

CULTIVATION SYSTEM: STRONGER WITH AGE

Chapter 21 - 20 Why I Have Never Encountered a Bottleneck

Four days later, Lin Xuankong was beside the table outside the wooden building. He had just finished his first bowl of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup for the day and let out a burp. His nose filled with the scent of ginseng, reishi, and other medicinal materials...

Lin Xuankong sniffed. *This overwhelming medicinal scent is the smell of extravagance!*

A few days ago, he had bought over a dozen sets of medicinal ingredients in one go. Now he drank three bowls of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup every day, all to accumulate a large amount of Qi Blood so he could easily activate the Twin Vine Demon Pearl in the future!

There was no way I could have been this extravagant before dealing with Wang Po and Xuu Zhongxiong. Three bowls a day cost over eight taels of silver, nearly his entire income from selling flatcakes for a year! Having money lets you be this unrestrained!

Sensing the ever-increasing Qi Blood within his Life Plate and thinking about the longer activation time of the Demon Pearl, a sense of satisfaction gradually rose in his heart.

Setting down the herbal bowl, he pondered over the events of the past few days.

The battle between the Black Tiger Gang and the Yin Talisman Sect had long ended. That night, both sides suffered heavy casualties, and it wasn't until the Great Marsh Prefecture officials' mediation that they ceased fighting.

The territories were re-divided. Lucrative areas like Lishui Street, Qingshui Street, West Third Street, and Shuinan Street now belonged to the Black Tiger Gang. Poorer areas such as Wutong Village, Cow and Horse Street, Yangchang Street, and Mule Street were assigned to the Yin Talisman Sect. The handover was complete!

Wutong Village being assigned to the Yin Talisman Sect was good news for Lin Xuankong. At least he wouldn't encounter any Black Tiger Gang scoundrels when going out.

However, according to the news brought by Little Hu, Boss Zhang Wu did not die in the battle. Not only did Zhang Wu survive the battle, but he also broke through a bottleneck that had hindered him for two years. After being stuck at the Late Stage of the First Layer for two years, Zhang Wu had finally advanced to Perfection. It was estimated he would soon break through to the Early Stage of the Second Layer!

Because of his battle achievements and breakthrough, Zhang Wu had leaped from a Leader to the Deputy Steward of the Black Tiger Gang Great Marsh Hall!

Thinking of this, Lin Xuankong glanced at his own Life Plate.

[Realm: Transcendence First Layer Perfection]

[Transcendent Qi Blood: 688/100,000]

[Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Initial Glimpse 79/80]

Zhang Wu was stuck at the Late Stage of the First Layer for two years before breaking through the bottleneck to reach Perfection. It took me only four days to advance from the Late Stage of the First Layer to Perfection. I estimate that by this morning, I can break through to the Early Stage of the Second Layer... It's hard to imagine what kind of bottleneck Zhang Wu encountered. Stuck somewhere unable to progress? Stuck somewhere unable to break through? Why have I never encountered such a bottleneck?

Forget it, bottleneck or not, as long as I focus on cultivation for a few more days and my strength far surpasses Zhang Wu's, I won't need to worry about this so-called Deputy Steward of the Black Tiger Gang. By then, Zhang Wu will have to worry about his own safety!

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

The sound of knocking on the door rang out, and Little Hu's voice followed, "Elder Lin, it's me!"

Lin Xuankong opened the door and welcomed Little Hu in. "What's up? Any new news today?"

Little Hu excitedly replied, "Of course there's new news! It's already spreading outside. People are saying that the reason the Black Tiger Gang and the Yin Talisman Sect fought so fiercely a few days ago—to the point of spilling brains—is because a very powerful Conical Hat Strange Guest killed Wang Po and Xuu Zhongxiong! Now everyone on the streets is talking about how powerful this Conical Hat Strange Guest is. Some say that on that night, the wealthy merchants and gentry of the Four Streets and Thirty Lanes were so scared they wet their pants! Some say that the Conical Hat Strange Guest waved their hand, causing a rain of stones that collapsed half of the Guangju Pavilion! And others quietly speculate that the Conical Hat Strange Guest isn't even afraid of the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, suggesting they must be a truly terrifying Martial Cultivator of the Transcendence Third or Fourth Layer! Hahaha, the rumors are wild!"

Lin Xuankong fell silent. *It's a bit embarrassing to hear people boast about me right to my face!*

Little Hu continued, "And there's another thing. It's said that the Black Tiger Gang and the Spirit Snake Gang obtained exclusive rights to transport and sell various medicinal materials under the Great Marsh Government's jurisdiction! Supposedly, aside from Martial Cultivators from the Black Tiger Gang, Spirit

Snake Gang, Guo Family, and Feng Family, it's becoming difficult for others to buy cultivation materials!"

Lin Xuankong frowned. *The Black Tiger Gang controls the medicinal materials of Great Marsh Prefecture?*

"Is this information true?" he asked Little Hu.

Little Hu nodded. "When I was coming over, I ran into some Yin Talisman Sect Daoists discussing it. Those Daoists from the Yin Talisman Sect seemed very indignant, so it must be true!"

Lin Xuankong frowned deeply. Luckily, he had bought plenty of materials for the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup in advance. If he used them sparingly, they could last another ten days or so. If Little Hu's news was true, this would be a significant blow to the Yin Talisman Sect. For a Loose Cultivator like him, it was like suffering collateral damage!

If those scoundrels from the Black Tiger Gang act this way, it will be troublesome for me to accumulate large amounts of Qi Blood and cultivate smoothly!

Lin Xuankong pondered for a moment but found no immediate solution. So he frowned and said, "Alright, let's put that aside. I heard the Yin Talisman Sect is recruiting disciples?"

Little Hu became interested when he heard Lin mention the recruitment, and he smiled. "The Great Marsh Hall of the Yin Talisman Sect suffered many casualties, so they are specifically recruiting disciples under sixteen years of age. It was said that youths with good physiques could join immediately without paying any silver. This was the only sect in Great Marsh Prefecture that didn't charge silver for entry—a truly groundbreaking event! Many of us from Wutong Village, including myself, have signed up. In five days, we'll go to the Yin Talisman Sect's Cow and Horse Street Hall for the physical test!"

Lin Xuankong nodded and took out a ten-tael silver ingot from his pocket. "Here are ten taels of silver. Eat and drink well these few days, and you'll perform better in the test!"

Little Hu stared at the shiny ten taels of silver in surprise, then quickly shook his head. "Elder Lin, I... I can't take this much silver!"

Little Hu is the person I'm closest to, aside from my wife. Since he wants to join the Yin Talisman Sect, I definitely have to help him!

Lin Xuankong frowned and said, "Take it quickly. You can pay me back when you have money in the future!"

"Elder Lin!" Li Xiaohu stood stunned for a moment, then silently accepted the silver, his eyes gradually becoming moist. He used his dirty sleeve to wipe his

eyes. "Elder Lin, if I have money in the future, I will definitely repay you three thousand taels, thirty thousand taels!"

"Really? Then I'll lend you ten more taels!"

Little Hu burst out laughing, but his eyes were full of determination.

「After Little Hu left,」

Lin Xuankong walked towards the backyard, thinking to himself: *The Yin Talisman Sect is widely recruiting disciples, with extremely strict conditions: one must be under sixteen! Although there is such a restriction, if I were to display my Transcendence Realm strength, I could definitely join the Yin Talisman Sect easily and get the opportunity to train in the Yin Talisman Thunder! However, this matter doesn't need to be rushed. The Spiritual Crane Finger, which wins with speed, is no less lethal than the Yin Talisman Thunder of the Yin Talisman Sect! The most crucial part is that the mystical and marvelous life-extending effect of the Pine Crane Longevity Technique is something the Yin Talisman Thunder and the Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw of Martial Dao cannot possess! As for the medicinal herbs... After finishing today's cultivation, I'll go out and see. If the news is true, then I'll have to think of other ways!*

At this thought, Lin Xuankong no longer let his mind wander. He moved his body into the Cangsong Posture and began to cultivate.

His Cangsong Posture was now extremely proficient. His movements were identical to the stance the Young Lady had once demonstrated, without the slightest error!

Nearly an hour later, Lin Xuankong, who was meditating and circulating his Qi Blood, suddenly felt his Heart Spirit stir. He clearly sensed the Pine Qi Blood within his body becoming increasingly refined. This highly refined Qi Blood circulated along his arms and hands, completing his Metamorphosis from Perfection of the First Layer to the Early Stage of the Second Layer...

After nearly two incense sticks of time, Lin Xuankong suddenly opened his eyes and looked at his arms. He saw that the skin on his arms and hands had formed a layer of grayish-white old skin and flakes, like a snake shedding its skin!

He raised his hand and gently brushed it. A large amount of old skin flakes fell off, revealing much smoother new skin underneath. The new skin was rosy and full, radiating a youthful glow. This was true for his arms, elbows, and the backs of his hands!

When Lin Xuankong brushed off all the old skin flakes, he found that the wrinkled, withered, and aged skin on his arms and palms now resembled that of a man in his thirties. Though not as delicate as the skin of a young woman like Lii Xiaolan, it was full and smooth, showing no signs of old age, as if he had been completely reborn and rejuvenated!

In his joy, Lin Xuankong leaped up, landed next to a large bluestone, activated his Qi Blood, and pointed with a finger.

With a light 'CHISS,' his finger easily pierced the bluestone. After withdrawing it, the new hole in the stone was smooth and bright, without a single crack around it!

This display of power, concentrated to an incredible degree, was indistinguishable from the casual gesture the Young Lady had made back then!

Lin Xuankong: Remaining Lifespan twelve years and three days

Life Plate: [Vigorous in Old Age]

Life Plate's First Talent: [Old and Wise] Age 59, Cultivation Speed increased fiftyfold

Realm: Transcendence Second Layer Early Stage

Transcendent Qi Blood: 686/100,000

Cultivation Techniques: [Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Integration 1/7,500]

[Stone-Throwing Skill: 12/12]

The four large characters of [Vigorous in Old Age] flashed faintly, and the [Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Integration] updated to 1/150.

Lin Xuankong's eyes were full of joy. The Pine Skill advancing to the Realm of Integration had surprisingly added more than nine years to his Lifespan, far exceeding the five or eight years he had initially estimated!

As long as I continue to cultivate, the next realm might add more than ten years, and the realm after that... to what extent will my Lifespan increase?

He looked down at his full palm skin.

The most marvelous part is, the Pine Qi Blood of the Pine Crane Longevity Technique not only extends life but can also rejuvenate my skin, turning it from wrinkled to youthful and full! And this is just the specialized Metamorphosis of the arms at the First Layer of Transcendence! If I reach Perfection of the Second Layer, or Perfection of the Third Layer, how could I not return to my youth! This is really an unexpected joy from cultivating the Pine Crane Longevity Technique. Compared to the Yin Talisman Thunder of the Yin Talisman Sect or the Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw of the Black Tiger Gang, the Pine Crane Longevity Technique taught by the Young Lady is countless times more miraculous!

Thinking of this, he couldn't help but recall the Young Lady who loved to eat chive pastries and sneak up behind people. He took out the folded peony handkerchief from his chest, stroked the stitches, and stood in a daze for a long time.

Since the Young Lady left, he had kept this peony handkerchief in his bosom and never used it again!

Tomorrow, I hope the Young Lady returns safely!

Lin Xuankong sighed, put the peony handkerchief back into his chest, and turned to walk into the wooden building!

Behind him, the dozen or so new buds on the Old Willow Tree had already grown branches and leaves after more than a month, becoming lush and vibrant!

At this moment, a voice suddenly sounded from behind him...

Chapter 22 - 21 This Bewitching Husband

"This time you didn't use my handkerchief to blow your nose. That really touches me!" A crisp, melodious voice rang out.

Lin Xuankong's steps halted, and a look of surprise and delight appeared in his eyes. He quickly turned around and walked a few steps to the Old Willow Tree, staring intently at the bright and beautiful Lii Xiaolan in front of him. "You're back!"

Lii Xiaolan saw his joyous expression and couldn't help but feel touched, a hint of tenderness appearing in her eyes. She blinked her bright eyes and said with a smile, "I always keep my word. I said I'd be back within fifteen days, so how could I not return! Besides, I couldn't eat well while I was away. If it weren't for some unexpected incidents, I would have been back sooner!"

Lin Xuankong laughed. "It's good you're back!"

Lii Xiaolan rubbed her small stomach with her slender, fair hands. "I really want to eat chive pancakes. Ah, I'm starving!"

Lin Xuankong shook his head speechlessly. *What a little foodie!*

「...」

「Outside the wooden building,」

Lin Xuankong placed the braised pig's knuckle, oil-braised prawns, braised pork tenderloin, and chive pancakes he had bought on the table.

Lii Xiaolan was somewhat surprised to see such a luxurious lunch. However, her attention quickly shifted to the chive pancakes. She ate a few, then moved on to the braised pig's knuckle. It wasn't until she started on the oil-braised prawns that this little foodie realized Lin Xuankong hadn't eaten anything and was just watching her from the side!

This is a bit embarrassing... Her face suddenly turned somewhat red. She sneaked a peek at Lin Xuankong and thought to herself: During these days of hunting Demons outside the city, I kept thinking of this guy for no reason. Maybe because he's my husband, married to me with a proper ceremony? Or maybe because, unlike those people at the Huang Mansion, he doesn't go on about the three obediences and four virtues all day! Or perhaps it's because he's always practicing martial arts, looking like a martial arts fanatic...

After thinking for a while, she decided to chat to ease the awkward atmosphere. "When I came back, I ran into the Eldest Young Lady. She said a lot of things happened in the West City during this time. Tell me about it."

Lin Xuankong smiled. "It's not just the West City..."

He then briefly recounted how Ma Xiong had tried to rob and kill him, how Wang Po had troubled Little Hu, and how he himself had advanced to the Second Layer.

"Advanced to the Second Layer?" Lii Xiaolan was so incredulous that her mouth fell open, the prawn she had just put in almost falling out. "You... you said you've advanced to the Second Layer of Transcendence? Your Cultivation Speed..."

The Young Lady has such great Talent; I thought her Cultivation Speed at the First Layer shouldn't be slower than mine. Why is she so surprised? Lin Xuankong was a bit taken aback.

He couldn't help but ask, "What's wrong with my Cultivation Speed?"

Lii Xiaolan paused, her eyes darting around. "Uh, well, your Cultivation Speed is... fine!"

She fidgeted, her little toe tracing patterns on her beautiful embroidered shoes, and continued, "Actually, the Cultivation Speed is fine. But didn't you encounter any bottlenecks when advancing from the First Layer to the Second Layer?"

"What bottleneck? There's a bottleneck advancing from the First Layer to the Second Layer?" Lin Xuankong was puzzled.

Looking at Lin Xuankong's expression, Lii Xiaolan suddenly felt the prawn in her mouth had lost all its flavor!

Listen to him! 'What bottleneck? Is there a bottleneck?' Who doesn't encounter bottlenecks when cultivating the Martial Dao? If there were no bottlenecks, there wouldn't be so many people stuck at a certain Realm for years without any breakthroughs! For example, the Zhang Wu and Wang Po he mentioned—one has been stuck for several years, the other for decades! But my husband... he actually asked me what a bottleneck is! AAAAAH! Seeing that clueless look of a martial arts fanatic on his face, why do I suddenly have the urge to just poke him until he drops dead! This time I went out to hunt Demons mainly because I needed silver taels to buy Cultivation resources. Another reason was that my Cultivation progress had slowed, and I'd hit a bottleneck, so I decided to go out! Fortunately, after a fierce battle with the Demons and a life-and-death experience, I finally broke through the bottleneck and have the chance to improve again... But this prodigy in front of me, not only is his Cultivation Speed shamelessly fast, but he didn't even encounter a bottleneck when advancing from the First Layer to the Second Layer!

"Why aren't you saying anything?" Lin Xuankong asked.

I don't want to talk to you! Lii Xiaolan thought, seething. She furiously ate seven or eight oil-braised prawns to vent her frustration.

But then, thinking about how worried Lin Xuankong must have been these past few days, coupled with the comfort from the oil-braised prawns, she felt a little apologetic. "These days... if I hadn't gone out to hunt Demons, you wouldn't have faced so much danger!"

Lin Xuankong shook his head. "You were just trying to earn more silver taels. But don't take such risks in the future. I got more than three hundred taels of silver from Wang Po and Ma Xiong. That should be enough for a while!"

Hearing this, Lii Xiaolan felt even more dejected. *I worked so hard to injure an Evil Sheep Demon and got an Evil Sheep Horn worth about two hundred silver taels, and I was so happy... But he earned more than three hundred taels of silver just by staying home! Is it true that a horse can't get fat without extra fodder at night, and a person can't get rich without a windfall? Does crime really pay that well?*

Lii Xiaolan pondered for a moment and decided she definitely needed to rethink her money-making strategies for the future!

Soon, Lii Xiaolan declared righteously, "That Zhang Wu actually dared to plot against my husband! I'll go take his life tonight!"

Hearing this, Lin Xuankong shook his head decisively, a cold glint in his eyes. "Zhang Wu made me live in fear for two months and has committed countless evil deeds. How can we let him off so easily by just killing him? He has to suffer in fear for two months as well!"

Lii Xiaolan pondered for a moment. "That works too. Just remember to confiscate all his assets when you deal with him!"

Confiscate his assets? Lin Xuankong couldn't help but look at Lii Xiaolan upon hearing this. Then, they looked at each other and smiled.

Lin Xuankong then said, "Tell me about your trip hunting Demons. Why were you delayed for several days? Did you run into any danger?"

Lii Xiaolan nodded, munching on a prawn as she began her story.

It turned out that because she couldn't borrow the Exorcism Armor, Lii Xiaolan had to find a Low Tier Demon to hunt outside the city.

In Li Yang Town, located on the outskirts, she encountered an Evil Sheep Demon that was terrorizing the townsfolk. After ambushing it for a few days, she prepared to slay the Evil Sheep. The battle initially went smoothly, and she managed to cut off one of its Evil Sheep Horns. Unfortunately, the Evil Sheep was very cunning and escaped using a Demon Technique. That wasn't a major issue, as a single Evil Sheep Horn was still worth about two hundred silver taels.

Unexpectedly, on her way back, she ran into thousands of Demon People controlled by a High-tier Evil Sheep. They trapped her for several days, putting her in grave danger. Fortunately, she was rescued by the Huang Family's Eldest Young Lady, who was leading a team of Huang Family Martial Cultivators.

"The Eldest Young Lady has been very kind to me since I was a child, teaching me martial arts, literacy, and how to be a good person. Without her protection, I

probably would have been... And now she's saved my life again!" Lii Xiaolan said with deep emotion.

Lin Xuankong laughed. "If you get the chance in the future, make sure to repay her kindness!"

Lii Xiaolan nodded. She seemed to recall something, then suddenly frowned and said, "Sister Rongshang has encountered a lot of trouble recently! Lady Huang, that old witch, failed to break through her bottleneck a while ago and suffered severe Primordial Qi damage. Patriarch Huang took the old witch to Liang City for treatment, and it'll probably be several years before they return. Although the Huang Family has many Martial Cultivators, the only one who can hold things together now is Sister Rongshang.

"I heard from Sister Rongshang that the Black Tiger Gang Leader, under instructions from his Prefect cousin, has formed an alliance with the Spirit Snake Gang and the Guo and Feng Families. They've taken over the transportation and sale of medicinal herbs in Great Marsh Prefecture! The Black Tiger Gang and the others have always been at odds with the Huang Family and the Yin Talisman Sect. It looks like the Huang Family and Yin Talisman Sect are going to face even more pressure! Actually, it's not just the Huang Family and Yin Talisman Sect who will suffer. Without medicinal herbs, our Cultivation will also be affected!"

Lin Xuankong frowned upon hearing this. *Little Hu also mentioned this. But these open and secret conflicts involving major gangs and families are far beyond what I can influence right now!*

"Let's not dwell on these troublesome things for now," Lin Xuankong said. "Since you're back, eat your fill and get some good rest!"

Lii Xiaolan clapped the prawn shells off her hands. "I just broke through a bottleneck recently, so of course, I need to focus on Cultivation! There's no time to rest!"

After saying this, she looked at Lin Xuankong. My husband cultivates so quickly. It would be a terrible shame if his progress were delayed due to a shortage of medicinal herbs... The actions of the Black Tiger Gang and Spirit Snake Gang are truly detestable! Also, I need to redouble my efforts in Cultivation. How embarrassing would it be if my husband surpassed me in the future... I, Lii Xiaolan, am naturally beautiful and a prodigious talent! I definitely won't be surpassed by him. Hmph!

Chapter 23 - 22 Conical Hat Strange Guest and the Yin Talisman Sect Heiress

Lii Xiaolan returned to the second floor to quietly cultivate, while Lin Xuankong, having eaten and drunk his fill, walked out of the wooden building.

Although the Black Tiger Gang's monopoly on medicinal herbs was somewhat bothersome, Lin Xuankong's cultivation realm had advanced. This gave him hope of regaining his youth, and his lifespan had greatly increased. Moreover, with his wife back home, he was in a rare mood for a stroll.

This was the first time in over two months he had wandered around without carrying his food stall, and it felt a bit strange.

After exiting his wooden house, he strolled to the entrance of Wutong Village and glanced at the chive pancake stand by the roadside.

After the Yin Talisman Sect exchanged Lishui Street and Cow and Horse Street with the Black Tiger Gang, Old Zhang, who sold chive pancakes, had moved his stand to the Wutong Village entrance on Cow and Horse Street.

Firstly, after the Black Tiger Gang took over Lishui Street, their notorious reputation caused foot traffic to plummet, making business difficult.

Secondly, the Black Tiger Gang's street cleaning fees for the vendors were exorbitantly high. While the Yin Talisman Sect also charged fees, theirs were nearly thirty percent lower.

With the pancake stand relocated here, it was naturally a good thing for Lin Xuankong, as Old Zhang's culinary skills were excellent. Now, enjoying his chive pancakes was much more convenient than when the stall was on Lishui Street.

"Brother Lin!" Old Zhang greeted Lin Xuankong from afar upon seeing him.

Lin Xuankong waved and walked over.

Old Zhang was about to chat with his old patron, but upon seeing Lin Xuankong's raised right hand, he was stunned.

He stared at Lin Xuankong's hand in amazement, then rubbed his eyes vigorously. *Could I have remembered wrong? I remember Brother Lin's hands being covered in wrinkles, like chicken skin. But looking at them now... Brother Lin is around sixty, yet his hands are as plump and smooth as a young man's! Their smoothness is comparable to my daughter-in-law's, and she's only in her twenties...*

Just then, many passersby near the pancake stand suddenly hurried to the sides of the street. Old Zhang looked up, his expression turning serious. Pushing aside his earlier confusion, he hastily moved his pancake stand further to the side.

In the middle of the street, dozens of individuals in Yin Talisman Sect Daoist Robes were escorting a sedan chair, walking along the road.

Passersby and merchants on either side of the street saw these Daoists and respectfully made way.

Some well-dressed young masters and wealthy merchants even cupped their fists, calling out, "Daoist Masters!"

Unlike their encounters with Black Tiger Gang Members, which filled passersby and merchants with fear, most now showed reverence when they saw the Daoists from the Yin Talisman Sect.

After all, the amount of the street cleaning fee directly impacted everyone's livelihood. A thirty percent reduction meant a significantly better life for ordinary folk.

Lin Xuankong also moved to the side of the road with the crowd, then looked at the group of Daoists.

A faint smile touched his lips as he recognized an acquaintance among them.

Among the dozens of Daoists, one stood out: Gu Beicheng, whose life Lin Xuankong had saved at Guangju Pavilion. With three wisps of a long beard and a clean, tidy Daoist Robe, he was guarding the sedan chair.

Gu Beicheng was currently beside the sedan chair, speaking with a pretty Daoist Nun inside.

"Chief Steward Jiang, that's all I know about the Conical Hat Strange Guest. He told me something cryptic, 'Wanderer, do not ask,' and I truly don't even know his name!" Gu Beicheng said with reverence.

The pretty Daoist Nun, addressed as Steward Jiang, frowned faintly at him.)

"Little Cheng, you should at least address me as Junior Sister Jiang. To be unwilling to disclose such a small matter makes you seem rather petty!"

They continued walking into the distance as they spoke.

Lin Xuankong's expression flickered when he heard them discussing the 'Conical Hat Strange Guest,' and he began to follow them.

He was now at the Early Stage of the Second Layer of Transcendence, his hearing vastly superior to that of ordinary people. Though Gu Beicheng and Chief Steward Jiang spoke softly, he could hear them clearly.

After walking for a while, Gu Beicheng sighed, "That Conical Hat Guest indeed saved my life, but I truly do not know him. Besides, the Black Tiger Gang now hates him to the bone, so he likely won't dare show up in Great Marsh Prefecture again!"

The beautiful Chief Steward Jiang spoke, "I've been hearing more rumors about the Conical Hat Strange Guest lately. They say his Concealed Weapon Technique is unparalleled, allowing him to kill as effortlessly as slaughtering chickens. And he's acquired the priceless Twin Vine Demon Pearl! So, I'm incredibly curious about

this Conical Hat Strange Guest! It's surprising you know so little about him... But that phrase, 'Wanderer, do not ask,' is quite amusing. You must have been completely exasperated at the time!"

At this, she turned to look west, her expression growing a little somber.

"If only there were more interesting people like the Conical Hat Guest in this world! Instead, my father assigned me to guard this area, forcing me to constantly watch those disgusting Black Tiger Gang members—it's truly infuriating! Those Black Tiger Gang bastards are vicious, arrogant, and shameless. The sight of any one of them makes me want to slap them to death with a single palm strike!"

Gu Beicheng felt a headache coming on at her words. *This Junior Sister Jiang has a temper like a skyward-pointing chili pepper... Still, what can you do? She's the daughter of our Yin Talisman Sect Leader; a young lady's temperament is to be expected!*

Chief Steward Jiang continued, "By the way, the Black Tiger Gang has likely already locked down medicinal herb sales. What arrangements does our Great Marsh Hall have?"

Gu Beicheng frowned and said, "The sect's medicinal herb plantation at Four-direction City isn't large, but it should suffice for the Stewards' cultivation. Disciples will need to economize and complete tasks to earn their medicinal herbs."

Chief Steward Jiang nodded, "We'll have to be frugal then... Hmph, I swear I'll tear down that Black Tiger Gang Great Marsh Hall someday!"

After speaking, she let down the sedan's curtain, ignoring Gu Beicheng.

But her muttering came from inside the sedan, "If only there were more Conical Hat Strange Guests around to batter the Black Tiger Gang into a frenzied state! Hmm, 'Wanderer, do not ask'... I really want to catch that Conical Hat Strange Guest and see what that old oddball actually looks like!"

Lin Xuankong, secretly following them, touched his face as he heard Chief Steward Jiang muttering.

It was getting late. Ahead lay the Yin Talisman Sect's station on Cow and Horse Street. Lin Xuankong stopped following and turned towards the apothecary shops on Lishui Street.

Upon reaching an apothecary shop, he found it was just as Li Xiaohu, Lii Xiaolan, and Chief Steward Jiang had said: most of the medicinal herbs essential for cultivation had been cleared out. The few remaining items were far from enough to concoct the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup.

Outside one apothecary shop, dozens of Independent Martial Cultivators like Lin Xuankong, unable to buy medicinal herbs, were angrily discussing the Black Tiger Gang's control over the supply.

Lin Xuankong moved closer to listen and soon learned what had happened. Near Great Marsh Prefecture City were three major medicinal herb cultivation grounds. Recently, powerful Demons had occupied two of them. This caused a drastic drop in herb production, making it impossible to meet the demands of Great Marsh Prefecture's many Martial Cultivators. This was one reason the Black Tiger Gang, along with several other gangs and families, had formed an alliance to control the medicinal herbs. With production so severely reduced, competition had naturally become fierce and brutal.

One round-faced Independent Martial Cultivator, visibly frustrated, couldn't help cursing amidst the crowd, "Those damn Black Tiger Gang bastards! They never do anything decent! They're trying to cut off the path for us Loose Cultivators!"

Just then, a group emerged from the street corner. Leading them was a Bearded Martial Cultivator with an imposing aura. Behind him followed dozens of Black Tiger Gang Members, among whom was Zhang Wu, recently promoted to Deputy Steward.

Zhang Wu had become a Deputy Steward, likely commanding two to three hundred underlings, with several Leaders under his authority. Yet, his position in this particular group was surprisingly low, as he trailed at the very back.

The Bearded Martial Cultivator at the head of the group had exceptionally sharp hearing. He caught the round-faced Martial Cultivator's words from over twenty zhang away.

His expression darkened, and he bellowed coldly, "Such audacity! Daring to slander my Black Tiger Gang behind our backs and insult us!"

Before his voice faded, he leaped towards Lin Xuankong and the other Independent Martial Cultivators. This Bearded Martial Cultivator's strength was terrifying. He pounced like a ferocious tiger, covering over twenty zhang in a single bound, creating a WHOOSHING sound as he tore through the air with unmatched momentum!

Chapter 24 - 23: Invulnerable and Mysterious Yin Talisman Thunder

In the crowd, Lin Xuankong's expression changed slightly. *Am I going to suffer for being in the wrong place at the wrong time? I'm just listening to some gossip...*

The round-faced Martial Cultivator who insulted the Black Tiger Gang immediately ran. He was obviously a master at the First Layer Perfection or Second Layer Early Stage, his speed incredibly fast!

Unfortunately, though his speed was like a fleeing rabbit, the Bearded Martial Cultivator was as fast as a flying hawk.

Within half a breath, the Bearded Martial Cultivator blocked the round-faced Loose Cultivator's path.

The round-faced Loose Cultivator's eyes turned vicious. He drew the steel saber from his waist and suddenly slashed at the Bearded Martial Cultivator's neck. The steel saber in his hand gleamed coldly, making a WHIZZING noise as it cut through the air!

However, the Bearded Martial Cultivator merely snorted coldly, neither dodging nor evading, allowing the steel saber to strike his neck.

His Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw then pierced directly into the round-faced Loose Cultivator's head, stabbing right through the man's temple.

The round-faced Loose Cultivator died on the spot. The Bearded Martial Cultivator rubbed his unwounded neck and looked at the dozens of other Loose Cultivators.

The faces of dozens of Independent Martial Cultivators changed instantly. Although their eyes flickered, not a single one dared to move rashly, nor did anyone dare to make a sound. They even held their breaths, afraid of attracting attention and sharing the round-faced Loose Cultivator's fate.

Lin Xuankong stood in the corner, frowning. *The round-faced Loose Cultivator who just died was rather strong, probably at the Second Layer Early Stage or First Layer Perfection, like myself. Yet such strength wasn't even close to being a match for the Bearded Martial Cultivator! The round-faced Loose Cultivator slashed with all his might at the Bearded Martial Cultivator's neck, but it didn't leave a scratch! If that slash landed on my own neck, my head might fly twenty feet away! What Realm is*

this Bearded Martial Cultivator in? If I were to fight the Bearded Martial Cultivator, I could use the Demon Vine to control him, thereby ensuring my survival! But his defense is terrifying. Even if I could control him, the Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts wouldn't be able to wound him; at most, they'd just pelt him with a face full of stone shards!

As Lin Xuankong was feeling astonished and doubtful, the Bearded Martial Cultivator from the Black Tiger Gang sneered contemptuously at the numerous Independent Martial Cultivators before leading his group away. Zhang Wu, who walked at the end of the line, glanced coldly at Lin Xuankong.

「...」

「The next morning, in the wooden building's backyard.」

Lin Xuankong held a Hundred-refined Steel Saber in his hand, hesitantly looking at Lii Xiaolan's fair and slender neck. "Really slash your neck?"

Lii Xiaolan nodded. "Yes, slash my neck with all your might, and after slashing, drag the Hundred-refined Steel Saber hard!"

Lin Xuankong was somewhat conflicted. "Can I slash your ankle instead?"

Lii Xiaolan was speechless.

"This kind of Hundred-refined Steel Saber can't hurt a Cultivator at the Second Layer Late Stage. The Bearded Martial Cultivator you encountered yesterday must be at least Second Layer Late Stage!

"For a Second Layer Transcendent, the body is refined, strengthening the internal organs and making one virtually immune to illness, with incredible endurance. Most importantly, it enhances the consolidation of Qi Blood and boosts defense. Once they reach the Second Layer Late Stage, they become Invulnerable!

"With this kind of defense, even if two Second Layer Late Stage Cultivators fight, you need weapons made of special materials to injure each other if their Qi Blood is ample!"

After saying that, Lii Xiaolan pointed to her delicate neck. "Aim here! I'm now activating my Second Layer Late Stage Qi Blood."

Lin Xuankong gritted his teeth. "I'd rather slash your chest... no, your shoulder!" He warned Lii Xiaolan and then slashed down with the Hundred-refined Steel Saber.

With a crisp CLANG,

the Hundred-refined Steel Saber struck Lii Xiaolan's shoulder.

Lii Xiaolan frowned at the tear in her green dress. "I told you to slash my neck so my clothes wouldn't get damaged. Don't you know clothes cost money?"

Lin Xuankong awkwardly stared at the exposed skin on her shoulder, where the Hundred-refined Steel Saber had left a faint white mark. In the blink of an eye, the mark vanished, leaving her skin unblemished!

This... truly is being Invulnerable! No wonder the Young Lady could easily crush a Hundred-refined Steel Saber into an iron ball! The Second Layer Late Stage of Transcendence has such terrifying, Demon-like defense! No wonder in factions like the Black Tiger Gang and Yin Talisman Sect, esteemed positions like Steward are only held by Martial Cultivators who have reached the Second Layer. Once a Martial Cultivator breaks through the bottleneck into the Second Layer, they have the chance to cultivate to the Second Layer Late Stage. A Second Layer Late Stage Martial Cultivator facing a First Layer Martial Cultivator is an absolute crushing! They can stand still and let you slash them with a saber, and you can't even break their defense. How are you supposed to fight that?!

At this thought, Lin Xuankong's heart filled with anticipation.

I am now at the Second Layer Early Stage and possess the [Vigorous in Old Age] Life Plate. Reaching such an Invulnerable state, this terrifying defense, shouldn't take long!

Lii Xiaolan frowned, touching the skin on her shoulder. Seeing him standing there, lost in eager thoughts and not looking at her, she couldn't help but roll her eyes. *This guy is truly a Martial Cultivation fanatic... Hmph, just now he even said he wanted to slash my chest!*

She walked towards the wooden building. "You stay at home and cultivate well. I'll visit Sister Rongshang to see if I can spend some silver to buy some ingredients for the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup from her!

"The Black Tiger Gang controls the medicinal ingredients. They will surely become harder to obtain in the future. It's always best to prepare some in advance to feel secure!"

After Lii Xiaolan left,

Lin Xuankong first cultivated the Pine Heart Method once, then, with anticipation in his heart, began practicing the Cangsong Posture.

As his Pine Crane Longevity Technique advanced to the Realm of Integration, he gained an increasing number of new insights into the Cangsong Posture.

Chapter 25 - 23 Invulnerable, Mysterious Yin Talisman Thunder_2

At this moment, while practicing the Cangsong Posture, he would silently reflect upon each movement.

Lin Xuankong was very clear that in Martial Dao cultivation, the master opens the door, but cultivation depends on the individual. If he wanted to walk the Martial Dao path for a long time, besides relying on his Vigorous in Old Age Life Plate, he absolutely needed his own understanding of the Martial Dao!

He savored his new insights, continuously integrating them into his Cangsong Posture practice. Gradually, his Cangsong Posture movements began to carry an exceptionally unique aura.

If Lii Xiaolan's Cangsong Posture was ethereal and graceful, pleasing to the eye, like a Nine Heavens Fairy transformed into a green pine, then the Cangsong Posture Lin Xuankong displayed at this moment was robust and grand, majestic and towering, like an ancient pine that had witnessed the vicissitudes of life and remained unshaken!

With the emergence of this aura, Lin Xuankong suddenly felt his Transcendent Qi Blood gradually condensing during his cultivation...

After more than half an hour, Lin Xuankong stopped his cultivation and then looked at the large characters in his mind:

[Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Integration 4/150]

Seeing that the proficiency of the Pine and Crane Skill had increased by three points, he carefully sensed it and indeed found that his Qi Blood had become much more condensed.

Lin Xuankong couldn't help but clench his fists excitedly. *With my own heartfelt understanding and the assistance of my Vigorous in Old Age Life Plate, my cultivation speed hasn't slowed down at all after entering the Second Layer; it has even accelerated! I haven't even begun practicing the Spiritual Crane Finger, yet the Pine and Crane Skill has already increased by three points!*

That kind of Invulnerable, Demon-hard defensive power is definitely within reach! And most importantly, I don't have to worry about cultivation bottlenecks!

Sitting by the Old Willow Tree and resting for a while, Lin Xuankong entered the wooden building once his stamina had fully recovered.

He glanced at the six portions of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup materials in the corner. His face, originally beaming with joy, suddenly turned slightly grim.

My diligence and Vigorous in Old Age Life Plate allow me to cultivate dozens of times faster. Normally, reaching the Late Stage of the Second Layer should be just

around the corner! But if the medicinal herbs run out, and our Qi Blood can't support it, both my Young Lady's cultivation and mine will be greatly affected. I must find a way to solve the medicinal herb issue...

As he was pondering, he suddenly heard shouts of battle and screams from a distance.

Thinking of his Young Lady who had gone out and hadn't returned, his heart tightened. He quickly headed to the backyard and leaped onto the roof of the wooden building.

Standing on the roof, Lin Xuankong looked into the distance and saw thick smoke rising from a Black Tiger Gang Cultivation Field in the direction of Lishui Street.

A large number of Martial Cultivators were fighting the Black Tiger Gang members, their battle cries echoing continuously.

A clear and melodious voice suddenly came from behind him, "It's the Great Hall Master from Zheng Martial Arts Hall, who is at the Early Stage of the Fourth Layer of Transcendence. He has always had a grudge against the Black Tiger Gang. This time, he took the opportunity to incite more than two hundred Independent Martial Cultivators to attack a Black Tiger Gang hall, which is where they store their medicinal herbs."

Lin Xuankong looked back at the gracefully standing Lii Xiaolan. "Let them fight their battles. As long as you're safe, that's all that matters!"

Lii Xiaolan nodded, then frowned and said, "It's a pity. Looking at the situation, the Black Tiger Gang was clearly prepared. The two hundred or so Loose Cultivators Hall Master Zheng brought with him fell into the Black Tiger Gang's ambush. I estimate they'll all perish there!"

As she spoke, the battle cries from Lishui Street gradually subsided.

Lin Xuankong turned to look and saw several Black Tiger Gang experts chasing and killing the Martial Cultivators escaping from the hall. These Black Tiger Gang experts leaped about with terrifying speed; they were at least Late Stage Second Layer Martial Cultivators. In an instant, the fleeing Independent Martial Cultivators were struck down one by one in the long street!

Lii Xiaolan lifted the herb bag in her hand. "I went to the Huang Family today. Sister Rongshang's situation is also quite difficult. After the medicinal herb supply was cut off, although the Huang Family has some reserves, they have many Martial Cultivators. As the one in charge, she can't possibly keep all the herbs for herself. She gave me these ten portions of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup from her own share!"

"Sister Rongshang said that if the third medicinal herb production site is also occupied by powerful Demons, the situation for Loose Cultivators will become increasingly dire. The Guo Family, Feng Family, Black Tiger Gang, and others won't fare much better!"

"She suggested I join the Spirit Snake Gang or the Yin Talisman Sect. Both the Spirit Snake Gang and the Yin Talisman Sect have medicinal herb planting grounds protected by Grand Arrays. With such backing, it would be a way to secure a future!"

Lin Xuankong frowned upon hearing this. *Huang Rongshang suggesting my Young Lady join the Yin Talisman Sect is understandable, but the Spirit Snake Gang and the Black Tiger Gang are in cahoots!*

He looked at Lii Xiaolan. "Did Miss Huang suggest you join the Spirit Snake Gang?"

Lii Xiaolan frowned. "What else can we do? Once the medicinal herbs in our hands run out, both your cultivation and mine will be delayed! In the current situation, unless Independent Martial Cultivators don't want to improve their strength, what other path is there besides joining a faction?"

"Although the Spirit Snake Gang is allied with the Black Tiger Gang... the Spirit Snake Gang only accepts women, which makes it more suitable for me! Of course, Sister Rongshang is considering my personal future; deep down, she surely doesn't want me to join the Spirit Snake Gang!"

Lin Xuankong shook his head. "Still, it's better not to join the Spirit Snake Gang. Any group that can mix with those scoundrels from the Black Tiger Gang can't be any good!"

If they lead my Young Lady astray, it would be a great loss!

Lii Xiaolan said, "But the Yin Talisman Sect is full of old Daoists. Out of two thousand members, there are only two or three Daoist Nuns. For a woman like me to join the Yin Talisman Sect..."

Lin Xuankong furrowed his brow and pondered.

Chapter 26 - 23 Invulnerable, Mysterious Yin Talisman Thunder_3

Thinking about the Yin Talisman Sect's enigmatic Yin Talisman Thunder, Little Hu's desire to join the sect, and reflecting on what he had seen and heard these past two days, Lin Xuankong couldn't help but secretly make a decision. He said, "How about you stay home and cultivate? I'll join the Yin Talisman Sect, get some medicinal herbs, and we can cultivate together!"

Lii Xiaolan looked at him in surprise. "You're joining the Yin Talisman Sect?"

Lin Xuankong also looked surprised. "Why not?"

Lii Xiaolan's expression froze momentarily upon hearing this. *She suddenly remembered that the husband before her was no longer the old, frail man clinging to life. Her husband possessed an incredible talent: he showed Transcendent Qi Blood in just ten days, advanced to the First Layer of Transcendence in less than thirty days, and reached the Early Stage of the Second Layer of Transcendence in about thirty days, all without encountering any bottlenecks during his cultivation!*

Thinking about this, her eyes sparkled brightly.

"The Martial Dao I'm cultivating is not quite suitable for you. If you join the Yin Talisman Sect and master the profound Yin Talisman Thunder, it would be fantastic! It's said that when that Yin Talisman Thunder Martial Dao is cultivated to the Peak of Perfection, a wave of the hand can unleash the Thousand Divine Thunder Paths, capable of shattering mountains and seas!"

Lin Xuankong was a bit astonished. The power seemed ordinary when he saw Gu Beicheng wield the Yin Talisman Thunder, not even as impressive as the Spiritual Crane Finger! Gu Beicheng could only make Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong's hair stand on end, and against a Second Layer martial cultivator, it would probably not even harm a single hair!

Lin Xuankong asked in bewilderment, "Is it really true? Thousand Divine Thunder Paths, shattering mountains and seas?"

Lii Xiaolan laughed. "I heard it from Sister Rongshang. It's said that the founder of the Yin Talisman Sect thousands of years ago could indeed unleash the Thousand Divine Thunder Paths; nothing could withstand it! But now, the sect has declined considerably. It has transformed from a major sect to a smaller one that even the Black Tiger Gang can challenge. Even the current Sect Leader of the Yin Talisman Sect can't achieve the Thousand Divine Thunder Paths. Moreover, cultivating Yin Talisman Thunder requires exceptional talent, and most people can't even produce lightning!"

Lin Xuankong nodded, while some ambitious thoughts surfaced in his mind. *He had the Life Plate of "Vigorous in Old Age." As long as the Yin Talisman Thunder truly possessed such power, he was confident he could cultivate it at a speed tens of times faster than others! Even if he couldn't achieve the Thousand Divine Thunder Paths, shattering mountains and seas, for the time being, joining the Yin Talisman Sect would provide him with a constant supply of medicinal herbs, solving their immediate crisis. After all, mastering the Thousand Divine Thunder Paths was a long-term goal, but reaching the invulnerable state at the Late Stage of the Second Layer of Transcendence was not a distant dream! As long as he had enough medicinal herbs, he could definitely achieve invulnerability in a short time. By then, someone like Zhang Wu couldn't harm him even if he stood still and let them attack, and he wouldn't need to worry about formidable people like the Bearded Martial Cultivator anymore!*

"It's decided then. I'll go to the branch of the Yin Talisman Sect on Mule Street now!" Lin Xuankong said decisively.

Lii Xiaolan thought for a moment, frowned, and said, "Given the current situation, there are bound to be many Independent Martial Cultivators trying to join the Yin Talisman Sect. If you want a well-paid position like a Steward, the competition will be fierce!"

Lin Xuankong resolutely replied, "Then I'll compete with them!"

Lii Xiaolan's eyes shimmered as she looked at him intently. Suddenly, she smiled. "Alright, like an old horse in the stable with ambition for a thousand miles, I hope you succeed! The most important thing is to be safe. If you can't do it, you still have me!"

Lin Xuankong's eyes gleamed with determination. It had always been his young lady running around for the family; now it was his turn as her husband to take action. This time, in joining the Yin Talisman Sect, he must give it his all! Being at the Early Stage of the Second Layer of Transcendence, becoming a leader among the disciples should be achievable. Who knows if he could even secure a Steward position? This was a rare opportunity, and he couldn't let his foodie young lady look down on him!

Chapter 27 - 24 It Must Be Tough For You Even To Buy Soy Sauce

Just as Lii Xiaolan expected, the Yin Talisman Sect's Great Marsh Hall at the entrance of Mule Street was already crowded with over a hundred martial cultivators dressed in combat gear, each radiating an impressive aura.

In the distance, many spectators had gathered, but these common folk were clearly intimidated by the martial cultivators, not daring to approach and only watching from afar. Lin Xuankong squeezed through the crowd, observing the martial cultivators for a while before walking towards them with a hopeful expression.

"Brother Lin, come quickly!" a voice called from the roadside.

Lin Xuankong turned his head to see Old Zhang, who sold meat pies, on the other side of the street. Old Zhang was quite the shrewd businessman, always setting up shop wherever a crowd gathered!

When Lin Xuankong walked over, Old Zhang whispered, "Brother Lin, those standing over there are fierce martial cultivators planning to join the Yin Talisman Sect. Don't go over there; it'll be trouble if you provoke them!")

Saying this, he glanced at Lin Xuankong's smooth and plump hands, which again reminded him of his own daughter-in-law's hands.

Lin Xuankong smiled, "I'm here to join the Yin Talisman Sect too!"

"What?" Old Zhang was stunned, only to see Lin Xuankong already turning towards the martial cultivators.

What a joke! Brother Lin is seven or eight years older than me; join the Yin Talisman Sect? Joining the Beitian Hall for the elderly might be more fitting! Brother Lin probably couldn't even defeat my own daughter-in-law! Even if my daughter-in-law could join, there's no way he'd make it into the Yin Talisman Sect! Old Zhang watched Lin Xuankong's back with a look of astonishment.

When Lin Xuankong squeezed into the crowd, the martial cultivators watching the announcement at the Yin Talisman Sect's hall were surprised to see an old man pushing through. Their surprise was understandable. Most of these martial cultivators were in their twenties or thirties; even the older ones were under forty. Each exuded a vibrant spirit, with dark hair and robust physiques... Among them, Lin Xuankong stood out with his white hair, nearing sixty!

Lin Xuankong was indifferent to the gazes around him, carefully examining the announcement posted beside the door of the Yin Talisman Sect.

The announcement's general idea was that the Yin Talisman Sect was currently recruiting disciples and talented individuals, welcoming heroes to join. It listed the entry requirements and detailed the benefits for disciples, deputy stewards, and others.

After roughly reading it, Lin Xuankong frowned slightly. According to the Yin Talisman Sect's announcement, to become a disciple, one must pass a talent test.

However, those who had already reached the Transcendence Realm could directly join as disciples!

Nonetheless, Yin Talisman Sect disciples must complete certain sect tasks to receive a small amount of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup herbs, and only after several months could they start cultivating the Yin Talisman Technique... *The benefits for disciples are quite meager!* Lin Xuankong thought to himself.

Looking at the benefits, Yin Talisman Sect disciples could barely gather enough herbs for one portion of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup every two days, even if they completed tasks each time. *That wouldn't even be enough to maintain my own high-speed cultivation, let alone gather herbs for the Young Lady!*

He continued reading. The requirements for deputy stewards were higher, needing to pass a test and compete in martial trials.

However, the benefits were far superior, much better than those for disciples!

External martial cultivators who passed the test and competed in martial trials could become deputy stewards, gaining various privileges and receiving two portions of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup herbs daily. Moreover, upon completing three steward tasks, they could immediately start cultivating the Yin Talisman Thunder, without waiting for months!

Lin Xuankong looked at the hundreds of cultivators around him, noticing many impressive experts among them.

These independent martial cultivators usually keep a low profile but are likely immensely skilled; I can't underestimate them. These people are all driven by the herb shortage to join the Yin Talisman Sect, so the competition for the deputy steward positions will surely be fierce! But I am already at the Early Stage of the Second Layer. To advance to the Late Stage of the Second Layer and start cultivating the incredible Yin Talisman Thunder as soon as possible, I must compete with these

heroes. It would make all my dedicated cultivation efforts worthwhile! I wonder what the first test for a Yin Talisman Sect deputy steward will be...

At this moment, one person emerged from among the sect's disciples maintaining order near the entrance—it was Gu Beicheng. He looked at the numerous martial cultivators and spoke, "Ladies and gentlemen, Chief Steward Jiang has ordered that those who wish to join our Yin Talisman Sect as disciples can wait for the test in a few days. If you want to apply for a deputy steward position, you can proceed to the training hall for testing and competition now!"

Chief Steward Jiang? Lin Xuankong thought, the image of that pretty Daoist Nun surfacing in his mind, along with her story about the Conical Hat Strange Guest.

While he was pondering, over a dozen independent martial cultivators had already walked towards the hall.

Among them, a burly man cupped his hands towards a martial cultivator with thick eyebrows, large eyes, a square jaw, and a broad nose, saying, "Brother Yang, for the herbs needed for my children's cultivation, I must vie for this steward position. Won't you join?"

The independent martial cultivator called Brother Yang shook his head. "Big brother, you have reached First Layer Perfection and possess extensive combat experience. I'm sure the others also have hidden talents! The Yin Talisman Sect only has six openings for deputy stewards. If I were to go, I would only make a fool of myself."

The man sighed upon hearing this and walked away. As the martial cultivators discussed among themselves, more martial cultivators continuously stepped out from the crowd, making their way toward the hall.

The martial cultivator surnamed Yang sighed and said, "The Black Tiger Gang monopolizing the herbs has truly forced the hidden experts of Great Marsh Prefecture out into the open! Who would have thought there were so many independent martial cultivators in Great Marsh Prefecture!"

The martial cultivator next to him replied, "People usually don't want to join sects and be restricted... But now, with no other options, we can only align ourselves with various sects. However, the Yin Talisman Sect has always had a good reputation. Why are there only about a hundred people here to join today?"

At this moment, a bald martial cultivator stepped out of the crowd, scratching his head, and said, "It's said that the Black Tiger Gang is also broadly recruiting members and offering very good conditions. Probably many martial cultivators have chosen to join the Black Tiger Gang! But the Black Tiger Gang's actions are despicable, monopolizing the herbs so viciously! Even if I, Li Er, can't get into the Yin Talisman Sect and get the herbs, I would never join that damn Black Tiger Gang!"

Many martial cultivators, upon hearing the bald man speak so forthrightly, couldn't help but react. Some smiled at him, saying, "Friend, you are quite straightforward!"

While everyone was talking, Lin Xuankong looked around. Seeing no one else entering the hall, he straightened up and walked toward the entrance.

Seeing this gray-haired old man heading to the entrance, the chattering martial cultivators couldn't help but show expressions of surprise.

Gu Beicheng clearly did not recognize Lin Xuankong. He frowned at the frail-looking old man before him and asked, "Elder, what is your business here? The Yin Talisman Sect is currently recruiting deputy stewards..."

Someone in the crowd suddenly spoke up, "Isn't this Brother Lin who often walks along the street selling his griddle cakes! Brother Lin, why are you here? The Yin Talisman Sect is recruiting disciples; this isn't a place you can just wander into!"

The speaker seemed worried that Lin Xuankong was hard of hearing, so he kindly shouted loudly.

PFFT. A long-faced martial cultivator in the crowd, whose complexion was a sickly crimson, laughed.

This long-faced martial cultivator, who seemed to be about eighteen or nineteen years old, chuckled and said, "So this old man sells griddle cakes. He was just standing beside me, staring at the announcement for a long time. It looks like he didn't understand what was written... But after all our discussion, he should have understood by now. Has his mind gone muddled?"

The martial cultivator surnamed Yang, seeing his mocking expression, couldn't help but say, "He's very old; it isn't easy for him. Friend, don't laugh at him!"

The long-faced martial cultivator was taken aback, his smile stiffening as he muttered, "What's it to you..."

Lin Xuankong ignored the others' discussions and addressed Gu Beicheng, "Daoist, I am here to join your esteemed sect and apply for a deputy steward position!"

Upon hearing this, the surrounding martial cultivators immediately showed strange expressions. PFFT. The long-faced martial cultivator again couldn't help but laugh out loud.

He chuckled, his tone somewhat odd, "An old man selling griddle cakes wants to join the Yin Talisman Sect and even plans to defeat others to become a respected deputy steward? Old man, at your age, you'd probably struggle to push a cart, let alone compete in a fight!"

"Brother Lin, hurry back home. This is the Yin Talisman Sect, not a place for jokes!" someone softly reminded.

Hearing these two speak, many of the martial cultivators burst out laughing, pointing at Lin Xuankong. Some, however, looked at him with a hint of doubt, scrutinizing him closely.

Lin Xuankong stood alone in front of the crowd, with laughter, discussions, and sighs continuously coming from behind him.

He frowned at Gu Beicheng. "Your esteemed sect is broadly recruiting martial cultivators. Is there an age limit?"

Seeing Lin Xuankong's advanced age and how he was being ridiculed by the crowd, Gu Beicheng felt a bit of compassion. He bowed and said, "Elder, there is an age limit for disciple recruitment, but no age limit for the deputy steward position. You just need to pass the test and win against others in the competition. However, during the competition, accidents are inevitable! Fists and feet have no eyes. Elder, at your age..."

Lin Xuankong stepped forward. "If I lack the strength and die, I will have no regrets!"

Gu Beicheng had intended to say more, but seeing Lin Xuankong's resolute tone and his steady, vigorous steps as he walked, he couldn't help but pause. He swallowed the words of dissuasion he was about to utter.

After watching Lin Xuankong's back for a few more moments, he couldn't resist stroking his three strands of long beard. *Why does this man's back look familiar, as if I've seen it somewhere before?* he thought.

Chapter 28 - 25: The Old Warhorse Aspires to Journey a Thousand Miles

At this moment, everyone standing at the doorway saw Lin Xuankong stride in quickly with a rather imposing manner, clearly indicating he had some skills, and they all showed expressions of surprise on their faces once more.

The bald Li Er then shook his shiny head. "This old fellow, at such an age... In the Great Thousand Worlds, all sorts of wonders exist. Maybe he really has some strength! HAHAHA!"

He followed closely behind Lin Xuankong, walking in quickly.

The remaining Martial Cultivators started discussing this peculiar old man, Lin Xuankong.

The long-faced Martial Cultivator spoke, "Even this old man dares to go in and compete, what do I, Luu Guanqi, have to fear! I will also go in and compete. Maybe my opponent will be this old man, and I'll win easily, HAHAHA!"

After saying this, he took a few steps, entered the doorway, and headed towards the hall.

The Martial Cultivator with the surname Yang looked at Lin Xuankong's distant figure, suddenly took a deep breath, and said, "Judging by the way that old fellow walks, he seems to have some skills. But at his age, his Qi Blood must have declined greatly. How could he possibly be a match for Martial Cultivators in their twenties or thirties! What's admirable is that such an old and frail man still has the courage to compete with so many experts!"

He thought of Lin Xuankong's decisive tone and steadfast steps, and a heroic spirit surged within his chest. "I, Yang Mountain, will also go in and compete! If that old fellow, at his age, can still harbor the ambitions of an old steed intent on a long journey, how can I, in the prime of my life, lack that heroic spirit! Even if I lose, so what if I lose some face? Competing with experts can still broaden my horizons!"

After saying this, he picked up the tasselled long spear beside him and strode off.

"Well said! Whether old or young, a Martial Cultivator should always possess a heroic spirit!"

"Today, my eyes have truly been opened! Our Great Marsh Prefecture still has heroic figures—young ones and old heroes alike! HAHAHA!"

Upon hearing his words, many Martial Cultivators couldn't help but cheer.

Soon, someone else spoke up, "I'll also join the competition! I really want to see if that old hero truly has some skills. My curiosity is getting the better of me!"

Gu Beicheng stood by the door, looking at the crowd inspired by Lin Xuankong, and couldn't help but be dumbfounded.

The cultivation field of the Yin Talisman Sect covered a vast area, about over ten mu in size.

To the east of the cultivation field stood thirty-six Martial Cultivators who had come to apply for the steward position. These people were clearly the elites among Independent Martial Cultivators, their strength quite impressive. Most of them were in their twenties or thirties, in their prime, each tall and broad-shouldered, with spirited eyes. Lin Xuankong stood among them... conspicuously. Especially his white hair; he was like a single white speck amidst a sea of black, visible even from a hundred zhang away.

At this moment, the beautiful, Daoist-robed Chief Steward Jiang Yuran, accompanied by several Stewards and hundreds of elite disciples, entered the cultivation field. She looked at the upright figures of the Independent Martial Cultivators in the distance and nodded with satisfaction. However, when her gaze fell upon Lin Xuankong in the crowd, her eyes paused involuntarily.

She turned her head in surprise to look at a nearby Grand Chief Steward and frowned, saying, "Why is there an old man applying for the steward position?"

This Grand Steward Jiang Yuran had organized many recruitment activities for sect members, but this was the first time she had seen an applicant in his sixties.

The Grand Chief Steward cupped his hands and said, "Reporting to Chief Steward Jiang, Xiao Cheng already informed me. He said this old man insisted on participating in the application. He had no choice but to let him in!"

Jiang Yuran frowned as she looked at Lin Xuankong for a while. Her eyes darted around a few times, and it was unclear what she thought of, but she suddenly smiled and said, "A hero in old age with a lofty ambition! Regardless of his strength, his courage is worth praising!"

The Grand Chief Steward joked, "I just worry that he might not pass the first test. Even if he does, if he gets killed in the second martial competition, we would have to compensate him with a coffin!"

Jiang Yuran was momentarily stunned. She glared at the Grand Chief Steward, then turned and walked towards the Martial Cultivators.

When she stood before the group of Martial Cultivators and everyone looked at her solemnly, Jiang Yuran said loudly, "Everyone, demons are rampant now, occupying many cities of our Great Xia and harming the populace. The Great Marsh Prefecture is also deeply affected. On behalf of the Yin Talisman Sect, I, Jiang Yuran, welcome all you heroes. I hope you can pass the first test. As for the second, the martial competition, fists and feet have no eyes. I hope that when you reach the second round, you will know when to stop!"

After delivering a lengthy opening speech, as she neared the end, she couldn't help glancing at Lin Xuankong in the crowd.

It wasn't that she had any opinion of Lin Xuankong; it was just a human instinct... Lin Xuankong was simply too special among the crowd, so her gaze naturally fell on him!

Why do I keep looking at him unknowingly?

Jiang Yuran, somewhat frustrated, withdrew her gaze.

She continued, "Next, Steward Ma and Steward Gu will take everyone for the first test!"

After speaking, surrounded by many Stewards, she stepped away. As a Grand Steward whose authority was nearly on par with that of a Hall Master, Grand Steward Jiang Yuran certainly couldn't personally oversee the tests for these First

Layer and Second Layer Martial Cultivators. Her presence was merely to show the Yin Talisman Sect's regard for newcomers!

After she left, Gu Beicheng stepped out from among the Daoists and led the numerous Martial Cultivators towards the Heaven-Interpreting Stone for the test.

Lin Xuankong followed the crowd. Once near the Heaven-Interpreting Stone, he looked at the giant rock with some curiosity. This oval giant rock was taller than three men, with a circumference that ten people could barely encircle. It was pale yellow, covered with intricate patterns, and had a handprint-shaped depression in the lower-middle part.

The many Martial Cultivators looked at the giant rock in confusion; only a few showed a hint of eagerness in their eyes.

Gu Beicheng, seeing the confusion in their eyes, explained, "This Heaven-Interpreting Stone is an artifact our Yin Talisman Sect uses to test a disciple's talent and see if they are suited for cultivating Yin Talisman Thunder. Since you are all applying for Deputy Steward positions, you will inevitably be responsible for managing and teaching disciples in the future. Therefore, you must possess the talent for cultivating Yin Talisman Thunder."

"But don't worry. Since you have all advanced to the First Layer of Transcendence, you certainly possess Martial Cultivation talent. Thus, there's a 60-70% chance you can cultivate the Yin Talisman Technique; the only difference lies in the degree of compatibility with the cultivation technique!"

When the crowd heard the beginning of his speech, they showed some concern, but upon hearing the latter part, they felt relieved. After all, a 60-70% chance of passing the first test was fairly high!

Gu Beicheng pointed above the hand seal on the Heaven-Interpreting Stone, where there were nine special symbols. He continued, "Based on the differences in compatibility, our Yin Talisman Sect categorizes talent into nine levels. In a moment, you will channel your Qi Blood into that hand seal, which will light up those symbols! The more symbols you light up, the more compatible you are with the Yin Talisman Thunder Technique!"

Everyone nodded.

Bald Li Er couldn't help but ask, "Steward Gu, this Heaven-Interpreting Stone is so mystical; I'm eager to try it! But I'm curious, within our Yin Talisman Sect, what's the highest number of symbols anyone has lit up?"

Hearing this, Gu Beicheng's eyes showed a hint of pride. He stroked his long beard and said, "Our Yin Talisman Sect has a long and storied history. It has been a thousand years since our founding ancestor established the sect, and he himself lit up nine symbols! Over the past millennium, there have been five sect members who lit up eight symbols. Those five ancestors who lit up eight symbols were all extraordinary geniuses, one in a hundred million! Of course, even lighting up five or six symbols means you're an exceptionally talented match for the Yin Talisman Technique!"

Bald Li Er's eyes lit up. "I wonder, among the current disciples, what's the highest number of symbols lit?"

At this question, Gu Beicheng paused. He carefully chose his words and said, "Among the current disciples... the highest is five symbols! Of course, five symbols are also extremely impressive. One can easily manifest thunder and lightning and has the potential to reach a very High Realm in Yin Talisman Thunder in the future!"

That Junior Sister Jiang Yuran managed to light up five symbols; she's a Yin Talisman Thunder genius, the likes of which are seen once in a hundred years! When I first joined, I lit up four symbols and was praised by my master as an extraordinary talent, one in ten thousand. I was highly regarded by everyone in the sect, and even the Sect Leader had high hopes for me. But my talent is still quite inferior to Junior Sister Jiang's!

At this moment, Steward Ma, standing beside Gu Beicheng, looked sternly at the numerous Martial Cultivators. "As long as you can light up one symbol, you can cultivate the Yin Talisman Technique. Lighting up two symbols gives you a 90% chance of cultivating lightning. You may even be reported directly to Chief Steward Jiang for an exceptional promotion to Deputy Steward without having to participate in the martial competition! When you test shortly, lighting up even one symbol would be very good. Don't aim too high! Alright, everyone, test one by one. Remember to state your name, family heritage, and cultivation level."

Being a Steward clearly indicated strong ability and high status. As soon as Steward Ma spoke, even the genius Steward Gu dared not idle and quickly organized the testing.

From the line, the first man, who had a sallow face, stepped out. He cupped his hands towards Gu Beicheng and said, "I am Li Lu, twenty-three years old. I have cultivated the Three Mountains Fist and am at the Late Stage of the First Layer of Transcendence!"

After speaking, he walked to the Heaven-Interpreting Stone with a hint of anticipation in his eyes, placed his hand on the hand seal, and channeled his Qi Blood into it.

Unfortunately, after several dozen breaths, the sallow-faced man's complexion had turned pale from the significant consumption of Qi Blood, yet the Heaven-Interpreting Stone still showed no reaction.

Seeing this, a hint of regret flashed in Gu Beicheng's eyes. He said, "Scholar Li, you may stop. It seems your constitution is not compatible with the Yin Talisman Technique! However, although you cannot apply for the steward position, you can still join our Yin Talisman Sect as a disciple. By cultivating other cultivation techniques in the future, you may still have a chance to be promoted to an Outer City Steward!"

The sallow-faced man reluctantly withdrew his hand, cupped his hands to Gu Beicheng, and returned to the crowd with a sense of dejection.

Next, the others continued the test. To Gu Beicheng's dismay, five consecutive people failed to light up any symbols. The remaining thirty-odd Martial Cultivators couldn't help but feel anxious.

Standing in the line, Lin Xuankong frowned at the Heaven-Interpreting Stone. *Based on the cultivation realms of these people, if I were to compete, I could likely secure a Deputy Steward position with my Early Second Layer realm and Spiritual Crane Finger! But for this kind of test... The Young Lady said my constitution is better suited for cultivating the Pine Crane Longevity Technique. I wonder if I am compatible with this Yin Talisman Technique. If I can't even light up one symbol, like these six people, it would be troublesome! I hope I can at least light up one symbol!*

Chapter 29 - 26 Mysterious Space, Thunder God (Seeking Follow-Up Read)

Lin Xuankong's thoughts spun as the many Martial Cultivators continued their tests.

"I am Guo Yun, twenty-four years old, Late Stage of the first layer of Transcendence, practicing the family tradition Iron Halberd Technique." A Martial Cultivator stepped out from the crowd and bowed respectfully to Gu Beicheng.

He took a deep breath, walked to the Heaven-Interpreting Stone, his Qi Blood surged, and he raised his hand to press it.

After three breaths, the special lines on the Heaven-Interpreting Stone glimmered slightly. The first mark flashed with a yellow brilliance, swirling like a spiritual snake, looking quite marvelous!

The Martial Cultivators were greatly encouraged to see someone finally light up a mark.

Guo Yun was secretly delighted. He quickened the flow of his Qi Blood, continuously channeling it into his Hand Seal. Unfortunately, even exerting every last bit of his strength, the second mark showed no movement!

After several dozen breaths, he reluctantly stepped back.

Next, three more people failed to light a mark. However, the man named Yang Mountain and three other Martial Cultivators each lit one mark, and the four of them were inwardly pleased.

What made everyone envious was that later in the test, Bald Li Er actually lit up two marks.

The two marks he lit were extremely bright, their dazzling radiance illuminating Lin Xuankong's silver hair from afar.

Steward Ma, who was with Gu Beicheng, couldn't help but show an expression of joy at this sight.

He quickly left to report the situation to Chief Steward Jiang Yuran in the Martial Arts Hall.

Gu Beicheng looked at Bald Li Er and said, "Being able to light up two marks indicates that you are a rare Talent highly compatible with the Yin Talisman Technique. There's a ninety percent chance that you will cultivate the wondrous Yin Talisman Thunder in the future! Junior Brother Li, please wait a moment. When Steward Ma reports this to Chief Steward Jiang, you probably won't need to compete in martial combat and can directly join our sect, with a chance to become the Deputy Steward overseeing disciples!"

As Gu Beicheng spoke with the man surnamed Li, even his form of address had changed. It was evident how difficult and rare it was to light up two marks!

The surrounding Martial Cultivators couldn't help but look at Li Er with envy. They still had to fight fierce battles against formidable opponents to have a chance of becoming a Deputy Steward, but Li Er might directly become one! *But Talent is heaven's gift, they thought. They could only envy or harbor secret jealousy, for what else could they do?*

「Next, only two people were left untested.」

The long-faced Martial Cultivator, second to last, glanced at Lin Xuankong, who was last in line. Then, with a feigned air of ease and a slight smile, he walked towards the Heaven-Interpreting Stone.

Yet, as he stood near the Heaven-Interpreting Stone, his face grew somewhat tense.

However, when he channeled his Qi Blood into the Hand Seal, the first mark quickly lit up.

The long-faced Martial Cultivator was thrilled. He quickly urged his Qi Blood, and seven to eight breaths later, the second mark showed signs of movement.

The surrounding people couldn't help but exclaim in admiration and envy.

Oddly, the second mark that the long-faced Martial Cultivator lit was extremely dim, like the faint glow of a candle about to extinguish.

He continually urged his Qi Blood, but after a few flickers, the second mark dimmed again, leaving only the first mark bright!

The surrounding Martial Cultivators were confused by this. *They had seen people light one mark. They had seen people light two marks. But lighting one and a half, only for the half to extinguish... that, they truly didn't understand!*

Gu Beicheng sighed as the long-faced Martial Cultivator stepped back a few paces and said, "Scholar Luu, you're only nineteen, supposedly at the peak age of vigorous Qi Blood, yet this happened... Forgive my directness, but may I ask if Scholar Luu took multiple wives and concubines several years ago, and has been particularly... intimate?"

Luu Guanqi was puzzled. "I took a concubine when I was thirteen, and later a few more, but I haven't married a principal wife yet! What does this have to do with the test marks?" f.(r)eewe/bnov\ll.com

Gu Beicheng sighed again. "For us Martial Cultivators, while we don't have to avoid marital affection, you took a concubine at the tender age of thirteen. You must have overindulged in your youth, greatly harming the foundation of your Qi Blood. This is why your Qi Blood has declined, preventing you from lighting the second mark! What a pity! Otherwise, if you had also lit the second mark, today would have been a double blessing for our Yin Talisman Sect!"

Hearing this, the long-faced Martial Cultivator, Luu Guanqi, paled. "This... how is this possible? I didn't indulge **that** much!"

Though he said so, his heart was already filled with endless regret and remorse, and he secretly cursed the pharmacy that had sold him aphrodisiacs.

The surrounding Martial Cultivators shook their heads, and some even whispered among themselves.

Everyone sighed. The long-faced Martial Cultivator clearly possessed amazing Talent but had squandered it himself—truly regrettable!

Of course, while many mouthed words of pity, they were secretly thinking he deserved it; after all, most people tend to be envious of those who have and scornful of those who have not.

Listening to the hushed discussions, Luu Guanqi, already filled with boundless regret and remorse, felt his face flush and pale by turns. He was almost too ashamed to remain standing there, wishing he could cover his face and flee the Cultivation Field immediately.

But then, remembering the esteemed position of Deputy Steward, he gritted his teeth. Lowering his head, a hint of malice flickered in his eyes as he retreated back into the group.

「Now, only Lin Xuankong remained untested.」

He stepped out of the crowd and walked towards the Heaven-Interpreting Stone.

The many Martial Cultivators, who had been whispering, now turned their attention to him.

Luu Guanqi, seeing that the discussion about him had ceased, lifted his head. Watching Lin Xuankong's back, he sneered internally. *Someone as young as I am couldn't light the second mark because my foundation was damaged. This old fellow must be so decrepit, probably suffering from frequent urination and a split stream—how could he possibly light a mark!*

Lin Xuankong stood near the Heaven-Interpreting Stone, naturally a bit tense.

After all, this test depends entirely on fate, not one's own strength. I can only hope for good luck!

He secretly regulated his breathing, then, with a determined gaze, activated the Pine Crane Longevity Technique. He mobilized his abundant Transcendent Qi Blood, pressing his right hand firmly onto the Hand Seal and channeling a large amount of Qi Blood into it!

I must light it up! Lin Xuankong silently urged himself. *At least light up one mark!*

As he was thinking this, he suddenly felt the Qi Blood he channeled into the Heaven-Interpreting Stone seem to connect with something. It was as if, in the unseen realm, a subtle link had formed with some immensely powerful existence.

The next moment, Lin Xuankong felt a tremor in his Heart Spirit. The scenery before his eyes changed, and he found himself in an infinitely vast space.

In this vast expanse, the sky was blood-red, and below lay an endless ocean. He could see countless massive Demons swimming rapidly in the Boundless Sea, their giant eyes, visible above the water, all fixated in the same direction.

Curious, Lin Xuankong followed their gaze. The sight that met his eyes instantly filled him with boundless terror.

Between the blood-red sky and the infinite sea, he saw a colossal humanoid figure wreathed in lightning. It stood immensely tall, as if propping up the heavens and rooted in the ocean depths, unleashing Divine Thunder against the innumerable Demons swarming towards it!

Strange Thousand-Eyed Giant Apes, tentacled Demons thousands of feet long, bird-headed, snake-tailed giant turtles... all erupted with Demon Qi before being blasted into dust by the relentless Divine Thunder!

Suddenly, the thunder-wreathed humanoid giant turned its head, its gaze falling upon Lin Xuankong's position.

With its stare, an indescribable and terrifying sense of oppression and crisis instantly enveloped Lin Xuankong's Heart Spirit.

At that moment, Lin Xuankong felt a terror that seemed to shred his insides, his Heart Spirit spiraling out of control, his very soul on the verge of scattering!

Immediately after, Lin Xuankong shuddered violently. The scenery before him shifted, and he found himself back in the Cultivation Field, the Heaven-Interpreting Stone before him.

He was breathing rapidly, his face extremely grim. The panic in his eyes only gradually faded after several breaths.

What in the world was that? he wondered. That space, those Demons, that god-like figure wielding Divine Thunder... was it an illusion, or was it real? When others activated the Hand Seal, they were all focused on channeling their Qi Blood; nothing like this happened to them! Why did it happen to me?

Composing himself, he suppressed the myriad doubts in his mind and looked up at the Heaven-Interpreting Stone. *Did I light up a mark?*

Chapter 30 - 27 Turns Out He's the Genius, Turtle-Poria Elixir (Please Follow)

"Three of them! He actually lit up three Seals in a row, and the fourth Seal seems to be starting to flicker too!"

"Holy shit!"

"I thought he was just an old man selling flatbreads. Who would have thought he's an old genius!"

Behind Lin Xuankong, those Independent Martial Cultivators were full of astonishment, their discussions constantly drifting over.

Gu Beicheng, who had been lightly stroking his long beard, showed a look of surprise when he saw the three Seals light up.

But before he could speak, he saw that under Lin Xuankong's infusion of Qi Blood, the fourth Seal had also lit up.

Gu Beicheng couldn't help but feel his Qi Blood surge, causing lightning to abruptly appear on his finger, almost scorching his long beard!

Lin Xuankong, who was infusing Qi Blood, felt a shock in his heart, feeling as if he had become one with the Heaven-Interpreting Stone. *If he continued infusing Qi Blood, it seemed he could keep lighting up the Seals! But what if that strange scene he had witnessed earlier occurred again? Would something unexpected happen? He felt that if the mighty, terrifying Thunder God so much as glanced at him one more time, his soul would surely disperse! This Heaven-Interpreting Stone was definitely not just for testing Talent; it was extremely bizarre!*

At this moment, that feeling of connecting with some mysterious existence appeared again...

Lin Xuankong was startled, and his eyes suddenly showed a fierce look. He decisively withdrew his right hand from the Hand Seal.

Lighting up Four Seals, judging by Gu Beicheng's reaction, I should have a chance to secure the Deputy Steward position! This situation of connecting with a mysterious and powerful existence might entail serious life risk, which I can't be certain about. I can't risk my life... Patience, the future is long!

Not far away, seeing that all Four Seals were lit, Steward Ma's expression was uncertain. *He actually lit up Four Seals! Four Seals! ...But the one who lit up Four Seals had to be him, an old man nearing seventy! If a Martial Cultivator in their twenties or thirties lit up Four Seals, the sect would have another genius like Gu Beicheng! But at his age, no matter how well suited he was to the Yin Talisman*

Technique, it would be impossible for him to make any further progress in Cultivation!

Frowning as he looked at Lin Xuankong for a few moments, Steward Ma pondered briefly, then eventually walked over. "This Scholar Lin, come with me to see the Grand Chief Steward."

「In the Martial Arts Hall,」

A piece of Agarwood was placed on a sandalwood table in the ornate guest room.

Sitting opposite Jiang Yuran, Chief Steward Wu smiled and said, "It's just a piece of Agarwood worth a few thousand taels of silver. It's rare for Chief Steward Jiang to visit me, so please accept it."

Jiang Yuran glanced at him. "Is Senior Brother Wu being so generous? If I come often in the future, will you give me a piece every time?"

Chief Steward Wu was stunned for a moment and then laughed awkwardly.

Jiang Yuran continued, "Grand Chief Steward Wu Liangye, of the twenty-nine towns you are in charge of in the Outer City, seven have been plundered by the Demon People Race, and thousands of townspeople were killed. Those are all our

Yin Talisman Sect's tenant farmers. If the spring planting and autumn harvest are delayed... the Yin Talisman Sect's monthly stipend shortfall for the second half of the year will far exceed a few thousand taels of silver!"

Wu Liangye sighed. "I have already cooperated with the officials' Exorcism Army to eliminate over a dozen groups of Demon People. But now, Demons are rampant, and the number of townspeople controlled by Demons and turned into violent Demon People keeps increasing!"

Jiang Yuran's apricot eyes widened. "Cooperate with the officials to eliminate Demon People? Hmph! The Black Tiger Gang Leader's surname is Li, and the Governor of Great Marsh County's surname is also Li. How could the officials' Exorcism Army be willing to help our Yin Talisman Sect!"

Wu Liangye thought for a moment and said, "Then, I will arrange for more elite members of the sect, and I will also personally participate in eradicating the Demon People Race!"

Seeing him say this, Jiang Yuran's expression softened.

She leaned back on the chair, looked at the guest room window, and said:

"Today, only about thirty Martial Cultivators came to apply for the Steward positions, but there was one who lit up Two Seals, which is rare good news recently!"

But after all, they are external Martial Cultivators, not as intimately known to us as our own disciples. Appoint that Li Er as a Deputy Steward. Observe him for two or three months, and only after he completes three Deputy Steward tasks should you allow him to cultivate the Yin Talisman Technique!"

Wu Liangye said, "That is indeed good news. Among the thousands of members of our Yin Talisman Sect, only seventy or eighty were able to light up Two Seals during their entry test. This Li Er has excellent Talent. As long as he sincerely joins our Yin Talisman Sect, I will surely cultivate him into a core pillar of the sect!"

At this moment, Steward Ma's voice came from the guest room door, "Chief Steward Jiang, Grand Chief Steward, I have something to report!"

Wu Liangye turned to look at Steward Ma. "What is it?"

After a respectful bow, Steward Ma finally spoke, "During the test, one person lit up Four Seals!"

"Four Seals! Really?" Wu Liangye, whose face had been calm just a moment ago, showed a sudden change in expression upon hearing the words 'Four Seals'.

"Absolutely!" Steward Ma said.

"Quick, bring that Martial Cultivator here immediately!" Wu Liangye ordered decisively. "Apart from Gu Beicheng, our Yin Talisman Sect hasn't had a disciple so compatible with the Yin Talisman Technique in over a decade!"

Jiang Yuran nodded slightly, a trace of joy also appearing on her delicate face.

Steward Ma cupped his hands and said, "Chief Steward Jiang, Grand Chief Steward, I have already brought that Martial Cultivator over!"

Upon hearing this, Jiang Yuran stood up, with a look of anticipation and curiosity on her face as she looked towards the door. "Brought him over? Let him in!"

Wu Liangye also looked toward the door with some anticipation.

But when he saw that the person who walked in was Lin Xuankong with his full head of white hair,

Their faces, which had been full of anticipation and curiosity, instantly turned into extremely complex expressions...

"This... you!" Jiang Yuran's delicate facial expressions shifted rapidly; for a moment, she didn't know what to say.

"The Martial Cultivator who lit up Four Seals... is this old... old man?" Wu Liangye frowned and asked.

Steward Ma replied, "Indeed, it is this Scholar Lin Xuankong."

Lin Xuankong, who had just entered the guest room, felt a stirring in his heart as he saw their expressions. After lighting up Four Seals, he was immediately brought over by this Steward Ma. It was evident that in the Yin Talisman Sect's testing, Four Seals were extremely rare.

After all, even Martial Cultivators at the Perfection of the Transcendence First Layer with Two Seals had the chance to be directly promoted to Deputy Steward!

But looking at their expressions, it was clear they were disappointed because of my age... However, it doesn't matter. So what if I can't directly become a Deputy Steward? Since I've already passed the Heaven-Interpreting Stone test, relying on my own strength, I can just compete with those Martial Cultivators! Most importantly, based on my own senses, if I keep infusing my Qi Blood, I might light up five Seals, six Seals, or even more... This indicates I'm highly compatible with the Yin Talisman Technique. With such high compatibility, plus the fiftyfold Cultivation Speed bonus, as long as I can complete Steward tasks and cultivate the Yin Talisman Technique in the future, my Cultivation Speed will surely be rapid! In this dangerous world where strength is paramount, this is what's most important! As for how others view me, why should I care!

Thinking of this, his heart became clear and worry-free.

"Scholar Lin, your age? And your Cultivation Realm?" Jiang Yuran asked.

"Reporting to the Chief Steward, I am fifty-nine, at the Transcendence Second Layer!"

Hearing Lin Xuankong's answer, Wu Liangye couldn't help but shake his head repeatedly, while Jiang Yuran frowned slightly, deep in thought.

Wu Liangye sighed and said, "A Four-Seal Talent, such aptitude is one in ten thousand... Even if you were thirty-six or thirty-seven, I'd be confident of making you a Martial Cultivator of the late Transcendence Third Layer, or even the Fourth Layer, within ten years. But you're already fifty-nine. Alas, what a pity, truly a great pity!"

Wu Liangye was a high-ranking figure in the Yin Talisman Sect and widely experienced. He knew that for a Martial Cultivator to achieve breakthroughs in old age, when their Qi Blood was continually declining, was so rare that one might not be found in a hundred million!

Thinking about this, his previously joyful mood dampened.

Steward Ma, seeing his expression, naturally understood what Wu Liangye was thinking, and said, "Then I'll take this Scholar Lin back to participate in the martial competition!"

Wu Liangye silently nodded, without a word.

Seeing that Steward Ma was about to lead Lin Xuankong out of the guest room,

"Wait a moment!" Jiang Yuran suddenly said.

She walked around the table and came to stand in front of the silver-haired Lin Xuankong. "With a Four-Seal Talent, and having already advanced to the Transcendence Second Layer, according to the rules set by the Sect Leader, not only can you become a Deputy Steward, but you can also be directly promoted to Chief Steward!"

Hearing this, Lin Xuankong was stunned. *I had originally prepared to go out and fight a few rounds to earn a Deputy Steward position... This Chief Steward Jiang is actually going to promote me directly to Chief Steward?*

"But he is already fifty-nine years old! Even if he cultivates the Yin Talisman Technique in the future, it's absolutely impossible for him to advance his Realm!" Wu Liangye frowned deeply.

Jiang Yuran did not pay attention to Wu Liangye.

She looked at Lin Xuankong and said with a smile, "Our Yin Talisman Sect is currently recruiting talents. How can we discriminate based on age? If word spread, it would only make the heroes of Great Marsh Prefecture laugh at us, saying that our Yin Talisman Sect lacks magnanimity! Moreover, I see that Scholar Lin has a firm gaze and an extraordinary aura. I am sure that after becoming a Steward, he will not disappoint me!"

She reached into her bosom and took out a Small Jade Box.

"I not only want this highly talented and spirited old scholar to become a Chief Steward directly, but I also want to help him! Steward Lin, this is a Turtle-Poria Elixir, refined by my father. It can continually enhance Qi Blood and has some life-extending effects. Consider it a welcoming gift from our Yin Talisman Sect for an esteemed scholar like yourself joining us!"

Lin Xuankong looked at the highly authoritative Jiang Yuran with some surprise.

Beside him, Wu Liangye, seeing Jiang Yuran's insistence and her taking out the Turtle-Poria Elixir, thought for a moment. His expression eased, and he said, "The Turtle-Poria Elixir! Only our Sect Leader can occasionally refine a batch. It's priceless and hard to acquire externally, normally only awarded to meritorious disciples at the annual commendation and disciplinary assembly! With Chief Steward Jiang treating you so generously, you should quickly accept it!"

Looking at the Jade Box, Wu Liangye felt somewhat emotional. Even he, the Sect Leader's second disciple, rarely received the Turtle-Poria Elixir. While its life-extending effects might be elusive, its Qi Blood enhancing effects were extremely potent, comparable to more than thirty servings of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup!

"If Steward Lin doesn't want it, I'll take it back!" Jiang Yuran smiled, her lips curved.

Hearing her address him as Steward Lin and speaking so kindly and approachably, Lin Xuankong couldn't help but be moved. He took the Jade Box and cupped his hands, saying, "This disciple thanks Chief Steward Jiang!"

Steward Ma, seeing Chief Steward Jiang appoint Lin Xuankong not as a Deputy Steward but as a Chief Steward, was filled with astonishment. This was the first time in his twenty-odd years in the Yin Talisman Sect that he had witnessed a Martial Cultivator at the early Transcendence Second Layer being promoted three ranks—from disciple, past Elite Disciple and Deputy Steward, directly to Chief Steward. And crucially, this was a fifty-nine-year-old, decrepit old man!

After a moment of astonishment, he gave Lin Xuankong a complicated look, cupping his hands and saying, "Congratulations, Steward Lin!"

Lin Xuankong returned the salute. Jiang Yuran, meanwhile, smiled and nodded.

Seeing this old Martial Cultivator, for some reason, I'm suddenly reminded of that elderly Conical Hat Strange Guest Gu Beicheng once mentioned! I wonder if this Lin Xuankong before me will be as fiercely opposed to evil and as interesting in his actions as that Conical Hat Strange Guest! But in any case, in these chaotic times, we must let the Martial Cultivators of Great Marsh Prefecture know that our Yin Talisman Sect is magnanimous and worth joining!

「Leaving the guest room,」

Lin Xuankong stood in a corner of the Martial Arts Hall and took out the Elixir from the Jade Box.

Looking at the Turtle-Poria Elixir exuding a peculiar fragrance, his heart was filled with a myriad of emotions. Unexpectedly, after a series of twists and turns today, I didn't become a Deputy Steward but was directly appointed by Jiang Yuran as a Chief Steward! My Young Lady at home was even preparing to apply herself if I 'failed'... I wonder what her expression will be when she hears this news? And then there's Chief Steward Jiang Yuran, with her inscrutable temperament, giving me a seemingly priceless Turtle-Poria Elixir! This is indeed an unexpectedly precious gain. I just don't know if this Elixir truly has life-extending effects. If it does, how much Lifespan could it extend?