

I Don't Want to Get Hurt, So I'll Max Out My Defense –

Chapter 76 – Chapter 76: The Mysterious Beggar

At the same time, inside the Xia Family's main hall.

Several family heads were gathered, each with a belly full of questions they wanted to ask.

"Patriarch Xia, what was the meaning of stopping us just now? A mere few evil cultivators aren't worth such fuss, are they?" frowned the Wang Family Patriarch.

"Indeed, even if those evil cultivators outside the city are protecting Tangneng First-class, Ancient Moon City is ultimately our turf. Could they really take it away?" the others chimed in.

"I think you all have really cultivated yourselves to confusion. Didn't you find the elder in the bathhouse a bit familiar?"

Xia Jiuquan pointed at the huge portrait on the wall behind him. "Take a closer look. Don't you find him very familiar?"

"This..."

"Is Patriarch Xia suggesting..."

"Elder Tianwu?"

"How is that possible? Elder Tianwu disappeared without a trace thirty years ago, and besides, why would such a powerful figure come to a small place like Ancient Moon City?"

Seeing the portrait on the wall and combining it with Xia Jiuquan's words, the others broke into a cold sweat in an instant.

They all recognized the huge portrait on the wall; in fact, each of their families also had this portrait hanging up. The figure in the painting had ascended to the level of the Northern Region's spiritual belief: it was customary for any prestigious family to hang a portrait of Elder Tianwu for peace.

How could such an esteemed master possibly appear in the insignificant Ancient Moon City?

“This can’t be. Elder Tianwu is a being capable of ascension. How could he come to a corner like ours?”

“Patriarch Xia, you must be over-suspicious. There are too many people in the world that look alike.”

The family heads couldn’t believe such a thing.

Xia Jiuquan frowned. He had seen it very clearly just a moment ago; the old man soaking in the bathhouse was the spitting image of the person in the portrait. He worshiped Elder Tianwu every day; there was no way he could have been mistaken.

“I am not necessarily saying he is Elder Tianwu himself from back then. Perhaps he is a descendant, or maybe there’s a blood relationship. In any case, aside from the hair and beard, he greatly resembles the Elder Tianwu in the portrait.”

“Regardless, I will promptly report this to the ancestral elders of my clan. True or not, we must alert them.”

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“Of course, I must go.”

“Who are the talents attending this gathering?”

Li Xiaobai didn’t hesitate to agree. A gathering of the city’s talents, this was a typical grand stage of showing off and face-slapping.

How could Li Xiaobai miss such an occasion?

He was only two thousand Attribute Points away from increasing his defensive power; he had to seize every opportunity to enhance his defense.

“Speaking of talents, apart from some of the clan disciples within the city, it has to be Xia Jian, the second young master of the Xia Family, and Wang Ruoxian, the young lady of the Wang Family,” said someone.

“This Xia Jian is the Xia family’s most talented; he was sent to Zhenyuan Country for cultivation since he was a child. I’ve recently heard he’ll be returning to join us on our journey to the Holy Demon Sect for further cultivation.”

“And then there’s Wang Ruoxian. It’s said she has been cultivating at the Xiao Cheng Sect all this time, far outstripping her peers in cultivation level. She too is preparing to advance her cultivation at the Holy Demon Sect.”

Li Ya explained this with a tone of awe and envy.

These two individuals were the most outstanding in Ancient Moon City, with solid high-stage Golden Core cultivation levels; they might even be on the cusp of reaching the Nascent Soul Stage.

Xia Jian, despicable?

Why do all the Xia Family members have such strange names?

Li Xiaobai found the names quite amusing, but he was somewhat looking forward to the gathering. Whether it was Zhenyuan Country or the Xiao Cheng Sect, he had encountered both, but he had no idea if anyone from Zhenyuan Country had been among those he'd tricked in the Divine Beast Mountain Range.

“Also, there’s one more thing.”

Li Ya snuck a glance at the old beggar, leading Li Xiaobai outside with a hesitant expression.

“Do you recognize that old beggar, Boss Ye?”

“Of course, doesn’t he come here every day?” Li Xiaobai replied.

“That’s not what I mean. Considering your remarkable abilities, Boss Ye, you must have traveled far and wide. Don’t you think that old beggar looks like someone?”

“Looks like who?”

Li Xiaobai’s interest was piqued; he had long suspected the old beggar was a master.

“Elder Tianwu from over a hundred years ago!”

“I’ve always felt his face was familiar. I didn’t notice anything when he was unkempt but after he washed up, the more I look, the more he resembles him. In the Northern Region, almost every big family has a portrait of Elder Tianwu hanging up. Boss Ye, you might have invited a revered deity over.”

A century ago, a legendary figure once emerged from Tianwu Sect in the Northern Region, known as the Martial Lunatic. He fought from the Northern Region to the Western Desert, from the Western Desert to the Eastern Sea, and then conquered Central Province with an overwhelming force. On the Immortal Spirit Continent, this man dominated an era; for over a decade, no young cultivators could match him.

He was known as a peerless genius but disappeared for a long time thereafter. Some said he went into seclusion to seek a breakthrough, others claimed he was eliminated by a powerful entity; rumors were many and conflicting.

Then, thirty years ago, a precious item surfaced in Central Province, attracting numerous experts to an intense battle. The Martial Lunatic, who had been in obscurity for nearly seventy years, suddenly reappeared, defeating all rivals and seizing the treasure. After that, he disappeared completely from the public eye.

No one knew of his whereabouts ever again.

Li Xiaobai's face showed shock. The old beggar had such a background? Elder Tianwu? The one who had overwhelmed an entire generation of young masters on the continent?

He looked up, and there was the old beggar, digging at his nostrils with one hand while scratching his feet with the other, grinning foolishly.

How could this seem reliable at all?

Could this guy really be a top-tier powerhouse of the continent?

"I don't think so. I admit the old beggar may be somewhat capable, but to say he's the master who swept across the continent is a bit too far-fetched. This unlucky fellow has the face of a simpleton; how does that resemble someone capable of moving mountains and seas?"

"Appearances can be deceiving. He really does look very similar. Just keep an eye on him from now on. If it turns out to be true, getting a few tips from him could skyrocket our cultivation levels."

Li Ya was excited, eager to gain favor from the supposed master.

Li Xiaobai just shrugged indifferently. He didn't need guidance, nor did he need to cultivate.

If there was one thing he truly needed advice on, it would be how to pretend to be more natural and smooth, how to attract the attention of various masters while enduring their beatdowns.

Beyond that, everything else was insignificant.

"Woof, in fact, there's another hidden supreme master inside this bathhouse!"

Ergouzi popped up from nowhere and said mysteriously.

"Oh? May I have the honor of knowing this master's esteemed name?"

Li Ya asked, aware of Ergouzi's uniqueness. Being able to speak human language, Ergouzi was definitely a Demonic Beast with an extraordinary bloodline, and his future achievements were bound to be limitless.

"Woof, it is none other than your noble self, Lord Ergouzi, Nicholas Er Gouzi. Lord Ergouzi punches tigers in the west mountains, kicks dragons in the four seas, the Supreme Sovereign unmatched in the universe. Stick with Lord Ergouzi, and your rise to glory is guaranteed!"

Li Xiaobai was at a loss for words with a forehead full of black lines: "Before you say that, wipe the drool from the corner of your mouth first."

Chapter 77 – Chapter 77 Tangneng First-Class Officially Launches

Ergouzi was as out of tune as ever.

Even after taking the Justice Elixir, its inherent nature hadn't changed.

"Kid, please don't look down on others; Lord Ergouzi has recently had a huge increase in cultivation level and doesn't want to stoop to your level,"

Ergouzi seemed very proud.

"You haven't been cultivating recently, so how have you become stronger?" Li Xiaobai asked.

"Lord Ergouzi's bloodline has awakened. Lately, every time I do a good deed, the power inside my body grows a little stronger, and today has finally come."

Ergouzi was excited; it was now a dog with an impressive cultivation level.

Li Xiaobai understood in his heart that this was because of the Justice Elixir. The fact that doing good deeds could actually increase one's cultivation level was indeed magical, a true hallmark of System products.

"So what breed are you exactly?"

"Woof, Lord Ergouzi is a supreme being!"

"And what is your current cultivation level?"

"The supreme level!"

Well, asking was a waste of time—Li Xiaobai knew that Ergouzi probably didn't even understand itself; although it had shown signs of greatness before, most of the time, it still had an unreliable demeanor.

Li Ya felt that everyone around Li Xiaobai was shrouded in mystery, including Li Xiaobai himself.

No one knew where he came from, nor did anyone know the secret of Tangneng First-class.

But that didn't stop him from making friends with Li Xiaobai. Not to mention anything, being able to create a bathhouse like Tangneng First-class, he definitely wasn't an ordinary person.

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In the city, all branches of Tangneng First-class opened for business simultaneously.

The cultivators of the entire city surged forth, flocking in droves. The reputation of the bathhouse had long been established, and nearly everyone knew that soaking in the baths could enhance their cultivation level.

The management and operation of the bathhouses were overseen by the various Family Heads.

Male and female cultivators gathered, all of them well-prepared, having diligently practiced body refining techniques in recent days. They had developed the curves and muscles they should have.

This large-scale bathing event was not only for cultivation but also to attract the opposite sex.

The Family Heads looked on with surprise; they had come to bathe as well, choosing cultivation over face between the two,

but they never expected that the disciples of their families, usually so pampered, would actually take the initiative to start body refining.

And by the looks of their figures and muscles, it seemed they hadn't skimped on hard work.

"Who would've thought, Boss Ye's Tangneng First-class not only attracts customers but also has educational merit. I've been racking my brains to get these disciples to do body training with no success, and now they're actually willing to put in the effort to practice."

"Isn't that the truth! The body is the foundation, after all. I've had such a headache trying to get them to focus on their base, and here this bathhouse has helped solve a major worry for me. But speaking of which, these disciples have indeed done an impressive job training."

“Hehe, that little fatty from the Wang Family has actually developed a six-pack; what startling progress!”

“Miss Zhang from the Zhang Family isn’t doing too badly either. From a sickly girl, she now emits a wild allure.”

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The Clan Leaders were reassured by the performance of their disciples—regardless of their motives, these young people had finally gotten the hang of it.

Inside the bathhouse, the atmosphere was harmonious, with male and female cultivators inadvertently showing off their physiques to attract each other, much to the satisfaction of the family elders, presenting a scene of peace and harmony.

Moreover, everyone was candid in the pools, which almost instantaneously brought their relationships closer.

“Wow, look, the Family Heads’ physiques are actually so amazing!”

“Yeah, my elders are always in those wide robes every day, and you can’t tell anything; who knew they actually had such strong muscles.”

“I originally thought our Family Head was a bit on the plump side, but it seems I was worried over nothing. Indeed, body refining is the right choice!”

“Even the Family Heads insist on body refining, so it must be beneficial. Following the Family Head’s lead is bound to be the correct choice!”

Seeing the clan elders immerse themselves in the pool, the disciples excitedly started to discuss.

The murmurs reached the ears of the Family Heads, who stood a little taller, their muscles tensing slightly, looking even more sculptured and defined.

“Patriarch Xia, you have some impressive abs there. Surely, that’s the result of at least ten years of hard work?”

“Haha, Patriarch Wang flatters me too much. Your latissimus dorsi must have taken you twenty years to build. Truly enviable!”

“When it comes to muscles, Patriarch Zhang’s physique is truly enviable. With that armor-like musculature, even Lower Grade Spiritual Artifacts couldn’t penetrate, could they?”

“It’s nothing to brag about...”

Inside Tangneng First-class, it was relatively quiet.

There were too many shops in the city, and they were all quite luxurious. In comparison, this original small store wasn't as bustling as it used to be.

The ones who came were mostly old friends or cultivators who were curious about Li Xiaobai and wanted to catch a glimpse of the owner himself.

Wang Ruoxian and Xia Jian also came.

These two were popular figures in the city, and the young talents were all speculating about their true strength.

"Yan Yu, take Immortal for a bath."

"No need, I'm fine right here."

A cool voice responded, and Wang Ruoxian gracefully walked in, immersing herself in the bathhouse.

The hearts of the male disciples present stirred. Immortal Wang was undeniably the number one beauty in the city, and when it came to her aloof demeanor, no one could compare.

To think that such a great beauty would bathe in the same pool as them was like a blessing falling from the sky!

"So you're Ye Liangchen, the one who injured my older and younger brothers?"

Xia Jian casually waved his fan as his robe flowed across the water's surface. He looked particularly cultured while soaking in the pool.

"I am Ye Liangchen. Liangchen just happened to get beaten up; I didn't initiate an attack on anyone. It's just that the gap in strength was too great, and as a result, it was your family members who got hurt," Li Xiaobai said.

"Why say so much, the Xia Family just deserves a beating," Ergouzi said, sticking out his tongue, his face full of disgust.

"Tomorrow there's a gathering of the city's young talents, and Xia would hope that Boss Ye could join," Xia Jian's eyes held a shadow of gloom.

"Of course, any event that has Liangchen present is bound to be a highlight. Without Liangchen, it couldn't be called a gathering of young talents," Li Xiaobai replied with a cheery grin.

“Boss Ye has a way with words. Miss is quite curious about your strength,” Wang Ruoxian said, slightly parting her red lips and speaking faintly.

“Unmatched through the ages!” Li Xiaobai replied indifferently. It had only been two or three months since he started cultivating, and he had gone from a weakling to surviving a strike from a Transcendence Tribulation Stage cultivator without dying.

In the Northern Region, no one could match him.

It seemed the cultivation level of the two people before him wasn't mediocre. They might become a source of Attribute Points for him in the future, so it was time to sow some hatred first.

“Lord Ergouzi too is an unparalleled existence!” Ergouzi also stood up with conviction.

Wang Ruoxian's gaze was indifferent, otherworldly, “Boss Ye jests. Those who have been unparalleled throughout the ages are all mighty beings capable of breaking the spatial barriers and ascending to the Upper Realm. Although Boss Ye's strength is commendable, one must understand that there are heavens beyond our own.”

“In Zhenyuan Country, there is a Spiritual Spring. Soaking in it, the Spiritual Energy surges and can help one break through several small realms in a day. Today, I have experienced Boss Ye's bathhouse and will take my leave.”

“Boss Ye, see you at the gathering.”

Chapter 78 – Chapter 78 The Promising Young Talent

The next morning dawned.

In Ancient Moon City, cheers rose and fell like waves, as nearly all cultivators who had stayed overnight for a soak in the bathhouse had made some sort of breakthrough.

Among them, quite a few had broken through major realms.

Even several Family Heads felt that they had stepped closer to the Nascent Soul Stage; after all, the more luxurious the bathhouse, the better the effect of the bath. It was hard not to level up in such an opulent environment.

Inside Tangneng First-class, Li Xiaobai gained several thousand Attribute Points once again, all of which he added to his defense.

Defensive power: [Sixth Turn of the Indestructible Golden Body (46000/60000)
Upgradeable.]

Situ Yanyu also successfully advanced to the Foundation Establishment Stage, her aura far more formidable than when they had first met.

“Boss Ye, the gathering is about to start. Let’s head out?”

“Let’s go!”

“Woof, Lord Ergouzi is also setting out!”

Blessed Land of Cave Heaven, this place was a treasure trove discovered by the Xia Family, usually used for the planting and breeding of Spiritual Medicines, rich in Spiritual Energy, and pleasing to the eye in scenery.

Many family descendants and young elites were already gathered here.

Such gatherings were almost an annual event, but this year was extraordinary, with the two outstanding figures of Ancient Moon City together—Xia Jian and Wang Ruoxian presiding, which raised the level of the meeting substantially.

Everyone was eager to hear about the experiences these two had in the outside world, and to broaden their horizons.

For a small city like Ancient Moon City, the opportunity to interact with disciples of a Great Sect is naturally very rare.

By the time Li Xiaobai and his companions arrived, the place was already packed.

“With both Immortal Wang and the second son of the Xia Family returning this time, tell me, who do you think is more formidable?”

“Naturally, it’s the son of the Xia Family. Young Master Xia has been in Zhenyuan Country all year round. That place is teeming with Golden Core Stage cultivators and Nascent Soul Stages as common as dogs. Training there, one has no choice but to be strong.”

“That may not be true. I’ve heard that Immortal Wang received the true teachings of the Xiao Cheng Sect and might even have some connections with the Western Desert!”

“But if you ask me, it’s Boss Ye from Tangneng First-class who’s the most powerful. Even the family heads have conceded to her, and this bathhouse has truly been a blessing to the community.”

“Yeah, I only soaked for one day, and I actually advanced an entire minor realm. It’s truly miraculous.”

Along the way, the conversations of the cultivators were all about several focal characters recently in the city, with their words full of longing.

Li Xiaobai shrugged his shoulders and casually found a place to sit down, and Ergouzi also swiftly took a seat beside him.

With that sitting, the whispering voices of the cultivators abruptly ceased, and they looked at Li Xiaobai with strange expressions, as the atmosphere suddenly fell silent in an eerie way.

Li Xiaobai was puzzled. Did he really have such a big face?

“Boss Ye, is this spot actually ours?” Li Ya whispered a reminder from the side.

“Is there a rule about this place?”

Li Xiaobai furrowed his brow. The seat he had chosen was just in a corner and he wasn't trying to steal the limelight from the host, so why couldn't he sit there?

“This is the challenge seat. There's a sparring session during the gathering, and whoever sits here can be freely challenged and must accept.”

Li Ya seemed a bit anxious. Are you going to get up or not?

That seat was notorious; the last person who dared to sit there has three-chi tall grass on his grave now.

“I see, no matter, Liangchen likes the feeling of being challenged.”

Li Xiaobai's eyes sparkled. This seat was tailor-made for him. Just by sitting here, even without showing off, he would still be besieged; Attribute Points were within his grasp.

“Exactly, Lord Ergouzi has a cultivation that reaches the skies; a mere challenge seat is nothing.”

“Everyone listen up, this is Lord Ergouzi's capable right-hand man; only if you defeat him will you be qualified to challenge Lord Ergouzi himself!”

Lord Ergouzi stood upright, with his paws behind his back, looking disdainfully at the world.

The corners of his mouth could not stop splitting open, drooling all over the floor.

“This is... a dog!”

“Damn, the dog can speak human language!”

“It must be a Spirit Beast, but it’s just too arrogant and also quite ugly. Its eyes and eyebrows look like a Husky’s!”

“And it’s drooling, so disgusting to watch.”

The cultivators automatically ignored Lord Ergouzi’s words, instead judging its appearance in great detail.

“Woof, your Lord Ergouzi is a supreme being!” Ergouzi’s fur bristled.

“Boss Ye, are you sure you want to sit here?” Wang Ruoxian asked indifferently.

“Yeah, tired from walking, just taking a seat.”

“It seems Boss Ye hasn’t taken this little girl’s words to heart. One really needs to contemplate more on the truth that there are skies beyond our skies.”

“Boss Ye, you better just come down obediently. You can’t sit here; you’ll get killed by someone,” Xia Liu sneered.

“Don’t talk too much. The last time someone sat here was years ago. We haven’t seen such a grand occasion in a long time. Boss Ye wants to challenge the young talents in the city, and we definitely welcome it.”

Xia Jian said slowly, instructing the maid to start serving tea and snacks.

Pale-faced maids in white clothes and light makeup came to serve, pouring tea and wine, gradually easing the atmosphere.

Li Ya pulled Yan Yu quietly to the back of the crowd, staying clear of the challenger’s seat. At any moment someone could lash out and strike, so it was better to keep a distance.

A servant brought over brush, ink, paper, and inkstone, lighting the incense burner. Wisps of blue smoke drifted, creating a very aesthetic scene.

The incense burning within was Calming Incense, which upon inhalation, steadied one’s breath and cleared the mind.

“Young Master Xia has returned from Zhenyuan Country, so he must be well-versed in the Confucian righteous qi. Why not paint a picture to enhance the mood?” Wang Ruoxian said.

“I had the same thought, but painting alone can be a bit monotonous. Why don’t we all take today’s gathering as the subject and paint together?”

“Excellent.”

“Express one’s feelings with brush and ink, infuse the painting with righteous qi. I have long heard that Zhenyuan Country seeks the Tao through Confucianism. Today we are fortunate to witness this.”

The cultivators nodded in agreement. It was their honor to paint alongside such accomplished painters.

“Prepare a painting for Boss Ye as well.”

“Woof, your Lord Ergouzi also wants a painting!”

Li Xiaobai was speechless. Where could he paint? It was clear that they wanted to use this painting challenge to humiliate him.

And there was Lord Ergouzi, always causing trouble. Can you even hold a brush with your dog paws?

“Then let’s begin. We’ll have half an hour as the time limit, and after half an hour, we will all appreciate the works together,” Xia Jian said in a cheery tone.

He pondered for a brief moment,

Picked up the brush, ground the ink, moistened it with water, drew lines, his brush strokes majestic as a dragon or snake, his movements as smooth as clouds and flowing water, seamlessly executed. The cultivators around him watched in astonishment; while they were still contemplating the composition, he had already started painting.

Although the specific content wasn’t clear, just this mastery of brushwork alone already showed the demeanor of a great artist.

“Damn it, this guy is painting so smoothly, without any apparent thought. Could it be he already knew what he wanted to paint before?”

Ergouzi cursed, having received a piece of paper but after much struggle, not even a single hair stroke emerged.

Xia Liu was indignant: “This is divine skill in each stroke; my family practices diligently every day, and you, you mangy dog, what do you know.”

Chapter 79: – Chapter 79: A Chaotic Spring And Autumn

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“Woof, kid, is that how you speak to Lord Ergouzi?”

“Who let their dog out without a leash, ranting nonsense without considering the occasion?” Xia Chuan said, his tone indifferent.

“During painting, do not disturb with noise.”

Wang Ruoxian’s brows furrowed slightly, as creation required inspiration and a fully focused spirit, which should not be disturbed.

The crowd calmed their anger and began to concentrate on painting.

Watching the surrounding cultivators furrowing their brows, holding their breath, and drawing with vigorous strokes, Li Xiaobai and Ergouzi stared at each other with wide eyes, looking at the brush and paper in their hands, dumbfounded and unsure of what to paint.

“Ergouzi, does your bloodline inheritance include painting skills?” Li Xiaobai asked in a lowered voice.

“A supreme being like Lord Ergouzi has devoted his life to benefiting humanity, how could he squander time on such playthings,” Ergouzi rolled his eyes, expressing disdain.

Li Xiaobai was speechless, thinking, “Then what the heck were you pretending for just now, even insisting on getting some fine stationery?”

He was about to embarrass himself.

Suddenly, an amazing vision rose from Xia Jian’s seat, circles of white light twinkling as a large painting scroll unfolded in the void.

In the emptiness above, a thatched hut, a candlestick, and a candle emitted an ancient and profound aura.

A young man dressed in white held a scroll, his eyebrows tightly knitted, as if reciting something, and after a long time, he put down the scroll and sighed.

“A vision, it is said that only when one’s state of mind reaches a certain realm can it be triggered, and this is the first time it has happened.”

“This is... the Liturgy Defiance Chart!”

“This vision is a snippet of Great Immortal Zhenyuan’s life from the past, known to have doubted the scriptures and challenged the sayings of the Saints, walking a path contrary to the Confucian way. The Young Master of the Xia Family being able to comprehend such a mood, truly a prodigious talent!”

“It’s a pity that it’s only a corner of the Liturgy Defiance Chart. If he could comprehend the complete Liturgy Defiance, it would likely be a blessing for our Northern Region!”

Xia Jian’s hand movements didn’t stop as he sketched stroke by stroke, the vision above his head gradually becoming blurry, transforming into an ancient aura that fused into his body, pushing his spirit to its peak in an instant.

Stroke by stroke, the ink marks turned into traces of the great Dao engraved in the void, and even without using cultivation, many cultivators present felt breathless.

It was no wonder he was a cultivator who had inherited from the Zhenyuan Country, with such a prowess at a young age, his future beyond measure.

Before the crowd could regain their senses, another dazzling light appeared in the void, and a woman in plain white clothes lay over her desk, in front of her a chessboard arranged like a star-roaming pattern, but this chessboard had no pieces, just various forms of living creatures.

“This is the vision of Xiao Cheng Sect!”

“Star-Roaming Chessboard, taking all of nature as a chess game, what ambition!”

“To think Wang Ruoxian likewise perceived a vision, with such talent, truly a monster!”

The cultivators were somewhat crazed; once a vision emerged, it was no longer about painting, but a contest of each individual’s mental and ideological state. When visions were displayed, one could intuitively feel the other’s heart and cultivation level, offering a silent sermon to onlookers.

If one could comprehend something from it, the benefits were limitless.

Li Xiaobai’s mind was in a fog, unable to understand the operations of these people at all.

Just paint if you’re going to paint, why all this pomp and circumstance, will conjuring a vision help with your painting or what?

Half an hour passed in the blink of an eye, Li Xiaobai put down his brush and looked towards the little wreck of a dog beside him, with its full-on dog’s mess of a landscape painting, several lines drawn wonky and twisted, the scene a sight for sore eyes.

“Xia here is unskilled, and presents this clumsy work!”

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Xia Jian flicked open the scroll in his hand, and a pilgrimage map presented itself before everyone's eyes.

In the center of the painting, a man dressed in white held a scroll, surrounded by thousands who came to pay homage. Despite being a scholar, he possessed an air of authority that could look down upon all beings.

A powerful will penetrated the paper, directly targeting the audience.

Choosing a gathering as the theme whilst depicting a pilgrimage, Xia Jian seemed to imply he was a Saint, somewhat arrogant, but he also had the capital. After all, everyone had witnessed the earlier phenomenon and saw nothing inappropriate about it.

“Young Master Xia's artistic conception is lofty. We are fixated on the surface form, whereas Young Master Xia directly elucidates the core of this assembly. We gather here in pursuit of knowledge and horizons. Young Master Xia, using a scholar as the spiritual guide, is truly fitting. I am impressed.”

“Indeed, the intent of this painting has transcended the medium. If someone with insufficient mental fortitude and cultivation level were to look at it, they might even injure their psyche. This painting shares a mysterious connection with the great strokes of Great Immortal Zhenyuan's Liturgy Defiance Chart!”

The supporters of the Xia Family were the first to review, encouragingly placing Xia Jian on a pedestal.

It is said that with a single stroke, Great Immortal Zhenyuan could alter history, and a drop of his ink could fill the seas, with an unwavering will and a glance deadly enough to kill.

Li Xiaobai was dumbfounded as he listened. It was clear to him that some were only posturing, yet the critic had ingeniously discovered profound life philosophies from the domineering image.

Looking at the other cultivators, they were all deep in thought, with some nodding frequently, apparently quite approving of these remarks.

“Young Master Xia's painting is captivating and the technique is exceptionally skilled — I admire it greatly. I'd be bold to request Young Master Xia to evaluate my own.”

Wang Ruoxian also shook the scroll in her hand, and fine mists filled the air. From the scroll, one could faintly hear the sounds of birds and the scent of flowers — it was a realistic painting.

It perfectly replicated every one of the hundred-plus participants at the gathering, not missing a single detail, whether in clothing, expressions, or postures, even Ergouzi was included.

Such keen observational skills could be called terrifying, and what's most impressive was the ability to capture the spirit of everyone present in just half an hour.

This is befitting of a disciple of the Xiao Cheng Sect.

"Immortal Wang, such frightening insight!"

"Such observational prowess is worthy of the woman who could comprehend the Star-Roaming Chessboard!"

"Although it seems to be mere painting, it actually serves to showcase her cultivation level to all of us!"

The crowd erupted into exclamations again, and Wang Ruoxian covered her face with a light laugh, "You flatter me too much; it's nothing worth mentioning."

"I wonder if Boss Ye's masterpiece is ready yet?"

Xia Liu asked with a mocking tone from the sidelines; after all, he had seen clearly that Li Xiaobai was scratching his ears in anxiety, obviously clueless about the art of painting.

"Woof! You weaklings, hurry up and come admire the peerless masterpiece of your Lord Ergouzi!"

Ergouzi unfurled the paper, revealing a simplified version of a chaotic scene with distorted lines that looked rather childlike.

"Who would have thought that Boss Ye's dog had such personality? A Spirit Beast painting is indeed rare."

"The Xiao Cheng Sect has a Sky Swallowing Python, at the Nascent Soul Stage, with great spiritual intelligence and capable of speaking human language. However, it's always been rebellious, harboring disdain for humans. Compared with Boss Ye's dog, it's clearly lacking in terms of obedience."

"Woof! You're the dog, your whole family are dogs. Your Lord Ergouzi is a supreme being!"

Ergouzi looked quite unfriendly, although it couldn't quite explain what breed it was, it absolutely refused to admit it was a dog – it was a matter of dignity.

Li Xiaobai covered its mouth; this wretched dog was an embarrassment, its words inconvenient to bear.

“All right, Liangchen today felt inspired, took an unconventional approach, and indeed produced a fine painting. I just wonder if among us there are truly talented youths who understand how to appreciate it.”

Chapter 80 – Chapter 80: Earth-Shattering Masterpiece

Li Xiaobai flicked open the scroll in his hand, presenting it nonchalantly before everyone’s eyes.

“This is...”

The cultivators around him were speechless; the scroll was entirely covered in black ink except for a single dot left in the very center.

This thing could also be called a painting? Where did such confidence come from?

“Could it be that Boss Ye is mocking us? This scribbling could hardly be considered a painting,” Xia Jian said lightly, with a hint of ridicule in his eyes.

“It seems Boss Ye is not proficient in painting after all; we have indeed been too presumptuous,” Wang Ruoxian said after glancing at the painting, losing interest.

“I thought you two, as young talents with aspirations, would have a different perspective. I didn’t expect you to have the same insight as the rest of the world,” Li Xiaobai said indifferently.

“This painting symbolizes the image of all beings; our gathering here is akin to seeking a glimmer of dawn in darkness, searching for a light within the fog. In the Northern Region, the Holy Demon Sect and Tianwu Sect are revered, yet the only one truly worthy of being that beacon is none other than the Holy Demon Sect.”

“The dot amidst the darkness is like the most radiant star in the universe, fitting the Holy Demon Sect’s image perfectly—as a solitary star shining brightly in these tumultuous times.”

Li Xiaobai expounded fluently, leaving the crowd dumbfounded. They could not have anticipated that a painting, hardly on par with a child’s ability, could be endowed with such deep philosophical meaning.

They couldn’t help but burst into applause.

Li Xiaobai's expression was calm. From the earlier sycophantic praise directed at Xia Jian by those lackeys, he had understood that the essence of painting was not how well you painted, but how well you could embellish.

As long as one could articulate the profound essence, they could present themselves as unmatched in the world.

Painting, this form of art, is not just aesthetics; it is also a study of psychology.

"Woof, why didn't you discuss it with Lord Ergouzi in advance and made him embarrass himself like this!" Ergouzi grumbled on the side, his expression unfriendly.

"Do you ever manage not to embarrass yourself?"

"Woof..."

"Boss Ye does have a deep understanding of the Holy Demon Sect," Xia Jian commented lightly, feeling somewhat stung by Li Xiaobai's sophistry.

"It's nothing but sophistry. If you can't paint, you just can't paint. Why bother with such mysterious nonsense!"

Xia Liu said resentfully, having missed a great opportunity to attack.

"Let's take a look at the other paintings," Wang Ruoxian suggested, his disdain for Li Xiaobai growing.

"This Fushan Spring Residence Painting is nice, with the birds chirping and flowers fragrance, possessing some artistic conception."

"The Scholar Seeking Instruction Drawing is also good, the story within the school has a touch of the Confucian elegance."

"This Mother Child Piety Picture is commendable as well..."

"Indeed, take a look..."

The rest of the cultivators unfurled their own scrolls, commenting on one another's work. Soon, they pushed Li Xiaobai to the back of their minds. Although Tangneng First-class had been greatly beneficial to them, the owner's artwork was not as impressive as they had imagined.

Once the critique of the central figure's painting concluded, the rest were given cursory attention, receiving faint praise before the conversation took a turn.

“Lately, quite a few things have happened in the city. The most sensational has to be Boss Ye’s Tangneng First-class. It’s said that many cultivators have broken through their cultivation level overnight, to extraordinary effect.”

“I heard that several Family Heads couldn’t even obtain the bathhouse formula.”

“Does Boss Ye have a Sect legacy for this art of bathing?”

“Liangchen has no Sect legacy; it’s all thanks to a dedicated heart committed to researching and benefiting all living beings,” Li Xiaobai said lightly.

“Boss Ye has the world in his heart, I admire that. With this bathhouse, even if we are not destined for the Holy Demon Sect, our future paths will surely broaden!” The mention of Tangneng First-class brought joy to the hearts of the cultivators.

Wang Ruoxian’s brows raised slightly as she spoke indifferently, “Tangneng First-class is indeed miraculous, but it pales in comparison to the Spiritual Spring. I tried it yesterday, and the effect was less than ideal.”

That’s because you went to the wrong shop. If you had gone to the luxury version of Tangneng First-class, I guarantee you would have been relaxed to the point of taking off.

Li Xiaobai muttered in his heart, this woman has too much of a sense of superiority; she looks down on everyone from above.

“This trip to the Holy Demon Sect isn’t just for simple cultivation,” Xia Jian said indifferently.

“I’d like to hear more.”

“Have you heard of Secret Realms? Throughout the ages, many brilliant and powerful individuals have left behind numerous Secret Realms. Our trip to the Holy Demon Sect serves two purposes: first, to enhance our cultivation levels, and second, to participate in the opening of a Secret Realm in the Northern Region. All the great sects will select their talents to venture into this Secret Realm.”

“Within the Northern Region, only a handful of sects are qualified to choose candidates to travel to the Central Province; the Holy Demon Sect is one of them.”

A glint of pride flashed in Xia Jian’s eyes. He was determined to secure a spot for himself.

“Hiss, over the years, I’ve often heard about the legacy of the Wine Sword Immortal emerging. Could this Secret Realm be related to the legacy of the senior Wine Sword Immortal?”

The Wine Sword Immortal was a renowned figure; it was a powerful individual who ascended to the Upper Realm hundreds of years ago. Legend has it that the Wine Sword Immortal would take only one strike at the enemy and had to drink before attacking. The more he drank, the more powerful the sword strike would become.

Renowned for hundreds of years, no one had ever withstood that single strike; the Wine Sword Immortal was a faith in the hearts of many Sword Cultivators.

He is also the one who left behind the most Secret Realms in the Immortal Spirit Continent.

“As the sage of Zhenyuan Country once mentioned, this Secret Realm was left by Beichen Feng, a disciple under Great Immortal Zhenyuan. Beichen Feng was a true successor of the Confucian Path, a man of immense righteousness. The Secret Realm he left behind is a blessed land for us Confucian scholars.”

Beichen Feng was unassuming, and only those who followed the Confucian Path would know of him.

It is rumored that Beichen Feng once ventured into the Western Desert alone to debate Buddhist philosophy with the old Buddha of the desert. For three days and nights, he didn't use a strand of his cultivation, yet he turned the entire Western Desert into barren land, thus becoming the saint of the Confucian Path in the hearts of scholars.

“With the support of Zhenyuan Country and the opportunity to study at the Holy Demon Sect, Young Master Xia is sure to have a place in the Secret Realm. I would like to extend my congratulations in advance,” said Wang Ruoxian, her voice muffled by a giggling behind her hand. Xia Jian was quite pleased.

“Liangchen once saw a Nascent Soul State Preceptor from Zhenyuan Country; what is his status there?”

Li Xiaobai inquired, as this was a matter of some concern to him. After all, he had made the State Preceptor of Zhenyuan Country into a puppet. If discovered, it might be difficult to explain.

“In Zhenyuan Country, anyone above the Golden Core Stage can become a State Preceptor and enjoy official salary. In our Zhenyuan Country, Golden Core Cultivators are a dime a dozen and are not considered anything special.”

“And what about Nascent Soul Cultivators?”

“A dozen or so.”

“What about those at the Tribulation Crossing Stage?”

“Boss Ye seems a bit too concerned about the strength of Zhenyuan Country. Zhenyuan Country has inherited the Confucian legacy; its foundation is profound and beyond our imagination,” Xia Jian said lightly.

Li Xiaobai breathed a sigh of relief within. If Golden Core cultivators had little standing in Zhenyuan Country, then the chances of being discovered should be very slim.

“My apologies for the presumption,” said Liangchen.

“Are you sure you don’t want to leave this spot?” Xia Jian suddenly asked.

“Hmm, it’s quite comfortable sitting here.”

“Good, since Boss Ye is sitting in the challenger’s seat today, Xia has been curious about Boss Ye and would be grateful for some guidance!”