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Layered-Feather Throwing Daggers

Chapter 51: Layered-Feather Throwing Daggers

During the next several days, Jiang Chen spent every day training in the Jiang Han manor, and consolidated the results of having trained to seven meridians true qi. He would never be careless in the area of strengthening meridians.

Compared to his peers, Jiang Chen placed much more of an importance on strengthening his meridians. Only by strengthening them to an unassailable stage, would he be on the safe side when vying for the next step.

As his cultivation continued to increase, it was inevitable that the difficulty in taking each step forward would markedly increase. The risks he would meet would also steadily increase.

If he greedily sought after speed and advanced rashly, it was very possible that his haste would not bring success.

With the aid of seven meridians true qi, Jiang Chen had quite a few breakthroughs on the two martial arts techniques.

There were seven forms in total for the “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”, and he had already successfully practiced the first two.

The first form “Wave Slash”, and the second form “Wave Breaker”, layered upon each other as they advanced, with each move stronger than the last. Not only had Jiang Chen practiced these two to the great perfection realm, but he’d also linked the two forms, thus doubling their power.

In terms of mysteries, the “Divine Aeons Fist” was many times greater than the “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”.

The “Vast Ocean Current Splitter” was a blade technique, devoting particular care to a dominance that pressed forward with indomitable will. Wherever the edge of the blade swept, all were laid prostrate, no matter friend or foe.

“Divine Aeons Fist” on the other hand, encompassed the theories of heaven and earth, fusing the way of the life and destruction of all creatures beneath the heavens. From one cycle of blooming and wilting, to nine cycles of blooming and wilting, there were the mysteries of nine rounds of reincarnation held within.

With each successful comprehension of the mysteries of each successive cycle of reincarnation, the power of the “Divine Aeons Fist” would double.

One had to say, the “Divine Aeons Fist” was practically tailored for Jiang Chen. The circle of life contained by the “Divine Aeons First” was precisely the way of destruction and growth encompassed by the wheel of life and death.

And Jiang Chen had reincarnated from the son of the Celestial Emperor to the common body of the son of a duke, literally undergoing the wheel of life and death.

Therefore, Jiang Chen’s comprehension of the “Divine Aeons Fist” was actually deeper and more extensive than the “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”.

If it was said that Jiang Chen had so far trained the “Vast Ocean Current Splitter” to the great perfection realm, then he would’ve trained the “Divine Aeons Fist” to the legendary realm. However, there were nine levels of mysteries in the cycle of life in the Divine Aeons Fist.

Jiang Chen had currently only grasped three levels.

“This ‘Divine Aeons Fist’ conforms so well with the trajectory of my destiny, that I’ve comprehended the mysteries of three cycles of blooming and wilting in just a mere few days. Given enough time, this ‘Divine Aeons Fist’ is sure to become an overbearing martial arts technique that I can use to vanquish my enemies. If I can train this ‘Divine Aeons Fist’ to seven or eight levels, then even if I am halted at seven meridians true qi, I would probably be able to fight against true qi masters. If I am able to comprehend the mysteries of nine cycles of blooming and wilting, then it’s not impossible that I would be able to resist those legendary spirit dao practitioners!”

Jiang Chen had a particular affixment to the “Divine Aeons Fist”. It was as if he had entrusted the spirit of his reincarnation to this martial arts technique.

Jiang Chen did not set a foot outside his door that day, and was practicing in the training field when Jiang Zheng hurriedly came to report that Princess Gouyu had arrived.

Princess Gouyu had kept quite a low profile during this time, apparently making her final preparations for breaking through to eleven meridians true qi. Her appearance now most likely meant that everything was in readiness.

“Looks like I must congratulate you in advance.” Jiang Chen discovered that Princess Gouyu’s spirit was soaring when he saw her, and that she gave off an unworldly feeling of revelling in the joy of the spring wind.¹

Princess Gouyu was obviously in a very good mood. “Jiang Chen, I’ve especially come to thank you. Oh right, here are the items that were prepared for you.”

Princess Gouyu personally took two boxes from her retinue.

The boxes were opened. A set of soft armor was in the first box.

The nine throwing daggers were in the second box, made from the Layered-Feather Golden Crystal from that day. This Crystal had been an almost transparent crystal to begin with, and was now as thin and transparent as cicada wings after it had been forged into throwing daggers. When the sunlight hit it, it was like ice entering water and melting away into nothingness, thoroughly becoming one with the vacant void.

Princess Gouyu had to give it up to Jiang Chen’s eye for appraisal. Who would’ve thought that the Layered-Feather Golden Crystal would have this kind of effect when forged into throwing daggers?

“Jiang Chen, this soft armor was made from the skysilk fibers from barbarian territory in the western regions. It encompasses the skin of the large deepwater whale, and can withstand the blow from an ordinary true qi master!”

One had to say, there was indeed quite a lot of sincerity in Princess Gouyu’s gratitude. This soft armor even surprised Jiang Chen a little.

“The item is not bad, I’ll accept it.” Jiang Chen smiled and was in exceedingly good spirits.

Princess Gouyu heaved an easy sigh. She was afraid that Jiang Chen would strut around for a while. This would have made her feel that she'd suffered a setback. Seeing Jiang Chen happily accept, Princess Gouyu was even happier than if she'd received a treasure herself.

"Jiang Chen, there's less than half a month left before the final examinations of the Hidden Dragon Trials start up. This is the final trial of strength, how are your preparations?" Princess Gouyu couldn't resist the urge to assume the demeanor of the organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials.

"Heh heh, what are your expectations of me?" Jiang Chen asked with a smirk.

"Do you want me to speak truthfully?"

"Do you have a habit of lying?" Jiang Chen blinked.

"Alright Jiang Chen, whether it's me or little girl Zhiruo, we both hope to see you show your capabilities in the Hidden Dragon Trials!"

"Show my capabilities? You're too vague, be more specific."

Princess Gouyu paused and a light flashed through her phoenix eyes. "If you can defeat all your opponents and seize the championship of the Trials, we will both be happy for you."

"Just be happy for me? Are there any rewards?" Jiang Chen laughed heartily.

"Yes!" Princess Gouyu didn't mince words. "If you can defeat all your opponents, you can have whatever reward you wish!"

"Whatever reward I wish?" Jiang Chen raked a dirty gaze up and down Princess Gouyu's entire body and wantonly looked all over her sexy body even more so.

"What are you looking at?" Princess Gouyu was a martial dao practitioner and didn't believe in the nonsense of shyness from a girl. She stuck out her chest and said, "If you can suppress Long Juxue this one time, you can have whatever lewd fantasies you're thinking of about me. Even if you wanted to take both me and little girl Zhiruo, that wouldn't be out of the question either!"

Princess Gouyu broke into a laugh herself after these words. Her smile was quite true, very radiant, and utterly unassuming.

“Take both of you?” Jiang Chen discovered that he had underestimated Princess Gouyu’s bold fierceness, even though he knew that Princess Gouyu wasn’t entirely serious.

However, even if one knew that this was a joke, the mere thought of that kind of scene was enough to make an ordinary person’s heart race.

“Indeed, take both of us!” Princess Gouyu nodded her head very affirmatively. “In the world of martial dao, the strong are venerated. If you truly have this kind of ability, then you will soar into the skies with one move sooner or later. At that time, all the women in the kingdom will be lining up for you to take your pick, not just counting the two of us. Whichever girl you choose, she would absolutely be willing to bring her sisters as her dowry!”

Worshipping the strong, clinging to the strong, those were rules that were applicable to any world.

“This is to say that you truly wish for me to be the champion of the Hidden Dragon Trials?”

“If it was a month ago I wouldn’t have even thought that anyone could affect Long Juxue from being the champion. But now, if I must find hope in someone, I hope it’s you, and you’re the only one that I can think of.”

Princess Gouyu was very honest. “I don’t wish for Long Juxue to be the champion.”

“Because of the strife between the royal family and the duke of Soaring Dragon?” There was a shadow of a smile on Jiang Chen’s face.

“Yes!” Princess Gouyu gritted her silver teeth and candidly didn’t deny it.

“You can offer yourself up for the royal family - for the profit of the Eastern family clan?” Jiang Chen’s tone was cold.

“Jiang Chen, are you belittling me?” Princess Gouyu’s expression changed, but her heart suddenly felt beyond bleak and desolate. She was such a proud person and couldn’t spare even a glance for any of her pursuers. How could she be someone who offered herself up for profit?

Jiang Chen, ah Jiang Chen. Don’t you know that I, Gouyu, am this way in order to encourage you, and provide additional impetus for you?

“Alright, I will also answer you directly. I will use all of my power to block Long Juxue because of the disgusting, dirty things that the duke of Soaring Dragon has committed against my Jiang family!”

Jiang Chen’s tone was also suffused with a sense of confidence that showed no doubt.

Jiang Chen felt an increased sense of urgency from the Hidden Dragon Trials after Princess Gouyu had left.

Jiang Chen decided to make a trip to the Hall of Healing before the Trials began. He wanted to make even more complete preparations for the Trials that were about to begin.

During this time, the Hall of Healing had been quite busy with trade. Guests visiting the Hall of Healing came to and fro in constant streams from morning to night, almost flattening the Hall’s door threshold.

“Hallmaster Qiao, congratulations.” Jiang Chen immediately said to Qiao Baishi who was shining with happiness after entering through the door.

“Ah, hon.... young duke.” Qiao Baishi almost blurted out the two words of “honored master”. If it wasn’t for his quick reaction, he probably would have actually done so.

“Young duke, honored guest. Please come this way, this way.” Qiao Baishi was naturally overjoyed to see Jiang Chen.

He had been busy with business during this time, and hadn’t had time to visit and pay his respect to his honored master. He had also been worried if his honored master might’ve become irate.

It wasn’t a matter of Jiang Chen worrying that Qiao Baishi wouldn’t listen to him anymore, but of Qiao Baishi worrying that Jiang Chen would turn his nose up at Qiao Baishi, and leave him out in the cold.

To Qiao Baishi, although the business of the Hall of Healing was quite important, when compared with the matter of acknowledging Jiang Chen as his master... the former was just an issue of minor importance.

If it was said that Qiao Baishi placed great significance on his status as the successor to the Hall of Healing before, then his worldview and thoughts had greatly changed after acknowledging Jiang Chen as his master.

He had cared very much for his position as the successor to the Hall previously, but now it seemed a little trivial. It didn't seem like a big thing if he wasn't the successor to the Hall.

If he was able to follow his master and pursue knowledge and direction, gaining great ability, he would have a stage in the future that was more expansive than the Hall of Healing by tenfold, or even a hundredfold. Why would he then worry about lacking scope for his abilities?

His honored master's random three pill recipes had been enough to upend the pill markets of the neighboring sixteen countries, to speak nothing of anything else.

These days, there had been a steady flow of customers placing orders at the Hall of Healing.

The orders that the Hall had received were already waiting in line for next year's supply. Even so, the people placing orders still had astonishing interest and pleasure, not minding a longer wait at all.

The Hall of Healing didn't wish to take deposits, but their customers wouldn't take no for an answer, and insisted on advance payments.

This kind of trade caused every associate in the Hall of Healing to feel free of mind and happy of heart. This wasn't doing business, this was practically opening a gold mine and having money flow in when one just sat there!

As for the man who had personally created this scene, the events of these days had caused Qiao Baishi to internally contemplate quite a bit. He had realized that his previous worldview had still been too narrow.

He had also become conscious that what his honored master, Jiang Chen, had brought him, would truly change his destiny.

1. Chinese saying indicating someone's joy after experiencing the tutelage of a wise teacher

Chapter 52: Fatty Xuan Seeks Help

“Baishi, is there any sign of movement from the Pill King Garden?” Jiang Chen wouldn’t lower his guard with regards to the Pill King Garden. Although the Pill King Garden’s decline was a foregone conclusion, one would fall victim in return if a snake isn’t beaten to death. Jiang Chen would never permit such a thing to happen.

“Master, the decline of the Pill King Garden is an inevitable development. It is said that all the senior executives of the Pill King Garden are prepared to abandon the Garden and throw themselves under the duke of Soaring Dragon’s banner, in order to become vagabond hang-ons.”

“It looks like we’ve underestimated the people of the Pill King Garden. Those who suit their actions to the time are wise. The Pill King Garden is smart regarding this point. They thoroughly sought refuge with the duke of Soaring Dragon upon knowing that a trend cannot be halted. This way, the duke of Soaring Dragon will surely not be unwelcoming towards them. An alchemy master is absolutely a strong reinforcement for a duke who desires to rebel.”

“Yes yes! Honored master is able to penetrate deeply into all things.” Qiao Baishi nodded, thinking nothing of Jiang Chen’s style of speaking with no scruples.

“Baishi, I’ve come this time to ready some pill medicines. I need some materials – prepare them for me.” As someone’s honored master, enjoying this kind of benefit was a given.

“Honored master, your disciple has already prepared ten “Heavenly Karma Pill”, ten “Vast Ocean Pill” and a couple bottles of “One Buddha Powder”.

One had to say, Qiao Baishi’s thoughts were quite clever and quite caring when it came to contemplating problems. He knew that Jiang Chen would participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials and thus had reserved these pill medicines for Jiang Chen early on.

Jiang Chen was very satisfied by this.

“These are the ingredients that I need, prepare these as well.” Jiang Chen naturally had his uses for these ingredients. His father had been ambushed on the steps of his house last time, and had fallen victim to a wicked poison.

This time, Jiang Chen planned to commence an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth attack, by fighting poison with poison. He too had prepared a few frightening poisons. This was all a piece of cake to Jiang Chen.

Although using poison was an unorthodox way, one still had to prepare some when in the midst of exceedingly poor conditions, and before strength had been built up.

This was being prepared against war.

If the enemy deployed an underhanded move, then fighting poison with poison would be a good thing.

Once all the requisite items had been prepared, Jiang Chen didn't linger around the Hall of Healing for too long. Qiao Baishi was also kept extremely busy, and they both didn't wish to waste each other's time.

After returning to the manor, Jiang Chen discovered that fatty Xuan had waited for him at the Jiang Han manor for quite some time. The heir to the Hubing dukedom, Hubing Yue, had also accompanied him.

"Brother Chen, I've finally awaited your arrival. Your brother is suffering." It was as if fatty Xuan had met a lifesaver when he finally saw Jiang Chen.

"What's going on?" With the Hidden Dragon Trials near at hand, Jiang Chen also knew that fatty Xuan would definitely not idly visit here if there was nothing going on.

Fatty Xuan had a bitter face, "Brother Chen, I was also deeply moved by your words last time and decided to turn over a new life in order to reserve the right for my next generation to be fops. I had planned to use all the fat on my body to keep the dukedom. But –"

Fatty Xuan heaved another sigh when he got to this point.

"Hurry and speak if you've got something to say, hurry and let it out if you've got a fart to release." Jiang Chen couldn't bear to see fatty Xuan speak in such a faltering way.

"Brother Chen, you should also know that this body of fat makes it more difficult for me to train than other ordinary people. I would've been able to slip through the Hidden Dragon Trials with my five meridians true qi. However,

some fellow with six meridians true qi suddenly appeared in my family's clan a few days ago. The conclave of the family elders are now calling for the strongest youth in the clan to participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials. Brother Chen, you know that, if that fellow is allowed to participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials, then it won't be me that inherits my old man's Jinshan dukedom, but that bastard!"

"What's his name?" Jiang Chen asked faintly.

"He's called Xuan Yuan!" Fatty Xuan revealed an expression that yearned to take a bite out of that person's flesh when he mentioned this name. "This kid was originally only four meridians true qi but I don't know if he's suddenly gone crazy, or if he's been hiding his strength all along, waiting until the last minute to steal my thunder!"

Fatty Xuan was at five meridians true qi and had lingered at this level for about a year or two. He'd been unable to find the sixth acupoint at all during this time.

Jiang Chen's forehead furrowed vaguely. "Didn't I tell you two to come find me before the Trials? Were you planning on not coming at all if this hadn't happened?"

Hubing Yue's face flushed red, "Brother Chen, my old man at home has been keeping a tight watch on me. He says it's because of the Hidden Dragon Trials that are at hand, and that he won't let me come out and act wildly."

"Ah whatever. Since you've found me fatty Xuan, then I'll give you two ideas." Jiang Chen said lightly.

"Brother, you're my brother alright. I can't even think of one idea and you have two? Please hurry and speak, your brother will do as you say." Fatty Xuan beamed with delight as his face full of depression was swept clean away.

"First, I take action on your behalf and surreptitiously get rid of that Xuan Yuan with one stroke!"

Fatty Xuan retracted his head and a cold chill prickled at the back of his head as he looked at Jiang Chen's murderous expression. He chuckled, "This won't do, definitely won't do. Interference from outsiders, particularly from you brother Chen, will result in both our doom if someone successfully investigates this. I'm not afraid, but I can't pull you down with me."

“Then it’s the second idea, you beat him fair and square, leaving him with nothing to say.” Jiang Chen didn’t beat around the bush.

Fatty Xuan however, looked like he’d bit into a bitter gourd. “Brother, would I be suffering so, if I could beat him fair and square? Do you think I’m as abnormal as you to challenge someone above my level and beat that Yan monkey like beating a dog?”

“Fatty Xuan, when did you become so good for naught? Did I say for you to challenge his six meridians true qi with your five meridians true qi?”

“I am five meridians true qi though, you know that brother Chen. I’ve been stuck there for about a year! This sixth acupoint is playing hide and seek with me!” Fatty Xuan was quite dejected.

“If you were able to ascend to six meridians true qi, would you have the confidence to defeat him?” Jiang Chen asked lowly.

“If it was six meridians against six meridians, would I be afraid of him? Brother Chen, I’m still the son of the duke of Jinshan after all, my heritage and potential are all better than him. Besides, the fat on my body isn’t good for nothing. In terms of tonnage, I can crush him to pieces with no questions about it.” Fatty Xuan’s spittle flew wildly.

“Alright, then I’ll help you breakthrough to six meridians true qi.”

“Brother Chen, what did you say? Help me breakthrough?” Fatty Xuan had a look of incredulity on his face and off on the side, Hubing Yue also listened with a face full of shock.

Helping someone breakthrough was a mighty feat that only a true qi master could materialize on occasion.

“Brother Chen, are you a true qi master who’s been concealing his strength?” Fatty Xuan was agitated with excitement.

“Remember when I told you to come find me last time? I said that I would give you a surprise. Although you’ve come a bit late, the surprise still exists.”

Jiang Chen had no time to engage in idle chatter with fatty Xuan but said seriously, “Before I reveal the surprise, the two of you must swear that only the three of us will know of this matter. Apart from us, this must not be

divulged to anyone else! Otherwise, this will be the equivalent of giving me up as a brother!”

Fatty Xuan patted his chest, “Brother, you’re the person that I, fatty, feel closest to. Even my old man can only take his place in line behind you. If I don’t listen to you, I will be struck by lightning!”

“Brother Chen, I too swear to safeguard this secret. If it is disclosed, then let my household be slaughtered!” Hubing Yue wasn’t as serious as fatty Xuan, but his oath was even more ruthless.

“Alright!” Jiang Chen’s gaze moved slightly. He was still rather at ease, and trusted these two best friends.

“Listen up. I am passing a method onto you today. This method can allow you to locate the acupoints within your body, making it unnecessary for you to spend large amounts of time in exploration of the next acupoint before each breakthrough like other practitioners. My method can allow you to simultaneously locate the next acupoint.”

“What?” Hubing Yue reacted even faster as his expression changed drastically. “Brother Chen, how can such a method exist in this world?”

“Brother Chen, are... are you going to say that this was also the result of divine possession?” Fatty’s Xuan tongue was tying itself into knots.

“Don’t ask me where it comes from, are you willing to learn?”

“Willing, I’m willing! I’m an absolute idiot if I’m not willing!” Fatty Xuan didn’t even crease his brow.

“Brother Chen, if this method exists, I’d like to learn too.” Hubing Yue was not ambiguous.

“Alright, listen well. This method is called ‘True Acupoint Resonance’ and is a secret that is not passed on. If knowledge of this method is leaked, it is sure to cause great turmoil in the world of cultivation. You two would also inevitably attract fatal disasters. This is why I had you promise earlier that you wouldn’t divulge this.”

Fatty Xuan was listening with a parched mouth and scorched tongue. He trusted Jiang Chen blindly. He would unequivocally believe anything that

Jiang Chen said. Therefore, he'd already treated this "True Acupoint Resonance" method as real.

Although a sliver of doubt still existed in Hubing Yue, he too felt great confidence in Jiang Chen.

"Let's stop chatting and start listening to the formula..." Jiang Chen also didn't want to waste time in convincing them and he simply, and directly, started passing on the formula.

Let the truth explain everything!

One had to say, practitioners were all naturally endowed with cleverness. After running through the formula three times, fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue could recite it fluently from memory.

"There's no use in talking any more. Both of you, try using this method."

"True Acupoint Resonance" came from an even higher level, but it wasn't such an advanced method at the end of the day. However, it was impossible for the Eastern Kingdom to possess such a method with its level.

Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue started their experimentation and their expressions started changing after a short while. Joy slowly appeared, surprise, and then glee —

As if one had discovered a precious treasure!

Truly, their emotions right now could only be described, as if they'd discovered a precious treasure!

"Brother Chen, I really located it! This is amazing, I located the eighth acupoint. Brother Chen, I'm... I'm too happy." Hubing Yue was so excited that tears were almost falling.

Hubing Yue looked dignified and strong and his training potential was exceedingly high. Otherwise, with the Hubing dukedom's less than impressive ranking, how would Hubing Yue have trained to seven meridians true qi at such a tender age?

Locating the eighth acupoint meant that he had the chance to breakthrough to eight meridians true qi before the Hidden Dragon Trials!

Breaking through to eight meridians true qi meant that he, Hubing Yue, had the opportunity to contend for the ranking of one of the top ten dukes!

As for fatty Xuan, his body, as rotund as a leather ball, suddenly bounced up with a roar, his entire being almost going mad as his motions were accompanied by the roar of a pig being slaughtered.

“Brother Chen, I want to break through, I’m going to break through!”

Chapter 53: Fatty’s Counterattack

Agitation, excitement, overjoyed... they were all inadequate to describe fatty Xuan’s current state of feeling.

Because he had successfully located his sixth acupoint! The five meridians true qi that he had strengthened and forged for around a year were actually in full readiness for ascension.

Unfortunately, his level of comprehension had never been enough to be able to locate where the sixth acupoint was.

And now, this “True Acupoint Resonance” method had easily helped him locate the sixth acupoint. This meant that he was almost able to breakthrough where he stood!

Yes, fatty Xuan had truly decided to breakthrough in his immediate vicinity. He gave no thought to what was an appropriate situation, nor paid heed to inconsequential things like closing his doors for training.

With brother Chen and Hubing Yue present, fatty Xuan totally didn’t think of any of this. He believed that his two brothers would monitor the premises for him.

Fatty Xuan was sweating profusely after roughly an hour. After a wild circulation of his true qi, it was like his entire being had been steamed. Droplets of water were on his face and head.

“Hahahahaha!” Fatty Xuan laughed heartily. “Xuan Yuan, you’ve been overbearing and arrogant for so many days, just wait until fatty goes back and tortures you to death!”

One had to give it to him, fatty Xuan was very proud and felt quite the feeling of exaltation upon fulfillment. The son of a duke being suppressed by some nameless fellow in the family clan - even with fatty Xuan's obliviousness, he still had a bit of pride that would be affected by a situation like this.

He itched to return immediately and find Xuan Yuan for a thorough beating to vent his frustrations of many days.

"Fatty, don't have your head turned by success. You've only just broken through and haven't stabilized your realm. You'd be seeking your doom if you picked a fight with a six meridians true qi right now." Jiang Chen doused his spirits with a pail of cold water in the nick of time.

"I'll give you some unconventional ways. These unconventional ways, along with the aid of pill medicine, will allow you to strengthen your meridians to a great perfection level in a short amount of time. This way, with your foundations as the son of a duke, you might as well ram yourself to death with a block of tofu if you still can't beat an ordinary six meridians true qi. And don't call yourself my brother."

Fatty Xuan was wreathed in smiles. "Brother Chen cares about me the most. Brother, brothers for a day, brothers for life. Haha, knowing brother Chen is the most exalted thing of my life. Brother Chen, wouldn't you say that my discerning eyes could recognize a gem when they saw one? Only Hubing Yue and I were your brothers when you were at the lowest point in your life. Tsk tsk, I'm a bit infatuated with my own foresight."

Hubing Yue's eyes also sparkled with excited and overjoyed light. His current emotions weren't much calmer than fatty Xuan's.

Except, fatty Xuan had broken through immediately and Hubing Yue had yet to do so.

However, to breakthrough or not breakthrough was actually not important anymore. With the "True Acupoint Resonance" method, the amount of time spent training in the future was sure to decrease greatly.

In addition, they would be able to travel a great many less winding paths, and avoid many pitfalls on the future path of their martial daos.

It wasn't that many lacked the potential, but rather encountered bottlenecks when in exploration of the next acupoint and thus were continuously unable to find the location of the next acupoint when training in the realm of true qi.

This was a problem in the power of understanding, and wasn't something that could be remedied by hard work.

But the "True Acupoint Resonance" method could offset the side effects of a lack in the power of understanding. Therefore, this method was absolutely beyond the existence of the Eastern Kingdom.

"Perhaps only those hidden sects possess such a method? And ordinary disciples are likely not allowed to practice it either?" Hubing Yue thought internally as his admiration and worship of Jiang Chen became even more struck from the depths of his heart.

"Brother Chen, I've decided that I'll go put down Xuan Yuan in three days time. Both of you number amongst my few brothers and must come support me."

"I'll attend for sure." Hubing Yue nodded.

"That works, I'll also go to watch the show." Jiang Chen agreed.

Three days later, Jiang Chen came to the Jinshan manor.

It could be seen that fatty Xuan had deeply concealed his intentions. He'd even hid the truth from his old man this time. It looked like that fatty Xuan had hardened his heart, and was determined to thoroughly thwart Xuan Yuan in order to give the entire Jinshan household a major surprise.

The friendship between the Jinshan dukedom and the Jiang Han dukedom spanned more than two generations. The duke of Jinshan was also vaguely surprised to see Jiang Chen attend. Strange and bizarre happenings had been occurring in the capital during this time, like that of fleeting clouds and ripples. The duke of Jinshan had also heard a few rumors about Jiang Chen, and after the events at the Soaring Dragon manor last time, the duke of Jinshan had personally observed with his eyes Jiang Chen's performance.

Therefore, the duke of Jinshan felt rather complicated feelings towards Jiang Chen. He had originally felt that his son was more or less doing nothing useful by hanging around Jiang Chen.

But given the friendship between the two families, he hadn't said much.

However, Jiang Chen's successive string of changes somewhat befuddled the duke of Jinshan. He too wondered if Jiang Chen was purposefully concealing his true strength?

He had tried to solicit the truth from fatty Xuan a few times, yet, although fatty Xuan was adept at nothing else, he was first in class at playing dumb. No matter how his old man tried, he played dumb until the end, and never spoke a serious word.

After making his greetings, the gravity of the duke of Jinshan's expressions didn't lessen. "Xuan'er, this Xuan Yuan has suddenly shot to six meridians true qi and some of the elders within the family have indistinctly grown close with the people of Soaring Dragon. Your father suspects that a few traitors helping others have secretly already appeared in our Jinshan clan."

The duke of Jinshan's words were shocking. There were no outsiders present here, and thus he decided he might as well convey the seriousness of the situation to fatty Xuan.

Fatty Xuan chuckled. "Don't worry, no matter what devious plots they have, today your son will subdue ten with the power of one, and suppress them all!"

"Xuan'er, although Xuan Yuan might not have trained to six meridians true qi through standard means, that doesn't mean you can think less of your opponent. Don't linger in battle if you are unable to handle your opponent, we can slowly craft another strategy."

"I say father, can you have a bit more confidence in your son?" Fatty Xuan protested.

At this moment, an elder within the family clan hurried over with a trace of an odd smile. "Your Lordship, Xuan Yuan has already arrived at the demonstration stage. The conclave of the elders has sent me to invite the young duke to meet his opponent."

"Huh, in quite a hurry are we!" The duke of Jinshan was a bit displeased.

Fatty Xuan however, bounced up like a rubber ball as his eyes sent out a wild light like that of someone about to torture another. "Has he finally arrived? I can't wait."

Fatty Xuan bounced away with surprisingly speed and hurtled towards the demonstration stage, leaving behind a chubby afterimage.

The duke of Jinshan was a bit dumbfounded and felt that it was a bit strange. Why was his son, who usually dispiritedly avoided battle, suddenly brimming with battle intent? This didn't seem his style.

Clustered in pairs or groups of three, many of the people within the manor had already gathered around the demonstration stage. The Jinshan household was different from the Jiang Han household.

Numbers were thin in the Jiang Han household - Jiang Feng basically decided everything within the Jiang family.

But with the Jinshan household - because of numerous family members - multiple factions and cliques had developed. Many hills stood in great numbers within the entire Jinshan household.

Although the duke of Jinshan held the power, many other powers held him back by the elbow and often caused him to be in a bind.

And the Xuan Yuan who had appeared this time was something that had been drummed up by the conclave of elders.

The duke of Jinshan could have absolutely just refused. After all, it was an unquestionably moral truth that a father would pass a dukedom down to a son. However, the conclave of elders had thrown out the banner of a righteous cause, and called for the dukedom to be passed on to the strongest youth in the family. This was why such a farce had happened.

If the duke of Jinshan were to refuse, then it would undoubtedly cause great harm to fatty Xuan's reputation. It would be more difficult for fatty Xuan to successively inherit and control the situation in the future.

Therefore, the duke of Jinshan had wanted to make use of this opportunity to compel his unambitious son.

"Look, the young duke has arrived."

"What young duke. If he loses the demonstration stage today, then he's no longer the young duke, and at most a noble son."

“Hmph, what do you mean by that? Are you in cahoots with Xuan Yuan? How dare a mere descendent from a collateral branch covet the vaunted seat of a duke?”

One indeed had to say, many camps had formed within Jinshan regarding the issue of the dukedom’s succession.

At this moment, fatty Xuan had changed from his usual status of muddy slime that wouldn’t let itself be helped over a wall. He walked unhurriedly onto the demonstration stage, with his thin eyes that were buried under fat eyelids staring intently at Xuan Yuan.

“Xuan Yuan, why don’t you look at yourself in a mirror? Someone like you wants to inherit the dukedom? Didn’t your mother and father ever tell you not to forget to bring a pillow when you dream?” Since fatty Xuan hung out with Jiang Chen, the foundations of his viper tongue naturally wouldn’t pale that much in comparison.

Xuan Yuan was someone that the conclave of elders had drummed up. When it came to birth, he naturally couldn’t measure up to fatty Xuan. His internal inferiority complex sensitivities made his face darken when he listened to fatty Xuan’s words.

“Xuan Xuan, as the noble son of the duke of Jinshan, you have no desire to make progress. The actions of I, Xuan Yuan, are but for the future of my Jin family.”

“Yo yo, now doesn’t that sound pretty. Don’t tell me that there are no Soaring Dragon dogs amongst you?” Fatty Xuan’s face darkened. “What I, fatty Xuan, hate most in this life are traitors. If you were only aiming for the dukedom, then I could have pinched my nose and bore it. But if someone wishes to betray the Jin family and throw themselves under the banner of those hotly ambitious fellows, then I, fatty Xuan, am the first to disagree!”

“Your tongue wags too fiercely!” Xuan Yuan stoutly denied. “Get the hell off the stage if you’re afraid.”

“Afraid?” Fatty Xuan laughed with a grimace. “What are you to say that I, fatty Xuan, should be afraid?”

Fatty Xuan's rotund body abruptly bounced up from the demonstration after his words. His rotund figure was like a fat bird - rising into the air through sheer effort and persistence.

"Xuan Yuan, eat my fist!"

A fatty has a fatty's intelligence. When fatty Xuan bounded into the air, his entire body had curled into a ball of fat. When this ball of fat had risen to the limits of its speed, it suddenly sprang open like a tightly coiled spring.

This strong punch accompanied that shocking bouncing speed and descended fiercely towards Xuan Yuan.

"Nice boxing skills, but you think to harm me with five meridians true qi?" A sliver of scorn and jealousy flashed through the corners of Xuan Yuan's eyes.

He envied fatty Xuan's boxing skills because they were the heritage of the duke of Jinshan's direct line of descent. He possessed none of the rights to train in the skill.

The scorn was naturally contempt for fatty Xuan's level of five meridians true qi.

Subduing ten with the power of one! The thing that Xuan Yuan relied on the most in order to stand on this stage was the six meridians true qi that could stomp firmly on the fatty!

One level of training was one realm!

Xuan Yuan coped with shifting events by sticking to one principle. He watched fatty's punch descend and was ready to maintain a solid and balanced position to confront the tough with toughness.

Suddenly --

An accident suddenly occurred.

Fatty Xuan's bouncing speed suddenly accelerated with no forewarning. The trail beneath his hand suddenly expanded and doubled like the Big Dipper. The punch became even more bloodthirsty, and descended with even more frightening speed.

“Layered trail? Six meridians true qi?!” Xuan Yuan’s pupils abruptly contracted as they shot out endless looks of shock and astonishment.

Chapter 54: Unique Throwing Dagger Skills

Just as was previously mentioned, a fatty has a fatty’s intelligence.

He had purposefully created that hubbub previously, but had shown weakness to his enemy to allow his opponent to think he was five meridians true qi.

As the boxing aura neared Xuan Yuan, fatty abruptly displayed his hidden ace.

This punch concentrated the essence of fatty Xuan’s six meridians true qi, concentrated his recent boundless wrath, and concentrated the ambition of a grudge-holding fatty who wanted to make the ultimate comeback!

Xuan Yuan almost had no time to react before he hastily thrust out his palm to meet the incoming attack.

The moment that Xuan Yuan’s palm met fatty’s fist, Xuan Yuan experienced what was called a disparity!

The boxing aura that encompassed six levels of spiraling power was like a drill, instantly churning his entire arm into broken scraps of chopped meat.

The boxing aura wasn’t decreased a single bit, and the punch landed on his chest!

Ah pfff!

A mouthful of fresh blood spewed out like an arrow.

Xuan Yuan’s entire body was like a kite that had lost its string as he was driven off the stage, thrown backwards more than ten meters as he crashed into a large pillar.

When people looked at him again, blood was streaming from the seven orifices of his head, and a large hole had been opened in his chest. His head was lolling on his shoulder and it was apparent that he was more than dead!

“What?”

“This... six layers of boxing aura? Xuan Xuan has broken through?”

Even the duke of Jinshan hadn't imagined this scene in his wildest dreams, not to mention Xuan Yuan's supporters. His son had won, and won so easily!

Fatty Xuan stood on the demonstration stage, the fat on his body vibrating from his trembling.

“My Jin family can descend in the world, but absolutely cannot have traitors! Those who betray the family, die!” It was the first time that fatty Xuan had given off the feeling of killing intent.

What happened next was a bit more bloody. As the duke of a territory, the duke of Jinshan's methods were completely displayed. After fatty Xuan won on the demonstration stage, the duke of Jinshan also revealed the extraordinary parts about him.

He ordered several elders to be fully controlled and displayed the evidence of them flocking to the duke of Soaring Dragon's banner and betraying the family.

Beheaded, house raided!

The inner turmoil within the Jinshan household was quickly handled in a clean and efficient method. This even elicited admiration from Jiang Chen. This duke of Jinshan, whether in terms of ferocity or cruelty, was much stronger than the likes of his old man Jiang Feng's.

Of course, it was understandable why ferocious and cruel ways were employed to settle internal turmoil. With regards to traitors, no family had ever been irresolute when firmness was needed.

The anticipated reversal caused no particular ripples in Jiang Chen's heart. Fatty Xuan profusely expressed a thousand thanks and ten thousand gratitudes, and wanted Jiang Chen to stay as a guest.

However, seeing that so many heads had rolled due to the Jinshan household settling its inner conflict, it was obviously an inappropriate timing to stay as a guest. Jiang Chen left thereafter.

Back at this manor, he received an astounding piece of news -- his father Jiang Feng had emerged from training!

Except, the only ones who knew this secret were temporarily Jiang Ying and Jiang Fu.

Jiang Feng had indeed emerged from training and had successfully broken through, smoothly entering ten meridians true qi, joining the ranks of the true qi masters. The true meaning of this was that he had entered the ranks of the strength of the premier dukes.

“Congratulations Father.” Jiang Chen was still very happy for his father.

“Haha Chen’er, why be so polite between father and son? Not to mention, if it wasn’t for you, your father would likely have reached my limit at nine meridians true qi.”

Jiang Feng had always been quite easygoing in front of his son.

Jiang Chen detailed the happenings of the Jinshan household and also conveniently went over some particulars of the current situation.

Jiang Feng nodded, “It’s best that the duke of Jinshan could handle his matters this way. According to your words, the duke of Soaring Dragon is likely to rebel within the next half year?”

“Based on my speculations, with his level of patience, it will most likely occur within this half year.”

“Chen’er, on which side would you say our Jiang family should take our place?” Jiang Feng actually asked Jiang Chen.

“We don’t need to take a side. Whether it’s the royal family or the duke of Soaring Dragon, they have all already assigned us to the side of the royal family.” Jiang Chen had a shadow of a smile. “Except, what need does our Jiang family have to need to take a side?”

Jiang Chen didn’t think that the royal family had the qualification to merit an attachment from him, Jiang Chen. He had chosen an opposite side from the duke of Soaring Dragon purely due to the circumstances of the greater picture, and not because that he had chosen the royal family.

He was one of a kind, and wasn’t someone that any power could drive.

The Soaring Dragon manor.

The events that had happened at the Jinshan manor quickly made their way into Long Zhaofeng's ears.

"Worthless, indeed a useless bunch!" Long Zhaofeng had heard that after failing to seize power in a coup, those elders in the Jinshan family had all been beheaded by the duke of Jinshan.

And the Xuan Yuan that they had painstakingly cultivated had been instantly killed with one move from the son of the duke of Jinshan.

"This isn't right. The son of the duke of Jinshan is a character as dumb as a pig. As inferior as that Xuan Yuan is, he shouldn't have lost to someone like that." The duke of Yanmen, Yan Jiuzhuang, was the first to feel that something was amiss.

"Bizarre. These matters in the capital have become more and more bizarre." Another duke shook his head. "Haven't you all discovered that the duke of Jiang Han and the duke of Jinshan all seem to excel at being a wolf in sheep's clothing? The last time, it was Jiang Chen, and this time it was the son of the duke of Jinshan. Wouldn't you say that these people are purposely showing weakness to an enemy?"

Long Zhaofeng's face darkened. "According to my intelligence, this is impossible! The son of the duke of Jinshan has always been hopelessly stupid and a good for nothing. There can be no error or doubt about that. The same goes for that Jiang Chen!"

"Duke Long, I've been thinking that the situation in the capital has been quite subtly odd ever since the Rites of Heavenly Worship. Many things that don't conform to common sense have happened, and it seems that Jiang Chen's shadow can be found in every matter. I feel that this brat is the source of all misfortune. It's said that the brat Jiang Chen was also present for the matters in the Jinshan household today."

Courtmaster Wang from the Pill King Garden became dispirited whenever he spoke of this matter. "Right, I feel that something is greatly amiss with the brat Jiang Chen. He was also present when we put on the pill exhibition last time. After all the events that occurred were put together and pondered over, I feel that he had long since conspired with the Hall of Healing, and that they were waiting to stomp on my Pill King Garden!"

“Also, the royal family actually sent quite a few strong practitioners in the advanced realm of true qi to protect him. When did this brat become so intimate with the royal family?”

All sorts odd matter having to do with Jiang Chen were all neatly organized. All sorts of questionable points all seemed to revolve around Jiang Chen.

Long Zhaofeng was also quite surprised. “Can it be that we’ve underestimated Jiang Chen?”

“Duke Long, this Jiang Chen must be killed! There’s no news of the duke of Jiang Han right now, I estimate that it’s more than likely he’s dead. If Jiang Chen is gotten rid of, then the Jiang Han dukedom would be thoroughly handed over.”

“Mm, Jiang Chen must die!” Long Zhaofeng nodded.

“Noble father, Xue’er will handle this Jiang Chen.” Long Juxue, standing beside Long Zhaofeng, revealed a cold smile. “I once said in the Hall of Healing that he shouldn’t even think of successfully passing the Hidden Dragon Trials. This time, let your daughter spill blood on the floor, and kill another group of people before entering the sect as a warning to others!”

“Mm, if he is able to enter the final stage of martial demonstration, then Xue’er, kill him. It will be as easy as stepping on an ant.”

The duke of Soaring Dragon was still quite confident in his daughter’s potential and talents. However, his words took another turn. “In consideration of a long night being fraught with dreams and that undue delay may bring trouble, we must make additional preparations. As long as there is an opportunity before the Hidden Dragon Trials progresses to the final stage of martial demonstration, we will not let it go!”

“Long San, I am giving this matter over to your care. You must bring back to me that Jiang Chen’s head!” Jiang Chen had ruined the duke of Soaring Dragon’s carefully laid plans quite a few times, making the duke of Soaring Dragon brim with killing intent.

“Yes.” A cold and sinister underling standing next to Long Zhaofeng responded. Killing intent wreathed his body, he was a practitioner of ten meridians true qi!

Within the Jiang Han manor, Jiang Chen was making his final preparations for the Hidden Dragon Trials.

At this moment, his level of seven meridians true qi was very stabilized. He had also successfully located the eighth acupoint.

The two martial arts techniques “Vast Ocean Current Splitter” and “Divine Aeons Fist” also improved with each passing day. Each day brought substantial improvement.

But Jiang Chen was actually preparing another set of techniques these days. The items he was playing with were the set of nine throwing daggers created by the Layered-Feather Golden Crystal.

“The unique skills of throwing daggers are comparable to the bow and arrow, but are easier to manipulate than bow and arrow and with even higher elusiveness.”

Compared to the bow and arrow, an attack from throwing daggers was absolutely even more secretive. It was also easier to manipulate. After all, in order to manipulate a bow and arrow, one had to first notch the arrow onto the bow.

This process was where the maneuverability of a bow and arrow lost out to that of throwing daggers’.

Throwing daggers -- you knew not whence they came from nor when they would be employed. A dagger in hand would have unerring accuracy. They were like an immortal from the heavens -- you knew not whence they came from and where they would go.

The advantages of a throwing dagger lay in nimble manipulation - in concealed attacks snuffing out breath with one cold blooded stroke!

“These nine throwing daggers were forged from Layered-Feather Golden Crystal. This Crystal is almost translucent. Aided with some skills when employing them, the daggers will almost melt away into nothingness, thoroughly becoming one with the vacant void.”

One had to say, these throwing daggers forged out of Layered-Feather Golden Crystal encompassed an exceeding degree of covertness and duplicity.

If deployed in sudden attack, the perception of ordinary practitioners might not even be enough to see the true form of the throwing daggers.

Jiang Chen planned to employ these Layered-Feather Throwing Daggers often, and found a unique throwing dagger skill, “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”, after much exhaustive thought.

As its name indicated and implied, Moonshatter Flying Daggers was a powerful force that could pierce the sun and moon and destroy the stars.

Of course, with Jiang Chen’s current methods, it would be quite a hyperbole to think of piercing the sun and moon. But the “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” skill could benefit him like adding wings to a tiger.

“Practicing this ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’ will not be the work of a day and night. The remarkable ability of the ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’ is many times more brilliant than the ‘Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans’. It’s a method that nears the level of those at a heavenly level. However, the initial portion of the ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’ is not that difficult or awkward.”

Four accompanying abilities had to be practiced in the course of practicing ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’: “God’s Eye”, “Ear of the Zephyr”, “Boulder’s Heart”, “Psychic’s Head”.

Vision needed to be practiced first before practicing throwing daggers! Hearing, mental ability, and the perception of the seven apertures of the human head all needed to be practiced first!

When vision had been trained to an extreme, a pair of eyes could be used to observe all the planes beneath the heavens. One throwing dagger could cause the enemy to have no avenue for escape whether in the heavens or underground!

When hearing had been trained to an extreme, the ears could discern direction from the wind. Even if you attacked from all directions, all would be beheaded wherever the throwing daggers landed!

When mental ability had been trained to an extreme, the heart would be as firm as a rock. Even if there were a thousand, or tens of thousands of illusions, one would not be entranced by them. One flying dagger would point straight towards the actual body and behead the enemy!

And when the perception of the seven apertures of the human head were trained to an extreme, the seven apertures would be opened and the entire world would be in your perception. There would be no secrets, no door to heaven, nor crack to the underground, that an enemy could take refuge in!

Of course, who knew how many years it would take to practice the “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” to an extreme level, and how many years it would take to reach an extreme level in the four accompanying abilities.

Chapter 55: The Hidden Dragon Trials

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

One had to walk along the path of training, no matter how long it might be. Only by taking a step forward was there hope of assailing the inexhaustible dao.

This “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” and its accompanying four abilities wouldn’t be trained in the span of a day and night.

However, even if one learned but a crude one out of ten thousandth bit, it would be a layer of extreme protection for the current Jiang Chen.

Out of the four accompanying abilities, “Psychic’s Head” could be temporarily set aside. Before a spirit consciousness was developed for the seven apertures, it would be like trying to catch a fish in a tree for him to train this ability, with no hope of accomplishing anything remarkable.

“God’s Eye”, “Ear of the Zephyr”, and “Boulder’s Heart” on the other hand, could all be practiced as of right now.

Jiang Chen studied assiduously, and immersed himself in the comprehension and training of these three abilities. Even if he only barely reached “minor accomplishment”, it would still be half the effort with double the results when training “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”.

When the manipulation techniques of a unique throwing dagger skill were trained to an utmost, it came down to a contest of vision, hearing, and mental ability!

These days, the sparring partners in the Jiang Han manor were all quite busy.

In order to train his vision, Jiang Chen had the sparring partners continuously release small bugs, such as mosquitoes and flies, and looked for the single small bug that he had marked previously, according to the flight speed, trajectory, and habits of these flies and mosquitoes.

One had to admit, this type of training method neared a consummately intense level.

In the beginning, Jiang Chen basically failed again and again. Even with his eyes continuously staring, he would still be too busy to attend to all the random dances of the several hundred flies and mosquitoes.

However, after persevering for two days, Jiang Chen could basically materialize the probability of one in ten based on his vision alone.

If based on hearing, the probability of one in about twenty would appear.

Training his mental ability was the hardest - the probability there was less than one in fifty.

Three days later, four days later...

Jiang Chen's improvement was quite apparent. On the fifth day, Jiang Chen could actually reach a success rate of fifty percent based on vision alone.

Hearing had also improved to thirty percent.

There wasn't much improvement in mental ability, but Jiang Chen wasn't depressed. He knew that training mental ability would be the hardest, and would need the most amount of patience.

Vision and hearing could be ground out with enough time. But mental ability required being calm and dispassionate, enduring persistently without a single trace of an irritable mindset.

Just as his vision and hearing had improved greatly, so did Jiang Chen's training of the "Moonshatter Flying Daggers" begin in an orderly way.

With the partnership of strong vision and hearing, Jiang Chen displayed astounding potential and status on the manipulation of throwing daggers.

The initial steps of the “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” were mastered by Jiang Chen with almost no hint of difficulty, and he quickly trained them to the great perfection realm.

“Looks like strong vision and hearing are indeed the biggest guarantee in training throwing daggers. Coincidentally, strong mental ability will allow the unique skills of throwing daggers that follow one’s will.”

Jiang Chen boasted good eyesight and an exquisite sense of hearing thanks to training his vision and hearing, and although his training in mental ability progressed slowly, it caused his entire bearing to become steady and stately, becoming even more confident and at ease.

In the short span of less than half a month, changes that thoroughly remoulded himself had appeared on Jiang Chen’s body again. As his training progressed ever deeper, he could experience gratifying improvement everyday.

And with the passage of time, the final examinations of the Hidden Dragon Trials finally arrived.

On this day, all 108 heirs had arrived in the grand courtyard in front of the entrance to the Hidden Dragon Trials testing site.

Jiang Chen was no exception. He had made so many preparations for these Hidden Dragon Trials that he naturally wouldn’t miss out on such a grand occasion.

This could be labelled as the first meaningful challenge that he had met head on since his reincarnation.

The Hidden Dragon Trials were the first stage in which Jiang Chen would prove himself on. He didn’t want to lose!

All the various heirs were casting complicated looks to judge one another, and even engaging in a contest with each other.

Everyone wanted to forestall one’s opponent with a show of strength on this occasion, no one wanted to be demoralized before things had begun.

Therefore, all sorts of gazes met in a tit-for-tat struggle, and permeated throughout the scene.

Jiang Chen greeted fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue. Fatty Xuan's six meridians true qi were already quite stable. In his own words, it would be at most two months before he broke through to seven meridians true qi.

As for Hubing Yue, he was already at eight meridians true qi. A hubbub arose after he made an entrance in which he didn't exercise restraint in displaying his level of training.

After all, eight meridians true qi was absolutely an existence at the level of the ten great dukes!

If Jiang Chen wanted to assail eight meridians true qi, his chances of success were absolutely above ninety percent. But he purposely didn't do so.

There was no major difference, currently, to him between seven meridians true qi and eight meridians true qi.

They were patently not the only ones who'd been improving. No matter friend nor foe, all the heirs had been making their final sprints before the Hidden Dragon Trials.

Therefore, everyone's appearance now was more or less accompanied by some improvement.

The heir of Yanmen, Yan Yiming - that catastrophic character that Jiang Chen had crushed beneath his feet twice - had somehow gotten ahold of some miraculous pill medicine and had actually recovered from his injuries, with his training attaining an even higher goal, and breaking through to seven meridians true qi!

"Jiang Chen, you've used sneaky tricks to plot against me multiple times. I, Yan Yiming, will find payment from you during the Hidden Dragon Trials. Now that I've entered the advanced realm of true qi, do you think your sneaky tricks will still be effective?" Yan Yiming glared at Jiang Chen from afar and privately expressed a great ambition, swearing to ruthlessly torture Jiang Chen.

"Brother Chen, look over there, the heirs of the four great dukes! Tsk tsk, the four great dukes get a sweet deal alright. They can have two candidates, that is some special privilege." Fatty Xuan's tone held some envy.

According to the rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials, if a duke was ranked in the top four, then they could have two candidates in the Hidden Dragon Trials, with the more optimal score being recorded.

This was equivalent to another layer of insurance that allowed the strong to become stronger.

The four great dukes were respectively the duke of Soaring Dragon, the duke of White Tiger, the duke of Vermillion Bird, and the duke of Black Tortoise.

Jiang Chen threw a faint glance in that direction when he heard those words.

The disciples of the four great dukes all knew how to put on a display alright - the heirs to Soaring Dragon in particular acted like they were the main protagonists.

The female one was naturally the hot topic of this time's Trials, Long Juxue.

The male one was Long Juxue's brother, Long Yinye.

Long Yinye was as his name implied, frosty and arrogant, suffused with a wild temperament. His entire being was like a dragon that overturned seas and rivers, full of a wild aura.

Although this man's reputation wasn't as renowned as Long Juxue and her azure phoenix constitution, he was even more mysterious. It was said that his true level of training wasn't less than that of Long Juxue, and that his capabilities in combat were even more than hers.

This was to say that the son and daughter of the duke of Soaring Dragon were practically double insurance, absolutely ensuring that the champion of the Hidden Dragon Trials wouldn't fall into other hands.

The first duke of the kingdom had their capital and their pride.

In contrast, whether it was the heir of White Tiger, Vermillion Bird, or Black Tortoise, all paled a bit in comparison.

When the eight of them walked together, although they all had the characteristics of being a phoenix or dragon amongst men, Long Juxue and Long Yinye gave off the feeling of being head and shoulders above others -

like a crane standing amongst chickens, rising above the common herd and allowing others to identify them with one glance.

“Damn it, what are you so cocky about? Sooner or later, I’m going to beat you down one by one.” Fatty Xuan showed naked admiration, jealousy, and hatred.

It wasn’t that he was narrow minded, but that these people had never treated him as a human being. This was the mindset of revenge developing from fatty Xuan after he’d been looked down upon by these people.

Jiang Chen closed his eyes after flicking a glance. He was wholly uninterested in these gestures that pretended to be aloof and lofty.

These four great dukes had purposely built themselves up to be one above everyone else. This was undoubtedly a demonstration of strength to the other heirs, and a warning to them not to lightly undertake the challenge to their position.

This was an instinct to protect one’s territory, but Jiang Chen turned up his nose at it.

If any of the dukes down below truly had great power, they would never give up the opportunity to challenge the four great dukes due to their display.

A duke’s position was won on the basis of battle, and not through a presentation.

“Jiang Chen!”

This time, it was the heir to Vermillion Bird, Hong Tiantong, who spoke first.

“Jiang Chen, I’ve heard that great happenings have occurred in your Jiang Han manor. What are you doing here?”

Bai Zhanyun was enlightened now, and was no longer Long Juxue’s striker. Hong Tiantong had naturally and happily accepted this glorious mission.

“Who are you? What does my brother Chen’s business have to do with you?” Fatty Xuan didn’t give a damn whether you were the four great dukes or not. In his eyes, if you weren’t one of them, then you were a bad guy!

“Damn fatty, didn’t your old man ever teach you the manners of nobility?”
When faced with such a character as fatty Xuan, Hong Tiantong displayed an instinctive contempt.

Jiang Chen raised his brow as a cold glance swept in front of Hong Tiantong.
“Are you provoking me? Then challenge me. If not, scram!”

“Jiang Chen is it?” Standing beside Long Juxue, Long Yinye stared at Jiang Chen with a pair of swift and fierce eyes. That wild killing intent surged without concealment at Jiang Chen.

“I’ve heard of you, you seemed to have given that worthless Bai Zhanyun a lesson? Very good. I hope you don’t disappoint me when it comes down to it.”

Bai Zhanyun wasn’t standing that far away, and his face convulsed when he heard Long Yinye publicly deride him as worthless, but he controlled his temper at the end.

Jiang Chen, on the other hand, had an obviously much more steady and stately demeanor after training his mental ability.

His eyelids didn’t even jump when faced with such a condescending tone from Long Yinye. “A bunch of flies, clamorous!”

“Nice one! Show us what you’ve got on the Hidden Dragon Trials. Who the hell do you think you are, flapping your lips here?” Fatty Xuan also had a face full of contempt.

Long Yinye’s face turned frigid and was about to open his mouth when, in the middle of the courtyard, a beam of astonishing sword aura suddenly descended as if from the heavens. Princess Gouyu’s lithe figure suddenly appeared when the rainbow sword aura landed on the ground.

“Rainbow true qi? Eleven meridians true qi master?” The scene was in an uproar as the gazes towards Princess Gouyu were tinged with more fear and respect.

The Eastern Kingdom also had a few true qi masters, but these true qi masters were mostly ten meridians true qi.

Those who’d trained to eleven meridians true qi could be counted on one hand.

And Princess Gouyu had just joined the ranks of the eleven meridians true qi masters at the age of just over twenty, how could this not astonish and astound people?

Even Long Yinye's wild eyes darted to and fro on Princess Gouyu's body, actually forgetting his conflict with Jiang Chen for a moment.

As for Long Juxue, an undetectable hint of killing intent flashed through that beautiful face. The lips of her mouth immediately resumed a faint sliver of a smile as soon as the killing intent had flashed by.

As if eleven meridians true qi was nothing much to her.

Chapter 56: Face Slapping Interlude

Princess Gouyu's entrance made the noisy din of voices completely disappear.

After all, every single heir present felt a bit of dread and fear towards the identity of the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials. If you irritated Princess Gouyu somehow and you faced additional obstacles as a result, the loss would outweigh the gain.

A distinguished vicennial gathering such as the Hidden Dragon Trials was something that the whole nation participated in. Shortly after the appearance of Princess Gouyu, two squads of strong practitioners from the Tiandu army sprinted down the avenue and occupied the two sides of the avenue, cordoning off the area.

This meant that the monarch was arriving.

Eastern Lu was in high spirits and his steps were steady and vigorous. His bright eyes looked around with a stern and an awe inspiring gaze.

"May the Emperor live ten thousand years, long live the Eastern Kingdom!"

The subjects and courtiers all threw themselves down on their knees one after another, awaiting the arrival of the king.

The 108 dukes also all found their areas and took their seats.

Eastern Lu occupied the center of the courtyard and spoke with a strong and resonant voice, "Our Eastern Kingdom, with a heritage of a thousand years,

has always emphasized the heritage of martial dao. In order to conspicuously display our martial dao, and provide impetus to the dukes, we - the Eastern Kingdom - highly value the vicennial Hidden Dragon Trials. We happened to come upon this distinguished gathering and we saw heroic bearings and valiant postures from all the nobles, people of exceptional ability in all their majestic variety. We are indeed gratified.

Today, the 108 dukes of our court have gathered in a meeting of the wind and clouds. It is said that each age brings forth new geniuses on this noble land, and each will rule their own domain for years to come. We hope that all dukes present will display a new aspect of themselves, and expound on the highest level of their abilities, continuing to foster and enhance the traditions of the revered might of our dynasty.”

Eastern Lu handed the reins back to Princess Gouyu after speaking only a few simple words instead of a long winded speech. After all, Princess Gouyu was the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials.

“Your Majesty, Yan Jiuzhuang has a matter to report.” Yan Juizhuang of the Yanmen dukedom stepped forward and bowed after Eastern Lu had concluded his remarks.

“Oh? What business does Duke Yan have?” Eastern Lu smiled faintly.

“Your Majesty, your subject has heard that the duke of Jiang Han has fallen ill with a severe disease, and has even heard that he is possibly not part of this world anymore. The Jiang Han territory borders the southern reaches of my territory, and is a military fortress of strategic importance. If the duke of Jiang Han does not reappear for an extended period of time, the thieves and rascals in the southern reaches will take advantage of the opportunity to rise in revolt. Your subject sincerely requests to discuss the jurisdiction of the Jiang Han dukedom before the Hidden Dragon Trials.”

The Jiang Han territory - the rights to a dukedom.

Eastern Lu’s expression froze slightly. No one had certain news of Jiang Feng’s condition. This duke of Yanmen had been the first to jump out in an apparent effort to be the trailblazer for the duke of Soaring Dragon.

Eastern Lu’s gaze flitted towards the Jiang Han dukedom area.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly and took a step forward, "Your Majesty, this duke of Yanmen has no respect for his own seniority to publicly curse my father at such a dignified gathering. As the son, how could I sit idly by and ignore this? Your subject requests that Yan Jiuzhuang apologize to me."

"Apologize? Jiang Chen, you're at an age in which you still smell of your mother's milk, who are you to make I, a vaunted duke of a province, apologize to you?" Yan Jiuzhuang laughed coldly.

"Cursing others without cause or reason is a mouth without virtue. A mouth without virtue is an old dog. Old dog Yan, you're an esteemed noble, yet you'll willingly become the falcons and hounds of others.¹ Condemning you as a dog is an extreme offense to dogs."

Jiang Chen's viper tongued foundations weren't made of pure bluster.

"Jiang Chen, you dare publicly insult and deride a territorial duke... this duke will petition to fix on you the egregious crime of slander and insult to a noble!"

"Old dog Yan, just try making a move against my son!"

Suddenly, a voice rang out like thunder from the area reserved for the Jiang Han territory.

This man's gait was akin to a dragon's gambol and a tiger's walk. He strode to the front with frosty looks shooting out of his eyes and stared at Yan Jiuzhuang, "Old dog Yan, where has my son spoken incorrectly? You, duke of Yanmen, are a duke of the first rank, at the end of the day, and have sunk so low as to become cannon fodder for others, what are you, if not the falcons and hounds of others?"

Jiang Feng!

It was Jiang Feng, the duke of Jiang Han who had been missing for quite some time.

The scene abruptly began bustling with noise and excitement. No one had thought that the duke of Jiang Han would suddenly appear, and even be bursting with the vitality of dragons and the ferocity of tigers.

And judging from his wholly unconcealed aura, it was the frightening aura that only a true qi master boast of!

This Jiang Feng had broken through and become another true qi master!

“Subject Jiang Feng greets Your Majesty!” After Jiang Feng had condemned Yan Jiuzhuang, he genuflected towards Eastern Lu in a very natural and poised way.

“Jiang Feng, We had heard that you were indisposed. So it turns out those were false rumors?” Eastern Lu’s heart had also settled slightly upon seeing Jiang Feng appear at a crucial moment.

As the king of the nation, he did not wish to see the Jiang Han territory change hands under these conditions.

Even if it were to change hands, it would still be up to him, Eastern Lu, to decide who would take over ownership. He absolutely would not let the duke of Soaring Dragon and his henchmen seize ownership with no clear reason whatsoever.

Jiang Feng laughed heartily, “A few thieves and rascals employed some disgraceful and unpresentable tricks. It’s not worth mentioning.”

“Haha, Duke Jiang possesses virtue and patriotism, and naturally has the protection of heaven and earth. It seems that we were overly concerned.” Eastern Lu was also in exceedingly good spirits.

The side of the duke of Soaring Dragon, however, was exceedingly gloomy. Jiang Feng hadn’t died? And had lived with the vitality of dragons and ferocity of tigers to boot? It looked like even his training had broken through.

Long Zhaofeng had a belly full of depression. He was becoming more and more dissatisfied with the competency of his underlings. Not a thing had gone smoothly ever since he had butted heads with the Jiang family father and son.

This Jiang Feng had fallen victim to a fatal poison, how could he be bursting with the vitality of dragons and ferocity of tigers?

Not only had Jiang Feng not died, but his training had gone up a notch. This way, weren’t they asking for ridicule if they sought to seize the Jiang Han territory through devious means?

The duke of Yanmen had a face full of awkwardness, as if someone had landed a hard punch on his nose. He was stuck between a rock and a hard place for the moment, and felt incredibly awkward.

“Duke of Yanmen, I, Jiang Feng, have one bit of advice for you. When being cannon fodder for someone, first look at Du Ruhai’s exit, then think of the straits that have befallen the Pill King Garden.”

The nobles who were the confidantes of and backing up the duke of Soaring Dragon were all deeply moved by Jiang Feng’s words.

Indeed, Du Ruhai had been a trailblazer and pathbreaker for the duke of Soaring Dragon, but had met his end at the duke’s own hands with his house raided afterwards and the family property confiscated.

Although no one had died in the Pill King Garden, their business was in a sorry state due to the Hall of Healing - like fallen flowers being carried away by the flowing waters as they steadily lost ground. There were even rumors that they had completely sold themselves to the duke of Soaring Dragon, and had lost their right of autonomy.

Yan Jiuzhuang was exceedingly depressed, but his tone remained quite proud. “Jiang Feng, don’t be pleased with yourself too early.”

“Why shouldn’t I be pleased with myself?” Jiang Feng laughed quite heartily. “In terms of one on one combat, you would be unable to beat me. In terms of sons, your son has been thoroughly trounced by my Chen’er on two occasions. I have no reason not to be pleased with myself in front of you, wouldn’t you say so?”

Yan Jiuzhuang had nothing to say to that.

Jiang Chen was in exceedingly good spirits upon hearing his father’s flashy comeback. One had to admit, everyone had their own rules for survival in order to become a duke.

With the appearance of Jiang Feng, the small interlude naturally ended with Yan Jiuzhuang’s losing face with a resounding slap.

Princess Gouyu’s phoenix eyes moved slightly as she flicked a meaningful glance towards Jiang Chen.

“Everyone, I now announce the official commencement of the final competition in this year’s Hidden Dragon Trials. The rules remain the same: Please begin applying for the exam mission.

This time’s exams are still missions divided into nine levels. The missions of different levels represent each dukedom’s rank.”

There were 108 dukes in the Eastern Kingdom that were divided into nine levels of ranks. Each rank consists of twelve dukes, and so on and so forth.

The duke of Jiang Han was ranked number 14 out of the 108 dukes, and counted as a duke of the second rank.

For instance, dukes ranked one through twelve were all dukes of the first rank, and there were naturally levels within the first rank.

Levels one through four were the four great dukes of the kingdom and honored with the title of utmost first rank.

Levels five through eight were honored with the title primary first rank.

Levels nine through twelve were labelled auxiliary first rank.

When it came to second rank and dukes ranked even lower, there was no title of “utmost”. Each rank was also divided into three levels.

With second rank as an example, they were divided into upper second rank, middle second rank, and lower second rank.

The duke of Jiang Han was a noble of the upper second rank!

And the Hidden Dragon Trials were a contest to determine the rankings of the next generation of nobles.

The 108 heirs could apply for a mission of any rank. Of course, each heir candidate only had two application chances.

If both times didn’t result in a completed mission, that meant one had failed the exam and had to handover the dukedom, to allow the big and powerful aristocratic families to continuously take their place.

Many of the heirs would be exceedingly cautious because there were only two application chances, and sought to make the best out of these two chances.

Some heirs may challenge a higher rank mission with the first chance. But if the first challenge failed, then they would exercise extreme prudence when it came to the second application chance. Otherwise, if they failed the second mission as well, that meant handing over the dukedom.

Every duke's feelings were exceedingly complicated when it came to the Hidden Dragon Trials.

If potential was high, then the concern was which rank was the most appropriate.

If potential was mediocre, then the concern was whether or not maintaining their position was most important?

The higher ranks had to worry about challenges from behind.

The lower ranks also had to worry about their dukedoms being taken by those aristocratic families casting covetous eyes like a greedy tiger.

The middle ranked dukes had to debate whether they wished to take a step forward or remain where they were.

The Hidden Dragon Trials was a time of decisions - indeed, of extremely difficult decisions.

Many times, some heirs overestimated their potential and strength and challenged high rank missions due to a moment's impulse. The end result was failing twice and the immediate loss of their dukedom.

This would cause extreme feelings of frustration, indignation, and regret.

"Brother Chen, what rank's missions do you intend on challenging?" Fatty Xuan crowded in and it was apparent that the fatty was just a tad bit nervous at the moment.

Jiang Chen glanced at his two best friends and asked in return, "What have you decided on?"

"I've decided to challenge a second rank mission first." A hint of resolution suffused Hubing Yue's fierce expression. He was of eight meridians true qi now and thus had the ability to say so.

He even had the right to challenge a first rank mission.

"I... I'll keep my position first and then see." Fatty Xuan said weakly. The duke of Jinshan was an upper fourth rank duke. His ranking was above average. It wouldn't be a bad thing if he could keep this ranking.

At least, the highest expectations that the duke of Jinshan had for fatty Xuan was only to maintain their current ranking.

Jiang Chen nodded, "It is right for Xiaoyue to pick the second rank.² Brashly assailing the first rank would be too much pressure for you. As for fatty, maintaining your rank would count as success."

Jiang Chen was rather familiar with the rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials. If the number of people who applied for the missions of particular rank exceeded the quota, then rankings would be decided based on the quality of the missions completed, successively being pushed back appropriately.

This was to say, if fifteen people applied for and completed a mission of the third rank, then the three people ranked in the last of these fifteen would be pushed back to the fourth rank.

And this was the logic that was followed. But the number of 108 dukedoms was eternal and unchanging.

1. The hunting animal of another.↵

2. This is Jiang Chen's nickname for Hubing Yue.↵

Chapter 57: Sights Set For Duke of the First Rank

This kind of competition was quite cruel. If neither application was completed, it was equivalent to directly losing one's dukedom.

This way, there were sure to be many dukedoms that were vacated.

The vacant dukedoms would be filled in by strong aristocratic families. Of course, these filled vacancies would only rank at the bottom.

This was to say, the heirs that successfully completed missions would be ranked with priority in the higher ranks. Those who filled in for heirs who had lost their dukedoms could only compete for the vacated, lower ranks.

Of course, Jiang Chen had no need to consider these rules.

Jiang Chen's goal was clear; he was aiming for the championship. To him, obtaining even the first runner up position on this level of competition meant failing.

"Brother Chen, say something. What rank's mission do you intend to apply for?" Fatty wasn't that concerned about his matters, but cared very earnestly about Jiang Chen's decision.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly as his gaze naturally flitted towards the four great dukes.

Following his gaze, Fatty slapped his thick thigh. "Damn straight. I knew that our Brother Chen either didn't care to make a move, or would shock everyone when he finally made one!

Heh heh, Brother Chen, I hope you can drag that chit Long Juxue down from her high horse." Fatty Xuan cackled. "It'd be best if this chit voluntarily offered her body after she was conquered by Brother Chen, and that Brother Chen cast her off after he's had her. Hahaha, that would truly be too perfect."

Fatty Xuan's thin rat eyes had almost formed slits in his laughter as he thought of this scene, fully depicting what "one is invincible when one is base" meant.

Following that, the 108 heirs all lined up according to their current dukedom rankings and prepared to step forward to apply for the missions of this year's Hidden Dragon Trials.

There was almost no suspense regarding the rank of the missions that the heirs to the first rank dukedoms would apply for.

Each heir had their own self dignity and pride. They would absolutely not tolerate their position being replaced by someone else and being thrown out from the rank of first.

However, it was an absolutely normal thing for the strong to replace the weak. Strength spoke for everything.

The Jiang Han dukedom was ranked 14 out of the 108 dukedoms, so it was soon Jiang Chen's turn.

“Jiang Chen, what rank’s mission would you like to apply for?” Princess Gouyu asked.

“First rank!” Jiang Chen didn’t even bat an eyelid.

“You have great aspirations, but I must remind you that everyone ahead of you has also applied for missions of the first rank. The competition between you all will be quite fierce!”

“What is the point of rankings without competition?” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

“Very good. According to the rules, each heir must complete three missions to pass this particular exam. If a single mission is failed, that will be deemed as failing this application.”

“Understood.” Jiang Chen nodded slightly.

“Mm. Head over there to draw your first mission.” Princess Gouyu marked down a symbol for the mission of the first rank on Jiang Chen’s application tablet.

“Jiang Chen, you’re applying for a mission of the first rank. Correct?”

“Yes.”

“Please come over here. All the scrolls here are missions of the first rank. Please choose whichever one you’d like.”

Jiang Chen nodded, swept his eyes in a circle, and picked one at random.

They were all missions of the first rank and thus, their difficulty should all be similar. Jiang Chen naturally would not be overly selective. Not to mention, these scrolls were all sealed with no hint at their inner contents.

After selecting his mission, Jiang Chen was in no hurry to open it. The organizers of the Hidden Dragon Trials also didn’t demand immediate verification of the mission.

Candidates only needed to complete the mission and hand it in for verification.

“Jiang Chen, what kind of mission did you select?” An heir next to him asked out of curiosity.

Jiang Chen flicked a glance at him but only smiled faintly and left. It was obvious that the other heir wasn't a friend, and was possibly from the enemy camp, here to elicit some information from him.

Although Jiang Chen was unafraid, he was unwilling for additional people to appear and cause trouble for him when he was completing his mission.

According to the rules, the three missions had to be completed within three months.

When the exams were over and the 108 nobles were present again, after weeding out and replacing the appropriate ones, the ranking contests would commence according to each rank.

This was to say that, when rank were decided, the twelve heirs of the first rank would only be able to challenge others within the first rank to determine the final rankings.

The competitions within each rank were for the final rankings.

The heirs could leave after selecting their first mission. They only needed to come back when they had completed a mission in the future to select their second mission.

"Chen'er, what kind of mission have you drawn?" Jiang Feng asked eagerly upon returning to the manor.

Jiang Chen gave the scroll to Jiang Feng. Jiang Feng took a look and frowned, "This first mission is a bit harder."

"Hmm?"

"A serial rapist has appeared in the region of the Red Moon county located within the Tianhu territory, collecting the flowers of beautiful girls. His qinggong is extraordinary, and he calls himself "Lotus Harvester".¹

He specializes in hunting young girls and is exceedingly cruel. Whenever he harvests a young girl, he even kills them and cuts off the two things in front of the victims' chest as a memento."

"Such a frenzied lunatic exists on this world?" Even Jiang Chen was vaguely surprised. Such a villain who had committed his full share of crimes should

have been slaughtered long ago. Why was he allowed to thrive until this day and destroy so many lives?

“The level of this thief’s training is said to be between eight meridians true qi and nine meridians true qi. He has weathered hundred of battles because he works alone, and thus his combat ability is incredible. Chen’er, your mission is not simple.”

Jiang Chen was also a bit surprised. None of the missions of the first rank were simple alright. The first mission was to kill a practitioner in the advanced realm of true qi who was between eight and nine meridians.

And this mission had to be completed within a month.

According to the exam’s rules, the participating heirs had to absolutely keep their identities a secret. They could not mobilize any connections.

If they used any connections without authorization, they would immediately be judged as failing the mission if discovered. As a punishment for cheating, their dukedom would be confiscated.

A few heirs had held the mentality of getting by on a fluke in past years, but would almost always be found out by the Eastern family clan’s mighty intelligence network. They would be called out and lose their dukedoms.

Therefore, there were fewer and fewer heirs who held the mentality of getting by on a flukes.

With no time to lose, Jiang Chen made a few minor adjustments to his preparations and set out on his way.

The Sheng battalion brothers escorted Jiang Chen out of the capital and halted their footsteps. According to the rules, if they escorted him another step, it was very likely that Jiang Chen would be deemed as having cheated.

Jiang Chen urged his horse onwards after leaving the capital. He came to a large canyon after galloping 60 km. Jiang Chen urged the horse to give a mighty leap forward, their bodies soaring high up in the air as he allowed the horse to descend into the bottomless abyss as it would.

As for Jiang Chen, he made a flip in midair and dashed towards another narrow winding trail. His figure vanished into the boundless and indistinct open country with a few leaps and bounds.

After roughly ten minutes, more than ten figures abruptly appeared where Jiang Chen had sent his horse jumping off. The person in charge was the Soaring Dragon warrior who was willing to die for his mission, Long San.

Long San's face was covered as his sinister and ruthless eyes patrolled the area. He cursed viciously. "This brat Jiang Chen is so damned devious and wretched. His presence scatters apart here. In front of us is the boundless open country, but we don't know where he's gone."

"Lord San, what should we do?"

Long San looked at the terrain again, "There's only one place to go here. We'll split up into three parties here and chase after him separately. Remember, the duke will award a hundred thousand gold, bequeath land, and award a rank with eight thousand below him to whoever kills Jiang Chen."

Territory and bounty, these were irresistible temptations. Moreover, this mission was merely killing an heir and wasn't too difficult!

The groups for the three different directions were quickly settled upon, and they started searching according to the three different paths.

Although it was the first time that Jiang Chen had ever walked out of the capital since arriving in this world, the memories of his past life were enough to help him handle such a situation.

There were roughly 2,500 km between the capital and the Tianhu territory. The ordinary steeds of this world could travel 1,500 km in a day. A practitioner in the advanced realm of true qi, if dedicating himself to traveling, could also travel 1,500 km in a day.

Of course, no advanced practitioner would waste true qi on traveling. Jiang Chen was no exception. He'd seen from the map that a larger village could be reached by traveling through this narrow, winding path and traversing a few mountain ridges. This village was one of the more renowned livestock farms for producing steeds in this area.

Jiang Chen had arrived at the road to the village after roughly two hours. He didn't enter the village, but spent a large sum to purchase a steed that could travel 2,500 km a day.

Jiang Chen didn't linger after swapping out his steed, and he dashed towards the direction of Tianhu territory.

To elude observation, Jiang Chen would occasionally choose a few trails off the beaten path. He'd rather take the longer way around, instead of having new complications crop up.

Like this, Jiang Chen covered 2,500 km in four full days before he entered the Tianhu territory.

Jiang Chen didn't just spend these days traveling. Whenever it was nightfall, Jiang Chen would revisit and study the past cases of that Lotus Harvester.

Jiang Chen had made a few gains after a few days.

One thing that Jiang Chen could be sure of was that the area in which the Lotus Harvester would commit his crimes never exceeded the Tianhu territory. There were ten counties within the Tianhu region, and the Lotus Harvester had committed most of his crimes in the Red Moon, Black Forest, and Large Rock counties. There was an occasional incident or two in the other counties, but the frequency wasn't high.

Jiang Chen spread out the map of the Tianhu territory for perusal and mused at the map for a while. From the terrain of these three counties, their location formed the Chinese character “品”.

Incidentally, the terrain of these three counties was more complicated and was advantageous to the Lotus Harvester's operations.

“This rapist has extraordinary qinggong, but the distance he can cover should be middling. This is why there are a few cases that involve a long and arduous journey. That is to say, this villain must have a lair within the three counties. It is said that the wily hare has three holes to its burrow. If I can find one of his lairs, then it will be much easier to capture and kill this villain.”

Jiang Chen had more or less deduced a few clues.

Jiang Chen arrived at the Large Rock county on the fifth day. He had his reasons for choosing the Large Rock county, and not the Red Moon county, which had the higher number of incidents.

According to the patterns from the previous cases, the Lotus Harvester had succeeded twice in the Red Moon county. Black Forest county neighbored Red Moon county, so its guard would be raised higher.

There was a mountain between Large Rock and Red Moon. Red Moon was located to the south of the mountain, and Large Rock to the north. The flow of information between the two was blocked due to the mountain.

Jiang Chen speculated that it was possible that this Lotus Harvester would choose to make a move in Large Rock county!

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qinggong>↔

Chapter 58: Competition at Star Argus Palace

“Heh heh, have you heard? The decennial competitions of the Star Argus Palace will begin in three days times. It seems that both the South Sect and North Sect think that their victory is a foregone conclusion.”

“Psht. How could that bunch of broads from the North Sect win out over the beasts of the South Sect. They haven’t won against the South Sect for the last sixty years.”

“What goes around comes around. It’s said that Sectmistress Jade of the North Sect has obtained a few disciples whose potentials are quite good. They’re all beautiful to a fault, and there’s high hope for the sect triumphing over the South Sect this time.”

“Whatever! Whether it’s the South Sect or the North Sect that wins, it won’t be our turn to live in the Star Argus Palace. It’s just be a bunch of men changing to a crowd of women.”

Jiang Chen heard this snippet of conversation from a neighboring table in some tavern.

In the days after he’d arrived in the Large Rock Country, he’d heard the most information about the North and South Sects of the Star Argus Palace.

The winner would be able to take up residence in the Star Argus Palace, and the loser would have to depart and find another location to settle down in.

Of course, this occurred once every ten years. If a sect lost, then they merely needed to stage a comeback next time.

Jiang Chen drank alone, but his hearing was focused on all sides. His “Ear of the Zephyr” was now at the third level and his hearing was at least two to three times stronger than the average practitioner.

All sorts of information and messages flowed in at the moment.

Star Argus Palace, North Sect, broads, beauties...

The useful information was constantly filtered out and listed separately by Jiang Chen.

Resting his wine cup, Jiang Chen put down a few silvers and floated out the door. He’d decided to make a stop at the Star Argus Palace.

If the Lotus Harvester was to commit an incident lately, then there was no location more suitable in the entire Tianhu territory than the Star Argus Palace.

Beautiful disciples, just this item was of enough interest.

The law of rapists was that the higher the level the training of the victim, the better. Therefore, girls who trained were the favorites of rapists.

And where else in the Large Rock province would have more beauties than the Star Argus Palace at this moment? Not to mention the fact that they were all practitioners, it would be one big harvest if these girls were plucked.

Jiang Chen contemplated things from the perspective of the Lotus Harvester and felt that even if the Lotus Harvester didn’t commit an incident, he was sure to come out and pluck something or another.

Jiang Chen used a few materials to make a few adjustments and disguise himself after leaving the capital. His current visage appeared as a thirty something wandering gallant.

Vagabond gallants and characters like these numbered at least eight hundred million, if not one billion within the Eastern Kingdom. Jiang Chen’s disguise

was beyond ordinary. It was the type that wouldn't be picked out if thrown into a crowd.

The Star Argus Palace's topography was exceedingly ideal. A city called Star City had formed in the 50 km around the Star Argus Palace, and it'd been built reliant on the Star Argus Palace.

The existence of a sect, even an ordinary sect, would bring pervasive influence to its local surroundings.

Two days later, Jiang Chen arrived at the Star City to discover that not just anyone could spectate the competition between the North and South Sects of the Star Argus Palace.

There were only three hundred audience members allowed. After eliminating the predetermined quota, there were only roughly one hundred places left for outsiders.

The number of wandering gallants that had surged into the Star City the past couple of days numbered more than a hundred thousand.

More than a hundred thousand competing for roughly one hundred spots was the equivalent of one out of a thousand. This wasn't just an ordinary level of difficulty.

However, Jiang Chen knew that in order to investigate the Lotus Harvester, he would have to obtain an observation spot.

If Jiang Chen revealed his status as the heir to a dukedom, he was bound to cause a ruckus within Star City. It wouldn't be a hard thing to obtain an observation spot.

However, if he did so, that would be in violation of the rules, and he would be directly thrown out of the competition.

Jiang Chen arrived at the Star Argus Palace headquarters stationed in Star City. There was already a sea of humanity and it was packed full of people.

"I'll pay thirty thousand silver, who's willing to give me a spot?"

“Psht. Pal, did you just awaken from your dream? A hundred thousand silver won’t even buy a spot now, how could you offer a price in the tens of thousands?”

“Eh...”

“I’m of five meridians true qi, don’t I have the right to spectate the battles?”

“Apologies, our rules are that unless you have the right to enter only if you’re of six meridians true qi.”

“Brother, I have a relationship with Xie Qiang of the South Sect. Make an exception for me?”

“Who’s Xie Qiang? We only recognize relationships with the Sectmaster and the elders.”

“Brother, I’m the boss of Thousand Horse Hall. Your Star Argus Palace has also done business with me. This observation spot...”

“Sorry, business is business and relationships are relationships. If you have money, there are still a few spots for sale. A hundred thousand silver for one.”

“Gah, I’ll buy one!”

Jiang Chen did an auditory sweep and comments such as these travelled into his ears. The entire scene was in a chaotic uproar. Everyone was trying their utmost and breaking their heads trying to get an observation spot.

“Ai, when a man is poor his ambition is not far reaching. Looks like we’re destined to be without luck for observing this decennial competition between the North and South sects.”

“What can we do, the Star Argus Palace is just that cocky. Apparently the disciples that are participating this time are all disciples of five meridians true qi.”

“Tsk tsk, the strength and influence of a foremost sect in the Tianhu territory alright. These genius disciples probably wouldn’t be inferior even when placed amongst the sons and disciples of the various nobles?”

“This... they’ll probably be on a similar level?”

Jiang Chen was speechless when he heard those words. Five meridians true qi was absolutely the lowest level of existence amongst the heirs.

However, this Star Argus Palace was just a sect in the Tianhu territory. It was a thing worth having pride and dignity in that they boasted so many disciples of five meridians true qi.

Jiang Chen stood in a corner, debating how to get his hands on an observation invitation.

He'd purposefully disguised himself as a three meridians true qi independent practitioner with humble strength. He had no desire to reveal his talents and attract the Lotus Harvester's attention.

Therefore, he absolutely could not reveal his true strength.

After thinking for a while, Jiang Chen hit upon an idea.

"Brother, my strength in martial dao is mediocre, but my potential in spirit medicine is quite high. I'm also exceedingly adept in the dao of alchemy. I can help out if any injuries from the blade result in the process."

"High potential in spirit medicine? That will only be proven through tests. If you truly have such abilities, then it will be no problem obtaining an invitation."

Jiang Chen sat through a spirit medicine test according to the other's instructions. This was practically as simple as eating to Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen was treated as an honored guest in less than fifteen minutes. His spirit medicine caused even the spirit medicine administrator from the Star Argus Palace, who had assumed personal command over the area, to even slightly admit defeat.

In this way, an invitation was in hand and "Spirit Medicine Great Master Chen" was written on it.

Jiang Chen had given himself a shake and become "Great Master Chen".

Jiang Chen's status immediately increased greatly with the invitation, becoming a distinguished, honored guest. A specially assigned person led him into the headquarters of the Star Argus Palace and arranged a first class guest room for him.

“Heh heh, it looks like one must have expertise in one specialty. One wouldn’t even be able to enter the door without a particular specialty.”

Jiang Chen laughed self deprecatingly and sat cross legged on the bed.

It would obviously not be the thing to do if he started practicing techniques in a powerful and dynamic way whilst on someone else’s territory. Jiang Chen meditated for a while and started circulating vast waves true qi in his body, strengthening his meridians.

After strengthening his meridians, Jiang Chen started training the three abilities of “God’s Eye”, “Ear of the Zephyr”, and “Boulder’s Heart”.

As of now, Jiang Chen had trained “God’s Eye” to the peak of the third level, and “Ear of the Zephyr” to the peak of the third level as well.

Progress was still slow in “Boulder’s Heart”, as he had just entered the second level.

“It’s said that these abilities can penetrate the Thirty Three Heavens (2), therefore there should be 33 levels. I have only but just started from ground zero.”

Jiang Chen also knew that the earliest stages of training were the easiest. It would unfortunately become more difficult as one progressed.

The range in which the “God’s Eye” and “Ear of the Zephyr” could cover was only a radius of a thousand meters.

Any further would be beyond his power.

The mental strength of “Psychic’s Head” wasn’t able to be defined in quantitative terms, but Jiang Chen could clearly sense that his mental state of being had increased greatly.

A mental state of being could only be perceived in the finest of details. It was an instinctive strength, a sixth, seventh sense that exceeded the five senses...

Jiang Chen woke up early the next morning because the decennial event of the Star Argus Palace was beginning today.

As “Great Master Chen” in the spirit medicine world, he had actually been arranged a second class seat. This seat was quite ideal and was situated behind only the “high and mighty” in the first row.

Jiang Chen used the “God’s Eye” for slight observation and discovered those sitting in front all possessed power that didn’t lose out to the North and South Sectmaster/mistress of the Star Argus Palace.

They were mostly all at seven meridians true qi.

“Looks like the culture of martial dao is flourishing in the Large Rock province. It’s a rare sight to have so many seven meridians true qi practitioners present.” Jiang Chen evaluated silently, but was also slightly worried. “With so many seven meridians true qi practitioners holding down the fort, even with the Lotus Harvester’s eight meridians true qi, he probably wouldn’t dare to brazenly do something impetuous?”

Jiang Chen’s emotions were quite complicated. He both hoped for the Lotus Harvester to appear, but also didn’t wish for female practitioners to be targeted.

Just as he was wavering, a group of people walked out from the hallways on the two sides.

One side wore all black, they were from the South sect.

One side was all female and mostly wore downy yellow clothes, patently the North Sect.

The South Sect Sectmaster was called Shen Rong and roughly forty years old. Long sideburns along with his thin, lean features, gave off a dignified bearing.

Everyone called the Sectmistress of the North Sect as “Madame Jade”. She was a young, married woman who actually looked only roughly 27 or 28. A pair of tapered almond eyes adorned her face and she was exceedingly alluring. No one knew if that was her true age or if she was skilled in making herself look youthful.

As a guest, Jiang Chen couldn’t very well have no respect and observe the two heads of their sects through the “God’s Eye”. But from external appearances, the two were absolutely of the advanced realm of true qi.

As for whether it was seven meridians true qi or eight meridians, Jiang Chen couldn't gauge it either, without a careful look.

"Heh heh, junior sister Jade, it's been ten years but your elegance remains the same as before." Shen Rong chuckled and took the lead in speaking.

"Save the idle chatter Shen Rong. In this time's competition, my North Sect will absolutely take back control of the Star Argus Palace." Madame Jade's delicate brow arched and her jade like voice sounded.

"Alright, then let our disciples fight decisively!" Shen Rong smiled freely and easily.

1. Land of the Thirty Three Heavens is the desired god realm in Buddhism.

<http://kadampa.org/buddhism/buddhas-return-from-heaven-day> ↵

Chapter 59: Following the Clues

Both sides agreed to send out five disciples to do battle. The side that won three times out of five would be labelled the victor, and would wrest control of the Star Argus Palace for the next ten years.

Jiang Chen was absolutely disinterested in the competition of those that were five meridians true qi.

Jiang Chen surreptitiously started utilizing his God's Eye when everyone's gaze was locked onto the crowd of youths, and he started observing the seated guests.

If the Lotus Harvester was going to come, he naturally wouldn't brazenly appear undisguised. He would certainly disguise himself as a guest and take advantage of the situation to profiteer, like robbing an owner when his house was on fire.

He had to admit, these guests were all quite entranced. Almost everyone in Jiang Chen's God's Eye range had concentrated their attention on the competition on the field.

This was a competition between the most distinguished disciples of the Star Argus Palace's new generations. These guests of exceptional ability all made

their living in the Large Rock Province. They would naturally pay attention to the condition of the Star Argus Palace's next generation.

The first two battles were quickly concluded. The North and South Sect had both won one battle.

Jiang Chen had also completed a round of observations but gained nothing. None of these people looked like the Lotus Harvester in disguise.

Jiang Chen's mind was not quite at rest, and so he made another thorough round of observations. The results were the same, he couldn't find the slightest flaw in these guests.

"Is it possible that the Lotus Harvester really didn't come? Or is it that he's disguised himself so well that my God's Eye can't see through him?"

Jiang Chen questioned his own judgement a bit. Due to his training of the "Boulder's Heart", he'd had a faint instinctive feeling that told him something would happen at the Star Argus Palace today, and it was very likely something to do with the Lotus Harvester.

That was the say, it was possible that the Lotus Harvester was already present.

Except, there was a full three hundred guests spectating the competition. Which one was the Lotus Harvester? Jiang Chen first observed through using God's Eye, then leveraged Ear of the Zephyr to listen to these people's breathing and heartbeat.

In the end, he still gained nothing.

"Is my feeling incorrect?"

Four battles of the competition had been completed as Jiang Chen was musing, and both sides had won twice.

At this moment, a fifteen to sixteen year old girl walked out from behind Sectmistress Jade of the North Sect. She was wearing a downy yellow light petticoat, and had an exquisite and delicately wrought body. She slowly walked onto the stage.

"I am North Sect disciple Wen Ziqi, please grant me your instruction."

The girl called Wen Ziqi had a head full of hair that was akin to a waterfall of black yarn. Her eyes like lacquer, shone with a purity like that of a mountain spring.

The softly spoken sentence was enough to send her entire face blushing to the backs of her ears.

“I’ve heard of master’s junior Sectmistress Jade of the North Sect obtaining a fine disciple. It must be you, junior sister. I am your foolish brother Lu Boyu and I’ll demonstrate a few moves with you.”

This Lu Boyu was slender and tall, and his thin face emanated a sense of suaveness. His eyes were like a second mouth that could also speak.

He had a few traces of a elegant bearing within his gestures.

What surprised Jiang Chen quite a bit was that both of them were actually six meridians true qi!

For two six meridians true qi to appear in such a small Star Argus Palace, no wonder it caused those spectating the competition to also gasp and exclaim softly.

Sectmistress Jade’s originally confident, charming face darkened suddenly. She had held this disciple, the pride of her joy, in reserve and concealed her strength in preparation to soar to the heavens with one feat. She hadn’t thought that the South Sect would also play such a hand.

The battle between these two trump cards was indeed much more exciting than those from earlier.

Although Wen Ziqi was gentle and refined, and even blushed when she talked, she wasn’t the least bit ambiguous and perfunctory when she entered battle conditions. Her advances and retreats were measured, and she attacked and defended. She actually had quite the authoritative air.

Except, disciple Lu Boyu was patently a character that the South Sect had cultivated with emphasis. No matter what Wen Ziqi did, he could firmly repress Wen Ziqi.

And, with his combat attitude of accomplishing a task with ease, he obviously was holding his strength back.

Jiang Chen shook his head lightly and privately flicked a glance at the South Sect Sectmaster Shen Rong. A sly old fox was the master at machination and maneuver. It looked like the North Sect would still be unable to win for the next ten years.

Just as the thought flashed through Jiang Chen's mind, Lu Boyu lightly exhaled forcefully and snatched out softly with his hand, grabbing Wen Ziqi's trailing sleeve and brought it for a sniff in front of his nose. "Mm, national beauty and a heavenly fragrance - great commendation, great commendation!"

Wen Ziqi was the epitome of awkwardness as she could neither advance nor retreat in that moment. Her eyes red, tears were already rolling in her eyes.

North Sect Madame Jade slammed her hand down on the table and rose, speaking angrily to Shen Rong of the South Sect. "Shen Rong, are your disciples just as wicked and philandering as you?"

Shen Rong laughed heartily and lightly rubbed his sideburns. "Junior sister Jade, what's the harm in the young making harmless jokes?"

Madame Jade was so infuriated that her alluring body trembled slightly and her pink face was suffused red with anger. She had labored over ten years of preparations but was still one step short in the end. It was easy to imagine the bout of depression she felt.

Lu Boyu cupped his hands at Wen Ziqi, "Junior sister Wen, your foolish brother had no other intention and was purely jesting with you, that was all."

Tears rolling in her eyes, Wen Ziqi lightly stomped her foot and ran to Madame Jade, starting to cry out of her aggrievement.

"What are you crying for?" Madame Jade was similarly depressed and she lectured, "Your skills were not as good as others, so just go back and train well. How will you bear responsibility for great matters in the future if you only know to shed tears when you run into anything?"

As the victor, Shen Rong didn't take the advantage to add insult to injury. Rather, he walked in front of Madame Jade and cupped his hands, "Junior sister, the stroke of a brush does not create two Star Argus Palaces. Although you and I are of the North and South Sects, the god of destiny has made fools of people. I have always had a noble ambition during my stewardship of the

Star Argus Palace, and that is to merge our North and South Sect and recover the glorious days of yesteryear, strengthening our Star Argus Palace's reputation, allowing our Palace to become a first rate sect in all of the Eastern Kingdom."

"Pretentious hypocrite." Madame Jade wasn't in a good mood.

"Junior sister, your foolish brother was contemplating in the depths of the mountains a while ago and unintentionally discovered a hidden spot of the sect. It may touch upon the heritage of the founder of our Star Argus Palace. Your foolish brother finds it difficult to do so much single handedly, and would like to invite junior sister to return to the mountain and discuss a strategy together." Shen Rong's posture was quite low.

"Secret spot of the sect? Founder of the sect?" Madame Jade's refined brows lifted slightly.

"Junior sister, you and I are of the same sect and same origin. Why the need to separate yours from mine on such an important matter? If this matter can facilitate the merging of the two sects, in the future, wouldn't you and I have rendered a great service to the sect?" Shen Rong's tone was exceedingly sincere.

Madame Jade mused in deep contemplation as she felt a bit of dilemma. If Shen Rong's attitude had been haughty, Madame Jade would have surely left with a flourish of her sleeves.

But on the contrary, Shen Rong had humbled himself and every word he spoke was from the basis of the righteous cause for the sect. This tempted Madame Jade a bit.

"Junior sister, there are many people here. Why don't you and I first discuss this in the sect's secret room? I have a few clues that just so happen to need to be discussed with junior sister."

Madame Jade hesitated for a bit and finally nodded. "Shen Rong, if you truly have the intention to help the sect merge as one, then I, Madame Jade, am not a heartless person."

Shen Rong was overjoyed, "Junior sister's magnanimity is the blessing of our sect. This way please."

He immediately gave orders to Lu Boyu, "Boyu, you look after the assorted honored guests. I have matters to discuss with my junior sister."

"Yes."

Shen Rong expressed his apologies to the guests and moved to the internal areas of the Star Argus Sect along with Madame Jade.

Jiang Chen sat in his seat, rather baffled. A competition had ended just like that, but he had gathered no clues at all.

Instinct told him that there was definitely something out of the ordinary at this decennial event. Yet, he couldn't find any traces of it, no matter how he observed.

"Just where did it go wrong?" The guests were already dispersing in twos and threes. Some intended to leave, while others were preparing to return to their quarters and leave after supping at the Star Argus Palace's banquet.

Jiang Chen was helpless and without a strategy at that moment, as he sank into an impasse.

"Did I really make this trip for nothing?" Jiang Chen was unwilling to concede defeat. He felt sure that he had missed some fine details.

After training "Boulder's Heart", he was confident that his intuition was much stronger than that of ordinary folks.

At this moment, another disciple walked out from within the inner doors and spoke to the six or seven female disciples left behind, of whom included Wen Ziqi. "Junior sisters, in accordance with the master's junior's orders, I invite my fellow junior sisters to go and pay our respects to the sect's founding master."

Upon hearing that it was their master's orders and that it had to do with paying respects to the founding master, Wen Ziqi naturally didn't decline and followed the disciple away.

Gazing at the messenger disciple, Jiang Chen's emotions bafflingly palpated a bit.

“Haven’t I met this person?” Jiang Chen went over the experiences of the past few days in his mind, but couldn’t find any memories with regards to this person.

But, when this disciple had arrived just now, his mental strength had detected a strand of a familiar feeling.

“Who was that person?” Jiang Chen’s thoughts flickered and he walked towards Lu Boyu. “Brother Lu.”

Lu Boyu took in Jiang Chen’s appearance as a wandering practitioner and smiled faintly, “What instructions does this honored guest have?”

“Brother Lu, the disciple that came by with a message just now, who is he in the Star Argus Palace?”

“Oh, that was one of master’s honorary disciples. I can’t remember his name. What, do you know him?”

Jiang Chen shook his head. “Just curious.”

An honorary disciple, obviously someone with no particular reputation, yet, he’d given Jiang Chen a familiar feeling. Jiang Chen instinctively followed them outside.

But, when he chased out after them, there were no traces of those people outside.

The most peculiar thing was that the female disciples should’ve had a particular body scent. But at this moment, a strange smell permeated the air, making it impossible to discern the scent of the female disciples.

“No, this isn’t right.” Jiang Chen immediately employed God’s Eye to the extreme and looked around his surroundings, but still came up empty handed.

It was as if that honorary disciple had vanished into thin air with those female disciples.

Jiang Chen found a South Sect disciple and asked him where the temple of the founding master was. When he swiftly hurried there, the locks were hung upon the doors to the temple. There were obviously no rites of worship to the founding master.

“Indeed, something’s wrong with that honorary disciple!” Jiang Chen calmed down and went over the entire matter again. Suddenly, the South Sect Sectmaster Shen Rong’s sideburns floated in Jiang Chen’s mind.

“Hmm? Shen Rong! Right! I’d actually detected Shen Rong’s presence on that messenger disciple just now. Although that person consciously concealed his presence, a few minute movements and subconscious habits were unable to escape from my God’s Eye’s notice!”

“Is something amiss with this Shen Rong?” Jiang Chen hesitated no longer when his thoughts arrived at this point, and he deployed God’s Eye, Ear of the Zephyr, and Boulder’s Heart to their utmost.

Chapter 60: The Splendor of Spring and Killing Intent

Once he had deployed all three abilities to their utmost, he finally found a tiny sliver of a clue in a clump of shrubbery. This clump of shrubbery was slightly different from the ones in front of it.

This shrubbery all vaguely leaned in the same direction. It was obvious that something had passed by here and caused this bit of change.

With The God’s Eye careful discerning ability, Jiang Chen finally found a few footprints in the surrounding grass - so faint that they could barely be detected.

These footprints were concealed very well. Jiang Chen quested all along the way and followed them to a sea of bamboo. Jiang Chen’s body was like an ape’s as he swung through the sea of bamboo, continuously hanging onto this clue and not letting go.

Finally, after half an hour, Jiang Chen appeared in front of an entrance to a secret underground chamber, deep within the sea of bamboo.

Jiang Chen took out one Layered Feather Throwing Dagger, and surreptitiously followed the course of the underground chamber.

There was actually a world of its own the further he went into the secret chamber. The entrance was small, but a vast expanse came into view after threading through a long hallway.

What Jiang Chen had wholly unanticipated was that this vast expanse was actually an underground palace. The palace wasn't large, but all the furnishings that should've been there were all present.

A large jade bed was installed at the end of the palace.

But an even more astounding scene was present on the jade bed.

Madame Jade was presently naked and had been placed in the center of the jade bed. There wasn't a shred of clothing on her body, and all of her places of importance were on full display.

The six female disciples of the North Sect were placed on both sides, three on each side. The three on the left had also been similarly stripped with not a scrap left on their bodies.

The silk robes of the three girls on the right had been partially unfastened. Although they hadn't been completely unrobed, important places disappeared and reappeared like smoke. Including Wen Ziqi, all of them bore expressions of fright and horror as they looked at the person standing at the head of the bed.

That person was that honorary disciple who had been the messenger.

Jiang Chen did not rush to reveal himself. Separated by such a distance, the honorary disciple hadn't discovered him either.

"Tsk tsk, it is indeed the greater the risk, the greater the reward. Haha, the old and young of the North Sect of the Star Argus Palace have all been captured in one net by me. Ah, this is excellent indeed!"

The person's voice carried a few tones of abnormal betwitchingness. A pair of evil eyes swept over the tempting bodies as he emitted a low roar like that of a beast's.

These North Sect girls were all martial dao practitioners, each with lithe and graceful figures. Particularly Madame Jade - her figure was even more superior compared to those of the female disciples.

If these female disciples were mostly budding flowers, then Madame Jade was a blossomed fresh flower full of the amorous feelings of a young married woman.

“Should I eat the old one first or taste the young one first?”

The person smiled evilly, but his gaze stopped on Wen Ziqi. “This lass is genteel and refined, and blushes even when she speaks. She must have a particularly distinctive flavor when tasted. She’s the one.”

The person bent down as he spoke and began to undo Wen Ziqi’s clothes.

Wen Ziqi’s eyes displayed a desperate, horrified fear as her tears rolled down like beads.

Jiang Chen knew that it would be rather unkind if he continued watching like this.

Coughing lightly, he walked out from the shadows and said with a trace of a smile, “Brother, you know how to enjoy amorous happenings alright. How could you relish such wonderful things by yourself?”

The person was as if struck by lightning and his body suddenly dashed away, landing in a corner. His hand had already grabbed the hilt of a short sword as his sinister eyes pierced towards Jiang Chen.

“Who are you?”

Jiang Chen laughed faintly. “Are you Shen Rong? Or Shen Rong’s honorary disciple?”

The person laughed heartily. “Shen Rong? Honorary disciple? Haha, they’re but bodies I use when I hunt and pluck flowers. If you want to find them, you can only go to the netherworld.”

“This is to say that you’ve already killed the Star Argus Palace’s South Sect’s Sectmaster Shen Rong? You were disguised as Shen Rong from the very beginning?” Jiang Chen understood everything all at once.

Shen Rong and that honorary disciple who had carried the message were actually all the same person, and that was the person standing in front of him. It was more than likely that this person was that Lotus Harvester.

“Haha, just who are you? Don’t you think that you’re asking too many questions?” The person’s tone was dark and cold as his eyes locked onto

Jiang Chen, seeming to want to seal off all avenues of retreat with his gaze alone.

“Lotus Harvester, you’ve got some nerve in hunting and plucking flowers in a sect’s sphere of influence.” Jiang Chen snorted coldly.

A sliver of surprise flashed through the person’s gaze. “You know me? Huh. Are you also from those interfering busybodies at the Six Panel Door? Trying to enforce justice on behalf of heaven?”

“You’re correct.” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

“Blockhead. Fool.” A trace of an odd smile suddenly appeared on the Lotus Harvester’s face. “If I haven’t met a thousand people trying to carry out justice on behalf of heaven, I’ve met at least eight hundred. All these people are now sleeping soundly in the netherworld, you’re the next one.”

“You’re quite confident.” Jiang Chen also smiled.

“Why wouldn’t I be confident towards someone who’s already half dead? Do you know why these women are lying here without being able to move at all? I didn’t seal their acupoints.” The Lotus Harvester smiled leisurely.

“What? You mean, the... the smoke from the candles are poisoned?” Jiang Chen’s face changed drastically.

“At least you’re not a complete idiot. You should die, must die, for disturbing my sexual pleasure. Give me your head in apology!”

The Lotus Harvester suddenly moved and his figure dashed forward like a ghost or a goblin.

It was said that the Lotus Harvester’s qinggong was extraordinary, and his movements indeed lived up to its reputation. The short blade in his hand turned into a flash of cold light as it chopped towards Jiang Chen’s neck.

Jiang Chen’s body wavered and tottered, as if he might fall down at any moment.

To the Lotus Harvester, this looked like the struggles of its prey and it further stimulated his wildness.

“Die!” The Lotus Harvester waved his blade and stabbed downwards.

The anticipated scene did not occur.

The short sword didn't land in a chop on the neck. More accurately speaking, the short sword chopped empty air.

That wavering and tottering opponent suddenly vanished where he stood.

"Ah, not good!" The Lotus Harvester's reaction was quick as he abruptly turned his body, sweeping his short sword out in the space behind him.

At this moment, a flash of cold light came from an unknown location. It was like it didn't need to follow the rules of space as it instantaneously shot to his throat.

A flying dagger!

A perfect angle, a perfect hit.

Jiang Chen's Layered Feather Throwing Dagger was as thin as a feather as it melted into the thin air. It cleaved space apart as it flew into the Lotus Harvester's throat.

The Lotus Harvester clutched his throat in a death grip as his eyes bugged violently like a dead fish's. He stared at Jiang Chen with a face full of incredulity.

He had never thought that he would perish in such a place like this.

He didn't understand. Why was the other fine after falling victim to the poison in the candle smoke? Why had the other been able to find this place and easily, thoroughly understand his identity?

But, the Lotus Harvester would have no chance to find the answers to all these in this lifetime.

How would he have known that for a great master of alchemy who had occupied all the various planes such as Jiang Chen in his past life, the poison methods of him, the Lotus Harvester, was akin to child's play.

Jiang Chen walked up and relieved the Lotus Harvester's body of its head with a light stroke of a blade. He enveloped it in a cloth bag at his waist with a smooth motion and rolled the Lotus Harvester's head inside.

He picked up the Lotus Harvester's short blade as well, and searched out a few other things from the Lotus Harvester's body.

According to the requirements of the mission, the head of the Lotus Harvester was required for inspection after killing the Lotus Harvester, and he also needed to obtain some sort of token from the Lotus Harvester. This short sword was naturally a type of token.

Jiang Chen rolled all the random things on the Lotus Harvester's body into a cloth bag, and hung it on his waist in a fluid motion.

Walking to the front of the big bed, the seven females from the North Sect were all staring with wide eyes. Their expressions were both awkward and full of the desire to be saved.

Jiang Chen had seen countless women in his past life, and naturally wouldn't lose his composure in such a scene with naked bodies lying all around. His gaze sweeping past all the ladies, Jiang Chen shoved a pill into Wen Ziqi's mouth.

"Swallow it."

Wen Ziqi's limpid eyes blinked. There were still traces of tears hanging on her long eyelashes, but she swallowed the pill obediently.

This pill was the antidote to those substances that would numb the nerves.

Jiang Chen had fully prepared these basic equipment the last time he'd visited the Hall of Healing.

Pills produced by the Hall of Healing would naturally not be an ordinary product.

A moment after Wen Ziqi had taken the pill, her hands and feet regained some of their movement. She struggled to sit up, and her hands subconsciously moved to put her clothes on.

Except, the pill had just taken effect and she didn't have enough strength in her hands. With a shake of her hands, the robe slipped down and ended up revealing, in detail, the splendor of spring that was her chest.

A pair of jade peaks as adorable as doves fell right into Jiang Chen's view.

What a beautiful sight. Jiang Chen's heart also lurched slightly as he turned around and didn't stare continuously instead.

Wen Ziqi's elegant face had already blushed to the back of her ears at this time. It was a good thing that Jiang Chen had turned his back so that she didn't continue to wallow in awkwardness.

She hastily wrapped her clothes around herself and said lowly, "It's alright now."

Jiang Chen turned around and placed a bottle of pills in front of Wen Ziqi. "Give these to your master and your fellow sisters. You've fallen victim to the Lotus Harvester's schemes. It was great fortune amongst unfortuitous circumstances that you were unsullied."

"He... he was the Lotus Harvester?" Wen Ziqi's face turned pale with fear when she heard the Lotus Harvester's infamous name. Her heart pounded furiously in her fright.

Madame Jade was the first to recover her movement ability after taking the pill.

She had been touched by the Lotus Harvester earlier and the flush of intimacy had yet to fully disperse from her face. There were still traces of lustful desire fading in and out in her charming eyes.

"What is the young hero's name? Little girl here thanks you for saving my life." Madame Jade's tone was young and ignorant, in stark contrast to her stern manner as cold as ice and frost earlier.

Jiang Chen's thoughts perked. Judging from this tone, he knew that the Lotus Harvester had probably employed some methods on Madame Jade, and her desire had not yet dissipated.

He smiled wryly. "I am a nameless nobody, my name is not worth mentioning. Since you are fine now, I shall take my leave."

Madame Jade sighed lowly and spoke bitterly, "Young hero, you've seen all there is to see from both young and old from the North Sect of the Star Argus Palace. What a philanderer. If you leave just like this, I'm an old woman and thus afraid of nothing. But who will prove the innocence of these girls in the future?"

Jiang Chen rubbed his nose. "I think this is a bit of an exaggeration?"

Madame Jade smiled in a gently and lovely way, "Who was it just now who was enchanted by my chest and the area between my legs just now?"

Jiang Chen felt greatly depressed and aggrieved. He admitted that his eyes had stayed on Madame Jade's body for a few seconds just now. That was because her young woman's body was the most special, the most curvaceous.

But it hadn't been as exaggerated as she said. Enchanted by her, now what the heck was that?

"Madame, although I am young, I know of the strict rules of conduct between men and women. I absolutely will not speak even half a word of what has happened today after I leave. If I violate my words, then may I die from ten thousand arrows piercing my heart."

"You... you don't need to swear such a blood oath." Wen Ziqi's face flushed red again as she hastily spoke up, and then added another sentence. "We all believe you, you're an upright gentleman with strict morals."

Wen Ziqi thought of the awkward scene just now. The scenery of her chest hadn't originally been displayed, but her own hands had failed and allowed a thorough look for the other.

When she thought of this scene, Wen Ziqi felt uncontrollable embarrassment.

Jiang Chen nodded his head lightly and took in a deep breath. He knew that it was not advisable to remain in this place for long. If he lingered any longer, and Madame Jade tried seducing him every now and then, he may actually fail to hold his position.

After all, a colorful scene littered with naked, jade bodies, and exuding fragrances such as this one, wasn't one that any male could easily defend against.

Seeing that Jiang Chen could resume a clear and bright heart under such a short time frame and walk towards the outside, Madame Jade also privately admired him. How could an ordinary young man have controlled himself under these circumstances?

“Young hero, I may not have enough face as an old woman, but can I ask for your honored name on behalf of my pathetic disciple?”

Madame Jade was a quick witted person and knew that Jiang Chen was at least somewhat kindly disposed towards her disciple Wen Ziqi, given that he had given her the antidote first.

Jiang Chen’s body halted slightly and he responded faintly, “I am Jiang Chen of the Jiang Han territory, here to execute the Lotus Harvester by royal order. Everyone, we shall meet again some day!”

He disappeared from where he stood with a point of his toe, like a wild goose flying to the unseen world, after he had spoken.