

Prodigies 341

Chapter 341 Intimidating Killing Intent

The change in Lin Dahong's expression was seen by Lin Xun, giving him a faint idea of the answer.

He did not push the issue. After all, it was clearly impossible to make Lin Dahong openly declare his stance at this juncture.

At the very least, Lin Dahong's current attitude was already relatively good because it meant the North Light Lin Clan did not share the same view as the other three.

"Young man, stop wasting time. We don't have the patience to indulge you."

Xiao Fengru icily snorted.

"If you're smart, you should understand how generous our conditions are. I advise you not to do anything foolish."

Shi Zhan was expressionless.

"My young friend, if you agree to the terms, kindly sign this contract."

With a flick of his finger, Chang Ziheng tossed a document to Lin Xun's feet as if he was throwing change to a beggar. It was an act of pure humiliation.

"How dare you!"

Lin Zhong's eyes bulged in anger. Unable to hold himself back any longer, he scolded, "You people...what kind of attitude is this?"

Xiao Fengru disdainfully said, "Old man Zhong, you're just a guard dog. Do you have any qualifications to speak?"

"Don't kick up a fuss. On account that you've looked after Mind Cleansing Peak for many years, our four clans might throw you some bones when we move back here."

Chang Ziheng laughed mockingly. *novelnext.com*

Shi Zhan murderously threatened, "Old slave, I'll take your worthless life if you dare to speak again!"

Lin Xun's eyes narrowed as he looked toward Lin Zhong. The other man's expression rapidly changed, veins bulging in his forehead as his face turned red in anger.

Unexpectedly, Lin Zhong ultimately did not lose control. His expression turned extremely dim, giving off an indescribable aura of bitterness and sorrow.

Lin Xun sighed. White Casanova Shen Jinglun, your name once shook the Forbidden City sixty years ago...what happened to you?

Xiao Fengru's, Chang Ziheng's, and Shi Zhan's expressions turned increasingly pleased when they saw this.

"Heh, this old slave is surprisingly tolerant."

"That's what makes him a good guard dog."

These venomous words made Lin Dahong's heart twist in his chest as his expression turned extremely strange.

It seemed like pity yet also anger.

"Kid, I'll ask you one last time. Do you agree or not?"

Xiao Fengru seemed to have lost her patience and pushed Lin Xun for an answer.

Shi Zhan and Chang Ziheng also looked at Lin Xun.

The atmosphere grew suffocating. The document glaringly sat at Lin Xun's feet. It felt as if all he needed to do was nod and the storm would be over.

Nodding was easy but would Lin Xun actually agree?

Lin Dahong's heart could not help but tighten as he looked toward Lin Xun.

Time seemed to stop for a moment.

The fifteen-year-old had been nothing but calm since the beginning. Even at this juncture, he did not reveal even a sliver of emotion.

His handsome and defined face gave off a sensation of stability and composure that did not match his age.

However, in the trio's eyes, it looked more like the face of someone who was waiting for death after being forced into a dead end!

In fact, they were already fantasizing about the generous rewards they would receive after returning with the signed contract!

The more they thought about it the more excited and impatient they became.

The prolonged lack of response from Lin Xun made Xiao Fengru speak again in a shrill voice. "Kid, you..."

Before she could finish, an unforeseen event occurred!

Lin Xun suddenly raised his head and revealed a faint smile before lightly waving his hand.

It was a simple nod and a simple raise of the hand.

However, the meaning behind these two actions was completely different.

Xiao Fengru, Shi Zhan, and Cang Ziheng were taken aback, unable to understand what Lin Xun's actions meant.

However, their bodies soon turned rigid as dreadful, ice-cold killing intent instantly enveloped them.

The frightening killing intent seemed to reach deep into their hearts and made their blood freeze. Their souls trembled as unprecedented panic and despair rapidly suffocated them!

Their expressions changed drastically as they finally took notice of the mountain of a man to Lin Xun's left, whose slightly shut eyes had now opened.

The man had been as silent as a statue, making it all too easy to overlook his existence. The instant he opened his eyes, however, torrential killing intent swallowed them as if they were in the presence of a primordial beast awakening from a deep slumber.

The terrifying killing intent made them feel as if an endless army was charging out from a sea of corpses and blood, causing the air to wail and space to crumble.

"This..."

"Heaven Ascension stage expert!"

"What terrifying killing intent!"

Xiao Fengru, Shi Zhan, and Chang Ziheng involuntarily shrieked. From the information they were given, Lin Xun and Lin Zhong should be the only inhabitants of Mind Cleansing Peak. How could they have possibly anticipated that the silent, towering man would be an incomparably terrifying Heaven Ascension stage existence?

Boom!

Killing intent rammed into the trio like a charging, armored cavalry unit.

Although it was only for a split second, they felt a stabbing pain in their souls which nearly caused their minds and hearts to crumble. It felt as if an invisible, divine mountain was crushing their bodies.

Soon after, the trio were forced to their knees with a groan!

Third Old Zhu had not moved an inch from start to end. All he had done was open his eyes and release his killing intent!

Hiss!

Lin Dahong could not help but gasp as his scalp turned numb.

Forcing three Spirit Sea cultivators to kneel with only killing intent?

How terrifying!

Although Lin Dahong had witnessed the power of a Heaven Ascension expert before, Third Old Zhu made them all look weak in comparison.

The perfect manner and ease in which he used his near corporeal killing intent was a feat that few could achieve in the Heaven Ascension stage!

Where did Lin Xun find such an expert?

Horror filled Lin Dahong's heart.

Lin Xun was somewhat surprised. He had called Third Old Zhu over to gauge his capabilities, but Lin Xun had not expected that Third Old Zhu would be able to force the trio to their knees without any resistance.

How could Lin Xun not be shocked by such astonishing power?

Advanced Heaven Ascension stage!

Moreover, he was not just any ordinary advanced Heaven Ascension expert but one who had been tempered by blood and fire on the battlefield!

All of this made Lin Xun finally realize how frightening Third Old Zhu's foundations were.

At the same time, Lin Xun noticed Lin Zhong's body tense imperceptibly like a lion reacting to danger by instinct.

It seemed that Lin Zhong was on guard against Third Old Zhu!

However, Lin Zhong relaxed substantially when he saw that Third Old Zhu's killing intent was only directed toward the trio and did not affect Lin Xun. Despite this, Lin Zhong's body remained tense.

As someone rich in battle experience, Lin Xun could naturally catch all of these subtle changes.

"Abominable! Little bastard, you dare to go against us? Do you wish to die?"

"Don't think for a second that having the help of a Heaven Ascension expert will allow you to do whatever you want. You're playing with fire!"

On the ground, Xiao Fengru, Shi Zhan, and Chang Ziheng's roared with enraged expressions. Being forced to kneel made them feel utterly humiliated and caused their expressions to turn incomparably ugly.

They did not believe that Lin Xun would dare to kill them. It was precisely because of this that their attitudes remained arrogant despite being forced to their knees.

Lin Xun smiled, rose to his feet, and casually said, "Third Old Zhu, keep a close eye on them. You may kill whoever dares to stand up without seeking my permission."

Third Old Zhu silently nodded.

The trio's expressions changed once more. Would he...actually dare to kill us?

While uncertainty was plaguing their hearts, Lin Xun walked forward.

He bent over slightly and gazed at the kneeling trio. "We agreed to meet at noon but you guys arrived late on purpose to challenge my patience. This is your first offense."

"After entering the hall, none of you bowed to greet me and instead acted as if you owned the place. You openly ridiculed me and did not bother restraining yourselves from start to end. That is your second offense."

As Lin Xun recounted the recent events, the trio inwardly breathed a sigh of relief as they secretly sneered.

What a childish young man, does he intend to mete out punishment on us?

What a joke!

They were from the Lin Clan's subordinate factions. It was not a hairless kid's place to judge them!

In their view, the more Lin Xun talked about these nonsense reasons, the more it proved that he did not dare to carelessly act against them!

In fact, they were already planning on finding a chance to teach him an unforgettable lesson in the future!

Lin Xun continued his monologue, "Despite knowing I am the master of Mind Cleansing Peak and the Lin Clan's sole successor, you three have committed the grave offense of going against your superior. You tried to force me to give up my authority and make me sign this contract that would betray the will of the ancestors. That is your third offense."

"Humiliating Uncle Zhong, displaying terrible behavior and horrible conduct. That is your fourth offense."

"Despite being Branch Clan Guest Stewards, you repeatedly challenged my dignity and ignored the clan rules. That is your fifth offense."

At this point, the smile on Lin Xun's lips disappeared as cold ruthlessness flashed in his black eyes.

He softly said with a slight pause after each word, "Any one of these offenses gives me sufficient reason to sentence all of you to death!"

Xiao Fengru and the others had already been forced to their knees but Lin Xun did not use the opportunity to humiliate or mock them back. Neither did he use any cruel methods to take revenge. He calmly acted according to the clan rules and not once displayed any anger. It felt very bizarre.

However, it made Lin Dahong's entire body turn cold as he experienced a never-before-felt oppressiveness.

A fearless maniac wasn't scary but a calm, indifferent, and cruel abnormality was!

That was Lin Xun's current image in Lin Dahong's heart.

However, Xiao Fengru and the others had clearly yet to realize this. After hearing everything, they became increasingly certain that Lin Xun would not dare to kill them. Otherwise, why would he need to list so many reasons?

Xiao Fengyu sneered and said, "Kid, you talk too much. Kill us now if you have the balls. If you don't, hurry up and release us!"

Chapter 342 Strong Counterattack

"That's right, do it if you have the guts!"

Shi Zhan and Chang Ziheng also sneered, their eyes filled with resentment.

The fact that mighty Spirit Sea cultivators like them had been forced to kneel made them feel extremely humiliated.

Lin Xun suddenly displayed a faint smile. "You guys guessed right. I listed all these reasons because I do not intend to kill you."

Upon hearing this, Xiao Fengru and the others turned increasingly fearless.

However, Lin Xun's following words struck them like a bolt of lightning, causing their expressions to change drastically.

"Although I will not give the death penalty, your crimes cannot be forgiven so easily. Crippling your cultivation shall be sufficient punishment."

Lin Dahong's heart violently twisted at these words.

That's so merciless! This kind of punishment is a hundred times crueler than killing them outright!

A cultivator that lost his cultivation was not just a mere cripple. He would have lost all of the power he had once relied on to survive, as well as his status and honor!

It was the most devastating blow to any cultivator.

Think about it, if Xiao Fengru and the others had their cultivation crippled, how could they continue to secure a place for themselves in their respective factions?

The more powerful a faction, the fiercer the internal competition. There was no doubt they enjoyed high status as Guest Stewards, but once their cultivation was crippled, all of their status and privileges would be stripped away!

If that happened, which faction would stupidly support useless people?

The trio clearly realized this as well. Blood drained from their faces, making them look as if their souls were leaving their bodies as panic descended upon them.

Xiao Fengru shrieked, "No! You can't do that! If you do, you will make our three clans your enemies. If that happens, things won't end well for you either!"

"Lin Xun, we did not actually want to make things difficult for you and were only complying with instructions. Please don't take it out on us."

In his panicked state, Shi Zhan basically surrendered in a trembling voice.

Chang Ziheng had been scared out of his wits and could not speak.

Their current appearances compared to their earlier arrogant attitudes made Lin Dahong thankful that he had acted as a bystander from the beginning instead of getting involved. Otherwise...

Lin Dahong involuntarily trembled, not daring to continue the thought.

Lin Xun smiled faintly. An unexplainable sensation of disgust rose in his heart as he looked at the trio's ugly faces.

"Third Old Zhu, do it."

Lin Xun waved his hand.

"You dare!"

"I'll fight you!"

Xiao Fengru and the other two finally lost it. In one last-ditch, desperate attempt, they tried to rise and take Lin Xun hostage to somehow stop Third Old Zhu.

Before they could move, however, the killing intent that had enveloped their bodies since the beginning suddenly intensified!

With loud thuds, their bodies were flattened onto the ground. The trio felt as if all of their bones were on the verge of snapping and found themselves unable to move even a finger, let alone resist.

Soon after, Third Old Zhu, who had been still and silent as a statue from the start, finally moved. With a wave of his sleeve, three black blurs shot out and entered the trio's bodies.

Plop! Plop! Plop!

The trio's faces paled, and they coughed blood. Meanwhile, their auras rapidly deflated like balloons that had been pierced.

In the blink of an eye, their eyes turned dull and cloudy while their skin lost its luster, becoming dry and wrinkled as if they had aged over a hundred years in an instant.

This was the outcome of having your cultivation crippled!

Lin Dahong watched with a blank stare as his heart violently shuddered. Lin Xun had been nothing but lukewarm since the start, making others suspect if he had any temper at all.

However, Lin Dahong finally understood that Lin Xun was more ruthless and terrifying than he had imagined!

Xiao Fengru, Shi Zhan, and Chang Ziheng seemed to have lost the will to live as they lay there with vacant expressions.

The fall from mighty cultivators to cripples was a devastating blow they could not bear.

Oftentimes, people would only realize how precious something was when they lost it.

Regretfully for the trio, they had learned this far too late.

Lin Xun was still smiling as he said, "Go back and tell your masters that I will give them two options."

"First, voluntarily submit to me and spit out all of the treasures they had stolen from Mind Cleansing Peak. On account of our familial ties, I will forgive their past crimes."

"Second, if they do not wish to submit, I will view them as traitors of the Lin Clan, treat them as enemies, and make sure to tidy up the clan on our ancestors' behalf."

Lin Xun contemplated a little before he calmly said, "I will give them three years to decide. If they are unable to make a decision after three years, I will choose for them!"

He waved his hand. "Uncle Zhong, send them off."

Lin Zhong immediately complied. He picked up the lifeless trio and left Mind Cleansing Hall.

Lin Xun sat back down and smiled as he looked toward Lin Dahong. "Clan-uncle, do you have any thoughts after watching?" *novelnext.com*

It's finally here!

Lin Dahong's heart shook. He took a deep breath in an effort to calm his emotions and answered, "I think that what you've done has completely destroyed all relations with the other three clans. Don't you think it was a little too extreme?"

Lin Xun shrugged. "I had no choice. I'm already all alone and in a dangerous and difficult position. Hence, it is impossible for me to back down. The moment I take a single step back is the moment I fall to my death."

Soon after, he chuckled in a carefree manner and continued, "Of course, you will never understand this. The master of Mind Cleansing Peak...is easy to become but very challenging to keep."

Lin Dahong's feelings were complicated. Although he did not understand Lin Xun's heart, he was certain that the youth's words were genuine.

His situation was indeed very dangerous and was akin to dancing on a knife's edge. He not only had to face numerous internal problems but also had to hide and keep vigilant against external threats!

Merely being the Lin Clan successor did nothing to change Lin Xun's predicament.

Furthermore, he was still too young and was only a young teenager.

Under these circumstances, being the Lin Clan successor was not an advantage. Instead, it was a burden that could crush him at any time!

Lin Dahong could not help but ask, "Since you've already decided to do this, why did you give them three years to think about it?"

He felt that Lin Xun was telling others that his current power and influence were still too weak and he needed three years to build up sufficient forces to counterattack. Hence, anyone who wanted to deal with him should hurry up and do so within these three years!

Due to this, Lin Dahong felt that Lin Xun's message was very unwise!

"If I did not give them a clear timeline, they would never allow me to continue monopolizing Mind Cleansing Peak for the next three years."

Lin Xun grinned. "Instead of this, why not tell them that as long as I survive the next three years, it will be my turn to consider whether I should clean up the clan on our ancestors' behalf."

Three years!

Lin Xun was confident that he would possess the power and qualifications to unite the Lin Clan within this time.

“Three years...”

Lin Dahong did not know the source of Lin Xun’s confidence. However, Lin Dahong could sense a rare boldness and ambition in the young man.

“Of course, my situation will not change much within these three years. In fact, it will probably become more dangerous. However, I am not worried.”

Lin Xun smiled mysteriously. “After all, if I were to die as Mind Cleansing Peak’s only successor, Mind Cleansing Peak would be forever lost to the Lin Clan. I believe this is the outcome the four clans absolutely do not wish to see.”

Lin Dahong’s expression changed slightly and found himself unable to reply for a time.

It was true. Mind Cleansing Peak had been empty for more than ten years but had not been taken away despite falling into such a decrepit condition. It was because the royal family’s attitude had always been clear. Only a direct descendent of Lin Daochen had the qualifications to possess Mind Cleansing Peak.

Why else would the four branch clans move out more than ten years ago?

However, if Lin Xun died, Lin Daochen’s bloodline would cease to exist.

If that happened, no matter how much the four branch clans wished to fight over Mind Cleansing Peak, they would have to first see if the royal family agreed!

Lin Xun picked up the contract from the floor that had been left behind by the now crippled trio.

“No matter how unfair these conditions are, they do not have the balls to execute me. Instead, the only thing they can do to move back to Mind Cleansing Peak and take the Lin Clan’s authority is to capture me and put me under house arrest. In fact, they will do everything in their power to make sure I do not die.”

Lin Xun carefully stored the contract and calmly said, “That is my only value in their eyes and I will make sure to remember it.”

Although his tone was calm, it made Lin Dahong realize that the other three clans’ attitudes had made Lin Xun bear a grudge!

If Lin Xun one day gained the power to unite the Lin Clan, life would become difficult for the other three clans!

Lin Dahong’s expression turned solemn. “I’ve come here as a representative of the North Light Lin Clan with a different goal from the other three clans.”

An amused smile rose from the corners of Lin Xun’s lips. “I’m listening.”

Lin Dahong confessed, “To be frank, my true aim is to personally judge what kind of person you are before deciding our next step.”

Lin Xun nodded in approval. "Very cautious, but undoubtedly also very wise."

Lin Dahong said, "We have no choice. Although we're already certain that you have direct blood ties to the Lin Clan, the North Light Lin Clan will not give a clear stance before determining what kind of person you are."

As expected.

From the visiting card and Lin Dahong's behavior, Lin Xun could tell that the North Light Lin Clan had a different opinion from the other three clans.

Although they had yet to declare their stance, they had not tried to usurp his power like the other three clans.

This is sufficient!

Lin Xun believed that as long as the North Light Lin Clan gave him a chance, he would definitely be able to give them a satisfactory answer that would make them willingly submit!

Chapter 343 Patriarch North Light

Lin Xun asked, "Clan-Uncle, are you satisfied with my views?"

Lin Dahong smiled bitterly. A long time passed before he finally answered, "I'm not sure, but it would be a lie to say I'm unsatisfied."

Lin Xun thoughtfully said, "What do you intend to do next, Clan-Uncle?"

Lin Dahong confessed, "There is no need to doubt me. You have already gained my approval. There are some matters that I will no longer hide from you."

After a pause, he continued with a serious expression, "For the time being, the majority of the North Light Lin Clan has refused to acknowledge your authority, and I believe you are also aware of the reason. You are too young and unqualified, making it very difficult for everyone to believe in you."

Lin Xun nodded. "I understand."

Lin Dahong's expression softened substantially. "However, Patriarch North Light has ultimately decided to give you a chance!"

Patriarch North Light!

The ancestor that was said to represent the North Light Clan — Lin Beiguang. He was the fifth brother of Lin Xun's grandfather, Lin Feiting, and the fifth uncle to Lin Xun's father, Lin Wenjing.

Although Lin Beiguang had handed power over to his son, Lin Huaiyuan, and had gone into seclusion, no one dared to object when he spoke out.

Lin Xun could not help but feel surprised by this. He had not expected his fifth granduncle, whom he had never met, to give him an opportunity to prove himself.

This made him realize that not everyone from the four branch clans objected to him succeeding the Lin Clan and becoming the master of Mind Cleansing Peak!

For instance, the attitude displayed by the North Light Lin Clan made them a faction he should value highly and be worth fighting for.

Lin Xun curiously asked, "What kind of chance is he giving me?"

Lin Dahong took a deep breath and answered, "It's simple. In a month, we will invite you to the North Light Lin Clan to have a duel with your clan-brother, Lin Xuefeng."

"If you win, Patriarch North Light will meet you."

"If you lose..."

Lin Dahong hesitated to continue.

Lin Xun's eyes narrowed and he smiled. "If I'm defeated, I will lose the qualifications to be acknowledged by the North Light Lin Clan, right?"

Lin Dahong forced a smile and nodded. "This is already the best outcome Patriarch North Light can get you. Although he has high status and great authority, he still has to give consideration to the opinions of the other clansmen."

Lin Xun thoughtfully said, "Although I dislike such tests and do not believe my qualifications as successor needs to be acknowledged by others, since my fifth granduncle has made the arrangements, it will be tactless of me to reject."

Lin Dahong excitedly said, "In other words, you've agreed?"

Lin Xun nodded. "I never wanted to make the branch clans my enemies. I'm naturally glad to use this opportunity to resolve any differences between us."

At this point, Lin Xun asked, "Who is Lin Xuefeng?"

Lin Dahong immediately introduced Lin Xuefeng.

It turned out that Lin Xuefeng was the son of the current North Light Clan Head, Lin Huaiyuan. According to seniority, he could be considered Lin Xun's cousin.

Lin Xuefeng was eighteen years of age and possessed great talent and comprehension abilities. He advanced to the Human Dipper stage at sixteen and cultivated a first-grade aeth power reservoir, Misty Rain Mountain. This news shook the entire North Light Lin Clan for a time, and many called him the most dazzling disciple of the clan's younger generation.

Lin Xuefeng currently possessed Heaven Dipper cultivation, and his strength had grown increasingly unfathomable.

A first-grade aeth power reservoir at sixteen and Heaven Dipper cultivation at eighteen...it seems that Lin Xuefeng is a genius who can rival the graduates of Blood Kill Camp...

Lin Xun fell into thought.

He had originally thought that since the North Light Lin Clan was arranging this 'chance,' they would not let him pass so easily.

Hence, he never expected them to send a young expert like Lin Xuefeng.

This made Lin Xun feel more relaxed instead. After all, he had never feared anyone in the Spirit Dipper stage!

However, Lin Dahong said, "I advise you not to be careless. Xuefeng has recently been in secluded cultivation to attack the Spirit Sea stage. From our estimates, he should be able to advance in less than seven days. At that time..."

Lin Xun's eyes immediately narrowed.

So that's their trump card!

Letting a new Spirit Sea stage member who was at the top of the younger generation deal with him? That was essential bullying.

The Spirit Sea and Earth Dipper stage was not merely a difference of two stages but an entire greater cultivation stage!

Most importantly, Spirit Sea cultivators could fly and wield the elements, making them capable of attacking from range and using the powers of nature!

An Earth Dipper cultivator would be at a huge disadvantage.

Upon seeing that Lin Xun had fallen silent, Lin Dahong embarrassedly said, "Although the duel does sound quite unreasonable, Patriarch North Light himself said that how could it be possible for you to succeed the clan easily? However, he is not intentionally making things difficult for you. If you survive a hundred moves, he will consider you to have passed."

Lin Xun made a noise in acknowledgment. No one could tell what he was thinking.

This made Lin Dahong feel increasingly anxious.

He did feel that the test was rather unreasonable. However, there was nothing he could do. This was the North Light Lin Clan's stance.

Lin Xun suddenly smiled faintly and said, "I roughly understand the situation. However, I have one final question."

Lin Dahong inwardly breathed a sigh of relief and hastily said, "Fire away."

Lin Xun asked, "Why are we waiting a month to begin the duel?"

Lin Dahong patiently explained, "In twenty days, Xue Feng will be participating in the national exam. That's why we are delaying it to a month later."

The national exam!

Lin Xun's heart shook as he suddenly recalled that there was such an event. Due to how busy his life had been, he had completely forgotten that there were only twenty days left until the national exam...

After sending Lin Dahong off, Lin Xun sat alone as he thought about the national exam.

His initial plan had been to leave Haze City and head for the Forbidden City to participate in the national exam.

After reaching the Forbidden City, however, he discovered that his plans could not keep up with the rapid developments. From the moment he stepped onto Mind Cleansing Peak, he had nearly no free time to cultivate or rest, let alone think about the national exam.

Lin Zhong soon returned, rousing Lin Xun from his thoughts.

Lin Xun said, "Uncle Zhong, there is a matter I need you to personally attend to."

Lin Zhong replied, "Young Master, please go ahead."

Lin Xun took out a brush and paper and wrote something before passing it to Lin Zhong. "Give this to Stone Cauldron Alms' Third Young Master Shi Yu. Tell him to spread the contents through any means possible."

Lin Zhong casually glanced at the paper, only to be stunned.

It did not contain any astonishing secrets. Instead, it held some information about Lin Xun.

The most attention-grabbing line was 'obtaining first place in the southwest provincial exam with Human Dipper cultivation.'

This was no secret in the southwest province, but it was like a bolt of thunder to Lin Zhong and shook his heart greatly.

Only now did he find out that his young master had obtained such a dazzling accomplishment.

First place in the provincial exam!

There were only thirty-four first places in the empire's thirty-four provinces and his young master was one of them!

The most shocking part was that his young master was only at the Human Dipper stage when he achieved this...

As Lin Zhong continued to read, his astonishment was quickly replaced by bewilderment. A brief recount of some of Lin Xun's current circumstances was also written on the paper.

When Lin Zhong read the words 'due to difficulties, I have no choice but to give up on the national exam this year,' his body turned rigid and his expression turned anxious.

He could not help but ask, "Young Master, you...are you really going to miss the national exam?"

Lin Xun casually replied, "I've been facing many struggles recently, and I don't have the energy nor time to think about such matters. Might as well not participate."

Lin Zhong seemed unresigned, "Young Master, it's the national exam! You...maybe you can reconsider?"

However, Lin Xun's attitude was firm. "Uncle Zhong, I'm only fifteen this year. Missing a national exam once is no big deal. It won't be too late for me to participate later after settling Mind Cleansing Peak's affairs."

There was unspeakable disappointment on Lin Zhong's face. He tried saying something more, but ultimately sighed and turned around to leave.

Lin Xun could not help but sigh as he watched Lin Zhong leave. How could he not wish to participate?

However, the reality was too cruel, leaving him no choice but to give up!

"Third Old Zhu, you've been a huge help this time. Thank you. I have nothing more for you. You may return to rest."

Lin Xun suddenly said as he looked toward the giant statue-like man, who was still standing at the very same spot.

Third Old Zhu nodded and walked towards the exit without saying a word.

When he stepped out of the hall, however, he suddenly said, "Persevering might not be a good thing, and giving up might not be bad."

His deep voice echoed in the spacious hall as his figure disappeared.

Lin Xun was taken aback before he suddenly laughed. So Third Old Zhu wasn't just a mute rock.

Lin Xun did a few quick stretches before he turned around and walked up to the third level.

Dealing with these daily affairs took up a huge amount of his time and energy. As a result, Lin Xun had to use any free time he had to train.

The opponent he was facing a month later was someone who had the qualifications to participate in the national exam and was called the most dazzling genius of the North Light Lin Clan's younger generation!**Novelnext.com**

Most importantly, he would definitely possess Spirit Sea cultivation by then!

Hence, Lin Xun did not dare to be negligent.

He plucked another root strand from the Snow Infant Jade Lotus, swallowed it, and sat down to meditate.

His figure was soon enveloped by wisps of seemingly boiling white mist, making it look as if he was in the dream world.

Meanwhile, at the West Creek Lin Clan.

There was an austere atmosphere in the clan discussion hall, making the two guards stationed outside shiver in fear as they struggled to breathe.

The three crippled Guest Stewards, Xiao Fengru, Shi Zhan, and Chang Ziheng, were trembling as they kneeled on the ground with gloomy expressions.

Chapter 344 Night Envelops the Capital

Three men were seated at the end of the discussion hall.

They were the West Creek Lin Clan Head, Lin Tianlong, the Cloud Weight Lin Clan Head, Lin Nianshan, and the Flying Peak Lin Clan Head, Lin Pingdu.

All three were formidable experts within the Heaven Ascension stage and each ruled over one of the Lin branch clans. They were individuals with great power, authority, and influence.

Today was one of the rare times when they were gathered together.

They had just heard about the events that had transpired on Mind Cleansing Peak from Xiao Fengru and never imagined that the hairless brat would reject their proposal!

The most infuriating part was that he had crippled the Guest Stewards they sent. Such arrogant behavior was basically a challenge to their dignity!

In the end, West Creek Lin Clan Head Lin Tianlong's voice thundered in the spacious hall, "A bunch of trash. Scram!"

The trio's expressions immediately turned sorrowful and pained. They listlessly climbed to their feet and dejectedly took their leave.

Sure enough, they no longer had any value after losing their cultivation and becoming cripples!

After leaving the discussion hall, all of the status and privileges they once enjoyed would be washed away by the merciless rain.

This was Lin Xun's revenge. Although he had not killed them, he had given them a fate crueler than death!

Lin Tianlong took a deep breath and said, "It seems he's intent on opposing us."

His expression was stormy and iciness flowed in his eyes, creating an intimidating sight.

"Hmph, a mere young man foolishly trying to go against us. The ignorant are truly fearless."

Cloud Weight Lin Clan Head Lin Nianshan icily snorted.

"Do the two of you have any plans?"

Flying Peak Lin Clan Head Lin Pingdu was the only one who appeared composed. "He wields the Mind Cleansing Jade Seal and controls Mind Cleansing Peak. There's not much we can do if he'd rather die than hand over the clan authority."

Lin Tianlong's and Lin Nianshan's expressions darkened at these words.

It was indeed a troublesome problem. If they killed Lin Xun, Mind Cleansing Peak would be taken back by the royal family and become forever lost to the Lin Clan.

But if they did not kill him, it would be a tall task for branch clan members like them to return to Mind Cleansing Peak, and they would never be properly recognized as the true authority of the Lin Clan!

Take now for example. Although they ruled over the branch clans, they would ultimately only be Branch Clan Heads and never the Clan Leader!

It was an important difference.

“Tianlong, you’ve always been resourceful. What’s your opinion on this?”

Lin Pingdu looked toward Lin Tianlong.

“Things would be easy if it was only the kid. However, the Heaven Ascension expert that appeared at his side makes things rather problematic.”

Lin Tianlong frowned. “We could seek help from one of our ancestors to deal with the expert, but the most troublesome part will still be the kid. If he refuses to give in, there is little we can do.”

The other two fell silent.

Their biggest headache was obtaining ownership of Mind Cleansing Peak, and Lin Xun was the only one in the world with the rights to it as its true successor.

No matter how much they wanted to deal with Lin Xun, they could not help but practice great restraint.

“However, if the direct method doesn’t work, there are always other less open options.”

A ruthless look suddenly flashed in Lin Tianlong’s eyes. “I don’t believe he’ll hide forever in Mind Cleansing Peak. Once he dares to leave, we will have thousands of ways to control him!”

Lin Nianshan’s eyes brightened. “Could you elaborate?”

Lin Pingdu seemed to understand and grinned. “Good idea. It doesn’t matter what methods we use as long as he doesn’t die. We only need to make him our puppet.”

By this time, Lin Nianshan also understood. He thoughtfully said, “There are indeed more than a few methods to achieve this. We can use poison, kidnapping, ambushing, etc. Once we have our hands on him, we can use some cruel secret arts to control his body and soul. He will become a mindless puppet that will follow our every command.”

Before he finished, Lin Tianlong and Lin Pingdu were already laughing gleefully.

Soon after, Lin Tianlong’s expression turned serious as he said, “It will be best if this stays between the three of us. Do not let anyone else know about it.”

Lin Nianshan and Lin Pingdu nodded. “Naturally.”

Each of them was the head of a powerful faction. How could people like them not understand that if this information were to spread, their reputation would take a huge hit even if they ultimately managed to obtain Mind Cleansing Peak?

After all, they were still Lin Xun’s elders and relatives from the same clan. Plotting against someone from the younger generation was not something to be proud of.

“Then we are in agreement on this matter.”

Lin Tianlong said, “Next, I hope that the two of you will dispatch your elite forces to cooperate with me and finish this mission as soon as possible. Once we succeed, it will finally be time for us to return to Mind Cleansing Peak!”

Lin Nianshan and Lin Pingdu agreed.

Lin Pingdu suddenly asked, "Right, about the North Light Lin Clan..."

"Leave them be!"

Lin Tianlong displayed a frosty expression. "Things have already reached this juncture and yet they're still hesitating and refuse to declare their stance. When we return to Mind Cleansing Peak, they'd better not think about trying to weasel their way in!"

.....

Night arrived, marking the start of the liveliest period in the Forbidden City. **Novelnext.com**

The stars in the sky and lanterns on the ground created a flowing brightness that lit up the capital.

This was the Forbidden City. When night descended, lanterns would burn in the city like fire dragons coiling in its alleys and streets. The resplendence and beauty were akin to something out of a dream.

The night was also the best time for pleasure-seeking and merry-making. It was a time for all kinds of people: gifted scholars and beautiful ladies, young masters and young maidens, poets and musicians, bigwigs looking for a thrill...

Various people opted for various types of transport such as luxurious carriages and beast-drawn vehicles. Some even leisurely walked with their own two feet as they moved through the busy streets.

In the city's central zone next to the Stone Cauldron Alms was a tall, jade-white building that seemed to reach into the clouds. It projected a screen onto the night sky.

On the screen, a dignified, graceful, and beautiful lady was reporting various news and events in the Forbidden City.

"There will be three thousand and seven hundred famous top younger generation experts participating in the upcoming national exam. The royal family will send Forever Mound King Zhao Zhuan to oversee the exam."

"This afternoon, Monk Yinian of Fullmoon Kingdom went to Qinglu Academy for a dao discussion session. He single-handedly defeated thirteen outstanding Qinglu Academy students in a row, causing quite a sensation. Little Sword Lord Xie Yutang has already personally stepped forward and issued a challenge letter to Yinian. As for how things will develop, we can only continue to keep an eye out for further news."

"Latest news from the frontlines. The Brute Water Tribe has suddenly sent out a delegation that should reach the Forbidden City in three months. Their goals are unclear, but it's rumored that the royal family has already approved."

.....

Similar to the news screens in the other provinces, the Forbidden City news screen also broadcasted the latest and hottest news.

Numerous cultivators were gathered nearby to listen, analyze, and discuss, making the vicinity appear rather happening.

Amidst the crowd, Spirit Vulture was slowly pushed along on his wheelchair by Xiaoke.

Spirit Vulture smiled and said, "We've more or less completed our task. There's still quite a hefty sum left from the sixty thousand gold coins the kid gave me. Do you want to take the chance to go do a little shopping? You should know that there's not going to be many opportunities to have such leisure time in the future after we return to Mind Cleansing Peak."

Xiaoke casually replied, "He's currently a penniless kid, I can't bear to spend his money."

"Haha, penniless? I might have to disagree."

Spirit Vulture smiled and chuckled.

A certain news report from the screen behind them suddenly drew their attention.

"I'd like to introduce a young hero today who is this year's talented champion of the southwest provincial exam."

"Our talented young hero is named Lin Xun and an especially exciting fact about him is that he took first place in the southwest provincial exam at the Human Dipper stage!"

"It's hard to imagine how he managed to do it. Just think about it, how many people in this world can achieve such an amazing feat?"

Countless people gasped in astonishment even before the beauty on the screen finished, seemingly unable to believe it was true.

"Damn! Is this Lin Xun for real?"

"Fourteen-years-old, Human Dipper stage, champion of the southwest provincial exam? I didn't mishear, right?"

"There are obviously only two possibilities. Either Lin Xun is an actual monster or the other participants of the southwest provincial exam are trash. How else could a young teenager take first place?"

"I've heard of Lin Xun's name before and it should be true. After all, who would dare to lie about the provincial exam?"

"In other words, Lin Xun is highly likely to participate in the upcoming national exam?"

"Definitely. He's the champion of the provincial exam, how can he possibly miss this opportunity?"

Spirit Vulture and Xiaoke were stunned and stopped to listen.

The crowd was soon shocked again by another piece of news from the broadcast.

"We've subsequently verified that Lin Xun is the direct successor of the Forbidden City Lin Clan and has inherited Mind Cleansing Peak, which is one of the seventy-two noble clan peaks."

“Regretfully, due to his many responsibilities, Lin Xun has declared that he will not participate in the upcoming national exam. It is a huge pity that we will not get to see the southwest provincial exam champion in action during the national exam.”

The crowd exploded into an uproar when they heard this.

“Lin Clan? I only recall four Lin Clans in the Forbidden City but none of them have the qualifications to stay in Mind Cleansing Peak!”

“You might not be aware of this but Mind Cleansing Peak can only be succeeded by a direct descendent of the Lin Clan’s Duke Daochen. You should know who Duke Daochen is, right? He’s a Life Death stage King that saved our empire five hundred years ago!”

“Tsk tsk, I did not expect the southwest provincial exam champion to be Duke Daochen’s direct descendent. No wonder he achieved such dazzling accomplishments at this young age.”

“Heh, Mind Cleansing Peak has been empty for more than ten years after that bloody incident and now Lin Xun has suddenly returned to the Forbidden City as the Lin Clan’s only direct successor to inherit Mind Cleansing Peak. It’s like jumping into a hurricane: a single misstep and he will be torn to shreds!”

Chapter 345 Various Reactions

The crowd’s faces were filled with shock, bewilderment, and other emotions.

The reason for this was simple: there were too many interesting points worth discussing regarding Lin Xun’s story.

Some were drawn by Lin Xun’s cultivation and battle accomplishments. They believed that his feat of taking first place in the southwest provincial exam at his young age and with the Human Dipper cultivation made him a peerless genius.

Others were drawn in by Lin Xun’s identity. Who could have imagined that he would be a direct descendent of Life Death Stage King Duke Daochen, whose name once shook the empire five hundred years ago?!

The majority, however, was more concerned about Lin Xun’s current predicament.

Although he was the only qualified successor to Mind Cleansing Peak, those who knew of the bloody incident more than ten years ago understood that Lin Xun’s situation was far worse than it looked.

Due to his identity, he was destined to fall into a storm of unfathomable danger!

On the street, Xiaoke frowned and said, “I wonder who spread this. It’s clearly been meticulously prepared. Otherwise, it would not have raised so much discussion.”

Anyone who witnessed the commotion today knew that after tonight, Lin Xun’s story would spread to the entire Forbidden City at an unimaginable speed.

When that happened, it would cause a huge commotion and draw the attention of many.

No one could tell whether this was good or bad for Lin Xun.

“Daily news from the central broadcast screen needs to first go past many layers of strict checking. If someone was trying to stir things up from behind the scenes, this information would not have been publicized in this manner.”

Intelligence surged in Spirit Vulture’s calm eyes as he said, “I suspect that this was voluntarily given by Lin Xun.”

Xiaoke was taken aback. “How can that be?”

Spirit Vulture chuckled. “Do you still remember the first day I met Lin Xun? He confidently guaranteed that he could let the entire Forbidden City hear of his name in less than a month.”

After a slight pause, he continued, “From tonight’s news report, it can be inferred that even if it wasn’t directly from Lin Xun, he definitely had a hand in it.”

A slight change occurred in Xiaoke’s eyes. “If that is true, wouldn’t it mean that Lin Xun still has more trump cards we don’t know about? After all, you mentioned that the daily news reports are strictly controlled. I doubt Lin Xun could have done this through his own capabilities.”

Spirit Vulture nodded. “Xiaoke, I should warn you that Lin Xun’s identity and background are complicated. He is not only a graduate of Blood Kill Camp but also seems to have some connection to Black Glory Sacred Hall.”

“It would be fine if that was all, but he is also the Lin Clan’s only rightful successor. The unfortunate incident that involved his parents and close relatives has yet to be properly investigated by anyone till today, which is already very unusual in itself.”

“What baffles me the most is the royal family’s attitude. Despite being abandoned for more than ten years, Mind Cleansing Peak has not been taken away by them. Don’t you find this strange? That’s one of the seventy-two aristocratic peaks and is not merely a cultivation paradise, but more importantly a symbol of status, influence, and power!”

At this point, Spirit Vulture looked Xiaoke in the eye and said, “Under these circumstances, even I do not dare to say whether it is good or bad to continue helping Lin Xun. You should... mentally prepare yourself.” **Novelnext.com**

Xiaoke pondered in silence for a moment before nodding.

“Of course, this is merely my analysis. Lin Xun has too many secrets and what I’ve sensed might only be the tip of the iceberg. To be frank, I’m quite excited to work with such a mysterious, young chap.”

Spirit Vulture suddenly changed his tone with a slight smile. “He might bring me numerous, unimaginable surprises and maybe even...miracles.”

Xiaoke’s heart shook as her clear eyes lit up. “Lin Xun will definitely be happy if he knows you think so highly of him.”

Spirit Vulture let out a carefree chuckle and waved his hand. “Let’s go. It’s time to return.”

Xiaoke pushed the wheelchair, and the duo began their journey back as their figures soon disappeared from the bustling streets of the Forbidden City.

In front of an old building behind the news broadcast screen.

This was the Forbidden City's news department that managed the news broadcast.

A gorgeous carriage pulled by four snow-white cloud water beasts was currently parked outside the building.

Before long, a beautiful figure walked out of the news broadcast station.

The dignified and graceful figure with outstanding looks was the newscaster lady who had been on the screen just moments ago.

When she appeared, the carriage curtains were pulled open, revealing Shi Yu's handsome face.

The lady walked forward and coolly said, "I've done what you asked me to. I'll be heading back if there's nothing else."

Shi Yu grabbed her wrist and pulled her into his arms. He kissed the lady's glistening lips and grinned. "How can there be nothing else? I've prepared a wonderful evening to celebrate your work tonight."

The lady's originally cool and dignified expression suddenly turned mischievous and flirtatious as she seductively said, "Oh? How wonderful will it be?"

With a swish, Shi Yu pulled down the curtains, tenderly stared at the lady in his arms, and said in a low voice, "You'll find out soon."

He lowered his head again and kissed the lady.

The Stone Cauldron Alms' Third Young Master was sighing inwardly as he did all this.

Lin Xun, ah, Lin Xun, I've even sold my body in order to help you. You'd better remember this debt!

Evidently, Shi Yu was the mastermind behind the news report about Lin Xun.

.....

On that same night.

Chi Cangmei withdrew her gaze from the broadcast screen and fell into thought.

Lin Xun!

So he's Mind Cleansing Peak Lin Clan's sole rightful successor and his great-grandfather is the famous Life Death Stage King, Lin Daochen!

No wonder the clan forbade her from dispatching experts above the Spirit Dipper stage. Someone must have objected to doing so.

Those that objected were likely factions that had some relation to the Lin Clan!

Chi Cangmei was almost certain that it was due to Lin Daochen's influence. After all, five hundred years ago, he was honestly far too famous. He had single-handedly saved the empire from a crisis and had once tussled with the Darkness Kingdom's Life Death Kings on the battlefield.

Although he died in the end, he had successfully saved the empire from a great disaster!

Due to how much the empire owed Lin Daochen, anyone who dared to touch his descendants would encounter substantial resistance.

The Chi Clan's operation had amply proved this. For example, they had not been allowed to send cultivators above the Spirit Dipper stage.

Another example was how Chi Cangfeng had been stopped by that elder from Black Glory Sacred Hall and was forced to serve a three-year confinement as punishment.

Chi Cangmei pondered for a long time before she suddenly said, "When we return, kill that useless trash Chi Ze."

The servant at her side was taken aback but quickly nodded. He heard that Chi Ze had tried to forcibly take a woman and had his hands crippled by Lin Xun as a result. In fact, Chi Ze was still recovering from his injuries in the clan.

Although Chi Ze's surname was Chi, he was ultimately not a true member of the clan and his life meant nothing to them.

Chi Cangmei added, "Warn all the clansmen with relations with Chi Ze that anyone who dares to try and avenge him by going after Lin Xun will bear the consequences!"

The servant immediately became a little flustered. He hesitated for a while before he asked, "Milady, are we being a little too cautious? Others might misunderstand that the Chi Clan is afraid of Lin Xun."

Chi Cangmei indifferently said, "Just follow my instructions."

She was doing this not out of fear, but because her father had already given her directions to stop targeting Lin Xun for the time being.

Chi Cangmei could roughly guess the reason. They wished to observe the internal battle between Lin Xun and the branch clans.

Regardless of the outcome, the Chi Clan would not carelessly step into such deep waters.

It wasn't just the Chi Clan. Numerous noble factions in the Forbidden City also shared the same attitude.

However, Chi Cangmei had a feeling that the matter would not be so simple.

It felt like there was an even more terrifying power behind Lin Xun that deterred numerous factions, including the Chi Clan, from moving recklessly!

Of course, this was only a hypothesis. No matter what, there were too many mysterious things surrounding Lin Xun that only made Chi Cangmei grow increasingly interested in him.

Her failure in the previous operation had been tough to swallow, and she would not miss out on any future opportunities for revenge.

.....

Castle of Darkness.

"Milady, the Heavenly Seer has been silent since Lin Xun entered the Forbidden City. This has deterred several factions, including the Chi Clan, from acting recklessly, and they've opted to watch and observe for now."

"That's normal. No one will dare to move before the situation is clear."

"Speaking of which, I had not expected a bigwig from the royal family to secretly stand up for Lin Xun. I wonder who it is."

"Continue looking into it."

"Understood."

"How is Lin Xun's current situation?"

"It is not optimistic."

"It's no easy feat to rule over Mind Cleansing Peak. This might be an opportunity for him to temper himself."

"I am also of the same opinion."

"Right then, have you investigated the relationship between Lu Boya and the Lin Clan?"

"There are no results yet."

"This matter is very important. Lu Boya is not from the empire, and his identity is a huge mystery. Despite this, he willingly saved Lin Xun and hid in the Violet Abyss Prison for so many years. There must be something more to it."

"I will not neglect this matter."

"Mm, you may leave."

In the dark hall, the elder turned around and left to carry out the queen's orders.

On the tall bone throne, the Dark Night Queen placed a hand on her chin and fell into thought.

Chapter 346 The So-Called Experts

Like Spirit Vulture and Xiaoke predicted, the news story about Lin Xun sprouted wings and took off that night. It spread to the entire Forbidden City, creating countless discussions and uproars.

Some jokingly called Lin Xun the youngest noble clan leader in the Forbidden City.

Of course, there was another more mocking title: the loneliest noble clan leader among the aristocratic peaks.

Although these were jokes, they did reveal a certain truth: Lin Xun was too young.

He was only a young teenager, and there was currently no other clan in his situation among the numerous noble clans in the Forbidden City.

Moreover, his circumstances as the Lin Clan successor were far too pitiful. He was all alone with no money and no manpower. All he had was an empty title and danger lurking around every corner.

Basically, the entire Forbidden City knew who Lin Xun was within a single night. His reputation was neither bad nor good but it had many points that fascinated the people.

.....

Meanwhile, Lin Xun was completely unaware of these developments.

Time passed. Seven days had elapsed since Lin Xun went into secluded cultivation.

Nothing out of the ordinary happened on Mind Cleansing Peak during these seven days. All of the affairs and chores were tidily resolved under Spirit Vulture's management.

On the seventh evening, Lin Zhong made his routine trip to the third floor of Mind Cleansing Hall.

There were many things he had to report, but he did not dare to disturb Lin Xun before he emerged.

The bronze doors were tightly shut as usual. Lin Zhong was prepared to leave when he saw this.

However, he suddenly heard a muffled buzzing sound, and the tightly shut bronze doors slowly opened.

Lin Zhong jerked to attention. The Young Master is finally out!

He turned his head right in time to see Lin Xun walk out.

However, Lin Zhong was baffled to find that his Young Master's aura had become increasingly ethereal and otherworldly. Lin Xun's black eyes looked shockingly deep and clear. Each movement he made gave off a solid air of confidence.

Lin Zhong quickly returned to his senses as happiness bloomed on his face. "Congratulations Young Master for successfully advancing to the Heaven Dipper stage!"

Lin Xun smiled. "Uncle Zhong, how long have I been holed up in there?"

"Seven days."

Lin Xun was taken aback, feeling a little stunned. ~~NoVeINext.com~~

He had not expected that his cultivation would smoothly advance like water overspilling from a full cup after consuming the Snow Infant Jade Ginseng root strand.

Moreover, this cultivation advancement was different than before. Lin Xun could sense that his physical and spiritual power had also undergone a transformation!

Due to all this, he had lost track of time and only now realized that his cultivation advancement had taken seven days.

However, the rewards were also enormous. The earth dipper power in his body had perfectly transformed into heaven dipper power, which was more than twice as powerful.

Lin Xun's body had also become much tougher and stronger. He had done some testing earlier and found that ordinary weapons could not even leave a scratch on him!

More than ten spirit stars had been lit in his mind-sea, bringing the total to seventy-two. Seventy-two spirit stars twinkled in the sky of his mind-sea, sprinkling clear light that nourished his spirit.

This greatly improved Lin Xun's spirit sense, allowing him to detect even a slight breeze blowing through the grass within a thirty-thousand-foot radius!

This was the Heaven Dipper stage.

From earth to heaven, the comprehension and appreciation of nature's grandness and power were no less than a life-changing transformation for cultivators.

Moreover, the transformation in cultivation, spirit, and body was also an accumulation of power in preparation to attack the Spirit Sea stage!

The stronger the accumulated foundation, the bigger the benefits after advancing to the Spirit Sea stage.

"Young Master."

Lin Zhong said, "Several things have happened while you were in closed cultivation that I need to inform you about."

"Oh, go ahead Uncle Zhong."

Lin Xun began walking down from the third floor.

"Seven days ago, I contacted Stone Cauldron Alms Third Young Master Shi Yu according to your instructions and he has done what you asked."

Lin Zhong followed behind Lin Xun.

"Already?"

Lin Xun was surprised.

Lin Zhong explained, "Correct. Young Master Shi Yu used the Forbidden City news broadcast screen to spread your name. Now, everyone in the city is talking about you."

Lin Xun chuckled. "I did not expect Shi Yu to be so resourceful. To think he could even borrow the news broadcast screen. This debt is going to be rather big."

Lin Zhong continued, "Young Master Shi Yu also told me to inform you that he will be holding an auction in ten days, and most of the Forbidden City's first-class factions will be participating. If you are interested, you may also come to have a look."

Lin Xun nodded. "I understand. Is there anything else?"

Lin Zhong said, "Mister Spirit Vulture has already returned and has recruited three experts for Mind Cleansing Peak. Mister Spirit Vulture said that you should personally have a look once you're out."

Lin Xun was stunned. "Only three?"

A strange look appeared on Lin Zhong's face. "Yes, only three. But from my observation, none of them are ordinary people."

Lin Xun immediately became more interested. "Come then, let us have a look."

Lin Zhong advised instead, "Young Master, we should find Mister Spirit Vulture first. The three experts have rather eccentric tempers."

Lin Xun nodded.

It did not take long for Lin Xun to find Spirit Vulture, who was currently leisurely enjoying the scenery on his wheelchair.

Xiaoke was not around. She had been leaving early and returning late for the past few days to help Lin Xun investigate the four branch clans.

"I heard that you've agreed to a duel with a youngster called Lin Xuefeng from the North Light Lin Clan."

Spirit Vulture was the first to speak when he saw Lin Xun.

"That's right."

Lin Xun nodded.

Spirit Vulture said, "The Spirit Sea stage isn't so easy to deal with and it will be very difficult for you to win. Hence, I feel that your decision was risky."

Lin Xun smiled and said, "I understand. However, I only need to last a hundred moves without losing."

Spirit Vulture gave some words of caution, "There is nothing more I can say since you've already agreed. However, I do have some advice: haste makes waste in the path of cultivation. You should never rush to advance your cultivation stage because of a duel as it will instead harm yourself."

Lin Xun naturally also understood this and nodded in agreement.

Spirit Vulture used to be a Heaven Ascension expert. Although he had been poisoned by the Demon Tribulation Poison and was currently in a state that was no different from having his cultivation crippled, his experience was still there and it was naturally impossible to go wrong from listening to him.

A sudden realization dawned upon Lin Xun at this moment. He had been so lost in his training that he had forgotten that there were several formidable individuals on Mind Cleansing Peak.

Xiaoke, Spirit Vulture, Third Old Zhu, and even Lin Zhong were all cultivators that were far ahead of Lin Xun. Their guidance would definitely save him much trial and error.

"Let's go and meet my three old friends."

Spirit Vulture began pushing himself down the mountain.

This was what he was always like. He could make many accurate guesses without asking much and was a very intelligent and wise person.

.....

The martial practice field.

It was built on a large area of flat ground roughly halfway up the mountain and originally provided a venue for the clansmen to practice their martial arts.

However, it had been neglected for more than ten years and had become an empty land filled with weeds.

There were currently three figures in the martial practice field.

One was a skinny man in shabby clothes. His body was sloppily sprawled across a boulder as he drunkenly drank alcohol.

Beside him, a tall and beefy fatty was fast asleep against a giant hammer.

Nearby, a sinister-looking elder with white hair was silently seated with his eyes shut. His face was covered in vicious blade scars.

When Lin Xun arrived and saw this, he could not help but be a little taken aback. These are the three experts Spirit Vulture invited?

Spirit Vulture smiled faintly and said, "The drunk is called Blood Thorn, the sleeping one is called Yang Ling, and the meditating one is called Old Diao. They are retired soldiers, and it took me quite a lot to invite them here."

Retired soldiers?

Lin Xun thought for a while before walking forward and cupping his hands together. "I am Lin Xun, greetings to everyone."

However, no one responded. The drunk continued to drink, the sleeping giant continued to sleep, and the meditating old man continued to meditate as if none of them had heard Lin Xun.

Either that or they were ignoring him.

Lin Zhong's heart thumped in his chest as he worriedly looked at Lin Xun, afraid he would be mad.

However, Lin Xun merely chuckled and said to Spirit Vulture, "It seems that it will not be easy to obtain their acknowledgment."

Spirit Vulture also chuckled. "Indeed. These three are very eccentric and even I could only invite them back. Whether or not they'll stay will depend on you."

Lin Xun replied, "I understand. Those who are proud of their abilities are all like this. How else can they show their worth?"

There was a strong provocation in his words.

However, Blood Thorn, Yang Ling, and Old Diao continued to ignore Lin Xun as if no amount of scolding or cursing could incite any reaction from them.

Spirit Vulture laughed heartily. "Right, right, right, that's how they are. Do you have the confidence to convince them?"

Lin Xun asked, "How should I convince them?"

Spirit Vulture said, "Simple. Use any method you wish. As long as you obtain their acknowledgment, they will definitely bring you unimaginable surprises in the future."

Lin Xun immediately grinned. "Any method at all?"

Spirit Vulture was stunned. He quickly guessed Lin Xun's plan, causing the corners of his mouth to twitch slightly. "Uh...just don't go too overboard."

Lin Xun's smile grew increasingly dazzling. "Relax, these are the experts you've painstakingly invited back. How can I possibly make things too difficult for them?"

A sliver of unease rose in Spirit Vulture's heart as he worriedly glanced at the trio. If you guys are too stubborn, there might be a painful price to pay...

Chapter 347 Happily Convinced

The conversation between Lin Xun and Spirit Vulture could be clearly heard by everyone present.

However, the drinking Blood Thorn, the soundly sleeping Yang Ling, and the meditating Old Diao still showed zero reaction like before.

Their complete disregard toward Lin Xun made them appear extremely arrogant. After all, this was Lin Xun's turf, Mind Cleansing Peak.

This proved that they were showing such attitudes on purpose!

It was a test for Lin Xun!

If he could obtain their acknowledgment, they would naturally choose to stay. If he failed, even Spirit Vulture would not be able to convince them otherwise.

Lin Zhong and Xiaoke could clearly see this as well. Lin Zhong was somewhat worried, while Xiaoke seemed to be looking forward to seeing what would happen next.

Only Lin Xun had a wide smile on his face. He raised his head toward the peak and said in a clear and loud voice, "Third Old Zhu, I'll leave this to you. It doesn't matter what method you use, I only need them to be happily convinced to stay."

Lin Xun placed extra emphasis on the words 'happily convinced.'

Third Old Zhu?

Xiaoke and Spirit Vulture were stunned and their expressions soon turned strange. They had found out about Third Old Zhu a few days ago when they returned to Mind Cleansing Peak.

However, they never imagined that Lin Xun would throw this thorny problem to Third Old Zhu!

Lin Zhong's body turned rigid. He was no longer worried about Lin Xun. Instead, he began to become concerned for Blood Thorn, Yang Ling, and Old Diao.

Among those present, only Lin Xun and Lin Zhong had personally witnessed Third Old Zhu's terror. Hence, Lin Zhong understood full well that Third Old Zhu only knew one method to solve problems: fighting!

Rumble!

Before Lin Xun's voice could fade, a towering figure with messy hair had already appeared in the martial practice field.

A frightening blood lust spread from Third Old Zhu's body, causing the air to wail as if space was about to crumble.

Everyone seemed to see a mountain of corpses amidst a sea of blood with Third Old Zhu standing atop and disdainfully looking down upon them like a god of killing.

Strong!

Xiaoke's and Spirit Vulture's pupils shrank.

Further away, Blood Thorn suddenly shuddered, causing him to choke on his alcohol and cough loudly.

The sleeping Yang Ling flusteredly rose to his feet like a frightened rabbit.

The meditating Old Diao abruptly opened his eyes as the sinister scars on his face squeezed together.

In an instant, all three looked towards Third Old Zhu, unable to continue showing a complete disregard for everything around them.

"Will you guys voluntarily lower your heads or do I have to come and press them down myself?" Third Old Zhu flatly said with a stoic face. His messy hair and giant figure with bulging bronze muscles gave off an oppressive pressure.

Blood Thorn, Yang Ling, and Old Diao were stunned. Their expressions fluctuated, clearly not expecting Lin Xun to use such a violent and simple method to gain their acknowledgment.

Wasn't this no different from cheating?

However, Lin Xun looked completely unapologetic. He had already withdrawn to the side and was enthusiastically watching as if the entire affair had nothing to do with him.

Rumble!

Upon seeing that the trio was not replying, terrifying killing intent gushed out of Third Old Zhu like a devastating storm that changed the color of the sky.

Blood Thorn, Yang Li, and Old Diao's expressions changed as they finally spoke.

"Please wait!"

"Friend, this matter should have nothing to do with you, right?"

"Is this how Mind Cleansing Peak treats their guests?"

Third Old Zhu's killing intent was far too terrifying and made their hearts tremble uncontrollably. They knew that they would be instantly crushed by him if they fought.

Third Old Zhu indifferently declared, "Submit or do not submit. Choose one."

This made the trio's expressions turn ugly as they looked towards Lin Xun and Spirit Vulture.

"Third Old Zhu, please pause for a moment."

Lin Xun finally opened his mouth, allowing the trio's expressions to ease substantially.

Soon after, he disappointedly looked toward Spirit Vulture. "Spirit Vulture, are these the experts you invited back? They don't seem to be much."

Before Spirit Vulture could reply, Blood Thorn disdainfully spit on the ground and said, "Kid, what do you know? What right do you have to judge our capabilities?"

Lin Xun raised a brow and grinned. "How about...I let Third Old Zhu continue and personally appraise your abilities?"

Blood Thorn's expression turned rigid. Exasperated, he said, "You, you...you dare to threaten us?"

On the other hand, Yang Ling seemed to be very disappointed. He looked at Spirit Vulture and said, "You want us to work for this kind of person?"

Old Diao also spoke up. "Only knowing how to bully others through force. This kid shows no sincerity at all."

Spirit Vulture merely smiled. He wanted to see how Lin Xun would resolve the situation.

"I tried to be polite earlier but you guys ignored me. So I changed my approach and asked Third Old Zhu to help me obtain your acknowledgment and now you guys are saying I'm not being sincere."

Lin Xun helplessly sighed. "You three are very difficult to please."

Blood Thorn icily snorted. "Of course you should first obtain our acknowledgment if you want us to work for you and not use force to make us submit. If we knew this would happen, we would never have agreed to come here."

Lin Xun chuckled. "So that's why. I understand now. If you guys told me this earlier, would such a misunderstanding have occurred?"

The trio could not say anything in response.

In the distance, Lin Zhong burst into laughter. Their Young Master was so unconventional. However, it could not be denied that his methods were direct and effective.

Xiaoke also pursed her lips as if trying to hold back her laughter.

Spirit Vulture said, "Since it was a misunderstanding, shall we discuss proper matters next?"

"Wait!"

Blood Thorn rejected and proudly said, "We can start discussing proper matters after this kid obtains my acknowledgment!"

Lin Xun's smile grew increasingly cold. He looked toward Yang Ling and Old Diao. "Do you two feel the same?"

The two of them nodded.

A sliver of annoyance surged in Lin Xun's heart. These three are truly stubborn!

Spirit Vulture frowned and said, "Blood Thorn, you guys..."

He seemed to be rather unhappy as well.

However, he was stopped by Lin Xun before he could finish. "It's fine. I want to hear how I should obtain their acknowledgment."

He had already decided that he would ask them to scram if they made things difficult.

After all, he wanted to recruit talents, not masters to be served!

"Our attitudes might not have been right from the start, but we did so because we do not wish to betray our principles either. We believe you do not wish to recruit people without principles either, right?"

Blood Thorn seemed to also agree that they had gone overboard earlier and softened his tone.

Lin Xun directly said, "Speak. What are your terms?"

Blood Thorn's sloppy expression immediately turned solemn, giving off a faint dignified air.

"I am a combat medic and a pharmacist. I only have one requirement. As long as you can provide an endless supply of ingredients and satisfy my medicine making needs, I will immediately agree to stay here and work for you!"

"Of course, you can nod and agree now, but I would rather see your sincerity."

Combat medic!

Pharmacist!

An undetectable gleam flashed across Lin Xun's eyes. After some thought, he said, "Although Mind Cleansing Peak is currently empty, we have various unique resources such as specialized herb gardens located above aeth veins and a medicine production facility that has been inherited from my Lin Clan ancestors: the Precious Pill Room." **nOVeℓnext.com**

He paused for a moment before he said in a powerful voice, "I can let you be in charge of all of this."

Blood Thorn stared hard at Lin Xun. After a long time, he said, "Alright, I will temporarily agree."

"Temporarily agree?"

Lin Xun frowned.

Blood Thorn flatly said, "I don't believe in verbal promises. You have to show me the goods first."

Lin Xun suddenly chuckled. He tossed a herb to Blood Thorn and said, "This is my sincerity. If you can refine it into a pill, I guarantee that I will provide more similar herbs in the future!"

Eh?

Blood Thorn hurriedly caught the herb. He still disapproved of the kid, believing that Lin Xun had agreed so quickly because he did not believe in his capabilities. Why else would Lin Xun casually throw him a herb and ask him to refine it?

Lin Xun was obviously trying to probe his herb refining standard!

However, when he took a closer look at what Lin Xun threw at him, Blood Thorn's expression suddenly turned dazed as if someone had hit him hard on the head. Still dumbstruck, he mumbled, "This is...this is Dragon Saliva Grass?"

The palm-sized herb had a slim stalk and was covered in tiny scale-like patterns. Its nine leaves gleamed bright red as if they were rubies, giving off a dazzling gorgeousness.

Light seemed to ripple from the herb as its fragrance filled the air.

Dragon Saliva Grass!

This was definitely one of the legendary ancient treasures that was said to be capable of creating the blood of gods!

Blood Thorn was dumbstruck.

For a pharmacist, there was nothing more exciting than to see a miracle herb like the Dragon Saliva Grass that should have gone extinct long ago.

Xiaoke, Spirit Vulture, Lin Zhong, Yang Ling, and Old Diao were watching the conversation between Lin Xun and Blood Thorn.

They had been wondering how Lin Xun would convince Blood Thorn and all of them were stunned when they saw this scene.

The fact that a single herb could make Blood Thorn lose his composure was clear proof that Lin Xun's 'sincerity' was more than sufficient!

At this juncture, Blood Thorn would likely hesitate if he was asked to leave.

After all, Lin Xun was not merely providing a stalk of Dragon Saliva Grass but also a specialized garden on Mind Cleansing Peak and the Precious Pill Room inherited from his ancestors!

In the outside world, not just any random pharmacist would have the qualifications to enjoy such treatment.

After a long time, Blood Thorn finally returned to his senses. With a deep breath, he looked toward Lin Xun and earnestly said, "I shall be in your care from now on!"

He bowed with a serious expression that he had never shown before.

This showed that he had acknowledged Lin Xun and had decided to submit.

Chapter 348 The Young Peak Master's Unrivalled Capabilities

Blood Thorn's actions seemed to move Yang Ling and Old Diao.

Yang Ling said, "I am a blacksmith, I..."

Before he could finish, Lin Xun smiled and said, "Mind Cleansing Peak also has smithing facilities. Of course, your value is greater to me since you are a blacksmith and not a rune master."

After a pause, he said, "How about this, I will promise you the same thing as Blood Thorn. I will satisfy all of your blacksmithing needs."

There was a difference between blacksmiths and rune masters.

A proper blacksmith needed to be adept at both refining and smelting because their craft consisted of smelting various ingredients to forge tools.

That was right, only ordinary and not aeth tools.

Additional help from a rune master was needed to create aeth tools.

Normally speaking, the biggest use for blacksmiths was not to forge things but to repair them!

It was a very practical skill because aeth tools would often be damaged and need to be repaired.

Although a blacksmith did not understand the true essence of carving aeth runes, they could still repair aeth tools from the rune arrays carved into them!

If one were to compare rune masters, blacksmiths, and refiners, rune masters would undoubtedly be the most welcomed group.

A qualified rune master could do everything a blacksmith and refiner could do. After all, Lin Xun had shown those skills himself several times before.

Blacksmiths had all the capabilities of a refiner, but they could not carve runes, making them inferior to rune masters.

As for refiners, they were inferior to both rune masters and blacksmiths. Despite this, they still fulfilled a very important function.

Normally speaking, a refiner could not only smelt smithing ingredients but also refine herbs and other medicinal ingredients!

This was a refiner's value.

In simple terms, if a blacksmith was a sword, the rune master was the sword's soul, and the refiner was the person who smelted the metals to make the sword.

"You...agree to all those conditions?"

Yang Ling was somewhat stunned. He had yet to voice his conditions, but Lin Xun had already given him an answer that was impossible to reject.

"Yes."

Lin Xun nodded. He suddenly recalled something and summoned Jiujiu from his palm. "The little fellow is my rune beast. It's a natural-born master of refining and has the heaven-tier Golden Star Fragment Fire in its body. You can get Jiujiu to help you when you're smithing in the future."

"Jiujiu~"

The round and soft Jiujiu innocently looked around like a curious baby.

There was astonishment in everyone's eyes. Golden Star Fragment Fire! This silly-looking little rune beast is actually so amazing?

Yang Ling's entire body shook as he gasped loudly before he ecstatically exclaimed, "Golden Star Fragment Fire? My god! That's awesome!"

His large menacing figure was happily bouncing around like a kid on Christmas.

To blacksmiths, the aid of a natural-born master of refining would make everything so much easier!

At this sight, Lin Xun knew he had subdued yet another helper.

His gaze turned toward Old Diao.

Before Lin Xun could speak, Old Diao said with burning eyes, "I'm different from the two of them. To be precise, I'm a rune master that specializes in arrays."

Lin Xun's heart shook. An array specialist! Another rare talent!

The rune master profession was extremely broad.

From what Lin Xun knew, there were many branches in the rune master profession. In fact, the smithing branch alone already had many sub-branches.

There were rune masters who specialized in weapons, rune masters who specialized in utility equipment, and rune masters who specialized in arrays.

Arrays were also known as rune formations and were usually set up in places such as battleships, fortresses, aeth veins, sects, mansions, etc.

There were killing arrays, defensive arrays, trapping arrays, illusion arrays, and many others.

This was because runes had far too much breadth and depth. An ordinary rune master could easily spend a lifetime pursuing the art but fail to fully master everything.

Due to these circumstances, selecting a path that suited you the most was undoubtedly the wisest decision. This was known as specialization.

"Since that's the case, I shall put you in charge of all matters concerning arrays in Mind Cleansing Peak!"

Lin Xun swiftly made his decision. "Of course, if you encounter any problems, you can come to find me so we can discuss it together."

Old Diao was taken aback. He skeptically asked, "Discuss with you?"

He could not help but feel somewhat disappointed. He had been hoping that Lin Xun would give him a surprise like Blood Thorn and Yang Ling and never expected that all he would receive was such a promise instead.

Before Lin Xun could explain, Xiaoke, who had been watching from the sidelines, could no longer hold back, "Old Diao, Lin Xun's knowledge and mastery of runes definitely surpasses your imagination."

Let alone Old Diao, Blood Thorn, Yang Ling, Lin Zhong, the others could also not help but be stunned. None of them could imagine that Lin Xun was a rune master!

How old is he?

How can Xiaoke believe that Lin Xun possesses an unimaginable mastery of runes?

Feeling everyone's skepticism and disbelief, Xiaoke looked toward Lin Xun as if waiting for him to give an answer.

After all, it was not appropriate for her to divulge Lin Xun's secrets.

Everyone looked at Lin Xun as if waiting for him to give a convincing explanation.

Lin Xun contemplated for a while before taking out his Rune Master Association identity badge. "This is an initiate rune master identity badge."

There was actually no need for him to say that. Everyone could tell that it was indeed an identity badge that could not be forged.*noVELNExt.COM*

However, when they heard that Lin Xun was only an initiate rune master, Blood Thorn's, Yang Ling's, and the others' expressions turned strange.

Old Diao was an advanced rune master!

How could an initiate rune master solve any problems he encountered?

Regardless, Lin Xun was indeed a rare and outstanding talent to have obtained the Rune Master Association's acknowledgment and become an initiate rune master at such a young age.

Old Diao seemed to have gotten over it and said with waning enthusiasm, "It's fine, I also promise to follow you. I only hope that..."

Lin Xun smiled faintly as he interjected, "I won't disappoint you. The new series Violet Hero Battleship that was pushed out by the empire this year was designed by me. I believe you should have heard of its power."

The new series Violet Hero Battleship!

Designed by a young initiate rune master?!

These words shocked everyone and caused them to fall silent.

Even Third Old Zhu, who had been silently standing to the side, seemed to react and look over.

Old Diao could not help but ask, "Is that true? I recall that the new Violet Hero Battleship was designed by rune grandmaster Old Mo of the Divine Workshop, how...how can it be you?"

The others also displayed great skepticism.

No one could blame them for doubting Lin Xun. The Violet Hero Battleship was one of the empire's tactical weapons and their most classic small-scale battleship. Ever since it was first invented several hundred years ago, its design had undergone many improvements and had long reached a state of perfection.

This year, however, the announcement of a new series Violet Hero Battleship broke all common sense. It was a miracle that bestowed a completely new power unto the classic small-scale Violet Hero Battleship.

Due to this, Old Mo's name became extremely well-known like a rising superstar. There was no one in the Forbidden City who did not know that Old Mo had personally created the Violet Hero Battleship miracle.

However, Lin Xun was now saying that the ship was designed by him. Who in the world would believe him?

If it was anyone else, they would have likely already begun scolding Lin Xun for being shameless.

"I can show you the Violet Hero Battleship's design right now. Moreover, you can also ask Old Mo about it."

Lin Xun nonchalantly continued, "To be more accurate, the new series Violet Hero Battleship was designed by both Old Mo and myself. However, something unexpected happened after completing it, so Old Mo had to bear a burden he should not have alone."

Towards the end, sadness gushed out in his heart as he recalled the scene of Old Mo being forcefully taken away from Blood Kill Camp.

Lin Xun had not wanted to bring this up ever again, but his current circumstances were now different.

He was the owner of Mind Cleansing Peak and the Lin Clan successor. He was no longer afraid of revealing this secret that would have once made him a pawn of others.

In fact, Lin Xun had already planned to pay a visit to the Forbidden City Rune Master Association headquarters to formally renew and evaluate his rune master status!

The more capability he displayed, the more he could restrain his enemies while he worked to resolve the internal conflicts and external threats to the Lin Clan.

"Could it be true?"

Old Diao was somewhat dumbstruck while the others were still in disbelief as they looked toward Xiaoke and Spirit Vulture.

"Lin Xun is telling the truth. I can testify to it."

Upon seeing that Lin Xun had openly admitted it, Xiaoke did not bother hiding it anymore. She displayed a serious expression and said, "Instructor Xu Sanqi and I personally witnessed it, and Old Mo was also there back then."

Everyone was shocked and speechless. The image of Lin Xun in their hearts suddenly became mysterious and unfathomable.

It was an inconceivable miracle for a young rune master to come up with a completely new Violet Hero Battleship design!

Lin Zhong was feeling the most emotional among those present. Never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined that their Young Master would be so extraordinary.

This was the new series of the Violet Hero Battleship that had astonished the empire!

This alone made it impossible for anyone to compare with him!

The most amazing part was that their Young Master was also the champion of the southwest provincial exam. He was already displaying such dazzling brilliance at such a young age!

The old Clan Leader and master would be very happy if they knew, right?

The Mind Cleansing Peak Lin Clan had a qualified successor!

Lin Zhong's emotions churned endlessly, unable to calm down.

Chapter 349 Like a Legend

A stalk of Dragon Saliva Grass had convinced Blood Thorn.

A rune beast possessing Golden Star Fragment Fire had made Yang Ling ecstatic.

And now, Old Diao had repeatedly lost his composure after discovering that Lin Xun had designed the new series Violet Hero Battleship.

What should have originally been a test had been effortlessly conquered by Lin Xun, causing Xiaoke and Spirit Vulture to feel surprised and astonished.

For Lin Xun, however, although he had passed with flying colors, there were several things he still did not understand.

.....

Lin Zhong had already calmed himself and led Blood Thorn, Yang Ling, and Old Diao away to prepare accommodations for them.

Since Lin Xun now had a chance, he asked a question that had been bugging him, "Why a pharmacist, a blacksmith, and a rune master?"

He had originally thought that Spirit Vulture was going to recruit experts with strong combat abilities. However, Lin Xun had clearly misunderstood.

"At this juncture, they are more useful than normal cultivators and will be a bigger help to you."

Spirit Vulture did not seem surprised as he explained, "Although Mind Cleansing Peak is currently an empty shell that has been abandoned for many years, don't forget that it is still one of the seventy-two aristocratic peaks and a top-class cultivation paradise in the Forbidden City!"

"The herb gardens here contain concentrated aeth essence and can be used to grow various precious and expensive plants."

"The medicine production facilities here can produce numerous amazing pills and tonics if utilized well."

"The smithy here..."

Spirit Vulture easily gave several examples as if he knew Mind Cleansing Peak like the back of his hand. "All in all, although it has been abandoned for many years, Mind Cleansing Peak is still an excellent foundation your ancestors left behind. If used well, it can provide you with endless wealth!"

Lin Xun immediately understood. His eyes shone as he said, "I see."

Spirit Vulture smiled faintly and said, "It's not just that. When the three of them begin to bring in endless wealth for Mind Cleansing Peak, you can use the money to hire experts in the Forbidden City."

"It might be difficult to find a three-legged frog in the city, but there are always many powerful experts you can hire!"

"Hire?"

Lin Xun was taken aback.

"Correct. As the Lin Clan successor, your only option is to hire experts for the time being. It will take too much time and effort to raise your own group. After all, it is not something that can be done in a day, and they would not be able to provide you any help for the time being anyway."

Spirit Vulture continued his analysis, "Most importantly, once you resolve the Lin Clan's internal problems, you can recruit from among the Lin Clan disciples and nurture them. This way, you will be able to reduce potential conflict in the clan while also solidifying your position."

"That is the most important!"

"After all, if your subordinates are all outsiders, will your clansmen tolerate being ordered or critiqued by these people after you unify the clan? It will become a potential source of conflict!"

"As the clan successor, you are responsible for the entire clan. If you let outsiders manage the affairs of Mind Cleansing Peak, it will only harm the harmony of the clan."

Listening to Spirit Vulture's long analysis felt like he had been struck by a sudden awakening, making Lin Xun feel as if he had achieved enlightenment.

If not for Spirit Vulture's reminder, Lin Xun would not have given consideration to these matters.

From this, it could be seen how difficult it was to become a fitting successor.

"Thanks for your guidance," Lin Xun earnestly thanked Spirit Vulture.

Spirit Vulture laughed and said, "No need to be courteous. I only wanted to remind you that Blood Thorn, Yang Ling, and Old Diao are rare and incomparable talents. If you can convince them to stay their whole lives on Mind Cleansing Peak, I guarantee that they will bring unimaginable benefits to the Lin Clan."

At this point, Xiaoke, who had been silently listening, could not help but purse her lips and giggle. "It's true. For the past few years, several factions from the army tried their best to recruit the three of them but were all rejected."

Lin Xun immediately understood and smiled. "I will do my best."

He could not help but feel somewhat expectant. When would the trio give him a 'pleasant surprise'?

Spirit Vulture suddenly said, "However, before they can generate income for Mind Cleansing Peak, there is an urgent matter you have to attend to."

"What is it?"

"Investment!"

Spirit Vulture patiently explained, "Seeds need to be bought to be planted, herbs need to be bought to manufacture tonics and pills, and even smithing also requires numerous metals. The amount of resources needed for Old Diao to set up arrays will be even more...all of this requires funding."

Lin Xun's expression turned rigid as he sighed deeply. "You won't know the difficulties of a clan until you become responsible for one."

.....

On that same evening, Lin Xun and Lin Zhong left Mind Cleansing Peak and headed to Stone Cauldron Alms once more.

Upon knowing Lin Xun's intentions, Shi Yu immediately loaned Lin Xun thirty thousand gold coins. He also gave Lin Xun a special Stone Cauldron Alms token.

With the token, Lin Xun could receive the best privileges in Stone Cauldron Alms and purchase all items at the best possible price.

According to Shi Yu, fewer than a hundred people in the entire Forbidden City could obtain this token.

This included the royal family, noble clans, Qinglu Academy, the army, and other powerful factions.

It showed how valuable the token was.

Of course, Shi Yu had not given it out merely because of his status but mainly due to the precious treasures Lin Xun had left with Stone Cauldron Alms to auction. The value of these treasures was enough to qualify him for such a privilege.

Before leaving Stone Cauldron Alms, Shi Yu suddenly asked about the national exam. Upon reconfirming that Lin Xun was indeed not going to participate, Shi Yu could not help but feel somewhat regretful.

At the same time, Lin Xun also found out that Shi Yu had already registered for this year's national exam.

It wasn't just Shi Yu. Ning Meng and the other Blood Kill Camp batchmates such as Marquis Jing Hai's granddaughter, Bai Lingxi, Zhao Yin, Zhangsun Hen, Li Duxing, Qi Can, Ye Xiaoqi...would all be participating in this year's national exam.

This showed that this year's national exam was truly going to be a gathering of talented and powerful geniuses!

Regretfully, Lin Xun was not participating.

Although Shi Yu felt regretful for Lin Xun, he also understood that Lin Xun's current circumstances were pretty terrible, and he could not afford to waste any time on the national exam.

In the end, Shi Yu invited Lin Xun to join a gathering with their other Blood Kill Camp companions to see how everyone had changed after the national exam was over.

Lin Xun thought it over for a while before nodding.

Blood Kill Camp was a place he had special feelings for, and it would be nice to meet the friends from back then once more.

.....

It was already late night by the time they left Stone Cauldron Alms.

Lin Zhong was driving the carriage at the front while Lin Xun was lost in thought inside the carriage.

It was a gorgeous carriage that had been gifted to Lin Xun by Shi Yu. He had originally wanted to give Lin Xun some young female servants as well but was firmly rejected.

What else could he do? Lin Xun had an entire clan to manage but had no money. He already had so many affairs to tend to and could not afford to support a few more servants.

"Three hundred thousand gold coins should tide us over for a while..."

Lin Xun inwardly sighed.

Money! Money! Money!

Nothing could be done without money. This life of poverty was something he would have to look into changing after resolving the clan's internal problems and unifying it once more.

For the time being, however, Lin Xun could only rely on himself to earn money.

Creak!

The swiftly advancing carriage suddenly stopped, causing the wheels to produce a harsh noise as they scraped against the ground.

Lin Xun's eyes narrowed as he awoke from his thoughts.

"Young Master, we've encountered an ambush."

There was a strange tone in Lin Zhong's voice as if he had no choice but to make a difficult decision.

"Wait in the carriage. These...people shall be dealt with by this old servant!"

Rustle!

Lin Xun lifted the window curtains and saw that they had stopped in a wide and empty alley.

A few figures stood in their path.

Their leader was an elder that gave off a cryptic and chilling aura as if he was linked to the world around him. Although he was merely standing there, he gave off the sensation that he could stop ten thousand men alone.

Heaven Ascension stage! **NOVELnext.COM**

Lin Xun's heart shook.

Who wanted him dead so much that they would send an expert of such caliber?

The figures behind the elder pulsed with killing intent and gave off extraordinary auras. They were all Spirit Sea stage and above experts!

This made Lin Xun's heart churn again. An elite force like this was definitely not sent by any ordinary faction.

Could it be the Chi Clan?

Before Lin Xun could react, Lin Zhong's body rose into the air. An eye-catching, snow-silver spear that was five feet long had appeared in his hand.

Lin Zhong looked like he had become another person. His back was straight, and his eyes flashed fiercely as he stood in the air with his clothes billowing around him.

An unrivaled aura spread from his body like a ferocious tiger that proudly ruled over the primeval forest!

Who would dare to believe that this was the same old hunchback servant who had silently guarded Mind Cleansing Peak for more than ten years?

The change was far too drastic!

Lin Xun's eyes shone brightly.

White Casanova Shen Jinglun! Have you finally decided to stop hiding your identity?

By this time, Lin Xun finally realized why Lin Zhong would expose his identity. It was because there was a Heaven Ascension expert among the group that was ambushing them!

In this situation, Lin Zhong would never idly stand by unless he wasn't White Casanova Shen Jinglun.

I did not expect that encountering an ambush tonight would actually be a good thing...

A smile rose from the corners of Lin Xun's mouth.

Gasps sounded from the distance. The ambushers had clearly not expected the old servant accompanying Lin Xun to suddenly transform into a peerless expert.

Shiing!

The silver spear seemed to roar like a dragon.

At the same time, Lin Zhong's figure dashed forward as he brandished his spear.

That unparalleled elegance made him seem like a legend that had walked out from a fairy tale!

Chapter 350 Forgetting Oneself in Loneliness

Regretfully, the battle ended before it could begin.

When Lin Zhong revealed his terrifying Heaven Ascension cultivation, the ambushers immediately retreated without hesitation.

Lin Xun could not help but feel somewhat disappointed.

He had genuinely wanted to see how powerful the famed White Casanova Shen Jinglun was. After all, he was the man who had taken third place in the national exam sixty years ago and whose name had once shaken the entire Forbidden City.

Lin Zhong did not give chase, seemingly worried that they were trying to lure him away.

When he returned, the silver spear had disappeared, and he had returned to his hunched and honest-looking appearance.

Lin Xun opened his mouth to ask something but was stopped by Lin Zhong. "Young Master, this old servant will tell you the reason when there's a chance in the future."

Lin Xun did not give up. "Uncle Zhong, will you act if I ask you to in the future?"

Lin Zhong sighed and displayed a bitter smile. "Young Master, my job is to protect you. I will move when I have to."

He paused slightly before he said in a low voice, "Of course, I will not attack anyone from the Lin Clan. That's what I promised master all those years ago."

Lin Xun looked deeply at Lin Zhong and smiled. "That's enough."

After returning to Mind Cleansing Peak, Lin Xun passed Spirit Vulture the thirty thousand gold coins, putting him in charge of this small fortune.

Lin Xun climbed to the summit alone and sat on a protruding rock on the cliff's edge.

The bright moon hung above a sea of clouds as it bathed the surroundings in its soft glow. The mountain breeze blew past and gently shook the old pines along the cliff, creating a breezy, rustling noise that could only be described as nature's sound.

Lin Xun was dressed in moon-white clothes with his black hair casually tied behind his head. His handsome, defined face appeared exceptionally serene under the moonlight.

In another twenty plus days, he would personally head to the North Light Lin Clan and have a duel with the genius disciple Lin Xuefeng.

By then, the other party would be at the Spirit Sea stage.

The difference between them was evident. Although Lin Xun's cultivation had reached the Heaven Dipper stage, an entire greater cultivation stage separated him from his opponent.

It was a single step but the gap was as wide as heaven and earth.

Lin Xun had exchanged blows with Chi Cangfeng before and thus understood how powerful the Spirit Sea stage was.

However, the duel was already set in stone, and Lin Xun could not lose!

Hence, he could only channel all of his focus onto raising his strength and preparing for the duel to the best of his abilities.

Lin Xun was lost in thought as he sat alone on the peaceful cliff. In the end, he let out a carefree laugh, took out a jar of liquor, and began drinking.

.....

From that day, Lin Xun would spend all his time on the summit alone.

In the morning, he would observe the sea of clouds. At night, he would hug the rose-colored clouds to sleep.

At times, he would practice his blade techniques on old trees, boulders, and the waterfall, his dancing blade flowing like water and drifting clouds amidst the howling wind.

Later on, he would sit alone while holding his blade like an unmoving cicada as he observed the stars in the sky, the rising sea of clouds, and the rivers meandering down the mountain.

Such sessions would often stretch across several days. Lin Xun would be lost in a strange, dazed, and muddleheaded state while ignoring the cold, the heat, and the cycle of day and night. He didn't even take shelter from the wind and rain. *novELNext.com*

He would at times become still and dignified like a buddha statue, blending with the world around him as he meditated upon the mysteries of heaven and earth.

This was cultivation.

It was the act of abandoning unnecessary thoughts, cutting off the worries of society, merging oneself with nature, tempering the heart, or achieving inner peace.

It was to behold the beauty of the world, the variables of time, the unpredictability of the wind, the randomness of the clouds, the flow of light and space, the trajectory of fireflies, the gorgeous brilliance of the morning rays...

It was to feel the wonders of the universe that encompassed all matter!

It was to merge the mind and body with the earth!

It was to hear the birth of dao from nothingness!

The Heaven Dipper stage sought to understand the grandness of the world and the scriptures of the heavens.

It was to seek a sound the ear cannot hear and a form the eye cannot see.

It was to seek the most beautiful sound and the most elegant form.

Time flowed as Lin Xun continued his solitary life like an existence that had cut himself off from the world.

He would meditate, practice the blade, observe the land and sky, have a happy drinking session, or sometimes blankly stare off into space.

His hair gradually grew longer, turning him shaggy and unkempt. The marks of hardship slowly took root on him, making him appear less like a youth but instead more like a man in dire straits who had experienced the many ups and downs of life.

Throughout this period, Lin Xun remained undisturbed by anyone or any matter.

However, Lin Zhong, Xiaoke, and Spirit Vulture were observing Lin Xun in secret.

From the first day, they already knew that Lin Xun was cultivating or, to be more precise, he was comprehending the dao!

Walk the path of dao and not the path of the commons. It was a concept that was both deep and mysterious. When a cultivator reached a certain level, the cultivator would begin to shift focus from the internal to the external. They would start to seek a deeper understanding of the world around them and comprehend the power of nature.

For example, the dao Lin Xun was trying to understand at the Heaven Dipper stage was the essence of the world around him. Only by truly comprehending the changes of the world around him would he be able to control the wind and clouds and gain the powerful ability of flight when he advanced to the Spirit Sea stage.

Xiaoke was worried that Lin Xun was rushing to advance his cultivation but would instead become stuck due to his haste.

After all, they knew that Lin Xun would have to soon fight a Spirit Sea expert and it was unavoidable for them to worry that the pressure was getting to him.

Spirit Vulture was also worried in the beginning, but after silently observing for a few days, he was certain that Lin Xun had not succumbed to the pressure.

In fact, Spirit Vulture suspected that Lin Xun had already forgotten about everything else and entered a deeper state of immersion.

Lin Zhong also gave his view, believing that even if Lin Xun failed to advance to the Spirit Sea stage, his cultivation would surely progress by leaps and bounds.

Regardless, the fact that nothing had gone wrong during Lin Xun's cultivation made them secretly breathe sighs of relief.

The pressure on Lin Xun was huge, and the burdens he carried were heavy. Sometimes, they would feel that they would not be able to do any better even if they took Lin Xun's place.

Time passed, and there were soon only three days left before the appointment with the North Light Lin Clan. However, Lin Xun's cultivation session showed no signs of coming to an end.

Several big things happened in the Forbidden City during this period.

Stone Cauldrons Alms held an auction that drew everyone's attention. The auctioned items were all rare and precious treasures that were fiercely fought over by numerous top factions.

It was rumored that after the auction was over, the total value of the treasures hit an astronomical price that would make anyone go crazy!

The success of the auction also elevated Stone Cauldron Alms' reputation to the next level, making them begin to appear unmatched among their rivals.

The most interesting part was that the auction had been entirely managed and organized by Fortune God Shi's third son, Shi Yu.

This greatly increased his influence in Stone Cauldron Alms, and many people began to think more highly of him.

Besides this, Little Sword Lord Xie Yutang and Yinian from Fullmoon Kingdom had their duel in Qinglu Academy.

The end result was a draw!

The young monk, Yinian, instantly became the focus of the city, causing his name to spread far and wide.

As for Little Sword Lord Xiao Yutang, his reputation did not suffer but instead grew as well after the battle because his cultivation advanced to the next stage. The news caused quite a commotion, and countless people gasped in amazement.

Of course, none of these events were as sensational as the national exam, especially because it was truly a gathering of powerful experts this year.

When the appointed time arrived, several thousand younger generation cultivators began a series of spectacular duels.

When it finally ended, only a hundred cultivators had passed and became the victors of this year's national exam.

First place was awarded to Song Yi, a young heaven pride from the Song Clan of the seven high clans.

Second place was Chi Cangfeng, who was also from the Chi Clan of the seven high clans.

Third place was Bai Lingxi, Marquis Jinghai's granddaughter, whose prestigious status was no less than Song Yi and Chi Changfeng.

All top three spots were monopolized by the descendants of the empire's noble class, a result that made many people sigh. The noble clans continued to prosper because their wealth, power, and influence had indeed reached unimaginable heights.

There were a number of people who talked about Lin Xun, believing it was a waste for the southwest provincial exam champion to have missed out this year.

However, such talk was limited to the minority while the majority was still more concerned about the top three.

It was said that when the exam ended, the top three and several other passers had not only been summoned to meet the great emperor but were also received by people from Qinglu Academy after they left the royal palace!

This was an unbelievably rare honor.

Qinglu Academy was the empire's number one academy and a supreme power that had nurtured countless talents for the empire.

Despite all this, Qinglu Academy had reached out to scout Song Yi, Chi Changfeng, and Bai Lingxi. It was a treatment that many people were deeply envious of.

Of course, Lin Xun remained unaware of all this.

The day before the North Light Lin Clan appointment, Lin Zhong could not help but approach the summit again.

Like always, Lin Xun was seated on a boulder protruding from the cliff, his thin figure silent and lonely like a tree.

His body was covered in leaves and dust, his unkempt long hair and beard hanging from his head. A haggard aura seemed to spread from his brows, making him look like someone who was down on his luck.

"Should I wake the Young Master up?"

Lin Zhong hesitated.

The duel with Lin Xuefeng was tomorrow. If Lin Xun continued to cultivate, he would definitely miss the appointment.

In turn, this would hamper the progress in resolving the clan's internal problems.

Most importantly, the North Light Lin Clan was currently not overly resistant toward Lin Xun like the other three branch clans.

If Lin Xun missed this chance, the consequences would be troubling to say the least.

Rumble!

A strong, indescribable aura suddenly surged out and rapidly swirled around Lin Xun.

Eh?

Lin Zhong's heart shook. Lin Xun had opened his eyes at some unknown time. A stormy vortex seemed to churn in his deep and black eyes as they shone with an intimidating and harsh light.

He was like an unparalleled sword that had been tempered thousands of times and was finally emerging from the fire!