later, the voice turned from one of confusion turned into one of disappointment, “This sure is a huge letdown.”

Peng peng peng peng peng!

A total of five crisp echoes sounded in the air, and following which, all of the sword qi and saber qi vanished from the surroundings, and the five experts were sent flying in the distance like footballs. They were embedded back into the cliff face once more, and fresh blood flowed profusely down the edges of their lips.

For an instant, one could see utter despair in their eyes before their heads abruptly hung loosely from their neck, passing out.

“This...”

Luo Xuanqing and the others widened their eyes in horror. Turning into the direction of the voice, they saw Zhang Xuan clicking his tongue in disappointment as he clapped the dust off his hand while walking back toward them with a look that seemed to be saying ‘The top sure is lonely. Just when will I be able to find a worthy rival in this world?’

1356 Distorted Space

To be honest, Zhang Xuan was really disappointed.

He had thought that Zhang Chun, as one of the top geniuses of the Zhang Clan, in collaboration with four other experts, should at least have been able to pose a challenge to him even when they had their cultivation suppressed down to the same level. However, as soon as they began launching attacks, he realized that he had been expecting too much from them!

But thinking about it again, this was to be expected.

Previously, when his zhenqi cultivation had just reached Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, he had already been able to successfully clear the Jia Corridor. Now, with his physical body cultivation and soul cultivation brought up to an equivalent level, there was no way Zhang Chun and the others, no matter how talented they were, could possibly catch up.

Stretching his back lazily, Zhang Xuan turned back to the crowd and said, "It'll probably be an entire day before they wake up. Don't worry, I'll have the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast look after them, so they won't be harmed by other saint beasts!

"Since we have time now, let's quickly find the Dongxu Gourd."

Even though Zhang Xuan detested the Zhang Clan for how frivolously they were treating Luo Ruoxin, it had not come to the point where he wished for their deaths.

If he simply left Zhang Chun and the others lying unconscious there, it would not be long before they were eaten by the other saint beasts in the valley. In a sense, that could be considered indirect murder by them.

By having the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast guard them, first and foremost, no saint beasts would dare cause any trouble, and secondly, they would not dare to enter the cavern anymore even if they did regain consciousness.

Suppressing the astonishment in his heart, Luo Xuanqing nodded. “Very well!”

To see his long-time rival, Zhang Chun, being knocked out so easily... This little friend that he had met just a day before sure was not an ordinary figure!

“Given the setback and humiliation that Zhang Chun has suffered today, there’s no way he’ll let this matter go easily. You must proceed carefully in the Sanctum of Sages from this day onward. If he attempts to find any trouble with you, make sure to inform me as soon as possible, and I’ll help you settle the matter,” Luo Xuanqing told Zhang Xuan telepathically as the group made their way over to the cavern.

He knew Zhang Chun very well. As an offspring of the esteemed Zhang Clan, as well as an 8-star high-tier master teacher, the latter would not resort to despicable deeds. However, with the power and influence the latter wielded in the Sanctum of Sages, he did not even have to resort to despicable deeds in order to make life difficult for others.

For one, just a stand made by Zhang Chun was more than sufficient reason for others to shun Zhang Xuan like the plague.

Considering how Zhang Xuan had offended Zhang Chun while trying to stand up for him, he was bound to get into lots of trouble in the future.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded.

In truth, while a huge part of the reason he had decided to teach Zhang Chun a lesson was due to the latter harboring lustful thoughts for Luo Ruoxin, he also felt that this was a good opportunity to win this future brother-in-law of his over to his side. In a sense, that would kill two birds with one stone, definitely well worth the trouble he would potentially face in the future as a result of this conflict.

He could feel that Luo Xuanqing no longer perceived him as an ordinary talented friend but a close buddy now.

Of course, it seemed to still be a little too early for him to talk about his relationship with Luo Ruoxin with the other party,

but nevertheless, the deepening of their friendship would surely be of great help to him in winning Luo Ruoxin's hand in marriage in the future!

In any case, his strength was not up to par yet, and he had not unlocked the Sanctum Head Token either, so it was still too early for him to make a move. It would be good for him to work on Luo Xuanqing for the time being instead.

With the threat of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast resolved, the group swiftly advanced into the cavern.

While the entrance to the cavern was narrow, its interior was vast. The cavern seemed to extend along with the entire mountain range, meandering up and down.

"Xuanqing, I took a look at the place earlier, but I didn't notice anything peculiar in here," Yuan Xiao remarked.

He had examined the entire place thoroughly while searching for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, but it was just an ordinary cavern within the mountain. There was nothing peculiar about it at all.

Instead of replying to Yuan Xiao's remark, Luo Xuanqing turned to Yun Lianhai and asked, "What about you? Did you notice anything?"

Considering how Yun Lianhai was a treasure hunter and possessed natural sensitivity toward treasures, there was a good chance that he could sense something that they could not.

"Let me give it a try." Yun Lianhai took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

A droplet of blood flew up to his glabella, and a glaring third eye abruptly opened up between his brows. It began scanning the surroundings intently.

A moment later, Yun Lianhai shook his head and said, "I don't sense anything either."

"Is this the ability that treasure hunters possess? I guess there is really no way for me to learn that!" Zhang Xuan remarked in wonderment.

He had used his Eye of Insight to assess Yun Lianhai's state earlier, and he had concluded that the latter was using his bloodline ability to scan the surroundings for artifacts rich in spiritual energy.

However, what was unique about that ability was how it could see through obstacles, like how a compass could detect the magnetic field of an object even from a distance away.

Since the very foundation of this ability lay in the unique bloodline of the Yun Clan, it could be said to be an innate talent. It was not a skill that one could learn through hard work.

Ultimately, while cultivation opened up a world of possibilities, cultivators were still fundamentally limited by their innate talent in many ways. Using an example from the world Zhang Xuan previously lived in, it would be just like how no matter a policeman trained himself, there was no way he would be able to become a K9.

With this, Zhang Xuan's hopes of picking up the art of treasure hunting were dashed.

"Zhang shi, what about you?" Luo Xuanqing asked.

The others also turned their heads over in curiosity.

It was just a short few days since they had first come to know one another, but this young man had already brought them an entire life's worth of shock. They were interested to know if this miraculous young man would be able to notice anything amiss or not.

In response, Zhang Xuan discreetly concentrated on the lines of insight in his eyes and began examining his surroundings carefully.

Unless a formation was active, the Library of Heaven's Path would not be able to perceive it. Thus, he could only rely on the Eye of Insight to search for clues.

But very quickly, he shook his head and said, "I can't find anything either."

As powerful as the Eye of Insight was, it was limited by his own cultivation. He was unable to discern items that were too much stronger than he was, just like how he had not been able to find Kong shi's folded space back at the Saint Ascension Platform.

Seeing that they were making no progress at all, Bi Hongyin frowned in impatience. "Just where is it? Luo Xuanqing, stop keeping us in suspense!"

"Haha, I was just curious to see if you would be able to find it," Luo Xuanqing replied with a light chuckle. "To be honest, I wouldn't have been able to find the location of the formation myself either. It was my younger sister who managed to deduce the rough location of the formation's Life Gate through a map, and I only managed to locate it by following her instructions."

"The little princess was able to deduce the location of the formation's Life Gate through a map?"

Everyone gasped in shock.

Wasn't the little princess of the Luo Clan a little too talented?

It was already an incredible feat to be able to tell that there was an ancient domain here just by looking at the map, but to be able to find the rough location of the formation's Life Gate as well... That was really inconceivable!

"This is a map that my younger sister drew for me. It's using this that I was able to find the core of the formation and enter the ancient domain where the Dongxu Gourd is!" Luo Xuanqing flicked his wrist, and a palm-sized jade token appeared in his hand.

He tapped on it lightly, and amid a brilliant shimmer of light, faint mist emanated from the jade token and shrouded the entire cavern. Vaguely within the mist, one could see rocks and crevices... In a sense, it was somewhat similar to a painting. It slowly fused together with the real world until there was no way of distinguishing the two from one another anymore.

What incredible manipulation of space! Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up in astonishment.

The mist emanating from the jade token was not a type of ink or formation—it was a manifestation of a type of spatial energy.

To be able to paint on space and fuse it together with reality... this was truly an incredible technique!

After the mist fused fully with the cavern, the jade token floated up from Luo Xuanqing's hand and began drifting forward.

The group quickly followed behind the jade token.

It did not take them long to arrive before a dead end.

A towering stone wall blocked their path ahead, preventing them from advancing any further.

Upon reaching this point, the jade token also stopped advancing and spun on the spot.

Luo Xuanqing turned around and said to the group, "Due to the massive design of the formation, the Life Gate moves with time. It's located at a different location from where it was the previous time I was here, but since the jade token has stopped here, this should be it."

Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan immediately activated his Eye of Insight to look at the space before him.

There's indeed a distortion in space here... Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes slightly.

With the location confirmed, he was indeed able to tell that something was amiss in the area.

There was a sesame-sized spatial distortion right beneath the jade token. If one was not sure where to look, it would have been practically impossible to find it.

After all, it was not too rare for slight spatial distortions to arise. Even a bunch of Transcendent Mortal cultivators putting their might together would suffice to create a slight spatial

distortion, so most cultivators would instinctively turn a blind eye to it.

It was no wonder the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, a Saint 8-dan beast, would fail to notice the secrets hidden within the cavern despite living here for so many years. Just how in the world was one supposed to find something like this?

At the same time, to be able to deduce this much just by looking at a map and even craft a jade token specially for it... Zhang Xuan could not help but feel deeply pressured by the astounding capabilities that Luo Ruoxin wielded.

In the past, he had not been particularly concerned about Luo Ruoxin's identity or background, choosing to confess to her solely because he liked her. However, in order to win the approval of the Luo Clan, he had no choice but to face the difference in their strength and standing.

And if even someone as powerful as Luo Ruoxin was not able to turn down the engagement with the Zhang Clan, things were truly not optimistic for them.

No matter what, I'll definitely wed you openly as my wife! Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly in agitation.

Yuan Xiao and the others stared at their surroundings with squinted eyes for a very long time, but they were still unable to find anything at all. Eventually, they could only shake their heads and give up.

"I really am unable to see what is so special about this place. Why don't you just open the Life Gate? We'll follow behind you."

"Alright." Without wasting any time, Luo Xuanqing raised his finger and tapped the area right ahead of him.

A droplet of blood dripped out from the tip of his finger.

Following which, he formed a few hand seals, and a unique power was imbued into the jade token.

Weng!

With a resounding buzz, the sesame-sized spatial distortion began rotating swiftly, reminiscent of a mini vortex.

Si la!

A rift was torn through space with the sesame-sized spatial distortion at its very center. At the same time, the vortex grew bigger and bigger, forming a cone-shaped spiral.

“Let’s enter,” Luo Xuanqing said.

Perhaps due to having expended too much strength, Luo Xuanqing’s face was slightly pale.

“Alright.” Yuan Xiao nodded.

Without any hesitation, he took the lead and leaped into the cone-shaped spiral.

He was the one who boasted the greatest defensive ability among their group, and considering that they were entering uncharted territory, it was a given that he should be the first one to enter.

Hu!

His two-meter-wide figure was still rather massive while it was at the top of the cone-shaped spiral, but as he descended, his figure grew smaller and smaller, until it was roughly the size of a needle, before vanishing into the distorted space.

“This...”

This was the first time everyone had seen such a bizarre sight, and their eyebrows could not help but leap up in astonishment.

Is this the ability of the 4-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, Creation? Zhang Xuan frowned.

Even though it seemed like Yuan Xiao had become smaller after jumping into the cone-shaped spiral, in truth, it was just a visual effect arising from the distortion of light due to the bending of space.

For example, it was just like how a person would appear to be different in size from a meter away and a hundred meters away.

Naturally, a person who was a hundred meters away, no matter how tall and big they were, would appear to be as small as a sesame seed.

Such was the situation over here as well.

While the cone-shaped spiral appeared to be only several meters away from them, there were actually many layers of space concealed within it. In terms of absolute distance, it was likely to be several li away from them.

Using space as a foundation to create stable space, and even make it so inconspicuous at that... It seems like the person who has left behind this ancient domain is likely to at least be a Saint 9-dan cultivator. On top of that, their comprehension of spatial laws is also extremely deep, perhaps still not on par with Ancient Sage Qiu Wu yet but definitely far surpassing that of ordinary cultivators, Zhang Xuan thought.

It was no wonder he had not been able to find anything with his Eye of Insight previously. This ability to manipulate space was already far beyond what someone of his level could comprehend.

“Let’s head in, too.”

Seeing that Yuan Xiao had entered, the others also forged ahead. Bi Hongyin leaped in first, followed by Yun Lianhai.

Watching as the two of them disappeared, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath before jumping into the cone-shaped spiral as well.

Hu!

In an instant, he felt as if he was plummeting through an abyss, heading somewhere he could hardly fathom. This Saint Ascension Platform refers to the mountain he went together with Luo Ruoxin and not the one in the Qiu Wu Palace.

1357 Why Aren't You My Brother-In-Law!

The wind whistled deafening by Zhang Xuan's ears. Even though it only appeared to be two or three meters, it felt as if he was falling from a height of several thousand meters. Not only was his speed swiftly accelerating, the pressure of the surrounding space on him was rapidly intensifying.

The moment that he dived into the sesame-sized spatial distortion, his surroundings suddenly blurred. When he came to once more, he was already standing in the midst of a lush green field.

White clouds drifted in the beautiful blue sky, and vibrant verdant grass covered the earth; it almost felt like a utopia. Taking a deep breath, the air was rich with spiritual energy, as if one was standing right above a spirit vein. It made one's cells dance in exhilaration.

It's indeed impossible for those of Saint 8-dan and above to enter this area... Zhang Xuan noted.

The entrance of the distorted space was only strong enough to carry cultivators of their strength over. If those of the Dimension Sundering realm attempted to enter, the distorted space would collapse.

Looking forward, Zhang Xuan saw Yuan Xiao and the others standing nearby. Confusion could be seen reflected in their eyes; they were shocked by the sight before them as well.

There were plenty of elders in the Sanctum of Sages who wielded a deep understanding of spatial laws too, but they were only capable of creating folded spaces. It was unimaginable that anyone would be able to create a space that bore such a deep resemblance to reality and harnessed such concentrated spiritual energy.

“The elder who left behind this ancient domain has placed the spirit vein in the valley into this folded space as well. Otherwise, how could he possibly breed an artifact on the level of the Dongxu Gourd?” said someone from behind.

Luo Xuanqing had entered the area as well.

“Placed the spirit vein into this folded space?”

Yuan Xiao and the others were astonished. Even Zhang Xuan felt that this matter was inconceivable.

He had seen plenty of folded spaces, and he even had one with him at the moment. Under normal circumstances, folded spaces were separate entities from reality, so to put an entire spirit vein in and even have it continue producing spiritual energy... It was unimaginable what it would take to accomplish that.

“Brother Luo, do you know who the expert that left behind this ancient domain is?” Zhang Xuan asked.

A person who could leave behind such a formidable ancient domain was bound to be a famous figure even among the countless experts who had risen in the entire history of the Master Teacher Continent.

Luo Xuanqing paused for a moment before saying, “I’m not too sure whom the ancient domain was left behind by, but this place seems to have some links to Ancient Sage Qiu Wu.”

“Ancient Sage Qiu Wu?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

“Indeed. In the past several dozen millenniums, other than Kong shi and the old ancestor of our Luo Clan, only Ancient Sage Qiu Wu has managed to comprehend the highest realm of space. This folded space is so exquisitely created that it could even sustain the growth of a treasure like the Dongxu Gourd. I really can’t think of anyone who could achieve such a feat other than him,” Luo Xuanqing explained.

Zhang Xuan also nodded in realization.

It was no wonder he was able to gauge the distortion space in terms of the levels of the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel prior to entering. In the end, it turned out that it was highly

likely that this folded space had been left behind by that expert.

Previously, he had quite a delightful chat with the Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's fragmented soul, but it was a pity that the latter could not stay for too long. If he could meet the latter here in this folded space, it would definitely be a good opportunity to exchange some insights regarding space.

"The Dongxu Gourd is right ahead, but there's a formation blocking the way. The previous time I came here, I studied the formation for quite a few days, but I was still unable to find a way to resolve it," Luo Xuanqing said as he pointed forward.

Looking in the direction that Luo Xuanqing was pointing, they saw a river flowing in the midst of the sky. There was a long, thin vine wrapped around the river at a certain point, and connected at the other end of the vine was a lush green gourd.

The gourd was not too big, and there were no physical traits to suggest that there was something exceptional to it. But for some reason, there was a bizarre distortion in the space around it that gave a feeling that the gourd existed in another dimension. It was a sensation that made one feel as if one would be unable to touch the gourd even if it was right before one.

Upon seeing the gourd, everyone's eyes lit up.

They were still wary of the dangers they would have to go through before reaching the gourd, but to think that it would actually be so close to them.

"Let me take a look..." Out of curiosity, Yuan Xiao took a step forward, intending to fly forth to harvest the gourd. However, the next moment, cold sweat rained down his body, and he hurriedly retreated in fear.

Despite his swift reaction, he was still a step too late. A huge force that seemed to have appeared out of nowhere abruptly struck his chest.

Peng!

Before he could even grasp what was going on, he was sent flying. He skidded several dozen meters across the fields

before he was finally able to dispel the force, and his face paled in fear.

If not for his swift reaction and superior defense, he could have died right there!

“That’s a formation?”

The eyes of the crowd narrowed in apprehension.

From the current looks of it, it was apparent that the gourd that seemed to be within reach to them was not as easily obtainable as it seemed. The entire area was filled with all kinds of formations, and one would have to overcome all of them before reaching the gourd.

“I was stuck at this point the previous time I came here, too. I was unable to overcome the formations.” Luo Xuanqing nodded.

The previous time he was there, through his superior comprehension of spatial laws, he had managed to advance much deeper than Yuan Xiao did. Nevertheless, he was still unable to get close to the gourd, as if it could only be watched from afar.

“Zhang shi, are you able to recognize what kind of formation that is?” Bi Hongyin asked.

“That isn’t a formation.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“It isn’t?”

The crowd was perplexed by those words.

“It’s a type of manipulation of space. To summarize, it’s somewhat similar to the seals in the Subterranean Gallery that serve to keep the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe at bay. The stronger an individual is, the greater the rebound they will face from the seal. On the other hand, if the individual isn’t a cultivator, they won’t face any rebound at all,” Zhang Xuan explained.

He had triggered his Library of Heaven’s Path previously when Yuan Xiao was attacked by the seal, and it was through the book compiled that he realized that it was a utilization of space instead.

“So, it should do as long as we suppress our cultivation, right?” Luo Xuanqing glanced at the injured Yuan Xiao and frowned. “I’ll give it a try then.”

Regardless of whether Zhang Xuan was right or not, someone would have to give it a try. Since Yuan Xiao was injured, he could only do the job himself.

Taking a deep breath, he sealed the zhenqi within his body, making him appear no different from an ordinary human.

Cultivators who had reached his level were already more than capable of concealing their zhenqi completely in their dantian, making them appear to be no different from ordinary humans. On top of that, it seemed like Luo Xuanqing was using some kind of secret art to suppress his cultivation even further, such that Zhang Xuan would not be able to tell even with his Eye of Insight without examining closely.

“Incredible!” Zhang Xuan remarked excitedly.

He had seen plenty of techniques that would allow one to conceal one’s aura and cultivation, but those would usually fail before the Eye of Insight. It was truly frightening that Luo Xuanqing’s secret art was able to deceive him too.

Noticing the shocked gazes all around, Luo Xuanqing explained, “It’s a technique created by our old ancestor. It uses folded space to seal and conceal one’s strength, making it impossible to circumvent even through Spiritual Perception.”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded before moving on to grimly warn, “After proceeding in, no matter what you encounter, you mustn’t tap into your cultivation. Remember, the higher the cultivation, the greater the rebound.”

The surrounding space was reminiscent of a wooden log floating atop a body of water. The more one tried to push it down, the faster and more forceful it would push back.

Only ordinary humans would be able to remain unfazed by its attacks.

“Un.” Luo Xuanqing nodded as he took a step forward.

As expected, due to his sealed cultivation, he really did not come under attack at all. However, barely after taking a few steps, his face suddenly paled. It seemed as if he had been through something inconceivable, and the fear in his eyes was palpable.

“Don’t release the seal on your cultivation...” Zhang Xuan bellowed upon noticing Luo Xuanqing’s peculiar state.

However, before he could finish his words, his future brother-in-law still failed to hold it in, and zhenqi gushed out of his body.

Boom!

A resounding explosion sounded, and just like Yuan Xiao, he was sent flying as well.

“Brother Luo...” Alarmed, Zhang Xuan hurriedly rushed forward and passed over a recovery pill infused with his Heaven’s Path zhenqi.

Luo Xuanqing took the pill and swallowed, and a moment later, when his injuries alleviated slightly, he opened his eyes once more and shook his head apologetically.

“I’m fine...”

“I told you earlier that you mustn’t tap into your cultivation no matter what you encounter.” Zhang Xuan frowned. “Why did you still...”

He had made it loud and clear to the other party that he had to suppress his cultivation by hook or by crook, but barely three breaths after entering, the other party forgot what he said and was forcefully thrown out...

Aren’t you a little too absent-minded?

“I encountered an illusion in there, and I saw... someone bullying my younger sister. That’s why I wasn’t able to hold myself back,” Luo Xuanqing replied awkwardly.

He had resolved himself to keep his cultivation firmly suppressed at all costs prior to entering the area of the seal, but as soon as he saw his younger sister being bullied by others, all of those thoughts instantaneously vanished from his mind.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan could not help but shake his head with a helpless smile.

As expected of this overly-affectionate brother. Despite knowing that it was an illusion, he was still unable to stop himself from making a move.

“The little princess is much stronger than you in terms of fighting prowess, so what can you possibly do against an opponent who can even bully her?” Bi Hongyin grumbled in displeasure by the side.

Yun Lianhai and the others also found themselves speechless after hearing what Luo Xuanqing had said.

The little princess of the Luo Clan did not just possess superior talents in cultivation, more importantly, she had assimilated the Dimension Silencer. With just a mere thought, she would be able to seal the surrounding space and crush even Saint 9-dan experts with ease. Considering that Luo Xuanqing was only at Saint 7-dan, how could he possibly help his younger sister?

If there was anyone who had to do the protecting, it was the little princess!

“My strength might be beneath my younger sister’s, but I still won’t hesitate to pit my life against anyone who dares bully her!” Luo Xuanqing declared with conviction. A hint of gentleness and sadness surfaced in his eyes. “Our mother died while we were very young, so she became my only true kin in the Luo Clan. Thus, I resolved myself to not allow the slightest grievance to come to her!”

“Is that why you harbor such deep enmity for the Zhang Clan?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Indeed. In terms of bloodline purity, that bastard young prodigy of the Zhang Clan is indeed worthy of my younger sister. However, he’s so arrogant that ever since the engagement was set, he has never appeared before my younger sister, not even once! This is a show of blatant disrespect and disregard toward my younger sister. How can I possibly not be mad at him?” Luo Xuanqing harrumphed coldly.

Recalling that fellow who was snatching his girlfriend from him, Zhang Xuan puffed up in rage too. He could not help but agree. “That bastard young prodigy of the Zhang Clan really needs someone to pull him off his high horse!”

If he was the one who was engaged with Luo Ruoxin, he would surely spend every single second of his life by her side!

“That’s right!” Luo Xuanqing roared furiously. “If I ever catch sight of that bastard young prodigy, I’ll definitely smash his head into his neck!”

“That’s right!” Zhang Xuan waved his hand grandly and said imposingly, “Count me in! I’ll make that bastard young prodigy crawl all over the ground, searching for his teeth!”

“This...”

Watching as the enraged duo lashed out at the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan, Yuan Xiao, Bi Hongyin, and Yun Lianhai glanced at one another in bewilderment.

And this bewilderment was directed right at Zhang Xuan.

It’s understandable that Luo Xuanqing is worried that his younger sister will have to spend her life in misfortune.

But as an outsider, why on earth are you getting involved in this matter for?

Not to mention, to even get so indignant at the matter...

Is there really a need for that?

Unable to withstand it anymore, Yuan Xiao turned to Zhang Xuan and cleared his throat. “Ahem! Zhang shi, if I recall correctly... the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan shouldn’t have offended you before, right?”

“I...” Zhang Xuan was stunned for a moment as he recalled his current position, so he fumbled for a moment before hurriedly replying, “I am just... just feeling a little indignant for Brother Luo! To anger someone as kind and tolerant as Brother Luo to such an extent, that bastard young prodigy must definitely be a shameless and despicable scoundrel! As master teachers, we have the responsibility to teach such scum of the world a lesson they will never forget!”

“This...”

The crowd glanced at one another.

Kind and tolerant... Well, putting that aside, there was not anything wrong with what the young man was saying, but why did he feel like there was something rather weird about his words?

Luo Xuanqing was also slightly taken aback by Zhang Xuan's impassioned response. He took a closer look and noted that the young man was truly furious; it was not just an act to win his favor.

Thus, he could not help but remark, “What a great brother you are! Why aren't you my brother-in-law?”

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Knowing that the others would get suspicious if he continued dwelling on this matter, Zhang Xuan decisively changed the topic. “Brother Yuan and Brother Luo are injured, so I’ll be counting on you to take care of them. I’ll head in to take a look.”

“Let me do it instead!” Bi Hongyin stepped forward and said, “I specialize in dealing with illusions and soul attacks, so I should be able to withstand them better.”

“Alright then.” Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before nodding. “There’s a good chance that there are many different formations in there, so be careful. Make sure that you don’t use your cultivation regardless of the situation.”

The illusion formation was a separate entity from the spatial seal, which was the reason why Zhang Xuan did not notice it through the Library of Heaven’s Path. Otherwise, he would have surely reminded Luo Xuanqing in advance.

“Un.” Bi Hongyin nodded before sealing her cultivation completely.

Her ability to seal her cultivation was not as absolute as Luo Xuanqing’s, so Zhang Xuan was still able to see through her using his Eye of Insight. However, she was still able to keep her zhenqi from emanating, and the formation was unlikely to be sensitive enough to sense the zhenqi concealed in her dantian either.

Hu!

The young lady began proceeding forward, and in just a few steps, she arrived at where Luo Xuanqing and Yuan Xiao came under attack. As if something had come to her vision too, she abruptly stopped as well.

“Be careful!” Yun Lianhai could not help but remind her.

“There’s no point shouting. The spatial seal in there prevents sound and even one’s Spiritual Perception from getting through!” Luo Xuanqing shook his head.

“It seals off Spiritual Perception as well?” Astonished, Zhang Xuan tried to extend his Spiritual Perception over, but upon reaching a certain point, his Spiritual Perception seemed to disappear in an abyss. No matter how he pushed on, he was unable to sense anything at all.

It was a very perplexing and bizarre situation. It was obviously something that was right before them, but due to a profound manipulation of space, it felt like these two spaces were in completely different worlds.

Amid everyone’s worried gazes, Bi Hongyin continued advancing forward steadily, but eventually, she was still unable to hold herself back from driving her zhenqi, and as a result of that, she was jolted out of the spatial seal just like everyone else.

Zhang Xuan rushed over and asked, “What happened?”

“After entering the spatial seal, I was teleported into another space where a saint beast was rampaging all around, devouring everyone in its sight. Unable to withstand it, I could only make a move in the end,” Bi Hongyin explained with a reddened face.

She had been determined to suppress her cultivation down to the very end, but she simply could not bring herself to stand by as the saint beast attempted to bite off the head of a child.

“Teleported? But you didn’t move at all!” Yun Lianhai exclaimed.

All of them could clearly see Bi Hongyin with their own eyes, so there was no way she could have been teleported somewhere else.

“Don’t you think it’s weird that we are able to look into the spatial seal despite being unable to perceive it with our Spiritual Perception?” Luo Xuanqing suddenly interjected.

“This…” Yun Lianhai fell into deep thought.

Sometimes, what the eye saw might not necessarily be real.

Just like mirages in the desert, no matter how lifelike and authentic they seemed to the thirsty explorers, they were actually all illusions.

The reason cultivators believed in their Spiritual Perception was because they were extending their consciousness directly toward their surroundings to perceive it, so it was much more unlikely for them to perceive something incorrectly. In their current situation, they were indeed able to see the entire situation clearly with their eyes, but who could guarantee that what they were seeing was real?

“Brother Yun, can you help us sense if that Dongxu Gourd is real?” Zhang Xuan suddenly spoke up.

“Alright!” Yun Lianhai nodded.

If what they were seeing within the spatial seal was false, there was a good chance that the Dongxu Gourd could be fake as well.

A droplet of blood flew toward Yun Lianhai’s glabella, and an eye abruptly opened up between his brows. The eye quickly turned its gaze toward the gourd in the sky.

A moment later, he shook his head and said, “I can’t sense the presence of any treasure...”

“You can’t sense it?” Luo Xuanqing’s face turned pale.

He had prepared for a very long time in order to acquire this Dongxu Gourd. If it turned out to be an illusion, he really might break into tears!

“Let me take a look at it,” Zhang Xuan said with a frown.

He could not make a clear assessment of the situation with what they had gathered so far, so the most effective way was for him to enter the spatial seal personally to check things out.

“Be careful,” Luo Xuanqing instructed.

“Un.” Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan suppressed his cultivation before making his way into the spatial seal.

The method he used to seal his cultivation was not as advanced as Luo Xuanqing, but the zhenqi he cultivated was the Heaven's Path zhenqi. As long as he willed it so, not even Saint 9-dan experts would be able to discern his level of cultivation, let alone the others!

Hu!

As soon as he entered the spatial seal, his surroundings abruptly turned completely white. He tried to extend his Spiritual Perception to the limits, but he was still unable to perceive anything at all. It was as if he was standing amid a barren land where he was the only man existent within this world.

Luo Xuanqing and the others had already vanished without a trace, as if they had not even been there in the first place.

This sure is a little unnerving... Zhang Xuan thought with a frown as he slowly proceeded ahead.

Shortly after, a mountain range appeared before his sight.

After which, he arrived before a waterfall with a lake at the bottom. The cascading water sounded deafening in the surroundings.

This is...

Taking a closer look, Zhang Xuan's heart began beating in agitation.

He had been there before. That was where he had first met Luo Ruoxin!

The Verdant Mountains of the Huanyu Mountain Range!

In this very place, he had witnessed countless spirit beasts gathering around the waterfall, and he had thought that they were intending to do Luo Ruoxin harm. So, he had charged forward in the hope of saving her. That was how they had first met.

He quickly turned his gaze over to the waterfall, and a beautiful figure stood calmly over there. Just as always, she stood with an air of indifference, reminiscent of an inviolable

lotus. It seemed as if there was nothing in this world that would be able to faze her.

“Ruoxin...” This was not the first time they had met one another, but even so, Zhang Xuan’s heart still could not help but skip a beat as if it was the first time.

He had thought that he would be able to meet Luo Ruoxin as soon as he came to the Sanctum of Sages, but as he came to learn more about their current situation, he felt more pressured. It was to the point where he was not sure how he could face her anymore.

Even so, the yearning in his heart never died down even for a moment; on the contrary, it had only been growing stronger with time.

No, this isn’t real. This is just an illusion... Clenching his fists tightly, Zhang Xuan endured his urge to charge over, and his breathing gradually calmed down as well.

His mind had been confused for a moment, but as rationality slowly returned to him, he recalled that he was in the midst of finding the Dongxu Gourd, and there was no way he could appear in the Verdant Mountain all of a sudden, let alone meet Luo Ruoxin. Even if it was not an Illusory Formation, it was likely to be some clever manipulation of folded space that allowed for the reflection of his memories.

Sou!

Having calmed down, Zhang Xuan was just about to advance forward when a sharp glint of light suddenly flashed across the sky. In the blink of an eye, it sliced right across Luo Ruoxin’s body.

Following which, a young man with a vile look on his face appeared before Luo Ruoxin, and he uttered with a cold sneer, “You are my fiancée, but you fell in love with someone else. Since that’s the case... why don’t you just drop dead!”

The young man had a demented look in his eyes, and his facial features were deeply reminiscent of Zhang Chun. But for some reason, the young man seemed to bear some resemblance to him too.

The young prodigy of the Zhang Clan... Zhang Xuan gritted his teeth in fury.

How dare that bastard young prodigy of the Zhang Clan make a move against Luo Ruoxin? He's courting death!

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to unseal his cultivation, the Library of Heaven's Path in his mind jolted. For an instant, he felt as if a resounding bell had chimed right next to his ear, causing his body to stiffen in shock. He was forcefully jolted back to rationality, and he told himself, It's just an illusion. It's just an illusion...

At the same time, he drove his state of mind swiftly and re-entered the state of Heart of Tranquil Water. When he looked over once more, the young prodigy had already disappeared, and Luo Ruoxin was nowhere to be seen. In fact, even the entire Verdant Mountain had vanished.

Everything had returned to a completely white space.

That was a close shave, Zhang Xuan thought as cold sweat trickled down his body.

Even though he knew that it was an illusion, he still could not help himself from making a move upon seeing Luo Ruoxin being injured. It seemed like the spatial seal did not just seek to confound—it intended to play on the emotions and feelings of others as well.

Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. It's fortunate that I have the Library of Heaven's Path, or else I would have been jolted out like Luo Xuanqing and the others...

Just as he was about to proceed ahead once more, he suddenly felt the 'ground' beneath him giving way, and he abruptly plummeted downward. The piercing whistling of the wind reverberated in his ears.

When he lowered his head, he could see the earth accelerating toward him at a fearsome speed, and it seemed like he would collide anytime soon.

He had suppressed his cultivation entirely, so his current strength was only at that of an ordinary human. If he fell from such a height, he would definitely lose his life.

In response to the danger perceived, his zhenqi began jumping into action, attempting to push its way out of the seal so that he could break the fall.

It's an illusion. It's an illusion! Zhang Xuan suppressed his zhenqi with greater force as he slowly closed his eyes.

If not for what he had experienced earlier, he surely would have succumbed. However, the previous experience had left him prepared for whatever was to come, so he was no longer as panicked or affected as before.

If he really used his zhenqi, the spatial seal would immediately rebound against him, and that would cause him to get injured.

Hu!

As soon as his heart had returned to perfect calmness, the deafening whistling of the wind and the falling sensation disappeared without a trace. When he opened his eyes once more, he found himself still standing amid the white space.

Using space to conjure effects reminiscent of illusions, I have never really thought of that possibility before... Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief as he examined his surroundings once more.

His comprehension of formations had reached the level of 8-star pinnacle, and he had learned the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel as well. Under normal circumstances, a folded space would not be able to trap him. However, this place was actually able to breach his mental fortitude without him sensing that anything was amiss. The means of the owner of the ancient domain were truly astounding,

Activating his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan noted that the structure of the surrounding space was reminiscent of a beehive, consisting of small cubes placed together. However, unlike an ordinary beehive, the cubes were not stationary. Instead, they were flowing along with drifting water, forcing one to go along with its momentum and fall under its effects.

Space is basically ripples moving at a frequency. As long as I can find the true nature of this space, I'll be able to manipulate

it too, Zhang Xuan thought as he went through what he had learned in the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel.

Some time later, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up. I see!

Through analyzing the structure of the space around him, the various parts of the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel that did not make sense to him previously suddenly made complete sense.

Back when he cultivated the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, his cultivation was still a little too low, making it highly difficult for him to comprehend the deeper nature of space. However, with his cultivation being raised to Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, he was able to better analyze the space around him and advance his understanding of spatial laws to a higher level.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization. It's no wonder this spatial seal is able to evoke illusions. Space can be formed using formations, and the inverse is true as well. So, naturally, it can be used to influence the thoughts of others as well.

Formations could be used to set up space, and space could be set up as formation. Building on this, that would mean that it was possible to embed formations within space itself to make one see the things that they desired the most.

Exhaling a mouthful of turbid gas, Zhang Xuan's eyes glowed in excitement. Having comprehended this, my understanding of space should have reached the level of 'Control'!

There were mainly five levels of the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, namely Compress, Traverse, Control, Creation, and Destruction.

Compress allowed one to compress space and hasten one's movements.

Traverse could be considered as a deepening of the concept of Compress. Through a greater understanding of space, one would be able to execute movements reminiscent of teleportation, covering a distance of several hundred meters in an instant.

One who had comprehended this realm would be able to breach the Dominion of a Phantasm Space realm expert without being affected by the latter's control of space.

Control referred to gaining the ability to manipulate space. Upon reaching this realm, folded space and the sort would no longer be able to trap one. In fact, one would even be able to tap into the strength harnessed within these spaces to suppress one's opponent.

As for Creation and Destruction, Zhang Xuan still had not managed to fully comprehend those two concepts. He could tell that the creator of this ancient domain had reached the level of Creation at the very least, but for the time being, he still could not say for sure what 'Creation' in terms of space represented.

Since I have managed to reach the 3-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, this spatial seal won't be able to trap me any longer... Zhang Xuan chuckled inwardly.

With his current comprehension of spatial laws, this beehive-like space was an enigma to him no more.

Even the various formations embedded into the spatial seal that induced illusions in his head earlier also appeared clearly before his eyes, and he could destroy him on a whim.

I should leave now. Zhang Xuan drove his zhenqi and lightly waved his hand.

Then, he took a step forward, and the next moment, he was standing right before the river. A lush green gourd floated right before him, emanating an overpowering aura.

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The river was a spirit vein, and the spiritual energy flowing through it was so concentrated that it felt almost tangible.

The gourd was just hanging right beneath it, absorbing the spiritual energy as nutrition and growing slowly.

“Now, I just have to pluck it and take it back...” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

If he wanted to level up, he just had to collect sufficient cultivation technique manuals and spirit stones. As valuable as the Dongxu Gourd was, it was of very little use to him. It would be more worth it for him to use it to develop a good relationship with Luo Xuanqing. As long as he could win Luo Xuanqing’s goodwill and get him to speak up on his behalf later when vying for Luo Ruoxin’s hand in marriage, everything would be worth the effort!

Thus, he reached out to grab the Dongxu Gourd.

Even though he did not use any strength, with his comprehension of Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel reaching 3-dan, his grasp easily caused the surrounding space to turn viscous. As if a fish trapped in a net, all escape routes for the gourd were sealed.

Just as Zhang Xuan’s hand was just about to reach the gourd, the lush fruit suddenly woke up and began struggling.

Kacha!

The sealed space immediately broke, and Zhang Xuan felt an overwhelming force pressing down on him, threatening to grind his arm down to dust.

“Hmm?” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment. He quickly drove his zhenqi to form a massive barrier before him.

With his enhanced comprehension of space, even if he were to drive his zhenqi now, he would not suffer a rebound from the spatial seal.

Hu!

The gourd hanging on the vine shook its bottom.

Si la!

The massive barrier was immediately torn apart as if it was a piece of paper. Zhang Xuan hurriedly placed his hands up to guard against the attack.

An intense pain assaulted his arm, and the next moment, he was smacked down onto the ground.

With a pale face, Zhang Xuan struggled to his feet. His entire arm had already gone numb from the impact, and his bones were creaking in protest, as if saying that they would shatter if they had to endure any more than that.

Zhang Xuan's physical body had currently reached a level of resilience on par with half-Saint high-tier artifacts. Thus, he would not feel anything even if a Saint intermediate-tier artifact tried to slice him. Yet, with a slight shake, the gourd was able to leave him in such pain. The strength of the gourd had far surpassed his imagination.

"Damn it!" Zhang Xuan quickly drove his Heaven's Path zhenqi to recuperate from his wounds as he glared at the gourd with reddened eyes.

"I don't believe that I won't be able to capture you!"

Taking in a deep breath, he flicked his wrist, and a sword appeared in his palm. With a slight flick, a burst of sword qi shot toward the gourd.

The Lingxu Sword!

Considering how the Dongxu Gourd could help one achieve a breakthrough to Dimension Sundering realm, its tier was probably quite high. Having suffered against it a moment ago, Zhang Xuan dared not take the gourd lightly, so he used his most powerful weapon right from the start.

Tzzzzzz!

As soon as the Lingxu Sword appeared, the surrounding space immediately began distorting, seemingly ready to be torn apart at any moment.

In the first place, folded spaces were not as stable as the spaces outside. On top of that, Zhang Xuan had already comprehended the third dan of Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel. Even if he could not rip the folded space open, it was not too difficult for him to create a distortion in it.

Hu!

Watching as a burst of sword qi flew in its direction, the gourd shook its body once more, reminiscent of a large-bottomed individual flaunting their figure.

Tz la!

A powerful shockwave rippled from the gourd, halting the incoming sword qi in place, preventing it from moving even an inch closer.

“This...” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

Even though he did not use the Three Swords of Lingxu, he had still harnessed its offensive Sword Quintessence in the attack. Not even a Saint 7-dan Phantasm Space realm primary stage expert would dare take the attack head-on. Yet, just by shaking its body, the gourd actually managed to neutralize his attack.

Was it not a little too strong for a mere gourd?

Knowing that he could not afford to hold back, Zhang Xuan quickly whipped out 108 swords and commanded them to attack.

“Go!”

Sou!

A barrage of sword qi instantaneously filled the area as the zhenqi in Zhang Xuan was swiftly sapped dry. The 108 swords warped into flashes of cold light as they charged in the direction of the gourd.

Padah!

The gourd also seemed to sense the devastating might wielded in the move, and it shook its bottom even more joyously.

Puhe!

Due to its excessively large movements, it dropped off the vine and flew over in Zhang Xuan's direction.

Boom boom boom!

It clashed directly with the sword qi, sending ripples diffusing into the surroundings amid brilliant bursts of colorful light.

As powerful as the Sea Severing Sword was, it seemed to be completely ineffective on the gourd. The swords qi simply bounced off it without causing the slightest mark on its surface. Instead, the gourd was even able to speed up in the midst of those attacks, tiding across the entire barrage of attack in just an instant.

"It's actually so powerful?" Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

Sea Severing Sword was already his strongest move, and even Yuan Xiao and the others would suffer a great deal if they were to take the attack head-on.

Yet... it was actually so easily neutralized by the gourd. This was really inconceivable.

Was it normal for gourds to be that powerful?

However, the gourd also did not plan on allowing Zhang Xuan any time to rest. Right after breaking through the Sea Severing Sword, it slammed its body forcefully toward his chest.

After executing the Three Swords of Lingxu, the zhenqi in his body was already on the verge of running dry. Fortunately, with the recent breakthrough in his physical body cultivation and soul cultivation, he was not completely powerless without zhenqi anymore.

Without any hesitation, he raised both of his palms while driving the Heaven's Path Soul Art to draw upon his soul energy to augment his defenses.

Peng!

The crisp sound of a shattering bone echoed clearly in the air. Zhang Xuan's arm had fractured under the impact.

His body was sent flying into the distance before crashing heavily onto the ground. This short encounter had caused several bones of his ribcage to shatter as well.

Despite being a mere artifact, the fighting prowess of the Dongxu Gourd was simply too powerful.

If not for the Sea Severing Sword neutralizing a portion of the offense, that previous slam would have left him completely incapacitated.

Sou!

Before Zhang Xuan could climb up from the ground, the gourd shook a little in the air and charged toward him once more.

This time, its movement was way faster than before, to the point where its figure was nothing more than a slight blur. It seemed as though it would not rest until it was able to smash him into his grave.

Zhang Xuan's face paled.

In a frontal encounter, he was completely no match for the Dongxu Gourd. On top of that, his zhenqi was completely expended at the moment, and he was severely injured as well. If he allowed the gourd's attack to fall on him, he really might just lose his life there and then.

“Spatial Seal! Clone!”

Zhang Xuan was not sure whether those outside were able to see what was happening within, but to prevent Luo Xuanqing and the others from seeing his trump card, he still snapped his fingers to seal the surrounding space, preventing anyone from seeing what was within. At the same time, he released his clone.

After cultivating the Heaven's Path Soul Art, the prowess of his clone had risen by leaps and bounds. Its fighting prowess was significantly higher than his, so it should at least be able to defend against the Dongxu Gourd for some time.

Hu!

As soon as his clone appeared, Zhang Xuan immediately filled him in on the situation through their telepathic connection, and the other party charged forward to engage the Dongxu Gourd.

However, as fast as his clone was, he was still lacking compared to the Dongxu Gourd. Before he could even throw a punch, the latter was right before him.

Padah!

The Dongxu Gourd crashed right into his clone's face, imprinting its shape onto his face.

“Screw you!” Zhang Xuan's clone immediately went berserk. “How dare you hurt my handsome face? I'm going to kill you!”

Each time he was released from the Myriad Anthive Nest, he would derive great joy from mocking his main body and flaunting his overwhelming strength. But this time, before he could say or achieve anything, he ended up being quashed by a mere gourd instead. This unprecedented humiliation left him feeling so angry that it felt as if he would explode from sheer rage.

While roaring, the clone did not forget to throw a furious punch toward the Dongxu Gourd too.

Boom!

It was a direct hit, but the clone felt a jolt run through his body instead. With quivering lips, he quickly turned to the main body and said, “I can't defeat him. You should quickly run away!”

Even though his fighting prowess was far stronger than the real Zhang Xuan's, it was still a huge way off from matching up to the gourd before him.

“Run away?” Zhang Xuan hesitated upon hearing those words.

He was here to obtain the gourd for Luo Xuanqing, and to run away after all the effort they had put into this mission... was really a little hard to accept.

“If you aren’t going to run, you can face that fellow yourself. I won’t be accompanying you, goodbye!” the clone roared with gritted teeth.

Under the furious onslaught of the gourd, his body already bore no semblance of a human anymore.

Of course you can still afford to hesitate when all you are doing is hiding behind my back! If you don’t want to run away, why don’t you try facing this monster of a gourd yourself?

“Alright then...” Zhang Xuan nodded with a reddened face.

He also knew that he would not be a match for the Dongxu Gourd with his zhenqi sapped dry at the moment, so without any hesitation, he waved his hand and withdrew his clone and all of the swords back into the Myriad Anthive Nest and his storage ring respectively before fleeing back the way he had come.

Kacha!

However, it seemed like the Dongxu Gourd still had no intention of letting him off. It charged over in his direction once more with the same astounding speed that was nigh impossible to dodge, so he had no choice but to reinforce his defenses and brace himself against the impact.

Pah!

He was sent flying once more, but fortunately, he had managed to retreat back to the area where the illusions were generated once more, and with a flash, his figure vanished from the spot.

Before vanishing from the spot, Zhang Xuan vaguely saw the gourd in the sky shaking its bottom triumphantly before leisurely made its way back to the vine and hanging itself back on it.

In the blink of an eye, everything returned to normal, as if nothing had happened at all.

...

Some time ago prior to Zhang Xuan's fight with the Dongxu Gourd...

After seeing the young man off into the spatial seal, Luo Xuanqing and the others could not help but pace around the area worriedly.

"Zhang shi... should be fine, right?"

"Zhang shi has a deep understanding of formations. Even though this isn't exactly a formation, it does bear some resemblance to one. I think he should be fine..."

"As long as he can resist the urge to release his cultivation, he won't be affected by the rebound of the spatial seal."

Even though these were the words that they spoke, uncertainty and apprehension still continued to plague their hearts.

This was especially so for Luo Xuanqing. He had paid a heavy price in order to obtain the Dongxu Gourd, and if he could not touch it after all that, he would really be at a loss.

"Look, Zhang shi is heading forward," Yuan Xiao said.

The crowd quickly turned their heads over and saw Zhang Xuan slowly making his way over to the gourd in the sky. However, barely after taking two steps, he abruptly vanished from the spot.

"He must have cleared the illusions..." Luo Xuanqing's eyes lit up in agitation.

However, just two breaths later, a figure suddenly flew out of the spatial seal, and with a resounding 'peng!', it crashed into the ground just beside them, coughing huge mouthfuls of blood.

"Zhang shi!"

Horrified, the crowd hurriedly rushed toward him worriedly.

"I-I'm fine..." As he struggled to his feet, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It was fortunate that he had fled swiftly, decisively leaping out of the spatial seal. Otherwise, he could have died at the hands of that fellow.

Looking at the severe wounds that Zhang Xuan had sustained, Luo Xuanqing could not help but ask, “Was Zhang shi also evicted by the spatial seal?”

They had all been injured by the spatial seal due to them unintentionally exerting their strength while inside. Could it be that the young man had faced the same inside too?

But... his wounds appeared to be slightly different from the ones they had sustained though?

“That’s not it...” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“What happened?” the intrigued Yuan Xiao asked.

Could it be that other than the spatial seal, there was still something else within the space that could hurt them?

If that was really the case, they would have to proceed carefully.

“I was...” With a face filled with embarrassment, Zhang Xuan scratched his head and said, “... attacked by a gourd...”

1360 Vine

It was no wonder Zhang Xuan would be so crestfallen by the matter.

All along, he had performed splendidly before his future brother-in-law, even impressing the latter through the taming of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. His image in the latter's heart should have been flawless and impeccable... but who would have thought that a mere gourd would undo all of his efforts at this critical juncture!

It was one thing if he could not defeat a saint beast or an artifact, but for even a gourd hanging on a vine to pummel him to the point where he was forced to flee frantically as if a mischievous son being evicted out of his house... this must really be the greatest humiliation in his life!

“You were pummeled by a gourd?” Luo Xuanqing was startled for a moment before he finally understood what was going on. “That means to say that... Zhang shi, you have met the Dongxu Gourd? So, that thing really exists, and what we see isn't just an illusion?”

“That's right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Due to Yun Lianhai saying that he could not sense the presence of a treasure, everyone's heart was left on an edge, fearing that their efforts had all gone to waste. Zhang Xuan's reassurance made all of them heave a sigh of relief.

Since it really existed, they still stood a chance then.

Seeing the dejected look on Zhang Xuan's face, Luo Xuanqing patted his shoulders and consoled him. “As an item that could help others comprehend the Dimension Sundering realm, its fighting prowess is likely to be on par with Saint 8-dan primary stage experts. As talented as you are, Zhang shi, your cultivation is still only at Saint 5-dan Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, a great distance from it. It's only natural that you

won't be a match for it. In fact, even I won't fare too well against it..."

Considering how the Dongxu Gourd raised the chances of a cultivator achieving a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm by 50%, how could it possibly be anything ordinary?

As long as one's strength was not on par, putting aside capturing it, even if one were to capture it, there was no way one would be able to assimilate it!

It was only after hearing those words that Zhang Xuan finally felt a little better inside. He turned to the crowd and said, "I have already deciphered the crux to the spatial seal before us, and I'll bring you all to the gourd later on. However, I just want to warn all of you beforehand that the fellow is extremely violent, and there's a good chance that it'll make a move on us as soon as it sees us. So, I think you all should heal up first and condition your physical state to your peak."

"Alright then."

The crowd nodded before taking a seat.

Zhang Xuan took a seat as well. He opened up his acupoints and swiftly absorbed the spiritual energy in the surroundings so as to replenish the zhenqi that he had lost earlier and heal his wounds.

Thanks to the concentrated spiritual energy that was present in the folded space, it took him less than four hours to recover completely.

While reinforcing his cultivation, Zhang Xuan began strategizing against the Dongxu Gourd. That gourd is really a little too powerful. It won't be easy to deal with it even with our current forces...

He had considered several ideas, but after some careful rumination, they did not seem to be feasible against the Dongxu Gourd.

Just as Luo Xuanqing had said, that fellow was likely to possess fighting prowess on par with Dimension Sundering

realm primary stage experts, a level that was far beyond the current them.

Unless... he released Vicious' finger and head to collaborate with Luo Xuanqing and the others!

But of course, that would mean exposing Vicious' existence, and for a master teacher to be rearing an Otherworldly Demon... If the matter got out, he would surely draw the wary gaze of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters upon him, and there was a chance that his master teacher license might even be revoked.

After quite some thought, Zhang Xuan was still unable to think of any good ideas. In this moment, Luo Xuanqing and the others suddenly stood up and said, "Let's head off!"

While they had sustained rather severe injuries from the earlier rebound of the spatial seal, after swallowing the recovery pill that Zhang Xuan had given them and utilizing the various means they possessed, they had managed to mostly recover from their wounds.

"Make sure to follow closely behind me. Don't even stray off by a single step," Zhang Xuan instructed severely.

Understanding the dangers that lay within the spatial seal, the others nodded.

Zhang Xuan swiftly sealed his cultivation before taking the lead into the seal.

Having comprehended the 3-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, his grasp over space was stronger than ever. On top of that, he had already comprehended the secret of the spatial seal, so in truth, there was no longer any danger in here for him.

In terms of absolute ability to manipulate space, Luo Xuanqing was likely a little stronger than him, but within the spatial seal, Luo Xuanqing would not even be able to come close to matching to him.

With the prior experience of traveling through the spatial seal, the second attempt proceeded much smoother. It did not take too long for them to arrive in the vicinity of the river of

spiritual energy, and they could clearly see the gourd hanging just beneath it.

“It’s the Dongxu Gourd...” Luo Xuanqing’s body trembled in agitation.

He could not see it clearly from afar, but now that he was already in its vicinity, he could see that it was the Dongxu Gourd. If he could assimilate it into his body, his chances of achieving a breakthrough to Dimension Sundering realm would be increased by 50%.

“I don’t think that I’ll be of much help to you from this point onward, so I’ll just wait for you here,” Zhang Xuan said.

Unless he were utilized all of his trump cards, his actions would not mean much in comparison to the fighting prowess of the crowd. So, it did not matter whether he involved himself in the fight or not.

“It’s fine—you have already done enough.” Luo Xuanqing and the others were pumped up. “With our strength, we should be able to subdue it easily!”

Zhang Xuan raised his clenched fist and gave a cheer of encouragement. “Good luck!”

Three minutes later...

The group was back outside the spatial seal, and Luo Xuanqing and the others were lying on the ground with bruised, miserable faces.

Their collaboration was superb, and every single move they utilized was well-calculated to corner their opponent. Nevertheless, they were still no match for the gourd, and they ended up being viciously pummeled instead. This was especially so for Yuan Xiao—his entire body was covered with round imprints of the Dongxu Gourd.

Yun Lianhai hesitated for a moment before saying, “Zhang shi, why don’t you bring the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast in? With it making a move, we should be able to destroy the Dongxu Gourd easily!”

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast possessed strength comparable to a Saint 8-dan pinnacle expert, and even if the four of them collaborated with one another, they still would not be a match for it. With its help, they should be able to subdue the Dongxu Gourd with ease.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was slightly troubled by that request.

It was not that he did not want to do that... but it had not been long since he had constructed an awe-inspiring image before the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, and if he had to engage its help just to deal with a mere gourd now...

His pride could not take it!

Besides, the folded space seemed to be constructed in a manner that did not allow Saint 8-dan experts to enter. Well, it might still be possible for him to bring the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast in if he were to first store the latter in his Myriad Anthive Nest before letting it out, but such a course of action could possibly result in the folded space becoming unstable as well. If so, that would cause much more trouble than it was worth.

While the crowd was still conflicted as to what they should do, Luo Xuanqing suddenly gritted his teeth and resolutely declared, “Forget it, I’ll use my bloodline ability then! I’ll need you all to assist me later on.”

“You are going to use your bloodline ability?” Bi Hongyin frowned. “Are you certain? You’ll have to rest for at least a month if you use it, and that might cause you to lag behind Zhang Chun...”

While activating the bloodline ability would briefly grant an offspring of a Sage Clan overwhelming fighting prowess, it would also put a great strain on their body. For this reason, they would only choose to resort to it in desperate situations.

“I know, but as long as I can capture it, I should be able to push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan as soon as I recover after the month. This price is something that I can accept!” Luo Xuanqing replied.

Given his current rate of cultivation, he would at least require a few more years or even a decade or two of effort before he would be ready to push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan.

However, with the Dongxu Gourd, he should be able to succeed within just three months! So, resting for just a month was just a small price to pay.

“I see.” Bi Hongyin nodded. “Since you have made up your mind, let’s do it.”

There was no such thing as a free lunch in the world. It would be blind optimism if a person expected to lay his hands on a treasure without giving something in return. Prior to making the journey here, Luo Xuanqing had already resolved himself to make sacrifices for this aim.

Having come to a decision, they quickly scattered to recuperate from their injuries and condition themselves back to their peak state.

Six hours later, they stood before the Dongxu Gourd once more.

“Hongyin, use your demonic tunes to interfere with its attacks. Yuan Xiao, try to draw the gourd’s aggression upon you. Yun Lianhai, you will be going on the offensive alongside me. We only have one chance, so we have to succeed this time around!” Luo Xuanqing said solemnly.

“Alright!” the crowd replied resoundingly.

“Let’s begin then!” Luo Xuanqing bellowed.

The next moment, overwhelming energy began billowing intensely within Luo Xuanqing’s body, and it felt like his aura had been lit on fire. Following which, the space around him began to distort randomly.

He took a step forward and raised his palm, and the space around the gourd seemed to instantaneously freeze in place.

Hu!

Sensing hostility directed toward it, the gourd immediately charged out indignantly, wanting to strike down its enemy. However, the strength that Luo Xuanqing wielded from

activating his bloodline was simply too strong. Despite multiple attempts to dash out, the gourd was actually unable to break out of the confined space.

Triiing ting! Trriiiiiinnng ting!

The melody of a zither began playing—Bi Hongyin had started her performance. Yuan Xiao and Yun Lianhai also charged forward to make their moves.

Watching the happenings, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. They should be able to succeed this time around...

After activating his bloodline ability, Luo Xuanqing's prowess had more than doubled, and his current strength was not any beneath that of a Dimension Sundering realm expert.

As expected one of the top geniuses of the Luo Clan, the rise in his fighting prowess from activating his bloodline ability was frightening.

He had fought with Zhang Qian in the past, and he had seen the latter activating his Zhang Clan bloodline ability as well. Even though Zhang Qian's strength did grow significantly upon the activation, it came nowhere close to comparing to this.

It seemed the purer one's bloodline was, the more formidable the effects when one's bloodline ability was activated.

While Zhang Xuan was still deep in thought, the four experts had managed to suppress the Dongxu Gourd to the ground, and they were kicking it furiously. Bi Hongyin even raised her zither and smashed it down on the gourd furiously.

Under the crazed onslaught of the crowd, the gourd could only tremble fearfully on the ground, forming a miserable sight in contrast to the arrogance it had shown before.

Recalling how badly he was pummeled previously, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction at that sight. You sure acted smug just now, didn't you? Take this to your heart, revenge is a dish best served cold!

This is the price you have to pay for acting arrogantly before me!

Let's see if you dare do something like that in the future!

Knowing that the battle was as good as concluded, Zhang Xuan turned his head over to the flowing river of spiritual energy in the sky.

This proved that there was indeed a spirit vein within the valley at one point in time, but someone had dug it out from the ground to nourish the Dongxu Gourd. On top of that, it had been used to sustain the folded space as well, so at this point in time, it was already on the verge of drying up.

What a pity... Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

If this spirit vein had only been extracted from the ground not too long ago, the concentration of spiritual energy flowing within it would have been on par with pinnacle spirit stones.

While there was still plenty of spiritual energy flowing within the river, the concentration had already dipped considerably. At this moment, its concentration was only equivalent to high-tier spirit stones, so it was not of much use to him anymore.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to retract his gaze from the river, he suddenly caught sight of the vine hanging over it in his peripheral vision. This vine seems to be good stuff...

It was roughly around the thickness of a finger, but its gleaming, jade-like exterior seemed to suggest that it was rich in spiritual energy. Previously, he had been paying so much attention to the Dongxu Gourd that he had neglected it, but examining it intently with his Eye of Insight, he realized that the vine was actually incredibly resilient, and the concentration of spiritual energy within it was far purer than that of a concentrated high-tier spirit stone.

“Let me take a closer look!” Unable to hold back his curiosity, he flew over with eyes gleaming in excitement.

It did not take long before he was standing in front of the vine. The vine had a brilliant green color that was reminiscent of emerald, and it felt cold to the touch. It was hard to put a finger on the feeling that the vine gave him, but it felt like there were countless folded spaces packed densely within it, similar to a beehive.

This... Zhang Xuan blinked in surprise.

He had felt such a sensation from the gourd as well. This should be what others called the power of Dimension Sundering, which was also what one had to comprehend in order to achieve a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan.

He had thought that such a power should only be existent in the gourd, but to think that the vine would carry traces of such power as well.

Will I be able to assimilate it? Zhang Xuan wondered as he touched it once more, and amid a cooling feeling that rippled through his body from his finger, a book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path.

Zhang Xuan retracted his finger and took a few steps back away from the vine before immersing his consciousness into the Library of Heaven's Path to read the book.

Kacha! Kacha!

However, at this moment, a series of crisp echoes reminiscent of squeals of delight sounded from the vine, and it dashed straight for Zhang Xuan.

Alarmed, Zhang Xuan raised his hand and grasped forward.
"Store!"

Hu!

In the blink of an eye, the vine was deposited into his storage ring.

1361 You Poisoned the Wine?

The disappearance of the vine seemed to have robbed the river of spiritual energy of its support, and with a resounding boom, it exploded. Rampaging spiritual energy diffused around the folded space, causing the entire folded space to ripple unstably.

Sensing the disturbance in the spiritual energy, Luo Xuanqing and the others were visibly stunned for a moment. They took a look at their surroundings before swiftly returning to pummeling the gourd.

Peng peng peng peng!

With the four Saint 7-dan experts utilizing all kinds of means and weapons against it, be it swords, sabers, spears, hammers, it did not take long before the gourd was lying completely paralyzed on the ground, seemingly on its final breath.

“The gourd is going to die if you continue pummeling it. Why don’t you rest for a moment before continuing?” The alarmed Zhang Xuan hurriedly rushed forward to persuade them to stop.

“Un.” Luo Xuanqing waved his hand, and the crowd finally came to a halt.

At the same time, he grasped his hand tightly together, and surrounding space distorted to form a bubble around the Dongxu Gourd.

“Alright, it’s done...”

Sealing the Dongxu Gourd seemed to have sapped the last bit of energy within Luo Xuanqing. His face turned pale as he slumped feebly to the ground.

There was a time limit on how long the bloodline ability could remain activated for. Back then, Zhang Qian had only used three moves before he was unable to lift his fist at all. On the other hand, Luo Xuanqing must have executed at least a

hundred moves considering how long he had fought with the gourd, and that was really an impressive feat.

“Congratulations!”

The eyes of Yuan Xiao and the others were filled with envy, but they still clasped their fist and offered their sincere congratulations to Luo Xuanqing.

Even though they would have loved to make the Dongxu Gourd their own, they were not willing to sacrifice their principles for that.

Besides, given Luo Xuanqing’s strength and standing, even though they were considered peers, they dared not offend him either.

“If not for all of your help, there’s no way I could have succeeded,” Luo Xuanqing said.

Just as he was able to place the spatial bubble into his storage ring—he would only be able to assimilate the gourd after conditioning his body back to its peak state—a powerful shockwave abruptly burst forth from the seemingly lifeless gourd.

Si la!

A huge rift was torn in the spatial bubble, and the gourd dashed out.

“Sh*t!” Luo Xuanqing narrowed his eyes in horror.

He had already depleted all of his strength due to the activation of his bloodline ability, and he could not even summon the slightest bit of energy in his powerless body anymore. If the Dongxu Gourd fled at this moment, there was no way he would be able to stop it!

“Stop right there!” Yuan Xiao and the others were startled for a moment, but they swiftly recovered and moved decisively to take down the Dongxu Gourd.

After all of the suffering they had gone through and effort they had put in to take down the Dongxu Gourd, how could they allow it to escape now that they were only a step away from success?

Sou sou sou!

However, the gourd seemed to have known their attack trajectories in advance, and with just a slight shake, it managed to avoid the rain of attacks with ease. In the blink of an eye, it accelerated beyond the speed of sound, and it was headed in one specific direction.

Toward Zhang Xuan!

“This...” Zhang Xuan felt as if ants were running on his scalp, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

I didn’t even make a move this time around, so why are you coming for me?

“Zhang shi, be careful!” the crowd shouted anxiously.

Given how quickly the gourd was moving, Zhang Xuan knew that it was already too late for him to hide. Thus, he gritted his teeth and braced himself to withstand the impact of the collision, just as he had done before.

Hu!

As soon as his palm came into contact with the Dongxu Gourd, he felt a searing pain assaulting his hand. The Dongxu Gourd had actually managed to puncture a glaring hole in his palm, causing fresh blood to spurt all around.

Weng!

In the presence of blood, the Dongxu Gourd did not bother dodging at all. Instead, it shook its bottom and prepared to make a second move.

Hu la!

This time, it dashed straight toward Zhang Xuan’s abdomen.

Given the strength of the gourd, should its attack really connect, his intestines would surely be ruptured, resulting in severe injuries!

It’s not me; I’m not the one who pummeled you just now. The party who wanted to capture you is them, and the party who made a move on your earlier is them too! Why on earth are you coming for me instead?

Tears nearly streamed down Zhang Xuan's eyes this time around, but he knew that this was no time for crying. He drove his zhenqi and attempted to grab hold of the gourd before it struck its abdomen, but it was futile. He only caught air.

But surprisingly, the pain that he had anticipated did not arrive. Instead, the gourd vanished into his abdomen.

"This..." Zhang Xuan was stunned.

He had no idea what to make of the current situation.

The others also turned doubtful gazes in his direction.

"Where is the gourd?" Zhang Xuan looked around him anxiously, but the gourd was nowhere to be seen. He used his Spiritual Perception to gaze inwardly into his body, and his lips suddenly quivered. "W-why... why is it in my dantian?"

Seated lazily in the depths of his dantian was the Dongxu Gourd. Upon sensing the presence of Zhang Xuan's Spiritual Perception, it even intentionally shook its bottom gleefully, as if flaunting its victory.

"What?"

Everyone quickly rushed forward and scanned Zhang Xuan's body with their Spiritual Perception. A moment later, Luo Xuanqing slumped to the ground with a dazed look and muttered, "You have actually assimilated the Dongxu Gourd into your body..."

"Assimilated?"

"The Dongxu Gourd can help its owner comprehend the Dimension Sundering realm. As long as one assimilates it, one will be able to infuse it into one's dantian," Luo Xuanqing explained with his eyes widened in disbelief.

"However, the assimilation process is extremely complex. Not only does it require the cultivator to tribute their blood essence to it, more importantly, their cultivation must also have reached Saint 7-dan pinnacle at the very minimum in order to make it acknowledge them as its master. Considering that your cultivation is only at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, two

realms away from Phantasmal Space realm pinnacle... just what on earth is going on here?"

He had put in so much effort and paid such a heavy price before he managed to take down the Dongxu Gourd, but before he could assimilate it, it ended up diving into someone else's dantian. Luo Xuanqing could not help but clutch his suffocated chest, patting it forcefully to alleviate the pain.

Zhang Xuan's face paled upon realizing what had happened, and he anxiously bellowed, "But I never intended to assimilate it! Gourd, you'd better come out right now!"

He had come here to help his future brother-in-law procure what he needed, and to end up taking it for his own instead...

You are really bent on destroying the noble and righteous image I have established before my future brother-in-law, aren't you? You homewrecker!

Hu hu!

The gourd continued shaking its body gleefully.

"You..." Seeing how the gourd continued flaunting its victory smugly, Zhang Xuan felt so angry that his body quivered in rage. Left with no choice, he could only face Luo Xuanqing with a deeply apologetic look. "Brother Luo, I really had no intention of assimilating the Dongxu Gourd..."

"I know." Luo Xuanqing shook his head and sighed in resignation. "Artifacts possess spirit as well. What's not meant to be is simply not meant to be; there's no point forcing it..."

Even though he felt so stifled that he could spurt a bucketful of fresh blood out at the moment, he still managed to think things through.

Given how the Dongxu Gourd had chosen to dive into Zhang Xuan's dantian despite all he had done, it could only mean that it had never been interested in him from the start!

"I..." Zhang Xuan's face turned scarlet from embarrassment. He really did not know what he should say in such a situation.

What the heck was this? He was supposed to be there to help, but with such a happening, who else would dare ask him out to

hunt treasures in the future?

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before speaking up. “Brother Luo’s intention of procuring the Dongxu Gourd is to push for a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm, right? If I can help you achieve a breakthrough, would it mean that it wouldn’t matter whether you had the Dongxu Gourd or not?”

Considering how gleeful the Dongxu Gourd was acting, it did not seem like it would be coming out anytime soon. This matter could not be considered his fault, but nevertheless, he still felt deeply guilty for taking what should have belonged to Luo Xuanqing.

“Help me achieve a breakthrough?” Luo Xuanqing was visibly surprised by Zhang Xuan’s remark for a moment before he shook his head glumly. “Achieving a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm is not a small matter... Countless experts in history have been stuck at the Phantasmal Space realm, unable to take the final step forward. If not for that, I wouldn’t have traveled so far and paid such a heavy price to obtain the Dongxu Gourd!”

Despite the various miraculous means the young man had displayed so far, the difficulty in achieving a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan was simply too great! Even cultivators who were privileged enough to receive the guidance from a 9-star master teacher might not necessarily be able to take the final step forward, let alone the fact that Zhang Xuan was only at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle!

“Since this has already happened, why don’t you just give it a try?” Zhang Xuan asked.

If it had been a while ago, without having seen any Saint 8-dan cultivation technique manuals, there was no way he would have been able to help Luo Xuanqing achieve a breakthrough even if he could compile a book on the latter’s flaws through the Library of Heaven’s Path.

However, with his comprehension of space achieving the level of 3-dan Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, as well as his assimilation of the Dongxu Gourd, he had already gained a

significant understanding of the power of Dimension Sundering.

With that and the Library of Heaven's Path, he just might be able to help Luo Xuanqing achieve a breakthrough to higher realms!

“Give it a try? With the current state I am in, how can I give it a try?” Luo Xuanqing said with a bitter smile.

The activation of his bloodline ability had depleted all of his energy. Putting aside pushing for a breakthrough to higher realms, even walking normally was an arduous task to the current him!

“Oh right... Don't worry, I'll find a way to help you alleviate the side effects resulting from the activation of your bloodline ability.” Saying those words, Zhang Xuan immersed his consciousness back in the Library of Heaven's Path and began studying the book he had just compiled on Luo Xuanqing.

He had compiled this book while Luo Xuanqing and the others were fighting against the Dongxu Gourd. He had been intending to use it to explore the secrets concerning the unique bloodlines of Sage Clans, especially since he felt that it would come useful when he vied with the Zhang Clan for Luo Ruoxin's hand in marriage.

The activation of the bloodline ability would result in damage to one's spirit, mind, and vitality, putting one's body in a state of extreme deficiency. In such a state, the cultivator would be unable to exert any strength, and any forceful attempt to do so would result in one's cultivation declining... Reading the description in the book, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows knitted together.

There was a fundamental limit to one's potential, vitality, and spirit, and the activation of one's bloodline would lead to excessive depletion of those. Without sufficient time, there was no way one could recover to full health.

The Heaven's Path zhenqi is able to heal injuries, open up blockages in the meridians, and restore the spirit, mind,

vitality of the ill... I wonder if it will be effective in this situation too? Zhang Xuan wondered.

Due to the incredible purity of the Heaven's Path zhenqi, it was able to easily dive into a cultivator's meridians and cells to repair the damaged portions. In a sense, the depletion resulting from the activation of a unique bloodline was a similar problem. Perhaps, it might be of some use.

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan looked at Luo Xuanqing straight in the eye and said, "Brother Luo, I have thought of a way that could possibly help you recover from your weakened state swiftly!"

"Oh? What kind of method is it?" Luo Xuanqing asked curiously.

The young man before him had produced too many miracles in the time they had spent together. While he did not bear too much hope in the matter—if there was truly such a method, top-notch Sage Clans like the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan would already have been using it by now—he still wanted to hear what the young man had in mind.

"Simple." Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and passed a vat over with a confident look on his face. "You just have to drink this!"

"You want me to drink wine?" Luo Xuanqing was still wondering what kind of solution the young man had in mind, but to think that it would be this. His eyebrows could not help but shoot up.

Bi Hongyin stepped in and intervened. "Luo Xuanqing's body is currently in a bad shape. Drinking wine at this moment will only worsen his condition."

Are you serious about having Luo Xuanqing drink your wine? Look at how frail he is at the moment!

Yuan Xiao also stepped forward and offered, "Zhang shi, if you really wish to drink, why don't I accompany you instead?"

"This is the method to help him recover swiftly from the side effects of activating his bloodline ability," Zhang Xuan explained to the crowd before turning his gaze back to Luo

Xuanqing. “Brother Luo, if you believe me, you should give it a try. If it succeeds, I’ll help you achieve a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan by today. Even if it fails, it’s just a vat of wine. It won’t cause too much harm to your current condition!”

“This...” Seeing Zhang Xuan’s insistence, Luo Xuanqing hesitated for a moment before nodding slowly. “Alright then.”

He took the wine from Zhang Xuan’s hands and stared at it for a moment before raising his head and gulping down the wine.

Gugugugu!

As soon as the wine washed down his throat, a spicy feeling arose in Luo Xuanqing’s body. However, it did not seem to be making any difference to his current condition at all.

Just as he was about to berate the young man for fooling around, his body suddenly shuddered involuntarily. He widened his eyes in astonishment and exclaimed, “This wine... There’s something wrong with this wine!”

“You poisoned the wine?” Yuan Xiao immediately turned to Zhang Xuan with a darkened face, and a powerful aura immediately burst forth from him.

“...” Luo Xuanqing.

“...” Zhang Xuan.

1362 Luo Xuanqing's Breakthrough

“No, it’s not poison. Luo Xuanqing’s complexion is improving!” Before Zhang Xuan could explain himself, Bi Hongyin had spoken up.

Her meticulous nature allowed her to immediately notice the slight changes within Luo Xuanqing.

Even though Luo Xuanqing still looked as weak as before, unable to draw forth the slightest strength in his body, redness had started returning to his previously ghastly pale face.

Seeing that he had misunderstood Zhang Xuan, Yuan Xiao hurriedly reined in his aura and scratched his head in embarrassment.

He had seen how the young man had poisoned the Crimsontail Wasp King to death and declared that he would poison Zhang Chun to death, so as soon as Luo Xuanqing said that there was something wrong with the wine, the first thing that came to his mind was that the wine was poisoned.

Gudong! Gudong!

It did not take long for Luo Xuanqing to down the entire vat of fine wine. Without his zhenqi protecting his body, he swiftly became intoxicated by the high concentration of alcohol in the wine. Nevertheless, his complexion and body seemed to have recovered significantly from before.

If he had appeared to be a terminally-ill patient who seemed like he was standing at the gates to hell a moment ago, right now, he seemed more like a young man who had just been afflicted with a slight fever or something.

Luo Xuanqing looked at Zhang Xuan with glazed eyes and asked, “Is there still any more wine?”

“Here you go!” Zhang Xuan took out another vat and passed it over.

“Thank you...” Taking the vat, Luo Xuanqing began gulping it down in huge mouthfuls.

It was an established fact that after the activation of one’s bloodline ability, one would be unable to exert any might for an entire month. Yet, just by drinking a vat of wine, he felt the frailty that seemed to plague him right from the depths of his body starting to vanish!

This was something that was unbelievable to him!

One must know that the frailty after activating one’s bloodline ability was a problem that had plagued Sage Clans for countless years. Much research had been done to alleviate the problem, but there was still no feasible and affordable solution to resolve it.

But as he gulped down more and more wine, he could feel his vitality swiftly coming back to him, returning to his peak state.

By the time he was done with the second vat of wine, all frailty he felt had already vanished without a trace!

“Zhang shi...” The astounded Luo Xuanqing turned to look at Zhang Xuan, wanting to know how he managed to do it.

“Close your eyes and don’t resist me...” Zhang Xuan interrupted Luo Xuanqing’s words with wave of his hand.

Then, he flicked his finger, and countless needles flew over.

Tzzzzzzz!

As soon as the silver needles pierced into his body, Luo Xuanqing immediately felt a unique energy coursing through his body. The meridians that had ended up getting blocked as a result of him activating his bloodline ability slowly opened up once more.

To make an analogy, activating one’s bloodline ability was like causing a machine to go on overdrive. Once it cooled down, the energy that had gotten into narrow meridians would slowly agglutinate, causing blockages in the area, making it difficult for one to drive one’s zhenqi through them.

In other words, what was blocking the meridians was not impurities but one’s own zhenqi!

However, the energy that flowed through the silver needle melted the agglutinated zhenqi as if ice in the face of boiling water, clearing those meridians swiftly. In just moments, Luo Xuanqing felt refreshed and energized, and strength swiftly returned to his body, surging through his entirety.

“This...”

Yuan Xiao and the others glanced at one another, flabbergasted.

Recovering one’s vitality through drinking wine could still be rationalized by the wine being concocted using potent recovery medicinal herbs... but to replenish one’s zhenqi just by sticking a few silver needles in, that was a little too exaggerated!

Having recovered his zhenqi, Luo Xuanqing no longer felt as withered before. He flicked his wrist, took out a pill, and threw it into his mouth.

Geji! Geji!

As he absorbed the energy harnessed within the pill, the energy in his body grew stronger and stronger. In less than an hour, he had already returned to his peak state.

“You are really able to resolve the side effects from activating one’s bloodline ability...” Getting to his feet and feeling the strength coursing through his body, Luo Xuanqing stared at the young man before him with a look of disbelief.

Ever since he was young, his clan elders had always warned him against activating his bloodline ability easily, or else he would have to undergo a long period of recuperation. Who knew that the formation master he had coincidentally met would actually be able to resolve his problems so easily?

“This is a secret art of mine, and it depletes my energy greatly as well, so I earnestly request for you all not to let this matter out,” Zhang Xuan said with a pale face as he clasped his fist.

Luo Xuanqing’s cultivation was simply too much higher than his. He had needed to expend nearly all of his zhenqi before he was able to heal the other party.

It would be best for him to avoid doing this in the future, or else he would probably die of overexertion after treating a couple of people.

“Un.” It was apparent that Zhang Xuan had also pushed himself a little too much in the recovery process, and the others also understood the significance of this matter. Thus, they swiftly nodded in agreement.

After a short moment of rest, Zhang Xuan said, “Since Brother Luo has already recovered fully, let’s push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan right now then!”

“Alright.” Luo Xuanqing nodded. Then, with a slightly lost look on his face, he asked, “What should I do now?”

Even though he had managed to recover to his full strength, he was still some way off from pushing for a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm. Otherwise, he would not have gone through the trouble of looking for the Dongxu Gourd either.

“You should assimilate this item first.” Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and passed a vine over.

Although the power of Dimension Sundering within the vine was slightly inferior to that of the Dongxu Gourd, it was apparent that assimilating it would do one much good in pushing for a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm.

It was due this vine that he dared promise Luo Xuanqing that he would help him achieve a breakthrough.

“Alright.” Nodding, Luo Xuanqing began pumping his zhenqi into the vine, attempting to assimilate it for his own.

This was only a small segment of the entire vine, so it was not too difficult to assimilate it. It took him less than six hours to succeed.

Within the period of time Luo Xuanqing spent assimilating the vine, Zhang Xuan had managed to recover fully as well.

“Alright, store it in your dantian!” Zhang Xuan instructed.

Seeing how slow Luo Xuanqing’s movement was, he tapped his finger forward.

Tz la!

The vine immediately dived right into Luo Xuanqing's dantian.

"This..." Luo Xuanqing widened his eyes in disbelief.

In his view, the vine was only an ordinary item. Even if he were to assimilate it, there would be nothing that would come out of it. However, when he fused it into his dantian, he realized that the vine actually harnessed countless folded spaces packed together!

In fact, it could be said that the effect of the vine was nearly no different from assimilating the Dongxu Gourd itself!

Seeing that Luo Xuanqing finally understood, Zhang Xuan casually said, "Alright, you can push for a breakthrough now."

It was only with the Eye of Insight that he could discern the power of Dimension Sundering that was harnessed within the vine. The others lacked the ability to do so, so naturally, they were not able to notice it.

"Alright."

With his body back to its peak state and having assimilated the vine, Luo Xuanqing knew that it was the ideal opportunity for him to achieve a breakthrough. Thus, he took a seat on the ground and began conditioning his breathing, preparing himself for a breakthrough.

Some time later...

With a resounding explosion, a powerful aura flowed forth from his body. His aura abruptly surged, and in just a few moments, he had already overcome his bottleneck.

However, as he advanced into the Half-Dimension Sundering realm, his cultivation gradually came to a halt.

Seeing as Luo Xuanqing's flow of energy gradually came to a halt, Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully, "What's wrong? Are you lacking the strength to push for a breakthrough straight to Saint 8-dan?"

Under normal circumstances, considering that Luo Xuanqing was in his peak state and that he had assimilated the vine, he should have been able to push for a breakthrough to Dimension Sundering realm with ease. Why did he stop at just Half-Dimension Sundering realm?

“As long as I wish to do so, I can push for a breakthrough at any moment. However, at Saint 8-dan, one’s Dominion will become imbued with the power of Dimension Sundering, which is equivalent to wresting power from the surrounding space. However, the space in this folded space is considerably weaker and less stable, so even if I do achieve a breakthrough here, the increase in my fighting prowess will not be as great,” Luo Xuanqing explained.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Even though he had already comprehended the third dan of the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, he still knew close to nothing about the Dimension Sundering realm. As such, he was unable to anticipate such a possible pitfall.

At the Dimension Sundering realm, cultivators would seek to sunder the space from the world to strengthen themselves, and naturally, the space sundered from folded spaces would inevitably be weaker than those sundered straight from the natural world.

The space of the natural world had come to achieve an exquisite balance over countless years of development, so achieving a breakthrough there would be much more beneficial to one in terms of increment in fighting prowess or future potential.

“More importantly, when a cultivator achieves a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan, a lightning tribulation will be drawn in. If I challenge the trial back at the Sanctum of Sages, I’ll be less susceptible to the offense of inner demons, making it easier for me to succeed.”

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

The Sanctum of Sages carried the aura left behind by Kong shi and generations of master teachers, and due to the righteous air

that lingered in the area, inner demons dared not wreak havoc when one was challenging a tribulation. As such, achieving a breakthrough in the Sanctum of Sages would be much easier than doing so outside.

After all, not everyone was like him, capable of talking an inner demon into submission.

“He really succeeded...”

“How did he manage to do it?”

Seeing how Luo Xuanqing, who had difficulty even standing up not too long ago due to the side effects from activating his bloodline ability, successfully made a breakthrough to Half-Dimension Sundering realm, the faces of Bi Hongyin and the others flushed red in agitation.

Even though they had not reached Phantasm Space realm pinnacle yet, as long as they were to cultivate hard, they should be able to reach it within a few years.

If they could engage Zhang Shi’s help then and push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan Dimension Sundering realm, their clans would surely view them with far greater regard and grant them greater authority!

“Brother Luo, how much has your strength grown after achieving a breakthrough to the Half-Dimension Sundering realm?” Yun Lianhai asked curiously.

“How much has my strength grown?” Hearing that question, Luo Xuanqing laughed heartily and grabbed the space in front of him.

Kacha!

He tore off a fragment of space, creating a rift ahead of him.

Everyone widened their eyes in shock.

Even though they were in a folded space and Luo Xuanqing had always possessed exceptional control over space, this was still an astounding feat. Even Dimension Sundering realm intermediate stage experts would have incredible trouble achieving such a feat!

“There’s no need to worry. There’s no problem in the breakthrough method that Zhang Shi has imparted to me. If I meet with that bastard Zhang Chun again, I’ll be able to beat him up to the point where even his own father won’t be able to recognize him,” Luo Xuanqing said in excitement.

He had been competing with Zhang Chun for many years, and each time he achieved a breakthrough, the latter would swiftly follow suit as well. Neither of them was able to shake the other off. It was for this reason that he was determined to find the Dongxu Gourd so as to surpass the latter once and for all.

Who would have thought that, even though the Dongxu Gourd did not recognize him, he would still be able to successfully make a breakthrough?

With his newfound strength, he would make sure to put that fellow through a round of suffering when he returned to the Sanctum of Sages!

“That’s a relief...”

Everyone first heaved a sigh of relief before they slowly directed heated gazes toward Zhang Xuan.

“Ah...” Facing everyone’s passionate gazes, Zhang Xuan scratched his head in embarrassment and said, “Since we have resolved the matter concerning the Dongxu Gourd, shall we return to the Sanctum of Sages now?”

“Wait a moment first,” Luo Xuanqing said with a smile. “I don’t think that there’s only the Dongxu Gourd in this ancient domain. In fact, the reason I invited Yun Lianhai over is to borrow his ability to scan the surroundings. Perhaps, we might be able to find much more valuable treasures in here!”

1363 Looped Space

A spirit vein was torn out of the mountain valley and placed into this folded space in order to supply it with energy. Surely the person who had left behind this folded space would not have conducted this huge operation just to nourish a mere Dongxu Gourd, right? There had to be something more to it.

At this moment, Zhang Xuan also came to the same conclusion. He shot a glance at Bi Hongyin and the others and noticed the lack of surprise on their faces.

From the look of it, it seemed like they had known this in advance as well, which was also the reason they were willing to lend their strength to help Luo Xuanqing obtain the Dongxu Gourd despite the danger involved.

“Yun Lianhai, we’ll be counting on you!” Luo Xuanqing said with a solemn nod.

“Un. Leave it to me,” Yun Lianhai replied.

Without any hesitation, he executed his secret art once more, and a series of ripples diffused from his glabella into the surroundings.

The folded space expanded far beyond the spatial seal where they had previously been. The ripples diffused for a very long time, to the point where Yun Lianhai’s body was beginning to tremble, before they finally came to a halt.

“How is it?”

Yun Lianhai had to gasp for air for quite a while before he managed to recover enough to reply. “I have sensed some ancient objects, but I’m not too sure if they are treasures.”

“Lead the way!” Luo Xuanqing said.

As soon as the order was given, Yun Lianhai began making his way forward.

After a roughly ten minutes journey, the crowd suddenly came to a halt with perplexed frowns on their faces.

“Judging from the river in the sky, it doesn’t seem like we are getting anywhere. Could we possibly be trapped within a Confinement Formation?” Bi Hongyin asked with a slightly perturbed voice.

Throughout their journey, she could not help but realize that no matter where they traveled to, the river of spiritual energy still appeared to be at the exact same relative position to them in the sky. It was almost as if they had not advanced a single step forward!

Facing such a situation, Luo Xuanqing lowered his head and pondered for a moment before saying, “It isn’t a Confinement Formation but the effects of the distortion in space.”

Achieving a breakthrough to Half-Dimension Sundering realm had granted him a deeper understanding of space, allowing him to swiftly notice what was amiss with the surroundings.

“Distortion in space?” Bi Hongyin asked doubtfully.

The scenery around them appeared to completely normal, devoid of the bizarre warps similar to the cone-shaped vortex they had seen prior to entering this folded space. As such, she could not help but harbor some doubts toward Luo Xuanqing’s judgement.

“The distortion in space here spans across the entire folded space, so it isn’t visible to the eye. The space that we commonly see is three-dimensional in nature, and it stretches endlessly into the surroundings. On the other hand, the space within this folded space seems to take the form of a ring. Traveling in a straight line will result in us walking in a loop, bringing us back to the point that we started from,” Luo Xuanqing explained.

“On top of that, a distortion in space will cause light to distort as well, and this creates the illusion that we are walking in a straight line even though we are effectively walking in circles! If we could jump out of this folded space and look at ourselves from above, we should see that our bodies are distorted instead of upright!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Distorted spaces were not apparent to those who were standing within them. In a sense, this was similar to how it was not apparent to an individual that the earth was round just by looking at their immediate surroundings.

The situation they were currently facing was similar to two endpoints in space connecting with one another, forming a closed loop that resulted in them walking in endless circles.

“If that’s the case... how do we leave this folded space?” Yuan Xiao asked apprehensively.

Luo Xuanqing hesitated for a moment before replying, “Shatter the folded space!”

Hearing that, Bi Hongyin shook her head and said, “Folded spaces aren’t stable. If anything goes wrong while shattering the folded space, there’s a good chance that we might be trapped here for life!”

Folded spaces were not as stable as spaces in the natural world, and they were incapable of regenerating on their own. So, if someone exerted too much strength, it could result in its complete collapse, and all of them would be reduced to dust.

It was also for this reason that it would be unsafe for them to bring the Saint 8-dan Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast in.

“This...” Luo Xuanqing frowned.

He also understood this much, or else he would have made a move immediately instead of wasting his breath on words.

Zhang Xuan suddenly spoke up. “Actually, there’s no need to shatter this space.”

“Oh?”

The crowd quickly turned their sights over.

“Look at the flow of the spiritual energy above us. No matter where we walk, it remains right above us. This only means that the space around the river is stable, or in other words, it isn’t within the folded space we are in!” Zhang Xuan explained.

Looks of realization dawned upon the crowd.

Indeed, if the river was within the looped folded space as well, its relative position to them should change along with their movement. It did not make sense for it to remain fixed in position.

“If we wish to escape from here, we just have to find a way to delve into the river and move against its current,” Zhang Xuan said.

“That’s right!” Luo Xuanqing’s eyes lit up upon hearing those words, and he quickly nodded in agreement as well.

“Since that’s the case, let’s make a move!”

Without any hesitation, the crowd immediately flew toward the river.

The river was actually a spirit vein. As soon as the crowd made their way into it, they felt overwhelming spiritual energy pouring toward them at an incredible speed, causing their breathing to hasten.

Luo Xuanqing waved his hand and formed a massive spatial bubble around the crowd, alleviating the pressure resulting from the strong currents in the river. With that, the discomfort was reduced significantly, and they began to make their way forward slowly.

This spirit vein could have been passed off as pinnacle spirit stones, but it has expended itself too much in order to sustain this space. What a pity! Zhang Xuan thought in lamentation.

If this massive spirit vein had still been in the mountain valley, it surely would have developed into a spirit mine filled with plenty of pinnacle spirit stones. However, in order to allow the space to remain operating normally, the spiritual energy within it had been slowly depleting, to the point where even producing high-tier spirit stones was a problem for it now.

But again, if this spirit vein had actually produced pinnacle spirit stones, it would have long been harvested by the other powers. There was no way they would have gotten a chance to obtain the Dongxu Gourd.

Right! I should try and see if I can communicate with that fellow!

Knowing that he would not be in any danger with Luo Xuanqing around, Zhang Xuan turned his consciousness into his body, toward his dantian.

He swiftly saw the fellow who had willfully dived into his body lying leisurely on the ground, exuding vibes similar to a lazy Sunday morning.

Seeing how the gourd was able to remain completely unfazed after all the trouble it had caused him, displeasure swiftly filled Zhang Xuan's mind. Since that fellow has absorbed my blood and acknowledged me, I should be considered as its master now!

Thus, he began trying to establish control over the Dongxu Gourd.

Tzzzzz!

Under the drive of his power, the Dongxu Gourd began revolving in the air.

The power of space contained within the Dongxu Gourd began flowing through his body.

Huala!

Wherever the power of space swept by, the Heaven's Path zhenqi in the area of his dantian would suddenly collapse inward, as if it had fallen into a depression.

What's going on? Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in alarm.

He had spent a great deal of effort to recover his zhenqi, so how could the Dongxu Gourd make it disappear just by emanating a bit of power?

No, that's not it. It's not that my zhenqi has disappeared—the space within my dantian has been changed. I can store much more zhenqi in here now...

After a swift scan, Zhang Xuan was stunned.

It was not that his zhenqi had vanished into thin air; the surrounding space had been distorted, allowing him to store much more zhenqi than he had before.

Wait a moment. A thought suddenly emerged in Zhang Xuan's mind. If I could set up a closed loop within my dantian as well and keep my zhenqi in perpetual revolution, not only will I be able to store more zhenqi, I'll be able to draw it swifter than before as well, granting me more explosive power.

As perplexing as the idea of a looped space might have sounded to one who was encountering it for the first time, it was actually a rather simple concept, and it was not too difficult for him to implement.

If I could exert all of my zhenqi in an instant, I might just be able to execute the Ocean Cataclysm Sword...

With that thought, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Even though the Ocean Cataclysm Sword still had a few flaws here and there, the main reason he could not execute it yet was mainly due to his output of zhenqi being too low.

No matter how huge a tank was, the amount of water it could pump out was still limited by the width of its pipes.

The Ocean Cataclysm Sword required far greater outburst of zhenqi compared to the Sea Severing Sword, but if he could set up such a looped space within his dantian, he might just be able to draw forth sufficient zhenqi instantaneously to execute the technique.

Let me give a try...

Tzzzzzzz!

Sensing his strength, the Dongxu Gourd began to revolve slowly, gradually releasing the power of space around Zhang Xuan's dantian. It was a little similar to a bee constructing its beehive.

It seems like it'll take a while before the construction is complete.

Owing to the limitations in his cultivation, Zhang Xuan knew that it would take him a lot of effort to construct a looped space within his dantian even with the help of the Dongxu Gourd.

Nevertheless, it was a relief to see that he was able to drive the Dongxu Gourd without it resisting him. This meant that he had really managed to assimilate the latter.

Watching the construction of the folded space in his dantian, Zhang Xuan sighed helplessly.

It'll be fine as long as it doesn't cause any trouble. Just that, I'll need quite a bit of spiritual energy to complete the construction, so I need to start looking for spirit stones once more...

Due to his cultivation of the Saint Ascension Decipher, his zhenqi capacity far exceeded that of an ordinary cultivator. However, with the setting up of a looped space, he would require a lot more zhenqi in order to fill it up.

Making a rough calculation, he would require ten times as much as what he had at the moment!

This meant that he would have to gather spirit stones, absorb the spiritual energy within them, convert that into zhenqi, and deposit it into his looped space.

But given how poor he was at the moment, where was he supposed to look for more spirit stones?

If it really comes down to it, perhaps I should get Sun Qiang to compile a list of cultivators who are on the verge of a breakthrough in the Sanctum of Sages and 'share' their lightning tribulation when it comes, Zhang Xuan contemplated seriously.

He had benefited greatly from absorbing energy from the lightning tribulation during his previous breakthrough to Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle. Since he was able to do that for his lightning tribulation, there should not be any reason he could not do the same for the other lightning tribulations. With that, he should be able to fill up his dantian easily without any trouble.

I should have a discussion with Brother Luo later on and request to observe his lightning tribulation. Zhang Xuan nodded as he made up his mind on the matter.

After the previous absorption, the energy harnessed within ordinary lightning tribulations would not have much use to him anymore. However, the lightning tribulation that Luo Xuanqing would have to face when he pushed for a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm should be able to meet his standards.

“Look, what’s that?”

While Zhang Xuan was deep in thought, a sudden exclamation from the group pulled him back to reality. Raising his head to take a look, he realized that they had already reached the end of the river flow. A mountain range filled with peaks that rose right above the clouds appeared before his eyes.

However, on second look, he realized that the mountain was not real. It felt fleeting and beyond reach, a little like a painting someone had hung at the horizon of the world or perhaps just a mere mirage, a product of one’s imagination.

“That’s the highest level of painting, World Composition!” Luo Xuanqing remarked grimly.

“World Composition?”

“A painting at the level of World Composition far exceeds the realm Evocative Vividness, reaching a level where even humans can enter and live within the painting,” Luo Xuanqing said.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded. He took a closer look at the painting, and suddenly, a feeling of déjà vu came to him. He racked his brain in an attempt to capture the source of this feeling of familiarity when his eyes narrowed in astonishment. “This mountain range... Isn’t it the same as the one in the painting that the Qingtian Emperor made me decipher?”

1364 You Again!

Back in the Qingyuan Empire, the Qingtian Emperor visited the Painter Guild with a copper mask in hand, seeking help to remove the seal on a painting he had. In the end, Zhang Xuan was the one who managed to remove the seal, and beneath it, he found an illusory image of Kong shi.

And for him to see a higher level painting that depicted the identical mountain range to the one he had seen before... Could they be depicting the same location?

“Kong shi’s image isn’t on the painting though. Did the painter intentionally choose not to draw it, or did he not notice Kong shi’s presence?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out the painting he had acquired from the Qingtian Emperor and compared it to the mountain range on the ninth level painting before him. The features were completely identical to one another, well, with the exception of the lake of bathing ladies.

“That’s the [White Creek Mountain] of the Empire Alliance. It’s located at a place very far away from the Sanctum of Sages, such that even a Saint 7-dan beast would require a flight of three months in order to reach there!” Taking a glance at the painting in Zhang Xuan’s hand, Luo Xuanqing said.

He was slightly surprised initially to see that Zhang Xuan had a painting of the same scenery as the ninth level painting before them, but he didn’t think too much into it. After all, due to the splendid scenery at the White Creek Mountain, there were quite a few paintings of it circulating out there in the world.

“White Creek Mountain...” Zhang Xuan muttered beneath his breath as he tightened his fists.

“While the painting you have can’t compete with the ninth level painting up there, it’s still a commendable work of art. It

has managed to bring out the splendor and beauty of the mountain range in full.” Luo Xuanqing complimented.

This was a painting that could astound all painters in the Qingyuan Empire, but to Luo Xuanqing’s eyes, it could only be considered to be ‘commendable’.

“Indeed...” Zhang Xuan replied perfunctorily as he kept the painting back to his storage ring with his mind wandering somewhere else.

Now that he knew that the mountain range depicted in the painting was the White Creek Mountain, he would have to make a trip over there to take a look. Since Kong shi’s apparition was spotted there, there was a good chance that he might find Kong shi’s ancient domain over there too.

Hu!

While the two of them were chatting, the spatial bubble rose up from the river and arrived before the massive ninth level painting.

“Are we able to enter this painting too?” Looking at the lifelike painting before him, Zhang Xuan asked in curiosity.

There was bound to be a reason as to why the elder who had left the Dongxu Gourd here would leave a ninth level painting here as well. If they could enter the painting, they might just be able to unravel the secrets behind this folded space.

“It should be possible...” Luo Xuanqing pondered for a moment before nodding.

“I’ll head in to take a look then.” Zhang Xuan said with a smile before heading in.

This painting was not drawn on a paper but on top of the folded space. It consisted of multiple layers stitched together by the fabric of space, so Zhang Xuan had to fly for quite some time before he finally arrived before the massive mountain range.

The sheer expanse the mountain range took granted it an imposing and grand aura.

Flying upward, Zhang Xuan soon arrived at where he had replaced Kong shi's image with the bathing ladies, and he swiftly scanned the area. A moment later, he shook his head in disappointment.

There was nothing special to be seen here. There was no apparition of Kong shi or any hidden folded spaces and the such.

“Nevertheless, there should still be some reason why the elder chose to leave this ninth level painting in here...” Zhang Xuan mumbled contemplatively beneath his breath.

If this ancient domain was really left behind by Ancient Sage Qiu Wu, everything would make perfect sense.

He was Kong shi's servant, and the reason why he left behind this painting was likely to remind future generations that there was something lying in the White Creek Mountain!

Zhang Xuan continued scanning through the mountain range, but he was unable to find anything or note. Eventually, he could only return with empty hands.

When he finally returned back to Luo Xuanqing and the others' side, the mountain range suddenly shuddered slightly before dissipating silently.

“This painting has been around for too long. It's likely that time had already left it tattered throughout, and the only reason why it's still able to maintain its original appearance is likely only because no one has touched it yet. Your act of entering the painting had placed too much stress on the painting, thus inevitably resulting in its dissipation.” Luo Xuanqing explained.

The slightly stunned Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

In a sense, this was similar to how even if old possessions were able to retain their beautiful outer appearances, their worn out within would only cause them to crumble to dust upon touch.

Zhang Xuan took one last glance at the dissipated painting before turning his gaze back forward. A rather wide passageway had appeared before them.

Following behind Luo Xuanqing and the others' footsteps, he landed on top of the passageway.

After all of the spatial distortion he had been through, it felt reassuring to have his feet planted onto solid ground.

"The artifact that I sensed is in there!" Yun Lianhai said with eyes gleaming with excitement.

As soon as he stepped onto the passageway, the fuzzy feeling he had received from the treasure before suddenly turned extremely distinct. As long as they were to walk down this path, they should be able to find quite a few good stuff.

"Great!"

Hearing that the treasure was located not too far away from them, the crowd immediately felt energized, and they began making their way forward.

Before long, a palace unfolded before their eyes.

While it was called a palace, it wasn't too big or extravagant. Instead, its ancient design seemed to be communicating the long history behind it.

"It's likely that there might be danger in here. Let me head in to take a look first." Luo Xuanqing said before taking the lead forward.

The gates of the palace were carved from stone, and it was densely filled with inscriptions.

"These are Spatial Inscriptions, unique characters which Ancient Sage Qiu Wu has created! Through studying these characters, one could comprehend the essence of space. Our clan has a detailed interpretation of these words." Luo Xuanqing exclaimed in astonishment.

"Spatial Inscriptions?" Zhang Xuan looked at those characters contemplatively for a moment before nodding.

He had seen those words at the Qiu Wu Palace as well.

The Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm was written using these words. Back then, he had no idea what those words

meant, but he still managed to learn the battle technique through emulating the form of those words.

“If that’s the case, does that mean that the ancient domain is really left behind by Ancient Sage Qiu Wu?” Bi Hongyin asked in agitation.

Even though Ancient Sage Qiu Wu was Kong shi’s servant, his true strength was no weaker than the founder of the Sanctum of Sages, Ancient Sage Bo Shang. More importantly, his comprehension of space had reached an extremely high level. If they could obtain his heritage, it would only be a matter of time before they achieved a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan or even Saint 9-dan.

“That’s most likely to be the case... But it’s a little weird though. My clan has a huge collection of books detailing the life of Ancient Sage Qiu Wu, but we have never heard that he has left behind such an ancient domain before!” Luo Xuanqing said with a bewildered frown.

“As complicated as this ancient domain appears to be, to experts of the caliber of an Ancient Sage, it’s something that they can create on a whim. I think it’s likely that not even Ancient Sage Qiu Wu remembered about this ancient domain he had left behind...” Yun Lianhai said.

Coming from a clan of treasure hunters, he had come into contact with simply too many treasures in the world.

There were many ancient domains which appeared to be mystifyingly profound to those of the later generations, and the treasures within them were incredibly valuable too. However, to those who had left them behind, those might not bear much significance at all.

The difference in realms inevitably led to a huge difference in how they assessed the value of things.

“That’s true.” Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Take him for example, he wouldn’t even blink an eye if someone were to throw a million high-tier spirit stones before him. However, in the Myriad Kingdom Alliance, just the

possession of a single high-tier spirit stone could already be considered as a great wealth.

Similarly, while the Dongxu Gourd might seem to be incomparably valuable to them, it might just be something that an Ancient Sage would just toss away casually.

“Luo Xuanqing, since you recognize those characters, what is written on there?” Yun Lianhai asked.

“It’s a message intended for the later generations who discover this ancient domain. The general meaning is that those who are able to come this far are bound to have a deep understanding of space and are qualified to obtain his heritage. Ah, the way to open the door is also detailed on it...” Luo Xuanqing said as he examined the inscriptions on the wall closely.

After many years of studying these Spatial Inscriptions, the Luo Clan had already compiled a book that allowed others to interpret the meaning behind these characters.

“Heritage? Does this mean to say that the heritage of Ancient Sage Qiu Wu lies in the palace?”

“That seems so.” Luo Xuanqing nodded. Taking a deep breath, he said, “I’m going to open the door now, so be careful. It isn’t easy for us to come to this point, so nothing must go wrong at this moment...”

After saying those words, he took a step backward before he raised his hand and tapped his finger forward. A surge of zhenqi poured forth and struck the gates.

He sent out a total of three such surges of zhenqi in a ‘品’ formation, and energy began rippling across the surface of the gates. ‘Jiyaya!’, it began to slowly open.

Luo Xuanqing immediately drove his zhenqi to create a protective barrier around him in preparation for what would appear.

Ancient Sage Qiu Wu was a respected and celebrated figure, but since he had left his heritage behind here, he must have set up all kinds of trials in order to assess the qualification of

those who sought his heritage. It would be better for them to proceed carefully.

Luo Xuanqing stepped into the palace, and some time later, he waved his hand to beckon for the others and said, “There’s no danger. Come in!”

The crowd quickly swarmed in and found themselves standing within a hall. It was completely empty, except for a sculpture erected not too far away.

“It’s Ancient Sage Qiu Wu!” Upon seeing the face on the sculpture, Zhang Xuan exclaimed.

He had seen Ancient Sage Qiu Wu back in the Qiu Wu Palace, so naturally, he could recognize the sculpture here too.

“This is Ancient Sage Qiu Wu?”

Despite coming from illustrious backgrounds, this was the first time they were seeing Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s sculpture.

“I have seen before Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s painting, that’s indeed him.” Luo Xuanqing replied before directing a perplexed glance at Zhang Xuan. “Zhang shi, how did you know it’s him?”

Ancient Sage Qiu Wu had maintained a low profile in his lifetime, so there weren’t too many records on him. The Luo Clan was only able to recognize the other party through a painting they had in their possession, so how was the young man before him able to recognize it with a look?

“You said earlier that those words were left behind by Ancient Sage Qiu Wu, so I thought that the sculpture must be him as well...” Zhang Xuan replied sheepishly.

The Qiu Wu Palace carried the secret of the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel, so it was best for him to avoid talking about it for the time being.

On the other hand, seeing that Zhang Xuan was unwilling to speak about the matter, Luo Xuanqing also didn’t push him for a response either. Everyone had their own private encounters and secrets, and there was no purpose in insistently dredging them up.

Instead, he walked over to the sculpture, kneeled onto the ground, and respectfully kowtowed a few times before standing up once more.

“Our Luo Clan’s understanding of spatial laws originated from Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s heritage, so our ancestor has made a rule that if any member of the Luo Clan were to encounter Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s sculpture or will, we must kowtow to him to honor him as our grandteacher!” Luo Xuanqing explained.

“The Luo Clan’s understanding of spatial laws originated from Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s heritage?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

He turned to look at Yuan Xiao and the others, but they seemed to already be aware of this matter.

“Space is an intrinsic nature of the world, so unlike swordsmanship and the others, which can be developed into many different Quintessences, it has only one true path. As such, their heritages are more unified...” Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

He should have known this earlier.

It was no wonder why the Annal of Bedstead Disquisition Sage Luo had left behind was able to perfect the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel. It turned out that the both of them had originated from the same source.

“Junior Luo Xuanqing plays respect to Ancient Sage Qiu Wu!”

After saying those words, Luo Xuanqing reached out his hand and placed it on the lower pedestal of the sculpture.

Weng!

A light buzz echoed in the air for a moment before brilliant light burst forth from the sculpture. The unmoving sculpture slowly opened its eyes.

“The will of Ancient Sage Qiu Wu...”

Bi Hongyin, Yuan Xiao, and the others widened their eyes in shock, and without any hesitation, they kneeled to the ground.

One must know that Ancient Sage Qiu Wu was an expert which was even older than the founder of their respective heritages, such that even those founders would have to kneel down and address him as ‘senior’.

“Back then, while I was passing by here, I happen to chance upon the seed of the Dongxu Gourd, so I decided to plant it, hoping that it would be of some help to the later generations. The fact that you are able to come this far shows that you have achieved a deep comprehension of space and is qualified to obtain my heritage...” the sculpture began speaking.

“Thank you, Ancient Sage Qiu Wu...”

Everyone felt agitated to receive Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s recognition. Luo Xuanqing was just about to utter some words of gratitude when he suddenly realized that not too far away, Zhang Xuan was still standing.

A frown emerged on his forehead as he berated, “Zhang shi, why are you not paying your respects to Ancient Sage Qiu Wu...”

But barely after those words were spoken, Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s sculpture had also turned his head over, and a horrified look appeared on his face, “You again!”

1365 Collapse of the Ancient Domain

“You recognize me?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“You made me come to see the flaws in my cultivation, so you can be considered half a teacher to me. How could I not recognize you?” the sculpture replied.

“Flaws in Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s cultivation?”

“Half a teacher?”

“Does this mean that... Zhang Shi has actually offered pointers to Ancient Sage Qiu Wu?”

The teeth of Luo Xuanqing, Bi Hongyin, and the others clattered from shock upon hearing those words.

The significance of this matter was truly big, to the point that knowing too much might even cost them their lives!

“But... aren’t you a fragmented soul?” Zhang Xuan asked in intrigue.

Even though they had met once another in the Qiu Wu Palace, each fragmented soul should have been an independent existence. Normally, it should have been impossible for any of Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s fragmented souls outside of the Qiu Wu Palace to share memories with those within, so how did the one before him recognize him?

“Each fragmented soul is an independent existence, but the order in which they are created is significant, too. It’ll be nigh impossible for fragmented souls that are created earlier to read into the memories of those who are created later, but as for fragmented souls that are created later, through some special means, it isn’t too difficult for them to share the memories of those that were created earlier. Not to mention, you are even carrying my heritage along with you, so it’s even easier for me to do so,” the sculpture explained.

Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

He had been carrying the Qiu Wu Palace with him wherever he went, and while it was currently stored in his storage ring, considering Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's unfathomable mastery over space, it was not too difficult for him to figure out what had happened within.

"It's no wonder you tamed the Dongxu Gourd and got here so quickly. Your presence here explains everything. Ahem, I still have some things to attend to, so... Goodbye!"

With a sudden 'kacha!', a crack ran through the sculpture.

Following which, the imposing aura that was compelling subservience in the crowd receded like an ebbing tide.

Boom!

Following which, the sculpture abruptly exploded into countless fragments amid a cloud of dust, and it took a long while before everything settled on the ground.

"This..."

"Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's will... has dissipated? But he hasn't told us what the heritage is yet!"

With twitching eyebrows, Luo Xuanqing and the others clawed at their hair, unable to believe the situation unfolding right before them.

They had traveled far to get there, and after a great deal of hard work, they had finally been just a step away from obtaining the heritage when the sculpture abruptly exploded before their eyes, and the will harnessed within it dissipated.

What the heck was this?

They slowly turned toward Zhang Xuan and said, "Zhang shi..."

Facing the glares of the crowd, Zhang Xuan was completely dumbfounded as well.

Was that Ancient Sage Qiu Wu not a little too unreliable? He had also dissipated the previous time before saying what the

heritage was! In fact, this time around, he had barely said anything at all.

He had seen so many wills... but in terms of speed, that fellow was surely the first!

It was no wonder he could come up with battle techniques such as the Unbounded Voyager. It turned out to be completely aligned with his innate nature!

But thinking of it again, Kong shi was rather fast as well. They had met two times so far, but each time, he did not manage to get the solution for the Innate Fetal Poison out of him.

This master and servant pair... No wonder the two of them managed to click with one another!

Under the murderous glares that were intensifying by the moment, Zhang Xuan replied with twitching lips, "Ahem, maybe this is a test posed to us by Ancient Sage Qiu Wu? He might have hidden the heritage somewhere in this folded space and want us to find it ourselves?"

That had been the case in the Qiu Wu Palace too. After Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's will dissipated, he had managed to find the Heavenly Art of Dimension Unravel through studying the three words 'Qiu Wu Palace' at the entrance.

Considering that it was the same Ancient Sage Qiu Wu they were talking about, he was likely to go by the same pattern.

Hearing those words, the crowd traded doubtful gazes, seemingly trying to ascertain the likelihood of Zhang Xuan's words being true.

Luo Xuanqing pondered for a moment before saying, "Back then, before our old ancestor obtained Ancient Sage Qiu Wu's heritage and comprehended the spatial laws, he also seemed to have gone through a similar experience.

"Zhang shi is right. A person like Ancient Sage Qiu Wu would only pass down his heritage to those who have undergone his careful selection. It wouldn't make sense for him to give his all to someone he has only met once!

“Let’s comb through the area. We might just be able to find something.”

Seeing that Luo Xuanqing had covered up for him, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Bi Hongyin and the others nodded before getting to their feet to search the area.

The walls of the palace were also made of some kind of mysterious stone, and just like the gates, there were characters inscribed on them as well.

Bi Hongyin and the others could not interpret those characters, so they could only turn to Luo Xuanqing for help.

“These characters aren’t a cultivation technique but just inscriptions to fortify the defenses of the palace. Even though this is a folded space—thus, there are no storms to weather—this fortification played a crucial role in allowing the palace to remain standing even after the passing of many millenniums,” Luo Xuanqing explained.

Regardless of weather conditions, all structures would still eventually wear down with time. Without the fortification inscriptions, the palace would have long collapsed from the accrued damage.

Seeing that these characters meant nothing at all, the crowd was a little disappointed. At this point, Bi Hongyin suddenly thought of something and turned to Yun Lianhai. “The heritage should also be considered a treasure, too. Yun Lianhai, do you sense anything in the area?”

Since Yun Lianhai had been able to lead them there, there was a chance he would be able to lead them to the heritage left behind by Ancient Sage Qiu Wu as well.

“I’ll give it a try.” Yun Lianhai nodded before activating his unique ability.

This ability of his could only be considered to be tapping into his bloodline rather than activating it, so while it would cause some damage to him, it was not to the point where he would be incapacitated for an entire month.

Opening the third eye in between his eyebrows, he swept the area swiftly before suddenly coming to a halt. “I sense something weird in that direction...”

He pointed in a direction as he said those words.

The crowd quickly turned their gazes over.

It was directed toward the area just beneath the sculpture.

Rummaging through the shattered stone fragments, they soon found traces of a folded space.

“Wonderful!”

The eyes of the crowd lit up, and Luo Xuanqing raised his finger and tapped on the folded space.

Weng!

With a brilliant burst of light, a line of words surged out of the folded space and appeared before the crowd.

“Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist!” Zhang Xuan read out.

He had thought that Ancient Sage Qiu Wu had just said those words on a whim, but who would have thought that he had really left his heritage behind?

“Legend has it that Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s strongest battle techniques involve his finger, sword, fist, and palm, and they carry the prefix ‘Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow’. The palm art is at Saint intermediate-tier, the fist art is at Saint high-tier, and the sword art is at Saint pinnacle... Even the old ancestor of my Luo Clan was unable to find those battle techniques, but to think that we would actually stumble on one of them here...” Luo Xuanqing was so agitated that his eyes were glowing.

“Finger, sword, fist, and palm?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

He had learned the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm before, and it was indeed a Saint intermediate-tier battle technique. He had thought that it was just an independent battle technique, but to think that it would actually be part of an entire series!

He quickly looked at the words in the sky and commanded in his mind, Flaws!

Huala!

A book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path. Placing his finger on it, a constipated look swiftly appeared on Zhang Xuan's face.

There are even more flaws with it, Zhang Xuan thought with a shake of his head.

Just the 27 flaws in the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm had left him feeling deeply uncomfortable within, but this one actually had 31 flaws.

To be fair, it was a decent battle technique with formidable strength, but... how could he bring himself to cultivate such a flawed technique?

Ever since he started cultivating the Heaven's Path Divine Art, he had already grown accustomed to practicing skills that were devoid of flaws. Like a germaphobe, even the slightest hint of a fault would leave him feeling deeply uncomfortable, as if bugs were crawling over his skin... and there were actually 31 of them in this manual!

Zhang Xuan swiftly gathered all of the fist art manuals that he had practiced so far and compiled them together with it.

Compile!

There are still 28 flaws.

Even though Zhang Xuan had seen quite a number of fist art manuals in the past, their tier was simply too low. They were still sorely lacking to complement the faults found in a Saint high-tier fist art.

Several hundred thousand books, but they only managed to remove three flaws in total.

Zhang Xuan shook his head and consoled himself. Forget it, I'll just have to find more fist art manuals when I return to the Sanctum of Sages to perfect the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist.

In any case, there were plenty of secret manuals in the Sanctum of Sages. As long as he could clear the examination for them, he should be able to gather quite a number of fist art manuals. With time, he would surely be able to perfect it!

At this moment, the ground beneath their feet suddenly began trembling, and the space around them began distorting.

“Crap, this is bad. The dissipation of Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s will and the taking away of the Dongxu Gourd have led to instability within the space. At this rate, it’ll soon collapse,” Luo Xuanqing exclaimed in shock.

Similar to the Mountain Gate of the Sanctum of Sages, the structure of this folded space was simply too complicated. Without someone to sustain its operations, it would swiftly collapse at the slightest hint of impact.

And clearly, this was what was happening at the moment.

“Collapse?”

Everyone’s face paled.

As powerful as they were, they were still limited by the space they were in. If the folded space were to collapse, there was a good chance that they would be crushed between dimension rifts and die... unless they could achieve a level that surpassed this folded space!

But that would require them to be at Saint 9-dan at the very minimum!

“We need to leave right now, or else we might just die in here!” Luo Xuanqing exclaimed anxiously.

“But... I have only remembered two lines of the entire fist art!” Bi Hongyin exclaimed with a reddened face.

“I have also only managed to remember two lines,” Yuan Xiao said.

There were countless cultivators who dream of obtaining Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s battle technique, and it was a stroke of luck that they had managed to find it. Yet, to have to leave without memorizing its entirety... they just could not get over the indignation in their hearts.

“Your lives are more important. No matter how powerful the battle technique is, it’ll be futile if you don’t have the life to practice it. I have also only managed to memorize four lines myself. Hurry up, let’s go!” Luo Xuanqing urged with a wave of his hand.

This battle technique had been created by Ancient Sage Qiu Wu, and it harnessed the essence of his wisdom. All in all, it contained more than several hundred lines, and despite their superior memory as cultivators, it would still take them at least an hour to memorize everything.

Barely a minute had passed so far, and it was already a formidable feat for them to have been able to memorize two to four lines.

But again, between a battle technique and their lives, it was clear which was more important!

“Alright!” Seeing that the surrounding space was shaking more and more intensely, such that dimension rift cracks had started appearing around the area, Bi Hongyin and the others realized that they could not afford to waste any more time. They quickly followed behind Luo Xuanqing to dash out of the folded space.

Naturally, Zhang Xuan followed suit.

They had proceeded slowly to carefully scan the area so as to ensure that they did not miss anything important when they were walking through the passageway toward the palace earlier, but with danger right behind them, they could not afford to do that. They flitted forward desperately as if their lives were on the line, and it took merely two breaths before they returned to the top of the river flow.

Luo Xuanqing swiftly summoned a spatial bubble once more and wrapped it around the entire group before driving it forward with all his might.

Ten breaths later, they returned to the bottom of the river, where they had first encountered the Dongxu Gourd.

Kacha! Kacha!

Barely after they returned there, they saw a huge dimension rift swiftly devouring the palace and the river behind them.

“That was a close shave...”

Cold sweat trickled down the crowd’s backs.

It was fortunate that they did not hesitate for too long there, or else they might have died.

“Let’s quickly get out of here,” Luo Xuanqing said as he used a secret art of the Luo Clan to forcefully tear open an exit in the folded space.

Everyone quickly leaped up and headed out.

Huuu huuuu!

A deafening gale whistled by their ears, and intense vertigo swallowed them, leaving them in a deeply disoriented state. Fortunately, this only lasted for a moment.

When they opened their eyes once more, they were already back at the cavern.

Po!

Barely after they managed to find their footing once more, the sesame-sized spatial distortion suddenly emanated a blinding burst of light before vanishing from view.

The ancient domain had really fully collapsed!

1366 Let Me Teach You!

“The Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist...”

The disappearance of the folded space meant that the ancient domain had become nothing more than a part of history. Even though they were relieved that they had managed to survive the collapse, they still could not help but feel dismay regarding the loss of Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s heritage.

An unparalleled battle technique was right before them... and they missed it just like that.

“Even though I only managed to memorize a few lines, it’s still a battle technique left behind by Ancient Sage Qiu Wu. If I can internalize it well, I should be able to raise my fighting prowess significantly,” Yuan Xiao said.

“Why don’t we do this? Let’s regurgitate the content that we memorized, put it all together, and analyze it. This way, we can at least make the best out of what we know of the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist?”

“I guess that’s all we can do now!”

Bi Hongyin and the others quickly nodded in agreement.

A battle technique of the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist’s tier was extremely difficult to comprehend. Every single line carried a deep conception and great significance. Even though they had only managed to memorize a couple of lines, if they could just study it thoroughly, they should still be able to benefit greatly from it.

“Luo Xuanqing, you have the best memory of us all. Why don’t you go first?”

“Un.” Luo Xuanqing nodded. “The four lines that I have memorized are...”

As one of the top geniuses of the Luo Clan, he possessed superb memory. In just a short one to two minutes, he actually managed to memorize more than a hundred words.

Hearing that what they had memorized was the exact same as what Luo Xuanqing had said, Yuan Xiao and the others heaved a sigh of relief.

Just as they were about to start analyzing what those four lines meant, Yun Lianhai suddenly spoke up.

“I think I got the fifth line...”

Everyone quickly turned their gazes over with their bodies trembling in agitation. “You memorized the fifth line?”

“I think so.” Yun Lianhai nodded as he quickly regurgitated the fifth line.

As a treasure hunter, possessing a good memory was of vital importance in order to be able to put clues together. As good as Luo Xuanqing’s memory was, it was still slightly lacking compared to Yun Lianhai’s.

“Amazing. Even though it’s only five lines, it seems to have already opened up a new world to me,” Luo Xuanqing remarked in awe as he ruminated over the words for a moment.

At this point, a thought suddenly flashed across his mind, and he turned to the silent Zhang Xuan. “Zhang shi, what about you? How many lines have you remembered?”

“Me?”

Zhang Xuan had been too preoccupied lamenting over the destruction of the folded space that he had not really heard what the others were saying. He felt that if he could have gotten the Myriad Anthive Queen to swallow the space, he would have been able to increase the space in the Myriad Anthive nest significantly.

He was slightly startled by the abrupt question before responding, “Oh, I managed to memorize everything.”

“You m-memorized... everything?”

Flabbergasted.

They were all Saint 7-dan and Half Saint 8-dan experts, possessing superior analytical abilities, but even so, they only

managed to memorize five lines in total.

But he actually memorized everything?

“Indeed.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Then... can you recite the content for us?” Luo Xuanqing asked in agitation.

“Sure. Actually, why don’t I just write it down for you? This way, you can refer to it whenever you want to...”

With a tap of his finger, a surge of zhenqi shot forth from Zhang Xuan’s fingers before abruptly bursting apart in the sky, forming a massive screen of light. Slowly, words began surfacing on the light screen.

It was the cultivation method for the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist!

He just had to use the Library of Heaven’s Path to collect the entire manual, so it did not even take him half a breath to memorize everything. All he had to do now was bring it out word for word, so it was no trouble at all.

“This...”

Looking at the screen filled with words before them, everyone gulped as they shot glances of disbelief at Zhang Xuan.

To memorize so many words within just a minute or two... Just how in the world did he manage to do it?

At this moment, Yun Lianhai suddenly exclaimed, “Wait a moment, Zhang shi. There are a few words in your manual that are different from what I memorized.”

Everyone turned their gazes over and saw Yun Lianhai pointing toward the third line. Indeed, there were three words in the third line that were different from what they had discussed and agreed on earlier.

Even though it was only a difference of three words, this alteration gave a completely different direction and conception to the battle technique.

Could it be that... even though that fellow did manage to memorize the entire manual, his memory on certain portions

was flawed?

If that was the case, they should not practice this version of the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist even if it formed a complete manual.

It was still fine if one failed to memorize a cultivation technique or battle technique—what was truly dangerous was if one had remembered it incorrectly. Even the slightest mistake in cultivation could possibly lead to one treading down the wrong path, possibly resulting in one's cultivation going berserk.

“Oh. After I was done memorizing the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist, I had some time to examine it closely. I realized that the cultivation technique had quite a few problems, so I made some alterations to it. However, due to the limitations of my knowledge, I was only able to correct a couple of the flaws.” Zhang Xuan sighed, and his head reddened in embarrassment.

If he had more Saint high-tier fist art manuals to refer to, he would have been able to correct more of the flaws. So far, of the 31 flaws, he had only managed to correct three of them, which was not even a tenth of the total. This was truly a huge failure on his part.

“A-alterations?”

The crowd nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

While we were struggling to memorize two to five lines of the manual, you managed to memorize everything and even alter it.

Their faces flushed red, and they felt as if they were about to explode from the sheer frustration bubbling within them.

Quick at setting up formations? Fine, we'll tolerate that!

Quick at deciphering poison? Alright, we'll accept that too!

Quick at helping others achieving a breakthrough? Fine, we'll take that grudgingly as well...

But to be able to memorize a manual that quickly and even have time to alter it... Don't you think that you are showing

off a bit too much?

“Why don’t you just give me a while first? If I can refer to the fist art manuals back at the Sanctum of Sages, I should be able to perfect it further, thus bringing its might up to a new height,” Zhang Xuan said.

It would not be nice for him to pass down such a disgustingly flawed battle technique to others. It would be best if he could perfect it before imparting it to them.

Yuan Xiao pondered for a moment before replying. “It’s fine. I’ll just memorize the original version...”

“I think I’ll go with the original version. Zhang shi, may I trouble you to pen down the battle technique prior to your alterations?” Bi Hongyin asked as well.

Even their old ancestors would dare not alter a battle technique from an expert of that caliber easily. Despite the extraordinary feats that Zhang Xuan had achieved so far, they were hesitant to put themselves on the line to cultivate a battle technique that he had altered.

“Alright then.” Knowing what the crowd was worried about, Zhang Xuan did not insist on the matter. With a wave of his hand, he reverted the portions that he had altered to their original version.

Seeing that the content had been changed to its original state, the crowd hurriedly took out some paper and brushes to copy the content down.

It would be disastrous if they memorized the content incorrectly, so it would be much safer for them to copy everything down instead.

An hour later, they were finally done copying the manual.

“Zhang shi... earlier, Ancient Sage Qiu Wu said that he knows you. Have the both of you met one another before?” Luo Xuanqing asked curiously.

“I happened to stumble into one of his ancient domain once, and after clearing his tests, I obtained his Heavenly Demon

Great Sorrow Palm,” Zhang Xuan said without going into detail or revealing the existence of the Qiu Wu Palace.

“I see!”

The crowd nodded in realization.

“Then... what about when Ancient Sage Qiu Wu talked about you seeing through the flaws in his cultivation?” Yuan Xiao asked.

“How could that possibly be true? The truth is that I happened to chance upon a book that detailed the flaws in the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Palm, so I spoke about it casually before Ancient Sage Qiu Wu’s will. Who would have thought that he would think so highly of me after the matter?” Zhang Xuan said.

Offering pointers to an Ancient Sage was simply too shocking a matter. Having something like that pinned to his reputation was not necessarily something good, especially considering how well-respected Ancient Sage Qiu Wu was.

In any case, he was determined to deny this matter to the end. As for whether the others would believe him or not, that was not his problem anymore.

“This...”

Luo Xuanqing and the others felt that Zhang Xuan was not being completely honest to them, but his explanation was something that they could accept, so they decided to probe no further.

“Let’s return!”

Even though Luo Xuanqing had failed to obtain the Dongxu Gourd this time around, he did manage to achieve a breakthrough in his cultivation. As for the others, they also managed to obtain the Heavenly Demon Great Sorrow Fist, so it was not a wasted trip for them either.

Shortly after walking out of the cavern, they were met with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

From it, they learned that Zhang Chun and the others had already regained consciousness two hours ago and left the area

immediately.

Toward this matter, Luo Xuanqing could not help but feel a tinge of disappointment.

He had been hoping to try my newfound strength on that fellow so as to vent his many years of frustration, but who knew that the fellow would actually flee?

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was not an aerial saint beast. While it was capable of moving at an incredible speed due to its superior cultivation, in terms of endurance, it still came nowhere near the Seven-colored Divine Crane. So, Zhang Xuan moved the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast into the Myriad Anthive Nest before leaving the valley with the others on the back of the Seven-colored Divine Crane.

“Here are your formation flags!” Zhang Xuan walked up to Bi Hongyin and passed a huge stack of flags over.

He had borrowed them from the other party for the mission, and since the mission had come to an end, it was only right for him to return them.

Otherwise, how would he be any different from bandits?

“My understanding of formations is still deeply lacking, so you can keep the flags. I think you will be able to do much more with them,” Bi Hongyin said with a wave of her hand.

In the view of others, she was not just a talented demonic tunist—she was also a proficient formation master, a true genius. However, after meeting the young man standing before her, she realized that her skills were still sorely lacking.

After witnessing what the young man was capable of, she was embarrassed to even tell others that she was a formation master.

“This won’t do. How can I simply take your stuff like that?” Zhang Xuan quickly shook his hands.

Those were grade-8 formation flags, capable of setting up even grade-8 pinnacle formations. Even a single one of those was worth a huge fortune, let alone an entire bunch of them.

He did not want to owe a debt to others over material possessions.

Not to mention that the other party was a lady, and they were currently before his future brother-in-law. He had to make sure to conduct himself well!

“If you think it’s too much as a gift, it’ll do as long as you offer me some pointers when I’m ready to push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan. That way, I will be the one who has gotten a good deal instead,” Bi Hongyin said.

Of course, it was not because she was too rich that she gave so many valuable formation flags away for free. She was intending to make use of this opportunity to win Zhang Xuan’s goodwill so that she would be able to engage his help in the future, especially when she needed to push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan.

“This...” Zhang Xuan frowned.

He did not think that he would have much trouble helping Bi Hongyin achieve a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan, but the main problem was that how long would she take.

Beyond the third month of the next year, he probably would not have time to attend to such miscellaneous matters anymore.

With this thought in mind, he turned to Bi Hongyin and asked, “How long will you need before you are ready to push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan?”

“How long?” A confident smile emerged on Bi Hongyin’s lips as she replied, “I’m currently at Saint 7-dan advanced stage, ready to achieve a breakthrough soon. As long as I cultivate diligently, I should be able to successfully make a breakthrough within three years. After reaching Saint 7-dan pinnacle, I will have to slowly reinforce my cultivation in order to build up a strong foundation for Saint 8-dan. I will require ten to twenty years for that.”

“Three years and ten years? That is to say that you will need at least thirteen years before you can push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“That’s right.” Bi Hongyin nodded. “My rate of cultivation can already be considered to be faster compared to the others in the Sanctum of Sages. You might not feel it that much at the moment, but every step forward beyond the Leaving Aperture realm gets increasingly arduous, and the time and effort one has to put in increases exponentially.”

Zhang Xuan nodded in response to those words.

He could relate to that. Ever since he reached the Leaving Aperture realm, he could sense that the quantity of spiritual energy he needed to push for a breakthrough was much greater than before, and the time he took to achieve a breakthrough had increased from two hours to four hours. Really, the difficulty was so great that it left a numbing sensation on his scalp. If not for that, he would not have been so troubled by the matter.

Seeing the awful complexion on the young man’s face, Bi Hongyin asked, “Zhang shi, is my rate of cultivation too fast or too slow?”

“This...” Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before replying. “Thirteen years is a little too long for me. I don’t think I can wait till then... Why don’t we do this instead? You should try to achieve a breakthrough to Saint 7-dan pinnacle on the spot and reinforce your cultivation, and when we finally reach the Sanctum of Sages, I’ll help you push for a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan straight!”

“Achieve a breakthrough on the spot?” Bi Hongyin’s face twitched upon hearing those words. “Zhang shi, you must be messing with me. If I really could really achieve a breakthrough as and when I like, I would have already done so.”

“I’m not messing with you.” Zhang Xuan chuckled. “It’s just a breakthrough to Saint 7-dan pinnacle, no problem at all.

“Here, I’ll impart a method to you. Twenty minutes, no, that’s too long... Five minutes! I’ll have you achieve a breakthrough within five minutes!”

1367 I'll Take You There

“Five minutes?” Bi Hongyin’s eyelids twitched. She forcefully suppressed the disbelief that was rising in her heart and asked, “What should I do?”

If anyone else had said those words to her, she definitely would have had the other party thrown off the back of the crane. However, it was different with the young man before her.

Through his guidance, he was able to make Luo Xuanqing achieve a breakthrough within just a short span of time. That was more than enough to prove that he was a man of great abilities. Achieving a breakthrough to Saint 7-dan pinnacle was not a small matter, but compared to a breakthrough to Saint 8-dan, it was indeed a walk in the park.

“Let me take a look at the cultivation technique manual you are practicing. I need to know the nature of your cultivation technique in order to determine a feasible direction to work in,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Alright!” Bi Hongyin flicked her wrist and passed a book over.

Zhang Xuan took the book and casually flipped it open.

“Seven Strings Music Forging Art!”

The cultivation technique that Bi Hongyin practiced was the strongest technique of the demonic tunists. With her body as the zither and her breaths as strings, she was able to produce music on thought. Even a simple word or hum from her was imbued with great power, drawing others under her control.

After looking through the other party’s cultivation technique, Zhang Xuan took out the book he had compiled on Bi Hongyin when she executed her battle technique earlier and studied both of them together. Some time later, he finally arrived at a solution.

“Cultivators of the Seven Strings Music Forging Art are able to temper their zhenqi into the seven strings of a zither, and upon breaking through to the Phantasmal Space realm, they are able to form the Seven Strings Dominion. Enemies who step into the Seven Strings Dominion will feel as if they have fallen into a world filled with demonic tunes. The slightest lapse in one’s guard against it could result in the injuring of one’s Primordial Spirit and the breeding of inner demons within one’s mind.

“It’s indeed not too easy to achieve a breakthrough with this cultivation technique. However, you have already accumulated a strong enough foundation for a breakthrough, just that you are currently lacking one last thing,” Zhang Xuan analyzed with a frown.

“May I know what it is?” Bi Hongyin asked anxiously.

“Your Seven Strings Dominion isn’t sharp enough yet. If an equally-skilled demonic tunist could put you under great pressure through attacking your openings, it should be possible to trigger your potential, allowing you to push for a breakthrough,” Zhang Xuan said.

There were quite a few major flaws in Bi Hongyin’s cultivation technique, but considering how far she had come cultivating it, it was already too late to change it. If she wanted to surpass her current bottleneck, there was only one way to do it—to use music to stimulate her music!

By attacking the biggest openings in her body, her body would be placed under immense stress, and this would force her body to achieve a breakthrough.

“Put me under great pressure?” Bi Hongyin was stunned for a moment before a bitter smile broke on her face. “Suppression by demonic tunes requires one to achieve a very high level of mastery in demonic tunes. The only person I know who can achieve this feat is my teacher, but it’s a pity that she’s not here. As simple as the idea is, it won’t be easy to carry it out in practice.”

“I happen to have some experience in demonic tunes as well. If you trust me, we can give it a shot,” Zhang Xuan said with a

smile.

“You are a demonic tunist too?” Bi Hongyin could hardly believe what she was hearing.

“I did learn it for a while. Right, do you have any books regarding demonic tunes? Let me take a look through them. I need as many books as possible so as to find a detailed way as to how I can help you achieve a breakthrough,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Alright.” Bi Hongyin nodded.

She flicked her wrist, and a huge pile of books immediately appeared on the back of the crane. She turned her gaze to Zhang Xuan and said, “These are all of the books relating to demonic tunes that I have with me at the moment. There are around two thousand of them here.”

Responding with a nod, Zhang Xuan swiftly scanned through the books with his eyes and collected them all into the Library of Heaven’s Path.

After which, he picked up a book and began flipping through, but meanwhile, his consciousness was immersed in his Library of Heaven’s Path, studying these books.

Even though he had the 7-star demonic tunist emblem, he had only browsed through 6-star demonic tune manuals before, so effectively, his comprehension of demonic tunes was only on par with 7-star primary demonic tunists. Such a level of proficiency was still far from enough for him to resolve the problems Bi Hongyin was facing.

Compile!

After some commotion, a book materialized in the air.

Fortunately, a Heaven’s Path Demonic Tune Art was compiled. With just a simple tap, he assimilated the knowledge contained within it. Thus, he opened his eyes once more and said, “Alright, I have found a solution to the problem.”

Bi Hongyin glanced at the ‘Discourse on Sheet Music’ in Zhang Xuan’s hand and asked in disbelief, “So fast?”

She had read the book when she had just become a 7-star demonic tunist. It simply introduced some of the simpler grade-7 demonic tunes and playing techniques. To make an analogy, it was somewhat similar to ‘A Collection of Nursery Rhymes’. Was the young man really going to induce a breakthrough in her using such a book?

“Un.” Without explaining the matter, Zhang Xuan instructed, “Sit down and take out your zither.”

Despite harboring an ocean of doubts in her mind, Bi Hongyin still sat down, took out her zither, and gently stroked it with her fingers.

Ting trringg!

The melody of a zither began sounded in the air.

As soon as Bi Hongyin started playing, her disposition changed. It grew towering and imposing, reminiscent of a tall tsunami that threatened to drown one within it.

Meanwhile, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out a zither as well.

This was the zither that School Head Jiang had made for him using a unique branch procured from his own residence. Even with his current level of proficiency in demonic tunes, it could still be a considered a decent zither.

Stroking on the zither lightly, a melody drifted gently into the surroundings.

His zither playing did not harness too much offensive power; instead, it carried a fleeting and distant feeling that seemed to gradually draw one deeper into the melody, putting one in a trance.

Even though he had managed to compile the 7-star Heaven’s Path Demonic Tune Art, he had not had a chance to cultivate it yet, so his prowess in demonic tunes was still only comparable to a 7-star primary demonic tunist.

Nevertheless, every note played was impeccably timed in between Bi Hongyin’s playing, messing up her tempo. In

terms of prowess, Bi Hongyin felt as if she was facing a 7-star pinnacle demonic tunist head-on.

Tring trringg ting tring!

In just moments, Bi Hongyin's face had turned crimson, and she nearly spurted blood on the spot.

“He's really powerful...”

Initially, Bi Hongyin still had some reservations about Zhang Xuan's proficiency as a demonic tunist, but just from this short encounter, she found that the other party's grasp of demonic tunes had reached a level far above hers!

This was truly frightening!

Formations, medicine, beast taming... It was already formidable that he possessed such astounding mastery in those occupations, but to think that he would possess such superb talent in demonic tunes as well! Just how in the world did he study?

While Zhang Xuan was stimulating Bi Hongyin's potential to help her push for a breakthrough to Phantasmal Space realm pinnacle, Yuan Xiao and the others were looking on with envy on their faces.

However, their envy did not last for too long before Yun Lianhai remarked, “Is it just me... or is the divine crane moving downward?”

Luo Xuanqing and the others lowered their heads and saw that the Seven-colored Divine Crane, which had been flying steadily a moment ago, was suddenly going on a downward trajectory.

“It's indeed moving downward. However, at the speed it's moving, this shouldn't pose any trouble,” Luo Xuanqing replied.

Not even a second after saying those words, the divine crane's neck suddenly arched backward, and its eyes were bulging so much that it seemed as if they would pop out at any moment.

Hu!

It fainted on the spot.

“This...”

The mouths of Luo Xuanqing and the others twitched.

They were all Saint realm experts, so even if their aerial saint beast were to plummet, they would still be able to maintain their flight. But...

Can't the two of you calm down a bit? Look, even the Seven-colored Crane can't tolerate you two anymore!

If something really happens to it, how do you plan on returning to the Sanctum of Sages?

Luo Xuanqing hurriedly waved his hands to support the divine crane and the others, slowly guiding the group to the ground.

All the while, Zhang Xuan and Bi Hongyin remained completely engrossed into playing against one another, oblivious to the suffering of the divine crane.

As such, despite having lost consciousness and landed on the ground, the divine crane's body continued convulsing endlessly, and white foam flowed out from the edges of its mouth. It was almost as if whipping a corpse!

Boom!

Just as Luo Xuanqing and the others were hesitating over whether they should stop those two so as to save the divine crane from its agony, a resounding buzz reverberated from Bi Hongyin's direction. Her aura surged, breaking straight through the clouds and into the heavens. The bottleneck that had confined her at Phantasmal Space realm advanced stage had been broken!

“Phantasmal Space realm pinnacle? She really achieved a breakthrough... and it's just been five minutes!”

Yuan Xiao and Yun Lianhai glanced at one another with widened eyes.

Previously, Zhang Xuan had said that he could help Bi Hongyin achieve a breakthrough within five minutes, and putting together the time he had spent on reading through a

book and playing the zither... it just happened that five minutes had passed!

This... Wasn't his calculation a little too precise?

"Alright, it's done!" Playing the very last note, Zhang Xuan put his zither back into his storage ring before exhaling deeply. He stood up and stretched his back lazily.

It was only at this moment that he finally recovered his trance, and after a short moment of confusion, a frown emerged on his forehead. "Hmm? Why are we on the ground?"

With his limited proficiency in demonic tunes, he had needed to focus his attention fully on his playing, so he did not notice the falling of the crane. As such, he could not help but be perplexed by the situation before him.

Logically speaking, they should still have been some distance away from reaching the Sanctum of Sages, so... why would they suddenly land on the ground?

"Why don't you take a look for yourself?" Seeing the confused look on Zhang Xuan's face, the veins on Luo Xuanqing's temples bulged as he pointed to the side.

Zhang Xuan hurriedly turned his head and saw the divine crane lying unconscious on the ground. Its tongue was stretched out, and its slender legs were twitching every now and then. Amazingly, he realized that its spasms were in tempo with the melody he had been playing before.

"It must have truly enjoyed the music I have played earlier to be dancing along to my melody even in its sleep!" Zhang Xuan remarked in awe. "It sure has fine taste in music!"

"..." The crowd.

"Zhang shi, I happen to have reached a bottleneck in my cultivation as well. Can you give me some guidance too?"

"I'm just a step short of a breakthrough, too."

...

Bi Hongyin's breakthrough had left Yuan Xiao and Yun Lianhai deeply moved. They realized that this was a good

opportunity for them as well.

Zhang Xuan had initially planned to turn down their requests, but in view of the great sincerity they were showing him—neither of their ‘sincerity’ was worth any less than the grade-8 formation flags that Bi Hongyin had gifted him—he solemnly pondered over the matter for a split second before reluctantly agreeing to help them as well.

Yun Lianhai’s cultivation was the lowest of the group, and his fighting prowess was not too strong, so helping him achieve a breakthrough was much easier. On the other hand, due to his powerful defensive prowess and strong foundation in cultivation, it was much more difficult for Yuan Xiao to achieve a breakthrough.

Nevertheless, that did not pose much of a problem for Zhang Xuan. He summoned the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and commanded it to give Yuan Xiao a beating he would never forget, and not too long later, the latter successfully achieved a breakthrough.

The group rested on that spot for an entire day and reinforced their cultivation before continue their journey back.

By then, the Seven-colored Divine Crane had already recovered from its previous trauma. Well, it would still make abrupt halts and plummet several hundred meters from time to time in the midst of its flight, but all was still well.

However, due to that, their journey ended up being much longer than expected. What that should have been a five-day flight ended up taking them ten whole days.

Fortunately, this time could not be said to have been wasted. The crowd managed to reinforce their cultivation, thus increasing their fighting prowess significantly. This was especially so for Luo Xuanqing. At Half-Dimension Sundering realm and ready to achieve a breakthrough at any moment, he was already standing at the very top of the Inner Sanctum.

“Zhang shi, are you interested in accompanying me to look for Zhang Chun?” Luo Xuanqing suddenly asked while he was

leaping down the back of the divine crane after landing in a vast courtyard.

“Look for Zhang Chun?”

“Indeed. It isn’t easy for me to one-up him, so it goes without saying that I should make use of this opportunity to vent my many years of pent-up frustration. Otherwise, wouldn’t my breakthrough have been in vain?” Luo Xuanqing said as he licked his lips savagely.

“This...” Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before saying, “Actually, I’m planning to take the 8-star examinations for my other supporting occupations so as to push for a breakthrough to 8-star master teacher.”

It had been quite some time since he had obtained the Sanctum Head Token, and time was rather tight for him too. It was about time for him to at least clear the 8-star master teacher examination and unlock one of the seals.

Otherwise, he might not be able to make it in time for Luo Ruoxin’s marriage.

“You want to take the 8-star examinations for your supporting occupations?” Luo Xuanqing looked at Zhang Xuan contemplatively. “Which examinations are you planning to take first?”

“Hmm, spirit awakener, apothecary, physician, painter, beast tamer, celestial designer, terpsichore, and appraiser... Any of these should be fine,” Zhang Xuan replied.

In order to qualify for the 8-star master teacher examination, he would need to have eight 8-star supporting occupations, and so far, he had only cleared his 8-star formation master examination. He really needed to work much harder.

“Ah, I have dest... I mean cleared those examinations before, so I am quite close with the personnel there. Why don’t you follow me to pummel Zhang Chun, and I’ll take you on a walk through all of them right after?” Luo Xuanqing said with a grand wave of his hand.

1368 Shrine of Seers

“I’ll be counting on you then, Brother Luo!”

Zhang Xuan was unfamiliar with the Sanctum of Sages, which made it difficult for him to find his way around. Hearing Luo Xuanqing’s confident declaration, Zhang Xuan’s eyes immediately lit up.

If he could have someone show him around, he would be spared from a great deal of trouble. Besides, he was more than willing to pummel Zhang Chun, not to mention the fact that the fellow still owed him quite a few pinnacle spirit stones. A few days had passed since then, so it was about time for him to collect the debt.

“There’s no need for formalities with me!” Luo Xuanqing laughed heartily as he took the lead forward.

Even though the cultivation of the young man before him was ordinary, he had shown extraordinary expertise in setting up formations and guiding others to achieving a breakthrough. Even for him and the Luo Clan, there were many benefits that could be derived from befriending such a person.

Not to mention, the young man’s personality happened to be to his liking as well.

While proceeding ahead, Luo Xuanqing sent out a few messages with his Communication Jade Token, and a moment later, he turned to Zhang Xuan with a smile and said, “That fellow isn’t in the Inner Sanctum but the Shrine of Seers. Let’s corner him there.”

“Shrine of Seers?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“It’s a branch of the Seer Guild, similar to the place where you took the 8-star formation master back then,” Luo Xuanqing explained.

“You mean... there’s a branch of the Seer Guild here?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in excitement.

He had heard of this occupation in the past. It was an Upper Nine Paths occupation that was shrouded with mystery. Seers were known to be able to use mysterious methods to foresee the events of the near future and use this knowledge to harness fortune and ward off bad luck.

Most Sage Clans would have a few seers serving as their honorary elders, assisting them in making important decisions.

All along, Zhang Xuan had only heard rumors about the occupation, but so far, he had not met a single seer in real life. Who would have thought that there would actually be a branch of the Seer Guild in the Sanctum of Sages?

“Of course! Where do you think the Sanctum of Sages is? Most likely, Zhang Chun is trying to get a seer to look into your background after getting done in by your tamed beast,” Luo Xuanqing said with a chuckle.

The fact that Luo Xuanqing was able to find out that Zhang Chun was in the Shrine of Seers so quickly could only mean that he had many pair of eyes in the Sanctum of Sages.

“He’s getting a seer just to look into my background? Wouldn’t it be far more efficient for him to just ask around?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

In his view, engaging the help of a seer for something so trivial was truly meaningless. After all, his background was stated in detail in his records, so all it would take was for Zhang Chun to tap into his connections to access it. Furthermore, there was likely a certain degree of error in the ability of any seer. It felt counterintuitive to go through so much trouble just to obtain possibly inaccurate information.

“The Zhang Clan has always been rather superstitious, and they regard seers and their ability of divination very well. The current clan head, Sword Saint Xingmeng, has even invited all the 9-star seers to the Zhang Clan over the past few years,” Luo Xuanqing said with a disdainful sneer.

“Why would he invite so many 9-star seers over to the Zhang Clan?” Zhang Xuan asked in bewilderment.

As the number one clan in the Master Teacher Continent, the Zhang Clan's position was extremely stable, and it was blessed with many talented offspring as well. Just what were they so dissatisfied about that they needed to engage the help of seers to look into?

"Who knows what's going through the minds of those lunatics?" Luo Xuanqing shrugged.

The Shrine of Seers was located in the Hall of Erudition, just like the other examination grounds. Flitting swiftly forward, it did not take them too long to arrive at their destination.

Even though the Shrine of Seers was located within the Hall of Erudition, it emanated a completely different vibe from the examination grounds of other occupations. The building was extremely old, carrying the slight scent of the primordial ages.

The entire building felt like an upside-down tortoiseshell, covered with all kinds of bizarre cracks on its surface. It was a rather mysterious feeling that was hard to describe, but it seemed like the building was infused with the will of the heavens, serving as a window to peer into the secrets of the world.

The doors to the other examination halls were all wide open, but this particular building had its gates tightly shut.

"This is the Shrine of Seers?"

"Un. I tried picking up the seer occupation at one point in time too, but despite studying it for several days, I wasn't even able to qualify as an apprentice, so I chose to give up on it in the end. Well, it's really quite an enigmatic occupation. It's not right to say that they are a bunch of frauds as their prophecies and insights do turn out to be astoundingly accurate from time to time. Then again... the notion of using just a few tortoiseshells or copper coins to predict one's fate is just plain ridiculous to me." Luo Xuanqing shook his head.

"Every established occupation has a reason for its existence. The fact that the seer occupation has been able to survive several dozen millennia without being phased out shows that it has its own meaning of existence," Zhang Xuan replied.

Survival of the fittest—those that were inept and useless would eventually be phased out with time. The fact that the seer occupation was able to be passed down for such a long period of time meant that it was not as simple as it seemed.

“You really talk like my younger sister. The last time I spoke with her about this matter, she said those words to me as well.” Luo Xuanqing glanced at Zhang Xuan with a displeased look.

“It’s my honor to share the same thoughts with the little princess.” Zhang Xuan chuckled softly in response.

“Don’t even bother trying to bootlick me!” Luo Xuanqing shot a glance at Zhang Xuan before continuing. “It’s only because I have a good impression of you that I’m giving you this advice right here. Don’t harbor any thoughts toward my younger sister. Firstly, there’s no way you’ll be able to catch her eye with your strength, and secondly, an outsider like you can’t possibly go against the will of the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan. This might sound a little harsh, but you’d do well to sever any wishful thinking you have toward her!”

Hidden within Luo Xuanqing’s blunt exterior was a meticulous heart. After spending several days with one another, he could not help but notice that the young man had an unnatural interest in the affairs of his younger sister.

If anyone else had been so nosy, he would have simply resorted straight to his fists. After all, his title as the King of Destruction was not for show. However, the young man had helped him greatly and even aided him in achieving a breakthrough. In view of that, he decided to persuade the young man instead.

It was not that he was resistant to the idea of having the young man become his brother-in-law, but he knew that such a matter was absolutely impossible.

Even he, one of the core members of the Luo Clan, was unable to change his younger sister’s fate, so what could a mere Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle fellow do?

Thus, it was better to sever all wishful thinking right from the start, or else it would only hurt more as time went by. It was

not easy for him to meet a person whom he could get along with, and he would hate to see the other party falling into danger over the matter concerning his younger sister.

“There’s no way I’ll be able to catch her eye? That’s hard to say. After all, who could fathom the capriciousness of life?” Zhang Xuan remarked deeply.

It was a sheer coincidence that he stumbled upon Luo Ruoxin in the midst of the Verdant Mountain back then, and it was also a sheer coincidence that those spirit beasts had gathered around her then, prompting him to make a move to save her. Without all of those coincidences, their fates probably would have never intersected, and they would not have gotten to know one another.

It was truly a marvel how fate was able to bring about a meeting of two people from two completely different worlds.

“Half of those who harbored those thoughts have been crippled by me, and the other half have been crippled by Zhang Chun...” Luo Xuanqing harrumphed coldly.

Jiya!

Just as he was about to continue speaking, the doors to the Shrine of Seer suddenly opened.

Following which, a young man wearing a long robe walked out from within.

“Seniors, my teacher invites you in!” The young man clasped his fist to greet Luo Xuanqing and Zhang Xuan before displaying an inviting gesture to usher them into the Shrine of Sages.

“Is your teacher... Master Feng Zhongquan?” Luo Xuanqing assessed the young man before him intently before his eyes suddenly lit up.

“Indeed.” The young man nodded quietly, but he was not able to fully conceal the glee that was beaming on his face.

“Master Feng Zhongquan has always been an elusive figure in the Sanctum of Sages. I heard that Zhang Chun has paid a visit to him seven times, only to be shut out each time around. Are

you sure that your teacher really wants to meet me?” Luo Xuanqing could hardly control his body from trembling in agitation.

Those of the Zhang Clan had a deep respect for seers, and Master Feng Zhongquan could be said to be the most formidable seer in the Sanctum of Sages. Zhang Chun had visited him on many occasions, only to be turned away before he could even pass over his name scroll. Yet, for Master Feng Zhongquan to send his student to invite him in... Didn't that mean that he was far more respected and esteemed than Zhang Chun?

With this, he would be able to give Zhang Chun a good mocking later on.

Hearing those words, the young man shot a nonchalant glance at Luo Xuanqing and said, “My apologies, I should have been clearer in my words. The one whom my teacher wishes to meet is the young friend beside you.”

“Your teacher wants to meet me?” Zhang Xuan was stunned. “Why?”

He had only recently arrived at the Sanctum of Sages, and he did not even know who Master Feng Zhongquan was. Why would the latter suddenly request to meet him?

“I'm afraid that I don't have the answer to your question. You'll have to head in to find out.”

In truth, the young man also found the matter inconceivable.

His teacher was a deeply esteemed figure on the Master Teacher Continent, such that he could even afford to snub the deputy sanctum head and the other elders if he wanted to, and there would be nothing they could do to him. Yet, he was actually requesting to meet a twenty-year-old freshman who had no particularly noteworthy background, and he had even instructed him to personally invite the other party in.

This was truly perplexing.

It would have been understandable if the other party was like the little princess, wielding formidable prowess, but he was only a humble Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator! He

might have been considered a genius anywhere else on the Master Teacher Continent, but in the Sanctum of Sages, there were plenty of students who could rival or even surpass him. Even at the very most, his talents could only be considered average.

“Master Feng Zhongquan wants to meet Zhang Shi?” Luo Xuanqing widened his eyes in disbelief.

He had thought that this was a good opportunity for him to mock Zhang Chun, but who would have thought that the person whom Master Feng Zhongquan wanted to meet with was the person beside him?

“Alright then.” Zhang Xuan was bewildered by the abnormal situation, but seeing that the young man before him really knew nothing at all, he decided to head in to take a look. After all, he had been intrigued by the mysterious abilities that seers wielded for a long time, and this would be a good opportunity for him to see what they were capable of.

So, under the young man’s lead, he walked into the Shrine of Seers.

The interior of the Shrine of Seers seemed to be even older than how it appeared outside. There were many bizarre flags planted on the ground, and they divided the main hall into many narrow sectors. There were several dozen young men sitting in a circle in each of these narrow sectors; some were holding onto a copper coin whereas others were holding onto a tortoiseshell. Their eyes were firmly shut, and the tight contemplative frown between their brows suggested that they were trying to fathom something.

At the middle of the circle was a reddish-green beetle placed on top of searing flames, and it looked so withered that it seemed like it was just a push away from falling into the embrace of death.

“Is that... the Light-shelled Beetle, renowned for being able to survive amid lightning?” Zhang Xuan wondered doubtfully.

He had never seen a Light-shelled Beetle before, but he had read records on them. According to the rumors, these lifeforms

neither ate nor drank. Only on stormy days where the rain poured and lightning raged would they rise from their hiding places and dash into the sky, taking in the power of the lightning to sustain their existence.

Light-shelled Beetles were extremely elusive, and their numbers were severely limited as well, such that it was viewed as one of the hardest beasts to find in the world by the beast tamers. Yet, to think that they would be roasting it on the flames... this was really perplexing.

He had never heard of the Light-shelled Beetles being edible! And even if they were edible, how were they going to split it among the several dozen young men? It would not even be enough to stuff the gap between their teeth!

Noticing the doubtful look on Zhang Xuan's face, Luo Xuanqing sent a telepathic message over to fill him in. "This is one of the daily training that seers have to undergo. The crux behind this exercise is to seal all of their senses and use their will to fathom the will of the heavens to predict whether the Light-shelled Beetle has been burned to death or whether it'll climb out from somewhere."

He might not be a seer himself, but he had spent a few days of his life attempting to learn divination, so he had some idea of what was going on within the Shrine of Seers.

"This..."

Luo Xuanqing's explanation only served to plunge Zhang Xuan deeper into confusion.

Placed upon flames, there was a chance that the Light-shelled Beetle could be burn to death at any moment. But similarly, there was also a chance that it would manage to rise from the searing heat and flee. In a sense, was this not the same as Schrödinger's cat? Until the outcome was determined, all guesses would be naught but guesses.

Seemingly noticing the communication behind him, the young man turned around and explained to them, "The Light-shelled Beetle's ability to resist lightning is, in truth, a struggle against the heavens. For this reason, it's known as the Seer Beetle.

Through predicting the life and death of such a lifeform, one is able to better grasp the elusive and capricious nature of the will of the heavens!”

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded, but it was difficult to tell whether he truly understood those words or not. He shot a glance at the beetle on the charcoal and asked with a frown, “Given the intense heat of the charcoal there, that Light-shelled Beetle should already be on the verge of death, no?”

“On the verge of death?” Hearing those words, the young man shook his head with a chuckle. “I’ve divined that beetle before. It’ll live up to a hundred years...”

But before he could finish his words, the sound reminiscent to a balloon popping echoed in the air. The Light-shelled Beetle that was lying on the charcoal a while ago abruptly swelled up and exploded into dust.

Peng!

“Ah...” Zhang Xuan shot a bizarre look at the young man and asked, “Could it be that... today is its hundredth birthday?”

1369 Voyeur

Instead of replying to Zhang Xuan's words, the young man walked up to the Light-shelled Beetle and examined it closely in disbelief.

His divination ability as a seer had reached the level of 8-star, allowing him to foresee many events with a high level of accuracy. He had divined the beetle before him multiple times, and the result he got each time was that it would die of old age. Why would it suddenly blow up now?

Of course, saying that it would be able to live up to a hundred years old was just a metaphor. It wouldn't just literally live to its hundredth birthday!

Furthermore, even if that was the case, it didn't make sense for it to explode into dust right after those words were spoken?

The young man stared at the beetle with a conflicted look on his face for quite a while, but he was still unable to make sense out of the situation. In the end, he decided not to think too much into it and continued leading the duo forward.

Not too long later, they arrived before a room. Before he could even knock, a voice already sounded from within, "Come in."

Following which, the room to the door slowly cracked open.

Taking a look within, Zhang Xuan saw an elder seated at the center of the hall. The young man standing beside him was no other than the person they were looking for, Zhang Chun!

At this moment, he had already recovered from the injuries he had sustained, and his aura felt a little sharper and purer than before. It seemed like the vicious pummeling he had received previously had helped to beat out the impurities in his body, bringing about a considerable rise in his fighting prowess. A blessing in disguise indeed.

"It's you?" Upon seeing Zhang Xuan walking through the door, Zhang Chun's face immediately turned livid.

As a genius of the Zhang Clan, he never thought that he would be pummeled by the tamed beast of a nobody in the Sanctum of Sages, nearly losing his life in the valley. Recalling the embarrassment and humiliation he had been put through, his face swiftly reddened in fury.

However, he swiftly remembered something and turned to look at the old man beside him in astonishment, “Elder Feng, is the esteemed guest you spoke of... him?”

Previously, in the midst of their conversation, Elder Feng suddenly tasked his student to head out and usher an esteemed guest in. Back then, he had thought that it would be a top-notch expert or a respected elder of the Sanctum of Sages. Never in his mind had he even fathomed that it would actually be this fellow!

That fellow only managed to overwhelm him by lucking out and taming the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast. Otherwise, there was no way a mere Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle would possibly be able to face him straight on! Surely there was no need for Master Feng, whom even their clan head would have to show deep respect to, to view him so highly?

“That’s right.” Elder Feng stood up and assessed Zhang Xuan intently. The more he looked, the brighter the gleam in his eyes became, and a while later, he couldn’t help but exclaim in amazement, “It’s indeed the Discarnate Constitution of Divination!”

“Discarnate Constitution of Divination?” Zhang Xuan frowned in bewilderment.

Even though he was unable to determine his own condition through the Library of Heaven’s Path, he did possess a deep knowledge of the various unique constitutions there were out there from the books he had assimilated so far, and there was none that corresponded to his own condition.

In other words, he was an ordinary man who couldn’t be any more ordinary!

So, what in the world was the Discarnate Constitution of Divination? Why hadn’t he heard it before?

If he really possessed such a unique constitution, why would his cultivation still advanced so slowly, such that he wouldn't even be able to catch up with his student and his girlfriend?

“The Number of Grand Divination, 49 with a discarnate 1, and you happen to possess that ‘discarnate’ physique.” Elder Feng stroked his beard and explained. “To use conventional terms, it means that it’s impossible to use the means of divination to determine your fate and thus, future!”

(The Number of Grand Divination is a terminology from Zhou Yi, which is the core of Yi Jing or I Ching, an ancient Chinese divination text. However, there is no clear grasp as to what Grand Divination truly means, and so, the Number of Grand Divination remains an enigma to the world.)

Before Zhang Xuan could make sense of what was being said, the young man beside him had already widened his eyes in disbelief.

“Teacher, that legendary unique constitution really exists?”

“I also thought that it was a legend until that incident, which made me understand that not only does such a unique constitution exist, there are even a couple of them out there in the world...” Elder Feng shook his head and said, seemingly unwilling to linger too long on this matter. “If you don’t believe me, you can give it a try.”

“This... Alright then.” The young man was stunned for a few seconds before taking out three copper coins. He held them tightly in his grasp and mused for a moment before tossing them into the air.

The copper coins swiftly dropped onto the ground and spun non-stop, but before a divination could appear, resounding ‘Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!’ sounded, and cracks appeared on the coins.

And soon after, just like with the Light-shelled Beetle, ‘peng!’, the copper coins exploded into dust.

The young man’s face immediately turned pale, and as if having sustained a heavy blow, he was forced to retreat several

steps back. A trail of blood seeped down the corner of his lips as stupefaction rippled across his face.

The young man was clearly right before his eyes, but for some inexplicable reason, his divination was unable to work on the young man, or to be more exact, it felt as if he was attempting to divine something that didn't exist in the world at all, a discarnate entity.

How could the concepts of karma and history possibly apply to a discarnate entity?

“How is it?” Having known this outcome, Elder Feng looked at his disciple and said.

The young man took in a deep breath to suppress his injuries before replying in resignation, “I really can't divine anything at all...”

“Of course, he's a void in the world. Not only his fate, even everything he has done and is going to do will be veiled from the eyes of the world!” Elder Feng said.

“This...”

In this moment, the young man could finally understand why his teacher wanted to meet this fellow.

Discarnate Constitution of Divination, this was the constitution that was most suited to become a seer. There weren't any records of anyone possessing such a constitution, but even in the entire history of mankind, there should only be several dozen of them existent in this world. He could have never thought that the ordinary-looking man before him would actually possess it as well.

“Everything I have done and am going to do will be veiled from the eyes of the world?” Zhang Xuan frowned upon hearing the words exchanged between the duo.

It took him a while before he could fully grasp that notion.

Most likely, the reason why divination didn't work on him was due to the Library of Heaven's Path.

The Library of Heaven's Path could probably be considered as the very manifestation of the heavens, so naturally, concealing

the will of the heavens and impeding others from looking in was probably just a walk in the park for it.

In other words, he didn't possess the Discarnate Constitution of Divination at all.

“Indeed. In other words, you are a fault in the world. If you were to become a seer, no matter how you peer into the secrets of the heavens, you still wouldn't suffer any backlash at all!” Elder Feng exclaimed with glowing eyes.

The act of divining the future was equivalent to revealing the secrets of the heavens, and naturally, seers would have to suffer the retribution of the heavens for their actions. For this reason, high-ranking seers usually didn't end well.

When one looks into the abyss, the abyss looks back at one. If one were to just divine smaller affairs, one might still be able to avoid the notice of the heavens. However, if one were to attempt to divine something that would affect the trajectory of the world... they would soon find the very ill will of the heavens directed against them. Eventually, most of them would meet their ends while undergoing the tribulation of the heavens.

Despite the seemingly glamorous exterior of seers, they were, in essence, voyeurs who sought to peer into the secrets of the heavens, and thus, the dangers they faced were greater than any other occupation.

However, there was one exception to the rule—the Discarnate Constitution of Divination. Those who possessed such a constitution were existences who weren't even within the calculations in the heavens, and no matter how they peered at the secrets of the heavens, they wouldn't face any punishment from the heavens...

A constitution that allowed others to flout the rules openly without being punished—it was as if it was made just for seers!

“I was only able to notice it when Zhang Chun requested me to divine your background and your teacher.” Elder Feng explained.

Hearing those words, Zhang Chun's face turned crimson. He felt so stifled that he could explode on the spot.

After the pummeling he had received, he had been wanting to get even with Zhang Xuan. For this reason, he spent a heavy price to request for Elder Feng's help, wanting the latter to help him divine Zhang Xuan's background... Yet, his efforts only seemed to have placed Zhang Xuan on a higher pedestal!

Not only had he not found out anything more about Zhang Xuan, the latter even became Elder Feng's esteemed guest!

It was as if even the world was on his side!

"Your Discarnate Constitution of Divination is most suited for seers." Elder Feng looked at Zhang Xuan with pulsating excitement in his eyes. "So, what do you think about becoming my direct disciple?"

"Elder Feng, you want to take that fellow in as your direct disciple? But you have never taken in any direct disciples before..." Zhang Chun's face twitched in shock.

While seers might not possess exceptional fighting prowess, due to the unique nature of their occupation, they were respected as one of the Upper Nine Paths occupations. This was especially so for Elder Feng, who was considered to be one of the greatest seers in the world...

Just the fact the polite attitude their clan head maintained before Elder Feng showed his standing on the Master Teacher Continent.

If Zhang Xuan were to really become Elder Feng's direct disciple, all his hopes of vengeance would be dashed!

"Direct disciple?"

The young man by the side showed a face full of envy and admiration.

He was only Elder Feng's ordinary student, which meant that he wasn't entitled to inheriting the crux of Elder Feng's heritage. Most likely, he would only remain an 8-star seer for life, unable to take a step forward anymore.

But again, there was nothing he could do. The Discarnate Constitution of Divination was something one was born with, and no amount of hard work would change that.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan didn't expect Elder Feng to request him to become his direct disciple on their first meeting. Instead of responding to that question straight, he looked at Elder Feng with a doubtful look and asked, "Is the Discarnate Constitution of Divination very rare?"

"Very much so. I only know of four people in the Master Teacher Continent who possesses that constitution, and that's including you." Elder Feng replied.

"Four people? May I know who are they?" Not expecting that there would be three people who would possess that constitution, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but be a little curious.

At the same time, Zhang Chun also quickly stemmed the thoughts in his mind and turned his attention over.

"You must be the Luo Clan's Luo Xuanqing, right?" Instead of replying Zhang Xuan's question, Elder Feng suddenly turned to Luo Xuanqing and asked.

"Xuanqing pays respect to Elder Feng!" Luo Xuanqing clasped his fist and said.

"Un, there's no need to stand on ceremony. Back then, when your younger sister sealed her cultivation and left the Luo Clan, your clan head paid me a visit and requested my help in divining her location. However, I was unable to divine her exact whereabouts, and if my guess fails me not... it's like that that she possesses the Discarnate Constitution of Divination too!" Elder Feng said.

"My younger sister possesses the Discarnate Constitution of Divination?" Luo Xuanqing was surprised by the revelation before nodding in realization.

Previously, he had been wondering why despite the many seers there were in the Luo Clan, they were still unable to find his younger sister's whereabouts for such a long period of time... It was due to this incident that he had a biased view toward seers, thinking that they were just fraudsters out to

dupe money and prestige out of others. However, if his younger sister possessed the Discarnate Constitution of Divination, that would explain everything.

Elder Feng nodded in response.

“What about the other two?” Zhang Chun asked.

“The first person I have found to have possessed that constitution is the young prodigy of your Zhang Clan... No matter how I attempt to divine his whereabouts, I was simply unable to find any trace of him anywhere. It’s as if he has never existed in the world at all!” Elder Feng said.

“The young prodigy?” Zhang Chun heaved a sigh of relief.

It was fortunate that the young prodigy possessed such a constitution as well, or else he would be spending the next few years hearing the gleeful Luo Xuanqing harping on this matter.

“The last person is a mysterious young lady I met a few months back. She is roughly Zhang Shi’s age, and she possesses extraordinary strength, unlike anything I have seen before... However, it’s a pity that she disappeared before I could catch a word with her.” Elder Feng shook her head and sighed.

“I see...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

All along, he had been hearing about how formidable the young prodigy was, and after hearing what Elder Feng had said, he was really starting to catch a glimpse into what kind of figure he was going up against.

He was only able to avoid the divination of seers due to his possession of the Library of Heaven’s Path, but to think that the young prodigy would actually possess the Discarnate Constitution of Divination...

It was no wonder why he was able to remain hidden for so long... It turned out that not even the Luo Clan had any way to figure out where he was!

“Wait a moment... You said that it’s impossible to fathom my fate and my history due to my Discarnate Constitution of Divination. If that’s the case, how did you know that Brother

Luo and I have just arrived before your doorstep previously, even sending out your student to receive us?” Zhang Xuan suddenly thought of something, and he couldn't help but frown in confusion.

Since it was impossible to divine his whereabouts, there should be no way Elder Feng should have known that he would be coming by today!

Furthermore, thinking back, the door to the room also opened right when they have just arrived outside it...

“This...” Seemingly not expecting to hear such a question, Elder Feng was visibly taken aback for a moment before directing a bizarre look at Zhang Xuan. “Have you... never used your Spiritual Perception before? This room isn't located too far away from the entrance, so it's very easy to extend one's Spiritual Perception over.”

“...” Zhang Xuan.

1370 Sage Xi's Tortoiseshell

Perhaps it was due to the awareness that he was at the Shrine of Seers, everything that had happened seemed to be veiled with a layer of mystery in his head. For this reason, he thought that it was due to the unique abilities of a seer that Elder Feng was able to divine his arrival and dispatch a student to receive them... But who could have thought that it would just be a simple Spiritual Perception scan!

That was an ability that all cultivators would unlock upon reaching Saint 2-dan. Once activated, one would be able to perceive everything within a given radius. With this ability, it was indeed not too difficult for Elder Feng to notice their arrival.

“How is it? Are you willing to become my direct disciple?” After explaining the matter, Elder Feng continued directing his heated gaze upon Zhang Xuan.

There was no way he would be able to take in the little princess of the Luo Clan, the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan, or the mysterious young lady as his students, but as for Zhang Xuan, he felt that he stood quite a huge chance.

If he could take Zhang Xuan in as his direct disciple, with the latter's tremendous potential in the occupation, they would be able to make seers great again!

“Pardon me, but I already have my own teacher and heritage, so it wouldn't really be convenient for me to acknowledge anyone else as my own teacher.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“I have the fortune of meeting your teacher, Yang Xuan, once before. While he does have an eccentric temperament, he wouldn't have any qualms about you acknowledging someone else as your teacher for other supporting occupations.” Instead of getting mad at Zhang Xuan's rejection, Elder Feng reasoned calmly.

Before Zhang Xuan could say anything, Zhang Chun's body jolted, and he exclaimed in disbelief, "Yang Xuan? Elder Feng means to say that... Zhang Xuan's teacher is Yang Shi of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters?"

Even Luo Xuanqing also widened his eyes upon hearing those words.

They did mention Yang Xuan's name during the journey to obtain the Dongxu Gourd, but Zhang Xuan didn't say anything about him then... Why would he suddenly turn out to be Yang Xuan's student?

If that was really the case, it would be understandable why Zhang Xuan would have no fear about the repercussions from pummeling Zhang Chun.

Even though the Zhang Clan was the number one Sage Clan on the Master Teacher Continent, it still paled far in comparison to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters. As the First Grand Elder, other than the seat of the pavilion master, which had been empty for several millennia now, Yang Xuan's standing was second to none in the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters!

"Due to your constitution, I am unable to divine anything relating to your lineage. Nevertheless, through using my authority in the Sanctum of Sages, I'm still able to access your record files. To rise through the ranks from the humble Tianxuan Kingdom and reach such a height, not to mention that you have always identified yourself as Yang Shi's student, I really can't imagine any other master teacher who is capable of grooming a student as talented as you!" Elder Feng said with a chuckle.

While he was unable to divine Zhang Xuan's profile, he was still able to access the latter's records.

Considering how often Zhang Xuan had identified his teacher as Yang Xuan before others, it wasn't too difficult to dig that up too.

"I..." Zhang Xuan immediately broke out in cold sweat.

The only reason why he identified himself as ‘Yang Xuan’s’ student was because he thought that it was just a made-up name, so he used it as he pleased! How was he supposed to know that that fellow really existed, and even possessed such a high standing at that... This was really a huge headache!

If Yang Xuan were to drop by the Sanctum of Sages and say that he didn’t have such a student, his lie would be immediately exposed!

Without this protective umbrella, it wouldn’t take long before greedy individuals turned their eyes to him, wanting to uncover the secrets behind the swift rise in his cultivation and supporting occupation.

“How is it?” Noticing the changes on Zhang Xuan’s face, Elder Feng thought that the other party was seriously contemplating over the issue, so he chuckled softly and said, “If you still harbor some reservations regarding the matter, I can send a message into the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and seek his opinion on this matter on your behalf!”

“Regarding that...” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows leaped up upon hearing those words, and he immediately spoke up anxiously, “... I am very thankful to Elder Feng’s high opinion of me. However, I have never come into contact with anything relating to seers, so if possible, I would like to access the books relating to it. If I do possess some talent in the art of divination, I would be more than delighted to take up your offer. Otherwise, I would feel guilt-ridden if my lack of talent in the field were to blemish your reputation!”

This sure was a difficult position he was in.

He had only come here with Luo Xuanqing to get a go at Zhang Chun, but who could have thought that he would end up getting such a passionate offer by someone else to become his student, and that person was even threatening to ‘tell on him to Yang Xuan’ if he were to reject his offer... Hai, being too outstanding sure was troublesome!

Was his simple wish of living an ordinary life really that difficult to achieve?

Since that was the case, he decided to first take a look through all of the seer-related books first. By then, let's see who would become whose student!

“You want to access our library of books?” Seeing that Zhang Xuan wasn't resistant to the idea of becoming his student, Elder Feng heaved a sigh of relief. With a look that said ‘there's no way you can't possibly not be a genius’, he chuckled, “There are simply too many things to learn as a seer for you to master the art within just a day or two. Actually, there's no need to go through so much trouble. There's a far simpler way to gauge your talent as a seer.”

“Gauge my talent as a seer?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“Un. Yu Chen, bring the tortoiseshell over here!” Elder Feng instructed with a wave of his hand.

“Yes!”

The young man turned around and left, and not too long later, he returned with an ancient tortoiseshell carefully held between his hands.

The ancient tortoiseshell was slightly grayish in color, and its surface was densely filled with slight cracks. Even before coming close to it, Zhang Xuan could already feel a slight quivering in the space surrounding it, as if the secrets of the world were sealed within it, awaiting curious minds to peer into it.

“Could this be... Sage Xi's Tortoiseshell?” Zhang Chun widened his eyes in astonishment.

Stroking his beard, Elder Feng turned to confused Zhang Xuan and explained with a smile, “Sage Xi is a renowned expert whose time predates even that of Kong shi. Through observing the patterns on the back of the long-living tortoise, he managed to grasp the will of the heavens and founded the seer occupation. He has passed down many divination-related artifacts, and the most famous of them all is a tortoiseshell...”

“That tortoiseshell is known to be the number one treasure of the Seer Guild, and it's stored in the deepest and most secure region of the guild. It's used to divine the trajectory of the

continent's fate and the rise and fall of the world... Of course, not even I have the rights to use it. The one before you is a replica which a 9-star pinnacle seer, Elder Ji Chan, created many years ago."

"However, don't underestimate it just because it's a replica. It's through the divination of this tortoiseshell that Ancient Sage Bo Shang found that several dozen millennium's worth of fortune was gathered in this land, allowing it to survive the trial of time, thus leading to him establishing the Sanctum of Sages on this land. That should be more than enough to verify its prowess!"

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up in astonishment.

It wasn't too difficult to gather spiritual energy and fortune within a land—high-ranked formation masters were capable of doing that too. However, to retain spiritual energy and fortune within a land for several millenniums or even several dozen millenniums, especially amidst an ever-changing world and environment... This was not something that they were capable of.

To do that would require one to not only foresee the changes in the land itself but those surrounding it as well... To be able to divine it accurately, the tortoiseshell could definitely be considered as a priceless treasure.

"This tortoiseshell has been passed down 121 generations so far, and all 102 9-star pinnacle seers who have appeared within this timeframe have all used it as some point in their life. As a result of that, their wills are all infused within the tortoiseshell as well... So, just by placing your hand on top of it, they will be able to assess whether you possess talent as a seer or not." Elder Feng said as he lightly stroked the ancient tortoiseshell in front of him.

Zhang Xuan didn't expect the other party to take out such a valuable artifact to assess his talent. At this point, it would only be disrespectful of him if he were to turn down the other party any more than this, so he asked, "I just have to place my hand on it?"

“Un. If you still harbor some doubts toward its effects, I can have others showcase it to you...” Elder Feng turned his gaze to Zhang Chun before continuing on, “You have been wanting to learn divination from me for many years, only to be turned away each time around. It’s not that I’m intentionally making things difficult for you or trying to test your patience, but you are simply unsuited for this occupation! Place your hand on this tortoiseshell and see for yourself.”

“This...” Zhang Chun’s face twitched.

He would have never thought that a day would come where he would actually be used as a counterexample. As displeased as he was, he still walked forward and slowly placed his hand on the tortoiseshell.

Seemingly sensing the touch of a living being, a slight radiance emanated from in between the many cracks on the tortoiseshell.

Kacha! Kacha!

It was a rather bizarre sight. The light seemed to be weaving across the many cracks on the tortoiseshell, and as if playing an instrument, a crackling sound echoed in the air. Very soon, two ancient runes surfaced before everyone’s eyes.

Elder Feng glanced at the runes and shook his head, “Yu Chen, explain these two runes to the others.”

“Yes!” The young man stepped forward and said, “What these runes over here mean is that the individual tested is of ordinary aptitude and is unfated with the art of divination!”

“Ordinary aptitude? Then what would the runes for the talented be like?” Zhang Chun asked with a hint of indignance in his voice.

The current clan head and elders of the Zhang Clan held seers in high esteem. If he could achieve a high level of mastery in the art of divination, it was likely that he would be regarded highly and them, and perhaps, he might even be brought into the circle of the upper echelon of the clan.

It was for this reason that he persistently visited Elder Feng despite being rejected time and time again. He was still

harboring hope that the rejection might just be Elder Feng's way of testing him, but who could have thought that the real problem lay in his lack of talent?

"The aptitude of a seer can basically be divided into six tiers, namely inferior, ordinary, fair, superior, and pinnacle." the young man explained. "For those who are unable to read the runes, there's a far easier way to interpret them. The greater the number of runes, the higher one's aptitude toward divination is. A single rune would mean inferior, two runes would mean ordinary, so on and so forth. If six runes were to appear, it would mean that the individual possesses unparalleled aptitude in divination!"

After saying those words, the young man placed his palm on the tortoiseshell.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

Brilliant light weaved across the cracks of the tortoiseshell, and the same crackling sound echoed in the air once more, but this time, it was more numerous. Slowly, five runes surfaced from the tortoiseshell.

"Superior?" Zhang Chun gulped down a mouthful of saliva in shock.

He had met Yu Chen many times around, and he thought that the latter only caught Elder Feng's sight by sheer luck. He had never thought that the latter would actually possess such a high aptitude toward divination.

Given that Yu Chen was only an ordinary student despite his 'superior' aptitude... as a mere 'ordinary', he really didn't stand a chance at all.

"I would like to give it a try too..." Stepping forward, Luo Xuanqing placed his palm on it, and two runes appeared. Just like Zhang Chun, his aptitude was 'ordinary' too!

Luo Xuanqing was initially a little disappointed, but he consoled himself by telling himself that his aptitude was at least not any beneath Zhang Chun. Afterward, he turned to Zhang Xuan and said, "Zhang shi, you should give it a try too!"

“Alright.” Knowing there’s no way for him to back out of this, Zhang Xuan stepped forward.

Previously, he had said that he would take Elder Feng as his teacher if he showed aptitude toward divination... Was he really going to have to acknowledge another person as his teacher?

This was really a little difficult for him to accept.

Perhaps, he could try using the Heaven’s Path zhenqi to conceal the results?

On the other hand, watching as Zhang Xuan stepped forward, an excited gleam surfaced in Elder Feng’s eyes.

The Discarnate Constitution of Divination was a legendary physique that all seers sought for. There were no precedents which he could use as a reference to fathom how many runes the young man would be able to induce, but most likely, it would be beyond six.

Hu!

Before his expectant eyes, Zhang Xuan placed his palm on the tortoiseshell.

Weng!

A light buzz sounded in the air, and a blinding light began streaming across the cracks in the tortoiseshell.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha...

Crackling sounds echoed one after another in high frequency, almost as if one was stir-frying beans.

“With so many crackling sounds echoing, I wonder how many runes would appear?” Zhang Chun clenched his fists tightly as he looked at the sight before him with reddened eyes.

Previously, when he placed his hand on the tortoiseshell and it crackled twice, two runes appeared. Following which, when Yu Chen placed his hand on the tortoiseshell and it crackled five times, five runes appeared.

And now, the tortoiseshell had already crackled for several dozen times in response to Zhang Xuan’s touch... It couldn’t

be that several dozen runes were going to appear, right? If that's the case, just how immense of a talent did he possess?

In his state of shock, he suddenly saw Elder Feng's face warping into horror, and the latter dashed forward furiously.

However, it was already too late. With a particularly conspicuous 'hong long', the ancient tortoiseshell exploded into dust.

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“...”

Zhang Xuan was completely dumbstruck, not knowing whether he should retract his hand from the tortoiseshell or not.

Whether I am talented or not, it'd do for you to just reflect it accordingly... Why the heck did you explode on the spot for?

All I had done was to use a bit of my Heaven's Path zhenqi and the power of the Library of Heaven's Path to disguise myself... Do you really have to do this to me?

Previously, when Elder Feng took out the tortoiseshell, he had treated it extremely carefully, as if it was his child. For it to explode just like that... wouldn't the other party pit his life against him?

Just as Zhang Xuan was at a complete loss as to what to do, he saw the old man who was still smiling a second ago suddenly standing before him, staring at the remains of the tortoise shell on the ground with a twitching face, seemingly on the verge of going berserk.

“Teacher...” Not expecting such a situation to occur either, Yu Chen was shocked beyond words too.

While others might not understand the significance of the tortoiseshell, he knew how important it was to his teacher. Having it reduced to dust like that was no different from claiming his teacher's life.

“My tortoiseshell...”

The trembling Elder Feng reached out to stroke the remains on the ground, and in just an instant, he looked as if he had withered many years.

“Elder Feng, he didn't do it on purpose. Why don't I have a new one forged out for you? Your tortoiseshell was already old and decrepit prior to this, filled with many cracks. It was only

a matter of time before it broke. Just last year, I came to know an extremely skilled craftsman at the Chen Village; his handicraft is truly exquisite, and the price he charged is fair as well. Shall I introduce him to you?” Luo Xuanqing consoled.

“Pu!” Unable to take it anymore, Elder Feng spurted a mouthful of blood.

“Cough cough...” Zhang Xuan rolled his eyes at his future brother-in-law before shaking his head speechlessly.

You shouldn’t try to console others if you don’t know how to go around doing it. You are only making things worse!

A tortoiseshell of this tier was incredibly valuable... Do you think that you would be able to replace it just by forging a close replica?

Seeing that Luo Xuanqing couldn’t be relied on, Zhang Xuan could only make a move himself. He pondered for a moment before speaking up earnestly, “Elder Feng, what is done cannot be undone, so there’s no use remaining upset about the matter. It’s just a tortoiseshell anyway. Why don’t I capture a few over tomorrow so that you can make as many of it as you want? If you like, you could even boil a pot of fine soup with their flesh too...”

“Pu! Pu!” Elder Feng spurted even more blood.

“Or else, why don’t I make a new one for you then?” Seeing that the situation seemed to only be getting worse with his consolation, Zhang Xuan was really at a loss as to what to do.

While he was touching the tortoiseshell previously, he managed to compile a book on it in the Library of Heaven’s Path. Despite the long heritage behind it and its high tier, it was plagued with many flaws too. As long as Zhang Xuan was willing to set his mind to it and managed to gather sufficient books on it, he should be able to forge another tortoiseshell that was of the same tier or even higher!

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan decided to immerse his consciousness into the Library of Heaven’s Path to study the book so as to analyze the feasibility of creating an exact

replica of the tortoiseshell when Yu Chen's anxious voice suddenly sounded.

“Teacher...”

His voice was quivering, carrying deep fear toward something.

Sensing the anxiety in the voice, the depressed Elder Feng turned his head over.

“Look at that...” Yu Chen pointed to the roof above them.

Elder Feng hurriedly raised his head, and what he saw caused his eyes to narrow in fear.

At the same time, noticing the peculiar reaction of the duo, Zhang Xuan and the others raised their heads as well, and in the next instant, they froze on the spot.

A huge crack had appeared on the tortoiseshell-shaped building above them, and it was swiftly creeping its way across the area. The inscriptions that were used to fortify the building seemed to have been rendered useless in this very moment, as if they had encountered a force which even they were helpless before.

“How could this be?” Elder Feng clawed his head in horror.

The explosion of the Sage Xi's Tortoiseshell could still be attributed to its old age and wear and tear, thus resulting in retribution from the heavens. On the other hand, the tortoiseshell building had a huge investment in manpower and resources to construct it, and in terms of durability, not even a Saint 8-dan pinnacle expert's full strength attack would be able to cause the slightest damage to it. Why would it collapse all of a sudden?

“Stop!” Bellowing furiously, Elder Feng rushed forward in an attempt to stop the destruction.

No matter what, he couldn't allow the Shrine of Seers to collapse just like that.

However, despite his furious output of zhenqi, he was still unable to stop the collapse of the building. It was as if an inexplicable force that no man could rival was acting upon the building, forcing the collapse to occur.

And before this force, even Saint 9-dan experts were nothing more than ants, not even worth a mention.

Kacha! Kacha!

Finally, the roof reached the limits of its durability, and with a series of explosions, rubble began plummeting from above. Many of the seers were immediately jolted out of their focused state, and they anxiously opened their eyes and darted out.

As for Zhang Xuan and the rest, it somehow felt wrong if they were to run away in this moment, so they could only drive their zhenqi and form a barrier above them to fend off the falling rubble.

Hualala!

Even amidst a cloud of dust, it took just a mere glance to see that the ancient tortoiseshell building was no more, replaced by a mere lump of rubble. All of the formations and the sort that it harnessed had also been completely destroyed as well.

“This...” Zhang Xuan blinked his eyes in a daze as he remarked, “Isn’t this building a little too poorly-built? Just who is the architect behind it? If any ordinary humans had been in here, they would have been crushed to death!”

The building still appeared rather sturdy when he looked at it from the outside, but it turned out to be just a false sense of security! It was fortunate that he was strong, otherwise he would have never been able to survive the collapsing rubble no matter how many lives he had!

“Pu!” Once again, Elder Feng spurted a mouthful of blood.

“Teacher, what’s going on?” Yu Chen rushed over to Elder Feng’s side and asked anxiously.

It took a while before Elder Feng managed to calm down the stifled sensation in his heart. He looked at the rubble all around him with a desolated look and sighed deeply, “It must be the retribution of the heavens...”

“Retribution of the heavens?” Hearing that phrase, Zhang Xuan asked in incomprehension.

“Seers sought to peer into the secrets of the heavens in order to receive insights into what the future holds, which is a violation of the natural laws of the world. For that reason, our occupation is deeply abhorred by the heavens. As such, we have to use unique means in order to conceal our presence from the will of the heavens, thus leaving the retribution of the heavens nowhere to strike... However, even such means aren’t completely infallible. After all, the heavens possess means which none of us can fathom. Take the situation just now for example, it seems that the will of the heavens have somehow slipped past the barriers we have put up and destroyed the entire place from within, thus resulting in the current state of affairs...” Elder Feng hesitated for a moment before explaining slowly.

As a 9-star seer, even though everything had happened abruptly, he was still able to fathom roughly what had just happened with a swift divination.

Those who had reached the top in a certain field were bound to catch the envy of the heavens, and this envy would often manifest in a physical form such as the Leaving Aperture Ordeal and the Dimension Sundering Ordeal. In a sense, this could be considered to be the heavens’ retribution toward those who dared to vie power from it.

And this was even more so for seers, who sought to peer into the secrets of the heavens. The only reason why they were able to survive so long was due to the elaborate preparations they had made to guard against the will of the heavens. Using the language of Zhang Xuan’s world, it would be similar to how illegal gambling dens would swiftly hide all traces of their activities as soon their sentries caught sight of the arrival of the police, leaving the policemen completely helpless against them.

And of course, when seers dared to peer into the secrets of the heavens, they didn’t just rely on their courage and bravado either. They would have made ample preparations in advance. However, they just didn’t expect that despite the tight guard they had put up against it, they were still noticed. Not only was the tortoiseshell destroyed, even the Sanctum of Sages’

several dozen millenniums old Shrine of Seers was destroyed as well...

Elder Feng clutched his chest as a stabbing pain assaulted his heart.

On the other hand, upon hearing those words, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up in astonishment.

He had previously attributed the incident to the lack of durability of the tortoiseshell and the building, but it turned out to be related to the will of the heavens instead.

When he used the Library of Heaven's Path to examine the tortoiseshell, the tortoiseshell broke. When he used it to help him assess whether he would be able to create an exact replica, the entire shrine collapsed on them...

Could the 'will of the heavens slipping past the barriers' which Elder Feng had spoken about possibly be related to the Library of Heaven's Path?

If that was the case, he would have a huge responsibility to play in the destruction.

Zhang Xuan's face turned crimson red, and he had no idea how he could explain this matter to Elder Feng at all. But at this moment, Elder Feng shook his head bitterly and patted Zhang Xuan's shoulder consolingly, "Zhang shi, you need no blame yourself for this matter. This has nothing to do with you! Our Shrine of Seers probably got complacent and slacked off in maintaining the defensive barriers, thus resulting in the current circumstances. I know that it might seem that our occupation might seem quite dangerous after everything that has happened, but I can ensure you that this is an anomaly. As long as one were to speak prudently and make proper preparations beforehand, one wouldn't face with any danger at all, not to mention that you possess the Discarnate Constitution of Divination!"

"Safe?" Seeing that Elder Feng didn't blame him for the matter, Zhang Xuan internally heaved a sigh of relief.

There was no way he could mention the Library of Heaven's Path before the other party. Since the other party didn't realize

a thing, it would be foolish for him to speak up and give himself away.

As for the damage he had cost, he would just have to find another way to compensate them.

“Indeed, this is just a freak accident. Usually, it wouldn’t even happen once in ten thousand years...” Fearing that the genius he had set his eyes on would back out due to this matter, Elder Feng hurriedly explained. “If you are still feeling a little skeptical about the matter, you can take a look at our library over there. We maintain another layer of defensive barrier around it, so it was able to avoid the retribution of the heavens. As such, despite the collapse of the Shrine of Seers, it’s still able to remain standing. As long as sufficient defensive measures are made in advance, it’s really extremely safe!”

As he spoke, he gestured over in a direction.

Looking at where Elder Feng was pointing at, Zhang Xuan saw a building standing not too far away. It was connected directly to the Shrine of Seers, but the destruction of the Shrine of Seers didn’t seem to have fazed it in the least. Through its open entrance, he could see shelves and shelves of books stacked neatly within. Despite the cloud of dust drifting in the area, the interiors of the library remained perfectly clean.

“That’s your library?” Zhang Xuan asked as his eyes lit up.

The destruction of the Shrine of Seers had already left him a little panicked, causing him to rack his brain desperately to find a way for him to compensate them. However, if he could access the library and compile a complete Heaven’s Path Divination Art, he would be able to make it up to them in full.

“That’s right!” Elder Feng nodded with a hint of pride in his voice. “Even though the members of our Shrine of Seers branch number much less than the other occupations in the Sanctum of Sages, our collection of books doesn’t pale in comparison at all. Sage Xi’s Tortoiseshell might have been destroyed due to the little accident we had previously, but you can still assess your talent through browsing through the books!”

Previously, when the other party said that he wanted to browse through the books to determine whether he was suited for the occupation or not, he proposed using Sage Xi's Tortoiseshell instead only because he thought that it would be too troublesome and too long.

But with the destruction of Sage Xi's Tortoiseshell, there was no other way around it anymore. They could only rely on the most primitive method now.

“Alright then, I'll go take a look.”

Hearing that he was free to browse through the books, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He instinctively began walking over to the library when warning bells suddenly rang inside his head, and he quickly halted in his footsteps.

“If I were to use the Library of Heaven's Path in there, would the library collapse as well?” Zhang Xuan's heart jolted in trepidation.

But thinking again, the reason why the Shrine of Seers collapsed was probably because the will of the heavens sensed someone attempting to peer into its secrets, so perhaps, it might not work on books? Besides, it wasn't certain that the collapse of the Shrine of Seers was due to him using the Library of Heaven's Path either.

Nevertheless, just to be safe, Zhang Xuan decided to activate his Library of Heaven's Path from where he stood so that even if his guess was wrong, the defensive barrier would still be able to defend the library.

Thus, he muttered lightly in his mind, “Flaws!”

Hong long!

In the next moment, a wild inferno swept across the books, burning them down into ashes in an instant. Following which, a massive crack crept across the entire library, similar to what that had happened to the tortoiseshell previously.

And in just a few breaths, the building collapsed into a pile of rubble.

...

“My library!” Elder Feng’s eyes widened to their brim, and a mouthful of fresh blood spurted from his mouth. Frenzy consumed his mind.

Just what in the world was happening? Why would multiple calamities strike the Shrine of Seers in such short succession?

If it was just once, it could still be reasoned as them failing to conceal their presence well, resulting in the notice of the will of the heavens. However, for it to happen thrice... at this point, even he was unable to find any reason to justify it anymore.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched in horror at that sight as well, “Even books aren’t spared either?”

He wasn’t too certain before, but this around, watching with his own eyes the inferno spreading across the library, there was no way for him to deny it anymore.

He quickly turned to look at the dazed elder beside him and called out, “Elder Feng. Elder Feng? Elder Feng!!”

Zhang Xuan called out thrice, but the other party didn’t respond at all. Alarmed by the unnatural state that Elder Feng was in, he began worrying whether the other party had ended up sustain grievous internal injuries due to the multiple shocks he had suffered, so he immediately walked toward the other party to take a closer look.

But in the next moment, a thick streak of lightning suddenly appeared from nowhere and fell right on top of Elder Feng.

Kacha!

Elder Feng collapsed to the ground.

“Elder Feng, you...” Horrified, Zhang Xuan hastened his footsteps.

Hong long! Hong long! Hong long! Hong long!

Multiple streaks of lightning drowned the old man, leaving only a pair of spasming legs outside.

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Some time later, the lightning finally receded, and Elder Feng climbed out from the ditch he was in an unkempt state. The expression on his face looked as if he had been ravaged by countless savage beasts, wretched and disconsolate.

It was one thing for the Shrine of Seers and library to be completely destroyed, but to be struck relentlessly by lightning when an azure clear sky stood right above him... what was he supposed to make of this situation?

All he wanted to do was to take in a student! It was not as if he had violated some heavenly rules or something, did his actions really warranted being struck by lightning?

It was fortunate that the lightning only sought to punish and not to kill, or else even a Saint 9-dan pinnacle expert like him would have been reduced to ashes too.

“Teacher...” Yu Chen hurriedly pulled Elder Feng out of the ditch. At this moment, he had no idea what he could and should say in this situation either.

This was the first time he had seen his teacher in such a state after coming under his tutelage two hundred years ago.

“It’s all my fault...” Seeing how the lively and energetic old man being reduced to such a state within just a short span of ten minutes, Zhang Xuan lowered his head apologetically.

After all that had happened, it was apparent that the situation was just as what the other party put it out to be—it was retribution from the heavens.

Peering into the secrets of the heavens was something forbidden by the heavens. It would still be fine if they weren’t caught in the act, but once they were... As the master of the Library of Heaven’s Path, unless he were to seal off the Library of Heaven’s Path, coming into proximity with the

seers would cause the will of the heavens to swiftly notice the existence of such desecrating actions.

In a sense, it was similar to how students cheating in the examination would be able to get away scot-free with they weren't caught, but once they were, there was no way they could be let away lightly. Otherwise, how could the school uphold the integrity of the examinations?

The authority of the heavens mustn't be challenged!

If it were to allow everyone to just peer into its secrets as when they liked, what would become of the world?

Initially, Zhang Xuan was planning to compile a book on Elder Feng to see if he could help the latter treat his injuries, but who could have known that this simple action would result in the will of the heavens noticing the nature of Elder Feng's occupation and sending a streak of lightning down on him?

And for every time he tried to check, another streak of lightning would fall. After multiple tries, it was finally absolutely clear to him that he was the one who had brought the lightning here...

His primary intention was to save Elder Feng, but his goodwill had only ended up causing even more damage...

Just the thought of it left him feeling deeply embarrassed.

"Given that I'm unable to look at the books of seers or even examine those of the seer occupation... there's really no way for me to learn the art of divination then..." Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment.

No matter what, as an Upper Nine Paths occupation, seers were deeply respected in the society. If he could master the art of divination, his standing would surely rise to greater heights, thus giving him more chips to win Luo Ruoxin's marriage in hand.

But not only was the Library of Heaven's Path unwilling to help him compile a Heaven's Path Divination Art, it was even bent on destroying every single book relating to divination that he lay his eyes upon... From the looks of it, it seemed like he was completely unfated with this occupation.

“Elder Feng, I’m truly apologetic about what have happened here today. If I hadn’t come here, such a situation wouldn’t have happened either...” Zhang Xuan walked up to the dazed-looking Elder Feng, clasped his fist, and apologized earnestly.

As one who possessed the Library of Heaven’s Path, it could be said that he carried the will of the heavens along with him. And to enter a place where others were peering into the secrets of the heavens with the will of the heavens with him...

To be honest, it was already a huge blessing that none of the seers had died in this calamity.

Even though it was completely unintentional, he still couldn’t shirk off responsibility for what that had happened here, so he could only admit to it candidly.

“This has nothing with you...” With lifeless eyes, Elder Feng shook his head and sighed deeply.

In his view, their occupation had simply revealed too many secrets of the world that the retribution of the heavens was falling upon them. No matter how talented the young man before him was, there was no way he could dictate the will of the heavens to attack them.

So ultimately, the fault still lay in them.

“Elder Feng, with all that had happened, I think that you might want some time to yourself, so I won’t impose on you any longer...” Knowing that there was no way for him to explain the matter, Zhang Xuan decided to say no more.

“Alright, you should return first. I’ll come and look for you after I make sense out of what had happened here...” Elder Feng nodded.

After witnessing what had happened to the Shrine of Seers, the young man should be filled with apprehension for the seer occupation at the moment. It would be best for him to first figure out the root of the problem before approaching the young man to alleviate his fears and talk him into becoming his direct disciple.

Otherwise, who in the world would be willing to join an occupation which would put one at risk of being struck by

lightning at any moment?

“Farewell then!” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist once more toward Elder Feng before leaving the area.

Luo Xuanqing took one last look at the surroundings before quickly leaving together with Zhang Xuan.

As soon as he was in a safe distance away from where Elder Feng’s Spiritual Perception could reach, he finally couldn’t hold back his curiosity any longer. He walked up to Zhang Xuan and asked with a hushed voice, “Zhang shi, what exactly happened back there?”

“I’m not too sure either...” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

It wouldn’t be safe for him to talk too much about this matter even if the other party was his future brother-in-law. After all, there were simply too much at stakes here.

“You aren’t sure?” Hearing Zhang Xuan’s response, a displeased frown appeared on Luo Xuanqing’s forehead. But eventually, he still decided against probing any further.

He wasn’t too sure about what had happened either, but without a doubt, it must have something to do with the young man before him.

Otherwise, why would the Shrine of Seers remain perfectly intact for several dozen millenniums, only to collapse completely as soon as he appeared?

Everyone had been saying that he was the King of Destruction, causing devastation and ruination everywhere he went. But within this short period of time that he came to know this young man, somehow, he felt that the young man was far more fearsome than he was.

At the very least, the destruction he caused was explicable, caused mainly by excessive use of strength or failure to rein in his cultivation properly... On the other hand, the young man managed to tear the entire Shrine of Seers down, and no one knew how he did it at all!

This must be the highest realm in the Art of Destruction. It seemed like he still had much to work on.

“I really should interact more with him so as to learn the art of causing destruction inconspicuously...” Luo Xuanqing thought as he stroked his lower jaw contemplatively.

“Right! I have been too preoccupied with all that was going on that I forgot about Zhang Chun!” Luo Xuanqing suddenly recalled something at this moment and smacked his forehead regretfully

He had been too caught up in trying to figure out if what had happened to the Shrine of Seers was related to the young man before him that he forgot his primary motive there.

Zhang Chun was still within the Shrine of Seers, and he hadn't found an opportunity to beat up that fellow yet...

It wasn't easy for him to achieve a breakthrough, so how could he let Zhang Chun off without giving him a huge gift?

“It would reflect poorly on you if you were to simply run over to pummel him... In my opinion, there's no need for you to go to him at all. You should make him come and find you instead.” Zhang Xuan said.

“Oh?” Luo Xuanqing looked over in interest and asked, “How should I go about doing that?”

“Simple. Of the many occupations in the Sanctum of Sages, are there any which the offspring of the Zhang Clan particularly excels in?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Hmph!” Upon speaking of the Zhang Clan, Luo Xuanqing immediately harrumphed in disdain. “While there's nothing good that can be said about the personality of those of the Zhang Clan, I have to admit that their reputation isn't just for show. There are plenty of experts amongst them, and their names are often brought up when speaking of the top geniuses of most supporting occupation as well...”

The talents of the Zhang Clan's offspring didn't just manifest in their fighting prowess, they also had outstanding accomplishments in other occupations too.

It was due to this reason that they were able to enjoy such a lofty reputation as the indubitable number one influence in the Sanctum of Sages, both feared and respected by the masses.

“That’s good. Other than Zhang Chun, who is the next most renowned offspring of the Zhang Clan? Bring me to him, and I’ll challenge him in his field of speciality!” Zhang Xuan declared. “As long as we do a sweep of all members of the Zhang Clan, it should only be a matter of time before Zhang Chun comes to us personally.”

It was only a matter of time before the matter that had happened at the Shrine of Seers was traced to him. On top of that, the fact that Yang Xuan was a real figure amongst the top echelons of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters was also a ticking time bomb threatening to explode on him at any moment...

It would be one thing if Yang Xuan were to never appear, but once the other party did and denied the teacher-student relationship that Zhang Xuan claimed, it wouldn’t take long before greedy individuals would set their eyes upon him, determined to uncover the secrets behind his swift rise.

While the Master Teacher Pavilion had rules against such actions, it didn’t necessarily have the resources to enforce it. Furthermore, it also had many other strategic goals as well, such as uniting the various powers of the Master Teacher Continent to fend against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. If it had to choose between maintaining friendly relations with a powerful organization and protecting an individual master teacher, even if a talented one, it would indubitably choose the former. Sometimes, for the sake of more important objectives, one had no choice but to compromise and turn a blind eye to other matters.

The only reason why Zhang Xuan was able to remain safe so far was due to his lineage, and this was also an important factor to preventing the top echelons of the Master Teacher Continent from falling into utter chaos.

Kill a disciple, and his teacher would come knocking for vengeance; this was actually just a gross simplification of the effects of a lineage. One had to be extremely careful when dealing with lineages because it was extremely difficult to say for sure just who was connected to whom... For this reason,

unless it was a truly irreconcilable grudge, most powers would avoid making a move on one another.

There was an incident in the past where a Tier-3 Sage Clan casually sentenced a Transcendent Mortal cultivator from a minor clan to death for crossing them. But as luck would have it, a 9-star blacksmith turned out to be their great great great grandfather... In the end, the Tier-3 Sage Clan was nearly entirely wiped out from the face of the world.

As such, most cultivators and powers would avoid making a move a person who could have possibly come from a powerful heritage. It was also for this reason that Zhang Xuan was able to rise through the ranks safely, such that there wasn't even any attempted assassination on his life. The protection he had received from the name 'Yang Xuan' had truly been invaluable.

If not for the fact that Yang Xuan really existed, given how he had succeeded in crashing two Master Teacher Pavilions, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters would have long sent some men down to investigate his secrets.

In other words, he was currently in a very precarious position. He had to become an 8-star master teacher and remove the seal on the Sanctum Head Token or raise his cultivation to a level where he would be able to protect himself before Yang Xuan came knocking.

If he could become the next head of the Sanctum of Sages, even the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters would have to think twice before making a move on him.

Just as what Fei shi had said previously, generations of sanctum heads would challenge the students of powerful clans and organizations while they were students themselves in order to build up prestige, and this would allow them would swiftly gain control of the Sanctum of Sages after their inauguration. Since he was going to be the next sanctum head anyway, there was no need for him to hesitate about the matter either.

It just happened that he had the poorest relationship with the Zhang Clan, so it went without saying that he should start

from challenging them!

If he couldn't flip the entire Sanctum of Sages upside down, his surname shan't be Zhang!

“You want to challenge the Zhang Clan offspring in their field of specialty?” Luo Xuanqing asked with a frown. “I know that you possess incredible means in the field of formations and beast taming, but it won't be easy for you to defeat them in the other supporting occupations. Are you certain that you'll be able to emerge victorious?”

It wasn't that Luo Xuanqing didn't trust Zhang Xuan, but it was impossible for even the most talented master teacher to be skilled in everything.

While the young man before him possessed exceptional prowess in the field of formations and beast taming, such that he didn't think that there would be anyone in the Sanctum of Sages who could rival the young man, he couldn't say the same for the other supporting occupations too. Just recalling the various unbelievable records that the Zhang Clan's offspring had set in some of the supporting occupations was enough to send shivers down his spines.

It was one thing if they managed to succeed, but if they were to fail in their challenge, things would get really embarrassing for them...

“Don't worry. As long as I can receive an ample amount of books, it won't be easy for me to lose!” Zhang Xuan said confidently.

“If you are really confident about it, I guess it should be fine. It happens that I have some business at the Spirit Awakener Guild. Do you want to come along with me?” Recalling the various miracles that the young man had produced, Luo Xuanqing hesitated for a moment before saying.

“Spirit Awakener Guild?” Zhang Xuan turned to Luo Xuanqing. “Are there any offspring of the Zhang Clan there?”

“Zhang Chun's younger brother, Zhang Feng, is the Inceptive Sage there. However, his proficiency of spirit enchantment has

already reached the level of 8-star... Are you sure that you're able to do it?" Luo Xuanqing asked worriedly.

Chuckling softly, Zhang Xuan replied, "Don't worry, how can a man say that he's unable to do it? If he's still of decent character, I'll let him off after a quick challenge. Otherwise, I won't be standing on ceremony then..."

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1373 Changes in the Library of Heaven's Path

Even though Zhang Xuan carried some prejudice against the Zhang Clan, he did not intend to make things difficult for every single one of them indiscriminately. As long as the other party's personality was not too bad, he would not go overboard.

As for Zhang Chun... as a shameless toad lusting for the flesh of a swan, he definitely had to be punished!

After making up his mind, Zhang Xuan turned a confused look toward Luo Xuanqing. "You mentioned Inceptive Sage earlier. What does that mean?"

"There are many occupations in the Sanctum of Sages, and as long as a student achieves proficiency superior to all other students and becomes the indubitable number one in a specific occupation, they will receive the esteemed title of 'Inceptive Sage'. This title isn't merely honorary; more importantly, it is a symbol of power and standing. As long as one is able to become an Inceptive Sage, they will be considered as the representative of all students in that specific occupation, as well as their senior!" Luo Xuanqing explained.

"Zhang Feng successfully enchanted the guardian golem in the Spirit Awakener Hall and made it move seven whole steps, thus breaking the record for the last three thousand years. Due to that, he became the Inceptive Sage of the Spirit Awakener Hall."

"Guardian golem?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

Enchanting a guardian golem should not have been too difficult a task. After all, he was someone who had even successfully enchanted a whole guild before!

"You'll know how difficult it is once you see it with your own eyes!" Seeing how Zhang Xuan thought little of that matter,

Luo Xuanqing shook his head with a bitter smile.

Naturally, the guardian golem was no ordinary statue, or else Zhang Feng would not have been the only one to have successfully enchanted it in the past three thousand years.

The Spirit Awakener Hall was also located in the Hall of Erudition, so it did not take them too long to arrive at their destination.

When Zhang Xuan saw the guardian golem standing at the entrance of the guild, he immediately understood why Luo Xuanqing would say such words.

Standing at more than a dozen zhang tall and six to seven zhang wide, it towered like a massive building before the Spirit Awakener Hall. On top of that, it was made of some kind of bizarre black stone that wielded the ability to absorb one's will, making it difficult to light up the spark of enchantment within it.

"This... There would indeed be some difficulty in enchanting it," Zhang Xuan remarked grimly.

Even he would require a lengthy period of time and deplete himself greatly in order to enchant this golem.

The biggest issue was not the golem's size but the material it was made of. The material was not particularly suited for harnessing a spirit, causing any spirit enchanted into it to dissipate swiftly.

In a sense, attempting to enchant it was like pouring a pail of water into a basket. The faster one poured the water, the quicker the water just seemed to flow away, making it seem like an impossible feat to achieve.

As long as the rate one enchanted the golem was beneath the rate at which the spirit infused into the golem was dissipating, it would be impossible to succeed. For Zhang Feng to not only succeed but even get it to move seven steps, he was indeed a formidable figure.

With such thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan stepped forward, placed his hand on the golem, and sent his consciousness into it.

In an instant, he felt as if he had been plunged into a domain of complete darkness, devoid of any hint of light. He could not see the slightest trace of the outstretched hand he had placed before him, and to make things worse, he found that he could not extend his Spiritual Perception outward either.

With a light tap of his finger, he conjured a brilliant spark that illuminated the surroundings. However, before the light could even diffuse around, a powerful suction force suddenly devoured the light.

This reminded him deeply of the Starluster Stone. Under the suppression of the surrounding suction force, the spark could only coil around his fingertip, unable to illuminate any further than that.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan brought his consciousness back into his body and opened his eyes once more.

Enchanting the golem would indeed be a huge challenge to him, even greater than the challenge of enchanting the entire Spirit Awakener Hall. Even with his current strength, it would not be too easy for him to succeed.

“How is it?” Luo Xuanqing asked.

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before replying. “Can you bring me to where the 8-star spirit awakener books are located? I have some doubts concerning spirit enchantment, and I’ll need to browse through some books in order to resolve them.”

He had only accessed 7-star spirit awakener books before, so his understanding of spirit enchantment was still a little lacking at the moment.

As long as he could gather sufficient books to compile the 8-star Heaven’s Path Spirit Enchantment Art, he would be able to easily clear whatever test there was to become an Inceptive Sage.

“You want to browse through 8-star spirit awakener books?” Luo Xuanqing nodded. “You’ll have to clear the 8-star spirit awakener examination first for that. The examination hall is

right ahead. I still have some matters to attend to, so I'll be leaving for now..."

"Alright." Zhang Xuan nodded in response before heading into the Spirit Awakener Hall.

Similar to the place where he had taken the formation master examination previously, there was hardly anyone in sight in the relatively big Spirit Awakener Hall, making the area appear exceptionally empty and cold in contrast.

Zhang Xuan quickly made his way over to the front receptionist and passed his emblem over.

"Zhang shi, this way please!"

The receptionist was a young lady who appeared to be in her early twenties. After learning of Zhang Xuan's identity, her attitude became exceptionally friendly, and she quickly led him over to the library.

"All 7-star spirit awakener books are within. There are quite a lot of books here, so if you need help finding any, feel free to approach me, and I'll find it for you!" the female receptionist said.

"It's fine, I think I can manage by myself. Thank you," Zhang Xuan replied with a smile before walking into the library.

The number of high-tier spirit awakener books in the Qingyuan Empire Spirit Awakener Hall was rather lacking, so it would be best for him to browse through more 7-star spirit awakener books prior to taking the 8-star spirit awakener examination just to be safe.

The library here did not disappoint. As soon as he stepped in, a massive collection of books immediately unfolded before him, causing his eyes to light up in excitement.

Without any hesitation, he dived straight into collecting them into the Library of Heaven's Path.

Flaws!

Hualala!

Books were swiftly replicated in his Library of Heaven's Path at a swift speed.

Zhang Xuan swiftly noticed that something was different. Hmm? Why does it seem like the speed at which I am collecting the books has improved?

It was true that he could collect the books just by looking at them directly with his eyes, but there was still a slight lag between his sight and the materialization of the books in the Library of Heaven's Path. Usually, while he was already done sweeping across the third shelf, the Library of Heaven's Path would still be materializing the second.

But this time around, it felt as if the Library of Heaven's Path was running right behind his back. Just as his eyes reached the third shelf, the Library of Heaven's Path reached the third shelf.

There hasn't been anything peculiar with the Library of Heaven's Path recently though, and I haven't fallen into a coma either. Zhang Xuan began racking his brain to make sense of the peculiar situation he was facing.

The only time the Library of Heaven's Path had undergone a metamorphosis was when he met Luo Ruoxin once more in the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. That metamorphosis had allowed him to collect books with not just his touch but with just a look from his eyes.

However, that metamorphosis knocked him out for three whole days. This time, nothing of the sort had happened, but the book collecting rate had grown much faster than before. What was going on?

A thought flashed across Zhang Xuan's mind, and he widened his eyes in disbelief. Could it be...

It was a little hard for him to believe, but that was the only reason he could come up with no matter how he racked his mind.

And that was... destroying the Shrine of Seers!

In the view of the heavens, destroying a Seer Guild branch was probably equivalent to successfully raiding a den of

criminals, ridding the world of a poisonous tumor. Could the changes in his Library of Heaven's Path be related to that?

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up. Could it be that there is a reward for me bringing ruination upon the seers, something like a bounty?

As powerful as the Library of Heaven's Path already was, he would not hesitate to grab an opportunity to evolve it further. After all, it was the strongest trump card that he had in his possession as well as the foundation of his growth. Without a doubt, its metamorphosis would grant him great benefits one way or another.

I guess I should go out and destroy a few more Seer Guilds when I have some free time on my hands... Zhang Xuan nodded affirmatively.

Of course, all of this was just his conjecture at the moment, so it would require further verification in order to determine whether his hypothesis was true or not.

In any case, with the enhanced speed at which he could collect books into the Library of Heaven's Path, he managed to collect all of the books in the library and assimilate them into his mind within four hours—in the past, it would have taken him six hours.

Once he was done, he returned to the main hall to find the female receptionist.

"I wish to take the 8-star spirit awakener examination. May I know what the processes for that are?" Zhang Xuan inquired.

In order to read the books of 8-star spirit awakeners, he would have to clear the 8-star spirit awakener examination first.

"You wish to take the 8-star spirit awakener examination?" A slight hint of astonishment could be seen in the female receptionist's eyes for a brief moment before she nodded. "The spirit awakener examination is actually rather simple, unlike those for apothecaries and blacksmiths. All you have to do is successfully enchant a grade-8 puppet before an elder of our Spirit Awakener Hall branch, and you'll be considered to have cleared the examination."

“I’ll be troubling you to bring me over to the examination hall then.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

After which, under the lead of the young lady, Zhang Xuan arrived at a relatively spacious hall.

The elder invigilating his examination was an old man who appeared to be in his sixties. The eight brilliant stars on the emblem pinned in front of his robe indicated that he was an 8-star spirit awakener.

The internal structure of the puppet was extremely simple, somewhat similar to the ones he had seen at the Qingyuan Empire Spirit Awakener Guild. Its purpose was to gauge one’s mastery of spirit enchantment, so there was no need for excessive complexity. Stepping forward, Zhang Xuan placed his palm on the puppet.

A sliver of his consciousness slipped from his Primordial Spirit into the puppet, and it did not take him long to light up the latter’s consciousness.

In truth, the puppet had only barely met the basic requirements to be considered a grade-8 puppet. Anyone who had met the minimum requirement to become an 8-star spirit awakener would be able to clear it with ease.

“Here is your 8-star emblem!” Not expecting the young man to clear the examination in a single try, the elder was visibly surprised.

He quickly helped the young man apply for an emblem and passed it over.

Seeing that he had managed to clear the examination without any unfortunate accidents occurring, Zhang Xuan secretly heaved a sigh of relief. Taking his new 8-star spirit awakener emblem, he headed for the section containing the 8-star spirit awakener books in the library and continued his studying session.

Six hours later, he finally walked out of the library.

It was exhausting going through so many books at once, but he did manage to master the 8-star Heaven’s Path Spirit

Enchantment Art, thus raising his mastery of the art up to the level of 8-star pinnacle.

“Zhang shi, how is it going?”

Barely after taking a step out of the library, Zhang Xuan encountered Luo Xuanqing.

“Un, I think I should have...” Zhang Xuan nodded as he replied, but halfway through his words, he suddenly stopped. He stared at the sight before him with utter shock, and it took a while before he managed to find his voice once more. “W-what is going on?”

The majestic building that he had been in just six hours ago had collapsed, and white smoke was rising here and there.

“Oh... I was intending to get Elder Zhao of the Spirit Awakener Hall to help me reinforce my Primordial Spirit, but that fellow was simply too incompetent. He ended up ejecting my Primordial Spirit out of my body, and in a moment of carelessness... Well, it just became like that...” Luo Xuanqing scratched his head in embarrassment.

“You were able to cause such a mess just by fortifying your Primordial Spirit?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

Previously, when Luo Xuanqing said that he had some business at the Spirit Awakener Hall, he had already guessed that the other party was intending to find someone to help him reinforce his Primordial Spirit in preparation to facing the Dimension Sundering Ordeal. He thought that a matter as simple as this should not have been too much of a problem, but such a mishap still ended up happening.

Honestly, can you stop causing destruction wherever you go? You are a huge embarrassment, you know!

“Someone must have cut corners while building this Spirit Awakener Hall, or else how could it possibly be so fragile...” Luo Xuanqing harrumphed unabashedly.

Before Luo Xuanqing could finish his words, a furious bellow suddenly sounded. “Luo Xuanqing, can you be any more shameful than that?”

Following which, a group of men rushed out angrily.

The one leading the group was a young man in his late thirties. Taking a closer look, the young man's facial features bore some resemblance to Zhang Chun's.

“Zhang Feng, what do you mean by that?”

“You have barged into our Spirit Awakener Hall a total of two times, and each time around, you somehow manage to leave it in complete shambles. From today onward, our Spirit Awakener Hall no longer welcomes you. If you dare to take even the slightest step into here, don't blame us for getting nasty with you!” Zhang Feng roared with gritted teeth.

“Humph, how is it my concern that your Spirit Awakener Hall's building is so fragile? If you have the time to be roaring at me, why don't you spend it finding better bricklayers instead?” Luo Xuanqing snapped coldly.

“You still have the cheek to be saying those words... If you hadn't lost control of your own Primordial Spirit, would such a thing have happened? You really are a piece of work, you know?”

With a grand wave of his hand, Zhang Feng stepped forward and loudly declared, “With my authority as the Inceptive Sage of the Spirit Awakener Hall, I hereby pass an ‘Inceptive Sage Decree’. As long as Luo Xuanqing steps into the perimeter of our Spirit Awakener Hall, all spirit awakeners are allowed to attack him without any qualms over injuring him or even killing him!”

1374 Luo Xuanqing Runs Amok

Luo Xuanqing's expression turned livid upon hearing Zhang Feng's words. A frightening aura lingered around him, reminiscent of a crouching tiger prepared to pounce forth at any moment. "Do you really think that I dare not cripple you?"

Ever since he entered the Sanctum of Sages, he had always stood unchallenged by others, stepping over those who had dared stand in his way. When had anyone dared speak to him in such a manner before?

Not even his elder brother, Zhang Chun, would dare talk to him like that!

"You want to cripple me? Sure, do it then! You might be stronger than me, but you'd better not forget that we are in the Spirit Awakener Hall right now. As the Inceptive Sage, I can control the countless puppets that are in here to subdue you with ease!" Zhang Feng sneered coldly.

The Spirit Awakener Hall was filled with puppets here and there. Once enchanted, all of these would be weapons at Zhang Feng's disposal. With these soldiers to fight in his stead, what would Luo Xuanqing's strength count for?

As long as he retained his identity as the Inceptive Sage of the Spirit Awakener Hall, he would be an invincible existence here. Not even Saint 8-dan experts would dare to pull their weight before him!

"You..." Luo Xuanqing gritted his teeth in fury as his breathing hastened.

"What's wrong with that? Unlike you, causing trouble and expecting others to pardon you just because you are a member of the Luo Clan, I forged a place for myself in the Spirit Awakener Hall through my own capability! If you weren't the brother of the little princess, do you think that our Zhang Clan

or even the Sanctum of Sages would have tolerated you for so long? You would have long been minced into countless bits and fed to the fish!” Zhang Xuan harrumphed coldly with a haughty swing of his sleeves.

“Also, tell your little princess that it’s her honor that the young prodigy of our Zhang Clan is willing to wed her. If she dares to flee once more, don’t blame us for resorting to extreme measures!”

“Honor? Extreme measures? Hahahaha!” Before Luo Xuanqing could even say a word, Zhang Xuan had already interjected. “Come, why don’t you tell me in detail just how much of an honor it is to marry the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan and how extreme the measures you plan to use will be?”

That young prodigy of the Zhang Clan must have accrued several generations of fortune for him to be engaged to be Luo Ruoxin at birth, and yet, he still dared to put on a disappearing act. And as if that was not enough, the rest of them still had the cheek to spout such words.

You are really challenging the limits of my tolerance!

To be honest, Zhang Xuan also thought that Luo Xuanqing had gone overboard with the damage, and the haughty attitude he put on after that only further worsened the situation.

I can understand why you are mad at Luo Xuanqing and want to get back at him, and I won’t stop you from doing it either. But how dare you speak of Luo Ruoxin in such a manner? You are really asking for a beating!

“Who the hell do you think you are? Is this any place for you to speak up?” Zhang Feng did not think that he would be bellowed at by Luo Xuanqing’s lackey, and he narrowed his eyes menacingly.

“Regardless of who I am, I just want to ask you a simple question. If the little princess of the Luo Clan were to turn down the engagement with your Zhang Clan, what kind of extreme measures do you intend to resort to?” Zhang Xuan

asked. His attitude was seemingly casual, but the frostiness in his eyes was unconcealable.

“Humph, do you think that she has any place in turning our Zhang Clan down? Little princess is a mere title she upholds before others! To our Zhang Clan, she’s nothing at all!” Zhang Feng sneered coldly.

“You bastard! Try saying those words once more, and I’ll rip you to shreds!” A powerful aura instantaneously burst forth from Luo Xuanqing, surging right into the clouds, seemingly threatening to tear the sky apart.

It was one thing for someone to insult him, but he would never forgive anyone insulting his younger sister!

“Sure, I’ll say it as many times as you like! Pure and innocent little princess, my ass! Despite having an engagement with our young prodigy, she still ran out to hook up with some other guy. She has really sullied every last bit of honor that we Sage Clans have,” Zhang Feng spat out disdainfully.

“You scum!” With a furious bellow, Luo Xuanqing dashed out like a cannonball, and it took only an instant for him to appear right before Zhang Feng.

Boom!

The abrupt outburst of overwhelming might compressed the surrounding air so much that a deafening cacophony of sonic booms resounded here and there.

“Humph, could there still be any mistake about it? Your Luo Clan should have received the news, and just a few days ago, they sent a few elders over to our Zhang Clan to explain the matter to us. Most likely, that little princess of yours that you hold so dearly should still be under house arrest!” Zhang Feng mocked coldly as he dodged Luo Xuanqing’s attack and retreated.

“Since she dared to do it, why can’t we say it out loud? Only that fool of an elder brother I have would think of that disgraceful woman as a treasure. If it was me, I would have marched right up to her to confront her over the issue!”

“You are courting death!” With eyes crimson with frenzy, Luo Xuanqing dashed forward with astounding speed. At the same time, he clasped his fist together, and the surrounding air suddenly seemed to have frozen in place, leaving Zhang Feng with nowhere to escape.

Peng!

Overwhelming might punctured Zhang Feng’s chest.

Pu!

With a spurt of fresh blood, Zhang Feng was sent flying into the distance.

He was by no means weak, but even so, he was only at the same level as Bi Hongyin and the others, still a distance away from matching up to the Half-Dimension Sundering realm Luo Xuanqing.

Just a single strike, and he was already severely wounded.

“Luo Xuanqing, you’ve asked for it!” After crashing heavily to the ground, the unkempt Zhang Feng forcefully pushed himself back to his feet and glared at Luo Xuanqing with scarlet eyes.

Raising his hand, he commanded, “Beat him down into his grave!”

Hu la!

As soon as that command was issued, a dozen puppets immediately leaped out from the surroundings.

These puppets were neither works of celestial designers or blacksmiths. Rather, they were enchanted artifacts. At first glance, it might appear that there was no specific grade to them, but their prowess was not to be underestimated.

This was especially so with the inferno giant among them. Standing at four meters tall, its presence caused the surrounding air to distort from overwhelming heat.

Besides the inferno giant, there was a metal giant as well. Zhang Xuan could not tell with just a normal look what it was made of, but it was extraordinarily resilient. In terms of

defensive prowess, it was probably on par with Saint high-tier artifacts. It would really take a great deal of effort to deal with it.

It would not be too much trouble for Luo Xuanqing to deal with Zhang Feng ordinarily, but the appearance of the dozen puppets immediately placed him out of tempo, causing him to fumble around a bit.

“Damn it!” Luo Xuanqing roared with rage bubbling within him, releasing all of the strength he harnessed in his body.

Si la!

Releasing the entirety of his Half-Dimension Sundering realm cultivation, the surrounding space began to distort under the rampaging outpour of his zhenqi. Under his immense might, the settled dust and rubble rose into the sky once more, bringing greater chaos upon the world.

His original intention was to conceal his cultivation and spring a surprise on Zhang Chun, but Zhang Feng’s words had exceeded his bottom line. At this point, he did not care that much either.

Peng peng peng peng!

It might have seemed as if there was only a small step of difference between the Dimension Sundering realm and the Phantasmal Space realm, but just like between a cocoon and a butterfly, there was a world of a difference between them. With his full might as a Half-Dimension Sundering realm expert released, the puppets swiftly found their movements sealed, as if they had fallen into a bog. As much as they struggled, they were unable to escape from whatever was holding them in place.

Kacha!

With a downward press of his hand, the dozen puppets did not even last another breath before being suppressed forcefully into a lying position on the ground. Indignant roars blared from their mouths, but as if the weight of an entire mountain was upon them, even getting to their feet seemed to be a daunting task.

“You...” Zhang Feng never thought that Luo Xuanqing would have already reached such a level. His eyes narrowed as he hurriedly retreated.

“You aren’t going anywhere until you make things clear today!” With a deep bellow, Luo Xuanqing dashed forth with the momentum of a human-sized massive dragon.

His movement caused countless ripples to appear in the surrounding space, reminiscent of a water surface disturbed by a pebble thrown into it.

Peng!

These seemingly light ripples struck Zhang Feng as if massive clubs hammering down on his body, causing fresh blood to spurt from his mouth once more. The impact of the blows forcefully pulled him down from the sky.

Hu la!

After striking Zhang Feng down, Luo Xuanqing took another step forward, appearing before Zhang Feng in an instant. Then, he raised his leg and stomped toward Zhang Feng’s face.

With the speed and the strength of the stomp, if the attack were to really land on Zhang Feng, he would be crippled for good even if he did survive this ordeal.

It seemed like hearing his younger sister being insulted right before him had truly enraged Luo Xuanqing, and that snapped the last bit of rationality in his mind, causing him to disregard all rules and consequences of his actions.

Those who dared touch the inverted scale of a dragon would meet with swift deaths!

“Formidable,” Zhang Xuan muttered.

For a moment there, rage had consumed his mind as well, and he had been planning to dash forward as well. However, seeing that his future brother-in-law had already made a move, he eventually forced himself to remain still.

It simply was not the right time for him to express his identity yet.

Of course, if Luo Xuanqing were to be placed in a disadvantageous position in the battle, he would step in and intervene.

Zhang Feng was justified in confronting Luo Xuanqing over the destruction of the Spirit Awakener Hall and passing the Inceptive Sage Decree. After all, Luo Xuanqing did go overboard in that matter.

However, he did one thing that he never should have done—insult Luo Ruoxin. Based on that alone, he was deserving of dying a hundred times over!

“You...”

Seeing the prowess behind the stomp heading for his face, Zhang Feng quivered in fear. Not daring to hold back anymore, he swiftly triggered the bloodline ability in his body.

Boom!

The surrounding time seemed to have slowed, but at the same time, it felt like Zhang Feng had gotten faster compared to the rest of the world. With a powerful push of his hand against the ground, he rolled several meters away, dodging the stomp by just a hair’s breadth.

Boom!

The stomp imprinted a depression of thirty-meters right beneath the floating Luo Xuanqing’s feet, raising countless stone fragments into the sky.

“Luo Xuanqing, you are insane!” Zhang Feng exclaimed as he cowered in fear at that sight, not daring to imagine what would have happened if that attack had landed on him.

Even though the Spirit Awakener Hall had collapsed, as long as they gathered sufficient workers, they should be able to get it rebuilt swiftly. However, now that even the ground beneath was devastated, how were they supposed to rebuild their base?

Boom!

Not bothering to respond to Zhang Feng, Luo Xuanqing’s figure flickered, and he appeared before Zhang Feng once more with a palm flying right for the latter.

This palm strike seemed to have forcefully dragged Zhang Feng into a sundered dimension, leaving him completely cornered and with nowhere to escape. In the face of the might of the palm, Zhang Feng only felt a numbing sensation rising all over his body as his aura was suppressed to the point where it felt as if he would explode from within.

Even before the palm strike could land, the unbearable pressure weighing down on him had already drawn a spurt of blood from his mouth.

Even after activating the power of his bloodline ability, it was still far from sufficient to bridge the disparity in the strength of the two of them.

“Just when did you achieve a breakthrough? How can you possibly be so powerful?” Zhang Feng exclaimed as he felt a prickling sensation run through his scalp. At this point, he was filled with regret.

He had known from the start that this fellow would lose all sanity when his younger sister was mentioned, so why in the world did he have to use those words to trigger him?

Wasn't that just asking for trouble?

Driving his bloodline ability to the maximum, Zhang Feng barely managed to break out of the sundered dimension and dodge the overwhelming palm strike.

Boom!

Another massive palm print appeared on the ground. The remaining buildings that had yet to collapse in the area began trembling non-stop, seemingly on the verge of falling into the depression created previously by the powerful shockwave.

Seeing how the other party was still dashing at him as if a crazed lunatic, Zhang Feng felt deep fear arising from his midst, and he anxiously bellowed, “Luo Xuanqing, I am an Inceptive Sage. If you dare hurt me, that's no different from going up against the entire occupation. You will be hunted down in the future. Not even the Luo Clan will be able to protect you!”

“Let them come! In any case, I’ll be sending you down to the netherworld today!”

Boom!

Amid another resounding sonic boom, Luo Xuanqing vanished from the spot. In the blink of an eye, he appeared before the Zhang Feng once more with a palm strike.

This time, he had sealed the surrounding space completely, turning it into a solid cage. Even if Zhang Feng were to drive his Zhang Clan’s bloodline to its limit, he would still be unable to escape from it.

“Are you done messing around yet, Luo Xuanqing? Don’t think that we’ll just tolerate everything that you do!”

Hong long long!

Just as the palm was about to strike down on Zhang Feng’s head, a resounding bellow sounded, and three elders suddenly appeared right before the crowd. One of them waved his hand, and a surge of light deflected the might of Luo Xuanqing’s palm strike. This is based on a legend where dragons have a scale on their neck that is inverted against the other scales, and those who touch it will be swiftly killed by the dragon. It eventually became an idiom in reference to those in power, saying that those who dared to prey on their ‘weakness’, be it their family or anything else, would have to pay the price eventually.

1375 Luo Ruoxin Is Under House Arrest

“A Saint 8-dan expert!” Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in alarm.

To be able to teach Luo Xuanqing a lesson while protecting Zhang Feng completely from the attack, it was truly an exquisite move. He could not be too sure about the other two elders, but the one who had made a move was likely at Dimension Sundering realm advanced stage at the very least!

Those who possessed such strength were ranked at the top of the Master Teacher Continent. They would be able to start their own sects and dominate a region of their own.

Peng!

Under the rebound of his own might, Luo Xuanqing’s face paled as he was forced to retreat several steps back to ward off the force. He raised his head to look at the trio in the sky with an awful look on his face.

“Elders, Zhang Feng dared insult my younger sister. My rage won’t be quelled unless I teach him a lesson!” Luo Xuanqing bellowed with eyes widened like bells.

“Enough!” the elder who had made a move earlier roared angrily. “Luo Xuanqing, does the Spirit Awakener Hall or the Sanctum of Sages still mean anything to you? In view of the little princess and the Luo Clan, we allowed you to get away with destroying our guild without any repercussions. What else do you want other than that? Will you only be content after you wipe our Spirit Awakener Hall completely off the face of the world?”

Luo Xuanqing stepped forward and clasped his fist tightly. “I bear no ill will toward the Spirit Awakener Hall. The one whom I have a grudge with is Zhang Feng. I’ll give the Zhang Clan and the Sanctum of Sages a satisfactory explanation after

I'm done with him, so I ask of the three elders not to interfere in this matter.”

He simply could not allow the other party to get away so easily after insulting his younger sister!

“Audacious! Zhang Feng is our guild's Inceptive Sage. By making a move on him, you are showing blatant disregard for our entire guild! Scram right now, and we can still overlook today's matter. Otherwise, even if you are from the Luo Clan, we'll make sure you have hell to pay for your actions today!” another elder berated sharply with an electrifying look in his eyes.

It was one thing for Luo Xuanqing to reduce the entire Spirit Awakener Hall to such a state, but he even wanted to make a move on their Inceptive Sage after that. This was truly intolerable. If they allowed such a thing to happen, what would become of their dignity?

“Are you threatening me? Let me tell you this, I, Luo Xuanqing, fear no threat!” Luo Xuanqing bellowed with his eyes narrowed coldly, and once again, his aura surged.

It seemed like even if he had to tap into his bloodline ability, he would make Zhang Feng pay the price for his actions.

“That fellow really is a lunatic!” Seeing his actions, a shudder ran through Zhang Feng's body.

Had it been anyone else, considering that even the elders had gotten involved, he would have made use of this opportunity to resolve the matter peacefully. Yet, Luo Xuanqing still refused to back down, determined to go all the way through regardless of the consequences.

He really was a true psycho. Once he got psychotic, there was no such thing as rationality in his head.

Seeing as a battle was about to break out at any moment, Zhang Xuan placed his palm on Luo Xuanqing's shoulder and said, “Brother Luo, just leave the rest to me.”

The crowd thought that the young man who dared talk to the berserk Luo Xuanqing would surely be pummeled beyond

recognition, but contrary to their expectations, the latter's powerful aura began receding instead.

“This...”

Everyone widened their eyes in disbelief, unable to comprehend the situation unfolding before their eyes.

Luo Xuanqing's temperament could be clearly seen from what had happened earlier. Most likely, other than his younger sister, there was no one else in this world who could shake him out of his berserk state.

Yet, the twenty-year-old young man beside him actually made him back down with just a couple of words? Just what was the background of that young man for Luo Xuanqing to actually be so obedient to him?

“Zhang shi...” Ignoring the shocked crowd, Luo Xuanqing turned his head to the young man behind him.

The person who was grabbing his shoulder was, of course, none other than Zhang Xuan.

It was not that he wanted to withdraw his strength, but the palm on his shoulder was pressed on the acupoint required for the activation of his bloodline, forcefully suppressing his strength.

“Don't worry, I'll bring justice to the little princess.” Knowing what the other party was thinking, Zhang Xuan raised his head and looked at the three elders in the sky with a sharp glint in his eyes.

“Elders, I don't think that there's any way to resolve this matter peacefully anymore. It's a private matter between the both of them, so I ask of you not to interfere in their affairs.”

The elder who had spoken up previously harrumphed coldly.

“Lad, do you know whom you are talking to?”

“Regardless of who you are, I'll just say this once. Step back and allow the both of them to settle this matter among themselves, and I can promise you Zhang Feng's life won't be endangered. Otherwise, I'm afraid that this won't look good on any of us here,” Zhang Xuan said.

He did not like to cause trouble either, but Zhang Feng's mouth was truly horrid. To dare slander his girlfriend's reputation in public, no matter how good his temper was, he still could not let this matter go without giving the other party a good beating.

All along, he had tried to steer clear of trouble, never provoking others wherever possible, to the point where humility was etched right into his bones. However, he was fine with going high profile just this once.

"Very well!" Not expecting a twenty-year-old young man to act so arrogantly before them, the three elders trembled with rage.

Having been in the Sanctum of Sages for several decades now, they had seen plenty of haughty young masters and talented geniuses, but there were none who had dared speak to them in such a tone barely after enrolling into the academy.

Who do you think you are?

The next sanctum head?

A Celestial Master Teacher?

Know your place!

"We'll just make it very clear to you right now. If you dare touch even a single strand of Zhang Feng's hair, we'll consider it as waging war against our Spirit Awakener Guild. You can be very sure that we'll make you regret having ever been born!" one of the elders replied with a wintry tone.

Given that they had already made a move, they would lose respect from their students and peers if they allowed the other party to just beat up their Inceptive Sage as they liked!

The authority they had built up over the years would vanish in an instant!

"Alright then. Since none of you are willing to back down, I won't stand on ceremony then... Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, knock those three impediments down!"

"Roar!"

The next moment, the massive Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast appeared before everyone's eyes. With a resounding roar, it swooped right for the three elders in the sky.

“Ah?”

Not expecting such a powerful saint beast to be released on them all of a sudden, the three elders were scared out of their wits. Before they could even react, the saint beast had already swiped its claws toward them.

Si la!

The space before them was immediately torn apart, and a black gorge harnessing rampaging might appeared.

The incredible might that Luo Xuanqing had displayed earlier was already extremely shocking, but compared to that of this Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, it was nothing at all.

They were not even at the same level as one another.

“What?”

“Saint 8-dan pinnacle...”

The faces of the three elders instantaneously flushed white. They hurriedly launched their strongest attacks, not daring to hold anything back in the face of an expert of such caliber.

The crux to Saint 8-dan Dimension Sundering realm lay in the comprehension of spatial laws, and there was a significant difference in fighting prowess across the cultivation stages within the realm.

On top of that, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was one of the stronger saint beasts, even possessing the Dragon Bloodline. Not even a master teacher of the same cultivation realm would necessarily have been a match for it, let alone weak spirit awakeners like them.

In an instant, various powers rippled through the air, raining down like a torrent. At the same time, many puppets materialized in the air, but they swiftly exploded one after another.

It was just a simple charge for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, but its superior might and nigh invincible defense were more than enough to destroy everything that the three elders sent at it.

In less than ten breaths, the heads of the three elders were stabbed into the ground, and white foam was leaking from their mouths. Their bodies were completely stiffened.

As powerful as they might have been, they were still far too lacking compared to the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

Hu!

After defeating the three elders, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast swiped forward and grabbed Zhang Feng in its hand.

With his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan looked at Zhang Feng and said, "I want you to apologize."

Even though his voice was calm, it carried inviolable authority to it, compelling others to bow down to him.

"I..." Zhang Feng bit his lips so tightly as fresh blood was flowing down his chin. "What I have said is the truth! Why should I apologize? The little princess of the Luo Clan has already confessed that there's someone she likes, and she intends to cancel the engagement with our Zhang Clan. This is a matter that the top echelons of the Luo Clan and the Zhang Clan are aware of. If you don't believe my words, you can get Luo Xuanqing to send a message back to his clan to ask about it!"

"Bullsh*t! If my younger sister has someone that she likes, how can I possibly be unaware of it?" Luo Xuanqing said with veins popping from his head.

"Cough cough! Brother Luo, there's no need to get so agitated..." Zhang Xuan quickly held the almost rampaging Luo Xuanqing back.

While Luo Xuanqing distrusted Zhang Feng, he thought that it was more likely that what Zhang Feng had said was the truth.

Considering that Ruoxin had agreed to become his girlfriend, it was indeed possible for her to have told both clans that she wanted to cancel the engagement with the Zhang Clan.

He knew his girlfriend very well. She was a silent and perhaps even cold person, but she was extremely decisive and headstrong when it came to crucial situations.

Just like him, as long as she had decided upon something, she would never back down or look back, no matter how great the difficulties that lay ahead were. Even if the entire world were to block her path, she would continue marching forward without fear.

Recalling what Zhang Feng had said earlier, with a tight knit between his eyebrows, Zhang Xuan asked, “You said that the little princess is likely under house arrest in the Luo Clan... What does that mean?”

He could not allow Ruoxin to be wronged because of him. As a man, he would have to step forward and bear the responsibility.

If he could not even protect the woman that he loved, what was the point of being a master teacher? What was the point of growing strong?

Being held tightly in the grasp of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, Zhang Feng knew that even if the duo did not kill him, they could easily inflict great suffering upon him should he choose to remain silent. Thus, he gritted his teeth and eventually revealed everything that he knew. “Half a month back, an elder of our Zhang Clan sent over a betrothal gift, as per usual, but the little princess suddenly appeared then and personally rejected the gift. She told him that she already has someone whom she loves, and she doesn’t intend to proceed with the engagement with the Zhang Clan. Thus, she said, there’s no need to waste time on such matters anymore.

“Her comments caused huge ripples. It didn’t take long for the upper echelons of the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan to learn of the matter, and soon after, the Luo Clan dispatched several elders to subdue the little princess and place her under house arrest.”

“This...” Zhang Xuan’s body jolted.

Someone of Ruoxin’s wits must have known the consequences of saying those words, but even so, she still unhesitatingly spoke them out loud.

Just how much courage would it have taken her to go against the will of two of the strongest Sage Clans on the Master Teacher Continent, not to mention that one of them was her family?

Zhang Xuan clenched his teeth and asked, “Where is she being held?”

“I’m not too sure either. I only heard of this matter from an elder in my clan,” Zhang Feng replied anxiously.

On the other hand, Luo Xuanqing was still unable to believe what he had just heard. “Bullsh*t! Everything that you have said is bullsh*t! How can my younger sister possibly fall in love with someone else? Who in the world can possibly be worthy of her?”

“Cough cough!” Seeing the extreme reaction Luo Xuanqing had toward this matter, Zhang Xuan could not help but turn his head over and say, “Brother Luo, calm down! I know that the little princess is outstanding, but there’s bound to be someone worthy of her.”

“Someone worthy of her?” A glint flashed across Luo Xuanqing’s eyes as he turned to Zhang Xuan and snorted. “You?”

1376 The Dancing Golem

“I...” Zhang Xuan suddenly fell silent.

For a moment, he was tempted to admit that Ruoxin was indeed his girlfriend.

However, he eventually still swallowed those words back then.

Considering how the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan were already in a mess after hearing that the little princess had someone that she fancied, he would only be making things worse if he revealed the matter right now.

He would have to reveal his relationship with Luo Ruoxin eventually, and now was definitely not a good time.

First and foremost, he would require an identity that would allow him to withstand the pressure exerted from the Zhang Clan. This way, Luo Ruoxin would be able to face her family as well. Otherwise, if others knew that the person whom she liked was just an ordinary person from a humble Unranked Kingdom... not only would it not ease the predicament they were in, it would only be complicating it.

It was traditional thinking, but marriage had to be between two equals, or else there was no way Luo Ruoxin's family would be willing to accept him. He did not wish to see his girlfriend falling out with her family over him, criticized by the world.

“Zhang shi, I am thankful for what you have done, but I am in no mood to joke with you!” Luo Xuanqing said grimly. He turned to Zhang Feng and said, “You said that this incident happened half a month ago?”

All in all, their journey to obtain the Dongxu Gourd had taken roughly twenty days. If the incident had happened half a month ago, it would mean that it had happened right after he left the Sanctum of Sages.

If that was the case, it would explain why he had not caught wind of the matter.

“That’s right.” Zhang Feng nodded.

Luo Xuanqing stood on the spot with a livid expression on his face for a while before he suddenly turned his head to Zhang Xuan and said, “Zhang shi, I’ll leave this fellow to you. Make sure to give him a good lesson so that he learns how to watch his mouth in the future. I’ll be right back.”

After which, he leaped up into the air and flew off in a certain direction. Before Zhang Xuan could say a word, he had already disappeared into the distance.

“Brother Luo...” Zhang Xuan frowned, not expecting the other party to leave just like that.

The other party moved so quickly that even the execution of the Unbounded Voyager would have been insufficient for him to catch up, so he could only hold back the urge to chase him. He turned his gaze to the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and said, “Teach him a lesson, but don’t kill him.”

“Roar!” Nodding, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was just about to make a move when a whiz sounded. The three elders who had been planted into the ground had flown back up into the sky.

“This friend over here, Zhang Feng is our guild’s Inceptive Sage. Hurting him is no different from going against the entire Spirit Awakener Guild. I hope that you can think things through before making a move,” an elder said through gritted teeth.

“Furthermore, the system of Inceptive Sages is something that is determined by the Sanctum of Sages. To show public defiance for it is equivalent to opposing the Sanctum of Sages, and you’ll be expelled for it.”

“Expelled?”

“Indeed. Luo Xuanqing is one of the core members of the Luo Clan, and his cultivation had reached Half-Dimension Sundering realm, so expulsion from the Sanctum of Sages doesn’t really mean anything to him. However, it’s different for you. Judging from your age, you must be a freshman who has just enrolled this year, right? You still have a long future

ahead of you, so why ruin your entire life just to vent a moment of anger?” another elder added.

“Ruin my entire life?” Zhang Xuan shook his head with a light chuckle. He turned to the three elders and said, “Since we are in the Sanctum of Sages, let’s settle this matter by the rules of the Sanctum of Sages then. I am currently an 8-star spirit awakener, so as long as I replace him as the Inceptive Sage, it won’t be considered a violation of the rules no matter what I do to him, right?”

“Of course! If you can become the Inceptive Sage, even if you were to beat him to death, our guild will help you cover up the matter,” an elder replied with a nod.

An Inceptive Sage could be considered the most outstanding member within a certain occupation among the younger generation, so if there were to be any conflicts with others, they were inclined to help him.

With the current situation, for example, if not for the fact that Zhang Feng was their Inceptive Sage, they would not have rushed out at all.

After all, it was apparent that both Luo Xuanqing and the young man before them were tough nuts to crack.

In all honesty, the collapse of the Spirit Awakener Hall was not a big matter; they could easily have it fixed by enchanting a couple of puppets. However, having their Inceptive Sage beaten up would really be a huge slap to their face, and this was something they could not accept.

“I see.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “I’ll have to trouble you all to tell me how the test for the Inceptive Sage works then. I still have some matters to attend to after this, so I don’t have much time to waste.”

There was no backing out of this matter anymore given how far they had come. In order to ensure that there would be no negative implications from the day’s events, he would have to replace Zhang Feng as the next Inceptive Sage.

After all, what he was aiming to do was build up his reputation in preparation for his inauguration as the sanctum head, not

sully it. How embarrassing would it be if he were to become the next Luo Xuanqing, hated by the entire student populace?

“You want to challenge the Inceptive Sage?” Hearing those words, the three elders nearly snorted their beards off.

They had seen plenty of arrogant people in the past, but they had never met one that was so conceited!

Only those who were the greatest of geniuses would be able to become the Inceptive Sage of an occupation, and Zhang Feng was one who had even broken many of their records. Initially, they had still intended to have him represent their Sanctum of Sages’ branch to challenge the candidacy for the position of the headquarters’ hall master, but who could have known that he would end up being nearly beaten to his death by someone else instead... and the culprit was even planning to replace him!

Even though spirit awakener was not an Upper Nine Paths occupation, it still had a complete heritage to it, and it was considered one of the top occupations of the Master Teacher Continent. For someone who had merely cleared the 8-star spirit awakener examination just six hours ago to spout such arrogant words...

The trio felt that the young man was simply taking spirit awakeners too lightly.

Gritting their teeth, they were just about to berate Zhang Xuan to put him back in his place when they suddenly noticed the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast looking at them intently with malicious intentions in its eyes.

It seemed as if it was ready to swipe its claws down on them should they speak a single unnecessary word.

Knowing that they were no match for the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, one of the elders suppressed his anger and explained, “The challenge to become the Inceptive Sage is very easy. As long as you can enchant the guardian golem and have it move more than the previous record holder, it’ll be considered your victory.

“Zhang Feng, this young man over here says that he wants to challenge your position as the Inceptive Sage. Are you willing to accept his challenge?”

With irrepressible fury in his eyes, Zhang Feng glanced at Zhang Xuan before nodding. “I’ll accept his challenge!”

He had been beaten up for no good reason earlier, and even though it was Luo Xuanqing’s doing, this fellow was an accomplice. Since this fellow was looking for trouble, he did not mind teaching him a lesson and showing him what a true expert was!

“There are two golems right in front of our Spirit Awakener Hall, and the both of you can choose either one of them to enchant. If you manage to get your golem to travel further than Zhang Feng’s, you will be able to replace him as the next Inceptive Sage of our Spirit Awakener Hall!” one of the elders said as he pointed forward. “First and foremost, I’ll have to ask you to let go of Zhang Feng.”

Tracing the elder’s finger, two guardian golems sat where the entrance to the Spirit Awakener Guild used to be. Even though they were slightly tilted due to the various prior events, they were not damaged in the slightest.

Upon hearing that the rules of the challenge were so simple, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief before waving his hand.

The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast nodded as well before releasing Zhang Feng. Nevertheless, it still continued glaring at the other three warily, as if saying that it was ready to crush them into minced meat should any of them dare make a move against its master.

Zhang Feng shot a spiteful glance at Zhang Xuan and the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast before walking over to one of the golems. A sharp glint flashed across his eyes, and he waved his hand grandly. “Let’s waste no time and begin right away!”

“Very well,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly as he made his way over to the other golem.

He had taken a look at the golems before, and it would indeed be rather difficult to enchant them considering their sizes and the materials that they were made of. However, after reading through the 8-star spirit awakener books, he had managed to gain a deeper understanding of spirit enchantment, so it would not be too difficult for him to succeed anymore.

“On my count, start!”

At the elder’s command, Zhang Xuan suddenly sensed a huge disturbance in the surrounding spiritual energy. Following which, Zhang Feng’s Primordial Spirit leaped out from his glabella and entered the interior of the golem.

I guess his title as the Inceptive Sage of the Spirit Awakener Hall isn’t just for show. His Primordial Spirit is indeed rather strong, Zhang Xuan remarked internally.

While the other party’s Primordial Spirit was still far from comparing to his, it was still a sight to behold. Just its very presence was able to exert immense pressure upon others.

One’s ability to enchant was deeply related with the strength of one’s Primordial Spirit. The stronger one’s Primordial Spirit was, the easier it would be for one to enchant an artifact.

In terms of cultivation, Zhang Feng was far from a match for Luo Xuanqing and Zhang Chun, but when it came to the strength of their Primordial Spirit, he was much stronger than the both of them.

Tzzzzzzz!

As soon as his Primordial Spirit seeped into the guardian golem, a unique energy began gathering and diffusing all over it. A slight gleam appeared on the surface of the golem, and it looked as if it would come to life at any moment.

Even though Zhang Feng had already started his enchantment, Zhang Xuan was in no hurry to start. Instead, he activated his Eye of Insight and observed Zhang Feng’s actions closely.

It had to be said that while Zhang Feng’s personality was so-so, his ability as a spirit awakener was indeed notable. He pulled forth the various abilities of an 8-star spirit awakener

perfectly with grace and elegance, such that there was even a peculiar kind of beauty to his actions.

“Alright, it’s about time for me to start too...”

A while later, Zhang Xuan turned his eyes back to his own golem and placed his hand on it.

Tzzzzzzz!

Submerging a hint of his consciousness into the golem, he was immediately plunged into a world of endless darkness. Driving the Heaven’s Path Spirit Enchantment Art, he tapped his finger forward, and a ball of flames was immediately conjured before him.

The ball of flames was not too big, but it was expanding to the surroundings at a steady pace.

Expand! Zhang Xuan willed with raised eyebrows, and in an instant, the ball of flames exploded into a sea of flames that rapidly spread across the area.

Even though the golem was steadily absorbing in the flames as well, the area which the flames covered was simply too great such that the rate it was growing at far exceeded the rate at which it was being absorbed.

It did not take long for darkness to be fully vanquished from this space, replaced with radiant light.

Seeing that the enchantment was a success, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

It wasn’t too difficult after all...

Even with a leaking pail, as long as one’s influx of water was fast enough, it was still possible to fill it fully.

After mastering the 8-star Heaven’s Path Spirit Enchantment Art, the speed at which he could enchant artifacts had become much faster than before. He was able to easily exceed the speed that the golem was undoing his enchantment at.

Turning his head to look at Zhang Feng, he saw that the latter was just about to finish as well.

With a light chuckle, he snapped his finger, and a sliver of his consciousness flew over. Right after he was done making preparations, he heard a voice beside him. “Elder, I am done...”

After which, a Primordial Spirit slipped out from the golem and floated in midair with a look of agitation and excitement on its face.

“Good. Make it move, and we’ll count how many steps it can take. Let’s see if we can break your previous record.” One of the elders nodded.

“Yes!” Zhang Feng nodded as he gestured his hand forward grandly.

Huala!

The stationary golem abruptly opened its eyes, and amid a cacophony of noises, it stood up.

Dong! Dong! Dong! Dong!

The golem began to walk forward, and each time its massive foot stepped down on the ground, the surrounding area would tremble under its sheer weight.

With every step that it took, the spirit harnessed within the golem would dissipate considerably. Nevertheless, it still continued to make its way forward.

“One step. Two steps. Three steps...” The elder in the sky counted as the light in his eyes grew brighter and brighter.

Dong dong dong dong!

The golem continued forward, and soon, it came to its seventh step. In the sky, agitation could be clearly seen on Zhang Feng’s face, and his fists were tightly clenched together. He willed with all of his might for the golem to make the seventh step.

Boom!

Zhang Feng’s golem lifted its leg with great difficulty and took a small step forward before finally losing consciousness with a resounding buzz, collapsing back to the ground.

A triumphant look emerged on Zhang Feng's face as he turned to Zhang Xuan with a gleeful smirk on his lips. "The golem I enchanted has managed to take seven and a half steps in total. It's your turn!"

"Alright," Zhang Xuan replied casually before snapping his fingers.

Huala!

His golem stood up, but despite moving its arms here and there, it did not advance forward at all.

"Your golem hasn't moved a step at all, so I'm afraid that we'll have to consider this your..." one of the elders began announcing with a frown.

However, before he could finish his words, another elder beside him exclaimed with a shrill voice tinged with disbelief.

"It's not that his golem isn't moving—it's dancing!"

1377 Luo Xuanqing's Dimension Sundering Ordeal

“Dancing?”

Astonished, the other two elders quickly took a closer look, and indeed, the movements of the golem had a unique rhythm to it, as if it was doing some kind of exercise.

They quickly turned their sights to the young man and saw that he had stood up at some point in time as well. His hands were placed behind his back, and he seemed to be muttering something beneath his breath.

“Chest expansion exercise. One two three four, five six seven eight; two two three four, five six seven eight; three two three four, five six seven eight; four two three four, five six seven eight. Hip twisting exercise. One two three four... Side stretch exercise... Toe touch exercise...”

The three elders looked at one another as they felt their mouths dry up.

It took a long while before one of them managed to find his voice. “Rather than dancing, it seems like the golem is... doing warm-ups?”

“That does seem to be the case.”

The other two elders nodded stiffly. They could not help but wonder if their eyes were playing tricks on them.

It was simply too difficult to enchant the guardian golems, such that even those who succeeded would only be able to get it to move a few steps. Yet, after enchanting the golem, the young man actually made it do warm-ups instead of moving forward?

Are you messing with us?

Not only were the three elders frenzied by what they saw, even Zhang Feng was so dumbfounded that he forgot to return his

Primordial Spirit back to his body. Instead, his Primordial Spirit trembled so intensely that it seemed like it would succumb to shock very soon and dissipate.

He had nearly died from exhaustion just by having his golem move seven steps, but that fellow was actually making the golem do warm-ups.

Aren't you way too arrogant?

Seeing the frenzied crowd clutching their hair in the air, Zhang Xuan shook his head in disapproval. Just one look, and I know all of you lack basic understanding about exercising. These golems have been stationary for far too long. If they get up without doing a short warm-up, they could be easily injured!

Did your physical education teachers not teach you to first warm-up your body first before exercising? That's elementary knowledge, you know!

Even little children know that they have to warm-up prior to exercising, and yet, these elders and geniuses actually still made the golem proceed without warming up. Honestly, where did their common sense go?

As he criticized the crowd internally, Zhang Xuan continued instructing the golem. "Alright, warm-up is over. Now, two sets of high knees. Go!"

Peng peng peng peng peng!

The golem raised its knees up to chest height one at a time, causing endless tremors to ripple through the ground as a result of its movement. It felt as if it would soon create a massive basin in the area.

Seeing that the golem's form was perfect, Zhang Xuan nodded in approval before issuing another instruction.

"Good! Two sets of frog leaps, go!"

Peng peng peng peng peng!

This time, the tremors on the ground was even worse. Under the relentless shaking, those buildings that had barely managed to survive the previous calamity eventually caved in and collapsed to the ground, raising a dust storm.

Even the library, which had been completely intact a moment ago, also collapsed under the intense shaking of the ground.

“Alright, warm-up is over. We shall start running around the Spirit Awakener Hall. You are only allowed to stop when I tell you to, got it?” Zhang Xuan said in an imposing voice reminiscent of a strict instructor.

Puhe! Puhe! Puhe!

The golem nodded excitedly as it began running. Every step it took felt as if a new comet had just crashed down onto the world, causing the earth to cave in and mountains to shake. More and more buildings fell victim to this bizarre sports meet.

“ ... ”

The minds of the three elders and Zhang Feng had completely turned blank from shock. They could hardly process what was going on at all.

Ever since the founding of this Spirit Awakener Hall, even the most talented of spirit awakeners had only been able to allow the golem to move a few steps. Yet, not only did this fellow make it complete an entire set of warm-up exercises, he even made it sprint laps around the Spirit Awakener Hall.

“Is this considered my victory?”

While the crowd was still at a loss as to what to make of the situation, the young man’s calm voice suddenly rang out.

“O-of course!” Swallowing their saliva, the three elders nodded with uncanny harmony, almost a little like little chicks pecking on rice.

The golem had already completed quite a few laps, and the buildings of the Spirit Awakener Hall had already collapsed to the point where there was nothing left to collapse. If this still could not be considered his victory, what else could?

“So, am I the new Inceptive Sage of the Spirit Awakener Hall now?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Yes, of course!”

The elders nodded once more.

“Good. I hope that you don’t have any qualms about me settling my own private grudges then,” Zhang Xuan said.

Then, he turned his gaze away from the three elders over toward Zhang Feng and said, “Since you have a foul mouth, let’s start with hundred slaps for your mouth. Make sure to use your full strength for that.”

Hearing the order from Zhang Xuan, Zhang Feng was appalled. He quickly turned his sights over to the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, and to his relief, the latter was not moving at all. Just when he was about to retort, he suddenly heard a series of ‘pah pah pah’ noises.

Lowering his head, he saw that his physical body had stood up at some point in time, and his hands were striking his face forcefully one after another at a certain tempo.

In just a few moments, there was already a long stream of blood flowing down his chin, and a couple of his teeth had been knocked out as well.

“You...” Zhang Feng widened his eyes in shock, and he bellowed with a hint of fear in his voice, “What kind of sorcery did you use on me? Why is my body obeying your orders?”

Considering that his Primordial Spirit was still up in the sky, his body should have been completely unconscious, reminiscent of a corpse. Why would his hands suddenly start slapping his face?

“Well, I had some free time after enchanting the golem, so I enchanted your body while I was at it,” Zhang Xuan said leisurely before turning his gaze back toward Zhang Feng’s body to instruct, “Yes, that’s good. That posture is perfect. Don’t stop, harder, harder!”

Pah pah pah pah!

The slaps grew even sharper.

“You enchanted my body?” Zhang Feng’s Primordial Spirit jolted upon hearing those words, and he nearly lost his sanity

in that instant.

He was not even dead yet, and that fellow actually successfully enchanted his body... Just how did he manage to do it?

“My body...” Unable to watch on any longer, Zhang Feng rushed back toward his body and began wrestling control over his body from the spirit Zhang Xuan had enchanted into it.

However, the spirit that Zhang Xuan had enchanted was simply too powerful. While he was still in the midst of fighting for control over his body, the spirit finished the hundred slaps, and after that was done, it maneuvered his body to lie on the floor, allowing the sprinting guardian golem to step on it every now and then.

An hour later...

Zhang Feng had finally wrestled back control over his body, but for some reason, cactuses and flowers had started sprouting on his head. At the same time, his body was also in a tattered state after all of the horrors it had been through—most of the bones in his ribcage were shattered, and his face was swollen to twice of its previous size. Even his own brother would have to stare intently at his face before finding any traces of the previous him at all!

“Alright, I am done settling my grudge. Farewell!” After teaching Zhang Feng a lesson, Zhang Xuan placed the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast back into the Myriad Anthive Nest with a wave of his hand before leaping into the sky, heading off in the direction in which Luo Xuanqing had left.

Most likely, Luo Xuanqing must have headed back to his clan in order to check on Luo Ruoxin. However, with how long he had been gone for, Zhang Xuan could not help but worry that something might have happened to Luo Ruoxin.

“Zhang shi...” Upon seeing that Zhang Xuan was going to leave, the three elders hurriedly rushed forward to stop him.

While young man before them was busy settling his grudge with Zhang Feng, they had managed to gather some

information on his background.

It had only been six hours or so since he had cleared the 8-star spirit awakener examination, and he already wielded the ability to make the guardian golem run laps around the Spirit Awakener Hall. His talent in spirit enchantment had really reached a level far beyond their imagination. It was not easy for them to stumble by such a talented spirit awakener, so how could they allow him to leave so easily?

Seeing that the crowd was blocking his path, Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure. “What? Are you all planning on exacting vengeance for Zhang Feng?”

“Of course not, of course not! It is Zhang Feng’s own fault for having such a foul mouth. He deserves to be punished for that,” an elder hurriedly said with a smile.

Spirit awakeners were not as particular about rules and conventions as master teachers. While Zhang Feng was a formidable genius as well, he was lacking compared to the young man standing before them. Naturally, they knew full well whom they should side with.

“Then?” Hearing that they did not stop him for Zhang Feng, Zhang Xuan frowned in confusion.

“It’s like this. In three months, there will be a selection in the Spirit Awakener Guild headquarters for the selection of our next hall master. Our Sanctum of Sages initially intended to dispatch Zhang Feng, but since you possess such astounding mastery in enchantment, we would like to send you there instead,” one of the elders said.

“Selection for the next hall master?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right.”

The three elders hurriedly nodded in unison.

The Spirit Awakener Hall in the Sanctum of Sages could be considered a branch of the Spirit Awakener Guild as well. If the person they dispatched became the next hall master, they would stand to benefit greatly as well.

Not only would there be a massive boost to their reputations, they would stand to earn handsome rewards.

It was for this reason that they had been determined to protect Zhang Feng regardless of the cost.

However, after witnessing Zhang Xuan's unbelievable mastery in spirit enchantment, they swiftly redirected their high expectations from Zhang Feng to him.

"Three months? I'll give it some thought," Zhang Xuan replied, neither accepting nor rejecting the offer.

It was the tenth month at the moment, and three months from now would be the first month. There was still some time before the agreed marriage date between Luo Ruoxin and the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan. If he could pay a visit to the Spirit Awakener Guild headquarters, he would be able to meet Wang Ying.

He hadn't heard anything from that lass ever since she left with the envoy from the Spirit Awakener Guild headquarters, so he had no idea how she was doing at the moment.

Hopefully, the Spirit Awakener Guild was treating her well. Otherwise, he did not mind enchanting everything there was in the headquarters and tearing everything down.

"Do give the matter serious consideration; this is a very good opportunity for you. Speaking of which, I haven't introduced myself yet. My name is Han Fu, and this is my Communication Jade Token. I'll check up with you some time later to hear your decision," one of the elders said as he passed a jade token over.

Zhang Xuan took it and threw it into his storage ring before hurrying away.

Luo Xuanqing had left roughly an hour ago, and his trail had mostly vanished. On top of that, he had intentionally concealed his trail, making it difficult to track him down.

Even when using his Eye of Insight, his trail was extremely faint, abruptly vanishing at some points. It took Zhang Xuan some fumbling around before he was able to find where the trail reappeared.

The Sanctum of Sages covered an area far greater than the Qingyuan Conferred Empire. Even with the considerable rise in his cultivation over the past few months, it still took him quite a while before he was finally out of its perimeters.

Ten minutes later, he arrived before a mountain range.

It was a true sight of devastation before him. As if someone had torched the area with flames, black patches of charred land and billowing white smoke could be seen here and there.

A battle broke out here not too long ago, Zhang Xuan thought grimly as he scanned the wreckage around him.

Judging from the various marks, it should not have been more than fifteen minutes since the battle ended. Considering how Luo Xuanqing had been heading in this direction, could the damage have been left behind by him?

But Luo Xuanqing had left in order to find Ruoxin and his own clan, so who could he have been fighting against?

Eye of Insight!

Zhang Xuan examined the marks carefully, and a moment later, a grim look appeared on his face.

These marks are indeed from Luo Xuanqing!

Through analyzing the various marks around in detail, he could tell that some of the marks had been caused by Luo Xuanqing's abilities. The opponent he had crossed blows with seemed to be rather powerful as well, a Saint 8-dan expert at the very least.

It can't be that something has happened to Ruoxin, right?

Such a thought surfaced in Zhang Xuan's mind, and it immediately sent him into a state of anxiety.

Just as he was about to quickly follow the trail ahead, he suddenly noticed a huge ominous cloud looming over a valley not too far away. Countless streaks of lightning crackled frighteningly, ready to unleash their devastating might on the world.

Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in alarm.

That's... a lightning tribulation!

Having just cleared one himself not too long ago, he was extremely familiar with it.

Turning his gaze to the storm clouds, Zhang Xuan swiftly saw a familiar figure.

Is that... Luo Xuanqing? But he hasn't finished reinforcing his cultivation yet! Could it be that he has encountered something that left him with no choice but to call forth his Dimension Sundering Ordeal prematurely? In any case, this doesn't seem good.

The other party was currently standing at the very center of the storm, and countless streaks of lightning raged around him, threatening to reduce him to ashes.

Luo Xuanqing was going to face his Dimension Sundering Ordeal!

1378 The Shameless Gourd

The Dimension Sundering Ordeal was incomparably dangerous. Luo Xuanqing had intended to challenge it in the Sanctum of Sages, where he would be protected by Kong shi's will, thus making him less susceptible to inner demons.

However, he had ended up calling the lightning tribulation in the middle of this mountain range instead. Without a doubt, something unexpected must have happened, leaving him with no choice but to face his Dimension Sundering Ordeal prematurely.

After making sense of the situation, Zhang Xuan did not rush forward to assist Luo Xuanqing. Instead, he activated his Eye of Insight and assessed the surrounding area, and a moment later, a frown surfaced on his forehead.

There was no one in the surroundings at all.

Was he mistaken? Or did the person Luo Xuanqing was fighting with previously flee in fear upon seeing the arrival of the lightning tribulation?

Seeing that there was no one in the area, Zhang Xuan quickly turned his sight back to the young man standing amid the sea of lightning. Forget it, there's no time to think about that now. Luo Xuanqing has a rather irritable temper, which makes him very prone to the assault of inner demons. Facing the Dimension Sundering Ordeal without ample preparation could be extremely dangerous to him.

The Dimension Sundering Ordeal was dangerous not just because of the lightning tribulation but also because of the transformations in the surrounding space and the inner demons. Even he would have some trouble clearing it. At this moment, Luo Xuanqing's eyes were already crimson, and it was apparent to anyone looking at him that he was not in the right state of mind. Forcefully challenging the Dimension Sundering Ordeal in his current condition could very well spell failure and even death!

I have to save him!

Without any time to hesitate, Zhang Xuan rushed straight toward the lightning.

Shortly after he flew into the area of the lightning tribulation, just three hundred meters away from where he had been standing before, two figures slowly materialized into existence.

It felt as if they were non-existent beings that were squeezed out of the void. Not even sweeping across them with one's Spiritual Perception would allow one to perceive their presence.

One of them was an elder dressed in a golden robe. Looking at Zhang Xuan's disappearing back with a tight frown, he asked, "Who is he?"

The other elder standing behind him clasped his fist and explained, "Elder, that young man is Zhang Xuan, a friend whom Young Master Xuanqing recently got acquainted with. The both of them have set out to find the Dongxu Gourd together, and that's what allowed Young Master Xuanqing to successfully make a breakthrough to Half-Dimension Sundering realm!"

"Zhang Xuan? The Zhang Clan?" the golden-robed elder asked.

"According to our investigations, he isn't from the Zhang Clan but an orphan from an Unranked Kingdom. It's said that he's Yang Shi's direct disciple!" the second elder replied.

"Yang Xuan? That fellow has started taking in disciples too?" The golden-robed elder was slightly surprised to hear those words.

A moment later, he shook his head in incomprehension and said, "Since that young man is Yang Xuan's disciple, he should know better than to charge right into the lightning tribulation. Did he think that he would be of any help to Xuanqing with his Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivation?"

A cultivator had to clear their ordeals with their own strength.

Help from others would only cause the lightning tribulation to grow larger and larger, possibly causing the situation to run out of control.

While it was true that the young man would not make much difference to the might of the Dimension Sundering Ordeal considering how weak he was, charging in recklessly was just plain suicidal.

Just what in the world was he thinking?

“Based on the rumors, this Zhang Xuan is a rather hot-tempered person who causes destruction wherever he goes. It might be due to their similar personalities that they forged a tight bond. Thus, when he saw that Young Master Xuanqing was facing the lightning tribulation, he couldn’t help but leap in to offer his help,” the second elder explained.

“Couldn’t help but leap in?” The golden-robed elder harrumphed coldly. “Courageous but lacks wit. Tell Xuanqing to steer clear from such reckless individuals after he clears his Dimension Sundering Ordeal.”

In the first place, he was already extremely displeased by how Luo Xuanqing was causing destruction everywhere he went. Naturally, hearing that he was friends with someone of a similar nature, his anger only intensified further.

“Yes.” The second elder nodded.

Oblivious to the two figures who had escaped the detection of his Eye of Insight and materialized behind him, Zhang Xuan had already arrived at a location not too far away from Luo Xuanqing.

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Luo Xuanqing anxiously bellowed, “What are you doing here?”

“You won’t be able to clear the Dimension Sundering Ordeal in the current state you are in. I’m here to help you,” Zhang Xuan explained.

“Help me? This is my lightning tribulation, what can you possibly do to help me?” Luo Xuanqing shook his head. “Get out of here fast. I’m not even certain if I can withstand the lightning that is gathering above, much less protect you...”

Before Luo Xuanqing could finish his words, the lightning bolt in the sky had finally finished charging up its power, and it abruptly bolted down with imposing momentum.

Kacha! Kacha!

A ten-meter-wide streak of lightning tore open a black gorge through space as it fell straight for Luo Xuanqing.

“Don’t even think about it!” Luo Xuanqing hurriedly gathered immense might in his palms and thrust them upward to fend off the lightning strike.

The overwhelming might he wielded as a Half-Dimension Sundering realm expert collided head-on with the lightning, causing the surrounding space to crumble layer by layer.

Kacha!

Even though he managed to ward off most of the energy harnessed within the lightning bolt, there were still some remnants that breached his defense and struck his head, causing his hair to stand up and his body to be charred black.

The Dimension Sundering Ordeal was many times stronger than the Leaving Aperture Ordeal that Zhang Xuan had summoned previously. Even with his recent breakthrough to Half-Dimension Sundering realm, he still felt a numbing sensation rippling through his body, and the zhenqi within his body nearly dissipated under the zap.

“Hurry up and leave the area. I really won’t be able to withstand this lightning tribulation!” Luo Xuanqing panted rapidly as he howled with reddened eyes.

He had spent nearly half of his entire capacity of zhenqi just to fend off that single streak of lightning, and the zap of lightning that struck him caused a feeling of weakness to spread throughout his body, making him feel as if there was lead in his arms and legs.

There was a total of six lightning streaks that one had to face in the Dimension Sundering Ordeal, and every single streak was more formidable than the last. Even the first one had left him nearly incapacitated, so he did not know if how he could persevere through the remaining five.

“You don’t need to worry about me. I’ll just head up to take a swift look.” Paying no heed to Luo Xuanqing’s words, Zhang Xuan suddenly leaped up, diving straight toward the storm clouds.

“You...” Not expecting the other party to leap into the most dangerous region of the lightning tribulation just to save him, Luo Xuanqing could not help but feel a little touched inside.

Really, it was only in a life-and-death situation that a person would be able to tell their true friends apart from their fair-weather friends.

In fact, putting aside friends, most cultivator couples would also choose to abandon their companion in times of danger. The fact that the other party was willing to dive deep into danger in order to save him at this crucial moment truly meant a lot to him. Zhang Xuan was a person who was truly loyal to his friends!

Wait a moment...

A thought suddenly came into Luo Xuanqing’s mind, and he shuddered.

Could it be that he likes me?

Looking back, it really felt like Zhang Xuan had treated him exceptionally well, to a point that was already beyond the normal relationship between friends.

Could it be that he harbors lustful thoughts toward me?

Regardless of what he’s thinking of, there’s no way I’ll submit to him, not even at the cost of my life. Humph!

Luo Xuanqing quickly shook away the thoughts in his mind as he swallowed a pill and quickly replenished the zhenqi that he had lost. He had to prepare himself to face the second streak of lightning.

...

“Is that fellow insane?”

Not only was Luo Xuanqing taken aback by Zhang Xuan’s actions, the two elders spectating outside were dumbfounded

as well.

They had seen cultivators dashing into their lover's lightning tribulation to shoulder the suffering together, and they had also seen those who stood resiliently in the face of the lightning, determined to protect their loved one even if it meant death. But not once had they seen anyone charging straight into the storm clouds to seek death!

How in the world did a master teacher as formidable as Yang Xuan end up with such a crackbrained disciple?

“Not even Saint 8-dan experts would dare dive into the midst of the storm clouds of a Dimension Sundering Ordeal. For a mere Saint 5-dan Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator to dive right in, that's practically suicide.” The golden-robed elder shook his head. “Forget it, let's collect his corpse later on and bury him well.”

This was the first time he had seen such an irrational individual. This was no longer saving others but leaping to one's death!

Tzzzzzzz!

Unaware of the frenzy he had induced among the crowd, an excited gleam surfaced in Zhang Xuan's eyes as soon as he dived into the clouds.

“Little Tribulation, Big Brother Zhang Xuan is here.” Zhang Xuan's voice quivered in excitement as he opened all of his acupoints and began taking everything around him in.

It had taken them five to six days to find the Dongxu Gourd, but the return trip had taken them ten days in total.

It had taken him only a couple of hours to help Bi Hongyin and the others achieve a breakthrough, and he did not waste the remaining time either. He had been using the Dongxu Gourd to expand his dantian, creating a looped space.

Hard work never fails.

He did manage to succeed with the construction of the looped space prior to returning to the Sanctum of Sages... but a new problem had swiftly arisen.

The creation of the looped space increased the capacity of his dantian more than tenfold, and all in all, his zhenqi was only sufficient to fill a tenth of it. Just as he was racking his brain to find a way to fill it up, this lightning tribulation came his way. How could he possibly not be excited?

With this, he would be able to fill his zhenqi right to the brim!

Tzzzzzz!

The lightning that seeped into his body was swiftly converted into lightning zhenqi before being deposited into his dantian. Sensing the sudden influx of power, the lazily lying Dongxu Gourd jolted upward, and it swiftly leaped out of his body.

“What are you going to do?”

The sudden appearance of the Dongxu Gourd immediately left Zhang Xuan feeling wary. Nothing good seemed to happen whenever it appeared.

Paying no heed to Zhang Xuan’s question, the gourd let loose a joyful exclamation as it began to circle around the area.

Along with its circular motion, the surrounding lightning was swiftly drawn toward it, and as if falling into a black hole, the lightning disappeared from the world.

“The heck... Slow down! You are just a mere gourd; do you really need that much energy?”

It was his clone the last around, and now, even a mere gourd was stealing the lightning tribulation from him!

What the heck is this?

It wasn’t easy for me to bump into Luo Xuanqing’s lightning tribulation, you know?

There’s still a huge vacuum within my dantian that I haven’t filled up. Don’t you feel ashamed profiting off my hard work?

As an artifact, shouldn’t you learn to respect your master’s will?

Zhang Xuan soon realized that there was no way he would be able to stop the Dongxu Gourd, so he eventually gave up on

talking to it and focused back on absorbing as much lightning energy as he could.

But soon, he suddenly felt a rapid decline in the concentration of lightning around him. Turning his head, he saw another vortex forming within the storm cloud. At some point in time, the vine that he had stored inside his storage ring had flown out, and it was gobbling down the lightning energy at an insane rate as well.

“Screw this... All this lightning is mine, mine!” Zhang Xuan was on the verge of going insane.

All of you are really too shameless! How can you snatch my stuff publicly?

While Zhang Xuan’s face was still twitching from rage, his clone suddenly popped out beside him, and after directing a cold harrumph toward Zhang Xuan, as if blaming him for not inviting him to the party, he dashed to the center of the lightning tribulation and began absorbing the lightning energy too.

“You...”

Seeing how each of these fellows was absorbing at a rate far quicker than him, Zhang Xuan knew that it would be foolish to waste his time getting angry. He could always berate them afterward. Thus, gritting his teeth, he drew out his Primordial Spirit and began absorbing the surrounding lightning energy furiously in unison with his body.

Zhenqi was swiftly deposited into his dantian, filling up the void in his body.

But barely after he had filled up a third of his capacity, he sensed that the surrounding lightning had already grown pathetically thin. Taking a swift look around him, he saw that the rate at which the gourd, the vine, and his clone were devouring the surrounding lightning was increasing, causing the initially concentrated sea of lightning to turn so thin that it looked like a thin layer of mist instead.

“You bastards...”

The more he thought about it, the more furious Zhang Xuan felt. Gritting his teeth, he hastened his rate of absorption as well.

And while he was on the verge of exploding of anger, Luo Xuanqing, who had spent his time desperately replenishing his energy, finally heralded the arrival of the second lightning streak.

Piii!

A sound reminiscent of flatulence echoed in the air, and a finger-thick streak of lightning weakly fell upon his head.

Puhe!

With a might that was probably insufficient to snap a branch, it dissipated after finishing its job.

“...” Luo Xuanqing.

“...” The two elders.

1379 No One Is Worthy Of Her!

“What happened?”

It took a while before the two elders finally recovered from their shocked states. Nevertheless, the disbelief in their eyes remained apparent for all to see.

Having lived for several centuries, they had witnessed plenty of lightning tribulations, and they had undergone quite a few themselves too. Each time it appeared, they still couldn't help but tremble slightly in trepidation before its overwhelming might... But what the heck was the fart-like thing they had just seen?

“Could it be that the lightning tribulation has a problem releasing the energy it has charged up?” the second elder couldn't help but ask.

“Are you trying to tell me that the lightning tribulation is constipating?” the golden-robed elder glanced at the second elder sharply.

Lightning tribulation was the retribution that the heavens brought upon those who stepped beyond their own boundary. The purpose was to establish its authority and instill fear into all lifeforms.

The immense energy it had charged up would eventually be channeled into a devastating streak of lightning to strike down the offender who dared to overstep his boundaries, and Luo Xuanqing's lightning tribulation had been charging up for quite some time already. Yet, the eventual lightning streak released ended up being so unimpressive...

“Most likely, the earlier streak of lightning is just a starter. It should be releasing a much stronger streak very soon... Ah? W-what's going on?” In the midst of analyzing the situation,

the golden-robed elder suddenly widened his eyes, as if he had just seen the impossible being realized.

The second elder hurriedly turned his gaze toward the sky too, and he saw the storm clouds covering several dozen li of the surrounding sky billowing furiously all of a sudden, as if an ill patient coughing violently.

This coughing continued for quite a while before it abruptly jolted forward, and a figure was puked out of the clouds.

It was the same young man who had dived into its midst earlier.

Seemingly enraged at being coughed out, the young man bellowed furiously as he wagged his finger threateningly at the storm clouds.

“You rascal, you sure have grown arrogant. How dare you puke me out?”

While saying those words, the young man dashed back toward the storm clouds. But before he could even come close to it, the fear-inducing storm cloud suddenly trembled intensely, as if falling into a state of panic. Following which...

Tz la!

It whizzed off into the distance, vanishing from view in the blink of an eye.

“He actually made the lightning tribulation flee in fear?”

The two elders glanced at one another, and the overwhelming shock coursing through their minds nearly caused them to lose control of their strength and appear from their invisible state.

All this while, they had thought that the young man was doomed to die after diving into the midst of the storm clouds.

Yet, when the young man placed his hand on his hip and berated with lightning tribulation with a wagging finger, not only did the latter dare not to retaliate, it even fled frantically as if a terrified ostrich... This sight made them realize that it wasn't that there was a problem with Luo Xuanqing's lightning tribulation, but that this seemingly ordinary young man wasn't as ordinary as they thought him out to be.

“That fellow is a true talent. No matter what, we must pull him over to our Luo Clan’s side!” the golden-robed elder said resolutely.

As unbelievable as the matter may seem to him, the Sanctum of Sages was still a place where geniuses all over the Master Teacher Continent gathered. It wasn’t completely impossible for a person who possessed the unique ability to deal with heavenly tribulations to appear here.

No matter the cost, they had to bring this talent over to their Luo Clan so that they could study the secrets behind his means.

“But he’s Yang Xuan’s disciple. It won’t be easy for us to pull him over to our side...” the second elder shook his head.

Yang Xuan was one of the grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, and naturally, his student was bound to enter the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters. There was no reason for the young man to join their Luo Clan at all!

“That’s true...” the golden-robed elder sighed in pity.

As much as they wanted the young man to join their clan, they dared not to vie with the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, and they didn’t have the ability to do so either.

After some thought, the golden-robed elder was still unable to think of any viable solution to the matter at the moment, so he waved his hand and said, “It’ll do to just report this matter to the clan head. Yuxin should have been escorted back at the clan by now, so we should be hurrying back too so as to not hold up the Elders’ Conference.”

“Un.” the second elder nodded.

With a slight wave of his hand, something similar to a massive Teleportation Formation appeared before the duo, and stepping into it, they vanished from the spot, as if they had never been there before.

...

Zhang Xuan cursed and cursed, but the rage in his heart couldn’t be quelled. However, there was nothing he could do

about it either.

With the size of the lightning tribulation, it should have been more than enough to fill up his dantian fully. However, due to the Dongxu Gourd, the vine, and his clone messing around, he only managed to fill up half of it...

The more he thought, the more stifled he felt.

It seemed like he would just have to rely on Luo Xuanqing and Zhang Chun's yet-to-arrive pinnacle spirit stones for that then.

It was only the filling up of his dantian for the first time that would require the purest of energies. For subsequent times, there was no need to go through so much trouble anymore.

To make an analogy, this was similar to expanding one's territory and developing new grounds. It was only the first time that would require an immense inflow of resources; subsequently, once the foundation was laid, one would only have to put in minimal resources in order to maintain it.

It was for this reason that he had to use resources harnessing spiritual energy far more concentrated than concentrated spiritual energy for the first charge up, and subsequently, even absorbing the spiritual energy from ordinary spirit veins would suffice to replenish his zhenqi.

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan lowered his head and saw the Dongxu Gourd lying gleefully in his dantian, shaking its bottom from time to time, as if challenging him.

At the same time, his clone had also returned back to the folded space, lying contentedly on the ground and letting loose a majestic burp.

As for the vine, its reaction was a little more normal. It lay motionlessly in his storage ring, seemingly still trying to assimilate the energy it had just taken in.

"These bastards..." Zhang Xuan couldn't help but curse beneath his breath as he shook his head helplessly.

If any cultivator wielded the power to absorb the energy harnessed within lightning tribulations, they would surely be the envy of others... And yet, even just the artifacts he carried

was capable of doing that, and on top of that, it turned out that he was the weakest of them all in contrast...

Deep indignance filled Zhang Xuan's mind.

Just when could he be more awe-inspiring?

"Hai, it seems like I'm too ordinary after all..." Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

It was one for thing for him to lose out to his clone, girlfriend, and clone... but now, even a clone and vine that he had picked up on a whim turned out to be so formidable too! If not for his resilient mental fortitude, he would have killed himself out of embarrassment by now!

"Zhang shi..."

Just as Zhang Xuan was feeling deeply stifled inside, a voice suddenly sounded not too far away. Turning his head over, he saw Luo Xuanqing staring at him with his mouth agape.

All this while, Luo Xuanqing thought that Zhang Xuan only wielded the ability to scare away his own lightning tribulation, but to think that he had the ability to do the same to others' too...

Didn't this mean that if he were to look for Zhang Xuan each time he was to face a lightning tribulation, he would be able to clear it without any danger?

"Brother Luo..." Seeing through Luo Xuanqing's thoughts, Zhang Xuan's reddened face quickly turned slightly pale, and his legs trembled feebly beneath him. "I hope that you won't speak of this matter to others. I had to use a secret art earlier, and similar to the side effects from the activation of your unique bloodline, this secret art carries severe side effects too, so it would be unsafe for me to use it recklessly..."

"..." Luo Xuanqing's cheeks twitched wildly.

Do you think that I'm blind? Putting aside how superficial your acting is, the very least you could do is to put up the act right from the start, not when I approached you!

However, seeing how the young man before him was unwilling to talk about the matter, Luo Xuanqing inwardly

gave the latter a thumbs up for being as humble as him before dropping the matter from his mind.

“Zhang shi, you have my deepest gratitude. If not for your help, I could have very well lost my life to the lightning tribulation.” Luo Xuanqing clasped his fist and said.

At the same time, a shudder ran through his heart and he imagined what would have happened if the young man hadn't been here.

It was out of a moment of anxiety that he triggered the Dimension Sundering Ordeal, paying no heeds to the consequences at all then. It was only when the lightning tribulation appeared did he realize what kind of frightening force he was going against.

If the young man had been any later, he could have very well been electrocuted to death. Not even his bloodline ability would have been able to save him.

“Brother Luo, weren't you intending to challenge your Dimension Sundering Ordeal back at the Sanctum of Sages? Why would you... What happened?” Zhang Xuan asked with a deep frown.

“I came here to look for my younger sister, wanting to ask her if what Zhang Feng said was true...” Halfway through his words, Luo Xuanqing couldn't help but shake his head glumly. “Forget it, there's no point talking about it...”

“The little princess, is she...” Seeing how Luo Xuanqing stopped halfway through his words, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but panic a little. “Is she injured? Where is she?”

“Injured?” Luo Xuanqing shook his head. “How can that be? My younger sister has assimilated the Dimension Silencer. If she were to tap into its full prowess, not even our father will be able to do anything to her! It's no exaggeration to say that no one in the Luo Clan is able to hurt her even in the slightest...”

Then, a thought suddenly came to Luo Xuanqing's mind, and he raised his head and glared at the young man before him warily, “Why are you asking me this?”

“I...” Zhang Xuan was caught off guard by Luo Xuanqing’s sudden question.

“I’m warning you right now. Even though I think of you as a brother, you better not dream of touching my younger sister...”

“This... May I ask the reason for that?” Unable to take it anymore, Zhang Xuan asked with a frown. “You know that she’s unwilling to marry the young prodigy of the Zhang Clan, so why would you still go along with that?”

“I know that she’s unwilling to do that too, but being born in the Luo Clan means that there are responsibilities that she cannot shirk off. There’s simply no other way around it...” Luo Xuanqing shook his head. “Let’s drop this matter here. I don’t want to talk about it anymore.”

“But...” Zhang Xuan exclaimed anxiously.

“There are no buts. Speaking of which, I happen to have a matter which I have to trouble you for.” Luo Xuanqing raised his head and said.

Zhang Xuan was still a little reluctant to drop the matter with the answer he had been searching for dangling just ahead of him, but seeing the stern look on Luo Xuanqing’s face, he could only give up on it.

“Brother Luo, feel free to speak. As long as it’s within my means, I’ll definitely accomplish it.”

“I want you to help me find the person whom my younger sister insists to be with even at the defiance of the entire clan.” Luo Xuanqing said with a sharp glint in his eyes.

“This...” Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched. He hesitated for a brief moment before probing carefully, “What do you intend to do after finding him?”

“What do I intend to do?” Luo Xuanqing gnashed his teeth together as he spat, “If I don’t break his third leg, my surname won’t be Luo!”

“...” Veins popped up all over Zhang Xuan’s temples.

“What’s wrong?” Noticing the bizarre expression on Zhang Xuan’s face, Luo Xuanqing asked doubtfully.

“Ah, it’s nothing much. I’m just a little curious. Considering how much you dote on your younger sister, why would you want to beat up the person whom your younger sister loves?” Zhang Xuan asked.

As a legitimate siscon, Luo Xuanqing should wish for his younger sister’s happiness... so why would he make a move on his younger sister’s boyfriend then?

“Isn’t the reason obvious? It’s because he’s unworthy of my younger sister!” Luo Xuanqing harrumphed.

“Unworthy? You haven’t even met him before, how would you know that he’s worthy of your younger sister?” Zhang Xuan replied indignantly.

It was understandable how the likes of Zhang Chun and the others were unworthy of his younger sister... but surely he should be able to meet the mark!

He might still be a little weak at the moment, but with sufficient time, he would become the next sanctum head and rise to the very top of the Master Teacher Continent!

“Hmph, the man who is worthy of my younger sister hasn’t been born in this world yet!” Luo Xuanqing replied adamantly.

“But... surely your younger sister has to marry someone eventually? You can’t possibly stay by her side for life, right?” Zhang Xuan questioned on.

“That’s for the future. In any case, I just don’t think that there’s anyone in this world who is worthy of her. Not to mention, according to what I heard, the person whom she likes isn’t too strong either...” Luo Xuanqing said.

“Isn’t too strong?” Zhang Xuan’s heart skipped a beat as he asked carefully, “Did she say who the person she likes is?”

“Of course she did!” Luo Xuanqing suddenly turned his head to Zhang Xuan as killing intent flared from his body.

1380 Only the Blind Would Be Interested in You!

“She said it?” Zhang Xuan covered his neck back as a prickling sensation broke out all over his scalp.

He hurriedly drove his zhenqi furiously, ready to escape immediately should the other party charge at him.

This future brother-in-law of his could be rather unreasonable at times, and Zhang Xuan had no intention of getting pummeled for no good reason either. Naturally, the wisest course of action was to flee first and return to communicate only after the latter had calmed down.

“Indeed!” Luo Xuanqing waved his hand in irritation.

Seeing that Luo Xuanqing didn’t make a move on him, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a brief moment before asking warily, “Then... who is he?”

“I don’t exactly know who it is, but it’s a person that she met in the period that she left home. According to her, he’s a master teacher who has a heart vast enough to embrace the entire world, never hesitating to help those who are in need. Despite his low cultivation, his character is nothing short of perfection. On top of that, his mastery in pill forging is unrivaled in the world, unprecedented even in history...”

The more he spoke, the more furious Luo Xuanqing became. In the end, he swung his sleeves backward angrily as he exclaimed, “But she refused to reveal his name! So, I have no idea who he is either.”

“She didn’t reveal his name?” Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

At the same time, he couldn’t help but feel deeply touched inside. He would have never thought that he would appear to be so perfect in Luo Ruoxin’s heart. As expected of his soulmate, she was able to discover the goodness in him.

Harboring such thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan turned to look at Luo Xuanqing once more and said, “Since the little princess has described that person to be so perfect, what else do you have to worry about?”

It was incomprehensible to him why this future brother-in-law would reject such a perfect man. It would be impossible to find another person as outstanding as that out there in the world!

If Luo Xuanqing was going to reject such a guy, just who in the world could catch his eye then?

“Perfect? Hmph! The more she says such words, the more apparent that she has been scammed by that fellow... How can there be any perfect man in the world other than me?” Luo Xuanqing waved his hand indignantly.

“Cough cough!” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows twitched upon hearing those words, and he nearly choked to death on his saliva.

He didn’t think that this future brother-in-law of his would be so narcissistic...

Perfect?

A person who wreaked havoc across all halls in the Sanctum of Sages, becoming a figure whom the entire school has picked up their pitchforks against... Is that your definition of perfect? Do you really have no idea what other people think of you?

With such thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but shake his head and say, “When it comes to perfection, I’m afraid that you still have much to work on. Perhaps only I have come the closest to it...”

“You?” Those words immediately induced Luo Xuanqing to send a disdainful glance over. “Stop daydreaming over here! I admit, you do possess incredible means, commanding formidable capability in formation, beast taming, and dealing with lightning tribulations. However, with your eccentricity and lack of common sense dealing with situations, your lack of thought before speaking, and your pathetically weak social

awareness, I really have no idea how you can the cheek to call yourself perfect! In fact, I doubt whether there would ever be a girl in the world who would be interested in you. Even if there is one, she must most definitely be blind!”

Even though he had only known this young man for roughly twenty days, he had already gained a deep understanding of the other party from the time they had spent together. Poor social awareness, lack of sensitivity to his surroundings, often choking others with his words, and not to mention, a complete lack of response that an ordinary man should have when facing the ladies!

This had led Luo Xuanqing to deeply suspect if the young man had some kind of weird interests. If anyone could fall in love with such a person, she must be blind!

“You...” Black lines streaked across Zhang Xuan’s face.
“Speak for yourself! Aren’t you very much single? Given your hot-tempered personality, it would take a miracle for any girl to be interested in you!”

I only speak to you politely out of respect for you as my future brother-in-law, but how can you say that there’s no one in the world who would like me and even claim that your own younger sister is blind...

The one who is blind is you!

The same bloodline, the same clan, and the same parents; how could there be such a huge difference between the both of them?

It is no wonder why you are still single despite already treading into your thirties!

“You... Bullshit! It’s not that I can’t find a girlfriend but that those who get close to me are usually due to my identity as the Young Master of the Luo Clan!” Luo Xuanqing bellowed with eyes bulging in agitation.

“Stop finding excuses for yourself! There’s just no one who is interested in you as a person, that’s all there is to it!” Zhang Xuan harrumphed.

“You...” So furious that his lips were quivering non-stop, Luo Xuanqing was on the verge of erupting.

Just like that, the two men glared at one another angrily with a fiery inferno blazing in their eyes, seemingly wanting to tear the other party apart.

Some time later, Zhang Xuan waved his hands and harrumphed coldly, “To tell you the truth, I have a girlfriend, and my girlfriend loves me a lot.”

“Hah hah.” Luo Xuanqing.

“What I’m saying is true! My girlfriend is really pretty, and she’s strong at that.” Zhang Xuan continued.

“Hah hah.” Luo Xuanqing.

“Are you doubting me? Just think about it, how can someone as outstanding as me possibly not have a girlfriend?” Black lines were starting to emerge on Zhang Xuan’s forehead.

“Hah hah.” Luo Xuanqing.

“...” Zhang Xuan.

A while later...

“To tell you the truth, I have a girlfriend too.” Luo Xuanqing said.

“Hah hah.” Zhang Xuan.

“She’s extremely pretty, and she possesses great strength on top of that.” Luo Xuanqing said.

“Hah hah.” Zhang Xuan.

“You...” Luo Xuanqing gritted his teeth furiously.

Just like that, the duo glared at one another furiously once more.

The standstill continued for quite a while before Luo Xuanqing finally waved his hand and said, “I won’t waste my breath with you anymore. Anyway, help me look into the person whom my younger sister likes.”

This was the matter which he wanted to entrust to Zhang Xuan.

“You want me to help you look into the matter?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “As the Young Master of the Luo Clan, you possess a much wider information network than I do. Why would you want to go through me instead?”

Even though Luo Xuanqing appeared to be extremely reckless, often acting without much thought, through the matter with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, Zhang Xuan knew that that was only how he appeared on the exterior. In truth, he was a rather meticulous person on the inside.

“I have already promised my younger sister not to investigate that man. However, it can’t really be helped if you were to investigate the matter and unwittingly speak of it before me, and I accidentally overhear that man’s background, right?” Luo Xuanqing said.

It was not that he didn’t want to look into this matter himself but that his younger sister had pleaded with him not to disturb the man whom she loved. He was unwilling to accept her request initially, but looking into her sorrowful eyes, he still eventually succumbed to her request.

But still, he couldn’t let this matter go just like that. If he were to go through another person instead, that wouldn’t be considered as breaking his promise, right?

“This...” Zhang Xuan fell into deep contemplation.

Most likely, Ruoxin knew that it would be impossible for him to stand against Luo Xuanqing and the entire Luo Clan with his current strength, so she chose to keep his identity hidden so as to prevent him from being harassed and hurt.

“Hai!” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

He felt like he really owed the other party far too much.

“Alright, I’ll help you find the other party. However, do you have any clues?” Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before nodding.

By agreeing to the other party, he would be able to forge a long-term connection with Luo Xuanqing, possibly allowing him to enquire into Luo Ruoxin’s current situation at any moment. At the same time, he would also be able to control

the flow of information that got to Luo Xuanqing, thus placing him in a safer position.

“The clues are as I have told you before. The person she likes is a master teacher, and it seems like he’s of good personality and his looks are fairly decent too... As for where she has been to during that period of time, I’m not too sure yet. I’ll get to you if I manage to hear anything about that.” Luo Xuanqing paused for a moment before saying.

His younger sister had concealed herself so well that there was completely no news about her during the period of time she left home. As such, not even he was aware of her whereabouts then.

Perhaps, there might someone in the clan who was aware of the matter, but he would have to ask around.

“Alright. I’ll be waiting for your news then.” Seeing that Luo Xuanqing didn’t know much about the matter, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

This meant that there was still some time for him to bring up his cultivation before his relationship with Ruoxin got out.

He wasn’t ready to appear before the Luo Clan as Ruoxin’s boyfriend yet. At the very least, he would have to clear the 8-star master teacher examination and officially become the sanctum head before then.

Only then would he be qualified to stand beside Luo Ruoxin and stand against the will of the two Sage Clans.

“I have just achieved a breakthrough, so I need some time to reinforce my cultivation. Here is the pinnacle spirit stone I have promised you a while back.” Luo Xuanqing flicked his hand and passed a jade container over.

It seemed like he had met his clan members earlier and received the pinnacle spirit stone from them.

“Thank you.” As this was what they had agreed on earlier, Zhang Xuan didn’t hesitate to take it.

As soon as he placed his hand on the jade container, he immediately felt a pure surge of spiritual energy flowing into

his meridians, and the Heaven's Path zhenqi in his body began to tremble in excitement.

As expected of a pinnacle spirit stone! It could induce such a reaction in him even without opening the jade container. There was truly a vast difference between it and concentrated high-tier spirit stones.

"I'll find you after reinforcing my cultivation..." After saying those words, Luo Xuanqing activated a formation plate before sitting down to cultivate.

Since he had survived his lightning tribulation, it meant that he had already successfully achieved a breakthrough to Dimension Sundering realm.

"Un."

Seeing that Luo Xuanqing had already made preparation measures, Zhang Xuan decisively left the area and returned in the direction where he came from.

Returning back to his living quarters, he was just about to use his pinnacle spirit stones to replenish his zhenqi when he saw Sun Qiang rushing over.

"Young Master, someone has been waiting for you here for quite a few days."

"Waiting for me?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had been too busy ever since he enrolled into the Sanctum of Sages such that he hadn't even returned to his residence for quite some day already, let alone getting to know others here... Just in the world was looking for him?

Not to mention, to be so determined as to wait day after day for him?

"That's right." Sun Qiang nodded.

"Who is it? From what power?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"He's a young man in his twenties. I'm not too sure what power he's from, but he did mention his name." At this point, Sun Qiang pondered for a moment. "I think his name... Feng Ziyi!"

Feng Ziyi? Isn't that Yang shi's real student?

'Gedeng!', Zhang Xuan's heart skipped a beat.

1381 Crossing Hands with Feng Ziyi

Feng Ziyi was the top ranker of the Mountain Gate examination, outdoing even Zhang Yu of the Zhang Clan. Zhang Xuan had met him once during the gathering of their Elite Division class prior to being abruptly taken away by Luo Xuanqing.

Previously, he had only known Feng Ziyi to be the direct disciple of a grand elder from the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, but during the journey to obtain the Dongxu Gourd, he learned from Yuan Xiao and the others that he was actually the real Yang Xuan's direct disciple... In other words, the real counterpart to the fake persona he had come up with!

And for the other party to have waited for him here for several days...

It couldn't be that the other party had found out about him faking his identity and came over here to apprehend him?

"Did... he mention the reason why he's looking for me?" Zhang Xuan asked anxiously.

It would still be fine if it was just Feng Ziyi, but if Yang Xuan were to find out as well, he would have no choice but to flee.

As the most enigmatic and strongest grand elder of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, there was little doubt that Yang Xuan had already achieved a level far beyond Saint 9-dan. There was no way he would be able to stand against a figure like that.

"Well, he didn't say anything at all, but he's oddly patient. Despite being well aware that you aren't around, he still refuses to leave, insistently waiting here for a few days straight..." Sun Qiang said with a deep frown.

"That's clearly an attempt to corner me..." Zhang Xuan's lips twitched upon hearing those words.

There had been completely no interaction between him and Feng Ziyi in the past, so other than the matter of him being ‘Yang Xuan’s direct disciple’, he couldn’t think of another reason why the latter would willingly wait here for a few days straight.

“Right, Zhang Jiuxiao is here as well. Just like Feng Ziyi, he has been here waiting for you for quite a few days now too.” Sun Qiang suddenly recalled another matter and said.

“Jiuxiao? What’s he doing here? Is he acquainted with Feng Ziyi?” Zhang Xuan was slightly taken aback.

Considering how Zhang Jiuxiao was a student of the Ordinary Division, barely meeting the mark to qualify as a student of the Sanctum of Sages, it didn’t seem too likely for him to be acquainted with the number one expert of their Elite Division class.

“Young Master, are you intending to meet them? Otherwise, I can just relay a message to them that you are currently in seclusion.” Noticing a hint of dilemma on Zhang Xuan’s forehead, Sun Qiang proposed.

“It’s fine, I’ll meet them.” Zhang Xuan replied.

What that would come would eventually come. There was no point evading the matter. He might as well meet the other party to see what the other party was intending to do.

Besides, considering how the Shrine of Seers and Spirit Awakener Hall were reduced to rubble, the other party should have already received the news of his return by now... There was no way he could continue hiding from the other party anymore.

Having made up his mind, he didn’t hesitate to make his way over to the main hall of his residence.

Walking in, he saw two young men seated patiently on the guest seats. One of them stood up in agitation upon seeing him and exclaimed, “Zhang shi, you are finally back! You sure have kept up waiting for long. I believe you should be familiar with Senior Feng over here too. I didn’t expect that he’s

actually Yang shi's direct disciple too, coming from the same roots as you, so I specially brought him over to meet you..."

Naturally, the young man who had stood up was Zhang Jiuxiao.

"Yang shi's direct disciple?" Zhang Xuan asked as he directed a long, meaningful look at Zhang Jiuxiao.

If thoughts could kill, Zhang Jiuxiao might have died a thousand times over in that short moment.

All this while, he had been wondering who was the culprit that revealed the news of him being Yang Xuan's student, but who could have thought that it would actually be an insider leak...

Zhang Jiuxiao had been in Qingyuan City during the same period of time as him, and he was rather close with Wu shi and the others too. All it would take was a simple ask for him to find out Zhang Xuan's lineage...

So, it wasn't too surprising for him to know about his relationship with 'Yang Xuan'.

But... it's one thing for you to know, but why do you have to boast about it in front of Feng Ziyi?

If, touchwood, this news were to get to the ears of the real Yang shi, won't I be a goner?

Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella in frustration. Rage bubbled furiously within him, but there was no outlet for him to vent it at all. In the end, he could only suppress his overflowing fury and chuckle awkwardly, "You... are from Yang shi's lineage too?"

Feng Ziyi stood up, and instead of answering the question, he raised his palm and gestured to the center of the hall, "I would like to request to have a duel with you."

"A duel?" Zhang Xuan asked with a deep frown.

"That's right." Not bothering to explain his intention, Feng Ziyi drove his zhenqi, and an intense aura rippled forth from him, threatening to crush the surrounding air into fragments.

“This is... Phantasmal Space realm primary stage?” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

The previous time he met Feng Ziyi, the latter was only at Grand Dominion realm advanced stage. Yet, in just a short twenty or so days, he actually managed to raise his cultivation by two stages, reaching Phantasmal Space realm primary stage... This was truly fearsome!

While the bottleneck that one had to overcome in order to achieve a breakthrough to Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm was significantly lower as compared to that of Saint 8-dan Dimension Sundering realm, it was still inconceivable for any cultivator to do so within a short span of twenty days.

What was even more astounding was that the other party was only in his mid-twenties, roughly twenty-four or twenty-five this year... With such talent, it was just a matter of time before he became one of the powerhouses of the Master Teacher Continent!

Noticing Zhang Xuan's hesitation, Feng Ziyi chuckled coldly and said, “I did manage to make some advancements during this period of time, but it seems like you have achieved quite a few breakthroughs yourself too. The previous time we met, you were only at Leaving Aperture realm primary stage, but in just a short twenty days, you have already managed to reach Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle. You were able to defeat Zhang Zhuo and the others as a Leaving Aperture realm primary stage cultivator, so you should be far stronger now, right? You didn't hesitate to challenge those of the Zhang Clan, so why would you hesitate at the notion of fighting against me?”

While Zhang Xuan was astounded by the rate at which Feng Ziyi was advancing his cultivation, the vice-versa was true as well.

Feng Ziyi remembered that Zhang Xuan was only at Primordial Spirit realm pinnacle when he challenged the Mountain Gate examination, but in less than a month, his cultivation had actually risen by an entire realm, reaching

Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle. This rate of cultivation was one which even he would pale far in comparison against!

Furthermore, the other party also wielded superior fighting prowess that allowed him to challenge cultivators far beyond his tier, as shown by how he managed to defeat Zhang Zhuo and the others back then.

In truth, Feng Ziyi's initial intention was to confront Zhang Xuan on the rumors of him being Yang Xuan's direct disciple too, but upon recalling the peculiarities surrounding the latter, his blood suddenly raced in excitement, and an urge to challenge the latter to a battle struck him.

"Since you are so earnest in your request, it would be impolite for me to turn you down." Knowing that there was no way to shun the matter, Zhang Xuan walked to the center of the room and gestured, "Feel free."

As long as Yang Xuan didn't appear in the picture, there was nothing for him to fear.

A blade was already above his neck, regardless of whether he pushed ahead or retreated. Since that was the case, he might as well retaliate.

If Feng Ziyi wanted to make a move on him, he would have to first defeat him!

Hu la!

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had accepted his battle, Feng Ziyi stepped forward as well and flicked his hand softly.

Huala!

A Dominion swiftly engulfed the main hall. Any Spiritual Perception that attempted to perceive within the barrier would abruptly vanish, as if falling into another dimension. At the same time, Feng Ziyi also pushed his palm downward, and an oppressive might froze the surrounding space, leaving one feeling as if one was standing in the midst of a vacuum, making even breathing nigh impossible.

"He's indeed rather strong." Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

Even though Feng Ziyi was only at Phantasmal Space realm primary stage, the strength he had displayed so far was already on par with the Phantasmal Space advanced stage Bi Hongyin!

True, Bi Hongyin was still slightly lacking as compared to Luo Xuanqing and the others, but with her caliber, she could already be considered as one of the top geniuses of the Sanctum of Sages, far surpassing most of the other students... And yet, to wield strength comparable to her despite being two cultivation stages weaker, Feng Ziyi was truly a frightening individual!

A feeling of tightness swiftly constricted Zhang Xuan's chest. He knew that he would only be plunged in a worse position if he were to retreat at this point, so he roared furiously, "Break!"

His voice seemed to be tinged with a powerful force that hammered down on one's soul like a wreaking ball. In just an instant, cracks swiftly spread across the Dominion before it shattered with a resounding explosion.

Through studying the books Bi Hongyin had relating to demonic tunes, he managed to raise his comprehension and mastery of demonic tunes to the caliber of an 8-star demonic tunist. He was still unable to exert the full prowess of an 8-star demonic tunist due to the limitations of his cultivation, but nevertheless, his attacks were still plenty fearsome. Without a transcendental state of mind, it would be impossible to withstand it.

After breaking the Dominion with a roar, Zhang Xuan flicked his finger and sent a surge of sword qi in Feng Ziyi's direction.

Considering that his cultivation was far beneath the other party, it would be extremely dangerous for him to hold back. Thus, he infused the full prowess of his offensive Sword Quintessence into the attack.

TZZZZZZZZ!

In the midst of its trajectory, the surge of sword qi suddenly burst open to engulf the entire area, creating something reminiscent to the sea. It wasn't the Sea Severing Sword of the Three Swords of Lingxu, but the combined prowess of the

countless sword qi within this ‘sea’ was plenty terrifying. They converged like a vortex and crushed down on Feng Ziyi with devastating might.

“Formidable!” Feng Ziyi’s eyes lit up upon seeing this move. “Under normal circumstances, it should be impossible for any cultivator beneath Saint 7-dan realm to withstand the Dominion of a Phantasmal Space realm cultivator. Yet, with just a roar, he was able to sever my control over my Dominion before creating his own Dominion using his sword qi to suppress me...”

The reason why Grand Dominion realm experts were so powerful was because they commanded absolute authority within the territory of their Dominion.

Considering that the other party was only at Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle, having yet to comprehend Dominion, the other party would inevitably be in a disadvantageous position facing him straight-on. In view of that, the other party actually chose to craft out his own Dominion using his sword qi in order to accrue sufficient power to fight on equal grounds with him...

This was something he had never thought of before. It was truly a brilliant move!

Peng!

As soon as the other party’s sword qi collided with his palm, Feng Ziyi was forced to retreat two steps.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was forced to retreat eight steps.

In this short encounter, it was apparent who wielded the absolute advantage in terms of sheer strength.

“For someone who is two cultivation realms weaker than me to be able to withstand my attack, I must admit that you are indeed a person of great capability. However... let’s see if you’ll be able to do the same for this too!” With eyes gleaming in excitement, Feng Ziyi charged forward once more.

Hu!

His silhouette swiftly turned illusory, as if he had warped into a phantasm. In just the blink of an eye, he had already covered ten meters to stand right before Zhang Xuan.

“His speed is incredible too...” Zhang Xuan was alarmed.

In terms of instantaneous burst speed, the other party was actually no slower than his Heaven’s Path Movement Art!

The reason why Luo Xuanqing was capable of moving faster than him was due to his high cultivation realm and superior grasp of spatial laws, but to think that Feng Ziyi would be so fast as well... As expected of Yang Shi’s direct disciple, a genius from the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters! His abilities were truly off the charts!

From the previous encounter, it was apparent that it would be unwise for Zhang Xuan to face Feng Ziyi’s attacks head-on, considering the disparity in their strength. Thus, in response to the latter’s sudden approach, he quickly activated his Heaven’s Path Movement Art to retreat.

Tzzzzzzz!

But as fast as he retreated, Feng Ziyi’s advancement was even faster. The latter’s outstretched finger seemed to be ready to pierce a hole open in his throat at any moment.

Hu hu hu!

Zhang Xuan quickly switched between various movements arts in hopes of shaking Feng Ziyi off, but as if his shadow, the latter remained tight on his tail. Slowly, he began to panic a little.

“At this rate, I just might lose...”

Even though Zhang Xuan was still able to keep the other party’s finger off his throat for the time being, he would risk losing control over the momentum of the battle at this rate. Once that were to happen, it would only a matter of time before his loss.

“I’ll just have to take a risk!” Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan made up his mind, and his eyes turned solemn.

He abruptly halted his footsteps as he forcefully compressed the muscles before his neck.

Hu!

As a result of his sudden stop, Feng Ziyi's finger struck Zhang Xuan's neck. However, the anticipated piercing didn't occur. On the contrary, a sound reminiscent to the metallic reverberation of two weapons clashing with one another sounded instead.

Heaven's Path Golden Body!

After learning the newest version of Heaven's Path Golden Body compiled from Yuan Xiao's physical body cultivation technique manuals, the resilience of his physical body had become comparable to half-Saint high-tier artifacts.

To put it in other words, as long as Feng Ziyi didn't wield a Saint high-tier weapon in his hands, it would be nigh impossible for him to impale him!

"It should be my turn now!"

Feng Ziyi was visibly stunned by the failure of his finger to impale Zhang Xuan's throat. Knowing that this was a good opportunity for him to strike, Zhang Xuan clenched his fist tightly and thrust it forward.

This punch harnessed not only the strength derived from his zhenqi but from his physical body and soul as well. Even before landing on its target, the other party's Phantasmal Space realm Dominion had already begun shattering inch after inch, reminiscent of a popped bubble.

"You... How is this possible?" Feng Ziyi was aghast.

1382 A Sixth

It was one thing for a Leaving Aperture realm pinnacle cultivator to be able to call forth strength that was on par with a Phantasmal Space realm primary stage expert like him, but more importantly than that, the timing and positioning of the other party's fist was indescribably ingenious. It was timed right in the lapse between the dissipation of his previous surge of might and the regathering of his strength.

In other words, the other party's had managed to see through the flaws in his fighting style despite only having exchanged a single blow!

One must know that the cultivation technique and battle techniques he practiced were no weaker than the top-notch techniques that the core members of the Zhang Clan and Luo Clan practiced!

It would be impossible for even Fei Shi to see through such profound battle techniques and cultivation techniques in such a short period of time, and yet, the young man before him was already able to find their flaws and exploit them even.

“But if you think that you can defeat me just like that, you are being far too optimistic!”

Feng Ziyi's shock only remained for less than a tenth of a breath before a sharp glint surfaced in his eyes. He tilted his body slightly sideways in order to bring forth sufficient power to return a fist of his own toward Zhang Xuan.

His fist was directed straight toward the other party's chest, and the latter's punch was directed toward his chest too. He was aiming for a direct showdown!

“Let's see how formidable your defense is!” A hint of callousness flashed across Zhang Xuan's eyes when he saw Feng Ziyi's response.

Without bothering to even change his positions, he drove the Heaven's Path Golden Body, and a slight golden shimmer

flowed across the surface of his body.

Peng!

Zhang Xuan's fist smashed into the other party's chest, and in that instant, he felt as if he was punching a boulder. A numbing sensation swiftly crawled from his fingers up his arm. At the same time, Feng Ziyi's fist also smashed into his body, and a stifled feeling welled up in his chest, forcing him to retreat several steps.

"Your physical body..." Zhang Xuan was astonished.

It was due to cultivating the Heaven's Path Golden Body that the resilience of his physical body was on par with half-Saint high-tier artifacts, but to his astonishment, the resilience of the other party's physical body was actually on par with him!

Even though it seemed like their direct confrontation had ended in a draw, the truth was that he had lost out a little due to his limited cultivation.

"Hahaha, wonderful!" Feng Ziyi roared in laughter.

Even in a clash of brute strength, the young man before him was actually able to stand toe-to-toe with him. He flexed his arms a little, and as if someone had blown air into his muscles, his body began bulging out, filling his loose robe.

It seemed as if he had just eaten some kind of incredible tonic that transformed his slender body into that of a bulked up, brawny man in an instant.

Peng!

Taking a step forward, he immediately felt immense pressure weighing down on him.

In just a short instant, Feng Ziyi's aura and strength had actually surged to twofold.

"What kind of secret art is that?" Zhang Xuan clenched his fist tightly in astonishment.

In his past year of journey through the Master Teacher Continent, he had seen plenty of secret arts that gave one an explosive boost of strength, but he had never seen one which

allowed an individual to enhance his muscle mass without any side effects at all.

However, he knew that he didn't have the luxury of allowing his thoughts to wander in this moment either. Driving his Heaven's Path Golden Body to its limits, he sent another punch over.

Peng peng peng peng!

In just the blink of an eye, the two of them had already traded more than ten blows. A deafening gale raged within the hall, threatening to tear the entire building down. At this point, Sun Qiang and Zhang Jiuxiao had already backed out of the hall.

Nevertheless, even the lingering air current that escaped from the hall was sufficient to leave them with a stinging sensation all over their body, as if a fearsome inferno was blazing on them.

"It wasn't too long ago that my strength was still on par with Zhang Shi... But in just a few months, such a huge gap has been pulled between us!" Zhang Jiuxiao was shocked.

张九霄骇然.

He could still clearly remember the days back in Qingyuan City when they were still an equal match for one another, and there was hardly any disparity in their strength at all. It was in remembrance of those days that he worked exceptionally hard during this period of time, hoping that he would be able to catch up with the other party. Yet, who could have thought that despite all the effort he had put in... the gap between the both of them only grew larger!

With the other party's current strength, even a punch from afar was sufficient to smash him into a lump of meat.

The difference between the both of them was already immeasurable at this point.

Hula!

At this point, Feng Ziyi suddenly flicked his wrist and drew a sword. He slashed it lightly in the air, and the air in the room

seemed to flow naturally along with the movements of his sword.

“Why don’t we move on to a weaponry battle instead?”

“Sure, why not?”

Zhang Xuan casually tapped his finger forward, and in the next moment, more than a hundred swords suddenly materialized floating around him.

“What are you doing...” Feng Ziyi narrowed his eyes in astonishment, and before he could finish his words, what that could only be described as an entire sea of sword qi suddenly crushed down on him.

Peng! Peng!

He was immediately sent flying by the immense force, and his back crashed right through a wall of the residence. An instant later, the wall was reduced into dust under the furious assault of the sword qi too.

Feng Ziyi flew back for roughly seven to eight hundred meters before the force pushing him back finally alleviated enough for him to regain his balance. At this point, his face was completely pale, and his hands were shaking non-stop. The web in between his thumb and forefinger felt as if it would tear apart at any moment.

He had to take quite a few huge mouthfuls of air before he finally managed to catch a breather and calm down his billowing zhenqi. He turned his gaze toward Zhang Xuan with a look of disbelief and said, “You... J-just what kind of move is that?”

He was a Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm primary stage expert whereas the other party was merely a Saint 5-dan pinnacle expert. Yet, despite their vast disparity in cultivation, the other party was still able to render him helpless with just this single move... Just what technique was it for it to be so formidable?

“It’s the Old Sword Maestro’s Sea Severing Sword.” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

There was no reason for him to hide this matter. Considering how famous the Old Sword Maestro was, as long as Feng Ziyi were to do some digging up, he should be able to uncover this easily.

“Impossible!” Feng Ziyi immediately exclaimed. “Putting aside Sea Severing Sword, not even the Heaven Desecration Sword wields that much strength!”

The Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters possessed a vast collection of battle techniques manuals from all over the continent. While the Old Sword Maestro’s Three Swords of Lingxu wasn’t passed down, there was still some brief information regarding it in the library. Through analyzing the Old Sword Maestro’s history and sword style, it wasn’t too difficult for those who had comprehended an offensive-type Sword Quintessence to make a rough deduction of the prowess of the Three Swords of Lingxu.

Putting aside Sea Severing Sword, not even the strongest sword move of the Three Swords of Lingxu, Heaven Desecration Sword, was able to command such explosive power.

“It’s true that the Old Sword Maestro’s original sword art didn’t wield such power. However, I did some modification to it.” Zhang Xuan explained.

To be fair, the Old Sword Maestro’s version of Sea Severing Sword wasn’t weak, but without a doubt, it paled far in comparison to the current version of it he was using.

The main reason why his Sea Severing Sword was so powerful, allowing him to even sent Jian Qinsheng flying back then, was because he had managed to resolve the hulking number of flaws it was plagued with, thus forming a perfect Heaven’s Path Sword Art.

“You did some modification to it?” Feng Ziyi widened his eyes in utter shock.

He could believe it if it was his teacher who had modified the Old Sword Maestro’s sword art to such an extent, but the young man before him was only a Leaving Aperture realm

pinnacle cultivator! Was it really possible for him to alter the Sea Severing Sword to this level?

“Indeed. Without altering it, how could I possibly send you flying using just a third of its strength?” Zhang Xuan explained with a smile.

“A third of its strength?” Feng Ziyi’s cheeks twitched uncontrollably upon hearing those words.

He had to use his strongest means just to fend against the sword art the other party had executed earlier, but even so, he was still sent flying several hundred meters away. He thought that this was already very exaggerated, but this turned out to just be a third of its strength?

Suppressing the urge to spurt blood, Feng Ziyi turned his gaze over to Zhang Xuan and said, “Considering the imposing might that your sword art harnesses, there’s no way it could only be a third of its original strength...”

Considering what a close match they were earlier—to be more exact, he was even slightly in the upper hand then—how could the other party possibly be able to suppress him using just a third of his strength just after wielding a sword?

Could this be psychological warfare from the other party in order to crush his confidence?

“This... How embarrassing! I didn’t think that you would be able to see through it. Well, I am actually quite a humble person, so I thought that it wouldn’t be good for me to brag too much. But since you have seen through my lie, I guess it would be rude for me to continue deceiving you. Actually, I have only used a sixth of my true strength in the earlier attack...” Zhang Xuan scratched his head as he revealed awkwardly.

After all, Feng Ziyi was ‘Yang shi’s’ direct disciple, so he had made sure to hold back a little while making his move. Thus, he only used a sixth of his original strength in the earlier attack.

He was hoping not to shatter the other party’s confidence by being a little humbler, but he ended up being exposed instead.

Since that was the case, as embarrassing as it was, he could only admit to it.

On the other hand, upon hearing those words, Feng Ziyi nearly fainted on the spot.

What he meant was that the other party had used his full strength but attempted to pass it off as just a third of his full prowess so as to strike a blow to his morale... but who could have thought that the other party would claim that the inaccuracy was a result of his humility instead!

“Since that’s the case, I want you to launch an attack of full might against me. I want to see just how powerful that sword art of yours is in its most powerful form!” Feng Ziyi harrumphed with gritted teeth.

He didn’t believe that it was possible for the young man before him to actually be so powerful.

“You want me to launch an attack of full might against you?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “I’m afraid that a lapse in control might result in your death instead.”

Part of the reasons why he didn’t dare to use his full strength was because the other party was Yang Shi’s direct disciple, but more importantly than that, if he were to devote his full strength to executing the Sea Severing Sword, he would have to expend all of his zhenqi before the sword art could be stopped... It was one thing when his zhenqi capacity was still lower, but after the alteration he had made to his dantian through the Dongxu Gourd, the amount of zhenqi he had in his dantian rose to fivefold of what it previously had. If he were to lose control of the sword art once more, a huge problem could very well occur.

“Lose control?” Hearing those words, Feng Ziyi gritted his teeth and said. “Don’t worry, I am a Phantasmal Space realm expert. I possess many means, such that even if you were to lose control of your attack, it won’t be that easy for you to hurt me!”

“This...” Zhang Xuan was still a little hesitant. “I do acknowledge your strength, but we are currently surrounded

by the freshmen residences. If I were to let loose here, I fear that I would accidentally destroy the buildings in the area...”

It had barely been half a day since he returned from outside, but he had already brought down the Spirit Awakener Hall and the Shrine of Seers. If he were to destroy the freshmen residences as well, he might very well end up giving away the pinnacle spirit stone in his hand as compensation.

“This...” Feng Ziyi took a look at his surroundings.

Zhang Xuan’s residence had become rather tattered due to the battle they had earlier. Considering how the defense formation cast over each residence wasn’t too strong, they really just might cause huge destruction if they were to continue fighting like that.

“Since that’s the case, let’s head to the Hall of Propriety then. It happens that Fei shi has brought the students from the Elite Division there to conduct mock battles today. Do you dare to have a duel with me there?” Feng Ziyi pondered for a moment before proposing.

“Hall of Propriety? Very well then.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The Hall of Propriety was the place where students would fight against one another. There were top-notch defensive formations there in order to minimize the destruction resulting from any battle, and there were even spectator stands and mechanisms to analyze one’s stats. Not only was there no need to fear causing unnecessary damage, more important, one would be able to gain an insight into one’s current strength and flaws and grow stronger through working on them.

“Let’s go.” Seeing that other party had agreed to it too, Feng Ziyi turned around and headed straight for the Hall of Propriety.

Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan quickly followed along too.

So far, of the five halls, Zhang Xuan had been to the Hall of Erudition, Hall of Attainment, and Hall of Solidarity, but he hadn’t been to the Hall of Propriety yet. If the place was really

as sturdy as the rumors put it out to be, he would be able to head there often to try out his skills.

1383 You Aren'

In contrast to the bleak emptiness of the other halls, there was a huge flow of crowd in and out of the Hall of Propriety. Cultivators were everywhere the eye could see.

Even though there were many esteemed occupations in the Master Teacher Continent, it still didn't change the fact that fighting prowess was still the most vital foundation to a cultivator.

For this reason, battling was an integral part of any cultivator's life, and the Hall of Propriety served as a location for that purpose. Each day, it would attract countless students who sought to raise their fighting prowess and cultivation through practical battles.

Following behind Feng Ziyi, it didn't take long for them to arrive at an independent hall. The vast hall was divided into countless dueling rings, each of which was covered in a transparent barrier a little reminiscent of a glass enclosure.

"Fei shi and the others are over there." Feng Ziyi pointed forward.

Turning his gaze over, Zhang Xuan saw Fei shi, Zhang Yu, and the other students of the Elite Division standing before a dueling ring.

Walking closer, he noted that there were two figures battling in a nearby dueling ring, and upon a closer look, a smile crept onto his lips. The two fighting individuals happened to be familiar faces.

Chen Leyao and Zhang Zhuo!

The previous time Zhang Zhuo fought with Chen Leyao, he suffered a humiliating defeat, being slapped publicly and even knocked out shortly after. He had been resting over the past few days, and not only did he manage to recover fully from the injuries he had sustained, his strength had also risen to greater

heights. Unable to hold himself back anymore, he immediately challenged Chen Leyao to a duel, hoping to avenge himself.

Powerful surges of zhenqi flew here and there within the dueling ring as the two fighters utilized their means one after another, but surprisingly, they were actually equally matched with one another for the time being.

“Not bad!” Upon seeing the sight, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

Chen Leyao had achieved a breakthrough to Grand Dominion realm under his guidance twenty days ago, so he thought that her cultivation would still be a little shaky. Contrary to his expectations, she had already successfully reinforced it, allowing her to stand against Zhang Zhuo on equal grounds.

It seemed like she hadn't been slacking off for the past twenty days. She had already managed to assimilate everything he had taught her.

“Zhang shi, who do you think will be able to achieve victory?”

All of a sudden, a voice sounded by the side. Turning his head over, Zhang Xuan saw the second ranker of the Elite Division looking his way—Zhang Yu.

Previously, Zhang Yu didn't think much of Zhang Xuan, feeling that a person who had barely met the mark to enrolling into the Elite Division wasn't worthy of his attention.

However, after seeing how the latter was able to guide Chen Leyao into making a breakthrough, he swiftly realized that the latter actually possessed extraordinary strength and eye of discernment, so thoughts of winning the latter over to his side began formulating in his mind.

“They...” Zhang Xuan was just about to answer the question when his eyebrows shot up slightly in surprise. He turned to Zhang Yu once more and asked, “You offered some pointers to Zhang Zhuo?”

He had seen the extent of Zhang Zhuo's prowess with his eyes in the battle twenty years ago. While his cultivation was not too bad, his combat skills were still sorely lacking. It was due

to that that Chen Leyao was able to easily defeat him under his guidance.

Had he been as skilled as Feng Ziyi instead, things would have never proceeded so smoothly then.

Yet, in this very moment, Zhang Zhuo was managing to fend off most of Chen Leyao's move, a huge contrast from the incompetent fighter he was before. Most likely, this matter had a lot to do with Zhang Yu.

"I gave him five minutes of my time." Zhang Yu placed his hands behind his back and said in composure. However, the glee and pride in his eyes couldn't be concealed.

The young man before him managed to induce Chen Leyao to achieve a breakthrough within five minutes and defeat Zhang Zhuo, so he decided to offer five minutes worth of pointers to Zhang Zhuo and have him defeat Chen Leyao.

His purpose was simple. He just wanted to prove that he was stronger than the young man before him, and his eye of discernment was far superior as well.

"It's indeed rather impressive that you can induce such improvement in Zhang Zhuo in just five minutes." Zhang Xuan nodded.

As expected of the man who was second only to Feng Ziyi in the Mountain Gate examination. It seemed like Zhang Yu was no simple character either.

The talent and eye of discernment he had shown were already on par with Zhang Chun and Zhang Feng; he only lost out to those two in terms of time and accumulation.

It was no wonder why the Zhang Clan was publicly recognized to be the number one Sage Clan in the Master Teacher Continent. As much as Zhang Xuan was unwilling to recognize it, there was no denying that they had many talents amongst their ranks.

"What do you think of the situation? Who do you think will emerge victorious?" Zhang Yu glanced at Zhang Xuan and asked once more.

“Zhang Zhuo did improve by quite a bit within this period of time, but Chen Leyao hasn’t been slacking off either. I’d say that since Chen Leyao has won the battle twenty dates ago, she should be able to do so this time around too.” Zhang Xuan replied with a light chuckle.

Back then, when he was offering pointers to Chen Leyao in order to deal with Zhang Zhuo, he had brought up many of the latter’s flaws. While the latter did make substantial advancement in his combat skills within this period of time, it was still impossible for him to shake off all of those bad fighting habits that had already been lodged deep into his bones within such a short period of time. As long Chen Leyao was no fool, she should be able to uncover quite a few of them easily, exploit them, and achieve the final victory.

“It was luck the previous time around, and luck won’t favor you every single time...” Zhang Yu remarked casually with a slight smirk and he watched the duel with his hands behind his back.

In his view, the reason why Chen Leyao was able to achieve victory the last time around was because the young man before him had made a thorough investigation into Zhang Zhuo’s profile, thus winning the battle of preparations. So, he made sure to look into Chen Leyao carefully and offered Zhang Zhuo very specific pointers in dealing with her.

With this, there was just no way on earth that Chen Leyao would stand a chance against Zhang Zhuo.

On the other hand, noting Zhang Yu’s response, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

In truth, it mattered not to him whether who won or lost the duel. Sometimes, the loser could stand to earn much more out of a duel as compared to the winner. Just take him for an example, he had won so many battles everything was starting to feel meaningless. In the deepest region of his heart, he deeply craved a defeat from a cultivator of the same cultivation realm...

But it was a pity that this simple request of him was never meant to be. No one in this world could give him what he

wanted, so this wish was doomed to remain unfulfilled for the rest of his entire life.

Kacha! Kacha!

While Zhang Xuan was deep in thought, in the dueling ring, Zhang Zhuo seemed to have suddenly activated some kind of secret art, causing his aura to intensify all of a sudden. This abrupt change caught Chen Leyao off guard. She was still able to stand toe-to-toe with Zhang Zhuo straight on previously, but in this moment, even dodging was starting to get real difficult for her.

She was forced to retreat time and time again, and it didn't take long before she was forced to the corner of the dueling ring. For the looks of it, it seemed her loss was sealed.

“There's no need to watch any longer. The conclusion is clear!” Seeing how Chen Leyao was trapped, completely losing control of the momentum of battle, Zhang Yu's lips curled up in delight.

“Indeed. The conclusion is clear.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

What he saw was a completely different image from Zhang Yu.

Even though Chen Leyao was indeed forced to the corner of the dueling ring, every single step that she moved was very steady, seemingly intentional actions to lure the opponent in. On the other hand, even though Zhang Zhuo appeared to hold the upper hand, being in the offensive position, the truth was that he had already lost all composure due to the time limit resulting from the activation of his secret art.

Looking at the situation from this perspective, it was clear that who was the one that truly wielded the upper hand in this battle.

It must be said that Chen Leyao had really been working hard during this period of time. She had managed to internalize all of his teachings to heart and even achieved an even deeper level of comprehension to them.

It was heartening to see that his efforts were not wasted.

Just as the conclusion of the duel was just around the corner, a voice suddenly sounded, “Zhang shi, there’s no need to worry about causing any accidental damage here. This way please.”

Feng Ziyi had already gotten up to another dueling ring with a sword in his hand, and he was looking at Zhang Xuan with fighting will burning in his eyes.

“Feng Ziyi wants to challenge Zhang Xuan?”

“But Zhang shi is ranked at the very bottom of the Elite Division! Even though he possesses an exceptional eye of discernment and outstanding ability to guide others, his cultivation is only at Leaving Aperture realm. There’s no way he could be a match for Feng Ziyi! Isn’t Feng Ziyi going a little too far by challenging him?”

“Indeed. What’s going on?”

A huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

Without a doubt, Feng Ziyi was the most prominent figure in their batch, and most viewed him as their goal. They hoped that they would be able to surpass him one day, but naturally, they also understood how slim the possibility was...

Considering how powerful Feng Ziyi was, if he was going to challenge anyone, it should be Zhang Yu or the others who were ranked in the top few in the Mountain Gate examination. Why was he challenging the last person in the Elite Division instead?

Even if he won the battle, his victory would only be frowned upon by others. After all, what kind of glory could one earn from defeating the weak?

“Brother Feng, I can be your opponent instead if you need a sparring partner.” Zhang Yu stepped forward and said with a frown.

However, Feng Ziyi simply waved his hands and said, “You aren’t a match for me.”

Those words immediately caused Zhang Yu’s eyes to turn cold. He leaped onto the dueling ring and harrumphed frostily, “How would you know without a fight?”

In the first place, he was already displeased at being outdone by Feng Ziyi back at the Mountain Gate examination. He was willing to concede that Feng Ziyi was a formidable adversary, but he couldn't accept been told by the latter to his face that he wasn't a match for him.

Instead of challenging me, the second ranker of the Mountain Gate examination, you chose to challenge the fiftieth place candidate instead...

Since you dare to snub me, I'll just have to show you what I'm worth then!

Hong long!

While Zhang Yu was still in the midst of his leap toward the dueling ring, he had already gathered strength in his palm and forcefully pushed it down upon the figure who stood at the middle of the dueling ring beneath him.

He was afraid that Feng Ziyi would reject his battle, so he used the most powerful capability he had at his disposal right from the start, not holding back at all.

"Not bad." Zhang Xuan nodded upon seeing the might of Zhang Yu's move.

It seemed not Feng Ziyi wasn't the only one who had grown substantially during his absence; clearly, Zhang Yu hadn't been slacking off either. He had already reached Grand Dominion realm pinnacle, just a step away from reaching Phantasmal Space realm.

As expected of the most talented genius of the Zhang Clan in this intake. Regardless of which aspect one assessed him from, he was indubitably a formidable figure.

"Like I have said, you aren't a match for me."

Standing in the face of Zhang Yu's attack, Feng Ziyi didn't even lift his eyelid. Instead, he tilted his body and thrust his palm up in a leisurely motion.

"Stop being so full of yourself. You might be a talented individual, but I'm also a one-in-a-million genius as well. You never know who will be the one standing at the very end of

this battle!” Hearing the haughty words coming out of Feng Ziyi’s mouth, Zhang Yu felt so furious that it almost seemed as if he would erupt like a volcano.

As he roared furiously, he drove the zhenqi in his body to its limits and channeled it all toward his palm, as if he wouldn’t be content unless he reduced the entire dueling ring into dust.

However, before this surge of strength could even strike Feng Ziyi, Zhang Yu suddenly felt the might of the other party’s palm piercing right through his attack and striking his chest squarely.

Peng!

With a look of disbelief on his face, Zhang Yu was sent flying into the sky before being planted into the ground not too far away.

In the view of others, he was sent flying as if he was a mere pesky fly before he could even leap onto the dueling ring. There was probably no better way to highlight the huge disparity in strength between the both of them.

“A one-in-a-million genius?” Feng Ziyi shook his head with a trace of mockery on his lips. He gazed down derisively at Zhang Yu as he said, “Perhaps it’s about time for you to wake up from your delusions!”

1384 Too Low Profile!

“You...”

Not expecting that he would be knocked down by a single slap from Feng Ziyi despite using his full strength, Zhang Yu forcefully pulled his head out from the ground and glared at Feng Ziyi with frenzied eyes.

He was a person blessed by the heavens. Even within the powerful Zhang Clan, he was known as an invincible existence to those around his age. He thought that even if he wasn't a match for Feng Ziyi, he would at least be able to put up a good fight. Yet, who could have thought that he would be knocked down before he could even get onto the dueling ring?!

And most importantly of all... he was even viewed in such disdain!

The sheer humiliation he felt from Feng Ziyi's actions left him feeling a crazed inside.

But as angry as he was, he also swiftly realized that Feng Ziyi had managed to enter Phantasmal Space realm a step earlier than him... It might only be a small step of difference between the two of them, but this small rift simply unbreachable.

Forcing himself to calm down, several doubts began surfacing in Zhang Yu's mind, “If he has already reached Phantasmal Space realm, why does he still want to challenge Zhang Shi?”

If Zhang Xuan's strength was around their level, it could still be understandable that Feng Ziyi could feel threatened by his existence and wanted to challenge him in order to establish his dominance. However, with his breakthrough to Phantasmal Space realm, the latter would be considered to have reached the higher echelons of the Sanctum of Sages, such that even some of the senior students wouldn't be a match for him at all. It simply didn't seem logical that Feng Ziyi would still be so caught up with a mere freshman despite his immense strength.

Peng!

While Zhang Yu was still in a state of confusion, a dull thud suddenly echoed, and a figure suddenly flew over in his direction and landed right beside him.

It was Zhang Zhuo, whom he had thought would win without any trouble earlier.

In this moment, Zhang Zhuo's face was swollen like a pig's head, an indescribably wretched sight. The ferocious aura that he commanded previously had vanished without a trace, and he was lying with a rather bizarre posture on the ground.

Zhang Yu's eyebrows immediately shot up in disbelief. He hurriedly turned to the stage and saw Chen Leyao walking down the dueling ring with a slightly pale face, but there was an exhilarated gleam in her eyes. She headed straight toward Zhang Xuan's direction before clasping her fist and bowing deeply.

"Impossible... This is impossible! How can she win against Zhang Zhuo?"

It was understandable why he would be sent flying by Feng Ziyi in a single slap—after all, the latter had already reached Phantasmal Space realm—but Zhang Zhuo wielded the absolute advantage in the earlier battle! It was irrational for it to end in such an outcome!

It could be said that Zhang Zhuo's loss was even more inconceivable than his own loss.

"Impossible?" Hearing those words, Chen Leyao puffed up her chest angrily and harrumphed, "If I can't even defeat Zhang Zhuo after Zhang Shi's guidance, wouldn't that mean that I am regressing as time passes by? Zhang Shi's guidance isn't something that just anyone can learn!"

Zhang Xuan was their young court chief's teacher, and it was a huge insult to compare the guidance from such an esteemed elder to that of an insignificant figure like Zhang Yu!

"But..." Zhang Yu clenched his fists tightly in indignation.

It was one thing for him to lose to the Phantasmal Space realm Feng Ziyi, but to lose to a mere Leaving Aperture realm fellow as well... He couldn't accept this! He just couldn't accept this!

This won't do. Others will eventually find out that I have offered pointers to Zhang Zhuo... What will become of my honor if I were to be found losing to someone as weak as Zhang Xuan? Zhang Yu narrowed his eyes menacingly.

Should I just challenge him to a battle? If I subdue him with absolute strength, I should be able to suppress with those rumors...

At this moment, Feng Ziyi's voice suddenly sounded from the dueling ring once more, "Zhang shi, show me if your full strength is really as formidable as you have put it out to be!"

"As you wish." Seeing that the other party was determined to try him out, Zhang Xuan unhesitatingly leaped up to the dueling ring and tapped his finger forward.

Wu wu wu wu!

Over a hundred swords immediately materialized all around Zhang Xuan. Every single one of them was pointed toward Feng Ziyi, each of them carrying a solemn aura.

"Good!" Having tasted how powerful the sword art was earlier, Feng Ziyi dared not to take it lightly.

He immediately drew out a semicircle with the sword in his hand and used it as a medium to channel his sword qi together, thus forming something reminiscent of a light barrier.

"Is that... the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters' Descending Cotton Sword Art?" Zhang Yu exclaimed grimly.

"Descending Cotton Sword Art?" a bewildered individual amidst the crowd asked.

"It's a Saint high-tier battle technique created by a master teacher in the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters while observing the drifting cotton in the air. In terms of defensive ability, it's only second to the Flowing Water Swordsmanship of the Third Sanctum Head. Once executed, a world full of flying cotton would drift around reminiscent of falling flowers,

creating an effect similar to that of the ultimate technique of the Yinyang Court, the Fallen Snow Sword..." Zhang Yu explained.

At this moment, he finally realized just how powerful Feng Ziyi was. Even without using his prowess as a Phantasmal Space realm expert, it would be nigh impossible for him to defeat the latter once the Descending Cotton Sword Art was activated.

Unless... he activated the ability of his unique bloodline!

But unless in a life and death situation, it would be best for him not to tap into that power, or else he would only be depleting himself needlessly. Even though he commanded quite a high standing in the Zhang Clan, which granted him access to a lot of resources, recovering from the side effects of activating his bloodline would still be extremely troublesome.

Despite his deep understanding of swordsmanship, he still chose to take a defensive stance right at the start of the battle... Does this mean that Zhang Xuan really wields the strength to stand against Feng Ziyi?

Amidst his shock, Zhang Yu also seemed to have dawned upon something as he turned his gaze to the young man standing opposite to Feng Ziyi with a look of intrigue.

If even someone as powerful as Feng Ziyi opted to take a defensive stance right at the start of the battle... wouldn't that mean that Zhang Xuan was even more powerful than him?

But no matter how powerful Zhang Xuan could be, he's only a mere Leaving Aperture realm cultivator. There's bound to be a limit to how powerful he is. Zhang Yu shook his head as he turned his gaze back to the dueling ring, not wanting to miss anything of the duel.

He saw Feng Ziyi tapping his left hand forward, and 'weng!'. Along with a surge of zhenqi, another layer of light barrier was formed in front of him.

"That's the Big Dipper Origin Aegis!" Zhang Yu's lips twitched in disbelief.

If Feng Ziyi execution of the Descending Cotton Sword Art had already left him deeply bewildered, the activation of this light barrier had left him disconcerted.

The Big Dipper Origin Aegis was a secret art which a 9-star master teacher from the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters came up with while observing the Seven Stars of the Big Dipper. This technique was known for its impenetrable defense to those of the same cultivation realm.

But to execute this technique on top of the defensive Descending Cotton Sword Art... just what in the world was Feng Ziyi trying to guard against?

Hula!

However, that wasn't the end of his shock yet. Feng Ziyi flicked his finger and crushed a jade token which materialized from his storage ring.

Weng!

A layer of light purple shimmer swiftly covered him.

“That’s a protective amulet forged by a Phantasmal Space realm expert! Even though it’s not as powerful as the Grand Cosmos Protective Amulet, it’s still more than enough to guard against the attack of any Saint 7-dan expert...” Zhang Yu’s lips twitched once more.

Aren't the two of you going to fight with one another?

Why is Feng Ziyi throwing out so many defensive measures then, even activating an invaluable protective amulet for it? Just what in the world is Zhang Xuan capable of that is able to instill such deep fear in him?

Kacha! Kacha!

While Zhang Yu still in a state of absolute bafflement, Feng Ziyi’s body began bulging once more, and in the blink of an eye, he made the transformation into a muscular, brawny man.

“Wait a moment... isn't that the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters' Golden Toad Metamorphosis? It's said to be created by a master teacher while observing the cultivation method of the Golden Toad. This technique will cloak one in a

thick layer of scales, granting one unparalleled defense and strength!” Zhang Yu tore his hair in frenzy.

“Just what the hell is he guarding against?!”

The first thing every cultivator would learn was how to defend. Only when one was capable of protecting himself would he be able to slay his opponent. Understanding this logic, Zhang Yu often spent his time studying the various defensive techniques out there in the world, so he was extremely knowledgeable about the subject.

But... to activate so many formidable defensive means at once, had Feng Ziyi gone insane or was Zhang Xuan really worthy of him setting up so many defensive measures for?

“Are you ready?” Paying no heed to the completely flabbergasted crowd below, Zhang Xuan asked with a smile.

“I’m ready. You can start now.” Feng Ziyi took in a deep breath before nodding.

While he thought that it was very likely that Zhang Xuan was bragging, just to be safe, he still chose to utilize every single defensive mean at his disposal.

“Very well. Brace yourself!” Saying these words, Zhang Xuan tapped his finger ahead.

The zhenqi in his body was immediately infused into the swords in the sky, and in the blink of an eye, the swords had already whizzed forward, forming a massive sea of sword qi, drowning Feng Ziyi within it.

“This...” Zhang Yu’s face turned aghast at the sight, and he subconsciously retreated eight steps as cold sweat rained down his head.

He had just made a quick calculation and found that even if he were to devote his full strength into defense, he would still stand no chance at withstanding that attack!

Wasn’t Zhang Xuan just a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator?

How could he possess such astounding offensive prowess?

Zhang Yu felt his throat turning hoarse from sheer fear. In his peripheral vision, he caught sight of Fei shi staring into the dueling ring with his mouth agape, and as if someone was gripping onto his throat, his body trembled uncontrollably.

Astonished by Fei shi's reaction, Zhang Yu turned his gaze over and asked, "Fei shi, you aren't able to withstand that sword art either?"

Fei shi slowly closed his eyes before shaking his head. Suppressing the horror he felt within, he replied with a bitter smile, "I'm afraid so. If he were to execute it against me in a real battle, there's a fair chance that I might lose my life!"

"It's that powerful?" Zhang Yu's eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets.

It was fortunate that he didn't challenge Zhang Xuan earlier on, or else he could have very well landed himself in a far worse state than Zhang Zhuo was in.

"No wonder why he's able to make Zhang Chun and Zhang Feng submit to him... I didn't think that I would fail to see through him as well. Without a doubt, he's the most terrifying individual in your batch!" Fei shi exclaimed.

"What? Zhang Chun and Zhang Feng submitted to him?" Zhang Yu felt as if a lightning bolt had just fallen upon him.

He had been too busy cultivating over the past few days that he wasn't aware of the most recent happenings in the Sanctum of Sages.

"Indeed. Zhang Chun came to look for me yesterday to obtain Zhang Xuan's profile, saying that he has been beaten up by the latter and wanted to exact vengeance... And from the looks of it, it seems like he hasn't fully recovered from his injuries yet!" Fei shi said with a nod.

Zhang Xuan was a freshman, and Fei shi was the person-in-charge of this new batch of students. Naturally, if Zhang Chun wanted to uncover anything concerning Zhang Xuan, the best way was to go through him. It was due to this that he found out about the matter of Zhang Xuan beating up Zhang Chun.

Even though Zhang Chun refused to elaborate on the matter, the tragic state he was in was more than sufficient for Fei Shi to fathom a good guess about what had happened.

“As for Zhang Feng... I just heard news that Zhang Shi had just challenged the Spirit Awakener Hall and became its Inceptive Sage. The first thing he did after becoming the Inceptive Sage was to enchant Zhang Feng’s body and commanded it to hit itself hard...”

Fei Shi flicked his wrist and threw a Communication Jade Token over.

Considering the huge ruckus that his student had caused, naturally, as the person-in-charge, he had already received the relevant news.

“He became the Inceptive Sage of the Spirit Awakener Hall... and he enchanted the physical body of a living human?” Zhang Yu’s lips twitched, and he nearly collapsed to the ground.

All along, he thought that the only one who was worthy of his attention in this batch of freshmen was Feng Ziyi, but who could have thought that there would be a true monster lurking in their midst...

Others might not be familiar with them, but he knew the Zhang Chun and Zhang Feng brothers very well. They were top geniuses in the Zhang Clan, his idol for a period of time. And yet, they actually were defeated by a freshman...

If these words hadn’t come directly from Fei Shi, he wouldn’t have dared believe such a thing to be true!

“Given his strength and capability, why is he only ranked in the fiftieth place in the entrance examination?” A question suddenly surfaced in Zhang Yu’s mind, and he asked.

Since even he was able to clinch the second place, Zhang Xuan should be able to take the first place easily with just the swordsmanship he was executing.

“It’s probably because he has a humble personality and wishes to maintain a low profile... Otherwise, isn’t it too much of a coincidence for him to be exactly in the fiftieth place, no more

no less...” Recalling what had happened back then during the entrance examination, Fei shi said.

It was only in the last three minutes that Zhang Xuan shot up to the fiftieth place, not showing any hints of his astounding talent prior to that. Very clearly, he had been holding himself back throughout the examination.

“You’re right...” Having heard of that incident as well, Zhang Yu nodded in realization as admiration seeped into his eyes.

He couldn’t help but exclaim, “He really is too low profile!”

1385 Call Me Senior!

In order to increase their chances of eventually becoming Inceptive Sages in the Sanctum of Sages, every single one of them pushed themselves to perform to the best of their abilities during the entrance examination. Just take him for example, he didn't sleep a wink for the three days of the examination, fearing that a moment of slack could mean a loss in opportunity for him.

On the other hand, the young man was content with just enrolling into the Elite Division. Ranking and the sort didn't mean a thing to him at all!

In fact... even when he was doubted by so many people, he didn't even bother to speak up against them.

As tranquil as a still lake, achieving a state of perfect inner peace; this must be what true experts, true talent, and true humility truly were.

“Indeed. If not for Feng Ziyi's challenge, I would have never known that there would be such a formidable figure in this batch of freshmen.” Fei shi remarked as well.

He was just about to continue showering praises on Zhang Xuan when a student suddenly rushed over to him and whispered a few words in his ears. His eyebrows suddenly shot up, and he quickly turned around.

“Elder Han Fu, what brings you here today?” Fei shi asked with utmost politeness.

Zhang Yu also quickly turned around, and he saw an old man with snowy white hair and beard standing before him. This old man seemed to exude a transcendental aura, similar to a deity from the heavens.

“Elder Han Fu?” Zhang Yu quickly recounted everything relating to the Sanctum of Sages he had seen in the Zhang Clan, and his face swiftly turned grim.

“The first elder of the Sanctum of Sages’ Spirit Awakener Guild, a Saint 8-dan pinnacle expert...” Zhang Yu noted in shock.

He hurriedly clasped his fist and bowed, “Zhang Clan’s Zhang Yu pays respects to Elder Han!”

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony.” Elder Han casually waved his hand before turning his gaze to the dueling ring anxiously. “When will Zhang shi be done with his battles?”

“May I know the reason why Elder Han is looking for Zhang shi? If it’s an urgent matter, I can help you stop the duel.” Fei shi said.

The other party was the strongest expert of the Sanctum of Sages’ Spirit Awakener Hall. Even if Zhang shi had become the Inceptive Sage, it still shouldn’t warrant the other party coming down here personally to look for him.

“I don’t know how I should speak of this...” Hearing Fei shi’s question, Elder Han’s face turned scarlet in embarrassment. “Actually, I just want to ask him when the guardian golem he has enchanted earlier will finish its run. Due to its increasing speed, it has already knocked down the halls of four other guilds in the vicinity of the Spirit Awakener Hall. If it doesn’t stop soon, I’m afraid that our Spirit Awakener Hall will become a public enemy in the Sanctum of Sages...”

Just by having the guardian golem walk seven steps, one would have already broken the record for the Spirit Awakener Hall for the past three thousand years. Yet, not only did the young man make the guardian golem do warm-ups, he even made it run non-stop... It had already been a few hours now, but it was still sprinting relentlessly, refusing to stop. He had tried to stop it, only to be knocked over every single time. He was completely helpless against it.

And honestly speaking, it would still be fine if the guardian golem were to obediently run its lap. Due to the unique nature of the material used to craft the golems, it was only a matter of time before it came to a halt... but the golem just had to do frog leaps, push-ups, squats, leg raises, sprints, fast sprints, front rows, back flips, and somersaults on top of that...

And that wasn't the worst of it yet. The lap it was running was growing bigger and bigger, such that it was beginning to expand its running course through the various guilds situated in vicinity to the Spirit Awakener Hall, crashing down everything that stood in the way of its run...

If it didn't stop soon, the other guilds might just destroy their guardian golem out of rage, and that would be truly problematic.

"The guardian golem of the Spirit Awakener Hall is running non-stop?"

"It has knocked down quite a few guilds already?"

Fei shi and Zhang Yu staggered on the spot.

"Also, when I came over, I saw that the Shrine of Seers had been reduced to rubble. According to what I have heard, it seems to be related to him too. So, I was a little worried that they might attempt to cause him trouble." Elder Han said.

"The Shrine of Seers has been reduced to rubble?" Fei shi and Zhang Yu looked at one another with twitching lips...

What happened to being low profile?

These were matters that no low profile individual could possibly pull off!

Unable to take it any longer, they raised their gazes toward the dueling ring.

And what they saw was Feng Ziyi being pressed against the transparent glass-like barrier around the dueling ring, his face warped like a fried dough twist. Sword qi continued assaulting him relentlessly from behind, and his eyes seemed to have lost all light, as if he had lost all hope for life.

"Too powerful..."

The four barriers which Feng Ziyi had prepared in advance had all shattered, and his entire body was filled with sword slashes. At this moment, he appeared no different from a miserable beggar.

Seeing this sight, the two of them couldn't help but gulp down a mouthful of saliva.

For the might of the sword qi to remain so powerful even after tearing down so many defensive barriers... This level of offensive power was something which not even Fei shi was capable of.

“Zhang shi, I would like to ask when will...” Seeing that the barrage of sword qi was still pushing forward relentlessly, showing no signs of stopping at all, Fei shi shouted.

However, before he could finish his words, Feng Ziyi's furious bellows echoed in the air, “You liar! Liar! You said that you only used a sixth of your full strength, but you only used a tenth earlier!”

The direct disciple of Yang shi was already on the verge of going insane.

When the other party first said that he had only used a third of his strength, he immediately thought that it was a lie. Then, when the other party said that it was actually a sixth instead, he became even more convinced of his prior assumption, which was also the reason why he proposed coming over here to see for himself whether the other party's words were true...

But in the end, a sixth did turn out to be a lie as well...

Because it wasn't a sixth but a tenth!

If it's a tenth, just say that it is a tenth! Why in the world would you say that it's a sixth? Because of that, I didn't put up sufficient defensive measures, and I nearly got beaten to death!

Do you know that your humility nearly cost my life?

Hong long long! Hong long long!

It was only when the zhenqi in Zhang Xuan's body was drained of its final drop did the Sea Severing Sword finally come to an end. While gasping for air, a look of helplessness could be seen on his face.

Even if the massive increment in his zhenqi capacity to fivefold of its original amount and the recent breakthrough of his cultivation from Leaving Aperture realm primary stage to

pinnacle, he was still unable to fully control the Sea Severing Sword yet. Once executed, he would have to deplete his zhenqi dry before he could stop.

In the past, due to his lacking zhenqi, the Sea Severing Sword would stop after a few breaths. This time around, however, the barrage of sword qi lasted for a whole ten minutes before finally fading to an end.

Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan retracted his swords from the dueling ring before raising his head. The first thing he saw was Feng Ziyi being pressed against the transparent barrier of the dueling ring in a very weird position. Nearly all of his clothes had been ripped at this point, and while he still had breath remaining in him, he had sustained severe injuries.

“I didn’t lie to you. While I was executing my sword art, new inspiration suddenly came to me, allowing me to raise its prowess by a little bit more...” Zhang Xuan quickly rushed over to help Feng Ziyi down from the protective barrier while explaining in a slightly awkward tone.

This time around, it really wasn’t his fault. He hadn’t lied to the other party at all. It was simply because he had never executed the Sea Severing Sword with such might before, so there was plenty of time for him to experiment with new things in the midst of its execution. Through trial and error, he managed to gradually refine the might of the Sea Severing Sword, thus resulting in its offensive might growing stronger and stronger.

While there were already no flaws in the Sea Severing Sword at this point, the might of his attack was still affected by how well he could coordinate his spirit and his movements together. Naturally, the more in harmony he was with his swordplay, the stronger his swordsmanship would be.

“You are able to raise the might of your sword art by such a huge proportion in the midst of its execution?” Feng Ziyi spurted blood.

It is already such a powerful sword art, and you were still able to enhance its prowess in matters of minutes... All those who

called themselves swordmasters would really have to lower their heads in embarrassment before you!

It took a long while before Feng Ziyi finally recovered from his distraught state. He glared at Zhang Xuan furiously and said, "You are indeed formidable, but as master teachers, our core responsibility lies not in combat but teaching. So, I would like to challenge you to a duel of impartation!"

At this moment, Zhang Xuan had already finished instructing Elder Han Fu how he could control the guardian golem. Hearing that Feng Ziyi still wanted to continue on with the duel, he couldn't help but say, "Why don't we just forget it? I'm afraid that you'll be traumatized by it."

He had no idea why the other party was so insistent on challenging him, but if they were to really compete in the duel of impartation... there was really a good chance that the other party might just succumb to his mental trauma and go insane.

"There's nothing for me to be traumatized over! My teacher has told me that I'll be his only direct disciple, but all of a sudden, you appeared as well. I would like to see just how formidable of a person you are that he would make an exception and take you in as well!" Feng Ziyi harrumphed.

Make an exception? Those three words made Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Judging from those words, it seemed like the other party still hadn't realized that he was a fake yet. The other party thought that Yang Shi had secretly accepted another student behind his back, so he came over to confront him out of jealousy.

And of course, the other party hadn't expected to suffer such a tragic defeat as well.

There are some formidable master teachers in the world who would leave their acceptance of students up to fate. As a result, other than he himself, not even his own students might necessarily know of each other's existence. Having read quite a few books, Zhang Xuan was aware of some of the eccentric quirks of master teachers.

Take him for example, if he were to take in another student right now, Zhao Ya, Wang Ying, Yuan Tao, and the others would definitely be unaware of the existence of their new junior.

“It’s only out of sheer luck that I managed to win teacher’s favor.” Seeing that Feng Ziyi really wasn’t intending to expose his fake identity, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He looked at the other party with an expectant look and asked, “I haven’t met teacher for quite a long time now. May I know where he is at the moment?”

“I have lost contact with teacher two years ago, so I’m not too sure of his whereabouts at the moment either. I have tried to reach him through a Communication Jade Token, but it doesn’t seem like he’s able to receive my message.” Feng Ziyi shook his head.

“That’s a relief!” Zhang Xuan nearly leaped up in joy upon hearing those words.

All this while, his heart had been leaping in trepidation, fearing that the other party would tell on him. However, since the other party was unable to contact Yang shi, that would mean that he was at least safe for the moment.

As long as he became the sanctum head before Yang shi returned, with his newfound esteemed standing, no one would dare to challenge him even if his lie were to be exposed then.

In other words, time was vital to him at the moment. He would really have to make haste, or else everything could just blow up on him.

“That’s a relief?” Feng Ziyi’s eyebrows shot up.

Shouldn’t you be disappointed that I am unable to contact our teacher? Why are you getting so excited instead?

“Ah, I misspoke. What I meant to say is ‘That’s a bummer’...” Realizing that he had accidentally spoken his thoughts out loud, Zhang Xuan quickly changed his words.

“Your words don’t seem to match your attitude...” Feng Ziyi eyed Zhang Xuan in skepticism for a moment before asking, “So, how is it? Will you accept my challenge?”

“Junior Ziyi, you aren’t a match for me, so why don’t we just drop the matter? Since we are both Yang shi’s students, I don’t want to traumatize you unnecessarily.” Zhang Xuan waved his hand casually.

“Junior Ziyi?” Feng Ziyi nearly exploded on the spot. “I have been with teacher since I was seven, and I’m older than you too. You should be addressing me as senior instead!”

“Isn’t there the saying that it’s the proficient one who should be viewed in esteem? I’m stronger than you, so it should go without saying that I’m your senior. If you can defeat me any day, I’ll be more than happy to call you senior.” Zhang Xuan replied leisurely.

Since Feng Ziyi was unaware of his lies, he could make use of him as a shield in order to verify his identity as Yang shi’s student.

“You...” Feng Ziyi’s face turned scarlet as words choked up his throat.

Despite possessing cultivation far beneath his, it was a fact that the other party’s fighting prowess was way greater than him. Just on the sword art executed earlier, had the other party not redirected the might of the sword art elsewhere to reduce the impact on him, there was no way he would have still been alive right now.

Considering that they were both direct disciples and that their teacher hadn’t explicitly stated their seniority, the convention was to view the stronger disciple as the senior. And given that he was unable to defeat the other party, there was indeed no convincing reason why he should be the senior.

“We’ll decide that after the duel of impartation. If you can defeat me once more, I’ll willingly acknowledge you as my senior.” Feng Ziyi flung his sleeves and harrumphed coldly.

Seeing that Feng Ziyi was reluctant to give up on the idea, Zhang Xuan frowned. Just as he was about to speak up, a young man suddenly rushed into the hall with a peculiar look on his face.

“Fei shi, Elder Liao of the Corridor of Puppets is waiting outside. He says that he wishes to acknowledge Zhang Xuan as his teacher...”

“Elder Liao wishes to acknowledge... Zhang Xuan as his teacher?”

Whoosh!

Deathly silence devoured the entire hall.

1386 Boreal Fire Poison

Even though Elder Liao was just a bottom-level managerial elder, his cultivation had already reached Saint 7-dan Phantasmal Space realm. For such an expert to run over and acknowledge a Leaving Aperture realm cultivator as his teacher...

Was there not something really wrong?

The group of Elite Division students shot horrified glances at one another.

Feng Ziyi felt a stinging sensation on his face, and he felt so stifled that he could have spurted blood.

It was just a moment ago that he had insisted on challenging the other party to a duel of impartation when an elder possessing far higher cultivation than him came over to acknowledge the other party as his teacher. It was as if he had lost the battle even before it was even fought!

That face slap had simply come too quickly!

On the other hand, Zhang Yu felt completely crazed.

For even an elder to acknowledge him as a teacher, how was that low profile!

“Elder Liao from the Corridor of Puppets?” Zhang Xuan was also taken aback for quite a moment before realization struck him.

More than twenty days ago, while he was challenging the Corridor of Puppets, he had failed to rein in his strength and accidentally destroyed the entire corridor. Feeling deeply guilty of his actions, he had decided to offer some pointers to Elder Liao, advising him against practicing the Hiemal Yin Formula.

Back then, the other party did not seem to have paid much mind to his advice. However, the fact that he had rushed over

to acknowledge him as his teacher meant that something must have gone wrong.

Upon making sense of the situation, Zhang Xuan waved his hand and said, "Let him in."

"Yes!"

The student shot a glance at Fei shi, and upon receiving the latter's approval, he quickly backed out of the room.

Not too long later, two students walked into the hall with a stretcher. There was a frail-looking old man lying on the stretcher, and he looked as if he would lose consciousness at any moment.

Standing by the side of a stretcher was an elder with a flowing white beard. His eyebrows were tightly knitted, reflecting a grim expression.

Feng Ziyi's eyebrows shot up upon seeing the elder, and he exclaimed in astonishment, "Divine Healer Bai Yu!"

"Bai Yu?" Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over to the elder as well.

Even though it had been more than twenty days since he enrolled into the Sanctum of Sages, he had spent a huge portion of his time outside, so he was unfamiliar with most of the elders and experts there.

"He's the person-in-charge of the Physician Guild in our Sanctum of Sages. His medicinal skills are said to have reached an unfathomable level, to the point that he's said to be able to breathe life back into any dying patient. Due to that, others respectfully address him as the Divine Healer!" Feng Ziyi explained.

In terms of fighting prowess, Divine Healer Bai Yu was nowhere near the top, but without a doubt, he was one of the most esteemed figures in the Sanctum of Sages.

Countless experts were indebted to him, and they would rally upon his call.

As such, he commanded great prestige and fame.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response to Feng Ziyi's words.

To have to be brought in on a stretcher with the Divine Healer following beside him... did Elder Liao ignore my advice and continued practicing the Hiemal Yin Formula? Zhang Xuan frowned in disapproval.

He had specially warned the other party against cultivating the technique, but the other party still landed himself in such a state. It was almost as if the other party was toying with his own life!

Physician Bai Yu stepped forward and asked, "Are you Zhang Xuan?"

On the stretcher, Elder Liao exclaimed, "Yes, he's Zhang shi... Zhang shi, please save me!"

In this moment, his face was completely pale, and it seemed as if there was a layer of frost atop his skin. His body was trembling non-stop, and before Zhang Xuan could even respond, he was already struggling to push himself upright.

"What happened?" Zhang Xuan asked Elder Liao with a grim voice.

To be honest, the reason he did not deal with the problem regarding Elder Liao on the spot back then was not only because the latter had a lack of trust in him. Even if the elder continued practicing the Hiemal Yin Formula, it should not have caused too much of a problem in the short-run. His warning should have led to the latter taking preventive measures as soon as he realized that something was amiss, so how did the latter end up in such a state still?

"Quiet down, or else no one will be able to save you!" Divine Healer Bai Yu tapped Elder Liao back onto the stretcher before turning to look at Zhang Xuan. "Are you the one who told him to stop practicing the Hiemal Yin Formula a while ago?"

"I did," Zhang Xuan replied.

"Utter nonsense!" Divine Healer Bai Yu waved his hand angrily as he glared at Zhang Xuan coldly. "Have you tried to fully understand the complexity of his physical condition before offering such advice? Do you know how severe a

consequence you have caused by running your ignorant mouth?”

“What do you mean by that?” Zhang Xuan asked with a deep frown, not expecting to be bellowed at by the other party.

In order to compensate Elder Liao for the damage he had caused, he had used the Library of Heaven’s Path to check on the other party’s condition. The other party was suffering from some kind of trauma, which would only be further aggravated by the cultivation of the Hiemal Yin Formula. The continued cultivation of the technique would bring greater strain to his body, so he had decided to offer a word of advice to the other party.

Yet, why was this Divine Healer Bai Yu making it seem as if Elder Liao’s current condition was caused by the advice he had offered?

Taking a step back, even if he was wrong, surely a Saint 7-dan elder would not be so obedient as to stop cultivating the Hiemal Yin Formula altogether, especially if it would cause huge problems to his body!

“What do I mean by that?” Placing his hands behind his back, Divine Healer Bai Yu sneered coldly. “Liao Xin was afflicted with fire poison while fighting with others a long time ago, so he requires the Hiemal Yin Formula in order to suppress it. Yet, you advised him against cultivating it, resulting in the fire poison to relapse. Are you going to deny that this is your fault?”

“If you don’t know the slightest thing about medicine, you should never diagnose others on a whim. If you are a physician, that makes it even worse. Did your teacher not teach you never to jump to a conclusion without analyzing the patient’s physical condition carefully? A misdiagnosis can easily cost a person’s life!” Divine Healer roared vehemently in anger.

He had a close relationship with Elder Liao, and he did not think that he would find the latter on the verge of death just after a few days of absence. How could he possibly not be angry?

If not for the latter listening to the atrocious advice of this young man, such a thing would never have happened.

“Are you trying to tell me that his condition is a result of the fire poison acting up?” Zhang Xuan asked with a deep frown.

A body coated with a layer of frost, and you are telling me that it’s the working of a fire poison... Are you messing with me?

“Indeed. What he’s afflicted with is the Boreal Fire Poison. Once it acts up, the surface of his body will become as cold as ice, but his innards will burn as if the magma underground. Before long, his zhenqi will be burned dry, and his dantian could very well be crippled. That’s the reason he has to practice the Hiemal Yin Formula in order to keep the fire poison under control!” Physician Bai Yu harrumphed coldly.

“Boreal Fire Poison?” While Zhang Xuan did not think much of the term, Fei shi trembled in horror upon hearing those words, and his face paled conspicuously. “Physician Bai, are you referring to the Boreal Fire Poison that is found in Hanqi Subterranean Gallery?”

“Hanqi Subterranean Gallery?”

“Of the many Subterranean Galleries that link the Master Teacher Continent to the otherworldly battlefields, there are seven that are known to be extraordinarily dangerous, and the seventh on the list is the Hanqi Subterranean Gallery!”

“I have heard of it, too! The most frightening aspect of the Hanqi Subterranean Gallery is this Boreal Fire Poison. Despite being a flame, it harnesses all of the attributes of frost as well, commanding both the powers of heat and cold. Even a Saint high-tier artifact would find itself melting instantaneously into liquid in its face!”

Such hushed discussion could be heard from the crowd in the surroundings.

Most of the students in the Sanctum of Sages were top geniuses coming from all kinds of major powers and clans, so they had some knowledge of the various Subterranean Galleries even though it was classified information.

“Indeed, it’s the Boreal Fire Poison. Back then, in order to prevent the Otherworldly Demons from reaching the Master Teacher Continent, he bravely dived into the midst of flames to fend them off. While he managed to survive the ordeal by sheer luck, he was unfortunately afflicted with fire poison as a result.” Physician Bai Yu sighed with a shake of his head.

“I have tried all kinds of means in order to treat him, even blood and bone switching, but none of them worked. In the end, I could only make him practice the Hiemal Yin Formula in order to suppress it temporarily. The reason I left a while ago was to seek the Nymphaea Tetragona, hoping that it could resolve his problems once and for all. Yet, who would have thought that a freshman like you would actually convince him against cultivating the Hiemal Yin Formula, causing the fire poison to relapse and even assault the depths of his soul? Even I am completely helpless before such a situation!”

“This...” Hearing Divine Healer Bai Yu’s words, everyone subconsciously turned their gazes to Zhang Xuan.

Even Fei shi had a deep frown on his face.

Physicians carried a heavy responsibility on their shoulders. As the saying went, ‘an incompetent doctor kills’. As such, if a physician was uncertain about a patient’s condition, it would be best for him not to treat the patient. Otherwise, he would only be harming himself and others.

“Physician Bai, I know that you are worried about me, but that isn’t entirely the case. The reason I stopped practicing the Hiemal Yin Formula is because I could feel problems cropping up in my cultivation. Zhang shi really doesn’t have any blame in this matter,” Elder Liao said feebly.

“Even after what he has done to you, you are still speaking up for him?” Divine Healer Bai Yu harrumphed coldly in response to Elder Liao’s words.

“He was able to tell that I practice the Hiemal Yin Formula with just a look, so I found his words credible,” Elder Liao said weakly.

The Hiemal Yin Formula was one of the rare cultivation techniques that would not manifest its properties in one's zhenqi, making it extremely hard to discern. Yet, the young man was still able to recognize it with just a single glance. He had been overwhelmed by shock at that moment, and after returning back to his residence, he had given the matter much thought and felt that the young man's words made perfect sense. Thus, he had eventually decided to reduce his cultivation of the technique.

Initially, he could feel himself getting better and better, but who knew that the fire poison would suddenly act up three days ago, placing him in the current condition he was in?

Even Divine Healer Bai Yu found himself completely helpless before his condition.

With no other choice, he had suddenly recalled the words of this young man, so he had decided to seek him out.

Considering how the young man was able to see through his Hiemal Yin Formula and wield such astounding strength despite his young age, achieving feats that even the little princess of the Luo Clan failed to achieve, he thought that the other party just might have a way to resolve his current condition.

And that was what led to the previous declaration that he wanted to acknowledge the young man as his teacher.

As long as his affliction could be resolved, what qualms did he have with taking the young man as his teacher?

Not to mention, if the young man was really able to cure the Boreal Fire Poison, it would mean that his medicinal skills had reached a level that even the higher elders of the Sanctum of Sages would be deeply impressed by!

“Credible? If he's really credible, do you think that you'd be reduced to such a state?” Divine Healer Bai Yu was so angry that he could have exploded on the spot.

He really could not understand the mindset of this old friend of his.

He was the Divine Healer of the Sanctum of Sages, but instead of believing him, his old friend chose to trust a mere student who had cleared the entrance examination just a couple of days ago.

“Enough! Let me take a look at his condition!” Seeing how the duo was still arguing with one another at this point, Zhang Xuan walked toward Elder Liao.

He had checked on Elder Liao’s condition using the Library of Heaven’s Path, and given the state he was in then, there would be no problem with him stopping the Hiemal Yin Formula altogether. So, why would the fire poison suddenly relapse?

“You want to take a look at his condition? Do you even know medicine?” Divine Healer Bai Yu sneered coldly.

In response to that, Zhang Xuan casually flicked his wrist and threw an emblem over.

Catching it, Divine Healer Bai Yu lowered his head to take a look, and a slight hint of astonishment flickered across his eyes.

It was a physician emblem with seven glistening stars on it.

As a 7-star physician, even if the young man’s medicinal skill was far beneath his, he should not be someone who would take a patient’s condition lightly and spout nonsense.

Knowing that the young man was not just fooling around, Divine Healer Bai Yu’s hostility alleviated slightly, and he said with a wave of his hand, “Fine, take a look then. I hope that you can give me a satisfactory answer today!”

Fei shi and the others also looked on the situation intently, curious about what the young man would do.

Zhang Xuan had displayed amazing prowess in swordsmanship earlier, and his ability to guide others on their cultivation was also extraordinary. Not to mention, he had also managed to become the Inceptive Sage of the Spirit Awakener Hall. If he was proficient in the Way of Medicine too, that would truly be incredible.

Paying no heed to the crowd, Zhang Xuan walked up to Elder Liao and placed his fingers lightly on the latter's pulse.

A moment later, he shook his head.

Seeing that there was something wrong with the young man's expression, Elder Liao asked with a deeply apprehensive tone, "What's wrong?"

"This..." Zhang Xuan was silent for quite a while before saying hesitantly, "Elder Liao, I would like to discuss something important with you."

"Zhang shi, feel free to speak. As long as I can be freed from my pain, I won't turn down any request that you have," Elder Liao replied in a feeble tone, reminiscent of an old man on his deathbed.

"That's good." Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. With an earnest look, he said, "I would like to knock you out for a moment."

"Knock me out?"

"That's right. If it's not convenient for me to do it, you can also faint by yourself. In any case, as long as you're out, I'll be able to discern the root of your illness and treat you." Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly.

"..." Elder Liao.

"..." Physician Bai Yu.

1387 You Are an Incompetent Physician!

Given Elder Liao's current condition, it was clearly infeasible to have him stand up and execute a punching routine. The fastest way was to knock the other party and analyze him through the Library of Heaven's Path as an artifact.

Previously, he could still rely on medicinal herbs to knock others out, but that would not work on a Saint 7-dan expert like Elder Liao.

“Utter nonsense!”

Before Elder Liao could say a word, Divine Healer Bai Yu had already lashed out furiously.

As the head of the Sanctum of Sages' Physician Guild, he had a deep understanding of the various diagnosis methods out there, and this was inclusive of those eccentric and unorthodox ones. But one that required the patient to be knocked out... Pardon his ignorance but he had really never heard of something like that!

Once a person was knocked out, there would be some deviation in their metabolism and other internal functions. While it was still possible to examine external injuries, it would be hard to analyze the internal traumas that the patient was afflicted with in such a state. So, for the young man to ask to knock Elder Liao out right from the start, just what the heck was he up to?

“How about it? Will you knock yourself out, or should I do it instead?” Paying completely no heed to the raging Divine Healer Bai Yu, Zhang Xuan looked at Elder Liao with a compassionate smile.

“I...” Elder Liao also doubted the existence of such a diagnosis method in the world, so he instinctively turned to

Divine Healer Bai Yu with a confused gaze to seek confirmation.

“Forget it, I’ll just do it myself then.” Noticing Elder Liao’s hesitation, Zhang Xuan decisively raised his hand and chopped down toward the top of Elder Liao’s head.

Hu la!

The surrounding air swiftly compressed together, making breathing highly difficult. Just as Zhang Xuan’s chop was about to reach the other party’s forehead, he abruptly pulled his hand back.

Poof!

A short but resounding sonic boom echoed, and Elder Liao immediately fainted.

“That is... the Air Compression Spirit Clearing Art? The secret art that not even 8-star physicians are capable of pulling off?” Divine Healer Bai Yu’s eyes narrowed in shock.

“Air Compression Spirit Clearing Art?” Fei shi asked in incomprehension.

“There are some injuries and illnesses that the treatment process is simply too difficult for those lacking in mental fortitude to bear. Thus, in order to prevent any unnecessary complications during the treatment, it would be best for the patient to be knocked out. However, regardless of whether it’s the use of anesthesia or any other means, it would leave a certain degree of damage to the patient’s body. This Air Compression Spirit Clearing Art makes use of a sonic boom resulting from the movement of one’s palm to stimulate one’s Primordial Spirit, forcing one to lose consciousness temporarily.

“It goes without saying that the ability to knock out a patient without causing any damage to his physical state can make a huge difference to patients who are already in a critical state and cannot take any more trauma. For this reason, most physicians would seek to learn it even though it’s a demonic tune in the strictest of sense, but unfortunately, it’s an extremely difficult skill to master. Even I am still unable of

performing it, but who would have thought that that fellow over there would be able to pull it off?”

At this point, a hint of doubtfulness surfaced in the eyes of Divine Healer Bai Yu as he asked, “Could it be that... he’s a highly-skilled demonic tunist too?”

On the other hand, seeing that Elder Liao has been knocked out, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. He placed his fingers on the other party’s pulse once more.

Weng!

A book materialized in the Library of Heaven’s Path, and he quickly flipped it open.

With just a look, his eyebrows immediately began twitching wildly. He turned to the elder behind him and lashed out furiously. “You incompetent physician, will you only be happy after you treat Elder Liao to his death?”

“What did you say?” Divine Healer Bai Yu’s face darkened upon hearing those words.

Hailed as the Divine Healer in the Sanctum of Sages, putting aside managerial elders, even the top elders would have to address him respectfully. Yet, this fellow actually dared call him an incompetent physician? The burning rage within him nearly caused him to blow up on the spot.

Hong long!

Unable to control his temper, a terrifying aura immediately gushed forth from him, plunging the surroundings into the midst of winter. Everyone’s body immediately stiffened.

Saint 8-dan pinnacle!

An expert of this caliber could already be considered one of the top figures in the Master Teacher Continent!

Unfazed by the pressure from Bai Yu’s aura, Zhang Xuan bellowed, “Are you really unaware of what I am saying? If you don’t know how to treat Elder Liao, just keep your hands off him! To think that you would call yourself Divine Healer... More like Goodbye Healer!”

“You...” Seeing the deep disdain in the young man’s eyes, Divine Healer Bai Yu felt a feeling so suffocating in his chest that it felt as if he would explode.

He had never been humiliated in such a way.

He glared coldly at Zhang Xuan before forcefully reigning his power back in. Flinging his sleeves coldly, he said, “No matter what your background is, if you can’t give me an explanation that I am happy with today, don’t blame me for getting physical on you!”

Those who were qualified to enroll in the Sanctum of Sages usually came from illustrious backgrounds. As angry as Divine Healer Bai Yu was, he still did not dare make a move recklessly.

“You still want me to explain to you?” Zhang Xuan shook his head and snorted.

He turned his gaze to the fainted Elder Liao and abruptly raised his leg and kicked the latter’s head.

“What are you doing!” Divine Healer Bai Yu roared in shock.

Given how the strength and speed behind Zhang Xuan’s kick, if it were to hit, Elder Liao’s face would explode on the spot!

Are you insane?

You are here to treat, but first, you knocked out your patient, then you went ahead to berate me, and now, you are even attempting to murder your patient.

You really need to get your head treated!

Hu la!

Divine Healer Bai Yu rushed forward and flicked his hand, creating a ripple through space with his power of Dimension Sundering, thus successfully deflecting Zhang Xuan’s attack.

“Get this hindrance out of the way.” In the face of Divine Healer Bai Yu’s impediment, Zhang Xuan raised his eyebrows and flicked his wrist.

Divine Healer Bai Yu was slightly startled by Zhang Xuan’s words, and before he could even process what was being said,

his heart suddenly jolted in fear.

Hu la!

A Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast suddenly materialized right before everyone's eyes, and a thick tail swept right in Divine Healer Bai Yu's direction.

"You..." Before Divine Healer Bai Yu could even react, he was struck squarely in his shoulder. An intense pain assaulted him as he was sent flying backward.

He was in the same cultivation realm as the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, but the latter was still more powerful than him due to its innate Dragon Bloodline. On top of that, its appearance was too sudden, so he was caught off guard, causing him to suffer a setback right from the start.

"You bastard!" Divine Healer Bai Yu snarled with a livid expression.

He immediately prepared himself to dash forward once more, but before he could make a move, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was already before him.

Despite its massive physique, the movement of the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was as swift as a bolt of lightning. Its enormous claws tore sharply through space, falling down upon him.

Given the speed at which the claws were moving, Divine Healer Bai Yu knew that he would not be able to evade on time, so he clenched his fists tightly to face the attack.

Hong long long!

The collision between the two experts caused a turbulent shockwave to ripple into the surroundings. The transparent barriers that shielded the individual dueling rings from the surroundings wavered non-stop, flickering in and out of existence, as if they would succumb to the pressure and shatter.

At the same time, conspicuous spatial ripples could be seen spreading outward, forcefully pushing the crowd back.

"What is happening?"

“Why did that saint beast suddenly appear out of nowhere?”

Fei shi, Feng Ziyi, and the others were dumbstruck.

Were they not in the midst of treating Elder Liao?

Why would they suddenly start fighting one another?

Furthermore, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was obeying Zhang Xuan’s command, so it should be his tamed beast, right? But how in the world did he manage to tame a Saint 8-dan beast in the first place?

A tamed beast can be considered a beast tamer’s strength as well. If I had really challenged Zhang Xuan earlier, I would have been tragically defeated. Zhang Yu felt cold sweat pouring down his back.

At this moment, he felt deeply thankful that Feng Ziyi had spoken up before he did. Otherwise, just a claw from the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast would have been sufficient to spell his death.

The Inceptive Sage of the Spirit Awakener Hall, pummeling Zhang Chun and Zhang Feng, subduing Feng Ziyi with a single sword art, berating Divine Healer Bai Yu without any hesitation, and bringing out such a powerful saint beast in public...

Previously, Zhang Yu had thought that Zhang Xuan was an extremely low-profile person, but from the looks of it now... it seemed that he just did not know the latter well enough!

There was probably no one as high profile as him!

In fact, even most high-profile individuals would only cause a commotion every now and then, but this fellow was inciting incidents one after another, as if he would not be content until he was constantly at the forefront of everyone’s mind!

To think that he had even thought that that fellow was unworthy of his notice at one point in time... Even if he had viewed that fellow as his rival, that fellow might not even think that he was worthy of his attention!

The gap between the both of them was simply too great!

Shaking his head helplessly, he turned his gaze to the young man not too far away once more, only to see that the latter was not paying any attention to the battle in the sky. Instead, he was looking at Elder Liao with a hint of viciousness in his deep, black eyes.

“Time to begin!” the young man muttered.

Hu la!

He raised his leg once more and aimed it right toward Elder Liao’s head.

Peng!

It landed on the latter’s head, and in an unconscious state, the latter did not have the slightest ability to retaliate at all. He was sent flying right off the stretcher, smashing right through one of the walls of the dueling rings.

“This...” Zhang Yu’s lips twitched.

Just what kind of grudge did he have with Elder Liao?

Or rather, what in the world was Zhang Xuan up to?

He should have known that he would never get out of the Sanctum of Sages alive if he killed Elder Liao!

While overwhelmed with shock, Zhang Yu saw Zhang Xuan rushing over in Elder Liao’s direction, and before the latter could even land on the floor from the previous kick, his leg whipped forth once more.

Peng!

As if a football, Elder Liao flew into the air once more.

It was hard to tell whether it was an intentional action or not, but the direction that Elder Liao was flying toward happened to be where Physician Bai and the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was clashing.

Both parties were pitting their full might against one another, causing an insane amount of power to ripple into the surroundings. Even ordinary half-Saint 9-dan experts would not dare get close, let alone the unconscious, Saint 7-dan Elder

Liao. Before he could even come close, the might was already beginning to ravage his body, threatening to tear him to shreds.

“It’s over...” Fei shi nearly collapsed to the ground from the sheer horror of what he was seeing.

Given how intensely the two experts were clashing with one another, unless a Saint 9-dan expert were to intervene in the battle, it would be impossible to stop them. Fei shi knew that even he would lose his life if he got involved at this point, much less the unconscious Elder Liao!

“Liao Xin!” Not expecting Zhang Xuan to make such a move either, Divine Healer Bai Yu was appalled.

However, he had already released his full might, and it was too late to retract it now. No matter how he shouted, it would not make a difference.

Weng!

Just as everyone thought that Elder Liao was doomed to die, a light buzz suddenly sounded from his body, and the frost shrouding his body abruptly expanded outward, forming a sphere of mist that extended for a radius of three meters.

After which, the sphere began to surge upward, forming something that was reminiscent of a giant lotus flower.

The overwhelming power between the clash of might of Divine Healer Bai Yu and the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast struck the lotus squarely, and astonishingly, even though it wavered slightly, it was not destroyed at all! As such, the unconscious Elder Liao did not sustain any damage.

It seemed like the lotus had saved his life in this desperate moment.

“This...”

Upon seeing that, Divine Healer Bai Yu and the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast were startled for an instant.

The clash of their strengths was strong enough to cause even the massive protective formation cast over the Hall of Propriety to waver, and yet, a mere lotus that sprouted from

Elder Liao was actually able to neutralize their attack entirely... Just what in the world was it?

“Now!”

As if having expected this situation, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out the pinnacle spirit stone that Luo Xuanqing had given him previously. Holding it tightly in his left hand, he began furiously absorbing its energy.

Hong long long!

Concentrated spiritual energy surged into his body, swiftly filling up the depletion he had sustained previously. Then, he lifted his right hand and tapped forward.

Si la!

The Lingxu Sword abruptly burst forth to strike down upon Elder Liao.

In the midst of its movement, the sword qi imbued within the Lingxu Sword extended to over several dozen meters, as if attempting to sever the world into two.

Puhe!

The sword cut down on the lotus shrouding Elder Liao, and shockingly, the seemingly invincible lotus actually began shattering like a mirror.

“How is this possible?” Divine Healer Bai Yu was stunned.

Even the combined might between him and the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast was insufficient to destroy the lotus, and yet, the other party managed to cut it apart with just a surge of sword qi. Could it be that the young man was even stronger than him?

Perhaps even reaching Saint 9-dan?

1388 Treating Elder Liao

After a moment of shock, Divine Healer Bai Yu swiftly came to a realization.

It was not that the young man was far stronger than him or anything else. Rather, the lotus was already left on the verge of shattering after the combined attack between him and the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, and the young man had aimed his attack at the very opening of the lotus.

Because of that, he was able to destroy the lotus with a single strike.

Nevertheless, it was still an extremely formidable feat.

Even he had not managed to find the opening of the lotus that had appeared out of nowhere yet, but the young man was able to see right through it, even accurately striking down on it from afar with his sword qi to destroy the lotus, not harming Elder Liao in the slightest. It had to be said that his eye of discernment and control over his strength had reached an astonishing level.

While Divine Healer Bai Yu was feeling deeply impressed by the young man's feat, he lowered his head to look at the young man, only to see that the latter did not show the slightest hint of joy at having sliced apart the lotus. Instead, there was a tight knot between his eyebrows, and his face was slightly pale.

“Hmm? What's going on?”

“There's something bizarre about the lotus...”

Just as Divine Healer Bai Yu was just about to ask what was wrong, he suddenly heard shocked voices from the crowd below. He immediately turned to look in Elder Liao's direction and saw that the scattered mist of the shattered lotus had attempted to dive into Elder Liao's body once more, as if it had a life of its own.

“Humph, don’t you dare!” With a cold harrumph, Zhang Xuan flicked out several dozen silver needles and flung them in Elder Liao’s direction.

Wuwuwuwu!

The silver needles fell right on the various acupoints all over Elder Liao’s body, impeding the mist from delving back into his body. As if meeting its nemesis, the mist released a sizzling sound upon contact with the silver needles before dissipating.

Hu!

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan waved his hand and pulled Elder Liao back from the sky, gently placing his back onto the stretcher. Then, he tapped his finger lightly on the latter’s glabella.

“Cough cough!”

While violently coughing, Elder Liao opened his eyes once more and spurted out black blood. After which, he sat up from the stretcher.

Pipa!

A resounding cracking sound reminiscent of snapping bamboo shoots sounded from within his body.

“This is...” Divine Healer Bai Yu widened his eyes in shock. “He’s making a breakthrough in his cultivation!”

He was well-aware of the circumstances surrounding his old friend. Under the assault of the fire poison, his friend’s vitality had been waning constantly, putting him on the verge of death. Even with his superior medicinal skill as the Divine Healer, he was still unable to treat him. Who would have thought that with just a few needles and a simple tap on the forehead, the young man would actually be able to induce a breakthrough in his old friend?

Could he be seeing things?

Hong long long!

Before he could recover from his shock, more and more cracking sounds echoed from Elder Liao’s body. Following

which, his cultivation swiftly surged, rising from Saint 7-dan intermediate stage to pinnacle within moments.

Even so, the momentum in his surge of strength showed no sign of calming down. Elder Liao shattered his Phantasmal Space realm pinnacle bottleneck within ten breaths, and a Dominion tinged with the power of Dimension Sundering suddenly extended from his body.

It was only then that the rise in his cultivation gradually slowed to a halt.

Half-Dimension Sundering realm!

To rise from Phantasmal Space realm intermediate stage to Half-Dimension Sundering realm in a single shot, this rate of cultivation could be said to be unprecedented!

Divine Healer Bai Yu's lips twitched uncontrollably.

The cultivation of his old friend had never risen ever since he was afflicted with the fire poison. For several centuries now, he had remained stagnant at Phantasmal Space realm intermediate stage. Who would have thought that he would suddenly experience such a tremendous surge in his cultivation, shattering all of the bottlenecks that lay in his path?

"I..." Elder Liao was also shocked beyond words. Feeling the overflowing power harnessed within his body, he sat in a daze on the stretcher, wondering if he was in a dream.

Before he was knocked out, his vitality had been swiftly dissipating, putting him on the verge of death. But when he opened his eyes, not only did he fully recover from his illness, his cultivation had also risen by leaps and bounds. At this point, he was deeply frightened that he would simply wake up and find that it was all a lie.

Pah!

He slapped his face, and to his relief, stinging pain assaulted his cheeks.

"I am still alive?"

The sudden realization of this fact made Elder Liao tremble in agitation, and even to his own surprise, tears began streaming down his cheeks.

For how many years, he had teetered on the edge of death. He had thought that his time had finally come, and death had descended upon him to claim his dues. Yet, at the very last moment, a savior appeared, and not only was his affliction cured, he even achieved a breakthrough in his cultivation.

He pushed himself up from the stretcher and walked up to Zhang Xuan. Standing before the young man who had brought him out of his anguish, his knees fell to the ground.

“Zhang shi, thank you for saving my life.”

Even though he had been unconscious and was oblivious to what had happened, he could tell that Zhang Xuan had paid a heavy price for him just by looking at the latter’s pale face and trembling body.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. To be honest, I didn’t have much confidence either, considering the critical state you were in. It’s a huge relief that everything turned out fine,” Zhang Xuan replied with a forced smile.

Puhe!

He suddenly collapsed to the ground.

This time, his injuries were not faked.

He had just depleted himself from executing the Sea Severing Sword when he had to deal with Elder Liao’s fire poison. Even if he had a pinnacle spirit stone in hand to replenish his spiritual energy, the immense mental toll he had been put under still left him on the edge of fainting at any moment.

“Zhang shi!” Elder Liao hurriedly stood up to support Zhang Xuan.

Hu!

Divine Healer Bai Yu also quickly descended from the sky to examine Zhang Xuan. “Don’t worry, he’s just suffering from overexertion. With sufficient spiritual energy and time, he

should be able to fully recover from his condition without any lingering trauma.”

The reason he wanted to make a move on Zhang Xuan earlier was because he thought that the young man bore malicious intentions toward Elder Liao. But with all that had happened, it was apparent that he had misunderstood the young man’s intentions, so all hostility he bore toward the young man had disappeared without a trace.

More importantly, he had been looking into his old friend’s condition for several centuries now, only to remain deeply helpless before it. Yet, in less than three minutes, not only did the young man manage to resolve his old friend’s affliction, he even induced a breakthrough in the latter. On top of that, there was no medicine or any complex procedure to the treatment process at all.

This left him feeling deeply perplexed.

“That’s good. That’s good.” Hearing that Zhang Xuan was fine, Elder Liao heaved a sigh of relief.

“Zhang shi, just... what is going on?” Divine Healer Bai Yu asked.

He had been a physician for many centuries now, but he had never seen any treatment method like this. And what was even more confounding was that it was actually extremely effective, vanquishing the affliction in just a few moments.

“Pardon me for my earlier insult. I had to provoke you in order to treat Elder Liao, so I hope that you won’t take it to heart.” Struggling up for a moment, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist apologetically.

“Don’t worry about that, I won’t take it to heart.” Divine Healer Bai Yu waved his hand.

Putting aside being berated, even if he had been beaten up, he felt that it would have been well worth the price for his old friend to be treated.

Not to mention, he had been able to witness such miraculous medical skills on top of that. This had deeply incited his curiosity as a physician.

Divine Healer Bai Yu clasped his fist and requested with an earnest look in his eyes, “Zhang shi, I ask of you to answer my doubts.”

Hearing those words, Fei shi, Feng Ziyi, Zhang Yu, and the others also quickly turned curious gazes over in their direction.

If Elder Liao had ingested a pill and driven his zhenqi in certain circulation pathways in order to resolve the fire poison, it would have been understandable that he achieved a breakthrough. But what had happened earlier... knocking out the patient, criticizing the principal physician, and pummeling the patient to the ground... how the heck did it turn out to be another treatment method? It was completely inconceivable to the crowd.

If it was that easy to treat an affliction, there would not be so many patients who died of illnesses every single day in the world.

“This...” Seeing Divine Healer Bai Yu’s intent gaze, Zhang Xuan said with a bitter smile, “My apologies, but will you allow me to heal up a little before answering your doubts?”

He was feeling so feeble that he could faint at any moment now, let alone explain the situation to the other party.

“Of course, of course. Please pardon my lack of consideration,” Divine Healer Bai Yu quickly replied in embarrassment.

He had been too focused on learning that he had forgotten the young man’s current state.

“I have an Energy Repository Pill here that can help you recover from your depletion!” Divine Healer Bai Yu flicked his wrist and passed a jade bottle over.

As the top physician of the Sanctum of Sages, there were countless patients who sought his treatment each year. As a result, he had plenty of good items on him.

Zhang Xuan took out the Energy Repository Pill from the jade bottle, and after taking a look at it, he shook his head helplessly.

The pill was of good quality, but to him, it was not of much use anymore.

Due to his Heaven's Path zhenqi, there was a strict requirement on the concentration of the spiritual energy he could absorb. The higher his cultivation became, the higher the requirement was. While the Energy Repository Pill would be effective to even the average Dimension Sundering realm expert, it was no different from popping a sweet to him.

"Thank you, but I'm afraid that this pill is completely ineffective to me." Zhang Xuan shook his head as he passed the pill back into Bai Yu's hands.

"It's ineffective?" Bai Yu was taken aback. "I still have a couple of them here if you need more."

"Physician Bai, I appreciate your goodwill, but I think I'll find a way myself." At which point, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a brief moment, but he still could not bring himself to use his pinnacle spirit stone. So, he turned to the elder by the other side and said, "Elder Liao, may I trouble you a little?"

"Zhang shi, there's no need to stand on ceremony. Feel free to say whatever you require. As long as it's within my means, consider it done!" Elder Liao nodded.

"That's a relief." Zhang Xuan nodded as a hint of excitement flashed across his eyes. "Then, Elder Liao, I'd need to trouble you to achieve a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm!"

"Achieve a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm?" Elder Liao was stunned.

1389 Frenzied Hu Qing

Should the first instinct of a drained cultivator not be to look for spirit stones and pills to recover his vitality?

Why was the young man asking Elder Liao to push for a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm?

It did not make sense at all!

Furthermore, pushing for a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm meant that Elder Liao would have to face a lightning tribulation. After years of turmoil from the fire poison, his body had already been emptied out. If he attempted to push for a breakthrough right now, it was likely that he would be zapped to death.

Surely you aren't intending to send him to death's embrace shortly after pulling him back from the gates of hell?

Elder Liao was completely dumbstruck as well.

"I'll need you push for a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm in order for me to recover. The reason you were able to make a breakthrough so quickly is due to the energy you have accumulated over several centuries. If I'm not mistaken, you should have enough drive in you to push for a breakthrough to the Dimension Sundering realm, right?"

Zhang Xuan asked feebly.

The reason Elder Liao was able to achieve so many breakthroughs at once was not because of his exceptional talent or Zhang Xuan's miraculous treatment but because of the hard work he had put into cultivating over the past several centuries. Previously, his cultivation had stagnated mainly due to the fire poison, but once that had been resolved, the energy he had accumulated over this long period of time immediately burst forth, allowing his cultivation to soar.

Considering how much he had accumulated over the years, Elder Liao should not have just stopped at Half-Dimension Sundering realm. It would be sufficient for him to push to

higher realms, just that he chose to suppress it forcefully out of fear for the Dimension Sundering Ordeal.

“But...” Elder Liao was conflicted.

“Don’t worry, you will succeed,” Zhang Xuan told him with a resolute gaze.

“Alright then.” Seeing the deep desire in Zhang Xuan’s eyes, Elder Liao gritted his teeth and removed the limitation he had placed on his cultivation.

Boom!

As soon as the energy was released, the surrounding air began growing viscous. Following which, through their Spiritual Perception, the crowd realized that storm clouds were beginning to congregate above them.

“Don’t challenge your Dimension Sundering Ordeal here, or else the formations could cause the lightning tribulation to run amok. Let’s head out instead...” Halfway through his words, Zhang Xuan suddenly widened his eyes in realization and halted.

On top of the defensive formations cast over the individual dueling rings, there were also aura isolating formations that served to prevent anything within from getting out. As such, it was likely that the lightning tribulation would not be able to find its target and strike the area in frenzy instead, similar to what had happened when he challenged his Leaving Aperture Ordeal.

But while this might end in a tragedy to others, this was exactly what he was wishing for!

The storm clouds would grow bigger as a result of being unable to find its target, thus providing a greater source of energy to him.

Just thinking of how it would be bigger than Luo Xuanqing’s, Zhang Xuan could not help but tremble in agitation as he looked at Elder Liao with eyes filled with desire.

“You’re right, I’ll go out...” Elder Liao nodded, but just as he wanted to leave the main hall, the young man suddenly shook

once more, and his body seemed to have become even feebler.

“It’s fine. You don’t have to head out anymore. Doing it here is fine.”

Elder Liao blinked blankly.

It’s just a moment ago that you told me to head out so that I don’t destroy the Hall of Propriety accidentally, but all of a sudden, you are asking me to stay?

Zhang Xuan turned around and instructed, “Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast, you head out to attack the lightning tribulation first.”

“You want me to attack... the lightning tribulation?” The Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast cowered backward, and it nearly plummeted from the sky.

It had been through the Dimension Sundering Ordeal before, and it had nearly died from that darned lightning tribulation. Its fear toward the lightning tribulation was so great that it would be paralyzed in the face of it, and yet, to attack it straight on...

It was still young, and it did not want to die yet!

“Master, can I... not go?” the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast looked at Zhang Xuan with large, pleading eyes, which might have possibly looked like puppy eyes had its eyes not been as big as lanterns. “If you feel that I haven’t done a good job beating up that Bai Yu guy earlier, I can continue hitting him till you are happy. Just... don’t make me face that lightning tribulation!”

Divine Healer Bai Yu’s mouth quivered upon hearing those words.

“Stop with your nonsense and hurry up and do it!” Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure.

“Alright...” Grumbling beneath its breath, the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast headed out with a despaired look on its face.

Hong long long!

A moment later, the ominous clouds grew even bigger. What had only covered the Hall of Propriety earlier expanded to encompass an area of over several hundred mu.

Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction before turning to Bai Yu. “Physician Bai, I’ll need you to attack the lightning tribulation too.”

“Me too?” Divine Healer Bai Yu’s lips twitched upon hearing those words.

“I’ll be troubling you. Don’t worry, there won’t be any problem.” Knowing what the other party was worried about, Zhang Xuan replied earnestly. “I know what I’m doing.”

“You know what you’re doing?” Bai Yu’s body trembled upon hearing those words.

Is this what you mean by you know what you are doing?

Your head!

Isn’t this obviously an attempt to murder Elder Liao?

Noting the other party’s hesitation, Zhang Xuan said, “Since I have a way to drag him back from the gates of hell, I hope that you can believe me when I say that I have a way to help him tide through the lightning tribulation too.”

“Alright then.” After a long moment of hesitation, Divine Healer Bai Yu looked at Zhang Xuan’s confident look and recalled the miracle that the young man had pulled off earlier.

Thus, he gritted his teeth and dashed out.

“ ... ”

Seeing how Zhang Xuan had instructed the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and Divine Healer Bai Yu to intercept Elder Liao’s lightning tribulation, Fei Shi, Feng Ziyi, and the others were completely flabbergasted.

They had never seen anyone committing suicide in such a manner.

Just what in the world was the young man up to?

...

In a certain room of the Hall of Propriety, several elders were seated in an oval.

The green-robed old man sitting at the end of the oval was the person-in-charge of the Hall of Propriety, Elder Hu Qing.

“For those matters, they can be resolved in such a manner...” Elder Hu Qing was in the midst of instructing the other elders when his eyebrows suddenly shot up, and he sprung to his feet.

“What happened?”

“Someone is undergoing their lightning tribulation?”

“Who in the world is so inconsiderate as to face their Dimension Sundering Ordeal here? This is really bad. The entire Hall of Propriety could very well be destroyed!”

Sensing the congregating storm clouds and ferocious crackling of lightning in the sky, the other elders also swiftly noticed that something was amiss.

If such powerful bolts of lightning really fell upon the Hall of Propriety, the entire place could very well be reduced to rubble!

“Assemble all of the elders. We’ll protect the Hall of Propriety!” Hu Qing roared decisively before leaping up into the sky.

Hu! Hu! Hu!

In the blink of an eye, another dozen managerial elders leaped up as well, and floating in the midst of the sky, they looked at the accumulation of lightning with awful looks on their faces.

They had looked over the Hall of Propriety faithfully for many years, so how could they allow anything to undo their hard work?

After seeing that all of the elders had gathered around, Hu Qing bellowed an instruction with gritted teeth.

“Elder Zhao, I need you to check who is undergoing the lightning tribulation here.”

Of all places that person could undergo their lightning tribulation, why did they have to choose there?

In fact, there was a facility in the Hall of Integrity built solely for the purpose of assisting cultivators in facing their lightning tribulation through alleviating the effects of the inner demons. Yet, to choose to do it here instead, was he intending to bring the entire Hall of Propriety down with him?

“Yes!” Elder Zhao quickly nodded.

But just as he was about to head into the main hall, he suddenly saw a Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast rushing out with a sonic boom, and with a golden hue infused into its claws, it dashed straight toward the storm clouds.

Kacha! Kacha!

Having come under the assault of another party outside of the cultivator supposed to face the ordeal, the area of the storm clouds immediately expanded.

“What is that fellow trying to do? Is it attempting suicide?”

All of the elders were frenzied by what they saw.

It isn't even your lightning tribulation, so why are you trying to attack it so desperately? Do you have a grudge with the person undergoing the ordeal?

“Hurry up and stop that fellow!” Hu Qing immediately barked out an order.

However, before any of the elders could move, the highly-esteemed Divine Healer Bai Yu suddenly flew out of the main hall as well.

With a flick of his wrist, he channeled imposing might in his palm, and with a forceful thrust, he struck it out toward the storm clouds in the sky.

Kacha! Kacha! Kacha!

The storm clouds immediately expanded to over a thousand mu wide, covering the vast expanse of the entire Hall of Propriety.

“Bai Yu, what are you doing!” Hu Qing nearly went insane on the spot. One mu is equivalent to 666.6 square meters.

1390 Bon Appéti

Divine Healer Bai Yu had a rather close relationship with the other elders in the Hall of Propriety, and they often went out for expeditions in seek of treasures and medicinal herbs together. Yet, in this crucial moment, despite seeing that someone was undergoing a lightning tribulation, not only was he refusing to help, he was even attacking it. This was no different from seeing a burning house and quickly grabbing a bottle of gasoline to pour on it!

Are you trying to seal off all chances of the individual undergoing the Dimension Sundering Ordeal from surviving the lightning tribulation, or are you uncertain whether the lightning tribulation was large enough to devastate the entire Hall of Propriety, so you chose to head out here to ensure it?

Hong long!

Paying no heed to Hu Qing, Bai Yu channeled might into his palm once more and sent another strike toward the storm clouds.

Kacha!

Provoked by those who dared challenge its rules, the lightning tribulation sent down two thick streaks of lightning down upon the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and Bai Yu. In just an instant, the bodies of the duo stiffened as their hair and dragon scales stood on end before plummeting from the sky.

“The authority of the heavens isn’t to be challenged,” Hu Qing remarked with a shake of his head.

After which, he raised his hand and roared, “Activate the Grand Defensive Formation of our Hall of Propriety to fend off the lightning tribulation. At the same time, dig out that fellow who is undergoing his Dimension Sundering Ordeal and have him sent off to the Hall of Integrity immediately!”

“Yes!” Two elders quickly nodded, but just as they were about to dash into the main hall to grab the cultivator undergoing the

Dimension Sundering Ordeal, the charred Bai Yu and Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast suddenly flew up once more and sent a furious surge of power toward the storm clouds.

Kacha! Kacha!

The lightning grew even larger. Lightning sparks crackled imposingly amid the storm clouds, as if heralding an impending catastrophe.

Divine Healer Bai Yu and the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast were both Saint 8-dan pinnacle experts, so their provocation easily caused a massive intensification of the lightning tribulation. At this point, what was above them could no longer be considered a Dimension Sundering Ordeal anymore. Even a Saint 9-dan expert would have a layer of skin torn off facing something of that caliber.

“This... How am I supposed to survive such a lightning tribulation?” Elder Liao collapsed weakly to the ground, paralyzed on the spot.

Just who in the world did he offend to warrant such a treatment?

It was just a moment ago that he was dragged back from the gates of hell, rekindling hope more in him. However, in the blink of an eye, he was shoved down into the abyss of despair once more!

Even though he had built up an extremely powerful foundation over the years, he knew very well that he would never survive even the first bolt of lightning from the billowing storm clouds above him!

“Calm down, everything will be fine. Just let those two make it a bit larger, and we’ll be done.” Noticing Elder Liao’s panic, Zhang Xuan patted his shoulder and reassured him.

“...” Elder Liao felt even more stifled on the inside.

“Alright, I think it should be about time. Let’s head out now.” Seeing that the lightning tribulation had already congregated to its limit under the combined assault from the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and Bai Yu, seemingly about to lose

control at any moment, Zhang Xuan shook his head slightly in pity before beckoning Elder Liao to follow.

Theoretically speaking, it was possible for a lightning tribulation to grow stronger endlessly as long as it were to come under continual assault, but limited by its foundations, it would start crumbling apart once it grew beyond a certain size.

It was just like an engineer trying to modify a simple bucket and a spade into a massive excavator. It was simply an impossible act because of how poor the foundations they were working on were.

“We’ll die if we head out at this point!” Elder Liao exclaimed with a pale face, his legs trembling uncontrollably.

Even though he had been through many life and death situations, he still could not help but feel natural apprehension and fear toward the might of the heavens.

“Die? Don’t worry, that won’t happen under my watch.” Knowing what Elder Liao was frightened of, Zhang Xuan assured him with a radiant smile. “I’ll help you deal with your lightning tribulation later on. What you have to do is release your strength whenever you see that the lightning tribulation is getting smaller or on the verge of escaping. Got that?”

“Lightning tribulation getting smaller? On the verge of escaping?” Elder Liao was dumbstruck by those terms. He could understand those words individually, but it became incomprehensible to him when strung together in a sentence. “Zhang shi, can you phrase it clearer? I don’t understand what you are saying... I really don’t...”

The lightning tribulation was a natural force sworn to never rest until the individual facing it finally succumbed, but why did it somehow become an adorable entity when filtered through your mouth?

What getting smaller and escaping... Do you take the lightning tribulation to be a pet in your house?

“It’s fine that you don’t get what I’m saying at this point. Just keep my instructions in mind and act accordingly later on.” Knowing that it would be hard for him to explain this matter in

a way that sounded convincing to Elder Liao, Zhang Xuan did not bother to elaborate further on the matter.

Instead, he flicked his wrist and took out various items to prepare as he began making his way out of the main hall.

“This...” Seeing how confident Zhang Xuan was, Elder Liao was a little lost for a moment. He briefly hesitated before he finally bucked up his courage and followed Zhang Xuan with a severe look on his face, reminiscent of a soldier marching to his death.

Zhang Yu gulped nervously before asking, “Fei shi, shall we head out to take a look too?”

“Un.” Fei shi nodded.

Even though they were indoors, they could still somewhat sense the sheer size of the storm clouds through their Spiritual Perception. From how densely the lightning tribulation was gathered around them, they roughly estimated that it spanned over an area of a thousand mu. If it were to descend on them, it was likely that none of them would be able to escape.

But since Zhang Xuan was so confident about the matter, it would be worth heading out to see how he intended to deal with this crisis they were in.

Feng Ziyi quickly headed out as well, but barely after taking a few steps, he saw Zhang Yu stumbling over his own feet, nearly falling to the ground. He immediately frowned. “What’s wrong?”

As a genius of the Zhang Clan, Zhang Yu should have been through plenty of huge affairs before. Surely, he need not be so frightened as to stumble over his own feet when they were not even completely out of the main hall yet, right?

Completely oblivious to Feng Ziyi’s question, Zhang Yu stared at the sky with widened eyes as he muttered in a daze beneath his breath, “What the heck... is Zhang shi doing?”

Frowning, Feng Ziyi turned his gaze to the sky as well, and the sight that he saw left him frozen silly on the spot.

In this very instant, Zhang Xuan had whipped out a white cloth from somewhere and folded it neatly before his chest. He elegantly took out a cup of water and gargled his mouth, as if he was about to enjoy a sumptuous course in a top restaurant.

“Is he... going to eat?” Feng Ziyi scratched his head frenziedly at that sight.

He had been with his teacher for many years, but he had never heard of anyone getting so excited before the deeply feared lightning tribulation before!

Was that fellow here to challenge the lightning tribulation or dine on delicacies?

Kacha! Kacha!

In his moment of shock, he saw Zhang Xuan and Elder Liao walking out of the main hall. As soon as the star of the show appeared, the storm clouds in the sky immediately began rumbling intensely, seemingly ready to fall at any moment.

“Zhang shi, regardless of whether I am able to tide across this lightning tribulation or not, I would still like to thank you for saving my life.” Elder Liao was still a little afraid prior to this, but upon seeing the vast expanse of storm clouds that plunged the entire world into darkness, he realized that there was no way he would be able to escape anymore.

It was either do or die. Perhaps it was the realization that he was completely helpless in this situation that made him accept the position he was in instead.

As someone who had bravely charged into the midst of the Boreal Fire Poison in order to fend off the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, Elder Liao was definitely no wimp, or else he would not have been promoted to become a managerial elder in the Sanctum of Sages in the first place.

“There’s no need to waste your breath on such emotional words; nothing will happen to you. Just stay right here and wait for me. I’ll be right back!” Zhang Xuan interjected with a wave of his hand before decisively leaping into the midst of the sea of lightning above.

“He’s dashing right into the storm clouds?”

“But he’ll die like that!”

Everyone was stunned. Even Hu Qing nearly fell from the sky upon seeing this sight.

They had seen cultivators who turned around as fast as they could upon meeting lightning, and they had also seen those who would bury themselves as deep underground as they could to hide from the lightning, but this was the first time they had seen someone dashing right into the lightning tribulation.

“Zhang shi...” Not expecting Zhang Xuan to make such a move, Elder Liao’s eyes reddened in agitation.

The other party was dashing into the lightning tribulation all for him.

Just as he was about to dash in as well to assist the young man in fending off the lightning tribulation, the storm clouds suddenly billowed, and oddly enough, just as the young man had told him earlier, the storm clouds seemed to have contracted considerably.

“Hmm?” Perplexed, Elder Liao was just wondering whether he should release his energy as the young man had instructed him to do earlier, but then the lightning tribulation suddenly turned around and fled as if it had met its own nemesis.

Its speed was so fast that not even the fastest cultivator could possibly catch up with it.

Hu!

With the escape of the storm clouds, the sky swiftly cleared up, revealing Zhang Xuan’s profile in the sky. In this moment, the young man was looking at the escaped storm cloud with a helpless look on his face. Just as he was about to speak up, his chest suddenly puffed up.

“Urrrrrpp!”

A resounding burp similar to the beating of a drum echoed crisp and clear.

1391 The Way to Resolve the Poison

“Did he really dive into the storm clouds to eat?”

“But what’s edible inside the storm clouds?”

Feng Ziyi, Zhang Yu, and the others looked at one another with utterly horrified expressions.

That was a lightning tribulation, something that even the most powerful of cultivator would have a headache facing! Yet, that fellow actually rushed right in to have a meal, even releasing a resounding burp right afterward.

Do you need to be so arrogant?

More importantly, you even scared the lightning tribulation away! It fled away so quickly that it almost felt as if a vicious dog was chasing after it.

Unable to hold it back anymore, Fei shi asked in agitation, “Elder Liao, that’s your Dimension Sundering Ordeal, right? What’s going on?”

“How am I supposed to know what’s going on?” Elder Liao was on the verge of insanity as well.

True, that was indeed his lightning tribulation... but from the start to the end, it was as if it had nothing to do with him at all!

While others had to struggle desperately to survive their lightning ordeal, he simply took a look at his lightning ordeal, and a few moments later, it fled.

To be honest, he was completely dumbfounded by the matter as well, and he did not know what to make of the situation.

“Try your cultivation. If you are able to tap into the power of Dimension Sundering, that means that you have successfully cleared the lightning tribulation,” Feng Ziyi suddenly suggested.

“Un.” Elder Liao nodded as he took a look into his current condition with his Spiritual Perception. A moment later, his eyes widened, and his mouth opened. “I made a breakthrough...”

Without even lifting a finger, he had already gone through his lightning tribulation. This had to have been the easiest breakthrough anyone had made in the entire history of the Master Teacher Continent!

“As expected!” Hearing Elder Liao’s acknowledgement, Feng Ziyi’s mouth twitched. He lifted his head once more to take a look and saw the young man who had dived into the storm clouds a moment earlier slowly descending with a look of pity and bitter regret on his face.

Seeing the young man’s state, Elder Liao hurried forward and asked worriedly, “What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing much...” Zhang Xuan waved his hand.

He had thought that with how much the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and Divine Healer Bai Yu had expanded the storm clouds, he would be able to make a full recovery. Yet, who could have known that the lightning tribulation had grown cunning after being absorbed twice, fleeing exceptionally decisively this time around.

As soon as he dived into the storm cloud, he immediately began absorbing the lightning energy around him frenziedly, but barely after he recovered the zhenqi in the looped space of his dantian by 70%, the lightning tribulation had already noticed that something was amiss, and it unhesitatingly turned around and escaped.

From the looks of it, I really should frequent the Hall of Integrity... Since that’s the place where students and elders of the Sanctum of Sages visit in order to aid them in achieving breakthroughs, there should be plenty of lightning tribulations there. Zhang Xuan stroked his chin as he made up his mind.

Attainment, Solidarity, Propriety, Erudition, and Integrity; each of the five halls served their own purpose. Of them, the Hall of Integrity served to reinforce one’s mental resilience,

thus reducing one's vulnerability to inner demons when pushing for a breakthrough. For this reason, countless students would visit it each day.

If there was really no way around it, he could consider camping at the Hall of Integrity to absorb the lightning tribulations that arrived there. He should be able to make substantial progress in his cultivation that way.

“Liao Xin, you managed to achieve a breakthrough?”

While Zhang Xuan was in the midst of contemplating over his future plans, Divine Healer Bai Yu descended from the sky, and upon seeing the Dominion Sundering realm Dominion extending from his old friend, a deep hint of astonishment surfaced on his face.

He had thought that this breakthrough would surely be fraught with danger, but who would have thought that it would pass by so calmly, as if all of the build-up before was nothing but empty threats?

In the midst of his shock, he directed a look of admiration toward the young man before him as well.

“Just... what's going on?” Divine Healer Bai Yu could not help but ask once more.

“The matter concerning the lightning tribulation is a secret art imparted to me by my teacher, so I'm afraid that it'll be inconvenient for me to speak too much of it before others,” Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand.

In any case, he already had a 'junior', Feng Ziyi, to validate his identity, so he could still push everything that was inconceivable about him to his teacher.

In any case, the current 'Yang shi' was uncontactable anyway, so no one would be any the wiser.

“Then... what about the fire poison that Liao Xin was suffering from before?” Seeing that the young man was unwilling to speak about the lightning tribulation, Divine Healer Bai Yu turned the topic to the fire poison, which he had been deeply intrigued about all this while.

“It’s true that the Boreal Fire Poison that Elder Liao was afflicted with could be suppressed using the Hiemal Yin Formula, but as time went by, it started to develop its own consciousness,” Zhang Xuan explained.

“Consciousness? You mean that a spirit developed within the Boreal Fire Poison?” Divine Healer Bai Yu pondered for a moment before nodding.

There were indeed poisons in this world that possessed consciousness, granting them the ability to avoid danger. These were the poisons that usually left both patients and physicians helpless.

“Since it had developed its own consciousness, the Boreal Fire Poison began to consciously avert the suppression of the Hiemal Yin Formula. As a result, the cultivation of the technique would not only be ineffective in suppressing the poison, it would cause his physical condition to further deteriorate as well. It’s for that reason that I persuaded him to stop cultivating the Hiemal Yin Formula,” Zhang Xuan continued.

He had gathered this through the Library of Heaven’s Path earlier, which was also the reason he had offered Elder Liao the advice to stop practicing the Hiemal Yin Formula.

“Under normal circumstances, as long as Elder Liao stopped cultivating the technique, considering that the fire poison was under the control of a conscious spirit, it shouldn’t have acted up in the short-term. With ample preparation, it should have been possible to get rid of it once and for all in a single go. But you just had to bring in the Nymphaea Tetragona at this moment!”

Recalling what he had just seen after knocking Elder Liao out a moment ago, he couldn’t help but shake his head.

“The Nymphaea Tetragona is indeed one of the nemeses of the Boreal Fire Poison, and it would have worked had the fire poison not awoken its consciousness yet. Unfortunately, that wasn’t the case. When Elder Liao ingested the Nymphaea Tetragona, it swiftly induced a violent response from the Boreal Fire Poison. Under the conscious control of the Boreal

Fire Poison's spirit, it managed to assimilate the power of the Nymphaea Tetragona and further its prowess.

“In the first place, Elder Liao's vitality was already waning, and the strengthening of the fire poison further worsened his physical state. As a result, he rapidly succumbed to the onslaught of the poison, thus resulting in his frail state a while ago.”

Upon coming to realize what had happened, Divine Healer Bai Yu's face reddened in embarrassment.

It was just a moment ago that he had felt indignant at the other party saying that he was an incompetent physician, but after hearing everything that Zhang Xuan had said, what was he if not an incompetent physician?

It was because of his careless prescription of the Nymphaea Tetragona that his old friend had nearly lost his life!

There was a slight moment of silence from Divine Healer Bai Yu before he asked once more, “Then... how did you manage to resolve the fire poison?”

Even though the other party had resolved the poison right before his eyes, he was still unable to make sense of how it had been done.

“It's actually rather simple. The birth of a spirit in the Boreal Fire Poison does make it a far more fearsome adversary, but at the same time, its possession of consciousness meant that the Boreal Fire Poison would have a goal and thus could be manipulated. The goal of the fire poison was actually rather simple—it simply wanted to absorb more energy and grow as fast as possible.

“In a sense, the Boreal Fire Poison could be viewed as a parasite, and it had a somewhat symbiotic relationship with its host. Or to put it in simpler terms, it was against its interests to allow its host to die quickly or else it would lose its source of nutrients. That's also why I intentionally provoked you and had you clash with the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast.

“By having the both of you execute your strongest moves and placing Elder Liao in the midst of your clash, the Boreal Fire

Poison would feel deeply threatened. In order to sustain Elder Liao's life, it would have to morph into a lotus and protect him from your attacks.

“While it did succeed in protecting Elder Liao, your attacks were so powerful that it suffered tremendous damage, placing it on the verge of dissipation. In this timely moment, I used my sword to strike down on its opening, causing it to be unable to hold its form anymore and dissipate. However, this didn't mean that the threat of the fire poison was over.

“In its severely injured state, the remnants of the Boreal Fire Poison sought to delve back into Elder Liao's body, where it would slowly bide its time and recover, but it ended up being halted by my silver needles, thus eventually resulting in its complete dissipation.

“And without the fire poison suppressing his cultivation, the energy that Elder Liao had accumulated over many years swiftly burst forth, allowing him to achieve successive breakthroughs. And as for the happenings afterward, it's exactly as you have seen, so I'll just stop here,” Zhang Xuan said with a smile.

Actually, the entire matter was not that complex at all. The main issue only lay in the Boreal Fire Poison within Elder Liao's body developing a spirit.

“To think that the consciousness of a poison could actually be used against it in such a manner,” Divine Healer Bai Yu remarked in awe as he nodded in realization.

It was a well-known fact among high-rank physicians that lethal poisons that had developed their own spirits were the most difficult to deal with, but who knew that it was possible to resolve the complicated issue with such a simple solution?

“Indeed,” Zhang Xuan said with a nod. He was just about to continue on when his eyes suddenly lit up in excitement.

The Innate Fetal Poison within me is also a poison that possesses a spirit. Is it possible for me to use the same method to deal with it?

1392 Yang shi's Strength

Zhang Xuan took a look into his body, and eventually, he shook his head helplessly.

All it took was one glance to tell that the Innate Fetal Poison was not as 'compassionate' as the Boreal Fire Poison. Putting aside saving its life, it would already be a great blessing if it did not backstab him when he was in serious danger!

It would be better for him not to take the risk. It was one thing if he failed to resolve the Innate Fetal Poison, but if he were to lose his life a result of it as well, it would really be a huge tragedy.

After all, he did not possess Vicious' ability to revive from scraps.

"Young Master..."

Speak of the devil. As soon as he thought of Vicious, the latter's voice immediately sounded in his ears.

"Yes?" Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

As the Sanctum of Sages was filled with innumerable experts, Vicious would usually avoid communicating him unless there was something truly important.

"Under the onslaught of the lightning earlier, Kong shi's will that permeates the entire Sanctum of Sages dulled slightly, and for a moment, I felt the presence of my skeletal frame!"

Vicious' voice was filled with agitation and excitement, and the entire Book of Heaven's Path seemed to be trembling in resonance to his emotions.

"Skeletal frame? Which part?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Vicious was simply too fragmented. If it was just a small bone or finger, it would make not much of a difference to his current fighting prowess.

"It's the skeletal frame of my entire upper body. I'm certain of it—it is definitely in the Sanctum of Sages!" Vicious

exclaimed excitedly.

“The skeletal frame of your entire upper body?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes widened in astonishment.

Just by fusing with a few bones, he already wielded strength on par with Saint 7-dan experts. If he were to fuse together with his entire upper body, would he not be able to defeat even Saint 9-dan experts easily?

If Vicious were to really wield such power, he would have more cards to deal with the Zhang Clan if the situation fell through.

“That’s right!” Vicious replied.

It seemed like even he did not expect that a part of him would actually be sealed within the esteemed Sanctum of Sages.

“Can you sense the general direction of where it is?” Zhang Xuan asked.

As long as Vicious could identify the exact location of it, he would be able to make some preparations to retrieve it.

Of course, that would also depend on whether the skeletal frame had its own consciousness or not. If it did, the Vicious in the Book of Heaven’s Path might just end up being assimilated into that Vicious instead.

“Kong shi’s will is simply too strong, so I can’t sense its exact location anymore. Unless...”

At which point, Vicious hesitated for a moment before continuing. “If a lightning tribulation as large as the previous one occurs, it should be able to suppress the aura temporarily, granting me sufficient time to determine the exact location of my skeletal frame.”

Due to the presence of Kong shi’s writing all over the place and the several dozen millenniums of respect and adulation from the student populace and elders, the entire Sanctum of Sages was permeated with his will and spirit, hindering Vicious’ perception.

Only during a lightning tribulation, when the will was busy vying with the inner demons contained within the ordeal,

would it thin a little.

“Another lightning tribulation as large as the previous one?”
Zhang Xuan shook his head.

The only reason the previous Dimension Sundering Ordeal had been so powerful was due to Elder Liao’s massive accumulation and the Netherworld Azure Dragon Beast and Divine Healer Bai Yu striking the ordeal simultaneously. Otherwise, there was no way the lightning from a Dimension Sundering Ordeal could possibly cover over a thousand mu.

“I’ll find a way for that. Just make sure to find your skeletal frame when the time comes,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

It happened that he required lightning tribulations to replenish his strength and raise his cultivation too. Since he could achieve both goals at once, he was more than willing to do it.

“Alright,” Vicious replied before falling silent.

As the both of them had communicated telepathically, the entire conversation only lasted roughly two breaths before Zhang Xuan returned his attention to reality. In the next moment, he saw Divine Healer Bai Yu staring him in excitement, saying, “Zhang shi, since you know so much about medicine, are you interested in coming over to our Physician Guild to conduct a lecture?”

“Conduct a lecture?”

“That’s right. It happens that our guild is currently studying a rather bizarre type of poison that we are still unable to remove even after twenty years of trying. We have invited many physicians over on many occasions to discuss the issue, but we still remain completely helpless before it. Since you were able to resolve the Boreal Fire Poison in Elder Liao’s body, it’s apparent that you are a person of great ability. If you could just conduct a lecture in our Physician Guild, I believe that you would be able to provide many fresh perspectives that might just allow us to resolve the poison!” Divine Healer Bai Yu exclaimed in agitation.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was slightly hesitant. “I am just an ordinary 7-star physician, not even reaching 8-star yet. If I

conduct a lecture, there's bound to be many who would doubt my words."

The fastest way to gain respect in an occupation was to show sufficient strength and proficiency in it. While Zhang Xuan had managed to resolve the Boreal Fire Poison, he had relied heavily on the Library of Heaven's Path. He had not read any 8-star physician books yet, so his knowledge was still a little lacking to lecture in the Physician Guild.

"Considering how you were able to see through Liao Xin's affliction with a single glance and resolve it so easily, I'll report this matter to the headquarters and have an 8-star physician emblem applied for you this instant!" Divine Healer Bai Yu said with a smile.

Their Physician Guild branch had studied the condition of his old friend for many years now, but they had all been completely helpless before it. Just the fact that the young man was able to resolve it so easily bore testimony to his abilities.

"Alright then. However, I'll have to take a trip to your library in order to brush up on my knowledge first," Zhang Xuan said with a nod.

It would be good if Divine Healer Bai Yu could apply for his emblem. He would be spared from taking the examination.

"That's simple. Follow me..." Seeing that Zhang Xuan had agreed to his request, Divine Healer Bai Yu heaved a sigh of relief. He quickly walked in front and led the way forward.

Before leaving, Zhang Xuan turned around to look at Feng Ziyi and said, "Junior Feng, is there anything else you wish to challenge me in? If there is, you can feel free to look for me anytime you want."

Feng Ziyi's lips twitched uncontrollably, unable to say a word at all.

When he challenged the other party to a duel of fighting prowess, he ended up being pummeled pitifully despite possessing superior cultivation. When he challenged the other party to a duel of impartation, Elder Liao suddenly rushed, crying for Zhang Xuan to take him in as his student.

Somehow, Zhang Xuan suddenly felt like a towering mountain before him, one that he could not overcome or circumvent.

...

While Zhang Xuan was following Divine Healer Bai Yu to the Physician Guild, back in his residence, Sun Qiang was looking at the nearby Zhang Jiuxiao with a look of bewilderment.

They had not tagged along to watch Feng Ziyi and Zhang Xuan's duel but instead found some craftsmen to repair the collapsed main hall.

"Young Master Jiuxiao, you said earlier that Feng Ziyi and our Young Master are from the same lineage." Sun Qiang could not help but ask, "Could Feng Ziyi be our old master's student too?"

He had heard the other party saying those words as soon as Young Master walked in, but he simply found the matter a little unbelievable.

No matter how he looked at Feng Ziyi, the latter just looked weak and dim-witted. Why would his old master take in a person of that caliber as his student?

"Indeed, Feng Ziyi is Yang shi's student as well." Zhang Jiuxiao nodded in admiration.

If he could take Yang shi as his teacher as well, he would surely be regarded with the highest of esteem when he returned to the Zhang Clan. He would not be just an ordinary member of the side family without the slightest standing at all.

Hearing Zhang Jiuxiao's confirmation, Sun Qiang hesitantly asked, "Do you know... what our Old Master's master teacher rank is?"

All along, the Old Master's strength seemed to be growing along with the Young Master's cultivation, which made him suspect that the Old Master was actually not as powerful as he initially thought. Since Zhang Jiuxiao was aware of the Old Master's true identity, this would be a good opportunity to ask about it.

If the Old Master was really that powerful, he would not have to lie low and hold himself humbly anymore. At the very least, he would not have to suffer the bad attitude from others when gathering intelligence in the Sanctum of Sages.

“I wasn’t too aware of Yang Shi’s affairs previously, but after coming to know of Feng Ziyi, I heard some of my clan members speaking of him.” At this point, Zhang Jiuxiao’s eyes suddenly lit up.

He had first heard of Yang Shi when he was in the Qingyuan Empire, but due to the latter being too high ranking, he had no idea what the significance of the name was. It was only upon arriving in the Sanctum of Sages and hearing others speak of Feng Ziyi that he finally realized just how high a standing and how great a power that that man possessed.

“He’s one of the grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, the man who wields the greatest power in the entire Master Teacher Pavilion aside from the pavilion master himself. On top of that, he’s a true 9-star master teacher, wielding unfathomable strength in his hands that’s on par with even the old ancestor of our Zhang Clan!

“In fact, he’s renowned to be one of the strongest experts in the world!”

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“The man who wields the greatest power in the entire Master Teacher Pavilion other than the pavilion master himself? One of the strongest experts in the world?” Sun Qiang’s body trembled in agitation.

In the past, he had thought that it would have been great if their Old Master was an 8-star master teacher. However, in the Sanctum of Sages, master teachers of such a rank were aplenty. As such, he had been forced to lie low and remain humble at all times.

But who would have thought that the Old Master was actually such a formidable figure?

One of the grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, a 9-star master teacher, and one of the strongest experts in the world; just any one of those titles was sufficient to leave the entire Master Teacher Continent trembling at its core!

To think that a mere realtor of second-hand houses in Tianxuan Kingdom like him would actually catch the eye of such an incredible figure. In that moment, a feeling of pride sprouted in Sun Qiang’s heart.

Considering the unfathomable eye of discernment that 9-star master teachers possess, the fact that I was able to catch the eye of the Old Master might mean that I possess great talent that even I am unaware of. Sun Qiang widened his eyes in realization.

All along, he had thought that he was an ordinary person, far lacking compared to the many geniuses in the world. However, after learning that the Old Master was such a formidable expert, he came to realize that he had to be a one in a million expert as well.

Otherwise, why would a 9-star master teacher treat him so well and even entrust him with the heavy responsibility of

taking care of his direct disciple?

“It’s Zhang shi’s fortune to have caught the eye of such a figure. But of course, I believe that Yang shi must be delighted to have taken in a student like Zhang shi as well,” Zhang Jiuxiao remarked.

While others might think that Zhang Xuan had to accrue several incarnations of luck in order to find a teacher like Yang Xuan, he knew very well that as long as the young man revealed his identity as a Celestial Master Teacher, there would be no master teacher in the world who would not be willing to take him in as their student.

A moment later, Zhang Jiuxiao suddenly recalled the other party’s previous question and frowned in doubt. “You aren’t aware of Yang shi’s true identity even though you are his butler?”

It was one thing for him to not know of Yang shi’s true identity, but Sun Qiang was someone who had seen Yang shi on multiple occasions, so how could he possibly not know of the matter?

“Our Old Master is a humble and low-profile person, and he dislikes being in the public eye or talking about himself. As such, I’m not too sure about his affairs either,” Sun Qiang replied.

“I see. I guess that’s the attitude that master teachers should have,” Zhang Jiuxiao said with a meaningful nod.

True master teachers should never allow their reputation to weigh down upon them, and clearly, Yang shi was such a person.

“Alright, the reparations for the residence are done. I still have some matters to attend to, so I’ll be taking my leave first. Farewell.”

After chatting for a while longer, Zhang Jiuxiao bade farewell before leaving.

Watching as Zhang Jiuxiao’s figure disappeared into the distance, Sun Qiang thought about what they had discussed

earlier, and a brilliant gleam twinkled into his eyes as he clenched his plump fists tightly together.

Previously, when the Young Master tasked me with gathering some intelligence on the acquirement of pinnacle spirit stones, I wasn't able to get the job done properly due to the hesitation and fear from facing those experts. However, now that I know of the Old Master's identity, why should I have any fear? If anything, they should be the ones fearing me!

Laughing heartily, Sun Qiang stood up from the chair, flung his sleeves, and began walking out of the room with widened strides.

As the butler of the number one expert in the world and a 9-star master teacher, his standing should at least be on par with the sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages. Surely it would be nothing much for him to enquire some information?

Thus, he swiftly made his way over to the Hall of Integrity.

On top of reinforcing one's mental fortitude and tempering one's character, the Hall of Integrity served as an information hub for important news. Most of the missions for the students of the Sanctum of Sages were allocated here.

After taking a swift look around, Sun Qiang was soon standing in front of a vast hall, and with deep confidence, he strutted in.

Seated in a corner of the room was a young man in his early twenties dressed in a black robe. He turned his gaze lazily toward Sun Qiang and said, "Please take out your identity token."

Sun Qiang flicked his wrist and hand over the token that Zhang Xuan had given him.

"A butler of a freshman?" Upon taking a look at the token, the young man scoffed disdainfully before tossing the identity token back. "Speak, what kind of information are you looking for? Is your Young Master looking for missions to participate in?"

From time to time, there would be young students who would purchase news concerning missions from him to complete.

“My Young Master isn’t looking for missions to participate in.” Sun Qiang shook his head. “I’m here to ask where I can exchange for pinnacle spirit stones or equivalent spirit essences and pills here in the Sanctum of Sages.”

“Pinnacle spirit stones?” A frown surfaced on the forehead of the young man, and he waved his hand perfunctorily. “I don’t have such news here. You should return.”

“You don’t have such news here?” Sun Qiang frowned in doubt. “I have visited the other places in the Hall of Integrity, and all of them said that this is the only place with such news. How can you possibly not have such news?”

The reason he had headed there directly was because he had already gathered some news on the matter the previous time he was there.

According to what the others said, this hall was the only place where one could exchange for pinnacle spirit stones.

“I told you that there’s no such news here. Send our guest off...” Just as the impatient young man was about to order the servants to drag this fatty out, an old man suddenly walked into the room.

“I need a pinnacle spirit stone to reinforce my cultivation. I’ll have to trouble you to help me process the exchange.” As he said those words, the old man took out a couple of rare ores and the hair of saint beasts and passed them over.

With just a look, Sun Qiang could tell that these were all good items.

The hair and claws of powerful saint beasts could be used to make weapons or armor that were far stronger than the typical ones forged by blacksmiths, thus making them exceptionally valuable.

“Elder, please wait for a moment!” Seemingly recognizing the identity of the elder, the young man hurriedly turned around and rushed into another room.

Some time later, he returned with a jade container in hand.

Prying it open lightly, overwhelming spiritual energy immediately poured into the surroundings. A spirit stone emanating a blinding radiance came into sight.

“You have my thanks.” After confirming that it was a pinnacle spirit stone, the old man took the jade container and placed it into his storage ring before leaving the room.

At the other party’s departure, a look of displeasure surfaced on Sun Qiang’s face. “Didn’t you say that you have no news concerning pinnacle spirit stones? Why did you process the old man’s exchange straight away then?”

“That old man that you are speaking of is the Sanctum of Sages’ Elder Qian, an 8-star master teacher! Do you think that a mere freshman butler like you can be compared with him? Scram to the side!” the young man scoffed as he waved his hand impatiently.

“What do you mean by that?” Sun Qiang’s face turned cold. “I might be a freshman butler, but it’s not as if I’m asking you to give the pinnacle spirit stone to me for free. As valuable as a pinnacle spirit stone may be, I am still able to afford it at the very least!”

“Afford it?” the young man sneered coldly. “Are you even qualified to buy it? Pinnacle spirit stones are an extremely rare and limited resource in the Master Teacher Continent! Every single one of them expended means that there’s one less to go around. How in the world did a freshman butler gain the notion that you are qualified to command such a valuable resource? How ludicrous!”

Due to the limited quantity of pinnacle spirit stones, the Sanctum of Sages had a strict restriction on who was qualified to procure them. Those whose standing was beneath the necessary requirement would not be able to exchange for one.

This was also the reason it was not used as a currency even in the Sanctum of Sages.

“You are saying that I’m unqualified to purchase the pinnacle spirit stones from you?” Sun Qiang’s face darkened, and his eyes narrowed threateningly.

“Weren’t my words clear enough? Hurry up and scram, or else I’ll just have to find someone to toss you out!” the young man bellowed impatiently.

“Toss me out?” Sun Qiang flung his sleeves furiously, and the air of an inviolable existence drifted off him.

“Audacious! Do you know who I am?”

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“Like I give a damn who you are!” the young man snapped.

A freshman butler like you should already be glad that you are allowed to walk around the Sanctum of Sages without obstruction. How dare you attempt to pull your weight here!

Were this not a place where master teachers gathered, you would have been long thrown out for daring to speak so haughtily!

“Get out of here right now, otherwise I’ll have no choice but to pass a Restriction Order on you, banning you from entering the Hall of Integrity for the rest of your life!” the young man bellowed in irritation.

Even the weakest of the butlers of top-notch powers would be at Saint 6-dan or 7-dan at the minimum. On top of dealing with miscellaneous affairs, they would be able to protect their master too. On the other hand, the fellow before him was not even at Saint realm. What the heck was he talking big for?

To use such a weak butler, it could only mean that the so-called Young Master was from a humble background too. Yet, instead of feeling honored that he was willing to waste so many words on him, that fatty actually dared to speak to him so arrogantly. He really did not know what was the best for him!

“You are saying that you want to pass a Restriction Order on me?” Hearing those words, Sun Qiang was so furious that he started laughing instead.

With a grand wave of his hand, he walked straight toward the main seat in the room and sat down. “I’ll sit down right here and wait for you to pass your Restriction Order. What are you waiting for? Go on. I really will look down on you if you don’t pass it today!”

“You...” Not expecting the fatty to be so arrogant as to sit right down on his teacher’s seat, the young man nearly erupted

on the spot.

Nevertheless, he still reigned in his rage at the very last moment, and with narrowed eyes, he asked sharply, “Do you know what you are doing right now?”

For a fellow who hasn’t even reached Saint realm like you to act so arrogantly, not even putting a Saint 5-dan expert like me in your eyes, aren’t you being a little too brazen?

“Of course I do!” Sun Qiang sneered coldly with a voice filled with confidence. “Rather, do you know whom you are facing, speaking to me in such a manner?”

With a deep frown, the young man took in a deep breath and asked lividly, “Who in the world are you?”

Given how the other party dared to act so arrogantly before him, there could be a chance that the other party might really have strong backing.

Having been in the Sanctum of Sages for so long, he never would have survived through the years if he was not discerning enough to differentiate the real from the fake.

“You aren’t worthy of knowing who I am. Get the elder managing your Hall of Integrity or the deputy sanctum head over here!” Seated calmly on the spot, Sun Qiang waved his hand imposingly with the air of a person in authority, reminiscent of a conqueror grasping innumerable lives in his hands.

Had he known that the Old Master was so formidable, he would not have had to lie so low. This was the kind of attitude that someone of his standing should be taking, otherwise he would only be an embarrassment to the Old Master.

“You want to speak to our elder or the deputy sanctum head directly?” The young man’s lips twitched upon hearing those words.

There were various differing tiers to the teachers and elders in the Sanctum of Sages.

Those at the bottommost level of the staff were the managerial elders. They were usually positions taken up by Saint 7-dan

experts, such as Elder Liao, and they were in charge of resolving most miscellaneous affairs and overlooking the various examinations and trials in the Sanctum of Sages.

Above that were the people in charge of the individual occupation branches in the Sanctum of Sages, such as Physician Bai Yu. This group of people were usually Saint 8-dan experts.

And on top of them were the five elders who governed the Hall of Attainment, Hall of Solidarity, Hall of Propriety, Hall of Erudition, and Hall of Integrity, such as Elder Hu Qing from the Hall of Propriety. Even the weakest of them possessed the might of half-Saint 9-dan.

As for the deputy sanctum head, he was even stronger than that, possessing a cultivation of Saint 9-dan.

These figures were top-notch experts whom he would not even dare to breathe loudly before in their face, and yet, a butler who had not even reached the Saint realm was demanding that they go to him, as if commanding a subordinate.

Was it just empty confidence, or did he really have something to back up his words?

“Indeed. My initial intention was to lie low and maintain a low profile, but since this is the attitude you wish to take with me, I demand to meet them here today. No matter what, they have to offer me an explanation as to why a mere subordinate like you dares to speak to me in such a manner,” Sun Qiang uttered coldly.

The more he spoke of the matter, the more furious he felt.

What the heck is this?

Who am I?

The butler of one of the strongest experts in the world. Putting aside you, even the deputy pavilion master of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters would have to talk to me amicably, not daring to offend me. Yet, a mere Saint 5-dan ant like you actually dared to snub me in such a manner.

You must be out of your mind!

“This...” In the face of the other party’s imposing disposition, the young man was starting to doubt if the fatty seated before him really had an esteemed identity or not.

Just as he was at a loss as to what he should do, an old man suddenly walked in, and his eyes immediately lit up.

He quickly rushed forward and greeted, “Teacher!”

The old man was his teacher, as well as the person-in-charge of the entire Hall of Integrity, Elder Ge Xiong!

Since this matter was already beyond his jurisdiction, it would be best for him to leave it in the hands of his teacher instead. Perhaps, his teacher might recognize his fatty and know of the latter’s background. If so, they would not have to take such a passive stance anymore.

Seeing that someone was sitting on his seat, Elder Ge asked with a frown, “What’s going on?”

“You are Ge Xiong?” Before the young man could even respond, Sun Qiang had already spoken up with a face as cold as a winter’s night. “You sure have taught your student well. What are you waiting for? Hurry up and offer your apologies to me!”

He had long heard of the person-in-charge of the Hall of Integrity, and he had seen the other party from afar once before. As such, he was able to recognize the other party with a single glance.

“Offer my apologies?” Elder Ge frowned.

A weak cultivator who had not even reached the Saint realm was taking up his seat and even demanding that a half-Saint 9-dan expert like him apologized? Was he hearing things?

Where did this imbecile pop out from?

“Indeed. Your student said that he would chase me out from the Hall of Integrity and even issue a Restriction Order against me. I never thought that I would hear something so insolent from the mouth of a junior. Apologizing is already the laxest punishment I can think of. Otherwise, I’m afraid that I’ll have

to find someone to replace you as the head of the Hall of Integrity!”

Sun Qiang narrowed his eyes menacingly as he harrumphed coldly. “There are plenty of candidates in line to take over your position. Don’t think that you’re safe just because of the position you are in!”

“Replace me?” Completely speechless by what he was hearing, Elder Ge turned to the young man beside him and asked, “Who in the world in this imbecile?”

Just who did that fatty think he was?

Not even the deputy sanctum head had the right to remove him on a whim!

To speak such arrogant words before him, was he tired of living?

“Teacher, you don’t know him either?” the young man asked in surprise.

He had thought that his teacher would surely know this person given how knowledgeable he was, but who would have thought that his teacher would be at a complete loss as to what was happening as well?

“I took a look at his identity token earlier, and he’s the butler of a freshman who has just enrolled this year!” the young man informed his teacher through zhenqi telepathy.

“He’s the butler of a freshman?” Dark streaks immediately filled Elder Ge’s forehead.

Were the butlers of the freshmen now all so arrogant?

Demanding for him to apologize and even threatening to find someone to replace him...

“If there’s a problem with how I teach my student, the Sanctum of Sages will step in and correct me accordingly, so there’s no need for you to worry about it. Rather, I would just like to ask, what right do you have to make a half-Saint 9-dan expert like me apologize to you?” Elder Ge asked with a hint of displeasure in his voice.

As a high ranked master teacher, even though he was deeply infuriated by Sun Qiang's insolence, he was still able to suppress his emotions and maintain his composure.

Otherwise, he surely would have sent a slap right over to the other party. How could he possibly allow such a weak fellow to spout this bunch of nonsense before him?

“What rights do I have?” Sun Qiang stood up and placed his hands before his back. He slowly took a step at a time toward Elder Ge with a lofty air surrounding him. “Since you have asked such a question, fine, I'll fulfill your curiosity. My Young Master is a student from the latest batch of freshmen, Zhang Xuan!”

“Zhang Xuan?” Elder Ge frowned.

Even though Zhang Xuan had caused a huge commotion in the other halls, his reputation had not reached the Hall of Integrity yet.

“That's right. Well, you might not have heard much about my Young Master, but I believe that the name of my Old Master should strike a chord in your mind!”

Harrumphing coldly, Sun Qiang tilted his chin upward with a proud look on his face. “The Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters' Yang Xuan!”

1395 You Imposter!

“Yang Xuan? You are... Yang shi’s butler?” Elder Ge was stunned for an instant before his face abruptly warped in shock.

As the number one grand elder in the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, it went without saying that he had heard rumors about the other party. But who would have thought that this fatty standing before him would actually be that legendary man’s butler?

It was no wonder the other party was so arrogant and haughty! If he was truly the butler of the man who stood at the very peak of the Master Teacher Continent, then he definitely had the right to speak in such a manner to him!

“Indeed!” A hint of majesty could be seen on Sun Qiang’s plump face as he took another step forward.

After the initial shock, Elder Ge grimly questioned, “Yang shi’s whereabouts have been a mystery to even the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters. You claim that you are his butler, but do you have any evidence to prove that?”

Even if he was willing to believe the fatty’s words, it simply did not make sense for Yang Xuan to take in such a weak butler!

A powerful general had no feeble soldiers under his command. For a person who was not even at Saint realm to claim that he was Yang Xuan’s butler, this was simply too much of a stretch to be true!

Ancient Sage Qiu Wu was Kong shi’s servant as well, but he still managed to reach an unparalleled level of strength in the world!

To take in such a person as his butler... it would be like a smudge on Yang shi’s name!

After all, if Yang shi really wanted a butler, not even 9-star master teachers would turn him down. Why would he choose a

weakling who had not even reached Saint realm yet?

Not to mention, just by what he had seen so far, the other party was a dim-witted and crude individual!

However, he could sense that the other party meant the words that he said. All of his vitals showed that he was not lying, and this was exactly what left Elder Ge feeling rather perplexed.

“Audacious!” With a livid face, Sun Qiang bellowed furiously. “Are you doubting my words, or are you doubting my Old Master’s judgement?”

“I wouldn’t dare to doubt Yang shi’s judgement.” Elder Ge shook his head. “However, as the butler of a 9-star master teacher, he should have imprinted his blessing within you. If it’s convenient for you, I hope that you would allow me a look. Once I verify your blessing, I’ll have my student apologize to you immediately.

“Otherwise, I’ll have no choice but to hold you liable for impersonating the butler of a 9-star master teacher and publicly humiliating the head of the Hall of Integrity, and the severity of these two sentences warrants the death penalty.”

Considering that the Sanctum of Sages was a subsidiary power to the Master Teacher Pavilion, naturally, Elder Ge dared not doubt the judgement of a grand elder from the headquarters. But so far, they had only heard empty claims from the fatty before him, so naturally, he held some reservations toward the matter.

For a fellow whom even he would snub to be taken in as Yang shi’s butler... this simply sounded too ridiculous to be true!

“Blessing?” Sun Qiang was slightly startled to hear that word.

He had met the Old Master on many occasions, but he had never heard of such a thing before!

“Just a surge of zhenqi from someone of Yang shi’s prowess can bring unimaginable benefits and strength to an individual. If you are truly his butler, he will have left a will or something similar within you. Otherwise, you could be killed very easily by enemies given your cultivation realm, and that would make

it extremely difficult for you to work for him, don't you agree?" Elder Ge explained.

Since the butler was working for the master teacher, it was only natural for the master teacher to offer some degree of protection to the butler. Under normal circumstances, the subordinates of high-ranking master teachers would have some kind of blessing infused into them so as to ensure that their lives would not be threatened when facing an enemy. If the fatty before him was truly Yang shi's butler, he was bound to have a blessing or something similar within him.

Otherwise, it would reflect poorly on Yang shi if his butler was killed.

"I... Of course my Old Master has bestowed upon me his blessing!" Sun Qiang was trembling fearfully on the inside, but on the surface, he continued putting up a brave front and harrumphed furiously. "Just that, how can I possibly show his blessing to anyone else so easily? What if I scare you out of your wits?"

As far as he knew, the Old Master had not imprinted a blessing on him before, but... it was already too late for him to back down at this point. Thus, he could only thicken his skin and push his way forward.

In any case, as long as he refused to take out the blessing, the other party should not be able to do anything about it.

"Don't worry, it'll be all good as long as you have Yang shi's blessing. There's no need for you to take it out," Elder Ge replied with a smile. "A master teacher of Yang shi's caliber is able to instill instinctive deference from other ordinary master teachers. As long as you follow me to the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall, we'll be able to discern if your words are true via the reflection of a unique formation."

"Teacher Acknowledgement Hall?" Sun Qiang's face twitched slightly upon hearing those words.

Even though he was not a master teacher, he had been to all kinds of Master Teacher Pavilions in his time with Zhang Xuan. He knew the significance of the Teacher

Acknowledgement Hall to master teachers and that the will of countless predecessors resided in there. There was no trickery nor falsehood that would be able to escape their eyes.

The fact that he did not have the Old Master's blessing would be exposed in an instant if they headed there.

"Don't you think it's deeply disrespectful to trouble the wills of the predecessors over something as trivial as this? My Old Master has always preached that a person should always rely on himself as far as possible so as to not trouble others unnecessarily!" Sun Qiang replied haughtily without the slightest tinge of redness in his face.

The days he had spent as a realtor back in the Tianxuan Kingdom had allowed him to refine his art of lying.

"It's not a trivial matter at all. This matter concerns the honor of a 9-star master teacher, so it's imperative that we take it with utmost seriousness. Otherwise, I will have to report this matter to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and have them send an envoy to verify the matter. That truly would be troubling others," Elder Ge replied earnestly.

The other party's firm confidence had left him a little doubtful earlier, but with the other party insistently refusing to verify his identity, he was starting to be more and more convinced that the other party was a fake.

Without bothering to give Sun Qiang any opportunity to argue, Elder Ge turned around and instructed, "Escort Yang Shi's butler to the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall!"

"Yes!" the young man replied.

He stepped forward, and a burst of energy surged from his palm and wrapped around Sun Qiang like iron chains, rendering the latter completely immobile.

As one who had not even reached the Saint realm yet, his strength was nothing compared to the Saint 5-dan young man.

"Butler Sun, this way please!" the young man gestured forward with a smile.

“I...” Not expecting to be treated in such a manner, Sun Qiang’s face reddened in rage. “How dare you bind the butler of a grand elder of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters? Will any of you be able to bear the consequences once my Old Master learns of the matter?”

“Bind? We would not dare bind a person as esteemed as you. All we are doing is inviting you over to the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall to verify your identity. As Yang shi’s butler, you should be well aware of how important lineages are to master teachers, so even if Yang shi does learn of this matter, he will agree with our actions,” Elder Ge said as he walked out of the room.

The young man quickly followed behind while dragging Sun Qiang along with him. Not too long later, they arrived before a vast hall.

Within the hall was a massive altar filled with innumerable tablets. These had been left behind by the generations of outstanding predecessors of the Sanctum of Sages. Erected at the very center of the room was Kong shi’s sculpture, and he was looking at the sky with eyes filled with compassion for the entire world.

By the side of the hall, there was a row of smaller sculptures. The sculpture at the very forefront of the row was an old man whose eyes were tightly shut. He was the founder of the Sanctum of Sages, Ancient Sage Bo Shang. To the right of him was Sage Kui.

After which was the Second Sanctum Head, the Third Sanctum Head, and so on.

The sculptures of these sanctum heads were significantly shorter than Kong shi, and it seemed as if they were listening to his teaching, comprehending the true nature of the world.

“We have arrived at the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall. If you really do possess the blessing of Yang shi, we should be able to tell easily here,” Elder Ge said with a smile before waving his hand grandly.

Huala!

Many rays of light shot forth from the tablets and the sculptures and fell upon Sun Qiang, embracing his body. It seemed like they were trying to detect the presence of any blessing within him.

Hu!

A moment later, the light shrouding Sun Qiang dissipated into the surroundings.

“You have no blessing imprinted on you at all! As expected, you have been lying all this time!” the young man bellowed in agitation.

“Preposterous! How can you even think of impersonating Yang shi’s butler? You must really be tired of...” Elder Ge glanced at Sun Qiang with eyes that looked ready to kill.

Kacha!

But before Elder Ge could finish his words, a resounding explosion suddenly echoed in the hall—one of the tablets had exploded. Following which, the other tablets swiftly followed suit, as if fearing that it would be considered an act of disrespect if they were to detonate themselves late.

In just the blink of an eye, the room was filled with wooden shavings all around.

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“This...”

The lower jaw of both Elder Ge and the young man fell to the ground, completely flabbergasted by what they were seeing.

The situation had far exceeded their imagination.

If Yang shi’s blessing was imprinted within Sun Qiang’s body, all of the predecessors whose strength was beneath Yang shi’s when they left behind their will would fall down as a sign of respect to him.

And based off what they knew of Yang shi’s strength, there were definitely not too many predecessors in the Sanctum of Sages who would be a match for him. If Sun Qiang was truly Yang shi’s butler, they estimated that roughly half of tablets would fall, leaving behind just a few incredible experts and the sanctum heads.

But instead of falling, they ended up exploding. What the heck was going on?

Elder Ge anxiously looked at the altar of tablets before him, but as if meeting with some kind of supernatural occurrence, they were exploding one after another with increasing frequency. In just a few breaths, they had all already been reduced to wooden shavings with none surviving the ordeal.

“It’s fortunate that the sculptures of the sanctum heads are still intact...” Elder Ge heaved a sigh of relief.

It was already bad enough for the tablets to be destroyed under his watch, so if anything had happened to Sage Kui and other sculpture as well, he really would have been in deep trouble.

But before he could finish his words, cracks began creeping across the sculpture of the Ninth Sanctum Head, growing more and more numerous.

Kacha! Kacha!

A second later, it was nothing more than a pile of rubble on the ground.

And as if a contagious disease, the same symptoms struck the Eighth Sanctum Head, followed by the Seventh Sanctum Head, then the Sixth...

Even Ancient Sage Bo Shang was not spared from this mysterious malady and split in two, leaving behind Kong shi standing silently on the spot.

At this point, Elder Ge and the young man's minds had gone completely blank.

The sanctum head of each generation was an astounding genius, be it in terms of their fighting prowess or eye of discernment. They would not pale in comparison even against the grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion!

This was even more so for Ancient Sage Bo Shang. As one of Kong shi's direct disciple, he had achieved a level of cultivation that not a single generation of deputy pavilion masters of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters were able to match up to. So why would they shatter all of a sudden while in the midst of recognizing Yang shi?

Just when in the world did Yang shi reach such a level of power?

If that was the case, as an elder of the Sanctum of Sages, Elder Ge should have heard of the joyous news by now!

Those two were not the only ones who were taken aback by the happenings. Even the perpetrator of the entire affair, Sun Qiang, was completely dumbstruck as well.

He had thought that he would be exposed this time around, but who could have known that this would happen instead?

While the Old Master had never imprinted a blessing on him, the Young Master did infuse several surges of zhenqi into his body before, saying that it would protect him in times of danger. It was out of a moment of desperation that he tried

driving them earlier, but who would have thought that it would lead to the tablets exploding instead?

It was as if they had met a being whom they dared not oppose. The whole debacle was too bizarre!

“You...” Just as Sun Qiang was deep in thought, he saw Elder Ge looking at him with a speechless expression on his face.

“Do you believe that I am Yang shi’s butler now?” Seeing that he was finally out of danger, Sun Qiang heaved a sigh of relief on the inside while glancing down on Elder Ge imposingly, as if everything had been under his control all this while.

“This...” Elder Ge was just about to nod when a resounding creak filled the room, and the next instant, Kong shi’s sculpture placed his hands together and bowed deeply, seemingly greeting a peer.

Huala!

Following which, cracks began surfaced on Kong shi’s sculpture as well, and it took just a few moments for it to explode into smithereens. And just as everyone thought that the worst was over, the entire Teacher Acknowledgement Hall suddenly began shaking non-stop, and the roof began plummeting down on them one chunk at a time.

Hong long long!

In less than two breaths, the majestic building collapsed inward, becoming nothing more than a pile of rubble.

“Just what in the world is going on?” Elder Ge and the young man looked at one another with frenzied expressions on their faces.

They had been planning to bring that fellow over to verify if that fellow really had Yang shi’s blessing imprinted on him or not, but who could have known that the entire Teacher Acknowledgement Hall would end up collapsing instead?

The Teacher Acknowledgement Hall was a place where the wills of the predecessors were stored. Even if the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe managed to destroy every single hall of the Sanctum of Sages, it would still be nigh impossible

for them to tear down the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall. Yet, the impregnable fortress was actually reduced to such a state.

Are you an envoy sent by the God of Destruction to bring ruination upon us!

“What happened?”

Barely after diving out of the rubble, they swiftly heard a voice in the sky. Looking up, they saw various silhouettes rushing over in their direction. The one taking the lead was an old man, and upon seeing the current state of the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall, his lips began twitching uncontrollably, seemingly unable to believe what he was seeing.

He was the incumbent deputy sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages, Zhan Tiancheng.

“Zhan shi...” Seeing that the deputy sanctum head had come down personally, Elder Ge hurriedly clasped his fist and explained everything that had happened in detail.

“While verifying for the presence of a blessing, the tablets all shattered, and Kong shi placed his hands together and bowed deeply?”

Upon hearing the story from Elder Ge, Zhan shi and the other elders in the sky looked at one another with unbelievable expressions on their faces.

For Kong shi to actually bow to another man as his peer... What a joke!

Who in the world could possibly be worthy of having the World’s Teacher bow down to them as a peer?

“What I’m saying is the absolute truth! If you don’t believe me, you can have him try it again once the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall is fixed!” Elder Ge exclaimed in agitation, seeing the doubt in the others’ eyes.

“The Teacher Acknowledgement Hall harnesses the will of many predecessors. It’ll take at least half a year in order to restore it to its previous state.” Zhan shi shook his head and

frowned. “Why don’t we do this instead? We shall temporarily seal our cultivation and use our own perceiving methods to examine Butler Sun’s condition so as to determine what’s going on.”

Their strength was already no weaker than the predecessors, so they could use the same means to determine if there was truly a blessing in Sun Qiang or not. At the same time, they would be able to find out what had happened earlier as well.

“Sounds good.” Elder Ge nodded.

“Let’s begin then!” Zhan shi instructed.

The various elders quickly surrounded Sun Qiang, and with a flick of their wrist, a ray of light burst forth from their hands.

Hong long!

Just like before, the light congregated on Sun Qiang, forming a sphere of light around him.

They really won’t learn, will they? Seeing that the crowd was still insisting on examining him, Sun Qiang shook his head helplessly.

He drove the zhenqi that the Young Master had infused into his body before turning to look at one of the elders.

Padah!

A slight jolt sounded, and the elder abruptly plummeted from the sky before lying in a daze on the ground, as if having encountered something terrifying.

Then, Sun Qiang turned his gaze to another one of the elders.

Paji!

That elder plummeted from the sky, too.

This... Scratching his head, Sun Qiang turned to the third elder.

Hu hu hu!

Wherever Sun Qiang’s eyes fell, the elders in that direction would suddenly lose control of their strength and plummet to

the ground. In just the blink of an eye, only Zhan shi was left in the sky.

“You...” Watching as Sun Qiang slowly turned his head around, Zhan shi could not help but shudder in fear.

Just as he was about to speak, he suddenly saw a towering figure appearing right before his eyes. That figure was so big that he seemed to cover the entire world, or perhaps, he was the world itself, a manifestation of the authority of the heavens.

Padah!

A jolt struck Zhan shi’s heart, and he suddenly found his zhenqi slowing to a halt. Just like that, he plummeted from the sky as well and struck the ground headfirst, dyeing his hair with dirt.

Watching as the deputy sanctum head and other elders fell from the sky, Elder Ge’s eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets. His teeth clattered together in fear as he looked at the fat silhouette before him with a hint of apprehension in his eyes.

“The Young Master’s zhenqi is actually so useful?”

While the crowd was overwhelmed by shock and fear, Sun Qiang was reveling in his newfound ability. He excitedly drove the zhenqi that the Young Master had infused into his body and swept his gaze across the crowd once more.

In response to that, Zhan shi and the others convulsed on the spot. Another sweeping gaze, and they convulsed on the spot once more. Sun Qiang could not help but find the situation deeply interesting.

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It was some time later before Sun Qiang reluctantly came to a halt.

It was not that he did not want to continue playing with the various master teachers, but the zhenqi that the Young Master had left in his body was limited in the first place. He could not just waste it all on trivial playing; he had to keep some for times of danger as well.

Hu hu!

With Sun Qiang ceasing to abuse the Heaven's Path zhenqi, Zhan shi and the others finally managed to rise back up into the sky. They instinctively turned their gazes toward the fatty beneath them—fear and shock could be seen reflected in the depths of their eyes.

The detection method required them to seal their cultivation so that they could better sense the presence of a master teacher's aura with their senses. Under normal circumstances, as long as the person who had left behind the blessing was not too much stronger than them, they would only feel a surge of respect and admiration for the individual.

What that had happened earlier—the loss of ability to move their bodies—should have been impossible! There had never been such an incidence of something like that happening before.

But the impossible had really come true this time around.

One of the elders cowered back fearfully before turning his gaze over to the others and asking, “What did you all see?”

“I saw a silhouette that towered even against the sky, an existence that seemed to encompass the entire world... it was almost as if that figure was the heavens themselves!” an elder said.

“That's exactly what I saw too!”

“Could it be that Yang shi has already achieved that level of strength?”

The crowd gulped before they gasped in shock.

Just what kind of realm had Yang shi reached in order for the blessing he imprinted to harness such astounding power?

“Yang shi has close ties with the old ancestors of the Three Sage Clans, especially with the Zhang Clan and the Luo Clan. In fact, he was the witness to the betrothal of the young prodigy and the little princess! He surpassed Saint 9-dan many years ago, reaching an unfathomable level in his cultivation. Furthermore, he possesses exceptional sensitivity toward souls and bloodlines, such that it would be no exaggeration to say that he’s the number one expert in that field in the world!” Zhan shi said.

“Other than him, I can think of no one else who wields the power to reduce the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall to such a state and render every single one of us completely powerless!”

While most elders in the Sanctum of Sages might not know much about the elusive grand elder of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, as the deputy sanctum head, Zhan shi still knew a thing or two.

And honestly, other than that legendary man, he could not think of anyone else who could make them plummet completely helplessly from the sky with just his aura.

“Does this mean that... he’s really Yang shi’s butler?” Elder Ge’s body stiffened.

“That’s most likely the case.” Zhan shi nodded. Then, he turned to Elder Ge and berated him in displeasure. “As Yang shi’s butler, it’s natural for Butler Sun to put on airs, or else what would become of the strict hierarchy of order among the master teachers? Yet, you doubted him and forcefully dragged him over to the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall to verify his identity. It’s no wonder he was unhappy and reduced the entire place to such a state. Elder Ge, this is a mess that you caused, so you’d better put some thought into how you intend to resolve it!”

Would anyone in their right mind dare impersonate Yang shi's butler?

Considering the heavy price that one would have to pay once caught, no sane person would attempt to impersonate as Yang shi's butler! Yet, he just had to doubt Butler Sun.

Look at the good work you have done! The Teacher Acknowledgement Hall has collapsed, and the several dozen millenniums of pride and honor of the Sanctum of Sages has been completely ruined!

"Yes..." Elder Ge nodded with a bitter smile on his face.

Gritting his teeth, he slowly walked toward to Sun Qiang, but before he could say a word, the latter had already put his hands behind his back once more and questioned with a haughty look on his face, "How is it? Have you verified my identity?"

"Of course, of course!" Elder Ge quickly nodded.

"Humph! Your student tried to throw me out of the Hall of Integrity and pass a Restraint Order on me, and you forcefully brought me to the Hall of Acknowledgement in order to verify my identity. How do you think we should resolve this matter?" Sun Qiang asked with an authoritative tone.

It was really fortunate that the Young Master had left a surge of zhenqi in his body, or else things would have gotten really awkward!

Of course, it was impossible for the Young Master's zhenqi to be so formidable by itself. In his view, the Old Master must have left behind some kind of means within him that even he was oblivious to.

But thinking over the matter once more, despite being a butler of the number one figure in the Master Teacher Continent, he had actually been messed around by a minor figure like that. The more he thought about it, the more infuriated he became.

"Butler Sun, Elder Ge was just ignorant of your identity, so if you could be so kind as to..." Zhan shi quickly stepped in and intervened.

“I told him whom my Old Master is, but he chose to doubt my words instead. I, Sun Qiang, have traveled here step by step from the Tianxuan Kingdom, and I have braved countless storms. But this is the first time I have seen someone that conceited!” Sun Qiang sneered coldly. “If everyone were to behave in such a manner, what would become of Yang Shi’s authority? What would become of the Master Teacher Pavilion’s authority?”

“This...” Zhan Shi frowned in a dilemma.

While humility was celebrated among the master teachers, there was still a need to regard the leaders of mankind with respect so as to not undermine their authority.

If everyone disregarded the authority of those in power, it would be hard for the leaders of mankind to rally the populace together to fight against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

Knowing that he was at fault for this incident, Elder Ge clenched his fists tightly and stepped forward. “Butler Sun, feel free to say what you want me to do. As long as it’s within my means, consider it done.”

“You are a master teacher whereas I am just a butler; I don’t have the right to issue any punishment to you.” Sun Qiang shot a glance at Elder Ge. There was a short pause before he waved his hand and continued. “However, if you wish to make reparations, it just happens that our Young Master is in dire need for pinnacle spirit stones. If you can bring some over, I think we can let this matter rest. Don’t worry, I’ll pay an equivalent price for the exchange. It’s not my habit to blackmail or coerce others into things.”

Having followed Zhang Xuan for quite some time, as he came into contact with higher ranked master teachers, he began to gain a deeper understanding of the rules concerning master teachers.

It was true that even 8-star master teachers would have to show him respect out of deference to the Old Master, but ultimately, he still was not a master teacher, so he was not qualified to pass judgement upon them. It would be a breach of etiquette.

“That’s simple, consider it done!” Hearing that the other party just wanted to exchange for pinnacle spirit stones, Elder Ge immediately heaved a sigh of relief. He flicked his wrist, and a jade container materialized in his hand. “Here are five pinnacle spirit stones. Please consider them an apology for my undeserving disciple’s insolent actions. If you wish to make any further exchange for pinnacle spirit stones, feel free to look for me. As long as it’s not beyond fifty pinnacle spirit stones, I should be able to sort it for you!”

“You are a wise man.” Sun Qiang nodded with a pleased smile on his face as he accepted the jade container.

The very purpose of his visit was to acquire the pinnacle spirit stones, and not only did he gain five of them for free, he was even given the right to exchange for them whenever. This outcome was one that he was extremely content with.

At the same time, he could not help but think how convenient it was when there was someone above that he could rely on.

Had these master teachers not found the Old Master’s blessing in him, putting aside earning these pinnacle spirit stones, he might not even have been allowed to walk out of there alive!

Seeing that the conflict was resolved, Zhan shi stepped forward and asked with a smile, “Butler Sun, if I may, what level of cultivation has Yang shi reached, and where is he at the moment?”

The imposing figure that he had seen earlier was simply too frightening, such that his heart was still beating in trepidation. Could Yang shi have really crossed that bottleneck and achieved that unfathomable realm?

“Our Old Master has always been a rather elusive figure, and even I don’t have any means of contacting him. Usually, he’s the one who looks for me instead. I’m also not too sure on the specifics regarding how powerful he is either, but I do know that the strength he wields has reached a level far beyond anyone’s gauge... such that it’s no exaggeration to say that he’s unrivalled in this world!”

When speaking of Yang Xuan, a brilliant gleam lit up in Sun Qiang's eyes, and his voice grew conspicuously agitated.

Despite his overwhelming strength, the Old Master still remained amiable and compassionate, and this left him deeply in awe.

“Yang shi is truly a person worthy of respect.” Zhan shi nodded. Just as he was about to continue speaking, an elder beside him suddenly rushed up to him with a bizarre look on his face.

“Zhan shi, there's someone looking for you outside.”

“Looking for me?” Zhan shi frowned. “Who is it?”

As the deputy sanctum head of the Sanctum of Sages, a Saint 9-dan expert, he was not a figure whom just anyone could meet.

The elder shot a glance at Sun Qiang, and his lips twitched slightly. Then, with a slightly awkward tone, he said, “That person claims that he is... Yang shi's butler!”

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“Ya-Yang shi’s butler? Which Yang shi?” Zhan shi was stunned by the elder’s report.

“It’s Yang Xuan!” the elder replied.

Zhan shi froze on the spot.

They had finally recognized the plump man standing before them as Yang shi’s butler when another one popped up all of a sudden. Was this some kind of elaborate prank working against them?

When did the position of Yang shi’s butler become so worthless that one could be found at every turn?

“What’s going on?” Zhan shi sent a telepathic message privately to the elder.

What the heck was this?

This was the Sanctum of Sages, not some ‘Guess Who Yang shi’s Real Butler Is’ event venue. For Yang shi’s butlers to pop up one after another... were they trying to stress him to death?

“I have no idea. My student just sent me the message.” At which, the elder suddenly paused for a brief moment before continuing on. “Furthermore, it seems like the person is someone whom you are acquainted with.”

“Someone whom I am acquainted with?” Zhan shi was bewildered by those words.

While he had heard of many affairs surrounding Yang shi, most of them were concerning official matters instead of the latter’s private life. On top of that, he had not had the honor of meeting the latter in person. Thus, he was not familiar with the latter’s personal relations. For example, he had not even heard of such Butler Sun prior to this matter. So, it was really perplexing to him that another one of Yang shi’s butlers would pop up and all of a sudden claim that he was acquainted with him.

“That’s right. Do you still remember Hu Yiwei?” the elder replied telepathically.

“You are speaking of... the Thousand Hands Poison Monarch Hu Yiwei?” Zhan shi subconsciously tightened his fists upon hearing that name.

“That’s right, it’s him!” the elder nodded grimly.

“The top echelon of the Poison Hall headquarters is classified by the Two Guardians, Four Eminences, Twelve Poison Kings, and seventy-two Tier-1 Hall Masters. As the Left Guardian of the Poison Hall, Hu Yiwei’s name is often raised alongside Right Guardian Shen Jue, and he’s known for his exceptional mastery of poison!”

Recalling the history surrounding Hu Yiwei, an involuntary shudder ran through Zhan shi’s body. “It’s said that his mastery of poison has already reached a level so high that he could even plant poison within an embryo through the mother’s body without harming either of the two, cursing the child to a life of suffering. The poisons that he concocts are so potent and powerful that even 9-star physicians would find themselves completely helpless before them!”

“Indeed. There was a period of time when he wreaked havoc in the Master Teacher Continent, poisoning every single person that he came by. Eventually, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters were forced to dispatch their forces to surround and take him down. If I recall correctly, Zhan shi, you were involved in that operation back then, right?” the elder asked.

“That’s right, I did participate in that operation. Combining the forces dispatched by the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, Sanctum of Sages, and Combat Master Hall, there was a total of nine Saint 9-dan experts in total. We managed to corner him at an ancient city, and we set up an unbreachable trap in order to force him to surrender. Yet, who could have thought that the fellow would actually manage to forcefully break out of our defenses through the sheer potency of his poison? Six of the Saint 9-dan experts died on the spot,

and it's only by a stroke of luck that I managed to survive the ordeal.”

As Zhan shi recalled the affairs that had happened back then, hostility rippled in his eyes, and he seemed to grow slightly agitated. “It is due to that lethal poison that my cultivation hasn't progressed at all for the past twenty years, stagnating at Saint 9-dan primary stage.”

“After that matter, the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters organized a couple more operations, but the cunning Hu Yiwei managed to get away each time. However, all news surrounding him abruptly stopped two months afterward, and he has not been seen since then. There are rumors saying that he encountered Yang shi, and the latter subdued him and made him his subordinate!” the elder said.

Due to the vast implications of the matter, the operations conducted over the past two decades had been kept confidential among the top brass of the Master Teacher Pavilion. As such, those who had not participated in those operations would never know of these matters.

“Un, I have heard of that rumor, too. No matter how powerful Hu Yiwei is, there's no way he would stand a chance against the powerful Yang shi. If that man who is requesting to meet me is really Hu Yiwei, then there might just be some credibility to the rumors!” Zhan shi said.

While he harbored deep anger toward the Hu Yiwei, if it was true that the latter had become Yang shi's subordinate, he would have no choice but to forsake all thoughts of exacting vengeance.

It was true that the Thousand Hands Poison Monarch had erred greatly in the past, but if Yang shi could guarantee that the other party would use his powers to contribute to mankind in the future, that would surely be preferable to killing the other party. After all, Saint 9-dan experts were not easy to come by, and mankind was in need of all the strength it could get in order to deal with the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

The rumors that Yang shi had subdued Hu Yiwei had spread like wildfire at one point in time, but there had been no

concrete evidence then to determine the authenticity of the rumor. As such, they could only take the matter with a pinch of salt.

But... who would have thought that it would actually be real!

“You’re right...” The elder hesitated for a brief moment before asking, “Should we invite him in?”

“Since he’s Yang shi’s butler, he should be acquainted with Butler Sun over here. It would be good to allow them to interact with one another, and perhaps, we just might be able to determine the cause of the peculiar situation earlier,” Zhan shi said.

Only someone as powerful as Yang shi could have the strength to possibly make the vicious Hu Yiwei bow in submission. If the person requesting an audience with him was truly Hu Yiwei, there should be little doubt that he was really Yang shi’s butler. After all, why else would someone as esteemed as the Left Guardian of the Poison Hall claim that he was the butler of a master teacher? That would only be lowering his standing!

Considering how the plump man before him was Yang shi’s butler as well, there was a good chance that the both of them knew one another.

“Alright.” The elder nodded before leaving the room.

Some time later, he returned with a gray-robed elder behind him.

This elder had particularly thick eyebrows, and there was a gloomy tone to his eyes, making it hard for one to read his emotions.

His true cultivation was buried deep within his body, making it impossible for one to accurately gauge his strength. However, based on what Zhan shi had said, he was likely to be a Saint 9-dan expert at the very minimum.

Hu Yiwei walked right up to Zhan shi and said with a slight smile, “Zhan Tiancheng, we meet once more.”

“Indeed, we meet once more,” Zhan shi said with narrowed eyes as he tried his best to suppress his fury.

“You need not get angry. I was the Left Guardian of the Poison Hall back then, so it’s a given that we would attempt to kill one another. But since I have become Yang shi’s butler, we can be considered allies standing on the same front now. There’s no reason for you to view me hostilely,” Hu Yiwei said.

“Indeed, there’s no reason for that anymore.” Zhan shi shook his head. “May I know the reason behind your visit? If there’s nothing much, why don’t I show you the way out?”

“Don’t be so quick to send me off. Why don’t you take a look at this first? Perhaps, it might change your mind!” Hu Yiwei flicked his finger, and a jade bottle flew over.

Zhan shi casually grabbed the jade bottle and pried it open. A moment later, his eyes narrowed, “Is this... the antidote to the poison in my body?”

Ever since becoming afflicted with the poison from the other party twenty years ago, he had sought out countless physicians, but none of them had been able to do anything about it. As a result of that, he had been unable to advance his cultivation. It was exactly for this reason that he was filled with rage for the other party. Yet, who would have thought that the other party would deliver the antidote right to him?

“Indeed. My master wishes me to cure all those patients whom I have poisoned over the years. Even though the poison you were afflicted with wasn’t too severe, it still must have caused you quite some suffering over the years. Thus, I hope to make it up to you one way or another,” Hu Yiwei explained.

“Help me relay my thanks to Yang shi.” With Zhan shi’s eye of discernment, he was able to tell whether the antidote was real or not with just a single glance, and he could hardly control his excitement with the cure to his long-term affliction right in his hands.

He hurriedly placed it into his storage ring before recalling the other matter he had in mind, so he gestured to Sun Qiang and said, “Right, why don’t I introduce the both of you to one

another? This gentleman over here is also Yang shi's butler, Sun Qiang."

"Butler Sun, this elder over here is Hu Yiwei, Yang shi's butler. Well, I guess the both of you should be acquainted with one another, right?"

"Yang shi's butler?" Hu Yiwei frowned in doubt. "I am the only butler that Yang shi has. How could there be another butler?"

On the other hand, Sun Qiang's eyebrows shot up upon hearing those words, and displeasure surfaced on his face. "Little Zhan, you said that he's the Old Master's butler too? You must be joking with me!"

After which, he turned his sights to Hu Yiwei and bellowed, "Preposterous! How dare you impersonate the Old Master's butler? Men, take him down!"

1399 Sun Qiang's Wrath

A wave of silence swept across the room.

The teeth of every single elder in the room were clattering non-stop, and they looked at Sun Qiang as if they were looking at a monster.

The gray-robed elder wielded strength that even Zhan shi could not match, and yet, that plump man actually said that the other party was preposterous and even commanded for others to take him down.

Even if we want to take him down, we need the strength to do so first!

If we really attempt to do so, every single one of us will probably be poisoned to the ground by the end of today!

On the other hand, Hu Yiwei was taken aback for an instant before his eyes narrowed into thin slits. "What did you say?"

He had been following Yang shi for more than twenty years now, and he knew very well whether the latter had more butlers and subordinates or not. In fact, he was the one who dealt with almost all of the miscellaneous matters. It was one thing for him to have never met the plump man standing before him, but to think that the other party would dare speak to him in such a manner!

"Are you deaf? Didn't you hear what I said?" Sun Qiang waved his hand in impatience. "Speak! What's your motive for pretending to be the Old Master's butler? You might have been able to get away with it if you did it elsewhere, but it seems that you have lucked out. You never thought that you would meet me, Yang shi's real butler, hmm?"

"Real butler?" Sensing the complete lack of nervousness within Sun Qiang while saying those words, Hu Yiwei could not help but turn his gaze to Zhan shi. "Zhan Tiancheng, who is this fellow?"

"You don't know one another?" Zhan shi's lips twitched.

He had thought that as fellow butlers of Yang shi, the both of them should have been acquainted with one another. Yet, who could have thought that a meeting between the both of them would end up so tense instead? It was not only the case that the both of them hadn't met one another, it was more like they did not even know of each other's existence!

This almost felt like a wife meeting the mistress for the first time!

“Am I supposed to know every insignificant person out there in the world?” Hu Yiwei flung his sleeves coldly.

His master was one of the strongest experts in the Master Teacher Continent, and even the weakest cultivator in his social circle was at Saint 9-dan at minimum. Given so, how could his master possibly take a fellow who was not even at the Saint realm yet as his butler?

“He... claims to be Yang shi's butler, and we validated his identity through the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall earlier. Yang shi has indeed imprinted his blessing on him,” Zhan shi explained.

The person who had imprinted a blessing onto Sun Qiang was an expert far stronger than their imaginations. Other than Yang shi, they could think of no other person who was powerful enough for that.

“He possesses my master's blessing?” Hu Yiwei was taken aback by those words. He turned his gaze toward the plump man by the side once more, and deep creases slowly etched themselves onto his forehead. “My master is a person who values peace and quietness, such that he has only taken in a single student to date. Given that, how could he possibly take you in as his butler? Fatty, explain yourself!”

Even if Yang shi wanted to take in a butler, he would at least take in someone who was much more qualified! There was simply no reason he would take in a person as weak as the fatty before him as his butler!

“Audacious! How dare you question our Old Master's judgement! Naturally, he has his own considerations for

making his decisions. Or could it be that you feel that our Old Master is accountable to you for every decision that he makes?” Sun Qiang waved his hand and harrumphed coldly.

He turned around and sat back down on the main seat in the room before continuing. “There’s no point wasting any more time here. Hurry up and confess your identity and the reason you are impersonating as our Old Master’s butler?”

What the heck was this?

People nowadays sure were getting more and more arrogant!

How in the world could a fake like the other party possibly have the cheek and the courage to stand before him without the slightest hint of fear? Not to mention, to even be putting on such an act in the Sanctum of Sages...

His audacity was truly incredible!

“Impersonating?” Hu Yiwei nearly exploded on the spot. “Do you know who I am?”

Had it been in the past, he definitely would have poisoned the other party to death for daring to conduct himself so arrogantly before him.

As the Left Guardian of the Poison Hall, possibly the top poison practitioner in the world, how could he allow another man to insult him in such a manner?

“Do I look like I give a damn as to who you are?” Sun Qiang replied with a deeply annoyed tone. “Rather, do you know who I am? Our Old Master is one of the grand elders of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters and very possibly the strongest expert in the world! As his butler, I have the responsibility to uphold his dignity and standing. Yet, a mere impersonator like you actually dares to question me in such a manner. I hate to say this, but are you tired of living?”

To think that even a mere impersonator would speak to him so arrogantly! It seemed like even the world was not a big enough place to house the other party’s ego anymore!

Even though Hu Yiwei was on the verge of erupting, he still suppressed his rage and harrumphed. “You claim that Yang shi

is your master, but do you have any evidence of it?”

After years of listening to Yang shi’s teachings, his temper had cooled down significantly. Had anyone dared to speak to him in such a manner in the past, he would have flipped the entire Sanctum of Sages upside down.

“Evidence? Little Zhan has already verified it earlier—the Old Master’s blessing is right within me! Instead of speaking of me, why don’t you take a look at yourself instead? Do you have any evidence to prove your identity? Who doesn’t know how to make empty claims? Why don’t you show some evidence first before pointing your finger at others?” Sun Qiang sneered coldly.

He had used the Young Master’s zhenqi in order to clear the identity examination, but given that the Young Master was the Old Master’s direct disciple, that could also be considered a method of the Old Master, so it was not entirely inaccurate to say that he possessed Yang shi’s blessing.

“You...” Unwilling to waste his breath on futile explanations, Hu Yiwei flicked his wrist and whipped out a token. “This is the token that my master has given to me!”

“Token?” Zhan shi and the others quickly turned their gazes over, and very soon, they nodded in approval.

“That’s a token specially crafted by the Master Teacher Pavilion!”

“Indeed, it belongs to Yang shi. There’s no way to fake that.”

As elders of the Sanctum of Sages, they would never make a mistake with something as important as this.

“It’s real?” Sun Qiang was stunned for an instant before hurriedly snatching the token to take a look.

The token was roughly the size of one’s palm. The majestic insignia of the Master Teacher Pavilion was imprinted on the front, and the back was a ‘杨 (Yang)’ character written in seal script.

It was difficult to determine what material it was made of, but just from the solemn and heavy air that it exuded, it was

apparent that the token was no weaker than any Saint high-tier artifact!

Putting aside whether the token was real or not, just the very material and craftsmanship of the token made it a highly valuable commodity, and not to mention, one could still vaguely feel the unique aura of the Master Teacher Pavilion within it.

“To think that the Old Master didn’t give one to me...”

The more Sun Qiang stared at the token, the more indignant he felt.

This is too much! Isn’t the Old Master too biased?

It’s one thing that he dumped the Young Master on me to take care of, but he actually didn’t leave anything for me either. This is really unfair!

As your student, I understand why you might want to cultivate independence in the Young Master and thus didn’t want to interfere in his growth too much... but I’m your butler! Not only did you not give me any money or a blessing, you even gave someone else such a good token instead of me.

We’re both your butlers, but why does it seem like I’m your step-butler instead?

This won’t do. The next time I meet the Old Master, I must really talk sense into him. At the very least, I should receive at least one or two tokens from him. Otherwise, how am I supposed to uphold my pride, my dignity, if everyone doubts my identity?

As the butler of the man who stands at the top of the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters, I need to at least maintain a front that’s worthy of my standing so that I don’t bring shame to the Old Master’s name!

Seeing the look on Sun Qiang’s face, Hu Yiwei harrumphed coldly. “How is it? Can this token prove my identity?”

Even though Sun Qiang felt deeply indignant inside, he still swiftly regained his poise and calmly replied, “Well... since Little Zhan and the others have already verified the token to be

real, I guess you are indeed a butler of the Old Master as well.”

Considering how powerful an expert the Old Master was, it was understandable that he would have other butlers behind his back. As the main butler, he needed to be understanding and magnanimous to the Old Master’s needs.

“Ever since I became the Old Master’s subordinate, I have followed closely in his footsteps, never leaving his side. Tell me, why am I unaware of your existence?” Hu Yiwei flicked his token back into his storage ring before gazing at Sun Qiang coldly.

“Do you think that you are truly capable of following every single one of the Old Master’s moves with your current capabilities?” Sun Qiang sneered coldly before slowly raising his head to look into the distance, seemingly reminiscing the old days.

“The Old Master picked me out from the market, saying that he was in awe of my character and temperament. He tasked me with taking care of the Young Master and protecting him till he matures. It was then that I made the decision to serve as his butler for life!

“But those are matters back from very long ago, so there’s no point bringing them back up now. Right, you mentioned earlier that you are the Old Master’s butler? Since that’s the case, you should just listen to my commands from now on. It’s fine, you don’t have to feel touched. It’s my responsibility to share the burden of the Old Master in taking care of the other subordinates...”

1400 Can't Be Poisoned to Death

Back when he was still in the Tianxuan Kingdom, Sun Qiang had been with the Old Master for quite some time, but he had never heard that the Old Master had another butler

Had he known this earlier, he would not have tired himself out like this. He could simply have ordered this fellow around to get things done!

After all, he was the butler whom the Old Master had entrusted the Young Master to, so it went without saying that his standing had to be higher.

“You want me to listen to your commands?” Hearing those words, Hu Yiwei’s cheeks twitched wildly, and he nearly rushed forward to strangle the other party to death.

Could you be any more shameless?

Even if I have concealed my cultivation, you should be able to tell how powerful I am from Zhan shi and the others’ attitude, right?

I am a figure whom others would faint in the face of, and yet, you actually dare to say such words to me. Are you really that brave, or are your eyes that bad?

“Indeed! You are only a subordinate in charge of handling the Old Master’s miscellaneous affairs whereas I am butler whom the Old Master has recognized and entrusted great responsibility to. Shouldn’t it be your honor to listen to my commands?” Sun Qiang nodded matter-of-factly.

After all, it was clear that the other party was a mere subordinate in charge of handling miscellaneous affairs. On the other hand, he was a butler who had been entrusted with a direct disciple!

Given so, was it not obvious which of the two of them was of higher standing?

A subordinate might still require a token for others to validate their identity, but as the real butler, it went without saying that he did not need such a thing! With such a thought in mind, Sun Qiang suddenly felt his indignation subsiding significantly, and his pride swelled once more.

“You want me to listen to your commands?”

Luo luo!

Hu Yiwei clenched his teeth tightly together as a hint of killing intent flashed across his eyes. With a flick of his finger, he inconspicuously sent a surge of poison into the plump man’s body as he thought callously, Sure, as long as you can survive this!

After which, he decisively turned his gaze toward the elder, not wanting to waste any more of his breath on a dead man.

“Zhan shi, I have accompanied the Young Master here this time. He has already successfully enrolled in the Sanctum of Sages, so my mission is already complete, and there’s no reason for me to stay here anymore. The reason I’m paying a visit right now is to request for you to take good care of him. My master has very high expectations of the Young Master.”

But before Zhan shi could respond, a loud voice suddenly interjected. “There’s no need for you to worry. I’ll take care of the Young Master well.”

Hu Yiwei’s eyes widened in astonishment upon hearing that voice. He quickly turned his gaze over and saw Sun Qiang waving his hand calmly.

“H-how is this... possible?” Hu Yiwei’s heart jolted in shock.

The poison he had used was so potent that even an expert of Zhan shi’s caliber would bleed from his seven apertures once afflicted with it. Considering the dose that he had injected into the plump man’s body, how could he possibly remain completely fine and even speak so energetically? Was this for real?

“What do you mean by that?” Not knowing the peril that he had just been through, Sun Qiang waved his hand derisively and harrumphed. “If not for me taking care of the Young

Master along the way, how could he have become a student of the Sanctum of Sages so easily? You needn't worry about anything; the Young Master is in good hands!"

"..."

Hearing how the plump man was speaking with increasing fervor, completely devoid of the weakened state that a poisoned man should be in, Hu Yiwei narrowed his eyes grimly. Unable to believe what was happening before him, he discreetly flicked his finger a few more times, sending more surges of poison into the other party's body.

Even though his temperament had calmed down over the years under Yang Shi's teachings, the plump man before him had simply gone too far, stomping right across his bottom line. As a Saint 9-dan expert, there was no way he could allow a weakling to humiliate him like that!

Wu wu wu!

In an instant, the few most lethal poisons that Hu Yiwei had with him were injected right into Sun Qiang's body.

"Enough! Is there any point in you flicking your fingers again and again? Are you hearing what I'm saying, or are you playing deaf with me? As a subordinate, you should know your place! It's no wonder the Old Master is unwilling to entrust greater responsibilities to you!" Sun Qiang flung his sleeves in disapproval.

He had been speaking nicely to the other party all this while, but that fellow just had to flick things at him again and again, provoking the zhenqi that the Young Master had left within his body to surge all around the place.

Don't you know about respecting your seniors? Or do you think that I have mellowed out so much over the year that you feel that you can climb over my head?

Otherwise, would you dare to act so brazenly before me?

It seems like you are really mistaking my kindness for weakness.

“You...” Seeing that there was really no sign of the other party being poisoned, Hu Yiwei’s eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets.

The poisons that he had flicked into the plump man’s body earlier were the most potent that he possessed. Even Yang shi had to struggle a bit to deal with them, and yet, the other party was actually completely fine before them. Could it be that the plump man really was not as weak as he seemed? Was he actually a formidable expert in disguise?

Just a while ago, he had met with a lady, whom despite her young age, was able to subdue him with ease!

Furthermore, he had heard that the founder of the Poison Hall had returned recently, and she seemed to be a young lass, too!

All of this taught him to never judge a person by their appearance.

Not to mention, his master’s eye of discernment had always been exceptional. Most likely, there was a deeper reason as to why he chose this crude plump man as his butler. After all, there was no reason for his master to recruit a useless man into his service!

In an instant, the silhouette of the plump man whom he had been looking down at all this while suddenly grew towering.

Zhan shi had noticed Hu Yiwei’s actions, but seeing that Sun Qiang remained completely unharmed, he thought that Hu Yiwei had decided against it in the end. Heaving a sigh of relief on the inside, he hurriedly asked, “I’ll definitely take good care of Yang shi’s student... He’s a freshman who cleared this examination just earlier this year, right? May I know his name?”

“Zhang Xuan!”

“Feng Ziyi!”

Sun Qiang and Hu Yiwei spoke simultaneously.

“Zhang Xuan?” Before Zhan shi could respond, Hu Yiwei had already turned to look at Sun Qiang with a deep frown. “My

master only has a single student, and his name is Feng Ziyi. Who in the world is the Zhang Xuan you speak of?”

All those who were close with Yang shi would know that he had only officially accepted a single student in his lifetime, and that person was Feng Ziyi. That was the Young Master whom he had been speaking of, and he had been following the other party all this while in order to protect him from the shadows, ensuring that he arrived at the Sanctum of Sages safely. As for that Zhang Xuan... he had never heard of this person before!

It was one thing for him to have never heard of his master taking in another butler, but would it not be truly ridiculous if he remained oblivious to his master taking in another student as well?

“Feng Ziyi and our Young Master are from the same lineage. They have already met one another, and they even had a friendly spar.” Sun Qiang waved his hand as he explained with a smile.

“From the looks of it, it seems like he has already become our Young Master’s junior!”

So, that fellow was in charge of taking care of Feng Ziyi. That would explain everything!

He had thought that it was weird when that fellow talked about how he had accompanied the Young Master here. It turned out that the Young Masters they were talking about were referring to different individuals!

Based on what he knew of Zhang Xuan, the latter would surely have Feng Ziyi pummeled till Feng Ziyi willingly addressed him as ‘senior’.

“Junior?” Hu Yiwei froze on the spot.

“We could have been spared from all that trouble if you had just mentioned Feng Ziyi’s name earlier! I wouldn’t have doubted you if that was the case. Since we are all working for the Old Master, we should at least try to get along with one another.”

Seeing that Hu Yiwei still had an uncomprehending frown on his forehead, Sun Qiang continued explaining with a smile. “For an expert as powerful as the Old Master, it’s perfectly normal for him to take in a couple of students and butlers outside without informing you. After all, as subordinates, it’s not our place to inquire too much into our master’s affairs.”

He knew full well how low profile the Old Master was. For one, despite knowing the Old Master for more than a year now, he would still have been oblivious to how incredible of a figure the Old Master was if not for Zhang Jiuxiao’s explanation a while ago!

“...” Hu Yiwei was stifled into silence.

With how confidently the plump man was speaking, and given that the other party had cleared Zhan shi and the others’ verification and even his most potent of poisons could not kill the other party, he suddenly felt deeply uncertain on the inside.

He might have been accompanying Yang shi for the past few years, but in the end, he was just a subordinate. There were still some matters that he was not privy to.

Could it be that his master had really taken in another student and butler behind his back?

His initial intention had just been to request Zhan shi to take care of Feng Ziyi, but in a weird twist of fate, it somehow turned into a reunion event.