

Prodigies 191

Chapter 191 Storm Grinder

Yao Tuohai was one of the most famous Heaven Ascension cultivators in the southwest province of the empire. Only Governor Liu Wujun could be compared to him in terms of power and status.

Lian Fei was the son of Lian Rufeng. He was born in Feiyun Village but he went to Donglin Academy in Donglin City to cultivate.

Lin Xun was extremely familiar with the two.

Lian Fei had often looked for opportunities to plot against Lin Xun when he was in Donglin City. Similarly, when Lin Xun took part in the district exam, Yao Tuohai also did the same. If the queen of darkness hadn't arrived in time, he and Xia Zhi would have been killed.

Now, after one year, when he heard the names Yao Tuohai and Lian Fei again, he felt a wave of anger and hatred surging in his heart.

The incidents that year, the oppression, despair, and helplessness that he suffered were unforgettable like they were deeply carved in his heart.

Lin Xun was only surprised that Lian Fei had become Yao Tuohai's son-in-law. However, he found it understandable after a thought. Yao Tuohai likely attacked him to stand up for Lian Fei!

"Hmph, he became a dazzling genius talent in Qingfeng County after opening up a second-grade aeth power reservoir? How ridiculous!" Lin Xun sneered inwardly.

This wasn't because Lin Xun thought highly of himself but that he had met many remarkable talents in Blood Kill Camp. The second-grade aeth power reservoir that Lian Fei formed wasn't particularly dazzling when compared to theirs.

Of course, in the vast empire, it was understandable that Lian Fei was crowned with the title of genius youngster after opening up a second-grade aeth power reservoir.

After all, a second-grade aeth power reservoir was already an incredible breakthrough achievement to countless cultivators in the world.

"When this guy comes to participate in the provincial examination, perhaps I should look for a chance to get revenge..." Lin Xun contemplated.

After a moment, a sudden loud cheer awakened him.

A huge space appeared in the rune transmission light screen and tens of thousands of people were gathered there, cheering wildly while waving their arms.

In the center of the huge space stood a figure on a platform illuminated by gorgeous columns of light. The illusionary-like figure was about to sing.

It was an incomparably beautiful maiden. Her light purple hair flowed down her shoulders, her crystal clear eyes sparkled, and her skin looked soft and delicate. Her face was exquisite but it gave off a unique cold aura.

Countless young men and women at the bottom of the platform raised their hands while shouting a name.

“Liu Qingyan!”

“Liu Qingyan!”

“Liu Qingyan!”

The cheers were rhythmic and uniform. The tens of thousands of people cheering and shouting together created a magnificent and buzzing scene.

Lin Xun was taken aback for a moment before the passionate atmosphere also affected him. He glanced around and saw many passersby gazing at the rune transmission light screen with admiration and many young men and women scream out loud.

But soon, the light screen changed to the dignified woman again.

“Since her debut last year, art cultivator Liu Qingyan has gained countless fans due to her heavenly voice, her unique pure and cold personality, and her delicate and beautiful face. In just one year, her song Drunken Flowers Part From Dreams has swept the entire empire and became one of the favorite songs of young cultivators in the world. She has also been known as a Soul Singer.”

“According to reliable information, in three months, Liu Qingyan will come to Haze City to celebrate Stone Cauldron Alms one hundredth anniversary and it is very likely that she will sing on stage then again.”

Cheers erupted from the crowd and made Lin Xun’s ears tremble. He couldn’t help but smack his lips in amazement. Liu Qingyan has such tremendous popularity.

Art cultivation was a type of cultivation just like sword cultivation, blade cultivation and medical cultivation.

Art cultivation entered the Dao through the four arts—zither, chess, calligraphy and painting, as well as poetry and music. It was considered a more elegant way of cultivation and was fairly rare in the world.

This was because the conditions to become an art cultivator were incredibly demanding. Not only did the person had to have a cultivation base but they also had to be skilled in one of the following: zither, chess, calligraphy, painting, poetry or music.

For example, those who entered the Dao with music would practice cultivation techniques related to music and their combat methods involved sound waves.

Of course, art cultivation wasn’t used for fighting. Art cultivators had an extremely prestigious status in the world and were often the guests of honor of the rich and noble families.

Liu Qingyan was an art cultivator skilled in music and an expert in singing. She also had some talent in writing lyrics and composing music. She had gained countless loyal fans in the empire very soon after her debut.

Lin Xun had never heard of her before, but he knew that she was a famous art cultivator in the empire given the reactions of the people around.

“Stone Cauldron Alms is impressive to be able to invite Liu Qingyan to sing! I must go and watch it live that day!”

“Yes, me too!”

“Hmph, don’t be so happy too early. I heard that Stone Cauldron Alms is only giving out three thousand seats and the influential figures in Haze City have already bought them all!”

Clamor of discussions rang in every corner. The young men and women were all eagerly looking forward to the day of Liu Qingyan’s arrival.

Lin Xun had no interest in it but Stone Cauldron Alms’ wealth shocked him a little. In his opinion, it had to cost an astonishing figure to invite such a famous art cultivator to perform.

Lin Xun didn’t stay any longer and left.

By the time he returned to his residence, it was already midnight. Xue Jin was asleep in a corner but he suddenly yelled out when he heard Lin Xun return, “Hurry, hurry, hurry, my stomach is crying for alcohol. Hurry up and bring the alcohol over!”

Lin Xun didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. He took out the bottle of Soul Burning Spirit from his storage ring and tossed it towards Xue Jin.

“Such good wine!” Xue Jin hurriedly took a few sips and exclaimed, “It still tastes the same. It’s so damn good! By the way, when do you plan to register?”

Lin Xun said casually, “I have checked, the provincial examination registration starts in one month.”

Xue Jin acknowledged Lin Xun’s response and quickly fell asleep with the bottle of alcohol still in his arms.

Lin Xun walked into his room, sat at the desk, and took out the rune ink and materials he had purchased. He drew a deep breath before he picked up the rune brush and began to create aeth tools.

Outside the window, the stars twinkled and the night wind blew gently. Except for Xue Jin’s snoring, it was particularly quiet.

Hunched in front of a desk, Lin Xun looked concentrated and focused as he controlled the rune brush with smooth, flowing motions.

If he wanted to continue to live in Haze City, he had to make money, and the only way he could do so was to produce aeth tools.

This was considered his speciality. After all, he was already a rune master able to form rune arrays.

An hour later, a mid human-grade Snowfury Blade was successfully created. Based on the market price in Haze City, ignoring the cost of production, a Snowfury Blade should be able to fetch three hundred silver coins or three gold coins.

However, Lin Xun wouldn't follow the market conditions.

His experience in Donglin City made him realize that the aeth tools he created were visibly much more powerful than those on the market despite looking identical.

This was the conclusion that Lin Xun came to after what Boss Gu Yanping from the Golden Jade Hall told him and the companions he made himself.

Lin Xun didn't know the reason for the difference in power, but he noticed that the Omega Secret Door in his mind-sea rippled in an imperceptible manner every time he succeeded in producing an aeth tool.

He realized that the reason he was able to successfully refine an aeth tool every time likely had something to do with the movements from the Omega Secret Realm.

Of course, this was just Lin Xun's speculation.

After Lin Xun made an aeth tool, he sat down cross-legged on the bed, closed his eyes and began to practice the Little Divine Meditation Art. After reaching the human dipper stage, he illuminated eighteen spirit stars in his mind-sea and his perception power could detect everything within a radius of hundreds of feet.

The average human dipper cultivator could at most perceive within a radius of sixty feet.

This was one of the unique benefits from cultivating the Little Divine Meditation Art. Of course, the strengthening of his spirit power also brought other benefits.

After practicing the Little Divine Meditation Art, Lin Xun continued to practice the Mystery Grotto Devour Wilderness Scripture.

This kind of hard work lifestyle was the same as when he was in Donglin City. The only difference was that Xia Zhi wasn't around him anymore and she was replaced by Xue Jin.

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Rumble—

The pure spirit dipper qi glowed a golden hue as it circulated back and forth along Lin Xun's meridians like a roaring river.

The aeth power reservoir rotated like a storm in his sea of qi and coordinated with the aeth power vortex in his four heart acupuncture points to produce a terrifying tempering force.

The spirit dipper power circulating through his body was constantly tempered as though it was being compressed by two millstones. It emitted an illusionary pale golden light.

This was a sign that the grade of the spirit dipper power had reached the pinnacle level. It was terrifyingly pure and a wisp of spirit dipper power unleashed from Lin Xun could suppress the majority of human dipper stage cultivators in the world!

This was all due to the unique aeth power reservoir in Lin Xun's body. It wasn't the first-grade Eye of Storm aeth power reservoir because it wouldn't have such astonishing tempering power.

Lin Xun called it the Storm Grinder.

Lin Xun swallowed one azure jade dipper pill after another and refined them until they were completely absorbed into his body. He continuously tried to temper and solidify his cultivation.

Lin Xun stopped his practice when he swallowed six azure jade dipper pills as he had reached the limit that he could bear.

Laying on the bed, Lin Xun began to quietly review his cultivation.

After advancing to the human dipper stage, he was able to release spirit dipper power to attack enemies from a distance and that brought about a change in his fighting style.

The Marching Army Fist he had mastered was no longer useful to him. Only the first move of the Heavenly Yuan Blade, Star-Gather, and the Six Word Blade Art could be put to good use

Of course, he had also learned combat skills in Blood Kill Camp. However, combat skills were different from combat arts. Cultivators had to be equipped with compatible combat arts if they wanted to display their true fighting strength in battle.

However, Lin Xun had to grasp those combat methods again. After all, he hadn't fought in battle ever since he broke through to the human dipper stage.

Lin Xun was full of anticipation. He was curious to know what sort of power he could display in battle now that he had reached the human dipper stage.

Chapter 192 Rune Master Association

Early in the morning.

Lin Xun had just finished breakfast and was about to bring the newly-completed Snowfury Blade out when Xue Jin stopped him.

"Boy, are you a rune master?"

Lin Xun was startled and then he nodded. "That's correct."

He had been creating aeth tools in his room last night and although he had made little movements and noise, it was still impossible to hide it from Xue Jin.

Xue Jin continued to question him, "Oh, so are you planning to sell aeth tools now?"

Lin Xun answered, "Isn't this very normal? If I don't have money, who will buy you alcohol?"

Xue Jin grinned and waved his hand. "Go, go, I'm just asking."

Finding it a little strange, Lin Xun said suspiciously, "Old Jin, do you have something to say about me selling aeth tools?"

Xue Jin explained, "Well, I just find it very strange why a high and mighty rune master has to lower himself to sell aeth tools to make money. If the guys from the Rune Master Association learn about this, they would no doubt come teach you a lesson."

Lin Xun was bewildered. "What do you mean?"

Xue Jin raised his head and took a sip of wine while looking at Lin Xun like he was looking at an idiot. "Kid, do you really not know? Do you know how respected rune masters are!? They are worshiped wherever they go, but you're like a lowly peddler. You simply are an embarrassment to other rune masters."

Lin Xun exclaimed, "They are that impressive?"

Xue Jin said disdainfully, "You are the only one who doesn't take a rune master seriously."

Lin Xun smiled wryly. He had never regarded himself as someone with a special identity and status.

However, he knew that rune masters had mighty status in the world. Major forces often fought over a true rune master.

In the entire empire, the rune master was the most unique and special profession. There was a simple reason for that: many matters concerning cultivation were inseparable from rune masters.

For example, rune masters created aeth tools and armaments for cultivators, made beast tags for beast tamer masters, set up rune arrays for horticulturists and crafted pill furnaces for alchemists.

The shadow of a rune master was behind almost every aspect of cultivation.

However, there was only a small number of rune masters in the world. They were known to be very rare as there might not be one rune master even among one thousand cultivators.

The small number of rune masters contributed to the unique and respectable status that rune masters enjoyed in the empire.

"As I thought, kid, you don't know anything. I'm really confused about how you became a rune master. Did your Master not tell you that a rune master should know his worth?" Xue Jin sighed.

"Old Jin, I really didn't know. Why don't you give me some pointers?" Lin Xun asked humbly.

Xue Jin snorted and stretched out one finger. "One jar of Soul Burning Spirit."

Lin Xun readily agreed, "Deal."

Only then did Xue Jin smile. "Kid, you're really interesting. You're sometimes smart and scary, but sometimes you're like an idiot."

Then, Xue Jin finally advised Lin Xun to head to a place—

The Rune Master Association!

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The Rune Master Association in the empire was regarded as an extremely large rune master alliance that spanned across the entire thirty-four provinces of the empire.

As the provincial capital of the southwest province, Haze City also had a Rune Master Association.

Lin Xun inquired about the directions and eventually found the place. It was a magnificent and grand building as striking as a crane among a flock of chickens.

The words 'Haze City Rune Master Association' in ancient writing was cast from an Image Rune Array on the top of the building.

Every word was flowing with colors like an illusion. Beautiful and dazzling, it resembled rainbow-colored clouds rising into the air.

Other cultivators would perhaps marvel at the works of the Rune Master Association.

But Lin Xun's first reaction was to exclaim, "Rich, so rich, too rich!"

The Image Rune Array consumed an astonishing amount of spirit crystals to constantly maintain it! However, such a rune array was being used as a signboard. It showed the wealth and power of the Rune Master Association.

However, it made Lin Xun even more full of anticipation.

He came here to make money so the wealthier the Rune Master Association, the more it proved that his decision was correct.

Without any hesitation, Lin Xun walked into the building.

"Young master, welcome to the Rune Master Association."

The moment he stepped in, a beautiful attendant came forward to greet him. Her manner was neither haughty nor humble but was courteous. She wore an impeccable smile as she asked, "Young master, can I ask you if you're here to buy treasures, request commission or sell products?"

"I want to look around first," Lin Xun said casually.

Although Lin Xun wore ordinary clothes, he had a handsome face. He was only fourteen years old, but he had an elegant figure, deep black eyes, and sharp facial features. He exuded a pure and ethereal air that made the beautiful attendant dare not to treat him with disrespect.

She nodded with a smile. "Young master, please feel free to look around. I will come right away when you need me."

She bowed and turned away.

Lin Xun really appreciated such service and manners.

The Rune Master Association was very large and grand with carved beams and painted columns. It was divided into different departments such as the treasure department, exchange department and commission department.

Although it was early in the morning, an endless stream of people went in and out of the Rune Master Association. The majority of which were cultivators. It seemed very busy and lively.

That was the area of the Rune Master Association that was open to the outside world. As an alliance of rune masters in the empire, the Rune Master Association had one true purpose—serve the rune masters!

Once a rune master passed the verification process from the Rune Master Association, they could enjoy many perks and benefits in the Rune Master Association.

However, every rune master also had to work for the Rune Master Association while they enjoyed the perks.

Of course, the work wasn't particularly demanding and could even be considered relaxing.

Each Rune Master Association had a commission zone where different rune-related commissions would be posted every day. Rune masters who helped complete those missions would be rewarded with a considerable amount of money and corresponding points.

The more points a rune master earned, the more privileges they enjoyed within the association.

Lin Xun wandered around and browsed the first floor. He found nothing special and it was no different from some businesses.

As for the second floor, it was an area exclusive for rune masters verified by the association as well as some influential people. Lin Xun wasn't qualified to enter yet.

Soon, Lin Xun threw away the distracting thoughts in his mind and headed directly to the verification zone on the first floor.

The verification zone was extremely quiet and only a middle-aged man in gray was sitting there with his eyes closed. Lin Xun couldn't tell if he was meditating or if he had really fallen asleep.

However, when Lin Xun arrived, the middle-aged man in gray snapped open his eyes and smiled warmly.

But when he saw that Lin Xun was just a teenager, he said in surprise, "Young master, this is the area where a rune master's identity is verified."

Lin Xun said, "I'm here to be verified."

The middle-aged man in gray exclaimed, "Young master, you're a rune master?"

Lin Xun smiled. "It might not count if I say so. Perhaps we will know after the verification."

The middle-aged man in gray looked doubtful. He's too young. He is at most fifteen years old. It would make sense if he is a rune apprentice but it's impossible that he's a rune master.

He couldn't help but ask, "Young master, how old are you?"

Lin Xun asked back, "Does age affect the rune master verification process?"

The middle-aged man in gray immediately reddened in embarrassment and quickly explained, "Don't misunderstand. Young master, I'm just curious."

While he was speaking, he waved to a female attendant. "Take this young master to the second floor to complete the rune master verification process."

Coincidentally, the attendant was the one who welcomed Lin Xun. She was stunned for a moment and then she hurriedly responded, "Young master, please come with me."

Lin Xun left with her.

"The youngster has an extraordinary bearing. He shouldn't be a scammer. But how old is he? How can he possess the ability of a rune master?"

As the middle-aged man in gray watched Lin Xun leave, he frowned in puzzlement.

He knew very well that it wasn't a simple matter to become a true rune master. In terms of cultivation, one had to at least be at the human dipper stage. This minimum cultivation level was already one of the easier steps.

In terms of the art of runes, one had to be able to produce a rune formation alone!

This was something not achievable to just anyone!

It was no exaggeration to say that, despite there being a countless number of rune apprentices in the empire, not even one in ten thousand could create a rune formation by themselves!

The cruelest reality was that most of the rune apprentices in the world would never become a rune master in their lives due to various reasons!

This clearly showed how difficult it was to become a rune master.

The middle-aged man in gray had met many rune masters in his life and almost all were adult cultivators who had lived for at least decades or one hundred years. Only very few were youngsters like Lin Xun.

At least, the middle-aged man in gray had never seen one in many years!

Correct!

Not even one!

This was the reason why he was so astonished to meet Lin Xun.

"This is bad. Could the kid really be a scammer?"

Suddenly, the gray-robed middle-aged man's expression changed, and anxiety filled his heart. But after a deeper thought, he changed his stance again. But if the kid is a scammer, what could he gain from this?

He thought it over and over again and weighed up the gains and losses, but he still couldn't calm himself.

Meanwhile, Lin Xun was heading up the second floor while being escorted by a beautiful attendant.

Along the way, the attendant couldn't help but take furtive glances at Lin Xun. Her eyes were filled with curiosity but also doubt. Apparently, she couldn't believe that a teenager would be a rune master.

Lin Xun sharply sensed her strange gaze and couldn't help but tease her, "Miss, you seem very interested in me?"

The beautiful attendant blushed, her entire face turning red.

Chapter 193 Display of Ability

Interrupted by Lin Xun, the beautiful attendant immediately flushed and dared not to overthink any more. She quickly took Lin Xun to the second floor of the association.

They walked along a long corridor and arrived at a quaint hall.

A scholarly man was sitting cross-legged behind a desk. He was dressed in a forest-green brocade robe and had a neatly trimmed beard.

The man had a tobacco pipe in his left hand and a rune brush in his right. As he blew out a puff of smoke, he leisurely carved runes onto a piece of indigo beast skin.

“Young master, this is Chu Feng, the president of our Rune Master Association.” The attendant introduced Lin Xun.

Lin Xun nodded. In his view, Chu Feng was no doubt an elegant and refined man who knew how to enjoy himself.

His clothes were made of exquisite extraordinary materials and covered with cryptic undulating runes. Each one of the accessories on him was of extraordinary quality. Even the tobacco pipe in his hand emitted a faint azure glow as it was made from the rib bone of an earth dragon beast.

However, Chu Feng’s beard left the deepest impression on Lin Xun. The hair on his upper lips was beautifully trimmed and curled upwards at both ends, which added an elegant charm to his scholarly face.

However, Lin Xun’s attention was soon drawn to the runes that Chu Feng was engraving. He identified the indigo beast skin on the table to be made from the wings of an Indigo Lightning Bird, which was a superb rune material ideal for making upper human grade inner armor.

The rune brush that Chu Feng used was extremely unique in shape. It was slender, translucent, and shaped like a pointy cone. As Chu Feng continuously maneuvered the brush with smooth, flowing motions, runes densely spread across the beast skin.

With one glance, Lin Xun could tell that Chu Feng was a rune master who had been practicing the art of runes for years from his skilful movements.

While Lin Xun was studying Chu Feng, the attendant had already informed Chu Feng of their reason for coming.

“Friend, take a seat. Allow me to complete the Wind Shadow Lightning Rune Array first, and then I will verify you as a rune master.”

Chu Feng didn’t lift his head once. He continued to engrave runes onto the beast skin, but his voice was gentle, friendly and pleasing like a spring breeze.

Lin Xun nodded and sat on the other side.

The maid stepped back and withdrew from the room.

The quaint hall fell silent and only the rustle of the brush strokes across the beast skin could be heard.

Lin Xun grew increasingly impatient as time passed. He couldn't help but look at Chu Feng and saw that his forehead was wrinkled and his eyes were fixed on the indigo beast skin. It was as though he had encountered a huge problem.

At that moment, he was as motionless as a statue. The tobacco pipe in his hand had been extinguished but he seemed to not notice.

As a rune master, Lin Xun could tell that Chu Feng had fallen into deep thought. Chu Feng could still be sitting at the table in three to five days if he couldn't solve his problem.

He had encountered such a situation before when he was a child, and so had Mister Lu.

Lin Xun couldn't stop himself from getting up and moving towards the table. His gaze immediately landed on the indigo beast skin.

He didn't want to just sit and wait around. It was a waste of time.

Almost from one glance, Lin Xun could tell that Chu Feng was creating an inner armor. But it was different from ordinary inner armor in that it was engraved with three different rune formations—Mountain Accumulation Rune Array, Golden Diamond Rune Array and Wind Shadow Lightning Rune Array.

The first two rune arrays were classified as defensive rune formations. One was of earth attribute and the other was of gold attribute, but both were initial-level rune formations.

Only the third rune array was more special in that it had two attributes—wind and lightning. The rune pattern was also very complex and belonged to an intermediate-level rune formation.

The problem that Chu Feng was faced with was related to the third rune array. There wasn't a problem with the refining but that there was an absence of medium between the three rune arrays, making it difficult for the three to integrate and connect.

In those conditions, even if the refining was successful, the inner armor's power would be weaker than normal.

Lin Xun studied it closer and then he suddenly said, "If you verify me as a rune master now, I can help you solve the problem."

Chu Feng seemed to not hear Lin Xun. Or perhaps he was fully concentrated in his thoughts and had forgotten everything around him.

Lin Xun sighed inwardly, leaned over, and snatched the rune brush from Chu Feng's hand.

Abruptly awakened, Chu Feng furiously snapped at Lin Xun. "Nonsense! What are you doing!"

"Help you solve your problem." Lin Xun casually answered him and sat himself down on the ground. He clasped the rune brush and was about to engrave on the indigo beast skin.

"Who are you? Who let you in? Quickly get out of here!"

Deeply worried, Chu Feng repeatedly yelled out. But even in fury, he still maintained his elegant demeanor and didn't immediately resort to violence.

“If you disturb me again, the inner armor will be ruined...” warned Lin Xun as he began to engrave.

“You—you—you—” Chu Feng was so furious that his chest heaved up and down. He hated the fact that he couldn’t send Lin Xun flying with a slap to his face.

It wasn’t that he didn’t dare to do so but the inner armor in Lin Xun's hands was extremely valuable and the rune materials that made it up were extremely rare. It took him many years to finally acquire them all.

If he disturbed Lin Xun and caused him to make a slight mistake, the incomplete inner armor could be completely destroyed.

Chu Feng didn’t want to see such a scene.

However, if he didn’t act, he would have to helplessly watch Lin Xun cause trouble.

Chu Feng was suddenly caught in a dilemma. His elegant face reddened with exasperation. It was the first time he had met such a daring young man ever since he became the president of the Haze City Rune Master Association.

“Let me ask you a question. Ground symbolizes earth, swamp symbolizes gold, wood symbolizes wind and thunder symbolizes lightning. If you want them to resonate with each other, what medium should be used?” asked Lin Xun suddenly as he leisurely carved.

“Water!”

Chu Feng was at first taken aback but he then replied subconsciously. Immediately after that, a wave of anger surged to his heart. This kid dares to lecture me!? How arrogant!

“Correct, earth benefits from water, swamp is born from water, wood and water complement one another, and thunder and water resonate with each other. Now that you know this, why don't you engrave a Four Water Division Rune Array as a medium?”

Chu Feng replied almost without hesitation, “That’s impossible! This inner armor is based on the skin of the Indigo Lightning Bird. It already contains two attributes: water and thunder. It simply cannot accommodate four rune arrays at the same time! “

He grew more enraged. What is wrong with me today? Why am I doing what a kid says?

However, soon, he was drawn to Lin Xun’s words.

“Who says it can’t? The Four Water Divisions Rune Array is extremely powerful, but why don’t you abandon the rune structure in the array and leave only the four division positions to provide a water cycle supply. As a medium, it will be compatible with the other three rune arrays.”

As Lin Xun explained, he completed the rune pattern on the beast skin.

It was then that Chu Feng froze as though struck by lightning. Only after a while did his eyes light up and he clapped his hands. “No wonder. I understand now!”

He had completely snapped out from his shock. His gaze shifted to Lin Xun and a strange expression came to his face. Just now...it was this young man guiding me?

How is that possible?

How old is he? How could he do this?

Lin Xun set down the rune brush, got up and pointed to the indigo beast skin emitting a soft glow on the desk. "Okay, the rune array on the inner armor is completed, but if you want to bring out its greatest power, it's best to soak it in True Heavy Water for a while."

Strictly speaking, it was no longer a piece of beast skin, but an inner armor filled with spiritual qi and it flashed glints of illusionary colors!

Chu Feng hurried forward, picked up the inner armor and examined it closely for a good moment. Shock and astonishment filled his heart.

An intermediate human-grade Wood-Thunder Armor was successfully refined like that?

Too unbelievable!

Chu Feng felt he was dreaming. Only after a long moment could he say to Lin Xun, "Friend, who are you?"

His voice contained a hint of admiration.

Lin Xun smiled. "I already stated my reason for coming. I'm here to be verified as a rune master."

Chu Feng looked blank. He thought for a long moment before he slapped his forehead and exclaimed, "I remember it now. It's just that..."

He stared at Lin Xun's young and handsome face, finding it hard to believe how such a teenager could be so amazing.

"Now that the inner armor has been completed, will you help get me verified?"

Lin Xun felt helpless as he saw the look of disbelief on Chu Feng's face. He already had enough of the feeling of being treated like a monster from Old Mo.

"Right, right, of course."

Chu Feng nodded. Then, he took several deep breaths in a row, suppressing all kinds of shocks and puzzlement in his heart, and he said with a smile, "However, haven't I verified you just now?"

Lin Xun said in puzzlement, "When?"

Chu Feng pointed to the inner armor on the desk.

Understanding dawned on Lin Xun's face and he smiled.

"These are four different badges that represent the different levels of a rune master."

Chu Feng casually brought out a jade box with a flip of his hand. Four different coloured badges were housed in the jade box. Each one was the size of a copper coin and had a simple and classical shape.

"They represent the four levels of rune master—initial, intermediate, advanced and expert. What level are you currently at, little friend?"

Chu Feng's eyes blazed with intense curiosity.

"Initial."

After contemplating, Lin Xun chose the qualification of initial rune master, which was represented by a bronze badge with jade-like qualities. The front was engraved with the symbol of the Rune Master Association and the back was blank.

"Initial?"

Chu Feng said in bewilderment, "Little friend, in my opinion, given your skills you showed in refining the inner armor just now, you are already worthy of the intermediate rune master badge."

Lin Xun had to explain patiently, "I just stole your light. I only engraved a simple rune array. You are the one who truly completed the inner armor."

A light dawned on Chu Feng's face and he said with a smile, "It's very rare to see a young rune master like you. If people learn about you, it will definitely cause a huge uproar. Your action wisely protects yourself. I understand."

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Wisely protect myself? Lin Xun was taken aback at first but then he nodded happily. "Yes, that's correct."

Chu Feng remembered his embarrassing manners out of shock and he couldn't help but sigh regretfully. "You made the right decision. If other rune masters knew that you have such mastery in the art of runes at such a young age, they would also lose their composure like I did."

He cupped his hands and said solemnly, "Little friend, please forgive my rudeness just now."

Lin Xun smiled. "I'm called Lin Xun. You can call me Lin Xun."

Chu Feng was extremely gentlemanly and courteous, which created a favorable impression to Lin Xun.

He knew very well that if Chu Feng had the temper of Old Mo, he would have driven him away already.

Chu Feng beckoned Lin Xun to take a seat as he took out a document to record Lin Xun's rune master verification.

The record was a sort of proof that indicated that Lin Xun could enjoy the perks of any Rune Master Associations in the thirty four provinces of the empire as long as he carried the initial rune master bronze badge.

"Name?"

"Lin Xun?"

"Native place?"

"Feiyun Village in Donglin City."

"Master?"

“None.”

Age?”

“Fourteen.”

“What?!”

Chu Feng’s hand trembled and he almost wrote a mistake when he heard Lin Xun’s age.

“Fourteen?”

Chu Feng lost his composure again. His eyes widened with shock as he stared at Lin Xun. A fourteen year old rune master. There are only a few in the entire empire!

According to rumors, very few people, including those from the three great rune families, had possessed the ability of rune master.

The most famous rune master in the empire today was Feng Qingyou, the genius maiden of Qinglu Academy. She had achieved the skills of rune grandmaster at the mere age of nineteen.

Rune master was a profession divided into different tiers: rune apprentice, rune master, rune grandmaster and rune founder.

Each tier had different levels. For example the rune master was further divided into initial, intermediate, advanced and expert .

It was easy to imagine how impressive it was for Feng Qingyou to receive the title of rune grandmaster at the age of nineteen.

However, Lin Xun, who became a rune master at the age of fourteen, wasn’t much inferior to Feng Qingyou.

“You...do you know Feng Qingyou?” Chu Feng asked.

Lin Xun nodded. “I heard that she’s a genius from the Feng clan, one of the three great rune families. Her father is the head of the Feng Clan and her master is the principal of Qinglu Academy.”

Old Mo had told Lin Xun about her and her name left a deep impression on Lin Xun.

Chu Feng said emotionally, “In my opinion, you’re comparable to Feng Qingyou. You might even be better.”

Lin Xun hurriedly said, “Elder, you’re over praising me.”

Chu Feng drew a deep breath and asked, “Do you know how much of a stir it would cause if I reported your matter to the higher-ups of the Rune Master Association?”

Lin Xun scrunched his brows.

But before Lin Xun answered, Chu Feng said with a smile, “Of course, that’s just my opinion. A genius like you likely doesn’t want too much attention.”

Lin Xun inhaled deeply and assumed a serious expression. “Elder, can you promise me one thing?”

Chu Feng seemed to know what Lin Xun was about to say. "Do you know that you can rise to the top overnight and enjoy unimaginable status and privileges if you attract the attention of the true influential figures of the Rune Master Association?"

Lin Xun shook his head. "I'm not interested in those things."

Chu Feng raised his brows in surprise. In his view, very few youngsters would be able to resist temptations such as fame, prestige, wealth and status like Lin Xun did...Which youngster wouldn't want to have whatever they want?

However, Lin Xun refused without any hesitation. His expression was calm and relaxed. He clearly didn't just decline but instead it was his heartfelt desire.

Chu Feng said solemnly, "You really decide to do this?"

Lin Xun nodded. "I hope Elder will agree."

Chu Feng sighed emotionally, his voice filled with undisguised admiration. "Lin Xun, you are the most extraordinary young rune master I have ever seen. I believe you will have a very promising future."

Lin Xun smiled. "Elder, does that mean you agree?"

Chu Feng laughed. "A gentleman helps others achieve what they want. Since you have asked me, how can I refuse? Not only do I promise to help you keep it a secret, but I also promise that no one else will know anything about you, at least in the Haze City Rune Master Association!"

Lin Xun stood up and bowed respectfully. "Elder, thank you."

"This is just empty talk. How about I sign a rune agreement with you?" Chu Feng asked as he took out a scroll glowing a silver hue.

This scroll was covered with gorgeous and exquisite runes and emitted an obscure aura.

Lin Xun's face lit up. "Is that the Book of Gods and Demons?"

"That's correct."

Lin Xun couldn't stay calm anymore.

He had heard from Mister Lu that, in ancient times, the continuous war between the gods and demons brought chaos upon the world and people were plunged into suffering.

In the end, the gods and demons reached an agreement and signed a contract to promise that they would not violate each other. The side who broke the promise will be punished by heaven.

The contract seemed as fickle as a promise, but it was said to be derived from the powers of heaven. It was unfathomable and mysterious, and it indeed put an end to the ongoing wars between the gods and demons with its binding force.

After that, rune masters invented the Book of Gods and Demons based on the contract. Bound by the power of runes, anyone who dared to break their promise after signing the Book of Gods and Demons would suffer a calamity.

Of course, this was just a rumor, and even Mister Lu didn't know whether it was true or not. However, the Book of Gods and Demons was undoubtedly real.

However, the Book of Gods and Demons was extremely rare and only a few were circulating around the world. Due to the lack of certain rune materials in the world, no rune master had been able to create it in the world.

Thus, the Book of Gods and Demons was very rare and there would be one less in the world once used.

Lin Xun was a little surprised to see Chu Feng actually take out the precious Book of Gods and Demons to keep his promise.

"Don't think too much about it. I'm very optimistic about your future achievements, so I want to build a good relationship with you." As though Chu Feng read Lin Xun's mind, he calmly expressed his intention and seemed open and honest.

Lin Xun shrugged. "To tell you the truth, if you hadn't been honest with me, I really wouldn't dare to sign the contract."

Chu Feng laughed loudly.

Lin Xun smiled.

Straightforward people spoke in a straightforward manner and made everything straightforward.

The two signed the Book of Gods and Demons with their blood.

Chi!

At that moment, the Book of Gods and Demons suddenly burst into flames and turned into nothingness.

Lin Xun suddenly felt that there seemed to be an extra mark in his soul—that was the power of the Book of Gods and Demons.

Lin Xun had a feeling that he could erase the mark when his spirit power reached a certain level!

Of course, that was just a feeling.

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After signing the Book of Gods and Demons, the relationship between Lin Xun and Chu Feng had invisibly improved and they seemed closer than before.

Chu Feng couldn't help chuckling when he learned about Lin Xun's purpose of coming to the Rune Master Association, which was to make money. But he then patiently directed him. ***novelnext.com***

It was actually very easy to make money in the Rune Master Association. Many commissions would be released in the commission zone on the first floor and a rune master would be rewarded with points and rewards after completion of the commissions.

Rune masters could also sell their aeth tools on consignment in the treasure zone. There were two ways to sell them on consignment: one was to clearly mark the price, and the other was auction.

There were also other various ways to make money. As long as one passed the verification process of the Rune Master Association, one could enjoy such perks.

Lin Xun took out the Snowfury Blade, an intermediate human-grade aeth tool. Chu Feng evaluated it and immediately suggested Lin Xun to put it in the treasure zone for auction.

Of course, Lin Xun agreed without any hesitation. After that, he bid goodbye and left.

.....

As soon as Lin Xun left, Chu Feng hurriedly summoned the gray-clothed middle-aged man and beautiful attendant who welcomed Lin Xun.

“You both have met the young man who came to be verified as a rune master today right?” Chu Feng gently asked.

The middle-aged man in gray and the beautiful attendant nodded in unison, wondering if something bad had happened.

“From today on, do not disclose anything about him to anyone else.”

Chu Feng’s gentle expression turned imposing and even carried a hint of coldness. “If I hear rumors about him spread, regardless of whether you did it or not, I can tell you that you will bear the consequences!”

The gray-clothed middle-aged man and the beautiful attendant trembled, and their expressions dramatically changed. They immediately swore on their lives.

Chu Feng restored his gentle expression. He knew that promises were not reliable, but as the president of the Rune Master Association, he believed that the authority and power he possessed were enough to deter the two from ignoring his orders.

Chu Feng pondered for a moment and said to the beautiful attendant. “Your name is Yun Qiao, right? When the young man comes here again, you will be in charge of serving him. From now on, your salary will be tripled. That’s your reward.”

Astonished and afraid, the beautiful attendant nodded repeatedly. She looked a little dumbstruck.

“Jia Zhen, you are an elder in the association. From today onwards, you will be in charge of the treasure department. Remember, if you come across the young man’s consignments in the future, don’t mention his identity to anyone!”

The middle-aged man in gray, who was called Jia Zhen, lit up with joy. “President, don’t worry, I will follow your orders well!”

The manager of the treasure department was a well-paid job with a salary several times higher than his previous position as the person in charge of the verification zone!

“Good, you can leave now.” Chu Feng motioned with his hand.

Before leaving, Jia Zhen couldn’t help but ask, “President, dare I ask...how should we address the young master?”

After a long ponder, Chu Feng lightly spat out a word, "Xun."

Chapter 195 Master Xun

As usual, Zhou Chen walked into the Rune Master Association.

Zhou Chen, a student of Haze Academy, had just broken through the human dipper stage and had quite a bit of fame within the academy.

Many of his teachers and classmates believed that he was strong enough to participate in the provincial examination that would commence in September.

Zhou Chen also wanted to give it a try, but he was worried about the fact that he lacked an aeth tool after breaking through to the Human Dipper Stage.

Human-grade aeth tools were divided into four tiers: lower, mid, upper and top.

Top human-grade aeth tools were incredibly rare and extremely valuable. They were considered precious treasures and so Zhou Chen didn't dare to hope for one.

However, the power of lower human-grade aeth tools was limited and couldn't bring out the full power of the human dipper stage.

Therefore, Zhou Chen's eyes were set on two aeth tool tiers—mid-tier and upper-tier.

Generally speaking, the majority of human dipper cultivators would choose to use mid-human grade aeth tools. Firstly, they were relatively cheap and secondly, they could bring out a human dipper cultivator's true power.

However, a well-known young cultivator like Zhou Chen, whose talent was considered top class, couldn't help but look down on mid human-grade aeth tools.

However, if he chose an upper human-grade aeth tool, although the power was great, the price was too high. Moreover, he couldn't guarantee that an aeth tool of that tier would be suitable for him.

The reason was very simple. The most important aspect in choosing an aeth tool wasn't its grade and tier but whether it suited a cultivator as that determined whether or not a cultivator could fully unleash their power.

A higher tier aeth tool might be powerful but it consumed a huge amount of aeth power and could be difficult to control. The disadvantages might outweigh the benefits.

The more that Zhou Chen analyzed the different tiers of aeth tools, the more troubled he looked. He couldn't decide whether he should choose a mid human-grade aeth tool or an upper human-grade aeth tool.

Therefore, in recent days, he would often visit the Rune Master Association to carefully examine the various aeth tools.

Unfortunately, he still hadn't found one he was satisfied with.

Although there was still six months until the provincial examination, he couldn't help but feel worried. Like him, many cultivators were doing everything they could to increase their strength before the provincial examination.

This was because the provincial examination was completely different from the district and prefectural examinations. It not only tested a cultivator's aptitude and comprehension but also their combat strength!

Aptitude and comprehension were nothing compared to how a cultivator would cope on the battlefield.

Regardless of how great a cultivator's aptitude and comprehension were, they wouldn't be able to pass the provincial examination with poor combat strength.

And what would a battle test?

Essentially it was one's cultivation. Additionally, a cultivator's combat techniques and skills as well as experience, weapons and armaments were also important factors that could affect a battle.

Zhou Chen had an abundance of combat techniques and experience but he lacked a good weapon!

A powerful weapon could play a critical role in reversing a battle and turn a defeat into victory!

Therefore, Zhou Chen definitely would never overlook the importance of a good weapon.

After arriving at the Rune Master Association, Zhou Chen directly headed towards the commission zone without waiting for an attendant to welcome him. A few days ago, he had posted a weapon commission request, hoping that a rune master would help him create a tailor-made aeth tool.

"Young Master Zhou, you're here." A female attendant in charge of reception in the commission zone greeted Zhou Chen.

Zhou Chen had come here almost every day so she was already very familiar with Zhou Chen.

"How's it going?" Zhou Chen's face was full of expectation.

The attendant shook her head. "Sorry Young Master Zhou, you had to come all the way here for nothing again. There are only nine rune masters in the association and for some reason, the number of weapon commission requests has increased several times so the rune masters are overwhelmed with work and can't take on anymore."

Although Zhou Chen already expected that to be the case, he still couldn't help but feel disappointed.

He also knew the reason why the number of weapon commissions requested had increased tremendously—The provincial examination would commence in half a year and many participants wanted to prepare in advance.

After all, aeth tool refining wasn't a simple task. It was time consuming and there was a high risk of failure. Even if successful, it would take a cultivator a while to adapt and grasp how to use the newly-refined aeth tool.

Based on those facts, it was understandable that cultivators started preparations half a year in advance.

“Then how long do you think before my commission will be accepted?” asked Zhou Chen.

“It’s hard to say.” The attendant didn’t dare to promise anything since the commissions in the commissions department had to involve rune masters, and rune masters had a superior status and identity in the world. An attendant like her couldn’t control whether or not the rune masters would accept a commission.

“Young master, why don’t you take a look at the treasure zone? Maybe you can find an aeth tool you’re happy with there,” suggested the female attendant.

“No need.”

Zhou Chen shook his head. He had already examined the various aeth tools in the treasure zone and found none suitable for him.

However, just as Zhou Chen was about to leave, he heard a commotion.

“You guys don’t need to fight over it. The Snowfury Blade is definitely going to be mine!”

“Hmph, you can’t say that. Since this treasure is a consignment sale, it should belong to whoever pays the highest.”

“Come on, keep bidding then! You think I would be afraid of you guys?”

Zhou Chen was startled. The commotion rang from the treasure zone and seemed to be caused by a treasure.

Curious, Zhou Chen couldn’t help but hurry over there.

A group of cultivators was gathered around a counter and not a stream of water could pass through them.

There were men and women, old and young, but all were staring at a blade behind the counter.

Zhou Chen moved forward and managed to squeeze through the crowd after much difficulty. Only then did he clearly see a Snowfury Blade, a mid human grade aeth tool on the market. Apart from that, there was nothing else special about it.

However, Zhou Chen’s heart fluttered when he read the blade’s description. Twenty percent more powerful than ordinary Snowfury Blades?

How is that possible?!

Zhou Chen was in disbelief but when he saw the name at the bottom of the description, he immediately believed it because the person who verified the aeth tool was Chu Feng, the President of the Rune Master Association!

Chu Feng was a top rune master known all over Haze City and also the President of the Haze City Rune Master Association. How would the aeth tool he verified be fake?

Zhou Chen finally understood why so many cultivators were fighting over the unique Snowfury Blade.

It was an unimaginable feat to create a mid human grade aeth tool with twenty percent more power than usual.

“That’s the weapon I need!” Zhou Chen’s eyes lit up.

“I offer 700 silver coins!”

“Hmph, I offer 800 silver coins!”

“What a joke! I don’t believe that I can’t win the blade. I offer 900 silver coins!”

As the bidding continued, Zhou Chen smacked his lips and seemed hesitant.

Generally speaking, the majority of mid human-grade aeth tools on the market cost between 200 to 400 silver coins and some top quality ones could be sold for around 500 silver coins.

It was extremely rare to see bids go up to 900 silver coins.

In the end, Zhou Chen gritted his teeth and made a bid, “1,000 silver coins!”

Many cultivators broke into an uproar.

The bidding had reached a climax and everyone thought that the bidding would end at just under 1,000 thousand silver coins, but who would have thought that it suddenly soared to 1,000 silver coins!

“It’s Zhou Chen from Haze Academy who recently made a name for himself.”

“It turns out to be him. I heard that he has been looking for an aeth tool recently, but I didn’t expect him to take a fancy to that blade.”

Many cultivators recognized Zhou Chen and were all surprised.

Zhou Chen’s offer shook the audience. Many bidders’ expressions dramatically changed.

One thousand silver coins was enough to purchase an upper human grade aeth tool!

In the end, the Snowfury Blade fell into Zhou Chen’s hands, and he had to pay 1,000 thousand silver coins for it. But in Zhou Chen’s opinion, it was absolutely worth it!

He particularly knew that he had made the right decision when he held the blade in his hand and examined it. He found it even more mysterious and was sure it was not an ordinary Snowfury Blade.

“With this blade, I can no doubt smoothly pass the provincial examination!”

Beaming, Zhou Chen strode out of the Rune Master Association.

Not long after Zhou Chen left, the cultivators unsuccessful in the bidding looked extremely disappointed and all started to ask questions.

“Can I ask which rune master made that blade?”

“Yes, I saw a Xun character engraved on the blade. Could there be a new powerful rune master?”

“Is there another Snowfury Blade?”

Faced with the many inquiries, Jia Zhen, who had just started to be in charge of the Treasure Department, had to personally come forward and explained, "To tell you the truth, the blade is indeed made by a new rune master in the association..."

Before he could finish speaking, he was interrupted. "Stop talking nonsense and tell me the name of the Rune Master. I'm going to make a commission request and offer the same price for a Snowfury Blade!"

Jia Zhen looked a little troubled as he explained, "Sorry, Great Master Xun just started today. I'm not sure if he will take commissions."

Great Master Xun!

Many cultivators buzzed with excitement upon hearing the name. Great Master? Could it be a rune grandmaster?

Many cultivators couldn't hold back any longer. They spun around and raced to the commission zone. Regardless of who Great Master Xun was, they had to make a commission request first!

This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. How would the rune master who made the unique Snowfury Blade be an ordinary person?

Jia Zhen stared dumbfounded at the chaos, while Lin Xun's figure emerged in his mind.

He sighed inwardly. No wonder President Chu Feng kept Great Master Xun's identity a secret. If these cultivators learn that Great Master Xun is just a teenager, I wonder what they would think.

On this day, the popularity of the commission zone of the Rune Master Association soared. In just one hour, there were another one hundred commission requests and each one was for Great Master Xun.

Meanwhile, the news that Great Master Xun of the Rune Master Association created a unique Snowfury Blade spread like wildfire. It rapidly spread throughout Haze City and stirred up great waves.

Even Zhou Chen, who bought the blade, received a lot of attention from the incident.

Chapter 196 Unexpected

Lin Xun was completely unaware of everything that happened in the Rune Master Association. But he was fairly satisfied and felt the trip to the association was worthwhile.

After being verified as an initial rune master, it would be much easier for him to earn money. He would no longer have to do everything himself.

When he returned home, Xue Jin, who was deep asleep, suddenly sprang up and cried out, "Where's the wine? Where's the wine?"

"Of course I didn't forget."

With a smile, Lin Xun took out a new bottle of alcohol from his storage ring and tossed it towards Xue Jin.

"It seems that you had a good harvest from your trip."

Xue Jin cast a glance at Lin Xun.

“It wasn’t bad. At least I won’t have to run around anymore. Once I create some aeth tools, I can just give it to the Rune Master Association to sell them on consignment.”

Lin Xun casually told Xue Jin about his experience in the Rune Master Association.

Who would have thought that Xue Jin would snort coldly. “When someone acts particularly nice for no reason, they are up to something. Kid, I have to remind you that Chu Feng must be scheming something since he is even willing to sign the Book of Gods and Demons.”

Lin Xun nodded. “I also guessed that. The greater the gain, the greater the price. I know it in my heart.”

Seeing that Lin Xun knew what he was doing, Xue Jin sighed, “You should know that the most difficult thing in the world to repay is favors!”

As though recalling something from the past, he shook his head a little disinterestedly and fell asleep on the ground hugging the wine jar.

Lin Xun stared at Xue Jin for a moment and then smiled slightly. He turned around and headed into his room.

A grasp of mundane affairs is genuine knowledge; an understanding of worldly wisdom is true learning. Lin Xun had already learned about favors since a young age. When you care about something, it is as important as a mountain, and when you don't care, it is as inferior as a piece of feather.

If Chu Feng made a ridiculous demand in the future, Lin Xun, of course, wouldn’t foolishly agree.

Of course, Lin Xun wouldn’t refuse to help if it was something he could do within his ability. But this was in the future and Lin Xun didn’t need to worry about it for now.

.....

Lin Xun entered his room and used up all the rune inks and materials in one go. He spent a few hours refining aeth tools and in the end, produced one Snowfury Blade, one Bloodcopper Spear and a pair of Swiftwind Boots.

The three aeth tools were all high-quality mid human grade products completely different from those on the market in terms of power.

Hu—

Lin Xun exhaled a breath of turbid air. Given his present spirit power and cultivation, he could at most produce three aeth tools a day.

He had no strength to continue.

However, he wasn’t aware that it was already a miracle that a human dipper rune master like him could produce three aeth tools without fail in just a few hours!

It was almost impossible for other rune masters to achieve this!

For example, the production of a Snowfury Blade usually took three to five days and there was no way to guarantee it being successful!

This comparison clearly showed how terribly abnormal Lin Xun's mastery in the art of runes was.

This was due to the fact that he had been learning runes from Mister Lu since a young age, but also his solid cultivation foundation and tremendous spirit power providing a strong support for him while he engraved runes.

Most importantly, the mysterious rippling movement from the Omega Secret Realm ensured that Lin Xun succeeded every time.

However, the most unbelievable thing was that every aeth tool that Lin Xun produced was significantly more powerful than ordinary ones!

The combination of all those factors contributed to Lin Xun's incredible skills in the art of runes.

After Lin Xun stored away the completed aeth tools, He began to practice the Little Divine Meditation Art and Mystery Grotto Devour Wilderness Scripture.

He had only just broken through to the human dipper stage when he left Blood Kill Camp. Now, he had to further temper and solidify his cultivation as well as make preparations for the provincial examinations in half a year.

Lin Xun knew very well that the cultivators participating in the provincial examinations would all be fierce characters who excelled over tens of thousands of people.

It was not an exaggeration to say that those qualified to participate in the provincial examination had already proved they were extraordinary.

Under such circumstances, Lin Xun didn't dare to be careless even if he had confidence in himself.

Late at night, Lin Xun lay quietly on his bed after practice. He wasn't sleeping but was mulling about what he should do next.

"I should make a set of weapons and armaments for myself before the provincial examination. Only then can I increase my strength to its max."

"Additionally, I should find out more about the provincial examination and analyze other participants' strengths. It's best to know your opponent and yourself."

"However, my priority is to temper my cultivation base. I have just reached the human dipper stage so I should get a feel of my new powers in order to understand my strengths and weaknesses..."

Lin Xun drifted off into a deep sleep after he had a clear direction and goal to work towards.

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Early next morning, Lin Xun left the house.

At the first glimmer of dawn, the spacious streets that were connected like cobwebs were already bustling with streams of carriages and people weaving in and out the streets.

Hu—

A unique whistle sounded from mid-air.

Lin Xun lifted his head and saw a rune shuttle enveloped entirely in gorgeous rune light. It was like a winding dragon as it whizzed past him.

The rune shuttle was a new type of shuttle developed in the empire in recent years. It traveled between places in the city to meet people's travel needs.

The shuttle body was covered with runes and the shuttle was powered by an aeth engine and spirit crystals. It not only glided across mid-air with impressive speed but was also extremely steady and safe.

A rune shuttle could carry thousands of people at once and provide transport for cultivators and ordinary people at the bottom of the society.

Of course, money was required to ride the rune shuttle.

This was the magic of rune masters. The aeth tools they invented and developed using their knowledge in runes not only met the needs of cultivators, but had a wide-ranging impact on the society.

For example, the two inventions—rune transmission light screen and rune shuttle might seem to be of little use to cultivators, but they were no doubt an advancement to the secular world of the empire. They could be called pioneering works in the history of mankind!

As Lin Xun watched the rune shuttle disappear into the distance, he couldn't help but marvel inwardly. The importance of rune masters in the empire was immeasurable, and this was perhaps one of the reasons that rune masters had a high and mighty status and identity in the empire.

Before long, Lin Xun came to the Rune Master Association.

As soon as he entered the door, Yun Qiao, the beautiful attendant, immediately recognized him and greeted him enthusiastically.

After a little questioning, Lin Xun learned that it was Chu Feng's arrangement. "Has the Snowfury Blade that I consigned yesterday been sold yet?" he asked in an unperturbed manner.

Yun Qiao swiftly glanced around before she whispered, "Young Master Xun, this is not a good place to talk. Please come to the second floor with me."

Lin Xun looked bewildered. Is there a need to be so mysterious?

However soon, he vaguely understood the reason when he passed through the treasure zone. He saw an astonishing number of cultivators gathered and they were all discussing loudly. It seemed extremely busy.

The topics discussed were all related to Snowfury Blade!

"Brother, can I ask whether the Snowfury Blade that Great Master Xun made yesterday was sold here?"

"Brother, don't tell me you're also here for Great Master Xun?"

"Haha, look at the cultivators in the treasure zone. Eighty percent of them rushed here upon hearing that a Great Master Xun recently joined the Rune Master Association. It is said that Great Master Xun has superb rune skills so everyone dropped by and this place became extremely busy."

“Damn, there are so many people. The competition will be fierce.”

“Ah yes, I wonder who this Great Master Xun is. I heard that Zhou Chen from Haze Academy got a huge bargain. He only spent one thousand silver coins to acquire a stunning and unique Snowfury Blade. I’m so jealous.”

“Damn it, it’s just one thousand silver coins! If I was here yesterday, I wouldn’t have let Zhou Chen get it for such a bargain price.”

The discussions all revolved around Great Master Xun and the Snowfury Blade, and the place was buzzing like never.

When Lin Xun saw the crowd and overheard their discussions, how would he not know that the Snowfury Blade that he consigned yesterday had been sold and it was sold for an extremely high price of one thousand silver coins?!

Additionally, the blade helped him earn the title Great Master Xun and caught the attention of countless cultivators in Haze City.

Lin Xun didn’t expect such a situation.

“Brother, are you also here to wait for Great Master Xun to consign aeth tools? I advise you to not wait. There’s too many people here. It’s best if you leave quickly.”

A man urged with a frown when he saw Lin Xun appear in the treasure zone. He thought that Lin Xun was another competitor.

“Oh, thanks for your reminder.” Lin Xun didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. He shook his head and continued ahead.

“We got rid of another competitor!”

The man couldn’t help but exclaim proudly. But how would he feel if he knew that he had driven away the Great Master Xun?

Lin Xun was dumbstruck again when he passed the commission zone. The number of cultivators gathered there was equally tremendous and it seemed even busier than the treasure zone.

“Hurry up and post my commission request for an aeth tool created by Master Xun. Money isn’t a problem as long as I am satisfied with the product!”

“Damn it. What bad luck! Why is there another guy requesting Master Xun? How many are there?”

“Look, the requests in the commissions zone are all for Great Master Xun. If I had known this would happen, I would have started to queue here yesterday!”

Lin Xun’s expression altered strangely, but it wasn’t until he came to the second floor of the Rune Master Association and was guided into a quiet and elegant room that he couldn’t hold back from asking, “Yun Qiao, why is it like that?”

Before Yun Qiao spoke, a hearty laugh rang from outside the door. “Yun Qiao can’t answer your question.”

Chu Feng strode in gracefully; the hair on his lips was trimmed beautifully on both ends. He was dressed in a meticulously crafted brocade robe, looking scholarly and refined.

Chapter 197 Xumi Ring

Yun Qiao tactfully withdrew from the room when Chu Feng arrived.

Chu Feng did not beat around the bush and quickly explained everything to Lin Xun. It turned out that there were actually many reasons why the situation had become so explosive today.

Firstly, the Rune Master Association had tremendous influence and anything that happened there would soon reach the ears of many people.

Secondly, the Snowfury Blade that Lin Xun had crafted was far too unique and impossible to purchase on the market. It was easy to imagine how big of a commotion the appearance of such a rare and unheard of aeth weapon would cause.

Next, the provincial exam was starting in half a year. Due to this, there was a huge influx of cultivators coming to the Rune Master Association to buy aeth weapons.

After all, the Haze City Rune Master Association was the only Rune Master Association in the entire southwest province. Numerous cultivators, who had qualified for the provincial exam, hoped to purchase a good weapon and equipment from the Rune Master Association in preparation for the provincial exam.

Under these circumstances, news of a newly arrived Great Master Xun, who could craft unique and powerful aeth weapons, naturally drew a huge amount of attention.

After learning everything, Lin Xun secretly breathed a sigh of relief. He had been worried that his identity had been leaked but it seemed that he was just overthinking things.

“Here are the profits from selling the Snowfury Blade yesterday. After deducting the association fee of ten percent, the remaining nine hundred silver coins are yours.”

Chu Feng retrieved a storage ring and handed it to Lin Xun. “This is a storage ring made by the Divine Workshop and is known as the little Xumi Ring. Take it as a gift.”

Lin Xun was shocked. The little Xumi Ring was extremely famous. Legend said that the ring was personally crafted by a rune grandmaster from the Divine Workshop a hundred years ago. He had collected dozens of extremely rare void jade and took a whole three years to craft a hundred little Xumi Rings.

Not only did the ring possess a storage function, but wearing it would also keep the mind clear, nourish the spirit, and harmonize a person’s aura. It was amazing, to say the least.

When the hundred little Xumi Rings were released, they were immediately swept up by the empire’s upper echelons. In the end, none of them managed to reach the markets.

Moreover, some of the materials used to create these rings were no longer available. As a result, no similar rings had been crafted until now.

In other words, these hundred little Xumi Rings were peerless treasures!

For the influential figures of the empire, the ring had become more than an accessory and was a symbol of status and power.

Under such circumstances, it was easy to imagine how surprised Lin Xun was by this gift.

Lin Xun repeatedly tried to turn Chu Feng down but he stubbornly insisted, "If you turn it down, I will destroy it right here and now!"

In the end, Lin Xun surrendered and accepted the gift. He knew that he now owed an even bigger debt to Chu Feng.

"Brother, don't think about this too much. I have no ulterior motives for doing this. Take it as a gift to commemorate our meeting. My only goal is to prove that I do not treat you as an outsider." Chu Feng smiled warmly. His words were filled with sincerity.

"Thank you, elder." Lin Xun cupped his hands together.

Chu Feng pretended to be angry, "What elder! You're being way too unfamiliar. Age is irrelevant in the friendship between gentlemen and we should only seek to be understanding of each other. Just call me Elder Brother in the future."

Lin Xun chuckled and said, "Then I shall be bold and call you Elder Brother."

He could not help but be impressed by Chu Qing's excellent social skills. At the very least, Lin Xun did not find himself feeling any resistance towards Chu Qing's suggestion.

"Hahaha, excellent! This must be what they call friends at first sight." Chu Qing laughed heartily. He looked ecstatic.

Lin Xun also began to laugh. However, he suddenly recalled Xue Jun's words: The most difficult thing in the world to repay is friendship!

Lin Xun soon cast this thought out of his mind. He had already gained enlightenment yesterday and knew that he would not be bogged down by this issue.

"Elder Brother, I crafted these three aeth tools yesterday. Please appraise them. If possible, I hope to put them up for sale in the treasure department like yesterday."

Lin Xun took out a Snowfury Blade, Bloodcopper Spear, and a pair of Swiftwind Boots, and handed them to Chu Feng.

Chu Qing's eyes brightened and he cheerfully began to appraise them.

After ascertaining the power of the three aeth tools, Chu Qing could not help but narrow his eyes as his heart shook in astonishment.

Like the Snowfury Blade from yesterday, the power of these three aeth tools was clearly a level higher than expected!

"Younger Brother, you've really opened my eyes. I can only say that your amazing rune craftsmanship is peerless!"

Chu Qing did not hide his admiration. There was now a little more admiration in his gaze when he looked at Lin Xun again.

"Elder Brother, you will kill me with such praise." Lin Xun displayed a forced smile.

"Haha." Chu Qing began to laugh again.

"Leave these three aeth tools to me. May I ask if Younger Brother has any other plans?"

Lin Xun thought for a bit and said, "Currently, I only wish to earn a little more money for my daily needs. Does Elder Brother have any suggestions?"

Chu Feng immediately replied, "That's easy. You just saw how busy the treasure department and commission department were. I suggest you also accept some commissions while crafting aeth tools."

"Accept commissions?" Lin Xun was surprised.

"Correct. You will not only receive rewards from the completion of each commission but will also be awarded points by the association. The more points you have, the more advantages and special perks you will gain."

Chu Feng swiftly said, "Of course, these might not have any practical benefits for you. However, these points have another use: they can be exchanged for goods! The aeth tools, materials, and other treasures in the Rune Master Association can be bought with points."

After a brief pause, he continued, "Most importantly, the Rune Master Association has special connections that can source special materials you can't find in the market. This is the most attractive aspect of the points."

Lin Xun was finally tempted when he heard the last part. "How do I go about accepting commissions?"

Chu Feng smiled and rose to his feet. "I'll get Yun Qiao to show you. You only need to choose which commission to accept."

Lin Xun nodded.

Chu Feng soon called for Yun Qiao. She led Lin Xun out of the room and they entered a private room on the second floor that was specially prepared for rune masters.

The room was elegantly decorated and had a serene atmosphere.

"Young Master, these are the available commissions. They are sorted by difficulty. A one-star commission is the easiest while a nine-star commission is the hardest."

Yun Qiao pointed to a bronze wall at the back of the room. Rune arrays had been imprinted into the wall and displayed a giant screen.

Lin Xun could see the contents of the commissions flow out like water. Every commission was graded by a differing number of stars which represented the difficulty level.

“There are currently 371 commissions available for you. Most of them are two-star commissions.”

Yun Qiao swiftly explained, “Two-star crafting commissions usually entail crafting human-grade mid-tier aeth tools. You may pick any commission you wish to accept.”

Lin Xun nodded as he casually looked through the list. A two-star commission soon caught his eye.

It was a request to craft an Azurestream Sword. The requester had already prepared three sets of materials and the reward was a thousand silver coins. Completing the commission would also award five points from the Rune Master Association.

Lin Xun said, “This one then.”

“Please wait here, Young Master.” Yun Qiao nodded. She walked to the bronze wall and lightly tapped the screen.

The screen buzzed as the two-star crafting commission turned into specks of light and disappeared.

Moments later, someone knocked at the door. A servant had brought the materials for the commission.

Yun Qiao placed the materials on the table and said, “Young Master, do you wish to start now?”

Lin Xun looked at the table. Upon seeing the prepared row of rune brushes, he nodded and said, “Sure.”

He picked a brush, dipped it in ink, and began carving on the sword.

It was an ordinary sword and served as the vessel. However, its material was specially prepared for crafting an Azurestream Sword.

Lin Xun’s task was to carve the rune array on the sword which would ultimately transform it into a human-grade mid-tier aeth weapon.

Normally, a human-grade low-tier aeth tool would have up to nine rune arrays.

A human-grade mid-tier aeth tool would have up to eighteen rune arrays.

A human-grade high-tier aeth tool would have up to thirty-six rune arrays.

A human-grade peak-tier aeth tool would have up to 108 rune arrays!

In other words, there was an inseparable relationship between the quality of an aeth tool and the number of rune arrays that had been carved into it.

The difference in quality would directly affect the aeth tool’s power!

The Azurestream Sword Lin Xun was currently working on required seventeen different rune arrays and was one of the more powerful human-grade mid-tier aeth weapons.

When he began his work, Lin Xun’s mind became calm and composed. His expression was focused and his movements were practiced and smooth like flowing water.

Yun Qiao silently watched from the side. She did not dare to breathe too heavily as she was afraid she would disturb Lin Xun.

Her eyes could not help but gleam with admiration when she occasionally glanced at him.

A young teenager possessing the mastery level of an initial stage rune master was unimaginable to Yun Qiao.

It was too outrageous and amazing!

This was Yun Qiao's thought on the matter.

While Lin Xun was working, an excited shriek suddenly sounded in the first floor commission department of the Rune Master Association.

"Oh my god! Great Master Xun accepted my commission! Hahaha, hahahaha..."

An uproar erupted from the numerous cultivators in the commission department. After waiting for so long, the mysterious Great Master Xun had finally appeared!

Many people could not help but look at the lucky guy who had been chosen by Great Master Xun in envy.

Chapter 198 Rise to Fame

The commission department was buzzing with excitement. Great Master Xun taking on a commission had made the many waiting cultivators present see a ray of hope.

They could not wait to see what kind of unique masterpiece Great Master Xun would produce this time!

Someone jealously exclaimed, "Blast it, Wang Lin you lucky bastard!"

Wang Lin was an upright-looking man and was the cultivator who had made the commission Lin Xun had just accepted.

Someone purposely countered in an attempt to provoke Wang Lin, "Hmph, that's too early to say. We've only heard that Great Master Xun is amazing but no one actually knows how amazing he is. Don't celebrate too early, Wang Lin!"

Wang Lin merely chuckled in response and did not argue. In his eyes, all of these people were clearly jealous!

One of Wang Lin's friends could not help but ask, "Wang Lin, how many sets of materials did you prepare?"

This was an extremely important question. Failure was very common when rune masters attempted to craft aeth tools. Hence, several sets of materials were often prepared in advance.

Wang Lin casually answered, "Three sets."

"Three sets? That's too few. However, given Great Master Xun's remarkable ability, his failure rate shouldn't be that high."

However, this made Wang Lin begin to feel uneasy instead. He was well aware that the more powerful an aeth weapon, the higher the chances of failure during the crafting process.

“It doesn’t matter. If three sets aren’t enough, I’ll go prepare a few more.” Wang Lin intentionally displayed a carefree smile. He had already begun to calculate how much it would cost to prepare a few more sets of materials.

After all, the material costs of a human-grade mid-tier weapon was not cheap.

The cultivators in the commission zone soon lost track of time amidst their discussions and more than an hour flew by.

Over this period, an increasing number of cultivators began to gather at the commission zone after hearing the news that Great Master Xun had accepted a commission.

The lucky man, Wang Lin, received more and more attention, causing him to feel a little pressure.

Everyone was waiting to see what kind of human-grade mid-tier aeth weapon Great Master Xun would make this time. Will it be as unique as the Snowfury Blade from yesterday?

Will he live up to the rumors or are the rumors exaggerated?

Ding!

A clear, drawn-out ring sounded, causing the eyes of numerous cultivators to brighten. It was the sound that signified the completion of a commission.

The crowd soon saw a servant girl hurriedly approach with a long rectangular jade box which she handed to one of the managers at the commission zone.

The manager was a thin elder with a stern expression that likely never had a smile on it. Those familiar with him knew he was called Guan Pinghu.

Guan Pinghu looked at the box and said, “Number thirty-seven has been completed. If the issuer is here, he may retrieve the item.”

Number thirty-seven?

Numerous cultivators were taken aback.

Wang Lin was also surprised. He soon returned to his senses and said, “I’m here, I’m here. I’m the one who made the request!”

While speaking, he had already rushed over, retrieved his receipt, and passed it to Guan Pinghu.

The entire place immediately erupted into an uproar!

Great Master Xun had completed a human-grade mid-tier aeth weapon in slightly more than an hour? This speed was inconceivable!

The reason for their delayed reaction was that they had not expected the number thirty-seven commission to be related to Wang Lin. After all, it had only been a little over an hour since his commission had been accepted. Who would have dared to imagine that Great Master Xun would fulfill it in such a short span of time?

Everyone's gazes converged on Wang Lin. Strong curiosity flowed out of their eyes as they stared at the box in his hands.

However, they were soon disappointed. Wang Lin clearly did not want his treasure to be seen by others and was led to a private room by Gu Pinghu.

Despite this, the crowd's curiosity did not fade but instead began to gnaw at their patience.

Wang Lin quickly appeared again wearing a strange expression that seemed to be a mix between surprise and happiness. He seemed to be desperately restraining the excitement in his heart but was betrayed by the unconcealable joy between his brows.

"How is it?"

"Wang Lin, can you show us your treasure?"

"Yeah, let us see Great Master Xun's masterpiece as well."

Numerous cultivators yammered.

Wang Lin took a few deep breaths and finally said with a sliver of admiration in his eyes, "Everyone, I can only tell you that Great Master Xun more than lives up to the rumors. In my opinion, his mastery of runes definitely surpasses all of your expectations!"

The entire place exploded.

What kind of masterpiece would make Wang Lin so satisfied and even elicit such high praise from him?

Unfortunately, Wang Lin was long gone when they wanted to ask more.

Someone gave a calm analysis, "He completed a human-grade mid-tier aeth weapon in an hour and thirty-six minutes. Moreover, from how happy Wang Lin looked, I'm certain that the weapon he received is much more powerful than the norm, like yesterday's Snowfury Blade."

"If so, wouldn't this mean that Great Master Xun completed the commission in one try and has no record of failure?"

Numerous cultivators fell into deep thought.

Although many had believed the rumors about Great Master Xun to be exaggerated, after witnessing everything that had happened to Wang Lin, everyone realized that Great Master Xun had immeasurable talent in the art of runes!

An excited shout suddenly sounded from the distance, "What? Three of Great Master Xun's works are being sold in the treasure department!? I'm definitely getting one this time!"

The crowd in the commission department looked at each other. Soon after, they began to move, creating a stampede toward the treasure department.

When they arrived, they found that the enormous department was already filled with people. It would be an understatement to call this a huge crowd.

"I am in charge of the treasure department, you may call me Jia Zhen. Everyone, please do not jostle or shove others. Anyone who causes a ruckus will have to face the consequences!"

Upon seeing that the situation was about to spiral out of control, Jia Zhen had no choice but to step forward to maintain order. He smiled bitterly. Who could have imagined that the three aeth tools made by Great Master Xun would be so popular?

"Hurry up and tell us the starting price!"

"Agreed. I'll win one of the Great Master Xun's aeth tools even if I have to break the bank!"

"Hmph? Break the bank? I think you'd better give up instead."

The atmosphere had already become hostile before the bidding began.

The cultivators who had just arrived from the commission department were dumbstruck. This was what explosive popularity was coined to describe!

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On that day, the Snowfury Blade, Bloodcopper Spear, and Swiftwind Boots were sold for 1300 silver coins, 1600 silver coins, and 1000 silver coins respectively, shocking everyone.

The news quickly spread in Haze City like a storm, causing giant ripples once more.

Human-grade mid-tier aeth tools were usually priced between two to three hundred silver coins. Even the expensive ones seldom exceeded six hundred silver coins.

In comparison, Great Master Xun's human-grade mid-tier aeth tools were sold for an astronomical price of more than a thousand silver coins. This was very alarming.

It might have been fine if it was just one item, but the most inconceivable part was that every aeth tool made by Great Master Xun was sold for at least a thousand silver coins.

What did this mean?

It meant that Great Master Xun's aeth tools were indeed unique and amazing. Otherwise, it would be impossible for them to be sold for such mind-boggling prices!

All of this cast a halo of mystery around Great Master Xun and drew many people's attention again. In fact, some of the rune masters in Haze City could no longer sit still and also began to take note of this affair.

Great Master Xun?

Who is he? How had he created such a huge storm in Haze City in just two days?

Regardless, the sudden appearance of Great Master Xun in the Rune Master Association was akin to a comet flying past in the sky above Haze City. He drew a crazy amount of attention in a short span of two days and became a figure filled with mystery.

.....

After completing two crafting commissions, Lin Xun decided to stop.

At his current level, crafting three human-grade mid-tier aeth tools in succession was already rather exhausting and was not worth the effort.

Before leaving, Lin Xun was surprised when Chu Feng told him about the events that had transpired in the commission department and the treasure department today.

However, Lin Xun soon began to frown. He knew that fame had its price and did not wish to draw too much attention to himself.

After some contemplation, Lin Xun made his decision. "Starting tomorrow, I intend to accept two commissions per day."

Chu Feng nodded and easily agreed.

After leaving the association, Lin Xun headed straight home. When he walked through the entrance, he saw Xue Jin seated at the stone table at the center of the courtyard, enjoying his wine. *novelnext.com*

Upon seeing Lin Xun, Xue Jin asked, "Kid, you're the famous Great Master Xun, who has become the talk of the city for the past two days?"

Lin Xun was surprised, "You knew?"

Xue Jin said, "Nonsense, I'm not deaf so why wouldn't I know? Do you realize that this will make your situation very dangerous?"

A rare sliver of graveness appeared on his face. "The sudden appearance of a rune master who has a unique insight into the dao of runes will definitely draw the attention of countless people. In fact, I can tell you that many factions have already dispatched spies to find out more about you!"

Lin Xun's expression also turned serious.

Xue Jin continued, "Regardless of whether their intentions are good or bad, once these factions have their eye on you, your situation will become problematic and filled with unpredictable variables!"

Before Lin Xun could say anything, Xue Jin said, "You can't depend on the Rune Master Association. There are many ways to dig out information about you. Remember, you should never place your hopes on others."

Lin Xun was silent for a moment before he asked, "Old Jin, what do you think I should do now?"

Xue Jin suddenly chuckled, returning to his lazy appearance as he extended a finger and waved it.

Lin Xun asked, "A jar of Ghostburn Wine? Deal."

Xue Jin shook his head. "Wrong, a jar of Ghostburn Wine every day."

Lin Xun was taken aback. "That's fine as well."

Xue Jin lazily stretched and said, "From tomorrow, you can continue doing what you want to. There's no need to worry about anything else."

Towards the end, he had already relocated himself to a corner of the courtyard and had fallen asleep like a lazy alcoholic.

Lin Xun chuckled inwardly. He knew that Xue Jin had finally decided to act!

Chapter 199 Calm Winds and Sea

After returning to the room, Lin Xun began to sort through his haul for the day.

The little Xumi Ring could not only store a thousand-foot-tall mountain but wearing it would also keep the mind clear, nourish the spirit, and harmonize the wearer's aura.

After a careful inspection to check that nothing funny had been done to the ring, Lin Xun shifted all of his belongings into it.

Lin Xun was thankful for the Xumi Ring's simple design. It looked like a piece of black jade and ordinary people would never be able to identify it as a peerless treasure.

Besides this, Lin Xun had also gained fifty-four gold coins. This was his total profit from selling three aeth tools and completing two crafting commissions. Of course, the Rune Master Association's ten percent cut had already been accounted for.

Fifty-four gold coins in a day was definitely a generous income and was equivalent to 5400 silver coins.

Finally, there were the ten points awarded by the association. From what Lin Xun had been told, a single point could be exchanged for three gold coins, making it a very valuable resource.

Of course, Lin Xun would not exchange his points for money. These points could be exchanged for aeth tools, equipment, aeth resources, and various treasures; it was a unique privilege enjoyed by rune masters.

After sorting through everything, Lin Xun took a deep breath, cast away any distracting thoughts, and began to cultivate.

His goal for earning money in the Rune Master Association was to better meet his cultivation needs. Lin Xun would not let earning money distract him from his true aim.

Moreover, the registration for the provincial exam would begin in about a dozen days. Lin Xun intended to use this time to temper his cultivation.

.....

While Lin Xun was cultivating, Chu Feng was silently seated in the deepest private room on the second floor of the Rune Master Association.

Those from the association knew that this was Chu Feng's personal quarters and no one was allowed to enter besides him.

However, a weak and thin figure was currently seated in front of Chu Feng.

The room was dark, making it difficult to see properly. All anyone could make out was a beautiful silhouette of a young lady with well-proportioned facial features.

She was seated in silence with her hands placed on her lap.

Chu Qing and the young lady sat facing each other in the dark and quiet room. It was a scene that gave off a strange and mysterious feeling.

After a long time, Chu Feng finally broke the silence, "I have to try no matter what. There's only one chance and I cannot miss it again."

His voice was gloomy. There was no trace of the warmth he usually displayed.

"Ahqing, I can never forget what happened all those years ago. Not for a single second have I forgotten the pain those people brought us!"

Chu Feng's expression turned chillingly cold.

Ahqing sighed and said, "Elder Brother, do you believe a young teenager can be relied upon?"

Chu Feng chuckled as he recalled Lin Xun's figure before sighing in admiration, "You can't judge a book by the cover. Ahqing, you might not understand now, but a young man like him will definitely become the most dazzling heaven pride in the empire once he grows up!"

His eyes seemed to glow as he passionately said, "I've been practicing the dao of runes for so many years and have seen all kinds of geniuses. Only after meeting Lin Xun did I realize that all these so-called geniuses are just a bunch of trash!"

Ahqing was stunned as she looked at her brother. The usually composed Chu Feng was displaying an extremely rare fanatical expression. She could not help but wonder: was that young man truly so different from the others?

"Of course, he's still young and lacks true influence and power. However, I can wait for his eventual rise!"

Chu Feng took a deep breath as his eyes shone with determination. "I believe in his intelligence and potential. He will definitely rise to greatness and become a true powerhouse in the future!"

At this point, he looked toward the young lady as a look of tenderness was revealed on his face. "When that time comes, our revenge will become possible. Ahqing, you will no longer need to hide and live in the darkness."

Ahqing's emotions seemed to stir somewhat but she soon displayed a bitter smile. "Elder Brother, I'm afraid that young man will have changed by that time. Are you certain he will still help us?"

Chu Feng was silent for a moment before he replied, "So what if I can't be certain? This is our only chance. If we don't grab it...our situation will only become increasingly dangerous."

Ahqing could not help but ask, "Elder Brother, why don't you tell him everything?"

Chu Feng shook his head. "Not yet. If I tell him now, it will only make him wary of me. After all, we're only strangers to him. Do you think he will agree if we suddenly make such a request of him?"

Ahqing sighed softly, feeling greatly conflicted.

Chu Feng smiled and tried to console her. "Ahqing, there's no need for you to think about such things. Leave everything to me. In my opinion, when he becomes a true bigwig, our little matter will be as easy as a flip of a hand for him."

Ahqing nodded. "Elder Brother, I feel that making use of others is no good. You...must tell him the truth in the future. A talented young man like him definitely hates being lied to the most."

Chu Feng made a noise in assent and rose to his feet. "Ahqing, have a good rest. I should get back to work."

He pushed open the door and left, leaving the young lady's frail figure to disappear into the darkness of the room.

The moment Chu Feng stepped out, he immediately regained his refined and distinguished appearance, every movement confident and filled with elegance.

Chu Feng soon walked into another private room.

There were already people waiting inside: an elder who was as thin as bamboo, a strong and honest young man, and a well-dressed listless woman.

Upon seeing Chu Feng enter, the three individuals rose to their feet. There was a sliver of respect on their faces.

"Old Diao, Xionsan, Yan Mei. Thank you for waiting."

Chu Feng greeted everyone with a smile and said, "I've called you guys here because there's a matter I need to trouble you guys with."

The elder called Old Diao nodded and said, "Brother Chu Feng, go ahead and tell us. Your problems are our problems."

Chu Feng said, "Then I'll go ahead. I need you guys to help me protect someone and ensure his identity is not leaked."

"Protect someone?"

Old Diao, Xionsan and Yan Mei were taken aback. They had assumed it to be some kind of dangerous mission. Who could have expected it would merely be protecting a person. This was a simple matter.

"Correct. Most importantly, you guys have to ensure that his daily life is not disturbed."

Chu Feng's expression turned serious as he continued, "This matter is of utmost importance to me. Hence, I hope that everyone will do their best."

Old Diao said, "In other words, we'll have to protect him from the darkness and cannot interfere in his daily life?"

Chu Feng approvingly said, "Precisely."

Old Diao pondered some time and ultimately accepted, "Alright. Leave this matter to us!"

.....

For the subsequent period of time, Lin Xun would visit the Rune Master Association in the afternoon to complete two crafting commissions. Afterwards, he would return home to cultivate, living an enriching and peaceful daily life.

However, due to Great Master Xun's fame, a tremendous number of cultivators would arrive at the association every day, making the place a beehive of activity.

Regretfully, Lin Xun only accepted two commissions every day. Moreover, they would all be human-grade mid-tier aeth tools, causing many cultivators to sigh in disappointment.

However, numerous cultivators began to realize that Great Master Xun seemed to never fail any commissions he accepted. In addition, the aeth tools he crafted were of excellent quality and were clearly stronger than their counterparts on the market.

As such, Great Master Xun's figure grew increasingly mighty in the cultivators' hearts. Great Master Xun's identity also became one of the most hotly debated topics among the cultivators.

Someone patted his chest and swore that Great Master Xun was an extraordinary talent who had once served as an instructor in Qinglu Academy and had come to Haze City because he was acquainted with Chu Feng.

Someone else said that Great Master Xun was from one of the empire's three great rune clans and had come to Haze City in hopes of meeting the famous art cultivator, Miss Liu Qingyan.

Of course, this explanation was even more absurd. After all, everyone in Haze City knew that Liu Qingyan would only arrive in about two or three months.

All in all, there were all kinds of theories about Great Master Xun's identity. No one could confirm their validity.

This was the power of fame.

Lin Xun did not know whether to laugh or cry when he heard these rumors. To him, fame and reputation were nothing but burdens. He would rather peacefully earn money than admit he had any relation to Great Master Xun.

On occasion, Lin Xun would feel strange about how peaceful it was. It seemed nothing like what Xue Jin had said about people using all kinds of methods to spy on him had occurred so far.

However, Lin Xun soon understood that Xue Jin had probably already taken action and neutralized numerous hidden spies, allowing Lin Xun to live a peaceful life.

When he returned home one day, Lin Xun saw Xue Jin snoring loudly in a corner and could not help but ask, "Old Jin, for the past few days..."

The sleeping Xue Jin suddenly burped and interjected, "Just concentrate on your cultivation. Why concern yourself with such matters?"

Lin Xun grinned upon hearing this, finally sure that it was all Xue Jin's hard work.

Xue Jin suddenly added, "That Chu Feng has been quite meticulous in taking care of you. He has even sent three people to protect you in secret. However, they've all been chased away by me. With their strength, those people won't be of any use if a real expert comes."

Lin Xun was stunned. After some thought, he said, "So something like that happened, huh."

"That's how being indebted works." Xue Jin sighed and rolled over to continue sleeping.

Lin Xun thoughtfully said, "Old Jin, did you suffer before because you were indebted to someone?"

Xue Jin acted as if he heard nothing and continued to snore loudly.

However, Lin Xun managed to notice Old Jin's body turn rigid for a split second when the question was asked.

It seems that he's a man with a story as well.

Lin Xun sighed inwardly, turned around, and walked into the room.

The provincial exam registration began tomorrow and the venue was Haze Academy. Lin Xun needed to make some preparations.

Chapter 200 Haze Academy

While Lin Xun was preparing for the provincial exam, Chu Feng was listening to Old Diao's report in the Rune Master Association.

"We've secretly followed that Young Master for several days but discovered that our actions were unnecessary." Old Diao's voice was somewhat bitter.

Beside him, Xionsan and Yan Mei also looked rather dejected.

Chu Feng's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

Old Diao seemed to recall something and a deep wariness emerged on his face. "Because there's already an expert protecting that Young Master!"

"An expert?" Chu Feng was puzzled.

"Correct. That expert has immeasurable strength and I suspect that if he wished to, he would only need a single strike to bring down all three of us."

There was a certain graveness in Old Diao's voice. It required great courage for an expert to acknowledge he was far lesser than another.

Chu Feng was shocked. He was well aware of the Old Diao trio's strength. Old Diao might appear to be an ordinary old man on the outside, but he had Spirit Sea stage cultivation!

Xionsan and Yan Mei also boasted extremely strong battle power. They had peak Heaven Dipper stage cultivation and were only a step away from advancing to the Spirit Sea stage.

A trio of experts like them would not have any problems in Haze City as long as they did not encounter a Spirit Sea expert.

However, Old Diao said that there was an even more terrifying expert watching over Lin Xun, who even Old Diao was extremely wary of. This was far too inconceivable.

Chu Feng's emotions churned like a stormy sea. He suddenly realized that Lin Xun's origins were not as simple as he had imagined!

Chu Feng took a deep breath and asked in a serious voice, "Can you tell what cultivation that expert has?"

Old Diao confidently answered, "It's definitely not as simple as the Spirit Sea stage."

Chu Feng's heart shook as he instinctively said, "Does that mean he's a Heaven Ascension expert?"

Old Diao shook his head. "I can't be certain. However, we've discovered several things over the past few days. Xionsan will elaborate."

Chu Feng restrained his shock and looked toward Xionsan.

The young man called Xionsan said, "Thirteen days ago, Haze City's Sun Clan Merchant Group dispatched two Spirit Dipper experts as spies. However, both of them were knocked unconscious that very night and sent back to the Sun Clan Merchant Group. A warning note was left on one of them which said: if the dogs keep running amuck, I will use your heads as wine cups!"

Chu Feng's eyelids jumped. He icily chuckled. "I knew that the Sun Clan Merchant Group won't be able to sit still. They thought that no one knew when they took away a rune master from the association previously but I just couldn't be bothered to bicker with them. To think that they would try the same thing again. They deserve to be taught a lesson!"

Xionsan continued, "Twelve days ago, Jadelight Pavilion dispatched a Spirit Sea expert in hopes of approaching the Young Master. However, he was heavily injured, knocked unconscious mid-journey, and sent back with a warning letter as well which wrote: mere ants dare to shake the mighty tree?"

Chu Feng's expression changed slightly. Jadelight Pavilion was a first-class faction in Haze City and controlled more than ten mines which made them extremely wealthy. To think that they had also targeted Lin Xun!

"Nine days ago, Heavenly Aroma House dispatched three Spirit Dipper experts..."

"Five days ago, two Spirit Sea experts were dispatched from the Violet Plume Army stationed in Haze City..."

"Two days ago, Haze Academy sent out a Spirit Sea stage rune master..."

Xionsan swiftly reported. Every piece of news shook Chu Feng's heart and made the expression in his eyes fluctuate indeterminately.

Toward the end, when Chu Feng heard the Violet Plume Army and Haze Academy had also sent out experts, he finally lost his composure and his face darkened considerably.

All of this had exceeded his expectations. He never imagined that Great Master Xun would draw the attention of so many factions.

Meanwhile, the strength of the expert protecting Lin Xun also shocked Chu Feng. Every expert dispatched by the many factions had been defeated and sent back.

How powerful was this expert?

In the end, Xionsan bitterly said, "The three of us were also warned today. He said our presence is completely unnecessary and he will not be so courteous if we appear again."

Chu Feng was dazed as his expression rapidly changed indeterminately.

He had finally realized that everything he did had already been seen by the expert at Lin Xun's side!

Chu Feng could not help but ask, "Did that expert say anything else?"

Old Diao, Xionsan, and Yan Mei shook their heads.

Chu Feng began to worry. If the other party had already seen through his intentions, why did he not expose Chu Feng?

If Chu Feng's intentions had not been seen through, how would the expert know that Old Diao and the others had been sent by him?

Chu Feng was confused and conflicted.

In the end, he decided to find a time to have a proper talk with Lin Xun!

.....

Lin Xun was unaware of all this.

Early in the morning, Lin Xun energetically left his room. He greeted Xue Jin before pushing open the doors to leave.

Huu~~

As Lin Xun walked along the streets, he soon saw a rune shuttle bus stop and descend. Feeling interested, he approached and paid the entry fee of ten copper coins, intending to try it out for himself.

He walked into the carriage and found it already filled with people. There were all kinds of passengers: cultivators, ordinary folk, men, women, old, and young.

There were many seats in the carriage but all of them had already been taken. Lin Xun could only stand as he curiously observed these new surroundings.

Uncles and aunties were discussing the prices of vegetables and grain. Boys and girls were excitedly chatting about the art cultivator, Liu Qingyan, who would soon arrive in Haze City.

The cultivators were talking about the provincial exam registration that began today.

It was lively and noisy, an environment that people who like peace and quiet would definitely dislike. However, Lin Xun found that he rather enjoyed this atmosphere.

He could see many different faces, each having their own special story.

This was the vibrance of life and the unique charm of the mortal world.

Woowoo~~

The rune shuttle bus soon began to move. It rose from the ground, its long body extending across the sky like a dragon. Although it moved quickly, it was also very stable.

Lin Xun was suddenly drawn to a certain conversation.

"I wonder how many famous formidable characters in the southwest province will be participating in the provincial exam."

"According to what I've heard, Haze Academy's four most famous geniuses, Xue Shaolin, Yu Wenjing, Le Zhiyou, Yun Zitong will be participating. They've been touted to be the most likely cultivators to reach the top ten!"

"That's right. I heard there will be more than three hundred students participating from Haze Academy alone which is much more than in previous years. There is no lack of formidable individuals among them. The only thing we don't know is how many people will be able to pass."

"Indeed. It's not only Haze Academy. Who knows how many cultivators in Haze City and even the entire southwest county are rubbing their hands in anticipation of the provincial exam. I heard that the number of participants will probably exceed five thousand this time!"

"Five thousand? My goodness! Only a hundred people will be able to pass each provincial exam. That means only one out of every fifty people will pass. Won't the competition be far too cruel?"

"Yeah, such is the provincial exam. The only ones who will pass are the first-class geniuses of this era. Only such people have the qualifications to participate in the national exam and contend with the other apex geniuses from the other provinces."

"Hehe, the provincial exam is the biggest event every year. I wonder how many dazzling individuals will be able to stand out this time."

Lin Xun could not help but be shocked by the contents of the conversations. With more than five thousand cultivators participating, the competition was going to be insanely fierce.

It must be known that not just anyone could participate in the provincial exam. A cultivator had to first pass the district exam and then the prefectural exam to obtain the qualifications for the provincial exam!

After so many rounds of selection, the cultivators who survived would naturally not be ordinary.

It was easy to imagine how cutthroat the competition would be when five thousand meticulously selected cultivators were going to duke it out for a hundred spots.

This made Lin Xun suddenly recall the year he had spent in Blood Kill Camp where he had to face challenges every day. Those who failed would be eliminated and only the victors would get to stay.

The provincial exam was quite similar in nature. However, his rivals were no longer Kill Blood Camp students but the most elite group of cultivators in the southwest province!

From what Lin Xun knew, the provincial exam had three criteria: age eighteen and below, Human Dipper stage and above cultivation, and proof of passing the prefectural exam.

Anyone who did not fulfill at least one of these criteria would be barred from participating!

Given these conditions, anyone could see how difficult and stringent it was to stand out in the provincial exam.

However, this only made Lin Xun increasingly expectant. He had never feared challenges, not in Blood Kill Camp nor ever in the future.

Only by vying against the truly strong would an individual know how far he had come on the road of cultivation!

Woowoowoo~~

The rune shuttle soon came to a stop. It had arrived at Haze Academy.

Lin Xun got off with the crowd and saw a group of old buildings in the distance silently towering over the land like mountains. They also took up a large amount of space.

There was a circular white jade plaza in front of the buildings where numerous figures were already gathered, most of which were young men and women. There was no lack of good-looking individuals among them, creating a beautiful sight under the clear blue sky.

This was Haze Academy. It was an academy that had the most history and strongest foundation in the southwest province.

Numerous dazzling geniuses had emerged from the academy over the past thousand years. Some became famous influential figures while others became lords who ruled over a great territory.

The current Southwest Province Governor, Liu Wu Diao, and the only man who rivaled him in the southwest province, Yao Tuohai, had studied in Haze Academy many years ago.

The registration for this year's provincial exam was in this very Haze Academy!