

Prodigies 281

Chapter 281 Polishing the Martial Dao

Wei Lingzhen's sigh filled Du Dongtu with thought. "Indeed, there are different levels of geniuses. From the strength Lin Xun has displayed today, he can already be considered first-class in the empire. However...it's regretful."

There was a tinge of regret in his voice.

If Lin Xun was defeated in the provincial exam, he would naturally be unable to participate in the national exam.

Governor Liu Wudiao remarked in a deep voice, "That's fate. The draw results depend on the will of heaven and no one can do anything about it."

.....

Boom!

In the arena, the battle grew increasingly intense. Lin Xun could not avoid the bronze umbrella in time and took a vicious hit to the back.

He staggered as a piercing pain burned his back. Several of his bones nearly fractured from the force.

With such a great opportunity presented to them, Le Zhiyou and the others hurriedly pressed the attack.

Rumble~

In an instant, a barrage of attacks engulfed Lin Xun like a wave.

However, Lin Xun displayed extraordinary ferocity at this critical juncture. He gritted his teeth, avoided the incoming attacks, and gathered power toward his hand.

Sea Splitting Destruction!

Fist-winds swept forth as space was ripped apart like a rag, knocking back two of the approaching Earth Dipper experts.

Before the technique was fully executed, Lin Xun changed the move with a howl and a giant blue python-dragon seemed to charge out of his fist.

Dragon Destruction!

One of the Earth Dipper experts could not defend in time and the python-dragon rammed into his body. He shrieked in pain, feeling like a mountain was slamming into him as he went flying through air.

Shlick!

At the same time, Le Zhiyou took advantage of the opening to hack at Lin Xun's left shoulder. A sizable chunk of flesh was sliced off, nearly crippling his left arm.

"Scram!"

Lin Xun spun around and pulled his hands through the air. A phoenix emerged, its feathers red like a burning fire. It let loose an intimidating cry with a flap of its wings as if it had flown out from a fairy tale.

Although Le Zhiyou tried his best to defend, he was ultimately pushed several hundreds of feet back. His qi and blood churned and his organs were nearly displaced, causing his expression to darken and grow increasingly frosty.

Lin Xun's tenacity and power had enraged Le Zhiyou and filled him with killing intent. He absolutely could not allow Lin Xun to reverse the situation again!

The crowd gasped in shock and amazement. The battle was growing increasingly intense and Lin Xun's desperation tactics made the audience's heart jump at every move.

However, none of them could understand why Lin Xun refused to use any weapons even at this juncture.

This was far too abnormal. Anyone could figure out with a little thinking that no matter how poor Lin Xun was, a young expert like him should still have a weapon he could use.

So why was he fighting bare-handed till now?

No one knew.

The battle continued to play out in the arena as blood constantly sprayed into the air. By this time, Lin Xun and the Earth Dipper experts had sustained various injuries.

This made the other Earth Dipper experts' expressions grow increasingly grim. Everyone attacked without mercy, allowing anger to fuel their attacks.

In contrast, Lin Xun's stoic expression remained unchanged from start to end, the contours of his face filled with nothing but indifference.

He was covered in blood and there was even bone visible on his shoulder. However, his momentum did not slow in the slightest. Instead, an endless blood lust seemed to surge from his body, making his aura extremely intimidating.

Only Wen Mingxiu knew that this was Lin Xun's true appearance in combat. Only those tempered by hundreds of battles and whose hands were soaked in blood could walk out from Blood Kill Camp!

And Lin Xun was one of the elites amongst them!

.....

Kill!

Lin Xun's qi and blood felt as if it was burning and boiling. Storm Grinder roared in this body, circulating all of his power like a great boundless surging sea.

In contrast, his mind remained calm and focused, not allowing itself to waver in the slightest.

The Nine Heavenshaking Destruction Art was continuously executed by his hands: Mountain Smashing Destruction, Sea Splitting Destruction, Emptiness Destruction, Soul Shattering Destruction, Dragon

Destruction, Phoenix Destruction, Prison Suppressing Destruction, Sky Devouring Destruction, All-Spirits Destruction...

Every move pulsed with almighty power, displaying destructive force that shocked the world!

This was Lin Xun's first real fight after advancing to the perfect Human Dipper stage and learning the Nine Heavenshaking Destruction Art.

Lin Xun refused to use any weapons because he sought to polish the Nine Heavenshaking Destruction Art through this battle!

True secret arts could not be mastered with only training and theory. Their true might could only be brought out after being tempered by blood and fire.

A long time ago, a powerful sword sovereign in the empire once said that if a sword has never drank blood, it will ultimately be a piece of useless metal!

.....

Oh?

As time passed, Liu Wudiao suddenly made a soft surprised sound and said, "Lin Xun's aura seems to be gradually growing stronger."

"It's not only his aura, the battle art he's using has also become much stronger than it was at the start."

Wei Lingzhen had also noticed some changes that made his eyes brighten.

To their side, Du Dongtu suddenly slapped his thighs and said, "I understand! He refuses to use a weapon because he wants to use this battle to polish his martial power!"

The bigwigs' eyes narrowed as their hearts shook, realization finally dawning upon them as well. Lin Xun's earlier display put together with the power he was showing now undoubtedly proved that Du Dongtu's conclusion was correct!

"This kid...I don't know what I should say about him..."

Wei Lingzhen let out a bitter chuckle.

The others also displayed conflicted expressions. They had previously felt regret for Lin Xun and believed that he would lose. Who could have expected that the cheeky brat would use the battle as an opportunity to polish his martial arts? This was far too ballsy!

"Eh? There seems to be something wrong with the situation. Why have Le Zhiyou and the others still not defeated Lin Xun?"

"Yeah, something is wrong. Have you guys not realized that Lin Xun's battle power is changing in the fight and has grown stronger than earlier?"

"You seem to be right. My god, could he be staging a comeback?"

"Damn, is he really such a monster?"

It was not long before many of the sharper individuals in the crowd also sensed the faint changes that were happening in the arena.

“That can’t be. Can it?”

Xue Shaolin gasped. How could he not tell that by now that Lin Xun was not being fully suppressed and was instead slowly turning things around!

His opponents were four Earth Dipper experts and a Heaven Dipper expert! It was horrifying to think that even their combined might could not subdue Lin Xun.

Yu Wenjing, Yun Zitong, and the others were also stunned.

In the arena, Lin Xun grew increasingly ferocious. Azure light rose from his body like steam as wind and thunder seemed to rumble loudly in his body.

Every attack made the surrounding air wail. The qi flow descended into chaos, creating terrifying and overwhelming power.

This placed Le Zhiyou and the other four under a tremendous amount of pressure and made their expressions turn extremely ugly. They were bewildered and unable to believe that not only had they failed to subdue Lin Xun, but he was also even slowly beginning to reverse the situation.

What do we do?

At this rate, they would sooner or later be suppressed by Lin Xun instead. If that happened, they would be the ones to be defeated!

“Kill!”

“We can’t let him flail about any longer!”

“Quick! Use your finishers. Otherwise, all of us will be eliminated!”

Amidst several stern shouts, they turned desperate and crazed. They brought out all their trump cards and secret arts to defeat Lin Xun.

At the same time, an almost unnoticeable sneer rose from the corners of Lin Xun’s lips. In the next instant, he suddenly charged at Le Zhiyou.

Unlike before, Lin Xun’s aura was akin to an unfurling storm accompanied by torrential wind and rain. He gave off a terrifying, oppressive presence that seemed to reach into one’s soul.

Swing and push.

It was the same simple Mountain Smashing Destruction. When it was executed, however, the surrounding space began to shriek and crumble inch by inch as if collapsing into itself.

Le Zhiyou’s expression abruptly changed as he felt a fatal danger. There was zero hesitation as he threw himself to the side to avoid the attack.

Despite this, he was still struck by the wind force generated by the fist. With a loud thud, he violently coughed blood and his body was sent flying as if it had been hit by a charging bull, before crashing into the ground several hundred feet away.

His body jerked in agony on the ground, clearly gravely injured. His face was deathly pale and his eyes were filled with disbelief as if unable to comprehend how a genius Heaven Dipper expert like himself had been sent flying by a Human Dipper expert.

This scene instantly ignited the atmosphere, causing a great commotion to erupt. Numerous people were unable to stay seated and rose to their feet in utter shock and indescribable excitement.

Lin Xun had made a comeback!

Moreover, he had sent the famous Heaven Dipper expert Le Zhiyou flying with a single punch!

This performance was far too astonishing!

“He...can no longer be suppressed...”

On the tall white jade stage, the same thought flashed in bigwigs’ heads: He...can no longer be suppressed...

“How...how is this possible?”

In the arena, the four Earth Dipper experts gasped, feeling somewhat dazed. Le Zhiyou had been sent flying?

Could Lin Xun have been concealing his strength earlier?

There was fear in their eyes when they looked at him again. What kind of person is this? Why is he so strong despite having Human Dipper stage cultivation?

He...he’s a monster!

Lin Xun appeared oblivious to all of this. After striking Le Zhiyou, he immediately charged at the four Earth Dipper experts.

Rumble~

Azure dipper qi surged around him, making him appear like a dazzling sun. His aura dashed straight into the clouds and shook the earth, making it feel as if a tornado was rampaging toward his opponents.

In the distance, Le Zhiyou roared, “Careful! Quickly avoid it!”

However, it was already too late. Lin Xun had arrived.

With four loud thuds, the four Earth Dipper experts were sent flying off the stage like rocks. They crashed to the ground, blood pouring from their mouths and noses, and were no longer able to stand up.

Hss!

The crowd gasped, stupefied by the sudden turn of events.

Chapter 282 Angered and Humiliated

Four Earth Dipper experts were taken down in an instant!

Everything had happened too suddenly, catching everyone by surprise. The curtains had already fallen before anyone could react.

Only when they saw the four Earth Dipper experts' struggling to get up to no avail outside the arena did the crowd finally dare to believe that all of this was real.

Disbelief and shock enveloped the entire place, causing the atmosphere to turn so silent that even a pin drop could be heard. Everyone's faces were filled with fear and confusion.

How did Lin Xun do it?

This is far too outrageous!

No one could imagine how Lin Xun could suddenly knock Le Zhiyou away with a punch and simultaneously defeat all four Earth Dipper experts when he was being heavily suppressed mere seconds earlier.

This wasn't just a comeback, it was practically reversing heaven and earth!

On the tall white jade stage, Governor Liu Wudiao, Wei Lingzhen, Du Dongtu, and the other bigwigs were speechless. Although they had managed to discern some signs that Lin Xun was gradually growing stronger, they never expected that he would reverse the situation so swiftly.

It felt like a miracle had suddenly arrived without warning, giving everyone a 'little surprise.'

Lin Xun's thin figure stood in the arena. He was drenched in blood and looked no different from before. However, he appeared exceptionally dazzling and tall in the audience's eyes.

This was the power of reputation!

"How loathsome!

Opposite him, Le Zhiyou's expression was ashen as he silently cursed the four Earth Dipper experts for losing so easily. Due to their uselessness, he had to take on the monstrous Lin Xun alone.

Le Zhiyou took a deep breath and gloomily said, "I did not expect that you and I will be the final two remaining on the 6th arena. Hehe, should I feel honored?"

He was not in a rush to counterattack. Only when facing Lin Xun alone did Le Zhiyou realize how huge the pressure was.

"You should be happy. If the exam was a duel between me and you from the start, do you think that you would've been able to hang on till now?"

Lin Xun's expression was indifferent and his words were blunt. Earlier, Le Zhiyou had used the advantage of his Heaven Dipper stage cultivation to cause much trouble for Lin Xun. In fact, many of his injuries had been left by the former.

Hence, he had only ill feelings toward Le Zhiyou.

“Exactly, the battle has not been fair since the beginning. It’s so shameless of Le Zhiyou to say such things at this juncture.”

“Humph, I can’t believe someone like him is a top expert who enjoys honor and fame in Haze Academy. What a joke. His attacks were the most vicious earlier.”

“This is the reality of the exam. Lin Xun is unlucky for being ganged up on but Le Zhiyou’s current display is too shameful. I agree wholeheartedly with Lin Xun, Le Zhiyou should be happy instead of honored!”

Several people in the audience verbalized their agreement. Their voices spread across the entire place like a wave, causing Le Zhiyou’s expression to turn ugly.

“You...”

Le Zhiyou ground his teeth and was just about to say something but was interrupted by a frowning Lin Xun, “The exam isn’t over yet. Save whatever it is you have to say after it’s over, okay?”

Le Zhiyou laughed in anger. “Bold words. Do you really believe that you can eliminate me one-on-one?”

Lin Xun could not be bothered to continue the conversation. He stepped forward and his aura soared into the clouds like a giant dragon: powerful and filled with disdain.

Rumble!

With a wave of his hand, he sent out yet another Mountain Smashing Destruction.

Although enraged by Lin Xun’s attitude, Le Zhiyou’s eyelids jumped as the familiar feeling of fatal danger surged in his heart, causing him to subconsciously dodge to the side.

However, he immediately realized his mistake and his heart flooded with embarrassment.

Dammit!

Sure enough, roaring laughter immediately rang out from the audience. Someone even mocked, “Hey Le Zhiyou, weren’t you acting rather arrogant earlier? Why have you been scared into running the moment Lin Xun attacks? Are you a rabbit?”

Numerous Haze Academy students felt their faces flush with embarrassment. They could not comprehend Le Zhiyou’s actions. Even if he couldn’t defeat Lin Xun, couldn’t he just admit defeat? Why must he humiliate himself so?

Le Zhiyou’s face had also turned red with embarrassment and anger. He suddenly roared and charged at Lin Xun as if trying to prove that he wasn’t afraid.

Lin Xun said nothing. Mountain Smashing Destruction continued to approach with unstoppable momentum.

Rumble~

Terrifying fist-winds swept forth like a storm, smashing apart space itself with frightening destructive power.

Le Zhiyou's body turned rigid as the fist-winds loomed toward him. A chill ran up his spine and his face rapidly paled. The humiliation and anger in his heart swiftly scattered into nothingness as he was forced to dodge again.

It was too terrifying. Le Zhiyou strongly suspected he would be smashed to a pulp if he were to receive the attack.

The sight made more and more people burst into laughter. Several cultivators who had highly regarded Le Zhiyou could not help but inwardly shake their heads.

"Look, that's the famous genius of Haze Academy that even possesses Heaven Dipper cultivation. Isn't he an embarrassment?"

"Hahaha, he talks big but his body is so honest. Come on, fight him like you claimed you will!"

Even Wei Lingzhen could not help but frown. He could naturally tell that Le Zhiyou was not truly afraid but the crowd's comments made it sound far worse than it actually was.

"Despicable! You...you...are definitely doing this on purpose!"

Le Zhiyou was nearly about to go crazy from anger. He had always been highly regarded by many people and often called a genius. Countless younger generation cultivators admired and respected him. Since when had he ever suffered such treatment?

His eyes turned red as he directed all of his rage toward Lin Xun, blaming him for everything.

Lin Xun merely chuckled. "It doesn't matter if it's intentional. Stop dodging."

"You..."

Le Zhiyou nearly coughed blood. This was far too infuriating. He never expected that the exam would turn out this way.

"Zhiyou, withdraw. You've already lost."

Wei Lingzhen's commanding voice suddenly thundered, suppressing the laughter.

Evidently, the Haze Academy Principal did not wish to watch this farce continue.

Le Zhiyou's body trembled as his expression rapidly dimmed. Was he going to admit defeat just like this?

Didn't this mean that he had been eliminated from the provincial exam?

Le Zhiyou felt a stabbing pain in his heart, causing him to suddenly cough blood as his complexion turned deathly white. He had evidently suffered emotional damage.

Several people could not help but display looks of pity. Le Zhiyou had lost far more than the match. His reputation would also suffer in the future and he would no longer be able to raise his head in public.

In the end, Le Zhiyou withdrew from the arena. No matter how much he refused to accept it, he had to admit that he did not have the confidence to face Lin Xun alone. Continuing the battle would only be a meaningless struggle.

The sight of him dejectedly leaving the arena caused Xue Shaolin's, Yu Wenjing's, and Yun Zitong's expressions to turn grave and gloomy.

Le Zhiyou was said to be their equal but had lost to Lin Xun. Moreover, the fact that Le Zhiyou had voluntarily admitted defeat made them feel even more conflicted.

However, they also understood that they would have faced the same result if they were in Le Zhiyou's place. There was nothing they could do. Lin Xun was an outlier. Although his cultivation was only at the Human Dipper stage, he could single handedly challenge the combined might of four Earth Dipper experts plus a Heaven Dipper expert and even triumph in the end.

Even in the entire empire, there was likely only a handful who could achieve such a feat!

Everyone now looked at Lin Xun in a different light. There was an additional trace of sincere admiration in their eyes.

They had previously believed that Lin Xun had terrible luck with the draw and was certain to be defeated, denying him the opportunity to challenge the final round of the exam. However, the final result proved that it was not Lin Xun who was unlucky but his opponents!

The four Earth Dipper cultivators had been simultaneously defeated in a clean and undeniable manner.

Le Zhiyou had ultimately become a clown that was mocked and laughed at. His reputation had suffered tremendously and he had lost all face.

Lin Xun had become the biggest winner of this round. It was like an impossible miracle that brought endless shock and surprise!

"His rise can no longer be stopped."

Wei Lingzhen sighed with a complicated expression.

"Although the final round has yet to begin, it has already become meaningless to him. Life is indeed difficult to predict."

Du Dongtu also sighed. He had greatly admired Lin Xun ever since the rainy night assassination event and had desired to recruit him into the Violet Plume Army. Du Dongtu believed that with some additional polishing, Lin Xun would definitely become a powerful general.

However, life was too complex to predict. From Lin Xun's performance today, a youth with unrivaled potential like him was not someone the Violet Plume Army could hold onto.

"Lin Xun is already a top-tier expert in the southwest province and can be considered first-rate in the empire. Someone like him should definitely participate in the national exam!"

Governor Liu Wudiao also sighed deeply. If not for the high possibility that Lin Xun had a close relationship with Black Glory Sacred Hall, Liu Wudiao would have already begun to think of ways to recruit Lin Xun.

In the arena, Lin Xun seemed to recall something and suddenly took a deep breath. His gaze swept across the crowd as his expression turned serious.

Numerous people could not help but feel curious. What was Lin Xun doing now?

Lin Xun smiled faintly and said, "I will always buy aeth tools at Golden Jade Hall!"

Everyone was dumbstruck. To think that he had not forgotten about generating publicity for Golden Jade Hall even at such a time. Didn't he know how to read the mood?

Numerous girls who had been subdued by Lin Xun's strong performance could not help but display despairing expressions when they heard this.

Why god why!?

Chapter 283 Secret Ripples

On the tall white jade stage, the corners of Governor Liu Wudiao's, Wei Lingzhen's, Du Dongtu's, and the other bigwigs' mouths could not help but twitch as their expressions turned a little strange.

Lin Xun's eccentric behavior put them at a loss for words.

By the time everyone returned to their senses, Lin Xun's figure had disappeared from the arena.

The risky and hard-fought battle had left him with several injuries. Moreover, he had depleted most of his energy and needed rest to recover.

Hence, he had decisively left as soon as he could. There was no time to waste since the final round of the exam would start in three days.

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The third round of the exam continued after Lin Xun departed and news of his battle swiftly spread to the entire city.

"My goodness, Lin Xun is a monster! He's freaking amazing!"

Numerous people were shocked and amazed.

"It's a pity about Le Zhiyou. He would have been able to pass the provincial exam if he didn't match with Lin Xun."

Many also felt regretful for Le Zhiyou.

"Hahaha, Lin Xun is simply too interesting. I can't believe he even helped create publicity for Golden Jade Hall at the end. I might have to visit them sometime."

Some laughed in amusement, finding Lin Xun's surprising actions rather refreshing.

None of this mattered to Lin Xun. When he returned home, he gave a quick greeting to Xue Jin before walking into the room to rest.

The final round was going to begin in three days. Lin Xun needed to recover to peak condition before then.

In the courtyard, Xue Jin sat alone under the night sky as he thought about how he would be leaving in three days. He would leave Haze City, leave the empire, and head toward a land filled with unpredictable danger and turmoil...

All of a sudden, a bizarre black shadow appeared in the sky. If one were to take a closer look, they would discover that it was a strange black bird!

It had golden eyes, red claws, and a long, slender body. Six wings grew from its back and lava-like fire seemed to burn deep in its pupils, creating an intimidating sight.

The dark night six-winged falcon!

Xue Jin was immediately roused from his thoughts. A wisp of iciness shone in his eyes as he gazed at the sky.

To think that it has been dispatched. Could something big have happened in Black Glory Sacred Hall?

The dark night six-winged falcon glided through the air and noiselessly landed in the courtyard.

A strong and deep voice sounded from the bird's mouth, "The Lord instructs you to wait here for orders and new information before proceeding to your next mission."

The bird spoke human speech as if it was an intelligent, sentient being.

"What happened?"

Xue Jin frowned.

The dark night six-winged bird shook its head. "We're not certain yet but it seems that a traitor has been discovered in Black Glory Sacred Hall and has leaked some very important secrets."

Xue Jin raised his brow as his expression turned ice-cold. "A traitor? Such a thing hasn't happened for many years. There's something fishy going on."

Xue Jin puzzledly asked, "But what does this have to do with me heading to the Turbulent Wasteland?"

The dark night six-winged bird was silent for a moment before it answered, "It has nothing to do with you but it concerns the little fellow you are protecting. Let's chat another time, I have to leave and report back to the Lord."

With a flap of its wings, it rose into the air and disappeared into the darkness in the blink of an eye.
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A matter related to Lin Xun!

Xue Jin's heart shook. A chilling light shone in his eyes as he fell into deep thought.

A traitor in Black Glory Sacred Hall had leaked secret information about Lin Xun...what was going on?

Moreover, even the dark night six-winged falcon had been dispatched to disseminate the news. This alone told him how serious the issue was.

After a long time, Xue Jin shook his head. He had far too little information to figure out what was going on. The only thing he could do was wait for new information to determine his next course of action.

However, the fact that Lin Xun's existence was somehow tied to a traitor made Xue Jin feel that this matter was likely far more astonishing than he could imagine!

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The Castle of Darkness.

The pitch-black hall was wrapped in its usual stony silence, filled with power that could squeeze a person's heart.

"Some decisions, once made, cannot be undone. However, I did not expect that you would be the first traitor to appear in the past 136 years."

A cold, ethereal voice sounded in the darkness. Light surged in its wake, revealing a sinister throne made of white bones.

An impossibly giant figure sat on the throne, like the king of the eternal night that looked down upon the world.

The Dark Night Queen!

Like always, her voice was uniquely husky and mysterious like night.

She was not showing her true face, or rather even if she did, only a small handful would be able to view her true features.

The surge of light also made visible a man with his torso bare kneeling at the center of the grand hall.

The man's head was lowered in silence.

At closer inspection, one would see numerous black chains embedded in the man's back. Mysterious black rune flames burned along the chains like the legendary fires of hell, burning the man's skin until it turned charred black.

However, the man seemed oblivious to it all. His kneeling figure was as still as a statue, painting a bizarre and horrifying sight.

"You are still the same as before. When you've decided on something, you'd rather die than break your silence. However, I've captured you because I'm curious about one thing. What did that old thing from the stargazing platform promise you that you would choose to betray me?"

The Dark Night Queen's ethereal voice sounded from the white bone throne, devoid of all emotion.

The man remained silent as if he was a mute.

"Never mind, since you've chosen to uphold your silence and die, I shall grant your wish."

The black chains on the man's back began slowly began to burrow deeper into his skin.

The man's body started to tremble uncontrollably as he was finally unable to bear the intense pain

Despite this, his head remained lowered in silence, stubborn as a rock.

A kindly-looking old man in black palace garb walked into the hall. Without glancing at the kneeling man, the old man bowed toward the white bone throne. "My Lady, we have investigated. Steward Zi Yun did it to protect a woman."

These words caused the man on the floor to tremble violently. He finally raised his head, revealing a resolute, weather-beaten face.

However, his face was currently filled with rage, and his eyes were red as if they were bleeding. It was an exceptionally sinister sight to behold.

He stared at the white bone throne and his pale lips trembled for a moment as if wanting to say something. In the end, he disappointedly lowered his head again as if resigned to his fate.

The Dark Night Queen was silent for a moment before she let out a soft sigh. "Love harms us all."

As her voice sounded, the man's body turned rigid. His body was soon enveloped by a layer of darkness and began to vanish little by little. In the end, he seemed to evaporate from this plane of existence, leaving no traces behind.

Everything had ended without a sound.

The old man could not help but sigh at this scene.

The Queen of the Eternal Night asked, "What else do you have to report?"

"It has already been discovered by the old seer of the stargazing platform. They've arranged for the Chi Clan to properly resolve this matter that had been left unsettled all those years ago."

The old man slowly said, "I've already informed the other party of your proposal as you instructed. However, I did not expect them to agree."

"They agreed?" There was a sliver of surprise in the Eternal Night Queen's voice.

The old man bowed his head. "However, they have a condition."

"Speak."

The old man's expression turned a little strange. "They said that Lin Xun can be allowed to live. However, it will depend on whether or not he can smoothly enter the Forbidden City."

The white bone throne was silent. After a long time, she finally said, "Is this the intention of that old thing from the stargazing platform?"

The old man nodded. "It should be."

The Dark Night Queen pondered for a moment and said, "How do they wish to do this?"

The old man replied, "The Chi Clan will dispatch forces to stop Lin Xun on his way to the Forbidden City."

The Dark Night Queen muttered, "That old thing's decision is somewhat odd this time. What is he up to?"

The old man also fell deep into thought. He also did not know the reason.

“Fine, since he wishes to play, we shall accompany him. I look forward to finding out what exactly he is up to.”

The Dark Night Queen made her decision. “Tell Xue Jin that there is a change in plans. He shall bring Lin Xun to the Forbidden City!”

The old man shook his head. “My Lady, the other party has already said that Black Glory Sacred Hall cannot interfere. They will only send Spirit Sea stage and below cultivators to stop Lin Xun. Otherwise, all of the conditions they promised will be void.”

“Heh, do you think that they have me cornered?”

There was a trace of iciness in her voice.

The old man said, “My Lady, regardless of what they believe, I feel that we can give it a try. Rather than call it a condition, it feels more like a test for Lin Xun. However, there is likely some hidden detail we are unaware of.”

After a brief silence, the Dark Night Queen said, “Alright. Tell Xue Jin to let Lin Xun decide. Tell him that if he goes to the Forbidden City, he might be killed along the way. But if he doesn’t, he will never again have a chance to learn of his true identity. He shall be the one to make this choice.”

The old man bowed and left to carry out her instruction.

The hall once again fell into darkness and silence.

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The next night, Xue Jin met the dark night six-winged falcon again and was informed of everything that had happened.

“Zi Yun...to think that it was him...”

Xue Jin felt somewhat lost. Zi Yun was one of the Black Glory Sacred Hall’s twelve stewards and a powerful Heaven Ascension expert. Even Xue Jin did not dare to claim that he could defeat Zi Yun!

However, such a powerful expert had become a traitor...

Xue Jin did not understand what was going on.

How did a piece of information that concerned Lin Xun make Zi Yun betray Black Glory Sacred Hall?

Chapter 284 The Final Exam

Xue Jin was lost in thought for a long time. In the end, he let out a soft sigh.

According to the instructions, he had to tell Lin Xun about this matter and was not allowed to help.

Xue Jin had a strong feeling that there was no way Lin Xun was going to back down once everything was revealed!

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Three days swiftly passed.

Lin Xun remained unaware that a dark night six-winged falcon had landed in his little courtyard three nights ago.

Neither did he know that news of his identity had already caused a fierce hidden current to flow in the far away Forbidden City.

His thoughts were fully focused on the provincial exam and his body was now fully recovered after three days of recuperation.

Lin Xun was quite happy to discover that after the grueling battle of the third round, his mastery of the Nine Heavenshaking Destruction Art had reached the Inkling level and had begun to advance toward the Elemental level.

The Elemental level consisted of discovering the subtleties of a technique. Only after gaining comprehension of a technique's essence and secrets would a cultivator become capable of bringing out the technique's full power.

It was early in the morning. After washing up, Lin Xun walked out of the room into the courtyard.

Today was the final round of the provincial exam. Whether or not he could successfully obtain the provincial exam certificate would depend on today's battle!

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Haze Academy.

A sea of heads bobbed, creating a scene of unprecedented grandness.

The seats were already filled with countless figures that had their heads raised in anticipation.

After the first three rounds of the exam, only the remaining two hundred cultivators were allowed to participate in the final round.

After experiencing several rounds of screening, these two hundred cultivators would face their final challenge today. From among them, only a hundred would emerge as the victors of this provincial exam!

"The final round of the exam is finally here. I wonder who will be able to distinguish themselves and become the ultimate winner."

"Who else can it be? It has to be Lin Xun!"

"That might not be certain. Although Lin Xun's performance in the third round was extremely dazzling, there are still several top experts who can go toe to toe with him like Xue Shaolin, Yu Wengjin, Yun Zitong, and others."

"What are you smoking? Even Le Zhiyou lost to Lin Xun, how can Xue Shaolin possibly be his match?"

"Everyone should know that the final exam score will be combined with the results of the first three rounds and evaluated together to decide the grading and the first hundred participants. From Lin Xun's previous performance, he should be able to take first place if he does okay in the final round!"

“Hehe, that might not be so. The evaluation will be done by Governor Liu Wudiao and the other bigwigs. Who knows what decisions they will ultimately make?”

Various discussions flooded the arena like the tide, swirling endlessly in the air.

Lin Xun and the other 199 cultivators were already waiting in the exam area. Some were resting with their eyes closed, some were softly conversing, and some were silently lost in their own thoughts.

The final round was the crux of passing the provincial exam. If they lost here, it would not matter how well they did in the previous three rounds.

Due to these circumstances, the cultivators that had managed to come all the way here were determined to win in the final round. No one would willingly be eliminated at this critical last juncture as it would be a very terrible blow to any of them.

Lin Xun was standing alone to the side, also somewhat lost in thought.

Before he left in the morning, he had sensed that Xue Jin seemed to have wanted to say something but had ultimately opted not to.

This was rather unusual.

“Old Jin has never been one to be indecisive...”

Lin Xun pondered over the morning’s events.

However, he was soon roused from his thoughts by the sound of a bell that signified the start of the final round.

Like the previous three rounds, they would draw lots to select their opponents. The rules were simple: defeat the opponent to obtain victory.

Since only two hundred participants remained, it would be a straightforward one-on-one. The losers would be eliminated and the victors would pass the provincial exam.

Next, the chief examiner Liu Wudiao and the other bigwigs would evaluate the overall performances of the one hundred who won and decide the final rankings.

The opponent Lin Xun drew was a young man called Wang Kang. He came from a city in the southwest province called Yunjing City and he had not stood out much in the previous rounds. The fact that he had advanced to the final round was proof of his strength.

In fact, almost all of the two hundred finalists were top experts among the younger generation. None of them could be called ordinary.

However, there were rankings even amongst this elite group. Compared to a monster like Lin Xun, Wang Kang did appear rather ordinary.

When he found out his opponent was Lin Xun, Wang Kang shrieked and dropped the lot he had drawn. He looked like he had suffered a devastating blow and was utterly crushed and disappointed.

No one laughed. Instead, many of the participants looked at Wang Kang with pity. It was a huge misfortune to draw Lin Xun as an opponent.

Some also secretly rejoiced and sighed deeply in relief, elated that their opponent was not Lin Xun.

Xue Shaolin, Yu Wenjing, and Yun Zitong, who many people viewed as the favorites for the provincial exam, also revealed relieved expressions after ascertaining that they had not been matched up with Lin Xun.

Although these reactions were extremely subtle, it was evidence of how terrifying Lin Xun was in the hearts of these cultivators.

Lin Xun could not help but feel speechless when he observed this. Was he really that scary?

Lin Xun finally had a taste of what it was like to be a crane standing among chickens and the loneliness at the top. Of course, he knew that this only proved that his strength had been acknowledged in the southwest province.

In the empire's other provinces, there were definitely existences that were equal to or even more outstanding than himself.

At the end of the day, the provincial exam was merely a single exam and most of the competitors were people from the same generation. Hence, being the top dog here was nothing to be proud of.

At the very least, Lin Xun's cultivation was still at the Human Dipper stage and he still had a long way to go.

The final round of the exam had begun. The air was charged with excitement like a bomb that was about to go off.

For Lin Xun, however, it felt rather boring.

His opponent, Wang Kang, was a formidable character. Despite losing his composure earlier, Wang Kang displayed the traits of a top expert the moment the battle began. He was calm, collected, and focused.

Unfortunately, his opponent was Lin Xun. After a brief struggle, Wang Kang was subdued.

"I knew that Lin Xun would not disappoint!"

"A Human Dipper stage cultivator conquering all four rounds of the exams. You can hardly find anyone who can match him even in the past exams."

"What a monster! I didn't use to believe that there are true geniuses in this world. However, I am now a firm believer after seeing Lin Xun."

"The national exam will begin in three months. I look forward to seeing Lin Xun represent our southwest province and vie with the other proud geniuses!"

Countless cheers erupted in the venue.

On the tall white jade stage, Governor Liu Wudiao and the others looked at each other and displayed 'as expected' expressions.

After the first three rounds, they had already concluded that there was no longer anyone who could stop Lin Xun from passing the provincial exam!

Lin Xun's victory undoubtedly proved that they were right.

However, when they searched the arena again, they were stunned to find that Lin Xun's figure was missing.

He had evidently left early again.

"This kid treats the provincial exam too lightly. He leaves as he pleases as if he doesn't care about the results."

Wei Lingzhen shook his head.

"Hehe, isn't that normal? I was worried about what to do if he did another publicity stunt for Golden Jade Hall after winning."

Du Dongtu laughed heartily. "However, he is quite an eccentric person and is different from the other cultivators. It's rare to see someone like him."

Governor Liu Wudiao coldly snorted. "Hmph, it will be naive of him to think that his overall results will easily clinch him first place in this provincial exam."

Wei Lingzhen and Du Dongtu smiled. "Brother Liu, given his temperament, I feel that being first isn't important to him at all."

Liu Wudiao was stunned. After some thought, he could not help but admit that it was true. Lin Xun was different from the others. Although calling him a rebel would be too extreme, he was definitely an oddball.

Wei Lingzhen muttered, "I'm curious to know if he will participate in the national exam three months from now."

"I don't think he will miss it. However, whether he'll reign supreme there is definitely uncertain. After all, only top-tier super talents can participate in the national exam and some of them even possess Spirit Sea stage cultivation!"

Du Dongtu said, "Although Lin Xun's battle power can contend with the Heaven Dipper stage, if he encounters a real expert, his cultivation level will become his biggest weakness."

Governor Liu Wudiao instructed, "It's still too early to say such things. When the final round is over, please join me in evaluating the participants who passed."

The other bigwigs nodded.

However, all of them already held a clear picture of Lin Xun's final evaluation in their hearts.

Lin Xun hurriedly left Haze Academy and rushed straight home.

Xue Jin was leaving today and Lin Xun worried that he would disappear without saying a word. Hence, Lin Xun immediately rushed back the moment the exam ended.

Fortunately, Xue Jin was still around when Lin Xun returned. He secretly breathed a sigh of relief and grinned. "Old Jin, we've yet to have a satisfying drinking session. Shall we drink till we drop today?"

In the past, Xue Jin would have agreed without hesitation to the proposal of drinking.

However, he shook his head and said, "Kid, since the provincial exam is over, there is something I have to tell you."

He wore a complicated expression that was very different from usual.

Lin Xun's heart could not help but sink as a sense of foreboding rose within him.

Chapter 285 Determined

Haze City was filled with zest and ecstasy due to the final round of the provincial exam. The levels of noisiness and excitement in the city were at an unprecedented high.

In a certain small courtyard, the atmosphere was a little heavy.

Lin Xun was seated at a stone table as he quietly listened to Xue Jin. After which, Lin Xun was silent for a long time.

It turned out that the Dark Night Queen, Liulan Jinian, had already guessed his identity long ago.

However, Lin Xun had not expected that his identity would make one of Black Glory Sacred Hall's Heaven Ascension experts turn traitor.

This made Lin Xun realize that the enemy who had taken his Origin Aeth Artery all those years ago was more powerful and frightening than he could imagine.

Otherwise, why would the Heaven Ascension expert called Zi Yun risk everything to divulge Lin Xun's identity?

His enemies would likely be rather surprised that he was still alive, right?

Lin Xun felt unimaginably conflicted, not knowing whether he should rejoice or feel enraged. It felt as if a rock had been shoved into his chest, creating an unbearable discomfort.

Who am I?

Who is the enemy who took my Origin Aeth Artery?

These questions had plagued Lin Xun more than a few times. The only thing he was certain about was that he had not died because he had received Mister Lu's help.

Unfortunately, Mister Lu had told Lin Xun nothing. Only in their final moments before the mine prison was destroyed did Mister Lu tell Lin Xun that he would be able to find out his origins by going to the Ziyao Empire.novelnext.com

Lin Xun had originally believed that after passing the national exam and enrolling in Qinglu Academy, he would be able to use the academy's vast resources to uncover the truth.

However, he had now suddenly discovered that someone had known about his identity long ago!

Why did the Dark Night Queen not tell him earlier? Was there some other hidden detail he was unaware of?

Lin Xun did not understand why things were becoming even more complicated than he had imagined when he was about to be one step closer to the truth.

Lin Xun's long silence made Xue Jin sigh inwardly. "The Lord said that you may choose not to go to the Forbidden City. From what I can tell, that will be the wisest decision. At the very least...you will not be in fatal danger."

Lin Xun suddenly said, "Old Jin, haven't I always said that I entered the Ziyao Empire to discover my origins?"

Xue Jin frowned. "I know, but what meaning is there in learning the truth if you lose your life because of it?"

He paused for a moment and took a deep breath before he said, "You don't understand. Zi Yun's betrayal is a sign that the people who will try to stop you from reaching the Forbidden City are far more terrifying than you can imagine. If you insist on going, you will face mortal danger!"

Lin Xun replied, "Of course I understand. However, didn't you say that they will not send anyone that surpasses the Spirit Dipper stage to stop me? That is sufficient."

Xue Jin's frown grew into a scowl. "What do you know! So what if you manage to enter the Forbidden City? That's the capital of the empire! You alone will not be a match for any of those people! Bluntly put, from the power they have shown, killing a small fry like you is easier than crushing an ant!"

Lin Xun immediately chuckled. "You're wrong, Old Jin, all of this wouldn't have been necessary if all they wanted to do was kill me. They could have just dispatched people to Haze City to do the deed."

A strange gleam flashed in Lin Xun's clear, black pupils. "Moreover, I have a feeling that the reason why they are not going to directly kill me doesn't have much to do with Black Glory Sacred Hall. They seem to have other intentions."

Xue Jin was stunned. He had sensed that there was something fishy about this affair but had not expected Lin Xun to pick it up so quickly.

Lin Xun's expression grew determined. "Old Jin, I must go to the Forbidden City. There is no need for you to talk me out of it."

The determined look on the young man's face made Xue Jin hesitate for a long time. In the end, he softly sighed and gave in.

"Come, let us drink. I don't know when we'll have a chance to meet again so don't mention these mood-killing matters anymore today and let us drink till we drop."

Lin Xun displayed a dazzling smile as he retrieved a jar of liquor.

"Hmph! Drink till we drop? Let's see if you have the capability to accompany me till the end!"

Xue Jin coldly snorted, slapped open the jar, and began guzzling its contents.

Lin Xun smiled, knowing that Xue Jin had acknowledged his decision.

.....

Late at night, the curtains finally fell on the provincial exam and the one hundred passers were finalized.

Although it was over, discussions about the exam did not stop. Instead, they increased in number and intensity.

Every duel of each round was analyzed and the final exam rankings became the hottest topic in the city.

It was no surprise that the battle in the third round where Lin Xun faced five participants alone became the most well-known fight of the entire provincial exam.

Lin Xun also became the most popular contender for the number one spot in the rankings.

All of this was related to Lin Xun, but the person himself could not be bothered with it all.

Early in the morning, Lin Xun woke up with a hangover and headed straight to Golden Jade Hall to meet Gu Liang, who was super busy with the shop when he got there.

Although the provincial exam had ended, Golden Jade Hall's popularity had exploded instead of falling and huge numbers of cultivators would come to visit every day.

Lin Xun's publicity stunts had naturally played a big part in this success.

In the private room, Gu Liang excitedly described the changes that happened to Golden Jade Hall over the past few days. It was not all sunshine and rainbows, but hints of happiness were visible in his occasional frustrated lamentations and sighs.

As Lin Xun silently listened, he found out that Gu Liang had already started preparations for introducing the seven new aeth tools and had even dubbed them the golden scale series.

Before these aeth tools were sold, they would first be marked with a unique golden scale symbol and would become a specialty product that marked the rise of Golden Jade Hall.

Golden represented Golden Jade Hall while scale sounded similar to Lin and naturally represented Lin Xun.

Golden scale also sounded auspicious and was related to riches. It could signify an ordinary person receiving a golden scale and turning into a dragon.

Much thought had clearly been invested in the name which was also proof of Gu Liang's commitment to this matter.

At this point, neither Lin Xun nor Gu Liang could have foreseen how huge of a commotion the golden scale series would cause in the empire in the future. It would be like a dazzling shooting star that appeared out of nowhere and be highly sought after by countless cultivators.

Lin Xun smiled. Although he was only listening, he could hear the ambition in Gu Liang's voice. This made Lin Xun rather envious of his friend who could pour all of his drive and focus into a path he loved.

"Right, is there something you need?"

Toward the end, Gu Liang suddenly returned to his senses. He had been talking all about himself and had forgotten to ask Lin Xun why he had come.

Lin Xun casually said, "Once the provincial results are out and I've collected my certificate, I plan to leave Haze City and head to the Forbidden City. I came here to let you know."

"So quickly?"

Gu Liang was taken aback and clearly somewhat reluctant. "We've yet to even have a drink together and you're leaving?"

Lin Xun smiled. "I'd love to as well but look at Golden Jade Hall. If you're drunk, who's going to oversee everything?"

Gu Liang smiled bitterly. Indeed, he did not have any time to spare during this period. Let alone drinking, even his rest time had been compressed to the max.

"Sigh, I can't compete with you. After passing the provincial exam, you're immediately going to the grand Forbidden City to make a name for yourself. How envious."

Gu Liang sighed.

Lin Xun was too lazy to retort. He rose to his feet and bid farewell. "Go back to your work. I still have to make trips to Stone Cauldron Alms and the Rune Master Association."

Gu Liang rose to send Lin Xun off. He suddenly frowned as he watched Lin Xun disappear into the street, feeling that he seemed to be somewhat different from usual as if he was hiding something important.

However, Gu Liang soon cast the thought aside. New VIPs had arrived and he needed to receive them personally...

.....

Stone Cauldron Alms.

Mu Wansu was not around when Lin Xun arrived. He heard that she had gone to a mine to inspect the goods and would only be back half a month later at the quickest.

Lin Xun shook his head and turned around to leave. Mu Wansu was one of the few people he knew in Haze City.

Since she wasn't around, he could only wait for the next time they would meet.

Of course, that was only if he was still alive.

Lin Xun soon arrived at the Rune Master Association. After receiving a warm welcome from Chu Feng, the two had a casual chat for a long time before Lin Xun finally revealed his motive for coming.

Chu Feng knew that his day would eventually come. After all, Lin Xun had passed the provincial exam, and the combat power he possessed definitely qualified him for the national exam.

"What a pity. If not for my duties, I would definitely accompany you to the Forbidden City."

Chu Feng sighed. "It's been many years since I last returned..."

"Big Brother, I've roughly heard of your circumstances. When there's an opportunity in the future, I will help you return to the Forbidden City and demand they return what originally belonged to you."

Lin Xun's tone was serious. After what happened at the Stone Cauldron Alms celebrations, Mu Wansu had told him some of Chu Feng's past. It was then that Lin Xun finally found out that Chu Feng had been chased out of his clan and had no choice but to hide in Haze City.

"Brother, you..."

Chu Feng was immediately taken aback as emotions began churning within him. He never imagined that Lin Xun would make such a promise. Chu Feng felt deeply touched, grateful, and surprised, and was unable to speak for a time.

Lin Xun rose to his feet and grinned. "There's no need to say anything, Big Brother. It won't be too late to thank me when I get the chance to resolve this matter in the future."

He then bid his goodbyes and left.

He had seen everyone he needed to and said everything that needed to be said. Next, it was time to prepare for his journey to the Forbidden City!

Chapter 286 Arranging the Troops and Formations

Swish!

An intricate and detailed leather map was unfurled on the stone table in the courtyard.

Lin Xun picked up a rune brush and drew a red circle around Haze City before beginning to carefully inspect the rest of the map.

He had bought the map at a bookshop after leaving the Rune Master Association. On it was the detailed topography of the empire's thirty-four provinces.

Xue Jin walked over and took a glance. He took the rune brush from Lin Xun and casually traced three routes on the map. Each marked a different path from Haze City to the Forbidden City in the north.

"These are the three roads that are connected to Haze City. The west route passes through thirty-seven cities and over a hundred mountains of varying sizes with plenty of danger zones amongst them. If you choose this route, your journey will be filled with unpredictable variables.

Xue Jin spoke in a confident and experienced voice, "The east route passes through the Spirit Burial Sea. If it was another time, this would be the safest route. However, during this period every year, the Spirit Burial Sea falls into a period of turmoil filled with storms and tsunamis. Moreover, numerous savage beasts are active as well. No one dares to enter the sea during this season."

Lin Xun's gaze fell on the route in the middle. "Isn't this the shortest route to the Forbidden City?"

Xue Jin nodded. "Although there are some natural dangers and risks on this path, rune shuttles and battleships can smoothly bring you through it."

Xue Jin raised his head and looked at Lin Xun. "But I don't recommend this path because the enemy will dispatch the most forces to guard it."

Lin Xun was silent.

Xue Jin continued, "Kid, I advise you to take the west route. Although it is long, winding, and goes through several danger zones, the enemy is less likely to attack you."

In the end, Lin Xu shook his head and pointed at the middle route. "I will take this route. It encompasses over a thousand miles and unless the other side sends tens of thousands of elite soldiers, they will not be able to block it off completely."

Xue Jin frowned. "Are you thinking the most dangerous place will be the safest?"

Lin Xun shook his head. "I have a feeling that I will encounter enemy forces no matter which route I take. Since that's the case, I might as well choose the most direct route. In addition, they have already declared that they will not send experts that surpass the Spirit Dipper stage. Hence, there's no need to be overly fearful."

Xue Jin was silent for a moment before he said, "Are you really going to do this?"

Lin Xun nodded.

Xue Jin acknowledged and asked, "How do you plan to reach the Forbidden City?"

Lin Xun casually answered, "Didn't you mention that the rune shuttles can get me through the danger zones? I'll take a rune shuttle then."

Lin Xun kept the map and said, "Old Jin, can I trouble you to help me collect the provincial exam certificate in two days? I need to prepare a few toys for the journey."

Xue Jin curiously asked, "Toys?"

Lin Xun grinned. "Yes, a few murder toys that definitely won't reach your standards. However, they should work wonders on the enemy this time."

After leaving these words, he turned around and walked into the room.

When Lin Xun returned earlier, he had not only bought a map but also a huge amount of aeth resources. Over ten thousand gold coins had been spent, which was his entire savings.

For the sake of entering the Forbidden City, Lin Xun could not afford to be stingy.

"He can't be making those crossbows with great destructive power, right?"

Xue Jin felt more certain the more thought about it. No one should ever forget that Lin Xun was also an accomplished rune master!

.....

The Forbidden City.

In an old manor with a thousand years of history.

“Everyone, I invited all of you here for one thing: to stop a young man called Lin Xun from entering the Forbidden City!”

Chi Cangmei’s sharp eyes swept across the group. Her voice was ordinary but gave off an air of authority that could not be rejected.

Although Chi Cangmei was a woman, she had fierce eyes, a proud disposition, and a powerful, intimidating presence.

Of course, she did have the goods to back it all up. She was seventeen this year and was one of the direct descendants of the Chi Clan, which was one of the Forbidden City’s seven high clans. Due to her status and her Spirit Sea stage cultivation, she was often praised as the pearl of the Chi Clan’s younger generation.

There were four or five youths around Chi Cangmei. All of them had impressive appearances and powerful auras. Anyone could tell they were also noble disciples.

When they were in front of Chi Cangmei, however, these youths subconsciously hid their usual arrogance and became as obedient as lambs.

Swoosh!

Chi Cangmei unfurled a map on which several markings had been drawn. It had evidently been thoroughly analyzed by her already.

Chi Cangmei swiftly said, “There are three routes that lead from Haze City to the Forbidden City. The west route passes through thirty-seven cities...”

If Lin Xun was present, he would definitely realize that the three routes noted by Chi Cangmei were exactly the same as the ones Xue Jin has drawn!

The youths listened attentively, not daring to display any negligence.

Toward the end, Chi Cangmei raised her head and looked at everyone again. “No matter which route the target chooses, I want our men to be stationed on all three of them!”

The youths were surprised by these words. One of them could not help but say, “That seems a little...”

Chi Cangmei indifferently cut in, “You guys think I am making a mountain out of a molehill?”

The others nodded. It was only a Human Dipper youngster, was there really a need for them to dispatch so many people?

If they did, the amount of manpower and resources would be insane. The Spirit Dipper stage cultivators alone would be over a thousand!

Chi Cangmei did not say anything else. She retrieved a leather scroll and passed it to them. “This is some information about the target. You guys can take a look.”

The youths immediately crowded together, opened the scroll, and began to read. Only a few seconds later, their expressions changed one by one, turning bewildered and uncertain.

Toward the end, some of them were unable to hold back gasps as shock flowed out in their eyes.

The scroll recorded various feats Lin Xun had done in Haze City. There was the bloody rainy night assassination, the apex duel against Huang Jianchen, and, most importantly, it was clearly recorded that Lin Xun was one of the successful graduates of Blood Kill Camp!

Every piece of information proved that the young man called Lin Xun was an extremely formidable character!

One of the youths softly sighed and said, "I never imagined that a fifteen-year-old Human Dipper youth would possess such powerful combat ability. To think that even that madman, Huang Jianchen, lost to him. He is indeed someone who cannot be underestimated."

"The most frightening part is that he is one of the successful graduates of Blood Kill Camp! Those people are cold, ruthless, and cunning. They are not only adept at assassination but also experts at self-preservation. These graduates are no different from monsters."

Everyone displayed solemn expressions. The identity of a Blood Kill Camp graduate made them reevaluate their opinion of Lin Xun.

"However, no matter how amazing Lin Xun is, his cultivation is still at the Human Dipper stage. In addition, he's only one person. There are less taxing methods available to stop him from entering the Forbidden City."

One of the youths still believed that Chi Cangmei's arrangements were excessive.

Before she could say anything else, the doors were pushed open, and a thin, frail man in blue with a waxy yellow complexion walked in.

"Xu Qianjing! Why are you here?"

The group of youths displayed shocked expressions at the sight of the man as if they could not believe he was there.

Xu Qianjing was a genius from Qinglu Academy's God Stratagems Department. He was a brilliant strategist with unmatched intuition, calculation ability, and tactical intelligence.

Even in a place like the God Stratagems Department where many amazing generals were born, Xu Qianjing was someone that no one dared to ignore!

Last year, Xu Qianjing faced over a hundred expert strategists from the same generation in Qinglu Academy's tri-yearly god stratagems face-off and ultimately clinched the title of champion, becoming the God Stratagems Department's youngest Master Tactician!

How could the group not be shocked to suddenly see such a prodigious genius appear?

"No need to be surprised. I invited Qianjing."

Chi Cangmei casually explained before inviting Xu Qianjing to take a seat. She personally poured him a cup of tea, displaying a respectful attitude.

In other words, only someone like Xu Qianjing was worthy of such treatment from her!

"I just received news that Lin Xun has passed the southwest district provincial exam and has been awarded first place."

Xu Qianjing threw out a bomb the moment he was seated, causing the others' hearts to shake as their expression changed indeterminately.

There were only thirty-four provinces in the empire. It was easy to imagine how powerful Lin Xun was to be able to become the champion of the southwest provincial exam.

Even Chi Cangmei could not help but be a little taken aback. "Is he still at the Human Dipper stage?"

This was a key question!

Xu Qianjing nodded. "The provincial exam results cannot be faked. According to the information I've received, in the third round of the exam, Lin Xun single-handedly defeated four Earth Dipper experts and a Heaven Dipper expert, none of whom were your average cultivator. The fact that Lin Xun achieved this feat proves that his current combat power can more than match a Heaven Dipper expert. He is an outstanding young expert."

Although his complexion was waxy yellow, his eyes were extremely clear as if they could peer through the sky and see everything in this world.

His voice was gentle and calm like a soothing spring breeze. It also gave off a sensation of unshakable confidence that would make anyone submit.

When everyone heard what he said, however, their expressions could not help but change once more!

Chapter 287 Trespassing into the City Lord Residence

After being shocked for a few brief moments, even the young man who had felt Chi Cangmei was making a mountain out of a molehill did not voice any more objections.

Chi Cangmei asked, "Qianjing, how do you think we should do this?"

Xu Qianjing thought about it for a moment and said, "I need to know what forces and resources are available."

Chi Cangmei answered without hesitation, "We have two thousand elite cultivators who were chosen from the numerous factions under the Chi Clan. They consist of three hundred Heaven Dipper experts, five hundred Earth Dipper experts, and one thousand two hundred Human Dipper experts."

"We also have six new Purple Hero Battleships and sixteen batches of crossbows bought from the Divine Workshop. Each batch is a different type and consists of one hundred crossbows."

"Besides this, there is also military gear and medicine worth fifty thousand gold coins."

Several people could not help but gasp. Although they knew that Chi Cangmei was determined to complete this mission, they had not expected her to prepare such an alarming amount of manpower and resources.

Two thousand elite cultivators!

Six new series Purple Hero Battleships!

Sixteen different types of crossbows!

Last but not least, fifty thousand gold coins worth of military gear and medicine!

Such power and resources would be more than enough to deal with a Spirit Sea expert, let alone a Human Dipper youth!

From this, it was clear how highly Chi Cangmei regarded Lin Xun. This made the other youths realize that his origins were likely far more extraordinary than they had imagined. Why else would the Chi Clan invest so many resources?

Xu Qianjing's expression remained unchanged as his clear eyes swirled in thought. After a long time, he finally said, "It's not enough. I need a group of wind shadow hawks to work as scouts and maintain surveillance of the target. Additionally, they will be used to establish an information network that will report all of the target's movements as quickly as possible."

"Besides this, I need detailed information about the two thousand elite cultivators."

Chi Cangmei pondered for a while and agreed to his conditions.

Xu Qianjing looked toward the group of youths and asked, "May I ask who these friends are?"

Chi Cangmei explained, "They are my friends. They will work as your assistants in this mission."

Xu Qianjing nodded, rose to his feet, and said, "I owe the Chi Clan a debt and will definitely do my best to fulfill this mission. However, allow me to say this first. I will bear no responsibility if the mission fails."

With these words, he pushed open the doors and left.

"He has no manners!"

The other youths' expressions could not help but darken at Xu Qianjing's rude and unfriendly attitude.

Chi Cangmei, however, appeared unconcerned. She waved her hand and said, "That's just how Qianjing is. Since he has agreed, he is definitely confident of completing the task."

One of the youths sullenly said, "But his attitude is terrible."

Chi Cangmei indifferently said, "You can act the same if you are as capable as him. If that was the case, I guarantee that I would respect you as much as him."

The youth's expression turned rigid and he immediately shut his mouth. No matter how unsatisfied he was with Xu Qianjing, he knew that he was far from comparable to the young Master Tactician from Qinglu Academy.

"Alright, you guys shall assist Xu Qianjing from now onwards. No matter who you are, you must do your best to follow his instructions and cannot show any dissent. Otherwise, don't blame me for being merciless if your negligence leads to problems."

A chilling light flashed in Chi Cangmei's clear, blade-like eyes, causing the youths' hearts to shiver, not daring to meet her gaze.

.....

Two days later.

Xue Jin left the courtyard and headed to the City Lord's Residence.

The provincial exam results were out and it was to no one's surprise that Lin Xun was awarded first place.

Xue Jin's task was to help Lin Xun collect the provincial exam certificate. Only with the certificate would he be able to participate in the national exam three months later.

While walking along Haze City's busy streets, discussions about the provincial exam results could be heard everywhere. Despite the varying topics, almost all of them would mention Lin Xun's name.

His various performances in the provincial exam were vividly retold, occasionally drawing gasps of amazement, envy, and admiration.

This was the power of fame.

Lin Xun had become a shining superstar in the southwest province who was known by almost everyone and had garnered much attention.

Xue Jin could not help but sigh as he listened to these discussions. It had been less than a year from the time Lin Xun had first stepped into Haze City as an unknown person, and it was just miraculous how everything had transpired.

Xue Jin impishly imagined what kind of expression these Haze City cultivators would show if they discovered that their Great Master Xun was actually Lin Xun.

Today was the ranking announcement day where the rankings of the provincial exam would be officially revealed.

A huge crowd was already gathered in front of the City Lord Residence. The place was so tightly packed that even water would be unable to seep through. Nearly all of them were here to admire the great cultivators who had passed the exam.

Today, all one hundred passers would come to the City Lord Residence to collect their provincial exam certificate.

For those who could not enter Haze Academy to watch during the provincial exam, this was undoubtedly an excellent opportunity to catch a glimpse of these cultivators.

"Where's Lin Xun? Why hasn't he appeared yet?"

"Yeah, I've been waiting here since last night because I wanted to find the best spot to see what the champion of the provincial exam looks like. However, even though most of the others have already appeared, Lin Xun is still missing."

"Hmph, he might be putting up airs. Who wouldn't be proud of claiming first place in the provincial exam?"

“Bastard! I’ll fight whoever dares to say anything bad about my idol Lin Xun!”

Amidst the noisiness, Xue Jin’s figure appeared in front of the City Lord Residence, and he could not help but be slightly stunned at the magnificent scene.

After some thought, he moved forward.

Although he made no special movement, the crowd before him parted as if pulled apart by a mysterious invisible force, allowing Xue Jin to pass through. The people who had been shifted appeared completely oblivious.

It was an amazing and wondrous power.

When he arrived before the entrance, however, he was discovered by a scholarly man. The man immediately frowned and shouted, “Stop, this is the City Lord Residence. All trespassers will be killed!”

The scholarly man was Ruan Lingdu and was an advisor to Governor Liu Wudiao. Of course, Ruan Lingdu also had another identity: he was a cultivator under the employ of the Forbidden City Chu Clan.

During the Stone Cauldron Alms hundred year celebration, Ruan Lingdu had attempted to humiliate Chu Feng but it had ultimately backfired, causing him to humiliate himself instead.

Of course, Xue Jin was unaware of all this. The rude shout made him frown and he said, “I am here to help Lin Xun collect his provincial exam certificate.”

Ruan Lingdu’s expression darkened. “How arrogant of him. Isn’t he being far too rude in not personally coming on the day of the results announcement?!”

Xue Jin patiently explained, “He’s unavailable at this time. Friend, I hope that you can look past it.”

Ruan Lingdu icily chuckled. “No. The City Lord Residence has its rules. How can exceptions be made so easily? Moreover, what proof do you have that you’re here to collect the certificate on Lin Xun’s behalf? What if you’re a fraud with other intentions?”

The mention of Lin Xun made Ruan Lingdu recall the terrible memory of the Stone Cauldron Alms hundred year celebration. If not for Lin Xun, how could Chu Feng have any right to be one of the VIPs?

The incident had left Ruan Lingdu with a bitter taste in his mouth and a stomach full of anger. Since Lin Xun did not personally come to collect his certificate, Ruan Lingdu did not mind making things difficult for Lin Xun’s proxy.

“In other words, you’re not planning on letting me enter?”

A lazy smile formed on Xue Jin’s rugged face.

Ruan Lingdu frostily retorted, “What do you think?”

Xue Jin displayed his pearly-white teeth and said, “I already tried to be respectful. Don’t blame me for what happens next.”

Ruan Lingdu’s expression darkened and he furiously said, “Who do you think you are? Come, men, capture this ignorant fool who seeks to humiliate himself!”

Before the echo of his voice could fade, Xue Jin grabbed Ruan Lingdu by the neck and lifted him into the air.

Piak piak piak!

At the same time, a series of slaps ruthlessly struck Ruan Lingdu's face, knocking several teeth loose and making his cheeks swell like a red tomato as he shrieked in pain.

The crowd gathered in front of the City Lord Residence could not help but gasp in horror. Who was this arrogant fellow?

Some of the sharper individuals in the crowd were even more shocked. Ruan Lingdu was a powerful expert but was currently being grabbed by the neck like a powerless chicken, unable to put up any struggle. Didn't this mean that the towering man was an extremely terrifying expert?

Several guards charged at him but were sent flying by an invisible force before they could get close.

For a time, it was complete chaos in front of the City Lord Residence.

"I've killed countless trash like you. This time, for Liu Wudiao's sake, I'll spare your pathetic life!"

Xue Jin casually flung Ruan Lingdu aside like trash. Despite causing such a huge commotion, he swaggered into the City Lord Residence as if nothing had happened, leaving behind a mess of chaos, shock, and terror.

"Who the hell was that? I can't believe he dares to forcefully trespass into the City Lord Residence."

"I heard that he's here to help Lin Xun collect his certificate. Damn, I thought he was just some errand boy. Who could have imagined that he would be so formidable?!"

"This is crazy. How can Governor Liu Wudiao let him off after creating such a huge ruckus?"

"Most definitely. If he doesn't pay the price, it will be very difficult to leave the City Lord Residence with Lin Xun's certificate."

"Something big is certainly going to happen next!"

Chapter 288 Until We Meet Again

In the official business hall of the City Lord Residence.

Liu Wudiao, Wei Lingzhen, Du Dongtu, and the other bigwigs were currently seated in the hall.

Below them stood the cultivators who had passed the provincial exam. All of them wore solemn expressions and did not dare to make too much noise.

The atmosphere was rather suffocating. Liu Wudiao and the other bigwigs were already showing slight signs of displeasure while the cultivators' expressions had already become impatient and annoyed.

They were all waiting for Lin Xun.

However, there was still no sign of him until now, making them feel rather unhappy.

Traditionally, the provincial exam certificates were given out according to the rankings, starting with first place.

It was a custom to show that the empire valued these cultivators and also a form of glory for each of them.

Thus, the certificate award ceremony could not begin without Lin Xun, leaving everyone in the hall with no choice but to wait.

One of the bigwigs could no longer hold back and spoke out to show his dissatisfaction. "Lin Xun is too sloppy. I can't believe he's so late for such an important event. Is the provincial exam certificate so unimportant to him?"

"Hmph, never mind about his antics during the provincial exam. After all, they're still young and it's understandable for them to have some pride. However, the provincial exam results are already out but we are all waiting here for a single person. This is too much."

"When he comes, I will definitely not let him off lightly!"

"Right, we also have to teach him a lesson that he will not forget. This is all for his own sake."

The other bigwigs also chimed in and vocalized their dissatisfaction with Lin Xun.

The exam passers inwardly gloated as they waited to see what would happen to Lin Xun.

They were also frustrated from waiting and sorely wished to see the bigwigs teach Lin Xun a lesson and make him suffer.

Governor Liu Wudiao said, "Everyone, don't get too agitated. Regardless of what reason he has, Lin Xun is in the wrong this time. I will make sure to reprimand him when he arrives."

A guard suddenly rushed into the hall, still anxiously sweating as he reported, "Governor, someone has barged into the City Lord Residence!"

Everyone was shocked after hearing this. Barging into the City Lord Residence at such a time? Isn't that courting your own death? Does the trespasser think all the bigwigs here are just for show?

"What's going on?"

Liu Wudiao frowned.

"The trespasser claims he is here to collect the certificate on Lin Xun's behalf. After being rejected by Lord Ruan, the trespasser went on a rampage..."

Before the guard could finish, someone unhappily snorted, "Lin Xun is too much. Never mind if he didn't come himself, I can't believe he dared to send a troublemaker. He's clearly showing no respect for any of us!"

The other bigwigs frowned as well, unable to understand what the hell was Lin Xun doing.

The exam passers' eyes had widened in shock. Who is this crazy bastard who has the balls to barge into the City Lord Residence? Does he think he can do as he pleases just because he mentioned Lin Xun's name?

Anger flared in Liu Wudiao's heart. He abruptly stood up and said, "I want to see which arrogant bastard dares to barge into my territory!"

A terrifying presence surged from his body, causing the atmosphere to solidify as an oppressive pressure flooded the hall.

A bold, rough-sounding chuckle sounded from outside the hall. "Please forgive me for making everyone wait."

A towering figure strode in, accompanied by a suffocating pressure. Everyone felt as if they were looking at a majestic walking mountain instead of a man.

The cultivators' bodies turned cold, causing them to tremble as their hair stood on end.

Several bigwigs' expressions changed slightly. Their pupils shrank as they stood up from their seats.

Only Liu Wudiao, Wei Lingzhen, and a handful of others had stunned looks as if they were unable to believe their eyes.

The towering mountain-like figure was naturally Xue Jin. His gaze scanned the hall before pausing on Liu Wudiao as he grinned and said, "Liu Wudiao, it's been so many years since we've last met. You've become increasingly adept at displaying your governor's authority."

"Why is it you?"

Liu Wudiao's aura immediately withdrew. He looked at Xue Jin with a complicated mix of surprise, wariness, and a sliver of repulsion.

"Why can't it be me?"

Xue Jin also withdrew his aura and returned to his usual lazy appearance.

In an instant, everyone realized that the towering man was acquainted with Governor Liu Wudiao!

Liu Wudiao sighed helplessly. "It's been years since we last met but you still act the same. Let me guess, you're here to fight me again?"

The crowd could not help but gasp. Governor Liu Wudiao was one of the few peak Heaven Ascension stage experts in the southwest province. His words implied that he had fought the towering man more than once!

Xue Jin laughed. "I'm not here to fight. It's meaningless for us to fight anyways and it would be more entertaining to slay a few pieces of trash from the Darkness Race. I came to help Lin Xun collect his provincial exam certificate."

Everyone finally returned to their senses. So he was the trespasser!

For a time, numerous people looked uneasy as if they were unable to believe what they had just heard. They had thought Lin Xun had made a critical mistake by sending a proxy to collect his provincial exam certificate. Moreover, the proxy had acted above the rules and unreasonably barged into the City Lord Residence.

Who could have imagined that the proxy sent by Lin Xun would turn out to be a peerless expert?!

Even Liu Wudiao could not help but be taken aback. After a long time, he sighed and said, "No wonder. I should have guessed this long ago but I did not expect that it would be you."

Xue Jin chuckled and did not say anything.

Liu Wudiao no longer hesitated and passed Lin Xun's certificate to Xue Jin. "Take it."

"Thanks, I'll grab you for a drink if there's a chance in the future."

Xue Jin's gaze swept across the surroundings and he smiled. "Everyone, I'm an uncultured person who isn't good with etiquette. If I've offended anyone earlier, I hope that you may find it in your heart to forgive me. Alright, I shan't waste any of your time anymore. Goodbye."

He turned around and left without looking back.

Liu Wudiao did not stop Xue Jin. After he left, Liu Wudiao returned to his seat and frowned. "I can't believe he willingly stayed there."

"After the Cangshan Blood Sunset battle, I heard he left with grave injuries and never appeared again. I did not expect that he..."*novelnext.com*

Wei Lingzhen sighed as he seemed to recall the past.

The other bigwigs were confused and puzzled. They could not help but ask, "Who was that?"

The cultivators in the hall were also curious to find out.

Liu Wudiao thought for a brief moment before he transmitted to the other bigwigs. "I shall not reveal his origins. You only need to know that the Black Glory notices that were received by the noble factions in the city should be related to him."

A member of the Black Glory Sacred Hall!

The bigwigs instantly arrived at the same conclusion, causing their hearts to shake as their expressions turned complicated. Lin Xun had sent an expert from Black Glory Sacred Hall to collect his provincial exam certificate? What relationship did he have with Black Glory Sacred Hall?

Although the exam passers did not hear the transmission, they could tell from the earlier events that the towering man was a formidable character.

The thought of Lin Xun using someone like that as an errand boy made their minds and hearts churn wildly.

It was at this moment that Ruan Lingdu hurriedly stumbled into the hall. His face was swollen like a pig's and his hair was in a mess, making him look extremely miserable. "Milord, why did you let that criminal go?"

Numerous people looked at him strangely. This fellow still didn't understand the situation after being beaten up by Xue Jin...

How pitiful!

Ruan Lingdu had originally been outraged but he immediately realized something was wrong from the strange gazes everyone was giving him. He stammered, "Milord, is that person..."

Liu Wudiao nodded.

Ruan Lingdu felt as if he had been struck by lightning. He also felt incomparably embarrassed and wished that a hole would suddenly open up and swallow him. He had not only offended someone he could not afford to but had also suffered a great humiliation!

This is all that blasted Lin Xun's fault!

If Chu Feng found out, he would be overjoyed to know that Xue Jin had unintentionally taught Ruan Lingdu a painful lesson.

If Lin Xun knew that all of the blame had been placed on him because of this affair, he would definitely grumble that it was unfair.

However, even if Lin Xun did find out, he would not care too much. He was about to leave Haze City so there was no reason to bother about such silly things.

On the second day after Xue Jin brought back the certificate, Lin Xun finally finished making his toys and walked out of the room.

He had already packed his belongings and was prepared to leave immediately for the Forbidden City!

.....

Outside the city gates.

Lin Xun earnestly said, "Old Jin, I don't know when we'll meet again but if you encounter any problematic situations in the future, let me know and I'll definitely help if I can."

Xue Jin disdainfully replied, "Hurry up and get lost. We can talk about such things after you have the power to defeat me!"

Lin Xun unhappily said, "This is our farewell, can't you be a little more serious?"

Xue Jin said, "No."

Lin Xun rolled his eyes, turned around, and began walking away.

"Kid, I won't avenge you if you die. So you'd better not die."

Xue Jin's lazy voice sounded from behind, causing Lin Xun's expression to twitch. Annoyed, he waved his hand and said, "Don't worry, I won't die before you, so you'd better not die before me!"

Xue Jin roared with laughter.

Only after Lin Xun's figure disappeared into the horizon did Xue Jin finally withdraw his smile. He retrieved a bottle of liquor, downed it in a single gulp, and let out a long sigh.

"A man gives his all, never backs down even in the face of a thousand enemies, is always ferocious and fearless in battle, and views death as the return...kid, till we meet again!"

Xue Jin drunkenly walked forward amidst his mumbling. He had no intention of returning to Haze City. After all, his mission was already complete.

Chapter 289 Blood Wolf Plains

The sky grew darker as dusk approached.

A lone figure was traversing through the plains. His posture was straight and his long hair had been casually pulled behind his head, revealing a defined and handsome face.

A simple black blade and a sinister great bow that seemed to be made from bones were slung across his back

This person was naturally Lin Xun.

He had been traveling alone since leaving Haze City.

Lin Xun had camped in the wilderness for the past two days and did not encounter any danger besides a few foolish wild beasts.

Despite this, he did not dare to be careless. The enemy this time was from the Forbidden City and was so powerful that they even made a powerful expert from Black Glory Sacred Hall turn traitor. Since they intended to stop him from entering the Forbidden City, they would definitely be sending their most elite forces.

To ensure that he would be ready for battle at any time, Lin Xun made sure the Flowing Light Blade and the mysterious No-Nonsense Bow were easily accessible.

Meanwhile, he also maintained a unique pace when traveling to conserve his energy as much as possible.

These were techniques he had learned from Blood Kill Camp. Although they seemed insignificant, they would reveal their true value when he encountered danger.

Under the setting sun, Lin Xun's figure flitted through the foliage like a wisp of smoke. It was almost impossible to detect him unless someone looked closely.

It's been two days. The enemy should have already sensed my presence...they might have already set ambushes on the road ahead.

Lin Xun thought as he traveled.

According to the map, this plains was known as the Blood Wolf Plains and encompassed a huge area of over a hundred square miles. Blood wolf packs were often spotted in the area, hence the name.

For Lin Xun, the blood wolf packs were of little threat, but the plains were very dangerous. The terrain was too flat and there was no place to hide beside the grass, making it very easy to be spotted.

However, there was nothing else he could do. Lin Xun needed to pass through Blood Wolf Plains to reach the Forbidden City and the enemy only needed to dispatch a few scouts to discover him.

Oh?

Lin Xun suddenly caught sight of what resembled a black dot high in the sky. Due to the distance, he could not get a proper look.

He immediately frowned. From what he knew, the enemy would not dispatch cultivators above the Spirit Dipper stage. This meant that Spirit Sea experts that had the ability to fly could not appear.

Hence, it could be concluded that even if the black dot was a cultivator, it could not have been dispatched by the enemy.

By this time, Lin Xun had already familiarized himself with the situation in the Blood Wolf Plains and knew that the native birds and other flying creatures were only able to reach altitudes of a thousand feet. However, the black dot was at an altitude of at least ten thousand feet!

As such, he concluded that the black dot was not from the Blood Wolf Plains.

Lin Xun thoughtfully remarked, "Interesting."

Although Lin Xun still did not encounter any danger, he did not relax but instead grew increasingly vigilant.

Because the night was about to arrive!

The night was always the best natural environment for an assassination attempt. If the enemy wanted to set up an ambush, there was no way they wouldn't utilize this unique environment.

The night eventually engulfed the sky, leaving the Blood Wolf Plains in pitch-black darkness. Mournful ghost-like wolf howls could occasionally be heard far away, making the atmosphere extremely eerie.

Rustle~~

The night breeze blew across the grass, making it ripple like waves. The rustling noises made it sound as if lonely ghosts were swishing about in the darkness, adding a strange, sinister feeling to the atmosphere.

Lin Xun stopped advancing. It was too dangerous to travel at this time.

He chose a spot with thick grass and took out a bronze disc-like object.

It was called an alarm device that had sixteen rune arrays carved onto it. It was powered by aeth stones and, when activated, it sent out an invisible energy pulse.

Within a hundred feet radius, any cultivator who approached would break the invisible energy pulse and alert the user.

The most amazing part was that the invisible energy pulse was very faint and undetectable by cultivators below the Heaven Ascension stage.

The only downside was its high consumption rate of aeth stones. As such, Lin Xun would never use it under ordinary circumstances.

This was one of the trinkets Lin Xun had made before leaving Haze City and it could not be bought on the market.

After setting up the alarm device, Lin Xun sat down and began to meditate.

His cultivation had long reached the perfect Human Dipper stage and he fully possessed the potential to attack the Earth Dipper stage.

However, Lin Xun was not in a hurry. His current cultivation was akin to a cup of water that had been filled to the brim. When the water overflowed, his cultivation would naturally ascend and there was no need to force anything.

This natural ascension method would not only dig out a cultivator's greatest potential but also give the cultivator a strong foundation that far surpassed his or her peers!

Under the night sky, Lin Xun's expression was serene like the water in an old well. His aura was akin to a sheathed sword, ready to strike at the right opportunity.

On the surface, no energy undulations of any sort were visible. Inside his body, however, a vast sea of dipper power boiled vigorously and gave off an illusory azure-blue glow as it was continuously refined by Storm Grinder.

Less than two hours later, Lin Xun's heart suddenly throbbed. He immediately stopped cultivating and opened his eyes.

The invisible energy pulse from the alarm device had begun to disintegrate.

"So they've come..."

A cold light flashed in Lin Xun's black eyes. He noiselessly rose to his feet and retrieved the alarm device. With the bow on his back, he began crawling through the thick grass like a calm and alert panther as his mind-sea spread out like a ripple.

In the black ink-like darkness, several figures had appeared a hundred feet away. They slowly advanced without making any noise like ghosts from hell.

However, these nearly unnoticeable figures were clearly picked up by Lin Xun's sharp senses.

Five, ten, twenty...

Lin Xun calmly identified that there were a total of thirty cultivators closing in on him from all directions.

They were dressed in black and had covered their faces. Their auras were stable and their movements were coordinated, indicating that they were well-trained.

However, Lin Xun remained as cool as ice. The only thing he did not understand was how they had found him.

If he did not figure this out, the enemy would be able to home in on him like sharks that had smelt blood no matter where he went or hid.

However, this was not the time to think about such things.

Lin Xun immediately drew the No-Nonsense Bow and gently pulled the blood-red bowstring with his fingertips.

The No-Nonsense Bow was a mysterious aeth weapon that he had obtained by chance. When used, a cold, indifferent, and extremely terrifying aura would surge out from within the bow.

Lin Xun's thoughts and feelings seemed to vanish as he entered a unique state of absolute calm.

At the same time, the surroundings seemed to change around him. The sound of the wind, insects, air flow, breathing of the enemies...everything had turned incomparably clear.

Lin Xun instantly locked onto one of the cultivators. His aura was the strongest and was clearly their leader.

His fingers released the bowstring without any hesitation and a mysterious flowing-water-like light rose from the white bone bow. In an instant, an invisible aeth arrow soundlessly pierced through the air and disappeared into the night.

Thud!

A hundred feet away, one of the advancing cultivators suddenly felt a pain in his neck. In the next instant, his entire body was blown away. He landed on the ground and did not rise again.*nOvelNext.com*

“Big Brother!”

An alarmed cry tore through the night as someone rushed over, only to find that their ‘Big Brother’ was already dead. His vacant eyes bulged from their sockets and there was a bloody hole in his throat. His expression was still frozen in terror and confusion as if he did not dare to believe what had just happened.

A confused voice sounded from the darkness, “What’s going on?”

Before the person could reply, cultivators at different locations began to drop one after another before they could react. Their throats were pierced by aeth arrows, instantly killing them amidst spurts of blood.

The attacks happened too quickly. None of the cultivators could even scream before they died.

The sudden scene immediately caused everything to descend into chaos.

“Shit! The target has already discovered us!”

“The situation has changed, kill him!”

“Quick! We can’t give him any time to shoot again!”

Loud shouts rang out as figures charged out from different locations on the plains and dashed toward Lin Xun.

By this time, Lin Xun had already put away the No-Nonsense Bow and pulled out the Flowing Light Blade. Despite the relatively close distance, he had used the bow to catch them off guard. Since the enemy had now responded, he could only change his strategy.

“Kill!”

For cultivators, a hundred feet could be crossed in an instant. A cultivator soon arrived and swung his sword from overhead.

Shiingg~

Sword light flashed, tearing apart the pitch-black darkness of the night.

Lin Xun did not dodge and instead charged forward with his blade. His black eyes were filled with endless cold indifference.

Bang!

The Flowing Light Blade shattered the sword light in a flash. Lin Xun took the opportunity to advance and beheaded the enemy with a swing of his blade.

By the time he completed this, four or five cultivators had arrived from different directions, clearly intending to surround him.

With a cold snort, the Flowing Light Blade flew through the air and rapidly hacked out numerous illusory blade-shadows.

Chapter 290 Overwhelming

Blade light flashed!

Although it appeared simple, the blow was very profound. The blade force seemed to hack, coil, rotate, stab, and shake all at once. It constantly shifted between different forms to make it impossible to predict.

Amidst a series of muffled sounds, the attacking enemies either had their necks chopped, their chests torn open, their throats pierced, or their heads smashed. Each individual was instantly killed, splashing blood everywhere!

It was just terrifying!

These enemies weren’t pushovers. Instead, they were elites who had undergone many selections. Each had experienced a hundred battles and possessed strong combat power.

However, all of them had lost their lives to a blade in an instant. It was a bloody scene that would shake anyone's heart and soul!

Compared to the battles of the provincial exam, Lin Xun seemed to have turned into a completely different person; one that was decisive, ruthless, and merciless.

This was Lin Xun's true face in battle!

After all, the provincial exam was just an exam and not a matter of life and death. This made it impossible for Lin Xun to bring out his true self in battle.

Only at a time like this, where there were no rules to restrain him, could Lin Xun fully display everything he had learned!

Blood permeated the night air. Numerous enemies' expressions changed, frightened by the ruthless and overwhelming combat power Lin Xun had displayed.

They already knew that the target was formidable and had made preparations to surround him and attack from all sides. However, they only realized that they had still underestimated the target when the battle unfurled.

At the very start, their leader and four companions had been soundlessly assassinated.

Now, a few more companions had been killed by a single blade. This was all far too inconceivable and horrifying to them!

They even began to suspect that the target was not a Human Dipper stage youngster but a heaven-defying monster gifted in the art of killing.

Whoosh!

Lin Xun did not wait for the enemy to approach and instead dashed forward to engage them.

His figure was akin to lightning and his blade akin to a dancing stream of light. With simple, precise, and direct movements, the pair started the gruesome and bloody fight.

It was still the same Six Word Blade Art.

However, compared to the past, there was an additional indescribable sensation in his technique. It felt like it came from the great aura of nature and contained an almighty power that shook the heart.

It was related to Lin Xun's practice of the Star-Gather art. In the third trial of the Great Azure Cloud Path, the hundred battles secret realm, Lin Xun had experienced death numerous times and ultimately absorbed the strengths of a hundred experts to perfect the Star-Gather technique!

The Star-Gather art's essence had been assimilated into Lin Xun's blade dao. As a result, although every move of the Six Word Blade Art was exactly the same as before, they gave off a completely different sensation.

Of course, it couldn't be compared to the true Star-Gather art. However, the moves were clearly much stronger than before.

Shrieks soon began to fill the night sky as enemy after enemy was subdued and killed.

From start to end, no one could stop a single slash from Lin Xun!

It was no longer a fight, but a massacre. The enemy had the numbers advantage, but Lin Xun easily cut through all of them like paper.

Bang!

Lin Xun swung his blade, sending it straight through a giant hammer in one of the enemy's hands. Without any drop in speed, the blade continued along its path and hacked the other party's body into two, scattering fresh blood and innards onto the green grass below.

It could not be denied that Lin Xun was indeed too overwhelming. His combat prowess was peerless and the Flowing Light Blade in his hand was unmatched.

Under these circumstances, it was indeed very difficult for the enemy to face Lin Xun with their current combat power.

Oh?

After killing the giant hammer wielder, Lin Xun was about to continue the slaughter when his eyes suddenly narrowed as if sensing something. His body abruptly stopped in its tracks and the blade in his hand began to spin, sending out waves of blade-shadows.

Strong, brief, and rushed wind-like sounds rapidly fired off in succession around him.

Beng! Beng! Beng!

The night was suddenly lit by blinding fireworks, followed by piercing whistles as the projectiles shot through the air and rained upon Lin Xun from all directions.

Aeth crossbows!

More than a dozen of them!

The most terrifying part was that they had fired simultaneously to seal off any possible path of retreat, making it impossible to avoid!

If any other cultivator was in Lin Xun's place, he would have already begun to despair because there was nowhere to run.

Sure enough, Lin Xun did not try to evade. He had already created layers of blade-shadows to defend himself the moment he sensed something was amiss.

A strange scene appeared. When the first arrow arrived, it was gently diverted by the layers of blade-shadows, creating a small change in its trajectory.

With a thud, it shot into the ground beside Lin Xun, creating a deep hole.

This was the rotating style of the Six Word Blade Art. It sought to counter hardness with softness and used the smallest possible effort to achieve the greatest effect. As such, it boasted the magical ability of force redirection.

Thud thud thud~~~

The strange scene continued to play out. Arrows blasted the ground, sending dust and soil into the air amidst the earth-shaking booms.

At the center of it all, Lin Xun remained unscathed.

“Crap! Even that volley couldn’t kill him?”

“Damnit, he’s a monster!”

“We have to leave! The enemy is too problematic. We’ll only be throwing away our lives if we continue!”

The crossbowmen were dumbstruck by this scene. Their hearts began to shiver uncontrollably as they were unable to believe their eyes.

However, reality was telling them that all of this was real!

This realization nearly made their souls leave their bodies. There was almost no hesitation as they turned around to flee. It was too frightening. Even the arrows could not kill him. Who could possibly be the target’s match?

After neutralizing all of the arrows, Lin Xun found that all the remaining enemies were gone.

Unfortunately, he could not afford to give chase. Although neutralizing the arrow onslaught had seemed effortless, only he knew the tremendous force he had to endure to deflect each arrow.

His blood was churning erratically and all his bones shivered slightly in pain. If he did not forcibly hold it back, he would probably be coughing blood.

This was the terror of the aeth crossbows. A single flick of the mechanism was all that was needed to instantly release an almost fatal power.

At Lin Xun’s current strength, he would have been instantly killed if he had not used the rotating style to defend himself in time.

Lin Xun did not doubt this. As a rune master, he naturally understood the terror of an aeth crossbow better than other cultivators.

With a few deep breaths, Lin Xun forcibly suppressed his churning blood. He walked to one of the corpses, searched the body, and soon retrieved a half-foot-long bronze crossbow.

Divine Arm Crossbow!

Lin Xun immediately identified the weapon. It was the empire’s most common crossbow that had a shooting distance of one thousand five hundred feet and could hold up to twelve armor-piercing arrows. It shot arrows that were as swift as lightning and could kill a Spirit Sea expert if taken by surprise.

After some contemplation, Lin Xun searched through the other corpses. Sure enough, he found a dozen more Divine Arm Crossbows.

“If not for the alarm device and if all of them used the Divine Arm Crossbows...”

Lin Xun's heart turned cold and he did not dare to continue the train of thought.

The bodies also yielded some healing and recovery medicine, and equipment.

On closer inspection, both the medicine and equipment had been standardized and were of excellent quality that could not be compared to the average products on the market!

These enemies must have prepared a huge amount of resources and equipment for the operation.

"Divine Arm Crossbows...standardized military equipment and medicine...it seems that the enemy has invested a lot to deal with me..."

After some thought, Lin Xun kept his spoils and swiftly departed under the cover of the night.

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Under the same night sky.

Inside an old mansion with a thousand years of history located in the Forbidden City.

The room's setup had already been completely rearranged. At the center was a long stone table used for meetings and a giant detailed map had been hung on the wall behind the table.

Xu Qianjing was currently standing in front of the map with his hands behind his back and his clear eyes filled with focus.

Suddenly, a guard rushed in and reported, "There's news, Young Masters. The target has appeared in the Blood Wolf Plains!"

The five or six youths seated at the stone table jerked to attention with excited expressions.

They had been appointed by Chi Cangmei to be Xu Qianjing's assistants and had already grown rather impatient after waiting here for three days. How could they not feel excited after finally hearing some news about the target?

Only Xu Qianjing's expression remained calm as if he had predicted this all along.

He turned his head and waved his hand to dismiss the guard. After which, he said to the assistants seated at the table, "Since the target has appeared in the Blood Wolf Plains, he must be taking the central route to the Forbidden City."

Everyone nodded.

With a solemn expression, Xu Qianjing instructed, "I have three tasks for all of you."

"First, tell the forces stationed on the east and west routes to withdraw. They will then rush to the meeting point on the central route to await further orders."

"Second, dispatch all the wind shadow hawks to scout and monitor the target's movements. I need them to report everything as soon as possible."

"Third, deploy the six Violet Hero class battleships to Mount Tianlao and behind the Yingchou River to await further orders!"

His composed tone was filled with a certain confidence that everything was within his control. It made the assistants subconsciously nod in acknowledgment.

However, Xu Qianjing had already turned around to stare at the map on the wall. The information they had received made him faintly feel that the target was not going to be so easy to deal with.

However, this only aroused his interest. Otherwise, why else would he bother to strategize so much?

While the assistants were preparing to move, the guard suddenly hurried back into the room. He looked grave as he reported, "Young Masters, the first encirclement mission has failed."

What!?

The assistants were stunned and nearly unable to believe their ears. Barely any time had passed since the discovery of the target but a report had come in that the first encirclement mission had failed? Who would dare to believe this?