

Doctor 1401

Chapter 1401: Breakthrough

Fang Bai and the other four moved like lightning, darting past one tier after another of the Heavenly Ladder.

In the blink of an eye, they had already left more than thirty steps behind them.

The higher the Heavenly Ladder ascended, the greater the oppressive force became.

Before the thirtieth step, Gu Yan and the other three could barely keep up with Fang Bai's climbing speed. But after the thirtieth step, under the increasingly intense oppressive force, their pace slowed down drastically.

The four had to exert all their strength, relying on their Spiritual Artifacts for support, to resist the overwhelming pressure coming from all directions.

Though this pressure was invisible, its intensity was extremely terrifying. At this moment, if a Universe Level Expert were to stand on the thirtieth step, their physical body might very well burst open under the massive force pressing from all sides.

After surpassing the thirty-fifth step, the four struggled to move upward one step at a time. From their grave expressions and trembling bodies, it was clear that the oppressive force was approaching the limits of what they could endure.

"I... I can't hold on much longer!"

Having barely made it to the thirty-eighth step, sweat drenched Liu Che's clothes entirely. He gritted his teeth tightly, his voice trembled as he spoke, and his pleading eyes turned toward Fang Bai ahead.

Five years prior, Liu Che had exhausted everything he had merely to reach the thirty-eighth step of the Heavenly Ladder. He hadn't expected that after five years, he would still only make it back to this level. His heart swelled with both shame and disappointment as he looked to Fang Bai for help, hoping he could alleviate the oppressive force upon him.

Gu Yan and the other three felt the same overwhelming pressure, yearning in their hearts for Fang Bai to fulfill his earlier promise and lend them assistance.

"You four, stand behind me... Hmm, come closer!"

Fang Bai slowed his climbing pace. Only after the four positioned themselves behind him did he form a True Essence Barrier around himself, isolating the oppressive force from outside.

Protected by Fang Bai's True Essence Barrier, the four immediately felt immense relief. They exhaled deeply, their burden instantly lightened.

Simultaneously, their gazes toward Fang Bai now carried even more gratitude and awe.

With the weight of the four slowing him down, Fang Bai's ascent could no longer be swift. Escorting the four to the fifty-first step of the Heavenly Ladder, the True Essence Barrier he had formed began to tremble intensely. It was clear that even a single step further would cause it to collapse entirely.

"Let's stop here!"

At this moment, Fang Bai himself had also consumed more than half of his True Yuan. He halted his steps, turned to face Gu Yan and the others, and said: "Let's cultivate here... Don't worry, I'll gradually weaken the True Essence Barrier to let the outside oppressive forces and dense Essence Energy seep in. This way, the oppressive force won't pose a major threat to you, and you can take advantage of the incoming Essence Energy to cultivate..."

As he spoke, Fang Bai had already sat down cross-legged.

Gu Yan and the other three, limited by their cultivation levels, could only stop here.

Meanwhile, Fang Bai intended to wait until his depleted Essence Energy was fully restored before continuing onward to determine the ultimate limits of his own abilities.

Gu Yan and the other three never expected to reach the fifty-first step of the Heavenly Ladder. Overflowing with excitement and joy, they suppressed their emotions, knowing now wasn't the time for celebration, and they sat cross-legged alongside Fang Bai.

Once the five sat down cross-legged, they cultivated for an entire month.

By this time, although nineteen days still remained before the Lotus Pool Secret Realm closed.

As Gu Yan and the other three emerged from their cultivation states, their gleaming brilliance had dimmed slightly, but their auras had grown significantly stronger. Every gesture now exuded an imposing presence.

Through a month of cultivation aided by exceedingly pure and dense Essence Energy, the four broke through their barriers, officially advancing to the Innate Perfection realm and joining the ranks of the top-tier experts of this era.

With such cultivation levels, they were now capable of easily resisting the oppressive forces of the lower tiers of the Heavenly Ladder.

Yet the four decided not to continue climbing higher.

Since they had just advanced, their realms remained unstable. Forcing themselves to ascend further would risk pushing their limits under the Heavenly Ladder's oppressive force, potentially resulting in severe injuries and catastrophic loss of their newly attained realms.

Such incidents had occurred to Martial Artists in the past—a lesson not lost on Gu Yan and his group, who wisely chose not to take such risks.

They resolved to descend and wait for the next Lotus Pool Secret Realm to reopen five years later, when their realms were fully stabilized, before attempting to climb the Heavenly Ladder's higher tiers.

While the month brought major breakthroughs for Gu Yan and the others, Fang Bai's strength saw little progress.

This wasn't due to Fang Bai lacking aptitude or Wuxing. Rather, his cultivation level had already reached the pinnacle of this world, and the resources within it could no longer provide him with meaningful assistance.

"You four wait here for me..."

Fang Bai looked up toward the higher tiers of the Heavenly Ladder shrouded in clouds and mist, a fiery determination flashing in his gaze. He declared, "I plan to attempt climbing to the very top of the Heavenly Ladder..."

Gu Yan urgently advised against it. "Senior Fang, the top of the Heavenly Ladder may be fraught with unknown danger. Over the centuries, more than one Innate Perfection expert has ventured there, never to return. If..."

Fang Bai waved his hand dismissively, chuckling as he said, "Relax, nothing will happen. Whether I succeed or fail, I'll definitely return safely."

His confidence stemmed from the numerous life-preserving measures he carried. Regarding what lay at the top of the Heavenly Ladder—whether it was a Teleportation Array or some unknown peril—his curiosity burned brightly, and fear was far from his mind.

Seeing Fang Bai's determination unshaken, Gu Yan and the others knew their advice wouldn't sway him. Sharing bitter smiles, they sat cross-legged quietly, preparing to wait for Fang Bai's return.

"Here I go!"

A flicker of motion from Fang Bai's figure blurred before Gu Yan and the others' eyes. As they focused to look closer, Fang Bai's silhouette had already appeared on the sixtieth step of the Heavenly Ladder.

"Such speed!"

"Senior Fang's cultivation level grows ever more unfathomable. It's getting harder to perceive his limits!"

"To ascend to the sixtieth step so effortlessly, I believe Senior Fang has a real chance of reaching the highest eighty-first step!"

"It won't be easy bare-handed, but Senior Fang possesses an incredibly formidable Spiritual Artifact. With its help to resist the oppressive forces of the Heavenly Ladder, he might indeed reach the summit."

"Let's hope it goes smoothly!"

Watching Fang Bai's rapidly ascending back, Gu Yan and the others exchanged quiet remarks, their expressions blending worry and excitement.

They worried for Fang Bai's safety on this journey.

Yet they couldn't help but feel exhilarated. If Fang Bai succeeded, his experience would provide a valuable roadmap for their future attempts to reach the summit.

"He's reached the seventieth step now... still bare-handed... Incredible!"

Gu Yan and the others gasped in amazement as Fang Bai, though slowing visibly, continued his tenacious ascent despite the overwhelming oppressive forces, reaching the seventieth step of the Heavenly Ladder.

The oppressive force at the seventieth step was dozens of times stronger than that of the first step. Though Fang Bai's physical body was immensely powerful and his strength unparalleled, bare-handed resistance against the Heavenly Ladder's force posed extreme challenges, slowing his pace until he moved no faster than a crawling snail.

"Whoosh!"

A flash of blood-red light streaked through the air, a thick stench of blood dispersing in all directions. The Blood-Drinking Mad Blade was summoned by Fang Bai, now tightly grasped in his right hand.

Chapter 1402: The Space Passage

With the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade in hand, Fang Bai's ability to resist the oppressive force of the Heavenly Ladder increased drastically, and he immediately felt much lighter.

Gripping the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade, surrounded by swirling Essence Energy, Fang Bai quickened his pace while continuously slashing forward with all his might.

The crimson blade arcs cleaved through wave after wave of crushing pressure, reducing the obstruction on Fang Bai's path considerably.

Taking advantage of this, Fang Bai accelerated his advance.

Within just a few breaths, Fang Bai's figure had vanished from the sightlines of Gu Yan and the others.

"Seventy-six... seventy-seven... seventy-eight..."

With each step upward, Fang Bai shouted loudly to bolster his courage and amplify his momentum.

After surpassing the seventy-fifth step of the Heavenly Ladder, every additional step brought a doubling of the oppressive force. Even with the assistance of the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade offsetting part of the pressure, Fang Bai still felt as though he was carrying a mountain, his strength faltering.

"Puh!"

A soft tearing sound signaled the rupture of Fang Bai's beast-hide boots under the immense pressure, leaving them torn to shreds.

Standing barefoot on the stone steps, Fang Bai's complexion turned slightly pale. His entire body was drenched in sweat, and his hand gripping the blade trembled faintly—evidently, he was nearing his limit.

"Almost... almost there... hold on!"

Fang Bai clenched his teeth, lifting his gaze to the final step of the Heavenly Ladder shrouded in clouds. He took a deep breath, his eyes filled with resolute determination, and tightened his grip on the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade.

"Break!"

With a thunderous roar, Fang Bai summoned his True Yuan and swung the Blood Blade fiercely, his feet inching forward with difficulty.

Droplets of sweat left marks behind on the ground with each step he took.

"Seventy-nine... eighty..."

Finally, after expending nearly all his True Yuan, Fang Bai successfully stood on the eightieth step of the Heavenly Ladder.

The cloud layer above was now within reach. Fang Bai knew that once he passed through it, he would stand upon the highest step of the Heavenly Ladder.

However, as the thought of continuing upward arose within him, a trace of unease suddenly surfaced in his heart.

Fang Bai faltered slightly. His brow furrowed, realizing that his exceptional intuition was warning him of immense, unpredictable danger lying ahead.

"This final step... should I ascend, or not?"

Staring at the dense, impenetrable cloud layer that even his Divine Sense could not pierce, Fang Bai found himself torn with indecision.

"Since I've come this far, how could I leave without seeing for myself? Besides, I possess the Houyi Bow, Five Elements Needles, and Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron—all powerful Spiritual Artifacts. No matter the danger, I should at least be able to protect my life, right?"

With this thought, Fang Bai's confidence surged.

Fang Bai's goal in ascending the Heavenly Ladder was merely to confirm his earlier speculations—to see if a teleportation array leading to the Three Thousand Worlds truly lay at the summit.

If the teleportation array did exist, Fang Bai planned to return to the Huaxia Sect to cultivate peacefully. Once he reached Foundation Establishment and ensured that the cultivation of his friends and family reached at least Innate Perfection, he would rendezvous with them at this location to activate the teleportation array and explore the higher Martial Dao in the Three Thousand Worlds together.

"Then I'll take a look..."

His mind made up, Fang Bai took a deep breath and, maintaining a state of full vigilance, gradually stepped forward.

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"Rushi, my heart suddenly feels uneasy... It's as though something bad is about to happen..."

Immersed in cultivation within the Seven-Colored Lotus Pool, Baili Mingyue abruptly felt a wave of agitation. She opened her eyes and glanced at Dongfang Rushi beside her, noticing that Rushi had also exited her cultivation state, her expression showing unease like her own.

"I feel the same,"

Dongfang Rushi replied softly, her brows furrowed.

"Could something have happened to Fang Bai? I hear the summit of the Heavenly Ladder is very dangerous..."

Baili Mingyue cast an uneasy glance toward Heaven-Reaching Peak.

Dongfang Rushi turned her gaze toward the peak as well, her outward appearance calm and composed, though deep inside she was far more unsettled than Baili Mingyue.

At the same time, far away at the Huaxia Sect on Shenwu Continent, Fang Bai's close relatives, disciples, and cherished companions similarly felt an inexplicable unease. Their hearts seemed synchronized as they turned toward East Shengzhou, each thinking the same thing: "Could Fang Bai be in trouble?"

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Fang Bai was indeed in trouble.

He never expected that after exerting all his strength to pass through the clouds and reach the final step of the Heavenly Ladder, what unfolded before him was far from his expectations—neither a traditional teleportation array nor a broad expanse of stone steps. Instead, it was a deep spatial passage resembling a black hole.

The spatial passage exerted a powerful suction force against which Fang Bai was helpless, continuously dragging him inward.

"To the four Elders: the summit of the Heavenly Ladder appears to lead to a spatial passage connected to the Three Thousand Worlds. Once you ascend, you will be pulled in—it's beyond human resistance. I must go ahead now. This space ring—please deliver it to Rushi or Mingyue so that they can inform everyone in the Huaxia Sect to cultivate diligently. Only by reaching at least the Half-Step Foundation Establishment Realm can they attempt to ascend the Heavenly Ladder. I'll wait for everyone in the Three Thousand Worlds to reunite."

This was the final message Fang Bai transmitted before being engulfed by the formidable suction force of the spatial passage.

The martial artists below the Heavenly Ladder could not hear Fang Bai's voice; fortunately, Gu Yan and the others, still lingering at the fiftieth step of the Heavenly Ladder, heard it clearly.

"The summit of the Heavenly Ladder is a spatial passage? Leading to the Three Thousand Worlds?"

"So that's why those Innate Experts who ascended never returned! They went to the Three Thousand Worlds!"

"Ancient texts depict the Three Thousand Worlds' experts as capable of soaring through the skies, traversing flames, manipulating water, and wielding all sorts of divine powers. I used to think those were mere myths, but now... it seems they may actually be true!"

"Half-Step Foundation Establishment to ascend the summit? I still have a long way to go!"

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Gu Yan and the others listened to Fang Bai's words, their hearts filled with mixed emotions of joy and worry.

A few breaths later, a space ring descended from the sky, carrying Fang Bai's unmistakable aura.

This space ring was one of Fang Bai's possessions, containing an incredible trove of Essence Stones, elixirs, Spiritual Medicine, Spiritual Artifacts, and other cultivation resources.

Aside from the Five Elements Needles, Houyi Bow, Blood-Drinking Mad Blade, and Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron, Fang Bai had left all other cultivation resources in this dropped space ring.

For Fang Bai, once he entered the Three Thousand Worlds, the spiritual energy, spirit stones, spiritual medicine, and other cultivation resources there would be ten to a hundred times superior to those in the True Martial Realm.

But for those cultivation resources that were no longer of use to him, they constituted a massive fortune for the disciples of the Huaxia Sect—enough to sustain their cultivation for a long time.

Fang Bai trusted that, with the Martial Arts Techniques he had taught and the cultivation resources he left behind, his close friends, disciples, and cherished companions would, given time, all reach the Half-Step Foundation Establishment Realm.

Especially the disciples of the Huaxia Sect with Innate Spiritual Roots—with their potential, the Martial Arts Techniques they practiced, and the abundant cultivation resources they had, they could stand at the pinnacle of Martial Dao in the True Martial Realm within three to five years.

After that, they could attempt to challenge the summit of the Heavenly Ladder themselves.

Chapter 1403: Descent, Three Thousand Great Worlds!

Forty-nine days later, disciples of the major Innate Sects completed their training within the "Lotus Pool Secret Realm" and returned to the massive valley where they had previously gathered.

"He... just left like that?"

"Ran off to the Three Thousand Great Worlds all by himself?"

When Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue received Fang Bai's Space Ring from Gu Yan and heard the words Fang Bai had left behind, they both refused to believe it was true.

After everyone else departed, the two women stayed in the valley for an entire month, waiting, searching for any sign of Fang Bai. Only once no trace of him emerged did they finally resign themselves to despair and leave with heavy hearts.

Months later, Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue arrived together at the Huaxia Sect.

When the sect learned from the two women that Fang Bai had climbed the Heavenly Ladder, a somber and oppressive atmosphere hung over the Huaxia Sect.

Especially for those martial artists who had followed Fang Bai from the mortal realm to the True Martial Realm, a faint sorrow lingered in their hearts.

Still, they understood that Fang Bai had not abandoned them, but had faced an unforeseen and uncontrollable fate, advancing before them into the Three Thousand Great Worlds.

If they wished to follow Fang Bai and pursue greater heights in the Martial Dao, they had no choice but to train diligently, attain the Half-Step Foundation Establishment Realm as quickly as possible, and scale the peak of the Heavenly Ladder.

Thus, after brief mourning and feelings of loss, resentment, and other negative emotions, the members of the Huaxia Sect rallied themselves and entered a state of fervent cultivation.

Over the next five years, the Huaxia Sect rose to prominence at meteoric speed. Innate Experts emerged one after another, and disciples spread across the True Martial Realm, ultimately becoming the most powerful sect in the realm.

Bar none.

Five years later, a new round of battles for the "Heavenly Talents Ranking" commenced.

With Fang Bai's personal instruction and disciples possessing Innate Spiritual Roots, as well as Hongyan joining forces, they ascended the Heavenly Ladder on Heaven-Reaching Peak, reaching its summit and entering the spatial channel to arrive at the Three Thousand Great Worlds.

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Pulled into the spatial channel, Fang Bai struggled for a while. But upon realizing his efforts were futile, he resigned himself, closed his eyes, and awaited his fate.

In his heart, Fang Bai felt deep regret.

He regretted stepping onto the final rung of the Heavenly Ladder, which had led to his separation from his companions, loved ones, and confidantes of the Huaxia Sect just as they had reunited.

Still, Fang Bai did not worry about the people of the Huaxia Sect. With Ruoshui Palace and Divine Fire Palace, two Innate Sects, providing support, along with dozens of Innate Experts stationed there, the Huaxia Sect had become an unassailable colossus in the True Martial Realm.

Fang Bai believed that in a few short years, others from the Huaxia Sect would follow in his footsteps, ascend the Heavenly Ladder to its pinnacle, and enter the Three Thousand Great Worlds.

What Fang Bai worried about most at the moment was himself.

Within the spatial channel, Fang Bai was like a lamb awaiting slaughter, completely at the mercy of forces beyond his control. He had no idea where he would be transported.

Fang Bai's greatest hope was to be sent to a cultivation holy land rich in spiritual energy, where he could build a residence, focus on cultivation, and raise his cultivation level to the Foundation Establishment Realm. Once he possessed the basic ability to protect himself, he could explore the world and seek opportunities in the Martial Dao.

His greatest fear was being sent to a perilous land. If he encountered vicious beasts or deadly predators, given his current cultivation level, he couldn't fully harness the power of his formidable Spiritual Artifacts, which might plunge him into dire straits.

At the end of the spatial channel, what awaited Fang Bai—was it a smooth path or disaster? Only fate could decide.

Immersed in the dark and void-like spatial channel, it felt as though he had endured countless years. He didn't know how much time had passed, but a faint light seemed to appear ahead, accompanied by a wisp of spiritual energy unique to the Three Thousand Great Worlds.

"I'm sensing spiritual energy... The Three Thousand Great Worlds—am I finally arriving?"

Fang Bai abruptly opened his eyes, watching as the faint light rapidly expanded before him. Feeling the spiritual energy that differed from the Essence Energy of the True Martial Realm, his mood couldn't help but surge with excitement.

Years ago, though his soul had remained intact and allowed him to seize and be reborn, he had now returned to the starting point of his previous life. Could he once again achieve glory in the Martial Dao?

Within moments, the immense pulling force dissipated, the surrounding darkness disappeared, and Fang Bai scanned his surroundings to discover he was now in midair, surrounded by an environment brimming with spiritual energy.

Taking a deep breath, Fang Bai's Qi Sea surged with Chaos Origin Energy circulating at high speed. The countless pores covering his body opened wide, expelling stored Essence Energy within him while frantically absorbing external spiritual energy.

In just moments, Fang Bai completed the transition between his internal Essence Energy and the external spiritual energy.

"Ahh..."

With a slight shift in his mental focus, spiritual energy gathered behind him to form Spirit Energy Wings. Slowly flapping, they gently carried Fang Bai down to the ground.

During his descent, Fang Bai noticed that there were over a dozen others falling from the high heavens just like him.

Those people were all Half-Step Foundation Establishment Experts. Once they landed, their gazes wandered about, showing traces of bewilderment and unease at the unfamiliar world.

"The True Martial Realm is but one of the Three Thousand Minor Worlds. These martial artists are likely just like me, arriving here via the spatial channels of their respective worlds."

Fang Bai studied the dozen or so martial artists who had sequentially landed, pondering inwardly.

From various corners of the Three Thousand Minor Worlds, the dozen martial artists sized each other up before seemingly forming an unspoken pact to gather together.

"Friends, I am Shi Ming from the Chaos Essence Realm. May I ask where you hail from?"

A towering martial artist, with a broad physique that stood almost a zhang tall, briskly approached Fang Bai. After sizing him up and appearing slightly surprised at Fang Bai's youth, he cupped his fists and asked.

"Ah, I am Fang Bai, from the True Martial Realm."

Fang Bai responded with a smile, thinking that this Shi Ming seemed to be a martial artist with immense physical strength and indomitable power. With fists large as bowls, if he struck, most martial artists of the same realm wouldn't dare take it head-on.

The two nodded to each other, then proceeded to introduce themselves to the other martial artists as they approached.

Having arrived in a completely unfamiliar place, with no clear direction for their next steps, the dozen martial artists sought mutual acquaintance, partly for camaraderie.

"Since we've all come from various worlds and have no kin or friends here, why don't we travel together? Facing challenges as one makes it easier to handle whatever lies ahead!"

Shi Ming suggested in his coarse, booming voice.

"Brother Shi is right!"

"Indeed!"

"The ancient texts from my world state that in the Three Thousand Great Worlds, Foundation Establishment Experts are as common as dogs. If we Half-Step Foundation Establishment cultivators don't band together, we're bound to encounter countless difficulties!"

"United by fate, we must watch out for one another from now on!"

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As Shi Ming finished speaking, the dozen martial artists quickly voiced their agreement.

"Traveling together... afraid that won't be possible anymore."

Fang Bai lifted his eyes to gaze toward the northern horizon, murmuring softly.

"Brother Fang, do you mean to reject joining us in traveling?"

Shi Ming, clearly misunderstanding Fang Bai's intentions, tried to persuade him earnestly, "Think this through carefully. In this unfamiliar world, if you travel alone and encounter trouble, how would you manage?"

"No, that's not what I meant... Look there."

Fang Bai pointed toward the northern sky as he spoke.

Shi Ming followed Fang Bai's gesture, his gaze locking onto the distant horizon, where he froze in shock.

The other dozen martial artists also noticed the phenomenon in the sky, their expressions turning equally astonished and speechless.

Chapter 1404: Kidnapping People

In the twilight sky to the north, dozens of streams of colorful light streaked across like meteors and descended before Fang Bai and the others.

The streams of colorful light landed, revealing dozens of martial artists dressed in various attire, each flying atop distinct spiritual artifacts shaped as blades, swords, spears, axes, and more.

"Flight using Imperial Instruments of legend..."

"They must all be Foundation Establishment experts, right?"

"Those artifacts—they're all Holy Grade spiritual artifacts, aren't they?"

"When would I also become a Foundation Establishment expert? When could I own a Holy Grade artifact?"

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The dozen or so martial artists newly arrived from the Three Thousand Minor Worlds looked at the sudden arrival of the dozens of powerful figures, feeling both wary and envious of their immense strength and spiritual artifacts.

Among the powerful arrivals, there were men and women, old and young. Judging by their attire, they clearly belonged to different sects.

Shi Ming and the others couldn't discern the cultivation levels of these dozens of experts, but Fang Bai knew they were all Foundation Establishment experts.

In the True Martial Realm, a Half-Step Foundation Establishment expert like Fang Bai could sweep through all opponents, unmatched and invincible.

But in the Three Thousand Great Worlds, even true Foundation Establishment experts were mere juniors within the grand Martial Dao hierarchy.

Above the Foundation Establishment realm lay numerous higher realms and vast powerhouses possessing shocking strength.

It was not an exaggeration to say that in the eyes of truly elite figures in the Three Thousand Great Worlds, a Foundation Establishment expert was no different from an ant—easily crushed.

Even so, the presence of the dozens of Foundation Establishment experts still brought immense pressure to the freshly-arrived martial artists, causing them to instinctively huddle together.

"Tsk tsk... This batch of martial artists from the Minor Worlds seems to have promising talent."

"Oh? There are even a few with innate spiritual roots!"

"Haha! Nobody fight over them—the innate spiritual roots are ours, Lingxu Palace's!"

"Why? Out of the several innate spiritual roots, Spirit Lion Mountain deserves at least one, don't we?"

"Finders keepers! Lingxu Palace can't think about hogging them all!"

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After landing, the dozens of Foundation Establishment experts sized up Fang Bai and the others, their faces lighting up. They encircled the group with gleeful expressions, ready to contend for recruits.

Shi Ming and the others were utterly bewildered, some even frightened. Back-to-back, they quickly brandished their spiritual artifacts, surrounded by swirling True Yuan, putting on a desperate stance for battle.

Only Fang Bai remained calm, his expression unruffled like an ancient, still pond.

Having experienced a previous life filled with wisdom, Fang Bai knew that these Foundation Establishment experts were elders from sects within the Three Thousand Great Worlds.

These elders stationed themselves here, and whenever martial artists from the Three Thousand Minor Worlds appeared, they would swarm over to screen and compete for those with exceptional talent, coaxing them to join their sects.

In the Three Thousand Great Worlds, promising Martial Dao geniuses were typically chosen by powerful, well-established sects and taken under their wing. Similarly, most talented martial artists were more than willing to join such influential sects.

This arrangement allowed the geniuses to gain strong backing and benefit from the full support of their sects, rapidly increasing their cultivation and strength.

Consequently, these dominant sects continued to thrive by consistently attracting talented recruits.

Meanwhile, weaker sects lacking genius martial artists and cultivation resources struggled to rise and grow.

The spatial passages from the Three Thousand Minor Worlds to the Three Thousand Great Worlds numbered in the hundreds and thousands. The location where Fang Bai and the dozen martial artists appeared was merely one of those insignificant entry points.

For millennia, of the countless martial artists who stepped into this location from the Minor Worlds, none had been innate spiritual root geniuses. Even those with exceptional talent were exceedingly rare, so much so that the powerful sects had long stopped dispatching disciples to station here.

This gave some weaker sects a chance. They sent their elders to guard this area, hoping for a stroke of good fortune—to discover promising cultivators among the incoming martial artists from the Minor Worlds and bring them back to bolster their sect.

When Fang Bai and the dozen martial artists crossed the spatial passage to emerge in the Three Thousand Great Worlds, the nearby sect elders felt the sudden presence and immediately rode their spiritual artifacts to arrive.

What those sect elders didn't expect was that this batch of martial artists from the Minor Worlds not only had excellent talent but included six with innate spiritual roots.

This revelation drove the dozens of sect elders into ecstatic joy.

Among the six innate spiritual root martial artists, besides Fang Bai, there were Shi Ming, Zhan Pengfei, Tong Yaoyao, and the sibling pair You Long and You Feng.

The gaze of every elder from the various sects locked onto the six innate spiritual root martial artists, their expressions resembling hungry wolves that had stumbled upon a feast, ready to pounce at any moment.

"Relax a little... They mean no harm. For us, this might even be a good thing..."

Fang Bai softly reassured Shi Ming, Zhan Pengfei, and the others, who were nervously bracing themselves for an attack.

"Haha, the young man speaks wisely!"

One of the Foundation Establishment high-level experts, an elderly man with a round belly, white hair and beard, and a ruddy complexion who resembled a laughing Maitreya Buddha, chuckled loudly and pointed at Fang Bai. "Let me tell you—we are indeed here with good intentions!"

Fang Bai understood what the elder meant by "good intentions" but remained silent, merely smiling.

Shi Ming and the others, however, looked at the white-haired elder with confusion, awaiting an explanation of the so-called "good intentions."

"Our sects are among the top-tier strong sects of the Three Thousand Great Worlds. The sect masters are unmatched super experts at the Foundation Establishment perfection realm, capable of flight, commanding fire, and taming water."

The white-haired elder boasted for a while before continuing, "We've come specifically to select disciples. You can choose any of the sects here to join... Young man, you possess the innate Fire Spirit Root, which aligns perfectly with my cultivation of Fire-based Techniques and Martial Arts. I'm more than willing to teach you in the future."

After landing, the white-haired elder immediately set his sights on Fang Bai and wasted no time extending an invitation. "I am Elder Wu Zhihua of Lingxu Palace, and I cordially invite you to join our sect."

His gaze then shifted to Shi Ming beside Fang Bai. "Lingxu Palace happens to have elders proficient in Earth Element Techniques and Martial Arts. If you join Lingxu Palace, you are bound to achieve Foundation Establishment soon. Ascending to even higher realms wouldn't be impossible!"

Upon seeing the white-haired elder try to recruit two innate spiritual roots at once, the other sect elders grew impatient and voiced their objections:

"Innate spiritual roots are incredibly rare—Lingxu Palace, are you truly planning to monopolize two of them? Wu Zhihua, have you no shame?"

"At least leave us some breathing room!"

"Young ones, don't just listen to him!"

"Exactly! Our Medicine King Mountain isn't lacking in strength compared to Lingxu Palace! Medicine King Mountain sincerely invites you to join us!"

"Nine Heavens Palace invites you to join as well!"

"Soul Summoning Hall invites you to join us!"

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The dozens of sect elders crowded around Fang Bai and the others in circles upon circles, issuing invitations. Each elder's face radiated earnestness, expressing a profound eagerness to recruit the newcomers like precious treasures.

Chapter 1405: Solving Problems with Strength!

Amid the chaotic voices of invitation, Fang Bai caught the words "Soul Summoning Hall," and his heart tightened slightly.

Back in Spirit Lake City of the True Martial Realm, Fang Bai had killed Zu Hanjiao, a direct disciple of the "Soul Summoning Hall" from the Three Thousand Great Worlds.

Fortunately, after slaying Zu Hanjiao, Fang Bai had casually erased her aura. Otherwise, if the "Soul Summoning Hall" Elder before him detected even the slightest trace related to Zu Hanjiao, it could spell disaster.

Fang Bai knew the dangers of the Three Thousand Great Worlds, which far surpassed those of the True Martial Realm. With his current Half-Step Foundation Establishment strength, traversing the Three Thousand Great Worlds alone would be nearly impossible.

Therefore, upon arriving in the Three Thousand Great Worlds, joining a sect temporarily before attaining the strength to ensure his safety was a sensible decision. Not only would he have a measure of protection, but he could also gain access to the sect's cultivation resources. Why not?

Due to the incident with Zu Hanjiao, Fang Bai bore no fondness for the "Soul Summoning Hall" and immediately excluded them as an option.

Dozens of elders from various major sects surrounded Fang Bai and the others, their tempers flaring, engaging in loud arguments and refusing to give an inch.

"The old rules—let's settle this with strength!"

Wu Zhihua, an elder from the "Lingxu Palace," thundered with a voice that drowned out all the surrounding noise.

"Fine! Wu Zhihua, since both Lingxu Palace and we at Medicine King Mountain have our eyes on that young man in white, let's fight it out! The winner takes him!"

"Who's afraid of whom? Come on, let's settle this with real skill!"

Thus, Wu Zhihua, the elder from Lingxu Palace, and the elder from Medicine King Mountain moved to a distant open area. Harnessing spiritual energy and summoning their spiritual artifacts, they fought fiercely, rolling across both ground and sky.

Meanwhile, dozens of other sect elders also clashed in heated battles over their favored martial artists.

Within a radius of several miles, spiritual energy surged, spiritual artifacts streaked through the air, sand and stones filled the sky, and the booming sounds echoed ceaselessly. The scene was astonishing.

As for Fang Bai and the others, they were closely watched by disciples from various sects, leaving no chance for them to slip away.

Shi Ming and the others were witnessing a battle between Foundation Establishment experts for the first time. Every punch and kick they delivered carried the force to shatter tigers and elephants, creating an awe-inspiring momentum.

As spiritual artifacts swung through the air, space rippled like water, producing sharp or thunderous sounds that struck terror into the hearts of observers.

Massive boulders standing around them, once touched by their fists, kicks, or spiritual artifacts, would explode with a roar, turning into fine powder.

Between Foundation Establishment experts, physical clashes were rare; the encounters predominantly involved spiritual energy collisions and spiritual artifact clashes, generating massive shockwaves that made one's heart race.

The elder from Medicine King Mountain, Chang Yuanlong, who was dueling with Wu Zhihua, faltered after a hundred moves and admitted defeat, wearing a dejected expression as he watched Wu Zhihua approach Fang Bai and Shi Ming with a triumphant look.

Meanwhile, the elders from dozens of other sects had mostly concluded their duels and split into winners and losers.

Some, having no opponents left, went over to persuade their chosen martial artists to join their sects.

Others rested briefly, preparing to take on their next challengers.

Wu Zhihua, being one of the top few in strength among the dozens of elders present, deterred other challengers after defeating Chang Yuanlong. No one wanted to risk public humiliation.

Thus, in the eyes of many martial artists present, Fang Bai and Shi Ming were as good as belonging to Lingxu Palace under Wu Zhihua's leadership.

"In Lingxu Palace, there are actually many stronger than me..."

Wu Zhihua walked up to Fang Bai and Shi Ming with a beaming smile and said, "As long as you two are willing to join Lingxu Palace, with your talent, surpassing me in the future will be a piece of cake. So... what are you hesitating for? With a simple nod, you'll officially become disciples of Lingxu Palace!"

After witnessing the fierce battle between Wu Zhihua and Medicine King Mountain's Chang Yuanlong, Shi Ming admired Wu Zhihua's strength and felt deeply awed.

He glanced at Fang Bai, then eagerly nodded with excitement: "Senior Wu, I, Shi Ming, wish to join Lingxu Palace!"

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful!"

Wu Zhihua repeated "wonderful" three times, clearly overjoyed.

Though his initial interest had been in the younger Fang Bai, Shi Ming, also possessing an innate spiritual root, was a martial genius highly welcomed by Lingxu Palace.

"And you, young man? What's your decision?"

Noticing Fang Bai hadn't nodded immediately, Wu Zhihua asked with a smile, his curiosity about Fang Bai deepening.

After being invited to join Lingxu Palace, Shi Ming's face turned red with excitement, a normal reaction for most martial artists in such circumstances.

However, Fang Bai remained unfazed, showing a faint contemplative expression as though weighing the pros and cons of joining Lingxu Palace.

Such composure and calmness at his age were rare among the younger generation of disciples.

"Looking around... it seems there's no better choice... Fine! I'm willing to join you..."

Under Wu Zhihua's watchful gaze, Fang Bai finally nodded as well.

However, Wu Zhihua failed to notice that Fang Bai had said "willing to join you" and not "willing to join Lingxu Palace."

Fang Bai intentionally omitted the words "Lingxu Palace."

Fang Bai's ultimate goal was to return to the Immortal Domain. He could not allow himself to be confined by a small sect within the Three Thousand Great Worlds. Lingxu Palace was destined to be only a temporary inn on his Martial Dao journey.

If Fang Bai were to be likened to a hidden dragon at this moment, then Lingxu Palace was merely a shallow pond. The hidden dragon was gathering its strength, destined to one day burst out from the shallow waters, soar to the heavens, and roam the Immortal Domain.

Having secured the recruitment of two martial geniuses with innate spiritual roots, Wu Zhihua was elated. Grasping one in each hand, he laughed heartily and said, "Haha... Excellent! Recruiting the two of you makes my ten years of watchful waiting here worthwhile! Finally, I can report back to the Palace Master and the high-ranking members of the palace!"

Accompanying Wu Zhihua in his watch were four direct disciples of Lingxu Palace, each at the early stages of Foundation Establishment.

With the addition of two disciples possessing innate spiritual roots, the future rise of Lingxu Palace seemed assured, leaving the four direct disciples equally thrilled and eager.

After another round of arguments with elders from rival sects, Wu Zhihua selected two more martial artists of superior aptitude, also from minor worlds, for Lingxu Palace before departing gleefully.

"Let's go—time to return to Lingxu Palace!"

Not too far into the journey, Wu Zhihua casually tossed out several holy grade spiritual artifacts.

The artifacts expanded several times over in the wind. Under Wu Zhihua's guidance, Fang Bai, Shi Ming, and the others stepped onto them. The artifacts emitted dazzling colors, streaking across the sky like arcs of rainbows.

The group, centered around Wu Zhihua, flew forward on the spiritual artifacts.

With their bodies protected by spiritual energy, they were shielded from the raging winds and made the journey unscathed.

Chapter 1406: Ancestral Master and Medicine Cauldron

During the flight, Wu Zhihua explained to Fang Bai, Shi Ming, and the other two new disciples some details about the Vast Universe and Lingxu Palace.

The world Fang Bai and the others were currently in was called the Spirit Martial Realm, one of the worlds within the Vast Universe.

The Spirit Martial Realm was vast and boundless, far larger than the True Martial Realm among the Minor Worlds.

It was said that even a typical Innate Expert, with a lifetime of effort, could never traverse the entirety of the Spirit Martial Realm.

This speaks to the realm's immense size and breadth.

The Spirit Martial Realm is divided into five regions, called the East Spirit Domain, West Spirit Domain, South Spirit Domain, North Spirit Domain, and Central Spirit Realm, based on their geographical locations.

The five regions are separated by features such as oceans, deserts, and forests.

Lingxu Palace is a small sect located in the East Spirit Domain.

The Palace Master of Lingxu Palace is called Li Sanfu, and his cultivation level is at the perfection stage of Foundation Establishment.

Li Sanfu?

When Fang Bai heard this name, he found it somewhat amusing.

For someone who is at least the master of a palace, shouldn't his name have a bit of dignity, if not outright majesty?

What kind of name is Li Sanfu... Could it be that his spiritual artifact is an axe and his techniques consist of only three strikes?

"The Palace Master's spiritual artifact is indeed an axe, and his most powerful martial art is 'Furious Three Axes'..."

Seemingly guessing Fang Bai's train of thought, Wu Zhihua chuckled and explained.

"The Palace Master has a burly build and is naturally strong. His height... hmm, about similar to yours..."

Wu Zhihua glanced at Shi Ming before continuing.

Upon hearing this, Shi Ming's brows raised in excitement, his tigerish eyes radiating with unusual vigor.

Shi Ming himself had a burly frame and was naturally strong. He was fascinated by martial artists of a similar type. Upon learning that Lingxu Palace's Palace Master was also a tall and powerful fighter, he immediately felt admiration and intense eagerness to meet him.

The group traveled on their spiritual artifacts, flying and resting intermittently. After half a month, they arrived at a beautiful, spiritually rich mountain, descending upon the expansive plaza before a cluster of palatial buildings.

Above the palaces, flocks of birds soared, and hundreds of spirit beasts, big and small, either sprawled or moved around, meandering around the palace grounds.

These flying birds and spirit beasts were massive and majestic, their strength evident. Even the weakest among them were equivalent to human Innate perfection experts, and most were on par with Foundation Establishment experts. The overpowering aura they emitted was intimidating.

"These flying birds and spirit beasts are all domesticated and bred by our Lingxu Palace. If disciples need to leave for urgent matters, they can apply to the senior members of the sect to ride them!"

Wu Zhihua stroked his beard and smiled.

Foundation Establishment-level flying spirit beasts! How impressive would it be to ride one outside?

Shi Ming and the other two martial artists from the Minor Worlds blushed with excitement, their hearts racing at the thought.

Fang Bai subtly curled his lips, feeling somewhat unimpressed inwardly.

In his previous life, Fang Bai had traveled across almost the entirety of the Vast Universe. He knew that sects, regardless of size, would keep and raise flying birds and spirit beasts.

The sheer size of each realm in the Vast Universe made it impractical for communication and transportation to depend solely on martial artists flying, as it would not only be time-consuming but also deplete their spiritual energy.

Hence, faster and more enduring flying birds and spirit beasts became indispensable "transportation tools" within the Vast Universe.

Apart from carrying messages, flying spirit beasts could also assist martial artists in combat and were highly loyal.

For these reasons, flying spirit beasts were a significant, dual-purpose combat force in every sect.

Although compared to the spirit beasts of the larger and more powerful sects, those in Lingxu Palace were nothing extraordinary.

Nonetheless, they were enough to astonish Shi Ming and his two companions.

The plaza before Lingxu Palace's mountain gate was vast enough to accommodate ten thousand people. At its center stood a massive cauldron sculpted from Golden Spirit Stone.

"Our sect's Founding Ancestor was a renowned Pill Master. Back in the day, Lingxu Palace relied on the ancestor's alchemy techniques to amass substantial cultivation resources, attract numerous Martial Dao

geniuses, and build extensive connections, allowing our sect to enjoy a millennium of glory. This cauldron was built to commemorate the ancestor's achievements..."

Wu Zhihua led Fang Bai and the others to the several-meter-high cauldron, his expression tinged with nostalgia and admiration, as he sighed, "Unfortunately, our later disciples lacked talents like our ancestor in alchemy, causing our alchemical legacy to decline with each generation. Because of this, Lingxu Palace's overall strength has rapidly weakened. If this continues... alas..."

He paused here, giving Fang Bai and Shi Ming a glance, lamenting that these two disciples with Innate Spiritual Roots of fire and earth lacked the qualifications to become Pill Masters—a missed opportunity.

Fang Bai's gaze swept over the giant cauldron, thinking that it was carved from tens of thousands of spirit stones—a truly extravagant display.

Before being pulled into the spatial passage in the True Martial Realm, Fang Bai had left all his cultivation resources to the Huaxia Sect members. Currently, aside from a few spiritual artifacts, he didn't even have a single Essence Stone, Spirit Medicine, or Elixir on him.

In this situation, Fang Bai was arguably the poorest martial artist present in the Spirit Martial Realm.

Fang Bai knew that although the Vast Universe was abundant in cultivation resources, it was also crowded with martial artists. Sect members and loose cultivators often engaged in fierce battles over cultivation resources.

Now penniless, Fang Bai felt like a beggar before the giant cauldron sculpted from tens of thousands of spirit stones—a tempting feast that made his heart race and left him craving.

For a brief moment, Fang Bai even entertained the idea of sneaking away with the cauldron to use for his cultivation.

However, the thought quickly passed.

After all, Fang Bai was now a disciple of Lingxu Palace—even if temporarily. Stealing from the sect was fundamentally inappropriate.

The great cauldron was effectively the symbol of Lingxu Palace. If it were truly stolen, it would surely drive every disciple of the sect mad.

Fang Bai had only just arrived and was unfamiliar with the sect's surroundings. It wasn't worth provoking a sect led by a Foundation Establishment perfection expert over a mere few tens of thousands of spirit stones.

The return of Wu Zhihua and the group quickly attracted many Lingxu Palace disciples. Soon, the expansive plaza became bustling with several hundred people.

Seeing Elder Wu bring back four "junior brothers," the disciples of Lingxu Palace were filled with curiosity, surrounding Fang Bai and the others while pointing and chatting.

"Four new junior brothers at once? They seem pretty young!"

"Hehe, that young man in the white robe looks so tender and fair—just my type!"

"What's so great about a pretty face? I prefer the tall, strong one!"

"Hmm, the other two aren't bad either..."

"If you've got the guts, go flirt with them!"

"Shh, lower your voices; don't scare them..."

A group of bold and unruly young female disciples without martial Dao companions flirtatiously sent provocative glances toward Fang Bai and the others.

Chapter 1407: I Get Easily Scared, So Please Don't Frighten Me

Shi Ming and the other two Martial Artists from the Minor World were quite aware of their limitations.

In the Minor World, they had been undefeatable overlords, but in this vast Three Thousand Great World full of powerful figures, they were at the very bottom rung. Only by behaving submissively could they avoid bullying.

Surrounding them now were several young female disciples of Lingxu Palace, all of whom were Foundation Establishment Realm cultivators. Though they giggled and teased endlessly, Shi Ming and the others dared not show any displeasure.

The young female disciples standing at the front spoke provocatively, shooting flirtatious glances at Shi Ming and the others while their hands occasionally wandered over their bodies. This made Shi Ming and the other three blush furiously, lowering their heads in shame without daring to utter a word.

"Dear senior sisters, please stop touching us—have mercy!"

Fang Bai, though not as embarrassed as Shi Ming and the others, was equally helpless in this situation. While dodging the "wandering hands" of the Lingxu Palace disciples, he chuckled bitterly and said, "All of you are Foundation Establishment experts, possessing tremendous power in every move, whereas we are weaklings with fragile bodies. If you were to accidentally damage certain parts, we might not be able to use them properly later."

"Hehe... Junior Brother, which parts are you referring to?"

A Lingxu Palace female disciple with freckles on her nose and large eyes giggled mischievously, casting a suggestive glance at Fang Bai's body while pretending to reach out for a pinch.

Seeing her gaze and movement, Fang Bai's heart skipped a beat, his legs instinctively clamping together. He thought to himself, Could it be that Lingxu Palace's female disciples are all this wild?

"Senior Sister, I'm timid, please don't scare me..."

Surrounded by a pack of "she-wolves," Fang Bai dared not utter tough words and could only grin ingratiatingly at the freckled Lingxu Palace disciple who seemed eager to pinch certain parts of him.

There was no choice—under someone else's roof and lacking the strength to compete, Fang Bai had to temporarily swallow his pride.

"Hey, what's your name?"

The freckled Lingxu Palace female disciple pointed at Fang Bai and asked.

"I... I'm called Fang Bai."

Fang Bai answered weakly.

"Fang Bai, right? Good. From now on, I'll watch over you in Lingxu Palace. Hurry up and call me Senior Sister!"

With her hands on her hips, the freckled Foundation Establishment disciple from Lingxu Palace smirked as she spoke.

"Senior Sister!"

Fang Bai called out and cupped his hands respectfully, then asked, "May I know Senior Sister's esteemed name?"

"She's Miao Lingling, ranked third on the Inner Court disciples' battle strength chart! Fang Bai, you're lucky. Senior Sister Miao has promised to protect you, and now you won't have to worry about being bullied in Lingxu Palace!"

Another female disciple chimed in.

"Miao Lingling... Senior Sister has beauty and a pleasant name!"

Fang Bai casually offered a compliment, noticing that Senior Sister Miao seemed quite pleased, her face lighting up with joy. Then he tugged on Shi Ming and the other two newcomers beside him and said, "Senior Sister Miao has a righteous and chivalrous character; I'm truly grateful. These three are my brothers—please also look after them, Senior Sister."

Miao Lingling beamed upon hearing Fang Bai's remarks—"Senior Sister is beautiful and has a pleasant name" and "Senior Sister Miao is righteous and chivalrous." Feeling increasingly favorable toward him, she patted her chest and declared, "No problem. I'll protect all four of you. In Lingxu Palace, if anyone bullies you, just let me know—I'll stand up for you!"

"Thank you, Senior Sister Miao!"

Fang Bai and his companions were newcomers to Lingxu Palace. According to tradition, rookies often faced various forms of bullying from senior disciples.

However, thanks to Miao Lingling, ranked third among Lingxu Palace's junior disciples, their situation would undoubtedly improve significantly.

"Hahaha... Elder Wu, I heard you've brought back some promising new recruits! Let me take a look!"

At this moment, a hearty laugh rang out, followed by a figure shooting through the air to land before Elder Wu Zihua.

With the arrival of this figure, Fang Bai and the others felt an overwhelming pressure far greater than Elder Wu's, and instantly deduced that the newcomer must be Lingxu Palace's current Palace Master, Li Sanfu.

As they looked closer, they saw Li Sanfu standing tall and broad-shouldered, even larger than Shi Ming. His imposing presence was akin to a towering mountain and pressed down heavily, making Shi Ming and the other newcomers struggle to breathe.

Although Fang Bai's physical body was robust enough to withstand Li Sanfu's might, he deliberately feigned discomfort, acting as if he were suffering greatly and unable to endure the pressure.

The dangers and challenges within the Three Thousand Great World were far greater than those of the Minor World. Carelessness could lead to death, so Fang Bai avoided standing out unnecessarily for fear of attracting unwanted attention or being treated differently.

Until he had sufficient strength to protect himself, Fang Bai thought it wiser to blend in than to stand in the spotlight.

"Haha, one Fire, one Earth—two Innate Spiritual Roots! This time, it's a big win! Hmm, the other two's aptitudes aren't bad either... Haha, Elder Wu, you've performed exceptionally well this time!"

Li Sanfu's gaze swept over Fang Bai and his companions. Excitement filled his face as he laughed heartily, the sound resonating so powerfully that Fang Bai and the others' eardrums buzzed incessantly.

Elder Wu Zhihua smiled slightly and said, "Thanks to the Palace Master's assistance, this was a fruitful harvest. It's just a pity that of the six Innate Spiritual Roots from the Minor World, I only brought back two."

Li Sanfu replied, "There were at least forty sects stationed at the Profound Spirit Mountain teleportation array. Being able to retrieve two Innate Spiritual Roots amidst a pack of wolves is already an impressive feat. As we always say at Lingxu Palace: faults are punished, merits are rewarded. Elder Wu, go to Elder Sun later and claim two bottles of Blazing Flame Red Heart Fluid."

Elder Wu was overjoyed and said, "Thank you, Palace Master."

Blazing Flame Red Heart Fluid, refined from the Blazing Flame Scarlet Heart Fruit, was a form of Spiritual Liquid invaluable to experts cultivating Fire-based Techniques.

The refinement of Blazing Flame Red Heart Fluid was difficult, and Lingxu Palace's reserves were limited. Each bottle taken directly reduced their stock, which was only used during critical breakthroughs by elders as supplementary aid.

Li Sanfu's decision to have Elder Wu claim two bottles was a rare reward, attainable only through major achievements, and Elder Wu naturally rejoiced.

The "Elder Sun" referenced was Sun Jing, who managed the Elixir Hall and was, like Elder Wu Zhihua, a High Rank Foundation Establishment cultivator.

Among Fang Bai's group, Shi Ming's tall, burly build made him impossible to ignore. When Li Sanfu arrived, his attention focused primarily on Shi Ming.

"What's your name? Judging by your physique and aura, you must be gifted with Divine Power, right?"

Li Sanfu, intrigued by this new disciple who resembled himself in size and possessed an Innate Spiritual Root, spoke while forcefully patting Shi Ming's shoulder.

Despite his impressive stature and strength, Shi Ming was only at Half-Step Foundation Establishment—the gap in cultivation level was far too great for him to withstand Li Sanfu's strength. His knees buckled with a pained cry, and he almost collapsed to the ground.

Chapter 1408: Competing for Disciples

"Reporting to the Palace Master, I... this disciple... this disciple's name is Shi Ming..."

Shi Ming felt as if all the bones in his body were about to be shattered by Li Sanfu's pat, but he managed to steady himself, replied with a bitter expression.

Li Sanfu slapped Shi Ming's shoulder, intentionally testing the weight of this tall disciple. Seeing how his body trembled like a sieve and his dark face revealed a look of embarrassment, he couldn't help but laugh heartily.

"Shi Ming, is it? You don't need to feel ashamed! When I was your age, my cultivation level wasn't even as good as yours! So... your Martial Dao cultivation will surpass mine in the future. I have high hopes for you!"

After speaking, Li Sanfu patted Shi Ming's shoulder again.

This time, however, the pat was gentle, without any force.

"And you? What's your name, little guy?"

Li Sanfu's gaze shifted to Fang Bai. He was equally intrigued by this youthful "pretty boy" who already possessed Half-Step Foundation Establishment strength.

Both Shi Ming and Fang Bai were in the Half-Step Foundation Establishment realm and possessed Innate Spiritual Roots. However, Shi Ming was already over forty years old, while Fang Bai was just in his twenties. The comparison clearly showed Fang Bai's talent and aptitude to be superior.

Li Sanfu understood, however, that even with better talent, Fang Bai's achievements today would have been impossible without diligent cultivation.

In this world, any Martial Artist who achieves glory and renown relies not only on fortune but also enduring the hardships and solitude of cultivation, investing unimaginable effort and sweat, and surviving countless battles on the edge of life and death; all are indispensable.

Li Sanfu had always admired Martial Artists with good aptitude, high talent, and devotion to cultivation.

The "pretty boy" before him was clearly one of them.

Little guy?

Hearing Li Sanfu refer to him as such, Fang Bai paused for a moment, then chuckled silently, thinking about how he has already lived for tens of thousands of years over two lifetimes, making him undeniably an old-timer. Yet here he was, called a "little guy."

Fine, little guy it is—it's not like this young body he possessed was anything but youthful.

"Reporting to the Palace Master, my name is Fang Bai."

Fang Bai intentionally put on a look of nervousness, as if meeting a powerful figure for the first time, cautiously answering.

Li Sanfu patted his shoulder as well and laughed, "Fang Bai, is it? Don't be nervous! Every Lingxu Palace disciple knows I'm a very approachable and easy-going person."

However, the force Li Sanfu used to pat Fang Bai's shoulder was the same as he had applied to Shi Ming earlier. Fang Bai's expression changed slightly as his body trembled faintly, revealing a look of pain.

Li Sanfu let out a surprised "Hmm," seeming quite intrigued. His gaze scanned Fang Bai up and down as he exclaimed, "Could it be that this little guy also possesses innate divine power? Judging by your physique, it doesn't seem likely!"

When Li Sanfu slapped Fang Bai's shoulder, he clearly felt a tremendous resistance arising from within Fang Bai's tendons and flesh, a kind of raw strength seemingly even greater than what Shi Ming possessed.

In Li Sanfu's understanding, individuals with such strength were considered to have innate divine power.

Innate divine power refers to Martial Artists who are born with tremendous physical strength that can be unleashed purely through the body.

Some Martial Artists with innate divine power can even contend against others in the same realm solely relying on their physical strength, without utilizing spiritual energy.

Such Martial Artists typically have tall, robust physiques, muscles as taut as steel, standing like imposing iron towers that exert an intangible pressure on others.

For instance, both Li Sanfu and Shi Ming fell into this category.

But although Fang Bai's height was slightly above average compared to ordinary Martial Artists, he far from qualified as "huge." Yet he unexpectedly possessed innate divine power.

This left Li Sanfu somewhat perplexed.

What he didn't know was that Fang Bai had been cultivating the "Dragon-Tiger-Lion-Elephant Technique" since his days in the secular world. This technique was a body refinement cultivation method designed specifically to enhance physical strength.

It was no exaggeration to say that if realms and cultivation levels were disregarded, and it came down to raw physical strength in combat, Fang Bai could even fight and defeat Li Sanfu.

Li Sanfu did not favor anyone over the other, and continued to warmly greet the remaining two new disciples, patting their shoulders as well.

However, the strength of those two disciples was slightly weaker than Fang Bai and Shi Ming. Li Sanfu's pat sent both of them toppling onto the ground, drawing bursts of laughter from their fellow disciples nearby, leaving them deeply embarrassed, almost to the point of tears.

Following Li Sanfu, Lingxu Palace's high-ranking members arrived one after another.

When the three elders of Lingxu Palace saw that Fang Bai and Shi Ming were both Innate Spiritual Roots cultivators, their eyes lit up, and they began loudly quarreling over who would take them as disciples, each eager to claim an Innate Spiritual Root for themselves.

"Fang Bai is an Innate Fire Spirit Root, aligning with my cultivation techniques and Martial Arts. Besides, I'm the one who brought him here, so from now on, I'll be the one teaching him. You three can argue over Shi Ming instead!"

Wu Zhihua stepped forward to shield Fang Bai, clearly showing a protective stance.

"Elder Wu has done great service for Lingxu Palace. Since he wants an Innate Spiritual Root disciple, you all should let him have one," Li Sanfu said in support of Wu Zhihua.

When Li Sanfu said this, the three elders were reluctant to compete with Wu Zhihua over Fang Bai, turning their focus to Shi Ming instead, who became the hot prize.

After much spirited verbal sparring, Shi Ming was ultimately taken by Yun Feng, the elder overseeing the Enforcement Hall, becoming Yun Feng's personal disciple.

Yun Feng cultivated Earth Element Techniques while Shi Ming was an Innate Earth Spirit Root. To ensure the smooth progression of Shi Ming's Martial Dao journey in the future, the decision was eventually finalized by Palace Master Li Sanfu, placing Shi Ming under Elder Yun Feng's guidance.

The other two elders, unable to claim an Innate Spiritual Root disciple, inevitably felt disappointed. However, the remaining two new disciples also had fairly decent talent. The elders each took one of them, preparing to instruct them in Martial Arts Techniques later.

Within moments, the four new disciples had been distributed among the four elders. The remaining high-ranking members could only exchange bitter smiles and sigh in regret.

"Elder Wu, I've got something to discuss with you..."

After the Lingxu Palace disciples in the square dispersed, Elder Sun Jing, who oversaw the Elixir Hall, approached Wu Zhihua. Gesturing at Fang Bai beside Wu Zhihua, she said, "If your disciple is ever free, could you lend him to me for a while?"

Wu Zhihua, who had a good relationship with Sun Jing, laughed and said, "First, tell me the reason! If I think it's appropriate, I'll lend him to you."

Sun Jing replied earnestly, "As you know, I've made some progress in the art of alchemy in recent years and can now refine basic Holy Grade low-tier Spirit Pill. However, the attendant who normally watches over my pill furnace doesn't have an Innate Fire Spirit Root. Their abilities to sense and control the fire are inadequate, leading me to ruin many furnaces of elixirs..."

Hearing Sun Jing's explanation, Wu Zhihua immediately understood her intention and said with an unhappy expression, "Elder Sun Jing, are you trying to make Fang Bai into a pill furnace attendant for you?"

Chapter 1409: Attendant

In Lingxu Palace, attendants belonged to the category of menial disciples, who usually lacked talent and aptitude, with no future in the Martial Dao. They held a low status in Lingxu Palace and were often bullied.

As such, when Wu Zhihua heard Sun Jing wanted to borrow Fang Bai to guard the pill furnace, he became slightly displeased, thinking to himself, "Elder Sun treats my disciple as if he's just an attendant. What is the meaning of this?"

"Elder Wu, you misunderstand me. I didn't mean it that way..."

Sun Jing explained with a bitter smile, "I want to refine a batch of Marrow Cleansing Pills for Lin'er to take, hoping she can step back onto the Martial Dao. Unfortunately, I only have enough materials to refine one batch of Marrow Cleansing Pills. If it fails, I don't know when Lin'er will be able to recover. Therefore..."

"I understand now."

When Wu Zhihua heard the name "Lin'er," his expression softened, and a trace of shame appeared on his face. He sighed and said, "Elder Sun, I misunderstood you... How is Lin'er doing? To tell the truth, it's been years since I've seen her."

Sun Jing's expression darkened, and she sighed wistfully, "How could she be well? Since Lin'er was injured, she's been despondent, crying every day... As her grandmother, it pains me deeply to watch her like this!"

"Sigh... Let's hope Lin'er recovers soon!"

Wu Zhihua also let out a long sigh.

Lin'er, whose full name was Sun Lin, was Sun Jing's granddaughter. She was originally a talented disciple within Lingxu Palace but had suffered severe injuries during a training expedition, resulting in her inability to continue cultivating. This was a heavy blow for Sun Lin.

For years, Sun Lin had shut herself away, succumbing to despair and nearly becoming a shadow of her former self.

Sun Jing loved her granddaughter dearly and felt both heartache and sorrow at her state.

To help her granddaughter regain her footing in the Martial Dao, Sun Jing had sought elixirs and spiritual medicines far and wide. When those efforts proved fruitless, she started gathering spiritual herbs herself, attempting to refine elixirs to heal her granddaughter's injuries.

Although Sun Jing did not possess the qualifications of an alchemist, she had, during one of her expeditions, stumbled upon a furnace cauldron. This cauldron was a Holy Grade superior Spiritual Artifact capable of generating fire on its own. Sun Jing, who practiced Wood System Martial Arts, had eventually managed to refine a batch of Spirit Pills after numerous trials.

Even though the pills she refined were only Holy Grade inferior Spirit Pills, the achievement brought excitement not only to Sun Jing but to all of Lingxu Palace's disciples.

It must be noted that regardless of whether one was in a Minor World or a Major World, alchemists were exceptionally rare individuals. For a small, unremarkable sect like Lingxu Palace to produce someone capable of practicing alchemy was an extraordinary event.

Because of Sun Jing's ability to refine Spirit Pills, Lingxu Palace saved a significant amount of valuable cultivation resources, which previously had to be exchanged for Spirit Pills and Spiritual Liquid with alchemists in surrounding major cities using spirit stones and other resources.

With the aid of her furnace cauldron, Sun Jing gained confidence in her ability to heal her granddaughter Sun Lin's injuries through alchemy. She began attempting to refine the Marrow Cleansing Pill, aiming to cleanse Lin'er's bones and marrow, reshape her meridians, and enable her to return to the path of cultivation.

However, Sun Jing was ultimately not a true alchemist. After expenditure of nearly all her materials for refining the Marrow Cleansing Pill, her repeated failures left her somewhat discouraged, and she grew wary of trying again.

During this period, Sun Jing sought out several alchemists in the nearby major cities, asking them to help refine the Marrow Cleansing Pill. However, the fees those alchemists demanded were exorbitantly high, and Sun Jing could not afford them, leaving her with no choice but to abandon the idea.

Out of frustration, Sun Jing resolved to take matters into her own hands, using the last two batches of materials she had painstakingly gathered over the years to attempt to refine the Marrow Cleansing Pill. Whether she succeeded or failed, she would leave it to fate.

Sun Jing's furnace cauldron allowed for precise adjustment of fire intensity at any time, but the attendants guarding the cauldron lacked sensitivity to the fluctuations in fire intensity. As a result, repeated failures in alchemy had occurred.

Of course, the failures couldn't be entirely blamed on the attendants. Sun Jing herself made errors as well.

Nonetheless, if there were an attendant who was particularly sensitive to Fire Spirit Energy to guard the cauldron, Sun Jing would be able to refine elixirs with much greater peace of mind, and the success rate could significantly improve.

Fang Bai, possessing the Innate Fire Spirit Root, was naturally adept at perceiving Fire Spirit Energy. Upon seeing him, Sun Jing had the idea of temporarily appointing him as an attendant.

"I only wish to temporarily borrow Fang Bai. With his assistance, I might succeed in refining the Marrow Cleansing Pill, and Lin'er's injuries could then be healed."

Sun Jing continued, "Of course, I won't use Fang Bai's help without compensation. If I succeed in refining the Marrow Cleansing Pill, I'll reward him with some cultivation resources."

Wu Zhihua nodded, stroked his beard, and said, "Healing Lin'er's injuries takes priority. I have no objections if you wish to use Fang Bai... Fang Bai, what do you think?"

Wu Zhihua and Sun Jing both turned their gaze to Fang Bai.

Although the two were confident Fang Bai wouldn't refuse—nor did he dare—they still felt it necessary to ask for his opinion, given that Fang Bai was one of Lingxu Palace's rare few disciples with an Innate Spiritual Root and had boundless potential.

"It would be my honor to assist Elder Sun!"

Fang Bai naturally wasn't so foolish as to refuse Sun Jing and answered intelligently.

Moreover, Fang Bai himself was a Pill Master and had a strong interest in alchemy. He also wanted to see how Sun Jing, who wasn't an alchemist, managed to refine Holy Grade Elixirs.

At his current level, Fang Bai could also refine Holy Grade Spirit Pills, but unfortunately, skillful cooks cannot work without ingredients. He was penniless and lacked even a single spiritual herb, making it impossible for him to refine any Spirit Pills.

Hearing Fang Bai's expected response, Wu Zhihua and Sun Jing exchanged a glance, satisfaction showing on their faces.

"Good! Rest well for now. Early tomorrow morning, the attendant from the pill room will summon you."

After saying this, Sun Jing whispered a few words to Elder Wu, cupped her fists in farewell, and swiftly departed.

"Head to the External Courtyard Department in the back mountain and hand this token to the disciple guarding its entrance. You'll be assigned accommodation. I have matters to attend to and must leave now."

While speaking, Wu Zhihua casually took out a palm-sized black wooden token. With his index and middle fingers extended, he swiftly inscribed a few characters onto the token before handing it to Fang Bai, then left in a hurry.

Fang Bai lowered his head and inspected the black wooden token, seeing the inscription: "Lingxu Palace, External Courtyard, Fang Bai." The strokes exuded a faint Martial Artist Aura.

The black wooden token, exclusive to the elders of Lingxu Palace, signified a direct disciple of an elder. Carrying it ensured treatment with respect wherever one went.

Holding the black wooden token, Fang Bai asked around and quickly reached the External Courtyard Department on the back mountain. When the disciples guarding the entrance attempted to block him, he handed them the token.

"Ah, so it's Elder Wu's direct disciple... Junior Brother Fang, my apologies. I'll lead you to your accommodation immediately."

Upon reading the inscription on the black wooden token, the disciples guarding the entrance dared not show negligence. Among them, a middle-aged man with refined features smiled at Fang Bai.

Chapter 1410: Little Junior Brother Fang is so young and handsome!

Under the guidance of the refined middle-aged man, Fang Bai headed towards the rear mountain of Lingxu Palace.

The rear mountain was lush with greenery, streams gurgling, waterfalls cascading, all complementing each other in serene harmony. Various types of spiritual medicine adorned the landscape, while gentle spirit beasts and birds occasionally passed by, creating a tranquil scene.

To Fang Bai, this place was not only picturesque, like a paradise isolated from the world, but it also brimmed with spiritual energy, making it an ideal cultivation ground for martial artists.

"Junior Brother Fang, isn't the scenery of our Lingxu Palace quite nice?"

The refined middle-aged man walked beside Fang Bai, pointing out the surroundings with a smile, his tone carrying a hint of flattery.

The man's name was Zheng Hong. He was merely an ordinary disciple of the External Courtyard. Limited by his innate talents, he considered himself fortunate if he could eventually enter the Inner Court.

However, although Fang Bai was a new disciple who had just joined, he was destined to be personally mentored by Elder Wu in the future. Coupled with his innate spiritual root, his path in the Martial Dao would extend far, making it impossible for Zheng Hong to measure up to him.

Thus, Zheng Hong was determined to befriend this Junior Brother Fang, hoping to gain his favor and assistance in the future.

"Indeed, the mountains are beautiful, the waters are clear, and the spiritual energy is abundant. Not bad."

Fang Bai smiled slightly, glanced at Zheng Hong, and casually asked, "Senior Brother Zheng, how many years have you been in the sect?"

"I have been in the sect for over twenty years now."

Zheng Hong smiled bitterly, recalling the past as he sighed, "I remember that back then, there were more than a dozen of us who entered Lingxu Palace together. We all started as menial servants. Now, twenty years have passed, and those disciples have progressed in their cultivation levels, gradually advancing to become External Courtyard disciples or even Inner Court disciples. Yet I... ha, I'm still stuck in the External Courtyard..."

Hearing the deep helplessness in Zheng Hong's words, Fang Bai patted him on the shoulder and said, "Senior Brother Zheng, don't lose heart or despair. While a martial artist's future achievements are influenced by their natural talent and aptitude, it's not entirely determined by those factors. From what I know, many martial artists without innate spiritual roots or remarkable talents have achieved great success in the Martial Dao through sheer effort. Perhaps one day, you could also rise to become one of Lingxu Palace's top figures."

Zheng Hong laughed heartily and responded, "Junior Brother Fang, that is a good thing to hear! However, I don't dare to dream of becoming a top figure. My greatest wish in this lifetime is to advance to the Foundation Establishment Realm and join the Inner Court."

As the two chatted and laughed, they soon passed through a mist-laden mountain path, where a series of stone steps appeared before them.

The stone steps twisted and turned, stretching forward into the depths of the mountain range.

To the left of the steps stood a towering stone tablet, inscribed with the five bold characters "Lingxu Palace External Courtyard." The strokes of the characters were powerful and vigorous, exuding the presence of the Dao, clearly written by a formidable expert.

Ascending the steps for a short while, they reached a point where pavilions and towers began to emerge on both sides of the pathway. Inner Court disciples of Lingxu Palace could be seen scattered in small groups throughout, engaging in discussions and exchanging insights on the Martial Dao.

In the distance, the layered mountain ranges were veiled in flowing spiritual energy. Waterfalls poured down from towering peaks, cascading like the Milky Way descending from the heavens, echoing with a thunderous roar.

The open stretches on either side of the stone steps had been cultivated into medicinal gardens, where vibrant and diverse spiritual herbs were planted in an orderly manner.

Among the spiritual herbs were spirit ginseng as thick as a child's arm, aromatic lingzhi, pristine snow lotuses, and ancient polygonum root with millennia of age... as well as many other spiritual herbs that Fang Bai had encountered in his previous life.

The branches, leaves, and fruits of these herbs shimmered with radiant light, containing pure and rich spiritual energy.

As he walked on the stone steps, the fragrant aroma of spiritual herbs wafted into Fang Bai's nose. Bathing in the spiritual energy exuded by the herbs, he felt entirely refreshed, as though his body and mind were cleansed.

After observing silently for a while, Fang Bai noted that the spiritual herbs in the garden were generally around five thousand years old. He was slightly disappointed.

Spiritual herbs of around five thousand years belong to the Holy Grade, but their age was among the lowest tier within the Holy Grade, suitable only for refining lower-tier Holy Grade spirit pills.

However, despite their relatively low age, their abundance made up for it. Refining some of these herbs into spirit pills would ensure Fang Bai's cultivation to the Foundation Establishment Realm in the future.

"These spiritual herbs, once mature, are harvested. A portion will be submitted to the Alchemy Cauldron Pavilion, while another portion will be sold in the cities nearby for spirit pills, liquid medicines, or spiritual artifacts..."

Noticing Fang Bai's apparent interest in the medicinal garden, Zheng Hong explained.

"The Alchemy Cauldron Pavilion? I've never heard of it..."

Fang Bai frowned slightly.

Zheng Hong was momentarily stunned, then laughed, "Junior Brother Fang, you come from the Three Thousand Minor Worlds, so it's natural that you haven't heard of the Alchemy Cauldron Pavilion. It's a powerful sect presided over by Golden Core experts!"

"Golden Core experts, hmm? Truly a strong sect..."

While Fang Bai said this, his expression remained indifferent, without a trace of astonishment.

In his previous life, Fang Bai had roamed the entirety of the Spirit Martial Realm, gaining knowledge of its strongest sects. However, he had never heard of the Alchemy Cauldron Pavilion, leading him to assume it must have been established after his ascension to the Immortal Realm.

Above Foundation Establishment comes Golden Core. Golden Core experts were entities whom Foundation Establishment experts could only look up to. Yet to Fang Bai, "astonishment" was far from an appropriate reaction to such figures.

Fang Bai understood that in every world, the principle of the survival of the fittest prevailed. Lingxu Palace's submission of cultivation resources to the Alchemy Cauldron Pavilion was essentially "protection fees" paid by a weaker sect to a stronger one.

With these "protection fees," the stronger sect wouldn't trouble the weaker one. Additionally, in situations where the weaker sect encountered overwhelming difficulties, they could seek support from the stronger sect.

Such was the plight of weaker sects—inescapable yet inevitable.

Unless a peerless talent emerged from the weaker sect, leading it to rise in power and overturn the balance, it would remain oppressed indefinitely.

Clearly, Lingxu Palace currently lacked the strength for such a reversal and could only comply with paying the "protection fees."

On the way to Fang Bai's residence, they encountered several External Courtyard disciples familiar with Zheng Hong.

Zheng Hong's popularity in the External Courtyard was evident, as disciples who recognized him would casually approach to chat or, if they were junior to him, offer him respectful salutes.

Zheng Hong maintained a composed demeanor while interacting warmly with the disciples and then introduced Fang Bai with great enthusiasm.

"Oh my, Junior Brother Fang is so young!"

"Hehe, not only is he young, but also so handsome!"

"With Junior Brother Fang here, Lingxu Palace's 'most handsome man' title might need a new owner!"

"Hah, Senior Brother Ye will have to step down!"

...

The female disciples in the External Courtyard, especially those without companions, were thrilled to welcome the young and attractive Junior Brother Fang.

Meanwhile, the male disciples in the External Courtyard felt a sense of "competition." However, upon learning of Fang Bai's innate spiritual root and Elder Wu's intention to personally mentor him, most of them quickly warmed up to him.