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Chapter 481

Gu Yunting rose to his feet. Illusory golden light swirled around him, making his tall and slim figure resemble an immortal of legend. His soft, black hair gently fluttered in the wind, giving him a certain air of elegance that could never belong to a mere human.

Dressed in white with his hands behind his back, his head was slightly raised as he looked upon the stone tablet.

He was undoubtedly a supreme heaven pride!

Everyone's gazes were drawn to the sight, especially the Dao Martial Department students whose faces were filled with expectation and adoration.

After five years of secluded cultivation, Gu Yunting must be here to retake his number one spot on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings!

Amidst the silent atmosphere, Gu Yunting finally made his move. He took a single step forward as golden flames surged out from the ground, creating a dazzling brilliance.

Buzz!

He reached out a fair, slender hand and gently knocked on the stone tablet. The ancient stone tablet immediately responded with a unique undulation, sending out a sprinkle of light that enveloped Gu Yunting.

Rumble!

Light rose like smoke from the stone tablet as a majestic and boundless undulation was released. The light intensified and surged forth like the great sea in all its blinding and radiant glory.

"First! He retook first place in an instant! Senior Brother Gu Yunting is way too strong!"

One of the girls shrieked so hard that her face flushed red. Her eyes sparkled like gemstones, filled with fanatical infatuation.

The others were also shocked. They had all witnessed Gu Yunting's name rise like a glorious sun and ascend to the first position!

A sliver of surprise flashed in Lin Xun's black eyes. Even he had to admit that Gu Yunting had already attained a unique pinnacle in the Spirit Sea stage.

The most astonishing part was that he was still so young like a proud rising sun that was destined to shine gloriously over the road of cultivation.

What surprised everyone, however, was that this wasn't even the end!

With a loud rumble, the sound of the dao rang out. A change abruptly occurred on the ancient stone tablet's surface. Name after name disappeared as unfamiliar names emerged one after another!

Unlike before, these new names shone brightly like the sun, gleaming with the light of eternity like letters formed from the dao.

This is...

Everyone gasped as their eyes widened in shock. No matter how hard they tried, they were unable to clearly see the names on the stone tablet!

The names seemed to be veiled by a mysterious power that was impossible to pierce!

“What’s going on?”

Many people were confused. Most of the crowd consisted of Dao Martial Department disciples, but this was the first time they had seen such a change occur to the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings.

The original hundred names had disappeared and were replaced by a hundred new names that could not be seen. What a mysterious and astonishing phenomenon.

What did this mean?

Someone asked in a trembling voice, “Is this...the legendary Spirit Sea Overall Rankings?”

Spirit Sea Overall Rankings!

Upon hearing this name, most of the crowd felt as if they had been struck by lightning as they suddenly recalled a certain rumor about the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings. It was said that there was an even more mysterious ranking which consisted of the most outstanding individuals of the past few thousand years.

Each name represented a person who had once reigned supreme in the world!

In simple terms, the hundred names imprinted on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings belonged to the top hundred most amazing individuals since the founding of Qinglu Academy several thousand years ago!

Qinglu Academy had produced countless heaven prides over the past few thousand years, but only a hundred had managed to leave their names on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings!

This showed how difficult it was to leave one’s name on the overall rankings.

At the very least, in the current day Qinglu Academy, none of the hundred names on the current Spirit Sea Golden Rankings had a place on the overall rankings!

Otherwise, they would have already drawn the attention of the entire academy.

Today, Gu Yunting’s appearance caused the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings to transform, revealing the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings.

In other words, Gu Yunting’s current foundations had qualified him for the overall rankings and were already comparable to the top hundred most outstanding heaven prides over the past thousand years.

Everyone was in shock. The Dao Martial Department students’ emotions wildly churned as if they had just witnessed a miracle.

Shi Yu muttered, “It’s another monster.”

Ning Meng, Ye Xiaoqi, Gong Ming, and the others were of the same thought. Gu Yunting's strength was nearly heaven-defying. If he left his name on the overall rankings, the news would shake Qinglu Academy and spread to the entire world in less than a day!

"Spirit Sea Overall Rankings..."

Lin Xun raised his head and looked at the stone tablet. Even he could not see the new names upon it.

Gu Yunting was enveloped by drizzling light, making him resemble a superior and holy existence.

After some time passed, a peculiar noise sounded from the stone tablet. It thundered like the morning bells and evening drums of ancient times that had crossed the river of time to arrive in the current-day Qinglu Academy.

Huala~ Huala~

Lin Xun's body immediately stiffened as he felt terrifying wills approach from various directions.

There was no doubt that these terrifying wills originated from the old monsters in the academy. They had clearly been alerted by the commotion!

"It's been a hundred and thirty-nine years since the last time the stone tablet made the dao sound. Yuntian is a truly extraordinary child. After five years of secluded cultivation, he has ascended to the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings and now stands shoulder to shoulder with the few top geniuses of all time. Remarkable!"

An old voice rang out across the area.

Everyone was shocked again, and numerous people stood there in a daze. They had realized that Gu Yunting had succeeded! He had successfully left his name on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings!

Soon after, the golden light from the stone tablet stopped surging and fell silent.

The light around Gu Yunting disappeared, revealing his tall and slim figure. His white clothes fluttered around him as his black hair danced in the wind like an immortal that had descended to the mortal coil.

He turned around as if to leave.

It was at this moment that Lin Xun finally saw Gu Yunting's appearance. He was a handsome man with clear and bright eyes that shone like the stars. His clothes were whiter than snow, and he gave off an aura of supreme elegance.

He had been born with great luck and possessed the Dao Fire Golden Body talent. Anyone could tell at a glance that he was a dragon amongst men and an unrivaled genius!

"Senior Brother Gu."

"Greetings Senior Brother Gu."

The Dao Martial Department students greeted him with respect and reverence.

Gu Yunting merely nodded in response. His expression was as calm as an ancient well as he drifted away, and he did not say a single word from start to end.

It was as if no one or anything could draw his attention.

Although it was arrogant behavior, no one could deny that Gu Yunting did have the capabilities to back it up.

The atmosphere remained rather quiet even after Gu Yunting's figure disappeared from sight with numerous people still in a daze.

Ning Meng muttered, "What a stuck-up."

Shi Yu made a dig at Ning Meng, "He's got the goods to back it up. If you disagree, go ahead and get your name on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings as well. I guarantee that I'll be the first to worship you."

Lin Xun ignored them because his gaze was drawn to the stone tablet. He had discovered that the names on the stone tablet were still shining brilliantly and could not be seen. It was clearly still displaying the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings and had not returned to the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings.

"Eh, the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings haven't disappeared!"

Someone also noticed this as well and blurted it out, immediately drawing everyone's attention. Numerous people grew excited and restless, wondering if they could somehow leave their names on the overall rankings.

Of course, it was merely a fantasy.

"Let me try."

A young man walked forward, took a deep breath, circulated his cultivation, and pressed his palm onto the stone tablet.

Omm~

The stone tablet began to glow.

The young man's face filled with hope as he looked up to find his name.

However, he was quickly disappointed. He failed to find anything even until the stone tablet returned to its usual silence.

"Brother, you can't even reach the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings and yet you dare to dream of the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings. Just how huge are your balls?"

Ning Meng smirked.

The young man immediately turned red all the way down to his neck as he angrily turned around and walked away.

The other students regained their calm and immediately tossed aside such delusional thinking. The Spirit Sea Overall Rankings was indeed not something they could climb.

Moreover, they also discovered that the overall rankings was gradually disappearing and was soon replaced by the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings again.

The first place was still Zhao Jingwen. However, they could no longer find Gu Yunting's name. He had evidently surpassed the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings and ascended to the overall rankings.

This made numerous students sigh deeply.

"Lin Xun, aren't you here to attack the rankings? What are you still waiting around for? Could it be that you've been scared timid by Senior Brother Gu Yunting?"

Someone suddenly called out Lin Xun.

"Yeah, you should also give it a go. Who knows, you might create a miracle. However, it's obvious that someone like you will never be able to compare to Senior Brother Gu Yunting."

"How many times have I warned you? Don't compare him to Senior Brother Gu Yunting. He's unworthy."

The students were clearly being sarcastic and trying to provoke Lin Xun.

In their view, Lin Xun might be able to leave his name on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings but it was no longer possible for him to become famous through it.

Because of the insurmountable mountain that was Gu Yunting, it was impossible for Lin Xun to reach the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings no matter how amazingly he performed!

In fact, he probably couldn't even compare to the first ranked Zhao Jingwen and second ranked Zuo Yujing!

Of course, this was merely the Dao Martial Department students' opinion.

Ning Meng said, "Lin Xun, those blind fools are slandering you. If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't tolerate it."

"I'm here to earn points, not prove something to others."

Lin Xun rolled his eyes.

"Earn points..."

The students were taken aback. The glorious and sacred Spirit Sea Golden Rankings was being used as a point earning tool by this fellow?

This was an insult to the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings!

"Lin Xun, don't you have any dignity as a cultivator? You're such a distasteful hooligan!"

The students angrily clamored.

Lin Xun could not be bothered with them. After some consideration, he asked Shi Yu and the others, "Will I get more points if I manage to leave my name on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings?"

"Eh..."

Even Shi Yu, Ning Meng, and the others were now stupefied.

They honestly did not know because the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings was something that was far beyond them. Moreover, it had not appeared for many years, and no one could say for sure whether you would be rewarded with a fitting amount of points for leaving your name on it.

The Dao Martial Students were enraged. That was the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings! It was a supreme and sacred honor that should never be tarnished! How dare he view it as mere source of points?

Lin Xun was simply far too hateful!

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The Dao Martial Department's students' faces turned ugly.

If not for the overwhelming battle power Lin Xun had displayed earlier in the arena, they would have already gone to teach him a lesson.

They had never seen such an arrogant and vulgar person!

Lin Xun ignored them as he stood before the stone tablet and silently did some calculations.

The four identity tokens he had won from Shi Yunpeng, Xue Yun, Jin Zhuliu, and Lan Yu contained a total of 1500 points, which was still a far cry from the 5000 he required.

In other words, he needed at least 3500 more points for the Sky Stairs Assessment.

Lin Xun inwardly sighed.

How troublesome.

Shi Yu said, "Although I don't know whether you'll get points from ascending the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings, I do know that first place on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings will reward you with 2000 points!"

Ning Meng casually suggested, "Yeah, why don't you try to aim for the number one spot first and win some points before thinking about the overall rankings?"

Lin Xun's heart stirred. 2000 points was indeed a sizable sum.

One of the Dao Martial Academy students shouted, "Arrogant! What do you guys think first place on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings is? It isn't something just anyone can take."

"You haughty fools simply don't understand how high the sky is!"

The other students also yelled. They were pissed off by Lin Xun's haughty attitude. Who could have expected that even Shi Yu and Ning Meng speak so boastfully as if it was easy to take Spirit Sea Golden Rankings' number one spot?

"If you guys are unconvinced, how about we make a bet? If I succeed, give all of your points to me. If I lose, all of my points will be yours."

Lin Xun proposed as he looked toward the students.

Shi Yu, Ning Meng, and the others were stunned.

This crazy bastard is even willing to gamble his points!

What exactly does he intend to do with these points?

This infuriated the Dao Martial Department students. In the arena, Lin Xun had desperately tricked everyone to earn points and now he was resorting to betting. What else was he but a conman?

They were very skeptical about how someone like him had become a rune grandmaster and how he had attained all of his achievements. Was money all that mattered to him? Were dignity, honor, and morals worthless to him?

"I'll accept your bet!"

One of the students stepped forward and angrily pulled out his identity token, "I'll be waiting to see if you can get first place!"

"Me too."

"How can I be left out of such fun?"

Roughly six students soon stepped forward, each grinding their teeth and wanting to take on Lin Xun's bet. Most importantly, they did not believe that he could seize first place.

After all, who was currently in first place?

Zhao Jingwen! A legend who was also a descendant of the imperial family. He was an individual who was as glorious as the sun!

A vulgar and arrogant bastard like Lin Xun was destined to be a grain-sized pearl that could never be able to compete with the brilliance of the sun.

The other students were more cool-headed. Even the fifth-ranked Lan Yu had lost to Lin Xun, which proved that his foundations were strong.

Hence, they did not dare to take the risk.

"Are you guys going to play as well?"

There was a wide smile on Lin Xun's face as he looked at the other students.

Regretfully, the other students refused to take the bait. Instead, they began to suspect that something was amiss from his composure and confidence.

What a pity...

Lin Xun inwardly muttered. With a deep breath, he turned to the stone tablet as his expression turned serious.

He seemed to become a completely different person at this moment. He gave off an air of natural calmness and confidence as his presence began to resemble an abyss.

Shi Yu, Ning Meng, and the others put aside all other thoughts and focused on watching. The time for chatter was over, and they could not help but feel a little nervous.

After all, the stone tablet did not merely test combat power but also talent and potential. From what they knew, a great calamity had befallen Lin Xun at birth, robbing him of his unique talent, the Grand Abyss Heaven Devourer.

This meant that Lin Xun had a disadvantage in the talent aspect and could not compare to Gu Yunting, who possessed the Dao Fire Golden Body.

“Hmph, you’re just putting up an act!”

The Dao Martial Department students sneered. After all, they were waiting to see Lin Xun make a fool of himself.

Omm!

Lin Xun reached out and pressed his right hand onto the stone tablet’s surface.

A cryptic and peculiar undulation instantly rippled on the pitch-black surface as resplendent golden light rose like the tide.

An extremely dazzling radiance abruptly surged from the bottom of the tablet and rose straight upwards. In an instant, it arrived at the top ten zone.

“This...”

The students’ hearts jumped in alarm. Wasn’t that far too fast?

Shi Yu, Ning Meng, and the others inwardly gasped. Although it wasn’t the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings, the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings was still a huge mountain for most.

Every individual on the rankings was a first-class elite of the Dao Martial Department. Moreover, only the top hundred among them could secure a spot!

In a single breath, Lin Xun had made his name charge all the way into the top ten zone. It was undoubtedly a very strong and astonishing showing.

“No need to worry. Climbing each rank in the top ten is a sizable hurdle, especially the final three which are akin to three giant mountains. The rankings aren’t that easy to climb.”

One of the students calmly analyzed, “Since Lin Xun has defeated Lan Yu, it’s normal for him to reach this step. We’ll see if he has the capability to ascend to the top three!”

By this point, the other students also discovered that the light that represented Lin Xun’s result had slowed after reaching the top ten zone.

This made them calm down a little.

Ninth.

Eighth.

Seventh.

.....

With each step Lin Xun's result climbed, the Dao Martial Department students, Shi Yu, and the others grew increasingly nervous.

When Lin Xun's result crossed fifth place and reached fourth, the expressions of the few students who had betted with Lin Xun changed.

However, they did not despair or admit defeat because the true test started at the top three!

First place belonged to Zhao Jingwen, second place to Zuo Yujing, and third place to a girl called Yu Ruhuo.

Gu Yunting had originally occupied second place, but his earlier result had been far too superior so he had easily steamrolled over Zhao Jingwen and rocketed to the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings. As a result, his name had disappeared from the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings, allowing Zuo Yujing and Yu Ruhuo to climb a position.

Regardless, Zhao Jingwen, Zuo Yujing, and Yu Ruhuo were still absolute powerhouses among the current generation of Dao Martial Department students.

They were like tyrants that could not be touched by just anyone.

Lin Xun's result had now reached fourth place. Would he be able to keep it up and climb to the peak?

Everyone watched closely, not daring to blink.

However, an unexpected event occurred at this moment—

An ancient, drawn-out noise that could only be described as a sound from nature seemed to arrive from an ancient time. Meanwhile, dazzling divine light rose into the sky as the stone tablet resonated. Dao flowers began to descend as multicolored light rapidly engulfed Lin Xun, the tablet, and the land!

"This..."

Shi Yu's, Ning Meng's, and the others' eyes widened as their hearts and bodies shuddered violently. It was grander than the phenomenon caused by Gu Yunting. In fact, each of these dao flowers was made from true imago power!

Could Lin Xun have also unlocked the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings?

"How can this be?!"

The Dao Martial Department students involuntarily cried out. They were also shocked by the sudden appearance of such a grand phenomenon, which caused their hearts to tremble.

Gu Yunting had also caused a phenomenon earlier. Was Lin Xun going to ascend to the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings as well?

However, someone soon discovered that although it looked very impressive and grand, the stone tablet was still displaying the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings. There was no sign of the overall rankings!

To make things worse, Lin Xun's result had suddenly stopped after arriving at fourth and was no longer rising! This made the students become even more excited.

"Hahaha, here I was thinking that a miracle had occurred. It turns out that Lin Xun is nothing much after all!"

"Still fantasizing about first? In your dreams!"

"We won, hahaha we won! The heavens are fair after all."

The students could not help but laugh ecstatically. They were all in high spirits and felt very pleased with this result.

Shi Yu and the others were also stunned. Such a grand phenomenon but nothing seemed to have resulted?

Dong!

Another sound rang out again. On the stone tablet, golden light condensed into dao flowers that flew into the sky and fell toward the ground. Dao flowers rapidly covered the entire area, creating a blinding and sacred brilliance that made it impossible to see Lin Xun's figure.

Everyone's hearts shuddered. Why was the phenomenon continuing? Could it have just begun?

However, they soon saw that the stone tablet was still displaying the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings, and Lin Xun's result had not moved an inch. The Dao Martial Department students secretly sighed in relief as their sneers and smug looks returned.

Shi Yu and the others frowned, unable to figure out what was happening. It was too bizarre. It was completely different from what occurred with Gu Yunting. What exactly was going on?

Huala~ Huala~

They did not sense the terrifying wills that had emerged from various areas in the academy and instantly arrived in the area.

"Another student is about to reach the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings?"

"Who is this child?"

"I can't tell. His figure is obscured by grand dao imago power, and I can't guess who it is."

"Something seems to be wrong. Everyone, look, although the phenomenon looks so grand, the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings has not appeared."

"Has such a thing ever happened before?"

"I think it has, but I can't seem to recall it. Someone once covered up the past and erased all traces, making it impossible to know the truth."

The terrifying wills communicated, somewhat shocked that even beings like them could not unravel the mystery.

The ancient tablet's origins were wrapped in mystery, and it was only known that it had been from an ancient sect. Although it had been refined and shifted to Qinglu Academy, no one had managed to discover all of its secrets!

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These terrifying wills represented the hidden old monsters in Qinglu Academy.

They had been alerted earlier when Gu Yunting had ascended the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings and had not expected the ancient stone tablet to create another commotion so soon after.

Moreover, it was an extremely special phenomenon that had not been heard of for several thousand years, which made them feel all the more flabbergasted.

Dao flowers hung from the air while golden light washed across the land. What did it mean?

Dong!

All of a sudden, the same peculiar ancient noise sounded from the ancient stone tablet once more. It was filled with an aeonian aura, which felt mysterious and unfathomable.

Multi-colored light hung in the air as if a waterfall was falling above the stone tablet with every splash containing mysterious and unfathomable imago aura.

"That's the third time. The phenomenon is becoming increasingly majestic!"

"Why have I never heard of something like this happening before?"

"Strange, the stone tablet is still showing the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings, and there's no sign of the overall rankings appearing..."

The terrifying wills were shocked as they grew increasingly bewildered and confused.

The Dao Martial Department students, Shi Yu, Ning Meng, and the others were stunned. They had been awed and overwhelmed by the dao sound, causing their minds to turn blank.

A sound filled with the aeonian aura echoed in the sky above the Dao Martial Department, causing shock and commotion.

All of the instructors and students stopped what they were doing. Their hearts trembled, unable to stay calm as they raised their eyes and looked in the direction of Spirit Sea Peak.

The peak was covered in a golden haze as if the dao had turned into a divine waterfall that was falling into the world. It was the holiest and most sacred thing they had ever set eyes on.

"What's going on?"

Numerous people were perplexed.

Dong!

It was not long before the fourth sound rang out, resonating with the old stone tablet. From afar, it was possible to just barely make out heavenly flowers scattering from the sky as divine light danced in the air. The ground was flooded with golden lotuses, creating a vision of countless sages chanting scriptures.

It was too glorious. It made the terrifying wills fall silent, unable to comprehend what was happening.

By this time, the dao sound had already spread to the Hidden Dragon Department, True Martial Department, Rune Department, Godly Strategams Department, and other mysterious districts in the academy. It filled the sky like the roars of a dragon or the cries of a phoenix!

In a small alley, Gu Yunting suddenly stopped and turned his head to peer into the distance. A strange and mysterious light seemed to reflect off his star-like eyes as if they were able to see through all falsehood.

He was soon stunned. It's from Spirit Sea Peak!

Did someone attack the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings after he left?

Gu Yunting was silent for a moment before he suddenly disappeared from the spot.

"Dao sound and dao imago power. Did something big happen?"

The entire Qinglu Academy was alerted by the disturbance, causing uproars to rise in every corner.

At the foot of Spirit Sea Peak, a thin old man had appeared at some unknown time. He looked extremely ordinary as he climbed the steps with his hands behind his back.

"Heh, he doesn't wish to leave his name?"

The old man raised his head, revealing a thin face with murky eyes. The corners of his eyes were filled with wrinkles, making him appear old and worldly.

When he looked toward the ancient stone tablet, his murky eyes abruptly became a pair of black holes. Mysterious dao runes surged within them, making them seem capable of peering into space and seeing everything in the nine heavens and ten lands!

"It won't do to allow this disturbance to continue."

After a long time, the thin old man frowned and waved his sleeve.

Although it was a simple action, gales suddenly rose in the sky and blew away all of the clouds!

The golden haze and divine light instantly disappeared as if they had been wiped away by a giant invisible hand. It almost felt as if they had never appeared before.

Huala~

At the same time, an invisible power descended and covered the area, instantly cutting off all sound as well.

The blue sky became quiet. The old stone tablet continued to give off a faint golden haze-like glow that was nowhere near as grand as before.

"Eh?"

"Who did that?"

"This...how...you...you were also alerted?"

The terrifying wills were astonished when these changes occurred, especially when they detected the thin old man.

The terrifying wills were in disbelief and shocked at his appearance.

“You guys should go. Do not tell anyone what happened today.”

The thin old man softly sighed.

Although simple, the sentence was akin to an imperial decree that could not be refused. The terrifying wills showed no hesitation at all as they withdrew.

Meanwhile, the thin old man arrived at the peak and found Shi Yu’s group and the Dao Martial Department students.

In the end, the old man’s gaze landed on Lin Xun, who was standing before the stone tablet.

“So it’s this little one...”

.....

.....

Lin Xun was in a very peculiar state. It was as if his soul had left his body and arrived at the river of time.

Each spray of water in the river seemed to contain infinite history as it flowed unpredictably toward an unknown location.

Lin Xun stood on one of these water sprays that traveled against the river flow. Time seemed to reverse as he seemed to peer into the past.

He saw many silhouettes, each as dazzling as the proud sun. Sprays of water emerged from the river, each appearing striking and able to illuminate an entire land.

When Lin Xun neared one of the silhouettes, the golden light around it immediately receded, revealing a tall and muscular figure.

It was a young man with a broad forehead and eyes which shone with violet light. He gave off a fierce, unyielding aura.

Information suddenly surfaced in Lin Xun’s mind: Ying Xinghen, ascended the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings 149 years ago. 100th!”

The young man was a heaven pride from 149 years ago. Even until today, his image was still present on the overall rankings and had not faded in the slightest!

Lin Xun’s heart shook.

His gaze shifted to the figure in front of Ying Xinghen.

A beautiful girl instantly appeared. She wore silk clothes and straw sandals, and her black hair was tied up in a bun. Her face was fair as jade with bright features, and she carried a silver, snow-white sword on her back, giving her a heroic air.

“Xu Yao, ascended to the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings 399 years ago. 99th.”

Lin Xun finally realized that he was in an illusory realm created by the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings!

The figures in the river represented the unrivaled experts who were on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings!

Even though thousands of years had passed, their rankings were still here and had remained untouched!

In other words, they were the top one hundred most amazing heaven prides of the Spirit Sea stage for the past few thousands years in Qinglu Academy.

“Wait a minute, Gu Yunting should already be in the rankings, meaning the rankings have already shifted slightly. I wonder what his rank is.”

Lin Xun looked thoughtful.

He continued looking down the line. Whenever his gaze came into contact with a silhouette, the golden light would disappear, revealing its true face.

“Qi Wuyang, ascended the overall rankings 477 years ago. 98th.”

“Song Qingchi, ascended 654 years ago...”

“Hua Linyuan, 813 years ago...”

“Zhao Yunxi...”

Emotions stirred within Lin Xun. These figures represented the most dazzling heaven prides of various eras, and each stood out in their own extraordinary way...

From their surnames, Lin Xun guessed that these figures were mostly from the imperial family and the seven high clans!

This made him sigh deeply. The great factions possessed amazing foundations.

Oh?

Lin Xun soon saw a familiar figure—Gu Yunting! He was ranked sixty-four on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings!

“What a freak. He’s truly incredible to be ranked 64th even among the countless students who studied at Qinglu Academy for the past few thousand years.”

Just as he was marveling over this, he suddenly discovered something odd. He could not clearly see the figure in front of Gu Yunting.

The silhouette was clothed in golden light and no matter how hard he tried, he was unable to see who it was.

At the same time, Lin Xun also noticed that the figures he had seen earlier had been swept away by the flowing water, falling far behind him.

Did that mean that the cumulation of his current power, foundation, and talent was ranked 63rd on the Spirit Sea Overall rankings?

Dong!

A nature-like dao sound rang out, causing Lin Xun's heart to tremble.

At the same time, a strange cryptic power surged into his body and began to spread as if to scan his entire body.

An unexplainable desire to resist rose in his heart. It felt as if an invisible eye was prying into his deepest, darkest secrets.

He became especially irritable when the power neared his heart acupuncture point. His Origin Aeth Artery suddenly flared up and became burning hot.

Lin Xun's heart shuddered as an ominous feeling washed over him.

Omm~

It was at this moment that the Omega Door in his mind-sea suddenly sent out a pulse.

In an instant, the pulse clashed with the mysterious power that had invaded his body.

Boom!

Lin Xun felt as if two volcanoes were colliding in his body. However, he was powerless to do anything to stop them.

The mysterious force that had surged into his body and the pulse from the Omega Door were far beyond his level. They were like arch-enemies that immediately clashed upon meeting.

What's going on?

Lin Xun was horrified. The Omega Door had always been silently floating in his mind-sea, and he had never thought it of more than a door to the Omega Secret-Realm.

He never imagined that it would suddenly begin to stir today.

The mysterious force was expelled in an instant. Before Lin Xun could breathe a sigh of relief he heard a 'dong' again!

The dao noise had sounded again!

Meanwhile, the mysterious power appeared once again and surged into his body. The only difference was that it was much stronger than before!

The Omega Door seemed to sense that it was being challenged. It began to shake and send out pulses to fight back.

Rumble~

Lin Xun felt as if his body was on the verge of bursting. The two clashing forces made his soul shiver in terror, making him feel as if he was about to collapse!

What the hell is going on?

Lin Xun's expression changed drastically.

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Bang! Bang! Bang!

Lin Xun soon could not concern himself with anything else. The battle occurring in his body was just too horrifying. It caused his channels, muscles, bones, and flesh to release a cracking sound that resembled breaking glass.

Bloody mists exploded one after another as section after section of channels collapsed. The indescribable pain nearly made Lin Xun fall unconscious.

He never imagined that attacking the rankings would put him in such precarious danger and was about to destroy his body!

It had all happened too suddenly. Even someone with Lin Xun's mental fortitude and composure could not help but lose hope at this juncture. Was he going to die today?

How ridiculous!

He had yet to craft a rune armament, kill the Lin Clan's enemies, avenge his parents...

How could he allow himself to die like this?

Lin Xun refused to accept this fate!

He had even survived his Origin Aeth Artery being taken away when he was a baby. How could he allow himself to die in such a sudden manner?

After experiencing endless trials, he managed to rebuild his Origin Aeth Artery, reach an unprecedented pinnacle of the Spirit Sea stage, and establish his own unique dao. Was this all his journey would amount to?

Lin Xun refused to accept it!

He desperately struggled to resist but helplessly realized that his body had fallen under the control of the two forces, making him powerless to change anything.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The body released loud popping sounds akin to popcorn popping as his organs began to be destroyed.

Just as his body was on the verge of crumbling, the Omega Door in his mind-sea moved and pressed down on the crystal-clear bead nearby.

It was the Heavenly Water Sacred Bead, the holy artifact of the Water Brute Tribe!

During his time in Blood Kill camp, Lin Xun had stumbled across the bead after killing an assassin from the Water Brute Tribe. It had silently rested in his mind-sea since then.

On the way to the Forbidden City, he had been swept away into the underwater vortex and sent into a wormhole. Right then, the bead revealed its power and safely transported him to an ancient ruin in the depths of Spirit Burial Sea.

It was there that he used the Heavenly Water Sacred Bead to safely escape from the ruins with the azure turtle who had been trapped there for thousands of years.

Lin Xun had originally believed that the bead was a supreme treasure with dimensional travel powers and would eventually serve a great purpose. He never imagined that the Omega Door would suddenly put pressure on the bead when his body was on the verge of being destroyed.

Boom!

If he had not attained the perfect Star Cycle stage, which greatly strengthened his mind-sea, the resulting disturbance would have devastated it!

Even so, Lin Xun still felt as if his head was about to split, and his spirit nearly shattered as well.

However, he soon felt a warm and gentle power akin to a dao spring flow out from his mind-sea and spread to every corner of his body.

His crushed channels, broken bones, torn flesh, and ruined organs began to repair and regenerate at an unbelievable speed as frightening life force overflowed!

The life force felt like a giant sea and a resplendent sun that gently nourished his body, transforming everything wherever it passed.

In an instant, the endless intense pain was replaced by an indescribable sensation of comfort. It felt as if he was soaking in a spring of divine medicinal water which cleansed his body and raised its quality.

Lin Xun nearly moaned in ecstasy. It had felt like he was being tortured by thousands of blades in hell a split second earlier, but now he felt indescribably wonderful and comfortable as if he was about to become an immortal of the heavens.

It was at this moment that Lin Xun finally realized the reason. The Heavenly Water Sacred Bead in his mind-sea that had been pressured by the Omega Door had sent out a boundless wave of cool spring-water-like power!

Can this treasure even regrow a skeleton?

Lin Xun was flabbergasted.

Moreover, he discovered that his channels, apertures, flesh, bones, and organs were not only being repaired but also undergoing a transformation!

The strands of mystical life energy made his muscles and bones gleam. It made his channels and orifices glow with vitality, and his flesh and skin sparkled and glowed. Every fiber of his being had been infused with vigor like a burning cauldron.

How inconceivable!

Is this what they called finding fortune in disaster?

Excitement flooded Lin Xun. He felt as if he was being born anew.

He noticed that the mysterious power that had surged into his body had once again been defeated and eliminated, allowing his condition to change for the better.

Dong!

However, it was as if the heavens were intentionally picking on Lin Xun. Before he could properly feel the changes, another ancient nature-like dao sound rang out.

Lin Xun's scalp instantly turned numb. It's coming again!

There was no chance for rejection. An even stronger and more aggressive mysterious force arrived and charged into his body with wild abandon.

The Omega Door seemed to bristle in anger. It buzzed incessantly, releasing pulses to engage in battle once more.

The war in his body began anew, and it was even more intense than the previous two times!

In mere moments, Lin Xun's restored and strengthened body was once again covered in cracks like a glass bottle on the verge of shattering.

It was naturally accompanied by intense pain that made Lin Xun feel as if he had fallen into hell again and was being brutally tortured.

However, right before his body was about to crumble, the Heavenly Water Sacred Bead was mercilessly pressured again. It immediately released mystical essence energy that began to repair Lin Xun's body...

As such, he once again returned to heaven!

Lin Xun did not feel the least bit happy this time. This was just far too dangerous. He was worried that his mind would collapse if he had to keep enduring this torture.

It was like cycling between hell and heaven, destruction and rebirth, and life and death!

Without personally experiencing it, no one would truly understand how it felt.

Dong!

Dong!

Dong!

The dao sound continued to ring. At each ring, a mysterious force would flood into Lin Xun's body.

The Omega Door continued to fight off the mysterious force. It was as if the door viewed Lin Xun's body as its territory and could not tolerate the invasion of the mysterious force.

Each time his body was on the verge of destruction, it would be repaired by the Heavenly Water Sacred Bead's power. Like a piece of metal that was being beaten and tempered, his physique was strengthening and improving with every cycle.

While all of this was occurring, Lin Xun did not notice that there was a thin old man observing him from start to end.

Mysterious dao runes swirled in the old man's black-hole-like eyes, as if able to see everything in the world.

After a long time, the thin old man muttered, "Fortune from disaster hmm. It seems that I will not need to take action..."

.....

An unknown amount of time passed. It felt like an eon and a dream of life and death before Lin Xun finally awakened.

The dao noise had stopped ringing.

In his mind-sea, the Omega Door returned to its silent, majestic, and mysterious state.

The only difference was that the Heavenly Water Sacred Bead was now missing!

Lin Xun was stunned. It was then that he recalled the bead had been grounded to dust amidst the constant cycles, becoming 'nourishment' for his body!

This realization shook Lin Xun. That was the sacred artifact of the Water Brute Tribe! It was of great importance to them and possessed the inconceivable power of dimensional travel. How could it be destroyed?

Did this mean that the Heavenly Water Sacred Bead's power had been infused into his body?

Lin Xun hurriedly inspected his body.

His interior shone with dazzling life force. His channels, orifices, blood, flesh, organs, bones, and muscles sparkled like gems as if they were gorgeous, perfectly-carved masterpieces. Even his skin gave off a healthy gleam as life energy slowly circulated within.

It was as if his body had undergone an astonishing metamorphosis!

His bones had attained an incredible level of hardness, and there was not even the slightest trace of impurity in his organs. It was as if they had become divine artifacts that were rich with life energy.

His channels had become pure and tough and gave off a multicolored glow.

His organs, flesh, blood, and life force pulsed in harmony as he breathed, producing a wonderful and joyful sound.

It was not an increase in cultivation but a physical level-up!

Like a sword that had been tempered a thousand times, his body had been purified and was now brimming with unimaginable vitality!

"This body was constructed from those countless cycles of destruction and restoration along with the sacrifice of the Heavenly Water Sacred Bead!"

Lin Xun sighed deeply.

He could sense that although his cultivation had not experienced a breakthrough, the physical level-up had made his body, spirit, and cultivation achieve an extreme state of perfection!

“Little fellow, you’ve truly surprised me.”

An old voice suddenly sounded in his ear.

The world seemed to spin around Lin Xun and he found himself standing amidst the river of time again!

His expression immediately turned ugly. It had been so difficult for him to escape previously. Was he going to experience that insane suffering again?

“No need to be nervous, the Dao Spirit Stone Tablet’s power has already returned to its slumber and will not appear again.”

The old voice echoed again. Lin Xun soon discovered that a thin old man had appeared at some unknown time.

Although he did not give off any powerful aura, Lin Xun felt as if he was looking at a great mountain that spanned across the world and had stood there since the beginning of time!

Lin Xun’s heart shuddered, realizing that the old man was an old monster whose strength had already reached an immeasurable level!

He could not help but ask, “Elder, why did you bring me back here?”

“Aren’t you curious to find out what you experienced earlier?”

Although the old man’s voice was ordinary, it immediately drew Lin Xun’s attention.

That’s right, he had been attacking the rankings earlier. Why had so many outrageous events occurred?

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The old man’s thin figure stood above the river of time with his hands behind his back, his murky eyes seemingly capable of gazing into the true secrets at the river’s end.

The old man slowly said in a worldly voice, “Since time immemorial, only the most talented heaven prides of each era have had the opportunity to see this place. The imprints of the figures you’ve seen are the one hundred strongest and most famous youngsters for the past several thousand years.”

“Their names have been imprinted here. Only when a heaven pride stronger than any one of them appears will that person shake their results and erase them from the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings.”

Lin Xun silently listened as he gazed into the distance where golden figures stood on the river like proud suns.

He had already guessed this. However, he did not understand why he had that near-death experience earlier.

“When you can see the name which represents a figure, it means that your current accomplishments have surpassed that heaven pride. If you cannot, it means that your rank is below them.”

Lin Xun suddenly recalled that he had seen Gu Yunting’s figure and name. Moreover, he knew that the other party was ranked sixty-four.

However, Lin Xun had been unable to see the person in front of Gu Yunting. According to the old man, wouldn’t it mean that he was ranked sixty-fourth on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings?

If that were the case, wouldn’t Gu Yunting be pushed back to sixty-fifth?

“But you are different from them.”

The old man suddenly changed the topic as his murky eyes looked at Lin Xun. In that moment, he felt as if all of his secrets were being revealed, making him feel rather uncomfortable.

“Please enlighten me, elder.”

Lin Xun took a deep breath.

“Given your talent and potential, if the Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet was allowed to sense everything, your rank would not be this low.”

The old man withdrew his gaze. “However, your body rejected the Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet’s power and did not allow it to sense all of your talent and foundations!”

It was an earth-shattering revelation!

Lin Xun turned rigid as it dawned upon him that the mysterious force that had flowed into his body earlier was from the Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet.

It was easy to guess what this ‘Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet’ was. It was the tablet that contained the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings and the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings.

It was rumored that the tablet originated from a certain ancient sect and was a highly mysterious treasure. The Qinglu Academy Principal had subsequently used his supreme power to refine the tablet and shifted it here.

Lin Xun could not fathom why the Omega Door had resisted the Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet’s power.

After some silence, the old man made a baffling remark, “This might be fate.”

Lin Xun was bewildered but only pursed his lips in silence. He would never reveal a secret like the Omega Door.

“You might not know this, but ascending the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings and leaving your name is equivalent to obtaining an amazing opportunity. You would have been allowed to enter the Ancient Wasteland Domain and become a core successor of a mysterious sect.”

The old man revealed a secret that shook Lin Xun’s heart. It was indeed a rare opportunity. For cultivators, it was no different from a future that was filled with hope!

According to the old man, the heaven prides on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings had probably already left for the mysterious sect to continue their cultivation journey.

Moreover, they were even treated as core disciples!

Lin Xun could not help but ask, "Dare I ask which mysterious sect they went to?"

"Heaven Axis Holy Land."

The old man gave a name. There was a slightly peculiar expression on his face as he continued, "Even in the Ancient Wasteland Domain, it is an extremely prestigious powerhouse faction. It is rumored that the sect has produced true Eternals: immortals who are as glorious as the sun and moon and possess longevity that spans across entire ages!"

Eternals!

Lin Xun inwardly gasped. Along his cultivation journey, he had gradually come to understand the difficulty and ungraspable nature of the cultivation path. Long life was something that was even more unrealistic than a dream, and no one had ever witnessed it.

However, it appeared that there were rumors of 'Eternals' in the Heaven Axis Holy Land of the Ancient Wasteland Domain. It was honestly an astonishing revelation.

Although these were merely rumors, they showed the greatness of Heaven Axis Holy Land's wealth and history!

"It's a pity that your destiny does not seem to lie with Heaven Axis Holy Land."

Although the old man said this, there was no hint of pity in his voice.

This stunned Lin Xun. He could keenly sense that the old man seemed to be very gratified by the appearance of an 'unknown variable' like him.

After a long silence, the old man suddenly sighed softly as he looked at Lin Xun and said, "Little one, you have far too many secrets that even I cannot unravel. It is difficult to say whether this is a blessing or misfortune. However, there is one thing I am certain of. If you have the chance to enter the Ancient Wasteland Domain one day, do not come into contact with anyone from Heaven Axis Holy Land. It will only be a disaster for you."

Lin Xun's heart shuddered. Disaster? Could it have something to do with the Omega Door's rejection of the Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet's power?

Lin Xun had an inkling that his conjuncture was correct although he did not know why. There were still too many things he didn't understand.

"You will understand when the time is ripe. However, you need not worry about this for the time being while you are still in the Ziyao Empire."

The old man must have sensed Lin Xun's worry and could not help but smile a little as his tone became gentle.

"Thank you for enlightening me, elder."

Lin Xun cupped his hands together.

The old man warned, "Remember, do not mention today's matter to anyone. No matter how curious you are, do not reveal a single thing. This is something you have to commit to heart."

Lin Xun solemnly acknowledged before he suddenly asked, "Elder, may I ask for your name?"

The old man's eyes grew deep as the night as he stared at Lin Xun, "You should have guessed it long ago. Why are you still asking?"

Lin Xun's expression finally changed. Shock surged in his eyes as he stood there rooted to the ground.

He had indeed guessed it but never imagined that he would draw the attention of such a mysterious and ancient individual on the very same day he returned to the academy—the principal!

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When Lin Xun returned to reality, he felt slightly dazed as if he had just awakened from a dream.

Although it had merely been an attempt to climb the rankings, he had somehow come across numerous secrets and even gotten to see the principal.

It made Lin Xun realize that the commotion he caused today had gone a little overboard. At the very least, he had not expected the Omega Door to repulse the Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet's senses, which ended up causing more complications.

Heaven Axis Holy Land!

Lin Xun committed the mysterious name to memory. The 'disaster' mentioned by the principal made him instinctively wary.

"Eh? Has the phenomenon disappeared?"

"What happened earlier?"

Several bewildered voices sounded. It was Shi Yu, Ning Meng, the Dao Martial Department students, and the others who had also returned to their senses.

Everyone was still somewhat confused.

Evidently, they were unaware of everything that had happened earlier which was probably the principal's handiwork.

"Haha, look. His ranking is still at fourth place on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings!"

Someone suddenly burst out into laughter upon discovering that Lin Xun's result was still in fourth place.

"I knew it. We've won the bet!"

"Lin Xun, how will you keep acting arrogant now? I told you earlier that you couldn't make it and yet you still dared to brag that you could achieve first place. What do you have to say for yourself?"

“You’ve lost, quickly hand the points over!”

The Dao Martial Department students excitedly clamored. It felt great to see Lin Xun lose the bet and make a fool of himself.

Shi Yu’s, Ning Meng’s, and the others’ expressions had become rather ugly. They could not understand why Lin Xun’s ranking had remained stuck despite such a grand phenomenon. It just didn’t make any sense.

Could something unexpected have happened?

Ning Meng loudly scolded, “What are you guys so pleased about? Can’t you see that Lin Xun is ranked fourth? Is such a result something the likes of you guys can mock?”

It was true, being ranked fourth on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings was considered top-tier in the Dao Martial Department. Such a result was not something just anyone would possess.

Someone sneered, “Hmph, what a joke. He’s not first so he lost and that’s the truth. Did we say anything wrong?”

“Cut the crap, you were so arrogant earlier and now you’re being a sore loser? How shameful!”

The others also retorted.

Ning Meng, Shi Yu, and the others were angered but could not refute. After all, Lin Xun had lost the bet.

However, Lin Xun turned his head, smiled, and asked, “Don’t be so anxious, it’s not over yet. I recall there are still quite a number of friends who have yet to participate in our little bet, right? Since all of you believe I’ll definitely lose now, why not take part as well? Don’t worry, if I do lose, I guarantee that I will not go back on my word.”

Ning Meng’s, Shi Yu’s, and the others’ eyes brightened, realizing that Lin Xun still had something up his sleeve! It was something to look forward to.

The Dao Martial Department students were taken aback. They had not expected that Lin Xun would still be so fearless at this juncture.

They could not help but begin to doubt themselves but soon relaxed after looking at the unchanged rankings on the stone tablet.

“Trying to put up an act? I’ll take that bet!”

A young man immediately stepped forward with a sneer.

“Me too!”

The other students also followed.

It wasn’t their fault for feeling so confident. So much time had passed, but Lin Xun’s result was still unchanged. It should be almost impossible for him to stage a comeback.

Lin Xun’s smile grew wider. Without further ado, he placed his right hand on the stone tablet again.

“Are you going to attack the rankings again? What a joke!”

One of the students laughed but before he could finish, the golden light that represented Lin Xun’s result lightly flashed before it...leaped straight to the top!

It was too quick. All they saw was a flash of gold and the originally first place Zhao Jingwen fell to second place.

The originally second place Zuo Yujing fell to third...

“This...”

The Dao Martial Department students were stupefied. They had already been considering how they would split Lin Xun’s points. Who could have anticipated that such a humongous change would occur to the rankings in the blink of an eye?

The students were in disbelief and tried to rub their eyes, hoping it was a mistake. However, the reality was cruel. The first-place spot had indeed been occupied by Lin Xun’s result — towering over all the other heaven prides like a mighty mountain!

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Shi Yu, Ning Meng, and the others also gasped. Lin Xun was far too savage. Could he have intentionally held back until all the fish finally took the bait?

That’s so devious!

They began to view Lin Xun in a slightly different light.

To think that he can become so unscrupulous in order to obtain points.

However, they had wronged Lin Xun this time. It had not been his intention to set such a trap, but things had somehow just fallen into place. Who else could the Dao Martial Department students blame but themselves for foolishly jumping in?

One of the students bellowed, “This is impossible!”

“Why? Are you a sore loser?”

Lin Xun could not be bothered with them. He began to collect the identity tokens as he said, “Hey you. If you dare to run, don’t blame me for burning bridges.”

One of the students, who had been planning to slip away, was rooted in place after hearing that. In the end, he had no choice but to hand over his identity token with an ugly expression.

“You cheated!”

Another student shrieked, clearly unable to accept the outcome.

These points were earned through their blood, sweat, and tears. Who would willingly hand them over to someone else?

“Cut the crap, go ahead and show me how you can cheat the rankings.”

Lin Xun snatched the other party's identity token, causing him to shake in anger. However, he ultimately restrained himself.

What else could he do? Even the likes of Lan Yu and Jin Zhuliu weren't Lin Xun's match, so how could he possibly dare to take on Lin Xun?

In the end, Lin Xun obtained a dozen more identity tokens. Together with the tokens he had won from Lin Yu, Jin Zhuliu, and the others, he now had a total of nearly four thousand points!

The abundant haul somewhat surprised him. Since he was now ranked first on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings, he would be awarded another two thousand points, bringing the total to six thousand. That was more than enough for the Sky Stairs Assessment.

“Many thanks, everyone.”

In the end, Lin Xun smiled and waved goodbye as he left Spirit Sea Peak with Shi Yu, Ning Meng, and the others.

The Dao Martial Department students nearly vomited blood.

.....

Swoosh!

Not long after, a man in white arrived at Spirit Sea Peak. His figure was tall and slim like an immortal from legend and his eyes twinkled like stars.

Gu Yunting!

His eyes immediately focused on the first-place name on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings, only to be stunned and bewildered. The phenomenon earlier had been so grand and mystical, so why had someone like that failed to leave their name on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings?

After a moment of silence, Gu Yunting turned around and left.

A little more time passed, and numerous people began to arrive at Spirit Sea Peak. These instructors and students could not help but be astonished when they saw the name occupying first place on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings.

Lin Xun!

To think that it's him!

There would be no peace in Qinglu Academy on this day. Two months after Lin Xun disappeared, he returned like an unstoppable force, defeating Shi Yunpeng, Xue Yun, Jin Zhuliu, and Lan Yu in the arena, which caused a big commotion in the Dao Martial Department.

His arrogant and fearless attitude, and underhanded tactic of acting weak in battle to fool his opponents made the students hate him yet also secretly fear him.

“He's devious, evil, and intentionally acted weak to trick everyone. What a shameless person!”

“How formidable. Even Lan Yu voluntarily admitted defeat to him. Lin Xun’s martial cultivation has already surpassed many heaven prides!”

These were the crowd’s opinions of Lin Xun. They loathed him and cursed him for being shameless and underhanded, feeling he did not act anything like a heaven pride.

There were also those that admired and praised his strength.

However, this wasn’t the end of it. While everyone was still guessing how strong Lin Xun was, a certain piece of news exploded in Qinglu Academy like a bomb!

Lin Xun had attacked the rankings, ascended to the peak in one fell swoop, and now towered over all the other heaven prides!

It was frightening, to say the least. The Spirit Sea Golden Rankings represented supreme glory. Every name upon it represented the top hundred most outstanding heaven prides of the Dao Martial Department of this generation.

And yet, a young rune master from the Rune Department had seized first place on the rankings. How could anyone not be shocked by this news?

Who could have imagined that Lin Xun’s martial cultivation would also stand at the apex of the Spirit Sea stage?

“How hateful. Lin Xun isn’t even a Dao Martial Department student, and yet he’s taken the first spot on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings. Wouldn’t this imply that there’s no one capable in our Dao Martial Department?”

The Dao Martial Department students could no longer keep calm and were both devastated and angered by this news.

“Lin Xun is incredible. In the long history of the academy, who has ever dared to beat up the Dao Martial Department heaven prides and then seize first place on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings? This is going to be hard to swallow for the Dao Martial Department students.”

“Those Dao Martial Department heaven prides are all so haughty. I hope this lesson will make them change their attitudes.”

The students from the other departments were excited, believing that Lin Xun was a true savage.

It was only when news of Gu Yunting ascending to the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings spread that the Dao Martial Department students were finally able to cheer up.

“After five years of secluded cultivation, Senior Brother Gu Yunting returned, surpassed the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings, and ascended to the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings. He’s now a miracle that stands shoulder to shoulder with the most outstanding heaven prides of the past few thousand years.”

“Hahaha, no matter how arrogant Lin Xun is, he’s only first place on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings. Compared to Senior Brother Gu Yunting, he’s just a grain-sized pearl that can never match the radiance of the sun!”

Gu Yunting singlehandedly swept away the bad mood of the Dao Martial Department students, making them ecstatic and excited.

“No wonder there was a phenomenon earlier. Gu Yunting had ascended the overall rankings!”

“He’s a man who possesses the Dao Fire Golden Body. He has already surpassed all of the current-day heaven prides and now stands shoulder to shoulder with the most dazzling heaven prides of the past few thousand years!”

The instructors and students from the other departments could not help but be amazed as well when they heard the news.

Gu Yunting was too incredible and peerless. No one could even feel jealous of him because he was just far too superior.

“What do you guys think? Who’s stronger between Lin Xun and Gu Yunting?”

“Of course it’s Gu Yunting! Lin Xun is only first on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings which Gu Yunting has already surpassed.”

“That might not be the case. I recall that Lin Xun is only sixteen this year while Gu Yunting is already more than twenty. There’s a substantial age gap between them. If Lin Xun is given a few more years, he definitely has the possibility of surpassing Gu Yunting.”

“What a joke. Although age does represent potential, cultivators ultimately compete via their cultivation. Since Lin Xun is currently behind, it will be very difficult for him to catch up.”

Numerous people in Qinglu Academy began to compare Lin Xun and Gu Yunting, which eventually gave rise to fierce debates.

Regardless of the conclusions, there was no doubt that Lin Xun and Gu Yunting had become the hottest topics in the academy today.

Meanwhile, another piece of news was spreading in the Forbidden City.

After disappearing for two months, Lin Xun exited his secluded cultivation with a massacre. He destroyed the Lin branch clan disciples and captured two younger generation heaven prides, Zuo Yang and Qin Xing!

The news immediately shook the city.

Lin Xun wasn’t an unfamiliar name to anyone. He had been at the center of many commotions and uproars, and was famous in the Forbidden City.

Just when everyone was thinking that he was in huge trouble after offending the imperial family, he suddenly launched a strong counterattack.

“He’s already started such a bloodbath on his first day out by slaughtering all of the branch clan members who dared to challenge and oppose Mind Cleansing Peak. Lin Xun is a truly vicious individual!”

“Is he not afraid of death? I can’t believe he even captured Zuo Yang and Qin Xing. Isn’t he worried about revenge from the Zuo and Qin Clans?”

"I only know that Lin Xun won't take this lying down. Even in the imperial palace, he dared to force the Rising Sky Marquis to kneel and apologize in front of all of those powerful figures. Is there anything he doesn't dare to do?"

The Forbidden City was abuzz with such discussions.

After two months of silence, Lin Xun had returned in a strong and bloody fashion, shocking everyone incredibly.

No one had thought he would dare to commit such acts. It was equivalent to burning bridges with the three Lin branch clans in addition to offending the Zuo and Qin Clans!

"Mind Cleansing Peak is already in an extremely dangerous position. Despite that, Lin Xun not only doesn't lay low but instead also causes a huge commotion. He's playing with fire."

"Even a rabbit will bite back when forced into a corner. Lin Xun must have done it because he has nothing left to lose."

"Sigh, his opponents aren't just the Zuo and Qin Clans but also the imperial family. I feel it will not be long before a calamity befalls Lin Xun. When that happens, Mind Cleansing Peak won't be safe either!"

"Indeed, no matter how incredible he is, he's ultimately still a young man who doesn't understand how terrifying the high clans are. For them, killing him is easier than squashing an ant."

It was the capital after all. As such, Lin Xun's matter quickly drew much attention and discussion from the entire city. Regardless of whether it was good or bad, there was no doubt that his fame had reached a level that no one could ignore.

On the same day, news about Lin Xun entering Qinglu Academy, defeating several famous heaven prides, and taking first place on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings also spread to the Forbidden City.

At the same time, news that Lin Xun captured Zuo Yang and Qin Xing and massacred the Lin branch clan members likewise spread to the academy.

It was no surprise that this resulted in another huge uproar that made Lin Xun the hottest topic in the Forbidden City.

Even in the long history of the empire, it was very rare for anyone to be treated in such a manner.

After all, if one was to disregard his status and strength, Lin Xun was merely a sixteen-year-old youth. The fact that he could stir up the entire city was something no one from his generation could ever hope to match.

Lin Xun was unaware of all this, but he probably wouldn't be overly concerned even if he knew. He had intended to stir up a ruckus, and it mattered not whether it made him infamous.

The Great Affairs Hall.

Lin Xun arrived with a big stack of identity tokens. He intended to exchange his points before finally starting preparations for the Sky Stairs Assessment!

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Lin Xun felt somewhat pained when he walked out of the Great Affairs Hall.

It turned out that using the second method to attack the rankings cost a thousand points. It was no wonder that almost no one would opt for this solo method.

A thousand points was an astronomical sum that most students could only dream about.

Fortunately, after paying a thousand points, Lin Xun still had roughly five thousand points, which were enough for the Sky Stairs Assessment.

Since it was getting late, Lin Xun decided to return to his accommodation. He was planning to head for Sky Stairs Mountain tomorrow.

Sky Stairs Mountain was a restricted zone in Qinglu Academy. Only students who possessed five thousand points were qualified to enter.

It was rumored that Sky Stairs Mountain was a mysterious place that contained traces of the almighty dao. Anyone who managed to climb to the top of the Sky Stairs would become capable of wielding the great imago power!

The word 'Sky' represented the 'Heaven Ascension' stage. It was common knowledge that only a Heaven Ascension expert could wield imago power.

Late at night, Lin Xun silently meditated in his room.

His cultivation had already reached an unprecedented pinnacle of perfection and flawlessness in the Spirit Sea stage. Moreover, because of the rebirth of his Origin Aeth Artery, his already incomparably solid foundations had grown increasingly strong like an immeasurable abyss.

Other cultivators would be stupefied if they knew. In the Spirit Sea stage, it was practically impossible to find someone like Lin Xun with such abnormally tempered foundations.

In his spirit cultivation, Lin Xun had reached the perfect 'Star Cycle' stage. His mind-sea was occupied by a cluster of stars and filled with dream-like starlight that illuminated his spirit.

The next level, 'Moon Phases,' belonged to a more profound level of spirit cultivation. The crux of this stage lay in the tempering of the 'Moon-Soul'.

Only after achieving the state of 'timeless sole shining full moon' would this cultivation stage be considered to have attained perfection.

Lin Xun planned to begin cultivating the 'Moon Phases' after breaking through to the Heaven Ascension stage. It was because his spirit power had already reached its limit in the Spirit Sea stage, and it was very difficult to further develop due to the restraining influence of his physique and cultivation.

What surprised Lin Xun the most, however, was the recent transformation of his physique. In the Dao Spirit Stone Tablet, he experienced multiple cycles of destruction and rebirth that repeatedly increased the quality of his physique.

In addition, the Heavenly Water Sacred Bead had been fully integrated into his physique as well!

In fact, Lin Xun suspected that he was now capable of killing a Spirit Sea cultivator with the raw power of a single punch!

“My cultivation, spirit, and physique have reached a perfect state. As the saying goes, one becomes two, two becomes three, and three becomes infinity. When I advance to the Heaven Ascension stage, my perfect cultivation will push me to a level that far surpasses all other cultivators!”

Comprehension suddenly dawned upon Lin Xun.

The Heaven Ascension stage was a greater cultivation realm that was completely different from the Spirit Sea stage. Only after reaching it would a practitioner be called a ‘great cultivator’ by others!

It was because only Heaven Ascension experts could begin to learn and wield imago power, allowing them to control the elements, shape the terrain, summon rain and clouds, burn mountains, and boil the sea with a flick of the wrist!

There were numerous ways to interpret the Heaven Ascension stage. Some people said that reaching this stage would allow the cultivator to pry into the ‘reason’ and ‘logic’ of the world.[1]

Others said that the Heaven Ascension stage represented a transformation in a person’s cultivation which was similar to creating a new world in the body where one would establish the roots of one’s dao, giving a cultivator the qualifications to seek eternal life.

No matter the interpretation, the Heaven Ascension stage was undoubtedly a greater cultivation stage that was filled with mystery and wonder. Since time immemorial, fewer than one in ten thousand cultivators even had any hope of reaching this stage!

It was just too darn difficult!

This was because the Heaven Ascension stage required one to comprehend the will of the world’s dao. Without talent and luck, there was no way to master such power even within a lifetime.

For the Forbidden City’s great factions, Heaven Ascension experts were indispensable, heavyweight existences who could exert unignorable pressure and influence.

In Mind Cleansing Peak, Third Old Zhu and Lin Zhong fulfilled this role. Without them, Mind Cleansing Peak’s situation would be far more dire.

This showed the importance of a Heaven Ascension expert.

Lin Xun was currently only a single step away from this cultivation stage. However, taking this step was far more difficult than reaching the sky!

It was not something that could be achieved by mere training in isolation as it also required a certain combination of luck and patience.

From what Lin Xun knew, numerous talented cultivators had failed to reach the Heaven Ascension stage despite trying their whole lives. Moreover, it was not because their foundations weren’t strong enough, but because they lacked an opportunity to seek out this breakthrough!

Lin Xun was currently in the same situation and was waiting for his breakthrough opportunity.

.....

The next morning.

Sky Stairs Mountain.

The mountain was located deep in Qinglu Academy and was a restricted area that was usually void of any people.

The morning mist swirled as a figure walked through. He was dressed in moon-white clothes, and his long black hair was casually tied behind his head, displaying his handsome and friendly face. His deep black eyes shone brightly, giving him an ethereal aura.

It was naturally Lin Xun.

The wilderness around him was silent with only the morning mist curling around the many mountains. Sky Stairs Mountain could be seen in the distance, and it was where the Sky Stairs Assessment would be held.

“Young man, this is a restricted area. Do not come any closer.”

A hut appeared in the distance. An old man with unkempt hair and an unshaven beard was preparing a meal in front of the hut.

As the stove burned menacingly, a fragrance spread from the meat cooking within that would make anyone’s fingers twitch in anticipation.

The old man did not raise his head when he sensed Lin Xun's approach. Instead, he gave a warning as he continued to watch the meat in the wok while tapping his mouth in impatience.

“Elder, I’m here to climb the Sky Stairs,” Lin Xun replied as he observed the old man. The old man was dirty and sloppy and did not give off a strong presence that usually indicated a powerful reclusive expert.

However, Lin Xun did not dare to underestimate the old man. Someone who was stationed at Sky Stairs Mountain was definitely no ordinary individual.

“Oh, over the past several hundred years, quite a number of students have come to climb the Sky Stairs, but none have succeeded. Young man, I advise you to leave and not waste your points.”

The old man suddenly chuckled, “If it were the past, five thousand points could buy you the best cut of heaven-grade monster-beast meat. It’s a pity that such an existence is very difficult to find nowadays.”

Lin Xun was taken aback. A heaven-grade monster-beast? That’s a terrifying existence that can compare to a Heaven Ascension or even a Cyclic Derivation expert!

Has this old man eaten the prime meat of a heaven-grade monster-beast before?

Lin Xun soon cast aside these thoughts and solemnly said, “Elder, I must climb the Sky Stairs.”

The old man seemed annoyed as he waved his hand and said, "What a bullheaded child. Fine, I won't stop you. Hand over your identity token."

Lin Xun handed over his identity token before continuing on his way.

"Perfect Spirit Sea stage? Heh, what a pity. Without the 'supreme' qualifications of this stage, he is destined to return in failure."

The old man glanced at Lin Xun's back as he shook his head in disapproval. He soon took out some utensils and began feasting on the meat in the wok.

"Eh? Another one?"

The old man was taken aback. He frowned and stared into distant mist as an immortal and transcendent-like man dressed in snow-white clothes gracefully emerged.

Gu Yunting!

"Are you also here to climb the Sky Stairs?"

The old man continued to gorge as he asked, clearly enjoying his meal.

Gu Yunting nodded. He handed over his identity token before continuing on his way, not saying a single word from start to end.

"What's going on today?"

The old man frowned. He soon shook his head and continued to eat as if even the sky collapsing was less important than the meat in his bowl.

Sky Stairs Mountain was a lonely peak shaped like a giant halberd piercing into the clouds. The barren and rocky peak gave off an unshakable aura.

A small stone path could be seen at the foot of the mountain that stretched to the peak. It was so steep that it nearly resembled a ladder.

This was the Sky Stairs.

Rumor said every step was branded with traces of the dao and filled with unfathomable power. Walking up these steps was more frightening than climbing a mountain of blades or plunging into a sea of fire.

Since time immemorial, only a tiny handful of people have managed to reach the top. It was just far too difficult, and even Spirit Sea cultivators would face great difficulty climbing the stairs.

However, those who succeeded in climbing to the top would receive unimaginable benefits.

Lin Xun took a deep breath and stepped forward without any hesitation.

He knew that each step was filled with danger, and a single slip could easily result in being mercilessly eliminated.

However, it was a trial that Lin Xun needed to overcome.

Pah!

When his foot landed on the first step, the scenery before his eyes abruptly changed, and a raging sea of fire appeared.

Ferocious fiery creatures seemed to dance within the flames, giving off terrifying auras that sought to burn everything.

“The brand of fire!”

Lin Xun’s eyes narrowed. He could tell that this was produced by the fire imago power that had been branded into the Sky Stairs. Although it was not real, the power was incomparably terrifying.

Swoosh!

Without giving Lin Xun any more time to think, a ferocious bird spread its wings, splashing giant waves of fire. It soared toward him, accompanied by scorching heat that could incinerate space itself, and was filled with the power of destruction.

The test had begun!

Lin Xun did not back down and instead boldly advanced. He circulated his cultivation, causing him to shine radiantly like an azure sun as he rose into the air and punched.

Rumble~

Fist-force instantly smashed into the bird, turning it into droplets of light that quickly vanished.

However, more beasts charged out from the sea of fire. Torrential flames raged from their bodies as they released piercing cries and swarmed toward Lin Xun.

“Excellent!”

Lin Xun’s black hair danced around him as he circulated the Nine Heavenshaking Destructions Art and began brawling in the sea of fire. It resembled a horrifying scene from a fire hell where flames rose all around as ferocious beasts attacked, filling the entire place with the power of burning destruction.

Meanwhile, Gu Yunting arrived at the foot of Sky Stairs Mountain. He could not help but frown a little when he saw Lin Xun on the first step

Soon after, he also approached and stepped onto the Sky Stairs!

1. The word ‘heaven’ can also be interpreted as a short form of ‘world’ while ‘ascension’ can be interpreted as ‘prying into the secrets of something’ 窥探

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Angry flames burned the air as ferocious beasts danced about. All of this originated from the traces of fire dao and fully displayed its explosive and intense power.

Lin Xun fought back with the Nine Heavenshaking Destructions Art. Covered in a faint azure divine glow, his body seemed to flicker from place to place as he plowed through the firelight creatures with an unstoppable force.

In mere moments, the sea of fire collapsed and the beasts shattered, turning into a flaming rain of light that sprinkled across the area. All that was left in the air was the aura of fire imago power.

Lin Xun gathered his focus and tried to feel the aura with his senses but soon frowned. The fire imago power was clearly right before his eyes, but he was somehow unable to sense even the slightest trace of it.

In the end, the fire imago power disappeared as if it was all just an illusion.

“It seems that it is indeed very difficult to comprehend and control imago power without first ascending to the Heaven Ascension stage.”

Lin Xun’s frown deepened.

Soon after, he was surprised to discover a figure dressed in snow-white clothes nearby. It was Gu Yunting.

He’s also here to climb the Sky Stairs?

Lin Xun noticed that Gu Yunting was already on the second step. Although he had obviously arrived later, he had already overtaken Lin Xun.

Is he trying to make this a competition?

Lin Xun shook his head in a carefree manner. He had no intention of competing, not because he was afraid, but because he did not wish to be distracted by such things.

After truly experiencing the wonders of the Sky Stairs Assessment, a certain ambition suddenly arose in his heart: to grasp a sliver of imago power at the Spirit Sea stage!

Long ago, while using the Heavenly Yuan Blade Art, Lin Xun had managed to bring out a certain special aura that contained imago power in the two moves: ‘Star-Gather’ and ‘Moon-Catch’.

However, the imago power had originated from the blade art. Although he had been able to wield it, it was not his own power.

The Sky Stairs were covered in dao traces that could display the dao’s true essence. It was a rare chance that Lin Xun naturally did not wish to miss out on.

If he rushed up the stairs just to compete with Gu Yunting, Lin Xun felt that he would lose out on a tremendous opportunity.

Without any hesitation, Lin Xun advanced to the second step, and an illusion created by imago power immediately appeared.

It was a world of green overflowing with abundant life force where mighty trees rose into the heavens and the sky was covered by leaves.

Wood imago power!

Wood embodied the power of life and was one of the five elements. It was rumored that Heaven Ascension cultivators who wielded wood imago power would possess endless stamina and have undying bodies, making them an extremely formidable force in battle.

In addition, they could communicate with the spirits of nature to absorb life energy from the surroundings. They were the closest cultivators to mother nature and had a much easier time cultivating than others.

Rumble~

Vines as thick as buckets abruptly burst out of the ground like wildly dancing pythons. They seemed to cover the sky and land as they swarmed toward Lin Xun.

Shhlaap!

The seemingly soft vine lives easily ripped through the air, filled with terrifying piercing power.

Lin Xun responded with the Horned Ice Dragon Step. His figure seemed to turn illusory as he dashed into the fray, unleashing punches akin to giant dragons that tore up the land and sky. Fist-force smashed vine after vine to pulp amidst splatters of juice and paste.

Unexpectedly, the pieces of vine regrew the moment they landed on the ground and rose into the air once more.

This was wood imago power. The vines were impossible to kill without absolute power!

After the time it took to brew a cup of tea, Lin Xun brought out the triple-layered destructions and completely obliterated the wood imago power.

He immediately cast aside all other thoughts and focused his senses.

Regretfully, he kept feeling that he was on the verge of grasping the wood imago power, but always ended up catching nothing but air. It felt as if the power was in a different space. and he could only look at it but could not seek it out.

However, Lin Xun was not discouraged. From the beginning of time, it was almost impossible for anyone to grasp imago power at the Spirit Sea stage. Even if any individuals did exist, they were like legends from a fairytale that could not be verified.

This showed how difficult it was to achieve such a feat at the Spirit Sea stage. It was not merely a 'difficult task,' but something that was in all likelihood impossible to accomplish.

It felt like a wall that separated the cultivation realms. Without reaching the Heaven Ascension stage, it was very difficult to break through this wall in comprehension.

Simply put, it was a hopeless endeavor. Many unparalleled genius cultivators had tried it in the past, but all of them had ultimately failed.

Lin Xun was unaware of all this and naturally did not understand how ignorant and fearless he appeared.

However, this was the path of cultivation. Only by actively seeking and searching would a cultivator be able to verify their dao.

.....

At the entrance to Sky Stairs Mountain.

All of the meat had been completely cleaned out from the wok, leaving the slovenly old man wishing there was more.

He lazily lay on a rock in front of the hut as he glanced into the distance with an expression of contentment.

A wizened voice suddenly sounded, "Junior Brother, what do you think about those two little ones?"

A thin old man had arrived at an unknown time, standing with his hands behind his back as he gazed upon Sky Stairs Mountain.

If Lin Xun were here, he would definitely be able to recognize the principal of Qinglu Academy!

"Heh, is there a need to ask me if even someone like you has come?"

The slovenly old man took out a toothpick to clean his teeth, seemingly not surprised by the principal's presence.

The principal said, "I wish to know your opinion."

"That white-robed kid should be the one who ascended the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings yesterday, right? If my guess is correct, he's here to find a cultivation breakthrough and is very likely to succeed."

The slovenly old man spoke as if it was just another trivial matter, "A young man like him will sooner or later enter the Ancient Wasteland Domain to cultivate."

"What about the other one?"

The principal's expression was indifferent, unsurprised by the evaluation. After all, he understood Gu Yunting's potential far better than the slovenly old man.

"Um, I didn't see anything worth mentioning."

The slovenly old man's reply was half-hearted as if he could not be bothered at all.

"Take another look," said the principal. He seemed very concerned about the slovenly old man's opinion.

The slovenly old man was somewhat surprised. He glanced at the principal and said, "Is there actually something special about that kid?"

The principal casually said, "He originally had a chance to leave his name on the Spirit Sea Overall rankings, but ultimately rejected it. Something like this has never happened since I brought the Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet to the academy thousands of years ago."

"What?"

The slovenly old man abruptly got up as a sliver of bewilderment appeared on his face. "Are you saying that there's a power in his body that the Heaven Axis Holy Land urgently desires?"

He was clearly privy to some secrets.

The principal nodded. "That's right. The Heaven Axis Holy Land's deepest desire is a power that is capable of rejecting the Dao Spirit Ancient Tablet's power. I once heard that such a power was brought into the Ziyao Empire from the Ancient Wasteland Domain many years ago but never imagined that it was true."

The slovenly old man's expression had become uncertain. After a long time, he suddenly chuckled and said, "In other words, do you plan to give this kid to the Heaven Axis Holy Land or take his power for yourself?"

His smile had turned sinister and chilling.

The principal indifferently said, "I might have done so in the past, but now, I only wish to watch as a bystander and avoid this karma."

The slovenly old man sneered, "You? Don't forget who forced you out of the Ancient Wasteland Domain all those years ago."

The principal's expression remained composed as he replied, "I was the one who proposed it back then. Or do you really believe I never had the chance to return all these years?"

The slovenly old man clearly did not believe him. "I don't believe you. You must have some other plan."

The principal frowned. After a long time, he sighed softly and said, "You won't be able to understand. I lost back then, and it's a convincing loss that I have accepted. I do not blame anyone."

"But you are not satisfied by the outcome. Why else would you care about this youngster?"

Each word was said with a noticeable pause in-between.

He gazed at Sky Stairs Mountain and watched Lin Xun slowly make his way up each step.

On the other hand, Gu Yunting was practically sprinting up the mountain and had already arrived at the halfway mark, placing him far ahead of Lin Xun.

"If you plan on nurturing that youngster to take back what you lost back then, I think you're going to have to prepare for disappointment because I genuinely don't see anything noteworthy about him."

This time, the principal fell silent. After a long time, he finally said, "I have no such intention. There is far too much karma surrounding him. Do you still remember Lin Wenjing and Luo Qingxun?"

The slovenly old man's eyes narrowed. "The champion and runner-up of the national exam seventeen years ago?"

The principal nodded, "Lin Wenjing's grandfather is the Life Death Stage King Lin Daochen. He died on the border battlefield, but how he died has remained a mystery till today."

"Luo Qingxun was also no ordinary person. It's said that she came from a poor household, her parents died when she was very young, and she has no relatives. However, she possessed peerless talent and was extremely intelligent. You also said back then that it was very unusual."

The slovenly old man seemed to become lost in his memories. After a long time, he finally nodded. "I have a deep impression of that little lass, Luo Qingxun. Her aura is definitely not something a poor household can nurture."

At this point, he could not help but frown. "But they died more than a dozen years ago. Why are you bringing this up again?"

The principal indifferently said, "Lin Xun is their child."

The slovenly old man was taken aback as a look of surprise arose on his face. "So he's the little fellow who was born with the 'Grand Abyss Heaven Devourer' Origin Aeth Artery that shocked the entire Forbidden City. I never imagined that he would survive till now, especially after it was extracted. If the Omega Sword Sect's Yun Qingbai finds out, it will certainly become interesting."

The principal indifferently said, "Someone saved him all those years ago."

The slovenly old man frowned. "Who would dare to save someone from Yun Qingbai's hands?"

The principal uttered a name, "Lu Boya."

"Him!"

The slovenly old man was shocked. He abruptly stood up with a mystified expression. "That old fellow's origins are very mysterious!"

The principal nodded.

"If that's the case, there are indeed many troublesome matters following the boy. His great grandfather's and parents' deaths are all related to terrifying karma, and he also has ties with Lu Boya. How complicated."

The slovenly old man fell into deep thought.

"That's why I will never place the burden of what happened back then on him," the principal casually said. His gaze remained fixed on Sky Stairs Mountain from start to end, always watching a certain figure with a slightly complicated expression.

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The Sky Stairs had a total of ninety-nine steps.

This was a physical form of 'nine and nine will return to one,' which was also secretly the number of the grand dao.

The dao traces imprinted upon the stairs made it such that each step was filled with killing intent!

Dong!

Sharp, golden blades rained down from the sky, dazzling and blinding as they cut the land. However, it only took a few moments for everything to be smashed to pieces by a pair of fists, leaving behind a rain of light.

Lin Xun began to focus his senses, but ultimately sighed again.

So difficult!

Imago power felt impossible to comprehend and master.

“The thirty-ninth step forced me to use a five-layer fist force. It’s only going to become harder the higher I go...”

Lin Xun pondered for a while. He glanced up and saw a flash of white that resembled an eye-grabbing flying immortal.

Gu Yunting was already on the eightieth step!

Lin Xun was taken aback. He withdrew his gaze and returned his attention to the path below his feet.

Time passed as he slowly climbed each step, overcoming illusory realm after realm and witnessing various types of imago powers.

There were fiery and destructive fire dao traces, wood traces that endlessly overflowed with life energy, peerlessly sharp metal imago power, etc...

Every type of imago power represented a particular type of dao aura that had originated from a different corner of the world. It was something that was too wonderful to be described in words.

The four seasons changed, living things wilted and thrived, the sun rose and the moon descended, night and day interchanged, and the tide rose and fell...there was a spiritual nature in all things which formed the foundation of the world. It was also the rhythm and nameless nature of the dao from which everything was derived and forever in constant flux.

In simple terms, it was the dao of the world!

Although it was an easy principle to understand, seeing and knowing were two completely different things. To learn and comprehend imago power was something different altogether.

Take now for example. Lin Xun was trying to comprehend imago power, but had made no headway despite trying everything he could think of.

Moreover, he was already on Sky Stairs Mountain which was filled with dao traces. If he were anywhere else, the dao would be even more ungraspable, making it far more difficult to sense and seek!

This was also one of the reasons why there were so few Heaven Ascension experts. The dao was just too endless and vast. Since the beginning of time, countless cultivators had found themselves unable to progress past this point and were ultimately forced to end their cultivation journey in regret.

As the saying went, there were countless bones and bodies buried under the path of cultivation! It was not an exaggeration at all. The boundaries between cultivation realms were often akin to an unsurpassable mountain that stopped numerous cultivators, rendering them incapable of climbing beyond.

If a cultivator failed to find a breakthrough at the end of their lifespan, they would naturally be unable to surpass death and sickness. Ultimately, they would return to the earth to be forever buried in the river of time.

Boom!

A raging sea rushed forth, transforming into spears, halberds, swords, blades, and other weapons as they charged through the air.

Lin Xun was like a bolt of lightning as he fiercely fought above the sea, his fists shining blindingly as they tore through the air.

Boom boom boom~

There were explosions everywhere as droplets of light splattered back into the water and were washed away by the waves.

The raging water imago power soon transformed into dragons, bird-like creatures, yakshas, sea elementals, and other terrifying creatures as its power grew increasingly horrifying.

He was on the sixty-third step, and the power from the dao traces had become increasingly frightening. The imago power they produced had also changed, gaining what seemed to be an untameable, spiritual nature.

Any other Spirit Sea cultivator would probably have been instantly destroyed!

That was indeed the case. For the past several thousand years, there had been no lack of heaven prides who had tried to climb the Sky Stairs, but only a handful could reach the sixty-third step.

It was because the dao traces' power had become akin to the almighty force of nature and was no longer something a Spirit Sea cultivator would be capable of facing.

Even Lin Xun began to feel pressured at this juncture, so he did not dare to let his guard down. A faint azure glow swirled around him as if he were a Hornless Ice Dragon that could devour the clouds and overturn the seas!

Moments later, the illusory realm created by the water imago power turned into a rain of light.

That's the sixty-third step. I had to use five-layer fist force and nearly half of my energy...

Lin Xun silently analyzed his current state.

If it was merely overcoming the illusory realm trial, Lin Xun would have long smashed it apart without wasting too much time and energy.

The crux was that he was also trying to sense imago power in the process, which naturally consumed far more time and energy.

If the other cultivators in Qinglu Academy were to know of this, they would definitely view Lin Xun as a freak. For people like them, merely climbing the Sky Stairs was already difficult beyond belief, and yet he was using it as a chance to sense imago power. It was honestly absurd, to say the least.

“Oh?”

While Lin Xun was focusing his senses, he suddenly caught a mysterious, indistinct aura.

It felt ungraspable as smoke, but was filled with the flavor of water!

He had done it!

Lin Xun’s heart shuddered in elation. When he tried to sense it more closely, however, the strand of mysterious indistinct aura disappeared.

It was nowhere to be found like a goose’s footprint left on the snow being brushed away.

However, Lin Xun did not feel frustrated. Instead, his black eyes shone brightly as his heart churned with excitement.

That split second earlier had felt like a sudden ray of light in the darkness, allowing Lin Xun to finally see a glimmer of hope!

In the past, countless examples had proved that it was a hopeless endeavor in the Spirit Sea stage.

However, the fleeting event that had just occurred undoubtedly proved to Lin Xun that it was not impossible to comprehend imago power at the Spirit Sea stage. The great wall that had separated the Heaven Ascension and Spirit Sea stages was not insurmountable after all!

“Water imago power...”

Lin Xun took a deep breath to regain his calm. Although he had witnessed various dao traces along the way, he had only succeeded in sensing the flavor of water imago power.

It was only an indistinct sliver, but it showed him a clear direction and path he could now follow.

Without hesitation, Lin Xun continued his climb.

This time, he did not waste any effort on the other dao traces and instead sped through them!

Only when he encountered a step with water traces would Lin Xun slow down and restrain his power in order to prolong the battle such that he could further comprehend water imago power.

For a time, Lin Xun seemed to sprint up the stairs, making his progress more than twice as fast as before.

On the ninety-first step, Gu Yunting was resting after breaking through a terrifying illusory realm. By this juncture, he was feeling rather hard-pressed and had no choice but to rest to recover his stamina.

“Oh?”

Gu Yunting suddenly seemed to sense something and glanced back to find that Lin Xun was already at the seventy-seventh step, which made him frown.

He recalled that Lin Xun should have been much further behind. It had been less than ten minutes since the last time he checked. How had Lin Xun shortened the distance between them so quickly?

Could he have been holding back all along and was only now going all out to catch up?

Gu Yunting withdrew his gaze. His handsome face remained composed.

He had indeed wanted to compete with Lin Xun previously because he had also noticed yesterday that Lin Xun had caused a grand phenomenon while attacking the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings.

It had left Gu Yunting slightly confused, hence why he wished to use this chance to probe Lin Xun's abilities.

However, Gu Yunting was quickly disappointed. Lin Xun's performance was far too ordinary and was nowhere near as amazing as Gu Yunting had imagined.

Originally, Gu Yunting had already forgotten about Lin Xun. Who could have expected that he would suddenly catch up so rapidly?

This made Gu Yunting wonder if Lin Xun was trying to use such a strategy in order to overtake him.

"All strategies are ultimately insignificant in the face of absolute strength. Even if he chooses to go all out at this juncture, his defeat is already written in stone."

Gu Yunting soon put aside these thoughts and continued to climb the stairs.

In his heart, Lin Xun might be an incredible individual, but he was still unable to induce any competitive spirit from Gu Yunting.

In front of the hut, the slovenly old man exclaimed, "Eh, the little guy is starting to ramp up his engine."

The principal replied, "I told you that he isn't inferior to Gu Yunting."

After all, he had personally witnessed Lin Xun's performance on the Spirit Sea Overall Rankings yesterday. The youth had not left his name in the end, but his final result had been better than Gu Yunting's!

"Doesn't that mean the kid is amazing? He would be called a little monster even in the Ancient Wasteland Domain."

The slovenly old man's eyes flashed as if they were reflecting the sun as dao aura began to swirl within them.

The slovenly old man asked, "Senior Brother, since you do not plan on interfering, how about you leave him to me?"

"No!"

The principal decisively rejected that proposal.

The slovenly old man chuckled in disapproval.

After some time, the principal and slovenly old man seemed to sense something and abruptly raised their heads to look at the peak.

Gu Yunting was standing on the ninety-ninth step as blinding scarlet flames surged around him like a flaming halo. The flames enveloped his body as they pulsed with a mystical aura.

Rumble~

Black clouds had appeared in the sky as thunder boomed across the land. In the blink of an eye, a lightning bolt descended from the clouds like a giant python and swallowed Gu Yunting.

“He has succeeded. As expected of the famous Dao Fire Golden Body. That’s a heavenly tribulation that would rarely be seen even among a ten thousand cultivators.”

The slovenly old man’s clear eyes shone brightly.

“That’s the foundation of a true heaven pride. The heavenly lightning tribulation will refine his dao body. It is an unparalleled opportunity that other cultivators will never possess.”

The principal could not help but sigh deeply.

Both of them knew that once Gu Yunting overcame the lightning tribulation, he would become a formidable Heaven Ascension expert!

However, the two of them had failed to notice that while Gu Yunting was undergoing the heavenly tribulation, on the eighty-eighth step, water-like ripples quietly rose around Lin Xun and poured into his body through his pores.

It was an unremarkable scene that was overlooked due to the huge disturbance Gu Yunting had caused. Space continued to shake around Lin Xun as ripples spread.

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Chapter 490

I’ve finally succeeded!

Lin Xun motionlessly stood on the stairs like a pine tree on a cliff.

A wisp of indistinct blue flickered in his mind-sea. When it flew past the many spirit stars, the originally silver spirit stars were instantly dyed in a gorgeous water-like glow.

After some time, the stars returned to their original color.

It was as if the wisp of blue light was lighting the stars up like lanterns. The only difference was that the lanterns would be extinguished when the blue light left.

In his mind-sea, the spirit stars went through a breathing-like cycle of being lighted and extinguished, creating an incomparably magical sight.

It was water imago power!

Although it was merely a strand, it still possessed immeasurable profoundness and was considered a type of dao manifestation.

Lin Xun could clearly sense an additional ‘beat’ in his soul that belonged to the ‘water’ dao. It allowed him to sense a certain type of dao power!

Water was kind, always living in harmony with all things and never seeking conflict. In its boundless majesty, water could become a swiftly falling waterfall that flowed over a thousand miles. It could

destroy mountains and split the land, possessing a mighty force that can never be restrained. In small quantities, dripping water could pierce rock. Water was formless and wet and oftentimes, water could be identified as a small detail that will tell what will come.

Its nature could be as soft at times like the spring breeze and rain, and hard at times like the furious sea striking at the heavens.

Its qualities varied based on size and quantity and could be characterized as both hard and soft. Water was one of the keys that could explain the mysteries of the world!

Lin Xun finally gained enlightenment and realized the greatness of imago power. It was a deeper understanding of nature's forces and could produce inconceivably terrifying power when mastered.

"Although it is merely a single strand, for me, it's akin to seeing cultivation in a whole new light. I will need to continue to temper and refine my understanding until I manage to control the power of water and incorporate it into my cultivation!"

Lin Xun took a deep breath before he abruptly opened his eyes.

His aura seemed to change, now containing an additional trace of transcendent water-like clearness.

If the principal and the slovenly old man were to find out that Lin Xun had cultivated a strand of water imago power at the Spirit Sea stage, they would likely lose their composure.

Regretfully, both of them had their full focus on Gu Yunting at the moment due to the lightning tribulation he had drawn. Hence, they did not notice that the youth near Gu Yunting had broken the world's common sense and achieved something that numerous amazing heaven prides had failed to do since the beginning of time!

If other cultivators knew about this, it would produce a huge uproar that would shake the entire cultivation world.

"Oh?"

By this time, Lin Xun also noticed that Gu Yunting was facing a heavenly tribulation. Lightning struck him from all directions, tempering his dao and body as he ascended to the next cultivation realm.

Divine fire condensed into a halo around Gu Yunting, bathing him in a sunset-like glow as he proudly faced the lightning like a god with unmatched might.

He's such an incredible guy.

Lin Xun's heart could not help but shiver in admiration. He had visited the Ancient Spirit World before and also seen numerous heaven prides like Bai Lingxi, Song Yi, Chi Cangfeng, the Rising Sky Marquis, and many others. However, almost none of them could compare to Gu Yunting.

Perhaps, only the older generation of heaven prides like the Little Sword Lord Xie Yuting could rival such an individual.

“Only in his twenties and yet he’s already going to become a Heaven Ascension expert. Not to mention, he also possesses the Dao Fire Golden Body. He’s definitely not going to be a background character if he enters the Ancient Wasteland Domain in the future.”

Lin Xun muttered to himself.

He was unable to advance for the moment because of the incomparably terrifying lightning tribulation. If he moved too close, he would definitely be caught up in its power.

However, it was also a rare opportunity. It was the first time Lin Xun had witnessed a cultivator’s lightning tribulation. Normally speaking, it was impossible to draw a lightning tribulation without heaven-defying foundations.

At the very least, from what Lin Xun knew, more than ninety percent of current Heaven Ascension experts had not experienced a lightning tribulation when they advanced.

From this, it was clear how much more incredible Gu Yunting was.

“Lightning tribulation. It’s said that in ancient times, only cultivators that survived lightning tribulations can be called true experts. I wonder if that’s true...”

Lin Xun silently felt the destructive power of the lightning tribulation as various thoughts swirled in his head.

A long time passed.

The thunderclouds dissipated and clear skies returned. Gu Yunting was meditating in a seated position on the ninety-ninth step while a nimbus made of lightning surrounded him.

He needed to stabilize his cultivation after the breakthrough.

His aura had clearly become different. It felt as if a true dragon was hibernating in his body that could awe the world with its supreme elegance.

Lin Xun silently observed for a moment before withdrawing his gaze and lifting his foot to take the next step.

He was satisfied with the strand of water imago power and decided to pour all of his focus and energy into climbing the Sky Stairs.

“What a pity. A young man like Gu Yunting will never stay in the Ziyao Empire. Only in the Ancient Wasteland Domain will he be able to shine.”

The slovenly old man sighed softly. Gu Yunting’s performance today had taken his breath away. It wasn’t rare for such a heaven pride to appear in the Ancient Wasteland Domain, but it was as rare as a unicorn’s horn in the Ziyao Empire!

The principal indifferently said, “I only hope that Heaven Axis Holy Land will not ruin his future.”

The slovenly old man was taken aback. All of a sudden, he chuckled and said, “It seems that you still can’t fully accept what happened all those years ago.”

The principal did not comment.

“Tell me, how do you plan on treating Lin Xun?”

The slovenly old man’s expression turned serious, “Although he is tied to many karmas, he is still a rare talent. Do you plan on letting him destroy himself?”

The principal was silent for a moment before he answered, “A dragon hidden in the abyss will have to suffer far more before it can fly in the sky. For the time being, I can only say that I do not intend to interfere.”

“Tempering him huh?”

The slovenly old man icily chuckled. “I’m only afraid that he will face too many troubles and die young.”

The principal’s eyes rippled slightly, but he ultimately did not reply.

.....

Advance!

On Sky Stairs Mountain, the higher you climbed the more terrifying the power imprinted on the stone steps. Lin Xun had no choice but to circulate his full power in order to face it.

Ninety-first.

Ninety-second.

Ninety-third.

When he reached the ninety-ninth step, Lin Xun was drenched in sweat, panting heavily, and his complexion had become a little pale.

It was too exhausting even for him.

Fortunately, there was only a single step left!

Swoosh!

It was at this moment that Gu Yunting rose to his feet. Light seemed to flow across his body as his aura soared into the sky.

For a moment, he was a Heaven Ascension expert who could wield the forces of nature with a flick of his wrist.

However, he withdrew his aura a split second later and returned to his usual extraordinary, immortal-like composed appearance.

Gu Yunting could not help but be a little taken aback when he saw Lin Xun standing next to him on the ninety-ninth step. He soon withdrew his gaze as his expression returned to normal.

He was already different from Lin Xun and had surpassed the Spirit Sea stage to become a true Heaven Ascension expert who Lin Xun could only look up to!

An eagle would not pay attention to an ant on the ground because the two existed in completely different worlds.

This was Gu Yunting's current mindset. It was not a type of arrogance, but the mannerism of a superior existence.

Lin Xun had originally intended to say hi but stopped himself when he saw Gu Yunting's 'air of superiority'. With a carefree chuckle, Lin Xun turned away and took a step forward.

At the same time, Gu Yunting also stepped onto the final stone step.

Swish!

The two reached the final step at the same time. However, neither of them looked at the other.

"Is this the peak?"

Lin Xun looked around and saw rose-tinted clouds, rocks covered in vines, and orchids spitting out their fragrant perfume. The sun hung in the sky, sprinkling its gorgeous golden light to create a picturesque image of mountains and rivers. It was a magnificent scene that allowed one to appreciate both the smallness and grandness of nature.

Besides the beautiful scenery, there was honestly nothing special about the place.

Gu Yunting's approach was even more straightforward. After a cursory glance, he turned around and left, white clothes fluttering as he disappeared into the horizon.

He did not even glance at Lin Xun from start to end.

"I only hope that you can still act like this if we meet in the Ancient Wasteland Domain in the future..."

Lin Xun sighed.

He has no ill feelings toward Gu Yunting, but he suddenly recalled the principal's words. He knew that Gu Yunting would definitely head to Heaven Axis Holy Land once he entered the Ancient Wasteland Domain, and the Heaven Axis Holy Land was a place that would bring disaster to Lin Xun!

Lin Xun could not help but worry that they might become enemies the next time they met, unlike today where things would end peacefully even if they ignored each other.

The principal was long gone when Lin Xun returned to the hut. He would remain unaware that the principal and the slovenly old man had watched him climb the Sky Stairs and conversed about his origins.

"It's been roughly three hundred years since someone last reached the peak, but today, Gu Yunting and you managed to achieve it. How unexpected."

The slovenly old man grinned.

"Elder praises me too highly."

Lin Xun smiled and cupped his hands together.

“Little fellow, I believe you still don’t have a master. Why not consider taking me as your master?”

Desire flowed out in the old man’s eyes as if he was staring at a flawless piece of jade.

“Eh.”

Lin Xun was taken by surprise.

The slovenly old man offhandedly said, “Forget it, let me think about it again. After all, it was just a sudden whim, and I’m still not certain if you’re appropriate to inherit my legacy.”

Lin Xun nearly rolled his eyes.

What an insincere old man, I definitely can’t accept him as a master based on this attitude alone!

Not long after, Lin Xun retrieved his identity token and left.

“Sigh, what a pity. Why is this kid’s origins so special...”

The slovenly old man sighed.

The Great Affairs Hall.

The hall was bustling with activity as usual. Numerous students would gather here to exchange points for their desired goods or sign up for training missions.

“Ehh, isn’t that...Lin Xun?”

“What? He’s Lin Xun? He looks way too young.”

When Lin Xun arrived, he was immediately recognized, causing quite a commotion.

He had become quite a celebrity after the Dao Martial Department incident yesterday. Everyone knew of the amazing tale of how he had defeated Lan Yu, Jin Zhuliu, and the others before ascending to first place on the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings.

As such, Lin Xun naturally drew a lot of attention when he appeared in the Great Affairs Hall.