

Prodigies 61

[Chapter 61: Essence Refining Resembled Frost](#)

That night, under Village Chief Xiao Tianren's leadership, the villagers gathered in the ancestral hall and he distributed the living supplies needed by each family.

The large quantity of items that Lin Xun had brought back included fabrics, clothes, cooking ingredients and other items for daily needs. In addition, there were aeth grains, aeth vegetables, and aeth herb seeds as well as farming tools.

The villagers buzzed with excitement when all the items were divided. Back when Lian Rufeng was the guard leader, the items he brought back could barely sustain their lives. In contrast, the items that Lin Xun brought back were not only generous but there was also a wide range of items.

Most importantly, each household was given a share of three imperial silver coins, which was equivalent to three hundred copper coins!

This was an unimaginable fortune to the villagers who had never left the Great Three Thousand Mountains.

What Lin Xun had done made the villagers even more grateful to him and raised his prestige to an unprecedented level.

It wasn't until late at night that the villagers began to disperse one after another, leaving only Lin Xun and Village Chief Xiao Tianren in the ancestral hall.

"Silly, what's the use of giving money to the villagers? They will always stay in Feiyun Village, how will they have the chance to spend the money?" Xiao Tianren sighed. He felt Lin Xun had spent too much money and he didn't have to do so.

"They might not use it now, but it might be useful in the future." Lin Xun smiled. "Besides, the money was from selling Feiyun Fire Copper, so just see it as wages for everyone."

Xiao Tianren sighed, "Thirty copper coins would be enough for wages, but they each received three silver coins."

Lin Xun smiled and said nothing. He had previously promised Xiao Tianren that the villagers would only receive payment for mining Feiyun Fire Copper and he shouldn't share his profits.

However, how could Lin Xun treat the villagers as his employees? In his view, Feiyun Village was no different from his home and the villagers were his relatives. Naturally, he had to share his earnings with them.

Based on that fact alone, Lin Xun would never be stingy to them.

"Ai, you—you—I really don't know what to say about you," Xiao Tianren sighed helplessly. In truth, Lin Xun's action had greatly touched him. And seeing that Lin Xun had no intention of changing his mind, he left the matter at that.

“Uncle Xiao, I believe Feiyun Village will only become better in the future. We should set our sights high. We should first make everyone become wealthy, then perhaps, in the future, all of the villagers can enjoy life in the city.” Lin Xun said seriously, “Don't you want your descendants to escape a life of poverty and live a better life in the city?”

Xiao Tianren was visibly moved. He fell silent, touched by Lin Xun's words and his beautiful vision for the village.

He's right. The villagers have been poor their entire lives. Would they want their next generation to be just as poor?

Of course not!

Lin Xun didn't say anything else, bowed, and took his leave.

He knew that the change wouldn't happen overnight. They would think deeper about the long term when the villagers from Feiyun Village become rich from selling Feiyun Fire Copper.

Surviving and living were completely different.

In the past, the villagers of Feiyun Village only had to deal with the problem of surviving. The most important thing for them was to survive.

However, once they dealt with the survival problem, they would think about their quality of life and how to raise their next generation.

Right now, the Feiyun Fire Copper Mine provided Feiyun Village with a solution to their survival problem and the ability to live a desirable life.

Lin Xun firmly believed that the villagers' lives would only get better when he left.

Of course, that was only if nothing bad happened.

However, given the Stone Cauldron Alms' credibility, he shouldn't have to worry.

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Early next morning, Gao Guiyong and Zhou Quan said goodbye and left. They had completed their mission and also reached an agreement with Xiao Tianren—They would personally come to purchase Feiyun Fire Copper every month as well as bring living supplies for the villagers.

This could be regarded as a mutually beneficial deal, only that the transaction would take place in Feiyun Village and, as a result, remove a lot of unnecessary risks and problems for the villagers.

The same morning, Lin Xun asked Ying Liu'er and the other three children, who had reached the first layer True Martial Stage, to gather together so he could distribute the aeth decoctions, including qi-drawing pills, inner strengthening pills, organ opening powder and orifice unlocking liquid, he had purchased among them.

There were over twenty children in the village but unfortunately, only four were able to draw qi into their bodies.

In other words, among the twenty-odd children, only Ying Liu'er and the other three managed to set foot on the cultivation path. The other children only had a slim chance of doing so.

This was the reality. After all, only very few people in the world could become true cultivators.

From that day on, Lin Xun was relieved of the responsibility of martial arts master in the village. He had imparted everything he could to the children and could only leave the children to train on their own.

As they said, the master could lead you to the cultivation door but one's cultivation depends on oneself.

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Lin Xun had done everything to help eliminate troubles for Feiyun Village, whether it was eradicating Lian Rufeng and his people or suppressing the Wu Corporation with the help of the Stone Cauldron Alms.

Moreover, the mining of Feiyun Fire Copper and teaching martial arts to the children in the village were for the future development of Feiyun Village.

Lin Xun could finally free himself from those mundane affairs now that they were progressing as he wanted.

However, Lin Xun couldn't completely relax. During the day he practiced martial arts and engraving runes and at night he tempered his cultivation base and spirit. He didn't need to worry about food or cultivation problems now that he had massive resources.

Every three days, he entered the rune battle realm—Thousand Heavy Wave Sea to attempt to break through. He fully utilized every second he had.

Occasionally, he would train with Xia Zhi to improve his combat skills and temper his body. The insights he gained from those battles were used to invent and perfect his own fighting techniques.

On the other hand, Xia Zhi lived a carefree life, doing nothing apart from eating and sleeping.

Half a month later. *nOvElnext.com*

Lin Xun had successfully broken through to the Essence Refining layer, the fifth layer True Marital Stage, with the help of Blood Essence Sand and the Four Seasons Brew.

Shua! Shua! Shua!

Lin Xun's figure was akin to a lightning bolt as he darted across the air and left blurred shadows in the courtyard. The Skybreaker Blade slashed through the air, performing various moves with ease.

Multiple blade shadows swiftly sliced a huge boulder thrown into the air into neat strips like dicing tofu.

Each stone strip was the same thickness of his thumb and three inches long.

Bang!

Each one exploded to smithereens before it touched the ground and dissipated in the air.

That move alone demonstrated the incredible speed and accuracy of Lin Xun's blade. The blade not only contained razor sharp qi but also an internal force that shattered the huge boulder to smithereens.

"As expected, my control of power has improved after breaking through to the Essence Refining layer."

Lin Xun withdrew his sword and stood still, quietly analyzing the subtle differences of his blade.

The Essence Refining layer was the fifth layer of the True Martial Stage. A cultivator's bones and essence would be tempered thousands of times upon breakthrough to the fifth layer and sparkle in a silvery shimmer. This was the reason why people said that blood refining resembled syrup and essence refining resembled frost.

At the same time, Lin Xun's aeth power underwent another transformation after the breakthrough. It became twice as strong as before. His body of qi had surged and he radiated a terrifying and fierce bearing even when he was merely standing and doing nothing

This was a sign of a further upgrade to the qi inside and outside the body.

The next layer was the blood igniting layer, the sixth layer True Martial Stage, and in that layer, as the name indicated, a cultivator would need to make their blood boil until it ignited and then vigorously course around the body.

Once a cultivator reached that layer, their skin membrane, muscles, bones, blood, essence, organs and the qi inside and outside their body would enter a state of true gold and could withstand even fire. Their life span would be extended beyond one hundred years!

However, Lin Xun, who had just broken through to the fifth layer, was still far from the Blood Igniting layer and his top priority now was to consolidate his foundation.

After all, a cultivator who had just undergone a breakthrough would need to go through an accustoming process to fully grasp their new powers.

"Are you going to keep practicing like this every day?" asked Xia Zhi. She was the one who tossed the huge boulder.

"Of course not." Lin Xun withdrew his Skybreaker Blade, sat at the stone table, took a cup of iced tea, and gulped it down. A refreshing feeling washed over his body.

"In another month or so, we will leave here and head to Donglin City in the Ziyao Empire. I have thought about it for a long time. If you want to become stronger, you should follow a powerful martial arts master or study at a powerful academy." Lin Xun said casually, "When we reach Donglin City, I will help you find out more about this."

Xia Zhi shook her head. "I don't want to follow a master."

Lin Xun was taken aback at first then he said with a smile. "Then I'll find an academy for you to study at."

There were different academies across the city in the empire. The majority was for cultivation but some taught courses such as the art of runes, forging tools, decocting medicines, law of sound, aeth planting, raising beasts and military affairs. There were all kinds of courses.

“Will you be going?” Xia Zhi raised her little face and stared seriously at Lin Xun with her clear and dark eyes.

“Me?” Lin Xun thought about it and shook his head. “I'm not sure yet.”

“If you're not going then I also won't go,” stated Xia Zhi.

Lin Xun said helplessly, “Let's talk about it then.”

“No matter what happens, you can't leave me behind.” He couldn't tell what Xia Zhi was thinking, but her beautiful and tranquil eyes became unwavering and stubborn.

Then, she turned around and went into her room.

Lin Xun fell into deep thought while he watched Xia Zhi leave the courtyard.

[Chapter 62: Set off to Donglin](#)

Time flew by, and another half month passed in the blink of an eye.

On that day, the villagers of Feiyun Village warmly welcomed Gao Guiyong and Zhou Quan, and sold them over four hundred pounds of Feiyun Fire Copper for seven hundred silver coins.

Gao Guiyong also delivered a letter to Lin Xun from Xue Liang. The letter was short and concise. It mainly notified Lin Xun that there was only one month until the district examination in Donglin City and that he should set off as soon as possible if he wanted to participate.

Lin Xun knew that the district examination was generally held in December and the prefectural examination was set for March of the following year and the provincial examination was three months after that, which would be in June.

The national examination was held in September.

Violet glory flowers were said to bloom in the Forbidden City every September and wrapped around every part of the city like a sea of flowers. Such a stunning spectacle was known as the Violet Glory Flower Festival.

Cultivators who successfully passed the national examination were hailed as the talent of Ziyao and the pride of the empire. They would be arranged to walk down the most famous imperial street in the Forbidden City in the midst of a sea of flowers and receive cheers and praises from million citizens.

This tradition was also called the Walk of Heaven Prides.

Lin Xun held the letter in his hand and stared at it for a long time. It was only when twilight descended that he came to a decision.

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Three days later.

Before dawn, Lin Xun had already packed his bags. Holding Xia Zhi's little hand, he pushed open the door and walked into the courtyard.

“Have you really decided not to tell the others?” Xia Zhi asked a rare question.

“Yes, we are not parting forever. It’s better not to disturb them.” Lin Xun shook his head. In truth, he couldn’t bear to see the villagers send him off.

However, their footsteps halted at the village entrance.

The sky was still dark and all mountains were shrouded in darkness but the village entrance was strangely lit up in firelight.

All the villagers including Xiao Tianren, the elderly and children, were quietly standing there and lifting a flame torch.

Every face was filled with reluctance to part with Lin Xun, and some people were forcing back their tears.

No one spoke and the atmosphere was still and silent; only the sound of the wind sighing could be heard.

Lin Xun was completely stunned. His emotions roiled uncontrollably and he was unable to calm down.

“Let’s go!”

Xiao Tianren took a deep breath and said in a deep voice, “You don’t need to say anything. We just want to see you off.”

Lin Xun nodded and somersaulted onto the scale horse with Xia Zhi in his arms. The horse hooves clattering against the ground was particularly evident in that quiet atmosphere.

Many children couldn’t help but rush forward, but were stopped by the adults near them. Some women had their heads bowed and were weeping from indescribable sadness.

Under the firelight, Lin Xun took furtive glances at everyone. He realized that he had lived in Feiyun Village for over half a year already.

Half a year!

Not only did Feiyun Village change during that time, but he also had changed a lot. Now, he had to leave and he didn’t know when he would return to see everyone again.

“Lin Xun!”

Suddenly, a loud voice rang in Lin Xun’s ears, snapping him out of his rambling thoughts. He turned his head around to see Village Chief Xiao Tianren wearing a solemn expression. “Remember, Feiyun Village will always be your home. If it’s too tiring in the outside world, don’t force yourself to stay there. Feiyun Village will always welcome you back!”

“We will wait for your return!”

The villagers could no longer contain their emotions. They simultaneously wailed, their voices filled with hope as they echoed endlessly in the darkness.

Lin Xun drew several deep breaths, smiled broadly and waved his hand. Then, he immediately turned his scale horse around and galloped into the distance.

Dawn broke, and the first ray of light pierced through the darkness, illuminating the mountains and rivers as it spread across the world. It bathed the young man on horseback with a dazzling glow.

The villagers would never forget that scene.

The villagers didn't leave until Lin Xun disappeared into the boundless horizon. Countless memories and past events with Lin Xun uncontrollably flashed to their minds as they watched him.

When Lin Xun first arrived at Feiyun Village, who would have imagined that he would be the one to help them resolve one crisis after another?

Who would have thought that Feiyun Village would undergo earth-shaking changes as a result of his arrival?

The villagers knew that Lin Xun truly regarded Feiyun Village as his home. They also regarded Lin Xun as one of them.

However, they all understood that Lin Xun couldn't stay in Feiyun Village his entire life. The outside world was his stage!

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"Lin Xun, will we come back in the future?"

"Definitely."

"Those people are nice."

"Of course, from now on, it may be difficult for us to meet people who treat us as nice as they did."

"Yes."

"Xia Zhi, the outside world is huge with many unexpected dangers. I will do my best to not let you suffer."

"As long as you don't abandon me, I won't suffer."

"Haha, how would I abandon you?"

In the vast endless mountains, Lin Xun spurred his horse into a gallop. The biting cold morning wind brushing against his face made his handsome and sharp face appear extraordinarily resolute.

Xia Zhi sat in Lin Xun's arms with a faint smile on her beautiful and tranquil face. Her world was very small, so small that it could only fit Lin Xun.

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Three days later.

Lin Xun came to the Qingyang Tribe, paid Xue Liang a visit, and received a map with a route to Donglin City drawn out. He left the Qingyang Tribe that afternoon and headed north.

Just as Lin Xun left, Yan Zhen, the manager of Stone Cauldron Alms in the Qingyang Tribe sent a letter to Donglin City, which was thousands of miles away.

The letter was written to Mu Wansu, who was in charge of Stone Cauldron Alms in Donglin City. Only one sentence was on the letter: "Lin Xun has left for Donglin City and is expected to arrive in two days."

This letter was delivered by an azure feather falcon and reached Mu Wansu's hands in just three hours.

Mu Wansu was taking a bath when the letter came to her. She immediately shredded it apart. "Come if you want. I have the final say in Stone Cauldron Alms in Donglin City so don't even think about coming to Donglin City and have anything to do with our Stone Cauldron Alms!"

As she got up from the bathtub, her graceful and enviable body glistened with water droplets, a seductive sheen that could make one lost in wild thoughts.

Mu Wansu put on a loose bathrobe, stood in front of a huge bronze mirror, and dabbed her wet hair with a clean towel. There was an indescribable sense of beauty in her lazy manner.

Suddenly, as though she thought of something, her dark eyebrows were raised, and were as sharp and fierce as a blade.

"No, the Stone Cauldron Alms shouldn't even purchase items from that little bastard. We must cut off all contact with him. Didn't First Young Master say that he will achieve greatness in the future? Let's see how he will establish himself in Donglin City without the help of the Stone Cauldron Alms!"

Thinking of this, Mu Wansu's red and plump lips broke into a smile. Her eyes suddenly dimmed as she murmured, "Lin Xun, Lin Xun, don't blame your older sister for being merciless. It's your fault for making your older sister so angry. From now on, remember that if a woman is thinking about you, the consequences will be terrifying..."

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Meanwhile at the Wu Corporation in the Qingyang Tribe.

"Manager, I have sent someone to investigate Feiyun Village. Chief Steward Wu Henshui and his subordinates, including Lian Rufeng, have all disappeared. They likely had met with a fatal accident like you suspected.

"In addition, this evening, a scout came to report that Lin Xun had set off for Donglin City with a little girl," a subordinate reported to Wu Deyong.

Wu Deyong's expression changed indefinitely as he listened, and he suddenly gritted his teeth. "He could have gone anywhere but he came to Donglin City. He walked right into our snare. Donglin City is our Wu Clan's base! Although the Stone Cauldron Alms also has a property in Donglin City, if we grasp this chance well, we can get rid of that kid!"

For a whole month, Wu Deyong couldn't sleep or eat every time he thought of Wu Henshui, Mad Dog Wu Jie and the others. He felt a thorn pricking his heart.

This was especially true after the Stone Cauldron Alms interfered in the matter. The Wu Corporation's reputation within the Qingyang Tribe had fallen to rock bottom and they had become laughingstocks.

That only deepened Wu Deyong's hatred towards the boy. Wu Deyong immediately smelled an opportunity when he heard that Lin Xun had left home and was heading to Donglin City.

As he said, Donglin City was the base of their Wu Clan and they had a complex network of forces working for them in Donglin City. Although the Stone Cauldron Alms was powerful and was one of the most formidable forces in the empire, it was still regarded as an outsider in Donglin City.

Even the mighty dragon couldn't crush a snake in its territory. Wu Deyong was well aware of the thousand ways to kill and he knew that they didn't have to deal with Lin Xun in the open. If they planned a little and acted cautiously, they could silently get rid of Lin Xun!

At that time, even if the Stone Cauldron Alms learned about what the Wu Clan had done, the consequences would be less severe as long as they refused to admit to it.

The more that Wu Deyong thought about that, the more that he couldn't hold himself back. He left the Qingyang Tribe in a hurry with several guards that night and headed for Donglin City.

In Stone Cauldron Alms, Xue Liang frantically searched for Yan Zhen and said worriedly, "Manager, it's not good. Wu Deyong is rushing to Donglin City with a group of people. He must have heard about Lin Xun and wants to do something to him!"

"No problem, I've already delivered a message to Miss Wansu."

Yan Zhen said calmly, "With Miss Wansu around, how would the Wu Clan dare anger the Stone Cauldron Alms because of Lin Xun?"

Xue Liang felt relieved when he heard that.

However, neither Yan Zhen nor Xue Liang knew that Mu Wansu had already decided to draw a clear line with Lin Xun.

On the other hand, Lin Xun likely didn't expect so many things to have secretly happened after he went to Donglin City.

[Chapter 63: Visitor in Donglin](#)

The Li's Bookstore in Donglin City was an unassuming book shop located deep in the corner of a busy street. Due to its isolated location, it was often quiet and deserted.

Behind the counter, the owner, an old man with the surname Li, propped his head up with one hand and was dozing off.

Only a youngster was browsing the store, and so the atmosphere was quiet and peaceful.

The boy looked around thirteen to fourteen but he was tall and slender. He had a handsome and gentle face and he looked refreshing and well-kept in his rough grey robe.

It was Lin Xun.

Very quickly, Lin Xun picked out four books, went to the counter and whispered. "Grandpa."

The old man awoke abruptly and smiled. "Well, let me see—'The Records of the Empire Landscape', 'The Official History of the Empire', 'The Handbook of Cultivation Basics', and 'The Collection of Runes'..."

The old man raised his head and exclaimed in astonishment, "It's rare to see youngsters interested in these kinds of books nowadays and there aren't many people who like to read like you."

Lin Xun gave a slight smile. "Grandpa, how much for these four books?"

"If you want them, I will take twenty copper coins for them," the old man said, quite casually.

After Lin Xun paid, he picked up the books and hurried out of the bookshop.

The night was dark but the row upon row of buildings in the distance were brightly lit. They were so beautiful that they resembled stars descending onto the secular world.

A cool night breeze blew as Lin Xun hurried along the streets. He turned into a store called 'Ahu Fruit Puree' and took out five copper coins to purchase a large cup of tasty sweet and sour fragrant fruit puree.

It was the signature product of Ahu Fruit Puree and it was a blend of several aeth ingredients such as root fungus leaf, violet floating radish and fragrant fruit. It had a sweet taste but most importantly, it had no impurities, which made it an ideal drink for cultivators.

Carrying the books and fruit puree, Lin Xun constantly threaded his way through the streets and alleys until he came to an extremely bustling street.

Crowds constantly weaved through the streets and there was an endless stream of horses and carriages. Bright and colorful lights as well as dizzying signs dotted the buildings on both sides.

Many people on the streets were dressed in luxurious clothes and were traveling back and forth with carts of expensive items. Additionally, cultivators riding scale horses and horned deer occasionally sped past.

Street vendors had set up street stalls and constantly advertised their products by yelling. The clamor and lively noises echoed ceaselessly on the bustling street.

This was the most famous street in Donglin City and was at least eight hundred feet long. Hence, it was called the Great Eight Hundred Street.

The center of this street consisted of several major businesses in Donglin City such as restaurants, inns, apothecaries and rune material stores.

Every shop was a famous money squandering establishment in Donglin City and was supported by major forces. Naturally, the customers were valuable cultivators and ordinary people simply couldn't afford anything there.

At the east end of the Great Eight Hundred Street stood an academy called Donglin Academy, which was managed by the empire. It would recruit students every year and anyone who passed the entrance assessment could study there after paying the tuition fee.

For cultivators in Donglin City, it was an honor to study at Donglin Academy.

The route that Lin Xun took happened to pass the Donglin Academy, and as he passed the academy, he couldn't help taking a closer look. The academy extended across a huge section of land and the campus was full of interesting architecture. And from time to time, he saw students walking past.

After silently surveying the academy, Lin Xun turned around and left.

It was then that a group of young girls walked over from the opposite side. Each one was dressed in fine clothes and looked radiant and spirited. They were extremely distinctive.

"In another month, I can take the district examination. I am already at the third layer True Martial Stage so I can easily pass the examination!"

"Hahaha, which of us isn't under fifteen years old and which one of us doesn't possess a cultivation base above the third layer True Martial Stage? This district examination is a piece of cake for all of us."

"Yes, the district examination isn't worth our time to think about. What we need to really consider is whether or not we are directly going to the Qingfeng region to participate in the prefectural examination in March after we pass the district examination!"

"It's not certain. This time, at least three thousand people from Donglin Academy intend to participate in the district examination and there are only one thousand admission places in the district examination. This means that two thousand people will be eliminated before it starts. We shouldn't be careless."

"Yes, I'm also worried about that."

As the young girls walked, their conversations were centered around the district examination.

Lin Xun wanted to listen closer but the girls entered the Donglin Academy together. They turned out to be students there.

Lin Xun didn't follow them.

"I didn't expect there to be so many people participating in the district examination and two thousand people would be eliminated. In other words, even if they meet the conditions of passing, they might not qualify for admission."

Lin Xun pondered while walking. The so-called admission was the certification of the district examination, which was one of the conditions needed to participate in the upcoming prefectural examination.

Soon, Lin Xun's figure disappeared from the Great Eight Hundred Street. he continued walking for another hour before he came to a dark, cold and dilapidated alleyway.

This was the slums of Donglin City. Compared to other prosperous areas in Donglin City, the slums were in a state of disrepair and the majority of the people living there were considered at the bottom of society. The slums were inhabited by all sorts of people, including a mix of good and bad.

The crime rate was very high and the environment was very chaotic with thieves, hooligans and murderers passing through the area every day.

Lin Xun wouldn't have decided to live there if he had another choice.

As Lin Xun made his way down a dark alley with puddles of grimy water covering quite a bit of the ground, he heard cats fighting and dogs barking.

A man suddenly jumped out from the corner of the alley and greeted Lin Xun with a smile, "Hey, buddy, are you alone?" The man's mouth protruded out and his chin was pointy like an ape's.

Crack!

The moment that the man raised his hand, Lin Xun clutched it tight, applied force to his fingers, and twisted his wrist.

The man loosened his grip and a little glinting blade clattered to the ground.

In deep pain, the man was about to scream out when Lin Xun struck him unconscious with a palm strike. He was left lying on the stream of filthy water.

From the start to finish, everything happened in a flash.

As though he was used to such attacks, Lin Xun still wore a calm expression as he strolled forward.

Not long after Lin Xun left, two suspicious figures emerged in the corner of the alley.

When they saw the unconscious man on the ground, one of the two gloated. "How many is it now?"

The other man counted with his fingers. "That little young master came to live here seven days ago and this is the nineteenth person who has fallen in his hands."

"Haha, the man on the ground is a clever person but why did he stupidly think to target that little young master? Doesn't he know how Boss Serpent died?"

"He has eyes but he failed to see properly. Who in this area doesn't know about the ruthless little young master in the no. 49 courtyard and how he kills without hesitation?"

"Okay, it's time for us to act."

While speaking, the two stooped down and searched the unconscious man, who was called Rotten Head Zhang, and found a dozen of copper coins. Then, they left happily.

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Deep in the alley, Lin Xun pushed open the door into the No. 49 courtyard.

Boom!

A fist thrust through the air, generating a terrifying force and gust of wind that caused the air to boom and crackle.

Lin Xun didn't move and only said helplessly, "It's me."

Suddenly, the wind subsided and calmness was restored. Xia Zhi's delicate and slender figure appeared before Lin Xun.

"I know it's you, if it's someone else they would have died already." Xia Zhi stepped forward, instinctively took the cup of fragrant fruit puree from Lin Xun's hand, and turned around.

Lin Xun smiled, shrugged helplessly, and entered the courtyard.

The courtyard wasn't particularly big but in the center stood a huge locust tree. The treetop was lush green and dense, and spread out like an umbrella. On the other side were two rooms and a kitchen. After a deep clean and some tidying, it was rather neat and beautiful.

In a room, a Nanling joss stick was lit. The light flamed brightly, producing wisps of calming aroma.

Lin Xun hunched over the desk, flipping through the books he just bought, while Xia Zhi sat quietly on a stool and sipped the fragrant fruit puree.

The two had arrived at Donglin City seven days ago, but they realized that the three hundred silver coins that Lin Xun had weren't enough to rent a good place to live in the city. Not only was it expensive to live in an inn but it was also crowded and not suitable in the long term.

With no other choice, Lin Xun could only rent a courtyard in the slums, which was surprisingly cheap—only thirty silver coins a year.

It was only after seven days of living there that Lin Xun finally understood why the rent was so cheap. The area was too rough and chaotic, and was inhabited by all kinds of people.

On their first day, a man nicknamed Snakehead came with a gang of scoundrels to collect protection fees.

On their second day, when Lin Xun returned home from buying basic necessities, he discovered three dead bodies in their courtyard. When he asked Xia Zhi about them, it turned out that they were three burglars who tried to enter their house.

On the third day, a group of people ambushed Lin Xun in the streets and tried to rob him.

On the fourth day, Lin Xun saw a group of thugs trying to rob a woman and he immediately stepped forward to save her, only to find she was with the thugs.

On the fifth day...

In short, in the seven days that Lin Xun had lived there, thieves, hooligans, thugs and murderers appeared like wild dogs smelling blood.

Of course, all those people suffered miserable fates. Many had even vanished from the world. But Lin Xun knew that he couldn't deal with such people everyday and guarantee that nothing would happen to him and Xia Zhi.

Most importantly, he didn't want Xia Zhi to grow up in such a dirty and dangerous environment.

The reason was very simple—He grew up in the dark environment of a mine prison. He had witnessed many cruel and deceitful tricks and violence since a young age and he had met many vicious and bloodthirsty people.

Compared to those fierce people, the thugs who controlled the slums were as pure as a white lotus and as well-behaved as an innocent baby.

Lin Xun knew that without Mister Lu, he would have been heavily influenced by the environment he grew up in. He would have been led onto a dark path and lost his human nature.

Due to his experience growing up, he didn't want Xia Zhi to live in such a filthy and dark environment.

However, he needed a large sum of money to move, which was impossible for him to achieve in the time being.

So, the thing that Lin Xun was most concerned about was how to make money fast, not passing the district examination!

[Chapter 64: The Meaning of Battle](#)

It was difficult to move an inch without money!

Lin Xun deeply understood the meaning of this sentence after coming to Donglin City.

Money was needed for clothing, food, housing and transportation. Additionally, as a practitioner, his spending was much higher than that of ordinary people.

For example, ordinary people would be happy as long as they had something to eat, but practitioners must consume aeth grains and aeth vegetables as well as the blood and flesh of beasts to maintain their bodies' purity. And the cost of such items were terrifyingly high.

Some cultivators from wealthy backgrounds would even solely consume aeth herbs and aeth pills to supplement their bodies' needs as to constantly sharpen and improve their cultivation base. Those valuable materials were not something that an ordinary practitioner could afford.

Moreover, the clothes that cultivators wore, the horses and other animals they rode, the combat equipment they used and the cultivation techniques they required, all required huge amounts of money.

Why else would there be the saying that children of poor families could only read while the rich learned martial arts?

Only the descendants of wealthy families could concentrate on martial arts without having to worry about money and afford the items necessary for martial training.

In contrast, even if poor people had the talent and constitution to cultivate, the lack of financial support and cultivation resources meant they wouldn't progress far on the cultivation road.

Why did the district examination held in the empire attract so many cultivators to participate every year? Why would cultivators from poor backgrounds treat the district examination as an opportunity to leap over the dragon gate?

It was because anyone who passed the district examination would be favored by many chambers of commerce, sects, clans and wealthy families and they would try to draw them to their sides by providing them with cultivation resources.

Cultivators did everything possible for their cultivation but cultivation was absolutely impossible without money.

In the seven days that Lin Xun had been in Donglin City, he had often gone out to familiarize himself and integrate into the life of the city as soon as possible.

Those seven days made Lin Xun deeply realize the importance of money.

Donglin City was different from the Qingyang Tribe in that it was far more bustling. Even if there were unimaginable cultivation resources in the city, it was extremely difficult to obtain them.

This was especially the case for Lin Xun given that it was his first time stepping foot into a city. It wasn't easy for him to settle in this densely populated place where cultivators were as common as trees and the countless sects and forces were intricately and complicatedly linked.

I need to make money!

This is my top priority!

Lin Xun thought to himself. Only when he had earned enough money could he move to a different place with Xia Zhi and obtain more cultivation resources. Then, he could live better in the Ziyao Empire.

.....

Hunched over the desk, Lin Xun suddenly sighed.

Xia Zhi raised her head and asked, "What's wrong?"

Lin Xun closed the book in his hand and shook his head. "Nothing."

The book was 'The Record of the Empire Landscape', which he had purchased from the Li's Bookstore. It was a book about the mountains, rivers and landscape of the Ziyao Empire.

Lin Xun originally intended to investigate where the mine prison that he used to live in was located but he could only find the Great Three Thousand Mountains. Further south of it was the territory of the Ziyao Empire's enemy—Darkness Kingdom.

Lin Xun remembered that he lost consciousness when Mister Lu pushed him into a mine of unfathomable depths and when he regained consciousness, he was already in the Great Three Thousand Mountains.

This made him speculate that the mine prison was likely located somewhere in the Great Three Thousand Mountains.

Unfortunately, the Great Three Thousand Mountain was too vast with mountains stretching endlessly. Even the 'Record of the Empire Landscape' had no detailed description of the area.

However, the book was pretty useful because Lin Xun learned that he was living on the vast and boundless Cangtu Continent.

The Ziyao Empire was only one of several empires on the Cangtu Continent.

"Are you still thinking about moving?" Xia Zhi suddenly asked, frowning.

"Yes."

Lin Xun nodded casually and opened another book. It was the 'Handbook of Cultivation Basics' and, as the name indicated, it provided knowledge on cultivation basics. The content was very simple but the sections were very well thought out.

The book was divided into five parts based on the five great cultivation stages: True Martial, Spirit Dipper, Spirit Sea, Heaven Ascension and Cyclic Derivation.

For example, the nine layers of the True Martial Stage from the first Qi Drawing Layer to the last Aeth Transformation were all explained.

However, books could only provide theoretical knowledge and not training experience. They could help readers roughly understand the changes expected in that stage and what were the specific signs of breakthrough.

Although the content was very simple, Lin Xun read it with great interest.

"There's no need to move, I like it here," Xia Zhi stated as she picked up a book called 'The Official History of the Empire' and flipped through it.

Lin Xun raised his head and glanced at Xia Zhi in surprise. "Do you like it here?"

Without looking up at Lin Xun, Xia Zhi responded, "You can fight anytime here. If you move places, it will be hard to find people to battle with. It will be boring."

She suddenly lifted her head and looked at Lin Xun with a serious expression. "Do you know how I felt in Feiyun Village?"

Lin Xun smiled bitterly as he could roughly guess what Xia Zhi was about to say.

As expected, she continued, "Bored. I have analyzed my strength and came to the conclusion that my strength will gradually weaken without any battles."

Lin Xun was a little taken aback by her answer and he gazed intently into her eyes. "Do you mean that your strength won't weaken with constant battles?"

Xia Zhi nodded. "More than that, only battles can make me stronger. I don't need to practice, I don't need any cultivation arts. I only need to fight."

Lin Xun was flabbergasted. He suddenly realized a problem. He had always subconsciously treated Xia Zhi as a little girl and had always done everything he could to protect her despite knowing that she was entirely different to other children. But had he ever thought about what Xia Zhi actually wanted?

At such a young age, she could effortlessly kill Wu Henshui who was at the eight layer True Martial Stage and could survive in the deep mountain forests where fierce and savage beasts roamed. Lin Xun had to admit that he wasn't as strong as her.

So what does she actually need?

Lin Xun had never thought about that question. He only knew that Xia Zhi liked to eat and sleep, and that she lived a simple and carefree life. But after hearing Xia Zhi's words, he realized that she had her own thoughts and a cultivation path that she wanted to follow. She had a life that she desired!

Lin Xun pondered for a long moment and said, "I understand", and then he scratched his head. "It's just that fighting means killing, do you know what this means?"

Xia Zhi nodded. "I only kill enemies."

Lin Xun smiled bitterly. "But we don't have many enemies."

"Really?"

Lin Xun thought again and fell silent. Do I really have no enemies?

Of course I do!

The person who took his Origin Aeth Artery and the owner of the giant hand that destroyed the mine prison and made Mister Lu's whereabouts unknown could be considered his enemies.

It was just that Lin Xun was still far from getting revenge.

"Your enemy seems to be the brute warrior." Lin Xun suddenly remembered a Spirit Sea cultivator was trying to kill Xia Zhi when he first saw her.

"I remember him. When I become stronger, I will personally kill him." Xia Zhi's expression was calm and her voice was calm as though she was destined to do that.

"Battles...battles..." Lin Xun hesitated. If what Xia Zhi needed was to battle, he currently couldn't help her.

"You don't need to worry, I like to fight, but it doesn't mean that I can't survive without fighting," Xia Zhi stated seriously.

Lin Xun let out a sigh of relief and he smiled. "That's good."

Xia Zhi suddenly raised the book 'The Official History of the Empire' in her hands and pointed to the paragraph on the last page. "I fight to become stronger, and this person was born to fight. This is the difference between me and him."

Lin Xun curiously took the book to take a closer look and saw that the last paragraph read, "I am born from the qi of heaven and earth and I live to battle. My glory is built on the blood of the enemy!

"If I die, the battlefield will be my burial mound and the enemy's bones will be my coffin. I will rest my head on the mountain of corpses, lay in a sea of blood, face the sky and sleep with the earth. This way, I have no other regrets!"

——The Iron Blood King of the Ziyao Empire.

Those few sentences made Lin Xun's blood rush around his body and battle intent surged to his chest. He couldn't help but marvel, "The Iron Blood King has such a bold vision. His brilliance could compete with the sun and the moon, and he could vie for eternal supremacy!"

He looked at Xia Zhi, who was sitting quietly, and said thoughtfully, "You are indeed different from him."

A slight smile lifted the corners of Xia Zhi's lips and her beauty lit up the entire house.

Fortunately, the smile disappeared in a flash.

But even so, Lin Xun couldn't help reminding her. "Xia Zhi, you shouldn't show your face outside in the future."

She was only five to six years old, but her beauty was already too dazzling and could draw many unexpected disasters.

Xia Zhi lifted her face and made an acknowledging sound.

Lin Xun smiled and said nothing else. He turned around to face the desk, took out a rune brush, a swallow-winged blade, and a dish of completed rune ink.

The rune brush was polished from the leg bone of an iron-beaked mountain pheasant. It was perfectly straight, slender and entirely pale purple. The body of the brush was heavy and simple and the tip was sharp and thin like a cicada's wings. It emitted a wondrous light and was named Violet Pheasant by Lin Xun.

Lin Xun had bought the swallow-winged blade from a weapon shop in the city. It was entirely made from a rune material called rosy cloud steel but it was only considered an ordinary tool due to the absence of any engraved runes.

That dish of rune ink was precisely scarlet fire rune ink, one of the more common rune inks on the market. It was able to engrave a dozen kinds of basic rune patterns with fire attributes.

Lin Xun hoped to engrave an explosive flame rune on the swallow-winged blade and thereby transform it from an ordinary tool to an aeth tool!

This was one of the most effective means of making money that Lin Xun could think of!

[Chapter 65: Create Aeth Tools](#)

Chi!

As Lin Xun gripped the brush, a wisp of aeth power flowed along the slender and straight violet brush body to the razor-sharp tip where it condensed into a ray of light as thin as a strand of hair. It constantly took in rune ink.

His wrist nimbly moved as the tip of the brush dipped into the dish of bright red rune ink. All rune ink was absorbed into the brush.

At the tip of the violet pheasant brush, the ray of light blazed like a flame, producing bright, blood-like beams of light.

Those two steps were called drawing aeth into the brush and absorbing ink as the source!

It tested the compatibility between a person's aeth power and the rune brush. The higher the quality of a rune brush, the more sensitive it was in drawing aeth power and the more ink it absorbed.

Lin Xun wore an extremely solemn expression as he sat at the desk. His back was straight as a spear and his deep, dark eyes were completely focused on the swallow-winged blade on the desk. His mind was calm without the slightest ripple.

Unhesitatingly, he lifted his brush from the ink. The razor sharp tip suddenly scraped the swallow-winged blade, producing a subtle but pleasant rustle.

Strands of slender hair-like scarlet lines flowed out from the brush's tip and spread like ink blooming in a clear river. It was a mysterious and beautiful spectacle.

Lin Xun's wrist constantly twisted and moved like a slithering snake as he made brush strokes in a precise, clean, and smooth manner.

Despite it being Lin Xun's first time to truly engrave a rune pattern, he didn't feel a hint of nervousness.

He had practiced it countless times in the past months and he had familiarized himself with the littlest details of each rune pattern as well as the key to each brushstroke.

This was what he had learned from Mister Lu from a young age. He had to tackle various basic rune patterns every day during that period and so he had long observed and grasped the mysteries hidden beneath those complicated rune patterns.

The explosive flame rune he was engraving was one of those basic runes. The arrow that killed Lian Rufeng and the others at Feiyun Village entrance was also engraved with the explosion flame rune.

However, the explosive flame rune he was engraving was a little different because he was trying to create a true aeth tool!

What was an aeth tool?

A treasure that could fully coordinate with a cultivator's aeth power to display its mighty powers!

The only difference between ordinary tools and aeth tools was that aeth tools were engraved with runes and, as a result, contained unbelievable powers.

The explosive flame rune engraved on Lin Xun's arrow was only semi-completed and the quality of rune ink used was at most mediocre. The arrows had to be scrapped after one use and were only considered to be semi-aeth tools.

This time, Lin Xun specially purchased a swallow-winged blade and a plate of high quality scarlet fire rune ink so that the engraved explosive flame rune would be complete and integrated with the swallow-winged blade.

Only then would it be called a true aeth tool and display its mighty powers in a cultivator's hands.

Although Lin Xun had already grasped the mysteries of engraving the explosive flame rune and had practiced countless times in the past, he still dared not be careless.

The reason for him being cautious was very simple. The process of creating an aeth tool seemed simple—it only needed a vessel, which was the tool for which the rune pattern would be engraved on—but there were strict requirements in each stage of the process.

It had been universally acknowledged that a rune master had to possess a Spirit Dipper cultivation base to be able to support the engraving of a complete rune pattern and forge an aeth tool.

Otherwise, the lack of aeth power would leave the rune engraving unfinished and it would be impossible to create a true aeth tool.

Now, Lin Xun only possessed a cultivation base of the Essence Refining Stage, the fifth layer True Martial Stage, and was still a distance from the Spirit Dipper Stage.

Fortunately, the engraving of rune wasn't a test of a practitioner's cultivation level but instead the amount of aeth power within a cultivator's body. Lin Xun's strong aeth power foundation made up for his shortcoming in cultivation level.

As a matter of fact, the aeth power within Lin Xun's body was indeed tremendous, strong and incredibly pure. It was the product of the four rune vortexes within Lin Xun's heart.

After Lin Xun's aeth power underwent refining as it passed the four Aeth Power Vortexes, his cultivation level was no different from other fifth layer True Martial Stage. But the purity and strength of his aeth power was far superior to those of other people.

This was why Lin Xun had the confidence to attempt to create an aeth tool despite only possessing a cultivation base of the fifth layer True Martial Stage.

Chi—

The blazing flame-like brush tip constantly drew across the surface of the swallow-winged blade, leaving several fine marks.

As time passed, Lin Xun's spirit perception and aeth power reached a perfect harmony with the violet pheasant brush, unrestricted and unhindered by anything.

His aeth power was constantly consumed with time but it was still far from being a problem.

Lin Xun, who was fully concentrated on engraving runes, failed to notice the beam of light flash across the Omega Door standing silently in his mind-sea.

Lin Xun had completed the last mark of the explosive flame rune. As he lowered the brush tip down, an imperceptible aura silently gathered within the tip.

At that moment, Lin Xun felt as though a giant invisible hand had clutched his wrist and he subconsciously rotated the tip of his brush. The last rune mark slipped out his hand without any obstruction.

But when he lifted his hand and studied the completed explosive flame rune pattern, he couldn't help but feel astonished. It looked familiar but there was a hint of unfamiliarity that he couldn't put his finger on.

Could there be a problem?

Before Lin Xun could investigate further, a buzz caught his attention. Millions rays of dazzling flame-like light roared to the sparkling clean surface of the swallow-winged blade. Then, everything immediately returned to normal.

When Lin Xun looked at the blade's surface again, it had become a faint scarlet color and the tip was much sharper than before. It seemed to have gained a spiritual nature.

Endless joy filled Lin Xun's heart. He picked up the blade without any hesitation.

Boom!

As he instilled aeth power into the swallow-winged blade, a blinding fire light shot out and illuminated the entire house. As he waved the blade around, it boomed and crackled like lava was erupting.

He succeeded!

Lin Xun's eyes lit up and his mind wandered.

He was certain that the swallow-winged blade had been transformed from an ordinary tool into a true aeth tool. There was no doubt about it.

But Lin Xun had never expected to succeed on his first attempt!

Mister Lu had once said that rune masters would inevitably suffer failure when forging aeth tools and that even experienced rune masters wouldn't be able to guarantee success on their first attempt.

In other words, failure was normal when refining aeth tools and non-failure wasn't normal!

Why else would aeth tools be worth so much on the current market?

Aeth tools were a product of repeated failures, which would not only waste rune materials and rune ink but also a rune master's effort!

In general, rune masters would think it was impossible for a rune apprentice like Lin Xun, who possessed only a cultivation base of the fifth layer True Martial Stage, to create an aeth tool.

However, Lin Xun not only refined it, but he succeeded at one go!

Lin Xun was also perplexed by his own success. He had prepared three sets of ink and a blade in case he failed.

Who would have thought that he didn't need to use the backups?

It was too unexpected!

Lin Xun stared intently at the swallow-winged blade in his hand, and all sorts of emotions welled up in his heart. No, it should be called the Explosion Blade now.

Who would have thought that he, a rune apprentice at only the fifth layer True Martial Stage, could create an aeth tool and also succeed at his first try?

How would other rune masters feel when they learned about his feat?

As Lin Xun thought about it, a ruminative smile crept to his lips. In the end, he shook his head and decided to never reveal this matter to anyone unless he was threatened with death.

The taller the tree, the more likely its top would be damaged by the wind. Lin Xun had understood this saying long ago. He realized that his feat would undoubtedly bring him unexpected disturbances.

“I’m going to rely on you to become rich...”

Lin Xun muttered as he gazed at the Explosion Blade. He had decided to sell the blade tomorrow!

In order to create an aeth tool, Lin Xun had purchased three sets of swallow-winged blades and scarlet fire rune ink, costing him sixty silver coins in total.

After renting the house for thirty silver coins and buying necessities and food over the past seven days, Lin Xun only had one hundred and thirty silver coins left from the three hundred silver coins he had brought to Donglin City.

If he didn’t make money as soon as possible, he might become penniless.

Fortunately, the Explosion Blade, an aeth tool, could be sold for a good amount.

Although Lin Xun didn’t know about the specific price, he knew that even the most damaged aeth tool was worth more than fifty silver coins!

“This blade is better than the one you have, are you really going to sell it?”

It was Xia Zhi’s voice.

Lin Xun was surprised to find Xia Zhi still awake at midnight and had been sitting next to him all that time.

“This is an aeth tool and it can only display its full power in the hands of a Spirit Dipper cultivator.”

Lin Xun casually said, “Of course, my strength will still no doubt be greater with the Explosion Blade compared to the Skybreaker Blade. After all, it’s an aeth tool and ordinary tools can’t be compared to it.”

Lin Xun couldn’t help but sigh, “It’s a pity that we need money now, so it’s best to sell it first. I will make another one when I have the chance.”

Xia Zhi said thoughtfully, “But I think the materials that make up your blade are very strange. It’s best that you keep your blade.”

Lin Xun couldn’t help feeling moved. Of course he knew that the Skybreaker Blade was extraordinary. Mister Lu had personally gifted him the blade as a weapon for self-defense. Mister Lu had mentioned that the blade was made from incredibly rare and special materials so even he couldn’t engrave a rune pattern on it.

This fact alone demonstrated the uniqueness of the Skybreaker Blade.

It was also because the Skybreaker Blade hadn’t yet been refined into an aeth tool that the unique materials that made it up remained buried.

What astonished Lin Xun was that Xia Zhi was able to identify the extraordinary features of the Skybreaker Blade.

[Chapter 66: Underground forces](#)

The next morning.

Before dawn, Lin Xun was already up and casually practicing the Marching Army Fist in the courtyard. His fist repeatedly whistled through the air and created shock waves.

Although the Marching Army Fist was an art widely known throughout the empire, very few people had mastered it to the extent that Lin Xun had.

It was just a pity that he still hadn't reached the perfect realm.

He had skilfully grasped the essence of the fist art, but he lacked a unique martial arts spirit and style that belonged to him.

Lin Xun knew well that he had to further sharpen his skills through real battles if he wanted to make a breakthrough. Only the flames of combat could temper the spirit of a fist art.

He practiced for a full hour and only stopped to rinse himself when his blood and qi were roaring and rumbling like boiling water. After eating breakfast with Xia Zhi, he left with a sack.

He was planning to sell the Explosion Blade that he had made last night.

Xia Zhi was left alone at home. She had no interest in anything in Donglin City except for reading so Lin Xun had bought her several books that would last her days.

Even in the morning, the slum area was dark as usual, and the dilapidated buildings that were randomly built formed several long and narrow cobweb-like alleys.

Walking through the alleys felt like being a labyrinth.

Fortunately, Lin Xun had a good memory and didn't get lost once. But before he got far into the labyrinth, he felt something was wrong and halted slightly. "Friends, if you don't come out now, don't blame me for being rude."

Before his voice died away, two figures frantically rushed out from a corner of the alley.

It was two men—one fat and one skinny. "Little young master, please don't be angry. We were waiting here to discuss something with you." The fatty cried out as hurried over to Lin Xun.

Lin Xun raised his brows. "What is it?"

The fat man hesitated and glanced at the thin man beside him.

The thin man rolled his eyes and gave an ingratiating smile. "Little young master, to tell you the truth, ever since you killed Boss Snake a few days ago, some people have begun to disregard the rules and many despicable things have happened lately. Many brothers and sisters who live nearby also don't dare to voice their anger."

Lin Xun didn't know whether to laugh or not. He could immediately tell the two men weren't good people yet they dared to complain to him about the despicable things that other people had done.

"We were thinking that this area can't continue without a leader, so we want to ask you, little young master, to come forward and take control of this area."

The thin man quickly added, "Of course, we won't let you work for nothing. According to the usual practice, anyone who works in our area will have to present you with money or things of value every month. What do you say?"

Lin Xun finally understood that the two men wanted him to play the role of 'boss', but he wasn't interested. Moreover, he didn't want to be connected with hooligans, thieves, thugs and that kind of people.

"Sorry, I'm not interested," Lin Xun stated as he walked away.

"Little young master—little young master."

Anxious, the fatty tried to stop Lin Xun, but when he met Lin Xun's gaze, he shuddered all over like he was threatened by a knife and dared not to make any other movements.

"Leave. I told you already that I'm not interested and I don't want to interfere in those affairs," Lin Xun said indifferently before he vanished into the depths of the alley.

Both the fat and thin man slumped and sighed out loud.

"Fatty Diao, what should we do? I don't want to turn to Boss Xiong. I had once offended one of Boss Xiong's relatives because of Boss Snake."

The thin man scrunched up his face bitterly.

"After Boss Snake died, Boss Xiong has been eager to act. He is going too far if he stretches his hand into our area as well."

Fatty Diao gritted his teeth. "It's a pity that the little young master doesn't want to get his feet into the muddy water. I really don't know what to do now."

The slums were very large. It covered over tens of miles and was inhabited by at least one hundred thousand people, most of whom were insignificant people considered at the bottom of society. Among them, there were many people of the Three Religions and Nine Schools as well as thieves, thugs, murderers and prostitutes.

Naturally, criminal gangs emerged from them.

The underground world in the entire slum area was completely controlled by over twenty criminal gangs and each one managed a specific area but territorial disputes still arose.

For example, Boss Snake, who Lin Xun had killed a few days ago, was a gang leader in one of the areas and Boss Xiong was the gang leader of another area, but following Boss Snake's death, Boss Xiong had been looking for opportunities to rule the entire underground world.

"Damn it, we might really have to go seek refuge with Boss Lu," the thin man said through gritted teeth. "Boss Lu is now one of the strongest forces."

"Beanpole Ma, are you stupid? Boss Lu is ruthless and greedy. If you work for him you are putting your life on the line."

Fatty Diao shook his head.

The thin man was called Beanpole Ma. He muttered bitterly, "Then what should we do?"

"Why don't you take refuge with me," a gentle voice sounded from a distance.

A delicate little figure clad in a black wind-proof robe emerged. A hat concealed the figure's face.

Naturally, it was Xia Zhi who Lin Xun had asked to stay at home and read.

"You—"

The fatty looked startled. Despite the figure appearing mysterious, he could tell it was a little kid. His face darkened and he grinned sinisterly. "Little kid, you dare play a joke on me. Do you not want to live?"

Before his voice even faded, a hammer slammed into his chest and sent him flying uncontrollably into the distance. He smashed into the ground so hard that his bones almost shattered but he could only scream in pain.

Beanpole Ma froze with terror. Fatty Diao was sent flying before he even saw what happened.

Xia Zhi stepped forward. Her indifferent and calm voice was filled with unyielding coldness as she said, "From now on, I am the boss of this area and you are my lackeys. Do you have a problem?"

Beanpole Ma quivered uncontrollably. Even if he was possibly facing a child, fear gripped his heart, and he repeatedly shook his head. "No, no—"

"What about you?" Xia Zhi shot a glance at Fatty Diao.

Fatty Diao immediately stopped howling in pain and scrambled from the ground. "I absolutely have no objection. From now on, we will be your loyal subordinates and will not hesitate to go into boiling water or walk on fire for you."

Xia Zhi lifted her hand and made a slapping motion in the direction of Fatty Diao. With a tragic scream, he tumbled to the ground like a gourd.

Then, Xia Zhi uttered, "I don't like to hear nonsense. If you want to stay on my side, obey my orders and you will be rewarded. If you make a mistake, you will be punished. Do you understand?"

"Understood."

Terrified, the fat man and thin man repeatedly nodded.

"Good, go tell all your comrades in the area that I am your boss from now on."

Xia Zhi nodded, turned around and left.

Fatty Diao exhaled a breath of turbid air, his face contorted with fear. Then, he remembered something and cried out, "Boss."

Xia Zhi halted her steps. "Is there a problem?"

Fatty shuddered as he mumbled, "I just want to know what to call you from now on."

Xia Zhi pondered for a long while before she replied, "Chopstick."

“Chopstick.”

Fatty Diao and Beanpole Ma exchanged a glance with each other and kept the name in mind.

It wasn't until Xia Zhi had completely disappeared from their sight that Beanpole Ma whispered, “Do we really have to work for Boss Chopstick?”

Fatty Diao rubbed his swollen and bruised cheeks and inhaled sharply. “Idiot, didn't you see the slap I suffered just now. She only slapped the air but I already sustained such injuries. Only Spirit Dipper cultivators could achieve this and there are now at most six people in the slums who can do that.”

Beanpole Ma's eyes widened and he exclaimed in joy, “We are saved. Boss Xiong is only at the True Martial Stage. How can he be compared to our Boss Chopstick?”

A smug expression crossed Fatty Diao's face. “Our Boss Chopstick may look like a child but she's a martial arts master. We might even become famous if we work for her.”

“Then what are we waiting for? Hurry up and tell the others that we have a new boss,” exclaimed Beanpole Ma.

Fatty Diao nodded.

What would Lin Xun think if he saw what had happened?

In the most central location of Great Hundred Street.

This was the most bustling core area of Donglin City. Magnificent buildings rose to the sky and the architecture had an ancient charm with the gray bricks, yellow tiles, painted pillars and carved beams.

Bustling crowds endlessly passed the core area and every person was gorgeously dressed and emanated elegance.

Dressed in coarse linen and lugging around a bag on his shoulder, Lin Xun inevitably was a bit of an eye sore.

Occasionally, he would even receive disgusting and disdainful gazes. Many young and beautiful women immediately moved away when they laid eyes on him.

This was not an exaggeration. The bustling Great Hundred Street consisted of the most money squandering establishments in the city. The shops, restaurants, inns and other stores set up on the street were completely unaffordable to ordinary people. Therefore, the majority of people strolling about were well-off or from wealthy families.

Lin Xun's simple and clean style of dressing naturally was a symbol of poverty in other people's eyes.

Lin Xun didn't seem to be aware of this. He raised his head and peered into the distance, where a dozen-foot high building stood.

Stone Cauldron Alms.

Lin Xun thought for a moment and finally decided to walk in.

Although Mu Wansu had a poor attitude towards Lin Xun when he was in the Qingyang Tribe, she still helped Lin Xun with a huge favor. Lin Xun wanted to sell an aeth tool so the Stone Cauldron Alms was naturally his first choice to sell to.

Moreover, Lin Xun didn't plan to sell just one aeth tool, he planned to make and sell more in the future. He believed that the Stone Cauldron Alms would be extremely interested and would perhaps even start a long term cooperation with him.

After all, which merchant would refuse such a beneficial deal?

In any case, Lin Xun offered such a beneficial deal to the Stone Cauldron Alms to repay their kindness and not because he was greedy for more benefits.

Chapter 67 Golden Jade Hall

The Stone Cauldron Alms in the Qingyang Tribe wasn't particularly special when compared to the Stone Cauldron Alms in Donglin City.

The entrance was a grand and gorgeous palace-like hall, and not only was the space tremendous, but the furnishings and decorative items were also all carefully selected antiques.

Beautiful maids escorted each customer into the hall like butterflies fluttering through a bed of flowers. They all wore a warm smile and their manner was neither overbearing nor humble.

Even Lin Xun, who was dressed in simple and plain clothing, was treated with courtesy. Their manners were excellent in every respect.

A maid led Lin Xun to the treasure exchanging zone.

Not long afterwards, a treasure appraisal master came out, chatted with Lin Xun and took the Explosion Blade for evaluation.

After a long while, Wang Lin raised his head and exclaimed. "This Explosion Blade isn't bad. The condition and appearance is excellent. It's a top quality item among lower human grade aeth tools. Young Master, do you really intend to sell this treasure?"

Lin Xun nodded with a smile.

Wang Lin thought for a moment and then said, "This treasure is worth forty silver coins. Would you be satisfied with this price?"

Lin Xun had just checked the Stone Cauldron Alms' aeth tools sales counter and noted that, in general, lower human grade aeth tools were roughly between ten to thirty silver coins.

The price that Wang Lin quoted him was neither high nor low.

But Lin Xun didn't particularly care about the price. The main purpose of his trip to the Stone Cauldron Alms was to establish a long term cooperation with them.

However, a maid suddenly rushed over and gestured Wang Lin to one side. She whispered something to him and Wang Lin quickly went back over to apologize to Lin Xun. "Young Master, please wait a minute, I have an urgent matter to attend to."

Lin Xun nodded.

Wang Lin hurried away. Lin Xun didn't have to wait long before he returned. Though he seemed a little distracted after his return.

After a thought, Lin Xun directly asked, "Big Brother Wang, about the aeth tool—"

Before Lin Xun could finish his sentence, Wang Lin waved dismissively and said, "Apologies, the Stone Cauldron Alms will not be making the transaction. Young Master, I hope you understand."

"You won't?" Lin Xun raised his eyebrows, looking a little surprised. Why did this guy's attitude change so drastically after he came back?

"I'm sorry. Young Master, please understand."

Wang Lin's attitude also turned lukewarm. Lin Xun's heart sank. As though he had speculated something, he forcibly suppressed his discontent, sprang up and said out loud, "If that's the case, I won't bother you anymore."

"Young Master, take care." Wang Lin's voice sounded cold and detached.

"Did Mu Wansu tell you to do that?" Lin Xun suddenly asked.

Wang Lin froze and his countenance changed. "Young Master, what do you mean?"

Lin Xun took in his expression and came to an answer in his mind. He shook his head. "Never mind."

Without any hesitation, he walked out the store in large strides.

Wang Lin sat dazed for a while. Then, he let out a long sigh and got up.

As Lin Xun walked along the bustling street, he turned his head back to look at the grand building of Stone Cauldron Alms. The corners of his lips quirked upwards in one corner.

Lin Xun knew that Mu Wansu had always seen him as an eyesore, especially after he used Yan Zhen to suppress the Wu Corporation.

But no matter what, he owed the Stone Cauldron Alms a favor. The favor could be regarded as the Stone Cauldron Alms and could also be regarded as Mu Wansu's.

Therefore, Lin Xun wouldn't resent them just because he had received the cold-shoulder treatment. He just wanted to do business with them. He could just sell his blade to other people.

"Mu Wansu is too petty. Is she not worried that I could shamelessly use Shi Xuan's badge to bother her again and again. What can she do to me then? Unfortunately, I'm not that thick-skinned."

Lin Xun shook his head in disappointment. "Never mind. From her attitude, it seems that she intends to draw a clear line with me. If that's the case, I should keep away from the Stone Cauldron Alms in the future."

Lin Xun didn't worry too much about his situation. He strolled along the Great Hundred Street, surveying the various shops on both sides of the street.

Very soon, someone called out to Lin Xun. He was an average-looking man but he exuded capability and steadiness.

“Young Master, if I’m correct, you just offered your treasure for sale to the Stone Cauldron Alms.” The man smiled as he gave a cupped fist salute. His voice, gentle and clear, gave a comfortable and refreshing feeling.

The ordinary-looking man’s amiable bearing, which was inadvertently revealed from his words and mannerism, made him seem very approachable and likable.

“Correct.” Lin Xun nodded.

“Let me guess again, you must have disagreed with the price that the Stone Cauldron Alms gave you so the transaction didn’t go ahead in the end, is that right?” the man continued, speaking clearly and smiling kindly.

“Correct.” Lin Xun nodded again. He had just carried a sack into the Stone Cauldron Alms and then came out with the same sack. Anyone who paid attention to his movements would have guessed what had happened.

The man introduced himself with a smile. “I am called Gu Yanping. I have just opened a store called the Golden Jade Hall. If you don’t mind, why don’t you take a look at my shop.”

Lin Xun also smiled. “Shopkeeper Gu is so enthusiastic, I don’t dare to decline your offer.”

The two smiled broadly.

The Golden Jade Hall was located on the west end of the Great Hundred Street and was relatively quiet compared to the bustling central core area.

The Golden Jade Hall wasn’t particularly huge and only consisted of a two-storey tiled building. But even if it couldn’t be compared to the Stone Cauldron Alms in size, it was tidy, elegant and every part was original and unique.

The only embarrassing aspect of the Golden Jade Hall was that Lin Xun saw not a single customer besides himself.

Gu Yanping calmly smiled. “The store only opened less than ten days ago so we still have a small customer base. Please don’t laugh.”

It not only had few customers, but the number of items in the store could also only be described as sparse.

Some counters were empty and had only the name tags of some items.

Anyone who walked into the shop would wonder if it was just an empty shell.

Those observations made Lin Xun deduce that the Golden Jade Hall couldn’t be compared to the other businesses in terms of financial resources and background. The only benefit it had was that it was located on the Great Hundred Street.

However, Gu Yanping’s next sentence surprised Lin Xun.

“Young Master, I know you have a lot of doubts in your mind. To tell you the truth, I rented this store, and the money I currently have could at most pay half a year’s rent,” confessed Gu Yanping.

Lin Xun was stumped for words and could only respond a good moment afterwards. “Shopkeeper Gu, why did you tell me that?”

Gu Yanping said righteously. “Honesty is of utmost importance in business and my strongest point is my honesty. Honesty is a must if I want to expand the Golden Jade Hall so I don’t want to hide anything from you.”

Lin Xun nodded. He suddenly realized that Gu Yanping was a wonderful person. From the moment Lin Xun met him, he had shown an extraordinary power of observation. He treated people and served customers very well. He was sincere but careful, and nothing about him was unlikeable.

“In that case, Shopkeeper Gu, can you take a look at my blade?” Lin Xun handed over the Explosion Blade.

Gu Yanping received it happily, carefully examined the blade and nodded. “A superior aeth tool of the lower human grade. It should be worth between two hundred and three hundred silver coins.”

Lin Xun remembered Wang Lin’s appraisal from earlier, and so he couldn’t help but nod. It seems that Gu Yanping’s treasure appraisal skills are pretty good.

He said casually, “Forty silver coins and the blade is yours.”

Gu Yanping didn’t expect Lin Xun to be so direct and straightforward. After a little thought, he said unwaveringly, “Thank you Young Master, but business is business. If I were to make an offer, it would be at least fifty silver coins.”

He took out his coin purse and handed fifty silver coins to Lin Xun. “Young Master, please accept this.”

Lin Xun silently put the money away and said, “Shopkeeper Gu, I believe that you are sincerely doing business with me. If I have another aeth tool to sell, I will think of the Golden Jade Hall right away.”

Gu Yanping smiled with a cupped fist salute. “Then I have to thank you, Young Master, for taking care of the store.”

Lin Xun nodded and bid farewell.

“Father, we don't have much money.”

As soon as Lin Xun left, a young man came out and said helplessly, “Why are you still spending money like that? It won’t be long before we have to close our shop.”

The young man was called Gu Liang and was the only son of Gu Yanping. “Liang’er, remember that business is not only about boldness and long term-vision but you also have to have the courage to burn your boats.” Gu Yanping disagreed with his son’s view.

After a pause, Gu Yanping continued unwaveringly, “The resources we currently have can’t maintain our business through normal means. So we must take a risk. If we succeed then our Golden Jade Hall can establish a firm foothold on the Great Hundred Street.”

Gu Liang couldn't help but argue, "What if we don't succeed?"

Gu Yanping fell silent for a moment before he calmly replied, "Then we close up and leave. Ever since the old guys of Zijing City expelled me from the house, I have thoroughly understood one thing—I have to rely on myself to do anything."

He picked up the Explosion Blade and went into the inner room.

The mention of being expelled from the house made young Gu Liang's eyes suddenly blaze with fury. But it was only for a split second, and he very quickly restored tranquility to his features.

Inside the inner room.

Gu Yanping was focused and calm. He stood tall as he drew the blade with his left hand. As though he had become another person, his eyes glinted with absolute confidence like everything was under his control. A strange charm came to his average-looking face.

Suddenly, Gu Yanping's hand opened up like a lotus flower and he folded his fingers together in a bizarre hand seal and pressed on the Explosion Blade.

With a clear ring, flames bubbled up to the blade's surface like molten lava. They blazed brightly and dispelled the darkness within the inner room and made Gu Yanping's face glow red.

"What an amazing blade."

Although it was a compliment, his expression remained calm and indifferent, without the slightest ripple. It was as though he had witnessed such a scene in the past.

At the same time, he changed hand seals. He tapped his fingers against the Explosion Blade's surface in a unique rhythm.

From the sharp tip of the blade, a shaft of gorgeous light burst forth like a sun pillar at sunset. It emitted an extremely dangerous aura as it flashed endlessly.

"What an amazing blade!"

Gu Yanping marveled out loud, his usual calm and composed expression changing drastically.

[Chapter 68: Traces of Enemy](#)

Gu Liang quietly waited.

An hour had passed but there was a lack of movement and noise in the inner room. Gu Liang couldn't help but feel perplexed.

Since the Golden Jade Hall had opened, his father Gu Yanping had already purchased seven items of treasures such as aeth armor, aeth spear and aeth sword...All were aeth tools for combat.

However, the quality of those aeth tools were barely passable. Additionally, they were all common aeth tools on the market and so they still weren't sold now.

Gu Liang couldn't help but worry whether his father's approach was feasible.

But what worried him the most was the rent for the store and the money spent on purchasing the seven aeth tools because it had already drained his family's money.

It wouldn't be long before the Golden Jade Hall would close down if they didn't change!

At that time...I'm afraid we would have to pack up and leave, right?

Gu Liang sighed. He had admired and looked up to his father since a young age and so even if he doubted his father's approach, he had never strongly opposed him.

At worst, we will close up the store. As long as we don't die from starvation, there will be a chance to bounce back!

Gu Liang drew a deep breath, dispelling the distracting thoughts in his mind. He had inherited many of Gu Yanping's good points and so he knew that sometimes it was best to do his best and leave the rest to the heavens. If he worried too much it would only make himself stressed and uneasy.

The door to the inner room was suddenly pushed open and Gu Yanping came out.

What surprised Gu Liang was that his father seemed to have become another person. His face was glowing and radiant like he had become years younger.

"Liang'er, the time has come for us to change our fortune!" Gu Yanping laughed heartily.

"Father, what do you mean?" Gu Liang frowned in puzzlement.

"The Explosion Blade from the Young Master just now is extraordinary!"

As Gu Yanping thought about when he verified the blade, his heart fluttered with excitement. "Its power is twenty percent stronger than other Explosion Blades! Twenty percent! A lower human-grade aeth tool actually has the power of a mid human-grade aeth tool. In the entire world, is there another Explosion Flame Blade that can compare to it?"

Gu Liang shuddered in surprise. "It really has twenty percent more power?"

From what he knew, Explosion Flame Blade was a very common kind of aeth tool on the market. It was impossible to increase its power by twenty percent even if the highest quality of materials were used to refine it!

Explosion Flame Blade was created by a rune master and so its materials and rune pattern were fixed and couldn't be changed.

In other words, the power of an Explosion Flame Blade couldn't be changed! Otherwise, it wouldn't be called the Explosion Flame Blade!

This was the reason why Gu Liang was flabbergasted by what Gu Yanping said.

Gu Yanping was also well aware of it, which was why he was astonished by the result and thought he saw it wrong when he tested the blade.

But it turned out that it was all true!

“Liang’er, when I appraised the treasure, I used the Flying Aeth Treasure Inspection Art, you should understand what this means,” Gu Yanping casually explained.

Gu Liang froze. The Flying Aeth Treasure Inspection Art was a secret art handed down from generation to generation and there had never been any mistake in appraising treasures.

“Then it's actually true...”

Gu Liang muttered, “It’s an ordinary Explosion Blade, but its power is twenty percent higher than normal. If this matter spread to other rune masters, it would no doubt create a sensation!”

Gu Yanping sighed emotionally. “I don't know who made this treasure. It’s a pity that the young man left in a hurry, otherwise we could have found out more.”

Gu Liang said with a smile, “Father, the person who made such a treasure is likely an extraordinarily accomplished rune master. How would it be so easy to meet such a remarkable person?”

Gu Yanping pondered for a long moment and shook his head. “Don’t mention this matter to anyone. Go and gather some people to spread the news that the Golden Jade Hall had acquired a peerless blade. Which hero would get their hands on such a treasured blade? Remember to chant this slogan!”

Gu Liang rolled his eyes and then smiled like a little fox. “Peerless blade?”

Gu Yanping laughed. “Isn’t it? The slogan is a tactic commonly used by businesses to draw discussion and attract more attention.”

Gu Liang nodded. “I will take care of this matter.”

Gu Yanping's eyes gleamed with confidence and he felt a sense of pride wash over him. “Whether or not our Golden Jade Hall can establish itself in Donglin City depends on whether this move can start a huge momentum!”

.....

The Stone Cauldron Alms.

After Lin Xun left, Wang Lin rushed towards the depths of the hall and made many turns and came to a secluded and quiet courtyard.

In the courtyard stood a waterside pavilion and a little bridge over the flowing stream. Dressed in a black dress, Mu Wansu sat lazily in the pavilion flipping through an account book.

Her jet black hair tied up in a bun accentuated her fair neck and her soft, creamy skin, and the warm sunlight highlighted her flawless curves.

Mu Wansun was undoubtedly a rare beauty.

However, Wang Lin dared not glance at Mu Wansu as he walked into the courtyard. He bowed his head low and said respectfully, “Miss Wansu, Lin Xun has left. I think he understood what our Stone Cauldron Alms wanted.”

Mu Wansu closed the account book as a smile curved her plump and red lips. She said leisurely, "I thought he would at least last a few days in Donglin City but it turns out that he has to come here to sell his aeth tools so soon. He seemed to have learnt that it isn't so easy to gain a foothold in Donglin City!"

Mu Wansu suddenly asked, "What was his reaction to all this?"

In Mu Wansu's eyes, Lin Xun was a cunning and shameless little bastard. She didn't believe that he would obediently leave after receiving the cold shoulder.

Wang Lin said in surprise, "He seems to know that it was all your arrangement. He didn't show much of a reaction when he left."

Mu Wansu strangely felt something was wrong, but she immediately shook off her worry with a toss of her head.

She had been watching Lin Xun's every movement ever since he came to Donglin City.

She knew that Lin Xun had to live in a filthy, dangerous and orderless place known as the slums due to financial constraints. She also knew that he seemed to be thinking about how to gain a foothold in Donglin City.

Mu Wansu originally thought that Lin Xun was quite impressive despite him being cunning and shameless and that he might really be able to survive in Donglin City with his own means.

However, when she learned that Lin Xun came to the Stone Cauldron Alms with an aeth tool, she knew he was in a desperate situation. Otherwise, how would he, a True Martial Stage cultivator, be willing to sell an aeth tool?

Mu Wansu was not only delighted but she also gloated over his predicament. Is this the person who First Young Master regards highly of? Without the help of the Stone Cauldron Alms, it would be difficult to step anywhere in Donglin City. He's too useless. If First Young Master hears about this, I wonder what he would think.

"Miss Wansu, the treasure that Lin Xun came to sell seemed pretty good. It likely is remarkable and it would be a pity to pass on the opportunity."

Wang Lin couldn't understand what Mu Wansu was thinking. He was a treasure appraisal master, and so what he cared about was also related to his expertise.

"It's just a lower human grade aeth tool, what's so special about it?" Mu Wansu didn't think much of the item.

"But from my examination, although the grade of the Explosion Flame Blade seemed ordinary, its appearance is different from other Explosion Flame Blades," Wang Lin quickly explained.

Mu Wansu frowned, "No matter how different it is, it's still an Explosion Blade. Why are you so persistent? You're dismissed now."

Wang Lin inwardly sighed, shook his head and left.

“Little bastard, I wonder what else you will sell after you sell the aeth tool. I won’t let you take advantage of the Stone Cauldron Alms anymore...”

Mu Wansu grinned and continued to review the accounts.

To her, what happened just now was a trivial matter and didn’t deserve her attention. She was most interested in how long Lin Xun could survive in Donglin City.

.....

Lin Xun was unaware of what happened in Stone Cauldron Alms after he left, nor did he know that Gu Yanping and his son were elated and eager to act.

After Lin Xun sold the Explosion Flame Blade and obtained fifty silver coins for it, he browsed the Eight Hundred Street in a joyful mood.

A swallow-winged blade and a dish of scarlet fire rune ink were worth twenty silver coins, but the Explosion Blade that Lin Xun put some effort into to refine had been sold for fifty silver coins. His profit was more than double his cost!

More importantly, he could continuously refine aeth tools in the future!

This was the key reason that Lin Xun was in a good mood. He felt he was setting foot on a dazzling golden path of fortune.

“When I have enough money, maybe I should buy some blood refining pills and prepare to break through to the sixth layer True Martial Stage.”

Lin Xun quickly calculated the cost. He had seen blood refining pills, which was a type of extremely precious aeth medicine, in the Stone Cauldron Alms of the Qingyang Tribe. They were worth around ten silver coins each.

It was extremely expensive but it was normal because as a person’s cultivation increased, the quality of the aeth medicines required also increased and so did the price.

A cultivator at the first-layer True Martial Stage only needed to consume aeth grains and aeth vegetables, but such grains and vegetables wouldn’t be effective once a cultivator broke through to a higher cultivation level.

Moreover, aeth medicines didn’t simply replenish aeth power but had other effects at different cultivation stages.

Huh?

A strange feeling suddenly surfaced in Lin Xun’s heart, snapping him out of his rambling thoughts.

His eyes darted around his surroundings but he only saw pedestrians moving along the street like flowing water. The street was bustling as usual and he didn’t notice anything unusual.

Suddenly, Lin Xun shook his head, turned around and walked into the depths of the alley on the side of the street.

Just shortly after Lin Xun disappeared, two ordinary-looking men in ordinary clothes suddenly walked out of the crowd.

They looked no different from the passers-by on the street, but their gaze simultaneously shifted to the alley that Lin Xun entered.

“Old Blade, the target seems to be aware of us. Should we continue to follow him?” a dark-skinned man asked with a frown.

Chapter 69 Master Chopstick

The man who was called Old Blade pondered for a moment before he said unwaveringly, “Go after him!”

The two darted into the alley in a flash.

They were already in the slums where it was dark and humid and alleys crisscrossed like a spider’s labyrinth.

Not long after Old Blade and the other man sped into the alley, they found that they had lost their target.

“Old Dog, can you still detect that kid’s presence?” Old Blade asked with a frown.

“He’s not that far ahead,” Old Dog quickly replied.

Old Blade grunted and hurried forward though he felt somewhat uneasy. The alley was long and extremely narrow, being no more than ten feet wide. They ran into no one on their way and it was dark and humid even during the day.

“Old Dog, we should be extra careful. Although we work for money, once we lose our lives we will lose everything,” Old Blade reminded. He still couldn’t help but feel that something didn’t feel right.

“Haha, he’s just a kid from a remote village. Also, we are just following our target and not doing anything else.” Old Dog disagreed.

“No matter what it’s better to be cautious,” said Old Blade with a frown.

“Of course.”

Old Dog didn’t think so but the next second, he immediately exclaimed, “How could that be? The target’s scent suddenly disappeared...”

Old Blade was stupefied. His heart sank and he groaned inwardly.

Bang!

A dark shadow suddenly descended from above with incredible ghost-like speed.

Old Blade could only see everything before him blur and then Old Dog violently shook and collapsed to the ground like lightning had struck down on him.

“He wants to die!”

Old Blade swiftly reacted with a fierce roar. He drew his blade and charged forward.

The shadow was, of course, Lin Xun. Before Old Blade could launch an attack, Lin Xun had already blasted towards Old Blade like a cannonball. At the same time, he extended his fingers, tightly clutched Old Blade's wrist and violently shook.

Boom!

A terrifying force slammed Old Blade's body like a torrent of water, causing his limbs and bones to vibrate to the extent that they almost shattered. And when the force finally subsided, blood wildly flowed from his nose and mouth.

Then, he smashed to the ground with a loud thud and his vision blurred. Every part of his body ached with indescribable pain to the point that he couldn't push himself up from the ground.

The fight broke out abruptly and ended in a flash. It was too unbelievably fast, direct and ruthless.

Only then did Old Blade see his attacker and realized that it was the target they had been following.

Old Blade had never thought that a thirteen to fourteen year old youngster would fight so fiercely and mercilessly. His combat methods didn't resemble a teenager's.

Lin Xun stepped forward and said with a smile, "Tell me what I want to know. If you don't tell me, I'll ask him. If you cooperate, I can let you die happily." He pointed to Old Dog who had lost consciousness.

With just one sentence from Lin Xun, Old Blade had realized that the youngster before him was no child!

However, Old Blade refused to admit defeat and hissed through gritted teeth, "Do you know who we are?"

Kacha!

Lin Xun smiled and said nothing. He stepped on Old Blade's hand with his toes until blood oozed out, flesh crushed and bones crumbled. Old Blade wanted to scream out in pain but a stone was stuffed into his mouth.

As Lin Xun watched Old Blade make a painful grimace, he remained calm and composed. He whispered, "Believe me, I have learned a lot of torturing methods since I was a child. At least one thousand. Don't tell me anything if you want to try them."

Old Blade's expression dramatically changed and his body violently trembled from severe pain. His eyes were on the verge of cracking and oozing blood. As he stared intently at the youngster before him, his heart pounded.

Kacha!

Lin Xun was still smiling but Old Blade's hand had been crippled under his foot. Old Blade was in so much pain that he whined and hissed, and his face contorted fiercely.

The youngster appears warm and gentle and seems like he would never hurt any living creatures but his ruthless means are more ruthless than those used by executioners!

How is he a mere boy? He is clearly a little devil!

When he saw Lin Xun crouch down and take out a short azure blade to torture him, he almost collapsed as fear drowned his head. It made him nod frantically.

Lin Xun smacked his lips in slight disappointment. "I thought you were pretty tough. Who would have thought that you would yield before the torture even began?"

Old Blade's entire body twitched violently. He hadn't started the torture yet?

Lin Xun's smile faded from his lips as he studied Old Blade calmly. "In that case, I will no longer make things difficult for you. I will ask you questions and you will answer. Understood? I hope you won't deceive me. I will ask your companion to answer these questions again later. If your answers are different, you know what the consequences are, right?"

Old Blade had completely given up putting up resistance and nodded.

.....

When Lin Xun walked out from the other end of the alley, two dead bodies had appeared in the dark alley and it wouldn't be long before they would be devoured by wild dogs.

Lin Xun didn't care.

Carrying the preserves, aeth fruits, roasted meat and all sorts of snacks he bought from the street vendors, he strolled home.

The warm sunset light brushed past the top of the alley. A ray of light squeezed into the alley and dispelled the darkness and bathed the thin figure of the youngster in a warm glow.

Anyone who saw such a handsome and gentle young man would never have thought that he was the one who ended two people's lives in such a cold and ruthless way.

The young man was Lin Xun.

Having been brought up in a dark environment, Lin Xun was destined to be different from his peers.

"Lian Fei...the Wu Clan..."

Lin Xun organized his thoughts as he walked.

Old Blade and Old Dog had already disclosed everything and so he knew that the Wu Clan had been targeting him from the first day that he came to Donglin City.

This surprised Lin Xun a little. The Wu Clan was the family of Wu Henshui and also the force behind the Wu Corporation in the Qingyang Tribe.

After the Stone Cauldron Alms' warning, Lin Xun thought that the Wu Clan wouldn't dare to bring him trouble even if they hated him, but it seemed like the Wu Clan hadn't given up.

According to Old Blade, the Wu Clan contacted Lian Fei and they plotted together on the first day that Lin Xun entered Donglin City.

Their plot was very simple—get rid of Lin Xun!

Only that the Wu Clan didn't act in person and gave Lian Fei full control while they stood behind him and provided him with all financial support and resources.

This was what surprised Lin Xun. Lin Xun didn't think that the Wu Clan would ask Lian Fei, who was the son of Lian Rufeng, to deal with him.

But after a deeper thought about it, Lin Xun understood why Lian Fei agreed—Lin Xun had killed his father!

Would Lian Fei not want to avenge his father?

“Push the wolf out to swallow the tiger? What a good plan the Wu Clan has!”

Lin Xun smiled coldly. He could clearly tell that the Wu Clan was afraid of the Stone Cauldron Alms and wanted to avoid dealing with him in the open so they used Lian Fei's hands instead.

Old Blade and Old Dog were intelligence gathers hired by Lian Fei. They were ordered to follow Lin Xun and provide him with information for his next operation.

According to Old Blade, Lian Fei had hired many desperate criminals with the financial support from the Wu Clan. Those criminals only cared about money and would not hesitate to assassinate Lin Xun with the right opportunity!

Lin Xun wasn't afraid of Lian Fei and the others, but when he thought about how they had been plotting to kill him and that assassins could appear at any time, he felt his head throb with pain. It's hard to prevent thieves forever.

However, Lin Xun learned that Lian Fei was only fifteen years old and already possessed a cultivation base of the fifth layer True Martial Stage. He was a student at Donglin Academy and had been focusing on the district examination for the past month. This was why he hadn't personally acted already.

Based on this information, Lin Xun speculated that if Lian Fei really wanted to kill him, he would wait until after the district examination was over in a month.

But that was just Lin Xun's speculation. If Lian Fei knew that Lin Xun had seen through his plan, he might decide to take action early.

“It seems that I have to hurry up and gather some information about the Wu Clan and Lian Fei...”

Murderous intent surged into Lin Xun's heart. He hated being targeted and being plotted against. Since the Wu Clan hadn't given up, how could Lin Xun just sit and do nothing?

However, the enemy was hiding in the dark while he was exposed. He knew little about the Wu Clan and so his priority now was to first understand the real situation and plan carefully before taking action.

While contemplating, Lin Xun arrived at the door to his house. He shook his head, dispelling the distracting thoughts. Then, he pushed open the door.

Huh?

Lin Xun immediately saw two figures in the courtyard, one fat and one thin. Suddenly, his eyes turned chilling and murderous intent filled them.

The fat man and thin man both turned their heads and saw Lin Xun. An ingratiating smile simultaneously came to their faces. However, when they met Lin Xun's icy blade-like gaze, their faces stiffened and they couldn't help but shudder with terror.

"What are you two doing?"

Lin Xun recognized the two men. It was Fatty Diao and Beanpole Ma. He immediately calmed down and his killing intent subsided.

Fatty Diao and Beanpole Ma breathed a sigh of relief. They respectfully bowed together and said loudly, "Paying respect to Master Chopstick!"

Boss...Chopstick?

The title stupefied Lin Xun. Isn't this title really bad?

Lin Xun swept a glance over the two and then looked at the tightly closed door. A thought came to his mind and he headed straight towards the door

He pushed open the door and, as expected, saw Xia Zhi sitting at his desk and reading quietly.

"What is happening?" asked Lin Xun.

He knew that the two men couldn't possibly break into their house if Xia Zhi was around, which meant that Xia Zhi was the one who let them in.

"They are your subordinates."

Xia Zhi set down the book in her hand, thought for a moment and said, "I originally wanted to be their master but I found it too troublesome so I passed the role of master to you instead."

Lin Xun's face grew overcast when he saw the serious look on the little girl's face.

He was most worried about Xia Zhi being influenced by the dark and filthy environment but she came into contact with the dark world on her own accord!

How would she not follow their bad examples if she became connected to ruffians, hooligans, gangsters, criminals and the underworld?

[Chapter 70: The Second Star](#)

Lin Xun was so unusually exasperated that he stormed out the room and then kicked Fatty Diao and Beanpole Ma out.

Then, he drew a deep breath, returned to the room and looked at Xia Zhi with a serious expression. "Why are you doing this?"

Xia Zhi also assumed a serious expression and asked in response, "Didn't you already agree?"

Lin Xun looked surprised. "Why would I agree?"

“To fight.”

Lin Xun stared at Xia Zhi and said nothing.

Xia Zhi’s clear, crescent-shaped eyes stared back at him. She refused to yield an inch.

It was only when the atmosphere within the room became a little suffocating that Lin Xun sighed out loud and said, “Let’s eat dinner first.”

He turned around and started to set the table, spreading out the preserved fruits, aeth fruits, roasted meat and a variety of snacks.

Then, the two ate in silence.

The very sumptuous meal felt tasteless to Lin Xun as if he was eating wax. He finally set down his chopsticks and broke the silence. “I’m just worried about you.”

Xia Zhi nodded. “I understand.”

“You don’t understand, I grew up and lived with evil and bad people since I was a child, and I have seen a lot of dark things. So, I know that those kinds of people will definitely influence you once you become involved with them!”

Xia Zhi thought for a moment and said, “But aren’t you living well now?”

Lin Xun said snappily, “I’m not the same.”

Xia Zhi argued, “Like you, I am not the same.”

Although the sentence sounded awkward, Lin Xun understood her meaning and couldn’t help but sigh again.

Xia Zhi put down her bowl and chopsticks and looked at Lin Xun directly. “I know what I’m doing, but if you’re really angry, I will choose to step back.”

Her flawless face was as tranquil as always but also firm and unwavering.

Lin Xun was silent for a long moment and then he suddenly smiled. His tensed face softened and he shook his head. “No, I just want to confirm your stance. I have seen it and so I won’t object anymore.”

Xia Zhi nodded.

Lin Xun helped Xia Zhi scoop another bowl of rice, saying, “Be careful these days. The Wu Clan may not plan to leave us alone.”

Xia Zhi raised her head and asked, “What do you plan to do?”

Lin Xun shrugged. “I’ll first confirm whether or not this information is accurate and then take action. We have to solve the problem ourselves this time.”

A cold intent flashed deep in Xia Zhi’s eyes, but vanished immediately. Then, she nodded.

.....

After dinner, Xia Zhi got up and told Lin Xun that she was going for a walk.

Lin Xun was hesitant to ask what she was going to do, but he could somehow guess what she intended to do and so he could only sigh inwardly.

However, Lin Xun wasn't worried about Xia Zhi encountering any danger because she was stronger than the average person and even he was no match for her. He believed that, as long as she was careful, she wouldn't run into any danger against the bad people in the slum area.

Lin Xun shook off such thoughts with a toss of his head, took out a swallow-winged blade and a dish of scarlet fire rune ink, and fully focused on making an Explosion Blade.

Lin Xun had found a good way to make money after his profits today at the Golden Jade Hall. His top priority now was to quickly make money to improve his cultivation level.

Three hours later.

The swallow-winged blade suddenly lit up on the desk as wisps of blinding flames surged upwards and rumbled like molten lava.

He had succeeded once again!

Lin Xun couldn't help nodding in satisfaction as he studied the Explosion Blade in his hand.

"If Mister Lu hears about how I successfully made lower human grade aeth tools on the first try when I'm just at the fifth layer True Martial Stage, he would surely be delighted."

Inexplicably, when Lin Xun thought of Mister Lu, he also thought of the giant hand that destroyed the mine prison.

After a while, Lin Xun suddenly picked up the violet pheasant brush again and on the Explosion Blade's handle engraved a rune marking that looked like the ancient character "Xun".

Lin Xun remembered that every time Mister Lu engraved a rune pattern, he would leave a similar mark, which, according to Mister Lu, represented him and was also a unique symbol that belonged to a rune master.

The mark identified the owner of the engraved rune.

The character "Xun" that Lin Xun had engraved wasn't only his name, but in a sense it represented his will. He was determined to find the enemy who took his Origin Aeth Artery!

It was late at night but Xia Zhi still hadn't returned. Lin Xun was sitting cross-legged on the bed, circulating aeth power around his body, but he was a little worried.

Fortunately, Xia Zhi had returned just as Lin Xun finished his training.

As usual, she was wearing a black wind-proof robe and her stunningly beautiful face was covered.

Lin Xun carefully looked up and down at Xia Zhi and after confirming that she was uninjured, he said, "You should come back earlier in the future."

Xia Zhi acknowledged him, went to wash up, and then she lay quietly on the bed.

Lin Xun blew out the candle, plunging the room into darkness. Only a little faint starlight penetrated through the window and sprinkled dim patches of light into the room.

Occasionally, the barking of dogs sounded from the alleys and made the atmosphere in the house quieter.

“Lin Xun, I killed a gang leader from another area. I don’t remember his name, but I have taken in all his subordinates.”

In the darkness, Xia Zhi opened her crescent-shaped eyes and said softly, “Around tomorrow, spoils will be divided. I have told them to exchange them all for money. Aren’t you short on money? They will directly deliver the money over here tomorrow.”

Lin Xun was training and visualizing his spirit, and so he didn’t hear what Xia Zhi had said.

Xia Zhi didn’t seem to care if Lin Xun heard her or not. She continued, “Also, about the Wu Clan—I have sent people to investigate them. You might not know this, but even if the gangsters aren’t good people, they have connections and ways of doing things that we don’t. Fatty Diao has confidently promised to find out everything about them tomorrow.”

Her eyes were as clear as cleanly washed black jewels and her voice was particularly pleasant and clear in the quiet and dark night.

“No matter what, you don't have to worry about anything anymore as long as I am around. Do you think I couldn't tell that Mu Wansu's attitude towards you wasn't good? She's so narrow-minded. One day, I will teach her a good lesson. But before then, you mustn't get as angry as you did today...”

Xia Zhi’s voice turned a little low and she seemed a little downcast.

After a long silence, a faint, imperceptible voice floated in the darkness. “My name is Xia Zhi. My world has always been dark but you made me see a glimpse of light...”

.....

Lin Xun’s mind-sea was equally dark and only a bright star was hanging in the sky.

It was the first star that he lit up in his mind-sea. It sprinkled down a pure, shining, silvery light that nourished his spirit.

The star was also called the spirit star.

The more spirit stars illuminated, the more beneficial it was to a person’s spirit cultivation.

Only when the spectacle of the great emptiness of the universe and the cycle of stars emerged in the mind-sea would the first Star Cycle be regarded as cultivated to the perfect realm.

However, Lin Xun’s spirit had only barely touched upon the Star Cycle. Only one spirit star had been illuminated; it was too early to even mention reaching the perfect realm.

Swiftly and silently, strands of starlight fluttered like ripples and nourished the spirit.

At that moment, Lin Xun's spirit felt light, pure and untainted. Additionally, he could distinctly feel his perception power constantly recovering.

Lin Xun had not only consumed his aeth power but also exhausted his spirit perception power to make an aeth tool and during his daily training.

In general, a rune master would need to rest for two to ten days after completing an aeth tool to restore their perception power.

This wasn't a huge problem for Lin Xun because he could easily recover after a night of rest by visualizing the Star Cycle.

Moreover, Lin Xun found that the constant consumption and recovery of his perception power turned out to be a kind of tempering on his spirit. The tempering effect even doubled when he trained after heavily exhausting his perception power.

This was similar to breathing out stale air and breathing in fresh air. His spirit was constantly tempered and improved through the repeated consumption and recovery of his powers.

Lin Xun distinctly noticed that when his perception power was restored, he somehow felt a sensation of fullness and was eager to move.

He didn't suppress this impulse, and almost naturally, his perception power suddenly soared. In the blink of an eye, it flew to the distant starry sky.

When Lin Xun awoke, he found that another dim and blurry star in the night sky had become bright and clear and was resonating with the first bright star.

Lin Xun had illuminated another spirit star after more than two months since the first one!

Buzzzz~

At the same time, he felt his spirit numb and shudder. Like a new window had been opened, his spirit power was steadily climbing.

He could only perceive things within a ten feet distance, but now, everything within twenty feet of him was accurately reflected in his mind!

Furthermore, his eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind had become much more sensitive, and was able to detect even subtle changes within the surrounding air and dust.

The entire world seemed to have suddenly changed with the addition of multiple layers to everything. Lin Xun couldn't help but feel enthralled.

This was the awareness through subtle details. The reason why cultivators were strong was because they could see things invisible to ordinary people, perceive the mystery of the heaven and earth that ordinary people couldn't detect, and master the power that ordinary people couldn't grasp!

By the time Lin Xun awoke from his meditation, the sky was turning bright and a new day had come.

On that day, news that the Golden Jade Hall was selling a peerless treasured sword rapidly spread through the streets and alleys of Donglin City like leaves in a storm and created a sensation.

