

Myriad 121

Chapter 121: Great Xia Cultural Research Academy (1)

The storm brewing in the academy had yet to reach Su Yu and the others. The convoy continued their journey. With the escort of four experts, the trip proceeded smoothly. The only incident was the appearance of a mad bull that had turned partially demonic. The bull was sent flying by Li Yunfeng's casual attack.

They had traveled through several cities. The number of the students on the bus increased. There were students from Yue, from Ning'an, and so on. With more people, there was also more noise and activity in the bus.

Su Yu did not talk much. Apart from some self-introductions, he had been silently listening to the others as they spoke. These high-tier geniuses were mostly from large families.

To progress quickly in physical cultivation, source qi liquid was required. To advance quickly in willpower cultivation, willpower text was required. Divine Characters also needed to be formed. None of that could be supplied by a poor family.

Thus, there were many low and middle-tier students from ordinary families, but there were very few of them among the high-tier students.

That was why Bureau Head Sun once said during the Nanyuan examination that he wished to see Su Yu break the monopoly of the rich and powerful families and become a high-tier student.

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"I heard from my elder sister that the foreign students are already in the academy. They're very scary. Many of them have human bodies and beast heads."

"That's normal. Apart from some humanoid races, most races will need to reach above the Mountainsea Realm to take on the human form."

"I don't know what the academy is thinking. Why are they accepting these fellows?"

The students were softly conversing on the bus. A day had passed. It was the 30th of July.

The bus would arrive at the capital that night. After a day together, the students had learned some basic information about each other even though they still didn't know each other well. Everyone was casually chatting while Su Yu was silently listening.

Their group consisted of the students of five different cities. Apart from Nanyuan with Su Yu as the sole student, the other cities varied between three to six students. Including Su Yu, there were twenty of them on the bus.

A majority of them were heading to the war academies while there were only eight heading to the cultural research academies. In other words, from these five cities, there were only eight high-tier cultural research students.

Following this trend, there would probably be around 50 high-tier cultural research students from the 28 cities. The capital itself would probably have more high-tier cultural research students than all the other 28 cities combined.

"So there will be about 100 to 200 high-tier students?" Su Yu guessed.

That wasn't exactly a big number. That was understandable. The cultural research students had all been picked after numerous trials. The cultural research academies would end up receiving less than 2,000 students. Meanwhile, less than one tenth of these students would be high-tier students.

And among the high-tier students, some would also choose to join the Nine Heavens Cultural Research Academy or Daoseeking Cultural Research Academy. Thus, the Great Xia Cultural Research Academy would probably end up with around 100 high-tier students.

Su Yu was thinking while listening to the crowd when a young man beside him suddenly smiled and said, "Su Yu, what are you going to study in the academy?"

That student came from Ning'an, a big city no weaker than Tianshui. His name was Tao Xing.

Su Yu softly said, "I have no idea. I really don't know too much about all this. Tao Xing, can you give me a simple explanation?"

Tao Xing laughed and said, "Sure. I can do that. In truth, someone will tell us all this in the academy, but it won't hurt to learn it in advance.

"Everyone knows that the cultural research academy is in charge of nurturing cultural researchers. But within the academy, there are various factions. Cultural researcher itself is merely a collective term to group them all together.

"I'll start with the biggest faction in the academy, the character faction."

Tao Xing was getting excited as he spoke. Giving this explanation to a high-tier student was an opportunity to showcase himself. If it was a low-tier student instead, he would have much less interest in giving the explanation.

"Within the character faction itself, there are several small splinter factions. I won't touch on that since I don't know too much about it either.

"The second biggest faction is the willpower faction. This faction focuses on strengthening one's willpower. Members of that faction will rarely form Divine Characters. Some would choose to not form even one. These people are very strong as well. Without Divine Characters, their willpower can grow rapidly. Their cultivation levels are generally higher than those in the character faction.

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"As for the third biggest faction, it's the beast taming faction."

Su Yu blanked out for a bit before asking, "Beast taming?"

"Yeap." Tao Xing said with a smile, "These are the cultural researchers who capture and tame demon beasts and also fight with their tamed beasts. We can call them summoners as well since that's what they call themselves.

"Regardless of what we call them, they are very strong. Their path of cultivation mainly involves taming demon beasts. You need to know that of the myriad races, a lot of them are demonic races. And a lot of them are exceptionally powerful. These cultural researchers walk the path where they grow alongside their beasts. The stronger their beasts are, the stronger they are."

Su Yu felt truly enlightened. Nobody had told him that before.

"As you know, some people in the military will ride to the battlefield on beasts. Most of these beasts are provided by the beast tamers. Thus, beast tamers are actually very popular in the military.

"And the fourth biggest faction is the pill making faction. From the name alone, you know what they do. These are cultural researchers specializing in making pills.

"The scientific research academies produce pills as well, but they mostly produce standardized pills. As for our pillmasters, they focus on producing non-standard pills. In the academy, they are also known as the divine pill faction.

"The fifth biggest faction, the weaponsmithing faction.

"The sixth biggest faction, the divine talisman faction. It is actually a small splinter of the divine character faction. With the unique Divine Characters they specialize in, they can create single-use Divine Characters and store them in talismans."

Su Yu felt even more enlightened. Tao Xing had told him a lot of things he didn't know before. Apart from the six commonly seen cultural researchers, there were also some rarer factions.

For example, the transformation faction where the cultural researchers focus on transforming their bodies. These people were very terrifying and often looked very similar to the foreign races. Some of them had modified themselves so much they no longer looked like humans anymore.

It was worth noting that these major factions were also split into many smaller factions. The character faction, for example, was further split into many smaller factions. These factions were split in accordance to the properties of their Divine Characters, the number of their Divine Characters, the ways they approach combat, and so on.

There was also a peaceful faction in the academy. Instead of focusing on their combat strength, they focused on studying the various cultivation methods. Most of them existed within the willpower faction, and each of them possessed a powerful willpower.

Toward the end, Tao Xing asked, "So Su Yu, what's your choice?"

Su Yu hesitated slightly before saying, "I think it'll be the character faction."

After listening to the entire explanation, he still felt like the character and the willpower factions were more suitable for him. But since he had already formed some Divine Characters and had tasted the prowess of Divine Characters, he was unwilling to shift his focus to willpower alone.

Zhao Li, who was seated in front of the bus, raised his brow. So was that kid...really going to join the character faction? Indeed, that was still the more attractive faction. But what was so bad about weaponsmithing? It wasn't like he had to stop cultivating Divine Characters after becoming a weaponsmith.

Although cultural researchers could be classified into different factions, most of them actually cultivated a mix of different paths. Very few would only stick to one path. Many cultural researchers would know at least the basics of the other paths.

Tao Xing laughed heartily and said, "I want to pick the character faction as well. But I'll probably finalize my decision after reaching the academy.

"We're all high-tier students, so we have a lot of options. A lot of the normal students are actually assigned to one instead of being given the freedom to choose."

Some of the new students still had weak willpower and no Divine Character. Thus, it would be the same whichever path they chose in the early stages. To protect some of the smaller factions from extinction, the academy would actually send some students over to them.

Su Yu nodded. Tao Xing was much more reliable than Hu Zongji. Traces of arrogance could still be heard in his voice, but that was more the natural pride of a genius. As a whole, he was not so conceited that Su Yu found it hard to even converse with him.

As for Hu Zongji, Su Yu couldn't bring himself to even talk with that guy. In fact, that fellow was not only so obnoxious when facing Su Yu. He was the same when facing the others as well. Thus, he had invited quite a lot of displeasure in the bus. He only learned to shut his mouth after Researcher Hu sent a couple of glares his way.

Chapter 122: Great Xia Cultural Research Academy (2)

Time passed quickly while the students talked among themselves.

The sky slowly darkened.

Before even reaching the capital city itself, Su Yu could already feel the bustling atmosphere in the air. They were currently at the outskirts of the capital city. The bus was traveling on a wide road framed by large trees.

The random buildings scattered about were clean and big. In some of the villages and towns they passed through, they could see many people practicing martial techniques. More and more vehicles could be seen on the road as well.

The further they went, the more bustling it was. Even some of the random towns they passed by were bigger and more developed than Nanyuan. Even at night, these towns were brightly lit and filled with pedestrians.

"We're nearing the capital city..." announced Li Yunfeng.

When Su Yu looked out the window at the nightscape, he was stunned. Was this the Great Xia City? He could sense the difference between this city and Nanyuan just by looking outside.

A lot of noise could be heard outside the bus. The cloudrush horse he had seen during the test previously could also be seen. These horses were carrying their riders and running rapidly on the road.

As someone who had opened a decent number of acupoints, he could sense that the source qi density in this area was far higher than anywhere else he had been to. There was no comparing this place with Nanyuan. In fact, the natural source qi density here was almost as high as the effect of source qi liquid when used in Nanyuan.

Some of the pedestrians he saw felt extremely strong. He could sense the concentration of source qi around Great Strength cultivators while Infinite Strength cultivators gave him the sensation of burning suns. And there were many such burning suns around.

Which meant that there were a lot of Infinite Strength cultivators around. And they were still not even in the capital city yet. Su Yu was not the only surprised student. A majority of the students in the bus were also exclaiming in admiration. They were simply being less obvious than Su Yu about it.

Of the 28 cities under Great Xia City's rule, many of them were powerful. But none could compare with the capital itself. Relying on those 28 cities alone, the Great Xia Prefecture wouldn't have been so powerful.

In front of the bus, the three Cloudbreach experts who had been relatively silent throughout the journey finally opened their eyes and exhaled in relief. They were finally safe. They had arrived at the outskirts of the capital city and were going to enter the city itself soon.

If even this place wasn't safe for them, then Great Xia might as well cease to exist. Unless the Myriad Race Cult wished to face total destruction, they would not dare to try anything here.

Sun Xia, the expert from the Nine Heavens Cultural Research Academy, said, "The capital is not a singular city. It is a greater city formed of a main city at the center surrounded by four sub-cities at the east, south, west, and north. Altogether, they formed the five major areas of the capital.

"The capital has 30 million residents. The war academies are mostly spread across the eastern district while the cultural research academies are spread across the western district.

"We will separate after entering the city. The cultural research academies are quite far away from the war academies. There will be some people coming to pick you up.

"You will be brought directly to your academies. Rest well tonight and don't wander off alone. The capital is a city that never sleeps. Even at night, the city is still bustling with activity. But even if you want to get to know this city, it is better for you to get properly settled down first before you start roaming around."

Su Yu was paying attention to the words when his attention was suddenly caught by something else. He was astonished. An incredible sight had appeared before him. The entire world seemed to have brightened up.

Countless flickering lights could be seen coming from the distant city, piercing through the darkness of the night. The city was incomparably big. It almost seemed boundless. There were city walls around the city, but the walls weren't too tall. And the walls were certainly not able to mask the thriving atmosphere behind them.

Since they were deep in the Human Realm, the city walls wouldn't be too tall. And the people here at the capital were confident enough in their own strength. Thus, they did not need excessively tall city walls.

Su Yu's entire vision was filled with lights. The resplendent lights seemed to stretch endlessly forward. When they arrived near the city wall, the gate Su Yu had expected to see was nowhere to be found. Rather, a massive road about 100 meters wide could be seen leading straight into the city.

There was a checkpoint outside the city. Some soldiers could be seen standing guard there. Some vehicles were allowed to enter after showing some documents. The road was further split into several paths such as the beast path, large vehicle path, small vehicle path, cultivator's landing zone, military path, and so on. The purpose of each path was clearly indicated.

Before long, the bus they were on reached the checkpoint. Li Yunfeng opened the window and showed a document to the soldier on duty. After checking the document, the soldier saluted Li Yunfeng before letting the bus through.

As the bus drove forward, Su Yu looked behind to see that an expert was flying down from the sky. The cultivator ultimately landed in the cultivator's zone before getting into a small car and drove off on a different path.

When Tao Xing saw what Su Yu was looking at, he smiled and explained, "For experts, it is better to either fly or go on foot in the wilderness. Vehicles will only inconvenience them. But in the city, they have to follow the rules and can't fly around willy-nilly, so they will use vehicles in the city instead."

Su Yu smiled and did not say anything. He wasn't surprised to see an expert driving. He was more surprised by the fact that cultivators at the Skysoar Realm and beyond could be seen so easily here.

One ought to know that in the entirety of Nanyuan, Xia Bing, Wu Wenhai, and Liu Wenyan were the only Skysoar cultivators. But here, he was able to see one before even going far from the city wall.

Next, rumbling sounds rang out. Su Yu looked behind again and saw about a dozen cloudrush horses running on the road, kicking a cloud of dust around them. Under the cover of the night, Su Yu couldn't get a clear look at them. However, he could still see the leader of the group flying off his mount before talking to the guards on duty. That was yet another Skysoar expert. Or maybe stronger.

Su Yu took a deep breath. The sky of the capital was indeed much higher than Nanyuan's. Excluding those on the bus, he had already seen two experts at the Skysoar Realm or beyond. He was both shocked and excited. This was the sight he wanted to see. Here, there were countless experts. That would both pressure and motivate him to work harder.

In Nanyuan, one did not need to be too strong to be considered successful. The Infinite Strength Realm was enough. In fact, Infinite Strength cultivators were the mainstay of Nanyuan. But here in the capital, the Skysoar Realm was merely the starting line.

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A while later, the bus approached a different vehicle and stopped.

"War academy students, get on that vehicle."

At that command, 12 students got off the bus. A few people were on the other vehicle, in charge of escorting these students to their academies. Su Yu did not know these students well and had not conversed much with them. Thus, he only watched silently as they left. The students from the same cities were bidding each other farewells.

A few minutes later, the other vehicle left.

The door closed and Sun Xia said, "We'll be heading to the western district. When we reach there, those joining the Nine Heavens Cultural Research Academy will follow me while those joining the Daoseeking Cultural Research Academy will follow Commander Li. Those joining the Great Xia Cultural Research Academy will stay in the bus and follow Elder Zhao."

Of the remaining eight students in the bus, six of them were joining the Great Xia Cultural Research Academy. The other two academies were only receiving a student each.

One couldn't say that their choice to choose those two academies were right or wrong. Each person had their own choice. Perhaps they could go further in those two academies. After all, those academies were certainly offering more benefits to high-tier students.

Hu Zongji who had forced himself to remain silent for an entire day finally spoke again, "Third—Teacher Hu, can we move freely after reaching the academy?"

He was about to say third grandpa instead. Su Yu was aware of that. On the journey, he had figured out the relationship between the two. Hu Youhui was the uncle of Hu Zongji's father. He was also a seventh-stage Cloudbreach expert. Meanwhile, Sun Xia was only a second-stage Cloudbreach expert.

That was why Sun Xia was only a junior researcher while the other two were intermediate researchers. Zhao Li and Hu Youhui seemed to have similar status. However, they had not conversed much with each other.

Sun Xia clearly had the lower status as most of the mundane affairs during the journey were either handled by her or Li Yunfeng.

Hu Youhui frowned and said, "Yes, you can. But don't roam around if you don't know the place well."

He did not bother hiding anything and directly berated, "Where are you planning on going? Your elder brother is already waiting for you. Follow him when you arrive. Don't do anything before completing your registration tomorrow!"

Ho Zongji muttered in disappointment, "My friends are waiting for me. We agreed to gather up tonight."

Hu Youhui ignored him. The bus continued moving. Halfway, Sun Xia and Li Yunfeng left with two students. That left only six students, Zhao Li, Hu Youhui, and the driver on the bus.

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After about half an hour when it was almost nine, they arrived. Su Yu blanked out when he was told to get off the bus. He thought that he was still in the middle of the city.

When he got off the bus, Zhao Li announced, "We have arrived at the academy."

Su Yu looked around. Weren't they still in the middle of the city? Where was the academy?

Looking at his confused expression, Zhao Li smiled and said, "This is the Great Xia Cultural Research Academy. We're at the Visitor Zone. Didn't we go through an iron gate earlier? That's the western gate of the academy."

Su Yu was truly stunned. They had been driving for more than 10 minutes after the gate before reaching the Visitor Zone. This place was filled with vehicles and people. He had thought that they were still in the middle of some commercial district. But they were actually in the academy?

Zhao Li said, "This is the outer area of the academy. The Education District? is not here. It is a few kilometers ahead of us. You will all be spending the night here. Tomorrow, you will finish your registration procedures. Only then can you be truly considered students of the academy."

Many other vehicles could be seen stopping nearby. Some people were walking with their luggages. These were probably new students like them. Many of them were driven here by their parents. These were most likely the local students.

Some were delivered here on buses like Su Yu's group, so these were probably the students from some other cities. A lot of them were staring around blankly like Su Yu. Zhao Li was standing with a few old men. After a short chat, more people arrived. These newcomers were youngsters.

"Junior brothers and sisters, come with me if your names are called."

"Line up here. Pay attention to the names being called. If you fail to follow, you'll have to find your own accommodation tonight."

These newcomers were all the older students of the academy. They started calling out students according to the lists in their hands.

Before long, Su Yu heard his own name.

"Nanyuan Secondary School, Su Yu."

"Here."

He hurriedly answered before walking toward a young woman. The woman looked at him and smiled before continuing with the roll-call. A short while later, about a dozen students had gathered around Su Yu.

"Alright. That's all."

The young woman smiled and introduced, "I'm Zhou Hui, your senior sister, a student of the mental tempering grade. Come with me. I'll take you to a meal. After that, you can settle down for the night. I'll come pick you up tomorrow morning. Don't run off by yourself. There will be a lot of people in the Visitor Zone these two days and things will be rather chaotic around here. If you run around and miss your registration, don't blame me for not reminding you about it."

As she spoke, she started leading the students away. Su Yu turned his head to look at Zhao Li. The old man, who was also looking at him, merely nodded with a smile instead of saying anything.

They were already in the academy. He would have plenty of chances to communicate with Su Yu later. He would let this kid get used to the new environment first.

Su Yu was slightly panicking. The familiar faces on the bus were nowhere to be seen. Even if that annoying Hu Zongji was here, he would find some comfort in the familiar face. But he was surrounded by total strangers. He instinctively tightened his grip on his saber anxiously.

Zhou Hui, who was leading the way, laughed and said, "Don't be nervous, everyone. I'm not a monster that will eat you guys. I only need to send you guys to the correct place to complete my mission. You're new here but you will get used to this place after a few days.

"By the way, be careful at night. A bunch of hungry wolves are waiting for you. Watch out for the senior brothers and sisters that might come looking for you late at night. Remember to never open your door..."

Su Yu shivered. Was this place so scary? He felt like he had entered a den of wolves. The world outside Nanyuan was wonderful. But it also felt very dangerous. Done with scaring the newbies, Zhou Hui giggled to herself. After a while, they arrived at their destination. A brightly lit building stood before them.

"Your group will be staying on the fifth floor. One room for each of you. Take your luggages up. The doors are all open. Pick your own rooms and come down for a meal when you're ready."

Su Yu and the students silently went upstairs.

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After picking a room and shutting the door behind him, Su Yu heaved a breath of relief. He had been very nervous earlier. He wasn't even this nervous when facing the attack of the Myriad Race Cult.

Unfamiliarity, confusion, and curiosity...

He finally loosened up now that he was alone. He exhaled deeply, trying to calm himself down. Since he was already here, he had to overcome his nervousness quickly.

"Don't panic! Stay calm! You can do it, Su Yu!"

Chapter 123: First Impression of the Academy (1)

After taking a short break in the room to readjust his mental state, Su Yu went down.

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In the cafeteria.

Zhou Hui was already busy eating while the new students arrived one after another. The same scene was playing out all around them as well, with one senior student leading several new students.

"Over here!"

Zhou Hui waved at Su Yu. When he went over, she smiled and said, "Go grab something to eat. You know how to do that, right?"

Su Yu smiled and left without saying anything. This was basically a self-service restaurant. By the time he returned with his meal, Zhou Hui was almost done eating. When all the students arrived, she gestured at them to eat while she sat there waiting.

As they ate, she said, "In the past, some of the genius students joined without knowing how to do anything. They thought the academy was their home, ordering the senior students around like they were servants. Some even ordered the senior students to fetch their meals for them."

Zhou Hui laughed and said, "Good thing none of you are that stupid. Otherwise, I would have been rich."

Everyone looked at her blankly. What did she mean?

"Stupid. Don't you need to pay for work done?" Zhou Hui softly said, "You can all serve as a witness that I'm not an unreliable senior sister. Pay attention to your surroundings. If any senior student ends up getting the meal for some new students later...hehe, those new students will not enjoy what comes next."

"According to the rules of the academy, you must be rewarded for what you do. Since the senior student has helped the new student with a task, then the new student will be charged no lower than one merit point. A greedier senior student can even demand three to five merit points per task. The new student will have no choice but to pay up. They only have themselves to blame for being incapable of even fetching their meal themselves."

Zhou Hui giggled and said, "Just wait and see. Something like this will definitely happen. Some new students are too stupid and arrogant. They think that this place is their home."

The expressions of Su Yu and the other students changed. Was the environment here really so cutthroat?

Fortunately, their group had been too embarrassed to let Zhou Hui help with anything. A short girl beside Su Yu asked with some lingering fear, "Senior sister, when you offered to help me with my luggage earlier, did you intend to charge me for it?"

"Of course." Zhou Hui answered righteously, "Everyone seems to be able to carry their own luggage except you. When I see you struggling, isn't it normal for me to offer my service? Don't worry, I'm not greedy. I can do it for only one merit point."

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The short girl rejoiced that she had insisted on carrying her luggage herself because she had been too embarrassed to accept the help. It would seem like that decision had saved her a merit point.

For these new students, even one merit point was a large amount. Even those from rich families wouldn't be willing to waste their merit points like that. That was basically the same as paying someone tens of thousands to carry a suitcase. Who would be willing to do that?

Su Yu was not bothered about that. Instead, he asked, "Senior Sister Zhou, are senior students being paid to welcome the new students?"

"Yes. We get one merit point for this mission." Zhou Hui smiled happily, "That's a lot. In fact, this is a job many couldn't get even if they wanted. Only mental tempering grade students like us can get it. It is easy and safe. It doesn't even take much time. We wouldn't be able to get one merit point so easily during any other time."

Zhou Hui scanned the group and said, "Who among you are high-tier students?"

The short girl raised her hand cautiously and said, "I am."

Zhou Hui's eyes lit up and said, "You're a high-tier student? You're rewarded 100 merit points for joining the academy, right?"

The short girl was fearful of the look in Zhou Hui's eyes. But she still nodded and said, "Yeah. That was what I heard."

"Junior sister!" Zhou Hui exclaimed with her eyes brightly lit, "Have you ever considered providing loans? By loaning your 100 merit points for 3 months, you will get 110 merit points in return. You have just joined the academy so you won't be needing that many merit points anyway."

"It would be too much of a waste to just keep your points in your card. You can consider lending it to me. I'll help you look for loan takers. After 3 months, I'll return 110 merit points to you. You can earn 10 merit points without doing anything!"

Su Yu and the other students were dumbstruck. The people here were way too creative in terms of making money. Even the students from the bigger cities were as stunned as Su Yu. Something like this was completely beyond their imagination.

The short girl was so scared that she almost teared up. She hurriedly said, "No. I still need to buy some original texts. I need the points myself."

"Sigh."

Zhou Hui sighed before smiling again, "You're bad at math. Fine, your senior sister won't trick you. You can always consider lending your merit points to me if you find yourself not able to finish them. I'll give you my number later."

She then looked at the others on the table and said, "The same goes for you guys. Consider my offer. Of course, there might be more high-high students among you as well. But that is not indicated on the list I'm given, I am too lazy to ask too much."

"Don't worry. Nobody would dare to steal your merit points. This is the academy. You will definitely receive interest for the merit points you loan out. There are a lot of people lacking merit points in the academy. These people only need some points for emergencies and can quickly return the points to you."

Su Yu couldn't help but to ask, "Senior Sister, are merit points hard to earn here?"

"Of course." Zhou Hui helplessly said, "We're not warriors. Our physical strength is too weak so some missions are out of our reach. And there are too many old students that have yet to graduate. Easy jobs involving translation and administration would be snatched the moment one is available."

Zhou Hui sighed, "I've been in the academy for six years. I'm already at the Mental Tempering Stage, but I can still rarely find any suitable missions for me. Otherwise, why would I be here welcoming new students like you? You need merit points for willpower texts, for classes, for meals, for everything!"

Zhou Hui's face turned gloomy as she said, "I can't live anymore."

The new students felt sad for her hearing about her hardships in the academy. That was too pitiful.

Su Yu was also worried. He asked, "Is there no way to earn merit points?"

"Of course we have." Zhou Hui said, "Like I said, there are a lot of missions around. Helping pillmasters with pills, helping beast tamers with rearing beasts, helping character masters with odd jobs, all those tasks provide merit points.

"If you're strong and confident, you can challenge the Top 100 Ranking of the academy. If you can get on the ranking, you'll receive bonus merit points each month."

"Top 100 Ranking?" Su Yu asked in confusion.

Beside him, the short girl said, "I know about that! Senior Sister, is that the ranking for those in the Mental Tempering Stage?"

"You can say so." Zhou Hui smiled, "Only those in the Mental Tempering Stage can get on that ranking. Also, you must be below 30. Those who have graduated after reaching the Skysoar Realm will not be allowed to get on the ranking as well. The rewards of this ranking are provided for the students, not the Skysoar graduates."

The short girl said, "Senior Sister, I heard about that from my aunt. But I'm planning to walk the path of pillmaking. I won't have much strength. How do I get on the ranking?"

"You don't have to worry about that." Zhou Hui explained, "The Top 100 Ranking is mainly for combat specialists. Pillmasters, talisman masters, and weaponsmiths have their own rankings. You can aim for those instead. But those rankings won't be as popular as the Top 100 Ranking."

She paused to look at the look of longing on the eyes of the new students. With a smile, she said, "You guys can forget about it. How many students are there in the academy? And how many students can graduate each year? Every year, there are at least 1,000 students below 30 staying behind after failing to graduate while the others leave the academy after giving up. And over the past 10 years, more than 10,000 of these students have been accumulated in the academy."

Even when taking only those below 30 into consideration, there were over 10,000 of them. And that was already excluding the ones who had given up and left the academy. Or else, the number would have been bigger.

Zhou Hui continued her explanation, "There are more than one mental tempering classes. Each major faction has their own classes. There are about 5,000 Mental Tempering Stage students below 30 in the academy. And among them, only 100 can get on the Top 100 Ranking. Newbies like you should stop dreaming."

"There are so many Mental Tempering Stage students?" A young man exclaimed in astonishment, "That's too many!"

"You're surprised by that?" Zhou Hui was indifferent, "There are plenty of Mental Tempering Stage students around. That number will be even bigger when including those above 30. You only need 50 percent willpower to reach the Mental Tempering Stage. A new student can reach that point after a year or two.

"However, after reaching that stage, you will be stuck for a very long time. There are still a large number of Mental Tempering Stage students in their seventies in the academy."

Zhou Hui shook her head and sighed, "It is too hard to reach the Skysoar Realm. Last year, 62 students graduated from the academy. Only 16 of them are below 30. A large majority of our students would have no hope of reaching the Skysoar Realm."

Everyone sank into silence.

Zhou Hui smiled again and said, "Don't worry. If you really can't do it, you can always change your profession. Like me. If I can't reach the Skysoar Realm by 30, I will leave the academy and look for something else to do.

"We have strong willpower. If we shift into a warrior, we can reach the Great Strength and Infinite Strength Realms quickly. At the Infinite Strength Realm, you can easily find a decent job."

One of them couldn't resist asking, "Senior Sister, how old are you?"

Zhou Hui's eyes turned dangerous, "That is a dangerous question. Do you know that?"

The smile then returned to her face as she said, "I'm ok. I've been in the academy for 6 years, making me 24 this year. I'm fine being asked that question. But if you ask those old senior sisters that have been in the academy for decades...you will regret it terribly."

The students laughed. The mood on their table had warmed up considerably. Earlier, everyone was tense. But Zhou Hui was a pleasant and talkative person so they were able to keep the conversation going.

Su Yu and the other students could see that the nearby tables were so silent it was scary. Some of the senior students only ate silently, completely disregarding their junior students. Evidently, this was only a mission for them.

Apart from showing the way, they would not need to do anything else. Thus, they would only converse with the new students if they were in the mood. Otherwise, they could always ignore the new students.

Chapter 124: First Impression of the Academy (2)

Su Yu's attention was still on the merit points. He asked, "Senior Sister, I heard you need to pay merit points for classes. Are those classes expensive?"

"Of course." Zhou Hui answered, "But not for all of them. Some basic classes are free. But the moment it involves specialized knowledge, especially willpower text writing, you need a scary number of merit points."

Zhou Hui continued with a look of heartache, "For example, the classes of those teaching assistants where they will write a willpower text during the class will cost at least 5 merit points per class. For junior researcher classes, you need at least 10 merit points per class."

"You won't be able to afford the classes of the intermediate and senior researchers. In truth, they don't conduct a lot of classes for new students either. For Mental Tempering Stage students, they won't waste their time on you unless you're a genius."

"The library and book repository also need merit points."

Su Yu asked in astonishment, "Those two are different?"

"Of course. You can only find ordinary books in the library. The book depository is where the truly good stuff can be found. The original texts and willpower texts can be found there. Some might have expired, but they are still much more valuable than ordinary books."

Zhou Hui sighed, "Library, book depository, classes, cultivating, pills, weapons, talismans...all those require merit points. And don't get me started on the secret grottos. The public grottos of the academy are scarily expensive. I've been here for six years and I've only entered a grotto once..."

Zhou Hui gnashed her teeth as she said, "And that one entry cost me a few years' worth of savings. Why would I be here on this mission otherwise?"

Everyone sank into a melancholic mood. How pitiful. It almost felt like one wouldn't be able to survive without merit points. That was too scary.

One of them whispered, "Fortunately my father gave me 30 merit points before coming..."

Immediately after, Zhou Hui looked at him with her eyes brightly lit, "Student, consider loaning your merit points to me!"

They were all speechless. This senior sister was truly desperate for merit points.

When Zhou Hui saw that the student was staying silent, she sighed, "Forget it. What a miser. But 30 merit points aren't that useful. In a few months, you will see just how little that is."

Zhou Hui shook her head and said, "Also, you didn't earn those merit points yourself. Your merit tier is not up there so some things will still not be available for you. For example, the secret grottos. Even with merit points, you might not be able to enter."

"Even the most ordinary secret grotto requires at least 30 total earned merit points to enter."

"As for the better secret grottos, you need over 100 total earned merit points. Think about it. How are you supposed to earn that much before the Skysoar Realm?"

Upon hearing that, Su Yu started calculating his own total earned merit. From languages, he had earned 18 merit points. From the previous mission, he had earned 10 merit points. From the entrance examinations, he had earned 40 merit points. However, half of that was bonus reward and would not be counted as total earned merit. From the recent battle, he had earned over 40 merit points. As a whole, his total earned merit had reached around 90 points.

He heaved a breath of relief. Fortunately, he had earned a decent number of merit points himself. He nearly had 100 total earned merit points.

These requirements were actually put in place to help those from ordinary families. If everyone needed total earned merit points to enter, then everyone had a fair chance to enter.

Even someone from a rich family would not be able to enter without enough total earned merit. By the time those from the rich families made enough total earned merit, those from the ordinary families would have made enough as well.

"This rule is a restriction on those from big families..."

Understanding dawned on Su Yu. In the academy, students must rely on themselves. Their backgrounds and families could be helpful, but they weren't as big a help as he had imagined.

Zhou Hui did not know what Su Yu was thinking about. She continued her explanation, "It is still too early for you guys to learn about all that. You'll learn after some time in the academy. For now, your main tasks are to study the basics, pick your course, and pick your teacher. Of course, the latter is only available for geniuses."

Zhou Hui shrugged and said, "If you're not a teacher, be happy with public classes. Private classes would require merit points."

She then looked at the short girl and flashed a wide smile, "Liu Ke, you're a high-tier student. The researchers will definitely be willing to accept you as a personal student. Do you have anyone in mind? Do you want me to introduce you to one?"

The girl timidly said, "It's ok, Senior Sister. I already have a teacher."

"What a pity." Zhou Hui had a look of regret as she said, "I can get some merit points if the student I introduce ends up accepted."

She then smiled at the other students and asked, "There must be more high-tier students among you. Even a middle-middle evaluation and above will be enough. After all, high-tier students are too rare. With middle-middle evaluation or above, you can actually find a teaching assistant as your teacher easily. I can introduce some suitable teachers to you. If both of you find each other agreeable, I can get some benefits."

To Su Yu's right, a young man raised his hand and asked, "Senior Sister, I'm a middle-middle student. Can I get a suitable teacher?"

"Yeah, you might be able to find one." Zhou Hui nodded and said, "We'll talk further later. They say that this year, there are fewer new students. They say that we are accepting 500 less students. But in truth, students are still being sent into the academy through other channels. There are also those who have entered through the smaller cities. So this year, we ended up accepting around 2,000 new students, the same as the previous years.

"Most of these students will be low-tier students. There are at least 1,200 of them. As for middle-tier students, there will be around 500 to 600 of them. The rest are the high-tier students.

"The academy has a new rule this year. All the researchers are required to accept some students. There will probably be over 100 researchers coming out to accept students. A few hundreds of them will end up accepted. Thus, you have a decent chance as a middle-tier student."

Su Yu asked, "Senior Sister, for new students that aren't accepted this year, will they have a chance in the future?"

"Yes." Zhou Hui smiled and said, "I'll be trying my luck this year as well. I'll see if I can get myself a teacher. But those teachers don't like old students..."

Zhou Hui sighed and said, "They call us old foxes with no vigor. But what choice do we have? Since we haven't been accepted during our first year, we have no choice but to survive by ourselves. If we aren't old foxes, we won't be able to reach this far. That is totally uncalled for!"

She looked at Su Yu and said, "Su Yu, you're from Nanyuan. I heard there's a high-tier student from Nanyuan this year..."

Zhou Hui blinked. What was the name of that Nanyuan fellow? As old students, they rarely concern themselves with these new students. Only the new students would care a lot about the other new students. The other students were unclear, but Liu Ke suddenly looked at Su Yu curiously.

Su Yu? Was that him?

High-tier students would normally pay more attention to other high-tier students. As for the weaker students, unless they were close friends, who would care about them? As a high-tier student, Liu Ke was naturally curious about the other high-tier students this year.

She did not have the complete list, but Nanyuan only had one high-tier student. She seemed to have heard the name before. It was...Su...something. Was it Su Yu? The look in Zhou Hui's eyes changed as well. The other Nanyuan students had yet to arrive. In fact, not one ordinary student from Nanyuan's region had arrived. Su Yu was the only Nanyuan student to have arrived. In that case, this must be the high-tier student.

Zhou Hui's eyes lit up. Since Su Yu was staying silent, she didn't expose him. But her attitude still turned warmer than before as she said, "Student Su Yu, take my number. Feel free to contact me if you need anything. Like looking for a teacher, looking for information, asking about the genius students, the Top 100 Ranking and so on. I will charge you cheaply. I won't even take merit points. Cash is enough for me."

"The same goes for you guys."

Zhou Hui then fished out some books from her bag and said, "As new students, you should get yourself a student's manual. It is cheap and useful."

Liu Ke was interested. She asked, "How much for one, Senior Sister?"

"It's cheap. I'll take 500 dollars per book." Zhou Hui smiled, "This is the latest edition. The older editions are already outdated. Some dishonest senior students will sell it to you for 1 merit point. You will be too curious to say no. Am I right?"

Many of them nodded. She was speaking the truth.

That was especially true for the so-called Top 100 Ranking. Everyone was very curious about that. Zhou Hui opened the book and pointed at a certain page, "This is the list of the strongest teaching assistants. Look, occupying the first place is Xia Yuwen. Some of you might already know that. But what about the second place? Third place? Aren't you curious?"

"We also have the latest student ranking. Under 30, which student is the strongest? And this is the ranking of the junior researchers. Who is the best among them?"

"This is..."

With each ranking Zhou Hui mentioned, the more tempted the new students were. Before long, they were pulling their money out to buy the student manual.

Su Yu was tempted as well. He was very curious about all that and he knew even less than the others. Thus, even though he loathed parting with his money, he still pulled out 500 dollars for one of the manuals.

All the new students in the group purchased a manual each. With money in hand, a wide smile bloomed on Zhou Hui's face. The manual only cost her about 30 dollars each. She had earned a massive profit selling them to these students.

Unfortunately, she wasn't in charge of too many students. And she was too kind to trick them. Like she said, she was actually a kind senior.

Not far away, a new student exclaimed in alarm, "Three merit points for one? That's too expensive!"

"Scram if you don't want to buy." A senior student indifferently said, "This is the market price. It involves the internal information of the academy. Do you think you can get it so easily? Do you know how much of a risk I took to get these books out?"

Some of the nearby senior students were speechless. What a scammer! Some of them only charged cash and some only charged one merit point. But this fellow was charging three merit points. He was too greedy. Of course, none bothered to expose him.

Although he was greedy and was obviously going to earn big, he needed to watch his back from now on. Some of these new students might grow strong in a few years and come back to settle scores. That had happened to some other students in the past.

One should not take only the short-term profit into consideration. Zhou Hui was envious of that student as well, but she wasn't too bothered about that. If he really encountered a petty but genius student, he would come to suffer a few years down the line. All that for a couple of merit points? Was that worth it?

Meanwhile, Su Yu and company looked at her gratefully. Su Yu even felt like he had made a profit buying from her. The other students had to spend three merit points per book. That was worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Meanwhile, they only needed to spend 500 dollars. With someone to compare against, they felt much better with the money spent. They carefully hid their books, scared that others would find out they had bought it for cheap.

Zhou Hui was giggling to herself. This was good. In her group, there were at least two high-tier students. It was good that they weren't holding any grudge against her. She might even be able to leave a good impression on them.

She was almost done with her job here. She had earned her money and left a good impression on them. It didn't matter if they would still remember her in the future. At the very least, some sort of connection had formed between them.

As for the greedy senior student, he probably didn't care about what these new students thought. He would take as much as he could from them. These new students would probably leave in a few years. Since they couldn't reach the Skysoar Realm, what was the point in staying in the academy?

"Go back and take your time reading the manual. I'll come for you guys tomorrow to show you the student dorms. By the way, high-tier students can stay in the Mental Tempering Garden. I suggest you stay there. Or else...hehe, the ordinary dorms will annoy you to no end."

She gnashed her teeth and said, "There, you'll be sharing the unit with seven other students. When you are reading, the others are training martial techniques. When you are training, others are showering. When you are showering, others are reading. That will drive you crazy."

Su Yu's expression changed. Was it so terrible? Eight per unit? One ought to know that they were here to cultivate. And disturbance was what one feared most when cultivating. Su Yu felt gloomy. Would he need to stay in the Mental Tempering Garden as well? But he had to pay 50,000 dollars for that! He didn't even have that much money on him!

Zhou Hui was actually stealthily paying attention to him. When she saw her expression, she smiled at herself. Sure enough, this fellow was probably the high-tier student from Nanyuan. Not bad at all. There were actually two high-tier students in her group.

They might be new students, but if she could build a good relationship with them, she might benefit from it in the future.

Zhou Hui was feeling very good about herself. It would seem like acting cute in front of the researcher in charge of assignments had worked splendidly. She had been given a decent list of new students to welcome.

Chapter 125: All Women Are Obstacles In Cultivation (1)

After the chat with Zhou Hui, Su Yu and company had learned a lot more about the academy. Although they had only learned some basic information, knowing more could still help with their anxiousness at being at a new place.

As for the rumors about the internal conflict in the academy, Zhou Hui merely mentioned that it was unrelated to them. In short, they were not qualified to get involved in the conflict yet.

The so-called cutthroat competition mentioned by outsiders only applied to the experts and the geniuses. The weak were unqualified to participate in the game of the strong. In fact, Su Yu could see a look of envy on Zhou Hui's face when talking about conflict.

"Internal conflict? If I am really dragged into the conflict, I would probably be so happy that I can laugh in my sleep."

Envy was plastered all over her face. If one was dragged into a conflict, that would mean that one was a genius, a freak, an expert, an individual of value. In the academy, nobody would care about people with no value.

Who would be willing to waste their time rivaling some weaklings? Geniuses, freaks, experts, all these people would not spare any of their time on weaklings. These weaklings were not even qualified to be bullied by them.

Thus, according to Zhou Hui, if you really found yourself dragged into a conflict, congratulations were in order. You had become a big deal in the academy. That signified strength, power, and merit points.

After listening to Zhou Hui, Su Yu felt enlightened. His mindset had been too rigid previously. Although he had joined the Great Xia Cultural Research Academy, he was still unhappy with the internal conflict. He believed that this wasn't how an academy should be. The internal conflict was so serious that even the new students were feeling pressured.

But after hearing Zhou Hui's words, he understood. The academy had not forced the students into conflict. Rather, the students themselves were the ones who were too outstanding.

If one was outstanding, one would get involved in some conflict regardless of whether one was still a student or a researcher.

Geniuses required a lot of merit points, cultivation methods, and resources. That was the same case for the experts as well. And since they needed more, if they didn't compete against each other for the resources, was the sky supposed to rain down resources on them?

As for students like Zhou Hui who would probably only need around 100 merit points over a period of several years in the academy, nobody would think that they were asking for too much.

But would Su Yu be happy with just that much? One ought to know that he had used nearly 80 merit points for his recent cultivation.

...

Back in his room, Su Yu sat on introspection. He felt as though the world had opened up before him. A smile formed on his face. Now that he was looking at things from a different perspective, he had naturally reached a different conclusion from before.

He exhaled deeply and erased those thoughts from his mind. Picking up the student manual beside him, he started reading.

...

Academy introduction section.

The academy was mainly separated into eight major districts.

Education District, Commerce District, Residential District, Visitor District, Grotto District, Dao Preaching District, Heart Cultivating Pavilion, and Elderly District.

The Visitor District was where Su Yu was currently staying. This place was in charge of receiving new students and providing accommodations to the visiting parents.

The Dao Preaching District was a place where some experts would occasionally conduct a public lesson. If one was lucky, one could even observe a willpower text being written or listen to some secret knowledge for free there.

The Heart Cultivating Pavilion was the academy's seat of power.

Meanwhile, the Elderly District was a place provided for the elderly. Most of the old students of the academy were living there. They formed a large community that was independent from the rest of the academy.

As for the other districts, their purpose was obvious enough from their names.

The Great Xia Cultural Research Academy was massive. From the introduction, it was no smaller than Nanyuan. It also had a large population.

There were almost 20,000 students below 30. These were all considered a part of the younger generation. For cultivators, 10 years weren't long. Thus, anyone below 30 would be considered young and full of promise.

There were also nearly 10,000 students between 30 to 50. As for those above 50, there were nearly 20,000 of them. At 50 and above, one had basically run out of potential and could hardly achieve willpower materialization.

Liu Wenyan was simply an exception to the norm. Very few people could replicate what he did. All in all, the academy had around 50,000 students.

And many of the students above 30 were also living in the academy with their significant other, children, and other family members. Including the family members, the academy employees, instructors, and researchers, the academy had nearly 100,000 people.

That was a lot of people. In fact, many of the business owners in the Commerce District were the family members of the students, instructors, or the researchers. These people were inextricably linked with the academy.

"100,000 people..."

Su Yu was stunned by that number. A population of 100,000 in a single academy. One ought to know that even though Nanyuan claimed to have a population of one million, most of those people were actually living outside the city, such as all the surrounding towns and villages. There were only around 300,000 residents in the city itself.

Meanwhile, the Great Xia Cultural Research Academy was not a city yet it already had a third of Nanyuan's population. It was basically a small city in itself. After skimming through the academy introduction section, Su Yu moved on to the people introduction section.

...

People introduction section: Principal.

Principal, Wan Tiansheng.

Sixth principal of the academy.

Strength: Unknown

It was rumored that 50 years ago when the principal took office, he was already a peak Mountainsea cultivator. He was 48 that year.

The introduction on Wan Tiansheng wasn't long. But through the introduction, Su Yu learned that the principal was actually 98 this year. And he was already a peak Mountainsea cultivator 50 years ago. As for his current strength, nobody knew.

He had stayed in the academy for 50 years and rarely fought. Nobody knew his true strength, and even if there was someone out there with that knowledge, it wasn't something mere students would know.

For humanity, the information of those at the Mountainsea Realm would always be incomplete and unclear. The public could barely gain any information about these experts.

"Understandable. Without that strength, he wouldn't have been able to take the position."

Su Yu wasn't too surprised. Since Wan Tiansheng could ascend to the position 50 years ago and forcefully restore order in the academy, his strength was definitely not to be underestimated.

In any case, he was definitely one of those standing at the peak of humanity. As for those in the fabled Invincible Realm, Su Yu wouldn't even dare to think about those people.

...

People introduction section: Vice principal

There were three vice principals in the Great Xia Cultural Research Academy.

First vice principal: Zhou Mingren (Peak Mountainsea Realm)

Second vice principal: Xia Changqing (Peak Mountainsea Realm)

Third vice principal: Su Ziming (Peak Mountainsea Realm)

There wasn't much information about the three vice principals. Most of the information about their strength was guesswork. The only one of them with additional information provided was Xia Changqing. According to the manual, he was someone from the Xia Family, the ruling family of Great Xia.

The next section was about the senior researchers. Not all the researchers were listed. Only a few of the more popular ones were introduced. Su Yu saw a familiar name in the list.

Senior researcher: Hong Tan.

He knew that this was Bai Feng's teacher and Liu Wenyan's junior brother.

Hong Tan, senior researcher walking the path of Divine Characters. Cultivation of eighth-stage Mountainsea Realm and specializing in Divine Character fusions. Deputy head of the Divine Character Faculty.

As for the faculty head, the position was held by Vice Principal Zhou Mingren. The Character Faculty was basically the headquarters of those walking the path of Divine Characters.

But according to the introduction, Hong Tan was rarely involved in the faculty affairs. Apart from the time when he accepted Bai Feng as his student a few years ago, he had rarely made any public appearances.

Su Yu continued reading and noted another name.

Senior researcher: Wu Yuehua.

Wu Yuehua, a senior researcher walking the path of pillmaking and an eighth-stage Mountainsea cultivator.

The introduction was short and simple. There was also an addendum noting that she was the grandaunt of the genius teaching assistant, Wu Qi.

Wu Qi!

Su Yu knew that name. That was Wu Lan's elder sister, a genius of the academy. A lot of people compared her with Bai Feng and according to many people, she was the stronger one between the two.

"Wu Family!"

Su Yu exhaled deeply. It was no wonder Wu Lan had so much confidence in herself. She actually had an eighth-stage Mountainsea cultivator as her grandaunt. It would be weird if someone like her wasn't confident.

If Su Yu had a backer like that, he would be confident as well. After skimming through the senior researcher section, he reached the intermediate researcher section.

Zhao Li, intermediate researcher walking the path of weaponsmithing. Specializing in forging weapons and a seventh-stage Cloudbreach cultivator. A leading figure among the weaponsmithing faction. Eccentric nature.

"Eccentric?" Su Yu raised his brow.

Zhao Li felt pretty normal the last time they met. Su Yu also noted that Zhao Li was actually ranked quite high among the intermediate researchers. He was actually in the top three. That was surprising to learn. Su Yu had thought that this fellow was merely bragging, but it turned out that he was really quite capable.

Su Yu searched through the section but he couldn't find Hu Youhui's introduction. That could only mean that Researcher Hu wasn't a prominent one among the intermediate researchers. After all, he was still a seventh-stage Cloudbreach cultivator yet there wasn't even a mention of him in the manual.

As for the junior researchers, Su Yu did not pay them much attention. Before long, he reached the assistant researcher section.

Xia Yuwen, assistant researcher, ninth-stage Skysoar Realm. A member of the Xia Family, number one on the Top 100 Ranking prior to his graduation, and the number one teaching assistant of the academy.

Hu Wensheng, assistant researcher, ninth-stage Skysoar Realm. Number two on the Top 100 Ranking prior to his graduation, number two teaching assistant.

Wu Qi...eighth-stage Skysoar Realm...

...

Bai Feng...seventh-stage Skysoar Realm...

From the introduction, Bai Feng's ranking wasn't that high. He was ranked 11th among the teaching assistants. But a few of the assistants ranked above him were already quite old. Those were all ninth-stage Skysoar cultivators. If only those below 30 were compared, Bai Feng could rank in the top five. Apart from Xia Yuwen, Hu Wensheng, and Wu Qi, nobody else was his match.

"Looks like he's really quite strong..."

From the manual, Su Yu understood that Bai Feng was actually quite strong even if he was only a seventh-stage Skysoar cultivator. After all, he was still young. Very few people could reach the Skysoar Realm before 30.

He also saw the name of Bai Feng's rival, Liu Hong. That person was a seventh-stage Skysoar cultivator as well. Ranked 14th, he was only slightly behind Bai Feng.

Previously, Researcher Huang had told him that Liu Hong was still at the sixth-stage and he didn't need to worry too much since Liu Hong wouldn't be Bai Feng's match. But now, Liu Hong had reached the seventh-stage as well. Su Yu couldn't help but to be impressed at the speed in which these geniuses were growing.

Liu Hong was definitely a genius. If even he couldn't be considered one, then Bai Feng couldn't be considered one either.