

Divine King 221

Chapter 221 Artifact Refining Sect

Although he had already discovered that Zhao Yanyun no longer had a heartbeat or breath, he believed that Emperor Ye Tian would not joke about such matters.

Since Emperor Ye Tian said Zhao Yanyun was not dead, then it was possible she really was not dead.

"Your Majesty, you just said she is not dead, what exactly do you mean?" Xu Nian took a deep breath, trying to calm himself.

"This girl was indeed about to die, but she had previously received the inheritance of the Battle Emperor. That inheritance contained the Spiritual Sense Power of the Battle Emperor, and it was this sliver of Spiritual Sense Power that kept her soul inside her body, thus preserving her from death," Emperor Ye Tian explained.

Xu Nian suddenly nodded in realization, so it was the inheritance that preserved her soul.

This was absolutely a stroke of luck for Zhao Yanyun, or she really might have died.

"However, this girl had not activated her Spiritual Sense before, and now after suffering such a severe blow, her soul has fallen into a deep sleep, no different from a dead person. If you want to awaken her, you must use a powerful Spiritual Sense Spiritual Artifact to draw out her soul, otherwise she still has to die," Emperor Ye Tian continued.

"Eh, a Spiritual Sense Spiritual Artifact? Your Majesty, with your level of the soul, can you not awaken her?" Xu Nian's brow furrowed again.

"If it were my peak period, then there would be no problem, but now I'm also not sure I can do it. If it fails, this little girl might be truly lost. For safety's sake, it's still best to use a Spiritual Sense type Spiritual Artifact; of course, a Spiritual Sense type Immortal Artifact would be better, with a higher chance of success," Emperor Ye Tian said.

Xu Nian nodded.

But where to find a Spiritual Sense type Spiritual Artifact?

In this continent, even finding an ordinary Spiritual Artifact was difficult, let alone the incredibly valuable Spiritual Sense type.

"Boy, you only have three months. This little girl's soul can only hold on for three months, after which no one can save her," Emperor Ye Tian's voice rose again.

Xu Nian's brow furrowed even more. Three months, wasn't that too rushed?

"Xu Nian, are you alright? We were really scared just now; we really thought you had gone into demonic possession," Chen Wudi came over and patted Xu Nian on the shoulder.

Xu Nian's face changed, a sharp pain from his shoulder passed through him, almost fainting him from the agony.

"Even if I was fine, you've patted me too hard now," Xu Nian cursed.

Chen Wudi immediately showed a smile, knowing from Xu Nian's words that he was alright.

The Chen Family also all breathed a sigh of relief, after all, Xu Nian just now was indeed terrifying.

"Senior, Uncle Chen, do you know where to find a Spiritual Sense type Spiritual Artifact?" Xu Nian thought about it and still asked.

Though he felt it was unlikely anyone would know about such a Spiritual Artifact, he decided to give it a try.

Unsurprisingly, Chen Xuanlong shook his head: "Spiritual Artifacts are already precious enough. Throughout the Tianhen Empire, it's unknown if there are any Spiritual Sense type Spiritual Artifacts. What do you need a Spiritual Sense type for?"

"To save Sister Yanyun, she's not dead yet. As long as we find a Spiritual Sense type Spiritual Artifact, there is still hope," Xu Nian responded.

Everyone was stunned, Yanyun wasn't dead?

That was indeed good news!

But how easy would it be to find a Spiritual Sense type Spiritual Artifact?

"Ah, I know where to find a Spiritual Sense type Spiritual Artifact," just then, Chen Tiansheng suddenly spoke up.

Xu Nian instantly was taken aback, then turned his head to look at Chen Tiansheng.

Chen Tiansheng hurriedly explained, "Yes, I know where there is a Spiritual Sense Spiritual Artifact, the Artifact Refining Sect, and the Treasure of the Sect, the Heavenly Gang Pearl, is a Spiritual Sense Spiritual Artifact."

"Artifact Refining Sect?" Xu Nian's eyes flashed with a glint of light.

Yes, if one were to speak of where the most treasures are, apart from the Imperial Family, it would be the Artifact Refining Sect that has the most.

"However, this item has always been regarded as a treasure by the Artifact Refining Sect, and only the members of the Sect can possess it. The position of the Artifact Refining Sect Master is so exalted that even the Imperial Family shows deference to him. It will be difficult for you to obtain this treasure from him, as the treasures of the Artifact Refining Sect are never lent out," Chen Tiansheng said with a furrowed brow.

The people around him, upon hearing this, had equally grave expressions.

The Artifact Refining Sect is one of the three supremely transcendent Sects of the empire, ranking alongside the Wuji Sect and the Haotian Sect as one of the Three Great Sects, and due to the Artifact Masters, it has always occupied the foremost position among them.

Such a Sect, even if Chen Tiansheng were to go there, would not give him a second glance, making it almost impossible to borrow the Sect's treasure.

"Uncle Chen, did you just say that only the Sect Master is qualified to possess this treasure?" Xu Nian suddenly turned his head and asked Chen Tiansheng.

"Yes, as long as you become the Sect Master or a candidate for Sect Master, you will have a chance to obtain this Treasure of the Sect," Chen Tiansheng replied.

Xu Nian's gaze instantly became resolute.

Three months, although the time was a bit tight, he had to try no matter what.

"Are you planning to?" Chen Tiansheng seemed to have guessed Xu Nian's thoughts and asked in surprise.

"Yes, I want to join the Artifact Refining Sect and strive to become the Sect Master or a candidate for Sect Master within three months. Sister Yanyun ended up like this to save me, so I must give it my all and try," Xu Nian declared with determination.

The people around were all taken aback.

Becoming the Sect Master or a candidate for Sect Master of the Artifact Refining Sect in three months was simply a fantasy.

If it were anyone else saying this, they would certainly think that the person was mad.

But regarding the young man before them, they dared not judge him by common sense because this guy was indeed a thorough madman.

"Alright, since you want to join the Artifact Refining Sect, I can write you a letter of recommendation; I believe the Artifact Refining Sect will still give that much respect," Chen Tiansheng spoke up.

"Thank you, Uncle Chen," Xu Nian expressed his gratitude.

Chen Tiansheng simply waved his hand, indicating that Xu Nian need not be polite.

"By the way, Uncle Chen, there's one more thing I need to trouble you with—it's about Sister Yanyun's body. I need a large Ice Coffin to put her in, to ensure her flesh does not decay, as well as some medicinal liquids to heal internal injuries, to help heal her internal organs," Xu Nian spoke again.

Zhao Yanyun's palm strike had caused severe injuries, with most of her internal organs nearly destroyed. If her flesh was not healed, even calling back her soul would still not cure her.

"Don't worry about it, leave it to me. Yanyun is also my niece, I can't ignore her," Chen Tiansheng nodded and said.

Xu Nian nodded, finally feeling relieved.

As he relaxed, his vision darkened, and he fainted.

"Xu Nian..." Chen Yao and the others became anxious.

Chen Xuanlong stepped forward to check on him and said, "Don't worry, he's fine. It's just the aftermath of the negative energy on his body; he'll be fine after some rest."

Hearing what Chen Xuanlong said, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Thinking back to Xu Nian's murderous aura before, they indeed felt a bit scared!

Chapter 222 Encountering Obstacles

Xu Nian rested for two days and, after mostly recovering, hurried toward the Artifact Refining Sect.

The Artifact Refining Sect was not in East Field County but was located within West Shu County.

With Little Xu Yu's help, what would have taken more than ten days of travel took them only three days to reach the base of the Artifact Refining Sect.

He only had three months, so he had to make use of every moment; he did not want to waste time on the road.

However, during this journey, Xu Nian's Divine Demon Refining Body unexpectedly broke through to the Nine-star Body Sect realm.

Xu Nian found a unique aspect of the Divine Demon Refining Body—that every time he was injured,

and once recovered, his physical strength would greatly increase.

This time, his invoking of negative energy into his body pushing it into an overloaded state was the reason his Divine Demon Refining Body broke through so quickly.

However, his Spirit Cultivation remained at the Nine-Star Martial Sect Peak; it seemed he would need more time to accumulate the strength to break through to the Battle General Realm.

Of course, the breakthrough was just a matter of time, perhaps he could suddenly receive some Spirit Pill that would allow him to break through in a day.

"Halt, who goes there?" However, just as Xu Nian arrived at the foot of the Artifact Refining Sect, he was stopped by two gate-guarding disciples.

Both disciples, around twenty years old, were not highly cultivated; only at the Warrior Realm.

But both young men had faces full of pride, looking at Xu Nian with disdain.

Today, in front of Xu Nian, he could kill these Nine-star Warriors with just one hand.

But Xu Nian was not there to fight; he came to request entry into the sect, so there was no need to offend these gate-guarding disciples.

"Two senior brothers, I come from East Field County and wish to join the Artifact Refining Sect. Could you please announce my arrival?" Xu Nian said with a smile.

"Who is your senior brother? Get lost. The time for recruiting disciples this year has already passed. Come back next year," replied a young man with a black mole on his cheek coldly, then he ignored Xu Nian.

Xu Nian frowned—next year?

He could wait, but Sister Yanyun couldn't.

So he smiled again and said, "Senior brother, I have a personal recommendation letter from the East Field County Governor. Please trouble yourself to pass it on."

Saying so, Xu Nian handed over the letter he was holding.

"Get lost, I'll say it again, no one here is your senior brother. I don't care whose recommendation it is—even if it's from Emperor Tianhen, it's useless," the young man with the black mole said bluntly as he knocked the letter from Xu Nian's hand, looking aggressive.

The other young man, though silent, also smirked disdainfully, never taking Xu Nian seriously from beginning to end.

Xu Nian's expression darkened instantly, and he bent down to pick up the letter from the ground.

He had heard that the disciples of the Artifact Refining Sect were extremely arrogant, but he didn't expect that even these gatekeeper disciples would be so haughty.

He originally wanted to enter the sect peacefully, but now he was facing obstacles from merely the gate guards.

"Are you really not going to pass the message?" Xu Nian asked coldly, his eyes icy.

With Sister Yanyun's safety at stake, he had to enter this sect today by any means necessary.

"Yo, quite the temper. What, kid, do you really think you can stand up to me?" the young man with the black mole, seeing Xu Nian daring to give him a stern look, said furiously.

The other young man also showed a hint of anger, clearly ready to stand united with his fellow disciple.

"I originally didn't want to cause trouble; I just wanted to enter the Artifact Refining Sect quietly. Since you're pushing me, I have no choice but to fight my way in," Xu Nian said with icy resolve, truly angered.

"Hmph, where does this wild kid come from, daring to cause trouble at our Artifact Refining Sect? Luckily I'm in a bad mood today; I'll take it out on you," the young man with the black mole arrogantly said, and then thrust a fist toward Xu Nian's face.

Xu Nian's eyes sharpened, and he was ready to strike back.

Once he hit back, this young man with the black mole would surely be severely injured.

"Stop!"

However, just as Xu Nian was about to retaliate, a commanding shout came from within the sect.

Following this, a middle-aged man in a red robe walked out from the sect's gate.

The two gate-guarding disciples became serious upon seeing the middle-aged man and respectfully said, "Elder Qi, we greet you."

Xu Nian also took a measure of this so-called Elder Qi.

He noticed that the elder's cultivation was in the One-star Battle General Realm, and his age appeared to be around forty.

This elder looked ordinary, but his eyes were somewhat narrow and long.

"What's the matter?" the middle-aged man, known as Elder Qi, sternly asked.

"Elder Qi, this wild kid, from who knows where, insists on joining the sect. As you know, the recruitment season has already ended. I asked him to leave, but he kept making trouble. He even claims he has a recommendation letter from the East Field County Governor. We are in West Shu County, he says he has a recommendation from the East Field County Governor, who knows if it's true or not. Isn't that absurd?" The young man with the mole quickly complained to the elder.

"Oh? A personal letter from the East Field County Governor?" Elder Qi turned to look at Xu Nian and then asked, "Young man, do you really have a personal letter from the East Field County Governor?"

"Replying to the elder, I do." Xu Nian respectfully said, and then directly presented his letter.

Elder Qi took the letter, glanced over it briefly, and declared, "It's true, this indeed is a personal letter from the East Field County Governor, and it even has the Governor's Seal, which is impossible to fake."

The two gate-guarding disciples were astonished. Was this young man actually recommended by the East Field County Governor?

Of course, they were only slightly surprised, since even if this young man were the personal son of the East Field County Governor, it wouldn't matter to them.

But what Elder Qi said next truly shocked the two gate-guarding disciples.

"Since you are recommended by the East Field County Governor, I can make an exception and give you a chance to take the assessment. But I am curious, the East Field County Governor claims your cultivation has already reached the Nine-star Martial Sect level. Is this true?" Elder Qi asked.

The two gate-guarding disciples were stunned. Nine-star Martial Sect?

How could that be?

Wasn't it supposed to be Nine-star Warrior? Could it be that the East Field County Governor made a mistake?

The young man in front of them looked even younger than them. How could he possibly be a martial sect expert, and a Nine-star Martial Sect at that?

"It is true!" Xu Nian declared.

He then released his aura, which indeed was that of the Nine-star Martial Sect Peak.

When writing the letter, Chen Tiansheng had asked for his opinion on whether to reveal his cultivation.

After some thought, Xu Nian decided it might be beneficial to disclose a bit about his cultivation to attract the attention of the Artifact Refining Sect, and hence had Chen Tiansheng include his Spiritual Artifact Cultivation level, omitting the fact that he had also reached the Body Cultivation level.

Elder Qi was taken aback; such a young Nine-star Martial Sect expert was something he had never encountered before.

The two gate-guarding disciples also wore faces of shock, feeling somewhat frightened.

Had they really started a fight just now, wouldn't they have brought disaster upon themselves?

Yet as shocked as they were, the two gate-guarding disciples felt a trace of disdain.

This was the Artifact Refining Sect, after all, where Artifact Refining skills mattered. What use was high cultivation here?

But the next sentence from Elder Qi left them utterly speechless.

"The letter also says you are a Seven-star Refining Apprentice?" Elder Qi curiously asked.

"Yes!" Xu Nian nodded.

Actually, his refining skills were already at the level of a Nine-star Refining Apprentice, but for safety's sake, he had asked to be written as a Seven-star. He believed that with the skills of a Seven-star Refining Apprentice, joining the Artifact Refining Sect should be sufficient.

Elder Qi and the two gate-guarding disciples looked at Xu Nian nodding and all involuntarily took a sharp breath.

Seven-star Refining Apprentice, were you refining artifacts from the womb?

Normally, refining takes much longer than cultivation, as improving by one star usually requires one to two years, and even those with exceptional talent need nearly ten months to advance a star.

And here the two gate-guarding disciples, already in their twenties, were merely Three-star Refining Apprentices.

How old was this young man in front of them, and he was already a Seven-star Refining Apprentice?

Seeing their expressions, Xu Nian felt a surge of speechlessness.

Had he asked Chen Tiansheng to write too high a level as Seven-star?

Would it not scare them if he had written Nine-star?

Chapter 223 Outer Disciple

The Gate Guarding Disciple, upon hearing Elder Qi's words, reacted immediately with disbelief.

They couldn't believe a teenager of sixteen or seventeen years old possessed such heaven-defying Artifact Refining skills.

Elder Qi also had some doubts. If what the youngster said was true, then this young man was definitely a prodigy in Artifact Refining.

"Although the level of Artifact Refining skills is determined by the grade of the weapons refined, the ability to control fire can also reflect a person's strength to some extent. If you can pull your flames into threads, it would mean you have reached the Seven-star Artifact Refining level," Elder Qi said.

The Gate Guarding Disciples nodded in agreement upon hearing this.

Controlling fire is one method of demonstrating one's Artifact Refining level. Although it's not all-encompassing, it's quite accurate.

"Okay!" Xu Nian responded and then summoned a flame in his hand.

This flame was just an ordinary flame.

For an Artifact Refining Apprentice, an ordinary flame was sufficient.

Of course, if Xu Nian wished to advance to the level of a Little Artifact Refiner, he still needed to seek out a powerful flame.

Other Artifact Refiners each had their own Lifebound Flames, but Xu Nian had to search for his own. Perhaps this was a disadvantage of the Divine Hammer.

The Gate Guarding Disciples and Elder Qi frowned subconsciously when they saw that the flame Xu Nian summoned was just an ordinary one.

An Artifact Refiner's flame quality usually improves with their level of skill. Ordinary flame is the most basic and is usually possessed by a One-star Alchemy Apprentice.

Could the young man in front of them be lying?

The eyes of the Gate Guarding Disciple also showed a hint of contempt, as if they had seen through Xu Nian's lies.

However, the next moment, they all widened their eyes in shock.

Xu Nian extended his left hand, and from the flame, he drew out a filament of fire, but this filament was as fine as a strand of hair.

Elder Qi and the two Gate Guarding Disciples looked at each other with astonishment in their eyes, speechless.

Even a Nine-star Apprentice could manage to pull fire into threads.

But the threads would at least be as thick as a carrot fiber, yet this youngster could pull the fire into strands as fine as hair.

Their control of fire was bloody terrifying.

Just this ability to control fire was already at the level of a Little Artifact Refiner, wasn't it?

Elder Qi was amazed, but the two Gate Guarding Disciples were swallowing hard with deep shock.

At this moment, they were fearful. With the young man's talent, he was sure to become a superstar in the Artifact Refining Sect. They had nearly offended this future superstar.

"Uh, this junior brother, oh no, senior brother, I was offensive just now, I hope you can be magnanimous," the youth with the mole immediately changed his tune.

The other youth beside him also had a face full of anxiety and apology.

Xu Nian didn't mind and waved his hand dismissively, then turned to look at Elder Qi and asked, "Elder Qi, can I join the Artifact Refining Sect now?"

"Yes, come with me. I'll take you to the administration office to complete the formalities," Elder Qi said.

Xu Nian's face finally showed a smile as he followed Elder Qi towards the administration office.

Soon, under Elder Qi's guidance, Xu Nian obtained his Disciple Identity Token and Disciple's robe.

He also learned from Elder Qi that the Artifact Refining Sect's disciples are divided into three levels: Outer Disciple, Inner Sect Disciple, and Elite Disciple.

Of course, it's said that above the Elite Disciples are Core Disciples, and becoming a Core Disciple grants one the eligibility to compete for the position of Sect Master.

The division of disciple levels is not based on Cultivation level but on Artifact Refining skills.

All Artifact Refining Apprentices are Outer Disciples, while One-star to Five Stars Artifact Refiners are Inner Sect Disciples, and above Five Stars they become Elite Disciples.

As for how to become a Core Disciple, Xu Nian did not yet know.

After learning all this, Xu Nian had a clear idea of the path he wanted to take in the next three months.

That was to diligently improve his Artifact Refining skills.

Since Xu Nian was still an Artifact Refining Apprentice, he could only become an Outer Disciple.

Elder Qi left after taking Xu Nian to the dwelling place of the Outer Disciples.

Before he departed, Xu Nian covertly slipped Elder Qi a piece of exceptionally high-quality Meteorite Iron.

Elder Qi's eyes immediately lit up, and after receiving the Meteorite Iron, his tone with Xu Nian also became much gentler.

A smile also appeared on Xu Nian's face.

Now that he had just arrived at the Artifact Refining Sect, if he wanted to climb the ranks quickly, he still needed support from others.

Although he had exhibited extraordinary talent, Elder Qi had only acted on behalf of the Sect. However, after receiving the gift from Xu Nian, the nature of their relationship changed.

This meant that the faster Xu Nian climbed the ranks, the more benefits Elder Qi would receive.

As such, Elder Qi would be more willing to help him, which undoubtedly lightened Xu Nian's burden.

After seeing off Elder Qi, Xu Nian then returned to his own residence.

The place he lived in was a courtyard house, which, besides him, also housed three other Outer Disciples.

Their ages weren't much different from Xu Nian's, all about seventeen or eighteen years old, with the eldest being just twenty-one.

As for their Cultivation, none of them were high; they were all of Warrior Level, not on the same level as Xu Nian at all.

"Hello, I'm Zhang Meng, a Two-star Artifact Refining Apprentice. Are you the new guy?" At that moment, one of the three, an eighteen-year-old youth, came up with enthusiasm.

"Xu Nian. I've just joined the Sect," Xu Nian replied politely.

"Not bad, it isn't the time for recruiting Disciples. You being able to enter the Sect at this time, and with Elder Qi personally escorting you here, you must be a scion of a major family or a relative of Elder Qi?" Zhang Meng said, his face ablaze with excitement.

The other two Disciples also looked towards Xu Nian, obviously curious about his identity.

Xu Nian smiled and said, "I'm not a scion from a major family, nor Elder Qi's relative. I'm just a member of an ordinary small family from East Field County. It just so happened that I ran into Elder Qi at the Sect's entrance, and we hit it off, so he helped me come over."

"Oh, I see." Zhang Meng nodded, suddenly enlightened.

But then he felt something was off. Elder Qi was always a skinflint. When had he become so amiable?

Upon hearing Xu Nian's words, the other two youths immediately lost interest in Xu Nian, turning around and heading back to their rooms without any intention of greeting him.

Xu Nian was taken aback.

Could the Disciples of the Artifact Refining Sect really be this arrogant?

"Don't mind them. People like them are most common in the Artifact Refining Sect, all with their noses in the air, without a trace of warmth. If you have no strength, they won't take you seriously. But I find you to be quite amiable, which suits my taste," Zhang Meng said, clapping Xu Nian on the shoulder and laughing heartily, as if they were kindred spirits.

Xu Nian gave a wry smile. This Zhang Meng was quite forward.

However, he seemed to be a nice person, someone worth making friends with.

Xu Nian then chatted with Zhang Meng for a long time and learned a lot about the Artifact Refining Sect through him.

Zhang Meng didn't hold back, even telling Xu Nian about the female Disciple he was smitten with.

Xu Nian felt helpless but grew fond of Zhang Meng. He saw a hint of Chen Wudi in Zhang Meng.

But soon, a wave of commotion came from outside.

The other two Disciples in the courtyard also rushed out of their rooms and hurried out.

"What's going on?" Xu Nian asked, puzzled.

Zhang Meng smacked his forehead and quickly said, "Hurry, I completely forgot. Today is the day Zhang Tian, the goddess, is sparring with Jing Haoyang. Quick, we'll be late if we don't go now."

After saying that, Zhang Meng pulled Xu Nian and ran out of the courtyard.

Although Xu Nian was confused, he roughly understood.

He didn't know who Jing Haoyang was, but Zhang Tian was exactly the one Zhang Meng had been admiring.

Of course, Xu Nian was more interested in seeing how the Disciples of the Artifact Refining Sect practiced their craft.

Chapter 224 Everyone Has Been There

Zhang Meng quickly brought Xu Nian to a square.

At this moment, the square was surrounded by many people, most of whom were Outer Disciples.

The attire of Outer Disciples differed from that of Inner Sect Disciples. The latter had a circle of blue wave patterns on their cuffs, making them easily distinguishable.

In the center of this crowd stood a man and a woman.

The woman was around twenty years old, a Seven-star Warrior.

Both her figure and appearance could be considered upper-class, though not comparable to Murong Xue or Chen Yao, she was still of a beauty caliber.

Next to her stood a youth, about twenty-four or twenty-five years old, who had reached the level of a One-star Battle Sect. He was considered a talented individual among the Artifact Refining Sect's Outer Disciples.

This young man clearly showed interest in the woman, his eyes frequently glancing at her, filled with admiration and possessiveness.

As for the woman, she held her head high, ignoring the young man's gaze, yet a faint smile hung on her lips as if she thoroughly enjoyed the attention from him and the crowd.

"See that? That's my goddess, Zhang Tian, how about it, isn't she beautiful?" boasted Zhang Meng. "She is the most beautiful among our Outer Disciples and also has an extraordinary Cultivation talent. She's only twenty but has already reached the level of a Six-star Refining Apprentice, a rare genius in Artifact Refining. These disciples around us are here for her, all coveting my goddess."

It was as if he was showing off a treasured possession he owned, filled with pride and self-satisfaction.

Xu Nian just smiled and said nothing. He believed Zhang Meng would never have any real interaction with Zhang Tian.

Clearly, Zhang Tian was much more prideful than he had anticipated.

Just by the way she enjoyed everyone's attention, it was clear that even if she wasn't scheming deeply, she wouldn't be naïve in her ways.

And someone like her would certainly have high standards for her partner.

For someone ordinary and yet honest like Zhang Meng, an Outer Disciple,

Zhang Tian surely wouldn't spare him a second glance, as he held no utilitarian value to her.

"Is that guy the one you mentioned, Jing Haoyang?" Xu Nian asked.

"Yes, that's Jing Haoyang, one of the recognized geniuses among the Outer Disciples," Zhang Meng responded with a displeased tone, his gaze towards Jing Haoyang was extremely unfriendly, even his voice carried a bit of weight. "It's said that his level in Artifact Refining has reached that of a Seven-star Refiner and he could become an Inner Sect Disciple within three years."

Xu Nian just smiled; Zhang Meng was obviously jealous.

It was apparent that Jing Haoyang was quite close to Zhang Tian typically, probably one of her staunch pursuers.

"What is this contest about then?" Xu Nian continued.

Hearing this question, Zhang Meng's face grew even more discontented, "Jing Haoyang has been relentlessly pursuing Zhang Tian. Even though she clearly doesn't like him, he keeps clinging on. Now, to get her to agree to go out to dinner with him, he actually set up this sparring bet. Left with no choice, Zhang Tian had to agree, which is really despicable."

Xu Nian chuckled bitterly.

Was Zhang Tian truly forced into agreeing to this bet?

She obviously wanted to use this contest to enhance her reputation within the Artifact Refining Sect. Even if she lost, no one would criticize her given that her level in Artifact Refining was a grade lower.

And if she genuinely determined to reject Jing Haoyang, would she really be helpless?

It was clear she was playing hard to get, deliberately keeping Jing Haoyang on the hook.

Poor Zhang Meng, too naive to see through Zhang Tian's intentions.

But Jing Haoyang was not much better, clearly being used, yet thinking he might succeed.

Xu Nian was sure that if someone superior to Jing Haoyang with more potential showed the slightest interest in her, she would immediately discard him and make a clear boundary.

However, these matters were none of Xu Nian's concern. He was at the Artifact Refining Sect not for these trivial matters.

"Look quick, Elder Wang has arrived. Jing Haoyang even invited Elder Wang, seems like he's worried Zhang Tian might back out!"

At that moment, a hubbub arose from the crowd.

Soon after, a middle-aged man walked out from among them. His face was stern and resolute, resembling someone impartial and strict.

Xu Nian used his Spiritual Sense to probe the middle-aged man's Cultivation and discovered that he was a three-star Battle General.

As for the man's identity, Xu Nian had already learned about it previously while chatting leisurely with Zhang Meng.

This man was named Wang Long, and he was one of the three Outer Elders. He was also the most impartial among them.

The person who had taken Xu Nian into the Sect, Qi Heng, was another Outer Elder.

As for the third Outer Elder, named Pang Fei, Xu Nian had yet to meet him.

"Greetings, Elder Wang," the crowd said in unison, bowing.

Wang Long, expressionless, waved his hand and walked straight up to Jing Haoyang and Zhang Tian, getting straight to the point, "Don't waste time, let's get started. Here are your Artifact Refining Materials. You have one moment, and I will judge who forged the better-quality weapon and decide the winner."

With a flick of his sleeve, two ordinary pieces of iron ore flew in front of the two of them.

Jing Haoyang and Zhang Tian both nodded, then with a serious expression, they took the iron ore.

The difficulty of this spar was not small. First, their Artifact Refining Materials were iron ore, not already extracted pig iron, which invisibly increased the difficulty of refining.

Secondly, they had only one moment, which was extremely pressing for them.

The two did not hesitate and immediately got to work.

Zhang Tian flicked her sleeve, and a green furnace nearly two meters tall appeared in front of her, radiating intense heat.

"Is that Zhang Tian's Artifact Furnace? It's actually a Yellow-level Top Grade green furnace; that furnace must not be cheap!" the crowd couldn't help but exclaim.

However, Jing Haoyang just smiled slightly, waved his hand, and a golden furnace appeared in front of everyone, its surface embroidered with patterns of Exotic Beasts, making the whole furnace look exceptionally domineering and luxurious.

"It's actually a Xuan Level Low Grade Artifact Furnace. Oh my, Jing Haoyang truly is the young master of the Jing Family. This Xuan Level Low Grade Artifact Furnace must be worth at least a million Gold Coins!" the crowd couldn't help but exclaim.

Even Zhang Meng in the crowd showed a look of envy at this moment.

A Xuan Level Artifact Furnace, that was not something an ordinary Refining Apprentice could possess, nor did many Little Artifact Refiners necessarily have a Xuan Level Artifact Furnace.

"Artifact Furnace? What's that?" However, Xu Nian asked with a puzzled face.

At his words, a few people standing near Xu Nian immediately turned their heads, looking at Xu Nian as if he were an idiot.

Even Zhang Meng looked at Xu Nian with a surprised expression and finally couldn't help but ask, "Dude, are you serious? The Artifact Furnace is an essential for every Refiner. Without an Artifact Furnace, how are you going to melt the iron ore, extract, and set the mold? You're not telling me you don't know about these, are you?"

Xu Nian nodded his head awkwardly. Indeed, it was his first time hearing that Artifact Refining required an Artifact Furnace.

He learned Artifact Refining from the Emperor Ye Tian, but Emperor Ye Tian only taught him an Artifact Refining Technique and left him to fend for himself.

He hadn't taught him anything else, and during the extraction of iron ore, he had always directly controlled the flame with his Spiritual Sense. What did he need an Artifact Furnace for?

However, Xu Nian's nod made the surrounding few people feel speechless.

How did this guy even get into the Sect without knowing what an Artifact Furnace is?

Could it be that he hasn't even started learning Artifact Refining yet?

"It's okay, we've all been there. I was also a novice once. Just learn more in the future," Zhang Meng said, patting Xu Nian's shoulder to comfort him as he saw Xu Nian's embarrassment.

Xu Nian's mouth twitched.

Novice?

Why does that word sound so strange?

Chapter 225 You Take the Blame

After Zhang Meng's speech, the people around paid him no more mind.

They simply saw Xu Nian as a newcomer at the entry-level, without much interest to spare.

And Xu Nian couldn't care less to explain himself, his attention quickly shifted to the two players in the field.

The two had already begun the first process of Artifact Refining, melting.

So-called melting is the melting of Artifact Refining Materials in order to extract the useful Artifact Refining materials.

Generally, the more high-end the Artifact Refining material, the more powerful the flames needed, otherwise, one cannot melt the Artifact Refining Material.

Both contenders in the field had brought forth flames, kindled through Secret Techniques, slightly stronger than ordinary flames but not immensely.

After all, they were still only Artifact Refining Apprentices.

After producing the flames, they placed them into the Artifact Furnace, using its advantage to completely melt the two iron ores.

However, to Xu Nian, this was nothing close to clever technique.

Nowhere near as good as the Ten Thousand Divine Hammer Technique, which uses Spiritual Sense to control the flames in a more harmonious and speedy way.

With Spiritual Sense, one can envelop the ore with flames at every point, more effectively refining the material.

It took nearly half of two hours for the two to extract the iron from the ores.

After the extraction, they proceeded to shaping.

In Xu Nian's view, their shaping process could only be described as clumsy—they had to rely on molds to pour the molten iron.

Xu Nian, however, could complete this process with just his Spiritual Sense, without the need for pre-made molds.

The third step was to begin hammering to set the shape.

This stage required constant pounding with a hammer to bring the weapon's form closer to perfection.

The two swung their hammers, continually striking and adjusting the weapon's model.

Nevertheless, this process still appeared clumsy to Xu Nian, their hammering was utterly feeble.

The final step, hammer refining, was all but neglected by them, with just a few simple strikes before declaring the task finished.

To Xu Nian, it was unspeakable.

If the hammer refining was inadequate, the weapon might look unblemished, but it wouldn't be one complete whole.

Invisible flaws would exist, thereby significantly decreasing the quality of the weapon.

Yet, what seemed like a problematic process to Xu Nian thoroughly enthralled Zhang Meng and the others.

Especially Zhang Tian's Artifact Refining process—they found it pleasing to the eye, her fluid and flexible moves made it hard for them to look away.

One cannot deny, a woman refining artifacts, wielding a hammer, indeed has a striking and spirited charm, a quality other women do not possess.

Soon enough, both participants completed their weapons.

The artifacts they crafted were both daggers.

Elder Wang Long walked forward, glanced at Zhang Tian's weapon and nodded, giving his assessment, "Not bad, the Artifact Refining process was mostly smooth; though there were a few details lacking, it's still quite remarkable to reach such a level at this age. The quality of this sword is also very good, barely qualifying as Seven-star Mortal Iron."

Seven-star Mortal Iron?

The people around all showed signs of surprise.

This Zhang Tian, just a Six-star Refining Apprentice, was able to craft a weapon of Seven-star Mortal Iron quality, truly a prodigy in Artifact Refining.

The grading of weapons is based on the Artifact Refining Materials and further divided into nine stars, corresponding to the Artifact Refiner's level.

This Zhang Tian's ability to craft a Seven-star Mortal Iron level weapon indicated that she was just about within reach of the Seven-star Refining Apprentice realm.

"Thank you for the praise, Elder." Zhang Tian said with a small smile, giving thanks.

Her smile reflected her current mood perfectly.

She just wanted the attention of others, and now that her goal had been achieved, the outcome of the competition, whether win or lose, no longer mattered to her.

Losing would at most mean a meal, and in the end, she still came out ahead.

Elder Wang gave a slight nod and then came in front of Jing Haoyang again, picked up Jing Haoyang's weapon, glanced at it, and shouted in anger, "Although it has reached the peak of Seven-star Mortal Iron, you used a Profound Level Artifact Furnace. If you used the same furnace as her, the quality of this sword would drop even further. After such a long time with no progress, you really disappoint me."

"Thank you for the guidance, Elder," Jing Haoyang hastily replied.

Although he had been criticized, his heart was filled with joy because he needed only to win the result; nothing else mattered.

Elder Wang saw the expression on Jing Haoyang's face and shook his head in disappointment.

The young people of today were too impatient, many seeking the noble profession of Artifact Master.

Those who truly cherished Artifact Refining from the bottom of their hearts were very few indeed.

For example, Jing Haoyang in front of him treated Artifact Refining as a chip to pursue a girl, which truly displeased him.

However, Jing Haoyang didn't pay any heed to that and turned his head to look at Zhang Tian with a smug expression, asking, "Tiantian, you'll agree to have dinner with me now, won't you?"

"I'll honor the bet!" Zhang Tian replied without hesitation.

Upon hearing this, Jing Haoyang was overjoyed and promptly boasted, "Then it's settled. I'll have someone reserve the entire Lion Building for tonight, to dine with my goddess."

Zhang Tian just smiled and didn't say a word.

However, the people around were filled with envy, including Zhang Meng.

Zhang Meng clenched his teeth in irritation, looking like he could devour someone, extremely dissatisfied with Jing Haoyang's smug look.

Xu Nian smiled helplessly and asked Jing Haoyang, "Want to make him miss that dinner?"

"Of course, I do. That's my goddess. How could she dine with someone else? But is there a way to do that? Zhang Tian already lost the match, we can't have her break her promise, can we?" Zhang Meng said, feeling powerless.

"It's good you want to. I can make Jing Haoyang miss this dinner without making your goddess break her word, but you'll have to take the blame. Are you willing?" Xu Nian said to Zhang Meng with a smile.

Zhang Meng was taken aback. Him, take the blame?

Surely Jing Haoyang wouldn't let him off afterward?

But thinking of his goddess dining with another man, he still felt uncomfortable.

"Okay, as long as you can spoil this dinner, I'll take the blame," said Zhang Meng as if making up his mind.

Xu Nian smiled upon hearing this.

If Zhang Meng didn't dare to take the blame, it meant his feelings for Zhang Tian weren't deep, and Xu Nian wouldn't have to bother.

If Zhang Meng was willing to take the blame, Xu Nian would give him a chance to get close to Zhang Tian, enabling Zhang Meng to see Zhang Tian's true face and prevent him from falling deeper.

Of course, if Zhang Meng didn't care about these, Xu Nian would still bless them.

"Good, since you've agreed to take the blame, I'll help you this one time. Just wait for Zhang Tian to seek you out actively," Xu Nian said with a smile, then walked out of the crowd.

Zhang Meng was bewildered. What was Xu Nian planning to do?

Before he could figure out what Xu Nian intended, Xu Nian's next words scared him.

Xu Nian stepped forward and declared loudly, "I never thought the Elders of the Artifact Refining Sect could be so useless, failing to notice such a big problem. It seems our Artifact Refining Sect truly has no one left?"

With these words, everyone looked at Xu Nian, wondering who was so bold as to mock Elder Wang.

Elder Wang Long, who had been preparing to leave, stopped in his tracks, his face flooding with anger.

At that moment, Zhang Meng's back was covered in cold sweat as his heart raced with anxiety.

Brother, I wanted your help to stop this bet, why are you provoking Elder Wang?

That's Elder Wang Long, known as Yama Wang!

Only then did Zhang Meng remember that Xu Nian was a complete novice who didn't even recognize an Artifact Furnace!

The more he thought about it, the colder his back felt!

Chapter 226 The Unassuming Genius Zhang Meng

At this moment, everyone turned their gaze to Xu Nian, wondering who this guy was.

Mad, right? He actually dared to confront Elder Wang Long?

Even Jing Haoran and Zhang Tian looked at Xu Nian with surprise and confusion in their eyes.

Xu Nian, however, paid no attention to the shocked stares of the crowd and strode towards the center of the square.

"Boy, are you also a disciple of the Artifact Refining Sect?" Although furious, Elder Wang Long didn't immediately lash out but coldly asked Xu Nian.

"Yes, I just joined the Artifact Refining Sect today," Xu Nian replied honestly.

The crowd was astonished.

This guy dared to confront Elder Wang on his first day in the Sect; was he seeking death?

Those who had heard Xu Nian ask what an artifact furnace was rolled their eyes even harder.

What kind of idiot was this?

How on earth did this idiot manage to get into the Sect?

Elder Wang's expression instantly darkened as well; a disciple who had just joined the Sect dared to confront him in front of so many people.

"Boy, did you just call me trash? Do you know that insulting an Elder of the Sect will get you expelled?" Elder Wang huffed.

He could be said to be the most proficient in the Artifact Refining Technique among the three Outer Elders, and now he was being called trash by a new Outer Disciple.

How could he endure this?

"I merely spoke the truth. If Elder Wang can't even tell the difference between trash and a Seven-star Mortal Iron Level Weapon, what are you if not trash?" Xu Nian replied boldly and firmly.

The surrounding crowd gasped in shock; this kid had some nerve openly calling Elder Wang trash.

This was asking for death!

At this moment, the most vexed person was naturally Zhang Meng.

He had just agreed to take the blame for Xu Nian, and now with Xu Nian directly offending Elder Wang, wouldn't he also be dragged down?

"Bro, please stop talking; if you go on, someone's going to get hurt," Zhang Meng thought silently to himself.

Now he really wanted to slap himself hard; why had he agreed to Xu Nian's request to take the blame?

Wang Long was truly enraged, his eyes filled with boundless fury. This youth actually called him trash to his face; probably even the Sect Master wouldn't dare to do so.

"Boy, you just said I can't even tell the difference between trash and a Seven-star Mortal Iron Level Weapon. What do you mean by that? If you can't give me a reasonable explanation, today I must kick you out of the Sect," Wang Long angrily declared.

"Elder, why waste words on him? Just expel this kind of person from the Sect. He has no respect for his seniors and does not deserve to be a disciple of our Sect," Jing Haoyang interjected.

He could have won Zhang Tian's agreement to dine with him, an occasion for great joy.

But now someone had come to stir up trouble, which naturally vexed him, so the more he looked at Xu Nian, the more displeased he became.

Upon hearing Wang Long's question, a smile appeared on Xu Nian's face.

It was just as he had expected; Elder Wang was an Artifact Refining enthusiast who took great pride in his craft.

He might tolerate disrespect from others, but he absolutely couldn't stand any questioning of his Artifact Refining skills.

And Xu Nian had seized upon this to challenge Elder Wang.

If he had directly confronted Jing Haoyang from the start, Jing Haoyang would definitely not have given him the opportunity.

Thus, Xu Nian smiled and said, "The sword he refined is nothing but trash, yet Elder Wang just claimed it peaked at Seven-star Mortal Iron. If that's not ignorance of Artifact Refining, it must be favoritism and cheating."

Xu Nian's words resounded forcefully throughout the area.

The crowd was taken aback; Jing Haoyang's sword was trash?

How could that be?

"You're talking nonsense! What are you? My creations could never be trash," Jing Haoyang immediately burst out in anger.

The guy in front of him dared to say his craftsmanship was trash, but he was, after all, a Seven-star Refining Apprentice. How could he stand such an insult?

Zhang Tian, too, curiously turned her gaze to Xu Nian, her beautiful eyes flashing with astonishment.

An intuition told her that this young man was neither a fool nor spouting nonsense, but she also had to admit that the quality of the sword Jing Haoyang had crafted did seem superior to her own work.

Wang Long's brows were furrowed, his eyes dark with contemplation, as if pondering something.

"Elder Wang, this guy is just a lunatic, spouting madness here. I think it's best we just kick him out now," Jing Haoyang said to Wang Long.

Xu Nian paid no heed to Jing Haoyang's bellowing, instead, he continued to look at Wang Long.

After pondering for a moment, Wang Long raised his head to look at Xu Nian and asked, "You say this sword is a piece of junk? What can you offer as proof?"

Xu Nian gave a slight smile, knowing it had finally come to this, and said with a smile, "Proving it is quite simple, I just need one person to help me. Let's call on Zhang Meng. Actually, the fact that this sword is a piece of junk and how to verify it were both told to me by Zhang Meng. He's modest and wouldn't want to bring it up himself, but I think that a truly talented individual shouldn't be buried in obscurity."

"Oh? Zhang Meng, come out here," Wang Long suddenly called out to the crowd.

Everyone instantly turned their attention toward Zhang Meng.

Having been an Outer Disciple for three years now, most disciples still recognized him, so following Xu Nian's words, they were all curiously looking toward Zhang Meng.

Of course, there were also gazes filled with mockery, and among them were two young men who shared residence with Xu Nian.

Zhang Meng felt like crying when everyone looked at him and he heard Wang Long's angry shout.

He had only wanted to sabotage Jing Haoyang's plan, and now he had not only offended Jing Haoyang but also angered Wang Long.

Sure enough, Jing Haoyang was also staring daggers at Zhang Meng, his gaze filled with intense fury.

But there was no way around it, for Wang Long had already spoken, and he had no choice but to step forward.

So, under everyone's gaze, he walked up to Xu Nian.

"Zhang Meng, was it you who just told him that this sword is a piece of junk? I hear you also told him how to verify it?" Wang Long asked angrily, his gaze fierce.

Zhang Meng looked over at Xu Nian beside him, and seeing the latter wink at him, for a moment, he didn't know how to respond.

"You'd better choose your words carefully, or the consequences will be dire," Jing Haoyang also threatened with an angry stare.

Zhang Meng furrowed his brow, finding Jing Haoyang's tone particularly unpleasant, and what was most critical was that Zhang Tian was also looking over at him. If he showed any sign of weakness now, perhaps Zhang Tian would never look at him in a favorable light again.

"Damn it, I'm all in," Zhang Meng thought fiercely to himself and immediately responded, "Yes, it was me. I told him that this sword is a piece of junk."

A wave of shock swept through the surroundings, and everyone's mouths fell open as they looked at Zhang Meng.

They were all puzzled in their hearts. Zhang Meng seemed normal on any other day!

What made him lose his wits today?

Could this madness be contagious?

Hearing Zhang Meng's words, a surge of intense anger swelled in Jing Haoyang's eyes.

Wang Long's brow also furrowed slightly. In his memory, Zhang Meng was just an ordinary Two-star Refining Apprentice. Had he been concealing his true ability all along?

"Alright, then I will give you both a chance. If you can prove this sword is junk, I won't only refrain from punishing you, but I will also reward you. However, if you fail to prove it, then both of you are out of the Artifact Refining Sect today," Wang Long declared authoritatively.

The onlookers all cast pitying glances at Zhang Meng.

The two companions from the same residence took delight in his misfortune, inwardly laughing at Zhang Meng for joining the silly newcomer in madness.

Sweat beaded on Zhang Meng's forehead as he looked at Xu Nian, giving him a look that read, 'My lifelong happiness is in your hands now.'

Xu Nian smiled and gave him a reassuring glance in return.

"If this sword is indeed one made of Peak of Seven-star Mortal Iron, then let's see what happens if I collide it with this other sword made of Seven-star Mortal Iron Beginner," Xu Nian said with a smile, tossing the sword crafted by Jing Haoyang to Zhang Meng for him to hold with both hands, while he himself picked up the sharp sword made by Zhang Tian.

"What else could happen? The two items are nearly identical in quality, almost no impact whatsoever. Even if there's a nick, it would be the Seven-star Beginner's sword that has the issue," Jing Haoyang answered haughtily.

Wang Long and the rest of the onlookers nodded along, evidently sharing this belief.

However, Xu Nian merely made a swift motion, swinging the sword in his hand fiercely towards the sword held by Zhang Meng.

"Clang!"

A crisp sound of breaking rang out, causing everyone to instantly widen their eyes in extreme surprise.

Broken?

The sword crafted by Jing Haoyang had actually broken?

Jing Haoyang was stunned!

Zhang Meng was stunned as well!

All the onlookers were stunned!

Even Elder Wang Long was utterly shocked, his eyes fixed on the broken sword in Xu Nian's hand.

How could this be possible?

It made no sense!

Chapter 227 Don't Fall in Love with Brother

Everyone was baffled, unable to comprehend how the sword had broken just from a collision.

Xu Nian had not used any Spiritual Energy just now, yet the sword broke upon contact.

Could it really be that the sword was just a piece of junk?

Elder Wang also showed a contemplative expression, clearly puzzled about why this had happened.

"It was him, it must have been their trickery. The sword I refined was a Seven-star Mortal Iron Level Top Grade sword, how could it possibly break upon impact? He must have tampered with it secretly," Jing Haoyang immediately said, his neck flushed with anger.

The fact that his own sword had issues, whether it was true or not, he absolutely couldn't admit.

Once admitted, it would mean that his skill as a Seven-star Refining Apprentice was in question.

Moreover, that would completely ruin his plans to invite Zhang Tian for a meal.

The people around also looked suspiciously at Xu Nian and Zhang Meng, equally perplexed about whether there had been tampering or if there was indeed an issue with the sword.

But if there was an issue, how could Elder Wang have not noticed it?

"Zhang Meng, explain what's wrong with this sword," Elder Wang said, looking at Zhang Meng.

At these words, everyone's eyes turned to Zhang Meng, their faces filled with curiosity.

Zhang Meng was momentarily stunned.

Explain what?

He himself was completely baffled.

Left with no choice, he looked to Xu Nian for help.

Xu Nian smiled and said, "Elder Wang, let me explain instead. Zhang Meng is a kind-hearted person, he doesn't want to destroy his friendship with Senior Brother Jing Haoyang. Some things are hard for him to say. Since he has already told me everything, shall I explain?"

Elder Wang looked at Zhang Meng, nodded, and said, "Alright, go ahead."

Upon hearing this, Zhang Meng immediately breathed a sigh of relief.

Yet, he couldn't help but admire Xu Nian.

Damn, pure-hearted?

And brotherhood?

He's really lying without even blinking.

Jing Haoyang's mouth twitched at the side, and at this moment, he felt like killing Zhang Meng.

If it weren't for Zhang Meng, he would already be having dinner with Zhang Tian today.

Xu Nian, however, ignored Jing Haoyang's murderous gaze and smiled as he picked up the broken sword from the ground, saying, "I suppose everyone knows that the most perfect weapon is forged by completely removing impurities from the ore, making the sword more flexible, thereby creating a weapon of excellent quality."

"However, I have already examined this sword," Elder Wang immediately interjected. "The impurities haven't been perfectly removed, but nearly eighty percent has been done. Could it be because of the remaining twenty percent impurities?"

Xu Nian smiled and said, "Elder Wang, do not be hasty, I haven't finished. It's true that eighty percent of the impurities were removed from this sword, but it contains a special material that degrades this Seven-star Mortal Iron Level Top Grade sword into a worthless item."

"What material?" Elder Wang pressed.

The crowd also showed puzzled expressions. What material could degrade a weapon directly into junk?

"Mo Tie!" Xu Nian replied calmly.

"Mo Tie? What is that?" everyone around showed puzzled looks.

However, Elder Wang showed a look of surprise, and then took the sword from Xu Nian's hand.

After closely examining it, he finally understood and exclaimed, "So it is. It seems I really was short-sighted."

Hearing this, Xu Nian's face also displayed a smile.

He knew that even if others didn't know what Mo Tie was, Elder Wang, obsessed with Artifact Refining, certainly would.

"What is this Mo Tie? Elder Wang, this guy is clearly talking nonsense." Jing Haoyang said angrily, refusing to believe that there was a problem with his artifact refining. It was obviously these two who had sabotaged it.

However, upon hearing this, Elder Wang Long looked displeased and scolded, "Hmph, ignorant fool, Mo Tie is a rare ore documented in the Artifact Refining Materials Manual. This kind of ore must not be

mixed into weapons, or even the most powerful weapon will be destroyed due to a trace of Mo Tie. Your weapon contains a small amount of Mo Tie, which I did not notice before. If it weren't for Zhang Meng's meticulous observation, I would have indeed been a useless person unable to discern the truth."

Upon hearing Elder Wang Long's words, Jing Haoyang's face turned livid, and he roared, "It's not fair! Even if my refining failed, it was because the materials you provided were flawed. It doesn't mean my skills are lacking! I demand a rematch!"

Jing Haoyang felt a strong sense of injustice. What could he do if the iron ore was mixed with Mo Tie?

He felt it was extremely unfair.

Yet, upon hearing this, Elder Wang Long became completely enraged and coldly retorted, "Hmph, removing Mo Tie is a basic lesson for an Artifact Refiner. If you can't even handle that, don't talk to me about fairness. Failure is failure. Without even this basic humility, you will definitely achieve nothing significant in artifact refining."

Jing Haoyang was scolded until his face turned blue.

Today, not only did he lose the chance to have dinner with Zhang Tian, but he was also humiliated in front of so many people.

And all this was caused by Zhang Meng and this young man.

"Zhang Meng, you wait for me. I, Jing Haoyang, will remember today's enmity. And you, kid, just you wait," Jing Haoyang glared at Zhang Meng and Xu Nian bitterly, then turned and left with a flick of his sleeve.

Having been so humiliated, he had no face left to invite Zhang Tian to dinner.

"Ai, it's not my fault, ah. It was all Zhang Meng's doing; if you want someone to blame, find him, not me." Xu Nian shouted towards Jing Haoyang's departing figure.

Everyone was speechless.

How could this person be so irresponsible?

In comparison, Zhang Meng's performance was quite unexpected; he even knew about the Mo Tie mixed in Jing Haoyang's weapon.

Seeing everyone casting approving glances at him, Zhang Meng's face broke into a naive smile.

When he saw that goddess Zhang Tian was also smiling at him, he was overwhelmed with excitement.

Zhang Tian was smiling at him, something that had never happened before!

At that moment, the first person he thought of was Xu Nian, his gratitude towards Xu Nian was overflowing like a surging river. He was tremendously undecided.

"Young man, well done. Would you be interested in having me as your master? I happen to be in need of a disciple," Elder Wang approached Zhang Meng and spoke.

Upon these words, the entire place was astounded.

Elder Wang was taking the initiative to accept a disciple?

Everyone knew that Elder Wang was extremely selective. Even some Inner Sect Disciples who wanted to be his students hadn't caught his eye, and now he was actively offering to take Zhang Meng as his disciple?

"I would, I would! Disciple in the upper position, please accept my bow as a student," Zhang Meng hastily knelt down, so excited that he misspoke.

Elder Wang blustered and glared, feeling that something was amiss.

But he didn't think too much about it.

However, when he found out the whole story days later, he nearly spat out a mouthful of old blood!

Seeing Elder Wang accepting him, Zhang Meng's face also lit up with a happy grin.

But the good news didn't stop there. Zhang Tian actually came forward and smilingly said to Zhang Meng, "Junior Brother Zhang, are you free tonight? As your senior sister, I'd like to invite you to dinner."

Upon hearing this, everyone looked at Zhang Meng with envy and jealousy.

Zhang Meng felt his head buzz, blood rushing to his face.

But just then, he saw Xu Nian quietly leaving the crowd.

"Bro, wait for me." Without a second word, he took off running after him.

People around were utterly baffled.

Holy cow, how awesome is this Zhang Meng?

He actually outright ignored Zhang Tian's invitation?

The ignored Zhang Tian looked embarrassed, watching Zhang Meng's retreating figure and silently vowed, "Hmph, dare to ignore me, I will definitely make you mine."

Chapter 228 The Marvel of Black Flame Lake

Xu Nian quickly returned to his residence, and Zhang Meng naturally followed after him.

However, soon Zhang Meng realized what he had just missed and regretted it so much that he almost slapped his own buttocks swollen.

That was a personal invitation from the goddess Zhang Tian, and he had actually ignored it.

Just now, all he could think about was how incredibly formidable Xu Nian was and how to express his gratitude to Xu Nian, completely overlooking Zhang Tian's invitation.

However, just as Zhang Meng was about to go back to look for Zhang Tian, Xu Nian advised him not to.

Zhang Meng was very puzzled.

Xu Nian merely gave a mysterious smile and told him to just follow his instructions.

He wanted Zhang Meng to do something very simple, which was to act a bit indifferent when Zhang Tian came to look for him.

This left Zhang Meng very bewildered. Why act indifferent?

Wouldn't that just drive the goddess away?

And Xu Nian said the goddess would take the initiative to look for him?

Was that possible?

Although he found it hard to believe, by now he had complete and utter faith in Xu Nian.

Being able to tell at a glance that the weapon refined by Jing Haoyang was a failure, cursing Elder Wang in front of everyone, and then manipulating the crowd with his clever tactics, such skill was simply terrifying.

The more Zhang Meng thought about it, the more amazed he became, and his admiration for Xu Nian grew even stronger in his heart.

Xu Nian, on the other hand, paid no more attention to Zhang Meng and went straight into his room to start studying artifact refining.

Previously, Xu Nian had already inquired that to become an Inner Sect Disciple, one must become a Little Artifact Refiner.

That is to say, as long as you can refine a Xuan Iron Level weapon, you can be promoted to the Inner Sect.

Now, Xu Nian's artifact refining level had reached the peak of a Nine-star Refining Apprentice but to refine Xuan Iron Level weapons, he was still lacking something.

Xu Nian's method of artifact refining was different from others; his refining technique mainly relied on the power of Spiritual Sense. As long as his Spiritual Sense Power kept growing, his artifact refining level would also continuously improve.

This was where the overpowering nature of the Ten Thousand Divine Hammer Technique lay.

"Buzz!"

With a single gesture of his hand, Xu Nian summoned a piece of Xuan Iron Ore into his palm.

Having killed three gang leaders of the Heavenly Slash Gang before, he had seized a large amount of the Xuan Iron Vein, so he was certainly not lacking in artifact refining materials.

Following that, with just a thought from Xu Nian, a flame appeared in his hand.

This flame was just an ordinary flame. Since he started learning artifact refining, Xu Nian had always used normal flames.

One of the secret techniques in the Ten Thousand Divine Hammer Technique was to absorb flames from the outside world, refine them into a "fire-seed," and use it for oneself.

But Xu Nian hadn't yet found any flames that he could refine, which left him somewhat helpless.

"By now, my Spiritual Sense is almost comparable to that of a One-star Little Artifact Refiner, right? I just don't know if this flame can melt the Xuan Iron. Well, let's just try it out. If it really doesn't work, I'll go look for a suitable flame," Xu Nian mused to himself.

Then he started to control the flame to melt the Xuan Iron Vein.

However, after one hour passed, then two, the Xuan Iron Vein showed no reaction whatsoever.

"Alas, this ordinary flame's grade is still not up to the task; the temperature it emits is not enough to melt the Xuan Iron," Xu Nian sighed inwardly.

Now, if he wanted to advance to be a Little Artifact Refiner, he still needed to find a flame capable of melting Xuan Iron and refine his own fire-seed.

Other Artifact Refiners' flames evolved continuously along with their secret techniques, but Xu Nian could only rely on external flames.

Of course, there are pros and cons to this approach. This way, Xu Nian could freely change the flame he needed, unlike other Artifact Refiners, who had to upgrade bit by bit.

"I have no idea where to find any strange flames," Xu Nian muttered to himself.

He thought it over and decided to ask Zhang Meng.

"Strange flames? What do you want with strange flames? Don't all artifact refiners have their own Life-bound True Fire?" asked Zhang Meng with a puzzled look at Xu Nian.

"You don't need to worry about that, just tell me if there are any strange flames nearby," Xu Nian said directly.

He had already made up his mind that if he really couldn't find a suitable flame,

he would rob a little artifact refiner and take their Life-bound True Fire.

But such an act was truly despicable and no different from when he had stolen Chen Yao's things in the past.

"When you put it that way, I do remember a place with strange flames, but it's very dangerous. Below the Marquis Realm, no one can get close," said Zhang Meng as if he had thought of something.

"Oh? Where is it?" Xu Nian's eyes immediately lit up.

At least he wouldn't have to resort to robbery.

"Black Flame Lake. There's a peculiar lake behind our sect's mountain. The lake has an eerie flame burning on its surface that never extinguishes year-round. The terrifying temperature can instantly melt Meteorite Iron. Within a thousand meters, no one dares approach. Anyone who does will certainly be burnt to death," explained Zhang Meng.

"If it can instantly melt Meteorite Iron, this is great stuff. This means he could solve the problem with the elite disciples all at once," Xu Nian was overjoyed and after thanking Zhang Meng, he headed straight for the back mountain.

Zhang Meng looked on, puzzled, not understanding why Xu Nian was so happy about Black Flame Lake.

Xu Nian, on the other hand, turned into a residual shadow, rushing towards the back mountain with extreme speed in the darkness of the night.

Now it was night, and the back mountain was seldom visited even during the day, let alone at this hour.

Thus, Xu Nian quickly arrived at the back mountain, and as soon as he entered, he felt a scorching heat.

This filled Xu Nian with delight; he had not yet seen Black Flame Lake, but the temperature of the surrounding area was so intense, indicating that the black flames of Black Flame Lake were extremely extraordinary.

Xu Nian then headed towards the source of the heat, and as he progressed, he felt his skin burning.

Not only that, a dense white fog began to permeate the surroundings.

This fog was created by the high temperatures of Black Flame Lake evaporating the lake water.

Xu Nian's thoughts moved, and he harnessed the talent of the Ice Frost Giant Dragon. Xuan Ice covered the surface of his body.

This made Xu Nian feel instantly cool and refreshing.

At the same time, Xu Nian used his Gray Dragon Eye to penetrate the mist and continued towards Black Flame Lake.

However, before he had gone much further, Xu Nian's heart suddenly pounded faster.

He saw, not far ahead on a large rock, a young woman in her mid-twenties sitting cross-legged.

She was beautiful and alluring, with an impressive figure, and her three-thousand strands of black hair draped behind her, adding to her seductive allure.

Of course, what truly shocked Xu Nian was that the woman's clothes had burned away due to the intense heat, leaving not a thread behind.

The woman seemed to have entered a state of cultivation, completely unaware of her surroundings.

Xu Nian was speechless.

Although the area was shrouded in thick fog, being stark naked was a bit much.

What if someone stumbled upon her? How embarrassing would that be?

Like right now!

Xu Nian shook his head, appreciated the view for a few seconds, then continued on his way by going around her.

He didn't want to wake the woman, which would be really awkward.

As for why he took a few seconds to appreciate the view.

Well, you know!

Chapter 229 Demon Beast of the Lake Bottom

Xu Nian circumvented the mysterious woman and arrived at another part of Black Flame Lake.

It must be said, the temperature of Black Flame Lake was truly terrifying.

Even the Xuan Ice covering Xu Nian's body began to gradually melt.

Fortunately, it wasn't melting so quickly, otherwise Xu Nian really would have been laid bare to nature.

Black Flame Lake wasn't large, covering only a few hundred square meters.

And for some reason, a bizarre black flame covered the surface of the water.

As the body of water was veiled by this eerie black flame, it continuously evaporated, sending up mists.

Logically speaking, water and fire were incompatible, yet now they coexisted strangely, which was very puzzling to Xu Nian.

However, Xu Nian didn't want to probe too deeply; all he wanted were these black flames.

The current level of the black flames was enough to promote him to a Great Refiner, entirely meeting his needs.

"Let's start refining the Fire Seed then, better leave here early, otherwise it will be troublesome if that woman discovers me," Xu Nian muttered nervously.

After all, having taken covert action, it would be an immense embarrassment to get caught.

Having finished speaking, Xu Nian directly stepped forward, entering the water of the lake.

The lake water was scalding, with the strange black flames all around.

Yet Xu Nian had achieved the pinnacle of leveraging external forces, and a gentle breeze encircled him, easily blowing away the black flames.

At the same time, Xuan Ice covered his feet, shielding him from the heat emanating from the lake below.

Soon, Xu Nian arrived at the center of Black Flame Lake and sat down cross-legged.

Refining a Fire Seed required time, and the process needed a substantial amount of flames.

Xu Nian then closed his eyes and, following the Ten Thousand Divine Hammer Technique secret art, began to refine the Fire Seed.

As he activated his secret technique, the flames around him crazily surged toward him, forming several fire ribbons that converged in the palm of his hand.

The Black Water Flames continuously gathered, compressing bit by bit.

Eventually, a small Fire Seed formed in the palm of Xu Nian's hand.

"The Fire Seed has formed!" Xu Nian looked at the Fire Seed in his hand, his face revealing a joyful expression.

But very soon, a puzzled look appeared on his face because he sensed from this Fire Seed a feeling as though it was on the verge of blossoming.

"I wonder if continuing to absorb the flames will make the seed bloom."

A bold idea popped into Xu Nian's mind.

He continued to stimulate the secret technique, frantically devouring the black flames on the surface of the lake.

The black flames were voraciously absorbed, merging into the Fire Seed, with nearly all of the black flames within a several tens of meters radius completely absorbed by Xu Nian.

As the Fire Seed continued to absorb flames, it slowly began to bloom, ultimately forming a Black Fire Lotus in Xu Nian's palm.

"Eh, it really bloomed, and the form of this black flame is actually a lotus—how strange. However, this Black Fire Lotus seems much more powerful than the previous Fire Seed," Xu Nian joyfully talked to himself.

He had been curious to see if the Fire Seed would bloom, and to his surprise, it was indeed successful.

The Black Fire Lotus was terrifying and bewitchingly beautiful.

It was mysteriously coincidental with the Dan Sea Species Green Lotus of his cultivation.

At the thought, Xu Nian collected the Black Fire Lotus into his Dan Sea, where it quietly blossomed inside.

"It's time to leave, otherwise I'll really get discovered by that woman," Xu Nian thought to himself.

He had already stayed on the lake surface for nearly six hours, and the sky had begun to lighten, clearly indicating that dawn was approaching.

If he didn't leave now, he'd be easily discovered.

Moreover, his frantic absorption of the black flames had caused disturbances on the surface of the lake, which may already have caught the woman's attention.

Xu Nian had already observed that the woman's cultivation was not low.

At the age of twenty-four, she already possessed the cultivation of a Four-star General.

She was definitely a rare talent, most likely an elite disciple of this sect.

Xu Nian had no desire to bring trouble upon himself.

"Young man, you're really careless; didn't you notice there's something at the bottom of this lake?"

However, just then, Emperor Ye Tian's voice suddenly echoed in Xu Nian's mind.

Xu Nian startled, immediately extended his Spiritual Sense toward the depths of the lake.

The lake wasn't deep, only a few dozen meters.

With Xu Nian's current strength of Spiritual Sense, he could easily reach the bottom.

But this investigation made him break out in a cold sweat.

Beneath the water, there was an enormous Demon Beast sprawled out.

This Demon Beast was covered in black flames, with a body full of sturdy Black Scale Armor, its massive size almost filling the entire lake bed.

However, the limbs of the Demon Beast were bound by powerful chains, sealing its entire body at the bottom of the lake.

At this moment, the Demon Beast seemed to be in a deep sleep and had not noticed Xu Nian above the surface, but the aura it emitted was terribly formidable.

Xu Nian quickly retracted his Spiritual Sense, not daring to probe the Demon Beast's cultivation, for fear of disturbing it.

His back was drenched in cold sweat.

Although this Demon Beast was sealed, it still made his back shiver with cold sweat.

If the Demon Beast had suddenly awakened while he was refining the fire kind earlier,

there was no telling what might have happened.

"Quickly leave, otherwise you're really going to be unlucky," Xu Nian muttered to himself.

Then he intended to make his way toward the shore.

However, just then, the Demon Beast beneath the lake suddenly opened its eyes, its huge pupils, like lanterns, staring dead at Xu Nian above.

"Roar!"

The Demon Beast spat out a mouthful of colossal black flames, which soared into the sky like a fire dragon, heading straight for Xu Nian.

Xu Nian was shocked on the spot.

Indeed, the Demon Beast had awakened, sensing the terrible danger coming from below.

Xu Nian hastily executed the Illusion Fascinate Trace, while simultaneously condensing layer upon layer of Xuan Ice Shields around himself.

Yet the black flames came too ferociously, and although Xu Nian dodged at extreme speed, he was still struck by the column of flame.

Luckily, Xu Nian had condensed the Xuan Ice Shield beforehand, otherwise he would have been reduced to ashes.

Even so, Xu Nian was still blasted away by the terrifying column of black flames.

And by an odd coincidence, he happened to land not far from that young woman.

The woman noticed Xu Nian, and Xu Nian saw the woman.

Their eyes met, the atmosphere extremely awkward.

"Roar!"

Another terrifying roar came from the bottom of the lake, and the entire lake surface began to churn violently.

The water formed stupendous waves, crashing fiercely toward the direction of Xu Nian and the young woman.

"Not good, run!" Xu Nian exclaimed in alarm and yelled to the woman.

The woman, too, was startled and wanted to flee.

But the lake water was too fast, and they had no chance to escape.

Seeing this scene, Xu Nian swore under his breath.

Having no choice, he lunged toward the young woman, condensing a Xuan Ice Defensive Shield around her to fend off the lake's assault.

The lake's water was scorchingly hot, and if the woman were to be struck by it, even if she didn't die, she would be severely injured.

This Demon Beast had been awakened by Xu Nian; how could he possibly stand by and let her die?

Xuan Ice formed a Defensive Shield, like an enormous bowl upside down on the ground, protecting Xu Nian and the woman within.

"Boom!"

The massive lake water smashed heavily onto the Xuan Ice Defensive Shield, emitting a terrible roaring sound.

And inside the Defensive Light Shield, Xu Nian and the young woman ended up holding each other, looking into each other's eyes.

Chapter 230 Overestimating Oneself

The atmosphere was particularly solemn, and it was quiet all around.

Both could hear each other's heartbeat.

"Get your dirty hands off me!" the woman suddenly shouted coldly.

Xu Nian then realized his hand was in an inappropriate place and quickly withdrew it.

"Turn your head away," the woman coldly shouted again.

Xu Nian, feeling helpless, knew the woman was going to get dressed, but he still did as he was told.

However, he felt disdainful in his heart, thinking that having already seen what was not meant to be seen, turning away now seemed a bit like deceiving himself.

Soon the woman finished dressing, and by the time Xu Nian turned back around, she had changed into a black dress.

The black dress accentuated her figure to perfection and, although she was now dressed, it still couldn't hide her impressive figure.

"If you look at me again, I'll gouge out your eyes," the woman said icily.

Xu Nian had no choice but to look away.

This woman's appearance and demeanor far surpassed that of Zhang Tian.

If rated out of ten, Zhang Tian would barely score a seven, whereas this woman was definitely a nine.

"Who are you? Why are you here? What's in this lake?" the woman asked a series of questions.

Xu Nian was speechless and didn't bother to respond to the woman.

With a thought, he dissolved the Xuan Ice and planned to leave.

The lake's surface had calmed down again, and Xu Nian knew it was because the seal at the bottom of the lake was taking effect.

The more the Demon Beast at the bottom struggled, the more the seal tormented it.

So as long as he didn't provoke the Demon Beast again, he wouldn't be attacked.

"Stop, I'm talking to you. I see you're dressed as an Outer Disciple; I'm commanding you as an Inner Sect Disciple to explain what's going on here," the young woman ordered coldly.

"Hmph, Inner Sect Disciple, think you're so great? Others might fear you, but I don't. Goodbye," Xu Nian snorted coldly and prepared to leave.

The woman's tone of voice irritated him, as if she expected everyone to obey her.

Yann Xi was furious inside. Not only had this young man seen her body, but he also showed such disdain towards her.

It should be noted that her suitors in the Artifact Refining Sect could line up from one end of the hill to the other, yet no one had ever spoken to her like this.

"Stop right there, I must teach you a lesson today!" Yann Xi shouted angrily and, with that, her Two-star War General Level cultivation burst forth, and she fiercely attacked Xu Nian.

"How presumptuous!"

Xu Nian felt the fierce aura coming from behind and a trace of anger flashed in his eyes.

Without a word, he responded with a palm.

"Bang!"

Spiritual Energy exploded, and Yann Xi was sent flying backward, landing heavily some distance away.

A shocked expression appeared on her face.

She had been sent flying by a single palm strike from this young man; how was that possible?

And his cultivation was at the peak of the Nine-star Martial Sect.

Such a young Nine-star Martial Sect Peak, and his strength was even above hers; how could this be?

But before she could look up again toward Xu Nian, she realized he had already disappeared.

Yann Xi got up from the ground, staring in surprise and anger at the spot where Xu Nian had vanished.

The young man was clearly much younger than her, yet his combat power was above hers.

And such a young man with extraordinary cultivation was only an Outer Disciple.

Now recalling the young man's strange methods from before, she realized he was not simple.

She initially did not want to pursue the matter of Xu Nian having seen her body, especially since Xu Nian had saved her life.

But Xu Nian's recent attitude made the typically proud Yann Xi feel very uncomfortable.

"I don't care who you are, I will find you and make you pay for today's incident," Yann Xi clenched her fist, her eyes gleaming fiercely.

After saying this, she glanced back at Black Flame Lake and then transformed into a silhouette, quickly leaving the place.

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When Xu Nian returned to the residence, it was already fully bright.

However, before he even entered, a noisy commotion was coming from inside the courtyard.

"Zhang Yu, Zhao Cheng, what is the meaning of this?" Zhang Meng's voice came from inside.

Xu Nian mentioned Zhang Yu and Zhao Cheng were the other two young men living in the same house as them.

"What do you mean, yesterday you were all high and mighty, but do you know that Jing Haoyang is our boss? You've offended him, you should know the consequences," said Zhang Yu's voice.

"Hmph, where did I offend Jing Haoyang? The weapons he refined had issues to begin with, I just told the truth," Zhang Meng immediately retorted.

"We don't know how truly skilled you are yet. Among the three of us, your artifact refining has always been the worst. And you still think you're a genius; it must have been that newcomer causing the trouble. Don't worry, neither you nor he will get away," Zhao Cheng followed, his tone filled with disdain.

"You guys are being too much. Yes, I spoiled Jing Haoyang's plan, but it was his own fault. The weapons he produced were junk, he admitted it himself, a fair wager lost; how can others be blamed?" Zhang Meng said angrily.

He had asked Xu Nian to act but there was self-interest involved, yet it was also the truth, so he felt no remorse for his actions.

"Look at you, still talking tough. Fine, since that's the case, let's teach you a lesson first," Zhang Yu coldly snorted and then moved to strike Zhang Meng.

Zhang Meng's cultivation was lower than Zhang Yu's; he was no match and could only keep retreating.

"Humph, take a punch from me first."

With a cold snort, Zhang Yu caught Zhang Meng's opening and directed a punch straight at his chest.

This punch would surely inflict severe injuries on Zhang Meng.

A trace of unwillingness flashed in Zhang Meng's eyes, yet he couldn't avoid the punch and could only watch as the fist smashed towards him.

"Bang!"

However, Zhang Yu's fist didn't land on Zhang Meng but was blocked by a palm.

Zhang Yu was stunned, turning his head to look at Xu Nian, who had suddenly appeared next to Zhang Meng, his face showing a hint of surprise.

"Yesterday's incident was my doing. If Jing Haoyang wants revenge, he can come directly to me. It has nothing to do with Zhang Meng," Xu Nian said coldly to Zhang Yu.

"Hmph, we were about to come for you anyway. I didn't expect you to come to us willingly. Fine, since you did, don't blame us for being inhospitable," Zhang Yu said coldly with a snort, unleashing the full might of a Nine-star Warrior's aura and launching a Xuan-level Fist Technique at Xu Nian.

Though he didn't know how this man called Xu Nian had blocked his attack, from his view, Xu Nian was much younger, and no matter how capable, surely couldn't be that powerful.

Zhang Meng also felt worried and surprised, that Xu Nian would take the blame for him like this.

They had agreed beforehand that he would take the blame for this.

This touched his heart deeply.

No matter what happened, he couldn't let Xu Nian be involved.

Though Xu Nian might be good at refining artifacts, his strength might not necessarily match Zhang Yu's, especially since Xu Nian was younger.

However, the next moment, he was astounded.

Without any noticeable movement, Xu Nian simply kicked out and sent Zhang Yu, who was unleashing a Xuan-level combat skill, flying.

Zhang Yu spat out a mouthful of blood and passed out.

Zhao Cheng's eyes widened in disbelief.

Going over to Zhang Yu's side and checking him, his expression became even more horrified.

Zhang Yu's chest had over a dozen broken ribs.

How powerful must that kick have been?

Zhang Meng was equally astonished.

Xu Nian hadn't even used spiritual energy in that kick.

Just relying on physical strength alone, he exhibited such formidable power.

What level of strength was that?

Battle Sect?

But how could there be such a young Battle Sect member?

However, what he didn't know was that Xu Nian had actually held back with that kick.

Had he used his full strength, Zhang Meng would have been reduced to nothing but bones.

Xu Nian paid no mind to the shocked expressions of the two men, his gaze cold as he looked at Zhao Cheng and said, "If Jing Haoyang wants revenge, let him come find me. If I see you messing with Zhang Meng again, it won't just be passing out; get lost."

Xu Nian's words were chilling, shaking Zhao Cheng to the core.

He hurriedly carried Zhang Yu and slinked away.

Zhang Meng stood still, admiration thick in his eyes.

"Come, let's go to the Outer Elder Hall," Xu Nian said to the surprised Zhang Meng.

"Why go to the Elder Hall?" Zhang Meng asked, puzzled.

Xu Nian smiled and said, "To advance to an Inner Sect Disciple!"

What?

Zhang Meng was stunned, almost thinking he had heard wrong!